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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MONUMENTS IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD

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Abstract

An ancient monument can refer to any early or historical manmade structure and/or architecture. Certain ancient monuments are of cultural importance for nations and become symbols of international recognition, including the ruins of Baalbek on Lebanese currency and the Great Wall of China on the Chinese currency. There are some countries that display ancient buildings as symbols on their coats of arms as a way to affirm national identity. In this way, ancient monuments in the modern world are used as icons to represent a country. The importance of ancient monuments extends to cultural heritage and how the people of a national or city identity themselves. According to British law, an ancient monument is an early historical structure or monument (an archaeological site) worthy of preservation and study due to archaeological or heritage interest. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 classified ancient monuments as scheduled monuments that are considered by the Secretary of State of archaeological, historical or artistic importance.

Introduction

India is truly a land of monuments. In whatever part of the country one moves, one finds numerous structures of temples, mosques, canopies and secular structures like tanks, step-wells and bridges scattered all over the region. This is an enormous wealth and undoubtedly contains great tourism potential. Similarly the sculptural wealth and other objects of culture such as coins, paintings, textile, arms etc. make India a veritable tourist attraction. Some part of this treasure has been successfully housed and displayed in the museums that today the urban townscape of the

country. As elements of cultural tourism this treasure trove has a special meaning to a tourism professional and needs to be documented properly and carefully. It also requires preparation of some kind of an inventory of these resources so that they are not lost to the Posterity. This is the basic purpose which has guided us in the preparation of this unit.

Monuments the Ancient Period

The monumental heritage of India dates back to the days of Harappan City culture - 3500 BC to 1500 BC. Since then there has been an unbroken sequence of the architectural works belonging to different

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cultural strata, the details of which may be found in the following Sub-sections.

Harappan Civilization

The information about the Harappan Civilization comes from the reports of excavations at places like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. The excavations at Harappa began in 1921. Very many Harappan settlements have been located and excavated since then. By now more than settlements have not been excavated. According to one estimate only 3% of the reported Harappan settlements have been excavated. Here we try to examine the details of the location and characteristics of some important sites that have been excavated.

Harappa

Harappa was the first site to be excavated in 1920s. It is located on the bank of the Ravi in Western Punjab. In terms of its size and the variety of objects discovered, it ranks as the premier city of the Harappan Civilization. The ruins of the city cover a circuit of about 3 miles.

Mohenjodaro

Mohenjodaro, located in the Larkana District of Sind (now Pakistan) on the bank of the river Indus is the largest site of the Harappan Civilization. Most of the information regarding the town planning, housing, seals and sealings of this Civilization comes from Mohenjodaro. Excavations begun at this site in 1912 show that people lived here for a very long time and went on building and rebuilding houses at the same location. As a result of this the height of the remains of the building and the debris is about twenty metres.

Kalibangan

The settlement of Kalibangan is located in Rajasthan along the dried-up bed of the river Ghaggar. Kalibangan was excavated in the 1960s under the guidance of B.K. Thapar. This place has yielded evidence for the existence of Pre-Harappan and Harappan habitations.

Lothal

Lothal is located in the coastal flats of the Gulf of Cambay (Gujarat). This place seems to have been an outpost for sea-trade with contemporary West Asian societies. Its excavator S.R. Rao claims to have discovered a dockyard here.

Town-Planning

Harappan towns had a remarkable unity of conception. This was suggested by the division of each town into two parts. In one part a raised citadel where the rulers were staying, in the other part of the town lived the ruled and the poor. This unity of planning would also mean that if you were walking on the streets of Harappa - the houses, the temples, the granaries and the streets themselves will be almost identical to those of Mohenjodaro or any other Harappan town for that matter.

The settlements of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan show certain uniformities in their planning. These cities were divided into a citadel built on a high podium of mud brick. The lower city contained residential areas. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa the citadel was surrounded by a brick wall. At Kalibangan both the citadel and the lower city were surrounded by a wall, streets ran from north to south in the lower city and cut at right angles. Obviously, this kind of alignment of streets and houses represents conscious town planning. In Harappa and Mohenjodaro baked bricks were used for buildings. In Kalibangan mud bricks were used. In settlements like Kot Diji and Amri in Sind there was no fortification of the city. The site of Lothal in Gujarat also shows a very different layout. It was a rectangular settlement surrounded by a brick wall. It did not have any internal division into citadel and lower city. Along the eastern side of the town was found a brick basin which has been identified as a dockyard by its excavator. In Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, the citadel areas contained monumental structures which must have had special functions. This is clear from the fact that they stood on a high mud brick platform. Among these structures is a famous 'Great Bath' of Mohenjodaro. This brick built structure measures 12m. by 7m. and is about 3 m. deep. It is approached at either

end by flights of steps. The bed of the bath was made water tight by the use of bitumen. Water was supplied by a large well in an adjacent room. There was corbelled drain for discharging water too. The bath was surrounded by porticoes and sets of rooms. Scholars generally believe that the place was used for ritual bathing of kings, or priests.

Major Styles

The ancient texts on Indian temple architecture broadly classify them into three orders – the Nagara, Dravida and Vesara which indicate a tendency to highlight typological features of temples and their geographical distribution. Nagara and Dravida temples are generally identified with the northern and southern temple styles respectively. All of northern India, from the foothills of the Himalayas to the central plateau of the Deccan is furnished with temples in the northern style. The Dravida or southern style, comparatively speaking, followed a more consistent development track and was confined to the most southerly, portions of the sub-continent, specially between the Krishna river and Kanyakumari. The term Vesara is not free from vagueness. Some of the texts ascribe the Vesara style to the country between the Vindhya and river Krishna but there are texts placing it between the Vindhya and the Agastya, the location of which is uncertain.

Shapes, Plans and Language of Temples

Each temple style has its own distinctive technical language, though some terms are common but applied to different parts of the building in each style. The sanctuary, which is the main part is called the vimana where the garbhagriha or the inner sanctum containing the main presiding deity is located. The part surmounting the vimana is known as the shikhara. The other elements of ground plan are: mandapa or pavilion for the assembly of devotees antarala, which is a vestibule connecting the vimana and mandapa and the pradakshinapath, circumambulatory passage surrounding these. The natmandir or dance hall and bhogamandapa were evolved subsequently in the

Orissan temples such as the famous Sun temple at Konarka, to add to the dignity and magnificence of the deities who were honoured in them. The exterior of the Nagara type is characterized by horizontal tiers, as in the jagamohan or porch in front of the sanctum of the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar, and the vimana is usually circular in plan. The Dravida style has a polygonal, often octagonal shikhara and a pyramidal vimana, which is rectangular in plan. A temple of the Dravida type is also notable for the towering gopurams or gate towers of the additional mandapas. From the days of Ganesh ratha of the Pallava times (seventh century) at Mahabalipuram (near Madras) to the gigantic Brihadishvara temple (c.985-1012 A.D) of the Cholas at Thanjavur, the Dravida style took many strides. We now mention some of the prominent temples according to their chronology and geographical spread.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Historical monuments are invaluable assets that connect us to our past, enrich our present, and will serve as beacons for future generations. Their preservation is a collective responsibility, requiring concerted efforts from governments, communities, and individuals alike.

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