

PRELIMINARY STUDY IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE – INDUS CIVILIZATION TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF GUPTAS

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Abstract

The brief sketch of the art and architecture of India is more historical than aesthetic. This article provides information about the art and architecture from Indus civilization to The Golden age of Guptas. The main objective of this article is to give a general view of the salient features of the Indian architecture. An attempt is, therefore, made in the following topics to trace the evolution of Indian art and architecture.

Keywords:Indian history;Architecture;The Golden age of Guptas;Indian art;Indus civilization.

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1. Introduction

Architecture derived from Latin word “architectura”, means "chief" or "builder". Architecture is a general term to describe buildings and other physical structures. The art and science of designing buildings and (some) nonbuilding structures. The style of design and method of construction of buildings and other physical structures.

Nearly all the artistic remains of ancient India are of a religious nature, or were at least made for religious purposes. Secular art certainly existed, for literature shows that kings dwelt in sumptuous palaces, decorated with lovely wall paintings and sculpture, though all these have vanished. Much has been said and written about Indian art since, some sixty years ago; European taste began to doubt the established canons of the 19th century and looked to Asia and Africa for fresh aesthetic experience. From that time to this most authorities on the subject, Indian and European alike, have stressed the religious and mystical aspect on Indian art.

2. Indus Valley Civilization

Harappa on the bank of the Ravi in Punjab was the first settlement where the Indus civilization was discovered. Most of the information about the Indus Civilization is derived from the study of the town and sealings planning, houses, seals from this place. Similarly, the site of Kalibangan in Rajasthan excavated in sixties seems to have been a provincial capital[4]. The old belief that Indian history started with the advent of the Aryans was closed after the excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Mohenjo-daro means the City of the Dead. Mohenjadaro was a well planned city [2]. The architecture of Mohenjo-daro, in general, is plain, utilitarian, and rather solid than beautiful [2].

In 1856, when the British ruled India, they laid railway lines on the banks of River Ravi, a branch of Indus River. They found a mound of sand. There they saw well- burnt bricks and ruins. They took those bricks and constructed the railway lines. So they destroyed many such walls of the buildings. In 1921, archaeologists found out that it was the ancient city of India. Harappa in Sindhi means ‘Buried City’ the Cities discovered after the Indus Valley Civilization were named as Harappan Civilization. This civilization flourished in India about 4700 years ago. Likewise, the ruins of the cities were found in Mohenjo- daro Chanhu-daro, Kalibangan and Lothal.

2.1 Town planning

The Indus valley cities were well planned. The northern part of the town was narrow and elevated. The excavators considered that those were constructed on security basis. The eastern side was broad and lowered. We get more information from this town planning.

The town was built with experts who well versed in the art of town planning. Houses were built on both the sides of the broad streets in systematic order. The houses had flat roofs and were many storied.

a. The Great Bath

The most important structure found the citadel was the Great Bath. It was built of kiln-fired bricks and sealed with a lining of bitumen. There were steps on both the sides of the pool. There were rooms on all the sides of the pool for changing clothes. It was fed by water from a well and the dirty water was emptied by a huge drain.

b. Buildings

Houses were built in grid system. There were houses which had two rooms and multistoried houses, public hall, granary and public buildings built out of bricks. There were no windows in the houses. Every house had a well and a bathroom. There were dustbins in front of the houses.

2.2 Applied Science

The science and technology such as construction, selection of lands, measurement of plots and foundation, selection of quality building materials and geometrical figures were in use.

There would have been an administrative committee in the city to administer it. The public drainage system, the Great Bath, the public hall, street lights, and the provision of dustbins show that the administrative system was well organized [1].

