

Context

Built, Living and Natural



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Indian Heritage Cities Network



highlighting the **Indian city** as a Living Cultural Resource, Preserve the uniqueness, Diversity of the cultural heritage, Promote heritage and Creativity as the driving force for urban development and employment generation and balance socio-economic and cultural development.



Dronah publishes a bi-annual refereed journal titled "Context: Built, Living and Natural", which records and evaluates the documentation and conservation methods for built and natural heritage, and simultaneously highlights people's role in the process by recording community activities. Interested subscribers, kindly use the subscription form.

Share a vision for a better quality of life without foregoing strengths of the traditional

It is our aim to actively promote sustainable development through conservation, utilisation of traditional practices and modern technologies, knowledge sharing and mutual interaction. The organisation is presently working towards the documentation, conservation and development of the built heritage, ecology and environment, communities, arts, crafts and education.



Dronah



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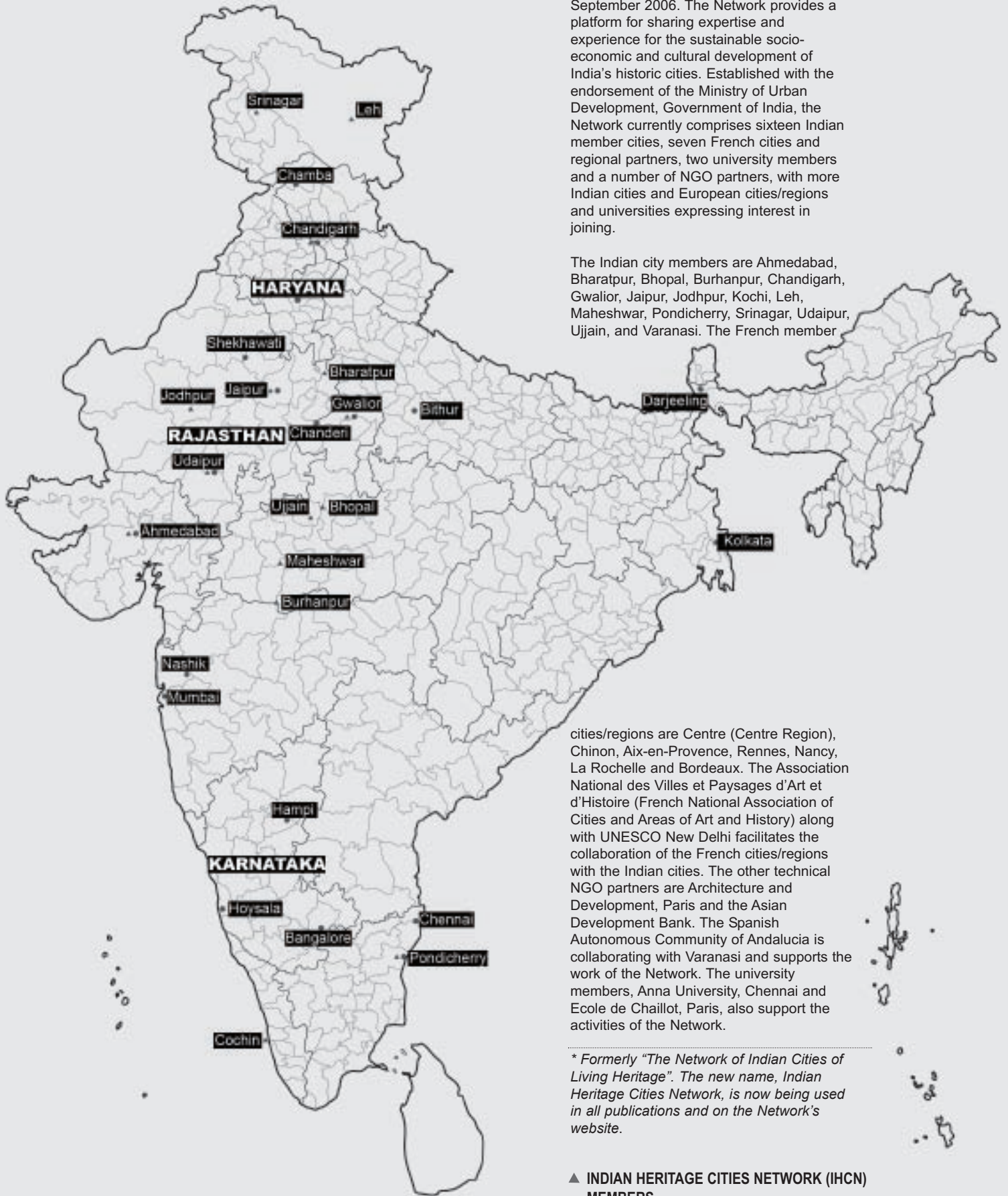
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Indian Heritage Cities Network (IHCN)* was founded by UNESCO New Delhi at an international conference held in Jaipur in September 2006. The Network provides a platform for sharing expertise and experience for the sustainable socio-economic and cultural development of India's historic cities. Established with the endorsement of the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, the Network currently comprises sixteen Indian member cities, seven French cities and regional partners, two university members and a number of NGO partners, with more Indian cities and European cities/regions and universities expressing interest in joining.

