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Gates of Lahore as the Major Subject for Prominent Visual Artists of Pakistan

Abstract

Walled-city of Lahore has been famous for its twelve Gates along with an opening, making a total of thirteen. Akbar built the wall and Gates around the city in his regime 1584-1598 CE to make this riverside city safe from the invaders as well as from the local criminals. The Mughal miniatures present few patterns of these Gates as the backdrops however, the British period artists of the 19th century carried out many outstanding watercolours and lithographs displaying the architectural details of these Gates. Later, these Gates of Lahore became a major subject matter for many prominent visual artists of Pakistan. This research paper aims at the Lahore Gates in reference with the visual arts, significantly being rendered by the prominent Pakistani artists. The study also explores the social and cultural patterns of everyday life within and around these Gates in a descriptive and analytical manner. Seven prominent visual artists have been selected for this research and their diversified mediums of visual arts. These mediums are Watercolour, Oil-colour, Printmaking, and Ceramics which represent an assortment of style and technique but aims at the common subject matter; the Lahore Gates. The research paper has been written following the MLA Writing Style.

Keywords: Twelve Gates, Lahore, Visual Artists, Pictures, Mediums.

3.1.Introduction

The historically famous old city of Lahore is marked with remarkably constructed wall around the abode with twelve Gates and one small opening or way out, making the count as thirteen Gates. All these gates have specifically unique and monumental architecture. Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar, the great Mughal Emperor, built the wall and Gates encompassing the city in the 16th century when he also constructed Lahore Fort during his regime 1584-1598.

These Gates have been known with their specific names throughout the history afterwards. Few of them survived the test of time, and many were endeavored by the cruelty of passing eras. These Gates in an alphabetical order are:

Akbari Gate, Bhaati Gate, Delhi Gate, Kashmiri Gate, Khizri or Sheranwala Gate, Lohari Gate, Masti Gate, Mochi(Moti) Gate, Mori Gate, Raushnai Gate, Shah'Alami Gate, Taxali Gate, Yakki Gate.

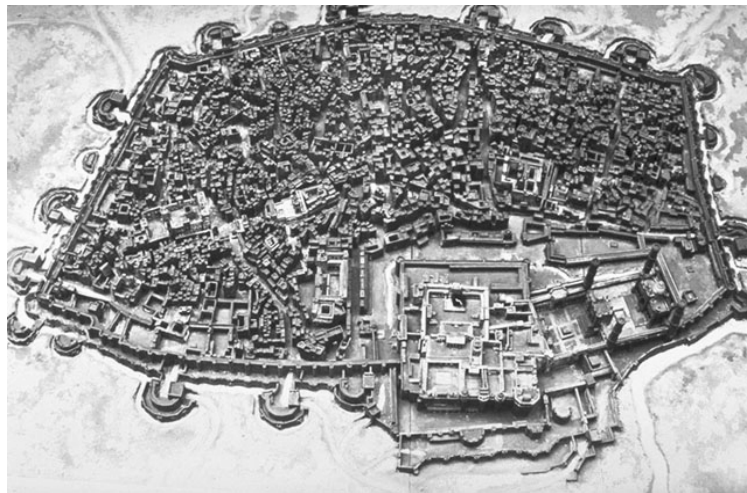


Figure.3 “A model of the walled city” (c. 1925)

Wooden model. Built to scale

Remained in the Victoria and Albert Museum for many years

After the British government took over the charge of Punjab in 1848, from the Sikhs, these Gates were neglected. Earlier, the Anglo-Sikh wars of the 19th century also cause a great deal of damage to these Gates.

During the British Colonial period, these Gates either lost the existence completely or partially; leaving the great heritage of Lahore unattended. Today, the surviving Gates are; *Bhati Gate*, *Delhi Gate*, *Kashmiri Gate*, *Lohari Gate*, *Roshnai Gate*, and *Sheranwala Gate*. Whereas, the *Akbari Gate*, *Masti Gate*, *Mochi Gate*, *Mori Gate*, *Shah Alami Gate*, *Taxali Gate* and *Yakki Gate* have become history.

However, the importance of these Gates, along with the fortified Wall around the city, never diminished, even after many centuries.

