



The buildings were constructed for various purposes— individual, social, religious and political. But now the skills of the craftspersons of that time seem more important to the visiting people. Earlier buildings were made of mud-bricks or baked bricks hardly few of them survived. However, many of the buildings made of stones still survive and we can study them to know our pasts. But most remarkable is the iron pillar at Mehrauli, Delhi near the Qutb Minar.

The Iron pillar



The Iron Pillar

The inscription on the Iron Pillar at Mehrauli, Delhi tells us that it was made about 1500 years ago by a ruler named Chandra. This ruler probably belonged to the Gupta dynasty. It is made of iron, 7.2 m high and weighs over 3 tonnes. It is most amazing that the iron of the pillar has not rusted even in 1500 years.

Buildings in Brick and Stone

Stupas, artificial caves and temples were made in brick and stone.

Stupa : The word stupa means a **mound**. Early stupas were made of earthen mound. Body remains (such as teeth, bone or ashes) of the Buddha or his follower monks or things they used along with precious stones and coins were put in a small box. This box is known as a **relic casket**. It was placed at the centre or heart of the stupa. This box was then covered with earth. Later, a layer of mud bricks or baked bricks was laid on the top to protect the stupa from rain. And then, this **dome like** structure was sometimes covered with carved stone slabs. This practice began during the time of Ashoka 2300 years ago. For many years an umbrella was also mounted on top of the *stupa* as a sign of honour.



The Great Stupa at Sanchi

As a mark of devotion people used to go round the stupa and bowed. So often a path was laid around the *stupa*. This path was called the *pradakshina patha*. This path was surrounded with railings and provided with one or more gateways for entry. Both railings and gateways

were often decorated with sculpture. The Great Stupa at Sanchi, near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh was built over several hundred years. The brick mound dates about the time of Ashoka, while the railings and gateways were added during the time of later rulers.

A large stupa once existed in Amravati in Andhra Pradesh. It was 32 m high and 32 m in diameter. It was larger than Sanchi stupa. Many of the stone carvings for decorating the *stupa* were made about 2000 years ago.

Artificial Caves : Rocks were hollowed out to make artificial caves (for the monks and nuns and sometimes for the pilgrims and traders). Then, some caves were elaborately decorated with sculptures and painted walls. The two storey building was carved out of the rock surface. This was built for the Jain monks to live and meditate. The rooms are artificial caves. These regular shaped caves are very different from the natural caves like Bhimbetka (In present day Madhya Pradesh).



A Jain monastery from Orissa

Temples : In a temple the Innermost room was called the *garbhagriha*, where the image of the chief deity was placed. Here the priests performed religious rituals and devotees offered worship to the deity. Often a tower, known as the *shikhara* was built on top of the *garbhagriha*. It was made to mark this out as a sacred place. Most temples also had a *mandapa* (central hall) in front of the *garbhagriha* where devotees assembled for prayer and worship.

An early temple at Bhitargaon, Uttar Pradesh was built about 1500 years ago. It was made of baked brick and stone. It also had a *shikhar*. Some of the finest stone temples were made in Mahabalipuram and Aihole (for location see). Each of the temples at Mahabalipuram was carved



An early temple at Bhitargaon



Monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram

out of a huge, single stone. These temples are called monoliths (mono= single, lith= stone). In carving out such temples the stone cutters had to work from top downwards with a careful planning.

Deities such as Vishnu, Shiva and Durga were worshipped in these shrines. The Durga temple at Aihole was built about 1400 years ago.

Stages in Building a Stupa or a Temple

To build a *stupa* or a temple was very expensive. Only kings, queens or rich merchants used to build *stupas* or temples. First, the place for the *stupa* or temple was carefully chosen according to several norms of the learned men or priests. Then, good quality stone was searched out, quarried and transported to this site. Now, the rough blocks were shaped and carved into pillars and panels for walls, floors and ceilings.



The Durga temple at Aihole

Then every piece was placed in precisely the right position. Several designs were carved out in every piece while stories or messages were carved out on the walls and ceilings.

The further decorations of the temple always continued whenever the devotees paid for them. The names of the donors were inscribed on pillars, railings and walls. They included merchants, farmers, smiths, garl and makers, perfumers, etc. both men and women.

Paintings



A painting from Ajanta

The Ajanta caves located in Maharashtra are artificial caves. These were hollowed out of the hills over hundreds of years. Buddhist monks lived in most of them. They meditated and taught there. So, these were monasteries. Some of these caves were decorated with paintings about the life of Buddha. Unknown artists created these world famous splendid works of art. They used the colours made of plants and minerals. It is amazing that the colours are bright even after 1500 years.

