

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF PENUKONDA FORT

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ABSTRACT

Penukonda, is the headquarters of a taluk of that name in Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. It is situated on the Guntakal-Bangalore section of Southern Railway and is about 44 miles from Anantapur, on the Kurnool-Bangalore highway. Topographically it lies between 14°5' and 77°36'E.

POLITICAL HISTORY OF PENUKONDA FORT

It is not known when exactly the fort of Penukonda was built. But tradition preserved in the Kaifiyat, mentions that it was built by a certain KriyasaktiVodayar, styled as ChikkaVadiyar, who was shown the place by a shepherd, and he on finding the site to be well provided with water facilities, immediately took measures for building a fort. According to the same account, the walls of the fort were built encircling all the hills and provided it with 2 tanks, 1 pushkarini and a temple of Narasimha swamy. It acquired its name Penukonda, (Big Hill) as it was surrounded by high chiffs, on all sides. In Sanskrit, it is referred to as Ghanagiri or Ghanādri in many inscriptions.

The earliest reference to the fort of Penukonda occurs in the first quarter of 14th C. when it stood as the South-eastern outpost of the Hoyasalas of Dwarasamudra. By 1320 A.D. it was occupied by Ballala III who appointed his son-in-law MacheyaDannayaka to rule over it on his behalf. Inscriptions of Ballala III, found at Sirivaram in the Hindupurtaluk of Anantapur district dated A.D.1316 at Alai in Madakasirataluk A.D.1321 and Tamapalli in Hindupurtaluk A.D.1323 mention MahāPradhānaMācheyaDannayaka, as making a gift of land in Maduvakuntayahalli, in Ramadinādu. Macheya appears to have continued to rule over it upto A.D.1328, as his last dated record A.D.1328, from Kodigapalli mentions him as ruling from his neleviduPenukondapattana and making a gift of a village Bengaru, to NageyaGaunda, a chieftain. He was succeeded by IsvaraDannayaka, as we find from an inscription dated A.D.1340 at Sanjivarayanipalli, in Hindupurtaluk, Anantapur district which mentions the gift of a village, ValagalaKuteyahalli, to GopaGavunda. By A.D.1349, we find Gangidevadennayaka, son of Macheya, ruling at Penukonda as seen from an inscription at SanganaPalli.

After 1349-50 A.D. Penukonda passed into the hands of Vijayanagara rulers when it was occupied by Bukka I, and it played a prominent part in the affairs of the empire, throughout and even rose to the status of a capital, after the fall of the imperial city in A.D.1565 as a consequence of the fateful battle of Rakkasa-Tangadi.

PENUKONDA UNDER VIJAYANAGAR

Harihara I after establishing his kingdom at Vijayanagar, began to cast his attention on the kingdom of Dwarasamudra, to expand his kingdom on the west. In the process took place a few border skirmishes between the two, during the last years of Ballala III. Sometime after 1349-50 A.D. Bukka I wrested Penukonda from Ballala III, to which he shifted his headquarters from Gutti, as his earliest record at the place is dated 5, 1274 i.e. A.D.1352-53.

This event was a great land mark in the history of Penukonda as it continued to serve its new masters viz. Vijayanagar, faithfully till the end.

During the reign of Bukka I Penukonda was entrusted to his son Virupanna under the guidance of his able minister AnantarasaChikkaVodayar, who, according to one account was responsible for building the fort of Penukonda. After this, it finds mention in the reign of Harihar II, in an inscription engraved on the west wall of the Anjaneya temple, at the Northern gate of the fort, dated 5, 1314 A.D. 1392, which records the construction of a temple for Virabhadra by Mailapa. Again it figures in the reign of Devaraya II, when his younger brother, Pratapadevaraya, is mentioned as having held a high office and acquired the rule of the kingdom of Ghanadri from his elder brother.

The next important event in the history of Penukonda occurs in the reign of Mallikharjuna. During this period came the fearful invasion of the Gajapatis of Orissa against south in 1454 A.D. under KumāraHamviras son of Kapilesvara. Mallikharjuna in order to stem the tide of Oriya invasion, transferred one of his best generals SaluvaNarasimhal from Chandragiri to Penukonda probably to defend the central part of the empire.

