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DEFENSIVE IDEAL VAN DURG, HINDU AJAIGARH FORT OF CHANDELA DYNASTY ON VINDHYAN HILLOCKS OF BUNDELKHAND REGION, PANNA DISTRICT, CENTRAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Ajaigarh fort is a Van Durg hilltop fort in Vindhyan ranges of Bundelkhand region, Panna district, M.P. Central India. The fort is located on a forested steep hill KedarParvat raised about 240 metres high from the surrounding plains. It was occupied by Chandela kings in 9th Century AD. The fort premises big in size and it was considered strongholds of Rulers in Central India. The fort is known for its rich historical-cultural heritages and Chandela Architecture of Bundelkhand. Many legends and tales of battles, War, Valour, strength, power repleted about the rulers. The Ajaigarh is significant for being the last stayed place of Chandelas in 13th Century AD. The aim of the study is to elaborate the facts scientifically about fort, Temples, palaces, natural environment of fort site, adopting multidisciplinary approach with interpretation of Historical indigenous Hindu Architecture, heritages and efforts made by Chandella Dynasty in defends against the Non Hindu Invaders (NHI) attackers during medieval periods in Bundelkhand region, Central India. The Chandellas were rising growth and extended reign over a vast area of Central India in early medieval period. Under methodology the Satellite Remote Sensing data product imagery have been utilized for recognition of physical domains of region adopting standard interpretation keys and correlated with facts available in records, archives, literatures, and presented in form of Table and maps. The study indicates that the Ajaigarh fort was built in strategic sound site on the mounds of hillock and in the vicinity of Ken river valley. The study reveals that the Ajaigarh fort represents ideal Van Durg type fort built in Bundelkhand and its similarity with Kalinjar fort of Banda, built by the Chandela rulers. It was strong hold and prestige for Rulers until the NHI attacks in 13th Century AD. The major portion of fort precincts was destroyed by attackers. It needs conservation and protective measures to survive the Hindu Prestigious Bundelkhand heritage of Central India.

Keywords: Ajaigarh Fort, Central India, Vindhyan Hill, Chandela Kingdom, Van Durg, Hindu Temples, Defence, Bundelkhand, Remote Sensing.

A. INTRODUCTION

Ajaigarh fort, district Panna, M.P., central India was occupied by Chandela kings in 9th Century AD. The fort lies on a hill top of KedarParvat (mountain). Before fortification maharishi Ajai Pala, a Hindu monk resided on Hill. The fort was constructed for defensive purposes as Van Durg type or forest Type fort. The rule of Chandelas at Ajaigarh fort continued till the invader's attacks, Non Hindu Invaders (NHI) Delhi and captured the region & took the fort. The hostile and impassable terrain of region favour the defensive fort inl inaccessible to attackers' invasions. Also, the battlement rarely visible since it rises from the rough terrain and dense forest surrounding it.i.e. a ideal Van Durg as categorized by Chanakya (Kautilya) in his treatise of Arthashastra during Mauryan Empire period. (3rd BC). The Ajaigarh princely state was founded in 1785 AD by Bundelas and Ajaigarh was the capital of state included underBundelkhand Agency of Central India Agency in 1809 AD. The Britishers captured when Ajaigarh refused to surrender their supremacy. They had titled (rulers) Sawai Maharaja with revenue of £ 15000/- and paid a of £460/-. The rulers were resided at town Nowaganj located at the base of fort Hill Ajaigarh. The flag contained double monographs of deity Lord Sun and Lord Hanuman flying on the Sky. During attacks the NHI were destroyed the Temples, the richly carved stones were reused even to reinforce the ramparts. Many Talav, water, Tank, and cave, springs exists in the fort precincts. The spiritual Hindu religious Idols, deities flourishing the culture and religion.Rock carvings, sculptures, Arts, reflects the cultural and religion practices of the region. The detailed carvings on stone sculptured and etched out motifs on Sati pillars near the Gateway. There is need of conservation and protection of the monuments, Temples, Ancient water resource Tanks/Talavs and Temples of Hindu religion of the Bundelkhand region. (Table II)

B. STUDY AREA- LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

The fort Ajaigarh lies on geographical co-ordinates 24°54'N latitude and 80°16'E longitude and well connected to all major cities of Central India through state highways eg.toBanda, Satna, Chhattarpur, Panna& Bhopal, Jablapur, Delhi by National Highways approaches. It is located on the eastern bank of Ken river (NE flowing) of Yamuna catchment at the border of UP and MP on isolated hillock of Vindhyan rocks. Fig I(a) shows location of Ajaigarh fort (AF) on the district map of Panna (MP). Ajaigarh is accessible on road transport only and the nearest air service is at Khajuraho, which is 46 km from Panna on way to Chhattarpur.



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C. LANDSCAPE, DRAINAGES, GEOMORPHIC AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

The landscape of fort region shows a varied ground surface due to hilly tract of Vindhyan forest ranges. The fort lies on one of the mounds on flat top. These mounds are seriate in the area and forms sequential valleys whereas the North-West part is occupied by undulating plains where Ajaigarh settlement have been developed. The Hills are oriented in NE-SW trends. The hill scarps, flat vertical rock walls and steep slope occurs in South-East wards. It provide natural site for fortification with forest fort (Van Durg) and Hill fort (GiriDurg) types combined in Ajaigarh fortification hence it was very difficult to conquer by attackers in medieval period. Fig II (a) shows rugged hilly tract of Ajaigarh fort located on Vindhyan ranges. The major drainages comprises Ken river and its tributaries. Ken river catchment is a part of Yamuna river basin. The tributaries of Ken comprises Bearma, Sonar, Patna, Baghain, Sirmardha and RanjNadi. Geomorphologically, the Panna district includes Plateau & ridges of Vindhyan, Denudational hillocks, Residual hill mounds, pediplains, undulating plains, older fluvial plains, flood plains etc. The climatic condition of region is subtropical with average rainfall of 1182.9 mm annually. The average elevation of plains is 170, AMSL and hillocks table lands shows av. Elevation of 440 m AMSL.

