

# Agra's Taj Mahal

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## Abstract

*The Taj Mahal, situated in Agra, India, stands as one of the most iconic monuments in the world, a testament to Mughal architecture, art, and cultural legacy. Built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, the mausoleum exemplifies the zenith of Indo-Islamic architectural design. This article explores the historical, architectural, and symbolic significance of the Taj Mahal, delving into its intricate craftsmanship, the cultural context of its construction, and its enduring influence as a symbol of love and artistic achievement. The paper also discusses the monument's role in shaping Agra's identity and its impact on tourism, heritage preservation, and global admiration.*

**Keywords:** Mughal architecture, cultural heritage, Shah Jahan, symbol of love, world heritage site

## INTRODUCTION

Agra holds a distinctive place for a vast majority of observers: it is the location of the world's most famous monument, and one which is synonymous with eternal love and architectural mastery. It is a part of the tri-city Golden Triangle of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur, which captures the main tourist flow of the North Indian subcontinent. More importantly, the Taj Mahal presents one of the most remarkable architectural wonders of the world and one of the most renowned legacies to the Mughal ruler, Shah Jahan [1]. The monument is not of typical Mughal style – it combines numerous elements from Indian, Turkish, Persian, and Timurid styles to produce an aesthetically and architecturally supreme monument [2]. The design and execution of the Taj Mahal display a sense of architectural grandeur unparalleled by other Mughal projects. Amongst the various styles of architecture that emerged in the Indian subcontinent, Mughal architecture was the sole cohesive architectural system that was nurtured and developed by a group of royal patrons, centered on the imperial Mughal family (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013) [1].

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Taj Mahal is a mausoleum located in Agra, India, constructed between 1632 and 1648 by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan [3]. It is a prominent example of Mughal architecture, renowned for its formal and symmetrical design inspired by Persian precedents. The mausoleum is situated within a large, Charbagh-style garden on the southern bank of the Yamuna River, a location believed to hold special significance for the Mughals and recurring in their architectural projects [4]. Surrounding the central marble tomb is an arcade seemingly designed to resemble a fortress. The complex includes several structures built during different phases, notably the main gateway to the west, a mosque to the west,

and a guest house to the east, all facing a four-part garden. The buildings employ Pietra dura decoration and inlaid calligraphy; the red sandstone walls bear inscriptions from the Quran (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

## The Mughal Empire

The Taj Mahal stands as a celebrated reminder of the lasting cultural and architectural legacy of the Mughal Empire. This empire emerged in the early 1500s after Babur, a prince in Central Asia, defeated

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the Sultan of Delhi, and the Mughals governed the Indian subcontinent until the 1700s (Schuster, 2008). Nearly 60 monuments from this period still remain, predominantly constructed in red sandstone or marble and combining elements derived from Persian, Indian, and Islamic architecture (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). The Taj Mahal exemplifies this lasting heritage, remaining as one of the most outstanding symbols of Mughal culture and architectural accomplishments.

### **Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal**

The Taj Mahal represents a significant Victorian Age adaptation of Mughal architecture. A notable example of Indo-Islamic architecture, the complex encompasses a mosque, the main mausoleum, subsidiary buildings, and extensive gardens. The construction commenced in 1632 and reached completion around 1653 [5]. Overseeing the project was a board of architects headed by Ustad Ahmad Lahauri, the chief architect of the emperor Shah Jahan. The mausoleum itself is a prominent white marble edifice that occupies the center of a precisely arranged Charbagh garden, featuring raised pathways interspersed with sunken flowerbeds, while a central marble Manzilgah serves as an imam-Bargee. The Mughal Charbagh, as illustrated by this arrangement, typically assumes a rectangular form with a tomb or pavilion positioned at its center. This design includes a system of four rivers symbolized by channels guiding water toward the four cardinal points (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **Construction Timeline**

Construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632 and involved a coordinated workforce of approximately 20,000 artisans and craftsmen. The site chosen for the project was situated on the right bank of the Yamuna River in the city of Agra. The mausoleum's completion occurred in 1648, with the broader complex taking an additional 5 years to finish [6]. This timeline reflects a meticulously planned and executed architectural endeavor that spanned over two decades (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN**

Following the shape usually given by the rectangular plot of land available along the bank of the river Yamuna, the Taj Mahal and its platform are perfectly square. The shape of a square is established by four monuments, the four minarets, at the four corners. Each minaret is more than 40 m (135 feet) tall. Thus, they have a slender aspect, but are still tall enough together and from a distance to visually dominate the whole complex.

Three of the sides of the Taj Mahal give onto a deep porch with five arches, which is a very typical Indo-Islamic design. The arched entrance running along the garden side (the south entrance, facing the garden) opens onto the main gateway [7]. The outer garden is built in the Persian Charbagh style, the word representing the division of a four-part garden by water courses. Only the foreshortened perspective makes the garden appear longer than it is. The order of the garden is progressively more elaborate toward the edge, where walkways, tree platforms, and a canal further subdivide the space, while the center, a cross-axis of paths and water channels, remains unfilled.

The use of the garden as a prelude for the mausoleum allows the Charbagh layout to serve a purpose other than an earthly paradise. With the entire complex mirroring each other across the River Yamuna, by some measures, the landscaped platforms become the actual center of the whole complex. Each of the four minarets is built slightly outward, so that in the event of a collapse, the structures would fall away from the tomb (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **Materials Used**

The Taj Mahal was built mostly using white marble, but red sandstone was also used. Stones from all over India and Asia were used to create this building. The marble was brought from South Asia, possibly from Chittaur in Rajasthan. Sangor, near Lahore, might have been where red sandstone was sourced. Lapis lazuli came from Badakhshan, now in Afghanistan. Crystal and turquoise may have been shipped from Tibet and China. Agra was also a hub for high-quality, local stone [8].

Craftsmanship was of the highest quality, with black marble from Magra, yellow marble from Jaisalmer, jade from Tibet, crystal from China, turquoise and Lapis lazuli from Tibet, and sapphire from Sri Lanka. Skilled artisans and craftsmen from different parts of India and Asia contributed to the construction of the Taj Mahal.

### Architectural Style

Several stylistic features link the Taj Mahal to its Timurid and Mughal predecessors. The double dome echoes the design of the Gur-e-Amir at Samarkand (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). The portico façade resonates with the design seen in Baburnama illustrations (Ali, 2013) [3], while the pavilion flanking the tomb building draws upon patterns observed in Humayun's tomb. The intricate Pietra dura decoration resembles that found in Akbar's tomb at Sikandra. The marblework draws inspiration from earlier Mughal sites in Punjab. Particularly significant is the employment of the four-quartered Charbagh (or Chahar Bagh) garden layout, a hallmark of Persian and Timurid architecture. Typically, the tomb is centrally positioned within the garden, underscoring its status as a symbol of power and the axis mundi of the universe. In the Taj complex, however, the building is situated at the northern end along the garden's main axis. According to Ebba Koch, the design adapts the terrestrial Charbagh into a maritime form centered on water, with the Chahar Bagh's four rivers of paradise represented by the actual river Yamuna and three artificial channels. The moonlight garden (Lahout) to the west further enhances this symbolism. Moreover, the garden's dimensions allow for azimuthal alignments, linking the site to solar cycles and the cosmic axis.

### Symbolism in Design

According to archeologist Amelia Carolina Sparavigna, the Taj Mahal embraces the Charbagh concept found in Mughal gardens (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). The Charbagh traditionally positions water channels to divide a square garden into four equal parts, with the mausoleum placed centrally. The Taj Mahal, however, situates the white marble mausoleum at the northern terminus of the garden rather than its center – leading to interpretative challenges. Ebba Koch hypothesizes a variant drawn from a secular waterfront garden model championed by Shah Jahan's court. The Archaeological Survey of India contends that the adjacent Yamuna River was deliberately incorporated to represent one of the four rivers flowing from Paradise.

