



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.2331(UIF)

VOLUME - 7 | ISSUE - 3 | DECEMBER - 2017



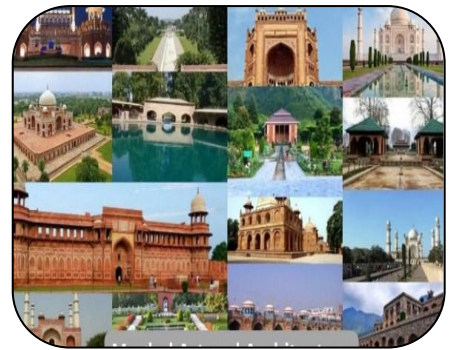
SYNTHESIS OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA: A JOURNEY FROM TEMPLES TO TOMBS

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ABSTRACT:

Medieval India stands as a testament to the confluence of diverse cultural influences that shaped its art and architecture. This article delves into the vibrant tapestry of artistic expressions that emerged during this period, from the intricately carved temples to the majestic tombs that continue to captivate the world's imagination. This synthesis of styles, born from a blend of indigenous traditions and foreign influences, created an architectural landscape that mirrors India's rich historical and cultural tapestry.



KEYWORDS : *Medieval India, art and architecture, Nagara style, Dravidian style, Indo-Islamic architecture, Mughal marvels, Deccan Sultanates, cultural synthesis, patronage, architectural diversity, cultural identity.*

Introduction: Synthesis of Art and Architecture in Medieval India

The medieval period in India, spanning from the 6th to the 18th century, serves as a significant epoch marked by dynamic shifts in political power, cultural interactions, and artistic expressions. This era witnessed the rise and fall of various dynasties, invasions by foreign powers, and the blossoming of trade routes, all of which played pivotal roles in shaping the art and architecture of the subcontinent. The synthesis of styles, born from the amalgamation of indigenous traditions and external influences, led to the creation of an architectural landscape that stands as a testament to India's rich historical and cultural heritage.

Cultural Mosaic: Foundations of Medieval Art and Architecture The cultural mosaic of medieval India was a result of various factors that contributed to the evolution of its art and architecture. Indigenous traditions that had been nurtured for centuries formed the bedrock upon which foreign influences were integrated. The Vedic and Puranic traditions, sculptural and iconographic practices, as well as regional architectural styles, provided the foundation for the artistic expressions of the era. The art of temple architecture, characterized by intricately carved sculptures depicting deities and mythological narratives, showcased the innate creativity and religious fervor of the Indian populace.

Early Medieval Period: The Blossoming of Architectural Diversity The early medieval period, spanning from the 6th to the 13th century, was marked by the flourishing of diverse architectural styles, each emblematic of the prevailing religious and political milieu. The Nagara style of temple architecture emerged as a dominant force during this period. Characterized by its towering shikharas (spires) adorned with elaborate carvings, this style created a distinct visual identity. The temples at Khajuraho, with their intricate depictions of human emotions and sensual forms, and the Osian and Modhera temples, which

stand as architectural marvels, exemplify the exquisite craftsmanship of the era. These temples, serving as centers of worship and artistic expression, represented the synthesis of spiritual and artistic ideologies.

Islamic Influences and the Birth of Indo-Islamic Architecture The advent of Islamic rulers in India introduced a new paradigm to its architectural landscape. With the establishment of various Sultanates, a unique synthesis emerged, fusing Islamic and indigenous elements. The Indo-Islamic architectural style was characterized by the use of pointed arches, domes, and minarets. The Qutub Minar in Delhi, an iconic symbol of this era, epitomized this fusion, standing as a testament to the harmonious blend of Islamic architectural principles with local craftsmanship. Mosques like the Jama Masjid, adorned with intricate calligraphy and geometric patterns, demonstrated the interplay of faith and artistry.

