



History and heritage structures of mandu - The enchanting kingdom of malwa

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Abstract

Mandu (also known as Mandav or Mandavgad) is a ruined town in the Malwa region of western Madhya Pradesh, India. It is geographically located at a distance of 100 km from Indore city. The site is positioned on a strategic landscape plateau at an elevation of 2000 feet on Vindhya Mountain ranges. Mandu was a retreat of Raja Bhoj in the 10th century amidst natural scenic beauty. In 11th century, it was a sub-division under Taranga kingdom. Since then, for a period of six centuries, Mandu was ruled by many rulers like Muslims, Mughals, and Marathas. An honest attempt is made to portray the history of Mandu and its heritage structures before the readers through this article. It includes the brief description on the prominent rulers, their reign and valour. These rulers built many exquisite palaces, mosques, tombs, baths, pavilions, and other miscellaneous structures. Most of these monuments, stand today as a testimony of glorious bygone era. In true sense, each of Mandu's monuments is an architectural gem and a national heritage. This article also covers the details of these monuments with their striking features.

Keywords: mandu, malwa, monuments, jahaz mahal, baz bahadur

Introduction

Mandu (also known as Mandav or Mandavgad) is an ancient city located in the Malwa region of western Madhya Pradesh, India. It is located at a distance of 35 km from Dhar town which is the present-day district headquarters and 100 km from Indore city. It is located on a strategic landscape of 20 square km plateau at an elevation of 2000 feet along the Vindhya ranges amidst natural defenses and scenic beauty. Mandu is endowed with very attractive greenery all around with number of streams, lakes and ponds interspersed on it. Mandu was a fortress retreat of Raja Bhoj in the 10th century. In the 11th century, Mandu was the sub division of the Tarangagadh or Taranga kingdom (Agarwal, 2011) ^[1]. The Reever dynasty established the kingdom of Tarangadh in 11th through the 12th century and conquered Marwar in the 13th century. Since then, for a period of six centuries, Mandu was ruled by many rulers from Muslims, Mughals, and Marathas. A leisurely walk down to this forgotten city will bring you face-to-face with countless mesmerizing monuments and palaces. This is probably the reason why the city, enclosed within its fort-walls, when in its prime, was called by the Muslim rulers as Shadibad, 'The City of Joy'. After Akbar added Mandu to the Mughal Empire, it kept a considerable degree of independence, until taken by the Marathas in 18th century. The capital of Malwa was then shifted to Dhar leading to the downslide of Mandu's fortunes.

Early History of Mandu

The earliest reference of Mandu is found in a Sanskrit inscription, where it was called as Mandapa-Durga (Durga means Fort) (Singh and Singh, 1994) ^[2]. This inscription is on the pedestal of a Jaina image of Adinatha, installed by a merchant named Chandrasimha Sha at Talapur in 555 AD. It is claimed that the vernacular version of the name Mandapa is present-day Mandu. Firishta, a 16th century

Persian historian, mentioned that in the days of Khusrau Parviz (590-628 AD), a fort was there at Mandu which was built by 'Anand Deo Rajput of the tribe of Bies'. But the name is not traceable amongst the historical personalities of that period. Nevertheless, when these two pieces of information are considered together, it may be inferred that a fort was already came to existence in 555 AD or even earlier. However, after that we do not have any history of Mandu for next three centuries.

The next reference to Mandu comes in 10th century from an inscription dating to 946 AD. This inscription, which was found in Rajasthan, referred to the fort at Mandu as a frontier outpost of the Guhara-Pratihara Empire. In the inscription, Mandu is referred to as Mandapika. By the end of 10th century, Mandu came under Paramaras, who ruled with their capital at Ujjain and later shifted to Dhar (Chisholm, 1911) ^[3]. An inscription on a sarpa-bandha (snake diagram) dated to 1068 AD found at Mandu refers to an individual by the name of Sri-Bhattaraka-Devendra-deva, who may have been a vassal of the Paramara king, Udayaditya. This dynasty was in its golden period under King Munja and Bhoja, who put it to the glory unmatched in the history of North India. The memory of king Munja is still retained at Mandu in the name of the Munja-Talao. It is also probable that King Bhoja put a blockade to Mahmud of Ghazni when he was returning from Somnath, which made him to divert his route leaving Mandu unharmed.