The Indian city members are Ahmedabad, Bharatpur, Bhopal, Burhanpur, Chandigarh, Gwalior, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kochi, Leh, Maheshwar, Pondicherry, Srinagar, Udaipur, Ujjain, and Varanasi. The French member



cities/regions are Centre (Centre Region), Chinon, Aix-en-Provence, Rennes, Nancy, La Rochelle and Bordeaux. The Association National des Villes et Paysages d'Art et d'Histoire (French National Association of Cities and Areas of Art and History) along with UNESCO New Delhi facilitates the collaboration of the French cities/regions with the Indian cities. The other technical NGO partners are Architecture and Development, Paris and the Asian Development Bank. The Spanish Autonomous Community of Andalusia is collaborating with Varanasi and supports the work of the Network. The university members, Anna University, Chennai and Ecole de Chaillot, Paris, also support the activities of the Network.

* Formerly "The Network of Indian Cities of Living Heritage". The new name, Indian Heritage Cities Network, is now being used in all publications and on the Network's website.

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About the Volume

Dilapidated urban fabric, unplanned growth, insensitive new development, encroachments and a web of electric wires are constant maladies that plague the historic core of majority of Indian cities. Though India is on the road to urban conservation with several initiatives taken at the international, national and local level in the last decade, we still have a long way to go. The cultural diversity of Indian cities entwined with complex historic layers and unique geomorphology present a challenging task for conservationists, urban planners, environmentalists, anthropologists, sociologists, engineers and other associated professionals at large.

Do we really understand our historic cities? And, are we equipped to conserve these in the best possible manner? This special volume presents the history and town planning traditions through centuries and aligns them with recent efforts in urban conservation.

Documentation of physical features and cultural mapping is the first step towards establishing heritage values of the social, natural and built environment. It leads to a better understanding of evolution of a city or a town, which forms a crucial prerequisite for any conservation work. This point is emphasised in the article on Bithur, an unknown, forlorn historic settlement representative of the several small sized towns sprawled across the country laced with their own local history.

The methods and approaches to Indian town planning and to the process of conservation can be observed across India in the chronological presentation of city development. Beginning with the description of archaeological settlements in Rajasthan, the ancient hill town of Chamba, the Hoysala towns in the south, religious city of Nashik to the later Mughal, Medieval and Rajput cities of Gwalior, Jaipur and Shekhawati, we finally review the Colonial town planning of Calcutta and the post independence vision for Chandigarh.

