

Introduction to History of Architecture in India
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Colonial Architecture in India

Today we will talk about colonial architecture in India when I say colonial I am really talking of only the British we do have other colonial presences in India including the French the Dutch and even the Danish yet the most lasting legacy of colonialism has been British colonialism and we will look at the buildings they erected and take a look at how trends in their architectural style changed through the course of two and a half centuries.

We are also going to look at buildings that really are public buildings we are looking at the monumental and not the humble the British came initially as traders became courtiers at the Mughal court eventually got revenue rights and by excellent more than any grand design starting with three presidency towns they took over large parts of the Indian subcontinent it is in this period from about 1780 onwards till about 1940 that we also see a sweeping change in architectural styles all across Europe.

After all the 18th century was the century just following the enlightenment and people thought that a certain kind of neoclassicism was the way to build in Europe naturally as the English found resources and power to build in India they chose this idiom which was being practiced throughout Europe.

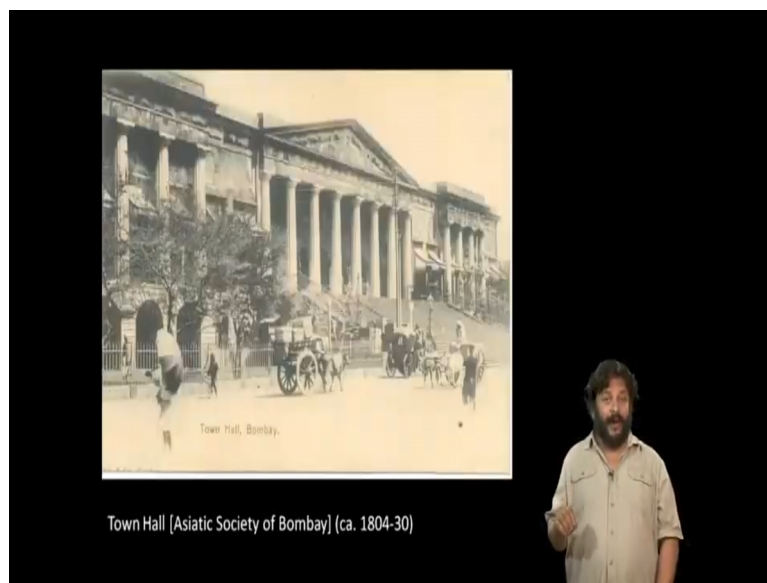
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It was supposed to be moralizing and a lot of the buildings built in the late 18th and early 19th century in India tend to be in the form of this neoclassicism how do you define neoclassicism well it is an architecture in which the overall shapes forms and elements of Greek and roman buildings are copied so buildings from classical antiquity are replicated with an understanding that if there was a period of enlightenment in the classical Age the new enlightenment must also follow similar architectural styles.

These buildings are marked by columns which you see in front here these columns typically follow what is called the order of columns Doric Corinthian ionic and sometimes Tuscan these columns are defined by the kinds of capitals or tufts they have and also by their proportions these columns usually support a triangular element called a pediment it is this facade that really marks a building as neoclassical as we will see in the next few examples also note the very high plinth that the building stands on most of the neoclassical buildings were two Storeys at most three Storeys tall if anybody has seen movies like jal sagar directed by Satya Jeet Rai you will notice that the zamindars house is also built in this idiom most likely in the 19th century.

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It was not just in the presidency towns of Calcutta and Bombay and Madras that you find neoclassical buildings but also in places where the British had a significant presence such as the residency in Hyderabad. The front of this building was completely in a neoclassical mode: a two-story high building but yet the porch was a single double-storied porch supported on six columns with a pediment on top. The rear end of this building was more Indian. If you look at something like the town hall in Bombay at what is called Horniman Circle now, which was earlier called Elphinstone Circle, this town hall which houses the Asiatic Society of Bombay, built in the 1803

1804 period when Bombay is really getting built is built in the neoclassical style again it has the characteristic facade with columns and a pediment.

