

# Features of Indian Ancient Art and Architecture

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## **Abstract**

As you go through the cities of Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Mumbai, Calcutta, and the southern part of India, you will come across numerous beautiful structures. Monuments, palaces, temples, cathedrals, mosques, and memorials are only a few examples. Many of them were established prior to Christ's birth, while others were established after Christ's birth. Many generations have contributed to the construction of this structure, which stands majestic and lofty as a reminder of the great history that has been ours. This is due to the fact that art and architecture are significant components of Indian culture. Many of the distinguishing characteristics of Indian architecture that we see now were established over a long period of time in the country's history. The settlements of the Harappan Civilization, which are distinguished by their inventive town planning, contain some of the earliest and most magnificent examples of Indian architecture. Post-Harappan architectural forms have been grouped into three categories: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. Hindu architectural styles are the most prevalent in the world today. It was during the Middle Ages that Persian and indigenous architectural styles came together to develop a new hybrid. Following that, the colonial period brought with it the influence of Western architectural forms on Indian architecture, which continued to the present day. A unique architectural composition made of indigenous styles and other influences has resulted, each of which has imparted its own distinctive quality to the final product.

**Keywords:** Harappa, Dravida, Mauryan, Chola, Chalukya, Architecture, Hindu, Buddhist, Islam, Stupa, Tomb, Mosque, Mughals, Persian.

## **1. Introduction**

'Indian art and architecture' refers to works of art and architecture that were made in the Indian subcontinent, which is currently divided between the countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and are collectively referred to as "Indian art and architecture". There are major collections of Indian art in the Western world, including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, which are located in London.

A considerable amount of Indian secular art was made, but it was mostly composed of perishable materials, and as a result has not lasted to the present day. Artistic expressions associated with religion are the only things that have persisted in stone. In both Buddhist and Hindu art, symbolism may be found in gesture, position, and attribute, and each level of significance is represented by a distinct symbol, as can be seen in the images below. Distinct hand positions (mudras) depicted in depictions of the Buddha represent different religious states, such as enlightenment (Nirvana), meditation, and preaching, respectively. Many hands are frequently depicted in Hindu sculpture,

particularly in the case of deities such as Vishnu, Krishna, and Shiva, to indicate their ability to execute multiple deeds at the same time, and the hands each contain their respective distinguishing traits.

### **1.1. Indus Valley Civilization**

The ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, which were both destroyed in the nineteenth century, are considered to be among the world's first examples of municipal planning. The Indus Valley is where the earliest Indian art arose around the second part of the third millennium BC. A grid-like design was used to arrange the houses, markets, storage facilities, offices, and public baths, which were all laid out in a grid-like manner on a grid-like plan. In addition, there was a well-established drainage system in the area.

### **1.2. Post-Indus Civilization through the Maurya Dynasty**

There are only a few signs left of the period between the end of the Indus civilization (c.1500 BC) and the crossing of the Indus by Alexander the Great (325 BC). The ideas of Indian architecture, on the other hand, were created in timber structures that have long ago fallen apart.

The edict pillars, which were constructed throughout northern India by the Emperor Asoka to announce his devotion to Buddhism, are the most well-known relics of the magnificent Maurya dynasty of India. The monolithic, polished columns rise to more than 50 feet (15 metres) in height and are topped with lotus capitals and animal sculptures. Some of the pillar capitals have a shape that is suggestive of Persepolitan architecture, while others are more traditional. The world's oldest stone ogival chaitya window, discovered on the entryway of a small rock-cut temple at Bodhi Gaya, is also thought to have been constructed during the reign of Asoka. The window is regarded to be the world's oldest stone ogival chaitya window. Monastic sanctuaries hewn from solid rock can be found in the chaitya halls, where they can be visited. They progressed from the 3rd century BC to the 1st millennium AD, becoming magnificent colonnaded halls or walls that were embellished with painting or sculpture as time went on.

