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Paper: SEC-B (2): Art Appreciation: an Introduction to Indian Art

Topic: **Architecture under the Sultanate**

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Unit: IV. Indian art and architecture (c.1200 CE-1800 CE)

4.1: Architecture under the Sultanate

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4.1.1 Introduction

The medieval period of Indian history was a period of synthesis amongst various cultures. The traditions brought by the Turks and Mughals assimilated with Indian traditions and enriched the Indian culture. The assimilation of Turkish elements with Indian ones began almost immediately. The Turks coming from Central and West Asia, required places for living and worshipping. Hence they converted some existing temples into houses and mosques. In later years, when new constructions were made, indigenous craftsmen were employed. Hence the monuments of the Sultanate came to reflect a happy mingling of Indian and Turkish elements. The architectural developments under the Delhi Sultanate can be divided into –the first phase till the end of the Khalji dynasty. The second phase was of the Tughlaqs. The third was under the Lodis.

4.1.2 The First Phase (c.1206-1320 A.D.)

The first phase of the architectural developments under the Delhi Sultanate extended till the end of the Khalji dynasty. The most significant aspect of this period was the development of an Indo-Islamic style. The arch and dome which were commonly used by the Turks replaced the flat roofed structures of the Indians. The Turks constructed many lofty and impressive buildings by

providing them with a dome. The height of a square building was raised by fitting a dome on it. The arch and dome did away with the need of a large number of pillars to support the roof. They enabled the construction of large halls which could be used for assemblies and prayers. Such structural features necessitated the use of good quality mortar in the buildings.

The Turks brought new decorative styles. No human and animal representation was used since this was considered unIslamic. The buildings were beautified by use of geometrical and floral designs as well as verses from the Quran. This combination of decorative features was called ‘**arbesque**’. Besides this, the Turks freely used Hindu motif and features. The bell, swastika, lotus, water-pots are seen in the structures of the Delhi Sultanate. The Turks further decorated their buildings by using colour. Red sandstone was commonly used while yellow sandstone and marble was used to highlight some particular features.

The greatest architectural achievement of the Mamluk Sultans was the **Qutub Minar**. This tower symbolized the victory of the Turkish forces. The Minar was planned and begun by Aibak and completed by Iltutmish. It was dedicated to Sufi saint Qutab-ud-din Bhaktiyar Kaki, who was greatly respected by the people of Delhi. The Minar has four storeys, separated by projecting balconies. It gets its strength mainly from the skillful manner in which balconies have been projected, yet linked and their weight transferred to the main tower. It has bands of richly carved inscriptions from the Quran. It has tapering cylindrical flute shape which gives it the illusion of increased height.



**FIG 4.1 INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE QURAN CARVED ON QUTAB MINAR, DELHI**

The process of experimentation under the Delhi Sultanate is reflected in the **Tomb of Iltutmish**. The form employed in Iltutmish' tomb is Squinch Arch (rounding off the upper angles of a square room so as to form a base to receive an octagonal or spherical dome). Another significant architectural development was the appearance of True Arch for the first time in the **Tomb of Balban**.



**FIG 4.2 THE SQUINCH ARCH OF THE TOMB OF ILTUTMISH, DELHI**



**FIG 4.3 THE TOMB OF BALBAN MARKED THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF TRUE ARCH IN INDIA**

The Khalji dynasty initiated ambitious building projects. A monument occupying a key position in the evolution of Islamic architecture under the Khaljis was the **Alai Darwaza** erected in 1305 by Alauddin Khalji. This was southern entrance gateway to the Qutab Mosque. The Alai Darwaza contains a dome that for the first time was built on correct scientific lines. The Darwaza also contains many arches (keel). Alauddin also built his capital at **Siri**, the second of seven successive cities of Delhi. Unfortunately hardly anything of this city survives today.



