

Preserving the Sufi Legacy: A case Study on the need of Conservation of Dargahs in Bijapur City

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ABSTRACT:

Bijapur, a city steeped in history and architectural splendor, is home to numerous dargahs that embody the rich Sufi heritage of India. These shrines, dedicated to revered Sufi saints, serve as vibrant cultural hubs that foster community cohesion and promote interfaith dialogue. However, the preservation of this legacy faces significant challenges, including urbanization, neglect, and environmental degradation. As Bijapur continues to evolve, the need for effective conservation strategies becomes increasingly critical. This study aims to highlight the importance of preserving Sufi heritage in Bijapur, focusing on the conservation of its dargahs. Through a comprehensive analysis of the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of these sites, this research underscores the significance of safeguarding this unique heritage for future generations. The study identifies the challenges facing these sites, including urbanization, neglect, and environmental degradation, and proposes effective conservation strategies to address these issues. By examining the role of dargahs in promoting community cohesion and interfaith dialogue, this research emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach to conservation. The study concludes that preserving Sufi heritage in Bijapur requires a multifaceted approach that balances development with conservation, engages local communities, and promotes cultural exchange. Ultimately, this research provides valuable insights into the preservation of Sufi legacy in Bijapur, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural heritage conservation in India.

KEYWORDS:

mystic, Conservation, moral equilibrium, interfaith, dargah.

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Introduction

The rich carpet of Sufi heritage in India is woven with threads of spirituality, cultural exchange, and artistic expression. Among the cities that exemplify this legacy is Bijapur, known for its historical significance and architectural marvels, particularly its dargahshrines dedicated to revered Sufi saints. These dargahs not only serve as places of worship but also as cultural hubs that foster community cohesion and promote inter-faith dialogue.

However, the preservation of this Sufi legacy faces numerous challenges, including urbanization, neglect, and environmental degradation. As Bijapur continues to evolve, the need for effective conservation strategies becomes increasingly critical. This research paper aims to explore the significance of preserving the Sufi legacy in Bijapur, focusing on the conservation of its dargahs. By examining the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of these sites, the study seeks to highlight the importance of safeguarding this unique heritage for future generations. (Halder, 2024) Through a case study approach, this paper will analyze current conservation efforts, identify gaps in preservation practices, and propose recommendations for sustainable management. Ultimately, the research underscores the vital role that dargahs play in the cultural identity of Bijapur and the broader implications of their conservation for the preservation of Sufi traditions in India.

Sufis in Deccan

With the establishment of the Brahmani Sultanate Deccan became a fertile ground for Sufis and cities, such as Daulatabad Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur became urban Centers and places of Sufi settlements. organized mystic efforts in the Deccan had begun as a result of Mohammed Bin Tugalaq's historic decision to make Devagiri second administrative capital of the Sultanate. A large number of Sufi had to migrate which affected the Khanqah life of Delhi. The shifting to Daulatabad though caused a serious setback to the Sufis Initially, it made Daulatabad, Gulbarga, Bihar and Bijapur in due course of time active mystic Centers in the South. Some of the major Sufi orders which operated in the Deccan may be classified into two: the north Indian immigrant orders such as ChistisJunaidis and Sattaris; and the alien orders such as Qadiris Naqshbandis and Nimatullahis. The former group of Sufi had migrated from the north, while the latter group came to Deccan from Persia Central Asia and

places outside the subcontinent and established themselves in Daulatabad, Bihar, Aurangabad, and Bijapur.

It was through the medium of mysticism that the Muslim culture group adjusted itself with the Local Milieu and with all the social and linguistic barriers which had separated the north from the South. The Khanqahs of the Sufi's helped in bridging these differences and initiated a new phase of understanding between regions, creeds and cultures, and they became genuine centres for the exchange of views between men belonging to different religions and languages. Thus, the Sufis established a direct contact with the masses and the Muslim mistakes in the Deccan as elsewhere in India, become a symbol of harmony and brotherhood. (Maryam, 2012)

In both Delhi and Gulbarga Sufi leadership was becoming closely involved with the affairs of the political authorities in Bijapur. This did not happen The Sufi of Shahpur hillock where not only separated by the physical separation, but also by the nature of the teachings which could be labelled as heterodox. For two centuries throughout the duration of the Shahi rule, these Sufis remained aloof from the state functionaries, and from the Oma, both socially and doctrinally. Another category of Sufi's for most part Qadiris and Sattari, who had migrated to Bijapur from outside Deccan directed their energies at reforming the court of what they considered. Its un-Islamic tendencies. As city Dwellers, these Sufi were usually well integrated with the institutions of urban Islam, the rustic literacy and the urban reform thus represented to Sufi responses to the Muslim city in its Hindu environment. The one reached directly towards the lower-class population, both Muslim and non-Muslims, the other employed his prestige and influence for reforming the court. The two types also formed Sufi counterparts to the old social dichotomy among Bijapuri's Muslims. The literati were the Deccanis and the reformists were the foreigners with more of an Arab or Iranian orientation.

