

Delhi Sultanate Art, Architecture, and Society:

Art, Education and Trade

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Art and Education during Delhi Sultanate

In 1258 AD, Delhi became the most important cultural center, when the Mongols destroyed the cultural centers of Central and Western Asia. During 1296-1316 AD, the poetry of Khusrau, the historical works of Barani, and the table talk of Hazrat Nizam-ud-din Auliya were witnessing the cultural vitality. This period cannot be marked by the scholarship and study of sciences which demarcated Baghdad and Cordova. The reason is that the learned and talented men had come to India, but without their libraries. As a result, only those cultural activities achieved eminence like poetry, music, and others, which were not dependent on the collection of knowledge. Due to the lack of libraries, large educational institutions did not develop in India.

During Muslim rule in India, the official in-charge of religious grants, the *sadr-i-jahan*, organised for the grant of tax-free lands to the various religious groups who provided education in Islamic subjects. Two big colleges or *madrassas*, called *Muizziya* and *Nasiriya*, were built for advanced studies. Three main subjects were taught: *tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran), *hadith* (tradition), and *fiqh* (constitution).

In the Deccan, science subjects were in focus. Firuz, a Bahmani king, encouraged subjects such as Botany, Geometry, and Astronomy. Medical science also received attention. In 1329 AD, Zia Muhammad, has written a manuscript on medicine, *Majmua-i-ziai*, gives information for Arabian as well as Hindu medicines. Another book on medical knowledge, *Tibb-i-Sikandari*, authored by Mian Bhuwa in 1512 AD, was a standard textbook for followers of the internal medical systems.

Reza (also referred as Sangreza), the secretary of Iltutmish, was the first eminent Persian poet who was born in India. Amir Khusrau was the best writer of the early sultanate period. Khusrau wrote poems relating to the ongoing events, like *Qiran-us-Saadain*, *Miftah-ul-Futuh*, *Ashiqa*, *Khazain-ul-Futuh*, and others.

Indian music had made an impact on the Arab systems, which resulted in the emergence in North India of a new kind of music. Sultan Husain is the original founder of the romantic school of music.

Literature:

Turko-Afghan rulers were primarily military persons, some of them took interest in belles-letters and under their patronage literature of high order was produced during this period. The court of Delhi Sultans were well attended by writers, poets, scholars, philosophers, logicians, theologians, lawyers and chroniclers. Amir Khusrau, Mir Hussan Dehlvi, Badruddin Thaneswari, Quazi Abdul and Amil-ul-Mulk etc. were the shining lights of the literary firmament during the period.

Islam gave an immediate filling to the vernacular languages which were in the course of evolution. The religious reformers and saints wrote, spoke and preached in languages which could be easily understood by the masses. The growth of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Maithili, Punjabi, Gurumukhi and other provincial literatures took place in this age. Ramananda, Kabir, Surdas and Tulsidas preached in Hindi, Mirabai and some other preachers and saints of Radha-Krishna cult preached in Brij-bhasa.

Hindi literature:

The liberal patronage extended by the court of provincial rulers to men of letters has added to the growth of Hindi literature. The poet Chand Bardai wrote Prithviraj-Raso was the earliest Hindi poet. In Rajasthan, a vast literature rich in heroic ballads and poetry connected with the deeds of Rajput Chiefs and warriors grew. Gorakhnath and Namadeva were the first saint to compose the Bhajans and Pads or Verses in Hindi. Kabir's verses possessed the charm and force with the sentiment of Hindu-Muslim unity.

His mysticism has its own prominence in Hindi literature. Nanak has also enriched Hindi literature. Mira bai who was intensely devoted to her deity Lord Krishna expressed her love and devotion in exquisite verses which are famous for their sweet melody and attracted millions of her time Kabir, Nanak, Dharamadas, Daud Dayal, Sunder Das, Maluk Das etc. have created religious literature.

Marathi Literature:

Marathi literature began from the medieval age. Chakradhar, Bhaskar, Bhatt, Narendra, and Mukundaraj were the early poets and writers of Marathi. Jnaneswar the famous saint poet of

Maharashtra in the 13th century composed his commentary on Gita called Janeshwari in Prakrit Marathi. It appealed to the masses most.

Gujarati Literature:

The early medieval Gujarati literatures were enriched by the boards and Jain monks. To preach the doctrine of Jainism, the Jain monks had composed many works in poetry called Ras. The Bhakti movement in Gujarat stimulated the growth of religious literature in Gujarati. Mira and Narsingh Mehta occupy prominent position among the saints and poets of Gujarat.

