

Art and architecture in Ancient Medieval and Modern India

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Abstract...

India has evolved with its rich history in art and architecture. In ancient India, during Indus Valley Civilization most of the arts were derived from Vedic influences and architecture was characterized by well-planned cities and houses where religion did not play an active role. After the birth of current Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, arts prospered with the support of emperors. Cave and temple architecture flourished during this period. In the medieval period of Islam, new form of Indian architecture and art were visible. Arch and dome were used in this period and the Mosque add a new experience in form and space. The Mughal had good perception in art. The style of painting in their rule is known as “miniature” which was primarily done on the delicate palm tree leaves. Finally, in the era of Modern Architecture the British brought their own Gothic and Roman influences and attached it with the Indian style. They had infusion in their art and architecture- a mixture of Hindu, Islamic and Western elements. In the late 1800's, art schools modeled on European institutions were established in Calcutta and Bombay. A number of talented Indian painters were trained at these schools.

Ancient Indian art and architecture: -(2500B.C.-1000A.D.)

From Indus Valley civilization or Harappan civilization, Various art forms like paintings, architecture and sculpture evolved. The history of art in ancient India begins with pre-historic rock paintings. They represented human or animal figures in such paintings. Other objects like



soapstone seals were also engraved with writing and animal forms which used to stamp trade goods or as a means of personal identification. Many small sculptures of metal and clay has survived from this period. Indian sculpture flourished during the Mauryan dynasty. Large stone pillars often had a lotus-shaped top bearing the figure of a lion. The lion was a symbol of imperial rule borrowed from Iranian art. Many pillars also featured important Indian symbols like elephant, the bull, and the lotus itself. During the Kushan dynasty, Buddhism was spread to areas beyond India. During this period, relief carvings began to show Buddha in human form. Early images of Buddha had staring eyes and a tense smile. By the Gupta period, the images of Buddha had changed. He had more inward and meditative look with downcast eyes and a graceful pose. In Hindu temples small images of Hindu gods in human



form were meant to show the forms taken by Hindu gods. Some gods were given many arms or heads. They were always shown carrying certain emblems. In northern India during the Gupta dynasty, images of Hindu gods were carved into the rock in man-made caves or temples. Elaborate relief carvings were made on the temple walls. These represented a variety of gods and their attendants. In southern India, bronze figures of Hindu gods were made. It was believed that the spirit of a god could be transferred in the statue. The statue was then carried in a religious procession. Outstanding bronzes were made in the Chola period. These sculptures were used for embellishment of religious buildings. Cave-halls are carved and painted images. The painting style used at Ajanta was later spread from India into Afghanistan and Central Asia. Figures were realistically painted and firmly outlined. Colors were used for shading and suggested the body's solidity. Those scenes appeared to be projected out from the painted wall.



During the Indus Valley period, cities were built according to a grid pattern of intersecting streets. Buildings were then made of brick. Hindu cities appeared less organized. But similar rules of planning were laid down in Hindu architectural manuals. In Buddhist India small trading towns formed centers of commerce, linked by trade routes. Structures were built of brick or mud. The material prosperity of the Mauryan and a new religious consciousness led to achievements in all fields. The development of cave architecture is another unique feature and marks an important phase in the history of Indian architecture. More than thousand caves have been excavated between second century BC and tenth century AD. The Buddhist period is mainly represented by three important building types- the Chaitya Hall (place of worship), the Vihara (monastery) and the Stupa (hemispherical mound for worship/ memory) – exemplified by the awesome caves of Ajanta and Ellora and the monumental Sanchi Stupa. Temples were hewn out of huge rocks. The earliest rock-cut temples were excavated in western Deccan in the early years of the Christian era. The chaitya at Karle with fine high halls and polished decorative wall is a remarkable example of rock-cut architecture. The Kailash temple at Ellora built by the Rashtrakutas and the ratha temples of Mahabalipuram built by the Pallavas are other examples of rock-cut temples. Most probably the stability and permanence of rocks attracted the patrons of art and builders who decorated these temples with beautiful sculptures. Free-standing temples began during the Gupta rule continued to flourish in later periods. In southern India the Pallavas, Cholas,

