

# WHISPERS OF TIME: REDISCOVERING AND PRESERVING HYDERABAD'S CULTURAL ICONS IN TELANGANA, INDIA.

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## INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, the city of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, stands as a testament to the delicate balance between progress and preservation. Amid the rise of skyscrapers and bustling IT hubs, a silent yet profound transformation has been taking place. Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking Hand NGO have embarked on a visionary journey to reclaim and preserve the forgotten heritage of Hyderabad, a city that has long been a cultural beacon with global significance. This self-initiated research project meticulously documents historic structures many of which have been forgotten or overlooked seeking to safeguard the architectural treasures that have shaped Hyderabad's identity.

The advent of the technology boom in the 1990s heralded a new era of prosperity for Hyderabad, transforming it into a bustling metropolis. However, this progress came at a steep cost. The city's rich cultural heritage began to wane, threatened by encroachments, illegal constructions, and widespread neglect. Many valuable historic buildings were demolished, abandoned, or left to decay, their stories lost to time. The primary objective of this research project is to act as a custodian of these architectural marvels before they fade into oblivion. By meticulously documenting these structures, the project aspires to inspire governmental intervention, urging authorities to conserve these invaluable assets. Beyond mere preservation, the initiative seeks to educate and enlighten future generations about the city's profound cultural past, offering a window into the narratives, histories, and stories embedded in these structures.

The culmination of this endeavor is a comprehensive book that encapsulates the essence of these efforts. Richly illustrated with sketches, drawings, narratives, photographs, and textual accounts, the publication serves as a poignant reminder of Hyderabad's cultural richness and the urgency to safeguard it. This paper provides a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of the research project, emphasizing the significance of its objectives and the broader impact on the cultural legacy of Hyderabad.

## The Historical Legacy of Hyderabad

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Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, is a city that resonates with history. Founded by the Qutb Shahi sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in 1591 CE, Hyderabad was meticulously planned around the iconic Charminar, which became the centrepiece of the city. Over centuries, the city evolved into a vital trading hub, particularly known for its diamonds and pearls, while also becoming a crucible of culture and architectural innovation. The city's architectural landscape is a vibrant tapestry woven with the influences of various dynasties that have ruled it, including the Chalukyas, Kakatiyas, Khaljis, Tughlaqs, Bahmanis, Qutb Shahis, Mughals, and the Asaf Jahi Nizams. Each dynasty left its indelible mark on the city's built environment, contributing to Hyderabad's unique identity as a global cultural landmark.<sup>1</sup>

### **Timeline of Hyderabad's Dynastic History**

- Chalukya dynasty (624–1075)
- Kakatiya dynasty (1158–1321)
- Khalji dynasty (1290–1320)
- Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414)
- Musunuri Nayakas (1336–1365)
- Bahmani Sultanate (1347–1527)
- Qutb Shahi dynasty (1518–1687)
- Mughal Empire (1526–1857)
- Asaf Jahi dynasty (1724–1948)
- Republic of India (1948–present)

These dynasties not only shaped Hyderabad's physical landscape but also contributed to its cultural and intellectual life, making it a city of global significance.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Importance of Preserving Heritage Buildings**

As India rapidly urbanizes, the relentless pursuit of modern infrastructure often comes at the expense of the country's rich historical legacy. In the race toward development, the nation risks losing its architectural heritage, a crucial link to its past. India, with its deep-rooted civilization, is dotted with heritage precincts and buildings that tell the stories of different epochs in history.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, much of this heritage has been neglected or forgotten, and it is only through efforts of few Govt. initiatives and various organisations, NGOs, like those of Ketham's Atelier and Thinking Hand NGO that these treasures can be brought back into the light.

The exploration of Hyderabad's heritage is driven by author's both personal and professional motivations. The project's initiators were inspired by childhood memories of growing up near historic sites such as Golconda Fort, Qutb Shahi Tombs, and Taramati Baradari. These structures, with their profound architectural qualities - elegant spaces, intricate designs, and thoughtful use of light and ventilation ignited a passion for architecture that would later evolve into a mission to protect and preserve these cultural icons.

The project seeks to:

- Illuminate Forgotten Heritage: Showcase the profound architectural design, spatial quality, and cultural significance of Hyderabad's heritage buildings.
- Raise Public Awareness: Educate the public, particularly students, on the importance of heritage in understanding cultures and fostering a sense of identity.

