

By Rabia Ezdi

The Sikh period

By the mid-18th century the Sikhs became the new rulers of the Punjab. During the early Sikh rule, the city of Lahore was divided into three parts; Gujjar Singh owned the area between Shalamar and Lahore.

According to historian Mohammad Latif, at the commencement of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh's reign in the early 1800s, Shalamar was in such a

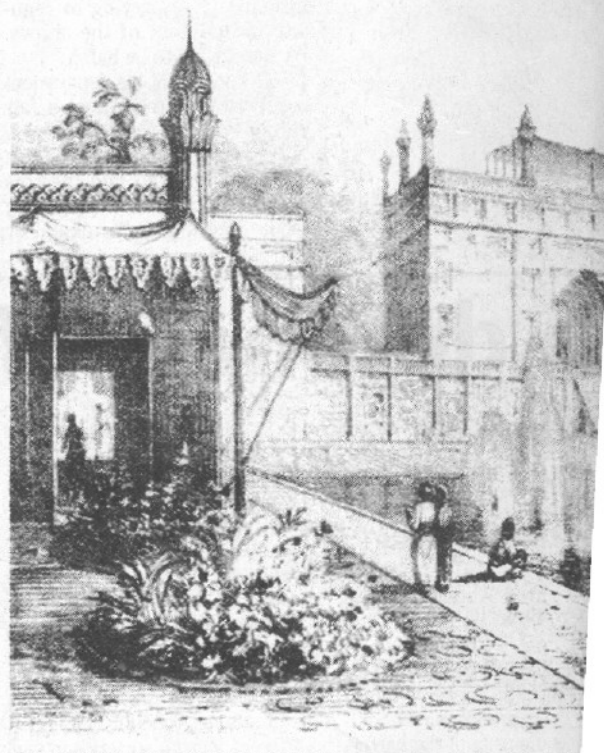
ruinous condition that its reservoirs were filled up with earth and its land was ploughed up and being used for cultivation.

Some of Lahore's powerful landlords had occupied Baghbanpura and Inayat Bagh surrounding the Shalamar but the monument itself remained the property of the government of Maharajah Ranjit

Singh.

In 1806 Ranjit Singh ordered the restoration of Shahjahan's canal which had failed before he had come to power, however the Gardens continued to be vandalised by invaders and Sikh freebooters.

A valuable pavilion of agate was removed by Lahna Singh, and sold to stone polishers in the city. Ranjit Singh removed a large portion of the marble embellishments to decorate his new constructions at the Sikh religious capital Amritsar. In an interesting instance historian Kanhaya Lal recounts, "On the Southern side of the central tank near the cascade is placed a white marble seat. Maharaja Ranjit Singh ordered this seat to be removed and to be sent to the Golden Temple, so as to place Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy book) on it. During dismantling it broke...". The marble pavil-



heritage



The next issue of The News on Sunday will cover the history of Shalamar Gardens from 1947 to the present.

Lahore's citizens witnessed total chaos again with the downfall of the Sikh rule as they had in the downfall of the Mughal Empire. In 1849 within ten years of Ranjit Singh's death, Punjab became the domain of the British Empire.

During the early British period, Shahjahan's original canal supplying water to the Gardens was modified and an independent canal known as 'Bari Doab' canal was introduced in 1860 and completed in 1875.

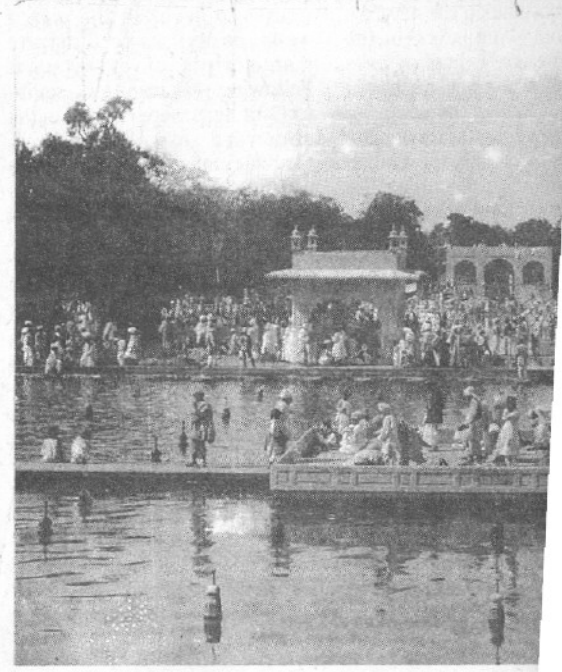
The Shalamar was a popular resort for the Europeans of Lahore, as a traveller in the late-19th century remarked, "Outside all is glare and dust; within all is green foliage, white marble, cool reservoir, and rippling cascade".

