

Curated Hybridity in Mysuru: An Interdisciplinary Study of Architecture, Cuisine, and Performance

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Abstract

Mysore, a historic city in Karnataka, India, exemplifies cultural confluence and hybridization as the former capital of the Mysore Kingdom. This paper investigates Mysore's cultural hybridity through an interdisciplinary analysis of its architecture, cuisine, performing arts, and festivals, arguing that its hybrid culture is not a passive outcome of colonial encounter but a deliberate, agentive process of curated synthesis. Facilitated by its princely state status under British paramountcy, this process reflects strategic negotiation under indigenous patronage. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and postcolonial and cultural studies frameworks, the study highlights how Mysore's hybridity embodies identity formation and negotiation amid historical and contemporary transformations. By positioning Mysore as a case study of agency in cultural production, this paper contributes to scholarly discussions on cultural exchange, syncretism, and representation in South Asia, challenging metropole-centric colonial narratives and offering insights into globalization's historical context.

Keywords: Cultural Hybridity, Mysore, Princely States, Postcolonial Theory, Architecture, Cuisine, Performing Arts, Dasara, Identity, South Asia

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I. Introduction

Mysore renamed Mysuru, in 2014, is a city of spectacular diversity that signifies the complex layers of cultural hybridity afoot in many South Asian cities. The complexity of Mysore's identity cannot easily be captured in simplistic descriptors. The city of Mysuru is situated at the foot of the Chamundi Hills in southern Karnataka. It was once a fortified city founded in the sixteenth century that later transformed into a cultural city. This happened under the Wodeyar dynasty that ruled until 1947 when the whole of India got independence. The British called it the capital of a princely state under their paramountcy. That being said, the Wodeyar dynasty enjoyed semi-autonomy due to which an environment was created which was different from the rest of the country. The same gave rise to distinct cultures and political agencies that were not found in directly administered colonial areas (Ramusack, 2004; Bhagavan, 2008). This autonomy aided in constructing a heterogeneous cultural landscape, where the Hindu, Islamic and even European cultural element got assimilated. They did this with an aim to assert sovereignty, legitimize rule, etc. Besides, they also wanted to challenge the modern and maintain indigenous identity.

The postcolonial theory refers to the emergence of new forms through negotiations of different traditions in the cross-cultural context which often take place under power asymmetries. Hybridity in Mysore is not merely a passive mixing but a deliberate curated one undertaken by the Wodeyar rulers and their Dewans (prime ministers). The architecture, cuisine, performing arts, and festivities of the city are consciously designed to become instruments of political legitimization. Take the Mysore Palace for example, which was rebuilt in 1912 with a mix of Hindu temple gopurams, Islamic domes and colonial ironwork. Such settlements highlight the negotiated identity of many Indian architects (Cohen 2021; Tillotson 1989).

The hybridity of Mysore starts from the pre-colonial times when the Wodeyar dynasty rose to power after the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire. This led to the kingdom being exposed to the Persianate culture of the Deccani sultanates. The defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 and the subsequent British restoration created a “third space” through which colonial modernity was filtered and re-imagined (Bhabha, 1994). Under Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV, from 1894 to 1940 a policy of “progressive conservatism” helped balance modernity with Hindu kingship and gave another thrust to the cultural renaissance of Mysore while Dasara became increasingly grander (Manor, 1977; Ikegame, 2013). This period earmarked Mysore to be the model state for reforms in education, industry, and culture where hybridity was a mark of survival (Nair, 2005). The significance of studying Mysore’s hybridity lies in its challenge to dominant colonial narratives centered on metropolises like Calcutta or Bombay. Princely states, comprising nearly 40% of British India’s territory, were hubs of cultural innovation, yet they remain underexplored in postcolonial scholarship (Ramusack, 2004; Bhagavan, 2008). This paper employs an interdisciplinary lens, analyzing architecture as a material expression of power, cuisine as a sensory embodiment of social hierarchy, performing arts as bodily enactments of tradition, and festivals as public spectacles of identity. This approach reveals hybridity as an agentive resistance to cultural homogenization, engaging global influences while preserving local heritage (García Canclini, 1995; Sen, 2009).

