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Eclecticism in Architecture: Panchakot Palace A Pictorial Case Study in Purulia, West Bengal

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Abstract: ***In the history of architecture there are several cases of blending between two different styles of architecture. Among those there are instances where any non-native race, tribe, group, or community had established their colony in a part of the world and their tradition, culture, art, architecture and moreover lifestyle got fused with the native ones. Beside those there are also such cases where tradition, culture, art, architecture, and lifestyle of one non-native race, tribe or group got fused with another non-native community, which had arrived there earlier. The interaction and exchange between the two non-native entities and their characters started happening on various socio-cultural and socio-economic activities, in a native backdrop, and resulted into blending.***

The non-native one which arrived earlier had already reflection of native influences. Beside that when the newer non-native one arrived it started getting influenced by that too. Both the phases of blending in art and architecture are clearly identifiable in different structural and spatial elements and their arrangements as well as design and building techniques. At the end all these had created a new evolved definition of another style in the native backdrop and became an integral part of it.

The intent of studying the 'Panchakot Palace', in Purulia District of West Bengal, is to investigate and understand one example of eclecticism, a blending between the Rajput architecture and the British Bungalow architecture against the backdrop of rural Bengal. The detailed study is to capture the blending of different architectural styles, respective architectural features, materials, and methods of construction etc. in the setting of amalgamated expression of the Rajput architecture and the British Bungalow architecture.

Keywords: architecture, native, backdrop, non-native, style, influence, blending, eclecticism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Eclecticism is evident in every nook and crevices of Bengal, which defies the rule of genius loci at times. One such marvellous example of eclecticism can be traced at 'Panchakot Palace' in Purulia. It stands tall at Kashipur Village in Purulia, defying the taste of a unique style of architecture.

The palace is an excellent example of eclecticism where the Rajput architecture has seamlessly blended with the Neoclassical styles, thereby creating an archetype which echoes its own vocabulary.

Zamindari Raj (sovereignty) of Panchakot or Chakla Panchakot was situated on the western front of Bengal. The sovereignty was founded around 81AD by Sri Damodar Shekhar Deo, a descendant of the Rajput family of King Udayji Singh Deo who reigned in Dhonagarh, in the North-West Provinces of India. The Kings were Angivashi Parmar Rajputs. The Panchakot Raj had ruled from their capital at Garh Panchakot from 940 to 1750 AD. However, Panchakot Raj faced misfortunes towards the end of their stay at Garh Panchakot. Around 1600 AD the area came under the rule of Bir Hambir of the Bishnupur Malla dynasty. Subsequently, Bargi (Maratha) attacks laid the final nail on their rule. Around 1750 AD, Panchakot Raj family shifted to Kashipur and have been residing since then.

Raja Bahadur Sri Jyoti Prasad Singh Deo, who ruled from 1901-1938, was granted the title of 'Raja' as a personal distinction in 1912, as he had the fortune of getting the British patronage. Raja Sri Kalyani Prasad Singh Deo ruled from 1938-1945, Raja Sri Shankari Prasad Singh Deo ruled from 1945 to 1956 and Raja Sri Bhubaneswari Prasad Singh Deo ruled from 1956-1972. This magnificent palace was built during the rule of Raja Bahadur Sri Jyoti Prasad Singh Deo.

II. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to study the blending between the Rajput architectural style and the British Bungalow architectural style against the backdrop of rural Bengal, through studying a live case example 'Panchakot Palace'. The major objective of the paper is to prepare a photo essay of the Palace and its spatial, structural and architectural features, as surveyed, captured, interviews conducted, and researched as well as analytical representation of the information or facts gathered.

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III.AREA OF THE STUDY

Purulia district is one of the twenty districts of the West Bengal state. The economy of the district is mainly driven by the industrial sector, agricultural sector, and tourism. Presently the Purulia town is the administrative headquarter of the district. According to the census around 40% of the population of the district is Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. The 'Santhali' and 'Kurmali' language speaking communities are one of the major parts of the Scheduled Tribes.

Purulia is connected through road and rail transport with Kolkata (previously Calcutta) and other major cities of West Bengal and neighbourhood states. The distance of Purulia is around 295-300 KM from Kolkata. The Kashipur village is around 35-40 KM from the Purulia town.

