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Khumba
Jaigarh fort
The Thyagaraja legend

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Next month.....



Vikramshila
Rabaris
Picture puzzles

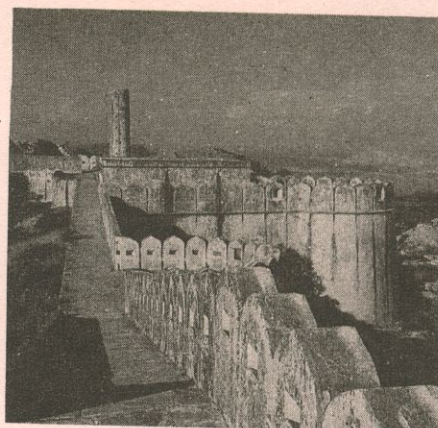


Religion 10

Confronted by the harsh realities of the outside world, Prince Siddhartha left the confines of his palace and went in search of truth and enlightenment. Donning the mantle of an ascetic and turning his back on worldly pursuits, he travelled from place to place preaching and meditating until he attained Nirvana to become Gautama Buddha. His message was simple and Buddhism became a way of life. Inder Raj Ahluwalia follows the Buddhist trail

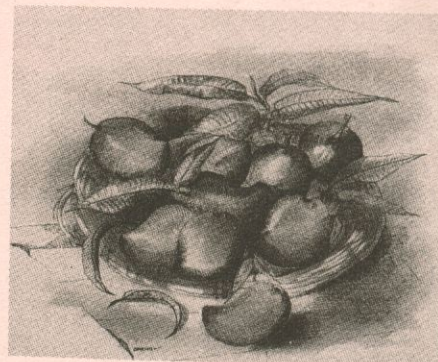
History 18

Towering above Amber is another fortress, Jaigarh, the Victory Fort. Built in the seventeenth century this fort has always been an enigma heightened by whispers of a fabulous treasure. The fort was sealed and a systematic but futile search conducted. Jaigarh continues to hold its secret. Nihal Mathur visits the hill of the eagle



Food 38

Come spring and the mango tree bursts into bloom. Soon the delicate pale yellow blossoms fall off and the trees are laden with small tight green fruit. Young children gather in mango groves with their catapults and begin a slow assault on the raw fruit. The mango is a fruit dearest to the heart of the people and universally relished, ripe or raw. Buddhadasa Kirtisinghe on this succulent summer speciality



