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KANIGIRI FORT

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Kanigiri is a small village and headquarters of a taluk in Prakasam district. It can be reached by bus up to Kandukuru and from there is by foot which is within 20 kmt distance as there is regular bus convenience to the place. The fort of Kanigiri is built upon a high rounded mass of granite rising about 600ft, above the valley¹. The Kanigiri was an important administration division in medieval period and served as provincial center of the Reddis, Vijayanagaras, Gajapatis frequently changed hands².

The territory constituting Nellore district appears to have passed under the sway of the Reddis who ruled from Addanki as their capital, Prolaya Vema Reddi 1324-53 AD. Son of Prolaya Vema Reddi was the founder of the Reddi Kingdom. The extent of his Kingdom is not ascertainable, but it is presumed that Nellore was under his sway from the beginning of reign as his ancestor's hailed from this place³.

He took advantages of the disturbed conditions in the region, defeated some of the local rules and annexed their chiefs. Chiefs among the local rules with whom he came into conflict, were the Telugu Cholas and the chiefs of Boyaviharadesa, references to which are found in epigraphs notices in Atmakur, Kanigiri and Udayagiri taluks. Besides these local chiefs, Vema was confronted with the Kingdom of Vijayanagara and had to give up the territory to the south west of Kanigiri and Kandukuru to its ruler Harihara-I. This appears to be the beginning of a long-drawn conflict between these two great Kingdom which lasted for over a century. The earliest references to Kanigiri an inscription dated 1377 AD. It records the protector of religion, the performer of gift of food, elephants, girls, lands, cows the favorite of Chennakesava Swami temple by Harihara-I⁴.

Another records of the Dodireddypalli same chief dated 1416 AD. Devaraya-I seated on the diamond throne at Vijayanagara was ruling Who the Kingdom. In this period Ramachandra Odayalu, had been associated with him in the governance of Udayagiri from 1390 AD. In the field of Gummalapdu granted at Kanigiri to Bhavinayaningaru constructed a tank⁵.

During the period, the rivalry between the rayas and Gajapatis for the possession of coastal Andhra came to hands. In the struggle that ensued, Mallikarjuna lost considerable territory besides Coastal Andhra in the name of which the fight began. Kapileswara Gajapati appointed one of his sons, Kumara Hamvira governor of the newly conquered area and commanded him to conquer the remaining Vijayanagara territories⁶. Hamvira led a huge army in 1463 AD into the southern provinces of the Vijayanagara Empire and captured almost all the important forts on the east coast including Kanigiri. But within two years, the Gajapatis lost all these forts with the lone exception of Kanigiri. However, the loss of the two strategic forts of Udayagiri and Kanigiri, together with their dependent territories, weakened the Vijayanagara empire⁷.

Krishnadevaraya ascended the throne by this time, the Gajapati was still in possession of the Kanigiri province. Therefore, he declared war on the Gajapati with an attack upon the fort Kanigiri in 1513 AD⁸. He narrates that when once the Gajapati king preceded to the Godavari for a bath, a host of the Mahammadam attacked the king at Kanigiri konda and that only four Kshatriya Putray gallantly put them to roat and slew them. It therefore appears that this Kanigiri by Krishnadevaraya, and identical with this Kanigiri⁹. Krishnadevaraya, proceeded against of Kanigiri pillaging several places on the way. He also captured series of forts as Kandukuru, Addanki, Vinukonda, Bellamkonda, Tangeda and Ketavaram etc. and captured it after a year half siege¹⁰. These forts must have fallen into the hands of Krishnadevaraya sometimes between¹¹. The inscription from Dasalapalli dated 1528 AD, refers to Raghava Reddi son of Bagava Reddi appears again in Kanigiri as chief of a sima under the governer of Udayagiri. He may have been connected with the Reddi dynasty¹². 1535 AD Venkatapathiraya-I have given Bhattunandi raju as a personal Agrahara the village of Cheruvupalli which is in the sima of Kanigiri. It is attached to Udayagiri ruled by Venkatapati-I¹³. Sadasivaraya was ruling the 1555AD, the corresponding to the Mangala Thimmaraju, Kondaraju having done service to Ramayya deva having made request to the King, obtained a royal decree exempting the barbers from the payment of Katlameras, Korukanike, Khaddayan tax, and such taxes throughout the Kingdom.

According the king Sadasivaraya ruled over the Kanigiri sima should remit taxes on the barbers¹⁴. Another inscription dated 1578-80AD Srirangaraya was ruling the Kingdom of the town of Penugonda, on the holy occasion, Chennappa Nayanigaru have given with libation of water 3 puttis of land, in the village of Policherla to the Kanigiri- Sima. It was given to us for our chiefdom by Ramgappa Nayanigaru for service to the deity on the five parvas¹⁵.



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FORT AND FORTIFICATION

Kanigiri has been considered one of the most intricate of the fort. The fort is strongly built and the hill is surrounded by thick forests. It is built on the top of the hill some 400 ft height, protected on three sides by an almost perpendicular precipice, while on the side there is steep ascent, which is guarded in every assignable part by ramparts and rebuilt.

