European influence on the *Thakurdalans*: A Religious Architectural Remain of 18th-19th Century's Calcutta

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the Thakurdalans of Hindu 'new elite' houses in Calcutta, in the years between 1757 and 1900. During mid-18th to early 19th century, when this city was emerging as a new trade centre it had witnessed several cultural diversity and influence. Impact of these diversity and influence has been preserved not only into the dwelling houses of the Hindu 'new elite' or the wealthy city dwellers but in their place of worship, in Thakurdalans also. These Thakurdalans or the place of worship were constructed as an adjacent part of the main residential houses with numerous European architectural features. The aim of the paper is to locate these European architectural features on this specific religious structure Thakurdalans of Calcutta. Massive use of European architectural motifs on Thakurdalan may indicate to the new socio-cultural practice of a new economic community. This article also tries to indicate the strategic role of those motifs of the Thakurdalans in a changing society where this new cultural practice emerged and went obsolete during the course of a time.*

Keywords: *Thakurdalan, European Architectural Features, Motifs and embellishments, Culture.*

Introduction

Faith and belief are the most important emotions of any human culture. Religious constructions represent not only the faith and belief but also the economic

condition and aesthetic sense of a group of people from a particular time and geography, which all are generally considered as a part of a culture. In Kolkata the numerous religious constructions including temples, mosques, churches etc. are present with several architectural features with embellishments which strongly indicate the city's vibrant and cosmopolitan character. Several accounts are available where these all have been discussed elaborately. As a cultural object, the emergence of *Thakurdalan* and massive use of these European motifs and lesser existence of indigenous motifs on this specific religious structure is found during a specific time period which indicates clearly the cultural exchanges of that time. All these European architectural features may indicate to the political and cultural inclinations of its founders and patrons. This practice was followed during 18th-19th century and as with time this cultural practice was also affected due to the changes of economic and political conditions around. Gradually constructing *Thakurdalans* with massive proportions of European features went obsolete. In this present paper some selected *Thakurdalans* of present Kolkata are going to be emphasized with their heavily embellished European architectural features and by studying these features the researcher has tried to point out the cultural exchanges within the Indian and European societies of Calcutta during 18th-19th century.

In 1757 the battle of *Plassey* was won by the East India Company. In this battle *Siraj-Ud-Daullah* the last independent *nawab* of Bengal not only lost his throne and political power but *Murshidabad* also lost its position and glory as the capital of Bengal. After winning the battle of *Plassey* the Company decided to shift the capital from *Murshidabad* to Calcutta. From that period Calcutta was planned as a place for future capital. In 1773 Calcutta started its journey as the first capital of the British India (Cotton 1909:82; Pal 1990: pp-2-3). During that period the official and administrative buildings of the Company and residential houses of the Company officials started to be constructed and in those early days of the city, many of the architects, engineers of those buildings even sometimes masons or artisans were brought from outside of this country, from England (Halder & Halder 2013: 90; Nilsson 1968: 64). A small architectural England was created on the soil of Calcutta. These constructions were built mainly following European architectural style and gradually this style also managed to put a great impact on the local culture. As a result, considerable European influences can be found on the monuments which were constructed even by the natives or local people of Calcutta, in 18th-19th century. During this period many constructions both religious and secular were constructed by the native 'new elite' community (mostly *Hindu*) which contain such influences. Few indigenous motifs, figures

and deities, though in a very small number also found their place among those European influences and indicating the cultural condition of the founders and patrons. Their large mansions which were built with heavy European influence are not however the focal point here. Inside their large mansions the *Thakurdalans* were constructed as a place for worship which contain considerable amount of European architectural features. Few of them are also found with traditional indigenous features too, reflecting the cultural practices of that particular geophysical area. This present article focuses rather on this specific religious architectural form *Thakurdalan* of 18th-19th century's Calcutta and European architectural influences on it.

