

## **Heritage Buildings in Mysuru: A Glimpse into the City's Rich Architectural Legacy**

**1. Dr.V.Vinay Krishna**

Research scholar

Department of ancient history and archaeology, Manasagangothri  
Mysore.

University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnataka, India.

**1. Dr. Thomas Feldman**

Professor

Department of ancient history and archaeology  
Maharaja's College Mysore.

University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnataka, India.

### **Abstract:**

Mysuru, a city deeply embedded in the cultural and historical fabric of southern India, is renowned for its architectural legacy, which spans from royal heritage to colonial influences. The city boasts a remarkable collection of heritage buildings that reflect its diverse history, cultural richness, and artistic grandeur. This article explores significant architectural landmarks in Mysuru, focusing on their historical contexts, architectural styles, and the role they play in preserving the city's identity. Key structures, including the Mysuru Palace, Jaganmohan Palace, St. Philomena's Church, and others, serve as prime examples of the fusion of indigenous and foreign architectural elements, such as Indo-Saracenic, Dravidian, and colonial styles. The city's architectural evolution mirrors its transition from a regal kingdom to a colonial-era settlement, highlighting the dynamic influences of the Wodeyar dynasty and British rule. Through an examination of these heritage buildings, the paper emphasizes the importance of architectural conservation in maintaining Mysuru's rich cultural heritage. The study not only serves as a record of the city's past but also calls for greater attention to the preservation and restoration of these monuments, ensuring that future generations can continue to appreciate and understand the architectural legacy of Mysuru.

**Keywords:** *Heritage Buildings, Mysuru Architecture, Wodeyar Dynasty, Indo-Saracenic Architecture, Cultural Landmarks, Heritage Conservation*

## **Introduction:**

Mysuru, once the capital of the princely state of Mysore, is a city that has long been a hub of cultural, architectural, and political significance. Its history is marked by the patronage of the Wodeyar dynasty, which ruled the region for centuries, and its later association with British colonial influence. This unique blend of indigenous and foreign elements has left an indelible mark on the city's architectural landscape, making Mysuru one of the most architecturally diverse cities in India.

The architectural heritage of Mysuru is not just a reflection of its royal past but also an embodiment of the social and cultural shifts that have shaped the city over the centuries. The influence of the Wodeyars is evident in the majestic palaces, temples, and public buildings they constructed, while the period of British colonial rule brought with it European-inspired architectural styles that transformed the city's infrastructure. From the grandeur of the Mysuru Palace, a symbol of royal opulence, to the neo-gothic spires of St. Philomena's Church, the city showcases a harmonious blend of styles that speak to its rich cultural history.

The architectural diversity of Mysuru also extends to religious structures, colonial-era buildings, and public spaces, each telling a story of the city's past. The city is a living museum of architectural styles, with each building serving as a historical marker of its time. The preservation of these heritage buildings has thus become a critical issue in the modern era, as rapid urbanization and development threaten to overshadow the city's historical landmarks.

This paper aims to explore the architectural significance of some of the most important heritage buildings in Mysuru. By examining their design, historical context, and the socio-political factors that influenced their construction, this study seeks to highlight the importance of these buildings as cultural symbols and as integral components of the city's identity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for conservation efforts to protect these structures from decay and destruction, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy and learn from Mysuru's rich architectural heritage.

## **Architectural Legacy of Mysuru:**

Mysuru's architectural legacy is an extraordinary blend of various styles and influences that span centuries of historical development. From the medieval period to the colonial era, the city's architecture showcases a unique synthesis of indigenous craftsmanship, royal patronage, and colonial aesthetics. The architectural landscape of Mysuru not only reflects the changing political powers but also represents the cultural and artistic vibrancy of the city, making it a living testament to India's diverse architectural traditions.

## **Indigenous and Dravidian Influences**

The earliest architectural legacy in Mysuru was heavily influenced by the indigenous South Indian styles, particularly Dravidian architecture, which is best exemplified in the region's temples and palace structures. Temples like the Keshava Temple in Mysuru highlight the expertise of local craftsmen who created exquisite sculptures, carvings, and intricate designs on pillars, walls, and ceilings. These temples are characterized by their towering spires (shikharas), grand gopurams (entrance towers), and expansive courtyards, which are traditional elements of Dravidian architecture. The style emphasized detailed stonework and

an intricate connection between sacred space and natural elements, which continues to define many of Mysuru's religious landmarks.