Like other walled cities of the world, Lahore also reflects the rich anthropological patterns that shape up the social, cultural and economic lifestyle within and around the alleys of these Gates. Earlier, these Gates were used as the entrance and exit points of the city which were closed at nights and during the turmoil times for the defence and security reasons. Today, these Gates, not only serve the city as the historical and architectural landmarks but, also as the crowded centers of business, trade and culinary to attract the foreign tourists and local visitors. Studded with the traditional and Colonial-style imperial architecture, the surrounding of these Gates presents the story of royal grandeur and the fall of the great empires at the same time.

3.2. Gates of Lahore and the Visual Culture

Landscape and cityscape painting has a significant value, generally in the art of Pakistan and specifically of Punjab. The lush green fertile plains of Punjab, enriched with saturated vegetation, are a treat for a landscape painter. At the same time, the historic cities, like Lahore, present the equally involving panorama in the form of traditional and historical architecture to the brush and canvas of the cityscape painters.

On the other hand, the city of Lahore has always been a center for literary and artistic activities. The visual documentation of the architecture of Lahore can be dated back to the Mughal period, where the miniature artists of the Mughal atelier used to document everyday activities of the royal life and lifestyle. Later under the British rule, the Lahore architecture, for diverse reasons ranging from defense to aesthetics, emerged as the main subject matter for the British watercolourists and printmakers of the 19th century.

This era marked the visual rendering of the Gates of Lahore in various genres of the visual arts. William Simpson, William Carpenter, Henry Ambrose Oldfield, Lady Charlotte Canning, Emily Eden and Edwin Lord Weeks are few prominent artists, from British and American origins, who concentrated on the Lahore scenery.

3.3.Prominent Pakistani Visual Artists and the Gates of Lahore

This tradition of capturing and documenting the architectural assets of Lahore as the practice of visual culture and history was passed on to the Pakistani artists after 1947, when a new sovereign state emerged on the world map. The early patterns of art in Pakistan could be related with the cityscape paintings of Lahore where these Gates have been given a significant value. The later generation of Pakistani artists emphasized on the charm and beauty of the Gates of Lahore, and focused on the life around and within. Interestingly, many of them were born inside the old city Lahore.

Mahmood Hasan Rumi, Ajaz Anwar, Ghulam Mustafa and Mahboob Ali are the renowned artists who, for almost the whole of their lives, have been capturing every inch of the Walled-city Lahore. In accomplishing this task, these artists actually rendered all the Gates of Lahore on their canvas or paper.

These artists inspired the next generation of Pakistani landscape and cityscape artists who carried on this tradition of exploring the architectural and aesthetic balance of Lahore Gates; on the spot as well as by triggering their imagination for the lost or completely destroyed Gates.

Among the contemporary generation of these painters, Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi and Munawar Mohiuddin are the two artists who discovered more shades and shadows in these fortified structures of all the Gates. Apart from these painters, many photographers have also been falling in love with these Gates, along with few ceramic artists. Jamil Hussain is one such ceramic artist who tries to reproduce the patterns of these Gates in his ceramic sculptures with an intentional quest of defining the lost or to be lost, heritage of Lahore.

3.4. Mahmood Hasan Rumi (b. 1930)

Mahmood Hasan Rumi is among the very first cityscape painters who took the Gates of Lahore as his main subject matter. He did his diploma from the Mayo School of Arts⁸ Lahore, and then he studied Fine Arts at the Sir John Cass College London. Later, he joined the Department of Fine Arts for further enhancement of the subject. Rumi has been an illustrator of the architecture, street life and culture of the Old-city Lahore, through many of his solo and group exhibitions. He used both the Watercolour and Oil-colour mediums for his detailed and descriptive painting style.

Rumi captured all the Gates of Lahore in a work that seems more illustrative rather than artistic. However, the documentary value of these frames is iconic as they represent the Colonial period Lahore. The Lahore Gates series by Rumi is based on the visual and verbal descriptions of the British Colonial era with a flat and demonstrative approach.

“Although, the painter has intentionally created the British time period by painting the cultural diversity through various dresses but, the total environment of the painting is very static and dull.” Alam (181)

However, at the same time, Rumi produced a large volume of work on Lahore and its architectural patterns which, is a remarkable achievement. This is one core reason that he has always been placed among the pioneer painters of Lahore with a significant reputation and dignity.

