

ANCIENT HINDU ROCK MONUMENTS, CONFIGURATION AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF AHILYA DEVI FORT OF HOLKAR DYNASTY, MAHISMATI REGION, MAHESHWAR, NARMADA VALLEY, CENTRAL INDIA

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Abstract: Holkar Dynasty was established by Malhar Rao on 29th July 1732. Holkar belonging to Maratha clan of Dhargar origin. The Maheshwar lies in the North bank of Narmada river valley and well known Ancient town of Mahismati region. It had been capital of Maratha State. The fort was built by Great Maratha Queen Rajmata Ahilya Devi Holkar and her named in 1767 AD. Rani Ahilya Devi was a prolific builder and patron of Hindu Temple, monuments, Palaces in Maheshwar and Indore and throughout the Indian territory pilgrimages. Ahilya Devi Holkar ruled on the Indore State of Malwa Region, and changed the capital to Maheshwar in Narmada river bank. The study indicates that the Narmada river flows from East to west in a straight course through / lineament zone. The Fort had been constructed on the right bank (North Wards) of River. Geologically, the region is occupied by Basaltic Deccan lava flow rocks of multiple layers, belonging to Cretaceous in age. The river Narmada flows between Northwards Vindhyan hillocks and southwards Satpura hills. The Maheshwar fort includes Palaces, Temples, Defensive Arsenel, storage and highly vegetated grounds and at present utilized as Tourist Hotel. The river front Ghats and Broad steps are unique feature. It became a cultural and religious heritage of Maratha Empire. Holkar Dynasty in Central India.

Keywords: MAHISMATI REGION, HOLKAR DYNASTY, AHILYA DEVI FORT, NARMADA VALLEY, MAHESHWAR, CENTRAL INDIA

A. INTRODUCTION: Indore State is known as Holkar state. It was a royal state in India under Maratha Princely state. It was established in 29th July 1732 AD including territories of Indore, Rampura, Maheshwar, Mehandipur, Barwah and Bhanpur (24,605 Km²). The Commander Malhar Rao Holkar was the Governor of Malwa Province and he was the founder ruler of the Holkar Dynasty. His daughter in law Ahilya Devi Holkar had built the Fort and Capital in Maheshwar in 1767, afterwards in 1818, 3rd Nov. the capital was again Indore. Ahilya Devi Holkar (1767 – 1795) changes the capital to Maheshwar on Narmada river bank. She was a prolific builder and patron of Hindu Temples in Maheshwar, Indore and throughout in India. She built many temples in sacred sites and towns like Dwarka, Kashi Vishwanath Varanasi on the Ganges. Tukoji Rao had been the commander under Ahilya Devi for entire rule. In this study the fortification of Maheshwar region terrain condition in the vicinity of Narmada river and configuration of Structure have been interpreted with respect to geomorphic and geologic characteristics. The Hindu Architectural Features and Monuments Design have been Carved out Skillfully by the Artesians utilizing local building stones available in the region. The detailed searches is needed for exhaustive study of cultural and traditional architectural pattern in Malwa region during 18th century in central India.

B. LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY: - Maheshwar is situated on the north bank of Narmada river at an elevation of 154m.AMSL. in geographical co -ordinates of longitude 75°35E and latitude 22°11'N. The word Maheshwar means Great Lord Shiva. Ahilya Devi fort is now changed into a heritage Hotel, founded by Maharaj Kumar Shivaji Rao Holkar a descendant of Ahilya Devi Holkar, belonging to Holkar dynasty of Maheshwar. It is accessible from Indore and district head quarter Khargone both in M.P.

C. METHODOLOGY: - Under methodology, the S.O.I. toposheets were utilized as a base map. Various literature regarding Maratha Empire and Holkar Dynasty of Malwa - Indore region were consulted and analysed the facts with historical events and growth of state. The satellite imagery has been interpreted for geologic and geomorphic conditions of Maheshwar region and fort – river zone. The fortification, monuments, their Hindu Architectural features have been compared and discussed, properly cited the references.

D. LANDSCAPE, DRAINAGES, TERRAIN CONDITION: - Physiographically, the region is bounded by Vindhyan escarpments in the north and Satpura hills in the south. Broadly the region can be divided in the three zones 1.) Vindhyan ranges

in north 2.) Undulating Deccan Plateau area and 3.) Alluvial belt along the bank of Narmada River. The low lying Deccan trap area with fertile alluvial belt of Narmada in the centre are highly cultivated. Narmada River exhibits the water flow in E-W direction, both side of Narmada river is bordered by high cliff and hilly tracts. The small hillocks and residual mounds attain height in the ground. The hill ranges form the water divide of drainages lines between Narmada and Ganga Catchment. The Vindhyan range is more conspicuous in the eastern part of the area. The annual rainfall of Khargone district is 835 mm and normal annual means max. and min. temperature is 35° C and 19.6° respectively. The major Geomorphic units comprises Flat Topped Plateau, terraced sloped, weathered pediments, pediplains in Trappean rocks. The lateritic uplands occurs on water divide of surface drainages.

