

Gingee Fort – A Tourism Icon of Villupuram District in Tamilnadu – A Case Study



Tourism

KEYWORDS : Fort Tourism-Important centers in India - Gingee Fort - Gnesis

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Introduction

Gingee Fort or Senji Fort (also known as Chenji, Jinji or Senchi) in Tamil Nadu, India is one of the surviving forts in Tamil Nadu, India. It lies in Villupuram District, 160 kilometres (99 mi) from the state capital, Chennai, and is close to the Union Territory of Puducherry. The fort is so fortified, that Shivaji, the Maratha king, ranked it as the “most impregnable fortress in India” and it was called the “Troy of the East” by the British. The nearest town with a railway station is Tindivanam and the nearest airport is Chennai (Madras), located 150 kilometres (93 mi) away.

Originally the site of a small fort built by the Chola dynasty during the 9th century AD, Gingee Fort was modified by Kurumbar during the 13th century. As per one account, the fort was built during the 15–16th century by the Nayaks, the lieutenants of the Vijayanagara Empire and who later became independent kings. The fort passed to the Marathas under the leadership of Shivaji in 1677 AD, Bijapur sultans, the Moghuls, Carnatic Nawabs, French and the British in 1761. The fort is closely associated with Raja Tej Singh, who unsuccessfully revolted against the Nawab of Arcot and eventually lost his life in a battle.

The Gingee Fort complex is on three hillocks:

Krishnagiri to the north, Rajagiri to the west and Chandrayandurg to the southeast. The three hills together constitute a fort complex, each having a separate and self-contained citadel. The fort walls are 13 km (8.1 mi) and the three hills are connected by walls enclosing an area of 11 square kilometres (4.2 sq mi). [1] It was built at a height of 800 feet (240 m) and protected by a 80 feet (24 m) wide moat. The complex has a seven-storeyed Kalyana Mahal (marriage hall), granaries, prison cells, and a temple dedicated to its presiding Hindu goddess called Chenniamman. The fortifications contain a sacred pond known as Aanaikulam. On the top of the hillock, there are minor fortifications.^[1] The fort, in modern times, is maintained and administered by the Archaeological Survey of India. The fort is one of the prominent tourist destinations in Villupuram district.

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The Bijapur Nawabs who held the fort from about 1660 to 1677 AD called it Badshabad, while the Marathas who succeeded them called it Chandry or Chindy. The Mughals, on their capture of the fort in 1698 A.D., named it Nusratgadh in honour of Nawab Zulfikar Khan Nusrat-Jang, the commander-in-chief of the besieging army. Later, the English and the French called it Gingee or Jinji. The early Madras records of the English give the spelling Chingee or Chengey.^{[2][3][1]}

As per Tamil legend, the tragic tale of Raja Tej Singh, popularly known in Tamil as Thesingu Raasan, is associated with the fort. The true life story of Tej Singh and his general, Mehboob Khan (aka Maavuthukaran), who were friends, has inspired many poems, street plays, and countless other stories. He was the son of Swarup Singh and revolted against the Nawab of Arcot, and was defeated and killed in the war that followed. Though Gingee became a part of the Nawab's territory in 1714, the young and courageous Tej Singh became a legend and his life, love and brave but tragic end were eulogised in various ballads.

The main source for the first two hundred years of the history of the place is the “Complete History of the Carnatic Kings” among the Mackenzie manuscripts. According to historian Narayan, a small village called Melacerri, located 3 mi (4.8 km) away from Gingee is called “Old Gingee” has traces of fortifications from about 1200 AD.^[4] Ananda Kon of the shepherd community (Konar), accidentally found a treasure in one of the cavities of the Western hill while grazing his sheep. Making himself the head of a small band of warriors, he defeated the petty rulers of the neighbouring villages and built a small fortress on Kamalagiri, which he renamed Anandagiri after himself. The Konar dynasty ruled Gingee from 1190 to 1330 AD, and was succeeded by the chief of a neighbouring place called Kobilingan, who belonged to the Kurumba caste and ascended the throne of Gingee. He was a feudatory of the powerful Cholas. Gingee came into the hands of various ruling dynasties of South India, starting from the Cholas.

Tourism in a broader sense has existed for a long time in the Himalayas:

in the form of pilgrimage to Hindu sanctuaries that are located high up in the mountains. With the arrival of the British in the 19th century, summer resorts, the so-called Hill Stations, were established. Examples for these foundations are Darjeeling, Nainital, Mussoorie or Shimla. Nowadays, these Hill Stations are most frequented by members of the Indian and Pakistani middle-class. “Modern” n region – activities such as trekking,

mountain climbing, sightseeing and winter sports – has been introduced only in the last few decades. These forms of western mass tourism have a huge impact on the environment and on the local social structure. This paper will explain the history of and discuss the effects of modern mass tourism on the local society and environment and possible enhancements towards a sustainable tourism in this region.

History of Fort tourism in India – Some Important Centres

Tourism in the Himalayas, seen from a historical viewpoint, can be divided into three distinct phases or categories: the religious pilgrimages, the British hill stations of the 19th century and the modern mass tourism of the 20th century.

