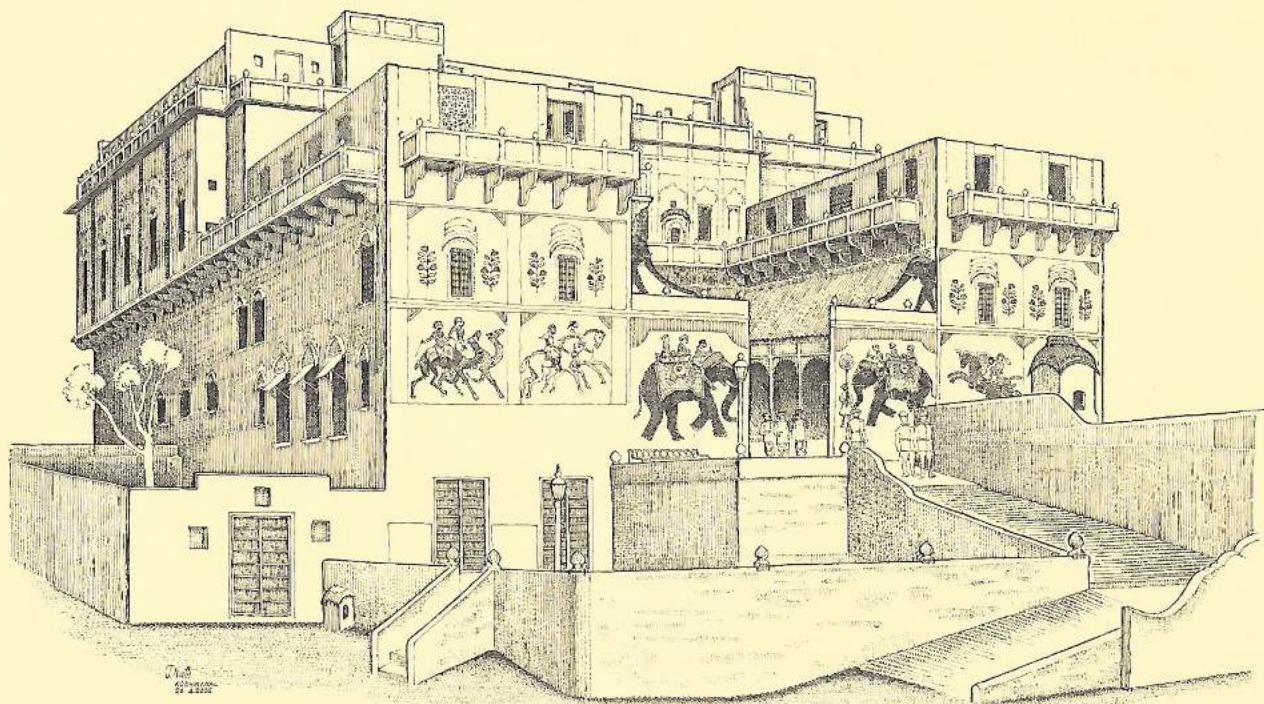


Seth Arjun Das Goenka Haveli Museum

DUNDLOD, RAJASTHAN

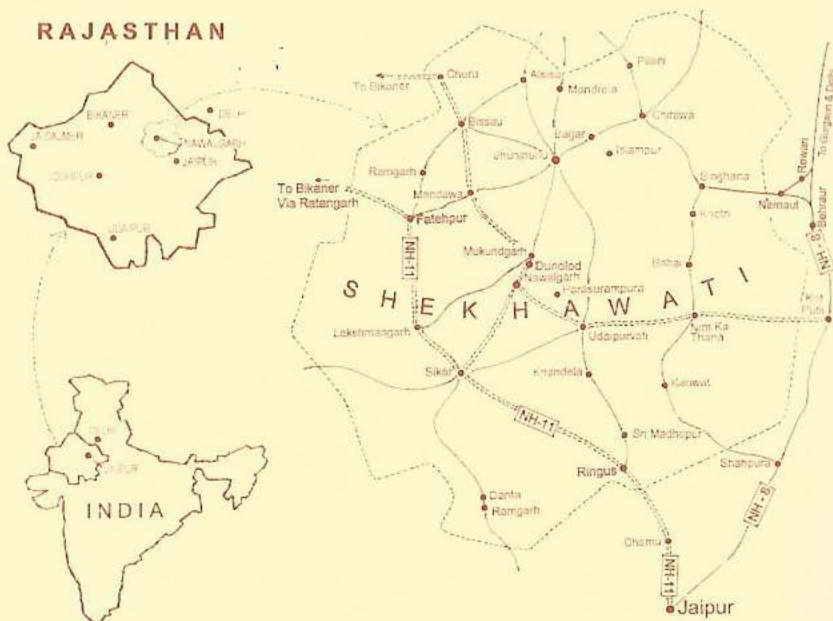




WHERE THERE WAS SAND AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD see and the only vegetation that thrived was the wild acacias; where the summers were scorchingly hot and the winters severely cold; where the traders transported their precious merchandise by camel caravans to the sea ports of Gujarat; there in the kingdom of the Raja of Dundlod, in the region called Shekhawati, in Rajasthan, Seth Arjun Das Goenka built his house (haveli) in the year 1875 AD.

