

THE AESTHETICAL FACADES OF COLONIAL ERA: AN EVOLUTIONARY STUDY THROUGH HISTORY OF INDIA

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Abstract: The architecture of India has no language of its own. As one travels within the country, a plethora of architectural styles meet the eye. However, the evolution could be traced back to the time period when European countries were driven to India, in search of power and dominance, known as the Colonial era. Colonial architectural style was a reflection of how European architectural features were inculcated in the Indian architecture. It involved the influence of British rulers, along with Dutch, French and Portuguese. Bringing such structures of immense importance into limelight, for the marvelous architectural features used to aggravate their magnificence is the major motive of this research paper. Emphasis on amalgamation of Mughal and British architectural features has also been included. The paper further explores the nature of the relationship between the Indian society and the Colonial architecture. Indian dwellings were found to be greatly influenced by the Colonial architecture, even those belonging to people of lower caste. An analysis of the extent of influence, with respect to the context of the city, has also been done which helps in understanding the impression that these structures have on the locals.

Keywords: Utilitarian, Palladian, Baroque, Gothic, Indo-Saracenic, Rajbaris, Regionalization.

1. Introduction: The architecture of India is a 'patchwork' of sorts. Back in the Colonial era, an amalgamation of both the European and Indian architectural styles, which majorly included that of the Dutch, French, Portuguese, and most importantly, the British, was seen. Colonial architecture was more of a symbolic index of imperial power, and was intended to strike awe in the minds of Indians. The pride of the British was metamorphosed into the physical realm by the structures built during that time period. The buildings that were made a few hundred years ago stands today in forms of office, hotels or a library or an important landmark. [1] This paper tends to study the European influences on Indian architecture and to trace a timeline of architectural styles prominently visible.

2. The Dimensions of Colonial Architecture: The Indian society shared a complex relationship with the colonial Architecture. To identify the same, an analysis of the political and symbolic role of colonial architecture in modern India was performed. All construction activities performed by the state had three dimensions [2]:

(A) Utilitarian Dimension (B) Symbolic Dimension (C) Political Dimension

The buildings had a particular utility; however, they were not purely utilitarian in nature. The colonial grandeur found its foundation in these metaphoric buildings. The typology has further been elaborated below:

2.1 Utilitarian Dimension included the buildings which were constructed with a purpose of serving a particular function or utility. According to their nature, these buildings have been classified into further categories: (a) Churches/Chapel (b) Circuit House (c) Hospitals (d) Schools/Colleges (e) Bridges (f) Post Office (g) Library/Stadium/Club (h) Police Station (i) Commercial Places. Some mentionable examples of these buildings are Cellular Jail, Port Blair (Kala Paani); Chattrapati Shivaji Railway Station, Mumbai; Victoria Public Hall, Chennai; Madras High Court; Writer's Building, Kolkata, etc. The facades of such buildings were majestic and grand, adorned with intricate details on Tuscan columns along the major entrance portico. A row of columns in Tuscan or Doric style was a major feature in the facades. The plinth was way higher than normal, which added to the fact that the British used their architecture to

highlight the supremacy over the Mughals. These buildings are an expression of the splendor and magnificence that the colonial power enjoyed during their rule in India. These are also remarkable in so far as they were designed to adapt to the climate of Indian subcontinent, as well.

2.2 Symbolic Dimension included War Memorials, statues and Canopies. Like Mughals, British also showcased their emotions through structures. Victory Towers, Triumphal arch were all a part of this category. The facades were grand in scale, with intricate detailing or engravings of text. The materials used were sandstone and granite. The India Gate, standing tall at Rajpath, New Delhi, was originally known as the All India War Memorial initially. It provides as a memorial to almost 82,000 martyrs, the Indian soldiers who bravely fought for the country in the First World War, in France, Mesopotamia, Persia, East Africa, as well as the Third Anglo-Afghan War [3].

2.3 Political Dimension buildings included the Government buildings of importance, namely, City hall, Consulate, Courthouse, Embassy, Fire station, Meeting house, Moot hall, Parliament. Examples of such buildings include Secretariat, New Delhi; Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru; Raj Bhawan, Kolkata; High Court, Chennai etc. These facades of such buildings followed the major principles of architecture, namely, symmetry and rhythm. Use of sandstone as the major elevation material was common, because it was suitable for the climate as well as blended perfectly with the surroundings. A row of arched corridors and openings with a central dome accompanied by minarets was another importance feature. The use of axis and symmetry in the overall façade seemed to be the priority.

3. Influence of Foreigners: Apart from the British influence, the early stages of the colonial era also saw the influence of Portuguese, French and the Dutch architectural styles. All of these foreign architectural styles eventually crept into the Indian architectural style. Major influence was felt at places like Coromandel, Goa, Pondicherry and Calcutta, where the Europeans had established their administrative, or, in some cases, trade centers. The Portuguese in Goa were believed to be the first ones, with an approximate time span of 400 years, from 1505-1961. They were followed by Dutch, who had a comparatively smaller stay duration in India, from 1605-1825. The upcoming of various churches and cathedrals, constructed in Portuguese style in Goa and other trade towns has been seen in these years. The French had the smallest sojourn of about 200 years, from 1759-1954. The British emerged to be the supreme ones amongst all. They looked upon themselves as the immediate successors to the Mughals and to showcase their supremacy, they used architecture as one of the means. The pomp, the vanity, the feeling of reigning supreme, all this the British transmuted into the buildings they erected in India. Colonial architectural style in British India wholly expressed the will of a people not simply to rule, evangelize, or exploit another but to adapt itself to alien circumstances, landscapes altogether unlike its own.

