

Beyond Thresholds :

*Bridging the gap of South Asian Dysphoria through
Indian Doorways.*

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Synopsis

This curatorial rationale immerses in an autoethnographic exploration of Indian doors, unveiling a temporary exhibition designed to act as a cultural window. The curated doors investigated are ancient cave doors, indo-islamic doors, trade-migrated, and colonial doors, serving as gateways to India's past – reflecting artistry, religious expression, historical trading, and cultural exchanges. The exhibition targets non-resident Indians, fostering a deeper appreciation for grand Indian architecture worldwide and hoping to provide a cultural bridge for those facing cultural dysphoria. This exhibition transcends physical artefacts, offering a holistic experience. The writing focuses on the explanation of integrating sound, light, and accessories, bridging personal insight with scholarly research, addressing a gap in literature by extracting nuanced meanings from the visual elements and cultural contexts of these doors. Beyond showcasing doors, the exhibition endeavours to dismantle cultural barriers, inviting a global audience to appreciate the grandeur of Indian art and design.

Intro

This curatorial rationale embarks on the exploration of Indian doors through the lens of autoethnography.¹ My research journey explores the diverse array of culturally significant doorways, each telling a unique story of history, art, and symbolism. To contextualise the multifaceted cultural significance of the door in India, the discussion is focused on the ancient architectural philosophy of Vastu Shastra. I specifically researched the book titled, *The Amazing Principles of Vastu Shastra*, by Hengameh Fazeli and Ali Goodarzi. This book informed me on the complexities of the ancient architectural approach. I have used my own knowledge as a starting point to research things that I have personally seen on Indian doors. This discussion topic is intimate to me especially in terms of the exhibition proposal and the proposed audience of this exhibit. I use my own experiences to justify why the international outreach of this exhibition proposal is significant. I have merged my own experience with knowledge, combined research, and analysis to connect to the overarching theme of Indian doors. The doors that are under scrutiny in the proposal span various contexts, including the Ajanta Caves shrine door, jali doors, fort doors of Zanzibar, the carved door at Täfäri Mäkonnen's house in Harar, and Colonial doors. These doors were specifically chosen for their cultural and historical importance, serving as gateways to the narratives of past lives in India. The cave shrine door stands as a testament to ancient Indian artistry and religious expression, while jali doors showcase the craftsmanship of Indo-Islamic architecture. The fort doors of Zanzibar are a witness to the island's history as a trading hub, and the carved door at Täfäri Mäkonnen's house alludes to the cultural exchange between India and Ethiopia. Colonial doors reflect the bygone era and symbolise the fusion of the indigenous and colonial influences. Whilst collecting information through books, articles, scholarly works, and archives, I found a gap in literature concerning the specific symbolism of these doors. Existing books focus more on the overall

¹ (No date) *Essentials of Autoethnography - American Psychological Association (APA)*. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/essentials-autoethnography-sample-chapter.pdf> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

architectural style and symbolisms, my autoethnographic approach involves extracting nuanced meanings from the visual elements and cultural contexts. I navigated through this type of exploration aiming to unravel the layers of symbolism embedded in these doors, interpreting their significance beyond the conventional architectural discourse. These doorways are rich in their physical forms and through research I seek to contribute fresh insights and understandings of Indian doors as cultural artefacts, inviting people like me to have a deeper appreciation for the stories and symbolisms these doors have to offer.

Importance of the door in Indian Culture

Doors are a fundamental component of architecture and provide multiple purposes such as security, privacy, and insulation. Beyond the simple function of an entry or exit point, it embodies a symbolic threshold that divides spaces and yields a transition. Although built for a purpose it also is more than a mere barrier; doors hold cultural and metaphorical significance in almost every culture. In this context, Indian doors will be the topic of exploration. In Indian culture doors encapsulate values, traditions, beliefs, history and stories. Indians believe in an architectural philosophy called Vastu Shastra, an ancient Indian architectural approach originating from the Vedic period. In Sanskrit “Vastu” means dwelling or building while “Shastra” refers to science or knowledge.² The fundamentals of this philosophy are based on the consideration of the impacts of the cosmic forces and energies, such as prithvi (earth), jala (water), vayu (air), agni (fire), and aakash (space). The principles of Vastu Shastra aim to create spaces that promote well-being, prosperity, and spiritual growth whilst specifying principles such as; layout, measurements, arrangement of spaces, design, preparation rituals etc.³ Vastu also states that the door is not only an entry point but also serves as an entry for energies, positive or negative.⁴ In terms of energy, it entails the forces which have influence on the earth such as; solar radiation, magnetic field, gravitational force, wind direction.⁵ In India one can see the Vastu Shastra being practised to this day. People adorn their doorways with many different motifs and ornaments. The most common practices would be carved wooden family name plates with a Ganesh motif,⁶ one would also commonly find a combination of lime and some chillies on a string hung on the door frame to ward off evil spirits, and torans, which are door hangings believed to bring good fortune, are commonly made from marigolds and ornate the doors of hindu homes.⁷ Although being a predominantly Hindu practice, principles of Vastu Shastra can be seen being used in

² Fazeli, H. (no date) *The amazing principles of Vastu Shastra*, Google Books. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=QlKaEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&dq=vastu%20shastra&ots=CYz4QN2aAQ&sig=dou7sXrSkblw7IngBv7Rkst0KVg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=vastu%20shastra&f=false (Accessed: 27 November 2023).

³ Fazeli, H. (no date) *The amazing principles of Vastu Shastra*, Google Books. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=QlKaEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&dq=vastu%20shastra&ots=CYz4QN2aAQ&sig=dou7sXrSkblw7IngBv7Rkst0KVg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=vastu%20shastra&f=false (Accessed: 27 November 2023).

⁴ Staff, A. (2018) *Vastu tips: 25 Ways To Boost Positive Energy in your home*, *Architectural Digest India*. Available at:

<https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/vastu-shastra-25-tips-make-home-radiate-positive-energy/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

⁵ Hotwani, M. and Rastogi, P. (2022) *Vastu Shastra: A Vedic approach to architecture*, *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology*. Available at: <https://www.ijert.org/vastu-shastra-a-vedic-approach-to-architecture> (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

⁶ Ann McCulloch & Paul Monaghan (Editors) et al. (2020) *Double dialogues, Double Dialogues RSS2*. Available at:

<https://doubledialogues.com/article/entrance-its-elements-its-stories/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

⁷ annvee2 (2021) *Bless this house!*, *Vernacular Vernacular*. Available at: <https://www.vernacular2.com/bless-this-house-indian-door-hangings/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

Buddhism, Jainism, and even through the Mughal empire; especially in Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), they mixed Islamic, Persian, and Indian design principles when it came to architecture.⁸ This ancient form of science has heavily impacted Indian culture establishing the importance of the door to this day and has shaped Indian culture for centuries.



