

BADNORE

THE GLORY THAT WAS

Text: Archana Singh
Photographs: Sanjay Singh

The Maharajas have all gone. So have the times. What remains are ruins from the past, legacies of a bygone era. Yet history was made here and for those who recognize this, much still remains to be seen. Here is a feature on the village of Badnore, one such testimony.

The vast desert of Rajasthan, the heartland of Rajputs, is dotted with innumerable forts and fortresses, some of which are the epitome of grandeur, even today. The others, however, that were abandoned and left unguarded against the vagaries of nature, look forlorn and hopelessly dilapidated in the arid desert surroundings. Bereft of the awe-inspiring aura, the mute walls that gaze towards the heavens are gradually mingling with the earth, only to be swept away by the winds of time. But, each one of these edifices, immaterial of their present state, has an indelible past and a spell-binding historic saga of sanguine romance and chivalry that is synonymous with the brave clan of Rajputs.

A little off the National Highway, between Jaipur-Udaipur, near Beawar town, lies the ancient village Badnore, a principality of the erstwhile Mewar state, 90 kilometres from the town of Ajmer. The pristine beauty of this fortified village, having entrances towards the east and west, is enhanced by ten surrounding lakes, which fill up during the monsoons, making it most picturesque. (Water from these lakes was primarily used to quench the thirst of the soldiers.)

Built atop a hillock is the majestic seven storeyed fort that commands a view of the village below. On the banks of Vinodsagar, one of the lakes, is Jalmahal (used for residential purpose now), which affords a superb view of crystal waters, mirroring the myriad



A miniature depicting one of the rulers of Badnore

culture in its unfathomable depth. Below the Jalmahal, is Grishma Niwas or the Summer House, overlooking a huge garden. In its midst is a step-well — a rare ubiquity in this region, as step-wells are mostly found in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Constructed by Thakur Govind Singh in 1897, the square enclosure has steps leading right down on three sides and an eight-pillared balcony extends on the fourth side.

The entrance to the fort, called the Bada Darwaza, has two archaic temples on both sides. Inside, the stables were on either side and there was an ancient temple which was constructed in 1584. Further ahead, were the prisons, with separate cells for incarceration of men and women.

The road that leads up to the fort or *garh* is motorable. Looming large, the *garh* seems a perfect blend of strength and beauty, bearing the indisputable mantle of pride. This mammoth bastion that could house an entire battalion still has over 130 rooms which can be used.

The rugged, yet the delicately proportioned storeys, belie the architectural skill of a genre where imagination remained the only source of aesthetics. The quaint balconies and the countless domed *jharokhas* that previously offered ventilation, now offer a peep into the arcadian lives of a by-gone era and the sublime past seems encapsulated in the ambience, even today.

A mile away from Badnore, towards the west is *Araam Bhawan* also called the Shooting Lodge, easily accessible by the metalled road. Interestingly situated among dense foliage, it was built for spying wild animals, without so much as disturbing them and also taking an easy aim, from one of the many shooting boxes. The walls and the ceiling inside are embellished with patterns made from coloured glass. A particular *jharokha* is adorned meticulously with miniscule pieces of glass of varied colours, giving it the appear-

ance of *meenakari* work. The human figures on the sides are painted with natural colours.

The artistically pillared *chhatris* on another hillock are memorials of the departed ancestors where their ashes lie buried. Regarded with reverence, a new bride even today, is expected to pay her respects here.

Badnore has several temples — of which few require special mention — that could easily be an antiquarian's delight. Towards the west is an old temple (the date of its construction, unknown), dedicated to Vairat



The temple of Kushala Mata — commemorating the victory of Rana Kumbha



(Chamunda) Devi. In the heart of the village, in close proximity to the fort, is an age-old Jain temple that has statues of 12 *tirthankaras*. From the inscriptions, it is evident that it was constructed in 1135 A.D. Just a kilometre away, is Kushala Mata's temple, which is believed to have been constructed by Maharana Kumbha of Mewar.

Nestling amidst one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the Aravalis, at a height of 2,100 feet, Badnore was originally known as Vardhanpur. Though established aeons back, it is still uncertain as to whose initiative it was. From the local

A village fair during Dussehra

A portrait of Rao Jaimal

ballads one gathers that a particular Parmar king, by the name of Badna had founded the village of Badanpur, in 845 B.C., which later came to be known as Badnore. But this is perhaps only folklore with no element of truth in it as there is no written evidence to support it. As derived from ancient texts, it is more likely to have been founded by Raja Harsha Vardhan of Kannauj.

