

Janjira Fort-Siddhi Architecture of India



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ABSTRACT

Janjira - The Undefeated Fort

Janjira Fort is situated on the Murud beach in the Arabian sea along the Konkan coast line. Murud is the nearest town to the fort which is located at about 165 kms from Mumbai. You need to drive on the NH17 till Pen & then proceed towards Murud via Alibaug and Revdanda. The Rajapuri jetty is from where sail boats sail to the fort entrance. The road from murud town to janjira fort takes you a top a small hill from where you get the first glimpse of this amazing fort. Once you decent this hill, you reach Rajapuri jetty which is a small fishermen village. The sail boats take you from the jetty to the main door of the fort . One unique feature of this fort is that the entrance is not easily visible from a distance and can only be identified, once you go nearer to the walls of the fort. This was a strategy due to which Janjira was never conquered as the enemy would just keep on wondering about the entrance of the fort. The walls of the fort have become abraded due to harsh waves crashing on its surface for over so many centuries. The remains of the palaces and courts in the fort are not well-maintained as it should have been. The Balekilla or the main complex of the fort is strategically located at a higher altitude right at the center of the fort so that it remains safe from the attack from any of the directions. The Lake in this island fort is surprisingly a fresh water source in middle of the sea. About 2 kms in north-west direction, you can also see another island fort, 'Padmadurg' which was constructed by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj inorder to conquer Janjira but his effort did not yield any fruitful result. This is a must visit place for all who adore History. Janjira Fort still stands tall among the violent waves of the Arabian Sea, roaring about its glorious past.

Murud Janjira is a good example of water body fort located near the south Konkan coastline. It was ruled by Abyssinian Muslims called – SIDDHI. Under them this fort remained unconquered till its merger in Indian Union in 1947. The Nizamshahis, Maratha, Portuguese, Dutch, French and even English could not subdue this fort. The word “Murud” is derived from a Konkani word Morod and Janjira is derived from an Arabic word meaning Jazeera meaning an island. Thus the name of the fort is a concatenation of the Konkani and Arabic words for Island, "Morod" and "Jazeera".

Review Geography: Murud is located at 17.77°N 73.12°E It has an average elevation of 159 metres (521 feet).

Main Land to Murud Janjira. At the time they seized the fort, the Siddis were employed by the Bahamani Sultan of Ahmednagar and a Habshi, Malik Ambar (1550–1626), held a prominent position in that government. Before the rise of the Maratha sardars, the courts of the Bahamani sultanates were rent by rivalry between the Indian Muslims and the foreign Muslims, as a result of which, the Sultans began to patronize the Marathas as a third force, leading to the rise of Shivaji and the Maratha Empire. Malik

Amber initially rose to great prominence as the Prime Minister of Ahmednagar. He is credited with having carried out a systematic revenue settlement of major portions of the Deccan, which formed the basis for many subsequent settlements. When the Ahmadnagar kingdom was conquered by Bijapur and the Mughals in alliance, the Siddis switched their allegiance to the Sultanate of Bijapur; when the Bijapur kingdom was conquered by the Mughal Empire, the Habshis switched their allegiance to the Mughal Empire. As clients of these Muslim states, the Siddis were nominally part of their navies, and fulfilled the role of defending Muslim interests in the sea, and particularly, access by sea for the Hajj and Umrah, for which reason, the interior Muslim states felt compelled to aid and rescue the Siddis from their enemies. Despite being feudatories, first of Bijapur and then of the Mughals, the Siddis acted as if they were independent, and lived mainly by piracy on coastal shipping. The piracy of the Siddis provoked the various local powers to attempt to suppress them, but despite efforts by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and the Marathas, the fort was never conquered. The fort thus earned a reputation for being impregnable. The reputation may be false. Mass mobilizations by the English and Marathas were always forced off before they could complete the task by the intervention of another power, such as the Mughals, creating a diversion in order to prevent the fall of Murud-Janjira. The same happened with Goa, with the Mughals invading Maratha lands in order to divert Maratha attempts to conquer Goa. As the Muslim powers of the interior waned in the face of rising English power, the Siddi state submitted to England under the system of Subsidiary Alliance, becoming a dependency under paramountcy of the Kings of England. HH Nawab Sidi Muhammed Khan II Sidi Ahmad Khan was the last Ruler of Murud-Janjira. A patron of arts and culture, he supported such musicians as Beenkar Abid Hussain Khan. The state continued in this condition until late 1947, when the last prince acceded his state to the Indian Union, and his state was merged into the Bombay Presidency which was later transformed into the State of Bombay and the State of Maharashtra.

