

3. Merchant Houses as Spectacles of Modernity

The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image.

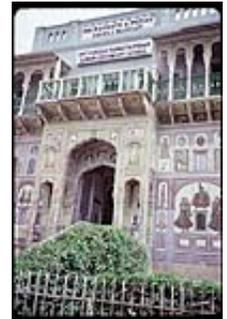
— Guy Dubord 1

The Marwaris today have completely abandoned Shekhawati, leaving their havelis in the care of guardians who live sparsely without the means to keep people from pillaging them. Some of the houses are occupied by destitute squatter families, who, for a couple of rupees, eagerly hasten to open the doors for visitors. An association, founded by Ramesh Jangid and Catherine Ripou, attempts to protect the painted towns and plans for a museum project are under consideration. But the rich Marwaris, upon whom it falls to restore these homes, are much too caught up in the rough and tumble of the great Indian metropolises, to come back into the tiny lanes of Shekhawati.

— Eliane Georges 2

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This chapter examines the production of visually spectacular ancestral houses by migrant merchants in colonial South Asia between 1860 and 1930, as well as the recent transformation of these now-abandoned homes into new objects of visual consumption. I primarily consider the elaborately painted houses belonging to the migrant Marwari traders of northern India in the Shekhawati region of eastern Rajasthan, and also comment upon the South Indian ornamental houses built by the Chettiar merchants in Madras Presidency, now known as Tamil Nadu. 3



The numerous small towns that make up Shekhawati—such as Nawalgarh, Fatehpur, Jhunjhunu, Mandawa, and Sikar—contain dozens of spectacularly painted mansions. These palatial Marwari courtyard houses, known as *haveli*, are characterized by a colorful pastiche of vivid wall paintings covering exterior and interior surfaces. These vibrantly colored painted frescos feature subjects ranging from scenes in the epic *Mahabharata* to European-manufactured train engines. The paintings juxtapose hybrid images of battle scenes from Hindu epics with pictures of lonely Englishwomen listening to gramophones, and depict steam-engine locomotives alongside portraits of Rajput princesses. A picture known as 'flying Krishna' depicts the charioteer hero of the *Mahabharata* and his consort Radha flying through the sky in a winged motorcar.

The South Indian mansions I mention here, which bear



remarkable similarity to the Marwari *haveli*, were built in the Chettiar homeland, commonly known as Chettinadu. Also organized around a series of courtyards, the outer portions of the Chettiar houses feature painted carvings and gargoyles of British colonial officials and Hindu deities like *Lakshmi*. Western Christian cherub and Madonna figures placed on the upper rooftops face outward to the local public. Inside, the Chettiar courtyard houses feature luxurious household implements obtained in the Chettiar overseas trade. These include Italian chandeliers and inlaid parquet marble floors in inner and outer verandas, as well as intricate Burmese teak carvings surrounding doors, entryways, and ceilings.

In this chapter I discuss the decorated merchant houses in order to address three general concerns. First, by using interdisciplinary methodology from history and anthropology, I explore why diasporic trading communities, like the Marwaris and the Chettiars, have felt the need to create an identity for themselves architecturally and visually through the development of hybrid forms of vernacular domestic architecture. The domestic architecture of commercial groups in India is a fascinating area of research, although admittedly much less studied than other forms, especially the religious architecture of prominent temples, mosques, and mausoleums like the Taj Mahal, or that of various ruling elites. Significant scholarly attention, for example, has been paid to the architecture of royal palace households, ⁴ imperial forms of domestic architecture under the Raj, ⁵ and disciplinary and exclusionary aspects of colonial urban planning. ⁶ Less notice has been given to the architectural transformation of the dwellings of migrant, intermediary trading groups and middlemen capitalists. Therefore, I wish to introduce an important visual dimension to issues of migrancy, diaspora, deterritorialization, and other aspects of globalization currently being explored by other scholars.

My second concern is to examine how the mansions relate to other proximate architectural forms and become associated with the region as an index of the local neighborly relations of migration and return within which housing style plays a part. The construction of ancestral mansions—for ancestors who never lived in them—constitutes a complex set of visual practices. As I will suggest, it represented an attempt to elaborate a devotional *bhakti*-centered identity of the families in the community through regional ties, yet with an explicit acknowledgement of the hybrid modernity of British rule in India. Notably, the migrant merchants' homes in their new cities of domicile such as Calcutta and Madras—where they actually lived and amassed their fortunes—did not elaborate the *bhakti* themes, but drew more directly upon the royal symbols of architecture in their former localities. By locating the Marwari *haveli* and Chettiar mansions in their local



social and architectural contexts, I hope to show how the "region," both real and imagined, still has an important place in the transregional histories I examine here.

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Finally, I will argue that these empty mansions are being rapidly appropriated by international tourism, becoming new objects of visual consumption and thereby transforming spaces of the private into spaces of public access. Visual practices in India have to be understood as part of a global and capitalist modernity, after all, and not just in terms of India's premodern past. Through practices of tourism, spatial geographies of diasporic identity formation are being recreated through a visual orientation to the past. I consider the history of the paintings and decorations and the kinds of visual practices they have enabled by being seen by Indians and foreign tourists. The discussion of "memory-places" in the work of Pierre Nora ⁷ helps me to illuminate the historical relationship between migrant merchants in an age of colonial capitalism and the production of one type of visual spectacle in India. My concern here is with visual narratives as representative of history, memory, migration, and rootedness, and with how visual objects both underpin and transform such representations of the past, present, and future. The *havelis* are spectacular in part because they have become sites that evoke memories—of homelands, of ancestors, and of Rajasthan—which are visually instantiated by the paintings on the walls.



Though the Marwaris and the Chettiars built and decorated their houses independently of each other, and as far as we know did not collaborate in the design and construction of their houses, a number of remarkable similarities prompts their comparison. The ancestral houses of each community were typically built between the 1860s and 1930s by migrant traders who had left their homelands in search of the riches to be earned through the vast trading networks that attended the development of colonial capitalism. The global cotton crisis of the 1860s, caused by the collapse of the American cotton industry, along with the advent of railroad travel, prompted merchants to migrate eastward as cotton traders and become part of the diasporic trading networks that stretched from Rajasthan to the colonial cities of Calcutta and Bombay. As these traders quickly emerged as the new capitalist class in India, their multiple aspirations—like those of the "new rich" in any capitalist culture—included attempting to gain interlocking forms of political, economic, and symbolic power.

In the case of both the Marwaris and the Chettiars, the migrants went "abroad" to make their fortunes. In search of trade and financial success, the Marwaris traveled by foot, camel, and riverboat from their home villages in the Princely States of Rajasthan to small towns and the colonial capitals of Bombay and Calcutta in British India. The Chettiars left their Tamil

homelands and sailed to Ceylon, Burma, and other places in island and mainland Southeast Asia. After they earned massive wealth through the hard work of buying and selling, and saved by frugal living in their newly adopted domiciles, the emigrant traders and moneylenders sent money —(and sometimes even materials) back to their place of origin to construct and decorate elaborately decorated mansions.

Visual Spectacles and Indian Capitalism

The idea of the merchant house as a visual spectacle needs to be understood historically as part of capitalist modernity in India, and not as a resurgence of feudal display, as it has been interpreted by some theorists of European modernity. Far from being in decline, as Huizinga would have it, ⁸ the visual is an essential part of Indian modernity and becomes transformed at critical social junctures. The production of these ancestral houses as a form of visual spectacle can be understood, I argue, as part of a particular moment of historical transformation in colonial India. The construction of such magnificent houses attests to how the newly rich (and increasingly confident) merchant classes sought to visually translate their recent wealth into new forms of social status in their homelands and beyond.

Though Marwari and Chettiar mansions have been considered ostentatious by many generations of both proximate and non-local viewers, they do not simply mimic the architectural styles of the local ruling classes. The architectural style of the *haveli* shares with Rajput architecture many similar Indo-Islamic elements—cusped arches, fluted columns, and courtyard structure—but the range in visual themes of the frescoes exceeds the Rajput styles. On the one hand, the paintings self-consciously appropriate symbols of the modern institutions of European culture, such as the railroad, motorcar, European women, and the uniformed soldier, and visually deploy these images as a means of suggesting the merchants' own new cosmopolitan, modern outlook. These paintings of Europeans on the mansions 'return the gaze' to depict a colonial modernity, often clearly from an Indian point of view, and imbue the images with a striking heteroglossia that no doubt contributes to the current popularity of such images with modern tourists.

What is also particularly striking about the merchants' mansions, and a second reason for their spectacular presence, is the way that the houses display these hybrid images associated with foreign rulers, the British, alongside of images of gods and goddesses associated with medieval traditions of *bhakti* (religious piety). Here the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous in the visual form suggests a syncretism of rival aesthetics, through which colonial power only partially mediates a space of authorization.