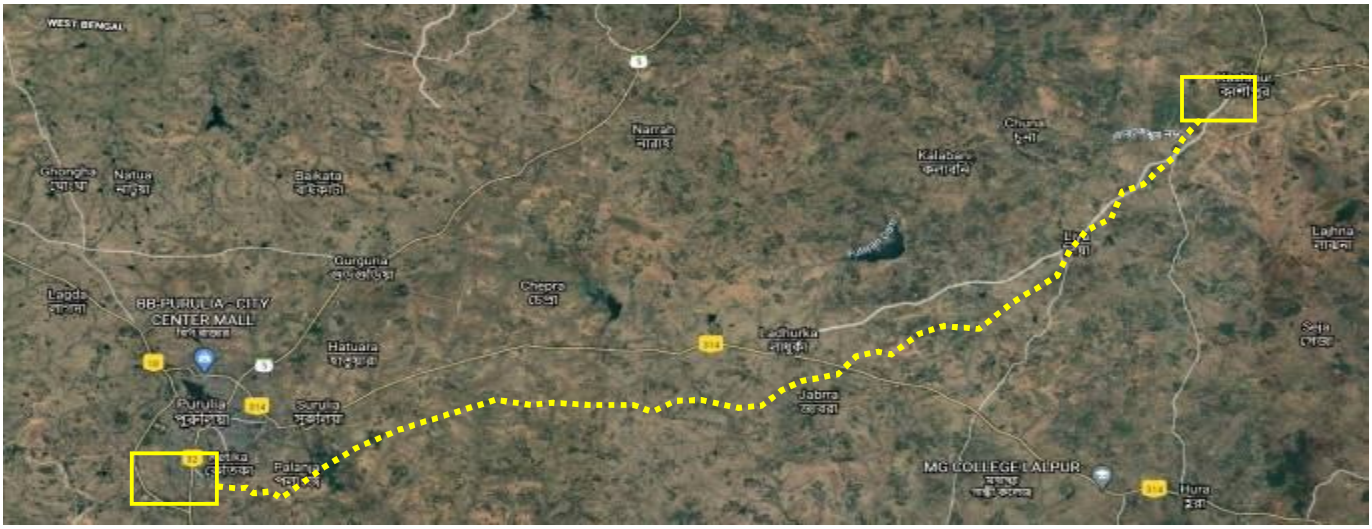

Fig. 1 Location of Kashipur Village

National and International tourists visit Purulia District in the state of West Bengal to visit Garh Panchakot fort, Ayodhya hills, Baranti reservoir, Joychandi hills and Surulia forest. But, beyond Panchakot dam, in the village of Kashipur, sits a beautiful old undiscovered treasure, the 'Kashipur Palace' or 'Panchakot Palace'. The palace has an explicit exhibit of British neoclassical features mixed with Indian Rajput architecture.

Fig. 2 Location of the 'Panchakot Palace' in Kashipur Village

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This history of their origin has impacted the design of the palace- which has intricacies of the Rajasthani or Rajput Architecture as well as the proportions of the British Bungalow design.

Fig. 3 The 'Panchakot Palace'

IV. ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

Sitting amidst the lush green campus and surrounded by bastion wall, the 'Panchakot Palace' is a hidden marvel. The thought-provoking blend of neoclassical architectural with Rajputana features would inspire any researcher to look deep into its origin, features and construction techniques. The awe-inspiring architecture starts from the trabeated entrance gate and continues till the tiniest guild work interior of each room. The multifaceted geometrical plan of the palace is a unique combination of a British bungalow and a Rajput architecture. The five orders of columns, cupolas, windvanes, skylights, fanlights, doors and windows, over decorated pilasters and cornices, arched portico, pediments remind one of the classical architecture from the west, while the disposition of the interiors spaces and their functions relates to the Rajputana culture. The paper delves to look deep into this exquisite spectacle, inch by inch, brick by brick to understand the eclecticism.

Fig. 4 The Composite Columns and Cornice

Fig. 5 The Skylight at the roof level

Fig. 6 The Cupola with Wind Vane

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V. JUSTIFICATION

The Rajput rose to prominence in India during 9th to 11th centuries. The Rajputs ruled more than four hundred out of six hundred princely states and eighty-one out of one hundred and twenty-one salute states extant in India at the time of independence. The Rajputs were great patrons of art and architectures and laid the finest examples of forts and palaces in India. It is evident that the Singh Deo family inherited the taste as they emanated from that land of Rajputs. During their rule in Garh Panchakot, they received British patronage since early twentieth century. There was an exchange of taste and as a result, may be Panchakot Palace stood out as an extraordinary example of eclecticism. The palace on one hand reflects the adaptation of British style of extrovert setting of a bungalow, having lush green lawn surrounding it and on the other hand surrounded by citadel walls and out houses, impersonating the forts of Rajasthan. Such seamless juxtapositions of neoclassicism and Rajput styles keeps one wondering and inquisitive while taking a campus tour.

A. Notes on Colloquial words:

1) *Zamindari:* The word "Zamin" means "land" in hindi. The owners of huge land parcels were called "Zamindars". These landowners used to have used huge land holdings under them and used to rule a demarcated area. Their rule was known as "zamindari"
2) *Bargi:* "Bargi" is a Bengali word for "dacoits". When the mighty Marathas attacked Bengal from the western fronts, they looted and vanquished everything enroute. Bengalis called these Marathas "Bargis" which is a distortion of the Marathi word, "bargir" (etymology: Persian) which means "light cavalry".
3) *Raj Prasad:* Raj Prasad is the Bengali word for Palace.
4) *Raja:* Raja means King/Landowner.

VI. THE CASE STUDY

A. Background of the Structure

'Panchakot Raj Prasad' or 'Panchakot Palace', popularly known as 'Kashipur Palace' is a testimony of a long forgotten princely era of the Chotanagpur plateau, a famous legacy of the Singh Deo Dynasty. This attractive testimony of architecture was built in 1917 at Kashipur, the capital of the state of Panchakot, under the reign of Maharaja Jyoti Prasad Singh Deo. The grand palace was built at the cost of Rs.3,00,000/- by Martin and Burn Company and took 13 years for completion of construction.