Types of Ancient Indian Forts

Though most of the structures have been decayed and are lost, India's legacy of ancient forts is seen mostly in the shastras (ancient Indian treatises) and in the reliefs on stupas. On some of the early relief work, the carvings indicate that ancient Indian forts has crenellations, embrasures and sloping walls.^[3]

The Arthashastra the Indian treatise on military strategy describes six major types of forts differentiated by their major mode of defense:

- **Jala-durga** (Water fort)
 - Antardvipa-durga (island fortress): surrounded by natural (sea or river) water bodies. E.g. Murud-Janjira.
 - Sthala-durga (plain fortress): surrounded by artificial moats or irrigated by a river. eg Deeg Fort, Lohagarh Fort

- **Dhanvana- or Maru-durga** (Desert Fort): Surrounded by an arid area of at least 5 *yojanas* (73 km).
- **Giri-durga** (Hill fort)
 - *Prantara-durga*: Located on a flat hill summit. E.g. medieval forts such as Chittor, Gwalior and Ranthambore.
 - *Giri-parshva-durga*: The fortifications and civilian structures extend down to the hill slope (not just the summit).
 - *Guha-durga*: Located in a valley surrounded by hills, where the outposts and the signal towers are located.
- **Vana-durga** (Forest fort): Surrounded by a dense forest over a distance of at least 4 *kroshas* (14.6 km).
 - *Khanjana-durga*, built on a fen surrounded by thorny forests.
 - *Sthambha-durga*, built in the forest among tall trees; lacks sufficient water sources.
- **Mahi-durga** (Earthen fort)
 - *Mrid-durga*: surrounded by earthen walls
 - *Parigha-durga*: Surrounded by earthen walls, as well as stone or brick walls. The walls are at least 5.4 m high and their width is half of their height.
 - *Panka-durga*: Surrounded by fens or quicksand
- **Nri-durga** (Human fort)

Defended by a large number of loyal and experienced warriors. Usually a city fortress, populated by a substantial garrison.

Each of these types had its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, according to the *Manusmṛiti*, the forest fort suffers from monkey attacks, the earthen forts get swarmed with rodents, the water forts were plagued by diseases etc. The *Manusmṛiti* considers the Hill fort to be the best defensive structure. Some Sanskrit text consider hill forts to be the abode of gods and hence auspicious. The *Mahabharata* describes the Human fort as the most effective fortification.

Medieval Indian Fort



Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur a Giri durg



Bastions of Murud-Janjira a Jal durg or Ocean FORT

Introduction of artillery: With the advent of the Muslims, closely followed by the introduction of artillery in the 16th century there were several changes to the construction and design of forts. These changes were similar to the changes that took place in Western forts with the advent of gunpowder, i.e. the lowering of walls, thickening of walls, further pushing out of bastions etc.

The construction of a citadel in the centre and putting in more area between the citadel and the walls was characteristic of Muslim forts (influenced in turn by the Norman motte and bailey). Classic examples of such structures are the Golkonda and the Berar fort.

The gates of medieval Indian forts were highly decorated. Two distinct styles are seen. The Hindu style with a lintel and the Mughal style with an arch. Gates in Indian forts were often high and wide to allow elephants to pass. Often they had rows of sharp, stout iron spikes to dissuade an attacking army from using elephants to break down the gates. The walls of the forts were often looked higher from the outside than the inside as the forts made use of the natural rock formations on hills. This not only gave an illusion of greater height but also lead to the lower walls of the fort to be entirely made up of natural rock providing almost a perfect defence against the use of a battering ram or elephants to tear down the walls. The main gate to the forts was located mostly facing north direction, this was to avoid its deterioration by the rains, winds and the sun.

Construction

Stone was the most important material for building fortifications in medieval India. Walls were erected by one of the following three construction methods. A wall could be an earthen rampart faced with stone on both sides. The rampart was built using the earth excavated while digging the ditch, with three-quarters of it used for building a rampart and one-quarter for levelling out the surface inside the fortress and in front of the ditch. Facing the rampart with stone allowed for the erection of higher and steeper

walls than those possible with a purely earthen rampart. The structure had a substantial shortcoming, however: an earthen core accumulated water, which could destroy the stone shell. Drainage channels were therefore installed along the length of the wall from top to bottom. The main binding material for construction was Lime mortar.