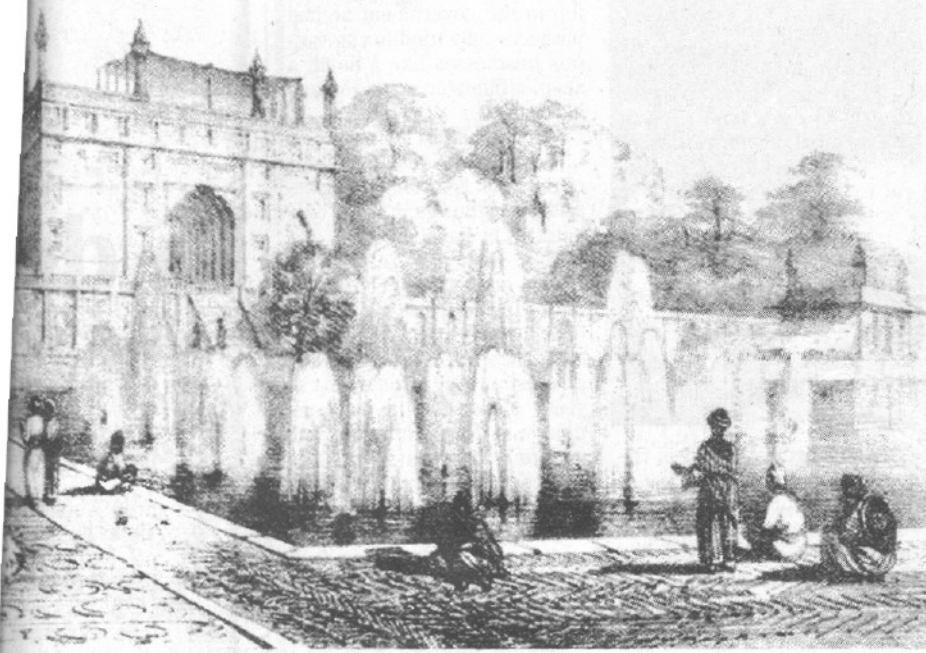
But although the Gardens was well looked after in terms of daily maintenance,

its buildings continued to be vandalised during the British rule. Panels of *kashi* work on both the eastern and western gates were removed. In 1883, although the gardens was government property, parts of it were let out on lease for the cultivation of fruit.

In the early-1800s, a major part of the urs of Shah Hussain, one of Punjab's most cherished Sufi poets, was held at the Shalamar Bagh. This probably marked a breakthrough in the history of the gardens as it now involved the participation of the general public and thus the Shalamar began to hold a more intimate significance for Lahore's citizens. Shah Hussain (1538-1599) commonly known as Madhu Lal Hussain had lived during the reign of Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir, and it is believed that he adopted his Hindu disciple Madhu Lal's

The British times



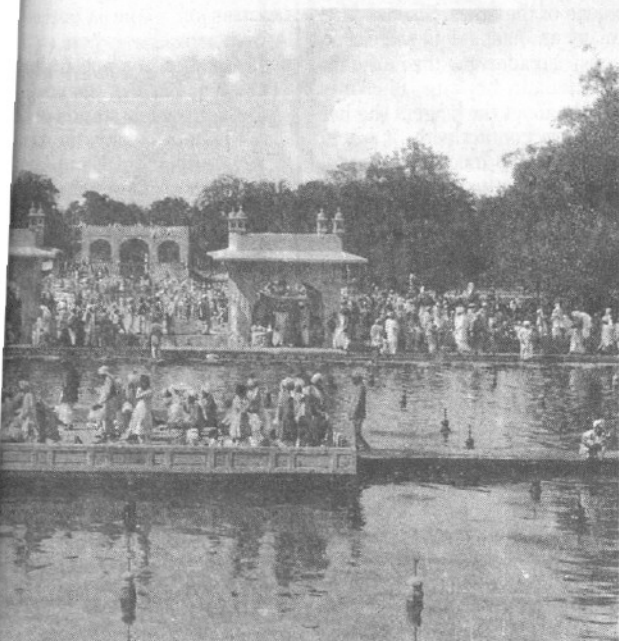


ions by the central reservoir were also used in adorning the Ram Bagh of Amritsar, and in their place structures of brickwork and whitewash were substituted.

Nevertheless, the gardens kept its traditions of kingliness and grandeur afforded by those in power. Important guests of the state continued to visit the Shalimar and functions were held in their honour. In 1842, during the rule of Ranjit Singh's son Sher Singh, Russian Prince A. Solytkoff was invited to attend a function at the Shalimar Bagh. He narrates "the whole garden was illuminated from the edges of the fountains and water channels to the orange trees... add to this... the intoxicating smell of orange blossoms and the even more intoxicating movements of the dancing girls. One felt inclined to say like Poor Tom in King Lear 'God keep us in our five senses'."

— courtesy 'Shalimar Bagh' by Sajjad Kausar.

times



name to immortalise their friendship. Mela Madhu Lal Hussain or Mela Charaghan (Festival of Lights) as the event is also known, was once the biggest festival of Lahore. According to Punjab historian Iqbal Qaiser, the Shalimar served as its venue for almost a century and a half, till 1958 when President Ayub Khan ordered that it would no longer be held here.

In 1913, the Shalimar was placed under the control of the Department of Archaeology. In an effort to anglicise the gardens, in 1922 the British cleared out the middle terrace and planted a typically English rose garden.

During the British rule, an operation that consequently did the greatest damage to the Shalimar was the construction of the new Grand Trunk (G.T.) Road to the

south of the gardens, connecting Lahore to Amritsar. It was hence due to a dramatic rise in traffic immediately outside the Shalimar's periphery walls, a flawed planning of services, and an *ad hoc* rise in road level that later, the gardens' entrance initially at the east and west ends of the lowest terrace, had to be shifted to the highest terrace on the south.

This marked a permanent change in the Shalimar's architecture, as it nullified the fundamental principle of the Mughal Paradise garden — its progression from lowest to highest terrace, symbolic in analogy with heaven. Inappropriate planning and construction of roads around the Shalimar vis-a-vis its fragile condition continue to contribute to the monument's deterioration today. — courtesy Department of Archaeology and Museums