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## Sketches of Golconda Fort

by Salma Ahmed Farooqui

Golconda, now very much a part of Hyderabad city, is well known for its fort, and has an interesting story behind it. It was popularly known as the Shepherd's Hill or 'Golla Konda' in earlier times. A shepherd boy while herding the cattle on the rocky hill of Mangalavaram had come across an idol. The Kakatiya king, who was ruling at that time, came to know about this finding and got a mud fort constructed around the spot, since it was considered holy. It changed hands from the Raja of Warangal, Krishna Deva, in 1363 to Muhammad Shah, the Bahamani ruler, who named it after himself as Muhammad Nagar. It soon became the provincial headquarters of one of the five Subas (provinces) of the Bahamani Sultanate. With the assassination of Mahmud Gawan, the Bahamani minister, the power struggle between the Dakhnis and Afaqis increased and the hold of the Bahamani Sultans over the provinces decreased. This led to provincial governors or Tarafdars proclaiming independence. Sultan Quli, the Bahamani governor of Golconda, who was given the title of Qutb-ul-Mulk by his master, was the last to assume such a position and proclaimed his independence in 1518, thereby establishing the Qutb Shahi dynasty. Thus, the Qutb Shahi capital came to be known as 'Golconda-Haidarabad.' Golconda is situated at a distance of 10 kilometres from the heart of the old city.

During the reign of Sultan Quli Qutb Shah the ordinary mud construction of the Golconda fort was expanded into a massive one of granite and mortar. Every nook and corner of the splendid monument of the fort echoes the unparalleled history of a bygone era. The fort has an inner wall surrounding the main hill (known as Bala Hissar), 120 metres above ground level, and an outer wall, which was re-modelled and further strengthened by his son Ibrahim Qutb Shah. The inner wall contained the important offices of the diwan, the durbar hall, armoury depots, the royal harem, guards, stables, mosques, temples etc. The entrance gate had a remarkable signalling device. At present, the only structures intact are the entrance gate, the durbar hall, a small mosque and temple while the other structures are partly or badly damaged due to the ravages of time. The fort was divided into two parts: inner and outer. The inner fortifications comprised the

personal precincts of the kings, whereas the outer fortifications contained the entire civil population, bazaars, houses of the nobles, the army quarters, well-planned gardens etc. In the last 500 years, many important buildings were erected in it, which have perished over time. Wooden edifices of extraordinary artistic beauty in Indo-Islamic style were once aplenty within the fort, so much so that until a few years ago the beautiful palace of Moti Mahal was intact. And it was a pathetic scene for art lovers to see it being pulled down.

The building of importance now remaining within the fort outside the inner fortifications is the Jami Masjid. This early and historically important mosque was constructed by Sultan Quli in 1518. The Habashi Kamans is another important landmark in the fort where the Abyssinian-guards of the Qutb Shahis lived. It contains some stucco relief work. It was here that the drum (Naubat) was beaten twice daily at early morning and sunset and the Abyssinian guards had lost their lives while bravely fighting against the Mughal armies. The Khazana building is a building of the Qutb Shahi period that has remained intact. It is devoid of its original stuccowork both on the walls and the entrance gate. What is seen presently is new plasterwork. This building is now used as a Museum of Sculpture by the Archeological Department, housing sculptures from all over the state.

The Qutb Shahis also had a parade ground for their armies, which were on the eastern side of the inner wall of the fort, and when the parade was in progress it could be witnessed from the Dad Mahal. Hira Khan's mosques and Katora Houz are among other structures in the fort, which had once existed. The Katora Houz is said to have no parallel of its kind in the world. Ibrahim Qutb Shah constructed it in 1560 and this vast pond was filled up with underground earthen pipes. The Ashurkhana near the Safa Mosque is the oldest of its kind in the fort wherein in the month of Muharram every year, for the first 10 days, mourning was observed. The outer wall, which is almost intact, has many bastions. The outer wall was extended during the reign of Abdullah Qutb Shah and was known as Naya Qila to meet the threat of the Mughal forces. Mulla Khyali, the poet laureate's mosque was situated in it. Even cultivation was done in this area in those days. Huge carved stone bowels, garden cisterns, and iron cannons were frequently seen in the fort area. Near the Moti Mahal was situated the Fateh Rahbar, a famous gun of the Golconda fort, and some medium sized guns mounted on small-wheeled carriages with four bores for firing four shots simultaneously. There were total eight gates (darwazas) in the outer wall of the fort beginning from Fateh Darwaza from where the Mughal forces had entered. The other gates were named as the Bahmani Darwaza, Bodli Darwaza, Makki Darwaza, Patancheru Darwaza, Banjara Darwaza, Jamali Darwaza and Moti Darwaza.

The Golconda fort thus stands as the epitome of Nawabi culture and grandeur and remains for posterity a majestic monument, on the western outskirts of Hyderabad city. It speaks of a great cultural heritage of over four hundred years and is regarded as a place worth visiting.

### Suggested Readings

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