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Cenotaph (Chhatri): An idea of art and culture with historical view in Northern India

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Abstract

The concept of 'cenotaph' has been inspiring and impinging practice in the shape of Art and Architectural mound building in Northern India. From ancient time numerous large monuments of stone been built for funeral and cult purpose. In India from 'Vedic era' andesite ceremony be designed in raising of a mound was an essential part of this system, result of the intermingling of the races and the culture traits of Northern India.

The historical development of the 19th century and 20th century an artistic building in the name of chhatri/ Samadhi being observed on the name of customs and religion. These cenotaphs have been keeping the aesthetics as well as utilities, qualities over the time periods. Fresco painting design, relief motifs, stone carvings, stucco designs and structural composition, art and architectural components which are memorial construction in the form of chhatri (cenotaph). The aesthetics is identified with the useful trend that seem up the experience of super consciousness. The artistic structure of the architecture and its aesthetics consider it the sphere of purely spiritual for humanity which establish its universal, historical, and cultural values. In modern time there is no practical utility of these chhatri building but still have aesthetics value as an artistic composition its own attraction. This paper will focus numerous artistic elements and its aesthetic value with the theory of Kant.

Keywords: Cenotaph, composition, history, design, aesthetics trends, traditional, architecture, painting

Introduction

The scope and sphere of fine and folk art is very broad and inclusive. It is universally acknowledged as precious legacies of the society and mankind. Indian culture is diverse and therefore rich in folk art. The diversity of natural wealth and climatic conditions are contributory factors in shaping the physical and mental character of the people. However, one aspect that is especially noteworthy and heart-warming is the form of their expression through the medium of monuments (Cenotaph) architecture. The architectural elements and designs of the Cenotaph buildings in the countryside, town, cities of northern India are a living example of art and culture. The architectural art of Northern India embodies a perfect combination of Fine Arts and Folk Arts with contemporary styles of adornment. A look at the artistic Cenotaph built over the last two centuries is enough to testify or prove the wisdom, intelligence, Personal creativity and individual ingenuity of our masons, artist, painters and engravers. Artistic buildings, wall paintings, motifs, sculptures and figures carved in relief had an intimate relationship with the culture of faith in northern India. Ancient Indian text related to 'Vastu' considered the fine arts and the folk arts as a significant link, in the chain of culture, aimed at establishing a sense of harmony, faith and feeling of well-being in society. Excellent description of these arts was incorporated in these ancient 'Vastu' texts and Purana's, especially the 'Vishnudharmottar Purana'.

Cenotaph (Chhatri)

The cenotaph is essentially a sepulchral construction which developed during the intervening period. Cenotaph (chhatri) being found in Northern India is a symbolic dome shaped structure with artistic elements and architectural elegance and have utilities for humans with aesthetic aspects.

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It is a mathematical and geometrical creation in proper order keeping out the chaos in the structure. It could be single story or double story. It consists of pillared hall and an adjoining space beside it with a dome at the top of it. It has the ideal elements and principals of the art and architecture. The manipulation of geometry and the creation of work in which aesthetics plays a greater role than anything likely to be found in a humdrum building. These buildings (cenotaph) are made in the memory of ancestor whose soul got departed but his presence in the heart is eternal. It is also a way of showing love, respect, and a symbol of remembrance for the departed soul or the loved one who got separated from the family which might be tragic or natural. Beside the architectural structure the cenotaph has spiritual aspects. Due to the dome shape above the structure the cenotaph connects the energy positively to the people who enters it. Moreover, it has been observed that these are constructed mostly by Royal families who considered it as a symbol of status because constructing a building with such grace is a matter of pride and wealth too.

