



SOCIOLOGY OF CEILINGS: INTERROGATING CEILING ARTWORK OF JAIPUR

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Abstract

The ceilings have always been specimen of exquisite art and multiple experimentations. The ornatejali (lattice) work or the meticulous inlay work to the vibrant frescoes and aaraiash, ceilings hid overarching realities of its time and social space. They depict community interaction, social constructs making ceilings have their own sociology. The social constructs behind ceilings aren't static but have been changing era per era. The research looks into the social aspect of ceiling artwork of Jaipur. It takes into account study of traditional and contemporary artwork of ceilings. The study further investigates if artworks on ceilings are losing their significance in contemporary methods as a mean to enhance aesthetics with respect to traditional artworks and furthermore more possible explanations for the same.

Keywords: Ceiling, Art Forms, Contemporary, Traditional, Hawelis, Forts, Sociology.

Introduction

For all those who couldn't touch the sky decorated their ceiling.

From the exquisite frescoes by Michelangelo in Sistine chapel or be it the jaw dropping Samarkand art to the glittering gold work on ceilings of Indian temples have often displayed the zenith of an artist's creativity. They talk to those who listen through their artwork narrate stories about their existence, surrounding and prevalent socio-cultural and economic pattern of their times. From a new born to someone who's old, from a person who's distressed to somebody's who's bed ridden often ceiling has proved to be with them as their all-weather friend. Ceilings have rather large effect on the overall ambience, outlook and lighting of your home or apartment. Walls notably carry eye-level colour and decorations, but ceilings set the tone for the character and comfort of your home or apartment for you and your loved ones. Hence ceilings couldn't escape an artist's eye, who started experimentation on one of the largest unbroken surfaces either by painting the flat surfaces or by emphasizing the structural member or by treating it as a field for an overall pattern relief.

In this context traditional ceilings played a much more dominant role in terms of artwork, social constructs with respect to contemporary ceilings. Traditional ceilings hid as much as they revealed. Besides being architectural marvels, ceilings also gave the scoop of reality of their time, narrated the social paradigms, myths, beliefs, values and much more.

The social context of ceilings intervenes around various notions, meanings that humans gave to it. Traditionally through its artwork, techniques, depictions, ceilings demonstrated framework of the society. This again narrates the jointly constructed meanings by society that forms the basis of shared assumptions about reality (Leeds-Hurwitz, W. 2009). But artworks on ceilings are losing their significance in contemporary methods as a mean to enhance aesthetics with respect to traditional artworks. The paper studies social aspect of ceilings and about their social spaces and agencies. It explores distinguished social constructs through ceilings between traditional artworks and contemporary artwork. It further explores the reason and sociology behind the change in the artwork. Intrigued by the perpetuity of dynamic artwork on one of the largest unbroken surfaces in traditional times have spurred one to question the relevance of the same in contemporary times and hence know the changing sociology of ceilings.

Research Method

I have used qualitative and quantitative research for this purpose. To study various of different art forms stratified random sampling was preferred. Population was divided in different strata and sub samples collected from each stratum. The strata included traditional as well as contemporary ceilings which further has various art forms. To include all in the study, the above mentioned method was preferred. The second level of stratification included study of both traditional and contemporary ceilings of house. This would provide maximum representation of all groups in sample. The comparison between groups is also possible. Along survey, case studies of various ceilings have also been done to make empirical research possible. Interview Schedule of various historians and archaeologist was also taken.

Limitations of the Study

- To study ceilings on the basis of different artworks of residential areas within Jaipur.
- Study the certain types, techniques, and materials.
- To limit the research within residential spaces of Jaipur.



Literature Review

Tradition is the illusion of permanence said Woody Allen (Allen, 1975)

Tradition is not to look after the ash, but to keep the tradition alive, said Jean Jaures (Jaures, 1912) Rajasthan is a land of vibrancy, people, forts, palaces, monuments and wide open spaces. Not only its rich in its history but also in its art, culture, music, scenic beauty. The unique architecture of the area is reflected in its fort, palaces, Havelis, and other monuments. Places like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Bikaner are virtually store house of architecture, being in its self an architectural marvel. Walking through the old cities one is filled with amazement at the scale of the built form, and the perfect blend of colour, finishes, pattern, which shows the reflection of the social and cultural traditions, skilful use of craftsmanship and building materials and techniques. The various traditional artworks had their uniqueness a great influence on them of the region, climate, availability and nature of building materials and the craftsmanship of the people.

