

Lahore has always been a land of superlatives. It is Pakistan's one of the most prosperous cities; home to universities and colleges, spiritual centers like shrine of Data Gang Bakhsh and historic, cultural, commercial and political center. Modern history of the country began from here. It has been a land of plenty since centuries.

I first became familiar with this magical city during the 70s when I landed here for the first time and stayed in Royal Artillery Bazaar (commonly known as RA Bazaar) in cantonment area for seven years in connection with my job.

After wandering about in different parts of the country, in June last year when the Lahorites were busy waiting for the (sawan) monsoon season, I came here once again to live. I was single during my first stay. This time I had with me my wife, school and college going children. Daunting challenges of moving to a new place like finding employment, accommodation, living conditions and schooling for children apart, Lahore with its cosmopolitan life style has welcomed me. Though, I could not recognize the once very friendly and familiar city.

The city has grown upward and expanded in all directions so much in last few years, but without any futuristic civic planning or heaving any single authority to look after the affairs of exponential growth. Even the Gora Qabristan that used to be the end of city, has been sandwiched by high rises.

As a whole, beautiful, elegant and aristocratic city of

the past is little more than a sprawling and ugly slum these days. Today, there are two Lahores. One is the city of inordinate beauty; imposing architecture, world class museum, monuments (Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens on the world heritage list of UNESCO) and cultural identities and traditions. The other Lahore is citadel of homeless, bad-governance,

All old cities are monuments. Athens, Rome, Bangkok, Lisbon and Calcutta stand as symbols of their unique civilizations. What then makes of Lahore, that transcendentally idiosyncratic accretion of rickshaws, art deco architecture, pulp fiction legends and skyscrapers soaring out of control in the center of Pakistan? Syed A Javed opines that Lahore must be taken care of in a proper manner

pollution, power outages and water shortages. A tourist travelling on the Mall, Jail Road or along the Canal Bank gets a very imperfect and incomplete picture of Lahore because of

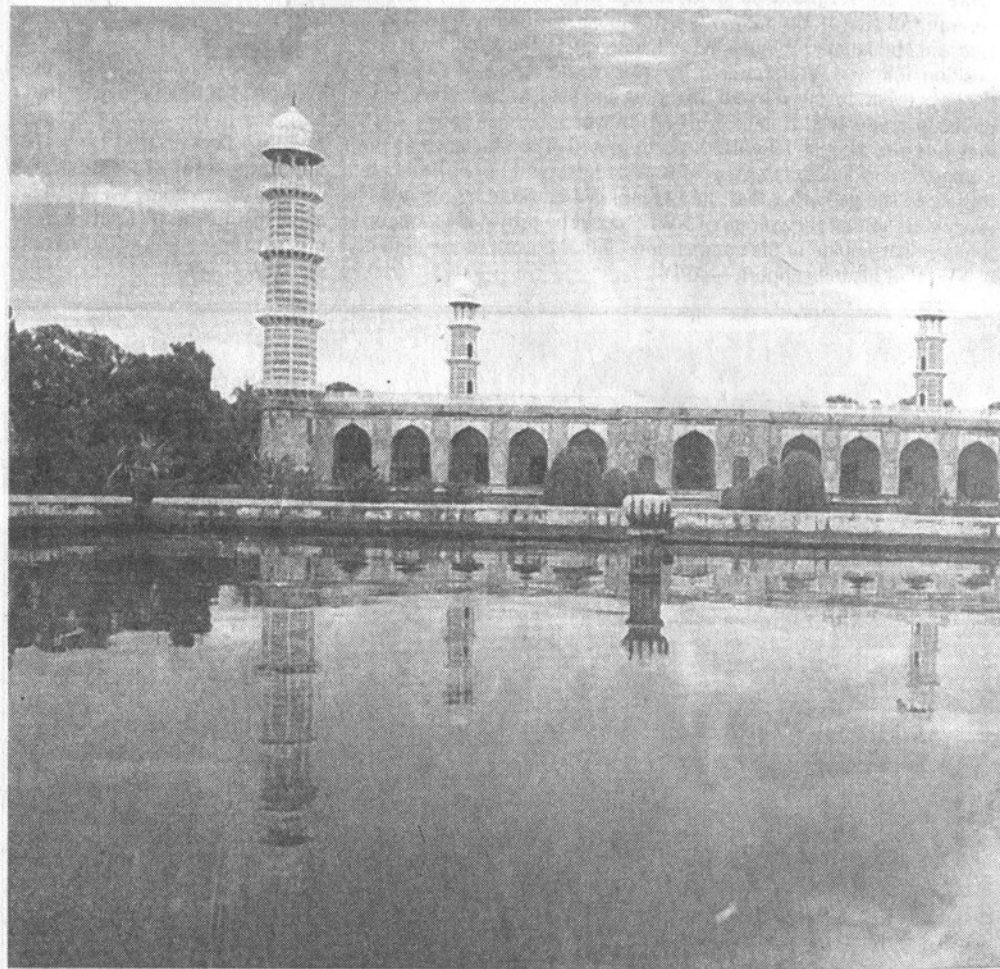
the wide gaps between different classes.

