



# Hyderabad

**Where Love Lives On.....**

*When a poet, architect and an aesthete supervises the building of a city, beauty, balance and symmetry are to be expected. What leads romance to the city of Hyderabad, is the love story of a young prince and a village belle that resulted in its very foundations being laid.*

## THE LEGEND



There is a love story related to the founding of the city of Hyderabad. As a young prince, Muhammad Quli fell passionately in love with a maiden from Chichlam village across the river Musi. He would even venture to cross the river in spite to keep his tryst with his beloved. Ibrahim Qutb Shah, his father, built a bridge on the river so that the crown prince did not endanger his life. When he ascended the throne, Muhammad Quli built a grand structure, the Charminar, at the site of the village. The city was called Bhagnagar to appease his beloved, Bhagmati. Later on it was called Hyderabad. Bhagnagar means city of good fortune. Farkhunda Buniyad, the Persian chronogrammatic name of the city yields the same meaning.

The provenance of the city's name has a quaint story behind it. One of the theories is that the fifth king of Golconda, the illustrious Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah, founded this city of Bhagyanagar in 1591 for the sake of his lover Bhagmathi. Later, he changed the city's name to Hyderabad.

Hyderabad's many rulers have left their imprints on the city contributing to its melting pot character. Not many know that Hyderabad was the richest princely state in India and perhaps, even the world, under the Asaf Jahs who ruled in the last few centuries till the British arrived. The Nizams, who trace their lineage to Central Asia, were very enlightened rulers too, building not just palaces and lakes but also hospitals, schools and colleges. They were also great visionaries and patrons of the arts, architecture and science, and their legacy can be seen everywhere in Hyderabad. It is also a city where a sizeable chunk of the population is Muslim, much more than any other city in India perhaps, and they have enriched the city's culture and cuisine to a great extent.

## THE HEART OF HYDERABAD

The Charminar dominates the psyche of any Hyderabadi, just like the Statue of Liberty in New York or the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Said to have been built soon after the city's founding to mark the end of an epidemic of the plague, the graceful building with its four(char) minarets (minar) stands for everything Hyderabad is about – its confluence of cultures, its royal heritage, even the little Hindu temple at its base showing how religions can co-exist peacefully. It is quite spectacular when lit up at night and offers a view of the old city from its ramparts. It is the nerve centre of the old city.



The Charminar towers over the Mecca Masjid mosque where up to 10,000 faithful gather for their Friday prayers. Started by Quli Qutb Shah, it was finished by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1694. Some of the Qutb Shah family is buried in its premises too and though pigeons are a menace at the building, its huge columns and stately arches made of single slabs of granite pose an imposing sight.

Next door lie the busy bylanes of Lad Bazaar market road where everything is available, for a price. It fills up to near capacity on weekends when women in burkhas haggle over anything from lacquer bangles and pearls to pots and pans. Some distance away is the Moazzam Jahi fruit market; Hyderabadis from all walks of life stop by at its 'Famous' ice cream parlour.

Just a short walk through Lad Bazaar lies the 220 year-old Chowmahalla Palace, still belonging to the Nizam and perhaps therefore, in very good condition. Once the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty, the spacious building with an Khilwat (darbar) hall featuring ornate stucco work, a marble seat and crystal chandeliers, was just opened to the public earlier this year after five years of restoration and will be used to host exhibitions and cultural events.

The magnificent palace with a giant central pool and fountains is still not really on the tourist trail yet, so there was just one other visitor when I visited. At that time, they had an exhibition of effects from the Nizam's private collections including one of rare hundred-year old photographs of not just state functions, but personal and intimate ones of the harem and children.

### EXQUISITE ARCHITECTURE



The Golconda Fort is not as iconic as the Charminar, but it is older and more fascinating. Built by the Kakatiya kings in the 13th century, it was improved upon by Sultan Quli Qutb Shah. The fort is an impressive example of acoustics with voices at the front gate being carried seven levels up and a system of water pumps that ensured that the harem could have running water in their showers. The sultan's fort building skills were only exceeded by his tolerance for all religions. Indeed, his wife Bhagmati was Hindu, and the tiny temple on the topmost ramparts of the fort directly opposite the king's court still stands.

Using the acoustical expertise at his command, he had a platform built for his favourite dancer Taramati for her to dance a kilometres away as the crow flies. Seated at his court, he could listen to the sounds of the musicians at the now-restored Taramati Baradari. Today, a sound and light show tells the story of Golconda and the Qutb Shahi kings most evenings.

The kings lie buried in tomb complex that is perhaps the largest in the world. The style of architecture is Indo-Saracenic with a distinct local Dakhani touch. It is quite an oasis of respite and green away from the city – there are young couples and families everywhere. The Paigah tombs built by the Paigah nobles are also elaborately designed examples of Dakhani architecture. Even Osmania University, one of the oldest in the state, is an architecture student's dream. The Arts College is a fine synthesis of European, Islamic and Hindu architectural traditions and motifs.