D. LITHOLOGY – ROCK TYPES

The Panna district shows an assemblages of rock types from Archean Bundelkhand Granites to Proterozoic Vindhyan, Quaternary to Recent Alluvials. The basement rocks of the region is occupied by Bundelkhand Granites of Archean age, mainly pink in colour and hard & compact in nature. The Granitic rocks occurs in the Panna and Ajaigarh blocks. The granites shows fine to coarse grained with porphyritic texture. The granites of Ajaigarh blocks are intensively weathered and found as thick soil and mantle debris covers in undulating rocks of proterozoic Era exposed in the study area. It includes sandstone, shale and limestone rocks, covered by alluvium sand and silt, soil Table I illustrates the Geological succession of Ajaigarh region in generalized form. The Vindhyan rocks are found in the region belonging to Kaimur Group mainly sandstones. These sandstones are white, hard, fine grained, Siliceous in nature and occurs as Residual hillock mounds. Alluvium occurs along banks and flood plains of river and streams. The thickness vary from few meters to 30, metres. The fine, soft, fusible shales forms the fertile land in the vicinity of Ken river. Fig. I(b) exhibits regional geology of Bundelkhand region Panna (Rewa Group) Ajaigarh (Kaimur group) rocks of Vindhyan supergroup. Almost 80% area of the Panna district is covered by alluvial soils derived from the weathering of Vindhyan sedimentary rocks. The northern part of the district the yellowish sandy soils occurs. These soils are the weathering product of Granitic rocks found in Ajaigarh block in pediment & pediplains. The thick alluvial soils are confined along the river courses in flood plains and river banks. Fig I(c) shows the Lithology (rock types) of Ajaigarh region, Panna district.

E. HISTORY

Earlier to Chandelas the Ajaigarh fort was under the control of Gurjar Pratihar kingdom. The Chandela came in Ajaigarh region and occupied the fort in 9th Century AD. The name of fort Ajaigarh derived from a Hindu Saint Ajaypala, who resided on the Hill Kedar Parvat. The Mahoba fort was captured by Prithvi Raj Chauhan in 12th Century AD from King Parmadideva. Afterwards the Chandela strengthened their power and built the centre of their reign in Ajaigarh in Bundelkhand, Central India. In 13th century the great defeat of Chandela was the loss of Kalinjar fort by attack of NHI Table II exhibits the chronological rulers of Ajaigarh state during Bundela Kings. The Ajaigarh city was the capital of Ajaigarh state during Bundela reigns. In 1785 AD the Ajaigarh princely state was founded by Bundelas and included in the Bundelkhand Agency of Central India Agency in 1809 AD. They had titled (ruler) Savai Maharaja with revenue of £ 15000/- and paid a token of £ 460/-. The ruler resided at town Nowganj at the base of fort Hill Ajaigarh Fig III(a) shows the flag of the state double triangle with deities images of Lord Surya and Lord Hanuman flying in sky, imposed on the Flag images. Table II shows the chronological successors of Bundelas of Ajaigarh state after Chhatrasal and Guman Singh up to G.O.I. independent India, Vindhyan Pradesh state in 1947 AD.

F. DEFENSIVE-STRATEGIC FORTIFICATION- ARCHITECTURE- PLAN-FEATURES

The Ajaigarh fort is a hill top fort type in Vindhyan ranges and lies in Ken river catchment of Yamuna Basin. The fort is located on a steep hill raised 240 metres high from the surrounding plains. The hill ridges of Vindhyan with natural forest provide a natural scenic view of Hillocks and Ken river valleys. The fort is big in size and it was considered for its rich historical- cultural heritage and Chandela Architecture of Bundelkhand. Fig II(a) depicts the Hilly tract of Vindhyan, Ajaigarh Town towards NE and Triangular fort-precincts on recent satellite scene of 2022 AD. The fort had five Gateways earlier. At present two Gateways exists known as Kalinjar Gate and Tarhaori Gate. Fig II(c) shows strategic fortification- Double fortified walls fort precincts, compact and rigid stone block utilized. During battlement and War the fights were rarely visible due to rough terrain and dense forest surroundings it. The fortification is made on the rise of Hill slope grounds selecting equal altitude i.e. the contours of same value. The Ajaigarh fort represents an Ideal Van Durg due to its more than 800 feet high elevation from the surroundings and nearly 3 miles of battlement on the Triangular Hill top Area. Fig. IV (c) exhibits Ajaigarh fort premises, the Military Defensive type fort, kept Metallic Cannon on



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Hill Top Arsenels. The Kalinjar fort of Banda and Mahoba forts of Khajuraho were strongholds and powercentre of the Chandela Kingdom. After capturing the huge Ajaigarh fort augmented the Chandelas strength in the Bundelkhand and Central India. The Chadelas raised their power and military strength in Ajaigarh since its is located in the remote area Van Durg, difficult to conquer by enemies fig II(b) depicts Ajaigarh hill top fort and Palace Water Pond at centre, Rangmahal towards South with Lord Shiva Temple Westwards and Settlement towards North- West in Satellite imagery scene of 2022 AD. The fort is rich of several Hindu Temples. These temples have been adorned with attractive carvings and sculptures. The fort has two water Tanks of Rock cut cisterns near by the North Gate these tanks are known as Ganga-Yamuna water kunds. The potable waters utilized by the Garrisons and Military Warriors during siege periods. Fig II depicts Ajaigarh fort precincts, fort Temple, Water Pond, rectangular in shape, measuring 50mx100m, permanent water body on hill tip as reservoir in recent Satellite scene, 2022 AD.

