

Islam and the Mughal Empire in South Asia: 1526–1857

By Mahak Mahajan

Most people, when they think of South Asia, also think of forts, miniature paintings, tombs, gardens and iconic buildings such as the Taj Mahal. These are all exemplars of the grandeur of the Mughal Empire (1526-1857), wherein a distinctive aristocratic culture was formulated and characterized by immense accomplishments in art, music, poetry, etiquette, ceremonies and objects of the imperial court. The Mughal empire was one of the largest centralized states of the early modern period in world history. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Mughal emperor ruled over a population of between 100-150 million and acquired about 3.2 million square kms (approx. 1.23 million square miles) of the Indian subcontinent.¹ During this time, Mughal territory extended to Kabul, Kashmir, Delhi, Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan and parts of Deccan. It covered areas that are today located in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and even Afghanistan. The centuries in which the Mughal empire flourished was a dynamic time in world history. Historian John Richards has described how this period included the linking of the entire world through sea passages, expansion of the textile industry, an upsurge in population and technological diffusions. The dynasties that preceded the Mughals embraced various religions, establishing important precedents in administration and other spheres of life which made it possible for a large empire to flourish. It is important to note that before the

establishment of the Mughal dynasty in India, Islam introduced by missionaries, traders, and warriors, had existed in South Asia for nearly a thousand years. Islam first came to South Asia in the seventh century with the Arab traders, who first appeared on the Malabar Sea coasts of southern India and Sri Lanka. They were patronized by non-Muslim kings and played an important role in the economy connecting India with Southwest Asia and beyond through networks of trade and circulation. During the period of the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus (eighth century CE), Arabic-speaking Muslim traders entered Sindh (now a province in Pakistan.) The Muslim population increased through intermarriages and conversions in South Asia in the pre-Mughal as well as Mughal periods.



Background: Detail of the miniature painting : "The Emperor Shah Jahan with his Son Dara Shikoh", Folio from the *Shah Jahan Album*. Painting by Nanha. Calligrapher Mir 'Ali Haravi. Source: *The Met Museum* at <https://tinyurl.com/2txfep8d>.



"Meeting between Babur and Sultan 'Ali Mirza near Samarqand"
Folio from a *Baburnama* (*The Book of Babur*) ca. 1590.

Babur, shown on horseback at the left, encounters Ali Mirza, his cousin, ally, and fellow Timurid ruler, near Samarqand. A walled city is visible in the distance. This meeting, which took place before the founding of the Mughal Empire, was part of an attempt by Babur to capture the city of Samarqand from another member of the Timurid dynasty.
Source: *The Met Museum* at <https://tinyurl.com/5ykysxb2>.

Hopefully, readers can imagine the Mughal empire's expansion of South Asia's contacts with the wider world, especially with Central Asia, East Asia, Southwest Asia, and the Arab Peninsula. Although rooted in Islamic traditions, Mughal rulers sought inspiration from Indic ideals, administrative structures, and ways of living. The Mughal state and its pivotal institutions, including the gradual acceptance of Islam among the local populace, and Islam-inspired Mughal art and architecture, from the reign of Mughal Empire founder, Babur (r. 1483-1530) to Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), the last of the great Mughal emperors. The most famous of all Mughal emperors, Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605) is also highlighted in what follows.

