



Indo-Islamic Architecture

For Prelims: Characteristics and Main Features of Indo-Islamic Architecture.

For Mains: Indo-Islamic Architecture: History, Components, Characteristics, Examples.

What is the History Behind the Indo-Islamic Architecture?

- Islam spread to **Spain and India in the seventh and eighth centuries Common Era (CE)**. Islam came to India, particularly, with Muslim merchants, traders, holy men and conquerors over a passage of six hundred years.
 - In the early thirteenth century, **large-scale building activity began under the Delhi Sultanate**, established after the Turkish conquest of northern India.
- A noteworthy aspect of these migrations and conquests was that **Muslims absorbed many features of local cultures and traditions and combined them with their own architectural practices** which results in the modification of architectural elements.
 - Those architectural entities or categories **showcasing multiple styles are known as Indo-Saracenic or Indo-Islamic architecture**.
- **Hindus conceived manifestations of god everywhere** in multiple forms as part of their religious faith, whereas, **Muslims thought of only one with Muhammad as their Prophet**.
 - Hence, **Hindus adorned all surfaces with sculptures and paintings**. Muslims, forbidden to replicate living forms on any surface, **developed their religious art and architecture consisting of the arts of arabesque, geometrical patterns and calligraphy on plaster and stone**.

What are the Different Characteristics of Indo-Islamic Architecture?

Typologies of Structure

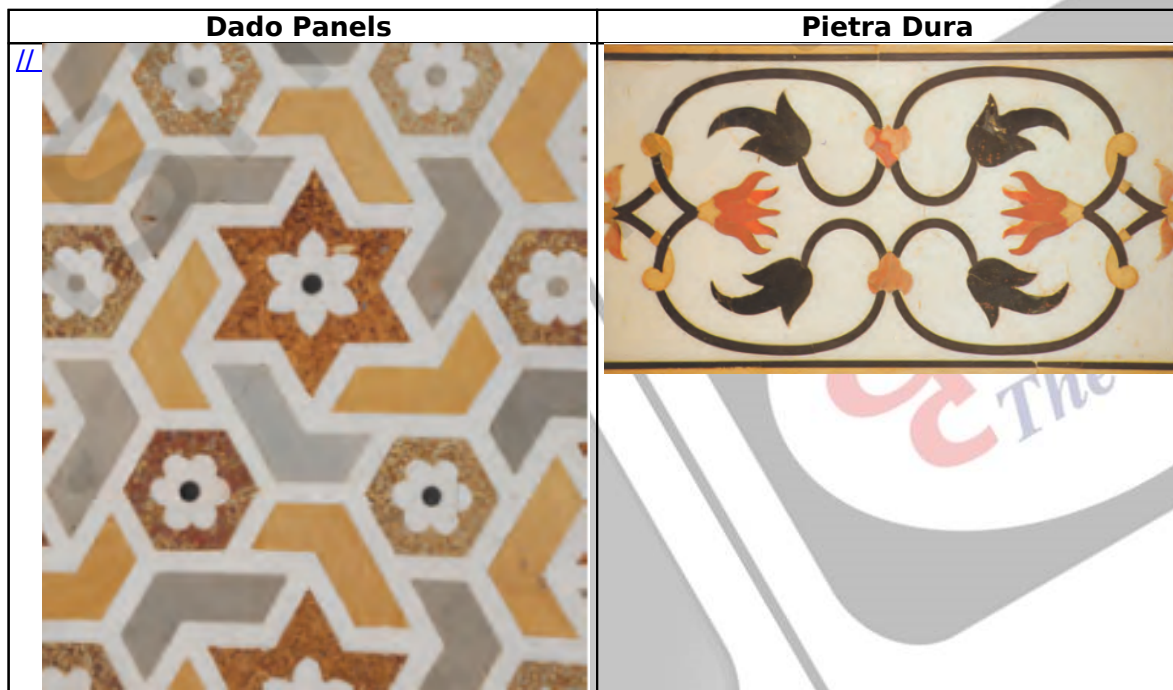
- Keeping in mind religious and secular necessities, architectural buildings like mosques for daily prayers, the **Jama Masjids, tombs, dargahs, minars, hammams, formally laid out gardens, madrasas, sarais or caravansarais, Kos minars**, etc., were constructed over a period of time.
- In spite of the **Saracenic, Persian and Turkish influences**, Indo-Islamic structures were heavily **influenced by prevailing sensibilities of Indian architectural** and decorative forms.

