

Government Freedom Struggle Museum, Meerut.

LOCATION :

Meerut is situated in the upper Ganga-Yamuna doab and lies between lat. 28° 27' - 29° 18' N and long' 77°8 and 78°7' E. It is situated at distance of 456 km. west-north of Lucknow, the state capital of UP and 65 km north-east of New Delhi on National Highway number 58.

It is approachable by train, bus or car. An important city of Western UP, Meerut is also a district as well as a divisional head-quarter.

The name Meerut has its origins in the myth of the ancient demon king Maya, the father in-law of Ravana, thus giving it the name Mayarashtra, which with the passage of time got converted to its modern shortened variant.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Meerut stands at a crossroad geographically within the Indian subcontinent. On one side, a few kilometers beyond the Yamuna stretch the fertile Punjab plains and on the other the fertile Indo-Gangetic planes. The culture of what we call the Meerut region (part of North-Western Uttar Pradesh of today) takes aspects from both these sides to create a unique admixture.

It is mostly an agricultural region, with a fair amount of industry and service sector distributed throughout the cities and towns of this region.

The language of this region is Hindi, one interesting fact being that its modern variant which is used all over India today originated in the area lying between Delhi and Meerut during the later part of the Mughal period.

Culturally this region is unique, sharing characteristics with the culture of related parts of Haryana in modes of dress, eating habits etc. Over this lies the cultural influence of the neighboring Braj region. Many different dialects are therefore spoken in the Meerut region including Jatu, Gurjari etc.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Meerut region in ancient times was a center of learning and some momentous events of history are linked to it. The area abounds in historical and archaeological sites such as Hastinapur, Barnawa, Sinauli, Kila Parikshitgarh, Gadhmutkeshwara, Mandi etc yielding archeologically important finds.

Meerut region is deeply related to the episodes of the great Indian epic the Mahabharata. Many of the names of places in Meerut region refer directly to locations mentioned in the Mahabharata, the most important of these being Hastinapur.

But even before this, when ancient man stepped out of his hunter-gatherer past, one of the first few urban civilizations that he created was the Indus Valley Civilisation. The eastern limits of this civilization were in Western Uttar Pradesh and a recent excavation at Sinauli has unearthed one of the largest graveyards of this civilization ever discovered.

This region continued to be an important center of human habitation with a high density of human population during the reigns of important dynasties of ancient India such as the Mauryas, Kushanas, Guptas and Pratiharas.

Old Meerut itself stands on a mound which is an artificial hill created by thousands of years of human settlement. The Meerut mound has given artifacts dating to the Gupta period (1800 to 1500 years from now) and also stone artifacts of the Rajput period including a beautiful broken stone pillar piece with a Vishnu idol engraved over it. The presence of an Ashokan Pillar (2300 years old) at Meerut, which now stands at Hindu Rao in Delhi, stands testimony to the importance of Meerut even in those ancient times.

It continued to be important through the Sultanate and Mughal era. One of the oldest Mosques in the country is at Meerut and one of Akber's 84 mints was present here.

The Marathas had Meerut under their control for some time. Many temples around Suraj Kund are testimony to their presence here. But then the British come in the picture and Meerut again bounced back on the national consciousness with the great events of 1857.

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1857.

The revolt of 1857 is aptly called the War of Indian Independence because of its power at being able to unite Indians of different religions and castes under a common banner for a common purpose. It set the platform from which future leaders who have shaped our modern India took lessons and ideas. Lines like 'Angrezi hukumat khatam hui' and 'Dilli Chalo' were first used in Meerut on the evening of 10th of May 1857, the point from which began the long drawn Indian freedom struggle.

THE MUSEUM :

Government Freedom Struggle Museum, Meerut was established in 1997. It is located in the Shaheed Smarak compound on Delhi Road, about 6 km north-east from the city railway station and at a distance of about 200 meters from the Delhi Bus Station. Visitors can stay in various guesthouses, private lodges and hotels.