Islamic Ideals and Key Features of the Mughal Empire

In 1526, Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur established Mughal rule in India that lasted until 1857, when the last Mughal emperor surrendered to British East India Company forces. Paternally, Babur was the descendant and heir of the great military leader Timur (Tamerlane, r. 1370-1405) and maternally, from the Mongol world-conqueror Genghis Khan (r. 1206-1227). Babur returned to Hindustan, the Persian name for India, as compensation for his lost inheritance in Samarkand (in today's Uzbekistan). Although he only ruled until 1526, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodhi in the first Battle of Panipat, conquered Delhi and sent his son Humayun (r. 1530-1540) to take hold of Agra, the imperial capital of a North Indian dynasty that professed Islam. In 1527, Babur defeated Rana Sanga at Khanwa, near Agra and took over much of northern India. In 1529, Babur expanded his rule to Bengal in north-eastern India and much of eastern India by defeating the Afghans. Babur was known for his huge army with gun carts, moveable artillery, and cavalry tactics. Later, his son Humayun (1508-1556) annexed Gujarat and other lands on India's west coast, and the fortified Mandu located in western India. After ruling for a decade, Humayun was defeated by Afghan Muslim Sur Dynasty rulers (1540-1556) and after an exile in Persia, won a great victory over the Sur in 1555 and regained his throne, only to rule a year before a fatal staircase fall.² The Surs enhanced the infrastructure of roads and laid the foundation for a bureaucratic and military reign, which was carried forward by Humayun's son, Akbar the Great, who had the administrative skills and strategic vision to transform the Mughal dynasty into a subcontinental empire.

Persian was the court language of the Mughal rulers. Persian helped Mughal rulers in nurturing their networks with Central and Southwest Asia and developing unique traditions in literature and religion. A wide range of capable people were part of the Mughal system including bankers, military personnel,

traders, cultural experts, and religious leaders. These notables were diverse not only in their occupations and areas of expertise but also varied in terms of their ethnicities, linguistic traditions, and religious affiliations. The Mughal imperial nobility in the late sixteenth century included Afghans, Turks, Uzbeks from Central Asia, Persians, Arabs, Hindu Rajputs (a warrior caste), Brahmins (a priestly caste), Marathas (a caste from Western India), and some locally born Muslims. Muslim rulers brought numerous transformations in existing institutions, language, law, irrigation and cultivation methods, literature, cultural traditions, and religious practices. To cite one example, Akbar replaced the *wazir* (a powerful minister in many Islamic polities) and distributed powers to four central ministries in all his provinces for army, finance, and royal household maintenance. In 1571, he also introduced the *mansabdari* (office-holding) system and nobles were awarded ranking according to civil and military duties. Local zamindars and respected persons in their respective areas—both Muslims and non-Muslims—who had a very powerful aristocracy were incorporated into a revenue-collecting system during the Mughal era.

In Mughal India, although there was some overlap, two kinds of Islamic religious practitioners existed: *Sufis*, who attained knowledge of religion by engaging with mystic traditions, and *ulema*, learned men who knew scholarly traditions of faith and law. Both groups usually provided allegiance to the rulers which helped in maintaining social order and Muslim religious life. Due to their closeness to God, the religious leaders and Sufi saints held authority regardless of their official status. The *ulema* held dominant positions and acted as legal officials through their network with local landholders, traders, and other influential people. They also handled legal and charitable matters

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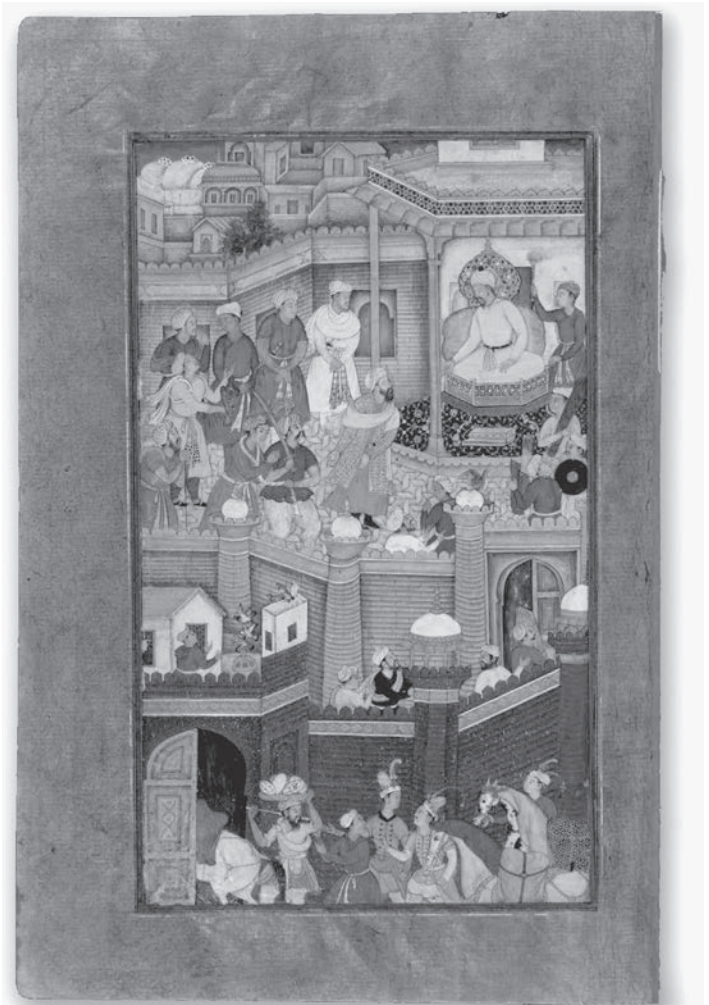
in judicial court. In the eighteenth century, the role of the ulema varied from educating the nobility to the appointment of staff in the judiciary.

