

Architectural History Thesis

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Final Draft

Name- Pranav Jadhav

Student Number- 6239641

Title-

Cultural Hybridity in Architectural Exteriors: The Brighton Pavilion and Its Indian Inspirations

Abstract-

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach, employing visual and contextual analysis of Brighton Pavilion and its Indian architectural inspirations. The study delves into the historical and cultural origins of the Pavilion's design elements, such as domes, minarets, chatris, arches, etc., and examines their reinterpretation within the European context. By analysing the building through a comparative perspective, the study contrasts these elements with their counterparts in Indian architecture, drawing examples from Mughal and Rajput architecture.

While most of the studies have examined the Brighton Pavilion's architectural hybridity or its symbolic function within the British royal interpretations, only a few have made a direct, element-to-element comparison between the pavilion and its authentic counterparts from Indian Mughal or Rajput architecture. This study aims to close the gap by examining the ideological reinterpretation of Indian design work within a Western colonial framework, in addition to the formal parallels.

The main goal of this research is to find out how the Brighton Pavilion reimagines and repurposes Indian architectural elements while exposing the cultural and political beliefs ingrained in this architectural synthesis. By doing this, the article hopes to add to the conversation about colonial architectural hybridity by establishing the Pavilion as a significant piece of imperial representation and Orientalist design logic rather than merely a stylistic peculiarity.

Keywords

Cultural Hybridity, architectural translation, symbolism, architectural symbolism

Research questions-

1. How does the Brighton Pavilion reinterpret Indian architectural elements for a European audience/ context?
2. In what ways does the Brighton Pavilion reflect British colonial attitudes toward Indian culture during its time?

Rationale of the study-

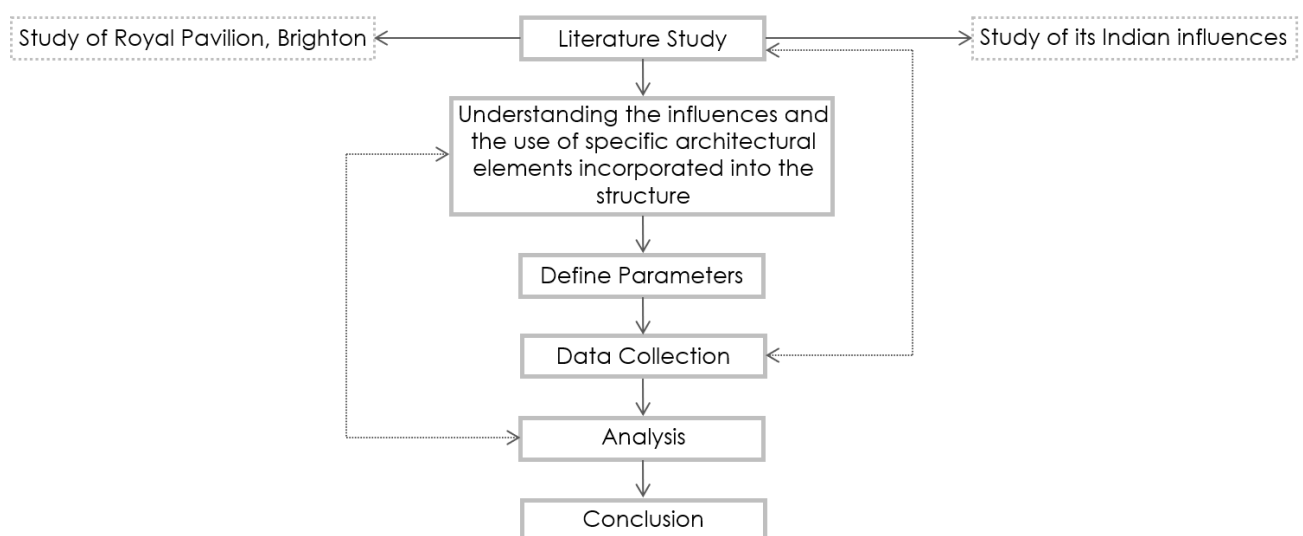
This study aims to explore and understand how the Brighton Pavilion reinterprets Indian architectural elements within a European context, offering insights into its reflection of British colonial attitudes toward Indian culture. As an individual from India with firsthand experience and familiarity with Indian architecture, I find it particularly intriguing to examine a case beyond the Indian subcontinent. This research will investigate how these architectural elements are translated and reimagined in the Western world, assessing the extent to which they remain faithful to their origins or undergo transformation within a colonial framework.

Methodology-

The methodology for this study is structured into two main components. The first focuses on a detailed study of the Royal Pavilion, with an emphasis on identifying and analyzing its architectural elements. The second component involves examining corresponding architectural elements in Indian architecture, followed by a comparative analysis with their counterparts in the Brighton Pavilion.

Key architectural features such as columns, minarets, domes, arches, doors, and windows will be systematically compared between the two contexts. This comparison aims to uncover the functional and symbolic roles of these elements within their respective architectural traditions.

