

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Indo-Islamic Architecture - Part I [Art & Culture Notes for UPSC]

Introduction

- Islam came to India in the 7th and 8th centuries CE chiefly through Muslim traders, merchants, holy men and conquerors.
- The religion spread in India over a time period of 600 years.
- Muslims in Gujarat and Sind had begun construction work in the 8th century itself. But it was only in the 13th century that building activity on a large scale began by the Turkish State after the Turkish conquest of North India.
- Muslims absorbed many aspects of local architectural traditions and amalgamated them into their own practices.
- Architecturally, a mix of many techniques, stylised shapes and surface decorations evolved through a continuous amalgamation of architectural elements from the various styles. Such architectural entities that showcased multiple styles are known as **Indo-Saracenic or Indo-Islamic architecture**.
- **While the Hindus were allowed to portray God in their art and were allowed to conceive manifestations of the divine in any form, the Muslims were forbidden by their religion to replicate living forms on any surface. So, their religious art and architecture mainly consisted of arabesque, calligraphy and geometrical patterns on plaster and stone.**
- Types of architectural buildings: mosques for daily prayers, Jama Masjids, dargahs, tombs, hammams, minars, gardens, sarais or caravansarais, madrasas, Kos minars, etc.

Categories of Styles

1. Imperial Style (Delhi Sultanate)
2. Provincial Style (Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, and Jaunpur)
3. Mughal Style (Delhi, Agra, and Lahore)
4. Deccani Style (Bijapur, Golconda)

Architectural Influences

- The architecture of Jaunpur and Bengal is distinct.

- Gujarat had more local influence than other styles. Example: toranas (gateways) from local temple traditions, carvings of bell and chain motifs, lintels in mihrabs, and carved panels depicting trees.
- Example of provincial style: Dargah of Shaikh Ahmad Khattu of Sarkhej (in white marble; 15th century).

Decorative Forms

- Designing on plaster through incision or stucco.
- Designs were either left plain or filled with colours.
- Motifs of varieties of flowers (both Indian and foreign) were painted or carved.
- In the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, tiles were used to surface the walls and domes. Blue, green, yellow and turquoise were the popular colours.
- In the wall panels, surface decoration was done by the techniques of tessellation (mosaic designs) and **pietra dura** (a decorative art that is an inlay technique of using cut and fitted, highly polished coloured stones to create images).



- Other decorative forms: arabesque, calligraphy, high and low relief carving and a profuse use of **jalis**.



- The roof was generally a mix of the central dome and other smaller domes, chatris and tiny minarets.
- There was generally an inverted lotus flower motif and a metal or stone pinnacle atop the central dome.

Construction materials

- The walls were quite thick and made of rubble masonry.
- They were then coated with chunam or limestone plaster or dressed stone.
- Stones used: sandstone, quartzite, buff, marble, etc.
- Polychrome tiles were also used.
- Bricks were used from the 17th century.

Forts

- Forts symbolise the seat of power of a ruler. Many large forts with embattlements were built in the medieval times.
- When a fort was captured, it meant the ruler who owned the fort had to surrender.
- E.g.: Chittor, Gwalior and Daulatabad
- Chittorgarh is the largest fort in Asia.
- Forts were constructed using great heights so that they were impregnable to enemy forces. Inside there were places for offices and residences.
- Many complex features were added in the structure and design so as to making breaching the walls of the forts challenging.
- Golconda Fort (Hyderabad) had concentric circles of outer walls. Daulatabad Fort had staggered entrances so that even elephants could not be used to open the gates.

Minars

- Minar was a form of stambha or tower.
- Examples of medieval minars: Qutub Minar in Delhi, Chand Minar at Daulatabad Fort.
- Everyday use of the minar: azaan (call to prayer).
- **Qutub Minar**
 - 13th century
 - Construction started by Qutub-ud-din Aibak (Delhi Sultanate ruler) and completed by his successor Iltutmish.
 - UNESCO World Heritage Site
 - 234 feet high
 - Tower is divided into five storeys
 - Mix of polygonal and circular shapes
 - Material: red and buff sandstone with some marble in the upper storeys

- Highly decorated balconies
- There are inscriptions intertwined with foliated designs
- It came to be associated with Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, a revered saint of Delhi
- **Chand Minar**, Daulatabad
 - 15th century
 - 210 feet high
 - Tapering tower has four storeys
 - Work of architects from Delhi and Iran

Tombs

- Tombs are monumental structures over the graves of rulers and royalty.
- They were a common medieval feature in India.
- Examples: tombs of Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, Humayun, Akbar, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, Itmaduddaula.
- Idea behind the tomb according to Anthony Welch was “eternal paradise as a reward for the true believer on the Day of Judgement.”
- Walls had Quranic verses. Tombs were generally placed within paradisiacal elements like a garden or a water body or both (as in the Taj Mahal).

Sarais

- Sarais were built on a simple rectangular or square plan around cities.
- They were meant to provide temporary accommodation to travellers, traders, pilgrims, etc.
- They were basically public spaces and a hub of cross-cultural interaction.

Structures for Common People

- Buildings such as those for domestic usage, temples, mosques, dargahs, khanqahs, pavilions in the buildings and gardens, bazaars, commemorative gateways, etc.
- Here also, a mixing of styles, techniques and decorative patterns were seen. This was a feature of the medieval period.

Jama Masjid

- Large mosques sprang up during the medieval times in India.

- Congregational prayers were held every Friday afternoon. A quorum of 40 Muslim male adults was required for this to take place.
- At the time of the prayers, a khutba was read out in the name of the ruler along with his laws for the realm.
- Generally, a city had one Jama Masjid and this place became the centre of the town for religious, commercial and political activities.
- Generally, Jama Masjids were large with open courtyards.
- They were surrounded on three sides by cloisters with the Qibla Liwan to the west. The mihrab and the mimbar for the Imam were located here.
- The mihrab indicated the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and so people faced the mihrab while offering prayers.