B. 'Panchakot Palace'

The palace is a fortified structure with three boundary walls, each towering to a height of 40 feet. Built on 7 acres of land, the palace has three halls - the British Hall, the Darbar Hall and the Puja Hall on the first floor. The King's room, Princess's room, the Sunroom and the 'Sipahi ghar' (the room for the soldiers) are some of the other rooms besides the ten office rooms.

Fig. 7 The Citadel Wall around the Palace

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The palace narrates the story of the brave kings of the dynasty through beautiful hunting trophies of tigers, bison and leopards. The palace is graced by glass paintings made by painters from Orissa. A hundred-year-old German piano, German flower vases, chests of pure almond wood adorn the palace. Working canons, a hundred-year-old kerosene lamp and telephone still gild the rooms. The palace has ten grandfather clocks, which are almost 100 years old, a billiard board mad of Mehagony wood, procured from London in late 18th century. There are eight chandeliers in the palace manufactured by the famous F & C Osler Company who had lighted up many royal palaces and Durbars including the Buckingham Palace. The chandeliers are made of lead crystals and silver.

Fig. 8 Mounted Trophy

Fig. 9 Flower Vase gifted by the Britishers

Fig. 10 Wooden Carvings

Fig. 11 Chandelier

Fig. 12 Exquisite Furniture

Fig. 13 The Royal Logo painted on Glass

Fig. 14 The ‘Panchakot Palace’

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VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Most of the information about the palace has been collected through primary survey by the authors. A thorough study of the whole campus had been conducted and photo documented. The present descendant, the sole owner of the princely estate, Mr Anshul Rajawat and his wife had been interviewed to delve into history of the estate.