G. MILITARY STRATEGY- GATEWAYS AND INVASIONS

The Ajaigarh was founded on a strategic safe place for Chandelarulers and they retreated to Ajaigarh and stayed for over a Century. The Ajaigarh became the Centre of power of Chandelas in Bundelkhand and Central India. The Kalinjar Gate of Ajaigarh fort located on the top part and it faces towards Kalinjar hence its name called kalinjar Gate. The both forts Kalinjar and Ajaigarh were equally weighted in power of Chandelas. The another Gate named Tarhaoni Gate and near the Tarhaoni Gate a panel of rock inscriptions depicting the SaptMatrika or Seven mother Goddess and Veerbhadra a form of lord Shiva prayed by the royal families. The Chandelas were administered the rule from Ajaigarh fort and continued till the Non Hindu Invaders (NHI) Delhi captured the region and took the fort from the Chandellas. The Ajaigarhfort being a military fort, the NHI placed one GondKiledar or fort custodian till the champatRai emerged as a force to reckon with the NHI. He favour the NHI attackers and guided them in hostile and impassable terrain of Ajaigarh region, to lead the Military Armies during 16-17th Century AD. The defensive Van Durg Type Hill fort Ajaigarh had faced many invasions, the last being that of British attacks in 1809AD. It was caused by the refusal of Ajaigarh to submit their supremacy and being a princely state. The British laid siege of Ajaigarh fort for more than one month. They had attempted the siege from the adjacent hillock, where by advantageously they could destroy the Gate of Ajaigarh. They had not tried attack at the basal section or portion of fort Hill base, their strategy were successful. Fig II(d) illustrates the internal structure of Ajaigarh fort including Building structures KilaMandir, Rectangular water tank at the middle-central part of the fort, serve as permanent surface water supply, in recent Satellite Scene, 2022AD.

H. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE- Hindu Temples, Ponds, Heritages- (Religious-cultural Heritages)

The Hindu Heritages of Culture and religious, expressed by the sculptures of monuments, Temples, Palaces, ponds, Cisterns etc. The Rock Carvings are the evidences of Chandelas Growth and power in Central India. Inside the Ajaigarh fort, there are remains of Medieval Hindu Cultures of contemporary Society represented by Arts. Sculptures, decorative stone carvings. The remains of huge Bastions and towers intact structures exhibits the evidences of its Military power. Towards the steep Ascent of fort Hill there are relics of Hindu iconography etched, engraved in the rock blocks, faces alongside many Sati hand prints and rock inscriptions of 12th and 13th Centurews AD. Most of these sculptures & impressions belonging to the reign of ViraVarmanChandela. A dancing Ganesha lies almost appears as sand grains and images of Hindu deities Goddess Durga and Kali sculptured in ancient black stone, statue of Lord Vishnu also foundalong side of a colossal jain idols. Since most of the Hindu Temples were destructed by the Non Hindu Invader/attackers. The richly carved stones were reused even to reinforce the ramparts and these Hindu temple remains are found as setted in the altered structures built by Non Hindu attackers/invaders. The Pavilions of fort and Palaces structures and historical moat found in ruins. It needs conservation and protection to restore the Hindu Heritage structures of Medieval period of Central India.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Ajaigarh fort is an ideal Van Durg, located on a steep Vindhyan hill ranges, KedarParvat in Panna district, M.P. Central India. The fort name has been derived from the name of Hindu Monk Ajaipala, who resided on the hill during ancient period. The defensive fort is occupied in 9th century AD by Chandella kingdoms and developed along with their two another forts exists nearby 1. Kalinjar fort, Banda and 2.Mahoba fort, Khajuraho as they were strongholds of the Bundelkhand region, Central India. The Chandellas rulers were bravely defends the attacks made by Non Hindu invaders (NHI) during 13th Century AD. The Non Hindu invaders (NHI) attackers had demolished and destroyed Palaces, Hindu temples, the ruins and remains of structures scattered and buried in the fort premises. The majestic ponds and rock-cut cisterns are still found in good conditions. The fort structures needs conservation and protective measures to survive the Hindu heritage structures of Medieval Chandela dynasty of Central India.



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TABLE – I
GEOLOGICAL SUCCESSION: PANNA DISTRICT (Generalized)
(AJAIGARH REGION)