In the early 13th century, Muslim forces (in about 1227, Shamsu'd-Din Iltutmish) invaded the Malwa region, and sacked the cities of Bhilsa and Ujjain. A treaty was signed between the invading Muslims and the Paramara king, which fortunately spared Mandu. Therefore, the Paramara kings continued to rule from Mandu, though their power was in decline. Jayavarman (1256-1261) ruled from Mandu who was succeeded by Jayasimha II. He was

defeated and killed in a battle by the Chahmana King Jaitrasimha in 1269. In about 1283, Bhoja II ascended the throne of Malwa as seen from a seven-line inscription at Rewa-Kund at Mandu. In 1293, Muslim ruler of Delhi, Jalalu'd-Din Khalji attacked Mandu and returned with lots of booty to Delhi. However, Mandu continued to be with Hindu rulers till 1305 when the final onslaught came from Alau'd-Din Khalji who sent his trusted general Ainu'l-Mu'luk to fight with Mahlak Deo, the Hindu ruler of Mandu. He added Mandu to his territories and renamed as Shadiabad, which literally means 'City of Joy' (Pathak, 2001)^[4].

Mandu under Muslim Rule

In 1305, the Muslim Sultan of Delhi Alau'd-Din Khalji captured Malwa, the Paramara territory. Ayn al-Mulk Multani, the newly appointed Governor of Malwa, was sent to expel the Paramara king Mahalakadeva from Mandu. With the help of a spy, Multani's forces found a way to enter the fort secretly. Mahalakadeva was killed while attempting to flee (Elliot, 1871)^[5]. When Timur captured Delhi in 1401, the Afghan Dilawar Khan, governor of Malwa, set up his own little kingdom and the Ghuri dynasty was established. His son, Hoshang Shah, shifted the capital from Dhar to Mandu and raised it to its greatest splendour. His son, the third and last ruler of Ghuri dynasty, Mohammed, ruled for just one year till his poisoning by the militaristic Mohammed Khalji (Yazdani, 2000)^[6].

Mohammed Khalji established the Khalji dynasty of Malwa (1436-1531) and went on to rule for the next 33 years. However, it was under his reign that the Malwa Sultanate reached its greatest height. He was succeeded by his son, Ghiyas-ud-din in 1469 and ruled for the next 31 years. He had a large harem and built the Jahaz Mahal for housing the women, numbering thousands. Ghiyas-ud-din was poisoned at age of 80, by Nasir-ud-din, his son (Stanley, 1970)^[7].

Nasir-ud-din ascended to the throne in 1500 AD. But he was never able to come out of remorse of killing his own father. He died of fever, leaving his throne to his third son Mahmud in 1510 AD. Mahmud II faced the domestic feud, which was started in the reign of his father. But he fought this with the assistance of Rajput chief Medini Ray. Medini Ray gained quite an influence over the king that his power soon became unbearable to the king. Mahmud II fled Mandu with help of Muzaffar Shah of Gujrat and later ousted Medini Ray and gained Mandu again. However, he did not keep good relation with Bahadur Shah, successor of Muzaffar Shah, so Bahadur Shah attacked Mandu and captured Mahmud II (Alfieri, 2000)^[8].

Malwa remained a dependency of Gujrat till 1534 AD when Humayun conquered the fort, while Bahadur Shah fled from Songarh Fort. But as soon as Humayun left Mandu, Mallu Khan, an officer of the former Khalji dynasty retook all territory between Narmada and the town of Bhilsa and crowned himself at Mandu with the title of Qadir Shah in 1536. In 1542, Sher Shah invaded and conquered Malwa and appointed Shuja't Khan as his governor in Malwa. He died in 1554 AD almost as an independent sovereign. His death resulted in a domestic feud amongst his three sons. After ten years of feuds, one of them, Malik Bayazid emerged on top

and crowned himself as Sultan Baz Bahadur and become an independent ruler of Mandu (Sing, 2009)^[9].