In about last 30 years, whenever I was in this dream city, I had little time for exploring it. This time I have come along with my family to live here and I have plenty of time and ample opportunities to delve into its myths and mysteries.

In Lahore I have spent enlightening few weeks wandering through highways, byways and also in narrow streets to relieve my memories of the past. But no matter how hard I tried, not to notice the filth, pollution and terrifying congestion of the streets of Lahore, I failed. Noise has become the most unbearable thing every where in the city, which the tourists used to find magical.

Once you spend resources meant for larger part of the country in haste in one city, you always repent later. Even in the new schemes that have sprang up like wild growth all around the city, there is no clear demarcation between residential and commercial areas. I have seen wheat-grinding machine in the room of a house. During my house finding turmoil, one house owner proudly defined his house saying, "We are right on the main road, the conveyance is available day and night." She did not seem to be bothered about the hazards of this 'merit' of her house.

Lahore — Welcome to a noisy

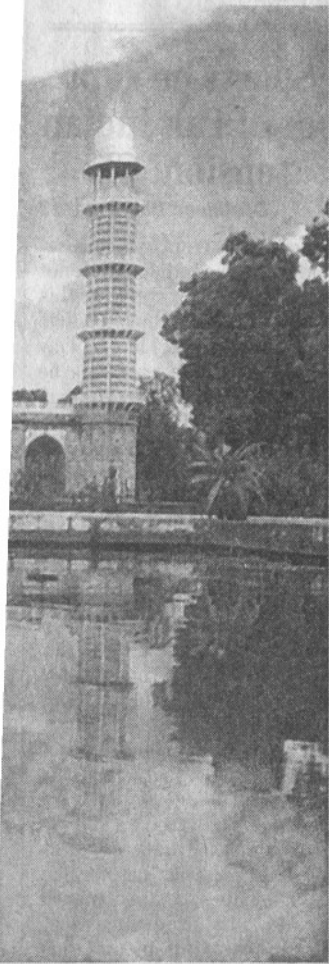


In the process of development, Lahore has become one of the noisiest cities of the world. Dr Kamran Mashhadi says, the noise causes deafness, tension, and blood

pressure and aggravates many other diseases. But it is so gradual that people do not feel those effects. Besides those coming to Lahore from outside, there are over 620,000

registered vehicles running on the city roads. Air flights (211 per week) and rail traffic passing through the city as well as unchecked industrial concerns inside residential

city



areas in Lahore together produce noise beyond the tolerance limits of human being.

There is no specific law against noise pollution in our

country, through motor vehicles ordinances 1965 and 1969 in directly put some checks on the noise producing traffic. But who bothers about such impotent laws? And, people are not even aware of what noise pollution is doing to them. A house wife Irshad Sheikh living on the bank of an open sewerage drain and busy College Road in Township says: "We are used to the traffic noise and it does not bother us at all. This noise is a sign of life."

And where are those noisy environmentalists? Who instead of making domes days prophecies about El Nino phenomenon and depletion of ozone layer around our planet, not try to save Lahore and its people. Huge sums have been collected for Venice and spent on preventing the city from sinking and on preserving its unique beauty. Why not something similar can be done to make Lahore more lovely and livable?

All cities are monuments. Athens, Rome, Bangkok, Lisbon and Calcutta stand as symbols of their unique civilizations. What then makes of Lahore, that transcendently idiosyncratic accretion of rickshaws, art deco architecture, pulp fiction legends and skyscrapers soaring out of control in the center of Pakistan? With 1500 years of recorded history layers of the past compressed tightly, may the city of academicians, writers, politicians, journalists, actors and other who made significant contribution to our society someday become ultimate 21st century city, if not Paris of the East.