

## Colonial Indian Architecture:A Historical Overview

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**Abstract:** The British era is a part of the subcontinent's long history and their influence is and will be seen on many societal, cultural and structural aspects. India as a nation has always been warmly and enthusiastically acceptable of other cultures and ideas and this is also another reason why many changes and features during the colonial rule have not been discarded or shunned away on the pretense of false pride or nationalism. As with the Mughals, under European colonial rule, architecture became an emblem of power, designed to endorse the occupying power. Numerous European countries invaded India and created architectural styles reflective of their ancestral and adopted homes. The European colonizers created architecture that symbolized their mission of conquest, dedicated to the state or religion. The British, French, Dutch and the Portuguese were the main European powers that colonized parts of India. So the paper therefore aims to highlight the growth and development Colonial Indian Architecture with historical perspective.

**Keywords:** Architecture, British, Colony, European, Modernism, India etc.

### INTRODUCTION:

India has a long history of being ruled by different empires, however, the British rule stands out for more than one reason. The British governed over the subcontinent for more than three hundred years. Their rule eventually ended with the Indian Independence in 1947, but the impact that the British Raj left over the country is in many ways still hard to shake off. Freedom came to India with a price. The price of years of struggle, countless men, women and children bearing the brunt of oppression and the political control of the masses by outsiders who didn't quite understand or respect the internal dynamics of the nation for a long time. The British initially were more interested in using the rich resources of the colonized areas. However, it is understood that especially after the 1857 Mutiny they started taking a much keener interest in governance and social norms.

The architecture of India is rooted in its history, culture and religion. Among a number of architectural styles and traditions, the contrasting Hindu temple Architecture and Indo-Islamic architecture are the best known historical styles. Both of these, but especially the former, have a number of regional styles within them. An early example of town planning was the Harappan architecture of the Indus Valley Civilisation. People lived in cities with baked brick houses, streets in a grid layout, elaborate drainage systems, water supply systems, granaries, citadels, and clusters of large non-residential buildings. Much other early Indian architecture was in wood, which has not survived.

During the British Colonial period European styles including neoclassical, gothic revival, and baroque became prevalent across India. The amalgamation of Indo-Islamic and European styles led to a new style, known as the Indo-Saracenic style. After independence,

modernist ideas spread among Indian architects as a way of progressing from the colonial culture. Le Corbusier, who designed the city of Chandigarh influenced a generation of architects towards modernism in the 20th century. The economic reforms of 1991 further bolstered the urban architecture of India as the country became more integrated with the world's economy. Traditional Vastu Shastra remains influential in India's architecture during the contemporary era.

British colonial architecture hence came into the picture the very instant that the British set shop in India. But over the years, the architectural styles evolved. From what started out as an all-out endeavor to mark superiority slowly changed into accepting and acknowledging the 'Indian way'. And hence in spite of more than 70 years of Independence, there are many architectural structures in India that were actually built during the British colonial period. In fact, many remain as the major landmarks of the cities that they are built in and some such as the Parliament House in Delhi are administrative centers of the country. Most of New Delhi was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker and is the main seat of administrative and political governance of the country.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

1. To analyse the architectural structures in India built during the British colonial period.
2. To know how colonial architects Influenced a generation of architects towards modernism in the 20th century.
3. To analyse European colonial architecture as became an emblem of power, designed to endorse the occupying power and reflective of their ancestral and symbolized their mission of conquest, dedicated to the state or religion.

### **DISCUSSION AD DATA ANALYSIS:**

#### **An overview of the British Colonial Architecture-**

One of the earliest architectural influences of the British colonial rule is seen on the churches. Gothic and neo-classical style was in rage and many of the structures in the Presidency of Bengal, Madras and Bombay became flag bearers of the opulent style of building. St. John's Church, Fort William, Calcutta Cathedral in Kolkata or the Mutiny Memorial Church in Kanpur are some examples of the Gothic style of colonial architecture. However, the constructors realized that the climate of the subcontinent did not always suit the architectural and raw material usage of the built structures. They slowly started to adapt to the climatic needs of the land, just like the Mughals had done earlier and began using the verandahs, blinds, screens, lattice work and so on.

