



Architectural Legacy of the National College of Arts: A Study of Cultural Fusion

Dr Syed Farjood Ailya Rizvi^a, Dr. Syeda Arooj Zehra Rizvi^a

a. Department of Graphic Design, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

ARTICLE INFO

Received:

April 27, 2026

Revision Received:

June 05, 2026

Accepted:

June 06, 2026

Available Online:

June 08, 2026

Keywords:

Mayo School of Industrial Arts, architecture, art and crafts, design, colonial culture.

ABSTRACT

The research analyzed the history and architecture of the National College of Arts, earlier recognized as the Mayo School of Industrial Arts in Lahore. The architectural features are examined with the historical background of the building, besides the educational system during the colonial period. The study focuses on how native architecture was reformed during the time it was built and highlights the blend of Eastern and Western influences in art and crafts. The research documents specific architectural elements and decorative themes existing in the old structure, such as brickwork and arches. Through the analysis of various pieces of evidence, the study aims to reveal the intentions of the college's founders and patrons. It emphasizes the important role of the artists, designers and architects in shaping the building's design and overall aesthetic in Pakistan today.

Introduction

The National College of Arts (NCA), originally established as Mayo School of Industrial Arts, has played a significant role in art education in the subcontinent. This institution was established during British rule and has continued to influence art education after the partition of India. The research examines the purposes of this art institution, focusing on how it has shaped architects and architecture over the years. The aim is to examine the impact of art education on modern society, highlighting its connection to contemporary artistic practices. This study highlights various architectural features, categorizing decorative design patterns that define the college's structure. It places special emphasis on the intricate details of motifs that adorn the buildings. Notably, before this research, there were limited records documenting these decorative elements in architecture. The NCA stands as the oldest art institution in Pakistan and remains one of the leading art schools on a national level. The book "The Raj Lahore," written by Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal, discusses this subject but does not cover aspects like the site plan and details of the decorative themes of the architecture. The structure of the college showcases various embellishment styles, each reviewed and noted in this research. Key focus areas include the founder, the architect, and the decorative themes represented in the building's design. The impact of colonial patrons and their influence on local art and craft is a critical aspect of this work. The

* Correspondence to: Department of Graphic Design, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
E-mail address: farjood.cad@pu.edu.pk (D. S. F. A. Rizvi).



photographs are added by the author unless stated otherwise.

2. The Drive to Build Mayo School of Arts Goals

The Arts and Crafts Movement from 1860-1910 was the response to the Industrial Revolution. While negating industrial mass, it promoted art and craft pieces. The movement provoked the British to launch art schools in British India (World Heritage Encyclopedia n.d.). The need to develop craft wares from Punjab for foreign markets emerged. The Mayo School of Industrial Arts was founded in 1875 to commemorate the memory of Lord Earl Mayo, the Indian viceroy who was murdered (Tarar 2018). The roots of this institution belonged to London, the capital of the colonial empire. The early nineteenth century was the period when Britain dominated world trade.

In the third decade, French and German silks and household luxury items grasped a superior share of the market. This was due to the better quality of design. Consequently, to remain in that competition, the need for educated artisans emerged. In response, the School of Design London was developed in 1837. Later, twenty-one schools were founded by 1852. They aimed to develop skills for industrial design. However, these schools did not endure because artisans were not interested or needed to attend such institutions. The Board of Trade in 1848 set the reforms for these schools. This made various teams visit France and Germany to investigate the system of design and art education. A delegation consisting of artists and architects was sent to attend a French National Exhibition in 1849. In return, these artists insisted on holding up an exhibition in London. The exhibition was supported by Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort. It was held in 1851 in London's Hyde Park, in a building Crystal Palace. The Exhibition was successful. The main reason for the success was wares from India. Known aesthetes and intellectuals like Gustave Flaubert, Gottfried Semper and host Ruskin criticized the mechanized industry in Europe as compared to the handicrafts of textile, metalworks and ivory works from the East, especially India. Due to colonialization, the work was superior in harmony of colour, rich material and application exhibiting Oriental fashion (Pervaiz Vandal 2006, 109-110).