Bengali Literature:

The work of Vidyapati and Chandi Das renowned poets of the age provided stimulus to the growth of the Bengali literature. Vidyapati extended his work to Maithili language also. The Muslim rulers of Bengal also patronized Bengali. They engaged scholars to translate Ramayan and Mahabharat from Sanskrit to Bengali.

Chaitanya enriched the Bengali literature with his songs and Bhajans. The elevation of Bengali to a literary status was brought about by several influences of which Mohammedon conquest was undoubtedly one of the foremost cause as marked by Dinesh Chandra Sen.

Sanskrit:

In spite of the abundant growth of the vernacular literature Sanskrit literature did not cease to be cultivated and the Sultanate period was not entirely barren of work in Sanskrit both religious as well as secular. Parthasarathi wrote many works on the Karma Mimansa and some works which expressed the doctrines of Yoga, Naya and Vaisesika systems of philosophy.

The saints of the Bhakti movement made valuable contributions to the philosophical literature in Sanskrit. In South India Sanskrit literature did receive sufficient patronage by the rulers. Telugu and Kanarese received much encouragement from Vijayanagar Kings.

Growth of Urdu:

Another important achievement in the field of literature was the growth of Urdu out of the mingling of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words and ideas with languages and concepts of Sanskrit Origin. It has the words of Arabic, Persian, Turkish languages, Western Hindi dialects of Delhi province.

The grammatical structure of Urdu is essentially that of Hindi. Various necessities forced the Mohammadans and Hindus to meet each other involved the evolution of a common language which came to be known as Urdu that turned to be the medium of expression of many during this period that still continued to be an Indian language, composed and contributed by many poets and literatures. Literature in different regions thus underwent a great change.

Trade during Delhi Sultanate

Hindus placed themselves in a prime position in foreign as well as domestic trade, even though foreign Muslim merchants also had taken a big share of it. Usually the imported goods consisted of certain luxury items for the elite classes, and horses and mules, which were scarce in India. Looking at the success of the Muslim horsemen, Hindus also started substituting horses for elephants.

The exported goods included food grains and textile. The agricultural products included wheat, rice, pulses, oilseeds, scents, sugars, etc. Cotton and other textiles were important items of export to Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Europe. The Arabs carried those textiles to Damascus and Alexandria via Red Sea, from where they were dispensed to the Mediterranean countries. Some other industries emerged during this period, such as textile, metal work, indigo and paper. Muslims introduced some fine varieties of textiles, for which Bengal was the main centre. Numerous industries connected with metal work included manufacture of swords, guns, and other household items. Sugar manufacturing was done in Bengal on a large scale and was exported. Delhi was the center for paper manufacturing, but on a small scale. All these industries were privately owned, but still the government supported some large-scale factories. In the royal factories at Delhi, more than four thousand weavers for silk alone were employed.

Society and Culture during the Delhi Sultanate

India was ruled by the Turks and Afghans for more than three hundred years. The Turkish Sultans, who ruled over India, debarred the Indians from enjoying power and responsibility of the state. They had developed the feeling of abhorrence towards the “low born non-Turks”. However, with the advent of Muslim refugees, this state of affairs underwent a change, resulting in the fusion of Muslims of different races and nationalities through matrimonial alliances. The converted Indian Muslims during the rule of Khilji dynast were given a share in the work of administration.

Society:*Muslim Nobles:*

During the Sultanate period, the nobles stood at the apex of the social system. They were mostly of foreign origin. They were the most respected and privileged class in the society. They were appointed in high posts and in lieu of their services, they received jagirs. As they belonged to different nationalities like Persians, the Afghans, the Turks, the Arabs, the Abyssinians etc. they are quite hostile to each other.

Indian Muslims:

The other section of the society was that of Indian Muslims. They were either of the converted Hindus or were descendants of such converted Muslims. They were deprived of enjoying social and economic privileges like other Muslims in the society. They were also not given a share in the work of administration. This state of condition of the Indian Muslims continued till the end of thirteenth century. During fourteenth century the attitude of the Sultans underwent a change when the migration of the Turks from Central Asia to India was stopped.

Sultan Ala-ud-din-Khilji for the first time had appointed Malik Kafur, an Indian Musalman as his general. Khwaja Jahan, a brahmin convert was the Prime Minister of Sultan Firuz Tughlaq. However, the well-placed Indian Muslims always tried to conceal their parentage as they desired to acquire equal footing with their foreign counterparts.

In India the Muslims were divided into two classes namely the Umaras or nobles and the Ulemas or the theologians. The nobles were divided into three groups such as Khaas, Malik and Amirs. They enjoyed high offices in the state. The Ulemas or the theologians were assigned the duties of clergymen, teachers and judges. They exerted commanding influence on the government. The cultivators, the artisans, the shop-keepers, clerks, petty traders, servants, slaves etc. formed the lowest class of the Muslim society. During that period a very few Muslims lived in villages.

