

The Architectural Saga of Two Tombs

The tomb of Anarkali and the tomb complex of Jahangir

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Traditionally, the documentation and investigation of a historic monument and its architectural character is carried out by employing an architecturally focused documentation, surface observation of the structure, ignoring its cultural context. The records produced after such documentation are mainly comprised of architectural drawings. In some instances where surface decoration is predominant in a historic structure, the motifs and material details of the craft are also documented. Essential components as these are, nevertheless, the documented structure consequently presents an incomplete story of the evolution of the monument which is oblivious to its intertwined myths with oral legends and cultural associations, symbolic importance and contextual integrity. These components when combined together can raise a historic monument from the level of a single entity into a much larger treasure of the Built Heritage.

On the other hand, religion and politics-based interpretations unnecessarily narrow the perspective of a monument; from being a part of the national heritage it is turned into a controversial symbol of this or that viewpoint resulting in the fragmentation of its historicity. The unavailability and scarcity of written records, lost or damaged in time, further subjugate the history of the monument to available circumstantial evidence and folk narrative. This situation is most pronounced in the historic Tomb of Anarkali which should have been treated as a Built Heritage rather than just a single historic entity. Irrespective of who rests in that noble building, it is a significant part of Lahore's cultural heritage.

Through this paper I shall attempt to investigate the socio-religious reservations encountered by this tomb in the writings of national and international scholars. I shall then build up an analysis based on the urban, mythical and symbolic importance of the tomb of Anarkali emphasizing, what historians and conservationists call the 'Associative Values' this tomb embodies in the shape of its architecture and urban context. I shall also debate upon the possibility of the existence of an urban link between the tomb of Anarkali and that of the tomb complex of Jahangir, hence establishing its Urban Context Value. On

the other hand, this paper will not be investigating the personality for whom Emperor Jahangir commissioned this tomb because the values and significances of the tomb itself portray and reflect the importance of the personality, whoever he or she may have been.

In this paper I shall also emphasize the importance of the oral traditions and myths associated with a particular monument. These can be tested and most of the time prove worthwhile, if a changed perception of investigation is employed which focuses on the establishment of the varied values that the structure embodies.

The Reservations: Social, Political, Cultural and Religious Distortions

The discussion of whether the tomb is of a condemned slave girl or a legitimate wife of Jahangir has by far overshadowed the importance of this structure both as a monument of architectural as well as cultural heritage. Nazir Ahmed Chaudhry's writings¹ are proof of this approach. He states that, "All of them (the narratives of different historians) appear to be the fiction of (a) maid servant in (the) harem of Akbar (who was) punished for the crime of exchanging a smile with Prince Salim in the Palace. But it has no documentary proof in contemporary chronicles. Emperor Jahangir, who has otherwise so faithfully recorded each and every event of his life, has nowhere mentioned such a love affair..."; He does not realize or refuses to acknowledge that the memoirs of an emperor are not without political and dynastic biases. Condemning the entire literary discourse on this fact alone and describing the incident as 'fiction' demonstrates his dismissive approach which reflects his own particular bias.

Further, Nazir Ahmad Chaudhry states that Dr. Baqir² and Maulana Ilm-ud-Din Salik³ are in agreement that the tomb in question is that of Jahangir's wife, as "the Emperor, of course, could not afford to build such a grand monument for a house-maid who has been condemned by the Emperor Akbar". The whole issue of the identity of the entombed personality of Anarkali is given the shape of a class-based and an Islamist approach rather than that of a historic and mythical occurrence, thus challenging its authentication. Chaudhry comments that "The undue publicity attached to the story by Urdu dramatists and fiction writers needs to be ignored which are to defame the Muslim rulers..." As regards the Persian couplet carved on the tombstone, he says that "...could an emperor (and that too a Muslim) afford to publicly make such a wish to his beloved ..."

