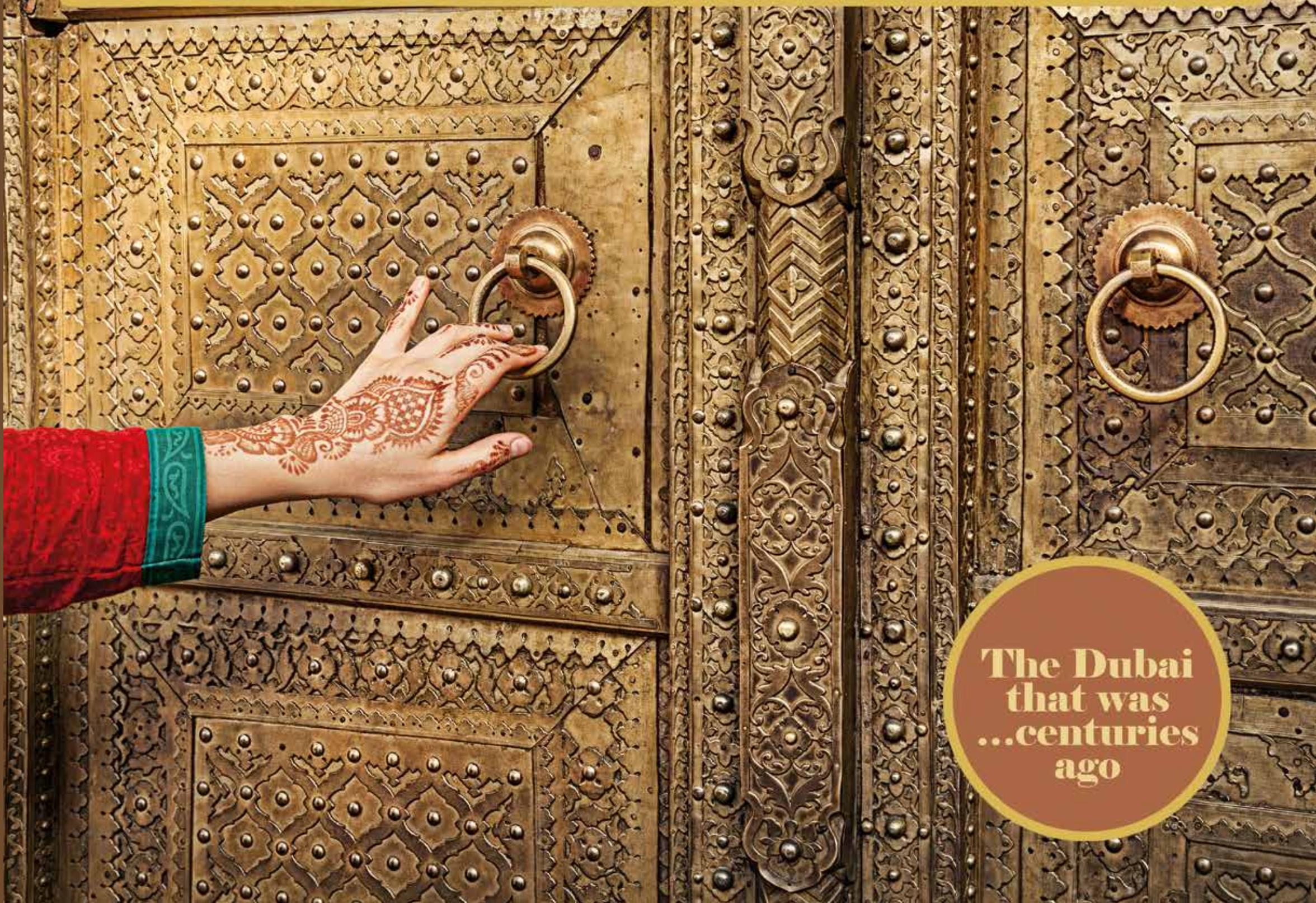
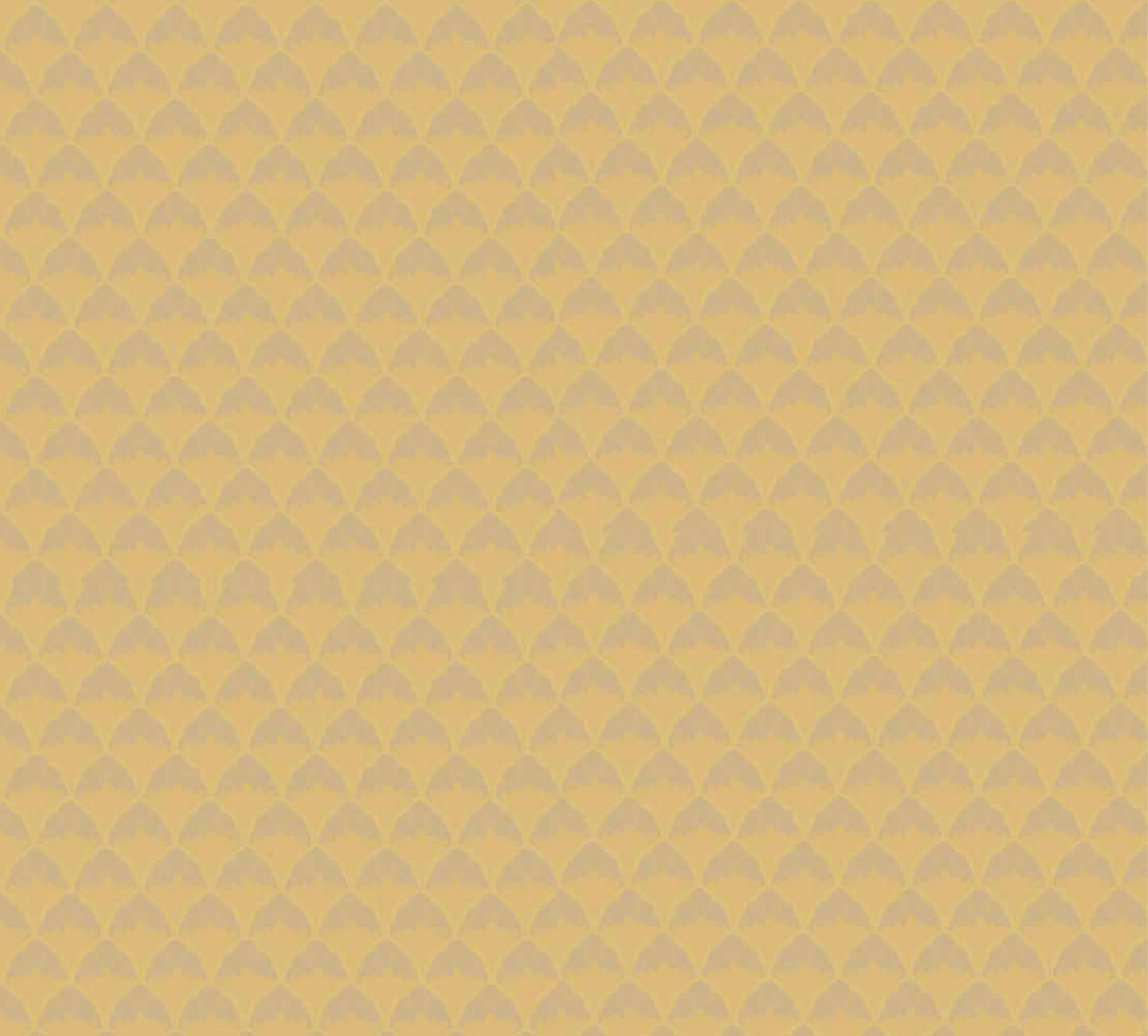


Shekhawati : Rajasthan



**The Dubai
that was
...centuries
ago**



**The Dubai that was
...centuries ago**

Yogesh Joshi

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Author - Yogesh Joshi

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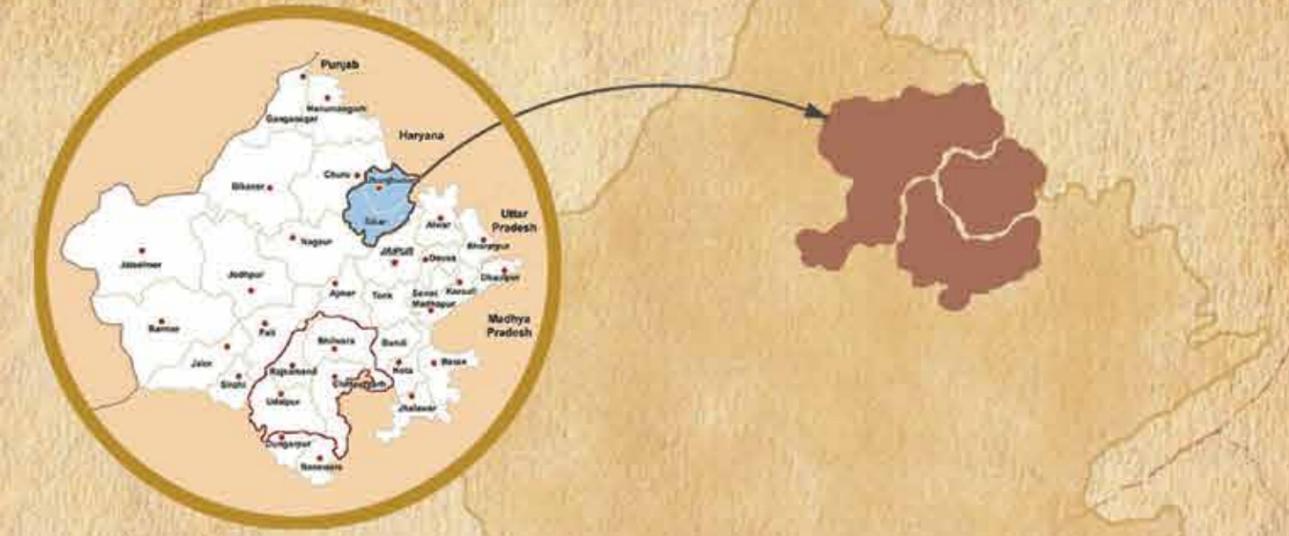
Introduction

Let me take you on a journey back to a timeless gem, India's richest architectural and artistic collection, an open art gallery, with the largest concentration of painted structures, perhaps, anywhere in the world. This region has a place in Indian mythology, was on the ancient caravan salt trade route connecting Kabul and Tashkent via Bhatner (Hanumangarh) and Multan, and came to be profusely dotted with flourishing towns founded by Shekhawat Rajput Thakurs.

