



Distance Learning Programme

UPPCS Mains

History of Indian Culture





drishti

HISTORY OF INDIAN CULTURE


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INTRODUCTION

Art, Culture, Religion and Civilisation

Art

Art is the creative expression of one's experiences, beliefs, ideas, thoughts and emotions. It reflects the values and developments of a society. It is one aspect of culture. Culture exerts a great influence on art and sometimes art becomes a by product of the culture.

Culture

Culture is sense of ultimate values possessed by a particular society as expressed in its collective institutions, by its individual members in their dispositions, feelings, attitudes and manners as well as in significant forms which they give to material objects.

Origin of Culture

According to the Idealistic Theory, the rishis of the Vedic Age caught a glimpse of certain ideas through divine inspiration or through their own intuition, which, in due course, took the form of an ideal suited to the social conditions and intellectual capacity of the Aryan community. They tried to put this ideal into practice in the physical environment of the Indo-Gangetic valley and in the process were created the ideas and institutions which constituted the Vedic culture. The latter class of theories say that the starting point of culture is the physical environment. Advocates of the Naturalistic Theory will explain the origin the agricultural life which the nomadic Aryans adopted when they came to India and on that basis they gradually reared the edifice of their religion, their philosophy and their social order.

Religion

Religion in its wider sense coincides with, and goes beyond, culture and in its narrower sense, forms an important part of it. Where religion signifies the inner experience which reveals to the mind the real meaning and purpose of life, it is the very soul of culture; but when it is used for the external form in which the inner experience has crystallized itself, it is only a part of the culture. Religion as the inner realization of the highest truth can never be opposed to culture; but positive religion, when it has degenerated into a mere form without substance, is often in conflict with cultural life.

Civilisation

Civilisation is generally used in the sense of a higher order of culture. As a matter of fact, civilization is that stage in the cultural development of people when they begin to live in large habitations called cities, which represent a higher level of material life or a higher



standard of living. When such life is in conflict with one of the moral values, or even when it is devoid of any such values, it will prove to be an obstacle to cultural progress. So civilization is not always an ally, but sometimes an enemy of culture.

New Cultural Fusion

In the past, we have achieved fusion of various cultures into a common national culture three times – Aryan-Dravidian, Hindu and Buddhist and lastly of the Hindu and Muslim cultures. But the ongoing fusion is more complex and has several new aspects.

The first thing, that we have to realise is that the dominating complexion of the present common culture is that of the north Indian culture. That is why its influence over the south is very limited. To be truly inclusive it has to assimilate at the best elements of the various regional cultures, specially those of south and north-east India. This requires a maximum cultural contact. Several important steps have already been taken in this direction. The Union Ministry of Education started a Youth Festival in the late fifties which was held every year at the beginning of winter. It was an occasion for university student from all parts of the country to live together for a few days and give one another glimpses into the cultural life of their respective regions—their music, dance, drama, painting and sculpture, etc. Earlier three academies were set up, one for the promotion of the representational arts, another for music, dance and drama and a third for literature. But if they are to serve as cultural laboratories of the Gupta and Mughal periods, they should be turned into institutions where the fellows are in permanent residence and receive liberal pensions so that, free from all financial worries they can devote themselves wholeheartedly to evolving common national patterns of art and literature.

Another course which could be adopted to pull down the barriers separating the various linguistic groups is the large-scale exchange of teachers. Under an exchange system, the selected teachers from each linguistic region who know several Indian languages could be induced by liberal terms to offer their services in different linguistic areas for sufficiently long periods so that they can enter into the spirit of the regional cultures and recognise in them local variants of the common culture of India.

The second aspect of the cultural fusion is that, if we review the trend of development in India during the last thirty years we will find that all the three fundamental objectives which we have before us in the reconstruction of our country—a secular democratic state, a socialist pattern of society and industrial progress—are based on ideas which have come from the West. It is true that in trying to realise these ideals we do not want to blindly follow the West but go our own way, adjusting Western ideas to our changing needs and circumstances.