In another instance he seems to mock the physical proofs on

the tombstone by stating that “If she was an accused person there was obviously no need to commemorate her death and story through a majestic monument...if she was a condemned slave what was the fun in having a sarcophagus with 99 attributes of Allah on it.....Many Muslim writers assert that it was an effort by non-Muslim historians to defame the Muslim rulers”. Strong statements indeed, completely belittling the power of oral traditions and mythological associations. It is my view that while analyzing history nothing should be left without examination and all the evidence must be taken into consideration, not only the written and physical but also the oral and mythical.

In contrast with the ‘Islamized’ approach of Nazir Ahmed Chaudhry, Ebba Koch⁴ compares the tomb of Anarkali with certain European structures which are reputed to have strong ‘Christian’ associations. Establishing “remarkable similarities” between these structures is indicative of her western biases of placing conceptual inspiration within the western culture. Prominent among these comparisons is the instance where she compares the tomb’s building with Castel del Monte, Italy, and its plan with that of San Giovanni dei’ Florentine, Rome.

The history of Castel del Monte is dominated by war – Crusades. It was built by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II as part of his efforts to fortify southern Italy during the Crusades. The World Heritage listing describes it as “a unique masterpiece of medieval military architecture”. It was later turned into a prison and then used as a refuge during a plague, finally falling into disrepair. The octagonal plan is unusual in castle design and historians have suggested that Frederick II may have been inspired by the plan of the ‘Dome of the Rock’, Jerusalem, which he had seen during the Fifth Crusade. Similarities between the outer octagonal turrets and the central octagonal space can be observed in both the tomb and the castle.

San Giovanni dei Florentine is, on the other hand, a church and is dedicated to St John the Baptist, the protector of Florence. The main façade faces the Via Giulia. This straight street was an urban initiative, carried out in 1508 at the instigation of Pope Julius II. It cuts through the irregular urban fabric to the Ponte Sant’Angelo, the bridge which crosses the River Tiber connecting the Castel Sant’Angelo and St Peters in the Vatican. The dominant idea for the plan was of a centralized church arrangement and in 1559 Michelangelo was asked to prepare designs for the church but his centralized church arrangement was not adopted. The final design however was organized as a Latin cross plan. Similarities between the two patterns of cross axes in the plan can be

seen in both the tomb and the church. The resemblance in the layout of the four diagonally recessed rooms present in both the structures is striking. There are also proportional similarities in the outer appearance of the tomb of Anarkali and that of the Castel del Monte except for the dome which the latter lacks.

These reservations and inclinations have deflected the contextual importance of the tomb of Anarkali towards the existence or non-existence of the entombed personality which in itself is surrounded by many myths. Subtracting these myths and oral traditions from the tomb, and the entombed, has distorted its evolutionary story whilst the dominance of continuous transformations and neglect in the history of the tomb indicates the loss of respect towards this structure.

The Structure: Architectural Value

Since its construction as a mausoleum, Anarkali's tomb has been subjected to a variety of usages. Maharaja Ranjit Singh decided to transform the character of his forces on the lines of well-disciplined European troops. He commissioned General Ventura an ex-officer of Napoleon's armies and asked him to train and station his troops south of the city with ample space as training grounds away from the citadel. This location is now called the Anarkali precinct. The General moved into the tomb and used it as a part of his residence which he also built alongside the tomb. The gardens surrounding the tomb must have been an attractive place to live. When the British annexed the Punjab Henry Lawrence used Ventura's house and the tomb as part of his secretariat, housing the Board of Administration. The tomb was vacated by the government functionaries when proper offices were constructed as an expansion of the secretariat but was then converted into a church. When the church moved to its new building on the Mall, the tomb was dedicated for use as the archives department. Extraordinarily through all these changes the tomb managed to keep its original name and the legends connected with it are still told.

