



# Cultural Heritage And Visitor Engagement: A Case Study Of The Murshidabad District Museum

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**Abstract:** The Murshidabad District Museum, located in Jiaganj in West Bengal, is an important cultural institution that presents the region's rich historical and artistic heritage, including artifacts from the Mughal and colonial periods. It is strategically located and has precious collections, but it still lags behind in attracting a substantial number of visitors. The key issues are low awareness, competition from other prominent local sites, transportation barriers, ineffective marketing, and lack of appeal to casual tourists. The museum's collections ranging from the 9th to the 13th centuries, provide a deep exploration of the region's cultural evolution. This paper explores these challenges and proposes strategies to enhance the museum's visibility and visitor engagement. Some of the suggestions include outreach in local media, better signage, transportation, online presence, interactive exhibits, and visitor facilities. All these approaches will allow the Murshidabad District Museum to reach more people, receive more recognition, and become an important cultural landmark in the area.

**Keyword:** Murshidabad District Museum, Cultural heritage, Tourism, Visitor experience, Marketing strategies, Public awareness.

## Introduction:

The Murshidabad District Museum is located in Jiaganj under jurisdiction of Jiaganj-Azimganj Municipality in West Bengal, and is a major cultural and historical hub that gives an interesting glimpse into the region's rich heritage. It is 20 kilometers from the district headquarter Berhampore and can be reached through the Matijhil Bypass Road beside Bhagirathi River or the Berhampore-Jiaganj State Highway (11A), which is 23 kilometers away. The museum is also just 1.6 kilometers away from Jiaganj Railway Station, so it's perfectly located as one of the good stops while seeing the region. The museum's strategic location within Jiaganj, a town on the banks of the Bhagirathi River and on the opposite side of the river is Azimganj railway junction, further enhances its significance as a key site for understanding the cultural, historical, and artistic evolution of Murshidabad. The collection housed in the museum reflects the district's rich past, including artifacts from

various historical periods, such as the Mughal and colonial eras, offering an in-depth exploration of the region's diverse cultural identity.

Murshidabad occupies a very important position in history as a political and cultural center of West Bengal during the Mughal period. Although it is situated close to the main routes of transportation, its treasure of cultural artifacts cannot attract visitors to the Murshidabad District Museum. This paper mentions the causes of its limited public engagement and outlines what might be the right strategies to increase its attraction and enhance the overall visitor experience.

### Objectives:

- I. **Understand the Challenges:** The paper would analyse the primary challenges that Murshidabad District Museum is experiencing in terms of attracting visitors. These challenges are limited public awareness, competition from other local sites, transportation difficulties, and inadequate marketing efforts.
- II. **Highlight of the Museum's Collections:** This paper will give a thorough overview of the collections that the museums showcase, underlining their cultural and historical significance and showing how they reflect a regionally rich artistic legacy of the Mughal and colonial periods.
- III. **Suggest Ways to attract More Visitors:** This paper will present workable ideas that will help in enhancing the museum's appeal by marketing it well improving its access, and also incorporating more engaging elements that could attract more people to the museum.
- IV. **Identify Collaborative Opportunities:** The paper will look at possibilities of collaborations between the local travel agency, schools and administrative bodies that may raise awareness and get more people into the museum.
- V. **Promote the Museum as a Cultural Landmark:** This paper will aim at emphasizing the museum's role in preserving and showing the cultural heritage of the region, in terms of placing it as a central destination for both tourists and enthusiasts of history.

### Inception and Development of the Murshidabad District Museum:

It was the brainchild of Rai Bahadur Surendra Narayan Sinha of Jiaganj who conceptualized establishing the Murshidabad District Museum in 1960. He very graciously gifted land in front of his Rai Bahadur Palace for constructing the museum, and thus started the project. It was officially inaugurated in 1963. On 16th January 1999, the new building of Murshidabad District Museum was inaugurated by Shri Manab Mukherjee then Minister of Youth Welfare, Environment, and Tourism. Now the museum is governed by the State Archaeological Department.

