

***TAJ MAHAL: THE SYMBOL OF ETERNAL LOVE***

**By Sonal Bhamare**



The **TajMahal** meaning Crown of the Palace is an ivory-white marble mausoleum on the south bank of the Yamuna river in the Indian city of Agra. It was commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan. (reigned from 1628 to 1658), to house the tomb of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The tomb is the centre piece of a 17-hectare (42-acre) complex, which includes a mosque and a guest house, and is set in formal gardens bounded on three sides by a crenellated wall. The Taj Mahal was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 for being "the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage".





**Fig: Shah Jahan on a globe**

**Born On:** January 5, 1592

**Died On:** January 22, 1666

**Achievements:** Founder of the magnificent monument TajMahal, Also associated with the Red Fort of Delhi, Jama Masjid of Delhi, Section of Agra Fort, the Wazir Khan Mosque and the Moti Masjid in Lahore, Pakistan.

Shah Jahan, his name along with the name of his wife MumtazMahal, being synonymous with the existence and ever growing popularity of TajMahal, was a Mughal Emperor of the Southern Asia who reigned from 1627 to 1658. Born as Prince Shihab-ud-din Muhammad Khurram in the Lahore, Pakistan of 1592, Shah Jahan was the son of Emperor Jahangir. His name Khurram, which means "joyful" in Persian, was given to him by his grandfather Akbar the Great. Displaying great military skills at an early age against numerous enemies including Mewar, the Lodi in the Deccan, and Kangra, impressed his father so much that

Shah Jahan received the title "Shah Jahan Bahadur" from him. He wasn't just a sharp military leader, but also had an exceptional talent for building and proved it by re-designing buildings within the Agra fort. Among many titles he had earned, "The Builder of the Marvels" was one that was about to be proved the most deserving in the time to come.



**Fig: Artistic depiction of MumtazMahal**

**Born On: April, 1593**

**Born In: Agra**

**Died On: June 17, 1631**

Shah Jahan who built the TajMahal, a wondrous monument built in dedication to love, beauty, and life of MumtazMahal, had succeeded in his lifetime his dire wish to immortalize the name of MumtazMahal, his third wife. Such is the esteem of MumtazMahal that she is known by one and all, who've ever heard of TajMahal. Born in 1593 as ArjumandBanu Begum, she was the daughter of Abdul HasanAsaf Khan and a princess from the Persian nobility.

So enthralling was her beauty that Shah Jahan (then Prince Khurram) fell in love with her at the first sight. It was in 1607 that she was betrothed to Prince Khurram and soon became the unquestionable love of his life. Five years later in 1612, their marriage was solemnized and from then on, started one of the most popular love stories of the world. Although she was one of the three wives of Shah Jahan, she was his favorite. He even bestowed her with the name Mumtaz Mahal meaning "Jewel of the Palace", and the highest honor of the land - the royal seal, Mehr Uzaz.



**Fig: The actual tombs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan in the lower level**



**Fig: Finial, tanga of the Mughal Empire**

The tomb is the central focus of the entire complex of the Taj Mahal. It is a large, white marble structure standing on a square plinth and consists of a symmetrical building with an *iwan* (an arch-shaped doorway) topped by a large dome and finial. Like most Mughal tombs, the basic elements are Persian in origin.

Involvement of 22,000 workers including masons, stonecutters, inlayers, carvers, painters, calligraphers, dome-builders and other artisans called on from all over the central Asia and Iran, and some 22 years later when a monument with a unique blend of Persian, Islamic, and Indian architectural styles came into its own, it was a sight to behold! The grandeur of the structure then created was such that even decades after its creation, it is still regarded as one of the most arresting and attention-grabbing manmade monuments of the world. Not just Taj, even structures alongside it add to the architectural beauty and artistic wonder of the place. The entire Taj complex consists of five major constituents, namely Darwaza (main gateway), Bageecha (gardens), Masjid (mosque), NaqqarKhana (rest house) and Rauza (main mausoleum). The Taj Mahal covers an area of 42 acres in total with the

terrain gradually sloping from south to north, towards the river Yamuna in the form of descending terraces. The main gateway situated at the end of the long watercourse, decorated in calligraphy with verses from Holy Quran and a domed central chamber, was constructed from the period 1932 to 1938.