Thakurdalan as a religious monument originated in a specific period when the city Calcutta was growing up as the first Capital of the British India and simultaneously as a famous trade centre not only within India but across Asian countries also. So, many reminiscences of the cultural exchanges and interactions can be found on this structure as a very natural result of time. Constructing *Thakurdalan* as a practice continued from the mid-18th to allover 19th century and after this period was abandoned. So *Thakurdalan* as a cultural heritage reflects the cultural practice of a specific Asian community in colonial Calcutta. That is the reason why this specific religious architectural remain is getting focus in this paper. For this article the researcher has gone through several books, documents and field surveys. Through this article the researcher is trying to look into what were the architectural influences on the *Thakurdalans* of Calcutta and also trying to indicate the probable reasons for which patrons chose to adopt such motifs for their religious constructions. Some selected *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata and their different architectural parts like pillars or columns, arches, motifs, designs and embellishments are going to be discussed separately in reference to their specific European influences. Before entering into this elaborate discussion let us know what the *Thakurdalan* is.

Thakurdalan

Thakurdalan, according to its literal meaning is, any construction made with brick and dedicated for deity. But *Thakurdalan* as a terminology is only used to indicate a specific architectural form. The term *Thakurdalan* is being used to mark a specific structure. This flat-roofed, multi-entranced structure was always built with a central courtyard in front and this courtyard was always enclosed by the residential complex on the other three sides. Another main feature of this structure is, it was always constructed as an adjacent part of the main residential house and shared the same roof. Religious construction of *Sovabazar Rajbari* or

the Royal Palace of *Shobhabazar* in Kolkata, the specific platform, where annual *DurgaPuja* of this Royal family is held every year, is called as *Thakurdalan* **(Fig no-1)**. In the year 1757 *Nabakrishna Deb,* one of the most eminent and economically powerful personalities of mid-18th century, bought this house from *ShobharamBasak* and after that he renovated the house and a *Thakurdalan* was constructed as an adjacent part of the main residential house to perform the *Durga Puja* (Lahiri Choudhury 2005:159). After *Nabakrishna* Deb, constructing of *Thakurdalan* became a trend which was followed by the "new elite" class. For a long time during the *pujadays* these *Thakurdalan* premises of *Hindu* 'new elite's were used as a "public space" (Chattopadhyay 2006: 139) where native and *sahibs* could experience the festive mood. In this article the European architectural features of this specific type of construction are going to be discussed. The discussion is starting with the Pillars or Columns.

1. Pillars or Columns: As an architectural element pillar or column plays a vital role in every construction. This vertical building element is used for supporting the roof of any construction or structure. In the *Thakurdalans* of Calcutta several types of pillars and columns were used and these were generally constructed by following the Greeko-Roman architectural styles, like-

a) Doric Column: *Thakurdalan of Rajkrishna Deb* (Late 18th century): In 1789 *Raja Nabakrishna Deb* constructed this house along with a separate *Thakurdalan* in *Shobhabazar* area of present Kolkata. *Nabakrishna Deb* was a renowned person of the mid-18th century's Calcutta. By occupation he was the *Dewan* of Robert Clive (Ghosh 1997:60) and closely associated with the Company and held several key designations under the Company (Bandyopadhyay & Mitra 2013: 101). This house along with a *Thakurdalan* was constructed for his son *Rajkrishna Deb*, just opposite to the *Sovabazar Rajbari*or the Royal house of *Sovabazar*. This gigantic *Thakurdalan* is highly decorated with magnificent Indo-Islamic architectural features and simultaneously some European features also have found its place. Tall and beautiful Doric style columns are standing between the cusped archway entrances as a support of the *Thakurdalan* which grab the attention of viewers at the very first sight **(Fig no-2).**

This specific style or order of pillar was used in many other *Thakurdalans* across the city. Using of Doric style of column indicates the European influence very clearly, and that was a very common practice during that period. *Thakurdalan* of *Chandra* House of *Shib Narayan Das* lane near *Thanthania Kali* temple of north

Kolkata, *Thakurdalan* of *Mahendralal Sarkar* at *S. N. Banerji* Road, *Thakurdalan* of *Sreenath Das* near *Bow Bazar* are some of these.

b) Ionic Column: ***Thakudalan of Bishwanath Matilal*** **(Early 19th century):** Apart from Greek Doric style of column another style of pillars are found to be used frequently in the *Thakurdalans* all over the city, which is the Ionic order. *Bishwanath Matilal's Thakurdalan* at *Bow Bazar* can be mentioned here as an example . *Bishwanath Matilal* one of the famous business personalities during late 18th to early 19th century (Ghosh 1997:66), built this *Thakurdalan* for his family. According to the present owners and his descendants, as found from personal interview sessions, this *Thakurdalan* was constructed between late 18th to 19th century. Use of Ionic columns and Clerestorywindows at the upper portion of the *Thakurdalan* façade represents a particular style of that time period.

