



INTERGLOBE
FOUNDATION



Sahapedia

My City
My Heritage

My
Gwalior

Title:

My City My Heritage My Gwalior

Publisher:

Sahapedia

Supported by:

InterGlobe Foundation

Copyright:

©Sahapedia and InterGlobe Foundation, 2026

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form without prior written permission from Sahapedia. Brief text quotations with use of photographs are exempted from copyright for publication review purposes only.

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, some details—such as contact information and services—may change without notice. The publisher is not responsible for any consequences arising from the use of this information.

We welcome suggestions and corrections for future editions and our website.

Contact:

Sahapedia

Website:

www.sahapedia.org

Email:

contact@sahapedia.org

My City My Heritage My Gwalior



Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present to you this compendium of booklets showcasing some of the lesser-known and overlooked treasures of select cities in our country. Over the past decade, the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF) has been steadfast in its commitment to preserving and restoring India's cultural and built heritage.

Launched in 2019 as a collaboration between the InterGlobe Foundation and Sahapedia, the My City My Heritage project is guided by a shared vision to promote India's vibrant intangible culture through the documentation and celebration of the cultural fabric of its cities. Each city has its own unique story to tell—stories rooted in its monuments, crafts, festivals, and the lived experiences of its people. By documenting these stories, this project not only preserves our cultural fabric but also inspires pride and awareness in local communities and visitors alike.

As custodians of a shared heritage, we at IGF believe that initiatives like this are crucial for exploring a deeper connection between the communities and the spaces they inhabit. We also hope that in each of the project cities, a group of concerned citizens, institutions and government will come together to carry forward this beautiful curation of their city's history. We hope these booklets will entice you to discover these cities and their treasures and share them with others. We welcome more organizations, individuals and researchers to build on the repository created here.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the team at Sahapedia, my colleagues at InterGlobe Foundation, as well as the researchers, photographers, and local communities who have contributed to this endeavor.

With best wishes,

Rohini Bhatia

Chairperson
InterGlobe Foundation

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this collection of city booklets created under the 'My City My Heritage' initiative, a collaboration between Sahapedia and the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF). These booklets celebrate the rich and layered cultural heritage of Indian cities, bringing to light their stories, unique traditions, and enduring legacies.

At Sahapedia, our journey since 2011 has been defined by a vision—to document and share India's vast and diverse cultural knowledge. Over the past 15 years, Sahapedia has established itself as an open, digital resource dedicated to exploring the histories, arts, and traditions that define our shared heritage. The Sanskrit term 'Saha,' (together with), embodies the spirit of collaboration that fuels our efforts in documenting local contexts and pluralistic traditions, and creating meaningful engagement with India's cultural legacy.

'My City My Heritage,' launched in 2019, has become an extension of this vision. With the generous support of IGF, this project underscores the role of cities as living repositories of history and culture. Beyond research and documentation resulting into City Booklets, the project engages communities, scholars, and enthusiasts in celebrating their cities' unique identities. Initiatives like heritage walks and Anubhutis—Sahapedia's initiative for children with disabilities and marginalized groups—have redefined heritage engagement.

Each booklet reflects research, thoughtful curation, and a commitment to accessible heritage. This endeavor owes its success to the unwavering support of IGF and the contributions of researchers, photographers, local communities, and Sahapedia's team.

It is my hope that these booklets will not only serve as resources for exploration and education but also foster a sense of responsibility for our cultural legacy. I invite you to dive into the stories within and to share in the joy of our collective heritage.

With warm regards,

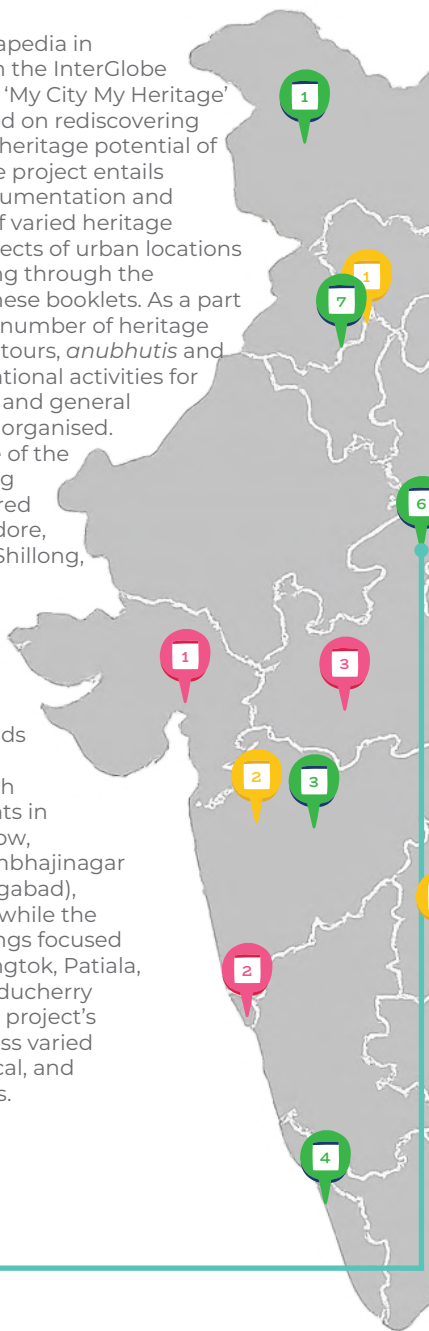
Sudha Gopalakrishnan

**Executive Director
Sahapedia**

My City My Heritage My Gwalior

Initiated by Sahapedia in partnership with the InterGlobe Foundation, the 'My City My Heritage' project is focused on rediscovering the culture and heritage potential of Indian cities. The project entails exploration, documentation and dissemination of varied heritage and cultural aspects of urban locations in India, including through the publication of these booklets. As a part of the project, a number of heritage walks, museum tours, *anubhutis* and engaging educational activities for school students and general audiences were organised.

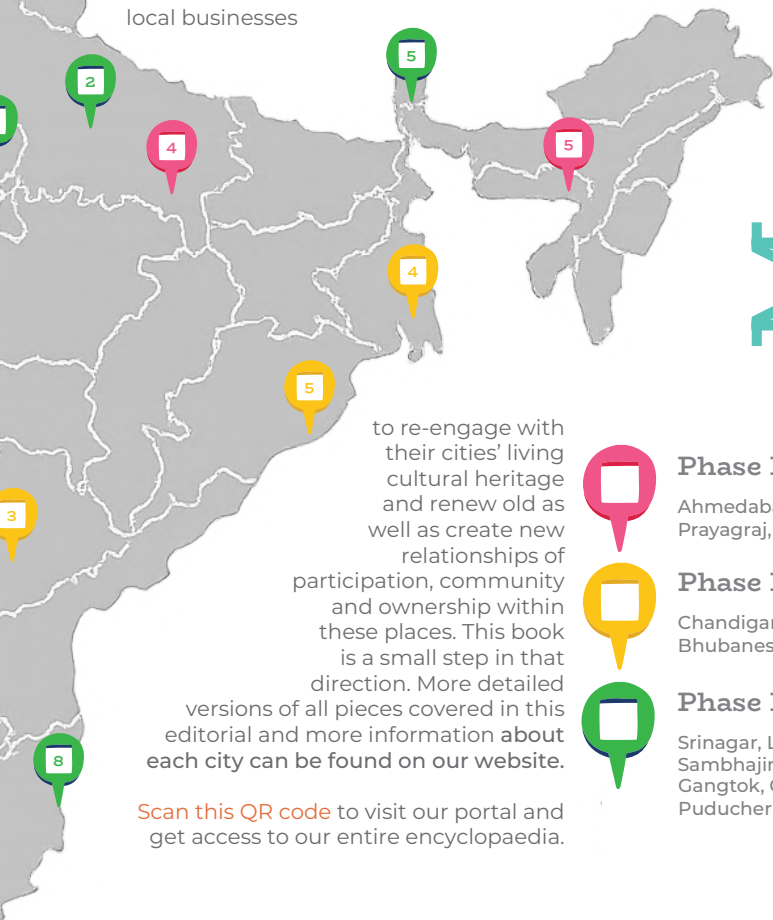
The initial phase of the project, spanning 2019–2022, covered Ahmedabad, Indore, Prayagraj, Goa, Shillong, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Nashik. The ongoing phase (2024–2025) builds on this legacy through in-depth city engagements in Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (formerly Aurangabad), and Kozhikode, while the current year brings focused attention to Gangtok, Patiala, Gwalior, and Puducherry—extending the project's exploration across varied regional, historical, and cultural contexts.



The 'My City My Heritage' project caters to a wide user group, including but not limited to children with disabilities and from financially and socially marginalised backgrounds, culture enthusiasts, scholars, heritage professionals and tourists. The project aims at creating opportunities, building interest and capacity of young local scholars through collaborative research, documentation and mapping. An equally important and compelling goal is to create fresh avenues for residents, local administration and local businesses



More about the project



to re-engage with their cities' living cultural heritage and renew old as well as create new relationships of participation, community and ownership within these places. This book is a small step in that direction. More detailed versions of all pieces covered in this editorial and more information about each city can be found on our website.

Scan this QR code to visit our portal and get access to our entire encyclopaedia.



Phase I

Ahmedabad, Goa, Indore, Prayagraj, Shillong



Phase II

Chandigarh, Nashik, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata



Phase III

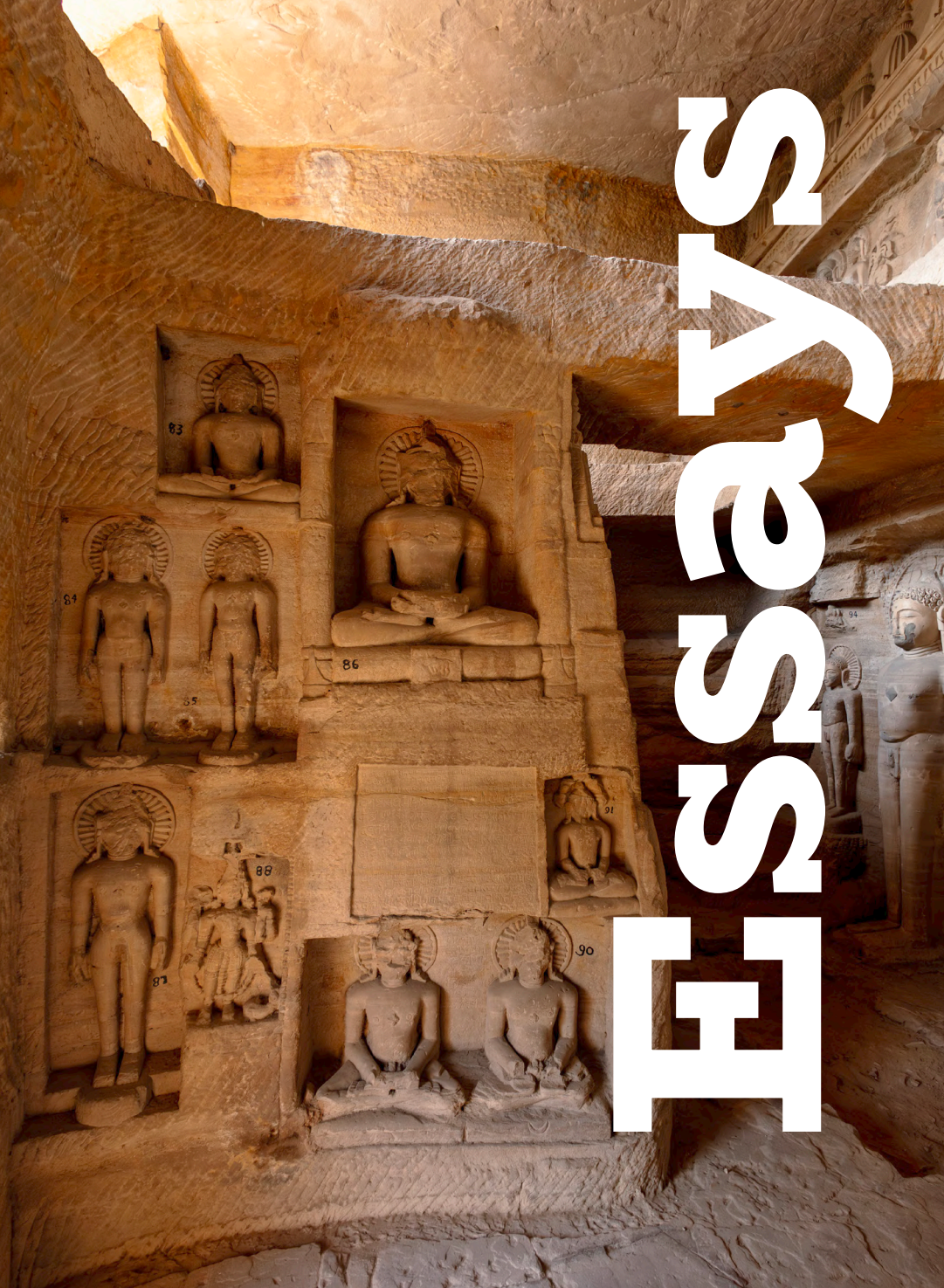
Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Kozhikode, Gangtok, Gwalior, Patiala, Puducherry

Contents

Introductory Note	07
Mihirakula to Marathas to Madhya Pradesh Amar Farooqui	11
Saviours in Stone Ross Lee Bernhaut	19
The Imprisoning Fortress Sarthak Sharma	25
Seeking Legitimacy in Stone Austin Coutinho	33
Recovering the Gvaliyari Bhakha Sandhya Sharma	41
A Sufi Mendicant and His Mausoleum Sarthak Sharma	45
Crafted in Gwalior Nandika Bhargava and Sarthak Sharma	51
Urdu Rhythms Sarthak Sharma	59
Through the Ollis Shikha Dhakad	65
Invisible Architectures Tulika Shrivastava	69
The Land of Music Meeta Pandit	75
Tracks through Time Meenakshi Vashisth	81
From Royal Retreats to Urban Respite Nitya Bhargava and Sarthak Sharma	87
A Jungle of Temples Sarthak Sharma	93
City Reads	99
City in Films	100
City Eats	101
Museum & Memories	102
Trail 1: Gwalior's Heritage at Maharaj Bada	105
Trail 2: The Echoes of Chambal: A Medieval Stone Trail	111



S a s a F



Introductory Note

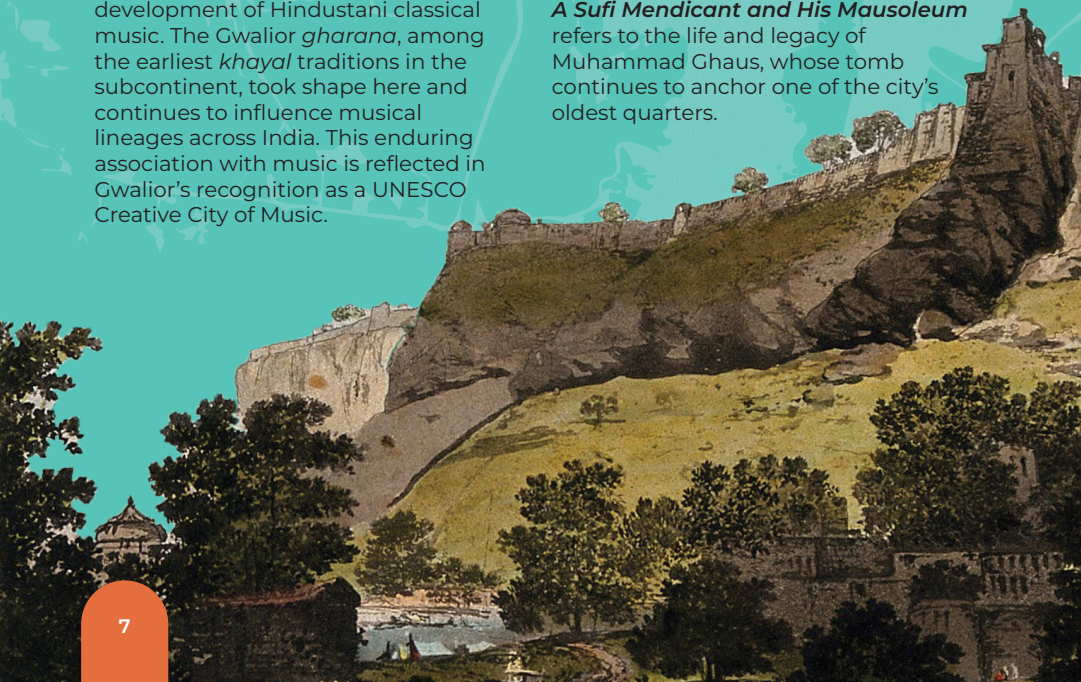
Gwalior is a city that boasts of a long and continuous history extending over more than 1500 years. Its layered past, often read through dynasties and monuments, is equally present in the practices, neighbourhoods, and cultural traditions sustained by its communities over time. This millenia and a half takes us back to the early medieval period, with traces of Central Asian Huns, showcasing how old the cosmopolitan culture of the city is! The Pratiharas and Kachchapagathas built temples in distinct architectural styles, while the Tomars contributed significantly to its palatial and urban fabric. With the arrival of the Scindias, the city expanded further, consolidating its position as an important political and cultural centre.

Alongside its architectural legacy, Gwalior is closely associated with the development of Hindustani classical music. The Gwalior *gharana*, among the earliest *khayal* traditions in the subcontinent, took shape here and continues to influence musical lineages across India. This enduring association with music is reflected in Gwalior's recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Music.

This curation brings together multiple strands of the city's history, moving across time, form, and practice.

Mihirakula to Marathas and Madhya Pradesh offers a historical overview, tracing the succession of rulers and cultures that have shaped the city. ***Saviours in Stone*** draws attention to the monumental Jaina sculptures carved into the cliffs of the Gopachal plateau, while ***The Imprisoning Fortress*** reconsiders the Gwalior Fort through its use as a site of imperial confinement during the Mughal period.

Moving beyond the fort, ***Seeking Legitimacy in Stone*** explores commemorative practices associated with rulers, while ***Recovering the Gvaliyari Bhakha*** examines literary connections between Gwalior and Brajbhasha through medieval texts. ***A Sufi Mendicant and His Mausoleum*** refers to the life and legacy of Muhammad Ghaus, whose tomb continues to anchor one of the city's oldest quarters.



The present finds reflection in ***Crafted in Gwalior***, which looks at three GI-tagged craft traditions still practiced in the city, and ***Urdu Rhythms***, which traces the city's connections with Urdu literary cultures. Urban life comes into focus ***Through the Olis***, which explores neighbourhoods historically associated with specific professions, and ***Invisible Architectures***, a visual account of domestic spaces shaped by early twentieth-century aesthetics of architecture.

Gwalior's musical heritage is explored further in ***The Land of Music***, which traces both lineage and innovation within the city's musical traditions. ***Tracks through Time*** follows the

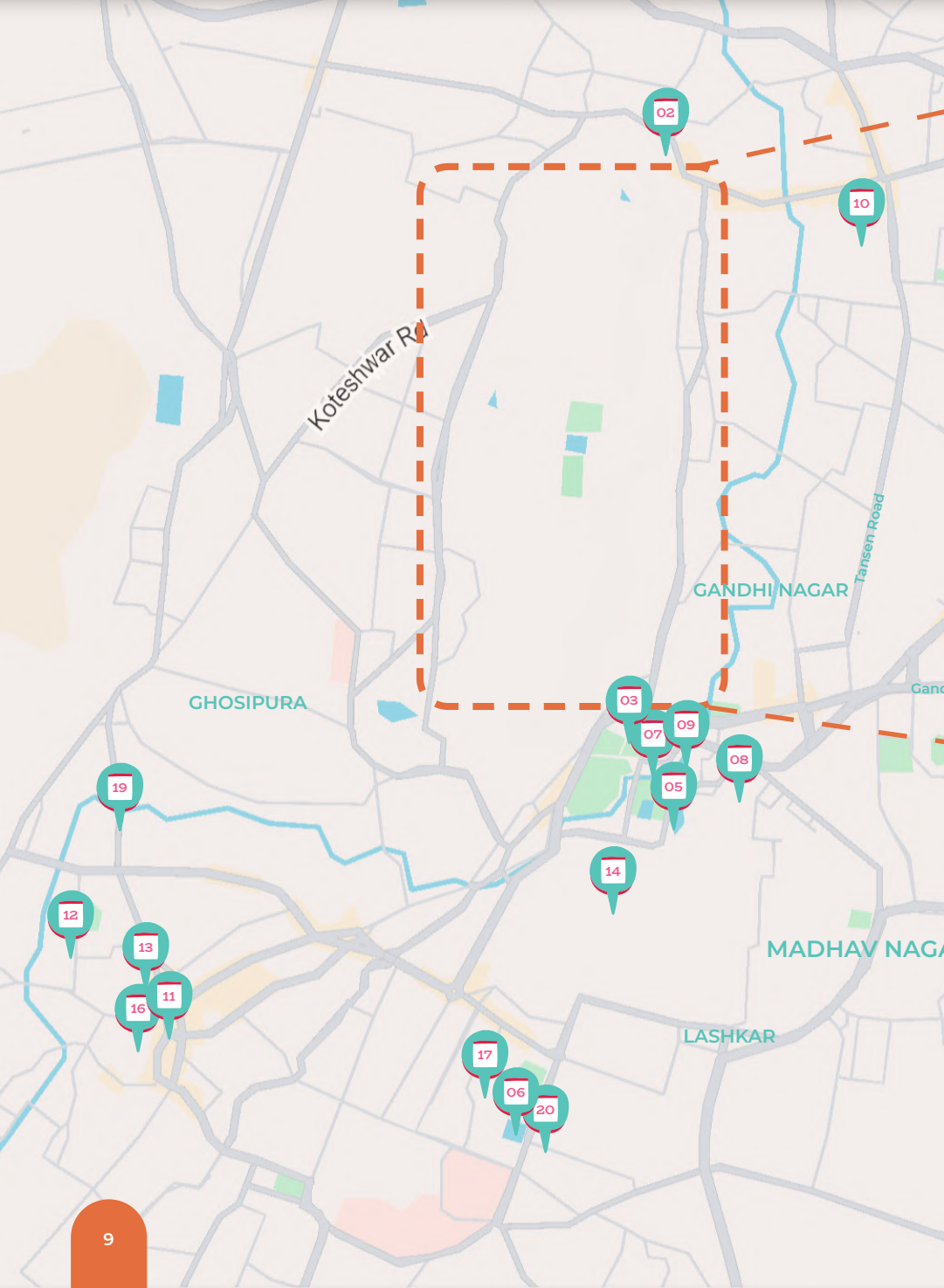
history of the Gwalior Light Railway, while ***From Royal Retreats to Urban Respite*** reflects on the green spaces in and around the city and their changing patterns of use over time.

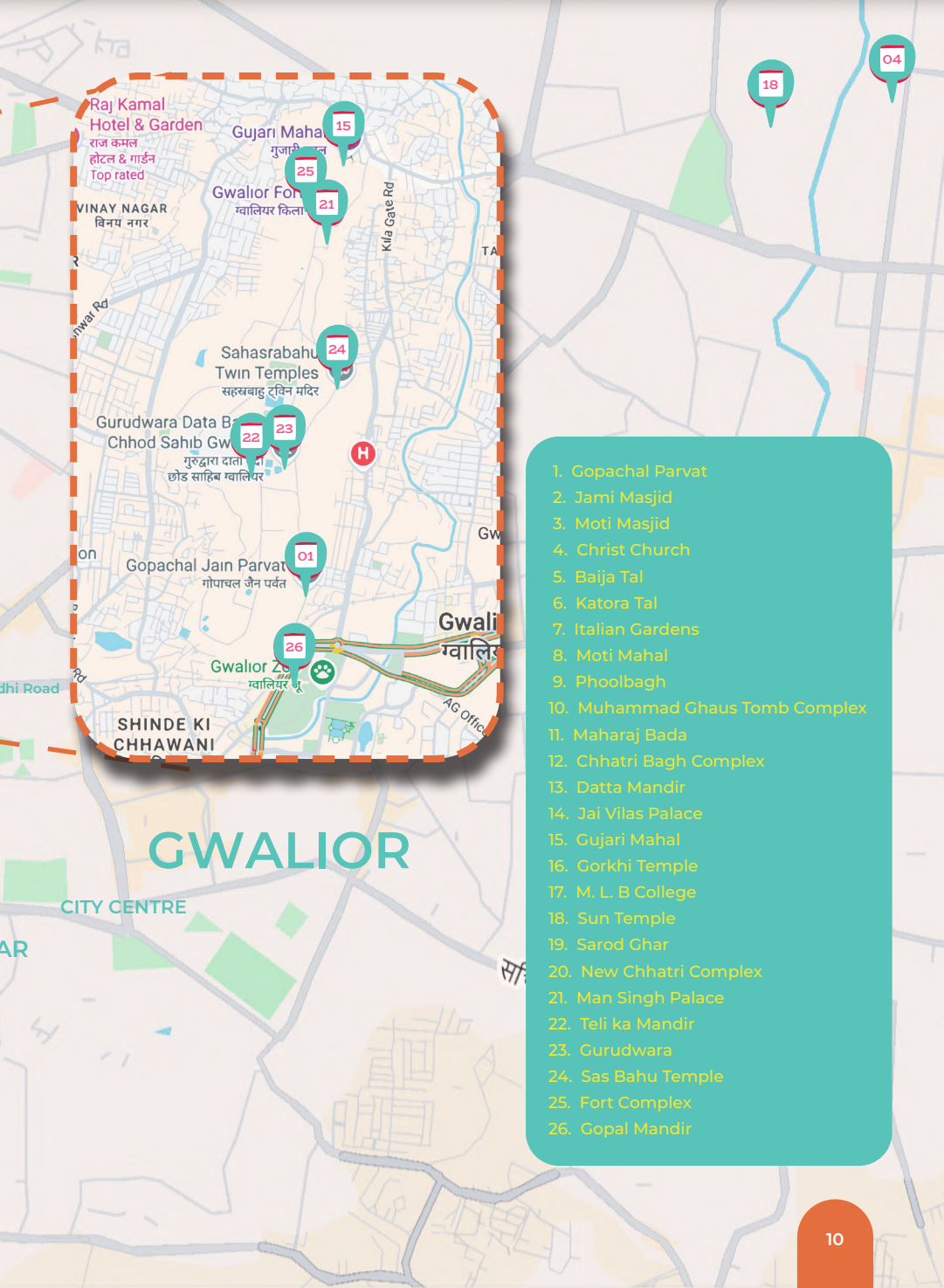
Finally, the narrative extends beyond the city to nearby Bateshwar in ***A Jungle of Temples***, where a cluster of medieval temples offers another perspective on the region's architectural and cultural history.

