

JAAT-RAJPOOT RULERS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEEG PALACE RAJASTHAN

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Abstract

Bharatpur in Rajasthan is known for its Jat glorious kings and their kingdoms who ruled the tiny State till recently. Deeg is a 32 kms away town which came into glory much earlier and is privileged to have a huge royal palace which was beautifully managed and partly inhabited by its legitimate inheritors till the year 1970. Deeg had been the pride of the Jat rulers of the time. Deeg Palace is a living testimony to the Jat rulers who fought bravely with the Mughals and Marathas onslaught. In a historical battle, 80,000 odd two armies were battered by the local army led by Raja Suraj Mal. When Raja Suraj Mal moved to Bharatpur, and made it his Capital, it relegated to the second place of the kingdom. Few historians are of the view that most of the stone used was looted from Mughal buildings and made use of in Deeg Palace after their victory. Since Bharatpur and Agra were the nearest places, the developments of these places affected the rule and rulers. Feeling jealous and due to political compulsions, the Deeg had been the centre of invasion by various enemy forces time to time. Fed up, they shifted their day to day activities of the royal clan to Bharatpur. People believe that the magnificent royal palace of Deeg and its campus is influenced by the Mughal architecture and they tried to imbibe the spirit of the contemporary designing. The other are of the view that the Deeg Palace is more appealing and architecturally rich building which though reflects the contemporary era but has its own footprints.

Key words: History, Study, Deeg Palace, Rajasthan



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Rajasthan is popular for its awe-striking destinations and surprisingly there are so many. While cruising through this incredible state of India, sometimes you land up to some exotic town or village so soothing to your senses. Deeg is one of the towns those are not extensively documented in Guide books but holds an importance place in all the history books. Deeg is
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known for a massive fort and a splendid palace both surrounded by beautiful lakes. These lakes are still the primary source of water in the town. Deeg was one of the Jat kingdoms of Rajasthan and Due to its proximity with Agra and Delhi; it passed through several vicissitudes and suffered the burden of many external invasions.

Deeg (Lat 27°25', Long 77°15') located in Bharatpur district, Rajasthan is historically associated as the eighteenth century strong hold of the Jat rulers. Badan Singh (1722 – 56 AD) after assuming the throne consolidated the headship of the tribe and thereby became the virtual founder of the Jat house at Bharatpur. The credit of commencing the urbanization of Deeg also goes to him. It was he who selected this spot as the headquarters of his newly established Jat kingdom.

Deeg is commonly a one day trip for the travelers to Bharatpur, Mathura or Agra. Deeg lies 36 km away from Bharatpur on Alwar road. There are frequent busses from Bharatpur to Deeg (All the busses going towards Alwar stops at Deeg). It takes around 1 hour (due to poor road conditions) to reach Deeg from Bharatpur.

The Garden of Deeg Palace is so large, beautiful and visually soothing that Moghul designing of the Charbagh Garden stands nowhere as compared to. The designing, architecture, landscaping and the location of the garden all are flawless. The walkways at the center, two water tanks and placement of trees, herbs and lawns all looks well researched. Ample use of jaalis, jharokhas, gates and use of stones and marble indicate to the then prevalent Rajasthani architecture styles.

The Keshav Bhavan which served as the monsoon court of the palace is situated near the man-made pond which serve as water reservoir and give cooling effect to the building and environment. The look of the reservoir from the various angles of the palce is simply beautiful. Some special viewers galleries have been designed in Rajasthani style which offer visually enhancing effect to the huge pond. The palace looks aesthetically pleasant with the row of different types of fountains which are no less than the contemporary designs of the fountains. It is said that the King had made the provision that while in operation, the fountains will splash water in such a manner that one will feel the ambiance of rains. Moreover, the technology devised in the fountains was such as it provided natural thunder like sounds while experiencing the magic of artificial rains.