After the Mutiny of 1857, Queen Victoria and Her Majesty's Crown took over the administration of the India. The shift from being traders to rulers was also seen in the architecture of the regime which now started incorporating few Indian designs and motifs

into its own style. There was a sort of architectural and construction boon since the mid nineteenth century that saw the building of various monuments, railway stations, rest houses, government buildings and so on. The Rajabai Clock Tower, Victoria Terminus, Bombay High Court in Mumbai and the grand Victoria Memorial in Kolkata are some of the many notable structures built during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, it was also during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Indo Saracenic architecture took its place in the colonial architectural history. Indo Saracenic architecture was in many ways a revival style which incorporated the British style along with many elements from the Mughal architecture as well as the Hindu temple architecture. The Chepauk Palace, Madras High Court and Chennai Central Station are some examples of the Indo Saracenic architecture. Others include the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai, the Khalsa College in Amritsar, Mumbai GPO and many more.

New Delhi is a classic example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial architecture. Sir Lutyens along with a group of architects designed the main central administrative district of the city that till date stands and houses important buildings and residences of the political and administrative importance.

### **Cities of British Colonial Architecture-**

Many cities have some or the other influence of the colonial architecture. However, the cities that are landmarks of the British architectural history are Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Agra, Delhi, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Bhopal and Karachi.

Over the years the names of many of the colonial structures have been changed to give them an Indian tone, however, the structure itself bears testimony to its period and age of construction. The British colonial era is a reality of the Indian subcontinent history and its architecture is an important and integral part of the nation's past and present.

### **Indo-Saracenic:**

Indo-Saracenic architecture evolved by combining Indian architectural features with European styles. Vincent Esch and George Wittet were pioneers in this style. The Victoria Memorial in Calcutta is the most effective symbolism of British Empire, built as a monument in tribute to Queen Victoria's reign. The plan of the building consists of one large central part covered with a larger dome. Colonnades separate the two chambers. Each corner holds a smaller dome and is floored with marble plinth. The memorial stands on 26 hectares of garden surrounded by reflective pools.

### **Neoclassical:**

Examples of Neoclassical architecture in India include British Residency (1798) and Falaknuma Palace (1893) in Hyderabad, St Andrews Church in Madras (1821), Raj Bhawan (1803) and Metcalfe Hall (1844) in Kolkata, and Bangalore Town Hall (1935) in Bangalore.

**Art Deco:**

The Art Deco movement of the early 20th century quickly spread to large parts of the world. The Indian Institute of Architects, founded in Bombay in 1929, played a prominent role in propagating the movement. The New India Assurance Building, Eros Cinema and buildings along the Marine Drive in Mumbai are prime examples.

**Other Colonial powers:**

The Portuguese had colonized parts of India, including Goa and Mumbai. The Madh Fort, St. John the Baptist Church, and the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mumbai are remnants of Portuguese Colonial rule. The Churches and Convents of Goa, an ensemble of seven churches built by the Portuguese in Goa are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**CONCLUSION:**

The infrastructure in India without the giving of the industrial revolution was negligible for the British, as mentioned above; the developments were for the colonizers and not for the ruled, the architectural manifestations also had a colonial aim of representation. Representation of power, supremacy and yet somewhere, even in their own dilemma, a way to connect to the masses of the colonized Indians and symbolize their blatancy of rule.

The architectural undertakings in the colonial empire also just like in their own nation, politically driven, had different needs to subside to. For instance, the colonial and India office buildings in white hall, in fact, themselves indicated something of the distinctive character of empire. Both structures, designed by Scott and aligned with the Foreign Office, were classical in their architectural form. Most revealing, however, was their sculptural ornamentation. The topmost story of the Foreign Office was decorated with a series of sculpted figures emblematic of different countries, such as France and Italy. Similar figures set on the India Office, however, represented not the nations but "Indian tribes", an afghan, a goorkha, a Malay, a Maharatt, and so on", social categories identified by the British as significant for their rule of the sub continent. While the inner court of the foreign office was plain, that of Indian Office was decorated with busts and statues of celebrated worthies, both civil and military, connected with the Indian empire."

British architects who worked in the empire, regardless of their choice, shared a set of attitudes very different from their colleagues' home. Their views together formed the colonial style, which more or less were inflicted with a concern of making visible Britain's imperial position as ruler. Since, the British thought process was based on the allegory that, "to know was, in some measure, already to rule", hence the imperial architecture was – "architecture both of knowledge and of power.

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### Internet Resources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture\\_of\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture_of_India)

Colonial Architecture in India: [www.indianmonumentsportal.com/indian-architecture/colonial-architecture.html](http://www.indianmonumentsportal.com/indian-architecture/colonial-architecture.html)

Indian Forts: [www.culturalindia.net/indian-forts/Forts and Palaces of India](http://www.culturalindia.net/indian-forts/Forts_and_Palaces_of_India)