

Shah Jahan's Golden Period of Architecture in India

On account of the intense interest taken and vigorous efforts made in raising magnificent and spacious buildings by Shah Jahan the Mughal period in general and his period in specific came to be known as the golden period of Indian architecture.

During his period architecture reached its highest water mark in India.

As observed by the noted art critic Percy Brown,

“As it was the proud statement of Augustus that he found Rome built of bricks and left it of marble, similarly Shah Jahan had found the Mughal cities of stones, he left them of marble”.

Shah Jahan has been variously called as ‘Prince among builders’ and ‘Engineer King’ on account of his love for architecture.

Important features of Shah Jahan's buildings are:

1. Shah Jahan's buildings are unmatched in exquisite beauty of form.
2. Shah Jahan's buildings have no parallel in symmetry of design.
3. Shah Jahan's buildings are unsurpassed in grandeur.
4. Shah Jahan's buildings have great strength.
5. Shah Jahan's buildings have beautiful balance among different parts.

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6. Shah Jahan's buildings have a great variety—cities, forts, gardens, mosques and palaces etc.
7. Shah Jahan's buildings are located at different places like Agra, Ahmedabad, Ajmer, Delhi, Lahore, Kabul and Kashmir etc.
8. Shah Jahan's buildings display a synthesis of Indian and foreign architectural style.
9. Shah Jahan's buildings are mostly built with white marble in place of red stone..

Taj Mahal (Agra):

Chief features:

“By its perfect proportions, luminous beauty, milk- white texture assuming different tones at different times, delicacy and variety of ornamentation, flawless execution of structure and by its picturesque setting, the Taj Mahal stands as a creation of superb beauty and magnificence in Indian architecture.”

Rabindranath Tagore has described the Taj as “a tear drop on the cheek of time.”

Taj Mahal has been usually described as “a dream in marble, designed by fairies and finished by jewellers.”

A view of the whole structure in a moonlight night (‘Chandni rat’) and its reflection in the calm Jamuna adds the supernatural beauty to the whole structure. This is the only magnificent monument in the world which reflects the eternal love of a king for his queen.

S.K. Saraswati has remarked:

“By its stately and perfect proportions, the delicacy and purity of its lineaments, its milk-white texture assuming different hues and tones at different times and under different conditions, the flawless execution of the structure and of its varied ornaments, and, lastly, by its picturesque setting aided by the ingenuity of man, the Taj Mahal at Agra stands as a creation of superb beauty and magnificence, not only in Mughal architecture but in Indian architecture as a whole.”

Why was the Taj Mahal built:

The charming Mausoleum, built in pure and white marble, was erected by the emperor Shah Jahan in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. Probably it is the only memorial in the world to reflect the eternal love of a king for his queen.

Construction of the Taj Mahal:

According to Tavernier about 20,000 men took about 22 years to complete it and it cost about three crores of rupees.

About twenty varieties of precious stones were imported from within and outside India to decorate it.

Shah Jahan used ‘pietra dura’ a method of decoration on a large scale—inlaid work of jewels.

An important feature of the building is the massive dome and the four slender minarets linking the platform to the main building.

The building stands in the midst of a formal garden.

From all available evidence it is concluded that the principal architect was Ustad Isha (Persian/Turk) who was assisted by a number of Hindu architects. There is also the possibility that for the decoration of the exterior, European artists were consulted.

Moti Masjid:

Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque at Agra is regarded as “the purest and novelist house of prayer.” The mosque was built at a cost of Rs. 30 lakhs. According to one writer, “It suggests the struggle of the soul above worldly entanglements.”

Jama Masjid:

Jama Masjid built at Delhi was constructed with red stone for the use of the royal family. High towers and domes are its special characteristics.

Red Fort and some important buildings in it:

In the fort among the important buildings are ‘Diwan-Khas’, the ‘Rang Mahal, Nahar Bahishit’ and Diwan-i-am’. The famous Persian poet Firdausi has said about the beauty of ‘Diwan- i- khas’.

“Gar Firdaus Barooey Zamin Ast, Hamin Asto—Hamin Asto, Hamin Asto”

(If there is heaven anywhere on the earth, it is here, it is here, and it is here,”

‘Takhat-i-Tahus’. (Peacock Throne):

This throne, a celebrated work of art was used for sitting in the court by Shah Jahan. The throne had an enamelled canopy supported by 12 pillars, each of which bore two peacocks inlaid with gems. A tree covered with diamonds, rubies and pearls etc. stood between the birds of each pair. It took seven years to complete at a cost of a one crore of rupees. In 1739, Nadir Shah who invaded India, carried it away with him to Persia.

Gardens:

Shah Jahan was equally interested in gardens. Some of the famous gardens laid out by him are the Wazir Bagh in Kashmir, Shalimar Gardens near Lahore, the Talkatora Bagh and Shalimar Gardens at Delhi.

Summing up:

Shah Jahan's buildings combine firmness and vastness with beauty and delicacy.