

Art & Architecture of India

Introduction

India's cultural heritage is extremely rich and counts among the most ancient in the world. The art of sculpture, the most highly respected medium for artists, was widely practised throughout the subcontinent, and buildings were lavishly adorned with sculptures. The subject matter of Indian sculpture was almost invariably abstracted human forms that were portrayed to instruct people on the truths of the Hindu, Buddhist or Jain religions.

Painting in India encompasses Buddhist murals from the Ajanta caves in Maharashtra to the Brihadishvara Temple in Thanjavur, from the large wall paintings of Ellora to the miniaturist tradition of Mughal and the mixed-media embellished works from the Tanjore school.

Indian civilisation also displays mixed architectural styles and influences, the most famous example of which is possibly the Taj Mahal in Agra, Uttar Pradesh.

Origin of art in India

Art is an integral part of culture. India had always been known as a land of cultural and traditional vibrancy through its conventional arts and crafts. The 29 states and 7 union territories across the country have their own distinct cultural and traditional identities, visible through the various forms of art prevalent there. Every region in India boasts its own range of unique folk art forms.

Statues and Seals of the Indus Valley

Among the surviving works of the Harappan Civilisation is a miniature bronze girl with beautifully formed limbs holding a bowl against her thigh. Of the various other sculptural pieces found, the best known is that of a bearded man, probably the image of a priest. Clay animal figures have been found painted with designs and themes from nature.

Sculpture in India

The art of sculpture began in India during the Indus Valley civilisation which encompassed parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and north-west India as far south as Rajkot. Indian sculpture echoes the brilliance and finesse of a most advanced civilisation while demonstrating the eroticism and spirituality, the mysticism and passion of Indian art forms with beauty and magnificence.

In India, sculptures have been made of all kinds of raw material. While some of them have been created out of a single solid chunk of the material, others have been crafted in parts,

and then joined together. Some of the materials used by artisans are wood, brass, paper-mache, bronze, clay, fibre glass etc.

Kushan Period

Kanishka I, the greatest of the Kushan Emperors, was a great patron of Buddhism. Two main spheres of Kushan Art are recognised today: on the one hand, the broader Bactria-Gandhara region (in modern day Afghanistan) and the upper-Indus region (around Peshawar in Pakistan) where works showing strongly Hellenic (Greek) and Persian influence were produced; and on the other, Northern India, particularly around Mathura where works in the Indian style were produced.

Gandhara School

The most notable of the Gandharan icons was that of the Buddha seated in a yogic position.



Mathura School

This school drew inspiration from Jainism as well as Iranian and Greco-Roman styles. The forms of Brahminical deities became crystallised at Mathura for the first time.

Gupta Period

Art of the Gupta period was marked by a deep spiritual quality and a vision which tried to record the higher level and deeper truths of life. An enormous amount of sculptures have been found from this period, the best known of which is perhaps the statue of the God Hari-Hara (half Shiva-half Vishnu) from Madhya Pradesh which dates back to the 5th century AD. One of the finest creations of the period is the high-relief statue of Buddha found in the ruins of Sarnath.

Painting Styles

In Bhimbetka, near Bhopal, in Central India, is India's largest and oldest collection of cave paintings – belonging to the Neolithic Age and depicting the everyday lives of people.

Numerous references to painting are found in literature dating back to the Pre-Christian period. Vatsyayana listed painting as one of the 64 *kala* or fine arts in his *Kamasutra*. He went further and elaborated on the 6 principles of art, or its limbs or *shadanga*: *Rupabheda*, *Pramanam*, *Bhava*, *Lavanya Yoganam*, *Sadrisyam* and *Varnikabhanga*.

Cave Paintings

The caves of Ajanta, Bagh, Sittanavasal, Armamalai are all examples of cave paintings. The themes are mainly drawn from Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religious inferences.

Early Miniature

The Pala School of Bengal (9th to 12th century AD) developed illustrations on palm leaf and paper manuscripts and on their wooden covers. A counterpart of these schools was the Apabhramsa School in Western India.

Vijayanagar Period

The best preserved and well-known paintings are those at the Virbhadr temple. The Lepakshi paintings are characterised by earth tones and the near absence of blue.

Transition

After the advent of Islam, an age of synthesis began. The Sultanate painting style reflected in the Mandu School shows a synthesis of Indian and Persian traditions.

Mughal Painting

In the courts of Babur and Humayun, the Timurid style of Persian painting continued.