Soon the Sufi moment in Deccan developed its indigenous characteristics and assimilated Local dialogues and ideas into mystic doctrine and literature. With the emergence of urbanization programmes and cultural growth, the Sufi and their Dargah acted as a counterweight in maintaining moral equilibrium in the Medieval Society and kept a close watch on the morals of both the people and governing classes. (Shyam, 2008)

‘Dargahs’ as Sufi Centers

With the advent of the Muhammedans in India an era ends the old order passes. And in no country was the movement of Islamization more epoch-making. For of the various civilizations with which the Muhammedans came into contact in the course of their world-conquest, none could have been more diametrically opposed to their ideals than that of the people of India. Apart from the fact that the Islamic movement was of relatively recent growth, forcing itself on the ancient and firmly established social and religious structure of India, it also postulates a clashing of fundamental convictions, a conflict of realism with Idealism, of the material with the visionary, of the concrete with the abstract. Nothing could illustrate more graphically the religious and racial diversity, or emphasize more decisively the principles underlying the consciousness of each community, than the contrast between their respective places of worship, as represented by the mosque on the one hand, and the temple on the other. Compared with the clarity of the mosque, the temple is an abode of mystery; the courts of the former are open to light and air, with many doorways inviting publicity, the latter having passages leading to dim cells, jealously guarded and remote. The mosque has no need of a central shrine, it is sufficient for the devotee to turn in the direction of Mecca, but the focal point of the temple is a sacred chamber often deep within of its endless corridors. Architecturally the mosque is wholly visible and intelligible, while the temple is not infrequently introspective, complex, and indeterminate. The representation of natural forms is prohibited by Islamic usage, whereas the walls of the temples pulsate with imagery, and their interiors are the dwelling places of the gods; decorative lettering attained its highest form in the sculptured texts on the Moslem places of worship, but on the temples inscriptional art is rare, the Hindus conveying their meaning by iconography and carved figure compositions. By means of a multitude of these figured forms, the Hindus gave to the temple an effect vivid and colorful, but all of it in the natural tint and texture of the stone; conversely, the Muhammedans broke up their wall surfaces in patterns of different colored marble, and also applied schemes of painted plaster and brilliantly glazed tiles. (Brown, 2024)

Dargah architecture in India is a blend of various styles, reflecting the cultural and historical context of the shrines. Dargahs showcase a mix of Islamic and Indian architectural styles, with intricate carvings, ornate

domes, and minaret. Many dargahs, such as Ajmer Sharif Dargah and Haji Ali Dargah, feature Mughal architectural elements, including arches, domes, and intricate marble work. Dargahs often feature beautiful marble and stone work, including intricate carvings and inlays. Dargahs typically have one or more domes and minarets, symbolizing spiritual and cultural significance.

Significance of Dargah Architecture

Dargahs are sacred spaces for spiritual growth, prayer, and contemplation. Dargahs reflect the cultural and historical heritage of India, showcasing the country's rich architectural diversity. Dargahs often feature symbolic elements, such as domes and minarets, which represent spiritual and cultural values.

Need of Conservation



Sheikh Hazarat Azagarshah Dargah in a narrow street of Bijapur, behind bus stand



Hazrat Sikandar basha Khwaja Moinuddin sheikh Dargah in a Bus Depo, with limited permission to the visitors.



Hazrat Mohammed Shanoor Baba (Bagdadwale Baba) and Hazrat Mohammed Sayed Khadri Baba (Bagdadwale Baba) dargahs in the centre of the city.





Mahjar of Sufis in the heavily traffic road of Shivaji Circle

Dargah conservation is crucial for preserving India's rich cultural heritage and historical significance. Dargahs are sacred spaces that foster spiritual growth, community cohesion, and interfaith dialogue. They showcase a blend of Islamic and Indian architectural styles, reflecting the country's diverse cultural legacy. Urbanization and environmental degradation pose significant threats to dargahs, including encroachment, pollution, and loss of open spaces. Inadequate maintenance and lack of funding can lead to structural damage, compromising the integrity of these historical sites. Structural Maintenance: Regular upkeep and repairs prevent deterioration and ensure safety. Artistic Preservation: Protecting intricate carvings, frescoes, and calligraphy preserves the site's artistic legacy. Active participation from local communities fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. Implementing eco-friendly measures, such as rainwater harvesting and waste management, contributes to environmental conservation. Conservation efforts safeguard the historical significance of dargahs for future generations. Dargahs play a vital role in shaping the cultural identity of local communities. Well-maintained dargahs can promote cultural tourism and educational initiatives, raising awareness about their significance. (Eaton, 1996)

In conclusion, dargah conservation is essential for preserving India's rich cultural heritage and promoting sustainable development. By addressing the challenges and implementing effective conservation strategies, we can ensure the long-term preservation of these historical sites.

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