E. ANCIENT HISTORY: - The Historians identify and recognize the Maheshwar as an ancient city place of Mahismati. It is mentioned in Hindu Epic Ramayana and Mahabharat as capital of Kartavirya Arjuna, Som vanshaya Shastrajun Kshatriyas. The legendry tales of Jagdgni Rishi, Renuka Devi and Lord Parshuram is closely associated with Maheshwar region and Yudhistir, Yagne, Lord Agni, flame and Mahismati stories. **Maratha Empire and Power** :- Maratha were dominated in a large Part of the country in the 18th century. The empire was formally existed from 1674 by Shivaji. The Hindu warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji fought many battles and the conquest were begin with Shivaji in 1569 from the victory over Bijapur , at Battle of Pratapgad. The Marathas were defended their territories against Non – Hindu invaders / attackers of Delhi Sultnate. Ultimately Maratha Empire territories expanded with Maratha confederacy in their states. Like Holkars of Indore, Shindes of Gwalior etc. It arose confliction with Non – Hindu rulers. Maheswar was capital of Malwa State during the Maratha Holkar reign (1767 AD to 1818 AD) before new capital at Indore. It had been capital of Great Maratha Queen Rajmata Ahilya Devi Holkar and the fort was built, named as Ahilya fort. Baneshwar Mandir is located in a small Island in the Narmada river and the Sahastradhara lies in the east portion of Straight channel of Narmada. It is developed due to braided nature of river. The Ahilya Fort is categorized under River Bank Fort The Narmada river valley provide natural safety and security to fort precincts.

F. GEOLOGIC SETUP – ROCK LITHOLOGY: - The litho assemblage of the area includes mainly Alluvium in the vicinity of Narmada river valley tract below 200 m. The Deccan lava flows or trappean rocks of basaltic composed are capped in the throughout plain areas and larger part of the Plateau region. The Archean granite and gneisses occurs in either side of Narmada river as patches particularly in Harshud Tehsil. Also the Bijawar formation of Quartzite and limestone with chert bands are exposed at the confluence of Chhotu Tawa and Narmada in southern face of Narmada valley. The upper Vindhyan rocks consists of Sandstone, Shales conglomerate exposed near Bharla of Punasa region. The Lameta rocks as horizontally bedded grit stone and conglomerate also occurs as Inter trappean rock formation. The undulating Deccan Trap table land consists of various form of basalt usually more or less amygdaloidal in area. The metamorphics and large outliers of Traps marked by state Geological Survey reports. The generalized geological succession is given in Table. The Vindhyan sandstones are hard, compact and mostly used as building materials in shape of blocks and trimmed stones. Light in colour, whereas the Basalt rocks are dark in colour and fine grained massive, compact with high Sp. Gr. (2.9) and uneven fractures also utilized as construction material. The Trappean rocks are affected by weathering and reduced to spherical blocks, the unaltered core surrounded by concentric shells of weathered zone. The fresh basalt rocks are hard and compact in thick layers expositions.

G. CONFIGURATION AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES: - The Narmada is sacred river of Central India, which is referred in many ancient religious texts e.g. Skanda Puran. It flows through fault or rift valley in hard and compact Deccan Trap Rocks. The fortification had been made in the straight river front of Narmada valley. The Maheshwar fort was constructed by utilizing vindhyan hard siliceous sandstones blocks and slabs mainly. A plan of rectangular shaped configuration of fort precincts were designed. At a distance of 200m from Narmada river right bank, the high stairs of elongated and rigid spacious steps had been constructed to protect fort from floods of Narmada Valley during rainy season and elevated structure became the surveillance and Watch Tower for safety. Many Religious Temples and Monuments had been renovated and reconstructed during Ahilya Devi's reign in the Fort precincts and in the vicinity of banks of Holy Narmada river, Maheshwar. (Table) These religious and cultural heritage structures are well maintained, in good conditions, only caretaking and yearly maintenance is required through local agencies and NGO's , State Govt. to conserve the ancient monuments of region.

H. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: - The Maheshwar fort or Ahilya Devi Holkar fort lies in the north bank of River Narmada in Khargone district, M.P. It had been built by Holkar Dynasty in 18th Century AD at present utilized as Heritage Hotel Tourist place. The Narmada valley is interviened between Vindhyan and Satpura ranges. The history and characteristics of physical location of site, sturctures, Architecture has been illustrated and analysed. The fortification includes Palaces , Temples, monuments, Buildings, Strategic Surveillance point, Bastins, intact and rigid construction makes the strong fort of Central India. Ahilya Devi's capital at Maheshwar was the centre of literacy, Musical, Artistic and Textile products. The reign of Ahilya Devi was considered as Golden Age of Indore State. The heritage structur, fort and monuments needs regular maintenance and protection from deteoration caused by natural and anthropogenic activities.

TABLE – I**MAHESHWAR REGION, NARMADA VALLEY
(GEOLOGIC SUCCESSION (GENERALIZED))**

Group	Age	Lithology / formation
Cenoznic and Quarternary	Recent - Quarternary -	Alluvium/Sands/Soils Sediments/Weathered Mantle
Upper Cretaceous	Deccan Trap	Deccan Trap Basaltic Lava Flows Intertrappean Beds
Protoreozoic	Vindhyan	Kaimur Sandstone, Shales
----- UNCONFIRMITY -----		
Archean – Granites Basement, Granite, Gneisses, Metamorphic, Quartzites, Schists.		

TABLE II**HOLKAR DYNASTY OF INDORE STATE
(MALWA REGION, CENTRAL INDIA)**

S.No.	Ruler /King	Life Period	Ruling Duration	Total yrs. Of Reign
I.	Malhar Rao Holkar (Founder)	1694-1786	1731 to 20 May 1766	35 yrs.
II.	Male Rao Holkar	1745-1767	20 May 1766 to 5 April 1767	1 yrs.
III.	Ahliya Devi Holkar (Regent)	1725-1795	5 April 1767 to 13 Aug 1795	28 yrs.
IV.	Tukoji Rao Holkar	1723- 1797	13 Aug. 1795 to 29 Jan. 1797	2 yrs. (approx..)

N.B. – Tukoji Rao Holkar also listed as Co – Ruler from April 1767 AD i.e. at Ahilya Devi Holkar rulings.

