



The History of Indian art Architecture

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Abstract

Such art and architecture of India has a long history, dating back for thousands of years. Indian art and architecture progressed through a number of stages: the characteristics of rock art and early settlement designs, inferences from the prehistoric period; sophisticated urban planning of the Indus Valley Civilization; stupas and caityas, Chaitya halls, Viha re halls of primitive Buddhis monasteries; the public and domestic architecture of early Jainism; Gupta architecture and sculpture; the early and medieval period of Hindu temple architecture; and the development of Indo Islamic architecture. They have developed unique architectural forms under different dynasties and over time under different religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and subsequently Islam and Sikhism. Gupta temples and cave complexes like Ajanta and Ellora display in them sculptural and mural painting richness which denote spiritual and artistic excellence. The Islamic architecture brought up new styles, the Mughal marvels such as TajMahal fused Persian and indigenous doctrines. European styles mixed with local aesthetics and were brought into the limelight during the colonial period: landmark structures seen in Victoria Memorial are examples of the same. This historical amalgamation continues to be reflected in modern Indian architecture, the mixed use of traditional and modern techniques. Not surprisingly, Indian art, ranging from ancient sculptures through to modern paintings, too mirrors these architectural trends as a rich, yet evolving visual language that is the reflection of India's spirituality, social and cultural diversity. This legacy demonstrates the tenacity of creative and adaptive expression of Indian artistry over millenia.

Introduction

Indian art and architecture history is a vast and complex journey through the country's long and varied cultural, religious, and political life. Starting from prehistoric rock art at sites like Bhimbetka, showing the earliest human expressions, then to highly organized urban planning such as in the Indus Valley Civilization that already had advanced drainage



systems and monumental structures, Indian architecture began from a very close connection between functionality and spirituality. Evolution of religious philosophies, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism was the reason of evolution of architectural forms and artistic expressions. In the beginning Hindu temples, Buddhist stupas and Jain temples there is a profound spiritual symbolism, with intricately carved and meticulously designed structures, all of which follow cosmic principles. Fantastic architecture and artistic sophistication are manifested in temples of the Gupta period and cave complexes at Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta, showing narrative murals and symbolic sculptures in a depiction of divine mythologies.

During the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire, the arrival of Islamic rulers caused Indian architecture to be transformed. Unique styles which blended Persian, Central Asian and indigenous Indian elements, and included domes, arches and minarets all paramount in the TajMahal, a prime example of architectural beauty and harmony. Landmarks like the Victoria Memorial and Mumbai's Gateway of India bear evidence of the introduction of Gothic, Baroque and Neo-Classical styles in the colonial period from Europe. The blend of Western and Indian styles fused to add to the architectural landscape allowing tradition and modernity to blend together.

Indian architecture and art of today is a synthesis as modern materials and techniques are integrated with traditional aesthetics. This extensive heritage is drawn upon by contemporary Indian architects and artists who create structures and artworks which are at once global in influence and local in identity. Over the millennia Indian civilization has stamped its orientation towards a creative, adaptive, expressive spirit through the continuous and evolving dialogue between past and present in Indian art and architecture. The study of this history gives us an idea regarding India's social, religious, cultural and evolutions and that India's contribution to the world of art and architecture is neither lesser nor comparable.

Importance of Indian art and architecture in world heritage.

Indian art and arch are of world heritage significance because of their rich variety, historical depth and tremendous cultural symbolic. With dates as old as the Pharaohs, these artistic and architectural forms present an Indian civilization in evolution, displaying the



contributions of successive dynasties, religions, and cultural interchanges. The TajMahal, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, and a UNESCO World Heritage site, stands as an iconic structure that epitomizes the architectural sophistication and aesthetic harmony in combining Persian, Islamic and Indian styles. Celebrated globally for their intricate carvings, exquisite frescoes and their spiritual depth are temples such as Brihadeeswarar and the cave complexes of Ajanta and Ellora demonstrating the mastery of artisans and their cosmic principles. India is home to some of the world's best architectural structures and these sites are self testament to the architectural ingenuity of India and its dominance over the other cultures.

