


Zero and Beyond

S K Mishra





and **Zero
Beyond**

 S K Mishra
Editor: Khushi Mishra



सत्यमेव जयते

DR. SHASHI THAROOR
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
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Foreword



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FOREWORD

S.K Mishra's *'Zero and Beyond'* offers an exquisite collection of photographs that pays homage to the rich cultural heritage of the mighty Madhya Pradesh. Through his striking images, the former banker turned intrepid photographer captures not only the beauty and brilliance of the state's visually arresting heritage sites but also offers a useful background into the history and stories behind these monuments. What makes this book wonderful is Mishra's ability to capture a piece of our history in a frame, while also bringing to life the lost—or perhaps forgotten—glory of these magnificent sites.

Embarking on a journey through the state, the book brings together photography and history to present a compelling chronicle of Madhya Pradesh's stunning cultural and heritage sites as well as the unique traditions and architectural influences of monuments that have inspired their creation. His unique perspective and ability to capture the grandeur, depth, and timelessness of Madhya Pradesh's nature, diversity and history offers to the peruser of these pages a way to live and experience this grand world despite physical distance. I am sure this book will ensure a memorable experience for the reader and would like to convey my best wishes to the author for successfully putting this together in a compelling and appealing way.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor

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DR. SHASHI THAROOR

Preface

It was 1971. I had just been admitted to the Bachelor of Arts (History Honours) course at St. Stephen's College, Delhi. My father, when he had gone to London for further medical studies in 1953, had purchased a Zeiss Ikon SLR Camera for taking photos of his research work in microbiology. As I was leaving Ranchi for Delhi, he gave it to me and said, "Take this camera. Make good use of it". I became a member of the Photography Society at St. Stephen's College and learnt the technique of developing and printing black and white photos in the College Photography Lab. That was the beginning of my love for photography and a camera has since then, been my constant companion, wherever I have gone.

As a student of history, I had read about the visits of Chinese travelers Fa Hien to Ancient India around 400 CE (during the rule of Chandra Gupta II) and Hiuen Tsang around 632 CE (during the reign of Harshavardhana) where they recorded what they saw and experienced in India. I often tried to imagine what India looked like, then. Unfortunately for them and for us, photography had not yet been discovered and all we know about India of those days is through their writings.

In 1976, I joined the State Bank of India as a Probationary Officer. A decade into a brand new century, I was promoted to the grade of Chief General Manager, and posted in Bhopal to oversee the bank's network in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. As a first time visitor to Madhya Pradesh (the second biggest state in India), this window of time gave me the opportunity to discover the unseen beauty of this historic state.

The diversity that I witnessed in Madhya Pradesh, the Heartland of India, was unparalleled. With an abundance of history, heritage, nature, unexplored mountains, amazing waterfalls, and an immensely diverse wildlife, I felt that it truly had something for everyone, from spiritual devotees to outdoor enthusiasts. My travels provided me with an open canvas to capture monuments, religious sites, forests, free flowing rivers, breathtaking waterbodies, artistry on stone, flora and fauna, mountains, gorgeous landscapes and much more. Along the way, I also came across several tales, stories and local folklore that deepened my understanding of the sights and sites I experienced.

Mesmerized as I was, by the beauty and charm of Madhya Pradesh, I am extremely delighted to share this curated collection of photographs and experiences in the form of a coffee table book. Without further ado, join me on this journey, that is, in many ways, an interactive journey back in time, a phenomenon we measure in standard units, but experience relatively within our own frame of reference. Interestingly, we begin this journey in the holy city of Ujjain, the seat of the Lord of Time, "Mahakal". It is in Ujjain, that the longitude of the Zero Meridian (as per ancient Indian astronomy) and the Tropic of Cancer intersect, and it is Ujjain, which is the gateway to my journey, where I experienced *aion*, the Greek notion of sacred or eternal time.

"The best things in life are the people we love, the places we've seen, and the memories we've made along the way".