Baz Bahadur showed some spirit of enterprise in the beginning, but later on got addicted to dance and music. Once on a hunting trip, he met a beautiful shepherdess, named Roopmati singing with her friends. Enchanted with her unmatched beauty, he begged her company. Later on, Roopmati proved to be his most favourite associate and consort. Unfortunately, the romance of this Muslim prince and Hindu shepherdess did not last long. The great Mughal Akbar decided to invade Mandu and captured Roopmati and Baz Bahadur. Akbar sent Adham Khan to capture Mandu and Baz bahadur went to challenge him with his small army. No match for the great Mughal army, Mandu fell easily. Baz Bahadur fled to Chittorgarh to seek help (Eraly, 2004)^[10]. As Adham Khan came to Mandu, he was surprised by the beauty of Roopmati. Rani Roopmati committed suicide by taking poison to avoid capture. This brought an end to the love story (Smith, 2017)^[11].

Under the Mughals, Mandu lost its former glory. Emperor Akbar visited the fort four times during his Deccan conquests. His successor, Jahangir was more fascinated by Mandu. He stayed in the fort for about seven months. He left many interesting descriptions of Mandu in his memoirs. Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan visited Mandu twice, once in 1659, to pay homage to the architect of Hoshang Shah's tomb (Patil, 1971)^[12]. Though Mughal emperor visited Mandu during their military conquests, its fortunes had already passed away with the fall of Baz Bahadur (Majumdar, 2007)^[13].

In 1732, Mandu came under the Marathas by Peshwa Baji Rao I. He defeated Diya Bahadur, the Mughal Governor of Malwa in a battle of Tirla near Dhar and re-established the Hindu rule. Afterwards, the Marathas shifted the capital of Malwa from Mandu to Dhar and ruled till the British rose to power. Mandu lapsed into ruin when it was abandoned in favour of Dhar in the 18th century (Krishnan, 1994)^[14].

Monuments & Heritage Structures in Mandu

A majority of the standing monuments at Mandu were raised between 1401 and 1526, a period spanning across 125 years (Trivedi, 1991)^[15]. In this period, Mandu was under Muslim rulers, and as elsewhere, they desecrated and destroyed Hindu temples to raise their structures with their own ideas of architectural compositions. The salient characteristics of Mandu buildings are the minimal ornamentation and decoration on exterior and interior of its buildings. Though the monuments by and large are devoid of luxury, they have unmatched dignity and grandeur, which were achieved with simplicity, austerity and massiveness of construction. The monuments at Mandu can be grouped into seven clusters, namely, 1. Ancient Monuments, 2. Royal Palace Group of Monuments, 3. Mandu Village Group of Monuments, 4. Sagar Talao Group of Monuments, 5. Rewa-Kund Group of Monuments, 6. Darya Khan Group of Monuments, and 7. Miscellaneous Monuments scattered around (Mitra, 2009)^[16]. The details of these monuments are discussed below.

Ancient Monuments

Amongst the ancient monuments, Lohani caves and Temple ruins are prominent.

Lohani caves & Temple ruins

Ancient monuments like Lohani caves & temple ruins are located on the way from Mandu village to Royal Enclave. These caves are ordinary excavations without much of carvings and without any inscription. The caves have few rock-cut cells meant primarily for residence, perhaps for Shaiva Jogis. To the south of the caves, a monolithic pillar of about 5 m high stands that probably adorned the front of a temple. Many of Hindu relics are found near Champa Baodi and from inside Dilawar Khan's Mosque.

Royal Palace Group of Monuments

The Royal Palace Group of monuments is comprised of six major monuments, namely (1) Dilawar Khan's Mosque, (2) Champa Baoli, (3) Hindola Mahal, (4) Jahaz Mahal, (5) Kapur Talao and Royal Palace. Their locations inside the palace complex are depicted below.



Fig 1: Location of monuments inside Royal Palace

Table 1

1. Dilawar Khan's Mosque	(1405 AD)
2. Champa Baoli	(2 nd Half of 15 th ~ 16 th C.)
3. Hindola Mahal	(End of 15 th C.)
4. Jahaz Mahal	(End of 15 th C.)
5. Kapur Talao	(2 nd Half of 15 th ~ 16 th C.)
6. Royal Palace	(2 nd Half of 15 th ~ 16 th C.)

Dilawar Khan's Mosque

This is the earliest Indo-Islamic building at Mandu. The mosque was built in 1405 by Dilawar Khan and was meant for the members of royal family. Its plan consists of a central courtyard enclosed by colonnade. The pillars and ceiling inside are of typical Hindu style.



