

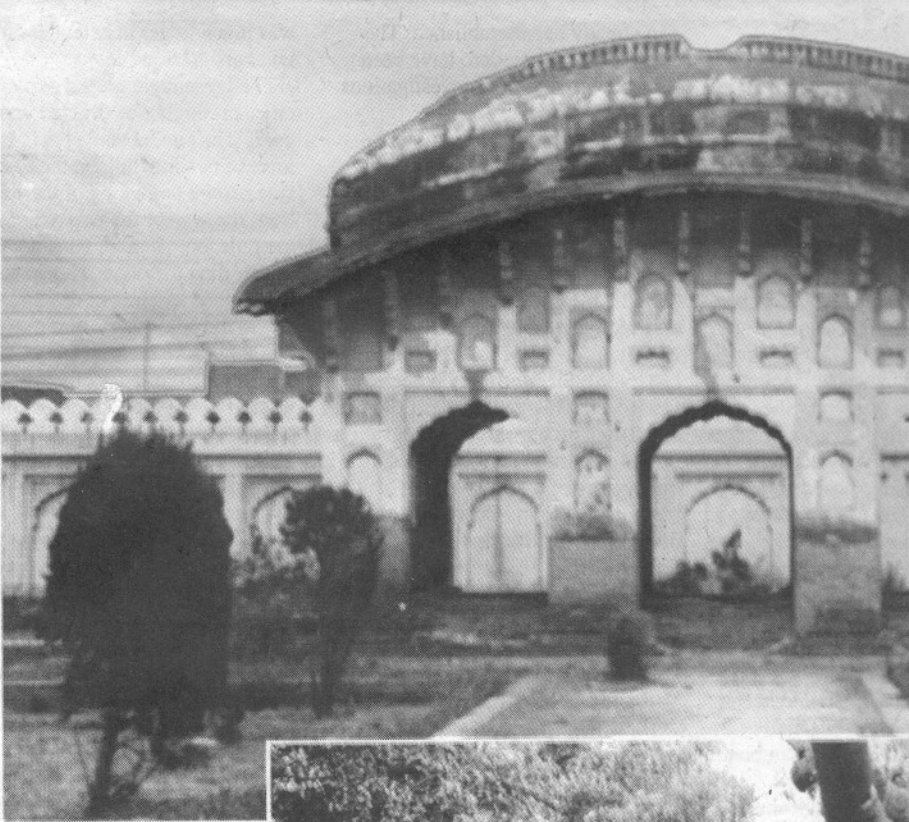
Shalimar the

SAJID ABBAS visits the Shalimar Gardens, and talks about the origin

Nigar Khana now being attended to

Five kilometres east of Lahore is the world renowned magnificent monument of Moghul splendour and the glory of Lahore, the delightful garden of Shalimar, which has most appropriately been called the Versailles of the Punjab, by many a European traveller. It is in the shape of a rectangle in three levels, each raised one above the other by about four or five metres, all surrounded by a wall of brick and mortar, some four or five metres high and marked by splendid cupolas of red sand-stone at the corners. Old chronicles say that a splendid view of the surrounding country could be obtained from these turrets, especially in the direction of the village Baghbanpura. Nevertheless, one can only see not so artistic construction around, now. The entire area of the garden covers forty acres or so.

The garden is a very popular with the people of Lahore who flock to this place on practically every occasion. It had become so during the colonial days, too. An old chronicle records the happenings about a century or so ago in the following words, 'The garden has become the favourite resort of the European parties of various kinds. The grounds are, on such occasions, artistically laid out with walks, flower beds and promenades; the fountains play; the branches are tastefully formed into graceful arches over the walks. The illuminations have a most admirable effect on the luxuriant foliage of the mango and orange trees, and their bright reflections in the watery sheets below spread like so many transparent mirrors, constitute a magic scene. The chateau glittering with coloured lamps, seems like a fairy palace—the trees, the lakes, the paths, the roofs of the marble structures, all shimmering with variegated lights. The fireworks, diffused in most singular lights and colours, float the garden in an ocean of flame'.



The narrative goes on to say 'The garden is well stocked with magnificent fruit trees and flowering shrubs. There are beautiful groves of lemon and pomegranate trees. The avenues of oranges are laden with such an abundance of large fruit, in their season, that the branches seem ready to break under the weight. The fine tall mango trees are in flourishing condition, and yield delicious fruit, which is hawked for sale in the streets of Lahore. As aptly remarked by a recent traveller, 'outside all is glare and dust within all is green foliage, white marble, cool reservoir, and rippling cascade.'