This timeless wonder, a breathtaking region, is Shekhawati in the northeast of Rajasthan, comprising the arid districts of Jhunjhunu, Sikar and Churu districts. Until 1947, it was a confederation of several Thikanas, which at different periods were controlled by Chouhan Rajputs, Muslims, Shekhawat Rajputs and British. Here, enveloped by an inhospitable land are large havelis, temples, cenotaphs, caravan sarais, wells and ground water tanks, adorned inside and out, on an unprecedented scale, with magnificent frescos, the most elegant possible symbol of an opulence past.

Shekhawati's art, culture and cuisine, poetry in stone, commissioned by its wealthy traders (Marwaris), are but odes to its thriving economy. When trade moved east many of these traders followed. This book is a grand salute to the people who through the multiple eras saw and seized opportunities, faced hardships, took multiple journeys but always came back to enrich the glory of Shekhawati. These odes are so compelling that they gave me the faith to recreate their story, to repaint the landscape that once was, to retell the story of glory and relevance of the region as best I could, and pondered on all that made it possible. With the havelis of Shekhawati as my muse, I bring to you all that made it possible.

Yogesh Joshi



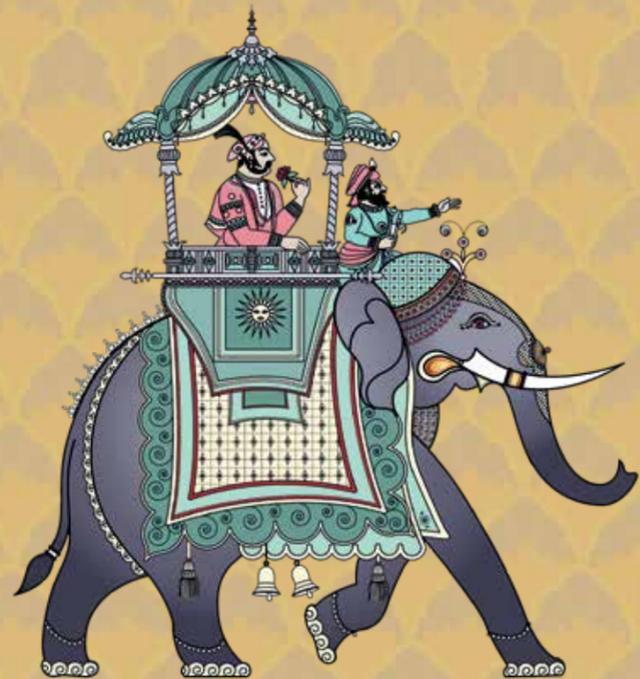
Shekhwati region

A 13,500 sq km economic oasis in the otherwise parched deserts of Rajasthan.

Fertile and well watered on the eastern fringes, westward the land becomes a desert of rolling, drifting sand dunes interspersed with low grade millet fields, and sparse grazing for sheep and goats.

Why?

Because.... intriguingly, the economic relevance and rise of the desert town of the yester centuries is a striking replication of the growth of the once tiny desert hamlet – Dubai – into the world's most iconic metropolis.



Did you know?

When you observe the sprawling desert city packed with gleaming high-rise towers that Dubai has become today, it is hard to imagine that this monument to the modern world started out as a tiny fishing village.

THE PROMINENT RESEMBLANCES ARE

Location

Being on a must traverse economic route

Resource

Water source in an otherwise parched topography

Policies

Attractive policies to attract footfall

Dubai

By the Fifth Century CE, the area we now know as Jumeirah, which is home to beautiful beachside villas, had become a caravan station along the trade route linking Oman to what is now Iraq.

The livelihood of the area's inhabitants was based on fishing, pearl diving, boat building, and providing accommodation and sustenance for the traders, who would pass through on their way to sell gold, spices and textiles - the very wares that can be found in our souks today.



The earliest recorded mention of Dubai is in 1095 in the Book of Geography by the Andalusian-Arab geographer Abu Abdullah al-Bakri.

The Venetian pearl merchant Gaspero Balbi visited the area in 1580 and mentioned Dubai (Dibej) for its pearling industry.





Shekhawati

The ancient caravan salt trade route which emerged from the Chauhan capital of Shakambhari (presently called “Sambhar”) passed through the currently recognized Shekhawati region to connect Kabul and Tashkent via Bhatner and Multan.

The region identified for the Merchant’s Trail in Rajasthan covers the entire Shekhawati area comprising of several towns and villages in Jhunjhunu, Sikar and Churu districts. The main towns and villages covered as part of the trail were Nawalgarh, Mandawa, Ramgarh, Fatehpur, Lakshmangarh, Bissau, Jhunjhunu, Dundlod, Mahansar, Churu and Mukundgarh. The trail also covered other places like Churi Ajitgarh, Alsisar, Malsisar, Gangiyasar, Khetri, Ratangarh and Sikar.

The traces of the salt trade network also suggest the presence of the Gangiyasar village on the trade route.



This is Dubai

**Wealth made the city
reach for the sky**

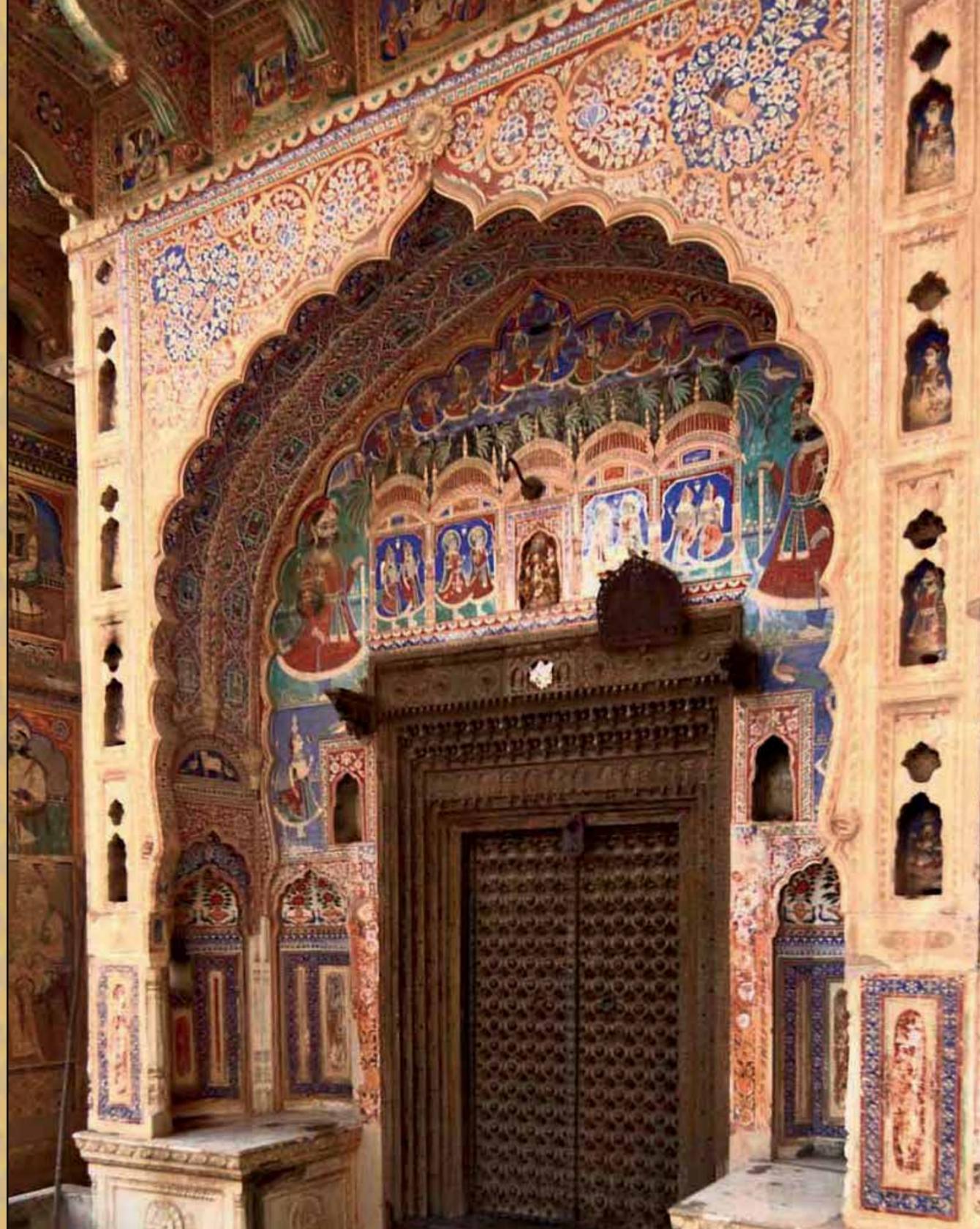


This was Shekhawati

**Wealth created beauty
that continues to attract
millions even today**



Back to the future



What was?

Traditionally, the Shekhawati region was an administrative entity covering western part of the present Sikar district and entire Jhunjhunu district. Cultural boundaries, however, extend beyond administrative borders bringing Churu within its fold as well.

But history reveals that habitation of Shekhawati can be traced back to the Harappan times.

What it became?

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 towns built by rich Marwari merchants are profusely painted with beautiful frescoes.

What it is now?

Sadly, the Shekhawati region once a booming oasis on the economic trade route, is now only a veritable open air art gallery – a key attraction of tourists as a showcase of the creativity, perfection and passion of Indian art and artisans. And a poignant memory of the tragic decline of an important economic hub consequent to the British Rule.



THE MARWARI COMMUNITY WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL GROWTH OF THE SHEKHAWATI TOWNS

Agarwalla, Agarwal, Bagla, Bagri, Bagaria, Bahety, Baid, Bajaj, Bajla, Bajoria, Balodia, Bangad, Banka, Bansal, Banthia, Beriwal, Bhadoria, Bhageria, Bhagat, Bhalotia, Bhangadia, Bharatia, Bhattad, Bhut, Bhutoria, Bhuwalka, Birla, Biyani, Buchasia, Chamaria, Chandak, Choraria, Daga, Dhoot, Dalmia, Deorah, Dhanuka, Didwania, Dingliwal, Dugar, Gadia, Ganeriwal, Gadodia, Garg, Garodia, Goel, Goenka, Goyal, Goyanaka, Gupta, Gyanaka, Heda, Jajodia, Jain, Jaipuria, Jajodia, Jaju, Janan, Jangra, Jhajharia, Jhanwar, Jhunjhunwala, Jhunjhunwala, Joshi, Kankaria, Kanodia, Kedia, Kejriwal, Khaitan, Khandelwal, Khemka, Khetan, Killa, Kothari, Kathotia, Ladda, Lakhotia, Lohia, Maheshwari, Mandelia, Mantri, Maskara, Mistri, Mittal, Modi, Moondra, Moda, Mohanka, Mohatta, Mokati, Mour, Murarka, Nevatia, Oswal, Parasrampur, Patodia, Poddar, Prahladka, Puranmalka, Rajputs, Ramgadha, Rathi, Rathod, Ruia, Rungta, Saboo, Saharia, Sanghi, Saraf, Saraogi, Saravagi, Sarada, Sekhsaria, Shah, Sharma, Singhal, Singhania, Singhi, Singhvi, Sisodiya, Sodhani, Somani, Sonthalia, Suhasaria, Sultania, Surana, Sureka, Tantia, Tappar, Tayal, Tekriwal, Tibrewal, Todi, Toshniwal, Vaid.