Fig 2: Dilawar Khan's Mosque

Champa Baoli -

Champa Baoli is a step well constructed in Turkish bath style and derived its name from the aroma of water resemblance to Champa flower. The vaulted rooms (*Tehkhanas*) connected with the step well were cool even during peak summer due to its genius architecture design.



Fig 3: Champa Baoli

Hindola Mahal -

Hindola Mahal literally means a 'swinging palace' a name given because of its sloping side walls. The plan of the building is 'T' shaped, with a main hall and a transverse projection. This projection seems to be added later on as apparent from the masonry of exterior. On both sides of the hall, there are six arched openings above which there are windows filled with beautiful tracery work for admitting light and air inside.



Fig 4: Hindola Mahal

Jahaz Mahal

Jahaz Mahal (Ship Place) is the main attraction of Mandu and noted for its romantic beauty. Standing lengthwise in a narrow strip of land between water of Munja and Kapur tanks, the palace resembles a ship. It was probably built by the pleasure-loving Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din (1469-1500 AD) for his large harem.

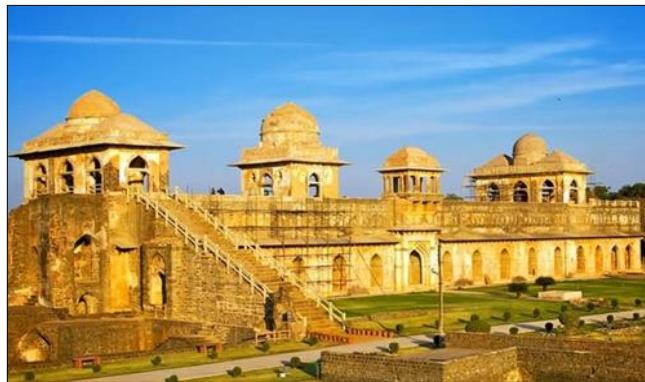


Fig 5: Jahaz Mahal

Kapur Talao

Kapur Talao (Camphor Tank) is built facing the front side of Jahaz Mahal and it was a precious source of water and natural beauty. It has masonry margin all around and in the middle of its waters was a pavilion, now in ruins, was once connected with the west side of the tank by a causeway which has disappeared.

Royal Palace

Royal Palace is mostly in ruins. Located on the north tank side, the palace is largely two-tiered and has many rooms with arch-shaped entrances and some fine staircases. These still remind us of the prosperity of the Malwa rulers in the past.

Mandu Village Group of Monuments

The star attractions in this group are Jami Masjid, Asharfi Mahal and Hoshang Shah's tomb.

Jami Masjid

Construction of this mosque was started by Sultan Hoshang Shah Ghuri and completed by Mahmud Shah Khalji in 1454 AD. It is designed after the great mosque of Damascus. There are three huge imposing domes and the front space is filled up by many miniature domes. In front of Jaami Mosque, there are ruins of Asharfi Palace.

Asharfi Mahal

The buildings here belong to two stages, the earlier ones representing a college (madrasa) built by Hoshang Shah (AD 1404-22) to face the Jami Masjid as its adjunct. Later this compound was used to support the tomb of Mahmud Shah, now in ruins.

Hoshang Shah's tomb

It is the mausoleum, began by Hoshang Shah and completed by Mahmud Khalji in about 1440 AD. It is perhaps India's first marble structure and one of the most refined examples of Afghan architectures. Its unique features include the beautifully proportioned dome, intricate marble lattice work, porticoed courts and towers. It served as a template for the construction of Taj Mahal.

Sagar Talao Group of Monuments

Sagar Talao, the largest lake, is located on the southern part of Mandu. Along the eastern bank of the lake, there are several monuments which are clubbed together as the Sagar Talao Group. Some important structures under this group of monuments are Jali Mahal, Dai-Ka-Mahal, Dai-Ki-Choti-Bahan-Ka-Mahal, Caravan Sarai and Malik Mugith's Mosque.

Jali Mahal

Built on a hill, the monument is a tomb of some noble. It is square in shape with three arched openings on each side having total of 12 openings. Except for the entrance in south, all opening are filled with screens carved in geometric patterns of Muslim style. Though there is no perforated screen or jali work, still the building is popularly called Jali Mahal apparently because of the carved screen.

