

Images of Lahore (Panjab) in Historiography and Cinema (Urdu and English), Myth and Reality

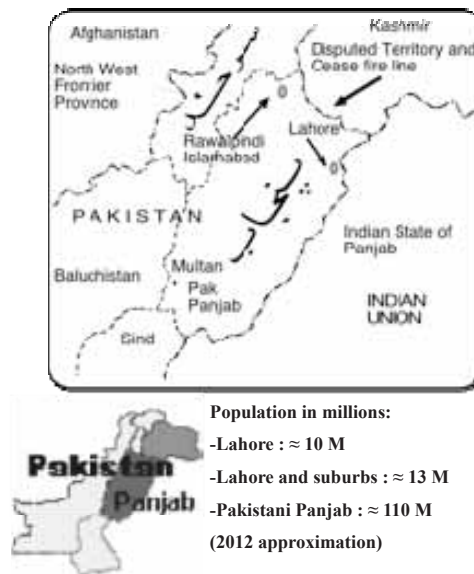
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An outside view of Lahore's famous University old campus.
Mixing colonial as well as Mughal style buildings.

1. Introducing Real Lahore

A map of Pakistani Punjab (Panjab) showing the city of Lahore with population figures



A map of Pakistani Punjab

Lahore was the historic capital of Punjab (British in colonial times) and (c.1790-1845) of the princely State of Lahore (Sikh Kingdom of Lahore) but above all it was one of the capital cities of the Mughal Emperors (c. 1525- c.1760) ; it has been the subject of many « Histories of Lahore », both in Urdu and English, before and after the 1947 partition. Lahore is now the capital of the Pakistani State (Province) of Punjab (*Panjab : the Five Rivers*).



A pedestrian footbridge above the Old Canal

Modern Lahore has kept its charming promenades along the Old Canal though with some concessions to modern urban traffic: flyovers are being built including for pedestrians (see picture above) and perhaps the most emblematic project of the municipality of Lahore (at least in September 2012) is the building of a freeway with some flyovers for cars and buses (with a new express bus service inaugurated in December 2012).

The «*Bārā Darī*» in Nawab Vazir Khan' Garden

An essential feature of Lahore is, as shown by the above illustration a tradition of blending Mughal style (17th and 18th Century) with colonial buildings a policy that was devised by the British authorities. Be it the Punjab University or the Lahore Museum (it was not the case with first Lahore Museum building, now called Tillington Market) the present city of Lahore has kept both styles and buildings, Mughal or colonial are well maintained. But I would like to focus on a peculiar Mughal building, which I was able to revisit very recently. That is the *Bārā Barī* now known as the *Press reading room of the Punjab Municipal Library*. Perhaps the best ever description of this historical building which is far from being as famous as the Lahore Mughal Fort or the Great Mosque, is to be found in the chronicle of Lahore written by the Lahori engineer Kanhaya Lal in Urdu in 1884.

Beginning of the description by K. Lal; translated from Urdu

This solid *bārā darī* (*Twelve Gate Pavilion/All Weather Pavilion*) is one of the monuments

built by the Nawab Vazir Khan, whose memory is perpetuated by the Vazir Khan Mosque that is inside the city of Lahore. When he had some leisure after building the mosque, he took the opportunity of having a beautiful garden made [c. 1634]. And because it had so many date trees that garden became famous as «Nakhla Vazir Khan Garden», where [naxla] = date (fruit). At the beginning of the Sikh administration, the Sikhs made a desert of the garden, only the *bārā darī* that was part of the garden remained in the centre of it. Its structure is entirely made of bricks. It is surrounded by a square platform (*chabūtrā*) of bricks at the height of a man's breast, measuring forty three yards in length and breadth. In the middle of every side of the *chabūtrā* is a flight of stairs giving access to this *bārā darī*. From outside this *bārā darī* looks two storied and from inside it has only one storey.

Every bay is made of bricks and has three entries (*sih darī*). And every such bay is in the middle and inside every façade of the building. It means three bays multiplied by the four sides. And in the «second floor» exactly the same structure of three bays multiplied by the four sides is repeated. The corresponding rooms (openings) on the façade are served by a corridor (gallery/at the base of the dome). The body of the building is a tall construction crowned by a dome and has four staircases in each of the four corners. Using these stairs one may walk along the corridors of the second floor. Over the four corners of the second floor there are four turrets that make very elegant tops. At the base of these turrets we have three bays in each of the four sides, it means that twelve [arched] are made in every turret... (Kanhaya Lal 1884: 363-364)

The author Kanhaya Lal, who was an engineer working for the colonial municipality, knew Persian (and probably Sanskrit, very well), and he carries on with a very precise description of the surrounding platform : it has a fountain on every side etc.