Scultures, paintings, and crafts form the Indian art, which has also set with impact the global artistic traditions. Art forms, including Buddhist art and iconography, sculptures of Gupta period are influence in Southeast Asia and Central Asia and are part of shared cultural heritage. India's heritage has richly intertwined into global art history by inspiring artists worldwide using Indian artistic techniques like inlay work, frescoes and metal casting. Moreover, Indian architecture's ideas of symbolic alignment, symmetry and harmony with nature have become a source of inspiration for many architectural philosophies world over, focusing on sustainable and spiritual design.

Prehistoric Indian Art and Early Settlements

The beginnings of artistic expression as well as architectural development in the Indian subcontinent are marked by prehistoric Indian art and early settlements which give us an insight into early human creativity, life style and community organisation. Yet the earliest forms of Indian art can be seen in the prehistoric rock paintings in the caves of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, vivid hunting scenes, beasts and symbolic figures at a time as early as 30,000 BCE. Commissioned by tourists (don't we all?), these cave paintings use natural pigments and depict the lives, rituals and environment of prehistoric societies, demonstrating an early sense for symbol and aesthetic. Often the subjects included human figures, animals, and geometric patterns, which may be associated with early religious beliefs or social practices and in which there was an attempt at artistic and cultural development.



One of the earliest sophisticated urban settlements in India was the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1300 BCE), with the major sites of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Dholavira. The civilization was known for its advanced town planning; for streets, drainage systems, public baths, and granaries reflected in the civilization were very social, organized, and well planned. Baked bricks built houses arranged around central courtyards in a system approach to residential planning that was functional and could accommodate community needs. Pottery, seals, terracotta figurines and jewelry reveal its artistic achievements and the place of craftsmanship in the civilization. The seals, mostly animal, religious symbol and script, appear to have complex social and possibly spiritual meaning relating to early religious practices and social organization.

The art and architecture of this period indicates that one in the society during this time did appreciate the practical urban living and symbolic representation. An emerging culture that combined aesthetic appreciation with functional designs is evidenced by its attention on town planning and the artistic representation of day to day life and spirituality. These prehistoric and early settlement achievements provide the background for the complex artistic and architectural heritage in the Indian subcontinent, which would flourish thereafter and contribute to the global concept of early human societies and position the Indian subcontinent as an important cradle for civilization.

Vedic and Post-Vedic Art and Architecture

This is a period of development and transformation of religious beliefs and culture which found their reflection in designing of the sacred and domestic structures. The architecture of the Vedic period (c. 1500–500 BCE) was mainly temporary and functional, and the Gods Vedic texts refer to were to be served on altars and in other such structures made of wood, bamboo and thatch. There was a focus on building simple, sacred spaces of worship, structuring such according to cosmic principals, such as the VastuShastra, an early form of Indian architecture that drew on balance and spatial harmony.

It was during the Post-Vedic period (c. 500 BCE and onwards) that permanent stone architecture was gradually adopted with religious beliefs and societal structures becoming more formal. The temples started to appear and the forms of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain iconography began to take shape. At first these structures were modest, but they grew more



elaborate, and indeed employed motifs and artistic embellishments. The stupa transformed during the same period as Buddhism rose, and stupas like those at Sanchi became centres of communal worship. Art and Architecture of India II – The Mauryan Period (322—185 B.C.) laid the foundation of the sophisticated temple architecture and the intricate iconography of Indian Art and Architecture in the centuries to follow.

