INTRODUCTION

Nestled at the foot of the majestic Golconda Fort, the Qutb Shahi Heritage Park is spread over 106 acres. This necropolis of the Qutb Shahi dynasty, that ruled the region for 169 years in the 16th – 17th centuries, includes 40 mausoleums, 23 mosques, 6 baolis (step-wells), a hamam (mournatory bath), pavilions and garden structures set within a heritage zone of international significance. No other ensemble of structures in the Deccani kingdoms of Ahmednagar, Berar, Bidar, Bijapur or Gulbarga includes as many monuments of striking grandeur and complexity reflecting a unique synthesis of architectural styles.

On 9 January 2013, Government of Telangana’s Department of Archaeology and Museums, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation’s Quli Qutb Shah Urban Development Authority, Aga Khan Foundation and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture signed a MoU that, over a ten year period, will enable conservation of all monuments and landscape restoration of the Heritage Park. Following the MoU, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust & Allied Trusts have provided required funding for the conservation works on ten major monuments.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Qutb Shahi dynasty ruled present-day Hyderabad region from 1518 AD to 1687 AD, and was founded by Sultan Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk. As great builders and patrons of learning, the Qutb Shahis’ strengthened Golconda - one of India’s most formidable citadels. The funerary architecture of the Qutb Shahi Tomb complex evolved through their rule with most of the mausoleums built by the rulers and their family during their own lifetimes. Similarly, they encouraged the development of Indo-Persian and Indo-Islamic literature and culture in the kingdom.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The monuments in the complex blend Persian, Pathan and Hindu architectural styles and are built with local granite. Surfaces of the historic buildings are ornamented with intricate incised plasterwork and few monuments also bear glazed tilework. The tomb structures are derivations of the geometrical designs of the earlier Bahmani tombs of Bidar though the stucco ornamentation carried out here is more intricate and on a far greater scale. During the Qutb Shahi period, these tombs were held in great veneration.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Conservation Proposal: Through 2012, exhaustive recording, documentation, condition assessment, surveys and research exercise carried out by the multi-disciplinary Aga Khan Trust for Culture team as a precursor to the Conservation Plan that forms the foundation for the project. Over 2000 drawings of the monuments alone have been prepared, in addition to topographical surveys wherein each minor feature of the site has been mapped including all trees. Further archival research and archaeological excavations are being carried out to guide the landscape restoration and enhance the understanding of the site. The conservation works will include further documentation including state-of-art technology such as High Definition Survey’s using 3D Laser scanning technology.

Routing in the Indian context where building craft traditions have been passed from father to son for centuries yet respectful of UNESCO emphasis on retaining authenticity, the conservation works will be implemented by master craftsmen. This are expected to generate over 100,000 man-days of employment for master craftsmen working with stone, lime and ceramic glazed tiles, thus leading a revival of building crafts in the region. No works will be based on conjecture and every effort will be made to ensure conservation efforts are explained through on-site exhibits leading to an enhanced understanding and cultural significance.

Through the conservation works coupled with landscaping of the setting, the project aims to ensure long term preservation, in a public-private partnership model for conservation of our built and intangible heritage in a manner the original builders intended the structures to appear. This major conservation effort will lead to a ripple effect thus attracting a significantly higher number of visitors and tourists, instilling a sense of pride in the city’s residents and creating potential economic opportunities for local businesses.

Conservation works will be carried out in a phased manner to ensure only portions of the site are inaccessible to visiting public at any given time. With its experience in Delhi and projects worldwide, AKTC believes that high degree of supervision by architects, engineers and master craftsmen trained/experienced in handling conservation works is critical to ensuring a proper understanding of the monuments and thus to ensure success of the initiative.

On the basis of investigations, it was found that most of the tomb structures are in a similar state of preservation and suffer from similar patterns of material decay as well as structural defects. Due to dampness and the water seepage, plaster work of the wall surfaces and dome surfaces have deteriorated. One of the common problems in all the structures is the inappropriate application of modern finish completely all over the internal wall surfaces. This has led to disfiguring the historic architectural character.

Conservation works required to be carried out on structures located within the Quli Qutb Shah Heritage Park range from preservation of original material fabric to reconstruction of collapsed building portions such as the step-wells.

The intention of the conservation works is to ensure the significance of the site is preserved and the architectural integrity is maintained which on occasion will require removal of modern material inserted into the built fabric.
**CONSERVATION WORKS**

Conservation works could commence only in November 2013 when a Wakf Tribunal order prohibiting works was lifted following the collapse of the Badi Baoli and some other structures.

As a priority, over 600 cu. m. of stone masonry walls of the Badi Baoli were rebuilt prior to monsoons in 2014. Conservation works here included removal of 400 cu. m. of collapsed masonry from within the well in a dangerous operation.

At Jamshed Quli Qutb Shah’s Tomb, the removal of deteriorating cement plaster from the domed surface and restoration of traditional lime mortar was carried out to prevent further water ingress which was causing significant cracks. The stucco plasterwork is also being restored on both the internal and external wall surfaces as is the stone edging of the lower plinth—clearly visible in archival images.

On the request of the local community emergency repair works have also commenced on the Abdullah Qutb Shah’s mosque, the roof of which was leaking and from where over 400 mm of cement concrete weighing over 110 tones was manually removed.

Two international peer reviews have already been held to discuss ongoing works and project team has accumulated significant archival material that will help define an appropriate conservation action for each of the monuments within the complex.

**LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS AND STUDIES**

The proposed landscape masterplan, based on site surveys and available archival material, is aimed at an enhanced setting for the monuments and an improved internal visitor circulation. Significant area will be dedicated for ecological zones on the northern and southern sections of the site coupled while reviving water structures, leading to a significantly improved environment within a densely populated city. Ecological trails will allow visiting school children, to have an improved understanding of heritage and ecology issues.

A detailed vegetation survey is being undertaken, to record species, height, spread, girth and condition of each individual tree to inform the landscape plan.

The proposed landscape plan would appropriately utilize the space of the ‘Deccan Park’ as a generously proportioned entrance zone hence establishing an effective presence on the public road, and avoiding the present anomaly of the indirect approach that does not encourage an even spread of visitor activity across the complex. Judicious modification and re-organisation of entrances and paths will increase accessibility of the older parts of the complex and allow visitors to easily traverse the whole site and understand its sequential development rather than restrict their experience to only a part. A path system based on the history of the place would play a vital role in enriching the visitors’ experience of this large, deep and complex historical site.