- Foster Interest in Architecture: Encourage interest in various architectural styles and the urban transformations that have shaped Hyderabad.
- Promote Knowledge Sharing: Create platforms for discussion on preserving heritage precincts and exploring conservation strategies.
- Inspire Conservation Efforts: Motivate students and professionals to take up conservation activities and contribute to the protection of Hyderabad's cultural heritage.

### **THE COLLECTIVE APPROACH: A MODEL FOR DOCUMENTATION AND PRESERVATION**

The work of Thinking HAND NGO is deeply inspired by the speculative design practices of architects like Mathur and da Cunha, who advocate for innovative approaches to addressing climate change and urban crises. Over years, the organization, in collaboration with Ketham's Atelier Architects, has developed a bottom-up approach known as the "collective approach." This methodology emphasizes a hands-on, participatory process that brings together participants from various sectors, disciplines, and communities including students, professionals, and local experts to collectively address the challenges faced by Hyderabad's historic neighbourhoods and buildings.

The collective approach is a metaphor for speculative design—a method and tool to collectively document, speculate on futures, evaluate, and reform cities. By engaging in workshops, competitions, exhibitions, and discussions, the collective approach aims to adapt to local culture, materials, climate, community needs, and socio-economic realities. This approach has been instrumental in the documentation of Hyderabad's forgotten and unknown buildings, involving a dedicated team of architects, volunteers, and local communities.<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 1. India, Telangana, Hyderabad Map.*

## **Documenting Hyderabad's Heritage: Buildings and Methodology**

The documentation process is a meticulous and collaborative effort, with teams visiting one heritage building each weekend. The tasks are divided among members based on their interests and expertise:

1. Photography and Videography: Capturing visual documentation of the site.
2. Measurement and Mapping: Using laser tools, tape measures, and scales to record the dimensions of the structures.
3. Site and Surrounding Study: Analyzing the building's context within its environment.
4. Historical Research and Interviews: Engaging with local residents to uncover stories and historical connections.
5. Detail Documentation: Recording architectural details such as wall patterns, finishes, and ornamentation.
6. Structural Analysis: Examining the building's materials, construction techniques, and structural integrity.

This extensive documentation is then digitized and analysed, resulting in a comprehensive set of architectural drawings, including site plans, elevations, sections, and 3D models. The documentation of each building is a testament to the unique mix of local and international art and architecture styles that have shaped Hyderabad.



*Figure 2. Collective Approach: Thinking Hand NGO volunteers, Ketham's Atelier Team with students and guest experts in Workshop.*

## **Challenges and Case Studies: Preserving Hyderabad's Architectural Heritage**

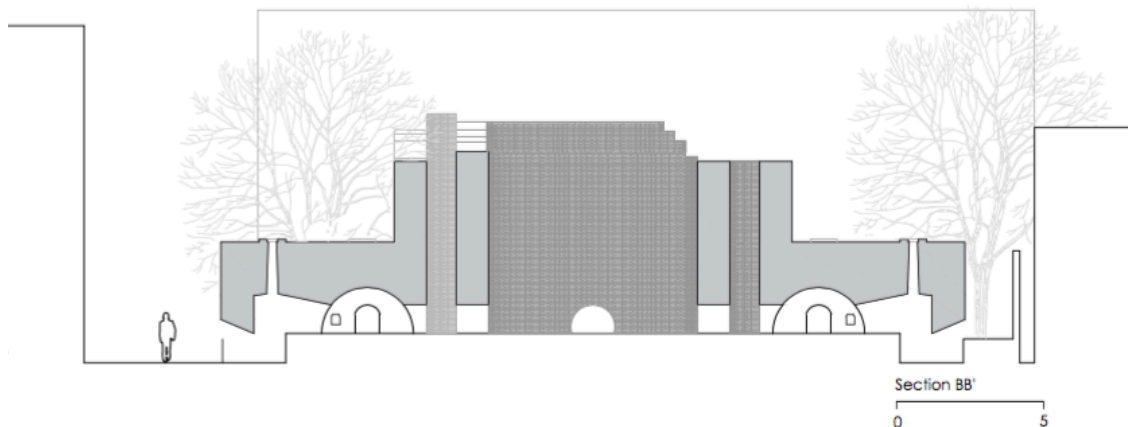
Documenting and preserving Hyderabad's heritage buildings is fraught with challenges. These include the need for adequate funding, securing permissions, and the physical demands of the documentation process. Despite these hurdles, several buildings have been successfully documented, providing a glimpse into the rich architectural legacy of the city.

