

Strategically-located safe haven

The Gingee fort is imaginatively built connecting three hillocks and encircling a triangular area which contained the royal centre and the settlement.

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Written history celebrates men of the past who are known for their heroic deeds, valour and battle deaths. It seldom mentions the steeds of these great men that sacrifice their lives along with that of their masters. On the other hand, ballads and other forms of oral histories are rich in recollection and offer many histories that are less known or forgotten.

Along with Raja Desing and his friend Mehmud Khan, their horses Neelaveni and Pancha Kalyani are part of the legends

Grand Heritage

and folklore of Tamil Nadu. Legend has it that Raja Desing, the prince of Gingee went to Delhi, tamed the untameable wild horse of the Mughal king and earned the horse as his prize. He revolted against the Nawab of Arcot, fought them and lost his life. So did Mehmud Khan and his horse Pancha Kalyani.

Raja Desing was a Rajput prince who ruled Gingee in the 18th century. Gingee attracted kings from far and wide because of its strategic location. More than this, it was the impregnable fort that drew rulers to this safe haven. The fort was imaginatively built connecting three hillocks and encircling a triangular area.

Well designed

According to some historians this fortified triangle was the royal centre and away from it



HISTORICAL SITE: Impregnable fort. PHOTO: R. SHIVAJI RAO

was the sacred centre and the settlement. This suggests that Gingee was modelled on Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagar Kings. This is plausible because Gingee was the capital of the Nayaks, who initially ruled on behalf of the Vijayanagar kings, but later became independent.

Some historians think that the fort was constructed in the 12th century, but recent studies prove that it was built in the 16th century. After the Nayaks, the Marathas ruled Gingee and following them, the Nawabs of Arcot. It became an important garrison for the French. When the British defeated the French,

the fort was abandoned.

The fort of Gingee makes good use of the natural boulders and the walls are built with stone veneers and rubble infill. The entrance gates are strategically designed preventing the attacking troops from rushing straight into the fort.

Apart from the fort, the site has ruined palaces, the relatively

intact Kalyanamahal, the granary, tanks and temples.

There is an 18th century mosque outside the inner fort wall. The landscape of boulders, the rocky outcrops and the way the fort and buildings integrate with the landscape make Gingee a beautiful historical site. If architecture is "a word in stone", Gingee is a poem.

Gingee has granaries on top of the two hills and inside the royal centre. They could store large quantities of grain which was useful during a siege. The granary in the royal centre has three large vaulted halls. It is estimated that this can hold about three million kilos of rice.