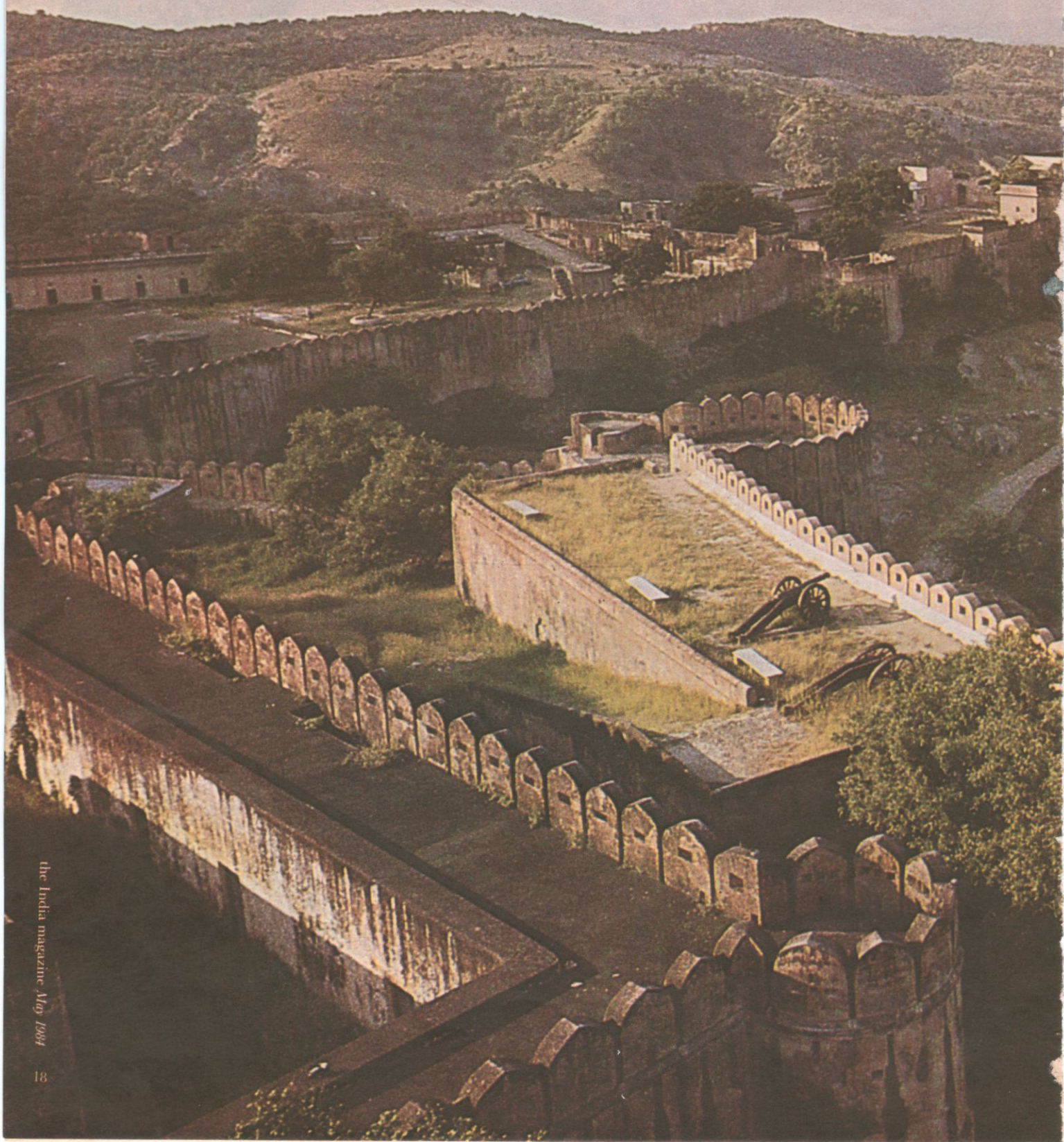
Legend 42

Far away in the Tanjore district is the small town of Tiruvaiyaru. This was where one of our greatest saint singers lived. Thyagaraja was a great devotee of Rama. This love inspired him to glorify the Lord's name in music and verse. Consequently every January, Tiruvaiyaru celebrates an incredible festival of music in homage to the master. Rupika Chawla on Thyagaraja's musical legacy



