



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631(UIF)

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514

VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 9 | JUNE - 2019



A STUDY OF PILLAR ART IN ANCIENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

In architecture, it is a perpendicular element, usually a rounded shaft with a capital and a base, which almost serves as a support to the building. It is constructed from wood, steel, bricks, stone blocks and so on. It is used to transmit load from one part of the structure to another part of the structure in the building and keep the building instantly and strength. In some cases this structural property may also be an element for decoration not support and structural rationale to the building. The size and shape of the pillar depend upon the loading and extent of the building. It implies sculpture, floral designs, animal figures, idol of deities, statues of sages, images of birds, fish, insects and intricate architectural carvings. The pillar's architectural and sculptural representations have developed period to period which depends up on the style of art, material and regional inspirations.



KEYWORDS: Pillar Art, Indian Architecture, Art History.

INTRODUCTION :

In western world the Classical Rome and Greek architecture made use of five major styles of column carved from single blocks or created from heaps of immense stone blocks. Doric, ionic and Corinthian order; these three types were developed in Greek architecture and then later continued with roman buildings. India is a very prosperous country in art and architecture. The buildings include religious buildings like temples, churches, masques, mandapa, gopuras and the secular buildings like houses, palaces, forts are in different art style of constructions. It is research on types of pillar

existed in history of Indian culture, art and architecture. Famous and rich architecture pillars of India were studied in this article. The illustration of its progress from Indus valley to Vijayanagara period has been done focusing on the aesthetical, ornamental, artistic, functional and structural elements.

ARTISTIC FEATURES AND EVOLUTION OF PILLAR ART THROUGH THE AGES:

In India the antiquity of pillar art goes back to the Indus valley civilization. The sites on the Indus valley has given systematic town planning. They used mud bricks and burnt bricks in the construction.

Dholavira site is a good example for studying the town planning. Here the settlement area has geometrical plan consisting of three divisions the citadel, the middle town, and the lower town.^[1]The gateways, built-up areas, street system, wells, drainage systems and reservoir are the noteworthy architectural features at the site. Obviously the pillars in construction should have major role for support and aesthetical point of view. The pillars and the pilasters which adorned the interior of the chambers of both east and west gates in the citadel area. The pillar members were proficiently sculpted and smoothed out of bright yellow or banded

limestone. The pillars have a basal slab supporting a set of square blocks followed by a beautifully carved circular member with concave profile and flattened bottom and top surface (*fig no.1*). While all those were in situ, there were also found two dislodged ones, both having convex profile as well as tenon hole provision on either flat surface of each. Plausibly, the shaft of the column was wooden one.^[2]

From the early historical periods only we have the good specimens for studying the pillar art. The pillars of Ashoka are a series of columns detached the entire part of India except in the southern most states. The pillars were normally erected at Buddhist monasteries and the places connecting to the life of the Buddha and sites of pilgrimage with Ashokan edicts. These are free standing pillars which are not connected to any building activity. The average height is around forty to fifty feet i.e. 12 to 15 meter. It is assumed that pillars are made of two kinds stones one is Mathura (red and white marked) and chunar (black and dark spotted). The eminence of the pillar is that the shaft is very smooth, clean and simple and the cross-section is circular and the upward direction is in tapering. It is made of a single stone. The capitals below part has a shape and structure of bell shaped lotus figure. The capitals are highly realistic and used a characteristic polished finish which known as mauryan polish, giving a shining appearance to the surface of the column.

The earliest type of pillar one seems to be the *Vaishali* pillar, with its heavy and short column, the firm lion and the undecorated square abacus. The *Sankissa* elephant and the *Rampurva* bull using a Hellenistic abacus of lotus for decoration. The abacus would then adopt the *Hamsa* goose as an animal decorative symbol, in *Lauria Nandangarh* (*fig no.2*) and the *Rampurva* lion. The pillars at Sanchi and Sarnath would mark the culmination with four animals back-to-back instead of just one, and a new and sophisticated animal and symbolic abacus with the illustration of the elephant, the bull, the lion, the horse blinking with the Dharma wheel for the Sarnath lion. (*fig no.3*)

The corporal appearance of the pillars underscores the Buddhist doctrine. Most of the pillars were topped by sculptures of animals. Each pillar is also topped by an inverted lotus flower, which is the most pervasive symbol of Buddhism.