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British Residency, Hyderabad, ca. 1803



Great Eastern Hotel, Calcutta, c. 1841





Now while this style was very popular it was not completely suited to weather conditions in India but even though it fell out of favor over a period of time it persisted in small quantities long after its heyday the great eastern hotel in Calcutta built in 1841 this hotel did not have the characteristic pediment but it still did have the columns except in this case they were composed in a completely new way so while this was a building that carried all the classical elements it was not a neoclassical building per se.

You had a number of permutations and combinations of neoclassical elements to create architecture that was suitable for the weather in India so a large number of British bungalows in fact even some of the bungalows and Latins Delhi in the 20th century are built in this idiom where neoclassical elements such as Tuscan columns are used to make the porches but yet the building itself in its overall massing and composition is not a neoclassical building.

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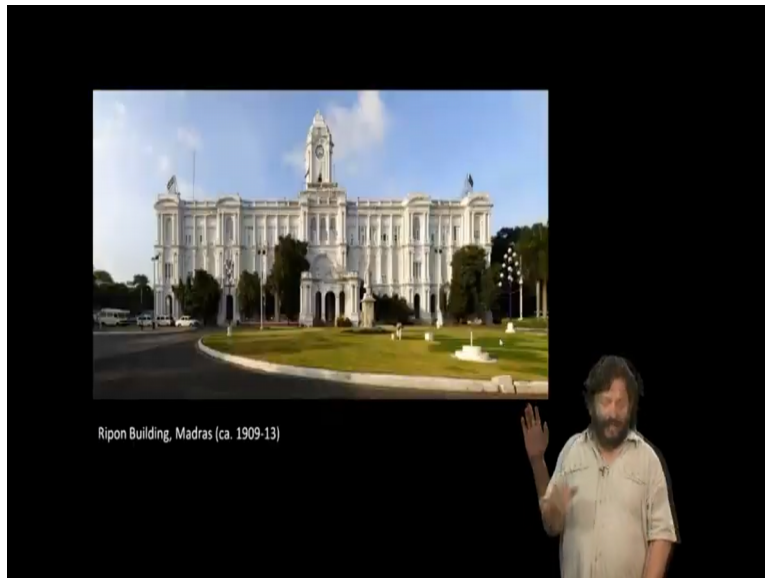


St. Andrew's Church, Calcutta, ca. 1818



St. Andrew's Church - Calcutta





Ripon Building, Madras (ca. 1909-13)

A number of churches in both Calcutta and Bombay were built along the lines of Saint Martin in the fields at Trafalgar square and this church which uses neoclassical elements became a very popular model for churches across India till the gothic swept in the British in Calcutta did really try to create a completely urban landscape with elements that look like they had been picked from late 18th and early 19th century England which was very unlike what happened in Bombay 50 years later when they tried to create a Bombay of its own contemporary times which is to say buildings that were being constructed in Victorian gothic in England were the kinds of buildings that were being constructed in Victorian gothic in Bombay.

But neoclassicism has its greatest flourishing in Calcutta and by the time Bombay is on the rise in the 1850s and particularly in the 1860s with the boom in opium and also the boom in cotton caused by the American civil war we come to something that is Victorian neo gothic a last example of the kind of widespread reach of neoclassicism other reppin buildings built quite late in the early 20th century in Chennai then called Madras opera house in Bombay a kind of mannerist take on the neoclassical and of course the mythic society in Bangalore which also is a very late example often your classical facade.

