

The history of creation and founding of taj mahal

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



With the likes of members of the high and lesser nobility, it was yet another New Year's Fair at Royal Meena Bazaar in Agra, India. As Prince Khurram, also known as Emperor Shah Jahan, approached to haggle for gems at the stall of Arjumand Bano, their hands met simultaneously for the first time. That way, in which their eyes clashed, their sweat dripped out of every pore, and their hearts pounded, it was true love at first sight. Five years passed before the promising day arrived for their wedding, and from that moment on, Arjumand Bano, now known as Mumtaz Mahal, became his beloved partner. Over the next 18 years, she travelled with him on his military campaigns and provided him with her compassionate guidance, often on behalf of the poverty-stricken Muslims. In fact, she was an incalculable source of strength that also provided her loyalty, support, and love to the emperor. One day, among the scene of desperate and sanguinary affray, Shah Jahan was filled with despair when he sat by his wife's bedside and watched her leave for the holy abode after giving birth to their fourteenth child. Following the death of Mumtaz Mahal, he felt disconnected from the world around him – emotionally, spiritually, and physically. As a result, it is said that he locked himself in his room for eight days, refusing to take any food or wine. And to everyone's surprise, the doors opened on the ninth day, it seemed that he had undergone a physical transformation: “ the emperor's back was now bent in a peculiar way and his hair, which had been raven black, had turned totally white” (Carroll 14-24). It wasn't until that moment that Shah Jahan focused his mind upon great construction projects that marked the height of Mogul architectural prowess. In December of 2008, approximately half a year after the queen's death, the corpse was

transported to Agra to rest in a crypt in a grove that is most rich of shade on the edge of Yamuna River. After this, the actual work began on the development and construction of a tomb that would be most extravagant monument of love ever built by a man for a woman – the Taj Mahal.

Before her proper burial, it took the whole six months for Shah Jahan to determine on a final selection of site that was occupied by an area where an ocean of overgrown grass spread without interruption to the beautiful horizon of the Yamuna River. It is assumed the gardens were owned by a Hindu raja, Raja Jai Singh, but he had been given four regal residences in exchange for the site. Although there is no apparent reason why Shah Jahan chose the location, but according to Christine Moorcroft, “Shah Jahan might have chosen the site for its beauty and because there was a clear view of it from the imperial palace at the Red Fort [the residence of the Imperial Family of India]. It was close to Agra; perhaps he wanted the monument he was planning to be part of the community – a quiet, sacred place amid the noise and bustle of the city” (20).

With his final selection of the site on which the Taj Mahal would stand, word reached to the lands beyond India that Shah Jahan was searching for an architect to build a monument to honor the memory of his beloved wife. With careful deliberations, the construction of the Taj Mahal was assigned to a board of architects under the supervision of two high-ranking nobles. Although it is not certain, some historians believe that the Taj Mahal was designed by several architects under the directions of Shah Jahan and his chief architect, Ustad Ahmad. However, other historians believe that there is no way to tell the name of the true architect of the Taj Mahal with certainty.

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Either way, it is known that the Taj Mahal could not be designed by a single brain since such a project with unique architectural design required the skill and talent from many different people. To re-create Shah Jahan's architectural vision of the mausoleum, the architects created a wooden model to show how the final outcome would look like - and the final plans for the Taj Mahal had been approved by Shah Jahan! With Shah Jahan's approval, the architects discussed the ultimate goal of all architecture activity with master craftsmen of different skills, such as stonemasons, calligraphers, and so on.

According to David Carroll, "Thirty-seven men [architects] in all formed the creative nucleus, and to this core was added a labor force of twenty thousand workers recruited from across North India." Since Shah Jahan only wanted the best workers of all time to build the mausoleum without slave labor, he had to hire workers from distant parts of the Mogul empires, as far as Iran and Turkey. Indeed, twenty thousand men and women flocked to live in the outskirts of Agra where they built houses in the courtyard beyond the Taj Mahal to promote labor force participation during the project, thus forming a new suburb. Originally known as Mumtazabad, the settlement became a great bazaar or marketplace under which there are rows of stalls where merchants sold their goods. Along with laborers migrating to Agra, the best materials for the construction also began arriving; the marble came from Makran, the jade and crystal came from China, lapis lazuli came from Afghanistan, chrysolite came from Egypt, and so on. It is reported that forty-three different types of gems were to be used in the embellishment of the Taj Mahal. With all the necessary resources and work force, they could now

begin the journey towards the construction of Taj Mahal that would compare to a teardrop that glistened “ spotlessly bright on the cheek of time,” according to Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in one of his famous quotes.

Upon starting the construction of Taj Mahal in 1632, most of the workers provided unskilled physical labor such as digging and lifting stone for the foundation of Taj Mahal. For the Taj Mahal to rest on the foundation, the workers had to excavate accumulated erosion soils and other materials in the river until the bedrock was reached. Under the boiling sun, the workers struggled to remove yards of hard-packed earth from the site until they cleared an area the size of three football fields. During the excavation, they loaded the dirt into carts drawn by teams of oxen and hauled it away to the outskirts of town. To ensure that no water from the river would run into the building, wells were dug and filled with stone to form the base of the tomb then layered with densely packed sediment mixed with mortar. Since the mausoleum was so close to the river, the workers had to install a series of conduits, encased in stone and mortar, into the foundation to divert the river away. By diverting the river, it raised the foundation above the water level so that the view from the mausoleum would be improved. Now that the workers have completed with the ground level construction, the workers participated in scaffolding and ramping instruction to erect the mausoleum. In order to lift blocks of stone to a height of over 200 feet, the workers had to construct gigantic brick scaffold that reflected the tomb. It is said that the scaffold was mountainous that the workers guessed that it would take years to take apart. However, Shah Jahan had a brilliant idea: he announced that anyone

could keep the bricks that were taken away from the scaffold, so in the end, it was taken apart by the villagers overnight. Along with the scaffolding, the workers also built a road ramp through the city of Agra and to the site of the mausoleum. Similar to the purpose of the road ramp during the construction of the pyramids, the ten mile ramp was used by teams of oxen to bring marble and materials to the construction site. Once the marble arrived the site, it was raised into the desired position by an intricate post-and-beam pulley. Throughout the construction progress, from 1632 to 1653, Shah Jahan was often there to oversee its growth from the ground to completion.