Mughal painting reflects an exclusive combination of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles. As the name suggests, these paintings evolved as well as developed during the rule of Mughal Emperors in India, between 16th to 19th century. The themes of that time revolved around musical parties, lovers on terraces and gardens, ascetics gathered around a fire, etc.



A Mughal Miniature

Rajsthani Painting

This has several schools included in it like the Mewar, Marwar, Kishangarh, Bundi and Jaipur schools each with their own characteristics.

Pahari Painting

The painting styles developed in the hill states (corresponding largely to Himachal Pradesh today), described by the generic name 'Pahari Art', was deeply rooted in the feelings and experiences of the human heart. Basohli and Kangra are the two main centres of this art.

Mysore Painting

It is a rich traditional art form of South India that enables us to understand the rich cultural values of our past. Painting in Karnataka has a long and illustrious history, tracing its origins back to the Ajanta times (2nd century B.C. to 7th century A.D.)

Historically, Mysore had been a place governed by many rulers with a strong passion for visual arts, which included architecture and painting.

Mysore paintings have a variety of forms: murals depicting scenes of Hindu mythology, portraits of heroes and kings, icons of Hindu mythology, strictly adhering to principles of iconography.



Mysore School

Tanjore Painting

The history of Tanjore Paintings dates back to the Maratha invasion of South India during the 16th century. Tanjore paintings are known for vivid colours, surface richness and compact composition. These paintings have a long-lasting glow, adorned as they are with semiprecious stones, glass pieces and gold that add colour and opulence.



Madhubani painting

Also known as Mithila painting due to its origins in the Mithila region of India and Nepal, Madhubani is a traditional Indian folk art made on canvas, cloth or cow dung washed handmade paper.



According to local mythology, its origins can be traced to the time of the Ramayana, when King Janaka of Mithila ordered his subjects to decorate the town for the wedding of his daughter Sita to Lord Rama.

Natural dye and colours are used in creation of Madhubani artworks, with geometrical figures and vibrant colours being key elements.

Pattachitra painting

Pattachitra is a term which is literally derived from *patta*, meaning cloth, and *chitra*, meaning picture. Hence, Pattachitra is a picture painted on a piece of cloth. *Pattachitra* resembles the old murals of Odisha especially of the regions of Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar.



Warli painting

Warli is a beautiful folk art of Maharashtra, traditionally created by the tribal women belonging to the Warli and Malkhar koli tribes found on the northern outskirts of Mumbai, in Western India. This centuries-old rudimentary domestic form was first explored for purely artistic purposes in the early nineteen seventies, and owing to its origin it was named as *Warli* art.



The paintings are beautifully executed and resemble prehistoric cave paintings in execution. They usually depict scenes of human stick-type figures engaged in activities like hunting, dancing, sowing and harvesting.

Kalamkari

Kalamkari means painting with a pen. It is a form of textile art with a heritage dating back to ancient times. '*Kalam*' is the Persian word for pen, and '*kari*' in Urdu implies the craftsmanship involved.

Started originally in the Sāsani era in Iran (almost 2500 years ago), there are two distinctive styles of kalamkari art in India – the Srikalahasti style and the Machilipatnam style.



Srikalahasti : a style of Kalamkari work which involves dyed hand- painting of a fabric.



Machilipatnam: a style of Kalamkari work which involves vegetable dyed block-painting of a fabric.

The rich cultural diversity of India is well reflected in the vivid, distinct and enchanting folk art and crafts. Various painting styles like Kalighat, Phad, Gond, Pichwai are prevalent across various regions, each representing tradition, customs, and ideologies passed on from one generation to other.

Modern Oriental Art

E.B. Havell and Abanindranath Tagore began the Bengal School in painting which was also called the Renaissance School or the Revivalist School. It aimed to revive lost values and revitalise the indigenous system. Its main exponents were Nandlal Bose and Gaganendranath Tagore.

20th Century Art

Indian Art was taken forward by stalwarts like Gaganendranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, S.H. Raza, Jamini Roy and others.

Around the time that India gained independence, a remarkable group of artists started the Progressive Artists' Group (PAG) in Mumbai. Its members included F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, and others. Others like Tyeb Mehta, V.S. Gaitonde and Ram Kumar also gravitated towards it.

