

Architectural Splendours of India: A Journey Through Time and Culture

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While traversing the urban centres of Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Mumbai, Calcutta, and the southern region of India, one will encounter a plethora of aesthetically pleasing architectural marvels. Monuments, palaces, temples, cathedrals, mosques, and monuments represent a limited selection of instances. Several of these institutions were founded before the birth of Christ, while others were formed after his birth. The creation of this edifice has been a collaborative effort spanning multiple generations, resulting in its majestic and high presence that serves as a poignant reminder of our rich historical legacy. The significance of art and architecture in Indian culture is the reason for this. The present-day features of Indian architecture have evolved gradually during the course of the nation's extensive historical timeline. The urban centres of the Harappan Civilization, characterized by their innovative urban design, encompass some of the oldest and most remarkable instances of architectural development in ancient India. The architectural forms that emerged after the decline of the Harappan civilization have been classified into three distinct types, namely Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. Hindu architectural styles currently exhibit the most prevalence on a global scale. The convergence of Persian and indigenous architectural forms occurred during the Middle Ages, resulting in the emergence of a novel hybrid form. Subsequently, throughout the colonial era, Indian architecture was significantly impacted by the introduction of Western architectural styles, a trend that has persisted to the current time. The end product is a singular architectural composition that incorporates indigenous styles and various other influences, each contributing its own particular charm.

Keywords: Harappan Civilization, architectural development, Hindu, Buddhist, colonial period, monuments, temples, mosques, cathedrals etc.

Introduction

The term "Indian art and architecture" pertains to artistic and architectural creations originating from the Indian subcontinent, now encompassing the nations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. These works are collectively recognized as "Indian art and architecture." The Western world houses significant assemblages of Indian art, notably within the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, both situated in London. A significant quantity of secular art originating from India was produced; nevertheless, the most of it was crafted using perishable materials, leading to its limited preservation until the present period. The sole entities that have endured in stone are artistic manifestations linked to religion. Symbolism can be observed in the gestures, positions, and attributes depicted in both Buddhist and Hindu art. Each symbol has a specific level of significance, as exemplified in the images provided. The images of the Buddha often portray several hand positions known as mudras, which symbolize distinct religious states like enlightenment (Nirvana), meditation, and preaching. Hindu sculpture often portrays several hands, notably in the depiction of deities like Vishnu, Krishna, and Shiva. These additional hands symbolize the deities' capacity to perform multiple actions simultaneously, with each hand representing distinct attributes or characteristics. (Lubotsky 1996)

The Indus Valley Civilization, also known as the Harappan Civilization, was an ancient urban society that flourished in the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan. (Vats, 1952) The ancient urban settlements of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, which suffered destruction during the eighteenth century, are widely acknowledged as early instances of urban planning on a global scale. The emergence of the earliest Indian art can be traced back to the Indus Valley during the latter half of the third millennium BC. A grid-based layout was employed to organize the residential dwellings, commercial marketplaces, storage facilities, administrative offices, and communal bathing establishments, all of which were systematically arranged according to a grid-based blueprint. Furthermore, the neighbourhood boasted a meticulously designed and effectively functioning drainage system. (Kak 1992)

Decline of Indus Valley Civilization and Establishment of the Maurya Dynasty

There exist limited remnants that signify the timeframe spanning from the decline of the Indus civilization around 1500 BC to the point at which Alexander the Great traversed the Indus in 325 BC. In contrast, the concepts of Indian architecture were originally embodied in timber constructions that have since disintegrated. The edict pillars, erected across northern India under the patronage of Emperor Asoka, serve as prominent artifacts representing the profound commitment of the Maurya dynasty to Buddhism. The towering columns, reaching a height of over 50 feet (15 meters), exhibit a monolithic and refined structure. These columns are adorned with ornate lotus capitals and intricate animal carvings at their summits.

Certain pillar capitals exhibit a form that alludes to the architectural style of Persepolis, but others adhere to a more conventional design. The stone 'ogival chaitya' window, which holds the distinction of being the oldest in the world, was found adorning the entrance of a modest rock-cut temple located in Bodh Gaya. (Rhoads 2006) It is widely believed that this architectural marvel was built during the reign of Asoka. The window is considered to be the earliest stone ogival chaitya window in the world. Monastic sanctuaries that have been carved out of solid rock can be observed within the chaitya halls, which are accessible for visitation. The architectural structures evolved from the 3rd century BC to the 1st millennium AD, transforming into grand colonnaded halls or walls that were adorned with painting or sculpture as the years passed.

