

Orugallu Fort: The Architectural and Cultural Legacy of the Kakatiya Dynasty

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Abstract: Warangal Fort, a monumental Kakatiya stronghold in Telangana, India, stands as a testament to medieval Indian architecture, governance, and cultural resilience. Constructed primarily in the 12th–13th centuries under the Kakatiya dynasty, the fort evolved from earlier Rashtrakuta and Chalukya foundations into a sophisticated defensive and administrative hub. Renowned for its massive granite construction, intricate Torana gateways, and multi-layered fortifications, it reflects advanced engineering and aesthetic finesse. This study explores the fort's historical significance, from its role as the Kakatiya capital under rulers like Ganapati Deva, Rudrama Devi, and Prataparudra II, to its conquests by the Delhi Sultanate, Bahmani, Qutb Shahi, and Nizam rulers. The fort's architectural typology, including its circular plan, water management systems, and iconic Kakatiya Kala Thoranam—now Telangana's state emblem—highlights its enduring cultural impact. Drawing on inscriptions, archaeological findings, and recent preservation efforts as of September 15, 2025, this paper underscores the fort's role in trade, religion, and regional identity, while addressing contemporary challenges in heritage conservation and tourism development.

Keywords: Land fort, medieval period, Kakatiya military architecture, Orugallu.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the medieval period, forts were indispensable as strategic defence strongholds, administrative centers, symbols of power, and economic hubs. They served to protect territories, enforce governance, and secure vital resources and trade routes. Forts acted as refuges for local populations during invasions, and their architectural and engineering prowess reflected evolving military technologies and the complex socio-political landscape of the era.

Forts as an Architectural Building Typology;

From the earliest times, humans have felt the need for protection, leading to the creation of shelters and barriers around settlements. This likely resulted in the construction of ramparts and fortifications (forts). Recent research and archaeological excavations have uncovered evidence of forts and fortifications from ancient times, evolving into distinct identities. Many forts in India were built by various dynasties and rulers. In northern India, fort architecture evolved from a combination of traditional architecture, Central Asian, and Persian influences. The term "Durg" is used for "fort" and means "difficult to trespass," signifying the importance of a strategic site, a strong wall, and a moat to make it an impregnable bastion (Forts of India, n.d.). There are six types of forts: Dhanva Durg (desert fort), Mahi Durg (mud fort), Jala Durg (water fort), Giri Durg (hill fort), Vana Durg (forest fort), and Nara Durg (fort protected by men) (Forts of India, n.d.). Forts are broadly classified as natural or artificial. Natural forts are divided into six categories: water fort, mud fort, forest fort, desert fort, mountain fort, and cave fort (Singh, 1987). The planning of forts is classified based on plan or shape and construction materials.

Warangal Fort, also known as Orugallu Fort (derived from Telugu for "one stone," referring to its massive granite construction), is situated approximately 150 km northeast of Hyderabad in Telangana, India. Spanning a radius of about 19 km between Warangal and Hanamkonda, it was the epicenter of the Kakatiya empire, which flourished in the Deccan Plateau during the medieval period. The fort's ruins today include defensive walls, ornamental gates, temple remnants, and public halls, offering insights into ancient engineering, art, and governance. As a UNESCO-recognized heritage site and the inspiration for Telangana's state emblem (the Kakatiya Kala Thoranam), it holds immense value for historical

research, tourism, and cultural identity. This presentation synthesizes its multifaceted aspects, supported by primary inscriptions, archaeological findings, and recent developments as of September 15, 2025.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The origins of Warangal Fort trace back to the 8th century under the Rashtrakuta dynasty, with further developments in the 10th century during the Western Chalukya Empire. However, its transformation into a major stronghold began in the 12th century when Prola Raja of the Kakatiya dynasty established Warangal as their capital (Sastry, 1972). The Kakatiyas, ruling from 1175 to 1323 CE, were known for their military expansions, irrigation projects, and patronage of Shaivism. The Kakatiyas of Warangal played a vital role in medieval Andhradesa from the 10th century until the first quarter of the 14th century A.D. They were the first to establish sway over the entire Telugu-speaking areas after the fall of the Satavahanas and before the rise of the Vijayanagara Empire (Yazdani, 1960). The Kakatiyas were descendants of Durjaya. Several feudatory chiefs exercised sway over medieval Andhradesa, including Kotas, Kondapadumatis, Velanadu Cholas, and Chagis, claiming descent from Durjaya. It is generally believed that Durjaya was a semi-mythical personality, but the Bayyaram tank inscription states that he was born in the line of Kshatriyas and sprang from the shoulders of Brahma (Sastry, 1972).