Figure 1 - Nameplate with Ganesh motif commonly found in front of or on doors in India.

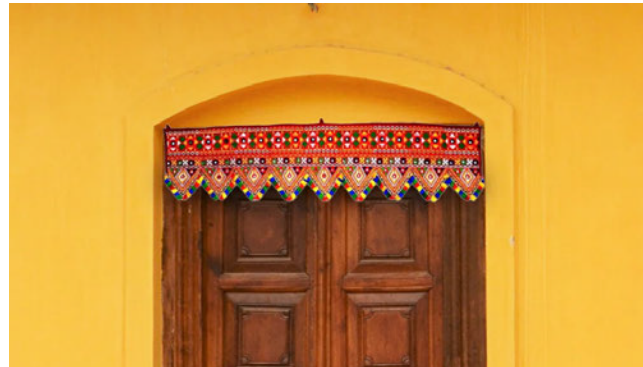


Figure 2 - Modern version of a cloth toran, one can also find torans made of marigolds especially during special occasions.

Exhibition Proposal

This exhibition would be a temporary exhibit which would act as a pop-up exhibition. As a touring exhibition it can attract many people from different cultures to briefly inform them on the topic of Indian doors and the extent of the architectural compositions of India. It would be a window to allow audiences into the history of Indian doors and hopefully share these artefacts to raise interest in grand Indian architecture. I considered hosting the exhibition in India initially but I would want the main audience to be Non-Resident Indians so they would be able to enjoy this exhibition in their country of residence, hence deciding to make it a pop up exhibit. I intend to have this exhibit be showcased in places with a large Indian diaspora such as, United Kingdom, the United States of America, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kenya, Mauritius, Saudi Arabia etc.⁹ If this exhibition were to be visiting Glasgow, I think Platform, which is located right below Central Station would be an ideal location. Being in the centre it would have reach to the Indian communities all around Glasgow, including families and students. The site arrangement is like an elongated corridor-like layout, which aligns perfectly with my envisioned exhibition setup. The linearity of this location complements the designed presentation style for the exhibit, making it an ideal match for the intended spatial configuration.

⁸ Centre, U.W.H. (no date) *Delhi - A heritage city, UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5743/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023).

⁹Mehriya, V. (2023) *Which cities have the largest Indian diaspora?*, *She Innovates Global*. Available at: <https://www.sheinnovatesglobal.com/blog/which-cities-have-the-largest-indian-diaspora/#:~:text=Also%2C%20in%20the%20UAE%2C%20there,numbering%20more%20than%204.5%20million> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

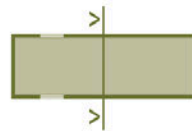
Empty Floor Plan of Arch 3 at Platform Galsgow



Section Drawing of Site



Estimated measurements of arch 3 in Platform Glasgow. Measurements taken through Google Earth. The empty floor plan shows the enterances and where the windows are in the plan. The section drawing/ perspective shows how it looks like inside the arch, there is an indication next to it showing which way the perspective is set from.



SCALE: 1:200 @ A4

Figure 3 - Empty floor plan of the site, and a perspective section of the site, both with estimated measurements of the site.

Personally, as an Indian who was raised abroad, I rarely had the chance to experience exhibits which were local to my ethnicity and my own culture. I was completely unaware about the grandeur of the art and design that my own culture has, just because it has been heavily underappreciated or been underrepresented in different countries. My education mostly extended to western cultural influences, until my own spark of interest for my cultural practices and designs. This exhibit is for all those like me who haven't had the chance to appreciate their own culture merely because they aren't exposed to it. India is the most populated country in the world, having a population of 1.43 billion people. Even so, many South Asians face cultural dysphoria, me included. In school it starts off with people mocking you for your skin colour, or for the food you bring for lunch, and it grows to a much larger irreversible dislike for anything to do with your own culture. It's also the lack of access to South Asian representation and appreciation outside of South Asia itself which possibly causes teenagers and young adults to avoid

their own culture.¹⁰ This exhibition can be a small step for children of immigrants, immigrants, or people with Indian ancestry to witness the appreciation of something that their own heritage has to offer hoping to battle that cultural barrier inside themselves.¹¹

Exhibition experience

This exhibition will make audiences embark through the exhibits one through five, each a distinct case study of a door that represents the exquisite artistry of Indian doors. These exhibits are arranged chronologically, the first exhibit showcasing the oldest door and the last door being the one that's more recent.