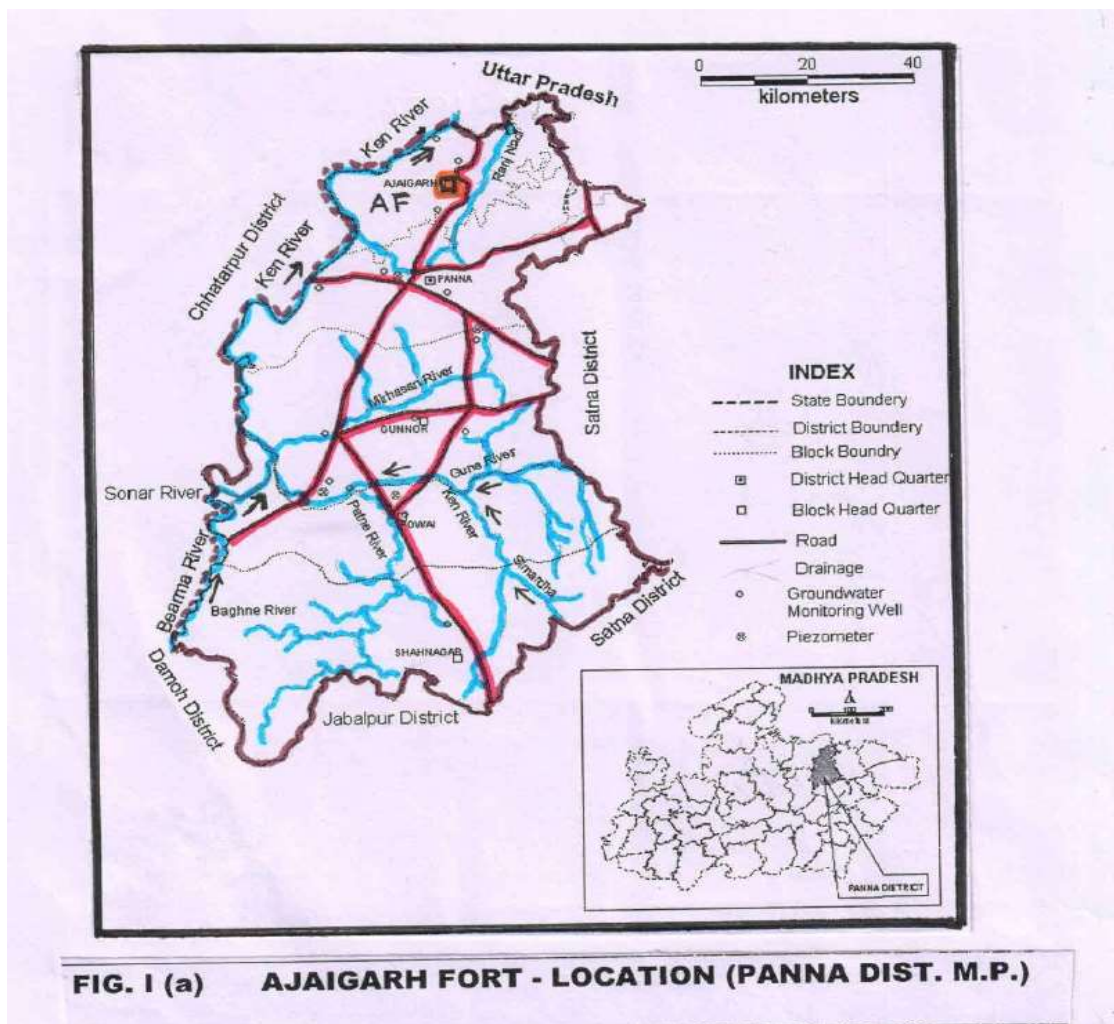
AGE/ERA	GP/Formation	Lithology/Rock Types
Recent To Pleistocene	Newer Alluvium Older Alluvium	Alluvial soils, sand, silt, clay Nodular Kankars
UPPER VINDHYANS (Proterozoic)	RewaGp-Bhander Fm.	Shale, Sandstone and Limestone
-Diamond Bearing Conglomerates-		
Upper Vindhians (proterozoic)	KaimurGp-Baghain Fm.	Sandstone and Conglomerates
Lower Vindhians (Proterozoic)	SemriGp- PorcellaniteBasalstage	Porcellanite, Shales, Quartzites, and Conglomerates
-UNCONFORMITY-		
Archaeans	Bundelkhand Granites massif (Basement)	Granites, Gneisses Granitoids

TABLE – II
Hindu Religious Temples, Monuments, Water Tank, Ponds in Ajaigarh Fort

S.N.	Temples/Monuments/ponds	location	Description
I	Ganga-Yamuna Kund	Natural Cave in developed as Rock cut cistern	Perennial U.G. water/springs
II	ParmadidevaTalao (Pond)	Utilized by Royal members	Built in the name of Ruler
III	AjaipalTalo (Pond)	At the Centre of the fort Ancient pond	Built in the name of Monk Ajaipala
IV	Rock- Monument-slab Sati hand prints	Near Gateway side Rock slab	Engraved during Parmadideva
V	Dancing Ganesha	Rock appears Sandy	ViravarmanChandela Reigns
VI	Goddess Kali-Durga	Nearby reservoir &Collasal of Jain idol	12 th century AD

TABLE –III
CHRONOLOGICAL SUCCESSORS OF AJAIGARH STATE, PANNA DIST.

S.N.	Ruler/King/possession Govt.	Time period	Description
I	Maharaja Chhatrashal	1649-1731	Founder of Many kingdoms
II	Jagat Raj	1731-1758	Jaitpur
III	Pahar Singh	1758-1765	Vir Singh Brother
IV	Guman Singh	1765-1792	Banda (In 1785 He founded Ajaigarh State)
V	Bhakhat Singh	1792-1837	Nephew of Gumansingh son of Durg Singh, 1809 AD founder Ruler of Ajaigarh
VI	Madho Singh	1837-1849	Son of Mahapat Singh
VII	Ranjore Singh	1849-1919	Ranjore Singh Son of Vijay Singh
VIII	Bhopal Singh	1919-1942	Successor (Bundela)
IX	PunyaPratap Singh	1942-1947	Successor (Bundela)
X	G.O.I	1947	Independent India Vindhya Pradesh State



