

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF ANCIENT INDIA.

In the domain of art, the Gupta period reached a high level of excellence. The glories of the Gupta Art have been made permanent through the visible creations of its fine arts. The age witnessed an unprecedented artistic activity all over India.

The Greek influence on the Indian art manifesting itself in the form of Gandhara School of Art, moved on from Taxila to Mathura and Sarnath. But before reaching Patliputra, it completely disappeared in the Gupta period and art became entirely and fully Indian.

In the Gupta period different forms of art, sculpture, painting and terra cotta attained a maturity, balance and naturalness of expression that have for ever remained unexcelled. Techniques of art were perfected, definite types were evolved and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision in the Gupta Age. Some of the most beautiful and splendid monuments which represent the very sense of Indian artistic achievements, among which the Ajanta's cave take important place of Indian Art.

The wave of creative enthusiasm, the intensely religious purpose and the deep sense of aesthetic beauty behind it, that swept all over the

* Different historians have classified the temple in the different groups among them Dr. S. K.

country in the Gupta Age, are seen at their best in the architectural activity of this period which produced magnificent Brahmanical temples. Notably stupa-shaped temples were constructed in the Gupta period. A temple was built on a raised platform with a flight of steps in front. But most of the temples have not survived the ravages of time. * Dr. S. K. Saraswati has classified the temples into 5 classes on the basis of their different style of construction. In short, in the history of Indian architecture, the Gupta Age is the formative and creative period of temple architecture with subsequent development and elaboration.

A large number of high stone pillars were erected in the Gupta period. The pillars of the Gupta Age lacked lustreous polish of the Mauryan period. The Mauryan pillar was adorned with the figures of lion, bull, elephant, horse, the Ghamachakra, etc. But the Gupta pillar had at the top either the figure of a lion or image of Gauri, the vehicle of Vishnu.

A large number of Buddhist architectural buildings, Viharas, Chaityas and Stupas were constructed in the Gupta period. The rock-cut caves belonging to the Buddhist, Jain

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and Brahmanical sects are interesting aspects of Gupta architecture. The Buddhist caves with two sections are found at Ajanta, Ellora and Bagh. (2)

With the excavated temples of the Jains at Ellora, the rock-cut architecture of India terminated. Many of the excavated Chaityas, Stupas, Viharas, shrines and temples are outstanding monumental works of art of India.

A large number of images of the Gupta period, made of stone and bronze, have been discovered at different excavated sites in India and in the largest number in Sarnath and Mathura. The images of the Gupta period have certain salient features. The artists of the period also introduced certain innovations with reference to the Buddha statue.

In addition to the above referred religious architecture, secular architecture was also practised. It includes construction of forts, palaces and laying out of gardens, cities etc. Forts were continued to be constructed in the Gupta period also. Kalidasa, the poet of the age and the Panchatantra the popular work of the Gupta period, have referred to the extensive forts. Its walls were made of earth and bark.

brick and there were guard-towers and lofty gateways. Generally, the town-life existed within the fort. Chinese pilgrims, Fa-Hien and Hsien-Tsang, Kalidas' and Banar, in their literary works, have referred to the extensive towns and urban life of the period. Towns were laid out with roads and squares. Multi-storied houses were constructed with adequate facilities. Royal palaces with adequate facilities and gardens were erected. These were adorned with adequate facilities and gardens were erected. ~~It~~ with audience hall, Chitrahala (picture-gallery), Agnishala, Sangitshala, Natya Mandap (Theatre-hall), Nayaagriha (Court of Justice) garden etc.

The art of painting reached its height of glory and splendour in the Gupta Age. Princes, nobles and wealthy persons had picture-galleries in their houses. Kalidas in his works refers to the art of painting and the play Uttar Ramcharit refers to Arjun who imparted instructions in the painting. Terra-cotta formed another branch of fine arts of the Gupta Age. Painted terra-cottas were very common. Buddha

and Badhisatras, Tera esther figures were discovered at Kasia; heads of Buddha figures were also found at Nigru khas in Simla.

Like other fine arts of the period Jewellers art attained a very high artistic standard of refinement and elegance. Jewels and beads were studded artistically and aesthetically in ornaments which achieved a high standard of excellence in design and execution. The art of casting metals reached a degree of development which may well be regarded as wonderful. The iron pillar at Delhi, near the Qutab Minar, is another marvel of the striking metallurgical skill of the artists. The fine gold coins of the Gupta Emperors possess considerable artistic merit.