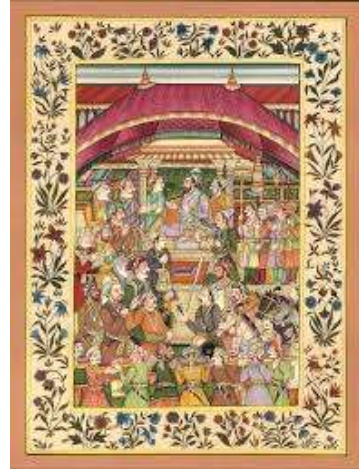


Pandyas, Hoyshalas and later the rulers of the Vijayanagar kingdom were great builders of temples. The Pallava rulers built the shore temple at Mahabalipuram. Pallavas also built other structural temples like Kailashnath temple and Vaikuntha Perumal temples at Kanchipuram. The Cholas built many temples most famous being the Brihadeshwara temple at Tanjore. The Cholas developed a typical style of temple architecture of South India called the Dravida style, complete with vimana or shikhara, high walls and the gateway topped by gopuram. Magnificent temples were built at Belur, Halebid where the stone engravings reached even greater heights. In north and eastern India magnificent temples were also constructed and the style followed by them is referred to as the Nagara style. Most of them consisted of the shikaras (spiral roofs), the garbhagriha (sanctum) and the mandap (pillared hall). Orissa has some of the most beautiful temples such as the Lingaraja temple built by the Ganga rulers and the Mukteshwara temple at Bhubaneswar and the Jagannath temple at Puri. The sun temple at Konark was built in thirteenth century by the eastern Ganga ruler Narsimha Deva. The temple is dedicated to Surya (the sun god) and has been designed as a twelve-wheeled chariot. The temple complex at Khajuraho was built by Chandella rulers between the tenth and eleventh centuries in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. Most important among them is the Kandariya Mahadev temple. Mount Abu in Rajasthan is known for the Dilwara temple dedicated to Jain Tirthankara's. These were built in pure white marble and adorned with exquisite sculpture. These were built under the patronage of Solanki rulers. Somnath temple at Gujarat, Vishwanath temple at Banaras, Govinda temple at Mathura, Kamakshi temple at Guwahati, Shankaracharya temple at Kashmir and the Kali temple at Kalighat of Kolkata are some other important temples which bear testimony to temple building activity of the Indian sub-continent. The structural system was essentially trabeated and with stone being the basic raw material for the Indian craftsman, construction could be done with minimal or no mortar. Decoration was necessary to Indian architecture and is seen in the innumerable details of figured sculpture as well as in the architectural elements. The notion of fractals has been used to observe the form of the Hindu temple, both in terms of its planning and external appearance. The garbhagriha forms the central focus housing the deity of the temple and is provided with a circumambulation passage around. The garbhagriha is small in scale when compared to the whole temple complex. However, it is articulated externally by the vimana or the shikhara. Pillared halls or mandapas are found preceding the garbhagriha.



Medieval Indian art and architecture(1000-1700A.D.)

The Muslim architecture of the time was dominated by carving and paintings of text from the Holy Book “Quran”. Arabic, Persian floral and geometric motifs are also found. The paintings in the regime of the emperors Khilji and Tughluq included the calligraphy and also the garden scenes but no animated picture could be found in this time. The Mughal had good perception in art. The style of painting in their rule is known as “miniature” which was primarily done on the delicate palm tree leaves till the introduction of paper in the country in 1400. The supremacy of Jehangir was also considered as the Golden age of Mughal painting, the portraits of emperors, members of royal families, holy men, saints, soldiers and dancing girls were depicted by the artists in the paintings. For the first time living beings- elephants, lions, peacocks and other birds were sculptured in the brackets



The Mosque and the Grave were major important architecture buildings of the time. The earliest building of this period is Quwwat ul Islam Mosque at Delhi ,Qutub Minar Alai darwaza and Hauz Khas in Delhi, The tomb of Mohammad Tughlaq, Firoz Tughlaq and the forts of Tughlaqabad are some examples. Though their buildings were not beautiful but had very strong walls, massive as well as impressive. During the Afghan rule the tombs of Ibrahim Lodi at Delhi and Shershah’s tomb at Sasaram were built. The architecture of this period also shows how indigenous styles were adopted and utilised by the builders



With the establishment of regional kingdoms in Bengal, Gujarat and the Deccan, beautiful buildings having their own style were constructed. The Jama Masjid, the Sadi Saiyyad Mosque and the shaking towers at Ahmadabad are a few examples of this architecture. In the Deccan, the Sultans erected a number of buildings. The Jama Masjid at Gulbarga, the Madarsa of Mahmud Gawan at Bidar, Ibrahim Rauza, Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur and the fort at Golkunda are just a few famous buildings. Gol Gumbaz has the largest dome in the world. All these buildings vary in design and style from the buildings of north India. In Bengal the oblong shape of many structures and the peculiar style of roof construction were the distinctive features of architecture.



The Adina mosque and the tomb of Jallal-ud-din at Pandua, Khil Darwaza and Tantipara mosque at Gaur. In Jaunpur, the Atala mosque build by the Sharqui rulers had a gigantic screen covering the dome while the tomb of Hoshang Shah at Malwa is made entirely of marble and is made of yellow and black marble inlay work beautifully done by craftsmen. The rulers of Vijayanagar also erected many beautiful buildings and temples and had a number of achievements to their credit.