### Notable Case Studies:

- **Gun Foundry:** Established in 1786 by the French general Monsieur Raymond, this historic site was once a major production center for cannons and cannonballs. Despite its historical significance, the site is often overlooked and in need of preservation.<sup>5</sup>



*Figure 3. Gun Foundry, Hyderabad, Photo Documentation by Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking Hand NGO Team.*



*Figure 4. Gun Foundry Section, Drawing by Ketham's Atelier Architects.*

**Architectural Features:** The Gun Foundry is an imposing structure with thick stone walls and massive arches that reflect its military function. The building's design is utilitarian, with a focus on durability and security. However, it also features some decorative elements, such as the arched windows and the intricate brick and stone work, which are characteristic of the Indo-European architectural style that was prevalent during the late 18th century.

**Preservation Challenges:** The Gun Foundry faces significant challenges, including encroachment by modern buildings, lack of maintenance, and environmental degradation. The structure has suffered from water infiltration, leading to the weakening of the walls and the growth of vegetation on the roof. The surrounding area has also become heavily urbanized, with new construction threatening the integrity of the site.

Current Status: Need restoration and maintenance.

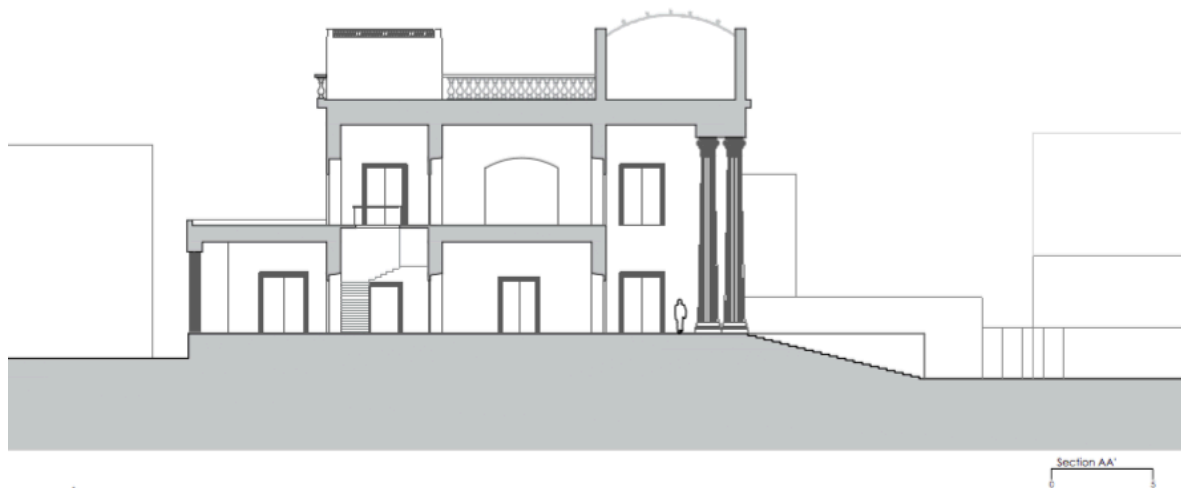
- **Baradari of Nawab Khursheed Jah Bahadur:** A stunning palace with a European façade and a rich history, this building is a relic of the Asaf Jahi period. It remains relatively well-preserved but requires attention to prevent further deterioration. It was originally designed by Nawab Khurshid Jah Bahadur's grandfather, Shams-ul-umara Amee-e-Kabir and was completed by his father – Rashiduddin Khan in the late 19th century.<sup>6</sup>

**Architectural Features:** The Baradari features a European-style façade with neoclassical elements, including tall columns, pediments, and symmetrical proportions. The interior, however, is distinctly Indian, with intricately carved wooden doors, staircases, and stucco work that reflects the craftsmanship of the time. The palace is surrounded by open space and garden, adding to its overall grandeur.



*Figure 5. Baradari of Nawab Khursheed Jah Bahadur, Hyderabad, Photo Documentation by Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking Hand NGO Team.*





*Figure 6. Baradari of Nawab Khursheed Jah Bahadur Section, Drawing by Ketham's Atelier Architects.*

**Preservation Challenges:** Despite its historical and architectural significance, the Baradari has suffered from neglect and is in a state of disrepair. The building's structural integrity has been compromised by water damage, and many of the decorative elements have been lost or damaged. Additionally, the gardens have been encroached upon by modern development, further diminishing the site's historical context.

**Current Status:** Front open space is still used as public playground by surrounding neighbourhood and the good news is it is now under restoration.

