



A Study on the Colonial Monuments of British Era of Kolkata, India

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Abstract

Today the restaurant industry is developing very rapidly. The review of literature has highlighted that there exist a number of "theme restaurant" outside India. Few, such types of restaurants were found in India too. The colonial theme reflecting the British era of Kolkata was yet not found in India and specially in Vadodara which inspired the designer to undertake the present design project with the objectives of a).Identifying the famous historical colonial monuments of British era in Kolkatta. b).Studying the interior features used in the selected colonial monuments of the British era of Kolkatta city. The observation sheet was used to gather the details for developing case studies on the existing interior features of the monuments. The findings of the case studies highlighted that the colonial monuments were having white colored walls. The existing floors were made up of wood and in majority of areas it was made up of marble and granite with geometrical pattern in them. The walls of the monuments were having mouldings. In the name of furnishings and lightings, the lights were replaced by the new lights and there were no furnishings. The monuments had chairs, tables, cabinets, book shelf and benches as prominent furniture. The furniture were made up of polished mahogany wood. The ceiling was of Mahogany wood and in some of the monuments, it was of cement with square and rectangular shapes. The findings of the present case study would serve as a valuable reference material for developing historical design projects and other design projects in general. While promoting a base to design other new interiors it would also assist to create the same in other commercial as well as residential interiors.

Keywords: Colonial, Monuments, British Era.

Introduction

Today the restaurant industry is developing very rapidly. One can find a restaurant near the home easily because every city has large number of restaurants. These restaurants mainly focus not only on food but also on over all ambience, look and interiors. It is quite natural that the human nature likes changes. This has led to noticeable changes in the restaurant industry and the emergence of "theme restaurant"¹. The researcher noticed that there exist a number of "theme restaurant" outside India. Few, such types of restaurants were found in India too. The colonial theme reflecting the British era of Kolkata was yet not found in India and especially in Vadodara which inspired the designer to undertake the present design project with the objectives were Identifying the famous historical colonial monuments of British era in Kolkatta and Studying the interior features used in the selected colonial monuments of the British era of Kolkatta city.

Being the origin of Britishers while colonizing India, great influence of the colonial era is seen on the buildings constructed during that time in Kolkata. This became one of the reasons for Kolkata to be renowned as the "colonial city" of India in the present time too². The British colonial era of Kolkata had witnessed monuments with many colonial interior features which the designer has tried to utilize them for designing a restaurant based on a similar theme. The purpose of developing case studies was to gain an insight into the existing interior

features of these monuments. Besides the detailed information on its interior features, the basic information about its inception, age of the monument, expenditure incurred, designed by and constructed by was also made as an important part of the case study. Further the information on the architecture and the other highlighting features of the monuments was also incorporated in the case studies.

Methodology

The electronic media was used to collect the list of the existing historical monuments of British era in Kolkata city. Of the total list of 12 monuments, only seven were finally selected based on their popularity and accessibility to collect the information for the present study. The seven selected historical monuments were Victorian Memorial, National Library, Indian Museum, Marble Palace, Saint Paul's Cathedral, Writer's Building and Raj Bhavan. The observation sheet was used to gather the details for developing case studies on the existing interior features of the wall and its treatment, floor and its treatment, ceiling and its treatment, furniture and furnishings, lighting and accessories of the selected British colonial monuments of Kolkata³.

Results and Discussion

Findings of the Study: Case Study 1: Victoria Memorial:
Background information: The Victoria Memorial is 103 years

old. The foundation stone of Victoria Memorial was laid by The Prince of Wales in 1906. The construction of the monument took 15 years and was completed in 1921. The cost incurred in its construction was Rs. 1,050,000,000. The building is 184 feet high, 228 feet wide, 338 feet long and spread in 26 hectares of land. The monument was built by Lord Curzon and designed by Sir William Empson.

Highlighting Features of the monument: It is a prominent building and art museum of Calcutta under the Department of Culture, Government of India. The main collections of the Victoria Memorial show cases Western Paintings, Sketches, Indian Paintings and Company school drawings, Archive, Arms and Armour, Lithographs, Aquatints, Mughal Miniatures, Manuscripts, Rare Books, Postage Stamps, Sculptures created by renowned artists and three thousand five hundred articles associated with the everlasting memory of Queen Victoria

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The monument has geometrical ceiling patterns with creative cornices designs. They were all white in color. Distemper paint was used over the ceiling. The designs on the ceilings were matching with the room size and shape having square and rectangular patterns.