This exhibition generated two branches, which later on shaped the art education in colonial India.

- (i) Reforms of art education
- (ii) Trade in oriental wares

The reformation of art schools developed state-sponsored art education. In Brompton, the new museum attached to the art school was founded and later retitled South Kensington. Henry Cole, one of the organizers, was put in charge of the museum and school. The funds generated by the Exhibition helped to purchase land to collect and display goods in a museum tied to the school. Approximately one-third of the wares were Indian. It served art students and the museum. A great contribution was made in this way to the arts and crafts movement by William Morris. Especially the textile design took inspiration from the Orient. This promoted Indian arts and crafts to Europe and established Indian arts as an asset.

Schools were founded in Madras in 1850, Calcutta in 1854, and Bombay in 1857. All these schools were at the discretion of the British market demands. In the memorandum regarding a school of Art and Industry addressed to the Registrar, Punjab University College in 1872, Baden Powell stated in 1864 that due to the lack of funds, it was delayed. In 1868 committee agreed and the process started on 24 September 1874. The Secretary of State for India endorsed to beginning of the School for Industrial Art and Design. John Lockwood Kipling was appointed as Principal on a salary of Rs 800 per month. Ibid (115).

3. Construction of Mayo School of Arts, Lahore

In 1881, Rām Singh had spent six years and became the pick of the students for Kipling. The building project of Mayo School of Arts started. Kipling wanted to keep the school near the Museum. He surveyed according to the range of proposals. He did not like to hire houses, though and preferred the Post Office building most suitable for the school. The construction of the Museum was also part of Kipling's plan as a founder of the institution. He suggested making the structure distinctive and artistic to convey the native touch. He suggested Casper Purdon Clarke or Major Mant, who was on distinct duty to the Government of India, should furnish the general design and details of the building. Although he strongly proposed that, for the ornamental details, the young carpenters were more suitable. He conceived the building in an Oriental style and urged to execute Ibid. (145-46) Kipling intended to describe the fact that the local draftsmen and carpenters must be included to ornate the building. He had planned to project this art school according to his philosophies. So, no other than Rām Singh was already in mind for the construction project he envisioned. Kipling's proposal was submitted to the Government in June 1875 by the Officiating Secretary of the Public Works Department. In reply, it was informed that the Design of the School of Arts must be treated alone. The construction of the Museum was also put aside. Kipling responded in his report in 1876-77 that the building did not require

excessive decoration, as it was not required. The preparation of the design in collaboration with the Executive Engineer would help to prepare the study of samples.

The decline of the Mughal Empire set the stage for the British administrators to establish a visual language, leading to a synthesis to blend the colonial and Mughal architectural features. Which emerged as Indo-Saracenic architecture (Jindal 2023). It incorporated the Moorish architectural styles of incorporating round arches, vegetative design, Arab calligraphy and decorative tilework. The arches appeared in different shapes, sizes and designs, blending influences from various cultures (Moorish Architecture and the Cultural Bridge between Morocco and Spain 2019). Some of its key features include horseshoe arches, geometric patterns, and arabesque motifs. The site for the school was selected by 1876. The location was on the main road of Colonial Lahore, the Mall near the Station Library. the site was carved out of the gardens of Wazir Khan. It was near the Exhibition Building (present Tollinton Market) and housed the Museum. Kipling held the design of the school building and attached his trusted student Rām Singh. In 1882 building was completed and became functional. The Public Works Department of Colonial India participated as a construction management agency. The design office was attached to prepare construction drawings as per standard. The staff was trained at Roorkee according to the European design of buildings. Thus, the Executive Engineer was the key character at that site. So, Kanhiya (Kanhaiya) Lal and Kipling were credited as designers of the Mayo School of Arts. Rām Singh is mentioned only assisting them (Pervaiz Vandal 2006, 146-48). A memorandum in 1911 for the Victorian Order acknowledged Rām Singh, a student at Mayo School under Kipling.

