

The Taj Mahal as a heritage of Islamic architecture of the Mughal dynasty

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Abstract

This article aims to examine and understand the Taj Mahal as an Islamic architectural heritage that represents the grandeur, spirituality, and aesthetic values of the Mughal Dynasty. This study was conducted to explore how Islamic cultural elements can blend with local Indian traditions through monumental architectural works. Through a descriptive-historical approach, this paper highlights the process of acculturation that gave birth to the distinctive Mughal architectural style, which combines Persian, Turkish, Central Asian, and Indian influences. The main focus of this study is to reveal the symbolic meaning behind the design of the Taj Mahal, from the Charbagh garden concept and the use of white marble to the Al-Qur'an calligraphy that adorns the walls of the building. This study also aims to show that the Taj Mahal not only serves as a monument to love, but also as a means of legitimizing power and expressing the high civilization of Islam. By understanding its historical, spiritual, and artistic aspects, it is hoped that readers will see the Taj Mahal as proof that Islamic architecture can be a medium for da'wah, art, and reflection on universal human values.

Keywords: Taj Mahal, Mughal Dynasty, Islamic Architecture, Acculturation, Spiritual Values

Abstrak

Penulisan artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan memahami Taj Mahal sebagai warisan arsitektur Islam yang merepresentasikan kemegahan, spiritualitas, serta nilai-nilai estetika Dinasti Mughal. Kajian ini dilakukan untuk menelusuri bagaimana unsur budaya Islam dapat berpadu dengan tradisi lokal India melalui karya arsitektur monumental. Melalui pendekatan deskriptif-historis, tulisan ini menyoroti proses akulturasi yang melahirkan gaya arsitektur khas Mughal yang memadukan pengaruh Persia, Turki, Asia Tengah, dan India. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah mengungkap makna simbolik di balik desain Taj Mahal, mulai dari konsep taman Charbagh, penggunaan marmer putih, hingga kaligrafi Al-Qur'an yang menghiasi dinding bangunan. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan menunjukkan bahwa Taj Mahal tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai monumen cinta, tetapi juga sebagai sarana legitimasi kekuasaan dan ekspresi peradaban Islam yang tinggi. Dengan memahami aspek historis, spiritual, dan artistiknya, diharapkan pembaca dapat melihat Taj Mahal sebagai bukti bahwa arsitektur Islam mampu menjadi media dakwah, seni, dan refleksi nilai kemanusiaan yang universal.

Kata Kunci: Taj Mahal, Dinasti Mughal, Arsitektur Islam, Akulturasi, Nilai Spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

The early history of Islam shows that Islam entered the archipelago through the archipelago-India route, not from Arabia. Understanding the history of Islam in India helps explain the spread of Islam to the archipelago. In the 700s, the Indian Ocean trade route allowed Islam to enter ports such as Malabar and Gujarat. India's Muslim community was formed due to the arrival of Islam through marriage and merchant interactions. (Sodikin, 1973).

Later on, Islamic dynasties such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals were very helpful in spreading Islam. The Mughal dynasty is famous for building a strong Islamic civilization that also encouraged tolerance for pluralism. The abolition of the jizya tax, Akbar's

"Sulh-i Kull" policy, and the integration of Hindu culture, such as the practice of political marriage, are tangible examples of how Islam can blend in an inclusive way and leave behind cultural heritage such as Mughal art, architecture and the taj'mahal. (Agustin, 2024).

The Mughal Empire was also the epicenter of Islamic culture and education in India. Their architecture, such as mosques, forts, and majestic monuments, reflects the acculturation between Indian and Islamic traditions. Islamic educational institutions also flourished in their heyday—with figures such as Sultan Akbar and Sayid Ahmad Khan spearheading the modern education system. (Sulistiawati et al., 2025). From the 16th to the 18th centuries, the Mughal Dynasty was one of the largest and most influential empires in South Asia. It also has an unforgettable splendor of Islam. The Mughal dynasty managed to unite people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The development of Islamic art and architecture, which incorporated elements from Persian, Central Asian, and Indian traditions, created a unique cultural identity. The love that is embodied in every detail of the Taj Mahal is the reason for its incredible beauty. The monument, which is built of white marble and adorned with gemstone inlays and calligraphy, shows deep grief over the loss and purity of love. Love is often associated with beauty in Islamic architecture, and the Taj Mahal is a testament to the enduring love between Shah Jahan (1000–1076 H) and Mumtaz Mahal (1001–1040 H). The message of love that will not fade with time is emphasized by harmonious landscapes, symmetry, and geometric balance. (Hidayat et al., 2024) The Taj Mahal is not just a magnificent tomb; it also shows the strong influence of Islam on Mughal art and style. By combining religious and cultural elements, it shows that the Mughal Dynasty left behind a very important and globally appreciated architectural heritage.

