

**KEY WORDS:**

Cosmopolitan, Cemeteries, Amalgamation, Surat

## **Cradle for the Dead or Monument for the Living**

**Preeti Pansare**

Tekton Volume 7, Issue 2, September 2020, pp. 22-42

---

**ABSTRACT**

The cultural practices of the immigrants and the native population amalgamates differently depending on the power relationship between the immigrants and the natives. This paper aims to study this relationship by choosing funerary practices to represent cultural practices. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, Surat was a melting pot of cultures as it had become an important port in India. The English and the Dutch cemeteries in Surat are amongst the earliest built monuments by the Europeans in this country using an architectural language different from the styles from their own country of birth. This study focuses on the idea of identity through the lens of architecture. It attempts to understand how architecture was used to create identity and spatial language that asserted their presence in a foreign land. The study is conducted by studying the amalgamation of the political, cultural and social practices during those times. In both the English and Dutch cemeteries, we find evidence of appropriation of the tangible and intangible elements from Indo-Islamic architecture and Hindu temple architecture. The paper studies the cultural amalgamation, appropriation that the English sought and from which they proceeded further to invent their own architectural style in India. The transition from traders to Imperial rulers can be seen in the style transitions in this period.



**Preeti Pansare** is a doctoral student at the University of Strathclyde. She graduated from Pillai's College of Architecture and acquired her M. Arch. in Design from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She also obtained a P.G. Diploma in Indian Aesthetics from Jnanapravaha, Mumbai. She is a recipient of the MASA Research Fellowship for her work on 'Cultural Osmosis in Korlai, currently under review for publication as a MASA monograph. She is a co-author of the photo-essay 'A Thing of Beauty- A Short Friction Story', published in the Hakara journal.

[preeti.pansare@strath.ac.uk](mailto:preeti.pansare@strath.ac.uk)

## Introduction

*In this small crevice in a huge rock face (in the Carnarvon Gorge in Queensland, Australia), an aborigine family laid the dead body of a small child, wrapped in bark. They marked the place with silhouettes of their hands, made with pigment. This grave is as much a piece of architecture as is the Great Pyramid of Giza (and more poignant) (Unwin, 1997, p.43).*

Death has always been an inescapable and intriguing reality for man. Every religion has tried to address this abstract, yet real phenomenon through varied funerary practices. In the Hindu and Buddhist religion the dead are cremated; while in Islam and Christianity the dead are buried in cemeteries. As observed by Francaviglia, cemeteries are very much a part of the living society and a link with the dead (Francaviglia, 1971. p. 501).

This study attempts to understand the cultural influences on funerary practices by focusing on tombs of immigrants in late Mughal India. Funerary practices of European immigrants differed significantly from the indigenous practices prevalent in India. India was largely under Mughal rule, who built magnificent mausoleums for their nobility and royalty. Curiously, the Dutch and the English immigrants in Surat also commemorated some members of their leadership by building grand and ornamented tombs. This paper studies the architectural influences on the cemeteries of the English, Dutch and Armenian immigrants that arrived in Surat. I examine whether the immigrants' funerary spaces were merely resting places for their dead or a political statement indicating the dominating position such immigrants would occupy in the future.