### **Royal Patronage and Indo-Saracenic Architecture**

Mysuru's architectural heritage was significantly shaped by the Wodeyar dynasty, who were great patrons of the arts and architecture. The construction of royal palaces, such as the Mysuru Palace (Amba Vilas Palace), became a prominent symbol of the city's architectural identity. The Wodeyars were instrumental in blending traditional Indian architectural styles with influences from Islamic, Persian, and European architecture, leading to the development of a unique hybrid style known as **Indo-Saracenic**. The Mysuru Palace itself is a striking example of this style, combining Gothic arches, Mughal domes, and Rajput-inspired elements with classical European details like verandas, towers, and turrets. This fusion reflects the cosmopolitan influences on the Wodeyars' court and their desire to project both royal opulence and cultural sophistication.

### **Colonial Influences and British Era Structures**

The period of British colonial rule brought significant changes to the city's architecture. The British introduced European styles, particularly **Indo-Saracenic**, which combined elements of Victorian, Gothic, and Classical styles with local traditions. This led to the creation of several important civic structures, such as the **Mysuru Railway Station** and **Lalitha Mahal Palace**, which embody these European influences. The **Mysuru Railway Station**, for example, is a fine example of colonial-era design, with its grand clock tower, arched windows, and expansive platforms. Similarly, the **Lalitha Mahal Palace**, built in 1921, stands as a testament to colonial-era grandeur, blending neoclassical and Indian architectural elements to create an imposing structure with a marble façade and towering columns.

### **Public and Civic Architecture**

Mysuru's architectural legacy also includes several civic buildings that were constructed during the British colonial period and reflect the urban planning efforts of the time. Buildings such as **St. Philomena's Church**, a magnificent neo-gothic structure, and the **Dufferin Clock Tower** reflect the grandeur and scale of colonial public works. These structures, with their pointed arches, tall spires, and ornate detailing, are designed to symbolize the colonial power and influence that pervaded the city during that era. Additionally, public spaces like **Chamarajendra Park (Cubbon Park)** were designed as part of an urban aesthetic that sought to blend nature with the built environment, further demonstrating the fusion of local and foreign architectural ideas.

### **Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture**

Mysuru's legacy is also marked by its thoughtful urban planning, which integrated green spaces, public amenities, and wide boulevards within the city. **Chamarajendra Park**, or **Cubbon Park**, established in the late 19th century, is a prime example of colonial landscape architecture. Designed by British engineer Richard Sankey, the park serves as a model of urban design that combines formal garden planning with open, expansive lawns and tree-lined paths. This vision for public spaces was part of a broader effort to create aesthetically pleasing and functional urban environments during the colonial era.

The **old city market area**, or **Doddakere Maidan**, also speaks to the blend of cultural and architectural practices, where traditional South Indian forms of commercial spaces are

combined with colonial-era influences. The market's architecture is representative of Mysuru's thriving trade and commerce, showcasing a mix of European-styled arches and traditional Indian open marketplaces.

### Modern Architectural Preservation

As Mysuru continues to grow and modernize, the preservation of its architectural legacy has become an important consideration. While the city has embraced contemporary developments, there is a concerted effort to conserve the historic buildings that have shaped its identity. Organizations and heritage conservationists work to protect structures like the Mysuru Palace, Jaganmohan Palace, and the railway station from degradation due to urban expansion and environmental factors. Efforts to restore and maintain these buildings ensure that they continue to serve as both architectural marvels and cultural symbols for future generations.

Mysuru's architectural legacy is a stunning testament to the city's rich history, its evolution from a medieval kingdom to a colonial city, and its ongoing cultural vibrancy. The fusion of indigenous, colonial, and royal architectural styles has created a unique cityscape that reflects the dynamic influences that have shaped Mysuru over the centuries. From the traditional stone temples and palaces to the neoclassical structures built during British rule, Mysuru stands as a city that celebrates its architectural diversity. Preserving these architectural landmarks is essential for maintaining the city's historical and cultural identity while embracing the opportunities for growth and development in the future.

