

A Glimpse into Bikaner's Golden Age: The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata

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Abstract — *The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata stands as a magnificent testament to Bikaner's rich architectural and artistic heritage. This paper delves into the intricate details of this architectural marvel, exploring its stunning façade, exquisitely carved jharokhas, and richly adorned deevankhana. The paper analyzes the masterful use of stone carving work and the vibrant colors employed by Usta artists to create a visual spectacle. Moreover, the paper discusses the significance of the Haveli's unique Maul (Mahal), a special room adorned with golden and other bright colors. By examining the architectural features and artistic techniques employed in the construction of this Haveli, the paper aims to highlight its contribution to the cultural and historical legacy of Bikaner.*

Index Terms — *Bikaner's Havelis, Stone Carving, Wood Carving, Usta Art, Architectural Elements, Decorative Elements, Conservation of Havelis, Cultural Heritage.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bikaner, a city founded by Rao Bikaji in 1488 A. D. [1], boasts a rich architectural heritage [2]. Among its many architectural gems, the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata stands out. This magnificent Haveli, built by wealthy Maheshwari merchant Shri Baldev Das Mohata more than a century ago, offers a glimpse into Bikaner's golden age. Its present owner is Shri Raj Kumar Mohata who has undertaken significant efforts to safeguard this historic gem.

A distinctive architectural style known as 'Haveli' sprang to prominence in western India prior to India's partition [3]. Many of these Havelis were built during the 18th and 19th centuries by wealthy merchants and nobles of Jain, Maheshwari, and Agrawal communities in Bikaner who wanted to showcase their wealth and social standing. These Havelis were residential places for their families and were also used for organizing important social events. As such, Bikaner is also known as a 'City of Thousand Havelis' [4]. Among them the Havelis constructed by rich Maheshwari merchants have a special significance.

The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata showcases a unique architectural style, blending Rajput, Mughal, and European influences. It features intricate carvings, vibrant colors, and opulent interiors. The façade, gates, and pillars are exquisitely engraved and constructed, while the interior is adorned with golden Usta Kala and Aala Geela Kala. The stone carvings and paintings, depicting nature, deities, and mythological scenes, are truly mesmerizing.

This paper delves into the intricate details of this architectural marvel, exploring its stunning façade, exquisitely carved Jharokhas, and richly adorned Deevankhana. The paper analyzes the masterful use of stone carving work and the vibrant colors employed by Usta artists to create a visual spectacle. Moreover, the paper discusses the significance of the Haveli's unique Maul (Mahal), a special room adorned with golden and other bright colors. By examining the architectural features and artistic techniques employed in the construction of this Haveli, the paper aims to highlight its contribution to the cultural and historical legacy of Bikaner.

II. ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata stands as a magnificent testament to the architectural brilliance of Bikaner. Its imposing façade, intricate jharokhas, and ornate interiors reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. A closer examination of the Haveli's architectural features reveals a harmonious blend of traditional Rajput, Mughal, and European architectural styles [5].

Overview of the Haveli's Architectural Style

The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata is a stunning example of traditional Rajput architecture, blending Mughal and European styles. Key architectural features include:

- Jharokhas: Ornate balconies projecting from the walls, offering ventilation and beautiful views.

- Jaali Work: Intricate stone patterns providing privacy and ventilation.
- Central Courtyard: A common feature of traditional Indian Havelis.
- Intricate Designs: Detailed carvings on both the exterior and interior.
- Symbolism: Religious and cultural symbols reflecting the beliefs of the builders.
- Custom Designs: Years-long projects created by skilled craftsmen.
- Ornamentation: Floral, geometric, and other decorative patterns.
- Functionality: Stone carvings aid in natural cooling.
- Cultural Significance: A testament to the region's rich heritage and skilled craftsmanship.