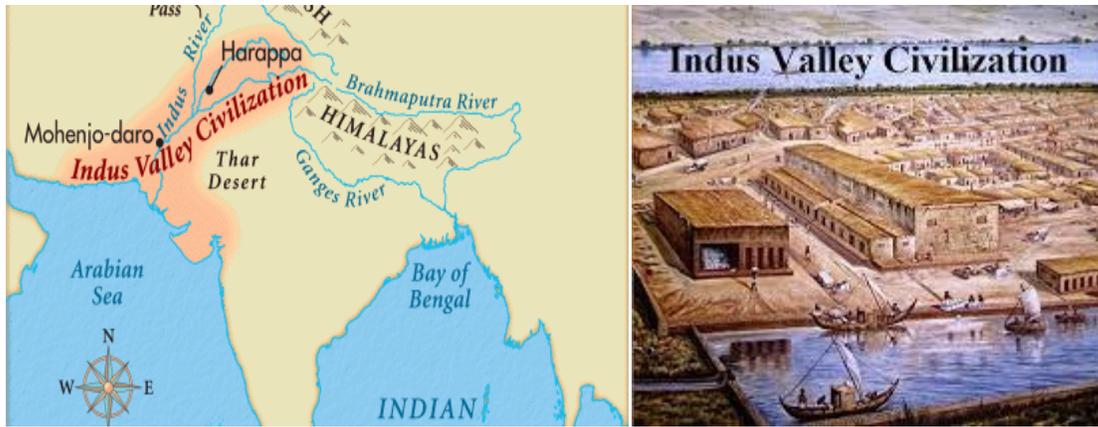


Figure 1. *Indus Valley Civilization*

2.3 Art

They were experts in making pots out of terracotta. The figures of birds, animals, images of male and female, bullock cart driven by a man, pots and bowls were discovered. Hundreds of rectangular terracotta seals were discovered. Pictographic writings were written on them. The script had not been deciphered yet. On the terracotta seals, bulls, cart, dove, boats and a figure of a human meditating are seen. There would have been workers like document writers, seal makers, carpenters, doll makers, masons and other artisans.

3. Vedic Period

3.1 Rig Vedic Period (1500 BC to 1000 BC)

The Aryans knew well the art of architecture and sculpture. We have reference to mansions supported by a thousand columns and provided with a thousand doors. There were stone castles and structures with a hundred walls. This is enough to indicate that architecture made some progress in the Rig Vedic India. Allusions to images of Indra point out, according to some scholars, the beginning of sculpture.

3.2 Later Vedic Period (1000 BC to 600 BC)

The house (*harmya*) was large enough to contain not only large family, but also pens for cattle and sheep, and evidently had many rooms with a special place for the *Grahapatha* fire which was kept continuously burning. Houses apparently were generally built of wood as in the Rig Vedic period. The (*Dhandhani*) treasure house mentioned in the *Taittiriya Aranyakas* was probably a

special type of room or house. The Atharvaveda mentions Patninam Sadan or a part of the house known as women's apartment. A seat with a pillow or cushion or coverlet, a bed, and a couch were among the articles of furniture mentioned. People knew well the art of architecture and constructed houses of several storeys in rows. They used mud, brick, stone, and timber for the purpose.

4. Jainism (6th Century BC)

The beauty of Jainism finds its high watermark during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. In their early centuries they erected stupas, like Buddhists, in honour of their saints, with their accessories of stone railings, decorated gateways, stone umbrellas, elaborate carved pillars and abundant statues. Some of these that have been discovered at Mathura, in Bundelkhand and some parts of Northern Madhya Pradesh, are full of Jain statues. They belong to the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. The gigantic statues of Bahubali called Gommatesvara at Sravana Belgola and Karkal in Karnataka are examples of the wonders of architecture. The former statue, 21 meters high, carved out of a mass of granite, standing at the top of a hill was erected in 984 AD. Chamundaraya, the minister of Ganga King Rachamalla. The colossal reliefs carved out of a rock in Gwalior fort in Madhya Pradesh belong to the fifteenth century. The Jain caves with their relief works and statues at Udaigiri hills, near Bhilsa in Madhya Pradesh and Ellora in Maharashtra are the examples of excellent architecture, sculpture of the period. The Jains have also constructed cave temples cut in rocks, the earliest examples of which belonging to the second century BC., and later exist in Orissa are called Hathigumpha caves. Other examples of different periods still exist at Junagarh, Junnar, Osmanabad and other places. Many Jain places of pilgrimage such as the Parsvanath hills Pavapuri and Rajgiri in Bihar, and Girnar and Palitana in Kathiawar have temples and other architectural monuments of different ages. The Jain tower at Chittor in Rajasthan is one of the best specimens of Jain architecture. The Jain temple at Mount Abu in Rajasthan, belonging to the eleventh century, carries to its highest perfection the Indian genius for the invention of graceful patterns and their application to the decoration of masonry [3].

