UNIT 35  THE CITY AS THE SITE OF
SPECTACLE*

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35.1 INTRODUCTION

Political power is almost invariably expressed through built structures in addition to other means. Whether it is parks and public spaces dotted with statues of icons of the regime, public buildings, or private residences of those in power, considerable thought often goes into what they intend to express. This is equally true whether or not the ruling power is culturally similar to or different from the mass of the population. In ancient and medieval India, rulers built imposing fortresses, palace complexes, monumental temples, mosques and tombs, and even victory towers and gateways to express their political and cultural control over their subjects as against their rivals.

In the same way, architecture and city planning under British colonial rule reflected political agendas; the buildings as well as their settings made a statement about the nature of colonial rule. In particular, impressive public buildings and grand vistas could turn the city into a spectacle of imperial grandeur, designed to awe the subject population, but also to lay claim to their loyalty. At the same time, the Indians who lived in these cities used these spaces to express their own identities in creative ways.

35.2 COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION BEFORE 1857

British Imperial architecture was fashioned over a long period of time. In the early years of territorial rule by the East India Company, the aim was, on the one hand, to make functional buildings to live and work in; on the other hand, to express a cultural distinctness and sense of identity through these buildings. This distinct identity through the architectural idiom was expressed most strongly in the enclaves where the white population tended to seclude itself, apart from the ‘native’, or indigenous, town.

In terms of style, the eighteenth century in Britain was the era of Georgian Architecture, with the clean simplicity of forms inspired by the classicism of ancient Greece and Rome. This was, therefore, the style that came to dominate early British colonial

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architecture in India, most notably in Calcutta. By the early decades of the nineteenth century a row of elegantly simple but impressive buildings lined Esplanade Row and the area immediately behind – the Supreme Court (built at the turn of the nineteenth century but later demolished), Government House (1803), Town Hall (1813), St John’s Church (1787), Writers’ Buildings (1776) and St Andrew’s Church (1818).

1. **Old Writers Buildings (left) and Supreme Court Building (right), Thomas Daniell**


2. **Government House, Calcutta. Engraved by R. Havell Jr.; James Billie Fraser, 1824**

3. **Town Hall, Calcutta, 1850s**


4. **St John's Church, Calcutta by Frederick Fiebig**

Source: Courtesy of the British Library, London; [http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apacphotocoll/s019pho0000247s2u00004000.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apacphotocoll/s019pho0000247s2u00004000.html); [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/St_John%27s_Cathedral_Calcutta_by_Frederick_Fiebig_1851.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/St_John%27s_Cathedral_Calcutta_by_Frederick_Fiebig_1851.jpg)
5. **St Andrew’s Church, Calcutta**  
*Source:* Biswarup Ganguly; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/St_Andrews_Chambur_-_Dalhousie_Square_East_-_Kolkata_2011-12-18_0124.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/St_Andrews_Chambur_-_Dalhousie_Square_East_-_Kolkata_2011-12-18_0124.JPG)

The architecture of these buildings owed everything to Western, mostly Classical models, and made few concessions to the Indian setting. Often buildings in India were directly modeled on British examples. Thus the Government House was modeled on Kedleston House, a country mansion in Derbyshire; both St Andrew’s Church and St John’s Church were modelled on St Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London. Often, however the materials used were different; for instance, cheaper limestone plaster was used for surface decoration in place of the expensive stones of the originals. This inconsistency between the superficial skin and the core of the buildings was in keeping with the early days of empire – aspirations to greatness, unmatched by feelings of solidity and permanence.
6. St. Martin in the Fields Church, London
Source: ChrisO at the English Language Wikipedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
File:St_martin_in_the_fields_exterior.jpg

Another noteworthy feature of these early colonial buildings, as pointed out by Swati
Chattopadhyay (Chattopadhyay, 2005) was that the interiors were not designed
according to the plans of the European buildings they were ostensibly copied from.
Instead, they reflected the very different needs of colonial life in India – such as the
large retinues of domestic staff which made common, as opposed to private, areas
more important.

Calcutta of course was first and foremost a British stronghold and thus bore a marked
colonial stamp. The situation was different in other, remoter parts of the British Indian
territories in the early nineteenth century. For instance in Delhi, the British presence
was thin on the ground. Though the administration was in the hands of the officials of
the East India Company, the Mughal Emperor still enjoyed considerable symbolic
authority. Till the late 1850s, pride of place in the urban landscape was taken by
Mughal landmarks such as the Red Fort palace complex, Jama Masjid and other
mosques, squares such as Chandni Chowk and Chowk Sa’adullah Khan, and gardens
such as the Begum ka Bagh.