Intentionally or unintentionally, Rumi has presented social patterns of the 19th century Walled-city Lahore as an observer of the location. His paintings of Lahore Gates showcase the native and British people busy in everyday life according to their social status. In his canvases, he paints a British woman with a parasol, a local woman in *ShalwarKameez*⁹ or a wheatish complexion woman in *Sari*¹⁰; to juxtapose

⁸ The Mayo School of Arts became the National College of Arts (NCA) in 1958

⁹ A local everyday dress often worn by the Muslim women

¹⁰ A local long dress of India worn in everyday life with a blouse by the Hindu women

the opposing cultures of the west and the east, that was prevalent in the 19th century Lahore. This approach makes him a Social Realist artist.



Figure 2. “Akbari Gate” (1994)

By Mahmood Hasan Rumi

Watercolour on paper. 11.5x15 inches

Artist's collection

3.5. Ajaz Anwar

Ajaz Anwar is a prolific watercolour artist of Pakistan, who has a special ambition for Lahore and its architecture. Through his matchless watercolours, Anwar has literally documented all the sights of the Walled-city Lahore. His paintings are like a visual commentary on the street life, culture and architecture of the Old-city Lahore.

Ajaz Anwar has been painting the socio-anthropological as well as socio-architectural patterns of Lahore for the last fifty years. He is one of those unique artists who captured all the Gates of Lahore, for more than one time, and from more than one angle. By studying his series of paintings on Lahore, one could find the changing patterns, evolution and expansion of the city over a span of a half century. Everyday life, festivities, street culture and moving or stationary vehicles, has remained his favourite subject, within or around the Lahore Gates.

“He does not paint the old monuments or the famous people but brings the everyday street scenes to his canvas [paper]. Passing-by common people, tongas, rickshaws,

street hawkers, the festival of Basant filling the sky with colorful kites, balconies and jharokas of old buildings are the main subjects of his paintings. These are the elements that make the city of Lahore, and Ajaz Anwar captures the very essence of it by highlighting its nuances.”
(Ayub 52)

The core reason for Ajaz Anwar’s love for the Gates, and the Walled-city Lahore could be traced back to his childhood. Anwar was brought up in these localities and this maze of narrow alleys of the Old city remained as a cradle to him. Whereas, his father was an artist as well who used to do caricatures; a good enough reason to train Ajaz Anwar in drawing.

When Ajaz Anwar sought admission at the Fine Arts Department of the Government College, he already had developed a taste for cityscape painting. Later in 1967, at the Fine Arts Department of the Punjab University, he took admission in MA Fine Arts. After being adept in drawing and painting, Anwar went on to earn his PhD degree in Islamic Architecture from Turkey. This combination of training and interest, in painting and architecture, pushed him to explore his birth city Lahore, throughout his life.

Ajaz Anwar inspired many of his young students when he was teaching Islamic Architecture at the National College of Arts but more with his high-volume of watercolours studded with every piece of Lahore architecture.



Figure 3. “Lohari Gate” (1988)

By Ajaz Anwar

Watercolour on Paper. 24x36

Private collection

3.6.Mehboob Ali (b. 1952)

Mehboob Ali, during his student years at the National College of Arts, took the challenge of creating a large-scale woodcut panel; that was the beginning of his everlasting love for this genre. On the other side, Mehboob Ali was born and brought up inside the famous *Bhati* Gate; playing in, and running through, the tangling streets.

Since his graduation, Ali has been working as a woodcut artist with special interest in the life and sights of the Walled-city Lahore. In this particular genre, Mehboob Ali is the only artist to have rendered all the Gates of the Old-city Lahore. Mehboob Ali has seen the old Ravi river dying outside the *Sheranwala* or *Khizri* Gate in his childhood, and many of his woodcut prints have been etched with his perpetual memories.