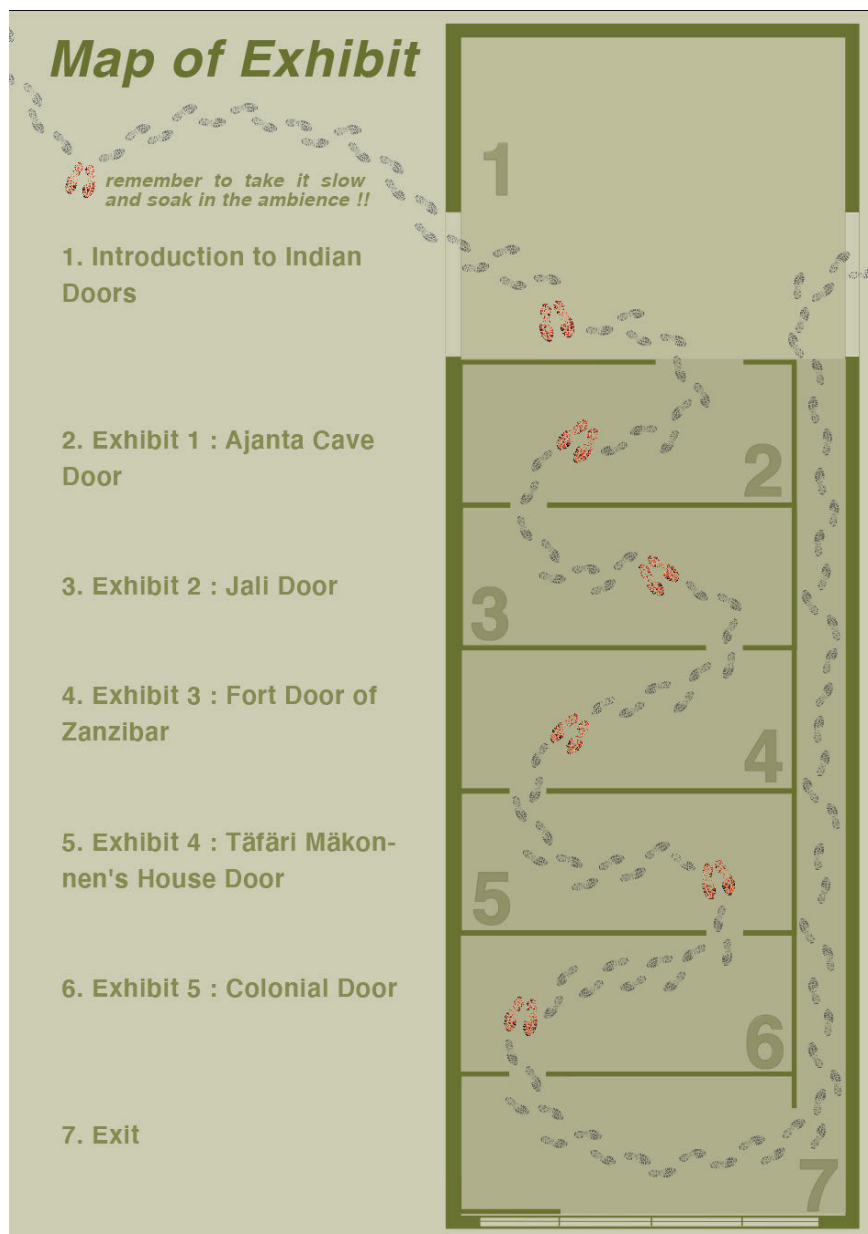


Figure 4- Visual of site floor plan which every visitor will receive upon entry. The plan shows the flow of space and where to stop to experience each door.

¹⁰ Puri, K. (2022) *South Asian diaspora recall gnawing loneliness in post-war Britain*, BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60988410> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

¹¹ (No date a) *Celebrating South Asian heritage in the UK - british medical association*. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/celebrating-south-asian-heritage-in-the-uk> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

In navigating the lacuna within academic literature on these particular doors, my approach takes on an autoethnographic dimension. Complementing scholarly research, I delve into firsthand accounts shared on articles and blogs, allowing both myself and the audience to glean insights into the experiential nuances of these doors. All these case studies pertain to doors that are currently in active use and there would be many logistical complexities associated with the transportation of these artefacts, so the proposed exhibit would feature re-creations of the crafted doors so the audience is able to see and engage with the cultural artefacts still physically. Each person attending this exhibition will receive a crafted booklet with in-depth explanations of each exhibit and a comprehensive map, facilitating the visitor to navigate the winding hallway with many adorned doors and doorways. Another consideration is that doors have a multifaceted nature, they possess duality of sides, each side of a door tells a story. The audience will be encouraged to interact with the doors and will need to push a button located right next to each door to be able to walk through, there they will be introduced to the back of the door, because each door has two sides to it. This side of the door will showcase the atmosphere of the interior facade of the door. Then the audience will be able to continue on to the next door exhibit. In this exhibit doors are the main element and take the centre stage, however it is important to emphasise the significance of the ambiance surrounding the door. This exhibition will integrate elements such as sound, light, and surrounding objects, this would offer a holistic representation of cultural nuances and provide authenticity which is embedded in these artefacts. The audience will have the pleasure of being transported to peaceful cave shrines, located on the edge of a mountain, to the hustle and bustle of the narrow lanes of India, to the places that were influenced by Indian architecture.



Figure 5 - Mockup of brochure which every visitor will receive, this brochure explains each exhibit in depth.

Exhibit 1: Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra, India



Figure 6 - Ajanta Cave Shrine IV door with Buddha statue in the background.



Figure 7 - Drawing of cave door.

The first exhibit that the visitor will be faced with is the Shrine Door located in Cave IV in the Ajanta Caves. This exhibit will echo the original atmosphere of where this door is located, the audience will be presented with sounds of birds, wind, and echoing voices through a speaker located next to the exhibit. The visitors will also be able to see through to the other side as this particular exhibit is a doorway, they would be looking onto an image of the stone carved, Buddha statue that is located in cave IV. The lighting will emphasise specific parts of the door carvings, such as the Makara carving, the Lotus motifs, and the carving of Buddha.

The caves consist of 29 rock cut caves that are located on a horseshoe shaped rock escarpment along the Waghora River in the state of Maharashtra, India. The caves are also a UNESCO World Heritage site. The earliest caves date back to the 1st and 2nd century, and during the 5th and 6th century more intricate rock cut monasteries were added. The layout of this cave emulates the traditional way of chaitya-grihas (Buddhist prayer halls) which can be characterised by their horseshoe shaped alcove, a central chamber, and a central stupa. The door carvings in this exhibit can be found in cave IV, one of the more intricately carved caves.¹² Although this cave is left as an unfinished excavation the elaborately carved door is what attracts visitors to this specific cave.¹³ The extravagant door carvings were made by skilled craftsmen with simple tools like a hammer and chisel.¹⁴ This door leads to the central chamber of the fifth cave. Commonly, the doors of cave complexes like Ajanta have a similar layout. What sets

¹² Centre, U.W.H. (no date a) *Ajanta caves, UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/242/> (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

¹³ Trawell.in (2023) *Cave 5 to 8, Ajanta Caves - timings, history, best time to visit, Trawell.in*. Available at: <https://www.trawell.in/maharashtra/ajanta-caves/cave-5-to-8> (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

¹⁴ (No date) *Ajanta caves in depth information*. Available at: <http://ajantacaves.com/Cavesinfo/Introduction/> (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

this particular door frame apart is the carved motifs that can be seen on this door. One might mistake the carvings to be of an elephant but in reality, they are carvings of a makara, a mythological sea creature with many interpretations but this particular carving is a combination of a body of a fish or a crocodile and the head of an elephant.¹⁵ Makaras represent the Capricorn constellation based on the twelve zodiacs. They are commonly seen as symbols in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.¹⁶ Makaras in Buddhism have drawn this concept from Hindu mythology, in Hinduism makaras are associated with bodies of water and are represented as a vehicle for gods and goddesses, the goddess Ganga in particular. They are particularly used as decorative elements in stupas, temples, and other sacred spaces in Buddhism. They commonly appear as sculpted figures on railings, pillars, and entrance ways in buddhist monasteries. They symbolise the subjugation of water elements, and are seen as protectors, hence adorning entrances of sacred spaces.¹⁷ Makaras aren't just seen in places of worship in India but also can be seen on torans at the entrance of Indian households and are also prevalent in temples in Nepal, Java, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka.