The places in this book have been divided into the following categories:



Sacred
Place of worship and religious importance.



Heritage
Place of political, military, cultural, or social history preserved for its cultural heritage and value in history.



Wildlife
Place where animals live in their natural habitat and not within the possession or control of humans.



Leisure
Place where one can take a holiday.

We have also indicated the approximate time period of each place in the chapters followed by some interesting facts. During my journey, I visited several temples and the images of these idols have been placed in a separate section at the end. Look out for the 🙏 icon and visit the "The Holy Trail" section.

At the very end, there is a puzzle that you can choose to finish with the clues that you will collect from the interesting facts and anecdotes that we have hidden within the chapters. Look out for the 👁 icon

Instruments to measure time



Using the Sun, Moon and Stars



Sand Clocks



Obelisks



Pendulum Clocks



Sundials



Quartz Clocks



Water Clocks



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Dating
back to
2000 BCE

Maheshwar



Maheshwar, located 95 kms from Indore, is a historic temple town situated on the banks of the beautiful Narmada river. Mentioned in the epics, this historic city was the capital of the great King Kartivarjun and its old name was Mahishmati. The literal meaning of the term Maheshwar means abode of Lord Mahesh, which shows this temple town's affinity with Lord Shiva. One of the most famous ancient temples of Lord Shiva is the



Baneshwar Mahadev, located in the middle of the Narmada and accessible by boat.

Along the banks of the Narmada is another lovely building dating to 18th century CE, **Queen's Fort**, which was the residence of Ahilya Bai Holkar, one of the greatest queens of India. Not only was she an able and benevolent ruler, she was also pious and kind hearted.

Ahilya Bai
Holkar's Fort

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Dating
back to
1st c. CE

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Bandhavgarh



The **Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve**, located at a distance of 180 kms from Amarkantak, has one of the highest tiger densities in the world, thereby increasing the chances of spotting these magnificent creatures in the wild. The original home of the white tiger, Bandhavgarh was the hunting preserve of the Maharajas of Rewa, where hunting was carried out only by the Maharajas and their guests. It was considered a good omen for a Maharaja of Rewa to shoot 109 Tigers and his Highness Maharaja Venkat Raman Singh shot 111 Tigers by 1914. While white tigers were found in the old state of Rewa for many years, the last known white tiger, Mohan is now mounted

and on display in the palace of the Maharajas of Rewa, having been captured by Maharaja Martand Singh in 1951.

The park has the facility of elephants with trackers equipped with walkie talkies to track the tigers in the morning and if a tiger is spotted, the jeeps are informed and visitors are taken either by jeep or on elephant back. I enjoyed the crisp cool morning breeze in the jeep safari deep inside the Tiger Reserve as well as the elephant ride during the Tiger Show. Guided by trackers on elephants called "Anarkali" and "Ashwathama", I could see a number of tigers and their cubs roaming

freely in the forest, including one sitting majestically inside a dark cave, a unique experience. It is said that tigers mark their territory by putting their paw marks on trees and we came across these markings during our safari (as seen in the above photo). The call of the Langur warns tourists and animals about the presence of an approaching tiger.

There are 39 man made caves with rock paintings and inscriptions in Brahmi script near the 10th century **CE Bandhavgarh Fort**, with the largest cave called **Badi Gufa** having nine rooms.





Shesh Shaiya, the statue of Lord Vishnu reclining on the seven hooded snake Sheshnaag, the king of serpents is a 35 feet long sculpture carved from a single

sandstone rock built in the 10th century CE. There is a shivling near the head of Lord Vishnu (which faces East) and a natural stream originates from his feet (which face

West), known as Charanganga, the lifeline of Bandhavgarh.



Dating
back to
450
million
years

Raneh Falls



About 19 kms from Khajuraho, the Ken River (a tributary of the Yamuna) cuts a 5 km long and 98 feet deep gorge made of igneous rocks ranging in color from pink to grey. Also known as the Grand Canyon of India, there are several waterfalls in the canyon, the largest being the **Raneh Falls**. The gorge generally remains dry during summers, but in the monsoon season, it gets completely full, with water reaching the base of the viewing platform on top.