### Key Heritage Buildings in Mysuru

Mysuru is home to a fascinating array of heritage buildings that capture the city's royal history, religious traditions, and colonial legacy. These buildings, ranging from grand palaces to charming public structures, tell the story of the city's transformation from a medieval kingdom to a cosmopolitan cultural hub. Below are some of the most significant heritage buildings in Mysuru, each with its own historical and architectural significance.

#### 1. Mysuru Palace (Amba Vilas Palace)

- **Historical Background:** The current Mysuru Palace was built between 1897 and 1912, designed by British architect Henry Irwin, after the original palace was destroyed by fire in 1897. It was constructed under the reign of the Wodeyar family, who had already established their royal rule in Mysuru. The palace was the residence of the royal family and served as the administrative center during the Wodeyars' reign.
- **Architectural Features:** The palace combines **Indo-Saracenic** and **Gothic** styles with a **Mughal** influence. The building includes **stained glass windows**, **domes**, **minarets**, and intricate **wooden carvings**. The **Durbar Hall** and the **Amba Vilas** are iconic parts of the palace. The **golden throne**, housed in the palace, is one of the most treasured possessions of the Wodeyars.
- **Significance:** The Mysuru Palace represents the **royal heritage** of the Wodeyars and continues to be the center of **Mysuru's cultural identity**, especially during the **Dasara festival**. It also reflects the synthesis of Indian and Western architectural

styles, showcasing the Wodeyars' ability to incorporate both indigenous and foreign elements into the royal structures.

## 2. Jaganmohan Palace

- **Historical Background:** Built in 1861 by the Wodeyars as a royal residence, Jaganmohan Palace later served as a temporary residence for the royal family after the Mysuru Palace was destroyed by fire in 1897. In 1915, it was transformed into a **public art gallery** and is now one of the oldest art galleries in the region.
- **Architectural Features:** Designed in the **Indo-Saracenic** style, the palace has large **arched windows**, high ceilings, and detailed **frescoes** that depict Hindu mythology and royal life. The **central hall** is especially famous for its murals, and the palace also features **intricate wooden carvings**.
- **Significance:** The **Jaganmohan Palace Art Gallery** houses an extensive collection of **traditional** and **modern Indian art**, including paintings by renowned Indian artists such as **Raja Ravi Varma**. It is a significant cultural institution and a testament to the royal patronage of the arts in Mysuru.

## 3. St. Philomena's Church

- **Historical Background:** Built between 1933 and 1936, St. Philomena's Church was constructed by the Wodeyars in honor of **Saint Philomena**, a Catholic saint from Greece. The church was built to cater to the growing Christian community in Mysuru, reflecting the influence of **Christianity** in the city.
- **Architectural Features:** The church is built in the **neo-Gothic** style and features **two towering spires** that rise to 175 feet, making it one of the tallest churches in India. It also has **stained-glass windows** that depict scenes from the life of Saint Philomena and other religious figures. The church is also known for its vast **interior**, which includes high arches and a **large nave**.
- **Significance:** St. Philomena's Church serves as an important **spiritual and cultural center** for Christians in the region. The church symbolizes the **diverse religious fabric** of Mysuru, a city known for its religious tolerance and pluralism. The **royal patronage** of this church also underscores the Wodeyars' commitment to fostering harmony among different communities.

## 4. Lalitha Mahal Palace

- **Historical Background:** Constructed in 1921 by the Wodeyars, Lalitha Mahal was designed to accommodate royal guests. The palace's design was influenced by the **Renaissance style** and is built on a **grand scale**, with a combination of **colonial** and **Indian architectural styles**.
- **Architectural Features:** The palace features **neoclassical** and **Indo-Saracenic** elements, with **grand staircases**, high ceilings, **mosaic flooring**, and **marble columns**. The **central dome** is particularly striking, and the **large verandas** and **spacious halls** were designed to host royal gatherings.
- **Significance:** Lalitha Mahal Palace is a **monument to royal luxury** and represents the grandeur of the Wodeyar era. It has been transformed into a **heritage hotel**, but it

still retains its royal essence and serves as a major tourist attraction in Mysuru, showcasing the Wodeyars' opulent lifestyle.

