
The Attractions of Nandi Hills - An Overview

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Introduction:

Karnataka is known for Hill Stations, Peak Mountains, flora and fauna etc. Nandi Hills is famous for Hill Station. The hill is also a popular tourist spot. Nandi Hills or Nandidurg is a famous historical hill station and fortress, situated in Chickaballapur Taluk & District. It is about 20 km from Chickaballapur and approximately 60 km from the city of Bangalore. Nandi hills is unique biodiversity spot and flora resembles that a distinctive high hills, Nandi hills forms a part of chain of hills namely, Brahmagiri, Channagiri, Dibbagiri, and Skandagiri in Chickaballapur Taluk. The hills are nestled between the neighbouring villages of Nandi, Sultanapet, Muddenahalli and KaniveNarayanapura etc.

Topography:

Nandi Hills stands in long. $77^{\circ} 53' E$ and lat. $13^{\circ} 22'$. The landscape of the hills is craggy and rugged. It is situated at an altitude of 1479 meters or 4851 feet, above the sea level. The area covered by the hills is around 2,837 hectares. Rivers, which originates from the Nandi Hills namely, Arkavathi, Chitravati, Papagni, Uttara Pinakini or Pennar, Dakshina Pinakini or Ponnaiyar and Palar. The rivers provide water to several districts and it is utilising for drinking and agricultural activities. Nandi Hills touching the clouds makes it a picturesque location. Nandi Hills is marked as State Forest, as it comprises several other hillocks (over 1,400 m) with several peaks, amongst all of these, Nandi Hills has a general pattern of scrubs and deciduous types of vegetation, altitudinal variation in the floristic composition can be seen owing to the influences of several ecological factors. It has impressive flora and fauna with around 150 different varieties of species. The natural ecosystem at Nandi Hills hosts a number of species including migratory birds and provides shelter to many of the globally threatened and biome restricted assemblages like Oriental White Eye or the Yellow-throated Bulbul. Pied Thrush. Eurasian Blackbird, Indian Blue Robin amongst various others.

The terrain of Nandi Hills being mostly consists of slopes, which are covered with scrub and vegetation being sparse. It comprises of medicinal plants like Eucalyptus and Shoreatalura along with Coffee Arabica. The trees grown in this area acts as a substrate for cloud condensation, as trees are covered with water, creates a sensitive ecology catalyses growth of varied flora and fauna. More than, 100-150 plants which grows there has unique capability to filter the rain water. There are several plant species and ornamental plants with natural pigmentation. The hill range has great potential for climate regulation and soil formation. The pigmentation of the flowers takes place because of the weather conditions, prevailing on the hills.

Etymology Nandi Hills:

Nandi Hills is a place of Historical significance. There are many stories about the origin of the name Nandi Hills. It is called Nandi Hills because the hill resembles a sleeping bull (Nandi). Another story is saying that Yoga Nandishwara performed penance here, and so it was named

after him. Nandi Hills is also called as Kushmandagiri, the sage of Kushmanda Performed austerities here. Nandi Hills was also called as Anandagiri (The hill of happiness) It was a place of Jain pilgrimage; the Jain antiquity of the place is attested by Shramana-tirtha. In the Sthalapurana, the hill is also named Sringiparvata and Kushmandaparvata. During the period of Gangas, the hill was called as Nandagiri (The hill of pleasure). It is said that Nandi hills was previously a military headquarters of Gangas and they called themselves as Nandigirinatha or Lord of Nandagiri. During the Chola period, the name Nandagiri was changed to Nandigiri. Nandi Hills is also called as Nandidurga, because of the fort built here by the ruler Tippu Sultan.

Epigraphical Evidences: Epigraphical evidences called the Nandi Hills as Nandigiri.

An Inscription from Mudayanur, in the neighbourhood, which dates from 338 A.D. during the supremacy of the Mahavalis, makes the earliest mention of Nandidroog that has yet been found. It speaks of the god, Shiva whose vehicle is the bull 'Nandi' sitting on the hill Nandi as on his beast.

- The Ganga dynasty was in power, gives cause for the question whether the name 'Nandigiri' (hill of the Bull) or Nandagiri (hill of bliss), was the original name of the hill. Gangas took themselves the title 'Lord of Nandagiri' and the term 'Nandigiri' seems with them to have been commonly applied to the hill)
- An Inscription of 750 AD. (CB-29) is inscribed on a large boulder on Gopinathagutta, a spur jutting out from the north east base of 'Nandidoorg,' after indicating who built and who repaired the Jain temple that stood, there, the inscription proceeds to praise the great hill as the best hill mountains, an ornament of the earth goddess, purified by Chaitya-Buddhist temple and a tirtha, a sacred bathing place, and as having caves suitable for the dwelling of holy sages. At this period, it is clear that the dominant worship performed on the hill was Jain, now there are no Jain temples nor performance of Jain rites.
- An inscription dated 1289, it is called the 'Southern Kailasa'
- An Inscription of Chola period about 10th century A.D. called it as Nandigiri and granted Byappahalli village to priests of Gangapuram in 1276 A.D. (DV-79) Vembideva (Nambideva) of Nandigirinatha had converted the tankKulaimandalam of Kuduvathi as Nandisamudram and granted it to 32 Brahmins in 1283 A.D. (DV-28)