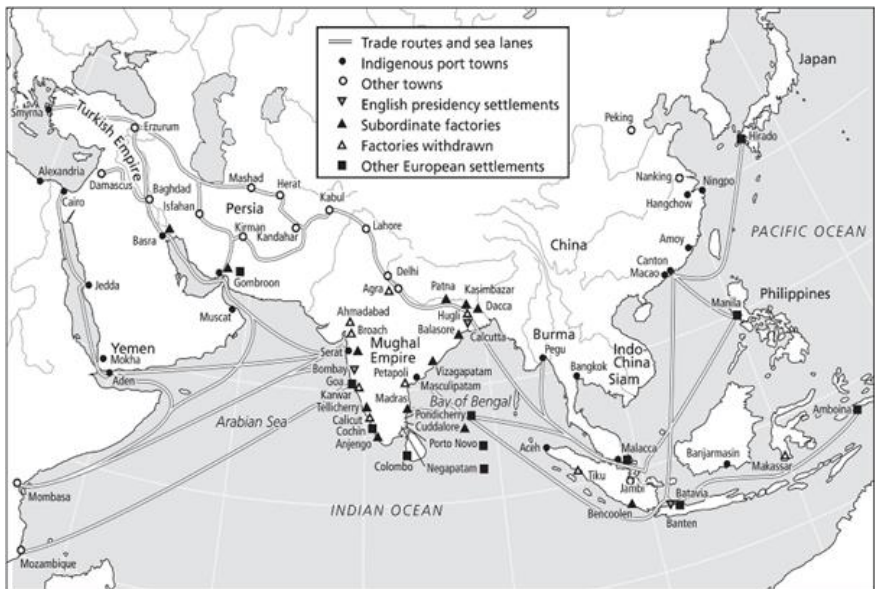
## Historical Context

Vasco Da Gama arrived in India in May 1498. Soon thereafter, ships carrying traders from many European countries such as Portugal, Holland, France and Britain arrived in India. The western coast, in particular the state of Gujarat was very well connected to the west through many of its ports. Gujarat was a perfect place for the development of ports because of the temperament of the people. The port towns of Gujarat were known for their cosmopolitanism, where brokers and merchants worked as arbitrators between the local merchant, the foreign trader, the craftsman, and the tax collector (Keller,2013, p.23). The port towns of Gujarat developed a complex society with a coherent social and cultural structure, required to support and further the trade and commercial relations with foreign merchants. This is in line with Subrahmanyam's observations that a cosmopolitan society can be cultivated in an urban environment where civic life is driven by commerce, and not just by intellectual curiosity (Binbas,2018, p.278).

Surat is located in the Western part of Gujarat, which is replete with ports. The Mughals entered Surat in 1573 after defeating the Gujarat Sultanate. After that Surat became an important port, due to its geography and the entrepreneurial acumen of its people. The prosperity of Surat was intimately connected with the opening up of the Persian trade route (**Figure 1**). Later Surat also became the important point of embarkation for *Hajj* travelers.

The earliest European settlers in Surat were the Armenians. The Armenians were invited by the Mughals to settle in Agra in the 16th century. Their knowledge of Farsi gave them prominence in the Mughal court and they were allowed to move around in the Mughal empire; even to areas where entry to foreigners was otherwise prohibited. Surat became an important settlement for the Armenians, where they worked as traders with their private ships. As per the records at St. Peter’s Church, the Armenians had two churches and a cemetery in Surat.

The British East India company established the first factory in Surat in 1612. For most of the 17th century, there was an intense power struggle between the English, the Dutch and the Portuguese to get prominence in the Mughal court. By the 17th century, the Portuguese power was waning and the Dutch (VOC) and the English were in ascendancy. The Dutch established their factory in Surat in 1617.



**Figure 1:** Trade Routes. Source: Tracy, J. (2015).

The English, Dutch and Armenian cemeteries in Surat are a living memory of the flourishing city that it was between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This paper is a study of the English, Dutch and Armenian cemeteries in Surat to understand the appropriation of cultural practices and symbols by various European settlers. A space like a cemetery needs to be seen at multiple levels. Architecture has always been strongly influenced by politics and is enmeshed in ideologies and references. The Dutch, English and Armenian cemeteries at Surat are an example of this and thus demand critical analysis.

The data considered in this study is a combination of primary data and secondary data. Primary data collection was done through a visit to the site to study the physical and spatial aspects and record the same in sketches and photographs. Secondary data collection is done through review of literature about Surat.

### **Surat Tombs in Historical context**

The earliest tomb in India is the Tomb of Iltutmish at Delhi built in 1235 AD during the Slave dynasty. (Lehri Shabbir, p.27) While the idea of tombs came to India with the Slave dynasty, it was later taken up by the Mughals and the Rajputs. The earlier tombs were simple, made of indigenous stone with square base and a dome on top, which was decorated with Pietra Dura or other calligraphic inlays. Over the years, with advances in construction technology the base of the tombs became octagonal. Tomb architecture in India is considered to be an appropriation of the Timurid style, with certain elements such as finials at the top of the dome being derived from the Hindu temple style. The Timurids used bricks with extremely vibrant ceramic glazed tiles for construction.

The English and the Dutch cemeteries in Surat are placed on either side of the city walls near the northern boundary of the city. There is no church in the vicinity, and the cemeteries are in close proximity to the river Tapti (**Figure 2**). The scale and grandeur of the English and the Dutch cemeteries at Surat surpasses even that of many cemeteries in Europe.

The European immigrants had come to a new country with different religious and cultural ideologies. The country that they had come to was also in a political turmoil with different rulers trying to prove their power. In line with this situation they had to walk a tightrope to maintain this fragile relationship with the rulers in the region. An example of the tight rope walking : "In the 17th century (a written record of the British East India company in 1616 November) erecting a weathervane/bell (mistaken for a cross) would cause riot." (Scarre, 2005, p.287).

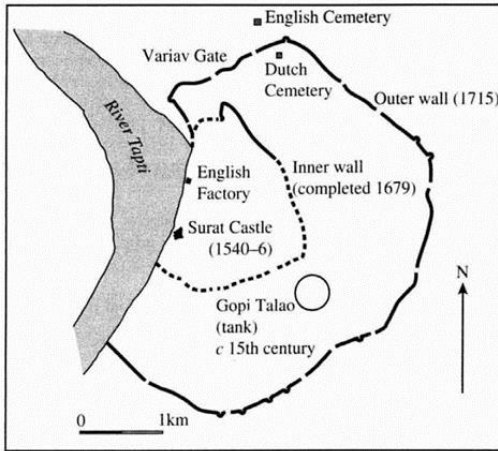


Figure 2: Map Showing Surat in 18th Century. Source: Mehta. R.