“In his pursuit of giving tangible shape to his non tangible observations, Mehboob Ali captured the matchless beauty of narrow streets of the Walled City. He imprinted the traditional, historical and colonial architectural patterns as well as the gates of Lahore, with unusual shades of printing inks.” (Alam 77)

If Pakistan lacks in any genre of visual arts, there are two major disciplines; sculpture and printmaking. Both these genres require skill, perseverance and commitment. There are few names like ShahidSajjad, Jamil Baloch and JabbarGul in sculpture but there is a lone warrior in the field of woodcut, and he is Mehboob Ali.

Mehboob Ali was born in the Walled-city Lahore, inside *Bhati* Gate and spent his childhood wandering through the maze of narrow streets. He along with his friends, used to run through these streets and cross the Gates, including those which were facing the old Ravi River.

Nostalgia plays a pivotal role in Mehboob Ali’s woodcut frames where he renders all the places, which are related to his life. Mehboob Ali experimented with the difficult technique of woodcut where; for each colour, the woodcut sheet has to be imposed on paper with precision in registration. If the print is in four colours, the imposition should also four times.

As compared to other printmakers, Mehboob Ali’s woodcuts carry the quality of a landscape and cityscape painter. His rendering of details of the architecture of the Lahore Gates, as well as the life around, seems vibrant and alive.

In a way, as a printmaker, Mehboob Ali is a continuation of the Colonial period printmakers of the 19th century; most of them preferably were lithographers.



Figure 4. “Sheranwala Gate” (1996)

By Mehboob Ali

Woodcut. 20x15 inches

Artist’s collection

For the last forty years, Mehboob Ali has come up with uncountable frames of woodcuts rejuvenating the Old-city Lahore and its street culture. However, at the same time, the Gates of the Walled-city emerged in his frames, either as the main subject or as the backdrop for a street scene. No matter, how does he render these Gates, but in every sense of the word, he has visually narrated the story of time passing through these openings.

This combination of imagery, of the surviving Gates and the imagination of the vanished ones, has been put on display in a variety of colour schemes, which is a difficult task in printmaking as compared to painting.

3.7. Ghulam Mustafa (b. 1952)

Ghulam Mustafa graduated in painting from the National College of Arts in 1972. During his student days, he started accompanying Anna Molka Ahmed at various spots of Lahore and specifically the Walled-city. This activity inclined young Mustafa towards the genre of landscape and cityscape painting which he adopted for his lifelong passion and profession. Under the scholarship of the legendary Khalid Iqbal, he learnt the techniques of Modern Realism in Landscape while Mrs. Ahmed's company caused him a great infatuation towards cityscape painting.

Ghulam Mustafa was also born inside the locality of *Bhati* Gate and spent his early life until adolescence wandering around the Walled-city and its thirteen Gates.

“Mustafa's first cityscape was made while he was a student at NCA in 1972, and shows the covered bazaar around Wazir Khan Mosque from the roof of a high building... The palette is very subdued, soft browns and greys predominate, and the tangled rooflines recede convincingly into the distance. His grandfather lived in the Walled City and so his passion to paint its building and streets developed naturally, he says.” (Schmitz 45)

Ghulam Mustafa earned fame in Oil-painting technique and started capturing the traditional and historical architecture of the Old-city Lahore on large-scale canvases. The detailed rendering and naturalistic colour palette are the significant features of his painting style.

Among Oil-colour painters, Mustafa could be named as the first painter to cover almost the whole Walled-city Lahore through his brush and canvas. He captured all the twelve Gates along with one opening *Mori* Gate, from diverse angles on a frequent basis.

In many of his frames, the Gates of Lahore are the main subject matter while in numerous others; these Gates appear as the background feature. His identity as a Painter of Lahore earned him a matchless name in the arts of Pakistan. He is best known as the painter who skillfully renders the lights and shades of the narrow streets of the Old-city.

Along with the Oil-colour technique, Mustafa also developed superlative mastery in the dry pastels. Many of his masterpieces, with the Gates of Lahore as the main subjects, are rendered in Pastels as well.



Figure 5. “Lohari Gate” (2011)

By Ghulam Mustafa

Oil on canvas. 30x48 inches

Private collection

Ghulam Mustafa has not only explored the architectural beauty of the Walled-city, or the Gates of Lahore, but also emphasized on the lifestyle and street culture of the locale. *Tongas*, hawkers, food points, rickshaws and other elements representing the social and anthropological patterns of the Walled-city, are his main rudiments that he uses as symbols of a centuries old culture.