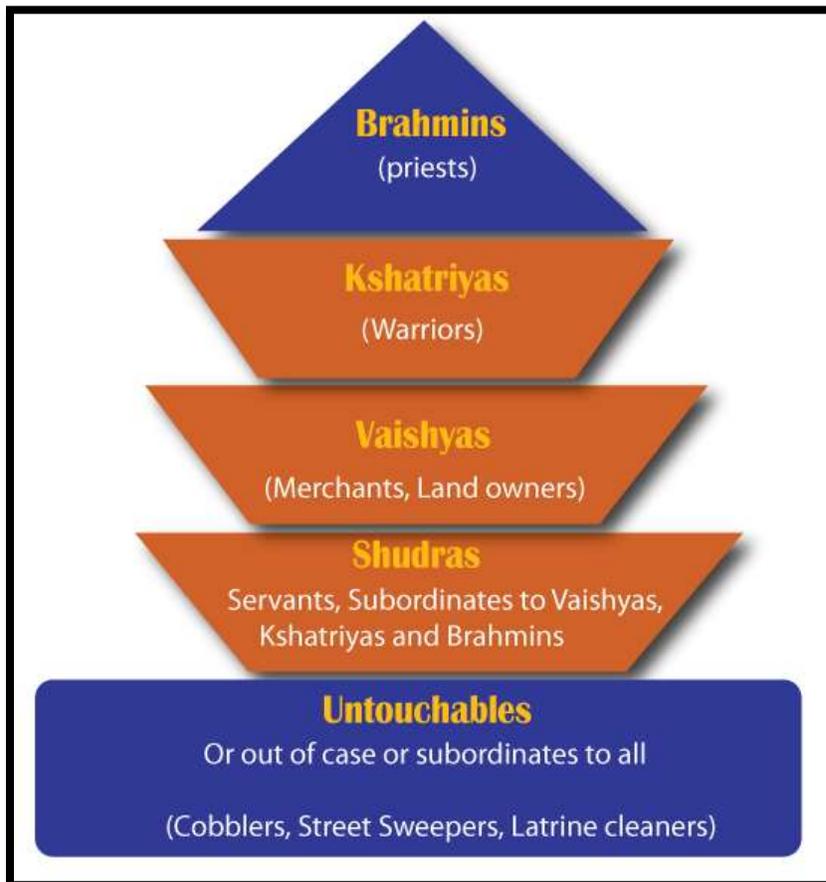
### **1.3. Sunga and Andhra Dynasties**

Historically, the first known stupas are said to have been built under the Sunga dynasty (c. 2nd–1st cent. BC) and the early Andhra dynasty (c. 2nd–3rd cent. BC) (1st cent. BC). These relic mounds are surrounded by ornamental railings and gates, which are themselves surrounded by ornamented railings and gates. In Bharhut, one of the most important stupas is housed in a structure whose sculpture is of antique origin. Relief medallions showing scenes from the Buddha's life or the jatakas (tales of his previous lives) are shallow cut, with all of the events from each story contained inside a single composition on the relief medallion's surface. The bodies of semidivine beings, particularly yakshis (female tree spirits), are flattened against the pillar of which they are a part; nonetheless, the importance of prana is still emphasised throughout the painting.

#### 1.4. Gandhara and Mathura

Between the second and fifth centuries AD, two of India's most notable styles were produced under the rule of the Kushans, conquerors from central Asia: Gandhara art and the art of Mathura. Art from Gandhara, which was named for the province of Gandhara that is now part of Pakistan, contains some of the earliest depictions of the Buddha. Prior to this, the Buddha's presence was represented by symbols such as the pipal tree, the wheel of life, footprints, and an empty throne, among other things, in the cities of Bharhut and Sanchi. It is believed that the Gandhara style was heavily influenced by Hellenistic art of the second century AD, and that it was itself extremely influential throughout Central and Eastern Asia during this time period. Its cosmopolitan tastes, as seen by ivory and foreign glass and lacquerware, as well as its substantial trade, were characteristics of the time. Walls of stupas and monasteries all across the world were adorned with relief friezes, which were typically carved in dark schist and depicted humans in classical postures dressed in flowing Hellenistic robes.