By the year this Urdu chronicle was being published, the British Government annexed the Baradari for making the Punjab Public Library, that is in 1884.

The original building was completed around 1634, by the then Governor of the Subah (province) of Panjab/Lahore, during the reign of the Emperor Shah Jahan. It is indeed interesting to observe that most Mughal gardens had such all weather buildings; few have survived and fewer are still providing a free for all service like this *Press Reading Room*. Needless to say: when the British buildings that house the other reading rooms and offices lack of sunlight and even of electric lighting (because of regular shortages of energy) the Mughal *bārā darī* proves to be an ideal reading room that can receive sunlight (and refreshing shadow) all day and can be open everyday as it has no closing walls nor windows. Actually the news paper readers stand in the opening bays behind lecterns. This simple and beautiful municipal Press Reading Room might be taken as a symbol of an ideal *sustainable city*. The reader may refer to our photograph of that monument (taken during our last visit to the Punjab Public Library).



***The Press Reading Room of the Punjab Public Library, Lahore,
actually the famous Mughal Baradari***

Another feature of Lahore is its legendary Mughal past that also sustains its name in the whole of South Asia.

2. Mythical Lahore and the legend of Anarkali

The tomb of Anarkali in Lahore

The tomb of Anarkali in Lahore is perhaps the most emblematic monument of Lahore. It can be said that it is both myth and reality. Most of historical books on Lahore such as the classical *History of Lahore* by Latif (first in Urdu and then in English, 1892) do mention it and comment its doubtful history, adding an engraving from the time it was still converted into a British church. The monument itself was never the royal tomb of a poor slave girl named Anarkali, buried alive but cruel legend has always been stronger than reality. Foreign travellers inspired by local tales as well as local historians all contributed to the building of the myth and the myth of the building itself. Kanhaya Lal in his *History of Lahore*, (1884) does give a faithful description of the monument, following S. Latif (1884), seems to believe that it is actually the tomb of the unfortunate Anarkali.

In the beginning of 20th Century a young and talented Urdu writer, Imtiaz Ali Taj, composed a stage drama (he was barely in his twenties) the heroin of which is Anarkali. As retold by Taj, the story of Anarkali (in Urdu *Pomegranate Bud*), is based on the quasi mythical character of a slave girl in love with the Mughal prince Salim (later emperor Jahangir). Her love is passionately shared by the prince, but the Emperor (Salim's father, Akbar), would not approve of such a debasing liaison and had the poor girl walled alive while the prince was kept away. The "romantic" drama is set supposedly in 1599 AD and takes place in Lahore, at the Mughal Court. Taj, who wanted to write a Shakespearian drama based on Mughal history of

Lahore and chose the best known Indian Mughal Emperor Akbar and his brilliant Court in the historical frame of the Lahore Fort and Mughal palaces. Conscious of the fact that his fellow Indian citizens would love to recognize the quasi mythical Mughal Court of Lahore, he did not hesitate to describe some palaces and monuments which did not exist at that time, but that were part of the familiar landscape of his audience, both in Delhi and Lahore (the two cities share a common history and destiny as far as Mughal Empire is concerned).

Taj's purpose (he knew that the Anarkali story was a mere legend, Emperor Akbar was never in Lahore by those days, neither do we know of Anarkali's brutal execution on his orders but his popular character was needed) was to write a historical play. That was in the 1920's. But his play was a failure as far as stage drama local directors were concerned. Local historians also criticised his work for not being realistic enough. In 1930, with the coming of talking cinema (the Indian Talkies from Bombay) he revised and wrote again his tragedy after (according to him) ten years of studying Western drama, no doubt the Shakespeare model was upon his mind, with its cruel kings, etc. Something his historian friends did not appreciate.

«My drama is only concerned with [oral] tradition. I have been listening to the imaginary story of Anarkali from my childhood, thus the drama that my imagination saw in the pomp and splendour of the Mughal harem is the expression of this story of beauty, and passionate love with its failure as an unhappy end. So far whoever listened to my drama has this objection at this point: is this tragedy about Anarkali and Salim or is it about Akbar the Great? But Anarkali is such a heart-touching character that at the moment of choosing the name [and title] it was impossible for me to retain another subject.»(Imtiaz Ali Taj 1931: preface 6).