During the reign of SaluvaNarasimha, took place, according to Saluvabhyudayam, a combined attack against Penukonda by the Sabara chiefs and the Turuksha king. The Sabara chief was Pikkilu according to Venkataramanayya, while the Turushka king was, Muhammad Shah III, who despatched an army under the leader-ship of Yusuf Adil Khan and Fakh-ul-Mulk, from Kandukur. VarahaPuranam, states that IsvaraNayaka, succeeded in capturing Penukonda. Jaimini Bharatam also eludes evidence to it.

After SaluvaNarasimha, his trusted general NarasaNayaka kept his elder son Timma, who was holding the office of Yuvaraja under his father. As he was slain early, by a certain Tymarasa, Narasanayaka, raised the second son ImmadiNarasimha to the throne; himself holding the reins of the Government. But the new ruler Immadi would not agree to remain a figure head, and began showing signs of discontent by favouring Tymarasa, the rival of NarasaNayaka, as he became king because of him. Troubles arose between ImmadiNarasimha, and NarasaNayaka. Therefore the later, repaired to the fort of Penukonda, on the pretext of hunting, gathered large forces, many horses and elephants, and proceeded against the capital, and besieged it for 4 or 5 days, when at last Immadi agreed to put Tymarasa to death and accept him as the protector of his person and empire. Immediately NarasaNayaka, under the pretext of safety, put Immadi under custody at Penukonda, with strict guards, and gave him 20,000 cruzados of gold every year. He also put a commander TimmapaNayakincharge of the person of Immadi.

The next reign that of ViraNarasimha, saw the end of ImmadiNarasimha, who was assassinated by ViraNarasimha in A.D. 1565.

In the next reign i.e. of Krishnadevaraya, we find Penukonda, was seized by a Gangaraja, the rebel chief of Ummattur, who held the title Penukondachakresvara conferred upon him by NarasaNayaka, father of Krishnadevaraya. The immediate task of Krishnadevaraya upon his accession to the throne, was to bring the rebel chiefs of Ummattur and Siva-samudram under subjugation. He therefore, according to Fr. Luiz, despatched an army against the rebel before 1510 A.D. who siezed Penukonda and captured it. Thereafter, it was kept under the command of RayasamKondamarasa till April 1512 A.D.

After this, Penukonda, figures in the internecine quarrel between Salakaraju China Tirumala, the brother-in-law of Achyuta, who proclaimed himself as regent of the infant Venkata I, and put an end to him, subsequently, and began ruling in his own name, and AravitiRamaraja,

who took up the cause of Sadasiva. In this, Ramaraya seized Penukonda and proceeded to Gandikota by way of Gutti and put Salakaraju China Tirumala to flight in a number of Sanguine battles, and finally killed him in an engagement on the banks of Tungabhadra.

The battle of RakkasaTangadi in 1565 A.D. in the reign of Sadasiva, and the resultant destruction of the city of Vijayanagar brought about a new phase in the history of Penukonda. After the sack and destruction of the capital at the hands of Muslim armies, Sadasiva with the help of Tirumala the brother of Ramaraja, repaired to Penukonda and began ruling from there.

From this period onwards Penukonda acquired the status of imperial capital, as the headquarters of the empire under the IVth Dynasty i.e. Aravidu, which continued to exist though in name, instead of the provincial capital i.e. the headquarters of a rajya.

PENUKONDA UNDER THE IVTH DYNASTY

During the reign of Tirumala, the founder of the Aravidu i.e. IVth Dynasty, after the death of Sadasiva, came an attack from the Adil Shah of Bijapur. This was repulsed by SavaramChennappaNayaka, who put the Muslims to flight. Tirumala in his last years divided the kingdom into three reign regions and kept his eldest son Sriranga I who became the ruler of Telugu area with Penukonda as capital in A.D. 1572.

In the reign of Sri Ranga I came another Bijapur attack from Ali Adil Shah in A.D. 1576 in collusion with the Hande chief TimmappaNayaka. Penukonda was besieged for more than 3 months but Adil Shah could not take it. Sri Ranga left Penukonda, leaving its defence to SavaramChennappaNayaka and himself repaired to Chandragiri. At last, he made the Adil Shah raise his siege by playing a stroke of diplomacy and SavaramChennappa, taking advantage of this inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Sultan in 1576 A.D.