Subsequently, the research will establish parameters for evaluating these elements, considering how their design, usage, and meaning evolve when transposed into a different cultural and geographical context. The study will also delve into the colonial reinterpretations of these architectural features, shedding light on how they were adapted, reimagined, or appropriated in the Royal Pavilion.



Structure of the Research:

Chapter 1: Introduction



From Mughal to Neoclassical

A graphic comparison of the Brighton Pavilion's astonishing evolution may be seen in the collage above. The image on the right, with its onion domes, chhatris, arches, jali, and other Mughal-style features/ elements that are frequently seen in structures like the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, and other Mughal architecture, displays the original design and example. In addition to their aesthetic value, these structures and features are firmly ingrained in climatic, spiritual, and cultural systems.

Henry Holland and John Nash created a dramatic reimagining of the original Neo-Classical sea villa in the image on the left, fusing its aesthetics with those of the Indo-Saracenic and Orientalists. Nash's design borrowed from Indian architecture to create onion domes, minarets, arches, and parapets, but it put them back together using European building materials and methods. Compared to their Indian origins, these components are not as true to structural or climatic factors. Instead, they are merely a perfect exotic representation of the East created for the luxury and show of the British monarchy.

This architectural experiment demonstrates the concept of cultural hybridity by incorporating Eastern influences within a Western architectural framework. It demonstrates how the British Empire, particularly the East India Company, increased its political influence and interest in colonial India in the 19th century.

Chapter 2: Historical, Social, and Cultural Context

The Brighton Pavilion, also known as the Royal Pavilion is a former residence in Brighton, England, known for its unique Indo-Saracenic architecture. It was built in the late 18th and early 19th century for King George IV, the Prince of Wales. The Pavilion shows its extravagant tastes and fascination with exotic styles, particularly Indian architectural influences on the exterior and Chinese influences on the interior. The building was originally constructed as a modest farmhouse, which George IV leased as a retreat, seeking relief from his health issues. Architect Henry Holland was commissioned to transform it into a neoclassical style pavilion in 1787-1793. After the rise of George IV, he was looking for a more lavish and exotic design for his retreat. He appointed John Nash in 1815 to design the building into a grand oriental-style palace. Inspired by particularly the Mughal architecture and Indian palaces, Nash designed the pavilion in the Indo-Saracenic architectural style. The exterior architectural elements included onion domes, minarets, arches, etc, while the interior of the palace drew inspiration from Chinese décor, including dragon motifs, wallpapers, doors, chandeliers, etc.

After George IV's death in 1830, the pavilion was occasionally used by his successor, William IV. Later on, Queen Victoria, who was much in favor of privacy and did not really like the crowded atmosphere of the pavilion, decided to sell the pavilion in 1850. Most of the furniture of the Pavilion was moved to Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Later in 1850, the pavilion was purchased by the Brighton town authorities for £53,000, making it the first royal palace in Britain to be owned by the public. In 1914, during the World War I, the pavilion was converted into a military hospital for the Indian soldiers fighting for the British Empire, which was an attempt to reinforce its historical connection to India.

The current situation of the Brighton Pavilion is that it is a major tourist attraction symbolizing cultural hybridity, blending Mughal, Rajput, and Chinese architectural elements within a European setting. This historical timeline provides an insightful look into the evolution of the Brighton Pavilion, tracing its journey from a modest farmhouse to a remarkable architectural icon.

