

## **Jain Mandir, Lahore - Digital Translation**

**Samee Ahmad**

My item is the renewed architectural complex of Jain Digambar Temple located in Lahore, Pakistan. A new monument that was scaffolded over the old ruins of a Jain temple in Lahore, the object has fascinated me for years and guides my interest in cultural heritage, ruination, and material memory. The site of violence at both the 1947 Partition and then the 1992 Babri Masjid riots, the actual object holds a prodigious amount of memory and trauma. I had only witnessed the ruins of the temple, located at one of the busiest intersections of the city, as an almost-dead site marked for complete demolition once a popular metro station came through. Though the site was almost completely forgotten, I visited it once after a six month interval and was shocked to find that the state had intervened and erected the ruins. Strangely, architectural preservationists had put stucco on the exterior and attached a new platform base to it. The once ruined site was now zombified into a new memorial, with no Jains to actually upkeep it.

Curious about the bureaucratic processes that enabled such a transformation, I finally found a government engineer who had worked on the site. He told me had carelessly used Google images to reconstruct a blueprint of what a Jain temple would look like. This inspired me to my interest in a digital translation of the temple complex. What does a Jain temple look like in the bureaucratic post-conflict imaginary? I wanted to see how I can represent this temple through a CSS drawing that tries to use basic shapes to work and think through the architectural decisions made through its attempt at preservation and why.

I used CSS shapes and HTML to make my drawing. I was able to capture the basic shapes of the platform and the structure of the monument. However, it was challenging to create curvature of the top-most sections, though I figured it out through the clip tool which hides some of the element to give the impression of an elliptical shape and an arch. I used a color dropper on the real image to figure out the hex codes I needed for the elements of the drawing. I made one of the cream colors slightly darker to differentiate the structure internally. I struggled with creating a trapezoid shape at the top, which required me to calculate the radians. I could not figure this out and opted instead for a triangle shape that backgrounds the arches. In addition, there were details that I wanted to capture on the site itself, which included some

peculiarly-placed flowers and the nonsensical decorations at the bottom that were added. However, I could not figure out how to place flowers which again required me to add radians.

But I do think capturing the basic shapes and placement here allows me to really demonstrate the simplicity of covering up the ethnic violence in a site created for preservation and masking; instead of the ruins that would have openly communicated its history, the so-called “preservation” allow the state and people to pretend the site was not a witness to the endemic violence that plagues post-colonial Pakistan. Using just simple shapes that do not compare to the architectural complexity of the old Jain temple or other Jain temples across South Asia is an easy, facile attempt by the Pakistani government to mask the ethnic violence in this context. I think the digital translation allowed me to think through the simplicity of scaffolding that allows such a process. This is how digital media simplifies some of the analog’s attempts to be domineering, allowing it to be flattened and the stucco piece to be extricated from the site of violence itself.

The absence of 3-D features also allows a sense of loss in the digital experience of the object. Indeed, the lack of details and even the presence on the web highlights how the object is intangible, but perhaps it also invites curiosity as to the object’s real-life existence. I am left with one last question: How can we think of the way digital media mirrors the sense of loss already present in the ruins hiding behind the stucco of the man-made monument?