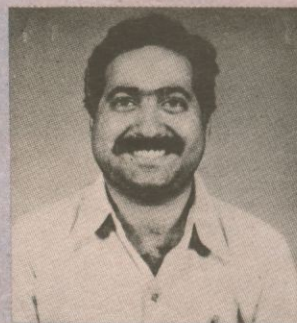
The hill of eagles

The story of Jaigarh,
the victory fort



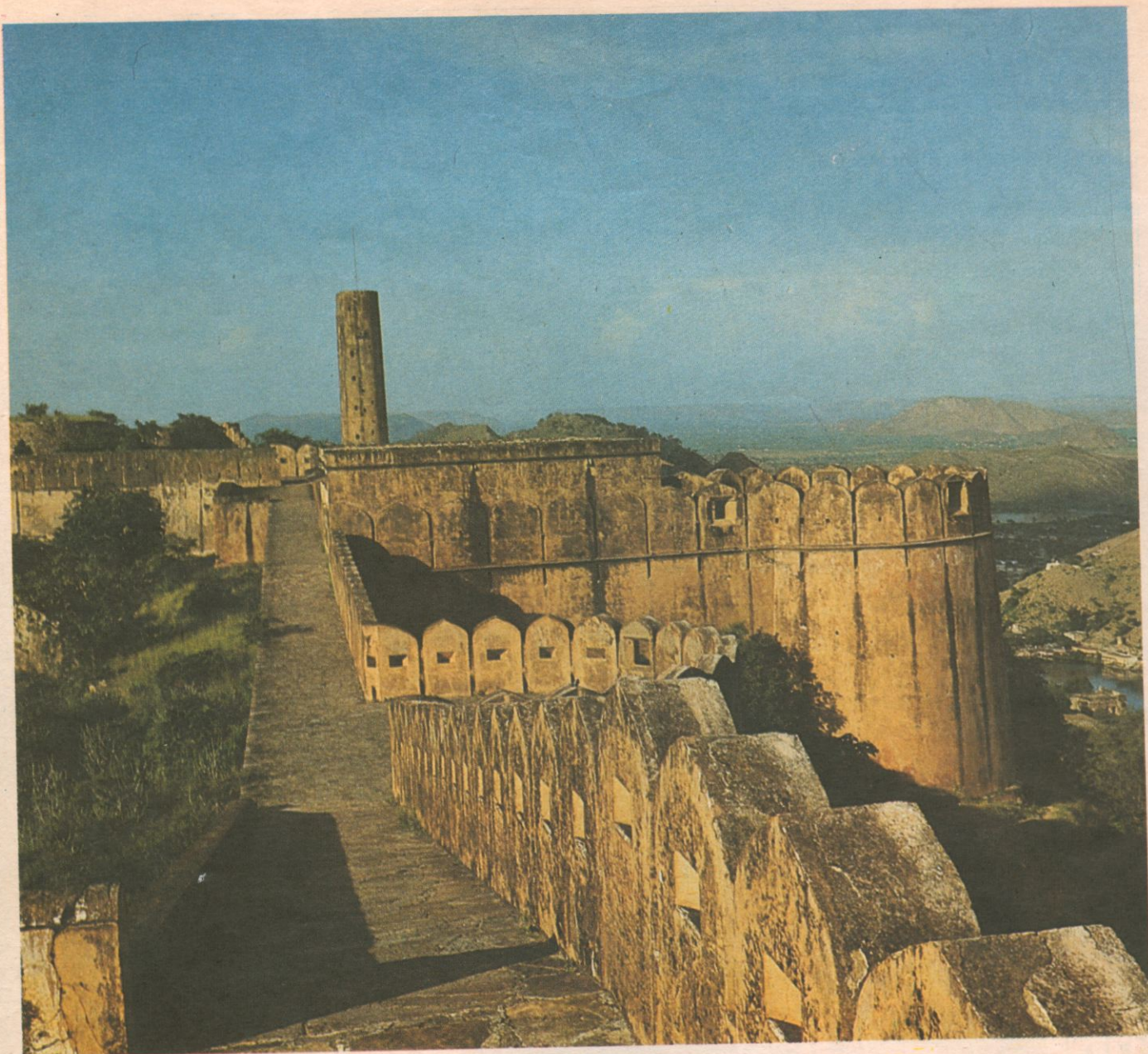
From the top of the tower the eagle had a sweeping aerial view of the surrounding hills and countryside. Launching off from its lofty perch it rode the winds keenly scanning the ground below. It flew over deserted ramparts and battlements and glided past rusting cannons and abandoned barracks. Then suddenly, in one terrific rush it swooped down onto a reservoir setting hundreds of pigeons to wing but emerged with empty talons. That afternoon, only a sharp *ki-ki-kee ki-ki-kee*, intermittently broke the mystic silence of the forsaken fort.

Jaigarh. Victory Fort. Towering four hundred feet above Amber palace in Jaipur, the fort has remained an enigma