Rajasthan

The name Rajasthan brings to mind the images of massive forts on the top of the Aravalli hills such as at Amber, Jodhpur, Kumbhalgarh, Chittorgarh; the magnificent palaces like those at Jaipur, Udaipur, Bundi, Kota, Bikaner; and the gorgeous temples such as Jag Mandir at Kotta, Jagadeesh Mandir at Udaipur, the temples at Ranakpur and Mount Abu. One is also reminded of the tall, sturdy men with big





Arjun Das Goenka
1830-1899



Rai Bahadur
Shubhkaran Das Goenka
1878-1939



Anand Ram Goenka
1882-1946

colourful turbans, twirling their moustaches and beautiful women in enchanting costumes. Also, very familiar is their love of music and dance that go with joyous celebrations of various fairs and festivals. We are talking about the state situated in the South West of Delhi the Capital of India. The Thar desert runs through most of the western Rajasthan.

Raj-sthan means the "Land of Kings" which it truly was until about 60 years ago when India became independent of the British rule and the Rajas joined the Indian Union. Some of these kingdoms have been mentioned in the 5000 year old legends of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The Rajas belonged to the martial Kshatriya race of brave fighters who guarded their territories with great pride. Their forts were symbols of power and defence, the palaces for grandeur and charisma, and the temples to project themselves as pillars and protectors of "dharma" in the eyes of their subjects. Naturally, rivalries, squabbles and skirmishes were

common. This weakness was exploited by the early Muslim invaders to their advantage about a thousand years ago, then by the Mughals about 500 year ago and finally by the British in the 17th and 18th centuries.

One section of the population that received special encouragement under the rule of the Rajas was the merchant community. Smart and clever merchants generated wealth, in return the taxes contributed to the coffers of the kingdom. In this regard, the northern part of Rajasthan, popularly known as Shekhawati deserves special mention. In time to come in independent India the stewards of Industry and business would be mainly the merchant class from Shekhawati, the Birlas, Singhanias, Poddars, Seksarias, Goenkas, Goyals, Dalmias...leading names of corporate houses.



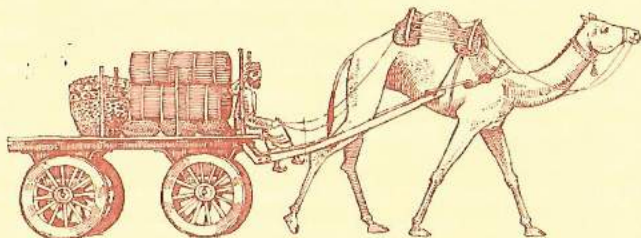
Shekhawati

Shekhawati, the garden of Shekha, derives its name from Rao Shekha, a chieftain from the Kachhwaha clan of Kshatriyas in Rajasthan. He had conquered territories east of the Aravalli range of hills in the middle of the 15th century AD. In the next 200 years



his descendents had annexed areas west of the Aravallis and established their supremacy on the towns that lay on the caravan trade route. The caravan operators preferred this route as it was economical. This region had traders and merchants generally from Marwar: hence the name Marwari merchants. They knew their arithmetic very well. Being soft spoken and congenial by nature they were persuasive negotiators. They were also diligent and hardworking.

Over the years their skills in the practices and principles of trade sharpened and life for them was successful and prosperous. By the 1800s another opportunity came their way : under the British Raj the sea ports of Kolkata and Mumbai were developed to handle large volume of cargo offering business opportunities to enterprising Indians. Men from the Marwari community of Shekhawati took this opportunity quick and fast. In a short period of time these businessmen earned large amounts of money as brokerage in trading of goods, imports and exports While they lived a very frugal life in the city they would bring their savings back home to Shekhawati and build large mansions (havelis) for their families.



The Haveli Culture

It was a rapid phenomenon around 1850-1900. These new-rich merchants wanted to show off their affluence. Building a fort or palace would have been considered an affront of prestige with the local Rajas. So they built huge houses with several rooms and lavished the construction with maximum of decoration for attraction and prestige. Large inner courtyards were provided for the

privacy of the women folk. They could carry out their daily chores more freely out of the sight of outsiders. Tall, metal fortified gates and a majestic frontage displaying large colourful murals became the norm. Today, over 20 towns in Shekhawati have these beautiful houses. Books have been written on them and tourists throng to see this "open art gallery" of Shekhawati.