Taj wanted to direct and produce a film *Anarkali*, aka *Love of Mughal Prince* but he was beaten by the powerful Bombay studios who produced a feature film based on that very story before he could finish his own. Bombay studios and other studios of India made the legend of Anarkali one of the best known cinematic and literary myth of India (Taj's drama was also translated and adapted in several Indian languages). As a result of it the so called Tomb of Anarkali (actually the tomb of a nurse of a Mughal Emperor) is more famous than ever: it houses the *Punjab Government Archives* (since 1924) and is still known as *Tomb of Anarkali*. Nowadays the most famous historical bazar of the city is still named *Anarkali Bazar*; and, since British colonial rule, the nearby railway station is also known as *Anarkali Railway Station*. Last but not least: As if to bring his legendary heroine to life, Imtiaz Ali Taj requested his friend and famous painter Abdur Rahman Chughtai to enliven "his dead words" with a portrait of Anarkali, which provided a beautiful cover for his 1931 edition. He remarks:

My respected friend, the painter Abdur Rahman Chughtai, who is the elegance and pride of India, has blended my dead words with his living touch of paint. Thus the printing of this drama has given me as much of happiness as if it had been represented on stage. Perhaps he [Chughtai] may not think of it as such a great favour, but for me I take it as a subject of pride

and honour (1931: preface 6).

The diffusion of *Anarkali* based films, (see our *filmography*, but also the modern productions that are based on this myth) via DVD and on the Web, the constant reprinting (in India, Pakistan and the united Kingdom), of Taj's tragedy, with illustrations on the cover, for the use of Urdu students, all add to the revival of the myth of Anarkali, as well as of the mythical Lahore itself, more or less assimilated to the important image (historical as well as symbolic) of Emperor Akbar's court. An image that is essential to the psychological reconstruction of former Mughal capital cities. A visit of Lahore Museum, that displays many Mughal miniatures as well as works of art and paintings inspired by that tradition is an additional proof of this assertion. Of course the Chughtai Museum of Lahore is also there.

The reader may refer to the reproduction of a portrait of the mythical Anarkali, by Sang-e-meel Publishers, for the first cover of their edition of Taj's Urdu drama *Anarkali* (Lahore, 2003-2009), inspired by a portrait of Anarkali by the Lahori painter Abdur Rahman Chughtai.



Portrait of Anarkali, Sang e Meel Edition (Lahore) and Abdur Rahman Chughtai

I would like to add a brief comment of my own about this portrait: Imtiaz Ali Taj's choice of Chughtai as an illustrator was particularly felicitous, as Chughtai's style evoked to the reader both modern sensibility and sensuality of the 1930s, and the general aspect of courtly miniature painting art. Indeed the lack of perspective, the drawing technique, preceding the filling with colours, the turban and the attire of the young and beautiful Anarkali holding a flower (a typical attitude for Mughal princely portraits), all these traits tend to remind the reader of Mughal courtly miniature painting (as may be seen in the exhibition rooms of the Lahore Museum).

However some significant details defy the conventions of the genre and are distinctly modern. For one, contrary to the classical landscape, typically used as a background for so many Mughal miniatures that represent women, we have a uniform background, the colour of which matches the complexion of the heroine, and the background is studded with thinly

drawn pomegranate blossoms. Even more revealing of the dramatic theme of the picture is the quite unusual, and almost defying attitude of the lady: like so many Mughal princes or princesses, she is holding a flower in her right hand but that flower is broken. Also instead of looking in front of herself, she turns her head to the left, contrary to the orientation of her body, facing the spectator. Her face is seen in profile, and although her traits are very much traditional ones (by the drawing of her lips, nose and eyebrow), she is shown as looking at somebody else. Her jewellery is too elaborate for a low caste court dancer, it rather evokes the European *Art Nouveau* portraits (e. g. by Mucha). The same can be said for her long and elaborated hair locks, one of them parallel to a rather unusual curving loose end of her turban that underlines her breast in absence of any veil. In a nutshell this picture shows an eclectic mixture of Mughal portraiture traits with a modern sensibility, evoking well defying feminine love, but with a broken flower or destiny.

No wonder Imtiaz Ali Taj's would feel so happy and proud of this work of art, inspired by his writings. It encapsulates his stylistic attempt of blending realistic historical writing with romantic, modern and popular tastes. The picture is an ideal representation of the crux of the drama. For him, that picture would serve to introduce his writings as potential script for film directors, somewhat like a cinema poster, at a time when he was refused by the Lahori stage companies.