Sparavigna's astronomical interpretation emphasizes the symbolic interplay of the garden's geometry and solar positions. The four cardinal points roughly align with the azimuths of sunrise and sunset on the summer and winter solstices. Accordingly, the surviving white marble chhatra pavilions mark the azimuths of the sun's rising and setting at these solstices. This schema seems plausible given the enclosure's solar alignment and the analogous burial placement under the garden's east–west axis – coinciding with the horizon at a sunset azimuth of around  $270^\circ$  [9]. Thus, the chhatra pavilions signify the sun's extremes, enclosing the complex within the perimeter of light. The western origin of the water channels symbolically connects the garden to the afterlife, being illuminated first by the morning sun and last at night.

### CULTURAL IMPACT

Every culture has a different method for telling stories, many of which are narratives related to human loss and pain. It is in this personal connection that the reader or listener learns about the past life and social environment of a people. Some forms are religious, some rise from grief, and others from humor. Some provide an outlet for harmless fantasy, still others warn and instruct. Certainly, one of the most familiar of all of these cultural expressions, and one that arises in virtually every human culture, is song.

The songs of mourners are such a universal phenomenon that little comment is required to make most readers and listeners aware of their important role in community and ritual life. In all places and in every period, people have lamented their dead. Widows have cried for their lost partners. Rhythmic laments have accompanied funeral barques, funeral pyres, or the simple interment of the body in the earth. These chants have become part of the ceremonial of funerary rites and supplied an emotional

ritual framework for the pain of loss. In some cultures, rather than formal songs, professional wailers have fulfilled this role of vocal mourning. The world's most famous lament is surely the poetry of the One Thousand and One Nights, which has been set to music on many occasions from Monteverdi to the present.

### **INFLUENCE ON ART AND LITERATURE**

The Taj Mahal exerted a profound influence on art and literature. Measured by the span of consciousness, the weight of acknowledgment, and the breadth of accomplishments influenced, The Taj's influence is gigantic and dispersed.

Its earliest effects on Islamic art were certainly transformative and widespread. Its spectacular geometry and colorful vitality went on to influence a whole generation of Mughal artists and calligraphers, while the extended formal vocabulary it summarized provided a handy shortlist of building blocks with which to revive and add resonance to almost any design. Its synthesis of arched and domical building models was fundamental to later traditions.

Within a few years of its completion, steps were taken to connect The Taj to the Mughal past through the new graveyard on the eastern campus, the renovation of Akbar's tomb, and Hans Vredeman de Vries' Chamber of Arts in his celebrated 1604 Architecture title [10]. By 1612, John Shute felt able to declare:

“This Fabric that is named the Taj, in Agra-India cannot be equalled in the whole World.” The Taj's admirers have long hailed it as a Mughal synonym for Paradise on Earth. John Milton's Paradise Lost, a key source, makes the importance of this connection and the impact of The Taj in England very specific and testable (M. Bleher, 2015).

### **Role in Indian Culture**

The Taj Mahal is widely regarded as the symbol of India. It celebrates India's rich history and exemplifies the finest examples of the Mughal (Persian-Islamic) style of architecture, and it has affected art and artisans in many ways. Few architectural achievements of Mughal art have captured the imagination of the public like the Taj Mahal (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). Designs of many buildings and residences in India and Pakistan are inspired by the Taj. It is even credited with inspiring the Taj Broadway, a resort in Bombay.