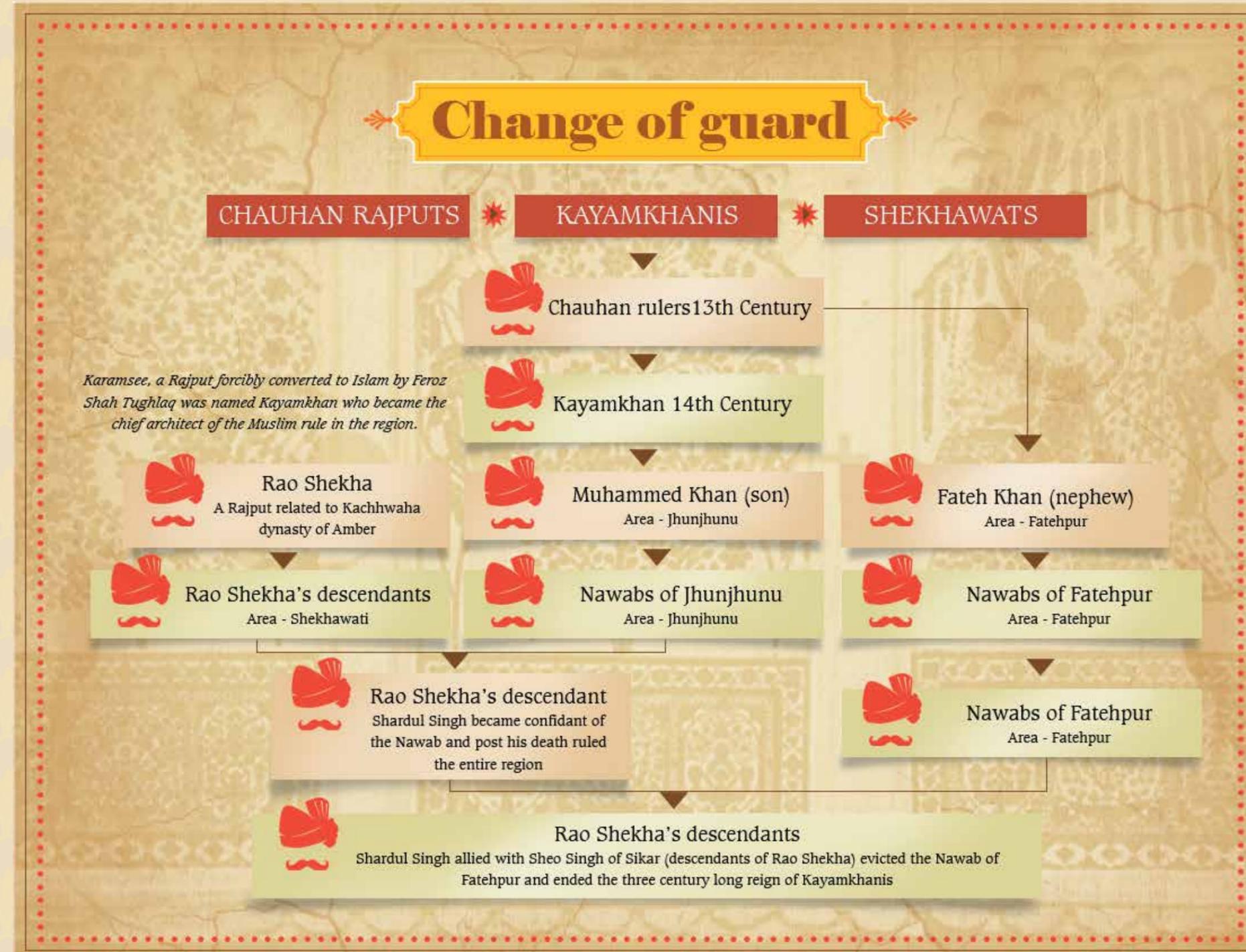
This then is the journey of the rise and fall of the

Shekhawati Region

**Let's begin our
journey that spans not
days, weeks, months or
years, but centuries!**

Shekhawats and the Shekhawati region

The existence of Shekhawati can be traced back to the Harappan times. But history has a slightly different timeline. The recorded history of Shekhawati dates back to the thirteenth century. An inscription found in Harshnath temple near Sikar and another dated 1215 reveal that this area was under the suzerainty of Chauhan rulers of Ajmer.



Chauhans to Kayamkhanis

According to Dr. Rima Hooja, the Shekhawati region was part of Chaurasi (84 townships) under Gor Rajputs. During the period of Feroz Tughlaq, a branch of Chauhan Rajputs (documents suggest a ruler named Karamsee) were converted to Islam called Kayam Khan and granted the Subedari of Hissar.

Descendent of Kayam Khan came to be known as Kayamkhanis. The Grandson of Kayam Khan, Fateh Khan was expelled from Hissar by Behlol Lodhi in 1449 AD, who then migrated to take over parts of Shekhawati and established Fatehpur as his capital city.

Kayamkhanis occupied the area forming the core of Shekhawati and established themselves at Jhunjhunu and Fatehpur.

Kayamkhanis to Shekhawats

Rao Shekha (1433-1488 A.D.) a Rajput related to Kachhwaha dynasty of Amber made several inroads into the Shekhawati during the 15th century.

The descendants of Rao Shekha known as Shekhawats, established an amicable relationship with Kachhwaha Rajputs of Amber and the Mughal rulers. They received several Jagirs (grants of landed property) from the Mughal Emperors thereby continuing to be active in Shekhawat.

However, the region around Jhunjhunu and Fatehpur ruled by the Kayamkhanis (Nawabs) was out of bounds for the Shekhawats.

During the 18th century the Nawab of Fatehpur usurped the territory of Rohilla Khan, the last Nawab of Jhunjhunu. After regaining his territory Rohilla Khan welcomed Shardul Singh, a descendent of Rao Shekha.

Shardul Singh not only became the Nawab's confidante but succeeded him after his death. Having acquired areas covered by Jhunjhunu, Narhad and Udaipur in 1732 A.D. he made Jhunjhunu the capital of an extended Shekhawati kingdom.

Shardul Singh 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.



Emergence of Shekhawati as a Confederation of Principalities

(Panchpana – Guwadi)

By the 18th century almost the entire Shekhawati region came under the control of the Shekhawats.

After Shardul Singh's death in 1742 A.D., the area of about 1000 villages and Kasbas (small townships) under his rule was divided into Panchpana (five units) among his five sons Zorawar Singh, Kishan Singh, Nawal Singh, Keshri Singh and Akhey Singh.

Division of Shardul Singh's estates amongst his five sons triggered the urbanisation of Shekhawati.

Each of the Thakurs embarked on consolidating his territory and streamlining his administration by establishing Thikanas (centres of power) founding new towns and upgrading the existing ones.



Relevance in history!

Some of the historical documents reveal the establishment of Medh Singh, a Shekhawat chief, in Panchpana Guwadi before they built a fort in the Gangiasar village and moved out.

The only known on the record remains one of the ' Panchpana Guwadi' (local Inhabitant site) in the Shekhawati region in history, perhaps a post before Mughal/ Kyamkhani rulers and then acquired by Maharao Shardul Singh in the war conquered in 1730 from the Rohilla Khan "Raseela", the last Kayamkhani Nawab of Jhunjhunu. This is clear from the poetry, made by the Charan of Shekhawats in the Rajasthani language.

Therefore, for the importance of history it is the oldest habitant site before descendants sons of Maharao Shardul Singh founded of many prominent thikanas and famous Forts in Shekhawati regions.



Shekhawati region's takes centre stage

Initially the Shekhawat Thakurs 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 for Shekhawati.

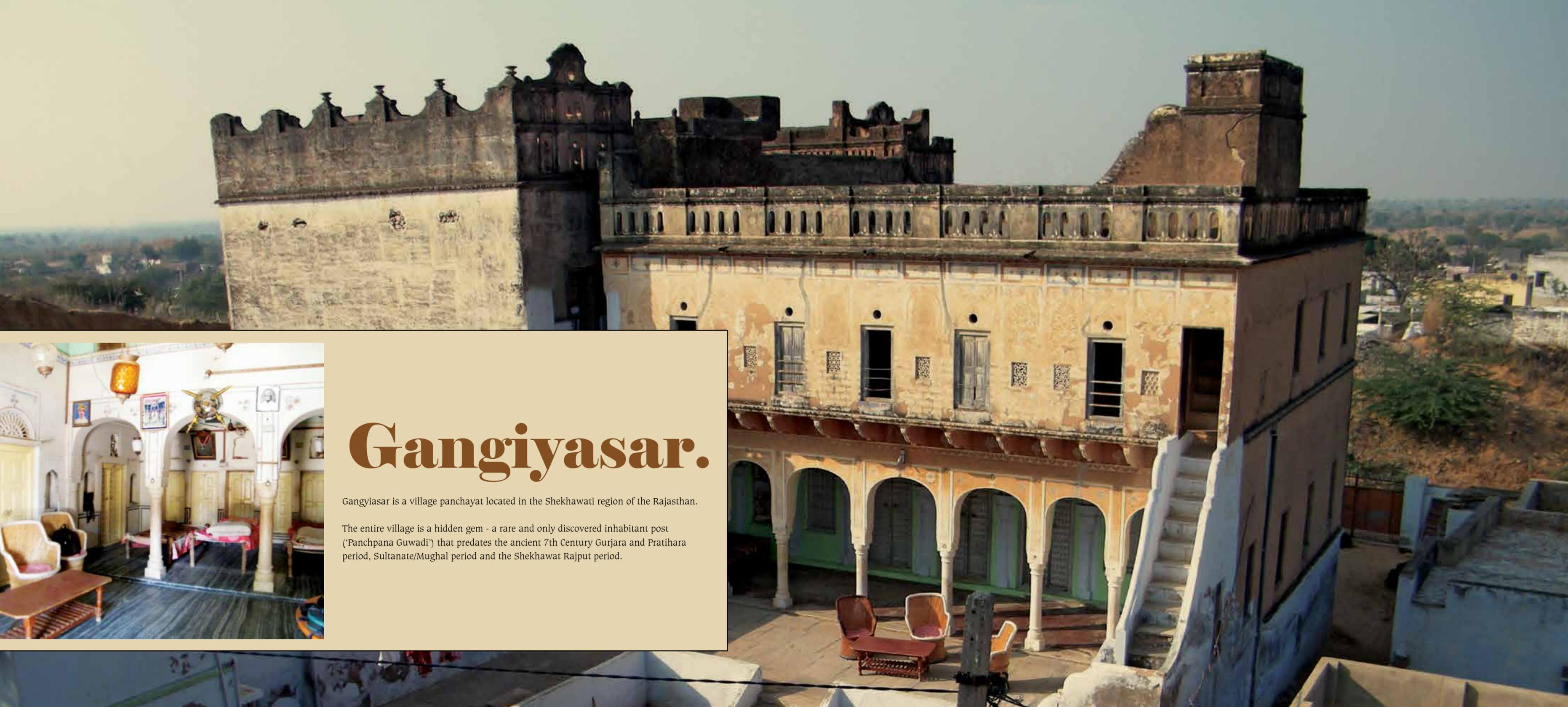
Subsequently Shekhawat Thakurs became tributaries of Jaipur State and accepted its suzerainty and administrative system.