Issues associated with heritage management, planning, legislation and sustainability of historic Indian cities are exemplified under 'sustainable solutions' with the case of an Integrated Management Plan for the Hampi World Heritage Site, Master Plan proposal for the historic *pete* in Bangalore, need for heritage resource management at Udaipur, heritage valuation in Chennai, the legislative apparatus in Haryana and finally the role models for heritage legislation and community participation i.e. the cities of Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

- Shikha Jain

Shekhawati

Contours of urbanisation

URVASHI SRIVASTAVA

Abstract

The semi arid region of Shekhawati in Rajasthan is dotted with small towns and villages renowned for their grand havelis, temples, chatris and wells. The magnificent havelis in the towns built by rich marwari merchants are so profusely painted with beautiful frescoes that the region is a veritable open air art gallery. The urbanisation of the region took place over a span of several centuries culminating into a network of well laid out towns. The towns in the region follow a distinct planning philosophy greatly influenced by that of Jaipur yet maintain a unique identity. This article traces the habitation of the region and gives an account of the political and economic environment that fashioned the growth and development of the settlements outlining the planning concepts of a typical Shekhawati town. It also presents a brief of the recent heritage conservation initiatives taken for these towns.

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INTRODUCING THE REGION: TOWNS, VILLAGES AND THE DESERT TRACT

Traditionally, the Shekhawati region was an administrative entity covering western part of the present Sikar district and entire Jhunjhunu



Shekhawati an extension of the Thar Desert

district. It was bordered in the northwest by the Bikaner State and in the southeast by the Jaipur State. The cultural boundaries of Shekhawati however extended beyond its administrative borders into Bikaner State bringing the district of Churu within its fold as well. The semi arid region of Shekhawati, an extension of the Thar Desert, has sustained a unique cultural environment within its settlements both in its humble villages and modest towns amidst an adverse environment.

FORMATION OF SHEKHAWATI

Habitation of Shekhawati can be traced back to the Harappan times. It is said that in ancient times Saraswati River flowed through parts of the region that is known as Shekhawati and the Kantli River flowing east of Jhunjhunu was a tributary of Saraswati River. Kantli seems to have been a major river during the pre-Harappan period. A supply node from the

Khetri copper mines in Jhunjhunu district through Kantli River was accessible to Harappa on the banks of Beas. Evidences obtained from excavations at Ganeshwar, a third millennium settlement, about 60 kilometres from Khetri has yielded a rich collection of copper objects like flat celts, arrow-heads, fishhooks, blades, spear-heads, nails, bangles, chisels pointing that the region was inhabited in those times. However the recorded history of Shekhawati dates back to the thirteenth century. An inscription found in Harshnath temple near Sikar and another dated 1215 V.S. (*Vikram Samvat*) reveal that this area was under the suzerainty of Chauhan rulers of Ajmer. In the fourteenth century, Karamsee, a Rajput forcibly converted to Islam by Feroz Shah Tughlaq was named Kayamkhan who became the chief architect of the Muslim rule in the region. Later his son Muhammad Khan moved from bordering area of Haryana and conquered area in and around Jhunjhunu while Fateh Khan his nephew founded Fatehpur town in 1451 AD. During the

fifteenth century there are references of inroads in the area from Dhoondhar and Amber region (present Jaipur district) by Rao Shekha (1433-1488 AD) a Rajput related to Kachhwaha dynasty of Amber. During Akbar's reign, areas falling under the Parganas of Jhunjhunu and Narhad were under command of the Mughal Emperor's resident representative based in Narnaul, while Ajmer was the provincial capital of the entire area.