Material and Techniques Used

- Primary Building Material:
 - This Haveli has been constructed using primarily a combination of red sandstone, and marble. The Stone carvings have usually been done on red sandstone, which has been abundant in the region and has a soft texture that makes it easy to work with. Marble and some other types of stone have also been used to create various effects, adding beauty and complexity of the carvings. High-quality lime has been used as cementing and plastering material which keeps the building cool. It has also been useful in creating wall paintings.
 - Burmese teak wood of A-grade quality has been used for building gates, windows, ceilings, and some other wooden structures. This wood is well-known for its durability, water and weather resistance, rich golden hue with fine grain, and aesthetic appeal.
 - Imported beautiful glazed tiles have been used to ornate the walls.
 - Belgium Mirrors have enhanced the beautification of the Haveli.
- Carving Techniques:
 - Stone carving is a difficult process and requires skill, patience, and extreme care. Several intricate carving techniques have been employed by the artisans to create detailed patterns and motifs on the façade and interior. Essential tools that were commonly used were Chisels, Hammers, Rifflers, Rasps, Grinders, Sandpaper, Sandbags, Brushes and safety-equipment.
- Paintwork:
 - Traditional mineral pigments were used to decorate the Haveli.

- Bright organic mineral pigments have been used for paintings..

Decorative Elements

The façade and the interior of the Suraj Narayan Mohata's Haveli [Fig. 1] have been adorned with a variety of decorative elements that contribute to its overall aesthetic appeal. Some of the most prominent decorative elements include:

- Jharokhas [Fig. 2]
- Carved Windows
- Stone Jaali Work
- Engraved Pillers
- Ornate Doorways
- Carved Wooden Ceilings
- Paintings and Murals

Thus, various decorative elements provide an aesthetic appeal and they richly contribute to the overall architectural and artistic significance of the Haveli.

Special Interior Places

The Deevankhana

The Deevankhana [Fig. 3], the heart and soul of this Haveli, is a breathtaking masterpiece. Every wall is adorned with exquisite Usta artwork [6]-[8], depicting vibrant flowers, luscious fruits, and lively birds, creating an illusion of a flourishing garden. The air is filled with the intoxicating fragrance of roses and wine, transporting visitors to a realm of sensory delight.

Six majestic pillars, each crowned with a golden mirror, stand beautifully within the Deevankhana. Ten ornate niches, framed by glass panels and intricate embellishments, line the walls. Each niche holds a fruit-filled pot, enticing a flock of colorful birds that seem to hover, eager to savor the delectable offerings.

The ceiling, a masterpiece of Burmese teakwood craftsmanship, is adorned with intricate carvings. Raised floral motifs, meticulously etched into the wood, add depth and texture to the design. The overall effect is magnificent.

A small chamber within the Deevankhana offers a captivating celestial spectacle. The ceiling is a breathtaking canvas, depicting dramatic cloudscapes

that evoke the feeling of an impending storm. Lightning flashes and rain showers are elegantly painted, while patches of blue sky and a radiant sun offer a contrasting glimpse of serenity. It can be called “Badal Mahal”. The walls are adorned with blooming roses, their sweet fragrance filling the air. The entire room is a sensory delight, transporting visitors to a world of enchantment.

The Maul: A Gilded Gem

The Maul (Mahal) of this Haveli [Fig. 4] is a true spectacle, perhaps the most stunning in all of Bikaner. Its beauty is unparalleled, a testament to the intricate artistry and opulence of the bygone era.

At the heart of the Maul, a magnificent glass flower, two feet in diameter and adorned with sixteen golden-edged leaves on its ceiling, takes center stage. The flower, encircled by a golden halo and intricate carvings, creates a breathtaking focal point [Fig. 5]. This harmonious blend of colors and textures is both elegant and awe-inspiring.

The Maul's walls are adorned with numerous golden windows and doors, some leading to the stairs and others opening onto the bustling street. This interplay of light and shadow, combined with the rich decor, creates a truly captivating ambiance.