The next Muslim attack against Penukonda occurs in the reign of Venkata II. This time it was the QutubShahi general Amin ulmuluk at the instance of QuliQutb Shah II, who himself marched against Penukonda and laid siege to it. Venkata II taken unawares, pretended submission, gathered all his forces and generals, and threw off all pretensions and inflicted a defeat on the Sultan. The Sidhout record of Ananta and Raghunadhabhyudayam refer to this Muslim defeat. Again, during the period of Venkata III (1630-1642) took place another attack against Penukonda from the Sultan of Bijapur. Venkata III appointed ChandragiriKonetinaayaka to defend Penukonda. In the next reign that of Sri Ranga III, Mustafa Khan, the Bijapur general induced by the rebellious nayaks of Sri Ranga III, marched against Penukonda in 1645 A.D. but DalawayiKonetinaayudu managed to defeat the invader. At last in 1653 A.D. it fell to Bijapur, captured by Khan Muhammad. Later it became a part of the possessions of Morari Rao and from him it was taken by Hyder Ali in 1762 A.D. It remained under the Mysore chiefs with slight interruptions till the death of Tippu in 1799 A.D. Then it became a part of the East India Company.

FORT

The fort of Penukonda consists of a moat, 7 rampart walls, 4 gateways and a number of bastions at regular intervals of distance, besides a few postern or side entrance ways, a large number of tanks and wells, temples etc. "The ruined fortification enclose the old town and a high hill to the west of it. On the top of the hill which is some 3000 ft. high may be seen the remains of a large round tower with a room inside, a large granary, a small Hanuman temple. All these are on the summit of the hill and are enclosed by a wall, with bastions, approached from below by a short steep flight of stone steps. Just below this enclosure is a large well, a

few ruined shrines and mandapasthe citadel is approached from the foot of the hill by an excellent pathway maintained in good order.

The fort of Penukonda is approached from the North, i.e. Erramanchiūruvakili. Outside it is a moat, probably dry about 10.80 mts. wide at the base. Behind it, stands the lower fortification wall running around on east south and west. Proceeding along the wall, towards west, it is found that the wall is built of irregular white granite stones, of lesser height, built on a high ground level. In this section of the wall are noticed about 6 bastions at regular intervals of distance all of uniform shape i.e. rectangular, resembling those at Hampi and Chandragiri a typical Vijayanagara feature. The wall on this side rises to a height of about 7mts. from the ground. level. Another interesting aspect of this wall is the method of its construction. Like the walls of Hampi and Chandragiri, it has an earthen wall in the interior which serves as core with stone veneering in the exterior and the cyclopaean masonry characteristic feature of contemporary Hindu structures.

After a few paces walk along this wall comes the 1st bastion which is rectangular at the base, but tapering towards square at the top. No crenulations are noticed in the wall. It is also devoid of any loopholes as there are no remnants of any parapet on the top along the outer edge. Then comes the 2nd bastion, also of similar shape and design, measuring 12 mts. width at the base, and 10 mts. at the top, with a frontal projection of 15 mts. on either side. A portion of the wall of this bastion is ruined. It continues forward again after taking a slightly curved turn. The 3rd bastion comes after a distance of about 35 ft. After this the wall appears to be intact, although some minor damages are noticed. After this comes the famous watch tower known as Ramaburuzu standing over the top of the 4th bastion, which commands a full view of the entire town and is visible even from a long distance. This Ramaburuzu is an octagonal structure, built of brick and lime mortar and stands as a typical example of Indo-Sarcenic style, a feature of the late Vijayanagar period. It is reached by means of a flight of steps. On the exterior it has 5 arched windows with an entrance in the interior. After entering it, are noticed 3 arched bays projecting inward, with 3 openings in each. On the top, it has a circular dome with two bands or pattas one below the other. On the whole, it measures a circumference of about 30 mts. After passing this comes the 5th bastion with in a distance of about 28.50 mts. Near this, is seen the western gate with two watch towers on either side, with right-angled turn inside in the interior which leads to the inner area of the fort. Proceeding further along this wall towards west, comes the last bastion. After this the wall takes a southward turn and merges into the high cliff above. Near the foot of this bastion is also seen a small wicket gate or postern about 3 ft. high, built into the foot of the wall.