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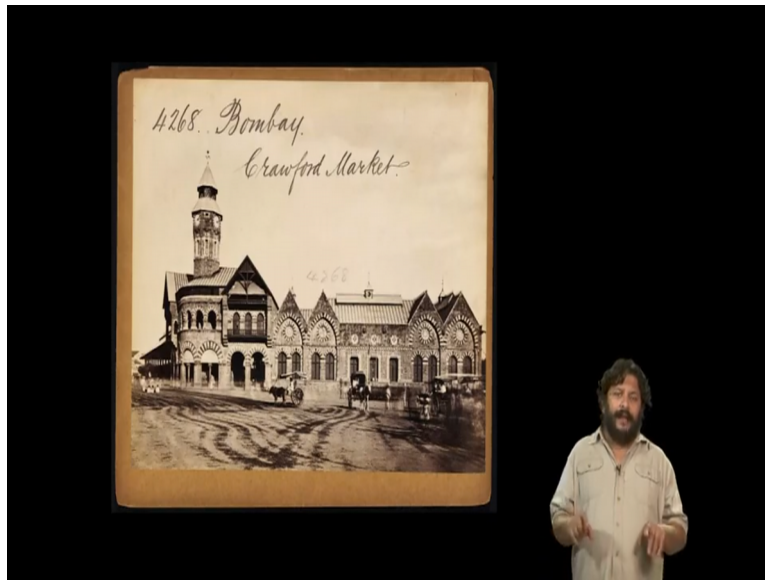
The neo gothic of Bombay is really championed by the governor of Bombay sir Bartle Freya. Freya was of the opinion that modern cities need to have a certain number of institutions that make them modern. These included railway stations, museums, post offices, universities, libraries, markets, and for all these, the style that he felt was most appropriate architecturally was the neo gothic. Now, the neo gothic picked up in Bombay partly because of the encouragement of Bartle Freya but also because the region was well versed in carving stone. Dressed ashlar blocks were very common in the net of architecture.

There you had the labor, you had the material, you had a willing patron, and you had this raging style through Europe, particularly in England, championed by a gentleman called Augustus Pugin. Pugin had championed gothic for the houses of parliament in England in the 1830s. There was a big debate in England about what style the houses of parliament should be built in after the old ones were burnt down, and Pugin, along with a number of supporters in Cambridge, rallied the cause of gothic, saying this was a style that really reflected the nationhood of England.

Let us not forget that the early 19th century was a period when nations across Europe were defining themselves typically as monolithic races with a shared history, and a number of people in England, particularly architectural thinkers, thought that what gothic represented were values that were very dear to their Englishness. And therefore, along with the houses of parliament, a whole host of buildings were constructed in London in this style called Victorian neo gothic.

Victorian because queen Victoria was ruling neo because it was a new take on gothic which was a much older style from the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries.

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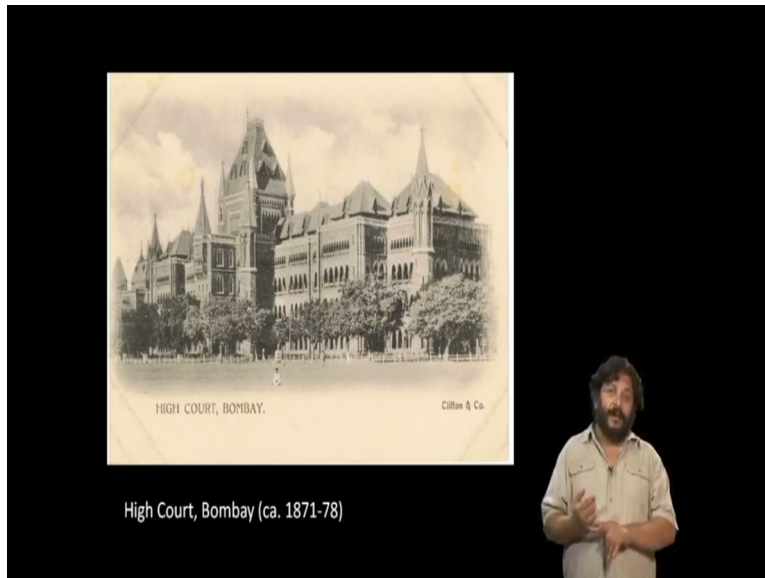


In Bombay you had after the mutiny of 1857 a new sense of the British being benevolent rulers they wanted to create public institutions that would serve the people but these institutions had to be imposing and monumental they would also be modernizing in ways that Bartle Freer had seen fit yet ironically the style that was chosen for these modern institutions was an old antiquated style namely gothic and sometimes as the case of Crawford market is this was a style that was a mixture of gothic elements and medieval pewter styles in England.

