



Introducing religions

The architecture of a mosque

Narrator:

The Jama Masjid Mosque was built in the mid 17th century by Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor who built the Taj Mahal. It's situated in the ancient town of Old Delhi.

Male:

Before the Jama Masjid, we had 400 years of Islamic rule. Which meant mosques were being built. The first mosque was simply an arched screen. Giving the direction of Mecca, which is the holy city. Which every devout Muslim looks towards while praying. Mosques then evolved because of the climatic conditions and became completely covered until the 1400's. This mosque form evolved with one bay, one covered bay and a large courtyard. And Shah Jahan took that into his ideal of symmetry. So everything is symmetrical around the central axis. And Shah Jahan developed some very specific architectural elements. Such as the cusped arch, which is repeated in this mosque. Such as fluted columns. Which are repeated in the colonnade. And the whole monumentality of white marble being used in great skills. White marble is a very expensive material. So these were traditional elements. Which were both used in the structural manner and in a decorative manner. And of course having been involved in the Taj, the whole concept of the minaret what then added to this mosque.

Because this is the royal mosque, this is the main congregational mosque of the empire. You have this whole grandeur of entrance gates. Which are all towards the east, north and the south.

The mosque is strictly guided by certain principles. One of which is the mihrab wall. The wall which you look towards, should face Mecca. So the mihrab is the first thing. Which gives you the direction of prayer. The hawes where you do your ablutions before you do your prayer, is the other essential element. And there is a minbar, where the Imam guides the prayer from. Which is in the central mihrab. I think what is interesting about Islam, everywhere in the world is that Islam picks up from local traditions, cultures. I mean a lot of Islam completely prohibits the use of human and animal motifs on buildings. Which were very extravagantly used in Hindu temples. But the same skills were used to make floral motifs. Geometric design. The lotus bud comes again and again on top of the dome. On the bosses, on the medallions, on the spandrels of the arch and so on. So it picks up different elements, which you can see are sometimes shared with non Islamic buildings.

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