**Fig: Calligraphy of Persian poems.**

The TajMahal always welcomes each of its visitors with an inscription, written in beautiful handwriting, on the great gate that reads "O Soul, thou art at rest. Return to the Lord at peace with Him, and He at peace with you." It was Abdul Haq, who created this in 1609, and was bestowed with the title of 'Amanat Khan' by none other than Emperor Shah Jahan himself. Along with spellbinding architecture and a picturesque background, the calligraphy done is one of the fantabulous ornamental decorations done on the surface of TajMahal. The calligraphy of the TajMahal mainly consists of the verses and passages from the holy book of Quran. It was done by inlaying jasper in the white marble panels. These passages were inscribed by Amanat Khan in an illegible Thuluth script. A number of the panels also bear his signatures.

Black marble has been used to decorate both the south gateway and the main mausoleum with Arabic inscriptions. The texts chosen refer broadly to the themes of judgment and fruitful paradisiacal rewards for the faithful. The inscriptions over the gateway invite the reader to enter the paradise. And as one enters towards the main mausoleum, the tone of the inscriptions changes from paradisiacal to that of an impending doom that awaits the unbelievers on the Day

of Judgment. However, once inside the mausoleum, the tone of the inscriptions changes yet again from judgment to paradisiacal. It is also believed that Amanat Khan even chose the passages for the calligraphy of TajMahal, Agra. The exterior of TajMahal are loaded with verses from the Quran like:

Surah 91 (The Sun)

Surah 112 (The Purity of Faith)

Surah 89 (Daybreak)

Surah 93 (Morning Light)

Surah 95 (The Fig)

Surah 94 (The Solace)

Surah 36 (Ya Sin)

Surah 81 (The Folding Up)

Surah 82 (The Cleaving Asunder)

Surah 84 (The Rending Asunder)

Surah 98 (The Evidence)

Surah 67 (Dominion)

Surah 48 (Victory)

Surah 77 (Those Sent Forth)

Surah 39 (The Crowds)



**Style:** Persian

**Divided Into:** Four Parts

**Canals:** Two (crossing in the centre)

**Flowerbeds:** Sixteen

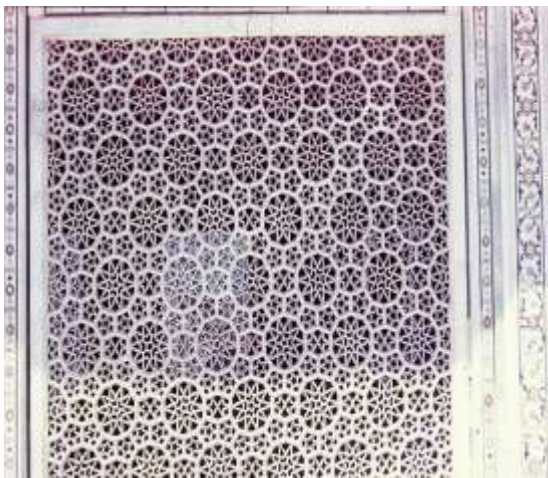
**Trees:** Cyprus & Fruit Bearing

The garden that starts from the end of the main gateway and ends near the squared base of the mausoleum is an integral part of the TajMahal structure and is, undeniably, one of the major highlights of the visit for many. The garden that beautifies Taj comes from the Persian Timurid style of gardens, and is based on the concept of 'paradise garden' and was brought in by Babur. This garden, filled with flowers, fruits, birds, leaves, symmetry, and delicacy, served many functions along with portraying strong symbolic or abstract meanings about paradise. A paradise which, according to Islamic beliefs, consists of four rivers: one of water, one of milk, one of honey, and one of wine. And it is from this concept that Char Bagh of TajMahal originated. Also, the symbolism of the garden and its division are noted in the Islamic texts that describe paradise as a garden filled with abundant trees, flowers, and plants.



The Charbagh plan that was beautifully adopted by the architects of Taj who wanted to give it a heavenly aura, did this by successfully incorporating the water devices, water which was brought from the river Yamuna, into the system in such a way that the garden looks full of life even after

three centuries. The lush green grass, the unabashed floral beauty, the ever growing trees, and the most stunning features of all: an elevated lotus pond in the centre of the garden that gives a pure reflection of the TajMahal is a mark of architectural wizardry being put into action to perfection by carefully orchestration and putting up of water devices at the TajMahal in a very systematical manner. The end result was the already gorgeous view of the TajMahal is further enhanced by a total of 24 fountains on all four sides of this lotus pond.



**Fig: Marble jali lattice.**



**Fig: Plant motifs.**



**Fig: Finial floor tiling.**



**Fig: The false sarcophagi of MumtazMahal and Shah Jahan in the main chamber.**



Fig: Detail of pietradura jali inlay.



Fig: Archways in the mosque

### Bio

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