Lime mortar mixer on Rasalgad

The second method consisted of filling the space between the outer layers with earth mixed with rubble. This core was considerably harder than simply using rammed earth. The third and most advanced method involved the use of mortar. A rubble-built wall fastened with mortar was strong and long lasting. Construction methods depended, however, on the materials available.

In medieval India, several reports exist of the practice of burying humans either dead or alive in the foundations of fort walls, to ensure their stability, being widely followed. It was believed that the ghosts of those sacrificed as such would keep evil spirits away. During the building of the Sri Qila, Delhi Alauddin Khalji is reported to have buried 8,000 skulls of Mughals killed by him into the foundation. During the building of Purandar Fort one its bastions gave way several times. The king of Berar then ordered his minister an Esaji Naik Chive to bury a first-born son and his wife into the foundation of the bastion. This was promptly done and after a further offering of gold and bricks. When the bastion was finished Esaji Naik was given possession of the fort and the father of the sacrificed boy was rewarded with two villages. Along with the fortification, emphasis was also given for construction of rock cut water cistern, ponds, wells and lakes. To avoid evaporation of water, the water bodies were covered. At times rooms were built close to water bodies to keep the temperature low.

Many Indian fortifications have parapets with peculiarly shaped merlons and complicated systems of loopholes, which differ substantially from similar structures in other countries. Typical Indian merlons were semicircular and pointed at the top, although they were sometimes fake: the parapet may be solid and the merlons shown in relief on the outside (as at Chittorgarh). What was unique is the arrangement and direction of loopholes. Loopholes were made both in the merlons themselves, and under the crenels. They could either look forward (to command distant approaches) or downward (to command the foot of the wall). Sometimes a merion was pierced with two or three loopholes, but more often, one loophole was divided into two or three slits by horizontal or vertical partitions. The shape of

loopholes, as well as the shape of merlons, need not have been the same everywhere in the castle, as shown by Kumbhalgarh.

History:

Visitors can gain access to the Janjira fort from Rajapuri, a small village on the coast. After a short ride in a small boat, one can enter the fort through the main entrance. The fort is oval shaped instead of the usual oblong or square shape. The fort wall is about 40 feet high and has 19 rounded porches or arches, some of which still have cannons mounted on them, including the famous cannon Kalaal Baangadi. These cannons were largely responsible for repelling oncoming enemies from the sea. Inside the fort walls are the ruins of a mosque, a palace and bath with water channeled from streams, evidence that royal ladies occupied the quarters. A deep well, still functional, provides fresh water despite the fort being surrounded by salt water. On shore is a luxurious cliff-top mansion, the Palace of the Nawab. Built by the former Nawab of Janjira, it commands a panoramic view of the Arabian sea and the Janjira sea fort. According to another record the Abyssinian Sidis established the Janjira and Jafarabad state in early 1100.

According to accounts written by the Portuguese Admiral Fernão Mendes Pinto, the Ottoman fleet that first arrived in Aceh prior to the Ottoman expedition to Aceh led by Kurtoğlu Hızır Reis included 200 Malabar sailors from Janjira to aid the region of Batak and Maritime Southeast Asia in 1539.. Later, in 1621, the Siddis of Janjira became exceptionally powerful as autonomous state to the point that the commander of Janjira-Siddi Ambar the Little, successfully defied his overlord Malik Ambar's attempt to replace him. Siddi Ambar the Little is accordingly considered the first Nawab of Janjira state. The island fortress was under control of Adil Shahi dynasty until the reign of Ibrahim II where Janjira fort was lost to the Siddis. Major historical figures from Murud-Janjira include men such as Sidi Hilal, Yahya Saleh and Sidi Yaqub. During the rule of Sultan Aurangzeb, Sidi Yaqut received a subsidy of 400,000 rupees. He also owned large ships which weighed 300–400 tons. According to the record these ships were unsuitable for fighting on the open sea against European warships, but their size allowed for transporting soldiers for amphibious operations.

Despite their repeated attempts, the Portuguese, the British and the Marathas failed to subdue the power of the Siddis, who were themselves allied with the Mughal Empire. For example, 10,000 soldiers from Moro Pandit were repulsed by Janjira's army in 1676. The Marathas led by Shivaji attempted to scale the 12-meter-high (39 ft) granite walls; he failed in all his attempts. His son Sambhaji even attempted to tunnel his way into the fort but was unsuccessful in all his attempts. He built another sea fort in 1676, known as Padmadurg or Kasa fort, to challenge Janjira. It is located northeast of Janjira. Padmadurg took 22 years to build and is constructed on 22 acres of land.



