

Mandu, known as 'the city of joy', is situated in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Its origins are uncertain. However, available literary and archaeological references date it to the end of the first millennium, when the Palmaru rulers in the Malwa region took advantage of its natural defences and built a fortified place under the name of Mandovgarh, the capital of some of their short-lived kingdoms. At the end of the 14th century, the city fell to Dilawar Khan Ghorī, the governor of Malwa, who was at the service of the Sultanate of Delhi. He took advantage of the circumstances of the siege of Delhi by the Mughal troops of the fearsome Tamerlain, to become independent, nominating himself as the first Sultan of Malwa, and establishing his capital in Mandu. The city was then renamed Shadiabad or the 'City of Joy'.

Today, a traveller can see even in the middle of nowhere curious baobabs beside the walls and domes of any of the countless cenotaphs, graves, huge step-wells or small mosques, sometimes almost overrun by weeds. It is almost baobab country...

A walk through the different monumental areas from the north on the road to Indore through one of the strong gates (Alangir or Bangui) takes one to the 'Royal Enclave' where lie some of the most impressive palaces of Mandu.

The Jahaz Mahal or the 'Ship Palace', long as a ship and situated in the middle of two artificial lakes, welcomes the beholder, and in the full-moon night and romances him with the oriental flavours of the tales of the thousand and one nights. The fourth Mughal emperor, Jahangir, a great admirer of the site, was reported to have often talked about its beauty.

Nur Jahan, the most famous of his wives, also admired the beauty of the place. Not far from there, is the Hindola Mahal, a palace with a strange architectural attraction, built in an odd style that from the outside reminds one of a Ptolemaic temple, with successive arches looking like small viaducts in the interior. It was here that the king gave an audi-



MANDU

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ence to his subjects. A few metres further, the Nilakanta temple melds with a curious fountain designed like a snake.

Not far from there are two big baolis or step-wells, Ujala Baoli and Champa Baoli. These huge step-wells with several rooms and halls were used by the royalty to rest in the hot days of summer. From there can be seen the remains of old palaces like Gada Shah Shop and the Royal Palace next to the northern lake.

The mosque of Dilawar Khan is another monument whose ruins are scattered in the area. In the middle of the village stands out the huge Jama Masjid, inspired by the great mosque of Damascus.

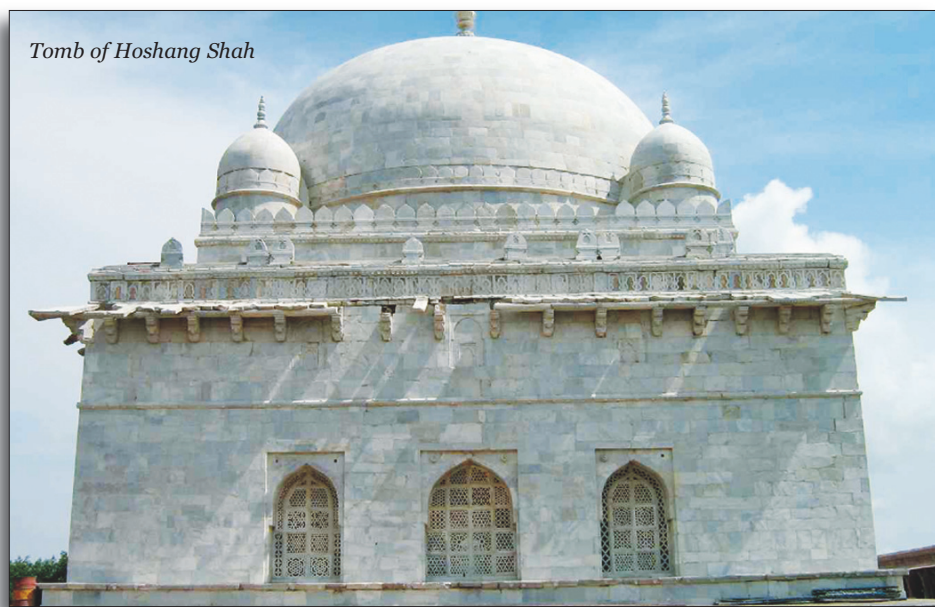
The Masjid is regarded as the finest

example of Afghan art in India. Its considerable size together with the austere elegance of its interiors holds out an awesome architectural effect. Inside are 17 polychrome mihrabs, the biggest of them in the middle preceded by a graceful pulpit with decorated steps. In front of the façade is the tomb of Mahmood Shah Khilji and the Palace of the Golden Coins or Ashrafi Mahal, originally an important *madrasa*.

Today, only one of the eight towers remains of the celebrated Victory Tower, commemorating Khilji's famous victory against the king of Mewar. The tower, still bearing polychrome marble etchings, was perhaps the most important monument in Mandu.

Behind the Jama Masjid is another jewel of Mandu — the Tomb of Hoshang Shah. This mausoleum is located in the middle of a big courtyard with four towers in the corners of a cloister with arcaded galleries. The 'tunnel vision' effect created by row after row of carved columns seeking to converge on an infinite point is reminiscent of the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

The main building houses the tomb of Hoshang Shah as well as five other smaller graves of his family. The building is made of white marble and was one of the sources of inspirations for the Taj Mahal. It is said that Shah Jahan sent four of his architects to Mandu to study the mausoleum's architecture.



Tomb of Hoshang Shah

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