

MANY cities in different countries around the world have earned fame for their unique topographical features, historic landmarks and the political and social dispensations of their residents. The Paltan Maidan of Dhaka, the Nishtar Baagh of Karachi, the Madison Square Garden of New York and Hyde Park of London are some examples of the landmarks of these cities. The second largest city of Pakistan, Lahore, for its famous Mochi Gate, is counted among these cities. Lahore city is also one of the most ancient cities of the subcontinent.

For the people of Pakistan, Lahore has had a certain quality of historical sanctity associated with its past, for it has served as the first outpost of the Muslim empire in India, which lasted nearly 800 years. A rich variety of personalities, who peopled this city as leaders, writers, poets, teachers, musicians and revolutionaries, regardless of their religious persuasions, have contributed much to its political, cultural and social development.

Called variously as the cultural centre of Pakistan, the Paris of the East, the Heart of Pakistan and the City of lush green gardens and public parks, Lahore's Shalimar Gardens, Badshahi Mosque and Jehangir's tomb also remind us of its long and enduring association with Mughal architecture.

Not too long ago, a beautiful and well-maintained Circular Garden ringed around the old Walled City of this metropolis that was known for its twelve Gates, that have often been

A Hyde Park of our very own

By Saeed Malik

mentioned in the annals of Lahore. One of the Lahore Gates is now known as Mochi Gate and has often been likened to the Hyde Park of London, for it has hosted innumerable political meetings before and after partition of the subcontinent. Secular politicians and Muslim leaders of 'All India' fame of different hues and professing different ideologies addressed many mammoth gatherings of people at Mochi Gate, Lahore.

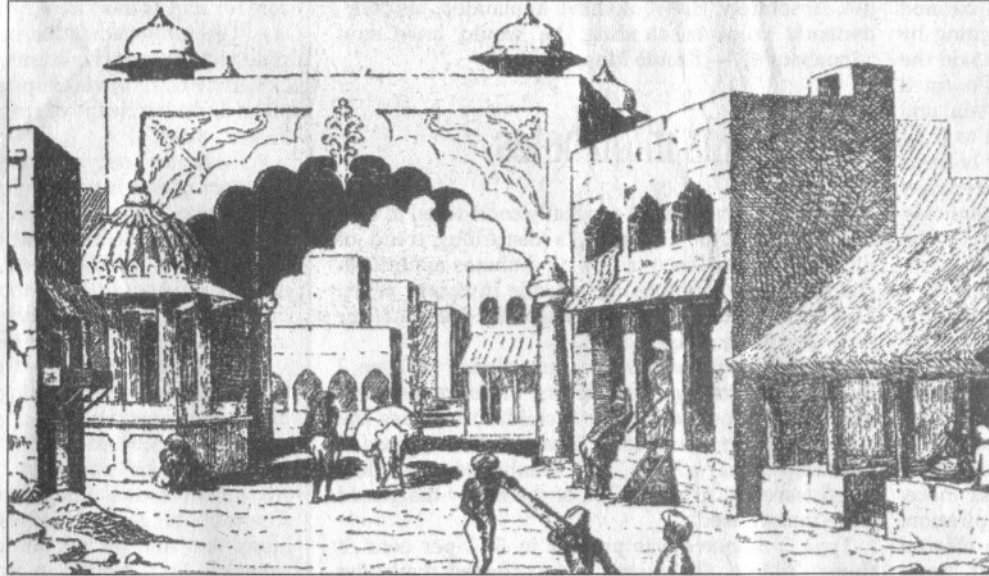
Originally named Moti Gate during the Moghul period, when a protective wall with 12 gates was built around the city, it is now known as Mochi Gate. Seemingly, it is a corruption of the original nomenclature, which points to one Moti Lal (or Ram) a Hindu employee of the State, whose responsibility it was to maintain and protect this opening to the city during the early days of the Mughal empire in South Asia.

Now the provincial capital of the Punjab, Lahore has a history of a thousand years and pre-history, which takes us back to the Buddhist times. The people, who lived inside Mochi Gate and areas close to it, have created lasting traditions of love and brotherhood and tolerance, and the people from other regions of the subcontinent acknowledged the cultural vivacity and political awareness of the residents. The origin and growth of these traditions are attributed to the political aspirations of the residents of Lahore, which have

been deeply rooted in local ethos since the enactment by the British Parliament of the Government of India 1935, giving limited self-rule to their Indian subjects. That Law trig-

gies by holding meetings and also to stage demonstrations against the government as and when the need arose. For the Muslim population of the city, the garden outside Mochi Gate

Jinnah, Maulanas Shaukat Ali, Hasrat Mohani, Zafar Ali Khan and Malik Barkat Ali addressed mammoth gatherings of the Muslims at Mochi Gate. During the campaign of



MOCHI GATE: An 1888 sketch of the famed Lahore landmark

gered a revolution in the social, cultural, literary environment and created political consciousness among the people of Lahore, which ultimately found its rich expression in their participation in the freedom struggle.

