

BOTTOM LESS AGAM KUAN IS SELF-EXPLANATORY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SYMBOL OF CRUELTY

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ABSTRACT

The "fathomless well" of Patna is famously known as Agam Kuan. Located near the Gulzarbagh railway station in Patna, Bihar, its name literally translates to "unfathomable well". It is one of the most important and mystery-shrouded archaeological sites in Patna, dating back to the Mauryan Empire under Emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE). Agam Kuan is an ancient, 2,200-year-old circular well in Patna, Bihar that is deeply tied to Mauryan history and local legend.

KEYWORDS: Fathom, Hell on earth, Ashoka, Mata Shitala, Well, Agam Kuan.

Overview

The name Agam Kuan translates to the "unfathomable" or "bottomless" well. [Fathom=1.8288 meters=6 feet=2 yards]

Ashoka's Hell Chambers: British explorer Laurence Waddell [Lieutenant Colonel Laurence Austine Waddell, (29 May 1854 – 19 September 1938)] identified the site in the 1890s matching descriptions by ancient Chinese travellers (**Fa Hien** and **Hiuen Tsang**). Legend says that before embracing Buddhism, Emperor Ashoka

used this site as a gruesome torture chamber ("*hell on earth*").

The 99 Brothers: Popular folklore claims Ashoka threw his 99 half-brothers into the well after executing them to secure the Magadha throne.

Subterranean Myth: Myth holds that the well connects directly to the netherworld (*Pataal*) because a lost log from a sea was once supposedly retrieved from it.



Figure 1: Agamkuan & Bihar map.

Structure and Location

Design: The structure is about 32 meters (105 feet) deep. The upper 13 meters (43 feet) are lined with brick, while the lower 19 meters (62 feet) feature ancient wooden rings. **Location:** It is situated near Gulzarbagh railway station in Patna, located right inside the complex of the revered Shitala Devi Temple.

Current Status: Today, the well is treated as a sacred and auspicious site. Visitors and families participating in local ceremonies or weddings throw coins and flowers into it for blessings, though the water itself is not consumed.



Figure 2: Fa Hien, Hiuen Tsang & Lieutenant Colonel Laurence Austine Waddell.

The Agam Kuan is set within an archaeological site identified by the Archaeological Survey of India which also contains the adjacent Shitala Devi temple where the Shakti deity Shitala Devi is venerated. Inside this temple, the pindas of the Saptamatrikas (the seven mother goddesses) are worshipped. The temple is widely revered for its belief in curing smallpox and chicken pox. Emperor Ashoka the Great (c. 304–232 BCE) was the third and most famous ruler of India's Maurya Dynasty, reigning from approximately 268 to 232 BCE. His vast

empire stretched across nearly the entire Indian subcontinent. Emperor Ashoka was known as Chandashoka (Ashoka the Fierce) early in his reign due to extreme acts of brutality before he converted to Buddhism. The main specialty of the historical Maa Shitla Mandir in Agamkuan, Patna is its deep spiritual association with healing skin ailments like smallpox and chickenpox, combined with its location right next to the legendary, Maurya-era Agam Kuan well.



Figure 3: King Ashoka.

Key Specialties and Features

Divine Healing Beliefs: Devotees widely revere Maa Sheetla as the goddess of pox and heat-related diseases, visiting the shrine to pray for protection or recovery from

chickenpox, measles, and other skin infections. The Saptamatrikas Pindas: The temple houses the sacred pindas (formless sacred stone manifestations) of the Saptamatrikas (the seven mother goddesses), along with

an idol of Angar Mata and regional guardian representations. Adjacent to Agam Kuan: The temple sits directly beside Agam Kuan, a historic 105-foot-deep 'bottomless' well attributed to Emperor Ashoka. Water and rituals connecting the well to the deity add a unique

layer of ancient mystery and sanctity. Major Festivals: The shrine experiences massive footfall during Chaitra Navratri (March–April) when special Shitala Puja and Solah Shringar rituals are performed to honor the goddess for health and well-being.

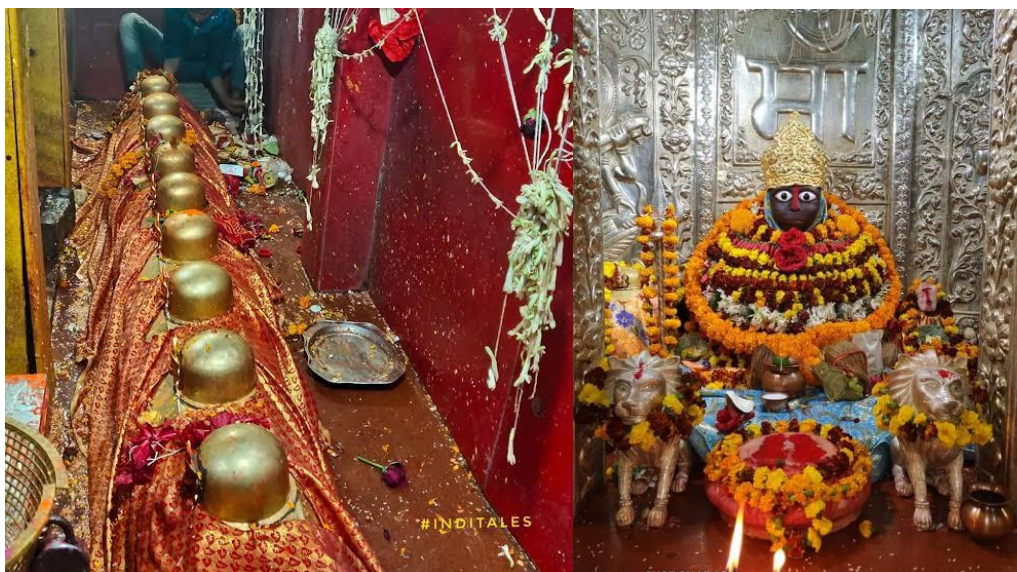


Figure 4: Mata Shitala.

CONCLUSION

Agam Kuan ("unfathomable well") is an ancient well and archaeological site in Patna, Bihar, India. It is said to date back to the period of Mauryan emperor, Ashoka (304–232 BCE). It is circular in shape, lined with brick in the upper 13 metres (43 ft) and wooden rings in the remaining 19 metres (62 ft). Faxian (337–c. 422 CE), formerly romanized as Fa-hien or Fa-hsien, was a Chinese Buddhist monk. Hiuen Tsang (also known as Xuanzang or Hiuen Sang) was a famous 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, and traveller who spent over 15 years journeying through India. Key Facts of His Journey Time Period: Travelled through Central Asia and India between 629 and 645 AD. The site is a protected archaeological landmark, and the adjacent Shitala Devi Temple has transformed the area into a sacred space where visitors drop coins and flowers for good fortune rather than fear. This is Ashoka's historical transition from "Chandashoka" (Ashoka the Cruel) to "Dharmashoka", the Ashoka of righteousness" or "pious Ashoka," combining dharma (righteousness, duty, or moral order) and ashoka (without sorrow).

REFERENCE

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