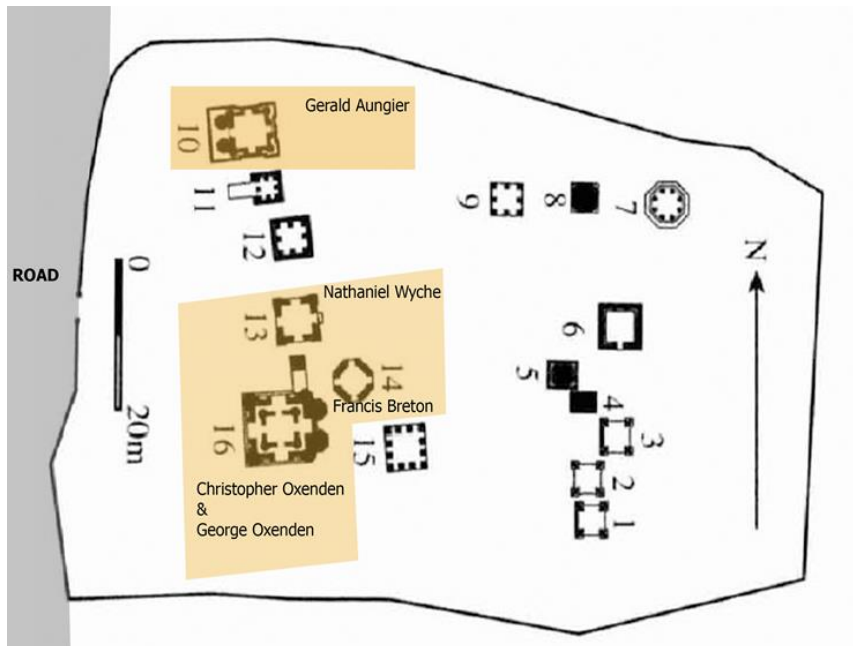


Figure 3: Plan showing the English Cemetery Source: Scarre, Chris. Roberts, Judith. (2005)

## English Cemetery

The English cemetery has 19 graves, a few of which have grandiose monuments and the others are simple table tombs (**Figure 3**). All the graves are all constructed in brick with a thick layer of stucco, similar to Indian monuments. The earlier graves on this site are of the presidents of the East India company. The first grave dated 1649 is of Francis Breton who was the president of East India company and a close friend of the then governor of Surat Muizz-ul-Mulk. The English tombs are generally considered to belong to three generations, spanning from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest tombs are the most prominent ones. These are tomb 10, 14, 15, 16 and 16a, which are on a higher ridge line facing the prominent road. These tombs are strongly influenced by the Mughal architectural style. The Second generation of tombs are all the pavilion tombs built in hybrid Indo-Islamic style. The third generation of tombs built in the late 1800<sup>s</sup>, consisting of tombs 1-5 and 8 conform to the classical European style. A few of the prominent and grandiose tombs in the English cemetery are described in the following section.

### **Tomb 14: Francis Breton**

The earliest tomb in the English cemetery is of Francis Breton who was a former president of the British East India Company when he died. The tomb has an octagonal plan with four arched doorways and four blind niches, similar to the tombs of Mughal rulers. The external decoration consists of ledge mouldings and a grotesque English moulding above the eastern doorway. The moulding still has traces of red paint. The dome is capped with a finial that is shorter than that of the other tombs.

### **Tomb 16 A (1658)**

Tomb 16A of Henry Gary a fourteen-year-old boy, and two storied tomb 16 of Oxenden brothers are considered to be related, since they share a plinth. Gary's tomb is on a 2-meter plinth and is a simple four-sided obelisk. Henry Gary senior was not employed with the company, but the shared plinth signals probable good relations with Christopher Oxenden. (Scarre, 2005, p.275)

### **Tomb 16: Christopher Oxenden (1659) and Sir George Oxenden (1669)**

Two storied tomb 16 is built for the Oxenden brothers, Christopher Oxenden and Sir George Oxenden. At the time of his death, Christopher Oxenden was an accountant second to the President Nathaniel Wyche of the East India Company. Sir George Oxenden was a former president of the East India Company, regarded very highly for withstanding the Maratha raids on Surat. The plan of Christopher Oxenden's tomb is octagonal with two floors. It has a closed pavilion plan on the ground floor, where the central burial space is surrounded by a veranda and a colonnade. There are octagonal turrets at the corners on the east side, pointing towards Mughal influence, while the other sides have finials. These octagonal turrets with cupolas on the top had become a fashion rage during the period of Shah Jahan (1628-1658) (Scarre, 2005, p.278). The outer tomb, built for Sir George Oxenden is an intricately decorated tomb with a double dome. The upper dome has cutouts that appear in the form of a cross in plan and a crown in profile.

The structure seems to be built in two stages. The inner dome structure with the extended plinth connected to tomb 16A would have been built before the second dome on top. The entrance to the tomb is on the Eastern side with steps that lead to an ambulatory passage between the inner and the outer tomb. The outer dome has a finial on a square base like the obelisk tomb 16a. Sir George Oxenden's tomb is placed on the south side of the tomb of Christopher Oxenden. The pointed arches with recessed voids points towards Mughal influence.

