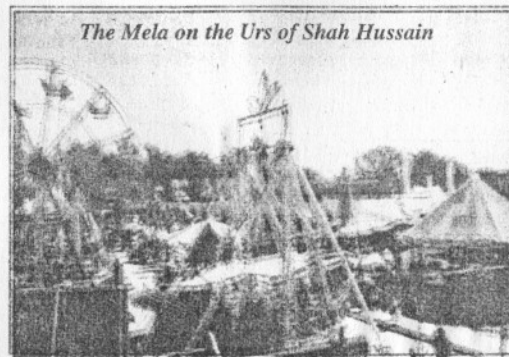
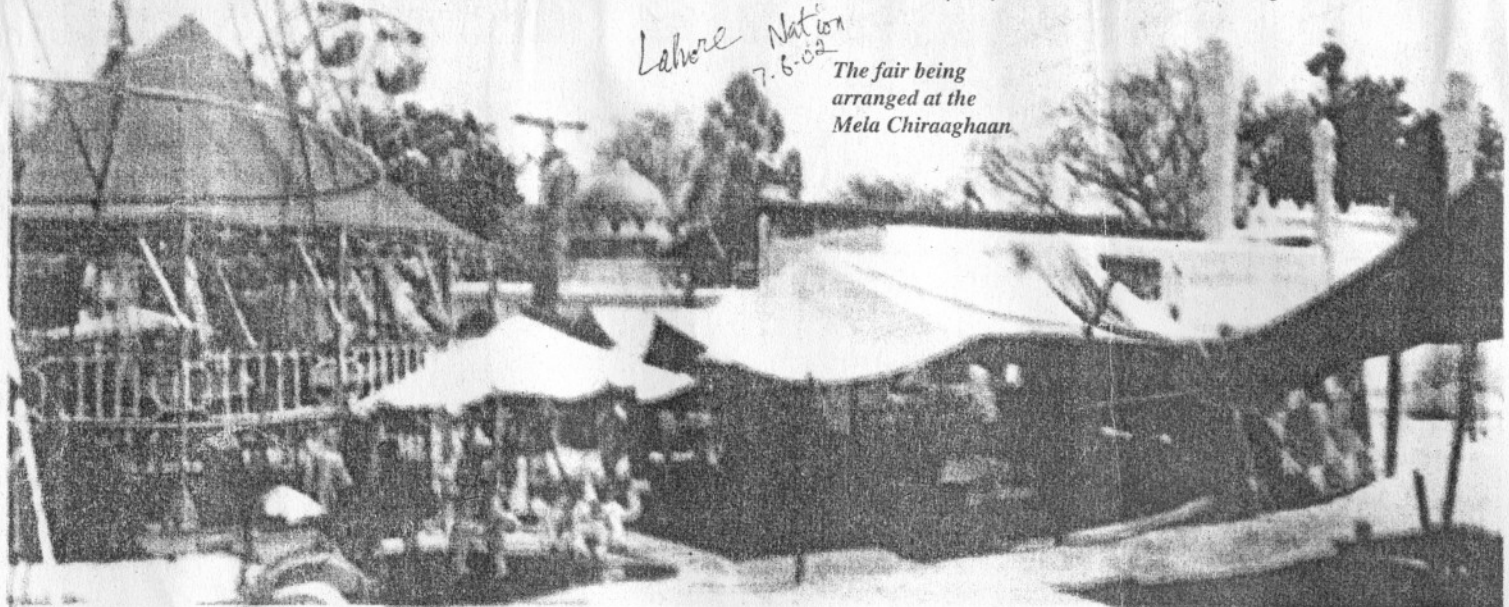


Teachings of Lal Hussain

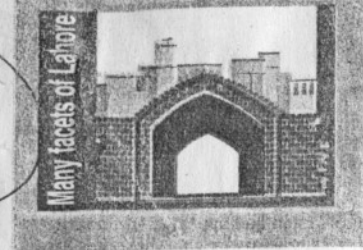
SAJID ABBAS visits the mausoleum of Madho Lal Hussain and shares views of the people about him and his enlightenment

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The fair being
arranged at the
Mela Chiraaghaan.



The Mela on the Urs of Shah Hussain



Sunday last, a week ago, Lahore had a festive event. There was a celebration more or less exclusive to Lahore. It was festival held at a place popularly known as the Darbaar of Madho Lal Hussain, a mausoleum in a vast graveyard, less than a kilometre or so west of the Shalimar Gardens. The mausoleum houses the last resting places of Lal Hussain or Shah Hussain and his disciple Sheikh Madho, two of the many revered and respected saintly people buried in and around Lahore.