The various artworks based on finishes and ornamentation work on ceilings can be classified as Finishes and Ornamentation. Finishes include Dar, Loi, Araish, Khamira, and Stucco. Whereas ornamentation included Mirror work, frescoes, panni, meena, Dak meena, Mandana, Woodwork, Manovat The traditional building artworks on ceilings of Rajasthan have gradually evolved over various centuries. It has not only the influence of earlier architectural styles of Mughal period but also the architecture of adjoining regions.

Vernacular heritage of Rajasthan displays an interaction between the human, social system and surrounding environment, subjected to the social, economic, cultural and climatic factors. (Amer, 2016). The artwork exceeds the architectural frame and enters social space, touching upon dynamic functionalities of the work of art. "The built vernacular heritage is a focus of contemporary life and at the same time a record of the history of society. It is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of its relationship with its territory and, at the same time, the expression of world's cultural diversity. Vernacular building is the traditional and natural way by which communities house themselves. It is a continuing process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to social and environmental constraints (International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), 1999)". The architecture of a structure more often than not, especially in the traditional art forms reflected the architecture of the social structure as well. The norms, folkways, moores, customs were reflected through such intricate and well thought work of art. Scholars have reiterated that one can explore about the community and social life through their architecture and their settlement layouts. (Gupta, 2016) Traditional architectural vintage proliferated further after human beings started surviving in groups (Gupta, 2016). This had further made sociologists and anthropologist curious to investigate social motives and community interaction. The impressions of social interaction in India clearly appear on the artwork on heritage architectural platforms such as walls, floors, ceilings etc. (Gupta, 2016)

The ceilings in particular contain many such social constructs. Despite for human neck to bend at an inconvenient angle of ninety degrees, ceilings have witnessed all sorts of experimentation, innovation to spellbound humans. This brings forth the essential social aspect of ceilings forth and how such meanings and social constructs have changed from traditional to contemporary artworks. The paper further explores and discusses reduction in aesthetics in contemporary artworks and the sociology behind it.

Case Study

The case of traditional and contemporary houses/forts was conducted keeping in mind to study different art forms. The four case studies include

- Bhatt raja ji ki haweli
- Amer Palace
- Dilip Baid's residence
- Rajeev Borad's residence.

See Table 1 Case Studies in Appendix

Bhatt Raja Ji Ki Haveli, Opp. Hawa Mahal, Jaipur

Constructed along the foundation of jaipur, the property was gifted to vidya guru raj guru mukutmani, shiromani sada shiv ji bhatt, who entitled with the title of bhatt raja in 1807, by maharaja madho singh ji, who was his student. The haveli has 3 courtyards, and the interiors show the intricate traditional artworks.

Amer Palace

Constructed of red sandstone and marble, the attractive, opulent palace is laid out on four levels, each with a courtyard. It consists of the Diwan-i-Aam, or "Hall of Public Audience", the Diwan-i-Khas, or "Hall of Private Audience", the Sheesh Mahal (mirror palace), or Jai Mandir, and the Sukh Niwas where a cool climate is artificially created by winds that blow over



a water cascade within the palace. Hence, the Amer Fort is also popularly known as the Amer Palace. The palace was the residence of the Rajput Maharajas and their families.

Dileep Baid's Residence

Dileep Baid is a first generation entrepreneur. He started with trading handicrafts and over the last 2 decades, has set up manufacturing units that make a plethora of products which he now exports to over 30 countries across the world. Ar. Ramniwas sharma constructed his residence in 2012 ,dileep jain wanted a subtle blending of interior elements yet keeping the grandeur of space alive.

Rajeev Burad's Residence

Ar. Ramniwas sharma constructed his residence in 2013 ,Rajeev burad wanted to blend the contemporary and traditional artworks without making the space chaotic and heavy.

Comparison Sheets

One could observe the following reasons leading to traditional artworks losing their significance in contemporary methods as a mean to enhance aesthetics after critically analysing and comparatively examining the table. See Table 2 Comparison in Appendix.

