

Voicing a Hushed Voice: A Journey Through Timeri.N.Murari's Taj:A Story of Mughal India

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Abstract

Mughal legacy is better known for its architectural symphony. But there are some who cannot be known to the outside world: hidden somewhere in the history books. This study seeks to explore the lives of those people who gave a glittering heritage to modern India by sacrificing their life and wealth for making their motherland famous across the globe. Murti, the idol carver who brought to Agra from South India to make Shah Jahan's dreams a reality. This article unfolds the life of Murti by analyzing Murari's novel Taj:A Story of Mughal India.

KEYWORDS – Mughals—construction of Taj Mahal—Murti—lives, workers

The Mughals are a wealthy and opulent ruling empire that reign Northern India from 1526 AD to the mid 18th century. Before Babur's invasion on India, she was under the control of Ibrahim Lodi. Babur defeats him in the first battle of Panipat in 1526 and becomes the ruling power. After Babur, each emperor of the Mughal Dynasty inscribed his name in golden letters in the history of India. Likewise the female voices are also heard in the name of Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara Beegum and so on. But their voices are more or less staggered than compared to the male counterparts. Another often ignored voice is that of the common working class people, especially the artists, painters, carvers and labourers imported to the empire for the creation of Taj Mahal. This article is giving voice to one of those hushed voices.

Timeri.N.Murari's novel Taj: A Story of Mughal India portrays an imaginary character Murti. Timeri.N.Murari is an Indian novelist. His debut work is *The Marriage* (1973). Murari published fourteen novels including the best seller *The Taliban Cricket Club* (2010) and *Taj: A Story of Mughal India* (2005). He is also the author of a book for children, *Children of the Enchanted Jungle* (2009). The even numbered chapters of the novel titled *The Taj Mahal* take the story on from 1632 – 1666 and describes Murti fashioning the famous jali over Arjumand's sarcophagus. Murti is an idol carver brought to Agra for the realization of Taj. He is accompanied with his pregnant wife Sita and son Gopi.

Emperor Shah Jahan orders the artists all over the world to come and fulfill his dream. Thus Murti is also called. He is an Acharya, one who carves Hindu Gods and perplexed to take the duty assigned on him. He knows nothing to carve out of marble. He

has been working with stone. But Isa, the eunuch of the deceased empress Mumtaz Mahal, helps him to enroll in the list of artists prepared by the imperial clerks. The emperor's delay in confirming the final plan of the mausoleum affects the life of all these talented workers as they have to live without food and other amenities for a long time. At this moment, he thinks of his home and village. The memories devour him. The home appears to him like the night sky, so distant and only a memory. He becomes so happy when the Hindu workers approached him to carve Goddess Durga to worship as there are any temples or other places for the Hindus to worship.

Murti's helplessness becomes evident when he prays to God for his next child to be a boy so that he can teach him the traditional job of idol carving. The conservative father who wishes to carry on the hereditary to next generation is embodied in Murti. At times of restlessness and boredom, Murti teaches his son Gopi the initial craft of caring and sharpening the tools. Also he thinks that a boy can only look after the family as the patriarchal system does not allow the girls to impoverish their talents. The male serving role models in the society affirm this idea by their deeds and practices. Even though in a pathetic scene, Murti is not so different from the other male members of the society who subjugates women.

When the construction of Taj Mahal begins, Murti got a small jali to carve for the huge mausoleum. It disappoints him. But the more disappointing factor to him is the design chosen for the jali. According to Murti, the design is geometric, unimaginative, made of refined vertical and horizontal lines. He is so depressed to carve straight lines as his hands are accustomed to obey laws of shape like curves, wholes, intertwining like the figures of Gods in dance. The aesthete in him disapproves of the pattern simply laid with flowers and leaves only. He questions the meaning of carving flowers over a pretty decoration. Murti believes that the flowers could not echo the complex rhythm of cosmic world. Though not educated and scholarly, the extreme aesthetic standards of a common man are revealed through Murti. Finally he gets an intricate beautiful pattern as if in a dream like all his earlier creations appeared in mind. He believes that those revelations would only appear in mind through prayers and meditation only.

As the story progresses we get the clear picture of Isa being Murti's lost brother. But it kept as a secret from everybody by Isa because he fears that the secret would affect his brother and his family. Murti asks everybody he met in the empire about Mumtaz Mahal. But he did not get a satisfying answer. He likes to know of her beauty to carve anything keeping her face in his mind. But the people he asked were all males and they never see her as the prevailing custom never allowed men to see a woman's face especially one inhabiting inside the zenana.

Murti is brave enough to agitate protest against the emperor in times of the great famine. The subjects of the empire do not get adequate food and money to live due to the lack of monsoon. The people at Lahore unite and request the empire for a living. Thus Shah Jahan opened the granary to the needy and supplies them with adequate food grains. Similarly the people under Murti sign a petition stating their pathetic situation. The emperor opens the granary to aid the people and gives alms from his treasury to the poor.

Nobody in the empire has known of a common man raising his hands against the most powerful person of the land. A rebellious person and a man with a kind heart towards his fellow beings can be traced in Murti. Towards the end of the famine Sita dies of ill health and during her funeral procession Murti discovers Isa to be his elder brother.

As time passes by Murti becomes too old to hold the chisel. Now it is Gopi's turn to look after his father's dreams. The mausoleum has completed by the efforts of these people like Murti. Murti plans to return to home town with his children as it was also the wish of his dead wife Sita. Before that he tells Gopi of his last wish to see the jali which he devoted his entire life for. But the soldiers on duty deny his request as it is an order from the emperor that a Hindu should not enter the tomb. Murti's pleas are all in vain and he returns to his hut heartbrokenly. Gopi approaches Isa to fulfill his father's last wish. But Isa is also helpless because he himself is unable to enter the tomb for the same reason. At last Murti takes his last breath without seeing his life's most tasty fruit.

Giles Tillotson called Taj Mahal 'the queen of architecture.' The worth of such a building is obvious from Tillotson's words. It is not just a mausoleum which recalls the memory of a beautiful empress in Mughal India, but it is the outcome of so many poor and talented people's twenty two years of life. Murti devotes all his life for the Taj. But the reward he got is utter negligence. Murti is just an instance of how the workers buried deeply under the pages of history. Through the characterization of Murti, Timeri.N.Murari pictures the once forgotten souls who uphold the tradition of India before the world.

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