

THE AZIMGANJ NOWLAKHA FAMILY

FAMILY HISTORY:

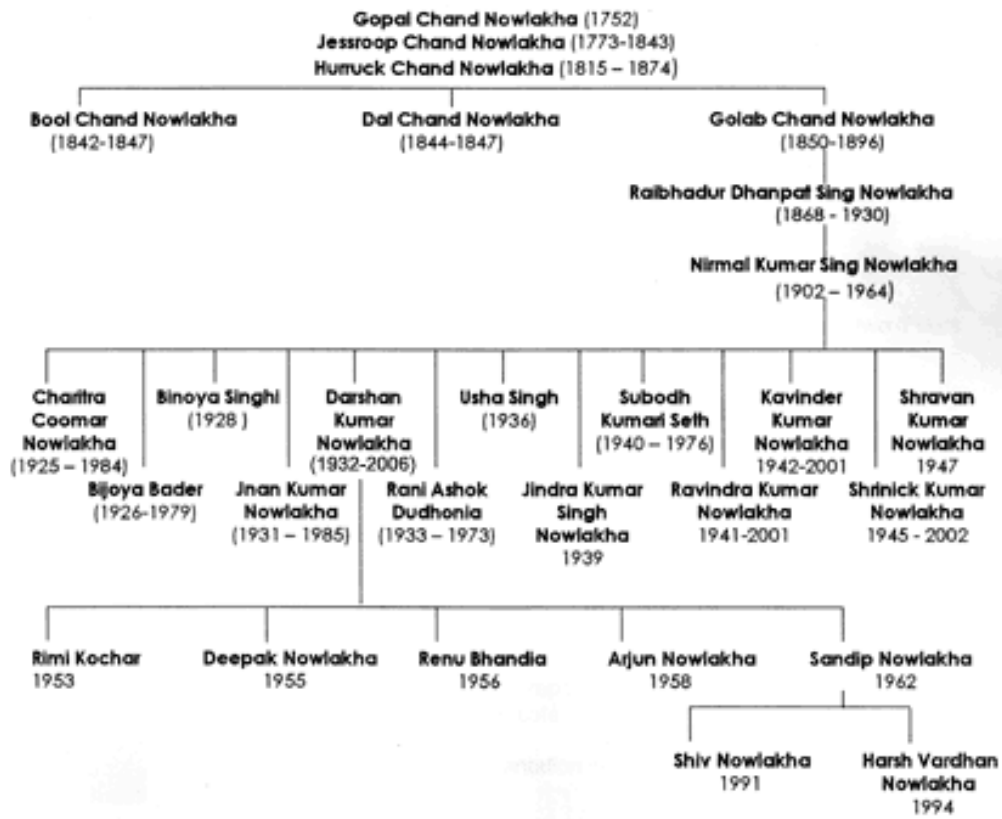
The Nowlakha family belongs to the Oswal Jain Community and migrated to Bengal in 1752 A.D. from Bikaner in Rajasthan and settled in Azimganj district of Murshidabad. According to a popular belief the title of *Nowlakha* was bestowed on one of the ancestors of the family as he had given a dowry of nine lakhs of rupees to one of his daughters in marriage.¹

Babu Gopal Chand Nowlakha was the first who immigrated to Bengal in 1752 A.D.

NAME	DATES	CHILDREN	CONTRIBUTIONS
1. Babu Gopal Chand Nowlakha	1752 A.D. -migrated to Bengal	None. He was succeeded by his cousin	- He was a successful businessman and amassed a large fortune.
2. Babu Jesroop Chand Nowlakha	1773-1843 A.D.	Adopted Babu Hurruck Chand	
3. Babu Hurruck Chand	1815-1874 A.D. -passed away on 6th November 1874 A.D.	Son: Babu Golab Chand Nowlakha	-Left his father and started business independently, as a banker and merchant in 1837 at the age of 22 years - Opened branch offices in Calcutta, Dhulyan, Sahebgunge, Prunes, Murligunge, Nowabgunge, etc -Purchased Zamindari estates in Murshidabad, Birbhum and Purnea.
4. Babu Golab Chand Nowlakha	- born on 20th March 1850 A.D.	Son: Babu Dhanpat Singh Nowlakha	- He was an honorary Magistrate in the Lalbagh court, Murshidabad for 10 years. -He had a great taste for music and encouraged those skilled in it. - A man of refined tastes and habits, he got the Rose Villa built and was popular amongst the Europeans, officials as well as non-officials.

¹ A. Vadivelu, The Ruling chiefs nobles & Zamindars of India (Madras: G.C. Loganadham Bros., 1915), 727.

