

Feature Articles

Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Colonial India: The Nabob, the Nabobian *Kothi*, and the Pursuit of Leisure

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Set on the culturally fluid eighteenth-century Indian subcontinent, this article focuses on Mughalized European mercenaries, called nabobs, who it examines through the prism of cultural hybridity via their sociability practices, as spatialized in the nabobian home, the *kothi*. Like its patron, the *kothi* was a product of East-West cultural amalgamation, making it spatially hybrid. The article examines surviving nabobian *kothis*, which served in the eighteenth century as family homes and places of leisure in the absence of a paradigm of institutionalized, colonial sociability. It concludes by underscoring the contribution of nabobs to the subcontinent's colonial narrative, and by making a case for the inclusion of the nabobian *kothi* in narratives of colonial architecture there.

The eighteenth century has been described by historians as a time of emerging connect-edness between the continents, including the linkage between Europe and the Indian subcontinent. On the subcontinent, it was also a time of transition between rule by the Mughal dynasty and the British Crown, as power shifted from the Mughals to Queen Victoria via the East India Company (henceforth, EIC).¹

At the time, the encounter between the indigenous (Mughal) tradition and foreign (European) mores produced a cultural entanglement. In particular, sociability was in a state of transition, as Mughal etiquette and British codes of conduct coexisted. This East-West cultural entanglement has received scholarly attention from a socio-cultural perspective.² However, the built environment that resulted has been largely neglected, as scholarship on colonial architecture in India has focused on the architectural patronage of the British Raj and Indian rulers.³ This article aims to address this gap by examining the culturally heterogeneous eighteenth-century subcontinent through the prism of social practices adopted by acculturated Europeans and spatialized patterns of leisure.

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CONTEXT

The article focuses on the social and architectural exploits of acculturated European mercenaries who served a variety of rulers in the north of the subcontinent — notably, the Mughals, the Avadh *nawabs* (a title signifying a member of the elite), Marathas, Sikhs, Rajputs and Jats, as well as the EIC. Notwithstanding this condition of multiple patronage, it was the Mughals who were regarded as the epitome of *adab* [etiquette] and *tehzeeb* [urbanity], and their cultural practices were adopted by others, including acculturated Europeans.

Such a highly fluid political scenario saw European mercenaries being employed for their military prowess and administrative skill. As they rose in the echelons of power, these men shared a close relationship with their Indian employers. This allowed both sides to be influenced by each other's culture, with Indians becoming Europeanized and mercenaries becoming Mughalized. Mughalized mercenaries were referred to as “nabobs” (an Anglicized version of the local appellation *nawab*). Prominent European-mercenaries-turned-nabobs living and working in cities like Agra, Delhi, Faizabad and Lucknow and in *moufassil* [subordinate] towns such as Aligarh, Meerut and Sardhana included Major General Claude Martin, General Benoit de Boigne, General Pierre Cuillier Perron, Major Antoine-Louis Henri de Polier, Walter Reinhardt Samru, and George Thomas.⁴ Being men of means and social standing, they built large residential estates, where they lived and entertained their Indian and European peers.

The nabobs have been examined as a subject of scholarship from political, military and social perspectives.⁵ Further scholarship has centered on nabobs who returned to England after having made large fortunes on the subcontinent. This work has largely scrutinized the nabobs through the lenses of personal comport and morality, resulting in their stereotyping as morally bankrupt plunderers of India and a threat to British values.⁶ By contrast, this article examines nabobs as residents of eighteenth-century India who were engaged in carving out identities in a foreign, culturally fluid condition.

The eighteenth century has been studied variously under political, military, historical and economic domains.⁷ It has also received attention from scholars of culture and gender under such rubrics as Europeanization, cosmopolitanism, hybridity and transculturation.⁸ Scholars like William Dalrymple and Brijraj Singh have termed the East-West cultural interaction of the era “multiculturalism”; however, others like Pankaj Mishra have contested this stance, claiming that the term's twentieth-century origin and meaning make it inappropriate for an eighteenth-century scenario.⁹ This article maintains that the eighteenth century was politically a “twilight” era, during which two major powers — the Mughals and the EIC — were in a contest for political dominance, a condition that forced smaller political entities to constantly shift allegiance from one to the other.¹⁰ This political fluidity

extended to the social sphere, producing a sense of companionship between Europeans and Indians, which led to an East-West cultural amalgamation evident in all domains of living, including art and architecture. And it is this cultural exchange that this article seeks to explore via the sociability practices and concomitant architectural patronage of European-mercenaries-turned-nabobs.

To examine this condition, the article relies on the post-colonial theory of “cultural hybridity,” which asserts that colonialism, notwithstanding its characteristics of dominance and oppression, produced cultural contacts between the colonizer and the colonized that had the capacity to influence/transform each other.¹¹ The article also argues that nabobian sociability practices and their built-form manifestations were not homogenous in the eighteenth century. Rather, they were highly dynamic, occupying a position between the East and the West, with the capacity to draw from both traditions. Employing Peter Burke's “adaptation” construct of cultural intermingling, the article further argues that mercenaries-turned-nabobs resorted to appropriation and reuse of the Mughal tradition in varying degrees to negotiate the unfamiliar environs of the subcontinent, both socially and spatially.¹² Yet it proposes that the nabobs never sought to fully adopt Mughal cultural practices. Instead, the extent to which they were willing to engage with Mughal culture was an outcome of personal choice abetted by the prevailing cultural climate.

In terms of scholarship, the nabobs' patronage of art and architecture has traditionally been relegated to the margins of the discourse on colonial architecture, at best being mentioned in passing in accounts of political and military history. It has only been fairly recently that nabobs have received academic attention as collectors and scholars of Indian art.¹³ Their architectural enterprise, meanwhile, remains understudied, despite the physical evidence of surviving buildings across the subcontinent's northern plains. The only notable exception are bodies of scholarship on Major General Claude Martin, a French mercenary employed by the Avadh *nawabs*, and on the German mercenary Walter Reinhardt's Indian consort Begum Samru.¹⁴ However, these works only examine these figures' specific architectural patronage, leaving the general architectural aspirations of nabobs as a social group operating in a culturally hybrid scenario little studied.

The article argues that nabobs were engaged in fashioning their identity, and that they used architecture, among other means, to signify their presence on the subcontinent. It focuses on the nabobian domestic space, a built-form type called the *kothi* (implying a mansion with hybrid East-West spatial characteristics), which served as a significant marker of identity. The *kothi*, like its patron, remains understudied in the discourse on Indian colonial architecture in comparison to coeval dwelling types like the Indian *haveli* (loosely implying a mansion of the Indian, notably Mughal, elite) and the bungalow, which replaced the *kothi* in the nineteenth century as the epitome of British colonial domesticity.¹⁵ The

nabobian domestic space, it is argued, was a culturally hybrid spatial construct produced via adaptation of design elements from the East and West. Further, in the absence of a paradigm of institutionalized colonial leisure and its concomitant spatial framework, the *kothi* was used as a space of sociability, as nabobs forged ties with their European peers and the Indian elite. This condition makes both the *kothi* and its patrons worthy of scholarly examination.