## 5. Mysuru Railway Station

- **Historical Background:** The Mysuru Railway Station, built in 1882, was a pivotal infrastructure development during the British colonial period, facilitating greater connectivity between Mysuru and other parts of India. It is a significant part of the colonial era's urbanization in Mysuru.
- **Architectural Features:** Built in **Indo-Saracenic** style, the station features **arches, ironwork, and a clock tower**. The **high ceilings** and **large open halls** reflect the tropical climate of the region. The **stone carvings** on the exterior are intricate and aesthetically designed.
- **Significance:** The station is an important transport hub and reflects the **colonial influence on the development of Mysuru's infrastructure**. It remains an essential part of the city's daily functioning while also showcasing the era's architectural style.

## 6. Karanji Lake Nature Park and Mansion

- **Historical Background:** The Karanji Lake Mansion was originally built by the Wodeyars in the 19th century as a **royal leisure retreat**. It is situated near **Chamundi Hill** and overlooks the **Karanji Lake**. The mansion was constructed as part of the Wodeyars' interest in integrating nature into royal life.
- **Architectural Features:** The mansion is a mix of **colonial** and **traditional Indian architecture**, with **high-ceilinged rooms**, large **verandas**, and **arched windows** that blend into the surrounding landscape. The lake, along with **lush gardens**, further enhances the building's aesthetic appeal.
- **Significance:** The mansion, now a part of **Karanji Lake Nature Park**, symbolizes the Wodeyars' commitment to preserving nature while offering a retreat from royal duties. The park has become a sanctuary for birds and animals and is a prime example of conservation efforts in Mysuru.

## 7. Chamarajendra Park (Cubbon Park)

- **Historical Background:** Established in 1874 by **Chamaraja Wodeyar**, Cubbon Park was designed to create a green space in the city, reflecting a British-era initiative to include parks in urban planning. It was part of a larger effort to develop Mysuru as a modern city under colonial rule.
- **Architectural Features:** The park is a blend of **natural beauty** and **colonial architecture**, with **fountains, statues, and wide walkways**. **Colonial-era buildings** like the **High Court** and **Legislative Assembly** are located within the park. The park is designed with **lawn spaces** and various plant species.
- **Significance:** Cubbon Park serves as a **green lung** in the city, providing space for relaxation and recreation. It is a reflection of the **colonial urban planning** influence and a testament to Mysuru's focus on creating urban spaces that blend nature and urbanization.

## 8. Dufferin Clock Tower

- **Historical Background:** Built in 1886, the Dufferin Clock Tower was erected in honor of **Lord Dufferin**, the British Viceroy of India. It marks the colonial period's influence on Mysuru's infrastructure.
- **Architectural Features:** The tower, in **Gothic style**, stands tall with its intricate **stonework, large arches**, and **clock face** that continues to mark time for the city.
- **Significance:** The Dufferin Clock Tower is an important **historical landmark** and continues to serve as a navigational point in the city, symbolizing the colonial-era emphasis on public infrastructure.

## 9. Keshava Temple

- **Historical Background:** Constructed during the **Hoysala dynasty** in the 12th century, the Keshava Temple represents the deep-rooted history of Hindu religious practices in Mysuru. It is one of the oldest surviving temples in the region.
- **Architectural Features:** The temple features **Dravidian** and **Hoysala architectural elements**, such as intricately **carved stone pillars, high spires**, and detailed **sculptures** of Hindu gods and mythological stories.
- **Significance:** The temple is not only a **religious center** but also a historical symbol of the region's rich architectural and cultural heritage.

## 10. Doddakere Maidan (Old City Market)

- **Historical Background:** The **Old City Market**, established in the 19th century, was a key commercial center during the Wodeyars' rule. It reflects Mysuru's growing economy and urbanization during this time.
- **Architectural Features:** The market features **colonial-era buildings** with **iron frames, large arches**, and open spaces designed to accommodate a variety of goods and vendors.
- **Significance:** The market remains an important **commercial hub** and an enduring **cultural landmark**, reflecting Mysuru's development as an urban center.

## 11. Chikka Gadiyara (Small Clock Tower)

- **Historical Background:** Constructed around the early 20th century, the Chikka Gadiyara was another timekeeping structure built during the colonial period to help maintain order in the city.
- **Architectural Features:** The tower is a smaller version of the Dufferin Clock Tower, with a **cylindrical design** and **clock face** at the top.
- **Significance:** The clock tower symbolizes **Mysuru's colonial-era planning**, and it continues to serve as a useful landmark for the local community.