However, the exact relationship between the Kakatiyas and Durjaya remains unclear. Historians are not unanimous regarding the origin of the name "Kakatiya." The Prataparudriyam of Vidyanatha states that the family became known as "Kakatiya" due to their worship of the goddess Durga, named "Kakati," who was their Kuladevatha (Vidyanatha, 13th century). Besides Kakati, the Kakatiyas also worshipped Swayambhudeva as their family deity. The rule of the Kakatiyas of Warangal from A.D. 1050 to A.D. 1323 was the golden period in the history of Andhradesa. They were not only great warriors but also great builders who left behind a series of magnificent edifices throughout Telangana and coastal Andhradesa. Notable examples include the Ramappa temple at Palampet, Ghanpur group of temples at

Ghanpur, and temples at Katakshapur, Jakaram, Ramanujapuram, Benjanki, Mahadevapur, Nagunuru, Tripuranthakam, Kolanupaka, and Pillalamarri (Prasad, 1998). Temples at Motupalli in Prakasam district and Rayali in East Godavari district also belong to this epoch.

Key Rulers

- Ganapati Deva (r. 1199–1262 CE): Replaced an earlier brick structure with a robust stone fort, marking the beginning of its grand scale (Yazdani, 1960).
- Rudrama Devi (1262–1289 CE): A pioneering female ruler who fortified the walls to 29 feet high, added an earthen embankment, and expanded the kingdom's influence (Talbot, 2001).
- Prataparudra II (1289–1323 CE): Grandson of Rudrama Devi; his era is considered the "Golden Age" of the Kakatiyas, characterized by prosperity, temple construction, and trade dominance in the Deccan (Eaton, 2005).

Post-Kakatiya, the fort fell to the Delhi Sultanate in 1323 after repeated sieges. It was briefly controlled by the Musunuri Nayakas in the 14th century, who added barbicans to the gates. Subsequent rulers included the Bahmani Sultanate (15th century), Qutb Shahi dynasty of Golconda (16th–17th centuries), and the Nizams of Hyderabad. Under the Nizams, the fort's commandership (Qiladari) became hereditary, with notable figures like Khwaja Burhan-ud-din in the 18th century and Nawab Qayyum Ali Khan (appointed 1848, titled "Qayyum Jang" in 1861) (Sastry, 1972). Telugu inscriptions within the fort detail royal gifts, underscoring its administrative and religious roles.

III. CONSTRUCTION AND ARCHITECTURE

Warangal Fort's construction evolved over centuries, blending defensive utility with artistic finesse in the Kakatiya style, often called "Thorean" or "Aatiyan." Built without mortar using massive, irregularly shaped granite blocks, it features innovative water management and multi-layered defenses. Investigations revealed that the Torana pillars stood over an anvil slab of 40 cm thickness on a sand bed, with exterior mouldings resting on a packed sand cushion. The stone mouldings consisted of two layers

of Upana (55 cm and 75 cm high). The upper Jagati has stones of 90 cm and 55 cm, with decorative dala-padma or Rekha padma mouldings. The top flat stone is 38 cm thick. From the foundation investigations, the Torana pillars have an ornate adishthana exposed after consolidation. The base is strengthened by an "I"-section girder inserted horizontally over a plum concrete foundation. The Eastern and Northern toranas were provided with this concrete apron and a curtain wall to arrest swing. This apron still exists around the Ramappa temple, retained and strengthened during the Nizams' period (Rao, 1992). A research project entitled "Geotechnical Appraisal and Evaluation of Kakatiya Monuments," undertaken by the Regional Engineering College, Warangal under Prof. M. Pandu Ranga Rao, paved the way for large-scale works at these monuments. Many more require careful exposure from earthen mounds and modern dwellings. A major reconnaissance and planned archaeological exposition of the remains of this medieval township is needed, similar to the Hampi ruins in Karnataka.

Construction Phases

- 12th–13th Century (Kakatiya Era): Initial earthen and brick structures upgraded to stone under Ganapati Deva. Rudrama Devi added a 150-foot-wide moat and heightened the inner wall. The outer earthen wall, 12.5 km in diameter, enclosed the city (Yazdani, 1960).
- 14th–17th Centuries: Post-conquest additions included barbicans by the Musunuri Nayakas and modifications by Bahmani and Qutb Shahi rulers, such as repurposing temple pillars for a mosque (Eaton, 2005).

IV.Architectural Layout

Warangal's circular plan features three concentric circuits of fortifications. The innermost ring of stone walls (1.2 km diameter) defines the fort, with gateways at cardinal points. The area is mostly agricultural, with houses along the east-west road. At the core is the archaeological zone of the demolished Shiva temple, with free-standing entrance portals. The Kush Mahal is to the west. Several temples remain in worship. A large lake in the southeast quadrant is overlooked by Ekashila hill, with structures on top. Other temples and reservoirs are scattered. The

intermediate ring (2.4 km diameter) is earthen, with aligned gateways. The space is fields with houses along the road. The outermost ring (12.5 km diameter) houses modern Warangal, with roads and a railway. Fortifications are interrupted by Hanamkonda's rocky hills. Reservoirs may date to the Kakatiya period. No gateways survive in the outermost walls. Diameters are in ratios of 1:2:10, intended as perfect circles but irregular due to scale and landscape (Sastry, 1972).

