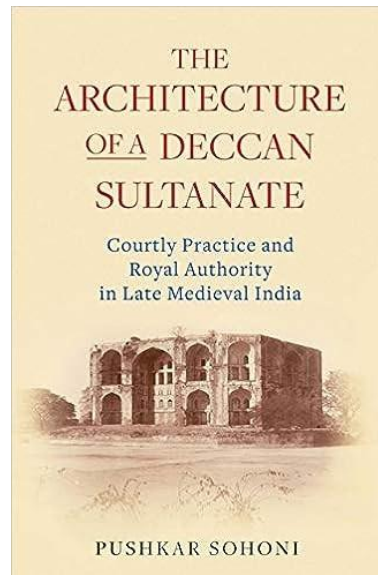


## **Book Review**



**Pushkar Sohoni:** *The Architecture of a Deccan Sultanate* *Courtly Practice and Royal Authority in Late Medieval India*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2018, Price: 8130/p INR)

### **Malya Singha<sup>1</sup>**

The magnificent edifices of the Nizam Shahi Dynasty have long been neglected. While only a handful of them have been given protected status, unfortunately, a large number of these monuments face the dangers of encroachment, vandalism, or simply, mere neglect. The cultural and political developments of the sultanates of Deccan have been neglected in the shadow of developments in the north. Thus, an important contribution has been made by Pushkar Sohoni, whose research has shed light on one of the significant polities of Deccan region. The present book has been a result of ten years of meticulous research work.

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The preface of the book expresses the concern that the historiography of South Asia has often favored the Gangetic polities. Present book is a survey of the courtly architecture of the Nizam Shahi dynasty, while at the same time giving insights into the political developments of their time.

Extensive on-field visits have been undertaken by the Author. At the same time, he has referred to pieces of evidence related to these sites in different historical records. Sohoni's book starts with an introduction to the geography of Deccan, details of the dynasties which ruled or extended control over it, and the gradual taking over of Deccan by the Mughals.

It talks about the evolution of architectural traditions from Bahamani to post-Bahamani sultanates and the concept of a "Hybrid "style of architecture that is a combination of Islamicate and local ideas.

The author expresses the need for studying these sites due to the fact that many of them have been demolished or have been converted for other uses. A discussion on various primary and secondary sources on the Nizam Shahi dynasty is also presented. He also talks about the Deccan paintings with a focus on the Ahmadanagar school of painting. He describes them as "Painting in a Persian Mode in an Indian setting".

Successive chapters of the book deal with different aspects of the culture and architecture of the Nizam Shahi dynasty. The author explores the significance of coins, highlighting how they served as expressions of sovereignty with the ruler's name embossed upon them. As an expression of sovereignty. He then talks about literature and that the Dakkani, Persian, and Sanskrit works were patronized by the Sultans. The section on 'urban design and settlement' deals with six important settlements of Nizam Shahi kingdom -Junnar, Daulatabad, Ahmadnagar, Chaul, Parenda, and Sindkhed Raja. All these towns had two features in common-construction of water works and control of these sites through a feudal apparatus. Among these, Ahmadnagar was the primary capital of the dynasty. Gardens were an important part of the planning of this city.

Another significant aspect of the book centres on 'urban system: water supply and civic buildings'. This section talks about the system of water supply in the cities and the author calls them "an amalgamation of local knowledge and foreign techniques". Beautiful hammams and intricate displays of water through large pools, and artificial lakes can be seen.

The Author also delves into the military design and fortification of the Nizam Shahi Dynasty. There were changes in fortification along with changing war technology. The fort of Ahmadnagar has been considered to show many innovations in planning. He provides a categorization of forts into three type, which are- land forts, hill forts, and sea forts. He

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further adds that “ by the end of the sixteenth century, mechanism of thicker walls became redundant against improved siege artillery”.

The author then covers another aspect of art and architecture that is palaces and mansions. Palaces were considered the “real loci of political power”. Rulers of successive regimes built new palaces in strategic locations. Mansions were found in cities and countryside and belonged to elites and court officials. Details of Farah Baksh Bagh, Hasht Bihisht Bagh, Manzarsumba, and Kalawantinicha Mahal have been provided.

The next section focuses on mosques, which could be found scattered throughout the kingdom of Ahmadnagar. There were no large Mosques in the kingdom, observes the author except for those in the forts of Daulatabad and Parenda. The material used to make them was dressed stones bounded in lime mortar. He provides details of Soneri Mosque, Kari Masjid, Damdi Mosque, Mahadavi Mosque, and Dilawar Khan Mosque among others. Finally, he talks about a number of tombs that could be dated to this period. Tombs were usually single or double-storied structures surmounted by a dome. They were set on a high pedestal and had entrances on three sides. Different tombs about which the author provided descriptions are Bagh Rauza, Saudagar Gumbaz, Tomb of Changiz Khan, Tomb of Salabat Khan, Bhonsle memorials, etc.

At last, He provides a discussion on miscellaneous buildings like the waterworks of Ahmadnagar, Manazar Sumba, Caravanserai at Chaul, Chini Mahal, etc.

The Author concludes by saying that “ the architecture built was most often an extension of personality, not of ideologies of the states”. The architecture of Nizam Shahs can be used to construct the social history of the period. He highlights the shift to fort-dominated architecture. He provides a picture of Mughal influences on court culture, architecture, and finally the collapse of the Deccan sultanate and the growth of the power of Marathas.

The book is an important addition to the sphere of architecture of the Nizam Shahi dynasty. The status of the preservation of these buildings is also grim. The book is comprehensive in its approach to dealing with aspects of architecture. The lucid language of the book and the interweaving of elements is interesting, supported by pictures, site plans, and inscriptional evidence. The description of the architecture is accompanied by the narrations of events and political scenarios. Overall, it is an interesting reading.