

Lahore
The Maki
15-10-

Rangmahal happens to be one of the most busy areas of the City of Lahore. It is literally situated at the confluence of all the important bazaars and streets of the Old City. Situated on the northern edge of Shahaalami Bazaar, again one of the busiest bazaars, it seems to be the junction of streets joining the main east-west axis of the City.

The Kashmiri Bazaar with its brilliantly lit shops, is on the east, the Suha Bazaar and Kinari Bazaar, where they trade in gold, golden ornaments and jewels is in the west, a little further up is the shoe market. But, walking west from Rangmahal, along the street leading ultimately to the Taxaali Darwaaza, one sees a strange phenomenon, one comes across a well defined incline as one traverses and moves along till one reaches a small fort like construction known as 'paani wala talao'. From here onwards the road slopes downwards again.

The paani wala talao is indeed the highest spot along the street. perhaps the highest in the City and maybe, a wee bit higher than the foundations of the Citadel. There are a few other places in the City, too, Dhiyan Singh's Haveli, for instance and some places in the Bhatti Darwaaza and Mori Darwaaza precincts, but, the paani wala talao seems to have its own importance. First, it is likely to be the spot where the City has its origins and started growing and secondly, it is the point from where drinking water is piped to the houses of the city. Besides, it is the station of the fire brigade of the city. Before one starts sifting through the history of the city that lies hidden there, lets go back a century and a quarter to see what happened then. The people of the city depended on wells for their requirement of fresh and drinking water. Not everybody had a well in his house. Only the elite and the well to do could afford the space required for a well in their havelis or mansions. The ordinary people made a trip to the community well or to the wells in the mosques and temples. Though, most of the wells have

been filled up by now, the sites of many and old ones are still there. A few old wells still exist in some old havelies.

Over the years the density of the population of the city, increased greatly, till sanitary arrangements broke down. Filth and muck accumulated to such an extent that the ground water was polluted and contaminated with disease carrying organisms. It is said that by the

time the English took over the Government, the rate of sickness and death had reached alarming proportions. So it was decided by the Government of the day to supply the city dwellers with fresh piped water obtained from deeply dug wells at some distance from the city.

The initial plans were drawn out by the then Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, Major Nisbet. Building of the water

Searching



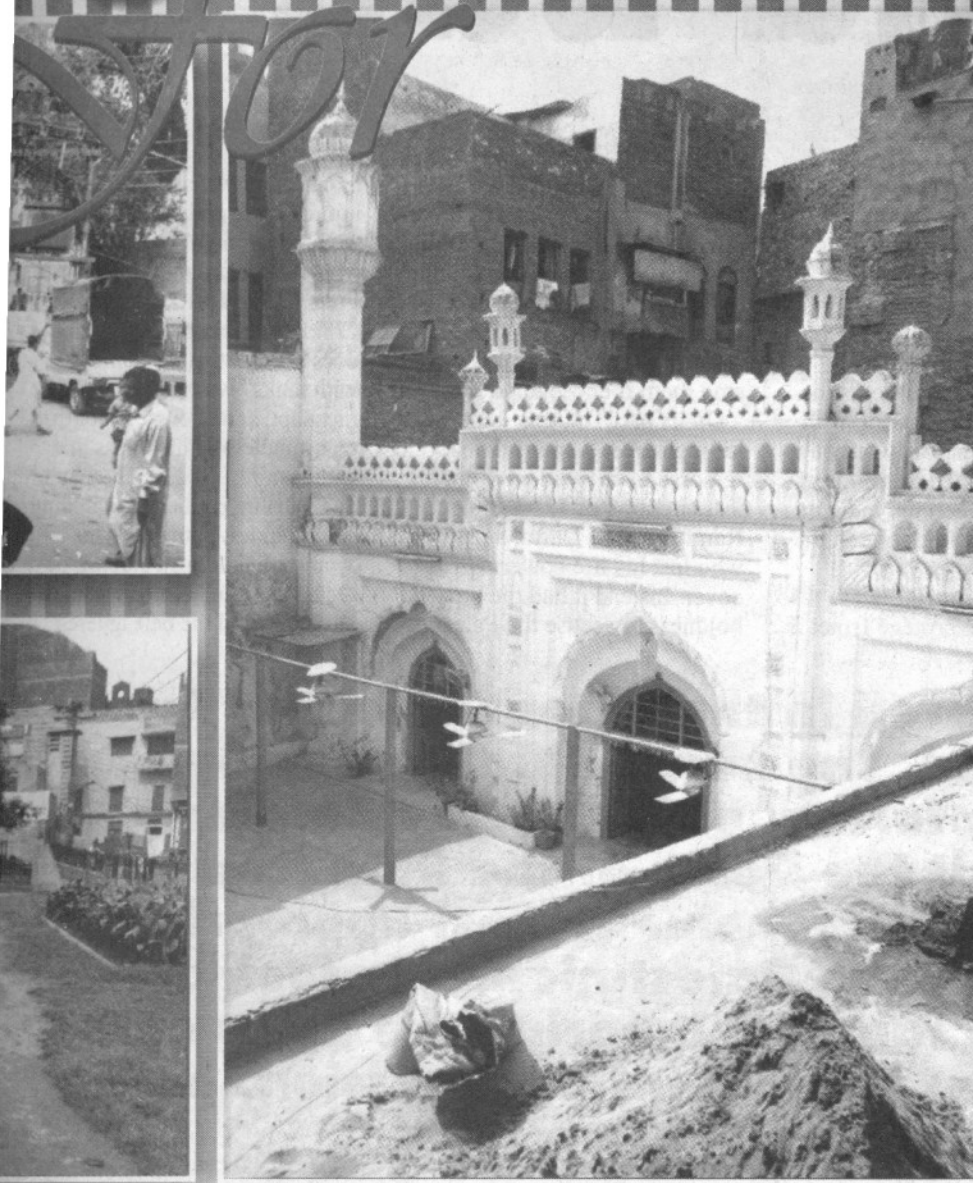
History of Lahore could be lying below this spot



