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Opening the gate on Lahore

Lahori Darwaza is from where the present walled city is said to have started its life. **Asim Mateen** begins his series on the 13 walled city

I gates right from the beginning

If Lahore is the heart of Pakistan, the walled city is the heart of Lahore. Well-known for its thirteen gates which still retain their old names, the city has its past covered in mist. The concrete facts, however, can be traced back to the fifth century A.D when the primordial Lahore made its first appearance somewhere behind these gates.

Malik Ayaz is believed to have given it the dignity of walled city with gates in the 11th century. The present configuration of the walled city was ordered by Akbar and completed in his time. The new city was protected by nine to ten meters high wall punctured with twelve imposing gates and an open passage. There were four gates in the northern side, four in the southern side, three in the eastern side and only one in the western wall of the city. All these gates are today more symbolic than functional.

The Lahori gate or Lohari gate was named after the city of Lahore. It is said that when Malik Ayaz rebuilt the town, in the time of Mahmud Ghaznavi, the quarters of the city first populated was around this gate, which, together with the Lahori Mandi, or the Lahore mar-

ket, was named after the city. The Lahori gate and the bazaar behind it comprises the oldest arterial route in the walled city built by Akbar. In the past, travellers coming from Multan used to enter the city from this gate.

Behind Lahori gate also, once stood a brick fort called Kacho Kot, probably the first fortified city of Lahore founded by Malik Ayaz. Among the few city gates which the British cared to reconstruct, only Lahori gate retained in its original form. During the Mughal period, the two famous divisions of walled city, namely Guzar Bahar Khan and Guzar Machhi

late Maulana Mohammad Bukhsh Muslim, a religious preacher and a freedom fighter. The city was once encircled by a garden, is now almost completely covered by illegal constructions.

The gate has a huge wooden door, about 20 feet high and six inches thick, decorated with 20 horizontal brass strips over which run half as many vertical strips. The gate is hinged in a double-storey structure with a doomed roof. Two high square towers adjoin each side of the main gate porch wall.

Through the gate, one enters the main bazaar

were named by the profession or cast of the residents. Thus some of the famous streets of Lahori gate are Mohalla Qureshian, Kucha Chirri Maran, Kucha Dhobian, Sirrki Mohalla, Tabela Chaudhri Meraj Din, Phoolan Wali Gali etc. With the passage of time, most of these residential streets gradually came to be occupied by businesses like printing presses, shoe making and handicraft manufacturing units or warehouses.

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Hatta, were served by this gate. During the anarchic rule of 18th century, all the city gates, except Lahori gate and two others were walled up.

Today, the approach to the gate from the Anarkali side is lined with all sizes of shops selling eatables, flowers and floral decorations, sweets, opticals and medicines. On the right side stands the beautiful high perched mosque (Muslim Masjid or Lal Masjid) stands, which was named after the

which starts from Lahori gate onward up a gentle slope, having beautiful three and four storey old buildings. Though some of them are in need of urgent repair work, their architectural beauty shows in the beautiful balconies or *gharokas* and the wooden work. Underneath these buildings, rows of shops extend on both sides of the narrow street providing commodities, mostly eatable and household things of all sorts.

In the olden days, streets

places came here to light candles and oil lamps on the shrine of Jhanda. This spot is one of the busiest bazaar in the area after main Lahori bazaar, Sooter Mandi, which once used to be the city's cotton yarn market. Said Mitha is another famous bazaar inside Lahori gate.

Not to forget food, the Lahorites old and young are so fond of. Lahori gate has its fair share of specialties in Haji Nihari House and Baba Bong Wala, Butt Baqar Khani and Khatai Wala. ♦