**- Pavilion in Bhagwandas Garden:** A beautiful structure surrounded by a large garden, this pavilion is a testament to the wealth and influence of Raja Bhagwandas Hari Das, who accompanied the first Nizam to Hyderabad. The pavilion is a rare example of the Mughal and Gujarati architectural style. The Bhagwandas pavilion built around 1800 resembles Tipu's palace in toto with open arcades all around and jharokas (balconies) overlooking the arcaded verandhas.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 7. Pavilion in Bhagwandas Garden, Hyderabad, Photo Documentation by Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking Hand NGO Team.*



*Figure 8. Bhagwandas Pavilion Section, Drawing by Ketham's Atelier Architects.*

**Architectural Features:** The pavilion is a modest yet elegant structure, with a central chamber surrounded by an arcade of arches, jharokas (balconies) overlooking the arcaded verandas. The design is typical of garden pavilions of the time, with an emphasis on open, airy spaces that connect with the surrounding landscape. The pavilion's interior features delicate stucco work and painted decorations, adding to its charm.

**Preservation Challenges:** Over the years, the garden has been encroached upon by urban development, and the pavilion itself has been neglected. The structure has suffered from weathering and vandalism, and much of the original decoration has been lost. The surrounding garden has also been significantly reduced in size, diminishing the pavilion's historical context.

**Current Status:** The Pavilion in Bhagwandas Garden has been documented, and efforts are needed to restore the structure and its surroundings. The project possibility is not only restore the pavilion but also to revive the garden, it's a private property and belongs to Bhagwandas family. It would be great if it can be converted to a public space that can be enjoyed by the community. This approach aligns with the broader goal of integrating heritage preservation with urban development.

- **Amberpet Burj:** The Burj is named after a muslim saint Hazrat Amber Mian, whoes sanctum sanctorum is situated near the Burj. The Burj which is a 2 storyed building probably served as an outpost during the early Asaf Jahi period. The style of architecture can be classed as regional Mughal variation.<sup>8</sup>





Figure 9. Amberpet Burj, Hyderabad, Photo Documentation by Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking Hand NGO Team

**Architectural Features:** The Amberpet Burj is a simple yet robust structure, built from local granite stone with thick walls and narrow openings designed for defense. The building's design is utilitarian, with a focus on functionality rather than decoration. However, it does feature some ornamental elements, such as the crenellations along the parapet and the jharokas (balconies) that are characteristic of Islamic and Gujarathi architecture.

**Preservation Challenges:** The Burj is located in a densely populated area, and its surroundings have changed significantly over the years. The structure has been encroached upon by modern buildings, and its visibility and accessibility have been compromised. The Burj has also suffered from neglect, with vegetation growing on the walls and structural issues threatening its stability.

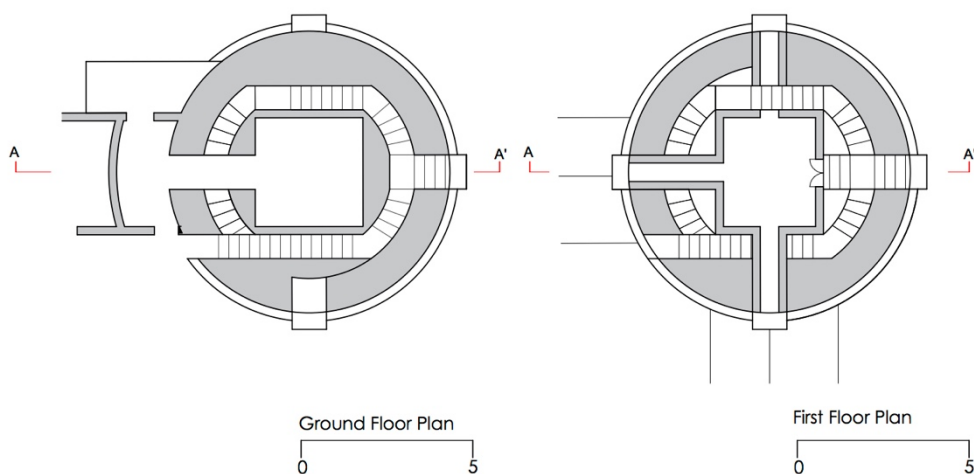


Figure 10. Amberpet Burj Plans, Drawing by Ketham's Atelier Architects.

**Current Status:** The documentation of the Amberpet Burj has provided valuable insights into its architectural and historical significance, highlighting the need for immediate preservation. Efforts should be focused on stabilizing the structure, removing encroachments, and restoring the Burj to a condition that reflects its historical significance. Further a proposal to develop the surrounding area into a heritage zone, creating a space where the public can engage with the city's history.