4. Architectural Features: Architectural features in the classical British architectural style were influenced by Mughal architecture. This was partly owing to the fact that several architects, masons and workers involved in the construction of these buildings were Indians. Apart from this, a notable diffusion of indigenous climate-oriented features with the European architecture was done. The structures were classical in nature; they adopted a style which would depict their superiority and historical antecedents. There were certain factors responsible for shaping of the facades as well as the architectural features that were used in this era which are explained henceforth.

4.1 The public buildings show a remarkable amalgamation of British architecture with the indigenous style/elements. This was partly owing to the fact that several architects, masons and workers involved in the construction of these buildings were Indians.

4.2 Apart from this, a notable diffusion of indigenous climate-oriented features with the European architecture was done.

4.3 The structures were classical in nature; they adopted a style which would depict their superiority and historical antecedents.

Architectural Features	Examples
Onion/Bulbous domes	Victoria Memorial, Kolkata
Overhanging eaves	Secretariat, New Delhi
Pointed arches, cusped arches, scalloped arches	General Post Office, Kolkata
Vaulted roofs	Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Bombay
Domed kiosks	India Gate, Delhi
Miniature domes	Madras High Court
Domed chhatris	Mysore Palace
Pinnacles	Mutiny Memorial Church, Kolkata
Towers or minarets	Victoria Memorial, Kolkata
Harem windows	St. Thomas Church, Palayur
Open pavilions	Agra Fort
Pavilions with Bangla roofs	Agra Fort





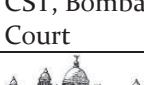
Fig. 2: Table Enlisting the Examples for Different Architectural Features in Colonial Era

The British employed local techniques coupled with their native practices to build several structures that stand now as proud heritage. Construction of geometric structures fronted with lofty pillars of Doric and Tuscan order. Covered arcaded porticos and use of elements like Jalis and domes, are exemplary visual evidences of the glorious past.

5. General mapping showing evolution: An estimated mapping has been done based on the three administrative centers of the British, namely, Madras (Chennai), Bombay and Kolkata. However, in 1911, when Delhi became the capital of India, colonial architecture expanded in other parts of the country as well. Eclecticism was given a last fillip by the establishment of New Delhi, the new capital of India, between 1911 and 1932. However this eclecticism was of a more muted kind. Eventually, Delhi, Madras (Chennai), Calcutta, Bombay (Mumbai) and Bengaluru emerged as the five regions which became the torch-bearer of colonial architecture. According to their nature, these buildings have been classified into the following different categories: (a) Churches/Chapel (b) Circuit House (c) Hospitals (d) Schools/Colleges (e) Bridges (f) Post Office (g) Library/Stadium/Club (h) Police Station (i) Commercial Place (j) War Memorial/Canopy [2].

6. Conclusion: Most buildings in Delhi constructed in Colonial era are located in 'Lutyen's Delhi.' Since, this area is slightly away from the swarm of the city, it is considered to be of an imperative and impregnable area with an unidentified circumference. However, in Kolkata, though most colonial structures are scattered along Hooghly River [4]. The area wherein buildings like Raj Bhawan, Vidhan Sabha Bhawan, Eden Gardens, West Bengal Basketball Association, and Town Hall is considered to be comparatively posh and opulent. A similar pattern has been observed in Mumbai (Bombay), where major colonial buildings like Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and the present BMC office are located at the western part of the city, along Arabian Sea, surrounded by all commercial buildings. On the other hand, this area is not solely dedicated to house the official buildings as it is partially commercial in nature and thus more interaction of the locals is observed in this area. In Chennai, absence of a comparable region solely reserved for guarding the Colonial buildings is observed. Madras High Court is surrounded by buildings like, city civil court, family court, and madras bar associations, post office, and state bank of Travancore which tends to escalate the overall persona of that area. In Bangalore, a clear demarcation under "posh" area includes buildings like Vidhan Soudha, High Court and Raj Bhawan. Zones where the Colonial buildings portrayed a mixed use tend to depreciate the value of the structure architecturally because the users become habituated to it. The society generally forgets to marvel at the architectural beauty and the appearance of the structure loses its aura. Culture plays a major role in defining spaces, which differs from place to place [5]. In cases where such buildings are comparatively distant from the normal buzz of the city, are viewed as masterpieces of the past. A timeline has been formulated based on

the evolving architectural facades in the Colonial buildings located in the above mentioned five zones which highlight a tentative record of the sustenance of each architectural style. It traces the path that the facades followed throughout the years till and after India became independent.

Year	Architecture Style	Examples
1800-1858	Influence Of French, Portuguese And Dutch	 Churches in Goa, Pondicherry and Kolkata(Trade Towns)
Mid 18 th Century Onwards	Palladian And Baroque Concept In Architecture	 Writer's Building, Kolkata; Council Hall, Kolkata
1850-1900	Gothic Style	 Cathedrals and churches in Calcutta, Goa etc.
Late 19 th Century	Indo-Saracenic Style	 Chepauk Palace, Madras; CST, Bombay; Madras High Court
1910-1950	Victorian/ Classic British Style	 Victoria Memorial

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