Wall and Wall treatment: Walls of the monuments were painted in white and off white color. The walls were having smooth finish. Inside the dome the side area on the wall had stones fixed on them. The stone were Makrana marble fixed like brick design on the walls. Stones were in white color, smooth in finish and rectangular in shape. The stone wall was deeply engraved with the text of imperial declaration speech given by the Queen Victoria. The doors and windows were made up of wood and some of them were framed with glass and dark brown in polished colour (figure-3).

Furniture: The furniture in the monument included storage cabinets, open shelf, tables, chairs and side table. Some of the furniture's were made up of Mahogany wood with polish applied on them. They were having smooth finish, dark brown in color. They were heavy, strong and sturdy. The tables were made up of Sheraton style with straight legs and sharp corners. The chairs had legs designed like ball and claw types. The back of the chair had curved design due to which it is called ribbon back chair⁵.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures and lights. The modern lights like the fluorescent tubes, incandescent bulbs and the spot lights were installed above the paintings displayed on the walls of the central hall of the monument.

Accessories: The monument displayed many accessories like pictures and statues. The statues were life sized and white in color reflecting the craftsmanship of the sculptor. The pictures were in color and in black and white too. The pictures were of

all sizes with golden frames and were straight as well as ornamental in design. They were quite heavy in weight.



Figure-3
Marble panels used as wall covering and pillars situated near it in the central hall of the Victoria Memorial

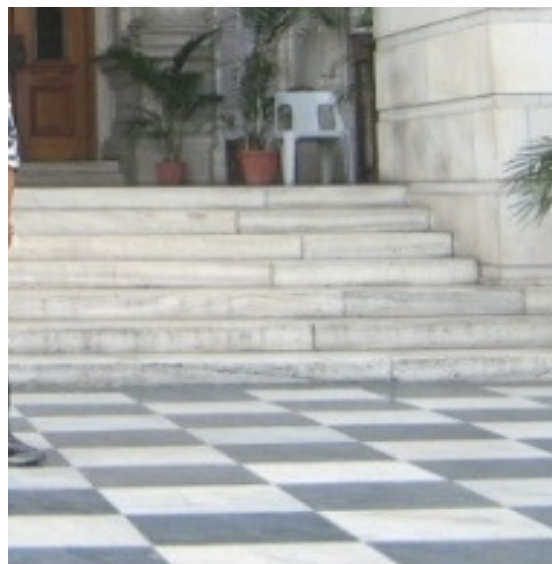


Figure-4
Checked floor built up of white makrana marble and black granite in the Victoria Memorial

Case study 2: National Library: Background information: The Kolkata National library today is 173 years old and the 2nd largest public library in Asia. It was the residence of the former Lieutenant Governor of Bengal which was inaugurated in 1836 by the Governor General Lord Meltcalfe by transferring 4675 books from the College of Fort William. The Imperial Library was founded in 1891 by merging several libraries. The library

was moved to its present quarters in Belvedere Estate, Alipore and renamed as “National Library” (figure-5).

Highlighting Features of the monument: The National library of Kolkata has separate Indian language division for the languages. The historians can get the richest collection of newspapers and periodicals that dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries.

Floors and Floor treatment: The floors of the library were made of wood. Some parts of the library also had stone flooring. The stone used in flooring is marble. The marble floors had smooth and semi glossy finish.

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The national library being an old building it still characterized by old design of ceiling. The library still owns a wooden ceiling (figure-6). The wooden ceiling had long planks and solid wooden logs to bear the load of the ruff. The wood used is polished in dark brown color.



Figure-5

Front white colored entrance with pillars in National Library

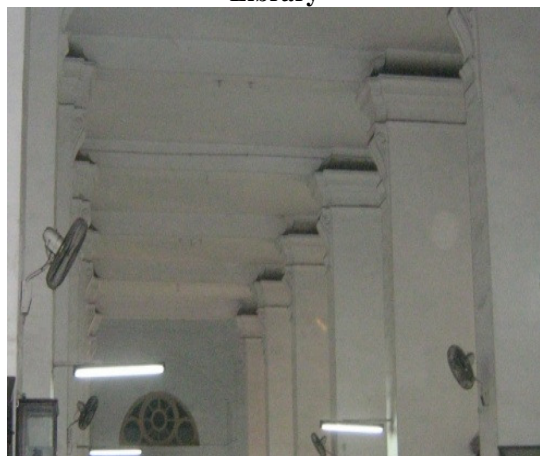


Figure-6

Wooden ceiling with inbuilt protruding pillars on the walls of National Library

Wall and Wall treatment: The walls of the national library were quite high and much thicker than usual (24”). The walls were painted white in color. The walls had cemented rectangular shaped in built protruding pillars stood 6’ apart from each other throughout the wall of the monument. The wall surface was smooth without any cracks. The walls were more than 20 feet high (figure-6).

