

# Sunday Herald ARTICULATIONS

**A price to pay**

Castle-building was an expensive affair. Dover Castle in Kent was one of the most expensive castles ever built, with Henry II spending £6,400 of his £20,000 annual income on its refurbishment alone.

**IN RUINS**



Achalgarh Fort. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

# THE RUE OF REMNANTS

**Achalgarh Fort, a forgotten historic gem, lies in decline following decades of neglect and mismanagement, writes Sahil Zutshi**

The village of Achalgarh lies 8 km from Mount Abu hill-station, further on the road leading to the famous Dilwara Temples, and is nestled amidst the Aravalli ranges in South Rajasthan. Achalgarh complex, holding historical and religious significance and situated in a declared eco-sensitive zone, comprises Achalgarh Fort, Mandakini Kund — a water reservoir which remains dry during the summer months, the important shrine of Shiva — Achaleshwar Mahadev Temple, built in 813 AD, a second reservoir, and a handful of other Hindu and Jain temples which are located inside and adjacent to the fort.

**Overflowing with legends**

Achalgarh Fort, built during the rule of the Parmar Dynasty was expanded and rebuilt by Rana Kumbha of Mewar in the 14th century. According to legends, Mandakini Kund, overlooked by a salute of three buffaloes, overflowed with ghee while sages performed *yagnas* in ancient times. Demons in the form of three buffaloes were infamous for their clarified butter-related thievery during the night. Dharavarsha, with a single arrow, managed to kill the buffaloes and the pierced statues still stand on the side of the *kund*.

Today, the fort complex and encompassing water bodies are eyesores and make for a sorry sight. Much of the complex is under the patronage of the Sirohi royal family and



Mandakini Kund

receives no assistance from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) since it is not a listed and declared protected site. While the fort complex has been in a state of neglect for decades, its rapid deterioration has been expedited by poor management, law enforcement, a lack of waste disposal facilities, and any desire to preserve the exquisite fortified structures which still stand today.

**In a mess**

The head of the Sirohi royal family and a historian, HH Maharao Ragubir Singh Bahadur, has, according to online sources, devoted his life to reveal that, "India was on the fore of all scientific, social and philosophical fields" in times bygone. In 2018, he was awarded the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civil award in India, for his contribution in the field of history. For this reason, the current state and neglect of the Achalgarh site are all the more puzzling. The municipality and the local *panchayat* remain silent on the issue, while residents and shopkeepers fail to understand the importance of preserving a historic jewel.

A decade ago, the steps leading to the Mandakini Kund were hastily removed as part of planned restoration work. The



Statues of buffaloes at the Kund



**ACHALGARH FORT WAS BUILT DURING THE REIGN OF PARMAR DYNASTY.**

ancient rock steps still lie in a pile of rubble to this date. While there has been no attempt to "restore" this ancient site, what such thoughtlessness has ensured is that the holy *kund* deteriorates further and the stone steps disappear one by one as a result of theft. One is forced to ask why such schemes are undertaken carelessly and in the absence of competent supervision?

Today, the Achalgarh site lies in ruin. Disorganised shops and a parking lot crowd the area leading up to the fort. Garbage can be found at every corner of the site. Waste disposal facilities are non-existent. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan appears to have made no inroads in this part of the country. Mandakini Kund and Revti Kund, situated inside the fort, are heavily polluted due to waste dumping. Shortly after the monsoon, the reservoirs are inundated by toxic blue-green algae and water hyacinth. Waste produced by local shops is conveniently emptied into the reservoirs or simply scattered around the site.

The site being classed as a tourist attraction is astonishing. Perhaps, it is time to scrap Achalgarh as an attraction on the destination checklist for tourists visiting Mount Abu altogether. In a country with an abysmal record of historical and heritage preservation, and like numerous other historical sites, the dilapidated Achalgarh site is ripe for being relegated to history.

It remains to be seen whether a privatised conservation model or adoption of the site by the ASI would do justice to this historical site. Alternatively, a possible way forward would involve the current management to willingly accommodate day-to-day operations of the site being handled by a local environmental group and concerned residents.



Dilapidated structures inside the fort



Achaleshwar Mahadev Temple

**HUMOUR**

# New home, new troubles

The new flat was to be our 'Happiness Project'. There was no need for any shoe-string budget, not because we had become richer, but because we had become prudent by experience. When we were putting up our first house, we were raw beginners but now we had a better idea of what we wanted and how. And there was a reversal of roles — our children pampered us and I did it up as I pleased.

It was not a joyride, though. They promised to give us possession in three years, but it took four. It was not that easy to get things done since we were not the sole owners. Our spirits began to sag. "Only one year's delay? We haven't got ours even after seven. You are lucky," sort-of-comparison cheered us up.