Climate: On account of the salubrity of its climate, the hill has become a popular health resort in the hot season. The climate at the top of the hill made it particularly of interest to horticulturists. Several species of plant were introduced into an experimental garden, and also notes the peculiarity of Hypericum Mysoreans. The botanist Benjamin Heynes introduced potatoes for the first time in the neighbourhood of Bangalore near Nandi Hills through a Colonel Cuppage. He brought seeds from St. Helena and these grew well enough that they were supplied in Madras and preferred to those obtained from Bengal.

Historical Background:

During the rule of Mahavalis/Banas, An Inscription dated 338 A.D. from Mudayanaur, mention about Nandidurg and the god shiva, whose vehicle is the bull, Nandi. The Gangas called themselves as Nandagirinatha or Lord of Nanda giri, It is said that Nandi Hills was previously a military headquarters of Gangas, During the rule of Nolambas, Nandi and Nandi Hills were the places of Shaivities (Kalamukha sect) known as 'Southern Kailasa' During the period of

Vijayanagar and post Vijayanagar period, it was under the control of Palegarsof Chickaballapur. Later it was under the control of the Marathas for some time. Hyder Ali, the commander of Mysore Army defeated Chickappa Gowda, the Palegar of Chickaballapur in 1762 and captured Nandi Hills. The hill was originally a fortified in a small way by the Chickaballapur chiefs, but later, extensive fortifications were erected by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan. In 1791, this formidable hill fort was captured by the British army under Lord Cornwallis and a regiment was continued to be stationed at the foot of the hill from 1799 to 1808A.D.. It was during this period that the fruit garden near Amrita Sarovara was established by Col.Cuppage and beautiful dwelling houses on the hill were erected by Col.Hill. Sir Mark Cubbon, Captain Cunningham and others. Mark Cubbon, when he was the Commissioner of Bangalore, had his summer residence in Nandi Hills. Mahatma Gandhiji visited twice and stayed in Nandi Hills in 1927 and 1936 to rejuvenate his health. Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru, Queen Elizabeth II, were among dignitaries who enjoyed their stay here. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the SAARC delegates, chose this spot for a retreat after their international deliberations in 1986. Nandi Hills is located close to Bangalore International Airport, Devanahalli. Due to its proximity to the airport, Nandi Hills is witnessing numerous commercial and residential ventures that are underway in the region.

Places of interest on the Nandi Hills are as follows:

Yoga Nandeeshwara Temple:The Yoganandeeshwara temple is the oldest among the existing monuments on the hill. It has two shrines-connected by two corridors, the court-yard being enclosed in a cloistered prakara. Most of the building including the Devi shrine on the west was evidently constructed in the Vijayanagara period. The Devi shrine has a small garbhagriha, a tiny sukanasi and a navaranga of four pillars. The goddess is a small figure made of dark brown stone. The other shrine, which is dedicated to Nandi, has a garbhagriha, a sukanasi and a four pillared navaranga measuring about 25 square feet. The central ceiling which is flat has nine sculptured squares having in the centre the figures of Uma and Maheswara seated in Sukhasana, surrounded by the AstaDikpalakas. In the navaranga are kept a large number of images. The finest piece of art in the temple is the sukanasi doorway.It which appears to have been made of pieces cast in bronze in imitation of wood work. This work belongs to Vijayanagar period. The oldest parts of the Yoganandeeshwara temple belong to the Chola period. The reddish-brown Linga is a small one appearing only about 4'' above the pitha. In the garbhagriha are also kept some metallic images among whom are a Sadasiva and & Devi. The floor of the navaranga is full of votive relievous and Kannada inscriptions descriptive of the. Among these may be noticed GandaraguliBhadrapa Nayaka, the Avati cheif. The south navaranga doorway has dancing and drumming figures similar to the Bhoganandishwara and Arunachaleshwara Navaranga doorways. From the inscription Cb-31, it is learnt that all these belong to about the mahratta days-1700 A.D. (EC X Cb-31)

There is nothing remarkable in the outer view of the temple, the walls being plain except for the usual simple pilasters. The only thing which indicates any antiquity is the octagonal cornice of the basement. The tower as it now stands upon the garbhagriha is one of brick and mortar and does not appear to be of much antiquity. On the whole, this Yoganandi temple may be described as a very plain structure with its oldest parts coming down from the Chola times. The prakara has two gateways, one on the north and the other on the south, neither of which has a lower above it. But on the east where there is no doorway there is a small brick tower of the late Vijayanagar

period. A small doorway in the south compound wall of the temple leads to a fine stone-built pond in the midst of which is a rock cut pool measuring about 20 feet by 15 feet. (MAR, 1932)

SaunakaTirtha: A steep descent of about 100 feet over the rocks to the south-west of the YogaNandeeshwara temple leads to a spot called SaunkaTirtha is also called as *SravanaTirtha*, where originally existed a well of that time. It is also sometimes called Sramana Tirtha.