Reorganisation of territories by the Shekhawat Thakurs had a tremendous role in shaping the built environment of Shekhawati.



And like all great stories have a protagonist, the Shekhawati region story also had a central character without which this journey would never have happened -

Gangiyasar.



Gangiyasar.

Gangiyasar is a village panchayat located in the Shekhawati region of the Rajasthan.

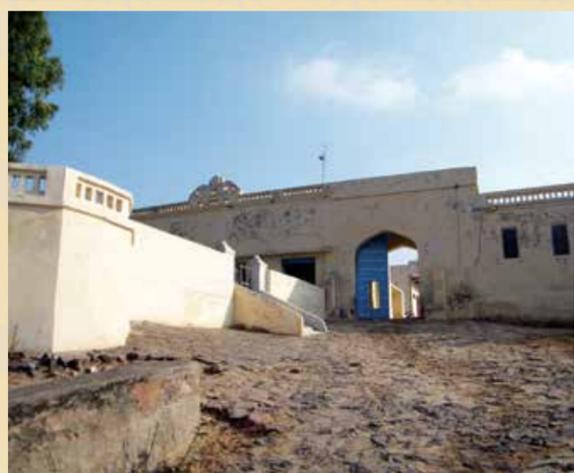
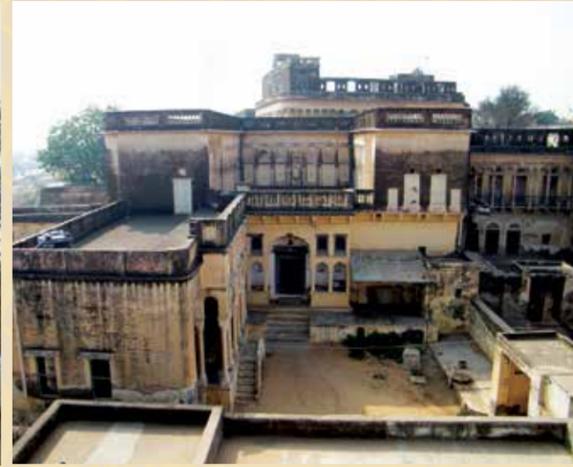
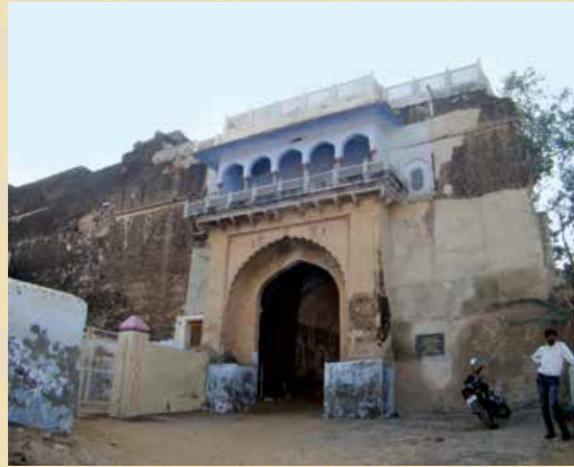
The entire village is a hidden gem - a rare and only discovered inhabitant post ('Panchpana Guwadi') that predates the ancient 7th Century Gurjara and Pratihara period, Sultanate/Mughal period and the Shekhawat Rajput period.





**And this tiny village's
“Panchpana Guwadi”
stood a mute spectator
then...to narrate the
story now of what
transpired in the
semi-arid desert patch
(Shekhawati region)
from then...**





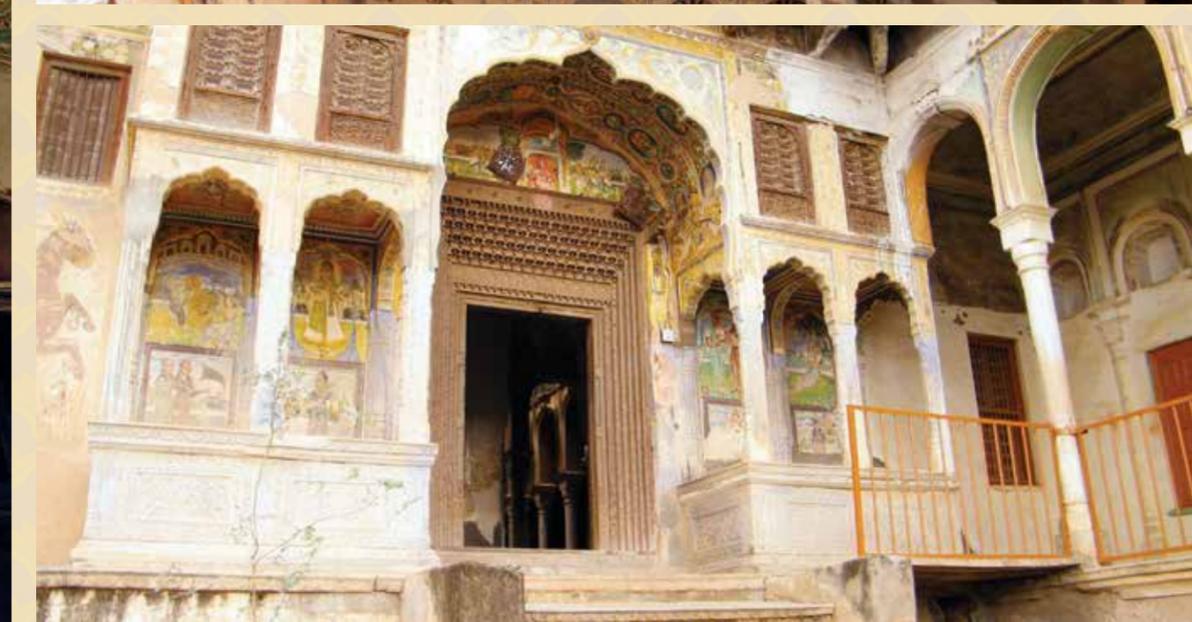
No matter how impossible, unattainable or unimaginable something may seem...if it's meant to be, it'll be.

Gangiyasar, the quaint hamlet had two critical elements that transformed Shekhawati region into an area of promise and power.

Water which is more precious than blood.

Location on an important route that was a must travel for traders.

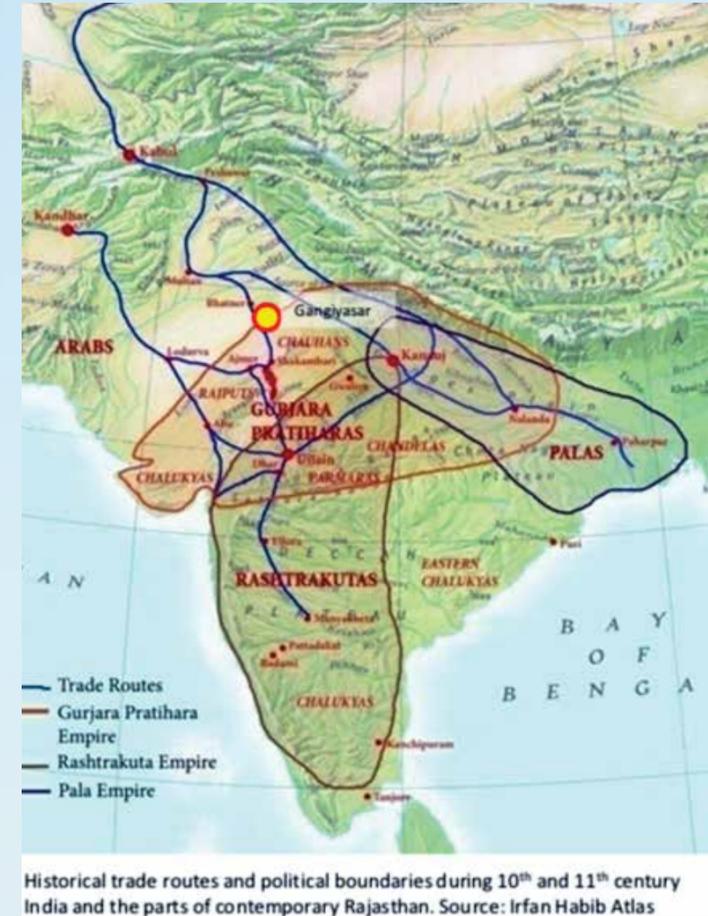






Water

Etymologically, the name 'Gangiyasar' suggests the existence of a water tank in the village where rainwater would get collected. The existence of a water tank is also affirmed by the study of contours. The entire settlement, in fact, grew along this water body. As such, it became a focal point for all passing caravans to rest and refill their food and water supplies to continue their onward journey towards Kabul.



