

Meet the Pucca Hyderabad (Beyond Charminar)

P: Padma Priya

Y: Yunus Lasania

P: My earliest memory of coming face to face with the history of Hyderabad was when I was seven years old. A couple of family friends had come down from Delhi, and my parents were keen to show them around Hyderabad. It was a school day. I chose to bunk school and tagged along with my parents and their friends. This is my first and earliest recollection of the majestic Golconda Fort. I didn't know a lot about the fort and its history. Even when I was too young to process some of the facts the guide was sharing, I remember being in awe of the fort. It's grandiose, with the gardens it held within it and the many rooms and dungeon-like structures. As an avid reader of Enid Blyton books, this was the closest to a 'castle' that I would come face to face with. I remember standing in the middle of Golconda and clapping my hands when the guide told us that it would be heard right at the top of the fort. I remember climbing the steep stairs of the fort and looking down at my beautiful hometown of Hyderabad. With the wind blowing in my face and the sun shining brightly, this was the day I truly fell in love with Hyderabad, my city and got intrigued to learn more about its history. Fast forward to the year when I became a reporter, some of my favourite features I wrote was around the history of this 400 odd old city. I discovered as a resident, and journalist that the city's history was more than and beyond the iconic Charminar. I also saw, much to my dismay, that very few seemed to know about the rich history they were surrounded by or lived among. From dinosaur eggs to megalithic structures to dynasties, this city has so many amazing stories, tucked away. When we started Suno India, I was keen on starting a history podcast. Sitting in Delhi and feeling homesick, one day I came across a journalist and history aficionado Yunus Lasania's Instagram account "thathyderabadiboy". So I reached out to him with the idea of a podcast on history, heritage and need to protect the structures. Luckily for me, Yunus too liked the idea. Here we are with a new podcast series "Beyond Charminar", produced by Suno India and hosted by Yunus Lasania. In this series, we will bring you stories of Hyderabad and its rich multi-cultural heritage spread across multiple episodes. This is our ode to our city and with hope in the heart that it would encourage at least some of you, our listeners from Hyderabad and elsewhere to appreciate your city a bit more and help us protect its heritage! Before I get too emotional, let me introduce you to Yunus, your host for weeks to come! Yunus works for a leading financial newspaper. A Hyderabad at heart, he has been a reporter for over 8 years.

Yunus in a weekend history walk: Golkonda Fort is the mother of Hyderabad. It was officially established as a separate dynasty in 1518, with Sultan Quli Qutb Shah as its first king. Hyderabad is now 428 years old and was built by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in 1591.

P- How did you come about to start documenting Hyderabad's history?

Y- Under my new boss Sirish Naniseti in 2015, I started writing about heritage. That is when I realised I really didn't know anything about the city. Just before I left The Hindu in April 2017, I wrote one long article for the Sunday edition, on the occasion of the Last Nizam Usmaan Ali Khan's 50th Death Anniversary. That went really viral, people had emailed me from the US, Delhi and other places. Then I realised that people are interested in it.

P: Yunus tells me that, soon after that he started a blog called 'The Hyderabad History Project', where he began documenting stories. Soon, his documenting moved to Instagram.

Y- I publish most of my work on Instagram because I figured out that is an easier way. It has short videos and pictures, and it gets people's attention. I started weekend walks in March 2017 for SahaPedia. Someone I knew had recommended me, saying that "You can talk to this guy, he is working on Hyderabad History". The idea was not to make money off it but to get people, and see if they are interested in learning something. Those were free walks. At the same time one fine day, I decided to see what happens if I try to conduct it on my own. That is when and how I started it on Instagram. Typically there are at least 10-15 people for the walks, which is good enough. I have seen people who have been here for decades, and they do not know much. They have their own memories associated with places but they do not know the history behind those places, or they do not know what is what. That is the issue I am looking to address through the walks.

P: Speaking of the architecture of Hyderabad and Telangana, for many years, Golkonda Fort has not received the world heritage status. How'd you comment on its condition?

Y- Golkonda Fort is still intact and very nice. However what people don't understand is that the fort area what we go to is just the inner fort, all the houses that they see in and around it are actually inside the fort area which are actually illegal, and they have all come up due to various political reasons. There are 8 gates for the Golkonda Fort, few of them are under the army. You can not look at the fort in an isolated way, you have to include the gates, as there are a couple of other buildings that are a part of the fort which are encroached and luckily the architecture inside is still okay. It does not have much cement. Usually, everyone loves to dump cement on everything.

P- We have lived in Delhi for a couple of years. It is very common to see walks and cycling tours. Delhi, as a city has so many different things to do if you are into Heritage and History. Why do you think as a city Hyderabad has very little interest, or very few people like you doing these things?

