

## **How far does architecture reflect prevailing art and culture?**

### **Discuss the idea that all patrons of architecture are self-aggrandizing.**

That art and culture have influenced architecture has been aptly indicated by history. Be it age old townships, large civilizations or temples, the connection that art and architecture have drawn with the existing culture has been profound. The Ajanta Caves built in India during 4 and 7th centuries in two phases typically presented the Buddhists' life styles and monasteries. The flawless architecture and the unique art carvings in the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, leave everyone speechless, even till date. The Ajanta Caves have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983. In the same district Ellora represents the epitome of Indian rock-cut architecture. These 34 "caves" are actual structures excavated out of the vertical face of the hills in the form of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain rock-cut temples and depict the teachings of these religions patronised by the kings of those times. Thus an entire culture is reflected in the structures and sculptures while glorifying the rulers at the same time.

It is very difficult to separate art from architecture as both go hand in hand, while they have changed and evolved, in response to the cultural changes. The Dutch artistic movement, 'neoplasticism' has evidently shown how supporters of De Stijl prescribed the reduction of the forms and colours used and simplified the visuals using the primary colours, black and white tones. The De Stijl principle initiated the relationship between the positive and negative components with the geometric rules and predominant usage of limited colours.

Developing a linear perspective and a naturalistic truth in the form of art was Renaissance; and related to this was the Bauhaus movement, another fitting example. This movement began in 1919, bridging the gap between art and the industry of crafts and fine arts. The Bauhaus school of thought brought about the truth of materials in the architectural structure, influenced the working architects to expose the materials hidden within the architectural piece, and thus contributed to a streamlined and modern appearance. Architect Mies Van de Rohe was influenced by the Bauhaus inspiration and designed two innovative steel-framed towers, enclosed in glass. He continued to refine his steel-and-glass style and soon designed one of his most well-known, weekend retreat, a clear box framed with eight exterior steel columns that were completely enclosed in glass, famously known as the 'Farnsworth House'.

The industrial revolution resulted in the growth of the metal industry and materials like steel and glass. The Eiffel Tower in Paris showed an innovative use of metals, implementing the impact of the industrial revolution on architecture at that time. The architects further industrialized by developing their styles into building the two most distinct, but intensely-conceived architectural pieces; the magnificent Paris Opera by Charles Garnier and the splendid Trinity Church by Hobson Richardson. The inspiring Esplanade Mansion at Mumbai, is India's oldest surviving iron structure. This external iron frame closely resembles the various buildings seen during the 19th century, as is seen in the London's Crystal Palace.

These examples clearly suggest that architecture has reflected the prevailing art and culture; however, Antoni Gaudi turned out to be one of the few exceptions. He remained loyal to his Catalan roots, using nature as an inspiration not only for the decor but also as a part of construction. His Casa Batlló was covered with lime mortar and a coating of multi-coloured broken crystals along with ceramic pieces. Gaudi was not insensitive to the change, but he developed his own individual style. But then again, it reflects the freedom that artists experience in expressing their art.

Flipping through the history books, one can see that grand buildings were built to show power. A prime example would be church architecture. Christianity, at first, wasn't accepted as a religion in the Roman Empire; however, when the tide turned in its favour, the Romans had to prove a point and therefore, built grand basilicas and churches like St. Peters. Furthermore, the Romans erected grand stadiums and monuments to show the world that they were a force to reckon with.

Such powerful and wealthy families, kings and even governments spent heaps of money to impress and leave their mark on the world. The Sri Ranga Pattana temple complex in India was built by its kings to show their temporal power. This illustrious complex with its seven Gopurams (Gates), each taller and more intricate than the other, has been one such example. More recently, the Guggenheim museum has had its patrons wanting to prove how much they were giving back to society. Elsewhere, the Burj Al Arab, with all its technological advancements and grandeur has towered over all to show its architectural superiority in the world.

It is apparent through the encyclopaedia of the ancient and recent times that architectural patronage has had a way of demonstrating status. Patrons do so as they spend a lot of money and put their prestige at stake. Architecture lasts for centuries and it is very human to want to leave one's impression behind.