Highest spot in the city-can history be found here

SAJID ABBAS strolls through the busy bazaars of Lahore and a

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Naveen Masjid-can history be found below its foundations

Lahore and arrives at a spot that could be hiding the foundations of this old city

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works commenced later, when Col. Beadon had replaced him. The construction was supervised by the well-known Executive Engineer of his time, Rai Bahadur Kanhayya Lal. The first six wells were bored north of the city in a place, which is close to the present big bus station. Old works can still be seen in that area.

Though, the project was designed by a

qualified engineer, Leslie Clark, member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, it had its teething troubles. The original reservoir, made of brick and mortar, collapsed after water was let in. The reservoir had to be abandoned and replaced by steel tanks. Then, it is said, that a second disaster took place. A number of distribution pipes leaked and burst when the valves were opened and

water was allowed in the pipes for the first time, consequently flooding the foundations and damaging a number of houses of the city. Nevertheless, the system was, after repairs, formally inaugurated by the then Lt. Governor of the Punjab, Sir Charles Aitchison and is still storing half a million litres of water and supplying it to the dwellers of the city. Lahore is said to be a city which is centuries old. Nevertheless, one has to admit that it's origins seem to be veiled, but not lost, in the mists of antiquity. Its recorded history is just about a thousand years old. Whatever is known about the city, is from the works of early Muslim travellers and chroniclers. One on the earliest works. *Hadud-ul-Aalam* (author unknown) contains a reference to Lahore that one comes across, dates back to 982. Before that date, hardly any thing is known about the place, but from this date onwards, historical chronicles abound.

One reason for this gap in history is the lack of archaeological evidence about Lahore. It is obvious that sufficient effort has not been made in this direction. There are many questions that have gone unanswered till today. For example, nothing is known with certainty about the founding of this city. Old chronicles do not support the assumption that Loh, the son of Ram Chander founded this city, and none of them has shed any light on such surmise of its origin. It was only in 1695-96 that, Sujjan Rai came up with such a conjecture in his *Khulasat-ut-Twarikh*. The theory gained further currency during the nineteenth century when Todd and Cunningham repeated the guess in their works.

In 1958-59, archaeological excavations were made in the Lahore Fort area. Some valuable information was gathered about the antecedents of this city to improve our knowledge of the place. Now we know a bit more about what happened here in the first millennium. We can say that Lahore was there in the first or second century before Christ where it is today. But, that is not enough, more has to be done.

The mound where the water-works are located is supposed to be a reservoir of history, for, it is believed that, the very original Lahore is buried there by the sands of time. There are two plots of open land on the eastern and western sides of the paani wala talao, where, one wonders that useful excavations can easily be carried out by archaeologists to determine the age and history of this lovely city. ■