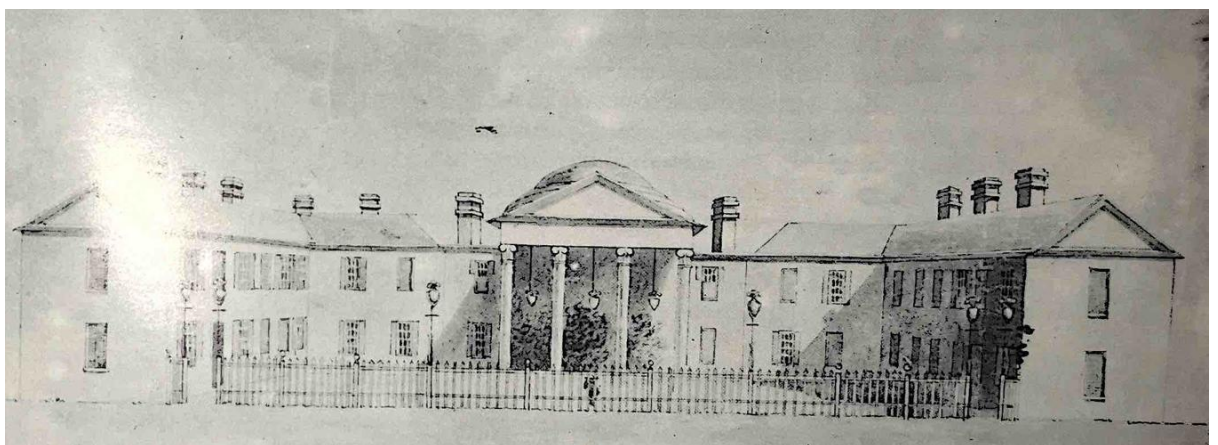


Figure 1 Brighton Pavillion before the radical renovation

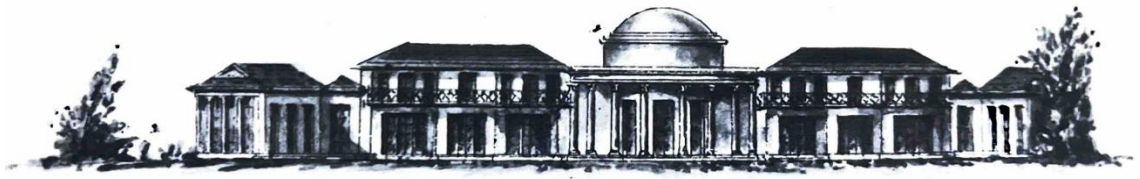


Figure 2 Design proposal 1 for the building elevation



Figure 3 Design proposal 2 for the building elevation with influences from Chinese Architecture

Elevation images above from Morley, J. (2003). *The Making of the Royal Pavilion Brighton: Designs and Drawings*. Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd.

Chapter 2.1: Introduction to the counterparts

To understand the architectural hybridity present in the Brighton Pavilion and its visual references, it is essential to understand the significance of the Indian counterparts it draws inspiration from. Each building, ranging from the imperial Mausoleum to the Royal residences, carries distinct stylistic, functional, and symbolic meanings. By briefly examining their origin and key uses, we can better contextualise these buildings when compared with the Brighton Pavilion. This understanding will provide a clear perspective to evaluate the cross architectural analysis.

1. **Taj Mahal, Agra:** It was commissioned in 1632 by Shah Jahan as a final resting place for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died during childbirth. It is a mausoleum that symbolises eternal love and loss while showcasing the grandeur of imperial power. Presently a UNESCO world heritage site, it has evolved into a pilgrimage site for admirers of art and history.
2. **Noor Us Sabah, Bhopal:** Built in the 1920s by Hamdillulah Khan, the Last Nawab (ruler) of Bhopal, it was constructed as a royal residence for his daughter, Begum Abida Sultan. Perched on top of a hill, it provides a picturesque view of Bhopal. It

stands as a symbol of the Princely legacy and unique history. Today, it is repurposed as a heritage hotel, retaining its historical grandeur.

3. **Red Fort, Delhi:** Also known as 'Lal Quila', it was constructed by Shah Jahan when he shifted his capital from Agra to Delhi. It served as the main residence of the Mughal emperors for nearly 200 years. It was both a political and ceremonial hub as well. It stands as a testament to India's layered history and national symbol.
4. **Itimad-ud-Daulah:** It is a Mausoleum that was commissioned by Nur Jahan, wife of Emperor Jahangir, for her Father Mirza Ghiyas Beg in the 1620s. It is seen as a precursor to the Taj Mahal and is considered a critical step in the evolution of Mughal architecture.
5. **Humayun's Tomb:** As the name suggests, it is a tomb that was commissioned in 1565 by Empress Bega Begum, the wife of Emperor Humayun, to honour his memory and legacy. It also serves as a final resting place for several later Mughal emperors, making it a sacred space for imperial continuity. It is a symbol of dynastic pride and remembrance. Today, it stands as a cherished monument in the Indian cultural landscape.

Chapter 3: Architectural Elements

This chapter examines the key architectural elements characteristic of Indian architecture, particularly Mughal architecture, as many features of the Brighton Pavilion draw inspiration from this style. It delves into the reinterpretation of these elements within a drastically different cultural and geographical context, raising questions about the authenticity and adaptation of such features in a foreign setting.

Elements such as domes, chhatris, Jali work, and minarets are not merely ornamental but are deeply rooted in cultural, climatic, and spiritual contexts. By analysing these components and their traditional use in Indian architecture, we can better comprehend how their reinterpretation in the Pavilion reflects a selective and stylized appropriation.

1. **Domes:** In Mughal architecture, domes are hemispherical or bulbous in shape. They are often mounted on a cylindrical drum to provide an added height. Domes range widely in terms of size, mainly used for covering and distributing loads over a large interior space without the need for columns.

2. **Chhatris:** They are elevated pavilions that are typically square or octagonal in plan, supported by slender columns, crowned by small domes, often standing at 4 to 5m tall. The primary purpose of the Chhatris is to function as a shaded viewing platform. Their proportion and open design allow for both ornamentation and utility.
3. **Jali Work:** Jaali refers to perforated or lattice screens, usually made of stone, terracotta, or wood. They contain intricate carvings that are inspired by floral or geometric patterns. In a hot country like India, the main function of a Jaali is to shade an internal space from the harsh sun while filtering in daylight and fresh air. It also provides an added layer of privacy to the space. Their sizes vary significantly, from small windows of 1m width and height to full-scale walls of several meters.
4. **Minarets:** It is a tall and slender tower with a small platform or balcony, which is typically built as part of or adjacent to a mosque. The formal function of a minaret is to provide a place from which a call to prayer can be made by a muezzin. Their heights can vary from 20m to 30m or more.

