

A Study on Built Heritage and Architectural Legacy of The Wodeyar Dynasty (1399–1947)

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ABSTRACT

The Wodeyar Kingdom of Mysore is renowned for its rich architectural heritage, primarily characterized by a distinctive Indo-Saracenic style that blends elements of Hindu, Islamic, Rajput, and Gothic architecture. This architectural tradition extends beyond royal palaces to encompass numerous temples and public works, collectively shaping Mysore's identity as the "City of Palaces." The Wodeyar architectural style evolved over several centuries, with its later phase strongly influenced by British architects such as Henry Irwin, who introduced European design principles. This paper was majorly two objectives are: to study the built heritage site of the Wodeyar dynasty under Mysore Kingdom and to examine the structure and architectural legacy of the Wodeyar dynasty under Mysore Kingdom.

As per study results, the Wodeyar Dynasty, which ruled the Kingdom of Mysore from 1399 to 1950, made significant contributions to the built heritage and architectural development of present-day Karnataka. Through sustained royal patronage, the dynasty commissioned a wide range of architectural works, including palaces, temples, administrative buildings, and cultural institutions. These structures reflect a gradual evolution from traditional Dravidian architectural forms to a distinctive synthesis of Indo-Saracenic and European styles, influenced by colonial interactions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prominent heritage sites such as the Mysore Palace, Jagannatha Palace, Bangalore Palace, Lalitha Mahal, and Cheluvamba Vilas Palace exemplify this architectural diversity and artistic excellence. The built heritage of the Wodeyar Dynasty thus represents an enduring architectural legacy that embodies historical continuity, cultural synthesis, and regional identity.

Keywords: Wodeyar Dynasty; Built Heritage; Architectural Legacy; Temple Architecture and Cultural Landscape

1. Introduction

The Wodeyar dynasty (also spelled Wadiyar during the British period) was an Indian royal lineage that ruled the Kingdom of Mysore from 1399 to 1947, until India's independence from British rule and the subsequent integration of princely states into the Republic of India. The spellings Wodeyar and Wadiyar appear in most historical records and are also used by members of the royal family. According to modern transliteration conventions from Kannada, the name is rendered as Odeyar or Wadiyar. Phonetically, the term begins with a vowel sound rather than a consonant, as suggested by its English spelling. In Kannada, Odeyar denotes "the king" or "the owner," reflecting the title's royal connotation. Key heritage sites, notably the Mysore Palace, were built, destroyed by fire, and rebuilt, with the current structure completed in 1912 by Henry Irwin, showcasing intricate carvings, durbar halls, and, notably, the Gajalakshmi sculpture.

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2. Evolution and Ruler of Mysore Kingdom

The dynasty was founded by Vijay, who assumed the dynastic name and ruled Mysore—then a small town—from 1399 CE to 1423 CE. The Wadiyars of Vijay's lineage belonged to the Arasu Wadiyar community of Karnataka, which comprised several noble clans of the region. The Kingdom of Mysore was governed by successive Wadiyar rulers for the next few centuries. During its early phase, the kingdom remained relatively small and functioned as a subordinate state within the Vijayanagara Empire. Following the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in 1565, Mysuru attained independence and continued as a sovereign kingdom until 1799. In 1799, during the reign of King Krishna raja Wadiyar III (1799–1868), the Kingdom of Mysuru came under British control. His successors subsequently anglicized the spelling of their royal title to Wadiyar and adopted the honorific Bahadur. The last two monarchs also accepted the British decoration of Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (G.B.E.).

3. Research Objectives

- To study the built heritage site of the Wodeyar dynasty under Mysore Kingdom.
- To examine the structure and architectural legacy of the Wodeyar dynasty under Mysore Kingdom

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical and architectural research methodology to examine the evolution of the Wodeyar Kingdom of Mysore and its distinctive architectural legacy. The research is mainly based on secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical records/ documents, archival documents, and government publications related to South Indian history and architecture.

