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BRITISH RESIDENCY, HYDERABAD: ITS HISTORY, USE, DISUSE, AND REUSE

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Abstract:

Hyderabad, the capital city of India's youngest state, is rich in architectural and natural heritage. Belonging to various historic layers, city's heritage components range from palaces to vernacular houses, mosques to tombs, and gateways to gardens... British Residency is one of the most important historic complexes of erstwhile Hyderabad, Deccan

The British Residency, also known as Kati Women's College stands well restored¹ at present. This paper unveils the past of the British Residency, the most powerful structure of the erstwhile Hyderabad Deccan. In the history of more than 200 years, the historic complex was mainly used by the British Residents. Post-independence¹ it was reused as Women's College and later preserved very well, funded by World Monument Fund. How the architecture of Residency became a guide for the many of the structures of Hyderabad, whose patrons were influenced by the British culture.

The paper also investigates the methods for restoration that were used by the teams of Conservation Architects. The archival research done by the consultant also uncovered many facts about the history of its construction and materials that were used to imitate the British Architecture on a foreign land.

KEYWORDS: Hyderabad, Residency, Deccan, restoration, palace

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

British Residency was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Hyderabad, Deccan. The historic complex was constructed as a result of Subsidiary Alliance¹ that took place in 1798. Residency complex was built to house the British Resident. He was a powerful political representative, for the communication between Nizam and the British. A large tract of land was allocated to the north of River Musi.



Figure 1 Residency, facing River Musi, engraving dating 1800's

The structure is learnt to be designed by Henry Holland, the English architect for the British Royalty and nobility. It is an impressive 19th-century structure built with Classical Revival architecture., one the earliest and finest examples still standing in India. The historic complex has played a very important role in the relationship between the Indian subcontinent and the British crown during 19th and 20th century.

USED BY THE BRITISH:

It was occupied for more than 140 years, official home to 54 British Residents and their families. Each Resident in general had to complete a term of four years. It is argued by some scholars that the structure known as Rang Mahal was used by the earlier Residents. Yet the present main structure with Darbar Hall was the centre of all activities. The superstructure remained as it is, but the interiors were changed to suit the taste of different Residents. Some focussed on maintaining library and garden, other Residents worked on interiors.

A model of the Residency main structure was also built in lime and bricks by the British.

As seen in the map of 1880 the historic complex had wells, a post office, a cemetery, Rang mahal Gardens, Assistant Residents' Quarters.

During 1849, the floods washed away the western walls of the Residency Gardens. 59 years later in 1908, the history was repeated. Stone markers at various location on gates and walls mention this.

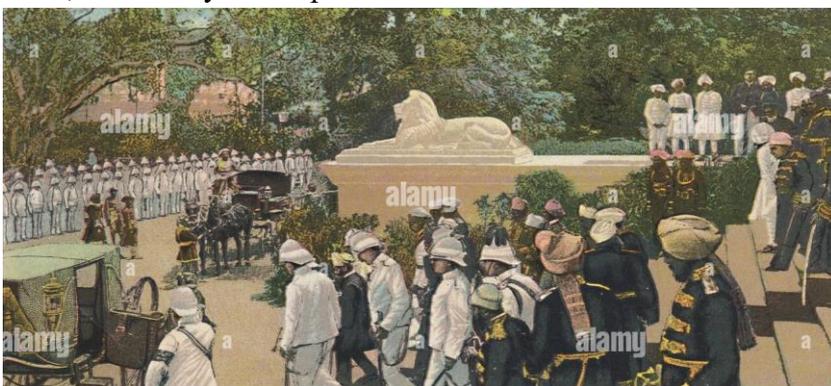


Figure 2 Nizam leaving British Residency, 1900's, notice the colossal lion made in lime

DISUSE and REUSE:

After the British left India in 1949, post Operation Polo (1948), the British Residency was converted into Women's College. Established in 1924, the historic building has been the pride of the Osmania University College for Women since 1949. Presently it is known as the Telangana Mahila Viswavidyalayam State University. After the British left the premises, the Residency complex was maintained by the Nizam's government. It was then handover to the college. The Residency Complex was modified and modernised for the use of the Women's College, Between 1949 and 1952.

Neglect over a period of time has been a major reason for the Residency's deterioration. Old buildings in the complex were modified without noticing their structural requirements. The Residency complex shrunk over the years and poor maintenance led to the collapse of structures. These were the sociology block and the Principal's Lodge. They were pulled down and replaced with new buildings. In this process the rich history of the place was mutely buried. Rains, and inappropriate repairs at many places were the other causes.

A many important event was hosted here, which can be studied through the archival images. The third Nizam Nawab Sikander Jah (1803-29) was the first one who visited Residency in 1808. He attended a banquet organised by the East India Company. When the later Nizams visited the Residency they would come with their entourage. For Nizam the royal *masnad* (low height traditional yellow cushioned seat) would be placed in the Durbar Hall. (Refer to page 64, Naik S Anuradha)

Durbar Hall was used as a Ballroom and a Dining Hall too.