Epic Books

Epic is a composition, especially poem, that tells a long story about brave actions and exciting events. Sometimes they included stories about gods also.


Two beautiful Tamil epics were discovered about a hundred years ago. The first epic *Silappadikaram* was composed by a Tamil poet Ilango, around 1800 years ago. It is the story of Kovalan, a merchant who lived in Puhar with his wife Kannagi. He fell in love with a courtesan, Madhavi. Later, he repented and left for Madurai with Kannagi. There he was wrongly accused of theft by the court jeweller of the Pandya king. The king sentenced Kovalan to death. Kannagi, full of grief and anger at the injustice, destroyed the entire city of Madurai. We can notice that the poet used the names of the famous trade centres, Puhar and Madurai, of the south. Thus, it shows the life in those cities at that time.

Manimekalai composed by Sattanar around 1400 years ago is another Tamil epic. This describes the story of the daughter of Kovalan and Madhavi. It seems that the writer wanted to extend the story of the first epic further.

Other writers, such as Kalidasa, wrote in Sanskrit. He is famous for his play, *Abhijnana shakuntalam*, poem, *Meghadoota*, etc. In *Meghadoota*, the poet imagines a monsoon cloud to be a messenger of a lover to his beloved in a distant land. He described the nature, the places and people in the way of the cloud.

Old Stories Told by the Sages

The Puranas, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the old Hindu religious stories narrated by the sages. The word *purana* literally means old. The



Puranas were composed in simple Sanskrit verse. They contain stories about gods and goddesses, such as Vishnu, Shiva, Durga (or Parvati) and the details of the methods of their worship. They also tell how the world was created and about the famous kings. They were recited in temples by priests to the people. Everybody was allowed to hear the Puranas.

The Mahabharata and Ramayana are two popular Sanskrit epics. The *Mahabharata* is about a war fought for the throne of the Kurus at their capital, Hastinapur. It was fought between the cousins, the Kauravas and Pandavas. Mahabharata was old but written down in the present form about 1500 years ago. The original creator of the *Puranas* and *Mahabharata* was the Sage Vyasa. The *Bhagavad Gita* was also included in the *Mahabharata*.

Ramayana, the another epic was composed by the Sage Valmiki in Sanskrit. The *Ramayana* is about Shri Rama, the eldest prince of Kosala. Ayodhya was the capital of Kosala. Shri Rama was sent into exile for 14 years. His wife Sita and brother Lakshmana also accompanied him. They met the sages and ordinary people in the forests. After some time, Sita was abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka. Shri Rama got her back after a fierce fight and returned to Ayodhya.

There are several versions of all these old stories, However, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are popular in their different versions in different parts of the subcontinent and even in the islands of the Eastern Asia.


Stories Told by Ordinary People

However, many fables told by ordinary people, other than the sages were popular. Jataka Tales and *Panchtantra* are the more famous collections of these stories. The most popular work written about 1500 years ago is, of course, the *Panchtantra*. It has inspired other animal stories like Aesop's Fables, written later, in other countries. *Jataka stories* about the Buddha were also written down about 1400 years ago. Parts of these stories are shown on the railings of the *stupas* and in cave paintings such as Ajanta.

Some of the stories from *Panchtantra* you may have read are : The cave that talked, the blue jackal, the hare and lion, the maid and the mouse, a monkey's heart, the priest and his goat, etc.

Books on Science

Around 1500 years ago, great progress was made in the fields of medicine, surgery, astronomy, mathematics and metallurgy, **Charaka** and **Sushruta** wrote books on medicine and surgery. **Varahmihira** wrote Brihatsamhita, a sort of encyclopaedia of all ancient scientific knowledge. **Aryabhata**, an astronomer and mathematician wrote *Aryabhatiyam*. He stated that day and night were caused by the rotation of the Earth on its axis, even though it seems as if the Sun is rising and setting everyday. He developed scientific explanation



for eclipses also. He gave an accurate formula showing the relation of the diameter and circumference of a circle. This formula is nearly as accurate as the formula we use today.

Around 1500 years ago Indian mathematicians invented a special symbol for zero. The numerals 0 to 9 were adapted by the Arabs who carried them to Europe. These continues to be in use throughout the world.