The Taj Mahal Garden is unusual because its main element, the white Mausoleum, is located at the end of the garden, creating debate among scholars about the reasons for not using the traditional Charbagh form. Ebba Koch suggests a variant of the Charbagh was employed, adapted for a religious purpose. The Archaeological Survey of India proposed that the Yamuna River was incorporated into the planning to represent one of the rivers of Paradise, making the complex a traditional Charbagh. The garden's planning may also reflect alignment with sunset and sunrise azimuths, like ancient Chinese towns and the planner of the Forbidden City in Beijing, where specific sightlines align with solstices. At the corners of the Taj Mahal Garden, white pavilions are positioned so that the sun rises and sets at these points during the solstices, symbolically linking the garden to the “axis mundi” as a horizon aligned with celestial events.

### **GLOBAL RECOGNITION**

The initiative by India to nominate the Taj Mahal as a World Heritage Site in 1979 underscores its significance. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) listed the Taj Mahal in 1983 as a celebrated masterpiece of human creative genius, exemplary of exquisite artistic achievement. India further promotes the monument through the “Taj Express” train connection between Mumbai and Agra to encourage tourism.

Agra is located in the Braj region celebrated by poets, and it stands on the Yamuna River. The foundation of the monument rests on well-drained, sandy soil, which required a complex structural

support system. The Taj Mahal rests on a square plinth forming a terrace; the symmetrical building plan adheres to an Islamic aesthetic forbidding depiction of living beings.

Situated to the south of the Taj Mahal complex, the Taj Nature Walk, covering 22 acres, serves as a conservation and recreational area with nearly 85 plant species covering diverse biomes. It offers strategic views of the Taj Mahal, emphasizes the importance of conservation, water management, and the online sharing of nature, and provides a valuable recreational space for residents and tourists (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

## **TOURISM AND ECONOMY**

The Taj Mahal is one of the world's great tourist destinations. Visitors come from throughout India and from all the continents (Umesh R. Dangarwala & Krupa J. Rao, 2016). This is partially because the polished white marble that covers the tomb's walls reflects the changing sunlight and moonlight, creating the impression of an unfolding poem in stone: red-sandstone quay walls were laid by the architect Ustad Ahmad Lahori. Tourists want to discover the "real city," and the architecture and built environment important to them is the everyday fabric rather than iconic or monumental structures (Maitland & Maitland, 2013). The four canonical destinations for ancient Buddhist pilgrimage are Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Lumbini, and Kushinagar. These have been augmented with sites, like Sanchi, Ajanta, and Ellora (K. Parker, 2013).

### **Visitor Statistics**

The Taj Mahal attracts approximately 7–8 million visitors annually, placing it among the most visited tourist attractions in the world. Data from 2001 to date indicate a steady flow of tourists, with the highest numbers recorded in 2013 and 2014. That bilateral top business travel destination for India, with an estimated 500,000 Indian and foreign visitors traveling to Agra annually solely for business reasons. The monument is closed on Fridays and open to visitors from sunrise to sunset on all other days.

Various ticketing options accommodate different visitor categories. Indians, SAARC country citizens, and BIMSTEC country citizens pay INR 50 per ticket, while foreign tourists pay INR 1,100. Students of Indian schools receive a strongly discounted INR 15, and children below 15 years of age enter free. Tours tend to be comparatively short, often lasting only an hour or a nighttime hour for various music events held in the summer months.

### **Economic Impact on Agra**

The economic benefits generated by the Taj Mahal were crucial to the maintenance and prosperity of the city of Agra. Its infusion of funds encouraged the local economy, particularly textile and silk production, to grow and develop. Agra became a hub to produce silk brocades, muslin – a gauzy, finely woven cotton textile – and fine carpets. These goods were highly prized by visitors from all over the world, who were required to provide rewards of gold, silver, and lace that fed directly into the imperial treasury. The demand for these products led to the establishment of formalized government departments in Agra devoted exclusively to the husbanding of the textile industry.

In a letter from 1924, the Yangtze River Daily from Shanghai noted that "ordinary tourists cannot match the wealth of those who come for silk." The textile industry reached its peak during the reign of Aurangzeb, and the records maintained in the archives of the Taj Mahal provide valuable insights today into the problems and solutions encountered by the court during its operation.