Figure 3 Floods in Hyderabad British Residency, 190, (source- Wikipedia)

THE BRITISH RESIDENCY: UNDERSTANDING THE ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING OF A HISTORIC COMPLEX:

The third Residentⁱⁱ James Achilles Kirkpatrick was responsible for signing the treaty- Subsidiary Alliance. He started altering the structure already existing on the site. The new structure also conveyed the power that was associated with the position of the Resident.

For the purpose of reuse the historic structure underwent a lot of changes. The new windows (as dummy) were added on elevations. Reinforcement was required in the weakening roof. The first phase was mainly an effort to safeguard the foundation so that further work can be carried on.

Conservation efforts:

THE WHITE MUGHALS written by William Dalrymple was released around 2001. This had the story of British Residency in much detail. An anonymous British donor contributed for £1 million soon after the book after reading the book. The Residency was put on the 2002 and 2004 World Monuments Watch List as ‘Osmania Women’s College’, After all these efforts the study for conservation took place. As the site was included on the 2002 list of the 100 Most Endangered Sites, WMF also came forward. The agency has contributed \$100,000—a grant made possible through American Express—to the site to undertake emergency repairs and develop a restoration masterplan.

It took 12 years to start the actual restoration process that began in 2013. Under the direction of Government of Telangana and World Monuments Fund, the first phase of restoration got over. It was noticed that the building was in a state of collapse. The first phase was to understand and consolidate the structure also working on its stability.

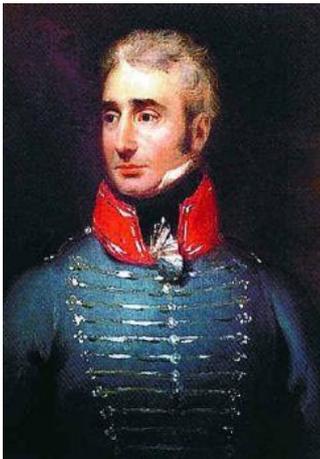


Figure 4 James Achilles Kirkpatrick (source-Wikipedia)

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH:

This well-known project focussed on restoring the craftsmanship to its original fine finish. It has also opened the chapters of colonial history of India. The Residency building was initially planned to face the Musi River on the south. Remains of a staircase were found as also a service stair in one of the rooms, the rectangular reception rooms were converted to oval ones.

As per some local scholars after the attack on Residency in 1857, the British added extra security system to the building. Many metal doors were added. They were unhappy with Nizam hence faced the main building to north, towards Delhi. The rooms had also to be remodelled following this change, many openings were closed.

Twenty years of restoration of this magnificent historic complex by the World Monuments Fund (WMF) has come to an end with the reopening of the British Residency of Hyderabad. A detailed

Conservation Management Plan was prepared. It took care of many issues, varying from large scale structural repairs to intricate handcrafted lime plaster details. The work was interrupted many times. In 2012, when the roof of the western wing collapsed, beams crashed through two floors. At this point of time new funding drive started for a temporary roof to protect the interiors.

Restoration is being done with craft techniques from across India. The structural techniques and the decorative ones are worked by the woodworkers from Kerala and stucco workers from Uttar Pradesh. Ost importantly they belong to all part of the continuous living tradition of craft in India.

To repair the structural damage in the western wing around 100 handcrafted stone staples were cut to the size of each crack. The much famed 12-metre-high, durbar Hall ceiling was cleaned by the crafts-persons. The 651 papier-Mache panels, part of the vaulted ceiling was repaired, and retouched. These panels display pastel-coloured Islamic geometric patterns and floral motifs and *gaja-vyala* (the elephant and mythical lion). Wherever the panels are missing, the high-resolution digital prints were processed, matching the original colour scheme. They were then printed on a pre-primed canvas using optimum image quality and colour permanence. (Ref- Page 131, Naik S Anuradha)

Authenticity was one of the main principles of building conservation as the lime mortar samples were well researched. These samples were sourced to replicate the original stucco of the decorative northern portico with its Corinthian columns. The lions flanking at both ends were also taken care of in the main entrance portico.

CONCLUSION:

After studying the history of British Residency, its use, mis-use and reuse one can appreciate the work done for the restoration of the historic complex. One can also observe the refinement in work, the skill, craftsmanship, preservation of traditional building techniques. Interpretation centre recreates the history of Hyderabad state focussing on the British Period. The scholars and the professional who have been part of the team for historical research and restoration have done justice to the pr

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Naik S Anuradha: *An Architectural Masterpiece in Hyderabad- From British Residency to Osmania College for Women*; Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers Ltd 2023

Maps-1880 plan of British Residency and Its Grounds

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¹A Subsidiary Alliance, in South Asian history was a tributary alliance between an Indian State and the European East India Company. Under this system, an Indian ruler who formed a treaty (agreement) with the company in question would be provided with protection against any external attacks.

ⁱⁱ Mr John Holland was the first Resident in 1799, the second was Mr Grant (1780-84). Third one Mr R Johnson (1784-87), Fourth was Sir John Kenna way (1788-94). Captain William a Kirkpatrick (1794-97) was the fifth and James Achilles Kirkpatrick was the sixth one (1795-1805)