The small pond inside Janjira fort

In the year 1736, Siddis of Murud-Janjira set out in a battle with the forces of Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao. On 19 April 1736, Maratha warrior Chimaji Appa attacked the gathering forces in the encampments of the Siddis near Rewas. When the confrontation ended, 1,500 Siddis, including their leader Siddi Sat, were killed. Peace was concluded in September 1736, but the Siddis were confined to only Janjira, Gowalkot, and Anjanwel, thus their power greatly reduced. However, Janjira remained unconquered until it became part of Indian territory after independence from the British in 1947.

Siddhis: The Siddi call them as Sidi, Siddhi, Sheedi, Sawahili or Habshi, are an enigmatic ethnic group inhabiting India and Pakistan. Members are descended from the Bantu peoples of the East African region. Some were merchants, sailors, indentured servants, slaves and mercenaries. The Siddi community is currently estimated at around 50,000–60,000 individuals, with Karnataka, Gujarat and Hyderabad in India and Makran and Karachi in Pakistan as the main population centres. Siddis are primarily Muslims, although some are Hindus and others belong to the Catholic Church. There are conflicting hypotheses on the origin of the name *Siddi*. One theory is that the word derives from *sahibi*, an Arabic term of respect in North Africa, similar to the word *sahib* in modern India and Pakistan. A second theory is that the term *Siddi* is derived from the title borne by the captains of the Arab vessels that first brought Siddi settlers to India. These captains were known as *Sayyid*.

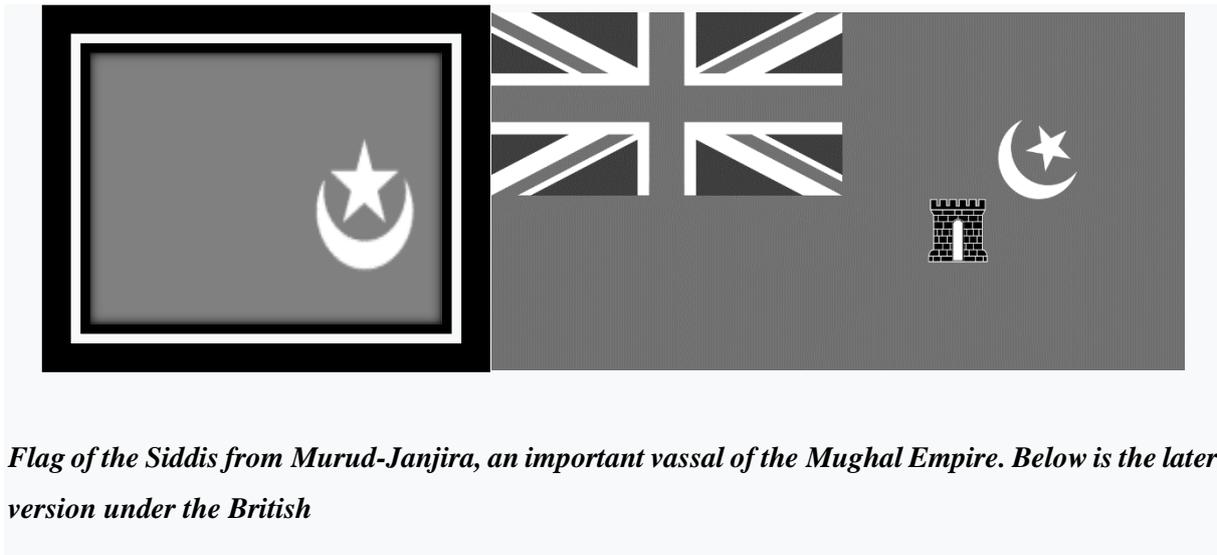
The first Siddis are thought to have arrived in India in 628 AD at the Bharuch port. Several others followed with the first Arab Islamic conquest of the subcontinent in 712 AD. The latter group are believed to have been soldiers with Muhammad bin Qasim's Arab army, and were called *Zanjis*. Siddis were also brought as slaves by the Deccan Sultanates. Several former slaves rose to high ranks in the military and administration, the most prominent of which was Malik Ambar. Later the Siddi population was added to via Bantu peoples from Southeast Africa that had been brought to the Indian subcontinent as slaves by the Portuguese. Later most of these migrants became Muslim and a small minority became Hindu. The Nizam of Hyderabad also employed African-origin guards and soldiers.