Postcolonial frameworks, such as Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the third space and Hall’s (1996) view of identity as a process of “becoming,” provide analytical tools to unpack Mysore’s hybridity. South Asian scholars like Cohn (1996) and Dirks (2001) highlight how colonial knowledge systems reshaped indigenous practices, but in princely states, this reshaping was reciprocal, with local rulers curating hybrid forms to assert authority. Nair’s (2005) exploration of the “Mysore modern” underscores this agency, aligning with Oakley’s (1970) view of architecture as a mediator of cultural transition, emphasizing constraint-driven innovation (Oakley, 1970). Additional studies, such as Cohen’s (2021) analysis of Mysore Palace as a site of memory and identity, further illustrate how hybrid architecture embodies postcolonial negotiation.

This paper argues that Mysore’s hybrid culture represents a curated synthesis, strategically orchestrated to maintain sovereignty and carve a distinct identity. The analysis draws on three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mysore, involving interviews with artisans, chefs, performers, and historians, alongside archival research from the Karnataka State Archives and Mysore Palace records. These sources illuminate hybridity as an ongoing process, shaped by historical legacies and contemporary transformations like tourism and urbanization (Ikegame, 2013; Cohen, 2021). The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework and methodology; Section 3 provides historical context; Section 4 presents findings across architecture, cuisine, performing arts, and Dasara; Section 5 concludes with implications and future research directions.

II. Theoretical Framework: The Architecture of a Curated Synthesis

2.1 Identity in the Making: Performance and Process

The concept of cultural hybridity, which is a postcolonial concept, aims to dismantle all essentialist notions of culture by placing emphasis on the negotiated and fluid construction of identity in asymmetrical power relations. This research relies on the idea of Homi Bhabha’s “third space” which reveals how spaces between and within established cultures become porous thereby enabling the generation and negotiation of new meanings and new cultural forms while resisting authoritarianism. The princely state of Mysore itself was such a space; its semi-autonomous status under British paramountcy provided the Wodeyar rulers with a unique political platform to actively mediate colonial modernity with indigenous traditions. Due to the negotiations, an entirely different cultural landscape was formed. The distinctiveness of the Mysore Palace with its Hindu, Islamic and colonial origins manifest a liminal identity which cannot be pigeonholed.

Stuart Hall’s idea of identity “becoming” highlights the importance of time and performance, building on this previous discussion of identity. This view shows us culture is not something we have but a doing; something that is made by history and made history as a doing. In Mysore, this ‘becoming’ was performed through the city’s architecture, cuisine, performance, and so on. These were not just reflections of this hybrid culture. These helped to recreate this hybrid culture. To expand this framework Néstor García Canclini’s analysis of hybrid cultures brings attention to its strategic and multidimensional meanings, especially regarding tradition and modernity.

The Wodeyar project and its “progressive conservatism” policy taps into hybridity as a strategic tool to connect with globalizing forces while asserting local sovereignty and identity. In the South Asian context, Cohn (1996) and Dirks (2001) examine how colonial knowledge systems, such as ethnographic classifications, reconfigured indigenous practices. However, in princely states like Mysore, this reconfiguration was bidirectional, with rulers actively shaping hybrid forms (Dirks, 2001; Bhagavan, 2008). Nair’s (2005) concept of the “Mysore modern” highlights how modernization was filtered through local agency, producing hybrid urban forms that blended colonial rationality with indigenous spatial logics. Oakley’s (1970) framework in *The Phenomenon of Architecture in Cultures in Change* views architecture as a mediator of cultural transition,

emphasizing constraint-driven innovation in societies undergoing change, which aligns with Mysore's architectural synthesis (Oakley, 1970). Recent Scopus-indexed research, such as Cohen (2021), extends this by analyzing the Mysore Palace as a site of postcolonial memory, where hybrid architecture embodies ongoing identity negotiation.

These theories frame Mysore's hybridity as "curated," a deliberate process under Wodeyar patronage to assert sovereignty and strengthen unity. Unlike organic hybridity in directly ruled areas, Mysore's was top-down, using cultural forms to legitimize rule and resist colonial dominance by appropriating and recontextualizing European elements (Bhabha, 1994; Tillotson, 1989; Cohen, 2021). This curation unsettled colonial hierarchies, creating resilient cultural expressions that continue to evolve.