The deeg bhawan popularly known as jal mahal was built by the rulers maharaja surajmal (A.D. 1756-63) and jawahar singh (A.D.1764-68) in sand stone of pinkish color from bansi
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paharpur. These buildings include gopal bhawan with two flanking pavilions- sawan and bhado, suraj bhawan, hardev bhawan, kishan bhawan, keshav bhawan, nand bhawan, singh pol, central garden and tanks - gopal sagar and rup sagar. The architecture is basically of the trabeate order but the use of accurate system can be seen in certain cases. The general features are engrailed arches resting on omate pillars, hypostylar halls, flat terraces, balconies and pavilions with bengal roofs, etc. Semicircular trefoiled and pointed arches are also met. The kachcha bagh across the gopal sagar served as royal garden. Objects of erstwhile rulers are exhibited inside the gopal bhawan & kisham bhawan. This palace is very famous for its colorful fountains which still run twice in a year.

The Suraj bhawan named after suraj mal, the jatking (A.D 1756-63) this handsome single storeyed building of marble with flat roof reminds one of shah jahan's structural products and shows a close resemblance to certain early mughal edifices. In spite of some fresh materials, marble slabs used in its walls, belong mostly to more than one mughal buildings because they are of different sizes and textures. Looking to the pavements, its plinth, and major portion of the western face, brackets and large number of eaves still in red sandstone, it may be said that the idea to encase the structure, was an afterthought.

The verandahs with five arched openings and rooms flanking at the corners and studded with a central tank containing jets were planned to beautify the building. The dados of the central apartment are bordered with excellent inlay works. The interior out of the suraj bhawan is like a pavilion which probably served as a relaxing place for ladies.

The Hardev Bhawan is situation and setup of this bhawan suggests that it was not an original part of the main bhawan and was probably a later addition by Suraj Mal (A.D 1753-63) to suit his taste and requirements. The principal southern block is double storeyed while the lower floor consists of a projecting central hall, faced with arches springing from a row of double pillars. An arcaded colonnade runs along the three sides of the inner group of four pillars behind the front arches. At the back side of the hall there is an on long corridor with raised floor at each end, which is somewhat on the pattern of Suraj Bhawan. A rectangular chamber with a verandah, flanked by cells has been built on either side of the hall while a comfortable ramp in the east provides access to the upper storey. The hind part of the terrace graces the building with a crowing chhatri bearing a spiked curved roof attended by miniature side domes.

The Kishan Bhawan

The archways of the bhawan communicate with a large hall akin in some respects to the main hall of the Gopal Bhawan. The spandrels of the middle and front arches are adorned with thickly carved arabesques while the back wall is provided with an alcoved balcony carved on its front side. The foliated hut-like curved roof, with delicate decorative details, is quite impressive. At the back side of the hall, there is a long corridor with a raised floor leading to a small cell and a room on either side. The arcaded pavilion surmounting the bhawan in the southern part is believed to be a later addition made by Raja Balwant Singh (A.D 1726-53) of Bharatpur. The Bhawan with its extensive paneled facade and a charming tank comprising thirteen fountains at its terrace is a magnificent structure of eighteenth century.

The Kesav Bhawan

This single storeyed palace commonly known as Baradari is placed on projecting semi-octagonal quoins recalling the pattern of the bases of corner minars or towers of Mughal structures. Each of its faces is composed of five noble arches serving as vertical passages for light in gracing it externally. Centrally this bhawan is diversified by an arcade running on all sides and forming an inner square which is separated from outer one by means of 0.91 M wide canal encircling it. The canal is provided with a border of tiny jets and also a row of fountains in the middle. The pipes above are arches set the spectacle of rains when the water was released from them, while the lithic balls rotated by pressurised water produced the sound of thunder.

The Nand Bhawan

This bhawan comprises a spacious oblong hall, resembling an auditorium enclosed by grand arcade of seven openings and narrow walled wings of the longer and shorter sides respectively. A Central arcade arranged on a rectangular pattern divided the hall into inner and outer sections. Each flanking wing of this pavilion consists of a raised floor covered by intercommunicating compartments having walls decked with ornamental alcoved balconies. Possibly the materials used in the balconies and basing were brought from Delhi as a part the booty. By the JAT Kings, the ceiling of the central portion of the hall in wood is designed on the lines of the ceiling of Diwan-I-Khas in Delhi. The earlier timber roof was replaced by Iron girders in 1867 and some more piers were raised in the hall to prevent its further dilapidation.