Shekhawats, descendants of Rao Shekha, continued to be active in Shekhawati. Their area of influence, mostly to the east of the Aravalli hills was greatly due to their amicable relationship with Kachhwaha Rajputs of Amber and the Mughal Emperor. From time to time they were commissioned by the Emperor as members of the Mughal army and sent for expeditions. Shekhawats received several *jagirs* (estates) from the Mughal Emperors but the region around Jhunjhunu and Fatehpur was out of bounds for them. Kayamkhani Nawabs of Fatehpur and Jhunjhunu often made attempts to occupy each others' territories. During the time of Rohilla Khan, the last Nawab of Jhunjhunu, the Nawab of Fatehpur usurped Rohilla Khan's territory. After regaining his territory from the Nawab of Fatehpur, Rohilla Khan welcomed Shardul Singh, estranged son of Jagram Singh, a descendent of Rao Shekha. Shardul Singh not only became the Nawabs confidant but later succeeded him after his death. Shardul Singh having acquired areas covered by Jhunjhunu, Narhad and Udaipur in 1732 AD made Jhunjhunu the capital of an extended Shekhawati kingdom. He allied himself with Sheo Singh of Sikar (who also belonged to a branch of Shekhawats) and together they evicted the Nawab of Fatehpur ending the long reign of Kayamkhanis lasting almost three centuries. Slowly almost the entire region came under the control and command of Shekhawats.

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE BUILDING OF A RAJPUT CAPITAL : JAIPUR

Political change and reorganisation of power in Shekhawati was not an isolated phenomenon, it was part of the larger political scenario of north India. Since the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 AD, the Mughal Empire was on the decline. Successors of Aurangzeb were not powerful enough and their grip over their territories was loosening. While the Rajputs were raring to go, the Marathas were dreaming of bringing the whole of north India under their control. The early half of eighteenth century saw the laying of foundations of a new capital of Dhoondhar in the

plains beyond the Amber valley. With conducive conditions, security and financial strength, Sawai Jai Singh embarked on establishing the city of Jaipur in 1727 AD. Since important trade routes passed through Rajasthan and Pali, Nagaur, Phalodi, Bhinmal, Merta, Jaisalmer, Rajgarh (Churu), Reni (Churu), Chittor, Udaipur, Bhilwara, Ajmer, Pushkar, Sirohi, Kota, Sambhar, Amber and Sanganer had already become established centres of business and trade in commodities from far and wide; Jaipur soon emerged as an important centre for economic activities.

Around the same time that Jaipur was established, Shekhawati had also come under the control of the Shekhawats. After the death of Shardul Singh in 1742 AD, his estates were divided amongst his five sons. Each of the *thakur* (baron) embarked on consolidating his *thikana* (principality) and streamlining his administration by establishing new administrative centres. Planning of these new centres was in all likelihood to be influenced by the planning principles and architectural vocabulary of Jaipur, the grandest and the newest capital being built in the vicinity of Shekhawati.

TRADE DYNAMICS : STATE VERSUS THIKANAS

Initially the Shekhawats paid tribute directly to the Mughal emperor just like the Kayamkhanis. Later Sawai Jai Singh acquired the *ijara* for Ajmer from the Mughal Emperor and received the right to administration and revenue collection of the Shekhawati region. Shekhawat rulers became tributaries of Jaipur State and accepted its suzerainty and administrative system.

In the late eighteenth century, with political instability and a burdened treasury, the rulers of Jaipur who had earlier promoted business imposed heavy duties on trade and commerce in their territories. Similarly rulers of Bikaner also increased taxes on trade in their terrain. Caravans that previously took long detours to stay away from the inhospitable region of Shekhawati looked for new trade routes to avoid heavy taxes imposed by the states of Jaipur and Bikaner.

Shekhawati though ruled by a number of *thakurs* was quick to take advantage of this situation. The *thakurs* provided and facilitated an easier access and detour to traders through their areas. Combined taxes imposed by various *thakurs* as the caravan moved through their respective territories proved to be lesser than the tax



Fort as the nucleus of a typical Shekhawati town



The bazaar near the fort formed the main commercial spine of the town

laid by Jaipur and Bikaner States. Thus trade was largely diverted from Jaipur and Bikaner areas to routes falling in Shekhawati region. Subsequently *thakurs* of Shekhawati encouraged merchants to settle in their newly established towns promising them economic benefits and security. This set the ball rolling for a great era of building activity in Shekhawati.