The Goenkas

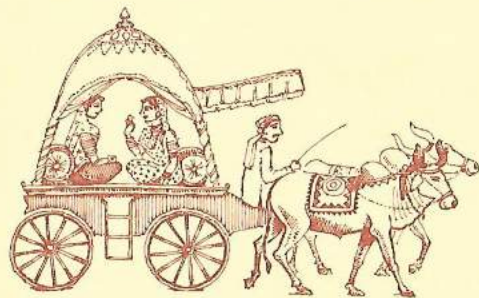
Amongst those who went to Kolkata were the "Goenkas" who trace the origin of their name to an ancestor, Goyendas, by name. They were already well established in several Shekhawati towns as successful businessmen. In the 8th generation was



Hunat Ram Goenka, well settled in Nawalgarh and who commanded great influence, socially and politically. The jealous local Raja could not tolerate this. So, Hunat Ram moved 8 kms away to neighbouring Dundlod. The Raja of Dundlod welcomed him with open arms knowing his entrepreneurial success and social graces. In time to come the Goenkas built magnificent havelis, dharamshalas (rest houses), a school, a hospital, wells, a temple and chhatris (cenotaphs). Dundlod

became known as the "town of the Goenkas". The second of the four sons of Seth Hunat Ram was Ram Dutt (1803-1864) who at a young age ventured out of Dundlod gaining his first foothold in life in the river port town of Mirzapur, UP. He was employed by the well known business family, the Singhania's. He was sent to Kolkata to negotiate and establish their textile interests with British companies. The move was a great success and Ram Dutt gained useful experience.

He branched out amicably on his own. His contacts with British textile businessmen proved helpful and earnings increased rapidly. His elder son, Ramkishan Das (1825-1853) looked after the family at Dundlod while the younger son, Arjun



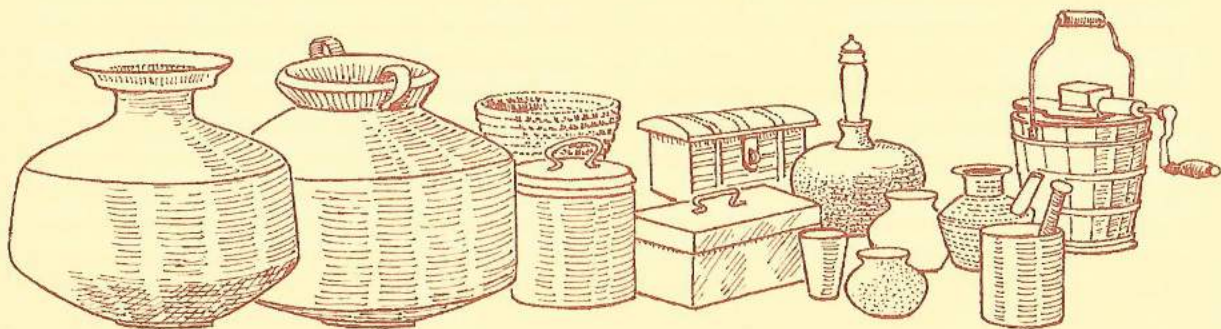
Das (b-1830) joined him in Kolkata. The firm of Ram Dutt Ramkishan Das was a financial success. Later, they were joined by Ram Chander (b.1844) son of Ramkishan Das. Their business acumen blossomed fully, fame and prosperity steered the name of the Goenka family to one of prominence in the community. Arjun Das was 50 then, had acquired wealth and the future was still bright. There arose the thought of building in his home town Dundlod a unique and gorgeous haveli to suit his status.



It should be tall enough to command a panoramic view of the countryside around from its roof top, and also beautiful to look at.

the word 'Seth' denotes.

His outlook on life was large and generous. He could have built a small house for himself and his family. After all there was just his wife and two children, a couple of servants perhaps. But when the time came to decide on the size of the haveli he included



A variety of period containers in bronze, copper, wood, straw for storage, safety, presentation and daily use in the kitchen.

Large and Gracious Outlook

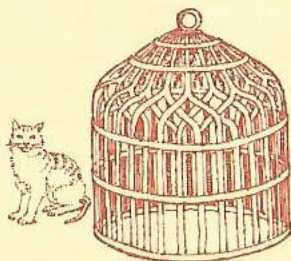
Arjun Das always thought big and bold. Once the decision was made he never looked back. Life had bestowed on him wealth and grace that is what

the extended families of his brothers and cousins to live together so that love and affection may pervade and the family bond grow stronger.