Through this collection, we invite you to engage with Gwalior as a city shaped by continuity and change, where multiple histories remain present within its contemporary landscape.



Fort of Gwalior. Coloured etching by William Hodges, 1786. Picture Credits: Wellcome Collection/ Wikimedia Commons.





Raj Kamal
Hotel & Garden
राज कमल
होटल & गार्डन
Top rated

Gujari Mahal
गुजरी महल

Gwalior Fort
ग्वालियर किला

VINAY NAGAR
विनय नगर

Sahasrabahu
Twin Temples
सहस्रबाहु द्विनि मंदिर

Gurudwara Datta B
Chhod Sahib Gw
गुरुद्वारा दत्ता
छोड साहिब ग्वालियर

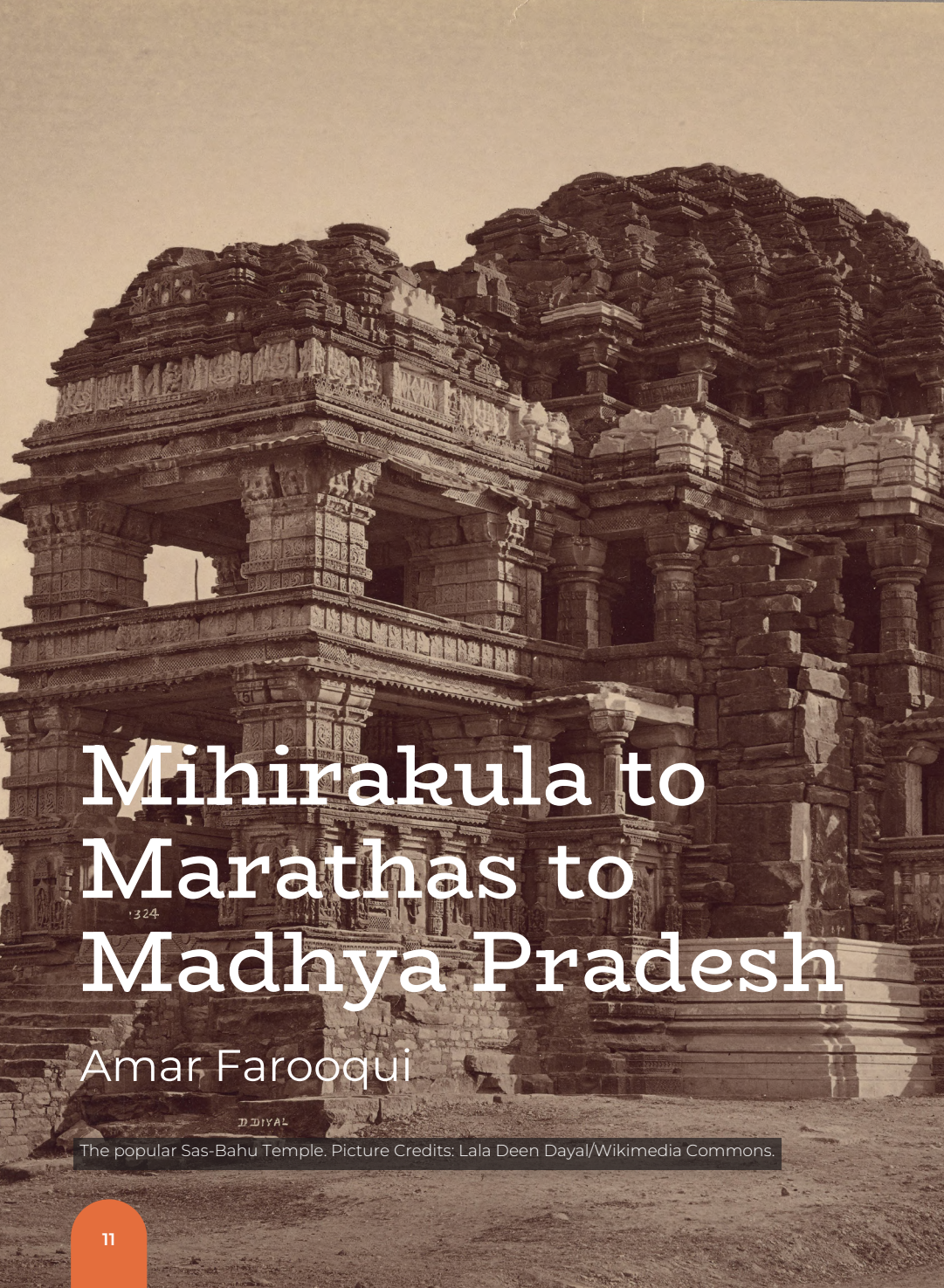
Gopachal Jain Parvat
गोपाचल जैन पर्वत

SHINDE KI
CHHAWANI

GWALIOR

CITY CENTRE

1. Gopachal Parvat
2. Jami Masjid
3. Moti Masjid
4. Christ Church
5. Baija Tal
6. Katora Tal
7. Italian Gardens
8. Moti Mahal
9. Phoolbagh
10. Muhammad Ghaus Tomb Complex
11. Maharaj Bada
12. Chhatri Bagh Complex
13. Datta Mandir
14. Jai Vilas Palace
15. Gujari Mahal
16. Gorkhi Temple
17. M. L. B College
18. Sun Temple
19. Sarod Char
20. New Chhatri Complex
21. Man Singh Palace
22. Teli ka Mandir
23. Gurudwara
24. Sas Bahu Temple
25. Fort Complex
26. Gopal Mandir



Mihirakula to Marathas to Madhya Pradesh

Amar Farooqui

BY LALA DEEN DAYAL

The popular Sas-Bahu Temple. Picture Credits: Lala Deen Dayal/Wikimedia Commons.

Gwalior emerged as a prominent city at the beginning of the nineteenth-century — when it became the capital of the region ruled by the Scindia dynasty, who established a state in Malwa in the first half of the eighteenth-century. Located at a strategic point, between northern India and the Deccan, the city has long been shaped by its position within wider networks of movement, exchange, and power.

Ancient Foundations

Lying at the edge of the Malwa plateau, Gwalior's Fort is poised at the top and the settlements at its foot. The strategic location of Gwalior within the subcontinent appears to have been recognised early, as evidenced by the inscriptions found at the fort site, including one from the sixth-century during the reign of Huna ruler Mihirakula. One of the oldest extant temples on the hill, carved into the rock face and dating to the ninth-century, contains inscriptions indicating that Gwalior (referred to as Gopadri) was part of the territories of the Pratihara (Gurjara-Pratihara) ruler Bhoja and the fort was already in existence. At that time, Kanauj was the capital and Gwalior a frontier outpost.

Although Pratihara rule concluded by the eleventh-century, a line of Pratiharas ruled Gwalior intermittently. The history of the following two centuries is marked by regional chiefs occasionally holding Gwalior. Among them, the Kachchhapaghata built spectacular temples, particularly the 'Sas' Temple (also known as 'Sahastra-Baahu') and

the lesser 'Bahu' Temple within the fort, in the late eleventh-century. The Ghurids, who had become the dominant power in north India by the late twelfth-century, occupied Gwalior briefly before it became part of the Delhi Sultanate.

During this period, its location became significant due to the Sultanate's expansion into the south. Ibn Battuta references it during these years as 'a big city with an impregnable fortress isolated on the summit of a mountain.'

The end of the fourteenth-century saw the Delhi Sultanate's decline and the emergence of regional polities. These included a kingdom centred on Gwalior, ruled by the Tomars. The Tomar chiefs, initially feudatories of the Tughluqs, became independent and created their own state, though rulers occasionally paid tribute to the Delhi sultans (especially the Lodhis in the early sixteenth-century).

Regional Rise and Fall

Under the Tomars, Gwalior saw a vibrant regional court emerge. Man Singh (1488-1518), the most illustrious of the Tomars, transformed Gwalior into a flourishing centre of art.

Under his ancestor, Dungar Singh, the now-famous Jain icons of colossal sizes were carved into the hill and the first Hindavi versions of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were produced.

Man Singh also added to the grandeur of the fort by building a palace, its façade adorned with beautiful tiles. This is believed to have inspired Mughal emperors and the architectural styles that evolved under Akbar. Gwalior was also a centre of Sufi worship under the Tomars, serving as the spiritual centre of Shaikh Muhammad Ghaws (Ghaus, Ghawth or Ghouse) of the Shattari order of Sufism. Man Singh was also a patron of classical music, himself an accomplished musician, and Gwalior provided sustenance to musicians, artists, and litterateurs who migrated there.

For a decade after Man Singh's death, Gwalior was a part of Lodhi territory before it passed to Mughal hands. Babur's visit to Gwalior, described in the *Baburnama*, is depicted in three separate illustrations of *Baburnama* prepared under Akbar, indicating its historical significance for Babur and his successors. Under the Mughals, Gwalior town expanded further from its base at the northern side of the hill.

In the eighteenth-century, Mughal decline and colonial ascendancy saw a seven-decade tussle for control over Malwa. The Marathas, expanding northwards from the Deccan under the Peshwas, emerged as the principal beneficiaries.

The Anglo-Scindia Tussle

Three *Peshwas* (prime ministers of the Maratha state), Balaji Vishwanath, Baji Rao I, and Balaji Baji Rao, mark eighteenth-century Maratha history. Under Baji Rao (1720-40), the Marathas embarked on an



Babur inspecting Gwalior Fort. Picture Credits: National Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

expansionist venture and gained most of western India, parts of the Deccan, Malwa, and central India. Shares of territory and resources were awarded to *sardars* (warrior-chiefs) by the *Peshwa*, providing these chiefs with the capacity to establish autonomous control over parts of the Deccan. Malwa was ceded by the Mughals to the Marathas in 1738. Malhar Rao Holkar and Mahadji Scindia were the most prominent Maratha *sardars* in Malwa in the eighteenth-century.

While Ujjain was the initial capital of the Scindias, Gwalior became the centre of government in 1810. Ujjain stayed the headquarters in



A picture of Maharaja Scindia, Nobles, and High Officials of Gwalior by Raja Deen Dayal in 1887. Picture Credits: Cleveland Museum of Art.



Portrait of Maharaja Ali Jah Daulatrao Scindia of Gwalior, ca.1825. Picture Credits: Victoria & Albert Museum.

Malwa prant (province), and Gwalior became the headquarters of the northern division of Gwalior prant.

As the Scindias laid their foundations of power in the region, they were halted by the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-18). This left the Scindia state incorporated into the British Empire as a princely state, one of only five princely states entitled to a 21-gun salute.

In the nineteenth-century, a new township came up around the southern base of the hill. Called *Lashkar* (cantonment), this seems to have been intended as a temporary military camp; similarly, a cantonment was situated at Morar, the east of the fort, in 1844 to

station contingents of troops commanded by the British.

Modern Gwalior comprises the old city, Lashkar, and Morar. Militaristically, even

after defeat in the Third Anglo-Maratha War and the curtailment of

Scindia power, the state had real potential to resist colonial control. As late as 1843, the British Governor-General led

a major military force to Gwalior and stationed it there for several weeks to enforce British authority.

Gwalior's military history and power made it a major centre for the Revolt of 1857. Under the leadership of Rani Lakshmi Bai and Tatya Tope, the rebels moved into Gwalior after the fall of Jhansi and Kalpi. The British force led by Hugh Rose battled the rebels for a month,

Rani Lakshmi Bai Memorial. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.



during which Rani Lakshmi Bai died, and eventually regained Gwalior. The British then occupied the fort until 1886.

Meanwhile, Gwalior was also progressing economically and socioculturally. By the end of the nineteenth-century and the early twentieth-century, Gwalior became an industrial centre with a textile mill, a leather factory, a cement factory, engineering works, and a state-owned pottery-making enterprise. Gwalior Potteries was a reputed brand name.

The city had a manufacturing unit for fountain-pen nibs, which required considerable technical expertise.

Gwalior also continued to be central to transportation. It was on the main route of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway connecting Delhi and Punjab with Bombay. It was also the

terminus for the narrow-gauge railway network, the Gwalior Light Railway.

Architecturally, no grand buildings emerged in this duration other than the impressive Jai Vilas Palace built in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. Lashkar had a relatively modest city centre, the Jayaji Chowk, with a Town Hall, the state-owned Alijah Durbar Press, and Victoria Market. The Gwalior Fort continued to completely dominate the skyline.

Under the Scindias, Gwalior also became a leading centre of Hindustani music. The classical music that had roots in the Tomar era found expression in the Gwalior *gharana* (school of music). Even Daulatrao (r. 1794-1827) was a disciple of Naththan Khan, the progenitor of the *gharana*, and Jayaji Rao (r. 1843-86) would become the disciple of Khan's grandson. Several vocalists received their training in Gwalior and other eminent *gharanas*, particularly



Mansingh Palace, Gwalior Fort. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

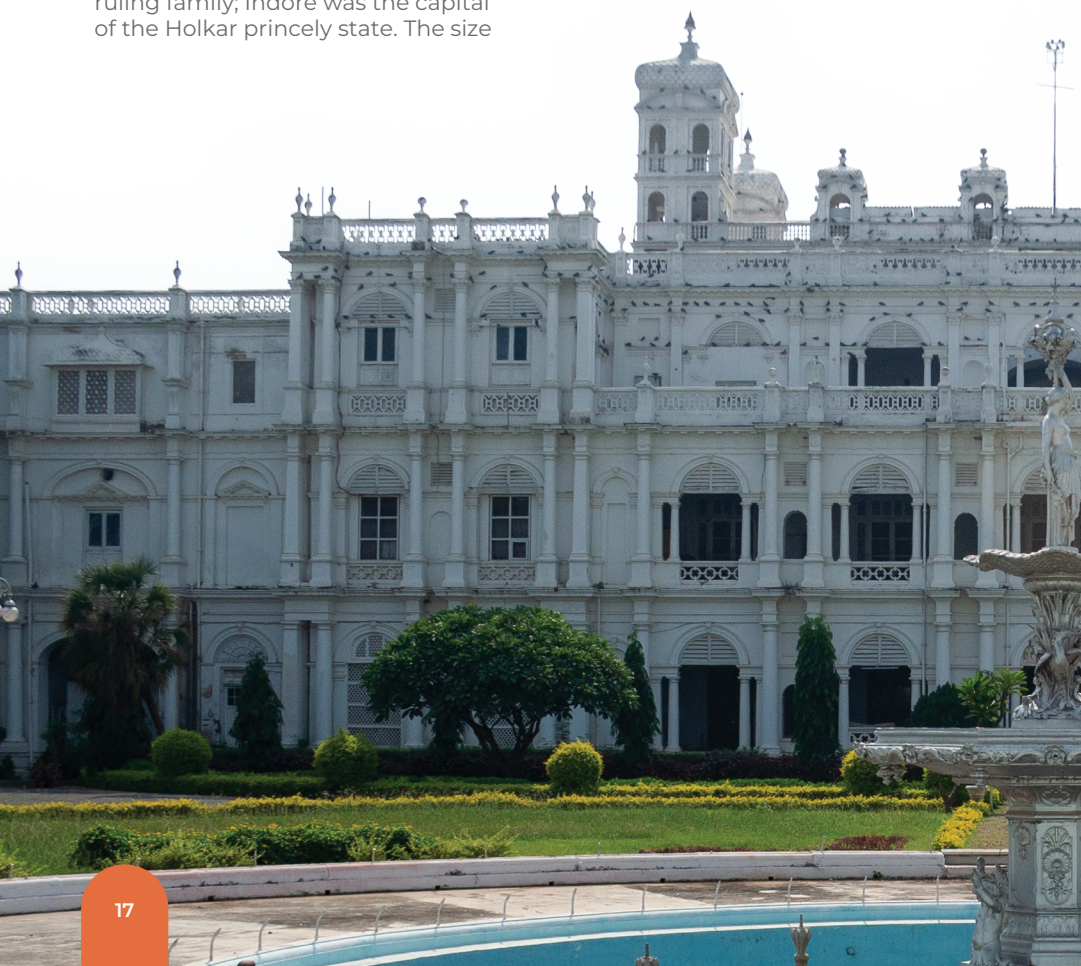
Patiala and Jaipur, evolved from Gwalior *gharana*.

Post-Independence Days

After independence, the Scindia State acceded to a merger with the Indian Union in 1948. When the princely states of Malwa were integrated to constitute Madhya Bharat (which in turn was included in Madhya Pradesh in 1956), the Scindia and Holkar territories together accounted for three-fourths of the area of Madhya Bharat. The Holkars were another prominent Maratha ruling family; Indore was the capital of the Holkar princely state. The size

of the Scindia State then was about twice that of Holkar.

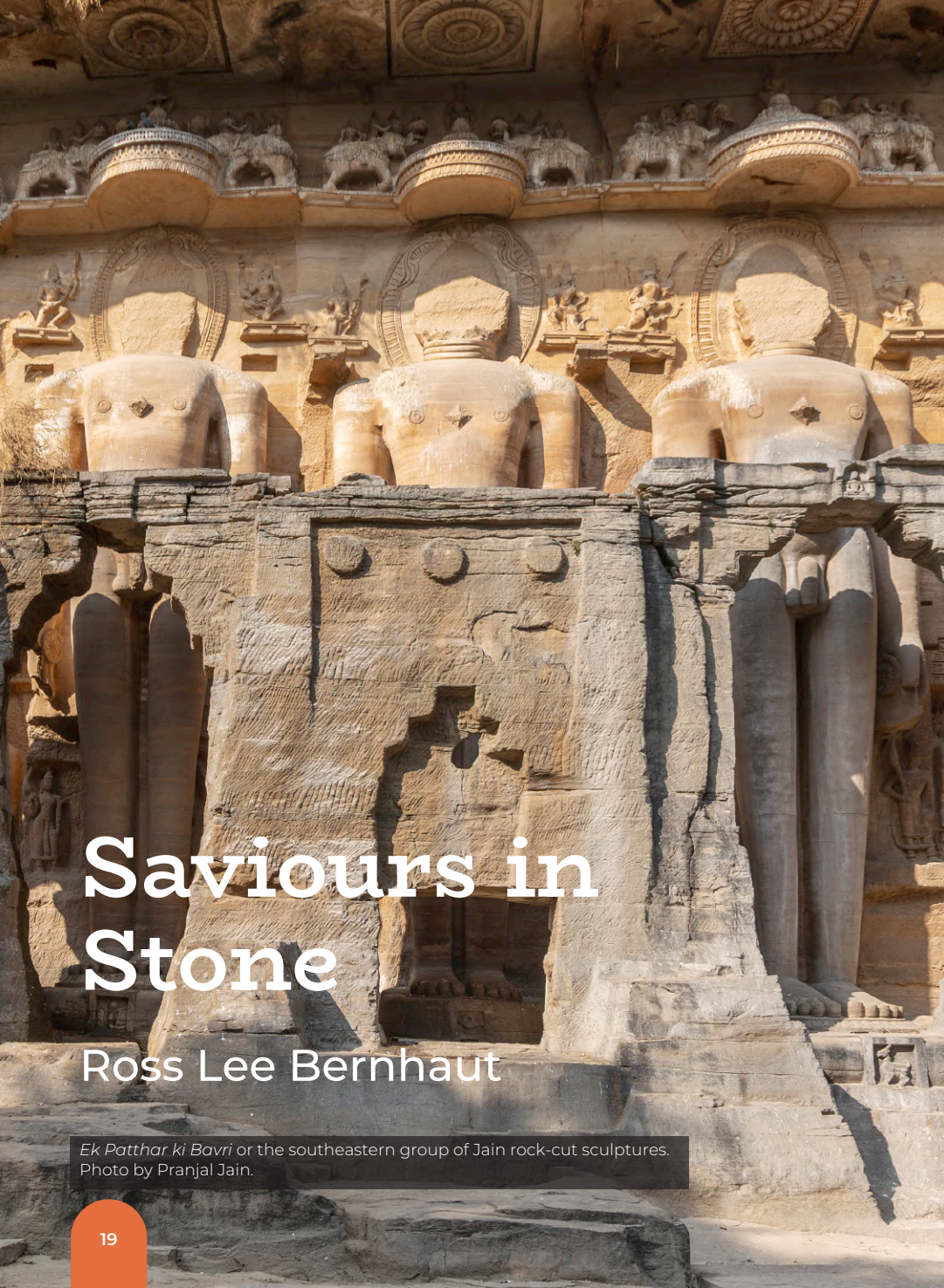
The Indian state accommodated the interests of both Gwalior and Indore when they acceded to the Union of India. This was reflected in the compromise over the choice of capital for Madhya Bharat, rotating between Gwalior and Indore. Subsequently, Bhopal was made the capital of Madhya Pradesh when the state came into existence. Gwalior has since declined in political importance. Nevertheless, it is a



major urban centre of Madhya Pradesh and a tourist destination today. The main attraction is the fort with its numerous buildings, many of them of great antiquity. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Gwalior go about their everyday lives under the shadow of the fort and its rich history.

Jai Vilas Palace. Photo by Ayan Ghosh.





Saviours in Stone

Ross Lee Bernhaut

Ek Patthar ki Bavri or the southeastern group of Jain rock-cut sculptures.
Photo by Pranjal Jain.

The fort of Gwalior has an illustrious history of monumental construction spanning 1.5 millennia, which began in the sixth-century CE and proliferated from the eighth-century. Gwalior emerged as one of the most significant centres of Jain patronage in north India, particularly through the support of merchant communities and regional courts. Jains established numerous temples around the hill and carved countless images into its cliffsides, some of which are worshipped even today. The central focus of Jain sculpture are Jinas (Victor) or Tirthankaras (Ford-maker), the enlightened beings who embody principles of Jainism and reveal the path of emancipation from *samsara* (transmigration or cycles of rebirth). These icons are usually portrayed in postures of seated or standing meditation.

In Gwalior, the Digambara (Sky-clad) sect of Jainism predominated — their statues were depicted without clothing, reflecting their commitment to relinquishing all material possessions.

Early Temple Sculpture

In the earliest period (roughly eighth-century), Jain statuary in Gwalior comprised sculptures originally fabricated for freestanding masonry temples and images hewn directly into the living rock face of the hill. Though Jain temples from this period have vanished, sculptures from them remain in archaeological museums, and displays around the fort.

One image portrays Jina Rishabhanatha (or Adinatha) flanked by an engaged square column, indicating its original architectural context on a temple wall. Before the Tirthankaras were represented with an identifying emblem (*lanchana*), the images of different Jinas were indistinguishable. Rishabhanatha — the first of the twenty-four Tirthankaras in our present *avasarpini* (a descending half-cycle of time in Jain cosmology) — was an exception, recognizable by his cascading locks of hair. The twenty-third Jina, Parshvanatha, was also distinct, sheltered by a canopy of serpent-heads.



Gwalior Fort map from *A handbook for travellers in India, Burma, and Ceylon* by John Murray, 1911. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

A popular sculpture type was the *caturvimshati-patta*, representing the twenty-four Tirthankaras: the standard format presents a haloed Jina, often Rishabhanatha since he is first, surrounded by twenty-three smaller-scale Jinas on the frame. Another image type portrayed is Nandishvara Dvipa, the eighth and outermost island-continent of the *madhyaloka* (middle world) in Jain cosmography, where deities venerate eternal Jina icons. The fifty-two eternal temples situated on Nandishvara Dvipa are signified by drums that house forty-eight enshrined seated Jinas, which supported a *caturmukha* (four-faced) image with four Tirthankaras.

Rock-Hewn Imagery

The earliest rock-hewn Jain images in Gwalior were chiseled into the westernmost bluff of the hill, outside the Urvai gate.

Today, this active temple site is known as Shree Mata Trishala Atishay Kshetra after a monumental image of Trishala, mother of the twenty-fourth Tirthankara, Mahavira. Adjacent is a relief depicting the yaksha (male divine attendant of a Jina) Sarvanabhuti (or Sarvanha) and the yakshi (female divine attendant of a Jina) Ambika (or Kushmandini). Ambika sits with her two children upon her lion-mount beneath a mango tree, reflecting her mythological association with motherhood and fertility. Goddesses like Ambika were considered intercessors in worldly affairs for



Head of Parshvanatha (above); Nandishvara Dvipa drum fragment (below), The Scindia School. Photo by Ross Lee Bernhaut.

Jains. By contrast, liberated Jinas have transcended material existence and reside for eternity in *siddhashila*, the crescent-shaped realm of perfected *siddhas* (disembodied souls) at the vertex of the universe. Various seated and standing Jinas occupy niches in these excavations, including a colossal image of Rishabhanatha.

Roadside Images and Hilltop Temples

Images were also carved along the road leading up to the fort from the northeast, which was developed in the ninth-century by Mihira Bhoja of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty. Most sculptures represent Hindu deities, but images of three Jinas appear



Trishala, Sri Mata Trishala Atishay Kshetra. Photo by Ross Lee Bernhaut.

between Shiva *lingas*. These include a life-sized standing Tirthankara in a two-tiered shrine, a small standing Jina in an aedicule crowning a pillar, and a tiny seated one to the south. Their style and the paleography of records attending the latter two suggest they were fabricated around the tenth-century.

Several Jain temples were built on Gwalior hill between the mid-tenth and late twelfth centuries, during the rule of the Kacchapaghata dynasty. In 1844, one temple was discovered by British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham, where he

found “several naked Jain figures” and an inscription from 1108.

Another Jain temple occupies the grounds of the Scindia School at the southern part of the fort: it has three superimposed stories and bears moldings dateable to the twelfth-century, although it was restored in the fifteenth-century. British officer and surveyor James Blaikie Keith dug up “a number of large statues representing various Jaina Thirthankars” and a pair of pedestals from beneath this temple. Other early medieval Jain sculptures, currently housed in the Gujari Mahal Archeological Museum and throughout the fort, confirm that other Jain temples

were constructed on the hill during Kacchapaghata rule.

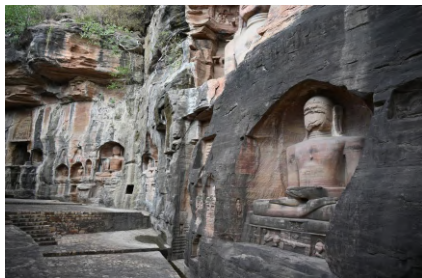
Tirthankaras of the Tomara Era

Gwalior's most famous Jain statues are undoubtedly the colossal Tirthankaras carved around the hill in the fifteenth-century. The patronage of these colossi resulted from several factors. In 1398, Digambara merchant families moved to Gwalior after Timur's invasion of Delhi, bringing new wealth to the city. Another factor was the rise of *bhattarakas*, lineages of Digambara monastic preceptors who were sedentary, clothed, and involved in worldly affairs.