c) Composite Column: ***Thakurdalan of Mitra House, Chorbagan & Thakurdalan of Rani Rasmoni, Janbazar*** **(Middle of the 19th century):**
Composite order generally comprises of two separate styles Corinthian and Ionic. This order is known as the most georgeous column order among all Greek column orders. During 19th century this column order was also used in several *Thakurdalans* but in a less ornameted way. Local or indegenous artisans copied this style from Euroepan structures of the city and during this process the actual designs were changed and a different form originated which was completely different from original style of corinthian column. *Thakurdalan* of *Chorbagan Mitra* house, *Thakurdalan* of *Rani Rasmoni* near *Jan Bazar* are some examples among many.

2. Arch: The word 'arch' originated from the Latin word arcus. It means 'an arc of any curved line' (Halder & Halder 2013: 65). Arch is generally built on an opening to span it. We can see several types of arches were constructed in the *Thakurdalans* of Calcutta. Some of these belong to the European architectural stream and few of these are presented here as examples.

a) Semi-Circular Arch: During colonial era in Calcutta, semi-circular arches were used massively not only in colonial constructions but also in native or indigenous constructions as a direct effect of the European influence. In the *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata such type of arches or semi-circular arches were

majorly used. *Thakurdalan* of *Madan Mohan Dutta* near *Nimtalaghat* Street and *Thakurdalan* of *Durgacharan Mitra* in *Darjipara* are some among many.

b) Four-Centred Tudor Arch: In this city very few *Thakurdalans* are containing 'Four-centred Tudor' type of arch but its existence proves the spread of European influence (Halder & Halder 2013: 65). *Daw* house's *Thakurdalan* near *Jorasanko* and the *Thakurdalan* of *Chandra's* in *Ramanath Kaviraj* Lane are two among those few. Both of these *Thakurdalans* were constructed in the period between middle of 19th century to late 19th century and the founders were both related with business as their occupations. Not only in the arches but both these *Thakurdalans* also contain several European motifs and designs as building embellishments as well.

3. Embellishments and Motifs: In Kolkata several *Thakurdalans* are standing till now which bear the beautiful wall or surface decorations with various European motifs. These motifs were made with plaster and stucco. Some *Thakurdalans* are decorated with grandeur and some are less ornamented. But both of these types have some features which indicate the influence. Now let us have a discussion about some selected *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata.

a) Thakurdalan* of *Gokul Chandra Mitra* (Middle of the 18th century):** *Thakurdalan* of *Gokul Chandra Mitra* in *Kumortuli* area is a highly decorated *Thakurdalan.** According to the foundation stone it was founded in 1761 by *Gokul Chandra Mitra* who worked as a goods supplier under the Company. Outer portion of this *Thakurdalan* is highly decorated with subtle intricate designs and floral motifs made with stucco and plaster. Arch façade of this *Thakurdalan* deserves a special mention because it was ornamented beautifully with European floral motifs, geometric designs. Lively presence of minutely engraved angels has given the structure a mesmerizing look **(Fig no- 3**).

***b) Thakurdalan* of *Baishnabdas Mallick* (Early 19th century):** *Thakurdalan* of *Baishanabdas Mallick* in *Pathuriyaghata* area is another one of the most decorative *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata. This *Thakurdalan* was constructed in early 19th century along with several European features. Arch façade was decorated with European style flowers, Acanthus leaves, festoons as usual.