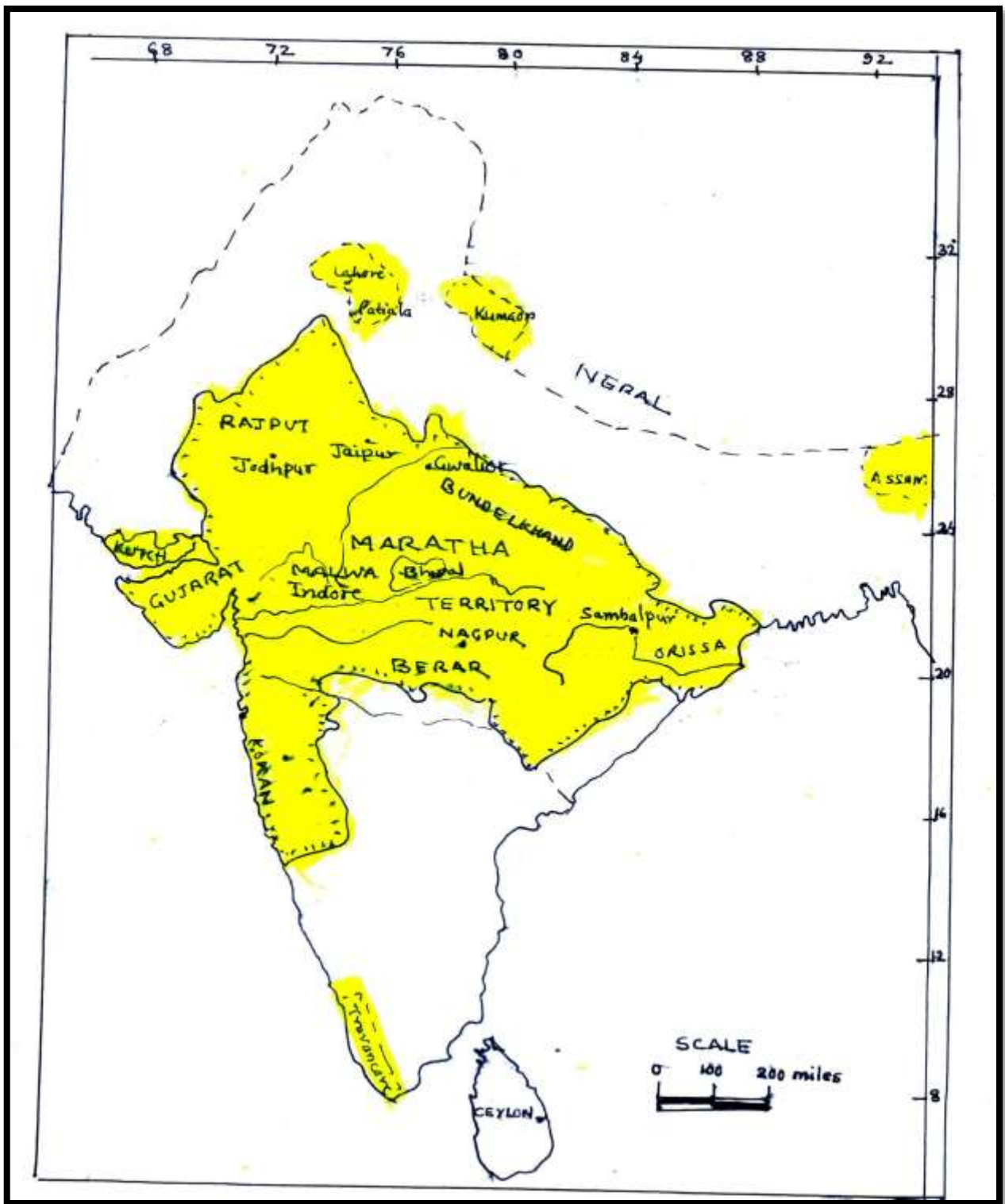
TABLE III**MARATHA DYNASTIES AND STATES**

S.No.	Maratha Clans	Territory Region	State in Union India	Maratha Princely States (British Rule)
1.	Bhonsle	Thanjavur	Tamil Nadu	Lapsed by East India
2.	Gaekwad	Baroda State	Gujarat	Maharaja Gaekwad
3.	Gandekar	Bhor State	Maharashtra	Raja
4.	Newalkar	Jhansi State	Uttar Pradesh	Lapsed by East India
5.	Holkars	Indore State	Madhya Pradesh	Maharaja Holkar
6.	Bhonsle	Nagpur State	Maharashtra	Lapsed by East India
7.	Pawar	Dewas Senior Dewas Junior Dhar State Chhatarpur State	Madhya Pradesh	- Maharaja - Maharaja - Maharaja
8.	Shinde	Gwalior State	Madhya Pradesh	Maharaja Shinde
9.	Parwardhan	Jamkhandi	Karnataka	Non Salute State
10.	Bhave	Ramdurg State	Karnataka	Non Salute State
11.	Shankpal	Manyakheta	Karnataka	Non Salute State