Indian Architecture

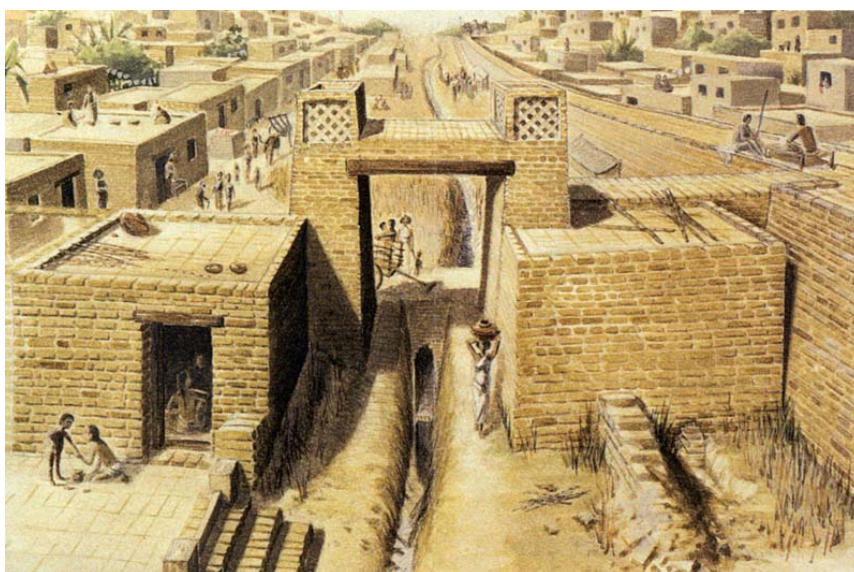
Indian Architecture evolved over the ages in different parts and regions of the country. Apart from these natural and obvious evolutions from prehistoric and historic periods, the evolution of Indian architecture was generally affected by many great and important historic developments. Naturally, the emergence and decay of great empires and dynasties in the sub-continent, each in their way influenced the growth and shaped the evolution of Indian architecture. External influences have also shaped the nature of Indian architecture, similar to the influence of different regions of the country.

Ancient Indian architecture

The excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro and several other sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation have revealed the existence of a very modern urban civilisation with expert town planning and engineering skills. The very advanced drainage system along with well-planned roads and houses show that a sophisticated and highly evolved culture existed in India before the arrival of the Aryans. The sites of the Indus Valley Civilization were excavated under the Archaeological Survey of India established by the British.

City Planning in the Indus Valley Civilisation

Another remarkable feature was the existence of a well-planned drainage system in the residential parts of the city. Small drains from the houses were connected to larger ones along the sides of the main roads. The drains were covered and loose covers were provided for the purpose of cleaning them. The planning of the residential houses was also meticulous. Evidence of stairs shows houses were often double storeyed. Doors were in the side lanes to prevent dust from entering the houses.



Harappan architecture was way ahead of all civilisations at the time

The most important features of Harappan architecture are its superior town planning skills and cities that have been built on a clear geometric pattern or grid layout. Roads cut each other at right angles and were very well laid out. As the Indus Valley settlements were located on the banks of the river, they were often destroyed by major floods. In spite of this calamity, the Indus Valley people built fresh settlements on the same sites. Thus, layers upon layers of settlements and buildings were found during the excavations. The decline and final destruction of the Indus Valley Civilization, sometime around the second millennium BC remains a mystery to this day.

The Vedic Aryans who came next, lived in houses built of wood, bamboo and reeds; the Aryan culture was largely a rural one and thus one finds few examples of grand buildings. This was because Aryans used perishable material like wood for the construction of royal palaces which have been completely destroyed over time. The most important feature of the Vedic period was the making of fire altars which soon became an important and integral part of the social and religious life of the people even today. In many Hindu homes and especially in their marriages, these fire altars play an important role even today. Soon courtyard and mandaps were built with altars for worship of fire which was the most important feature of architecture. There are also references of *Gurukuls* and hermitages. Unfortunately, no structure of the Vedic period has survived. Their contribution to the architectural history of India is the use of wood along with brick and stone for building their houses.

In the 6th century BC, India entered a significant phase of her history. There arose two new religions – Jainism and Buddhism, and even the Vedic religion underwent a change. The emergence of Buddhism and Jainism helped in the development of an early architectural style. Buddhist Stupas were built at places where Buddha's remains were preserved and at the major sites where important events in Buddha's life occurred. Stupas were built of huge mounds of mud, enclosed in carefully burnt small standard bricks. One was built at his birthplace Lumbini; the second at Gaya where he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, the third at Sarnath where he gave his first sermon and the fourth at Kushinagar where he passed away attaining *Mahaparinirvana* at the age of eighty.



