

# Islamic architecture in india



## **Introduction**

India is vast in culture and traditions, nature, religions, languages rich with historical monuments with vernacular architectures. Taj Mahal is one such wonderous monument structures built by ShahJahan as tomb in memory of his adored wife, Mumtaj Mahal. Taj Mahal is renowned for its glorious Indo-Islamic architectural presence in style, shape, color, location of the monument and material used to construct it. It is one of the eighth wonder of world's famous monuments and appreciated by its visitors' interests for their insight into its culture, time and history of the monument. Therefore, Taj Mahal architecture can be renowned as the largest model combination of the derivative of Byzantine, Persian, Indian and Islamic architecture.

The Indo-Islamic architecture takes live in form with the slave dynasty in India. It is credited to Mughal dynasty in Pakistan and India, the field of arts and architecture who gave special care to raise historical monuments in India. The earliest monuments what we find in India are the recycled material of the existing Jain, Buddha and Hindu monuments. The Islamic architecture was then fostered by the Delhi Sultanate and achieved excellence by the Mughal contributions.

## **The Background of Islamic Architecture in India**

The Persian dynasties dating back to 500 BCE has seen many Islamic faith dynasties. Throughout the ruling dynasties, Persia (modern Iran) has modeled as center for many art, architecture, poetry and philosophy. Persia is well known for its trade since pre-historic times. The Silk Route acts as bridge between distant lands for trade, religious and material culture. The

business also spread to main lands of central Asia, including Armenia, Georgia, and India.

Persia has also seen developmental fronts in architecture which spread many Asian countries as did business too. The climate, the influence of people, “available material, religious purpose and peripheral cultures, and patrons also played a important role in the development of architecture” (Mehraby). The magnificent architectural buildings take inspiration from the landscape, snow-capped mountains, valleys, and wide shining plains which conceived and accomplished novel ideas for building artifacts while mountains serve both physical and mental sources of inspirations in Iranian architecture. Thus, Beauty is regarded divine for ancient Persian civilizations.

### **The Architectural Intentions of the Taj Mahal**

Taj Mahal traces its architecture as rooted with Islamic conjectures. Though the Persian or the Islamic civilization was not the first to concentrate their architecture on religious themes, it was a strong feature among Byzantine architects. The Byzantine Architecture records the religious buildings and their designs as achievements of the Byzantine Empire. The most remarkable example at Constantinople is Hagia Sophia, a Christian church at Constantinople (the present Istanbul) is a massive and ornamental church represents the glory of the Byzantine Empire.

The architectural intentions also note the power factor in Islamic architecture. The Islamic dynasties believe in spreading Islam and glorify to God by articulating through mosques, unmatched historical monuments and palaces of excellent beauty. To achieve this, they desire and acquire power

to patronage architecture. The Islamic architecture spread as far as Egypt and North Africa, Spain, and Persia. Then, they developed their unique style by combining the arts of the Byzantines, the Copts, the Romans, and the Sassanids. This unique style specializes in fusing the native design elements with imported ones.

Taj Mahal suffices this stance. The memories of Mumtaj Mahal are spread all over the world symbolizing his love for her. The uniqueness of this monument is its dome structure which is feature of Byzantine architecture. The abstract designs are noteworthy of Persian architecture, the floral designs and painting goes to Safavid style, the location of the building is also an important factor which totally reiterates the presence of chief Persian architecture.

Communicating spirituality is yet another perspective attributed to Islamic Architecture. This perspective has been practiced among sages, philosophers, poets, and spiritual masters of Islamic countries. The discipline of proliferating Islamic law through the pursuit of knowledge, reflections on reality of nature beyond appearance, disciplined prayer is also reflected on their architecture.

The stone flowers of the Taj Mahal gives a picture of realism fascinating “ the visitor with their grace and colorful freshness”, (Okado and Joshi). The Taj Mahal’s mention to “ paradise can be seen in the motif of flowers carved on the funerary chambers of the mausoleum, as well as on the plinths of the inner iwan”, where flowers and roses symbolize the Kingdom of Allah, (Bin and Rasdi).