But if our new national culture is to be built on a broad and strong foundation we have to perform another act of cultural fusion—harmonising the upper and middle-class culture which is mainly confined to the urban areas, with the rural. In the development of a healthy and vigorous culture, it is essential that there is close contact between urban and rural life and both are constantly influenced by each other.

A fusion of the cultural values of the city and the village, or of the upper and middle-classes and the masses in a broad national culture is not possible unless we get rid of the narrow aristocratic and individual concepts of art and culture which dominate our minds.



It is enough to say that if we believe in a democratic socialist society, we cannot possibly accept the aristocratic and individualistic concepts of culture. To regard culture as the privilege of any particular class is against the spirit of democracy and to permit the individual to give free expression to his idiosyncrasies, even when they are harmful to society, is the negation of socialism.

There is a danger that the country might face cultural disintegration, leading first to political anarchy and then to foreign domination. The best way to solve this problem is to give up revivalism and make what is left of our common Hindustani culture the foundation of the national culture. Unity in diversity has always been the distinguishing feature of Indian culture. We should keep it as our aim in our efforts to build the new national culture. In order to have a democratic society with a common culture and common ideals, we have to infuse in our education a spirit of democracy and organise it as an integrated whole.



The architecture of India is rooted in its history, culture and religion. Indian architecture progressed with time and assimilated the many influences that came as a result of India's global discourse with other regions of the world throughout its millennia-old past. The architectural methods practiced in India are a result of an examination and implementation of its established building traditions and outside cultural interactions.

Indian architecture, belonging to different periods of history, bears the imprints of the respective periods. Though the cities of Indus Valley provide substantial evidence of extensive town planning, the beginnings of Indian architecture can be traced back to the advent of Buddhism in India. It was in this period that a large number of magnificent buildings came up. Some of the highlights of Buddhist art and architecture are the Great stupa at Sanchi and the rock-cut caves at Ajanta.

With the establishment of Hindu kingdoms in South India, the south Indian school of architecture began to flourish. The most notable achievements of the Pallava rulers were the rock-cut temples of Mahabalipuram and the temples of Kanchipuram. The Chola, Hoysala and Vijayanagar rulers also did a remarkable job in the field of architecture. The temples at Thanjavur, Belur and Halebid bear testimony to the architectural excellence of the South Indian rulers.

In north India, there developed a new a different style of architecture. This was called as the Nagara style architecture. In central India, the Chandela rulers built a magnificent temple complex at Khajuraho. With the coming of the Muslim rulers, there developed a new architectural style in India-the Indo-Islamic architecture. The Indo-Islamic style was neither strictly Islamic nor strictly Hindu. The architecture of the medieval period can be divided into two main categories. They are the Delhi or the Imperial Style and the Mughal Architecture.

It was followed by a new style of architecture that developed as a result of colonization of India. This style of architecture came to be called as Indo-Saracenic. The Indo-Saracenic architecture combined the features of Hindu, Islamic and western elements. The colonial architecture exhibited itself through institutional, civic and utilitarian buildings such as post offices, railway stations, rest houses and government buildings.

Indus Valley Architecture

The Harappan civilization is known as the earliest civilization of the south Asian subcontinent. It covers an appreciably larger area than the early dynastic Egypt or Sumer. The earliest remains of Indian architecture are to be found in Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Ropar, Kalibangan, Lothal and Rangpur, belonging to a civilization known as the Indus valley culture or the Harappan culture. The Harappan people had constructed mainly three types of buildings-dwelling houses, pillared halls and public baths.

The Harappan cities were surrounded by the fortification walls. In the archaeological context fortification can be defined as protective or defensive works around the settlement area. Size and shape of the defensive wall vary from site to site.

Public buildings include granaries which were used to store grains, which give an idea of an organised collection and distribution system.

