

# Circular Gardens eaten up by encroachers

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By Muhammad Asghar

LAHORE, May 12: The historic Circular Gardens around the Walled City have been vandalized by the state and the citizens alike destroying their traditional beauty.

Hundreds of shops and houses have been built in the gardens starting from the stretch in front of the Data Darbar to the area in front of the Do Moria Bridge. Only patches of grass and trees exist behind the rows of shops from Data Darbar to Akbari Mandi. More shops exist in the area between Shah Muhammad Ghaus and Do Moria Bridge.

Other encroachments in the gardens between Taxali Gate and Yakki Gate include two Wapda grid stations, government and city district government schools, union council offices, Wasa tubewells, jamia mosques and warehouses of goods transporters and traders. No efforts have ever been made to clear encroachments in and around the gardens since 1980's.

The gardens between the Do Moria Bridge and the Lady Willingdon Hospital are comparatively in a better shape and visible from the Circular Road because shops have not been built along these so far. Only a mosque and a petrol pump and Wasa tubewells are the major encroachments. The stretches beside the Lahore Fort are about to be vandalized due to marked increase in commercial activity in the vicinity following the shifting of the stands of air-conditioned coaches from the Lahore Railway Station to the

Badami Bagh General Bus Stand. Scores of trucks, wagons and flyingcoaches are being parked on the adjacent Circular Road stretch and the railings fixed outside the gardens have been removed at places already.

Only the Muslim Masjid and a few shops outside the Lohari Gate and shops outside Delhi Gate existed till early 1950's. The destruction of the gardens started when the government and the civic authorities utilized the outer periphery for the expansion of the Circular Road in 1960's. The Lahore Municipal Committee gave a cue to the business community to vandalize the gardens by building the shops along the Akbari Mandi Police Station wall on Circular Road in 1970's. The shops were the first to be built outside the Akbari Mandi on Circular Road and their success encouraged the traders to build more shops along the gardens afterwards.

The Metropolitan Corporation of Lahore also built a row of shops between the Bhati Gate and Mori Gate obstructing the view of the gardens. The open space behind the shops was utilized for shifting a government school in 1980's. Shops were also built gradually on the periphery of the gardens between the Shahalmi and the Mochi Gate during the 1980's obstructing the view of the gardens.

The MCL, which started vandalizing the gardens by building the shops along the same between Bhati and Mori Gate, went a step further in 1980's and

built an entire market in the gardens near the Shahalam Market entry on Circular Road for shifting the Anarkali vendors. Yet another market was built in the gardens in front of the Data Darbar in the early 1990's for shifting the shopkeepers outside

the Darbar to facilitate the construction of its complex.

Shops along the Circular Road stretch were built around 1980's and the councillors of the newly revived MCL council came to the rescue of the land-grabbers when the civic authori-

ties tried to remove the encroachments. The shops were thus saved from demolition despite the fact that these had been built by encroaching on the government land.

In 1980's former Punjab governor Ghulam Jilani directed the

civic authorities to remove encroachments along the Circular Road in a manner that the gardens came in full view but his orders could not be implemented because the vested interests proved strong enough to protect the encroachments.



HOUSES built in Circular Gardens outside Yakki Gate. —Dawn