The British had carved out small enclaves for themselves in Delhi; some of the more
important buildings were located in the northern part of the city. Predictably, the buildings
were of a distinctly Western idiom, such as the Renaissance Revival style of St James’
Church (1836). In some cases it was considered practical to use certain pre-existing
Mughal mansions, and in these, facades were added to disguise their original look. Thus the mansion known as Dara Shikoh’s Library was transformed into the British Residency with the addition of Classical columns to its exterior. Another mansion nearby was re-incarnated with a Gothic exterior, while leaving internal features including a *tekhana*, or underground chamber, intact.

7.  St James’ Church, Delhi  

8.  Dara Shikoh’s Library/Residency, Delhi
35.3 THE REVOLT OF 1857 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The revolt of 1857 profoundly affected the circumstances and self-perceptions of the British in India. The British had fought hard to regain control of the country, and cities like Delhi and Lucknow had been major sites of the contestation. To take just these two examples, the British needed to underscore their authority; in Lucknow, which until 1856 was the seat of a large principality; and in Delhi where the British had always felt the need to counter the cultural and political influence of the Mughal emperor, ensconced in his palace in the Red Fort.

The physical destruction of the built fabric was the first step towards sweeping away older cultural regimes. The Red Fort at Delhi, the seat of the Mughal royal family, was taken over by the British army. Most of the buildings within it were destroyed, leaving behind only those considered to be of particular architectural value. A large area of the city of Shahjahanabad (as the 17th century city founded by Shahjahan was called), around the fort was also cleared of buildings.

Security reasons were cited for the clearance of some areas such as that immediately around the fort. This was to give a clear line of fire around the fort wall. Nevertheless some of the clearances were of a punitive nature, to punish the people of Delhi who had supported the revolt. A particularly harsh line was taken with Muslims. While predominantly Hindu areas such as Dariba were spared, many Muslim areas were leveled, including the Akbarabadi Masjid, a major mosque of the city. For a while there was even talk of demolishing the main congregational mosque, the Jama Masjid.

The revolt of 1857 altered the nature of colonial rule in important ways. Rule of the East India Company was swept away and Indian territories were placed under the British Crown. This led to a greater self-awareness among Britons both at home and in India of being an imperial power, wielding power over large subject populations spread over vast territories, much as Rome had in the ancient world.

So, as the structures of indigenous regimes were swept away, they were replaced by visual, self-confident, symbols of British power. In Delhi, this was most evident in the re-ordering of space in the main Mughal ceremonial way that led from the entrance to the fort, through the city. Chandni Chowk, which was a major square on this street, had originally held a large pool in the centre. Ranged around it were a number of buildings commissioned by Jahanara, the daughter of Shahjahan. They included a serai or resting place for travellers, a garden, and a hammam or bath house. All of these were cleared away. The serai was replaced by the building that was soon to become the Town Hall. The garden was re-designed and re-named ‘Queen’s Gardens’. A clock tower was built in the centre of the square. This was rounded off with the construction of the railway line in the 1860s and its Gothic style station sometime later. Mughal Shahjahanabad was thus invested with a new British colonial look, with buildings that were representative of new social functions, such as the Town Hall, or of new lifestyles and technology, like the clock tower and railway.
9. Town Hall, Delhi

Source: Varun Shiv Kapur (http://flickr.com/photos/72155957@N00/4142579345); http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5b/Delhi_Town_Hall.jpg

10. Railway Station, Delhi


Churches were built too – the Baptist Church, the Catholic St Mary’s, and the Anglican St Stephen’s; but these essentially fulfilled a practical need for places of worship. Even under the Mughals, Shahjahanabad had not been an overtly ‘Islamic’ city, filled as it was with not only mosques but Hindu and Jain temples and gurudwaras. The new churches therefore simply added to the already rich variety. The state in post-1857 British India, while it sought to represent the intellectual and technological superiority of the West, did not project a religious identity.
11. St Stephen’s Church, Delhi

Source: Varun Shiv Kapur; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/St_Stephen%27s_Church_on_Church_Mission_Marg.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/St_Stephen%27s_Church_on_Church_Mission_Marg.jpg)

In Lucknow, demolitions immediately after 1857 were carried out with aims similar to those in Delhi – to punish, and to ensure easier control over the population by British forces. Thus the densely populated city around Machhi Bhawan (the fort of the Nawabs, which was also demolished), was cleared of buildings to make broad roads such as Victoria Street, that would allow quick and easy movement of troops through the city in the event of any disturbance. Colonial civic and institutional buildings – clock towers, monumental railway stations, etc. were slow to develop, coming up only in the later decades of the century. This was probably because Lucknow, shorn of its political importance, was not a major commercial centre like Delhi.