The railway station in madras built in the 1870s again a monumental gesture of public benevolence constructed in the style that reflected English values but could be replicated in India again this gothic which was originally used for churches allowed buildings with wide spans and therefore a whole host of building functions of architectural programs could be accommodated in a gothic building thus a school a museum library a post office a railway station a university a hospital a court everything could essentially have the same design and yet housed these functions.

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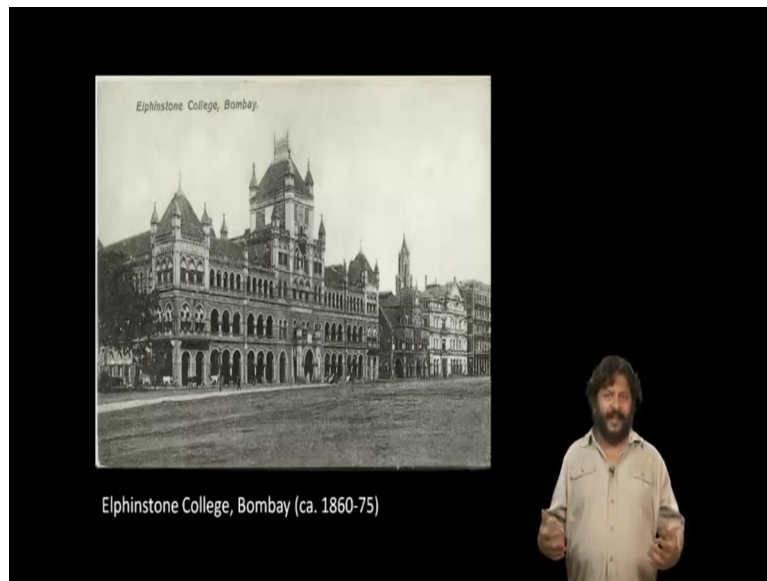




High Court, Bombay (ca. 1871-78)

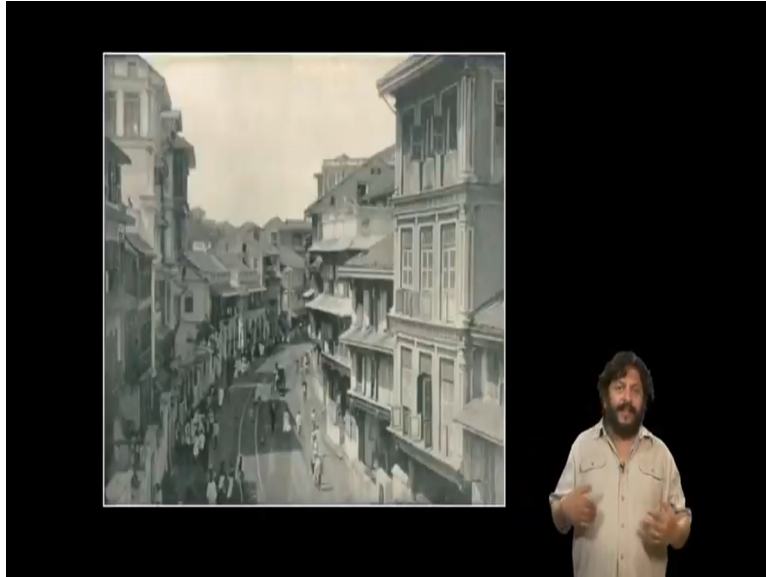
The big Victoria terminus station in Bombay was also built in the very same mode of Victorian neo gothic one of the most photographed grand buildings in Bombay what the black and white photographs do not allow us to admire is the Polychromy of the stones where stones of different colors are used judiciously to create a more dramatic effect in Bombay the 1860s because of the American civil war seized an enormous demand in cotton trading from India and also Bombay becomes the major mercantile hub for exporting opium to China as a result of which the city grows rapidly it has been the decade after the mutiny and the government is very keen to make its presence felt through buildings and it Commissions the High court the big secretariat the university buildings and a whole host of buildings around what would later be called the Maidan in Bombay.