The wall walk or battlement on this side is of irregular dimensions. It roughly measures about 4.20 mts. wide. Proceeding along the same wall towards east beyond the Northern gate are noticed 6 bastions built closely to each other. On this side the wall and bastions rise to a higher level than on the west, being built on plain level ground. Altogether, there are 16 courses in the wall measuring a height of about 7.70 mts. The design and shape of the bastion is a same as on the west. The first bastion reached after a distance of about 42.80 mts. The method of construction is typical cyclopaean masonry without the use of lime or mortar as joining material. Near the 5th bastion comes the eastern gateway called Gorantlauruvakili.

Beyond this, the wall proceeds forward to a considerable distance along a high ground and turns towards south. On this side i.e. towards south, the wall has 7 courses, with large blocks of stones in the lower courses and smaller ones in the upper levels. There are only 3 bastions on this side. There is also a large tank called Babayyacheruvu. Towards the end of this wall, is reached the southern gateway called Cheruvuuvakili.

On the west stands the hill about 3000 ft. high and there is no continuity of the lower fortification wall at its foot on this side.

Thus a survey of the lower fortification wall reveals that it consists of 3 gateways and 15 bastions all of uniform shape and design. It is also found that it has no crenulation or loopholes, being devoid of any parapets on the top along the outer edge.

GATEWAYS

It was already been mentioned that the lower fort has 4 gateways. At present the fort is entered through the Northern gateway i.e. Erramanchiuruvakili. On, the outside, it is flanked by two semi-circular or gut shaped watch towers, with a covered roof above. These watch towers are also built of huge blocks of stone and on the right side watch tower is seen a carving of Gajalakshmi. The outer entrance of this gateway is 4.10 mts.wide. Inside are low platforms which serve as guard rooms; while the roof above is built of horizontal beams laid across. To the right of this entrance is the shrine of Hanuman, which contains a colossal image of the deity, probably to serve as the guardian deity. The watch tower on the outside measure a height of about 6 mts. Above the roof of the gateway is a short parapet wall; on the outer edge about 2 mts. high. The right watch tower has 3 embrasured parapets, by means of arched wood stones, crude in shape, with 4 vertical loopholes in the lower section and 5 in the middle. At the foot of these arched hood stones, is a big opening in the floor, probably to serve as a machicolation, comparable to the one at Gandikota. Along the inner edge of the ceiling, i.e. on the hind side, is a row of 5 arches, built of brick and lime, with-out any openings in between, while the 2nd one is completely open.

Passing through this outer entrance, comes the 1st court yard of the gateway. On the left i.e. east the wall is broken, but is found to run in a semi-circular fashion, which connects itself to the 2nd entrance; while on the west i.e. right, the wall is intact. Proceeding along further towards south, one is compelled to take right ward turn i.e. west, to enter the 2nd courtyard which again is flanked by two rectangular watch towers of huge size, exude in shape and design. Like the outer ones, these also are devoid of any parapet wall on the top. Passing through this narrow entrance, one notices a barbican wall in front, i.e. west, and hence is compelled to take a left turn i.e. towards south, and proceed along further towards the end or inner most entrance. This again like the 2nd one, has two flanking watch towers of the same type and design.

The above description of the northern gateway reveals that the plan of the gateways of Penukonda, consists of one outer and 2 inner entrances with intermediary courtyards, and right angled, turns towards right and left, a common feature of almost all the Vijayanagara gateways. The other gateways of the same fort, i.e. Gorantla urn vakili on the east and Cheruvuurnuvakili on the south are also of similar type and plan. The eastern gateway, i.e. Gorantlaurnuvakili appears to have derived its name as it faces the village Gorantla. It is also entered through an outer entrance with 6 mts. wide gap flanked by rectangular watch towers on the outside. Inside are two court-yards, and two inner entrances. After entering the 1st one has to turn towards right i.e. North, through a 2nd entrance which also is flanked by watch towers. Passing through this one has to take a slightly leftward turn and pass through the inner most entrance i.e. 3rd. The wall in this gateway rises to a height of about 7 to 8 mts. with 9 courses of stones in it.