Public spaces, new or re-designed, were used for demonstrations of colonial splendour, such as the Durbar processions which travelled from the Red Fort down to Jama Masjid and then to the Town Hall and onwards. At the same time, Indian residents used these broad ceremonial avenues for their own religious, and later, overtly political processions. The religious procession often expressed the desire of a particular group to demonstrate its wealth and influence, and as such became a contentious issue, and faced opposition from rival groups. This prompted attempts by the local administration to control and regulate such demonstrations, as described in the case of Delhi by Narayani Gupta and Jyoti Hosagrahara (Gupta, 1981; Hosagrahara, 2005). In Calcutta, the Swadeshi movement saw the start of aggressive political agitation, that took over the public spaces of the city.

35.4 INTERPRETING THE EMPIRE

The vexed question of the cultural role of the state was one that occupied the rulers of India in the post-1857 years. Much of British policy in these years was based on the presumption that most Indians were inordinately attached to their ways and traditions. The experience of the revolt of 1857 had seemed to suggest that any attempt to interfere with their beliefs and practices could threaten the stability of British rule. The state
therefore had to forge ties with this conservative majority, in a language that was familiar to it, and in ways that inspired loyalty and respect.

One device used to this end was the grand spectacle of the Durbar – an imperial levee seeking to bring together the rulers and subjects in an elaborate ceremonial jamboree (first studied in detail by Bernard Cohn, 1990). This was a practice borrowed from the Mughals, who were experts at formalising ties with diverse feudatories. The first Durbar held by the British on an India-wide scale was in 1877, at Delhi, to celebrate the new title of ‘Kaiser-e-Hind’ or ‘Empress of India’, adopted by the British monarch, Queen Victoria. A range of practices and rituals that were deemed to be essential to Indian expressions of royalty were adapted to the ceremonial. Thus Lytton, the Viceroy, seated on a richly caparisoned elephant, went in procession past the Clock tower and Town Hall, those unabashedly alien symbols of British authority erected not many years before. (For photographic representation of the event see http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1600_1699/shahjahanabad/clocktower/clocktower.html)

12. Durbar Procession, 1903

Source: James Ricalton; (http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/m/019pho000000181u00080000.html);

On the one hand the Durbar in its spirit and its form sought to express British authority in terms that Indians would understand and appreciate. At the same time however, the idiom it used was given a stamp that was unmistakably colonial. Thus all the native rulers were given banners emblazoned with specially designed coat of arms, in a style that was distinctly European. Each coat of arms was designed to have relevance to the peculiar traditions of the respective ruling house, incorporating ancestral symbols, origin myths, identification with particular deities, events in their history, or topography of their lands.

Important cultural values of the empire were sought to be expressed through the Durbar: the use of some forms familiar to Indians, but with an unmistakable stamp of the technological, organisational and cultural superiority of the ruling power. These were values that were also beginning to be expressed in the architectural enterprise of the empire around the same time, most evidently in the style known as ‘Indo-Saracenic’, analysed in some detail in works such as that by Thomas Metcalf. (Metcalf, 2005) As an architectural style first becoming evident in the 1870s, it consciously sought to use Indian, or at least vaguely ‘oriental’, forms and motifs for public buildings. One of the early practitioners of this architecture was Robert Chisholm, consulting architect of the...
Madras Presidency, who also designed buildings elsewhere. Until then, buildings in Madras, as in Calcutta had been of a Classical style. They included the Governor’s Banqueting Hall and Government House (1779-1803), St Andrew’s Church (1820) and St George’s Cathedral (1816), both on the popular St Martin’s Church plan. Chisholm’s creations changed all this. Of his major buildings, The Post and Telegraph Offices building (1881) at Madras and the Napier Museum (1880) in Trivandrum incorporated local Travancore styles into Western forms, while the Madras University Senate House (1879) and the Baroda College (1880s), unusually, used Byzantine elements.

13. Governor’s Banqueting Hall and Government House, Madras, 1905

**Source:** “Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.”
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/The_Banqueting_Hall%2C_Government_House.jpg

14. St Andrew’s Church, Madras

**Source:** Courtesy Arun Ganesh, PlaneMed; CC-by-sa; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/04/St_Andrews_Church_-_The_Kirk.jpg
15. St George’s Cathedral, Madras

Source: Prithvin88; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/George%27s Cathedral.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/George%27s Cathedral.jpg)

Source: Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/General_Post_Office%2C_Chennai.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/General_Post_Office%2C_Chennai.jpg)
17. Baroda College, Baroda


Other architects too were experimenting with the Indo-Saracenic style. William Emerson, who would later go on to design Victoria Memorial at Calcutta, designed the Muir College at Allahabad in the 1870s, with distinctly Mughal arches, cupolas, projecting windows and a minaret. Henry Irwin’s Victoria Memorial Hall (1909) in Madras was a Mughal style pink sandstone edifice. Swinton Jacob designed St Stephen’s College, Delhi (1890) and St John’s College, Agra (1913), also using primarily Mughal features. Charles Mant designed the Mayo College, Ajmer (1885) as well as the Lakshmi Vilas Palace, Baroda, though it was finished by Chisholm.

