



Kumbhalgarh: The Great Wall Of India

By **SOMEN SENGUPTA**

Among all its heritage monuments that the land of Rajasthan houses, there is one which is unquestionably extraordinary but surprisingly dons a low profile in the list of heritage travellers.

Though it's colossal presence, outstanding archeological features and profound historical importance gives Kumbhalgarh fort the crown of second biggest fort of India and one of the biggest in the world, it hardly comes closer to the other celebrated forts of Rajasthan like forts of Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Bikaner and Chittorgarh. However since 2013 with the winning of UNESCO world heritage tag Kumbhalgarh now is rapidly getting included as tourist destination for both Indian and foreigners.

Standing at an elevation of 3600 ft from sea level on the edge of rough surface of Aravalli hills, the 15th century fortress of Kumbhalgarh was the bastion of Sisodia warriors of Rajputs. The positioning of the fort literary divides the kingdom of Mewar and Marwar, and many a time the fort played the last resort for rulers of Mewar whenever they needed a safe shelter.

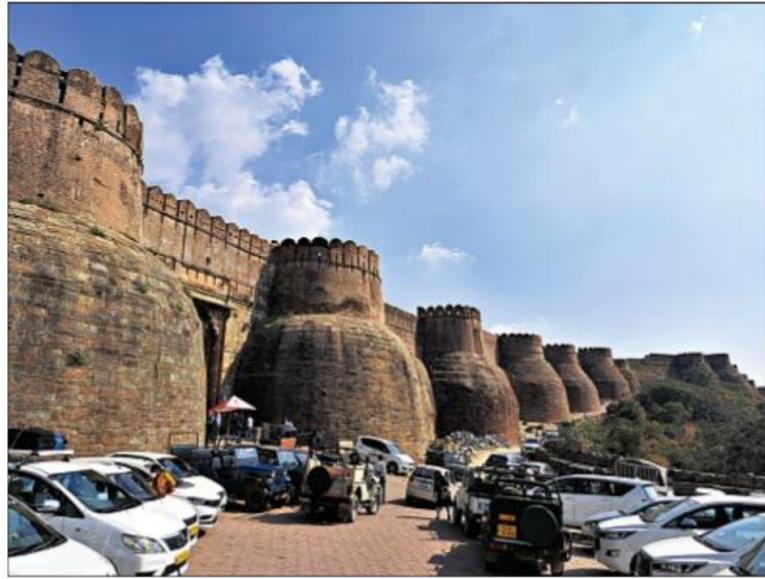
Though there is not much tangible historical evidence to establish the fact, still the legend goes that the original fort was built by a king named Samprati who belonged to Maurya dynasty in 3rd or 4th century. Then the place was known as Machindrapur. The Kumbhalgarh inscription that describes the kingdom of Rana Kumbha was found here and is now relocated to Udaipur city palace museum.

Its origin is well recorded from 15th century and that speaks that the present walled fortress was established by Rana Kumbha of Sisodia Rajput clan in 1458 and it's architectural design was done by one Mandan who was one of the top fort designers of that era. It took 15 years to complete the fort and a fable associated with it says a human was sacrificed here to complete the project. Till now there is a small shrine dedicated to this sacrificed man near Bhairo pole.

It is said that out of all 32 forts that Rana Kumbha made in his time, Kumbhalgarh was the biggest and the most modern in its design.

Though in the next few centuries the fort saw several expansion with many new gates, temples, boundary walls etc by different rulers of the time, its present form is largely shaped up by Rana Kumbha. Its difficult accessibility and insurmountable topography have made it a near non impregnable citadel of the world.

From the shape and location selection of the fort it is well understood that it was designed to make a near invincible fort for any invaders. Apart from selection of its place at very high edge the fort was built in typical Rajput Military Hill style with many gargantuan sturdy rounded bastions shaped up in such a design that it is near impossible for ene-



my to climb the wall with ladder or rope.

The long high never ending boundary wall has a thickness of 15 ft to 20 ft. The boundary wall runs for more than 36 km and passes through deep dark wood and hilly villages. This fortification wall is the second longest man made running wall of the world only second to the great-wall of China.

The stiff upward sloping approach road passes through seven gates and every single gate has its own design of military defense.

The gates known as Rampole, Bhairav pole, Hanuman pole, Padga pole, Hulla pol, Arait pol and Nimbu pol all are designed in such a way that more and more one climbs and reaches atop of the fort, the size and wideness of the gate becomes narrower. It is designed to stop heavy canons and Elephants of the enemy inside of the fort in case of invasion.

