



Growth and development of Indo-Islamic architecture of India from early thirteenth century to A.D to fifteenth century A.D under Delhi Sultans

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Abstract

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in A.D 1206 a new phase ushered in the cultural development of India. The Turks who came to India towards the beginning of 13th C.A.D., had not only a well-defined faith in Islam to which they were deeply attached, they also had definite ideas of Government, Arts, and Architecture etc. The Hindus had also developed their own style, although their concepts and designs differed from those of the Muslims. A synthesis of these two types, however, was soon evolved due to a number of factors. The Muslims after firmly establishing themselves in India employed Hindu master craftsman for designing and constructing their buildings. These craftsmen naturally introduced the characteristics of Hindu architecture like solidity and grace, while adopting Muslim features like arches, domes, minarets, geometrical designs etc.

Keywords: Delhi sultanate, architecture, Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Lodi's.

Introduction

The Sultans of Delhi are known to have been great builders. They founded many new towns and built royal palaces, forts, public buildings mosques, madrasas, dargahs, serais and mausoleums. Most of the buildings constructed by them have either disappeared altogether or lie in ruins now, but a large number of beautiful mosques and tombs built by the Sultans or during their age have survived the ravages of time and constitute the living monuments of the Sultanate period up to this day. Of course, as regards the socio-cultural advancement of medieval India, the Sultans of Delhi made the greatest contribution in the domain of architecture. Their hectic building activity gave rise to what is styled as Indo-Islamic architecture¹.

The growth and development of 'Indo-Islamic architecture' during the Sultanate period took place in three phases. During the first phase were erected buildings at Lahore, Ajmer and Delhi by the Slave Sultans (A.D 1206-1290) and Khiliji monarchs (A.D 1290-1316); the construction of buildings by the Tughlaqs constitutes the second phase, quite distinct and advanced from the earlier one.

The construction of architectural monuments by the sultans of Delhi suffered a setback after the downfall of Tughlaq dynasty; by this time, the architectural activities were still carried by the Sayyid and Lodhi Sultans, but on a limited scale, because they had neither time nor resources to attend to the architectural activities. This marked the third phase of development of architecture during the period under review².

The First phase: architectural monuments of the Slave and Khiliji Sultans (A.D 1206-1320)

The Slave Sultans (A.D 1206-1290): The Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque at Delhi was the first building erected by Qutubud-Din-Aibak (1206-1210) in A.D 1197 after the fall of Prithvi Raj Chauhan in the Second Battle of Tarain in A.D 1192. The material for it was taken from some Hindu and Jain temples. The main attraction of the mosque is the red sand-stone building in front of the prayer hall consisting of a big central arch (6.7 meters wide and 16 meters high) with two smaller arches on either side. There is no doubt that the arched façade is based on the style developed by the Muslims in Persia, while the hand of the indigenous craftsman is clearly visible in the construction of these arches³.

Similarly, the mosque at Ajmer (A.D 1200), known as Adhai-din-Ka-Jhonpra, with its pillars, architecture, roofing, stones and the domes also built from the spoils of a Sanskrit College, is more austere and follows the Muslim conception of architecture. It was occupied by the Marathas on the decline of the Mughal Empire (A.D 1526-1857); it is said that they celebrated a festival there which lasted two and a half days; hence the name Adhai-Din-Ka Jhonpra. The other version is that it took Aibak only two days and a half to build the mosque hence the name Adhai-Din-Ka-Jhonpra⁴.

The building complex raised by Qutub-ud-din Aibak round about the Qila Rai Pithora (viz; the fort of Pritvi Raj Chauhan) was the first of 'the seven cities of Delhi' built by the Muslim rulers⁵.

Aibak also started the construction of world famous Qutub minar in A.D 1199 in memory of the popular Chisti Sufi saint Qutub-ud-Din Bhakhtiyar Kaki and it was completed by Iltutmish in A.D 1232. It was originally built to be a minaret for the muezzin (one who gives Azan) to call the muslims for prayer, but later on it became a tower of victory. Made up of red sandstone, with the artistic grafting of white marble in its higher reaches, the Qutub Minar is a master piece of Indo-Islamic technology and art. Its diameter is 14.32 meters at its base and about 2.75 mts on the top. The height of Qutb minar is 73 meters thus making it the highest stone tower in India⁶.

The tomb of iltutmish, built by the sultan during his lifetime near the Quwatul Islam mosque, is a beautiful monument of the Persian art. It contains a single chamber, made up of red sandstone with an outer layer of grey granite. It has arched entrances on three sides and a mehrab, flanked by two small arched entrances on the fourth side⁷.

An entirely different type of tomb was built by iltutmish on the grave of his son Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud; it is called the Sultan-Garhi and is situated in Malkapur at a distance of about three miles from the Qutub Minar. Its exterior is made of grey granite stone and white marble while its inner base is octagonal in form and the roof is supported by beautiful pillars with decorative capitals and arches of the Hindu architectural designs⁸.

Khiljis (A.D 1290-1320): There is no significant development during the half century which followed the death of Qutub-ud-din Aibak in 1210 and the rise of Khiljis in 1290. During this period we can perhaps take note of the mausoleum of Balban which he himself constructed at the south-east of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque. It lacks any charm or aesthetic appeals. Its only importance lies in the fact that for the first time we see the 'true arch' building with radiating voussoirs on the scientific system which the Muslims had learnt from the Romans⁹.

With the accession of Allauddin to the throne in 1296 a decisive advance in the field of architecture took place. Allauddin had the ambitious plan of extending the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque towards the north where he wished to raise another colossal tower double the height of the Qutub Minar. He started constructing it in 1311, but was only above the plinth, when he died in 1316. His grand design of enlarging the mosque was not fulfilled¹⁰.