Figure 8 (Left) - Close up of Makara motif which.



Figure 9 (Right) - Lotus motif seen on carved columns.

Another significant motif seen carved on the door is a lotus motif which is another commonality between Hinduism and Buddhism. The lotuses can be found at the top and bottom of the carvings of these pillar-like structures on either side of the door. The lotus is the symbol of creation and is believed to be a foundation for Lord Buddha, and is believed to support the world above the tumultuous waters of the universe.¹⁸ Lotuses serve as the symbol of purity and divine birth according to the

¹⁵ Buswell, R.E. and Lopez, D.S. (2014) *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶ Graves, L. (2017) *Mythical Beasts & Beings: A visual guide to the creatures of Folklore*. United States: Xist Publishing.

¹⁷ ROBINS, B. D., & BUSSABARGER, R. F. (1970). The Makara: A Mythical Monster from India. *Archaeology*, 23(1), 38–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41668057>

¹⁸ Ward, William E. "The Lotus Symbol: Its Meaning in Buddhist Art and Philosophy." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no. 2 (1952): 135–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/426039>.

Lalitavistara; a pure individual or spirit is likened to a spotless new lotus which emerges from muddy water, basically implying that it is untouched by impurities.¹⁹ It is also located at the centre of the Garbhadhatu Mandala, and it represents the core or origin of the world, also representing the womb or embryonic source. Another symbolic motif that is presented in this doorway is the carving of Lord Buddha sitting on a naga throne which translates to snake throne in English that can be seen in between the two Makaras. This represents harmony, protection, and the enlightened state of being. This symbol has originated from the Jataka stories (a collection of tales that showcase Siddhartha's (Buddha) previous lives), which is a prominent feature that can be seen through the Ajanta Caves. These stories serve as the virtues and principles of Buddhism based on the knowledge that Lord Buddha gained in these lives. The stories include a variety of characters including animals, humans, and deities, some of the deities can be seen in the carving of this door. The tale known as the "Naga King's Gift" or "Mucalinda Sheltering Buddha" is a story which can be found in the Jataka Stories. The plot of the story is that shortly after Siddhartha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, a severe storm arose. Naga, the serpent king, emerged from the earth and protected Buddha from the elements by coiling its body around him and by spreading his hood to shield Buddha from the elements.²⁰



Figure 10 - Close up of the carving of the Naga protecting Buddha.

¹⁹ Ward, William E. "The Lotus Symbol: Its Meaning in Buddhist Art and Philosophy." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 11, no. 2 (1952): 135–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/426039>.

²⁰ The Lord Buddha Protected by the Naga in the Attitude of Subduing Mara

Exhibit 2 : Jali Doors



Figure 11 - Simple jali door commonly found as entrances to havelis.

As visitors approach the end of the hallway, they will be allured by the enchanting Jali door. Stepping into this exhibit is akin to the journey through the narrow galis of Rajasthan, where a traditional village haveli entrance unfolds before their eyes, with the Jali door taking centre stage. This door will be bathed in a radiant light, reminiscent of the sun. This exhibit showcases the intricate lattice patterns that cause mesmerising shadows on the floor's surface. This door is a portal not only to appreciate the beauty of Indian architecture but also to the stories and heritage that Jali architecture holds. To add to the atmosphere of a Rajasthani gali there would be a motorcycle or bicycle placed, along with sounds of traffic in the distance. On the other side of the door would be a projected image of a stereotypical Rajasthani haveli, which has a haveli chowk (courtyard), with light gleaming into the centre of the house.²¹

The word jali can be described as a meticulously crafted screen made of perforated stone, or lattice, adorned with intricate carvings by harmoniously combining calligraphy and geometrical patterns.²² In Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit the word Jali is used to describe a net like pattern. Jali work can be used for windows, screens, railings, furniture, etc, in

²¹ Home (no date) *8interiors*. Available at: <https://8interiors.com/interior/entry/interior-design-india-haveli-4825/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

²² publisher, M.P. this (2021) *Jali, Issuu*. Available at: <https://issuu.com/mapin/docs/jali> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

this context however the discussion is focused on Jali doors.²³ Jali can be crafted from any kind of material, however traditionally jali doors were primarily made from stone, wood, or metal, each material lending its unique characteristics and functions. In this



Figure 12 - Jali architecture found in the Taj Mahal.

exhibit this particular Jali door is crafted out of wood. Usually, wooden jali elements and furniture are specifically made from Indian Rosewood which is a type of hardwood, it is recognised for its durability and robust nature as it can survive in harsh conditions and dry wood termites as well.²⁴ Jali work reached its pinnacle of intricacy during the Mughal era. The Mughal rulers brought a wealth of artistic influences and were patrons of the arts, and this also included architecture. Many Mughal architectural traditions have become iconic elements which can be found in both Hindu and Islamic architecture especially jali work. The jali work in havelis is testimony to the beautiful confluence of indigenous Rajput and Mughal artistry.²⁵ In the early days of the Mughal reign under Akbar, the geometric patterns of jali were usually hexagonal and octagonal which were simpler, like the one showcased in the exhibit. Throughout the reign of the Mughals the jali pattern developed specifically under the reign of Shah Jahan, plant and floral motifs were more popular in jali work. They also adorned the jali screens with gemstone accents by inlaying them into the frame of the jali screen.²⁶ The biggest example of the complex floral motifs in jali can primarily be seen in the Taj Mahal in Agra, one of India's most famous monuments. This type of architecture provides ventilation, allowing air circulation into the home, the small holes allow air to funnel in and functions similar to an air conditioner compressor. The cooling element is also enhanced by the materials used, the stone and the wood enhance humidification, as the organic materials can absorb, hold, and release water particles.²⁷ Jali architecture also allows privacy, whilst providing fresh air into the building. Haveli's serve similar purposes and that's why these doors, windows, and screens are commonly used in the havelis of India. Like jali another crucial architectural element is the courtyard which is in the heart of the haveli.

