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IMPERIAL ARCHITECTURE UNDER THE MUGHALS

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Imperial Architecture under the Mughals

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Abstract – In beginning Islam did not materially influence Indian Art. The Muslims were in small numbers and there were very few craftsman among them. Before the advent of the Mughals there was little progress in Art. At the outset the Mughal domination was marked by a fresh wave of pure Iranianism, as well as by the coming of ottoman influence. Babur was very busy in wars so they didn't have much time to build. We owe him scarcely anything but the mosque of Panipat and Jama Masjid at Sambhal. Under the reign of Akbar, Yusuf, built the palaces of Delhi, Agra and Lahore. During Jahangir period, in architecture his age is a period of transition between the splendour and practical Nature of Akbar's buildings. Under Shahjahan Mughal architecture reached its peak point. The style of his reign is characterized by a new wave of Persian inspiration, but we should always bear in mind that the buildings which he constructed are distinguished from the Constantinople by the use of white marble circular domes, High minarets, Mehrab, various types of pillars, big doorways and large compounds, forts, royal-palaces, fountains, baths Diwan-i-khas, Diwan-i-aam and Mosques were given special care Till Jahangir's regime, Redstone was mainly used in buildings while white marble was also used at certain places. However, marble was largely used during the regime of Shah Jahan. The buildings during the Mughal period were adorned with precious stones, diamonds and jewels. Walls and ceilings were engraved with several types of designs of flowers and paintings.

In about the year 1200 the whole of northern India came under Muslim rule and Delhi became the capital. The previous architectural patterns of the Hindus were rich in sculpture and decorations, often having representation of human and animals, but Islam prohibited the representation of living beings, and so the builders had to invent devices to make it more attractive. The Mughal period was the most creative one and new ideas were introduced. Under the Mughals, this simplification was to lead to a harmonious fusion of Jain and Persian art and to the birth of a new art which was of a genuinely original and classic nature. Mughal architecture falls into two broad divisions Mosques and tombs are types of religious monument, and others are the secular kind, like palaces, fortresses and city gates.

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BABUR AND HUMAYUN

Although Mughal architecture begins with Babur, the two buildings of his which have survived, Kabuli Bagh Mosque at Panipat and a Jama Masjid at Sambhal in Rohilkhand. These buildings do not have any architectural beauty. Their only merits lies in their spaciousness. But Babur was quick to realise the worth of Indian artisans and he appreciated the skill. Humayun was too busy in his wars with Shershah to think about architecture. After his death his widow Hamida Bano to begin the construction of her husband's tomb in 1564. The tomb of Humayun may, therefore be regarded as the first landmark of Mughal architecture. This monument is a blending of Indian and Persian styles. The dome is of white marble while the rest of the building is of red sandstone. It is placed in a well laid out large garden. The Persian influence can be seen in the dome. However with Humayun preoccupation in wars and Babur's animosity to everything Indian, architecture did not make much progress under the first of the Mughals.

AKBAR

The individual and distinctive tradition of Mughal art began with Akbar. The Mughal Indo-Islamic and Rajput fashions blend in the architecture of his period. This can be seen in the palace-fortresses at Agra and Lahore. The massive Agra fort is built in red stone. It has a radius of one and a half miles and the inner walls go to a height of about seventy feet. The two palace buildings which still remain, the Akbari Mahal and Jahangiri Mahal show a fusion of Hindu and Muslim styles. The city of Fatehpur Sikri was built by Akbar about twenty two miles from Agra, on a ridge. Work on it was started in 1569, and the city was completed in fifteen years. Among palaces the most beautiful are those of Jodha Bai, Mariam, Sultana and Birbal.

The Panch Mahal is an unusual structure. It has five stories built in a pyramid, each storey having an open pavilion supported on gracefully designed pillars. The pillars in each storey conform to a general scheme and each has a varied pattern and design. The

ground floor has as many as eighty four pillars. The number diminishes in each successive storey till there are only four in the topmost one supporting the domed canopy. Mariam's house is also small but perfect in simplicity of design. It was also known as sunhera makan or the golden house.

The other group of buildings in Fatehpur Sikri are religious ones. The most impressive of these is the grand Jama Masjid which Fergusson describes as the glory of Fatehpur Sikri. It has a large sanctuary crowned by three domes of the flat lodi type but tilted at the base. The central dome covers the prayer hall, the remaining portion of the roof being flat. Each dome has a finial. The facade is inlaid with white marble. The interior of the sanctuary has ornate mural decorations, particularly over the Mihrab Wall. After his victory in the deccan Akbar got the Buland Darwaza raised at the southern entrance of the Mosque. This is a complete structure in itself with a large hall and a number of small apartments. The gateway is of red sandstone inlaid with white marble. The surface is carved. The gateway is cleverly constructed to diminish its size gradually bit by bit, till it ends up in a normal sized doorway.