3. Images of Mughal Lahore as reconstructed by Taj (and later by Bombay cinema)

A case of historical reconstruction by description

An analysis of the use of archaeology and picturesque description by Imtiaz Ali Taj gives us the very sources of the lavish so called Mughal décor. This description goes well beyond the usual instruction for décor makers. It describes a landscape, has a slow approaching movement and then goes into the palace, to, finally go into minute details of the inner decoration and style. Such a performance can only be achieved by an elaborated stylistic and linguistic technique: it requires a proper knowledge of the architectural technical terms (apart from the fact that Imtiaz Ali Taj knew the Lahore Fort, and could have descriptions of it, even in Urdu). Combining technical and historical terminology with a well structured description, that is with clear logical and topological sections, was a way to present to the reader a kind of reconstruction, by means of literary description, and indeed that was a clear guide line for directing the feature film Taj was dreaming of.

Indeed we have a small introductory part which gives us the exact location of the palace, with its customary name. In square brackets we give in approximate Roman transliteration all Urdu archaic terms, that are all Indo Persian terms or lexemes peculiar to the Indo-Mughal referent reality, that the authors inserts in the otherwise modern Urdu text. He does so in order to recreate an atmosphere and increase acceptance for an historical, realistic play that was not

easily created on stage, and was rather refused by Indian troupes.

Act II, Scene 2 : Saleem's Hall [aiwān]

The North Western Royal Hall [aiwān] of Prince Saleem's Palace [mahal]. Within the Imperial Fort, his Palace is situated out of the enclosure [cārdīvārī] of the Seraglio [haram sarā] but at very close distance. This is the Hall that is fronted by the Musamman Burj (the Octogonal Tower) with its Mughal lattice work balconies [jarokhe dārī]. Outside, the landscape is so full of greenery and freshness, and has become such a charming and delicious abode that no Mughal [prince] can, in the whole Palace, choose another place for spending his moments of leisure.

Far away the declining sun is mixing its purple colours with the blue sky. From a long alley of thick bushes the blackish and silent palm trees balance their high heads. The Ravi is trying to bring all those flowing colours from far away up to the wall of the Fort in her robe of waters. Through the western balcony [jharokā] we can see part of the white cupola and red minarets of a mosque.

Inside, in front of the Tower, there is a marble paved terrace [cabūtrā] that is as wide as the Hall. On both sides of the terrace are Mughal style arched doors [mahrābō wāle darwāze]; the one on the right side goes to the Royal Harem, and the left one to the exteriors. Three stairs, covering the whole width of the terrace, lead to the Gallery. In the right and left walls of the Gallery two doors open to the other parts of the Palace.

Priceless carpets are spread in the Hall. On the carpets is standing prominent a royal seat [masnad] with gold threaded cushions, on a throne [taxt] studded with jewels. Decorations pieces are few but very elaborate. Although there is a great simplicity in the ornamentation work, and, being a Royal Hall, it looks quite empty. But if one looks at the design of the walls, at the handicraft of the lattice of the balconies [jarokā] of the Tower, and the octagonal tables [hasht pahlū mezen], topped by studded flower vases, then the heart cannot remain impervious to the charm of the Mughal splendour.

Like in the beginning of every scene Imtiaz Ali Taj gives us a very detailed description of the locale and atmosphere of the scene. This is Act II, "Dance" [raqs], scene number four "The Hall of Mirrors" which narrates the preparation of the Spring Festival.

Again, in square brackets we give in approximate Roman transliteration all Urdu archaic terms, that are all Indo Persian terms or lexemes peculiar to the Indo-Mughal referent reality, that the authors inserts in the otherwise modern Urdu text.

The Spring Festival in the Hall of Mirrors [Shish Mahal] in the Fort [qilā] of Lahore [qilā e Lahor] as imagined by Imtiaz Ali Taj

For the celebration of the Spring Festival [jashan e nau roz], the whole City [shahar] and Fort become the very reflection [aina bardār] of the Mughal [Mughalia] pomp and

magnificence. And wherever one may look he could see intoxicated people, embraced by the pleasures and joys of spring time, quite forgetful of themselves. But in the Imperial Harem [haram shāhī], there is such a delightful coming and going with pomp and magnificence, that the eye is dazzled by its splendour. Golden tapestry [zar baft] and silk brocades [kimx(w)āb] sort of put walls and doors on fire. Carpets [qālīn] from Iran and Tukestan would make the floor look like a garden. On the doors curtains from China and Tatarstan [Cīn o Macīn] with beautiful pictures seem to keep the secret of some magics. Thanks to bushes of lanterns [jhār fānūs], round shade lanterns [qamqamā], chandeliers [qandil], the ceilings of the vast halls, look like the sky of the world of poetry...