### ARCHIVES OF HISTORY



The Salarjung Museum is a huge magnet, one suspects, for people mainly curious about the collecting propensities – and by extension, money – of one man, Nawab Mir Yousouf Ali Khan Salar Jung III. It is a testament to the fabled wealth of the Nizams, said to be the richest royal family of their time in the country.

### Stock Up In Between Sights

If there is an Indian city inextricably linked to food it has to be Hyderabad. Mention the city to any Indian and one of the first associations would be that of biryani, the rich, flavourful dish of meat and rice that alone is a reason for many to visit. Eating biryani is something for a pastime for Hyderabadis, what with a 'famed' or 'renowned' biryani joint at every corner.

I sampled two. One named Madina is one of the city's most well-known; an old institution that looks its age with formica tables and service that wears an air of something like arrogance at being the best. If you can ignore the grime, the biryani is a delight. Light and airy, with tender mutton chunks that literally fall apart. Even after sampling a couple of biryani's - the mutton one is still the best - I wasn't feeling stuffed at all. No wonder there was a long line of people waiting to take out.

If you'd rather dine in nicer surroundings, head to Persis at Chaurasta (literally, four roads) in Hyderabad's twin city, Secunderabad. Starting off as a hole in the wall, Persis has expanded to a multi-level restaurant, the top most of which is a huge air-conditioned hall capable of seating more than a hundred. Noise levels are muted though, with most busy with their biryanis. Persis' biryanis are very good, though a tad heavier and less flavourful than the one at Madina's –and of course, there is a premium for the surroundings. Most Hyderabadis have their favourite biryani restaurants and you will likely get a handful of names if you ask around.

While biryani is the main prize, there are also other treats that make up Hyderabadi cuisine – the eggplant dish baghare baingan and haleem, a rich paste of pounded meat and wheat, flavoured with cinnamon and sugar usually used to break Ramzan fasting.

For dessert, do try the khubani ka meetha, apricots stewed with sugar for a treacle-like consistency, best served with malai or clotted cream – most delicious, if utterly sinful. Of course, you can always shoot the breeze with chai and an Osmania biscuit at any of the Irani cafes that dot the city; Alpha in Secunderabad purportedly serves 200,000 cups daily of the milky confection slurped sometimes from the saucer. The other names bandied about are Shadab, Nayaab, Faraasha and Masqati.

The tongue scorching local Andhra cuisine can also be found at every corner, but foodies head to Southern Spice or Dakshin at the Kakatiya for authentic delicacies.

Hyderabad is also indelibly associated with pearls. The city is one of the major pearl markets worldwide. Again opinions are divided about where to buy them, but veterans recommend Mangatrai at Basheerbagh.

Shopping carts are usually also weighed down by sarees in typical Andhra weaving patterns such as Pochampalli, Venkatgiri, Gadwal and Narayanpet.

Handicrafts such as wooden toys from Kondapalli, Pembarti brassware or handcrafted bidri work, silver inlay in a black alloy of copper and zinc, can be found at the state handicraft 'emporiums' called Lepakshi, where prices are fixed.

## SITES NEARBY

Golconda has been known as famous center for diamonds, and the diamond mines boast of some of the most renowned diamonds in the world. The Kohinoor originally belonged to Golconda as did the Darya-I-Noor, the Orloff, the Pitt, and the great table of the Nizam.

Warangal is situated 157 km north-east of Hyderabad. It is famous for its thousand pillar temple-a specimen of the Chalukya architecture. The fort was built by the Kakatiyas, who ruled between 12th and 14th centuries. Ruins of the mud-brick fort survive in certain portions. Kakatiyas held Golconda prior to the advent of the Qutb Shahi's and their original mud fort atop the Golconda hill was replaced with stone fortifications. The great temple at Harnamkonda was built on the slopes of the hill in 1163 by Rudra Deva. It carries some exquisitely carved pillars. The monolithic Nandi sits on guard at the entrance which also has rock cut statues of elephants on either side. The Warangal fort was conquered by Muhammad Tughlaq in the 14th century suffering much destruction. The freestanding gateway in the Buddhist toran style is the most magnificent structure of its kind.



110 km northwest of Hyderabad lies Bidar, former capital of the Bahamani, and later on Barid Shahi dynasty. Ultimately it was annexed by Aurangzeb and subsequently the Nizams took over Bidar. It has a vast range of palaces mosques baths, schools and tombs within a strong fortified area. The tombs at Ashtur and Gawan's Madarsa have strong architectural splendor. If one has some time to spare he/she shouldn't miss nearby Gulbarga, the Bhamani capital, famous for its beautiful mosques and fort.