Slave System.

Slave system was in vogue. They were engaged in domestic works only. Both the Hindu and Muslims used to keep slaves. There were slave markets. The sultans provided them with proper education and training so that a good number of slaves rose to eminence.

Condition of women:

Though the Hindu women enjoyed respectable position in the family, participated in the religious ceremonies yet their position had deteriorated in the society. The practice of polygamy was prevalent among the rich. Sati system was in practice among the Hindus. Another social evil namely devadasi system was also prevalent among the Hindus. Widow Remarriage was not allowed. Women could not inherit property.

Muslim women also did not have an honored position in the society. The system of polygamy was in practice. Muslim women strictly observed purdah system. They were also deprived of education. However, in certain aspects, they were in a better position as compared to Hindu women. Unlike the Hindu women, they could divorce their husbands, remarry again and could claim their share in the paternal property. Sati system was not prevalent among the Muslim women.

Food and Dresses.

The Hindus were vegetarians whereas the Muslims were non- vegetarians. Liquor and opium was consumed both by the Hindus and the Muslims. Clothes made of silk, cotton and wool were used by the people. Various sports like hunting; animal fights, horse-polo etc. were their favorite pastimes. The Hindus and Muslims came in contact with each other and influenced each other in many respects. But during the Sultanate period the moral character of both the Hindus and Muslims had declined.

Art and Architecture:

During the Sultanate period, architecture made tremendous progress. This period witnessed the growth of Indo-Islamic architecture. This style of architecture was either purely Islamic or purely Hindu, rather it was influenced by both the styles. Several factors contributed towards the synthesis of Indian and Islamic style.

Firstly, the Muslim rulers had to employ Indian Craftsmen, architects and sculptors, who had applied the Indian style of construction into Muslim buildings.

Secondly, the Muslim rulers destroyed the Hindu temples and built the mosques, palaces and tombs out of the materials of the destroyed Hindu temple.

Thirdly, the rulers converted the Hindu temples and palaces into their mosques and buildings. Besides, there was a nexus between the two styles with regard to the fact that both the Indian and Islamic art were inherently decorative. The Hindus adorned their buildings with images of different gods and goddesses, whereas the Muslims decorated them with square, triangular, parallel, rectangular lines, teachings of the Korans inscribed in the Persian script. Thus, the Hindu style of architecture greatly influenced Islamic style because of these factors and gave birth to this Indo-Islamic architecture.

Delhi Architecture:

Sultan Qutb-ud-din Aibak constructed the Quwat-ul-Islam mosque of Delhi and Dhai-din-ka-jhompara mosque at Ajmer. Both these mosques bear the mark of Indian and Islamic art. The construction of Qutb Minar was started by Qutb-ud-din but was completed by Iltutmish. The purpose of this tower was that from it the Mauzzin could Summon the faithful to prayer.

It was named after the famous Muslim saint Qutb-ud-din who was famous as Qutb Shah. It is purely an Islamic structure. During the reign of Firuz Tughlaq lightning caused damage to the fourth story of this tower and he replaced it by two smaller ones and raised its height to 71.28 meters.

According to Percy Brown, “Qutb Minar as a whole is a most impressive conception, the vivid colour of its red sand stone, the changing texture of its fluted stories with their overlay of inscriptional bonds, the contrast between the alternating spaces of plain masonry and rich carving, the shimmer of the shadows under the balconies, all combine to produce an effect of marked vitality.

Iltutmish, besides completing Qutb Minar, also built a tomb for his eldest son known as Sultan-Ghori, situated at a distance of five kilometres from the Qutb Minar. He also built three buildings such as Hauz-i-Shamsi, Shams-I-idgah and Jam-i-masjid at Badava and the Atarkin-ka-Darwaza at Jodhpur. The mausoleum of Iltutmish was also another famous building of that period. Sultan Balban built Red Palace and his own tomb at Delhi.

Sultan Alauddin Khilji had constructed some beautiful buildings like Hazar Situn (thousand pillars), the fort and the city of Siri, the Jamaita Khan masjid at the dargah of Nizam-ud-din Auliya,

Alai Darwaza at Qutb Minar, the Hauz-i-Alai and the Hauz-i-Khas buildings. Of course, the city and palace were destroyed but the Jamait Khan mosque and the Alai Darwaza still exist and have been considered as beautiful specimens of Islamic art.

