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Decorative Forms

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- These forms included designing on plaster through incision or stucco.
- 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.
- The lotus bud fringe was used to great advantage in the inner curves of the arches.
- Walls were also decorated with cypress, chinar and other trees as also with flower vases. Many complex designs of flower motifs decorating the ceilings were also to be found on textiles and carpets.
- In the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries tiles were also used to surface the walls and the domes.
- Popular colours were blue, turquoise, green and yellow.
- Subsequently the techniques of tessellation (mosaic designs) and pietra durawere made use of for surface decoration particularly in the dado panels of the walls.
- At times lapis lazuliwas used in the interior walls or on canopies.
- Other decorations included arabesque, calligraphy and high and low relief carving and a profuse use of jalis.
- The high relief carving has a three- dimensional look.
- The arches were plain and squat and sometimes high and pointed.
- From the sixteenth century onwards, arches were designed with trefoil or multiple foliations.
- Spandrels of the arches were decorated with medallions or bosses.
- The roof was a mix of the central dome and other smaller domes, chatrisand tiny minarets.

- The central dome was topped with an inverted lotus flower motif and a metal or stone pinnacle.

Materials for Construction

- The walls in all buildings were extremely thick and were largely constructed of rubble masonry, which was easily available.
- These walls were then cased over with chunamor limestone plaster or dressed stone.
- An amazing range of stones were utilised for construction such as quartzite, sandstone, buff, marble, etc. Polychrome tiles were used to great advantage to finish the walls.
- From the beginning of the seventeenth century, bricks were also used for construction and these imparted greater flexibility to the structures.
- In this phase there was more reliance on local materials.

Forts

- Building monumental forts with embattlements was a regular feature in medieval times, often symbolising the seat of power of a king.
- When such a fort was captured by an attacking army the vanquished ruler either lost his complete power or his sovereignty.
- This was because he had to accept the suzerainty of the victorious king.
- Some examples of strong, complex edifices which still exercise the imagination of the visitor are the forts of Chittor, Gwalior, Daulatabad, earlier known as Devgiri and Golconda.
- Commanding heights were utilised to great advantage to construct forts.
- These heights gave a good perspective of the region, strategic advantage for security, unfettered and unhindered space to make residential and official complexes while simultaneously creating a sense of awe in the people.
- Other complexities woven into such topography were concentric circles of outer walls as in Golconda, so that the enemy had to breach these at all stages before getting in.
- Daulatabad had several strategic devices to confound the enemy, such as staggered entrances so that gates could not be opened even with the help of elephants.
- It also had twin forts, one within the other but at a higher elevation and accessed by a complex defence design arrangement.
- One wrong turn in the labyrinth or complex pathway could lead to the enemy soldier going in circles or falling to his death several hundred feet below.
- The Gwalior Fort was invincible because its steep height made it impossible to scale.

- Babur, who did not find much merit in many things he saw in Hindustan, was said to have been overawed at the sight of the Gwalior Fort.
- Chittorgarh bears the distinction of being the largest fort in Asia and was occupied for the longest length of time as the seat of power.
- It has many types of buildings including stambhas or towers to signify victory and bravery.
- It was replete with numerous water bodies.
- Innumerable acts of heroism have been associated with the principal people in the fort, forming the substance of many a legend.

Minars

- Another form 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.
- The Qutub Minar also came to be associated with the much-revered saint of Delhi, Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki.
- The Qutub Minar, built in the thirteenth 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 with some use of marble in the upper storeys.
- It is characterised by highly decorated balconies and bands of inscriptions intertwined with foliated designs.
- Chand Minar, built in the fifteenth century, is a 210-foot-high tapering tower divided into four storeys.
- Painted peach now, its façade once boasted of chevron patterning on the encaustic tile work and bold bands of Quranic verses.
- Although it looked like an Iranian monument, it was the combined handiwork of local architects with those from Delhi and Iran.

Tombs

- Monumental structures over graves of rulers and royalty was a popular feature of medieval India.
- Some well known examples of such tombs are those of Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, Humayun, Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, Akbar and Itmaduddaula.
- According to Anthony Welch, the idea behind the tomb was eternal paradise as a reward for the true believer on the Day of Judgement.
- This led to the paradisiacal imagery for tomb construction.
- 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 Taj Mahal.
- Surely though, such vast expanses of structured and stylised spaces could not have been intended only to signify peace and happiness in the next world but to also showcase the majesty, grandeur and might of the person buried there.

Sarais

- A hugely interesting feature of medieval India was the sarais which ringed cities and dotted the vast space of the Indian subcontinent.
- 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 which thronged with people of varied cultural backgrounds. This led to cross-cultural interaction, influences and syncretic tendencies in the cultural mores of the times and at the level of the people.

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