Ideology

Man is mortal and mortality is the universal truth. The frightfulness regarding the death is universal among society. Man has scabbled deep into the mystery of severance of the earthly existence and only found out spurious things causing death. There are many myths and superstitions about the death of a person that where does the soul go after the cremation of the body, what about the existence after death, which is a philosophy of Egyptians that there is a life after death and need to provide all necessary things in pyramids for the dead's needs and peaceful life after death. In the Indus valley civilization, no trace of cemetery or burning place is found. The common pointed goblets or drinking vessel with ashes, bones and charcoal are found under the house. The remains of a burial with few bones found in vicinity of houses. Cremation took place at the bank of river or at some distance. Stone monuments were raised by the megalithic people for the spirit of dead. The Buddhists raised stupas which were representatives of Vedic mounds. Even the excavations at Ur (in southern Iraq) proved that certain Sumerians buried the departed body into grave and raised a mound over it. People in India still think that where the soul goes after death, even we do not have any scientific proof about the life after death or the soul existence. The artistic structure of the architecture and its aesthetics consider it the sphere of purely spiritual for humanity which establish its universal, historical, and cultural values. We as the member of family or the close ones often gets dream of the dead person, from here came the idea of giving tribute to the departed soul through this beautiful architectural building. The death of the loved one continuously plays in subconscious mind as a belief of soul and spirit. The concept of cenotaph would have matured in subconscious mind in collective myth of 'Death' so that a symbolic form is being made on the earth in the form of stone and prayers are performed for the departed person to set the soul in heaven.

Vedic literature spans over a thousand years and bears witness to a radical change in the way of life. The Rigveda contains many instructions regarding activities related to rituals and ceremonies.

The Yajurveda also includes important information about the rituals. The Atharvaveda has a rich record of rites and rituals. There are writings on funerals and liturgical details are covered at length.

Art, Architecture and Design

The Cenotaphs are made on the entrance/connecting roads/gateway of the village. The masons used raw and baked bricks, usually 'Lakhauri' bricks of size 4:2:1 size for the construction of these cenotaphs. The columns had various sizes, shapes, forms and length. The lower part of the column was generally square and the upper octagonal. The pillars had tetragonal, octagonal, hexagonal or square shape having lavish ornamentation in relief. The number of them vary from structure to structure. There are little domical canopies which are supported by four columns. Generally, a cenotaph was constructed in an Octastyle scheme. Handsome columns raised on lofty terraces and hence stupendousness and gorgeousness of the structure. Some cenotaphs had the arc recliner on all four sides. The dome of the Chhatra binds all parts of the structure in one and enhances its beauty. The dome like pillars and arches has many form, shape and size. There are oval, flat hemisphere conical, square type or many other types and onion shaped dome supported by pillars. The base is decorated with floral patterns of Tal leaves, Raksha leaves or Padma leaves or Lotus leaves. The entrance of the cenotaph is made impressive by providing Pravesh Mandap which stand on pillars. The interior is approached by way of steps. Mud was used for fixing bricks and plastering walls. The plastering of walls was done with a mixture of mud and beaten straws and after it dried, carving in relief-design was attempted. The use of lime mortar was most suitable for durability of the structure and as base for wall paintings. The pictorial depiction on walls was done in fresco and tempera techniques. The Fresco paintings were done on wet lime. The colours and lines of these paintings used to be gradually and simultaneously prepared and pressed while the plastered surface remain wet. In the process of gradual drying, the limewater left a transparent layer on these paintings that made them as enduring as the buildings itself. The cenotaphs bear reflections of a rich culture. In cenotaph, the impression of main entrance, interior and inner areas take adequate notice of the religious ethos, social beliefs and values prevalent in north India for long. The images of Ram, Krishna and Radha, Laxmi, Durga, Gayatri and others depicted in various shapes and form. The style of these images and icons of the Hindus is purely indigenous form. The illustrations are splendid and remind us of the colours of attires of rural folk and delicate drawings noticed about the painting in cenotaph in northern India largely reflect the colourful lifestyle of people. These are made in open spaces close to nature keeping in mind the environmental ambience. These structures are pleasurable being made taking care of proper ventilation, high ceilings and spacious. These are not only perfect for family gatherings but also serve as a good place for relaxation. The architecture is aesthetically pleasing as it consists of several big pillars holding the structure which are carved with beautiful designs of petals, leaves and rhythmic patterns. The dome above the structure also holds carvings of flowers and their repetition. Paintings related to the mythological stories are being represented in the dome of cenotaph. Paintings of animals in movement is also a repeated theme in these domes. The space between the ceiling and the pillars are decorated with paintings of flora and fauna in tempera. Fresco painting designs, relief motifs, stone carvings, stucco designs and structural composition stands with elegance. The area inside the dome or the ceiling is painted with the