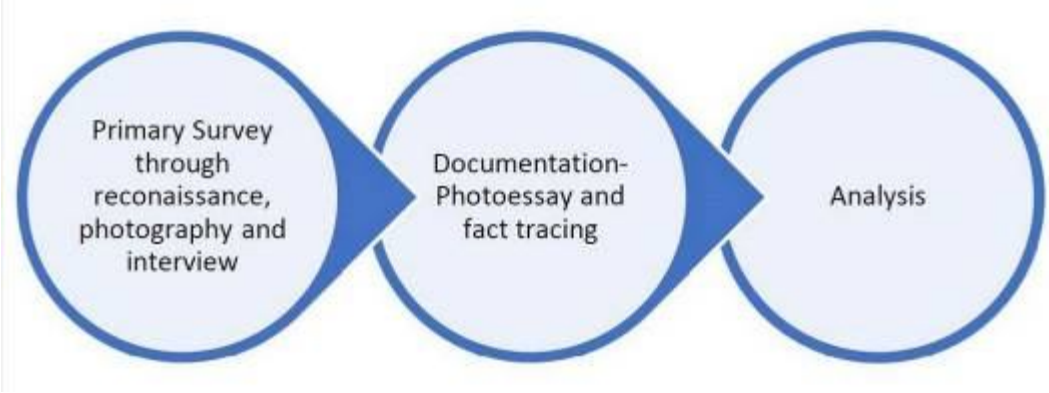

Fig. 15 Research Methodology

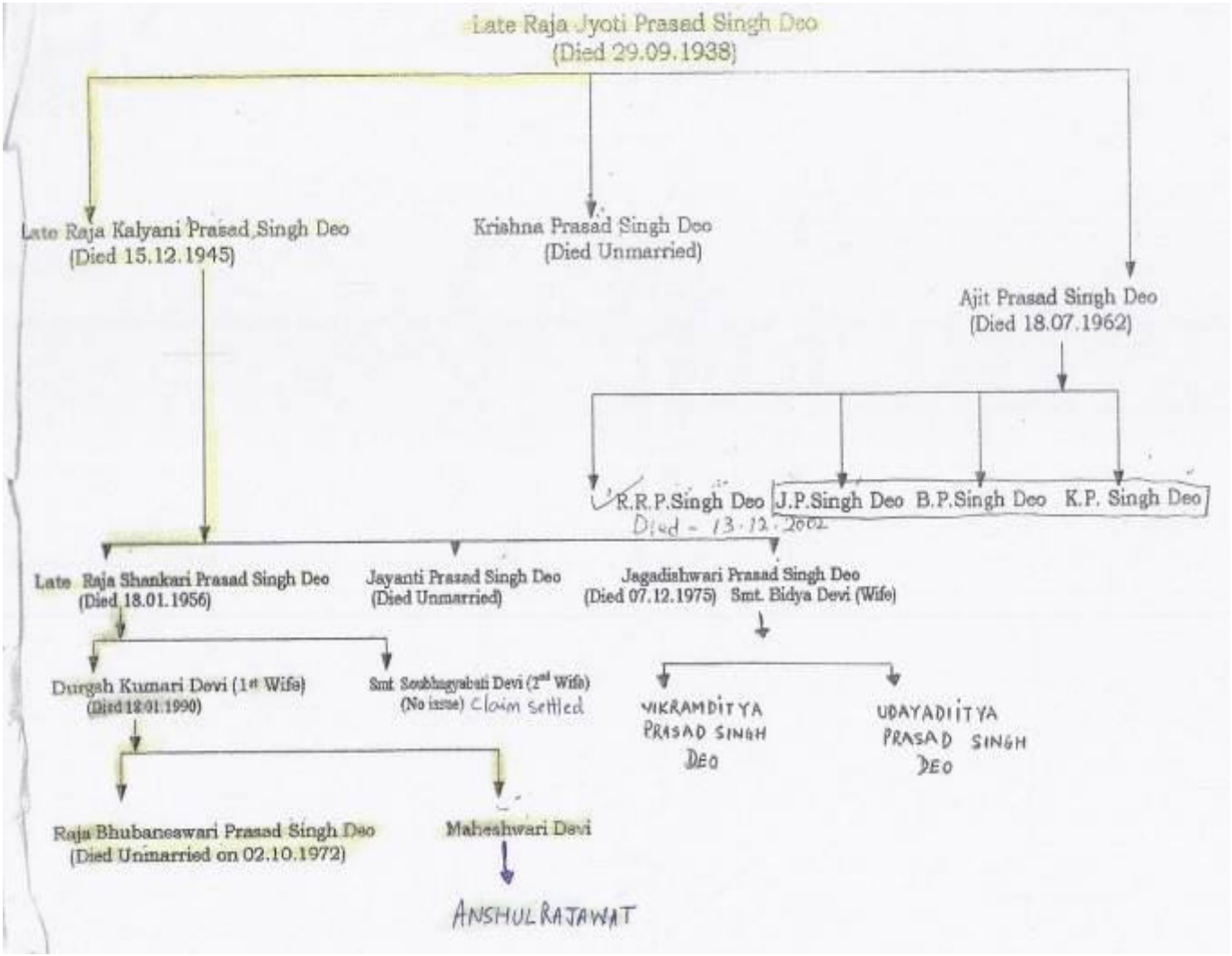

Fig. 16 Family Tree – as furnished by Mr. Anshul Rajawat

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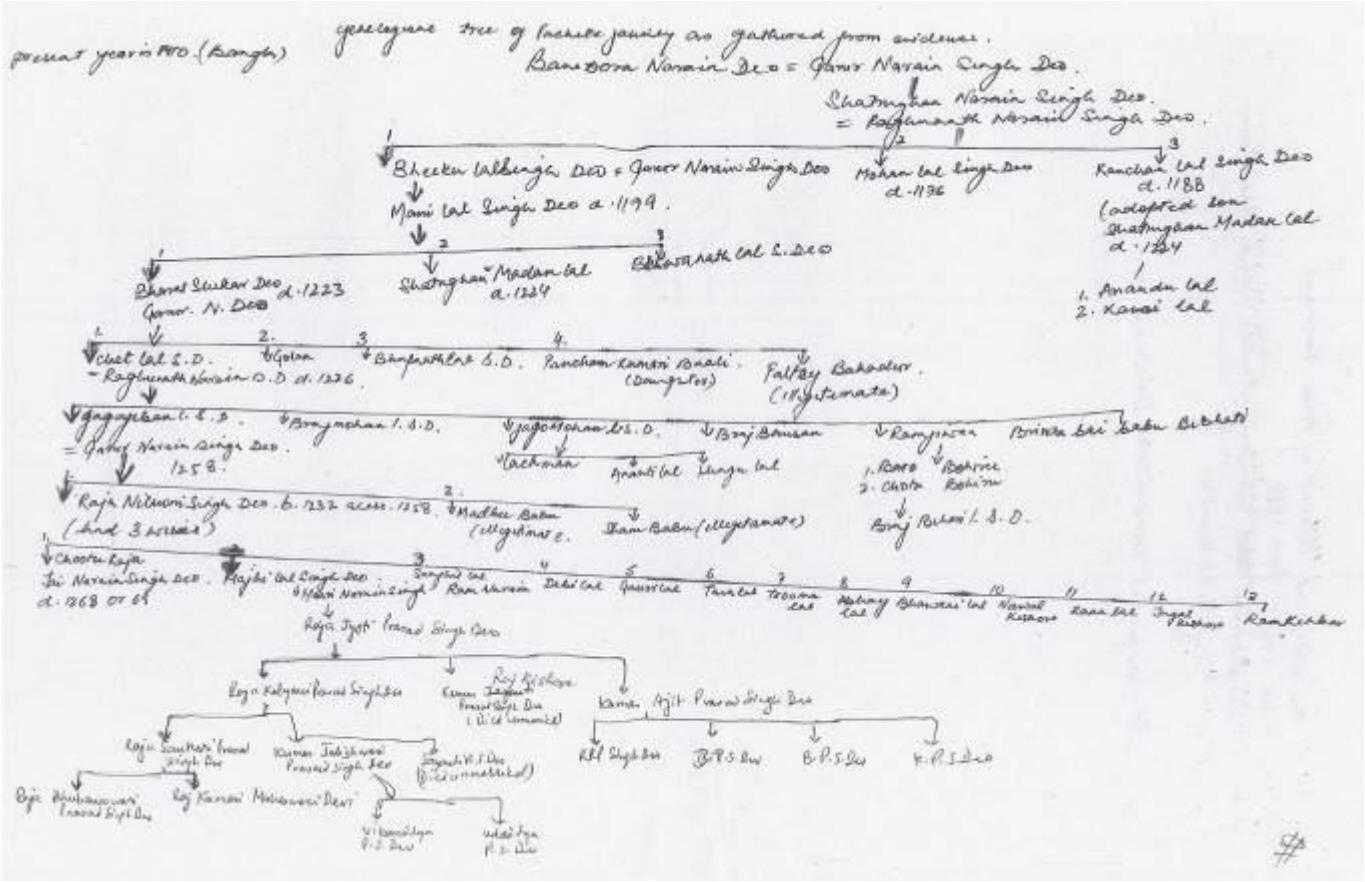