A key feature of Mughal rule was that its economic and military institutions were not “Islamic” in nature. Rules were not administered according to textual norms, but by forming alliances and networks with other kings and local notables and by utilizing the military and good governance.³ *Sharia* laws (Islamic laws based on the teaching of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad) were not followed in administrative laws such as taxation but only in matters pertaining to the “personal” domain: family, marriage, and inheritance. Just as non-Muslim rulers used to patronize Brahmins (scholars or priests at the top-most rung of the Hindu caste system), Mughal rulers patronized learned men like ulema who had knowledge of Arabic and religious texts, as well as Sufi *shaikhs* (scholars and leaders). Historian Barbara Metcalf questions the labeling of Muslim rulers as “foreigners” and the Mughal era as “Muslim rule.” The foreignness of Muslim rulers can be defined only in terms of their origin outside South Asia. Scholars such as Richard Eaton have questioned British Raj and Hindu nationalist views that focused on the destruction of Hindu temples and centers of worship, during the pre-Mughal and Mughal periods in India, overlooking a key point that various raids, destructions, and plundering of temples at Benares, Mathura, and Rajasthan took place in the context of warfare.⁴ The British Raj later adopted a version of the Mughal “balance and rule” policies so that public appointments were not discriminatory and rewarded the most capable among many ethnic groups.⁵

There is no evidence that mass conversion to Islam during this period took place because converts wanted to escape the hierarchical order of Brahminical society and were influenced by the Sufis’ message of equality and brotherhood. Rather, as Susan Bayly suggests, conversions happened for finding a higher rank within the system, and not for getting away from the already existing hierarchical order. As Barbara Metcalf has convincingly demonstrated, there is no correlation between the rate of conversion to Islam and areas of Brahminical domination or the location of Muslim political power.⁶ Historian Peter Hardy explains that conversion in India meant more of a change in fellowship rather than personal conduct or inner life. The new converts to Islam aspired to join new social groups for the purpose of marital alliances, ritual practices, shared dining and socializing, and leaving old associates. However, Mughal rulers provided conditions that may have encouraged conversions to Islam, for example, land grants and land settlements to Muslim scholars and the opening of schools based on an Islamic curriculum.

Akbar’s Religious Experiments and Policies

As noted, consolidation of the Mughal empire took place mainly during Akbar’s nearly fifty yearlong reign (r. 1556-1605). He made significant changes in economic, political, and social institutions. The impact of his changing religious views was clearly visible in state policies. Akbar came to emphasize *Sulh-i-Kul*



Page from the *Memoirs of Babur*, 1483 to 1530. You can view the book, page-by-page online and download a color PDF.
Source: Library of Congress at <https://tinyurl.com/22czavvf/>



Map Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/5n6r2r2a>. By Avantiputra with modifications.



"Akbar With Lion and Calf", Folio from the Shah Jahan Album

Painting by Govardhan

Calligrapher Mir 'Ali Haravi

This posthumous portrait of Akbar incorporates the Elizabethan-derived motif of a lion and calf living in peace under the emperor's benign rule and the lion's visible teeth.