Furniture: The monument had wide variety of collection of books and articles to be stored in big storage racks and cabinets. The tables, chairs, racks and cabinets were the only furniture pieces visible in National Library. The furniture were quite old but they were strong, straight, polished and in good condition. The Sheraton style of furniture design was used and Mahogany was the main wood used for the furniture⁶.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures and lights found in the monument.



Figure-7

White colored walls with straight moldings applied to in Indian Museum



Figure-8

Wall with pillars and wooden ceiling with iron railing in Indian Museum

Accessories: There were some pots, pictures and lamp stand as accessories. The pictures were hung on the walls. The library had some old style of glass chandeliers in reading rooms. The small pots were put on small tables.

Case study 3: Indian Museum: Background information:

This museum was established in 1878. It is considered as the largest museum in the country and one of the best in Asia. It is 131 years old.

Highlighting Features: The Museum is housing rare antiques, ornaments, armors, fossils, stones, paintings of Mughal India, royal dresses/uniforms, rare animal skeletons and mummies. The Museum has over sixty galleries of Art, Archaeology and spreading over ten thousand square feet area. It houses perhaps the greatest collection of Indian natural history and an Indian Art collection to rival the Smithsonian and the British Museum. The Indian Museum has a library of excellent historical value, with a special focus on the Raj and Kolkata.

Architecture Features of the monument: It is a massive big structure painted whole in white. It is built in Italian style. It is a two storied building which is divided into different sections (figure-9).

Floors and Floor treatment: The floor of the building is covered with white marble and black granite laid in a geometrical pattern. The staircase of the building has black granite laid on it. At some places the wooden floors in the building having radish shade that add to the beauty of the building.

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The ceiling of the building is made up of dark red in some areas where as in other parts of the building the wooden ceiling is painted with white color. The wooden ceiling gives the building a vintage colonial look (figure-10).



Figure-9
Garden side view of Indian Museum



Figure-10
Mahogany wood ceiling with vertical moldings in Indian Museum

Walls and Wall treatment: Walls of the building were painted in white color. They were 15' high having large sized glass windows on it. The heights of the walls were creating an illusion of bigger room. The molding décor on the walls in cement had increased the aesthetic value of the walls. The finish of the walls was smooth and it had suspended lights hung on it (figure-7 and 8).

Furniture: Furniture of the Indian Museum included wood framed cabinet with glass fixed on it. The mahogany furniture was quite big in size, heavy and polished. Benches were placed in the corridor for the visitors to rest. Wrought ironed, white colored railing of stairs is designed in old ways^{7,8}.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures and lights found in the monument. The modern lights were used in the monuments.

Accessories: There were big statues of Queen Victoria placed on the first floor near to the stairs. Pictures and pots were other attractions in the building. The pictures were historic in nature.

Case study 4: Marble Palace: Background information:

The marble palace was built in Kolkata in 1830 and is presently 179 years old. The Marble Palace is an exquisitely engineered palatial mansion that was built when Kolkata was the capital of British India by Raja Rajendra Mullick Bahadur, who was one of the wealthiest landlords of Bengal in the year 1835. The aristocratic Mullick family built this palace. In fact, the name "Marble Palace" was given by Lord Minto, perhaps because of the fact that the entire palace was built using an astounding 126 varieties of marble procured from various parts of the world.



Figure-11

Landscaped garden and fountain in the center decked with statues in the Marble Palace



Figure-12

Floor design made with Diamond shaped cut white marble against green colored marble a stylized design can be seen with two surrounding borders in the Marble Palace

Highlighting Features of the monument: Special Attractions of the Marble Palace is, a room decorated with mirrors containing rewarded works of artists Ruben, Reynolds and others. The palace also houses a very old Queen Victoria statue in plaster standing large as life by the main stairway and a very young Queen Victoria statue in oak, somewhat larger, dominating a red marble room. The marble is used everywhere in the palace, transported across the seas in tons to provide floors and wall panels and table tops. On the frontal façade of the palace is a landscaped lawn with statues of animals and human beings (Figure-11).