*Written and photographed by
Nihal Mathur who is a
freelance photojournalist*



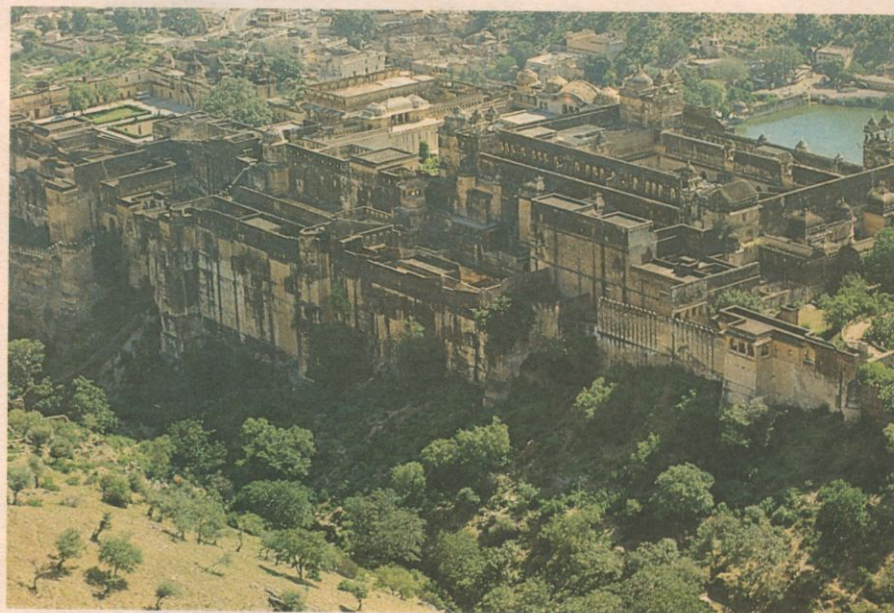
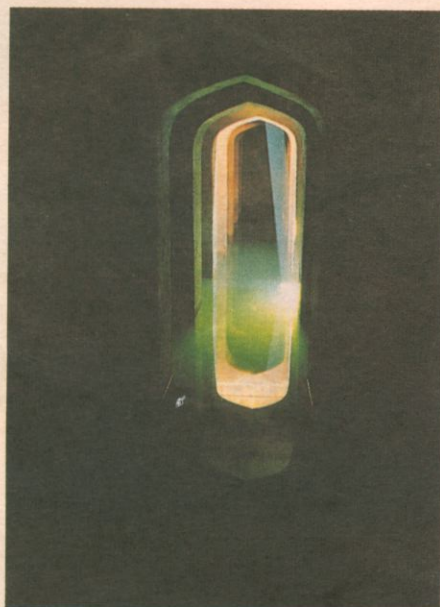
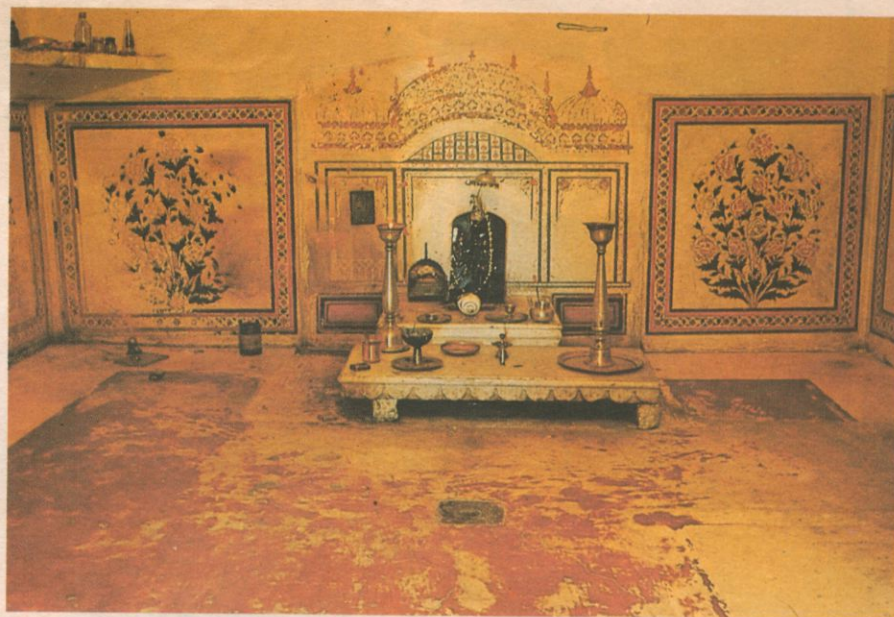
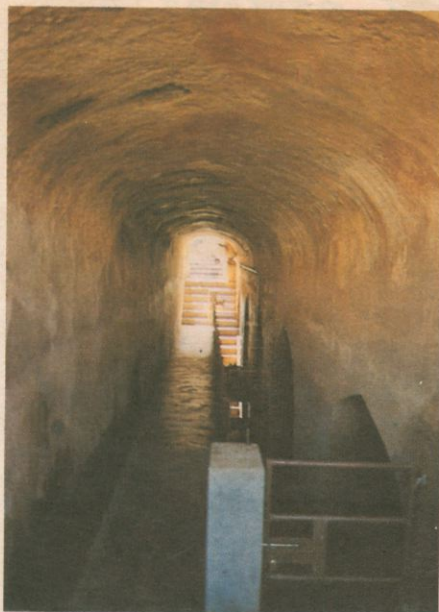


