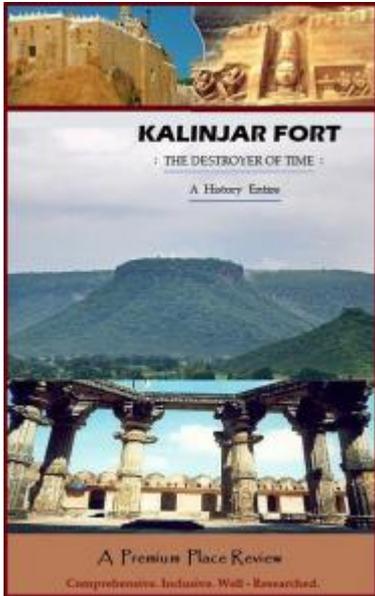




Kalinjar Fort

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India : through the ages ...

The **Kalinjar Fort** in Bundelkhand is an entire history in itself, a story through 6000 human generations in immediate past alone. You cannot think of it without the convergence it includes – of people and events from the wide, wide world within the sub-continent and from abroad – over a span of one and a half millenia. Developments in East, South, West and North West of India, Asia Minor, Middle East and Central Asia, and in Europe, as far as British Isles, gravitated to this now rather nondescript place.

That is too much of history, we note in astonishment, and far too many people of all kinds to be converging on this quiet forested periphery of one the oldest mountain ranges on earth – the Vindhya.

What accentuates our wonder are the legendary architecture the Fort and other ruins from antiquity in the region present, the exquisite temples and irreplicable sculptures at Khajuraho mere 100 km away, the economic and political significance it acquired and the culture it spawned over the centuries as the Indian civilisation itself evolved from the " Golden " Gupta era through the Hun, Sakya and Muslim invasions, the Turk and Mughal reigns in medieval times, the spirited movements it saw during British occupation, the remarkably endowed persons it raised, the rich traditions it fostered, and the fabulous hearsay natives in its vicinity still talk about !

Though associated principally with the Chandels and that fantastically temple – dense "city" of Khajuraho, from 10th Century through the 13th, the ' Kalinjara ' connection goes back to the Kalachuris of Elephanta and Ellora caves, the Rashtrakuts of Deccan, and further on to the Gujarat Parmars, the Kannauj Pratihars and Chauhans, the Vijaynagar empire, the Mughals, Afghans, the English, the armed rebellions against British occupation and for Indian independence, and to Mahatma Gandhi.

It takes the wind out of me and leaves my heart brimming with humanity. The Kalinjar Fort was a fortress with unparalleled strength, much culture and uncounted wealth. Together with its twin fort at Ajaigarh, Kalinjar formed a formidable line of defence against attacks from the north. In 1019, Mahmud of Ghazni ravaged much of north and west India but had to turn back from Kalinjar on account of the difficulties it posed and the opposition he encountered. The year 1022 saw a repeat, with Ghazni having to remain content with a few gifts from the [Chandel](#) ruler of Kalinjar, but without the keys to the Fort itself.

In its heydays, it is said that the Fort was ' a frightening embodiment of Hindu power.' The most significant place within the Fort

still extant is the Neelkanth (Shiva) Temple, built in a cave in the mountain wall, which precedes the Fort itself by a couple of millenia, or more. The entire construction came up around this ancient place of worship. The wide platform in front of its small entrance includes a *mandapa*, with proud pillars that still stand, but which is now roofless. All around it are priceless, ancient rock cut relics and carvings.

It is certain that had the Kalinjar Fort fallen to Ghazni's plunder, Khajuraho and its priceless expressions of art, thought and architecture, would not have survived. And the irony of ironies is that Khajuraho is a thriving well-promoted tourist hub today while Kalinjar is a grey area, seldom appreciated, rarely remembered and infrequently visited by the connoisseurs of history, art, architecture and defence strategy.

The Chandel supremacy was constantly under challenge since early medieval period and its kings had to face assaults from rulers of Kannauj in their north-west, Malwa in the west, the Chalukyas and Rashtrakuts in south and south-west, the Pals in the east, and of Kalinga in south-east. But the survival of Ch?di – Kalchuris through a millennium in such hostile environment, with their own dateline, currency and administrative institutions, speaks a lot for their commitment to the dominion and for their capability of shoring up order and security in the region to allow for pastoral and agricultural occupations, crafts and trade, arts and culture.

But it was the forts at Kalinjar and Ajaigarh that still remained with the Chandel line of kings, when their dominion had shrunk to a few districts in the neighbourhood and the last of them was finally submerged in the waves of history that saw attacks by Gonds, because the Gond king wanted the hand of the Chandel princess, onslaughts of Afghan and Mughal armies, the rise of Raja Chhatrasal, the sway of Maratha power and its occupation by the British.

Today, the Fort is at peace. The battles have ended and the two old forts are gradually fading, much like old soldiers of yore.

Of the hearsays, it is said that even today the Queen's Palace fills with spooky sounds at night, of ankle trinkets specially worn by courtesans and danseuse while they performed before a gathering of eminent persons invited by the royals for an evening of art, joy and pleasure !

The well illustrated e-book is available @ <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B007WYGNNNA> and through its distribution arms in UK, France, Germany, Spain and Italy.

(Column originally blogged @ <http://vamadevananda.wordpress.com>)