Ceiling and Identification of Prominence of an Area

In the case study of traditional ceilings, we find in Bhatt raja ji ki haveli, the ceilings could let one differentiate between the varying prominence of an area for example in case of Bhatt raja ji ki haveli, the garbh-griha of the temple area is a specimen of intricate mirror work , also called the sheesh mahal of Lord Govind. The exquisite work in the garbh-griha tells about the relative prominence of the grabh-griha in the haveli. The tee-bara (area with three open sides) just outside the garbh-griha showcases fresco of highly intricate nature depicting flowers with manovat work. Flowers have had many meanings in myths and legends. Swelling from tender bud to full bloom, flowers were associated with youth, beauty, and pleasure. But as they used to wilt and die, flowers represented fragility and the swift passage from life into death. Flowers in Mythology (2011, January 11). Specific flowers such as roses and lilies had assumed symbolic significance in mythology. Similarly the ceiling artwork of Diwam-i-Aam (Hall of public Audience) and Diwam-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience) of Amber fort distinguish between the relative importance between the two areas, whereas Diwam-i-Aam showcases the blend of red sandstone with marble While Diwam-i-Khas also known as sheesh mahal famous for its elaborate mirror work .Whereas ceiling in contemporary times are not seen defining an area through the medium of their artwork more often than not defining the kind of area one is in also shows the reduced prominence of ceilings which are limited to their functionality.

Space

Space was an instrumental element which was flamboyantly used due its adequacy in the traditional forts and havelis. The open courtyards, colossal walls, numerous openings through the medium of doors, windows, lattices, and thick walls infused natural air and light.

These elements also gave a grandeur look to havelis and palaces. The fuller and rich ceilings in such structures could be afforded due to the above mentioned reasons that are availability of space, specifically the massive height of the walls in a particular area.

Such essence of grandeur did not in any way confined the space or made the room appear stuffy despite of the meticulous intricacies. The sole contribution of this can be given to the lack of space constraint the high walls were capable of absorbing such artworks.

The spaces received abundant natural light, an intricate artwork on such ceiling didn't not affect the perceived illumination.

Correlation between the height and the Design Density of Ceiling Artwork

Through the medium of case studies and literature it has been established that increase in height and space of a room had a positive increase in the design density of that area. The usage of dark colours like indigo, maroon, green could be laid along without disrupting or making the space look small.

Such artworks in contemporary ceilings have diminished due to paucity of space the average height of room is 10-9 feet compared to 12 feet in traditional times in addition to that lack of spaces like courtyards , numerous openings resulting in scanty daylight are also the reason for deviating from such traditional artworks , dark colours on the ceilings or rich and fuller designs would make the exiting room look even smaller , light colour such as white are often used in today's ceilings as such colours create an illusion of height.



Rather efforts are done to maintain the illusion of height and openness through various mediums wherein direct source of light, air could be more properly used to enhance the relatively lesser space as compared to traditional spaces.

In rooms that receive scant natural light, a white ceiling helps boost the perceived illumination by reflecting whatever light is available.

Tools

Traditional artwork required tools such as karni, jhara, nelyar, batkara, ghooti, brush, scale, small screwdriver, cardboard with designed pattern, trowel, brush, cutter, glass cutter, nose piler, jamori, small trowel, iron cutters, tape, scissors, paper, pencil whereas contemporary artwork use tools such as hammer, chalkline, drill, pencil, miter box, string, coping saw, metal, tape, putty knife, Nails, Framing or combination square, drywall pan, Sharp utility knife, Thick nap roller etc. These tools had an impact on the process of doing the artwork and vice versa. Change in one can lead change to the in a distant way affected the artwork.

Materials

The materials used in traditional artworks are comparatively cheap, organic, long lasting and eco-friendly. Whether the preparation of chunna kalli, where chunna is mixed with the kali or the various stone, minerals and vegetable pigments as colours or while mixing the curd in lime while making the khamira lime wash, or using the herbal goggle, mostly all the materials were closed to nature hence organic.

Contrary to the above are the materials used in contemporary days, graphic wallpaper, paint, primer, gypsum, pop, wood, tiles, steel sections, despite the above being more eco-friendly, durable the later are in use now because it saves time, labour, and skills. The use of materials directly have an impact on the artwork on the ceilings.