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All of them happen under the leadership of Bartle freer and therefore a number of military architects or military engineers who serve as architects eager to please him design in Victorian neo gothic again more buildings in Bombay being constructed till a point that there is a density of these buildings making it look like it might be a part of London and so when you stand at the big public fields like the Maidan you see on all sides around you umpteen number of buildings in Victorian gothic.

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What of native architecture in India very much under a certain kind of pax Britannica in the late 19th century well what you see in native quarters in the city is that a number of motifs and designs are being picked up from English fashions yet being composed in their own logic and way so while the overall design of the building might be native certain elements like pilasters windows trellises fascia boards are being copied from English architecture.

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Now the English are very uncomfortable with gothic being used in India because it is not suited to the weather in fact there are a number of failures where buildings have had to be altered because the gothic architecture is just not conducive to ventilation and to light and therefore you have a number of champions of a new style which is going to be a hybrid style in which not only is British supremacy going to be displayed but it's actually going to pick up on the mantle of the great Mughals the British are going to be the new Mughals.

This is ritually enacted in things like the big darbars in 1877 and 1891 in Delhi where a big Mughal ceremonial is played out by the Prince of Wales and to go with it they also promote a new style of architecture which is British in its logic but has Indian elements on it as opposed to the vernacular architecture we saw which was Indian and logic but with British ornament the British architects of this new style called Indo-Saracenic rely on British manor-like designs onto which are affixed a number of decorative and ornamental elements derived from the great book called the Jaipur portfolio now an architect called Jacob Swinton has published in the late 19th century a twelve-volume work called the Jaipur portfolio in which he reproduces faithfully all the details of various building elements throughout the historical periods of India so if you open the Jaipur portfolio and you say balconies you will find balconies from the second century BC as depicted at Bharod all the way to balconies made by the maharaja of Patiala in his old palace.

There is no historic understanding it is basically a pattern book and all these military engineers were designing both for the british government but also for a lot of princely patrons like the maharaja of Mysore the Gaikwad of Baroda the Nizam of Hyderabad they are using these pattern books to compose facades onto English designs and so a number of these indo saracenic buildings will have details that are yes Indian but from completely different periods in history.

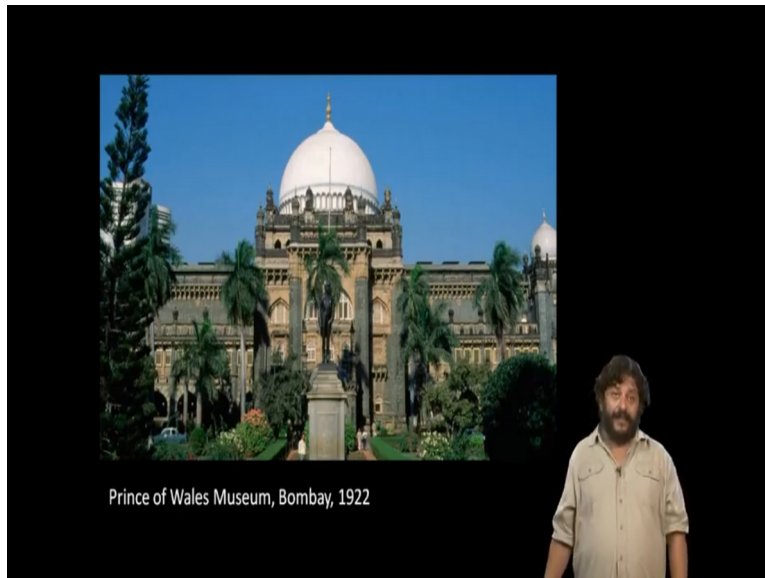
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High Court, Hyderabad, 1919