⁹ Migrant merchants used a hybrid form of painted



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architecture—in itself a form of visual practice—to both announce and renew their identity as pious sons of the soil, but with a cosmopolitan worldview requisite to their aspirations of becoming new major players on a national stage. [10](#)

The paintings in the *bhakti* style quite self-consciously elaborate religious themes that are outward expressions of (and that make visible) the communities' professed devotional sentiments. This important difference suggests that merchants did not wish directly and aggressively to challenge the authority and status of regional royalty, but that they instead sought to legitimate their rising economic and social status through a visual performance and adaptation of traditional Vaishya



religiosity rooted in *bhakti* devotionism. This could be seen as an instance of local mimicry, such as described by Bhabha, [11](#) where signs of aristocracy, albeit "not quite," are appropriated in a transformative practice. By creating ancestral houses for ancestors who never lived in them, migrant merchants sought to acquire symbols of cultural power to correspond with their new economic success in British-controlled foreign lands. In short, by using such visual displays on their spectacular mansions built in their homelands, they attempted to shore up their reputations as sons of the local soil.

Such highly imaginative displays of vernacular architecture and decoration in the built environments of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, then, speak to the visual dimensions of migrancy and diaspora in the context of colonial capitalism. The development of transregional trading networks among migrant commercial groups such as the Marwaris and the Chettiars developed first through the ascendancy of regional princely states after Mughal decline. [12](#) These commercial groups began a dramatic, even meteoric rise to success, which coincided with the burgeoning economic and political power of the British, especially after the development of rail transportation in the 1860s. The fact that these migrant merchants felt confident enough to display their amassed wealth through fancy decorations on ancestral houses in their homelands reflects also the changing constellations of patronage structures under colonial rule. The construction of Marwari and Chettiar ancestral houses marks the moment of the ascendancy of the capitalist classes in India and the traders' shift in allegiances from local royalty to the British and their increasingly powerful commercial interests.

The painted houses of both Marwari and Chettiar

families draw upon the architectural styles of local regional rulers, and yet announce the cosmopolitanism acquired by the commercial communities in their work abroad and subsequent exposure to the European presence in India. By incorporating images of the British and their increasing cultural, economic, and technological hegemony, the paintings signify a tacit accommodation to the British as the new rulers of the region. Through their avowed hybridization of British artifacts and local devotional themes, the houses signify as well an acknowledgement of the British presence in the urban spheres of commerce, politics, and technology. At the same time, as spectacles, the painted houses make visible the rising autonomy of merchant groups and their celebration of *bhakti* religiosity *vis-à-vis* their local royal patrons, whose crowns were becoming increasingly hollow in the face of British colonial domination.

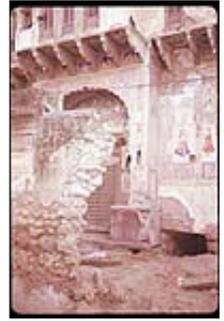


The wider context of practices of religious gifting and the dynamic moral economy of the bazaar is of importance here. For trading groups such as the Marwaris and the Chettiars, the construction of the decorated ancestral houses was enabled by a framework of global capitalism, but it also, importantly, intersected with the traders' concerns for providing philanthropy and charity, especially the establishment of religious and educational institutions. Over at least the last century, the diasporic Marwaris in Calcutta and Bombay and the Chettiars in Madras and Madurai have both maintained ties with their homelands through a number of changing social and cultural links with their ancestral villages, including building the ancestral homes. Hindu and Jain religious traditions promised merit for building projects for public welfare, including temples, schools, step wells, water tanks, and pilgrim's lodges. Marwari merchants in Calcutta and Bombay sent money back to Rajasthan for these activities. The Marwaris also built cow-protection sheds and cenotaph memorials known as *chhatris* (literally, umbrellas) with pillared domes to commemorate the lives of wealthy merchant families, such as the Goenkas of Nawalgarh.

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As Peter Nabokov has recently suggested for the Chettiar houses, these forms of vernacular domestic architecture may have "been ways for mediating between the caste's self-image of religious piety and charitability with their financially-winning implication in British colonialism." ¹³ Chettiar families also set aside earnings for alms and charities, and built resting-places for visiting travellers and pilgrims. In addition, the Chettiars were well known for taking care of cows; they would buy and maintain cows and give the milk to the local Shiva temple. Even though mansion-building ceased in the 1930s, many philanthropic projects, including the establishment of schools and temples, continued to be carried out among Chettiars and Marwaris in their respective homelands.

The old mansions of the Marwaris and the Chettians today stand largely deserted and increasingly dilapidated, shadows of their former glory. Here the similarity between the general outlines of the history of the Marwaris and the Chettians to some extent diverges. Although as a group the Marwaris have maintained their financial success well past independence, their families have tended to largely neglect the houses out of a seeming lack of interest, seeing them as no longer being of value to the family. For many Chettian families, however, severe financial losses suffered from the nationalist movement and independence of Burma in 1948 forced many to sell off antiques and



even the houses themselves. A growing number of thrift and pawn shops in the towns of Chettinadu retail valuable household objects scavenged from the houses, while the decorated houses in the small towns themselves attract visitors who come to view them and perhaps also to hunt for antiques, such as carved doors and home furnishings. The tourism and

commodification of merchant houses, therefore, cannot be relinquished to a mere "afterword" in this account. Over time, the mansions and their frescoes -- long-lasting visual spectacles--have been open to re-appropriation by various social actors, and tourist practices of "sight-seeing" represent new ways of viewing old objects. Today the Marwari *haveli* have become new objects of visual consumption by tourists, increasingly becoming part of the well-established heritage industry of princely Rajasthan.

These paintings and decorations on the now-abandoned mansions, whose owners live in the urban metropolis, are quite different from most other forms of house painting in South Asia, where all sorts of people have frequently painted and decorated the houses they dwell in for self-expression. ¹⁴ The



mansions were only partially or occasionally occupied by women and children as a temporary measure, until the men had earned enough money to ensure them a safe travel passage and to maintain a permanent residence for the family in the urban locales. Thus here the difference between home and house comes into play. The home, as inhabited space, connects to the lived-in aspects of dwelling and affect associated with Nora's aforementioned idea of memory. The empty house, on the other hand, is disembodied from the lived present; it becomes a space amenable to the rearrangement of familial and cultural myths. It is precisely the very 'emptiness' of these structures that creates the temporal and spatial conditions of possibility for converging interests and visual practices to emerge between Marwari trader families and visiting tourists. The emptiness of the buildings, save for a distant relative or caretaker, is what after all gives them the appearance of being historical, and such houses can more easily become available for tourist consumption.

To understand what the painted *haveli* accomplishes as a visual strategy, it is useful to think about Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope to describe a place or site that fuses time and space, such as Sir Walter Scott's use of the castle as a common setting for the production of "antiquarianism" in his Gothic novels. ¹⁵ Bakhtin refers to the merger of temporal and spatial structures, such as he finds in narrative genres including the romance and the folktale. ¹⁶ The chronotope is arguably related, in Bakhtin's work, to the liminality of the carnivalesque, in the inversion and subsequent reappropriation of patterns and social norms into new and different forms. ¹⁷ As a type of visual chronotope, the Marwari *haveli* could be said in part to index the aristocratic aspirations of a new business class in modern India, albeit tempered by a traditional North Indian Vaishya anxiety about directly appropriating Kshatriya emblems. ¹⁸ The ancestral homes speak to Bakhtin's model of the production of an original time and space through chronotopic form. The world of the merchant house is a realm in which the self was disciplined to conform to the new codes of authority in the rising aspirations of migrant merchants. Homeland was defined by the supposed ancestral domicile, even though built and abandoned after the family moved away, and not by holdings of agricultural land. The signifier is the *haveli*, and the signified is the fusion of time and space, the absent family and their relationship to the absent entity of their ancestral home. The family heritage is embodied and lodged in the house, at once being a multivalent site of private memory and public space.

For though they derive from Rajput mansions, the Marwari *haveli* go beyond being mere aristocratic 'residences' of ancestral lineages. In fact, they far exceed the spatial and temporal boundaries of the secularized palace or castle described by Bakhtin. As structures meant to be the ancestral homes of the founding fathers of some of India's top business houses, the mansions create new narratives about the migrant businessmen and their families. The potential risks of expressing a rootless cosmopolitanism are tempered by maintaining a strong local identity. The *haveli* simultaneously bridge the space between the desert and the colonial city where the families' riches were earned, and orient time back into the distant past by positing both family origins and connections deeper into history. Through their emphasis on *bhakti*, the houses remain part of Vaishya religiosity, and do not directly appropriate, and thereby challenge, Rajput authority. Rather than being living art, as in the cases of house painting mentioned earlier, the empty Marwari *haveli* are instead a type of historical artifact attesting to the historicity of Marwari claims of being (almost) aristocratic sons of Rajasthan.

Painted Themes of the Marwari *haveli* of Shekhawati, Rajasthan

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For reasons that will soon become clear, let me say at the onset that we need to complicate the standard ecological rationale for why the Marwaris painted their massive houses. ¹⁹ This explanation states that Marwaris wished to bring a little color into their desert lives, to liven up the otherwise drab

monotone look of the desert sands. It is true that in Rajasthan houses tend to have very few exterior windows and instead depend on ventilation from the open ceilings of inner courtyards, thus leaving large blank surfaces on exterior and interior walls that become amenable to mural paintings. But simply relying on the standard environmental explanation does little, I believe, to clarify or help us to understand the unique cultural and historical milieu in which the *haveli* were painted or in which they are currently being viewed.