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Dating
back to
16th c. CE

Orchha



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Panoramic view of Orchha:
Lakshminarayan Temple and
Raja Ram Temple

Famous for ODI world
record (page 31)



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The ancient city of Orchha was founded in 1531 CE by the Bundela Rajput King, Rudra Pratap Singh who chose this stretch of land along the Betwa River for his capital and built the Orchha Fort complex. Of the succeeding rulers, the most notable was Raja Bir Singh Deo who built the exquisite Jehangir Mahal, a tiered palace with graceful chhatris and intricate trellis work. Matching the striking exteriors are the interiors painted with murals representing the finest Bundela school of painting. There is a spectacular sound and

light show in the evenings at the Jehangir Mahal. The Lakshminarayan Temple, constructed in 1662 CE, has an architectural style that is a blend of temple and fort whereas the Raja Mahal has colourful paintings on religious and secular themes on the walls and ceilings.

Connected by a flagstone path to the Lakshminarayan Temple is the Ram Raja Temple, the only place in India where Lord Ram is worshipped both as King and God and is given a daily guard of honour. 🙏

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Murals inside
Raja Mahal



‘Zero and Beyond’ is a pictorial odyssey, a journey back in and through time, as the author traverses the geographical and historical landscape of Madhya Pradesh, starting at Ujjain, ancient India’s Zero Meridian, to 30 other locations, abounding in history, heritage and stories. The aim of the author is to use the frame of his personal experiences that are in the form of his memories and photographs, to synthesize the histories, places and stories associated with these locations.

Madhya Pradesh, the heartland of India, provided the ‘time’ and space for this exploration, with its destinations serving as the perfect laboratory for capturing their essence, be it their sacredness, antiquity or wilderness. This book is meant to be a gateway, very much like the number ‘Zero’, so that you are inspired to go beyond the form of what you see and read, to embark on your unique journey, to any one or more of these destinations.



Author: Sushil Kumar Mishra has been an ardent photographer for over 50 years, since he joined the Photography Society at St. Stephen’s College, Delhi where he pursued his Bachelor’s in History (Hons.) from 1971 to 1974. He has done Business Management from XLRI, Jamshedpur (1974-76). As a professional banker, he retired as the Deputy Managing Director of State Bank of India, the largest bank in India.

While posted as the Chief General Manager, SBI, Bhopal Circle, his desire to implement real and relevant changes at the ground level led to extensive touring of the branches located across the length and breadth of Madhya Pradesh. His on-site visits gave him an opportunity to explore and capture the different moods of Madhya Pradesh through his camera. Post-retirement, he has had the time to reflect upon this journey, and compile his memories and photographs into this coffee table book.

Sushil is married to Ujjwala, with two daughters Khushi and Ruchika, son-in-law Manu and adorable grandson Neev. Post retirement, he serves on the Boards of various companies as an Independent Director/ Advisor and pursues his passion for photography. He also writes a blog about Indian coinage called “www.sikkekikahani.com”.



Editor: Khushi Mishra is a visual artist and fine art photographer. Her work centers around themes pertaining to the environment, self-reflection and journeys of the self/spirituality. As part of her role as a full-time freelance photographer, Khushi has also been actively engaged in commercial assignments involving portraiture, lifestyle photography as well as assignments for boutique heritage homestays and corporates.

Khushi’s professional journey as an artist involved making a transition from being a full-time corporate lawyer for 8 years, having pursued law at National Law School (Bangalore) followed by an LLM degree from University of Cambridge, to practising photography as a tool for personal expression and later, delving into commercial projects as a full-time freelance photographer.

She has studied photography professionally with a specialization in fine art photography, and has held two solo fine art exhibitions at the India Habitat Centre, Delhi titled ‘28’ (2011) and ‘Frames of Mind’ (2015). This is her first book project.

₹ 3000/-
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