The Bahamani sultans borrowed architecture from the styles of Persia, Syria, Turkey and the temples of southern India. The Jama Masjid at Gulbarga is quite well known. The courtyard of this mosque is covered with a large number of domes and is the only mosque in India which has a covered courtyard. The advent of the Mughals brought a new era in architecture. The architecture of Mughal style started during Akbar's rule. The buildings showed a strong influence of the ancient Indian style and had courtyards and pillars. Humayun's Tomb at Delhi, magnificent building red stone was used. Akbar built forts at Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. The Bulund Darwaza reflects the grandeur of the mighty Mughal empire. The tomb of Salim Chishti, Palace of Jodha Bai, Ibadat Khana, Birbal's House and other buildings at Fatehpur Sikri reflect a synthesis of Persian and Indian elements. During the reign of Jehangir, Akbar's Mausoleum was constructed at Sikandar near Agra. He built the beautiful tomb of Itimad-ud-daula which was built entirely of marble. Shahjahan was the greatest builder amongst the Mughals. He used marble extensively. Decorative design in inlay work, beautiful arches and minarets were the features of his buildings. The Red Fort and Jama Masjid of Delhi and above all the Taj Mahal are some of the buildings built by Shahjahan. The Taj Mahal, the tomb of Shahjahan's wife, is built in marble and reflects all the architectural features that were developed during the Mughal period. It has a central dome, four elegant minarets, gateway, inlay work and gardens surrounding the main building. The Mughal style of architecture had a profound influence on the buildings of the later period.



Modern Indian art and architecture (1700 – 1900 A.D.)

The European came to India from the route of the sea. These were the Portuguese traders, then subsequently came the British, the French and the Dutch. All these invaders brought with them the elements of western cultures into the art and ways of living of the people of the country. The Portuguese initiated the revival of glitzy art and the French introduced their tastes in the decorations of palaces and houses. The British brought with them the Britain style of architecture and also influenced their modes in paintings and sculptures to such an extent that the Indian mind became alien to their own inheritance. Paintings made for the British East India Company include detailed studies of birds. European painters who worked in oils also went to India and painted for local Hindu rulers. In the late 1800's, art schools modeled on European institutions were established in Calcutta and Bombay. A number of talented Indian painters were trained at these schools. Early in the 1900's, a South Indian artist, Ravi Varma, made large oil paintings of Hindu gods in the style of British portrait paintings of the 1800's. The oil paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, on the other hand, continue to influence many Indian painters.

Architecture in modern India draws on a variety of contemporary styles. The colonial influence can be seen in office buildings. Europeans who started coming from sixteenth century AD constructed many churches and other buildings. Portuguese built many churches at Goa, the most famous of these are Basilica Bom Jesus and the church of Saint Francis. The British also built administrative and residential buildings which reflect their imperial glory. Some Greek and Roman influence can be observed in the colonnades or pillared buildings. Parliament House and Connaught Place in Delhi are good examples. The architect

Lutyens, designed Rashtrapati Bhavan, formerly the Viceroy's residence. It is built of sandstone and has design features like canopies and jaali from Rajasthan. The Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, the former capital of British India, is a huge edifice in marble. It now houses a museum full of colonial artefacts. Writers' Building in Calcutta, where generations of government officers worked in British times, is still the administrative center of Bengal after independence. Some Gothic elements can be seen in the church buildings like St. Paul's Cathedral in Calcutta. The British also left behind impressive railway terminals like the Victoria Terminus in Mumbai. More contemporary styles of building are now in evidence, after Independence in 1947. Chandigarh has buildings designed by the French architect, Corbusier. In Delhi, the Austrian architect, Stein, designed The India International Centre where conferences are held by leading intellectuals from all over the world and more recently, the India Habitat Centre which has become a centre of intellectual activities in the capital. In the past few decades, there have been many talented Indian architects, some trained in premier schools of architecture like the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) in Delhi. Architects like Raj Rewal and Charles Correa represent this new generation Raj Rewal has designed the SCOPE Complex and JawaharVyapar Bhavan in Delhi. He takes pride in using indigenous building material like sandstone for construction and also combines steps and open spaces from the plazas of Rome. An example of this is the CIET building in Delhi. Charles Correa from Mumbai is responsible for the LIC Building in Connaught Place, Delhi. He has used glass facades in the high-rise to reflect light and create a sense of soaring height. In domestic architecture in the last decade, Housing Cooperative Societies have mushroomed in all metropolitan cities combining utility with a high level of planning and aesthetic sense.



Conclusion

From at least 3000 B.C. to the present day, many civilizations have flourished on the subcontinent of India (which includes today's countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). Each has made valuable contributions to India's rich artistic heritage. Several of the world's major religions (including Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism, and Islam) either began in India or flourished there. Much Indian art, therefore, has a religious content. Traditional sculpture continues to be made in modern India, mainly for an international tourist market. Other sculptors have experimented with modern styles and techniques. Indian art and architecture are classic representations of aesthetic beauty and time-tested creativity. Several inspirational and influential factors could be attributed to art and architecture of India.