The Taj, Punjab and beyond (1920s)

The Taj Mahal and shots of Jalandhar nestle between footage from Canada and Africa in this intriguing film compilation.

Received from an anonymous donor, this somewhat mysterious collection of film sections features scenic views of the Taj Mahal and footage of a bullock shoeing in Jalandhar, Punjab. The similar intertitle pages for these films suggest they may have been from the same series, perhaps intended to teach British audiences about history and daily life in India, or even the empire in general.

The ‘Indian bazaar’ seen towards the end of the film seems to show an Indian merchant trading somewhere in eastern Africa, which was home to a large Indian, predominantly Gujarati, diaspora and mercantile community. The opening sections of the film shows Toronto and perhaps part of Montreal while the footage of logging workers was probably taken further up the St Lawrence river in Ontario or Quebec. Together these films remind us of the enormous global reach of imperial power after the World War One, and of the centrality of India to the British imperial imagination.

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