Source: *The Met Museum* at <https://tinyurl.com/54cd7cfj>.

(peace and harmony between all religions), *Din-i-Ilahi* (syncretic religion), and the abolition of capitation tax imposed on non-Muslims.

During the early years of Akbar's rule, he was a devout Muslim and offered five prayers daily with fellow Muslims, swept the floor of the palace mosque himself, and made various provisions for Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Akbar the Great believed in Sufi mysticism and was a staunch devotee of the Chishti Sufi saint, Khwaja Muin-ud-din. During parts of Akbar's reign, poets and saints like Kabir (1398-1518), Daud Dayal (1544-1603), and Guru Nanak (1469-1539), helped to create a form of synthesis between Sufi Islam and the Bhakti (devotional) tradition of Hinduism, influenced Akbar to believe in the transcendental unity of all religions and equality of all human beings irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Akbar found that his subjects followed different religions and as ruler, it was his responsibility not to differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims. In 1575, the emperor built a large rectangular building, *Ibadat Khana* (House of worship) in the town of Fatehpur Sikri for religious discussions. Initially, Ibadat Khana was open to Muslims only but after a 1578 mystical revelation, Akbar opened the house of worship to people of all faiths including Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism. The extended debates by scholars of different religions led to confusion and some turmoil and eventually Ibadat Khana was permanently closed in 1582. Although Ibadat Khana debates were mostly futile in ushering in any long-term changes, they helped Akbar in the development of his own religious ideas.⁷

The application of the Sulh-i-Kul policy minimized discrimination based on religious divisions and helped in the installation of social harmony as an ideal of the Mughal empire. The unifying ideology of the regime was not Islamic sectarian identity or tribal affiliation but loyalty. By ensuring that no social group was higher in authority, Akbar was able to manage peace and the distribution of political resources. Other examples of Akbar's religious tolerance included abolition of the Hajj tax imposed on Hindus, permitting all forms of public prayers, removing a ban on the construction of new temples or repairing old ones, and



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Map Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/2pa5wfkj>. By Avantiputra with modifications.

forbidding forced conversions of slaves to Islam. He began the custom of marrying Rajput (mostly Hindu) wives without expecting them to convert to Islam. He also patronized the translations of two epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The new policy also helped in the accumulation of wealth, territory, higher status, political power, and other resources from Rajput clans which were earlier not available to them. He devised a policy of religious syncretism and tolerance that catered to the needs of the empire's diverse population.

Ibadat Khana debates demonstrated the bigotry, narrow views, and arrogance of court ulema. *Mazhar* (Maximum Provision), also known as the Infallibility Decree of 1579, was signed by seven leading ulema, willingly or unwillingly. It gave Akbar unlimited powers in both spiritual and mundane spheres. Drawing from the theories of his Central Asian ancestors who ruled over tribal polities, he asserted that the king had all the powers to rule and was not answerable to other superiors. He learned to rule by concentrating power instead of disturbing it. This decree did not claim Akbar to be *mujtahid* (an interpreter of the Islamic religious law) but he reserved all rights to choose between varying interpretations and change the earlier laws keeping in mind the public good and the empire's administrative needs. This came as a blow to the authority of the court ulema as Akbar had declared himself as a just ruler and no longer needed them for the interpretation and drafting of laws.

Another such example comes from the abolition of the capitation tax (Jizya) imposed on non-Muslims, mostly Hindus in 1563. Most of the ruled population were non-Muslims known as *zimmi* (protected people) who were liable to pay jizya. Payment of jizya was an obligation and it entitled non-Muslims protection and peaceful existence under the state. Some scholars have interpreted this as symbolizing inferiority and second-class status to non-Muslims under Muslim rulers. However, non-Muslims were free to follow their own laws, customs, and practices in private but were not eligible for military enrolment. In order to maintain equality among Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, Akbar abolished jizya. This ensured the lessening of the economic burden on non-Muslims while guaranteeing equal facilities for them.

[AKBAR] DEvised A POLICY OF RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM AND TOLERANCE THAT CATERED TO THE NEEDS OF THE EMPIRE'S DIVERSE POPULATION.