In the large courtyard of the Harem Palace [haram sarā], it is not the agitation that prevails for the Weighing of the Emperor [Tulā Dān] or other official ceremonies [rīt rasm]. However there is an extraordinary atmosphere of agitation. Novel and amazing displays of fireworks [ātiśh bāzī] are gathered. The performance is only waiting for the coming out of “the Shadow of the Divinity” [Zil e Ilāhī] (the Emperor). Trusted servants [muqarrabīn] come one after another breaking the news of the arrival of “the Shadow of the Divinity” [Zil e Ilāhī]. Whoever comes from inside [the Palace], is surrounded by a crowd. Aphrodite looking [zohrā jamāl] Imperial ladies [begamen] and princesses [shahzādian] are dressed with nicely cut and light colours shalwārs covered by glittering robes [peshwāz]. They are wearing priceless jewels [jawaharāt]. One is covering herself with a fine linen [shabnam] stole, another one is trimming her head with an elegant turban with a plume [kalghidār pagrī], they are looking like birds of Paradise [quails from the Garden of Iram].

They are all waiting very impatiently. Those who are tired are sitting. Some of them, hand in hand, are walking along in groups with a coquettish gait. Some are sittings in groups looking unconcerned, and exchanging laughs. In some groups they are playing charades and double entendre limeric [pahaliyān muqarniān], some exchange gossips and jokes. Some character is mocked [sawang bharā jātā hai], and many women gather to have a look. In some places colourful dances are taking place, tambourines, drums and tanpuras are playing. In another place evening rites are being celebrated and offerings are distributed.

Abyssinian, Turkmene and Qalmuq women [imperial Harem lady guards] are quite noticeable with their bright coloured dresses. Slave girls [kanīzen] are coming in a hurry, eunuchs [kh(w)āja sarā] are running in all directions. One is calling him, another is shouting at him. One is lifting a nape [x(w)ān], someone is distributing betel nuts with cardamom [pān alaichī], someone else is serving sweet drinks [sharbat] to the noble ladies invited (at the Harem). Outside the musicians have taken hold of the whole Fort.

But the noises of such an agitation do not reach inside the palace of the Hall of Mirrors (Shish Mahal). There, if at all there is some noise, it is only the sound of the pleasant melodies, like a gentle lullaby, played by the flutes [sur nā’ī] and pipes [shahnā’ī] that reaches inside the

palace. Here and there are fashionable illuminating candelabras, with one or several branches, and through the lamp shades elongated flames can be seen, some of them are straight, some of them cir-convoluted, they may be white or with changing colours [rangīn kafūrī]. Amazing [nighat bāz] clouds of rejuvenating [rūh afzā] ambered perfumes are escaping from golden and silver incense burners, and in the mirrors the effulgence of glaring lights, everything contribute to create an atmosphere of a dream world [ālam e kh(w)āb].

The use of terminology for Mughal institutions and ceremonies: a short comment

These terms, though still present in modern speech, are to be understood within the “Mughal” context with a peculiar semantic marking; e.g. the simple offering of betel leaf was almost a ceremony by itself, and therefore in that context, even the word betel [pān] carries another meaning within the mughal etiquette. The author knows that once he has instilled in the mind of the reader the curiosity for the “mughal atmosphere”, through the accumulation of material details in his description, then he has won his adhesion. The fact that some technical terms may be obscure for the reader does not matter, they are numbed or clouded with a kind of “historical” feature (or semantic marking). And the reader may either let his imagination work, or, if he is a stage drama or a cinema professional, his curiosity will be stimulated and his ability will be challenged.

[qilā e lāhore] The Lahore (Mughal) Fort, the Urdu phrase with Indo-Persian izafat (or genitive case) denotes not what is known as the “fort” but the Mughal Palace for the itinerant Court of Akbar : The author revives the old opposition between the Mughal city or town [shahar] and the Fort/Palace. These two terms are to be read and understood within a very precise «historical» context, and not with the modern perception of «town» and naturally the reader has to forget the archaeological vision of the Fort [qilā], it is no longer a monument but the Palace, a centre of the political life, and from the point of view of the stage the unique «locus dramatis».