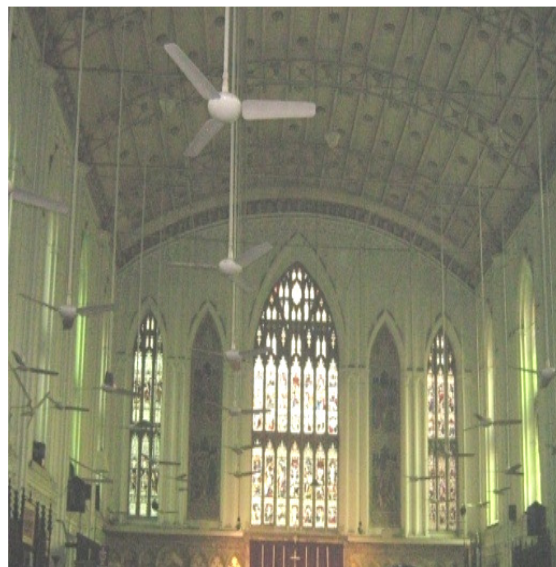


Figure-13

Gothic style windows with glass paintings in St. Paul's Cathedral

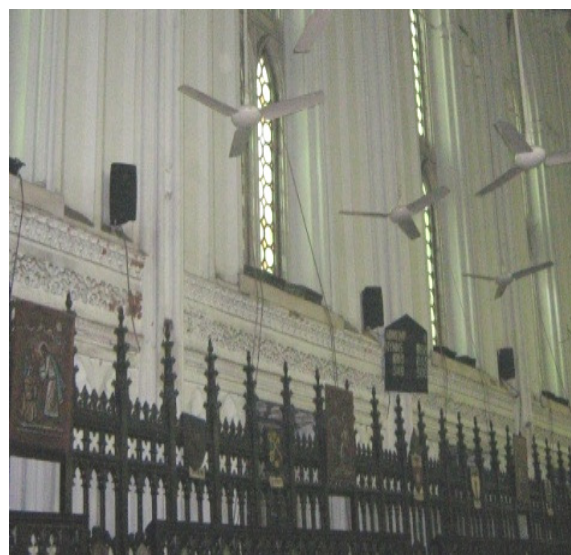


Figure-14

White colored walls enashed with floral design carved moldings in Saint Paul's Cathedral

Floors and Floor treatment: This architectural masterpiece is made from the extensive use of Italian marble. Floors were made up of different marble which were white, brown, black, green and dark brown in color. The flooring had geometrical patterns created by these stones with glossy finish as they were mirror polished. The patterns were in diamond, flower and other stylized design. The floor was patterned with diamond shape white marble and lozenge of multi-colored marbles. The maidens and men cut in stone and wrapped in togas were standing high on plinths. In the other part of the monuments plane white flooring was used (figure-12).

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The monument had geometrical ceiling design with creative cornice designs. They were all white in color. Paint was used for the ceiling as a finish. The wood was used on the ceiling for decorative purpose.

Wall and Wall treatment: The palace was colored in white. The walls of the monuments were painted in white color. The white walls were embellished with swaging in Wedgwood blue. The walls of the rooms were also covered with enormous paintings and mirrors. The doors and windows were of brown color and made up of oak wood. Different colors of marbles were also used on the walls to decorate them.

Furniture: The furniture in the monument included storage cabinets, open shelf, tables, chairs and side table. The furniture was having smooth finish. The whole furniture of the Marble palace was made up of Mahogany wood and was polished in dark reddish brown color. The furniture pieces had variety of storage cabinet in different dimensions and design. Number of different sized table, chairs and side table were also the prominent part of its furniture and were having smooth finish. All the table tops were made up of marble. Small tables and side table were used to put statues on them for display. The tables and chairs had Happlewhite designs with curved legs^{8,9}.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures and lights found in the monument. The modern lights like the fluorescent tubes and incandescent bulbs were used in the monuments.

Accessories were heavy, strong and sturdy. The monument displayed many accessories, which included statues, urns and pictures. The statues were of all sizes. There were sculptures and statues of Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, Christopher Columbus and Lord Buddha. The building had paintings of Rubens, Reynolds and other artists. Gigantic chandeliers were hung on its ceilings. The lamps on the stair cases were exemplary creative skill of the creator. The rooms had hundreds of statues and oriental urns. The collection of 82 types of clocks was also displayed in the palace.

Information: St. Paul's Cathedral's construction was initiated in the year 1839 and was completed in 1847. It is 170 years old. It was constructed with a budget of Rs 5 lakhs during that time. The cathedral was designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. It is 60 meter high, 71 meter long and 24meter wide. A massive earthquake led to the collapse of its tower. It was renovated but in another earthquake of 1934, it was again adversely affected.



