

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XI · CODE 312

# Some Aspects of Indo-Islamic Architecture

CUET unit: Indo-Islamic Architecture (Sultanate, Provincial,  
Mughal & Deccani Styles)

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## Snapshot

- Islam arrived in India (7th–8th c. CE via traders/Sufis; 13th c. CE large-scale Sultanate building), and foreign forms fused with Indian sensibilities to produce Indo-Islamic / Indo-Saracenic architecture.
- There are four conventional categories of style — Imperial (Delhi Sultanate), Provincial (Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, Jaunpur), Mughal (Delhi, Agra, Lahore) and Deccani (Bijapur, Golconda).
- Key structural innovations (arches with voussoirs and keystones, true domes on pendentives/squinches), decorative vocabulary (arabesque, calligraphy, pietra dura, jalis, tessellation) and building materials (rubble masonry, chunam, sandstone, marble, polychrome tiles).
- Key typologies — forts (Chittor, Gwalior, Daulatabad, Golconda), minars (Qutub, Chand), tombs (Humayun, Itmaduddaula, Taj Mahal), sarais, Jama Masjids, and structures for common people.
- Detailed case studies cover Mandu (provincial), the Taj Mahal (Mughal apogee) and Gol Gumbad (Deccani).
- Bridges Class XI temple architecture (kefa106) with Class XII Mughal painting (lefa103), since several buildings discussed here also house the Mughal album tradition.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

NCERT opens the final Class XI chapter with a careful chronology. Islam reached India in the seventh and eighth centuries CE through Muslim merchants, traders, holy men and conquerors. Though Muslims had already begun constructing in Sind and Gujarat by the eighth century, large-scale monumental building activity began only in the early thirteenth century CE under the Delhi Sultanate, established after the Turkish conquest of northern India (NCERT §Intro, p. 109). By the twelfth century India was already familiar with monumental construction using trabeation — brackets, pillars and lintels — to support flat roofs or shallow domes; arches existed in wood and stone but could not bear top-structure weight on their own.

The structural revolution of the Sultanate consisted of importing the arcuate form. Arches were now built with voussoirs — series of interlocking wedge-shaped blocks —

and fitted with a keystone at the apex; true domes were now erected over square chambers by means of pendentives (triangular brackets in the angle of two walls) and squinches (arches spanning the corners). The combined effect was to permit large pillar-free interior spaces, transforming the typology of religious and royal buildings (NCERT §Intro, p. 109). The fusion of these imported Saracenic, Persian and Turkish techniques with Indian decorative and structural sensibilities is what NCERT calls Indo-Saracenic or Indo-Islamic architecture.

A short philosophical aside in NCERT contrasts Hindu and Muslim attitudes to surface decoration. Hindus believed in multiple manifestations of god and adorned surfaces with sculptures and paintings of living forms; Muslims, forbidden from replicating living forms in religious contexts, developed religious art using arabesque, geometric patterns and calligraphy on plaster and stone. This explains both the dense floral-geometric ornament of mosques and the focused use of figural painting only in secular Mughal courtly contexts.

Indo-Islamic typologies introduced during this period include mosques for daily prayers, Jama Masjids for Friday congregational prayers, tombs, dargahs (shrines of Sufi saints), minars, hammams (bath-houses), formal gardens, madrasas (theological colleges), sarais or caravansarais (traveller's lodges), and Kos minars (distance markers). Patrons, in descending order of investment, were rulers, nobles and their families, merchants, merchant guilds, the rural elite and devotees of cults (NCERT §Typologies, p. 110).

NCERT then sets out the four conventional style categories: Imperial Style (Delhi Sultanate); Provincial Style (Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, Jaunpur); Mughal Style (Delhi, Agra, Lahore); and Deccani Style (Bijapur, Golconda). Among the provincial styles, Bengal and Jaunpur are regarded as especially distinct; Gujarat borrowed regional temple elements including toranas, lintels in mihrabs, bell-and-chain motifs and carved tree panels. The fifteenth-century white marble dargah of Shaikh Ahmad Khattu at Sarkhej in Gujarat heavily influenced the form of subsequent Mughal tombs (NCERT §Architectural Influences, p. 111).