[Shish Mahal] perhaps the most famous feature of Mughal Forts or Palaces, the Hall of Mirrors. It is interesting to note that the author uses the popular form of this Arabo Persian compound word, which, if taken in its original and literary form, should have been [shisha mahal]: literally the “mirror palace”, combining a Persian noun with an Arabic one to describe an Indo Mughal referent, but there is a limit for archaism, and the author, who is probably aware of the literary original form, cannot do without the universally accepted term.

[jashan e nau roz]: The (Persian) New year Festival. Perhaps the best remembered and still celebrated Mughal and Persian Festival. Instead of simply mentioning the «nau roz» the author gives us the complete Persian phrase with the izafat construction marked by [e] or Indo-Persian annexation for nominal compounds (compare with [qilā e lāhor]). By using this historic label, Imtiaz Ali Taj signals to us that he intends to recreate (or evoke) the atmosphere of the Mughal

courtly ceremony, the way it was codified by Akbar, in a spirit of religious reconciliation, the reader should forget his own perception of «nau roz» as it may be celebrated, mainly by Shia or Persian speaking minorities in the years 1930 in Northern India.

[Tulā Dān] (not a Persian phrase but a Sanskrit one, originally the gift in gold made to a Brahman), it was practised for a long time in the Mughal Empire and even in Princely States of colonial India; this ceremony, often represented in miniatures is the weighing ceremony of the Prince on the auspicious occasion of his birthday : The Prince or the Emperor is sitting in one pan of a big scale [tulā] and the nobles and important persons of the of the Court have to fill the empty pan, in turns, first, in diamonds, then in gold, silver, grain etc., till the scale is levelled at every turn. The amount of wealth thus collected on such an auspicious day increases the prestige of the Prince and allows public charity. The nobles themselves being presented with symbolic gifts. This scene has been often reported by travellers, and indeed it was the occasion for grandiose feasts and ceremonies. At least this short and very approximate description is what the cultivated reader has in mind when he reads the words [tulā dān], associated with another classical and official term like [jashan] (opposed to the popular [melā]). The huge pair of scales that was standing in the Imperial Palace was also the symbol of the Emperor's justice.

[rīt rasm] is an interesting Urdu compound word used by the author to the Mughal Court etiquette and ceremonies; Imtiaz Ali Taj cares for his general readers he uses a popular cliché: [rīt rasm], a doublet, that is a usual way of making Indo-Persian popular lexical compounds by associating a Sanskritic lexical unit with an Arabic or Persian one with a common meaning; we have an emphatic effect with the repetition of two equivalent words. Had our author been writing history he would have used the literal Arabic plural of [rasam], [rusūm].

[aina bardār] evokes the word [āina dār], “mirror holder”, who is an officer at the Mughal Court, in the mind of the reader, the word echoes the well known [huqqa bardār] or water pipe holder office of the nawwabs of Lucknow. The metonymy or simile for the concept of «the very image of...» is particularly consistent with the courtly etiquette and usage. Again the imagination of the reader is sollicitated. The game of the mirrors was at the root of the tragic destiny of Anarkali, as imagined by Taj.

[haram shāhī] The Imperial harem, or Seraglio. This Mughal “women’s quarter” is a court institution (in any case not peculiar to the Mughal Court, and even not to Muslim Courts) that has always been, within the relations or European travellers, a choice passage favoured by their readers. The fabula of Anarkali owns something to those travelogues and our author is well aware of that. He also knows that the cultivated audience is somehow expecting an evocation of the “Seraglio” to use the colonial term, and he skilfully writes [haram shāhī], a familiar contraction of [haram e shāhī]. He is both recreating an historical reality and using the fashionable decor of the “Imperial harem”, like so many European operas, dramas, and

indeed films have done before. To do so he used very precise clichés and technical terms for the costumes of the ladies; refer, for example to the term [pishwāz] a more common form than the classical [peshwaz], for the outer, translucent garment or robe, see our translation above). And he also retrieves the exact (or supposed to be) terms for the different categories and stock characters of the “Haram.”

[begamen] or Imperial ladies (and wives), singular [begam], the Turkish word implies that they are from the Imperial Mughal family and married, some of them to the Emperor.

[shahzādiān] or Imperial Princesses. Literally in Persian “daughters of the king”, but in fact high ranking princesses, not married, and not allowed to go outside the Haram.

