

TRUE LIES

(S. Jaikumar, Advocate)

"As battles are won by soldiers, medals are wo(r)n by Generals!"

1607A.D. Mina Bazaar. Among hundreds of stalls, there was one with a straw roof and bamboo clusters! The week was very bad for young Arzumund Banu Begum and she could not even sell 40 to 50 pairs of bangles a day. She had to somehow sell at least 150 pairs to meet a two-meal-a-day livelihood. Worried Begum was busy and desperate in selling her stuff. There comes the announcement that "Prince Khurram" is on his "official rounds" to ensure the welfare of his citizens! Knowing this "royal ritual" would only hamper the trading, frustrated Begum started murmuring about her fate, with utter despair! As the royal Prince crossed her stall they exchanged a glimpse and that instant Mr. Cupid struck both of them with his most powerful darts!

They were happily married in 1612 A.D. In 1631 A.D she breathed her last, while giving birth to her 14th child. One year later, crestfallen and heartbroken by her death, he started building a monument of her memory, which became the edifice of eternal love – The Taj Mahal! Yes! The prince was none other than Shahjahan and the fortunate bangle seller was Mumtaz!

The manuscript written by one Luft Allah in the 17th Century A.D accredits Ustad Ahmed of Lahore, who practiced both astronomy and architecture as the eventual designer of the Taj. It is now known that around 37 departments worked together to bring life to this fabulous work of art and architecture. Experts from the world over were invited to take charge. Ismail Khan came all the way from Turkey to make the dome. The gold structure atop the dome was shaped by Kazim Khan of Lahore. The mosaic-motifs were crafted by *Dilliwallah* Chiranjilal. Amanat Khan came from Siraz (now in Iran) was the chief calligrapher and Mohammed Hanifa of Bukhara supervised the stone cutters. As Mir Abdul Karim and Mukirat Khan from Siraz were the chief organizers, Ustad Isha was the chief coordinator between the various departments. Each one of them brought the best craftsmen from their countries. Twenty thousand workers of various nationalities formed a settlement, known as Mumtajibad and the different dialects merged to form a new language – Urdu.

This world famous structure is built from some of the finest and exquisite raw materials procured from various parts of this world. The two symmetric auxiliary shrines were made with red sandstone. While the Makarana hills near Jaipur supplied marble to a limited extent, other qualities and colours were imported. Forty-three different qualities of pearls were inlaid, of which, Zed and crystal came from China. While Tibet provided the turquoise, yellow amber was imported from Burma. While lapis lazuli came from Badakshan, cressolitre came from Egypt.

It is believed that the word "paradise" originated from Persian *para-deeza*, which literally meant a walled garden. The Mughals consciously duplicated the plan of *Beheseth* (the heaven) as described in the Holy Koran. Hence a Mughal garden is always made of a definite geometric pattern beautified by flowing fountains and the Taj is no exception. The layout is so simple that of a square. It has a square pool in the centre, from which, four subsidiary canals flow, further dividing the garden into four squares. In these, a pair of pathways makes four smaller squares thus forming

a symmetrical arrangement of sixteen lawns. The pathways are flanked on both sides by pines, palms and poplars. Previously the symmetry was reinforced by rows of cypress that formed the outer boundary of the garden. An engineering marvel ensured that a canal and some tanks supplied the fountains with Yamuna water. Hydrology says that the more the distance of a fountain from a feeding tank, the less is the height of the water pillar ejected by it. Taj's fountains were positioned in such a manner that each projected water pillar remained at the same height!

It is said that Taj is basically a story of optical illusions! I can bet that if asked to sketch Taj, invariably most of us end up in drawing a square as its original octagonal form shall effortlessly evade notice. The marble platform was constructed on a plinth of red sandstone and the main monument was erected at the centre. There are four flanking *minars* and the central hall is surrounded by sixteen chambers (eight each on two floors), where the Holy Koran used to be recited and the brilliant acoustics made every word uttered echo 14 times.

The calligraphy (fine penmanship where an artistic script is produced) in Taj is unique because both, the medium and the canvas, is stone! The calligrapher Amanat Khan of Siraz drew on papers which were then copied by laying coloured marbles on white marbles. Undoubtedly this is the best specimen of calligraphy ever produced. The Koran's sermons are reproduced on the arches of the main doorway and in the aisles in the main hall. As a matter of perspective, letters nearer to the eye appear bigger than the distant ones. But the genius calligrapher controlled the size of the letters in such a masterly fashion that standing at the base one can see all letters equal in size!

The other marvel of Taj is the spectacular mosaic motifs! The art of weaving patterns on stones and embedding precious and semi precious stones was taken to another level beyond imagination by Chiranjilal, who was the only Indian in an otherwise international array of experts. Though abstract geometric forms and floral motifs were predominant, plants with roots or flying bee hovering around a flower, also appeared as well, which is an exhibition of extraordinary inspiration and imagination!

Last but not the least, the crowning glory of this eternal structure - The dome of Taj! The shaping domes were first perfected by the Turks (Santa Sofia!). The master craftsman Ismail khan experimented with a novel technique by first making a smaller dome and then superimposing the larger, visible one. The space between these two domes was left vacant. The process of distribution of weight was such that, without any burden on the main monument, the outer dome appeared much bigger (44m). To avoid making the entire construction look elongated because of the mammoth central dome, four secondary domes were placed at four corners, thus making it, none other than the "Eighth Wonder!"

Last month after succeeding in a high revenue case, I met the Chairman and the Managing Director of the most powerful economic house in India and while greeting me, he casually asked me, "Who built the Taj Mahal?" Though puzzled, like everyone, I replied spontaneously to this childhood GK poser as "Shahjahan". Then he gave me an article written by Mr. Joydip Mitra, the details which I have extracted above, to a greater extent. After reading and knowing, I am sure that, if the same question is asked to me again, I shall only remember the names of the greats of Ismail khan, Chiranjilal, Amanat Khan and others, and lastly maybe, Shahjahan!

In any achievement, be it the "V" of Sir Winston Churchill or the moon-landing of Mr. Neil Armstrong, there were millions, who had been behind such glory. Similarly, the greatest freedom struggle on this earth is that of our beloved India! We are celebrating the "Shahstiapdhapoorthi" (60th Birthday) of Free India! While worshipping our Gods like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lokmanya Tilak, and others, I take this opportunity to pay my homage to all the faceless heroes who had dedicated and devoted their precious lives and died for the cause of our freedom! Though it is unfortunate that these heroes are eclipsed by the limited space in the pages of history, I sincerely dedicate this piece to all those unsung heroes, without whom, this would not have been possible!

Jai Hind!

Before parting...

On the converse, I am also perplexed about another prevalent social behaviour! When the Rajamundri Express collides with Ernakulam Express during the wee hours, the next day the whole Parliament roars and demands the resignation of the Hon'ble Railway Minister! What could be the reasoning or logic behind accusing a Railway Minister for the irresponsible act of some drunken driver or mad signal operator?