

SEPTEMBER 2018, ISSUE NO. 32

TRAVEL & DEAL

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THE CITADEL OF THE SUN GOD

UPASANA BHATTACHARYA

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PARTHA SEAL

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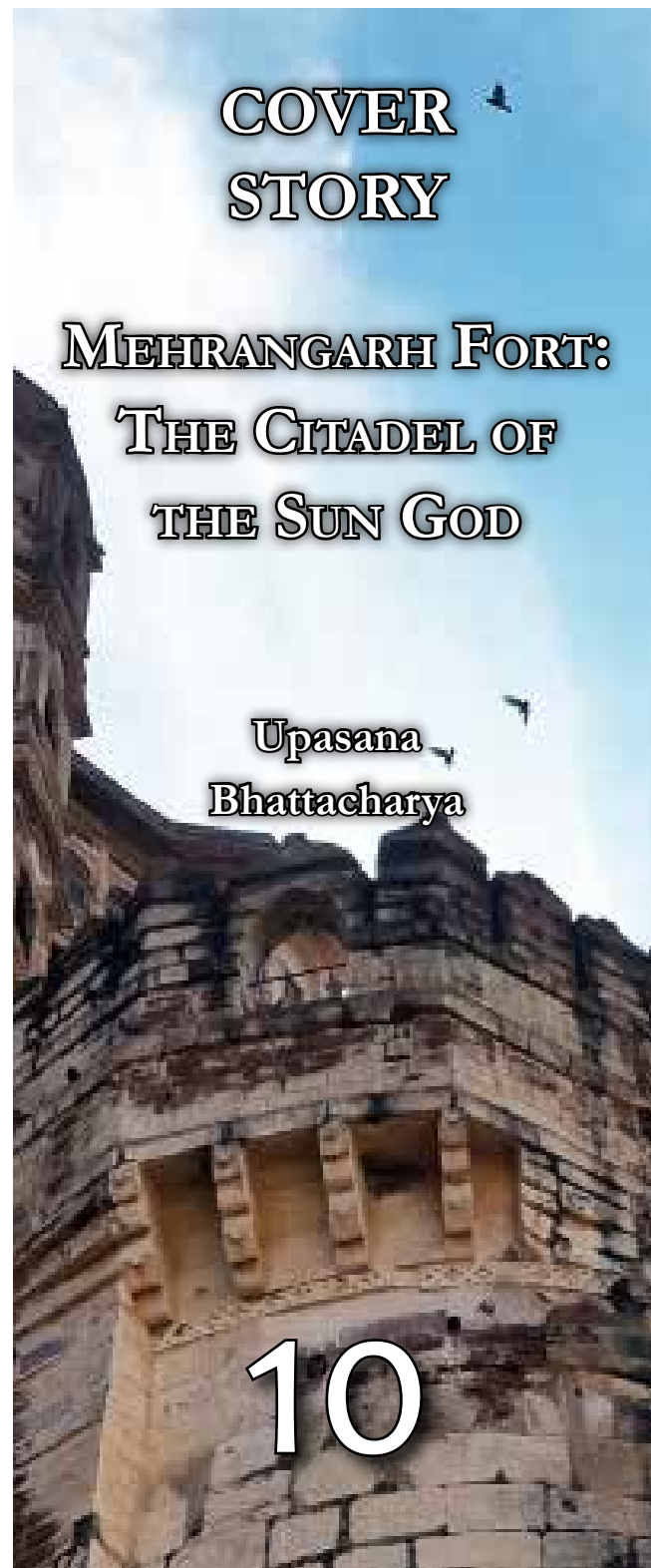
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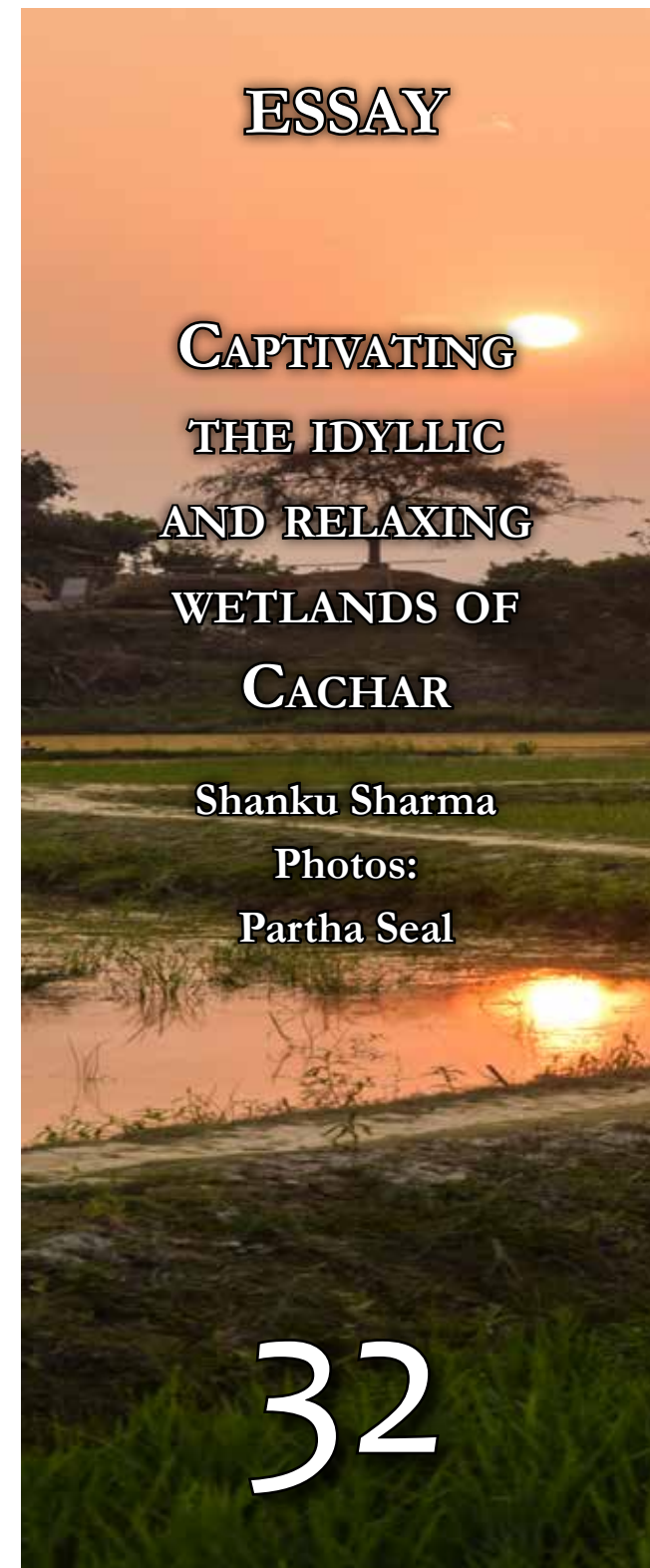