The tomb of Anarkali is described by Ebba Koch as "the most outstanding and ingeniously planned octagonal building, not only of Jahangir's period but – next to Humayun's Tomb – in the whole history of Mughal Architecture.....which originally stood in large, architecturally planned gardens.....".⁵ The uniqueness of this tomb can be observed through its building typology and plan layout. The tomb's radical nine-fold plan has been compared with that of the tomb of Humayun, in Delhi, and with the Hada Mahal, at Fatehpur Sikri, all of which are composed of the two patterns of cross axes (+ and x). In

another instance, Koch compares the plan of the Taj Mahal with that of the tomb of Anarkali stating that “Radial symmetry is observed in the gatehouse and the tomb proper, both of which follow the ninefold plan” and that the plans of the tombs of Anarkali and Humayun “may be more creative and original”.

The Timeline: Historic Value

A chronological representation of the tomb building activities during Mughal rule will provide a comprehensive analysis of the sequence of events which surrounded the construction of the tomb of Anarkali and that of the tomb complex of Jahangir. It can be observed from the dates that since 1527 the area north of the River Ravi was used for laying out gardens by the Mughals and much frequented by the Emperor of the time while residing in the historic city of Lahore. It is recorded that in this year Mirza Kamran⁶ planned and planted a garden on the banks of the River Ravi. On the other hand, an old image of the tomb of Anarkali taken from the *Gulgashat-i-Punjab*, a book compiled during Sikh rule, shows the same river passing right at the foot stone of the tomb of Anarkali with some of its *chajjas* located at the corner turrets broken. The events surrounding the tomb building activities are as follows:

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| 1566 | Emperor Akbar was crowned the Padshah of Hindustan. |
| 1569 | Prince Salim was born – The future Emperor Jahangir. |
| 1589 | Akbar makes his first visit to Kashmir, his first encampment is at the <i>serai</i> of Madhu Singh and then at Shahdara. |
| 1591-95 | Akbar makes recorded visits to gardens across the River Ravi including Kamran’s garden, the garden of Ram Das (1592), <i>Dilamiz</i> garden and <i>Ram Bari</i> (1595) while residing in Lahore. |
| 1592 | Prince Khurram was born – the future Emperor Shah Jahan. |
| 1599 | Anarkali, a name assumed to be given to Nadira Begum or Sharfun Nisa (of Akbar’s harem), dies. |
| 1605 | Emperor Akbar dies and Prince Salim is crowned as Emperor Jahangir and takes upon himself the task of |

building a magnificent tomb for his father.

- 1606 Emperor Jahangir takes up residence in Mirza Kamran's garden in Lahore while crushing the rebellion of his son Khusraw.
- 1611 After a delay of six years NurJahan agrees to marry Emperor Jahangir.
- 1612-13 The tomb of Akbar was completed.
- 1615 The date of the completion of Anarkali's Tomb.**
- 1627 Emperor Jahangir dies in Kashmir and his body is brought to Lahore. Construction of his tomb begins.**
- 1628 Prince Khurram was crowned Emperor Shah Jahan
- 1637 Emperor Jahangir's tomb completed.**
- 1641 Asaf Khan (brother of NurJahan, father-in-law of Shah Jahan) dies and is buried to the west of Jahangir's tomb's forecourt.
- 1645 NurJahan dies and is buried to the west of Asaf Khan's tomb.
- 1632-53 Construction and completion of the Taj Mahal.
- 1666 Emperor Shah Jahan dies.

Through analyzing the dates and corresponding events it becomes evident that one person was common throughout the tomb building activity that started from the tomb of Akbar till the creation of the Taj Mahal, and that person is none other than the 'Architect' Emperor Shah Jahan, who is acclaimed for bringing the Classical Period of architecture to the sub-continent.⁷ The marked grey area within the chronological list presents the period during the lifetime of Shah Jahan. In this regard the future Emperor may have experienced the construction of the tomb of Akbar and that of Jahangir, Asaf Khan, NurJahan and Anarkali. Furthermore, he may have been aware of the possible urban arrangement followed by the tombs of Anarkali and Jahangir.