Other Decorated Rooms

A Glimpse of Bygone Elegance

Beyond the grandeur of the Maul and Deevankhana, the Haveli boasts numerous other captivating rooms. Ascending to the second floor, one is greeted by a room adorned with a remarkable stone-carved window [Fig. 6]. This elegant, semi-circular window, seamlessly crafted without a single joint, invites visitors with its delicate floral carvings. From this vantage point, one can enjoy panoramic views of the neighborhood.

The room's teakwood ceiling, intricately carved with floral motifs, further enhances its charm. This unique ceiling, a testament to the Haveli's rich heritage, adds to the overall splendor of the space. There are other rooms also which are equally ornate [Fig. 7].

The Haveli's elegant stone staircases, adorned with imported glazed tiles, seamlessly connect its upper and lower levels. This architectural marvel, once guarded

by vigilant sentinels and graced by the presence of luxurious carriages and four-wheelers, now stands as a testament to a bygone era. Though the grandeur of those days has faded, the golden memories of its opulent past continue to shine.

III. ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES AND INFLUENCES

The artistic brilliance of the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohtaa is evident in the intricate paintings and carvings that adorn its walls and ceilings. The Usta artists, renowned for their mastery of various painting techniques, played a pivotal role in creating the visual splendor of this Haveli. Their work, influenced by Mughal, Rajput, and European artistic traditions, showcases a unique blend of styles and techniques.

The Role of Usta Artists in Decorating the Haveli

Usta artists, renowned for their exceptional skills in painting and decorative arts, played a crucial role in embellishing the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata. Their artistic contributions can be seen in various parts of the Haveli, including:

- **Wall Paintings:** The Usta artists created intricate murals depicting mythological scenes, historical events, and natural landscapes. These paintings were executed using a variety of techniques, including fresco painting and tempera painting.
- **Ceiling Decorations:** The artists adorned the ceilings with ornate patterns, floral motifs, and geometric designs. They often used a technique called "naqqashi," which involves creating intricate carvings and reliefs on plaster.
- **Door and Window Frames:** The artists embellished the door and window frames with delicate floral and geometric patterns. They often used a technique that involved inlaying wood with various materials like ivory, bone, and metal.

Analysis of Painting Techniques and Motifs

The Usta artists employed a variety of painting techniques to decorate the walls and ceilings of the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata. Some of the most common techniques include:

- **Fresco Painting:** Pigments were applied directly to wet plaster, resulting in vibrant and long-lasting murals.
- **Tempera Painting:** Pigments were mixed with a water-soluble binder, such as egg yolk, to create a durable and luminous finish.

- **Miniature Painting:** This technique involves creating detailed and miniature paintings on paper or cloth.

The motifs depicted in these paintings are diverse and often draw inspiration from various sources, including:

- **Mythological Themes:** Scenes from Hindu mythology, such as those depicting gods, goddesses, and epic tales.
- **Historical Events:** Depictions of important historical events and figures.
- **Natural Motifs:** Flowers, birds, and animals.
- **Geometric Patterns:** Abstract patterns and designs.

Influence of Rajput, Mughal and European Art on the Haveli's Decoration

The decorative arts of the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata exhibit a fascinating blend of Rajput, Mughal, and European artistic influences.

Mughal Influence:

- **Intricate Carvings:** The detailed carvings on the stone and wood elements of the haveli, particularly the jaali work, are reminiscent of Mughal architectural style.
- **Floral and Geometric Motifs:** The use of floral and geometric motifs in the paintings and carvings is a characteristic feature of Mughal art.
- **Symmetrical Layouts:** The symmetrical layout of the haveli's interior spaces and the emphasis on axial symmetry are also influenced by Mughal architectural principles.

Rajput Influence:

- **Vibrant Colors:** The use of vibrant colors in the paintings and decorations is a hallmark of Rajput art.
- **Mythological and Historical Themes:** The depiction of mythological and historical scenes in the paintings reflects the Rajput fascination with these subjects.
- **Bold and Expressive Styles:** The bold and expressive style of the paintings, with their emphasis on line and color, is characteristic of Rajput art.

European Influence:

- **Glasswork:** The use of stained glass windows and intricate glasswork patterns is reminiscent of European architectural styles.