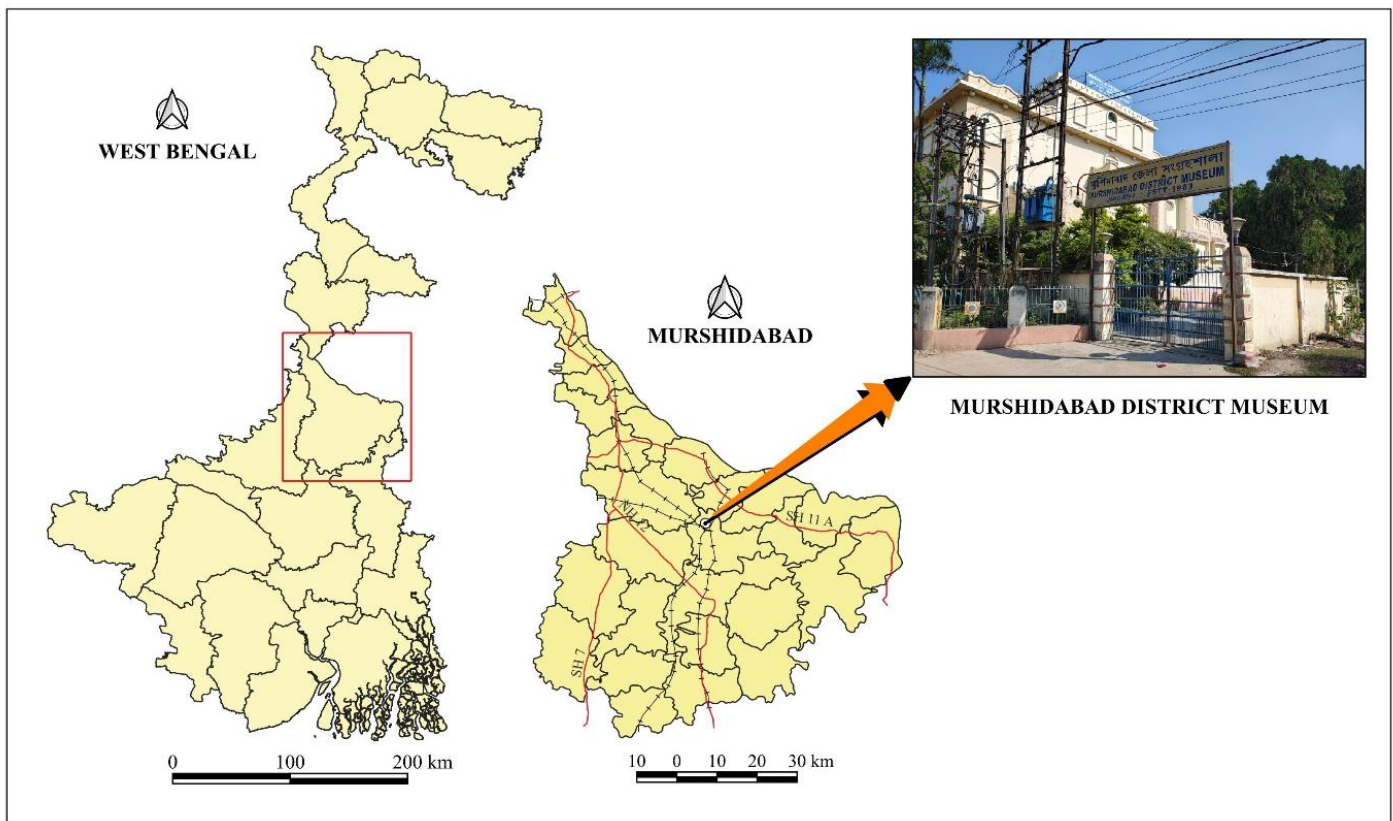


Figure 1. Location map of the Murshidabad District Museum.