....Continued on page 15



Lady grinding wheat

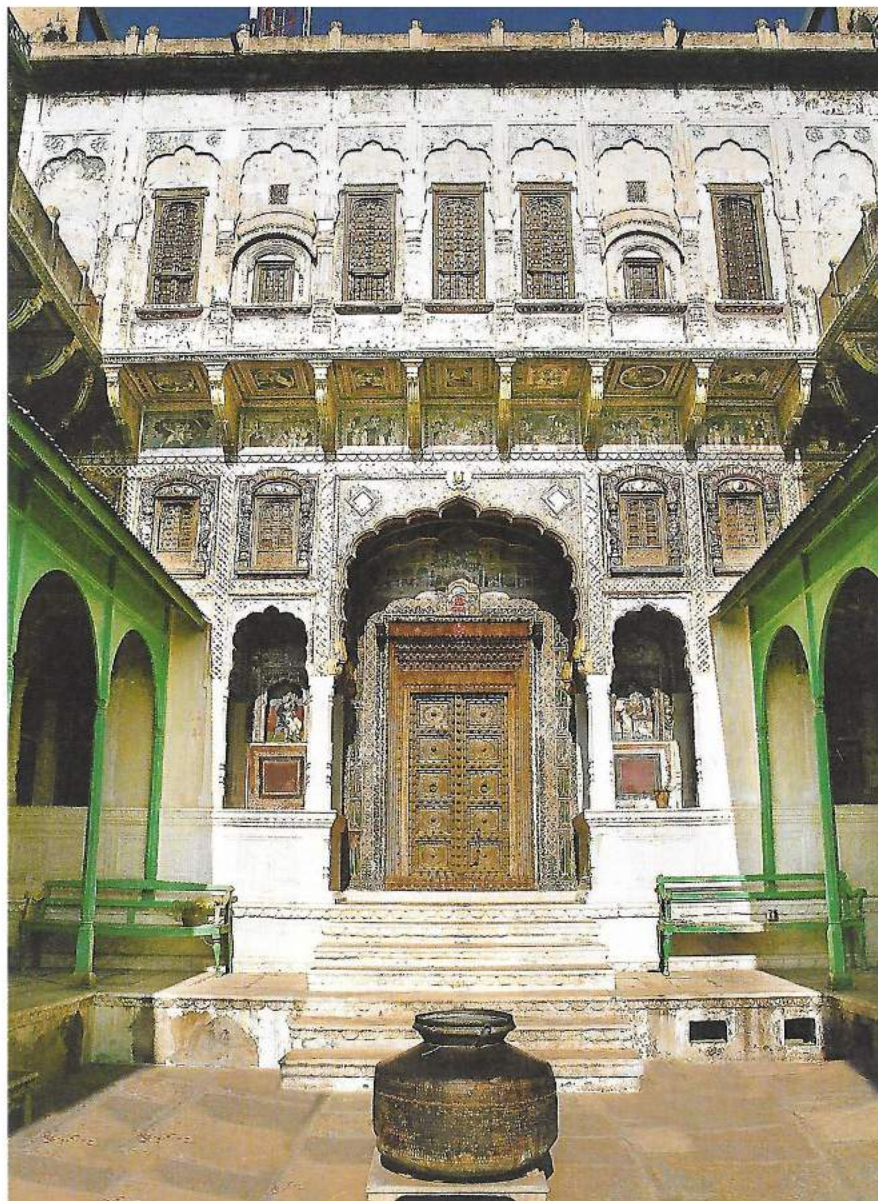


Special iron-strip cover to keep milk and curds safe from cats



Lady churning curds for butter

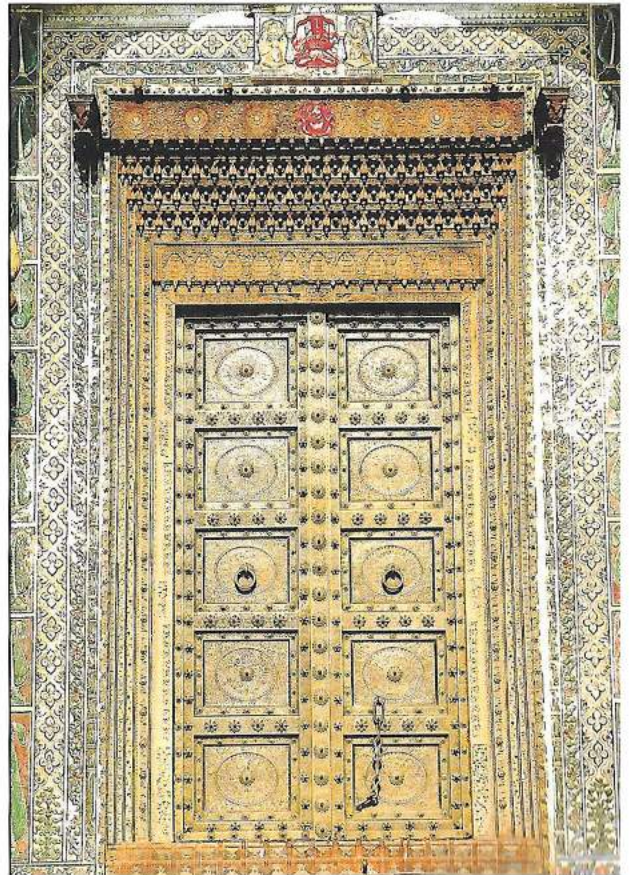
View of the outer courtyard from the main gate. Rooms on the left were used as office and to the right were rooms for guests. Entrance to the inner courtyard is marked with a small vermilion coloured idol of Sri Ganeshji, the remover of all obstacles, above the door. The elaborate carvings and painting took a team of 5 carpenters a duration of full one year to complete. The stone carvings and woodwork on the floor above is also very eye-catching