The Progression: Dynastic Value

Shah Jahan was 20 years of age at the time of the completion of the tomb of Akbar and may have been acquainted with the desire of Jahangir to follow the combination of the Timurid and indigenous styles of architecture in the tomb of his father, an experiment appreciated and already undergone by Akbar in the construction of Fatehpur Sikri, especially in the structure of Punch Mahal. However Jahangir was much disappointed when he saw the tomb two years into its construction and it is recorded that he ordered its “immediate destruction”⁸ by stating that “the tomb did not come up to my idea of what it ought to be”.⁹

Emperor Jahangir fell ill in Kashmir and was on his way back to Lahore when he died. Some historic records¹⁰ claim that the dying ‘request’ of Jahangir was to take him back to Verinag, his favorite Kashmir spring where he and NurJahan had spent ‘so many happy summers’. Other sources state¹¹ that it was the ‘will’ of the Emperor that he should be entombed in the garden of NurJahan, the Dilkusha Bagh, which is now popularly known as the Akbari Serai.

In the case of the latter, the wish to be buried in the Dilkusha Bagh may possibly have arisen during 1606 when, after the death of Emperor Akbar, Jahangir resided in Kamran’s Baradari in order to crush the uprising led by his son Khusraw.¹² Maybe this was also the time when he decided to construct a tomb for his long dead, beloved Anarkali. It is noteworthy here that the tomb of Jahangir was commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan while the place was identified prior to the construction either by NurJahan or, considering the above circumstances, by Jahangir himself.

The Location: Contextual Value

Observing the urban setting of this tomb through the 1893 map of the British colonial Lahore, it can be established that the tomb of Anarkali and the tomb complex of Jahangir have been indicated on the map, the detail of the latter can be seen in the right hand corner. However, the tomb of NurJahan has not been indicated. It may be observed from the two diagonal red lines, that the two tombs of Jahangir and Anarkali lay along a straight line, the angle of which coincides with the angle of the Shalamar Gardens. The line generates from the tomb of Jahangir and, cutting across the River Ravi upon the bridge of boats, passes through the irregular urban fabric of Lahore towards the tomb of Anarkali, similar to the setting of San Giovanni dei Florentine.

Similar observations can be seen in other archival maps such as the ones reproduced by F. S. Aijazuddin in his two books.¹³ The detail from the 1867 map of Shahdara bears no indication of the tomb of NurJahan, however the surrounding *serai* and water wells are meticulously recorded. The second map¹⁴ indicates the tomb of NurJahan and once more a straight red line can be drawn between the tomb complex of Jahangir and the tomb of Anarkali.

A more comprehensive and meticulous study of the map-image¹⁵ of Lahore establishes that indeed there exists a straight line between the two sites of the tombs located on opposite banks of the River Ravi. The straight line intersects the main gateway to the tomb of Jahangir when it was drawn from the center of the tomb of Anarkali. A romantic might conjecture that the gateway to the Emperor is through the heart of his beloved Anarkali. The logical idea that these two tombs could belong to a larger urban scheme or could be part of a singular complex was, however, never imagined nor analyzed, if ever investigated. Furthermore, two straight lines, each from the center of the tomb of Jahangir and the tomb of Asaf Khan, when drawn towards the tomb of Anarkali, are the same distance apart. Assumptions may be made that these lines can possibly indicate the outer limits of a garden named *Bagh-e-Anarkali*¹⁶ which is mentioned only in the *Sakinat-ul-Auliya*, written by Dara Shikoh. Some of the remaining fresco embellishments still show the 'Anarkali' flower.

On the other hand, and in contrast with the above, the tomb of NurJahan does not comprise any such geometrical link with the tomb complex of Jahangir or any layout similarity with the Taj Mahal. All the lines projecting straight out of the tomb of NurJahan towards the tomb of Jahangir intersect within the southwestern corner. The garden limits overlap with that of Asaf Khan's tomb gardens and it seems that only in the plan did NurJahan identify herself with the Emperor. She did not share his 'lines of geometry'.