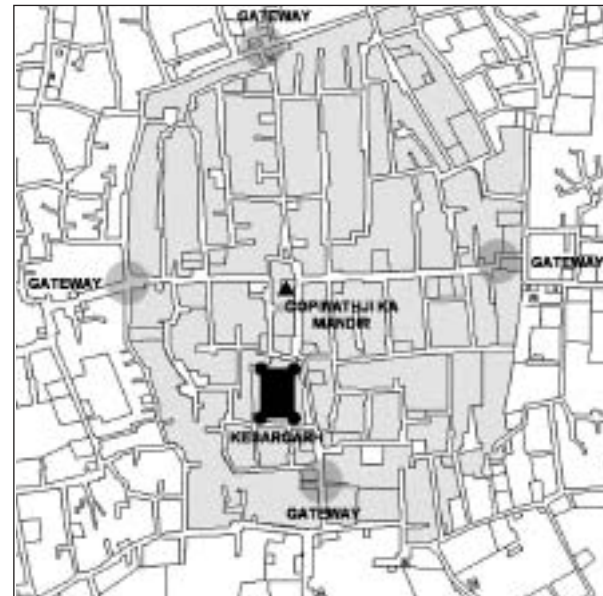
STRUCTURING AND RESTRUCTURING OF SHEKHAWATI SETTLEMENTS

The system of land grant and the system of equal division of property amongst the ruler's sons coupled with increased trade through Shekhawati started the process of urbanisation in the region. Land in the region was sectioned into *jagirs* or *thikanas* (fiefdom) comprising of several towns and villages and granted to *jagirdars* or *thikanedars* (baron) from the Rajput clan. The *Thikanedar* levied the royal share on yields from the land under his control and exercised jurisdictional rights and responsibilities on behalf of the ruler of Jaipur State. After the death of the Thikanedar his fiefdom got divided equally amongst his sons. Largescale urbanisation of Shekhawati, especially area falling under Jhunjhunu *Thikana*, was triggered off with the division of an area of about 1000 villages together with connected *kasbas*, (small townships) including Jhunjhunu town, the head quarters of the Shekhawats, into *Panchpana* (five units) after Shardul Singh's death in 1742 AD amongst his five sons.

Jhunjhunu town after its division into five units came to be known as Panchpana Jhunjhunu. The town witnessed a major restructuring. New urban elements were added to its landscape which initially exhibited morphological features peculiar to a Muslim settlement being the seat of Kayamkhanis. With this restructuring the original morphology of the town was modified. Each of Shardul Singh's sons owned a sector in the town and they constructed palaces and forts in their respective sectors. Zorawar Singh constructed Zorawar Garh and Akhey Singh constructed Akhey Garh in the central part of the town which was later completed by Nawal Singh after his death. Kishan Singh constructed Khetri Mahal, and Kesri Singh who had inherited Barragarh also known as Badalgarh constructed Bissau Mahal to its south.

Outside Jhunjhunu town each of the five sons of Shardul Singh started reorganising their territories. Nawal Singh the fourth son of Shardul Singh

established the Thikana of Nawalgarh as his separate kingdom at the site of the village Rohelli where he had already established a fort named Balaqila in 1737 AD. as a prince. He raised the village of Mandu Jat to the status of a town which later came to be known as Mandawa and founded a fort in 1756 AD. Kesri Singh the fifth son of Shardul Singh founded a town in 1746 AD. on the site of a small village known as Bisale ki Dhani which later came to be known as Bissau. He expanded the village of Dundlod with the construction of a fort in 1750 AD. and also built a fort named Kesargarh at Bissau in 1751 AD. Similarly several



Bissau layout

other new towns came into existence. Around each newly founded town several villages sprung up apart from the existing ones. These villages developed a symbiotic relationship with the town providing for the primary needs of the town and, the town in turn provided the villages with amenities of life.

The shift in political power from Kayamkhanis to Shekhawats as well as diversion of trade from Jaipur and Bikaner States into the territories of the Shekhawats initiated the structuring and major restructuring of settlements in Shekhawati.