### **Challenges of Tourism Management**

The initial construction and subsequent relocation of Agra offered a strategic advantage for the new capital. Situated on the banks of the Yamuna and far removed from Delhi, Agra benefited from proximity to the imperial granary, now sited near the road between the Lal Quila and a monument immediately east of the Firoz Shah gate. The capital also lay beside major routes connecting the eastern (Jaunpur-Bengal) regions with the north-west frontier (Multan-Sind) and Rajasthan (Ismail et al., 2014) [8].

Although Agra was largely an imperial preserve, its environs, including the river plains, the city, and ruins attracted strong Muslim and Hindu influences. The Taj Mahal was set within a fully functional environment where the imperial granary served the needs of growing crop production.

### CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The Taj Mahal, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983, is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India and features around 1,200 guards. Despite such measures, the monument faces conservation challenges. In 2007, some visitors demonstrated against a high fee of 750 rupees (around \$16 USD in 2011) before being allowed to see the interior of the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. The marble similarity of the nearby Taj Nature Walk complements the Taj Mahal's aesthetic (Rajora, 2013).

Situated on the banks of the Yamuna River, the Taj Mahal is more vulnerable to the effects of pollution due to its characteristic white marble and woodwork details. Several initiatives and restrictions on nearby manufacturing processes and traffic have been implemented to reduce air pollutants. Since 1996, the Indian Supreme Court has restricted the use of two-wheelers with two-stroke engines, heavy vehicles, and industrial emissions in the vicinity of the Taj Mahal. Alternative fuels, such as compressed natural gas, have been adopted by rickshaws and taxis in Agra.

### Restoration Projects

Individuals with legal and/or political influence in India have been outspoken about the fact that the Taj Mahal was facing serious threats and should be protected at all costs; such individuals include the Supreme Court of India, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Ministry of Culture, the Prime Minister of India, and the President of India.

Protection of the Taj Mahal is carried out by the ASI and the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ) Authority. The ASI is responsible for the upkeep of the Taj Mahal and management of the monument, while the TTZ Authority has jurisdiction over the area surrounding the monument. In 1996, the Supreme Court of India ordered the closure of industries operating in the vicinity, because they had been found to be polluting the atmosphere and damaging the monument. After the closure of such polluting industries, the white marble of the Taj Mahal was observed to have regained its original color. At present, the government of India has put in place a seven-phase restoration plan for the monument, and also for the Yamuna River, which flows in its vicinity.

### Environmental Concerns

Environmentalists have expressed concern about the effects of pollution on the Taj Mahal. Water pollution in the Yamuna River has contributed to the discoloration and deterioration of the building's foundation by decreasing river water levels, which, in turn, have dried up the wooden foundation beneath the monument. Several trees have fallen and cracked the marble walls of the littered garden surrounding the Taj Mahal. Serious concerns have also been raised about the impact of constant tourism on the monument. The large number of vehicles causes air pollution, which can lead to the yellowing of the iconic white marble.

A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi in 2013 found that vehicle emissions caused a concentration of sulphur dioxide around the Taj Mahal exceeding safe levels for the preservation of marble. The Supreme Court of India, in response, imposed restrictions on vehicles entering the Taj corridor. It was ordered that vehicles emitting more than 50 mg of nitrogen oxide per km should be banned from entering a 10-kilometer radius around the Taj Mahal. Furthermore, the Court directed that all vehicles within a three-kilometer radius of the monument switch to cleaner fuels such as CNG, LPG, or battery technology. Adherence to these rulings led to a reported 40 per cent decline in pollution levels, making the Taj Mahal resemble its appearance from two decades prior.