The fort was attacked by invaders many a time and it remained unvanquished in most of such attempts.

It was first attacked in 1457 by Ahmed Shah-II of Gujarat who destroyed the oldest temple of the fort. It was attacked thrice by Muhamud Khilji of Malwa in 1458, 1459 and 1467. Both of them failed to conquer it. It fell finally in 1576 when Man Singh and Shahbaz Khan under Akbar attacked it and created water scarcity inside the fort. Pratap took over the power in 1572 after his father's death but lost the fort to the Mughals in 1576. He later on regained it in 1582 though he was never able to reclaim Chittorgarh till his death.

In 1615 Amar Singh- I son of Rana Pratap got vanquished by Jahangir and submitted the fort to Mughal. Finally Maha Rana Jai Singh bought peace with Aurangzeb and ensured that the Mughal army would not invade the fort for next 100 years or so.

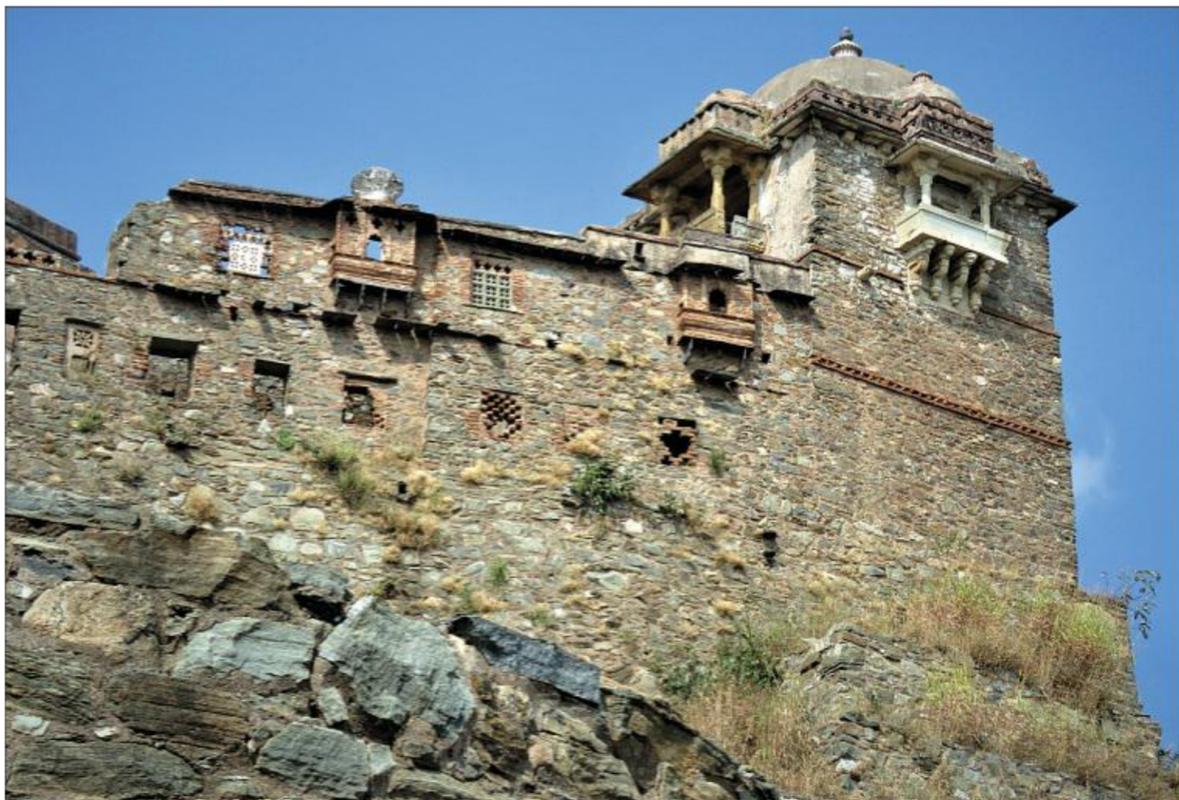
The fort was once taken over by Marathas and from them it was taken over by British East India Company in 1818 after the end of Anglo-Maratha war. It was given to Maharana Bhim

Singh in 1818 from whom his predecessor Fateh Singh got it's ownership in the late 19th century.

Kumbhalgarh gets its place in history for two legendary figures whose memories are associated with it.

