

Insects' excreta damage Taj Mahal, leaves marble with green, black stains

By Simran Kashyap | Updated: Friday, July 26, 2019

New Delhi, July 25: The Taj Mahal, a grand marble mausoleum completed in 1653, is under threat from a tiny mosquito-like insect.

The marble walls of one of the world's majestic monuments, Taj Mahal, have started to turn green and black, reportedly due to insect attack.



File photo of Taj Mahal

The sudden increase of *Chironomus calligraphus* is due to the stagnation and pollution of the Yamuna, a major river that flows near the monument in Agra.

The unregulated dumping of solid and liquid municipal waste into the river has led to a surge in algal growth and phosphorus, the primary food for these insects.

An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) official said that it has become a persistent issue since the bacteria from the filth floating in Yamuna nearby provides a healthy breeding ground for insects. Black and green patches have started to appear on the white walls and these patches are

actually the excreta of the insects. This can potentially damage the marble surface and the designs on it.

While the green discoloration can be washed away by water, environmental activists see the insects' impact as more a warning of the environmental degradation occurring all around the Taj.

But it's not just insects that are changing the color of the Taj Mahal. The city of Agra where the monument is based has some of the highest levels of atmospheric black carbon in the country.

The Taj Mahal, one of India's most cherished tourist attractions, brings millions of visitors to Agra every year. Archeologists are struggling to protect the monument.

Meanwhile, the top court has also been monitoring developments in the area to protect the monument, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal in 1631. The mausoleum is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.