Colours

Traditional artworks extracted the colours from earth pigments that are naturally occurring minerals, principally iron oxides that were used in paints for thousands of years for their natural colour. These natural pigments are found in rocks and soils around the world, where different combinations of minerals create vibrant colours that are unique to the regional landscapes. Some earth pigments are roasted in order to intensify their colour. Earth pigments produce soft, earthy hues that create uniquely vibrant, naturally harmonious interiors (Yehia Bahei-El-Din, 2016). Lay onto the surface of the wet plaster, as these alone can resist the alkaline action of the lime.

Though durable and environmental friendly in nature, it required a lot of patience and composure for example the gau-gochan or gau-goli also known as Indian yellow is derived from urine of cows which are fed with mango leaves. The cow urine is evaporated and the resultant dry matter is formed into balls by hand. The urine is heated in order to precipitate the yellow matter then it is strained, pressed into lumps by hand and finally dried.

In today's era it becomes difficult to ensure such patience where instant results are preferred to save time. The change in social life and social design has forced social agents to prefer options which are instantaneous. This led to decline in usage of traditional methods for making colours, paints.

Techniques: Complexity and Time, Changing Virtues of Postmodern Societies

There's a stark contrast between the application of techniques in traditional and contemporary times. Traditional artworks require techniques which were not only meticulous and complex but also require abundant time, labour and most importantly patience. The soaking of lime itself requires a period of sixty days. The durability, luster of those artworks was mainly the result of patience.

Time is luxury and patience a forgotten virtue in today's globalised society of fast moving goods, ideas and techniques. Man has innovated things according to this changed social set up which does not test his patience, for instance even the most beautiful false ceiling would not require more than two weeks even with limited labour. The works and techniques have evolved and happen to be less complex than earlier technique. One can imagine how much time, labour, skills one would require to place wallpaper as one's ceiling. The techniques have played the most vital role in evolution in contemporary artworks which suits the modern day requirements. The artworks on the ceilings are losing their significance in the contemporary also mainly due to the techniques former requires.

Labour

One of the most vital necessities for traditional artworks was the availability of abundant laborers. The skilled laborers were needed to perform such intricate work, as mentioned earlier, the mirror work requires hundred days to complete one metre



square area per person, which reflects that 2100 days i.e. approximately six years are required to complete an area of twenty one metre square by a single person, which obviously means that more laborers were to be employed in order to reduce the time for accomplishing the work. Such abundance of skilled labour available in earlier days could also be contributed to less diversity in occupational choices. There was less division of laborers unlike in contemporary days.

Availability of cheap labour in this highly globalized era is a difficult task. Hence it also observed that the artworks found on ceiling nowadays are relatively less labour intensive. For instance from placing a wallpaper to false ceiling or even wooden ceiling wouldn't require more than fourteen days.

Socio Political Environment and Ceilings

Days back then, one usually observed monarchy or kingship, wherein the king controlled the powers in a centralized set up. In such an environment, it wasn't difficult for the king to employ numerous men for this task. Hence such labour intensive artworks could be easily undertaken.

The globalized economy has brought diversity in the sector of occupation. This has consequently brought changes in labour trends. Such trends have made availability of labour not an easy affair.

Economy, Expenses and Impact on Ceilings

Economy can be calculated beneath two heads: time and money.

Traditional artwork could be termed pricey in terms of time economy. Through the previous few paragraphs such a conclusion could be reached. Whether it is in terms of readying the materials or application of the technique, the entire process could be concluded as highly time consuming. Many materials unlike gold and copper, used in traditional artworks such as leaves for green colour, indigo for blue, flowers for other colours beetroot for red colour are not relatively expensive but require time to be prepared.

Whereas alternatives to such materials for instance ready to use paints in countless colours are available in the market, such alternative maintains time economy.

Philosophy and Symbolism

The traditional artwork laid its premises more often than not on philosophy, symbolism through the medium of stories, symbols, motifs that they depicted through the medium of artwork. The detail laid on ceiling had a meaning other than just a mean of aesthetics. They narrated stories impacted the mood, mind, body and soul. Ceilings were not just a sheer part of the structure but reflected value, norms of the social system as well. They depicted underlying beliefs of the society.

