

Restoration of historic OontKadal: a challenging task to conserve the built heritage within the Lake



Photos: Ongoing restoration of historic OontKadal in Dal Lake, Srinagar © INTACH, J&K 2019

Despite the harshness of winter, and the challenges of working at sub zero temperatures surrounded by water, the restoration of historic OontKadal continues and is about to be completed soon. Built in the 17th Century AD in the famous Dal Lake, the historic bridge was in dilapidated condition for long, and on the verge to collapse. The project, undertaken by INTACH J&K, is funded by the Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, New Delhi, and supported by the State Government. The OontKadal forms an important part of the public realm that constitutes the combined environ of the Dal Lake, the Zabarwan Mountain range and the potential World Heritage Site of Mughal garden, Nishat Bagh.

OontKadal, the stone masonry bridge, was part of the erstwhile ChaudhriSoth (also called Soth-i-Chodri) that started at the end of the Naidyar Bridge in Kralyar (Rainawari) in the old city and opened up across the Lake at Ishber, Nishat. It was built during Mughal rule around the later part of 1670s to facilitate the pilgrimage to the ancient Hindu temple at Ishber.

Conservation brief:

While adhering strictly to the principles of conservation, Saima Iqbal, Lead Conservation Architect with INTACH, J&K explained briefly the process of conservation work carried so far on the site in the following manner:

- Cleaning the site of vegetative overgrowth and loose rubble.
- Consolidating the foundation by means of strengthening and underpinning the earth stratum below water.
- Reversing previous inappropriate interventions that included repairs in brick masonry and masonry that lacked proper bonded with original masonry
- Considering the substantial thickness of the masonry walls, which are essentially double-leaf Wythes and lacked any through bonding, it was important to retrofit the structure by means of using tying systems that ran the thickness of the walls so that the walls would not experience delamination as previously experienced.

To understand the hydraulic properties and strength of the lime mortar used in OontKadal originally, samples of lime from the site were lab-examined so that the new lime mortar mix could match the original as closely as possible.



Photo: Ongoing restoration of historic OontKadal in Dal Lake, Srinagar © INTACH, J&K 2019



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- Since the project commenced as winter and subsequently sub-zero temperatures were approaching, a decision was taken to carry out the entire reconstruction in dry masonry which will then be grouted and pointed with lime mix when temperatures improved.
- All the trees growing from the fabric of OontKadal and therefore compromising its strength were carefully removed and subsequently treated with appropriate herbicide to avoid any future growth of trees from the masonry.
- Logistics of material have been one of the most challenging aspects of restoring OontKadal. A boat, called khoch, traditionally used to ferry sand from rivers has been used to carry stone, sand, lime etc from the shore the site within Dal Lake – this made the process very labour intensive and relatively time-consuming.

INTACH joined the mission to Conserve Manuscripts; signed MoU with NMM to safeguard documentary heritage



Photo: Remedial treatment to a manuscript © INTACH, J&K 2019

As a significant step towards preservation of manuscripts, INTACH Kashmir joined the National Mission on manuscripts to save the documentary heritage of the country. The mission aims at documenting the collections, taking appropriate steps for conservation including preventive as well as remedial measures, and digitizing the manuscripts for access and easy availability online for any research.

INTACH, Kashmir has set up the Manuscript Centre for preservation of manuscripts and written heritage in Kashmir. Earlier a 5-day workshop was organized by INTACH in collaboration with State Archives department to sensitize the collectors, who are in possession of manuscripts and rare books, about the need to adopting scientific methods of preservation and secure these from further deterioration. The workshop received overwhelming response from the Government as well as the private repositories.

Establish a full-fledged conservation laboratory in Srinagar

INTACH is working to establish a full-fledged paper conservation lab in Srinagar. As a first step, the staff is undergoing special training course first at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, then from Himalayan Society for Heritage and Art Conservation, Nantital and Manuscript Conservation Centre Lucknow. The laboratory shall function in technical consultation with the best conservators of IGNCA and under the aegis of NMM.

AttaullahKhanqahi: a forgotten kashmiri mathematician of 17th century, coming alive from the debris of history.

Abdul QadirSarwari, the most eminent scholar from Hyderabad donned the mantle of headship of Urdu Department of Kashmir University some time in 1962. The pleasant memories of great contribution of Kashmiris to the Persian literature motivated him to research and write the 'History of Persian literature in Kashmir, (*Kashmir main farsiadabkitareekh*). Apart from the hard core literature, his research also lead him to the work of Kashmiris in uncharted world of sciences. He chanced on a book, '*KhazeenatulAedad*'(Treasures of Numerical) written by one AttaullahKhanqahi. Sciences not being his forte, he left it at just the mention of this book and the author.

