

# Fading glory of the Mall

Lahore 6-10-02  
Nation

Not in the original plans



**L**ahore has always been the centre of interest to people from far and near. The stories of its populace and accounts of visitors are keenly read. The only real historical city of Pakistan, Lahore, is proud to show its many facets, both brilliant and dazzling, or dull and sombre. While visitors may see Lahore as a city of monuments and lively bazaars, to a *Lahoria* its charm emanates from the City — the traditional centre of activity. A few may get a chance of experiencing its life, but fewer still become part of it and share the amusing secrets of its bazaars, *galees* and bye-lanes or savour the delights of its haunts or diversions of its inhabitants, of the affluent, the indigent, the city slicker, or the leisured.

The only real historical city of Pakistan, Lahore, acquired glory during the days of the Grand Moghuls, Akber, Jehangir, Shahjehan and Aurangzeb, especially during Shahjehan's times when it reached its peak. Although some sort of a focal point since times immemorial, it became an important political centre of this part of the world about a thousand years ago during the days of Mahmood of Ghazni and continues to be so till today. It is, conceivably, the most important political centre of the South Asian Sub-Continent, despite other cities, such as Calcutta, (present Kolkata) appearing on the map of the world a couple or so centuries ago, as the seat of the government of British India and the second largest city of the Empire.

Ours is an ancient culture, tempered by heterogeneous influences over the ages. We belong to one of the three oldest civilisations known to man. Our origins trail far back to antiquity. One of the oldest known habitation of man is very much here — Harappa — it has, more or less, been continuously inhabited for, perhaps, the last sixty-five centuries or so. But with all our credentials, is it not a pity that though we may be an ancient people, we do not seem to have grown-up? At least, we do not behave like ones.

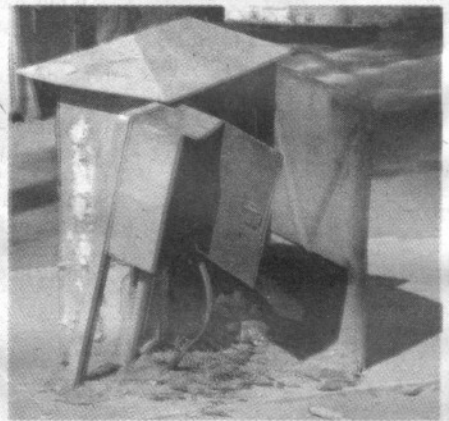
Talking of others doing our work, we find, that the English, though engaged in

**SAJID ABBAS** goes round old spots of Lahore, noticing changes and wonders if these are for better

diverse activities here since the early seventeenth century managed to entrench themselves as rulers about a century-and-a-half ago. They had been very lucky, it was their century, the Imperial century, it had been heralded by the exit of Napoleon from the political stage of the world of that time. Half way through the English had added vast and strategic territory to their Empire. In the Sub-Continent, the only Power that that had kept them at bay for nearly half a century, had fallen victim to their design. The Punjab had been annexed to the territories of the East India Company by 1849. Less than ten years later, in the aftermath of the happenings of 1857, Victoria had replaced the last of the indigenous rulers. The English now began consolidating their gains and came out in right earnest to express their exuberance in various forms. One such form was buildings and public works.

With the change of guard came a band of men, who loved this land more than the natives. There were the Lawrence brothers, Henry, John and George. Henry came as Resident at the Lahore Darbar during the Sikh Rule. After the occupation of the Punjab, he, along with John, ruled the Punjab as a member of the Board of Administration. Henry was against the annexation of the Punjab to the rest of the territory ruled by the East India Company; so was Montgomery, who appeared on the scene later. Both served in their own way and were responsible for initiating schemes resulting in prosperity of the people of the Punjab. Both were respected and liked by the people for that.

Then there were others who did their bit for this land, again more than the natives themselves, for instance, the Kiplings, Lockwood and Rudyard, who served this



*Once part of a facility...*

land and City in an appropriate manner. While the father, Lockwood, laid the foundations of exhibiting the culture of this land and making it known to the world, the son, Rudyard placed Lahore on the international literary map. Some body may find his "My Lahore" having a flavour of colonial mentality, but there is genuine love for the City. Rudyard's several short stories and the famous novel 'Kim' pay the finest tribute to Lahore. His writing has done more than any English, Pakistani or other writer.

One of the many lasting monuments that the English have left behind was and is the showpiece of modern Lahore — the Mall. Eversince it was built, it has been Lahore's most important thoroughfare. Whether it will remain so and withstand the onslaughts aimed at mutilating it beyond recognition, depends clearly upon our attitude towards conserving our history, heritage, past and present. The Mall was built almost a hundred-and-fifty-years ago, as a "direct road from Anarkali to Mian Mir", that is,

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from one cantonment to another. Perhaps many may not be aware of the fact that Anarkali Gardens were the cantonments or *chhaonee* of Lahore during the days of Ranjeet Singh. It was here that Ranjeet Singh had encamped when he came from Gujranwala to capture Lahore in 1799. The place remained as the cantonment of the troops of the East India Company when they garrisoned Lahore after Ranjeet Singh's death. Foundations of the present cantonment were also laid about the same time. Originally, the Mall was the road extending from the Deputy Commissioners office, the present District Courts, to the Multan Road junction, somewhere near the Chauburji. Today it is called the Lower Mall. The Mall as we find today was known as the Lawrence Road before 1876. Now it is officially the Sharey-Quaid-e-Azam. It was Lt.Col.Napier, the then Civil Engineer deputed to the Punjab Administration, who first aligned the route in 1851. The cost of the original road was only Rs.10,428/- This is the usual part of the data that is repeated off and on whenever an article on the Mall appears in some journal or newspaper, credit be given to Goulding for that, whose articles appeared in the *Civil & Military Gazette* of Lahore in the earlier part of the last century.

The social life along the Mall is now more or less changed. The landscape along the present Mall is changing, but possibly, not to its benefit. Everyday one passes up and down the Mall without ever noticing what is on his right or left, the rapid pace of the traffic forces one to get out of the rush and chaos without delay. The mad race does not allow one to enjoy the sights, the increasing pollution has adversely affected the character of this comely stretch. This undesirable trend must be stopped. Let us, for the time being, join hands and vow to stop the decline and gather to promote the love our predecessors had for this City of ours. ■

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