5. Historical Background of Heritage Sites and Architecture under the Wodeyar Dynasty

The Wodeyar Dynasty, which ruled the Kingdom of Mysore for over five centuries (1399–1950), played a pivotal role in shaping the architectural and cultural landscape of present-day Karnataka. The dynasty was known for its patronage of art, architecture, religion, and education, resulting in the construction of numerous palaces, temples, administrative buildings, and public institutions that today stand as significant heritage sites. Wodeyar architecture evolved over time, reflecting changing political influences and aesthetic preferences. Early constructions were rooted in traditional Dravidian architectural styles, particularly evident in temples and forts. During the later period, especially under the reigns of Maharajas Krishna raja Wodeyar III and IV, the dynasty embraced Indo-Saracenic, European, Gothic, and Tudor architectural styles. This fusion was influenced by colonial interactions while retaining indigenous artistic elements, leading to a unique architectural identity.

Prominent heritage structures such as the Mysore Palace, Jaganmohan Palace, Bangalore Palace, Lalitha Mahal, and Cheluvamba Vilas Palace exemplify this architectural synthesis. These buildings not only served royal and administrative purposes but also functioned as cultural centers, hosting art collections, royal ceremonies, and social gatherings. The use of ornate woodwork, stained glass, vaulted ceilings, expansive courtyards, and landscaped gardens highlights the emphasis placed on grandeur, craftsmanship, and aesthetic refinement. Today, many of these heritage sites have been repurposed as museums, art galleries, educational institutions, and heritage hotels, ensuring their continued relevance and preservation. Collectively, the architectural legacy of the Wodeyar Dynasty represents a significant chapter in South Indian history, illustrating the dynasty's vision of cultural integration, royal patronage, and architectural excellence.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Heritage Sites under Wodeyar Dynasty

Through this study, list of heritage monuments and edifices located in and around the city of Mysore under Wodeyar Dynasty. The city is distinguished by a wide range of historical structures constructed prior to Indian Independence, as well as post-Independence buildings that continue the tradition of classical architectural styles. The history of Mysore city in particular and the Deccan Plateau in general, spans both pre- and post-Independence periods. Mysore

is believed to have existed as an organized political entity even before the historically documented medieval period of India. The regions in and around the Mysore plateau are referenced in Vedic literature, where the area is identified as Mahishaka, meaning “the mighty” or “great” kingdom.

Table –1 Constructed Historical and Heritage Sites under Mysore Dynasty

S. No	Building	Year	Government Buildings	Year
Palaces				
1	Jaganmohana Place	1861	DC Office	1840
2	Jayalakshmi Vilas Palace	1905	Public Offices	1895
3	Mysore Palace	1912	Railway Station	1870
4	Chittaranjan Palace	1916	Lansdowne Building	1879
5	Cheluvamba Vilas Palace	1918	Town Hall	1884
6	Lalithamahal Palace	1921	Devaraja Market	1886
7	Rajendra Vilas Palace	1924	Cheluvamba Hospital	1889
Academic Buildings			Krishnarajendra Hospital	1918
1	Hardwick High School	1840	Chamundeshwari Temple	1670s
2	Maharaja's College	1851	The Parakala Mutt	1810
3	Marimallappa's High School	1876	St Philomina's Church	1933
4	Sadvidya Educational Institute	1854	Masjid E Azam	1925
5	Oriental Research Institute Mysore	1887		
6	Crawford Hall	1915		
7	Maharani's College	1917		
8	Chamarajendra Technical Institute	1917		
9	Mysore Medical College	1924		
10	Sri Chamarajendra Ursu Boarding School	1927		
11	D Banumaiyah's Post-Graduation College	1940		
12	D Banumaiyah's College of Commerce and Arts	1940		

Source: Historical Department, Mysore

- **Mysore Palace (Ambar Vilas)**

Mysore Palace, or Ambar Vilas Palace, is a key heritage monument in India and the former royal residence of the Wodeyar dynasty in Mysore. The completed in 1912 by Maharaja Krishna raja Wadiyar IV after the previous structure was destroyed by fire, it showcases Indo-Saracenic architecture with influences from Hindu, Islamic, Rajput, and Gothic styles. The palace features distinctive domes, arches, and ornate interiors, constructed mainly of grey granite and pink marble. It is known for its artistic elements, such as murals and chandeliers, reflecting the legacy of the Wodeyar rulers. The palace is culturally significant as the center of the annual Dasara festival and currently serves as a major tourist attraction and protected heritage site in Mysore.