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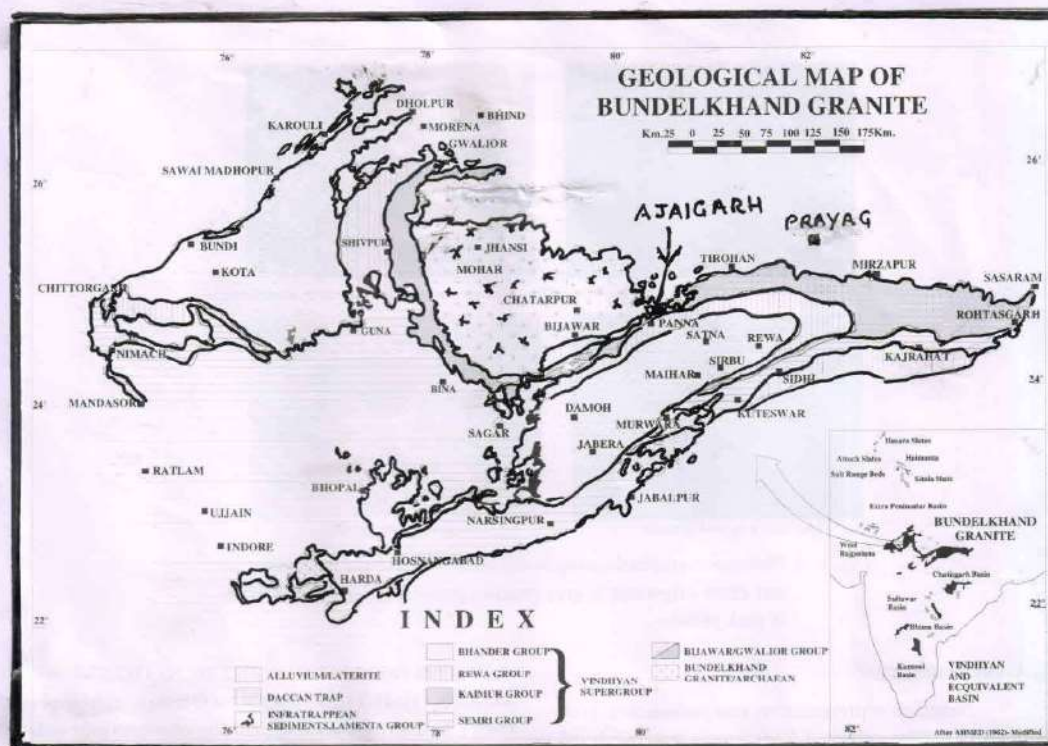
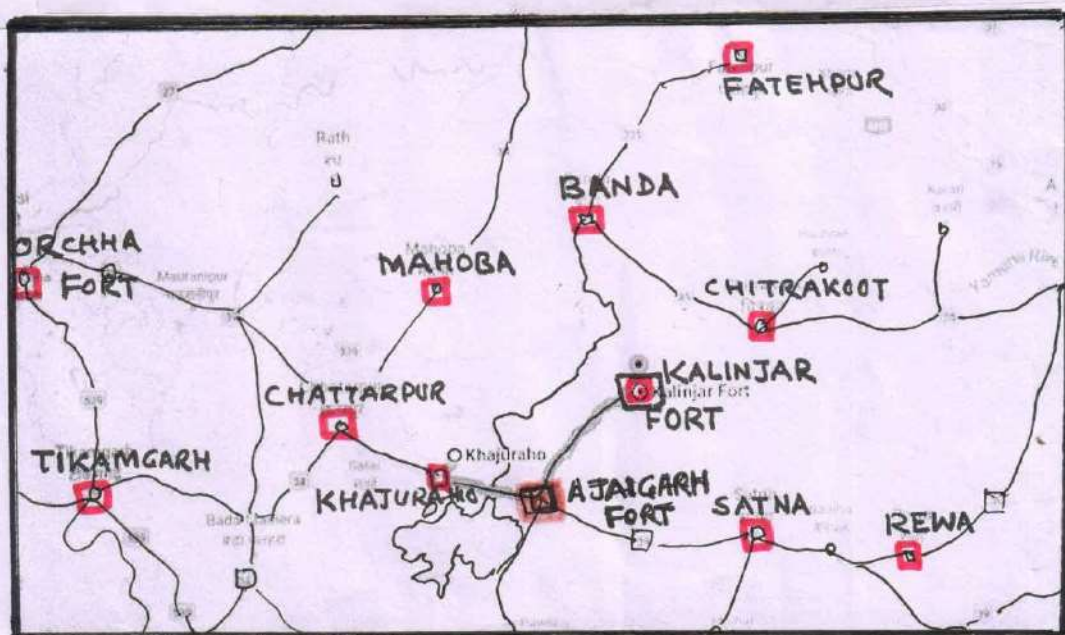


FIG. 1 (b) AJAIGARH FORT - REGIONAL GEOLOGY (Bundelkhand)



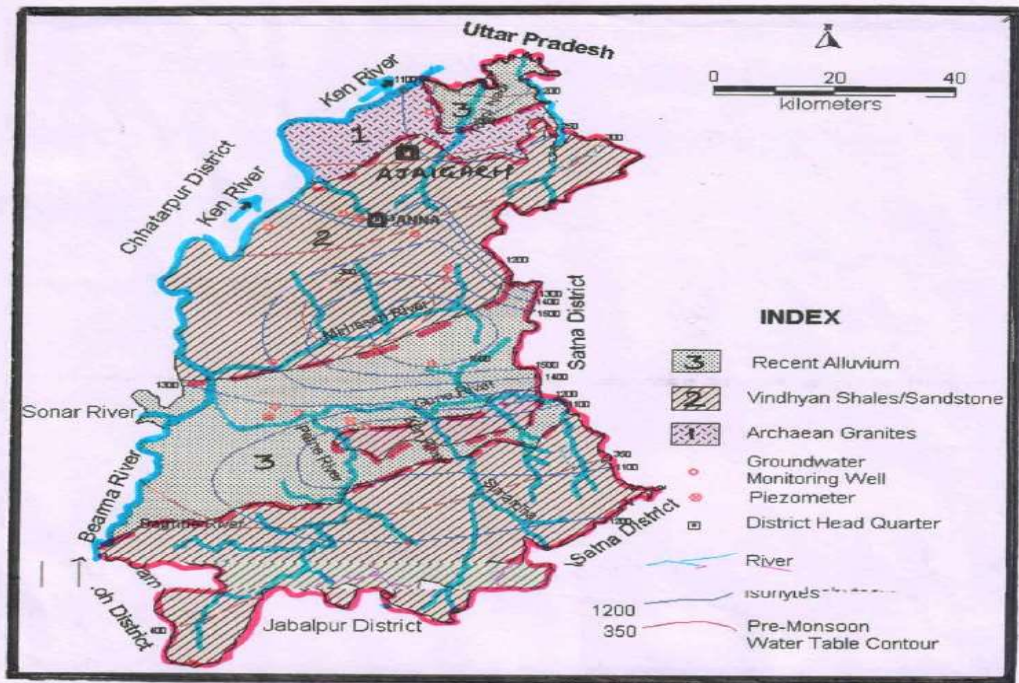


FIG. I (c) AJAIGARH FORT - LITHOLOGY - ROCK TYPES
(Source- C.G.W.B., 2013)