***c) Thakurdalan of Radhanath Basumullick* (Early 19th century):** *Radhanath Basumullick's Thakurdalan* was constructed during 1830s by himself. He worked as a director of a European company and he also was a share-holder

of the same company (Bandyopadhyay & Mitra 2013:15). This *Thakurdalan* is located at *Radhanath Basumullick* lane, near College Street. It is one of the most ornamented *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata **(Fig no- 4).** Arch façade was highly decorated with intricate floral designs, Acanthus leaves and angels which were the representatives of European influences**.**

d) ***Thakurdalan of Rani Rasmoni*** **(Middle of the 19th century):** In *Jan Bazar* area of Kolkata several houses are known as *Rani Rasmoni's* house. These houses were constructed between early 19th to middle of the 19th century. Presently these all houses belong to the successors of *Rani Rasmoni*. As a very common phenomenon of this period every house was constructed with a separate *Thakurdalan.* Inside, outside, entrance façade, pillars and archways of this particular *Thakurdalan* of *Rani Rasmoni* is highly decorated with various floral motifs, festoon, Acanthus leaves, and intricate geometric European designs and motifs made with stucco and plaster.

e) ***Thakurdalan of Jhamapukur Rajbari*** **(Middle of the 19th century):** This *Jhamapukur Rajbari* or the Royal house of *Jhamapukur* was founded by *Raja Digambar Mitra* during the middle of the 19th century. By occupation *Raja Digambar Mitra* was involved with many fields. He started his career as a school-teacher and ended as a successful businessperson of silk, indigo. In 1874, he became the first Bengali sheriff of Calcutta. During his career he earned a lot of wealth (Bandyopadhyay & Mitra 2013: 77) and by using all that he constructed this house along with this *Thakurdalan*. As a structure of 19th century's colonial Calcutta several colonial architectural features can be found on it. Outer surface and arch façade of this *Thakurdalan* is highly ornamented with Acanthus leaves and European floral motifs. Two angels were engraved on the central portion of every archway and pillars were also decorated with models, figures and faces beside the *Thakurdalan's* entrances as a part of European attire.

f) ***Thakurdalan of Jorasanko Rajbati*** **(Middle of the 19th century):** It is said that *Jorasanko Rajbati* or the Royal house of *Jorasanko* was established by *Raja Dinendranath Roy* in the middle of the 19th century. This *Thakurdalan* was decorated with several European motifs and designs like festoons and photo frames engraved at the arch facade made with stucco plaster.

g) ***Thakurdalan of Baghbazar Basubati*** **(Late 19th century):** *Baghbazar Basubati*or the house of *Basu's* at *Baghbazar*is one of the most decorated *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata but very sadly at present it exists in a very bad or poor condition. This *Thakurdalan* was constructed by the *Pashupati Basu* and *Nandalal Basu* during 1878 in *Baghbazar* area (Bandyopadhyay & Mitra 2013: 99). Their socio-political consciousness could be clearly assumed by scanning the decoration of the *Thakurdalan.* Gigantic Greek Doric columns are standing at the entrance portion of the *Thakurdalan*. Inside and outside of the *Thakurdalan,* cusped arches were also hugely decorated with Acanthus leaves and several non-indigenous flowers. A mural in fresco style was also painted inside of this *Thakurdalan* but presently it is completely ruined. Façade and walls were ornamented with oval and round shaped frames and indigenous deities were engraved beautifully within these frames with plaster.

h) ***Thakurdalan of Harinath Mukherji*** **(Late 19th century):** *Harinath Mukherji*, an architect, engineer in colonial period constructed his house in north Kolkata region, just beside the *Raja Bazaar* science college. His *Thakurdalan* was highly decorated with intricate European floral designs. Depiction of angels between the flower design is a unique feature of this specific *Thakurdalan*.

Indigenous Motifs among European features

In the previous segments some *Thakurdalans* have been presented with their huge European architectural impressions. In this present segment some *Thakurdalans* are going to be presented where indigenous motifs were also used though very few in number but which is the indication of the existence of two separate cultural threads. *Thakurdalans* of *Gokul Chandra Mitra* **(Fig no- 3)**, *Radhanath Basumullick* **(Fig no- 4**), *Jorasanko Rajbati*, *Baghbazar Basubati* and *Harinath Mukherji* represent indigenous cultural threads through use of traditional Indian religious motifs simultaneously with the European motifs.

