

Aesthetics in Architecture - A Historical Study

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Abstract: *Aesthetics deals with beauty or appreciation of beauty.¹ In other words, it is a philosophy behind a pleasing appearance. Apart from structural stability and materials, aesthetics plays a major role in the appearance of the building as any building is first experienced visually by an individual. Aesthetics is an important part of our day to life. Aesthetics has a rich past. Though the modern day approach towards aesthetics is inspired by history, there have been many modifications which have taken place from time to time. It is interesting to see how the aesthetics during ancient times was derived using minimalistic materials and construction techniques. This paper focuses on the aesthetics in the historic buildings in Pune during the Peshwa period. This paper studies and documents the aesthetical elements used in these buildings.*

Key words: Aesthetics, beauty , historic, Pune, Peshwa

'Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as to best accomplish a particular purpose'.²

I.Introduction

Architecture is a design process which involves planning and designing of buildings to be used for different purposes. Architecture deals with overall form and space of any buildings. Aesthetics forms one major quality of architecture.

Any building is first perceived visually. The facade, the material, external form, colour and texture creates and lasting impression on the person who sees it. A permanent image of the building , good or bad, is registered in the memory of the person who devours it visually first. The impression of any building can be created within minutes. One need not look at it for hours, one glance is sometimes sufficient to decide the beauty of the building.

Hence aesthetics forms an important element of design. Without aesthetics, the buildings will be lifeless. However, too much of aesthetics will make them look horrendous. Therefore it is very important to have the right balance of aesthetics in any building.

As per general definition, Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty³. It can

¹<http://www.architecture-student.com/architecture/aesthetic-components-of-architecture/>

² Charles Eames, as quoted in The Nature of Design, P. 13

also be stated as a set of principles followed by architects for the evolution of the end product that is aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

Aesthetics plays an important role in the life of human beings. Right from the food they eat, the daily products they use to the clothes they wear, human beings are driven by aesthetics. It has formed an integral part of their lives. Aesthetics brings art into the daily lives of human beings. So when it comes to buildings, apart from form and texture, equal importance is given to the look of the building i.e. aesthetics .

Aesthetics has been a part of human lives through pre-historic time. This was evident in the excavations of Mohendajodaro and Harrappa. The layout of the city to the construction of houses to the day to day items, all had an element of aesthetics in them. The day to day utility items were aesthetically made from locally available materials.

II.Aesthetics in the City of Pune

The city of Pune was developed first along the banks of the river Mutha. It is said that Kasaba peth was the first peth to evolve and settlement first took place there. The earliest houses were simple made with local materials.

Pune witnessed a period of prosperity after it was made the capital during the Peshwa period in around 1713 A.D. TO 1818 A.D⁴. The iconic Shaniwarwada was the first palace built by Peshwa Bajirao as his residence. This was a typical wada typology which was later seen in the houses of that period. Wada was a form of domestic architecture emerged in specific response to the prevailing social characteristics of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wadas were not merely residences but often contained administrative offices entrusted to standards. Under rule of Peshwas, the architectural character of buildings changed considerably in terms of its size, exteriors and internal elements. Some of the noteworthy buildings of that period are:

- i. Shaniwar Wada.
- ii. Bhudhwar Wada.
- iii. Vishram Baug wada.
- iv. Raste wada.
- v. Natu Wada.
- vi. Naik Wada.
- vii. Puranadre Wada.

The basic structure of wada was thick walls of brick enclosing a courtyard and a sloping roof. The wadas were either one or two storeys with timber used for roofs, doors, windows and floors. The wadas of Peshwas era consist of beautiful

³<http://www.architecture-student.com/architecture/aesthetic-components-of-architecture/>

Figure 1 The brick work pattern on Vishrambaug wada façade.

⁴ Parag G.Narkhede (2008) Changing Housing Types And Their Impact On Urban Design: CaseStudy Of Pune City, ITPI Journal

carvings on supporting columns and decorated brackets. Corbelling in bricks was done at floor to floor levels externally. The roofs were of both types flat supported over timber joists and slant or sloping covered with country tiles.

Though the wadas were simple in plan and structure, they were ornately decorated. The fronts of wadas were often ornately carved with a stylized peacocks, parrots or pigeons as later additions on exposed beam ends. Timber brackets supporting balconies were also carved in themes of exotic flora and fauna. The decorative torana or foiled arch at the entrance was protection against evil spirits and hence located at critical threshold⁵. All these features and typical character of old and native housing types are needed to be conserved to preserve the original character of Pune city.