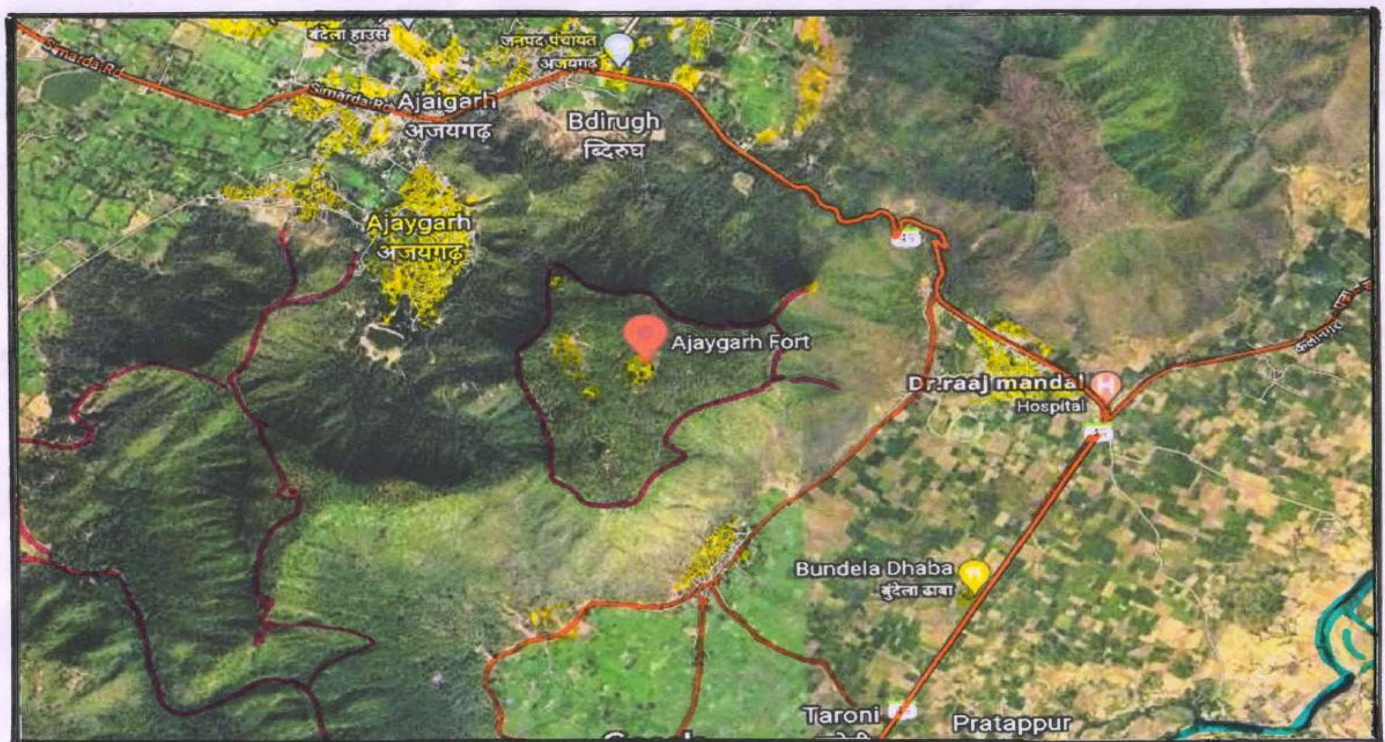


FIG. II (a) AJAIGARH FORT - HILLY TRACT OF VINDHYANS
Ajaigarh Town (NE), Triangular Precinct
© Author (Dr. H.D. Diwan) (Based on Satellite Imagery Data, 2023)

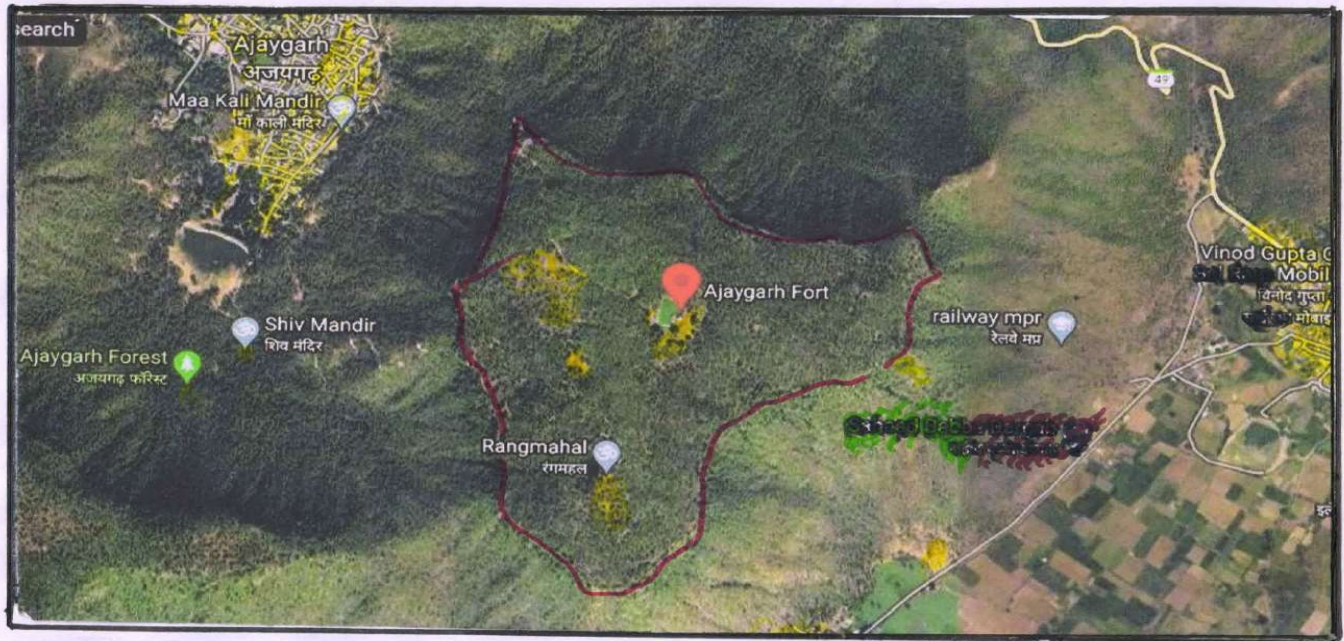


FIG. II (b) AJAIGARH FORT - HILL TOP FORT AND PALACE
(Water Pond at Centre) (Rangmahal (S)) lord
Shiva Temple (W)