The honor of locating and the reading this work of Science belonged to another of the eminent scholars from main land India, DrRazaullah Ansari, Professor of Physics, Aligarh Muslim University. Finding the huge merit of the work, he presented the contents and his commentary on the book at a mathematics conference in Cambridge University,UK some time in 2004. As of today, we know nothing about the author. The day is not far when such significant works of Kashmiri scholars will be recognized by international scholarship. If only our university and Departments of languages move beyond churning out unemployable post grads and Doctorates when these and other treasures can be unearthed. This, apart from restoring their lost prestige and dignity, will also bring to light the wisdom and scholarship of our glorious past.

Reference from Peerzada Ashraf Sahib (former Deputy Director Archives. He is also researching on Persian mathematicians of subcontinent).

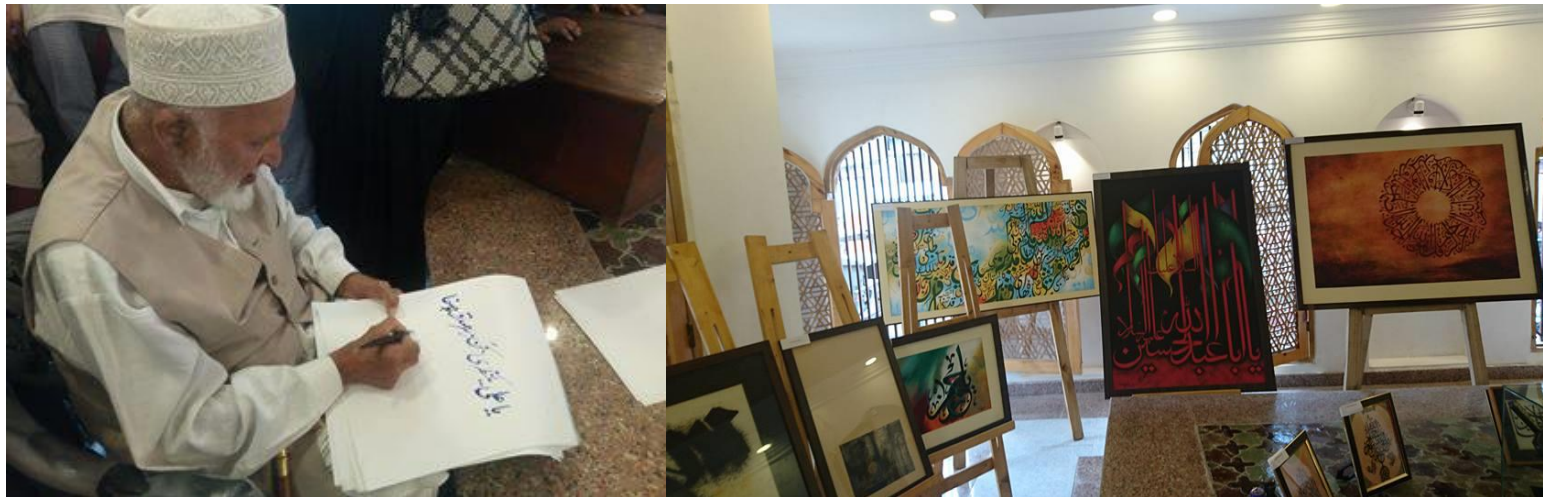
Source: fb post.M Saleem Beg

350 years of archival records of J&K a click away



The Department of Archives J&K is all set to launch the website wherein they have uploaded digitized archival documents from 1724 AD onwards available in the State Archives. This will give access to huge primary historical records of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The step is being widely appreciated, especially by the cultural enthusiasts. The website is under final process and shall be launched soon, said the Director Archives.

Obituary



The last surviving patriarch of the Kundangar family, Mohamad Amin saheb left for his eternal abode on January 17th, 2019, at a respectable age of 93 years. His departure marks the near end of an art form. Once on the high table of markets of precious objects, they survive now only in museums and as family heirlooms. Out of the art forms practiced by our artists that gave Kashmir a unique identity and dignity, gold and silver carving has held a place of prominence. Calligraphy on gold and silver were the preserve of few of them. Kundangars, those who handled kundan (gold) were a class apart. He was not just the last of the practitioner of a dying, rather dead art form. He was an embodiment of humility, a proud master and a mystic who radiated affection and righteousness in word and deed.

In June 2017 INTACH held a calligraphy workshop at Jamia Masjid Srinagar. These were challenging times in Srinagar and we were not sure how long we would survive at the most uncertain location in the old city. More than an inaugural, we wished to have blessings from someone who could impart sanctity to this solemn effort to re-root this craft from where it might have originated. Our prayers were answered when through some divine intervention Amin saheb reached the venue, facilitated by Mrd Kundangar, his noble son and a friend. Amin saheb spent some time with young and old residents of down town Srinagar. This post shows how well he had mastered this art form. His pen matched the instruments in his nimble hands.

