

Castles Legends



7 Cities of Dehli

Author: Sammik C Basuu

Illustrations: Agata Krzyżanowska



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Castles Legends: 7 Cities of Dehli

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Written by Sammik C Basuu

Illustrated by Agata Krzyżewska

Proofreading by Joanna Zahorska

Typesetting by Smart DTP

Project coordinator: Michał Nowakowski

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The Legend that is Delhi

To this day, the historical city of Delhi has been standing since mythological times, encompassing New Delhi, the capital city of India, since it gained independence in 1947. The area in and around the present-day Delhi has been the site of many ancient cities. Earlier historical accounts suggest seven cities waxed and waned there, but the number of settlements was up to nine or ten. Revisiting the sites of these ancient cities is to suddenly see a glimpse of Delhi's past lives. "If there is one place in India which gives one a sense of experiencing thousands of years of history at once, it is Delhi," says writer Rana Safvi, author of *Where Stones Speak: Historical Trails in Mehrauli*.

From being the site of the fabled city of Indraprastha from the epic *Mahabharata*, which was the capital city of the Pandava princes and of the first united empire in India, to the new city of Delhi built under the British, Delhi has seen the rise and fall of many empires. Delhi holds many stories and legends owing to the rich history and cultural legacy of the area around it. From Raja Dilu in the 1st century AD to the Tomars and Chauhans building up Qila Rai Pithora and Lal Kot; from the advent of the Muslim rule to the prosperous age under the Khiljis, the Tughlaqs, the Surs and the Mughals; from the invasions and destruction done by Tamerlane, Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Ghulam Qadir to the great mutiny of 1857 and the destruction of the old city by the British; from the building of the new city by the same British to being the famed capital of the largest democracy of the world, this city has seen everything. Each of these cities grew round a palace – a fortress of a particular dynasty and every dynasty wished to have new headquarters for consideration of prestige. Even kings of the same dynasty were driven by this ambition and pursued it if they had the means to do so. With each successive reign, some

distinctive architectural features were added or some changes in the urban morphology occurred. Often, some important new buildings of monumental size would be erected, such as a mosque or a tomb, a palace, a fortress, or a victory-tower.

The first Prime Minister of the independent India Jawaharlal Nehru called Delhi the grave of many empires and the nursery of a republic. With every step we take in this city where every other building is replete with historical significance, we can trace India's journey through the bright and dark times it has experienced over the ages. Legends and stories present us with a discovery of the seven cities of Delhi, and when explored layer by layer, they give a reader an idea of the wonder that India used to be.

There are many versions of the different cities of Delhi. Some say there were 7 cities, some say 9, some historians also claim that there were 12 or 14 different cities in total, starting from the mythological times to this day. For our convenience, we have selected the most famous version of the seven cities of Delhi and merged the overlapping locations of different cities in one single chapter, like that of the legendary, pre-historic city of Indraprastha and the Purana Qila in the medieval city of Dinpanah, which share the same location and therefore have been clubbed together.

The seven cities are as follows:

- Indraprastha, whose location more or less coincides with the later city of Dinpanah around the Old Fort or Shergarh.
- Qila Rai Pithora
- Siri Fort and the city of Siri
- Tughlaqabad

- Jahapanah – Adilabad
- Firozabad around Kotla Firoz Shah
- Shahjahanabad

The two additional citadels of Shahjahanabad are Lal Qila or Qila – e – Mubarak and Salimgarh. Because of the multiple citadels of Shahjahanabad, as well as because of Shahjahanabad itself being huge with many other important structures, these two citadels have been handled separately under two additional chapters .

1. The Legends of Purana Qila (The Old Fort)

et us start with the oldest city that Delhi comprises, namely, Indraprastha. According to the legend, Indraprastha was founded by the Pandava princes during the epic ages described in the *Mahabharata*. Legend has it that when Arjuna, the middle Pandava prince, burnt down the Khandava forest, he saved the family of Moy, an architect and builder of vast experience. To show his gratitude, Moy built the unique city of Indraprastha of unparalleled charm along with its exquisite palace to serve as the capital for the Pandavas in their new kingdom. The ruins of this city were discovered near the old fort in today's Delhi. Archaeologists dated this historical monument to anywhere between 3400 and 4000 BC, which makes it about 5500 to 6000 years old.