© Author (Dr. H.D. Diwan)

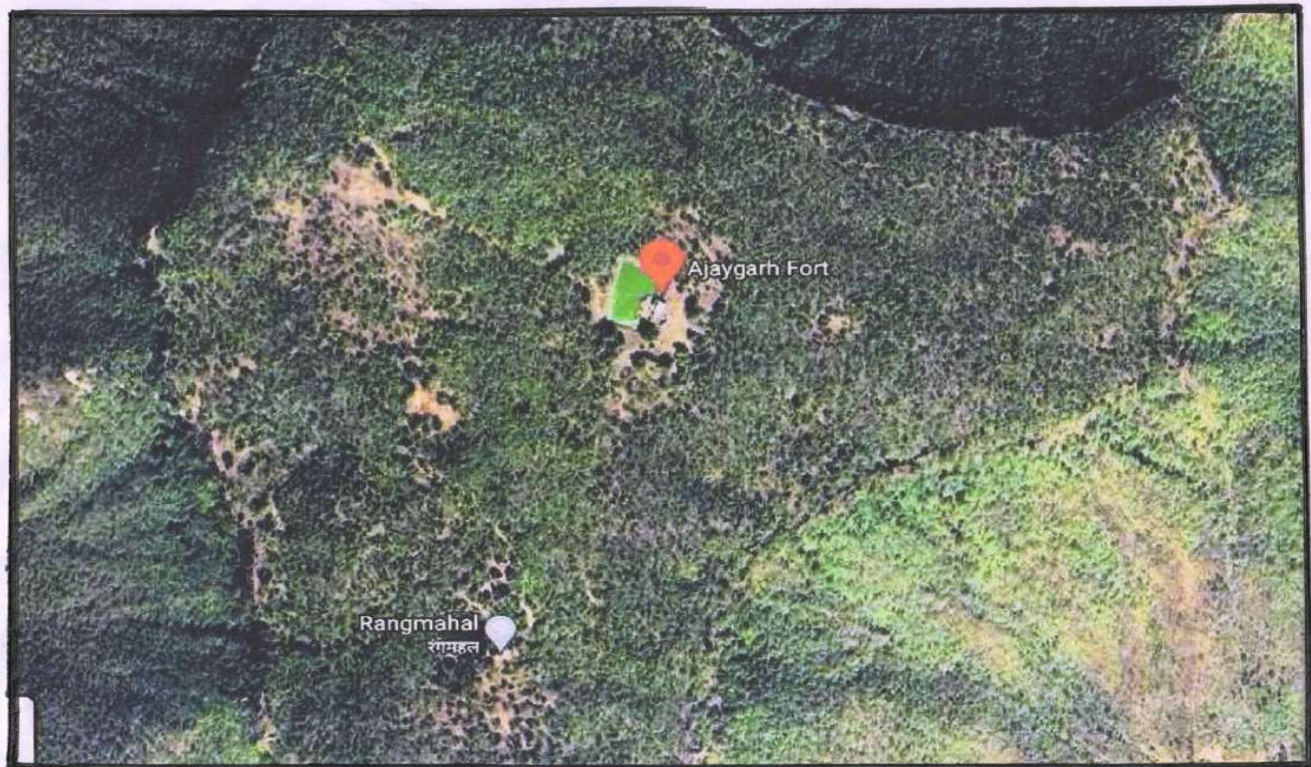


FIG. II (c) AJAIGARH FORT - Double Fortified wall (precincts)

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FIG. II (d) AJAIGARH FORT - INTERNAL STRUCTURES