ever since it was built in the seventeenth century. Too many questions were asked without any answers. Who built Jaigarh, when and why? Why has it been locked up ever since it was built? What is inside the fort? Did they have the treasure? And what about the world's biggest cannon we have heard about? Jaigarh has always been shrouded in mystery.

Rajputs never developed a tradition of writing history. It was left largely to the court poet and his imagination. There are only few and oblique references to Jaigarh. One of the earliest mentions that at the site where Jaigarh stands a document was found referring to it as *chilh ka tola*, hill of the eagle. Legend tells us that Man Singh, 1589 to 1614, the commander-in-chief of Emperor Akbar had selected this hill to build a citadel for the security of Amber and to house a treasury within its walls.

pothikhana in the City Palace at Jaipur and in the Rajasthan State Archives at Bikaner. The records tell us that Mirza Raja Jai Singh, 1621 to 1667, and Sawai Jai Singh, 1699 to 1743, were the builders of Jaigarh, as suggested by the name of the fort. Besides, the architectural styles and other details in some of the earlier apartments of the fort speak of construction during the time of Mirza Raja Jai Singh while it is known for certain that Sawai Jai Singh remodelled and expanded the residential sections of the fort. It is appropriately summarised and quite accurately surmised by Lt. Col. H.L. Showers who wrote at the turn of the century in his, *Notes On Jaipur*: "The fort was commenced by Man Singh in about 1600. Additions were made by Mirza Raja Jai Singh and it was completed in the eighteenth century by Sawai Jai Singh."

Perhaps the most significant feature of the fort is the cannon foundry, the only cannon foundry in India that



Facing page: *A view from the ramparts of the fortress*

This page left, above/below: *Steps that lead inside the cool dark subterranean reservoir. Sunlight filters in through the ventilation shafts creating an extraordinary play of light, shadow, water and reflection*

Above right: *The temple lamp is still lit every day by the pujari to venerate the fort's legendary deity*