As the most extraordinary representation of Mughal architecture, the Taj Mahal combines styles from Persian, Indian, and Islamic designs in a single structure thus becoming overwhelming in its aesthetic beauty. The gateway, also called darwaza, situated a distance from the main complex stands in contrast to the stark white marble of the Taj Mahal with its red stone walls mirroring the shape of the tomb's archways. Etched in black calligraphy with selected verses from Qur'an, the gateway was supposed to be considered "an atmospheric transition point between the bustling world outside and the tranquil ambiance within the grounds of the Taj Mahal." Through the gateway, the tomb itself is surrounded by 980 square feet of gardens consisting of 16 flowerbeds, also planted with 400 plants each, with two marble canals studded with fountains crossing in the center. The trees of the Taj Mahal were also meticulously chosen and can be put into two categories; fruit trees that symbolizes life or Cyprus trees that symbolizes death.

Leading up to the tomb, there is a massive reflecting pool that captures the structure perfectly in its depth and symmetry. At the far end of the complex,

two grand red sandstone buildings with beautiful archways lie between the sides of the tomb. Although the two buildings seem to be precise images of each other to provide architectural balance, both buildings serve completely different purposes to the complex. With exquisite calligraphy of the name Allah along the western building, the Mosque was mainly used for prayers because it faced towards Mecca. And on the east side, opposite of the Mosque, stands its twin often referred as the Jawab, or the “ answer.” It is not certain what the purpose of the building was, but it could have been used for a meeting hall or a caravansary for people. And in between both buildings, in the sheer poetic beauty of light and shadow, the tomb itself sits atop a plinth of nearly 315 square feet. At the each corner, there are marble minarets slanting outwards at 138 feet tall with onion-shaped crowns adorning their tops similar to the central building dome. Upon closer inspection of the complex, there are different types of decorative elements on the buildings including black calligraphy reciting the passages from the Qur’an as well as the colorful floral and vegetal motifs. Lying at the center of the plinth stands the world-famous capped central dome mausoleum, the entire complex is planned in such precise way that the unity of the whole does not diminish the individuality of any part nor does it take away its reputation.

Although there are many details on the exterior design of the Taj Mahal, the interior design surpasses the traditional decorative features involved with the whole construction process. Here, the building consists of many different forms of decoration that are repeated in different sizes and situations. In the lower section of the building, complicated art of calligraphy and floral

designs adorn the many porticos and iwans leading up to the octagon shaped room that borders the false cenotaphs of the emperor and his queen. With the eight marble walls surrounding the false cenotaphs, the main chamber has been highly decorated with different stones to depict vines, fruit, and flowers as the Islamic symbol of paradise. Because the Muslim law does not allow any type of decoration of tombs, the bodies of the emperor and his queen were buried in a small crypt directly below the main chamber. Since the original concept of the mausoleum was to honor Mumtaz Mahal, her cenotaph is placed perfectly at the center of the crypt alongside Shah Jahan's crypt. With the raised platform of the emperor's cenotaph squeezed next to his queen, it is said that Shah Jahan's burial in the Taj Mahal disrupted the perfect symmetry seen throughout the building and courtyard. Although the emperor's cenotaph may be the only visible asymmetric feature, both caskets were decorated with the same elements – both caskets were decorated with gems as well as calligraphic inscriptions to identify and praise the bodies for an everlasting love that withstood the test of time.

There is nothing stopping it from being rebuilt in today's century. Since the construction of the Taj Mahal in the 17th century, nearly 400 years ago, it offered a deep sense of harmony and unity that the society needs in this century. Though not built for symbol of love, we have built something that is close in resemblance of the vision of Taj Mahal ranging from the medieval cathedrals to the modern-day churches so people can have a direct connection with God. So shouldn't we build a modernized structure with such extravagance all in good purposes of God? Because of the explosion of technology and computers, there are no doubts that we are more than

capable of designing the exact structure with such precise depth and symmetry. Instead of conducting strenuous tasks during the construction project in the 1640's, we have all types of equipment and tools with full technical details that could have been used to excavate the earth, transport and lift heavy materials to its accurate position, and so many other functions. Despite our technological advancements, it wouldn't make sense to imitate such a magnanimous structure only because it wouldn't have the same significance as the original design as it had its own story. For instance, in Bangladesh, they have recently opened a gigantic replica of the original version of Taj Mahal. Apparently, the wealthy builder Ahsanullah Moni, " built it to pay honour to Emperor Shah Jahan and enable the ordinary people including students to have an idea about the heritage as most of them don't have scopes to visit Agra spending huge money." Although it was built on over four acres of lander, it took only five years to complete the life-size replica with machinery, which was formed of the same materials of the original Taj Mahal. As modest as his contribution may seem to the society of Bangladesh, it has sparked a controversy about the claim of copyright on the original Taj Mahal between India and Bangladesh. Now, is imitation the sincerest form of flattery?