Mughal Marvels: A Culmination of Aesthetics and Innovation The Mughal Empire, which spanned from the 16th to the 18th century, ushered in a period of unparalleled architectural magnificence. With their Persian and Central Asian influences, the Mughals introduced a new aesthetic language that transformed the Indian architectural panorama. The Taj Mahal, commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan, remains an immortal testament to Mughal architecture's splendor. The ethereal marriage of white marble, intricate inlay work, and symmetrical design encapsulates the Mughal approach to architecture as a means of blending aesthetics and innovation. The Red Fort in Delhi and the Fatehpur Sikri complex further exemplify the grandeur and grand vision of Mughal architecture.

Regional Styles and Deccan Sultanates: A Tapestry of Diversity The Deccan Sultanates, comprising the Bahmani Sultanate and the Qutb Shahi dynasty, introduced a unique regional architectural tapestry to medieval India. Characterized by intricate stucco work and the use of indigenous materials, these regional styles bore influences from both local traditions and broader Indian architectural trends. The Gol Gumbaz in Bijapur, with its colossal dome that remains the second-largest unsupported dome globally, stands as a testament to the innovative architectural feats of the Deccan Sultanates.

Cultural Synthesis and Patronage: A Catalyst for Artistic Expression Medieval India's art and architecture were nurtured under the patronage of rulers, merchants, and religious leaders. These structures not only served practical purposes but also functioned as symbols of power, prestige, and cultural identity. The architectural marvels born from this patronage provided a platform for the synthesis of various artistic elements. Local artisans, skilled craftsmen, and architects collaborated to create structures that resonated with both the spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities of the period.

The medieval period in India was an epoch of dynamic cultural interactions, political upheavals, and artistic innovations. The synthesis of diverse styles, originating from both indigenous traditions and foreign influences, resulted in an architectural landscape that continues to intrigue and captivate the world. The art and architecture of this era, spanning from temples to tombs, not only provide insights into India's historical evolution but also reflect the creative prowess and rich cultural exchanges that have shaped the nation's identity. As we explore the intricacies of these architectural marvels, we embark on a journey through time, witnessing the seamless blend of art and history that characterizes medieval India.

Early Medieval Architectural Diversity:

The early medieval period in India, spanning from the 6th to the 13th century, was a time of dynamic cultural, religious, and artistic evolution. This period witnessed the emergence of a diverse range of architectural styles that reflected the prevailing religious beliefs, cultural influences, and regional variations. One of the prominent features of this era was the proliferation of temple architecture, which showcased the intricate craftsmanship and artistic expressions of the time.

Nagara Style of Temple Architecture: At the heart of the early medieval architectural landscape was the Nagara style of temple architecture. This style originated in the northern and central regions of India and is characterized by its distinctive shikhara (tower), which rises in multiple tiers and is often crowned with an amalaka stone or kalasha. The Nagara temples stood as physical embodiments of devotion, grandeur, and artistic excellence.

Architectural Elements and Ornamentation: The Nagara temples were not just places of worship but also artistic marvels that showcased a rich variety of architectural elements and ornamentation. The walls of these temples were adorned with intricate carvings that depicted various deities, celestial beings,

mythological narratives, and scenes from everyday life. The carvings served both aesthetic and spiritual purposes, narrating stories and imparting a sense of divine presence within the architecture.

Symbolism and Iconography: Every architectural detail of the Nagara temples was imbued with symbolism and iconography. The layout of the temple complexes often adhered to Vastu Shastra principles, a traditional Indian architectural and planning guide. The main sanctum, or garbhagriha, housed the deity, serving as the spiritual nucleus of the temple. The mandapa, or hall, provided space for devotees to gather and engage in religious rituals and ceremonies.

Regional Variations: One of the remarkable aspects of early medieval architecture was the diversity of regional styles that emerged across different parts of India. While the Nagara style was prevalent in the north, other styles like the Dravidian style evolved in the southern regions. The Dravidian temples are characterized by their pyramid-shaped vimanas (towers) with intricately sculpted gopurams (entrance gateways). These temples stood as architectural marvels in their own right, boasting towering structures adorned with elaborate sculptures and ornamentation.