Railway Station, Kuala Lumpur, 1910



Here you have the high court in Hyderabad built in the early 20th century by an American architect called Vincent Ashe but he too is using the Jaipur portfolio and composing in a style that the Hyderabadis love to call the city improvement board or CIB style but which really was indo saracenic a regional variant on it in fact this indo saracenic spreads way beyond India and has even used as an appropriate secular style in places in southeast Asia such as Kuala Lumpur where the railway station built in 1910 is built in this indo saracenic style the prince of wales museum in Bombay designed by George witted again a fine example of this mode the majestic buildings across from the prince of wales museum.

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But the story is not as simple as saying the British come and design in three styles over a period of years initially in the neoclassical then in the Victorian neo gothic and then in the indo saracenic the problem gets complicated because you have English architects trying to invent styles that are Indian Indian architects who are designing buildings that are British buildings in India that look like their buildings from England and also buildings in England that look like

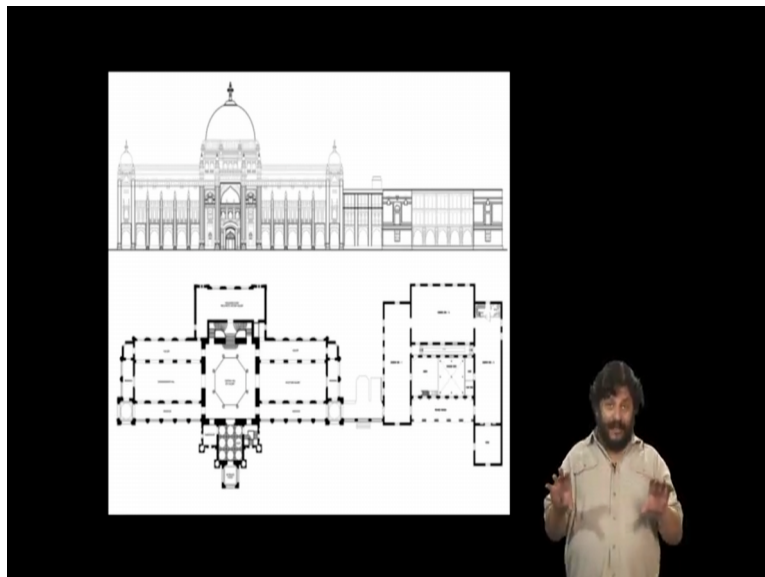
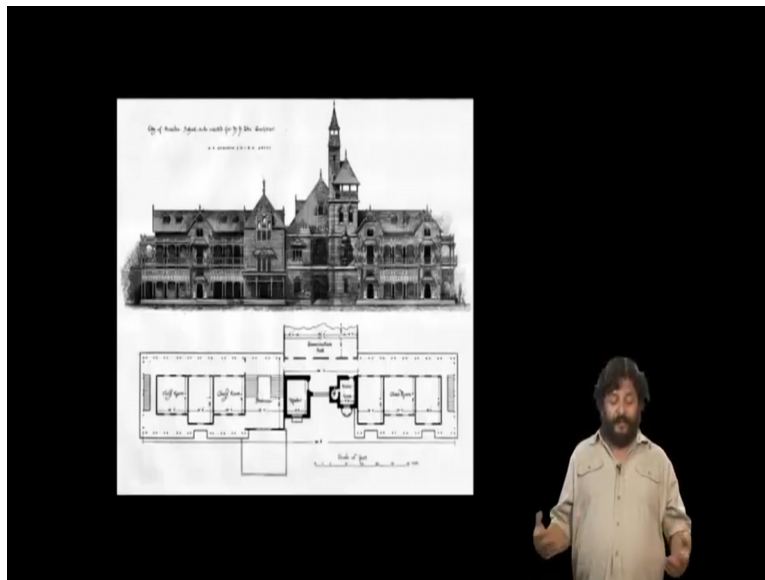
they might be from India if you consider a building like the royal pavilion at Brighton constructed in the 1820s and 1830s this was supposed to be the great Indian pavilion of course the Jaipur portfolio has not been published and so there is no set of details that they can borrow on largely done through painted images of India as popularized by William Hodges or the Daniels these buildings rely more on a pictures imagination of what Indian architecture is like but just eight years later in the city of Hyderabad palaces like the Chowmahalla are borrowing heavily on Europeanizing designs this might be a palace in north Africa built under European colonial rule this might be a palace around southern Europe but it happens to be in Hyderabad.