3.1 Cultural Hybridity in Architecture

The term cultural hybridity refers to the blending of cultural elements from different traditions, often within postcolonial contexts. In architectural studies, hybridity manifests in the fusion of design elements from multiple cultures, particularly in colonial architecture. Bauer (2011) explores how Mughal architecture in India itself was a product of cross-cultural exchange, making its adaptation into British designs a continuation of architectural hybridity.

3.2 The Role of Exoticism

John Nash's *Designs for the Pavilion at Brighton* (Repton, 1806) outlines the aesthetic and ideological motivations behind the Pavilion's Indo-Islamic design. Nash, under the patronage of the Prince Regent, sought to create an architectural spectacle that reflected the British fascination with the East. Morley (2003) discusses how Nash selectively borrowed elements from Mughal and Rajput palaces, particularly:

- Onion domes (inspired by the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri)
- Chhatris (elevated pavilions), commonly found in Rajasthani architecture
- Scalloped arches, reminiscent of Delhi's Red Fort
- Jali screens (perforated stone lattices), adapted into decorative elements rather than functional ventilation structures

However, as Hinze (1996) argues, Nash's interpretation of Indian architecture was superficial, using ornamentation rather than structural principles. Unlike Mughal palaces, which incorporated climatic considerations, the Pavilion's Indian features were primarily aesthetic choices meant to reinforce British exoticism. As noted by Bauer (2011), who critiques how

Nash's design reduces Indian architecture to an exotic spectacle rather than engaging with its structural or cultural significance.

3.3 The Role of the Pavilion During British Imperial Rule

In addition to being a manifestation of architectural taste, the pavilion's Indian-inspired design served as a potent representation of the goals of the British monarchy. The Pavilion's conversion to a military hospital for Indian soldiers during World War I is a moment of profound historical irony, as Hyson and Lester (2012) point out. Later, the colonial subjects were housed in the same building that had formerly idealized Indian culture through exotic and selective architectural appropriation. The pavilion's dual role in colonial tactics is revealed by this adaptive repurposing. It was used as a mode for aesthetic consumption that praised Britain's fictitious relationship with the East, but it also served as a practical extension of its control and rule over its colonial subjects.

3.4 Gaps in the Literature

The Brighton Pavilion's design, Orientalist style, and Indo-Saracenic influences have all been thoroughly studied in previous research, but there is still a noticeable lack of direct, in-depth comparisons between the Pavilion and real Indian architectural precedents, such as Mughal or Rajput palaces. Few studies examine individual architectural parts and how their original cultural and spatial logic was changed or recontextualized in the Pavilion's adaptation, instead concentrating on the Pavilion's stylistic hybridity or symbolic value within British cultural history. This research seeks to address that gap.

3.5 Visual and Comparative Analysis:



Figure 1: Brighton Pavillion Entrance Foyer

3.5.1 Domed Canopy Entrance (Chhatri Influence)

The entrance is covered by a domed canopy supported by slender columns, drawing direct inspiration from Indian chhatris, which are elevated domed pavilions commonly found in Rajasthani and Mughal architecture. These domed structures function as entrance markers or transitional spaces, guiding visitors into the building while adding an element of grandness. The columns, adorned with ornate capitals, show a hybrid style that blends influences from Mughal, classical European, and Indo-Saracenic architecture. However, this design approach contrasts with traditional Rajput palaces, which prioritize climate responsive strategies over pure ornamentation, given Rajasthan's hot and dry climate.

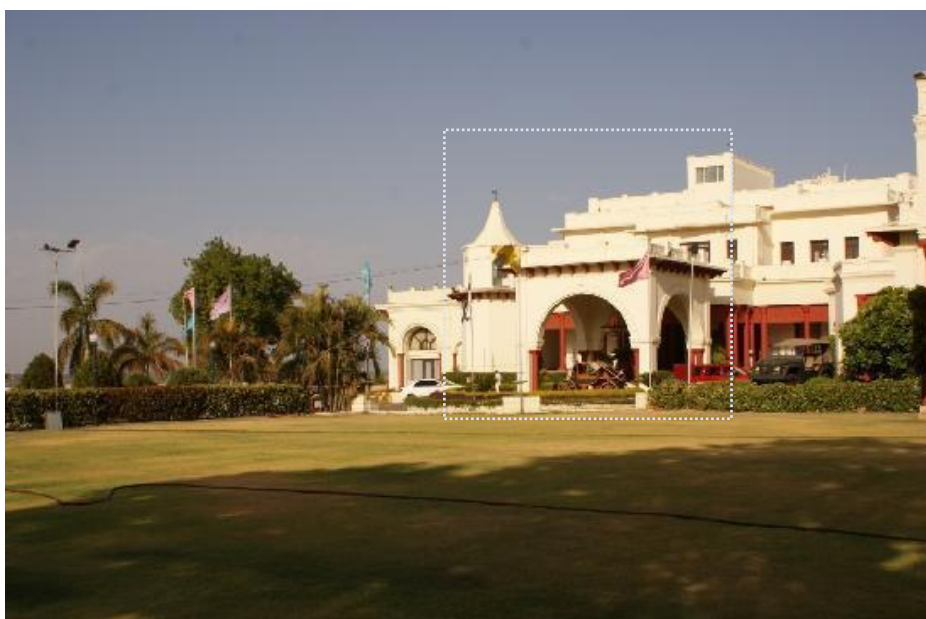


Figure 2: Canopy Entrance (Noor Us Sabah Palace, Bhopal)

