

The missing havelis and the hukamr

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WHEN the Moghals were at the height of their glory, the elite preferred to establish a small city just outside Lahore. The havelis and gardens which they built there represented the wealth that truly was Moghal. Chaucer described this wealth in a verse: *Magnificent Lahore, where streets are paved with gold*. This clean and spacious place was Moghalpura.

This was the main reason why the Emperor Shah Jehan built the magnificent Shalimar Gardens just outside Moghalpura. He expected the elite to be entertained there to the choicest food and wines, and Moghalpura boasted of excellent 'raisin wine', which even the English aristocracy visiting the court of Maharajah Ranjit Singh professed as "being smooth, soft and with a deep mellow strength."

Even though Moghalpura had the Shalimar Gardens and an array of fine Moghal buildings, it were the magnificent havelis, grand in every respect, that attracted the most attention. In the Moghal court there was a saying that there are more bricks, of mud and gold,

in Moghalpura than in the entire walled city of Lahore. History was to prove this to be correct. Mind you, the place is still full of magnificent buildings, if you are the wandering type and care to explore.

During the reign of Akbar the Great, it was decided to build 'Moghalpura' on the Lahore-Amritsar road. Probably the idea had two basic motivating factors, they being an attempt to be away from the common man, and, more importantly, to be just far enough away when invaders from the West attack Lahore. This provided the elite with enough time to leave to safer havens at Delhi, for Lahore represented the western edge of the settled portions of the Moghal Empire.

Almost all the leading lights of the Moghal court purchased large tracts of land in Moghalpura, and set about trying to build residences of excellence. The haveli of Nawab Zakariya Khan is recorded as having cost Rs1.2 million in its day and encompassed gardens and entire sections for various uses. The haveli of Shah Nawaz Khan is said to have cost Rs1.1 million and mind you in those days an excellent house cost

rupees five to six thousand to build. The entire area from Wagah to Lahore had hundreds of brick kilns operating, where the small bricks used in those days were baked. Some of the finest builders were employed and workers colonies sprung up at Dharampura and at Jallo. The area was well known as vegetable producing and some of the rich Arain families of the area also built their havelis there. Even today, the old families of Moghalpura still have possession of their old havelis, like the families of Mian Iftikharuddin, or that of Mian Misbahur Rehman.

By the time the Moghal Empire was declining sharply, the invaders from Afghanistan came on their annual pillaging raids, their sole aim was to loot and plunder. By the time Ahmad Shah Durrani was on the throne at Kabul, his forces invaded India, and based on their intelligence, they attacked Moghalpura and not Lahore. When asked why they avoided Lahore, he is said to have remarked: "The money and gold is in Moghalpura, the guns and grit are in Lahore."

And so they hit Moghalpura, and the entire army went on a wild looting campaign. All day and all night they looted, so one account goes, and by the next morning each and every soldier was laden with wealth he could never imagine, or even lift. The army decided to forget about invading India or attacking Lahore, for they had more gold and wealth than they could carry, and so they decided to return to Kabul.

By the time the Sikhs came to power, they also attacked Moghalpura three times, each time managing to take away what was left. By the time the Sikhs had decided to ransack Moghalpura, the entire city was empty. Not a soul was left in the magnificent havelis. It was a ghost town. By this time, Maharajah Ranjit Singh came to power, the town of Moghalpura was virtually without any population.

He decided to tear down the place and, so the legend goes, find the gold buried in the foundations of Moghalpura. It took almost ten years for him to take away the bricks of Moghalpura, and from these, so an account by Kanhayya Lal says, he

built a thousand havelis. It seems a rather exaggerated account of the number of bricks stolen, but one account says that the bricks used in the huge haveli of Maan Singh inside the walled city were taken from Moghalpura. Another account puts down these bricks and the marble as having been stolen from the grand graveyard of Nawab Zakariya Khan, the area now called Begumpura.

And so lay Moghalpura waste, its glory being the reason it was destroyed. But so many were the havelis of Moghalpura that they had become part of the local folklore, depicting grandeur and glory in style. It truly is mind-boggling when one thinks of the immense destruction that once took place, and if we are to imagine just what the original Moghalpura was once like, we can picture a small city of the Moghal elite.

While wandering through the streets of Moghalpura, it was interesting to find that in a small simple house lives Zahoora Ahmad Khan, a descendant of Ghani Khan who, along with his brother, Nabi Khan, saved the life of Guru Gobind Singh at Machhiwara. Living in

nama

er abject poverty, this man possesses the
of original Hukamnama of Guru Gobind
at Singh that was presented to Ghani
of Khan and Nabi Khan in AD1704. The
re hukamnama is kept wrapped in silk
er and has been passed on from genera-
he tion to generation.

ne A translated version of the 10-line
ya hukamnama reads: "The Sikhs may
know that Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan
ts are as sons to me. They have saved me.
d. He who serves them would be blessed.
of Service rendered to them would be serv-
rt ice done unto me." The Shiromani
ur Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee on
g- April 13, 1928 (letter No 3046/16) certi-
se- fied that the hukamnama was authen-
if- tic. Besides this, Zahoor Khan has with
al him the Farman of Maharaja Ranjit
c- Singh conferring a jagir on his family, a
ts jagir that was confiscated by the British.
to Research tells us that such a hukamna-
es ma was indeed issued by Guru Gobind
of Singh, and it was nice to know that it is
n- safe in the hands of the family. I advised
u them to put it away in a bank locker, but
n they do not trust banks. I am not sur-
prised. — *Majid Sheikh*