

Agra, the City of the Taj: A Hub of Medieval History

Abstract

Agra, popularly known for the leather industry, Petha and the Taj, is a hub of the medieval history where there can still be traced the evidences of the medieval culture, art and architecture. It has a glorious historical past that has ever since motivated the historians and scholars from all the four corners of the world to enjoy the glimpses of the medieval art and culture present here, and thus to feel blessed. The daily visits of the foreigner-tourists from the various countries of the globe witness its glory. The Taj got built by Shahjahan in the memory of his beloved paramour, is the chief attraction here, but it will not be fair if the other monuments in Agra and in the surrounding area are ignored. Indeed, every brick and stone whether in the existing monuments or the destroyed ones has a history of its own that cannot be exactly expressed in any code of the world.

No part of the city Agra is without the cultural and architectural traces and glimpses of the medieval history. The city as a whole reveals a high and inexplicable aesthetic and romantic sense of the emperors and rulers who ruled during the medieval period of history. The Taj, the Red Fort, the Sikandara, the Buland Darwaja in Fatehpur Sikri at a distance of about 35 kms etc. are the best and finest examples of the Medieval history which is a landmark in the field of art, culture and architecture. Words fail to express the beauty and architectural designs of the monuments that have been magnetically been inviting the people of the world since the time they were built. Despite the lapse of years, the historical monuments in Agra are still standing all unchallenged by Time which is said to make its prints on everything.

Designed with the purpose to highlight the aesthetic sense in the Mughal emperors, and prepared on the basis of the secondary data available in the various forms of literature, the paper is a theoretical study on Agra. The paper mirrors Agra as a hub of medieval history, reflecting on some of the monuments that have made their makers immortal, and that have won Agra and India universal fame and popularity.

Keywords: Medieval History, Hub, Architectural Designs, Artifices, Monuments, Global Scenario

Introduction

Agra, a city on the banks of the river Yamuna in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, India, is one of the most populous cities in Uttar Pradesh, and the 24th most populous in India. It is a major tourist destination because of its many Mughal-era buildings, most notably the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri, all three of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is included on the Golden Triangle tourist circuit, along with Delhi and Jaipur; and the Uttar Pradesh Heritage Arc, tourist circuit of UP state, along Lucknow the capital of the state and Varanasi. It falls within the Braj cultural region. It was the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1556 to 1658.

Agra has a long history, and its climatic and geographical features attracted several rulers belonging to different dynasties. The Lodis, the Mughals, the Marathas and the British ruled it under the name of Akbarabad and Agra for a long time.

Sultan Sikandar Lodi, the Muslim ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, founded Agra in the year 1504. After the Sultan's death, the city passed on to his son, Ibrahim Lodi. He ruled his Sultanate from Agra until he fell fighting to Mughal emperor Babar in the First battle of Panipat fought in 1526.

The golden age of the city began with the Mughals. It was known then as **Akbarabad** and remained the capital of the Mughal Empire under the emperors- Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Akbar made it the eponymous seat of one of his original twelve subahs (imperial top-level

Rachna Mehta

Head,
Deptt.of History,
Government PG College,
Dholpur, Rajasthan

provinces), bordering (Old) Delhi, Awadh (Oudh), Allahabad, Malwa and Ajmer subahs. Shah Jahan later shifted his capital to Shah Jahanabad in the year 1649.

Since Akbarabad was one of the most important cities in India under the Mughals, it witnessed a lot of building activity. Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, laid out the first formal Persian garden called the Aram Bagh on the banks of river Yamuna. His grandson Akbar the Great raised the towering ramparts of the Great Red Fort, besides making Agra a centre for learning, arts, commerce and religion. Akbar also built a new city on the outskirts of Akbarabad called Fatehpur Sikri. This city was built in the form of a Mughal military camp in stone.

Jahangir had a love of flora and fauna and laid many gardens inside the Red Fort, known for his keen interest in architecture. Shah Jahan gave Agra its most prized monument, the Taj Mahal, built in loving memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, the mausoleum was completed in 1653.

Shah Jahan later shifted the capital to Delhi during his reign, but his son Aurangzeb moved the capital back to Akbarabad, usurping his father and imprisoning him in the Fort there. Akbarabad remained the capital of India during the rule of Aurangzeb until he shifted it to Aurangabad in the Deccan in 1653.

Taj Mahal

Taj Mahal, one of the wonders of the world and most beautiful monument of India, is the most precious cultural and historical heritage of Mughal dynasty with a symbol of love in memory of wife from a husband. It is probably the best gift a husband ever gave to his wife. Shah Jahan got it built in the memory of his loving wife Mumtaz. It took 22 years to build with a labor of 20000 workers and jewelers. The Persian, Islamic, Turkish, Indian architectural styles and designs together are involved in designing of Taj Mahal. In the center base of the dome, there are sarcophagi of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan. This is a masterpiece which is admired in all over the world. It is this exceptional grandeur and splendid beauty of the Taj that invites the tourists of the world at large everyday.