Y- Until the creation of Telangana, in the last few decades, people grew up without learning anything about Hyderabad history from their history books. In my own state syllabus textbooks, there was no mention about Hyderabad, Usmaan Ali Khan, The Nizam, The Qutub Shahi or the founders of Hyderabad. It was just about Andhra, the leaders who fought for Andhra Pradesh's formation, etc. There was no mention about Telangana Armed Struggle, no story about the state of Hyderabad being the largest Princely state. People are not aware of their own history. When you just grow up in a city, randomly seeing old buildings and hearing people saying "Ek zamane mein aisa tha...", you'd think "What is this old person talking about". That will be your first reaction. The way the state of Hyderabad was Annexed to India in 1948 has created a 'bad-space' about history, as we can't talk about Hyderabad without talking about Operation Polo. Operation Polo was a Military Action, that was initiated by the Indian Army on September 13, 1948. Usmaan Ali Khan, the last Nizam of the Princely State of Hyderabad refused to join India. Negotiations went on for nearly a year. After Independence, from November 1st, 1947, there was a standstill agreement that was signed

between Hyderabad and India. At that time, Hyderabad barely had an army. The Telangana Armed Struggle went on till 1951-52. That was until our first general elections when the communists decided to come out and participate actively in elections. Indian and Andhra governments did not want to let people learn about the communist history of Telangana, which was one of the most successful communist revolutions in the entire country. The other issue is the lack of historical literature. People like H. K. Sherwani and Ghulam Yazdani books were actually immemorial in the sense, you can't ignore them. Those were the basic foundational and historical references to whatever we have in the Deccan. These books are out of print today, and a lot of old Hyderabadis don't want to share information. Hyderabad primarily consists of Muslims, and the others don't want to talk about these things. It is a combination of lack of awareness and apathy. I remember after I started documenting Hyderabad, half the people who contacted me for information were History students. Even they don't know where to look for information, and their professors have fed them with the wrong information.

P- What are some of the very interesting facts that you dug up during you know your time.

Y- For me, somebody like Haja Moinuddin who went underground in 1948 with the Revolutionary Communist and the Urdu poet Maqdoom Moinuddin are more important than a building that is crumbling. At the same time architecturally I understand the importance of that. The smaller things fascinate me, for example, there is the Wesley Garrison Church in Secunderabad near Lal Bazar. More importantly, what I found fascinating is the way Hyderabad and the Golkonda Fort were built by the Qutub Shahi. He is the founder of Golconda and Hyderabad. They were orthodox Shia Muslims. They were orthodox as far as their religion was concerned, but they were also very liberal. Hyderabad's architecture and planning were really good and even the things that are left today by the Qutub Shahis are more valuable than the entire Ashafjahi or the Nizam history. That is my personal understanding. There are Ashur Khanas, which the Shia Muslims built primarily, for mourning the death of Imam Hussain during Muharram. There are many Ashur Khanas that are run by Hindus in Telangana. These are ruminants of the Qutub Shahis, and these Ashur khanas were built by the Kings (Locally, not directly by the Kings. The dynasty and they would appoint local people or local Hindus, non-muslims to take care of them so that, that would create some sort of a cultural and religious confluence. The cultural confluence is what I find really fascinating, which has lasted for 100 years. People are trying to break it, but it is still not breaking, maybe it will, but you never know.

P- What are some of the interesting Myths of Hyderabad. So like one of the myths that I mean I don't know if it a myth or it is a historical fact till date is the whole story of Bhagmati and the name of Bhagya Nagar..

Y- There was nobody named Bhagmati in Qutub Shahi's official history, nor is there any actual proof of her existence anywhere in Hyderabad. Before Mohammed Qulub Quli Shah became an adult, he was in love with a lady named Bhagmati. This was during his father Ibrahim's reign (Ibrahim reigned during 1515-1580). According to the story, Mohammed Qutub Shah would swim across the Musi river, to go meet Bhagmati. Bhagmati used to live in a place called Chinchlam, somewhere behind the Charminar area. A king would not allow his child to go across the river even when he is madly in love with her. Unlike today, the Musi river was

highly untamed. I don't completely discount Bhagmati's existence because if the contemporary Mughal Viceroy in the Deccan wrote back to Akbar (Akbar was the King) saying that 'This boy Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah is in love with this lady named Bhagmati'. But unlike for Taramati's, there is no grave for Bhagmati. If they were close to the Kings, they had a place to be buried there. There was also a rumour that Bhagmati's grave was in Talab Katta and some Pehelwan had taken over it. The grave is there, and, he has built a house around it. Nobody knows what has happened to it, or whether he has removed the name/inscription. It is a myth at best, but it could be true because Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah's father Ibrahim married Bhagirathi, a Hindu princess from the Vijayanagar Empire. But the myth is where from the story of Mohammed Qutub Shah naming the city Bhagya Nagar after her, comes from. After she converted to Islam, he then renamed it as Hyder Mahal, and then it became Hyderabad.

Conclusion: Thank you for listening to our introductory episode of 'Beyond Charminar'. In the coming months, we hope the series will engage you in understanding Hyderabad and its vibrant history beyond the iconic Charminar. To know as and when an episode is released, please subscribe to our newsletter on www.sunoindia.in. We are an independent platform and we rely on you, our listeners, to bring high quality audio stories. Do consider supporting our work by logging onto the 'Support Us' page.

Some related video:

Hyderabad Nizam Government Gives In.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biYMH1A9i3Q>

Old Video, Medical Supplies For Hyderabad State Under The Nizam Government.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQTvt2laobE>

BRITONS (British people) LEAVE HYDERABAD IN 1948.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJNLq60tjal>

Operation Polo: How did Hyderabad become part of India? (BBC Hindi)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N06uRAkZYRU>

History Of Hyderabad Independence | How Nizam Lost Hyderabad In 1948 | V6 News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0OF0gHf9cg>

History of Nizam of Hyderabad state operation polo 17 sept 1948

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3nFjC5KHJg>

The Nizam's Jewels | Treasures of India (English)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgdvUTDyzB4>

How the fashionable sixth Nizam helped in the evolution of the 'sherwani' (English)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwpR3KfUA7E>

Operation Polo - Hyderabad State Brought Back Into The Indian Fold (English)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itPihtVAbXc>