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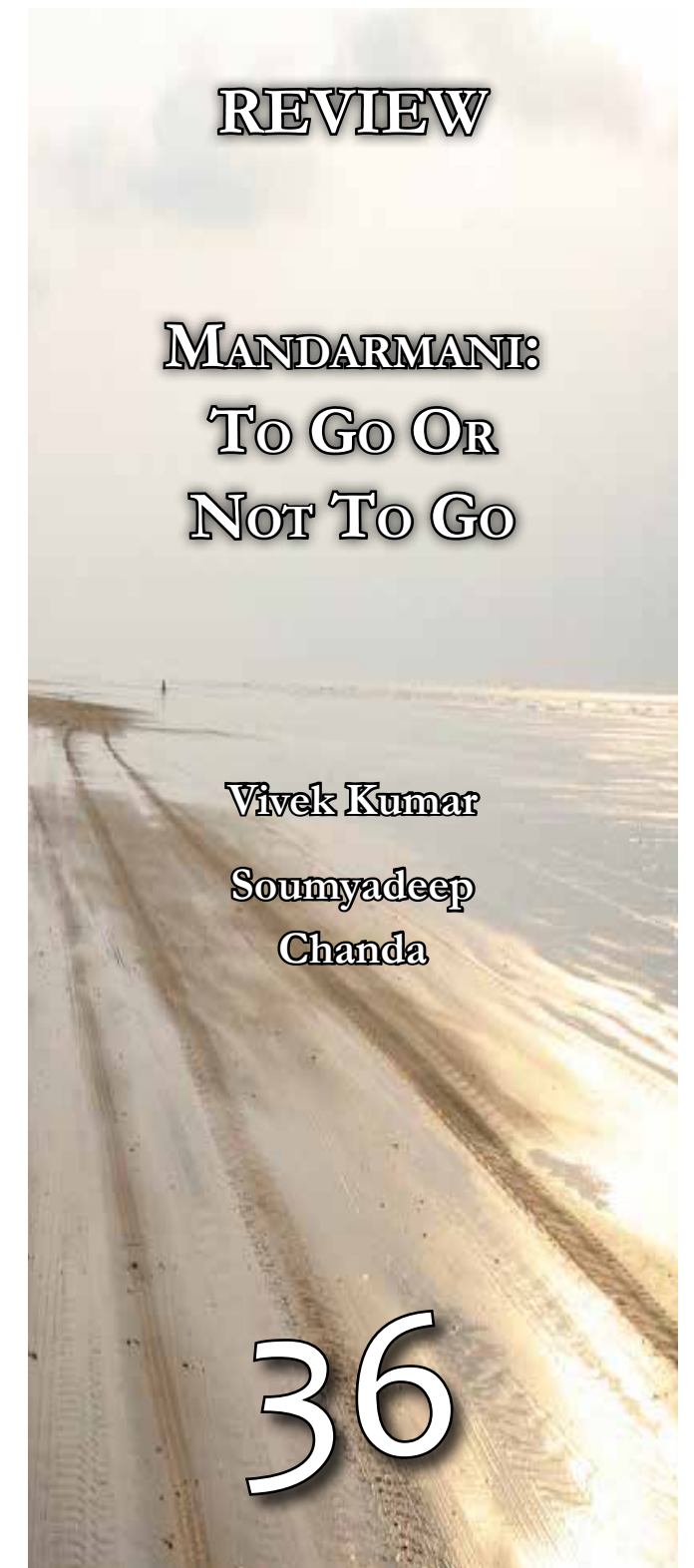


ESSAY

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Photo courtesy: metro.co.uk



Photo courtesy: wikimediacommons

Janmashtami 3rd September 2018

Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna is celebrated with great devotion and enthusiasm in India. According to the Hindu calendar this religious festival is celebrated on the Ashtami of Krishna Paksh or the 8th day of the dark fortnight in the month of bhadon. People keep fast, sing devotional songs of their love for Krishna, and keep a vigil into the night. After Krishna's midnight hour birth, statues of baby Krishna are washed and clothed, then placed in a cradle. The devotees then break their fast, by sharing food and sweets.



Photo courtesy: RED school, Jhajar

Teachers' Day 5th September 2018

This was the day when our first Vice President and second President of Independent India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born. This day is celebrated to honor the teachers for their contribution in our lives.



Photo courtesy: Harandane Dicko

International Literacy Day 8th September 2018

International Literacy Day, celebrated annually on the 8th of September, is an opportunity for Governments, civil societies and stakeholders to highlight improvements in the world literacy rates, and reflect on the remaining literacy challenges of the world. The theme of this year's International Literacy Day is 'Literacy in a Digital World'.



Photo courtesy: palace on wheels

Teej 12th September 2018

Teej celebrates the union of Lord Shiva with Goddess Parvati and welcomes the monsoon season. It is celebrated primarily by the womenfolk of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Nepal with songs, dancing and prayer rituals. Apart from dressing up in fine clothes and jewelry, women also go on a shopping spree!



Photo courtesy: holidays to nepal



Photo courtesy: wikimediacommons



Photo courtesy: What's Up Life



Photo courtesy: Free Press Journal



Photo courtesy: hari bhoomi

Ganesh Chaturthi 13th September 2018

This celebration honors Lord Ganesha on the occasion of His birth. It is celebrated all over India, especially in Maharashtra where grand processions and merriments happen.