Abyssinian, Turkmene and Qalmaq women [imperial Harem lady guards] : A third kind of feminine character is represented by the tribal ladies that guard the Harem from the intrusion of non authorised persons. It is also an historical fact. But our authors is perhaps too precise in accumulating the ethnical terms. Now it is for the reader to fancy «their bright coloured dresses».

[x(w)aja sarā] or eunuchs in charge of the Haram [sarā]; they are trusted servants, the author also uses the technical and historical term [muqarrabīn] (Arabic noun with Arabic literary Arabic plural) for “trusted servants”. One of the eunuchs is personified as a funny character in the play : Kafur.

[kanīz], literally a slave woman of the Haram, this Persian term is used with an Indian (common in Urdu) plural [kanīzen] and not the unfamiliar Persian plural [kanīzān]. Normally they occupy the lower position in the Imperial Harem. In the play those women are not courtesans, and a cut above the state of abject slavery, they are rather shown as servants (in this context the modern Urdu term from Arabic [xādimā] for “female servant” would have been more appropriate). They also happen to be musicians and dancers of the Harem, where male artists were not admitted (a situation that may not be inconsistent with historical reality). But for the reader of S. Imtiaz Ali Taj’s times, [kanīz] describes a reality that would belong to historical chronicles or novels or even traditional fairy tales. S. Imtiaz Ali Taj who is writing a play inspired by a local legend, does not bother to check the actual function and status of a [kanīz], and from the very beginning, in the dramatis personae, we know that the heroine Anarkali is said to be, a [haram sarā men Akbar kī manzūr e nazar kanīz] : a female slave of the seraglio “reserved for the eyes” [manzūr e nazar] of Akbar, that is, a favourite of the Emperor. In other words a singer and dancer chosen by him ; and some other characters are termed as [kanīzen], for example, the rival character of Anarkali, who is the former favorite dancer of Akbar (as mentioned above).

In this description we do have the whole hierarchy of the Moghal harem, using the proper technical and historical terms : [begamen] are served by [kanīzen] and watched by eunuchs etc.. but, again we have a sort of artificial reconstruction, a mere décor. Especially if we

consider the major paper of those “slaves” or female servants in the drama: they play a major part and act with initiative and freedom as servants of the Italian classical comedy would do, two of them even have a “confident” or [rāz dār] (mentioned in the dramatis personae), another feature and technical term that is proper of comedy; his historical evocation illustrates the dramatic action but the plot involving the [kanīzen] is far from historical realism.

Historical Realism and drama’s necessities an intentional fake reconstruction of the past

Imtiaz Ali was barely in his twenties when he wrote his first version of the drama. He had an intimate connection with the local legend, as he was from Lahore, living close to what is supposed to be Anarkali’s tomb. He was fascinated with Mughal and local history of Lahore. In those days there was still a strong tradition of Urdu and English local historiography, notably Latif’s work, by which Imtiaz Ali was influenced a lot as we have seen. For his second version, Imtiaz Ali Taj secured the help of two local erudite Lahori historians, Ghulam Abbas Sahib and Maulana Chiragh Hasan Hasrat, to proofread his drama, as he mentions in the preface of the second version (1931: preface 7). This serves to reinforce his claim to historical realism.

Due to the loss of the first version of the play, we can only guess how Imtiaz Ali Taj revised his drama. We know he listened to some literary criticism. He may have expanded the descriptive passages of his play, which read like passages from an historical novel, particularly the first introductory descriptive passage about the royal garden and daily life in the women’s quarters (Act 1, scene 1, 1931: 11-2) and the presentation of Salim’s palace and apartments with a luxury of colourful details (Act 1, scene 2, 1931: 22-3). These passages emphasise the *couleur locale*, and add to the realistic aspect of the play.

The realistic and picturesque description of the Mughal Palace goes well beyond the usual instructions for decor makers and stage indications. It first describes the landscape, has a slow approaching movement and enters the palace, and finally goes into minute details of the inner decoration and style, thus giving almost an indication for a camera movement. The description is replete with architectural technical terms. Combining technical/historical terminology with a well-structured description was a way to present to the reader a kind of reconstruction by means of literary description. Imtiaz Ali Taj knew the Lahore Fort very well, and could have used descriptions of it in Urdu.