SETTING UP OF A SHEKHAWATI TOWN

Shekhawat Thakurs as tributaries of Jaipur State were often invited to attend the royal court at Jaipur. As regular visitors to the city they were exposed to the planning of Jaipur with its concepts of distribution of administrative, religious and commercial functions



Grand havelis of Marwari merchants line the streets

commercial *mandis* in the towns were set up that facilitated the growth of commerce.

Apart from the fort and palace, temple of Gopinathji, main bazaar, havelis of merchants and houses of the other residents, several social, religious and recreational institutions like *baithaks* (reception space for guests), *dharamshalas* (guest houses), *gaushalas* (cattle shelter), community temples, *chattris* (cenotaphs) and *bageechis* (pleasure garden) also formed an integral part of the fabric of a typical Shekhawati town. Natural topography of the land was tapped to construct *kuan* (well), *johara* (tank), *baori* (stepped well) and other water harvesting structures that formed the life line of the towns.

EMERGENCE OF A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

The years between 1740 - 1800 AD witnessed a multiplication of settlements in Shekhawati. In the late eighteenth century there was a change in the political and economic environment that had supported this trend of urbanisation. Flourishing cross desert commerce started declining with the decline in the power of the Mughal Empire. Taking advantage of the lack of central authority at Delhi the Marathas and Pindaris disturbed and intermittently disrupted trade in the region.

Late eighteenth till early nineteenth century saw the

consolidation of British power. States of Bikaner and Jaipur signed treaties accepting British sovereignty in 1818 AD. On advice of the British Resident at Jaipur, States of Bikaner and Jaipur reduced taxes on trade in 1822 AD and trade passing through Shekhawati which was already affected due to the prevalent banditry suffered a sudden slump as it was no longer cheaper to travel through the region. Formation of the Shekhawati Brigade under the command of Major Forster in 1835 AD curbed the rampant banditry in the region but trade never recovered.

The British increased their control over India through the East India Company and by 1860 AD, British power was firmly felt all over India. Changes in the modes of transportation from caravans to steamships in 1819 AD, and later to the railways in 1853 AD, coupled with the setting up of the ports by the British through East India Company at Bombay and Calcutta changed the pattern of trade. Trade shifted from land to sea crushing the indigenous economy which had previously depended largely on traditional land routes with their network of towns some of which functioned as important trade centres. Trade became dominated by the East India Company leaving the Indian rulers with practically no control over its dynamics.

Impacts of these developments were felt deep down in



An ostentatious well built by a merchant family



Chatris of Marwaris emulating the royal cenotaph



Larger havelis displaying the wealth of the merchant

the Shekhawati region. Marwaris who had contributed to the economic and physical growth of towns suffered the most but were quick to adapt themselves to changing conditions of the nineteenth century. Heads of these Marwari families migrated eastwards to ports on the Ganges and finally some of them settled in Calcutta, the capital of the rising British Empire while others moved to Bombay and beyond, fashioning themselves as middlemen playing an important role in the import and export of commodities taking place on these ports. Eventually with time, these Marwari merchants attained a remarkable level of economic prosperity.

RE DENSIFICATION, EXPANSION AND FLOURISHING OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Shekhawati region, after having seen significant growth during the period starting with the Shekhawats gaining control till the end of the eighteenth century witnessed another surge of development which began in the mid nineteenth century with the migration of the Marwari merchants to big cities of the British till the 1930s. During this period the already established towns in Shekhawati started expanding and underwent re densification. The rich Marwari merchants started pumping money in their hometowns and villages in Shekhawati commissioning not only private structures such as their *havelis* but also community facilities such as temples, schools, *dharamshalas*, wells, water tanks, leisure gardens, cenotaphs, etc. With the growth in the wealth of the Marwari merchant the number of *havelis* in the town grew and



Profusion of frescoes on the walls of the haveli



A cluster of four havelis

the size of the *haveli* was also greatly enlarged. At first vacant areas within the original boundaries of the towns were utilised, later newer quarters of the towns were developed with lavishly planned mansions displaying the recently acquired wealth of the merchants. There came into existence havelis with as many as six courtyards locally known as Cheh Chowk Haveli. In the early twentieth century havelis began to be planned in clusters around a cul-de-sac like the Char Haveli (four havelis) complex, the Cheh Haveli (six havelis) complex and the Aath Haveli (eight havelis) complex. Interactions of these merchants with Europeans and Britishers resulted in modifications in the design of the later *havelis*, inclusion of new typologies within the local cultural paradigm and fusion of traditional Indian and western themes in frescoes.

