

Lahore Fort — the treasure lost

Lahore
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The Lahore Fort is a monument of the Mughal Period. The Fort as we see now, was the work of Emperor Akbar, continued by Jehangir and completed by Shah Jahan. In the following paragraphs an account is given of the existing buildings, even though in a ruined condition for the information of the readers and the visitors of the fort.

Lahore Fort Museum and Sikh Art Gallery

The Lahore Fort Museum has a collection of oil paintings, water colours, photographs and portraits of Sikh princes. The museum was built on April 17, 1965. The opening ceremony was preformed by Dr S M Sharif, HQA. It has collection of Afghan knives and shields, Mughal type swords, matchlocks, helmets, shots, percussion-lock pistols, European swords, silk arms and armour, drums, banners, quilts and bayonets dating back to 1799 AD. Some items were removed for chemical treatment, but they never came back.

The Sikh Art Gallery is currently closed for repairs. It was established in 1961 and antiques displayed there belong to the collection of the daughter of Maharaja Daleep Singh.

Diwan-e-Aam

The Diwan-e-Aam, the Hall of Public Audience, was erected by Shah Jahan in 1628. He ordered that a hall of 40 pillars should be built in front of jharoka or balcony, on which the Emperor made his daily public appearance. The large platform on which the hall is raised, was

enclosed by a railing of red sand-stones. All travellers who witnessed the daily court of the Great Moghal referred to these railings, which separated the different classes of nobles in attendance.

After the British occupation, the building was converted into a barrack. The existing park in front of the Diwan-e-Aam was used as a football ground by military personnel after demolition of Sikh structure. With the establishment of Archaeological Department by the government of India in the late 19th century, restoration work was done and it was brought to its original shape in the first decade of early 20th century.

These days when dinners and receptions are held, the Diwan-e-Aam is used as a waiting area for the guests. It is carpeted, furnished sofas and chairs are laid and the guests are served drinks while the fireworks go on in open ground facing the podium of the edifice. It is regularly white washed.

Daulat Khana-e-Khass-o-Aam

The back portion of Diwan-e-Aam is known as Daulat Khana-e-Khass-o-Aam (Hall of Private and Public Audience) of King Akbar and includes the State Balcony. The projected balcony of white marble is supported on four brackets of red sand-stone. There are beautiful cusped marble arches in different chambers. The ground floor is practically closed to the public.

Daulat Khana-e-Jahangiri (Jahangir's Quadrangle)

This portion of the palace was built by Jehangir in 1617-

1618 AD at a cost of seven lakhs of rupees. There is a large garden inside the quadrangle with a spacious tank in the center. The numerous fountains playing in the tank greatly enliven the atmosphere of the

The palaces and buildings of the Lahore Fort are still standing inspite of cruel and crude handling with no maintenance at all. The age of this historic monument is being reduced day by day. No repairs are made and the roofs are leaking, plaster is falling and the condition of the rooms is getting from bad to worse, Sonia Zulfiqar writes about the pathetic and dilapidated condition of the fort along with peeping from different arches of the fort

quadrangle. During the British Period, the garden was turned into a badminton court and the sleeping chamber of Jehangir which is also called "Badi Khwabgah" was used as arms store. It was only after 1904 that steps had been taken to restore it.

Moti Masjid

The Moti Masjid or Pearl Mosque was erected by Emperor Jehangir 300 years ago. As the mosque is built entirely in pearly pure white marble hence it is called pearl mosque. The marble floor has 'musallas' (space for each worshipper) marked in

black lines. The court for worshippers measure 50 feet from north to south, and 33 feet from east to west.

These days before we enter the Moti Masjid we have to pass through the Makatib Khana. The other possible entry is from the site of Hamams, where presently a canteen is located. The proportions of the mosque are elegant and the building on the whole is very graceful.