The Byzantines' architecture also followed similar organizing principles. Whereas the Christian religious worship place and its design corresponds to the religion. Therefore, symbolism also played a significant role in the evolution of the form of the monuments. During the Byzantine period the Church itself became a symbol of the faith. The master piece of Indo-Islamic Architectural style, the beauty of the Taj Mahal, inspires numerous artists from all over the world. To this, Okada and Joshi (1993) relates to the four canals to the four rivers of Paradise referred in the Holy Qur'an. The symbolic nature of the garden and the canals at Taj Mahal is considered the funereal nature of the monument and the Quran inscription located on the southern entrance wall of the main Gate gives undeniable credibility to the comparison of the Taj Mahal with the Garden of Paradise, this inscription says:

(It will be said to the pious): O (you) the one in

(complete) rest and satisfaction!

Come back to your Lord, — well-pleased (yourself)

and well-pleasing unto him!

Enter you, then, among My honored slaves,

And enter you My Paradise!

*The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Fajr: 89: 27-30*

Therefore, it is notable to see the students of Islamic architecture enduring Taj Mahal as an incomparable monument in Persian origin.

### The Architecture, Structure of Taj Mahal

The Byzantine and Islamic architecture share a common style of architecture, the dome. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is in response to the Islamic architecture which shows the influence of Byzantine architecture imparted as the dome style passed on to the Islamic architecture. It is also known as ' Persian dome'. Today, it is called the Onion Dome. This architecture advancement of the use of dome is accredited formed a new style in global architecture. The most celebrated example is the Taj Mahal (A.D. 1630) built by Mughal Dynasty in India. But, this is not new to Indian architecture. The well known Buddhist Stupa at Sanchi, India 4th to 1st century BCE is " a commemorative monument associated with preserving sacred relics. Not only these, the Mauryan kingdom (c. 321-185 BCE) in India also fortify their cities with Stupas, Viharas, and temples were constructed," (Kumar).

The Taj Mahal consists of sixteen chambers, eight chambers each on two levels that contain the octagonal funerary chamber overcome by a surbased inner dome. The funerary chamber consists of the tombs of Mumtaj Mahal and Shah Jahan together, adorned by " a baluster of delicately perforated marble and studded with semiprecious stones," (Okado and Joshi).

Persians focused their efforts on reviewing their architecture in barrel vaulting, crenallated roofs, conical squinches, big bricks, oval arches and different designed brick work or now and again platerworks over bricks. Though the architecture is traced to 3000 years, the design elements of Persian architecture like " high-arched portal set within a recess, columns with bracket capitals, columned porch or talar, a dome on four arches, a vast

<https://assignbuster.com/islamic-architecture-in-india/>

ovoid arch in the entrance, a four iwan courtyard, early towers reaching up toward the sky, an interior court and pool, an angled entrance and extensive decorations” display their distinctive structural designs, (Mehraby).

### The Structure

The intended tomb is made of large white marble structure standing on a square plinth beam consisting of a symmetrical building with an iwan (arch-shaped doorway) presented with a large dome and finial at the top. François Bernier noted how “the centre of every arch is adorned with white marble slabs whereon are inscribed large Arabian characters in black marble.” This structure styling reflects Persian architecture.

The base is multi-chambered cube with chamfered corners creating an unequal octagon of approximately 55 meters on all the four long sides. On each of these sides, a massive pishtaq, or a vaulted archway, frames the iwan with two similarly shaped, arched balconies stacked on either side forming a symmetrical shape on all sides of the building. There are four minarets frame the tomb and the main chamber houses the false graves of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan. The actual graves are located at a lower level.

The top of the dome is fancily decorated with a lotus design. “The columned bases open through the roof of the tomb and provide light to the interior. Tall decorative spires (guldastas) extend from edges of base walls, and provide visual emphasis to the height of the dome. The dome and chattris are topped by a gilded finial, which mixes traditional Persian and Hindu decorative elements,” (Wiki). Even the tenure of Byzantine architecture, the discovery

of pendentives and dome on pendentives changed the expertise for constructing churches and eased the procedure during the Byzantine period.

The bronze make of moon and its horns pointing upwards, the heavenward in trident shape clearly indicates the mixing of Persian and Hindu decorations. The symbolic meaning can be derived as Hindu symbol of Shiva.

“ The minarets are 40 meters tall; each minaret dividing into three equal parts by two working balconies surmounted by a chattri that mirrors the design of a lotus design topped by a gilded finial,” (Wiki).