5. Buddhism (6th Century BC)

The finest contribution of Buddhism to Indian life was made in the realm of architecture and sculpture. Before the advent of Buddhism, art was a handmaid of religion. Consequently it did

not progress much during the Vedic period. Architecture was mainly confined to the construction of mandapas or yajnasalas, stambhas or pillars and yajna vedis or altars for the purpose of the sacrifices. But Buddhism gave the powerful impulse to religious architecture. Today, almost every museum in the world possesses relics of Buddhist art. Under the patronage of the Buddhism all branches of art-architecture, sculpture, painting etc.- progressed well. Vihars were built all over the country for giving permanent abode to the Buddhist monks. The stambhas bearing religious emblems were raised by the pious followers of Buddhism in honour of their teachers and other holy men. Similarly, big stupas of stone were raised over the relics of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. The whole life story of Lord Buddha was expressed in stone. These new building of Vihars, temples and monuments were richly carved and ornamented, and thus, in course of time a new style of architecture and sculpture came into existence. Some pieces of Buddhist sculpture are considered to be the finest specimens of art in the world. The stupas at Sanchi, Barhut and Amravati, the stone pillars of Asoka and the cave temples of Kanheri (Bombay), Karle (Poona) and Nasik are considered the best specimens of the Buddhist art. The Stupa at Sanchi is world renowned for its gateways and railings which are profusely covered with sculpture, depicting either scenes from the Buddha's life or incidents from his legendary past lives. Those, the Gandhar art are the outcome of Buddhist patronage. It tried to interpret Indian subjects and religious conceptions through the Graeco-Roman technique. It had plenty of charm. The walls of the caves and temples were richly decked with beautiful frescoes which perhaps formed the life-work of many of the artists. The remnants of this art at Ajanta, Bagh and Sigiriya (Sri Lanka) would suffice to inspire a person even today [3].

6. The Mauryas (322 BC – 185 BC)

6.1 Viharas-Stupas-Palace-Caves-Pillars

Kalkana's Rajatarangini credits Asoka with foundation of two cities, Srinagar in Kashmir, and Lalihpatan in Nepal. He built thousands of stupas throughout his far-flung empire to enshrine the Corporal relics of the Buddha [2].

a. The Viharas

Asoka undertook keen interest for the construction of Viharas or monasteries and cave-dwellings for the residence of monks.

b. The Stupa

The Stupa was a hemispherical structure of brick or stone masonry. It had a central chamber in which the relics of the Buddha were placed in a small casket often beautifully carved in crystal. Each Stupa consists of the following features. A circular base bearing a massive solid dome (Anda) representing the dome of heaven enclosing the earth. From in projects as shaft crowned with an umbrella (Harmika-chakra). The stairway (Sopana) and a railing over the Stupa (Berm) and a wooden sailing covering are found. These Toranas are found on four cardinal points-North, South, East, West.

The original stupa was built by Asoka and later it was enlarged and replaced by stone during the rule of Satavahanas. It is now 36 meters in diameter and rises to a height of more than 16.4 meters. The internal construction sometimes took the form of auspicious designs such as swastika or a wheel. the Buddha's presence is still represented by symbols, such as an empty throne, foot-prints, umbrella, wheel and the like.

c. Palace

Asoka's Palace at Pataliputra was described by Megasthenes as no less magnificent than the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana.

d. Caves

Loma Rishi-Sudama Caves

These Chambers are the earliest example in India of the rock-cut method. The Lomas Rishi and Sudama caves have been carved out adjacent to another on the Barabar hill. The doorway 2 meters high is recessed within a semi-circular archways above which are two lunettes forming a kind of fanlight. In the lower lunette is carved a procession of elephants while the upper is filled with a diaper pattern of lattice-work. The elephants are performing an obeisance before stupas [2].

e. Asoka Pillars

Asoka erected monolithic pillars. Edicts were carved out on the surface. These pillars have been found at Delhi, Meerat, Prayaga, Luauriya Nandangarh, Lauriya Araraj (Bihar), Rampurva,

Tosali abd Sopra. The Capital resembles the shape of an inverted lotus; the abacus (top of the capital) serves as a pedestal. Majestic Dharma Chakra is also found.