- In the previous discussion *Thakurdalan* of *Gokul Chandra Mitra* was mentioned for its most beautiful façade decoration with European motifs. But if we minutely observe the design, we can see that the Indigenous deity *Devi Lakshmi* is engraved in between the angels and European floral designs **(Fig no- 3).**
- *Thakurdalan's* arch façade of *Radhanath Basumullick* was highly decorated with the Acanthus leaves, intricate European floral designs and angels but at the same time a panel of relief work can be seen containing

Dasavatar deities (ten incarnations of *Hindu* God *Vishnu*) on this façade also **(Fig no- 4).**

- The *Thakurdalan* of *Jorasanko Rajbati* where indigenous deities like *Saraswati* and *Gour Nitai* are painted within the oval shaped pendant frames.
- *Baghbazar Basubati* is one of the finest examples of this segment. In this *Thakurdalan*, figures of native deities like *Shiva-Parvati*, *Kartikeya*, *Ganesha*, were delicately engraved within the round shaped frames made with concrete. Arch façades at inside and outside of this *Thakurdalan* is highly decorated with these kind of figures. The gigantic Doric columns of this *Thakurdalan* have a completely new style of capitals, Lotus petals were used there as traditional Indian motifs.
- Lastly the indigenous deity *Ganesha* can also be found among the highly decorated *Thakurdalan* of *Harinath Mukherji* with European style.

Some *Thakurdalans* are presented here as examples where the indigenous motifs and deities can be seen to be used in surface decorations. These deities and motifs were engraved among several intricate and gorgeous European designs but the point is that these indigenous elements always got the main focus.

One of the best examples is the *Thakurdalan* facade of *Gokul Mitra* which was highly decorated with beautifully carved angels and floral motifs but the indigenous deity *Devi Lakshmi* was the centre of attraction. A minute observation reveals that this deity is worshipped with garlands by the angels (**Fig no- 3**). It reflects the cultural and religious affinities of its patron. To the Bengali *Hindu* community from that time period, irrespective of their economic class, *Devi Lakshmi* was considered as a goddess of prosperity and wealth and she was also traditionally worshipped as the consort of God *Vishnu*. The *Mitra* family was inclined towards the *Vaishnavite* tradition by their religious faith and belonged to traders' class so *DeviLakshmi* was always adorable to the founder.

Dasavatar pannel on the *Thakurdalan* facade of *Radhanath Basumullick* (**Fig no- 4**) is also very unique in character because use of such a kind of a large pannel for surface decoration could not be seen in any other *Thakurdalans*. The *Dasavatar* refers to the *Hindu* god *Vishnu* and his ten incarnations. Though the arch facade of this specific *Thakurdalan* was decorated with intricate European floral designs and angels, but above this arch design *Dasavatar* panel also found its venerated place which reflects the founder patrons' own religious faith and belief. This again indicates the love or faith of the founder towards the *Vaishnavite* or *Krishna*

cult.

Jorasanko Rajbati's Thakurdalan's arch entrance is beautifully engraved with oval shaped photo frames on five separate arches. Different indigenous *Hindu* deities like *Shiva-Parvati*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Gaur-Nitai*, *Radha-Krishna*, all are painted separately in these photo frames. These deities along with their associated myths and stories were related to the daily lives and emotions of most Bengali *Hindu* families of that time. Inspite of the use of such oval shaped photo frames and curtain designs as surface decoration tool which are very common European motifs, the focus of attraction were the indigenous deities highlighting the founders' own religious and cultural affinity and priority.

One thing is common in almost all these examples. The founders of the *Thakurdalans* all belonged to a specific social and economic class- the "new elite" class. By occupation they all belonged either to the trader class or were related to the Company in some ways. On the one hand they could not deny their own traditional religious faith and on the other hand rulers' architectural or cultural tastes also had put a significant impression on their minds. Co-existence of these different types of architectural features indicates the cultural interactions between two separate groups and also the aspirations and affinities of their founders. The owners were also keen to show their roots even when they were modeling their state of minds on the European sense of taste.

Here *Thakurdalan* of *Baghbazar Basubati* requires a special attention. This is one of the highly decorated *Thakurdalans* across the city Kolkata. Several types of architectural styles and motifs including indigenous and European were used in this specific *Thakurdalan* for decoration purpose. This *Thakurdalan* gives a classic and strong statement about the psychological and political stand of its founders because this late 19th century's *Thakurdalan* was constructed with a proper plan. They appointed *Nilmoni Mitra* as the engineer and architect of this house and *Thakurdalan*. *Nilmoni Mitra*, a Bengali Engineer was famous for following several indigenous styles in his work (Ghosh 1990: 223). Incorporation of indigenous motifs like lotus leafs, mural paintings, several *Hindu* deities and European architectural features like use of Doric columns, round shaped frames, European floral motifs was a result of this conscious effort.