Unlike the buildings of slave and Khilji regimes, the buildings of the Tughlaq period lacked splendor. The buildings of the Tughlaq period were formal, prosaic and famous for puritanical simplicity. The puritanical attitude of the Sultans and the financial difficulties were two factors which had influenced the architecture, Ghiyasuddin built the new city of Tughlaqabad, east of the Qutb Minar, his own tomb and a palace.

Muhammad Tughlaq had built the city of Johan Panha, the fortress of Adilabad and some other buildings at Daulatabad. All the buildings built by him are destroyed, only the remains of two buildings, the Sathpalahpund and the Bijai Mandal, are found. The buildings constructed by Firuz Tughlaq were the new city of Firuzabad, the palace fort known as Kotla Firuz Shah within it, a college and his own tomb near Hauz Khas.

The best specimen of architecture of the Lodi and Sayyid Sultans are the tombs of Mubarak Shah Sayyid, Muhammad Shah Sayyid and Sikandar Lodi and a mosque known as Moti ki Masjid by the prime minister of Sikandar Lodi at Delhi.

Provincial Architecture:

A good number of provinces proclaimed their independence during the period of the later Tughlaqs. The rulers of these provinces were also great patrons of architecture. The provincial style was different from imperial style in some respects. The imperial architecture was more splendid than the provincial architecture. This was mainly due to the limited financial resources of the provincial rulers. Secondly, the local style also influenced the provincial style of architecture.

In Bengal the style of architecture which developed was the synthesis of Islamic art and Hindu art. The notable buildings of province are Adina Masjid constructed by Sikandar Shah at Pandua the Eklakhi Mausoleum at Hazrat Pandua, the Lotan Masjid and the Bari Sona Masjid at Gaur, the Qudam Rasul at Gaur built by Nusrat Shah, the Dakhil Darwaza at Gaur and the tomb of Jalaluddin Muhammad at Pandua.

The buildings of Gaur Tribeni and Pandua are made of bricks. Stones were very rarely used. The special features of Bengal style of architecture were the use of pointed arches on pillars, Hindu decorative designs and the application of Hindu architecture to Islamic art.

The rulers of Jaunpur were great patrons of art and architecture. The architecture of Jaunpur contained the features of both Hindu and Islamic architecture. The Atala Masjid constructed by Ibrahim Shah Sharqi, the Jami Masjid built by Hussain Shah, and the Lai Darwaza mosque are some of the beautiful specimens of provincial architecture.

The province of Malwa witnessed the emergence of a distinct style of architecture which had some resemblance with the architecture of Delhi. The domes and pillars of two mosques built out of the materials of Hindu buildings at Dhar were of Hindu form. The fort of Mandu has been considered as the beautiful specimen of provincial architecture. Some of the beautiful buildings of Mandu are the Jami Masjid, the Hindola Mahal, Asharfi Mahal, the Jahaz Mahal, the tomb of Hushang Shah and the palaces of Baz Bahadur and his queen Rupamati.

Before the advent of Turks the province of Gujarat had developed a beautiful indigenous style. After the Muslim conquest, Gujarat had produced the best combination of Hindu and Muslim architecture. The famous buildings of Gujarat are the Jami masjid at Cambay, the Jami Masjid and tomb of Ahmad Shah at Ahmedabad, the Tin Darwaza, the Ranika Hujra and Dholka Masjid. The city of champagne is adorned with many beautiful building and the most famous building among them is the mosque built by Mahmud Begarha.

The Sultans of Bahamani kingdom also constructed magnificent buildings within their territories. Some of the famous buildings are the mosques at Bidar and Gulbrga, the tomb of Muhammad Adil Shah known as Gol Gumbuz and the Chand Minar at Daulatabad.

Hindu Architecture:

In north India particularly in Rajasthan, the Rajput's could maintain their political existence. Hence in Rajasthan, the specimens of Hindu architecture are found. Rana Kumbha of Mewar had constructed the fort of Kumbhal Garh and the Kirti Stambha or the tower of victory in Chitor. Kirti Stambha has been considered as one of the remarkable tower in the country.

At many places forts and palaces were built by different rulers. Though the forts still exist, the palaces have perished. In the south, the rulers of Vijay nagar empire had built many beautiful architectural edifices. Unfortunately, the battle of Talikota devastated the kingdom and most of the beautiful buildings and temples of the kingdom were destroyed.

However, one among them which were survived is the Vithala temple built by Krishnadeva Ray. Fergusson has described this temple as the, “finest building of its kind in South India.” Thus, both the Indian and Islamic art had played pivotal role in the enrichment of Indian architecture. During the period of Delhi Sultanate architecture had made good progress.