Historical trade routes and political boundaries during 10th and 11th century India and the parts of contemporary Rajasthan. Source: Irfan Habib Atlas

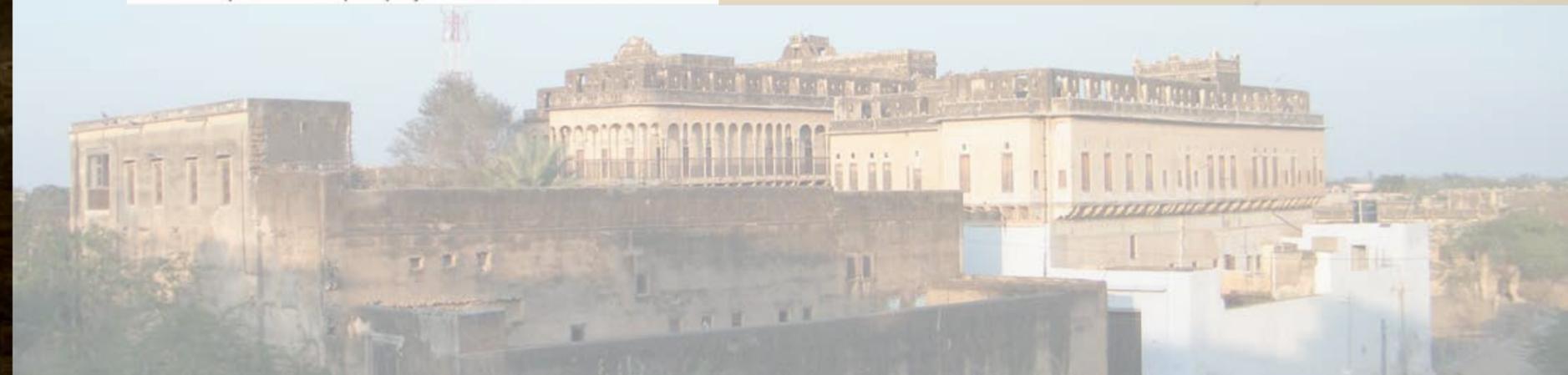
Location

The ancient caravan salt trade route which emerged from the Chauhan capital of Shakambhari (Presently called "Sambhar") passed through the presently recognized Shekhawati region to connect Kabul and Tashkent via Bhatner and Multan.

The traces of the salt trade network suggest the presence of Gangiyasar village on the trade route - existing routes connect Gangiyasar with centres of historical trade.

According to Col. Tod, the region around village of Gangiyasar was under the political control of Chauhan Rajputs during the 10th and the 11th century.

With the emergence of Panchpana State under the leadership of Sardul Singh in 1730 AD, Gangiyasar was granted to Zorawar Singh (elder son of Sardul Singh). Henceforth Gangiyasar became a seat of governance for Shekhawat lineage of Rajputs. Medh Singh son of Zorawar Singh settled at Gangiyasar and initiated the development of the village.



It's always the small pieces that make the big picture. A phrase that aptly sums up what Gangiyasar did for the Shekhawati.



Since the trade route was essentially Caravan-based, using camels as the means of movement, they needed several halting points for water and shelter in the Semi-arid plains of Shekhawati. Gangiyasar, with its water body, emerged as the main oasis - providing travellers with water and shelter en-route their destination.

Camel – the Ship of the Desert

Its heavy body is carried by four strong, long legs which keep the body away from the heat of the desert sand.

Each leg ends with a broad pad of fats and flexible fibers coated with a thick layer of hide which looks like the sole of a shoe and is called a “sole pad”. This sole pad helps the camel move easily over the desert sand without his legs sinking into the sand, because the sole pad is extremely wide when the camel walks. The camel can also painlessly and tirelessly walk over extremely hot solid rocks by virtue of this thick sole pad which is almost completely insensitive to the outside environment.

The camel has an almost rectangular, middle-sized head. It has wide eyes which have good visibility during the day and night. Its eyes are shielded by very long and thick eyelashes which protect the eyes from flying dust and the scorching heat of the sun. The camel has small ears covered with thick hair from all sides to protect them from flying desert dust.

Its nose, in the forefront of its head, consists of two thin cleaved sides surrounded by thick hair that prevents flying sand and dust from reaching its windpipe, but at the same time, it does not block the air itself. They are also encircled by strong muscles that allow the camel to close or open its nostrils whenever it wants. When there is a dust storm, the camel closes its eyes, bends its ears to the back, closes its nostrils, and moves forward without being affected by the storm.

The camel's hump is its most distinctive feature. It is a store of fat with a pyramid-like shape on its back. The camel's hump is very beneficial. When the camel is very hungry or thirsty, the fat in the hump is converted into food and water. This enables the camel to survive without food or water for several days.





**There is a big difference
between seeing and
opportunity and seizing one.**

**The Shekhawati Thakurs
did both. Saw. Seized.
With speed.**

Important trade routes have passed through Rajasthan since ancient times.

An important route connected Agra and Delhi with Surat in Gujarat via Ajmer and Pali while another connected them with Sindh through Bikaner and Jaisalmer.

Centres like Pali, Nagaur, Phalodi, Bhinmal, Merta, Jaisalmer, Rajgarh, Reni, Chittor, Udaipur, Bhilwara, Ajmer, Pushkar, Sirohi, Kota, Sambhar, Amber and Sanganer were centres of business and trade in commodities from far and wide.

In the later half of 18th century, Jaipur emerged as an important trade centre.

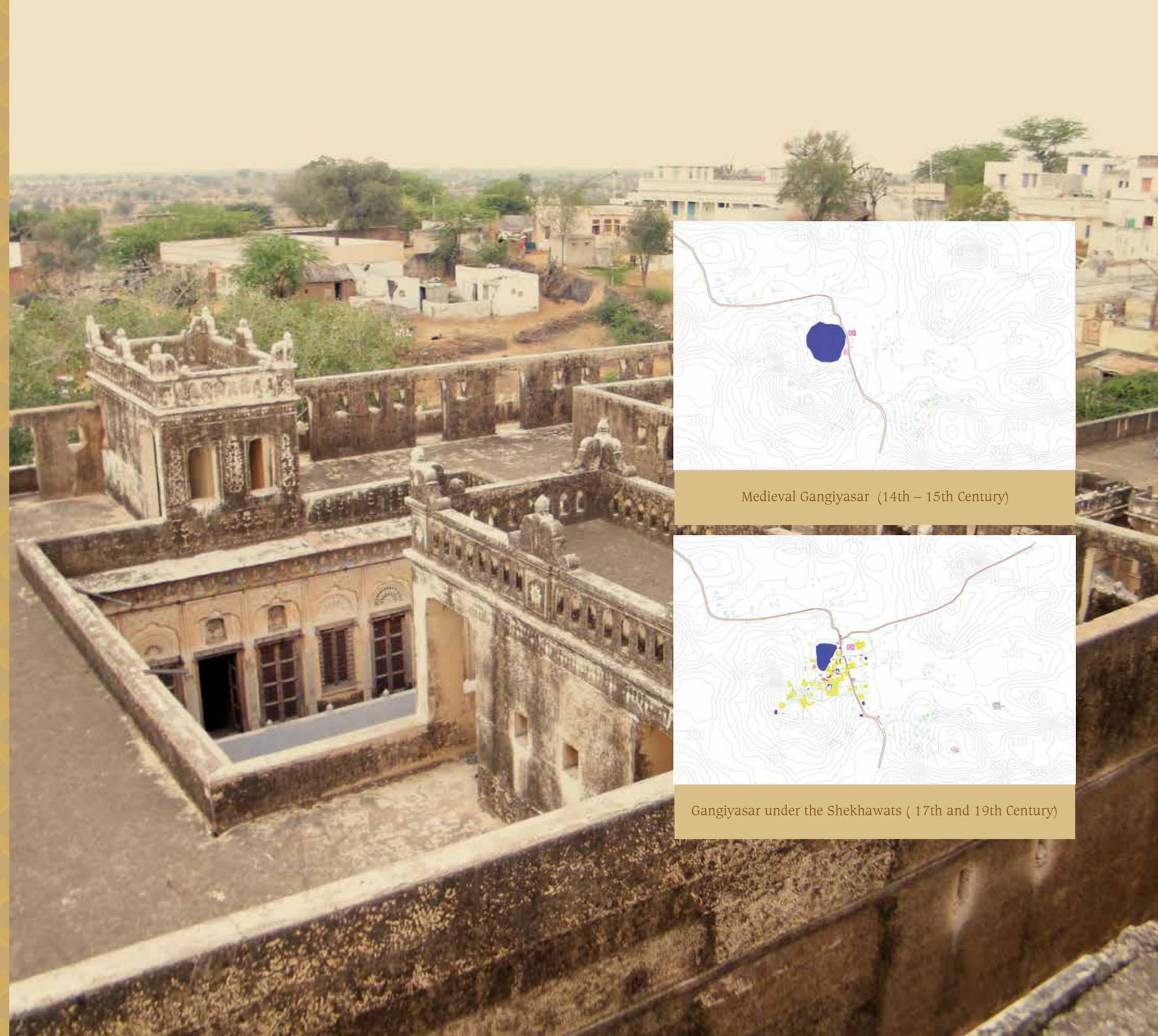
However, political instability and a burdened treasury led the rulers of Jaipur and Bikaner to impose heavy taxes in their territories.

The Shekhawati rulers were quick to use this to their advantage by providing a detour to the caravans, facilitating access through their territories. Trade was thus diverted from Jaipur and Bikaner states to routes falling in the Shekhawati region leading to improved financial condition of the Shekhawati Thakurs.

This ushered in an era of great building activity in the Shekhawati region, including Gangyiasar. The period between 1740 A.D. till 1800 A.D. witnessed a proliferation of settlements.

When the inner vision opens, horizons expand.

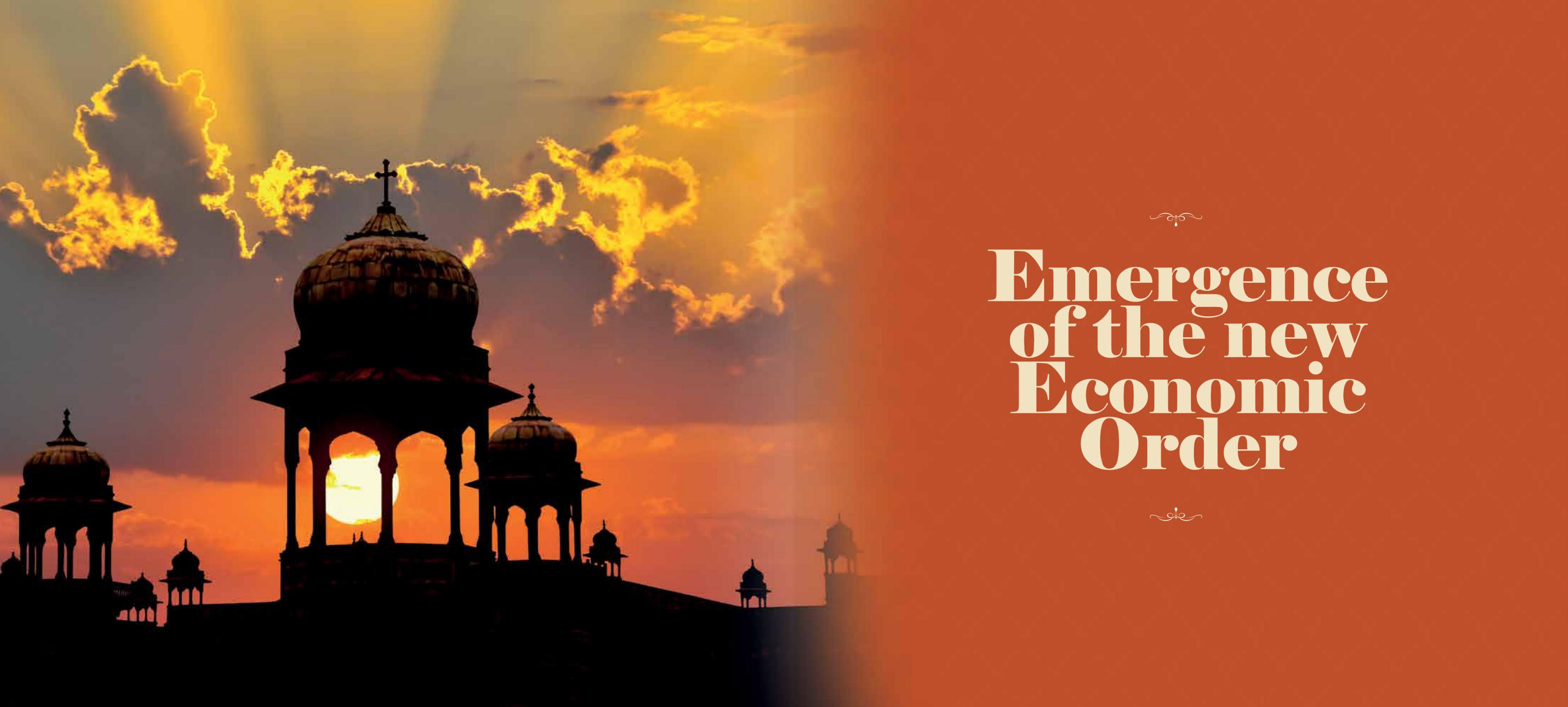
This was evident in the transformation of Gangiyasar – from an insignificant speck on the Rajasthan map to an economic hub bustling with activity.