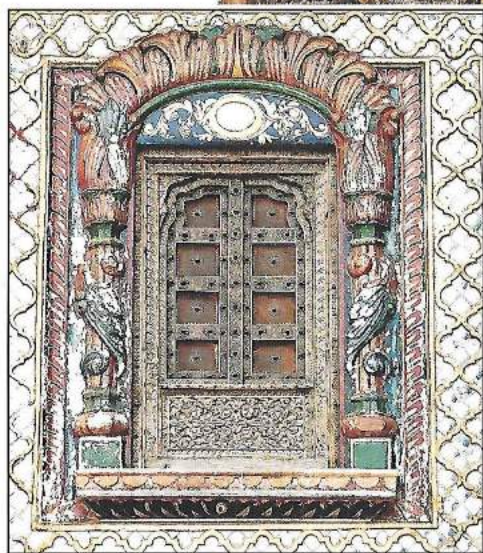
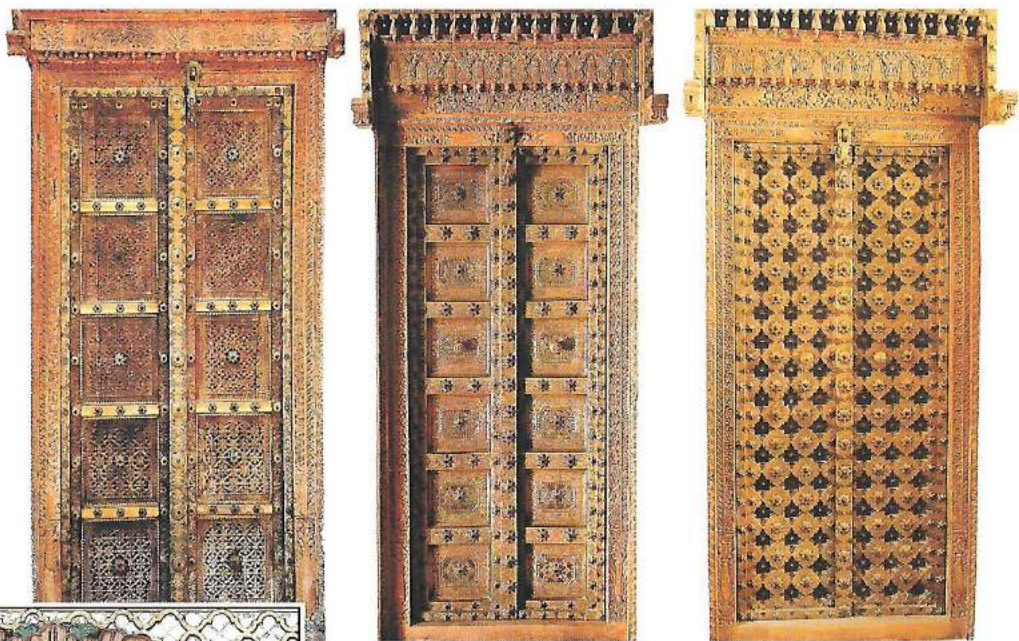




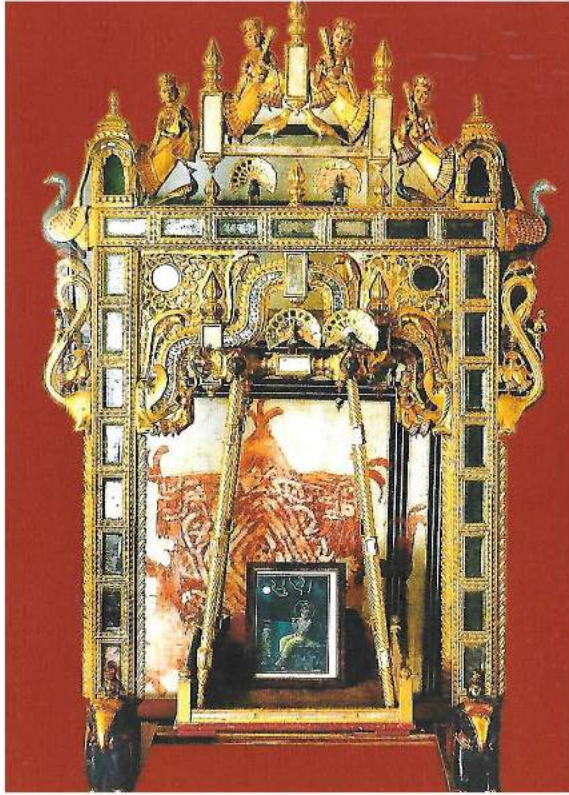
In a few places the paintings cover the area from the ground floor to below the chhajjas. Vegetable dyes were used which have withstood the vagaries of weather for over 125 years

Entrance door to the inner courtyard. The woodwork is covered with brass plates embossed in minute floral designs. The intricate carvings on the top of the door frame are a piece of highly skilled craftsmanship