The Museum's main aim is the collection, preservation, documentation and exhibition of cultural property and to make it available for educational activities as well as for creation of awareness about our glorious past.

Presently Five galleries are on display in this Museum. They depict important episodes of the War of Independence 1857 through paintings, relief ,dioramas and other important documents and potographs -

Gallery no. one displays the events of Meerut in 1857. It begins with the story of the arrival in Meerut of one of the leaders who coordinated the revolt of 1857 as a fakir (saint). He incited the people and the Indian soldiers to fight the rule of the East India Company.

Col. Carmichael Smyth, commandant of the 3rd Native Light Cavalry Regiment, decided to test the willingness of his soldiers to use the disputed cartridges. On the 24th of April 1857, he ordered soldiers to use these, 85 of whom refused to do so, they being as a result awarded a punishment of 10 years imprisonment.

On the 9th of May the authorities, to teach a lesson to the Indian soldiers, ordered a parade of the whole Meerut garrison. The 85 convicted sepoys were made to stand in the center, with the three Indian Regiments, disarmed and dismounted, made to stand and see a spectacle unfold. The three British Regiments, armed and mounted, stood around all of them. The uniforms of the 85 soldiers were publicly removed and shackles were put on them. The Indian regiments stood through all this, feeling dishonor and shame. The British authorities thought that a good lesson had been taught to the native, but something else rose out of all this.

The 10th of May 1857 was a Sunday. Around 5.30 PM, a rumor entered the bazaar and all hell broke loose. Crowds of the bazaar immediately attacked every British soldier or officer present, led in some places by the native police and cantonment staff in uniform. The soldiers ran to their lines. The War of Indian Independence had begun.

There is a painting showing the shooting of Col. John Finnis, he being the first Britisher to be killed in the War of Indian Independence 1857. Immediately after the onset of the revolt, soldiers of the 3rd Native Cavalry rode to the New Jail and broke open the doors to release their 85 jailed comrades. Blacksmiths cut their shackles there and then and they all marched off to Delhi, this being depicted in the mural `March to Delhi' (Dilli Chalo)

Gallery no. two displays various events of 1857 which took place outside Meerut with the exception of the first painting that shows the breaking of the bridge of boats on the Yamuna at Baghat by the farmer leader Shah Mal. There is a painting showing the tough hand-to-hand combat for Delhi that took place between 14th of September 1857 and ended on the 20th of September.

There is a relief showing the hanging of the Indian revolutionaries in British reprisals. There are painting related to Sati Chaura Ghat (Kanpur), Lucknow residency, Sikander Bagh, important centers of events of 1857. There is a relief showing the Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai, the embodiment of female power in the Indian psyche.

Gallery no. third displays various aspect of 1857 and freedom struggle of India shown authentic pictures such as early East-India company, event of 1857 and original photographs of Netaji

Subhash Chandra Bosh and his various movements. This gallery also displayed postal stamps of Indian freedom struggle in some showcases. Gallery no. four displays life of Mahatma Gandhi and other important leaders, freedom fighter. This also displays memorial coins, copper plates, postcards etc.

Gallery no. five is very important of archaeological presentation of Meerut region and displays archaeological artifacts. Such as S profile jar, bowl Sinauli (Baghpat), PGW Hastinapur, Kakor etc. Bricks Kushana and Gupta. In this gallery displays various coins Kaushambi to Mughal periods and other important archaeological remains also display in this gallery.

Some postal stamps, pictures, post cards, memorial coins related to the events of 1857 and latter coins are also in the collection of the museum. The museum is in the developing stages and efforts are being made to collect more specimens. The museum organises educational programs such as lectures, seminars and competitions related to history, culture, philosophy, the freedom struggle and religion. It also aims at coordinating with other cultural and educational organizations for disseminating Indian culture and particularly the events related to the long drawn freedom struggle of India.

Museum Timings : 10:30 AM. to 4:30 PM. Open on all days except Monday, Sunday following 2nd Saturday of the month and public holidays.

Note : For further information please contact :

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