Gavi Veerabhadra Temple: Approximately at the level of about 1,400 steps up the hill there is a large boulder beneath which is a wide cave about 40 feet long, 30 feet broad and 7 feet high. It is divided into two chambers. The inner chamber contains a dark stone image of *Veerabhadra* about 4 feet height. The image and its arch are of Hoysala style and probably belong to the early 14th century. The God is in a standing posture (Sthanika) holding in his four hands namely a sword, an arrow, a bow and a shield. A small ram-headed figure of *Daksha-Brahma* stands to his right. The garbhagriha doorway is of wood and of very old style in workmanship. An inscription above the mouth of the cave mentions that Devayya son of Kannapparaya got a doorway put up in the year corresponding to 1397 A.D. it has a novel design with Gajalakshmi on the lintel and a group of dancers and musicians in the horizontal band above here. (MAR, 1932)

AmritaSarovara: The Amrita Sarovara or Lake of Nectar is the main source of water supply on the hill. It is a fine, large, stone-built pond measuring about 200 square feet at the top. Its sides are all built up off stone slabs which form several series of steps. It is said that all the four series meet at a point at the bottom where a shrine is believed to be existing. The work appears to be of about the 18th century, i.e., of the days of the Avati chiefs or of Hyder Ali.

KudureMetlu(Horse Steps): At exactly the north-east corner of the fort line, there is a small gateway which leads out to an old pathway leading down the hill. The pathway is now ruined in many places and overgrown with lantana in others so that it is not possible to use it. The fact that it is said to have been in use even in Tippu's days, his favourite horse being led up to the hill every summer for the Sultan's use. It is called kuduremetlu because horses were being led up the hill by this path.

Source of the Palar and Arkavati: About fifty yards to the east of oak lands, there is a well with a spring just inside the fort wall. From it is said to originate the Palar river. The continuity of the stream is however difficult to trace on the side of the hill, and all traces of it are lost for several miles.

NellikaiBasavanna: Near the cave is a large pavilion supported by cylindrical pillars. The pavilion contains a large bull, measuring about 10 feet long and 6 feet high, which resembles in workmanship the Bull in the BhogaNandeeshwara temple. It appears to have been carved during the Chola period. It is popularly called NellikaiBasavanna because there is a Nelli tree in front of him.

Tippu's Fort: The hill was originally fortified in a small way by the chiefs of Chickaballapur but later, extensive fortifications were erected by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan. During the period of

Tippu Sultan, the fort was reconstructed with stones and bricks masonry.

Tippu's Palace: On the northern and western side of the hill meet two lines of fortifications of which the upper one appears to have been an old Hindu construction of the Paleyagars as can be seen from the gate-way whose jambs and lintels are ornamented with creeper scroll and rope designs and the figure of a devotee. Just above this gate-way, Tippu constructed a small building and ornamental parapet and pointed arches. Tippu used to refer as Tashk-e-jannat. It is made mainly of wood and boasts carved arches and pillars along with beautifully painted walls. Tippu used to spend his summers often here while his army was stationed at Sultanpet at the foot of the hill. This building is now in charge of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Tippu's Drop: To the west of Hanuman Temple there is a rocky pool known as Narasappana Kunte and a pathway by its side leads to a precipice, nearly one thousand feet deep, known as Tippu's drop. It is located on cliff which is 600 metres above the elevated ground. Tippu's drop is one of the oldest and most famous tourist attraction in Nandi Hills. It is said that Tippu was using this precipice to throw down the prisoners who were condemned to death.

Gandhi Nilaya: Mahatma Gandhiji used to stay at Nandi hills in 1927 for a period of 45 days and in 1936 for three weeks to recuperate from high blood pressure and consumed the naturally filtered water deposited at Amrita Sarovara. Gandhiji stayed in the erstwhile Cunningham lodge, which was later renamed as Gandhi Nilaya. It is today renovated by the Tourism Department.

Nehru Nilaya: It is formerly Cubbon house. Jawaharlal Nehru used to stay in the erstwhile Cubbon house, which was later renamed as Nehru Nilaya. now it is a Guest House of the Horticulture Department.

Conclusion: Nandi hills is a famous historical hill station in Southern India, it is famous for climate, flora and fauna. It is also famous for heritage tourism. Many National icons visited Nandi hills.

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