

Advancements in Ancient Indian Art and Architecture and its Perspectives

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Abstract:

The evolution of ancient Indian art and architecture shows a continuous progression from the Indus Valley Civilization through the Vedic period, Mauryan, Gupta dynasties, and Buddhist and Jain influences. Ancient Indian literature features depicted in over 177 texts that which describes the architecture, sculpture, painting, and related arts in detail, such as the Brihat Samhita, Manasar, Samarangana Sutradhar. It all starts with prehistoric rock paintings at Bhimbetka, advanced urban planning in Harappa-Mohenjo-Daro of the Indus Valley, Lothal's ship dock, and the dancing girl statue. In the Vedic era, 'Vishwakarma' was seen as the father of all arts, a son of Brahma; yajna altars evolved from mud-brick to more advanced forms, leading to grand structures like the Lakshagriha and Maya Mahal in the Mahabharata period. With royal patronage and stable governance, these arts flourished and continue to inspire as cultural heritage today. This research paper will explore various aspects of ancient Indian art and architecture.

Key words: Evolution, Civilization, Lakshagriha, patronage, Architecture, Sculpture

Introduction:

The history of art and architecture in the Indian subcontinent has evolved steadily from prehistoric times to the modern era, enriched by cultural, religious, and political influences. Indian art and architecture developed continuously from the Indus Valley Civilization through various ancient Indian kingdoms. In ancient India, diverse forms like temples, rock-cut caves, chaityas, stupas, viharas, paintings, architecture, sculpture, music, and dance all took shape. This progression is evident from the planned cities of the Indus Valley to Vedic yajna altars, Mauryan pillars, Gupta temples, and Buddhist-Jain caves.

Ancient Indian painting, music, dance, and metalwork made these arts multidimensional. This research paper delves deeply into the stages, features, and evaluation of this artistic development in ancient India, helping us understand India's cultural heritage.

Evidence of Art in Ancient Indian Literature:

The word 'architecture' comes from the Sanskrit root 'vas,' meaning 'to dwell' or 'settle permanently.' Since buildings are needed for living, 'vastu' refers to a residence or habitable structure. From 'vastu' come words like vas, aavas, vasti.

Ancient Indian literature includes over 177 texts on architectural science, with detailed descriptions of sculpture, iconography, painting, and architecture. Key ones include Brihat Samhita, Mansar, Mayamatam, Samarangana-Sutradhar, Vishnu Dharmottara Purana, Shilparatna, plus references in Agni and Matsya Puranas, Kamika Agama, and Agama.

Early Art and Architecture:

The history of art in ancient India begins with prehistoric rock paintings. At Bhimbetka, we see stunning cave art from that era. In the Indus Valley Civilization, cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had advanced urban planning centralized layouts, well developed homes, public halls, and public baths. Lothal's dockyard for ships and the dancing girl statue from Mohenjo-Daro highlight the artistic and architectural progress of the Indus people.

Vedic Art and Architecture:

Studying Vedic texts shows that in Vedic culture, Vishwakarma was considered the originator of all arts and called a son of Brahma. The Rigveda mentions architecture, sculpture, and painting many times. Yajna rituals, fire offerings, and invoking gods were key religious practices, giving birth to architecture out of religious needs. Initially, yajna altars were made from mud, straw, and dung mixtures, but later they used raw and fired bricks. Famous historian Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee says Indian architecture originated from Vedic religious practices, inspiring architects to first build Yadnya Vedikas and Yadnya halls.

These altars likely foreshadowed later Hindu temple construction. They were circular, square, triangular, or falcon-shaped (like Garuda). Built in five layers of bricks; 200 per layer, totalling 1,000 bricks. For roofing buildings, bamboo and ropes were used, with layers of mud plaster called 'arhan' on top.

Advanced architecture appears in the Ramayana and Mahabharata periods too. Poet Valmiki's Ramayana describes cities more than buildings. In the Mahabharata era, we see developments like the Lakshagriha (Lac House) and Pandavas' Maya Mahal, with shared walls instead of doors and water tanks which are true symbols of high level architecture. It also mentions royal palaces, temples, assembly halls, wrestling arenas, and ordinary buildings.