3.8.Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi (b. 1963)

Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi represents the younger generation of Pakistani artists who fell in love with Lahore. He graduated from the National College of Arts in Communication Design, but his natural inclination was towards painting. Before joining NCA, he was a student of Ghulam Mustafa at the Alhamra Arts Council where he started following his mentor passionately.

At NCA, he was greatly inspired by the legendary landscape painter Khalid Iqbal, who strengthened Zulfi’s longing for landscapes.

Later AbassiAbidi, the principal of NCA advised Zulfi to seek career in painting rather than in design which he followed religiously and became a leading landscape and cityscape painter of Pakistan.

The cityscape painting of Lahore has now become a mark of identity for Zulfi, and he reproduced many of the subjects which his teacher Ghulam Mustafa had already covered; however, in his own distinct style and technique. In this pursuit, Zulfi went on to render all the Gates of the Walled-city Lahore.

A distinguishing feature of Zulfi, is his command over rendering the atmosphere and weather as the main element of his paintings. His frames with meticulously painted sunshine, fog, mist, and dust in the atmosphere, add a new dimension for the viewer where the onlooker feels a fresh sight for the old buildings or streets. Zulfi's cityscape paintings do have western influences and photographic quality as a notable characteristic, Dr. Barbara Schmitz comments on it as:

“His Masjid “Wazir Khan in Winter” [a painting] includes two of the fabled minarets seen from a narrow side street inhabited by a few dark forms of people and vehicles. If the French photographer Henri Cartier-Breson has photographed this street, it would have probably looked much like Zulfi's painting; the mood of a large city coming to life in the early morning has rarely been better portrayed, East or West.”

(Schmitz 49)

Few other painters have also presented the sunlight rays descending on the labyrinths of the narrow streets, sprouting through the Gates of Lahore, but Zulfi has captured the same subject in a different approach where the atmosphere plays a vibrant role in presenting the life and architecture of the Old-city Lahore.



Figure 6. “Inside *Lohari Gate*” (2011)

By Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi

Oil on canvas, 24x36 inches

Private collection

Zulfiqar Ali Zulfi also experimented with other mediums like Watercolours and Pastels. However, the Oil-colours on canvas has always been his forte where he is seen comfortably rendering the difficulties of perspective and colour tonalities.

3.9.MunawarMohiuddin (b. 1965)

After earning an MFA in Graphic Design from the Fine Arts Department of the University of the Punjab, Lahore, MunawarMohiuddin explored that he is better a painter than a designer. His early career is marked as a colourist landscape painter inspired by the painting techniques of Impressionism¹¹. However, over the years, he developed a unique taste for the Walled-city Lahore, and he carried on numerous cityscape frames with the exclusive architectural patterns.

In this quest, Mohiuddin explored the aesthetic value and beauty of the Gates of Lahore, and gradually it became his favourite subject

¹¹ An art and literary movement of the West in later part of the 19th century.

matter. In 2017, Mohiuddin has had his solo exhibition at the Minhas Art Gallery Lahore, displaying only the Gates of Lahore. So, he enrolled himself among the painters of Lahore, along with big names like Rumi, Anwar, Mustafa and Zulfi, who have covered all the Lahore Gates.

Munawar has painted all the Gates of Lahore individually and together with markets, abodes and mosques in a significantly flamboyant colour palette. For the existing Gates, he worked on the spot whereas, for capturing the lost or completely demolished gateways; he relied on the images produced by his predecessors. However, in both ways, he justified his obsession and standardized all the images under his signature technique of a colourist.

Renowned artist and art academician MianIjazulHasan commented on Mohiuddin’s work regarding Gates of Lahore in these words,

“...most of the 13 gates didn’t exist anymore and Mohiuddin had recreated them on the basis of their description in the historical books and documents. MunawarMohiuddin has made these 13 gates eternal through his work.”(Hasan 05)



Figure 7. “Lohari Gate; overview” (2015)

By MunawarMohiuddin

Oil on canvas, 72x24 inches

Private collection

Mohiuddin's interest in the heritage conservation has led him to capture many important buildings of Lahore before they were lost completely. He ran through the Laxami Chowk, Jain Mandir and Chauburji in the times when Orange Train track was being laid down, and these sites were in dire straits of being lost entirely or partially.

