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# The Dar-us-Shifa at Mandu

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**Abstract:** *The institution of the Dar-us-Shifa (general hospital) was the cornerstone of the Islamic world, where in terms of building and services provided had reached a significant degree of sophistication. Despite its popularity in the rest of the Islamic world, the examples of hospitals in the subcontinent are few and far between and even fewer are researched. In this paper I attempt to describe one such Dar-us-Shifa located at Mandu, Madhya Pradesh. I will also try to locate the Dar-us-Shifa in the many architectural remains of Mandu. Lastly, I will elucidate how the building of the hospital was an attempt by its patron to link his legacy with that of his ancestors and the Islamic world at large.*

**Keywords:** *Mandu, Dar-us-Shifa, Mahmud Khalji, Islamic World, Hospital, Timurid*

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## The Dar-us-Shifa in the Islamic World

The Dar-us-Shifa (literally, the general hospital) has been a well-recognized institution in the Islamic world since its earliest days. In 706 AD Ummayyad Caliph Al Walid “passed a philanthropic decree to aid the blind and the disabled and to establish separate quarters wherein lepers could be confined to prevent the spread of the disease” (Hamarnah 1962, p. 367). The hospital in the Islamic world took on a structural and physical form when Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, built a hospital in Baghdad, replete with physicians trained in Greek medicine (Nowsheravi 1983, p. 55).

With each successive construction, the Dar-us-Shifa grew more complex. Elgood (1951, p. 177) in his book on the medical history of Persia describes how each hospital was “divided into two completely separate sections” (male and female). “Each section was furnished with a nursing staff and porters of the sex of the patients to be treated therein...medical and surgical staff was male.” He further adds (Elgood 1951, p. 178) “each of the two main sections of the hospital was divided up into several smaller halls. The biggest hall served for general medical cases and was itself subdivided into separate cubicles for the segregation of cases of fever, mania, cold diseases and diarrhoea.”

The hospital built in Cairo during 872-874 AD, patronised by the governor of Cairo Ahmad ibn Tulun added the feature of hammams, separate baths for men and women. These separate bath houses would become a common occurrence in the institution of Dar-us-Shifa. Additionally in the Cairo hospital, "After admission, each patient was required to wear special apparel provided by hospital authorities, while his personal clothes, money or valuables were kept in a safe place until the day of his discharge." (Hamarneh 1962, pp. 373-374)

The hospital at Tulun also provided all treatment and medicine free of charge, largely because the hospital was endowed with a waqf which "constituted a sign of more complete integration with Muslim culture and civilization" (Nowsheravi 1983, pp. 56-57)

The Dar-us-Shifa in the Islamic world reached a level of sophistication and as an institution came to acquire a status which many rulers aspired to be associated with via patronage.

### **The Dar-us-Shifa in the Indian Subcontinent**

While examples of hospitals in the Islamic world are rife, as an institution it did not make such a visible mark in the Dar-al-Islam of the Indian subcontinent. As a result, not a lot of research has been done on the institution of the Dar-us-Shifa (alternatively, Shifakhana) in the subcontinent. The only surviving example of the hospital is the Dar-us-Shifa built by the Qutbshahi ruler of Hyderabad, Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah in 1595 AD. Sherwani (1967, p. 31) in his biography of the Quli Qutb Shah describes the hospital as a double storeyed building with "the eastern, western and southern wings have twelve double rooms on the ground floor and the same number on the first floor while...eight double rooms on the ground floor and the same number on the first floor...the Dar-us-Shifa was a hospital as well as a college of Yunani (Greek) medicine...hammam or a bath was attached to the hospital...medicines, lodging and diet were provided free to patients."

In addition to the many amenities listed by Sherwani (1967, p. 31) the Hyderabad Dar-us-Shifa also had a mosque and a caravanserai attached to it in order to "provide board and lodging to those on the waiting list". Distinguished physicians were also employed at the hospital.

The Shifakhana at Hyderabad is so far the only properly researched hospital in the subcontinent which leaves a huge gap in the study of this well-established institution. I aim to bridge some gaps by discussing at length another example of a Dar-us-Shifa built during the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Mandu, Madhya Pradesh.