Some Siddis escaped slavery to establish communities in forested areas, and some also established the small Siddi principalities of Janjira State on Janjira Island and Jafarabad State in Kathiawar as early as the twelfth century. A former alternative name of Janjira was Habshan (i.e., land of the Habshis).

The wanderers or bantu: The Bantu are an ancient group of people from Africa, whose origins are unclear. Some of the people from West Africa traversed from the Congo or Niger Delta Basin to become the main inhabitants of East and South Africa. They migrated slowly, such as in small groups and in the process of traveling they became known no longer as West Africans, but rather the Bantu, which translates as “The People.” They migrated within the years of 1000-1800 AD.

There are several hypothesis as to why the Bantu moved; one being that the population simply became too large and thusly forced some to move and practice agriculture; another is that they were searching for fertile land. When the Bantu met hostile tribes they used iron weapons, which they developed around 400 A.D. When they reached their destination, some of the Bantu in South Africa married the pre-existing people there, who were known as the Khoikhoi and the San people. During their transition from nomads to settlers they adapted farming and keeping livestock, but those who wished to remain hunters and gatherers were forced off the farming land and into the desert. Before 1000 A.D. Persian and Arab traders had already started to trade with east Africans. After having made contact, many refugees fled here to avoid the chaos in Arabia after Muhammad’s death, which occurred in the 7th century. Because of Arabian immigrants mixing with the Bantu, the Swahili people were born. During the next seven centuries the Swahili people worked with the Bantu and spread their communication deeper into Africa to new tribes.

Then came the colonial period, which brought the Portuguese. By the 15th century the Portuguese found a modern and advanced economy, so much so that some even said that it rivalled Europe. Once the Portuguese gained control the local economic networks were broken down. The Portuguese, however, were overthrown by the Omani Arabs in 1730, the Swahili were given some rights back, but the Omani Arab rule proved to be disastrous for the inland African tribes. The Omani Arabs practiced slavery, which was one of their major economic enterprises. Due to the need for cheap labor in the 18th century the Sultan of Oman, whose name was Sayyid Said, moved his seat of power, in 1840, to Zanzibar, near east Africa’s coast. His territory then expanded from northern Mozambique to southern Somalia. The Africans in these areas were abducted into the slave trade. Tanzania was exceptionally affected by the slave trade. The people who were responsible for abducting slaves were agents of the Sultanate of Zanzibar and some African tribes. The main source of slaves were from raids and prisoners. Some written accounts tell of slave traders marching the slaves 400 miles to the coastal city of Kilwa Kivinje. The Siddhis were



Flag of the Siddis from Murud-Janjira, an important vassal of the Mughal Empire. Below is the later version under the British

presented as slaves by the Portuguese to the local Prince, Nawab of Junagadh, the Siddis also live around Gir Forest National Park and Wildlife sanctuary. On the way to Deva-dungar is the quaint village of Sirvan, inhabited entirely by Siddis. They were brought 300 years ago from Portuguese colonial territories for the Nawab of Junagadh. Today, they follow very few of their original customs, with a few exceptions like the traditional Dhamal dance.

Although Gujarati Siddis have adopted the language and many customs of their surrounding populations, some of their Bantu traditions have been preserved. These include the *Goma* music and dance form, which is sometimes called *Dhamaal*. The term is believed to be derived from the Ngoma drumming and traditional dance forms of the Bantu people inhabiting Central, East and Southern Africa. The Goma also has a spiritual significance and, at the climax of the dance, some dancers are believed to be vehicles for the presence of Siddi saints of the past. *Goma* music comes from the Kiswahili word "ngoma", which means a drum or drums. It also denotes any dancing occasion where traditional drums are principally used. Majority of the Siddis in Gujarat are Muslims(98.7%),with very few following Hinduism(1%).

Janjira State was ruled by Siddi dynasty of Habesha descent and the state was under the suzerainty of the Bombay Presidency during the British Raj. Janjira State was located on the Konkan coast in the present-day Raigad district of Maharashtra. The state included the towns of Murud and Shrivardhan, as well as the fortified island of Murud-Janjira, just off the coastal village of Murud, which was the capital and the residence of the rulers. The state had an area of 839 km², not counting Jafraabad, and a population of 110,389 inhabitants in 1931. Jafraabad, or Jafarabad state was a dependency of the Nawab of Janjira State located 320 km to the NNW.

