

# Maharana Pratap

## A Note on the Author

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# Maharana Pratap

The Invincible Warrior

Rima Hooja

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS  
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,  
New Delhi 110080, India

First published in hardback by Juggernaut Books 2018  
Published in paperback 2019

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ISBN 9789353450649

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Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro by R. Ajith Kumar, New Delhi  
Printed at Manipal Technologies Ltd

*For my mother, Usha Rani Hooja  
(18 May 1923–21 May 2013)*

*Sculptor, alumna of St. Stephen's, Delhi, &  
Regent Street Polytechnic, London, in the 1940s,  
and an Unforgettable*



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# Timeline

## **Mewar rulers**

Maharana Sanga (Sangram Singh I)	r. 1509–27
Rana Ratan Singh	r. 1527–31
Rana Vikramaditya	r. 1531–37
Maharana Udai Singh II	r. 1537–72
Maharana Pratap Singh	r. 1572–97
Maharana Amar Singh I	r. 1597–1620
Maharana Karan Singh	r. 1620–28

## **Mughal rulers**

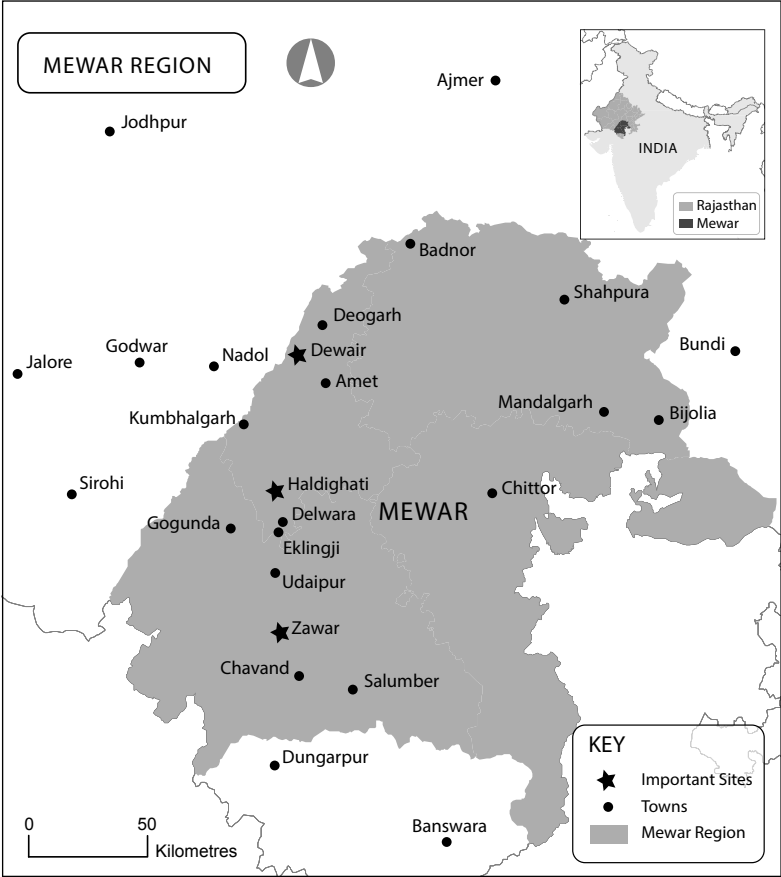
Babur	r. 1526–30
Humayun	r. 1530–40 and 1555–56

## Timeline

Akbar	r. 1556–1605
Jahangir	r. 1605–27
Shah Jahan	r. 1628–58

### **Major battles**

Siege of Chittor by Sultan Alauddin Khilji	1303
Battle of Khanua between Maharana Sanga and Emperor Babur	1527
Siege of Chittor by Bahadur Shah of Gujarat	1535
Siege of Chittor by Emperor Akbar	1567
Battle of Haldighati between Maharana Pratap and the Mughal army led by Man Singh of Amber	1576
Battle of Dewair between Maharana Pratap and the Mughal army	1582





## Prologue

The horses were saddled and waiting at the outskirts of the rugged fort of Gogunda, nestled in the hills of Mewar. Everything was ready for Prince Pratap's quick and quiet departure. But before he left, there was one last thing to do. Bending down to gather up some earth from the ground, he applied a pinch on his forehead, and tied the rest in a piece of cloth which he tucked away in a corner of his turban. Wherever fortune would take him, he would carry the soil of his beloved Mewar with him.