Mughal Emperor Akbar holds a religious assembly in the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri; the two men dressed in black are the Jesuit missionaries Rodolfo Acquaviva and Francisco Henriques illustration to the *Akbarnama*, miniature painting by Nar Singh, ca. 1605. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/yc3trz6b>.



The emperor Aurangzeb. Source: OAC (Online Archive of California) at <https://tinyurl.com/y4erzupe>.

AS COMPARED TO HIS PREDECESSORS, THE RELIGIOUS POLICIES OF AURANGZEB WERE DISCRIMINATORY TOWARDS HINDUS, SIKHS AND OTHER NON-MUSLIMS.

Akbar's memoirist and advisor Abu'l Fazl in his work *A'in-i-Akbari* (Constitution of Akbar), written in the sixteenth century, expressed that Akbar was not only a learned and strategic emperor but also a person with spiritual knowledge and charisma. His teachings were labeled as *Din-i-Ilahi* or *Tawhid-i-Ilahi* (Divine Faith), a syncretic religious movement devised to bridge the gap between Islam and Hinduism through mutual interactions and believing in the oneness of God. It was a blend of a personal self, religious knowledge, societal conditions, Sunni theology, and the constitutional system. Akbar was considered a representative of God and his disciples should refrain from eating meat, respect sun and fire symbols as life symbols, and be ready to sacrifice their life, property, and honor for the king. He also replaced traditional greetings among Muslims, *Assalaamualaikum* (Peace be upon you) and *Alaikum salam* (Peace be also with you) with *Allah-u-Akbar* (God is Great, God is greatest) and *Jalla Jalalah* (May his glory be glorified), respectively. He launched a solar calendar starting from his own accession, known as *Tarikh-e-Ilahi* (Divine Era).⁸

Aurangzeb's Religious Policies and the Decline of the Mughal Empire

Aurangzeb ruled for a long forty-nine years. He expanded the frontiers of the empire considerably, as can be seen on the map on page forty-three. Historians have asserted that one of the major reasons for the decline and disintegration of the empire was his religious policies. He was keen to implement sharia laws everywhere. In 1658, he appointed ulema or clergy as *muhtasaibs* or censors in large cities. The muhtasaibs enforced Islamic laws and stopped practices that were

Reign of Mughal Emperors in Chronological Order



First Mughal Emperor
Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur
(Imperial name: Babur)
(April 20, 1526–December 26, 1530)

Source: Wikimedia Commons
<https://tinyurl.com/48mx2bzd>.



Second Mughal Emperor
Mirza Nasir-ud-Din Muhammad (son of Babur)
(Imperial name: Humayun)
(December 26, 1530–May 17, 1540)

Source: Los Angeles County Museum of Art
<https://tinyurl.com/2epsmpdz>.



Third Mughal Emperor
Abu'l-Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar
(Imperial name: Akbar)
(February 11, 1556 –October 27, 1605)

Source: KidzSearch Encyclopedia
<https://tinyurl.com/4hkbb5um>.

forbidden by Islamic law, such as the consumption of alcohol and gambling. Under his reign, the status and power of the ulema was enhanced.

As compared to his predecessors, the religious policies of Aurangzeb were discriminatory towards Hindus, Sikhs, and other non-Muslims. His edict of 1669, prohibited the construction of Hindu temples and their repairing works. He also discontinued the practice of appearing before general masses, which is majorly related to the Hindu practice of taking *darshan* of a deity. In 1679, he reimposed *jizya* on non-Muslims, which was abolished by Akbar. The custom fee on goods paid by non-Muslim merchants was double that of Muslims.⁹ The historian John F. Richards is of the opinion that Aurangzeb's main aim was the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam by means of suppression and disfavor. Moreover, he dealt rigorously with the Shia kingdoms of Golconda and Bijapur as with Hindus and non-Muslims in order to show supremacy and restore the interest of the Sunni ulema and Muslim community as a whole. Historian of medieval India, Satish Chandra notes that Aurangzeb's interpretation of the law was always subject to concrete social, political, and economic circumstances. Thus, by taking the contrasting examples of Akbar and Aurangzeb, we see that the Mughal empire has a very varying pattern of engagement with Islamic theological ideals as well as with religious scholars and officials. Ruling over a population where Muslims were in a minority, the empire had to negotiate with non-Muslim power



Map Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/4fm62s2v>. By Avantiputra with modifications.