However, the most famous architectural monument of Alla-ud-din Khilji is the Alai Darwaza. Rightly called 'a treasure-gem of Islamic architecture', it served as an entrance to the imperial campus. It is made of red sandstone, picked out by white marble stripes and enriched by calligraphic inscriptions and decorative carvings¹¹. Allauddin Khilji also built a new fort and the imperial township known as "Siri- 'the second of the seven cities of Delhi'. Here the Sultan built a magnificent Palace, Mahal Hazar Satun---- 'the palace of thousand pillars'. The entire town now lies in ruins and is located by the bare outlines

of an erstwhile extensive tank, called the Hauz-i-Illahi or Hauz-i-Khaas. The Jamaat Khana masjid (mosque) built within the premises of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya's tomb is another noteworthy building of Allau-ud-Din Khilji¹².

The Second Phase: Buildings of the Tughlaq Period (A.D 1320-1412)

The Tughlaq dynasty which succeeded the Khiljis ruled for about a century from A.D 1320-1412. They brought about a marked change in the style of architecture. In comparison to the heavily decorated buildings of the preceding centuries, the buildings of Tughlaqs were marked by massiveness and simplicity. The most striking example of Tughlaq style of architecture is the tomb and fortress of Tughlaqabad 'the third city of Delhi' built by Ghias-ud-din Tughlaq (A.D 1320-1325), the founder of the dynasty. The mausoleum nearby is a massive and austere structure enclosed within enormously thick walls. It is made of red sand stone with the exception of the dome and a few other portions which are of marble. The height of the building, including the finial is 80 feet. The finial resembles the Kalasa and Amla (vase and melon) motifs of the Hindus¹³.

The small fortress of Adilabad, situated in the neighbourhood of Tughlaqabad was constructed by Mohammad Bin Tughlaq (A.D 1325-1352). He also founded Jahanpanah-'the fourth city of Delhi'. The entire structure now lies in ruins with the exception of Sathpalah Band and Bijai Mandal. The Sultan had also the grandiose dream of building a new capital city in Daulatabad (Dewgiri), but all that remains are fortified walls of great thickness, with archways and towers on each end. There was to be a 'palace of thousand pillars' and also an artificial lake¹⁴.

Firuz Shah Tughlaq (A.D. 1351-1388), the successor of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq was also deeply interested in architecture. But his style was completely different from those of his predecessors. This was due to the prevailing conditions. Mohammad Bin Tughlaq's ambitious plans had emptied the public treasury; with the result Firuz could only undertake inexpensive projects. Thus, deprived if skilled architects and financial resources, Firuzian architecture completely lacks ornamentation, so dear to Indian masons, and has the general appearance of massiveness¹⁵.

Among his well-known buildings are four fortress cities-Jaunpur, Fatehabad, Hissar and Firuzabad. However his foremost achievement was the building of Firuzabad, 'the fifth city of Delhi' now known as Firuz Shah Kotla, on the bank of river Yamuna. The citadel was surrounded by high battlements and the main gateway was on the western side. The palaces and the private residences of the nobles faced the river¹⁶.

There is also a Jami Masjid (grand mosque) the largest of Tughlaq times. The remaining space is divided into square and rectangular courtyards which contained the hall of public audience (Diwan-e-Aam), gardens, baths, tombs, servants

quarters etc. besides this Firuz is said to have constructed several mosques. Mention may be made of Kali Masjid (Black-Mosque) constructed in 1370 A.D, Begampuri Mosque, Khirki Mosque at Jahanpanah (A.D 1375) and Kaaba Masjid. The sultan also built his own mausoleum and that of his Prime Minister, Khan-i-Jahan Tilangani, on a ridge called Hauz Khas. Tilangani's tomb is very distinctive, as it was the first octagonal tomb built in Delhi¹⁷.

The Third Phase: Development under Sayyid and Lodi Sultans (A.D 1414-1526)

The Tughlaq dynasty virtually came to an end with the sack of Delhi by the central Asian conqueror Amir Timur in A.D 1398 and the imperial throne was first captured by the Sayyid's who ruled from A.D 1414-1451 and then by the Lodhi's (A.D 1451-1526). These dynasties made hardly any significant contribution to the sphere of architecture. Nevertheless, Khizr Khan, the founder of Sayyid Dynasty, laid foundation of a new township, called Khizrabad, while his successor Mubarak Shah made a half-hearted attempt to raise yet another building complex, known after him as Mubarakabad¹⁸.

The Lodi Sultans also built a large number of tombs, mausoleums and gardens in the vicinity of Delhi. A new element in the architectural pattern of Delhi during this period was however, introduced in the time of Sikandar Lodhi (A.D 1489-1517), where, instead of one, two domes were built, one within another, leaving some space between the two. The other tombs were, however, square in plan, without any verandah. Some of these tombs are Bara Khan Ka Gumbad, Chote Khan Ka Gumbad, Dadi Ka Gumbad, Shish Gumbad, Poli Ka Gumbad and Moth Ki Masjid¹⁹.

Conclusion

It is almost definite now that the Indo-Islamic architecture made much progress and development under the Muslim Sultans of Delhi. The Indo-Islamic architectural activity had become almost universal throughout the length and breadth of the empire during the Sultanate period. But, with the decline and disintegration of the Sultanate, the architectural activities were also decentralized and shifted to the provincial capitals and the regional states which emerged on its ruins. It resulted in the diversification of the Indo-Islamic architecture, giving birth to a number of art styles with the manifestation of new features, distinct from those of the traditional Indo-Islamic architecture as had been patronized by the Sultans of Delhi from early thirteenth century to first half of fifteenth century.

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