NCERT's section on decorative forms is dense with terminology. Designs were incised or stuccoed on plaster and either left plain or painted; the lotus bud fringe was used in the inner curves of arches; cypress, chinar and flower-vase motifs dominated panel borders. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, tile-work in blue, turquoise, green and yellow covered exterior walls; later, tessellation (mosaic) and pietra dura (pictorial inlay in semi-precious stones) appeared in dado panels, with lapis lazuli applied to interiors and canopies. Arabesque, calligraphy, high and low relief carving, and jali screens (perforated lattices) developed in parallel. Arch profiles evolved from plain and squat to high and pointed, with trefoil (three curves) and multiple foliations (many curves) appearing from the sixteenth century onwards. Spandrels — the triangular spaces between the outer curves of arches — were filled with medallions or bosses. Roofs typically combined a central dome with chhatris (cupolas on four pillars) and tiny minarets, the central dome topped by an inverted lotus and a metal or stone pinnacle (NCERT §Decorative Forms, p. 111).

Materials evolved across the period. Walls were extremely thick rubble masonry cased with chunam (limestone plaster) or with dressed stone. Stones used included quartzite, sandstone, buff, and marble; polychrome tiles provided exterior finish. From the seventeenth century, bricks were used in increasing quantity, giving greater design flexibility and producing increased reliance on local materials (NCERT §Materials, p. 112).

Forts symbolised the seat of royal power: their capture meant either total loss of power or formal acceptance of suzerainty. NCERT names four representative forts: Chittor, Gwalior, Daulatabad (earlier known as Devgiri) and Golconda. Commanding heights provided perspective, security and awe; Golconda has concentric outer walls; Daulatabad has staggered entrances and a labyrinthine pathway with twin forts at higher elevation; Gwalior's unscalable steep height overawed Babur according to his own memoirs; Chittorgarh — the largest fort in Asia — was the longest-occupied seat of power, with stambhas (victory towers) and elaborate water bodies (NCERT §Forts, pp. 112–113).

Minars were tall towers whose everyday use was for the azaan or call to prayer; but their height also symbolised the ruler's might. NCERT highlights two: the Qutub Minar in Delhi and the Chand Minar at Daulatabad. The Qutub Minar — built in the thirteenth century — is 234 ft high, divided into five storeys, mixes polygonal and circular shaft shapes, is built largely of red and buff sandstone with marble in the upper storeys, and is decorated with bands of balconies and inscriptions; it came to be associated with the saint Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. The Chand Minar — fifteenth century — is 210 ft high, four storeys, painted peach today, originally bore chevron tile patterning and Quranic bands, and was built by local architects together with craftsmen from Delhi and Iran (NCERT §Minars, pp. 113–114).

Tombs were monumental structures over the graves of rulers and royalty, signalling, in Anthony Welch's phrase, eternal paradise. Quranic verses were inscribed on walls, and the tomb was characteristically placed in a garden or near water, as at Humayun's Tomb and the Taj Mahal — both in the Chahar Bagh style. Other examples named include Ghyasuddin Tughlaq's tomb, Humayun's Tomb and Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan's tomb in Delhi, and Akbar's tomb at Sikandra and Itmaduddaula's tomb in Agra (NCERT §Tombs, pp. 114–115).

Sarais — built on a simple square or rectangular plan — ringed the major cities and dotted the subcontinent, providing temporary lodging for travellers, pilgrims and merchants and serving as public domains that produced cross-cultural and syncretic interaction. Non-royal structures included temples, mosques, khanqahs (Sufi hermitages), dargahs, commemorative gateways, pavilions, and bazaars (NCERT §Sarais and Structures for Common People, p. 115).

