

Patron Motives behind Art Patronage in Hyderabad till Indian Independence

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Abstract: Historically, patronage has been the main support system through which arts have been produced and nurtured in any time period and any region in the world. Starting from ancient rulers to present day market-driven systems, art creation has been in the need of patronage to sustain. An Art history of Hyderabad has witnessed the development of visual art culture through royal patronage to institutional support. Along with patronage, the motivation behind it is equally important as it can significantly influence the creation of art itself. This study focuses on studying the art patronage in Hyderabad from the ancient times till late nineteenth century when the art scenario changed drastically. Study of all the arts of the past and existing literature on them provides us the evidences to understand the motivation behind these patronages.

Keywords: Patronage, Motivation, Hyderabad, Royal Patronage, Political

I. INTRODUCTION

Art histories tell us how art and artists were supported by different entities throughout history, whether in the west or in India. Motivation behind the patronage is a crucial aspect and can change the meaning and direction of the art and culture significantly. Studies show that art patronage has been primarily motivated by a desire for something of the patron like desire to project their power, express religious devotion or to gain social prestige etc. Motive can be for personal enjoyment or public display too. So, it is important to know the underlying motives of the patron for a better understanding of the cultural history of a region. There are scholarly articles on art patronage in Hyderabad discussing the region's cultural history which is shaped by Deccan sultanates, Asaf Jahi rule, colonial influences, and post-colonial changes, emphasize its hybrid patronage systems. This research intends to identify and analyse the motivation of patrons in the past behind such a rich cultural heritage of Hyderabad.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative approach and uses the textual sources on art patronage to understand and analyze the motives and patterns behind the patronage in Hyderabad till late 20th century. A systematic review of the literature is done on the articles that were gathered through online scholarly search engines and books related to the topic. Along with that some of the sites in Hyderabad were visited to gather visual information for the analysis. This study divides the history of art of Hyderabad into three segments: Qutb Shahi Period (1518–1687), Asaf Jahi / Nizam Period (1724–1948) and colonial interface in art and post-Indian Independence and focuses patronage only till late twentieth century.

III. QUTB SHAHI PERIOD (1518–1687)

Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah founded Hyderabad as a planned city and actively supported architecture, literature, calligraphy, and painting. Patronage during this period was centralized at the royal court, with artists sustained through court appointments and royal commissions rather than a market economy (Sherwani 1974).



Court Paintings and Royal Self-Representation

Deccani painting flourished under this system, characterized by rich color palettes, poetic themes, and Persian stylistic influences blended with indigenous traditions (Zebrowski 1983). Monumental architecture such as the Charminar and Mecca Masjid functioned as visual assertions of political legitimacy and cultural refinement.

Miniature paintings commissioned by The Qutb Shahi rulers depicted courtly leisure, poetic gatherings, and royal portraits. These works emphasized refinement and cultural sophistication rather than militarism. They included two types:

Court Paintings and Royal Self-Representation

An example is the portrait of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (fig. 1), which presents the ruler in an idealized manner, reinforces his image as a poet-king (Zebrowski 1983)



Fig. 1: Portrait of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, Deccani school, late 16th century.

Source: Zebrowski, *Deccani Painting*, 1983

Court scenes portraying music, gardens, and intimate assemblies further reflect the patron's motivation to cultivate a distinctive Deccani court culture that blended Persian aesthetics with local sensibilities (Haidar 2011).

Architectural Patronage as Political Symbolism

Architecture was one of the important art form of patronage during the Qutb Shahi period. Monumental structures such as the **Charminar** symbolized sovereignty, urban authority, and religious legitimacy (Fig. 2).

This monument is embellished with ornamentation, calligraphy, and geometric designs- demonstrating how visual art was an expression of dynastic power (Michell 1995). Other monuments included Mecca Masjid and Golconda Fort tied to imperial authority.

Similarly, the **Qutb Shahi tomb complex** functioned as a visual statement of lineage, permanence, and sacred kingship (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Charminar, Hyderabad, 1591

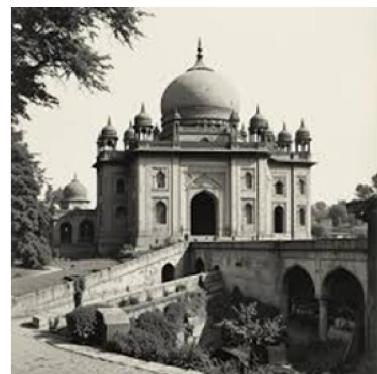


Fig. 3: Qutb Shahi Tombs, Golconda, c. 16th–17th



IV. ASAF JAHI / NIZAM PERIOD (1724–1948)

Art patronage in Hyderabad expanded beyond the royal court under Asaf Jahi dynasty and included nobles, jagirdars, and elite families. Emphasis was on collecting, preservation, and cosmopolitan taste. The Nizams were among the wealthiest patrons in India, supporting different art forms like architecture, painting, decorative arts, textiles, music, and literature (Leonard 2014).

Portraiture and Dynastic Continuity

Hyderabad functioned as a **princely state under indirect colonial control**. This political arrangement produced a **unique cultural interface** where the art produced witnessed an amalgamation of **royal authority, British colonial aesthetics, and local Deccani traditions**.

Patronage shifted toward formal portraiture under the Asaf Jahi dynasty, that emphasized dynastic continuity. Portraits of early Nizams portray rulers seated formally, adorned with symbols of authority, indicating a shift toward Mughal-influenced and later European compositional styles (Fig. 4) (Welch 1985).