One is Maharana Pratap who was born inside of the fort in 1540, and other one is the legendary bravery of Dhatri Panna who saved the life of young Udai Singh-I in 1537 when his uncle Banbir Singh killed his father Vikramaditya Singh. Panna by sacrificing her own child in Chittorgarh fort secretly shifted Udai Singh here in Kumbhalgarh.

Though Udai Singh later on left the fort and established his new capital in Udaipur his life is mingled in the saga of



this place. He was crowned here in 1540 at the age of 18 and on the same year his eldest son and successor Pratap was born here. The room inside of which Rana Pratap was believed to be born is now open to visitors.

The massive zigzag frontal stone wall of 15 ft of width which has space to accommodate eight horses abreast runs like a fat anaconda and it encircles a huge area of the fort where apart from palaces, pleasure chambers, arsenal, step wells, nearly hundreds of Hindu and Jain temples have co-existed for centuries.

Among the most prominent palace, the palace of Rana Kumbha comes first in the upward scaling of the fort from the Paghara pole. Built in classic Rajput style of architecture, the palace is decorated with windows with extended balcony and *chatri* as sun guard. It houses a blue coloured durbar hall which has paintings of elephants, camels and crocodiles. There is separate chambers for men and women ensuring enough privacy of the royal ladies.

Fateh Singh who was alive till 1930 built up a small yet beautiful palace on the top of the fort and named it as Badal Mahal the palace in cloud. The palace itself gives a feel of staying among clouds and the panorama of the fort from this point is literally breathtaking.

Badal Mahal is painted yellow and it has a spacious courtyard inside. Its roof top is an extraordinary place to see the massive fortification of Kumbhalgarh fort with most of its temples and thick wall encircling the structure.

The fort has a small palace named Jhalia Ka Malia and Rana Pratap was

founded by Rana Kumbha and renovated by Rana Fateh Singh

Neelkanta Madhav temple is a Shiva temple and it enshrines a big Shiva *linga* of 5ft. Legend has it that Rana Kumbha was so huge in physical presence that he could match his eye contact with the apex of the Shiva *linga* even being seated on the floor while offering *puja*.

The temple based on pillars stands on a highly raised platform and it also has domes influenced by Islamic archeology on its flat roof. Interestingly it has no pinnacle.

The Ganesh temple at the entrance of the first gate of the fort is built in typical north Indian naggar style. It was probably meant for the members of the royal family. The temple houses inscription of Kirti *stambha*, the ornamented tower inside of Chittorgarh fort.

Mamadeo temple and Baeen Devi temple are two more important edifices of the fort. While the first one is a spot where Rana Kumbha was assassinated by his elder son in 1468, the second one is a small complex of 52 temples.

No doubt after getting the tag of UNESCO Kumbhalgarh is slowly becoming a big destination and it is now frequented by wild life lovers for Kumbhalgarh Wild Life Sanctuary an exciting forest full of leopards, hawk eagles, wild wolves and many more. The sanctuary is partly visible from the top point of the fort.

The Great Wall of India should be on your itinerary whenever you want to visit Rajasthan.

(Pics by Somen Sengupta)



believed to have been born here. There is a *topkhana* i.e arsenal which still has several canons of that era.

There is one step tank inside the fort built in 1578 by Shahbaz Khan. It is known as Badshahi Badvi. One more tank known as Lakhola tank was built by Rana Lakha.

There are more than 300 temples inside the fort and some of those are as old as 500 years. Out of all those, the most significant three are Ganesh temple, Neelkanta Madhav temple and Vedi temple. While the first two are Hindu temples the third one is a Jain temple.

Vedi temple is a unique piece of architecture very rarely found in Rajasthan. It has a huge dome like pinnacle which is profoundly influenced by Islamic school of architecture. The octagonal shaped temple is founded on 36 pillars and there is a flight of stairs. It was

Travel Logistics :

Kumbhalgarh is 84 km from Udaipur city and a drive of nearly three hours. Night halt is not required but if one wants to enjoy the light & sound show in evening then it is needed. There are plenty of modern accommodation available in and around Kumbhalgarh. Hire a guide through Rajasthan tourism. For rate, one can check the ticket counter. It takes nearly 3 to 4 hours to see all monuments and as the slope is stiff, you will need to have good walking shoes, water bottle, sunglasses and if needed a walking stick. Photography is allowed. Walking on the width of the wall is not allowed - Do not attempt it. Useful website : www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in