²³ Tola, M.M. (2023) *Jali in Mughal architecture, the most delicate stone curtains*, *DailyArt Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/jali-in-mughal-architecture-the-most-delicate-stone-curtains/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

²⁴ *Jali Furniture Buyers Guide* (2020) *Trade Furniture Company Blog*. Available at: <https://www.tradefurniturecompany.co.uk/blog/jali-furniture-buyers-guide#:~:text=Jali%20Furniture%20is%20crafted%20from,to%20other%20less%20efficient%20materials> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

²⁵ Tola, M.M. (2023) *Jali in Mughal architecture, the most delicate stone curtains*, *DailyArt Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/jali-in-mughal-architecture-the-most-delicate-stone-curtains/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

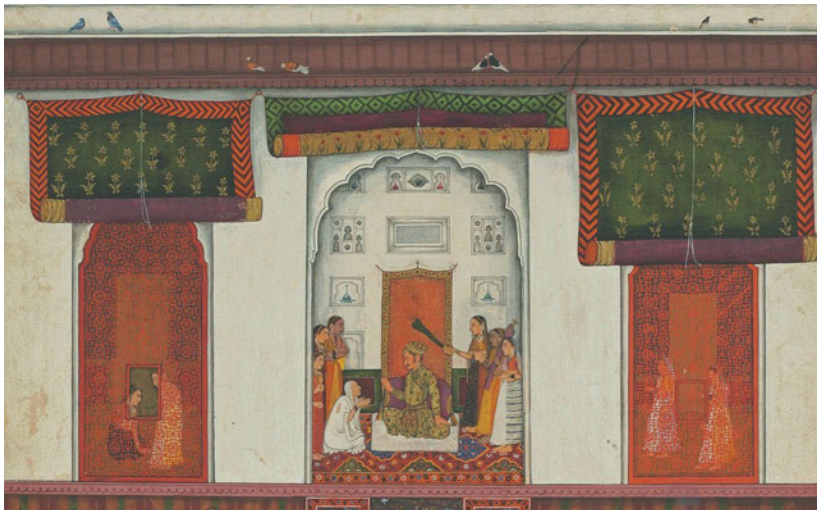
²⁶ Tola, M.M. (2023) *Jali in Mughal architecture, the most delicate stone curtains*, *DailyArt Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/jali-in-mughal-architecture-the-most-delicate-stone-curtains/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

²⁷ (No date) *Jaalis: A study on aesthetics and functional aspects in built ...* - *IJSEAS*. Available at: <https://ijseas.com/volume2/v2i2/ijseas20160211.pdf> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).



Figure 13 (Top) - Common rajasthani haveli chowk, this one is in a heritage hotel.

Figure 14 (Below) - Illustration of Raja Kansa, his wives, and jali screens.



time, these perforated screens allowed the elite to be glimpsed by the public as the most powerful women were commonly concealed from the public gaze.³¹ The illustration showcases Raja Kansa listening to the prophecy of an old duenna. Through the jali screens one can see the shielded and secluded world of the Raja's wives in the figure. Through time the context of jali has evolved, notably evident in contemporary architecture across India.³² In the present day jali has been adapted for the modern city

A jali door can be used to lead into the haveli courtyard, either from the main street or even from inside a room located in the haveli itself. The courtyard serves the function of providing light, ventilation, fresh air, and provides a social space.²⁸ It acts as a heat dump, by working with the jali screens, doors, and windows to circulate the warm air out of the rooms and allowing cool air to enter.²⁹ This is especially important in the peak of summers in India where the temperatures can get up to 45 degrees celsius, hence cooling architecture is crucial.³⁰ In the setting of this exhibit in Rajasthan, the initial purpose of the jali screen was to serve as a divider in the zenana, the women's quarters. Functioning similar to the veils worn by women at the

²⁸ Gupta, J.K. (2018) *Learning from planning and designing of Havelis of Malwa region of Punjab as a role model of sustainable built environment*, LinkedIn. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/learning-from-planning-designing-havelis-malwa-region-jit-kumar-gupta/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

²⁹ Gupta, J.K. (2018) *Learning from planning and designing of Havelis of Malwa region of Punjab as a role model of sustainable built environment*, LinkedIn. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/learning-from-planning-designing-havelis-malwa-region-jit-kumar-gupta/> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

³⁰ *Climate - india* (no date) *India climate: average weather, temperature, rain - Climates to Travel*. Available at: <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/india> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

³¹ publisher, M.P. this (2021) *Jali, Issuu*. Available at: <https://issuu.com/mapin/docs/jali> (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

³² (No date a) *Why is Jaali so popular in contemporary architecture*. Available at:

<https://rayarchitects.com/why-is-jaali-so-popular-in-contemporary-architecture/#:~:text=Jaali%20architecture%20is%20an%20effective,be%20beneficial%20in%20rural%20cont> ext. (Accessed: 06 January 2024).

and now utilising materials like brick, concrete, and MDF to incorporate this architectural heritage into the urban landscape of India's cities.



Figure 15 - Modern interpretation of Jali by Silhouette Architects.



Figure 16 - Modern brick jali in atrium of house.

Exhibit 3: Fort Doors of Zanzibar



Figure 17 - Indian fort door on the streets of Zanzibar

This next door is situated in Stone Town, Zanzibar presenting a striking fort entrance to the audience. Unlike their original purpose of fort protection in India, these doors now serve as entrance ways for houses and shops in Zanzibar. Dramatic and robust, these doors retain their heavy and thick characteristics, holding their historical function. The ambiance surrounding the door harmonises with the cultural mosaic of Stone Town in Zanzibar, a town which is influenced by India, Europe, and the Arab world, blending with the indigenous Swahili coastal elements. The exhibit's atmosphere resonates with the streets of Stone Town featuring the narrow bustling pathways bordered by two-storey limewashed buildings. Tropical plants adorn houses and line the streets, creating an immersive experience for the audience. The surroundings come alive with the sounds of people conversing and socialising, accompanied by the noises of waves gently crashing, characteristic of this seaside town.