Buddhist Art and Architecture

The beginnings of Buddhist art and architecture in India date from the Mauryan period (c. 322–185 BCE) and continued unabated as Buddhism was disseminated throughout India (and beyond) producing some of India's most iconic and spiritually significant structures. The early Buddhist architecture focused on the stupa, a dome form symbolizing Buddha's presence and enlightenment. One of the earliest and most influential examples is the Great Stupa at Sanchi, which exhibits a simple yet powerful architectural theme that involves a central dome, a surrounding walkway, and adorned gateways (toranas) carved with images of Buddha's life, Jataka tales, and significant motifs such as the lotus and the wheel. As pilgrimage sites these stupas were where followers made their pilgrimages, performed rituals, and gained spiritual closeness to the Buddha via circumambulation.

Another example of Buddhist building is the rock-cut caves, such as Ajanta, Ellora and Karle. They are renowned for their intricately carved and finely crafted viharas (monastic living quarters) and chaityas (prayer halls) carved into cliff faces, with columns, arches, and statues in abundance. Above all, Ajanta is renowned for the frescoes, which depict scenes from the life of the Buddha (and, before that, his 'previous births') with fine detail and expressive realism in a style that is simultaneously dramatic and serene, in keeping, always, with a sense of divine beauty. For these are masterpieces of ancient Indian art and show compassion, renunciation and the unity of life.

Buddhist art and architecture also introduced quite a new iconography, first symbolically with the Bodhi tree, footprints, the empty throne, later transforming into anthropomorphic images of Buddha and bodhisattvas. Also evident in Kushan times this evolution made Buddhism more conversant, more relatable with the masses.

Buddhist art and architecture affected neighboring regions, since its development carried by monks and artists on trade routes over Central Asia to China and Southeast Asia. A

synthesis of spiritual purpose, artistic beauty and architectural innovation, Buddhist structures in India, especially stupas and rock cut caves, represent Buddhist values of compassion, meditation and enlightenment. Not only did these contributions help define Indian aesthetics, they also made significant contributions to Asian religious art and influenced Asia at large.

Jain Art and Architecture

The Jain art and architecture in India are famous for their complexity, symbolism and its commitments to spiritual ideals, which are the core values of Jainism such as nonviolence, purity and renunciation. Most typically they are most epitomized in this depiction with temples displaying graceful carvings, ornate detailing, and harmonious design. Jain temples were built mostly in stone, and were often located in remote places, set on mountain peaks or in forests, to facilitate meditation and to represent Jain principle of living harmoniously in nature. Each of their architecture has a unique style, but is very exquisite: temples in Mount Abu, Palitana, and Ranakpur are outstanding examples. In fact, Dilwara Temples in Mount Abu's marble presents, at times, are intricately carved pillars, ceilings and domes that ultimately pave the stories of Jain Teaches and signifies the Tirthankaras (Jain spiritual teachers). In the same way, the Ranakpur Temple in Rajasthan proudly stands with more than a thousand pillar sculpted in differentiated designs, showing a dear and a vigorous Jain artisan.

The Jain art has, almost invariably, been spiritual and iconographic, mostly seen through the images of the 24 Tirthankaras, who appear in meditative postures, representing spiritual purity and detachment. Jain art which early was aniconic, resorted to the symbol of the lotus and the wheel but later began to turn into anthropomorphic depictions of serene, idealized figures which aforementioned represent the calm and ascetic nature of Jain spirituality. The Jain art was also furthered by Jain manuscripts, including Kalpasutra, which included miniature paintings demonstrating Jain cosmology, story of the Tirthankaras and description of Jain philosophy.

Jain temples are often planned symmetrically and balanced in terms of their architectural planning, reflecting the spiritual harmony. The mandala is a large hall or sanctuary surrounded by other smaller halls or sanctuaries, similar to other Jain temples, but in these

highly arranged in a mandala form, representing the universe and inviting to meditation. Distinctive characteristics of Jain art and architecture are principally to promote purity, simplicity and meditative ambience that represent Jain way of spiritual discipline and non-attachment. Along with the artistic and architectural achievements these have become the testimony of Jainism's legacy in India and make enormous contribution to India's religion and culture.

