# Shekhawati – The Cradle of Life

## Chronicles of a Tale Foretold

1. The watchful eyes of this royal guard have witnessed decades of historical events standing at gates of the imperial castle in Mandawa. His strong demeanor reflected the aristocratic traditions that have been passed on for centuries.
2. Sitting on a camel cart with her daughter in her lap, Anita was travelling back to her village with her family of camel herders. Her powerful glance looked out in the distance for any looming dangers while the innocent child snuggled up into her body as a place of refuge. In Rajasthan, it is customary for women to hide their faces under a veil in the presence of a stranger.
3. The bylanes of Mandawa are full of life! My interaction with this lady and her shy grandson invoked a brief moment of laughter between the three of us. The picture that resulted thereby portrayed the warm welcoming culture of the inhabitants of the region.
4. A young woman dressed in pink sits inside the weathered walls of a Haveli, originally abandoned by its owner. Her enigmatic aura brings a spark of colour and life to the dull surroundings.
5. The art of carpentry has been passed on from generation to generation in this Muslim family living in Laxmangarh. The mantle of the craft has now been handed over to the youngest of the family, who, standing at the door of the shop, greeted me with a shy smile upon my visit. Inscribed on the wall above him is his grandfather's name, presenting the lineage of the family tradition to the viewer. A tinge of brown from the wood works has consumed the walls and painted his white attire.
6. Enlightenment finds its way even in the deepest, darkest corners of the world. The ruins of an abandoned relic now house a temple where this aged priest has been performing his daily rituals for as long as he can remember. His undying devotion towards the almighty burns like a bright flame in the shadows.
7. Kathputli, one of the most popular forms of puppetry in India, finds its roots in Rajasthan. The puppets are made out of wood with strings attached to them, which lets the puppeteer take full control over the doll's movements. I witnessed one such beautiful performance during my stay in Mandawa. The puppeteer had quite a few tales in his bag that he narrated through the actions of his puppets.

## Wrinkles in Time

1. The structure "Diwan-e-Khaas" was built inside the City Palace of Jaipur as a private meeting hall of the "Maharajas". The immaculately congruous symmetry was brought about by the implication of the ancient Indian art of architecture. The royal guard standing at the centre of the hall added to the grandeur.
2. The intricately carved design of this window fragments the outside world into a hundred pieces. In the olden times, the fort was used as a vantage point to foresee attacks and prepare for war. The incredible view from the top of the hill in Jaigarh Fort produces an everlasting impact in the minds of the tourists visiting in the present day.
3. Carved out in the ceiling of Amber Fort is a three-dimensional geometric design. Staring at the eye of this immemorial design, one can get lost into the illusory world of patterns that it projects in the brain. The blended style of artistry speaks about the history of intercultural influences that the region has witnessed.
4. Frescos are a common sight on the walls of the "havelis" in the various towns of Shekhawati. These frescos often narrate historical battles or mythological stories. The angular alignment of these two "havelis" creates an interplay of perspective that makes the architecture look all the more beautiful. The golden sun peeking through the gap brings about a sense of warmth in the scene, precisely what I felt when I visited this place.
5. Hidden inside the rooms of the "havelis" are majestic designs that speak about the bygone era. The merchants that used to live here have migrated to other parts of the country after the fall of the Silk Route, leaving these "havelis" in the hands of their caretakers.
6. Located in Laxmangarh, this old "haveli" has maintained its charm to this day, even after enduring multiple agents of wither. Surrounded by four walls lie a common space that has been used for cropping. The bajra plants reach up to the height of a full-grown individual. The subtle dual colouring of this "haveli" makes it stand out from the rest.
7. Mandawa, a town of immense historical significance and cultural beauty, lies on the Silk Route in the centre of Shekhawati, a semi-arid region in North-East Rajasthan. Standing tall in the heart of the town is a 266 years old grand monument - Castle Mandawa. The conversion of the castle into a hotel by Thakur Kesari Singh has left it in a subtle dichotomy of heritage and modernity - a perfect blend between the old and the new!