Agra Fort

Agra fort, one of the UNESCO world heritage sites, was renovated by Akbar. The Fort includes Pearl Mosque, Diwan-e-has, Diwan-e –aam, Khas mahal, Shish mahal. It was later converted into the palace of Jahangir, the son of Akbar.

Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri, situated on the outskirts of Agra was commissioned by Emperor Akbar in 1569. He took a keen interest in the innovation of this city. It was Akbar's capital from 1571 to 1585. He named this city on the Persian word 'Fateh' means victory by means of his courtiers and Navaratans. This royal city has private quarters, harems, courts, gardens, mosque and other buildings. It is a masterpiece collection of architecture and precious jewels, stone works.

Akbar's Tomb

Akbar's tomb, located at a distance of about 1km from his wife, Mariam's tomb, is made up of beautiful architectural of red sand stones with work of white marbles. This tomb has full tourist attraction and numerous of tourists flooded in the Tomb to take a look of royalty.

Jama Masjid

Built by Shah Jahan for his loving daughter Jahannara Jama Masjid is a holy mosque known all over India. It has 3 large domes and beautiful architecture of red sand stones and white marble. It took 6 years to build with a labor of 5000 workers.

Moti Masjid

Built by Shah Jahan for the worship of his courtiers, Moti Masjid is a great artwork and beauty. The prayer chamber is well decorated with jewels and luxury of white marbles. It is called pearl white for its dignity and glory.

All the above mentioned monumental works in Agra have a glorious past. They are not only the evidences of the Mughal art and architecture, but also the glimpses of the medieval history. Indeed, but for their reference, the medieval history might not have been complete.

Review of Literature

William Dalrymple (November, 30, 2012). Art treasures of the Mughal Empire. The Mughals, perhaps more than any other Islamic dynasty, made their love of the arts, their aesthetic principles, a central part of their identity as rulers. The second Mughal emperor, Humayun (1508-56) believed that artists "were the delight of the entire world" and lured several Persian masters to his court from Persia and central Asia. His son, the emperor Akbar, did the same and emphasised that he had no time for ultra-orthodox Muslim opinion, which objected to the depiction of the human form: "There are many that hate painting," he wrote, "but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if a painter had a quite peculiar means of recognising God; for a painter in sketching anything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life." It is one of the most eloquent defences of portraiture in the history of Islamic art. The reigns of Akbar's son, Jahangir (1569-1627), and his grandson, Shah Jahan (1592-1666) saw the highpoint of Mughal portraiture and with it the moment of greatest celebrity for the masters of the court atelier.

Kensington (February, 23, 2013). Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire. The Mughal Empire has intrigued Europeans for centuries and the huge attendance at the British Library's splendid Exhibition shows how it still holds our interest. The Mughal Emperors attained great power in India from 1526 to 1757. They lived surrounded by incredible opulence, created magnificent Architecture and developed Arts and Culture. They controlled all of what is now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The Empire survived in a diluted form, for another hundred years, until 1858 when there was a British presence and the Mughal Empire was absorbed into the Raj.

Tag: Agra (April, 18, 2016). Revisiting Taj Mahal on World Heritage Day. On the occasion of World Heritage Day, The Humming Notes revisits its trip to a monument that is Indian, but is, indubitably, the most photographed World Heritage Monument in the world, Taj Mahal. Commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, as a memoir of his most favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal is perhaps the ultimate gift of love. The tomb is the centrepiece of a 42-acre complex, including a guest house and a mosque, and has been described.

Lisa Cheng (February 14, 2017). Eight Secrets of the Taj Mahal. For first-time visitors to India, it's almost impossible to skip the bucket list-worthy Taj Mahal. The mausoleum in Agra is India's most famous monument, and a sublime shrine to eternal love. Built from between 1632 and 1647 by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, the Taj Mahal was dedicated to Jahan's favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died during childbirth. But despite its iconic stature, much of its history is still shrouded in mystery. Here are a few things about the marble-clad marvel you might not have known- Optical illusions can be spotted everywhere, The most famous myth is probably false, Both of the cenotaphs are empty, It's (almost) perfectly symmetrical, The Taj gets regular facials, It changes color throughout the day, A second, black-marble Taj Mahal was being planned, It was as much of a symbol of power as it was of love.

Objectives of the Study

1. Developing an understanding of the medieval history through the literature available on the theme and subject.
2. Getting an idea and feedback of the researches previously undertaken by the researchers on the subject.
3. Focusing for the purpose chiefly on Agra, and pointing out the medieval beauties through the historical monuments erected here.
4. Going back to the history of the monuments in Agra.
5. Exploring the glimpses of the medieval history in Agra through the various historical monuments erected by the Mughal emperors.
6. Being familiar with the aesthetic and romantic sense of the Mughal emperors.
7. Tracing out the patterns and architectural designs of the monuments.
8. Exploring the purpose of erecting the monuments
9. Being familiar with the approach of the tourists to the medieval historical monuments.
10. Learning about the causes of the frequent visits of the tourists and the effects of their visit to Agra.

