

India's Historical Monuments

It is said that India is dotted with monuments since antiquity. The country has a rich cultural heritage. Our ancient rulers had great fascination for magnificent buildings like forts, temples and mosques.

The built some of the most remarkable buildings in the world. Some of these buildings have vanished in the march of time but many like Taj Mahal, Iqbal Quila, Qutub Minar, Jama Masjid, Fatehpur Sikri, Caves of Ajanta and Ellora, Sarnath Temple have stood the test of time. The British have also played an important role in giving us some historical monuments.

Temple art flourished in the Gupta period architecture. Dash Avtar Temple of Deogarh is the first example of making Shikhar (top) in temple art. Brahma cave temples and Buddha cave temples are important among Gupta period caves temples.

The main temples of Gupta Period are:

Bhimrao (Nagada) (Shiva)

Toga (Jabalpur) (Vishnu)

Deogarh (Jhansi) (Dash Avtar)

Syrup (brick made) (Layman)

Udayagiri (Vishnu)

Bitargaon (Kanpur, brick made) (Shiva)

Kho (Nagada) (Shiva)

The rock-cut architecture of the period is represented by two conventional types- the Chaitya and the Vihara. They are mostly found at Ajanta, Ellora and Bagh. The special feature of Chaitya is its emphasis on the colossal image of Buddha seated between two attendants. The Vihara was in the form of rows of cells around a central court. The most number of Viharas are to be found at Ajanta.

These caves are remarkable for the variety and beauty of the pillars and the fine fresco paintings with which the walls and ceilings are decorated. The Gupta period is the formative and creative age heralding the two important styles, Nagara and Dravida. Of the stupas built during this period, the one at Mirpur Khas in Sindh

and Dhamesh at Sarnath is most remarkable. The Iron Pillar of Mehrauli, near Delhi, is another excellent monument of Gupta period.

The Chalukyan style of temple architecture equated with versara style is seen as an admixture of the Dravida and Nagara styles of temple architecture. Like the Dravida style, the Chalukya style of temples has two principal components, the vimana and the mandappa, joined by an antarala. Famous temples of this period include the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal near Badami, the Vishnu temple of Badami, the Shiva temple of Maguti and the Kashi Visaveswara temple of Lakhundi.

Krishna, I built the famous rock – cut Kailash temple at Ellora in the latter half of the eighth century AD. It was built in the Dravidian style of the Chalukyas and elaborately carved with fine sculpture. The cave shrine of Elephant was built in the second half of the eighth century, on an island near the west coast. It was dedicated to Shiva in his image as Mahesha.

The credit for having initiated the rock architecture in the Pallava Dynasty must be given to the royal artist Mahendra Varman I. Some of his architectural works are the cave temples on the hill at Mandagappattu, the five – celled cave temple at Pallavaram near Chennai, the four cave temples at Mamandur and the Siva temple at Sivamangalam. A few Vishnu cave temples on the hill at Mamandur and the Siva temples at Sivamangalam a few Vishnu cave temples were also excavated by Mahendra Varman.

The Hoysalas were great temples builders, the finest examples of which are the Kesava temple at Belur (in Hassan district) and Halebidu (Dwarasamudra).

The chief features of the Chola temples are vimanas or towers, which were later eclipsed by the richly ornamented gopurmas or gateways. One of the finest examples of Cholas style is, however, provided by Brihadeshwara temple at Tanjore, built by Rajaraja I. The temple of Gangaikonda – Cholaapuram is another fine example of temple architecture under the Cholas.

The Chandellas built magnificent temples at Khajuraho. Chausath Yogni temple is most prominent among these temples.

Rajput rulers made many historical buildings. Amber Fort, Hawa Mahal, Fort of Chittor, etc. are historical monuments of India. Victory Tower at Chittor is also a remarkable monument built by Raja Kumbha.

The new features of architecture brought by the Turkish conquerors were (i) the dome, (ii) lofty towers, (iii) the vault, and (iv) the true arch unsupported by beam.

The most magnificent building constructed by Turks in the 13th century was Qutub Minar. This tapering tower, originally 71.4 meters high and built by Iltutmish, was dedicated to the Sufi saint Qutub-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, who was greatly respected by all the people of Delhi.

Quwwatul-Islam Mosque, built by Qutub-ud-din, in Delhi is another remarkable example of the architecture of the Ilbari Turk Dynasty. The Arhai-Din Ka Jhonpra at Ajmer started by Qutub-ud-din Aibek has an exquisitely carved mehrab of white marble and a decorative arch screen and a beautiful prayer hall. The premier example of true arch is said to be the tomb of Ghias-ud-din Balban in Mehrauli. Balban made Lal Mahal in Delhi.