Poet and scholar Raidhu served as *pratishthacharya*, the one presiding over the consecration of these images. The kings of the ruling Tomara Rajput dynasty also supported this undertaking.

These Jain statues are concentrated in four locations:

1. The northeastern cluster, colloquially known as the Girnar or Naminatha group due to the image of the twenty-second Tirthankara, is reached via a steep footpath off the northeastern ascent to the fort.
2. The southwestern group lines the escarpments on either side of the Urvai valley. Entry to the valley housing these colossal Jinas, as well as the main road up to the fort from the west, is guarded by the Urvai



Southwestern group of Jain rock-cut sculptures.
Photo by Ross Lee Bernhaut.

gate. Included in this set is the largest sculpture in Gwalior, a fifty-seven-foot tall standing Adinatha. Building began in the southern gorge in 1440 and continued over the next couple of decades.

3. The southeastern group, or *Ek Patthar ki Bavri* (A Stone Stepwell), is carved into the southeastern face of the hill. Inscriptions suggest construction was undertaken from 1468. Image dedications here largely subsided by the 1480s, but continued sporadically into the sixteenth-century.
4. The final group of Tomara-period Tirthankaras was established on the northwestern spur, just north of the Dhodha Paur gate to the fort. This cluster was popularly called the Naminatha group due to the colossal image of the twenty-first Tirthankara. The first recorded consecrations took place in 1470, with another spate in 1474.

Gwalior's giant Jinas appear in an array of sizes and configurations, housed in sanctuaries displaying diverse framing features culled from temple, palace, and military architecture. Their sophistication and heterogeneity is unparalleled among the Jain caves of the region.

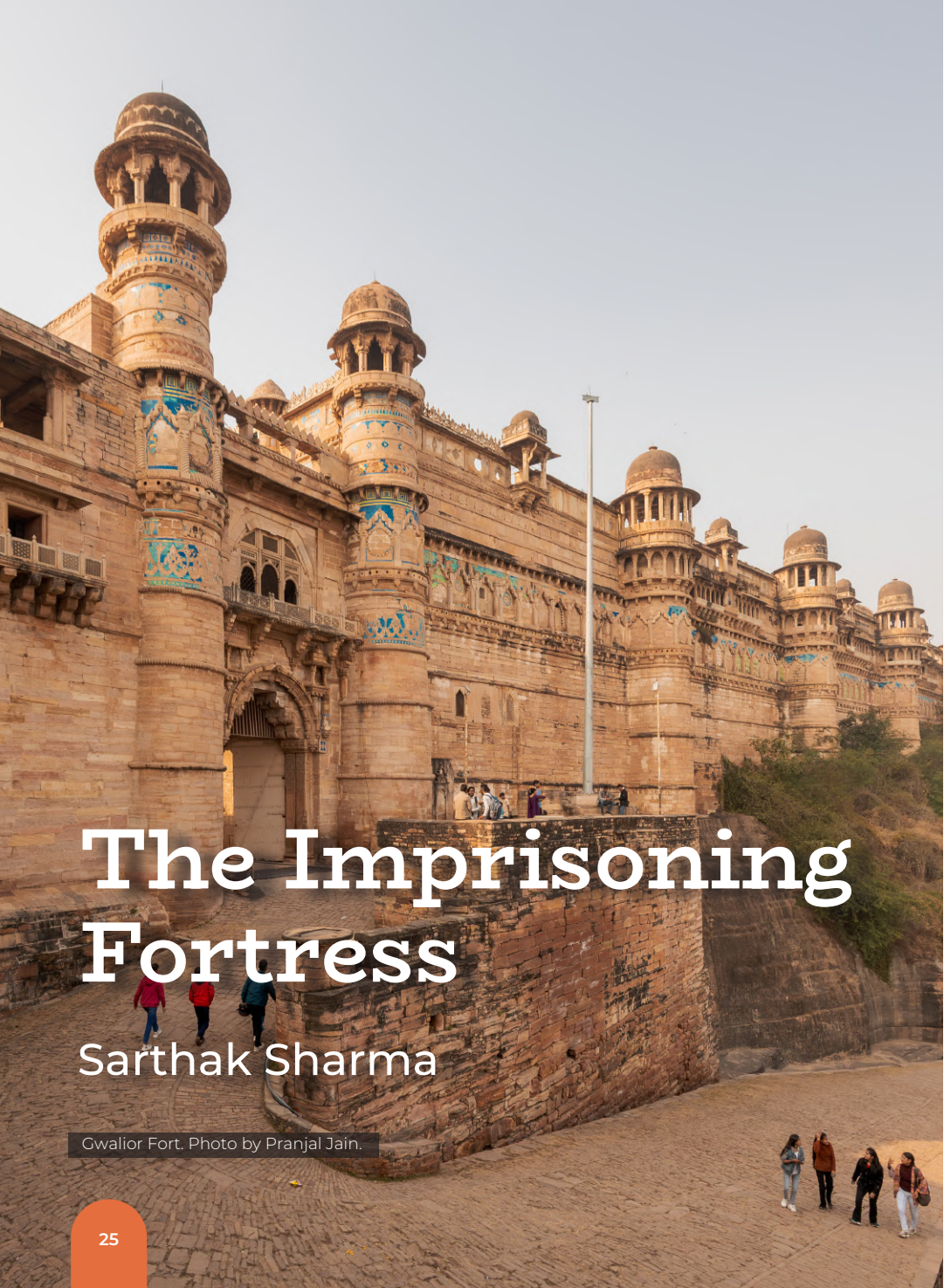
Desecration and Reclamation

The heads and exposed genitals of most of Gwalior's rock-hewn Tirthankaras have been disfigured. This mutilation is attributed to the first Mughal emperor Babur. In his memoir, *Baburnama*, he relates how during his tour of Gwalior in 1528, he found these "idols" the sole defect of the valley and had them destroyed. Their programmatic defacement of heads and bodily extremities seems to reflect ideas about the neutralisation of idols in Islamic theology and law. Though all four major grouping of fifteenth-century Jain colossi sustain iconoclastic damage, the earlier rock-cut images at Shree Mata Trishala Atishay Kshetra survive entirely intact.

Since then, the Jains of Gwalior have restored many of these statues; Cunningham notes that Jina heads were replastered as early as the 1860s. Today, Gwalior's rock-cut Jain statues remain both objects of art historical interest and actively venerated images.

Jain Tirthankar statue, *Ek Patthar ki Bavri*,
Gopachal Parvat. Photo by Pranjal Jain.





The Imprisoning Fortress

Sarthak Sharma

Gwalior Fort. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

The fort in Gwalior, built atop a plateau, dominates the skyline, no matter where one stands in the city. The urban landscape seems to have grown outwards from it, making it the centre of Gwalior. The image of the Man Mandir — a fifteenth-century palace built by Man Singh Tomar — is arguably the most well-known visual of the city. Structures dating from as early as the eighth–ninth-centuries, such as the Teli ka Mandir, stand alongside later additions like the Scindia School and other palaces preserved within the three square kilometres enclosed by the fort walls.

This commanding presence is closely tied to the fort's geography and architectural evolution. Gwalior Fort rises from a long sandstone plateau, extending for nearly two kilometres and rising over 100 metres above the surrounding plains. Its steep, near-vertical escarpments form a natural defensive barrier, while access to the summit is controlled through winding approaches and fortified gateways such as the Urvai and Alamgiri gates. Over time, successive rulers adapted the site — developing palaces, temples, and water systems that allowed the fort to function as a largely self-sufficient settlement during periods of siege. These features made it not only secure, but enclosed and difficult to access.

It was these very features, of elevation, enclosure, and controlled access, that shaped the fort's later histories.

Four hundred years ago, it was on Diwali that Gwalior Fort was the site of an event

which changed the meaning of the day for Sikhs forever.

Yet this is not the only history the fort holds. Over time, it came to be used as a prison for political rivals, religious figures, and members of ruling elites, giving it a distinct place within the histories of power and confinement in the region.

The Legend of the Sikh Guru

The most famous story of Gwalior Fort is associated with the Sikh celebration of Diwali as *Bandi Chhor Divas* (Day of Releasing Prisoners), commemorating the end of the internment of Guru Hargobind Singh, the sixth guru of the Sikh faith.

The reasons for his imprisonment are unclear, though they are suspected to be associated with bearing arms and unpaid fines. The causes were likely, however, to have been the Guru's attempt to consolidate armed forces (Akal Sena) and construct a fortress (Akal Takht) in Amritsar. Historically, the Sikhs and Mughals were already on tentative terrain, with Guru Arjan Dev executed due to his support for a rebellion against Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Within this context, Guru Hargobind Singh's activities may have caused the Mughal Empire anxiety. Jahangir's memoirs only note that after the guru was summoned to court, Jahangir found him arrogant and imprisoned him to teach him a lesson in humility.

Just as the cause of imprisonment is only conjecture, so too is the duration of Guru Hargobind Singh's incarceration. It might have been as short as two months or as long as 12 years, although fact does declare he was released in 1620. His release may have been secured by Sufi saint Hazrat Mian Mir's intervention with the emperor. But until then, the guru's followers frequently paid homage to him from below the fort's walls.

Palace ruins at Gwalior Fort, including residential courtyards, pavilions, defensive walls, and bastions, built of sandstone and masonry, overlooking the surrounding cityscape from above. Photo by Ayan Ghosh.

The strangest part of the tale recounts how the guru secured the release of 52 princes held alongside him. The favourite version of the guides at the fort today suggests that the guru refused to leave without the other prisoners. Jahangir in turn ordered the release of all those who could touch the guru's robes while he left — and the robe grew long enough that all 52 princes gained their liberation. Henceforth the guru was called *Data Bandi Chhor* (Munificent Liberator). A gurudwara built in the twentieth-century, stands within the fort complex to commemorate this story.

Royal Prison of the Past

Gwalior Fort was the prison of choice for several high-status individuals during Mughal rule.





Inside of the Gurudwara Data Bandi Chhor Sahib.
Photo by Pranjal Jain.

This began with the imprisonment (and execution) of Akbar's cousin Abul Qasim and continued into Aurangzeb's reign.

Gwalior Fort might have been chosen as a prison for its geographical features: not too far from Agra, it sat near a plateau and made escape near-impossible. Moreover, after the last Tomar ruler died, nobody could claim it as their ancestral home, making attacks unlikely. Simultaneously, leaving it ungarrisoned and open to unorganised use would be dangerous. Consequently, turning it into a prison might have been the most practical idea.

The prisoners of Gwalior Fort were usually of significance, ranging from rival sultans to princes or religious preceptors. This was a prison for the elite and aristocrats. Of these many personalities that dared to resist the Mughal empire and faced

imprisonment, records remain only of certain religious and political figures.





Contemporary painting of the sixth Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind Singh, mid-seventeenth century. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Religious Opponents

While the Guru's imprisonment continues to live on in the memory of Sikhs and the residents of Gwalior, several others were forgotten in the public mind. Among them is the story of Sunni leader Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi. Directly opposing Akbar's policies, Sirhindi called him the "enemy of Islam" and denounced any faiths that did not subscribe to Sunni Islam in a series of vehement letters made public between 1617-1619. Jahangir promptly arrested him for infidelity and hearsay.

The legend around the scene goes that Sirhindi refused to perform the *sijda*, a court prostration, and defied Jahangir. This story, however, could very well be a later invention, created to portray Sirhindi as a devout Sunni.

To add insult to injury, however, Sirhindi was handed over to a Hindu Rajput custodian, Ani Rai Singh, in Gwalior for a year. After his release, he was more tempered and his letters were no longer as virulent. This is a tale rarely recounted today, even by the tour guides of Gwalior Fort.

Political Prisoners from the Deccan

While the motivations behind imprisoning religious leaders were murky, the reasons for jailing rival sultans was obvious. Three distinct sultans of the Ahmednagar Sultanate, in the Deccan, were kept in Gwalior Fort.



Chand Bibi hawking with attendants in a landscape, ca. 1700. Picture Credits: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Bahadur Nizam Shah was an infant ruler, with his aunt Chand Bibi serving as the effective authority of the Sultanate. Her sustained resistance to the Mughals posed a significant challenge even to Akbar. It was only towards the end of the sixteenth-century that Mughal forces, led by Akbar's son, were able to overwhelm Ahmadnagar. Following Chand Bibi's assassination by her own nobles, the young Bahadur was taken to Gwalior Fort, where the historical record of his life falls silent.

The Nizam Shahs did persist after the fall of the capital and their ruler, but suffered continuous defeat. Malik Amber, the de-facto ruler of the Nizam Shah Sultanate, was a

persistent challenge to Jahangir. His son, Fath Khan eventually placed Hussain Nizam Shah on the throne, but a fresh wave of attacks by Shah Jahan resulted in Hussain's capture and imprisonment at Gwalior Fort in 1633. Finally, the last Nizam, Murtaza Nizam Shah was sheltered and backed by a powerful and landed citizen, Shahaji (the father of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj). Continued pressure from the empire eventually forced Shahaji to surrender the Nizam — marking the end of Ahmednagar Sultanate with the imprisonment of its last sultan in Gwalior.

Princes of the Empire

A number of Mughal princes were also held as prisoners in Gwalior; among the earliest was Abul Qasim, Akbar's cousin, who was confined during early struggles for succession within the Mughal family.

During Aurangzeb's reign, the numbers of incarcerated princes began to rise. As a brutal war of succession began between Shah Jahan's four sons, Aurangzeb allied with his younger brother Murad Baksh, the then-governor of Gujarat, to defeat their elder brother, Dara Shukoh. But brothers could not remain allies for long in a war of succession and Murad was soon drugged and shipped off to Gwalior before execution. He is rumoured to be buried in the 'Traitor's Cemetery' inside the fort, its exact location unclear today.

Aurangzeb's nephew (Dara's elder son) Sulaiman is also buried in that cemetery. Having fled after his father's losses, he was discovered in hiding by Rajput ruler Jai Singh and imprisoned in Gwalior Fort before execution. His younger brother, Siphir Shukoh, was also incarcerated but survived. Even Aurangzeb's son, Muhammad Sultan, did not escape imprisonment. A portrait of him in unadorned robes still survives: likely painted in the Fort itself, it offers a glimpse of prison life for the royals. Besides such fleeting details, there is no information remaining of the stories from inside the Fort. Even the names of most inhabitants are lost to time.

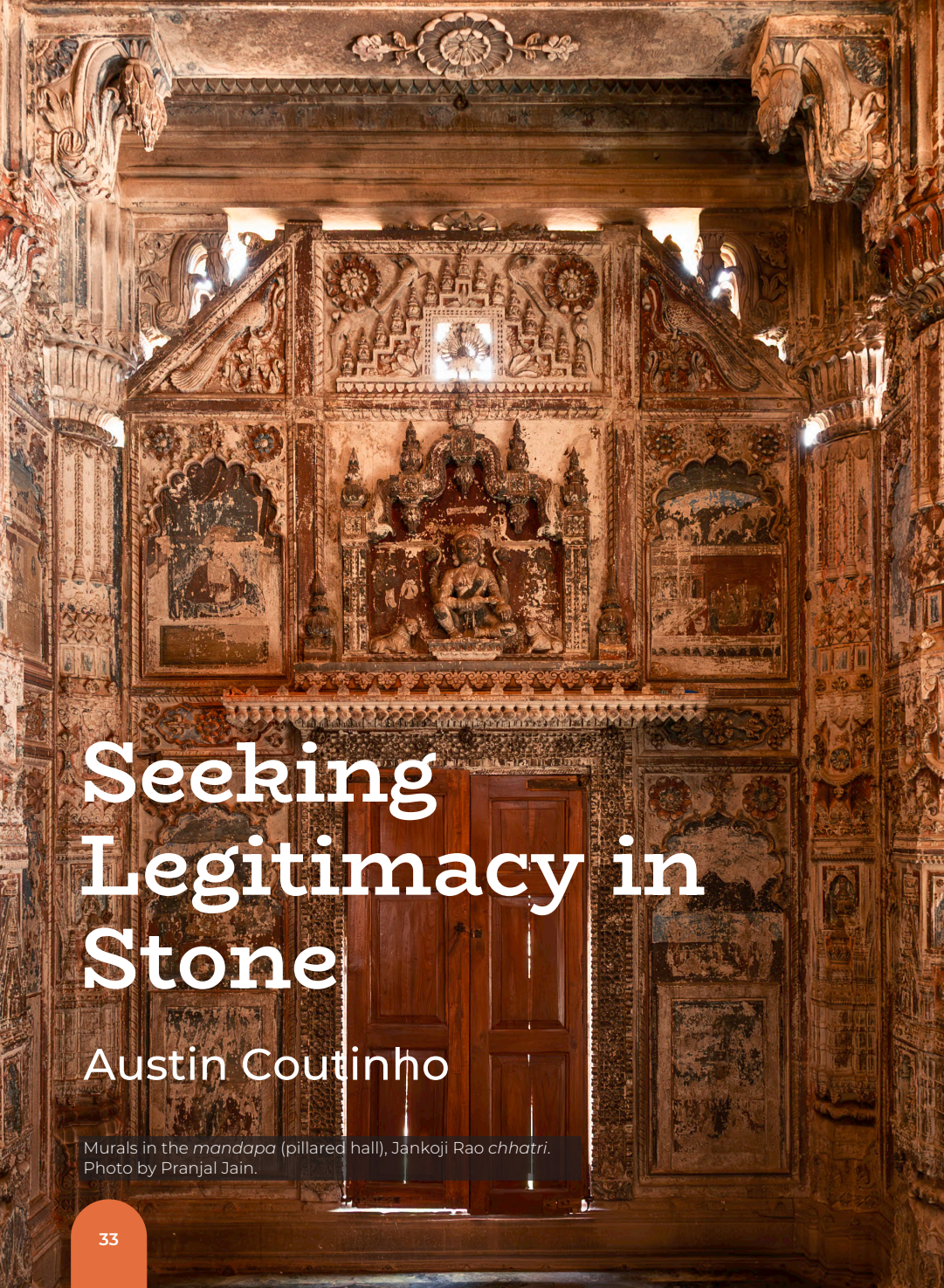
Ghosts of Gwalior Fort

Given its long history as a prison, around which several legends accumulate, Gwalior Fort continues to generate stories and myths today. Like many forts in the country, it is often spoken of as haunted. Executions did take place in Gwalior Fort, with several prisoners rumoured to have died there. Today, the residents believe that certain chambers were once execution chambers — and around these rise legends of ghosts, the executed who still reside there. Murad Baksh still roams the ramparts in the imagination of the public.

These stories point towards a cultural memory of how the fort was used by the Mughal Empire, also showing how the politics and violence of high-society inflects the lives of the masses that witnessed it.



Portrait of Murad Bakhsh, c. 1635; borders c. 1700s. The painting is attributed to Balchand. Picture Credits: The Cleveland Museum of Art.



Seeking Legitimacy in Stone

Austin Coutinho

Murals in the *mandapa* (pillared hall), Jankoji Rao *chhatri*.
Photo by Pranjal Jain.

The history of commemorative architecture in the Indian subcontinent is a journey from the sacred to the sovereign. While funerary practices varied across cultures, the transition from simple burial to “celebratory remembrance” found its early monumental expression in the Stupa. Originally modest earthen mounds containing the relics of the Buddha or his disciples, these structures evolved into sophisticated architectural microcosms. They shifted the focus of a funerary site from a place of mourning to a centre of spiritual presence, where the physical remains of the departed served as a permanent anchor for the community’s devotion.

This impulse to mark the landscape with the memory of the dead took diverse local forms over the centuries. In the rural and frontier landscapes of Gujarat and Rajasthan, this was expressed through sati stones and *paliyas* (memorial stones), while the Deccan and South India saw the rise of viragal or *natukal* (hero-stones).

However, the *chhatris* (cenotaph) represents a distinct evolution where memorialisation met power and politics. Across central and peninsular India, the act of building a *chhatris* carried deep political connotations of kingship and caste.

Chhatris are funerary monuments built where Hindu — generally *kshatriya* — rulers or aristocrats were cremated. While the impulse was

indigenous, the architectural form was a sophisticated appropriation. When the Ghurids and the Mamluks arrived in the Indian subcontinent and took control of parts of north India, they brought along the practice of tomb-making. These were monuments that not only honoured the dead, but signified dynastic lineage and political power. Building tombs was a royal prerogative, with a successor building tombs for the just-dead ruler and thereby maintaining dynastic continuity. These meanings were not lost on the Rajputs, who appropriated the practice in the form of *chhatris* by the sixteenth-century.

By the time the Marathas emerged in the seventeenth-century, *chhatris* were a firm component of Hindu courtly culture and a symbol of kingship. Shivaji and his immediate successors did not build grand *chhatris*, but later Maratha dynasties would: the Scindias of Gwalior, the Holkars of Indore, the Bhonsles of Nagpur, and the Gaekwads of Baroda (now Vadodara). To the Marathas, the *chhatris* were markers of *kshatriya*-hood, a status still new to them during the seventeenth and eighteenth-century. Shivaji brought forth a dynastic lineage linking his clan, the Bhonsles, to the Sisodiya Rajputs of Mewar during his first coronation, thus cementing the Marathas as twice-born *kshatriyas*. The Scindias of Gwalior might have performed a similar move when they came into power, for their ancestors were considered agriculturists.

The Need for Legitimacy

The Maratha raids in Malwa region began in the early 1720s under Maratha *peshwa*, Bajirao I, alongside his generals Malhar Rao Holkar, Udaji Pawar, and Ranoji Shinde. Much of the Maratha dominion in Malwa and up north was secured under Malhar Rao Holkar and Mahadji Shinde. Mahadji is regarded as the real architect of the Scindia kingdom: under him, much of central and northern India came under the influence and rule of the Marathas. The Scindias set up their base of operations in Ujjain and shifted it to Gwalior. Under Mahadji's successor, Daulatrao, Scindia rule was firmly established in Gwalior and Malwa. As Gwalior had until then borne the imprint of Rajput and Mughal authority, the Scindias sought to establish their legitimacy – one way of doing so was through the construction of *chhatris*.

The *chhatris* of the Scindias are now spread across Chhattri-bagh (near Lashkar), Shivpuri and the Taal Katori complex in Gwalior. Most *chhatris* resemble a north Indian Hindu temple, with a grand mandapa replete with murals on inner walls, a *garbhagriha* (sanctum sanctorum) containing a *lingam*, and a sprawling *shikhara* (superstructure) atop the *garbhagriha*.

Scindia *chhatris* (alongside the Holkar ones) are unique for the



Portrait of Mahadji Shinde. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

almost life-size *murti* (statue) of the king (often alongside his wife) or queen in the *garbhagriha*. Made out of marble and placed under a *bangladari* (a Bengali style) roof, the *murtis* are dressed daily, lustrated, and offered *bhog* (food), which is then served as *prasad*. Priests also perform regular *puja* (worship) in these *chhatris*.

The earliest dateable Scindia *chhatri* in Gwalior belongs to Daulatrao Scindia, who died in March 1827. Located in the Chhattri-bagh complex, it is entered through a cusped-arched gateway flanked by two infantrymen statues serving as *dwarapalas* (guardian gatekeepers) dressed in peculiar European-inspired uniforms. The *chhatri* is devoid of decoration from the outside, although the *mandapa* has murals on the inner walls. The *garbhagriha* contains a *linga* and a

murti of Daulatrao with his wife, atop which a *sekhari*-style (a north-Indian style) *shikhara* rises several feet into the air. To the left of Daulatrao's *chhatri* is the most ornate *chhatri* in the complex, belonging to his successor, Jankoji Rao II Scindia (r. 1827–43). The outer walls of this *chhatri* depict Vaishnavite and Shaivite relief sculptures, and the inner walls of the *mandapa* (pillared hall) depict murals painted.

Beyond these lies the *chhatri* of Janakji's mother, Bala Bai, in a separate enclosure. Bala Bai, the only daughter of Mahadji Shinde, was married into the Shitole family — one of the subordinate families of the Scindias. At the time of Daulatrao's death, Jankoji was his adopted heir, but on account of his being a minor, Bala Bai served as regent. She died in 1833, so Jankoji would have been the patron of her *chhatri*; however, the murals inside were only finished under Madho Rao I Scindia (r. 1876–1925) and have therefore largely survived.

These murals depict scenes from *ragamalas*, Hindu mythology, as well as frescos of *yogis* (practitioners of meditation), battle scenes, and royal hunts. Interestingly, one depicts Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi in battle against the British East India Company.

Another notable *chhatri* in the complex is that of Jayaji Rao Scindia (r. 1843–86). Located in an enclosure that includes *chhatris* dedicated to



Chhatri of Daulatrao Scindia in Chhatri-bagh, Gwalior. Photo by Austin Coutinho.



Chhatri of Jankoji Rao Scindia. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Baccha Bai and Gyaneshwar Patil, the *chhatri* of Jayaji Rao is the largest and most elaborate among the Scindia memorials. Featuring a uniquely European double-staircase in front, it has a proportionally larger *mandapa* and a *pancharatna* cluster of *shikharas* (five *shikharas*) over the *garbhagriha*.

Jayaji Rao was succeeded by Madho Rao I, whose *chhatri* is located in Shivpuri, a 100 kms from Gwalior, and the summer capital of the Scindias. Madho Rao built a memorial here dedicated to his mother, Sakhya Raje Scindia: much like a Mughal tomb,

it was laid out in a garden with a water tank in front. In 1925, when Madho Rao passed away in Paris, he was cremated at Père Lachaise Cemetery and his ashes brought back to India. A portion of the ashes were probably interred at Shivpuri, on top of which a beautiful *chhatri* — the first one built entirely in marble — was built by his successor, Jivajirao Scindia (r. 1925–47, monarchy abolished). Madho Rao's memorial was the last grand Scindia *chhatri*. The later ones, starting from Jivaji Rao, his widow Vijaya Raje, and successor, Madhavrao, were built in the newer Taal Katori complex. Though built in marble, they lack ornamentation and are more modest in scale.

This practice of building *chhatris*, adopted from the Rajputs and gradually shaped into a distinct Scindia idiom, became an integral part of their political and cultural expression. Continuing until the end of the monarchy in Gwalior, the *chhatri* — an already recognised royal medium — served its purpose as architectural edifice and symbol of political authority for the rule of the Scindias.



