

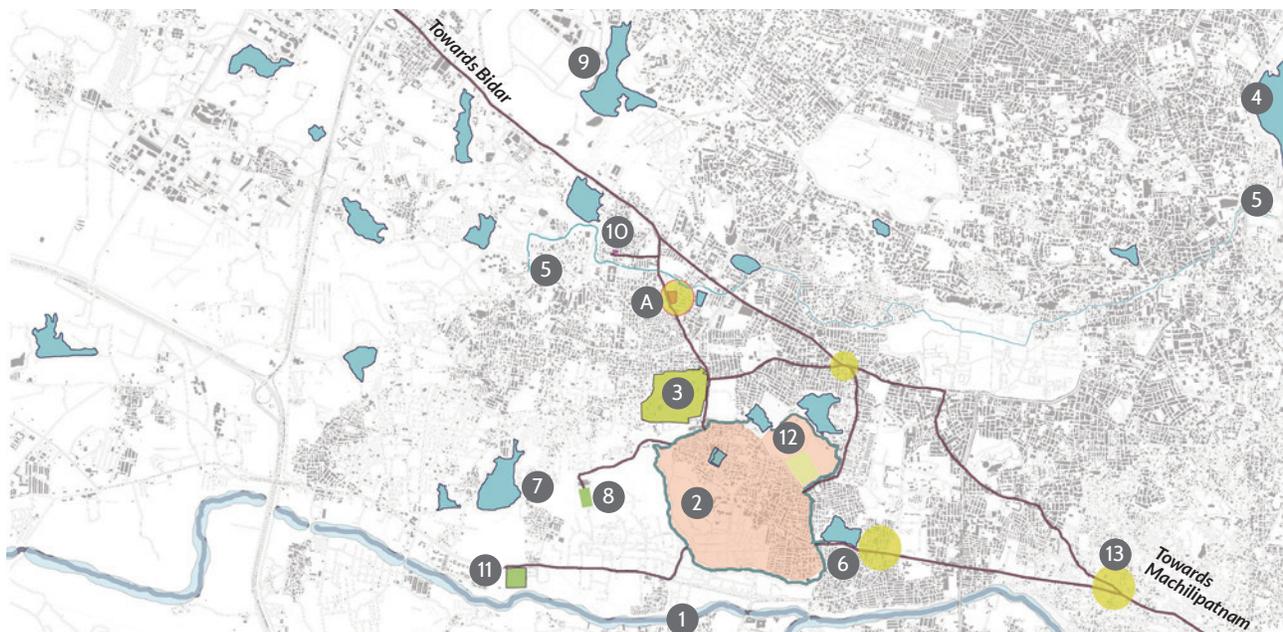
Sriganesh Rajendran

A READING FROM SHAIKPET SARAI QUTB SHAHI, HYDERABAD

Serai: The usual meaning in India is that of a building for the accommodation of travellers with their pack-animals; consisting of an enclosed yard with chambers around it.

(Hobson-Jobson, 1903)

A large building for the accommodation of travellers, common in Eastern countries. The word is Persian and means in that language, 'a place, the king's court, a large edifice'; hence *karavan-serai*, by corruption *caravanserie*, i.e. place of rest of caravans. The erection of these buildings is considered highly meritorious by Hindus as well as Mohammedans, who frequently endow them with rents for their support. *(The Penny Cyclopaedia of The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Vol XXI. London. 1829)*





↑ *Shaikpet Mosque (c. 1978)*
Source: dome.mit.edu

➤ *Recent conservation works by Government of Telangana included structural restoration and protection from encroachments.*