The Harappan civilization is well known due to its town planning. They developed a unique city plan which was unparalleled among the contemporary civilization. In most of the city plan, the citadel was in the west and lower town was to the east of the citadel, but at some sites like Lothal and Dholavira the citadel was in the southern part of the city. The cities were divided into blocks and sub-blocks by the cardinal orientation of streets and lanes. The streets run north south and east-west directions. The elites who lived in different parts of the cities did not construct elaborate centralized places or temples, as was common in Mesopotamia and Egypt, but they maintained well planned cities with massive walls and gateways to protect the citizens and to control trade.

A drainage system was considered as hallmarks of Harappan town planning. They developed a good drainage system in their cities town. The Harappan drains can be categorized into two parts, the public and private drains. The Harappan people constructed many hydraulic structures like Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, the dock at Lothal, reservoirs at Dholavira and wells at different sites. The water management system of the Harappan civilization revealed that this area received scanty rainfall during the Harappan period. They constructed some canals for irrigation like the moat was constructed at Kunal and Banawali and a canal was built at Lothal. The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro revealed the aspects of public ceremony.

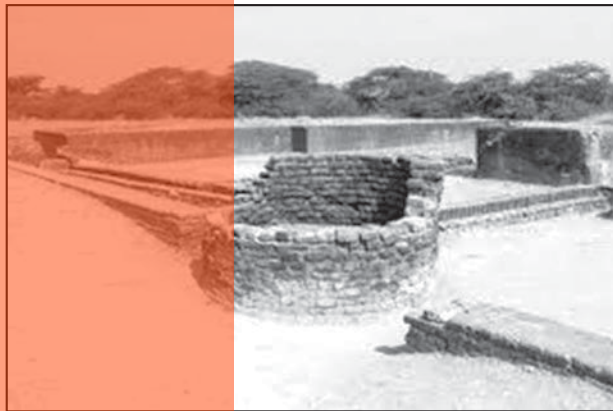


Fig: Drainage in IVC

In the construction of houses, different types of material and techniques were used by the Harappan people. The houses at Balu, Banawali, Kalibangan, Lothal, Harappa etc. were constructed with mud-bricks. At Mohenjodaro the houses of common people were constructed with baked-bricks. The dressed and undressed stones were used in the construction of houses at Surkotada. The doors, windows and roofs of the houses were constructed with wood.

The houses and public buildings were constructed on platforms. The platforms were constructed with mud and mud-bricks. The walls of the houses were constructed with a deep foundation. These instruments were helpful to make angles like a compass; some were used to measure length like scale. Scales were found at Mohenjodaro, Lothal and Kalibanga. Plumb-bob were used to make the wall vertically straight. Some model of plumb-bobs was found at Chanhudaro and Lothal.

To sum up, the Harappan sites provided evidences of systemic town planning, fortifications, elaborate drainage system, granaries, etc., which throw light on the surplus economy, standardization of brick size, weight and measures, geometric instruments, linear scales and plumb-bobs. A unique type of hydraulic architecture is another legacy of the Harappan civilization. The Harappan people constructed their houses on immense platforms of mud or mud bricks. The Harappan cities were equipped with numerous wells, bathrooms and an intricate system of drains.

However, there does not appear to be any connection between the cities built in the 3rd millennium BC and the beginning of the historic period of Indian history, mainly the time of the great Mauryas of Magadha.

Stupa

Amongst all the religious monuments of the world, the stupa has the largest uninterrupted historical development spanning more than 3 millenniums. In India all most all the early structural stupas have lost its original shape due to subsequent renovations (Whenever an old stupa was repaired it was renovated according to the style prevalent during that period. For instance, the present form of the Great Stupa at Sanchi is after the renovation done in the second century BCE, but within its core are the remains of another stupa built more than 100 years before, i.e., belonging to the Ashoka period. Similar instances are found in the stupas at Taxila and Nagarjunakonda), making it difficult to describe the shape of the earliest stupas.