Shah Hussain, born Hussain and later known as Lal Hussain, was a humanist, a saintly person and one of the best known poets of Lahore of his days. Living here during the days of Akber the Great, the third of the Grand Moghuls. Lal Hussain is said to have been a follower and disciple of Sheikh Behlol Qadri, whose influence and interest resulted in making the very

young Hussain of a tender age, an 'Hafiz' of the Holy Quran. Though, he was not a Syed, but of a line of Hindus or non-Muslims, he was called a Shah, for, he knew the Quran by heart. Occasionally he has been called Sheikh Hussain, for, his grandfather, Kalas Rai, a Hindu, had accepted Islam, it is said, during the days of Feroze Shah Tughlaq. At times he has been called Hussain julaha, since, his father had adopted the profession of a weaver, too.

In practical life since he was mostly found attired in red coloured garments he became popularly known as Lal (red) Hussain. His garments were said to have been coloured red by his disciple Sheikh Madho, on one of the festivals of Holey.

Shah Hussain was born around 1538. He was accepted in the tutelage of Sheikh Behlol at the age of ten. His earlier life was, more or less, uneventful. It was only in his mid thirties that he nurtured his thoughts and proponent his theses. He is said to have joined the 'Malamatiya' order,

too. Many a super-natural happenings, such as, being in more than one place at a time, snapping of chains, leading troops to victory and displaying alchemic wonders, are credited to him.

Shah Hussain passed away in 1599 and was buried in Shahdara in a place that he had selected himself in his lifetime.

Shah Hussain or Lal Hussain, as one may wish to call him, is particularly remembered for his vast contribution to the moulding of the attitude and philosophy of the people of this land, who accept precepts which

happen to be impartial, just, fair, unbiased and reasonable. Shah Hussain being more of a humanist, endorsed the inherent Muslim broad-mindedness and sane liberalism, rejecting die-hard

retrogressive and psychotically regressive thinking. The message of Shah Hussain is simple and down to earth. His ideas have influenced the personality

of the people of this land, who, it should be remembered, have always been in the forefront for upholding the traditions of Islam and have striven for defending its values. They have

committed themselves irrevocably to do that. That was the theses that made the people of this land whose epics are full of ideas brought up under the influence of an amiable, caste-free and egalitarian ambience, subscribing to an ordered accord, a synthesis of reason and understanding. For them, parochialism is incomprehensible, any number of attempts to promote ethnocentricity, are bound to meet with failure, simply because the people of this place, throughout history, have viewed such ways as injustice and have remained above such undertakings, they are more likely to remain loyal to the ideal of a humanistic and homogeneous Pakistani culture. That is the real, pure and simple Pakistani reasoning.

The other saintly person buried alongside is Sheikh Madho the well-known follower and disciple of Shah Hussain. Sheikh Madho was a Brahmin lad, who, early in his life, some say at the age of eighteen, came under the influence of Shah Hussain. The young Brahmin became the Shah's disciple for



Mendicant
at the Mela
Chiraaghaan

all practical purposes but remained a Hindu. What made him accept Islam is an interesting story. According to legend, Madho, on some occasion, requested Shah Hussain, his mentor, for permission to go on a pilgrimage to the Ganges, probably Hardawar or Benaras. Shah Hussain was, as it looks, not happy at the prospect of putting up with the absence of his disciple, so, he refused permission. As the legend goes, he advised Madho not to bother about undertaking an inconvenient and tiresome journey when, he will bring the Ganges to him at the appropriate time. So on the appointed day Shah Hussain asked Madho to close his eyes. On doing that the latter found himself in the company of his parents on the banks of the Ganges, where ever they were.

When Madho's parents returned to Lahore, after their pilgrimage, they were able to confirm that Madho was with them on their visit to the Ganges and had made his pilgrimage with them, too. This episode had a certain effect on Madho, so much so, that he uttered the Kalima, the Creed of the Muslims and entered the fold of Islam.

Shah Hussain was buried in Shahdara after he passed away. Some thirteen years later the Ravi changed its course, over flowed and threatened to wash his grave away. His remains were therefore removed and reburied them on the other side of the Ravi in Baghbanpura, in the present site. Sheikh Madho who had become the Sajjada Nasheen, himself passed away in 1646 and was buried next to his mentor.

Every year on the last Sunday of March people gather at the tomb to remember Shah Hussain and his disciple Sheikh Madho. The event is called the Mela Chiraaghaan, for, the venue is lit by thousands of lamps and candles. It is a big carnival, formerly celebrated on the first of Rajab, the time was changed to the last Sunday of March in 1863. By now the Urs has taken the form of a Mela. People gather on Saturday evening and listen to the numerous mendicants reciting poetry, lighting lamps and keeping a vigil till the next morning. The crowds swell on the morning of Sunday and the air of festivity lasts till the close of the day and sometimes overflows to the next Monday. Unfortunately, things were in a lower key this time. ■