18. Muir College, Allahabad

Source: Abhijeet Vardhan; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a9/Au_science_faculty.jpg
19. **Victoria Memorial Hall, Madras**

**Source:** Williamsatish25; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/98/Quenn_Victoria_Memorial_Hall.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/98/Quenn_Victoria_Memorial_Hall.jpg)
21. St. John’s College, Agra

Source: Jain.tanj: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ed/St._johns_college_2C_agra_2C_uttar_pradesh_2C_India.JPG

The theories behind the Indo-Saracenic movement can be found in the notes of the architects themselves, and in occasional discussions about proposed plans of buildings. The message of the Imperial Durbar was that the British Raj could present itself to its native subjects in forms that they could identify with, while retaining its integrity as a force for positive change. This was also the principle that underlay Indo-Saracenic architecture. Chisholm had used a Kerala-style roof for the Napier museum at Trivandrum, and in the Mughal cities of Agra and Allahabad distinctly Mughal elements were prominently used. There was frequently a very conscious desire to conform to what were considered ‘local tastes’. This was evident, for instance in the design of the Mayo College. Charles Mant, the architect, described at some length how he had arrived at a style suitable for a college meant for young Rajput princes. To Mant, it seemed logical that an essentially ‘Hindu’ style was most suitable for the Hindu princes. However, the style that had been prevalent in Rajputana for many centuries was one that incorporated many elements which the British labelled ‘Muslim’. The architect therefore decided to use these so-called Muslim elements, but give them and the building an overall ‘Hindu’ look.

Architects like Mant were thus interpreting indigenous tastes strictly according to the categories in which British colonial systems put Indians, such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’, irrespective of complex cultural contexts. Having stereotyped Indians as basically conservative, it was difficult for them to understand the ease with which the inhabitants of Rajputana, as elsewhere in India, had adopted forms and elements from a wide variety of often quite alien sources and modified them to their own use.

While the practitioner of this hybrid architecture used a variety of ‘oriental’ forms and motifs, the technology and building practices that were followed in their works were strongly western. British architects designed buildings using modern materials like steel and concrete, incorporating the latest advances in European structural engineering. Moreover, unlike traditional Indian buildings, where master builders worked with guilds
of builders and craftsmen to create buildings, the Indo-Saracenic edifices were entirely conceived by professional western architects, with no design inputs from traditional Indian professionals.

35.5 THE INDIAN RESPONSE

What did Indians think of the Indo-Saracenic style? In their domestic architecture most Indians still preferred traditionally designed houses, but were not averse to adopting European decorative forms. Therefore, in a curious inversion of Indo-Saracenic architecture, there was for instance, a growing trend of traditional havelis (courtyard mansions), made with traditional materials and techniques, but decorated with European style arches and pillars, often mingling with indigenous motifs. Such nineteenth century buildings can be seen in the streets of many Indian cities. Far from being conservative, as the British had imagined them to be, Indians had been quick to adopt new fashions, as they always had. They chose to keep intact the essentials of their way of life – e.g. as reflected in the basic form and function of the haveli, but were willing to experiment at the more superficial levels. However, the relation between private and public was also being refashioned in elite and non-elite homes alike, as Hosagrahar (2005), Chattopadhyay (2005) and Kidambi (2007) have shown.

According to Swati Chattopadhyay, the havelis of the elite in the earlier era included important public areas – in the form of outer courtyards, that were important arenas for the patronage of the performing arts, or semi-public religious ceremonies. These tended to be important means for the expression of wealth and influence. With the rise of the importance of the middle class, smaller houses and means necessitated the absence of such public space within the house. Instead, the public face of the house and its inhabitants had to be expressed through its street face. This not only led to the tendency for heavier ornamentation of facades, but the greater use of design features such as seating platforms that would facilitate social interactions at the street level.

Hybridity in design was also a conscious political choice, opening up opportunities for straddling different social and political spheres. The example of the Nat Mandir – a semi-public hall commissioned by the Calcutta magnate Radhakanta Deb is an interesting one. Designed as a double height enclosed space, in neo-classical style, this also had space for the family deity. It could thus function equally well for religious celebrations and for those that emphasised the connections of the family with the British rulers. This included the ball to celebrate the victory of the British in the revolt of 1857, where the ornamentation of the room was designed along the lines of the ball room at Government House. In such a context, the use of European forms was a strategic choice representing a claim to association with the power of empire.

