Ancient stepwell sinks into oblivion

SERISH NANISSETTI
HYDERABAD

A centuries-old stepwell in the Hussain Shah Wali Dar­gah area has been filled up after a 10-year-old boy from Kurnool drowned while playing a few days ago.

The stepwell, which served the locality both as a drinking water source and for irrigating fields, has been filled up and levelled, and no trace of it remains, except for a small stretch of the parapet wall. “There is a madrasa in the area and children keep playing here. We didn’t want to take chances after the boy died,” says Nizamuddin, a madrasa official attached to the Bilal Masjid.

Photographs clicked by a heritage enthusiast, a few days before it was filled up, show a deep well cut into the rock with steps leading all the way down. At an upper level was a row of arches where visitors could walk around. A pulley arrange­ment for drawing water from the well at a higher level completes the picture. “The well was fenced with chicken mesh and there was a lock and key arrangement. How the boy reached the well undetected and died remains a mystery,” says Omer, who runs a shop near the masjid.

“I came here from Delhi after my marriage. We used to grow rice and other crops in the 10-acre area. There were two stepwells which were used for irrigating the fields. I don’t know the fate of the other, but this one was filled up after the boy died,” says Suraiya Hussain Bose, whose house abuts the masjid.

The stepwell and masjid are part of the old trade route between Golconda and Bidar connecting the Shaikpet Serai area during the Qutb Shahi era, according to a path traced by histor­ian Robert Alan Simpkins.