Fourth Mughal Emperor
Mirza Nur-ud-Din Muhammad Salim
(Imperial name: Jahangir)
(November 3, 1605–October 28, 1627)

Source: The Walters Art Museum
<https://tinyurl.com/bdhp2wsd>.



Fifth Mughal Emperor
Mirza Shihab-ud-Din Muhammad Khurram
(Imperial name: Shah Jahan)
(January 19, 1628–July 31, 1658)

Source: The Met
<https://tinyurl.com/bd3aw3a5>.



Sixth Mughal Emperor
Muhi al-Din Muhammad
(Imperial name: Aurangzeb)
(July 31, 1658–March 3, 1707)

Source: Wikimedia Commons
<https://tinyurl.com/mhphfp4x>.



A miniature painting of Shah Jahan and his three eldest sons: Dara Shikoh, Shah Shuja, and Aurangzeb and their maternal grandfather, Asaf Khan.
Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/3dvd96ke>.

THE TAJ MAHAL IS SEEN AS THE EPITOME OF LOVE NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF SHAH JAHAN'S AFFECTION FOR MUMTAZ MAHAL BUT ALSO DUE TO ITS PERCEIVED BEAUTY AND PERFECTION.

blocs, ideas, and patterns of administration in order to sustain itself for over three hundred years.

Islamic and Indic Ideals in Mughal Architecture

Finally, we come to a tangible legacy of the Mughal empire today, and its connections with Islamic art forms: the architectural and built heritage, which is a unique amalgamation of Islamic and Indian forms and aesthetics. The Mughals were famous for the construction of palaces, forts, tombs, and public buildings such as mosques, *hamams* (communal bathhouses), *sarais* (resting places), and *baolis* (stepwells). Many gardens were laid out by Babur and Jahangir in Agra and Lahore. Nishat Bagh and Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir, Pinjore garden near the Punjab in northwest India, and Ram Bagh near Agra, a city in northcentral India, are among a few gardens that survived and are well maintained. The architecture during Akbar's period was a blend of Persian and Hindu elements. The magnificent town of Fatehpur Sikri, Jama Masjid, with a massive gate called *Buland Darwaza* (Victory Gate), Humayun's tomb, Agra fort, and Ajmer fort were some of the buildings built during Akbar's rule. The art of miniature paintings, which had received an impetus from Humayun's exile in Persia, reached its peak during the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605-1627). Miniature paintings showed a synthesis of Indian and Persian styles, where animals, flowers and natural motifs were painted. These paintings, originally book folios, had a close connection with the ideals and ideology of empire, and were



Humayun's Tomb. The tomb was commissioned by Humayun's first wife and chief consort, Empress Bega Begum, in 1569–70, and designed by Mirak Mirza Ghiyas and his son, Sayyid Muhammad, Persian architects chosen by her. It was the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent, and is located in Nizamuddin East, Delhi, India.
Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/ycks9j4e> . By Eatcha and thanks to W.carter, for the editing. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Taj Mahal, Agra, India, south face. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at <https://tinyurl.com/3c2fzn5x>. © Yann Forget, CC BY-SA 4.0.

intended to demonstrate the glory of the empire to the elite circles which could access this art.