Another example of historical realism is the chosen time and place. Imtiaz Ali situates the story in the Punjab, where the Mughal Court is supposed to have sojourned, and at the time of the Spring Festival, for which the author uses the Persian name, *jashan-e nau roz*. Indeed, this was instituted by Akbar at the Mughal Court (see below).



Latif, Sayyad Muhammad, 1888 *Tarikh e Panjab*, first page (*History of Lahore, Urdu*)

In spite of all the attention to historical and archaeological details, we should not forget that this is fiction and the buildings and palace described never existed in Lahore during Akbar's reign, but were built during Jahangir's reign. Imtiaz Ali Taj was certainly aware of this anachronism and we may take it as an intentional fake reconstruction of the past. In a similar approach, the successive film directors would reconstruct familiar Mughal buildings for their viewers, irrespective of whether they were actually built during Akbar's reign. In Jaswantlal's film, the Mughal architecture and interiors (in particular the sophisticated candelabras), including the great hall of mirrors, are close to what Imtiaz Ali Taj described. The same is true for K.S. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam*. Similar observations prompted Salim Arif, in the *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, to criticise the movie on grounds of lack of historical realism.

Authenticity versus effect

This attitude towards historical characters and events resulted in films that violated authenticity for the sake of effect, of which K. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam* is the best example. Based on Imtiaz Ali Taj's play *Anārkalī*, *Mughal-e-Azam* had a predecessor in Filmstan's 1953 production of *Anarkali*. The same story with changed emphasis and excellent production values and performances, made *Mughal-e-Azam* a landmark in Hindi cinema.

Though the *Mughal-e-Azam* characters have become a part of Indian cinema folklore, the film was anything but historically accurate in the manner of textual details, costumes, sets, and music. For instance, thumri, a 19th-century musical form is used along with kathak costumes in a court supposedly in the late 16th century India. Even the Sheesh Mahal (the royal bath of the actual queen) is enlarged into a dancing hall of the Mughal emperor, Akbar. Anarkali could have been one of the numerous dancing girls of the Mughal harem; whether the Mughal prince Salim fought his father over his beloved is not documented in history (Arif 2003: 233).

Comparing the film-directors' visions and the architectural approach in Imtiaz Ali Taj's

Urdu drama, we may say that we have a case of historical reconstruction for romantic and popular intent. In a way, the directors stay true to Imtiaz Ali Taj dramatic vision. Indeed, if we look at the introductory sequences of Jaswantlal's *Anarkali* (1953) with its typical Mughal styles arches with a storm agitating the palm trees and Anarkali's supposed tomb, or the décor of K. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam* with the impressive Mughal fort, its ever blooming gardens and inner decoration, we can see that Imtiaz Ali Taj's vision prevailed. Another concrete example of Indian cinema décor being influenced by Taj's literary vision of Mughal Lahore is the *Hall of Mirrors* as staged by K. Asif's *Mughal e Azam* ; the 1960 film had a huge success and contributed to perpetuate the legend of Anarkali and kept alive the imaginary Mughal Lahore as created by Taj. Later on quite a few films re- used the Anarkali Saleem story and theme.

Some forty years after, K. Asif directed film was re-mastered and colorised by the producers (including the director's son, Akbar Asif) so the legend was again big news. The renovated film was again distributed and issued in DVD copies. Along with it a beautiful book introducing the film and reproducing the dialogues, in Urdu, with Roman Urdu, Hindi transliteration and English translation *The immortal Dialogue of K. Asifs Mughal-e-Azam*, (the retrieved Urdu dialogues make the comparison with Taj's Urdu dialogues easier) was issued by Nasreen Munni Kabir and Suhail Akhtar, in 2007, printed in Mumbai with a rich photographic album from the coloured film. No doubt this beautiful book will again contribute to the celebrity of *Anarkali* and of her native town.

To conclude, we would like to refer here to one photograph of that film showing the mythical Hall of Mirrors of Lahore Palace with the dancing Anarkali, indeed an immortal image of Lahore, taken from the above quoted book.

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Mughal-e-Azam, K.S. Asif, (Bombay) Mumbai, Black and white, partly in colour, 1960, re-mastered and colourised by the producers in November 2004), contrary to its predecessor K.S. Asif's film added a happy end, and a few additional characters.

(reference to the above quoted book):

Nasreen Munni Kabir and Suhail Akhtar. *The immortal Dialogue of K. Asifs Mughal-e-Azam*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

In addition *Anarkali* by Taj was translated in quite a few Indian languages thus adding more credit and fame to the legend of Lahore.