**Tomb 10: Gerald Aungier (1677)**

Gerald Aungier was a former Governor of the East India Company. Tomb 10, built for him is similar in structure and style to tomb 16 built for the Oxenden brothers.

**Tomb 13: Nathaniel Wyche (1659)**

This tomb was built for Nathaniel Wyche, who was a president of the East India Company and died in 1659 (Scarre, 2005, p.286). The tomb is square in plan with octagonal columns and a stepped entry from the east. The access to the insides is through pointed archways that are recessed inside a rectangular portal flanked by pilasters. This tomb has elaborate ornamentation with decorated brackets and decorated ledge molding inside and outside. The dome here is mounted on a cylinder and capped with an elaborately decorated finial. This tomb also has traces of painted decorations. From this tomb onwards, corner finials are seen over the columns that rise above the last balustrade in addition to the dome finial.

**Dutch Cemetery**



*Figure 4: View showing the Dutch and Armenian Cemetery (Mapping done with Google Map)*

The Dutch cemetery has 8 tombs and another 8 graves, many of which do not have an inscription (**Figure 4**). The Dutch cemetery is older than the English cemetery. The first burial here dates to 1642 of Magdalena Haijers. In the Dutch cemetery the most noteworthy tomb is that of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede who died in 1691, as a top-ranking official of the Dutch East India Company. Interestingly, he has to his credit the *Hortus Malabaricus*, a 12-volume treatise on the medicinal value of flora along the Malabar Coast from Goa to Kanyakumari.

The tomb of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede is the most magnificent tomb in the Dutch cemetery. This tomb resembles a mausoleum, with a high plinth and double floor. The plan is octagonal with stairways leading to the seating gallery on the top floor, that is protected by a balustrade. The sides have circular columns, which end in circular arches. This open pavilion tomb is similar to Sikander Lodi's tomb built in 1518 with some modifications in the geometric proportions. The Dutch tomb has a frescoed crypt with a staircase going down to a vault. The other tombs are also splendid with plentiful Hindu and Mughal imagery. The plaques are missing on most of the Dutch tombs, as a result it is difficult to date or identify them.

### Armenian Cemetery

The Armenian cemetery shares a common wall with the Dutch cemetery (**Figure 4**). The entry to this cemetery is separated and flanked by an ornate gate that presently lies in ruins. The gate is on the axis of the only chapel that is visible on the site. The site has many simple table tombs arranged in an orderly manner.

The cemetery has one gravestone dated 1579. There are no magnificent tombs in the Armenian cemetery, unlike the Dutch cemetery next door. Many of the graves do not have an inscription and lay there in ruins. The only chapel on site is not dated but the tomb of the son of Phanoos, a notable, rich and influential Armenian is found within the chapel and is dated 1695. This chapel has an entry gate that is visible on the site, but is in ruins. The rest of the cemetery has table tombs or simple burials with intricate plaques engraved with symbols and writings.

### Framework for Analyzing the Cemeteries

Architectural production of space depends on various tangible and intangible factors. To get a holistic view of these factors by using multiple lenses to study the Surat cemeteries.

1. Architectural analysis of the styles and stylistic changes of markers, gravestone / tombstones
2. Geographical analysis of cemeteries as an element in local land use pattern
3. A Semiotic analysis of the Architectural space production



## **Architectural Analysis**

### **Construct One: Tangible**

We begin with an architectural analysis of the cemeteries by looking at tangible entities such as location, line of sight, form, ornamentation to understand the context in which they were built, and to examine whether there was an appropriation or amalgamation of architectural styles.

#### **Location:**

Understanding the geographical location of the cemeteries in Surat in relation to the surrounding city and development is important to understand the social and cultural standing of the immigrants. The Dutch had come to India before the British and had already established a stronghold within the Mughal court. So, were the Dutch more privileged than the British in getting plots for cemeteries?

The tombs in Surat are the earliest examples of cremations outside the church yard all over the world. Other than the chapel on the Armenians burial ground there is no church on this premises.

Dutch domination is apparent in the proximity of the cemetery to the fort and its adjacency to the Armenian Cemetery. The Armenians were close allies of the Mughal rulers and would have got the prime plot. Later when the inner city wall was constructed, the Dutch and the Armenian cemetery was within the precinct and the English cemetery was north of the wall.

In the English cemetery, the tombs do not seem to be laid as per a set grid pattern. But it appears that there was some planning about the placement of the tombs. The prominent people have prime plots that are facing the road. Tomb 16 was constructed in 1659 and Tomb16a was built in 1658, within a gap of one year on the same plinth. The idea of accounting for one more grave later, shows that there was some planning in the location of the tombs. The same also appears to be the case with the Dutch cemetery, where the Reede tomb is on the highest point with space all around. The Reede tomb is also on a very high plinth, unlike the others in the cemetery. The Armenian cemetery is difficult to understand, as it is in disarray and one cannot be certain that the current positions of the tombs and tomb slabs are in the original positions.

