

Rulers and Buildings

In medieval period rulers built private and public buildings like forts, palaces, tombs, temples, mosques, tanks, etc

Engineering Skills and Construction

- Monuments provide an insight into the technologies used for construction.
- Between the seventh and tenth centuries, architects started adding more rooms, doors and windows to buildings.
- Roofs, doors and windows were made by placing a horizontal beam across two vertical columns, a style of architecture called 'trabeate' or 'corbelled'.
- Two technological and stylistic developments from the twelfth century are 'arcuate architectural' form and use of limestone mixed with stone chips that led to faster construction.
- Assimilation of Indian style with Persian style of architecture was prominent.

Buildings, Temples, Mosques and Tanks

- Temples and mosques were beautifully constructed because they were places of worship and meant to demonstrate the power, wealth and devotion of the patron.
- The largest temples were all constructed by kings. The other, lesser deities in the temples were gods and goddesses of the allies and subordinates of the ruler.
- Muslim Sultans and Padshahs did not claim to be incarnations of God but Persian court chronicles described the Sultan as the 'Shadow of God'.
- As each new dynasty came to power, kings wanted to emphasise their moral right to be rulers.
- It was widely believed that the rule of a just king would be an age of plenty when the heavens would not withhold rain.

Why Were Temples Destroyed?

- Since kings built temples to demonstrate their devotion to God and their power and wealth, they attacked and targeted these buildings when they attacked one another's kingdoms.
- In the early 11th century, when the Chola king Rajendra I built a Shiva temple in his capital he filled it with prized statues seized from defeated rulers.

Gardens, Tombs and Forts

- Under the Mughals, architecture became more complex. Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan were personally interested in literature, art and architecture.
- Babur got gardens called Chahar Bagh (four gardens) built in Kabul. They were further constructed in Kashmir, Agra and Delhi by Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jahan.
- Akbar's architecture is visible in his father, Humayun's tomb.

- Under Shah Jahan, Mughal architecture was fused together in a grand harmonious synthesis.
- The ceremonial halls of the public and private audience (diwan-i-Khas; diwan-i-am) were carefully planned.
- Shah Jahan adapted the Chahar Bagh technique in the layout of the Taj Mahal, the grandest architectural accomplishment of his reign.

Region and Empire

- As construction activity increased between the eighth and eighteenth centuries, there was also a considerable sharing of ideas across regions.
- In Vijayanagar, for example, the elephant stables of the rulers were strongly influenced by the style of architecture found in the adjoining Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda.
- In Vrindavan, near Mathura, temples were constructed in architectural styles that were very similar to the Mughal palaces in Fatehpur Sikri.
- The creation of large empires that brought different regions under their rule helped in this cross-fertilisation of artistic forms and architectural styles.
- The Mughals adopted the 'Bangla dome' in their architecture.

Between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries kings and their officers built two kinds of structures—the first were forts, palaces, garden residences and tombs and the second was structures meant for public activity including temples, mosques, tanks, bazaars, etc.

Merchants and others also carried out construction activity. They built temples, mosques and wells.

The technologies used in the monuments are unique. It requires sophisticated skills in making a large room with an elaborate superstructure.

Between the seventh and tenth centuries, architects started adding more rooms, doors and windows to building.

Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, the trabeate style (a style of architecture in which roofs, doors and window were made by placing a horizontal beam across two vertical columns) was used in building temples, mosques, etc.

The early eleventh century temples were decorated with elaborately carved sculptures. The temples had shikhara too.

From the twelfth century, two technological and stylistic developments came to be noticed—firstly, the weight of the superstructure above the doors and window was sometimes carried by arches. This architectural form was known as 'arcuate', secondly, limestone cement was increasingly used in construction.

Temples and mosques were built to demonstrate the power, wealth and devotion of the patron.

According to an inscription the Rajarajeshvara temple was built by King Rajarajadeva for the worship of his god, Rajarajeshvaram. Here, it is worth mentioning that the name of the ruler and the god are very similar. The king took the god's name because it was auspicious and he wanted to appear like a god.

But Muslim Sultans and Padshahs did not claim to be incarnations of god. However, Persian court chronicles described the Sultan as the 'Shadow of God'.

Rulers offered patronage to the learned and pious people.

Rulers also built tanks and reservoirs and got praise. Sultan Iltutmish won universal respect for constructing a large reservoir just outside Delhi-i Kuhna. It was called the Hazi Sultani or the king's Reservoir.

Kings built temples but they often looted them while attacking one another's kingdoms.

In the early 11th century when the Chola King Rajendra I built a Shiva temple in his capital he filled it with prized statues seized from defeated rulers.

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni attacked the temples of defeated kings and looted their wealth and idols.

Under the Mughal rulers, gardens, tombs and forts were built.

Babur was interested in planning and laying out formal gardens, placed within rectangular walled enclosures and divided into four quarters by artificial channels. These gardens were called Chahar Bagh, four gardens, because of their symmetrical division into quarters.

During Akbar's reign tomb architecture became important. His architects turned to the tombs of his central Asian ancestors, Timur. The central towering dome and the tall gateway (pishtaq) were important aspects of Mughal architecture, first visible in Humayun's tomb.

During Shah Jahan's reign, huge construction activity was carried on in Agra and Delhi.

Shah Jahan's audience halls were specially constructed to resemble a mosque.

He adapted the river-front garden in the layout of the Taj Mahal. Here, the white marble mausoleum was placed on a terrace by the edge of the river and the garden was to its south. Shah Jahan developed this architectural form as a means to control the access that nobles had to the river.

In the new city of Shahjahanabad that he constructed in Delhi, the imperial palace commanded the river-front. Only especially favoured nobles were given access to the river.

The Mughal rulers were particularly skilled in adapting regional architectural styles in the construction of their own buildings.

In Bengal, the local rulers had developed a roof that was designed to resemble a thatched hut. The Mughals liked this 'Bangla dome'.

In Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri, many of the buildings show the influence of the architectural styles of Gujarat and Malwa.

Superstructure: It refers to the part of a building above the ground floor.

Baolis: They were large stepped-wells.

Shikhara: The top-most point of the temple.

Arcuate: An architectural form in which the weight of the superstructure above the doors and windows was sometimes carried by arches.

Chahar Bagh: Four gardens.

Pishtaq: The tall gateway.

Pietra dura: Coloured, hard stones placed in depressions carved into marble or sandstone creating beautiful ornate patterns.

Diwan-i Khas or am: The ceremonial halls of public and private audience.

Hasht bihisht or Eight paradises: A central hall surrounded by eight rooms.