

Jilani and Lahore's parks

Parks and the Complexes are a living testimony of his vision and far-sightedness, BRIG (RETD) YASUB ALI DOGAR writes in memory of Gen Ghulam Gilani, former Governor of the Punjab

Lt Gen Ghulam Jilani died in June 1999 after a protracted illness. He was Governor of the Punjab from early 1980 to the end of 1985. His contributions in the field of administration and good governance are well-known. The communication infrastructure almost doubled in his tenure, as did rural electrification etc. However, I will confine myself to his efforts for 'greening' of the metropolitan city of Lahore.

Probably he had acquired his love of green and open spaces from his childhood, mostly spent in beautiful, sub-mountain hills and forest covered tracts of Dehra Dun. So he tried to create similar places of beauty, charm and ecologically friendly environment wherever he could. Whatever open or wasted spaces he saw he had converted into parks or tree-shaded areas.

I was commanding a piffer battalion on Lahore borders in 1980 when he drove in along with Brig (Retd) Qayyum who had been my CO in the Guides Infantry (FF). Over a cup of tea in our field mess I told him about the neglected woodland around Jallo. He asked me to take him around that place. We went in my rickety old World War jeep on the *katcha* track that existed along the Lahore Canal. The visit to the Jallo Reserve Forest was enough to charge him with ideas on its improvement. This, not only changed the fate of Jallo Park, but also gave the public their first safari and open air park.

Gulshan-e-Iqbal was the next to draw his attention. After his endless visits the people got a beautiful park in that part of Lahore. Though the joyland and other such facilities have taken some of

the green spaces and over-commercialized it, yet it remains an ideal place for a family to relax and enjoy. The Race-Course Park and the Children's Complex are a living testimony of his vision and far-sightedness. The senior government officials had wanted these to be converted into housing estates or a five star hotel.

The biannual rituals of ceremonially planting trees at the Governor's House or other such places gave way to public participation on a mass scale. In Aug 1982, instead of planting a tree ceremonially, he directed all ministers, secretaries, councillors and other officers in Lahore to join him in planting trees at the Lahore Park on Raiwind Road. Hundred of trees were planted. Another Jallo was in the offing on the southwestern edge of Lahore.

The Ravi Park astride the old Ravi bridge was a neglected reserve forest. Its fate changed after a similar tree plantation session. The old city and western Lahore now have a place of



Race-Course Park

recreation and contemplating the beauties of nature. Along with the park, efforts for restoration of Kamran's Baradari were also undertaken. To the north of Lahore the Reserve Forest again saw its fortune being changed. This would have provided an outlet to the north of Lahore for the densely populated areas of Misri Shah, Shadbagh and Mahmudbooti. Similarly other works like the Model Town Park, Mianmir Park etc. started by him were to be completed later by the then Chief

Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Had he stayed long enough, we would have seen a continuous long green belt from Ravi bridge upto BRB Siphon, thereafter along BRB/LBDC canals to Jallo Park, and subsequently along Hadiara Drain to Lahore Park, Multan Road and back upto Ravi. Lahore would have been ringed with a green forested belt like some of the European cities. The Ring Road project will cater for such a green belt.

Hopfully it will be composed of native, indigenous and environmentally friendly trees rather than eucalyptus which is being grown everywhere these days, whereas farmers in Thailand have campaigned against it for upsetting the ecological balance.

Not only was he fond of nature personally but inculcated this spirit among those near him too. I had joined his staff as Military Secretary in July 1982. It was because of him that I became a lover of nature, fond of wild life and

mindful of the fast disappearing natural habitat and the approaching environmental catastrophe. I remember him asking me to plant lots of pine trees in the Governor's House because they emit Ozone (O3). In the early eighties only the ecological experts were mindful of Ozone depletion problems and ecological imbalance likely to be created. It was his way of compensating nature for the damage being caused by mankind. He inducted a professional as Secretary Forest for their upgradation. The Wildlife Dept was re-organised under another professional Aziz Aslam Khan. As a friend, patron and enthusiast of WWF he would be long remembered.

I remember the pressure exerted on him when he had ordered the removal of nurseries along the canal bank. Quite a few of the owners were from the President's *biradari*. Today we have one of most beautiful water front in Asia. Along The Mall lots of green parks and lawns were opened to view once their brick walls were knocked out and substituted by iron grills. One now does not have the feeling of passing through a tunnel.

During this period many eminent personalities contributed with their ideas and imagination. However, I would like to particularly mention Mr Waliullah Khan, the famous archeologist who was an authority not only on historical buildings but also on historical gardens of Lahore. It was mainly because of his plea being implemented that one sees a green belt around the old city walls.

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