The lush green garden that ringed around the original Lahore i.e., the Walled City, provided a forum to political parties to promote their ideolo-

gies by holding meetings and also to stage demonstrations against the government as and when the need arose. For the Muslim population of the city, the garden outside Mochi Gate

provided a permanent venue for the expression of their political, social, economic and cultural yearnings. Since then, the Lahoris have developed a mystic veneration for this place, where history has been made on more than one occasion during the past 70 years.

Much before the creation of Pakistan, Muslim leaders of the calibre and status of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali

the 1945 general elections Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, Mian Mumtaz Muhammad Khan Daultana, Nawab Iftikher Hussain Khan Mamdot, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan rallied the Muslims of Lahore under the League flag through their inspiring speeches at Mochi Gate, Lahore.

After August 14, 1947, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, Maulana Abdul Hameed Khan Bhashani from East Pakistan, Khawaja Nazimuddin, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Sardar Abdul Rab Nishtar, Ahmed Saeed Kirmani and many other top-ranking politicians addressed large political meetings at Mochi Gate. Before presidential election of 1964, both the contestants — General Ayub Khan and Mohtrama Fatima Jinnah, choose Mochi Gate garden as the venue to launch their election campaigns. It was Mochi Gate from where revolutionary poet Habib Jalib mesmerized his audience with his poem — *Bees gharanay hain abaad our karoran hain nashaad*, Sadar Ayub Zindabaad. Miss Jinnah addressed his other poem *Aisay dastoor ko subah-i-banyoor ko mein naheen jaanta mein naheem maanta* electrified the people.

Located across the road from Mochi Gate garden is a small auditorium known as the Barkat Ali Mohammedan Hall, where seminars, political confabulations on a smaller scale and *mushairas* were held in the past. The Barkat Ali Hall and Mochi Gate are closely identified with the political, literary and cultural mainstream of the country, having been the spearheads of modern movement in Urdu literature before partition and serving as the vanguard of political movements in the subcontinent. The Mochi Garden imparts to the residents and

the visitors sense of history

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governors, sages and scholars, who were associated with the history of the region.

The clash of Hindu nationalism with Muslim political yearnings and aspirations, which were spawned by the egalitarian ideology of Islam as enunciated by Shah Waliullah, took place much before the British colonialists annexed the Punjab province with their Indian empire in 1849. During the Sikh period, the Muslims suffered much humiliation inflicted upon by the rulers. When the All India Congress Committee (AICC) was founded by an Englishman in Bombay about the middle of the decade of 1880s, the Muslims pinned their hopes on the newly formed political party for their economic and social emancipation. However, soon they were disillusioned by the fantasy that clouded their imagination. They became suspicious of the AICC because of its Hindu character, which became abundantly clear at the turn of 20th century. That was why they gathered at one platform at the clarion call of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah he gave after the adoption of the Lahore Resolution at the Lahore session of All India Muslim League Council in Minto Park on March 23, 1940.

In large cities old landmarks suffer from decay and slip into historical oblivion. New ones are created with the passage of time. The city of Lahore, too, has gone through this process of wasting away and self-repair and rebirth. Although the importance of Mochi Gate in terms of politics has plummeted much in recent years, its place in the history of freedom struggle remains intact. ■

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the visitors alike a special sense of history.

Parenthetically, for the Hindu and Sikh residents of Lahore, a portion of the Circular Garden outside Lohari Gate served the same purpose. Nearby, the (now vanished) SPSK Hall was built by the Hindu dominated Society for the Promotion of Scientific Knowledge (SPSK) for academic purposes. With the passage of time and an upsurge in political activities, the Hindu residents of Lahore for political confabulations used it. Politicians of the stature of Pundit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Non-Muslim members of academia like Ram Saroop Bhatnagar participated in seminars. The Hall was also used as the venue for several All India Music Conferences.

The citizens of Lahore used to take pride in the capacity of the city to indulge in and appreciate politics. In matters related to this art of the possible and also culture, the city could compete with any other city in the subcontinent. Its contributions to the struggle for freedom, launched by different communities, have been monumental. Historically, Lahore has changed its masters on several occasions during the past 1000 years, a majority of whom thoroughly pillaged it and burnt its *hauzas*. To this day, the *gullies* (streets) and *bazaars* of the walled City and hundreds of buildings inside it bear the names of famous emperors,