The region of Shekhawati is located in northeastern Rajasthan, between the cities of Jaipur, Delhi, and Bikaner. Although for administrative purposes the area is today divided into the districts of Churu, Jhunjhunu, and Sikar, in everyday speech the region collectively retains the name of Shekhawati, as it has been known for some 500 years. The name is traced to the fifteenth-century Rajput ruler Rao Shekha, whose descendants established themselves in this region during the slow decline of the Mughal Empire, which ended with Aurengzeb's death in 1707. The Rajputs of Shekhawati encouraged trade in the region by charging lower tariffs than did neighboring regions. As a result, this desert region became a crossroads for trade caravans traveling from Gujarat in the southwest to northern India, as well as to Central Asia and China. Merchant families from all over Rajasthan moved to Shekhawati to establish themselves as trading agents along such routes. ²⁰ These merchant families, who only much later came to be called Marwaris, began to consider Shekhawati their home.

Most of the painted Marwari *haveli* were built between 1860 and 1900, coinciding with the development of rail transportation and increasing emigration to the colonial cities. Ironically, then, most of the Marwari mansions "at home" in Rajasthan were built during the period of highest out-migration. After all, it was only after the migrants had left and established themselves in business and trade in the colonial metropolis that they would have been able to afford such elaborate housing in their homelands. To understand the cultural and historical reasons why such painted *haveli* were built, and their recent entry into the tourist imagination, we need to consider how the Marwari ascendance as a business community in India came about in the shadow of the Rajputs, the traditional ruling caste of Rajasthan. The Rajputs were a locally powerful group from whom Marwaris drew some of their inspiration in attempting to gain the cultural legitimacy that they needed to emerge as a new generation with plausible aspirations to economic, social, and sometimes political leadership. *Haveli*-building was a tradition that migrant Marwari traders picked up in part from the local Shekhawati Rajputs, who had begun building carved and gilded *haveli* in the 1830s.

Though the Marwaris borrowed a local structural design, as I have noted, the reproduction of Rajput architecture was in no small part due to British

influence. For some time, the region of Rajasthan had been associated with ruins and heroism, and the figure of the martial Rajput was the embodiment of this much-admired sensibility. As mentioned previously, a key element of local Rajasthani pride is the claim that, for the past millennium, Rajasthan has never been directly subject to foreign conquest. The image of the early Rajput princes of Rajasthan, shaped by the filter of colonial ethnography, became the locus for a potent romanticization of the region. Colonel Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-32) was particularly influential in popularizing and canonizing this romantic ethos of Rajasthan through the textualization of oral epic and memories into colonial ethnography. One aspect of this European romantic imagination of Rajasthan was a fascination with historical ruins, and the simultaneous development of a romantic sensibility associated with remains of relics, forts and palaces, which associated such landmarks with a heritage of martial gallantry.. As Ramusack notes, the canonization of such tales of Rajput chivalry by Tod and the texts' frequent reprinting helped embellish and preserve such history so that it became part of the social memory of Rajasthan, eventually enabling the memorialization of Rajasthan through tourism. [21](#)

Although the Marwaris did not merely copy Rajput designs, as noted, the building of *haveli* can be understood as a Marwari strategy of capitalizing on the romantic aura that colonial ethnographers like Tod bestowed upon the Rajputs. The Marwari *haveli* are usually not decorated with the same degree of silver and gold work as the Rajput *haveli* on which they were modeled, perhaps out of deference to their ruling patrons. [22](#) Whereas Rajputs expressed their prowess through forts and gilded *haveli*, Marwaris could try to translate their newly found wealth into cultural capital with painted *haveli*, if not actual forts. Marwari *haveli* are named after the lineage of the family that built them, commemorating the ancestors who originally come from that place. The architecture of the *haveli* suited the tastes and requirements of trading families. The *haveli* are often crowded together on narrow, twisted streets, and accentuated by balconies, gargoyles, arches, doorways, and niches. [23](#)

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The mansions are organized around at least two courtyards, an outer one for business and visitors, and an inner one for the family and for women. Sometimes a third courtyard is used by the servants, who leave the courtyard from separate entrances. Visitors enter through a heavy carved wooden outer door into an inner courtyard, and are ushered into surrounding rooms where business is done while sitting on white cloth-covered cushions. Furniture is minimal. Separate inner courtyards and sets of rooms provide privacy and protection for the women.

The presence of such structures would justify translating the word *haveli* as a "courtyard house." But there is some disagreement among architectural historians, however, as to the exact etymology of the word *haveli*. *Haveli* are

found across medieval northwestern India, from Gujarat to Rajasthan to even the Mughal city of Shahjahanabad (now Delhi). According to Stephen Blake, the term *haveli* is derived from Persian, and refers to the large walled mansions and open courtyards of the nobility and the rich. ²⁴ Many of the standard art books on the Shekhawati *haveli* concur. ²⁵ However, Catherine Asher has observed that the term *haveli* appears nowhere in the vocabulary of Mughal architecture. According to Asher (personal communication), the term probably originated in early modern Rajasthan to designate a new form of architectural synthesis of Rajput and Mughal domestic styles.

The blending of temple and domestic residence through architectural synthesis was a common tradition among Vaishya groups in western India. In neighboring Gujarat, wooden *haveli* built to be either residences or temples date back to about 1600. Domestic *haveli* architecture incorporated the elaborate carved wood style that became commonplace around the 1830s and lasted until about 1900. Occasionally, murals in the Gujarati *haveli* resemble the designs found on traditional Gujarati embroidery. In contrast, the *bhakti* styles of the Marwari *haveli* in Shekhawati are to a large extent patterned after the Krishna-lila scenes of murals such as those in the temple town of Nathdvara, north of Udaipur, a popular pilgrimage site for the wealthy commercial and trading communities of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Tillotson suggests that these mural decorations may also be a popular revival of palace mural art, an alternative to the ornate wooden carvings that characterize the *haveli* in Jaipur and in Gujarat. ²⁶ In Nathdvara, notably, the word *haveli* (rather than the more generic *mandir*) is used to describe the Pushti Marg shrines of Krishna as Shrinathji. The Pushti Marga Vaishnava cult and *bhakti* sect thought of their deity as a king who was installed in a "palace." ²⁷ Since Shrinath is considered a living god, and not a mere image, his abode—the mansion where he resides—is called a *haveli*. The home of the god follows the plans of royal residences, and its wall paintings consist of a combination of murals and miniature paintings done on cloth, paper, and wood. ²⁸

So far we have considered what the mansions may have meant for the merchants who financed them, but we know surprisingly little about the artists who built them, and what the *havelis* may have represented for them. The mural painters traditionally came from the *kumhar* caste of potters, and often worked in multiple capacities as builders, masons, and artists. ²⁹ The patronage of the *haveli* paintings by emigrant Marwari merchants was important for establishing a new class of itinerant artists who were called upon to paint the walls. Since the demand for artists was too high in the district to be met solely by local artists, there was an immigration of architects, masons, and artists into Shekhawati from surrounding regions. ³⁰ The artists came from a variety of religious backgrounds, and derived inspiration from various schools of Rajput painting, including the Jaipur and Mughal. The paintings approximate the fresco

techniques that were developed in Italy in the 14th century. ³¹ In Rajasthan, limewater mixed with pigment was brushed onto wet plaster, which produced a highly durable surface painting with an impressive longevity. The chemicals in the artificial European pigments introduced in the late 19th century, however, reacted with the wet plaster, and the technique was modified for use on dry walls. The artists drew as well on the British-inspired Company School and on the new subjects of European technological modernity. Photography provided a means for urban scenes, including technological marvels and European life, to be depicted in the countryside, where such sights were hitherto unknown. Ironically, however, photography and the cheap reproductions made available by techniques such as chromolithography eventually created competition for the painters. As Marwari patronage itself dried up in the 1930s, these artists were eventually displaced. ³²

The types of images on the *haveli* vary stylistically, ranging from Mughal miniatures to Jaipur mural painting to the Company school with obvious British influence to "calendar-art" images, which reflect the influence of modern print technologies. Marwaris used the blank exterior of the building façade, with upper-story windows, as a canvas for a variety of visual representations. Here I divide the *haveli* paintings into a few basic types for the purpose of my analysis. The earliest paintings, dating from the 1840s, show remarkable Mughal influence, their designs consisting largely of floral patterns and geometric designs. Hindu themes soon became popular. Most of the scenes on the early Marwari *haveli* are colorfully painted with intricate scenes from folk tales, daily activities, and the epic *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, as well as images of Mughal customs and Hindu goddesses, gods, and their incarnations. Images of the Hindu god Krishna and his consort Radha are especially common. A comparison with Rajput art is pertinent to my argument. The Marwari pictures of gods and goddesses are more influenced by folk traditions, whereas in Rajput painting there is a stress on more typically Kshatriya warrior themes of rulers, wars, and battles. The Rajputs could deploy images of maharaja kings, whereas the Marwari paintings do not make such claims to warrior authority, and visually perform more of a "virtual" devotional *bhakti*.

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The second type of painting I discuss are those associated with European rule. These are often considered the most remarkable paintings on the *haveli* murals, at least in the eyes of English-language travel writers, and are pictures that comment on the presence of British culture and technology in an Indian context. These images were made possible by European lithographs and photographs, which brought new and previously



unseen subjects into the artists' frame of reference.