Among the group considered most conservative by the British – the rulers of the Princely States, there were mixed responses to Indo-Saracenic architecture. There were those who were developing westernised tastes, and wanted their buildings to follow European patterns. Thus the princes of Rajputana had in fact expressed a preference for a classical European design for the Mayo College building. The fact that the British decision makers overrode their wishes, tells us something about the connection between architecture and the role the British expected the Indian Princes to play. The British saw the Princes as the bulwarks of ‘traditional’ Indian society. They were to be given an enlightened education to impart to them western values, aimed at making them better rulers. At the same time they were expected to, at least in outer form, exhibit their Indian-ness so as to represent their states adequately. This duality exactly mirrored the essence of the Indo-Saracenic building: western in its core forms, Indian in embellishments.
22. Mayo College, Ajmer
Source: Sinmgh92karan; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Mayo_college_in_a_sunny_day.jpg

The rulers of many of the states therefore, in accordance of what was expected of them by their British overlords, built public buildings – clock towers, railway stations, offices, museums etc. in the Indo-Saracenic style. In their private palaces more individual tastes could be expressed and often they adopted classical forms. Jayajirao of Gwalior commissioned the opulent Italianate hybrid Jai Vilas Palace in 1874, and the Italianate Falaknuma palace was built in Hyderabad in the 1880s.

23. Jai Vilas Palace, Gwalior
Source: Mohitk Jain123; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/08/Jai_Vilas_Palace_%2828_Scindia_Palace%29.jpg
24. Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad, 1900


The rulers of Jaipur state, Ram Singh and Madho Singh, patronized Indo-Saracenic architecture for public buildings like Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur (1876, designed by Swinton Jacob). They however continued to use traditional models for their personal buildings. Even exceptions such as the Ram Bagh Guest House and the Mubarak Mahal were those buildings where Europeans were entertained. Some rulers of course did commission Indo-Saracenic palace buildings, such as Lakshmi Vilas Palace at Baroda (1890), Amba Vilas Palace at Mysore (1912), and the palace at Kolhapur (1881).

25. Albert Hall Museum, Jaipur

Source: V S Vinay Kumar; [http://www.panoramio.com/user/vsvinaykumar](http://www.panoramio.com/user/vsvinaykumar); [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Albert_Hall_Museum.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Albert_Hall_Museum.JPG)
26. Ram Bagh Guest House, Jaipur
Source: Lunialaura; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eb/Showroom.png

27. Mubarak Mahal, Jaipur
Source: VS Vinay Kumar; http://www.panoramio.com/user/vsvinaykumar;
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fa/Mubarak_Mahal_City_Palace.JPG

28. Lakshmi Vilas Palace, Baroda
Source: Bracknell; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/67/Baroda_Lyp.JPG
29. Amba Vilas Palace, Mysore

Source: Kiran Ravi Kumar; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Mysore_Palace_south_gate_view.jpg

30. Palace at Kolhapur

Source: Vijayshanker.munoli; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/Kolhapur_New_Palace.jpg
The princes needed to present a carefully calculated face to their subjects, as much as the colonial state did. Public spaces were created and designed for the display of royal splendour. In a study of Mysore state, Janaki Nair describes the important role played especially by royal ceremonial, especially the staging of the Dussehra festival in newly enlarged public facades of the palace. (Nair, 2011) While rulers connected to their subjects at the ‘traditional’ level of court ceremonial, they also sought to put into place important changes in city planning that conformed to the standards of ‘modernity’. Among substantial developments such as well-planned residential localities, broad roads and squares, these included the ubiquitous clock tower.

The Indian response to this phase of colonial architecture was also evident in the structures of Bombay, unusual among colonial cities, in that it had a fairly large, prosperous, and influential Indian mercantile class. This group of people, many of them Parsis and Jews, had Anglicized lifestyles and tastes, and this was projected in the architecture they patronized. Pre-1857 buildings in Bombay, such as the Town Hall (1833) had tended to be of a Classical style, but later building projects tended to reflect newer European trends. Crawford Market building (1869) commissioned by Cowasji Jehangir and donated to the city, was built in a Flemish and Norman style. A large contribution to the funds for the Venetian Gothic style Sassoon Library ((1870) came from the banker David Sassoon. The dominant feeling among the prominent Indian citizens also influenced the design of many public buildings. The Bombay High Court (1878), Bombay University Senate Hall, Library and Clock Tower (1878), and the Victoria Terminus (1887), though built at the height of the Indo-Saracenic movement in India, owed practically nothing to it. Instead they all mostly followed the Gothic Revival that was the current trend in Britain.