Categories of Styles

- **The study of Indo-Islamic architecture is conventionally categorised into:**
 - The Imperial Style (Delhi Sultanate)
 - The Provincial Style (Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, and Jaunpur)
 - The Mughal Style (Delhi, Agra, and Lahore)
 - The Deccani Style (Bijapur, Golconda)

Decorative Forms

- These forms included designing on plaster through incision. **The designs were either left plain or covered with colours.**
- **Motifs were also painted on or carved in stone.** These motifs included varieties of flowers, both from the sub-continent and places outside, particularly Iran.
 - Many designs of flower motifs decorating the ceilings were **also to be found on textiles and carpets.**
- The **lotus bud fringe was used to great advantage** in the inner curves of the arches.
 - The **arches were plain and squat and sometimes high and pointed.**
- Walls were also **decorated with cypress, chinar and other trees**, as well as with flower vases.
 - In the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries **tiles were also used to surface the walls and the domes.**
- Other decorations included **high** (three-dimensional look) **and low relief carving and profuse use of jalis.**
- The techniques of **tessellation** (mosaic designs) **and pietra dura were made use of for surface decoration** particularly in the dado panels of the walls.
- The **roof was a mix of the central dome and other smaller domes, chatris and tiny minarets.**



What are the Components of Indo-Islamic Architecture?

Minars

- **One of the forms of stambha or tower was the minar**, a common feature in the sub-continent. **Two most striking minars of medieval times are the Qutub Minar in Delhi and the Chand Minar at Daulatabad Fort.**
 - The everyday use of the minar was for the azaan or call to prayer. **Its phenomenal height, however, symbolised the might and power of the ruler.**

Tombs

- Monumental structures **over the graves of rulers and royalty were a popular feature of medieval India.** Some **well-known examples of such tombs are those of** Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, **Humayun**, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan in Delhi, Akbar and Itmaduddaula in Agra.
- Beginning with the introduction of Quranic verses on the walls, the tomb was, subsequently, **placed within paradisiacal elements such as a garden or near a body of water or both**, as is in the case of the Humayun's tomb and the Taj Mahal, **which follows the charbagh style** (a four quadrant garden with the four rivers of Quranic paradise represented).

- Such vast expanses of structured and stylised spaces **signify the majesty, grandeur and might of the person buried there.**

Sarais

- Sarais **were largely built on a simple square or rectangular plan** and were meant to **provide temporary accommodation to Indian and foreign travellers**, pilgrims, merchants, traders, etc.
- In effect, sarais were **public domains that were populated by people of varied cultural backgrounds**. This led to cross-cultural interaction, influences and syncretic tendencies in the local culture and at the individual level.

Structures for Common People

- One of the architectural features of medieval India was also a coming together of styles, techniques and decorations in **public and private spaces of non-royal sections of the society**.
 - **These included buildings for** domestic usage, temples, mosques, khanqahs (hermitage of Sufi saints) and dargahs, commemorative gateways, pavilions in buildings and gardens, bazaars, etc.

What are the Examples of Indo-Islamic Architecture?

The city of Mandu



- It is **located in Madhya Pradesh**. Mandu's natural defence encouraged consistent habitations by Parmara Rajputs, Afghans and Mughals. **As the capital city of Ghauri Dynasty (1401-1561) founded by Hoshang Shah, it acquired a lot of fame.**
- Mandu is a **typical representation of the medieval provincial style of art and architecture**.
- Provincial style architecture of Mandu is **regarded as too close to the structures of Imperial Delhi** to make a bold statement of local traditions.
 - A significant aspect of the **Indo-Islamic architectural experience was the lightness of the structures**.
- It was a **complex mix of official and residential-cum-pleasure palaces**, pavilions, mosques, artificial reservoirs, baolis, embattlements, etc.