Starting in about the 1860s, many new wall painting motifs began to reflect European cultural influences and to define new images of colonial modernity. Using artificial pigments from Germany, local artists known as *chiteras* (who themselves may have never seen firsthand these technological innovations) created scenes celebrating various material marvels of the Industrial Revolution as introduced by the British in India. Trains symbolized the very essence of modernity, at once implying wealth, status, and, especially after the 1860s, the very means that enabled many Marwaris to travel. The train represents a shift away from the royal titles of feudalism to a market-based capitalist prestige. Horizontal murals of trains became a very frequent motif, such as in a well-known example from the Poddar *haveli* at Nawalgarh. Other depictions of technological modernity include bicycles, cars, sewing machines, planes, gramophones, and even Orville and Wilbur Wright's first flight. Christian themes also emerged. The Poddar *haveli* in Nawalgarh features a picture of Jesus adorned with a halo of light.

As with the other examples of visual culture discussed in this volume, the *haveli* paintings too rest in an inter-ocular sphere constituted by multiple habits of viewing. We have already seen how these murals invoke Mughal painting and Hindu religious art, as well as images of European technological modernity. References to European paintings and photography, my third category of painting, were also part of this visual literacy. After the technique of photography became more widely available in India from the 1840s, artists used portraiture to depict their individual subjects more accurately. ³³ However, unlike the Rajputs, who commonly commissioned portraits in the style of Mughal miniatures, paintings of individual owners of the Marwari *haveli* are less common than portraits of English royalty, including Queen Victoria, George V, and Queen Mary, introduced thanks to the availability of photography. Scenes from the Delhi *darbar* of 1911 are a common theme in both lithographs and frescoes. Wacziarg and Nath trace this major shift in the content of the frescoes toward European themes to the Great Jeypore Exhibition of 1883, which displayed a combination of European and Indian objects. ³⁴ This exhibition was essentially hybrid, and attempted to showcase local Rajasthani cultural production while bringing it alongside the British world of science and industry in a naturalized juxtaposition. ³⁵

The final class of paintings I will discuss here are pictures of

women, both local and foreign. Some increased reliance on portraiture was used in popularizing domestic images of *seth* traders. Scenes depicting the modern couple reflect emerging ideas about bourgeois domesticity, suggesting the importance of companionate marriage. A woman sits with a baby on her lap trying to put on a makeup *kumkum* on her forehead while looking into a mirror. She is wondering, perhaps, whether she will still be attractive to her husband after having become a



mother. Pictures of Englishmen with hats, shoes, and walking sticks were common, as were pictures of European women, often with low-cut necklines, in bathtubs, or in formal portraits as brides and bridesmaids participating in church weddings. One of the most intriguing forms of *haveli* art, scattered among a number of *haveli*, depicts private acts of courtship, sexual intercourse, and childbirth. Servants are painted into the background of some of the most erotic images, perhaps implying that there is little that goes on inside the household that is unnoticed by the hired help. In the Shiv Narain Nemani *haveli* in Churi Ajitgarh, a picture of Queen Victoria turning up her nose and scowling is juxtaposed with a picture of a couple having sexual intercourse. ³⁶ We might find it strange to find explicit images of sexual acts in a space—the *haveli*—primarily designed for women. Often these erotic pictures are hidden away behind closed doors in some of the bedrooms, and can literally be viewed only when the door is shut.

Beyond the multiple depictions of both local and foreign women, in general the *haveli* has been generally considered to be a quintessentially gendered space, a domain for the seclusion of women. As Sarah Tillotson has documented, since the early 19th century the *haveli* have long been a source of fascination for European tourists, particularly Victorian women travelers, who wrote vivid accounts of the lives of women living behind the walls of palaces and other mansions. ³⁷ Ostensibly, the *haveli* were built to house the intergenerational groups of females, children, and elderly members of the household left behind when the men spent much of their time in the colonial cities. The *haveli* is divided into separate quarters for men and women, preserving practices of gender segregation called *parda*. As such, the *haveli* is a marker of gender segregation practiced through creating separate living quarters for men and women. Internal and external courtyards marked degrees of domestic privacy. The *haveli* thus became a feminized space, akin to the *zenana* in its associations as the sphere of womanhood. ³⁸

In addition to being a space for the seclusion of women and serving as a marker of the rising status of the merchant family, the *haveli* were a site of accumulation and thrift. Until the 1930s, Marwari merchants competed with each other to build the biggest and the best *haveli*, even though these

mansions were constructed only after one or sometimes all of the family members had left and gone "abroad" to British India for trading and commerce. The practice of sending money back to be expended on paintings made on all available walls, ceilings, and window sills is illustrative of the social importance once placed on *haveli* as ostensible symbols of hearth and home. The *haveli* are thereby important geographical markers of the existence of Marwaris living outside Rajasthan. In the oral history that I have done among prominent Marwaris in Calcutta, I found that many people claimed to have a family *haveli* in Rajasthan. In the past, Marwari families traveled to Rajasthan and to their *haveli* for important events of the life passage, including naming ceremonies, first tonsure, and marriage, although such trips eventually became less and less frequent. Today, one member of the family might spend a day or two at the *haveli* to check up on things, but typically many of the family members would have never visited there.

Haveli-building ceased around the 1930s for a variety of reasons. One was tied to the permanent migration of Marwari women and children to the colonial cities to join their menfolk, who had prospered and could now afford to house the extended family in the city. But even more importantly, it was at that time that Rajasthan became less central to the Marwari self-perception, and competition with the Rajputs becomes less important. Instead, involvement with the Congress Party and increasing participation in the affairs of the nationalist struggle created a new, national arena for the staging of such concerns. Rajasthan in the Marwari eye no longer remained the primary site of action, identity, and memory. Though philanthropy in the region was revived by a Gandhian imperative for village-level initiatives, building ancestral houses was no longer a pressing concern. The *haveli* were still used on occasion, such as during World War II, when many families sent their children and women back to Rajasthan to avoid the Calcutta bombing. But at this stage, most Marwari families in Calcutta came to feel that they no longer needed to establish domiciles in Rajasthan.

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At the same time that Marwaris were building these painted mansions in the desert, resembling the devotional temples there, their places of domicile in Calcutta were remarkably different. The same merchants who commissioned these large houses covered in paintings—paintings that perform a kind of devotional *bhakti*—did not choose to replicate such images in Calcutta. New arrivals initially lived cheaply in rented rooms and shared community kitchens. Later, they amassed more wealth and brought their families from Rajasthan. In the old quarter of the city, known as Burabazar, Marwaris built towering structures more clearly in the Rajput idiom, using more traditional motifs such as wooden carvings, without the devotional *bhakti*-like paintings of their residences in Shekhawati. Unlike the spectacles of the painted *haveli* mansions in Shekhawati, there are no Marwari mansions with painted frescoes in Calcutta. Instead, these houses more confidently and directly quote from the architecture of Rajasthani palaces. Starting in the 1930s, and continuing into the 1950s and beyond, wealthy Marwari families moved out of the Burabazar and bought up the mansions vacated by departing British businessmen and government officials. Once their diasporic identity was secured, with the permanent migration of women and children,

the practice of directly reiterating their visual connections to the former homeland through building spectacular domestic architecture was suspended.

The Lifeworlds of Tamil Chettiar Mansions

For at least the last century a number of observers, ranging from colonial administrator and ethnographer Thurston to anthropologist Yuko Nishimura, have commented that the ornate Chettiar mansions were their entry point to gaining interest in and familiarity with the community. The Chettiar houses are typically found in the towns of the region, as opposed to villages or in the countryside. The houses on the main streets are set back from the road, practically fortress-like, with a one-story wall separating the mansion from the passers-by in the streets. The houses are normally two or three stories tall, and have ornate statues, carvings, and gargoyles on the edges of the red tile rooftops and framing the entrance gates. These figures are often hybrid combinations of European faces and figurines along with Hindu images, especially of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. The interior portions of the Chettiar houses face inward into courtyards, and are lavishly decorated with imported granite and marble pillars, intricately carved Burmese teak, decorative tiles, and crystal chandeliers.



Among the Chettiars there are eleven unrelated Chettiar groups, and the Nagarathar ('town-dwelling') Chettiars built the fanciest houses. Their elaborate mansions in southern Tamil Nadu have been so important to the self-identity of the community that the Nagarattar Chettiars have in fact been referred to as the Nattukottai ('Country-fort') Chettiars (Thurston in fact chose to list the Chettiars under the name 'Nattukottai Chettiar' in his authoritative survey, *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India*). Thurston, however, did not dwell on extended descriptions of the mansions as later observers did, and attributed the rise of the "commodious houses" simply to the Chettiar social custom of married family members living in separate quarters and cooking separate meals within the same family house. [39](#)



The writer Nilkan Perumal made a visit to Chettinadu in September 1937, and wrote about his impressions of the social and material well-being of the Chettiars as epitomized by the mansions. After a visit to the small town of Arimalam, he stated that the "Chettiar elephantine-houses" were the village's "greatest asset," comparing the castle-like homes to what we imagine were found in towns in antiquity. In a striking comparison to the Marwari *haveli*, Perumal remarked that "they [the Chettiars] built them just like the *Bania* [traders] who built up gold-chambers in Sardarnagar (Bikaner) to boast about their cash!" [40](#) In Devakottai alone, Perumal contended, he found about 300 of these mostly-empty Chettiar

mansions, whose owners were abroad on banking business, while servants and "stray relatives" occupied some portions of the homes.