Mohiuddin stood at these places one by one and saved the impressions of these sights on his canvas, creating a visual history of Lahore for generations to come. The colourist technique and strong imagination of the painter, add some extra aesthetic value to his paintings of Lahore architecture.

“In an Impressionistic style, with strokes applied in uninhabited energy and vigour, he creates a colourful pattern of complimentary hues.” (Masud 91)

The Gates of Lahore, within the frames of Mohiuddin, present a vibrant look rather than scenery of the lost glory. His style of painting is just like of a storyteller, and not of a historian where, he adds some romance, colour, sensation and personal feelings.

3.10 Jamil Hussain (b. 1965)

Jamil Hussain is another MFA Graphic Design graduate of the Department of Fine Arts, University of the Punjab, Lahore who, opted the Ceramic Sculpture; a difficult genre of visual arts. He started his career as a Ceramic artist with an urge to replicate the clay models of the famous architecture of Lahore and exhibited them in his first solo exhibition under the title of “*Mit Na Jayein Kahin*” (Lest, they perish). He had a series of solo shows namely “Silent Whispers-I”, “Silent Whispers-II”, “The Living Legends”, “The Past Lives On”, and “Forgotten Relics”; all these exhibitions pointed out the need for conserving and restoring our national heritage.

Jamil Hussain has exhibited his work, mainly in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, but his focus has remained on the traditional, historical and Colonial architecture of Lahore city. A substantial part of his work is comprised of the architectural splendour of the Walled-city Lahore. He has implied many complete and partial patterns of the Gates of Lahore in

his ceramic sculptures and at times; he has molded the ceramic models of Lahore Gates but, with artistic inspirations and modification. One such work is the ‘*Sheranwala Gate*’ which, bears main iconic features and architectural patterns of the original *Sheranwala Gate*. Fig. 7



Figure 8. “In inspiration of *Sheranwala Gate*” (2013)

Ceramic Model. H. 18 inches

Private collection

“...the artist seems to be obsessed with the traditional architecture of the Walled City, studded with the enchanting jharokas and balconies. Apart from the nostalgic value, the artist again focuses on the rapidly vanishing architectural heritage of Lahore and other cities. Many of his pieces present a half-broken or deteriorating state of this glorious heritage, which needs attention.” (Alam 10)

The work of Jamil Hussain is a combination of aesthetic and social responsibility. When Hussain presents a Gate of Lahore in his ceramic work, he not only admires the beauty and poise of the architectural exquisiteness but, also try to evoke the national responsibility of cherishing the irreplaceable past of the bygone days.

3.11 Conclusion

The thirteen Gates of Lahore, 12 Gates and 1 opening, are a landmark in the architectural history of the city. These Gates have seen the invaders crushing to annihilate the city as well as the conquered being expelled or executed. These Gates are the narrators of the unwritten story of the rise and falls of the empires and the fables of a common man.

Since the times of the Mughals, these Gates have been depicted in the miniature paintings, mainly as the backdrop of the recorded or documented scene. During the 19th century, the British Colonial artists, concentrated on the realistic details of these Gates through their watercolours and lithographs.

The tradition of rendering the Lahore Gates through various mediums of visual arts continued in Pakistan after 1947, and received more attention from the landscape and cityscape painters. Once the visual arts tradition became strong and expressive along with international taste and standards, the later generations of Pakistani artists took a keen interest in exploring the architectural and aesthetic beauty of these Gates along with their pivotal significance in shaping the social and cultural patterns of the surroundings.

Mahmood Hasan Rumi, Ajaz Anwar, Ghulam Mustafa, Zulfiqar Ali Zulf, Munawar Mohiuddin and Jamil Hussain are the prominent visual artists who have rendered these Gates in their work with diversified techniques. However, the common feature in all these artists is, the urge to document the vanishing heritage and to evoke the compulsion for restoring and conserving these emblems of the glory and grandeur that the Walled-city of Lahore once possessed.

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