Dai-Ka-Mahal

The Dai-Ka-Mahal is a tomb built on the east bank of the Sagar Talao. It was built in honour of the maids (wet nurses) who had served the kings by taking care of their children. It stands on square-shaped plinth with arched openings, a domed roof, and traces of pavilion-topped towers at the corners.

Dai-Ki-Choti-Bahan-Ka-Mahal

The monument is actually a mausoleum for the sister of a wet nurse. Wet nurses played an important role in the social upper crusts of ancient India. It is octagonal on plan, crowned by a shapely dome which was originally adorned with tiles. The tomb is built of red chiselled masonry and has four arched openings facing the four cardinal points.

Caravan Sarai

It is a large inn located adjacent to the Malik Mugith's mosque. Built in 1437 AD, it has an open courtyard surrounded by halls meant for accommodation with vaulted ceilings. There are also rooms at both ends which were used to store goods.

Malik Mugith's Mosque

The mosque was built by Malik Mugith, father of Mahmud Khalji in AD 1432. It belongs to the first phase of Muslim architecture in Malwa when material from earlier Hindu buildings was utilized for construction. The projecting porch, the arched corridors and the small turrets at corners provide an impressive frontage to the building.

Rewa-Kund Group of Monuments

The Rewa Kund group of monuments, associated with the legendary romance between Sultan Baz Bahadur and Rupmati, are located about 4 kms south of Mandu. The monuments are Rewa-Kund, Baz Bahadur Palace and Rupmati Mahal.

Rewa-Kund

Rewa-Kund is a reservoir constructed by Baz Bahadur for the purpose of supplying water to Rani Roopmati's Mahal. Above its north-western angle are some halls with arched openings apparently forming part of the pleasure resort which once stood there facing the crystal waters of the tank.

Baz Bahadur Palace

Built in 1509, Baz Bahadur's Palace encloses huge courtyards, large halls and terraces that offer breathtaking views. The main portion of the palace consists of a spacious open court with halls and rooms on all the four sides and a beautiful cistern in middle.

Rupmati Mahal

Roopmati Mahal is a pavilion built on a hill top overlooking the Nimar valley. Rani Roopmati is believed to have beautiful views of the river Narmada from here. A closer examination shows that it had undergone two or three stages of construction in different periods. The building, without pavilions, belongs to the earliest stage and originally for maintaining an effective military watch on enemy movement.

Darya Khan Group of Monuments

The Darya Khan Group of monuments is a small group of scattered monuments and tombs located south of the Central Group and north of the Sagar Talao Group of monuments in Mandu. Hathi Mahal and Darya Khan's Tomb are the important ones.

Hathi Mahal

The name Hathi Mahal for this monument perhaps due to its rather disproportionately massive pillars, looking like the legs of an elephant, built to support the high dome above. It is believed that the building was originally constructed as pleasure resort and later converted into a tomb.

Darya Khan's Tomb

The tomb is within a rectangular complex and stands on a raised platform. Its exterior is with red masonry and was once decorated with coloured enamels in various intricate patterns. Near the piers of arches are seen octagonal posts in the traditional style. The most interesting feature of the building lies in the small domes at four corners surrounding the main dome.

Miscellaneous Monuments scattered around

There are few other monuments in Mandu which do not fall in any group but possess special merit, thus drawing public attention. Prominent among them are Chishti Khan's Palace and Nilakantha Mahal.

Chishti Khan's Palace

The palace was built in 16th century as a retreat for the rainy season. The main wing in the south consists of a rectangular hall with a room at each end. There is a Persian inscription making a poignant reference to the desolation of the surroundings. As the building is much decayed so its plan cannot be made out for certain.

Nilakantha Mahal

Nilakantha is a charming spot named after an old Siva shrine which once existed there. The present structure, built of red stone, is a pleasure-house constructed by a Governor of the Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century, as recorded in an inscription on the site. The spring of water is collected in a kund (tank) down the Mahal.

The priceless and timeless monuments of Mandu are well preserved today by Archaeological survey of India (ASI) and some by State Archaeology Department. There are many monuments that are in good condition and one can find out the well-detailed architectural close-up. ASI has also published an excellent monograph on Mandu for the public. One can comfortably spend a day or two, exploring and admiring these monuments. The place still retains its rustic rural charm and is not crowded unlike many of our monuments.

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