- **Cornices:** The introduction of ornate cornices and moldings, especially in the ceilings and walls, is another European influence.

IV. PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata, a magnificent example of Bikaner's architectural heritage, faces numerous challenges. These include deterioration due to age and weather, invasive plant growth, pest damage, urbanization pressures, and a shortage of skilled craftsmen.

To preserve this heritage, the owners have implemented various conservation measures. These include regular maintenance, restoration projects, preservation of traditional techniques, collaboration with heritage experts, and public awareness campaigns.

V. CONCLUSION

The Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata stands as a magnificent testament to Bikaner's rich architectural and artistic heritage. Its intricate carvings, vibrant colors, and opulent interiors offer a glimpse into the bygone era of the city's golden age. By examining the Haveli's architectural features, artistic techniques, and historical context, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the craftsmanship and ingenuity of the artisans who created this masterpiece.

Preserving this architectural gem is crucial for safeguarding Bikaner's cultural identity. The ongoing conservation efforts, combined with increased public awareness and support, can ensure that the Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata continues to inspire and amaze future generations. As research continues, we can uncover new insights into the history, architecture, and art of this remarkable Haveli, further enriching our understanding of Bikaner's past and its enduring legacy.

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IMAGAES OF SURAJ NARAYAN MOHATA’S HAVELI



Fig. 1: Haveli of Suraj Narayan Mohata
(Source: Haveli Owner)



Fig. 2: Carved Jharokha
(Source: Haveli Owner)

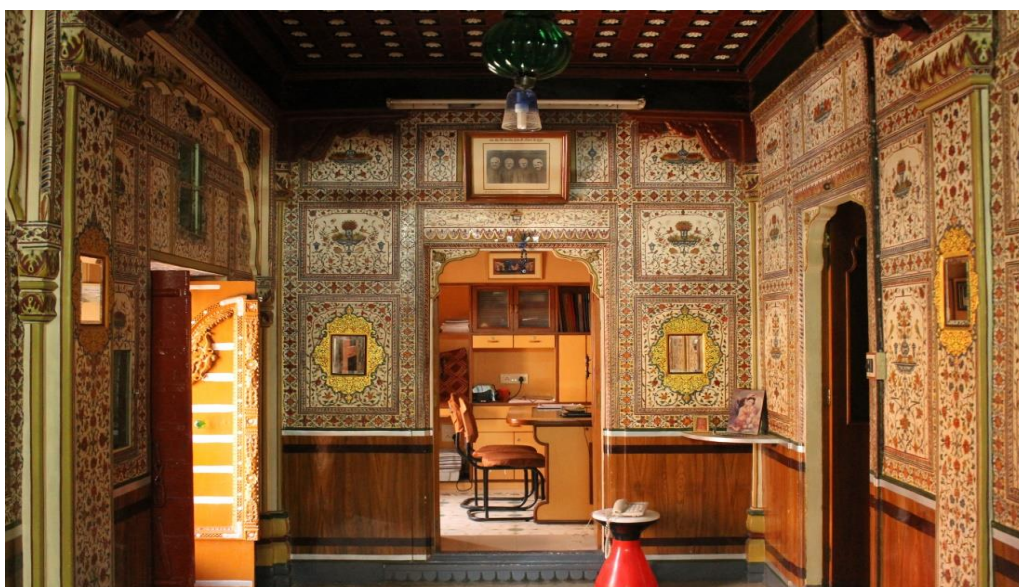


Fig. 3: Deevankhana
(Source: Haveli Owner)

IMAGAES OF SURAJ NARAYAN MOHATA'S HAVELI



Fig. 4: Maul (Mahal)
(Source: Haveli Owner)



Fig. 5: Ceiling of Maul (Mahal)
(Source: Self)

IMAGAES OF SURAJ NARAYAN MOHATA'S HAVELI



Fig. 6 : Ornate Room
(Source: Self)



Fig. 7: Another Ornate Room
(Source: Self)