Chhatri of Jayajirao Scindia (Samadhi of Jayaji Rao Shinde). Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.



Chhatra of Sakhya Raje Scindia in Shivpuri. Picture Credits: Amit Sen/Wikimedia Commons.



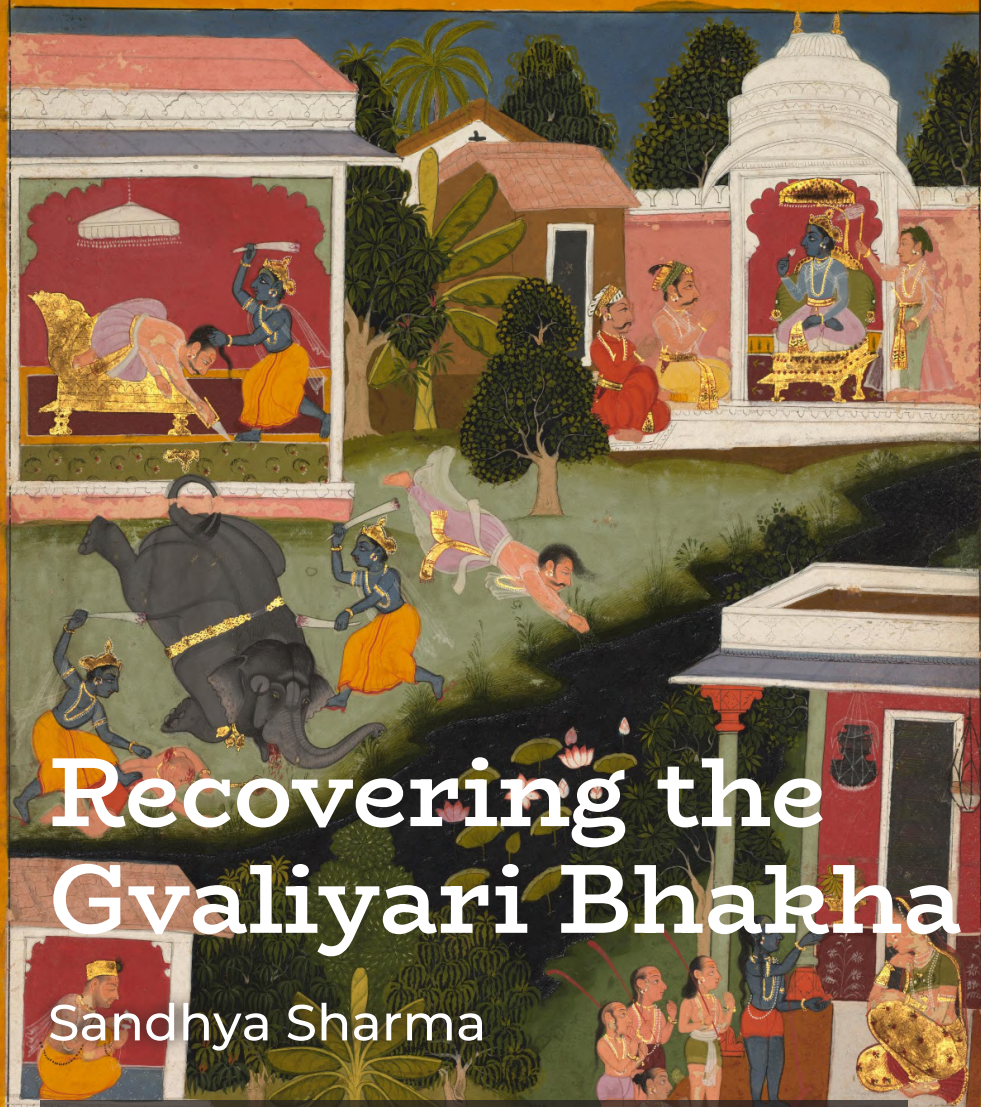
Inside the sanctum of the *chhatra* of Jivaji Rao Scindia. Photo by Austin Coutinho.



Intricately carved façade of Jankoji Rao Scindia's *chhatra*, illustrating Vaishnavite iconographic programme of the monument. From left to right are depicted Krishna lifting Mount Govardhan (*Govardhanadhari*), Sheshashayi Vishnu above the entrance lintel, and Krishna subduing the serpent Kaliya (*Kaliyamardan Krishna*). Photo by Pranjal Jain.



गंगा-प्रासादरी॥ मईयानेकबनोकरिलैरी॥ बाहुगोतबटहलकरुंगोमरुंगोसबवेरी॥ दूधदधौ
मांषनमधुमेवाजबमांगोतवदैरी॥ कसेमारिअषारोजीतुंघीसिवहाउनेरी॥ असोसुबले
कहाउंसबहिनतेजेसोनोहिनकोरी॥ सरदासकीप्रांनप्रत्यंगाबेठेमुथराभेरी॥ २५॥



Recovering the Gvaliyari Bhakha

Sandhya Sharma

Krishna asks for sweets, an episode from *Sursagar* of Surdas, 1705. Picture Credits: The Cleveland Museum of Art.

In most books on the history of Hindi *Sahitya* (literature), Vishnudas and his compositions are given negligible space. Similarly underdiscussed is the language he employed for writing his epic stories: the word ‘Gvaliyari’ appears infrequently. George Abraham Grierson, in many volumes of *Linguistic Surveys*, does not reference it once. In recent research, Vishnudas has been termed the first Hindi poet of the fifteenth-century, suggesting that ‘Hindi’ has now replaced Gvaliyari. However, some scholars have attempted to recover Gvaliyari as the language of Vishnudas and his texts — and to understand how Gvaliyari became identical with Hindi and Brajbhasha by the eighteenth-century.

The Growth and Disappearance of Gvaliyari

Of the many languages spoken and used across the subcontinent in the past, literary languages are often the only remaining languages recorded for study. Religion played a primary role in the transformation of a vernacular language into a literary one. Brajbhasha, for instance, evolved due to its rhythmic suitability for Krishna *bhakti* (devotion): Surdas composed emotional-devotional poetry in it and Braj became a language of poetry, associated strongly with Vaishnavism, since the sixteenth-century.

However, dialect also evolved into textual language because of other political, social, and cultural processes. Conquering rulers, in order to legitimise their kingship, often desired to demonstrate their knowledge

of Indian culture by commissioning adaptations of Sanskrit epics in languages accessible to the masses. Poets, in turn, projected their patrons as embodiments of the attributes of kings from these epics in the local language, through which the vernacular dialect often became a literary tongue. This pan-Indic phenomenon also found expression in Gwalior.

The Tomars of Gwalior promoted the local language of the area through their patronage of poetry and it came to be known as Gvaliyari.

How did Gvaliyari then vanish into Brajbhasha or Hindi? Brajbhasha is considered to have been the common language shared by the people of Gwalior, Bharatpur (Rajasthan), and Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), during the tenth to fourteenth-centuries. In the *Linguistic Survey of India*, Volume IX, George Grierson concluded that Brajbhasha assumed many forms in different regions, though he does not refer once to Gvaliyari while enumerating around 390 dialects. So it is that the language spoken in Gwalior – Gvaliyari – came to be subsumed within Brajbhasha.

Some scholars speculate that Gvaliyari may have been a precursor to Brajbhasha. Famous Brajbhasha poet, Keshavdas, is often figured as distantly related to Vishnudas. As Vishnudas wrote during the fifteenth-century and Keshavdas in the sixteenth, it has been suggested that Gvaliyari may have traveled and transformed into Braj over that time. While other scholars dispute the connection between the two poets, they concur

that Keshavdas' ancestors may have migrated from Gwalior to his town of Orccha, carrying along Gvaliyari.

Lallu Ji Lal, the *Bhasha-Munshi*, a scholar and teacher of Brajbhasha at Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800, refers to Brajbhasha as the spoken language of the Hindus in the Braj region — where Gvaliyari is also known to have been spoken.

One theory, thus, is that Gvaliyari became obscure in name when Brajbhasha was embraced. Though both languages share similarities, their relationship continues to remain unclear even today.

What can be taken with some certainty, however, is that the fall of the Tomars in Gwalior led to the fall of the cultural traditions they supported. Vishnudas was forgotten. Like the *Dhrupad raga* originated in Gwalior but later came to be associated with Akbar, the linguistic traditions too underwent a shift under the Mughals as they gave recognition to Braj for political gains in the region. This becomes another way that Gvaliyari was then buried and Brajbhasha gained currency.

Eventually, all these different languages and dialects came to be grouped under Hindustani or Hindi by the colonial linguists. From this direction, we see that Gvaliyari might have become Hindi over a period of time — and so Vishnudas became the first poet who composed epics in Hindi.

In his essay “Early Hindi Epic Poetry in

Gwalior: Beginning and Continuities in the Ramayana of Vishnudas”, Imre Bangha (2014) considers Vishnudas the first poet who wrote *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in Hindi/Gvaliyari as early as 1442.

Vishnudas Composes

The history of Vishnudas is obscure. Born to a Brahmin family, with the poet Karna Vyas as his father, Vishnudas found a preceptor in Nathpanthi Sundardas and a patron in the royal court.

A culture of literature in the local tongue already prevailed at the time. Ramdas, the successor of Sundardas, had composed a prosaic text; Sufis and Nathyogis wrote verses to the public; poetry in Apabhransh was patronised by Jain merchants.

In spite of the prevalence of Nathyogis and Jains, Vishnudas was inclined towards the Vaishnava bhakti tradition. He wrote bhakti lore and is best known as the author of a *mahakavya* (great poem) on *Mahabharata*. Versions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were popular oral epics told across religious communities in local languages in Gwalior. Vishnudas himself attests to this: *Chaudah sai ru banvai aana. Pandu-charit mai sunyo purana* (Aadi Parv, verse 34). (*It was when the year 1492 came, I listened to Pandu Charit, the Purana.*)

In the age of state-formation, the period was marked by the conquests and defeats of the rulers. Retelling and rewriting of epics became a tool for upholding the honour of kings, both defeated and victorious. Gwalior

was frequently attacked by its neighbouring powers such as Malwa, Delhi, Datiya and Orchha, and Panna, creating a milieu in which such compositions acquired particular significance.

When Dungarendra Singh (1427- 59) ascended the throne of Gwalior, having averted attacks from Malwa and Delhi, he patronised art and culture for the remaining years of his rule. He asked Vishnudas to narrate the *Mahabharata* for him, in which context the poet composed his first *katha-kavya* (story-poem), the *Pandav-Charit* — called the *Mahabharata* by copywriters and editors from the seventeenth-century onwards. In Vishnudas' words, however: *Barnau pandav-charit abheu, jo parsad karai guru deu* (I narrate *Pandav-Charit* now and dedicate it to my Guru).

In the retelling, Vishnudas praised Dungarendra for his skills, stratagem, and implicitly emphasised his qualities as a good king. However, he also cites the fact that he is asked to write the text upon the king's request:

***Tihi Tamoru diyo kai haatha.
Puni poochhai Dongaru Nar
Natha.
Kahi kavidas hiye dhari bhau
Kauro- Pandav ki sati bhau.
Panch Pandu sau Kauron
bhaye.
Kahi kyun Jurjodhan kai laye.
(Aadi Parv, verse 38 – 39).***

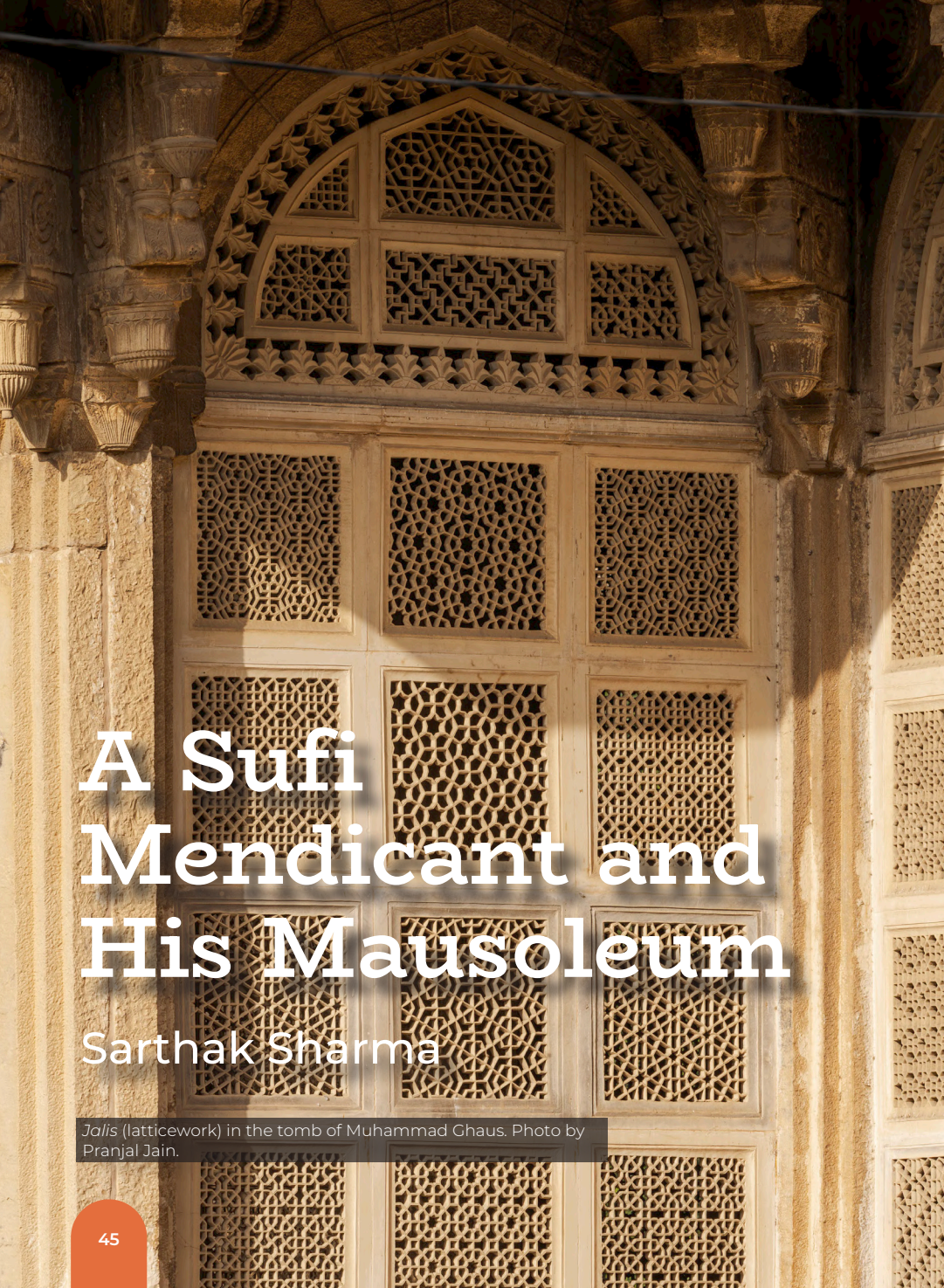
*(Having given the text to me,
Dongaru, the lord of the people, then
raised a query.
Keeping your hand on your heart you*

*tell me honestly brother Kavidas, the
truth of Kaurav- Pandava's story.
Five Pandavas and hundred
Kauravas, still they brought a huge
army of great warriors).*

In addition, Vishnudas' other works — *Ramayana*, *Svargarohan*, *Rukmini-Mangal* and *Sneh-lila* — eulogised not only Dungarendra Singh, but also other rulers of the dynasty. These were recited orally in public and the poet delineated them in Gwaliyari, which in turn made the language itself more legible.

Concluding Verses

The disappearance of Gwaliyari, once a language promoted by the poetry of Vishnudas, can also be traced through other literary references. In the words of Krishna Kavi, a poet of the early eighteenth-century: *Barnat hai tin saban me Gvairyari ras saar./ Braj Bhasha Bhakhat sakal surbani samtul. (Among all these, Gwaliyari narrates the essence of Rasa./Most people speak Braj Bhasha which is at par with Sanskrit.)* This reveals that Gwaliyari and Brajbhasha were considered two languages even as late as the eighteenth-century. Chandrabali Pandey, the author of *Keshavdas*, suggests that Gwaliyari became Brajbhasha through the flute of Krishna, again indicating a distinction. These references also make it reasonable to consider Gwaliyari, the language of Vishnudas, different from Brajbhasha. Today, this question of Vishnudas and his texts — once likely markers of regional identity — have been subsumed under the wave of broader linguistic histories of the time and nineteenth-century nationalism.

The image shows a close-up of a tomb's facade. The central feature is a large, arched window filled with a complex, repeating geometric lattice pattern known as 'Jalis'. The stone is a warm, yellowish-brown color. Above the main window, there is a smaller, semi-circular section also containing a lattice pattern. The window is flanked by ornate stone carvings, including what appear to be small, cup-like structures. The overall style is characteristic of traditional Indian Islamic architecture.

A Sufi Mendicant and His Mausoleum

Sarthak Sharma

Jalis (latticework) in the tomb of Muhammad Ghaus. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Nestled below the fort, standing amidst one of the oldest areas in the city of Gwalior is the tomb of Muhammad Ghaus (1500–1562). The sacred and archeological site is a kilometre away from Kila Gate (literally, the fort gate). Outside, the city is bustling but the complex itself is serene. Constituted of a huge dome, a maze of *chhatris* (dome-topped pavilions), hexagonal towers amidst the *charbagh* (the preferred style of garden plans by the Mughals), and a number of smaller tombs, the mausoleum of Muhammad Ghaus (Chawth or Ghouse) is a material symbol of this Sufi Saint's philosophy.

The Story of the Saint

Muhammad Ghaus was a major saint of the Shattari Sufi order and a renowned figure in sixteenth-century India.

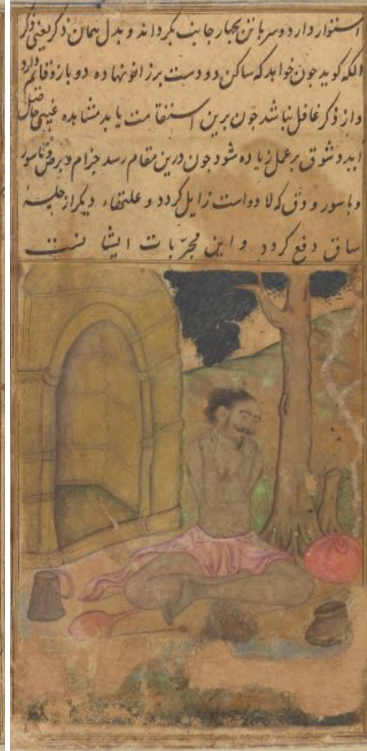
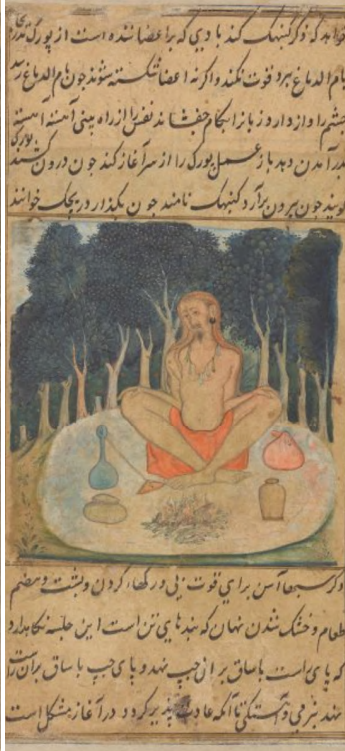
Of his many beliefs, the most unique one is captured in his text *Bahr al-Hayat* (the Ocean of Life).

Written in Persian, this is based on an earlier Arabic text named *Hawd al-Hayat* (the Pool of Life) – which itself is a translation of a now-lost Sanskrit text *Amritakunda*. In *Bahr al-Hayat*, Ghaus presents the possibility of equating the practice of yoga with that of Sufi mysticism to argue that the Sufi experience of *kashf* (unveiling of the world) is similar to the trance-experience of the yogis. This theory of Ghaus hints towards a world where the lines between religions were more permeable.

Ghaus' belief stemmed from his own

life, details of which come to us from his hagiography or the *manaqib*. Born in Uttar Pradesh, he left home in 1501 to serve as a disciple in Jaunpur. His master's diktat to spend his time as a mendicant shaped Ghaus: he spent 13 years in Chunar, Varanasi, gathering spiritual experiences that later became the basis of his writings. During this time, he meditated with followers of *Hatha Yoga*, a foundational branch of yoga that employs *asanas* (physical postures) and *pranayama* (the regulation of breath) to direct vital energy and cultivate balance between mind and body, which became the gateway for his theory connecting Sufism and Yogis.

Ghaus found fame in Chunar, with people climbing the hills to meet him in the wild. This is rumoured to have annoyed him, as he sought isolation and mystical rigour. Yet these experiences in Chunar produced not only *Bahr*, but also another text: *Jawahar al-Khams*, which would go on to be taught as far away as Mecca. In that, he outlined the process of a man's ascension to heaven, based on a vision he claims to have received after a request from a man to become his disciple. At around the age of 21, Ghaus is believed to have climbed up a higher, more isolated mountain. He is rumoured to have spent six months without sleeping and stopped eating altogether: his body grew so thin that 'if the wind were blowing behind him he would go three or four times faster than a normal person, but if the wind were blowing against him, he could hardly take a single step.' With these legends behind him, Ghaus was a popular saint by the time he moved to Gwalior.



(Left to right) Yogi seated in *sitali* posture (cross-legged); Yogi is seated in a *kumbhaka* position; and Yogi seated in *Thambha* (*thambasana*) position. From the *Bahr al-Hayat*, 1600-1604. Picture Credits: Chester Beatty Library.

Political Entanglements

Ghaus moved to Gwalior after Lodhi ascension in the city, though he had fragile relations with the new kingdom: he refused to bless the Lodhi king, branding him a despot.

The relationship between the Mughals and Ghaus, however, was a special one. Ghaus' brother Shaykh Bahlul later would take Humayun on as his disciple and Ghaus' followers were known for calling upon God to replace the Lodhis with the Mughals. When Babur besieged Gwalior Fort after defeating the Lodhis in the battle of Panipath, the governor was

unsure whether to remain loyal to the fallen Lodhis or surrender to the incoming Mughals.

It was Muhammad Ghaus who was critical in persuading the governor to permit a small Mughal contingent into the city to negotiate — they overthrew the governor and established Mughal rule in the city.

His known Mughal loyalties worked against Ghaus when Sher Shah Sur took over: he was exiled and moved

to Ahmedabad in Gujarat. There, he remained steadfast in his loyalty to Humayun, even predicting his return. His *Bahr al-Hayat* is said to have been written in Gujarat. As the region had not fully assimilated into the new Mughal system and Ghaus had rivals in the area, particularly due to religious opposition from Shaikh Ali Muttaqi, a Sunni Islamic scholar close to the Sultan of Gujarat, he fled once more. He moved to Baruch, but was returned to Ahmedabad by the governor. He eventually lived peacefully there, eventually establishing a *khanqah* (Sufi hospice) and a mosque in the city.

When Ghaus finally returned to Delhi and Agra from exile, he may have expected a grand welcome from the Mughals he had supported throughout his life. But with the start of Akbar's reign, the Mughal

relationship with Ghaus had changed. The new emperor's preference for dead saints like Muinuddin Chishti permitted the nobles in Akbar's court to oppose Ghaus, roused by religious scholars who disagreed with his spiritual claims. Ghaus finally passed away in Agra, but was entombed eventually in Gwalior.

The Architecture of Unveiling

Ghaus' Tomb was commissioned by Akbar and highlights the transition from Sultanate Era architecture — sturdy, almost military-like structures — to the more symmetrical elegance of the Mughal era tombs. With its massive, dominating tomb, the overall plan, and the use of *chhatris* and *jalis* (lattice-work), the burial site shares similarities with that of Humayun's Tomb.



The tomb of Muhammad Ghaus. Photo by Pranjai Jain.

The *jalis* in Ghaus' Tomb are its most striking feature. The screens not only cool the interior, but also act as a physical metaphor for Ghaus's philosophy of *kashf* — the harsh outside light is transformed into soft, patterned shadows within the sanctum.

The use of *jalis* might be an influence that the Sufi Saint himself brought from his days in Gujarat. Local elements are also seen in the use of ubiquitous sandstone, the popular and common wave-shaped brackets, and the floral motifs on the plinth. Originally, the tomb was surrounded by gardens divided into four quadrants with the structure standing in the centre.



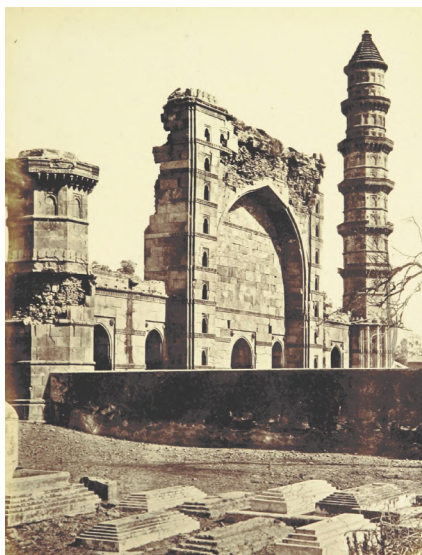
Tansen tomb, inside the Muhammad Ghaus tomb complex. Photo by Meenakshi Vashisth.



Jalis (lattice) in the tomb of Muhammad Ghaus. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Today, the site is a massive necropolis, housing the burial sites of Ghaus' followers and disciples. Per Sufi beliefs, it is considered to be a huge privilege to have one's final resting place next to their spiritual preceptor. Among these disciples is Mian Tansen, a famous musician of Akbar's court, who is buried alongside Ghaus in a humble, canopied tomb. The only other full-fledged structure in the site is called 'Bahu Sahiba ka Maqbara'.