According to historical records, the construction of the earliest known stupas is attributed to the Sunga dynasty (about 2nd–1st century BC) and the early Andhra dynasty (around 2nd–3rd century BC) during the 1st century BC. (Bisht 1997) The relic mounds are encompassed by decorative railings and gates, which in turn are enclosed by embellished railings and gates. The region of Bharhut is home to a significant stupa, which is contained within a structure adorned with sculptures of ancient provenance. The relief medallions depict various scenarios from the life of the Buddha or the jatakas, which are narratives about his past lives. These medallions are characterized by shallow cuts, wherein each story is encompassed inside a singular composition on the surface of the relief medallion. The physical forms of semidivine entities, specifically yakshis, which are female spirits associated with trees, are depicted as being pressed against the

pillar to which they are connected. Nevertheless, the significance of prana, the life force or vital energy, continues to be highlighted within the artwork. (Vatsyayan 1992)

The regions of Gandhara and Mathura

During the period spanning from the second to the fifth centuries AD, two prominent artistic styles emerged in India under the patronage of the Kushans, a group of conquerors originating from central Asia. These artistic forms were known as Gandhara art and the art of Mathura. The artistic creations originating from the region of Gandhara, presently encompassed within the borders of Pakistan, are renowned for their historical significance since they feature some of the first representations of the Buddha.

In the cities of Bharhut and Sanchi, prior to the aforementioned period, the presence of the Buddha was symbolically depicted through various means, including but not limited to the pipal tree, the wheel of life, footprints, and an unoccupied throne. The Gandhara style is commonly thought to have been significantly affected by Hellenistic art from the second century AD. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that the Gandhara style had a substantial impact on the artistic traditions of Central and Eastern Asia during this particular era. The characteristics of the time were evident in the cosmopolitan preferences, exemplified by the presence of ivory, foreign glass, and lacquerware, as well as the significant trading activities. Relief friezes, commonly carved in dark schist, covered the walls of stupas and monasteries worldwide. These friezes featured human figures in classical positions, elegantly attired in flowing Hellenistic robes.

The Mauryan era heralded a significant epoch in the realm of Indian architecture. Due to their considerable material wealth and a burgeoning theological awareness, the Mauryans attained significant accomplishments in all domains. According to Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Selucus Nikator who visited the Mauryan court, the palace of Chandragupta Maurya was a remarkable architectural accomplishment. The edifice was of considerable magnitude, constructed exclusively from timber materials.

During the Mauryan era, spanning from 322 to 182 BC, there was notable progress in the field of architecture, particularly under the reign of Ashoka. The artistic and architectural manifestations

of the Mauryan Empire exhibit discernible traces of both Persian and Greek influences. During the reign of Ashoka, a significant quantity of monolithic stone pillars were constructed, onto which the principles of 'Dharma' were inscribed. The presence of unique and distinctive animal sculptures crowning the summits of meticulously crafted pillars, commonly referred to as capitals, is a notable characteristic. The national emblem of India, commonly referred to as the "Lion of the Sarnath," has been officially acknowledged by the Indian government. (Kak 1987) This recognition pertains only to the lion capital of the Sarnath pillar. According to estimates, the weight of each pillar is approximately 50 tons, while its height reaches around 50 feet. The stupas of Sanchi and Sarnath, situated in distinct regions of India, serve as notable examples of Mauryan architecture and its achievements within their unique contexts.

The entrances of the Sanchi Stupa are remarkable illustrations of the artists' artistic prowess and aesthetic perception, characterized by the display of creative genius and the incorporation of magnificent sculptures that reflect scenes from Jataka legends. The synthesis of Greek and Indian artistic traditions resulted in the emergence of Gandhara art, which subsequently flourished across numerous years. In addition to the indigenous Mathura school and the Amravati schools, which experienced significant growth after the first century AD and drew notable inspiration from the Kushanas during that era, there existed alternative schools of art and architecture to consider. The Gandhara School, while rooted in local Indian ideals, inspirations, and concerns, incorporated elements of Greek deities in its portrayal of life, including statues depicting Buddha and Bodhisattavas. Elaborate embellishments, garments, and textiles were utilized to augment the aesthetic appeal of the individuals. The sculptures were crafted using materials such as stone, terracotta, a cement-like substance, and clay. During the reign of the Kushanas, there was a notable prevalence of ivory and foreign glass in their architectural designs.