Zanzibar's opulent history is rooted in trade, flourishing as a hub where a myriad of goods was converged through traders hailing from the Arab world, Persian Gulf, and India.³³ The heart of this historical richness is encapsulated in Stone Town which intertwines a maze of narrow pathways, spice markets, and bustling traffic embodying a seamless blend of influences from the Arab world and India.³⁴ A striking manifestation of the fusion lies in the intricately carved wooden doors with distinctive brass fixtures, a design hailing from India's forts where this feature served as a defence against charging



Figure 18 - Fort door in Jaisalmer, India.

elephants.³⁵ Traditionally, fort doors in North Western India stood at 12-16 feet tall, covered in these brass spikes from top to bottom to deter battle elephants from ramming into the fort doors without getting injured. In Stone Town, however, these doors merely transcend their functional origins, serving primarily for aesthetic purposes and, though not towering like the traditional doors, they still exude grandeur, nonetheless.³⁶ Initially Swahili craftsmen carved geometric and rectangular door frames, yet the elite class showcased their affluence by elevating the height of their door frames, birthing in a tradition. Each doorway is a canvas reflecting the owner's identity, informing people about the origin, religious belief, social status, and identity of the house owner.³⁷

³³ Centre, U.W.H. (no date) *Stone Town of Zanzibar, UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/173/> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

³⁴ *Stone Town Architecture* (2013) *Stone Town Heritage Society*. Available at: <https://stonetownheritagesociety.wordpress.com/stone-town/stone-town-architecture/> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

³⁵ *Zanzibar's slave market is a site made sacred by history* (2010) *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/26/slave-markets-zanzibar> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

³⁶ India, N. (2023) *Metal-spiked entrance gate doors of Indian forts- a defensive feature!* Available at: <https://www.navrangindia.in/2022/10/metal-spiked-entrance-gate-doors-of.html> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

³⁷ Zanzibar Doors. 2022. *Focuseastafricatours.com* <<https://www.focuseastafricatours.com/blog/zanzibar-doors/>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

Within Zanzibari culture the door takes centre stage as a symbol of affluence, with the intricacy of its design correlating to the owner's wealth. Common motifs depict vegetation and flowers, which symbolise the number of families residing within the home. On older doors, prevalent motifs include fish and chain patterns, indicating ties to the trade and fishing in the Indian Ocean. The fish motif, initially representing the ancient Egyptian fish god, transformed into a pineapple, symbolising a welcoming gesture.³⁸ Unique carvings further personalise these doors of the Zanzibari public, with motifs ranging from Chinese mythological creatures to Quranic scriptures, and even Gujarati words. Most Indian doors found in Zanzibar can be traced back to Gujarati or Punjabi origins, crafted from Burmese teak wood. Wealthy Gujarati businessmen would ship this type of wood all the way from Myanmar to carve these elaborate doors, traversing a journey from fort to port, all the way to the Swahili Coast.³⁹ These find prominence in the bazaar streets of Stone Town often where the Indian businessmen once lived. The irony lies in the fact that fort doors in India initially aimed to ward off threats from Islamic rulers, yet in Zanzibar, Islamic motifs intertwine with elements reminiscent of the elephant fort doors of India, reading a captivating tapestry of cultural interplay.



Figure 19 - Traditional Swahili door.



Figure 20 - Door with Chinese motifs.

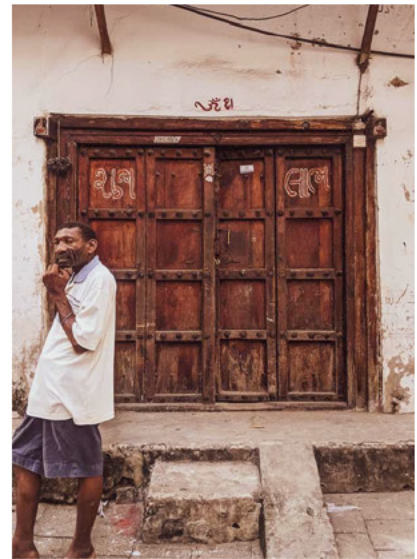


Figure 21 - Door with Gujarati script.

³⁸ Maganga, Matthew. 2023. "The Doors of the Coast: From Zanzibar to Oman," *ArchDaily* <<https://www.archdaily.com/992378/the-doors-of-the-coast-from-zanzibar-to-oman>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

³⁹ "Exploring the Ancient Zanzibari Doors at Stonetown! – Orange Wayfarer." [n.d.]. *Orangewayfarer.com* <<https://www.orangewayfarer.com/stonetown-doors-unesco/>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

Exhibit 4: Carved Door at Täfäri Mäkonnen's House at Harar, Ethiopia



Figure 22 - Entrance of Täfäri Mäkonnen's House at Harar with Indian carved door.

As visitors absorb the atmosphere of this exhibit, set in Ethiopia, they are not merely observers but participants in a cultural dialogue that spans continents. This exhibit showcases a unique and intriguing cultural juxtaposition- a carved Indian door nestled within the heart of Ethiopian heritage. The ambiance within this section of this exhibition is distinct, offering a departure from the preceding displays as the context of location undergoes this fascinating shift. Adjacent to the carved door there would be a plaque written in Harari with the list of all the artefacts that are showcased in the Sherif Private Collection Museum. Behind the door would be an image of the museum showcasing the Harari artefacts.

The trade and commercial relations between India and the Horn of Africa date back centuries, to the 1600s.⁴⁰ During the early nineteenth century, Indian craftsmen and traders left an indelible mark on Ethiopian soil, contributing their expertise to the churches and structures, especially in Addis Ababa and Harar, Ethiopia.⁴¹ These craftsmen found a place of prominence in Ethiopia's cultural tapestry, aligning themselves with the emperor and influential members of Ethiopian society. The reason for employing Indian craftsmen in Ethiopia was that they were far more economic in

⁴⁰ Pankhurst, R. (1991) 'The Indian door of Täfäri Mäkonnen's house at Harar (Ethiopia)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1(3), pp. 389–391. doi:10.1017/s135618630001206.