In Other Parts of the World

Manuscripts in early India were written on palmleaf and birchbark. The type of paper we use today was invented in China about 1900 years ago by Cai Lun. He beat plant fibres, cloth, rope and the bark of trees, soaked these in water, and then pressed, drained and dried the pulp so made to create paper. Even today, handmade paper is made through a similar process. The technique was known in Baghdad about 1800 years ago. From there it spread to Europe, Africa and Asia including the subcontinent.



Key Words

- » Relics : body remains or things used by Buddha or by his follower monks.
- » Stupa : an earthen mound, containing Buddha's or monks' relics.
- » Temple : house containing images of Hindu deities.
- » Epic : long poem describing brave actions and exciting events.
- » Purana : old stories about gods and goddesses and about kings .
- » Garbhagriha : the innermost room in temple where the image of the chief deity is placed.
- » Shikhara : a tower above the garbhagriha.

Time Line

- ◆ Beginning of stupa building (about 2300 years ago)
- ◆ Amaravati stupa (about 2000 years ago)
- ◆ Kalidasa (about 1600 years ago)
- ◆ Iron pillar, temple at Bhitargaon, Paintings at Ajanta, Aryabhata (about 1500 years ago)
- ◆ Durga temple at Aihole (about 1400 years ago)

SUMMARY

- ▶ Earlier buildings were made of mud-bricks or baked bricks, hardly few of them survived. However, many of the buildings made of stone survive and we can study them to know our pasts.
- ▶ Earlier stupas were made of earthen mound. The relics of Buddha are put in a small box in the heart of the stupa. It was later covered by brick or stone slabs.
- ▶ Temples from bricks and stones were made containing garbhagriha, mandapa and shikhar.
- ▶ The colours of the paintings about the life of the Buddha in Ajanta caves are bright even today.
- ▶ Epics in Tamil and Sanskrit and Puranas in simple Sanskrit were written.
- ▶ Stories told by ordinary people were collected as JatakaTales, Panchtantra etc.
- ▶ Books on medicine, surgery, astronomy, mathematics were written.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

- The Iron Pillar at Delhi was built about _____ years ago.
a. 2000 b. 1800 c. 1500 d. 1400
- The monolithic temple was made out of :
a. one hill b. one huge stone c. two stones d. three stones
- The story of Kovalan and Kannagi is written in :
a. Manimekalai b. Silappadikaram c. Jataka Tales d. Panchtantra
- These were the old stories told by the sages :
a. Puranas b. Silappadikaram c. Jataka Tales d. Panchtantra
- Who told the formula showing the relation of diameter and circumference of a circle ?
a. Aryabhata b. Charak c. Sushrut d. Sattanar

B. Fill in the blanks :

- Meghadoota was written by _____.
- _____ is a Tamil Epic depicting the story of Kovalan and Kannagi.
- Stories about gods and goddesses are found in the _____.
- Indian astronomer _____ told that the Earth moves round the Sun.
- _____ is the author of the Sanskrit Ramayana.

C. Match the following :

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1. Mandapa | a. Mound |
| 2. Shikhara | b. Central hall in front of the garbhagriha |
| 3. Pradakshina | c. Patha Place where the image of the chief deity is placed |
| 4. Stupa | d. Tower |
| 5. Garbhagriha | e. Circular path around the stupa |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

- The temple at Mahabalipuram are monoliths.
- The Iron Pillar in Delhi is located at Red Fort.
- The word stupa means a tower.
- Silappadikaram was composed by Ilango.
- Ayodhya was the capital of Kosala.

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E. Define the terms :

- Epic
- Purana
- Garbhagriha
- Stupa

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

- What does a stupa contain ?
- Give an example where monolithic temple is made.
- Who wrote the Tamil Epic Manimekalai ?
- What type of cave is Jain monastery from Orissa ?



5. Which goddess was worshipped about 1500 years ago ?

G. Answer these questions briefly :

1. What are monolithic temples ? Give one example.
2. What are the basic features of the stupas ?
3. Describe the Pradakshina patha of the stupa at Sanchi ?
4. What were the stages in building a stupa or a temple ?
5. What story is told in the Tamil epic Silappadikaram ?

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Describe the structure of stupas.
2. Describe the structure of the temples.
3. Write an account of the old stories told by the sages.
4. Describe different type of books that were composed around 1800 to 1400 years ago.

PROJECT WORK

1. List some uses of paper.
2. Give an order to the places described in this chapter in which you would like to visit them and why ?