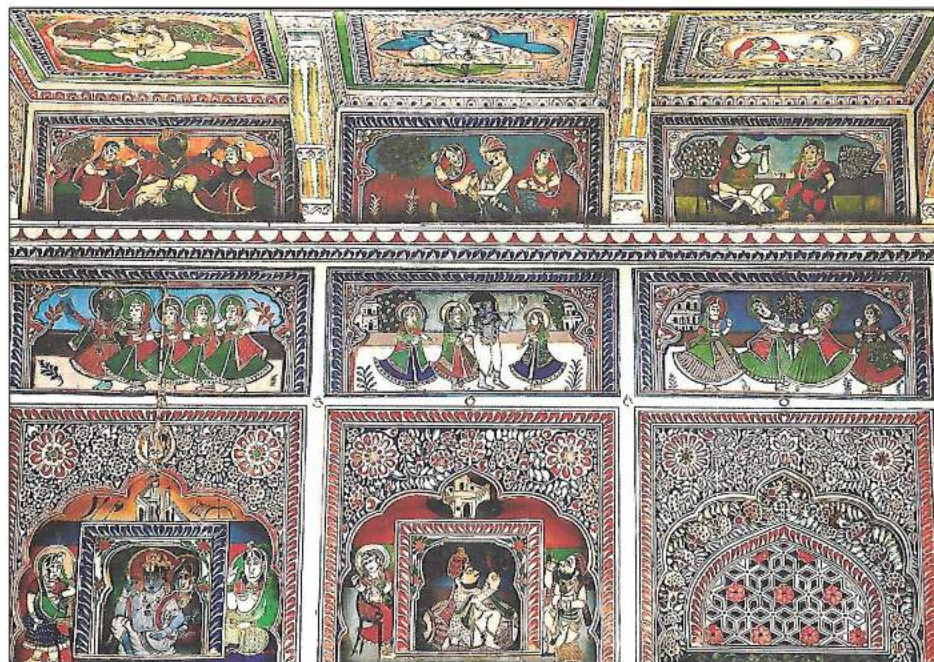
These three doors above and the 'jharoka', projecting window, at left are executed in charming designs. On the main floor there are several doors with a wide variety of patterns. Engraved appliques in iron, bronze, copper and brass have been used. In many places ivory nails have been used



Jhoola (swing) for Baby Krishna. Images of celestial musicians and colourful singing birds have been woven into this mirror-work studded design. Note the combination of auspicious happy colours. This design is one of the very few in the whole of Rajasthan

The colourful inner courtyard with an open-to-sky large chowk. Living rooms, water storage rooms, kitchens, shaded verandas for work and rest. The magnificent touch of colourful wall paintings





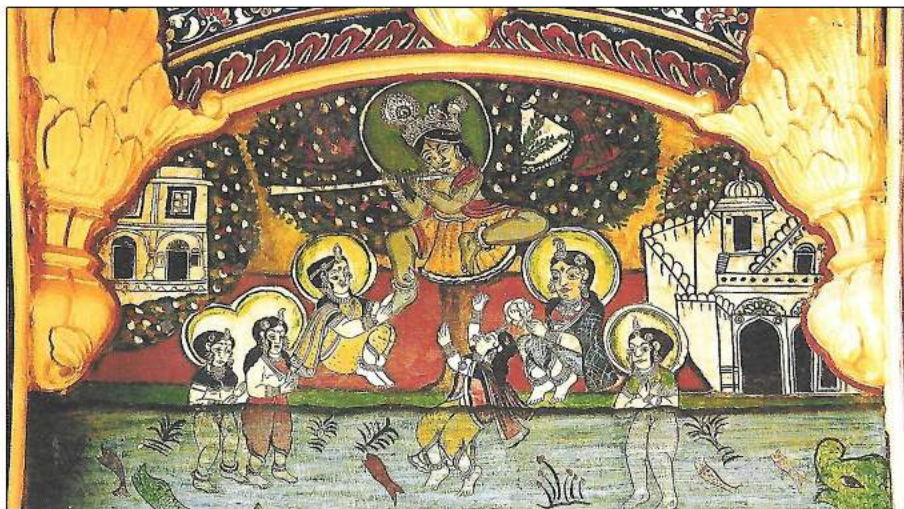
Beautiful wall paintings showing scenes of everyday life of the period and of mythological subjects. The geometric and floral patterns are exquisite



In the ladies rest room on the top storey use was made of stained glass to create a harmonious lighting



A scene from Krishna-Lila, Vastraharan



Arjun Das saw to it that the roof had ample space for sleeping out under the sky on hot summer nights.

The gaddi (office) had on either side rooms and gallery space for staff and storage.

He got large size wooden boxes made for safe storage of winter clothing and linen.

All members slept on cots woven in jute fibre.

A Lover of Things beautiful

The finishing touches to the haveli commanded his special attention. The best artists and craftsmen available were hired for their services. Use was made of dressed stone, terra-cotta bricks and lime mortar in construction.

Carved stone pillars in sand stone, have been used in both courtyards. Other than their beautiful visual appeal they lend an air of temple-like sanctity. Stone carving was also used to advantage above the doors and windows. The floral and geometrical designs blend beautifully with the architecture.