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If you look at a number of these buildings like the mayo college in Ajmer and you look at the plans you start seeing how the logic of these buildings is impeccably European and more importantly Victorian if you are given just a plan this building could be a building anywhere in Europe built in the 19th century with details that conform to styles they're the only thing that makes this Indian is by having ornament that can be called indo saracenic which is largely cut and pasted from pattern books.

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Again you have buildings in Baroda being built like their English Menor houses and then you have buildings like the prince of wales museum which is indo saracenic in its ornamental detail completely English in its planning designed by a British architect George witted who is assisted variably by a number of Indian assistants these Indian assistants will be highly sought after to build colonial style buildings that is to say European style buildings whereas the English architects will be highly sought after to build buildings that look Indian.

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St. James' Church, Delhi (Skinner's Church, 1826-36)



Bara Imambara, Lucknow, 1784





Brighton Pavilion, Brighton, 1815-1822



Indian Gate, Dromana Estate, Villierstown, Waterford, 1849





Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad, 1884-1889



King Kothi Palace (Nazari Bagh), Hyderabad, 1911





Rampur Raza Library (Hamid Manzil), Rampur, 1904



Indian Museum, London (unbuilt)





Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, 1894





At the same time you do have Europeans who design European buildings such as skimmers church in Delhi you also do have Indian designers such as the designers of the Bara Imam Bara in Lucknow who are building buildings for an Indian patron but somewhere are being shaped by images that they're seeing of Europe the reverse happening of course in England in England there is a high fashion of trying to design buildings that look like they are Indian much like in India there is a fashion of building big palaces that look like they are European.

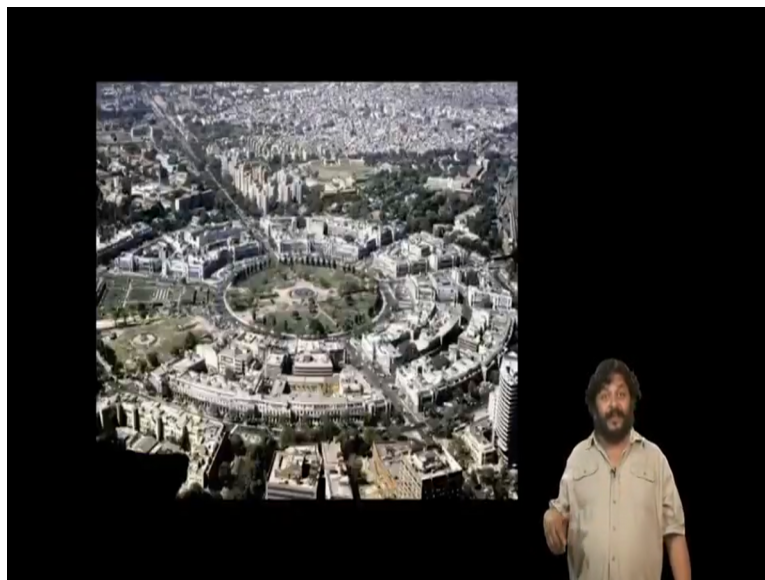
In fact in Hyderabad all the state buildings are built in the indo saracenic style but all the residential buildings are built in the Europeanizing ways if you go to other princely states like Rampur you see completely fantastic hybrid interpretations of the indo saracenic using elements that are Mughal in origin but filtered through a British constructional apparatus there were buildings that never got built such as Robert Shashams Indian museum which was meant to be in London but really could have been anywhere in Calcutta, in Allahabad, in Delhi, Lahore, Bombay, Madras or Mysore.