The tradition of making stupas, originally funerary mounds were common during the Vedic period. But with the passage of time, the stupa became an object of veneration and worship. The stupa swiftly became an emblem of Buddha's Dharma and an important part of Buddhist monasteries.

Ashoka's sovereignty marked a significant juncture in the history of Buddhist stupa architecture.

Some of the places of famous stupas of the ancient period are given in the table below.

Place	Significance
Vaishali and Piprahwa	Old mud stupas were rebuilt and enlarged with bricks.
Sarnath	Dhamekh Stupa: The Dhamekh Stupa is said to mark the spot (Rishipattana which can be translated as "where the Rishi arrived") where the Buddha gave the first sermon to his first five brahmin disciples after attaining enlightenment.
Taxila	Dharmarajika: The Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila was constructed in the 2 nd century AD, part of the eight shrines built in 3 rd century BC by emperor Ashoka. Excavated by Sir John Marshall, the Dharmarajika gives us insight into the rise and fall of Buddhism in the Taxila.
Sanchi	The brick core of the great stupa of Sanchi was built in Ashoka's time. The stupa was about 60 feet in diameter at the base and was a low dome mounted on a low cylindrical drum. It was surrounded by a wooden fence and had entrances at the four cardinal points. In the second century BC, this stupa was encased in stone and other additions were made over the next few centuries. The Great Stupa at Sanchi was built with bricks during the time of Ashoka and later stone and many new additions were made.

After the first century CE, stupa architecture underwent a gradual transformation. The heights of the accessory parts became more accentuate. The stupas in ancient India were generally composed of three parts:

- The base or drum.

- The dome (anda) which resting on the drum, demarcating a terrace called medhi. The relics are kept in the hollow space in the interior of the dome of a stupa. The relic casket is generally made of precious metal in the shape of a miniature stupa.
- The upper part is made up of a square structure called harmika (meaning Pavilion), into which the shaft (yupa) bearing the umbrellas (chatra) is inserted.

The pradikshinapatha (circumambulatory passage) of the stupa was often paved with stone panels bearing votive inscriptions. The vedika reminds of the ancient wooden railings. The toranas are built up of two large pillars linked by two or three lintels. Hiuen-tsang mentions the existence of these columns erected in front of stupas in his writings.

According to him, one was erected to recall the circumstances of the death of the Buddha, another one with the inscription, to mark that it was here that the relic was divided. Generally the bigger stupas were constructed of bricks; some smaller ones were made of soap stone or blue schist, etc.

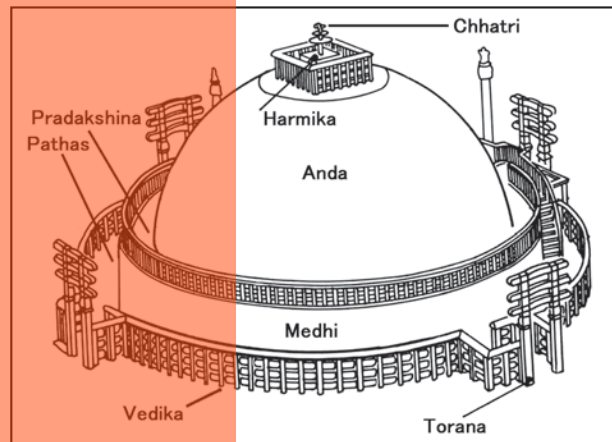


Fig: Stupa

In the earliest phase the stupa was always in the shape of a large hemisphere resting on a drum. It is only after the fifth century CE (Intermediate period) that it underwent two important modifications: basement on the one hand, and the crown on the other, concurrently increasing their importance to the detriment of the dome which earlier constituted the entire structure. The later versions in contrast, were tall, often resting on a higher platform with the surmounting structures such as the chatra becoming more elongated (late period) and spire-shaped.

