

Unveiling Hybridity: Colonial Architecture Re-mapped in Delhi, India

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Abstract: *Delhi, India's historic and ever-changing capital, is a fascinating tapestry of architectural styles reflecting its rich past. This study dives into the often-overlooked legacy of colonial-era architecture in Delhi, questioning Eurocentric interpretations and emphasising the city's unique combination of Eastern and Western influences. The research investigates how colonial architects worked with existing Mughal and Indian building traditions, moving beyond the mainstream narrative of Victorian-era impositions. The research demonstrates an inventive combination of components such as chhatris, jalis, and grand colonnades by analysing significant structures like as the renowned Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Lutyens' Bungalow Zone. This architectural hybridity goes beyond mere mimicry, displaying an intriguing interplay between colonial authority and indigenous cultural expression. Furthermore, the research investigates how colonial Delhi's spatial layout, with its radial roads and intimidating government buildings, worked as a mechanism for demonstrating imperial power. It also contends that this urban landscape cannot be understood exclusively as a symbol of Western domination. The research reveals how Indians subverted and reinterpreted the imposed architecture, imbuing it with their own meanings and purposes, by examining people's daily lives and the use of colonial places for local business and pleasure. Finally, this article argues for a more nuanced interpretation of colonial architecture in Delhi, one that goes beyond basic concepts of cultural imposition and embraces the intricate interaction of power, resistance, and adaptability. We may get a greater appreciation for this unique architectural chapter in Delhi's rich history by recognising the agency of both British architects and the Indian population.*

Keywords: Indo saracenic architecture, colonial era, amalgamation, urban landscape, British raj

1. Introduction

India is heir to a rich cultural legacy. In that case architectural identity of India bears some significant phases of political surges or ideology of globalization in different moments. India's architecture reflects a unique regional identity shaped by various factors, including geographical, climatic, political, social, religious, and cultural elements, along with the local materials and environment. These influences have led to an architectural style that incorporates both native and vernacular traditions. However, the shifting aspects of architectural language are clearly evident in different contexts.

Many civilizations have traversed this country, altering each region in their way. Although the 'histories of India' have always been marked by thriving urban civilizations and prosperous trade systems, colonisations have imposed several architectural and urban development models that we must consider when developing a critical view of the present.

Delhi as a city is an archetypal example of how India as a country did not adhere to a single tradition, but rather how each separate region of its territory formed its own tradition in response to the influences with which it came into touch. India has therefore been a large and very dynamic laboratory of experiences, but Delhi has evolved and acquired its own character inside it.

Especially troublesome is the categorical division that this concept has reinforced between "Indian" architecture and "Modern" or "European" architecture in India. On the one

hand, the purportedly "essential" principles, and hence "timeless" traits, of India's architecture forms and traditions have traditionally been investigated via an anthropological lens. Colonial European architecture initiatives in the Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, have typically been evaluated historically, as case studies of the reception and transmission of urban architectural forms and debates within the empire. (Srifer, 2015, page 27)

New Delhi was a stunning new illustration of British imperialism's domination inside the very symbolic and authoritarian capital complex. However, it provided no facilities for individuals who worked in industry, labour, or as normal citizens.

The intriguing interplay of colonial and indian identity in Rashtrapati Bhavan:

Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president of India's official residence, is a structure that wonderfully encapsulates the country's architectural tradition. Edwin Lutyen, a British architect, designed the huge complex by combining western and Indian architectural features, drawing inspiration from European Renaissance, Mughal, and Rajput architecture. The Rastratapati Bhavan's chhatris, or pavilions, are some of its most notable features. These magnificent, dome-shaped buildings provide grandeur and elegance to the complex as a whole. The chhatris provide stunning views of the surrounding gardens and Delhi, and they are sometimes adorned with ornate carvings and bright paintings. Another distinguishing aspect of the Rastrapati Bhavan are its jalis, or latticework screens. These ornate wooden or stone screens are used to decorate entryway, windows, and sometimes entire

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walls. The jalis enhance the architecture's beauty and elegance while also providing solitude and shade. The Rashtrapati Bhavan is also known for its ornate colonnades. These long rows of columns, which are reminiscent of European Renaissance architecture, add to the structure's majesty. The colonnades are frequently used for ceremonial purposes, such as entertaining prominent guests or hosting state dinners.



Figure 1: One of the *jaalis*, or pierced stone lattice screens in the air while providing shade from the sunlight, and shelter from rain



Figure 2: Another *jaali* along a stairwell. These are varied in pattern, some being floral and perhaps more western in that respect.

The Dome that crowns Rashtrapati Bhavan is one of the most distinctive features of the building. Fifty-five meters above the level of the Forecourt, it has the National flag hoisted from its peak. The central dome is twice the height of the building. Bordering the dome are miniature pavilion roofs called *chattris* and inverted half-dome fountains.

The Central Dome is particularly inspired by Indian architecture. It is said to be inspired by the Buddhist Stupa at Sanchi. The bottom of the dome is surrounded by railings that can also be attributed to the Stupa of Sanchi. The dome is clad in copper plates that have acquired a dark finish over the years.