Artistic Flourish and Devotional Expression: The early medieval period was marked by a heightened artistic flourish, with skilled artisans and craftsmen showcasing their talents through intricate carvings, sculptures, and architectural details. The temples not only served as places of worship but also as artistic expressions of devotion. The artists' devotion to their craft mirrored the devotees' devotion to their deities, resulting in architectural masterpieces that embodied both spiritual and artistic dimensions.

Cultural Exchange and Continuity: The early medieval period was a time of significant cultural exchange due to trade, pilgrimage, and interaction with neighboring regions. This exchange led to the incorporation of diverse architectural influences into the existing styles, enriching the architectural vocabulary. The continuity of certain design elements across different dynasties and regions demonstrated the enduring impact of early medieval architecture on subsequent periods.

The early medieval architectural diversity of India, with its Nagara and Dravidian styles, stood as a testament to the artistic vibrancy, spiritual devotion, and cultural interactions of the era. These temples not only showcased the technical prowess of the artisans but also reflected the profound connection between architecture and spirituality. As we study these architectural marvels today, we gain insights into the complex tapestry of early medieval India, where creativity, faith, and cultural fusion converged to shape a rich and diverse architectural heritage.

Islamic Influences and Indo-Islamic Architecture:

The advent of Islamic rule in India during the medieval period brought about a significant transformation in its architectural landscape. The fusion of Islamic architectural principles with local traditions gave birth to a unique style known as Indo-Islamic architecture. This style not only reflected the influence of Islamic aesthetics but also showcased a synthesis of cultural and artistic elements that defined the architectural narrative of the era.

Introduction of Islamic Architecture: The Islamic influence on Indian architecture began with the arrival of various Muslim rulers, starting from the Ghaznavids and Ghurids. The architectural elements introduced by these rulers were primarily based on Islamic design principles that had developed in regions like Persia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. These principles were adapted to the Indian context, resulting in the emergence of a distinctive architectural style that blended Islamic features with local craftsmanship and materials.

Characteristics of Indo-Islamic Architecture:

1. **Use of Arches and Domes:** One of the defining features of Indo-Islamic architecture was the extensive use of pointed arches, often seen in gateways, entrances, and windows. These arches added an elegant and aesthetic dimension to the structures. Domes were also an integral part of this style, often crowning important buildings such as mosques and tombs.
2. **Calligraphy and Ornamentation:** Indo-Islamic architecture showcased intricate calligraphy and decorative elements. Arabic inscriptions from the Quran adorned the façades of many structures,

infusing them with religious significance. Intricate geometric and floral patterns, as well as intricate tile work, were used to embellish walls and domes.

3. **Minarets:** Minarets, slender towers with balconies, became prominent features of Indo-Islamic architecture. These minarets served both functional and symbolic purposes. They provided a platform for the call to prayer (adhan) and also became distinguishing features of mosques and other Islamic structures.
4. **Courtyards and Gardens:** Islamic architecture emphasized open courtyards and gardens within structures, providing spaces for community gatherings, prayers, and reflection. These areas were often surrounded by arcades and verandas, creating a harmonious balance between architecture and nature.

Architectural Examples:

1. **Qutub Minar:** The Qutub Minar in Delhi is a prime example of Indo-Islamic architecture. Built by Qutb-ud-din Aibak, it features intricate calligraphy, fluted shafts, and a blend of Hindu and Islamic motifs, symbolizing the transition from Hindu rule to Islamic governance.
2. **Jama Masjid, Delhi:** Built by Shah Jahan, the Jama Masjid in Delhi is a stunning representation of Mughal Indo-Islamic architecture. Its monumental courtyard, grand entrance gateways, and use of red sandstone and marble exemplify the fusion of Islamic architectural elements with local materials and techniques.
3. **Tomb of Humayun:** The tomb of Emperor Humayun in Delhi is another notable example. Its use of a grand garden layout, Persian-style double dome, and intricate tile work showcase the amalgamation of Persian and Indian architectural aesthetics.