It was during Shah Jahan's reign (r. 1628-1658) that Mughal architecture reached its zenith. One of the stellar achievements was the construction of the Taj Mahal on the bank of river Yamuna in Agra, in today's Uttar Pradesh, province in Northern India. Attractive features of the architecture of Shah Jahan's period included domes, minarets on four corners, symmetry, balance, decorative work, and ornamentation, garden-like surroundings and large halls. Construction of the Taj Mahal started in 1631 after the death of Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan's Persian-origin Empress, and her grave was placed at the center. The Taj Mahal is seen as the epitome of love, not only because of Shah Jahan's affection for Mumtaz Mahal, but also due to its perceived beauty and perfection. However, many historians contest this "love theory" and argue that the tomb does not represent a mere extravagant display of love but has some covert ideological agendas or is designed in order to show the power of the emperor. In 1979, an American writer, Wayne E. Begley, proposed that the tomb is possibly Christian-influenced iconography since Emperor Shah Jahan had knowledge of the visual representation of the throne of God, where God will sit on the day of Resurrection and give his judgment. As with Mughal miniatures, high aesthetic standards did not only convey the Empire's wealth and good taste but also connections with Islamic ideals and devotional beliefs.

The inspiration for its design comes from different sources, i.e., the architecture of Mughal's central Asian homeland, buildings constructed by Muslim rulers in India, especially Delhi, and older Indian stone architecture. The placement of the tomb at one end of the quadripartite garden near the river makes it clearly visible from a distance and all its gardens. This marks it different from previous buildings of the Mughal era, where buildings are placed in the exact center of the garden. The tomb complex consists of cross-axial gardens known as *char-bagh* (four gardens), a mosque and *Mihman Khana* (Guest House).



Shalimar Bagh is a Mughal garden in Srinagar, linked through a channel to the northeast of Dal Lake, on its right bank located on the outskirts of Srinagar city in Jammu and Kashmir. The other famous shore line garden in the vicinity is Nishat Bagh. The Bagh was built by Mughal Emperor Jahangir for his wife Nur Jahan, in 1619. The Bagh is considered the high point of Mughal horticulture. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at <https://tinyurl.com/226av6ft>.



Bibi-ka-Maqbara also known as the "Taj of deccan" or Dakkhani Taj is located in the city of Aurangabad, Maharashtra. It was built by Shah Jahan's grandson, Azam Shah in the memory of his mother, Dilras Banu Begum, the wife of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/msx5d5vb>. By Pranaysahu26, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Every aspect of architectural design in the Taj Mahal supports the concept of the paradisaical mansion. The territorial gardens become a representation of the heavenly in Islamic culture. In the Quran, there are frequent mentions of gardens with fruit trees and rivers as "paradise" and afterlife rewards for the faithful. Art historian Ebba Koch suggests looking at the tomb as a heavenly mansion of the deceased or a representation of Mumtaz's abode in heaven. The accounts of Shah Jahan's court historian Abdul Hamid Lahauri tell us that the purpose of using white marble was to project the emperor's purity of heart and spiritual nature. Ebba Koch mentions the hierarchic use of white marble (associated with the purity of Brahmins) at the top and red sandstone (denotes ruling power of Kshatriyas) below also symbolizes a link to pre-Islamic Indian social stratification and shows that Mughals represented themselves among the two highest strata of the Indian social system.

The white marble is carved with depictions of stylized flowers and inlaid colored stones of European origin known as *pietra dura*. Islamic traditions disapprove depiction of people and animals based on a *hadith*. The idea of representation of God in form of idols and statues is condemned, but flowers are generally sanctioned and permissible. In the case of the Taj Mahal, its fundamentally religious character is conveyed through inscriptions of the sacred text. The *Surah* 36 of the Quran is inscribed on a great arch in the center on the four sides of the building, and it is one which is particularly recited to the dying and promises eternal life in heaven to the faithful. Today, Taj is seen as a national symbol and as part of India's secular common heritage rather than an association with the legacy of a religious minority group.

Hopefully, this survey of the reigns of the major Mughal Emperors from Babur until Aurangzeb provides readers with more nuanced knowledge of some Mughal rulers' interactions with not only Islam but other belief systems as well and the multi-ethnic, and for many years, highly-functioning empire they created. ♦

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8. See "Islam Links" from the Columbia University website at <https://tinyurl.com/2sp8kbc>.
9. See "Aurangzeb: Religious Policies" from the UCLA social sciences website at <https://tinyurl.com/mv72ck>.

MAHAK MAHAJAN is a research scholar at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi, India. Her research's title is *Education, Gender and Islam: An Ethnographic Study of Girls' Madrasa*.