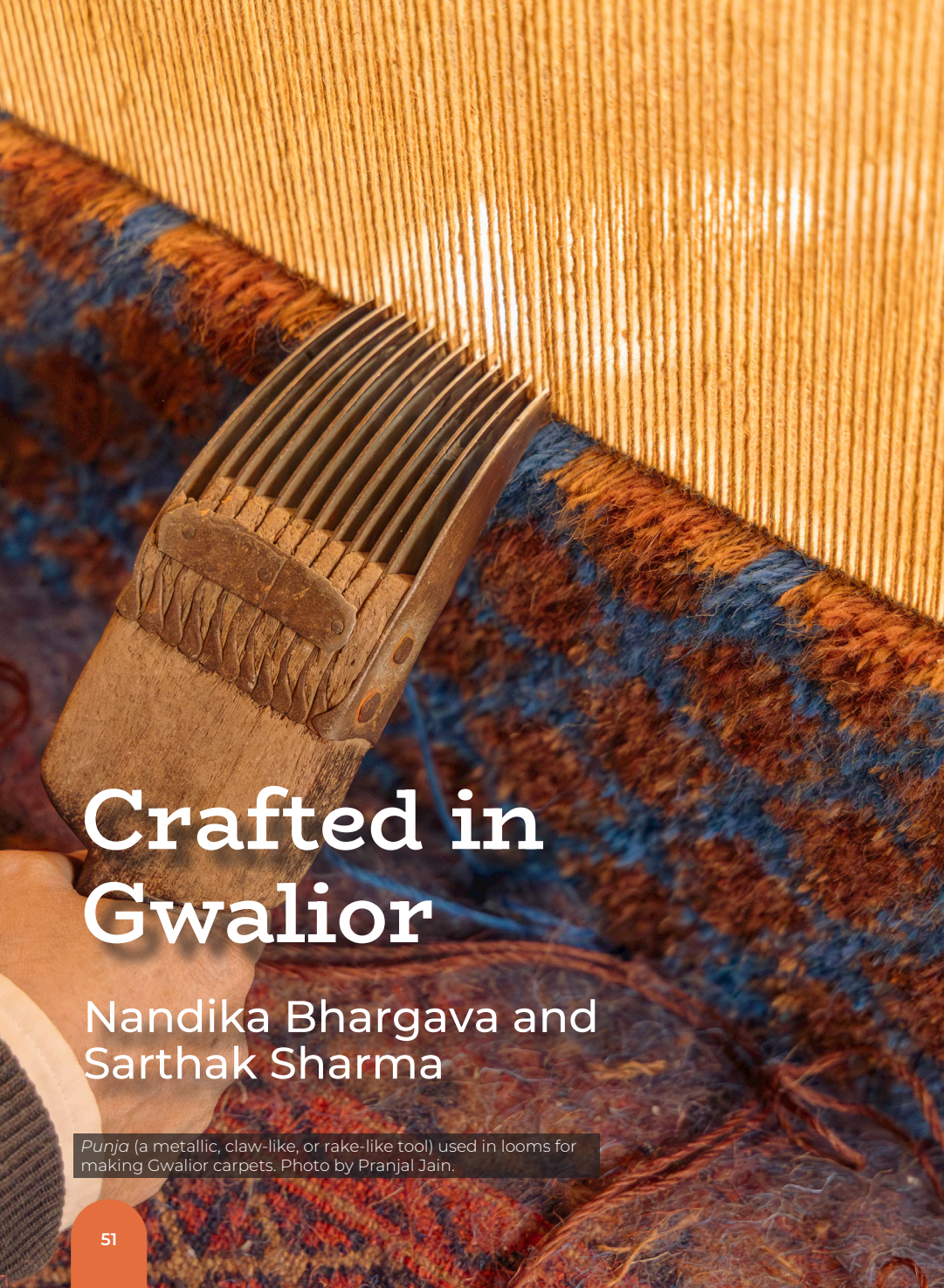
The tomb continues to be a sacred site, with devotees crowding the structure especially during the saint's *urs* (death anniversary). Locals visit for morning walks, as the garden is well-maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. Musicians also visit for the blessings of Tansen. The complex is also the site of Tansen Samaroh, an annual music festival including Hindustani classical performers from across the country. The Sufi Yogi and his tomb continue to be a constant and living presence in Gwalior.



Southern side of Muhammad Ghaus' mosque in Ahmedabad. Picture Credits: The British Library/ Wikimedia Commons.



Different types of Jalis at Muhammad Ghaus' tomb. Illustration Credits: Jisha Unnikrishnan.



Crafted in Gwalior

Nandika Bhargava and
Sarthak Sharma

Punja (a metallic, claw-like, or rake-like tool) used in looms for making Gwalior carpets. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Amidst the sheer diversity of craft practices in the region of Madhya Pradesh — Chanderi and Maheshwari saris, Bagh prints, Bhopal's *zari* or *zardozi* work — Gwalior is hardly considered a centre of crafts. Yet this perception is misleading, since the historically enterprising city of Gwalior has sustained diverse crafts traditions. In December 2025, two crafts from Gwalior received the Geographical Indicator (GI) tags, bringing the total to three separate GI-tagged crafts from the city: stonework and paper-mâché have now joined carpet-making.



Batto Bai dolls. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

Transforming Waste

In Gwalior, the legend of paper-mâché goes back to the nineteenth-century, when the Scindia Palace was ornamented with pearls, hence the name Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace).

When a guest complimented a pearl, the Maharaja was compelled to gift it to them. To prevent this situation, the jewels were replaced with paper-mâché pearls. While the story remains difficult to verify, practitioners of the craft today continue to believe that their work has royal origins.

Today, it is primarily the Nagvanshi community in Gwalior that practices the craft. They were also the key stakeholders for gaining it the GI-Tag.

The process begins with gathering the main material, scrap paper

collected from printing presses. After pulping, the paper is combined with *dhaora* tree gum (*Terminalia anogeissiana*), glue, and chalk powder, then kneaded into a workable dough. This dough is then casted into moulds of different shapes made of Plaster of Paris (PoP). Once dried and smoothened with sandpaper, the artefacts are ready to be painted. Finished products include human figures, animals, mythical creatures, deities, birds, even models of structures in Sanchi and Khajuraho. Jewellery boxes, vases, and masks are also made. Gwalior paper-mâché is especially famous for its toys.

Batto Bai dolls in particular are part of Gwalior's long history. *Gudda-Gudiya* (male and female dolls) were integral to girls' childhoods, especially during the festival of *Akh-Teej*, when these dolls were ceremonially married under banyan trees. Batto Bai Parihar, who learned the craft from her mother-in-law, played a key role in taking these dolls beyond the region,

even to global avenues — Japan, Australia, and the United States of America — and turned them famous.

Now named after her, the dolls earned her a National Award in 1967, and her work was featured in exhibitions post the 1970s. Her Raja-Rani (King and Queen) models, which featured even the Maratha *pheta* (headgear), became especially popular.

Waste like sawdust, cloth, paper, rags, and unusable bamboo are used for manufacturing the dolls, after which they are painted brightly and sold in pairs. Today, Batto Bai's descendants still manufacture these dolls at Bharat Art Shop, with women being the sole makers.

Warps and Wefts

Carpet-making was the first practice to receive the GI-tag in Gwalior. Irani carpets, popular since Mughal rule in the subcontinent, may have inspired this tradition. Equally, the Scindias' engagement with weaving centres in Chanderi and Maheshwar may have contributed to the growth of carpet production in the nineteenth-century.

In 1902, Madho Rao Scindia also invited Greek carpet-maker Stavrides to Gwalior. He established GP Stavrides Gwalior Ltd, which produced Schna and Ghiordes knots, and introduced Chinese designs into the market.

The Oriental Carpet Manufactures, established by the East India Company, also contributed to carpet-making in Gwalior until its closure in 1980. Carpet-weaving was also introduced to the prisoners in Gwalior's Central Jail, where it became part of prison labour practices.

Today, there is no single *karkhana* (workshop-community) structure in Gwalior. Multiple carpet-makers across the Muslim and Hindu Kori communities, often working together, practice the craft in their homes. There is no established apprentice system. For example, one maker, Shahida, learned it in a *karkhana* (workshop) and later imparted the techniques to her family. Her area 'Pichoriyon Ki Pahadia' in Kampoo developed as a settlement of weavers, thanks to the old *karkhana* established here. With its decline, the workers moved to producing carpets from home.

Carpets are made out of locally procured cotton warp, with wool and art silk from Amritsar used for weft. The precise material is decided case-by-case, depending on the size, thickness, and design intricacies of the product. Carpets can range from a 4 x 4 inch coaster to a 12 x 18 ft giant carpet, the latter requiring a year's worth of four weavers' labourers. Worked from the bottom to top, the weaving knot used is the Persian knot (*funda*). Weavers follow the *naqsha* (graph), on which the design is pre-planned. Excess threads are cut by *churi* (small knife) and knots pushed down by the *punja*, securing the design. After the carpet is taken off the loom, it is trimmed, the edges



Typical *naqsha* (graph) used for following designs or distinct patterns in Gwalior carpets. Photo by Meenakshi Vashisth.



Gwalior carpet on a loom. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

are burned, and the carpet is polished, soaking them in water for 8 to 10 hours.

Motifs are woven into the carpets, ranging from being as complex as the Taj Mahal to a simple geometric pattern. Other common motifs include the Tree of Life, stylised flowers, birds or animals, and even abstract motifs are woven. In conversation with Ustad Pallav Shah, I also learned other terms designers used. *Chala* (literally, walk) indicates weaving a straight line, and *bachcha* (literally, kid) a repetition of colour. 'Persian Design' refers to floral patterns in a four-fold symmetry, potentially the oldest type in Gwalior. *Bukhara* are geometric patterns that completely occupy the finished product. 'Hunting' refers to animal figures, and *Lichi* to carpets with repeated dotted patterns.

Riyajuddin Usmani, the founder of Amma Carpets, who has found international success via the internet, laments that Gwalior residents are not themselves buyers. However, Gwalior carpets were historically exported, with Oriental Carpet Manufactures taking the lead. Today, the trade is struggling. Apprentices are lacking, as weavers' children leave the unlucrative business. Kaleen Park, the government initiative to revive weaving, is faltering. The issue of 'Bunkar Cards' to identify authentic workers achieved no change either. Usmani's focus on exports, courtesy his understanding that the labour will be disproportionately underpaid at domestic rates, is not a viable option for all producers. However, as Usmani points out, governmental marketing



Riyajuddin Usmani, the founder of Amma Carpets and master weaver, at work on a loom in his workshop. Photo by Pranjal Jain.



Coasters and other small size products at Amma Carpets. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

assistance with this endeavour and pension for the craftspeople would be two ways to turn the tide of Gwalior's carpets.

Sculpting Statues

From carvings in Garhi Padavli to the beams in Man Singh Palace, the *jalis* (lattice-screens) in Muhammad Ghawth's tomb to the scenes from *Bhagvat Purana* on Scindia *chhatris*, stone-sculpting is integral to Gwalior's history. The craft is practiced by the Vishwakarma community, who live around Gende Wali Sadak today. Today, most shops exist near houses, with the front-space serving as the shop and the back the place of manufacture. During Ganesh Chaturthi or Navratri, the streets come alive with statues to be sold. Otherwise, however, with royal patronage dead and modern buildings lacking ornamental details, the sculptors rarely work on large-scale projects. Instead, they sell statuettes of deities. The sculptors also participate in exhibitions.

While sculptors use a range of materials from marble to soapstone, the most traditional and popular is Gwalior red-and-white sandstone. Marble is sourced from Rajasthan; sandstone is sourced from a quarry at Reshampura. Sculptors choose the stone blocks themselves, checking for cracks.

Sahil Vishwakarma, who operates one of the many *karkhana*-stone workshops, estimates that around 30-40 Vishwakarma families work in this profession. Like him, most workers learned it from fathers, uncles, and brothers. Their tools are the hammer and chisel, preferred over electric

Gwalior carpet. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.





A craftsman at work. Photo by Pranjal Jain.



Inside a shop of a stonemason in Gwalior, near Gende Wali Sadak. Photo by Meenakshi Vashisth.

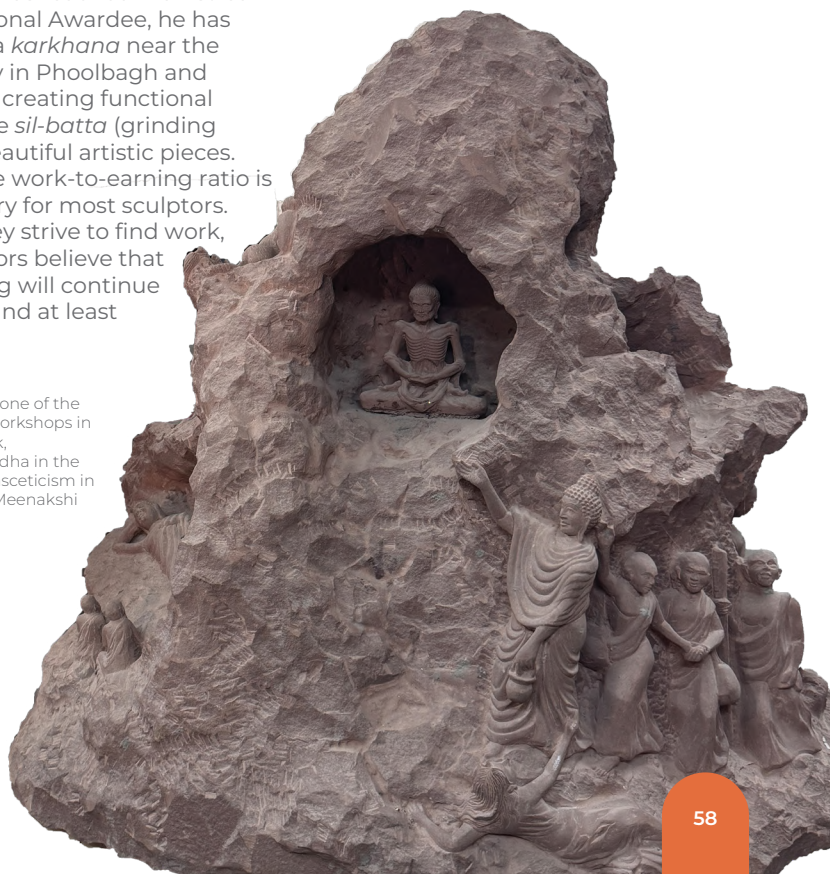
tools like machine-grinders. While the latter are efficient, the resultant dust pollution is hazardous — so heavy machines are used for minimal work, like finishing a giant statue. The laborious manual work also affords flexibility in changing styles based on a client's expectations. Statues of goddesses Kali and Durga, along with *lingams*, are sold the most, according to most shopowners. Accordingly, Navratri is the most lucrative time of year, sourcing half their annual earnings. A foot-tall *lingam* takes a full day to create, with more complicated sculptures requiring more labour.

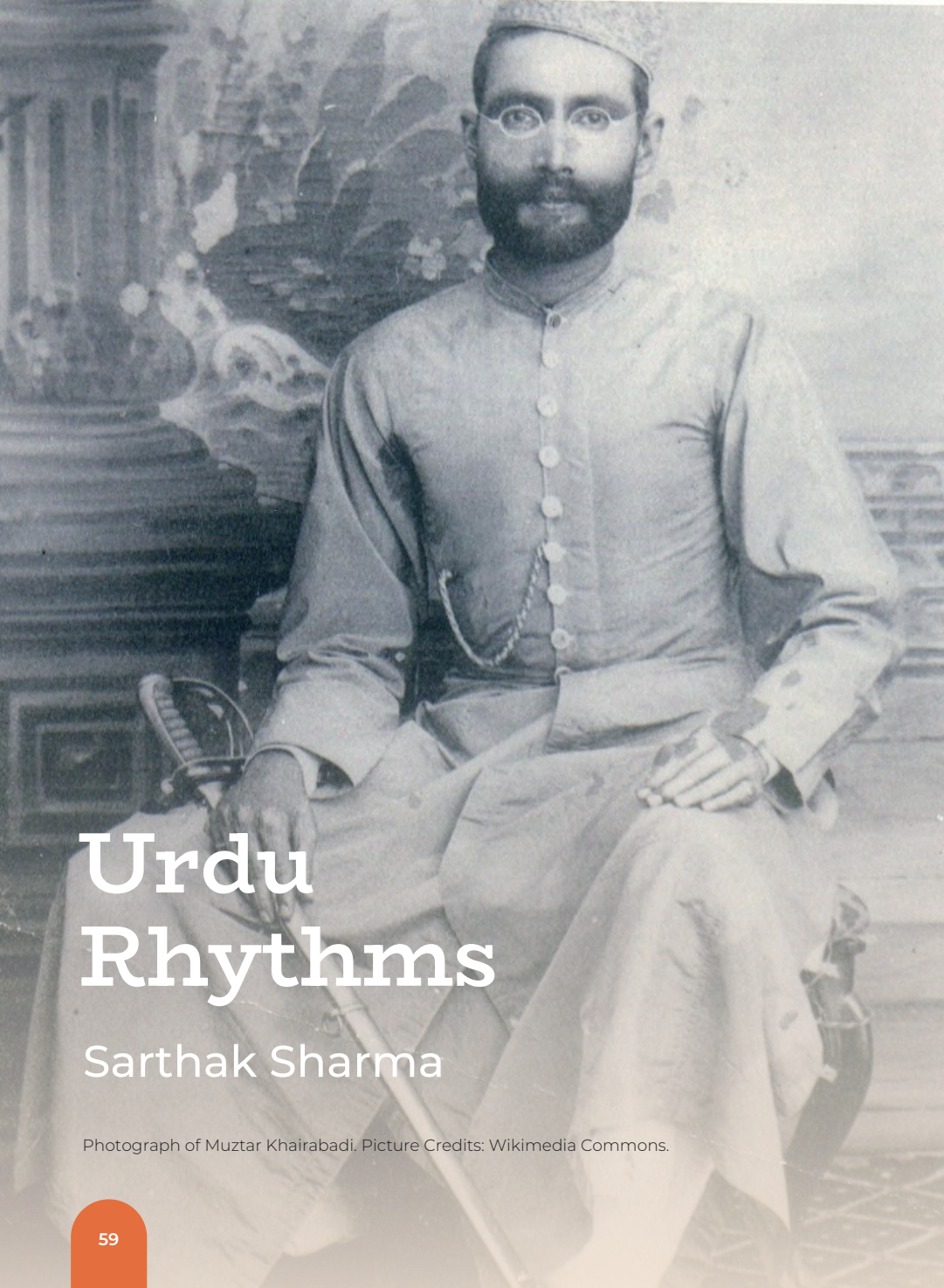
Deepak Vishwakarma is one stone-worker who has reached mainstream fame. A National Awardee, he has established a *karkhana* near the centre of city in Phoolbagh and moved from creating functional items like the *sil-batta* (grinding stones) to beautiful artistic pieces. However, the work-to-earning ratio is dissatisfactory for most sculptors. Today, as they strive to find work, some sculptors believe that stone-carving will continue to find demand at least

in temples. Sahil believes that things are improving, suggesting that the introduction of phones and the internet has expanded their consumer base to orders beyond the town.

The government has begun initiatives like the PM Mudra Yojana to streamline loan processes, and authorities have also organised camps to provide tools and support to the workers. The recent achievement of the GI-tag has been another step towards the recognition of this craftwork.

A masterpiece, in one of the stone sculpture workshops in Gende Wali Sadak, representing Buddha in the state of extreme asceticism in a cave. Photo by Meenakshi Vashisth.





Urdu Rhythms

Sarthak Sharma

Photograph of Muztar Khairabadi. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

The history of Gwalior's music is famous, but what is less recognised is the Urdu poetry that continues to find a home in the city. More recent history has witnessed figures such as Jan Nisar and Javed Akhtar, both born in Gwalior, who are widely known for their works as lyricists and writers in the film industry, as well as celebrated poets in their own rights. Also associated with Gwalior is Nida Fazli, popular for his work in cinema. Yet the history of Urdu poetry in Gwalior goes back much further.

Abroo's Roots

The figure of Muhammad Ghaus (Ghouse or Ghawth), among the most influential in the history of Gwalior, is also distantly connected to poetry. His grandson, Shah Mubarak Abroo, was among the first poets who shaped Urdu as the language it is today. Shamsuddin Rahman Farooqui describes Abroo as "the first major poet in Delhi".

Born in Gwalior in 1683, Abroo was a contemporary of Mir Taqi Mir, the famous Urdu poet who moved from Agra to Delhi. These early poets were closely interconnected. Abroo became a disciple of Siraj-ud-din Ali Khan Arzoo, the maternal uncle of Mir, in Agra.

Abroo was an innovator in his style of poetry. He frequently used *iham* or puns, experimenting with the intricacies of Urdu. Punning has been a feature of Indian literary culture

since the days of Sanskrit *kavyas* (songs-poems): called *slesha* in Sanskrit, this seeped down to other Indic languages like Brajhasha. Brajhasha poetry, in turn, had an intimate relationship with the city of Gwalior, indicating a potential source of inspiration for Abroo's puns.

Take the following verse: *tumhare log kahte hai kamar hai/kahan hai kis tarah ki hai kidhar hai*. (Your people say it is a waist/Where is it? How is it?) Here, *kamar* could refer to a waist—or if pronounced slightly differently, a moon, thus changing the entire meaning of the verse.

The Akhtars

Descendants of Fazl-e-Haq, himself a renowned Hanafi jurist who issued a *fatwa* (a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law) of war against the British, also became pivotal architects of the Urdu poetic landscape.

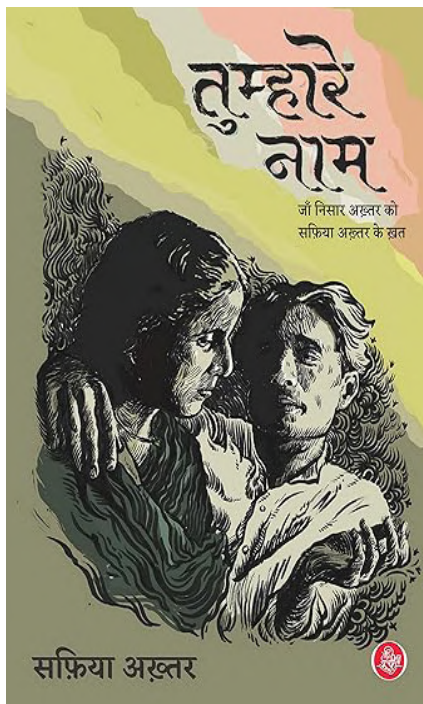
Fazl's grandson, Iftikhar Hussain, adopted the pen-name 'Muztar'. Princely states often employed scholars of repute and Muztar was associated with courts such as Rampur and Tonk, before arriving in Gwalior. There, he served as a judge in full stride, even getting into a conflict with the rulers. When the Maharaja wanted a man named Nuthmul to be convicted of a crime, Muztar found him innocent. To avoid further conflict or persecution, he fled to Bhopal and later Indore. Yet he eventually returned to Gwalior, where he spent his final days and was buried. In his time as a poet, Muztar wrote four collections of Urdu poetry and founded the literary magazine *Karishama-e-Dilba*.

Muztar's son, Jan Nisar, was also a scholar and a poet. He taught at Victoria College in Gwalior (today the Maharani Lakshmibai College) and became a part of the Progressive Writers Movement, eventually serving as its president.

This group sought to shift from the poetics of romance and tragedy to the poetics of politics and equality, shaped by the context of India's anticolonial struggle and wider global developments of fascism. United in intent, the group sought to break away from traditions and structures of socio-political inequality. The literary works of the members approached socialism from different perspectives, not necessarily focused solely on revolution. Jan Nisar, for instance, wrote *Ghar Aangan*, a collection of *geet* and *rubai* (poems) from the perspective of a housewife. One verse goes: *gulnar dekhti hai ye mazdur aurten/chehron pe khaak dhuul ke ponchhe hue nishan* (the labouring women look at the pomegranate flowers/the marks of ash and dust on their faces). Eventually, Jan Nisar would leave the movement on account of considering it propaganda.

After moving to Bombay in 1949, he found fame as a composer in Hindi cinema, with popular songs like *Aankho Hi Aankho Me* in Guru Dutt's *CID* (1956) and *Aaja Re* in *Noorie* (1979) attributed to him.

His move to Bombay separated him from his wife, Safia, and their



Cover of *Tumhare Naam*, a collection of Safiya Akhtar's letters to Jan Nisar Akhtar, published by Rajkamal Prakashan in 2004. Picture Credits: Rajkamal Prakashan.

children. Their letters to each other, collected in *Tumhare Naam*, depict the warmth of their relationship in the years before Safia passed away in 1953. She left their children, including Jawed Akhtar, in Gwalior with her family. Jawed Akhtar, in turn, would later become one of the most prolific scriptwriters and songwriters in the Hindi film industry.

The Next Generation

Among later poets associated with Gwalior are Shifa Gwaliari and Nida Fazli.

Tele : 441704

77, Premalaya
24th Road
Bandra, Bombay 50

TEEN MURTI
PUBLICATIONS

PATRONS

Shri L. C. PRARTHII
Forest Minister H.P.
Shri K. L. POSWAL
Home Minister, Haryana
Shri KRISHAN CHANDAR
Miss QURRATULAIN HYDER
Shri RAMANAND SAGAR
Shri B. R. CHOPRA
Shri SUNIL DUTT
Smt. NARGIS DUTT
Shri NANA PALSIKAR

میری عبدالقادر دہلوی صاحب

آپ کو تعجب نہ دینی ہے کہ ایک مضمون میرزا شاعری
کا متعلق لکھ ڈالے۔ میں مرزا پبلشرز ایک خاص نمبر
میری شخصیت اور فن پر شائع کرنے چاہتا ہوں۔ اور میرزا خواجہ
ہے کہ اس نمبر میں آپ کا مضمون شامل ہو۔ آپ جانتے تو کسی
خاص پہلو پر یا روشنی ڈال دیجئے مثلاً میرزا دہلی میں
موت کے بعد مدفن پر آ رہا ہے وہ "جان نثار آخر کی شاعری میں
کا کات" ہے۔ معلوم نہیں آپ کا کالج کی لائبریری میں
میرزا کی کتاب لافاک دل آ چکی ہے یا نہیں۔
آخر خاک دل ہو دے اور گھر آئیں گے بھی ہو دے
تو مضمون کا تکمیل میں آجے گا کوئی وقت نہ ہوگا۔

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Shri FIKAR TUNSVI
(DELHI)
Shri C. L. KAVISH
Shri AHSAN KHAN
Shri S. N. VERMA P. C. S.
(SOLAN H. P.)
Shri YOG "JOY"
ROHTAK (HARYANA)

EDITOR

SABIR DUTT

Office : 15, CHHAPRA BUILDING, MADHAVDAS PASTA ROAD, DADAR, BOMBAY-400 014.

In this handwritten letter, Jan Nisar Akhtar invites the noted Urdu scholar Prof. Abdul Qavi Desnavi to contribute an essay to a special issue devoted to his poetry, suggesting the theme of *makanīyat* (sense of place). The correspondence reflects the close intellectual exchanges among twentieth-century Urdu writers. Picture Credits: VoidBaba/Wikimedia Commons.