Cultural Synthesis and Legacy:

Indo-Islamic architecture not only demonstrated the aesthetic integration of Islamic and Indian elements but also highlighted the cultural and religious coexistence that characterized the medieval period. The architectural legacy left by this style continues to shape the modern Indian architectural ethos, serving as a reminder of the cross-cultural interactions that have shaped the nation's history and identity.

Mughal Marvels: Architectural Splendors of the Mughal Empire

The Mughal Empire, spanning from the 16th to the 18th century, is renowned for its monumental contributions to Indian art and architecture. The Mughal rulers, with their Persian and Central Asian heritage, brought an innovative aesthetic vision that blended Islamic, Persian, and Indian architectural elements. The architectural marvels created during this era, often referred to as "Mughal Marvels," are a testament to the grandeur, elegance, and cultural synthesis that define Mughal architecture.

The Mughal Aesthetic: Mughal architecture is characterized by a distinctive blend of elegance, symmetry, and intricate detailing. It reflects the Mughals' appreciation for aesthetics, their affinity for creating harmonious spaces, and their inclination towards monumental structures that conveyed power, authority, and cultural refinement. This architectural style is a fusion of Islamic geometric patterns, Persian ornamentation, and Indian architectural traditions, resulting in structures of unparalleled beauty.

Taj Mahal: The Epitome of Love and Craftsmanship: Perhaps the most iconic of all Mughal structures is the Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal is a paragon of symmetry, balance, and architectural brilliance. Its central white marble dome, exquisite inlay work using precious and semi-precious stones, and surrounding lush gardens create an atmosphere of ethereal beauty. The Taj Mahal symbolizes both eternal love and architectural magnificence, encapsulating the essence of Mughal architecture.

Red Fort: The Citadel of Power: The Red Fort in Delhi, also known as Lal Qila, is another Mughal masterpiece. This imposing fortress served as the main residence for Mughal emperors and is characterized by its red sandstone walls and intricate design. The Diwan-i-Am (Hall of Public Audience) and the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience) showcase the intricate floral and geometric patterns that adorned Mughal

architecture. The fort's grandeur and architectural innovation reflect the Mughal emperors' role as patrons of art and culture.

Fatehpur Sikri: The Abandoned City: Emperor Akbar's vision of creating an imperial capital led to the construction of Fatehpur Sikri, a city near Agra. This architectural marvel combines Indian, Persian, and Islamic styles, resulting in a synthesis of cultural influences. The Buland Darwaza (Gate of Magnificence) stands as an imposing entrance to the complex, while the Diwan-i-Khas showcases Akbar's religious tolerance through its intricate jali (lattice) screens. Fatehpur Sikri, although abandoned, remains a testimony to Akbar's architectural legacy.

Legacy and Cultural Influence: Mughal architecture's legacy extends beyond the structures themselves. It has profoundly influenced subsequent generations of architects and artists, contributing to the development of the Indo-Islamic architectural style. The Mughal focus on creating inviting gardens, harmonious layouts, and intricate ornamentation continues to resonate in contemporary architectural designs. The Mughal Marvels are not only architectural wonders but also living symbols of India's rich history, cultural diversity, and artistic ingenuity.

The Mughal Marvels stand as a testament to the Mughal Empire's artistic and architectural achievements. These structures, marked by their exquisite beauty and cultural significance, embody the fusion of diverse influences, reflecting the Mughals' ability to harmoniously blend Islamic, Persian, and Indian elements. The legacy of Mughal architecture continues to inspire awe and admiration, showcasing the enduring impact of their vision on India's architectural heritage.

Regional Styles and Deccan Sultanates: A Tapestry of Architectural Diversity

The medieval period in India was not just marked by the dominance of a single architectural style; it was a time of regional variations and diverse artistic expressions. In particular, the Deccan Sultanates, including the Bahmani Sultanate and the Qutb Shahi dynasty, introduced their own unique architectural styles that showcased the richness of regional influences and creative innovation.