Kundangars of Kashmir

The craft traditions of Kashmir have withstood the depredation of time and phases of extremely harsh occupation by outside rulers and these continued to flourish till recent times. It is mainly due to the open mindedness and dedication of the craftsmen to accept and assimilate new ideas that these skills survived the vicissitudes of time. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya (D1988), the most eminent Cultural Historian of subcontinent has placed Kashmir crafts only next to the Indian miniature paintings, a description and status not shared by any other craft community.

With passing away of Mohamad Amin Saheb, the last surviving artist of the kundangar family, this has become an art form of past. Their father, Ghulam Mohamad Kundangar had achieved fame and prosperity in this intricate art form. He was survived by four sons; Ghulam Ahmad, Ghulam Mohidin, Maqbool Hussain and Mohamad Amin. Out of the four, Maqbool Hussain had made a name for himself with a clientele spread among the high and famous all over the British Empire. He and the youngest brother, Mohamad Amin, pursued the family passion for kundangari, jarah and wash kundan, different form of precious metal arts. The clients were sourced by tajirs of Srinagar who would then engage this family for undertaking the manufacture. It seems to have been a respectable and symbiotic relationship, not exploitative in the least, only prevalent in precious metal arts. The two brothers were commissioned to do silver crest for Royal Air force, UK by Habib Joo and Sons. This crest was awarded by the British Government for its intricate craftsmanship.

Descendants of pure Aryan race cry for attention

Well aware of the demands to preserve the cultural and identity of the rare Dard Aryans tribe — believed to be the original descendants of “pure Aryan race” — from the Jammu & Kashmir’s lower Ladakh region, the Union Tribal Ministry awaits for a formal communication from the State Government to give them the status of tribal community.

The Union Culture Ministry has already shared with the Tribal Ministry the concerns of the artists from the Dard Aryans community who at an event held here had expressed fears that modernization, migration, and religious conversion, etc., threaten to wipe away their traditions and culture.

“Dard Aryan’ is not among the list of notified Schedule Tribes. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has not formally received any charter of demands from the concerned State Government for seeking financial help for preservation of cultural heritage of ‘Dard Aryans’”, said Jaswantsinh Bhabhor, Minister of State for Tribal Affairs in a written reply in Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

However, he admitted that a delegation of artists from the community had presented a charter of demands regarding preservation of their culture and other grievances to the Minister of State of Tribal Affairs.

As informed by the Ministry of Culture, during the Seminar on Dard Aryans at IGNCA from 16-21 January, 2019, artists from Dard Aryan Community raised the issues that due to modernization, migration, and religious conversion, etc., their traditions and culture are at threat. However, no formal communication has been received by MoTA from the concerned State in this regard.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) had organized Dard Aryan Festival (Aryan Utsav) last month. Virendra Bangroo, an INGCA scholar and curator of the exhibition showcasing their culture and coordinator of the Arya Utsav said, “So far, the Government has not been able to do anything for this community. Its policies and programmes are yet to reach them. Not many people in the country know about this rich colorful legacy, which today stand threatened.”

The IGNCA has also taken up various initiatives to preserve cultural heritage of the Dard Aryans including assistance in setting up a few museums in the regions of Dard Aryans in Leh, Laddakh, Kargil, etc., with the help of local community.

In addition, the cultural organization, with a view to preserve the cultural heritage of ‘Dard Aryans’, had also organised a seven-day long workshop at Dha-hanu, Laddakh, Jammu & Kashmir last year for documentation of traditions of Aryan Valley.

Source: <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

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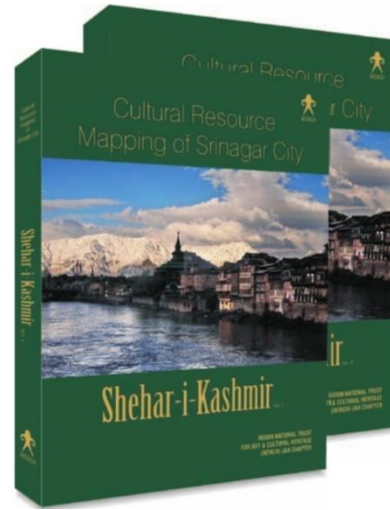
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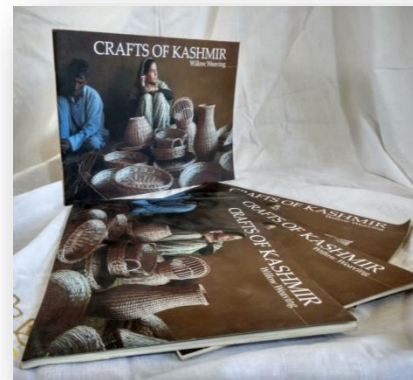


Publications available:



Cultural Resource Mapping of Srinagar City **Shehar-i-Kashmir** 2 Vols.

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