From this visual representation of *Thakurdalans* one thing is clear that, though it is true that the European influence on *Thakurdalan* can be seen as a natural effect of Colonial period but simultaneously the owners were also concerned about their own religio-cultural identity.

Discussion

As it is mentioned earlier, for a long time these *Thakurdalans* were used as a "public space" for gatherings where several cultural events were organized by the patrons. During these events or festivals this space was opened for *sahibs* and natives both. *Sahibs* were invited during these seasons and it was recognized as prestigious occasions for the event organizer and the founder. Organizing *Durga Puja* and inviting the *sahibs* in *Thakurdalan* premises as a trend was set by *Nabakrishna Deb*. A resonance can be found from a letter of *Nabakrishna Deb* where he wrote to one of his friends to come and experience the *puja* where *sahib* Lord Clive will come to experience the *Durga Puja* (Sur 1990: 56). In this letter *Nabakrishna Deb* was not only sharing information but arrival of the *sahibs* to attend his invitation was also a matter of glory to him. Inviting *sahibs* during *puja* days became a trend by *Nabakrishna Deb* and gradually was followed by the persons who belonged to this "new elite" class. Documents state that at the very early phase natives were not welcomed into the *Thakurdalan* premises during the festive seasons or *durgapuja* and they were even beaten by the door keepers (Sripantha 2013: 352) but gradually some of the house-owners opened their *Thakurdalans* premises to experience the religious festival to the natives. A famous painting "*Europeans being entertained to a nautch*" by William Princep from mid 19th century stands for this statement. As time flowed the need of becoming popular was felt by these "new elite"s and this specific space became an important tool for them, because only on this platform they could gather natives and *sahibs* both. These premises also became the political platform where they could securely show off their wealth by organizing mesmerizing and grand *puja* ceremonies by spending huge wealth. Subsequently constructing *Thakurdalan* for organizing *Durgapuja* became a trend. Though it was related with their religious faith but simultaneously intention of showing off their economic power enveloped their faith and believes. *Hutom*, one of the famous personalities of middle of 19th century indicated this tendency and importance of *Thakurdalan*. According to *Hutom* these *Thakurdalan* premises were used as platforms where the "new elite" could show off their wealth and economic power easily (Nag 2013: pp- 152-153).

Constructing large mansions containing massive European architectural features was quite familiar for the "new elite"s which could secure their position to the new rulers because adopting the cultural practices of rulers might appease the rulers but simultaneously they also wanted to secure their position into the native society too. Because these large mansions could be seen from outside but that was not enough to assume their actual economic power. "New elite"swere

not able to show off their economic power publicly due to reasons of security. In that situation a platform was very much required where they could do all these things with proper security. As a result religious festivals were lavishly organized in these *Thakurdalans* premises. *Thakurdalans* were decorated by spending huge wealth and using intricate European designs because at the first sight to the common native people these grandeurs helped to generate a sense of awe, fear and respect. And these *Thakurdalans* became the part of the process which could help to earn respect and a sense of fear for the "new elites", that they were not just a common native anymore. They were the people who belonged not only to the economically powerful section of the society but also belonged to the mental state of the rulers culturally. The European designs and motifs which were used for surface decoration in the *Thakurdalans* stated very easily that the cultural tastes of its founders were different from the local people and closer to the *sahibs* or new rulers. But simultaneously they may also have wanted to convey the message about their commitment towards their own religious faith to the native society which would not only secure their positions as economically powerful person but also their commitment towards their own religious faith.

It is well known that the cultural practice of Calcutta during 18th-19th century was influenced heavily by the British rulers and architecture was one of the most eminent examples among these. Columns like Doric-Ionic-Corinthian-Composite and Tuscan and arches like Semi-Circular and Four-Centred Tudor were constructed as inevitable parts of the administrative buildings of the Company. As an effect of time these all features were also followed by the indigenous section of the "new elites" of Calcutta who were close to the Company by their occupations and their cultural taste was massively influenced by the cultural tastes of contemporary rulers. A minute study of the *Thakurdalan* as a cultural object reveals the socio-political complexity of colonial Calcutta as well. The Europeans came here not only with their business minds but also carrying their cultural and aesthetic tastes, which influenced the cultural taste of the contemporary local non-European society. Most of the *Thakurdalans'* owners or patrons were associated with the Company or several other foreign institutions by their occupations, so an intention to please or impress their new lords or rulers might have played a vital role behind adopting these European features in their religious space. Gradually these all European architectural features were used in the constructions of "new elites" but as a fact these designs were also changing during the course of the imitation.