The Sanchi Stupa

Buddha's burial mounds and places of major events in his life became important landmarks of the significant architectural buildings in the country. These became important sites for Buddha's order of monks and nuns – the sangha. Monasteries (*viharas*), and centres of preaching, teaching and learning came up at such places. Congregational halls (*chaitya*) for teaching and interaction between the common people and the monks were also built up.

The Mauryan period (322-182 BC) especially under Ashoka architecture saw great advancement. Mauryan art and architecture depicted the influence of Persians and Greeks. During the reign of Ashoka many monolithic stone pillars were erected on which teachings of 'Dhamma' were inscribed. The highly polished pillars with animal figures adorning the top (capitals) are unique and remarkable. The lion capital of the Sarnath pillar has been adopted as the Emblem of the Indian Republic. Each pillar weighs about 50 tonnes and is about 50 ft high. The stupas of Sanchi and Sarnath are symbols of the achievement of Mauryan architecture. The gateways of the Sanchi Stupa with the beautiful sculpture depicting scenes from *Jataka* stories are specimens of the skill and aesthetic sense of the artisans.

Medieval Architecture

The Gupta period marked the beginning of the construction of free-standing Hindu temples. An example of this is the temple at Deogarh (Jhansi district) which had a central shrine or *garbhagriha* where the image of the deity was placed. Another temple at Bhitrigaon (Kanpur district) is a fine example of this period.

The temple building activities that began during the Gupta rule continued to flourish in later periods. In southern India the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, Hoysalas and later the rulers of the Vijayanagar kingdom were great builders of temples. The Pallava rulers built the Shore temple at Mahabalipuram. The Pallavas also built other structural temples like the Kailashnath temple and Vaikuntha Perumal temple at Kanchipuram. The Cholas built many temples, the most famous being the Brihadeshwara temple at Thanjavur. The Cholas developed a typical style of temple architecture of South India called the Dravida style, complete with a *vimana* or *shikhara*, high walls and the gateway topped by a *gopuram* or cupola. Magnificent temples were built at Belur and Halebid in Karnataka, 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). Odisha has some of

the most beautiful temples such as the Lingaraja temple built by the Ganga rulers, the Mukteshwara temple at Bhubaneswar and the Jagannath temple at Puri.



The Konark Sun temple

Other Temple Complexes

The sun temple at Konark was built in the thirteenth century by the eastern Ganga ruler Narsimha Deva I. The temple is dedicated to Surya (the Sun god) and was designed as a twelve-wheeled chariot. The temple complex at Khajuraho was built by Chandela rulers between the tenth and eleventh centuries in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. The most important among them is the Kandariya Mahadev temple. Mount Abu in Rajasthan is known for the Dilwara temple dedicated to Jain tirthankaras. These were built under the patronage of Solanki rulers in pure white marble and adorned with exquisite sculpture.

With the arrival of the Turks during the thirteenth century came a new technique of architecture: the styles of Persia, Arabia and Central Asia. The engineering features of these buildings were domes, arches and minarets. The palaces, mosques and tombs built by these rulers had these features which were blended with the features of the indigenous architecture. This new synthesis in architecture occurred because the Turkish rulers of Delhi utilised the services of the highly skillful local craftsmen in India who had already constructed beautiful buildings. The buildings that came up reflect the simplicity of Islamic design as well as the detailed sculptures and designs they made on their own indigenous structures. A middle path was followed in all their designs in the architecture of this period.



The Qutub Minar – the world's tallest brick minaret

The earliest buildings of this period are the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque at Delhi and the Qutub Minar. The latter is a five-storeyed tapering tower whose height is over 70 metres. There are beautiful engravings of calligraphy both in the mosque and on the tower. Many other buildings were later constructed by the Sultans. Alauddin Khalji enlarged the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque and built a gateway to the enclosure of the mosque. This gateway, called the Alai Darwaza, is an extraordinarily beautiful structure even today. Decorative elements were used to make the building outstanding in its beauty. Alauddin Khalji also built the Hauz Khas in Delhi which was a hydraulic structure.