Advancements in Mauryan Art and Architecture:

The Mauryas unveiled a new chapter in India's cultural history. Beyond administration, arts and literature saw remarkable progress. Mauryan rulers supported education, literature, architecture, sculpture, polishing, jewellery and engineering. In fact, Indian art history truly begins with the Mauryas, as no Pre-Mauryan monuments survive as evidence. Mauryan rulers, especially Emperor Ashoka, built grand structures, monuments, and pillars that are prime examples of Indian art.

Palaces and Beautiful Structures:

Ancient Indian rulers created unmatched constructions pillars, caves, stupas, along with palaces and beautiful edifices. Some still stand today, exemplifying ancient architecture with their unmatched beauty and elegance.

Mauryan palaces and structures were grand and superior worldwide, as noted by Greek and Chinese writers of the time. Pataliputra was the Mauryan capital. Chandragupta Maurya built a beautiful palace and other structures there, mostly of wood. Greek ambassador Megasthenes gave vivid, poetic descriptions of Chandragupta's palaces and buildings such as courtyards, artificial lakes, animals, birds, and fruit trees. Since wood was mainly used, they likely burned down in fires. In Ashoka's time, polished stone was introduced to buildings, starting a new era in architecture. He built a grand palace in Pataliputra and stupas, caves, rock edicts, and more across the country are unique architectural gems. Chinese traveler Fahian visited during Chandragupta Vikramaditya's Gupta reign and was stunned by Ashoka's Pataliputra palace, writing it was too beautiful and grand for human hands. In short, all ancient Indian dynasties built massive, splendid palaces, forts, and ramparts, but time has erased most of them.

Jain and Buddhist Architecture:

Ancient India's art and architecture have an incredibly rich heritage that flourished over a long time. It ranges from well preserved cave paintings at Ajanta and Ellora to towering

temples in South India. Rock-cut architecture i.e. cave shows deep religious faith, artistic skill, and the dedication of the monks who built them. These monuments still inspire tourists and leave them in awe today. In ancient Indian Buddhist architecture, the main structures are chaityas, stupas, and viharas.

Rock-Cut Architecture (Caves):

One standout feature of ancient Indian architecture is monuments carved right into rocks. Buddhist and Jain monks used these caves for worship and living. During periods when Buddhist and Jain monks held influence, cave architecture was a major art form. Artisans had to chisel away at huge rocks to create them. Famous examples include Ajanta, Ellora, Udayagiri, and Khandagiri caves. These were built in high, hard to reach spots. In Maharashtra, the abundance of basalt rock made it possible to create so many on a large scale.

Chaitya Halls:

A chaitya is like a prayer hall or temple in Buddhism, usually carved from rock or built with stone. It has a semi circular shape, with a stupa often carved in the center. On both sides, there are rows of pillars with images from Gautama Buddha's life, intricately sculpted and decorated. Chaityas were places for Buddhist monks and followers to gather for worship, meditation, and religious activities. Some rock-cut chaityas in Maharashtra, like those at Bhaja and Karle, are still in great condition today.

Stupas:

In Buddhism, a stupa is a memorial mound for the relics of enlightened monks (Bodhisattvas). They started as simple, sturdy heaps over ashes but evolved into grand structures with a central dome, square base, and a harmika (box-like top). Stupas were centers for worship and pilgrimage, often surrounded by viharas, sculptures, and other religious buildings. Post-Mauryan architecture shifted from bricks to stone for stupas. During the Maurya period, magnificent ones like Bharhut, Sanchi, and Amaravati were built.

Viharas:

A vihara is a Buddhist monastery or living quarters for monks, with rooms for residence and facilities for religious study, reflection, meditation, and contemplation. They typically had a central courtyard and assembly hall surrounded by many cells. They also included prayer rooms, libraries, and spaces for religious discussions.