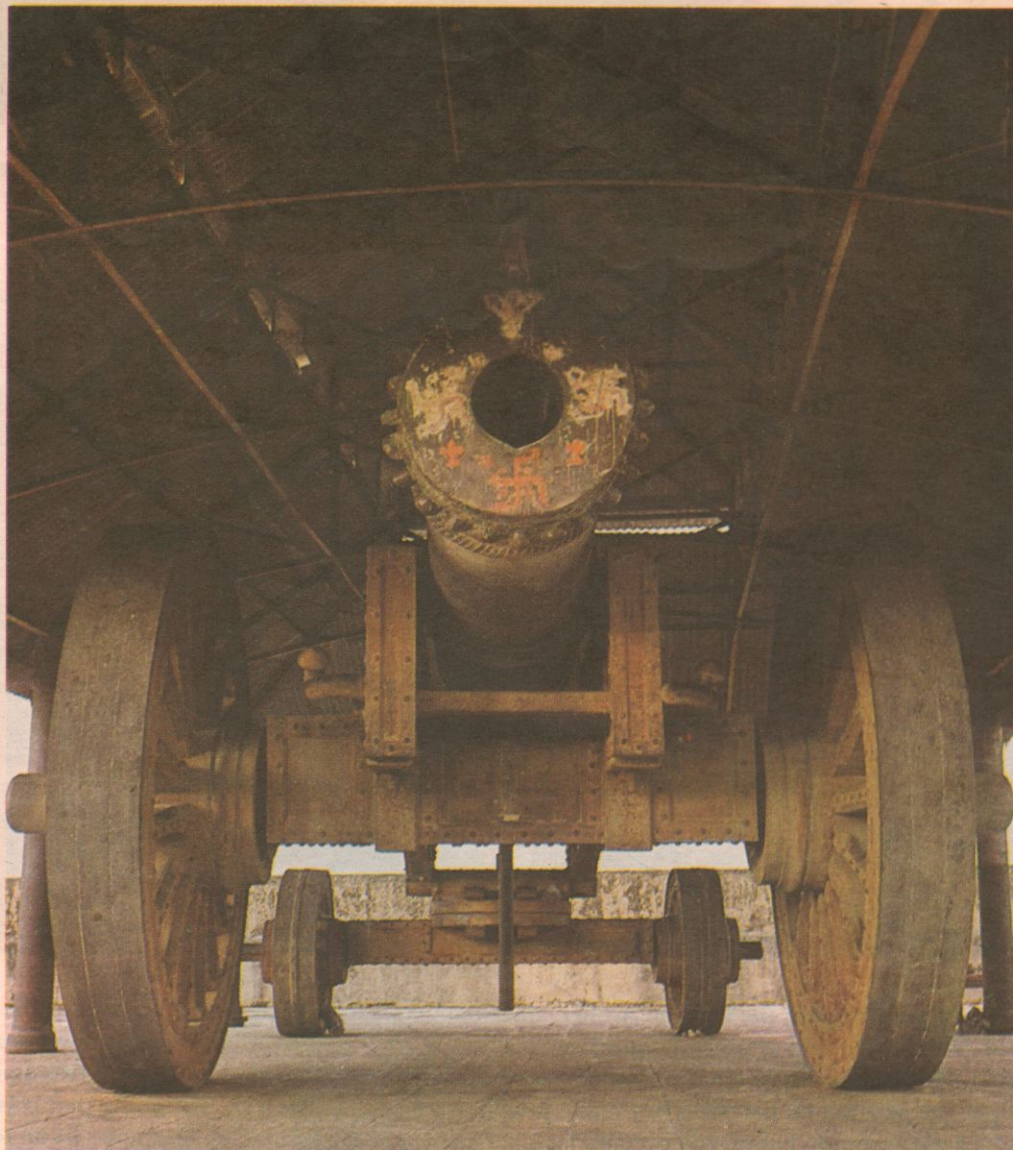
Below right: *The fortress of Jaigarh overlooks Amber. The rear view of Amber may not be as familiar but it is equally imposing*

survives from medieval times. Chandramani Singh, Director of Jaigarh fort, said that the model of this foundry was based on a drawing found in the *Ain-i-Akbari* and experts are attempting to determine the indigenous gun technology of the period.

A cast of sand and clay was made in two parts and the design of the barrel was engraved on it. The cast was then bound by iron strips very firmly and taken to the furnace where a molten alloy of eight metals, *astha dhatu*, was poured in. Once cool, the mould was split and the solid barrel removed. Bulls were harnessed to move a circular shaft that facilitated the boring of the barrel. The foundry with its huge casts, furnaces, and a complex system of wheels and gears and their mechanics, can still be seen. Lord Ganesha is the presiding deity of the foundry. This is where the legendary cannon was cast.

Jaivana. Victory Cannon. Under a huge corrugated iron

Under a huge corrugated iron shed, Jaivana stands like some quirk of military logic. Despite myths, it is believed that this massive weapon was never fired



shed the cannon stands like some quirk of military logic. It may not figure in the Guinness Book of World Records but it certainly has very impressive statistics to match those of Big Berthas and Tsar Puchka. It is thirty five feet long with a barrel of twenty feet and a bore of eleven inches. Sixty kilogrammes of powder was required to shoot a round projectile, weighing sixty kilogrammes at a range believed to be forty eight kilometres. The front wheels of the cannon measure nine and a half feet. Four elephants were used to change the direction of the cannon on a rolling pin system between the two back wheels. A jack system was employed to change the angles of the barrel which is reputed to weigh fifty tons.