The smooth white plaster finish seen on the walls in the office was achieved by laborious burnishing for several days using sea shells : it has withstood weathering for over a century and a quarter.

Beautiful designs and patterns were adopted for various doors. The designs of the main entrance to the inner courtyard is exceptionally gorgeous. The wood carvings have been done by hand and there is rich embellishment with hand-made appliques in steel, copper, brass and in some places even ivory. Incise work on metal on some doors invites special attention.

Painting the front walls of a haveli had become fashionable by then. Bright and eye catching vegetable dyes were used that did not wash away in the rains. The most common motifs were scenes of Rajput bravery and chivalry. So, we see handsome riders on elephants, horses and camels, alongside floral motifs painted on the frontage of the Goenka Haveli. And on the four sides of the inner courtyard there is a profusion of scenes from the early life of Lord Krishna and some from the daily life in the Dundlod of that period. These paintings take us to those ancient times sung in legends. At some places the wall has been painted from the ground floor of the courtyard to right under the chhajjas (eaves). The style is bold and rather folkish. The artist could have been a local citizen or from Nawalgarh or Jaipur. The two street lights in front of the Haveli were the latest in design of gas lighting.



Pooja Room

In any Hindu house this room is a miniature temple wherein idols of the family deities are installed. Daily worship, morning and evening, is performed by the elders in particular with great reverence and fervent gratitude. Lamps are lit, incense burnt,

flowers offered, prayer mantras uttered and bhajans sung in soulful voices. All the articles for decoration and for pooja have to invoke in the devotee feelings of bhakti and surrender. Seth Arjun Das would acquire beautiful pieces whenever and wherever he got the opportunity during his various tours.

A unique piece in the Pooja room is a jhoola (swing), beautifully carved in wood and painted in shimmering shades of gold, bright yellows and sindhoori reds. Baby Krishna was made to sit in it and sweet songs sung in His praise.

Social Awareness

Other than the Haveli meant for the comforts of his family Seth Arjun Das was a do-gooder for the local community. Charity was his second nature. In close proximity was built the grand and beautiful Sri Satyanarayan Temple by the family where daily pujas have been performed to this day. The decorative domes and jharokas (balconies) and the flight of steps at the entrance make it an imposing structure.

A large four-post well was dug for water: a tremendous convenience for the people in the village. In the compound of the haveli a "piao" was installed so that passers by could have a drink of cool clean water.

Not far away from the haveli a school for children, a hospital for the sick, dharamshalas (rest house) for the travellers and chhatris (cenotaphs) were constructed. Chhatri of Ram Dutt Goenka, in the memory of their ancestors is specially notable. Recognising his social concerns and attitude the

Raja of Dundlod had presented him with a 'Sword of Honour'.

Seth Arjun-Das would have liked to retire to Dundlod for a life of dignified relaxation but this was not to be. He breathed his last in Kolkata in August of the year 1899.

The construction of the upper part of the Haveli was completed by his two young sons Subhkaran Das (1878-1939) and Anand Ram (1882-1946) according to the visions and plans of their departed father:

Elegant Life-Style

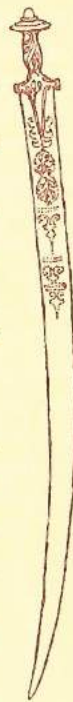
Subhkaran Das inherited the mantle for steering the fortunes of the Goenka family in Dundlod. The Haveli served as a symbol of his social status.

He was awarded the title of "Rai Bahadur" by the then British Government for the family's contribution to socially productive activities.

Dressed in elegant clothes he sat on the spacious gaddi in his office, a picture of dignity and respect. A large bolster served him as back rest and in his left hand he held one end of the pipe leading to his hukka for smoking tobacco, a piece of special decorative design.

He was surrounded by his brother Anand Ram and his munim (accountant) and other assistants. The grown up sons and nephews would watch all the proceedings and learn their lessons.

Their mode of transport was a chauffeur driven rath, a palanquin like two-wheeler cart pulled by bullocks. For the ladies of the house there was



a four-wheeler rath.

Auspicious occasions in the family such as birth of a child, thread ceremony, weddings were celebrated with sumptuous feasting, show of fireworks and lighting. Young and old would be dressed in their choicest finery and decked with jewellery in gold and precious stones. Joy and laughter rent the air.

Colour throwing at one another with joyful abandon was observed during the spring festival of Holi. Krishna Janmashthami, Dussera, Diwali, were celebrated with exchange of sweets and greetings and fireworks for children.