The architectural structures of this time, including stupas and monasteries, are embellished with relief friezes made of black schist. These friezes depict persons in classical poses, wearing Hellenistic robes that flow gracefully. They can be observed in many locations. The relief friezes, crafted from black schist, showcase individuals depicted in classical postures adorned with drapery reminiscent of the Hellenistic era. (Bisht, 1999) The reliefs of Yaksha's carved during

this period exhibit a higher degree of sensuality and seductiveness in comparison to those found at Sanchi.

The stupa located in Gandhara is considered the apex of the progressive development of the basic types of stupas found in Sanchi and Bharhut. The aforementioned elaboration manifests as sculptural ornamentation adorning the base, drum, and hemispherical dome, rendering it perceptible from all perspectives.

The colossal tower constructed by King Kanishka in Peshawar, renowned as a remarkable Buddhist marvel, stands as the preeminent stupa in the Gandhara region and a genuine wonder of the Buddhist world. In contrast, the figurines produced by the Mathura school were crafted using a type of red stone that exhibited a speckled appearance. They had a heightened sense of spirituality. In addition to the presence of Buddha sculptures, one may also find sculptures depicting Jaina deities in this particular site. The Satvahanas of Andhra Pradesh played a pivotal role in fostering the growth and advancement of the Amravati school within the region. A splendid stupa was erected in the Amravati area of the Lower Godavari region. In conjunction with bas relief, the walls of the stupa were adorned with curving medallions and intricate panels for decorative purposes. Nagarjunakonda, situated in the state of Kerala, is renowned for its Buddhist architecture. (Kak 1990)

The subject of discussion is the architectural developments during the Medieval Period, specifically focusing on the Mughal era. It may be of interest to note that India possesses a rich historical background in the realm of town planning, with its origins tracing back to the Harappan culture, also known as the Indus-Saraswati Civilization, as acknowledged by certain scholars. The cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were characterized by several advanced features, including a well-developed drainage system, roadways that intersected at right angles, the construction of a citadel on an elevated plateau, and a predominant settlement pattern in the lower-lying parts.

The urban development of Kalibangam in Rajasthan and Surkoda in Gujarat exhibited a comparable framework. Numerous settlements, encompassing both Aryan and Dravidian cultures, have been excavated, spanning from 600 BC to the present era. Rajgir, Varanasi,

Ayodhya, Hastinapur, Ujjain, Sravasthi, Kapilvastu, and Kausambhi were among the several cities and locations that were encompassed. There existed a greater number of entities. During the Mauryan period, we encounter various settlements referred to as Janapadas (little towns) and Mahajanapadas (large towns). The arrival of Muslims in India led to a significant alteration of the local environment. The towns exhibited a discernible Islamic influence. The city currently boasts a plethora of mosques, forts, and palaces that are scattered throughout its landscape.

According to Abul Fazal's account, the number of towns in the year 1594 AD amounted to 2,837. (Kak, 1997) The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon was the conversion of numerous large villages into smaller urban settlements, commonly referred to as 'qasbas'. Numerous local artisans and craftspeople established their residence in these 'qasbas', where they proceeded to develop expertise in their own domains, such as leather work and marble carving in Agra, among other specialized crafts. The production of textiles and other materials was predominantly concentrated in the region of Sind. In contrast, Gujarat was renowned for its expertise in weaving, particularly in the production of gold and silk threads, as well as the creation of brocades. These commodities were frequently exchanged in international trade. The entrance of the Turks in the thirteenth century led to the establishment of a novel architectural technique, which subsequently influenced the development of architectural styles in Iran, Arabia, and Central Asia. The architectural structures in question were widely recognized for their remarkable engineering accomplishments, as seen by the presence of domes, arches, and minarets. The aforementioned characteristics were observed in the construction of palaces, mosques, and tombs by the emperors. These features were then amalgamated with elements of local architecture, resulting in a distinctive architectural synthesis unparalleled globally. Hence, the Turkish rulers of Delhi sought the assistance of proficient local Indian craftsmen who possessed exceptional skills and had already successfully constructed several significant monuments. The Islamic architectural style is characterized by its simplicity, as well as the intricate carvings and motifs that adorn their indigenous constructions. These features may be observed in the various structures that have emerged throughout history. During this specific time period, all of their architectural projects adopted a moderate approach that balanced the two contrasting extremes.