31. Town Hall, Bombay

Source: http://bestundertaking.com/his_chap01_1.asp; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/da/Asiatic_Town_Hall%2C_Mumbai.jpg
32. Crawford Market, Bombay, 1905

Source: “Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.” http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/71/Crawford_Market_-_1905.jpg

33. Sassoon Library, Bombay

Source: Joe Ravi: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fa/David_Sassoon_Library.jpg
34. High Court, Bombay

Source: FIBIS; Original post card owned by Beverly Hallam; http://wiki.fibis.org/images/a/a/High_Court%2C_Bombay.jpg

35. Bombay University Senate Hall

36a. Victoria Terminus, Bombay, 1905

Source: “Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.” http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/af/Victoria_Terminus_GIP_Rail.jpg

36b. Victoria Terminus, Bombay

Source: Joe Ravi; CC-BY-SA 3.0; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c5/Chhatrapati_S Shivaji_Terminus_%28Victoria_Terminus%29.jpg

Strangely, the Indo-Saracenic style was adopted in Bombay, much later. Major buildings included the Bombay Municipal Corporation Building (1893), The administrative offices of the Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway at Churchgate (1896) the Taj Hotel (commissioned by the entrepreneur Jamshedji Tata and completed in 1904), the Post Office building (1913, modelled fancifully on the Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur), the Prince of Wales Museum (set up at the initiative of prominent Bombay citizens, the building was completed in 1914), and the Gateway of India (1924).
37. Municipal Corporation Building, Bombay

Source: Vegpuff; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ac/Bombay_Municipal_Corporation.JPG
38. Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway office, Churchgate, Bombay


39. Taj Hotel, Bombay

Source: Joe Ravi, CC-BY-SA 3.0; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/73/Taj_Mahal_Palace_Hotel.jpg
40. Post Office, Bombay

Source: Beverly Hallam; CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported; http://wiki.fibis.org/images/5/5f/The_General_Post_Office%2C_Bombay.jpg

41. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay

Source: Bernard Gagnon; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/39/
42. Gateway of India, Bombay

Source: Beetlacies; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9b/Gateway_of_India_Sepia.jpg

This trend had probably something to do with the politics of the city. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, nationalism was gaining ground among the upper class of the city. Therefore a need was felt to break away from the overt European facade of prevalent architecture. But there was an absence of Indian models for the kinds of public buildings that needed to be built in the twentieth century – hotels, museums, post offices. Therefore, the Indo-Saracenic was found the most suitable ‘Indian’ style, even though it was the creation of the British Colonial effort to a redefine ‘traditional’ India.

35.6 NEW IMPERATIVES OF EMPIRE

The Indo-Saracenic style dominated the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the preferred architectural idiom of the colonial state. It was of course not universally used, even in public buildings. We have seen the case of Bombay and the uneven response to it in the Princely states. Calcutta, the capital of the empire, also remained outside its pale. In British opinion, Calcutta, dominated by British political and commercial elite, did not need to make many concessions to ‘native’ sensibilities.

Unlike Bombay, the major public buildings erected in Calcutta in this period did not include the participation or patronage of important Indian citizens. So the architectural style followed in Calcutta remained largely Classical or Gothic, for reasons somewhat different from the current European trends followed in Bombay. When a High Court building was erected in 1870, it was patterned on the Cloth Hall at Ypres in Belgium. The Writers’ Buildings, when they were re-furbished in the 1890s to accommodate the offices of the Bengal Secretariat, were given a Greco- Roman façade.
43. High Court, Calcutta, 1862
Source: Samual Bourne Archives; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c7/Calcutta_High_Court_1860.jpg

44. Cloth Hall, Ypres
Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4d/Lakenhalle_Ieper.JPG
45. Façade of Writers’ Building, Calcutta
Source: Rangan Datta Wiki; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/07/Writers%27Building.jpg

35.7 BLENDDED ARCHITECTURES

By the beginning of the twentieth century new movements in architecture and town planning as well as political, were at work in defining how Indian cities would look. In Britain itself, the empire had assumed a new popularity, as the accumulated fruits of colonialism created a prosperous middle and upper class, bigger than ever before. The desire to celebrate empire was reflected in a revival of Classical forms that drew inspiration from the time of the Roman empire.

Thus the façade of Buckingham palace was re-done, giving it a more emphatically Classical appearance, through porticos composed of columns and pediments. The space in front of the palace was re-designed to create a ceremonial way, the Mall, which led from the palace gates, past the Victoria Memorial sculpture, and the gateway known as the Admiralty Arch, on to Trafalgar Square. Such ceremonial ways were by now considered an essential part of grand capital cities such as Paris, Washington D.C., and Vienna.