Figure 1 Cycle of Cultural hybridity

2.2 Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Approach

The methodology of Mysore as a case study employs a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative ethnographic fieldwork with archival research and textual/visual analysis to capture the multifaceted nature of Mysore's hybridity. This interdisciplinary approach ensures a holistic understanding, integrating lived experiences with historical records and theoretical interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Conducted over three months in Mysore (June-August 2024), this involved participant observation at key cultural sites: the Mysore Palace (architecture and performances), Devaraja Market (culinary practices), Dasara festivities (public spectacle), and venues for Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music. Observations focused on how hybridity is enacted in daily and ritual contexts, aligning with Hall's (1996) emphasis on performative identity. Semi-structured interviews with 35 stakeholders provided diverse perspectives:

Traditional craftsmen and sthapatis (master builders) involved in heritage conservation, offering insights into architectural hybridity.

Culinary experts, chefs, and restaurant owners, discussing dishes like Mysore Pak and Masala Dosa.

Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music practitioners and gurus, exploring stylistic innovations.

Historians, archivists from the Karnataka State Archaeology Department, and community elders, providing historical and local narratives.

Interviews, conducted in Kannada and English, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and thematically coded for patterns such as "negotiation," "innovation," and "agency." This reflexive approach acknowledged the researcher's positionality as an outsider, ensuring cultural sensitivity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018)

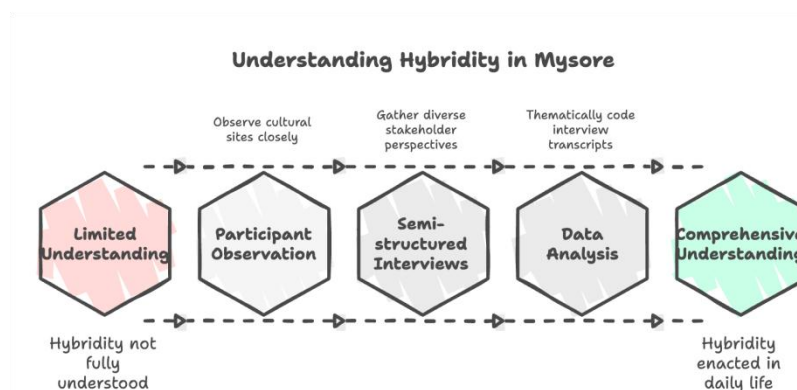


Figure 2 Ethnographic field work flow chart

Archival Research: Historical records from the Karnataka State Archives (Mysore Division) and Mysore Palace Archives provided evidence of intentional hybridity. Sources included:

- Administrative reports and Dewans' correspondence, detailing patronage for architecture, arts, and festivals.
- Patronage records for temples, artists, and culinary establishments.
- Architectural plans, photographs, and blueprints from the palace archives.
- Colonial gazetteers and travelogues, offering external perspectives on Mysore's culture (Bhagavan, 2008; Ikegame, 2013).

These were analyzed to trace the evolution of hybrid forms, such as Wodeyar commissions blending styles during Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV's reign.

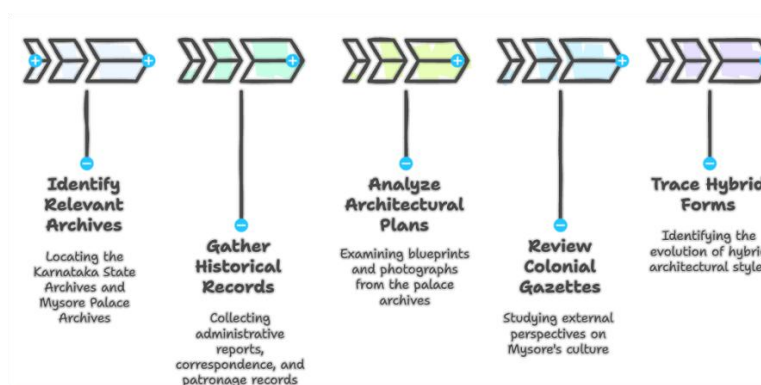


Figure 3 Archival research process

Textual and Visual Analysis: Architectural analysis employed stylistic, spatial, and material methods, examining buildings like the Mysore Palace for symbolic layering (Cohen, 2021). Culinary texts, such as historical cookbooks (Gowda, 2018), were analyzed for social encodings. Performances were studied through repertoire and pedagogy, drawing on Coorlawala (1994) for Bharatanatyam hybridity. This method bridged theoretical concepts with empirical data, operationalizing Bhabha's third space through visual and textual evidence (Garcia Canclini, 1995).