Assuming that Emperor Shah Jahan was familiar with this urban symbolism his father laid out during his life time, he constructed the mausoleum on the site of his father's choosing. It seems that he perfected this urban scheme of incorporating the river inside the whole tomb complex in his architectural master-piece, the Taj Mahal. The layout of the Taj Mahal and the Mahtab Bagh, which contains the water pond that reflects the Taj Mahal in the moonlight creating the legendary Black Taj¹⁷, is in perfect accord with the initial layout concept of the tomb complex of Emperor Jahangir and the tomb of Anarkali. Once again the setting and plan of these two tombs may be linked with the

setting of the Taj Mahal and, if investigated, may be compared even in its layout geometry.

It is in fact documented¹⁸ that Shah Jahan took architectural elements from his ancestors' tombs and incorporated them in the singular structure of the Taj Mahal, hence creating a perfect symmetry through his chosen elements. It is documented that he took,

1. Minarets from the tomb of Jahangir – the symbol of elevation and prosperity.
2. Chamfered corners with corner *burjis* from the tomb of Humayun – the four corner stones of perseverance.
3. Entrance portals from the entrance gateway of the tomb of Akbar – the gateway to kingship.
4. The magnificent dome from the tomb of Timur – the crown of the Timurid dynasty.

Metaphorically, in this building not only did Emperor Shah Jahan physically incorporate all the vital elements from the tombs of his ancestors, the symbolism behind the tomb of his father was also incorporated. Thus he created a 'perfect example of love' towards both his ancestry and his wife, the link for his future generations.

The verse below sums up the Architectural Saga of the Two Tombs, one a monument of absolute and legitimate love, the Taj Mahal, and the other a monument of lost love that could not merit a single word of recognition in history except in the couplet of her beloved,

Ah! Could I behold

The face of my beloved (*yar*) once more

I would give thanks unto my God

Unto the day of resurrection

Majnu Salim Akbar

Endnotes

- 1 Chaudhry, N. (2002) *Anarkali: Archives and Tomb of Sahib Jamal*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications
- 2 From his write-up in his publication on Lahore.
- 3 From his article in *Nairang-i-Khyal*.
- 4 Koch, E. (1991) *Mughal Architecture*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag
- 5 *ibid*
- 6 Mirza, Kamran – Son of Mughal Emperor Babar and brother of Emperor Humayun
- 7 Koch, E. (1991) *Mughal Architecture*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag
- 8 Brand, M. (1993) 'Orthodoxy, Innovation and Revival: Considerations of the Past Imperial Mughal Tomb Architecture'. *Muqarnas X: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*. Margaret B. Seveenko, ed. Leiden. Quoted from Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, trans. Alexander Rogers (1909), rpt (1968)
- 9 *Ibid*
- 10 Stuart, CMV (1913) rpt (2007) *Gardens of the Great Mughals*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services
- 11 Latif, SM (1892) rpt (2005) *Lahore-Its History, Architectural remains and Antiquities*. p 50. Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications.
- 12 Latif, SM (1892) rpt (2005) *Lahore-Its History, Architectural remains and Antiquities*. p. 50. Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications.
- 13 Aijazuddin, FS (2004) *Lahore Recollected-An Album*. Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications
- Aijazuddin, FS (1991) rpt (2004) *Lahore Illustrated Views of the 19th Century*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd
- 14 Courtesy PEPAC, *ibid*
- 15 Courtesy – Google Earth Corporation Ltd
- 16 Nadiem, IH (2005) *Gardens of Mughal Lahore*. Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications
- 17 Smithsonian Institute (2000) *The Moonlight Garden-New discoveries at the Taj Mahal*. Washington DC: University of Washington Press
- 18 National Geographic documentary on Mughal India – National Geographic Secrets of the Taj Mahal HDTV-part 1 to 5