Fig. 17 Genealogy Tree – as furnished by Mr. Anshul Rajawat

Fig. 18 'Panchakot Palace' and its surrounding

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VIII. STUDY ABOUT ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

A. Influence of Different Architectural Styles

The Kashipur palace entrance is graced by a majestic gate and gate houses, flanked by tall boundary walls on two sides. The gate opens to a huge campus, where in the majestic palace stands tall. The palace has a grand portico at the entrance. The palace opens into a grand foyer.

The grand foyer is decorated with rose wood furniture, huge hunting trophies and beautiful crystal lanterns adding to the grace. The room is about 12m in width and 20m long. This grand foyer acts as the transition to enter the private spaces of the palace on the ground floor and the public spaces on the first floor.

Fig. 20 Boundary Wall and Entrance Gate

B. Campus/Site Planning and Influence of 'Defence/Fort Architecture' in Rajput Architectural Style

The campus was planned in line with Rajput Culture. The palace is a fortified structure with three boundary walls, each towering to a height of 40 feet, as observed in the forts of Rajasthan. Though not necessary, three layered security was provided to safeguard the palace, as a practise. Built on 7 acres of land, the palace has several rooms and structures, which followed social requirement of the Rajputs.

The buildings have geometrical layout, which is also an evident feature of Rajput architecture. There was a Darbar Hall in lines with the Diwani-Khas, painted with exquisite gold filigree painting work on the ceiling and the walls. and Puja Hall on the first floor. Besides this, there were the King's room, Princess's room, the Sunroom (Surya Ghar for offering prayer to Sun god by the Surya Vanshi Rajputs) in lines with Rajput palaces. There were separate structures, such as Ranimahal (Palace for Queens), Sipahi Ghar (the building to house the soldiers), Hatishala (Place to house the elephants), temples, Rasoighar (kitchen building) and store are some of the other rooms besides the ten office rooms in the campus which had been built reminiscing Rajput culture. The palace narrates the story of the brave kings of the dynasty through beautiful hunting trophies of tigers, bison and leopards. The palace is graced by glass paintings made by painters from Orissa.

But unlike Rajput architecture, the palace lacked a courtyard and features an extrovert planning like British Bungalows, having lush green lawns around the palace.

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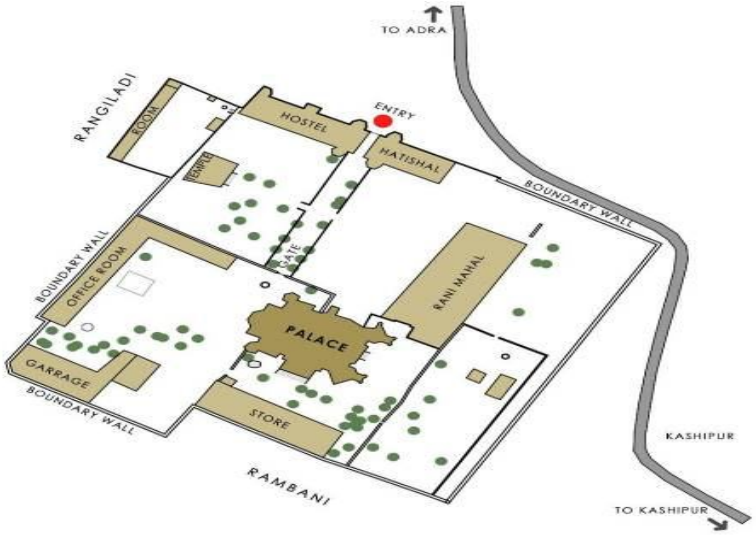

Fig. 19 Site Plan of the 'Panchakot Palace' precinct

C. Public Spaces in the Palace:

1) *British Hall:* The British Hall used to be the hall for entertaining guests and parties were organized for the Englishmen and the Kings. The gold ornamentation in the ceiling of the hall and the Italian marble flooring add to the regalia. The British hall is a double storied structure and used to hold the pride of showcasing world's tallest lantern hanging from its ceiling.
2) *Darbar Hall:* The Darbar Hall is adjacent to the British Hall and is the seat of culture and entertainment for the palace. Famous courtesans from Benaras (presently Varanasi) and famous scholars of the era used to adorn the hall during the reign of King Jyotiprasad Singh Deo. The hall is decorated with glass paintings, ornamented pelmets, bedecked fireplaces, and Italian marble flooring.
3) *The Dining Hall:* The dining hall at ground floor is accessed from the foyer. Its decorated with Italian glass shelves, Chinese cutlery sets, Rose wood dining table and chairs, Rose wood chests, Rose wood fireplaces at four corners and beautiful sofa sets and scintillating chandeliers to brighten the ambience.
4) *Billiard Room:*The Billiard room is accessed from Dining Room. A big rose wood billiard board adorns the room with other flamboyant furniture sets and dazzling chandeliers.