Photo courtesy: indiablooms.com

Vishwakarma Puja 17th September 2018

Vishwakarma Puja is celebrated all over India to praise the divine architect. He is considered as Swayambhu and the creator of the world. One can find the mentions of Lord Vishwakarma in the Rig Veda. He is believed to have constructed the holy city of Dwarka, the capital of Lord Krishna's kingdom. He is also the creator of many fabulous weapons for the "Devtas". He is believed to have constructed the holy city of Dwarka, the capital of Lord Krishna's kingdom. He is also the creator of many fabulous weapons for the "Devtas". Holy rituals are followed and charity is done to mark the significance of this day. With the help of the Vishwakarma Puja, machinery and equipment are kept in excellent conditions and industries flourish with his blessings. Normally, on this day, after Vishwakarma Puja, machines are allowed to rest and the holiday is declared for workers. A statue or picture of Lord Vishwakarma is placed in the factory on this day. All workers gather at one place and offer prayers to Lord Vishwakarma. Gifts are distributed to workers.



Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons



Photo courtesy: gettyimages



Photo courtesy: maxresdefault

Muharram 21st September 2018

This is usually a sorrowful occasion for Shia Muslims. The word "Muharram" means "forbidden". Shia Muslims observe and respect Muharram as the month that martyred Hussein Ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad and son of Ali, in the Battle of Karbala. They mourn for Hussein Ibn Ali and refrain from all joyous events. They observe this day by walking barefoot on the roads and weep loudly as an act of mourning. Many of them beat their chest with their hands as an act of matam. However, the Sunni Muslims only keep a fast in the month of Muharram and celebrate it as a low key affair.

International Day of Peace 21st September 2018

Each year the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on 21st September. The General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and people. The theme for this year is "The Right to Peace - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70."

World Tourism Day 27th September 2018

Over the past six decades International tourist arrivals worldwide have grown from 25 million in 1950 to nearly 1.2 billion in 2015. The sector represents an estimated 10% of the world's GDP and 1 in 10 jobs globally. It is estimated that tourism will continue to grow at an average of 3.3% annually until 2030. The day celebrates this flourishing economic sector.

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MEHRANGARH FORT

THE CITADEL OF THE **SUN** GOD

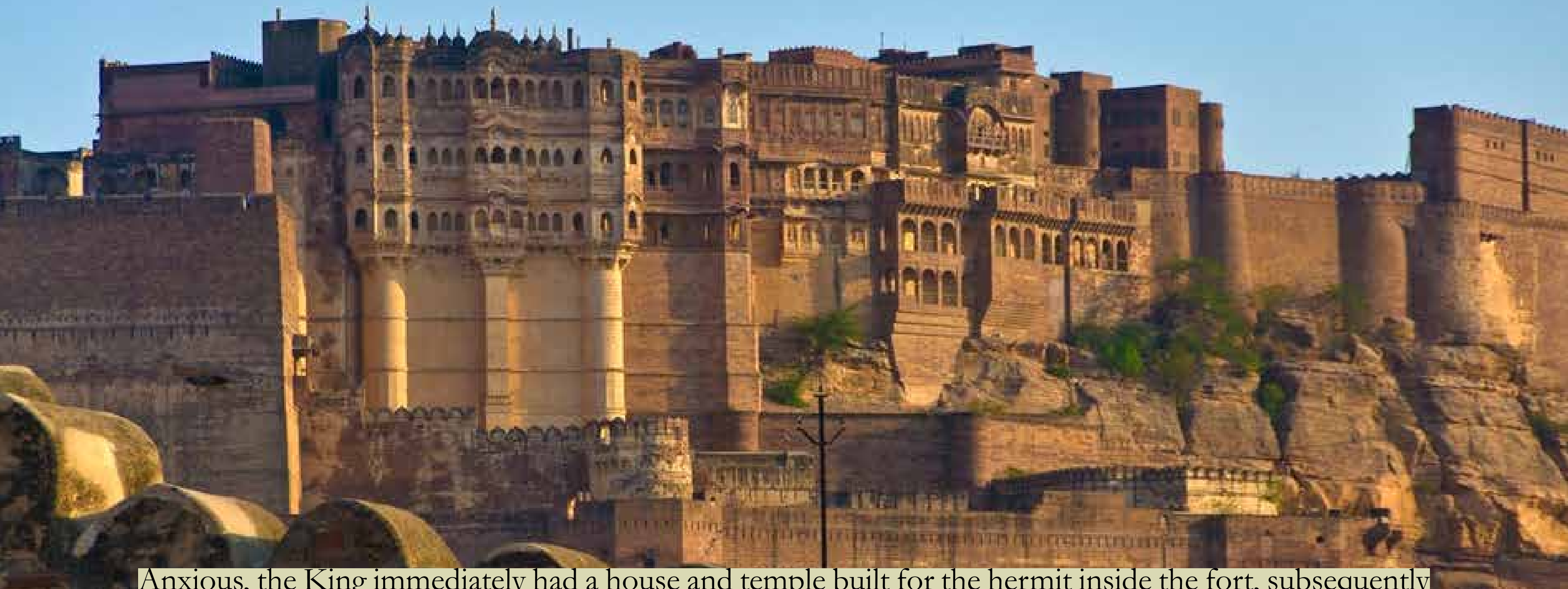
Story & Photographs: **Upasana** Bhattacharya

It was 1458. Rao Jodha, one of the twenty-four sons of Rao Ranmal, had just ascended the throne of Marwar. But in spite of this outwardly joyous occasion, the man was doused in agony. His father had been assassinated by the Rana Kumbha of Chittor, and by some luck he had managed a narrow escape. Now, he simply had to move his capital to a safer location before it was too late, for the thousand years old Mandore fort had begun falling apart, constantly vulnerable to attacks by the Sultans of Malwa and Gujarat, a city no longer safe to dwell.

An extensive search for a new location began.