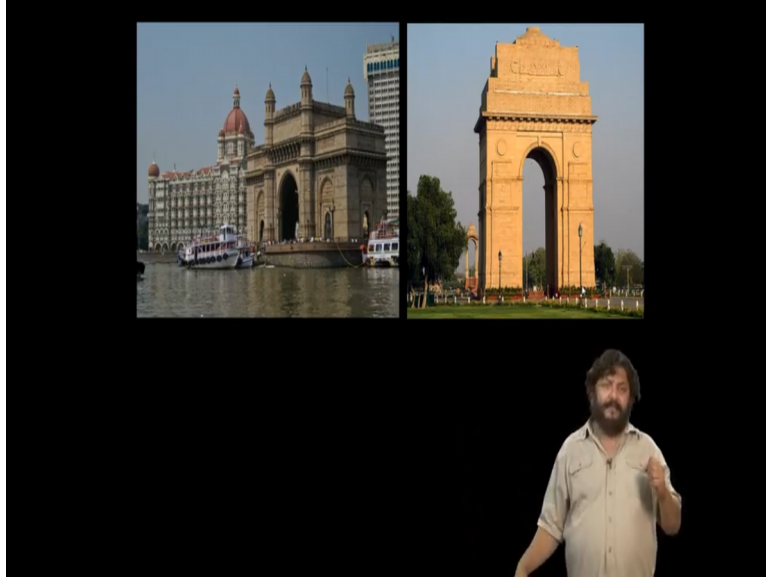
You also have museums such as the Baroda museum which looks like it is a European country club but it all changes when the capital of India moves from Calcutta to Delhi and the new capital is envisioned because this new capital wants to mark a completely new age moving away from the classical European roots moving away from the period when England was trying to define its character through gothic moving away from when the British wanted to be the new Mughals and therefore invented new indo saracenic really moving into a modernist phase of

architecture and planning where the new capital would embody modern values with references to a past that were shared the past that was Indian as much as British which would borrow heavily from renaissance planning from rational grids but would have things like domes that were not Mughal domes but were references to things like the Sanchi stupa.

If you look at this building you have the Mughal style Chhatris play evenly along the roof line but yet they are not clustered as if to mistake them for a Mughal building the building is modern yet it has references to the past not an imitation of the past.

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One of the centerpieces of this was an exercise in urban design such as cannot circle where you had a large commercial establishment that was utilitarian as well as ceremonial again buildings that are modern but yet hark back to a different kind of heritage European heritage in this case and it is perhaps these two gateways which were both built in a sense to commemorate British rule in India.

The one on the left which is the gateway of India and Bombay built in 1911 again by George Witter the same architect who designed the Prince of Wales Museum but built to mark the arrival of the King George Fifth into India and India Gate in Delhi which you see here which is to commemorate those dead in the first world war gateways is built literally within a decade of each other but yet showing a completely different understanding of architecture the gateway of India trying to replicate in an Indo-Saracenic more details from the Jaipur portfolio trying to be an Indian building for a new master who had replaced the Mughals whereas the India Gate is really a modernist enterprise which relies on Indian elements such as the little dome on top but also a lot of European representations of historic architecture thank you.