The Central Dome is the only feature of Rashtrapati Bhavan that is visible from Vijay Chowk. There was a controversy regarding the slope between Lutyens and his collaborator, Herbert Baker. Baker was commissioned to build the two Secretariat buildings. He had them planned at the same level as Rashtrapati Bhavan. Lutyens signed the related documents but later realized the implications of it. He understood that, if allowed, Rashtrapati Bhavan's courtyard would not be visible in its full grandeur from the Vijay Chowk.



Figure 3: Entrance portico at the top of the sweeping stone steps, with the central dome above

This fancy former presidential home in India shows how local culture and colonial power mixed in interesting ways. Its architecture doesn't just copy styles but weaves together bits of India's rich history with parts of western classical design. This blend captures a key time when the British Raj wanted to show they were in charge while still recognizing India's deep-rooted traditions.

Rastrapati Bhavan's architect, Lutyens, was entrusted with designing a representation of the might and majesty of the British Empire. His influence was Europe's grand Palladian style, as seen by the building's symmetrical design, massive

four-winged structure, and magnificent colonnades. These components exuded stability, permanency, and imperial might.

But Lutyens was not just copying European fashions. He added subtle references to Indian architectural sensibility throughout the design. For example, the sandstone domes resemble the shapes of old Buddhist stupas, and the four wings are similar to those of the Mughal capital Charbagh. Windows are adorned with elaborate prison screens, which are a defining feature of Mughal and Rajput architecture. They provide a subtle decorative touch.

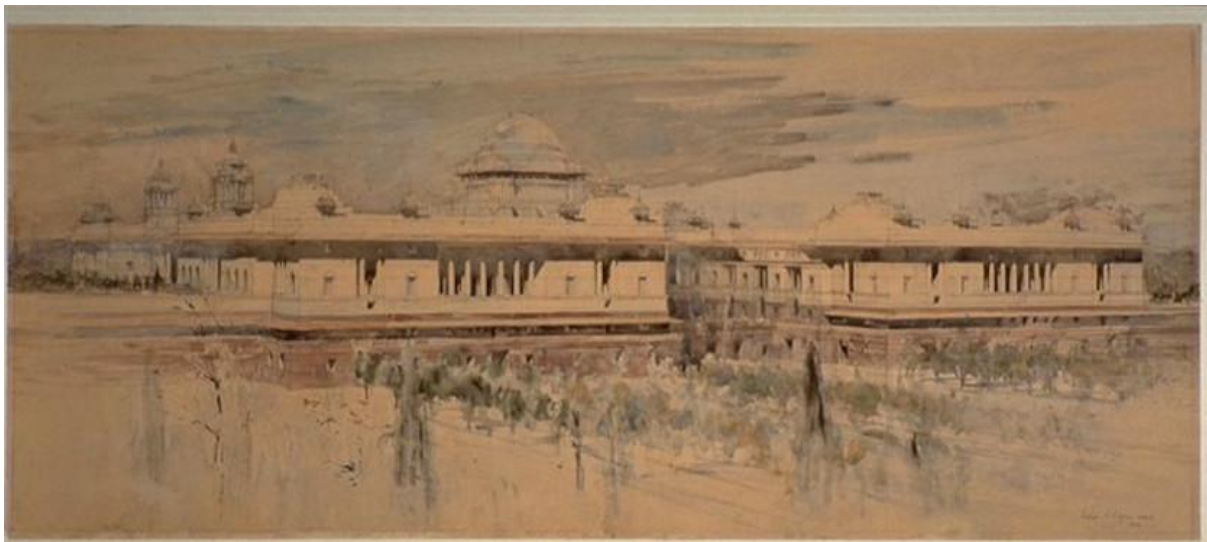


Figure 4: Perspective View of the South Elevation of the Viceroy's House (now known as Rashtrapati Bhavan), New Delhi, India." By Lutyens' and Baker's artist, the perspectivist William Walcot (1874-1943), 1914. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian

The use of Indian patterns into architecture was not just for aesthetic purposes. It was a clever strategy to make British power appear more legitimate by demonstrating an understanding of local culture. This subtly suggested that, while being in authority, the British were not neglecting Indian customs and history. Without a sure, the British

benefited much from this technique, although some of the builders may have admired Indian innovation and construction talents. In addition, not everyone saw things the same way. Some in India may have believed it was merely for show, while others may have interpreted it as a statement of respect or pride in their culture being recognised.

It's crucial to recognise that this integration was frequently regulated and selective. In order to match their story, the British occasionally even simplified or distorted the ingredients to fit their ideal of power and order. This act of appropriation may be interpreted as an attempt to co-opt and dominate components of Indian culture.

Beyond imposition: exploring the tapestry of colonial architecture in Delhi:

For too long, the story of Delhi's imperial architecture has revolved around a single thread: cultural imposition. But history, like any rich tapestry, requires a deeper examination, a finer weaving. This article aims to understand/ unravel/ reveal the complexity of this architectural chapter, which is infused with power, resistance, and an unexpected dance of adaption. To argue that British architects simply imposed their architectural character on Delhi is a naive oversimplification. While it is evident that the raj exercised authority by erecting majestic structures and planning roads, the tale does not end there. Among these enormous buildings, among the very bricks and cement, lurk murmurs of resistance and adaptability.