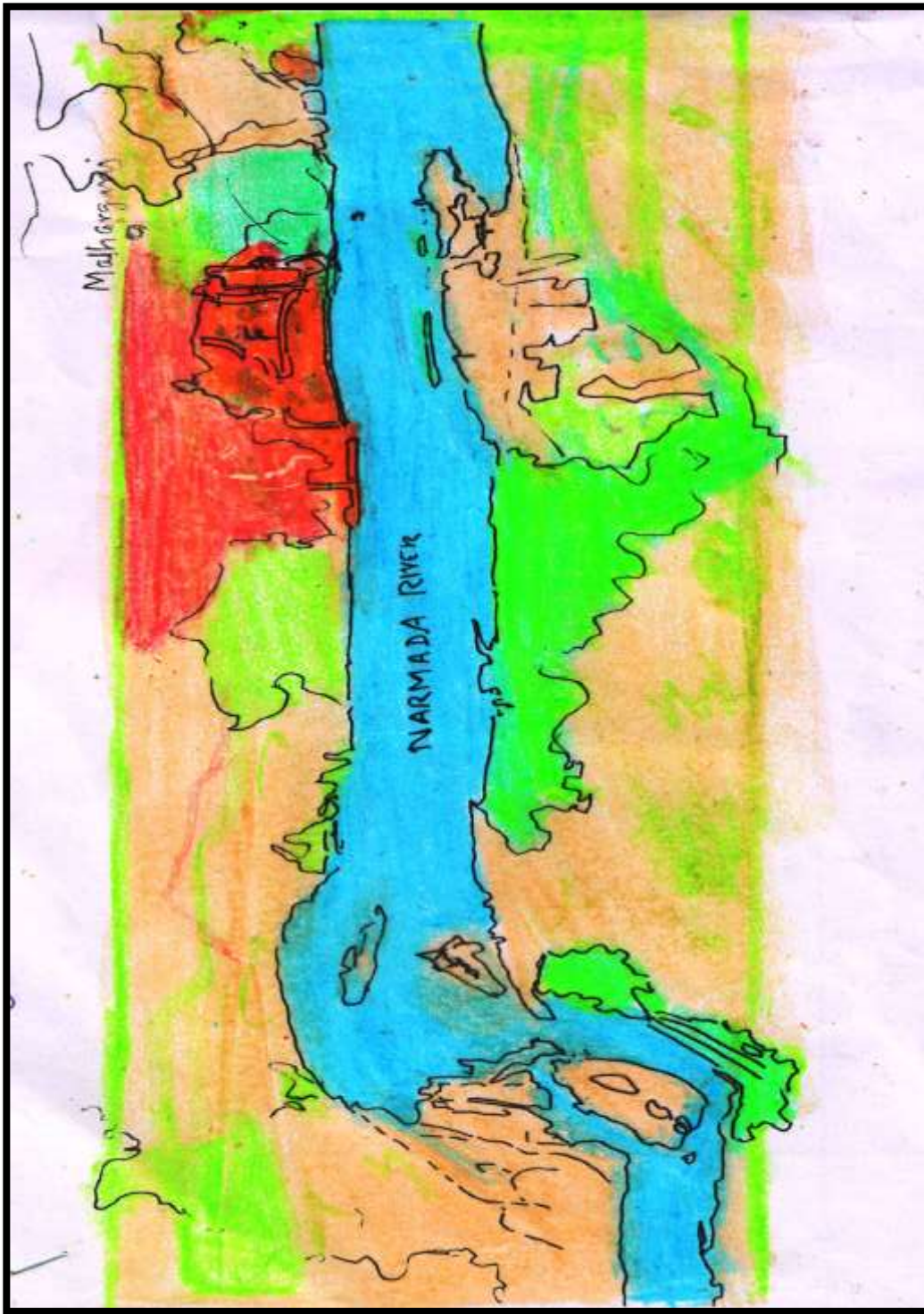
Source :- Wikipedia (2020)

TABLE :- IV**HOLKAR DYNASTY , MAHESHWAR
HINDU RELIGIOUS TEMPLES / MONUMENTS
(In the Fort and Bank of River Narmada)**