Taj Mahal



- The Taj Mahal is located in Agra. It is the **finest specimen of Mughal architecture, exhibiting the most exquisite display of glory and richness.** It was constructed in memory of Shah Jahan's wife Arjumand Banu Begam or Mumtaz Mahal.
- It **had all the features of Mughal architecture** including the use of calligraphy, pietra-dura works, foreshortening technique, Charbagh style gardens and the use of water in the premises for decoration.
- **Some of the unique features are:**
 - The jaali work in Taj Mahal is lace-like and is extremely fine
 - The carvings on the marble were low relief

Gol Gumbad



- Gol Gumbad is **situated in Bijapur of Karnataka.** It is the **mausoleum** (group of tombs) of Muhammad Adil Shah (1626-1656), the seventh Sultan of the Adil Shahi Dynasty of Bijapur (1489-1686).
 - Built by the ruler himself, **it is a notable building despite being unfinished.**
- The tomb **is a complex of buildings such as a gateway, a Naqqar Khana** (Drum house), a

mosque and a sarai located within a large-walled garden.

- The Gumbad is a monumental square building topped with a circular drum over which stands a majestic dome, giving the building its nomenclature. **The building rises to a height of over two hundred feet.**
 - **It is the second-largest dome in the world.**
- Along the drum of the dome, there is a **whispering gallery where sounds get magnified and echoed many times over.**

Jama Masjid



- Large mosques, spanning huge spaces, were also **scattered across the Indian subcontinent during medieval times. Congregational prayers were held here every Friday afternoon.**
 - The prayer **required the presence of a minimum of forty Muslim male adults.**
- In medieval times, **a city had one Jama Masjid**, which along with its immediate surroundings became the focus of the lives of the people, **both Muslim and non-Muslim.**
- Such a mosque was large with an open courtyard, **surrounded on three sides by cloisters and the Qibla Liwan.** It was here that the **mihrab and the mimbar** (a short flight of steps used as a platform by a preacher in a mosque) **for the Imam** (the person who leads prayers in a mosque) were located.

Qutub Minar



- The Qutub Minar, **built in the 13th century**, is a 234-foot-high tapering tower **divided into five**

storeys. The minar is a **mix of polygonal and circular shapes.** It is largely built of red and buff sandstone.

- It is characterised by **highly decorated balconies and bands of inscriptions intertwined with foliated designs.**

Chand Minar



- It was built in the **14th century**, is a tower divided into four storeys. Now painted peach, its façade once featured **chevron-patterned encaustic tile work and bands of Quranic verse.**
- Although it looked like an Iranian monument, **it was the combined handiwork of local architects with those from Delhi and Iran.**

Humayun's Tomb



- This tomb, built in 1570, is of particular cultural significance as it was the **first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent**.
- It was **built under the patronage of Humayun's son, the great Emperor Akbar**.
- It is also **called the 'dormitory of the Mughals'** as in the cells are buried over 150 Mughal family members.
- The [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation \(UNESCO\)](#) recognized it as a [World Heritage Site](#) in **1993**.

Other Examples

- **Red Fort:**
 - Built by Shah Jahan in 1618 when he decided to move the capital from Agra to Delhi. It was the residence of Mughal rulers.
 - **UNESCO designated it as the World Heritage Site in 2007.**
- **Badshahi Mosque:**
 - Built **during the reign of Aurangzeb**. At the time of completion in 1673, it was the largest mosque in the world. It is **located in Lahore, capital of the Pakistani province of Punjab**.
- **Agra Fort:**
 - One of the **first constructions which started during the reign of Akbar**.
 - During the reign of Akbar, **more than 5000 women stayed in his harem inside this fort**.
- **Fatehpur Sikri:**
 - One of the highlights of Indo-Islamic architecture **was the creation of a new capital city by Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri**.
 - It has been **described as a frozen moment in history** as the buildings here represent a unique blend of Hindu and Persian styles.
 - **Some of the important buildings inside the city are as follows:**
 - Buland Darwaza
 - Salim Chishti's Tomb
 - Panch Mahal
 - Jodha Bai's Palace or Mariam-uz-Zamani's Palace

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/indo-islamic-architecture>

