



Bathing in History: A Comprehensive Study of the Hammām (Bathhouse) at Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, Hyderabad

**Dr. Ashfaque Ahmad¹, Dr. Goli Panchala Prasad², Dr. Sania Sultana³,
Hakeem Mohammed Farooq ul Islam⁴**

1. Research Officer (Unani) & corresponding author, 2. Asst. Director In-Charge, CCRAS-National Institute of Indian Medical Heritage, Hyderabad, 3. SRF (Unani), 4. Consultant Unani Physician, Hyderabad

ABSTRACT

Hammam (Bathhouse, Turkish bath), endorsed by Unani Physicians, became famous as a therapy, a method of cleansing, and a place for relaxation. Hammam is used for bathing, stimulating circulation, and detoxifying the body by sweating out impurities, ensuring a deep cleanse. The Roman Empire created the first public bath more than 2000 years ago. It spread to many countries like Ancient Greece, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Al-Andalus (Spain and Portugal), Syria, and Egypt. When it came to the Ottoman Empire of Turkey, it was called the Turkish bath. Hammam was introduced in India with the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century, and it was established in many cities like Delhi, Bhopal, Hyderabad and so on. Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, Hyderabad, contains the tombs, Hammām, and mosques built by the various kings of the Qutub Shahi dynasty. Many historic Hammams are considered cultural heritage sites. They represent a connection to the past, preserving architectural styles, traditional practices, and a way of life that has been passed down through generations.

Keywords: *Hammām, Heritage, Qutb Shahi Tombs, Unani Physicians*

Introduction:

The "Hammam" (حَمَّام) is a noun taken from an Arabic root ح م م, which means heat or heating, or it is derived from the Arabic word al-Hamma (الْحَمَّة) meaning hot spring. "Hammam" means "bath", "bathroom", "bathhouse", "swimming pool", etc. From Arabic "Hammam", it passed on to Persian and Turkish (Hamam). Hammam is one of the methods of Ilaj bil-Tadbeer (Regimental Therapy). According to the fundamentals of Unani Medicine, Usul-e-Ilaj (principle of management) of a disease has four types: Ilaj bil-Tadbeer (Regimental therapy), Ilaj bil-Ghiza (Diet therapy), Ilaj bil-Dawa (Pharmacotherapy), and Ilaj bil-Yad (Surgery). The principle of management is decided on the basis of etiology, which may be one or more.

The first method applied in the treatment is Ilaj Bil-Tadbeer, followed by others if needed. Ilaj bil-Tadbeer (Regimental therapy) consists of various methods, some of them are: Kaiyy (cauterization), Taleeq (leeching), Imala (diversion of morbid material), Ilam (Pain induction), Huqna (Enema), Qai (Emesis), Ishaal (Purgation), Idrar-e-Baul (Diuresis), Tareeq (Sweating), Fasd (Venesection), Hijamah (Cupping), Hammam (Turkish bath), Natul (Irrigation), Takmeed (fomentation), Dalk (Massage or Friction), Riyazat (Exercise)

A Hammam, also known as a Turkish bath or steam bath, is a traditional bathing facility. It is a place where people go to cleanse and relax, similar to a sauna or steam room. The Hammam experience typically involves a series of rooms with varying temperatures and humidity levels. ¹

The History of The Hammam

The Hammam, or Turkish bath, has a rich history that spans several centuries and has roots in different cultures. The tradition of communal bathing can be traced back to ancient Roman and Byzantine bathing practices. Still, the

Hamam as we know it today is strongly associated with the Islamic world and Turkish culture. Here is a brief overview of the history of the Hamam:

Ancient Roman and Byzantine Influence: The concept of communal bathing was present in ancient Roman and Byzantine societies. Large public baths were built for socializing, cleansing, and relaxation. These bathing practices influenced the development of similar traditions in the Islamic world. The term 'Turkish bath' was used in English in 1644.



Qutub Shahi Hamam building from outside with many arches

Islamic Civilization: The spread of Islam saw the adoption and adaptation of various cultural practices. Islamic hygiene and purification practices emphasized the importance of cleanliness. As Islamic civilization flourished, so did the Hamam tradition. The Ottoman Turks played a significant role in the development and popularization of the Hamam.