### **Government Initiatives**

In 1971, the government of India designated the Taj Mahal as a historical monument of national importance, placing it under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which is responsible for its maintenance and conservation. During the reign of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Subsequently, the government undertook a series of protective measures to safeguard the monument. Several industries were ordered to relocate their activities away from the Taj Mahal. A green belt was established, and tourist, vehicular, and other movements in the immediate vicinity were subjected to strict monitoring. Moreover, certain environmental conditions were regulated to reduce the accumulation of particulate matter that had been contributing to the yellowing of the mausoleum's white marble façade. (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

Construction of the Taj Mahal was completed in 1648, more than 20 years after the emperor's death in 1627. His mausoleum does not enshrine his remains, which instead are buried in a subterranean crypt of the Jahangiri Mahal, a palace built around 1600 (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **Urban Development Around the Taj Mahal**

India is a nation of vibrant colors and contrasts where the charms of the past mingle effortlessly with aspirations for the future, all living side by side. This is especially evident in Uttar Pradesh, whose fertile landscapes encompass the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri, both ensembles that make Agra the jewel in the crown of the Indian tourism circuit. However, the hijacking of the Yamuna River in the 20th century brought shadow and uncertainty to this paradise. The Taj Mahal was designed to take advantage of all the natural elements, with the sun and the moon acting as symbolic guardians; the arrival of the monsoon season was also met with celebrations involving the Mahtab Bagh (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). To the west, the Jazmau village had been destined to remain a rural settlement encircled by an expanse of cultivated fields; its sudden expansion into an industrial zone threatened both the monuments and the population.

Urban development and industrialization have progressed so quickly and intermittently in Agra that, unlike other cities, the area covered by the urban agglomeration has shrunk since the 1990s. However, much of the fabrication and commercial activity has shifted to unorganized forms and to suburban areas, shifting the pressure instead on the historical city center. A unique and shared landscape evolved within the walls of Agra Fort at the beginning of the 17th century and lasted until the beginning of the 20th century. It was a landscape dominated by deserted pavilions, by Maya Bazaar and an avenue of collection tanks, extending through the plain toward the Moonlight Garden on the banks of the Yamuna: a selection of tunes that is still audible today.

### **POLLUTION AND ITS EFFECTS**

Central India's geography creates a unique micro-meteorological condition, like an inverted cup, in which the Taj Mahal and Agra's industrial areas reside. Industrial pollution accelerates the deterioration of the monument. The northern and northeastern winds carry polluting particles from the Yamuna River and the cotton-iron industrial area, causing marble discoloration and the worsening of other vegetation's conditions. It became so corrosive that the white marble of the Taj Mahal turned yellow. Smoke and pollution from local traffic and Agra's industries have caused a discoloration of the Taj Mahal's facade. A study by India's Central Pollution Control Board and the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur concluded that the marble might turn black within 15 years if the air quality in Agra is not improved.

A 1996 study sponsored by the Indian government found that the building is gradually dissolving in a process called marble cancer, a form of acid rain damage, induced by the sulfur, nitrogen, and other industrial oxides present in the air. The Taj Mahal has suffered from damage caused by poor conservation practices, including the use of harsh chemical methods in cleaning the marble. Officials fiercely oppose public transport in close proximity to the monument; only electric buses and electric

rickshaws are allowed to operate nearby. Despite setbacks, the tourism infrastructure in Agra has demonstrated a clear progression in service standards over the last decade, reflecting the broader pattern visible in nature and civilization as outlined earlier.

### **Cultural Heritage vs. Modernization**

The Taj Mahal, deeply embedded in the collectivity of the Indian population, is an architectural paramount of the values, aims, and aspirations of the society from which it originates. National monuments worldwide are sensitive areas for planning, and their surroundings assume significance due to the close harmony they share with the inherent character of the structure. The involvement of the community, from the initiation of renewal projects to their execution, is crucial. The degree of renewal must be carefully defined to maintain the balance between the historical monument and its environs (Ellen Shea, 1995).