This article aims to examine how the Taj Mahal reflects the rich Islamic architectural heritage of the Mughal Dynasty and to understand the symbolic meaning behind the building's beauty.

Method

This research uses a historical (historical) research method that is oriented towards tracing, collecting, verifying, interpreting, and reconstructing past events based on reliable sources. This approach was chosen to ensure that the research results have an authentic and

scientifically accountable information base. The historical method emphasizes the search for valid data through four main stages, namely heuristic (the process of tracing and collecting sources), source criticism (testing the authenticity and credibility of data), **interpretation** (interpretation of the meaning and context of the source), and historiography (the preparation of a systematic historical narrative).(Riska & Hudaidah, 2021)

In addition, this study also combines historical methods with descriptive-analytical approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the data obtained. This approach focuses not only on the reconstruction of past facts, but also critically examines their historical value, message, and relevance in a broader social and cultural context. Various literature sources are used as supporting materials, both in the form of academic books, journal articles, and credible digital references. Through the synergy of the two approaches, this research is expected to be able to produce a more in-depth, objective, and highly scientific validity study.(Wijaya et al., 2025)

Result and Discussion

The Mughal dynasty was one of the largest Islamic dynasties that ever ruled in South Asia, especially in the region of North India, including the region that is now Pakistan. The Mughal rule began in the early 16th century and lasted until the mid-19th century, with a total reign of about 332 years (1526–1858 AD). This fact makes the Mughals one of the longest-running powers in Indian history. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that the Mughals were not the first Islamic power in the region. Previously, the influence of Islam had entered through the military expeditions of the Umayyad Dynasty during the time of Caliph al-Walid, who sent Muhammad ibn Qasim to conquer parts of India. This shows that the emergence of the Mughals was not the beginning of the Islamization of India, but rather the continuation and culmination of a long process of Islamic political and cultural integration in the region.

The establishment of the Mughal Dynasty 25 years after the Safavid Dynasty also shows the existence of geopolitical dynamics between Islamic empires in Asia. The Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans are often referred to as the "Three Gunpowder Empires" because of

their success in utilizing modern military technology. In this context, the Mughals were not only politically powerful, but also played an important role in spreading Islamic cultural and religious influence through social integration, centralized government administration, and tolerance of ethnic and religious diversity in their territories. Therefore, the sustainability of Mughal rule for more than three centuries can be understood as the result of a combination of military power, administrative prowess, and adaptive cultural policies.(Alifah & Erman, 2024)

One of the most striking aspects of the Mughal civilization was its contribution in the field of architecture. The Mughals produced monumental works that not only served as symbols of power, but also as a medium of representation of cultural identity. Buildings such as the Red Fort in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra are proof that architecture is used as a political and aesthetic instrument. The hallmark of Mughal architecture is seen in the use of marble, embossed carvings (reliefs), and contrasting color combinations that show the luxury and precision of the technique. Not only that, the Mughals also developed building structures that combined elements of Persian, Central Asian, and local Indian traditions. This can be seen from the shape of large domes, arches, large courtyards, and symmetrical layouts that show the philosophy of balance and harmony.

In addition to the aesthetic aspect, Mughal architecture also reflects a continuity with earlier traditions. The use of zoomorphic shapes, bell and chain motifs, and winding walls as roof supports suggests that the Mughals did not completely abandon the pre-Islamic architectural style, but adapted it into the Islamic context. This adaptation shows that Mughal architecture was eclectic—taking various elements and then blending them into an authentic distinctive style. In mosques and palaces, domes that originally developed in Muslim architecture became spiritual and political symbols at the same time. The dome is not only structurally functional, but also has cosmological significance, depicting the relationship between the world and the sky. Thus, Mughal architecture was a form of interaction between culture, religion, technology, and power.

Overall, the Mughal Dynasty was not only seen as a political entity that controlled a vast territory, but also as a cultural force that formed a new identity in Indian history. Through

architecture, they affirm the legitimacy of power, express aesthetic values, and transmit Islamic cultural heritage in a timeless form. Therefore, the study of Mughal architecture, especially iconic buildings such as the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort, is important to understand how art can be a reflection of power, religion, and civilization.(Mar'ah et al., 2021)

The Taj Mahal is often considered the most famous monument of love in the world, but limiting its meaning to just the romantic story between Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal is too superficial an oversimplification. Historically, its construction in the 17th century shows that the Taj Mahal was not only a personal expression of an emperor, but also a political and cultural strategy to assert the legitimacy of the Mughal Dynasty's power. Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal not only in memory of his wife, but also to show that his dynasty had a high level of power, wealth, and aesthetic sense. Thus, the Taj Mahal occupies a dual position: as an emotional monument and as a symbolic manifestation of imperial power.