The Asoka pillar at Sarnath is famous for its Lion Capital. It was erected to commemorate Buddha's first sermon. It is 2.15 meters in height. The Capital consists of three parts. There is a Bell-shaped inverted lotus. Above it, is the circular abacus with four royal animals, namely a bull, a horse, an elephant and a lion carved in high relief. Between each of them is a similar Dharmachakra[2].

7. The Kushanas (2nd Century BC – 3rd Century AD)

7.1 Gandhara Art

Gandhara, a place in the lower Kabul Valley was a meeting place of three civilizations-Indian, Greek and Iranian. This resulted in the birth of somewhat hybrid culture. This distinct style of art was the combination and culmination of Greek Art with Buddhist ideas. The sculptures before the Kanishka period were the portrayed scenes from the Jatakas and other stories connected with the Buddha [2]. Buddha's figure was never carved, but the presence was showed by symbols, such as footprints, the bodhi-tree, a vacant seat or the Umbrella [2].

7.2 Features of the Sculptures

1. The Gandhara artists gave a human form of Buddha in a realistic manner.
2. The body is covered with thick drapery of large and bold fold-lines. The result is that Lord Buddha appears to be a king rather than an aesthetic. The Gandhara art lays stress on decoration and ornamentation.
3. They incorporated many techniques and motive from ancient Roman art, such as for example fine scrolls, angels bearing garlands, figures framed in niches and Semi-human creatures like centour.
4. The figures themselves are shorter in stature, stumpy in appearance and treated in a rough manner, exhibiting a king of crude rustic strength.
5. As the Mahayanists worshipped Buddha in idol forms, the idols of Buddha and Bodhisatvas were carved out in the Gandhara art.

The backside of the head of Buddha receives a disc showing the enlightenment [2].

8. The Gupta's Art and Architecture (320 AD – 550 AD)

Art, architecture, sculpture and painting attained an extraordinarily high point of achievement. The buildings of this age were exceptionally grand and beautiful. The Chief characteristics of temple architecture are

1. The temples were built on raised platform divided into squares
2. The use of durable materials like stone and bricks
3. A square sanctum (Garba griha) with a flat roof
4. Plain interior but richly carved exterior
5. A small porch in front of the doorway [2]

The followings are the examples of the temples constructed during this age:

1. Vishnu temple at Tigawa
2. Buddha temples at Sanchi and Bodh Gaya
3. Dasavathara temple at Deogarh
4. An Introduction to Indian Art, Part I, National Council of Educational Research and Training
5. Siva temple at Bhumara
6. Siva temple at Khoh
7. Parvathi temple at Nachchana-Kuthara
8. A group of rock-cut sanctuaries at Udaigiri

The walls of the square shrine of Deogarh show Vishnu asleep on the coils of the giant multi-headed serpent, Ananta. The roof of the Nachchana-Kuthara temple was flat but it is transformed into an elegant curvilinear spire in the Deogarh temple. The entrances are four in number receiving steps from four sides with porticos on a row of pillars.

8.1 Metallurgy

The iron pillar at Delhi was set up by Kumara Gupta I in 415 AD in honour of his father. It is 7 meters high and 40 cm in diameter. It is made of pure malleable iron and weighs 6 tonnes. It has not been rusted even after 1500 years. The standing Buddha from Sultanganj (Bihar) measuring 2.25 meters high is a remarkable piece of metal casting [2].

9. Conclusion

Indian architecture is as old as the history of the civilization. The earliest remains of recognizable building activity in the Indian subcontinent dates back to the third millennium in the Indus Valley cities.

Studies of Indian architecture normally begin with the Indus Valley Civilization, moving through the late Vedic period, the Maurya-Gupta age of Buddhist monuments. Most of the art and architectural remains that survive from ancient and medieval India are religious in nature. Temples also became as space for many other art forms.

Above all, by studying these artworks, able to learn much about the kind of society that made these objects. It tells us about their religious practices and the love towards their religion. Through them can surmise the types of buildings, clothes and culture of ancient India. By using the art material to reconstruct the history of their religions.

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