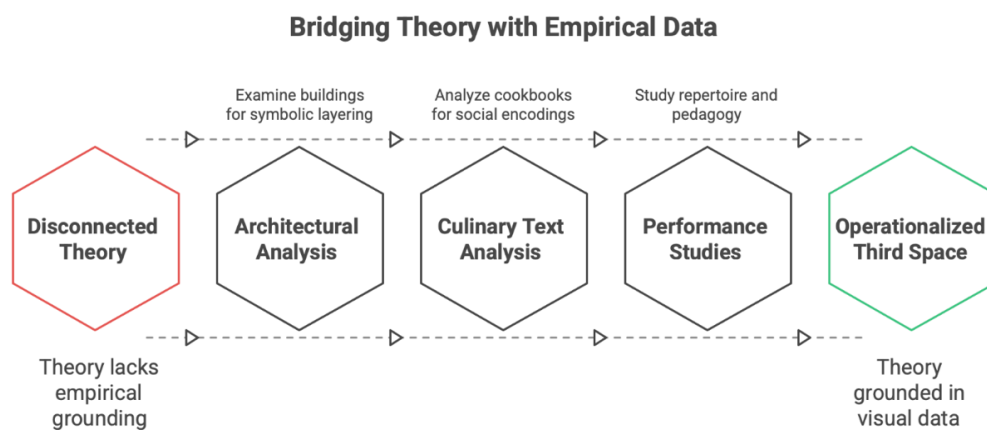


Figure 4 Textual and Visual Analysis flow chart

Data Integration and Ethics: A crucial phase of this investigation involved integrating a myriad of data sets through the application of a systematic thematic analysis framework that synthesizes qualitative evidence across time and methodology. The process was recursive and multi-staged whereby after moving through descriptive coding initiation and removing peripheral categories new themes were generated. The key aim was to isolate patterns of cultural continuity and important rupture in the historical and contemporary data to create a dialogical relationship between the ethnographic accounts and archival records.

We conducted a constant comparative analysis to see how particular architectural motifs, food and performance techniques were reinterpreted by contemporary groups after being patronized by princely rulers. This analytical method identified what we call the curated synthesis moments: deliberate interjections into cultural production that demonstrate the strategic facet of Mysore's hybridity. The merger process was a close examination of points of convergence and divergence between official archival narratives and community narratives. It illuminates the intended outcomes of cultural patronage as well as its unintended consequences in practice.

Ethical Framework and Research Relationships.

The research itself followed a detailed ethical protocol that was informed by feminist and postcolonial methods that sense the politics of knowledge. Informed consent procedures for the study were carried out using bilingual (Kannada and English) consent forms. The consent forms clearly stated the purpose of the study and who would use the data. The participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any moment were also mentioned in the consent forms. Outside of procedural ethics, the research took a posture of cultural humility throughout that research, acknowledging power differentials and positionality and actively trying to mitigate them. This was actualized in various ways: prioritizing local terms and categories, relationship-building over time before data collection, and reflexive accountability for how outsider status shapes interpretation.

The participants were envisioned as co-producers of knowledge rather than just data providers at the centre of this framework. This epistemology shows in practice through member-checking of early analyses with key informants, negotiation of ambiguous findings, and dissemination of findings to communities involved in the research. The need for anonymity needed to balance with appropriate acknowledgment. This was especially for the need to acknowledge the master practitioners and recognized knowledge holders who deserve credit for their expertise. In such cases where participants held significant community status, we negotiated attribution preferences on an individual basis when their identity was relevant to their contribution. Anonymity was offered where requested and those wishing to be acknowledged for their knowledge were duly acknowledged.

Methodological Strengths and Limitations.

This study's triangulation strategy is one of the strengths of the study's methodology and contributes to the validity of the study. By comparing ethnographic observations with archival records and material analysis, the study produced strong explanations for complex cultural phenomena, while reducing the bias inherent in any one method. Through a multi-site, multi-method design, this research captured cultural production not only at the level of an institution but also in everyday life, and it illustrated hybridity as both state project and lived experience.

