

# travelogue

# North meets South

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**T**ucked away in a quiet corner of the Old City in Hyderabad is the Sitaram Bagh Temple. Built by a banker Purnamal Ganerwal in 1832, this centuries-old Shri Sitaram Mandir is a sprawling complex of temples and beautiful airy courtyards spread over 25 acres.

From the main entrance and its imposing facade to the labyrinth of quadrangle courtyards leading you on to endless discoveries, this peaceful temple is a visual treat. Built in a style that is exquisitely distinctive, it combines the North and South Indian styles of architecture with the European.

Back in the day, Seth Purnamal ji acquired land in what was then the village of Mallapally, in the outskirts of Hyderabad, laid out an expansive garden (bagh) and built a temple for Sitaram. Thus bestowing on this temple, the moniker Sitaram Bagh. This

In 1832, Seth Purnamal Ganerwal set out to build a Sitaram Mandir in Hyderabad, in a style that was a lyrical confluence of the South Indian Dravidian temple architecture and the North Indian Rajasthani vastukala. About 12 years later, he replicated this style, this time around in the North, in Pushkar. These centuries-old sister temples are just as beautiful today, functioning still, under the stewardship of the heirs of the original Ganerwal

stretch of land was also the site for a Qutb Shahi Mosque, which stands even today, albeit separated from the temple by a concrete wall. Also on this expanse was an archaic stepwell that was connected via subterranean ducts to a well in the mosque. It is around this stepwell that the various

structures of the temple complex, including a gaushala, ved pathshala and houses for the Brahmin families were constructed. This entire compound is now a protected monument by the Archaeological Survey of India.

As you enter the main temple, intricately painted doors, imposing archways and massive colour blocked doors take you through a series of courtyards. Each one opening up to a mandapam, a temple or to just an open-to-sky pavilion enclosed in European style terraces adorned with Rajasthani style jharokas. If one courtyard boasts of a South Indian mandapam adorned with the Dasavataram carved in stone, the very next one will surprise you with a mandapam of European columns and fading frescos. Even the two main temples alternate in their styles. While the Sitaramji Mandir is built in the North Indian style, with an entrance reminiscent of a palace in Rajasthan, the Varadarajaji Mandir is built in the typical Dravidian architecture style of South India.

The idols of the main deities are in marble, staying true to the prevailing theme of Rajasthani. Little surprise then that the Sitaram Bagh is popular with the local Marwaris



A beautifully painted set of doors lead into one of the airy courtyards in the Sitaram Bagh temple

## Fact file

The Sitaram Bagh Temple is located in Old City, Hyderabad. While the Purana Rangji Mandir is in the main town of Pushkar. Both temples are open every morning and evening except for a few hours between 12-4pm in the afternoon.



Purana Rangji Mandir in Pushkar, now under renovation

in and around the Old City. While the official priests at its sister temple in Rajasthan, the Sri Ranganatha Venugopal Mandir in Pushkar, come from South India. So, if North meets South here in Sitaram Bagh, then South meets North at the Varaha Ghat on the Pushkar Sarovar. And not just in its architecture but in its people and customs.

Built in 1844, the Purana Rangji Mandir as it is popularly known leads you in through a series of small shops lining the street and a facade that is typically Rajasthani. It is only when you enter the main complex, the outer Parikrama Marg as one calls it, that you are transported to a South Indian Vaishnava Temple, complete with the Shanku - Chakram, Dwaja Stambham and the

intricate South Indian Gopuram. Beautiful paintings depicting scenes from religious and Dharmic stories, the Ramayan, Sagar Manthan, Krishna Leela and even the Dasavataram crowd the faded walls that are now undergoing restoration.

The main deity of the temple who is Lord Krishna is known as Venugopal in South India and is manifest as Ranganatha Swamy in Srirangam, Tamil Nadu, and it is he who gives this temple its name. The customs followed here, to this day are in the Vaishnav Ramanujacharya Sampradayam, whose founding father Shri Ramunajachrya himself was born in the town of Srirangam where the iconic Ranganatha Swamy Temple is situated. These two strikingly evocative sister temples are but beautiful illustrations of how the North meets South.