The subsequent Islamic architecture in India signifies in the form of Mosques and tombs’ facade beautification is the main form. The evolution of the dome style as called the basic cube and hemisphere terminology in past architecture was later brought into excellence at some stage in the Mughal Period. The experts say that Taj Mahal replicates Humayun’s tomb before the blueprint for Taj Mahal was formed. The best examples for the Indo-Islamic Architecture are the Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur, Agra Fort, Buland Darwaza, Qutab Minar and Safdarjang Tomb.

Hambly (1964) writes the architecture of Taj Mahal to be of Safavid style in his ‘ Cities of Mughal India’ which accounts the amazing factors of Mughal dynasty. Safavid is yet another dynasty which ruled Persia during 1499-1722 B. C. E. Safavid has great deal of finest works of metal art works like arms, armor, candle stand, helmets, drinking vessels, and wine bowls. Ruggiero notes the events during “ the Safavids, networks of caravansaries were constructed” to facilitate transportation and promote trade since Persia was business center for many countries then, (Hambly).

The calligraphy on the large pishtaq is definite work of Safavid. Anon says, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan conferred “ Amanat Khan” title for his work for his dazzling virtuosity. This inscription from the Qu’ran can be found underneath the interior dome are the inscription, “ Written by the insignificant being, Amanat Khan Shirazi.”. Not only this, the calligraphy found on the marble grave is attended in detail and delicate.

### **Historical, Societal and Cultural Importance of Islamic Architecture**

Haider (2002) studies the Islamic architecture along the fourfold phenomenon activity of societal implications namely, the dwelling imperative, the functional imperative, the constructive imperative and aesthetic imperative; these principles also project our images, expectations, definitions, and critique of Islamic architecture.

Functional importance of any building under this architecture marks as symbolic or a marker or an icon or a monument fundamental to uphold the longing remembrances and therefore, indicate meaning of a society. If we can cross these societal manifestations against the architectural intentions, a more focused and prolific discussion can be formed. Our study on Taj Mahal is one such productive result of these crossing. If we can view Islam as religion and as historical observable fact of power and patronage and inclined to seek the aesthetic imperative and symbolic expression in architecture, the focus is more likely on Taj Mahal.

### **Conclusion**

The Mughal courts established in Pakistan and India were occupied by poets and calligraphy artists from Persia who took flight from their very little home

country to fortune earning in India. The constructions what we see of Mughal dynasty is the work of these Iranians who were the special guidance of the Mughal Empire who gave attention for very detail to raise monuments for the public to praise the Islamic architecture. The Islamic architecture holds its generosity in various monuments found mostly in India. They portray their love for art and inturn to God. Their thrust to spread the fame is notable. We see every dynasty or the empire have their own set of values, cultures and traditions. These impacts are also well noticeable in their architectures. Therefore, the Islamic architecture is symbolic of the architecture they produce.

## **Work Cited**

### **Books**

- Amina Okada and M. C. Joshi. (1993). Taj Mahal. Abbeville press
- Guido Ruggiero. (2002). A companion to the worlds of the Renaissance. Wiley-Blackwell
- Roger Savory. (2008). Iran Under the Safavids. Cambridge University Press
- François Bernier (1996). Travels in the Mogul Empire 1656-1668. Asian Educational Service Raj Kumar. (2003). Essays on Indian art and architecture: History and culture series. Discovery publishing house

### **Journal**

Mohamad Tajuddin Bin and Haji Mohamad Rasdi. (2008). Reconstructing the idea of Islamic architecture: restructuring the academic framework and

design approach within the perspective of the Sunnah. The Journal of Architecture, 13: 3(6). pp 297 – 315.

### Online Sources

- Mehraby, Rahman. <http://www.destinationiran.com/Architecture.htm>
- Okado and Joshi. [http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj\\_mahal.html](http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj_mahal.html)
- Bin and Rasdi. [http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj\\_mahal.html](http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj_mahal.html) Anon. "The Taj Mahal". Islamic architecture. Islamic Arts and Architecture Organization. Accessed on 25 Nov 2009. [http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj\\_mahal.html](http://www.islamicart.com/library/empires/india/taj_mahal.html).
- General Information about Iranian Architecture. Accessed on 25 Nov 2009. <http://www.destinationiran.com/Architecture.htm>
- Introduction of Islamic architecture to India. Accessed on 27 Nov 2009 <http://www.india9.com/i9show/Taj-Mahal-19777.htm>
- Byzantine Architecture. Accessed on 25 Nov 2009. <http://library.thinkquest.org/C005594/Medieval/byzantine.htm>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_architecture)