Hindu Temple Architecture

Indian Hindu temple architecture is a vast and varied tradition exhibiting deep spiritual symbolism, regional and local diversity and architectural innovation. From centuries, the Hindu temples are evolving as they are not just the places to worship but cosmic to represent the divine to human beings. These represent sacred geometries and architectural principles laid out in books like ShilpaShastra and VastuShastra that specify exact measurements and alignments, to align with the energies of the cosmos. Hindu temples are generally categorized into three primary architectural styles: The rakha (post or stella) is classified as Nagara (North Indian), Dravida (South Indian), and Vesara (hybrid style found in the center of India).

In North India, the Nagara style features a tall shikhara (spire); curved or straight, symbolizing the mythical cosmic mountain, Mount Meru. Notably, Temples like Khajuraho and the Sun Temple at Konark boast of some extraordinary carvings where deities, animals and mythological scenes are carved very elegantly and elaborately, reflecting the themes of divinity, nature and the oneness of life. The outer walls of the temple often show scenes of Hindu epics which portrays life; the divine and the divine narratives.

The Dravida style, by contrast, seen in South India, has its gopurams (gateway towers) beautifully worked with several superimposed layers, great pillared halls, and pyramidal vimanas (temple towers). Monumental gate ways and elaborate sculptures of gods and goddesses, as also not unromantically of mythological figures find expression in temples such as Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur and Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. Also common in South Indian temples are a large inner courtyard and a water tank for the purposes of ritual purification and of reflection.

The nascent Vesara evolved as a medley of panchayatana elements of Nagara and Dravida types originating mainly under the dynasties of Chalukya and Hoysala in Karnataka. As their star shaped platforms and model most densely carved temples of Belur and Halebidu, Hoysala temples are famed for their most intricate carvings and every surface of the temple is covered with carvings to give you the feeling of being in the presence of the divine.

Architecture of Hindu temples of all styles are a profound expression of Hindu cosmology, philosophy and art. These temples are, at one and the same time, spiritual sanctuaries, works of art and architectural marvels symbolising part of India's cultural and religious history as eternal link between humans and the divine.

Indo-Islamic Art and Architecture

With the coming of Islamic rulers to India, Indo-Islamic art and architecture developed as a diverse and synthetic tradition combining the influence of Islam, Persia, and Central Asia with indigenous Indian styles. From the Delhi Sultanate of the 12th century onwards this style became so popular under the Mughal rule that it came to define India's cultural language in terms of architectural forms, motifs and their decoration. Symmetry, geometric patterns, calligraphy, arches, domes, and minarets, which symbolized unity, harmony and the infinite nature of Allah, were emphasized by Islamic architectural principles. This architectural style, when it took on local Indian elements, resulted in some marvelous set of buildings that became iconic symbols of Indian heritage.

That can be traced one of the earliest of the QutubMinar, which was built during the Delhi Sultanate, with intricately carved and inscribed minarets topped with towers that are a fusion of Indian craft and Islamic design. Indo-Islamic aesthetics took to its very pinnacle in the architecture of Mughals which were at its zenith in the 16th and 17th century. One can notice the grandeur of this time in structures such as the TajMahal in Agra, Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, and Jama Masjid. Built over 22 years (1631–1653) by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his third wife, MumtazMahal, who had died during the birth of their 14th child, TajMahal stands for eternal love and spiritual beauty through its elegant, symmetrical buildings, gardens and jaw dropping view of white marble and the pietradura (stone inlay) work.



Got to private decorative arts, like miniatures painting, textile and metalwork. Islamic themes, Indian landscapes and flora, and Persian styles combined in relation to Mughal miniatures to portray court life, battles, and nature in vivid detail and with vibrant colors. Ornate jali (lattice) screens and floral carvings in architecture dragged Indian craftsmanship into Islamic aesthetic principles, so interiors were wrought of delicate light making patterns, creating mystique.

