

SAJID ABBAS talks to a teacher of architecture and architectural art, Sajjad Kausar, and talks about the Shalimar Gardens, Lahore and his efforts to conserve this patch of paradise on earth in its true and original form

The history of Lahore, though obscure, seems to date back to a time when perhaps the scriptures had not yet been compiled and composed. Over the ages, Lahore progressed to become a centre of refinement and culture; and barring some periods of misrule, continues to be so.

One may notice that Lahore presents itself like a kaleidoscopic show, one can see a novel but interesting view from a different angle. Every ruler in the history of Lahore seems to have added something celebrated, according to his taste, to add to the life and comfort of the city and its people. For example, the picturesque Shalimar Gardens, some five kilometres east of Lahore is something not only attractive but radiant and heavenly inspiring, too. Nevertheless, after almost three centuries and a half of its building one finds that the Garden and the place around needs some extra attention.

Only recently this scribe got a chance to visit the Shalimar Gardens in the company of Mr Sajjad Kausar who teaches at the National College of Arts, Lahore, and is an authority on Moghul Gardens and discuss various matters about the Garden with him.

The discussion brought out some

interesting facts not ordinarily known but useful for the people in general, otherwise. For example, one does not realise the danger that the Garden is facing due to encroachment on the land around it. It was literally horrifying to realise that we are not only choking the exquisite architectural works of the olden

days built during the reign of Shahjehan to extinction but helping to remove ourselves from the privileged list of World Heritage Sites.

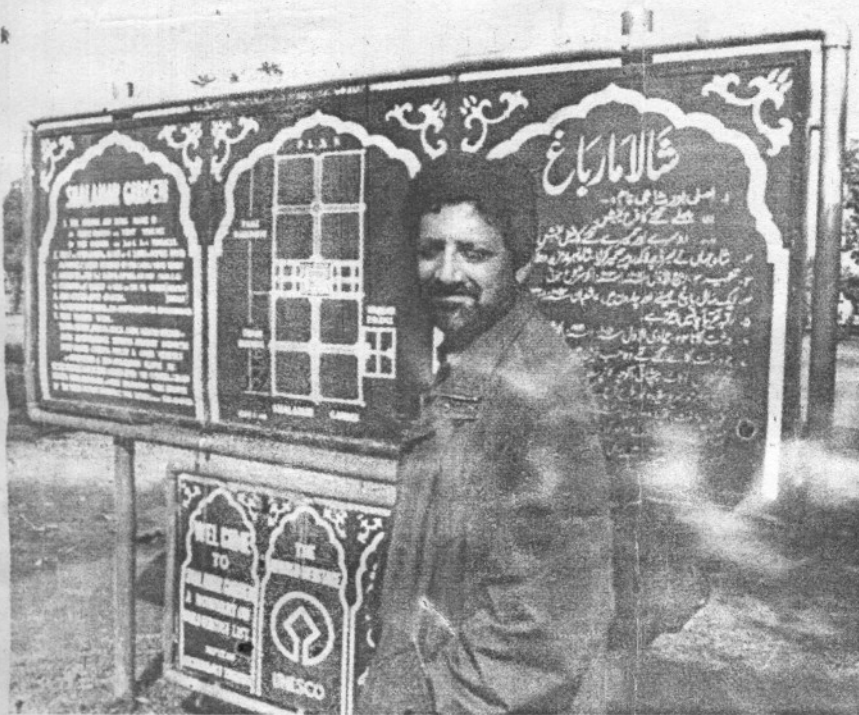
A decade and a half ago, Sajjad Kausar had pointed out the danger of the ill effects on the Shalimar Gardens due to encroachment and had said that Shalimar, once a pleasure garden at the farthest suburb of Lahore, was surrounded by residential and commercial areas. Most of the development has taken place in the last three decades. With the urban development waste water began to stagnate near the gates. Finally the streets had to be raised. Then dampness was observed all along the wall from inside the Garden. A water supply complex constructed on the southern side of the highest terrace beyond the Grand Trunk Road is in a ruinous state now and very soon it will disappear if it is allowed to remain in its present state. All this seems to have come true.

Within a matter of two decades, the land around the Garden has been encroached upon by residential housing, shops and bazaars and all the attendant problems. One hears that one has to stay clear off historical structures, monuments or archaeological sites by several hundred metres, one wonders if the authorities know about that and follow the rules.

Restoration of historical buildings and sites is something that is not given up, especially in the civilised world whose nations are proud of their history and heritage. They scrupulously resist efforts



Khuld-e-Ba



Sajjad Kausar

Lahore
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Nation

The engineering marvel, tanks, channels and all has no duplicate elsewhere. It can be conserved, restored and shown, with pride, to the world. The site is not only our heritage but that of the world, too. Rather demolishing, it could be added to the list of monuments and structures due to which we own our identity.

Last Friday, February 28, Sajjad Kausar spoke at the École Nationale Supérieure du Paysage de Versailles (France), to a gathering interested very much in the restoration of the Garden.