#### 2. Early Historical Period of Architecture



The Mauryan period marked the beginning of an important phase in Indian architecture. As a result of their worldly affluence and a new religious consciousness, the Mauryans achieved great success in all fields. The palace of Chandragupta Maurya, according to Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Selucus Nikator who paid a visit to the Mauryan court, was an impressive architectural feat. It was a massive structure made entirely of wood. During the Mauryan period (322 – 182 BC), and particularly under Ashoka, architecture made significant strides forward. The influence of the Persians and the Greeks could be seen in Mauryan art and architecture. It was during the reign of Ashoka that a large number of monolithic stone pillars were built, on which the teachings of 'Dhamma' and 'Dharma' were engraved.

Highly polished pillars (capitals) with animal sculptures adorning their tops are one-of-a-kind and distinctive. India's government has recognised the lion capital of the Sarnath pillar as its country's national emblem, which is known as the "Lion of the Sarnath." It is estimated that each pillar weighs roughly 50 tonnes and measures approximately 50 feet in height. Located in different parts of India, the stupas of Sanchi and Sarnath are representative of the accomplishments of Mauryan architecture in their respective locales.

Exhibiting creative talent and aesthetic sensibility, the Sanchi Stupa's entrances, which are adorned with exquisite sculptures depicting scenes from Jataka stories, are outstanding examples of the artisans' artistic ability and aesthetic sense. The combination of Greek and Indian art culminated in the birth of Gandhara art, which continued to grow over the course of several centuries after that. Aside from the indigenous Mathura school and the Amravati schools, which flourished after the first century AD and were particularly inspired by the Kushanas at the period, there were other schools of art and architecture to choose from. Although all of the concepts, inspirations, and topics associated with the Gandhara School were indigenous to India, life – such as statues of Buddha and Bodhisattavas – was modelled after Greek deities under the influence of the Gandhara School. Rich ornaments, clothes, and draperies were employed to enhance the physical beauty of the subjects. Stone, terracotta, cement-like substance, and clay were used to create the sculptures. When the Kushanas were in power, ivory and foreign glass were used extensively in their architectural designs.

Relief friezes carved in black schist, representing individuals in classical positions with flowing Hellenistic robes, adorn the architectural monuments of this period, such as stupas and monasteries, and can be found in a variety of locations. Sculpted in black schist, relief friezes feature people in classical poses with flowing Hellenistic garments. When compared to those at Sanchi, the reliefs of Yaksha's carved during this period are more sensual and seductive. The stupa in Gandhara represents the culmination of the incremental refinement of the rudimentary kinds known from Sanchi and Bharhut. This elaboration takes the shape of sculptural embellishment on the base, drum, and hemispherical dome that is visible from all sides.

The enormous tower built by king Kanishka at Pashawar, which is considered to be a Buddhist wonder of the world, is the most famous stupa in Gandhara and a true Buddhist wonder of the globe. The figurines of the Mathura school, on the other hand, were constructed of speckled red stone. They possessed a more spiritual air about them. Along with sculptures of Buddha, we may also locate sculptures of Jaina deities in this location. It was the Satvahanas of Andhra Pradesh that encouraged the development of the Amravati school in the region. In the Lower Godavari region, a magnificent stupa was constructed in Amravati. In addition to bas relief, a curved medallion and ornate panels were used to decorate the walls of the stupa. Also known for its Buddhist architecture is Nagarjunakonda, which is located in the state of Kerala.