Hammams were a feature of life in many countries like Ancient Greece and Rome, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Al-Andalus (Spain and Portugal), Syria, Egypt, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and India. Hammams were introduced in the subcontinent by Muslim rulers which were started in the 13th century, mainly with the Delhi Sultanate and continuing through the later Mughal period (16th–19th centuries). They still exist in Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bhopal in India. Prominent examples are the Hamam located in the garden of The Qutb Shahi Park, Hyderabad, the Hamam-e-Qadimi of Bhopal, and the Hamam-e-Lal Qila of Delhi. The Hamam-e-Qadimi of Bhopal is the only functional Turkish bath that dates to the Mughal period in the early 16th century. Today, Hammams continue to be popular in many parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey. They offer a unique and historical experience, combining aspects of bathing, socializing, and cultural heritage.²

Cultural significance of the Hamam

The Hamam holds significant cultural importance in the regions where it has been traditionally practised, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey. Its cultural significance extends beyond a bathing ritual and encompasses various social, religious, and communal aspects. Here are some vital cultural elements associated with the Hamam:



Waiting hall before hammam



Waiting hall inside hammam

Hygiene and Purification: The Hammam is rooted in Islamic hygiene practices, emphasizing the importance of cleanliness. It provides a space for physical purification and is often associated with religious rituals, especially before important events or religious ceremonies.

Social Gathering and Community Bonding: The Hammam serves as a communal space where people gather for bathing and socializing.



A Reception room with arches and walls of lime mortar



Water storage showing ducts for hot and cold water

Architectural and Artistic Expression: Traditional Hammams often feature stunning architecture and intricate tilework. The design of the Hammam reflects cultural aesthetics and artistic traditions. These architectural elements contribute to the overall cultural identity of the community.

Wellness and Relaxation: Besides its cleansing properties, the Hammam is a space for relaxation and rejuvenation. In modern times, Hammams are often incorporated into spa experiences, attracting locals and tourists.

Gender Roles and Social Norms: In some societies, Hammams are divided by gender, with separate facilities for men and women. The Hammam, therefore, plays a role in reinforcing and reflecting gender roles within a particular cultural context.³

The various stages of the Hammam process

Here is a general overview of the typical features and process of a Hammam:

Entrance and Changing Room: Visitors enter the Hammam and change into a traditional wrap or towel. They usually leave their personal belongings in a designated area.

Warm-up Room: The first room is usually a warm-up room with a moderate temperature. It helps the body adjust gradually to the heat.

Hot Room: The hot room is the central and most desirable area of the Hammam. It has high humidity and often features a large, heated marble platform. Visitors lie on the platform, where they are usually scrubbed and massaged by an attendant using a coarse mitt to exfoliate the skin.

Cooling Room: After spending time in the hot room, visitors move to a cooler room to relax and cool down. This room may have a fountain or a basin with cold water for rinsing.

Rest Area: Many Hammams have a designated rest area where visitors can relax, drink water, and unwind.

The entire process is designed to cleanse the body, promote relaxation, and enhance well-being. It is important to note that the Hammam process can vary, and modern variations may include additional services or amenities. Attendants in traditional Hammams are often skilled in massage and exfoliation techniques, enhancing the overall experience.



A circular ceiling with many windows



Water fountain



Place of Lantern for lighting

Hammām at the Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, Hyderabad

The Qutb Shahi Heritage Park is located in the Toli Chowki (garden precinct), close to the majestic Golconda Fort in Hyderabad, India, spread over 106 acres. Qutb Shahi Heritage Park contains an ensemble of Mausoleums, Mosques, Baolis (Stepwells), Hammams, Garden and enclosure walls and funerary tomb structures of the Qutb Shahi dynasty, spanning the 16th and 17th centuries. It includes many monuments of striking grandeur & complexity, reflective of a synthesis of architectural styles. The Qutb Shahi Heritage Park is the only surviving complex of this nature. During the Qutb Shahi period, these tombs were held in great reverence. The site comprises over 100 monuments encompassing mausoleums, funerary mosques, Baolis (Stepwells), a magnificent Hammam, garden structures and enclosure walls. The surfaces of the historic buildings are ornamented with intricate incised plasterwork, and a few monuments also bear glazed tilework. It was revived in collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The Park also contains the tombs of the two Unani physicians of Sultan Abdullah, Hakim Nizamuddin Ahmed Gilani, and Hakim Abdul Jabbar Gilani.⁴

Construction:

This Hammam or bathhouse was modelled on Iranian bathhouses. The exquisite Hammam was provided with its own stepwell to fulfil the water- requirements of the elaborate mechanisms for the baths. The retaining walls at the Hammam Baoli are built using local granite stone in random rubble stone masonry with a series of stone steps leading down at the western side. Initially, the 'Hammam' was made of lime mortar. The miniature columns and arches over the cisterns are reminiscent of the Mughal style of architecture. The 'Garam Hammam' (hot bathhouse) is a square chamber with three small cisterns and a shower on one side. In the middle of the roof is a skylight. Embedded in the wall on the outside is a vast iron disc which gets heated when the Aatish Khana (fireplace) is ignited. The disc radiates heat and warms up the 'Hammam'. Water in the cisterns also gets heated. Using Unani medicines, the masseur works on the patients. Then, hot water was used as a therapeutic measure, and it was found highly effective in treating patients with paralysis, rheumatism, and Parkinson's.



