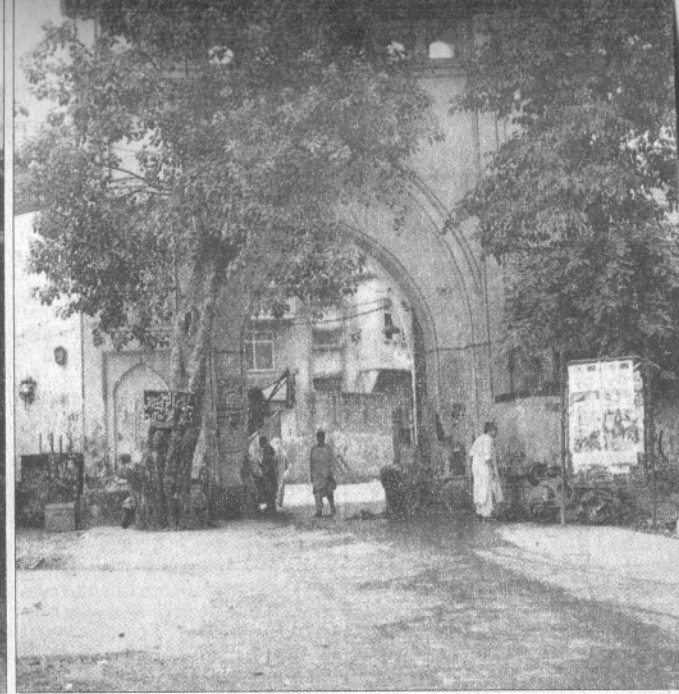


THE remains of the Masti Gate have disappeared due to the construction of a shopping plaza. — Dawn



KASHMIRI Gate which resembles the Masti Gate.

Masti Gate — a shadow of its past

By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE, May 13: The remains of the Masti Gate have vanished because of construction of a shop and extension of a commercial plaza.

The arch of the gate disappeared years ago, leaving only a structure. However, the structure also started crumbling in the late 1990s when the plaza was built. Its extension on one side of the gate and construction of a shop on the other have spoiled the structure.

The federal and provincial archaeology departments have no clue as to when its arch fell, not to speak of the commoners living around. However, both are witnessing the destruction of the historical monument.

The Masti Gate now joins the other five gates — Shah Alam, Taxali, Yakki, Mochi and Akbari — which have almost been effaced.

Re-built during the British period, the Masti Gate is one of the seven gates 'protected' under the Antiquity Act 1975. The other gates are Bhati, Delhi, Sheranwala, Roshnai, Kashmiri and Lahori.

The British government, after taking

over the Punjab, demolished most of the gates. Of those, five were rebuilt and declared protected.

Archaeologists believe rebuilding of these gates will not cost much to the government.

"They will certainly add to the grandeur of the old city and attract more visitors," says NCA Art Gallery Director Dr Ijaz Anwar.

Under the Antiquity Act, no construction is allowed around 200 feet of a protected monument, but almost all the existing gates have been encroached upon.

The Bhati and Masti Gates are occupied by the police stations; Delhi Gate by the City District Government's computer centre, shops and kiosks; Sheranwala Gate by a government school, mosque and a timber shop; Lahori Gate by shops and houses; and the Kashmiri Gate occupied by an illegal parking lot.

The Chitta Gate inside the Delhi Gate, also declared protected, has been encroached upon by shops and houses.

Moreover, these gates are in a state

of disrepair as there has been no conservation work on these for over two decades. The Punjab archaeology department estimates that Rs3.5 million are required for their conservation.

Neither the federal archaeology department nor the provincial authorities own the responsibility of the protection of the gates. They say the CDG, which has rented out the protected area of the gates to shopkeepers, is responsible for their upkeep.

There are two historical references to the Masti Gate. Some historians say the Lahore Fort's gate facing Maryam Zamani's Mosque is the Masiti Gate (Masti). However, the others, including Ray Buhadar Kanhaya Lal, say the Masti Gate comes after the Kashmiri Gate and named after an 80-year-old man Masti, who was deputed there.

Mahmood Hassan Rumi, who has painted seven gates, including Taxali and Shah Alam, says the Masti Gate's design was similar to that of the Kashmiri Gate. "I am gleaning description of the other disappeared gates to

draw them for pictorial record," he says.

The archaeology departments even lack the pictorial record of the demolished gates.

A brief account of the gates of the old city is given below:

ROSHANAI GATE: This is called the gate of lights located between the Badshahi Mosque and the Lahore Fort. As it was most frequently visited by the royalty and courtiers, it used to be profusely lit up at night.

KASHMIRI GATE: It was named so for being opened in the direction of Kashmir.

KHIZRI OR SHERANWALA GATE: As the Ravi used to flow close to the city on the side, the place was known as Khizri after a patron saint of waters and discoverer of *aab-i-hayat*.

However, during the Sikh period, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh kept two lions at the gate, which gave it the popular name of Sheranwala darawaza or lions' gate.

DELHI GATE: It was named as it opened on the trunk road to Delhi.

AKBARI GATE: It was named after

Mughal Emperor Akbar, who had rebuilt the city with burnt bricks. A market close to it said to have been built during the same period.

SHAH ALAM: It was named after Muazzam Shah Alam, the son and successor of Aurangzeb Alamgir. It was demolished during the independence.

BHATI GATE: It was named after the Rajput tribe, which inhabited the area in Mughal period.

TAXALI GATE: Coins were minted here, therefore, it was named after Taxal (mint).

MOCHI GATE: Mochi (cobbler) originally moti (pearl) was named after an officer of Akbar, Moti Lal, who resided in the quarters close to it.

YAKKI OR ZAKI GATE: Zaki was a saint martyred here during fight against the Mughal forces.

LAHORI GATE: Also commonly called Lohari (pertaining to blacksmith) was named after the city itself.

The 13th gate was a mori, the smallest of all the gates, and is said to have served as refuse disposal route of the city.

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