The Mandu case study introduces provincial architecture in detail. Mandu lies 60 miles from Indore at over 2000 ft elevation, overlooking the Malwa plateau and the Narmada valley. Its natural defence position attracted consistent habitation by Parmara Rajputs,

Afghans and Mughals. Mandu was the capital of the Ghauri Dynasty (1401–1561) founded by Hoshang Shah, and is famed for the Baz Bahadur–Rani Rupmati romance. The Mughals used Mandu as a monsoon retreat. Its Royal Enclave contains the Hindola Mahal (whose railway-viaduct-like buttresses give the audience hall the appearance of swinging — hence "hindola"); the Jahaaz Mahal (a two-storey ship-palace placed between two reservoirs, built by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Khilji as a harem retreat with watercourses and a terrace pool); Rani Rupmati's double pavilion; Baz Bahadur's palace; the Asharfi Mahal madrasa (now ruined); Hoshang Shah's tomb (with its majestic marble jali, brackets and toranas — a classic example of robust Afghan structure softened in hue, influencing later Mughal tombs); and the Jama Masjid of Mandu (with its monumental gateway, squat dome, red sandstone, a mimbar on carved brackets in the Qibla Liwan, and a lotus-bud fringe mihrab). Mandu thus combines Pathan austerity with the lightness of jalis and brackets, producing a distinct provincial intervention (NCERT §Mandu, pp. 116–118).

The Taj Mahal at Agra is the centrepiece — described as the apogee of medieval Indian architecture. Built from 1632 onwards by Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his deceased wife Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj took about twenty years and the labour of 20,000 specialised workers. The complex is entered via a monumental red sandstone gateway and laid out in the Chahar Bagh form — criss-crossed paths, water courses, pools and fountains. The tomb itself is placed at the northern extremity of the bagh rather than at its centre, in order to exploit the river-bank position. Four 132-ft tapering minarets stand at the terrace corners; the main body has a drum, a central dome and four cupolas. A red sandstone mosque stands to the west and an identical building to the east for visual balance. The marble was quarried from the Makrana mines in Rajasthan. The tomb structure is a square chamfered to eight sides with deeply recessed arches; the floor-to-roof elevation and the roof-to-pinnacle elevation are each 186 ft. The interior contains a crypt below, a vaulted octagonal tomb chamber above, and rooms at each angle connected by corridors; light filters through carved jalis. The ceiling is as high as the façade, made possible by a double dome. NCERT identifies four embellishment types: stone carvings in high and low relief; marble carved into jalis and graceful volutes; arabesques in pietra dura using yellow marble, jade and jasper; geometric tessellation; and calligraphy in jasper inlaid on white marble for the Quranic verses (NCERT §Taj Mahal, pp. 119–121).

The Gol Gumbad at Bijapur in Karnataka is the Deccani case study. It is the mausoleum of Muhammad Adil Shah (reigned 1626–1656), the seventh Sultan of the Adil Shahi Dynasty (1489–1686), and was left unfinished. It is a monumental square building topped by a circular drum and a majestic hemispherical dome of dark grey basalt with plasterwork. The complex includes a Naqqar Khana gateway, a mosque, and a sarai inside a walled garden. Each wall measures about 135 ft long; the dome is about 110 ft high and 125 ft in diameter; the tomb covers about 18,337 sq ft of uninterrupted floor — the second largest in the world (NCERT explicitly says second, not largest). The hemispherical dome rests on a square base, with the weight transferred to the walls below by pendentives formed by intersecting arches; new vaulting systems using arch-

nets and stellate forms cover the angles. The famous Whispering Gallery runs along the drum and amplifies sounds many times over. Four seven-storeyed octagonal minaret-like towers occupy the corners, housing the staircases that ascend to the top dome. A foliated drum cornice resting on corbels is a distinctive feature. The whole combines Timurid, Persian and local elements; the corner turrets recall the Qila-i Kuhna Masjid and Purana Qila in Delhi (NCERT §Gol Gumbad, pp. 122–123).