The Anjaneya urn vakili on the west appears to be somewhat less complex in plan, with only one court yard, and 1 inner entrance, obviously because the fort is well protected on this side.

On plan, the entire lower fort area appears to be somewhat irregular square in shape.

Inside these gateways lies the entire village of Penukonda. There are a number of temples, a mosque and GaganMahal.

The citadel of the fort lies on the hill on the west. It is climbed up by means of a stone paved path upto a distance of about 1/2 a mile where are noticed 2 pillared mandapas.

Beyond, is the ramped pathway leading to the fort. The fort in the hill is enclosed by a number of ramparts at different levels, as at Gutti which number about 7 in all and there are a number of entrances one in each. The 1st entrance faces south, flanked by two semi-circular bastions. It is also connected by corresponding walls on either side, which run in a curved manner going up the hill. The method of construction is by means of smaller boulders, filled up with chips as core. Inside is a narrow wall walk at the top. Near this is also seen a carving of Hanuman on a rock boulder. After proceeding further, comes the 2nd wall, in which is seen a huge circular bastion ascended by a flight of steps. The third wall has a curved entrance, like the one in the lower fortification wall with platforms to serve as guard rooms inside. Within this is a small shrine for Ganesa, the wall on the right proceeds farther and merges into the rock while after some walk on the left, comes the 4th gate which faces north. Here is noticed an underground water cistern. Near this is also noticed a gateway on the south leading to the outside of the fort called Punuguriuruvakili. Outside this gate are several water tanks one of which is known as Bhairannakunta. Facing it on the south are two hills connected by means of a continuous wall called Narasimhaswamy gutter. It is protected by a fortification wall and gateways proceeding along further after the 4th gate, comes the 5th flanked by two watch towers and aligning walls. From this area, begins the khilla or citadel portion. Inside is a wellcalled Khillabavi. This gateway has a row of 3 circularbastions. Of them the middle one is very big in size andproportion. Near them is a flight of steps to ascend up.Opposite the Khillabavi is a small temple, comprising a garbhagriha, and antarala. On the lintel of the garbhagriha is thecarved figure of Alingana Chandra Sekharamurti, while on thelintel of the antarala is the curving of Gajalakshmi. Outside are two Dwarapalikas.

Proceeding along further through the 5th gate, comes the 6th which is not of much significance. After this comes the 7th, with a flight of steps to climb up. In it is seen an under-ground passage. On the right is the wall which faces south. After climbing up the stair case, is seen a circular watch tower,supported by temple pillars. Inside is a semi-circular bastionwith a row of arched wood stones arranged along the outer edge.The floor space in this bastion is neatly, plastered with lime mortar. Below is an underground chamber comprising a big hall and a small room.

Proceeding from this citadel portion towards southis reached the Narasimhaswamygutta. On the way near the 1st Wall is a-small cleft of water called 'antargangi'. After walking for about a mile further, comes the Narasimhaswamygutta. Init isa huge pushkarini or water tank, enclosed by a parapetall round. It is called Vakkiri, with a pillared mandapa in thecentre. Proceeding along further, comes the entrance, whichresembles a temple doorframe with typical Vijayanagara art motifsof Ganga and Jamuna, with scroll and foliage designs above.Inside are two platforms, with carved figures of fish, tortoise and Tiger.

After passing through this entrance is seen a ruinedtemple probably of Narasimhaswamy, mentioned by the Kaifiyat;built in typical Vijayanagara architectural style. Outsideit on the east runs the fort wall built in cyclopean order,with an underground passage at its foot. Below is another line of wall, near the uruvakili on the south.

WATER RESOURCES

The fort of Penukonda is well provided with several waterresources by means of tanks, wells etc., both outside and insidethe fort. To name a few are, BhogaSamudram, adjoining theSouth wall of the fort, nearby to its west is Tiruvengalanathunicheruvu. Within the fort area are two big walls called Posalakkeriand Palakkeri, There are also about 12 other wells likePeddaNagulabavi and ChinnaNagulabavi near the fort of thelower fort wall, EguvaNagulabavi, Velupalabavi outside thefort wall, Chakkerabavi near the Babayyadargah and Bhairanna-kunta on the top of Narasimhsswamygutta.

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