Pilgrimage to the Himalayas has played an important role for a long time in several different religions: the worshipping of holy rivers and nature deities has its roots in the Aryan culture and was later integrated into Hinduism. The whole Himalayan region has an important spiritual meaning for Hindus as a "sacral space" (Grötzbach 1994, p. 184). This leads to a different, Hindu point of view of the Himalayas: not a collection of natural features or a beautiful landscape, but a representation of the divine. It is estimated that pilgrimage to the sanctuaries in the Himalayas started between the 4th and 2nd century B.C. The earliest written evidence for pilgrimage to the Himalayas is the Epos Mahabharata from the 1st century B.C., which mentions Hardwar and the sources of the Ganga (Badrinath and Kedarnath) as pilgrimage destinations. The most important pilgrimage destinations were and still are the sources of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna (Figure 1), and, even more important, the lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailash, the home of Shiva, in southern Tibet. Vaishno Devi and Amarnath, two cave sanctuaries, are located in Jammu and Kashmir (Grötzbach 1985, pp. 30-31). Even though most of the sanctuaries in the Himalayas are Hindu sanctuaries, there are also Buddhist and Bon sanctuaries such as the Kongpo Bonri in central Tibet.

Until the middle of the 20th century, the number of pilgrims that went on the arduous trek to one of the sanctuaries was relatively low: for example, about five to ten thousand pilgrims arrived in Badrinath each year after a 30-day hike in the middle of the 19th century. But with the expansion of streets in the middle of the 20th century, Badrinath could be reached from Rishikesh within one and a half day by bus. Since then, the number of pilgrims arriving in Badrinath and the whole Garhwal region has increased dramatically.

The total number of pilgrims arriving in the pilgrimage places of the Garhwal Himalaya (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Hemkund) is still rising, too: from 355 000 in 1975 to 751 000 in 1989 (Grötzbach 1994, p. 185). It is obvious that this development has an impact on the environment in this area: Grötzbach reports on the fact that in Badrinath undeveloped areas are used as garbage dumps and even the water of the holy river Alakananda is contaminated with feces and sewage (Grötzbach 1994, p. 188).

The British Hill stations and Forts

The second stage of tourism had its beginning in the 19th century, when the British discovered the Himalayas as a recreation area. After several military excursions of the British in the early 19th century discovered the restorative effects of a stay in the Himalayan hills, several sanatoriums were established to provide services to members of the military. The first hill station was Simla, founded in 1819. It was recognized as the government and military summer headquarters for India in 1838 (which it stayed until the British withdrawal from India in 1947), thereby gaining importance (Spencer 1948, pp. 640-641). Simla has re-

tained its importance until the present day, being the capital of the Himachal Pradesh (Grötzbach 1996, p. 31).

After some time, in the late 1830's, the hill stations became more attractive for the civilian residents of India (especially for the colonial middle and upper class), due to the fact that they were an opportunity to escape the hot pre-monsoon months and the summer monsoon, at the same offering a stay in a more pleasant region with a beautiful landscape (Grötzbach 1985, p. 34).

Change started in 1947, when India became independent and the number of British tourists decreased dramatically. After a few years of crisis the number of tourists started to increase again: the Indian urban middle class had discovered the Hill Stations as an interesting vacation destination.

Modern mass tourism started in the 1960s and the number of tourists visiting the hill stations increased by huge numbers:

in Nainital, the number of visitors increased from 166000 in 1958 to 332000 in 1968 and to 560000 in 1988. In Mussoorie, the number of visitors increased from 158000 in 1958 to 306000 in 1966 and 720000 in 1981 (Joshi 1990, p. 347; Grötzbach 1985, p. 36). This enormous increase had, of course, its negative side effects on the nature: Joshi, for example, describes the situation in Nainital as follows:

Sukhatal, a small lake northwest of the town at an altitude of 1960 m, has dried up and its bed is being used as a dumping ground for building debris. [...] The waters of the [Naini] lake are no longer clear due to the increased turbidity. Bacteriological pollution and the concentration of coliform and E-coli bacteria in the lake are at unsafe levels. Similarly, the levels of chlorine, lead and manganese are far beyond those considered safe." (Joshi 1990, p. 351)

Modern Tourism of the 20th century

Modern mass tourism started in 1950s after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed the Mt. Everest and made the region popular in other parts of the world, that had until then more or less ignored the region (Walder 2000, p. 9). In the first years, the lack of transportation infrastructure limited tourism to the Hill Stations and the Garhwal region. But soon after the Indian-Chinese border war in 1962, a huge number of roads were built in the Indian part of the Himalayas – until 1970, 10 000 km of roads. Although their purpose was primarily a military one, they opened the region to modern mass transportation. After these roads were also opened for foreign tourists, the regions close to the roads experienced an enormous growth in tourism – in Ladakh, e.g., the number of visitors increased from 0 in 1974 to 15.000 in 1982 (Grötzbach 1994). Nepal, too, witnessed an enormous growth of tourism in the last 50 years. In 1962, 6179 tourists arrived in Nepal. The growth in the number of tourists reached its climax in 1999, when 421 000 tourists arrived in Nepal (Walder 2000, p. 13).

CONCLUSION

The Himalayas offer the modern tourist a widespread range of possibilities: the activities range from visiting the unique cultural attractions, hiking, skiing, to the more adventurous types of tourism. In the last years, the modern (western) trend sports have been established in the Himalayan region: rafting, kayaking, canyoning, rock climbing, mountain biking, bungee jumping, paragliding etc (Nepal Tourism Board 2000, pp. 45-51). The modern mass tourism has an enormous impact on the economy, ecology and society in the Himalayas.

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