Finally, the Jama Masjid type — the large mosque for Friday congregational prayers, requiring a minimum of forty Muslim male adults. The Khutba was read in the name of the ruler with his laws of the realm. In medieval times each city had one Jama Masjid that became the focus of commercial, cultural and indirect political life. The plan is an open courtyard with cloisters on three sides; the Qibla Liwan in the west houses the mihrab (prayer niche pointing to the Kaaba in Mecca) and the mimbar (stepped pulpit) for the Imam (NCERT §Jama Masjid, p. 124).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Voussoirs	Series of interlocking wedge-shaped stones used to construct an arch	109, 130
Keystone	Central stone at the summit of an arch	109, 128
Pendentive	Triangular bracket in the angle of two walls connecting the dome base to its arches	109, 129
Squinch	Arch spanning the corners of a square chamber supporting the dome	109, 129
Arabesque	Ornamental design of intertwined flowing lines, leaves and flowers	126
Jali	Perforated lattice screen with arabesque or geometric patterns	128
Pietra dura	Pictorial mosaic in semi-precious stones; cenotaphs of the Taj	121, 129
Mihrab	Prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca	124
Mimbar	Stepped pulpit from which the Khutba is read	124
Qibla Liwan	Western wall of the mosque facing Mecca	124
Chahar Bagh	Square walled garden divided into four by water channels	115
Kos minar	Tower-shaped distance marker	110
Saracenic	West-Asian Muslim architectural style of 11th–14th c.	129
Sarai	Traveller's lodge / caravansarai	129
Dargah	Shrine of a Sufi saint	127
Chhatri	Cupola on four pillars with a dome/pyramid roof	126

Term	Definition	Page
Trefoil	Three-curved arch	130
Spandrel	Triangular space between outer curves of arch and rectangle	129
Medallion	Circular disc in spandrel of an arch	128
Tessellation	Mosaic decoration on walls and floors	130
Chunam	Limestone plaster casing rubble masonry	112
Batter	Slope in a wall	126
Maqbara	Mausoleum / tomb	128
Naqqar khana	Ceremonial drum-house over a gateway	128
Stambha	Victory or commemorative tower	113

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

The Plan of Jama Masjid (p. 124) is a high-frequency CUET diagram: candidates should label the Main Entrance on the east, the open courtyard (Sahn) with the ablution Tank, the Cloisters (Liwan) on three sides, the Aisles, the Maqsur Screen, and the Mihrab and Qibla Liwan on the west — note the strict orientation: Qibla in the WEST pointing toward Mecca. The arch-and-dome construction sequence (p. 109) is best memorised as a three-step evolution: trabeation (lintels and brackets) → arcuate form (arches with voussoirs and keystone) → true dome supported by pendentives or squinches.

The Qutub Minar diagram (p. 109) shows the five-storey tapering shaft with polygonal lower storeys and circular upper storeys, decorated balconies and inscription bands. The Chand Minar at Daulatabad (p. 114) has four storeys and was originally clad in chevron tile-work. The Mandu cluster diagrams (pp. 117–118) include Hoshang Shah's marble-jali tomb, the buttressed Hindola Mahal, the Jahaaz Mahal floating between two reservoirs, and the Jama Masjid with its squat dome and lotus-bud fringe mihrab. The Taj Mahal site plan (pp. 119–121) should be remembered for the Chahar Bagh layout, the off-centre tomb on the northern extremity, the four 132-ft minarets at terrace corners, the chamfered square plan extended into eight sides, and the double dome. The Gol Gumbad section (pp. 122–123) shows the square plan with hemispherical dome rising 110 ft on pendentives, four seven-storey octagonal corner towers carrying internal staircases, the foliated drum cornice on corbels, and the Whispering Gallery running along the drum.

### 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Qutub Minar (Delhi, 13th c., 234 ft, 5 storeys) vs Chand Minar (Daulatabad, 15th c., 210 ft, 4 storeys). NTA loves swapping the height, century or number of storeys.
- Daulatabad was earlier known as Devgiri (not Devagiri or Devagar) — easily confused with related spellings.