Fig. 21 The 'Darbar Hall'

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D. Private Spaces

1) *Sunroom:* The Sunroom, adjacent to the Darbar Hall, was used for worshipping the Sun God, located on the first floor. This room has a dome shaped roof and glasses all around which allows the sunlight to filter in from all sides. The queens and kings used to worship the morning sun from this room. There is a private staircase to access the room from the interior of the palace.
2) *The King's Room:* As the name suggests, this room belonged to the King and his wife. No one could enter the room. Guards were kept posted outside the room to restrict the entry.
3) *Princess Room:* The princess room, adjacent to the King's room is named after the present queen, Rajkumari Maheshwari Devi.
4) *'Sipahi' Room:* There are six rooms which were allotted to the soldiers (Sipahi), who looked after the security of the palace.
5) *'Gatha' Ghar:* Big rooms with arched openings at the back side of the palace are called, Gatha Ghar. The kings used to stay in the 'Gatha' Ghar before the palace was built. Presently these are used for storage.

Fig. 22 The 'Surya Ghar' or Sunroom

IX. STUDY ABOUT PROMINENT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

A. Materials and Methods/Techniques of Construction:

The main system of construction was trabeated with wooden beams supported by iron girders. Bricks have been used as basic building materials with lime plaster. Exquisite lime plaster mouldings can be traced all over the building to express and emulate Neoclassical décor, as well as the Rajput carvings. Marble has used been extensively used as a flooring material and for construction of the grand decorative staircase leading to first floor from ground level. Cast iron has been used to reproduce the neoclassical style, to make grills, arches, balcony railings, spiral staircase, columns, and brackets. Doors and windows have made of wooden shutters and frames with stain glass panels. The fanlights above the doors and windows have stained glass work or cast-iron tracery work, as reminiscence of Gothic revival. The wooden louvered windows remind us Neoclassical revival.

Round neoclassical arches could be traced above the doors and windows ruminating the Roman revival. Segmental arches with key stone have been also observed above the semicircular fanlights. Imitating the rose windows from Gothic style, the staircase landing is lighted through a circular window with a fixed glass. The louvered windows followed the habitual Rajput style of being long, having low sill level, set on extended corbel with lime plaster mouldings.

Fig. 23 Wall with Segmental Arches

Fig. 24 Fanlight above the window

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Fig. 25 Cast Iron Spiral Staircase and Balcony with Cast Iron Railing

Fig. 26 Iron Girder Ceiling and Wooden Door

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Fig. 27 Intricate Railing and Marble flooring work in the Staircase