4. Location and Architectural Details of Mayo School of Arts

The structure of the building is brick class. The façade of the building is towards the north-facing Mall Road. The building is situated adjoining the Lahore Museum and opposite the Punjab University Lahore. The renowned Zamzama gun is memorialized by Rudyard Kipling. It stands on the traffic island opposite the college on the Mall. The gun was cast in 1762 in Lahore by Shah Nazir metalsmith for the Mughal viceroy Muin-ul-Mulk (Helaine Fendelman 2017). When the construction project was executed, the building consisted of three wings around the courtyard. The north wing facing the Mall was double story. The ground floor of the north wing was used for the offices of principal, vice principal and clerks. It also had a Gallery for the works prepared by students and teachers for the exhibition 'Ibid, 149'.

The first floor over the north wing had a large hall 63 feet by 24 feet. The western wing comprised three studios. These studios were used for elementary education in geometry, model drawing and carpentry. The rooms in the southern wing were used for modelling plasterwork and painting. These rooms were huge. The north wing rooms were 18 feet high. The western and southern wings were 30 feet high. The dimensions reached 39 feet by 31 feet in the west wing to 46 feet by 28 feet in the south wing. The light source was specifically added to the design of the College. The large windows are made to fully use the northern light and in west skylights. The light source for the south wing was created through a corridor on the north and large windows. The verandas on the western and southern sides of the wings were designed for the extreme heat of the Punjab plains. It was planned to protect the rooms from the sun in summer. The architect Rām Singh used his knowledge and skill of the native art on the details of brickwork to soften the impact of heavy brick surfaces. The moulded ornamental bricks were applied all over the building. The terracotta jāl work in fenestration. The word fenestration is used for window and door openings in the building (Barnsdale 2018). Fenestration was implemented only on the construction on the back side of the southern wing. The façades of the building are divided into panels, a plinth, a cornice, lintel. The sill levels are highlighted with intricate molded brick patterns varying in ornamental schemes. The term sill means a flat stone used beneath windows, doors, and masonry openings. It is a horizontal unit at the bottom of the exterior structure (Select Stone 2024). The north wing façade is decorated with turrets and chattrīs. The word chattrīs is used for a canopy and umbrella used to protect from rain (Afzaal 2018, 15).

The ornamental decorations under the eaves enhance the stylishness of the surface. A specially designed marble drinking fountain was placed in the centre of the courtyard 'Ibid, 149-151'. (see figure 1-2)



Figure 1. View of the northern wing facing courtyard Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 2. View of the western wing facing courtyard Source: Photograph October 20, 2024

The plan of the building and sizes of the north, south and western wings are mentioned in general. The site plan was prepared by Zahid Usman associate professor and project director at National College of Arts. The plan provides an overall view of the structure and its exact location. Kipling engaged Pinto the School modeler to prepare the students for the series of panels with sculptures in high relief of animals and foliage. These were not incorporated into the brick façade. The frieze designs in the interior walls of the west and south wings still exist. The panel of wall painting in the upper room of the north wing was made by the student. Kipling had prepared and planned for each student to work on the designs of the panel with the name of the student 'Ibid, 151' (see Figure 3-17)