To build on this argument, fieldwork was undertaken from 2012 to 2018 to examine existing eighteenth-century nabobian estates in Agra, Lucknow, Hisar, Aligarh and Sardhana, locations where European-mercenaries-turned-nabobs worked and lived. The following Nabobian estates with extant *kothis* (even if they have been spatially altered) were examined: Perron's estate in Aligarh called Sahib Bagh (literally, "Sir's Garden" — "Sahib" implying "Sir Perron"); Samru's estates in Agra, called Samru-ka-Bagh (literally, "Samru's Garden"), and in Reinhardt's *kothi* Sardana (henceforth referred to as the Begum's Old Palace — Begum implying Samru's younger *bibi*, Begum Samru, who later built a newer one in its vicinity); Thomas's Jahaj (literally, "Ship") *Kothi* in Hisar; and Martin's two estates in Lucknow — namely, *Kothi Farha Baksh* [Pleasure Giving Abode] and *Constantia*.¹⁶

These *kothis* were built during the course of the eighteenth century, and were used as dwellings during their respective nabob's lifetimes, making them hubs of private as well as public life. During fieldwork, they were examined in terms of their evident adaptation of ideas borrowed from different cultures — European and Mughal — in terms of spatial delineation, built form, design elements, materials, and construction methods. Further, they were analyzed in terms of their use by occupants and visitors for leisure activities.

The fieldwork was supported by archival research on textual and visual sources. The latter were largely eighteenth-century paintings and drawings by traveling European painters and by Indian artists patronized by the nabobs.¹⁷ The research particularly examined the works of Johann Zoffany, an English painter who arrived on the subcontinent around 1783 and became a part of Lucknow's nabobian social circuit. Nabobs like Polier and Martin served both as patrons and subjects of his paintings, as was the case for Mihr Chand, an Indian painter patronized by Polier.¹⁸ The works of these artists were examined as evidence of both the sociability practices of nabobs and the spatial manifestation of these practices.

The article concludes by underscoring that nabobian *kothis*, like the men who built them, represented East-West cultural hybridity, facilitating a duality that formed an integral part of nabobian life. A case is also made for the inclusion of nabobs and their largely unknown and neglected *kothis* as built heritage reflecting the impact of colonialism on the subcontinent's socio-cultural narratives.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL FLUIDITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF NABOBISM

Percival Spear has described the East-West cultural encounter in the eighteenth century as a meeting of "Orientalism and Imperialism, like two seas."¹⁹ This meeting was abetted by the absence of any firm guidelines from the EIC as to how Europeans — and EIC personnel, in particular — were expected to conduct themselves. Political expediency and a general spirit of camaraderie fostered this cultural exchange, a condition that resulted in the acculturation not only of European mercenaries but also of several EIC officials serving in the Mughal and other courts. For example, the court of the Avadh *nawabs* welcomed a mix of acculturated EIC officials, like Colonel John Mordaunt and John Wombwell, and Mughalized mercenaries, like Martin and Polier.

Once Mughalized, nabobs adapted elements of Mughal lifestyle by choice and incorporated them via mannerisms, fashion, food, language and lifestyle, while also retaining their European roots (FIG. 1).²⁰ Most spoke Persian, the official court language of the Mughals, and some even acquired a



FIGURE 1. "Portrait of a Gentleman, possibly William Hickey, and an Indian Servant," by Arthur William Devis. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (accession number B1981.25.333).

reputation as writers and poets. Polier was fluent in Persian, learned Sanskrit and Urdu, and was a scholar of Indian history.²¹ Declared by their European peers to have “gone native” or “crossed over,” nabobs settled in their adopted homes, with some like Martin never returning to Europe.²²

Described by academia as a “hybrid of East and West” and “primarily the product of cultural miscegenation,” the nabobs negotiated this duality through Burke’s “adaptation” in the politically and socially fluid climate of the eighteenth century.²³ And even as the EIC’s policy of distancing itself from Indians came into effect toward the end of the eighteenth century, compliance was far from absolute. Constant interaction among serving EIC officials, mercenaries, and the Mughals, Avadh *nawabs*, and other ruling powers in north India could not insulate the Europeans completely from Mughal traditions, resulting in nabobism being extant even in the nineteenth century, much to the EIC’s displeasure.

MERCENARIES-TURNED-NABOBS AND THE EAST-WEST CULTURAL ENTANGLEMENT

Typically, European mercenaries were men of means who acquired their wealth through battle and other activities. For instance, de Boigne and Martin engaged in trading in indigo, a much-prized commodity in Europe, while Martin sourced products from Europe for sale at excessively inflated prices to the Indian elite — notably, his employers, the Avadh *nawabs*.²⁴ As they moved between patrons, they were exposed to Mughal culture, resulting in their Mughalization. Their wealth also permitted these men to patronize art and architecture. Thus, Martin and Polier collected objects and built large personal collections, while all mercenaries indulged in building, leaving behind an architectural legacy.

Visual representations underscore the duality that marked the existence of nabobs. On the one hand, they adopted local habits such as Mughal-style clothing, smoking the *hookah* [hubble-bubble], eating *paan* [betel leaf], and indulging in Mughal leisure pursuits. On the other, they remained Europeans, retaining the cultural mores of their own countries. The nature of this “adaptation” can be assessed by examining two portraits of the German mercenary Samru. One shows him wearing the Mughal *jama* [tunic] tied at the waist with a *patka* [sash] with Mughal-style turban and footwear; the other shows him dressed in a suit and seated on a chair.²⁵ Likewise, Polier was represented by Zoffany both as a nabob in a private setting and as a European in the company of his peers. And such demonstrations of Burke’s “cultural hybridity” extended from personal comportment to domestic lifestyle and architecture.