### **THE TAJ MAHAL IN POPULAR CULTURE**

Originally designed as a complex private residence for Empress Jahanara, the Taj Mahal has since permeated Bollywood narratives as well as global popular culture. Its iconic status is such that an imitation appears on the 1000-rupiah banknote of Indonesia, underscoring the symbol's broad cultural resonance. Located in a vast garden offering visitors an extensive view, the Taj Mahal complex is embellished by four canals emanating from a central spring that convey water symbolically in the four cardinal directions – a design also reminiscent of the “Garden of Eden.” The enclosures of the gardens establish a symbolic horizon aligned with the earth's axis, facilitating uninterrupted views of the sunrise and sunset during solstices. The complex's architecture has long been believed to harness this celestial alignment, with its main entrance oriented toward Mecca and the entire site designed, since its inception, to capture the sun's positions at these significant astronomical moments in the year (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013).

### **Representation in Films**

Because of its romantic history and magnificent aesthetics, the Taj Mahal has been portrayed in films and literature as an epitome of romance. Notable film appearances include two Bollywood films, *Taj Mahal* (1941) and *Taj Mahal* (1963), both centering on the emperor's love for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The Taj Mahal has also featured on at least two Indian postage stamps. In the 1968 James Bond film “On Her Majesty's Secret Service,” the structure was depicted as a palace, albeit inaccurately situated on the Dal Lake in Srinagar rather than beside the Yamuna River in Agra. The Taj Mahal was featured during scenes set in India in the 1964 film “The Pink Panther.” The palace also received a tribute in the 1980 Hindi film “Qurbani,” with the song “Laila O Laila.” Asian Dub Foundation utilized the Taj Mahal in the cover art for their 2001 single “Fortress Europe.” Mongolian singer Bold produced the video “Taj Mahal,” filmed in both the surrounding areas in India and the Mongolian steppes. Furthermore, it appeared in the 2021 Hollywood musical “Everybody's Talking About Jamie.”

### **LITERARY REFERENCES**

References to the Taj Mahal in contemporary literature are few. The quotes below are from stories and novels from the last few centuries.

*Mark Twain wrote in The Innocents Abroad:* “The finest, the most perfectly developed mausoleum in the world.” He also witnessed his guide dig up the corpse of Mumtaz Mahal to confirm how “perfectly embalmed, the eyes quite open. The perfume of the corpse was exquisite.”

Rudyard Kipling mentioned the Taj Mahal several times in his novels; for example, in *Kim* he wrote of the “hidden bunderundur of Mumtaz Mahal, clothed in the restless shadows of countless generations of sorrowing men” and added, “A million people have looked at the Taj Mahal – they look so at the sun, when the stars are shining.”

### Artistic Interpretations

The Taj Mahal has inspired a profusion of conceptual, literary, and visual works that derive their beauty from imagination and theory instead of physical fact. As a masterpiece of ideal geometry organized around the perfect symmetry of the circle, the monument's essential form and a few characteristic elements can be summarized in just two fundamental shapes, a thesis which has been explored in recent studies of the site (Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). This simplified formal framework underlies the schematic and metaphorical constructs found in artistic and literary interpretations, which often emphasize symmetrical balance and circular harmony. While the marble construction remains an accessible point of departure, and its representation in monochrome etching or astonishing miniature often enhances the classical atmosphere, the spirit and significance of the monument can hardly be captured in a single image and are more dependably outlined in theoretical or literary formulations. These expositions congratulate the Taj Mahal as a symbol of perfect and transcendent balance and harmony that need never be built or even seen to be admired.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Taj Mahal is a magnificent example of Muslim art and architecture and is forever celebrated as a symbol of eternal love. It is ranked among the wonders of the world. Centrally placed in an extensive garden overlooking the Yamuna River, the Taj Mahal is universal acknowledgment of the exquisite beauty of Persian-influenced Indian architecture amid a landscape consistent with the design of the Persian paradise, Atarakhsh-Bagh.

The Taj Mahal is recognized as one of the supreme achievements of the non-European world during Europe's Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. It continues to captivate onlookers and inspire artists of all disciplines. Dostoevsky pointed out that the Taj Mahal was "not built by a slave but by a great sage."

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