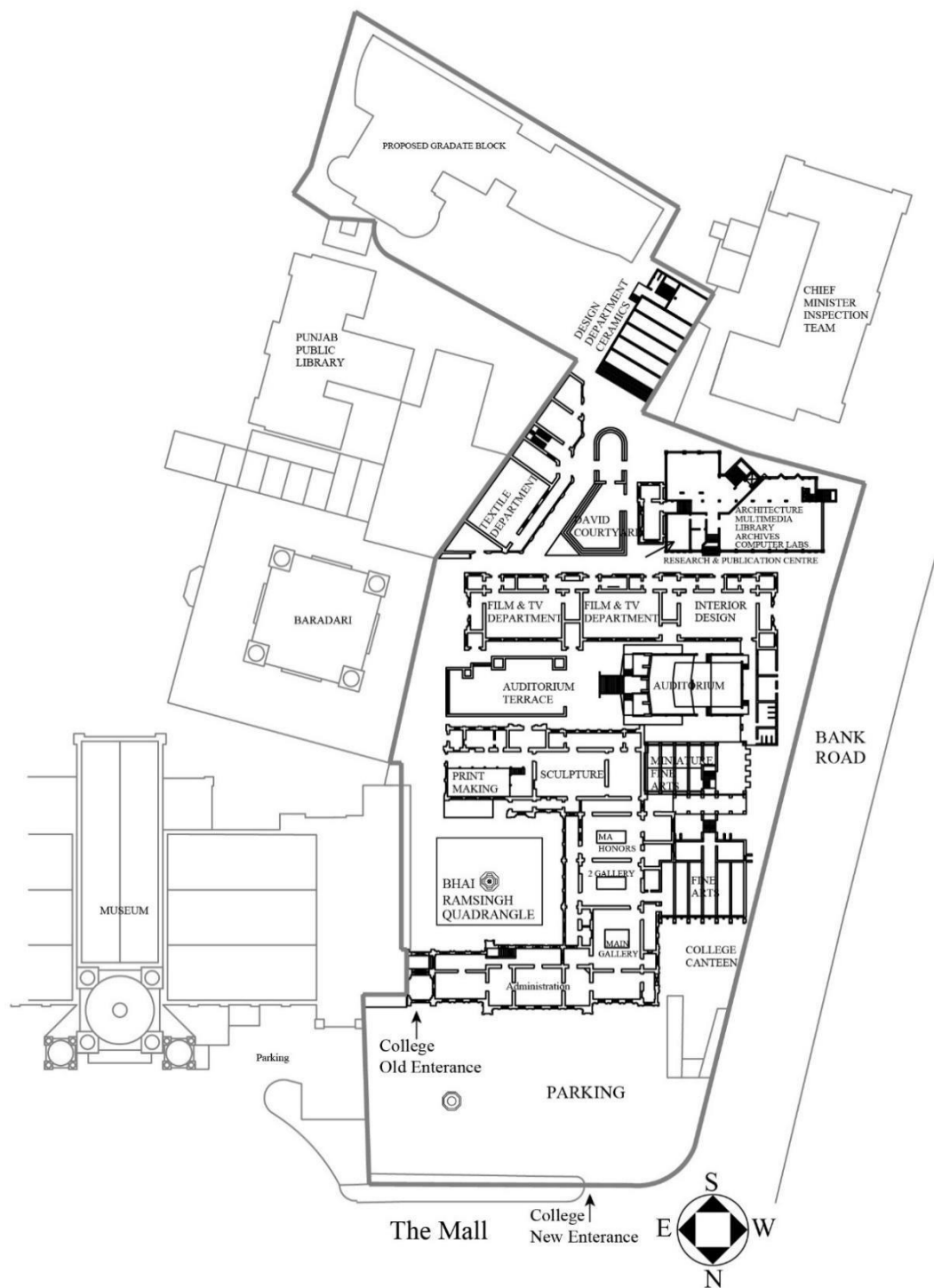


Figure 3. Site Plan National College of Arts, Lahore 2017

Source: Prepared by Zahid Usman associate professor and project director at National College of Arts, Lahore.



