

TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA-

FOCUSSING ON TOMB ARCHITECTURE

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Having to confront a harsh environment, for believers of Islam from West Asia, the fertile Indian sub-continent was a new land that would fulfil the dream of becoming rich overnight. When Islam came into existence in the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century, along the coast of the Indian ocean or by crossing the Khyber Pass, many Muslims, as armies, merchants and religious followers, came into India in search of fame and fortune. Towards the end of the 12th century, when Islam had established its administrative power in the Indian sub-continent, this tendency was severely accelerated. Hinduism and Islam, a polytheist and a mono-theist religion respectively, iconic and non-iconic, the post and beam structural methods and the true arch one, entirely two opposing traditions had to compromise on the Indian sub-continent.

From the mention of Hindu architecture, one recalls massive substance overflowing with liveliness, like the Khajuraho temple. And from the mention of Islamic architecture, one reminds rational space floating with symmetry, like the Taj Mahal. Would not it be? But if one compares the Taj to West Asian Islamic architecture, not only the material and details, but the arrangement of flanking a main building, use of free-standing towers (minarets), negligent treatment of internal spaces etc. may be seen as transformations in India. Let us focus here on tomb architecture as the Taj Mahal was.

In Islam, after death, the corpse would be positioned to receive 'the last judgement'. On the other hand, in Hinduism, the corpse would be cremated and it is thought the soul would be reborn. Hindu believers let the remaining ashes flow into the river, and naturally have no need for tomb architecture to bury the corpse in. Originally, Islamic believers needed a tomb for nothing more than placing the body, but due to common people who believed in holy persons, or rulers who held attachment to the present world, erecting splendid mausoleums came about. Yet, the Islamic tombs in South Asia are distinctively numerous. Not only in numbers, but the diversity of their form and appearance here leads anyone studying Islamic tomb architecture to India.

Why did Islamic rulers who died in India indulge in building tombs? Further, why did Islamic followers become so engrossed in venerating mausoleums for dead saints? As the metaphor, 'The little island floating on the ocean of Hinduism' expresses, the minority of Muslim rulers, for peacefully preserving one's corpse till the day of final judgement, were probably driven by a need to leave behind a subsistent memorial within the confusion on the earth. The common people being mainly converts from Hinduism, with the same feeling as to shrines, probably venerate holy people, wishing for gain in the present world.

Islamic followers, coming into contact with the philosophy of rebirth in India, overflowing with the power of life, seemingly had but to notice the world after death or the mysterious spiritual power. The diffusion and diversification of tomb architecture may said to be one of the transformation of Islamic architecture in India.

Tomb architecture promoted by the compromise between Islamic and Hindu cultures, also influenced Hindu architecture. The Hindu royalty of the Mughal dynasty, without hesitation, erected memorials called

❖ Tomb of Saint Muhammad Ghaus



❖ 'Chhatri' in Chanderi Fortress



For the believers of Islam, who believe in the Day of Resurrection, the tomb left on the Earth is the dwelling place after death. On the other hand, for believers of Hinduism, who cut off attachment to the corporal remains, erecting a memorial is a concrete way of linking the deceased with the present world.

❖ The Taj Mahal at dawn



'chhatri'. Even though it would not hold ashes of the deceased, it took the same form of tomb architecture for Muslims and had a memorial stone like in a tomb stone, with the name of the deceased person engraved on it.

Taking just one example of tomb architecture, the exchange between Hindu and Islam gave both sides new variations. Against the continuing confrontation between Hindus and Muslims, one cannot but look back at the architectural history of both sides, once having progressed along the path of co-existence by attempting transformation on Indian soil.

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