A later addition within the Mosque was the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti on the north side of the quadrangle. This is a beautiful shrine in marble. The interior is as finely carved and fashioned as the outside. The floor is inlaid with coloured marble. To the east of the tomb of the Shaikh is the tomb of Islam Khan the Saint's grandson. This is built of red sandstone. Though constructed in Jahangir's time it retains much of the style of Akbar.

JAHANGIR

Jahangir was more interested in painting than in building. In architecture this period is period of transition between the splendour, practical nature, of Akbar's buildings and the luxurious of those of Shahjahan. Jahangir's first work in this field was to complete his father's tomb. Akbar had got work started on it but he died soon after. Jahangir took eight years to complete it, but could not do it quite according to his father's grand conception. The tomb lacks harmony and proportion despite the uniqueness of its design.

Jahangir used white marble for his buildings instead of the red sandstone. Jahangir was influenced with Persian ideas of luxury and grace and tried to artificially force them into his concepts. The result was his buildings had neither the grace of the Indian nor the Persian style. Nur Jahan, Jahangir's talented wife, built her husband's tomb at Shahdara near Lahore. It is a one storeyed building with spacious gardens around it. Nur Jahan also built a marble Tomb at Agra for her father Itmad-ud-Daula. Another tomb made was that of 'Akbar-Rahim-Khan-i-Khana'. This is copy of Humayun's tomb very little of it now remains.

SHAH JAHAN

Shah Jahan had a special aptitude for architecture. He is known as Engineer Emperor. His reign in Indian history has become memorable for its architecture. He made liberal use of petro-dura with marble. Architecture reached its peak during his rule. He had all the money for his schemes and a huge army of workers paid and unpaid, and finally he had the interest and the initiative.

Shah Jahan's main architectural were (1) the constructions and replacements of stone structures of predecessors in the palaces of Agra, Lahore and at other places (2) the palace fortress of Lal Qila at Delhi to where he transferred his capital from Agra (3) the Jama Masjids at Agra and Delhi and (4) the Taj Mahal. The new buildings in the Lahore fort included the Diwan-i-aam, Shish Mahal, the Khwabgah and others. In Agra fort the new constructions included the Diwan-i-aam, Diwan-i-khaas, Rang Mahal, Heera Mahal Moti Masjid etc.

The Pearl Mosque stands on a height and commands a fine view of the palaces, pavilions and courts. It is of pure white marble with three graceful domes. The Red fort at Delhi was meant to serve as the emperor's residence. It is surrounded by a high wall of red sandstone. There are two main gateways, the main gate facing Chandni Chowk and the other the Lahore Gate. Inside there is a market place, servants quarters, the royal residences, courts, pavilions and so forth. The Diwan-i-Khas is highly ornamented. The Rang Mahal was the king's private apartment. This is even more ornamented. The walls are decorated by small pieces of mirror. In the middle of it runs the Nahr-i-bihisht (canal of paradise). There is an ornamental fountain and a basin designed as a large lotus flower. Originally the ceiling was ornamented with golden flower patterns.

The grand 'Jama Masjid' at Delhi is the most well known in India. It has a huge courtyard nearly a hundred metres square. There are three domes of white marble and tall minarets. It was begun in 1644 A.D and completed in 1656 A.D. The mosque at Agra was built by Shah Jahan to please his favourite daughter Jahanara.

The Taj Mahal built as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz Mahal is Shah Jahan's Supreme creation. It's construction started in 1631 AD and 20,000 workers work for 22 years to complete it in 1653 AD. But viewed as a whole the Taj Mahal is a miracle in conception. It wouldn't took so nice if it was not at the riverside. The chief architect of the Taj was Ustad Isa a citizen of Agra, helped by many Hindu crafts men and artists. The gateway as well as the four towers at the corners are based on the pattern of Akbar's tomb at Agra. The interior arrangement and decoration is a copy of Humayun's. The white marble is an idea borrowed from the tomb of Itmad-ud-daulah. But it

contains some of the finest carvings of trees and flowers.

Situated on an elevated grounds on a bend of the river Yamuna, the Taj Mahal has perfect visibility. The court is rectangular and the tomb is at one end. The front side of the tomb is richly ornamented by inscriptions from the Quran texts. The decoration both outside and in the tomb are superb forty two kinds of precious stones have been used in the Petro-dura works. These ornamentations have been very skilfully executed. The great dome also shows that the builders possessed high technical skill. It is not without reason that the Taj is one of the world's greatest wonders.

AURANGZEB

Aurangzeb had no interest in architecture, for he thought it to be wastage of money. So, he did not build any great buildings. Architecture therefore, suffered a great setback during his period. He had got Moti Masjid built in Red Fort at Delhi and Badshahi Masjid at Lahore. However the two buildings do not rank among the great buildings of the world. He had also built a tomb, known as the southern Taj Mahal in 1679 AD, in the memory of his Begun, Rabiya-ud-Dauhani.

During the great period, several excellent buildings were constructed. Architecture made a remarkable progress under the patronage and the respective interests of the Mughal emperors. All these cultural activities reveal a fine blend of Hindu, Muslim, Persian and Indian culture.

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