figures of deities or the daily life of the people working in village. These paintings are decorated with some frames of geometric patterns or the plants and animals drawing. Each part of the cenotaph shows some different painting and bold figures which are outlined mostly with dark colour. The design is made in such a way that a person could walk 360degree in the chhatri as parikrama done in Hindu mythology in temples. Every cenotaph has something different and unique from other in painting and little difference in architecture, but central theme and architectural design is same.

Now a day we still have these structures which we called "Madhi" or "Samadhi" in local language, as a tribute to our ancestor which we call by name "pitter" and consider that he/she is still with us and help us in our work and values of mankind. Few people have strong faith in it while some believe it's a total myth. These structures are not highly decorated and do not have carvings, motifs, or paintings, these are simply made with two bricks joined together in triangle as triangle itself serves as a spiritual shape in some texts.

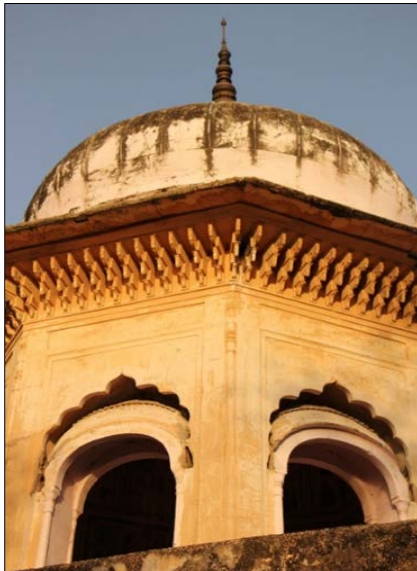


Fig 1: Structure of cenotaph



Fig 2: Paintings inside the dome



Fig 3: Paintings at glance

Conclusion

The cenotaph is not only a structure that serves culture, faith, and honour but also emotionally expressive and aesthetically valuable which could appeal to society. Cenotaph provides a place for leisure or relaxation for the passengers who passes through its way with proper sitting facility and an adjoining well for water.

Culture, is connected with the life of the people through activities which are economic, social and political. Social as by having small gatherings which are necessary to discuss the daily life challenges and decisions to be taken by the elders. Economic by serving people giving infrastructure.

Kant explains that an object should have interesting features, spiritual quality with the utility of the realm. So, cenotaph having its natural sustainability of the weather conditions.

Kant- Sublime is man's pride which emerges when faith help him to overcome fear. In Northern India Chhatri revealed faith over the ancestor's having positive universal human value of the phenomenon which have been thoroughly understood and utilized by society. The sublime of chhatri aesthetic property of cultural positive value for society but also possess an enormous unexplored potential.

Nowadays, the task of painting and creating relief or portraits on buildings has become a matter of forgotten practice of decoration but it has a greater significance attached to it in the earlier times. However, in this 21st century modernity has taken place in India. Every comfort is now a days available to mankind, be it hotels, restaurant, properly connecting roads, transportation, clean drinking water, banquet halls/ community halls for personal and public gatherings. Due to this development in society cenotaph has lost its utility and only stands as a building structure in dilapidated condition but its ambience, aesthetic feature still attracts the eyes.

Source: The Southern part of Haryana has been studied and pictures from the cenotaph of Rewari and Bhiwani has been taken from Canon 700D.

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