What were particularly striking to Perumal were the unabashed displays of wealth in the form of these houses. Perumal estimated that these houses cost about one *lakh* rupees (100,000) each. He suggested that the Chettiars were vying with one another for such symbols of affluence and were perhaps living beyond their means. He wrote that Chettiars "indulged in this sort of costly mansion to impress upon their fellow Chettiars and the public that their financial success was all too substantial. The personal pride of Chettiars amongst themselves could also be noticed in conducting marriages and birthdays of their children, a lot of money lavishly spent. In the old days, the Chettiars did not invest much money in landed properties, because they believed that the more cash in hand, the better the prospect for returns through lending." ⁴¹



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From the time of Perumal's visit and beyond, the houses began to fall into decline, owing to financial setbacks in the business ventures of the Chettiar merchants. Perumal attested to the relative poverty of many Chettiar families after the nationalization programs in countries like Burma. He was struck by the number of formerly wealthy bankers forced to sell off iron and other housing materials in order to eke out a daily living and return to India. ⁴² In fact, many Chettiar families have had to sell their elaborately decorated mansions because of financial duress, and the loss of their family houses highlighted the stigma of their community's overall economic decline. In order to understand the rise of the Chettiars and their reasons for building spectacular hybrid houses, I briefly review the major points of their meteoric rise in economic life.

Chettiar Wealth and Display

The ascendancy of the migrant Chettiars as the leading merchant capitalists of southern India paralleled the rise of the Marwari community to commercial and financial success. The Chettiars began their outward migration even earlier than the Marwaris, in the tenth—twelfth centuries, by following the shipping routes of the Chola traders across the sea. ⁴³ As chandlers who managed the provision of supplies on the Chola ships, the Chettiars began to build transregional networks that facilitated the expansion of trade. The Chola ships sailed from Kaveripoompattinam (Poompuhar) to lands further east, including Java, Sumatra, and Malaya. Salt- and rice-trading, along with trade in precious metals and gemstones, also increased the Chettiars' legendary financial fortunes. The Chettiars established close relationships with the Chola kings, gaining their favor, and were rewarded by the granting of *zamindari* land rights. While their business establishments dotted the Tamil coast, the Chettiar homeland was in an area of ninety-six villages

between Pudukkottai and Sivaganga. Near temples founded by members of the community, the Chettiars built homes made of stucco, wood, and tile in a pattern around the temple. Because of these residential patterns, which resembled those in larger towns, the Chettiars were also called by the name 'Nagarathar Chettiar.' meaning town-dwellers.

Because of the salt monopoly claimed by the East India Company in 1805, the Chettiars withdrew from the salt trade. They gradually developed into a regionally powerful community of merchant bankers in parts of the former Pudukkottai kingdom and present-day Ramanathapuram and Pasumpon Muthuramalingam districts, the area that since the 18th century has been known as *Chettinadu*. ⁴⁴ One of the Chettiars' major activities was to make loans to agricultural producers and to political and military leaders, and they began to expand their intricate networks of *hundi* (credit exchange) and to prosper. The growth of transregional Chettiar trading networks in colonial times followed the European expansion in South and Southeast Asia. ⁴⁵ In the early nineteenth century, a few adventuresome Chettiars began to settle in Ceylon. By the 1850s and 1860s, the British had made significant inroads into the commerce of Burma and Malaya and solidified their political domination. The expansion of the British Empire into Southeast Asia created new avenues of trade, commerce, and money lending, and the Chettiars sailed to those regions and began to form business empires there. ⁴⁶ They financed agriculture and trade, as well as domestic expenses such as weddings. In order to save money and live frugally, the men stayed together in a *kittangi* (warehouse), with between fifteen and thirty men sharing a single common room. A hired cook prepared the meals. Ultimately, the growing independence of Southeast Asian nations brought about severe nationalization policies and a decline in the price of rice. The Land Purchase Act of 1941 in Burma forced Chettiars to sell their land for a fraction of its worth. As a result of these unfavorable policies, the Chettiars lost most of their massive investments in Burma, Indochina, and Ceylon, and returned home under considerable economic duress.

Like the Marwaris, the Chettiars set aside a part of their earnings and developed a noteworthy tradition of philanthropy and charity that had precedents in religious gifting dating back to pre-colonial times. They built rest houses and water-supply facilities for travelers, and feeding-houses to nourish the poor. As devoted Shaivites, they built new temples, especially for the worship of Murgan, and repaired old ones. These philanthropic activities were not, however, without their share of local politics. As the Chettiars' wealth grew, and their confidence in trying to claim various cultural and religious symbols of authority increased, they invested in gaining patronage and privilege in the authority structures and disputes of local temples. The result was fierce competition between the Chettiars and the dominant Maravar ruling caste for control of temples. ⁴⁷



Being at home in Chettinadu: Design of the Chettiar House



Although one can reasonably claim that no two houses are alike, the basic design of a Chettinadu merchant house has a series of courtyards surrounded by rooms, with the most public of rooms at the front, followed by increasingly private rooms, with the kitchens at the very back. According to the house owners that I met during my July 2000 visit to Chettinadu, the houses had generally been constructed from back to front. The workers who constructed the houses were typically from the Asari *jati* community of carpenters. An outer veranda (*tinnai*) is at the front of most houses. It is intended as a public area and is meant for the use of distant associates and as a place for visiting travelers to sleep at night. A small clay pot storing cool water allows outsiders to use the shelter of the covered veranda as a place to rest; the granite stones absorb very little heat. Sometimes the outer veranda has rooms at either end for accountants or family members to use for conducting business.

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Passing through a heavy, elaborately carved doorway into the interior portion of the house, one enters an inner courtyard used by family members for household chores and rituals. This major open space around which the house is organized is called the *valavu*.⁴⁸ The four corners of the courtyard represented the directions of the universe, letting the sun be a witness to the ceremonies held within. The open structure lets in good ventilation and light. As a symbol of hospitality, a raised seating area sits at the front end of the open space to be used by family members and their more intimate associates for leisure or business activities. Elaborate drainage along the corners of the slanted roof (*koodalvaai*) facilitates the collection of rainwater in brass pots on top of granite slabs, which prevent the floor tiles (*athangudi*) from breaking. Layered red tile that absorbs very little heat is the most common form of roofing.

Surrounding and facing into this first inner courtyard is a ring of small double rooms. Most houses have rooms on both sides but others have rooms on one side only. Each one of these double rooms is called a *veedu* (literally, house), belonging to each married son and his family.⁴⁹ These rooms were used for storage, religious rites, and for sleeping in relative privacy. One of the homeowners mentioned to me that each of these sets of double rooms could even have a different postal address, signifying the separateness of that family's branch. The inner sections of the double rooms on the ground floor are always windowless, for security, with the back wall of the innermost room forming the outermost wall of the house. This secure room is used to house family valuables, including *puja* deities, and a safe containing jewelry, gold, account books, and cash. The hosts who showed me the innermost rooms displayed a *pelai*, a trunk or box where the ancestor's clothing is kept and

worshipped. A *kaipetti* (handbox), holding accounts, money, and important papers was also kept inside the *puja* room for protection.

Going even further back from the inner courtyard, one enters the rear-most courtyard, which is used as a space for cooking. This is the *antapura*, the women's quarters, the innermost precinct of the house. Previously, women used to enter and exit the house through the rear-most door, especially during functions when men were present. Typically, each married son and his wife would operate a separate hearth. This architectural form of dwelling is suggestive of the economic independence of each son as a "nuclear family" or *pillu*, within a larger joint family structure. The ancestral home was quite literally used as the business headquarters for the family. The initials binding the family members together—a common South Indian naming practice—were given to the house as well. The father, sons, and brothers took turns being away from home, and on their occasional visits home let others look after the business. Often, however, the house was inhabited only by women. The fact that the women could live safely on their own while their menfolk were away was cited to me as evidence of how the Chettians were able to integrate themselves into the local community. The interpenetration of public and private areas of the house, enabled by the flexible and multifarious uses of inner courtyards, created a relational system of using space for business, religious, and family functions. The courtyards were a semi-public space for the use of travelers and the familial public, yet allowed for privacy and cleanliness. [50](#)

Nowadays, however, the owners of the famed Chettiar houses rarely return, and many of the houses stand empty. Though once upon a time the houses were the focal point for family gatherings, the exodus to urban areas has changed the place of the ancestral house in Chettiar life. A few rooms in the Chettiar house will sometimes be occupied by a distant member of the family, living alone. The owners of some of the houses have rented out the rooms surrounding the outermost courtyard to unrelated families, whose rent contributes to the restoration and upkeep of the mansions. This practice may have started in the first decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly, in keeping with the original design features of the house, the outermost rooms are the ones designated as suitable for occupancy by outsiders. In order to maintain their upkeep, some of the better-preserved mansions have been featured as background sets in Tamil commercial films.



"Discoveries" of the Hybrid Houses in Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan c.1980-2000

The commodification of the hybrid houses into new objects of visual consumption among local and international tourists is a fascinating development, one that needs to be situated in the context of the

contemporary types of architecture one finds in India and its diaspora today.