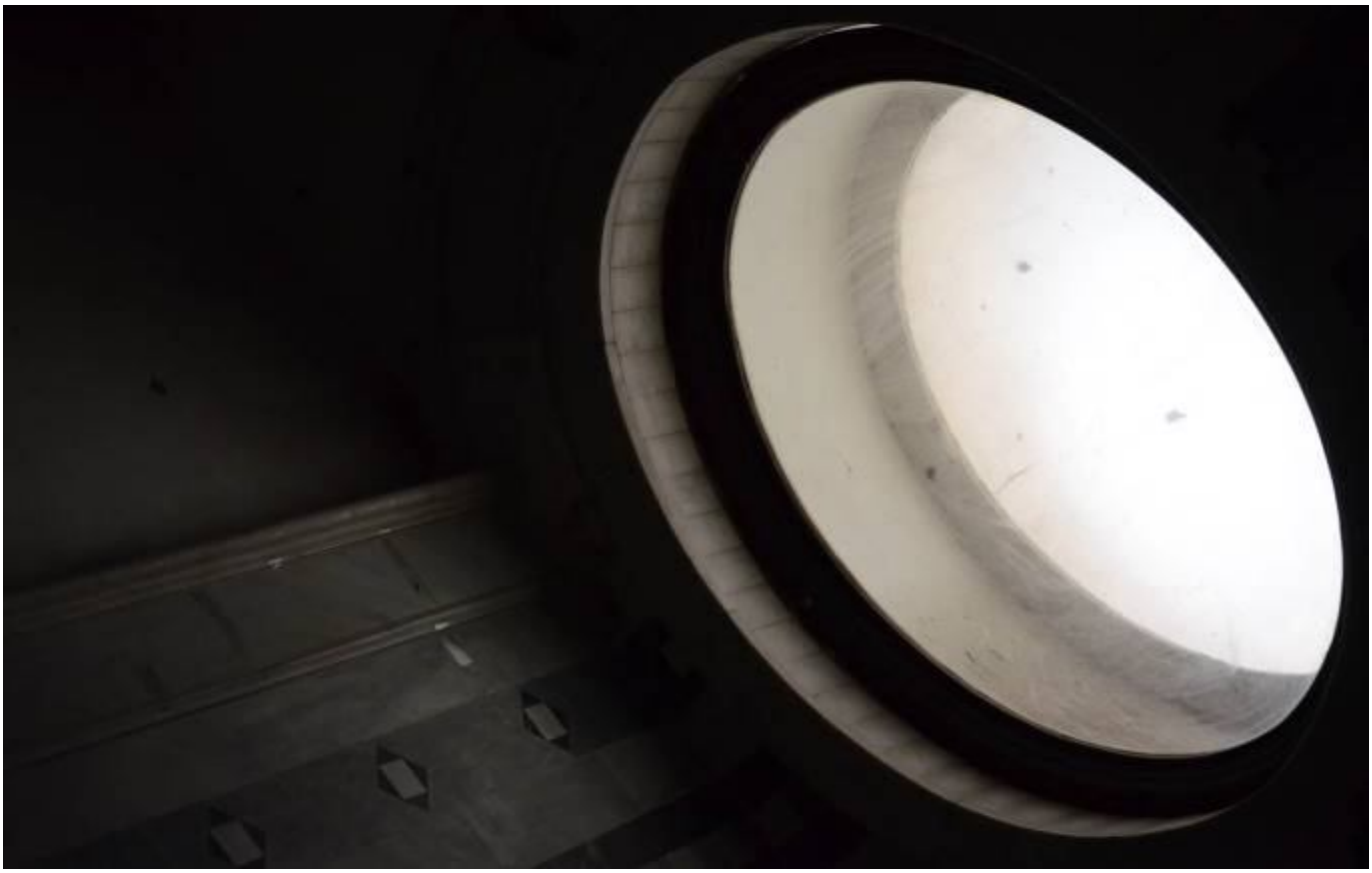

Fig. 28 Circular opening with fixed glass at the Stair Landing

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1) *Composite Columns:* The columns in the palace are composite in nature, outdoing the roman order. They are set on high base, slender in nature and end with a composite décor of scrolls and acanthus leaves at capital. Though structurally the columns resemble the composite order, the overtly décor at the base of column capitals reminds us of Baroque revival. The similar decors can also be traced along the frieze above the architrave band, at pediments, above arched doorways at first floor and corbels below the windows.

Fig. 29 Decorated Composite Columns

2) *Pediment:* The provision of pediment above the cornice was seen in Greek architecture. As a component of neoclassical revival, the palace has overtly decorated pediments, without any distinct tympanum, with decorated statues as acroterion. The cornice band has been carefully adorned with teething, which emulates the Renaissance practices. The parapet has been constructed on the lines of Rajput architecture, having bulb shaped baluster constituting the balustrade, topped with lotus bulbs at regular intervals. As per Hindu mythology, lotus is considered to a symbol of peace and purity. Thus, the parapet has been decorated with the over conspicuous and decorated lotus buds on the stiffeners along the balustrade.

Fig. 30 Pediment at the 'Thakur Dalan' or Temple

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Fig. 31 Decorated Balustrades

Fig. 32 Teething at Cornice level

3) *Balconies:* The balconies have been designed as a mix of European and Indian architecture styles. Neoclassical revival features extended cantilevered balconies with cast iron columns and railings, covered with cast iron roofs supported by cast iron arches spanning between the columns. The decorated serpentine brackets supporting the balconies, remind one of the Rajasthani Jharokhas.

Fig. 33 Balconies at First Floor Level

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4) *Cupola:* A cupola is a rounded dome forming or adorning a roof or ceiling. Similar domes can be traced in Roman architecture from smallest to higher order and with some in Rajput architecture too. In Kashipur Palace, a cupola it is capping the sunroom, with fixed glass inbetween the ribs, to let the sun light in. the ribbed cupola has an octagonal base lantern with a windvane as finial.

Fig. 34 The 'Cupola'

5) *Articulated Ornamentation:* The painted and decorative Ceiling with Gold Gilding reminds one of the renaissance mansions designed by Giovannio Palladio as well as the Gild work on the walls and ceiling of Rajput Palaces.

Fig. 35 The Gold Gilding work on the Ceiling

6) *Inlay Works:* Inlay work in India started with Indo-Saracenic architectural style which was later adapted by the Rajputs to decorate their interior and exterior surfaces of their Palaces.

Fig. 36 Inlay work on the Wall

Fig. 37 Inlay work on the Floor

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7) *Statues, Painting & Show Pieces:* The Rajputs believed that the trophies and the statues add glamour to their lifestyle. They curated many such statues and trophies by themselves as well as got some as gifts. They also curated paintings of Hindu Gods and Goddesses as well as Self Portrait.

Fig. 38 The statue of a Lion

Fig. 39 Painting from Hindu Mythology

X. CONCLUSIONS

The magnificent edifice of the 'Panchakot Palace' tells the story of eclecticism at its highest order. It shows us how seamlessly West can meet the East through architectural manifestation. Such manifestation has been rare in history and should be preserved and celebrated so that the joy of reflecting the past runs down through generations to come. This eclecticism is rare because it blends provincial architectural style of a faraway state from Bengal with neoclassicism. Thus, the edifice invigorates many untold stories.