⁴¹ Pankhurst, R. (1995) *The role of Indian craftsmen in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ethiopian palace, church and other building*. Cambridge: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.

terms of labour than the Greek or Italian builders.⁴² The architectural influence of these Indian craftsmen is palpable in the streets of Ethiopia, reminiscent of the type of architecture found in India, it resembles the colourful, Indian style stone buildings with wooden balconies.⁴³ The Sherif Private Collection Museum in Harar, houses this significant artefact- a door that serves as a tangible link to the interplay between these two distant cultures that are oceans apart. This carved door is a masterpiece that is made by an Indian craftsman. The carvings on the door tell a story of craftsmanship and artistry, reflecting the fusion of Indian and Ethiopian design elements. This carved door is reminiscent of the woodwork style that can be found in Madras or Madurai. Traditional doors from the South of India are carved out of teak wood and have carved panels with mythological or devotional carvings on them.⁴⁴ The carving of an elephant head positioned atop the carving at the door's pinnacle embodies the representation of the Hindu God, Ganesh who has the head of an elephant.⁴⁵ Below the elephant head there are three intricately carved dwarfpals (gatekeepers), a motif commonly found on doors or brackets of havelis, or even temples.⁴⁶ Despite the recipient, Täräfi Mäkonnen, being an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, the craftsmen honoured the protection of his house

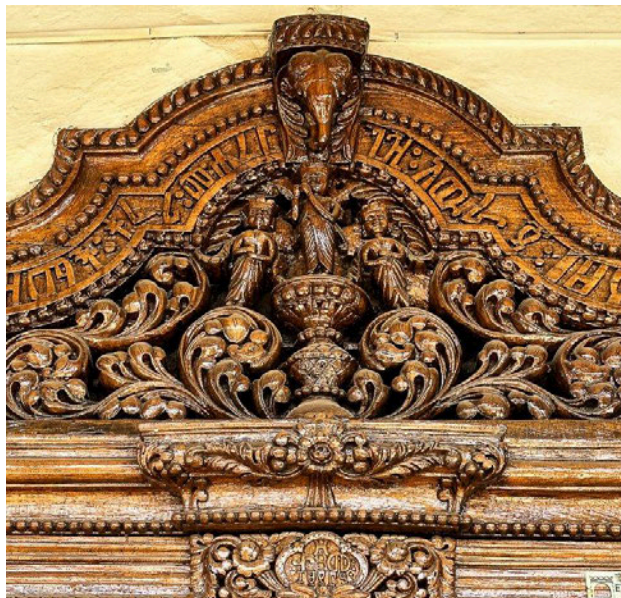


Figure 23 - Close up of the carved door, with dwarfpal motifs.

and placed these carvings in accordance with age-old Hindu custom, a gesture that encountered no objections from Täräfi Mäkonnen himself. The cultural interplay extends further, at the top of the door frame, one can see some script written, it reads, “This is the house of Däjzmach Täräfi Mäkonnen governor of Harar 1903.”⁴⁷ This is written in Ge’ez, Ethiopia's old Semitic language, it specifies the house-owner, the rank, and the year. The year 1903 corresponds to 1910 on the Gregorian calendar, this was when Täräfi assumed the position of governor.⁴⁸ Beyond the physicalities of the door, it is a metaphorical bridge connecting the historical narratives of Indian culture and

⁴² Pankhurst, R. (1995) *The role of Indian craftsmen in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ethiopian palace, church and other building*. Cambridge: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.

⁴³ McLean, J. (2023) *Harar, Ethiopia - UNESCO site and city of peace!*, JAYNE MCLEAN PHOTOGRAPHER. Available at: <https://www.jaynemclean.com/blog/visit-harar-ethiopia-unesco-harari-culture-and-hyenas#:~:text=The%20layout%20of%20Harar%20was,place%20during%20the%2019th%20century.&text=The%20old%20town%20of%20Harar%20has%20historical%20architectural%20significance%20with,Middle%20East%20and%20Indian%20influences.> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

⁴⁴ *Doorway to heaven* (2012) *The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/features/homes-and-gardens/doorway-to-heaven/article3723376.ece> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

⁴⁵ Pankhurst, R. (1991) 'The Indian door of Täfäri Mäkonnen's house at Harar (Ethiopia)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1(3), pp. 389–391. doi:10.1017/s1356186300001206.

⁴⁶ Sadiyah Faruki & Aneri Nihalani / TNN / Updated: Nov 23, 2012 (no date) *Ahmedabad's old Havelis not just works of art: Ahmedabad news - times of India, The Times of India*. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/ahmedabads-old-havelis-not-just-works-of-art/articleshow/17331314.cms> (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

⁴⁷ Pankhurst, R. (1991) 'The Indian door of Täfäri Mäkonnen's house at Harar (Ethiopia)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1(3), pp. 389–391. doi:10.1017/s1356186300001206.

⁴⁸ Pankhurst, R. (1991) 'The Indian door of Täfäri Mäkonnen's house at Harar (Ethiopia)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1(3), pp. 389–391. doi:10.1017/s1356186300001206.

Ethiopian culture, representing a shared history of trade and craftsmanship that transcends geological boundaries. This carved door with Indian origins is placed within the Ethiopian context, it invites reflection on the dynamic interplay of cultures and the lasting impressions left by craftsmen who traversed oceans to contribute their skills in foreign lands. This is proof of the cultural testament to the intricate threads that weave together the diverse tapestry of the influence of Indian craft in the context of global heritage.

Exhibit 5: Colonial Doors

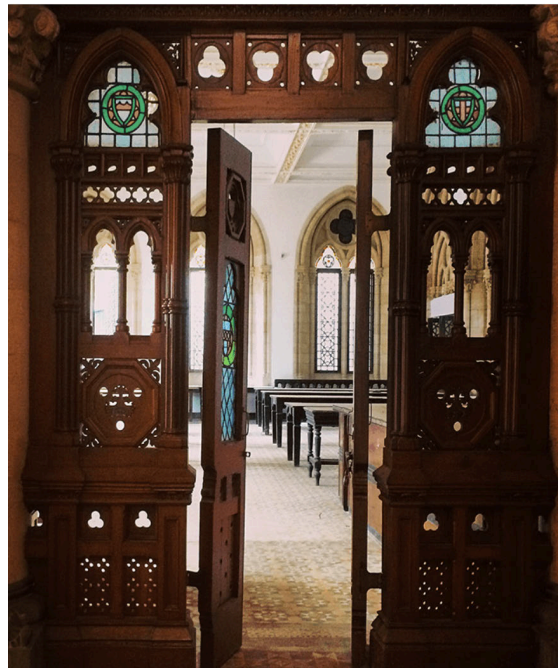


Figure 24 - Door in the Library of the University of Mumbai.

The audience is presented with the next exhibit of the refined ambiance of colonial architecture, reminiscent of the distinguished libraries in the United Kingdom, such as Oxford or the University of Edinburgh. However, upon closer inspection, the observer will notice distinctive elements, subtly interwoven into the traditional framework, exemplified by the intricate jali-like work adorning this colonial-style door. Illuminated by carefully directed light, the stained glass within this exhibit takes centre stage, revealing the nuanced craftsmanship that thrives when light permeates its intricate patterns. Adjacent to the door stand two columns, bearing testimony to the meticulous carving indicative of the colonial aesthetic. Situated within the precincts of the University of Mumbai, this door finds its home in the University Library. One can also see the gothic/neoclassical windows which would be a style commonly found in Churches in the UK.