Architecture represents a strategy of negotiating a series of modern disjunctures between new wealth and older values, and helps create various configurations of being both "home" and "away." In considering the architectural styles found among members of the urbanized commercial communities in recent times, one might imagine that similar houses could be found

that articulate the styles of the "country-forts" and painted mansions.

According to David Rudner, there are in fact some elaborate, Chettiar-style houses to be found as far away as Madras, Madurai, and even London. ⁵¹

Nowadays, many Chettiar mansions in Chettinadu, however, are being sold as their owners can no longer afford the upkeep.

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In the town of Karaikudi, antique stores were crowded with furniture, dishes, lanterns, statues, doors, chairs, and other household decorations, all originally part of Chettiar households. When we stopped in at one of the many curio shops in Karaikudi, I was grateful for some time out of the sun, and lingered inside for several minutes. I had no intention of buying anything, but I was curious to see what kinds of objects were there, and we admired and fingered the arresting array of household implements once acquired by Chettiar merchants. It was not until later in the day that my research assistant, Annie, pulled me aside and quietly told me that our host was somewhat distressed about the existence of such shops and what he saw as the exploitation they practice. They harshly reminded him of the hard economic times which had fallen on the erstwhile heroes of Chettinadu, and the quite literal material and cultural losses suffered by the Chettiers.



This loss of ancestral mansions by members of the Chettiar community initially prompted D. Thiagarajan of the Madras Craft Foundation to establish an extremely creative and well-endowed hands-on museum known as Dakshina Chitra, just south of Chennai, for the preservation of domestic architecture in South India. The spacious site is divided into four large areas, superimposed over a map of South India, to display houses from the four South Indian states. Winding paths lead visitors into the preserved houses of potters, weavers, Chettinadu merchants, agriculturists, and Brahmins, as well as to an open-air restaurant selling *idli* and *dosa*. Groups of schoolchildren visit Dakshina Chitra on a regular basis, and are taught various arts and crafts by local artisans employed by the museum.



There are a large number of well-preserved houses on display, and here I will restrict my discussion to one pertinent example. The reconstruction of a Chettinadu merchant house in Dakshina Chitra provides an excellent example of the evolution of the Chettiar ancestral home. Originally, these were one-story structures, but increased in height to two stories in

the middle of the nineteenth century. The façade of the house replicates that of a merchant house from around 1850, and the Burmese teak columned veranda and main central courtyard date from 1895, and were taken from parts of a house in the village of Arykuddi. The excellent preservation work at Dakshina Chitra has done much to increase awareness about the architectural heritage of South India.

This recent revival of interest in the domestic architecture of the Chettiars and the Marwaris among museum-goers and tourists suggests, as I have said, a new moment of visual practice involving the merchant houses. I have already discussed the preservation schemes of the Madras Craft Foundation, and I again turn my attention to the Marwari *haveli* in Rajasthan. The Marwari painted houses are much better known on the tourist circuit than the Chettiar mansions, and here I want to discuss how the broader context of the romanticization of princely Rajasthan serves to incorporate the merchant *havelis* into a new socio-economic universe of cultural tourism. I explore the types of negotiation that the Marwaris pursue which simultaneously allows their houses to be seen both as "traditional"—not unlike the royal homes and palaces—yet makes them of special interest in themselves for their picturing of modernity and the hybrid world in which they found themselves.

For at least the last fifty years, distant relatives of the traders and/or poorly-paid caretakers and their families have occupied some *haveli*, and small numbers of them are increasingly rented out to middle-class families requiring housing in the vicinity. Other *haveli* are deserted and locked up. Upon payment of *baksheesh*, caretakers will show the insides of the homes to tourists. Though there is little local interest, it is rare also that diasporic Marwari families living in Calcutta and Bombay themselves ever visit their "homes." The relatively recent presence of European tourists roaming the villages of Shekhawati represents a new public for consumption of the painted Marwari *haveli*. Visitors wander slowly in the lanes of Shekhawati towns in order to look at and photograph the outer walls of the *haveli*. Local residents pass them by, puzzled and shaking their heads, and, in a significant Occidentalizing reversal of the gaze, wonder aloud why anyone should be bothered with looking at such houses.

Despite a general lack of local interest, the fact that many of the *haveli* are now being refurbished for tourists is an important part of the production of social memory, community, and region for the Marwaris. The international notice that the *haveli* have drawn reproduces the story of Marwari migration, and provides another setting for the reiteration of rags-to-riches narratives common to the newly rich in global capitalism everywhere. This relatively new consumption practice of tourists looking at the *haveli* taps into well-established practices of tourism in western India, centering around the forts and palaces of the Rajput princes, and helps construct narratives about business families as being part of the romance of Rajasthan.

A considerable number of expensive, English-language art books outline and illustrate the unique, brightly-colored frescoes of Marwari dwellings. ⁵² The books give particular attention to images of technology and modernization. Yet despite its popularity with foreign tourists, who undoubtedly relish these curious depictions of their colonial forebears, this so-called "western-inspired" art has not been seriously addressed by art historians or architectural scholars. G. H. R. Tillotson, for instance, writes, "While the older paintings are among the finest examples of mural art in India, and the first depictions of trains have an amusing naïveté, the late, westernized paintings are vulgar and incompetent." ⁵³ The "colonial language of vulgarity" ⁵⁴ is ironically reversed here to make a somewhat nativist distinction between ostensibly fine local art versus styles which are tainted by western influence.

The fact that the *haveli* and their frescoes have so far been seen as colonially-inspired objects of curiosity, and thus not subject to the kinds of "standards" placed on "high-culture" art, brings to mind Eric Michaels' insights into the commodification of Aboriginal visual culture in late 20th century Australia. Michaels argues that forms of (post) colonial racism produce a global circulation of aboriginal art as a form of kitsch, and thus constitute practices that promote issues of authority. ⁵⁵ Similarly, because the *haveli* paintings are often viewed as kitsch by westerners, critics, and travelers alike, the murals re-invoke a colonial discourse when they are called artistically primitive. Instead of making an aesthetic judgment about the artistic value of the painted houses, therefore, I direct my attention to the contingent sets of visual practices which attend various moments of historically-situated forms of display and viewing.



Some of the wealthiest and best-known Marwari families have made conscious attempts to turn their family *haveli* into public venues.



In the Birla family *haveli* in Pilani, originally built in 1864, one part of the structure is devoted to a Birla family museum, which is formally organized and very clearly addresses a public and tourist audience. ⁵⁶ The formation of such a museum derives from the imagination of colonial exhibitions, and creates narratives of accomplishments through the display of educational and honorary degrees, photographs of the family with world leaders, as well as various articles of clothing worn on special, public occasions. The Poddar *haveli* in Nawalgarh in 1966 was made into a secondary school, which is still in operation. In 1992, the family decided to restore the frescoes and open a museum. A promotional brochure for the museum states that almost 10,000 foreign tourists were expected to visit in 1997. ⁵⁷ The

Morarka family in Nawalgarh has recently followed suit, employing a caretaker to greet guests, charge admission, and guide visitors around the structure. Many of the *haveli* are in bad states of repair, either covered up with advertisements, or else simply crumbling into ruin. Though some owners are revamping old *haveli*, Marwari families are no longer building new ones. Other local forms of commemoration have emerged. Recent examples include *shahid minars* in Churu, to memorialize soldiers who were killed in Kashmir and in other wars of the late twentieth century.

But there is evidence that other community groups from Shekhawati villages have now adopted this mansion-building custom. Since at least the 1990s, Rajasthani Muslims working in the "petroleum diaspora" of the Persian Gulf have sent money back to their home villages. The construction of modern, ostentatious, and palatial family homes there has become the latest way of indicating transnationally-acquired economic and social status. Though architecturally these houses do not look like Marwari *haveli*, and have more in common with modern Islamic architecture, there is continuity in the idea and practice of building an ancestral home in the place one no longer inhabits. The practice of building "ancestral" houses has become a cultural pattern of the re-articulation of one's local identity, and the negotiation of the malleable links between the past and the present, as part of the process of engaging in global capitalism. This strategy has become a pattern available to other social groups when they too acquire new wealth elsewhere. Those homes belonging to Gulf-returned owners, because of their newness, are not (yet) tourist sites, although on my various visits to Shekhawati local residents always pointed them out to me as part of the continually changing architectural landscape of the region.



The promotion of *haveli* tourism capitalizes on the romantic, Orientalist, and princely stereotypes of Rajasthan inspired by colonial ethnographers such as Colonel Tod, who, as I noted earlier, sought to promote Rajasthan as an exotic land of deserts, forts, and ancestral mansions. Rather than take for granted this European romantic investment in Rajasthan since the time of Tod and his contemporaries, I wish to consider the visual practices that have enabled such commonplace (and usually European) forms of viewing. The imagination of Rajasthan as a place of romance has not been obvious and automatic, or, for that matter, arbitrary. It has happened through a number of very deliberate visual moves, dating back to ethnographers like Tod and periodically invoked up to modern times with the Heritage Hotel scheme.