- **Jaganmohan Palace**

Jaganmohan Palace, constructed in 1861 in Mysore, was originally used as an alternative and temporary residence for the Wodeyar (Wadiyar) kings during the reconstruction of the main Mysore Palace. In the later period, the palace was repurposed into a public cultural institution and now functions as an art gallery and function hall. At present, it houses an extensive collection of paintings, artifacts, and cultural exhibits, and serves as a venue for various cultural programs, reflecting the artistic and historical legacy of the Wodeyar Dynasty.

- **Bangalore Palace**

It was constructed in 1887 for King Chamarajendra Wadiyar, is a prominent example of Tudor-style architecture inspired by England's Windsor Castle. Located in Bengaluru, the palace spans approximately 45,000 square feet and comprises a two-level structure characterized by fortified towers, turrets, Gothic-style windows, and elaborate wood carvings. The palace stands as a significant symbol of royal opulence, representing a fusion of British architectural influence with the cultural and royal heritage of the Mysore Kingdom.

- **Chamundi Hill & Temples**

Chamundi Hill, overlooking Mysuru, features the 17th-century Chamundeshwari Temple, the tutelary deity (Kula Devi) of the Wodeyar dynasty. Under their rule, particularly under Dodda Deva raja Wodeyar (1659) and Krishna raja Wodeyar III (1827), the temple was significantly developed, adding the 7-tier gopura, massive Nandi statue, and elevating the goddess to state deity status. The Wodeyars regarded Goddess Chamundeshwari as their protector. The famous Mysuru Dasara festival starts with her worship, reflecting her status as Nada Devi (State Goddess). Krishna raja Wodeyar III built the present magnificent 7-storey Raja Gopura in 1827, adorned with golden finials. He also added the silver-plated doorways, and statues of himself and his queens. Dodda Deva raja Wodeyar (1659) is credited with constructing the 1,000+ steps to the hill and the colossal 16-ft high monolithic Nandi (bull) statue situated halfway up.

- **Lalitha Mahal**

It was constructed in 1921 under the reign of Maharaja Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV, is one of the grandest palaces in Mysuru. Designed in an Indo-European architectural style, the palace is distinguished by its imposing white façade, domes, arched corridors, and expansive interiors. Originally built to host royal guests, Lalitha Mahal currently functions as a heritage hotel, reflecting the grandeur and hospitality traditions of the Wodeyar Dynasty.

- **Cheluvamba Vilas Palace**

It was built in 1911, served as the royal residence for the queens of the Wodeyar Dynasty. The palace exemplifies refined royal architecture with spacious halls, ornate interiors, and landscaped gardens. In the present day, it houses the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), thereby continuing its cultural relevance through academic and linguistic research.

6.2 Architecture Legacy under Wodeyar Dynasty

Architecture under the Wodeyar Dynasty (14th–20th century) is distinguished by a unique synthesis of Indo-Saracenic, Hindu, Rajput, and Gothic styles, reflecting both indigenous traditions and external influences. While early constructions emphasized functional and religious architecture, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a period of architectural grandeur and monumental expression. This transition is most prominently exemplified by the Mysore Palace (Ambar Vilas Palace), which stands as the iconic representation of Wodeyar architectural achievement. Following its destruction by fire in 1897, the present Mysore Palace was reconstructed under the patronage of the Wodeyar rulers and designed by British architect Henry Irwin. The structure is characterized by the extensive use of grey granite, distinctive pink domes, expansive arches, and richly ornamented interiors, showcasing exceptional craftsmanship and material sophistication. The palace, along with other contemporaneous structures, illustrates the dynasty's emphasis on aesthetic grandeur, spatial complexity, and architectural symbolism. Key Architectural Features and Structures are as follows:

- **Indo-Saracenic Style**

The Indo-Saracenic architectural style under the Wodeyar Dynasty, particularly during the reign of Maharaja Krishna raja Wadiyar IV, significantly transformed the architectural landscape of Mysuru through the integration of Hindu, Islamic, Rajput, and British Gothic elements. This stylistic synthesis is most prominently exemplified by the Mysore Palace (1897–1912), which stands as an enduring symbol of royal authority and artistic excellence. Designed by

British architect Henry Irwin, the palace is distinguished by its stone domes, expansive arches, and richly ornamented interiors, reflecting both structural sophistication and aesthetic grandeur. Collectively, these features underscore the Wodeyar Dynasty's commitment to architectural innovation and cultural synthesis.

- **Mysore Palace (Amba Vilas)**

Mysore Palace, also known as Amba Vilas Palace, stands as the most iconic architectural achievement of the Wodeyar Dynasty, exemplifying the grandeur and cultural synthesis that defined their rule. Originally built in the 14th century, the palace underwent multiple reconstructions, with the current structure completed between 1897 and 1912 after a fire destroyed its predecessor. Designed by British architect Henry Irwin, the palace showcases the Indo-Saracenic style, a fusion of Hindu, Islamic, Rajput, and Gothic influences, reflecting the dynasty's openness to diverse architectural traditions while emphasizing royal prestige. The palace is primarily constructed of grey granite, complemented by pink domes, ornate arches, and intricately carved interiors. Its expansive halls, decorative ceilings, stained glass windows, and intricate woodwork demonstrate a high level of craftsmanship. The design also integrates courtyards, gardens, and ceremonial spaces, making the palace both a functional royal residence and a symbol of Wodeyar authority and artistic patronage. Today, Mysore Palace remains a heritage landmark, highlighting the architectural innovation and cultural sophistication of the Wodeyar Dynasty.

- **Bangalore Palace**

Bangalore Palace, constructed in 1887 under the patronage of King Chamarajendra Wodeyar, represents a distinctive example of Tudor-style architecture in India, inspired by England's Windsor Castle. The palace reflects the Wodeyar Dynasty's adoption of European architectural influences alongside their traditional emphasis on royal grandeur. The structure spans approximately 45,000 square feet over two levels and features fortified towers, turrets, Gothic-style windows, and intricately carved wooden interiors. The extensive use of wood, ornamental motifs, and sloping roofs demonstrates a blend of European craftsmanship with Indian sensibilities. Designed to serve as a royal residence, the palace also functions as a venue for cultural and social events, highlighting the dynasty's focus on ceremonial architecture and aesthetic elegance. Bangalore Palace, with its combination of fortified design, ornate detailing, and spacious interiors, exemplifies the Wodeyar Dynasty's architectural versatility, illustrating how European styles were adapted to suit Indian royal tastes and climate conditions. Today, it stands as a heritage landmark, preserving the legacy of Mysuru's royal architectural vision.

- **Temple Architecture**

The Wodeyar Dynasty (1399–1950) played a significant role in shaping the religious and cultural landscape of Mysuru through the construction and patronage of temples. Temple architecture under the Wodeyars reflects a continuation and adaptation of the Dravidian style, integrating indigenous South Indian traditions with regional innovations in sculpture, layout, and ornamentation. Wodeyar temples typically feature mandapas (pillared halls), vimanas (towered sanctums), and gopurams (ornate entrance towers), with intricate carvings depicting deities, mythological narratives, and floral motifs. Stone and wood were the primary construction materials, allowing for elaborate sculptural detailing and durable structural forms. The dynasty also emphasized spatial symmetry, axial alignment, and courtyard-based layouts, ensuring both religious functionality and aesthetic harmony. For examples of Wodeyar temple architecture includes Chamundeshwari Temple (Mysuru), Lakshmiramana Swamy Temple, and Kote Venkataramana Temple, which reflect the dynasty's commitment to religious patronage and artistic excellence. These structures served not only as centers of worship but also as symbols of royal authority and cultural identity, embodying the Wodeyars' synthesis of devotion, artistry, and architectural innovation.

