

Examrace

Indian Art and Culture: Some Aspects of Indo-Islamic Architecture

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The seventh and eighth centuries CE, Islam spread towards Spain and India.

Islam came to India, particularly, with Muslim merchants, traders, holy men and conquerors over a passage of six hundred years.

Indo-Islamic architecture



Although by the eighth century CE, Muslims had begun to construct in Sind, Gujarat, etc. , it was only in the early thirteenth century that large-scale building activity was begun by the Turkish State, established after the Turkish conquest of northern India.

By the twelfth century India was already familiar with monumental constructions in grandiose settings.

Certain techniques and embellishments were prevalent and popular, such as trabeation, brackets, and multiple pillars to support a flat roof or a small shallow dome.

While arches were shaped in wood and stone, these were unable to bear the weight of the top structure.

Now, however, the archuate form of construction was introduced gradually in which arches could support the weight of the domes.

Such arches needed to be constructed with voussoirs (series of interlocking blocks) and fitted with keystones.

The domes, resting on pendentives and squinches enabled spanning of large spaces leaving the interiors free of pillars.

A noteworthy aspect of these migrations and conquests was that Muslims absorbed many features of local cultures and traditions and combined them with their own architectural practices.

Thus, in the field of architecture, a mix of many structural techniques, stylised shapes, and surface decorations came about through constant interventions of acceptance, rejection or modification of architectural elements.

These architectural entities or categories showcasing multiple styles are known as Indo-Saracenic or Indo-Islamic architecture.

According to E. B. Havell, Hindus conceived manifestations of god everywhere in multiple forms as part of their religious faith whereas a Muslim thought of only one with Muhammad as His Prophet.

Hence, Hindus adorned all surfaces with sculptures and paintings.

Muslims forbidden to replicate living forms on any surface, developed their religious art and architecture consisting of the arts of arabesque, geometrical patterns and calligraphy on plaster and stone.

Typologies of Structures

- Keeping in mind religious and secular necessities, architectural building like mosques for daily prayers, the Jama Masjids, tombs, dargahs, minars, hammams, formally laid out gardens, madrasas, sarais or caravansarais, Kos minars, etc. , were constructed over a period of time.
- These were thus additions in the existing types of buildings in the sub-continent.
- Architectural edifices in the Indian sub-continent, as elsewhere in the world, were constructed by wealthy people.
- They were, in descending order, rulers and nobles and their families, merchants, merchant guilds, rural elite and devotees of a cult.
- In spite of the obvious Saracenic, Persian and Turkish influences, Indo-Islamic structures were heavily influenced by prevailing sensibilities of Indian architectural and decorative forms.
- A lot depended on the availability of materials, limitations of resources and skills and the sense of aesthetics of the patrons.
- Although religion and religiosity were very important to people of medieval India, as elsewhere, they borrowed architectural elements liberally.

Categories of Styles

The study of Indo-Islamic architecture is conventionally categorised into the Imperial Style (Delhi Sultanate) , the Provincial Style (Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, and Jaunpur) , the Mughal Style (Delhi, Agra, and Lahore) and

the Deccani Style (Bijapur, Golconda) . These categories help in understanding better the specificities of architectural styles rather than putting them in immutable slots.

Architectural Influences

Amongst provincial styles, the architecture of Bengal and Jaunpur is regarded as distinct. Gujarat was said to have a markedly regional character for patrons borrowed elements from regional temple traditions such as toranas, lintels in mihrabs, carvings of bell and chain motifs, and carved panels depicting trees, for tombs, mosques and dargahs.

The fifteenth century white marble dargah of Shaikh Ahmad Khattu of Sarkhej is a good example of provincial style and it heavily influenced the form and decoration of Mughal tombs.

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