### **The Sultanate of Mandu**

Madhya Pradesh's Mandu is today largely sustained by its long and vibrant past. This is not only because of its many extant historical monuments giving birth to its enviably lucrative tourism industry but also because of the excellent water management that the Sultans of Mandu put in place. Situated on top of a hill surrounded by a deep gorge, Mandu's bane has largely been an acute shortage of water. But the kings of medieval Mandu put the paraphernalia in place to harvest rainwater, apparatus that is still feeding vast swathes of Mandu. Each year during monsoons the many tanks, reservoirs and pools, built centuries ago swell up with water and Mandu comes alive. People, from several parts of India, flock to the village to peek at its historical remains and to admire its breathtaking beauty.

Husain Ghori, a high ranking noble under the Delhi sultan, Firoz Tughluq, Ghori received the title of Dilawar Khan (valiant Khan) and became the governor of Malwa. Ghori styled himself Amid Shah Daud after parting ways from the Delhi sultanate and had the khutba read in his name in Dhar (Yazdani 1929, pp. 7-8). Even though Dilawar made Dhar his capital, he frequented Mandu as is evidenced by

a mosque (dated by inscription to 808 AH, 1405 AD) as well as the Tarapur gate (dated by inscription 809 AH, 1406 AD) patronized by him. But it was Dilawar's son, Alp Khan, who shifted the seat of Malwa's ruling elite from Dhar to Mandu. It was a herculean task, to inhabit the rugged terrain of Mandu, to bring water to its dry lands. The reward was having a formidable fortress and Hoshang Shah (Alp Khan's title) and his successors made Mandu a flourishing city by patronizing wells, tanks and canals. Every tomb, mosque and palace was fronted by a water body.

Mahmud Khalji, the third ruler of the Mandu sultanate, had a whole complex of buildings constructed right after his conquest of the Chittor fort. These included, a madrasa, a minar and a Dar-us-Shifa. I will attempt to piece together the history of the Dar-us-Shifa from its inception to its completion as written in the Persian sources. Furthermore, I will also try and locate the Dar-us-Shifa in the remains of Mandu. Lastly, I will try and understand the motivation of Sultan Mahmud Khalji behind building this hospital.

### The Dar-us-Shifa in Mandu

The Dar-ul Shifa built in Mandu was patronized by Mahmud Khalji. The Ma'asir-i-Mahmudshahi, an eyewitness account of Mahmud Khalji's reign penned by the 15<sup>th</sup> century chronicler, Shihab Hakim describes it thus:

“In the year 846 AH (1443 AD) the king ordered the construction of the hospital. Artists from various origins were put on this project and they built a pharmacy (*dawa-khane*). Expert pharmacists were sent to every corner of the world to scourge for remedies essential to both Hindu and Muslim physicians. A hammam was also constructed and the best physicians were sought, out of which Maulana Fazl-allah Mahfuz was one.” (Hakim 1968, p. 64). Despite his meticulous recording, the author leaves out the information on where the hospital was constructed. One does not even know whether it was made in Mandu or any other part of the Malwa sultanate.

Ferishta another Persian chronicler of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, adds a lot of value to Shihab's account. Not only does Ferishta (1832, p. 488) mention that in 849 AH (1445 AD), Sultan Mahmud Khalji had a hospital constructed”, he also adds that “in this the best Hakim of his time, Maulana Fazl'ul lah was appointed to take care of the patients and for the upkeep of this hospital a few villages were given as waqf.”

This greatly enriches the account of the hospital constructed by Mahmud Khalji. Firstly, Ferishta records the date of the completion of the hospital while Shihab records the commencement date. Judging by both these dates, the hospital took about 2 years to be constructed. Furthermore, the fact that villages were given away as auqaf to the hospital suggests that the patients treated at this hospital were either treated for free since the state provided for the hospital's expenses or paid a really nominal fee for their treatment.

Another layer of information is provided by Nizam Ahmad (1939, p. 519), the author of *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, in this regard points to the fact that patients at the hospital were treated for free. Ahmad narrates that in the year 846 AH the Sultan planned the establishment of a hospital and created an endowment by the gift of some villages for paying the charges of medicines and all other things required by the sick. He (Mahmud) also appointed Maulana Fazl-ul-lah Hakim who had the title of Malik ul Hukama for observing the condition of the sick and the insane.”

This bolsters what Ferishta was hinting at, that the hospital treated its patients without a fee, drawing reimbursement for its expenses from the auqaf grant given by Mahmud Khalji. Ahmad further mentions that the insane were cared for as well in Mahmud's Dar-al Shifa.