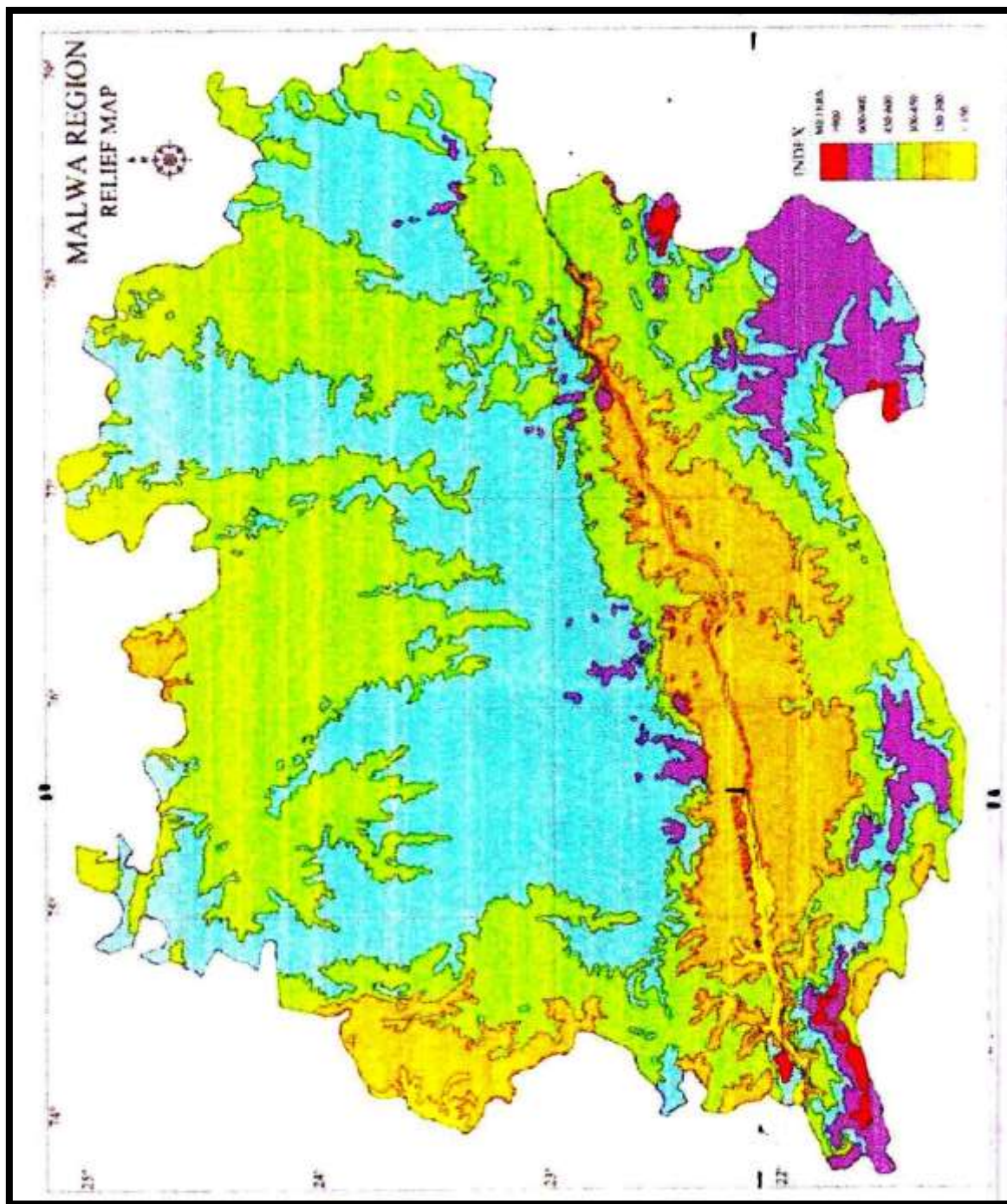
1. Raj rajeshwar Mandir (fort)	10. Khedapati Hanuman
2. Kashi Vishwanatha Mandir (fort)	11. Ram Temple
3. Chatur bhuj Narayan Mandir	12. Krishna Temple
4. Ahilya Mata's Chhattari	13. Narsingh Mandir
5. Banke Bihari	14. Kaleshwar Mandir
6. Ganesh Mandir	15. Jwaleshwar Mandir
7. PandariNath Mandir	16. Baneshwar Mandir (Island)
8. Bhawani Mata Mandir	17. Vindhya Vashini Maheshwari (Fort)
9. Anant Narayan Mandir	18. Sahastradhara Ek Mukhi Dattatraye Mandir



**FIG- I (A) HINDU TERRITORY (1765) AD IN INDIA
(Source Imperial Gazetteer)**



**FIG- I (B) AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR, NARMADA VALLEY
(Location – River Bank E-W Straight flow along Rift)**