Medieval Gangiyasar (14th – 15th Century)



Gangiyasar under the Shekhawats (17th and 19th Century)



Emergence
of the new
Economic
Order

The beginning of the end

The late 18th century heralded a transformation in the eco-political environment that had earlier supported urbanisation.

The decline in power and control of the Mughal Empire, which once bound India into a unified marketplace, adversely impacted the once flourishing cross-desert commerce.

Taking advantage of the lack of central authority at Delhi, numerous marginal political forces mushroomed across the length and breadth of our vast nation with an aim to exercise their power and wield control over trade routes leading to considerable disruption in trade and commerce.

Among them, the Marathas and Pindaris became a prominent disturbance to economic growth. The prevalent banditry also dealt a body blow to trade volumes passing through the Shekhawati region.



**In trade, trust
and confidence is
everything.**

**It's like a sheet of
glass. Once broken,
it can never be
restored to its
pristine glory.**

**The same happened
with traders
traversing through
the Shekhawati
region.**

While Delhi was fast losing grip over India as a nation, the British forces started consolidating their position in this vast nation at almost the same time.

As their power gained credence, states of Bikaner and Jaipur signed treaties accepting British sovereignty. On advice of the British Resident at Jaipur, states of Bikaner and Jaipur reduced taxes on trade around 1822 AD in a bid to revive trade volumes which has suffered drastically due to the growing banditry.

Further, the British formed the Shekhawati Brigade under the command of Major Forster in 1835 AD to curb the rampant arson in the region. As a follow out of this initiative, the route became safe but trade never recovered. For confidence among trades took a severe and irreparable beating.





**With a new power
come new ideas,
new strategies,
new initiatives and
new investments.**

**The old order
changed, yielding
place to the new.**

**Even as
tradition stood
by and watched
helplessly.**



The impact of the East India Company and British Power was being felt across the expansive geography of our beautiful nation. Increasing British dominance brought in a sweeping wave of change in India which completely altered its economic, social and political fabric.

From an economic perspective, the changes were path-breaking which transformed the face of commercial norms in 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.

Almost overnight, trade became dominated by the East India Company leaving the Indian rulers with practically no control over its dynamics.

**While the winds of change
swept through India...**

**...the Shekhawati region
painfully succumbed to the
pressure and pain
of the new power.**



And while trade flourished and expanded, the economic relevance of this oasis, in the otherwise parched region, rapidly plummeted.



The impacts of these developments were felt deep down in the Shekhawati region.

As the impoverished thakurs took to looting and plundering the caravans, the killings and robberies on the trade routes increased. In addition, the Britisher's of trade through the newly established ports at Mumbai, Calcutta and Madras significantly reduced trade volumes through the traditional road routes.

The Marwari who had contributed to the economic and physical growth of towns suffered. This

business slide forced this trading community to adapt themselves to changing conditions of the nineteenth century.

The Marwaris needed little encouragement to migrate to garrison towns. Here they were quick to establish their trade as they received protection from the British, who were quick to recognise their importance to economic growth of the region.

Heads of these 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, Chennai, Delhi and beyond, fashioning themselves as business catalysts playing an important role in the import and export of commodities taking place on these ports.

The progress in transportation and communication made migration easier and soon there was a veritable Marwari exodus to the states of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Hyderabad and Mysore.

The British traders had developed an interest in opium, tea, jute, silver and gold; the migrant traders were quick on catch on this trend and gained expertise in these commodities. Soon they emerged as important stakeholders to foreign firms. And in the process reaped significant benefits.

In addition, foreign companies wanting to sell finished British goods in India required agents to represent them and offered good brokerage. Resourceful Marwaris recognising the potential of colonial trade, moved into the ports as brokers and made their fortunes.

The opening of the Delhi-Calcutta rail link gave a fillip to the Marwari community migration. They were helped immensely by the early Marwari migrants whose operations had expanded by this time, and who needed assistance to manage and grow their newly started ventures.



Eventually with time, while these Marwari merchants attained a remarkable level of prosperity, the economic fortunes of the Shekhawati region slipped into darkness.

Bhagwandas Bagla, who is considered to be the first Marwari millionaire, proceeded abroad to Burma and settled in Rangoon.

Nathuram Saraf served as a bania to the firm of Miller Kinsell and Ghose, while Ramkumar Chokhani of Nawalgarh was the bania for Ludwig Duke.

Haram Goenka was a guarantee broker to the Ralli Brothers, Onkarmal Jatia to Andrew Yule and Anandilal Poddar to Toyoto Menka Kesha.

The Poddars and Ruia of Ramgarh set up firms in Mumbai

Ramnarain Ruia and Govindram Ghanshyamdas, in a short while, firmly entrenched their presence in the cotton trade and came to be recognised as 'cotton kings'.

Bilasirai Kedia, Gulraj Singhania and Ramdayal Nevatia, from Fatehpur, and Nathuram Poddar and Jokhiram Ruia of Ramgarh, made their mark in the opium trade and were referred to as business magnates of the opium markets.

The Birlas, too rose to great heights during the First World War by supplying cotton and textiles.

While Surajmull Jhunjunwala and Nathuram Saraf emerged as pioneers in the Calcutta cloth market, Ganeriwala of Lachhmangarh made his name in Hyderabad – his acumen, respect and wealth soon elevated him to the position of Treasurer to the State.

Marwari Why Marwari? Who is he? Where did he come from?

The term Marwari literally refers to someone who hails from or is an inhabitant of Marwar - the erstwhile Jodhpur state.

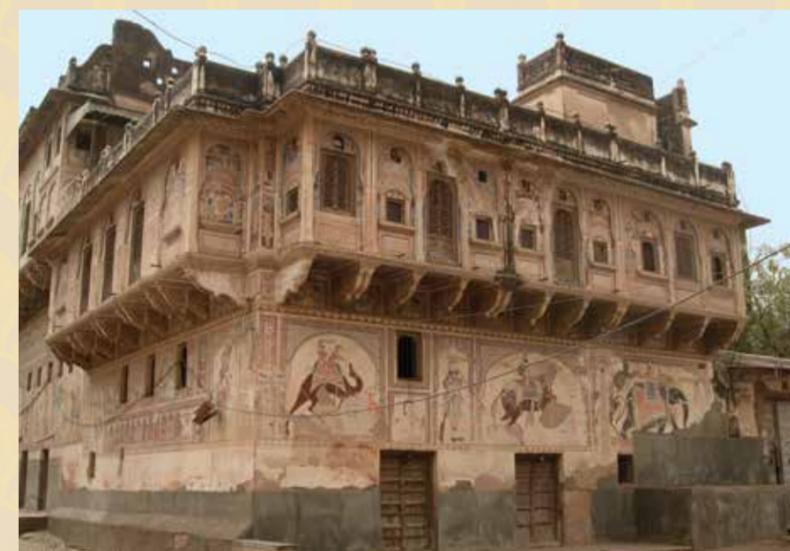
This term gained currency initially in Bengal, where the traders from Shekhawati and other parts of Rajasthan established their business empires.

Distinct in their dress, customs and language, the traders and merchants of Rajasthan came to be known as Marwaris.

Thomas A Timberg states, 'In colloquial usage, outside of Rajasthan, Marwari is used to refer to emigrant businessmen from the vicinity of Rajasthan.'

The earliest link of the Marwaris with Bengal can be traced back to 1564, when Rajput soldiers under Akbar's flag came to camp there during the reign of Suleman Kirani. The contract of supplying the essentials for the soldiers was awarded to the merchants of Marwar. On their arrival in Bengal, they are supposed to have introduced themselves as Marwaris and since they wore pugris (turbans), they were also referred to as pugridhari Marwaris (Marwaris who wore turbans).





The Marwaris – they truly were the economic rulers of the Shekhawati region.

These Marwaris commanded a great deal of respect back at home in Shekhawati. Royal letters of recognition and admiration, and the permission to wear the tazim - the anklet of honour, were some of the other privileges bestowed on them.

Their opinion was given due weightage and often, they were consulted on the matters of the state as well. The rulers were wise enough to realize it was better to get the cooperation, if not the approval of the merchant community, as they were dependent on them for economic support.

The rich and prosperous trader community in turn, would offer extended loans to the rulers and

also invest in other public related projects. Seth Mirzamal was known to have loaned a sum of four lakh of rupee to Maharaja Surat Singh of Bikaner. The Poddars of Ramgarh provided financial assistance to the Rao Raja of Sikar, and gained implicit powers through unwritten rules and regulations.

On several other occasions, the Marwari community succeeded in framing ordinances and decrees to suit their interest. In 1868, the Surana family protesting against the imposition of heavy taxation, left Churu to settle in Mehansar. Sir Ganga Singh, the Maharaja of Bikaner (Churu was a part of Bikaner) had no option but to accede to

their demands and get them back to Churu.

Thakur Sheo Singh levied heavy taxes on the Poddars of Churu in the early part of the 19th century. The Poddars asked him to reconsider his decision. Upon his refusal, the Poddars migrated en-masse, and founded a new town, Ramgarh, 51 kms south of Sikar.

The Poddars were perhaps the biggest traders of the region and Ramgarh stands testimony to their entrepreneurial abilities.



“What though the field be lost?
All is not Lost.” - John Milton.

**And so it was with
the Shekhawati
region.
For ties with the
hometown remained.**

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.



Pouring wealth beautified homes, expanded the towns and developed community utilities.

Marwari businesses flourished, their net worth rose beyond their imagination.

The rich Marwari merchants invested their business saving in their hometowns and villages in Shekhawati. First, they constructed huge palatial havelis for their loved ones who they had been left behind. These handsome homes were adorned with some of the finest most memorable frescoes in the world.

They also invested in community facilities such as temples, schools, dharamshalas, wells, water tanks, leisure gardens, cenotaphs, etc. in memory of their forefathers and donated to the town, for the development of its people

With the growth in the wealth of the Marwari merchant, the number of havelis in the town grew and with it grew the size of the haveli.

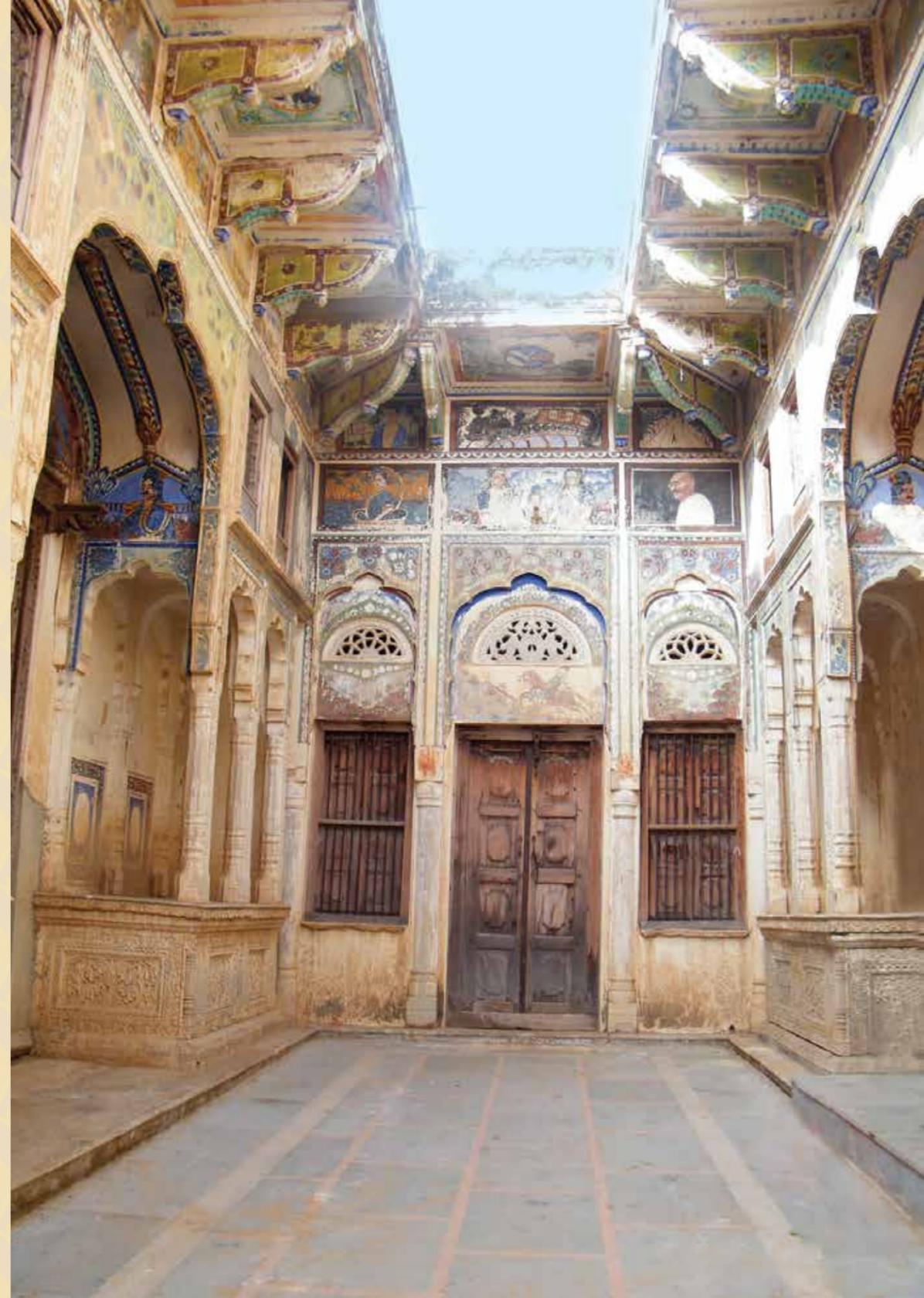
Havelis: The glory of past



Havelis: The glory of past



Havelis: The glory of past



Havelis: The glory of past





Wealth can do wonders. For the Shekhwati, it 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.

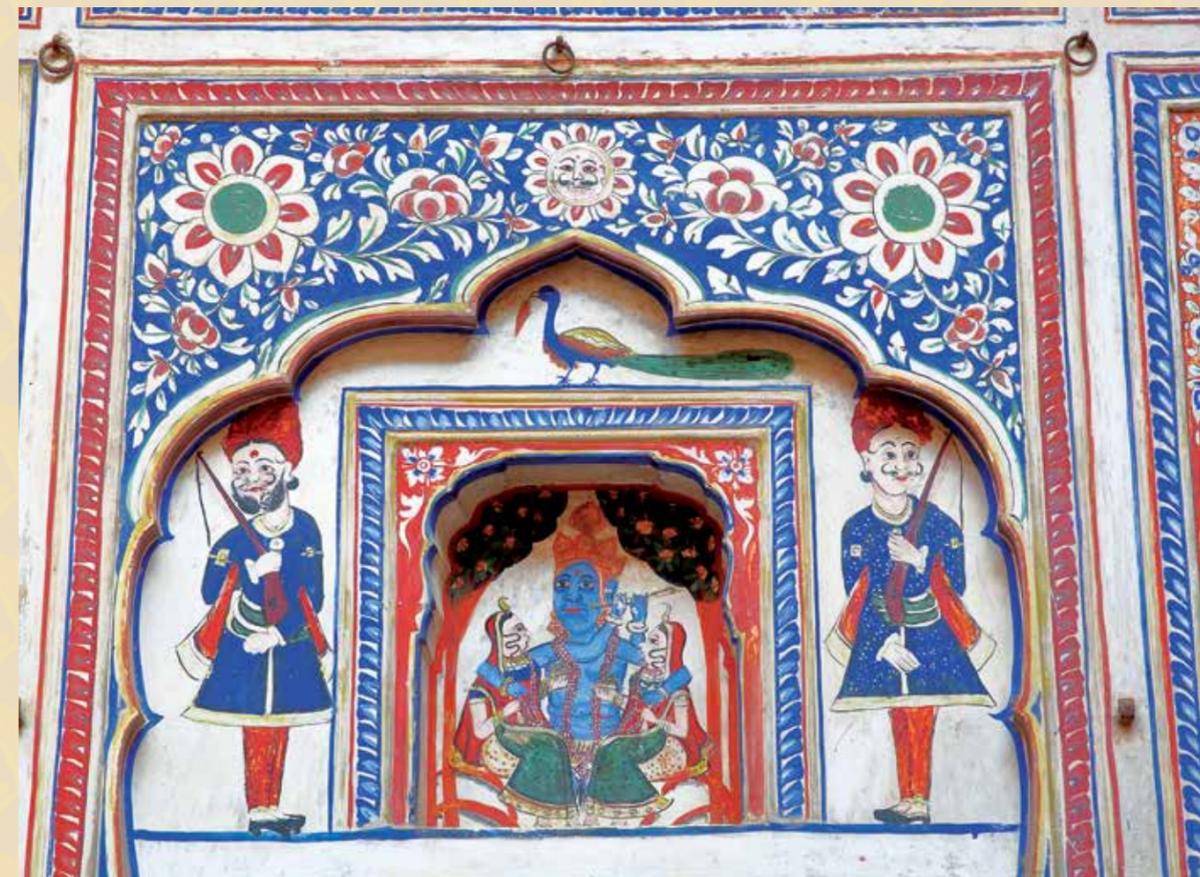
Its documented in great detail the finer nuances of everyday life as well as the innovations that were taking place in those times.

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.









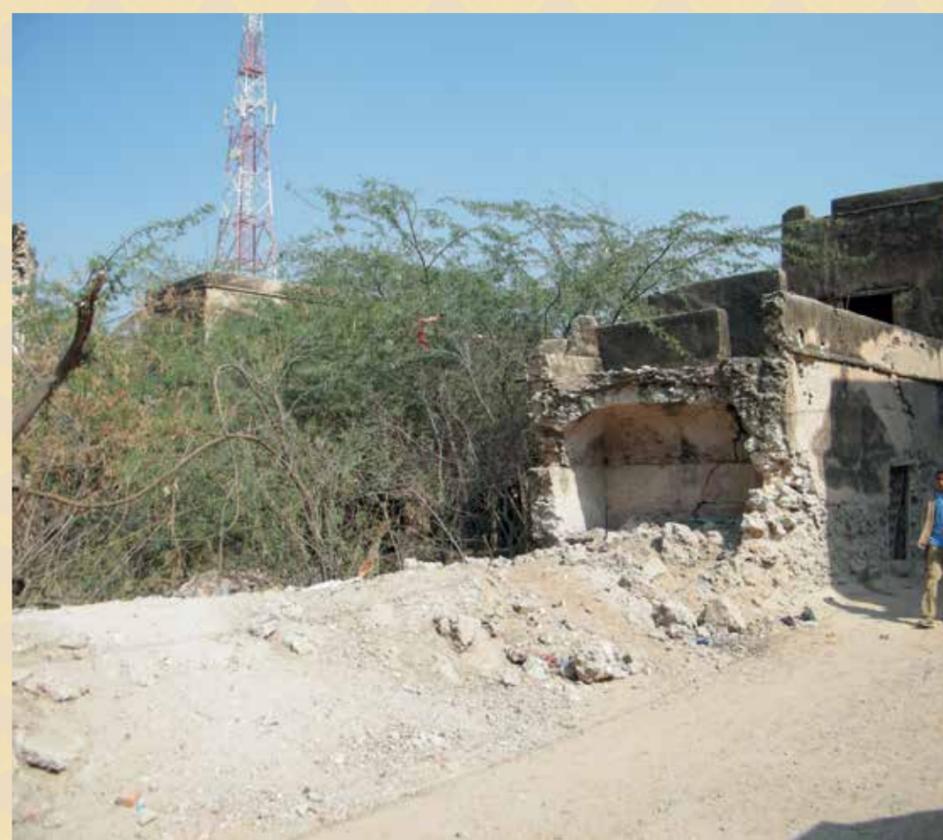


**But like all good things
have to come to an end.**

**The pang of the
hometown slowly but
surely died. Ties with
the roots severed.**

**This then is the cycle
of life!**

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.