### Challenges Faced by Murshidabad District Museum in Attracting Visitors:

The Murshidabad District Museum attracts very few visitors, indicating its lack of popularity and limited recognition. Despite good transport connectivity at Jiaganj and the popularity of Lalbagh nearby, the museum does not attract significant crowds. Several reasons explain this:

- I. **Lack of awareness:** In addition, many local and transregional visitors are not aware of the existence or the cultural importance of a museum. This means that the museum is barely noticed without appropriate marketing and public relation campaigns.
- II. **Competition from other attractions:** Murshidabad has several historical attractions that are very famous like Lalbagh, which tends to overshadow the museum. Tourists tend to visit these more famous attractions, leaving the museum less explored.
- III. **Transportation and accessibility issues:** While Jiaganj is well-connected, the museum may still face accessibility challenges. Poor advertising billboards, limited transportation options from nearby attractions like Lalbagh could prevent visitors from getting to the museum.
- IV. **Lack of marketing and promotion:** The museum lacks a proper marketing strategy to promote its offerings. Unless promotional procedures exist or it is included in tourism itineraries, it does not find a place on the radar for many visitors.
- V. **Limited appeal to casual visitors:** It is mainly the site to school and college groups on an educational trip, although their number remains fairly low. There is no individual attraction appeal or even a draw that can cause the casual tourist or independent visitors to visit the museum and bridge that gap of public engagement.

### A Detailed Overview of the Museum's Collections:

With the support of the State Archaeological Department, the modern air-conditioned museum now features with three well-designed exhibition halls. I collected the information during the primary survey. The sculptures displayed in the museum range from the 9th to the 13th century, which has been discovered through excavation at various locations in Murshidabad like Karnasubarna, Manigram, Hatpara, Satui etc.

#### First Exhibition Hall:

- i. A glossy black stone sculpture of the Sun (Surya deva) from the Pal period, standing on seven horse-drawn chariots, dating approximately from the 10th to the 11th century.
- ii. A sculpture depicting the ten avatars of Vishnu together, dating approximately from the 11th to the 12th century.
- iii. The largest sculpture in this hall is called "Soddojato", featuring a child-like Shiva beside devi Parvati, also dating approximately from the 11th to the 12th century.
- iv. Vishnu in his Narasimha avatar killing Hiranyakashipu, is depicted in this sculpture. It also shows the emergence of Lord Vishnu from the pillar of Prahlad's palace, carved in glossy black stone, dating approximately from the 11th to the 12th century.
- v. A standing sculpture of the Jain deity "Parshvanatha", carved in black stone, dating from the 10th to the 11th century. Additionally, there is a Buddhist goddess "Tara" sculpture made of sandstone, dating from the 11th to the 12th century.
- vi. A sandstone Shiva-Linga surrounded by four female figures representing Parvati, Ganga, Yamuna, and Chandi, collectively known as "Shiva-shakti," dating from the 11th to the 12th century.
- vii. A black stone sculpture of Vishnu seated on a bull, with carvings of Vishnu's ten avatars. This sculpture shows distinct marks of the Odisha's school of art.

#### Second Exhibition Hall:

- i. A standing Vishnu sculpture made of sandstone dating from the 9th to the 10th century, with seven headed serpents, extending like a canopy behind the head. Vishnu holds a conch, chakra, mace and lotus in his four hands.
- ii. Other sculptures in this hall include various sizes of Vishnu, a Sun sculpture with seven horses carrying the Nabagraha (9 Planets), a ten-armed Mahishasuramardini, a Trishul-wielding Goddess Gauri, and a four-armed Gauri with a crown, all dating from the 11th to the 12th century.
- iii. A large sculpture of Uma-Maheshwar embracing along with an eight-armed dancing Ganesh (Astabahu Ganesa), where Ganesh is performing an ancient classical dance form with two people playing Mridangam and Kartal. Also, dancing Apsaras and a Buddhist goddess "Hariti" are shown, all made of sandstone, dating from the 11th to the 12th century.