The most significant aspect of the nabob’s Mughalization was his relationship with Indian women. Nabobs tended to cohabit with women, usually of Muslim origin, popularly called *bibis*, by entering into matrimony or otherwise.²⁶

Bibis bore the nabob’s offspring and ran the nabobian household, creating a culturally entangled East-West model of domesticity. A nabob could have several *bibis* in his household, with some maintaining *zenanas* (loosely the equivalent of seraglios). Samru lived with two *bibis* — the older of whom bore him a son, and the younger who inherited his estate and title as Begum Samru and converted to Catholicism following his death.²⁷ Martin’s *zenana* housed seven *bibis* at the time of his demise in 1800. Martin also supported Polier’s *bibis* and offspring after Polier left permanently for Europe, leaving his Indian family behind — a common practice in the eighteenth century.²⁸

The nabob’s affiliation with Mughal culture was bolstered via his *bibis*. Samru was thus described as having “. . . quitted civilisation . . . adopted the native dress, and with it the custom of keeping a harem.” His younger *bibi* was later said to have “. . . gained a great ascendancy” over him, due to which “. . . he abandoned his roving life and settled down permanently at Sardhana.”²⁹ *Bibis* observed *purdah* [the veil] and lived in seclusion in the *zenana’s bibi-khana* (literally, “*bibi’s* room/s”). Their highly private lifestyle makes them difficult to examine, even as they have been depicted in some eighteenth-century paintings — either drawn from the artist’s imagination or produced as a result of access by the artist to the *zenana* as a member of the patron’s inner circle of friends.

One such painting is of Begum Samru, made when she was young, depicting her in Mughal-style attire and ornament seated on a chair, with her arm resting on a table.³⁰ One of Martin’s *bibis*, called Boulene, was likewise painted by Francesco Renaldi, an English painter of Italian origin, in 1794 (FIG. 2).³¹ It depicts her in Mughal finery holding a fishing rod, with a young boy holding a fish by her side. Given the highly private lives led by *bibis*, the idyllic setting for this painting was probably Martin’s estate, Martin Villa (renamed Kothi Farha Baksh by the incumbent Avadh *nawab*, who later bought it) — henceforth referred to as Kothi Farha Baksh, since Martin’s other estate, Constantia, was still under construction. The subjects are indulging in a leisurely activity (fishing) associated with Europe, underscoring the era’s culturally fluid practices. Based on examination of these paintings, it would be fair to aver that the nabob and his *bibi/s* were aware of and accepting of each other’s cultural traditions. This made them — and the nabob, in particular, as a public figure — adept at straddling two culturally different worlds.

The nabobian household was centered on the nabob as head of a family that typically comprised his *bibi/s*, their offspring, and several servants. In the absence of coeval accounts, nabobian domestic life is difficult to reconstruct, and very few paintings were made on the subject. However, in 1785 Zoffany did paint the family of an EIC official, Major William Palmer of the Bengal Artillery who was also aide-de-camp to the governor-general, Warren Hastings.³² Titled “The Palmer Family,” it depicts Palmer and his family in an intimate setting, possibly an extension of a room in the *zenana’s*



FIGURE 2. *Martin's Kothi Constantia.* Interior view of a room with Renaldi's painting of Martin's bibi on display. Photo by author.

bibi-khana overlooking a *chawk* [courtyard] or a *bagh* [garden], as can be inferred from background planting comprising a plantain and two palm trees. It shows Palmer, dressed in European clothes, seated on a chair, with his family seated on the floor on a *kaaleen* [carpet]. To his right is his *bibi* — identified as Faiz Baksh, a Mughal princess, holding their youngest offspring, while to his left is her younger sister. Two older children, a boy and a girl, stand close by to complete the family portrait, which also includes three female attendants. In

terms of space, the *chawk/bagh* is shown to be separated from the enclosed space by a low wall with an opening in it. The setting would thus appear to indicate a seamless interconnect- edness of indoor and outdoor living space, an attribute that facilitated comfort in the hot and humid climate.

Renaldi likewise painted an unidentified *bibi*, generally presumed to be the companion of an Englishman living in Dacca, in 1789 (FIG. 3).³³ Titled “Muslim Lady Reclining,” it depicts the *bibi*, dressed in Mughal finery, indulging in



FIGURE 3. “Muslim Lady Reclining,” by Francesco Renaldi. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (accession number B1981.25.519).

leisure within the confines of a room, probably within the *bibi-khana*, whose spatial articulation is different from that depicted in Zoffany's "The Palmer Family." The *bibi* here sits with her bare feet on a patterned *kaaleen* spread on the floor, with her footwear beside it. Reclining on a *gaav-takiya* [bolster], she holds a *hookah* pipe in one hand and a piece of jewelry in the other. A *paan-dan* [container with cruets for preparing *paan*] lies close by. The room, with a louvred window to cut out the harsh light, is bare, with no furniture except the carpet and a *moodha* [stool] by the door, which is partly draped with a hanging.

Comparing these two paintings it is possible to see how Zoffany's work depicts influences from the Indian tradition via its background representation of the *chawk/bagh*. Meanwhile, Renaldi's work is more inclined toward the Western tradition, being set in a room that employed adapted design elements like the louvred window to control the ingress of light. Both paintings, however, indicate that, in addition to their subjects' personal comportment, the nabobian dwelling space was hybrid in character.

THE NABOBIAN *KOTHI*

Nabobs often built more than one large residential estate during their checkered military careers. The centerpiece of these estates was always the *kothi*, which served as the main spatial manifestation of the cultural hybridity that ran through the nabobian persona. Based on fieldwork, it is possible to reconstruct the architectural character of these nabobian estates. Generally, they were laid out in the outskirts of the city where a nabob was based, and they marked its patron's identity in a land where nabobs were a minority.³⁴ Reflecting wealth and

power, in addition to the *kothi*, such compounds included ancillary buildings such as stables, stores, and servant quarters.

The *kothi* was the fulcrum of the household in which the nabob lived and socialized, and as an architectural ensemble it typically reflected the East-West cultural entanglement that defined nabobism. It could either be designed by an EIC military engineer/soldier; by the nabob himself — as was the case with Martin and Polier, who, in the manner of the European gentleman, dabbled in architecture both as a hobby and a vocation; or by a *mistri*, an Indian craftsman with years of hands-on experience, and who might also oversee its construction, but who usually chose to remain anonymous. Its built form was thus typically the outcome of a collaborative enterprise between the patron, the designer, and the builder, with all bringing their own visions and sensibilities to the project. The result was thus an architectural hybrid, employing elements from different cultures (FIG. 4). This might be reflected in a *kothi's* layout, choice of materials and construction techniques, facade articulation, and details of ornamentation.

Typically, the estate comprised a walled enclosure with entrance gateways that announced the power and wealth of the patron to the outside world. For example, the entrances to Perron's Sahib Bagh and Samru's Agra estate took the form of grand gateways, whose design drew from the Mughal gateway archetype (FIG. 5). Further, the *kothi* was usually set amidst extensive grounds comprised both formal and pleasure gardens, fruit orchards and vegetable gardens, and a forecourt and driveway. Samru's Old Palace (later turned into a seminary), whose architect is not known, took the form of a walled enclosure where the grounds surrounding the *kothi* included both gardens and agricultural fields (FIG. 6).