III. Material and Methodology

The aesthetics of the historic buildings in the Peth area of Pune were documented by visiting the structures and recording the features through photographs and sketches. Reference material from books in form of notes and photographs were used for writing of this research paper.

The aesthetic qualities were studied under the category of basic elements, mainly:

- Unity
- Proportion
- Scale
- Balance
- Symmetry
- Rhythm

All these qualities are collectively important, and had an important impact on the design of these historic structures.

IV. Study of Aesthetics

To understand the various aesthetics elements used in historic structures in Pune, the buildings were studied. The aesthetic elements were identified, both on the exterior and interior photographed and analyzed.

Source: Jaymala Didee and Samita Gupta - Pune: Queen of Deccan, MM College of Architecture, Pune.
Gopal Krishna Kanhere-Emeritus Professor(2013)-Temples, Wadas & Institutions of Pune



Fig.2 Intricately carvings in stone in Shaniwarwada



Fig.3 Ganesh patti: The doorway with carved strip on the top with auspicious symbol to ward off evil.



Fig.4 Carved temple door of Siddheswar temple.

⁵ Gopal Krishna Kanhere-Emeritus Professor(2013)-Temples, Wadas & Institutions of Pune (P- 231-245)



Fig.5 Intricately carved bracket depicting monkey in Vishrambaug wada



Fig.6 The shikhar of Omkareshwar temple with its ornamentation

The structures selected were mainly wadas and temples which are built during the Peshwa period. Aesthetic elements like the brickwork pattern on the exterior wall, carved stone bases, ornamental brackets, carvings on door panels were documented through photographs.

In terms of aesthetics for the facades, various bonds and patterns in brick were used to decorate the exposed brick walls of the wadas. Stones were also highly dressed and skilled mason's were employed. Walls in the interiors were usually plastered and painted with painting depicting stories of deities. Frescoes were also painted on such walls. Timber was another material which was used extensively during those days.

Intricately carved timber columns with carved stone bases and ornamental timber brackets are found in many old wadas. Timber beams were simple with no carvings. The brackets had motifs of flowers, parrots or mangoes carved on them. The aesthetics of the interiors reflected a pleasing and ornate appearance. The brackets used on the external façade supporting the balconies were carved too with features of monkeys which is seen in Vishrambaug wada.

The shikharas of the temple was mostly in brick and stucco plaster. The doors and windows were made in timber

with fixtures of iron and carvings & decorations on the doors. Carvings on the door panels was very elaborate and had geometric or floral running motifs. The apex had a carved strip of wood called the Ganesh patti with the motif of Lord Ganesh. Windows too had carved wood panels.

Every structural element in these buildings had an aesthetic value in some form or the other. The aesthetic look of these buildings is still intact because of all these elements. They provide an historic character to the place since these aesthetic elements have vanished with the passage of time. These elements impart a sense of proportion, balance, rhythm and symmetry to the building. It also unifies the building by tying all the elements together. The carved motifs show how well the proportions were carved on the brackets or columns. Rhythm and symmetry was reflected in the brickwork pattern and the shikharas. Proportion and scale is evident from the size of doors and windows and the columns with stone base.

V. Conclusion

Over the years, the city of Pune has undergone many changes and acquired various characteristics. Aesthetics also has changed with change in the technology and materials. Though modern aesthetics are a far cry from what was in the historic buildings, the inspiration lies in the aesthetics of these historic elements. Many of the modern day aesthetic elements are a version derived from the old elements.

The timber carved brackets supporting the balconies have been replaced by MS brackets with curvilinear form. The stone masonry work has been taken over by stone cladding which is not actual stone masonry, but gives effect of the same. In place of carvings in stone, moulds made from plaster of paris (POP) are widely used.

These are some of the changes which have taken place over the years in the aesthetic elements. Though the new versions aesthetically pleasing, they lack the same beauty as was there in the historic buildings.

Aesthetics will always be an important factor in the appearance of any building, be it historic or contemporary. Though the historic aesthetic elements are fast disappearing, they always have been an inspiration and will be recreated in the contemporary buildings in some or the other form.

VI. References

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