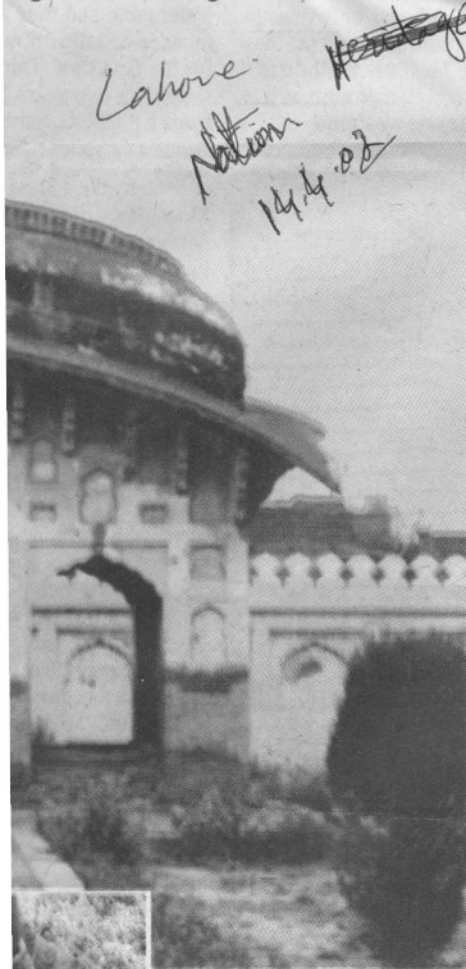
Nevertheless, many things seem to have changed by now. One does not



know of any fruit of the garden being sold any more. There have been problems with the irrigation of the garden but these have been tackled with success. Originally the garden was irrigated by a canal, brought from Madhopur, a great distance away, which discharged itself in the water-works, remnants of which can be seen opposite the garden on the other side of the Grand Trunk Road.

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origin and the neglect it has faced



Lahore

Heritage

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cascade on the other side. Down this the water ripples into a large pond below, whence, falling further into another ornamental reservoir, the Cheenee Khana or Sawan Bhadon and passes on to the extremity of the garden. The fountains, when playing, not only add to the grandeur of the scene in the garden, but have the effect of sensibly diminishing the heat.

The Shalimar Gardens, were the royal pleasure grounds of Shahjehan and were laid out after the plan of the royal gardens in Kashmir in the sixth year of his reign, or in 1634 A.D. Abdul Hamid, Lahori, says in his Badshahnama that Shahjehan laid out these gardens with the object that they might serve as a place of recreation for the Royal family, and that the use of tents, which customarily required large space might be avoided.

The cost of the gardens and the buildings attached to it was six lakhs of rupees, and they were laid and constructed in one year, five months and four days. The canal, or the Hasli canal, to irrigate the gardens was brought from Madhopur, at the expense of two lakhs of rupees. It was the combined work of Ali Mardan Khan, the great canal

engineer, and Mulla Ala ul Mulk.

One does not know when the gardens came to be called 'Shalimar', as at present, for, nowhere in the Badshahnama of Mulla Abdul Hamid Lahori, or in the Maasir-i-Aalamgiri of Muhammad Mustaid Khan, written in the time of Shah Alam, does this designation appear. The garden, is called Farah Bakhsh. The first mention of the name 'Shalimar' that we find, is in the chronicles of the chroniclers of Nadir Shah.

During the troublesome days of the Triumvirs, the Sikhs laid their hands on this magnificent garden, and robbed it of much of its glorious and decorative works. Costly agate of some places was removed by Lahna Singh, one of the Triumvirs of Lahore, and sold to stone merchants of Lahore for twenty-four thousand rupees. Later, Ranjeet Singh removed a large amount of marble to decorate constructions at Amritsar and Govindgarh. The marble pavilions, by the central reservoir of the gardens, too, were used in adorning the Ram Bagh of Amritsar, and, structures of brick and mortar were substituted in their stead.

Of late some effort at restoration has been noticed. A new tubewell seems to have been added to the irrigation system which one hopes will go a long way to change the face of the gardens. The Nigar Khana seems to be under repair and restoration. Nevertheless, one hopes that the kasheekaree in the gardens is restored early, for that will further enhance the looks. ■

Some years ago the Authorities were prepared to destroy the water-works to widen the road thus endangering the garden to be removed from the world-wide list of the monuments recognised as the Heritage of Man.

The irrigation system feeds the fountains and water courses of the terraces of the garden.

Water flows from one terrace to the other. There are some four hundred fountains which throw jets of water that is collected in channels and received ultimately in a large tank. The large discharge of water in a way serves to render the atmosphere cool and pleasant. On the uppermost terrace is a large pillared pavilion or Boarder open on all sides, and rendered delightful by a row of fountains in front and an artificial



This west wall needs attention