Martin's flamboyant Constantia once contained a formal garden in the English style. Indeed, Martin urged his peer de

FIGURE 4. Martin's *Kothi Farah Baksh*, Lucknow. View of southwest facade showing an eclectic mix of details that borrow from European and Mughal sources. Photo courtesy of S.K. Arora, Archaeological Survey of India.





FIGURE 5. Perron's kothi in Aligarh. View of entrance gateway borrowing from the Mughal archetype. Photo by author.

Boigne, who had left India permanently to settle in England, to send him seeds of plants, including "raspberries, strawberries of all kinds, large currants, . . . tulips, hyacinths, buttercups, . . . apricots, peaches, . . . and others that we don't have here."³⁵ Constantia also had fruit orchards and vegetable gardens that supplied the household's needs, and a set of steam engines were imported from England to work the garden's fountains.³⁶ While considerably altered over time, some semblance of the garden's grandeur still exists (FIG. 7).

In terms of spatial layout, facade articulation, and detail, the *kothi* drew on two archetypes: the Western, Palladian villa and the Eastern, Mughal *haveli*.³⁷ But the extent to which elements from these sources were employed varied from patron to patron. Thus, Martin and Polier, who had designed buildings themselves, were more involved in the details of construction, while Perron, Thomas and Reinhardt in all likelihood left most matters of design and construction to a

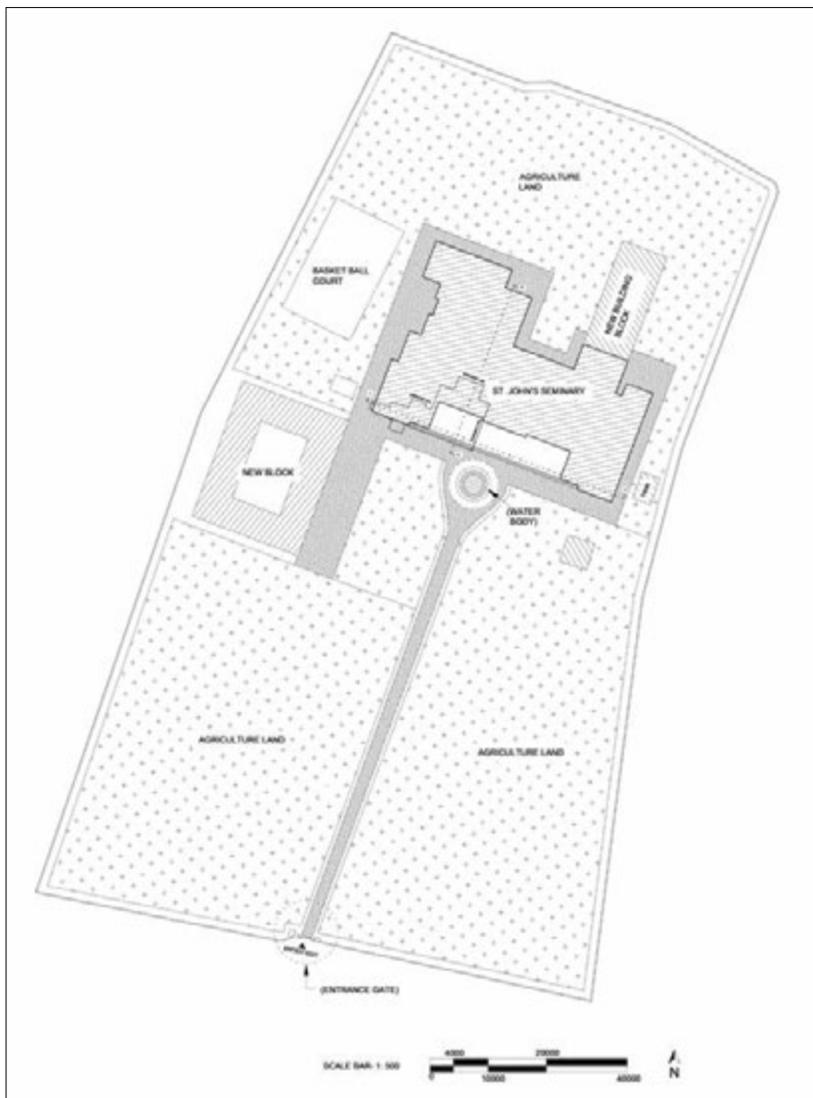


FIGURE 6. Site plan of Samru's Old Palace-turned-seminary. Courtesy of Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram University of Science and Technology.

FIGURE 7. *Martin's Kothi Constantia. View of European-style garden. Courtesy of S.K. Arora, Archaeological Survey of India*



team of *mistris*. These variations notwithstanding, the *kothi* demonstrated how different spatial elements from East and West could be adapted to create forms validating Burke's constructs of "cultural hybridity" and "adaptation." Regardless of scale — from Perron's relatively modest dwelling to Martin's flamboyant Constantia — fieldwork indicated that the *kothi* epitomized an East-West duality (FIGS. 8A, B).

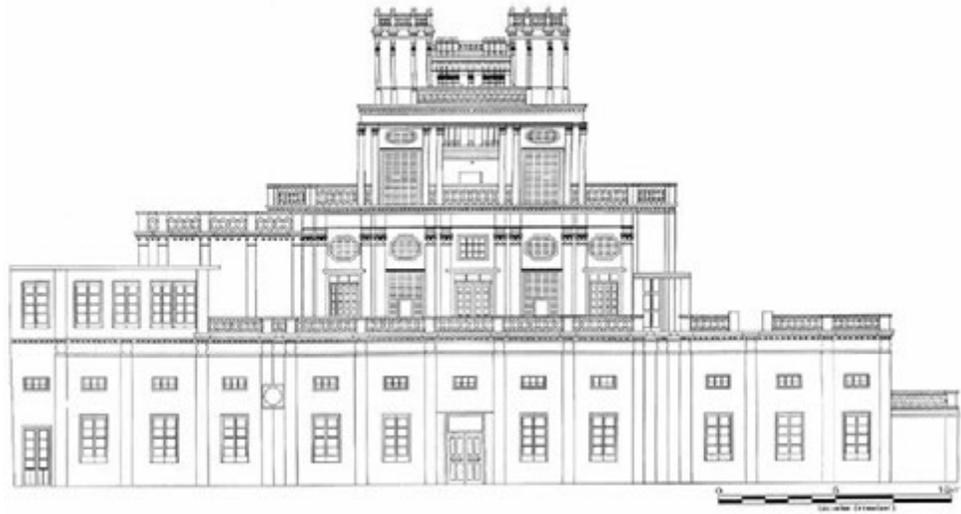
The *kothi's* Europeanization began with its layout, which was based on a spatial form comprising a centrally placed hall with enveloping rooms.³⁸ As in a villa of the time, the hall was larger, with a higher ceiling than other rooms, and featured tall windows for ventilation and light. This configuration was common to all *kothis* examined during the fieldwork. For ex-