#### **Line of sight:**

Physical markers that tie a place to the surroundings help define the identity of the place. Monumental tombs almost two storey tall with particular Indo-Islamic architectural style create an aura of nobility at the site. The idea of space here is dominated by the monumentality and the grandiosity that was seen only in the tombs of Mughal royalty. The immigrants who came here as traders quickly appropriated symbols of power and established their stature in their adopted country.



*Figure 5: Present view of the Dutch Cemetery & a 1920s view (Unknown photographer)*

The tombs in both the Dutch and the English cemeteries are placed on a high plinth. It would be a reasonable conjecture to attribute this change from the traditional Christian burials to Mughal influence. However, it is also possible that the higher ground burials are due to the high-water table of the Tapti river, which is nearby. As per the cremation protocol in Europe, burials would take place above the ground in case of high-water tables to prevent water contamination due to decomposing bodies.

### **Architectural form**

One can see simple utilitarian architectural language in the warehouse and the residential units of both the English and the Dutch structures. They have used courtyards to adapt to the local weather conditions with minimum windows on the outside, thus making most of the buildings inward looking. This approach to planning is not only on account of the weather but also because of the external threat that they possessed from the locals. These buildings, especially the warehouse would have additional protection of a high wall all around (**Figure 6**).

As we move to the cemeteries, we see a complete change in the architectural language. The huge walls have disappeared. The structures abutting the road are majestic and taller. There is a sense of appropriation till the end of the seventeenth century when the English were still trying to find a stronghold in India. As trade grew so did their power and sense of domination. The tombs in the Dutch cemetery have appropriated the Mughal style and later tombs have the Indo-Islamic style like in the English cemetery. In the English cemetery, the change in the style can be seen from the 18th century onwards, where the architectural style started developing its own hybrid language. This can be seen in the later



**Figure 6:** View of the residential quarter (Source: Broecke Pieter van den) and General view of the Dutch Cemetery

tombs which mix the Indo-Islamic style with elements of classical European style. The style changed later from structures covering the tombs to basic plinth or table tombs that were simple. The table tombs would be a simple modification of the obelisks with rectangular plans and gable ends on top. This change is reflected in tombs 4,5 and 8 as the open pavilion tombs were now replaced by table tombs.

### Ornamentation

Earlier colonial tombs were simple and lacked the ornamentation that is seen on the splendid tombs of the Dutch and the English at Surat. Many of these hint towards the influence of the Timurid style of architecture, which the Mughals brought into India. Does the ornamentation signify anything beyond beauty?

Dutch Cemetery: The Dutch cemetery tombs display an ostentatious array of ornamentation on its surfaces (**Figure 7**). One can observe a complete appropriation of style and forms from the Hindu temple motifs and the Indo Islamic traditional motifs all across the interiors and the exteriors of the tombs. Geometric and floral patterns can be seen on the external as well as the internal facades. An intricate and beautiful wooden *jali*, which is a hallmark of Mughal architecture can be seen in the Reede tomb.



**Figure 7:** Details from the Dutch Cemetery

English Cemetery: The English use of ornamentation on the tombs in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century displayed a complete appropriation of the local motifs. The Timurids used tiles for inlays which the Mughals later mastered in the form of Pietra Dura. The local craftsmen, instead of Pietra Dura, painted the patterns engraved on the stucco in colors. They have used corner finials and dome finials which are a syncretic mix of Hindu lotus motifs, the *amalaka* and round motifs with Indo-Islamic floral and geometric ornamentation. The dome is also used as an element in the two-dimensional ornamentation like the *Kalasha* seen in temples on the columns and the dome (Figure 8).

Armenian Mortuary chapel: The architectural style of the Armenian mortuary chapel is a hybrid of various European styles with very little native influence. This is probably because the Armenians were part of the Mughal court and thus already had legitimacy. As a result, they did not feel the need to appropriate Mughal symbols for acquiring stature (Figure 9).



**Figure 8:** Details from the English Cemetery



**Figure 9:** Details from the Armenian Chapel in the cemetery

## **Light and Elegance**

The Surat cemeteries were built by native builders using native materials. The vocabulary of the space does not entirely follow a set of European or Dutch syntaxes. They are in line with the native vocabulary. But unlike the Mughal tombs the structures are built with brick and stucco as opposed to marble. A number of techniques from Indo-Islamic style are employed to optically reduce the mass of the structure. As a result, they appear to be elegant despite their massiveness.

Natural light is another crucial element in Indo Islamic tradition that has been adopted in both the cemeteries. There are openings in the drum supporting the dome, that allow natural light to filter in. The interplay between the built volume and natural light results in changing the perception of volume for the viewer, making the structures more elegant.