Within the ramparts of Gogunda, the funeral rites of Mewar's ruler and Pratap's father, Maharana Udai Singh II, were taking place. As the eldest son,

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and widely regarded as the most able and gifted, the thirty-one-year-old Prince Pratap should have succeeded him, but the dying Rana had declared that his chosen heir was Pratap's younger half-brother, Prince Jagmal, born of his favourite wife. Prince Pratap, refusing to squabble over the throne of Mewar with his half-brother – a move which could have plunged Mewar into civil war – decided to leave quietly with his small retinue, while everyone was busy with the royal funeral. But even as he gathered up the reins and mounted his horse, several of his father's senior courtiers and kinsmen suddenly arrived and stopped him. They told Prince Pratap that he was the people's favourite as well as theirs, and that as Maharana Udai Singh's eldest son he was now their king.



Pratap's absence at his father's funeral had not surprised the crowd of mourners – convention decreed that the successor to the throne did not join his predecessor's funeral cortege, and it was

## Prologue

assumed that as the eldest son he would be in the palace inside the fort, awaiting the hour of his enthronement. What was noticed, however, was the absence of Prince Jagmal.

Some senior Mewar nobles, among them Rawat Kishan Das of Salumber and Rawat Sanga of Deogarh, hastened back to the palace in search of him.<sup>1</sup> They found Jagmal seated on the ceremonial Mewar gaddi (throne) reserved for the Maharana of Mewar. Two of the nobles then politely but firmly took Prince Jagmal by his arms – one on each side – and as they did this, they declared loudly for all to hear, ‘You have made a mistake, Maharaj, that place belongs to your brother.’ They then marched him to a seat just a little removed from the throne, where a ruler’s brothers would traditionally sit in the court. White with rage and humiliation, Jagmal shook himself free of the nobles and immediately left the hall, and subsequently the fort of Gogunda.



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Sunset was approaching. Since the coronation ceremony had to be performed before nightfall, Pratap was hastily escorted to the nearby Mahadeo stepwell on the outskirts of the fort, where there was a flattish stone that was the right height for him to be ensconced upon. Seated on it, Pratap received the ceremonial anointment from Mewar's leading noblemen Rawat Krishna Das of Salumber and Rawat Sanga of Deogarh, the kingdom's Brahmin priests, as well as the Bhil tribal chieftains of Oguna and Undri, whose presence was essential to the time-honoured enthronement ceremony in Mewar.

Pratap was now ruler of Mewar, formally its 54th Custodian, with the title of Maharana, ruling a kingdom with a position of pre-eminence among Rajput states, and a long and illustrious history of valour. Still seated on the stone – which would henceforth become a symbol of kingship for his successors – Maharana Pratap received the pledge of allegiance and loyalty from the men present. Then, almost immediately, he rode out with them



## Prologue

for the traditional succession hunt known as ‘the shikar of Aheda’ where the new ruler, according to ancient Mewar custom, was expected to hunt wild boar as an offering to the goddess Gauri. Success during this shikar was seen as an omen for the future of a newly anointed ruler’s reign. The Aheda was also an opportunity for the new Maharana to display his skills as a rider and marksman, and his familiarity with the thickly forested hills of Mewar, teeming with tigers, leopards and other wildlife.

If an oracle had been present on that coronation day in 1572, he or she may have declared that a stone for a throne, and the open-air anointment, were harbingers of the long years that Pratap would take refuge in Mewar’s hills and forests, ruling his kingdom from there, as he held out against the forces of the mighty Mughal emperor Akbar. All that, however, still lay in the future.

As Pratap began his reign, Jagmal, furious with his brother, and enraged at losing the chance to be ruler of Mewar, found his way to the Mughal

## Prologue

governor of Ajmer, and from there to the court of Emperor Akbar, where he was given the jagir fief of Jahazpur and a position of honour at the Mughal court. It was indeed an irony that Jagmal had sought refuge from the very Mughal emperor who had besieged and sacked Mewar's ancestral capital of Chittor just four years earlier.

Many Rajput rulers had previously offered allegiance to Akbar, but proud Mewar had refused, and already paid a price. Pratap, and the Mewar he now ruled, were willing to keep paying the price. In the years that followed, and indeed until his last breath, Maharana Pratap's resolve remained unbroken.