Deccan Sultanates: A Cultural Crossroads: The Deccan region, located in the southern part of India, was a crossroads of cultural interactions due to its strategic location and trade routes. The establishment of the Bahmani Sultanate in the 14th century laid the foundation for a distinctive architectural tradition that blended indigenous traditions with Islamic and Persian influences. Subsequent dynasties, such as the Qutb Shahis, continued this architectural legacy while infusing their own regional flavor.

Distinctive Features:

1. **Stucco Work and Ornamentation:** Deccan Sultanate architecture is characterized by its intricate stucco work and ornamentation. The use of plaster allowed for detailed and delicate designs to be molded onto the surfaces of structures. These decorative elements featured geometric patterns, arabesques, and floral motifs, creating a unique visual language.
2. **Local Materials:** The Deccan Sultanates made use of locally available materials such as basalt and granite for construction, contributing to the distinct appearance of their buildings. The robust nature of these materials lent a sense of durability and authenticity to the architecture.
3. **Architectural Layout:** Deccan architecture often incorporated a combination of arches, domes, and elevated platforms. This architectural layout provided a sense of elevation and grandeur to the structures, highlighting the artistic and spiritual significance of the buildings.

Gol Gumbaz: The Jewel of Bijapur:

Perhaps the most renowned example of Deccan Sultanate architecture is the Gol Gumbaz, located in Bijapur. Constructed during the reign of Muhammad Adil Shah, the Gol Gumbaz stands as a remarkable feat of engineering and design. Its colossal dome, one of the largest in the world, creates an awe-inspiring interior space. The structure's whispering gallery is a testament to the precision and acoustics achieved by Deccan artisans.

Cultural Fusion and Legacy: The Deccan Sultanate architecture exemplifies the cultural fusion that defined the medieval period. These structures, while influenced by Islamic and Persian aesthetics, retained a

strong connection to the local traditions and materials of the region. This architectural synthesis was a testament to the sultanates' endeavor to create a unique identity that embraced their diverse cultural milieu.

Enduring Influence: The legacy of Deccan Sultanate architecture continues to influence contemporary architectural trends. The use of indigenous materials, intricate stucco work, and attention to detail remain sources of inspiration for modern architects seeking to connect with their cultural heritage while embracing contemporary design sensibilities.

The regional styles of the Deccan Sultanates provided a vivid tapestry of architectural diversity that celebrated the convergence of cultures and influences. These structures, characterized by their stucco ornamentation, local materials, and unique architectural layouts, are not just historical artifacts but living reminders of the rich heritage and creative ingenuity that define the Deccan region's architectural legacy.

Cultural Synthesis and Patronage: Shaping Medieval Indian Art and Architecture

The art and architecture of medieval India were not only a product of artistic expression but also reflections of cultural synthesis and the patronage of rulers, merchants, and religious leaders. This intricate interplay between diverse cultural influences and the support of patrons played a pivotal role in shaping the magnificent structures that define the period.

Cultural Synthesis: A Tapestry of Influences

Medieval India was a cultural melting pot, where various religious, regional, and ethnic influences converged. The synthesis of these diverse elements is evident in the architecture, where indigenous traditions blended with foreign styles brought by invaders, traders, and migrants. This cultural fusion enriched artistic expressions, resulting in structures that were unique amalgamations of various influences.

1. **Architectural Styles:** The architectural landscape of medieval India showcased a variety of styles, ranging from the Nagara and Dravidian temple architecture to the Indo-Islamic synthesis seen in Mughal monuments. Each style reflected the cultural context of its time and was enriched by the cross-cultural exchanges that were a hallmark of the era.
2. **Religious Syncretism:** The art and architecture of the period often demonstrated the harmony between different religious traditions. Temples, mosques, and tombs bore witness to this syncretism, with architectural elements and designs reflecting both indigenous beliefs and foreign inspirations.