Shifa Gwaliari, born in the early twentieth-century, became a poet in the tumultuous years preceding Independence. Nida Fazli, on the other hand, is likely the most well-known poet from Gwalior outside the Akhtar family.

His father too was a poet under the pen-name Murtaza Hassan. Fazli's personal life was shaped by Partition: his family and wife-to-be moved to Pakistan post 1947, but Fazli chose to stay in India. In his autobiography, he recounts how his father was a follower of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and he himself was influenced by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. His brother, Tasleem Fazli, in a mirroring parallel, found fame in the film industry in Pakistan.

Nida Fazli, meanwhile, moved to Bombay in the 1960s and made a name for himself by composing songs for Kamal Amrohi's *Razia Sultan* (1983). A polymath at heart, Fazli was steadfast in his message of peace and communal harmony across the country, often writing columns for organisations like the BBC. A representative verse from Fazli goes: *Kabhi kisi ko mukammal jahaan nahi milta/Kaheen zameen to kahin aasman nahi milta* (No one gets a perfect world/If you get land, you don't get the sky).

These famous names and figures, often through their varied writing — poems, lyrics, compositions — have left lingering associations of Urdu poetry with Gwalior that are rarely

explored. From Aabroo's initial contributions to Urdu poetry and its form, Gwalior has always been somewhere in the scene in Urdu's history. Even as Urdu became the language of Bollywood, Gwalior was silently present.



Poster of Kamal Amrohi's *Razia Sultan*.
Picture Credits: Wikipedia Common.



Nida Fazli was awarded with Padma Shri by President Pranab Mukherjee in 2013.. Picture Credits: President's Secretariat/Wikimedia Commons.



श्री दि. जैन नया मन्दिर जी

Through the Olis

Shikha Dhakad

Old house in Darna Oli. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Gwalior is not only made up of its fort and palaces, but also of its smaller, less visible geographies — its lanes and neighbourhoods that continue to shape everyday life in the city. These spaces, often overlooked in formal histories, offer a different way of reading the city: through its people, their routines, and their patterns of inhabitation.

Once, this was a city of small colonies, with streets sewing up neighbourhoods into the sizes of lanes — in which lives and routines were crowded in close contact. These ancient lanes continue to be social, intimate, and fiercely inhabited. While monuments tend to dominate historical narratives, these lanes trace quieter histories: of people, continuity, development, endurance, and survival of the locals.

The Growing Olis

Gwalior was a crucial administrative, military, and trading hub during the rule of the Rajputs, the Mughals, and eventually, the Scindias. This prolonged political existence led to the formation of many heritage areas, old market places, and narrow lanes with neighbourhoods. Over time, this led to the creation of three settlements, namely Old Gwalior, Lashkar, and Morar. After the establishment of Lashkar, Gwalior started receiving soldiers and their families, traders and craftsmen, and diverse communities of service, which in turn led to the development of the different lanes. All these zones were formed in various periods of time and contain traces of that era's political, social, and economic metamorphoses. Most of these areas

are further subdivided into groups of central markets and lanes. One of the oldest groups of market-areas are called *bazaars*, consisting of Chatri Bazaar, Mor Bazaar, Sarafa Bazaar, Topi Bazaar, Chawri Bazaar, and Lala Ka Bazaar.

By their side ran the major narrow lanes, also known locally as *goths*, *galis*, or *olis*. These include Mali Wali Gali, Batase Wali Gali, Rane Khan Ki Gali and Dana Oli, Kasera Oli, Lasera Oli, Didwana Oli, Chitera Oli, and Mochi Oli.

Olis were not architecturally planned, but developed organically as allied lanes around specialised services, markets, and traditional trades. Many of them are centuries old, with their foundations taking shape during the consolidation of Scindia rule. The Scindias actively encouraged skilled artisans as part of their efforts to shape Gwalior into a thriving centre of craft, trade, and services. At the same time, the relative political and cultural stability of the period drew artisans from Maharashtra, Bundelkhand, the Deccan, Rajasthan, and neighbouring regions to the city. As these craftspeople settled in Gwalior, they clustered in particular areas depending on their occupations. Consequently, each *oli* became a specialised economical and social unit, where communities of a specific trade-craft worked and resided. These lanes gradually developed into closely-knit communities with their own distinct economic, architectural, and religious heritage.

These lanes are therefore not merely streets, but the amalgamation of dense clusters of houses, markets, crafts, and communities that come together in a tight urban structure, comparable in some way to the *polis* of Ahmedabad or the *peths* of Pune.

Several *olis* have also emerged as sites of cultural and religious significance over time, including ancient temples and shrines such as Chaturbhuj Nath Temple, Goverdhan Nath Temple, Santoshi Mata Temple and a number of Jain temples. Some of the existing *olis* are:

Dana Oli, often referred to as the *halwai* gali, is renowned for its ancient sweet stores, traditional *halwais*, and ghee-rich, soul-stirring delicacies. Old havelis, winding narrow streets, and Jain temples, famous *gajak* (crunchy Indian dry sweet made primarily from sesame seeds and jaggery) and *petha* (a translucent candy-like sweet made from ash gourd) shops, and stuffed *choti kachoris* (deep fried snack filled with savoury lentil mixtures) define its character.

Kasera Oli was home to craftsmen of brass, aluminium, and iron utensils. *Kaseran* was the common surname of the community.

Mochi Oli housed cobblers engaged in leatherwork and shoe repair.

Chitera Oli was for the painters of *chitera* (a traditional wall-painting),

which originated in Gwalior. This art, which held religious value for the Marathas of Gwalior, once decorated the entrance-gates and the temple-walls of houses. The paintings were not merely decorative, but signs of auspiciousness and protection. Over time, *chitera* paintings were adopted by families across communities and integrated into the cultural environment of the city.

Remnants of the Olis Today

Post-independence, Gwalior experienced significant demographic and economic changes. As families migrated, the occupation-clustering that characterised the *olis* began to disappear. Workshops were either closed or reduced in size. Households were divided or turned to other uses.

The Chitera Oli, for instance, is fading out slowly. Changing architectural



Gopinath Mandir in Dana Oli. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

practices, shifting aesthetic preferences, along with the growing use of manufactured materials, has placed *chitera* on the fringes. There are only a few remaining practitioners of the art-form that once defined domestic visual culture in the city. A similar transformation can be seen in the *halwai* shops, many of which are more than a century old. These establishments do not work with a fixed menu or annual consistency.

They produce sweets and modify recipes in response to seasonal changes and occasions of rituals, ensuring minimal wastage.

Some sweets are only available during specific months; some are prepared exclusively for weddings, festivals or community rituals. The rhythms that once supported such a lifestyle have been transformed by the passage of time as they do not conform to the mass production needs of the contemporary day.

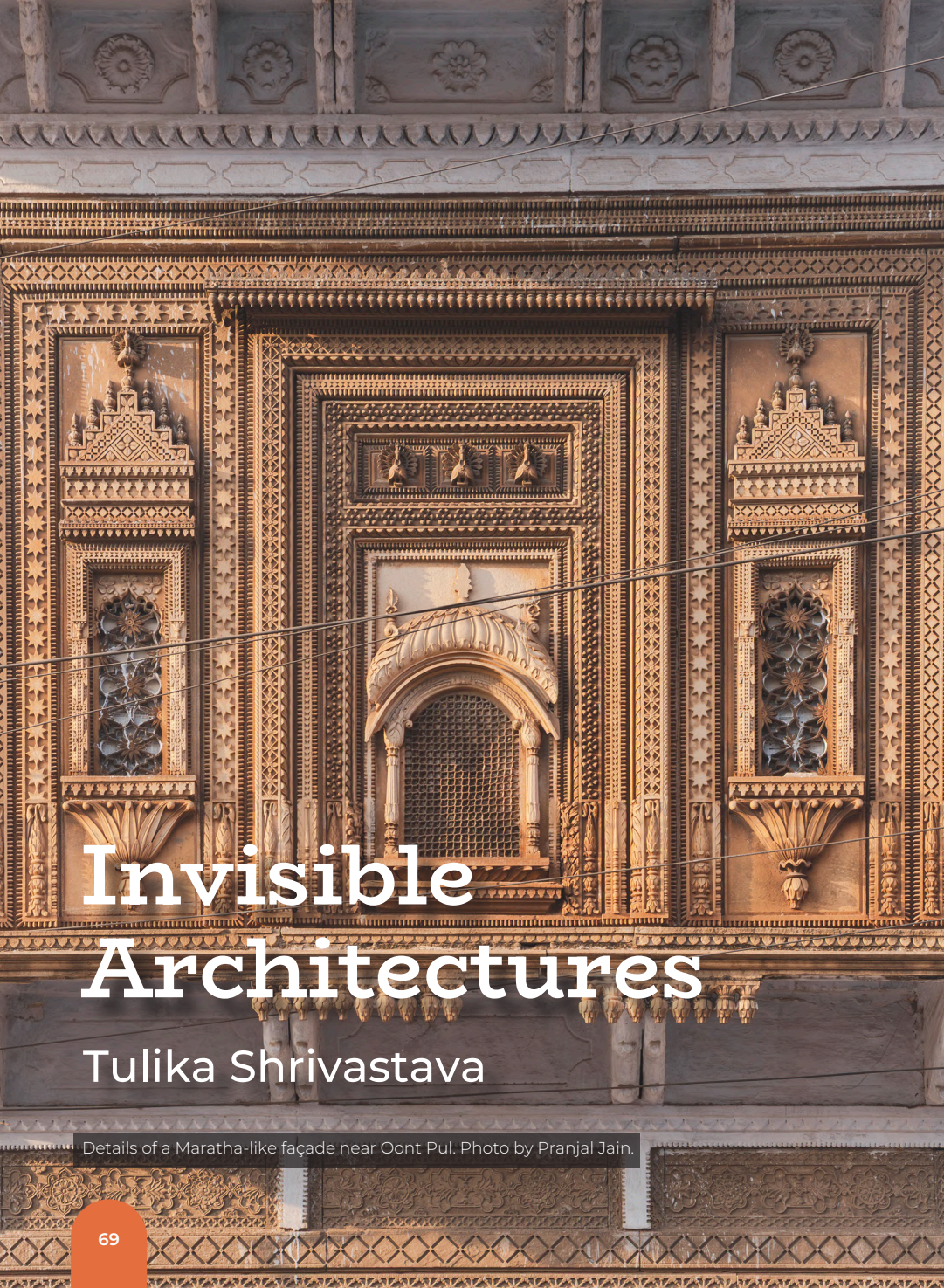
Despite this, the *olis* continue to endure — *gajak*, *petha*, seasonal sweets, traditional utensils, and handicrafts from these *olis* are still prepared and passed over the counter, even sold and shipped all around the country. Old craftsmen still toil next to cell-phone repair shops, the ringing of the temple bells can be heard over the sound of traffic, old houses still bear painted doorsteps and common yards. The stories of living culture contained in the *olis* is a reminder that cities and their cultures survive not merely via monuments, but through people

who continue to practice their everyday practices and crafts, despite the fact that the world around them has altered.

Gopi bhaiyya, a metal artisan I visited in one of the lanes, is one such example. The fourth in his family to enter this trade, he tells me his forefathers moved from Jhansi to Gwalior during the time of the Scindias. To hear the stories of craftsmen like him, hearing the fading *chitera* patterns, and eating the sweets of these *olis*, is not a desire to freeze practices in time. Instead, the impulse is to identify practices with meaning, rather than only use, and ensure that they are not lost to memory.



Gajak. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.



Invisible Architectures

Tulika Shrivastava

Details of a Maratha-like façade near Oont Pul. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

When we turn to the history of a city such as Gwalior, narratives tend to coalesce around the monumental architecture — forts, palaces, and temples — that articulate the authority and aspirations of the ruling elite. This emphasis produces what may be described as vertical historiography, one that privileges elevation, visibility, and power. Far less visible, and consequently less documented, are the built environments of its citizens. Beneath Gwalior's monumental skyline lies a more expansive, horizontal history: a vernacular architecture that shaped the lived experience of the city.

These domestic and commercial structures were not incidental. They were consciously designed, responding to climate, economy, and social life. In older commercial neighbourhoods such as Lashkar, the built fabric still reveals a careful negotiation between private and public space — one that continues to structure everyday urban life.

Archival photographs from 1913 offer an important point of reference. They show upper storeys projecting into the street through stone railings and shaded by *chiks* (bamboo blinds), while the ground level accommodates temporary or semi-permanent shopfronts.

These features were not merely aesthetic; they mediated heat, visibility, and commerce. While the materials and surfaces have evolved — fabric awnings replaced by



A typical house, Gwalior, 1913. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

synthetic printed signage, façades layered with electrical wiring — the underlying spatial logic remains remarkably consistent. The contemporary street, in this sense, retains the imprint of early twentieth-century urbanism.

Colour emerges as another important register of this architectural culture. The richly painted interiors of Jain temples in Lashkar and Dal Bazaar, supported by mercantile patronage, suggest a broader aesthetic sensibility that extended into domestic space. Painted wooden balconies, glazed tiles, and coloured window frames introduced vibrancy into the otherwise muted palette of sandstone. Such chromatic choices may also be read as expressions of a mercantile identity, asserting presence and prosperity within the dense commercial fabric of the city.

Gwalior's domestic architecture also reflects its position as a site of cultural and economic exchange. Under the Scindias, and through sustained mercantile activity, the city absorbed multiple stylistic influences.

Elements associated with emerging Art Deco vocabularies were integrated into buildings: geometric railings, stylised floral motifs, and sunburst patterns, appear alongside older features such as *jharokhas* (projecting enclosed balcony or window) and *jalis* (latticed screens), which regulated light, air, and privacy.

Similarly, Neo-Classical motifs such as columns, pediments, and symmetrical compositions were selectively incorporated, often translated into local materials such as sandstone rather than executed in their original forms.

In areas such as Morar, this process of adaptation is further complicated by the presence of colonial institutions. The proximity of structures such as Christ Church, MGM School, and neighbouring structures form a layered architectural landscape, where European forms intersect with regional building practices. Smaller structures, such as local banks or commercial buildings, often reinterpret these influences at a more modest scale, resulting in hybrid forms that are neither purely colonial nor entirely vernacular. In the same vicinity lies the District Bank building which flaunts a motley of colours and railings. The street features recessed balconies and floral motifs rendered not in the reinforced concrete of Mumbai, but in regional sandstone. This stands in stark ideological contrast to the State Bank of India (SBI) building at Maharaj Bada. The

latter, a monolithic modernist structure, utilises architecture as an instrument of state authority, whereas the District Bank's motley colors and idiosyncratic railings represents a more personal, democratic interpretation of modernity.

Beyond broader stylistic tendencies, domestic architecture in Gwalior also functioned as a medium of personal and social expression. House façades frequently incorporated names, symbols, and imagery, effectively transforming architecture into a form of inscription.

Residences such as Shiv Bhawan, where the name is integrated into



Interiors of a Jain Temple. Photo by Pranjali Jain.



Christ Church, Morar. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

the railing design, or houses that embed the owner's identity within decorative programmes, suggest that the built form was also a site of self-representation. Ramswarup from Mathura made sure that his house carries his name forever: it is tucked within the railings, in between a couple of lions, flanked by grape vines. Other home-owners were more eclectic in their style, using tiles to create arabesque patterns. These tastes are European and Indian, even if the owner moved only from Mathura to Gwalior. This home from 1965 does exactly that and also carries a sculpture of Krishna in the centre of the pediment. Other homes might make a political statement: Gandhi and the British Queen both feature in the railings of different buildings. The presence of such figures points to a society negotiating overlapping



House near Old High Court building, Gwalior. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

identities during a period of transition. Architecture, in this sense, becomes a record not only of aesthetic preference but also of ideological positioning.

It is important, however, to situate these structures within their social context. The houses described here largely belong to merchant and trading communities concentrated in commercial areas. They do not represent the entirety of Gwalior's urban population, though they do offer insight into how wealth, mobility, and patronage shaped the city's visible fabric.

In the present, these structures face increasing pressure. The demands of contemporary urban life — commercial expansion, vehicular movement, and modern infrastructure — have altered their



Gandhi on a balcony railing. Photo by Tulika Shrivastava.



original form and function. Ground floors have been adapted for retail, often at the cost of architectural integrity, while upper storeys, difficult to retrofit for modern use, are frequently abandoned. Features once integral to their design such as narrow balconies, wooden windows, and dense street engagement, now sit uneasily alongside air-conditioning units, electrical networks, and the spatial demands of a contemporary city.

Yet these buildings continue to define the character of Gwalior's historic markets. Even in altered states, they retain traces of earlier ways of inhabiting the city. To read them closely is to recognise that Gwalior's architectural history is not confined to its monuments. It resides equally in these quieter, everyday

structures — forms that, though often overlooked, offer a more intimate understanding of how the city was lived, adapted, and imagined over time.

House in Dal Bazaar with Greek elements. Photo by Pranjali Jain.





The Land of Music

Meeta Pandit

Sarod. The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889. Picture Credits: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Gwalior is known as the “land of music.” Even the children of Gwalior are reputed to wail melodiously. Over the years, the city has given rise to a variety of musical styles that have found worldwide recognition. Therefore, it is not surprising that Gwalior was referred to as India’s cultural centre by Faqirullah, an administrator who translated the *Mankautuhal* (c. 1666 CE) into Persian during Aurangzeb’s reign.

The Reign of *Dhrupad*

Raja Mansingh Tomar (1486-1516) founded the Gwalior *gharana* (school of music). His *darbar* (court) was adorned by *nayakas* (scholar-musicians) whose caliber was considered superior even to the court musicians of Akbar. He and his queen Mriganayani were accomplished musicologists too. Eventually, Mansingh wrote the musical treatise *Mankautuhal* on contemporary music and established a music school at Gujari Mahal in Gwalior Fort. Also responsible for the innovation and popularisation of the *dhrupad* style by using Brajabhasha — the popular language of central India — for the lyrics of the compositions, he is called the father of *dhrupad*.

This was the foundation for the nurture of musicians like Tansen, of whom it was said “*bhuto na bhavishyati*” (there never was, nor will there be another), who was born in the household of Makarand Pandey in Behat village near the city of Gwalior.



Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior, seventeenth-century.
Picture Credits: San Diego Museum of Art.

When Akbar heard Tansen for the first time, he rewarded him two lakh *dinars* (gold coins) and made him one of the nine jewels of his court. Mian Tansen, as he is known, introduced several new *ragas* (a series of musical notes on which a melody is based) that remain popular to this day, such as *mian ki todi*, *mian malhar*, and *darbari Kanada*, along with several *dhrupads*. His rich musical legacy was carried forward by his disciples and family members across the Indian subcontinent.

Till today, the name of Tansen remains inseparably linked with Gwalior. Near the Gwalior Fort stands his tomb, beside which grows a tamarind tree. Local legend believed

that anyone who ate the leaves was blessed with a melodious voice — the entire tree, including the roots, was eventually consumed by believers. Today, the tree standing there is one planted later, but the stories continue.

I remember, from my childhood, my grandfather Pt Krishnarao Shankar, mentioning that renowned actor and singer K. L. Saigal visited the Shankar Gandharva Vidyalaya in Gwalior — the purpose of his visit, in part, was to taste the leaves of the legendary tree.

Gwalior's Gharana

After the Tomars, music in Gwalior received fresh impetus under the patronage of the Scindias, particularly Daulatrao Scindia (r. 1794–1827) and Jayaji Rao Scindia (r. 1843–86). Their court hosted *ustads* (master musicians) in great esteem. The musicians received stipends of hundreds of rupees at a time when government officials earned about 15–20 rupees per month. They also received lavish residences, horses, and even elephants — in fact, the silver coins presented as remuneration were so heavy that *ustads* required elephants, horses, or palanquins to transport them.

In this period, the new style of *khayal gayaki* began to surpass *dhrupad*. Ustad Naththan Pir Bux is regarded as the innovator of this Gwalior *khayal* style.



Tomb of Tansen in Muhammad Ghaus's Tomb Complex. Picture Credits: Gyanendra Singh Chauhan/Wikimedia Commons.



(Left to right) Pt Anokhe Lal accompanying Pt Krishnarao S. Pandit, with Pt Sita Ram Sharan on the *tanpura*, and Pt Laxman Pandit. Picture Credits: Dr Meeta Pandit/Pandit Family Archive.

He is the descendant of Shah Sadarang, a renowned musician-composer of the Tansen tradition, who also composed numerous *khayal* compositions.

Naththan developed the Gwalior, or Lashkari, *khayal gayaki* upon the desire of the Scindias. His grandsons Hassu Khan and Haddu Khan, and his nephew Nathu Khan, continued shaping the *Ashtang gayaki*, after him.

Central to this style is *Ashtang gayaki* — the balanced integration of eight elements such as *alap* (slow melodic elaboration), *taans* (fast melodic runs or musical phrases), *bol-taans* (melodic patterns using lyrics), *layakari* (rhythmic play), *gamak* (oscillation of notes), *meend* (gliding between notes), and other ornamentations.

During Daulatrao Scindia's reign, Hassu, Haddu, and Nathu Khan secretly learned the technique of *taans* of the rival lineage of Ustad Bade Mohammad Khan. Hidden beneath the Maharaja's throne during performances, they absorbed these and blended them with their own style, eventually giving birth to what is today considered the Gwalior *khayal gayaki*. Their era is remembered as the golden age of *khayal*, with experts considering Haddu Khan an unparalleled *khayal* vocalist. Music in Gwalior flourished, with even businessmen valuing *ragas* as highly as silver and gold. Even as vocal traditions took centre stage, instrumental lineages such as that of the *sarod* also found a place within Gwalior's musical landscape. Musicians across the country came to learn from these masters, and spread across India, making the Gwalior *gharana* immortal.

Family Friendships

My ancestors, Ramchandra Chinchwadkar and my great-grandfather's father Vishnu Shastri Chinchwadkar (whose family name would change to Pandit), who were both scholars of Sanskrit and Vedic studies and deeply connected to music, moved to Gwalior during the early nineteenth-century. Their

love for music brought them close to Naththan Pir Bux, beginning a relationship that would influence and shape music in Gwalior.

Vishnu Pandit frequently visited the Khan household, teaching Hassu, Haddu, and Nathu Khan Sanskrit *shlokas* (prayer-chants) and Marathi *arya abhangas* (devotional-poems) by poet Moropant. The three brothers often sang these with Maharaja Scindia in his *devghar* (house of god). Vishnu Pandit's four sons — Gopal Rao, Ganapat Rao, Shankar Rao, and Eknath Pandit — also accompanied him to the Khan home, particularly to the *talghar* (basement), where the ustad did their *riyaz* (practice). Ustad Rehmat Khan, a well-known “Bhugandharva” (heavenly singer, a title bestowed on musicians), was also present, learning from and singing with Haddu Khan. He would



Jayaji Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior, a 1848 portrait from Edwin Binney 3rd Collection. Picture Credits: San Diego Museum of Art.

later move to Maharashtra with the Chattré brothers, pioneers of the Indian circus, and influence many others.

Haddu Khan accepted the four Pandit sons as disciples, taking special interest in Shankar Rao's voice. Haddu Khan often made Shankar sing before his own performances. After Haddu Khan's death, the sons' sessions continued under Nathu Khan. After his passing in 1884, their *talim* (training) continued under Nathu Khan's adopted son, Nissar Hussain Khan, known as *Kothiwalé Gawai* (treasure-house of compilations) for his vast repertoire. Through his dedication, Shankar Pandit won his guru's heart so deeply that Nissar Hussain Khan would say: "If anyone wants to hear my singing from my youth, they should listen to Shankar Pandit."

Eventually, after the Maharaja's death, musicians faced neglect and salary cuts. Nissar Hussain Khan left court to live with his disciple, Shankar Pandit, from 1886 until his death in 1916. Their intimacy cut through the social norms that made it unthinkable for a Muslim *ustad* to live with a Brahmin disciple; eventually, Nissar Hussain Khan called himself Nissar Bhatt, donned the sacred thread, and turned vegetarian. This unique relationship marked a historic moment in musical tradition.

The Pandit family would continue to play a critical role in preserving the Gwalior *gharana*, especially since the original musical lineage left no descendants.

Eknath Pandit, uncle of Shankar Pandit, contributed 500 compositions to Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande's *Kramik Pustak Malika*. Disciples of the Pandit family assisted Bhatkhande in preparing the series and running his music colleges.

Krishnarao Shankar Pandit, with a remarkable eight-decade career, gained fame for his own distinct style as well. In 1914, he founded the Shankar Gandharva Vidyalaya, known for its ongoing "Thursday Concerts," which provides a performance platform for students, teachers, and visiting artists. He also created an independent, simplified notation system and published seven music books for the Vidyalaya's courses.

The Legacy and Afterlife

Each of the Khans had disciples that would go on to teach several other musicians, who went on to form new *gharanas* and spread over all of India. The Khans' disciples also widely propagated the Gwalior *gayaki*. For example, Balkrishna Bua Ichalkaranjikar (disciple of Vasudeo Rao Joshi) and his disciple Vishnu Digambar Paluskar played key roles in spreading and popularising this music, including through the establishment of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in 1901. Ustad Banne Khan further carried the Gwalior style to undivided Punjab. Through a lineage of teaching and learning, then, the Gwalior *gayaki* spread across India. *Gharanas* such as Agra, Rampur-Sahaswan, and Patiala have, at different moments, drawn from and engaged closely with the Gwalior tradition.



Swami Haridasa with Tansen and Akbar at Vrindavana, 1700s. Picture Credits: National Museum/Wikimedia Commons.



Tansen Samaroh. Picture Credits: Tinkubasu/Wikimedia Commons.



Tracks through Time

Meenakshi Vashisth

A GLR Train in 1904. Picture Credits: Railway Carriage and Wagon Review/
Wikimedia Commons.

When one thinks of India's narrow-lane railways or tram-like tracks winding through marketplaces and fields, the mind instinctively travels to Kolkata or the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Yet far from Bengal, threaded through the Chambal region of central India, another narrow-gauge marvel once stitched together landscapes, livelihoods, and lives. The Gwalior Light Railway (GLR), born in the early twentieth-century, was a technological curiosity and a cultural artery — carrying goods and passengers alongside the pulse of a princely state negotiating its place in the modern world. Scindia State Railway, (rechristened North Central Railway in 2003) once connected 200 villages between Gwalior and Sheopur Kalan.