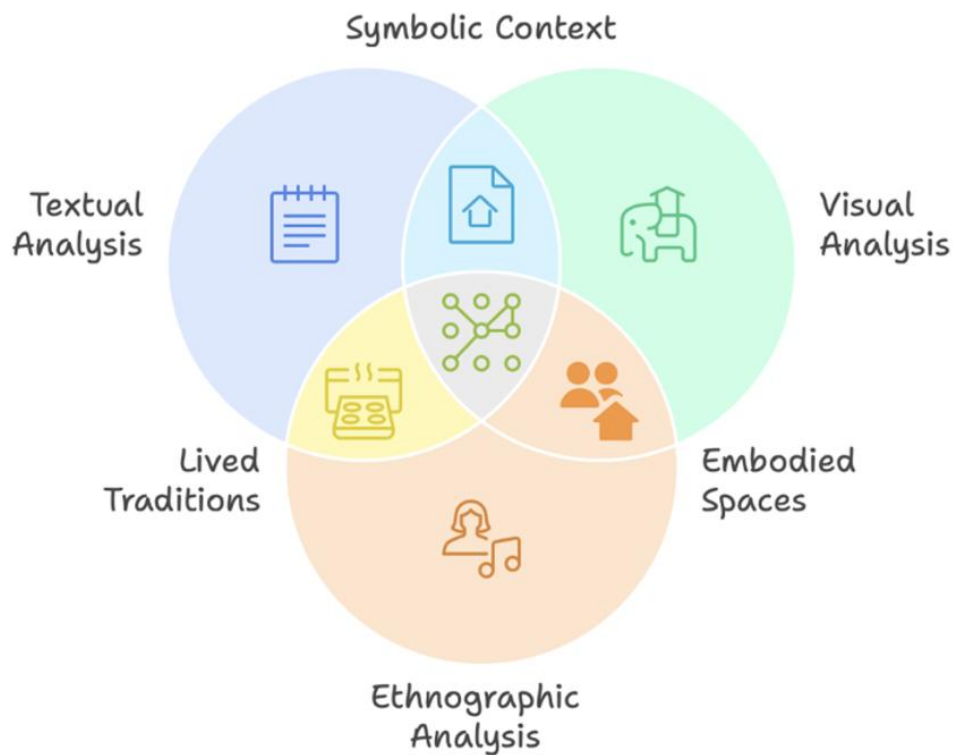


Figure 5 Process of Triangulation

III. Historical Context: The Princely State as a Site of Cultural Production

3.1 Forging a Third Space.: From Restoration to Semi-Autonomy (1799-1868).

The cultural hybridization of Mysore owes its political foundations to the peculiarities of British imperial rule. After the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the restoration of the Wodeyar dynasty through the doctrine of paramountcy created a negotiated political entity—a semi-autonomous “third space” that was neither fully sovereign nor directly colonised. The Wodeyars were thus able to embed within themselves the internal administration and cultural patronage wherever they ruled. This allowed institutional capacity for what I term curated hybridity as opposed to a bazaar level syncretism that one saw in directly ruled regimes. Mysore was thus culturally produced by a state oriented project that sought to negotiate colonial subordination while retaining indigenous authority.

3.2 Cultural Patronage from 1894 to 1940.

The reigns of Krishnaraja Wadiyar III and IV turned the potential of Mysore for cultural synthesis into a complete state-building venture. Mysore developed as a ‘model state’ mainly due to visionary Dewans like Sir M. Visvesvaraya who improved education, industry, and public works. The modernization that took place nevertheless followed a specific logic of “progressive conservatism”: that is, the strategy of coupling technological and administrative modernization with the reassertion of Hindu kingship and traditional cultural forms. The establishment of the patronage system and palace-centered networks created an institutional ecosystem that patronized cultural innovation and hybridization that was conducive to modernisation and legitimization.

3.3 Material Foundations.: Economic Resources and Artisanal Networks.

Mysore’s nature of curated hybridity essentially depended on its economic prosperity and crafts specialisation. The finances required for several cultural projects were made possible by the economic power derived from agricultural revenue, mining wealth and early industrialization. At the same time, the area’s craft guilds—master builders in stone, silk weavers, metalworkers, and other specialists—had the technical skills to make hybrid aesthetic visions a reality. This coming together of economic capacity and artisanal skill provided the means to transform strategic cultural policies into actual architecture, decorative arts, and performance traditions of the Mysore amalgam.