Nagarjunakonda, lying south-east of Hyderabad, has had been under strong Buddhist influence. The Satvahanas built a grand stupa at Amravati, embellished with most sumptuous sculptures. Later on, the Ikshvakus dominated the region around ad 235 their capital was Vijaipuri, a university town. With the decline of Ikshvakus, Vijaipuri fell into neglect. The Reddy kings in the 14th century fortified the commanding hill of Nagarjunakonda, perpetuating the memory and teachings of Buddhist teacher Nagarjuna. Before work on the Nagarjunasagar Dam project began, archaeologists performed the miraculous task of transporting stone the excavated ruins of Vijaipuri to the top of Nagajunakonda hill and setting them up in their exact position. Remains of sculpture, monasteries, amphitheatre, and streets found a new safer home permanently relieved of the fear of inundation. A huge statue of Buddha dominates the crest of Nagarjunakonda. It is the old forgotten Vijaipuri of the Ikshvakus which has been resurrected on the hill.

## SHOPPING IN HYDERABAD

Pearls - Hyderabad's chief claim to international fame rests on two things, the Charminar and the pearl market. Both the Qutb Shahi rulers and the Nizams loved pearls and diamonds. They patronized this trade in a big way. The Asaf Jahi Nizams not only wore ropes of pearls studded with diamonds as part of state regalia but also used paste for crushed pearls as beauty aids. The princesses were covered with pearls and weighed against pearls on their birthdays. Osman Ali, the richest of the Nizams stored pearls and diamonds in sacks in basement chambers. At one time pearls were imported from Basra; now Japan is the chief supplier of raw material. The flourishing trade in pearls at Hyderabad attracts tourist and connoisseur alike.



Bidriware - Hyderabad is also famous for Bidriware, a type of encrusted metalwork where one metal is inlaid or overlaid on another metal. It looks similar to damascene work (koft gari) with gold or silver. Originating from Bidar, this art achieved perfection in Hyderabad. The design is inlaid by hammering in strands of wire in engraved grooves in linear design or pieces of chiseled out pattern in metal are inserted in exact cut out surface and then hammered in. Later, a permanent black color is imparted to the alloy surface by chemical process which leaves the inlaid designs brilliant and unaffected. Lastly the object is washed, dried and given an oil massage for finish. Bidriware derives its beauty from the contrast created by the inlaid metal-gold silver or brass against the black background.



Kat Saris - For women, Hyderabad holds yet another shopping opportunity—those irresistible late saris in striking colors. The patterning is done by resist-dyeing or tie-dyeing the yarn before it is put on the loom for weaving. It requires precise measurement of designs and patterns—birds, animals or diamonds cut motifs. The other popular variety of saris is from Siddipet, Dharmavaram, Narayanpet and Gadwal. These forms of weaving require experience since patterns are created by changing the color of the yarn during weaving and by elaborate forms of placement of the warp and weft for creating different motifs. Also typical of the state is Kalmakari—the hand painted fabric, and Nirmal painting, using dyes to create memorable scenes from the Mahabharat and the Ramayana.



## HYDERABAD CUISINE

Hyderabad has a typical cuisine which combines the tastiest recipes of the south with the northern Mughlai. The most popular is the birani or pulao. It is the aromatic long grained basmati rice cooked with mutton or chicken pieces. These meat pieces add a flavor of their own to the preparation. The kababs are barbecued meat, hot and succulent, they are irresistible in taste and do not require a well laid table for fear of spilling the curry on one's clothes. One can also try haleem—a preparation of pounded wheat with tender portions of meat, garnished with crispy fried onion rings. Nahari sheep trotters and spices stewed overnight over a slow charcoal fire, and eaten with hot bread cakes, is yet another of Hyderabad delicacies. Two dessert items deserve special mention—the rich creamy sheer birinj flavored with crushed almonds and garnished with rose petals and Shahi Tukre topped with a fine sheet of edible silver foil. Of course, one can never forget that Hyderabad grapes have a taste of their own.



## THE WANDERERS

On lonely roads, on barren hillsides or crowded city markets-ever one can notice troops of nomadic gypsies, whose womenfolk wear loads of chunky silver and ivory jewelry on gorgeous black skirts and tops embroidered with mirror pieces, leading children and cattle by the hand while balancing huge baggage bundles on their heads. They are the Banjaras. They belong to one of the oldest nomadic communities highly organized and with a language of their own called gar boli. Homeless, they wander from village to village. Descendants of Mola, of the Yadav community and friends of Lord Krishna and Radha- these banjaras adopted a nomadic life. Historically they were traders in salt in Rajasthan. Their present name lambadi means lavana or salt in Hindi. Yet another name, Sugali in Telegu means cowherds men. They had helped Alexander the Great in carting away the treasures plundered during his north Indian campaigns. Later the Mughals used the banjaras as guides on the roads and carriers of their baggage towards the Deccan. That's how they reached these distant lands. Banjara is a derivative from vanijayam, meaning trade, their original profession. The heavy jewelry, which Banjaran women wear, can weigh anything up to four kilograms. Silver and ivory are being replaced with aluminum and plastic. The married women wear anklets, hair ornaments, and bangles above the elbow. They have made tattooing limbs a fine art of bodily ornamentation. Their marriage rituals are quite modern and dowry is out of the question. Only recently has their traditional mirror embroidery caught the fancy of fashion designers and slick boutiques.

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