The Princely Line

GLR was the brainchild of Maharaja Madho Rao Scindia (1876-1925), the ruler of Gwalior who understood the significance of railways. Where the British had grand broad-gauge lines, he joined the experimentation of the princely states to build narrow, economical tracks to connect their towns and villages. Madho Rao's fascination with rail was deeply personal, most famously captured in the solid silver model train which famously traversed his banquet table to deliver cigars and brandy.

Still at the banquet display of Jai Vilas Palace Museum, the model was ordered from the British firm Bassett-Lowke around 1906.

The 2-ft (610 mm) gauge chosen for the GLR was rare in India, smaller

even than the common metre gauge — making it lighter (30 lb/yd steel), more flexible, and cheaper. This gave the railway an intimate scale and the ability to curve around the river Chambal's difficult terrain. The line had gradients as steep as 1 in 40 and curved down to 955 feet, shaping it for slow but steady travel. The train's leisurely pace was legendary: it was said that one could step off, pick a flower, and hop back without a stop. Its stations were modest and its coaches short and close to the ground.

What started as a short palace tramway soon grew into a public transport network linking Gwalior with Bhind, Shivpuri, and Sheopur Kalan. The first major sections — Gwalior-Bhind and Gwalior-Shivpuri



Portrait of Madho Rao Scindia, 1911. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.



Dining Hall in Jai Vilas Palace. The toy train in the foreground was used for serving the dining guests. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

— opened on 2 December 1899, with Sheopur Kalan joining the network by June 1909. The network became one of the largest 2-ft gauge systems in the world, covering over 300 kilometres.

The Maharaja successfully knit together the far reaches of his state, from the Chambal ravines to the forests edging Rajasthan, while feeding goods into the broader colonial railway grid.

In 1942, the title was changed to Scindia State Railway; and in 1951, post-independence, ownership passed to Indian Railways' Central Railway zone.

Stations as Social Stages

The GLR's routes told the story of Gwalior's geography and economy. The tracks passed fields of wheat and mustard, over stone culverts built by local masons, and across tracts where the river twisted. Older residents of Gwalior paint vivid scenes of the GLR's stations: at Ghosipura, early morning travellers huddled near coal-fired stoves, sipping tea from thick glass tumblers. In Sabalgarh, the station platform doubled as a marketplace, with vendors selling jaggery and groundnuts weaving between porters.

Gwalior being a region with a historical reputation for dacoits (bandits), local legends say the railway was deliberately exempt from their looting — the story goes that

they too understood its vitality to village-life economies. Certainly, the railway linked small manufacturing centres, weaving workshops, and oil mills to Gwalior city's markets. It carried salt inward and agricultural produce outward, sometimes in mixed trains where freight wagons and passenger coaches rattled together.

During the monsoon, when rural roads became rivers of mud, the GLR was a lifeline. Farmers brought their produce in bullock carts to the nearest station, relying on the train to transport it to the market. During harvest, extra services handled surges in grain transport. The train was also a link to hospitals, schools, and weekly markets. It carried farm produce, livestock, and the occasional wedding party, defining the region's mobility.

A Colonial Partnership

Technically, the GLR was built and run under the supervision of the Gwalior *Durbar* (court) in coordination with the British Indian railway network. Railways were symbols of political positioning for princely rulers, showcasing progressive governance while aligning with imperial economic interests.

British engineers expressed surprise at the GLR's operational efficiency despite its scale and light gauge.

Its steam locomotives, some imported from Kerr, Stuart & Co., W. G. Bagnall, Baldwin Locomotive Works of the USA, and later, the Japanese

firm Nippon Sharyo, were adapted to local conditions with reinforced cowcatchers and sandboxes for traction on dusty stretches.

Wheel arrangements ranged from compact 0-4-2 tanks to more powerful 4-6-2 and 2-8-2 designs, adapted to varying loads and gradients. Many of these engines became local landmarks, recognizable by their compact frames and distinctive whistles.

Despite its many uses, however, the Gwalior station, with its elaborate façade, also served as a showpiece for visiting British officials. Special saloon



A 1914 map of the GLR Network. Picture Credits: Laplorfill/Wikimedia Commons.

cars, with plush seating and fine wood panelling, were reserved for the Maharaja and his guests — a sharp contrast to the wooden benches in third class.

The Slow Fade

By the late twentieth-century, the GLR's charm became a liability in the age of faster road transport and standardised rail operations. The costs of maintenance and the need to transship goods between gauges slowed down logistics.

Gauge conversion projects in the early 2000s systematically replaced or closed much of the original network. The Gwalior-Bhind and Gwalior-Shivpuri sections were converted to broad gauge by the early 2010s. The Sheopur Kalan stretch, the longest surviving 2-ft gauge line in the world, saw its final scheduled service in 2020. Stations became larger and impersonal, with many small communities losing their direct connection to the railways.

Yet the ghosts of the Maharaja's railway still dictate the geography of modern Gwalior.

Rail enthusiasts trace the old routes, uncovering culverts and bridges built by local craftsmen more than a century ago. Deep within the urban sprawl of Lashkar and Kampoo Kothi, the steel has vanished, but the roads still trace the rhythmic, sweeping curves of the 1925 suburban extension; even today, locals navigate by old *phataks* (gates) that exist only in memory. As the final broad-gauge conversion reaches Sheopur Kalan, the original 1904 masonry piers endure in the riverbeds — handcrafted stone standing in quiet, defiant contrast to the modern concrete rising beside them. For those who grew up with the GLR, the change was bittersweet: faster trains came, but the leisurely human theatre of the old stations vanished. The fading tracks of the GLR remind us that progress comes at the cost of intimacy — but the narrow-gauge marvel, which once linked remote villages to the world beyond, lives on in the hearts of those it touched.

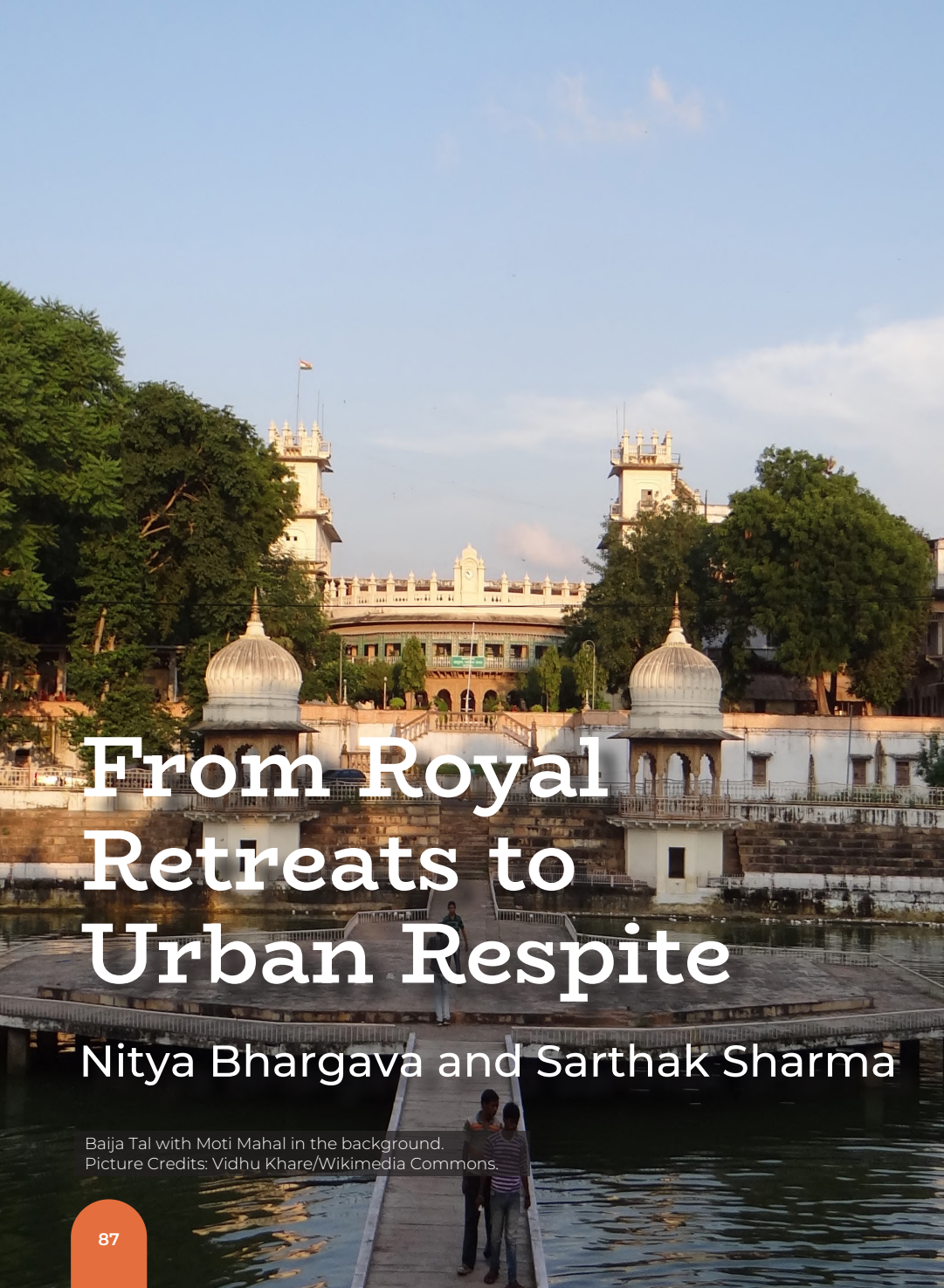
At the station, the grand colonial-era sandstone façade remains a sentinel, overlooking retired ZDM-diesel locomotives now plinthed like monumental art. There is an old locomotive preserved near Gwalior station, weathered station signs, and overgrown embankments.



One of the last trains of the erstwhile Gwalior Light Railway. Photo Credits: Shobhit Gosain/Wikimedia Commons.



Old Locomotive showcased at the Gwalior Railway Station. Photo by Pranjai Jain.



From Royal Retreats to Urban Respite

Nitya Bhargava and Sarthak Sharma

Baija Tal with Moti Mahal in the background.
Picture Credits: Vidhu Khare/Wikimedia Commons.

Those who know a little about Gwalior rightly imagine it as a city built on rocks at the edges of the Vindhya. It does not inspire images of greenery or common breathing spaces — like many other cities in the developing world, a rise in population and a subsequent demand for housing has led to the inevitable sacrifice of forests in and around the city. Yet not even a century ago, it was the political duty of rulers to create and extend such areas. Royally curated gardens, water tanks, and tomb gardens with the Mughal *Charbagh* (Mughal pleasure gardens, divided into quarters) design all once flourished in Gwalior. Today, the city faces the prospect of lacklustre forest conservation policies and desperate government intervention for parks to preserve remaining greenery.

Natural Avenues

Certain natural lungs of the city continue to breathe. The cliffside against the Gopachal plateau — on which the Gwalior Fort stands, around which the city has developed — is one remaining bastion of greenery. The paved road to the fort runs against forestry, a major reason that residents frequent the area. Some of these spaces may have been left intact for centuries as a defence strategy, some might have been too difficult to develop. But the consequence is that the cliffside is covered with native shrubbery and trees. Babur notes in his memoir *Baburnama* that he found the climate on the plateau cool and agreeable — and even today, it still feels as cool, owing to the untouched greenery and the overall windy atmosphere.



Oroxylum indicum pods. Picture Credits: Vinayaraj/ Wikimedia Commons.

At the southern edge of Gwalior, Tapovan forest also continues to endure, today under the protection of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department. Inside is an ‘eco-museum’ that hosts soil varieties, seeds, and leaves.

Tapovan also hosts the rare Broken Bone (*Oroxylum indicum*) tree species: so named for its large, falling leaf stalks that resemble a broken limb, this tree is among the vulnerable plant species in the country.

Ghatigaon Wildlife Sanctuary, which is located a little far from the city, compared to Tapovan, is spread across 500 square kms. This area was demarcated as a protected zone for the natural habitat of the *Sonchiriya*, the Great Indian Bustard. Once the forerunner to be the National Bird of the country, the large, migratory,

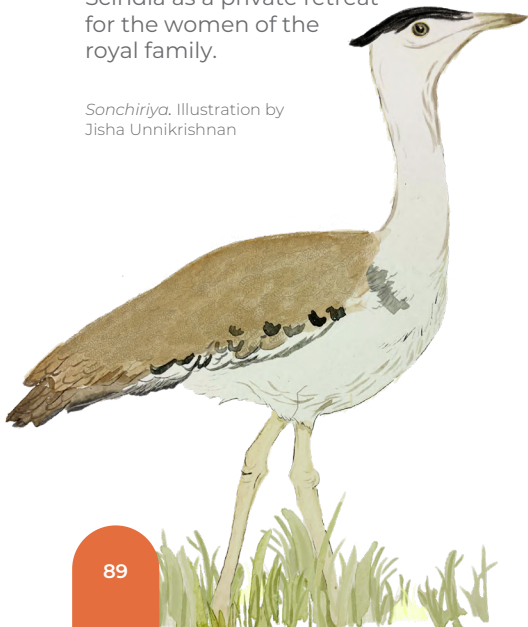
ground-dwelling bird is on the verge of extinction today as a consequence of habitat loss. Unfortunately, neither Ghatigaon nor the nearby Karera Bird Sanctuary, which was also set up to preserve the Sonchiriya, have had a sighting since the 1990s. Today, these 'birdless sanctuaries' stand as sombre reminders of the gap between policy and ecological reality.

While Tapovan has enjoyed some degree of success as an urban forest, Ghatigaon has faced failure as a wildlife sanctuary. Though it contains a few animals like the Black Buck and hyenas, its location was not ideal for the preservation of the *Sonchiriya* — whose breeding ground lay towards the west of Gwalior in Tighra.

Constructed Getaways

Gwalior is also home to several commissioned and constructed garden-spaces and parks. The Italian Garden complex in the Phoolbagh district, established roughly 200 years ago, was constructed by Daulat Rao Scindia as a private retreat for the women of the royal family.

Sonchiriya. Illustration by
Jisha Unnikrishnan



Between the Italian Garden and the Moti Mahal, a royal Scindia palace, lies the artificial lake, Baija Tal. While the Mahal functioned as a vital government nerve centre, first housing the Madhya Bharat Legislative Assembly and later the Divisional Commissioner's office and the State Tax department for many years, the other two sites became lively public spaces.

The Italian Garden hosts a fountained walking space, a garden, and a *baradari* (12-doored pavilion), with abundant water bodies around. The Jal Vihar (literally, water-place) complex boasts multiple, interconnected water tanks with a wave-shaped drain running next to it.

At the heart is a central square, where the sounds of royal women have been replaced by children on rollerskates today. Nearby is a Scindia-era building, repurposed as an office, that retains Indo-Saracenic character and signature cusped arches.

But even here, the consequences of contemporary development are on display. The *baradari* is now filled with trash. The river that once fed the Jal Vihar, Swarnarekha (*golden stream*), is a drain for untreated sewage. Once, the Swarnarekha fed Baija Tal, named for the wife of Daulat Rao Scindia. Today, the raised platform in the centre of the lake is a place for cultural performances. The space too is a lively open site, where groups of people

are seen walking, talking, and boating. What started off as a space reserved for royal leisure has now become a part of everyday life for lakhs of Gwalior dwellers and tourists.

Phoolbagh, where the entire Moti Mahal complex lies, was constructed by Madho Rao Scindia. Considered the king who built modern Gwalior, he inaugurated this park complex when the Prince of Wales visited in 1922. The area also includes places of worship for major religions. Several worship places — like the Gopal Mandir, Moti Masjid, Gorkhi Mandir, and Datta Mandir — follow Haveli-style architecture, the prominent style during the Scindia era: Bangla arched roof (elongated arch, popularised during the Mughal era), cusped arches, and a long *mandapa* (pillared hall) flanked with smaller lanes. Even today, the Gopal Mandir receives crowds during Janmashtami, when the Krishna idol is adorned by precious jewellery gifted by the Scindias.



Façade of the Gopal Mandir. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Adjacent stands the Moti Masjid, the largest religious structure in the precinct; its sandstone carvings mirror the very aesthetic seen in the nearby temples, showcasing a shared regional style. There is also a gurudwara nearby, which has a flagpole that is so old it was used to indicate safe shelter during the 1984 riots. Once, even a Theosophical Church was located within the vicinity.



Current state of Baradari, Phoolbagh. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

However, beyond sites of worship, it is the parks in the complex that figure majorly in the daily lives of people in Gwalior. The Ambedkar and Gandhi parks are always full of people on walks, kids playing, and frequent cultural activities. All this, though built next to the Italian Garden complex, was completed nearly 100 years later. Together, this contiguous landscape affords the modern city a dedicated precinct for public leisure.

Post-independence too, some effort to create green spaces in the city was invigorated. One of the prominent architects of the city, my grandfather Ar. Prabhat Kumar Bhargava, discussed these developments with me. He designed the Bal Bhawan complex, part of the wider City Centre area (the newest part of the city), that includes a park and a recreational centre. In front of the Bhawan is the Roop Singh Cricket Stadium: though not in use any longer, it was once the site where Sachin Tendulkar reached the record of 200 runs in an One Day International (ODI) match. Though the stadium itself is no longer a public space, the areas where players practiced and the swimming pool remain amongst the most important open-access athletic areas in the city.

The Neglect of Urbanism

Gwalior, like many Indian cities, has lost much of its green-public spaces to expanding urbanity.

not yet eaten up public spaces. For example, Ghaus ki Talaiyya, near the Railway Station, once had room for growing water chestnuts (singhada).

A ditch behind Jiwaji Club, which today houses nurseries, was an important pond filled with snakes, fishes, and even turtles! Public playgrounds near Science College and Achaleshwar Temple now must function as wedding venues to make profit. And Phoolbagh, between Gandhi Park and Ambedkar Park, was a fully forested area with a stream of water that locals used to call their own Kashmir. Today, there are only roads there.

Places of leisure that are still maintained for public-use are only the famous and the oldest ones, like the Gwalior Fort. But this is not solely a story of Gwalior so much as a story of Indian urban development — and how it permitted the concern of public spaces to slip from a crucial government function to a rare consideration.

Older citizens, like Prabhat Bhargava, reminisce about a time when urban sprawl had



Jal Vihar, Gwalior. Photo by Pranjal Jain.



Citizens leisuring at Italian Garden. Photo by Pranjal Jain.



A Jungle of Temples

Sarthak Sharma

The Bateshwar Group of Temples. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Bateshwar, which is technically in the district of Morena, lies just around 25 kilometers from the Gwalior airport. Its name gives it away: *Bada Ishwar*, or 'A Big God' (a term used mostly in Shaivite contexts in reference to Shiva). In one 25-acre complex in Bateshwar, there are about 200 temples, surrounded by two pools, giving the sense of being amidst a jungle of temples. Far from any villages and lying within Chambal Valley, an area once famous for dacoity, the complex was forgotten after it succumbed to ruins, likely post an earthquake in the fourteenth-century. Today, it is slowly turning into a site for tourism and pilgrimage again.

Shared Pasts

Stylistically, the sandstone ruins of Bateshwar were likely built during the reign of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, between the ninth and eleventh-centuries. Though singular in its massiveness, Bateshwar shares several features with other architectural structures built during the Pratihara era, including Gwalior Fort.

The sandstone used is ubiquitous not only to the fort, but also early medieval temples in other nearby sites in Madhya Pradesh such as Kakanmath, Nareshwar, Aiti, Mitaoli, and Padavali. Similarly, the magnitude of sculptures is also common: take, for instance, the Gadhi-Padavali Temple, which also has dense sculptures.



Sculptures inside Gadhi-Padavali. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

Bateshwar's temples also feature the popular *chandrashala* (or *gavaksha*, moon-window): these horse-shoe shaped niches, stacked one top of another, create a long vertical chain in many temples at the site. This element was common in the Pratihara era, also used in the Teli ka Mandir inside the Gwalior Fort complex and the Nareshwar temples.

The Stories of the Ruins

The Bateshwar complex is not limited to its 200 semi-restored temples. The moment one enters the site, they are greeted by free-standing sculptures, unfinished decorative elements, and stone ruins. Whether these were all parts of temples that crumbled with time or whether they were works in progress that were never completed,



Remains of a *torana* (gateway) in Bateshwar. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

we cannot say. K. K. Mohammed, the primary archeologist who worked on the restoration and documentation of the site, suggests that Bateshwar was a kind of a *prayogshala* (laboratory) of temple-making and used as a *siddha-sthana* (holy place). Mohammed theorizes that this was a place used by anyone who wished to construct a temple, since all the materials were readily available and construction would be streamlined. This would align with the idea that several of these remains were unfinished specimens.

One glaringly obvious example of such an unfinished piece is the sculpture I saw resting towards the farther wall of the main office building. In its unfinished state, at the very top is an inscription, still unfinished. Then there are two figures worshipping a *linga* (aniconic representation of Shiva), followed by a figure on a horse, next to the outline of other animals. From the looks of it,

this seems to be a hero-stone commemorating a cattle-raid.

While hero-stones are not prevalent in North India, especially when compared to the Deccan, the Gujari Mahal Museum below the Gwalior Fort houses several such stones — including five related to cattle-raiding. These stories in the sculptures also point towards the prevalence of pastoral economy. The Pratihara state was never physically or culturally far from pastoralists, whose heroes often died in cattle-raids rather than battling armies.

Hero-stones commemorate only the death of males. The valour of women, on the other hand, was only related to their immediate male relatives — and so *sati* stones served as their remembrance.



A *sati* stone and a hero stone next to each other.
Photo by Pranjal Jain.

In the Bateshwar complex, a *sati* stone is located immediately towards the right from the gate: the two elements on the sculpture – the raised hand, with the sun and moon motif – indicate that this is a *sati* stone. Right nearby is an uninscribed hero stone. Together, if these sculptures were originally found next to each other, they might tell the story of a man who succumbed to death fighting and his wife having to immolate herself after.

Such hero-*sati* stones are not unique to Bateshwar nor are they the most dominant structures inside the site. However, they serve as a reminder that monuments were living and thriving spaces in which several people participated. Bateshwar, in particular, is evidently not only a space for royalty. The lack of



Door Jamb laid down in Bateshwar. Photo by Pranjal Jain.

inscriptional evidence reinforces the idea of non-royal patronage at the site. Bateshwar seems instead a space where communities remembered their fallen heroes, the devout came for patronage, and where artists and artisans showed their talents.

Rediscovery and Restoration

Possibly the most well-known aspect of Bateshwar's history is its renovation. It begins with a controversy around the origins of the Pratiharas. The dynasty, most well-known as the 'Gurjara-Pratiharas', are a source of fierce debate: the caste of the Gurjars claim the dynasty as their own, but face strong opposition from the upper-caste Rajputs who insist that these are *their* ancestors. This controversy played a significant role in the excavation of the temple.

Bateshwar was nothing but a pile of detailed carvings and sculptures in the Chambal Valley when archeologist K. K. Mohammed arrived at the site in 2004. The area was plagued by dacoits who called themselves *baaghis* (rebels), ranging from Robinhood-esque figures to opportunists. Caste played an important role in the make-up of gangs: one of the last gangs remaining belonged to the Gurjar caste, led by Nirbhay Singh Gurjar, the last of the Chambal dacoits (until his death in 2005, during an encounter by the Uttar Pradesh police). When the restoration of the temple-complex started, his 'gang' still held the site as a hideout.

K. K. Mohammed says, "When I saw Nirbhay Gujjar for the first time in 2004, he was smoking a *bidi* (cigarette) on the stairs of the temple complex. I didn't recognise him and admonished him for bringing disrespect to a holy place" (only to change his tone when he discovered the identity of the person he had reprimanded).

Mohammed and his team convinced Nirbhay to help restore the temple site, ostensibly by suggesting to him that the site was a place of religious activity heralded by his ancestors, the 'Gurjara'-Pratiharas.

At the beginning, the bandits were quite helpful and played a role in this process. After the death of Nirbhay Singh in 2005, however, the site was firmly in the hands of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). Archeologists identified and repositioned elements on the site based on their structural role, stylistic features, and iconographic details to restore the complex. By 2012, 80 of over 200 original temples were restored.

However, a major challenge for Bateshwar continues to be the illegal mining around the region, which causes the soil to shake and makes monuments vulnerable. The locals and villagers, especially those from the Gurjara community, wrote to the Prime Minister to resume restoration activities — and while this has initiated work once more, it is difficult

to say what will become of it and whether future restoration will ensure restrictions on mining.

Despite these concerns, the site remains a space of interaction for local communities. Within is now a Hanuman sculpture painted in vermillion, worshipped by the people. K. K. Mohammed shares that even the dacoits would worship the Hanuman before adventing to loot or redistributing loot. There is also a relatively vast Shiva temple which has become an active place of worship, likely after restoration. From their ancient heights to the more recent restoration, the temples of Bateshwar seem to be coming full-circle: the spirit of worship and the communal drive to claim this space have had a resurgence with the return of life to its physical structures.



Entrance to one of the temples in Bateshwar. Photo by Pranjal Jain.



Sculptures inside Kakanmath Temple. Picture Credits: Ramakrishna Kongalla/Wikimedia Commons.

City Reads

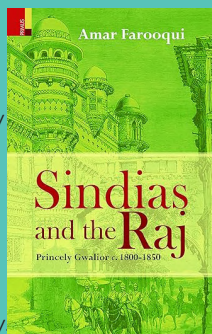
Books that capture the region's historical and cultural heritage.

Sindhias and the Raj (2011)

Amar Farooqui, Primus Books

Amar Farooqui traces the history of early-colonial Gwalior, centering the Scindia dynasty in his narrative. A time of great flux, this is when the British empire was entrenching itself in the nitty-gritty politics of the nineteenth-century.

The resistance initiated by the local dynasty, especially with queen Baiza Bai at the helm, makes for an interesting read on the local histories of colonialism.

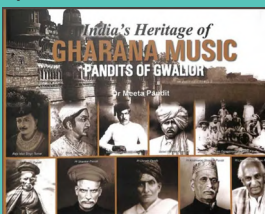


India's Heritage of Gharana Music: Pandits of Gwalior (2018)

Meeta Pandit, Shubhi

Publications

This book is a history of the Gwalior *gharana*, the first *khayal gharana*, written not only by a scholar, but a practitioner of the craft of Hindustani music. Gwalior's patronage of music has led to the city being awarded with the title of 'UNESCO City of Music'.