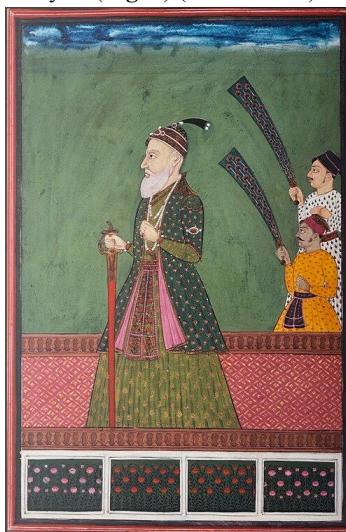


Fig. 4: Portrait of Nizam ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I, 18th century.

Mughal-influenced court portraiture.

With the entry of British and European artists, oil paintings and Company School works became increasingly popular, reflecting changing tastes of the elite and colonial engagement (Fig. 5) (Markel 2000).

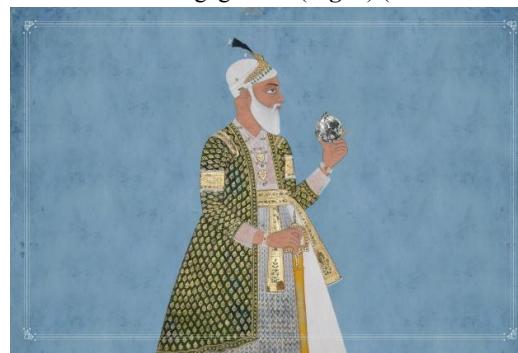


Fig. 5: Nizam Portrait, Company School style, 19th century.

Reflecting European influence on princely representation



Palaces and Elite Architecture

Palatial architecture such as the **Chowmahalla Palace** illustrates how Nizam patronage combined traditional Deccani aesthetics with European influences (Fig. 6). These spaces functioned as ceremonial settings, reinforcing elite hierarchy and royal spectacle.



Fig. 6: Chowmahalla Palace, Hyderabad, 18th–19th centuries.
Royal palace architecture combining Deccani and European styles.

Religious Architecture and Ceremonial Patronage

Religious monuments such as the **Badshahi Ashurkhana** demonstrate patron motivation rooted in ceremonial devotion and political legitimacy (Fig. 7). Decorative tile work and architectural symbolism underscored the ruler's role as protector of faith and tradition (Michell 1995). Other architectural expression of hybrid patronage, combining Islamic, Hindu, and European design principles include: High Court of Judicature, Hyderabad (1916), Osmania University (1918) etc.

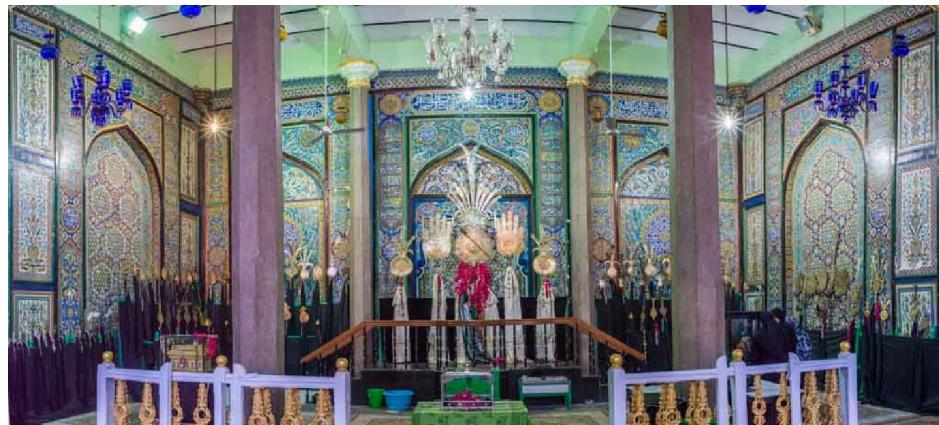


Fig. 7: Badshahi Ashurkhana, Hyderabad.
Ceremonial religious architecture under royal patronage

Comparative Motivation Analysis Table

Patron Type	Primary Motivation	Secondary Motivation	Visual Strategy	Outcome for Visual Culture
Qutb Shahi rulers	Cultural legitimacy	Religious symbolism	Poetic portraiture, urban monuments	Formation of Deccani visual identity
Asaf Jahi Nizams	Dynastic continuity	Colonial negotiation	Formal portraiture, palace architecture	Hybrid visual culture
Court nobility	Social prestige	Cultural imitation	Commissioned paintings, interiors	Diffusion of elite visual norms
Religious patrons	Devotion	Political legitimacy	Ceremonial architecture	Integration of art and ritual space

V. CONCLUSION

The relationship between patron, artwork, and motivation becomes evident with the table. As summarized in Table, patron motivation in Hyderabad evolved from cultural legitimization under the Qutb Shahis to adaptive modernity (colonial inference) under the Asaf Jahi rulers. The visual record of Hyderabad's paintings and architecture reveals that patron motivation extended far beyond aesthetic appreciation. From poetic court portraits (Fig. 1) to monumental architecture (Fig. 2-3) and later hybrid portraiture (Fig. 4-5), patrons used visual arts strategically to articulate power, identity, and cultural aspiration. Irrespective of the motives, art has been supported by all the patrons of the past giving us the rich artistic heritage and culture.

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