Jaivana was cast in 1726 during the reign of Sawai Jai Singh — the astronomer king who built the city of Jaipur. A later ruler, Sawai Ram Singh, ordered in the mid nineteenth century, the assembly of the cannon on the platform in one corner of the fort where it stands today.

After its assembly a trial big bang is said to have taken place. The one and only. It is believed that the shot landed

at Chaksu, a village south of Jaipur. But then, this is a myth. The reality, as weaponry experts pronounce, is the fact that Jaivana has never been fired, the simple logic being that to fire a cannon like this would require a football field for the recoil.

There is another cannon, a little cousin in comparison to Jaivana, that also stands under a shed near the carpentry and blacksmithy workshops where wheels and other spare parts of the cannon were made. Jaigarh is strewn with cannons which are either displayed at the gateways or simply left as relics on parapets and bastions. One such point is Dam Dama or continuous firing. Once a formidable array of ten cannons was positioned here in a north east direction facing Delhi, overlooking the valley and hill pass that led into the Amber complex. Clearly, the idea was to stop the enemy short in one furious fusillade.

What is intriguing however, is why did the battery look towards Delhi? Did they fear an attack from there? It is common knowledge that the House of Amber was a close ally of the Mughals in matrimony. This gives birth to a



wild hypothesis that the kings of Amber, smarting under the jibes and insults of other Rajput kingdoms who had refused to submit to Mughal suzerainty, secretly plotted to fight the Muslim monarchs. They made Jaigarh a garrison fort with a cannon foundry to prepare for the final armageddon. Lest rebellious sentiments became known to the overlords in Delhi, absolute secrecy was maintained and the fort was constructed to lock up from within.

Detractors of the hypothesis scoff at the arguments. Besides, there was also a treasury in Jaigarh — though never officially declared — the wealth of which was estimated in billions and trillions. And a treasury such as this certainly needed the muscle of the garrison as well as tight lipped silence of security. The charge of the treasury was not reposed in the hands of the Rajput braves but entrusted to the Minas, a tribal clan known for their loyalty and faithfulness to their masters. Tradition dictated that the kings of Amber ordered the Minas to not allow anybody except the king himself inside the fort — not even his brothers.

A recalcitrant brother of Sawai Jai Singh however, was admitted to the fort, but only as a prisoner. He was confined in a building called Vijay Garhi which was once an armoury. It is locked now but there were plans to develop it as an arms exhibition hall. Close to Dam Dama and Vijay Garhi rises the landmark

of Jaigarh — Diva Burj, the lamp tower. From one edge of the fort this quaint tower soars seven storeys high. It is said that there were two more storeys which were struck down by lightening that was envious of its place in the sky. A huge oil lamp was lit on top of the tower at the king's birthday and during Diwali. The tower was also an observation and signals post.

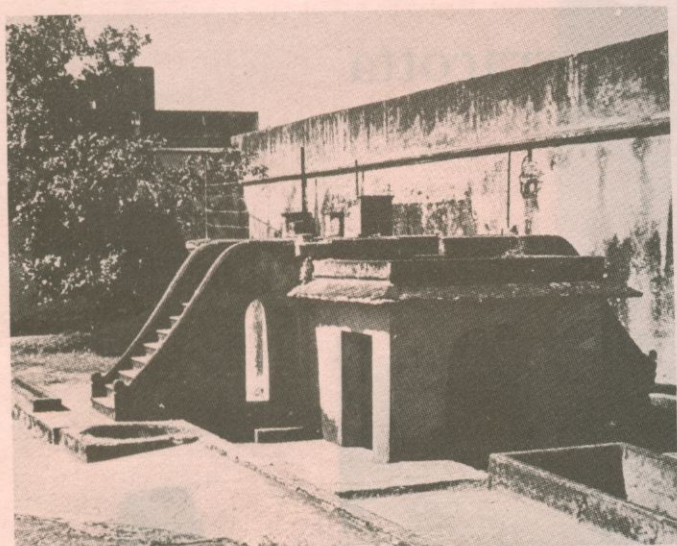
Normally this tower is closed to tourists but with special permission one can climb up to the top and get the eagle's point of view. On a clear day you can see the far horizons, the distant city of Jaipur, the picturesque Amber valley with its lake, the surrounding hills crowned with fortification walls and the grandeur and solidity of the fort.