5. Babu Dhanpat Singh Nowlakha	<p>- born on 15th December 1868 at Mahimpur in the residence of Jagat Seth</p> <p>-died in 1913 A.D.</p>	Son : Babu Nirmal Kumar Singh Nowlakha	<p>-He was appointed as an Honorary Magistrate of the Lalbagh bench by the Government on 18th March 1903</p> <p>- He made several donations to various funds like the Victoria memorial, Edward memorial fund, Transvaal war fund, construction of a hospital building at Azimganj,etc.</p> <p>- The Government in recognition of his valuable services conferred on him the title of Rai Bahadur on 24th June 1910.</p>
6. Babu Nirmal Kumar Sing Nowlakha	<p>-born on 7th September 1902 A.D.</p> <p>- He was adopted by the widow of late Rai Bahadur in 1919 A.D.</p> <p>-Passed away on 12th January 1964 A.D.</p>	-He has 8 sons and 5 daughters	<p>- He had inherited all good qualities of his father and proved to be a worthy scion of the noble family.</p> <p>- The Government appointed him as an Honorary Magistrate of the Lalbagh sub-divisional bench in 1922 A.D.</p> <p>- He started several handlooms to revive the Murshidabad silk industries both at Azimganj and within his Zamindari area.</p> <p>- He established and donated to a lot of schools and supported female education.</p> <p>-He made monetary contributions for the compilation of old Jain literature and manuscripts.</p> <p>- He granted remission of rents to his tenants and supplied them with food during the famine from April till August 1929 A.D.</p> <p>- He was the president of All India Jain Swetamber Conference in Mumbai in 1938 A.D.</p>



1.1 Babu Golab
Chand Nowlakha



1.2 Babu Dhanpat
Singh Nowlakha



1.3 Babu Nirmal Kumar
Singh Nowlakha



1.4 Lilam Kumari Nowlakha



1.5 Nirmal Kumar Singh Nowlakha



1.5 Rose Villa at Azimganj-built by Babu Golab Chand Nowlakha.

Nowlakha Kothi

The Nowlakha Kothi was built in the 1750's when Golab Chand Nowlakha had come to Azimganj. The Rose Villa came about much later around 1878 A.D.² The Nowlakha Kothi is the oldest out of all the houses in Azimganj. At present, the family is settled in Calcutta and they keep visiting the house as and when they have time.

² Sandeep Nowlakha. Interview by the author, 24th March, 2010, Calcutta, West Bengal.

The Façade



1.6 The street and the main façade



1.7 The main door



1.8 The façade showing the cast iron brackets

The front wall of the house is mainly a blank wall except the Main door and few windows which are the only perforations on the Ground floor. On the first floor, the balcony which is supported by cast iron brackets projects on to the street.

The Entrance Plaque:

The marble plaque is flanked on one side of the main door with the owner- Rai Dhanpat Singh Nowlakha's name which is indicative of the family's position amongst the Britishers.

Cast iron brackets:

The Cast iron Brackets supporting the balcony display an early Georgian influence of decorative leaves and motifs in cast iron.

Balcony

The cast iron parapet runs continuously on the first floor balcony. Ornamentation on the cast iron parapet displays various motifs from the Georgian Era.



1.9 Balcony parapet detail



1.10 balcony passage overlooking the street



Main Door



1.11 Main entrance and door details

The entrance is marked by a decorative doorway made out of wood. There is a small niche on top of the door which may have used to place an idol. Ornamentation in the form of relief work is seen on the top of the doorway in the form of Indian floral motifs.

Ground floor



1.12 Entrance space



1.13 Wooden joists supporting the stone slab



1.4 The staircase leading to the court on the 1st floor



The Ground floor is mainly for public use. The single archway leads to a vestibule space and then into a long narrow passage through which one enters the court. Hence the narrow passage became an interface

between the public zone and the Private zone. It controlled the degree of Movement for the outsiders. The court is surrounded by several rooms on all the sides which are not in use at present. This court was occupied by the women during the day. The court can be accessed on the ground floor from the outer space. The vestibule area also has the staircase which leads to the first floor of the house. The railing and the balustrade is made of cast iron. The motifs display an early Georgian influence.

First Floor



One enters into a court on the 1st floor. Adjoining the court is where the *gaddi* was located. It was the office and work space used by the male members of the family. The doorway connecting the outer public court to the inner private court was shut, ensuring that the immediate zone was inaccessible to all. All the door shutters had wooden louvers which emphasized the *zenana* tradition and the women could view into the outer court through that when there were male members and guests present. The work area has a lot of elements which have a strong Mughal influence. The elements here have more of a decorative implication. There are louvered blinds used only on the upper floors for climatic reasons. In the inner court there are cast iron columns used which are characterized as slender support instead of the wooden columns used in the work place adjoining the public court.

Furniture and Interior elements

Doors and Windows: All the doors on the ground floor are paneled. On the first floor all the doors have double shutters of wooden louvers and glass for climatic purpose as well as for privacy. Some of the windows on the first floor display colored glass.

Flooring: All the transitional, circulation and public spaces have rough stone flooring. Where as all the rooms have marble flooring which is an early Georgian feature.

Materials and Method of construction:

The walls are made of Bricks and the roof shows wooden joists supporting stone slabs. The walls and brick work within the house is lime plastered in which lime (*chuna*) and brick powder (*surkhi*) is used.

Wood is used for the doors, windows, screens as well for columns in the work area on the 1st floor. These elements are painted in bright colors mainly green or yellow to strike a contrast with the walls.

Furniture elements

There is a strong preference for Victorian and Georgian furniture where the local or regional influence is not reflected at all. In terms of the spatial organization a lot of regional influences as well as traditions of the community are reflected. But when one comes down to the furniture elements the European influence takes up a dominant and visible portion in the house.