- **Materials and Design**

The architectural legacy of the Wodeyar Dynasty demonstrates a careful selection of materials and design principles that combined functionality, durability, and aesthetic appeal. Across palaces, temples, and other heritage structures, the Wodeyars employed a blend of traditional Indian materials and techniques alongside European influences.

Table –2 Description of Materials and Design of Temple Architecture

S. No	Materials	Design Principles
1	Stone and Granite: Predominantly used in large-scale structures like Mysore Palace and temples for walls, foundations, and domes, ensuring strength and longevity.	Fusion of Styles: Indo-Saracenic, Hindu, Rajput, Gothic, and European elements were blended to create unique aesthetic expressions.
2	Wood: Extensively used in interiors, including ceilings, pillars, doors, and decorative panels, often featuring intricate carvings and inlay work.	Symmetry and Proportion: Palaces and temples were carefully planned with axial alignment, courtyards, and proportionate spaces for ceremonial and functional use.
3	Lime and Mortar: Used for plastering, creating smooth finishes, and structural bonding.	Ornamentation: Extensive use of carvings, murals, frescoes, and woodwork highlighted royal patronage of arts.
4	Glass and Stained Glass: Incorporated in palaces and ceremonial halls for decorative windows and skylights, adding colour and grandeur.	Spatial Hierarchy: Structures were designed to differentiate public, ceremonial, and private spaces, reflecting social and royal hierarchies.
5	Metalwork: Bronze, iron, and brass were used for gates, lamps, railings, and ornamental detailing.	Integration with Nature: Gardens, courtyards, and landscaped surroundings were incorporated to enhance aesthetics and climate adaptability.

Source: Historical Department, Mysore

- **Architectural Blending**

The architecture of the Wodeyar Dynasty (1399–1950) is notable for its innovative blending of diverse stylistic traditions, creating a distinctive regional architectural identity. While early structures primarily reflected traditional Dravidian and Hindu designs, later constructions under rulers such as Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and IV incorporated Indo-Saracenic, Rajput, Gothic, and European elements, reflecting both cross-cultural influences and the dynasty's exposure to colonial architecture. This fusion is particularly evident in places such as Mysore Palace (Amba Vilas) and Bangalore Palace, where domes, arches, turrets, and stained-glass windows coexist with ornate woodwork, carved pillars, and temple-inspired motifs. Similarly, temples maintained the Dravidian sanctum structures and axial planning, while integrating elaborate ornamentation and occasionally Gothic or European stylistic flourishes.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper concentrates on the architectural legacy of the Wodeyar Dynasty, highlighting the evolution, design principles, and cultural significance of their built heritage from the 14th to the 20th century. Through an examination of palaces, temples, and other structures, it is evident that the Wodeyars not only preserved traditional South Indian architectural forms but also skilfully integrated Indo-Saracenic, Gothic, Rajput, and European styles to create a unique aesthetic identity. The study emphasizes how the choice of materials, spatial planning, ornamentation, and stylistic blending reflected both royal authority and cultural sophistication. By focusing on iconic examples such as Mysore Palace, Jagannath Palace, Bangalore Palace, Lalitha Mahal, and Cheluvamba Vilas Palace, as well as temple architecture, this paper demonstrates the dynasty's commitment to innovation, artistic patronage, and functional design. Overall, the Wodeyar architectural legacy represents a synthesis of tradition and modernity, devotion and grandeur, and continues to serve as a living testament to Mysuru's historical and cultural heritage.

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