Designs of European buildings were changed sometimes with innovations as well when these were imitated by the native artisans. Designs of column capitals

also were changed. As for an example we can say about the Ionic pillars of the *Thakurdalans*. Most of the *Thakudalans* are carrying this kind of columns but the size and shape of the columns have been changed. Traditionally it is always constructed by maintaining a particular proportion of height and diameter but in the *Thakurdalans* these pillars have become thinner in size and smaller in height. Not only that the capital parts of the columns also go far from their traditional designs. *Thakurdalan's* capitals of *Chorbagan Mitras* and *Rani Rasmoni* are some among many such examples. Several kinds of European floral designs were engraved and designs became localized gradually. Apart from that, festoons, pendant style frames, several types of angle figures, Acanthus leaves with intricate designs are also found in a large number as a series of very common European features but simultaneously the complications and intricateness had become simpler. Intricate and complicated floral designs of Corinthian and Composite columns, Acanthus leaves became less ornamented and less complicated or to say more localized and some time a new design also originated. As for an example column capital of *Kundu* House's *Thakurdalan* near *Girish* Park in Kolkata can get a special mention. The capital parts of the columns are decorated only with Acanthus leaves. This type of column was never seen in any European structure.

These designs indicate not only the incapability of artisans to produce such designs but also the economic and aesthetic differences of the founder-patrons. Economically powerful founders could spend huge money to hire expert masons or artisans to decorate their *Thakurdalans* delicately with intricate designs. On the other hand economically less powerful founder-patrons were not able to do this and they had to be happy with their less decorative *Thakurdalans* with simple designs. But whatever the reasons be, existence of these designs indicates not only the European architectural influence but also the co-existence and exchanges of two separate cultural threads.

This whole process was complicated and not linear. There were many insecurities and many activities occurred as a result of unknown psychological and social complications. These embellishments of *Thakurdalans* with both indigenous and European elements may indicate such social and psychological tensions. As *Thakurdalan* was a result of a specific time and it almost completely went obsolete after a specific time period it contains the mark of the cultural complexities and interactions of its own time. By scanning these designs we may assume most of such complexities and tensions from the unseen past and that is

the reason why *Thakurdalans* are seen with a special attention from the unseen past.

Conclusion

It is said that an architectural edifice is the physical manifestation of human experience and expression. Social significance of any structure can be understood by examining the reasons within the need of its emergence and use of that specific object. Every architectural remain tells a story of its own time. *Thakurdalan* tells the story of the city's early days. Incorporation of so many European features reflects not only the political condition but also the cultural and economic aspirations and sensitiveness of the contemporary native society of Calcutta. Co-existence of "new elites" personal religious faith and cultural taste with rulers' cultural practice can be observed at these *Thakurdalan* premises very clearly. This particular phenomenon had been visually communicated to the others of the society very easily via this platform and that is one of important reasons behind such a distinguished position of *Thakurdalans*. Power and social status when were conveyed through gigantic and gorgeous personal visual spaces could really generate attention and *Thakurdalan* owners had been quick to follow the social trends and norms of the time. That is why apparently being a religious structure *Thakurdalan*s of Kolkata brought two architectural features on a same platform from two different continents of the world. So, the *Thakurdalans* of Kolkata are very important remains of colonial cultural influence and a representative of the inter-relations, acceptance, tensions and expectations between the native and European communities from Kolkata's early days.



Fig No. 1 Thakurdalan of Sovabazar Rajbari (Nabakrishna Deb in 1757)



Fig No.2 Thakurdalan of Rajkrishna Deb Doric columns were used in entrance



Fig No. 3 Thakurdalan facade of Gokul Chandra Mitra decorated with Devi Lakshmi and European figures



Fig No. 4 Thakurdalan entrance of Radhanath Basumullick Dasavatar panel engraved upon European designs

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