

THE MAJESTIC MONUMENTS OF LAHORE*Anjum Rehmani*

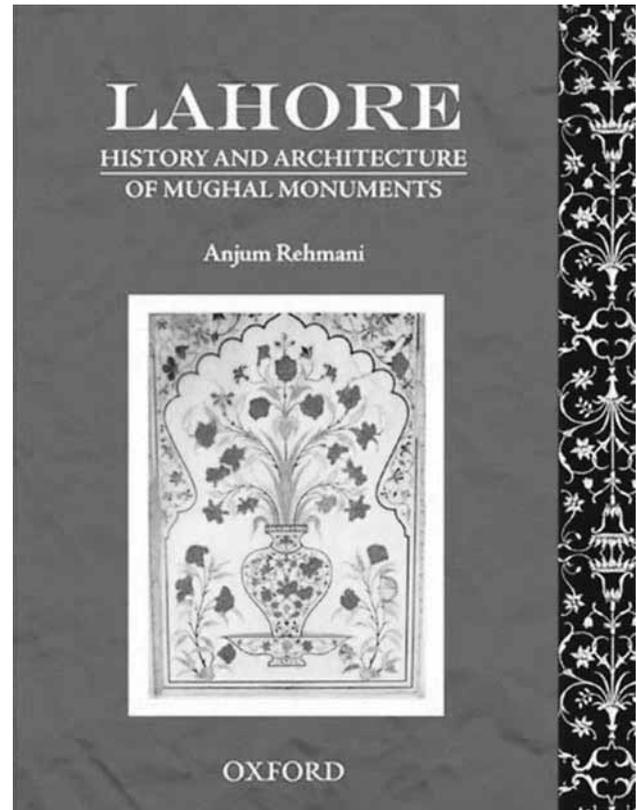
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A Review by Rabela Junejo*

The Mughal-era architecture of the city is studied as a manifestation of its culture through the centuries. Anjum Rehmani's book is a befitting eulogy to Lahore, the quintessential Mughal city, and its architecture. *Lahore: History and Architecture of Mughal Monuments*, however, is neither lyrical nor poetic. On the contrary, it is a very well-researched volume referenced with supporting photographs. Structured chronologically, the book traces the origins of Lahore as far back as is possible based on available literary and material sources. Chapters are arranged in sequential order from early, classical and late Mughal times, with a brief look into pre-Islamic and pre-Mughal episodes. Architecture is examined through a spectrum of building types erected under the patronage of various sovereigns and their appointed governors.

The title here becomes slightly misleading as the book sheds light on people, culture, society, religion and historiography, laying a firm ground for a context where architecture breathes and blossoms. Architecture being a "valuable historic document" through agency of which the past is recreated, takes centre stage in the writing. Written like a monograph, the book does justice to the prolific builders that were the Mughals, and the brick, stone and marble aesthetics they brought to the region.

As copious as the number of monuments is the length of the book — spread over more than 400 pages, one ends up browsing page after page consuming information about gates, forts, tombs, mosques, gardens, hammams and *havelis*. This volume certainly adds to the scholarship that exists in Pakistan on the subject of heritage and history. The academic and service background of the author as director of the Lahore Museum serves the book well, as many non-generic resources are brought to light. Hence, it becomes an important resource in itself for young academics and researchers, and a history lover like myself cannot help but pause and look at the notes in the end for answers.



"One who visits Lahore always yearns to return to Lahore", "*Lahore Lahore ae!*" Sayings like these start the narrative in the first chapter where the author makes use of popular slogans and anecdotes to set a rather light tone for the book. From here, though, delves into the realm of literary evidence. As one progresses, the author's strong grasp of the subject matter becomes evident. In the very first chapter Rehmani writes, "Since Sultan Mahmud had come to Lahore to rule permanently, not to quit it after conquest; he formulated a policy of reconciliation to win the hearts of his Hindu subjects. Furthermore, he wanted to ensure simultaneously that these Hindu subjects should feel that his government was their own", rejecting the popular notion of Sultan Mahmud as an anti-Hindu destroyer of temples.

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For a scholarly work like this it is important that sources speak for themselves and popular propaganda is questioned and challenged in the light of material evidences. It becomes clear that policy matters adopted by the rulers were sensitive to the populace and Akbar was not the first one to reconcile the differences between Hindus and Muslims, provided there were any. As early as Mahmud's time, Lahore fostered tolerance where "Persian and Arabic were current alongside Hindi and Sanskrit ... *devanagari* script alongside that of *naskh* and occasionally *kufic*".