Figure 4. Frieze in the interior walls of western and southern wings of National College of Arts, Lahore 2017

Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 5. The double-storey north wing facing Mall Road

Source: Photograph October 20, 2024

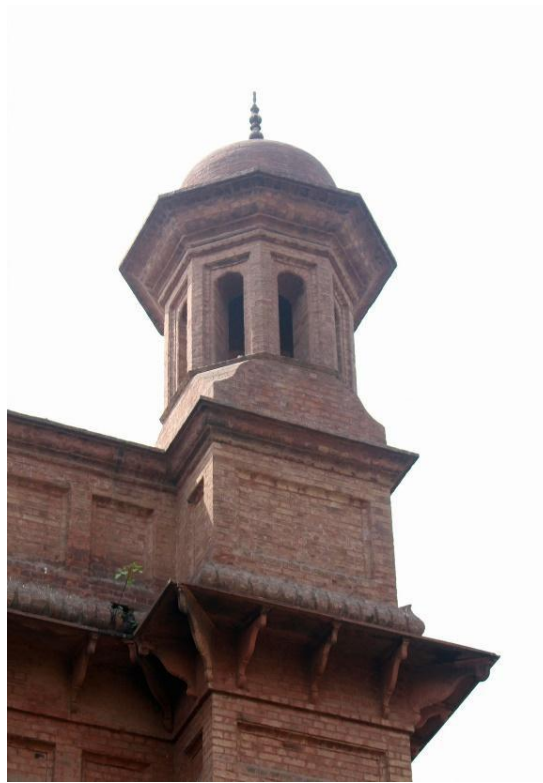


Figure 6. A turret on the north wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 7. A small domical turret on the north wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 8. Details of moulded brick designs on the frieze inside the northern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 9. Details of moulded brick decoration under the sill on northern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 10. Details of moulded brick decoration on western and southern wings Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 11. Details of moulded brick decoration on the cornice of the southern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 12. Details of moulded brick decoration on the façade of the southern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 13. Decoration details on the eastern wall of the southern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 14. Decoration details on the back wall of the southern wing Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 15. Close-up of moulded brick design details at the building's backside the southern wing

Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 16. Terracotta Lattice or Jāli work on the building at the back of the southern wing type 4 Source: Photograph October 20, 2024



Figure 17. Multifoil arched windows for light and ventilation on the building at the back of the southern wing

Source: Photograph October 20, 2024

The College has a pointed arch entrance with two domical minarets sides. The turrets on the north wing are mounted with hemispherical domes. The College's slogan is Persian and written in *Nasta 'līq* script with black letters on a white marble slab under the battlement. The slogan states the motto of the College *Kasab i-kamāl kun kih Azīz i-Jahān ḡawī*, meaning seek excellence in your work, so you can be admired by the world. The friezes and arches are decorated with molded brick patterns of types (see Figure 18).

