

A STUDY ON INDO-SARACENIC ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

J. Sheeba¹, John T. Mesiah Dhas²

Associate Professor

Mohamed Sathak A.J Academy of Architecture¹,
RVS Padmavathi College of Engineering & Technology², Chennai
sheeba4archi@gmail.com¹, jtmdhas@ymail.com²

Abstract: Indo-Saracenic (from Saracen, an archaic name for Muslims used by the British), also known as Indo-Gothic was a style of Architecture used by British Architects in the late 19th century in India. Indo-Saracenic Architecture was an effort to merge British and Indian aspirations after 1858 and to show that how despite being an Imperial power, the British in India were part of the Indian milieu. It also aroused Indian's interest in their own history. The Indo-Saracenic movement began in the 1870's. An attempt at creating authority through classical prototypes and the latter phase moving towards the Colonial Architecture. It is more classical than Gothic. The Indo-Saracenic is a mixture of Indian and Islamic Architecture but remained British in spatial Organization and composition. Buildings built in this style were usually grand public buildings such as clock towers, court houses, civic and municipal buildings, Government colleges, Town halls, Railway stations, Museums and Art galleries. Few Architects of this style were: Robert Fellowes Chisholm, Henry Irwin, Edwin Lutyens and Charles Mant.

Keywords: Indo-Saracenic, Indo-Gothic, Colonial, Gothic, Spatial Organization.

1. Introduction

"Indigenous ethnic Architecture" The Indo-Saracenic Revival (also known as Indo-Gothic, Mughal-Gothic, Neo-Mughal, Hindu-Gothic) was an Architectural style movement by British Architects in the late 19th century in British India. It drew elements from native Indo-Islamic and Indian Architecture and combined it with the Gothic revival and Neo-Classical styles favored in Victorian Britain. Saracenic was a term used by the Ancient Romans to refer to a people who lived in desert areas in and around the Roman Province of Arabia and who were distinguished as Arabs.

2. The Emergence of Indo-Saracenic Style

The prevailing style of Architecture was Trabeate employing pillars, beams and lintels. The Turkic invaders brought in the Arcuate style of Construction

with its Arches and Beams, which flourished under Mughal patronage and by incorporating elements of Indian architecture especially Rajasthan Temple architecture (*chattris*).

Indian touch gave rise to new architecture of Indo-Saracenic style of Architecture. The hybrid combined diverse architectural elements of Hindu and Mughal with cusped arches, domes, spires, tracery, minarets and stained glass, in a wonderful manner.

The buildings built in India by Indo-Saracenic style of architecture were built according to advanced British structural engineering standards of the 1800's including infrastructures of iron, steel and poured concrete. These type of buildings were employed with domes, pointed arch, vaulted roofs, pinnacles, minarets, pierced open arcade and open pavilions. It is an indispensable overview to one of civilizations most resplendent artistic traditions.

3. A Tradition Created: Indo-Saracenic Architecture Under the Raj

A distinctive style of Indian architecture commonly known as the 'Indo-Saracenic' – came of age. It has been fashionable for British attempts to imitate in their buildings the traditional architectural styles of India. Yet these British buildings still tell us much about how the British shaped India's conception of its past, and how they turned India's architectural heritage to the service of the Raj.

Much British building in India harked back to Western classical models, for the 'eternal principles' and ordered beauty' of these buildings embodied, as Herbert Baker argued, 'eminently the qualities of law, order, and good government' which the British held out to their Indian subjects. But the British sought as well to place themselves in the line of the great Indian empires of the past, and so, during the later decades of the 19th century, set about creating a style of building Indian in appearance, but Western in function.

This study and analysis of British emerged a composite architectural style fitted for modern building. As precedent and justification for this 'reconstruction' of Indian architecture, the British looked back to the work of the Mughal and other medieval Indian builders.

The architecture of those centuries they saw as a blend of Hindu and of Muslim elements; hence most appropriately called 'Indo-Saracenic'.

4. Architecture as a Symbol of Power

Turbulent Islamic culture irrupting into the ancient world of the Hindus and Jains was like an Earthquake. The antagonism was fundamental: Hinduism venerates a thousand Gods; whereas the message of the Quran is strictly monotheistic and the facades of Hindu temples are covered with images celebrating the Gods of a protean pantheon, while Muslims inspired the Ten Commandments had established an iconic form of worship that rejected all images.