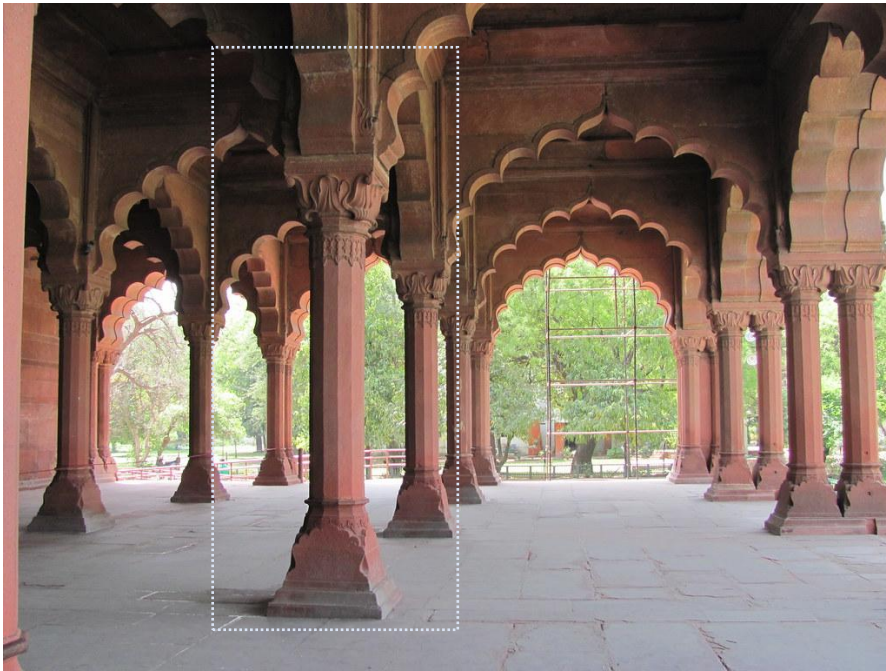


Figure 3: Slender Columns with Ornamented Capital (Red Fort, Delhi)



3.5.2 Onion Domes

Traditional Mughal domes are often constructed from white marble or sandstone, exemplifying the grandness and craftsmanship of Indo-Islamic architecture. In contrast, the domes of the Brighton Pavilion feature a ribbed texture, which is uncommon in Indian domes but bears resemblance to certain European dome structures. Additionally, the small circular windows embedded within these domes reference Indian jali screens, which traditionally serve to enhance ventilation and diffuse natural light. However, in the Brighton

Pavilion, these windows are purely ornamental and do not fulfill any climatic function, highlighting a stylistic rather than a practical adaptation of Indian architectural elements.



Figure 4: Dome (St. Paul's Cathedral, London)