'Tah Khanas' or Basement Chambers

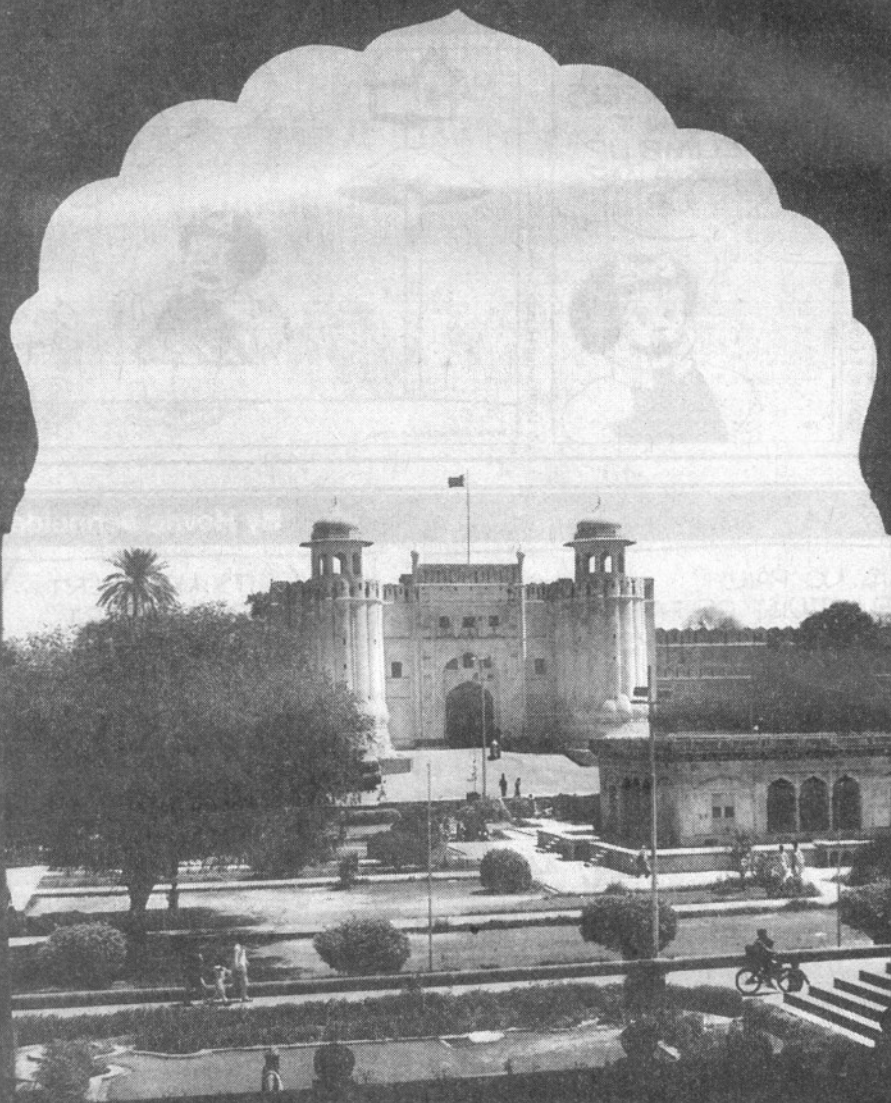
These are situated in the northern portion of the Fort. These offered a lot of space for storage and military purposes. Besides some of the basement chambers could be used as cool shelters during summers. Most of the areas are closed dark dungeon cells and barracks closed to public, being considered dangerous.

Shah Jahan's Quadrangle

These days visitors ordinarily enter Diwan-e-Khass by crossing the leveled roof of an underground chamber of Jahangir's Quadrangle dalan. There is a fountain in front of the central room towards the lawn. In the room there is also a small fountain of marble. The walls of these rooms are double and hollow from inside and at places where damaged, badly repaired.

Diwan-e-Khass (Hall of special audience)

Here the princes, ambassadors, grandees, nobles, the great Khans, Nawabs, rajas, and Maharajas prostrated themselves before the great Moghal. In the enclosure fronting the palace there is



A view of Lahore Fort—the example of a fine architectural heritage.

ruined building on arches beneath a marble pavilion. Above it is the Khawabgah of Shah Jahan, where he retired to sleep among his prostitutes. On rising he showed himself at the marble windows to the grandees, who gathered below to do him homage; they stood at distances according to their respective ranks. These days it is used for dinners to the guests by the government.

Lal Burj

The burj is in three storeys, the top most being a Sikh addition while the rest are the works of Jehangir and Shah Jahan. The building now gives a haunted look due to ill maintenance by the administration.

Hamam-e-Shahi (Royal Bath)

Built by Shah Jahan in 1633 AD, is almost in ruins now. It

was on Turkish Bath style comprising three stages; Jama Khana (dressing room), Neem Gram (warm bath), and Gram (hot bath). The heating arrangements were on the western end where also lies the Baitul Khala (toilet).

Khilwat Khana

Built by Shah Jahan in 1633 AD it is also called Ghusal Khana.

Paien Bagh

A small garden with beautiful walkways, the chief characteristic of such a garden is a provision of the paved paths for the morning and evening walks of the prostitutes.

Kala Burj

This tower occupies the north-west corner of Khilafat Khana. It is in a rotten shape and needs some sort of maintenance.

Sheesh Mahal or Shah Burj

This majestic palace was built by Shah Jahan in 1631 AD. It was the residence of the emperor when he stayed at Lahore. Situated in the extreme north-west corner of the fort, the Sheesh Mahal (palace of mirrors) is one of the most profusely decorated palaces of the Mughal period. It was the favourite residence of successive Muslim viceroys of Lahore.

Naulakha Pavilion or Bungla

Lying within Sheesh Mahal and popularly called Naulakha is a dainty little marble pavilion. Its general outer appearance is after the shape of a royal tent.

Athdara

It is an open pavilion dating from the reign of Ranjit Singh and was used by him as a kachari or court of justice.

Hathi Paer (Elephant Path)

It was built by Shah Jahan in 1631. It is a stair case with low and broad steps, 216 feet in length and 18'-8" in width. This path was meant for elephants carrying the royalty from and to the palace. It was remarked that the Hathi Pole Gate was also used by the prostitutes for their movement.

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