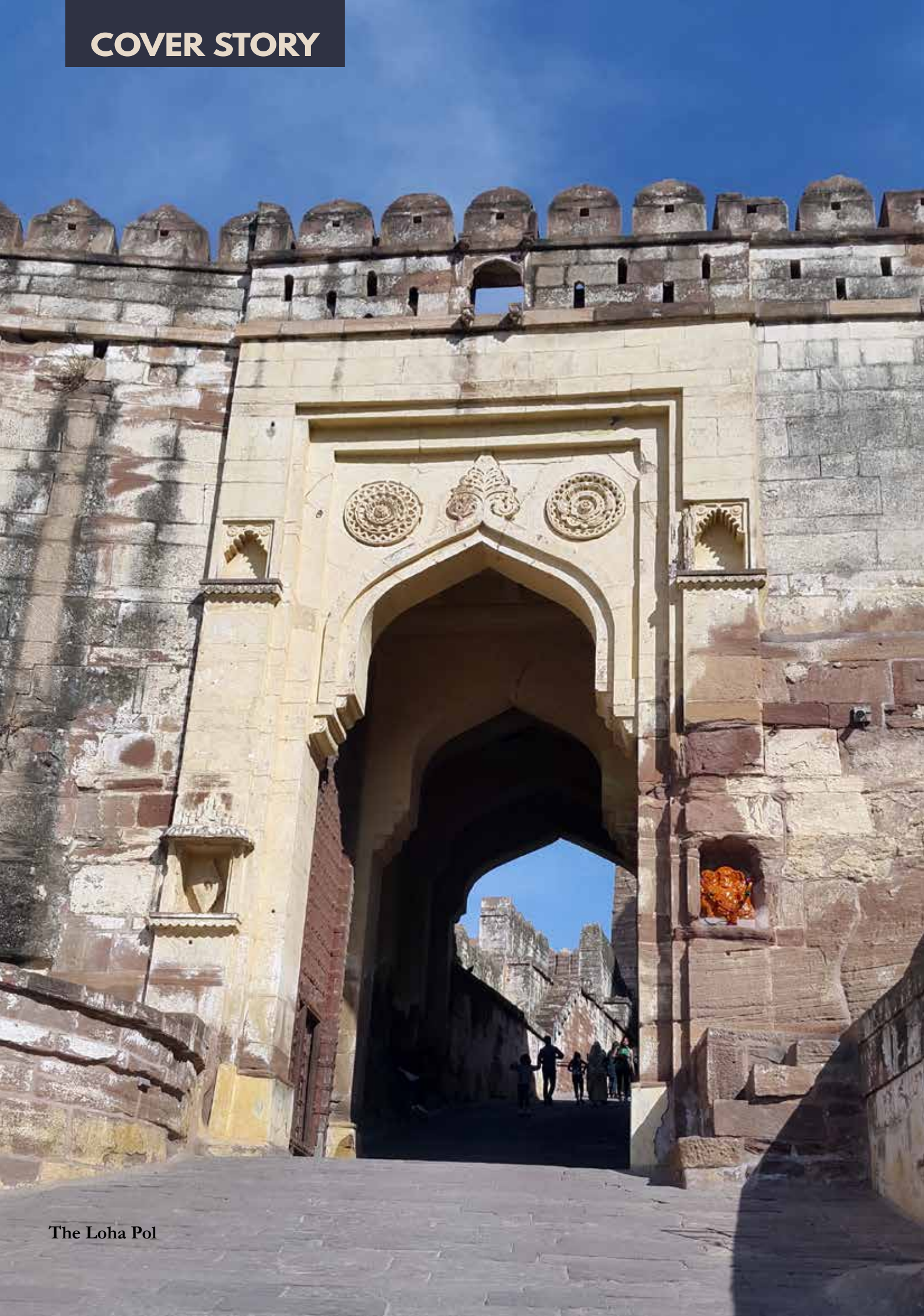
The answer came in form of one rocky, isolated hilltop nine kilometers to the South of Mandore, the Bhakurcheeria, meaning, the mountain of birds. According to legends, the sole human occupant of the hills, a hermit named Cheeria Nathji, the lord of birds, had to be displaced though, in order for constructions to begin. However, each time he was asked to move, there came an uncompromising refusal. So much so that at one point Rao Jodha was pushed to take a very severe measure. Help was sought from the immensely powerful female warrior sage from Deshnok, Mata Karni. Cheeria Nathji had no choice but to quit under her prevailing influence. Nonetheless, he did not vacate without a daunting, bitter curse.

“Jodha! May your citadel ever suffer the scarcity of water!”



Anxious, the King immediately had a house and temple built for the hermit inside the fort, subsequently mollifying him by doing so. Furthermore, to ensure that the new site proved auspicious, a man named Raja Ram Meghwal was buried alive as an offering to appease the gods, who came forward for this service voluntarily; a man who rightfully finds mention in many folktales and certain stone carvings within the fort. In return, his family and descendants have been looked after by the Rathods to this day. Thus, it is Rao Jodha, the fifteenth chief of the Rathod clan, who established this new city, a city named Jodhpur.

Today, the Mehrangarh Fort stands 117 feet tall, 68 feet wide and at an altitude of nearly 400 meters above the city skyline. The construction of this fort started in the fifteenth century, and went on till the seventeenth, ultimately completed by Maharaja Jaswant Singh, a much later descendant of Rao Jodha. The fort is named after the chief deity of the Rathods, for it is believed that the Rathods are direct descendants of the Sun God. '*Mihir*', also pronounced locally as '*Mehr*', means the Sun; and '*Garh*' means Fort. Therefore,



The Loha Pol



Portrait of King Rao Jodha
Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

as per the pronunciation in local language, *Mehr-Garb* came to be known as Mehrangarh. Initially, Jodhpur was contained within the four walls of the fort. However, the city outgrew in size within fifty years of its construction because people migrated in from many different regions.