The impact of colonisation on India is palpable in the widespread presence of colonial doors, steeped in history and cultural cross-pollination as symbols of the enduring impact of British colonialism on Indian society and architecture. Places like Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai where the colonial vestiges persist in the form of government buildings, colonial mansions, and churches, these doors stand as silent witnesses to the most important and transformative chapter in Indian history.⁴⁹ Subtle nuances etched onto these doors and other architectural elements which have survived encapsulate a visual narrative, offering a glimpse into an era where British influence permeated Indian society and left an indelible mark. This door which is located on the premises of Mumbai University and the building it is located in is the University Library and the Rajabai Clock Tower. Designed by George Gilbert Scott, this architectural masterpiece reflects the colonial influence pervasive in South Bombay. The Gothic style is characterised by pointed arches, stained windows, ribbed walls, and spires.⁵⁰ These elements define the grandeur of this heritage building. The doorway featured in this exhibit exemplifies the colonial gothic and art deco style of architecture, with its stained glass and intricately carved wooden elements. This architectural display becomes a canvas on which the cross-cultural exchange between British and Indian influences unfold. The Gothic styled

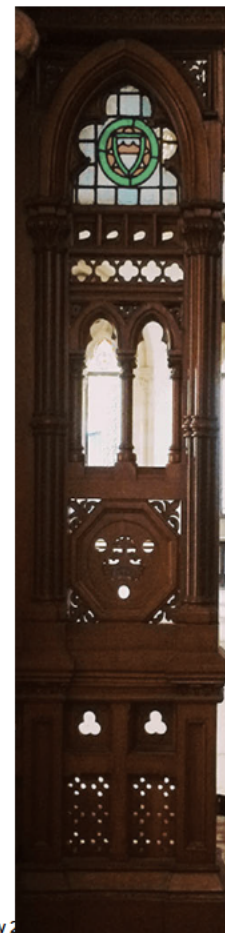


Figure 25 (Top) - View of Rajabai Tower and the University building from Watson's Hotel Bombay.
 Figure 26 (Right) - Close up of the intricate stained glass and carvings on the Gothic style door.

carvings and stained glass embody the colonial eras architectural nuances, while the jharoka-styled carvings pay homage to indigenous

⁴⁹ *Calcutta's architecture is unique. its destruction is a disaster for the city* (2015) *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/02/calcutta-architecture-heritage-destruction-city-campaign-amit-chaudhuri> (Accessed: 15 January 2024)
⁵⁰ Richman-Abdou, Kelly. 2022. "What We Can Learn from the Exquisite History and Ornate Aesthetic of Gothic Architecture," *My Modern Met* <<https://mymodernmet.com/gothic-architecture-characteristics/>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

Indian architecture, The intertwining of these influences create a unique amalgamation, highlighting the adaptability of the colonial architects who seamlessly incorporated local practices into their designs. The British not only introduced new architectural styles to India but also integrated indigenous materials and cooling practices into their structures. Materials like red sandstone and brick employed for their cooling properties, became integral to the construction of colonial buildings.⁵¹ This exhibit serves as an illustration of the harmonious fusion of the two distinct cultures, exemplifying the Indo-Saracenic architectural style, characterised by a blend of arch and dome elements from Indian architecture with Gothic or Neoclassical features like spires and pinnacles.⁵² This style not only resonates in India but also transcends borders, leaving its imprint on British architecture and various global locales.⁵³ As the audience immerses themselves in the delicate play of light on stained glass and the intricate carvings, they witness not just architectural beauty but the living testament of an era that shaped the aesthetic narrative of a nation, reflecting the convergence of cultures that continues to define the architectural tapestry of India.

Exhibition Considerations

With any exhibition there are considerations that come into play to ensure a seamless and engaging experience for visitors. Each exhibition can have its shortcomings and advantages with either the space, audience, lighting, etc. The artefacts are the star of the show and should be the centre of the audience's attention. Each door tells its own story and needs to be given the opportunity to shine on its own to showcase the cultural and architectural tapestry that they represent. To install the doors there will be specialised tools required such as, mounting brackets, anchors, and handling equipment to ensure these intricate pieces are handled correctly. The use of these tools guarantees the safety of the artefacts themselves and the people handling the artefacts as well. The installation process for this exhibition demands meticulous planning, with attention to detail given to the arrangement of each artefact. The exhibit will have a maze-like plan with a one-way system so visitors can focus on one door at a time. Personally, in any museum or exhibition I tend to get overwhelmed by all the artefacts around me and I find myself rushing through all the exhibits just because there is so much going on around me. This exhibit will aim to battle that concept of having everything in one space. The audience will be able to walk through each and every door exhibit which gives them the chance to fully experience the door itself, but due to these being meticulously crafted re-creations of these artefacts the audience won't exactly be able to use them as actual doors. Next to each door will be a button placed where the visitor will have to press it in order to be let through the door, this minimises the risk of

⁵¹ Sharma, Pragma. 2023. "The Powerful Influence of Colonization in India: History and Architecture," *Novatr.com* <<https://www.novatr.com/blog/architectural-influence-of-colonization-in-india>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

⁵² "Indo-Gothic." 2016. *On Art and Aesthetics* <<https://onartandaesthetics.com/2016/04/23/indo-gothic/>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

⁵³ "Imperial India." [n.d.]. *Britishempire.co.uk* <<https://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/india/indosaracenic.htm>> [accessed 15 January 2024]

damage or wear and tear as visitors won't be able to touch the door first hand. There also must be staff at each door exhibit to make sure that visitors are adhering to the rules. In terms of artefact care, this exhibition would have to be held in spaces that are undercover and away from the elements. Additionally security measures would need to be implemented, such as, surveillance and protective barriers which would ensure the physical safety of the artefacts, and protection from any potential harm or theft. Funding is also crucial to discuss for any exhibition, this influences the scale and the scope of the presentation. There would need to be funding for laser printing and commissioned artists to recreate these pieces. For this exhibition to be brought into a physical reality there would need to be sponsorships, or grants for implementation from foundations such as India Foundation for the Arts. Companies that encourage education of the design and art practices throughout India could potentially sponsor this cause of educating people outside India about the beauty the subcontinent holds through this cultural journey of Indian doors.

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