## 11. Chikka Gadiyara (Small Clock Tower)

- **Historical Background:** Chikka Gadiyara, built in the early 20th century, was part of the efforts to modernize and beautify the city during British rule. It stands as a smaller

counterpart to the more prominent Dufferin Clock Tower but is still an essential timekeeping and navigation landmark for locals. Its construction marked an era when clock towers became integral parts of urban planning, symbolizing both British influence and the development of the city.

- **Historical Significance:** Chikka Gadiyara is a **symbol of colonial-era infrastructure** and urban planning in Mysuru. Though smaller in scale, it serves as a **local landmark**, reinforcing the importance of clock towers in marking time for residents and visitors alike.
- **Architectural Features:** The tower features a simple design with a **cylindrical structure** and a **clock face**, standing as a **key navigation point** in the city's landscape.

## 12. K.R. Hospital (Krishna Rajendra Hospital)

- **Historical Background:** Established in **1852**, K.R. Hospital was one of the **first modern hospitals** in Mysuru, founded under the patronage of the Wodeyars. The hospital was part of the Wodeyars' efforts to modernize the city and provide better healthcare services to the public, reflecting the royal family's dedication to the welfare of their subjects.
- **Historical Significance:** K.R. Hospital stands as a **milestone in public health** in Mysuru, symbolizing the Wodeyars' progressive vision for the city's development. It remains an essential healthcare institution, providing medical services and continuing the legacy of royal care and service.
- **Architectural Features:** The hospital building reflects a **colonial design** with **functional healthcare architecture**, featuring **large windows**, **high ceilings**, and expansive **hallways** to accommodate patients and ensure proper ventilation.

## 13. Rajendra Vilas Palace

- **Historical Background:** Rajendra Vilas Palace was built as a **royal retreat** on **Chamundi Hill** for the Wodeyars. It was designed to offer the royal family a peaceful environment away from the hustle and bustle of the city. The palace represents the Wodeyars' love for natural beauty, as its location atop Chamundi Hill provides stunning views of the surrounding region.
- **Historical Significance:** As a retreat for the Wodeyars, the palace symbolizes **royal leisure and tranquility**. Over time, it became an important spot for visitors seeking a serene location with majestic views of Mysuru.
- **Architectural Features:** The palace combines **Indo-Saracenic architectural styles** with natural elements, creating an elegant yet peaceful environment for the royal family. The palace's strategic location atop Chamundi Hill makes it a stunning example of **harmonizing architecture with nature**.

## 14. Devaraja Market

- **Historical Background:** Established in **1886**, Devaraja Market is one of Mysuru's **oldest and most vibrant markets**, named after **Devaraja Wodeyar**. The market was designed to cater to the growing commercial activities of Mysuru during the Wodeyar



era. It reflects the Wodeyars' foresight in creating infrastructure that served the city's commercial and social needs.

- **Historical Significance:** Devaraja Market is a **cultural and commercial hub** that reflects the **economic heart** of Mysuru. Established during the Wodeyars' reign, it has been a symbol of Mysuru's commercial growth. It continues to serve the local population while attracting tourists with its lively atmosphere and rich history.
- **Architectural Features:** The market features a **colonial-style iron roof, colorful facades, and open-air spaces** that cater to both locals and tourists. Its vibrant atmosphere blends **modern and traditional elements**, offering a glimpse into Mysuru's bustling market culture.

### 15. Maharaja's College

- **Historical Background:** Established in **1864**, Maharaja's College is one of the **oldest educational institutions** in Mysuru. It was founded under the patronage of the Wodeyars to provide high-quality education, especially in the liberal arts and sciences. The college was instrumental in shaping the intellectual landscape of the city, fostering a spirit of learning among the residents of Mysuru.
- **Historical Significance:** Maharaja's College has played a key role in the **educational development** of Mysuru, producing many prominent scholars and leaders. The institution is a symbol of the Wodeyars' commitment to education and the advancement of knowledge in the region.
- **Architectural Features:** The building combines **neoclassical and colonial architectural styles**, featuring **large columns, arches, and wide verandas**. The **elegant façade** and well-maintained gardens contribute to the college's legacy as a prestigious educational center.