Patronage: Catalyst for Architectural Excellence

The support and patronage of rulers, nobility, merchants, and religious institutions were crucial in shaping the landscape of medieval Indian architecture. Patrons played a dual role: they provided the financial resources necessary for construction and, in doing so, influenced the artistic and cultural direction of the structures.

1. **Symbolism of Power:** Rulers and nobility utilized architecture as symbols of their power and prestige. Palaces, forts, and grand monuments conveyed their authority to their subjects and rival powers. The Red Fort, for instance, not only served as a residence but also symbolized the imperial might of the Mughals.
2. **Religious Patronage:** Religious leaders and institutions played a significant role in the patronage of architectural projects. Temples, mosques, and monasteries were often built under the patronage of religious figures, showcasing their devotion and the importance of these structures in the spiritual lives of the community.
3. **Mercantile Patronage:** Wealthy merchants and traders also contributed to architectural endeavors. Their support often led to the creation of grand temples, which not only served as places of worship but also acted as centers of economic and cultural exchange.

Legacy and Modern Reflections The cultural synthesis and patronage of the medieval period have left an enduring legacy. The architectural masterpieces that emerged during this time continue to inspire awe and appreciation today. Moreover, the spirit of cultural exchange and the role of patrons in nurturing art and architecture remain relevant in modern times.

Medieval Indian art and architecture stand as a testament to the synergy between cultural synthesis and patronage. The blending of diverse cultural elements and the support of patrons created an architectural landscape that mirrored the rich tapestry of India's history and culture. This legacy serves as a reminder of the enduring impact that art, architecture, and cultural collaboration can have on shaping a nation's identity and heritage.

CONCLUSION:

The medieval period in India, spanning from the 6th to the 18th century, was a dynamic and transformative era that left an indelible mark on the nation's art and architecture. The culmination of diverse cultural influences, architectural styles, and patronage gave rise to a tapestry of structures that continue to captivate and inspire people across the world. As we reflect on the journey from temples to tombs and the synthesis of various elements that defined this period, several key takeaways emerge.

Cultural Fusion and Synthesis: Medieval Indian art and architecture were the product of a rich cultural synthesis, where diverse influences merged to create unique expressions. The fusion of indigenous traditions, foreign elements, and cross-cultural exchanges enriched the architectural landscape, resulting in structures that embody the essence of a diverse and pluralistic society. The architectural styles, from Nagara temples to Indo-Islamic monuments, exemplify this synthesis and remain as living testaments to the interplay of cultural influences.

Symbolism and Patronage: Patronage emerged as a driving force behind the creation of architectural marvels. Rulers, religious leaders, merchants, and nobility provided the financial support necessary for the construction of grand structures. These monuments symbolized power, religious devotion, and cultural identity. The Red Fort's imperial presence, the Taj Mahal's eternal love, and the Gol Gumbaz's architectural ingenuity all exemplify the impact of patronage on the architectural narrative.

Legacy and Continuity: The legacy of medieval Indian art and architecture continues to reverberate through time. The visual language, design principles, and aesthetic sensibilities of this era have left an enduring imprint on subsequent generations. Modern architectural trends often draw inspiration from the harmonious layouts, intricate ornamentation, and cultural syntheses that defined the medieval period.

Cultural Identity and Heritage: The architectural heritage of medieval India is a source of pride and identity. It reflects the resilience, creativity, and adaptability of a society that embraced change while preserving its cultural roots. The temples, mosques, tombs, and forts stand not just as architectural wonders but as connections to a vibrant past that informs the present.

Conclusion: An Invitation to Explore: As we conclude this exploration of art and architecture in medieval India, we are reminded of the richness and diversity that define the nation's cultural heritage. The temples and tombs, palaces and mosques, all invite us to delve deeper into the stories they carry, the influences they synthesize, and the visions they represent. From the spiritual devotion of Nagara temples to the imperial grandeur of Mughal monuments, every structure has a tale to tell, a history to unravel, and a cultural legacy to celebrate. In embracing this rich heritage, we find ourselves connecting with the past while appreciating the enduring beauty and cultural relevance of these architectural marvels.

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