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As part of an effort to popularize the region among European tourists, Rajput owners of Shekhawati's royal palaces started to convert part of their royal residences into tourist accommodations. All over Rajasthan, particularly near the painted mansions, medieval palaces are being turned into heritage hotels, especially popular among French and Italian tourists, who flock there

in large numbers, even in the hottest months of July and August. This promotion of tourism capitalizes on romantic and princely images of Rajasthan, with government and private companies offering "princely tours." The European and, increasingly, American interest in finding aristocracy in India (and other places around the globe) may be a resurfacing of early Orientalist ideas, where Europeans (like Tod) believed that the feudal regimes they observed in India were vestiges of their own past. [58](#)

Part of the popularity of these new holiday destinations is the product of deliberate changes in the Indian government's policy on tourism. [59](#) In 1991, the tourism ministry started the Heritage Hotel scheme. It gives loans and tax breaks to the owners of buildings that are at least fifty years old,—such as forts, castles, hunting lodges, and mansions—that are being developed for tourism. The owners of palaces have become relatively impoverished during the last fifty years of Indian independence, because the Indian state, especially under Indira Gandhi, dramatically increased its expectations of tax revenue from the former princes. In order to hold onto their real estate, many royal families have had to turn part of their homes into tourist hotels. Whereas the royal families are now both owners and operators of palace hotels, their domestic staffs now serve a new set of high-living people expecting royal treatment—Western tourists.

The State Government of Rajasthan has even attempted to bring schoolchildren into the heritage business, through the combined efforts of the departments of education, tourism, and archaeology. In the fall of 1999, the Tourism Secretary of Rajasthan, Lalit Pawar, announced that each school would adopt one monument of historical significance in its neighborhood, and the *dharohar sena*, or heritage army, composed of schoolchildren, would look after its upkeep. [60](#) NGOs and multinationals are also getting into the act.

Both the Ford Foundation and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) have done conservation proposals and surveys of the painted heritage in Rajasthan. American Express donated \$100,000 in 1997 for the restoration of a fort under its World Monuments Watch program. According to the Tourism Secretary, Mr. Bezbaruah, nearly half of foreign tourists come to India to see heritage sites. [61](#) Of course, it should come as no surprise that American Express, as one of the world's largest travel and tourism companies, would have a vested interest. Tourism is, after all, big business in India, attracting a couple million foreign tourists each year, and earning over a billion US dollars in foreign exchange. [62](#)

As part of this boom in tourism, the Shekhawati area has figured prominently in the travel sections of several American and European newspapers. [63](#) It is estimated that about 16,000 foreign tourists visited Shekhawati in 1994. [64](#) The European tourists I spoke to in Shekhawati in 1996 were interested in

the *haveli* because of the art value of the frescoes and murals as High Culture, which they continually compared to various European paintings at home. The idea of the *haveli* as a profitable marketing concept has traveled abroad, where a number of small businesses are attempting to capitalize on the semantic allure of the word. ⁶⁵ In London, a mail order company called *Haveli* sells items "focused on the comforts of homelife." Since the late 1980s, entrepreneurs have created upscale Indian restaurants called *Haveli* in Atlanta, Houston, Boston, and Ottawa. One restaurant in Singapore boasts a *haveli*-like interior, with wall paintings and ornate doors and interior screens imported from western India.

Despite its present popularity, the development of tourism in Rajasthan was not predestined. Ramusack has described how the princes of Rajasthan encouraged hunting and nature tourism in the nineteenth century, and then promoted the popularity of aristocratic forms of tourism in the twentieth century. ⁶⁶ The very fact that we might tend to see the connection between tourism, landscape, and historical mansions and ruins as obvious or natural suggests the dominance of European influence in visual practices in Rajasthan and in South Asia generally. ⁶⁷ After all, the staging of these *haveli* as historical—and as expressing the romantic and aristocratic essence of Rajasthan—appeals to certain identifiable and historically contingent tourist sensibilities. It is entirely possible that these kinds of associations were first generated in the tourist industries of Europe and the West, and that Indian sensibilities have been trained by that practice. I am therefore attempting to provide an explanation for this "obviousness" of the *haveli* in terms of the historical practice of the visual and visual objects in Rajasthan.

Conclusions

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An analysis of the visual practices surrounding the production of the Marwari *haveli* and Chettiar mansions provides a fascinating glimpse into the way in which merchant classes saw themselves as part of a new and hybrid colonial modernity. It shows how images of modernity and Vaishya religiosity were taken up in various local self-representations. The Marwari houses, in particular, could easily be viewed as a case study of the exercise of modernity, as discussed by Freitag. ⁶⁸ The very deliberate assemblage of public and private in the house form is itself, after all, a modern move. The houses illustrate how merchants negotiated a series of modern disjunctures: being home and away, creating new wealth while maintaining older religious values, depicting the modern, cosmopolitan world in which they found themselves, all while emphasizing the continuity and honor of the family ancestors and lineage in the homeland. To do these things, merchants forged a visual idiom drawing upon a range of painting styles and local domestic architectural models, but made it their own by stressing *bhakti* devotional imagery.

The historical context of the production of such houses comes at a specific point in the colonial experience of the merchants. The construction of spectacular merchant houses by business communities can be interpreted as a sign of the confidence the merchants had in the gradual transfer of economic and symbolic power from royal patrons to migrant capitalists who engaged in global capitalism. Each of these architectural practices, while being part of a wider cultural trend, was locally engaged with regional politics. The eventual commodification of the houses into objects of tourist interest further extends the importance of local/global relationships in the production of history and social memory.

As a chronotopic architectural form that extends time and invents history, the Marwari *haveli* seeks to be part of the romance of the idea of Rajasthan. I have already explored its impact for the development of tourism in the region. But what does the popularization of the *haveli* mean, if anything, in terms of its potential social capital for Marwaris living in Calcutta? It is true that the romance of Rajasthan as a region was strongly taken up in traditions of vernacular literature in India, especially in Bengal. Yet the prominence and romance of the martial Rajput in the Bengali imagination did not extend to their less well-liked neighbors in Calcutta, the Marwari traders. It does seem, after all, that despite all their acclaimed grandeur, the painted *haveli* in Rajasthan have made little difference in how the domestic culture of the Marwaris is viewed in urban locales. In Calcutta, Marwaris are (perhaps unfairly) associated with the dingy and crowded neighborhood of Burabazar, the "big market," where the new arrivals from Rajasthan traditionally lived. Partly because of economic jealousy, the living quarters in this area were the special target of colonial sanitation inquiries in the decades around the turn of the century. ⁶⁹ The pervasive images of Marwaris as unsanitary and unhealthy individuals have persisted despite the fact that a large number of prominent Marwari families have left their Burabazar neighborhood. It is these colonial and later scientific images of chaos and filth that get associated with the Marwaris of Calcutta, and not the romantic imagery of the Rajasthani *haveli*. The quest for legitimacy that the Chettiers once sought by building ancestral mansions extends to the current reception of the large houses themselves by local dwellers in the vicinity, who find the homes too showy and ostentatious. ⁷⁰

A process of mapping identity onto landmarks in a so-called ancestral homeland, especially through building ancestral houses, has been a crucial element in the self-fashioning of the public face of migrant traders. Their way of being Marwari and Chettiar within a history of emigration and mobility is one where a geographical orientation to the past became embodied in a visual performance of what they thought they owed their ancestors. Building elaborate mansions in their homelands was an attempt to institute origin through a retrospective move. Whether or not this



mansion building as performance of locality has generated the desired effects remains an open question. The Marwari *haveli* are far more popular among international tourists than with local residents, and more than one critic has dismissed the artistic value of the painted mansions. To a large degree, it seems, the fate—and indeed the legacy—of the Marwari *haveli* and Chettiar mansions rests with the global tourist trade.

Notes:

Note 1: Guy Dubord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone Books, 1995): 24.[Back.](#)

Note 2: Eliane Georges *Les Petits Palais du Rajasthan* (Paris: Editions du Chene, 1996): 44-46.[Back.](#)

Note 3: This is my translation from Georges, Lennard, Genestar (1996). Antonio Calabria and Despina Stratigakos gave excellent suggestions in improving my translation here.

Between 1860 and 1930, the time period when the Marwari and Chettiar mansion were constructed, Rajasthan was a conglomeration of Princely States. Present-day Tamil Nadu was part of the Madras Presidency until 1948, when it became known as Madras. The current political units of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu were formed in 1948 and 1968, respectively. For details on the territorial terminology on Tamil Nadu, see chapter four in Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*.[Back.](#)

Note 4: Sarah Tillotson, *Indian Mansions: A Social History of the Haveli* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998).[Back.](#)

Note 6: Thomas Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).[Back.](#)

Note 6: Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, social power and environment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); Gwendolyn Wright, "Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900—1930," *Journal of Modern History* 59 (June 1987): 291—316.[Back.](#)

Note 7: Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).[Back.](#)

Note 8: J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954).[Back.](#)

Note 9: See Chris Pinney's forthcoming essay in *Beyond Appearances: Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, ed. Sumathi Ramaswamy, (New Delhi:

Sage, forthcoming 2002). [.Back.](#)

Note 10: In the twentieth century, the Marwaris emerged as primary financial backers of Gandhi's activities in the anti-colonial freedom struggle.[Back.](#)

Note 11: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).[Back.](#)

Note 12: R. Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British 1720-1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).[Back.](#)

Note 13: Peter Nabokov, "Research is a Vine by a River," *Dak: The Newsletter of the American Institute of Indian Studies* 4 (Autumn 2000): 9-14.[Back.](#)