HINDU ARCHITECTURE, with its temples hollowed out of cliffs or built of worked stone, is based on Traditional techniques derived from Timber construction: piers and lintels are combined with corbelling. MUSLIM ARCHITECTURE, on the other hand is based on arches, vaults built up of shaped Voussoirs and domes on squinches.

The introduction of these features into India initiated a technological revolution.

12th Century- INDO-MUSLIM ART

PERSIAN BUILDERS- Masters in the Art of brickwork, made use of four-centered arches and of domes. Persian influence is detectable between 12th to 15th centuries. The most characteristic element of Persian Architecture was the courtyard-plan mosque nor is the four-iwan scheme is nowhere seen. The iwan with its pointed vault posed too many problems for Hindu stone masons.

Brick was replaced by Ashlar, in the use of which local builders excelled. Only the Arch and Vault which had initially defeated became widespread. After the throne of Akbar in the mid 15th century, "A time of chaos" of rich creativity saw a profound revitalization of the form and aesthetic principles of Islamic Art

This melded style reached its height in 17th century Bijapur, if not even earlier, in the fifteenth-century Pathankindoms of Gaur and Mandu. The buildings of this era, as contrasted with the ornate structures of later rulers, were, in their view, 'more restrained and flexible', simple yet dignified, eminently suited both to decorative elaboration and modern needs.

5. Secular Style

India emerged in terms of scale and of its stylistic features- SECULAR

Palace of Jodhbai- Traditional Indian structural techniques are used with piers supporting lintels, braced by brackets and the carved decoration is similar to that of Hindu and Jain temples. All expresses Akbar's desire to marry the innovations of Islam with the ancestral customs of India.

16th century- ThirmalaiNayakar Palace built of Indo-Saracenic style with Arcaded Octagon wholly constructed of bricks and mortar supported by giant 12m tall round pillars.

17th, 18th centuries – British redesign of Fort St.George, Colonial Architecture spread by Nawabs exhibited institutional, civic and utilitarian buildings such as Post offices, railway stations, rest houses and Government buildings.

19th century- Indo-Saracenic had become almost universally accepted as the appropriate style for substantial public building in India. Even in the far south, in Madras, buildings as diverse in character as the Moore Market (1898) and the Victoria Memorial Art Gallery (1906) conformed faithfully to its canons of taste.

During the first decade of the 20th century, however, architectural fashions were beginning to change. So too was the political environment in which building took place. Curzon's vice-royalty (1898-1905) foreshadowed the change. Despite his commitment to the preservation of India's architectural heritage, Curzon never conceived that an Indian style could convey the spirit of British Imperialism. From the outset he insisted that the soaring monument he planned to commemorate Queen Victoria's reign must be in a European style. 'What I shall want', he wrote, 'will be a simple, severe, but noble Italian or Palladian building'. He brushed aside the objections of critics, including the Governors of Madras and the United Provinces, and personally supervised the Architect (Sir William Emerson) he hired to design Calcutta's Victoria Memorial Hall. In Europe too classical styles were sweeping back into public favour. As Lutyens wrote in 1903, a decade before his appointment to New Delhi

'In architecture Palladio is the game!!... To the average man it is dry bones, but under the hands of a Wren it glows and the stiff materials become as plastic clay.'

New Delhi, the new capital constructed after 1912, Indo-Saracenic architecture still left its mark on the face of India. A vast array of buildings – government, princely and commercial alike – remain to testify to its hold for nearly half a century over the Indian subcontinent. In the process the Indo-Saracenic builders reshaped India's view of its architectural heritage.

The Indo-Saracenic style gained further impetus from its close association with the Gothic. Though the two had of course a wholly different origin, they shared an exuberant surface decoration, arched gateways and other features; and these provided sufficient superficial similarity so that the taste for the one style reinforced the acceptability of the other. Indeed it was not uncommon to refer to the Indo-Saracenic as 'Eastern pointed or Gothic'. Nor were buildings which joined Gothic and 'Oriental' features at all rare. In Bombay and Madras especially, the predominant style for

government and commercial offices was, as one critic described the Bombay Victoria Terminus, 'a free treatment of Venetian Gothic with an Oriental'.

6. Characteristics

Indo-Saracenic designs were introduced by British imperialist colonizers, promoting their own sense of "rightful self-glorification". Public and Government buildings were often rendered on an intentionally grand scale, reflecting and promoting a notion of an unassailable and invincible British Empire.