The tomb of Mohammad Tughlaq, Firoz Tughlaq and the forts of Tughlaqabad are some examples the martial nature of architecture of the early and middle Delhi Sultanate. Though their buildings were not focussed on aesthetics, they 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. During these years, the Turks were still in the process of settling down. The rulers were threatened by the Mongols, who made sudden invasions from the north. This is why the buildings of this period are strong, sturdy and practical.

Architecture in the Mughal Period

The advent of the Mughals heralded a new era in architecture. The synthesis of style which began earlier reached its zenith during this time. The architecture of Mughal style started during Akbar's rule. The first building of this rule was Humayun's Tomb at Delhi. In this magnificent building red stone was used. It has a main gateway and the tomb is placed in the midst of a garden. Many consider it a precursor of the Taj Mahal.



Fatehpur Sikri, built by Akbar, briefly served as the capital of the Mughal Empire.

Akbar built forts at Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. The Buland Darwaza reflects the grandeur of the mighty Mughal empire. This building was made following Akbar's victory over Gujarat. The Arch of the Buland Darwaza is about 41 m high and is one of the most imposing gateways in the world. 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 Sikandra near Agra. He built the beautiful tomb of Itimad-ud-daula clad entirely in white marble. Shahjahan is considered the greatest builder amongst the Mughals.

With the declining power of the Mughals, their architecture reflected the loss of power, and one of the last major works was Safdarjung's Tomb at Delhi, built in 1754.

Colonial Architecture

Colonial influence can be seen across India especially in Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai; and the numerous cantonment towns of the British. Europeans who started coming from sixteenth century AD constructed many churches and other buildings. The Portuguese built many churches at Goa, the most famous of which include the Basilica of Bom Jesus and the

church of Saint Francis-Xavier. The British also built administrative and residential buildings which reflect their imperial glory. Some Greek and Roman influence can be observed in the colonnaded or pillared buildings, of which Parliament House and Connaught Place in Delhi are good examples. The British architect Edwin Lutyens designed the Presidential Palace or Rashtrapati Bhavan, formerly the Viceroy's Residence. It is built of sandstone and has Indian design features like canopies and jaalis from Rajasthan.



Goan architecture is still heavily inspired by European ideas since Goa was the first place to be colonised by Europeans.

The Victoria Memorial in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) is a powerful symbol of the British Empire, built as a monument in tribute to Queen Victoria's reign. It now houses a museum full of colonial artefacts. Writers' Building in Kolkata, where generations of government officers worked in British times, is still the administrative centre of West Bengal post independence.

Some Gothic elements can be seen in church buildings like those seen in the St. Paul's Cathedral in Kolkata. The British also left behind impressive railway terminals like Mumbai's Victoria Terminus (renamed as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus). Contemporary buildings, designed after independence show a variety of influences and styles.

Post Independence

India had been dominated by foreign powers and influences for a thousand years. In every field, efforts were made to modernise yet there was a need to inculcate cultural values that

were important to Indians and needed to be expressed. Architecture was a field in which these contradictions manifested themselves.

On the one hand several modern buildings were built by a set of architects who had studied and worked overseas.

A new era of architecture began when the renowned Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier was invited to design the capital of the state of Punjab, Chandigarh. Le Corbusier's uncompromising functionalism consciously broke with the past 'historicism' of imperial architecture.

On the other hand several monumental buildings were built which evoked Indian traditional architecture like the Vidhana Soudha (Assembly) at Bangalore.

In Delhi, the American architect Joseph Allen Stein, designed The India International Centre where conferences are held by intellectuals and academicians from all over the world and more recently, the India Habitat Centre which has become a centre of intellectual activities in the capital.

Here are some of the important examples of post-independence architecture of India



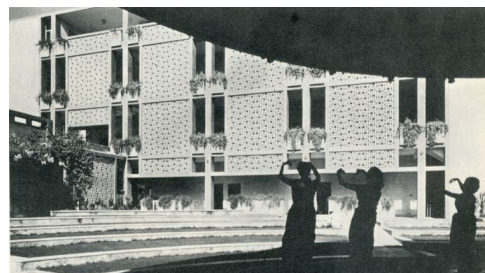
Chandigarh Assembly Building



Bangalore Vidhana Soudha



India Habitat Centre, Delhi



Triveni Kala Sangam, Delhi



India International Centre, Delhi



Vigyan Bhawan, Delhi



Swaminarayan Akshar Dham Temple, Delhi



Lotus Temple, Bahai House of Worship,



Indian Institute of Management,



Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore