

By **SOMEN SENGUPTA**

Before visiting Chittorgarh one must be smart enough to differentiate between academic history and popular history. The physically exhaustive exploration in India's biggest fort will be pathetically incomplete if at the right point one does not discard fiction from facts.

The story of Chittor is the story of ultimate Rajput's bravery and pride that sings verses of those great souls who always preferred death to submission of dignity. Over many centuries from local bards of Rajputana to the British antiquarians and from Bengali play writers to cinema makers of Bombay the saga of bravery and sacrifice of Chittor remain as a cynsure of their creative and academic space.

Spread over 700 acers and covering more than 5 km of fortification the Chittorgarh or Chittor is a mesmerizing edifice of India's history. In this walled arena situated 150 mt atop of Aravalli mountain range is dotted with many water bodies. There are 4 palace complexes, 19 temples and 4 memorials all reflecting th rich legacy of a bygone time. Till 1568 it was the capital of Sisodia Rajput whose saga of bravery against Muslim invaders is still a matter of pride. Legends of Rani Padmini, Meera and Dhatri Panna along with many folklores are loaded with many unsupported supplements of popular history and have made Chittor the most popular saga of our pristine past.

Situated between two rivers named Berach and Gambhir on the foothill of Aravalli, Chittor is believed to be founded by one Chitrangad of Mauri Rajputs clan in 7th century. He named it Chitrakoot which later became Chittor. Another version says it was founded in the 6th century by Guhil of Mewar. However James Tod the self-taught historian who wrote *Annal and Aniquity of Rajasthan* mentioned that one Bheel leader named Saddar Bappa Rawal conquered it from Mauri's in 728.

Chittor was ruled by Sisodias for many centuries and in that span they confronted three major attacks of Islamic army. Each of these attack was fought with extreme bravery and self sacrifices by both men and women of Rajputs though at end defeat and death were only award.

In 1303 it was first attacked by Sultan of Delhi Alauddin Khilji who as popular history says was enamored by a queen named Padmini wife of then King Ratan Singh. It is said, though with no solid historical evidence, that Alauddin was given an audience to see Rani Padmini in a mirror reflection



# Chittorgarh: Blend of history & folklore

and that stimulated his lust for getting her. This finally culminated into a gory battle in which a huge number of Rajput men were slaughtered and before that for the sake of protecting her dignity Rani Padmini along with all females of Rajput family sacrificed their lives in pyre a ceremony named Jauhar.

Now this story came from a fictional ballard named 'Padmavat' written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540. It became a part of popular history when James Tod included this in his book and from then this has unfortunately become a part of Chittor's story.

History says Rana Kumbh recovered Chittor in 1440 by defeating Sultan Mamood of Malwar and it was he who developed it's massive fortification. His biggest tangible contribution is Vijay Stambha the nine floored 37 mt high yellow sand stone victory tower which is now a signature landmark of Chittor. The grand edifice built in 1458 at an estimated cost of Rs 90 lakhs still stands on a plinth of 3 mt and covers a foundation base of 14 sqmt. Embellished with exotically decorated floral designs, animal, human and Hindu mythological figures the tower is a master piece of art work without any Islamic influence though on it verses from Quran in Arabic are also carved. There are innumerable statues of Hindu Gods along with plethora of elephants and lions. This is perhaps the finest surviving war memorial built by a Hindu king in India. A flight of 157 steps inside can take one on top but it is no more permissible. Surprisingly this tower has name of Allah written in Arabic in it's 3rd and 8th storeys.

Chittor had another bloody attack in 1534 by Bahadur Shah of Gujarat who vanquished Udai Singh. 32000 Rajput men were killed and 13000 Rajput women observed jauhar to protect their dignity. The place of their sacrifice is marked very near to Vijay stambha.

Later the fort was won by Humayun and given back to Sisodias.

Udai Singh who regained it was again attacked by Akbar in 1568 and fled Chittor forever. In this war 8000 Rajputs were slaughtered. Rana Pratap son of Udai Singh and the tallest heroic figure of Rajputana after this fought many years to regain Chittor but was never successful in his mission. He died in 1597 without winning his Chittor back.

In 1616 Jahangir and Sisodias entered into a treaty and the fort of Chittor was given back to Rajputs on many conditions. However capital never came back to Chittor from Udaipur.

Pregnant with many archaeological edifices, Chittor fort still has seven gates known as poles. The gates are named after Badal, Jaimal, Hanuman, Ganesh, Jorla, Laxman and Ram. The stone gates are decorated with royal symbols.

Near the victory pillar there is a majestic 8th century temple dedicated to Chitoreshwari Kalika Mata. The deity here is Kali which is enshrined inside of this sandstone temple which was earlier a Sun temple as it seems. The old temple was destroyed by Alauddin's army. It was converted into a Kali temple in 1568 at the hands of Rana Kumbha. Temple walls are embellished with extra ordinary crafting of stone figuring events of Hindu mythology and also intricate floral designs with many Hindu motifs.

The palace of Rana Kumbha is dilapidated, yet it is the most exciting edifice of the fort. It was built in 8th century but later on expanded in 1433. The palace has two gates named Badi amd Tripolia. The palace, a typical specimen of Rajput architecture houses stables meant for horses and elephants, a Shiva temple, zenana mahal and a tunnel that ends at a water body named Goumukh kund. It is believed that Padmini had her last bath here before offering herself alive to the flames.

Padmini is very popular in Chittor. The palace of Padmini is situated in the middle of a lotus lake. This lake palace known as Padmini Mahal or Dweep palace faces towards a palace from where Alauddin as it is believed he had seen her

## Travel Logistics:

Chittor is just 117 km from Udaipur – So a day trip is good from there. The accommodation provision is modest. The fort is nearly 3 km away from railway station. A car is needed to explore the fort –Do not try to walk – It is not easy. Guide is needed but be careful to tame them from going fictional over facts. Useful website – [www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in)



reflection in a mirror. Earlier a mirror was placed on the wall here to make people believe how Alauddin saw Padmini. The mirror is now removed as its rationality came under serious question.

The Krishna temple built in 1440 in the memory of Meerabai is known as Meerabai temple. This humble abode of God was built in Indo-Aryan style. Meera, queen of Rana Sangh's eldest son Rana Bhojraj, dedicated her life in romantic devotion of Krishna and she composed many path breaking *bhajs* which are still sung by common people. There is another temple known as Kumbhashyamji temple dedicated to Vishnu. Meerabai's memories are mingled with this temple as well.

One of the finest historical edifice of this fort is another stone pillar exotically decorated with finest stone carving. This is Kirti stambha or tower of fame built in 12th century. This was built by Shresthi Jija and Punyasingh of Bagherwal clan in 1357. Dedicated to first Tithankara of Jainism Adinath Digambara the relic is 24.5 mt high with six floors and stands on a square platform. It houses a small pavilion of elegant design. The roof is supported with 12 pillars all elegantly decorated. Large standing mages of Tithankaras are found in its niches and there are plethora of other small figures in other stories. It is facing a small yet beautiful 14th century Jain temple which is enriched with stone carving.

The fort has a gate through which Alauddin entered and it also shows the stony alley through which Islamic army invaded the fort to ravage it. From the gate the battle field is seen.

Other important structures like Babadevi temple, shringer chauri, Samadhisvara Jain temple, haveli of Fatta Jaimal also draw attention for history lovers.

Pregnant with endless anecdotes of history Chittor is still a living fort and perhaps the most celebrated historical edifice of Rajasthan.

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