

Depiction of Elephants in the Architecture of Rashtrapati Bhavan by

Lutyens

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ABSTRACT

The elephant is one of the most loved animals. It is a byword for strength and wisdom. They have been depicted in Indian architecture as temple bearers. This paper will discuss the depiction of elephants by Edwin Landseer Lutyens in the architecture of Rashtrapati Bhavan or President House of India, which was known as Government House or Viceroy House during British Rule. The architecture of this place is very interesting and fascinating and is a combination of Indo-European styles. Many animal figurines have been introduced by Lutyens in the architecture of Rashtrapati Bhavan but most prominently he had introduced elephants in various locations across the place.

Most of the elephant figurines have been carved in stone on the main entrance of President House and while they seem to guard the entrance, their importance extends far more than their present-day use as working animals. Lutyens understood their importance in Indian mythology. On the north and south sunken road entrances also Lutyens had introduced huge elegantly carved elephants in red sand stone, the canopies above them seem like howdahs or seats. This can be compared with the elephant rows carrying the world mountain Meru at the Kailasha temple of Ellora. The elephant also frequently appears in Lutyens's drawings and sketches, and he transformed its benign solidity most effectively in his architecture.

The State Banquet Hall of President House also has elephant trunks depicted in wooden panelling all over on the upper sides. Other examples are the procession paintings on the side walls of Ashoka Hall which depict the King's procession going on elephants, horses and camels. The paintings of Ashoka Hall known as State Ball Room in the Vice Regal period is adorned by these paintings in fresco style which were done by an Italian painter, Collonello with the help of twelve Indian painters, probably inspired by the fact that the elephants not only guard the palace as symbols of strength but they are also a regular fixture in all great processions of India whether religious or political.

Another interesting example is the Pergola or the shaded device made of red sandstone used in the Mughal Garden of President House by Lutyens. In the structure he created a statically

balanced system of short beams that were procured in balance by decorated stone weights, which resemble the trunk of elephants.

Thus my paper will take into account different aspects of the depiction of elephants by Lutyens in the architecture of President House. The paper will also take into account the use of elephants in the architecture of North Block and South Block located exactly on the north and south sides of President House designed by Lutyen's partner Herbert Baker.

Keywords: *Rashtrapati Bhavan/ President House, Edwin Landseer Lutyens, elephant figurines*

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