From an architectural point of view, the Taj Mahal is a very complex work as it combines various artistic traditions from the Islamic and Indian worlds. Elements of Islamic architecture can be seen from the use of calligraphy of Qur'anic verses, strict symmetry, the concept of the Charbagh garden (a four-part garden that symbolizes heaven in Islamic cosmology), and the main dome structure that dominates the building. Meanwhile, Persian influences are seen in the form of iwan (large arched gates), geometric gardens, and floral ornaments. Turkish architectural traditions can be seen in the shape of towers (minarets) that rise in the four corners of the building, while Indian influences appear in local decorative elements and stone carving techniques. This blend is not just aesthetic, but shows the Mughals' ability to integrate various cultures into one distinctive visual identity.

In addition to aesthetics, the Taj Mahal has a strong spiritual dimension. The location of the Qur'anic calligraphy on the walls and gates is not only as a decoration, but as a symbol that this building is a transcendental space between the world and the hereafter. Its main function as a mausoleum confirms that the Taj Mahal is a sacred space where the contemplation of death and immortality is observed. By creating a calm, balanced, and symmetrical environment, the Taj Mahal's architectural design brings a spiritual experience to visitors. The

serenity of the garden, the reflection of the buildings in the pool of water, and the rhythm of the visual ornaments seem to convey the message that the beauty of the world is a reflection of divine order. This approach shows that Mughal architecture was not only aesthetic, but also philosophical.

Culturally, the designation of the Taj Mahal as one of the Seven New Wonders of the World and a UNESCO World Heritage Site shows that the building is not only important to India's history, but also to global civilization. The Taj Mahal has enormous historical, architectural, and symbolic value. The building reflects exceptional technical capabilities—as seen in the use of high-quality white marble transported from various parts of India and Central Asia, as well as precious and semi-precious stone ornaments installed with the *pietra dura* technique. The high level of construction precision shows the sophistication of Mughal engineering and surveying science. Thus, the Taj Mahal is proof that architecture can be a meeting place between technology, art, and spirituality.

From an art theory perspective, the Taj Mahal is often associated with the school of expressionism because it not only displays physical forms, but also visualizes emotions—specifically love, suffering, and immortality. Expressionism emphasizes that art is a medium for expressing human inner feelings. The Taj Mahal represents Shah Jahan's deepest feelings, as well as being a universal symbol of how humans capture emotional experiences through monumental works. In this context, the Taj Mahal transcends its original function as a tomb and becomes a cultural artifact that represents the relationship between power, art, and human existential experience.

Thus, the Taj Mahal should be understood not only as a tourist attraction or symbol of love, but as a work of civilization that brings together aspects of architecture, politics, spirituality, and emotional expression. Its multidimensional values make the Taj Mahal relevant to be studied in various disciplines such as the history of civilization, architectural theory, aesthetics, and cultural studies.(Nurhaswinda et al., 2025)

The Mughal dynasty was the single largest and most influential empire in the history of South Asia, which ruled the region of India and its surroundings from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Their success is measured not only by the size of their territory, but also by their ability to create political stability, religious tolerance, and social integration in the midst of ethnic and religious diversity. The Mughal dynasty is an example of how an Islamic power was able to adapt to the local cultural reality without losing its own identity. This is what made the glory of the Mughals a political phenomenon as well as a civilization that is difficult to match by any dynasty in South Asia.

It was under the reigns of great figures such as Babur (888–937 AH) who succeeded in establishing a dynasty, Akbar (963–1014 AH) who strengthened the system of government and introduced religious tolerance, Jahangir (1014–1037 AH) who emphasized the art and aesthetics of the palace, Shah Jahan (1037–1069 AH) who combined power and cultural splendor, and Aurangzeb (1069–1119 AH) who significantly expanded the territory. This dynasty reached the peak of its glory. They not only mastered the political and military aspects, but also contributed greatly to the economy, bureaucratic system, art, architecture, education, and international trade. With a structured bureaucracy and an efficient tax system, Mughal rule developed into one of the largest economies in the world in its time.

