International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development (IJERED)
ISSN: 2320-8708, Vol. 8 Issue 2, March-April, 2020, Impact Factor: 5.246

Mughal's architecture Vs. Modern Architecture : A Brief Historiography

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ABSTRACT

The descendants of Timur stand out in Islamicate history for their high personal cultivation and their patronage of arts and letters. This was especially true in the architectural patronage of the Mughal emperors. During the reigns of the first five rulers in particular,6 the concept, practice, and usage of space was in part informed by their Timurid, Persianate, background. This shared heritage, part of the cultural milieu in which the Mughals existed, was felt most strongly in the first 180 years of the Mughal period, during which time the strength and wealth of the Mughal rulers rose and peaked, allowing for the creation of vast architectural programs that were, inherently, a means of visually proclaiming their political power.

Keywords: mughal dynasty, struggle, conquest, reign, Akbar.

INTRODUCTION

The architecture of India is rooted in its history, culture and religion. Among a number of architectural styles and traditions, the contrasting Hindu temple architecture and Indo-Islamic architecture are the best known historical styles. Both of these, but especially the former, have a number of regional styles within them. An early example of town planning was the Harappan architecture of the Indus Valley Civilisation, whose people lived in cities with baked brick houses, streets in a grid layout, elaborate drainage systems, water supply systems, granaries, citadels, and some non-residential buildings. Much other early Indian architecture was in wood, which has not survived[1].

Hindu temple architecture is mainly divided into the Dravidian style of the south and the Nagara style of the north, with other regional styles. Housing styles also vary between regions, partly depending on the different climates[2].

The first major Islamic kingdom in India was the Delhi Sultanate, which led to the development of Indo-Islamic architecture, combining Indian and Islamic features. The rule of the Mughal Empire, when Mughal architecture evolved, is regarded as the zenith of Indo-Islamic architecture, with the Taj Mahal being the high point of their contribution. Indo-Islamic architecture influenced the Rajput and Sikh styles as well[3].

During the British colonial period, European styles including neoclassical, gothic revival, and baroque became prevalent across India. The amalgamation of Indo-Islamic and European styles led to a new style, known as the Indo-Saracenic style. After independence, modernist ideas spread among Indian architects as a way of progressing from the colonial culture. Le Corbusier, who designed the city of Chandigarh influenced a generation of architects towards modernism in the 20th century. The economic reforms of 1991 further bolstered the urban architecture of India as the country became more integrated with the world's economy. Traditional Vastu Shastra remains influential in India's architecture during the contemporary era.[4]

Mughal's architecture

The most famous Indo-Islamic style is Mughal architecture. Mughal art and architecture, a characteristic Indo-Islamic-Persian style flourished on the Indian subcontinent during the Mughal empire (1526–1857). This new style combined elements of Islamic art and architecture, which had been introduced to India during the Delhi Sultanate (1192–1398) and had produced great monuments such as the Qutb Minar, with features of Persian art and architecture[5]. Its most prominent

examples are the series of imperial mausolea, which started with the pivotal Tomb of Humayun, but is best known for the Taj Mahal.

Mughal elements

The Tomb of Salim Chishti and jali latticed screens is famed as one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture in India. Darwaza-I-Rauza, Taj Mahal Complex, showing large vaulted gateways with delicate ornamentation and minarets with cupolas[6].

Bulbous domes on Tomb of Nisar Begum at Khusro Bagh. It is known for features including monumental buildings with large, bulbous onion domes, surrounded by gardens on all four sides, and delicate ornamentation work, including pachin kari decorative work and jali-latticed screens. Pietra Dura or 'Parchinkari' rose to prominence under patronage of Emperors specially under Shah Jahan[7]. Originating from Italy, it found its way to Mughal courts via trade route. It adapted to its present distinct feature of floral art by the hands of local artisans and Persian influence.

Mughals brought in Persian style into Indian Architecture. The character and structure of Mughal buildings displayed a uniform character and structure. Some of the main features of the Mughal architecture are mentioned below[8].

- Large halls
- Very large vaulted gateways
- Delicate ornamentation
- Bulbous domes
- Slender Minarets with cupolas at the 4 corners

The Red Fort at Agra (1565–74) and the walled city of Fatehpur Sikri (1569–74)[95] are among the architectural achievements of this time—as is the Taj Mahal, built as a tomb for Queen Mumtaz Mahal by Shah Jahan (1628–58).[96] Employing the double dome, the recessed archway, the depiction of any animal or human—an essential part of the Indian tradition—was forbidden in places of worship under Islam[9].

Mughal architecture reached its zenith during the reign of the emperor Shah Jahan (1628–58), its crowning achievement being the magnificent Taj Mahal. This period is marked by a fresh emergence in India of Persian features that had been seen earlier in the tomb of Humayun. The use of the double dome, a recessed archway inside a rectangular fronton, and parklike surroundings are all typical of the this period. Symmetry and balance between the parts of a building were always stressed, while the delicacy of detail in Shah Jahan decorative work has seldom been surpassed[10].

The Taj Mahal does contain tilework of plant ornaments. The architecture during the Mughal Period, with its rulers being of Turco-Mongol origin, has shown a notable blend of Indian style combined with the Islamic. Taj Mahal in Agra, India is one of the wonders of the world.[11]

Mughal gardens are gardens built by the Mughals in the Islamic style. This style was influenced by Persian gardens. They are built in the char bagh structure, which is a quadrilateral garden layout based on the four gardens of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an. This style is intended to create a representation of an earthly utopia in which humans co-exist in perfect harmony with all elements of nature[12].