During the Sunga period (2nd-1st century BCE) a outstanding pillar model has made at Sanchi which is known as pillar 25. It is considered as similar in design to the Heliodorus pillar, locally called *Kham Baba* pillar, dedicated by Heliodorus, the ambassador to the Indo-Greek king Antialkidas.^[3] The height of the pillar, including the capital, is 15 ft, its diameter at the base 1 ft. 4 in. Up to a height of 4 ft. 6 in. the shaft is octagonal; above that, sixteen-sided. In the octagonal portion all the facets are flat, while in the upper section the alternate facets are fluted. The capital is of the usual bell-shaped Persepolitan type as Mauryan pillar with lotus leaves falling over the shoulder of the bell. The crowning feature, probably a lion or bull has disappeared.

Another pillar capital to the 2nd century BCE during the Sunga period in Bharhut which is an example of Bharhut architecture thought to incorporate Persian and Greek styles,^[4] with recumbent animal (in the style of the Pillars of Ashoka), and a central anta capital with many Hellenistic elements (rosettes, beads-and-reels), as well as a central palmette design, in a style similar to that of the Pataliputra capital.^[5]

The column datable to the 3rd century BCE at Pataliputra is a well decorated rectangular capital with volutes and Classical Greek designs. The top is made of a band of rosettes, Below the band of bead and reel pattern, then under it a band of waves, generally right-to-left. Further below is a band of egg-and-dart pattern, with eleven "tongues" on the front, and only seven on the back.^[6]

In satavahana period the best art pillar can seen at the southern gateway of Sanchi. It is one of the richly carbed gateways of the 'Great stupa'. Like the other gateways, (*fig no.4*) it is composed of two square pillars surmounted by capitals, which in their turn support a superstructure of three architraves with volute ends.^[7] The lion capital in the manner of the pillars of the Ashoka.

The pillar art is also developed in the Buddhist caves. The earlier excavations of this series (200BC to 200AD) , pertaining to the hinayana creed of Buddhism, consist of chaitya and temple halls and viharas. The Buddhist cave architecture has developed in the following places like Udayagiri,

Kandagiri, Ajantha, Elora ,Bhaja, kondane, Pitalkhora, Bedsa, Nasik, Junnar, Karle, Kanheri And Aurangabad.(fig no.5)

The form of columns in the work of the first period is very plain and un-embellished, with both *chaitya* halls using simple octagonal columns, which were later painted with images of the Buddha, people and monks in robes. In the second period, columns were far more varied and inventive, often changing profile over their height, and with detailed carved capitals, often spreading wide. Most of the columns are carved with floral motifs and Mahayana deities, some fluted and others carved with decoration all over, as in Ajanta cave No.1^[8]

The chaitya at Bhaja having a pronounced slant of the pillars, closely ranked wooden roof-ribs. The chaitya at Bedsa shows an elaborate faced fronted with pillars and pilasters with capitals, surmounted by spirited sculpture- human and animal. Nasik and Ajanta cave -9 have similar pillars; the pillars inside are almost perpendicular, show better proportions and have a pot-base and square abacus. At Junnar cave -12 contain plain pillars of octagonal section carrying a dome on top, while the circular aisle is half-domed. At Karle – in front are two free standing *dhvaja-sthambas* surmounted by adorned lions originally supporting *dharmachakra*, like the Ashokan columns. The great pillars inside the chaitya hall are truly perpendicular with pot bases, octagonal shafts and ‘persepolitan’ capitals, with abacus carrying beautiful pairs of kneeling elephants, each bearing a couple in front and caparisoned horses with their riders.

The pillars in the caves are richly carved pillars and entablature. The columns have square base with figures of small dwarfs at the four corners and elaborately- decorated bracket capitals. The shafts, however , vary in shape and design. Octagonal, sixteen sided and fluted pillars are there. They are with bands of fine tracery of singular beauty. The central compartment of their capitals is adorned with squat dwarf, and the projecting ends have the figures of fluting of couples with garlands ad flowers. Underlying the capital is square abacus , delicately carved with *makara- motif* and supported by dwarfs, below which is an *amalaka* like member between two fillets. The shafts of the outermost pillars are octagonal all though, relieved at places by bands of ornamental designs. Their capital rests on heavy square abacus carved *kirti mukha* sprouting forth pearl-strings, the ends of which are held by two flying figures. Besides the pillars, pilasters carved with a half and a full lotus- medallions of a most ornate patten. Pilaster crowned by a female figure standing gracefully on a *makara* under a tree (Ajantha cave no.1). The Mahayana creed of Buddhism in rock cut architecture of the second phase (450-700AD) in Ajantha- they excavated in the time of Vakatakas. The pillars inside have developed capitals, the *kumbha* or cushion- shaped member being most prominent: the shafts are decorated. The corbel-brackets and the parts above are richly decorated with sculpture.(fig no.6)