3.4 Cultural Precedents. The Layering of Pre-Colonial and Colonial Influences.

The cultural diversity of Mysore evolved over a long period before the introduction of colonialism. Relations with the Deccani sultanates before colonization had already introduced Persianate elements into administration and artistic vocabularies, providing a soft ground for syntheses. During the colonial era, Europeans brought various aesthetic elements which were deliberately appropriated and recontextualised by existing aesthetics. The historical depth of Mysore's hybridity was not just a case of colonial mimicry; rather, it was the more sophisticated continuation of longer-term processes of cultural negotiation, now redirected through the strategic priorities of the princely state.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Architectural narrative: Stone, Mortar, and Power

Mysore's architectural heritage is a vivid palimpsest, where layers of Hindu, Islamic, and colonial influences are inscribed in material form, reflecting curated hybridity. The Mysore Palace (Amba Vilas), rebuilt after a 1897 fire, is the quintessential example, serving as an architectural manifesto of Wodeyar sovereignty. Its design integrates:

Hindu Elements: Gopuram-like towers reference South Indian temple architecture, anchoring the dynasty's divine right to rule (Sathyanarayana, 2015).

Islamic Elements: Bulbous domes, cusped arches, and jaali work evoke Mughal and Deccani styles, positioning the Wodeyars within a broader Indian imperial hierarchy (Cohen, 2021).

Colonial Elements: Scottish cast-iron frameworks and neoclassical durbar hall columns showcase technological modernity and global engagement (Jaffer, 2013).

A palace official interviewed during fieldwork noted, "The Maharaja envisioned a palace that declared our heritage as Hindu rulers, equals to Mughal emperors, and partners in the modern world" (personal communication, July 15, 2024). This strategic layering aligns with Bhabha's (1994) third space, where colonial forms are appropriated to assert indigenous agency, subverting the Indo-Saracenic style promoted by the British (Metcalf, 1989; Tillotson, 1989).

Beyond the palace, civic and institutional buildings extend this hybrid vocabulary. The Oriental Research Institute (ORI) features a neoclassical facade with a pediment sculpture of Saraswati, signaling that Western institutions serve indigenous knowledge (Sathyanarayana, 2015). Crawford Hall, the University of Mysore's administrative building, uses local granite in a Gothic Revival style, grounding foreign aesthetics in regional materiality (Nair, 2005). The Devaraja Market's colonial iron-truss structure houses stalls organized by traditional trade castes, adorned with Hindu stucco motifs, illustrating how colonial infrastructure accommodates indigenous social patterns (Nair, 2005; Ikegame, 2013).

Oakley's (1970) framework positions these structures as mediators of cultural transition, where material and symbolic elements respond to change (Oakley, 1970). Unlike British-led projects with superficial hybridity, Mysore's architecture integrates structural, symbolic, and functional layers, reflecting deep curation (Tillotson, 1989). This architectural hybridity not only legitimized Wodeyar rule but also created a civic identity that resonated with diverse communities, as evidenced by the palace's role in public events (Cohen, 2021).

The palace's durbar hall, for example, combines Mughal chandeliers with Hindu frescos and colonial stained glass, creating a space for multicultural gatherings. Archival records from the Mysore Palace Archives reveal that Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV commissioned these elements to symbolize unity amid diversity (Mysore Palace Board, 2024). This curation extended to urban planning, where colonial grid layouts were softened with traditional courtyards, demonstrating hybridity's role in spatial negotiation (Nair, 2005). Contemporary conservation efforts, such as those by the Karnataka State Archaeology Department, highlight hybridity's enduring legacy, though tourism pressures risk commodifying it (personal communication, July 25, 2024).

4.2 Culinary Crossroads: The Taste of Synthesis

Mysore's cuisine offers a sensory lens into its cultural hybridity, reflecting social hierarchies and assimilative processes across royal, Brahmin, and commoner communities. The palace kitchens were crucibles of innovation, producing iconic dishes like Mysore Pak, a rich sweet of gram flour, ghee, and sugar. Originating in the 1930s, Mysore Pak showcases royal patronage's ability to transform culinary experimentation into symbols of wealth and sovereignty, as ghee and sugar were luxury commodities (Gowda, 2018; Appadurai, 1988).