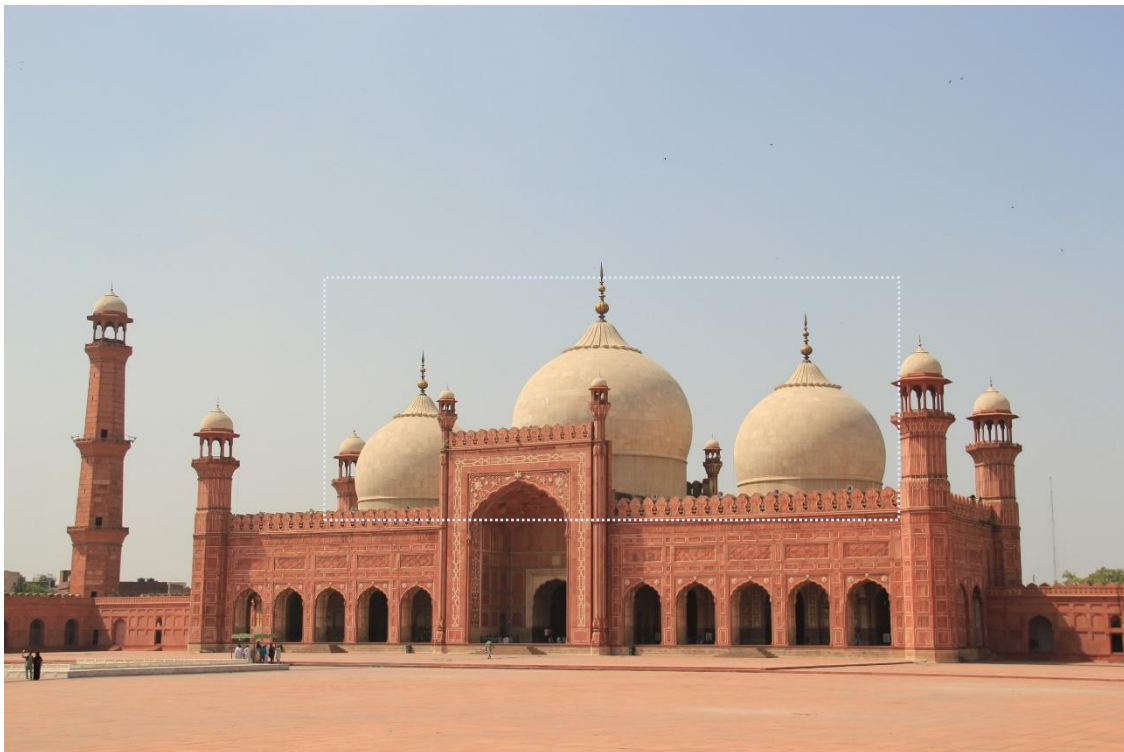


Figure 5: Dome (Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan)

3.5.3 Minarets

Minarets, traditionally associated with mosques and tombs for the call to prayer, take on a purely decorative role in the Brighton Pavilion. While they do not serve any religious or functional purpose, their design draws inspiration from Mughal architecture. The small,

stacked cupolas adorning the minarets further emphasize this influence, echoing elements commonly found in Mughal structures.



Figure 6: Minarets (Itmad-ud-Daula)



3.5.4 Columned Walkway

The long colonnade of the Brighton Pavilion draws inspiration from Indian palace corridors, which are primarily influenced by Mughal and Rajput architecture. However, unlike traditional Indian palace corridors that often feature intricately carved stone, this structure

appears to be made of stucco or plaster over a brick or timber frame, reflecting a more European material choice. The roof projection along the corridor mimics the chhajja overhanging eaves commonly found in Indian architecture. In Indian buildings, chhajjas are typically deeper, serving a functional role in providing shade and protection from rain. In contrast, the Brighton Pavilion's chhajja is a much shallower element, serving a more decorative rather than practical purpose.

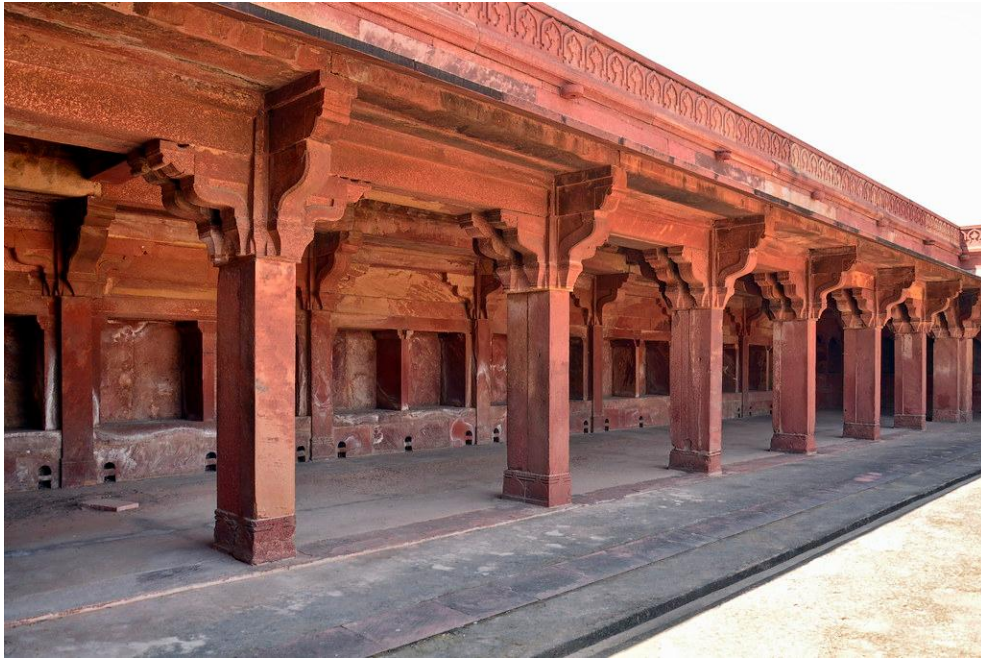
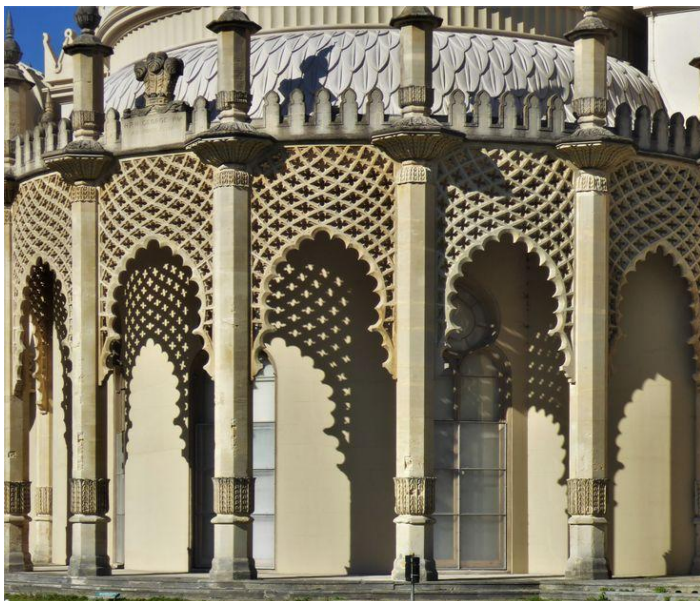