## **Construct Two: Intangible**

Architecture conveys more than what is physically present and visible to one's eyes. We will discuss a few intangible attributes of these cemeteries here.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

In early European history, burials were in the form of mounds. These mounds would be within their local polity, the burial mounds were reserved for the community and would be used and reused again. These were significant markers for the local community. In later years the idea of private burials in public plots began. The kings and the rulers had their mausoleums built. The idea of placemaking can be seen here, where one could feel the physical presence of the deceased in inanimate objects and be connected to them post their absence in our physical world. Rulers had bigger and visible memorials, whereas the masses were restricted to having tombs with tombstones.

When we see the tombs constructed in Surat, we see a new style of tomb architecture emerging in the Christian world in India. Surat was not an imperial capital, but was an important port with an influx of different people from different cultures with cosmopolitan values. Cosmopolitan people are the ones who have crossed the borders of religion and politics to come up with universal ideologies. One can view the immigrants to Surat through this lens. The appropriation of style evident in the English and Dutch tombs from Mughal culture, suggests that their patrons had cosmopolitan values. The idea of universalism was different from imperial rule, until as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The term Cosmopolitanism is useful when analyzing the intangible aspects of the design of the tombs. Paraphrasing Binbas, "The contradiction is inherent in the very definition of the concept of cosmopolitanism: Cosmos (the universe) + Polites (citizens). This concept was first used with broad political and philosophical implications by the stoics, who tried to substitute the ancient political concept of polis with the concept of cosmos. So, each individual lives in two parallel realms that coexist in harmony: one is the local community

and the other is a wider or universal community in which human ideals and aspirations are articulated." (Binbas,2018, p.278).

Throughout history, church spires have dominated the landscape and burials were always in the church yard. Here in Surat, the burials were not only outside the church premises, but were so ostentatious in architectural form that they began to dominate the surrounding landscape. The cosmopolitans known as Nabobs back in the home country were criticized for their practices. In "*The Calcutta Review*" of 1848, this idea of cosmopolitan tombs was not taken well. They were termed as Moorish and outlandish. Philip Anderson in his accounts about Surat writes "The body of a viceroy would have found a worthy place here; it is far too superb for the chief of the factory and his brother who was a mere subordinate". (Scarre, 2005, p.286)

In 1862, Bellasis also called the tombs specially the Oxenden tomb pompous (Scarre,2005, p.286). This view changed 60 years later when Rawlinson termed them to be awkward but quaint. The change of view could be ascribed to growing imperial power and the consequent reduction in the gap between universalism and imperialism.

### **Ownership**

John Ovington, who spent over two years as chaplain at Surat in 1690s, writes the following:

*"The English and all the European are privileged with convenient repositories for their dead, within half a mile of the City. There they endeavor to outvie each other in magnificent structures and stately monuments, whose large extent, beautiful architecture and aspiring heads, make them visible at a remote distance, lovely objects of the sight, and give them the title of the principal ornaments and magnificence about the city. They dominated the skyline with the Mughal domes and column finials"*

(scarre, 2005, p.285)

The mausoleums at the time of the construction formed the skyline of Surat. These two-storey high structures would be amongst the tallest structures on the skyline other than the fort, which was under Mughal rule. The English under the new *Farman* from the Mughal court of Jahangir could now construct and own certain parcels of land. They began to build private architecture, which resembled public buildings that dominated the skyline in Europe. The monumental architecture of the tombs, thus was a statement made through the built environment to convey their power and an appreciation for the local culture. The Appropriation here further helped in building their image as the cosmopolitans. This was also the process of asserting individual identity in a country far away from their motherland, for all the ones back in Europe. This also was a statement moving away from the idea of burial in the European countries, where the church controlled the political and religious front.

## **Construct Three: A Semiotic Analysis of Architectural Space Production**

### **Symbolic Overtones: Inherent and Appropriated**

Architecture has the power to convey the abstract ideas of Domination and Subjugation. The immigrants were alien to this part of the world. To demonstrate their superior stature to the native populations, the immigrants used symbols and styles which were practiced by the rulers in India. India was still not one country but was ruled by different rulers. The members of nobility in Mughal India lived a life of opulence and conspicuous consumption. To maintain their stature, they had to have lavish weddings and stately funerals. Ovington states that sometimes the amount spent on funerals was enough to sink a large fortune. Expensive tombs were raised over the graves and a yearly feast was given in honour of the departed. The tomb was decorated with lamps that were lit on the death anniversary of the departed. (Gokhale, 1978, p.33-34) The English and Dutch cemeteries at Surat were also built as monuments designed for viewing and not as utilitarian spaces.

This construct of the dynamic and static place can be used when analyzing the Surat cemetery as a city of the dead. Unwin remarks, *“One might tend to think of a place as somewhere one stops—a market square, a living room, an operating table. These may be called static places, or perhaps nodes. But the pathway one takes to get from one static place to another is a place too. One might call this a dynamic place. Dynamic places play an essential part in the conceptual organization of space.”* (Unwin, 2003, p.157).