The royal family of Janjira were Sidis, also known as 'Habshi', assumed to be from Abyssinia. Initially the rulers of the state held the title of 'Wazir', but after 1803 the title of 'Nawab' was officially recognized by the British Raj. They were entitled to an 11 gun salute by the British authorities.

This amazing structure was built by Malik Ambar, who was an Abssinian minister in the court of the Sultan of Ahmednagar. Janjira Fort was built during the end of the 17th century and till date withstood the tests of time. It reflects the marvel of ancient engineering. The fort stands with an impressive height of 40 feet and is bounded by high walls on all sides. It endures the lashes of the sea waves through ages and still stands strong. In 1489 an Ethiopian at the service of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate took over the island of Janjira and established his rule. This was done through deceit by the Siddhis. They short-changed the Koli Chief of native coastal settlement Ram Patil for feast and poisoning his food. They captured the island where the fort Janjira stands. In the century that followed the rulers put themselves under the overlordship of the Sultanate of Bijapur. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century Janjira successfully resisted the repeated attacks of the Maratha Empire.

Cooperation with the Ottomans: According to Ottoman records, a combined force from the Ottomans and Janjira routed a Portuguese fleet in 1587 at Yemen. From this moment onwards Janjira played an important role in resisting Portuguese influence in the region.

There's further record of Cooperation with the Ottoman Empire when the Ottoman fleet first arrived in Aceh prior to Ottoman expedition to Aceh has included 200 Malabar sailors from Janjira State to aid the region Batak and the Maritime Southeast Asia in 1539.

According to one records at one time Sultan Aurangzeb supplied the Siddis of Janjira state with 2,000 men, provisions, ammunitions along with two Frigates and two large Man-of-war battleships. The ship arrived at Bombay harbor under the commands of Siddi Kasim and Siddi Sambal at 1677. The largest Mughal ship named Ganj-I-Sawai Which equipped with 800 guns and 400 musketeer type soldiers also stationed in the port of Surat. Another record from East India Company factory which written 1673 has reported the Siddis fleet which wintered from Bombay has five Frigates and two Man-of-wars beside of fifteen *grabs* vessels. It is because the formidable naval warfare skills of Siddis in Janjira that Aurangzeb granting annual payment of 400,000 Rupee for the maintenance of their fleet.

1. Rivalry with the Marathas

The main competitor of the Sidis was the Angrias, a Maratha Koli family with sea forts and ships, based in southern Konkan.

2. Treaty with Marathas

In 1733, Peshwa Bajirao of the Maratha Empire launched a campaign against the Siddis of Janjira. Bajirao's forces, however, did not take Janjira fort, though they captured much of the surrounding area; a favorable treaty gave the Marathas indirect control over virtually all of the Sidi's lands.

3. Post Maratha-rule

When the British came to the Konkan area, the repeated attacks of the Marathas against Janjira ceased. Janjira State was administered as part of the Deccan States Agency of the Bombay Presidency, founded in 1799. In the nineteenth century the rulers maintained a military force of 123 men.

Following the independence of India in 1947, the state was merged with India.

Wazirs of Janjira

- 1676 - 1703 Kasim Yaqt Khan II (d. 1703)
- 1703 - 1707 Amabat Yaqt Khan II
- 1707 - 1732 Surur Yakut Khan II (d. 1732)
- 1732 - 1734 Hasan Khan (1st time) (d. 1746)
- 1734 - 1737 Sumbul Khan
- 1737 - 1740 `Abd al-Rahman Khan
- 1740 - 1745 Hasan Khan (2nd time) (s.a.)
- 1745 - 1757 Ibrahim Khan I (1st time) (d. 1761)
- 1757 Mohammad Khan I (d. 1757)
- 1757 - 1759 Ibrahim Khan I (2nd time) (s.a.)