**Third Exhibition Hall:**

- i. Excavated archaeological items found during the excavation carried out under the supervision of the State Archaeological Department, including various ornaments worn by people from the Hatpara region.
- ii. Approximately 10,000 small cultural artifacts collected from various places like Dheka, Karnasubarna and Manigram, including clay utensils, pots, and broken iron tools.
- iii. Various artifacts made of sandalwood, along with some ancient items of Murshidabad's famous brass craftsmanship.
- iv. The latest addition to the collection is a small bronze Vishnu sculpture found at Manigram and a palm leaf manuscript collected from Satui.

**Effective Approaches to Strengthen the Museum's Impact:**

A primary survey was conducted among 100 tourists who came to the Hazarduari Palace of Murshidabad. The main trend that emerges from it, that 83% of the people are not aware of the existence of the Murshidabad District Museum, only 17% of the people are aware of the Murshidabad District Museum. The majority of these 18% tourists visit Lalbagh for a day trip. In that case, the whole day is spent seeing the sights of Lalbagh; do not become interested in going to the district museum in Jiaganj. Therefore, the existence of the Murshidabad District Museum should be informed to the tourists first. To enhance the popularity and visitor numbers at the Murshidabad District Museum, a focused approach should be adopted. The following strategies can help improve visibility and engagement:

- I. **Increasing Awareness and Visibility:** Increasing the museum's presence in local media such as newspapers, social media like Facebook, YouTube platforms is essential. By emphasizing the museum's historical significance and its connection to Murshidabad's Mughal heritage, the museum can attract a broader audience. Partnership with local travel agencies will incorporate the museum visit in sight-seeing packages coupled with other significant attractions around including Hazarduari Palace. Dissemination of brochures in hotels and restaurants and visitor centres will boost the visit from potential visitors too.
- II. **Improve Signage and Accessibility:** The correct and clear, easy-to-follow signs are to be provided to guide tourists to the museum. Installing Advertising billboards of museum at usual places such as Katra Masjid, Lalbagh and both side of the road leading to Lalbagh frequently, would enable easy search for this museum for the visitors. For making it easy, an agreement could be entered with local transportation providers or providing the shuttle services itself from the popular sites. Adding ramps and rest areas will also make the museum more accessible to a wider range of visitors, thus enhancing its appeal.
- III. **Strengthen Marketing and Public Relations:** Developing a strong online presence through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp will help share engaging content about the museum's exhibitions and Murshidabad's cultural heritage. More user-friendly websites and YouTube vlog that feature virtual tours would also attract more visitors. Hosting cultural performances or

heritage walks tied to local events such as the Battle of Plassey anniversary would further engage tourists.

**IV. Attract a Wider Audience:** Interactive exhibits like augmented reality displays will make the museum interesting to people of all ages. Family-friendly programs such as art workshops and scavenger hunts will attract more visitors. The museum will also experience new visitors because the exhibitions will be different each time.

**V. Enhance Visitor Experience:** Improve amenities such as restaurant, seating areas, and gift shops to encourage visitors to spend more time at the museum. Providing guided tours will also enhance the visitor experience, offering deeper insights into the museum's collections and the region's history.

By implementing these strategies, the Murshidabad District Museum can increase its visibility, attract a more diverse audience, and become a cultural landmark in the region.

### Conclusion:

The Murshidabad District Museum, despite its valuable historical collections, struggles to attract a diverse group of visitors. Challenges such as low awareness, limited local transportation options, and insufficient marketing have hindered its ability to engage a broader audience. To improve its appeal, the museum can implement strategies such as strengthening local media outreach, enhancing visibility through better signage, and offering improved transportation access. Additionally, incorporating interactive exhibits and enriching the visitor experience with cultural events will make the museum more engaging. With these steps, the Murshidabad District Museum can increase its recognition, attract more visitors, and solidify its status as an important cultural institution in the region.



Plate 1. 'Sthanaka-Vishnu'



Plate 2. 'Gouri'



Plate 3. 'Astabahu Ganesa'



Plate 4. 'Manuscript'

Plates: Highlights from the museum's diverse collection.

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