While the tomb itself is a static place the path one has to take to reach the center of the tomb chamber is a dynamic place. The adopted and appropriated style of architecture helps us experience the transition as we travel towards the center, where the tomb is located. This is in contrast to the Christian table tombs, where one can directly walk to the tomb. Here in the English and the Dutch tombs the high plinth becomes a part of the transition that separates the ordinary from the sacred. The plinth is like the palanquins carried over the shoulders by the people and indicates high status of the deceased above the ordinary and the other local people.

### **Hierarchy**

Hierarchy becomes important also when one moves from one static place to the other, and when one moves from the street (dynamic space) to a more static place like the cemetery. This is seen in both the English and the Dutch cemeteries, where the tombs of important people are at vantage points. Within the prominent tombs, as one moves to the center, one is moving through the colonnades to a more sacred space. The columns and the placement of the tombs indicate the sanctity of the space. The dome here marks the transition from the ordinary world outside to the sacred place, where the departed is laid to rest. Barring the Oxenden brothers, no other tombs bear any signs of Christianity. In Oxenden brothers' tombs, the Cross in the second dome is clearly a Christian religious symbol. The Oxenden dome was constructed in two stages. The initial bulbous dome with finial and column finials on four corners was built in 1659. The height of the initial structure was one floor. Later in 1669, Sir George Oxenden's tomb was added on the same plinth.

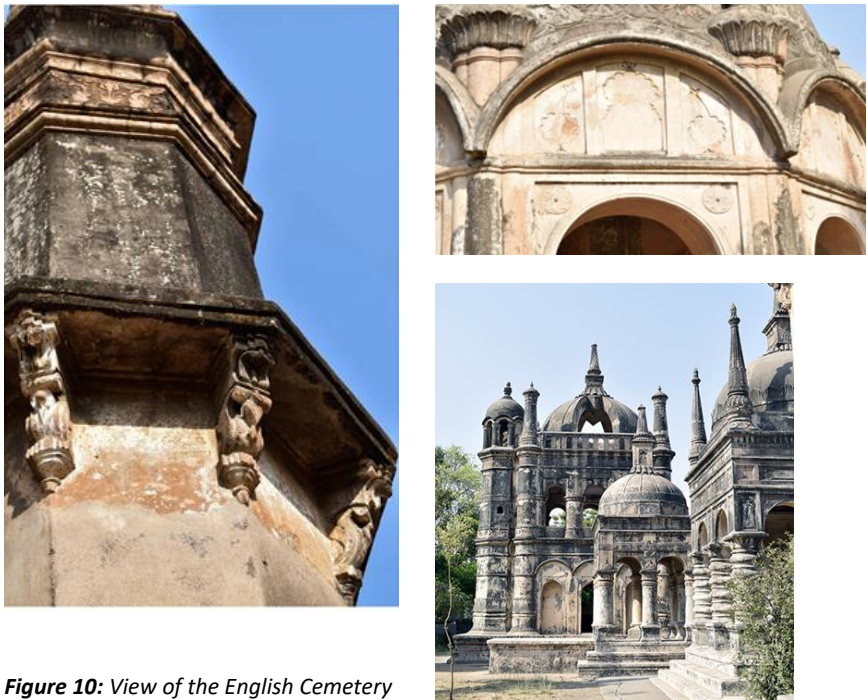


The status of George Oxenden was already elevated because he was a former President, who had withstood the Maratha raids in 1664. The second dome was perhaps in recognition of his services and stature. The dome with the cross covers the tombs of the two brothers. In the Dutch cemetery the dome on President Reede's tomb was already elevated over a drum like a Mughal dome. The dome is capped by a finial that resembles an obelisk, which is Christian religious symbol that represents eternity. This indicates that the final built form contained an amalgamation of cultural symbols from the local and the immigrant cultures.

The references to faith and beliefs are presented in a subtler manner so as to not upset their social relations. In Mughal tombs the upper floor around the drum base of the dome was an ambulatory space. In the English and Dutch tombs the balcony space on top is merely present as an architectural element, since in Christianity there is no ritual of moving around the grave. But one still can see the staircase providing access to the upper floor in some of these tombs. This is just a physical duplication/appropriation of the elements without any cultural / religious ideology attached to the element.

### Hybridization

English Cemetery: The Mughals used *jalis* to allow light into built spaces, while maintaining the separation between the inside and the outside. In the English and Dutch tombs at



**Figure 10:** View of the English Cemetery

Surat, the Mughal wooden *jalis* are now transformed into stucco with a complete mishmash of motifs. There are subtle uses of English symbols like a vase with flowing tendrils and flowers suggesting a full life. In the later tombs one can also see a mixture of classical columns and architectural elements with typical Indo Islamic details.

Architecture is a very effective language to convey hierarchy and power. While the English were upstarts in India, they appropriated tangible and intangible elements from Mughal architecture to establish their legitimacy. As they grew in power, they built a typology that combined elements from Classical architecture, Indo-Islamic architecture and Hindu temple architecture. In some of the later tombs in Surat, one can see forerunners of the architectural vocabulary that was developed during the Raj (**Figure 10**).