Thanadars of Jafarabad and Wazirs of Janjira

- 1759 - 1761 Ibrahim Khan I (s.a.)
- 1761 - 1772 Yaqt Khan (usurper to 6 Jun 1772) (d. 1772)
- 1772 - 1784 `Abd al-Rahim Khan (d. 1784)
- 1784 - 1789 Jauhar Khan (d. 1789)
 - - in dispute with -
 - 1784 - 1789 `Abd al-Karim Yaqt Khan
- 1789 - 1794 Ibrahim Khan II (d. 1826)
- 1794 - 1803 Jumrud Khan (d. 1803)

Nawabs

- 1803 - 1826 Ibrahim Khan II (s.a.)
- 1826 - 31 Aug 1848 Mohammad Khan I (d. 1848)
- 31 Aug 1848 – 28 Jan 1879 Ibrahim Khan III (b. 1825 - d. 1879)
- 28 Jan 1879 - 2 May 1922 Ahmad Khan (b. 1862 - d. 1922) (from 1 Jan 1895, Sir Ahmad Khan)
- 28 Jun 1879 – 11 Oct 1883 -Regent
- 2 May 1922 – 15 Aug 1947 Mohammad Khan II (b. 1914 - d. 1972)
- 2 May 1922 - 9 Nov 1933 Kulsum Begum (f) -Regent (b. 1897 - d. 1959)

The word Janjira is not native to India, and may have originated after the Arabic word *Jazeera*, which means an island. Murud was once known in Marathi as *Habsan* ("of Habshi" or Abyssinian). The name of the fort is a concatenation of the Konkani and Arabic words for Island, "morod" and "jazeera". The word "morod" is peculiar to Konkani and is absent in Marathi.

Pre Siddi history-Raja Ram Rao Patil was Koli Patil of Janjira Island who established and/or built this island in the 16th century for kolis to live peacefully away from pirates. After gaining permission from the Sultan of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate, he built the island but later refused to obey the orders of the Sultan. So the Sultan sent his Admiral Piram Khan to capture the Janjira. Due to the castle's fortifications, Piram Khan was unable to attack the island conventionally, so he disguised himself as a

merchant and requested to stay a night at Janjira and permission was granted. Piri Khan hosted a party under the guise of thanking the Patil. When the Patil and his men were intoxicated, Piri Khan attacked them with his men who had been hidden in barrels and captured the island.

Janjira from the outside Murud-Janjira Fort is situated on an oval-shaped rock off the Arabian Sea coast near the port town of Murud, 165 km (103 mi) south of Mumbai. Janjira is considered one of the strongest marine forts in India. The fort is approached by sailboats from Rajapuri jetty. The main gate of the fort faces Rajapuri on the shore and can be seen only when one is about 40 feet (12 m) away from it. It has a small postern gate towards the open sea for escape.



Entry Gate into Murud Janjira Fort. Accessible by ferry.

The fort has 26 rounded bastions, still intact. There are many cannons of native and European make rusting on the bastions. Now in ruins, the fort in its heyday was a full-fledged living fort with all the necessary facilities, e.g., palaces, quarters for officers, mosque, two small 60-foot-deep (18 m) natural fresh water lakes, etc. On the outer wall flanking the main gate, there is a sculpture depicting a tiger-like beast clasping elephants in its claws.

The palace of the Nawabs of Janjira at Murud is still in good shape. Another gate to the west is sea-facing, called 'Darya Darwaza'. There is also another fortress, named Ghosalgad, which is located on top of the hill around 32 km (20 mi) east of Murud-Janjira, that was used as outpost for the rulers of Janjira.

The fort is made up of black rocks that had been cut evenly as blocks. The fort was constructed in very strategic manner. The main entrance of the fort is not visible from any angle outside the fort because the gate is located in an angled manner compressed between two bastions. This narrow gate is east facing and is visible only from 200 meters.

Military Setup:

1. Bastions: The fort has 22 bastions at its peripheral wall. Two more bastions are located inside at the citadel. The height of the fort wall is about 40 feet and its width is 12 feet and at places 15 feet. The parapet walls are 2½ feet in thickness. It is crenelated, that is to say provided with projections called merlons²⁰. The merlons have narrow slits through which guns or arrows could be shot very easily being safe behind the walls. In some places there are cannon holes at the crenels²¹. The intrados of these cannon holes are made up in Ogee arch. The fort wall and the bastions are three storied. According to the local guide, each storey had its own purpose:

- a. The lower storey being cool was used to store the ammunition.
- b. The middle storey was used as watch tower.
- c. The upper storey was used to keep the cannons.