ample, the central room in Martin's much-altered Kothi Farha Baksh took the form of an elongated octagon, which opened into a number of other rooms, including one built over the river. It was flanked by two staircases, symmetrically placed at its northern end, and could be accessed from the south via a verandah (FIG. 9). Martin's Constantia had a central core comprising a large octagonal hall with smaller octagonal rooms at its four corners. The geometry of this central core also ran through the house's six floors, from its basement to its roof (FIG. 10). Perron's *kothi* likewise had a large, centrally placed room (subsequently divided into two rooms, and divided by an intermediary floor to create a separate, upper level), which was accessed via a verandah from the garden on its west.



FIGURE 8. A) *Perron's kothi in Aligarh. View from the front garden. Photo by author. B) Martin's Kothi Constantia. View from across its large forecourt. Courtesy of S.K. Arora, Archaeological Survey of India.*

FIGURE 11. *Martin's Kothi Farah Baksh. Northeast elevation showing European design elements rendered in stucco. Courtesy of the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology Department, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.*



In terms of facade articulation and interior detail, the *kothi* borrowed design elements from Europe, such as the pediment and classical columns, and its ornament included urns, statues, festoons, scrolls and swags. These elements could be used modestly, as in Samru's Old Palace, or in a highly elaborate manner, as in Martin's *kothi* (FIG. 11).

The Mughalization of the *kothi* addressed not only concerns of acculturation but also the need for comfort on the north Indian plains.³⁹ Thus the *haveli* archetype, with its quintessential Mughal spatial ensemble of *chauk-bagh-tehkhana-zenana-hammam* [courtyard-garden-seraglio-basement-bath] was used both to enable the nabobian lifestyle and mitigate the impact of climate. However, this ensemble was adapted in the *kothi* in keeping with the patron's taste and preference. For example, the *hammam* [bath], which offered rejuvenation for both the mind and the body through its hot and cold rooms, was not found in any of the surveyed *kothis*, and was not mentioned in archival sources. However, Samru's younger *begum* (Begum Samru) did include an elaborate *hammam* in the *kothi* she built in the nineteenth century in Sardhana, and which was designed by an Italian mercenary serving in her army.⁴⁰ The *chawk*, a multifunctional courtyard space, was also not clearly identifiable during the fieldwork due to alterations made in the surveyed structures over time.

The *zenana* with its *bibi-khana* (a women's stronghold with spatially segregated living quarters) also could not be identified, even as archival accounts recorded its existence. Martin's Kothi Farha Baksh was recorded as having a *zenana* where his *bibis* lived in seclusion. And Zoffany's painting of Martin's *bibi* Boulene was likely set within the confines of Farha Baksh's *bibi-khana*. Martin's English friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Plowden, the wife of an EIC official, Captain Richard Plowden, also visited his *zenana*, where she met Polier's *bibis* — who Martin was supporting after Polier left for Europe (where he subsequently died).⁴¹ Martin further willed that a *zenana* be built for his *bibis* in Constantia after his death.⁴²

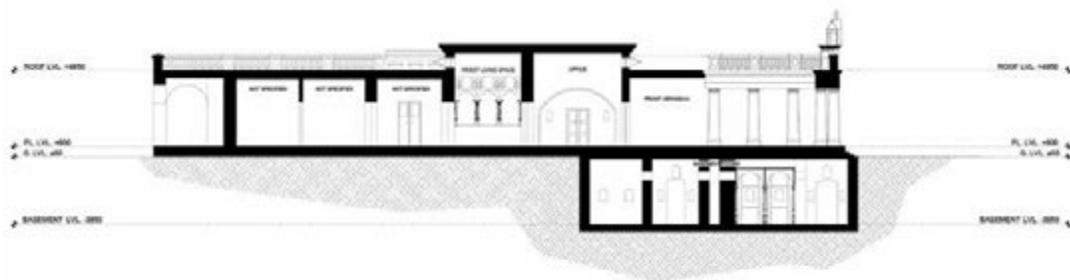
The fieldwork also revealed that the *kothis' baghs* had either disappeared or been completely altered in the later remodeling of nabobian compounds. And while elements of their planting (especially trees) survive, no structures like pavilions or water features (traditionally an integral part of a Mughal garden layout) exist today. Thus Perron's Sahib Bagh still contains fruit trees, like *aaam* [mango], *sharifa* [custard apple], *anar* [pomegranate], and *mehndi* [henna], along with a front lawn. But the gardens of Thomas's Jahaj Kothi, as well as of Samru's Old Palace, have been greatly altered, with only a few original trees surviving (FIG. 12). In the case of Martin's *kothis*, it was difficult to establish the existence of *baghs* as part of the fieldwork due to transformations made in the estates over time — even as Constantia's European-style garden has ironically survived as a semblance of its original self.

The *tehkhana* was a very practical addition to the *kothi*, as its subterranean rooms offered respite from the summer heat. Martin's Villa Farha Baksh had a *tehkhana* with two levels below the ground, which was described in publications of the day, like *The European Magazine* and *Asiatic Annual Register*.⁴³ It still survives, but remains inaccessible due to excessive dampness. And the *tehkhana* in Constantia was also designed to serve as its patron's burial place. Indeed, Martin was interred there following his death in 1800, and a tomb raised over his remains is still open to visitors.⁴⁴ The *tehkhana* in Samru's Old Palace comprised a set of interconnected apartments whose design inspiration came from Mughal (i.e., Shahjahani) sources — as reflected by the use of ornamental baluster columns and cusped arches. Meant to serve as a cool retreat for the family during the hot summer months, it is currently not in use due to extreme dampness (FIGS. 13A, B).

In terms of facade articulation and interior detail, the *kothi* incorporated elements from the *haveli*. Notable among these were the *jaali* [pierced stone screen] for ventilation; *chajja* [roof eaves] to cut out the glare and keep out the rain; *aala* [wall niche] for display of objects; and cusped arches resting



FIGURE 12. *Thomas's Jahaj Kothi. View of the front garden and main house. Photo by author.*



A

SCALE BAR: 1:150



B

FIGURE 13. *A) Samru's Old Palace-turned-seminary. Section through the kothi showing the tekhkhana. Courtesy of Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram University of Science and Technology. B) Samru's Old Palace-turned-seminary. View of rooms in the tekhkhana, with Shahjahani baluster columns and cusped arches. Photo by author.*

FIGURE 14. *Samru's Old Palace-turned-seminary.* View showing the interior of a room with an eclectic mix of European and Mughal design elements. Photo author.



on Shahjahani baluster columns (FIG. 14). The predominant construction material in most cases was locally sourced brick, finished in lime plaster.