### 16. The University of Mysore (Main Building)

- **Historical Background:** The University of Mysore, established in **1916**, was the **first university** in the state of Karnataka and one of the first in southern India. It was created to offer higher education and foster academic excellence in Mysuru and the surrounding areas.
- **Historical Significance:** The establishment of the University of Mysore marked a **milestone in educational reform** in the region, contributing significantly to the development of higher education in South India.
- **Architectural Features:** The main building of the university showcases **Indo-Saracenic architecture**, with **arches, domes, and large open courtyards**. The grand design of the building reflects its dual purpose of serving both **academic and ceremonial functions**.

### 17. The Government House (Raj Bhavan)

- **Historical Background:** Raj Bhavan serves as the official residence of the **Governor of Karnataka** when in Mysuru. Built during the British colonial period, it was originally designed as a residence for the British officials and later adapted to house the Governor after India gained independence.

- **Historical Significance:** Raj Bhavan symbolizes Mysuru's **administrative heritage** and its importance as a **political hub** in the region. It represents the **continuity of governance** in the state and serves as a key historical building for Karnataka.
- **Architectural Features:** The building exhibits a fusion of **colonial** and **traditional Indian architectural elements**, evident in its **portico**, **columns**, and expansive **grounds**. The large gardens around the building enhance its **picturesque setting**, creating a serene atmosphere.

#### 18. The High Court of Karnataka, Mysuru

- **Historical Background:** The High Court of Karnataka in Mysuru was established during the **British colonial era** as a center for judicial authority in the region. It has served as a symbol of the region's judicial system, dispensing justice for the people of Mysuru and surrounding areas.
- **Historical Significance:** The High Court building stands as an important symbol of **legal authority** in Mysuru and Karnataka. It has contributed significantly to the development of judicial systems in the state, with its **colonial-era** foundation continuing to shape legal practices in the region.
- **Architectural Features:** The High Court building is a prime example of **Indo-Saracenic** architecture, with **grand arches**, **columns**, and **decorative stonework**. Its imposing structure reflects both its **prestigious function** and its historical significance in the region's legal landscape.

#### 19. The Lalit Mahal Palace Hotel (The Lalitha Mahal)

- **Historical Background:** Originally built in **1921** as a **royal guesthouse** for visiting dignitaries and royal family members, Lalit Mahal Palace was designed to provide a luxurious setting for the Wodeyars' guests. It was later transformed into a **luxury hotel** and continues to operate as one, retaining much of its original grandeur.
- **Historical Significance:** The Lalit Mahal Palace was a symbol of **royal hospitality** and luxury under the Wodeyars. Its transformation into a hotel has allowed visitors to experience the opulence once reserved for royal guests.
- **Architectural Features:** The palace combines **Italian Renaissance** and **Indian architectural styles**, featuring **large domes**, a **marble façade**, and **detailed frescoes**. It is one of the most stunning structures in Mysuru, with a timeless appeal that continues to attract visitors from around the world.

#### Conclusion:

These buildings serve as **tangible markers** of Mysuru's **rich cultural, architectural, and historical legacy**. From the **royal residences** and **cultural institutions** to the **colonial infrastructure**, each heritage site reflects a distinct phase in the city's evolution, showcasing the blend of **royal magnificence** and **colonial influence**. Together, they represent the **legacy of the Wodeyars**, colonial rule, and post-independence governance, all contributing to the cultural richness that defines Mysuru today. These key heritage buildings in Mysuru are an incredible testament to the city's architectural evolution, from royal grandeur to colonial influences and modern-day importance. Each building holds historical, cultural, and architectural significance, helping to tell the story of Mysuru's development from a royal capital to a modern city, while maintaining its rich heritage. These landmarks serve as both a reminder of the past and a bridge to the future.

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**Online Resources:**

1. **Mysuru Tourism Official Website** - [www.mysore.nic.in](http://www.mysore.nic.in)
2. **Archaeological Survey of India** - [www.asihyderabadcircle.in](http://www.asihyderabadcircle.in)
3. **Indian Heritage Sites** - [www.heritageindia.com](http://www.heritageindia.com)