

# Metaphors of Power in Sacred Spaces: Mughal Imperial Authority through Calligraphy in 17<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Introduction

Masjid-e Jahan Numa or Jama Masjid since its founding in the seventeenth century, has occupied a prominent location and served as the centre of Shahjahanabad's socio-political and religious landscape (city of Shahjahan, the fifth Mughal emperor of India). The Jama Masjid, widely known by its name in popular culture, was strategically placed. On October 6, 1650 A.D., on the 10th of Shawwal, 1060 A.H., under the supervision of the wazir (prime minister), Saadullah Khan, and the khansaman (chief of the Shahjahan's household establishment), the Jama Masjid's foundation was laid. Fazil Khan at the cost of ten lacs of rupees<sup>1</sup> and was only thousand yards from Shahjahan's palace-fortress, *Qila Mubarak* or Red Fort.

At the westernmost point of Khas Bazaar, on a high rocky outcrop known as Bhojla Pahari, the Jama Masjid is situated. The masjid had to be erected on a high elevation so that the roofs of the highest dwellings would be level with its floor, and Bhojla Pahari offered a perfect location for this. Thus, it is a masjid of indescribable beauty and excellence as six thousand masons had laboured every day for six years and showed their skill in its construction and was not only a place of worship, but serves in addition, as a highly valued land mark.<sup>2</sup>

Being a marvel of architecture, it was regarded as a *Padshahi* (sovereign) masjid that represented the aura, power, and philosophy of the empire in Shahjahanabad. Expert craftsmen in the field of construction, best sculptors, engineers, calligraphers and eminent artisans were called to construct this noble structure not only from India but also from

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