The popular nineteenth-century practice of sourcing prefabricated building components in cast iron and steel from foundries particularly in Britain — like railings, column and beams, and staircases, to name a few — was restricted in the eighteenth century, even as industrial objects were imported by men like Martin. Indeed, Martin's London-based agents regularly shipped the choicest goods to India, which were displayed in his *kothis* (FIG. 15).

With norms of social behavior dictated by the metropole still to find a footing on the subcontinent, the nabobs subscribed to both European norms of sociability as well as Mughal etiquette, cultivating personal and professional bonds to abet their growth. At a time when the club and assembly room, colonial leisure spaces *par excellence*, had yet to make their appearance, the *kothi*, with its assortment of spaces, acted as a fulcrum of sociability in nabobian life.

THE NABOBIAN *KOTHI* AS A HUB OF SOCIABILITY

The nabobs' social regimen included indulgence in leisure as family men with their *bibis*, their offspring, and other members of the household. It also included interaction with their European and Indian peers and guests. Sociability thus entailed subscribing to a combination of European and Mughal practices, comprising both outdoor and indoor activities. The former included those of European provenance like visit-

ing sites of interest, including monuments and scenic landscapes, sketching, painting, and drawing. Those of Mughal origin included *shikaar* [hunting] and animal fights.

The nabobs' indulgence in both hunting and animal fights is recorded in archival literature. In fact, Colonel Mordaunt, an EIC official in the Avadh *nawab's* court, was known to keep fighting cocks. Zoffany, who also painted "The Tiger Hunt" in 1795, thus made a painting entitled "Colonel Mordaunt's Cock Match" in 1784.⁴⁵ The painting depicts a contest between two cocks, one belonging to the incumbent Avadh *nawab*, Asaf-ud Daulah, and the other to Mordaunt. In the center of the composition are the *nawab* and Mordaunt greeting each other as their respective attendants goad the cocks to fight. The fight is being witnessed by a large crowd of leisure seekers, including a group of women who in all probability are entertainment artists. The spectators include several Europeans, including Lucknow's nabobs: Polier, Martin, John Wombwell (an EIC official), and Zoffany himself. Dressed in European-style clothes, some are seated and others stand, all beneath the fabric of a *shamiyana* [tent] that has been erected to protect them from Lucknow's hot weather.

Indoor leisure, a preferred form of recreation on account of the local heat and humidity, entailed activities of European origin like painting, drawing, and collecting and showcasing art, and it often extended to the pursuit of scholarly activities like the study of Indian languages, art and manuscripts. The Nabobs also commissioned Indian and European artists to capture images of the subcontinent's flora and fauna, people, and monuments. Polier even maintained an atelier in the manner of the erstwhile Mughals, with Mihr Chand,



FIGURE 15. *Martin's Kothi Constantia.* View showing the highly ornamental interior of a room displaying Martin's collection. Photo by author.

an Indian painter, being his most famous artist.⁴⁶ Polier and Martin's social circle likewise included European painters like Zoffany and Renaldi, who painted for them. Martin's collection had 47 oil paintings and sketches by Zoffany, while Polier was the subject of many of Zoffany's paintings.

Collecting art enhanced the nabob's stature in the sub-continent's European society. Large collections, like Martin's, included manuscripts, coins, paintings, weapons, jewelry, and fossils and shells.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Nabobs like Polier aimed to be "Orientalist gentleman" by engaging in scholarship on Indian languages, literature, religion and art.⁴⁸

Mughal forms of recreation by contrast centered on indulgence in a state of languorous repose, during which the senses might be stimulated by an assortment of elements. These might include aromatic fragrances; scented oils and water; choice foods, herbs and beverages; and performances like *nautch* (the Anglicized term for *naatch*, implying a dance performance by female artists) and *mushaira* [a poetry session] (FIG. 16).⁴⁹

The nature of socializing affected the nabob's comportment in terms of mannerisms, dress, epicurean habits, and, by extension, spatial preferences. When in the company of other Europeans, nabobs wore Western-style clothes and accessories and used European-style spaces and furniture. Yet, as family men, they adapted to the tradition of their adopted home, and might be dressed in Mughal-style attire and accessories, smoke the *hookah*, eat *paan*, and use spaces and furniture in keeping with a Mughal lifestyle.

The hybrid spatial layout and detailing of the *kothi* made it easy to adapt it for both European-style and Mughal-style leisure activities. Thus the *kothi's* European gardens might



FIGURE 16. "An Indian Dancing Girl with a Hookah," by Tilly Kettle. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (accession number B1981.25.385).



FIGURE 17. “General Claude Martin and His Friends,” by Johann Zoffany. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, West Bengal, India (accession number R2066).

be used for leisurely strolls. And its ensemble of central hall and surrounding rooms, borrowed from the villa archetype, might be used to entertain European guests or exhibit the nabob’s collection of cultural artifacts. Such a condition can be inferred from Zoffany’s painting “General Claude Martin and His Friends,” made in 1786, which depicts a gathering of Lucknow’s nabobs in Polier’s home (FIG. 17).⁵⁰

Even as Polier’s Lucknow *kothi* no longer exists, Zoffany’s painting offers a reconstruction of its interior space as this was used for entertaining European guests. It depicts Polier, Martin, Wombwell, and Zoffany himself sitting (in all likelihood) in its central room, which is furnished with chairs and a table around which the nabobs, all dressed in European-style clothes, sit. Three Indian servants stand in attendance, with two in the background. On the walls are displayed paintings of Indian landscapes in an assortment of frames. An album of Mughal miniatures, probably part of Polier’s collection, lies open on the table. Zoffany occupies the center of the composition, sitting in front of a canvas. Polier sits on a chair close to him, inspecting what is probably produce from his *bagh*, brought in by the attendants. Martin

is standing and engaged in conversation with Wombwell, gesticulating toward a drawing held by an attendant that depicts a view of his *kothi*. In this painting, intended to illustrate Polier socializing with his European peers, all present subscribe to the mores of their own culture — and the space, too, is articulated in keeping with Polier’s reputation as an “Orientalist gentleman.”