The quadrilateral garden is divided by walkways or flowing water into four smaller parts. Significant use of rectilinear layouts are made within the walled enclosures. Some of the typical features include pools, fountains and canals inside the gardens.

Mughal architecture Vs. Modern Architecture

The Mughal architecture is an architectural style developed by the Mughals in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries throughout the ever changing extent of their empire in Medieval India. It was an amalgam of Islamic, Persian, Turkic and Indian architecture. Mughal buildings have a uniform pattern of structure and character, including large bulbous domes, slender minarets at the corners, massive halls, large vaulted gateways and delicate ornamentation.[13] Examples of the style can be found in India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The architecture of the United Kingdom, or British architecture, consists of an eclectic combination of architectural styles, ranging from those that predate the creation of the United Kingdom, such as Roman, to 21st century contemporary. England has seen the most influential developments, though Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have each fostered unique styles and played leading roles in the international history of architecture.[14]

Although there are prehistoric and classical structures in the United Kingdom, British architectural history effectively begins with the first Anglo-Saxon Christian churches, built soon after Augustine of Canterbury arrived in Great Britain in 597. Norman architecture was built on a vast scale throughout Great Britain and Ireland from the 11th century onwards in the form of castles and churches to help impose Norman authority upon their dominions. English Gothic architecture, which flourished between 1180 until around 1520, was initially imported from France, but quickly developed its own unique qualities.[15]

There is an inherent paradox in trying to classify Mughal architecture as a single stylistic genre. Is it to be considered 'Islamic'? 'South Asian'? Both? The answer is, of course, a fusion of the two, but the question of where the Mughals should fit in this geo-cultural spectrum has been problematic since the emergence of an architectural/archaeological field.
It was the British and their agents who established the study of monuments in what was British India with the creation of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861. From the latter half of the nineteenth century they created a narrative that considered Mughal architecture as inherently Persian because it was 'Islamic', not 'Indian'; this was put forth by, for example, James Fergusson, one of the first proponents of this categorisation, and Percy Brown[16]. Also in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Alexander Cunningham implemented a chronological categorisation system for Indian art and architecture that created periodic divisions based upon a conquering entity: 'Indo-Grecian,' 'Indo-Scythian,' and 'Indo-Sassanian'. This classification system, however, presented art and architecture created in South Asia as a result of interactions with outside forces, and therefore as derivative. This lack of nuance in architectural documentation and classification continued in the work of some South Asians who adopted a nationalistic point of view in their writings.13 They rejected imperial (i.e. British) charges of derivation and claimed that Indian art and architecture was solely the result of the country's own genesis[17].

As an academic discipline developed, there was some recognition of the multi-cultural and multi-regional nature of Mughal architecture. Such writings referred to Mughal buildings as having a debt to 'Persian', 'Iranian', 'Central Asian' and/or 'Timurid' architecture; it is the latter which became the frequent citation. For example, in modern survey texts and introductions to Mughal architecture, authors acknowledge that the early Mughal rulers looked to their Timurid heritage to inform their buildings[18]. The Mughals' garden tradition, an integral facet of their architectural contributions to South Asia, is universally accepted as having Central Asian, Timurid roots. Decorative motifs do not escape being awarded this generalised source, with certain imagery like cypress trees and the chini-khana motif being described as generically 'Persian'. While such broad statements are often made, what of more particular studies on how and why Persianate ideals, forms and designs are found within Mughal architecture, garden design and architectural decoration[19]?

Some concrete studies within this area have been undertaken by, for example, Michael Brand, Robert Hillenbrand, Ebba Koch, Glenn Lowry and Gülru Necipoğlu.16 There are those, like Koch's 'Diwan-i `Amm and Chihil Sutun: The Audience Halls of Shah Jahan' which explore particular spaces or constructions and how a common architectural concept sourced from the Persianate past was integral to their creation. Others, like Necipoğlu's article on the palaces of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals, explore how the early modern Persianate courts shared aspects of a socio-cultural history, and how each used architecture to reflect and visually claim this heritage. Finally, there are studies like Lowry's on Humayun's tomb, which discuss particular buildings and make direct connections between their creation and the cultural ties that linked the Mughals and Timurids [20].

Much more recently, Lisa Golombek and Ebba Koch have revisited broader theoretical questions surrounding Mughal-Timurid architectural connections. In their essay, 'The Mughals, Uzbeks, and the Timurid Legacy', while acknowledging that the Mughals used architecture to make their most visible and lasting claim to their Timurid roots, they query what exactly can be claimed as 'Timurid' due to conscious Mughal choice and not merely happenstance. Giving many examples of Timurid architecture, spaces and planning provisions that have visual relationships with aspects of Mughal architecture, Golombek and Koch's conclusion is that it is in geometry, symmetry and rational planning that the primary links between Timurid and Mughal architecture can be made[21].

CONCLUSION

In the fifteenth century, the central lands of Persianate culture saw a vigorous flowering of Persian literature and of all the more imaginative arts, especially, but not exclusively, under the rule of Timur's descendants. Expanding upon other Persianate connections to share new research on architectural relationships between the Mughals and the Safavids, and on Mughal architecture with Persian philosophy and poetry. Focusing on specific topics that exemplify the shared cultural heritage of the Mughals within the wider Persianate world, this Special Issue highlights that avenues for further study on this topic are still necessary and viable.

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