

Study – The Characteristics of Persian and Mughal Architecture

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Honestly, I have been a very lazy blogger these days...pretty much owing to the fact that I have been busy and due to that, it drains my energy for blogging. Thankfully I can manage my time efficiently now, so I can have some time to dedicate on this blog

Before we have seen some examples of the Mughal and Islamic Persian architecture and now I would like to point out the characteristics of both of these architectural styles. Since the both of these styles are essentially the same, I would like to note first the similarities, and then to point out the difference between them that makes the individual style unique from each other.

Essentially Mughal (and most Islamic Indian architecture) and Islamic Persian architecture styles are similar because Mughal, Islamic Indian architectures uses the services of Iranian/Persian architects – hence, Islamic Persian architecture influenced the Mughal architecture. The main differences between these two are aesthetics and further influences from other existing or foreign cultures. While the Mughal architectural style have been developed in India and the surrounding South Asian countries in the 16th and 17th centuries, it is influenced by the foreign styles of Islamic and Persian Architectures, as well as the existing Hindu architecture. Persian architecture, on the other hand develops as early as 5000BC, predating Islamic style, hence seeing the close proximity of South Asia to the Persian World, it is understandable that the Mughals took their influences from their neighbours.



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The Jame Mosque in Isfahan, Iran

The Main Characteristics of Persian and Mughal Architecture

I have to point out that I will be referring the Islamic Persian architecture rather than the Pre-Islamic one to compare with the Mughal architecture. There are a few structural similarities between these styles –

1. *The usage of Iwans* – as I had noted before, Iwans are vaulted spaces, with the space enclosed by three walls and an opening. These architectural feature is built to resemble a gateway, and it is used extensively for both religious and secular buildings throughout Islamic Persia as well as South Asia, and to a certain extend , the Arabian Peninsula and some North African Islamic empire, especially in the modern times.
 2. *Extensive use of arches* – The two famous monuments, The Taj Mahal for the Mughal architecture and the Great Mosque of Isfahan for the Persian architecture displays the example of this fact. It is built for aesthetic reasons, as well as to place Mashrabias windows and to lessen the extend of sunlight to pour into the building.
 3. *Gardens, fountains and pools* – Both architectural styles offers spacious gardens or pools with fountains as features to the buildings. Taj Mahal have well tended gardens in front of it as well as fountains and pools.
 4. *Domes* – The domes for both of the architectural styles are quite similar in shape – it sits on top of a cylindrical drum, before tapering to a point and decorated with a finial. In Mughal architecture, sometimes multiple smaller domes decorate the rooftops of the buildings.
 5. *Symmetry* – Both styles exhibit impeccable attention to symmetry of the buildings – it is not uncommon for a building to have same number of minarets and the same number of arches and pillars to each side of the buildings. even the pools and garden are often designed in a similar style, creating a mirror like effect.
- Smaller details that are common to both of these styles are –

1. *Usage of Muqarnas* – The stalactite like decoration are commonly used under arches, especially under the vaults of the Iwans.
 2. *Calligraphy* – Both of the styles used calligraphy as decorative accents around the gate of the Iwan, as well as under cornices and around the arches surrounding the building.
 3. *Mashrabias* – The pierced screens used as windows are used all throughout the buildings of both of the styles, however there is some notable differences of the Mashrabias.
- The figure above represents the common plan for both Islamic and Mughal architecture, particularly for religious buildings. The colours correspond to different features of the styles –

- Light Green denotes the main dome (here shown with the cylindrical drum on the bottom part, and a finial on top of the dome) as well as supplemental smaller domes above the arcades.
- The Sky Blue shows the main portal of the building, the Iwan.
- The Dark Blue on top of the Iwan and in between the main domes are the minarets – these are commonly placed flanking the top part of the Iwan of the building, sometimes supplemented by a separate, taller minaret.
- Most of the buildings have an arcaded corridor, sometimes the shapes (particularly the size) is different. Usually , the bottom level, in dark purple, are larger, perhaps to place extra doors beside the main one that is situated in the Iwan, while the top or second level of the building, in lilac, features smaller arches, presumably to fit in high windows or mashrabias.
- The grey strips are usually where Calligraphic, usually in cursive scripts, are put, though not limited to the places specified.
- The dark Green squares are usually where gardens are built, but sometimes, in its place, is a large courtyard. This is particularly true for Mosques, as to accommodate extra devotees, when the main prayer hall is full.
- The dark Blue square in the middle denotes fountain and/or a pool. For mosques it is usually the Ablution pool where devotees cleanse themselves before offering prayers in the mosque.

differences between the two styles

there are a few differences to these two styles, some are –

1. *Materials used for building the structures* – In South Asia, the preferable material used for the buildings, both for the religious or secular structures are stone, mainly Redstone, or in some cases, marble. This is perhaps because of the material are easily obtainable in the region. For Persia and the surroundings, the buildings are mostly consists of mud bricks, plastered and covered with decorated tiles. This is also because of the question of availability – mud bricks are easily made, and quarries of

stone building materials are scarce, if not non-existent in that area. since Persia is in the crossroads between China and the Middle East, the Persian took the technologies of tile and pottery making from China and utilized it to decorate their buildings, particularly for larger structures.

2. *Decorations* – Deriving from the facts about the materials used by the styles, and so decorations are different. Since the Mughal empire have access to stone building materials, the decorations are mostly carved – the Jaalis, Mashrabias of the South Asia are carved stones, usually of marble, sometimes inlaid with semi-precious stones. Arabesques or Geometrical designs are carved directly into the rock. Their Persian counterpart relies on the usage of tiles and ceramics for decorating the buildings. Designs are painted on each individual tiles and arranged and plastered on the walls of the buildings. Sometimes, smaller tiles are used and arranged to make certain designs for example Kufic calligraphy or certain geometric decoration.
3. *Colours* – Since the building materials are different, for sure the colours of the buildings are different. In South Asia, the buildings tend to be warm coloured – reds, oranges, browns and maroons are predominant, as well as white, since the building materials consists of red stones and marble, among others. In Persia and its surroundings feature azure, blue or turquoise coloured tiles – the cooler colours are preferred because it is to contrast from the bright yellow sands and the strong sunlight of the desert.
4. *Influences* – Persian architecture mostly derives its influences from Islamic architecture, as well as the pre-Islamic cultures : Elamites, Achaemenids, Parthians, Byzantine, Chinese and Sassanids all influenced the Post-Islamic Persian architecture. While Mughal architecture is influenced by Persian, Islamic as well as Hindu architecture. This influence can be seen by the carvings and decorations on the structures – Minarets looks like stalks of flowers, as well as flower inspired inlaid decorations, a motif commonly used in Hinduism. Arches in Persia curves without any bumps or such, but in Mughal architecture features grooves in the arches, signifying influence directly taken from older structures in India.



Author - Soman

The Jamia Masjid in Delhi, India