**FIG 4.4 ALAI DARWAZA, QUTAB COMPLEX, DELHI**

#### 4.1.3 The Second Phase (c.1320-1414 A.D.)

The second phase of architectural developments under the Delhi Sultanate belonged to the Tughlaqs. By this time the Indo-Islamic style of architecture had emerged as an independent style. New features of Tughlaq architecture include rough construction, solid structures with sloping walls and use of batter to sustain the increased height and loftiness of the Tughlaq domes. However we do not find any batter in the buildings of Firuz Shah Tughlaq.

A second feature of the Tughlaq architecture was the deliberate attempt to combine the principle of the arch, lintel and beam in the buildings. Thirdly, the Tughlaqs generally did not use the costly red sandstone in their buildings but chose the cheaper and more easily available grey stones. The Tughlaq buildings came to have a minimum decoration, for it was not easy to carve the grey stones. A decorative device found in Tughlaqs was the use of Hindu motifs. The water pot and lotus was often used.



FIG 4.5 TOMB OF GHIYASUDDIN TUGHLAQ, DELHI

Ghiyasuddin's efforts in the field of architecture lay in the creation of the third city of Delhi, known as **Tughlaqabad**. It was the first of such great complexes – combining a city, fort and palace. Further the **Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq** marks a new trend in architecture. The Tomb was put on a high platform to give it an increasing height and skyline. White marble dome and red sandstone were used to beautify it. The dome's design is of the pointed or 'Tartar' shaped which later became characteristics of the Indo-Islamic style as a whole. The archway of Ghiyasuddin's tomb reveals a new trend by combining the two principles of support-the arch and the beam. The tomb looks like a fortress and has been described as 'warrior's tomb'. Ghiyasuddin's successor Muhammad Bin Tughlaq built the fourth city of Delhi named '**Jahanpanah**'.



FIG 4.6 THE RUINS OF JAHAPANAH, THE FOURTH CITY OF DELHI BUILT BY MUHAMMAD BIN TUGHLAQ

The greatest builder of the Tughlaq dynasty was Firuz Shah Tughlaq. In 1354 he built the fifth city of Delhi, **Firuzabad**. It contained a palace called Kushk-i-Firuz and a citadel called Kotla Firuz Shah. He also built **Hauz Khas**. He added two more storeys to Qutab Minar. According to a contemporary source his city had 8 Jama Masjids and 120 inns.

A new type of tomb architecture is seen in the tomb of Khan-i-Jahan Tilangani, a noble and prime minister in the reign of Firuz Tughlaq. Instead of square the tomb was octagonal in shape. Moreover, an earlier application of the *chhajja* or eaves board was also seen in the tomb.

#### 4.1.4 The Third Phase (c.1451-1526 A.D.)

The third phase of architectural developments of the Delhi Sultanate was under the Lodis. The Lodis developed the tradition of Indo-Islamic art further. Both the arch and lintel and beam method were used in their buildings. Balconies, kiosks and eaves of the Rajasthani and Gujrati style were also used. Another device used by the Lodis was placing their buildings especially tombs, on a high platform thus giving the building a more imposing look. In some cases gardens were laid out around the tombs. The Lodi gardens at Delhi are the finest examples of this.

The most significant structural alteration under the Lodis was seen in the **Tomb of Sikander Lodi** in the Lodi gardens at Delhi. Earlier the tomb was constructed solely on the thickness of

stone work. But in Sikander Lodi's tomb, the dome is composed of an inner and outer shell of masonry, with a distinct space between the two. This was the first application of Double Dome architecture. By this method the height of the dome was raised to present a loftier and more imposing structure. Later most of the larger domes of the Mughal period were constructed on this principle.



FIG 4.6 TOMB OF SIKANDER LODI, LODI GARDEN, DELHI

#### 4.1.5 Suggested Readings and Documentaries

Blair, Sheila and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250-1800*, Yale University Press.

Satish Chandra, *History of Medieval India: 800-1700*, Orient Longman

A.L.Srivastava, *Delhi Sultanate*, Agra College.

Architecture of Delhi Sultanate, ePathsala, a MHRD initiative, available at <https://youtu.be/f3Q2hCJQ9o>