One of the most monumental achievements of the Mughal dynasty was its ability to unite vast territories with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Through a policy of integration and acculturation, the Mughal Dynasty succeeded in establishing a new cultural identity that did not impose homogeneity, but celebrated diversity. In this context, architecture is a means of expressing power as well as a symbol of unity. The development of Mughal Islamic art and architecture blended elements of Persia, Central Asia, and India, giving birth to a distinctive and stunning new architectural style. This blend is not only a visual aesthetic, but also an ideological representation of the harmony of civilization.

The Taj Mahal is the most iconic symbol of the grandeur of Mughal architecture and Islamic civilization in South Asia. Built by Shah Jahan (1000–1076 AH) in the 17th century as a mausoleum for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal (1001–1040 AH), the monument reflects a blend of

personal love, political power, and high-level artistic expression. The construction of the Taj Mahal took decades and involved thousands of artists and architects from various regions. Symbolically, the Taj Mahal is not only a means of commemoration, but also a tool of legitimacy of power: Shah Jahan shows that the splendor of the Mughal dynasty lies not only in its military, but also in its ability to create lasting beauty.

Architecturally, the Taj Mahal reflects the peak of Mughal aesthetic maturity. The use of white marble, symmetrical layouts, Qur'anic calligraphy, floral carvings, and precious stone ornaments creates harmony between form and meaning. The building brings together Persian elements (onion domes and Charbagh gardens), Turkish influences (symmetrical towers), Indian art (floral ornaments), and Islamic traditions (calligraphy and spiritual symbolism). Thus, the Taj Mahal is a reflection of the process of cultural acculturation that the Mughals have built over the centuries. This shows that their architecture is not an imitation, but rather an innovation born from the dialogue of civilization.

More than just a tomb, the Taj Mahal is a representation of the wealth, economic stability, and organizational capabilities of a dynasty. A project of this magnitude can only be carried out by an empire that has abundant resources, strong political legitimacy, and a vision of civilization that is far ahead. The construction of the Taj Mahal also shows that architecture not only functions practically, but also becomes a medium of ideological communication. In this context, the Taj Mahal serves as a symbol of eternal love, a propaganda tool of power, and a manifestation of Islamic spirituality in artistic form. Thus, this monument is proof that the glory of the Mughals was not only military or administrative, but also cultural and intellectual.

With its detailed design and timeless beauty, the Taj Mahal is a perfect example of Islamic art and culture that flourished under Mughal rule. This monument proves that the Mughal Dynasty not only built a physical structure, but also formed a civilization that was able to survive in the world's historical memory. Therefore, studying the Mughal Dynasty and the Taj Mahal means understanding how power, culture, and spiritual values can come together to form a great heritage that is relevant to the present day. (Hidayat et al., 2024)

Conclusion

The Taj Mahal as a relic of Islamic architecture from the Mughal Dynasty is not only a symbol of beauty and love, but also reflects the maturity of Islamic civilization in the heyday of the Mughals. This dynasty succeeded in integrating elements of Persian, Turkish, Central Asian, and Indian cultures into a meaningful architectural harmony. The Taj Mahal is present as a form of spiritual, political, and aesthetic expression that is integrated in the form of timeless building art. Every detail from the main dome, Charbagh garden, Qur'anic calligraphy, to floral ornaments reflects the relationship between the values of beauty and purity that are the hallmarks of Islamic civilization.

This building also shows that architecture can be a means to affirm the legitimacy of power. For Shah Jahan, the construction of the Taj Mahal was not only to commemorate his wife, Mumtaz Mahal, but also to show the success and prosperity of the Mughal Dynasty. Through its architectural splendor, the Taj Mahal is proof that Islamic power in India is able to combine political power, scientific progress, and spiritual depth in a harmonious aesthetic unity. Mughal architecture, in all its grandeur, managed to show how art could function as a medium of conveying ideological and religious messages at the same time.

From a historical and cultural perspective, the Taj Mahal emphasizes that the glory of the Mughal Dynasty was not only measured by the size of the territory, but also by their ability to give birth to cultural heritage of universal value. The meticulousness of design, sophisticated construction techniques, and the selection of the best materials are proof that Islamic civilization has advantages in science, technology, and art. The Taj Mahal is a symbol of a dialogue of civilization that brings together Islamic values with local Indian traditions, giving birth to a beautiful, balanced, and philosophically meaningful architectural style.

As a UNESCO recognized world heritage, the Taj Mahal is now not only the pride of India, but also the property of all mankind. Its beauty and spiritual message teach that art and faith can come together in creating harmony between man and his God. Through this legacy, the Mughal Dynasty left a universal message that a great civilization was not born from power alone, but from the ability of man to combine love, belief, and knowledge in one timeless work.

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