

History of Architecture and Culture III

Lecture 1

Birth of Christianity

Talking about the birth of Christianity, as everybody knows, Christianity was born in the Eastern province of Roman empire. It was carried on by missionaries to Rome, to the centre of the World Empire, that was Rome back then. See, if you look back in time, when christianity came into existence, it was almost like Christianity became alive. So basically what happened? At that point of time, there were a lot of people who decided to take up christianity and decided to take it up to different parts of the world and make it something like what it is today. It has become the most ruling religion of the world. So why? Why was it taken to Rome? Rome at that point of time was the most powerful kingdom and it was actually the centre of the world empire. Everything from art, music, culture, literature, architecture, everything grew in Rome became what it is in Rome and if you see Roman architecture, architecture wise, is one of the most prominent architecture in ancient times.

So if you see the various influences that Christianity had in the Christian architecture if you see. Basically, there were geographical influences. See as I said, when christianity came to Rome, Rome was one of the power capitals of the world, at that time Rome was like India of today. As in, there were in many religions, as in many idols and people had different different beliefs that was happening then and what happened was, when Christianity was growing, the Roman empire and the people of Rome protested, amidst that protest, amidst the war, amidst the human cry, Christianity grew and it became the most universal religion of the Roman empire. Christianity became the reason why Romans bound and became a part of one religious culture. So, different beliefs from different perspectives, the Romans decided to come together as one and become a part of one religious group to follow one art, one understanding under the name of Christianity. It unified Rome under one particular religion. So there were geological influences too. See geological influences were not direct as that of the geographical influence. The geological influence was pretty indirect. The Roman buildings and Roman architecture was one of the most famous form of architecture back then. They had very very versatile designs, very versatile design concept, very versatile planning concept, different detailing concepts. So at that time, the Roman buildings were the epitome of architecture, power, success, everything. So when, the Roman buildings were ruined, you can see in those pictures the ruins of the Roman buildings and these kind of buildings became the quarry from where the materials were taken or planning concepts were taken or maybe you know the elements were taken as such to form the Christian churches or the Christian architecture that later involved to what it became. So this particular geological influences or the building influences from the Roman buildings, this became the style. So for both the construction and the decoration or

anything, that became the basic concept of the first early Christian church development or architecture or whatever you call it. Moving on, climatic influences. As you know, architecture is very much influenced by the climatic aspects of a geographical place as in if you see Rome, Rome had its own climatic zones, climatic regions, it varied yes, maybe; from one part to another. But then had a particular influence in shaping up the architecture of Christian time, religious influence. So in history, there is no history that's as striking as that of the rise of Christianity. For any religion, every religion rose, every religion conquered but if you see the rise of Christianity, that was something very gigantic. If you see every aspect of society, Christianity conquered and became something that was much bigger than what was experienced before. Some of the greatest architectural monuments was created during this period as in this influenced the creation of certain architecture monuments which we call 'the monuments' of all times. At that particular time, Christianity and the Christian churches were purposed or it was made to shelter the worshippers who met at one particular place to pray or to call for an unseen deity. So at that time, the only basic understanding or the requirement of a Christian church was to create a space where they can accommodate so many people. So the social influences were there. So as I said, there were a lot of political influences, there were social outcries against the rise of Christianity but Christianity definitely rose from that but all these outcries had small influences in the Christian architecture when the Architecture was developed.

Historical - historical from Constantine to the death of Gregory, Christian architecture had a lot of changes, a lot of upliftment, a lot of making. Constantine was the one who decided to actually bring together Rome under the name of Christianity and Gregory was important because under him that was when christianity came to a standstill, Christian architecture came to a stand still. After that architecture never developed, after around two three centuries, the Christian architecture came to a stand still and there was no further advancement in that, it was kind of plain, what was there was there, nothing new came up at that particular point of time.

Church Planning

Moving on, the Church planning. If you talk about church planning, the first basic concept of church planning, happened as the Basilican concept. The Basilican concept of church planning if you see in the slides, the Basilicas were the Roman halls of justice and that served as the early Christian models of their churches. So as I said before, Roman architecture became quarry of architecture from where christian architecture was developed. The same way if you see the Roman halls of justice became the basic planning idea of a Christian church because that was big, huge, it has space, it could keep people inside, it could shelter people inside, that was what they took as a basic planning concept. The term Basilica applied to the Christian church from