In strict military terms, Jaigarh was vital ground for Amber, the loss of which would have paralysed the entire area. Jaigarh was made an impregnable stronghold which was manned by five Qila Jaats or Fort Castes comprising of Achrol, Boraj, Dhula, Jobner and Pipla. These were feudal states of Amber which were obliged to maintain fighting forces in Jaigarh. The Qiladars or keepers of the fort however, were the Minas. How did the Minas achieve such positions of eminence over the Rajputs in Jaigarh? Here is some more history.

It is quite evident from *Mina Itihas* that this area was under the sway of the Minas from the sixth century, much

before Amber was built. In the eleventh century the Kachhawaha Rajputs wrestled for this strategic valley from the Minas and established their power at Amber. To give the Minas back their lost pride as well as to pacify future insurgency aspirations, the Kachhawaha kings gave them the responsible position of Qiladars — guardians of the fort.

But the protector of Jaigarh however, was Kal Bhairu — an occult deity who was worshipped by the warriors.



This page above: *The simply constructed and designed furnace.*

Below: *The entrance to the cannon foundry*

Facing page: *The huge cannon casts made of sand lie behind bars in the foundry*



Demonic manifestations of the deity are painted outside the Kal Bhairu temple. Within the precincts of the fort are two more temples, one of Shiva and the other of Ram Hari. In the latter temple there are two statues representing twelve gods — a clever design to ensure that nobody left the fort on the pretext of prayer.

Spiritual matters aside, the water system in the fort, so crucial for its survival, was tackled just as imaginatively. Rain water was tapped for drinking through a complex network of drainage built all along the top of the hill of Jaigarh. The water from the hills was directed by these *pucca* canals to a courtyard in the middle of the fort where there were three water storage tanks called *tankas*. Two of these *tankas* are small and open. It is the third which is really big and legendary.

It is estimated that the water holding capacity of this *tanka* is fifteen million gallons, enough to sustain the fort for two long years in an eventuality of a siege or successive failure of the monsoons. The rain water passes through filtering tanks before emptying out inside this huge circular *tanka* which is covered. The roof of the *tanka* rests on arches.

Steps go down below the roof from one side of the *tanka* to the cool and dark subterranean reservoir. It is difficult to see anything in that inky blackness. If one wants to get an idea of how big this underground water chamber really is, then one has to wait for the midday sun to climb directly over the roof of the *tanka* so that a beam of sunlight bursts in through a ventilator lighting the interiors to reveal contours of arches and pillars. An extraordinary sight.

A *bejak*, or a parchment, came to light in 1975 indicating a fabulous treasure buried within this *tanka*. Immediately, the Government of India took over the fort and a treasure hunt began. The water was drained out and the murky *tanka* was floodlit. Extensive excavation work took place for nearly six months in and around the *tanka* but all that was unearthed from the treasure trove was a rusted musket. Where did the treasure go? It is believed that Sawai Jai Singh used it to build his Pink City of Jaipur.

The Archaeological Survey of India retained its control of the fort till 1982 when it was handed back to its rightful owner — the former ruler of Jaipur. A year later, in July, the fort was opened to the public. And already there is graffiti. Jaigarh never fought a war but today it might just succumb to Shyam, Hasina, KPS, and Edwina and other countless conquerors who enter on a three rupee ticket and scrawl humiliations on its ageing walls and parapets.

The beauty of Jaigarh goes unmarked and unnoticed. The fort is landscaped to blend with the natural features of the hill. A rocky depression becomes an open reservoir where water, stone and cactii harmonise to create a powerful impression of a Zen rock garden. And the trees, graceful and ancient, lend that mystique to Jaigarh which is enhanced by the flight of pigeons and the cry of the eagle.