The only piece in the puzzle then is the location of this building. The account of Shihab says that a *hammam* was also constructed which could give us a possible location. However, the only identifiable *hammam* located in fort of Mandu so far is in the palace complex and it is highly unlikely that the hospital would be in the heart of the royal palaces.

### Location of the Dar-us-Shifa

Despite the plethora of details provided by the Persian chroniclers not a lot of information points to a possible location of the building of the Dar-us-Shifa. The building that comes the closest in description is today known by a misnomer, Gada Shah's shop (Plate 1). Not only does the building match the description of the Dar-us-Shifa built by Mahmud Khalji, it also matches the general description of a hospital as elucidated above (see section titled, Dar-us-Shifa in the Islamic world).

The interior of the building measures 130 feet by 31 feet. The ceiling is strengthened by a series of high arches, only a couple of which still stand. "To counteract the thrust of the arches, extremely massive buttresses are built along the walls" (Plate 2) (Yazdani 1929, p. 80). The building is largely divided into two chambers (Plate 3). The front chamber still shows remains of a mezzanine floor which seems to replicate the small cubicle rooms the ground floor of the back chamber has. Apart from having around 3 cubicles on each side the back chamber also had a large hall which was perhaps used as a specialized unit within the Dar-us-Shifa. The front chamber's ground floor had a single hall, while its mezzanine floor had rooms.

Outside scattered remains of a tank exist along with imprints of a couple of more structures which could have been the bath houses (*hammam*) that Shihab Hakim (1968, p. 64) points to. The Dar-us-Shifa matches the overall description of a hospital, two chambers, separate for male and female patients, existence of small rooms but also big halls. Furthermore, the building is located far away from the palace area but is in close proximity to the other building projects of Mahmud Khalji which were started after his victory of Chittor, namely the madrasa and the Jama Masjid.



Plate 1: Dar-us-Shifa at Mandu, view from the east, locally known as the Gada Shah Shop  
Source: Wikimedia Commons



**Plate 2: Dar-us-Shifa at Mandu, view from the north, Source Wikimedia Commons**



**Plate 3: Dar-us-Shifa at Mandu, view from the inside showing the two main chambers,  
Photo taken by the author**



Plate 4: Dar-us-Shifa at Mandu, Lakhori brick work used for repairs, Photo taken by the author

## Conclusion

Mahmud Khalji was an avid builder and a lot of his buildings including the Dar-us-Shifa highlight how closely he wanted to align himself with the Timurid visual culture. As Richard Eaton (2019, p. 126) opines, “Timurid architecture was characterized by imposing, free-standing structures meant to be seen from afar, complex vaulting techniques supporting large dome chambers on high drums, exterior surfaces richly decorated with glazed and unglazed brick, and geometric patterning using interlocking star and polygon pattern”. Furthermore the building of monuments huddled together in a small area was also an unmistakable Timurid feature. In Mandu, the madrasa, minar, tomb, congregational mosque and the Dar-us-Shifa are in close proximity with each other.

One such monument, the madrasa bam-e-behesht was described by Shihab Hakim (1968, pp. 45-46) as having been built by “artists (*hunarmandaan*) from Khorasan and Hindustan (India) collected at the capital and started working in no time. They did not spare any artifice. The four walls were decorated with designs of coloured stone- red carnelian, green jade, blue onyx, yellow sang-e-maryam, white alabaster, black marble and many others. Persian calligraphers etched beautiful inscriptions on the door, walls as well as the ceiling in the Thuluth and Muhaqqaq scripts with glazed tiles (*kashikari*).”

Similar tiling could still be observed on the Dar-us-Shifa building as testified by Yazdani (1929, p. 80). At its core the building of the Dar-us-Shifa was built as part of the heavy public infrastructure that Mahmud Khalji invested in, in order to aspire for his capital, Mandu to be well received by travelling mystics and scholars many of whom were requested to visit Mandu.

Lastly, the Dar-us-Shifa stood as a testament to how much Mhamud Khalji wanted to In his bid to align himself with the larger Islamic cosmopolis, where the institution of the Shifakhana was popular. Clearly the Dar-us-Shifa served more than its purpose since repairs done to the large hall in the ground

floor back chamber, carry 17<sup>th</sup> century Lakhori brick work (Plate 4), informing us that the building was used for a good 250 years after its inception.

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