- Onion (bulbous) domes
- Overhanging eaves
- Pointed arches, cusped arches, or scalloped arches
- Vaulted roofs
- Domed kiosks
- Many miniature domes
- Domed chhatris
- Pinnacles
- Towers or minarets
- Harem windows
- Open pavilions or pavilions with Bangala roofs
- Pierced open arcading

Chief proponents of this style of architecture were these: Robert Fellowes Chisholm, Charles Mant, Henry Irwin, William Emerson, George Wittet and Frederick Stevens, along with numerous other skilled professionals and artisans throughout Europe and the Americas.

Structures built in Indo-Saracenic style in India and in certain nearby countries were predominately grand public edifices, such as clock towers and courthouses. Indo-saracenic architecture found its way into public buildings of all sorts such as railway stations, banks and insurance buildings, educational institutions, clubs and museums .

7. Emphasised Examples

Chepauk Palace in Chennai designed by Paul Benfield is said to be the first Indo-Saracenic building in India. Outstanding examples are spread across the country - Muir college at Allahabad, Napier Museum at Thiruvananthapuram, the Post Office, Prince of Wales Museum, University Hall and Library, Gateway of India in Mumbai, M.S. University, Lakshmi Vilas Palace at Baroda, the Central Railway Station, Law courts, Victoria Public Hall, Museum and University Senate House in Chennai, the Palaces at Mysore and Bangalore.

7.1. Chepauk Palace in Chennai

Chepauk Palace in Chennai designed by Paul Benfield is said to be the first Indo-Saracenic building in India, referred to as licentious "eclectic" incorporating elements and motifs of Hindu and Islamic precedents.

It was the official residence of the Nawab of Arcot from 1768 to 1855.



Figure 1. Chepauk Palace

7.2. Mysore Palace, Mysore (Karnataka) India

The Mysore Palace (also known as the (Amba Vilas Palace) is a palace situated in the city of Mysore in southern India. It is the official residence of the Wodeyars - the erstwhile royal family of Mysore, and also houses two durbar halls (ceremonial meeting hall of the royal court).The architectural style of the palace is commonly described as Indo-Saracenic, and blends together Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, and Gothic styles of architecture. It is a three-storied stone structure, with marble domes and a 145 ft five-storied tower. The palace is surrounded by a large garden. It is designed by British architect, Henry Irwin



Figure 2. Mysore Palace

7.3. Gateway of India

The **Gateway of India** is a monument built during the British Raj in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India. Built in Indo-Saracenic style, the foundation stone for the Gateway of India was laid on 31 March 1911. The final design of George Wittet was sanctioned in 1914 and the construction of the monument was completed in 1924.



Figure 3. Gateway of India

7.4. Victoria Memorial in Calcutta

The Victoria Memorial, officially the Victoria Memorial Hall, is a memorial building dedicated to Victoria, currently serves as a museum and a tourist attraction. The memorial was designed by Sir William Emerson using Indo-Saracenic style, incorporating Mughal elements in the structure.



Figure 4. Victoria Memorial

7.5. Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), also known as the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) or the Bruhan Mumbai Mahanagar Palika, is the civic body that governs the city of Mumbai and is India's richest municipal organization. Built in the Indo Saracenic style of architecture, the BMC is the largest civic organization in the country.



Figure 5. Brihanmumbai

7.6. Government Museum, Chennai

Government Museum, established in 1851, is located in Egmore, Chennai known as the Madras Museum. Many of the buildings within the Museum campus are over 100 years old. Built in Indo-Saracenic style, it houses rare works of artists such a Raja Ravi Varma.



Figure 6. Government Museum

7.7. Madras High Court

The building of the High Court, an exquisite example of Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, was built in 1892 with the design prepared by J.W. Brassington and later under the guidance of the famed architect Henry Irwin, who completed it with the assistance of J.H. Stephens.



Figure 7. Madras High Court

8. Conclusion

Indeed the term 'Indo-Saracenic' itself has now disappeared from scholarly discourse on medieval architecture and the term however remaining to be a label for the British buildings of the later 19th century in India. Indo-Saracenic masterpiece has survived amid the high-rises along with its commercial heritage. Not only the western influential buildings, but also other cultural identities like Temples, Churches should be conserved from the urban growth and knowledge of it has to be oriented for a better historical heritage of state and country.

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