Figure 7: Corridor (Panch Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri)



3.5.5 Horseshoe Arches

The arches in the Brighton Pavilion are primarily ornamental rather than structural, emphasizing an exoticized aesthetic rather than functional necessity. Above the arches, decorative latticework mimics the intricate patterns of Indian jali screens, which in traditional Mughal architecture were used for passive cooling, light diffusion, and privacy. However, in the Pavilion, the jali patterns serve a purely decorative role, as materials like stucco or plaster lack the permeability of traditional carved stone jali. Additionally, the column capitals exhibit a fusion of Islamic detailing and lotus motifs, a common feature in both Hindu and Mughal architecture, further reinforcing the building's hybrid stylistic approach.



Figure 8: Arches (The City Palace, Jaipur)

Additional Mughal Architecture photos references



Figure a Red Fort, Delhi, India



Figure b Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, India

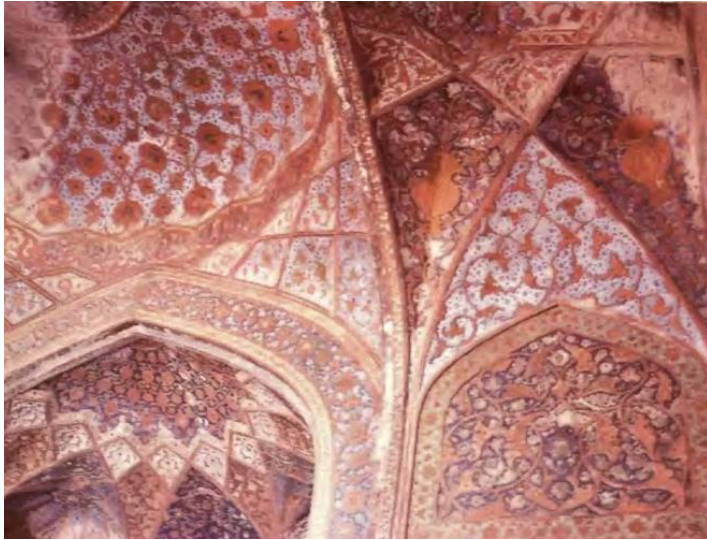


Figure c Tomb of Akbar, Agra, India

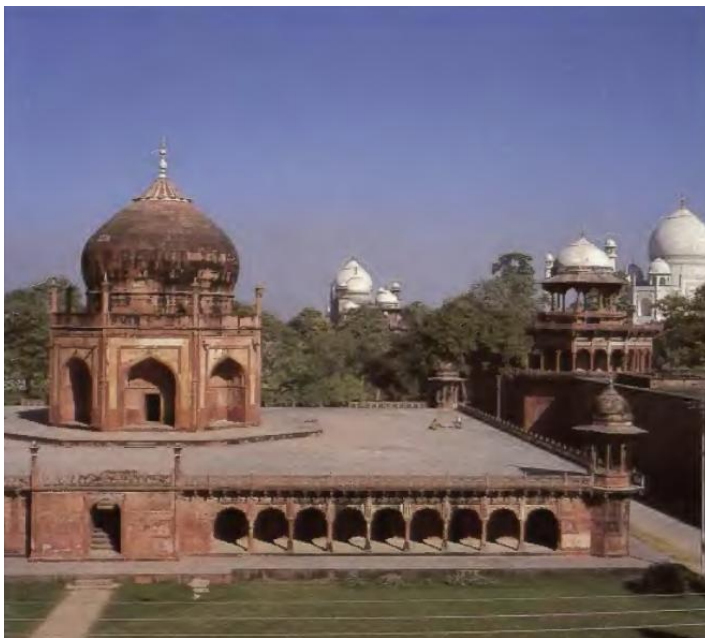


Figure d Tomb of Fatehpuri Begum, Agra, India

Chapter 5: Parameters of Analysis of Architectural Elements

This chapter examines the key architectural elements characteristic of Indian architecture, particularly Mughal architecture, as many features of the Brighton Pavilion draw inspiration from this style. It delves into the reinterpretation of these elements within a drastically different cultural and geographical context, raising questions about the authenticity and adaptation of such features in a foreign setting.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Brighton Pavilion, which blends Mughal, Rajput, and older Indo-Islamic architectural features in a decidedly European and colonial setting, is a remarkable and intricate example of an architectural experiment with cultural hybridity. This combination reveals the fundamental conflicts between cultural appropriation and appreciation that are typical of architecture created under imperial power structures, in addition to illuminating a visual dialogue between East and West. The Pavilion's design origins and reinterpretations are closely examined in this study to show how hybridity, although visually striking, was frequently superficial and confined to ornamentation rather than a sincere integration of the structural logic, spatial planning, or climatic responsiveness that characterize traditional Indian architecture.