The focus, however, is on the Mughal period and corresponding monuments. Lahore became a flourishing city during the Mughal time and remained the seat of the empire for many years, a city at par with Delhi and Agra at the time. Mughals brought with them a taste for gardens designed in the *chahar bagh* manner, bringing a Persian sensibility to the region. "Jahangir and his empress Nur Jahan both fell in love with Lahore ... Nur Jahan's stay in Lahore, in particular, caused a revolution in the city's social and cultural life, transforming it into almost a blueprint of her native Iranian society and civilisation. She devoted much attention to the development of landscape architecture in Lahore; laying out in Shahdara her garden, the Bagh-i-Dilkusha, where Jahangir was later buried, and *chahar chaman* where she herself was laid to rest". Such was their love for the city they built and nurtured, that they chose it as their final abode.

The most growth took place during the times of Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan. Babur, Humayun and Aurangzeb also contributed to the city, but not on the same scale. "Lahore began to flourish under Ghaznavid rule (1021-1186). It declined in the era of the Sultans of Delhi. The city rejuvenated when the Mughal prince Mirza Kamran was the governor of Lahore (1530-1540), and continued to progress physically and culturally in the times of emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan. During the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir, however, it began to deteriorate." The length of chapters narrating contributions during different periods reflects the same; the description of work done by Akbar and Jahangir is spread over two chapters each, while Shahjahan takes the lion's share of six chapters.

Although during Shahjahan's time Lahore was no longer the imperial seat, being his birth place it held a special place in his heart and these six chapters are proof of the interest he took in building and developing Lahore. "His fondness for the city found expression in the various visits he paid it after becoming emperor. During each visit, his devotion and generosity found ways to bestow on the city magnificent

buildings, palaces, hammams, serai, etc. Amidst this overall development of the town, official emphasis was on the expansion of the Lahore Fort."

Like Shahjahan, for building activity the Lahore Fort is the focal point and gets a separate chapter and sub-chapter in each period presented with the minutest details; it makes up almost one fourth of the volume. This progress during the golden period of the Mughals attracted migrants from all around the empire, increasing the diverse cultural milieu of the city. These migrants and settlers added to the city's already flourishing architectural repository.

The linear chronological narrative of the book assists in conjuring up step-by-step images of the progress and decline of the city. The information provided facilitates an understanding of Lahore and its architecture for all and sundry. The details of the historic background of people and places, city layouts, materials of construction, structural techniques, etc., all are recounted with extensive excerpts added to the text.

At this point one is left with a longing for analytical depth and synthesis, for although much breadth of information is presented, analysis falls short. There are comparisons between Mughal buildings and their predecessors, but these are rare. The conclusion, too, basically summarises the preceding chapters, with analysis as though an afterthought. This volume, therefore, is more information-centred, but what has been collected is immense. It can be a point of departure from a diachronic study into a more analytical synchronic effort for future academics and scholars. Given the state of archives in our country, and how difficult it is accessing any resources, this undertaking by Rehmani conserves effort by pointing scholars in the right direction.

The graphics are slightly disappointing for this time and age of high resolution cameras and easy availability of digital tools. The drawings could have easily been digitised for a finer, crisper outcome. Whatever constraints the author may have had, the lopsided and distorted images and scattered composition are not easy to overlook. The contemporary photographs defy the grand descriptions of the structures, but the state of conservation of the monuments is also given. This contrast between text and photographs leaves great room for mentally filling the gaps; converting words into images.

This piece of scholarship sheds light on Babur's nostalgia for the terraced landscape of Central Asia, Humayun's political struggles, Akbar's strategic tolerance for all religions,

and Shahjahan's love for his birth place, evident in the architecture and city planning of their reigns. Architecture is presented as an outcome of all that happened around and within Lahore socially, politically, culturally and otherwise. In writing about history, roles are often reversed and architecture acts as the marker for the very social, cultural, political and religious milieu that produced it. The longevity

of architecture is exploited well in the book; it is celebrated as the very agency and aid through which the context and culture of the past are recreated. This volume is as much about the architecture still standing, as it is about the people who made it a reality, and left imprints for the likes of Rehmani to structure the sum of parts into a seamless narrative.