### **The Way Forward: Actionable Steps for Long-Term Preservation**

To ensure that Hyderabad's heritage buildings are preserved for future generations, a series of actionable steps need to be implemented. These steps should be part of a comprehensive, long-term strategy that involves all stakeholders in the preservation process. Below are some key recommendations that could guide the future of heritage conservation in Hyderabad.

#### **1. Establishing a Heritage Trust**

One of the first steps towards ensuring sustainable heritage preservation in Hyderabad is the establishment of a dedicated Heritage Trust. This independent body could be responsible for overseeing all preservation activities, including the identification of endangered buildings, fundraising, and public awareness campaigns. The Trust could also serve as a liaison between the government, private sector, and international organizations, ensuring that all efforts are coordinated and effective.

#### **2. Implementing Legal Protections**

Strengthening the legal framework around heritage preservation is crucial for protecting Hyderabad's historic buildings from demolition or unsympathetic alterations. The government should review and, if necessary, update existing heritage laws to provide stronger protections for listed buildings. This could include stricter penalties for illegal demolitions and incentives for property owners to maintain and restore their historic buildings.

#### **3. Fostering Public-Private Partnerships**

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer a viable solution for funding and managing heritage preservation projects. By involving private companies, philanthropic organizations, and community groups in the preservation process, a broader range of resources can be mobilized. These partnerships could take the form of joint ventures for the restoration of specific buildings, sponsorships for cultural events, or the creation of heritage-themed tourism initiatives.

#### **4. Engaging the Community**

Community engagement is critical for the success of any heritage preservation initiative. Efforts must be made to involve local residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in the preservation process. This can be achieved through public consultations, workshops, and heritage walks that raise awareness about the importance of preserving Hyderabad's architectural heritage.

#### **5. Promoting Heritage Education and Awareness**

Ongoing education and awareness-raising efforts are essential for creating a culture of preservation in Hyderabad. This can be achieved through a variety of means, including school programs, public lectures, and media campaigns. By highlighting the cultural and economic value of heritage buildings, these initiatives can inspire a broader segment of the population to take an active interest in preservation.

## 6. Utilizing Technology for Preservation

The use of modern technology can significantly enhance heritage preservation efforts. Techniques such as 3D scanning, digital archiving, and virtual reality (VR) can be used to document and preserve historic buildings in their current state, creating detailed records that can be used for future restoration projects or as educational tools.

## 7. International Cooperation and Funding

Finally, it is important for Hyderabad to seek international cooperation and funding to support its heritage preservation efforts. Global heritage organizations, such as UNESCO, the World Monuments Fund, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), can provide valuable expertise, funding, and advocacy support.

## **CONCLUSION: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR HYDERABAD'S HERITAGE**

The preservation of Hyderabad's heritage buildings is not just about saving the past; it is about building a sustainable future that respects and celebrates the city's rich cultural legacy. By taking a holistic approach that includes legal protections, community engagement, education, and the use of modern technology, Hyderabad can ensure that its historic structures continue to tell their stories for generations to come.

The efforts of organizations like Ketham's Atelier Architects and Thinking HAND NGO demonstrate that with passion, dedication, and collaboration, it is possible to make a significant impact in the field of Architecture and heritage preservation. However, the responsibility does not lie with these organizations alone. It is a collective endeavor that requires the participation of everyone—from government officials and private businesses to local communities and international partners. As Hyderabad moves forward, it must do so with a deep respect for its past legacy. The city's heritage buildings are more than just physical structures; they are the embodiment of Hyderabad's identity, its history, and its spirit. By preserving these buildings, we are not only honoring those who came before us but also ensuring that future generations can continue to experience and learn from the rich cultural tapestry that makes Hyderabad unique.

“The younger generation plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage as they are the guardians of our future. Through creativity, innovation, and active involvement, they do more than protect cultural heritage; they enhance its value and resilience for future generations.” - Brahmantara, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology.<sup>9</sup>

A concerted effort to preserve our heritage is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies - all of the things that quite literally make us who we are.-Steve Berry.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, the future of Hyderabad's heritage lies in our hands. It is our responsibility to ensure that the city's historic buildings are not lost to time, but preserved and cherished as symbols of a vibrant, diverse, and enduring cultural legacy. Through collective action, innovative thinking, and unwavering commitment, we can create a future where Hyderabad's heritage buildings stand not as relics of a bygone era, but as living monuments that continue to inspire, educate, and enrich the lives of all who encounter them.

## Acknowledgment

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## NOTES

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