46. Victoria Memorial, Calcutta
Source: Ken Walker; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Victoria_memorial_kolkata.jpg
47. Avenue de Champs Elysee, Paris
Source: Bretva: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/t/f4/Champs-%C3%89lys%C3%A9es eastern_view_.20111001.jpg


In India, the empire was not as self-confident as it had been, faced as it was with a growing national movement. For that reason it had to make bold and dramatic gestures. The Victoria Memorial Hall, built in Calcutta between 1906-21, was grander than any previous building of the British Raj. It was essentially Italian Renaissance in style with
some small suggestions of Indo-Saracenic, i.e. in the cupolas at the four corners. In decorative details, the depiction of early Governors such as Hastings and Cornwallis in the garb of Roman statesmen, emphasised the parallels with the Roman empire. Sculptural representations of landmarks in British Indian history, such as the abolition of sati by Bentinck, told the story of British rule in India.

The last flourish of British imperial architecture in India, and the most spectacular, however was in Delhi. A decision was taken in 1911 to move the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi, and the choice of Delhi for the capital again had to do with a desire to establish continuities with the imperial rule of the Mughals. Coronation Durbars of 1903 and 1911 had continued the traditions set in the 1877 Durbar, being ever more elaborate pageants, incorporating ceremonial underscoring the fealty of important groups of Indians to the empire.

### 35.8 PLANNING AN IMPERIAL CITY

The decision was made to lay out a grand capital city, worthy enough to be the centre of a great empire, following the decision to shift the capital. The design of the city of New Delhi, and of the individual monumental buildings in it, embodied all the values of the ‘high noon’ of British imperialism. The spectacle of grandeur was centred in a majestic ceremonial way – Kingsway, inspired by the Avenue de Champs Elysee in Paris and the Mall in Washington D.C. It was a long avenue, lined with water channels and large trees. At one end stood the core apparatus of the empire – the Viceroy’s House and the Secretariat, and at the other, the War Memorial Arch. Parallels with Champs Elysee were obvious, as that too was a broad avenue with the Louvre Palace at one end and the Arc de Triomphe at the other. The placement of the Government buildings on Raisina Hill was reminiscent of the US Capitol building on a raised site dominating the National Mall in Washington.

49. **War Memorial Arch (India Gate), New Delhi**  
*Source:* Thebrowniris; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a6/India_Gate_.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a6/India_Gate_.jpg)
50. **Viceroy’s House (Rashtrapati Bhawan), New Delhi**

**Source:** Scott Dexter; [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Rashtrapati_Bhavan_Wide_New_Delhi_India.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Rashtrapati_Bhavan_Wide_New_Delhi_India.jpg)

A unique feature in Delhi was ‘Princes’ Park’, the area around Memorial Arch (today called India Gate). Here plots of land were given to the rulers of various princely states, so they could build small palaces for themselves. As the ceremonial of the Durbars had grouped the princes physically around the sovereign power, so now the princes were grouped like satellites around the symbols of colonial power.

The process of planning New Delhi (described in detail by Irving, 1981; and Volwahsen, 2004) was made easy because of an important feature of Delhi; the planners did not have to locate the new structures in or even in close proximity to a pre-existing city. There were practically no important pre-existing colonial structures that had to be incorporated into the plan of the new city. Also, plenty of potentially usable land was available. Admittedly, this was covered with ruins of historic cities of Delhi, and by some villages, but these were cleared away without a second thought, leaving only a few historic structures that could be picturesquely integrated with the new plan.

The commission for the planning of the city and its major buildings was given to Edwin Lutyens, with Herbert Baker as his associate. Lutyens was well connected among the elite in Britain, having married Emily, the daughter of Robert Bulwer-Lytton who had been Viceroy of India in the 1870s. This played a big role in his landing the job, though all his experience so far had been in designing villas for the rich in England. Herbert Baker, whose career had been spent mostly in South Africa, had designed some important public buildings, including Pretoria’s Union Buildings, South Africa’s seat of Government.
51. Baker’s Union Building, Pretoria

Source: Davinci77; http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Uniegebou.jpg

Both were conservative in their outlook, and conscious of their task of making their buildings represent the ideals of British rule in India. In fact, for all the decision makers involved with the project, the building of New Delhi meant putting in stone the idea of empire – that a strong alien race, in its own mind motivated by the highest principles, could bring order and civilisation to a subject people. As they well understood, the very task of creating a grand city on this scale on a clean slate was possible only under a despotism.

Their personal instincts took both architects in the direction of essentially Classical forms, which were elevated to the status of ‘universal principles’. According to them only the superior architectural traditions of the West could embody and represent British Imperial rule, that had brought progress and order to the land. The architects’ clients, the political authorities in India and Britain however felt differently. The Viceroy, Lord Hardinge and King George V in particular felt that in these important public buildings the British empire should put forth a more ‘Indian’ face; seeking to establish connections with the traditions of the country and its people.

