

Nizam's Wardrobe in Hyderabad

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Abstract

A visit to any museum is an exciting part of a scholar's life, but it becomes more meaningful and engaging when the museum itself is an amazing part of history. While researching on elite Indian menswear, I chanced to visit the Nizam's wardrobe. It was interesting to note that the articles in the wardrobe were not as exciting as the wardrobe itself. This short article is a first hand account of the visit to Nizam's wardrobe and has no references thus. The aim of this article is to encourage people to visit this marvel.

Introduction

There are many museums across the world; each one has its amazing features. I have been fortunate to visit many museums during my life, most of them are well known to the world, but one I found to be very special, which deserves to be known to a wider audience, and needs more attention. While conducting my research on the British influence on Indian menswear, and in the search for *sherwani*, I had to visit Hyderabad.

As was planned I visited the Salarjung Museum to see the exhibits and the Chowmahalla Palace Museum, I was told by one of the attendants at the Chowmahalla Palace Museum that while I am here, I must visit the Nizam's wardrobe. He insisted that it was worth a visit and thus I went to see the wardrobe. I remembered that one of my friend's had also mentioned it once, and thus I was keen to see the wardrobe museum. It was rather difficult to find it, as no one knew where and what is the Nizam's wardrobe, someone then informed me that I must say that I want to go to the MukkaramJah Junior College. The Figure 2 below shows the outside of the museum, thus people did not know that it is a museum. From the outside, the façade of the building shows that it used to be a wonderful *haveli*, but now it has been converted to a college (Figure -1). This wardrobe is in *puranihavelli* (literally meaning – the old palace) at Hyderabad. Once you enter inside and ask for the wardrobe, the sentry knows where to go.

Once I entered the place, I truly marvelled at its size. A truly phenomenal exhibit in its own right, the wardrobe, is 176 feet long, I was told, and is made of the finest of the Burma teak. It has two floors. It was supposed to belong to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, HEH Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, (1869-1911) who was a man of refined tastes and had the money to support his fancies. The Nizam ruled Hyderabad, independent of the British. His huge wardrobe was truly very impressive. It is really surprising that this marvel is not known to many. It looked like many wardrobes in a single place, you may also call it akin to the changing rooms in the malls today. But if we pause to think this was built in the early 20th century and was for a single man. The complete luxury that it would have been can only be imagined today. One can recreate by imagination that the teak wardrobe, with two floors, with multiple racks and many divisions would have been a warehouse of rich textiles. Today it is a mere shadow of its past. It showcases some menswear and some women's wear articles of clothing. They represented the fashion choices of the Indian elite of the late 19th and early 20th century.



Figure 1: The entrance to the wardrobe, Photo Courtesy: Author

It is believed that rich merchants and friends gifted the Nizam articles of clothing, which he stored here and a tailor sat at one end of the wardrobe always ready to create new garments. The museum keeper also informed me that the Nizam never repeated his clothes and once worn, his clothes were given away. Which meant that it was not really possible to see what he used to actually wear. His pictures show him to be a remarkable modern man. What I saw however were a few clothes in each compartment, showcasing the styles of early 20th century. Figure 3, shows a *sherwani* (not in its best condition), hanging in the museum.



Figure 2: The Nizam's wardrobe
Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure 3: A *sherwani* hanging in the wardrobe. Photo Courtesy:

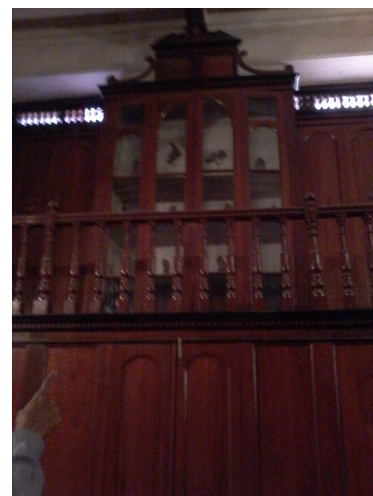


Figure 4: Part of the wardrobe,
Photo Courtesy: Author

The upper floor of the wardrobe could not be accessed, but I was told that the Nizam kept his shoes there. He used a hand operated lift to go to the upper floor of his wardrobe. This was the time of Anglicization of the Indian elite. The Nizam could read and write in English, wore western clothes and organised balls for his British guests. The chandeliers made of Belgian glass and billiard tables were all imported from Europe. He experimented a lot with clothing, wore western as well as Indian clothes. Figure 4 shows one end of the wardrobe that has two floors.

I wish I had more time to dig deep into the history of this wardrobe and to find out how did he get this idea, who helped him to create this piece of marvel and how was it actually used. Apart from this, there were a few rooms housing other artifacts, showcasing the rich history of Hyderabad's past. There were gold plated pens and paperweight, many other exquisite things that were made during the time period of the seventh Nizam, Osman Ali Khan, who was the son of the sixth Nizam. I do hope in future I visit this again and that the world knows this museum.

References

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About the Author

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