Changes in the political and economic scenario not only resulted in the expansion and growth of towns

and villages in Shekhawati, it also brought about a thirst for artistic expression. With the Marwari merchant community growing in power and wealth the style of painting and decorating interiors of buildings that had reached Amber from the Mughal courts and later to the palaces of Rajput barons of Shekhawati, struck the imagination of the merchants as a means of creative expression. Soon the painting of *havelis*, temples, and cenotaphs became a popular type of expression achieving the status of an art form with its own unique style and vocabulary. It documented in great detail the finer nuances of everyday life as well as the innovations that were taking place in those times. Initially, the paintings were done very discreetly in between the brackets and later on, the frescoes covered up every available space on the façade of the *haveli* proudly proclaiming the newly acquired wealth and power of the Marwari merchants.

CONCLUSION

After Independence when the British left India, they sold their factories and Marwari merchants were quick to acquire them. Descendants of these Marwari merchants are still today controlling a significant portion of the Indian economy as owners of main trading and industrial houses. They have however gradually severed their ties with their homeland leaving behind the legacy of their forefathers frozen in time.

The proclamation of the wealthy Marwari merchants, still echoes in the streets of Shekhawati, in the empty spaces of the innumerable grand havelis, splendid wells, majestic temples and chatris that stand till this day as mute spectators bearing testimony to the economic prosperity, expansionist ambitions and creative urges of a bygone era.

In the present times, drastic changes are severely impacting the cultural heritage of Shekhawati towns. Population pressure and urban transformation have put the traditional built environment under increased stress. Modern urban development processes insensitive to the environment are eroding natural resources. Built environment of the towns and villages in the region is being modernised disrupting, displacing and overlaying the local cultural traditions. Regional architectural identity is being gradually erased by anonymous modern architecture. Unplanned development, inappropriate additions, alterations, disuse and misuse of heritage properties over the years has accelerated the process of decay. Modern

infrastructure has been mindlessly inserted in heritage properties damaging beautiful frescoes. Excessive use of modern materials especially cement for repair of traditional structures has caused further damage. Unused spaces inside heritage properties are being converted into shops with openings on the façade damaging the painted walls. *Havelis* are being pulled down to give way to modern structures and the salvaged components are sold in the antique market that is flourishing in the region.

Despite all the pressures of unplanned urbanisation the quaint little towns and villages of Shekhawati do not fail to entice the modern day travellers. Heritage tourism is gradually picking up in the region with more and more visitors coming in every year. However in the absence of a planned strategy for tourism and development its ill effects have started becoming evident. In a bid to entice the visitor renovation and modernisation of heritage properties especially havelis is very rapidly catching up as a trend in place of well planned restoration.

If immediate action is not taken, continued negligence could lead to a point of irreversibility and the cultural diversity of the region would be lost forever. Conserving the heritage of Shekhawati is therefore, critical and so is the promotion of sustainable tourism for ensuring continued use of traditional built and unbuilt spaces existing in its towns and villages.

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Cultural Organization

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UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, contributes to the building of peace, the alleviation of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue, through its work in education, natural and social sciences, culture, communication and information.

As the sole UN agency with a cultural mandate, it advocates the protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, movable cultural properties, intangible heritage and contemporary creativity as the basis of local sustainable development. The Organization provides legal standards for the protection and promotion of diverse forms of cultures through various International Conventions, in particular: the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003); and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).

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