Seven gates stand guard to this stately fort: Jai Pol, Loha Pol, Fateh Pol, Amrita Pol, Dodh Kangra Pol, Gopal Pol and Bheru Pol. Each of these gates has a saga of its own. Jai Pol is the main entrance to the fort, built in 1808 by Jaipur's Maharaja Man Singh following his defeat in invasion. Just inside Loha Pol are two sets of small hand prints, the sati marks of royal widows who threw themselves on their Maharajas' funeral



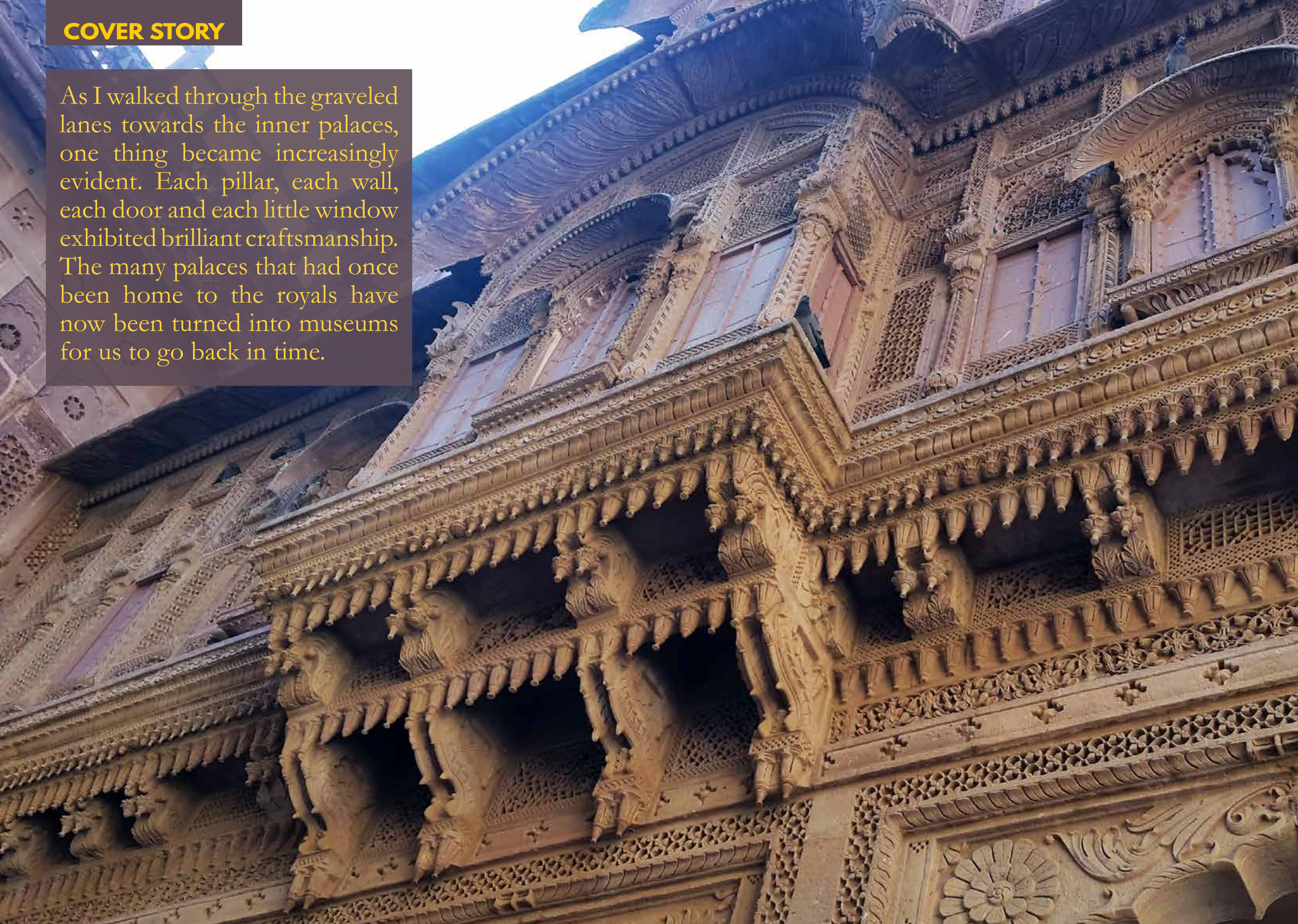
pyres. The Fatteh Pol, which also means victory gate, was raised by Maharaja Ajit Singh to celebrate the defeat of the Mughals. Imprints of the impact of cannonballs fired by the attacking armies of Jaipur can still be seen on the Dodh Kangra Pol. Situated to the left of the main entrance of fort is the *chhatri* of Kirat Singh Sodha, the honorable soldier who fell dead on that spot defending Mehrangarh against the armies of Amber.

As we stepped out of our auto-rickshaw into the main fort entrance, we were welcomed by the absolutely divine jugalbandi of the *chikara* and *khartal*. There is something strangely magical about Rajasthani folk music. It has an effect on me that I cannot quite understand or explain. Unmoved by all this, my mother walked ahead while I stood there for long, appreciating the little boy who played the *ravanabatha* like a pro!

Chhatri of Kirat Singh Sodha, the honorable soldier who fell dead on that spot defending Mehrangarh against the armies of Amber.

COVER STORY

As I walked through the graveled lanes towards the inner palaces, one thing became increasingly evident. Each pillar, each wall, each door and each little window exhibited brilliant craftsmanship. The many palaces that had once been home to the royals have now been turned into museums for us to go back in time.





The Royal Throne of Jodhpur, also known as the *Sringar Chowki*, is preserved in the Moti Mahal. Exceptionally intricate filigree work in gold adorned the ceilings of Phool Mahal. The Ajit Villas displayed a varied range of musical instruments and royal attires from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Tamzam, 19th Century

Most elaborate palnquin influenced by European carriage design



Hathi Howdah, 17th century

Presented to Maharaja Jaswant Singh by Emperor Shah Jahan



The Phool Mahal

I was particularly intrigued by the gorgeous Phool Mahal, literally meaning the chamber of flowers; a palace that is still used as a shooting location for many Bollywood films.

