

The study of Gothic art and architecture in the Minor Basilica Church- Bengaluru

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Abstract:

Background: During the British Crown rule in India from 1858 A.D. to 1947 A.D. the colonial era was established by the British government. Even today the structures are still in stand. One such Colonial architecture that still remains even today in Bangalore is St Mary's Basilica Church located in the busy area of Shivajinagar. The Church still remains through building and infrastructure in the 'Gothic' style of architecture. The basilica has been constructed with arches, ornamental motifs and stained glass windows. The small chapel was modified and enhanced in 1813. The Church was rebuilt during the years 1856A.D.- 1882 A.D. The current form of the majestic spacious Gothic-style is one of the oldest Roman Catholic Church dedicated to St Mary. It was designed by a French architect and was constructed in the form of a Cross. The main church is 172 feet long and 50 feet broad. The magnificent tower and imposing building forming the facade of the Church is 160 feet high. A 6 feet height beautiful statue of Mother Mary carrying baby Jesus in her arms is the Centre of attraction of the shrine. In order to study the exact styles of architecture in the church the present study was undertaken.

Key Word: British Crown rule, Basilica church, Gothic-style, stained glass windows.

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I. Introduction

Intention of British in the capital city of Karnataka

The city's nucleus was a settlement around a mud fort, built in 1537 A.D. by the local chief, Nadaprabhu Hiriya Kempe Gowda I, a feudatory ruler under the erstwhile Vijayanagar Empire. Kempe Gowda was considered as the founder of Bangalore. Kempe Gowda chose Bangalore as the capital in the early 16th century. During the Colonial times and British rule Bangalore came to prominence. Bangalore was the headquarters of the British administration from 1831 A.D. to 1881 A.D. The British troops were first stationed at Srirangapatna after the fall of Tipu Sultan in 1799 A.D. Later the troops were shifted to Civil and Military Station of Bangalore in 1809 A.D. (<https://www.Karnataka.com>.)

The Bangalore Cantonment:

The original cantonment word comes from the French word corner or district. The British found Bangalore to be a pleasant and appropriate place to station their garrison and therefore moved their garrison to Bangalore. In the year 1806 A.D.- 1881 A.D. the military troops of the British Raj were in Bangalore. The area not only became a military base for the British but also a large settlement for many Europeans, Anglo-Indians and missionaries. In the 19th century many clubs, churches, bungalows, shops, cinemas had a colonial design with a resident population.

Brief history of Shivajinagar:

Later the early settlers in the area were farmers with agriculture as their main occupation. The farmers were basically from Gingee of Tamil Nadu. These farmers set up village styled living and found the fertile land for cultivating rice. It is said and believed that since white rice was cultivated here, the area was referred as bili akki pally (kannada) that means white rice. It is said that the British called the dark skinned neighborhood natives as 'Black'. Since the dark skinned Indian population was more in this area they referred as Blackpally. It was later named Shivajinagar in honour of Maratha King Shivaji Bhosle who once ruled here.

II. HERTIAGE OF SAINT MARY'S BASILICA CHURCH

British design plan to construct Church:

During the Colonial time Shivajinagar developed as a popular prime market place. Variety of fruits, vegetables, meat etc., was sold under the one roof called Russell market. During the 17th century Tamil Christians from Gingee build a thatched hut near Russuell market. The shrine was then known as 'Chapel of Kanikkai Madha' (Madha means Mother). During the year 1799 A.D. the French priest Jean-Antoine Dubois arrived in Bangalore. Dubois built a chapel with attached roof in 1803 at Blackpally and offered mass. The Chapel was named Kaanike Mathe Devalaya, which means 'The Church of Our Lady of the Presentation'.

In the year 1813 A.D., Abbe Jean Dubois with the help of British, modified and enhanced the small chapel. This small chapel still remains in the premises of grand church. Fr. Andreas, an Indian origin priest from Pondicherry succeeded Dubois and he expanded the small chapel in the shape of a cross. But during the communal riots in 1832 A.D. the church was destroyed and the British troops had been called to protect the building. After many months of settlement the church was rebuilt in the years 1856 A.D. – 1882 A.D. After the completion of the church, the church was renamed with original name, the Church of Our Lady of the Presentation.

III. ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHURCH

Gothic Style:

The small chapel was built into an ornate Gothic-style. The efforts are credited to Late Rev. L. E. Kleiner. The current style of the main church is in the majestic Gothic-style. The church is adorned with beautiful arches, stained glass windows and ornamental motifs (Fig 1). The church has columns with royal Corinthian capitals arches. In 1882 A.D. a fairly large number of stained glass windows were brought from Paris and were then inserted into the church windows. However during the World War II the stained glass windows were damaged but later subsequently restored in 1947 A.D. The main Church stands with long tapering roof-like elongated pyramid that clearly indicates the Gothic-style (Fig 2).



Fig. 1: Stained glass windows and ornamental motifs. Fig. 2: Gothic style

The Sacred Church Architecture:

The present church is a spacious gothic style building which was designed by a French architect and built in the cross shape. The church stands 172 feet long and 50 feet broad. The imposing and magnificent tower of the church is 160 feet high. The church has a prominent main altar. It is one of the oldest churches in Bangalore and the first church in Karnataka that has been elevated to status of minor Basilica. A beautiful statue of Mother Mary carrying Infant Jesus in her arms is an attractive set up of shrine outside the church building. The statue is typically dressed as an Indian lady.

IV. RELIGIO-CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CHURCH

Annual feast:

Every year on 8th September the Church celebrates the birthday of Mother Mary. The feast is celebrated as St Mary's feast with 10 novena days. The festival begins with a traditional flag hosting on 29th August and ends on 8th September with culminating in a grand light decorated chariot procession (DH Bengaluru: September 9, 2016, DHNS).

Christmas and New Year celebration:

Christmas being the annual festival, commemorating the nativity of Jesus Christ is observed on 25th December. Masses, Social gathering, gift-giving, symbolic decoration, feasting marks the day (DH DEC 26 2019, 01:09AM IST).

V. CONCLUSION

St. Mary's Basilica is said to be one of the oldest Gothic-style Church in Bangalore. Looking at the long pyramid tower one recalls the master brain of the person with meticulous ideas and hard work involvement. The beautiful church still attracts people of all faiths, giving a supernatural peace of mind and serenity. It is believed that the Nature reunites with the human in sacred places. However in the present century, new commercial, residential, industrial fields, churches, schools, colleges are giving new life to Gothic-style constructions. The stained glass windows are taking rebirth with figures representing the art of flora and fauna. The embellishment of the church, like those of stained glass windows registers artistic appearance even today. This it attest the continuation of the Gothic Style.

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