The first day at the flat was heavenly. "See, all we have to do is just lock one door — flat is definitely better than houses," we beamed at our visiting friends. There was unholy glee when they complimented us on the light and the air.

But we had forgotten about water. On the morning of Day 3, all I could get from the tap was air. "We may have to go home (still lying vacant)," was my *suprabhatam* to a sleepy husband. That got him out of bed in a jiffy. "Let me first check with the security." It turned out to be a man-made disaster — the security had forgotten to switch on the pump.

It was just a beginning: power failure with no back-up ("Oh, we'd inverter back home"); no proper waste disposal ("We had Kudumbasree there"); lift failures, faulty nameplates — but years had taught us to be patient. "Don't worry, these are all teething troubles," we console each other.

There are positives. More and more people have started moving in and it is socially rewarding. The mix of young and old makes it interesting. The residents' meetings re-



**WE, WITH NO WORRIES ABOUT KIDS' EDUCATION, LOAN REPAYMENT, WORKING WIVES OR WORKPLACE PRESSURE, ARE LAID-BACK...**

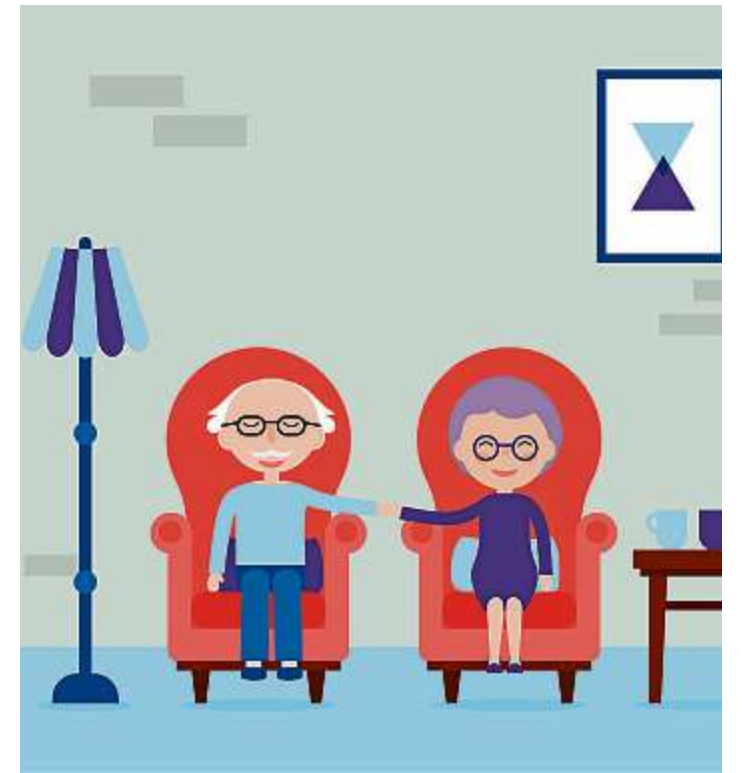
flect various moods. There is an ever-expanding list of grievances and the way the seniors and the juniors approach and react to the issues is a study in behavioural psychology.

We, with no worries about kids' education, loan repayment, working wives or workplace pressure, are laid-back; they have these, and much more. We don't feel the need to look much beyond; the only concern is staying healthy.

For them, everything is a burning issue. "If it's like this now, how it'll be in another ten years," is their refrain. For the same reason, they are sharp. We will say most of the cameras are working; for them, out of eight CCTVs, the one at the main entrance is not working.

This is getting into us also. We are also learning. We no longer get just stuck inside the lift for some time; we now say we have been trapped inside for 3 minutes and 40 seconds. But there is one bonding — no problem is mine or yours alone; it is ours.

The new flat is now turning out to be a learning curve for us. **LALITHA RAMAKRISHNAN**



Prashant Gautam

**I am just starting early**  
Haridwar



Sandip Deshpande

**What age? We just don't care!**  
Bengaluru

**[ MY TAKE — AGE IS JUST A NUMBER ]**

The theme for the next photo feature is 'My hometown, my pride'. Submit your entry (one per person) with your name, a caption, and information about where you have taken the photo to [sundaydh@gmail.com](mailto:sundaydh@gmail.com) latest by October 22, 2019.

► File size should at least be 500 KB. The subject line for the mail is 'My Take'.



Rajiv N Magal

**Wait till you see the fruits of my labour...**  
K G Palya, Magadi taluk



Harsha K R

**She's a load of happiness**  
Bengaluru