**FIG- I (C) AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
(ELEVATION RANGES OF GROUND)**

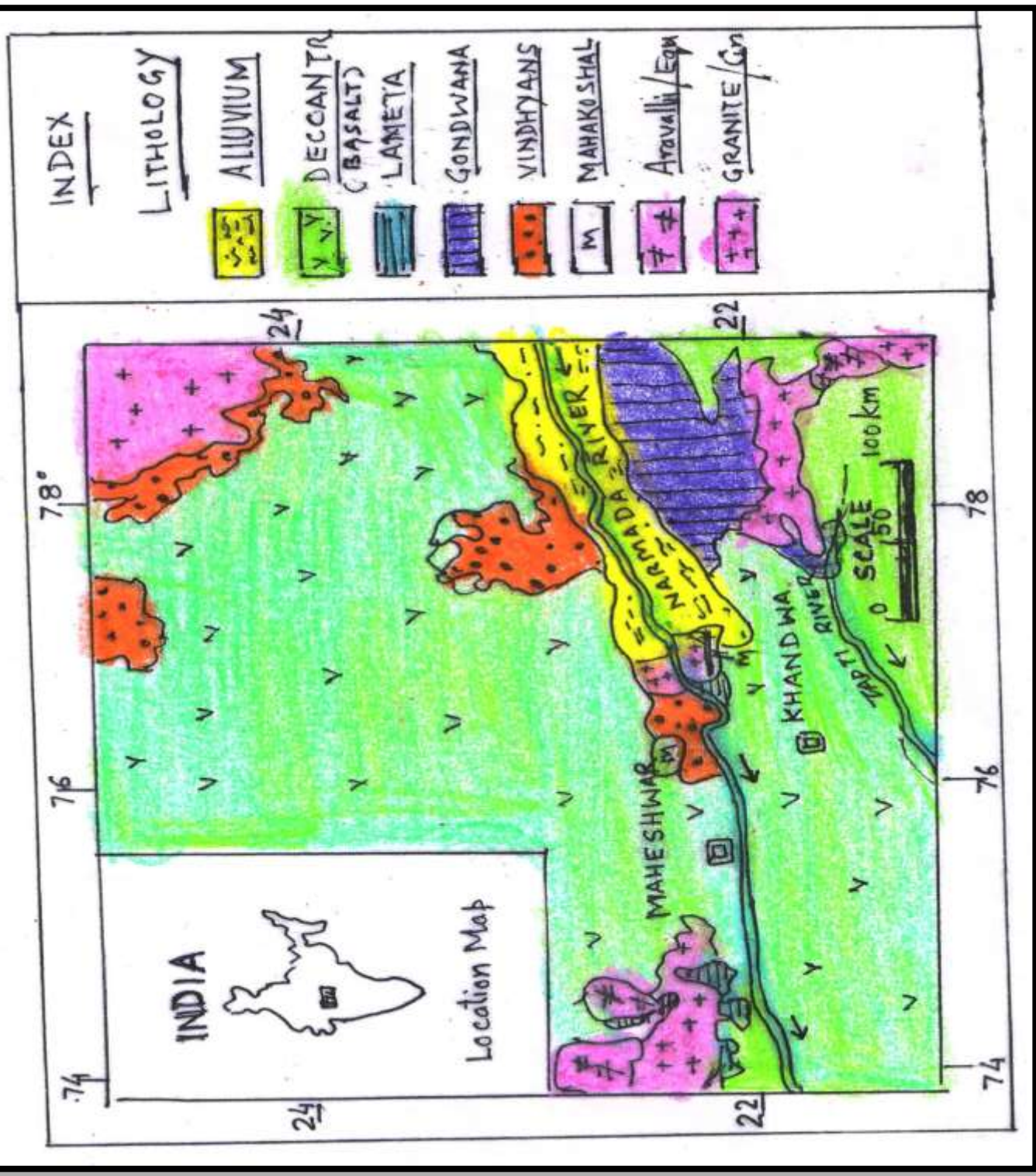
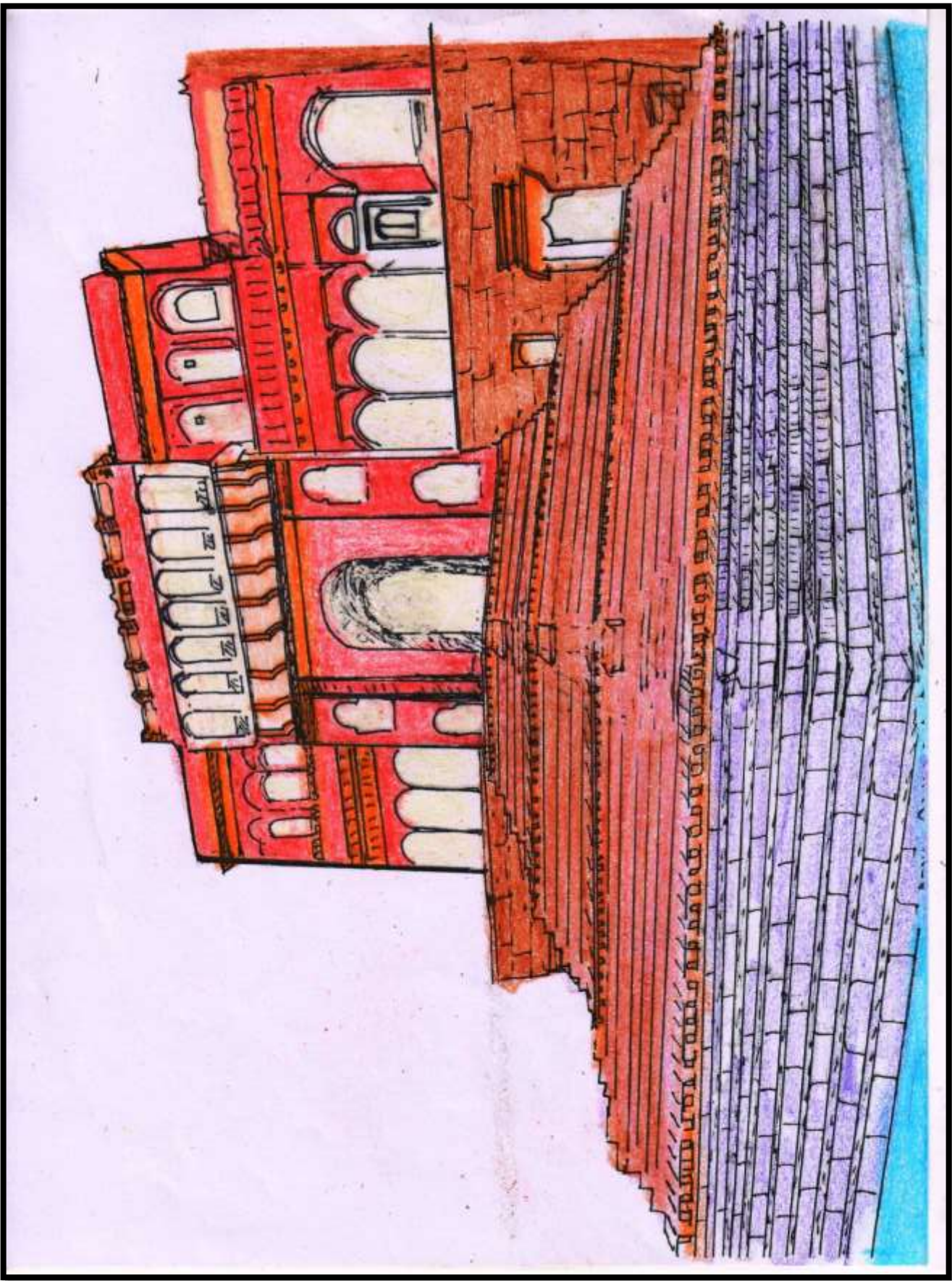