Ala-ud-din Khilji added an entrance door to the Qutub. This door, which is called the Alai Darwaza, has arches of very pleasing proportions. It also contains a door which, for the first time, was built on correct scientific lines.

The Tughlaq buildings show stark simplicity and sobriety – probably indicating less financial resources as well as a puritanical taste. The buildings are characterized by sloping walls and a dark appearance. Tughlaq monuments are the fort at Tughlaqabad, the tomb of Ghias-ud-din Tughlaq which marked a new phase in Indo-Islamic architecture by serving as a model for later tombs, the fort of Adilabad, Firuz Shah's capital at Delhi, now known as Kotla Firuz Shahi and a group of buildings at Hauz Khas in Delhi with Firuz Shah's Tomb.

Moth Ki Masjid erected by the Prime Minister of Sikandar Lodhi is a magnificent monument of medieval period. The building shows elegance with the use of enameled tiles – a technique introduced from Persia.

Husan Shah erected Jami Masjid, his dome and Hindola Mahal. Jahaj Nahal was erected by Sultan Mahmood I these are classical monuments of Islamic architecture.

Ibrahim Sharki erected Atala Masjid and Jhanjori Masjid. Hussain Shah Sharki constructed Jami Masjid and Lal Darwaza.

Ahmed Shah, I erected Jami masjid in Ahmedabad. It is an excellent monument of Gujarat style. The famous Nagina Masjid was built by Mahmood Baigra.

Chhoti Sona Masjid, Bari Sona Masjid, and Lotan Masjid are famous monuments in Gaud. Adina Masjid in Pandua, built by Sikander Shah is another magnificent monument.

The famous Hazara Rama Swami Temple built during Krishna deva Raya's reign is described as "a perfect specimen of Hindu temple and architecture". Fergusson, the great art critic, has described the famous Yithal Temple as the "true replica of Dravidian style –a distinct school of architecture".

Several excellent monuments were built during the Mughal period.

Sher Shah, who dispossessed Humayun, was a great builder, the most remarkable monuments of his time are the mosque in the Purana Quila Delhi and his own tomb at Sasaram in Bihar. Akbar mostly used red stone in his buildings. One of his earliest buildings was the tomb of Humayun at Delhi.

He built magnificent buildings in Agra such as the fort, the Diwan-i-Aam, the Diwan –i- Khas and the palace known as Jahangir Mahal. The most impressive monuments are the tomb of Salim Chisti, the Panch Mahal, Buland Darwaza and Jodha Bai Palace at Fatehpur Sikri constructed by Akbar. Akbar combined Persian, Indian and Central Asian styles. His mausoleum at Sikandara is a unique building modeled on the Buddhist Viharas of India. It was planned by Akbar, but built by Jahangir.

Jahangir also made the tomb of Itimad –ud – daulah. It was built in white marble and is one of the earliest buildings to be decorated with pietra dura or inlaying of semi-precious stones of different colours. In fact, it was built by Nur Jahan over the grave of her father.

Shah Jehan was a most prolific and magnificent builder. Taj Mahal is a world-renowned excellent monument erected by Shah Jahan over the grave of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. Pietra dura work, delicate marble screens and chhatris are special artistic features in this monument. It took twenty-two years (1631-53) to build and cost about three crores of rupees. Twenty thousand workmen were employed to construct it.

Diwan- i- Aam, Diwan – i- Khas at Red Fort, Jama Masjid in Delhi, and Moti Masjid in Agra are remarkable monuments built by shah Jehan.

The Pear Mosque or the Moti- Masjid was also built at Agra inside the fort at a cost of Rs. 300,000. It is one of the most beautiful buildings made of white marble.

Mussamman Burj is a beautiful octagonal structure of marble in the fort of Agra. Shah Jehan died here. From this place the Emperor could see the Taj.

Lal Qila or the Red Fort stands in Delhi on the right bank of the Yamuna. It contains the Diwan-i-Aam (Hall of Public Audience) and the Diwani-i-Khas (Hall of private

Audience). The latter has a marble water channel running through it, which enhance its beauty.

Jama-i- Masjid is another remarkable historical monument which stands at some distance opposite the Red Fort in Delhi. It is one of the finest and biggest mosques in the world and can accommodate thousands of people. It is made of red sandstone and white marble.

Victoria Memorial and Writers' Buildings in Kolkata and India Gate in New Delhi are the notable historical monuments of the modern period erected by the British during their 200 – year rule in this country. Some people even blame them for tempering with some parts of architecture of Taj Mahal. They uprooted one of the fountains to see how it worked, but were not able to fix it back.

India has a number of remarkable monuments in almost every part of the country, but it is a matter of shame that almost all of them are in a state of neglect. The governments at the centre and the concerned state are trying their best to keep their sanctity and beauty, but unless people realize the importance of preserving these monuments will continue to suffer.