The result, arrived at after a great deal of negotiation, was an interestingly original ensemble of buildings. They were not quite Indo-Saracenic in style, for they owed their basic form and important decorative features to the Western architectural tradition. However, the continuous insistence of Hardinge on the incorporation of Indian elements had led to a distinct quality. In the case of Baker, who designed the Secretariat buildings, the Indian elements – jalis (stone screens), chhatris (cupolas), carved elephants, were grafted on, more or less in their original form. Lutyens, whose major works were the Viceroy’s House, The war Memorial Arch, and George V Memorial, worked more creatively to adapt Indian forms such as the Stupa at Sanchi and Ashokan pillar capitals, in addition to chhatris and jalis, into his buildings.
52. Baker’s Secretariat Buildings, New Delhi
Source: Laurie Jones; (http://www.flickr.com/photos/ljonesimages/);

53. Stupa at Sanchi
In New Delhi, a whole new city had to be planned too, not just the monumental government buildings and memorials. The street layout, the built-up area, and even the avenue trees, were meticulously planned. Lutyens headed the New Delhi Town Planning Committee, and his hand can be seen in much of this work. Before coming to Delhi he had worked on an important project – Hampstead Garden Suburb. Founded in 1907, this locality in London had been designed along lines that were quite revolutionary for its time. It provided aesthetically pleasing housing for all classes, in a community setting within a healthy green environment. Woods and public gardens were open to all classes, and plots were not separated by boundary walls. As much as the layout, which emphasised wide tree-lined streets and open spaces, it was the social experiment that made Hampstead Garden Suburb stand out.
Lutyens had been involved with the Hampstead Garden Suburb plan, having designed the Central Square, and it is generally believed that he was inspired by the ‘garden city’ concept while designing New Delhi. Yet the premise of New Delhi was very different. There were of course many open spaces, not only in the wide avenues, but in the large plots of land on which houses were located. The social context of these however was very different from that in Hampstead Garden Suburb, because this was housing for the privileged class of colonial administrators. Thus the bungalows in New Delhi owed much more to the long lineage of colonial bungalows all over India – situated on large plots of land, shielded from contact with the town outside by boundary walls and trees.

In fact, New Delhi was not in a strict sense a complete city. It was a city for a very limited social class. It was designed to house only the colonial administrators and the Indians who either served as subordinates in the government, or as personal servitors, or the princes who occasionally lived in their palaces at Delhi. Its public spaces were not used in any meaningful way by the citizens of Delhi until much later. The bulk of the Indian population continued to live in Shahjahanabad, which was now designated ‘Old Delhi’ and gradually allowed to sink into neglect and disrepair.

35.9 SUMMARY

British rule created a break of sorts in the Indian tradition of monumental construction. As the new patrons of significant public buildings, the British to begin with re-created structures they were familiar with at home. While many of these were simple, functional buildings, some were clearly intended to invoke grandeur in terms of western ideals, notably the Roman empire. The phase of Indo-Saracen ideology, which was at its height in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, represented an attempt by British architects working in India, to interpret ‘traditional’ Indian style and incorporate it eclectically as a veneer on buildings that were western in form, function and building technology. Though many buildings were constructed in this style throughout British India and in the Princely States, it was rarely a style of choice for Indian patrons. Where they had a choice, Indian patrons rejected these attempts to represent ‘tradition’.

Contrary to the traditionalism ascribed to them, Indians frequently chose to express their architectural tastes either in purely western styles, or experimenting with it at the level of surface decoration. In these choices, and in the creative use of newly designed public spaces, they underlined their own interpretations of and engagements with British rule.

The tradition of British imperial architecture reached its climax in the building of New Delhi, a grand capital city for British India. It sought to express many of the ideas of imperial rule – the rulers’ authority and might, the superiority of western intellectual and technological attainments, and finally, through the use of Indian motifs and devices, the idea that the British empire was an Indian empire, having taken over the mantle of grand Indian powers such as the Mughals.

Interestingly, colonial architecture proved to be one of the least persistent legacies of colonial rule. Neither the constructions of Baker or Lutyens, nor those of the Indo-Saracen architects, much less the Classical and Gothic models, found any significant imitators after independence. For a newly independent democracy, different indigenous histories were pressed into service, and often the utilitarian principles of modern architecture served public building design much better. (Nair, 2005) Moreover, buildings no longer needed to express the might of the rulers, or their self-conscious attempts to engage with the culture of an alien subject population.
35.10 EXERCISES

1. In what ways did colonial architecture and city planning reflect a British political agenda?

2. Highlight the characteristic features of early colonial architecture.

3. What was the impact of the revolt of 1857 on the planning of older Indian cities?

4. Why do you think the British felt compelled to organise such grand spectacles such as the Durbar in Delhi in 1877/1911?

5. How did Indians adapt or transform features of the Indo-Saracenic style developed by the British in their own architectural practices? Discuss at least two examples.


35.11 REFERENCES