the fourth century. So that was dedicated to the king of the kings. So that time the king was the main part of an empire, so the king of the king was somebody who ruled even the king, so that directly meant the Christian church. So that was how important the christian church became at that time of the Roman empire. So this was, a Christian church or a Basilica was usually erected over a burial site of a saint for whom that church was dedicated to. So if you see, as I said Christianity was taken to another level by the saints or the monarchs who preached christianity at that point of time. So at that point of time, those saints were the most important part of christianity and under each Saint's name, there will be one or two churches dedicated to them. These churches were actually built over the burial sites of those saints under whom this church was named. So there were like, almost thirty one Basilican churches in Rome alone. So the first church which we will be learning as an example today is, St. Clement, Rome. This church as you see in the picture, this is the St.Clemente's elevation, if you see. This was built 1084 AD - 1108 AD. The construction lasted for such a long period. So this had a Basilican plan of the Christian ritual and this was made to shelter a number of worshippers. It is as I said, rebuilt over an earlier building. This church particularly retains the original arrangement of the existing building of the 5th century. If you see the plan, there is an Atrium. This Atrium is covered by arches and that creates an imposing approach. Ambulatory is nothing but continuous Archades. This Atrium has a central fountain in the centre, it is for the water of Abusions Abusions is basically a christian function that has been happening, a ceremony that has been happening for ages. So this fountain is a fountain of abusion. If you see this part, this part is the church part and this part is the Atrium part. The Atrium part and the church part is separated by a Narthex. This is a covered Narthex. So after a Narthex, the Narthex opens into a big nave and the nave has on either side a clear storey of windows which provide lighting to the particular Nave of which I am talking about. On either side of the Nave, you have Aisles and these aisles are almost half the size of the Nave in dimension. So the Nave is the main part or the biggest hall of a church. If you see as I said, the Narthex opened into a Nave and it is lighted by the clearstory of small windows, you can see it here in this picture. You can see the storey of windows and here you have the aisles on either sides and in the centre you have the Nave. So in this semi circular altar, this part is where the Bishop sits. He took the centre position in the semi circular altar, so that he can face the Nave and face the place where all the members took places. So the members took their place here and the Bishop took place here. If you see, there is an Altar in front of the Bishop where the Christian ceremonies were conducted and the choir happened here. The choir is and was, still the most important of a Christian ceremony. Whichever ceremony happens, the choir keeps happening. So there was a canopy that was erected over columns, to support the altar below it. So if you see there is a central dome above the apse I said. This is the apse and there is a central dome which you can see in the picture. The Central Dome is the main part of this particular church because it is made of glass mosaic and that gives this fabulously crafted interiors for this particular church and there is a picture or a figure of

Christ in glory in the centre if you see here. There is timber roof which is supported by rafters to support this particular dome and this becomes a major part of the interiors of this church.

Moving on, talking about another church, we have St.Peter's in Rome which is also another example of Basilican concept of architecture. This was constructed in AD 330 and it was erected by constantine. This was erected on the site of St.Peter after whom this church is named. St.Peters today is one of the most famous churches in the world, if I can say, it is the most famous church in the world and that is not the same church I am talking about. This particular church that is present today, is actually made after pulling down the existing churches made by Constantine long back. So this particular church which is present right now is present on the site this particular church which I am talking about right now is existing. So if you see the plan, you can see again there is an Atrium and you have columns on all sides. There is a fountain in the centre. This particular Atrium is separated from the church again by either covered Narthex and you can see Nave in the centre and you can see two Aisles on either sides. The Aisles are double storeyed here, that is the difference and the double storeyed aisles have clear storeys on all sides which gives light to the centre Nave and there is transept on the other side. This is where the apse is. The difference is this apse is where the Pope sits. The pope being the highest power in Christianity after God, he sits in St.Peter's room and he faces the East and he faces the altar towards the Eastern side.

Byzantine Architecture

The next style of architecture that developed after this is the Byzantine architecture. The Byzantium, renamed Constantinople. Byzantium was renamed Constantinople after Constantine, its imperial founder and was inaugurated the capital of Roman empire in AD 330. The constantinople had no good building stones, so the local materials like clay, bricks, rubble, all those were used as construction material for the Byzantine architecture which is a little different from what happened in the Basilican concept of architecture. So the practice of placing many domes over a building came into existence in the Byzantine type of architecture. If you see in the previous Basilican concept which we discussed before, there was a dome but then there was a single dome but if you see in this kind of architecture, there were multiple domes over one single building.