- Gol Gumbad — built by Muhammad Adil Shah, SEVENTH Sultan of the Adil Shahi Dynasty (1489–1686). The tomb is the SECOND LARGEST uninterrupted floor space in the world. NCERT does not say "largest."
- Provincial styles = Mandu, Gujarat, Bengal, Jaunpur. NOT Bijapur and Golconda (those are Deccani).
- Chahar Bagh / Charbagh style is exemplified by Humayun's Tomb and the Taj Mahal — not by Itmaduddaula alone.
- Mihrab = niche pointing to Mecca; Mimbar = stepped pulpit. Students often swap these.
- Chittorgarh is the LARGEST fort in Asia; Gwalior is famously unscalable (Babur was overawed). NTA often swaps these attributes.
- Pendentive = triangular bracket; Squinch = arch across a corner. Both support domes but they are not interchangeable.
- The Jama Masjid mihrab points WEST (toward Mecca), not east.
- Pietra dura is INLAY of semi-precious stones; tessellation is MOSAIC. NCERT distinguishes them.
- Voussoirs are the interlocking blocks; the keystone is the single central block at the apex.
- Hoshang Shah's tomb at Mandu is white MARBLE; its jali is celebrated.

## 2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Qutub Minar, Delhi	13th c., Imperial	234 ft, 5 storeys, sandstone + marble	113–114
Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki	13th c.	Sufi saint associated with Qutub Minar	114
Chand Minar, Daulatabad	15th c.	210 ft, 4 storeys, chevron tile-work	114
Chittorgarh fort	Medieval	Largest fort in Asia, with stambhas	113
Gwalior fort	Medieval	Unscalable height, overawed Babur	113
Daulatabad fort (Devgiri)	Medieval	Labyrinthine path, twin forts	113
Golconda fort	Qutb Shahi	Concentric outer walls	113
Tomb of Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, Delhi	14th c., Tughlaq	Imperial-style tomb	115
Humayun's Tomb, Delhi	16th c., Mughal	Chahar Bagh layout	115

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Tomb of Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, Delhi	16th–17th c.	Mughal noble's tomb	115
Akbar's tomb, Sikandra	Early 17th c.	Mughal tomb in Agra	115
Itmaduddaula's tomb, Agra	17th c.	Pietra dura precursor to Taj	115
Hoshang Shah (patron)	1401–1561	Founder Ghauri dynasty, Mandu	116
Hoshang Shah's tomb, Mandu	15th c., Provincial	White marble jali; influenced Mughal tombs	117
Hindola Mahal, Mandu	15th c.	Audience hall with batter walls	117
Jahaaz Mahal, Mandu	Ghiyasuddin Khilji	Ship-palace between two reservoirs	117
Jama Masjid, Mandu	15th c.	Squat dome, lotus-bud fringe mihrab	117
Baz Bahadur & Rani Rupmati pavilions	16th c., Mandu	Famous romance heritage	116–117
Shaikh Ahmad Khattu dargah, Sarkhej	15th c. white marble	Influenced Mughal tombs	111
Shah Jahan (patron)	17th c., Mughal	Builder of the Taj Mahal	119
Mumtaz Mahal	d. 1631	Empress, buried in Taj Mahal	119
Taj Mahal, Agra	1632 onwards, ~20 yrs	Apogee of medieval Indian architecture	119–121
Makrana marble quarry, Rajasthan	17th c.	Source of Taj marble	119
Muhammad Adil Shah	1626–1656, Bijapur	Buried in Gol Gumbad	122
Gol Gumbad, Bijapur	Mid 17th c., Deccani	Second-largest uninterrupted floor in world; Whispering Gallery	122–123
Qila-i Kuhna Masjid / Purana Qila, Delhi	16th c.	Influenced Gol Gumbad corner turrets	123



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## Practice MCQs

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## PYQ Alignment

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This chapter is a high-yield CUET Fine Arts topic — past papers (2023–25) have consistently drawn 5–7 MCQs per year, especially on the Taj Mahal (Chahar Bagh, embellishment types, dimensions), Gol Gumbad (Adil Shahi lineage, Whispering Gallery, pendentives), Qutub Minar (storeys, materials, saint association), terminology (mihrab, mimbar, voussoirs, pietra dura, jali) and the four-fold style classification (Imperial / Provincial / Mughal / Deccani). CUET 2024 included a NOT-correct Gol Gumbad question on the "largest vs second-largest" trap; CUET 2025 set a Mandu cluster match.



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