The Gopal Bhawan

The Gopal Bhawan provided with a flat roof, was built by Suraj Mal (A.D 1756-63) and resolves itself into three principal portions VIZ, a median and two side ones. The Bhawan is mainly built in two storeys but in certain parts, It has three and even fourstoreys. The eastern facade graces this palace with its majestic arches and well sculptured imposing pillars. The royal reception hall with its alcove amidst the thickness of the back wall resembles diwan-i-am of shah jahan. A smaller oblong chamber opposite the grand hall forms the western projection which is presently enclosed by arcades on three sides. The side wings comprising a front and back hall with a central corridor and rooms of different sizes on either side, seems to have been commenced for residential purpose. The room of the northern wing contains a throne of black marble and the southern one of white marble. They were probably brought from the imperial palaces of the Delhi by Jawahar Singh (A.D 1764-68). The Western face of the Bhawan attains utmost picturesque effect due to proximity of Gopal Sagar which reflects its over-hanging kiosks and the balconies on the sides. The main palace is flanked by two detached pavilions known as Savan (Month of July-August) and bhadon (Month of August-September) respectively, on the north and south sides. Each of them is in two storeys and has a fascinating hut-shaped roof crowned by a row of spikes.

The Jat rulers were influenced by the magnificence of the Mughal courts of Agra and Delhi. The design of the gardens has been inspired by the Mughal Charbagh. The palace forms a quadrangle with a garden and walkways at its centre. Decorative flowerbeds, shrubs, trees and fountains cool the place considerably during summer. Two huge water tanks, Gopal Sagar and Rup Sagar, on either side also helped to bring down the temperature.[1]

Elaborately filigreed gates, stone slabs, ornate beams, and marble jaalis from Mughal constructions have been used in the palace. A fine marble swing, rumoured to have belonged to Nur Jahan, was brought as a war trophy from the Mughal court. The swing overlooks the gardens.[1]

Keshav Bhawan, the monsoon pavilion, is a single-storeyed baradari placed on an octagonal base. It stands next to the Rup Sagar tank.[2] The edifice has five arches along each side which seem to divide it in to parts. An arcade runs around the interior of the pavilion over a canal with hundreds of fountains. The walls of the canal are pierced with hundreds of minute water jets. Bullocks were employed with large leather "buckets" to draw water to the tank through a complex pulley system.[2]

In festivals such as Holi, colours are added to the water. Small cloth pouches with organic colours were manually inserted into the holes in the reservoir wall. When the water flowed through them passing along an intricate network of pipelines, the fountains spouted coloured water.[3]

The fountain spray and the jets create a monsoon-like ambience that is enhanced by a unique technique that produces thunder-like sound all around the pavilion. Hundreds of metal balls placed strategically on the channel surrounding the roof are set rolling with the water pressure which results in a thunderous effect. The ambience in a desert town must have been significant for the Jat kings and queens.[4]

King's bedroom contains an enormous black granite bed of the Maharaja. It had once served as a part of Parsi death rites, functioning as a platform for washing dead bodies.[5]

The fort was constructed by Raja Badan Singh of Bharatpur state about 1730 A.D. The fort was important because of its strategic location and was also centre of trade. In the mid of 18th century this fort was in possession Afgan invader Ahmed Shah Abdali for a few months. Otherwise it remained unconquered. A huge canon was placed in this fort by Maharaja Suraj mal which was brought from the fort of Agra. The fort was used as residence of royal family during war. Once had been a royal structure, Deeg fort is now just a group of ruins and relics which is surrounded by a lake. It would be in the periphery of 1 km or so and 3-4 canons are placed in different directions. Despite of severely deteriorated buildings in the fort complex, there are some splendid temples, step wells and architectures. When we were exploring that deserted fort, we reached to a building which was one of most fascinating archeological site I ever been. It was an underground building (almost 4 storeyes downwards). There were vents on the top of that building for sun light and seems like none had really been there since a long time. We took the staircases and descended till the bottom of the building. Currently, the Deeg Palace is maintained by the Archeological survey of India and comes under the category of protective monuments of national importance. If one visits the Palace and its Museum, the furniture and the artifacts of the Kings and their families are still preserved in the original shapes. Besides sofa sets, chairs, beds one can see the technology of room cooler which was pulled by the manpower.

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