Nalanda Vihara was built to inspire Buddhist monks' spiritual and intellectual pursuits. It played a key role in spreading Gautama Buddha's teachings, serving as a hub for worship, pilgrimage, education, and community gatherings in ancient times.

Pillars:

In ancient times, Emperor Ashoka erected many tall pillars to engrave rock edicts spreading his faith (Buddhism). These are the most unique and finest examples of Mauryan art. They prove that India's architecture, engineering, and sculpture were second to none back then. Each pillar was about 15 meters tall and weighed around 50 tons, carved from a single piece of fine sandstone are truly beautiful.

Temple Architecture:

In ancient India, temple architecture was a key form of artistic expression. Temples served as educational and religious centers, prayer spots, pilgrimage sites, festival venues, and community gathering places. Three main styles developed in different regions.

A special feature of ancient Indian architecture is the start of temple building. From the Gupta period, dressed and precisely cut stones were used. Temples began to be constructed with carved stone. Temples for gods like Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti were built, including Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh, Parvati Temple at Nachna, and those at Bhitargaon, Bhumara, and Tigawa. South India's Dravidian style, North India's Nagara style, and the hybrid Vesara style emerged from mixing the two.

Temples played a huge role in ancient India's cultural and religious life. As pilgrimage centers, they drew devotees from entire regions. They generated revenue through land grants and donations, becoming important economic hubs. The rich symbolism and artistry in temple architecture still inspire and offer lessons today.

Paintings:

We know about ancient painting's progress from the artworks at Ajanta and Bagh. These show proportionate bodies, expressive eyes, emotional faces, suggestive movements, and diverse themes proof of advanced skills. Artists understood colour harmony and paid special attention to it. They painted and coloured walls in homes too, but those remnants haven't survived. It must have taken years of practice for these painters to reach such mastery.

Music:

Ancient Indian kings loved music. An excavated Gupta era coin shows Samudragupta playing a veena, with his posture and grip revealing his deep knowledge. This suggests kings gave royal patronage to musicians. Women in royal families learned music. Paintings at Ajanta and Bagh depict string, wind, and percussion instruments, showing society was familiar with various musical tools.

Dance and Drama:

Dance and theatre also enjoyed royal support. Sculptures and paintings at Ajanta show men and women lost in dance. One procession scene has women dancing upfront, proving dance was socially respected. Famous plays from that time were likely staged. Literature mentions theatre parts and acting techniques, indicating drama too had societal approval.

Terracotta :

Hundreds of terracotta figurines of men and women have been found from various ancient Indian kingdoms and regions. They include clay images of Vishnu, Durga, Ganga, Yamuna, Ganesh, animals, and birds in temples and homes. These helped develop sculpture.

Metalwork:

Metal craftsmanship reached its peak in the Gupta period. The Iron Pillar (panchadhātu) at Mehrauli in Delhi is a prime example 8 meters tall, 6 tons heavy. Erected about 1,600 years ago by Kumaragupta in memory of his father, it stands rust-free and majestic despite sun, wind, rain, and cold. A 7.5 foot copper Buddha statue is also famous for its durability.

Concluding Remarks:

In concluding remarks we may say that the Political power, long term peace, and good governance in ancient Indian kingdoms fuelled artistic growth. Gupta rulers provided patronage and financial support to artists, letting various arts and architecture bloom. The development of ancient Indian art and architecture was shaped by political strength, religious devotion, and artists' dedication, it still inspires the today's world. From Indus urban planning to Mauryan pillars, Gupta temples, Ajanta-Ellora caves, and Sanchi stupas, it shows remarkable evolution. Over 177 ancient texts and scriptures laid a scientific foundation. From Vedic altars to Nagara-Dravida Vesara styles, it linked religious centers with economic-social life. Wooden structures burned down, but stone monuments endure. As Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee noted, religious needs sparked architecture, turning temples into pilgrimage hubs. At present these

heritages are valuable for tourism, study, and aesthetic purpose. Studying Gupta era patronage will guide future architecture, as ancient India outshone the world in engineering, sculpture, and beauty. This proves cultural richness comes from stable rule and artistic protection.

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