### **2.1. Medieval Period of Architecture (Mughals)**

Perhaps it will surprise you to learn that India has a very extensive history of town planning that dates back to the Harappan culture (which some historians refer to as the Indus – Saraswati Civilization). The two cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, as we all know, had a sophisticated drainage system, roadways that intersected at right angles, a citadel that was erected on a high plateau, and the majority of the inhabitants lived in lower-lying regions. Construction of the cities of Kalibangam in Rajasthan and Surkoda in Gujarat followed a similar pattern. More villages and cities that were associated with both Aryan and Dravidian civilizations are uncovered starting from 600 BC and continuing till the present day. Rajgir, Varanasi, Ayodhya, Hastinapur, Ujjain, Sravasthi, Kapilvastu, and Kausambhi were just a few of the cities and places that were included. There were many more. There are several settlements called as Janapadas (little towns) and Mahajanapadas (giant towns) that we come across during the Mauryan period (big towns). The entrance of the Muslims in India resulted in a dramatic transformation of the environment. In the towns, there was a noticeable Islamic influence. Mosques, forts, and palaces may now be found all across the city. In 1594 AD, there were 2,837 towns, according to Abul Fazal's count. This was mostly due to the transformation of several big villages into smaller towns, which were known as qasbas (little towns). Many local artisans and craftspeople settled in these qasbas and began to specialise in their respective fields, like as leather work and marble carving in Agra (among other specialties). Textiles and other materials were produced mostly in Sind; whereas Gujarat was known for its weaving skills, gold and silk threads, as well as its brocades, which were regularly traded internationally. A new architectural technique was established as a result of the arrival of the Turks in the thirteenth century, culminating in the development of architectural styles throughout Iran, Arabia, and Central Asia as a result of their presence. The domes, arches, and minarets of these constructions were renowned for the engineering feats that went into their construction. Those qualities were present in the palaces, mosques, and tombs constructed by the emperors, and they were combined with those of indigenous architecture to produce an architectural design synthesis that was unique in the world. Therefore, the Turkish rulers of Delhi engaged the help of indigenous Indian craftsmen who were highly competent and had already completed a number of great monuments. The simplicity of the Islamic structure, as well as the detailed carvings and designs they produced on their own indigenous structures, can all be discovered in the structures that have risen to the surface of the earth.. All of their projects in the field of architecture during this time period took a middle route between the two opposite extremes.

### **3. Conclusion**

It is as old as the civilization of the Indus Valley that Indian architecture and sculpture can be traced back. India has a rich history of urban planning that dates back to the Harappan Civilization, which was around 2350 BC. Due to the fact that it is influenced by numerous cultural traditions and religious practises over time, architecture is essential for understanding the cultural diversity of any section of India. When it came to the construction of stupas, viharas, and chaityas, religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism all contributed to the development of early Indian architectural style. Temple architecture flourished throughout the reign of the Gupta, Pallava, and Chola dynasties. The history of mediaeval Indian architecture begins with the invasion of the Delhi Sultanates, which marked the beginning of the Middle Ages. The Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals brought with them Persian influence, and we can see this in the architecture, which is known as Indo-Persian (Indo-Islamic) style. The architecture of these Muslim invaders was remarkably similar to that of the indigenous people; for example, both temples and mosques had open courtyards in front of them, as did the architecture of the indigenous people. During the reign of Akbar, the Mughal architectural style was established. He was responsible for the construction of numerous significant structures. The construction of his new capital city of Fatehpur Sikri, which is located 40 kilometres from Agra, was the crowning achievement of his reign. Fatehpur Sikri is a romantic city built entirely of stones. This gateway, also known as the Buland Darwaza or Arch of the Buland Darwaza, is the most spectacular on the face of the globe. The tomb of Saint Salim Chisti is a work of art that is breath-taking in its splendour and craftsmanship. The palace of Jodha Bai is a stunning example of old Indian architecture and is open to the public. The Jama Masjid was built in the style of Persian architecture, and it is the largest mosque in the world. It is widely acknowledged that the Dewan-i-Aman and Dewan-i-Khas were built with painstaking planning and decoration, and that they are among the most beautiful buildings in the world. The Ibadat Khana and the Panch Mahal are two more noteworthy structures. The Panch Mahal is a five-story pyramidal edifice with a central courtyard. The structure was designed in the style of a Buddhist Vihara.

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