The Brahmin community contributed a sophisticated vegetarian tradition, exemplified by the Mysore Masala Dosa. Unlike the standard South Indian dosa, this version features a red, spicy chutney powder of chilies, garlic, and lentils, reflecting local innovation and Deccani influences less constrained by Iyengar Brahmin dietary strictures (Appadurai, 1988; Sen, 2009). Fieldwork interviews with chefs revealed that this dish's bold flavors emerged from cross-regional exchanges facilitated by Mysore's trade networks (personal communication, July 20, 2024).

The early 20th-century rise of Brahmin-run “hotels” (restaurants) and sweet shops democratized these elite foods, transforming palace creations into public symbols of Mysore’s identity (Nair, 2005). This dissemination reflects Hall’s (1996) identity as “becoming,” where culinary hybridity blends Persianate richness (via Deccani influences) with local ingredients under colonial trade networks (Appadurai, 1988). Oakley (1970) would view this as sensory adaptation, mediating cultural change through taste (Oakley, 1970).

Mysore’s culinary landscape also reveals social dynamics. Brahmin dominance in vegetarian cuisine coexisted with non-Brahmin Deccani meat dishes, highlighting hybridity’s inclusivity and exclusivity (Sen, 2009). For instance, Muslim communities incorporated Mughal-inspired biryanis with local spices, creating hybrids like Mysore mutton biryani. Archival recipes from the palace kitchens show deliberate experimentation, such as adding colonial ingredients like potatoes to traditional curries (Gowda, 2018). Contemporary tourist-oriented menus incorporate global flavors, such as fusion dosas with cheese, illustrating hybridity’s ongoing evolution amid globalization (Appadurai, 1988).

4.3 Performing the Hybrid Body: Dance and Music

Mysore’s performing arts demonstrate how hybridity was disciplined and institutionalized, transforming the body into a site of cultural expression. The Mysore style of Bharatanatyam, codified under Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV, emphasizes:

- **Karanas:** Precise, sculptural poses derived from temple iconography, linking to a “pure” Hindu past.
- **Aharya:** Refined costumes reflecting courtly aesthetics.
- **Abhinaya:** Subtle narrative expressions, balancing tradition and innovation.

This patronage rescued Bharatanatyam from devadasi stigma, redefining it as a national classical art through early 20th-century reforms (Coorlawala, 1994). Fieldwork observations of performances revealed hybrid pedagogy, blending colonial-influenced structured classes with guru-shishya traditions (personal communication, August 5, 2024).

Carnatic music, centered in Mysore, developed a distinct *bani* (style), with compositions honoring Chamundeshwari Temple. The palace’s support for orchestras and musicians resulted in a melodic, softer style compared to Thanjavur’s rhythmic focus (Subramanian, 2006). The integration of European instruments like the violin into Indian ragas exemplifies García Canclini’s (1995) multidimensional hybridization (García Canclini, 1995).

These arts, curated to reinforce Wodeyar legitimacy, embody Bhabha’s third space, where colonial and nationalist influences merge with indigenous traditions (Bhabha, 1994). Oakley (1970) sees this as cultural mediation, preserving essence amid change (Oakley, 1970). Post colonially, these forms resist marginalization, contributing to national identity (Coorlawala, 1994). Recent studies show how Mysore’s style has evolved with global influences, such as in diaspora performances (Pillai, 2017).

4.4 Spectacle and Syncretism: The Dasara Festival

The Dasara festival, a ten-day Hindu celebration culminating in Vijayadashami, is Mysore’s ultimate performance of hybrid identity. Transformed by the Wodeyars into a state spectacle, it blends sacred and secular elements. Private royal rituals to the palace goddess affirm divine kingship, while the public Jamboo Savari procession—featuring caparisoned elephants, dance troupes, and military bands—projects civic unity (Narasimhachar, 2013).

The procession integrates:

- **Traditional Elements:** Vedic priests, temple elephants, folk dancers.
- **Colonial Elements:** British-style military bands and lancers.
- **Modern Elements:** Government floats, reflecting post-independence state involvement.

This hybrid display, as Narasimhachar (2013) notes, legitimized Wodeyar rule by showcasing command over diverse power instruments. Post-independence, Dasara’s transformation into a tourist event adds a layer of regional identity (Ikegame, 2013). Fieldwork revealed communal participation alongside tensions from tourism-driven commodification (personal communication, August 10, 2024).