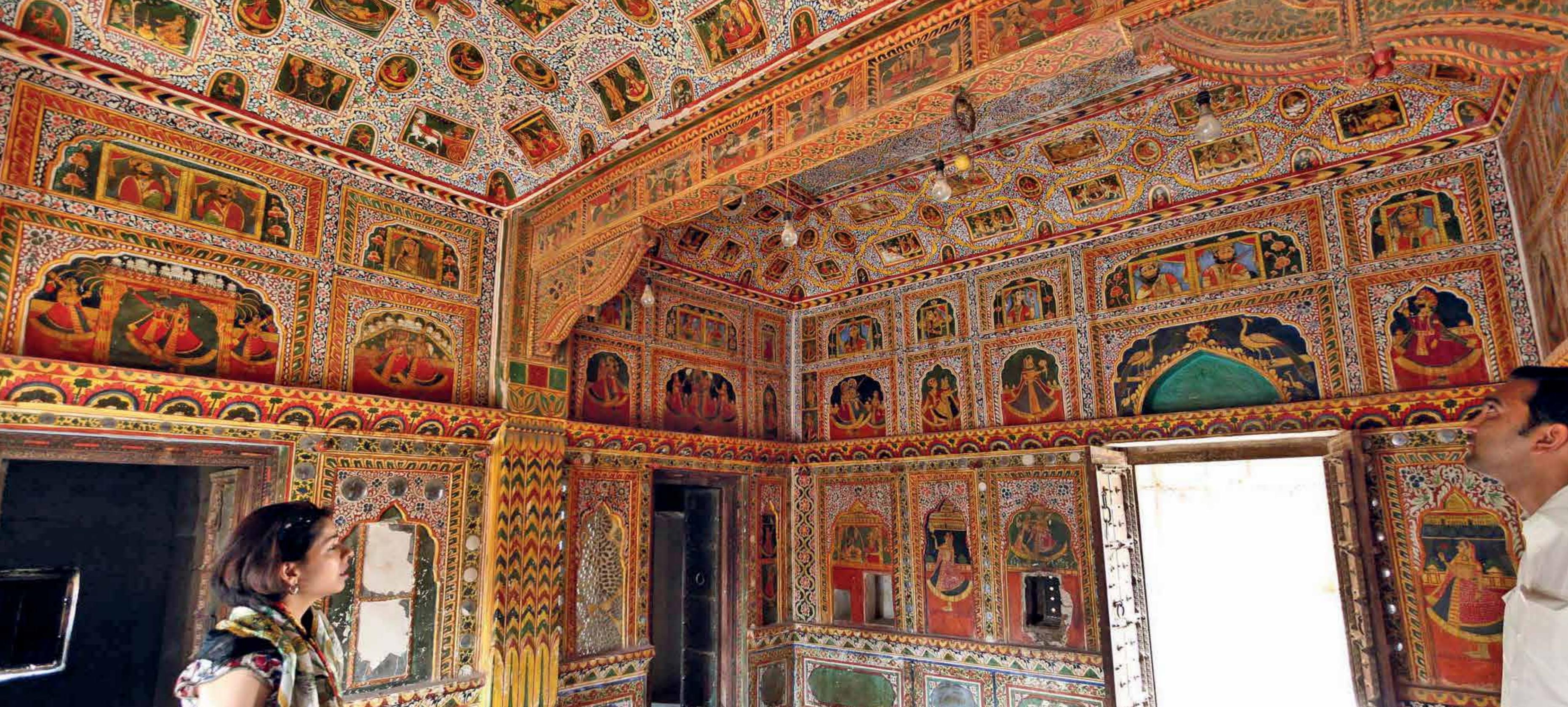


Greatness...silenced!

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, ambitions and expansionist urges of a bygone era.

**Despite everything,
the quaint little towns
and villages of the
Shekhawati region do not
fail to entice the modern
day travelers.**

**For it seduces their
minds to repaint the
horizon of what was...
and to ponder a bit about
what could have been!**



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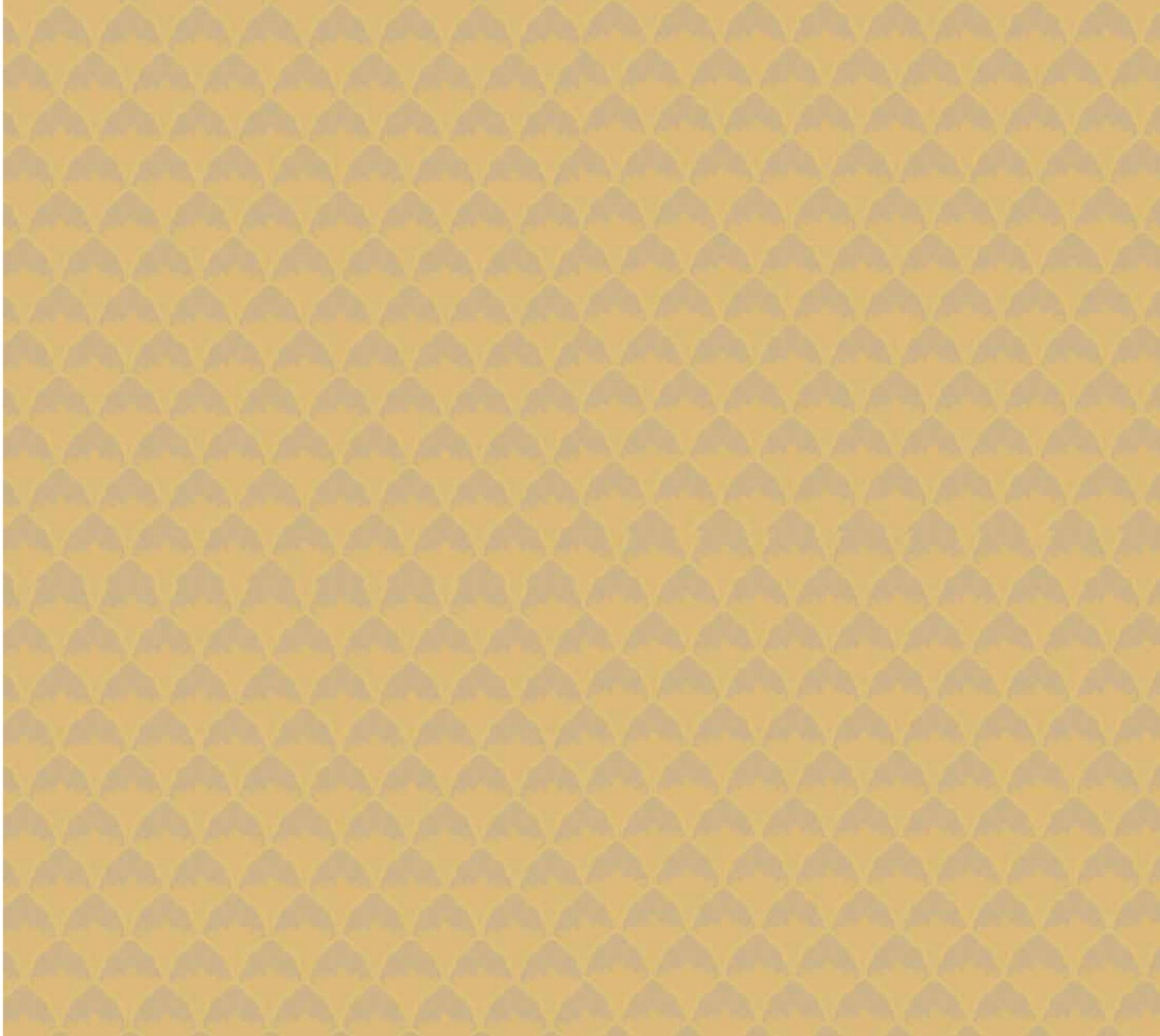
Dr. Rima Hooja –

Rima Hooja is currently a Member of the Government of India’s National Monuments Authority, Director of the MSID India Program of Minnesota University (USA), and Managing Trustee of the Jaipur Virasat Foundation. Dr. Rima Hooja is also a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland. She received a Ph.D in Archaeology from Cambridge University (UK), for her research on the Ahar Culture. She has held several academic and research positions, and has served on several committees, boards, trusts and councils, etc. She has published over 100 research papers, articles, book-reviews, reports, etc. Books written by Rima Hooja include Ahar Culture and Beyond (BAR, Oxford, 1988); Prince, Patriot, Parliamentarian: Biography of Dr. Karni Singh – Maharaja of Bikaner (HarperCollins India, 1997); Crusader for SelfRule: Tej Bahadur Sapru and the Indian National Movement (Rawat, 1999); Mandan’s “DevataMurti-Prakarnam” (Prakrit Bharati, 1999); History of Rajasthan (Rupa & Co., 2006), and the coedited Constructing Rajpootana-Rajasthan (Rawat, 2009).

Dr. Shikha Jain –

Director, DRONAH Foundation, (DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ORGANISATION FOR NATURE, ARTS AND HERITAGE)

Shikha Jain’s vast experience in cultural heritage of India ranges from steering conservation projects for various state governments to preparing conservation plans funded by international organisations such as the Getty Foundation, World Monuments Fund and advising ASI on World Heritage. Representing India as a Cultural Heritage expert, she steered matters as Member Secretary, Advisory Committee on World Heritage to the Ministry of Culture during India’s term in the World Heritage Committee from 2011-2015.



- A good book for anyone interested in getting a good understanding of Indian business history and the rise of Marwari businesses in particular
- *Prof. A. K. Mukherjee, Department of Economics, University of Florida, U.S.A.*
- Every Marwari should read--who are Marwaris and for their pride & contribution to the Shekhawati region
- *Mr. Ramesh Agarwal, Industrialist*
- An engaging information of India ancient caravan based trade routes to water and railways consequent to rise and fall of regional economy. Comprehensive and vividly illustrated coffee table book is first of its kind
- *Mr. Sidhartha Jain, Industrialist*
- A good amount of information about where these Marwari businessmen came from, how they migrated across different parts of India and set up businesses is covered in the book
- *Mr. N. K. Bajaj, Industrialist*

Research study and documentation -
Heritage Management Plan for Gangiyasar, Rajasthan
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