← **SHAIKPET SARAI**
In relation to Qutb Shahi era landmarks



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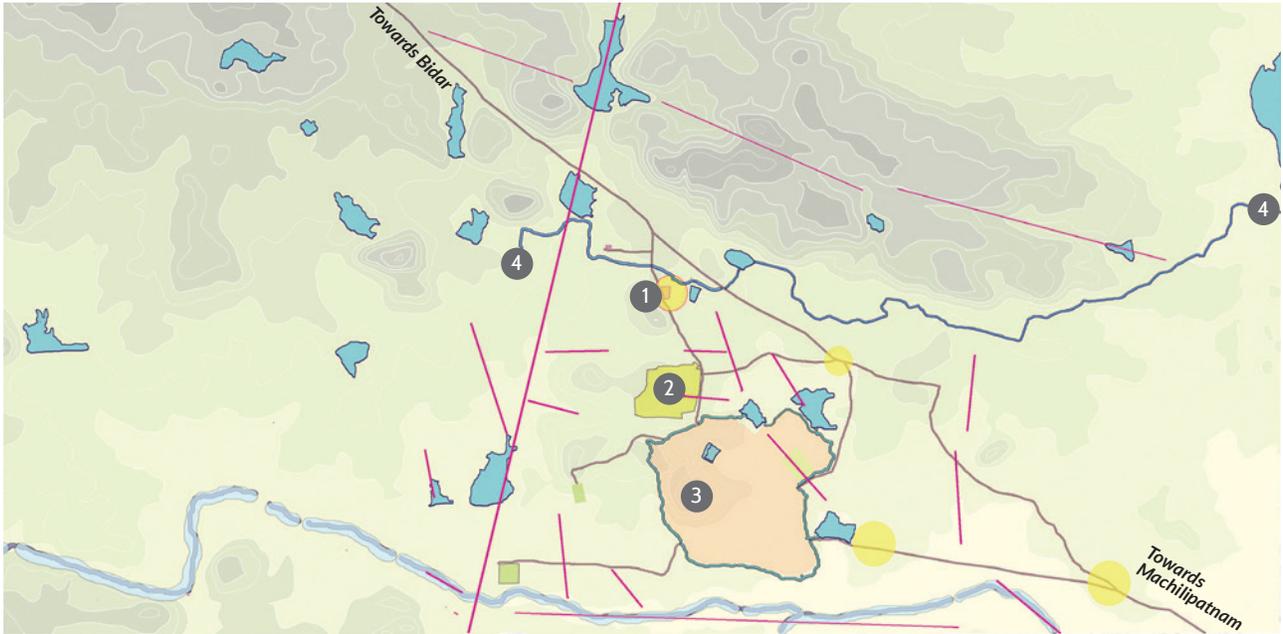
LEGEND

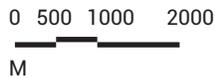
- A. *Shaikpet Sarai (c. 1570)*
- 1. *River Musi*
- 2. *Golconda–Qutb Shahi Citadel (1518-1687)*
- 3. *Qutb Shahi Tombs (1518-1687)*
- 4. *Hussain Sagar (1562)*
- 5. *Nehr Hussain Shah Wali (c. 1565)*
- 6. *Langar Houz (c. 1570)*
- 7. *Ibrahim Cheruvu (1573)*
- 8. *Bagh-i-Ibrahim (c. 1570; Lost)*
- 9. *Durgam Cheruvu (c. 1600)*
- 10. *Dargah Hussain Shah Wali (Built 1620)*
- 11. *Taramati Baradari (c. 1650)*
- 12. *Naya Qila & Bagh-i-Qutb (1656)*
- 13. *Toli Masjid (1671)*

The historic reign of the Qutb Shahi dynasty/Golconda Sultanate (1512-1687) inherited a complex terrain of hillocks and fractures as the settings for their architecture. Judicious interpretation of the natural landscape led to the siting of trade routes, fortifications, tomb complexes, water reservoirs, percolation ponds, stepped wells, aqueducts and subterranean conveyance systems, pleasure gardens, orchards and water distribution mechanisms. Some of these systems lie in close proximity to erstwhile settlements or remnant historic building complexes, while others are found today in the midst of dense modern-day settlements. Many are already lost in the wake of modern developments. Collectively, these man-made systems and their landscape settings - past and present - form a tangible layer of the larger cultural landscape of Hyderabad. One such setting is that of the Shaikpet Mosque and Sarai, enroute to the Golconda Fort.

The Precinct: Shaikpet Mosque & Sarai

The Shaikpet Sarai was built by Ibrahim Qutb Shah (1550-80) in the early Qutb Shahi style of architecture as a night-halt for traders awaiting permission for entry into Golconda Fort. The adjoining mosque, a later addition, is similar to other Qutb Shahi era mosques like the Mecca Masjid, (c. 1614 onwards). The terrain around Golconda and its traverse formed the basis of an important trade route from Ahmednagar. It passed Bidar, Patancheru, Golconda and onwards to Machilipattnam on the east coast. By its side lay the dargah of Hazrat Syed Hussain Shah Wali - a revered Sufi saint during the reign of the Qutb Shahi dynasty and descendant of Khwaja Banda Nawaz (Gesu Daraz) - the most influential Sufi saint of the Chisti order in South India. Hazrat Syed Hussain Shah Wali is credited with building the Hussain Sagar Tank at Hyderabad (1562), which served as a water reservoir for the city till the 1920s.