The city's tendency has always been to embrace rather than rebuild or demolish. That is how public buildings from various periods have gradually been added. The fact that the city absorbed pre-existing buildings and made them a part of the present configuration is an important indicator of the interesting relationship the capital has established with time. As regards historical monuments, what actually changed in the colonial period due to a series of conservation laws promulgated by the Archaeological Survey of India, was the relationship the population had with them. The spontaneous interaction between people and monuments was lost forever in favour of isolation and 'musealization'. The most ancient historical monuments gradually lost their 'original context', and it may be useful to recall the original use for which they were intended: as spaces at the disposal to the people. Doing so may possibly, on the one hand, respond to the need for more collective spaces for the overwhelming and ever-increasing population, and on the other, respect for the idea that public buildings could once again be used more freely by all. (Guerrieri, 2018)

Agents of change, agents of power:

Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect behind New Delhi, designed the city to demonstrate British imperial supremacy. To demonstrate their authority, he put out beautiful highways flanked by massive neoclassical structures. But Lutyens was aware of the land he was working on. He used elements of Mughal style, such as chajja overhangs and jaali patterned screens. This wasn't just him imitating cool designs; it was a subtle homage to the clout that existed previously.

Though the architects sparked shifts in design, the Indian masons and laborers also brought their traditions and techniques to the construction. Their skilled hands honed by generations of craftsmanship, molded the exotic designs adding a distinct Indian twist to them. Peering at the intricate stonework and carvings reveals the local style's resilience and the regional designs and patterns.

The colonial structures represented more than merely power. They also become houses for ordinary people. The verandas, which were supposed to be relaxing spaces away from the hot heat, became lively marketplaces and social gathering places. Those spacious roadways designed for large, major parades? They're now crammed with all kinds of cultural vibes that keep people going long after the parades have ended. Delhi did more than merely reclaim these sites; it also incorporated them into its own story. It's not simply sitting there, receiving it; it's developing itself.

Through a nuanced lens:

In the fifty years following the uprising in 1857, the shape of the streets and the size of the buildings have mostly not changed in many areas of Delhi. The topography that the city is frequently connected to is one of the factors that defines the layout of various metropolitan regions.

We may comprehend Delhi's imperial architecture more fully when we acknowledge the agency of the Indian populace as well as the British architects. It is a dynamic conversation between power, resistance, and adaptability rather than a static tale of imposition. With this nuanced perspective, we can see the architectural heritage for what it truly is: a multifaceted legacy that acknowledges both the history of the Raj and the enduring strength of the Indian soul.

As such, while the colonial government was biopolitical, it did not extend the full range of liberal governmental tactics into the alien Indian population. While, in Europe, political society incorporated a mainly working-class population, this form of governance was more general in the colonial context. Without, the full apparatus of a liberal government, the focus still lay on the disposition of people and Governmentality, congestion, and calculation in colonial Delhi subjects rather than on the processes of society, economy and population, which were deemed to be too unstable in the colonial realm. (Iqbal, 2022)

2. Conclusion

Local modifications and adaptations can be observed in residential typologies as well as colonies. There are many different kinds of residential buildings. At least from the perspective of the Indians, a hybridised architecture might help deter future uprisings by making the foreigners seem less alien. Modern-style buildings were constructed during this time, but reviewers all too frequently overlook or forget about them.

It is not possible to properly comprehend Delhi's colonial architecture as a simple case of cultural imposition. Rather, it necessitates a complex viewpoint that recognises the complex interactions between resistance, power, and adaptability. Understanding the agency of Indian people as well as British architects is essential to understanding this special chapter in Delhi's long history.

Power dynamics were clearly present throughout the colonial era, but interpreting the relationship only from this perspective leaves out important details. The construction process involved the active participation of Indian artisans, builders, and architects who frequently incorporated and

reinterpreted European styles within their own cultural frameworks. As a result, a distinct architectural language that combined Eastern and Western features was created: the "Indo-Saracenic" style.

Moreover, to disregard the agency of the Indian populace is to disregard their subtly expressed and overt actions of resistance. Local communities developed methods within the prescribed frameworks to express their identity and beliefs, from reinterpreting symbols to sabotaging architectural components.

For this reason, understanding Delhi's imperial architecture necessitates going beyond crude ideas of cultural domination. When we recognise the intricate interactions between power, resistance, and adaptability on both sides, a more thorough understanding becomes apparent. We may view these buildings not just as reminders of the past but also as examples of the human spirit's inventiveness and resiliency in the face of historical change when we acknowledge the agency of all parties involved.

This multifaceted viewpoint encourages a greater understanding of Delhi's architectural legacy. It enables us to see these buildings as complicated and intriguing creations of their period, reflecting the negotiation and interchange of cultures that took place throughout the colonial era, rather than only as "good" or "bad" judgements.

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