Certain erstwhile objects were so incredible to see up close. The Howdahs for example, a kind of two-compartment wooden seats covered in gold or silver embossed sheets, fastened onto the elephant's back, were something I had seen only in period films. The section with the more abundant leg space was evidently made for the Kings or Royalty; while the rear smaller one stayed reserved for a reliable bodyguard disguised as a fly-whisk attendant. Palanquins or palkis were another very popular means of travel for the ladies of

the nobility. I could only marvel at the exquisite designs!

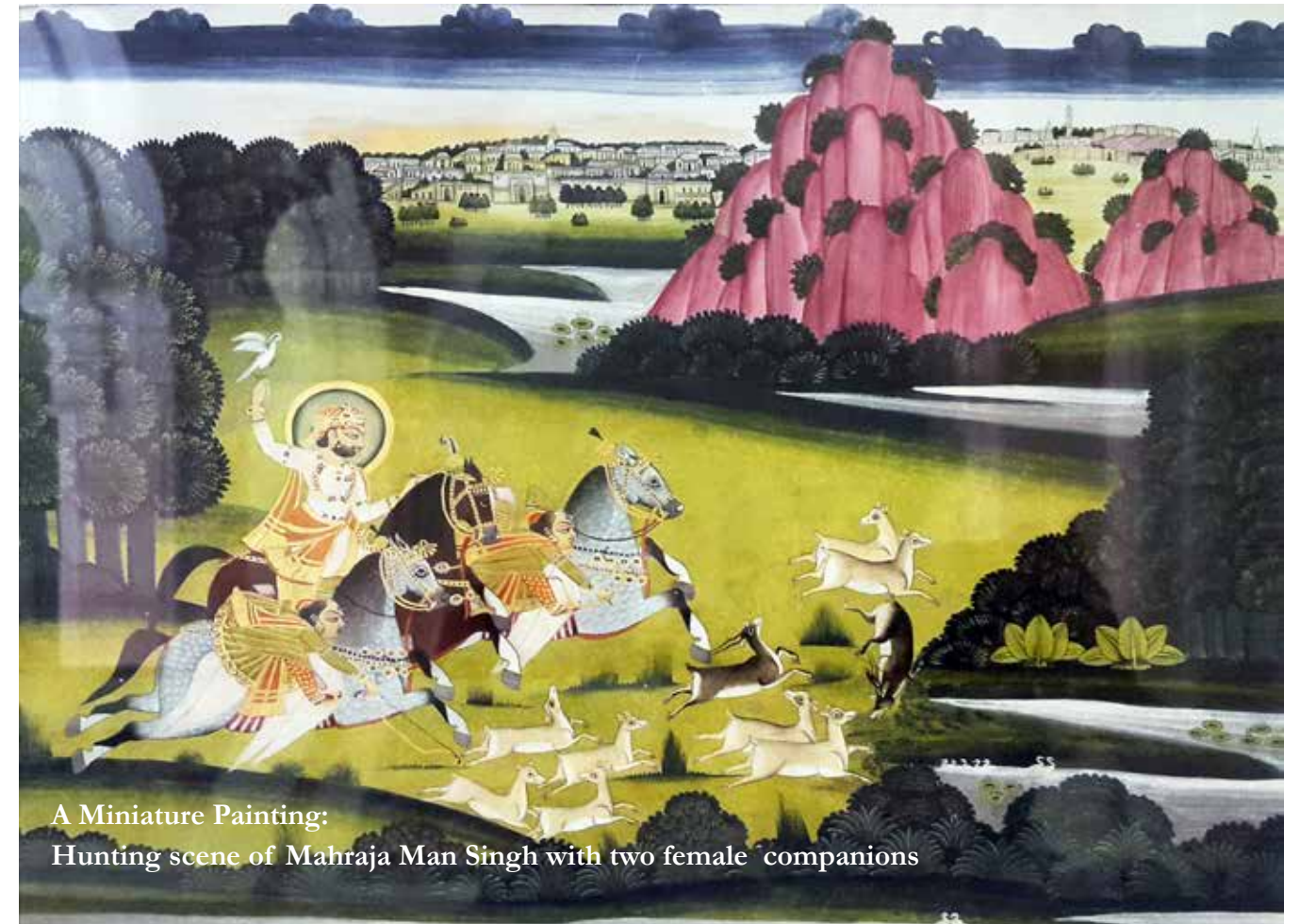
The Daulat Khana displayed a collection of fine and applied arts of the Mughal period of Indian history, some stunning miniatures of the Rathod dynasty. The exhibits here dated to the period during which the Rathod rulers of Jodhpur maintained close links with the Mughal emperors. Also, rare collections of armor from every period in Jodhpur were on display, a floor definitely not to be missed. There were sword hilts in jade, silver, rhino horn, ivory; shields studded with rubies, emeralds and pearls; guns with gold and silver work on the barrels, and what not! Also on display were the personal swords of many emperors, like the outstanding historical Khaanda of Rao Jodha weighing over 3 kilograms, the sword of Emperor Akbar, and the sword of Timur.



Armour of a Marwar soldier



^ The various arms used by the dynasty



A Miniature Painting: Hunting scene of Mahraja Man Singh with two female companions



There was a Turban Gallery which preserved the many different types of turbans once widespread in Rajasthan. Every community, region and festival had their own head-gear!

In the end, I went to the the Chamunda Devi Temple.

It houses Rao Jodha's favorite goddess, Chamunda Mataji. Photography wasn't allowed there so I could not click pictures, but I wish I could, because the chief deity was absolutely magnificent and the temple was extremely clean.

In popular culture, the Mehrangarh Fort has been one of the prime filming locations for Disney's 1994 live-action film *The Jungle Book*, as well as the 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*. The fort is built on a Malani Igneous Suite Contact which represents the last phase of igneous activity of the Precambrian age in Indian subcontinent. For this unique feature, the fort has been declared a National Geological Monument by the Geological Survey of India.

Indeed, when Rudyard Kipling had illustrated Jodhpur's Mehrangarh fort as "A Palace that might have been built by Titans and colored by the morning sun", he was not exaggerating.