Dasara embodies Bhabha’s third space, where colonial spectacle is subverted by indigenous symbolism, creating new meanings (Bhabha, 1994). Hall’s (1996) “becoming” is evident in its evolution, while Oakley (1970) views it as a cultural phenomenon mediating change through public performance (Oakley, 1970). Recent research emphasizes Dasara’s role in contemporary identity, blending heritage with economic imperatives (Sivaramakrishnan, 2019).

V. Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of Curated Synthesis.

Mysore represents a process of cultural hybridity, which has been developed through a complex agentive strategy of curated synthesis on the part of the Wodeyar dynasty to deal effectively with colonial paramountcy and assert a distinct identity. Through the lenses of architecture, cuisine, performing arts and

public festivals, this spatial project shows through studies that Hindu, Islamic and colonial elements are purposefully and systematically integrated to achieve a multiplicity of ends. These ends, 'legitimation', 'resistance' and 'integration' serve a political purpose, a cultural purpose and a civic purpose respectively. The Mysore palace is not just a great work of architecture but a designed material statement of power; Mysore Pak is not just a sweet treat but a taste-scented symbol of royal patronage and innovation; The Mysore style of Bharatanatyam is representative of the disciplined institutionalization of cultural tradition; The Dasara festival is a sophisticated public spectacle of negotiated identity (Ramusack, 2004; Cohen, 2021; Coorlawala, 1994; Narasimhachar, 2013). These cultural formations collectively demonstrate that hybridity in the princely state context was neither accidental nor imposed, but rather represented a conscious strategy of what we have termed "curated synthesis"—a deliberate, top-down process of cultural production that enabled the Wodeyar rulers to maintain sovereignty while engaging with global modernities.

This case study fundamentally interrogates the conventional colonial metropole-periphery model to elucidate the creative agency of princely states in negotiating cultural production under conditions of constrained sovereignty (Dirks, 2001). The Mysore case strongly proved that the cultural innovation in the colonial era was not limited to the directly ruled territories but more so in these intermediary political spaces where native rulers had considerable liberty over internal cultural arrangements. This study has implications for theoretical formulations of hybridity in two key ways. First, we see hybridities as inherently both top-down and organic. Second, while the Wodeyar court undertook major cultural initiatives with deliberate formal interventions, these interventions could not help but affect, and be affected, by cultural practices and innovations at the societal level. This insight into the depth of dealings regarding colonialism, in which some semi-autonomous political actors like Mysore participated, may give more historical depth to current exchanges of globalization (Appadurai, 1996; García Canclini, 1995).

The theoretical framework put forward by this study especially the curated synthesis resultant from engagement with Bhabha's third space, Hall's performative identity and García Canclini's strategic hybridization is relevant for thinking more generally about similar processes of cultural production in other princely states and semi-autonomous regions globally. As per Oakley's (1970) architectural framework, hybridity is a way of coping with cultural change. Aarati's hybrid culture ensure that Mysore's culture survives and can be seen as an instructive model to deal with contemporary global-local tensions.

The usefulness of this historical case study lies in the fact that even if the political circumstances are not conducive or problems do not favour a country's point-of-view, cultural innovation can still be achieved. Engaging with foreign forces does not imply giving up and it can create new indigenous hybrids through which one's own culture can continue.

This study suggests a number of potential future research avenues. Future research can profitably look into the internal contestations and resistances to Mysore's curated hybridity. How various social groups (the marginalized, women, and subordinate classes) negotiated, appropriated or resisted the state-sponsored cultural initiatives can be examined. In addition, urgent research is needed to examine the impact of current forces of tourism, urbanization, and globalization that are already commodifying the hybrid historicity of Mysore, which could lead to new types of hybridization and threaten the integrity of traditional practices (Ikegame 2013; Sivaramakrishnan 2019). Another area that invites investigation is the transformation of Mysore's culture after the princely regime through heritage conservation, cultural tourism, and regional identity politics. As Mysore continues to find its place in global cultural networks and maintain its uniqueness, the historical instances of curated synthesis dealt in this paper speaks to enduring patterns of cultural resilience, adaptation and innovation in an increasingly globalising world.

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