In conclusion, it may be inferred that the aforementioned points support the notion that the evidence presented is indicative of the stated conclusion.

The origins of Indian architecture and sculpture can be traced back to the ancient civilization of the Indus Valley. India possesses a profound historical legacy in the realm of urban planning, tracing its origins to the Harappan Civilization, which flourished approximately in 2350 BC. Architecture plays a crucial role in comprehending the cultural diversity among various regions of India, as it has been shaped by a multitude of cultural traditions and religious practices throughout history. The development of early Indian architectural style was influenced by several religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which made significant contributions to the construction of stupas, viharas, and chaityas. The architectural style of temples had significant growth and development during the Gupta, Pallava, and Chola periods. (Kenoyer 1998)

The inception of medieval Indian architecture may be traced back to the advent of the Delhi Sultanates, signifying the commencement of the Middle Ages. The architectural style known as Indo-Persian (Indo-Islamic) emerged as a result of the Persian influence provided by the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. The architectural style employed by the Muslim conquerors exhibited striking resemblances to that of the indigenous population. Notably, both temples and mosques featured open courtyards situated in front of them, mirroring the architectural practices of the indigenous people. (Balasubramaniam 2008) The establishment of the Mughal architectural style occurred under the reign of Akbar. He was accountable for the development of various noteworthy structures. The establishment of his newly constructed capital city, Fatehpur Sikri, situated at a distance of 40 miles from Agra, might be seen as the pinnacle accomplishment of his reign. Fatehpur Sikri is an architectural marvel characterized by its construction predominantly using stone materials, evoking a sense of romanticism.

This architectural structure, alternatively referred to as the Buland Darwaza or Arch of the Buland Darwaza, is widely regarded as one of the most remarkable gateways worldwide. The tomb of Saint Salim Chisti is an exquisite artistic creation, characterized by its awe-inspiring magnificence and exceptional craftsmanship. The palace of Jodha Bai exemplifies the exquisite

architectural style of ancient India and is accessible to the general public. The Jama Masjid, constructed in the architectural style reminiscent of Persian design, holds the distinction of being the largest mosque globally. The Dewani-Aman and Dewan-i-Khas are renowned for their meticulous planning and ornate decorating, establishing them as prominent architectural marvels globally. These structures are widely regarded as exemplifying exceptional beauty. The Ibadat Khana and the Panch Mahal are two further notable architectural structures. The Panch Mahal is a structure consisting of five stories arranged in a pyramidal form, featuring a central courtyard. The architectural design of the structure was conceived in the manner reminiscent of a Buddhist Vihara. (Kak, 2005)

Conclusion

To conclude, the architectural landscape of India stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of its rich historical legacy. The collaborative efforts of multiple generations, spanning centuries, have given rise to a majestic presence that continues to captivate the world. The significance of art and architecture in Indian culture is profound, with its roots reaching back to the dawn of civilization. From the innovative urban designs of the Harappan Civilization to the distinct architectural styles of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain influences, India's architectural journey has been a remarkable one.

Over time, Indian architecture has seamlessly integrated various influences, including Persian and Western styles, resulting in a unique and captivating hybrid form. The architectural composition that has emerged is a reflection of the nation's diverse cultural heritage and its ability to adapt while retaining its distinct charm. As we contemplate these architectural wonders, we are reminded of the enduring legacy of a nation that continues to evolve while staying firmly rooted in its past. The architectural edifices of India serve as a powerful connection to history and a source of inspiration for future generations, reinforcing the idea that the past and the present can coexist in harmony, creating a timeless and awe-inspiring legacy.

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