The first example which we will be seeing in the Byzantine architecture is St.Vitale, Ravenna. This was made in AD 526 - 541. If you see this is the church which I am talking about. It was founded by Justinian to commemorate his recovery of Ravenna. This church represents an extreme Byzantine influence. You can see its a Byzantine church, if you know Byzantine architecture. Basically the plan of this church is an Octagon. There are two concentric octagons and the centre one, the inner one being 54 feet 9 inches in width and the outer one being 115 feet in width. So if you see the upside chances opens to the apse area and the other sites if you

have, you can see there will be semi circular arches on all sides. So these arches form these small pendentives on which the dome is rested. The pendentives are the small spaces formed when two arches collide. If you see this is a sensitive and these are arches and on this rests the big dome of the church. Specifically, this dome is different from other domes of other churches because this was made by earthen pots fitted on each other and that brings the lightness of the structure and that was why this dome is particularly famous, particularly different from other Byzantine architecture churches. The interiors are remarkably calm, if you see the exteriors, it is very simple but the interiors are remarkably carved with capitals and mosaic lined walls. It is very rich in the interiors and very simple when it comes to the exteriors. At the centre of the Apse if you see, you can see the figure of Christ as your globe and the exteriors are large thick bricks with thin mortar joints.

The next church which I am going to talk about is the Church of the divine Wisdom or Hagia Sophia. Hagia Sophia today is a very famous mosque and Hagia Sophia then was a very famous church, that itself shows how different architecture, different religion kind of intervened, intertwined, it had very similar features. If you see there was a time when both the architectures were pretty similar. Like what they wanted was the same. So, the architectural concepts if you see, the Roman architecture gave rise to the Christian architecture, that slowly evolved into Islamic architecture. So, Hagia Sophia is one example which can actually tell you that, that point where both the architecture merged because then it served as a church and now it is one of the most famous mosques in the world.

Hagia Sophia as you all know it is in Constantinople and its also called the Church of divine wisdom. It was built between AD 532 - 537. It was built by the order of Justinian by the architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus. Basically the reason why Hagia Sophia is so famous is because of the number of domes it has. If you see, you have the Atrium with marble columns around which gives way to two Narthex. Yes, this church has two different Narthex, one is the outer Narthex and the other is the inner Narthex. The Atrium if you see is 220 ft x 30 ft in dimension. The Narthex if you see has two floors, the upper floor has the gallery and the below floor gives way to the Nave. So what you see here, you can see there is a huge dome in the centre and there smaller domes on the sides. So there are two principle semi domes, in the East and in the west and it abends against each other for the great supporting arches and that forms the Buttress. Buttress is a structure made of stone or brick which supports against the wall and that particular Buttress gives support for the wall. So the monumental interiors for the Hagia Sophia if you talk about, it has four semi circular arches. You can see upon which one huge dome is rested which is 180 feet above the ground and it is 107 ft in diameter. The whole area is enclosed by semi domes. If you see, these are semi domes and forming one oval nave. The nave of this church is oval in shape. you can see. The first floor

has the women's gallery and below you have the arcades and the nave. The aisles are there on two sides and actually, the reason why the plan is almost a square is because of the introduction of these aisles around these naves. So if you see, the dome is constructed with bricks and has mortar joints of almost the same thickness as that of a brick. The walls and floors are laid with mosaics and the columns are of many colours and that is why the interiors of Hagia Sophia you see is very very flashy and very exquisite compared to other churches. Till that period no church had as an exquisite interior as that of Hagia Sophia. So there are columns of bronze rings encircling them and ionic volutes above them. If you see below the particular dome, you have 40 small windows, these small windows give lighting and light and shadow affect the nave of this particular church, that is the best part about this church and this is considered to be the masterpiece of Byzantine architecture of all times.

Moving on, the last church which we will be discussing in this particular episode today is, St. Mark's church in Venice. St. Mark's church is not only the most important church of Venice. St. Mark's is the landmark of Venetian architecture. This was constructed between AD 1042 - AD 1071 and it reflects the art of Byzantine so much that the Venetian architecture itself was influenced from this. So if you see, the facade of St. Mark's is very much different from the facade of other Byzantine churches that you will see. It has very glittering facades, very exquisitely carved, it is very different from the simple and plain facades of the other Byzantine churches. If you see, in front of St. Mark's you have a vast open space made of marble and this becomes like the public atrium to the church and the particular church which I am talking about faces the Piazza of San Marco. The Piazza of San Marco is very important because it is the most important market place of Venice. This church stands on the site of the original Basilican church of the same name which was founded to invite or receive the body of St. Mark's in AD 864. That particular church was brought down to make this particular church that is existing right now and the plan was completely modified and that resembled the Church of Apostles in Constantinople. If you see, the plan is basically the plan of a cross and it has a central dome which is 43ft in diameter which you can see here, that is the central dome and there is a dome over each arm of the cross. There is a dome here, dome here, so there are that many domes above the church and the church is exactly square in plan other than that after you bring in all the Archives and everything. The church plan is exactly square in shape. As I said, the exterior is clad with coloured mosaic panels and the interiors are gorgeously decorated with coloured marbles and glass mosaics. The difference between this particular church from other churches is that, there is a lot of influence from other foreign lands from this particular church and that is why this particular church forms as a transition of the previous Byzantine architecture to the next level of church architecture that was evolving to be.