Figure-15

Wooden carved one foot high level for seating in the back side having gothic pattern in Saint Paul's Cathedral



Figure-16

Wooden ceiling with moldings used for enhancing the aesthetics of the Writer's Building

Case study 5: St. Paul's Cathedral: Background: Highlighting Features of the monument: St. Paul's Cathedral is renowned for its many well-preserved memorials. The chapel walls show mural of historical importance. They include significant utterances by Macaulay, Thackeray, and Lord Curzon. The massive gold-gilt plate presented by Queen Victoria to Bishop Wilson and the western window are special features of the cathedral. Another special feature of the monument was fire control system used in the church. It is a part of the fire management system used during British era for the fire safety of the monument.

Architecture of the monument: The influence of Indo-Gothic style of architecture dominates the cathedral (figure-13)⁴.

Floor and Floor treatment: It has a large hall with similar floor design consistency throughout it. The floor is having two different color of stones laid on the floor. There were white marble and black colored granite laid to create diamond shaped design with sharp edge. The floor is having diamond shaped design with alternately placed stones.

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: Ceiling of the church was three storied high. It was made up of wood. The wooden ceiling is painted in white color. The ceiling is not flat throughout. At some places it is curved where as in some part of the church it is plain flat ceiling. The ceiling had big chandelier hung downwards.

Wall and Wall treatment: Wall of the cathedral was having magnificent carvings and molding done on it. The wall was more than 30 foot high. It is painted in white color. The wall also had arched long and sleek windows with painted glasses. The interior of the cathedral along the eastern wall runs a colored red in alabaster inlaid with panels of colored mosaic, depicting scenes from the life of Saint Paul's. In the centre of the eastern sector is the magnificent alter piece. Above these are two Florentine frescos. One of which is a stained glass panel of the west window, designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones in 1880 to honor Lord Mayo assassinated in the Andaman Islands (figure-14).

Furniture: The furniture of the church includes chairs and benches with gothic arched designs on their backs. The furniture was made up of oak and mahogany wood with polish applied on them. The wood is dark reddish brown in color. Extensive use of caving is done on the furniture⁴. There are separate cabins for the king of different country. The marking of different countries are painted on cabins (figure-15).

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures and lights found in the monument. The modern lights like the fluorescent tubes and incandescent bulbs were used in the monuments.

Accessories: The accessories in the cathedral include painting and statues in the church. The large sized paintings are framed in carved frames. There are statues placed at varies places in the church.

Case study 6: Writer's building: Background information: Writer's Building also known as 'Mahakaran' is presently, headquarter of the State Government of West Bengal. Originally, Writer's Building was built for clerical and administrative staff of the British East India Company. These employees were called Writer's. Hence the name Writer's Building came into being. It was built in 1780 and is the oldest building of 229 years old. The building constructed by Thomas Linas, is housed in 2.8 x 10 acres of land.



Figure-17
Mahogany wood ceiling with molding to enhanced the design in the Raj Bhawan

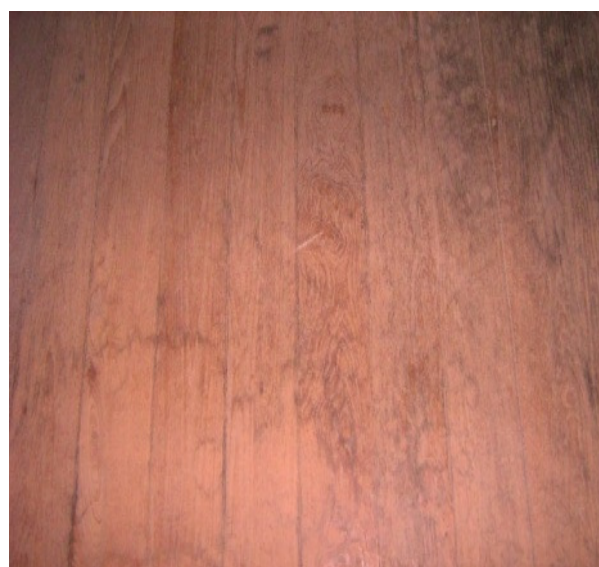


Figure-18
Mahogany wooden panel smooth finish Floor of Raj Bhawan

Highlighting Features of the monument: At present, there are about 6000 government employees working in Writer's Building. Writer's Building in Kolkata houses the offices of the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

Architecture of the monument: The red building is a fine example of the West's attempt to remodel the East's landscape to suit European taste. Writer's Building is an epitome of classical European architecture in India.

