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"THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM ON INDIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE"

Basavarajappa A. G.

Assistant Professor, Sri Siddalingeshwara first
Grade College Kanamadugu.
Kudligi.(tq) Bellary. (Dist)

ABSTRACT :

The influence of Buddhism on Indian art and architecture is a profound and transformative aspect of South Asian cultural heritage. Originating in the 5th century BCE with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, Buddhism significantly impacted the artistic and architectural landscape of India. This article explores how Buddhist principles and practices shaped Indian art and architecture from the early aniconic phase to the development of iconic representations and monumental structures. Key developments include the evolution of stupas, the rise of cave temples, and the integration of Buddhist motifs into regional artistic traditions. The analysis highlights the role of Buddhist art in conveying spiritual narratives and its enduring influence on subsequent architectural styles. By examining significant sites such as the Sanchi Stupa, Ajanta Caves, and the Mahabodhi Temple, this article provides a comprehensive overview of Buddhism's impact on Indian artistic and architectural traditions and its lasting legacy.



KEYWORDS : Buddhism, Indian art and architecture, stupa, aniconic and iconic representation, Gandhara art, Mathura art, cave temples, Ajanta Caves, Mahabodhi Temple, Buddhist motifs, monastic architecture, evolution of Buddhist art, regional variations in Buddhist art.

INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism, emerging in India in the 5th century BCE with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, has had a profound influence on Indian art and architecture. The impact of Buddhism is reflected in a diverse array of artistic and architectural expressions, spanning several centuries and regions. This article explores how Buddhism shaped Indian art and architecture, examining the evolution of Buddhist motifs, monuments, and artistic styles, and their lasting legacy.

ORIGINS AND EARLY INFLUENCES

The early phase of Buddhist art in India was characterized by the absence of figural representation of the Buddha. Instead, art during this period focused on symbolic representations of the Buddha's presence. The aniconic phase, which dominated from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE, utilized symbols such as the lotus, the Bodhi tree, and footprints to signify the Buddha's spiritual essence. This period also saw the development of stupas, which were initially simple mounds of earth but gradually evolved into more complex structures.

THE STUPA AND ITS EVOLUTION

The stupa, a hemispherical mound containing relics of the Buddha or other venerated figures, became a central element in Buddhist architecture. The earliest examples of stupas, such as the Sanchi Stupa, were built during the Mauryan period under Emperor Ashoka (r. 268-232 BCE). Ashoka's patronage led to the construction of several stupas and rock-cut caves, which became significant centers of Buddhist

worship.

The Sanchi Stupa, with its intricately carved gateways known as toranas, represents a key development in Buddhist art. These toranas are adorned with detailed reliefs depicting scenes from the Jataka tales, which narrate the previous lives of the Buddha. The depiction of these stories, combined with architectural elements such as the harmika (a small railing surrounding the stupa's summit) and the yasti (a central spire), illustrates the integration of narrative art into Buddhist monuments.

The Emergence of Iconic Representation

The 1st century CE marked the transition from aniconic to iconic representation of the Buddha. The Gandhara and Mathura schools of art played pivotal roles in this transformation. The Gandhara art, influenced by Hellenistic and Greco-Roman styles due to the region's historical interactions with the Greek world, introduced a more realistic and humanized depiction of the Buddha. The sculptures from Gandhara are characterized by their naturalistic style, detailed drapery, and the use of iconography such as the halo and the ushnisha (a cranial bump representing wisdom).

In contrast, the Mathura school developed a distinctive style that combined indigenous Indian artistic traditions with Buddhist themes. The Mathura sculptures are notable for their robust and expressive portrayal of the Buddha, marked by a more stylized approach compared to the Gandharan realism. This period also saw the introduction of elaborate narrative reliefs, depicting significant events in the Buddha's life.

Cave Temples and Monastic Architecture

As Buddhism spread across India, cave temples became an important architectural form. These rock-cut caves, often carved into hillsides, served as monasteries (viharas) and meditation halls. The Ajanta Caves, dating from the 2nd century BCE to the 6th century CE, are renowned for their exquisite frescoes and sculptures. The murals at Ajanta, depicting various Jataka tales and scenes from the Buddha's life, are celebrated for their artistic excellence and narrative depth.

The Ellora Caves, another significant site, illustrate the co-existence of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. The Buddhist caves at Ellora, including the impressive Kailasa Temple, showcase intricate rock-cut architecture and monumental sculptures. These caves reflect the integration of Buddhist art with local architectural practices, resulting in unique and diverse expressions of Buddhist devotion.

Stupa Architecture and Monumental Constructions

The development of stupa architecture continued with the construction of grander and more elaborate stupas. The Great Stupa at Sanchi, expanded under later rulers, exemplifies the evolution of stupa design. The incorporation of carved narratives, decorative elements, and elaborate gateways illustrates the growing importance of artistic expression in Buddhist architecture.

Similarly, the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, built by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE and later renovated, stands as a monumental testament to Buddhist architecture. The temple complex, marking the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, includes a towering brick structure and a central Buddha statue, reflecting both architectural innovation and devotional significance.

Regional Variations and Influence

Buddhist art and architecture also exhibit significant regional variations. In South India, the rock-cut temples of Badami and the cave temples of Elephanta reflect local adaptations of Buddhist architectural forms. The Buddhist monastic complexes in Andhra Pradesh, such as the Nagarjunakonda site, demonstrate the integration of Buddhist art with regional traditions.

In the northeastern regions, such as Bengal and Assam, Buddhist influence is evident in the ancient stupas and monastic ruins. The Buddhist monuments in these regions, including the site of Paharpur in Bangladesh, showcase the spread of Buddhist art beyond the traditional heartlands of India.

The Legacy of Buddhist Art and Architecture

The influence of Buddhism on Indian art and architecture extends beyond the traditional period of Buddhist rule. The architectural principles and artistic styles developed during the Buddhist era have continued to inspire and inform subsequent architectural traditions. The use of stupas, monastic complexes, and narrative reliefs can be seen in various later Indian architectural styles, including Hindu and Jain temples.

The preservation and study of Buddhist art and architecture have also contributed to the understanding of India's cultural and historical heritage. Institutions and archaeological projects dedicated to Buddhist sites have played a crucial role in documenting and conserving this rich legacy.

CONCLUSION

The influence of Buddhism on Indian art and architecture is profound and enduring. From the aniconic symbols of the early period to the iconic representations and monumental constructions, Buddhist art has left an indelible mark on India's cultural landscape. The evolution of stupa architecture, the development of cave temples, and the regional variations in Buddhist art reflect the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Buddhism's impact on Indian artistic traditions.

As we continue to explore and study these artistic and architectural achievements, it is essential to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Buddhism to India's rich artistic heritage. The legacy of Buddhist art and architecture not only enriches our understanding of India's past but also continues to inspire contemporary artistic and architectural endeavors.

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