The Palace of Illusion

his palace was built by the demon and construction maestro Moy, who was saved by one of the Pandava brothers, Arjuna, while burning down the Khandav forest to build up the legendary city's of Indraprastha, or the abode of Indra, the king of Gods. The unparalleled beauty of the palace sparked extreme envy in Duryadhana, a cousin of the Pandavas and the eldest of the 100 Kaurava brothers. This instigated a dangerous game of treachery of the Kauravas, who manhandled the Pandavas' wife Queen Draupadi. The irreversible game of politics brought the entire country at war that broke out between the Kauravas and the Pandavas' supporters, bringing an end to the classical age in the history of India.

Dreams and Jealousy

he most interesting aspect of the city of Indraprastha was the Palace of Illusion. As described in the *Mahabharata*, the palace had terraces that looked like ponds and ponds that looked like land. The mystery that surrounded the entire architecture added to its irresistible charm. As described in the epic story, the palace housed real gardens with fruit and flowers made of gems and precious stones, and artificial gardens with real fruit and flowers for visitors to enjoy. For all these reasons, that place was called the Palace of Illusion.

According to the legend, it was because of this illusion that Duryadhana fell into a stream he took for land. The already embarrassed prince was badly mocked by Queen Draupadi, who said that that was what happened to a blind man's blind son. Already jealous of his cousins' prosperity, Duryadhana could not take this mockery passively, as his father was actually a blind man. This event, as the legend says, instigated him to start scheming against his powerful cousins to bring their downfall, including the infamous slander of Draupadi, in which Lord Krishna prevented the ultimate humiliation of the queen at the hands of Duryadhana's brothers by supplying her with countless layers of clothing to save her from becoming forcefully undressed using his sheer magic. Eventually, this event followed by a twelve-year-long exile of the Pandavas led to the great Kurukshetra War, which was the ultimate fight of good against evil.

The Indian Nation

egend has it that in the Palace of Illusion in Indraprastha a concept of united Bharath (or India) was born. It was there that Lord Krishna killed the evil Shishupala to embark

on a journey to conquer evil with good. And it was there that the second Kaurava brother Dushyashana tried to strip Queen Draupadi off her clothes in front of the whole council. Lord Krishna responded to Draupadi's prayers, giving her endless amount of clothes to save her honour. After being dragged to the council by her hair, Queen Drapadi promised to her husbands, the five Pandava princes, that she would not tie her hair until she drenched it with Dushyashana's blood. It was Bhima, the second of the Pandava princes, who fulfilled this promise during the Kurukshetra War by ripping Dushyashana's chest open and taking his blood to the Queen, so that she could wet down her hair with it and finally tie her hair after 13 long years.

Nur the Mighty Elephant

The old fort itself is the theme of numerous legends, from being the center of Dinpanah, the new city founded by Mughal Emperor Humayun, through serving as the famed capital citadel of the Sur Empire, named by Sher Shah Suri as Shergarh, to housing the renamed fort of Nurgarh under the Mughals after they reconquered Delhi. It is said that after Humayun retook Delhi from the last Sur Sultan, he entered Shergarh on his favorite elephant Nur, who was wounded in the 'earlier' battle to recapture Delhi but still carried the emperor into the citadel, breaking the main arch gate made by the Sur



Nur the Mighty Elephant

Sultans in the process. Soon after, the famed elephant died and Humayun renamed Shergarh as Nurgarh in his memory.

Centuries before the Shergarh – Dinpanah, Delhi's first medieval settlement was the city around Lal Kot and Qila Rai Pithora. This city was a continuation of the 1st-century AD town of Dilu and has its share of fantabulous legends.