The philosophy, mythology was often showcased through use of motifs, designs, colours. For example flowers have had many meanings in myths and legends. Swelling from tender bud to full bloom, flowers are associated with youth, beauty, and pleasure but as they wilt and die, flowers represent fragility and the swift passage from life into death. Flowers in Mythology (2011, January 11). Floral designs on the fresco also depicted the blooming of flowers which gives a sense of elation comfort, and glee in the eyes of the viewer.

Flowers along with the leaves with a rectangular border running across the ceiling show a strict pattern and symmetry across the ceiling, they are less flexible and hence very sharp, giving a sense of geometry in the design, such discipline in the fresco work.

The symbolism behind the beautiful mirror work was to distinguish the area which held high importance like the meeting halls, dining areas and so on, so that one could figure out from a distance the importance of the area in the palace. This expresses about the prominence ceilings held in traditional art works was much more than just a part of building structure. The ceilings defined social spaces and depicted social values and moores.

A story narrates that in ancient days the queen was not allowed to sleep in open air but she loved to see the stars while sleeping. So the king ordered his architects to make that kind of *mahal* (room) which could solve this problem and so the architects built Sheesh mahal. Agarwal, P. (2012, August 25). It was built with stones and glass and in night the reflection of two candles in glass looks like stars in the sky spread throughout whole room. Another story narrates that, the king used to shift from Sukh Niwas to Sheesh Mahal in winter season. The ceiling mirror glass reflection of the candles keep the room warm. The impact of religion could be seen through stories, philosophies, and myths in traditional artwork in direct or indirect way.



The contemporary artwork lacks depiction of philosophy through the medium of stories, symbolism, these ceilings show an inclination towards non-religious art form which neither has a story nor which depicts any philosophy.

Socio Cultural aspect of the Ceilings

The world of today's time can be considered by and large affected with capitalist tendencies. Such tendencies also proliferate the virtue of consumerism leading towards a life of materialism. This unending race of gaining access to goods and commodities is often in contrast to the idea of Socrates's Eudemonia. The man is moving away from what is real happiness towards something which gratifies him only for a short span. Flamboyancy whether in art, literature, lifestyle or even architecture can also be judged through these parameters.

A counter current to this has been the idea of minimalism. Worldwide Financial Turmoil – Rising unemployment, stagnant wages, and falling stock prices have forced families and individuals to reevaluate their purchases. Many have begun living on tighter budgets. As a result, many consumers are choosing to identify the difference between essential and nonessential purchases. BECKER, J. (2016).

Many people are choosing to live a minimalist life out of concern for the environment. They understand that less consumption equals less use of the earth's natural resources. And they are choosing to make a difference rather than stand idly by on the side-lines.

Increased Global Social Awareness also contributed for the rise of minimalism Injustice, poverty, and malnutrition have always existed. But as new technology has made the world smaller by making global images/news more accessible, our awareness of the disparity has increased. Some are responding to the call and using their finances to make a difference on a global scale by feeding the hungry, providing clean drinking water, fighting back epidemics, and speaking up for the voiceless wherever it is needed.

Minimalist Art / Modern Aesthetics – Good art enters the soul and makes new ideas plausible. The term “minimalist art” (first used in 1929) experienced its major growth during the 1960's and 1970's when stripping art down to its fundamental features began showing up in painting/sculpting/music. Soon, it transcended into design and architecture and began to define the term: modern design. As a result, it has entered our soul and made the idea of minimalist principles plausible as a lifestyle as well.

The Benefits are Desired Today More than Ever – As our world continues to grow in complexity, there is far greater personal demand for many of the benefits that minimalism offers. Minimalism offers a life with less stress, less distraction, more freedom, and more time. All things that people today are desperately searching for more than ever.

The Realization There's more to Life than Possessions also contributed to the same. Consumerism is alive and well. But there is a growing trend of thoughtful people who are beginning to see through the falsehood and challenge this claim. As a result, they are beginning to seek happiness and fulfilment in other places: relationships, social causes, and significance. BECKER, J. (2016).