The pillars in Udayagiri and Kandagiri Caves are ‘wooden’ in style, simple, with square shafts, sometimes with corners beveled to make the plan an octagon, in many cases with oblong notches on top into which the beam above is shown as sunk to its full depth, with additional brackets sprung from the top of the shaft below the notch.

In southern parts, large stupas having a row some tall slender monolithic pillars called *aayaka* pillars. In Amaravati the pilasters carried animal figures in the capitals. Other sites like Nagarjunakonda, Salihundam, Bhattiprolu, Guntapallai and Gudivada contain stupas and monasteries with beautiful pillar art designs.

Pillars in the Hindu temples are more decorated and well proportioned character. It started in the Gupta period. The façade having a row of pillars with greater inter columniation between the inner two- a characteristic Gupta feature; square bases, octagonal and ultimately sixteen sided shafts, carrying the vase- and foliage (*kumba – valli*) capitals.

Badami and Aihole cave temples essentially consist of a rectangular pillared varanda , mahamandapa with square shrine cell at its rear. The widen faced pillars are tall and massive, often carved and of square section carrying brackets below the beam. The inner pillars having square at base, are complete with capital-components of circular section, viz. the vase-shaped *kalasa* and the cushion shaped bulbous *kumbha*, these pillars are polygonal section. At aihole the pillars are more slender, and the capitals have all the usual components of the order.

In Pallava period during the time of Mahendravarman I the pillars are in square in section, with the middle third chamfered into an octagonal section, and carry massive corbels curved ends, sometimes with the faces carved as a series of rolls (Taranga). In later lotus medallion adorned in the middle of the square portion. During the time of Mamalla the pillars resemble the conventional patterns of their wooden proto types, having all the capital components of the order and are taller and more slender than those of the previous style. The bases are often shaped into squatting lions or leonine *vyalas*. One of the best pillar architecture can be seen at *varaha mandapa* at mamallapuram (fig no.7). The base of the pillar has a molded *oma* and *adhishtana*. Their pedestals are lotus-shaped (*padma pithas*) in square. Above this are seated lion-faced *vyalas*. Their heads merge into octagonal shafts (*kal*) of the pillars, which taper and flow into an octagonal *kalasa* and ornamented capital. The top *phalaka* (flat plate) is a square^[9].

The pancha pandava cave temple at maamllapuram, (fig no.8) pillars have in addition rearing lions springing from the abacus of the capital. The pillars in Pandyan cave temples look like Mahendran pattern, the corbels mostly with a plain bevel at their ends and occasionally with the *taranga* moulding, the pillars at kudumiyana are unusual in that they have moulded capital-components, such as the *kalasa* and *kumbha*, as in the Chalukyan cave temples.

Monolithic temples in Mamallapuram the pillars are complete with capitals with Taranga-corbels. *Vyala* based pillars or pilasters are found on the ardhamaandapa facets of the *arjuna*, *bhima* and *dharmaraja* ratha, *nakula sahdeva* and *ganesa* ratha. The *nakula sahdeva* ratha has in addition a pair of elephant – based pilasters and *ganesa ratha* pilasters with a *vyala*-like form with a beaked face. Toranas of the makara type- festoons issuing out of the gaping mouths of makara carried on tops of two columns spanning the entrances or enclosing niches on walls are seen in *draupati*, *valayankutai* and northern *pidari ratha*.

The potentiality of dressed stones was for the first time appreciated during the Gupta period which are in *panchayatana* and *tri ratha* plan^[10]. Temple 17 is an early Gupta temple which consists of a flat roofed square sanctum with a portico and four pillars. The interior and three sides of the exterior are plain and undecorated but the front and the pillars are elegantly carved, giving the temple an almost 'classical' appearance.

