

'Umrao Jaan' gets flak in Lucknow

Bollywood filmmaker J.P. Dutta's 'Umrao Jaan', which released Friday, has been criticised by a certain section of the Muslim community in Lucknow as they feel the film does injustice to their city and its prized courtesan.

According to a report in a [Mumbai](#) paper, Maulana Yattoo Babbar and Nawab Mir Jaffar Abdullah - both descendents of a royal family - have alleged that the film hasn't been shot in Lucknow and that not enough attention has been paid to period details and other research.

Incidentally, Abdullah was not only part of Muzaffar Ali's 'Umrao Jaan', he also desired to be cast in Dutta's version, which has Aishwarya Rai in the title role.

Making a new film on the life and times of the legendary Lucknow courtesan Umrao Jaan Adaa hasn't been an easy task for the film maker.

Dutta, neck-deep in release hassles, took time off to laugh at the allegation.

'It just goes to show how much research these guys have done before making such accusations against my film. I shot two long schedules in Lucknow stretching for nearly 60 days. In fact, 'Umrao Jaan' is dedicated to the city of Lucknow and its people. They co-operated so much. I had heard about the unruly crowds of Lucknow. On the contrary, I faced no trouble from them,' Dutta told IANS.

As for the research, Dutta explained: 'We had a gentleman and scholar named Yasa Rizvi with us from the start. He is an authority on that period. What's more, I had a 70-year-old lady named Zarina Parveen, who's the last of the tawaifs (courtesans), constantly on the sets. She was there to instruct Aishwarya on the adaas (mannerisms).'

Dutta not just contributed considerably to the choreography of the mujras (dances), he shot Aishwarya's dances with three cameras.

'That's a scaling-down. We had nine cameras for 'LOC',' quipped Dutta.

Dutta also said that 'Umrao Jaan' was the first big-budget mainstream Hindi film to be shot voluntarily in Lucknow.

'Other films like Satyajit Ray's 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi', Shyam Benegal's 'Junoon' and Muzzafar Ali's 'Umrao Jaan' were shot in the city because they couldn't afford to shoot on elaborate ostentatious sets. I chose to shoot in Lucknow because I owed it to the city, and Umrao's memory.

'I chose Lucknow not because of lack of choices, but because it was my only choice. No one demanded any money from me for shooting in Lucknow. When I first landed in the city to meet the parents of a dead soldier for 'LOC', I had decided that I had to make a film in Lucknow. I shot almost 60 days in Lucknow for 'Umrao Jaan'.'

He paused for breath. 'This isn't a small manageable art house film. It's a big film on a legendary poetess and courtesan. So far, such films were seen to be the creative property of avant-garde filmmakers. The myth might be broken now.

'As for the questions about Aishwarya's ability to portray Umrao, they'll be answered in ample measures when the film releases.'

Subhash K. Jha (© IANS / India eNews)