The rise of minimalism as a philosophy hence has also contributed to the lessening of highly ornate, gaudy and grandeur art works. It has tried to make contemporary art work simple and far away from complex. It has helped to create an illusion of space, openness which is usually missing in the times today. Through the medium of art and utilising the philosophy of minimalism as a counter current, the missing needs of society are offered.

Eco Friendliness and Environmental Adaptability of Ceilings

The materials used in traditional art works were eco-friendly, the process was also organic, and the techniques kept themselves close to the nature, even so the inspiration of motifs were nature driven. These ceilings adapted themselves to their surroundings and climate. For instance lime keeps itself warm during winters and cool during summers, such adaption towards the surrounding made those ceilings highly environment friendly.

Such organic nature cannot be found in contemporary ceilings. The wooden fittings, paints or false ceiling none relates itself to its surroundings. These are neither organic, neither eco-friendly nor can adapt themselves to changing climate.

Ceilings acquire one sixth of a space in a room, despite not being the first thing to look as one enters any enclosure, ceilings in history have compelled one to held his head up high and made him wonder the various marvels of mankind through his artwork where he has displayed zenith of an artist's creativity. Ceilings never in the past restricted their role only as just as a



part of the structure, its functionality varied from impacting and comforting one's mood and attitude to determining the prominence of an area and also its adaptation to the environment in the most organic way. From gold work to blue pottery, ceilings have witnessed all but present day analysis brings forth stark contrast as to how ceilings are perceived.

One could observe the following reasons leading to traditional artworks losing their significance in contemporary methods as a mean to enhance aesthetics after critically analysing and comparatively examining the literature and case studies.

Previous discussed points brings forth that the core requirement of traditional artworks were time, labour, space and most importantly patience. One cannot even imagine waiting for 60 days only to form Kali which is the soaking of lime, required for arash work, if the lime is not properly soaked, arash cannot be done. Arash work can only be done if the lime is properly soaked. The other alternatives available now have mended the way one would presume artwork. An Asian paint palette can provide a colour range both at ease and in no time. This way procurement of materials and application of techniques, both have led to paradigm shift towards new materials and techniques which are both readily available and time saving. Even if one goes more a less time consuming technique, what is compromised is the quality, goodness, durability and sturdiness of the art form which are its essence.

The design density as previously concluded is directly proportional to space, intricate and fuller designs done in limited space can make the space appear even lesser, such designs could only be afforded in larger spaces. For a Sheesh Mahal to become cynoclosure of all eyes it was imperative to have colossal walls of height not less ten metres along with various openings and open spaces in the surrounding area. Such limitation on part of space has along become of the prominent reason for ceilings getting less attention in terms of intricate details.

Paucity of labour, space and time can safely be blamed or such a departure from traditional art form.

The change in socio politico and economic status has as discussed earlier immensely impacted the artwork. The ceilings earlier not only showcased craftsmanship brilliance but also symbolised about life, health, and mind through the medium of its design. These ceilings also took inspiration from religious connotations. The modern ceilings have steep inclination towards non-religious artworks and have no religious symbolism. They don't adhere to any philosophy nor are the ceilings used to balance body, mind and soul like in traditional artworks. Such decrease in relative importance in other functions that ceilings perform is also one of the reasons leading to decrease in intricacies on ceiling work with respect to traditional artwork.

Another factor that is invasion of an idea of minimalism has in manifold lead to change the gear of art forms from traditional to contemporary. The basic idea of flamboyance and grandeur which traditional artworks had to offer is attacked by the idea of minimalism. "Less is more" is the product of such a counter current. In the era when materialism and consumerism are at pinnacle, the counter current of minimalism has shred of those practices and moved towards simpler artworks.

None of the above mentioned arguments prove that such art forms have gone out of fashion neither they prove them to be just passing fad, they only argue on the premises of their feasibility in terms of their application. The creation of a genre in its own of "Heritage architecture" is a proof to above argument. The palatial residences of erstwhile Maharajas have been transformed into heritage hotels which ooze out the same old luxury and elegance. Most of the palaces and mansions of the royal families are now turned into luxury and boutique hotels. This proves the continuing relevance and admiration towards the artwork. An artwork which still undauntedly remains the cynoclosure of all eyes.

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