Chalukyan style Temples at Badami, Pattadakal, Mahakuteswar, Aihole having significant temple forms which had a considerable impact on the development of the early northern and southern temple styles. The pillars at here are in cloistered mandapa having ponderous bracket-capitals, timber like construction of walls. The mandapa pillars carry ornate brackets usually embellished with palmetto-like foliage.

The pillars and pilasters in structural temple particularly Rajsimha's temples the pillar design has developed from rock cut style' pillar designs. Here the rearing lions replaced squatting lions (fig no.9). The wall portion of the sanctum and ardhamaandapas are decorated with these lion figures at the base. Some time *yali* sculpture adorned in the base instead of lion. *Yali* is considered as the sacred animal which is very dangerous in look so makes it powerful and it is made using the body parts of other animals like lion, elephant, snake etc.

The peak of temple building activity marks in Chola period in the south. Many earlier temples of brick and timber were renovated in stone. Short pillars carrying shrine motifs (*panchara* –fronts) on the top which is the characteristic of the period. The main pilasters containing the corners of the bays and walls are square with full capitals, the abacus as in the earlier pallava structures, still being large, massive and square, but the corbel arms are bevelled with a central tendon on their faces.

The close of the eighth century the north Indian style temples comprised a cruciform plan, continuation of the main lineaments of the plan on the elevation and curvilinear *sikahara*. From ninth century the evolution of north Indian temple had a largely a regional pattern. The chandelle temple particularly *lakshmana temple*, *paravanatha*, *viswaanatha* and *Kandaria mahadeva temple* marking the successive stages in the architectural or sculptural efflorescence at Khajuraho. Among these *kandaria mahadeva* temple represents the grand finale of the architectural and sculptural movements. The pillars have harmonious integration of sculpture with architecture.

In Hoysala temples, the pillars have square bases and shafts finely polished on the lathe and capitals of the order (*fig no.10*). Few of the intricately carved or carry exquisite sculpture. Towards the end of the period and before the Vijayanagra period the decorative pilaster adorning the walls of the *vimanas* and *gopuras*, as in Brahadiswara and other temples, came to develop bases of *purna-ghatas* or full vases of plenty with excrecent foliage and are called *kumbha panjaras*. The central tenon of the corbels takes the form of a moulded campanulas pendentive tending to become floral and anticipating the incipient malai of the *pushpa-potika* characteristic of vijayanagara times. The abacus of the pilar and pilaster- capitals is thinner in contrast to the large square and thick Pallava and early Chola examples.

Vijayagara pillars and pilasters have more elegant shafts, the lower part of the abacus, which was a plain abundance in the Pallava and early Chola periods and got scalped into a floral form with the petals-ideal; the corbel or *potika* has evolved to characteristic *pushpa potika*, with a double-flexed arm extending from the main block and scalloped at the free - hanging extremely into everted petals with an incipient bud or torus hanging in the centre. The flexed arm has a straight horizontal bar connecting its free tip with the main block.

One of the greatest pillar art design can seen at Thousand Pillar Temple in Hanamakonda in Telangana. The temple is devoted to Hindu God Shiva, Surya and Vishnu made by the Kakatiya king Rudra Deva in 1163 AD. The main reason for it being so famous is that it has one thousand pillar in it and no pillar will stop the view and see the deity in the temple from any angle of the temple. The pillars are splendid and have great aesthetics carvings on them.

During the Vijayanagara and Nayaka period time the pillar art attained its zenith. The pillars are different varieties. Most of them bear horses or mythical animals with riders or soldiers in fighting mood. The riders and even the galloping animals are highly ornamented. The pillar and figures are carved out of a single block or stone. There is another type wherein show a cluster of miniature pillars encircling the central pillar. The architecture and art designs attained on steadily expanding , its centre would naturally continue to occupy the important position for loading. Exterior parts have been decorated with intricate carvings. The brackets of the pillars are elaborately embellished which from the capital the pendant, which was carved below the capital, was further elaborated into an inverted lotus bund. Wherever they made additions to the old temple, they to constructed 100 pillared madapa and 100 pillared mandapa.

Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is in Srirangam, Tamil Nadu, is known to have a great architecture used in its building and supports or pillars. The engraving and ornaments on the pillars are gorgeous and impressive. The Hall of 1000 pillars (actually 953) is a fine example of a planned theatre-like structure and opposite to it is the "Sesha Mandap". The most artistic halls that the Nayaks added to the complex is the *Sesha Mandap* on the east side of the fourth enclosure.^[11] The hall is celebrated for the leaping animals carved on to the piers at its northern end.^[12] The pillars consists of sculptures of wildly rearing horses bearing riders on their backs and trampling with their hoofs upon the heads of rampant tigers, seem only natural and congruous among such weird surroundings^[13] (*fig no.11*).

The strength and architecture of pillar is really appreciable at Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Temple in Madurai. The carving and ornaments on pillars are great and an example of Indian ancient art. It's a circular or round cross-sectional pillar or pillar having straight or linear length. It is a square cross-sectional shaft possessing pillar. The base and capital are having both square and round shape with design complexity in it. The pillar is straight or linear one. It is having extra-long rods which is providing extra support and increasing its architecture beauty. Vitala temple at hampi is the best example for studying of pillar art. Here a large mandapa with its 56 musical pillars is known as *Ranga mandapa*. These pillars are also known as '*Sa Re Ga Ma*' pillars, which are attributed to the musical notes emerging out of them.^[14] The stone pillars of different diameters, shape, length and surface finish that produces musical sounds when struck; according to local traditional belief, this hall was used for public celebrations of music and dancing^[15] (*fig no.12*). In architecture each pillar provides support to the ceiling of the mandapa, and the main pillars are designed in the manner of musical instruments. Every main pillar is wrapped by 7 minor pillars and these minor pillars emit different musical notes.

CONCLUSION:

The Indian artists portrayed different kinds of pillar design right from ancient periods to the modern period. The material and artistic features are changed from time to time. This paper highlights the development of architectural and sculptural designs in the pillars from Indus valley civilizations to Vijayanagara period. The pillars are not only contain the architectural members but also restrain the various sculptural representations which are connected to the buildings. They tried to visualize them in his mind within his inner source as expressed there in and tried to symbolize the same in the carving of stone. The Pillar is one of the most imperative elements in exterior and interior design that we can see through the art history in different ways of expression, steering between structural, esthetics, functional, and emblematic require.

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fig no.1 Pillar base at Dholavira, Gujarath (Harappan site)



fig no.2-Ashokan pillar, Lauriya Nandhagarh (Mauryan period)



fig no.3- Saranath lion capital, Saranath (Mauryan period)

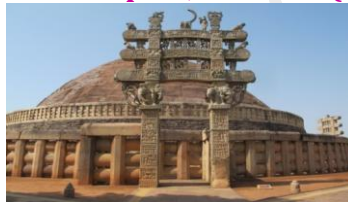


fig no.4-Sanchi stupa gateway , Sanchi

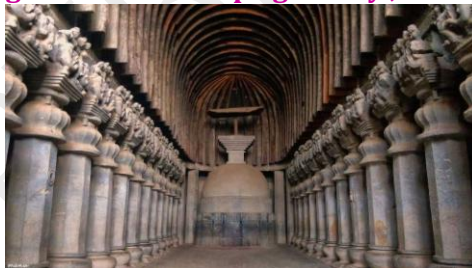


fig no.5- Pillars at Karle cave

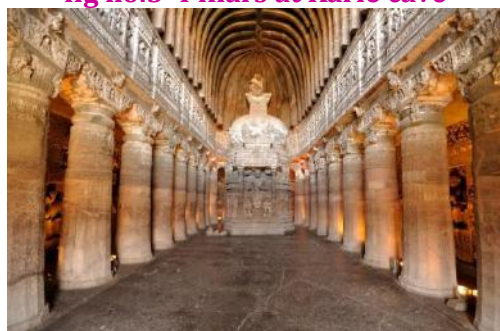


fig no.6- Cave 26, at Ajanta



fig no.7- Varaha cave temple, mamallapuram



fig no.8. Panchapandava cave temple, Mamallapuram



fig no.9. Rearing lion based pillars at kanchipuram Kailasanatha temple



fig no.10- Pillar design, halebidu (Hoysala period)



fig no.11- Pillar architecture, Srirangam temple, Tamilnadu



fig no.12. Music pillars at Vithala temple, Hampi (Vijayangara period)



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