Dutch Cemetery: The Dutch cemetery is a mixture of classical and Indo Islamic Style. While they have appropriated several motifs from Indo-Islamic style, the proportions of the structure are not in line with Indo-Islamic architecture (**Figure 11**).

Armenian Cemetery:

The Armenian Cemetery has only one stand-alone chapel and many gravestones within the area of the porch. These gravestones seem to be brought together and rearranged later. There are a few table tombs present on the site at the further end. The style of the cemetery is completed Armenian with all Armenian motifs and language used on the tombs. Almost no appropriation seen in the tombs. But there are few elements used in the entrance way of the chapel and the chapel where the architectural style is Indo-Islamic with Armenian motifs in the main chapel (**Figure 12**).



Figure 11: View of the Dutch Cemetery



*Figure 12: View of the Armenian Cemetery*

## Conclusions

Looking at the history of India and other countries, one understands how they were taken over by invaders, with conquests and war in the earlier centuries. But by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, tactics of war and assimilation of culture and power had changed. In India the colonizers who travelled from Europe had initially come as traders. These colonizers typically had modest backgrounds in their home countries. They were employees of the company, who were satisfying their personal ambition for riches and fame, in addition to furthering their companies' interests.

Before they grew in military power, the colonizers had to depend on favors from the local rulers and the mighty Mughal court to continue their business. The colonizers did not have the authority and the means to create any monuments reflecting their culture till they gained substantial power or influence.

Architecture and public buildings were used to show the authority, power and the superiority over the local populations. The cemeteries at Surat were among the first public monuments created by the Europeans in India. Thus, these cemeteries in Surat present a unique set of data points to study the relationship between the natives and the immigrants. The large amounts of money spent on these ostentatious tombs was an affirmation of the elevation of their status from traders to nobles or nabobs. It was also an

affirmation that the colonizers (English and the Dutch) had the ambition and the means to grow in stature and power.

The appropriation and hybridization were on the rise till the end of the 17th century and faded thereafter. The Dutch almost entirely withdrew from India, while the English became the dominant power in India and went on to establish the Company rule. Viewed through the lens of cosmopolitanism, the colonizers used cosmopolitan values to gain entry and establish trade relations in their adopted country.

The physical manifestation of cosmopolitanism was in the appropriation of styles and language of the rulers. The Mughals who were the primary power in India at the time were believers in opulence and ornamentation. The Mughal tombs had an elaborate architectural idiom comprising finials, domes and *jalis*. Both the English and the Dutch colonizers appropriated tangible and intangible elements from Indo-Islamic architecture and Hindu temple architecture. The Dutch tombs architecturally followed the Indo-Islamic style without any hybridization. The probable reason was the fading interest of the Dutch in establishing power in India. Once the English gained power, they established their own idiom to assert superiority over the native community. Architectural appropriation further helped the English in asserting the dominance over the skyline. This helped in deciding the architectural language for the Company and the Imperial rule that followed. The appropriation of architectural form became more dominant by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the English used Baroque and a composite style that became associated with the British Raj.

In contrast to the English and the Dutch, the Armenians came to India at the behest of local rulers and stayed back as businessmen loyal to the rulers. Armenians assimilated in the country keeping their identity alive with very little appropriation of native styles, as can be seen in the chapel in Surat. Comparing cemeteries of the three immigrant populations, one can conclude that the level of stylistic appropriation is dependent on what image the immigrants wanted to project to the native populations and back in their home countries. ■

**Note:**

All photographs by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

**References**

Gokhale, Balkrishna (1979). *Surat in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Urban History of Pre-Modern India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Lang, John (1861). *Wanderings in India: And other sketches of Life in Hindostan, Churchyards*. London: Routledge.

Unwin, Simon. (1997). *Analysing Architecture*. London: Routledge.

Binbas, Evrim. (2018). Unsavoury Cosmopolitanism: Reflections on Sanjay Subrahmanyam's The Hidden Face of Surat, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, University of Bonn*. 61(1-2), 277-287.

Dr. Keller, Sarah. Curator. (2013). Port towns of Gujarat: from Kachchh to Konkan, Ahmedabad *Alliance Francoise d'Ahmedabad*. 3-32

Francaviglia, Richard V. (1971). The Cemetery as an Evolving Cultural Landscape, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 61(3). 501–509

Hosking, Susan. (2016). The Great Burial Ground at Chowringhee: Reflections on the South Park Street Cemetery at Kolkata, *Transnational Literature*. 9 (1). 1-15

Lehri, Shabbir. (2014). Evolution of tombs in Islamic Architecture, *Architecture-Time Space and People*. 26-31

Scarre, Chris. Roberts, Judith. (2005). The English Cemetery at Surat: Pre-Colonial Cultural Encounters in Western India, *Antiquaries Journal*. 85, 250-291

British Library online catalog (2009), from

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/d/019pho000000201u00029000.html>