Note 14: Several examples come to mind. Many housewives daily decorate the floors of the entrance, the kitchen, and prayer areas of their homes, typically first sprinkling the space with water, and then drawing ornamental and auspicious designs called *rangoli* (in Hindi) or *kolam* (in Tamil). Warli tribal women in Maharashtra use rice-flour to paint family and community events inside of their huts, depicting weddings, hunts, and wars. These paintings are created primarily during weddings and festivals. See Stephen Huyler *Painted Prayers: Women's Art in Village India* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994) and Henry Glassie *Life and Art in Bangladesh* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1977) for more examples of painting and living space in South Asia.[Back.](#)

Note 15: Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas. 1992): 84-85; Christopher. Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 183..[Back.](#)

Note 16: John Bender and David Wellbery, eds. *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). [Back.](#)

Note 17: M.H. Hays, ed., *Hejduk's Chronotope*.(New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996): 20 n.3.[Back.](#)

Note 18: Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).[Back.](#)

Note 19: Ilan Cooper, *The Painted Towns of Shekhawati* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 1994).[Back.](#)

Note 20: The emigration of Rajasthani traders and moneylenders to eastern India began as early as the seventeenth century during the Mughal Empire, especially of those Oswal Jains associated with the famous banking concern of Jagat Seth in Bengal. These early networks of traders provided the infrastructure that enabled the foundation of British trade networks concentrated in the port cities of Calcutta and Bombay.[Back.](#)

Note 21: Barbara Ramusack, "The Indian Princes as Fantasy: Palace Hotels, Palace Museums, and Palace on Wheels" in C. Breckenridge, ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1995): 66-89. . The Hindi translation of a Bengali text, *Bangal Mein Rajasthan* (Rajasthan in Bengal) is part of a large corpus of literature attesting to the popularity of Tod in local retellings and in the Indian and Bengali imagination of Rajasthan.[Back.](#)

Note 22: P. Rakesh and K. Lewis, *Shekhawati: Rajasthan's Painted Homes* (Delhi: Lustre, 1995).[Back.](#)

Note 23: Gianni Guadalupi, "Painted Cities, frescoes from Shekhawati," *FMR: The magazine of Franco Maria Ricci* (Dec 98/Jan 99): 107-121. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Stephen Blake, *Shahjahanabad: the Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).[Back.](#)

Note 25: F. Wacziarg and A. Nath, *Rajasthan: The Painted Walls of Shekhawati* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982); Rakesh and Lewis, 1995; Cooper, 1994.[Back.](#)

Note 26: G.H.R. Tillotson, *The Rajput Palaces* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 200-201.[Back.](#)

Note 27: V.P. Pramar, *Haveli: Wooden Houses and Mansions of Gujarat* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1989). [Back.](#)

Note 28: A. Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1987), [Back.](#)

Note 29: Wacziarg and Nath, 1982[Back.](#)

Note 30: Cooper, 1994; Wacziarg and Nath, 1982. [Back.](#)

Note 31: How this process may have travelled from Italy—whether by Mughal conquest, foreign missionaries during Mughal rule, or by traders representing the Chola-Nayak dynasties of South India—remains uncertain (Wacziarg and Nath, 1982, 25).[Back.](#)

Note 32: Wacziarg and Nath, 1982. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Pinney, 1997.[Back.](#)

Note 34: Wacziarg and Nath, 1982, 31. [Back.](#)

Note 35: I thank Sandria Freitag for this point.[Back.](#)

Note 36: Rakesh and Lewis, 1995.[Back.](#)

Note 37: Sarah Tillotson, 1998. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Despite the fact that the *haveli* are rarely inhabited, the continuing Orientalist associations of the *haveli* with an 'exotic' Eastern lifestyle, emphasizing the seclusion of women, has prompted the recent publication of novels which promise to depict the secrets of family life within the seclusion of

the painted walls. A number of novels make use of the Rajput *haveli* as a lived-in space, neither preserved but empty nor or in ruins. Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* tells the author's autobiographical story of how as a new bride— a sophisticated and educated young woman from Bombay—she finds herself coming to terms with the rigid social expectations that attend everyday life in her husband's family *haveli*. In Mehta's feminist account, mirroring her own slow acceptance of the customs of her husband's traditional household, the *haveli* becomes transformed from an object of patriarchal tyranny to a place of tradition, protection, and continuity. Rama Mehta, *Inside the Haveli* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977. For reviews see *The Independent* (London), 29 May 29 1994; *Financial Times* (London), 13 August 1994.) Suzanne Staples' book, entitled simply *Haveli*, takes place in desert Pakistan and is a tale aimed at teenage readers. It infuses romanticism, Orientalism, and intrigue into the trials and tribulations of a nineteen-year old 'junior wife' living in the mansion of her powerful husband's family. Both of these novels arguably extend, for a modern, international and tourist public, the Orientalist romanticization of the *haveli*. Suzanne Staples, *Haveli* (NY: Random House Children's Publishers, 1995).[Back.](#)

Note 39: Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras: Government Press, 1909): 258.[Back.](#)

Note 40: Nilkan Perumal, *Chettinad* (Coimbatore: Popular Hindusthan, 1955), 26.[Back.](#)

Note 41: Perumal, *Chettinad*, 23.[Back.](#)

Note 42: *Ibid.*, 22-23.[Back.](#)

Note 43: Environmental rationales are sometimes invoked to explain the Chettiars' success in business. It is claimed by some of the hagiographers of the Chettiars that because the dry and sandy soils of Chettinadu are not conducive to agriculture, the environment encouraged the community to trade instead of farming (Perumal, *Chettinad*, 17).[Back.](#)

Note 44: There was no question of the cultural impact of the Chettiars on the region; the local Tamil dialect was known as *Chettiar basha* and had a special pronunciation.[Back.](#)

Note 45: S. Chandrasekhar, *The Nagarathars of South India* (Madras: Macmillan, 1980); R. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). [Back.](#)

Note 46: D.W. Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 53—55. The well-known Indians Overseas Bank found in most major cities in India is a legacy of the Chettiars' success in foreign places.[Back.](#)

Note 47: Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 370-374.[Back.](#)

Note 48: *Valavu* can have many meanings, including house, household

premises, and a cluster of "houses" inside a compound with one entry.[Back.](#)

Note 49: D. Thiagarajan "The Chettinad House" in *From Village to Centre: The Structures of DakshinaChitra* (Chennai: Madras Craft Foundation, 1999).[Back.](#)

Note 50: K. N. Chaudhuri notes that the arrangement of rooms around a central space has been a basic design of urban domestic housing in a cultural area ranging from the Middle East to India. Historians such as Chaudhuri have argued that in courtyard houses in the Indo-Islamic architectural tradition, women and children were not confined, although some have noted that custom dictated the use of those houses as public spaces. The courtyard design allows for domestic privacy and interior ventilation, yet also protects the interior from dirt, dust, and noise pollution from unpaved streets K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 199-200.[Back.](#)

Note 51: Personal communication.[Back.](#)

Note 52: I. Cooper, *Painted Towns of Shekwawati* (1994) is one of many examples. [Back.](#)

Note 53: G.H.R. Tillotson, *Tradition of Indian Architecture* (New Delhi: Oxford, 1989): 22.[Back.](#)

Note 54: P. Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) .[Back.](#)

Note 55: Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).[Back.](#)

Note 56: There is some debate about the age of the Birla *haveli*, since Shivnarain Birla migrated to Pilani in 1858, only giving him six years to amass such wealth. Kudaisya has argued that the Birla *haveli* has probably had extensive remodeling done on an original structure. *The Public Career of G. D. Birla 1911-1947*. PhD Diss, Cambridge University, 1992): 26 n.37.[Back.](#)

Note 57: *Poddar's Social Commitment* brochure, Nawalgarh, n.d.[Back.](#)

Note 58: Thomas R. Trautmann's *The Aryans and British India*, contains an excellent discussion of these issues. [Back.](#)

Note 59: *The Daily Telegraph* 29 July 1995.[Back.](#)

Note 60: *The Hindu*, 28 September 1999.[Back.](#)

Note 61: *Business Line*, 19 July 1997.[Back.](#)

Note 62: Xinhua General Overseas News Service, 24 September 1993.[Back.](#)

Note 63: C.W. Dugger, "Painted Mansions of Shekhawati," *The New York Times*, TR 11, 26. November 22, 1998. [Back.](#)

Note 64: *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 25 August 1995, 20.[Back.](#)

Note 65: I am grateful to Sumathi Ramaswamy for this point.[Back.](#)

Note 66: Ramusack, 1995. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Discussions of the heritage industry of Britain are an obvious point of comparison here.[Back.](#)

Note 68: Sandria Freitag, in *Beyond Appearances*, ed. Sumathi Ramaswamy. (New Delhi: Sage, forthcoming, 2002).[Back.](#)

Note 69: See Patrick Geddes (1919) and *Report of the Commission to Enquire into Certain Matters Connected with the Sanitation of the Town of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885) IOL V/26/840/8.[Back.](#)

Note 70: Anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel wrote that the house that he rented during his 1970s fieldwork in Kalappur, built by a rich absentee Malaysian owner, was considered by the local inhabitants to be a showy "status symbol" and as such inauspicious and "highly vulnerable to the evil eye" (Daniel *Fluid Signs*,: 132—133). Elsewhere Daniel discusses the compatibility of the house-person relationship in Tamil culture (105—162).[Back.](#)

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