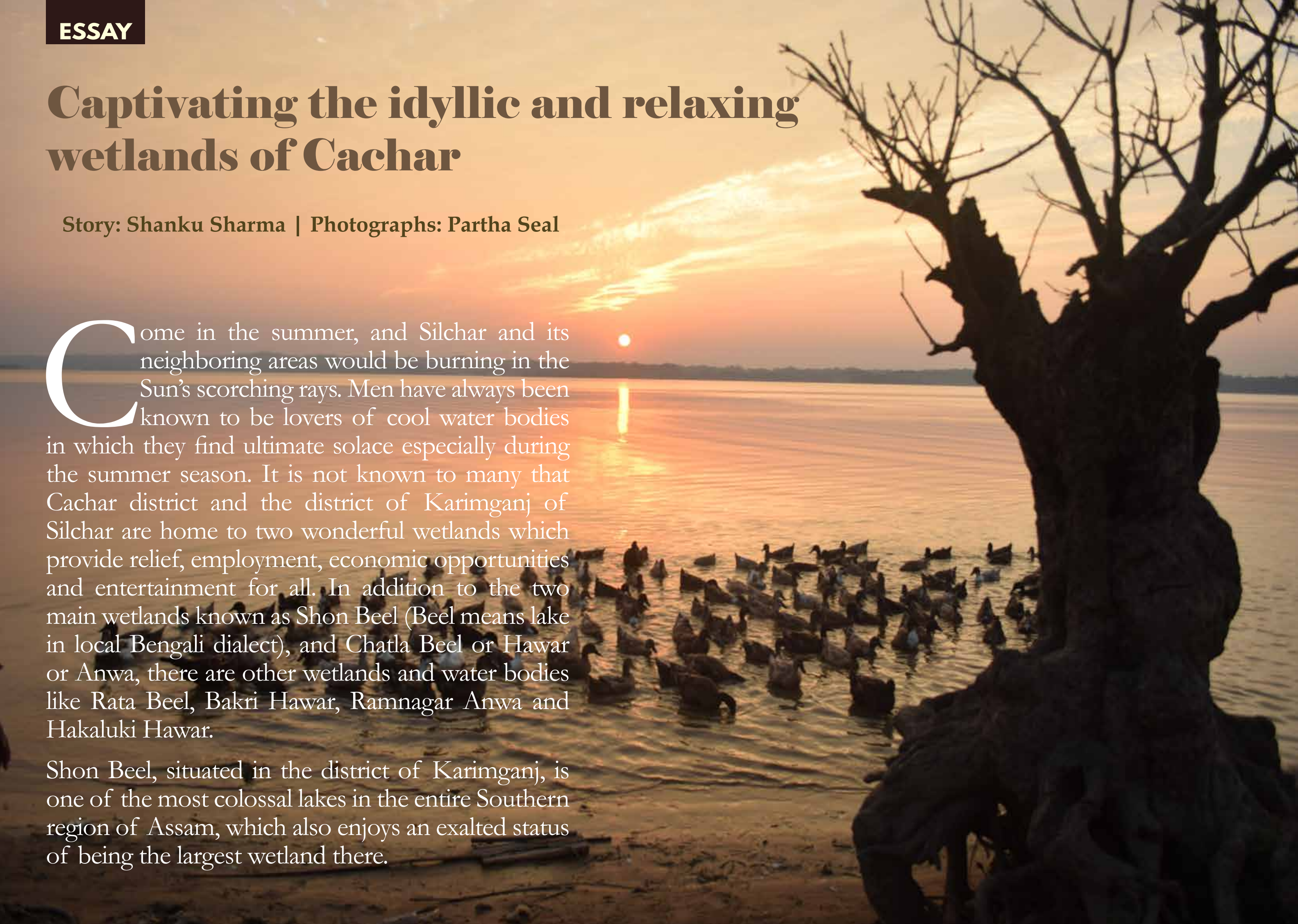


Captivating the idyllic and relaxing wetlands of Cachar

Story: Shanku Sharma | Photographs: Partha Seal

Come in the summer, and Silchar and its neighboring areas would be burning in the Sun's scorching rays. Men have always been known to be lovers of cool water bodies in which they find ultimate solace especially during the summer season. It is not known to many that Cachar district and the district of Karimganj of Silchar are home to two wonderful wetlands which provide relief, employment, economic opportunities and entertainment for all. In addition to the two main wetlands known as Shon Beel (Beel means lake in local Bengali dialect), and Chatla Beel or Hawar or Anwa, there are other wetlands and water bodies like Rata Beel, Bakri Hawar, Ramnagar Anwa and Hakaluki Hawar.

Shon Beel, situated in the district of Karimganj, is one of the most colossal lakes in the entire Southern region of Assam, which also enjoys an exalted status of being the largest wetland there.





Shon Beel is special in more than one way. During winters, it is used as a farmland for cultivation of rice (Buro Rice). It remains a lake through the rainy and summer seasons. The Beel is also popular for the existence of both lotic and lentic ecosystems. The Singla River flows through the middle of the Beel, enriching its fauna.