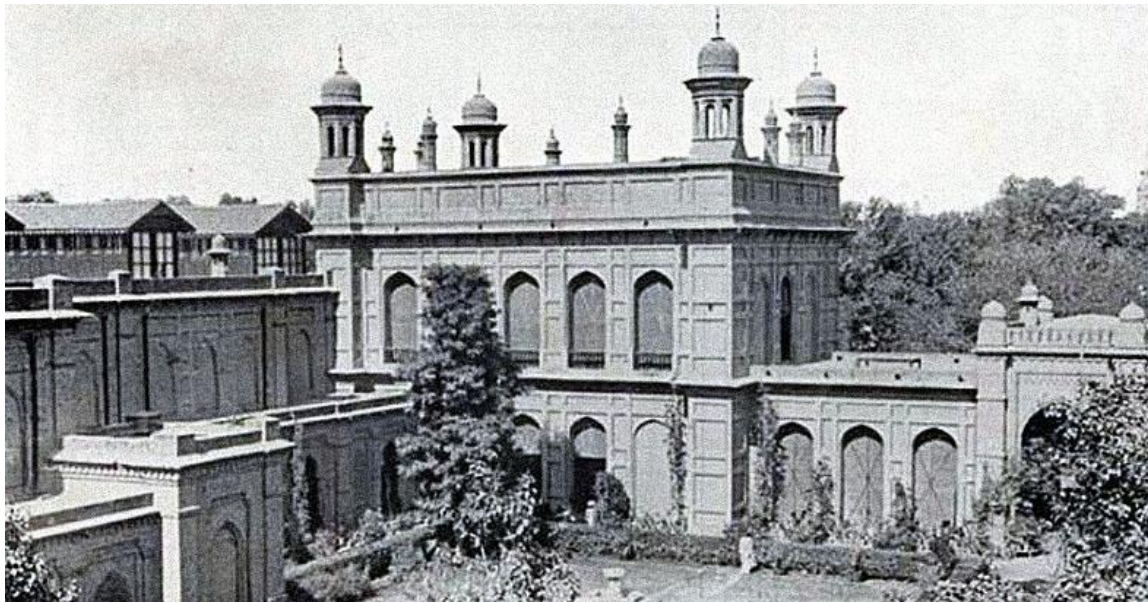


Figure 18. The Mayo School of Arts (now NCA) Lahore 1911

Source: <http://lahore.city-history.com/mayo-school-of-industrial-art-later-national-college-of-arts.html>

It took 10 years when the area of the courtyard to be enclosed. It was due to the construction of Victoria Technical Institute on the eastern side. The extension was designed to the south wing in 1888-89. Bhaī Rām Singh designed all these constructions. The design schemes are harmonious and still maintain their elegance. The executive Engineer Ra'ī Bahadur Kanhiya (Kanhaiyya) Lal was the construction manager. Additions were made to Mayo School of Arts constructions during 1889-1890. Ra'ī Bahadur Ganga Rām was the Executive Engineer who carried out many works with Rām Singh. The opportunity to practice the theories made Rām Singh an exceptional student. The training combined both contemporary theories with a practice-oriented study of native architecture. This unified the view with a thoughtful aptitude of the institution. He neither abandoned traditions nor contemporary ideas in architectural designs. He made a unity between the two aspects of architecture in a creative and splendid way (Pervaiz Vandal 2006, 152).

The Mayo School of Arts' New Identity

The Mayo School was upgraded to the National College of Arts in 1958. Professor Sonnenburg, who was a sculptor at JJ School, continued as principal of the college. He brought the most important deviations in the syllabus for the progression of the art disciplines. Later on, Shakir Ali thrived as Principal from 1961-69. The National College of Arts was recognized in 1963 as the premier art institution in Pakistan. Thus, it was detached from the Department of Industries and considered the Education Department with an autonomous Board of Governors. Its achievements were recognized in 1972 and it further developed as a center of excellence in the visual arts. It came under the Federal Government and became autonomous.

The College was granted degree-awarding status in 1985. The National College of Arts is authorized to carry out graduate programs. The Master's degrees in Visual Arts and M.Phil. leading to PhD were also launched in 1999. The project for the restoration of archives and records of the Mayo School of Arts was established in the same year. The graduate program in Multimedia Arts was started in September 2001. The Department of Musicology, Film and Television was included in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The College was promoted to university status by the Prime Minister of Pakistan in June 2011 (Shahzad 2015). All these progressions made the National College of Arts a prime institution for art education. The pre-colonial Mayo school was succeeded by the genre of artists who contributed to both national and international forums.

During the Mughals, the introduction of Western art was peripheral. Whereas the Colonial introduction of art was to execute the cultural values of the West in India. The entire philosophy reinforced nineteenth-century salon art. The launch of British institutions transformed the meaning and function of art in India. The elite artists were individual initiators, substituting the local artisans. Aristocratic patrons were replaced with art societies. The art schools served to indoctrinate Western taste for

subjects. It changed the status of the artist. The artists became individuals beyond social ties. The artists began to follow their destiny and ideals (Mitter 1994).

5. Conclusion

Lahore has lived with many cultures since it was established as a city. After the arrival of the British, it was influenced by their language, religion, culture and literature. These features transformed the local way of living and eventually buildings. The colonial policies utilized the available manpower and material for their progress. The ornamentation and architectural features documented in this research are one of the sources that fulfill the gap in research regarding the building details of NCA. It preserved the architectural elements catalogue for future studies. The Museum building seems more significant and comprehensive than the College. However, a close observation reveals the characteristic features of the construction and design. This helps to understand the importance of institutions besides the Museum for colonial agendas. All the discussion above highlights the characteristics of architecture and style of construction, blending both Eastern and Western styles. It clarifies the purpose and intentions of the patrons who set the trend of the building styles in the Indian subcontinent.