Building, Kila Mandir, Rectangular Tank

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SCALE 50m 100m

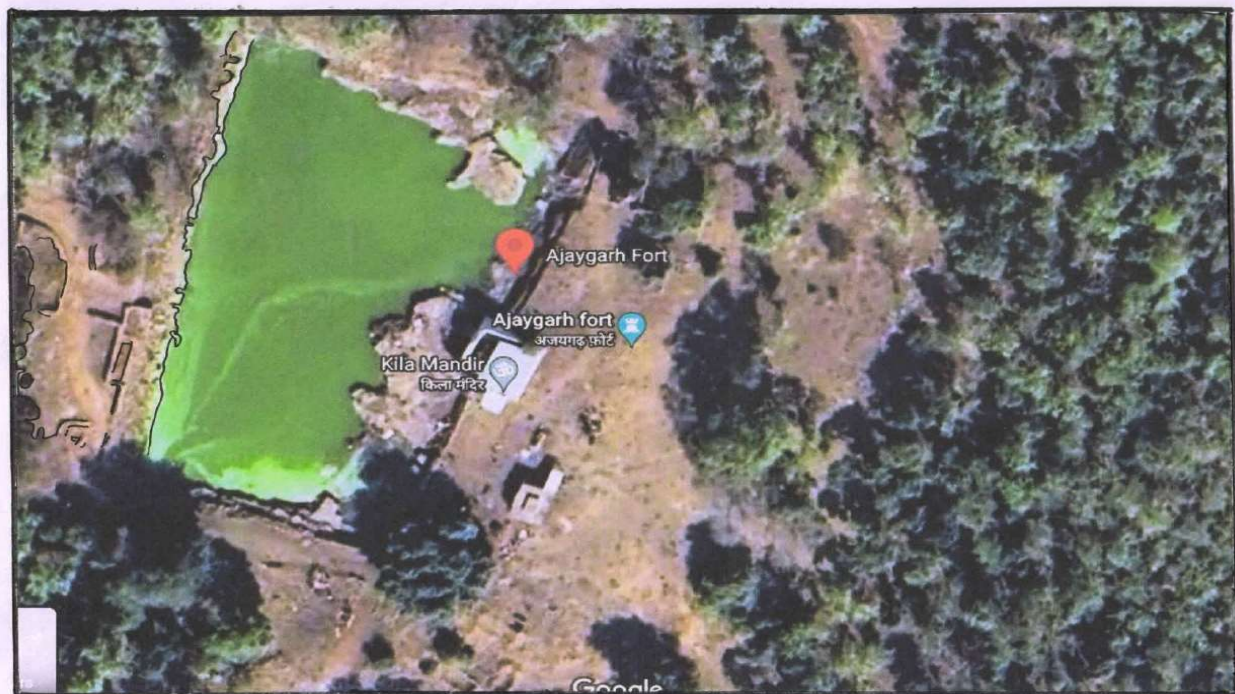
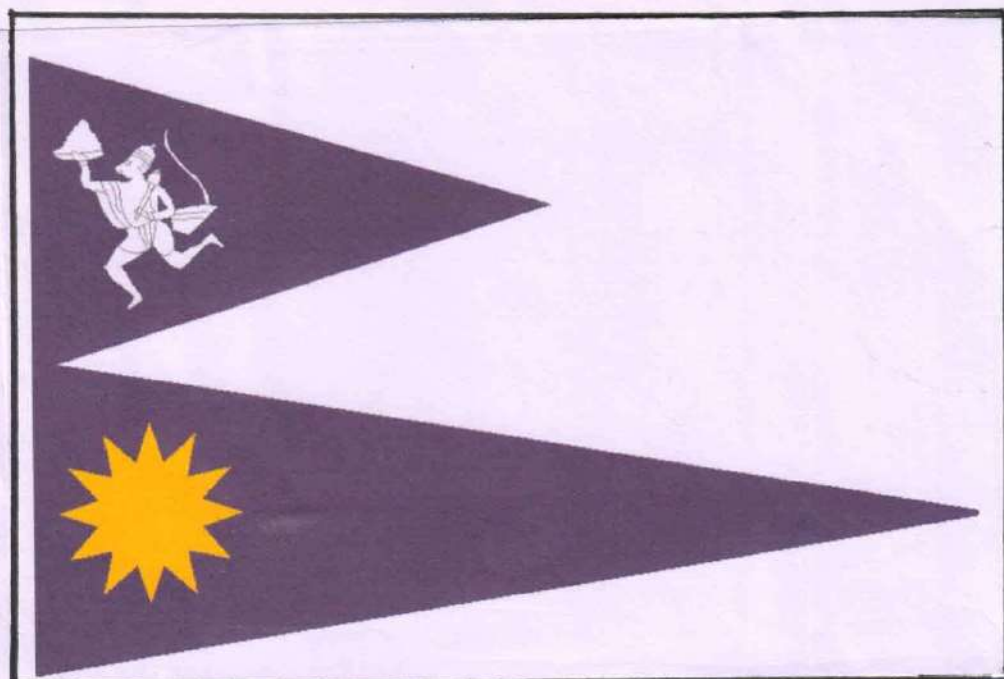


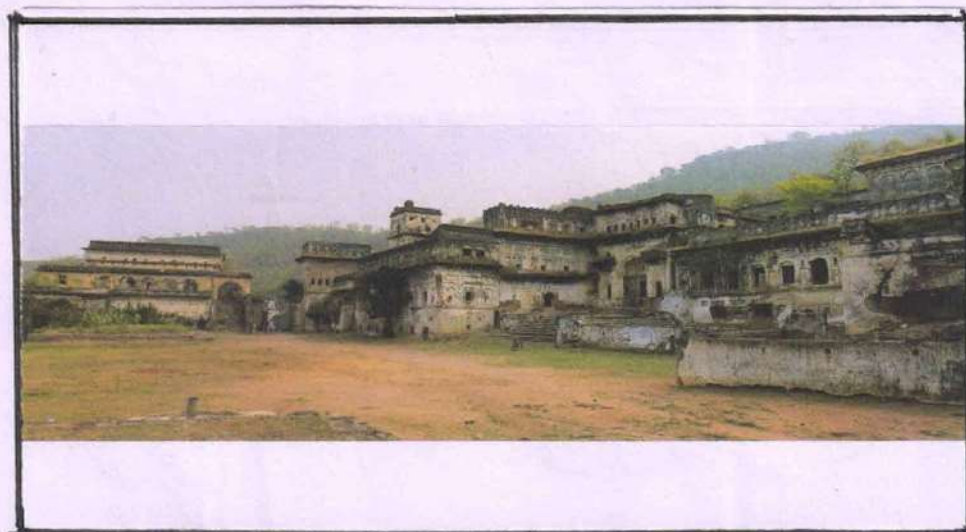
FIG. II (e) AJAIGARH FORT - fort temple, water pond (50 x 100m)

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SCALE 0 10 20 30m



**FIG. III (a) AJAIGARH FORT - ROYAL FLAG OF PRINCELY STATE
AJAIGARH (Image of SUN- HANUMAN)
(Triangular flag - double strip)**



**FIG. III (b) AJAIGARH FORT - PALACE (EXTERNAL VIEW)
(Three storied, Courtyard)
(Source: Wikipedia, 2022)**



FIG. III (c) AJAIGARH FORT - HINDU TEMPLE DEITIES



FIG. IV (a) AJAIGARH FORT - PALACE ENTRANCE GATE - STAIRS

(Source: Wikipedia, 2022)



FIG. IV (b) AJAIGARH FORT - PALACE (INTERNAL VIEW)

(Source: Wikipedia, 2022)



FIG. IV (c) AJAIGARH FORT - METALLIC CANNON

(Source: Wikipedia, 2022)

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