But it is a misfortune that with time the princely family has reduced to fewer descendants and they have moved out of the Palace for employment, better fortune, or urban lifestyle after end of 'Zamindari' era post-independence. As a result, the palace stands unattended, without maintenance and proper upkeep due to constraint of time and fiscal resources. This hidden gem has not got its due attention from the Government as well, may be because of its location. Though this is a private estate, some interventions may be required from the local authorities as well as from the State Government, to improve the connectivity to the estate and to promote the estate. If, through Public- Private Partnership, the palace is restored and proposed for adaptive reuse, it would keep the property maintained, as well as safeguard the fiscal interest of the owners. It be converted to museum or heritage hotel, or any other use as suited to both Government and the owners, so that to attract tourists. The way forward may not be easy, but not undoable. Whatever it may take, it is not justified to let such an architectural marvel to die its natural death. One can learn how the culture of a clan in India can get mixed with colonial architecture to give birth to a magnificent edifice.

XI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to acknowledge Mr. Anshul Rajawat, the present descendant of the 'Singh Deo' family for the help he rendered to conduct the case study and Mr. Tirthankar Basu for photography.

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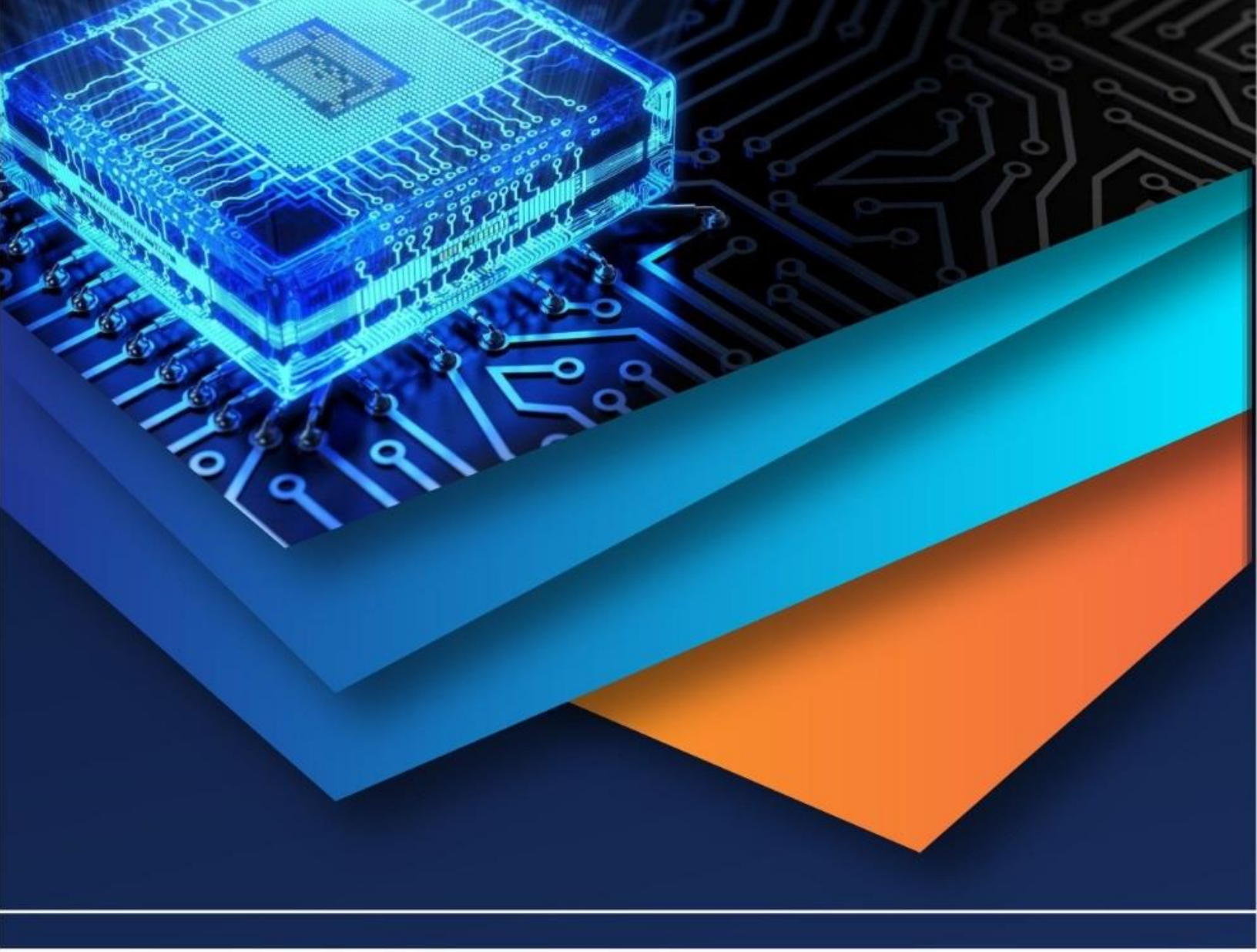

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