The interior is divided into three enclosures by means of two more fortification walls each of which starts from the hills and joins the southern wing of fort wall. These two walls are pursued by gateways on in each case. The fort as such is climbed upon the north and east, from the village. After proceeding towards east for about half mile, began the remains of the fort at the hill. Here the path takes a turn towards south, where, a narrow entrance is seen, built of crude and irregular boulders. The pathway through brushes leads upon the hill with turns towards left and right.

One conspicuous point that attracts one's attention is that are no evidence of the existence of bastions for this historical hill for a Kanigiri. In the absence of any such material evidence it may be safely concluded that there was no need for the construction of bastions in those days. The Importance of bastions was much less in early years of the Christain era, as the wars were generally fought on the plains in these days rather them attacking the fortified cities or town as can be seen from the contemporary history as being of Kanigiri in the period of Katamaraju.

The utility as well as the purpose of the bastions of a fortress increased on the later period, that is just before and after the Gajapates rose to power in the beginning of the 13th century AD. Thus, it may be interred that the Vijayanagaras dispensed with the bastions probably keeping in view of the military needs of their times.

There is a semi- circular projection of a distance of about 180 mt. south of western gate. At this point the fortification wall takes a curve towards south. Thick layer of morrow is noticed over the natural rock. The width of the fortification wall here is 4.50 mt. trace of superstructure are missing. On the southern corners of the fortification, displaced stone boulders scattered near the basement formed by natural rock. The rectangular stone slabs might have been used as superstructure.

From the place two kms distance is clearly visible in day light on account of its high altitude. The distance between the two boulders is nearly thirty meters and width is about ten meters. This is about 150 mt from the northern gate. There is every possibility to believe that the above two structure might have been used as watch towers.

Gateways

Gateways from an important obstacle in the structure of the fort, next to the rampart the eastern gateways are to provide with flight of steps a mall turret, the main road of town. As started earlier, the Kanigiri fort was provided with four gates on the east, west, south and north. Huge dressed rectangular stone slabs were used in the construction of some gateways. Such boulders are found even today as a reprehensive of the glorious past.

First Gateway

After this comes the east gateway called Vijayamandu dinni, with a flight of 120 broad steps on the climb up. Here on the east, are seen two temples on the hill. It is flanked on the right by a semicircular bastion called singarappa burugu the width of the gate is nearly 6 mt. no stone boulders are visible. Probably natural rock boulders must have served as gateway. The gate face towards Kanigiri and Kandukuru , Innumerable natural rock boulders protect this gateway.

Second Gateway

The southern gateway is sloppy. Stone pavement is visible but, on the stone, slabs are traceable contained. The width of the gate is about 6 mt. There is a big tank just by the side of this gate down below the fortification wall might have served as a moat. The natural rock boulders and sloppy sheets of rock served as side walls for the gateway.

Third Gateway

The western gate contained towards the village Kanigiri. This gate is about 7 mt in width. The stone slabs of the size of 2.85 mt and 0.45 mt are lying near the gate. The big slab probably used as door jambs are also found at this place. About 150 mt from this gate inside the fort contained.



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Fourth Gateway

Topographically, northern, side of the fortification wall appears to have been given importance and the main gate is located here. At the same time, the gateway also shows Islamic features in the superimposed arches, built above the gate in stucco. This gateway on the exterior is 6 mts high and 2.10 mts wide. On entering this are two low platforms on either side, probably guard rooms, with 2 pillars in each, side. The ceiling above is covered by measures of horizontal beams of stone. The platform on either side is 0.80 mts high and 2 mts wide.

The northern gate is exactly at a distance of 1320 mts from the western gate. The distance between northern and eastern gates is about 1820 mts. Eastern and Southern gates are at a distance 2420 mts. Western gate is situated at a distance of 1320 mts from southern gate.

The Palace

The palace is constructed out of brick and mortar, with a stone foundation. The roofing has been done with the help of strong wooden beams. In the centre of the palace there is a big hall. Its longitudinal facing is towards east. The central chamber projecting well beyond the back wall measures 6.0 X 4.12 mts. The side halls vary in dimension but roughly measures 5.76 X 2.63 mts. The span of the arches is 2.30 mts. While the corner rooms are 2.54 mts square. This building also exhibits stucco decoration of super quality.

Horse Stable

After climbing up for about half a mile is seen the horse stable on the right side of the fourth gate way to the fort. There are sixteen pillars three rows of four in each. The pillars are of the Gajapatis order. Originally this must have been a mandapa. Later it might have been converted into horse stable. There are small rock stone layers to keep the horse stable in this mandapa. In this mandapa, is measures a length of 36.10 mts and width of 10.56 mts. The ceiling is covered by horizontal beams above within the mandapa.

Water Sources

Sufficient care is taken to provide water to the garrison of the fort by means of served spring with perennial supply of water. Also, there are wells dug within the level space available in every gate, thus assuring water supply available at every level of the fort. This is because of the irregular nature of the fort.

It is noteworthy that the shape of the fortification at Kanigiri is almost similar to that of the rock fortification wall unearthed in Udayagiri fort.

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