The term *merlon* comes from the French language, adapted from the Italian *merlone*, possibly a shortened form of *mergola*, connected with Latin *mergae* (pitchfork), or from a diminutive *moerulus*, from *murus* or *moerus* (a wall). An alternative etymology suggests that the medieval Latin *merulus* (mentioned from the end of the 10th century) functioned as a diminutive of Latin *merle*, "blackbird", expressing an image of this bird sitting on a wall. A merlon is the solid upright section of a battlement (a crenellated parapet) in medieval architecture or fortifications. Merlons are sometimes pierced by narrow, vertical embrasures or slits designed for observation and fire. The space between two merlons is called a crenel, and a succession of merlons and crenels is a crenellation.^[2] Crenels designed in later eras for use by cannons were also called embrasures.

As an essential part of battlements, merlons were used in fortifications for millennia. The best-known examples appear on medieval buildings, where battlements, though defensive, could be attractively formed, thus having a secondary decorative purpose. Some (especially later) buildings have false "decorative battlements". The two most notable European variants in Middle Ages merlons shape were the Ghibelline and the Guelph merlon: the former ended in the upper part with a swallow-tailed form, while the latter term indicates the normal rectangular shape merlons (wimperg).

Other shapes include: three-pointed, quatrefoil, shielded, flower-like, rounded (typical of Islamic and African world), pyramidal, etc., depending either from the type of attacks expected or aesthetic considerations.

In Roman times, the merlons had a width sufficient to shelter a single man. As new weapons appeared in the Middle Ages (including crossbows and the first firearms), the merlons were enlarged and provided with loop-holes of various dimensions and shapes, varying from simply rounded to cruciform. From the 13th century, the merlons could also be used to pivot wooden shutters; these added further protection for the defenders when they were not firing, or were firing downwards near the base of the wall. The shutters (also known as "mantlets") could be opened by hand, or by using a pulley.

2. Cannons: A special attraction of this fort are 3 gigantic cannons feared for their shooting range. There were 572 cannons in 1669 CE. Nowadays only 75 cannons are left. Out of the existing 75 cannons in the fort, 3 are the centre of attraction named Kalal Bangadi, Chawari and Laanda Kasam/Kasāb . All the three cannons of Janjira are forged-welded cannons. Kalal Bangadi got its name as it is made up by joining metal rings. Bangadi in Marathi means bangles or a round ornament. The Largest cannon of these 75 is the Kalak Bangadi. It is 3rd Largest Cannon in India. It is estimated to weigh 22 tonnes.



Kalak Bangadi, 3rd Largest Cannon in India At Janjira Fort, weighing over 22 Tons

3. Sculpture symbolizing the Fort: After climbing the stairs, on the right hand side of the wall there is a sculpture showing a tiger holding 4 elephants in four claws, 1 elephant in mouth and 1 elephant by tail. The interpretation of this sculpture is:

It is symbolic of the fort showing that even if you are strong like 4-6 huge elephants I am a strong tiger who can hold you without being captured.



Above the top margin of the gate is a Persian inscription carved on a marble stone. The gate is flanked by two bastions and has a “Nagād Khāna” above it. On the left hand side is “Peer Panchayatan”.

Darbar: At some distance is located the palace of Siddi Surul Khan “Surulkhan Wada that was an assembly place and was used to hold the “Darbār”. This palace used to be 7 storied but now only 3½ stories are left.

Water Ponds: On either side of this palace lie two fresh water ponds this is most surprising as the Island is in the middle of the salty sea. To maintain even water level between the two ponds there is an underground stream with a barrier system.

“Bale Killa”: Behind Siddi Surul Khan’s palace is a citadel popularly known as “Bale Killa” and is the highest point on this island. The citadel has a high stone platform for hosting flag and a building structure what used to be the palace of Siddi Khairiyat Khan “Khairiyat Khan Wada”. The roofs of this palace have fallen and only the walls stand now. Behind the citadel is the royal courtyard. The ramparts of the palaces are made up of bluish granite. The citadel also has watch towers. On the western side of the fort wall is a secret gate called “Darya Darwāza”, opening straight into the sea. This gate was used for emergency entry or exit during crises situations. . The pond towards the south is located near the stable and has a “Masjid” (Mosque) by its side called Jāmā Masjid. The entire fort has a sparse collection of good artwork on stone as well as plaster. Three types of arch16 styles have been used in various doors in the fort. These styles are:

1. Ogee Arch
2. Tudor Arch
3. Multi-Cusped Arch

Formerly the capital town of the Siddis of Janjira, Murud is today popular for its alluring beach, whispering casurina, coconut and betel palms and an ancient fort. On a hillock to the north is the shrine of Lord Dattatreya, the three heads representing Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara.