Surrounded by the Chauhans in the east, the Parmars in the south and the Solankis in the west who remained constantly at war with each other, Badnore obviously remained in the hands of the victor, till captured by the Mughals. About a century later, on the death of Ala-ud-din Khilji, Badnore regained its independence. After a short while, in 1490, Maharana Kumbha gained supremacy over the land and to commemorate his victory, built the temple of Kushala Mata and the Kushal Sagar Lake, now known as Vinodsagar. A perpetual ground for the clash of different clans, it was ultimately the



The imposing facade of the fort



Rathores who held permanent sway over Badnore.

In the annals of Badnore's history, the one name that commands utmost respect is that of Rao Jaimal, grandson of Rao Dudaji and brother of the legendary poetess, Mirabai. Maharana Udai Singh, the founder of the city of Udaipur, granted Badnore to Jaimal in September 1554 along with 1,000 other villages. (Written records that elucidate this fact say that Jaimal who was referred to as 'The Baron of Badnore', was hospitably received by the Rana who assigned to him the rich district of Badnore. His short though extremely eventful reign was marked by many decisive battles and jubilant victories. In the year 1567, when Akbar decided

to attack Chittor, the fort was guarded by Rao Jaimal himself, the Maharana having shifted to Udaipur). It was a gory battle that lasted for several months, where very often Akbar himself came close to death. Jaimal wounded in the course of battle, was unable to mount a horse. Instead, astride a soldier's shoulders with swords flashing in both his hands, he put up a fine show of bravery and finally succumbed to his fatal wounds.

It is an established fact that Akbar, extremely impressed by Jaimal and Patta (another soldier of similar repute), installed their life-size statues at the main entrance at Agra fort. The statues were shifted to Delhi when Akbar changed his capital where later, they were destroyed by Aurangzeb's virulent fanaticism.

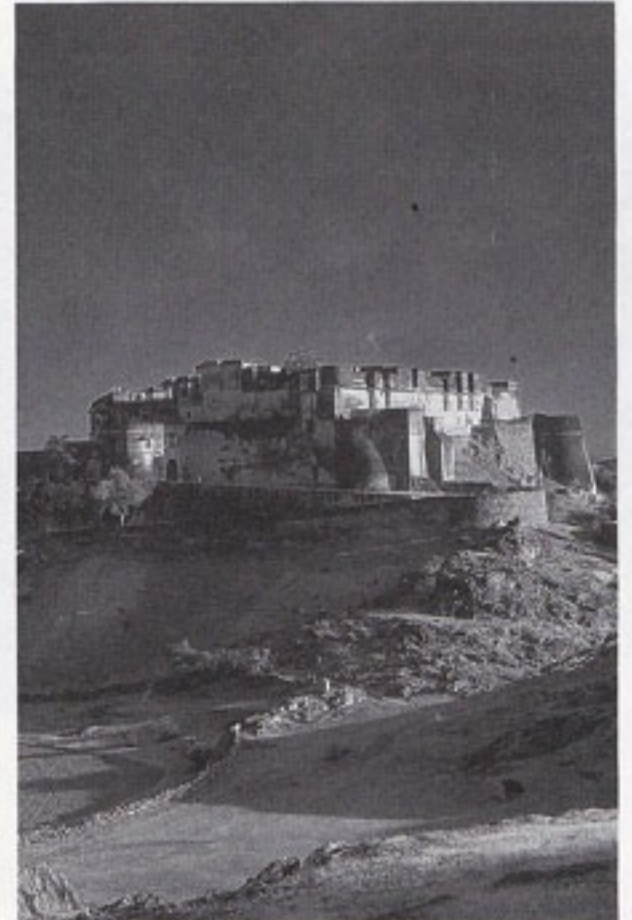
Colonel James Todd mentions: "The names which shine brightest in the

history of Mewar, which are still held sacred by the true Rajput and immortalized by Akbar's own pen, are those of Jaimal of Badnore and Patta of Kelva. Household names in Mewar, they will be honoured so long as the Rajput retains a shred of his inheritance or a spark of his ancient recollections." Rao Jaimal's fifth son, Mukund Das, became the heir to Badnore and ever since it has been nurtured by his scions.

Thakur Raghu Raj Singh, now residing mostly in Ajmer, plans to develop this ancestral property into a tourist spot by providing the various required facilities, thus opening up yet another vista for people sustaining a keen interest in the much coveted heritage of India.

In a recent excavation, a more than 2,000 years old inscription has been found very near the village, proving the

A miniature painting from Badnore



A view of the fort

strategic location of the region on an ancient trade route. The engraved letters on the rock are of Ashoka-Brahmi script, prevalent around the 3rd century B.C. Badnore has also been established as a sub-school of the Mewar school of miniature paintings and now research is going on to prove that it was a separate school, with a distinctive style of its own.

A walk down memory lane, a tryst with the esoteric past that still impregnates the land, and a close encounter with history that meanders through generations and is solely responsible for the metamorphosis of the ephemeral into the eternal, is what Badnore has to offer.