Ladies celebrating Gangaur in a procession carrying idol of Devi Parvati for immersion

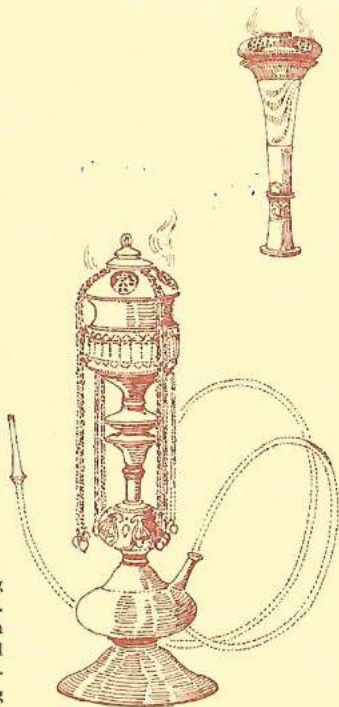
Ladies took part in the festival of Teej and Gangaur taking part in a singing procession carrying pooja idols of Devi Parvati to a nearby river or pond for immersion, to ensure good and noble husbands for their grown up daughters.

Move to Kolkata

Life continued this way for the next 50 years in the Haveli. Many summers and winters of life did they see. The properties got divided between the cousins; happy occasions and sad events, all part of the earthly existence. However, in 1944 Seth Anand Ram moved to Kolkata with family leaving the Haveli in the hands of the family's faithful caretaker Sohanlal Sharma.

The reason was the changing economic scene in the country. The big towns turning into cities and existing cities becoming still bigger. Rapid industrialisation drew people from all walks of

His hukka for smoking tobacco had to be special. The design carried a combination of engraved silver work and wood-work with ornate carving



life to the cities. Village economy remained stagnant. Dundlod was after all a sleepy village. The Goenka family branched out to different cities, content with the new life there. Visits to the Haveli by these members became less and less frequent.

Restoration

In 1996 two grandsons of Seth Anand Ram Goenka namely Mohan Goenka Son of Purshottam Lal Goenka from Chennai and Basant Goenka son of Ram Narian Goenka from Kolkata were remembering fondly their Dundlod Haveli and decided to restore their heritage to its original glory. Their sturdy mindset and persistent efforts to secure the services of worthy craftsmen and artists paid handsome dividends over the next 10 years. The doors and windows were meticulously cleaned. The drainage system was put in working order. Many items of wooden furniture were carefully repaired.

Inventory was made of all the articles stocked in various rooms as they belonged to that era of bullock carts and camel carts.

To give the viewer a wholesome idea of the atmosphere of those times some mannequins have been specially made and installed at the gaddi (office), in the rath, to show the grinding of wheat flour and the churning of butter. The Haveli became a tourist draw in the region.

It is worth mentioning that in all these efforts no financial help was accepted from any outside quarters. All efforts were motivated by inner devotion to the task of a neat and presentable

restoration.

On the 11th of April 2005 Smt. Pratibha Patil, Governor of Rajasthan, paid a visit to the Haveli "Elected President of India, On the 25th July 2007" and wrote the following comments.

"Very beautiful paintings, big jars and old carpentry work is very attractive and unique. The books in the library are about old Ayurveda Science. I will ask our Ayurveda University experts to study these. It may prove to be very useful in the Ayurveda Science advancement, and publish these for the knowledge of others."



Marwari lady dressed in her typical costume and jewellery



Excellent depiction of old art. The work of artisans and carving details are superb. The restoration work is excellent. M.C. SHARMA, Ph.D., Retd. Chief Engineer, Jaipur.

Beautiful restorations. Proud to be a Rajasthani born in Dundlod. DR. S.C. SHARMA, Scotland, U.K.

Exquisite work and excellent restorations in progress. MANJUL MAHESHWARI, Florida, USA.

Wonderful building, worth the restoration. DR. J. BLUMBAD, Germany

Wonderful treasure of an era. Thanks to owners. MURLI BASOTIA, Editor of Shekhawati Gandh, Nawalgarh.



Coming to this place is like entering History itself. The sculpture, painting, wooden work, books, cereals bring one back to those lively days of ancient times. No doubt it is an impressive and extraordinary experience. I am obliged to be given an opportunity to visit here. Thanks.

DR. RAKESH, K. SHARMA
Lecturer, Rajasthan Ayurveda University, Jodhpur.

Shri Satyanarain Mandir
Dundlod

PLACES WORTH VISITING IN DUNDLOD

Dundlod Fort : Built in 1750 by Thakur Keshri Singh, it has a beautiful Durbar Hall in Mughal style furnished with Louis the 14th furniture. A well-stocked library has some original manuscripts. Presently it is run as a heritage hotel by the family, allowing guests to play polo, do horse riding and tent pegging, etc.,

Shri Satyanarain Mandir was constructed in 1911 by the Goenka family, a magnificent tall construction. It has the idol of Shri Satyanarain on a swing.

Chhatri of Ram Dutta Goenka was built in 1890 by the Goenka family. There are wall paintings based on Krishna-Lila, the Mahabharat and Vishnu Purana.

Shiv Baksha Goenka Chhatri and Dharamashala was built in 1903. The construction took four years and two months and cost was Rs. 18,361, Annas 8 and 2 Paise.

Nawalgarhia Well was built for the convenience of Dundlod inhabitants. Like most Shekhawati wells it has the popular 4 minarets.