

THE BLACK TAJ

An incomplete memory of the Mughal Empire

TALE OF THE CITY

Traces of time indicates that the city of **Agra** is much older than it is supposed to be. In '*Diwan*', a collection of poems *Khwaja Masud bid s'ad bin salman* has mentioned about Agra and its fort. In his writing he says that after a tough fight with Jaipal, the Amir of Agra, Mahmud Shah who was also the governor of Hind invaded the Fort of Agra in 1080-81. Undoubtedly, the fort must have been built sometime earlier than the mentioned time frame. There are other records that confirm the existence of this **old brick fort on the bank of River Yamuna, which was in ruins at the time of Akbar. Akbar found it in ruins and rebuilt in red sandstone, which stands to this date and is known as Agra Fort.** This reconstruction activity has found its mention in the memoirs of Jahangir and the three eminent historians of those times including Sheikh Abul Fazal, Mulla Abdul Qadar Badaoni and Khwaja Nizamuddin. In 1192, northern and central India underwent great political upheavals. Chauhans were overthrown by the Turks. Great battles were fought. Agra was forgotten for a time being and no references to the city were found during the three centuries dominated by the reign of the slave dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, Khaljis or Tughlaqs.

During the reign of Syed Allauddin (1445-51), it finally managed to get its mention as a dependency of Biana. Later, **it came in control of Sikander Lodi during his reign, the city flourished as an important cultural center.** However the claims of Niamatullah, the chronicler of the Lodhi dynasty, that Sikandar founded the city are unacceptable, as it has been mentioned in earlier records. The only claim that could be justified was that Agra came to be known as the Shiraz of India during Sikandar Lodi's time. The mighty ruler died in the fort on 14th December 1517. Ibrahim Lodi, **the son and successor of Sikandar, held the fort for 9 years before succumbing to the might of Mughals.**

Babur invaded Agra in 1526 after killing Ibrahim Lodhi, the last Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate in the first battle of Panipat and laid the foundation of Moghul dynasty. **Humayun, his eldest son and successor, was bestowed with the responsibility to seize the treasury of Agra,** which included rare diamonds such as the famous '*Kohinoor*', presented to him by the king of Gwalior. Babur entered Agra on May 10, 1526. Agra remained the capital of Mughal for generations to come. **Humayun was crowned**

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the next emperor. After the Afghan ruler **Sher Shah defeated Humayun at the battle of Chausa**, Agra came under the rule of *Brahmajit Gaur* on his behalf. **In the second battle of Panipat in 1556, the Mughal forces recaptured Agra.** It was the *golden period in the history of Agra.* It became the center of art, culture, commerce and learning during the reign of Akbar and flourished under the reigns of Jehangir and Shah Jahan. Agra is the birthplace of the religion known as *Din-i Ilahi*, which flourished during the reign of Akbar and also of the Radhaswami Faith, which has around two million followers worldwide. Agra has historic linkages with Shauripur of Jainism and Runukta of Hinduism, of 1000 BC. The Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri are all UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

"Thirty years of Shah Jahan's rule were comparatively peaceful and thus, his passion for architecture came to the fore and the world-famous architectural masterpieces were constructed including the Taj Mahal and the Moti Masjid. This era marked the summit of the Mughal Dynasty."

Agra's glory faded since Aurangzeb shifted his capital to Delhi but it will always be remembered as the city of Taj.

Agra was one of largest Sabhas (Courts of higher order) out of the 12 provinces of their empire and encompassed Gwalior, Kalpi, Kannauj, Koil (Modern Aligarh), Narnaul and Alwar. **Abul Fazl, the court historian of Akbar, describes Agra as a large city with a healthy climate, situated in the bank of River**

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Yamuna. He has also mentioned the villas, gardens and red sandstone fort built by Akbar. Badaoni and Nizamuddin, the other two contemporary historians also describe the grandeur and splendor of the Mughal Agra. A church, an orphanage, a Christian cemetery and a college were built by a Jesuit father at Agra. In 1585, Ralph Fitch noted that Agra had much more population and larger dimensions than London, while Jehangir boasted in his memoirs that the number of the buildings here were equal to several cities of Iraq, Khurasan and Mawar-un-Nahr put together. Agra attracted English and Dutch, who established their factories here. **The capital of Mughal India for nearly a century,** it sports beautiful palaces and splendid royal mausoleums and tombs.

Akbarabad (Or Agra) remained the capital of India during the rule of Aurangzeb **until he shifted it to Aurangabad in the Deccan in 1653.** After the decline of the Mughal Empire, **the city came under the influence of Marathas and was named 'Agra', before falling into the hands of the British Rule in 1803.**

In 1835 when the **Presidency of Agra was established by the British,** the city became the seat of government, and just two years later it was witness to the Agra famine of 1837–38. During the Indian rebellion of 1857 British rule across India was threatened, news of the rebellion had reached Agra on 11 May and on 30 May two companies of native infantry, the 44th and 67th regiments, rebelled and marched to Delhi. The next morning native Indian troops in Agra were forced to disarm, on 15 June Gwalior (which lies south of Agra) rebelled. By 3 July, the British were forced to withdraw into the fort. Two days later a small British force at Sucheta were defeated and forced to withdraw, this led to a mob sacking the city. However, the rebels moved onto Delhi which allowed the British to restore order by 8 July. Delhi fell to the British in September, the following month rebels who had fled Delhi along with rebels from Central India marched on Agra but were defeated. After this British rule was again secured over the city until the independence of India in 1947.

Today, the city is more famous for Taj, the white-marble tribute of Shah Jahan to his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal. The other places worth visiting here speaking volumes about the splendor of these days are Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb enshrining graves of Noor Jahan's parents and Moti Masjid. However, if we take the monuments away, the city has lost it all. And here the brief finds its place.