

Ganga Sagar island is an island in the Ganges delta, lying on the continental shelf of Bay of Bengal about 100 km (54 nautical miles) south of Kolkata. This Island under South 24 Parganas District in India State West Bengal. It belongs to the Republic of India and is governed by the State government of West Bengal. The island is large — with an area of 224.3 km², lying between 21°36' to 21°56' north latitude and 88°2' to 88° 11' east latitude.[1] It has 43 villages and a population of over 160,000. The largest village is also named "Ganga Sagar" or "Gangasagar". Although Sagar island is a part of Sunderban Administration, it does not have any tiger habitation or mangrove forests or small river tributaries as is characteristic of the overall sunderban delta.

This island, also known as Gangasagar or Sagardwip, is a place of Hindu pilgrimage. Every year on the day of Makar Sankranti (14 January), hundreds of thousands of Hindus gather to take a holy dip at the confluence of river Ganges and Bay of Bengal and offer prayers (puja) in the Kapil Muni Temple.

History

A holy man, Kardam Muni, made a pact with Vishnu that he would undergo the rigours of marital life, on the condition that Vishnu would incarnate as his son. In due time Kapil Muni was born as an incarnation of Vishnu and became a great saint. Kapil Muni's ashram was located on the island. One day King Sagar's sacrificial horse disappeared; it had been stolen by Indra. The king sent his 60,000 sons to find it, and they found it next to Kapil Muni's ashram, where Indra had hidden it. Mistaking Kapil Muni for the thief, the sons accused Kapil Muni, who in his wrath at the false accusation burned the sons to ash and sent their souls to Hell. Later having compassion for the King Sagar's sons, Kapil Muni acceded to the prayers of King Sagar's descendants, agreeing to the restoration of the sons, if Parvati in the form of the river goddess Ganga would descend to Earth to perform the Last Ritual (Hindus also called as "Tarpan") of mixing the ashes with holy water (niravapanjali).

Through deep meditation, King Bhagiratha induced Shiva to order Ganga down from heaven and the 60,000 sons were freed (moksha) and ascended to Heaven, but the river Ganges stayed on the Earth. The date of the descent of Ganga was the date, as is at present the 15th Day of January of the Gregorian Calendar which coincides with that of Makar Sankranti.

How To Reach

From Kolkata, Diamond Harbour Road (NH-117) runs south around 90 km to Harwood Point, near Kakdip, where a ferry runs to Kachuberia at the north end of the island. The Panchyat Samity maintains a parking area near the ferry landing. The ferry travels about 3.5 km across a distributary of the Ganges river (also known as Hooghly River or Muriganga river locally) to reach Kachuberia. Small boats also cross from Harwood Point to Kachuberia. Private cars and buses travel the roughly 32 km to the pilgrimage site at Sagardwip. From the pilgrimage parking area the Kapil Muni Temple is about 200 meters and the Gangasagar confluence is about 700 meters.

Train and ferry

Trains run on the Sealdah South lines from Kolkata through Kakdwip to Namkhana where at Bok-Khali there is a ferry across the Muriganga distributary (Channel Creek) to Sagar Island (Gangasagar).

