



(Left to Right): Shiva and Parvati; a view of the Kendariya Mahadeva Temple (the Shikaras and profuse carvings are worth noting); the nymphs.



(Left to Right): The demons; mother and child; the Apsaras —singers and musicians.

KHAJURAHO TEMPLES

BY M. S. GILL, I.A.S.

Khajuraho, once the flourishing capital of the Chandella is today a little village in the Chhatisgarh district of Madhya Pradesh. Except for its 20 odd, a thousand-year old temples, it is wholly insignificant—almost unknown. It has no official latitude, no longitude, no height above sea level.

About 50 miles to the east of Jabalpur lies Bhopalpur, the rail terminus for Khajuraho. From there the temples are another 100 miles by bus. A trip by road—350 miles from Delhi—is much more enjoyable. One can spend pleasant days at Akra, Gwalior and Jabalpur—all rich in history—on the way. There is a safe ferry on the Betwa river, seven miles beyond Jabalpur. The road passes through some of the most beautiful country in Central India—open landscape broken by low wooded hills and dotted with lakes and tanks of every description. One might wish some justification call it the lake district of India.

Chhatisgarh, 25 miles short of the temples was once the capital of a quaint little State.

Great Patrons

The Chandellas seem to have been great patrons of art. During the 100 years between 1000 A.D. and 1050 A.D. some 2000 pieces of art were at its zenith scores of temples were put up at Khajuraho. It is said that there were over 50 of these edifices. Today, noted by the dozen remains. Yet enough remains to show the ability of their architects and the skill of their sculptors. Graciful in proportion, the monuments are profusely covered with art work—all done with an abandon and a sense of joy.

The much attention has been paid perhaps to the carvings in Khajuraho sculpture, even to the point of ignoring much else that is worthy of attention. The temples offer a veritable scroll of history of the Chandella period. Beautifully carved in stone are: processions of kings and commoners; scenes of hunting and war; dances and institutions

all done by the master craftsmen of the Chandella kings.

The Khajuraho temples are also masterpieces of architecture. Ascending in graduated heights they sweep up to the lofty 'Shikaras' of the sanctum, suggestive of the rising peaks of a mountain range converging on to the highest point. The rising roof with the subsidiary 'Shikaras' signifies an impatient and restless upward surge which seems to lead to the entire monument a striking quality of aspiring verticality. This repeatedly emphasised verticality is so perfectly balanced with the horizontal that one wonders at the mastery over technique of the Khajuraho architects.

The world of Khajuraho is an entrancing world. These temples represent "a moment of perfect utterance" in the history of the country's temple architecture. To guide Kerasan they are "the most beautiful in form, as well as the most elegant in detail of any of the temples now standing in India."

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