References

- Afzaal, Muhammad Sohaib. 2018. "Chhatri element in the Mughal Architecture." *Academia.edu* 1-10.
https://www.academia.edu/44125011/Chhatri_element_in_the_Mughal_Architecture.
- n.d. *Ancient-Symbols.com*. Accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.ancient-symbols.com/symbols-influence-on-history.html>.
- Banerjee, Jacqueline. n.d. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/design/kiplingjl/bio.html>. Accessed 2017.
- Barnard, Malcolm. 2006. *Graphic Design As Communication*. New York: Routledge 270 Madison Ave.
- Barnsdale, George. 2018. www.georgebarnsdale.co.uk. March 8. Accessed October 25, 2024.
<https://georgebarnsdale.co.uk/blog/fenestration/>.
- Chaturvedi, Patanjali Nandan. 2009. *Encyclopedia of Indian Art and Architecture*. New Delhi: MD Publication Pvt Ltd.
- Eskilson, Stephen J. 2007. *Graphic Design a New History*. London: Laurance King Publishing Ltd.
- Helaine Fendelman, Joe Rosson. 2017. www.santamariatimes.com. July 27. Accessed October 25, 2024.
https://santamariatimes.com/lifestyles/home-and-garden/treasures-in-your-attic-cannon-is-a-model-of-famous-zamzama/article_3cedcoa2-d309-5698-bbd3-5c47b8509005.html.
- Hollis, Richard. 1994, 2001. *Graphic Design A Concise History*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
2015. <http://lahore.city-history.com/places/mayo-school-of-industrial-art-later-national-colle/>. Accessed April 30, 2017.
- Ian Noble, Russell Bestly. 2016. *Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methods in Graphic Design*. 3. London: Bloombury Publishing.
- Ibrahim, Asma. 2011. *Mazaar, Bazaar*. Karachi: Noorani printing & Packaging Industry.
- Jindal, Ar. Ishita. 2023. *The Architect's Diary.com*. December 21. Accessed October 25, 2024.
<https://thearchitectsdiary.com/indo-saracenic-architecture-20-historic-landmarks-in-the-country/>.
- Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. 2011. *Mazaar, Bazaar*. Karachi: Noorani printing & Packaging Industry.
- Mitter, Partha. 1994. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922*. New York: Cambridge university press.
- Paracha, Nadeem F. 2014. *Dawn Today's Paper*. May 29. Accessed September 20, 2020.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1109105>.
- Pervaiz Vandal, Sajida Vandal. 2006. *The Raj Lahore and Bhai Ram Singh*. Lahore: Research and Publication Centre, National College of Arts, The Mall, Lahore, Pakistan.
- Shahzad, Siddique. 2015. <http://lahore.city-history.com/places/mayo-school-of-industrial-art-later-national-colle/>. February 3. Accessed May 1, 2017.
- SINGH, DR AMRIK. n.d. https://sikhchic.com/architecture/bhai_ram_singhthe_grand_architect. Accessed April 30, 2017.
- Tarar, Nadeem Omar. 2018. "JOHN LOCKWOOD KIPLING, RAM SINGH AND THE MAYO SCHOOL OF ARTS, LAHORE." *Academia.edu* 1-21.
- World Heritage Encyclopedia. n.d. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/mayo_school_of_arts_lahore. Accessed April 30, 2017.
- Manager, Web, ed. 2019. www.gazette.one. December 9. Accessed October 25, 2024. <https://www.gazette.one/moorish-architecture-and-the-cultural-bridge-between-morocco-and-spain/>.
2024. www.selectstone.com. December 28. <https://www.selectstone.com/glossary/>.