

The tangible approach of the divinity of Indo-Islamic architecture in India

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Abstract

The Mysterious World of divinity already holds up a strong connection between the existing and physical “us” and The Almighty. India had always been a center of attraction to obtain that level of divine satisfaction. This paper is an approach to identify the physical elements of Indo Islamic architecture in India that connects us with the Almighty and creates a sense of comprehensiveness. The varying styles across the subcontinent had a major impact in imbibing the philosophies of Islam in the hearts of people. This paper will focus on the various features of the architecture that despite the change and impact of various ruling dynasties had the same effect on people and inclined them more and more to the religion and the culture.

Keywords

Divine architecture, Indo-Islamic architecture, tangible and intangible factors, mysterious architecture

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Mongolian invaders not only blended the existing Hindu architecture with the Persian artistry but also gave birth to an absolutely new architectural style known as Indo-Islamic architecture. This paper is an attempt to attain the architectural know how of various elements of functional and aesthetic importance and their combination and use by various artists and Craftsmen. It proved that these are the major factors that have brought the structure to life and imbibed a soulful and divine appearance. The arches, domes, minarets, mihrab, open courtyards, jaaliwork, ablution tank, calligraphy and patterns, kiosks, landscape are the various elements of design in Indo-Islamic architectural style. These are the factors that make this style unique and different from all others and truly stand out in the Indian subcontinent. For a layman all these features might look indifferent and the significance unknown but all these collaborate to create such a soulful environment that nobody can ignore. The wholesomeness and aesthetic appeal thus created stands apart and gives a unique identity and exemplifies the image to the rest of the world. The Islamic architects were successful in adapting in this new environment and depict their faith in the form of artwork. The architectural work signifies that the artist and Craftsman did not keep aesthetics as their only priority but tried to send the Islamic teachings to the masses through their artwork. Dynasty after dynasty these architectural monuments went through various changes and the functional identity of the architectural elements also faded and confined to only aesthetic purpose.

II. INDO-ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1- ARCHES :

Although being a truly structural element in the building design it has a special place value in the undue reality of making someone realize “Infinity in divinity”. The series of arches gives the perfect perspective of heading towards the unknown. The arcuated gallery leading to the main sanctum gives the feeling of mysterious sensitivity. The series of arches creates or visual appeal of defining a linear walking pathway and a sense of direction.

2- Domes :

The grandeur of dome both inside and outside of the building gives a sense of heavenly adobe and the feeling of protection. Domes are in fact one of the primary focus of attraction and gives a royal and rich outlook of the beholder and also denotes his greatness and power. Not being a ritual requirement of the religious

building, it is purely a symbolic representation of the House of God. In the desert areas of the Arabic region where the Islamic religion originated, the domes had a functional tag to it. It did not allow the sand to rest on the roof and thus protected the monument from sandstorm but later it became the major identity of Islamic Architecture worldwide. It is also widely used for acoustical reasons and thus it amplifies the devotional content.

3- MINARS AND MINARETS :

These high soaring 'beacons' are a perfect symbolic representation of a pointer to heaven and God and the heights seems to decrease the distance between us and the supreme. The function it served lately was to call for a prayer but now it has become an inseparable architectural element from the Indo-Islamic architectural style. It is truly sad to be 'Landmarks of Islam'. It was made to be visible from far. The word *minar* literally meant an object that gives light and it became a symbol of faith and power.

4- KIOSKS (CHATTRIS) :

These have widely been used in tombs, maqbara and religious buildings all over the subcontinent. They were the particular element in Mughal architecture and its origin is purely Indian. Although not apart of purely religious architectural domain, it is indeed an essential visual and aesthetic element which increases the pride of the structure. These umbrellas have also been used in Jat and Maratha architecture. Rajasthan being the most popular site of using this element as their chief architectural identity. These were also often used to demarcate the funeral sites. The use of chattri also continued to be used in colonial era.

5- WATER TANKS :

The ablution tank has been an integral part of any religious building in India. The religion, culture and function united together in the form of these tanks of different shapes, sizes and ornamentations and it has now become one of the most striking features of Indo-Islamic architecture. The function it serves of purification of the body also intended to cleanliness of the soul and then entering the main sanctum. Waterbody, be it natural or man-made always had a major impact on not only the architectural design process, aesthetics or the microclimate of the site, but also it had a calming and decontaminating impact on the mind body and soul of the individual. It always participated in giving that soothing effect to the mind and bringing the body and soul in collaboration with the religious proceedings.

6- LANDSCAPES :

The adaptation of Persian garden styles in India and the use of charbagh patterned Landscapes in the buildings is a prominent feature of Indo-Islamic architecture. Landscaping is a process of syncing the surrounding environment with the natural or semi natural elements. Primary goal of designing a landscape is to create a defensive space for our mind. This means that there should be enough barriers and openness that our mind will perceive sufficient protection and at the same time sufficient freedom. The charbagh patterns have managed to do so by visually appealing us in every respect.

7- JAALI WORK :

Jaali work or latticed screen usually seen with intricate ornamentation is common in Indo-Islamic architecture. Calligraphy and patterns are depicted in the jaali work making it very aesthetically pleasing. The concept of using jaali is to create a partial visual barrier and allowing daylight and air to enter into the building. The light that is received by the jaali in the interiors is a mesmerizing experience for the visitor. It helps in achieving a sense of divine light from heavens. The Placement of jaali in building is very crucial. The correct amount of light and at the right time entering the building is the key to achieve the desired result. This element apart from all others truly stands out in creating a magical and mythical appeal.

8- CALLIGRAPHY AND PATTERNS :

Calligraphy played an important role in Muslim art as it was used in writing the Quran. The Quranic inscriptions are to be found in every Indo-Islamic building and are written in various forms and designs. The

several style includes floral patterns, geometrical shapes and *kufic* pattern. Prophet Mohammed is said to have created pen first, so it directly relates the calligraphic inscriptions on the building to the supreme.

III. THE SUMMATION OF THE TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE ELEMENTS

All these above mentioned factors surely contributed to achieve the desired performance of the building. Apart from them the other intangible figures like space, distance, suspense, surprise factors etc .are to be properly calculated and well applied. When we enter the building there has to be enough space between the entrance and the main sanctum so that the excitement is maintained. The time taken to reach the main sanctum increases the urge to reach there but at the same time it should not be long enough to create disappointment and decrease interest. The best example is of Taj Mahal where enough surprise element is maintained so as to give the awe inspiring view of the mosque. Mystery has to be maintained for the viewer.

IV. CONCLUSION

Various scholars and writers through the decades have already mentioned and written about these architectural features and the criticism goes on. In the contemporary world, the use of these elements have gained popularity and people are well aware about its placements and importance. They have already managed to blend it with the current architectural practices. Sacral architecture be it public or private must encompass that X factor which directly connects the faith and the building. Architect Norman L. Koonce has suggested that “the goal of sacred architecture is to make transparent the boundary between matter and mind, flesh and the spirit”. We should be grateful to the previous generations that have managed to sum up the functional, aesthetical and structural elements to create a unique architectural style that have impressed and fulfilled the divine needs of the people till date. In the current scenario we indeed have the technological advancements and scientific intelligence but their glory still remains the same and will definitely increase with time. The masterpieces are deliberately designed to teach the masses that the soul of the building will always lie in the proportional use of the architectural elements.

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