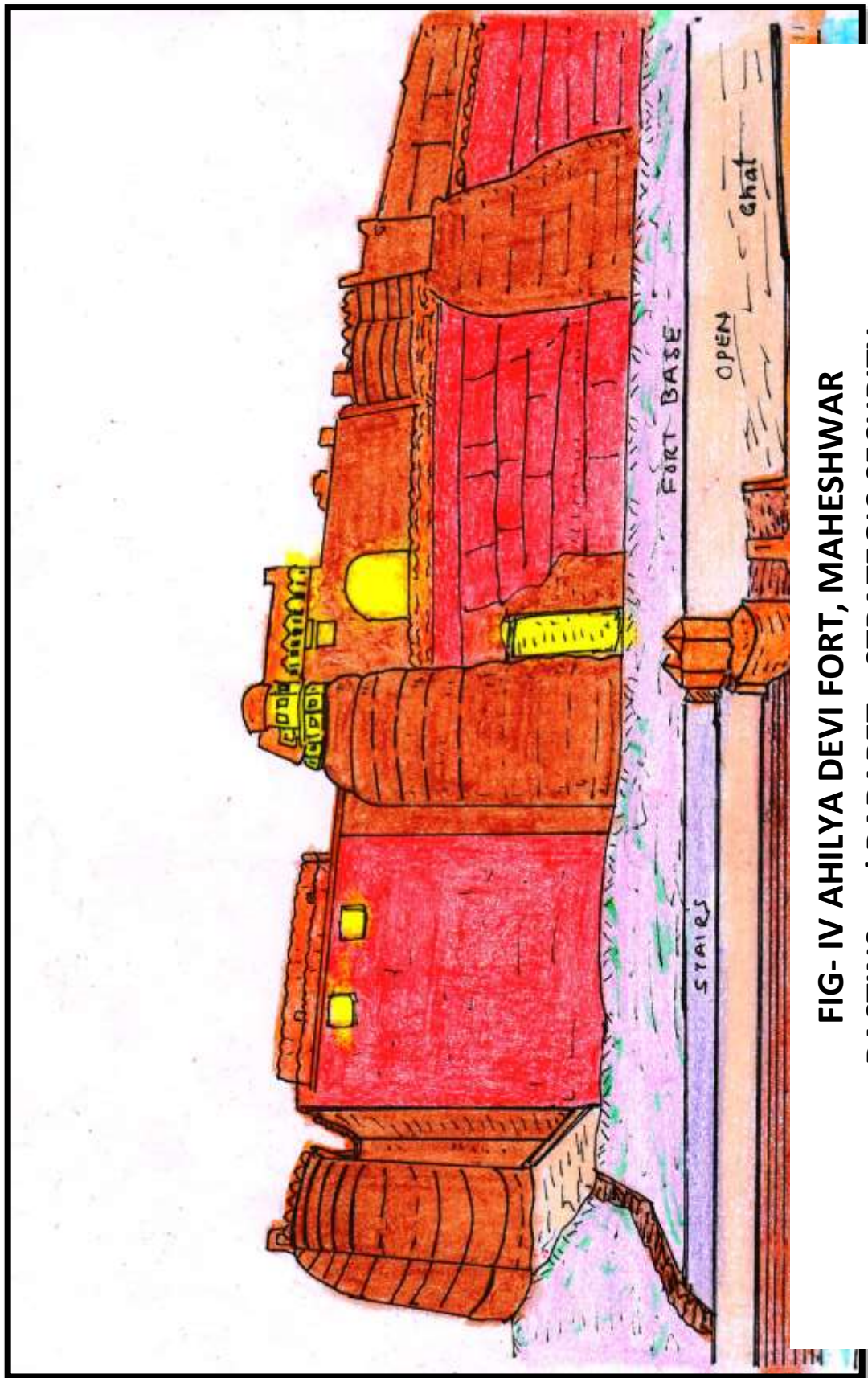
FIG- I (D) AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR



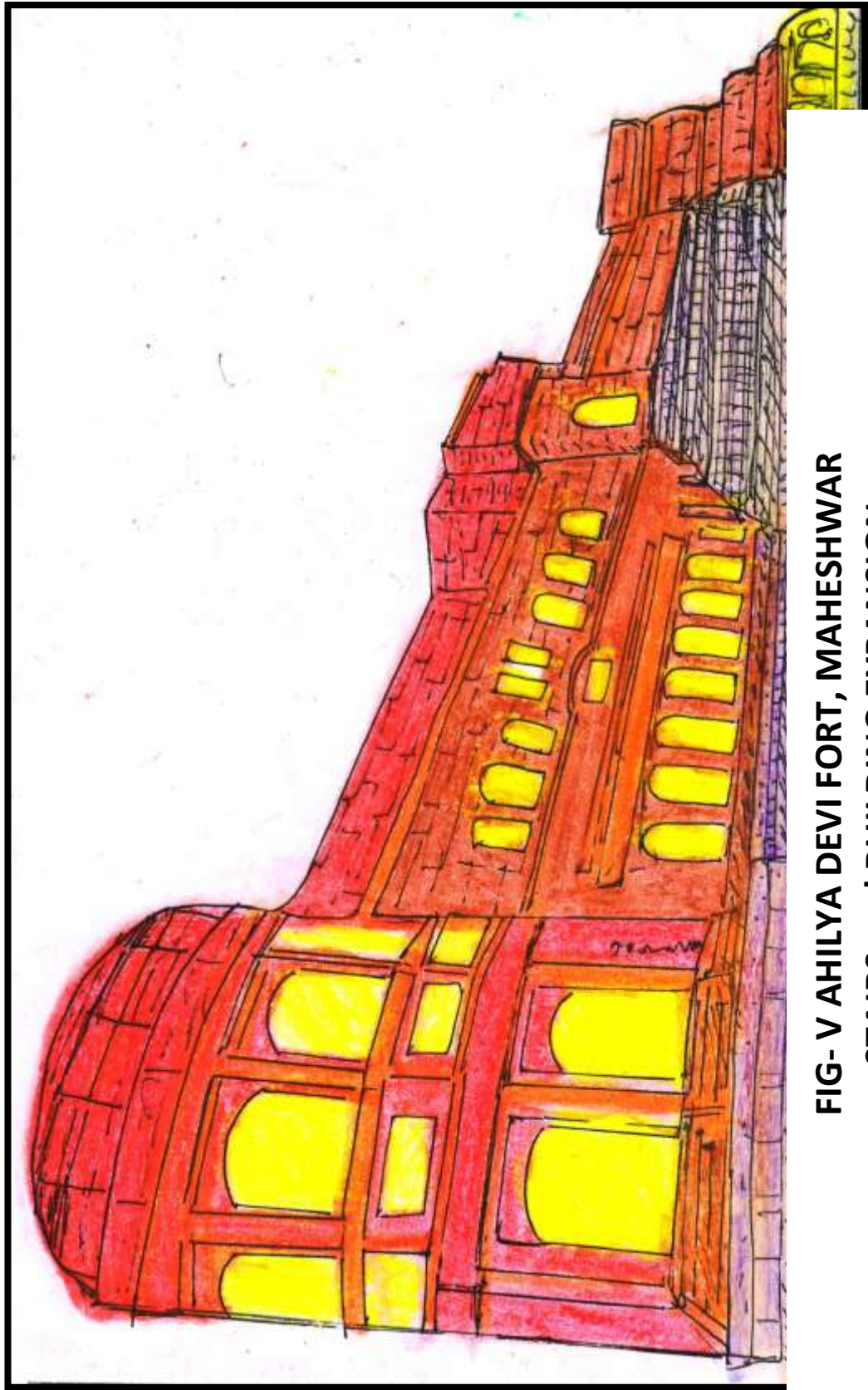
**FIG- II AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR, NARMADA VALLEY
(Fort Front View Along River Bank)**