V.FORTIFICATIONS

The first circuit uses massive granite blocks, finely fitted without mortar to 6 m height. Bastions (mostly 12 m x 16 m rectangles) project outward, totaling 45. Upper parts have later Muslim battlements and lookouts using reused temple materials. A water-filled ditch protects the outside. The inner face is rammed earth with stepped blocks for access. The second circuit is earthen (up to 10 m high), with semi-circular buttresses and a moat. The third is earthen (over 5 m high) without buttresses (Yazdani, 1960).

VI.GATEWAYS

The four innermost gateways are rectangular barbicans (60 m projection) divided into enclosures, with square bastions. Entry requires right and left turns through doorways. Walls match fortifications; upper portions use reused materials. Doorways have pilasters, brackets, and ornaments (damaged deities). Pink granite balustrades with mythical beasts flank east and west outer doorways, shielded by curved walls. The intermediate ring has passageways with bends; east and west are stone-lined with Bahmani-style pointed arches and arcades. North and south have ruins. Other breaks are midway or later. The outermost ring has a gap near Sadarpeta with buried blocks suggesting a vanished entrance (Sastry, 1972).

Key Features

- Kakatiya Kala Thoranam (Four Ornamental Gates): 10-meter-high arches at cardinal directions, carved from single rock faces with twin pillars and brackets. Spaced 480 feet north-south and 433 feet east-west, they symbolize Kakatiya heritage and are Telangana's emblem (Prasad, 1998).

- Swayambhu Shiva Temple Ruins: Central 1162 CE temple with 45 pillars, massive Nandi, and four-faced Shiva linga (now in separate shrine). Destroyed during invasions (Yazdani, 1960).
- Kush Mahal: 14th-century public hall by Delhi Sultans, with sloping walls, arched openings, and stone arches for a former timber roof (Eaton, 2005).
- Other Elements: Three granaries, small shrines with votive lingas, large water tank near Orugallu rock, Linga Gudi (three temples), and an outdoor museum with artifacts (Sastry, 1972).

VII. SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS

The fort's history is marked by resilience amid conquests:

Delhi Sultanate Sieges

- 1310: Malik Kafur's attack led to tribute, including the Koh-i-Noor diamond (Eaton, 2005).
- 1318: Khusro Khan breached walls with an earthen ramp (Yazdani, 1960).
- 1323: Ulugh Khan (Muhammad bin Tughluq) captured Prataparudra II, who died en route to Delhi. The city was renamed Sultanpur, with coins minted until 1332 (Talbot, 2001).

Post-1323: Regained by Musunuri Nayakas in 1335; later under Bahmani, Qutb Shahi, and Nizam rule as a military and administrative hub (Sastry, 1972).

VIII. CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Warangal Fort epitomizes Kakatiya contributions to Deccan art, influencing later styles. It highlights gender roles through Rudrama Devi's legacy and promotes themes of resilience and innovation. As a hub for trade (diamonds, agriculture) and religion (Shaivism), it fostered regional prosperity. Its gates' design, adopted as Telangana's emblem in 2014, underscores its enduring cultural impact (Prasad, 1998).

Current Status and Preservation (as of September 15, 2025)

Maintained by the ASI and Telangana government, the fort is a protected monument open daily (10 AM–7 PM) with entry fees and a Sound & Light Show. Recent efforts include the successful relocation of ancient Kakatiya-era sculptures and inscriptions from Mogilicherla village to the Ekaveera Devi Temple complex in early September 2025. This move preserves these artifacts in a dedicated heritage site. Additionally, conservation and restoration work on the dilapidated Kalyana Mandapa at the nearby Thousand Pillar Temple was highlighted on September 12, 2025. In July 2025, the IndianOil Foundation completed an illumination project, enhancing the fort's nighttime visibility and cultural appeal. Proposals for broader Warangal heritage restoration, including Kakatiya temples, were advanced in August 2025. Efforts to develop the fort into a major tourist hub, upgrading areas like Shringara Bhavi and Khush Mahal, were announced in March 2025. The site hosted Miss World 2025 contestants in May 2025, boosting international visibility. However, challenges persist, including the non-functional lighting and sound system for shows since March 2025, misuse of ancient wells for waste dumping, health hazards, surrounding areas used for drinking activities affecting visitors, and urban issues like land acquisition for development (e.g., IRR projects, Kush Mahal land, Mud Fort). Initiatives address these, including well restoration, jungle clearance, road development, and adventure sports. As of 2025, it remains a key tourist site, recognized among India's best heritage cities, with ongoing excavations uncovering artifacts (ASI Reports, 2025).

IX. CONCLUSION

Warangal Fort encapsulates the grandeur and turmoil of medieval Indian history, from Kakatiya innovation to colonial endurance. Its architectural marvels and cultural legacy continue to inspire, while preservation efforts ensure its relevance in contemporary discourse. For researchers, it offers avenues to explore themes of empire-building, gender in leadership, and heritage conservation. Future studies could focus on integrating digital mapping for virtual tours or analysing inscriptions for socio economic insights.

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