Unlike Polier’s house, Martin’s *kothis* survive, and examination of them as part of the fieldwork revealed a series of rooms provided with ornamental plasterwork on walls and ceilings offering ample space to display his large collection. Martin entertained at Kothi Farah Baksh regularly, and on one occasion, with the Plowdens, he showed off “. . . Medals and some New Prints among them the beautiful Window painted at Oxford by Sir J. Reynolds and Shakespeare’s Characters, a fine Print of the Witches which cost 3 Pounds in England.”⁵¹ The *kothi* also had a “museum, well supplied with various curiosities” and an “observatory, which he furnished with the best astronomical instruments.”⁵² However, these spaces cannot be identified with certainty today due to alterations to the property over the years.

The *kothi's bagh* and *tekhana* were also used to entertain guests. *Nautch* and poetic soirees could be hosted in a *bagh*. To reconstruct their use as a spatial setting for a *nautch*, two eighteenth-century paintings, with Polier as the subject, were examined as part of the research. The first, made in 1785 and regarded as a copy of a lost work by Zoffany, is titled “Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier enjoying a Nautch at his house in Lucknow.”⁵³ The second, made by Mihr Chand in 1780, was based on the same theme.⁵⁴ Both show Polier dressed in Mughal-style clothes and accessories, watching a *nautch*. The first painting shows Polier seated on cushions on the floor of a pavilion inspired by Shahjahani architecture, while in the second he sits on a European-style sofa under the red fabric canopy of a *shamiyaana*. Both show a *bagh* as part of the setting. In the first, the pavilion is set in a walled *bagh* with a fountain pool and trees with other apartments in the background; in the second, a *bagh* provides a backdrop for the entire scene. Indeed, within his *kothi*, Polier could easily transform from acting as a European host for his peers to acting more like a Mughal lord indulging in private leisure.

Like Polier, Martin organized *nautch* for the amusement of his European guests at Kothi Farha Baksh. This is reported by Mrs. Plowden, who on one occasion was “hospitably entertained by a “*jhuttpathey nautch*,” literally a brisk dance, performed by dancing girls, and by a game of cards.⁵⁵

The *kothi's tekhana* could also be used to host guests in summer. The *tekhana*s in Martin’s *kothis* were a particular subject of remark, with *The Asiatic Annual Register* describing Kothi Farha Baksh’s subterranean rooms as “. . . two caves or recesses within the banks of the river. . . . In these caves he generally lived in the hot season. . . .”⁵⁶ While the first level was accessible during the fieldwork, the second level was inaccessible due to flooding. Constantia’s *tekhana* was visited in 1795 by Thomas Twining, an EIC civil servant. He noted that “Under the principal apartment are subterraneous rooms, intended for the hot season. . . . In the middle of the largest of these dark rooms the Colonel had already raised his tomb.”⁵⁷ The *tekhana* in Samru’s Old Palace was likewise used by the family for leisure during the hot summer months (REFER TO FIG. 14A, B).

By contrast to these relatively public spaces, the *kothi's zenana* was meant for private repose. Eighteenth-century accounts of leisure activities in the *zenana* are rare, yet evidence exists that it could host both *nautch* and *mushaira*, as *bibis* tended to be patrons of poetry, and often composed poetry themselves. Further, it was also possible to indulge in a typically British sport — i.e., angling — in private, as revealed by Zoffany’s painting of Martin’s *bibi*. Indeed, the nabobian *kothi*, with its East-West spatial dualism, facilitated the smooth transition from one type of leisure activity to another.

THE END OF NABOBISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: FROM THE *KOTHI* TO THE BUNGALOW

In the nineteenth century, a new, metropole-inspired social order arrived on the subcontinent, which the colonial regime advocated as the norm. It was espoused by a new generation of EIC officers, whom Mildred Archer has described as men of “stoical duty,” who under the influence of evangelical thinking, worked with “pious dedication scorning luxury and lackadaisical frolics.”⁵⁸ This scenario relegated both nabobs and their leisurely indulgences to the margins of the colonial political and social order. Europeans who continued to adhere to the nabobian way of life, particularly in north India, thereafter became the subject of reproach among their compatriots, with their *bibis* and children regarded as social outcasts.

Like nabobism, the *kothi* too fell out of fashion as a residential archetype, and the bungalow emerged as the epitome of British colonial domesticity. The bungalow typically served as the home of the European official serving on the subcontinent, and he resided in it with a family that comprised his European wife and progeny and several servants. As an architectural entity, the bungalow departed from the *kothi's* hybrid East-West spatiality, with its layout centered on a metropolitan spatial ensemble of parlor-drawing room-dining room-bedroom. While it did incorporate traditional Indian design elements, such as the *jaali*, *chajja*, and a verandah, the inclusion of such design features was driven more by the need to mitigate the tropical climate than a concern for cultural adaptation (FIG. 18).

Further, as a space of sociability, the bungalow was meant for indulgence in leisure privately with the family, and was not amenable to hosting Mughalized forms of leisure. Indeed, the very notion of leisure was redefined. As the *mushaira* and *nautch* came to be regarded as inappropriate and even immoral, room had to be made for novel public forms



FIGURE 18. The bungalow, the colonial domestic space par excellence. Photo by author.

of recreation like dancing, dining, reading and sport. Consequently, a new public leisure landscape consisting of the club, assembly room, reading room, and public park emerged across the subcontinent, replacing the intimate *kothi* as the hub of sociability.⁵⁹

NABOBISM AND THE NABOBIAN *KOTHI* AS PART OF THE COLONIAL NARRATIVE

The East-West cultural hybridity that defined the eighteenth century gave rise to nabobism. And the consequent cultural entanglements of the era extended to architecture, making the nabobian *kothi* a hybrid spatial entity that combined elements of European and Mughal archetypes.

Just as the acculturated mercenary made the transition from European gentleman to Mughalized nabob through cultural adaptation, so did the *kothi* spatially adapt design elements from the villa and the *haveli*. Further, it served as a hub of nabobian social life. Thus it might host an evening of *nautch* in the *bagh* and showcase the nabob's art collection in the central hall with equal ease. This scenario was replaced in the nineteenth century by colonial notions of cultural superiority, religious zeal, honor, and sense of duty, which were no longer accepting of the camaraderie between Europeans and Indians. Such a cultural turn transformed nabobs, their *bibis*, and progeny into social pariahs and object of ridicule.⁶⁰

Likewise, nabobian architectural endeavors were ridiculed for their hybridity, with Martin's Constantia, the grandest nabobian building venture, inviting the most attention. Thus, it was described by one visitor, Lord Valentia, shortly after Martin's demise, as a "strange fantastical building of every species of architecture, . . . the wretched taste of the ornaments only excites contempt."⁶¹ Further, more than

seven decades later, the architectural scholar James Fergusson described Constantia as "somewhat fantastic in arrangement, which sins against most of the rules of pure Palladian Art to an extent, that would not be pardonable except in such a climate and under the peculiar circumstances in which it was erected."⁶² This so-called deviation from "pure" Palladianism, which Fergusson reluctantly acceded to, was an act of adaptation by Martin, the nabob, abetted by the culturally hybrid eighteenth century. And Fergusson's evaluation can be seen to apply not just to Martin's *kothi* but to other nabobian *kothis* as well, even as they remained out of the spotlight.