Art and architecture around the world used to embrace Indo Islamic style and leave its legacy in art and architecture; this Indo – Islamic style was to create a unique fusion which is the epitome of cultural coexistence. It added to India’s artistic vocabulary combining the linear and geometric with the organic and symbolic. The Indo-Islamic architecture brings out a history of synthesis and tolerance, and is an important part of India’s artistic heritage, as well as a celebrated contribution to the world’s art and architecture.

Regional Indian Art and Vernacular Architecture

Diversity is a hallmark of India’s geography and social landscape, and the same is true of regional Indian art and vernacular architecture, which adapted suitably to local climates, resources and culture. In each region, architectural styles, materials and art forms emerged that met local community needs and aesthetics and which expressed regional identity. These are structures made from local materials such as wood, clay, stone, and bamboo and have the design qualities of the environment in mind, i.e. living in harmony with the atmosphere. Vernacular architecture in a similar manner adapted to the arid desert climate in Rajasthan, for instance, using sandstone for the construction of fortresses and havelis (traditional mansions), and included construction with courtyards to facilitate the flow of air. Ventilation and privacy were achieved with jharokhas (overhanging enclosed balconies), and further visually pleased by intricate latticework screens with wielded artistic craftsmanship. Kerala’s architecture meanwhile, is reflective of its humid tropical climate having sloping tiled roofs, wide eaves and open courtyards to efficiently deal with monsoon rains and heat. The traditional wooden homes in Kerala called nalukettu are built using timber and have interior courtyards to promote natural ventilation.



In Assam and Nagaland as well as in some other north-eastern states, the houses are on stilts due to the risk of flooding, the wildlife. Bamboo is a very flexible and resilient material that is thus used in an abundant materials. These will be the best built as they show a profound understanding of the local environment, and with rains as frequent as they are in the area, these buildings provide protection. As with other artistic traditions, regional variations are also wide and variously develop their own paints styles, crafts and sculptures. The art of Madhubani painting from Bihar, Pattachitra from Odisha and Warli art from Maharashtra are just a part of regional art form that depict local myths and religious beliefs and nature. These art forms are so much part of community life and many are associated with seasonal festivals, rituals and social narratives, safeguarding cultural heritage and regional stories. The cultural diversity and resilience of India is shown by vernacular architecture and regional art of the country. Traditional and adapted to the local environment, they are pragmatic solutions which celebrate regional identity. The architectural and artistic diversity of India is part of its heritage and is a mosaic of traditions that bears testimony to the ingenuity and adaptability of Indian culture in regions and epochs of varying landscapes and histories.

Conclusion

The history of Indian art and architecture is a testament to the country's enduring creativity, spirituality, and adaptability, reflecting millennia of cultural evolution, religious influences, and regional diversity. From the rock art of prehistoric times to the sophisticated urban planning of the Indus Valley, Indian architecture has continuously adapted to changing social and religious contexts. Ancient Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples display intricate craftsmanship, spiritual symbolism, and innovative engineering that represent India's deep reverence for the divine. The introduction of Islamic influences brought about a fusion of Persian and Indian elements, giving rise to iconic structures like the TajMahal, which epitomize Indo-Islamic architectural brilliance. Regional architecture, shaped by local climates, materials, and traditions, showcases India's ingenuity in sustainable design, with structures crafted from accessible resources and built to harmonize with the environment. Additionally, regional art forms—such as Madhubani, Pattachitra, and Warli—are vibrant expressions of local beliefs, social life, and natural beauty, each contributing to India's rich artistic legacy. This heritage continues to inspire contemporary

Indian art and architecture, merging traditional aesthetics with modern techniques. The study and preservation of India's art and architecture not only celebrate its cultural achievements but also offer insights into human resilience and adaptability. This vast legacy stands as a significant contribution to world heritage, highlighting India's unique blend of history, diversity, and spirituality in its enduring artistic and architectural achievements.

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