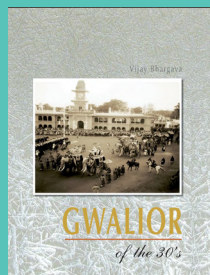


Gwalior of the 30s (2016)

Vijay Bhargava, Roots & Shoots

A coffee-table book which takes the readers through a series of unique, monochromatic images of the city from the 1930s.

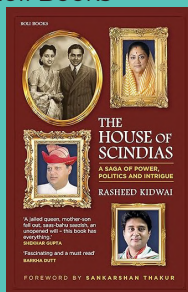
Containing a total of 115 photographs, these were taken by the author's father, who worked as the editor of a weekly newspaper in the city.



The House of Scindias: A Saga of Power, Politics and Intrigue (2021)

Rasheed Kidwai, Roli Books

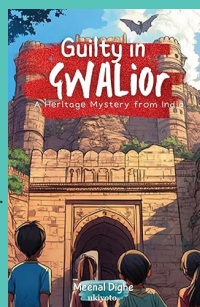
This book is a de-facto biography of the Scindia dynasty. Mentioning the extremely-public lives of royals-turned -politicians, the author notes the public feuds, conspiracies, and court cases that have marred the lives of the Scindias.



Guilty in Gwalior (2024)

Meenal Dighe, Ukiyoto Publishing

A novel for children, this 100-page long book is a fictional account of Gwalior's heritage featuring the characters visiting temples, palaces, and the fort. The narrative starts with the robbery of an artefact at the museum, crafting a light and fun read which weaves Gwalior's heritage into a detective story.



City in Films

Films that revolve in and around Gwalior

Paan Singh Tomar (2012)

A biographical narrative, *Paan Singh Tomar* follows the life of an athlete who turns into a dacoit, following police inaction over crimes against his family. Along the way, the movie also captures the ethos of Chambal's villages in the 1970s.



B for Bundelkhand (2017)

An award-winning story, *B for Bundelkhand* received great critical acclaim. The film follows the relationship between a father and his only son, tracing the gravity of agricultural life in Bundelkhand.



Sonchiriya (2019)

While the dacoits of Chambal have served as inspiration for many movies across decades in the Indian film industry, the 2018 movie *Sonchiriya* captures their relationship to



wider society, including the police officers charged to arrest them. Set against the ravines of Chambal, this social drama also depicts speech that is close to the real dialects of the region.

Vadh (2022)

A gritty thriller, *Vadh* follows the life of a teacher who resides in Gwalior. A turn of events lead him to execute a perfect murder, while the city serves as a backdrop for the crime-thriller. Fun fact: the movie was originally meant to be titled 'Gwalior'.



12th Fail (2023)

A classic underdog story, *12th Fail* is a biographical narrative of IPS Manoj Kumar Sharma, who travels to Gwalior for his studies. The city features heavily in half of the movie, as it captures the struggles of many aspirants hoping to pass exams for their future.



City Eats

Legendary street food joints that serve thousands of Gwalior residents everyday and should not be missed by visitors.

Bahadura Sweets



Possibly the most well-known sweet shop in the city, it is famous for its extremely delicate and ghee-fried *boondi laddoos*. The shop is located in an old building in the Naya Bazaar locality. While the *laddoos* remain their unique selling point, locals will advise you to also try their *gulab jamun*, fresh and hot.

Chotelal Samosa and Imarti



Bedai is among Gwalior's favourite breakfast dishes. Fried like a *poori* with dal stuffed inside, it is served alongside a hot potato curry. Even the samosas in the city are served with the same curry. Do not miss out on *imarti*, especially from this shop near Patankar Chauraha.

The Gajak Shops of Nai Sadak

A winter dessert, this flaky delicacy is made by blending roasted sesame seeds (*til*) with hot, hardened jaggery (*gur*) syrup. Today, some shops in the Nai Sadak market claim to be a century old. Innovations have led to the creations of many varieties of *gajaks*, in all shapes and sizes.

Panwadi Breakfast Shop



Located near the Old High Court building, this breakfast place is tucked away in a corner but remains among the most popular breakfast spots in Gwalior. A variety of selections here include sprouts, *khichdi*, and of course, *poha*.

SS Kachoriwala



SS Kachoriwala is among the most famous breakfast places in the city. It is located near Bahadura Sweets in the Naya Bazaar market, with crowds gathering at the shop from early in the morning. As the name suggests,

Kachoris here are among the best in the city, but they also serve *samosas* and *bedais*. The shop itself is over 60 years old!

Saffron Milk



Saffron milk is a popular beverage, especially in the winters, due to its piping heat and super sweet taste. The drink comes with a show: servers pour it from up-high without wasting a single drop! If you want to try it, the most popular spot is in Phalke Bazaar, named Bherent Kesariya.

Museum & Memories

Institutions that house precious remains from not only Gwalior's past, but the Earth's long history. Please note that entry fees may be applicable for some sites.

Gujari Mahal



Gujari Mahal was the residential palace of Mrignayani, "queen" of king Man Singh Tomar. The complex hosts a state archeological museum hosting remains found not only in and around Gwalior, but from all over Madhya

Pradesh. One comes across the palace-turned-museum as the first thing when starting their ascent to the fort on foot. *Note: Gujari Mahal is at the Kila Gate entrance of the fort, not the Urvai Gate which is open for vehicles.*

Location: Gujari Mahal, Kila Gate

Days: Tuesday to Sunday

Timings: 10 am - 5 pm

Fort Archeological Museum



The site museum at Gwalior Fort is located right in front of the Hathi Pol. Originally a British-Era Hospital and Jail building, this museum houses remnants found in the fort and around Gwalior, including Pratihara-era temple remains from sites like Bateshwar. One can trace the evolution of sculptural art in the region as the artefacts range from as old as first-century CE to the eighteenth-century!

Location: Inside Fort Premises, next to Assi Khamba Bawdi

Days: Saturday to Sunday (Closed on Fridays)

Timings: 9 am - 5 pm

The HH Maharaja Sir Jiwajirao Scindia Museum

Jai Vilas Palace still houses the descendants of the erstwhile Scindia rulers of Gwalior. Today, a part of it serves as a museum showcasing the royal paraphernalia of the ruling family. Palanquins, textiles, and a collection



of vintage cars make this an interesting stroll for curious minds.

Location: Jai Vilas Palace, Lashkar

Days: All days

Timings: 10 am - 5 pm

Sarod Ghar



Sarod Ghar was gifted by the ruling family as residence to the ancestors of Sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan Bangash. Still in his name, the property is now converted into a museum of music, showcasing the history of music and instruments associated with the Gwalior *gharana*. Apart from the exhibits and artefacts, the architecture of the property teleports visitors to a calm and peaceful place, away from the streets outside.

Location: Jiwaji Ganj, Lashkar

Days: Monday to Saturday

Timings: 10 am - 4 pm

GSI Geoscience Museum



The GSI Geoscience Museum houses exhibits, models, rocks, fossils, and much more! The building itself has a history of its own. Originally built in 1910, the premises came to be known as the Victoria Market. The market used to house a stationary market before a fire erupted in 2010. Standing today at the Maharaj Bada circle, the Indo-Saracenic structure today seeks to educate visitors about our planet's long past.

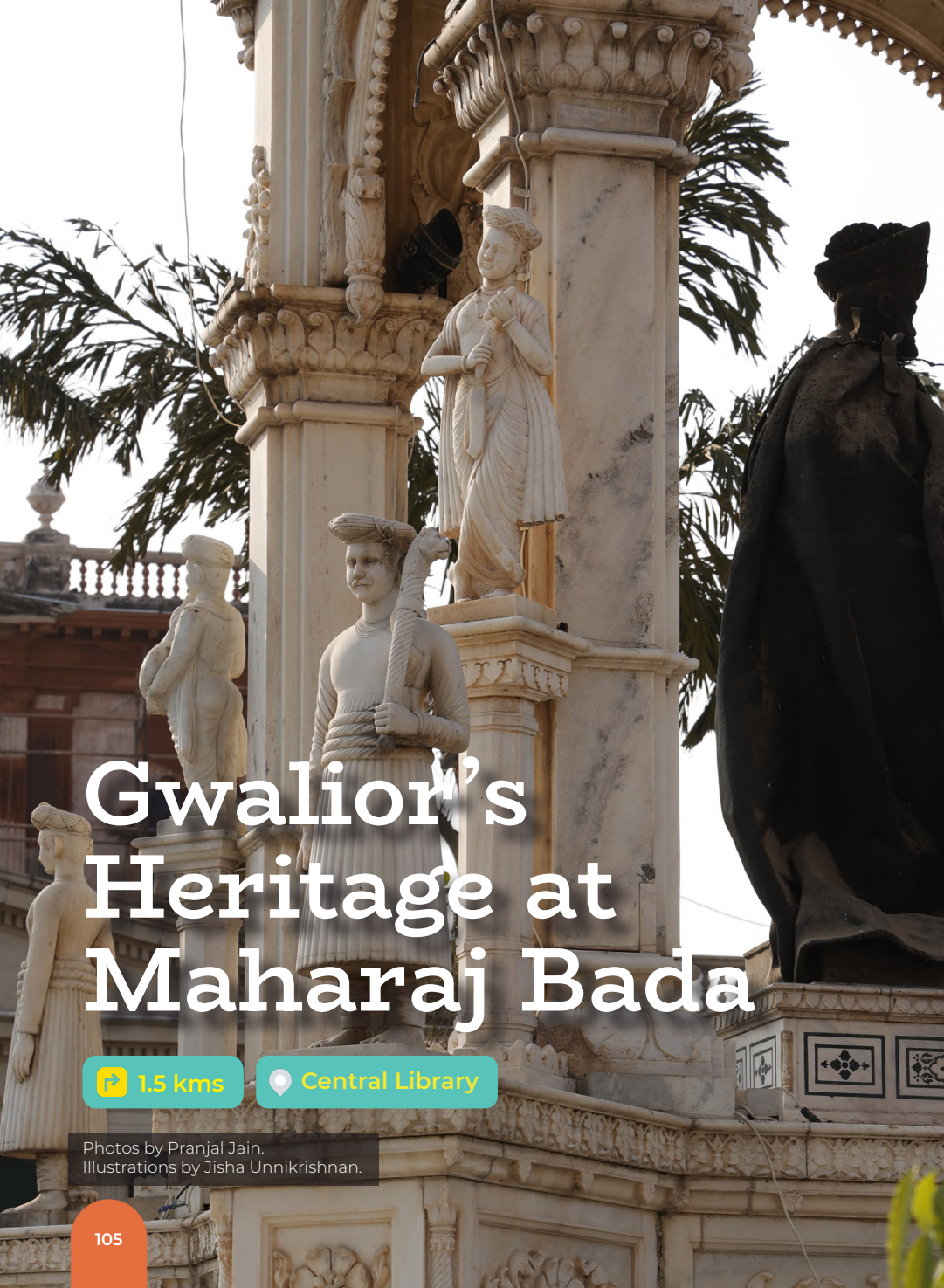
Location: Jiwaji Chowk, Maharaj Bada

Days: Tuesday to Sunday

Timings: 10 am - 5 pm

Still



The background image shows the Maharaj Bada monument in Gwalior, India. It features several white marble statues of figures in traditional attire, including a central figure holding a bow and arrow, and another figure holding a mace. The monument is set against a backdrop of palm trees and a clear sky. A large, dark, draped statue is visible on the right side of the frame.

Gwalior's Heritage at Maharaj Bada



1.5 kms



Central Library

Photos by Pranjai Jain.
Illustrations by Jisha Unnikrishnan.



01. Central Library
02. Imperial Bank Building
03. State Bank of India Building
04. General Post Office
05. Gorkhi Mahal and Devghar
06. Victoria Memorial Market Building
07. Alijah Darbar Press
08. Jayaji Chowk
09. Town Hall

Shree Ram Dabeli Center
श्री राम दबेली सेटर

Conceived under Madho Rao Scindia II, Maharaja Bada is a grand central square that has become a shared public realm shaped by governance, commerce, ritual, and community interaction. From palatial and civic buildings to temples, markets, and administrative structures, this walk explores Jayaji Chowk and its surrounding precincts, tracing how diverse architectural styles and institutions came together within a compact urban landscape. Moving on foot, participants are invited to engage Maharaj Bada as a living urban fabric that shapes the city's cultural and social life.

1 Central Library

Built in the first quarter of the twentieth-century, the current Central Library houses the court and a jail of Gwalior. Granted to the state library in 1927, the building's heavy stone masonry and high ceilings provide a sanctuary for one of the



region's largest collections of rare manuscripts and books, representative of the Scindia commitment to public literacy.

It famously houses one of the eleven original manuscripts of the Indian Constitution, complete with the printed signatures of all 286 constituent assembly members. This makes the library a living monument that connects Gwalior's local history to the birth of the Indian Republic.

2 Imperial Bank Building



At the beginning of the twentieth-century, the Gwalior *Durbar* (court) decided to establish a foreign exchange and this building was born. While it is currently used as an extension of the State Bank of India office, it earlier housed a historic branch of the Imperial Bank of India (a predecessor of the SBI). The building itself is constructed in a classical Roman idiom, with Tuscan pillars. The columns are distinguished by their proportions, being the least ornate among all column archetypes.

3 State Bank of India Building



The State Bank Building, commissioned to fulfill the financial requirements of the Gwalior Army during Madho Rao's rule, has an enormous triumphal arch in the centre. The arch is extended by a flat entablature, a superstructure resting on the column capitals. Usually, such buildings bear ornamentation and commemorative inscriptions, but the State Bank of India building is plain with no such work. The building is a specimen of Victorian architecture incorporating Indo-Saracenic motifs, like the lotus medallions on either side of the main arch.

4 General Post Office

The telegraph office was converted into the present-day General Post Office (GPO), still used



as the central post office building of the city. The façade and motifs adhere strictly to classical European architecture, with long steps leading to its entrance followed by tall pillars supporting a triangular architrave. This feature makes it particularly distinct among the buildings of the Bada, reminiscent of ancient Greek temples.

5 Gorkhi Mahal and Devghar



Gorkhi Mahal, the original residence and administrative seat of the Scindia dynasty before Jai Vilas Palace, was built across the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries in a robust Maratha-influenced style. Named after the Gorakhnath/Devghar Temple inside, its courtyards and artisan-built stone gateway now mark the entrance to Maharaj Bada. In an example of adaptive reuse, Gorkhi Mahal has served as a residence, office, and treasury, and today houses a Government Higher Secondary School — alma mater of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee — alongside historic temples. Recently upgraded under

the Smart City initiative, it also functions as a digital cultural heritage museum with exhibits on Indian classical music.

6 Victoria Memorial Market Building



Built in 1904 to commemorate Queen Victoria, the Victoria Market is distinguished by its Indo-Saracenic arches and sandstone façade. Four clocks are installed in the central tower. After a fire in 2010 left the structure severely damaged, it underwent careful restoration that retained its historic exterior while adapting the interiors for a new purpose. In December 2024, it reopened as the Geo Science Museum, developed by the Geological Survey of India, and houses interactive galleries on Earth's planetary history and geological processes.

7 Alijah Darbar Press

The Alijah Darbar Press of Gwalior was a state-run publishing house in the early twentieth-century, responsible for printing official reports, cultural studies, and scholarly works. Now housing the Government Printing Press, the Persianate building has large

bulbous domes and small minarets at the corners above the roof. It is going to be converted to a museum showcasing Gwalior's industrial past.



8 Jayaji Chowk

Jayaji Chowk, popularly known as Maharaj Bada, is the grand square at the heart of the city. Taking its name from a bronze statue of Jayaji Rao Scindia that stands at the centre, on a pedestal under a pointed spire, the square is an epicentre for Gwalior's commercial life. Street markets branch into narrow lanes and imposing structures commissioned by the Scindia Maharajas abound.



A statue of the goddess Lakshmi standing on a lotus is situated in the garden around Jayaji's statue.

9 Town Hall

The Town Hall of Gwalior is a prominent and intricate example of Gwalior's many colonial-era landmarks. With Gothic and Indo-Saracenic influences, the building once served as an opera house. Its many small arches, supported by Corinthian columns, are distinguished by the dense sculptural forms and foliage at the top of the capital. Stalwarts of Indian classical music including Bhimsen Joshi, Vinayak Rao Patawardhan, legendary Pakistani singers Ustad Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali Khan, and many others have performed here.



Please Note:

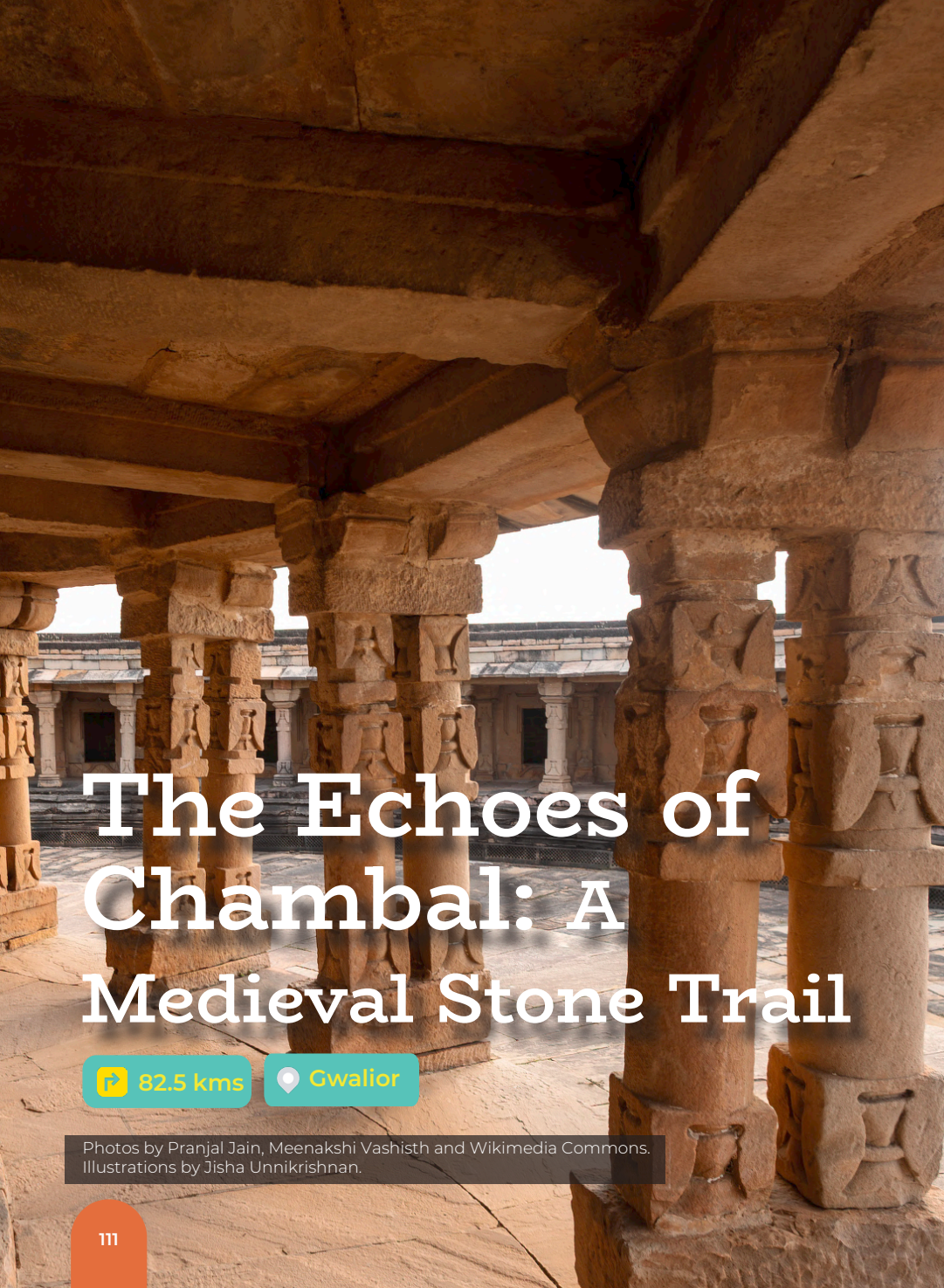
- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior of buildings).
- It is a leisurely stroll with a number of stops to talk and discuss.
- Wear comfortable clothes, footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- Please be on time at the venue, as the roads tend to get busy, and the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces.

Neelesh Ishwarchandra

Karkare is a historian of Gwalior's Maratha and Shinde-Shahi legacy, known for his work on Mahadji Shinde and publications such as *Tawareekh-e-Shindeshahi*.

Ankit Agrawal is a tourism academician and heritage practitioner who curates heritage walks in Gwalior and works on cultural landscapes and intangible heritage.

Email: mail@travelosthan.com



The Echoes of Chambal: A Medieval Stone Trail



82.5 kms



Gwalior

Photos by Pranjal Jain, Meenakshi Vashisth and Wikimedia Commons.
Illustrations by Jisha Unnikrishnan.



01. Bateshwar Archaeological Site
02. Gadhi Padavali
03. Chausath Yogini Temple at Mitaoli
04. Kakanmath Temple
05. Ancient Shrines at Aiti Village
06. Nareshwar Temple Group

This trail explores the rugged borders of the Gwalior and Morena districts, tracing a landscape shaped long before the rise of the Scindias. Not far from the airport and travelling through rural roads and scrub-covered hills, the trail connects a series of eighth to eleventh-century temple sites.

By traversing these remote locations, the journey takes us to a sophisticated pre-colonial world of Gurjara-Pratihara and Kachchhapaghata architecture. The trail situates Gwalior not just as a fortress city, but the nucleus of a deeper cultural and ecological landscape defined by masterful stone masonry and monastic seclusion long before colonial or early-modern rule.

1 Bateshwar Archaeological Site

The archeological site of Bateshwar is a staggering jungle of 200 sandstone temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu. For decades, the ruins served as a hideout for the dacoits of the Chambal, whose presence deterred idol thieves and kept the site intact. In the early 2000s, the ASI famously worked alongside the local outlaws to reassemble the shattered shrines. Today, it is a rare tactile space where visitors can walk among hundreds of scattered friezes and unfinished sculptures.



2 Gadhi Padavali

Known as *Gadhi* (fortress) Padavali, this nineteenth-century fortress was built by the Jat rulers of Gohad. The fort walls were constructed using the salvaged ruins of a magnificent tenth-century temple that stood on the site. Guarded by two massive stone lions, the surviving *mandapa* (pillared hall) is covered with intricate carvings depicting the *Dashavatara* (Vishnu's ten incarnations), scenes from the *Ramayana*, and secular life.



3 Chausath Yogini Temple at Mitaoli



Perched atop a 100-foot rocky hill, the eleventh-century Chausath (64) Yogini Temple is one of the only circular temples in the country. Featuring 64 small peripheral chambers surrounding a shrine to Shiva, the temple's geometry and hypaethral (open-to-sky) design are believed to have inspired the old Indian Parliament House in Delhi. From its ramparts, the temple offers a view of the surrounding agrarian landscape.

4 Kakanmath Temple



Local folklore maintains that Kakanmath was constructed by ghosts overnight, a myth fueled by its skeletal and precarious appearance. This eleventh-century marvel was likely built by King

Kirtiraja Kachchhapaghata for Queen Kakanwati. Standing 100 feet tall, the temple's *shikhara* (tower) appears to be held together by gravity alone, as the outer walls of the sanctum have long collapsed. The remnants of a grand *torana* (gateway) and exquisite carvings of celestial beings also remain on the site.

5 Ancient Shrines at Aiti Village

At Aiti stand a pair of medieval temples. One Shiva shrine at the village entrance is well-preserved within a protected boundary, retaining some of its eleventh-century structural integrity. A second shrine, dedicated to Surya (the Sun god), lies deeper. This has undergone renovation by the local residents, the ancient stone layered with modern paint and plaster and a substructure covering it. These structures are testament to the varying ways the state and the community negotiate the preservation of sacred spaces in their backyard.



6 Nareshwar Temple Group

Nareshwar is the reclusive predecessor of Bateshwar, predating it by several centuries. Reaching the site requires a 3 km trek through rugged terrain, leading to a secluded canyon where 23 temples were carved from the rocky hillside. Dating back to the fourth to sixth-century, these are among the oldest examples of North Indian temple architecture. It is an essential site for understanding the early evolution of the Pratihara style in the region.



Please Note:

- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior buildings).
- Since the distance between the points is considerable, it is recommended that visitors make a two-day trip by car to visit them all.
- Wear comfortable clothes, footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- It is recommended that you head out early in the day.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces.
- None of these sites are ticketed.
- These sites are situated in rural settings and the ones like Nareshwar are especially difficult to reach. Carry your own supplies as you bring out the explorer within you.

Sarthak Sharma is a student and writer of history, interested in narratives of our past and how we choose to remember it.

Email: sarthak2466manu@gmail.com



Team

Curator

Sarthak Sharma

Contributors

Amar Farooqui
Austin Coutinho
Meenakshi Vashisth
Meeta Pandit
Nandika Bhargava
Nitya Bhargava
Ross Lee Bernhaut
Sandhya Sharma
Sarthak Sharma
Shikha Dhakad
Tulika Shrivastava

Photographer

Pranjal Jain

Editor

Shree Thaarshini Sriraman

Designers

Kaustav Purkayastha
Farishta Anjirbag

Illustrator

Jisha Unnikrishnan

Project Mentor

Vaibhav Chauhan

Project Head

Meenakshi Vashisth

Project Coordinator

Adit Shankar

About Us

InterGlobe Foundation

InterGlobe Foundation (IGF) is the CSR arm of the InterGlobe Group of companies. The key focus areas of IGF include Heritage Conservation, Promotion of Livelihoods and Environment Conservation including Waste Management. The Heritage projects cover both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. The environment projects support development and protection of Natural Resources thereby increasing the green cover and ground water recharge. It also includes work on Waste Management. The livelihood projects support income enhancement of marginalized groups, especially women through environment friendly projects. By partnering with leading NGOs of the country, IGF has been able to impact more than 600,000 lives.



Sahapedia

Sahapedia is an open encyclopedic resource on the arts, cultures and histories of India offering digital content in multimedia formats such as articles, books, photo essays, videos, interviews, oral histories, maps and timelines, authored by scholars and curated by experts. Subject areas range from ideas and belief systems, rituals and practices, to visual and performing arts. The values that guide our work are accessibility, inclusiveness, collaboration and reliability. Sahapedia hosts multiple perspectives, is free to access, and is designed and developed with participation as the central principle. As a knowledge enterprise, Sahapedia is focused on India and South Asia.





Cover Image: Pranhjal Jain

Copyright ©Sahapedia and InterGlobe Foundation, 2026