Hypothesis

1. Medieval history is known to be rich in aesthetic sense of both the rulers and the subjects.
2. The Mughal emperors erected several monuments for several reasons all over India satisfying their own fancy and sense of romance
3. Agra was one of the most favourite seats to the Mughals.
4. The Taj in Agra is the best and finest example of the medieval art, culture and architecture.

5. The Taj, the Sikandara, Etmaddaula, Red Fort etc. acclaim Agra to be the hub of medieval history.
6. Eversince the monuments in Agra have won universal fame and popularity.

Research Methodology

Replete with the evidences of the glorious aspect of the medieval history, the paper which is designed with the purpose to highlight the aesthetic sense in the Mughal emperors, the paper is a theoretical analytical interpretation of the medieval glimpses in Agra that are visible in its matchless and splendid monuments and architectural designs. For the purpose the secondary data already available in the books, magazines, research journals, theses and internet sites were used. After the selection of the topic, some of the relevant reviews and research papers were gone through; objectives of the study were set; hypotheses were formulated; secondary data were collected from the accessible sources, classified, analysed and interpreted keeping in view the theme and purpose of the study, and finally the conclusions were drawn. During the course of the study, all the steps of social research were observed. The reviews selected to be studied for the purpose provided the investigator a sufficient feedback about Agra and its immense monuments that are a history in themselves. The hypotheses enabled the investigator to proceed further in a directional way.

Analysis & Interpretation

Obviously, the plan helped the investigator develop an understanding of the medieval history through the literature available on the theme and subject; the study of the research papers and of the reviews supplied her the required feedback on the subject; her curiosity and sense of imagination enabled her to peep into the history of the monuments erected by the Mughal emperors in Agra; her research sense allowed her to feel that the Mughal emperors associated with the monuments had an incredible aesthetic sense and romantic temperament. As a result of all this she was able to get the idea that it is the monumental and architectural beauty and designs that enslave the tourists from all over the world to be a witness to such splendid pieces of medieval history.

Findings & Conclusion

Agra with thousands of tourists from the various parts of the world produces a global scenario. There are two terms: medieval Indian history and the middle ages. Medieval Indian history refers to the time frame starting with Indian invasion of Muhammad Ghazni and extends to 18th century when British Empire was established in India. Middle ages in India refer to the time between 300 BCE and 1200 CE.

During Medieval history, major dynasties were- Chauhan dynasty, Tomar dynasty, Dynasties of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal dynasty. Each of the dynasties in the medieval history was important, but from the aesthetic sense of the rulers, inclination to the architectural designs and building of monuments, love of flora etc., it is none but the Mughal dynasty. No doubt, most of the monuments in Agra belong to the Mughals, but are taken as representatives of the medieval history.

Agra is rightly called 'a hub of medieval history'. It has much to satisfy the lovers of the medieval history, and particularly, to satisfy the lovers of the Mughal rulers and their aestheticism. Agra has so many historical places monuments and tourist places each of which has a glorious past and history sufficiently to reflect the rich extraordinary artistic and aesthetic tastes of the Mughal emperors who got them erected. Their significance is evident in the fact they are visited without fail by thousands of tourists from all over the world. In a word, Agra with all its splendid monumental work and architectural designs, is an incredibly historic city.

References

Primary Sources

1. *Aftabchi, Jaubar, Tazkeratul-Waqiat-e-Humayuni, Punjab University, 1076 A.H.*
2. *Babur, Zahiruddin Md., Baburnama (Persian Translation by Mirza Abdur-Rahim Kban-e-Kbana, IS89-90 A.D), Bibliotheca Series, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1924 AD.*
3. *Begham, Gulbadan, Humayun Nama, Lahore, 1966 A.D.*

Secondary Sources

4. *Alam, Muzaffar, the Language of Political Islam in India (c; 1200 - 1800), Pennant Black, 2004, Delhi.*
5. *Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. "Agra Fort". Whc.unesco.org. Retrieved 11 November 2017.*
6. *Chandra, Satish, Historiography, Religion, and State in Medieval India. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1996.*
7. *Gommans, Jos, Mughal Warfare, London, 2002.*
8. *Haider, Mansoor, Mirza Haider Dughlat as Depicted in Persian Sources, Manohar Publishers & Distributers, 2002.*
9. *Kensington. Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire, Ministry of External Affairs, Media Center, February 23, 2013*
10. *Lisa Cheng. Eight Secrets of the Taj Mahal. smithsonian.com, February 14, 2017.*
11. *William Dalrymple. Art treasures of the Mughal Empire. The Guardian (International Edition- November, 30, 2012.*