Floors and Floor treatment: The writers building has a well maintained white colored marble stone flooring. The marble floors have black border to enhance the floor design.

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The ceiling of the Writers building is made up of straight large sized wooden logs. The wood was painted in white color for protective reasons. The ceiling was about 15 feet high. The wooden ceiling had a straight vertical molding on it which enhances the beauty of it (Figure no. 16).

Wall and Wall treatment: The walls in this building were plain. Being the government office it had plain white color painted to it. The wall surface was smooth, clear and regularly colored. Some connecting areas wall had rectangular and oval shape design given to the surface by the use of cement work.

Furniture: The building had chairs, tables and cabinets as its furniture pieces. The chairs had carved back and ball and claw design in their legs representing Chippendale style of furniture with the influence of Queen Annie design. There was not much old furniture. The Tables and chair had mahogany wood as their material which were treated with dark red brown polish⁶.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures. The modern lights like the fluorescent tubes and incandescent bulbs were used in the monuments.

Accessories: The building lacked accessories except for few like the ancient paintings and pots in the cabinet minister's office.

Case study 7: Raj Bhavan: Background information: Raj Bhavan is not just another colonial left-over mansion of the erstwhile British East India Company. It is a significant estate of stupendous dimension, spread in an area of 84,000 sq. ft. It took almost four years to complete the construction of Raj Bhavan which was initiated in 1799 and finished in 1803. Raj Bhavan is 210 years old building constructed at the cost of Rs 5,06,326 during that time. The building was built by Mrquis and designed by Lord Curzon. Till 1912, the palace was the residence of the Viceroy of India. At present, the Governor of West Bengal stays in this palatial 'Bhavan'.

Highlighting Features: It houses a rare collection of antiques. The first ever elevator of Kolkata can be seen at Raj Bhavan.

Architecture of the monument: The style of architecture in Raj Bhavan is Victorian (Gothic style of colonial architecture)⁴. It is a grand demonstration of the Queen Anne Style, too. The wooden compound of six acres show cased elegance and majesty, marked by flower-beds, green lawns and gravel walks. The huge iron gates with sculptures of lion engraved on top represents the grandeur of its rich historical past. In the ground floor the central area is called the Marble

Hall. The residential suites are in the four corners of the second floor and the Prince of Wales suite on the first floor North West. The first floor central area consists of the Throne Room, Banquet Hall, the Breakfast Room, the Drawing and Dining Rooms. The gold embroidered pillars add luster to this magnificent hall. In the days of yore, royal banquets were held here.

Floors and Floor treatment: The monument has wooden floors in some parts and marble floors in other parts. The design of wooden floor was plain and polished. The main suite had wooden flooring. There was lot of variations in stone with smooth, glossy and multi colored designs (figure-18).

Ceiling and Ceiling treatment: The ceiling of the building is designed carved accordingly. The ceiling had cemented geometrical designs with carvings and white color done to it. In other area there were simple mahogany wood ceiling in dark red color (figure-17).

Wall and Wall treatment: Wall treatment of the building was different in every section. The special suites had blue and red in color on walls with smooth finish. The beauty of the walls was enhanced by using moldings to it. In some areas the walls were decorated with carvings. The other parts of the building were having walls painted in white color.

Furniture: Large sized ornamental chairs, sofas and tables in Chippendale and Queen Anne style were the furniture found in Raj Bhawan. Mahogany wood was used in construction of the furniture⁹.

Lighting: There were not any specific colonial lighting fixtures. The modern lights like the fluorescent tubes and incandescent bulbs were used in the monuments.

Accessories: The accessories at Raj Bhavan included large sized decorative paintings framed in carved golden colored frame. The pots as accessories were also used and placed in tune with the interiors of each room⁷.

Conclusion

The findings of the case studies highlighted that the colonial monuments were having white colored walls. The existing floors were made up of wood and in majority of areas it was made up of marble and granite with geometrical pattern in them. The walls of the monuments were having mouldings. In the name of furnishings and lightings, the lights were replaced by the new lights and there were no furnishings. The furniture was made up of polished mahogany wood. The ceiling was of Mahogany wood and in some of the monument, it was of cement with square and rectangular shapes. The findings of the present case study would serve as a valuable reference material for developing historical design projects and other design projects in general. While promoting a base to design

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