Development of the Stupa and its Parts

The earliest stupas such as we see in the carvings at Bharhut and Sanchi, were low circular brick mounds resembling in outline their humble prototypes of the pre-Buddhist period. They were not built or decorated so elaborately or elegantly like some of the famous stupas built at Amravati and Nagarjunakonda.

The stupas built by Ashoka were simple structures built of bricks and plaster, surrounded by a wooden rail with open gateways facing the cardinal direction. Representation of the early type of stupa can be seen at the Sanchi's entrance gateway pillar, which is a simple structure shaped like a hemispherical cup placed upside down and is surrounded by a simple railing. The circular drum is very low and the stupa is a small structure of brick or stone pieces, devoid of harmika or chatra but surrounded by a short railing (wooden prototype). The wooden railing that was initially erected around a stupa was later on copied in stone on a more elaborate scale for the bigger stupas, such as at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amravati and at Bodhgaya around the Mahabodhi temple.

The earlier stupas being quite low and comparatively small, so could well be decorated by pious worshippers with festoons and garlands of flowers which were supported by the pegs. The proportional height is just about half, while at Piprahwa it is less than one-fifth

of that of Sanchi Stupa shows that early stupas were low rise. This later on developed into a conventional representation of the festoons in plaster work over the edifice and the pegs became purely ornamental.

The elaborate rail with decorations carved on it came later, the gateways at the cardinal points being special ornamental feature as exemplified in the case of Bharhut and Sanchi. With the size of the stupas becoming huge and to economize the building material (brick or stone) in some cases, small compartments were made and filled with earth and rubble. The drum of the stupa also underwent changes; from the Kushana period onwards the medhi portion became very elongated, leaving the anda portion look very short in height. Simultaneously with the elongation of the medhi portion the discs of the chatra also increased in number and appeared like a tall conical spire, sometimes crowned by a single chatra and often tapering to a conical point. The evolution of the torana (gateway) is equally interesting. The earlier type is found at Amravati. The early gateways were a pair of pillars to which were tied the two ends of a torana wreath. The earlier torana pillars must have had fresh torana wreaths tied to them every day. Later heavy stone work took the place of the wreath.

Depiction of Buddha in Stupas (Symbolism of the Stupa)

During the early period, the Buddha is depicted symbolically through footprints, stupas, lotus throne, chakra, etc. Thus, the events from the life of Buddha, the Jataka stories, etc., were depicted on the railings and torans of the stupas. The main events associated with the Buddha's life which were frequently depicted were events related to birth, renunciation, enlightenment, Dhammachakrapravartana (first sermon), and mahaparinirvana (death). Among Jataka stories that are frequently depicted are Chhadanta Jataka, Ruru Jataka, Sibi Jataka, Vidur Jataka, Vessantara Jataka and Shama Jataka.

Gupta Stupa Architecture

Dhamekh Stupa is a famous stupa built during this time. It is a solid cylinder of bricks and stone reaching a height of 43.6 meters and having a diameter of 28 meters. The basement seems to have survived from the structure of Ashoka's times. The stone facing is chiselled and displays delicate floral carvings of Gupta origin. Carvings on the walls are of Brahmi Script.

Rock Cut Architecture: Caves

The Rock-cut structures present the most spectacular piece of ancient Indian art specimen. Caves in ancient India were places of special relevance. Aside from offering natural shelter, they were regarded as a centre of supernatural powers and spiritual enhancement. Natural caves were the earliest caves used by local inhabitants. The natives used such caves for different purposes like places of worship and shelters.

The Maurya period saw the incipient phase of rock-cut architecture. The Barabar and Nagarjuni hills contain several caves of the Mauryan times. Three caves in the Barabar hills have dedicative inscriptions of Ashoka and three in Nagarjuni hills have inscriptions of his son Dasharatha. The caves have a simple plan, plain but highly polished interior walls and decorative gateways.