Aatish Khana (FIREPLACE) for heating water

Treatment by Hammam

Hammam is often favoured due to its use of steam over water. Steam softens skin, relaxes the mind, and opens the pores for a deep cleansing experience. It also helps nourish and exfoliate and has antibacterial benefits. It boosts the

immune system, rejuvenates the body, and restores tired, aching muscles. The intense scrubbing and massage lead to the body experiencing a considerable increase in blood flow, stimulating, and awakening the senses. It relaxes the mind and body. The steam is produced by burning Atishkhana (logs) in the arched basement, which heats water in a large copper vessel. The moisture is then transferred through copper pipes embedded in the floor and walls of the chamber.

Benefits of Hammam:

Ibn Sina has elaborately mentioned Hammam in his book Canon in Section XIX titled "Effects of baths, sunbaths, sand-baths, immersion in oils and sprinkling' of water on the face". The best Hammam (bathroom) is that which is old and 'spacious and has fresh air and fresh water. The following benefits are mentioned:

It reduces Lazujat Akhlat (viscosity of humors), improves the health of weak persons, strengthens the body, treats obesity, increases Hararat Ghariziya (Innate heat of the body), improves Istihala (metabolism), removes waste through the skin in the treatment of palsy and Zubul (muscle wasting).⁵

The other benefits of Hammam include:

Relaxation and Stress Relief: The warm and humid environment of the Hammam promotes relaxation and helps reduce stress. The heat can soothe tense muscles and calm the mind, providing a tranquil experience.

Improved Circulation: The heat in the Hammam helps to dilate blood vessels, leading to improved blood circulation. This can contribute to better oxygenation of the body's tissues and organs.

Detoxification: Sweating induced by the heat in the Hammam helps to eliminate toxins from the body through the skin. This natural detoxification process can leave you feeling rejuvenated.

Exfoliation: Hammam sessions often involve exfoliation, where a particular soap or scrub is applied to the skin and then rinsed off. This helps remove dead skin cells, leaving the skin smooth and refreshed.

Skin Cleansing and Softening: The combination of steam, exfoliation, and cleansing rituals in the Hammam can contribute to improved skin health. It can open up pores, cleanse the skin, and leave it soft and supple.

Respiratory Benefits: The steam in the Hammam can benefit respiratory health. Inhaling warm, moist air can help relieve congestion, improve breathing, and provide relief for conditions like asthma and sinusitis.

Improved Sleep: The relaxation induced by a hammam session and the physical benefits can contribute to better sleep. The calming effects on the nervous system help alleviate insomnia and promote a more restful night's sleep.

Muscle Pain Relief: The warmth of the Hammam can help relieve muscle tension and reduce pain. It is particularly beneficial for individuals with sore muscles or those experiencing conditions like arthritis.

Enhanced Mood: The combination of relaxation, improved circulation, and the release of endorphins during a hammam session can contribute to an enhanced mood and a general sense of well-being.

It is important to note that individual experiences may vary, and people with certain medical conditions should consult with a healthcare professional before participating in activities involving heat and steam.



A round platform with arches for the massage



Water supply and storage



Indian style toilets inside the Hammam

Types of Hammam in Unani Medicine:

Hammām, constructed per specific guidelines, is included in regimental therapy and is of multiple types.

1. Hammām Hārr (حمام حار): hot bath: It is a hot, dry room as well as a hot, wet room where the person stays for specified periods. It helps soften skin, increase blood circulation, relax muscles, and reduce pain in diseases like joint pain and pain over the liver.

2. Ḥammām Dawāī (حمام دوائی): Medicated bath: In this type of Hammam, some medicine is mixed in the water. It is used for various diseases.
3. Ḥammām Būraqī (حمام بورقی): Borax bath: In this kind of Hammam, borax is mixed with water. It is used for bathing in skin diseases.
4. Ḥammām Kibrītī (حمام کبریتی): Sulphur bath: In this type of bath, a slight sulphur is mixed in water. It purifies the nerves and relieves the pain due to convulsions. It is helpful for skin diseases,
5. Ḥammām Ramlī (حمام رملی): Sand bath: In Ramlī, limbs or the whole body is buried up to the neck in the dry sand for a few minutes. It treats several diseases, such as chronic ascites, arthralgia, stiff joints, etc.
6. Ḥammām Baḥrī (حمام بحری): Sea bath: Taking a bath in seawater. As seawater contains various salts, it is beneficial in certain skin diseases.
7. Ḥammām Shamsī (حمام شمسی): Sunbath: Here the body is exposed to the sunlight. It leads to perspiration, relieves headaches and flatulence, cures vitiligo, etc.
8. Zaytī Ḥammām (حمام زیتی): Oil bath or immersion in oil: In this type of bath, the body part is immersed in lukewarm oil. It cures fatigue, nerve pain, joint pain, convulsion, tetanus, and urinary retention.
9. Hammam Qabiz (حمام قابض): Astringent bath: In this type of Hammam, some strong astringent like alum is dissolved in water. It is beneficial for hemoptysis and excessive sweating.
10. Hammam Khardali (Mustard bath): Mustard powder is added to hot water and used by the patient to take a bath for 5-10 minutes. It cures skin diseases.
11. Hammam Barqī (Thermal bath): In this type of Hammam, the person takes a bath in hot springs. It is beneficial for the weakness of nerves.⁶