**FIG- III AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
(Stairs and Hindu Architecture) Front Elevation**



**FIG- IV AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
BASTINS and PARAPET – STRATEGIC SECURITY**



**FIG- V AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
STAIRS and BUILDING EXPANSION**



**FIG- VI AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
(GATEWAY DESIGN)**



**FIG- VII AHILYA DEVI FORT, MAHESHWAR
(ARCHES AND PILLARS)**

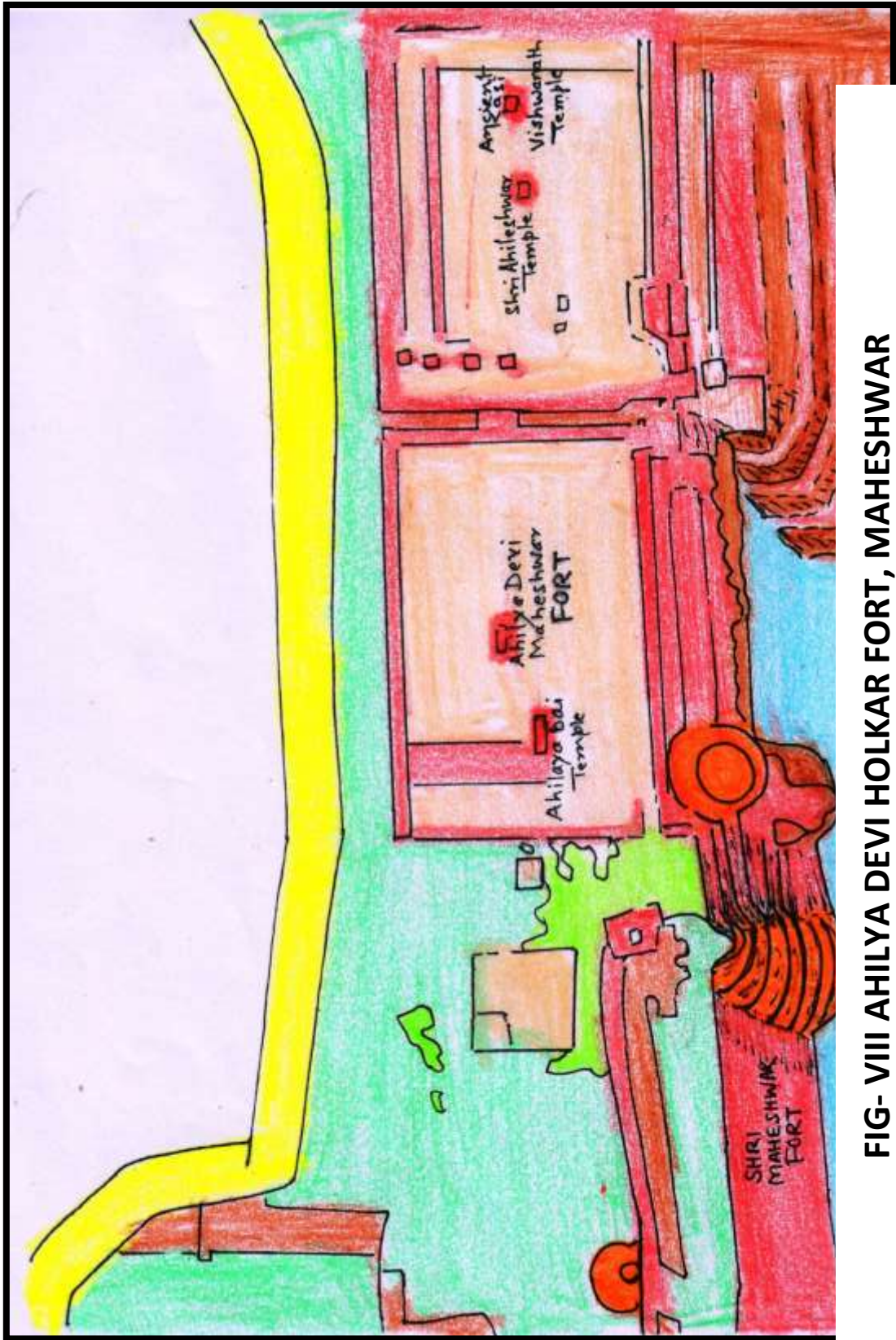


FIG- VIII AHILYA DEVI HOLKAR FORT, MAHESHWAR
Fort wall, Bastin, Stairs, Temple, Greeneries

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