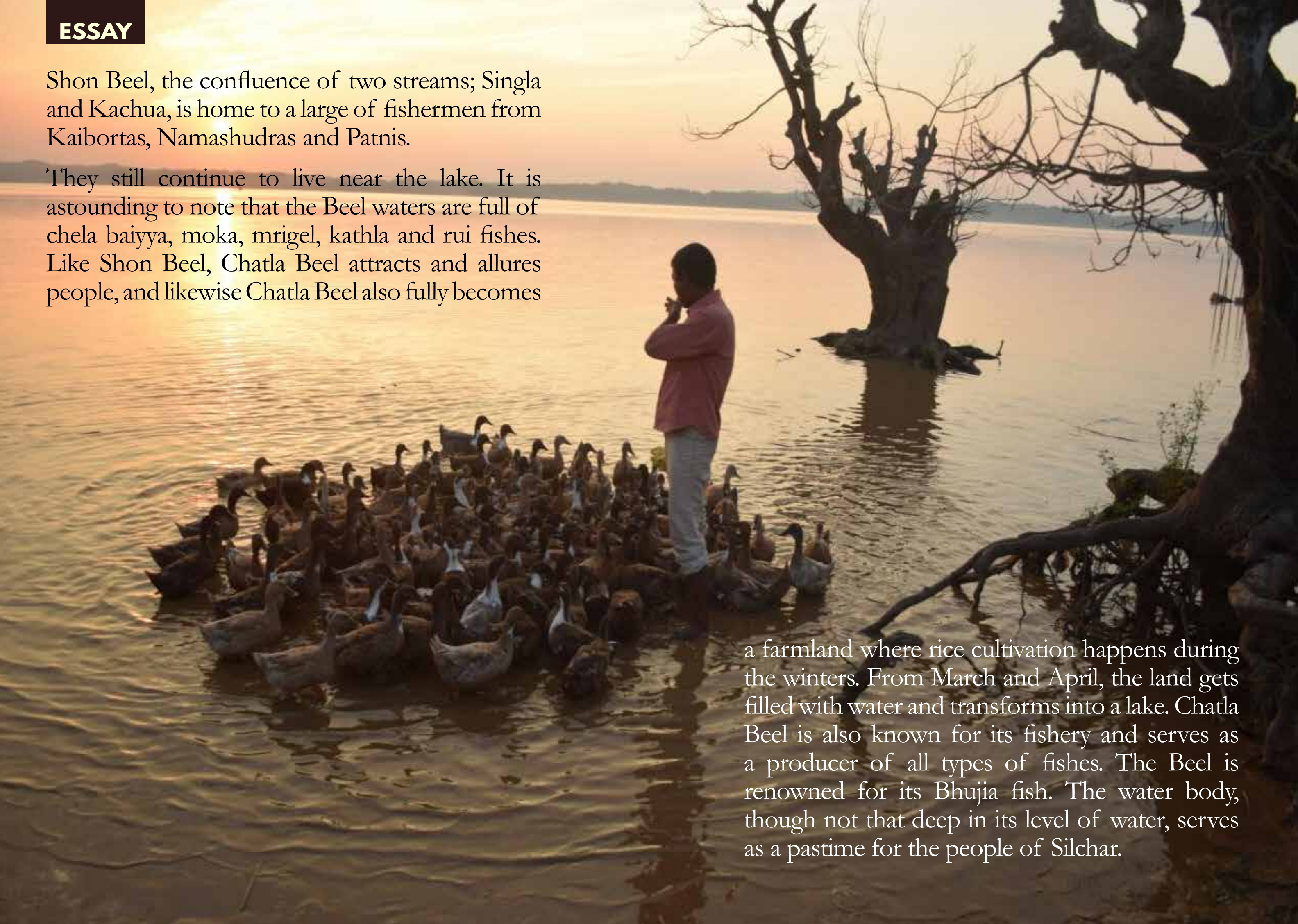
During the summer season, a large number of people visit the Shon Beel for enjoying its charming, serene scenic beauty. Here professions change with conditions. Fishermen plunge into fishing during the summer season, and cultivate rice during winter season. Very few people know that it is the second largest wetland in Asia. In fact, it is the second water body in the state of Assam which has been accorded the status of being a wetland of National importance.



ESSAY

Shon Beel, the confluence of two streams; Singla and Kachua, is home to a large of fishermen from Kaibortas, Namashudras and Patnis.

They still continue to live near the lake. It is astounding to note that the Beel waters are full of chela baiyya, moka, mrigel, kathla and rui fishes. Like Shon Beel, Chatla Beel attracts and allures people, and likewise Chatla Beel also fully becomes

A photograph of a person standing in a shallow lake at sunset. The person is wearing a pink shirt and light-colored pants, and is looking towards the water. A large flock of ducks is gathered around the person. In the background, there is a large, leafless tree with its branches extending over the water. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow, and the water reflects the light. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

a farmland where rice cultivation happens during the winters. From March and April, the land gets filled with water and transforms into a lake. Chatla Beel is also known for its fishery and serves as a producer of all types of fishes. The Beel is renowned for its Bhujia fish. The water body, though not that deep in its level of water, serves as a pastime for the people of Silchar.

MANDARMANI

To go or not to go...



VIVEK KUMAR

Mandarmani is a nice beach located approximately 170 kms from Kolkata. I feel that it is the best out of the other two beaches: Digha and Shankerpur nearby. There are a large number of hotels for every section of the society, ranging from Rs. 800 to Rs. 3000 per day. It is advised to book the hotel in advance if one is travelling on the weekend. Tourists are advised to stay away from the waves during high tides. Advice and instructions of the local people should not be ignored.

Transportation is easily available from Kolkata to Mandarmani by Bus or Rail.

Mandarmani is a pristine sea beach of silt colored sand. This beach is a very enticing travel destination and is additionally a shooting spot. Many Bengali films have been shot here.

Sunrises here are the best!

**SOUMYADEEP CHANDA**

I am sorry to say but I did not find Mandarmani to be a secure tourist place at all. Here is what I experienced. Me and my family went for a weekend holiday to Mandarmani. There were lots of unmarried young boys there. They were completely drunk and were behaving badly. I tried to talk about this with the hotel staff where I was staying, name of which I would not like to mention here. However, nothing was done about it. The drunken boys also tried to scare our kids. I went to make another complaint in the hotel reception but this time the hotel staffs did not even entertain us.

As far as accessibility goes, I found Mandarmani to be very far away from the State Highway, and the road was like a roller coaster ride. There was only one road that led to the beach, and it was very narrow and in bad condition. Big vehicles like trucks were always

dangerously running on the road and I found the entire drive tiring.

In terms of local sightseeing, there is nothing much to experience. It is just the beach that's all. The beach was quite wide but kept too much dirty. The sea also seemed rather muddy.

There is Rose Valley Resort on the beach was too expensive. The other smaller hotels were also overpriced. Food is very expensive there.

One thing that I found especially alarming is that there were no coast guards on the beach. If there were any, I could not find them because there were no coast guards on the watch tower.

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