Selective cultural borrowing is evident in the architect's purposeful use of features like chhatris, scalloped arches, onion domes, and jali-like screens. In the Pavilion, these motifs, which were essential to Indo-Islamic architecture, were reinterpreted as ornamental elements, losing their original environmental, functional, and symbolic meanings. The Pavilion's usage of these elements, in contrast to their counterparts in Indian palaces and mausoleums, largely sought to create an exotic dream that was founded in Orientalist visual language and appealed to British preferences. These aspects may have channeled sunlight, promoted ventilation, or had ritual and political significance.

Furthermore, the Pavilion was a purposeful political statement rather than just an artistic experiment. George IV's wish to establish a symbolic connection with the East was mirrored in its Indian-inspired design, which matched the monarchy with Britain's expanding imperial position in India. The Pavilion demonstrated international sophistication by visually emulating the architectural magnificence of the Mughal empire, but it also reinforced British authority through reinterpretation. It positioned the empire as a cultural mediator that could absorb and redefine non-European cultures in addition to being a global power.

The Pavilion thus becomes a place that allows us to examine the ideological aspects of hybridity. It was a carefully regulated and controlled aesthetic synthesis supported by colonial imagination and imperial authority rather than an equal meeting of architectural traditions. This study emphasizes how crucial it is to consider these buildings as architectural representations of historical identity, political projection, and colonial memory in addition to their formal hybridity. By doing this, it advances a more critical comprehension of hybrid architecture as a representational and power-wielding instrument within the framework of empire.

Annotated Bibliography

Repton, H. (1806). *Designs for the Pavilion at Brighton*. Brighton: Red Books.

Repton's landscape designs are an important aspect to consider in understanding how the Royal Pavilion's cultural fusion extended beyond the building's architectural form to its surrounding environment. The holistic approach to both architecture and landscaping in a cross-cultural context is a key point in exploration of how cultural hybridity manifests in the Pavilion. Repton's work helps extend the discussion beyond the building itself to the broader landscape and cultural implications of the Pavilion's setting.

Bauer, S. K. (2011). *The power, subjectivity and space of India's Mughal Architecture*. Durham and London : Duke University Press.

Helps in understanding how cultural elements, specifically those from India, were not only decorative but also laden with power, identity, and symbolism. This aligns with the study on Cultural Hybridity in Architecture, especially in the context of the Royal Pavilion's hybrid design. The Mughal influence on British architecture during the colonial period, as seen in the Pavilion, can be understood through Kavuri Bauer's exploration of how architecture operates as a medium for both cultural expression and imperial power.

Bohn, J. (1826). *John Nash's Views of the Royal Pavilion*. Brighton: J. Bohn.

Acts as primary source material in the form of architectural views and designs that represent Nash's vision for the Royal Pavilion. The illustrations and accompanying text will link directly to the Pavilion's hybrid architectural style, allows to examine how Indian inspired motifs were used and how these elements were reinterpreted through a Western lens.

Dinkel, J. (1983). *The Royal Pavilion at Brighton* . Rizzoli Intl Pubns.

To contextualize the Royal Pavilion as a product of British imperial ambitions in India, showing how hybrid architecture was used to convey power, influence, and cultural significance. By examining the Pavilion's design, decoration, and symbolism, it can further help to explore how architectural hybridity was not only a visual phenomenon but also a cultural tool that expressed the complexities of British colonial identity during the 19th century.

Hinze, V. (1996). *The Re-Creation of John Nash's Regency Gardens at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton*. The Gardens Trust .

To understand the spatial and symbolic relationship between the Pavilion and its environment, providing a fuller picture of how hybridity in architecture can extend beyond the built form and into the surrounding landscape. By exploring the design, restoration, and cultural significance of the gardens, can better analyse how both the building and its landscape worked together to represent British imperial power and fascination with Eastern cultures during the Regency period.

Koch, E. (1990). *Mughal Architecture*. Delhi: Central Archaeological Library.

To analyze how Indian architectural elements were interpreted and recontextualized within a British imperial framework, contributing to the cultural hybridity of the Royal Pavilion. By examining the parallels between Mughal architecture and the Pavilion's design, it helps to gain a more nuanced understanding of the architectural dialogue between India and Britain and how these cultural exchanges shaped the built environment of the Regency period.

Morley, J. (2003). *The Making of the Royal Pavilion Brighton: Designs and Drawings*. Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd.

Provides essential primary source material (designs and drawings) and a thorough architectural analysis of the Royal Pavilion. This will help you gain a deeper understanding of how John Nash and his collaborators created a hybrid architectural style that combined elements of Indian, Chinese, and European traditions.

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