← *Interweave of macro terrain and lineaments with Qutb Shahi layers*

RELIEF LEGEND (METERS)



LEGEND

1. Shaikpet Sarai
2. Qutb Shahi Tombs
3. Golconda-Qutb Shahi Citadel
4. Nehr Hussain Shah Wali

← *View from Golconda fort. 1902-03. Dargah Hussain Shah Wali and Shaikpet Sarai (red circle) seen in the distance. Photographer: Unknown Source: wikipedia.com*

Terrain & Cheruvu

A series of water-bearing fractures criss-cross the granitic gneiss underlying the city-region of Hyderabad. Where the topography exhibits drainage patterns with parallel and perpendicular junctions implying the presence of compact fractured substrata we see a large incidence of percolation ponds and detention ponds with overflow mechanisms. While many ponds pre-date the Qutb Shahi rule, most of them were subsequently repaired and enlarged. Seen from the vantage of the Golconda Fort, the surrounding terrain was an undulating pediplain with scattered low hillocks. The region to the north of Golconda comprised a prominent spur whose main valley forms the Durgam Cheruvu. An underlying fracture connected this broad shallow valley to the Musi river. A series of reservoirs last datable to the Qutb Shahi era are found along this line.

Trade Route, Dargah & Water Footprints

The main trade route along Golconda lies on a relatively flat pediplain enabling easy traverse whilst conserving the shallowest of valleys to collect and channel runoff into percolation ponds. To the north-west of Shaikpet Sarai lies the Dargah of Hazrat Hussain Shah Wali. A canal (Nehr Hussain Shah Wali) purportedly built to channelize overland flow into the far away Hussain Sagar flanks the dargah. Minor tanks such as the Shaikpet Cheruvu empty their overflow into this canal, ensuring hydrological continuity.

The Golconda-Qutb Shahi tombs - Shaikpet precinct lay outside the limits of the detailed survey maps prepared by Leonard Munn (1915), after the Musi floods of 1908. Hence a vital piece of information regarding the landscape quality of this area at the beginning of the 20th century is missing. However, nearby areas such as Toli Chowki and Karvan areas depict many small orchards, fields, small mosques, lakes, ponds and Bavadis (stepped wells) scattered in the larger landscape. This may have well been the landscape character around Shaikpet at the start of 20th century.

In addition, the area bounded by the Golconda fort, Qutb Shahi tombs, Shaikpet Sarai and the Dargah of Hazrat Syed Hussain Shah Wali represents a socio-political and socio-economic configuration linking hydrology, trade, religion and civic spaces (*Simpkins (2008), James (2015)*). It can be postulated that the erstwhile landscape between these larger markers would have a fair share of open grounds, agricultural fields, orchards and gardens



← *Dargah Hussain Shah Wali and Shaikpet Sarai (red circle) seen in the distance. View c. 1991.*
© Lois Safrani. Source: dome.mit.edu

↙ *View c. 2017 from fort bastion*

watered by *bavadis* (wells), traces of which no longer exist. The photograph of the area (c. 1902, anon.) seemingly corroborates this further. However, it is to be noted that the thorny scrub-like landscape quality on relatively flat hydrologically active terrain is also the result of a series of plagues, draughts and famine that swept across the region between 1806-1899 CE.

In this regard, 19th & 20th century photographs need careful consideration on the issue of whether the visual links they capture between Golconda, Qutb Shahi tombs and other historic structures, really did exist.

Re-stating Conservation

In a regional context, a history of drought and famine in the medieval Deccan constantly pushed kingdoms towards the quest for water-wise settlement patterns and strategies. Golconda's geo-political location in the Deccan peninsula, further demanded strategic vision behind creating a network of water systems during the Qutb Shahi rule. It could be said that the broad 'zoning' of Qutb Shahi Hyderabad is then reflective of its underlying water footprint. Presently, the ground surface around Shaikpet Sarai is broadly readable as dense urban village whose historic layers lie fragmented due to a largely ad-hoc development over the years. (e.g. Shaikpet Sarai, Shaikpet Cheruvu, erstwhile routes etc.). Its erstwhile neighbours - Qutb Shahi tombs and Golconda fort enjoy a higher degree of protection and regulation.

The historic links between water, civic and public spaces and community face threat of erasure from present day change in watershed characteristics due to human activity and land development. Deep readings of such fabric can therefore offer informative constructs regarding their immediate and long term future. Such readings and constructs can bridge monument-centric conservation and community-centric revitalization of precinct, while protecting historic vestiges. Imaginative, systemic and cross-disciplinary approaches could prove beneficial in illustrating the enduring role of heritage sites in meeting their own needs and extending their capabilities to play new roles. It is here that, examples like Shaikpet Sarai stand out as a potential case, illustrative of similar sites elsewhere in Hyderabad and India.

| Maps and images courtesy the Author

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