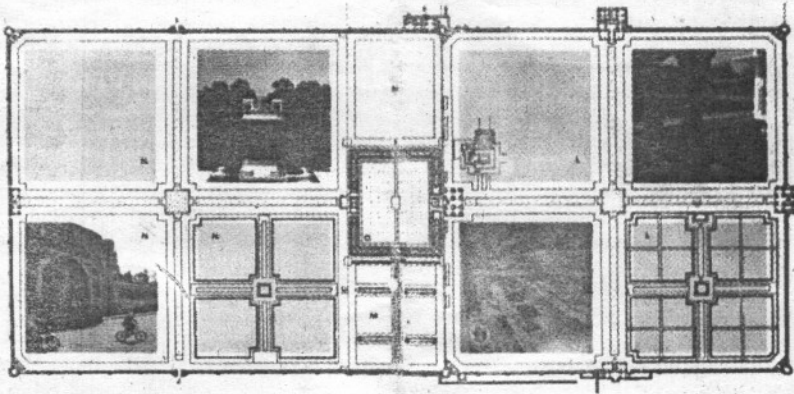
The French embassy in Islamabad

urbanism (coexisting uses, regulations, how to anticipate) raised by the restoration of a XVIIth century garden in the outskirts of a modern active city, can be found in different places around the world. However, these problems are experienced differently, depending on social and economic contexts.

Consciousness of the world's need to preserve artistic heritage is widely recognised. Historic garden preservation in an urban environment underscores the necessity to co-ordinate the preservation project with social growth and local



Encroachment along the periphery



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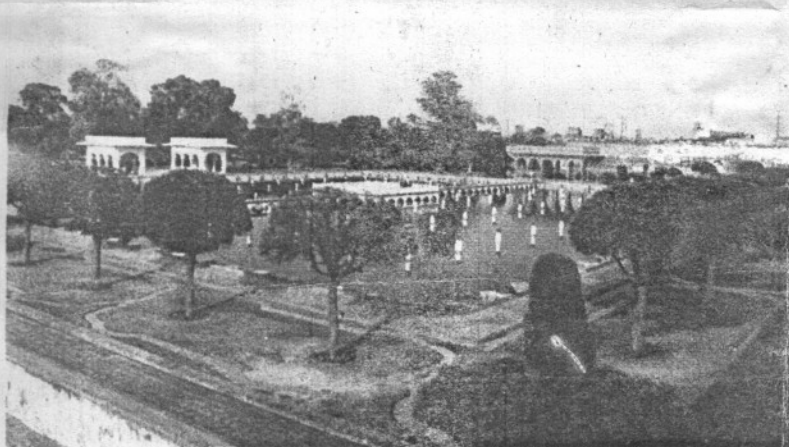
supports a very important project of co-operation between National College of Arts of Lahore and Ecole Nationale Supérieure du Paysage de Versailles. This project aims at (finding solutions) for restoring the moghul gardens of

economic interest, will come under discussion, too.

Besides, this is an opportunity for the French student to escape traditional prejudice and rediscover the landscape heritage preservation within an unfamiliar cultural world and inside an unknown socio-economic context. He should therefore try to discover how to marry different interests in his restoration project. To preserve or to develop? Carelessness or overregulation? To preserve ancestral customs or to invent new behaviour? The deadlock of these antagonisms that get so hot when they relate to one's own culture might be broken by bringing in a different point of view from a distant country.

The lecture is expected to open a week of studies and workshops organised at ENSP with eminent professors and architects and under the co-ordination of Sajjad Kausar. Throughout these studies, the students of ENSP will have to show curiosity and imagination in inventing ways and solutions for new processes to restore the historical gardens of Shalimar within the developing neighbourhood. The best propositions will be sent to the National College of Arts, Lahore, where another studio will be held on the same subject in the coming weeks.

The difficulties of the French studio comes about by the impossibility to visit the site. Sajjad Kausar will be the students' main source of information concerning the urban environment, while a set of plans and sections will be made available for them to work on. A video tape made by NCA video department, too, will be made available. The layout of the garden, geometrically and regularly designed, will help for an indoor studio. ■



The pool — Shalimar Gardens, the middle terrace

to reduce their past to rubble.

However, we have seen something contrary here. Despite, 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 adults. Perhaps we have a streak of childish destructiveness in ourselves and that, unfortunately, may be our correct portrayal, at least for the present. Some years ago we went about destroying an engineering marvel which formed part of the garden. It used to be something that this city could be proud of, instead, somebody got the idea of driving a road through it. Silly, wasn't it.

Shalimar. In the framework of this project, the French embassy in Pakistan has invited Professor Sajjad Kausar, of National College of Arts to France in order to deliver a lecture on the subject at Versailles. The professor will be in Versailles from February 26 to March 6. The lecture will focus on educational aims: altogether to tackle the topical subject of historical garden restoration and to discover an unrecognised chapter of garden history: the moghul garden, contemporary with the French formal garden invention.

Issues of landscape development and