

Potagarh of Ganjam

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The fort of Potagarh was the first Collectorate complex of Ganjam. Later on it was shifted to Berhampur in 1815 and subsequently to Chhatrapur in 1835, where it is continuing till to-day.

Potagarh or the "burried fort" is named as such since it is burried. It is situated at present near a village named Ganjam between 18° 15' and 20° 15' N. Latitude and 83° 49' and 85° 15' E. Longitude on the mouth of river Rushikulya. The fort is in ruins and still it stands as the mute witness to many rulers, who have used it as their administrative Headquarters to rule over this region named in different periods as Kalinga, Kalinga Dandapat, Ganjam, Chichacole Circar etc. It is not a single fort, rather a cluster of forts erected by different governments, the remanants of which tell the stories of their administrative procedures. Thus the history of Potagarh is the history of the Ganjam Collectorate that involves the history of Ganjam, Northern Circars, French Government, Madras Presidency, Bengal Presidency and the history of the East India Company as a whole.



It is said that the construction of Potagarh fort was commenced in 1768 by Edward Costford, the first Resident of Ganjam. But the star-shaped design of the fort and a very old Masjeed standing near it attest more of its Mahammadan origin than British. During the Kutabsahi rule in 17th century Ganjam was extended from Chilika to Chicacole and

designated as Chicacole Circar which was the Northern-most Circar of the Northern Circars and was controlled from Golconda. In 1641 a Faujdar named Mahammed Khan was appointed in Srikakulam for the first time by Abdul Kutab Shah, the ruler of Golconda. He constructed some fine mosques at Srikakulam and Icchapur. The old

Kalinga Dandapat (Ganjam) was then divided into two divisions namely Chicacole (Srikakulam) and Icchapur. Most probably it was Mahammed Khan who erected a fort at the present site of Potagarh for administration of Icchapur division. Some scholars are of the opinion that the fort was erected by the Fourth Sultan Ibrahim Kutabshah.

In 1753 the Northern Circar was granted to the French and Monsieur De Bussy, the French Commander took control over Ganjam and functioned from Potagarh. He must have erected a fort there for him as well as his French people. The presence of the French people is proved by two tombs erected in the cemetery close to Potagarh in honour of two souls of French origin.

in 1765, the Northern Circars were granted to English by an imperial *farman*. French power ended and Edward Costford was appointed as the British Resident of Ganjam in 1766 and took direct charge of Ganjam in 1768. He constructed there another fort.

The fort is spread in a vast area close to the river in star-shape. Inside the compound there are three residential buildings of three different architectural designs, most probably assigned to the Mahammadans, French and British. The first one probably of Mahammadan or Kutabshahi origin is completely in ruined state. The other two are also not in so good condition. Besides, two magazine houses are there. Two passages are there in the eastern side of the compound wall opening to the river.



Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik inaugurating the Blood Bank at Daspalla on 20.2.2005. Shri Bijayashree Routray, Minister, Health and Family Welfare and Shri Prasanna Kumar Patsani, M.P. are also present.

One was probably used as a secret passage to escape into the sea and the other for the queen to go to the river to take bath. The compound wall is about 8' thick with a moat encircling it. The fort has two nicely designed doors, one is in the front side the other one is in the back side, close to the river.

The fort of Potagarh is described by the celebrated historian W.W.Hunter having towers in the star angles except in the east front where there is a large gateway, the walls neither under 18 nor above 22 feet in height and a ditch running in three sides in many parts with deep water and in the fourth side defended by a thick wood which runs to 150 yards from the walls".

Potagarh tells many stories of horror relating to the wrath of the fort-goddess on the ancient village of Ganjam and the escape of the king through the secret passage into the Bay of Bengal by a boat at the time of attack.

The fort Potagarh is an archaeological asset of the state and deserves preservation.

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