Another Ḥammām at Mian Mishk Masjid, Hyderabad:



Mian Mishk Masjid with the 'Garam Hammam'

The mosque and the 'Garam Hammam' harmonized seamlessly with the Islamic concept of "Dua" (blessings) and "Dawa" (medicine). Mian Mishk Masjid was built near Purana Pul, Hyderabad, during the reign of Qutb Shahi in the 17th century by Mian Mishk (d. 1680 AD), who was a noble of Abdullah Qutb Shah (1614-1672 AD), the 7th ruler of the kingdom of Golconda. The Mian Mishk Mosque has a Garam Hammam (The hot bath structure), complying with the Islamic principle of hygiene and purification. Both nobles and commoners used it for treating muscular ailments. A Sarai (inn) was also attached for the convenience of persons entering the city after the Puranapul Darwaza was shut for the day. Even during the Police Action of 1948, the 'Garam Hammam' was in use. Mian Mishk Masjid is declared a heritage site by the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority but is not part of the Archaeological Survey of India. An inscription of 1674 AD is also found over the western gateway of the mosque.⁷

Conclusion:

Presently, these Hammams languish in a state of complete decay. Cobwebs and dust have claimed the marble structures, devoid of any maintenance. Unfortunately, their existence is known to very few, a regrettable circumstance. The responsibility for their care should be shouldered by the Department of Archaeology and Museums. A revitalizing chemical wash could bring the 'Garam Hammam' back to its former glory. Opening them to the public could unlock substantial tourist potential. Initiatives to restore and sustain these Hammams not only revive historical significance but also contribute significantly to the preservation of cultural identity. Exploring the cultural significance of the Hammam unveils profound insights into the historical, social, and religious fabric of the communities where this tradition thrives. It serves as a potent symbol of tradition, community, and holistic well-being in India. In the 21st century, with evolving social and hygiene norms, the allure of traditional Hammams dwindled. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed a revival of interest in time-honored wellness practices. Many historic Hammams have undergone restoration, breathing new life into their ancient walls, and subsequently reopened as captivating cultural and tourist attractions.

Declarations

1. Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not Applicable
2. Consent for publication: Not Applicable
3. Availability of data and material: Not Applicable
4. Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests
5. Funding: No source of funding
6. Authors' contributions: All authors read and approved the final manuscript

Acknowledgement:

The author expresses gratitude to Prof. Rabinarayan Acharya, Director General, CCRAS, and Dr. Goli Penchala Prasad, Asst. Director In-Charge, National Institute of Indian Medical Heritage, Hyderabad. Their selfless dedication and generosity stand as a beacon, inspiring us to redouble our efforts toward our goals within the institute. Special thanks extend to Hakeem Mohammed Farooq ul Islam for his on-site explanations. Appreciation is also extended to Mr. Ravi Babu, our institute's photographer, for capturing outstanding images. We are grateful to the administrators of the heritage sites for granting permission to photograph these rare locations.

References:

1. Bilgrami, Syed Ali Asgar, Landmarks of the Deccan, The Government central press Hyderabad, 1927. pp. 78–88
2. Fadli, Fodil; Sibley, Magda. "The Historic Hammams of Cairo: Safeguarding a Vanishing Heritage". *Journal of Architectural Conservation*. 2008. 14 (3): 59–80
3. Ibn Sina, Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb, Vol. 1: Fann (Part) 2, Talim (Thesis) 2, Chapter 19, Influence of bathing and exposure to the sun, Darul Kutub, Lebanon, 1999. pp. 140-141
4. Rahman, Hakim Syed Zillur. "Hammam", *Jahan-i Tibb*, Volume 7, Number 1, July–September 2005. CCRUM, New Delhi, pages 12–17.
5. Sibley, Magda. "The Historic Hammams of Damascus and Fez: Lessons of Sustainability and Future Developments". The 23rd Conference on Passive and Low Energy Architecture.
6. Sourdel-Thomine, J.; Louis, A. "Hammām". In Bearman, P.; Bianquis, Th.; Bosworth, C.E.; van Donzel, E.; Heinrichs, W.P. (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill. 2012.
7. The Hindu: Front Page: Hot bath lies in neglect (archive.org), "Hot bath lies in neglect". The Hindu. 15 December 2007.