The nineteenth-century tradition of neglect continues today, with the legacy of European-military-adventurers-turned-nabobs being little known except in academia. Yet, as a symbol of East-West cultural hybridity, the nabobian era represented a significant period in the colonial narrative of the subcontinent.

The nabobian architectural legacy, as epitomized by the *kothi*, has likewise been a victim of neglect. Not only is there scant scholarship on this building tradition, but, with the exception of Martin's *kothis*, there seems also to have been a complete disregard of its worth as a cultural asset. Today, only Martin's Kothi Farah Baksh and Thomas's Jahaj Kothi have statutory protection as heritage. Furthermore, as the nabobian *kothis* have been put to new uses, they have been altered, with scant regard for their historic character. As they serve their new functions, the *kothis* remain victims of obscurity, as neither their users nor the public in general is aware of their cultural value. Given their historicity, it is important to recognize that remaining nabobian *kothis* are significant heritage sites. As such, they need to be included in the colonial architecture corpus both as a symbol of the East-West cultural hybridity and as testimony to the lives of their Mughalized patrons.

REFERENCE NOTES

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The drawings of Samru's Old Palace (now Saint John's Seminary) were prepared

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The drawings of Martin's Kothi Farha Baksh (now called Chattar Manzil) are reproduced by the kind permission of the Uttar Pradesh State Archaeology Department, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

The painting "General Claude Martin and His Friends" is reproduced by the kind permission of the Trustees of the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The painting is archived as R2066.

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16. All nabobian *kothis* examined during the fieldwork have been readapted to serve new functions. Perron's *kothi* serves as a students' hostel, called Sulaiman Hall, at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh; Samru's Agra *kothi* is privately owned and has restricted access; Samru's Old Palace in Sardhana serves as a seminary called Saint John's Seminary; Thomas's *kothi* in Hisar, Haryana, has been transformed into a museum; Martin's Kothi Farha Baksh in Lucknow was renamed Chhattar Manzil and incorporated into a larger complex that functioned as the Central Drug Research Institute until very recently, while his second estate, Constantia, also in Lucknow, has been serving since 1840 as a school called La Martiniere College, as per Martin's will.
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32. The account is based on an examination of the painting as reproduced and critiqued in <http://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2015/01/portrait-of-major-william-palmer-and-his-family-now-on-display.html>, accessed September 17, 2018. The painting is part of the India Office Collection, British Library, London (reference: F597).
33. The account is based on an examination of the painting as reproduced and critiqued in <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/1665157>, accessed September 16, 2018. The painting is part of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (reference: B1981.25.519).
34. For a discussion of Martin’s estates, see J. Pandey Sharma, “The Villa in Colonial India: Major General Claude Martin’s Villa Estates in Eighteenth-Century Avadhian Lucknow,” in B. Arciszewska, ed., *The Early Modern Villa: Senses and Perceptions Versus Materiality* (Warsaw: Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów, 2017), pp.233–46.
35. Llewellyn-Jones, *Man of the Enlightenment*, p.396.
36. Llewellyn-Jones, *A Very Ingenious Man*, p.185.
37. Pandey Sharma, “The Villa in Colonial India.”
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. The Begum’s *kothi* functions as a college today in Sardhana called Saint Charles Intercollege.
41. Llewellyn-Jones, *Man of the Enlightenment*, p.285.
42. C. Martin, *The Last Will and Testament of Major General Claude Martin* (Lyon: 1803), p.34.
43. Pandey Sharma, “The Villa in Colonial India.”
44. Martin, *Last Will and Testament*.
45. The account is based on an examination of the painting during the fieldwork at Martin’s Kothi Constantia in 2014. For a critique of the painting from an art history perspective, see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/zoffany-colonel-mordaunts-cock-match-to6856>, accessed September 18, 2018. Zoffany’s “The Tiger Hunt” is held at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, (reference: R1974).
46. Roy, “Mihr Chand.”
47. Martin, *Last Will and Testament*.
48. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*; and Harris, “European Collectors.”
49. See A. McNeil, “Tawa’if, Military Musicians and Shi’a Ideology in Pre-Rebellion Lucknow,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.32 No.1 (2009), pp.46–62, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856400802709276>, accessed June 29, 2011; and P. de Silva, *Colonial Self-Fashioning in British India, c.1785–1845: Visualising Identity and Difference* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).
50. The account is based on an examination of the painting held at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, West Bengal, India (reference: R2066). For an art history perspective, see Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, p.140.
51. Llewellyn-Jones, *Man of the Enlightenment*, p.285.
52. “Authentic Anecdotes of the Life of Maj. Gen. Claud Martin,” *The Asiatic Annual Register . . . of the Year 1801* (1802), p.73.
53. The account is based on an examination of the painting as reproduced and critiqued in Harris, “European Collectors,” Fig.7, p.125. The painting forms part of the private collection of Princess Catherine Aga Khan, Geneva.
54. The account is based on an examination of the painting as reproduced and critiqued in S. Markel and T.B. Gude, eds., *India’s Fabled City: The Art of Courty Lucknow* (New York: Prestel, 2010), Fig.26, p.180. The painting forms part of the private collection of Princess Catherine Aga Khan, Geneva.
55. Llewellyn-Jones, *Man of the Enlightenment*, p.285.
56. “Authentic Anecdotes,” p.73. Also see “An Account of Colonel Martin’s Villa, Near Lucknow, in the East Indies,” *The European Magazine* 17 (1790), pp.86–87.
57. T. Twining, *Travels in India a Hundred Years Ago with a Visit to the United States* (London: James R. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1893), p.310.
58. M. Archer, *India and British Portraiture, 1770–1825* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979), p.357.
59. See, M. Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India,” *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol.40 No.4 (October 2001), pp.489–521; and J. Pandey Sharma, “Spatialising Leisure: Colonial Punjab’s Public Parks as a Paradigm of Modernity,” *Tekton*, Vol.1 No.1 (September 2014), pp.14–30.
60. Lawson and Phillips, “Execrable Banditti”; and Edwards, *Nabobs at Home*; and Nechtman, *Nabobs*.
61. Lord Valentia, as cited in Llewellyn-Jones, *Fatal Friendship*, pp.140 and 142.
62. J. Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture: Being a Sequel to the Handbook of Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1862), p.419.