

Vanished garden and gory tales

Lahore
Nation 3.5

While crossing the Ravi on one's way out of Lahore by the Grand Trunk Road one sees an attractive structure on a sandbar in the middle of the river. The edifice made of brick and mortar used to stand on the right bank of the Ravi some three decades ago, today the sandbank is surrounded by the river, rather two measly channels of what is left of it. The Ravi having moved and dried over the years. The structure is simple but has always attracted many an artist to paint it from all possible angles and points of view. Two more structures exist within a few kilometres of this one having closely similar plans, though, built decades later. Albeit, the scale of at least one, is quite different. The tombs of Jehangir and Noorjehan, both have a square plan bearing a fair degree of resemblance to that of the edifice which is popularly known as the Baradari of Kamran.

All three sites were gardens of early Moghul days, for, the Moghuls loved gardens. Jehangir is resting in 'Dilameez', the garden of his favourite consort. The Baradari of Mirza Kamran was surrounded by another, again, one of the earliest ones known to have been laid out by the nature-loving progeny of Babur. Perhaps, it reminded them of their origins. The layout is said to have been wonderful, between the Baradari and the city the branches of the Ravi used to flow, giving the area the look of paradise. Things were like that till the branches took the shape of dirty drains carrying sewage.

Though, being places of recreation, the gardens have witnessed horrible scenes too. One such hair raising event has been recorded by Jehangir himself in his 'Tuzuk'. The act seems to have taken place in the garden of Mirza Kamran. (The exact location seems to be disputed).

Nearly six months after Jehangir had ascended the throne, Khusrow, his eldest son, rebelled against him. Khusrow happened to have harboured ideas which were not approved by his

SAJID ABBAS visits a four hundred and fifty year old spot, once a beautiful garden, perhaps one of the first ones of this city, now not so neat and on the besmirched edge of this charming city

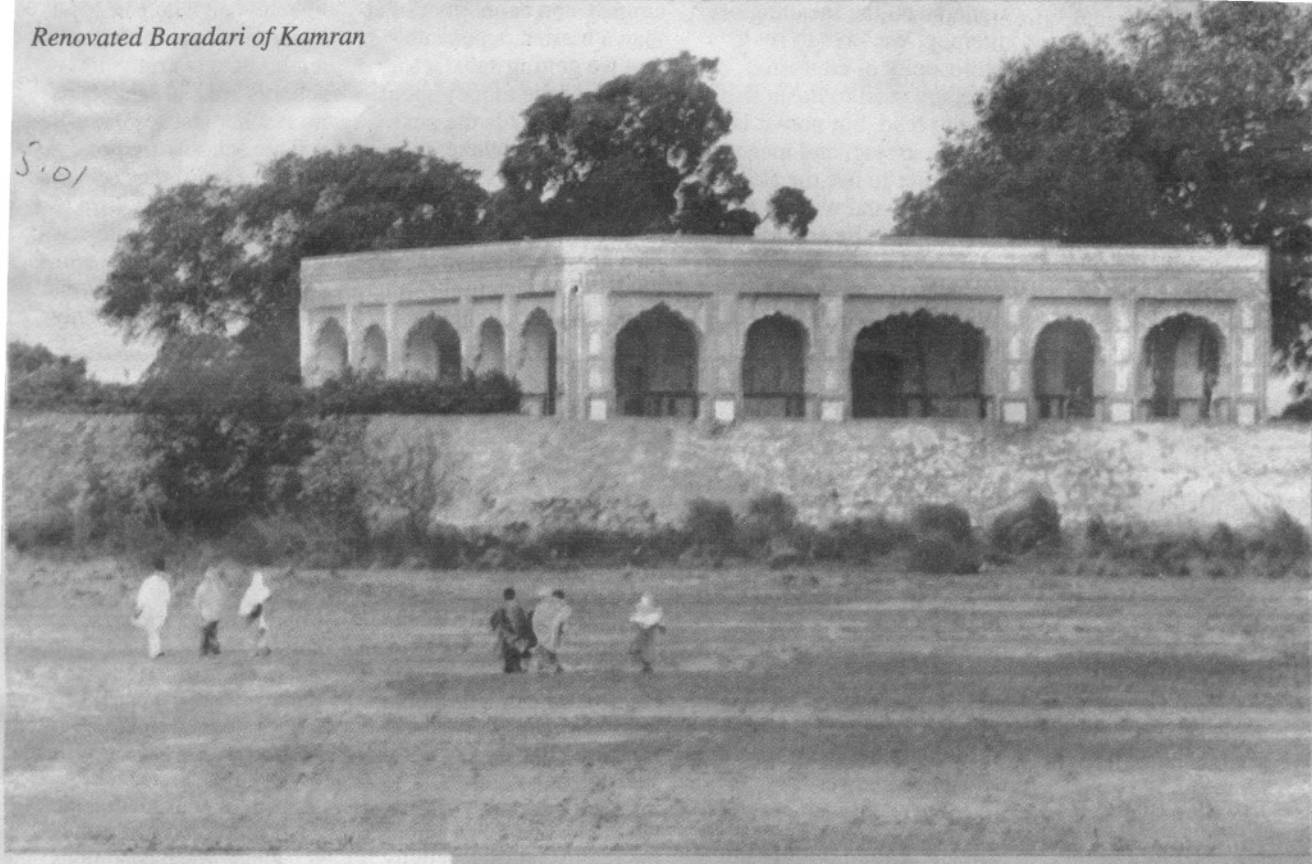


Dry bed of the Ravi-Baradari in the background

father. For the sake of security he was put under surveillance and was not allowed to leave Agra. On the night of 16th April, 1606, Khusrow, with the connivance of Sultan Shah Afghan, left Agra for Lahore along with a number of horsemen. Jehangir acted promptly on hearing Khusrow's escape and mounted a pursuit. While proceeding northwards, the young prince ran into Hussain Beg Badakhshi, subverted him into joining him in revolt and gave him the command of the Badakhshi Aimaqs. Readers might be interested to know that the Aimaqs were a sub-tribe of the Moghuls who lived and moved together and never separated without the permission of their chief. When the Aimaqs assembled to fight the enemy, the assemblage was called an 'orda'. The English word 'horde' is, perhaps an anglicised transliteration of this word.

Returning to our narrative, Khusrow and his Aimaqs continued their trek to the Punjab with Jehangir and the Royal troops following in pursuit. One of Jehangir's courtiers managed, by rapid marches, to reach Lahore in time to warn the garrison in the Fort and make the city secure. Khusrow arrived two days later and laid siege to the city.

Nevertheless, Khusrow and his band of men could not triumph despite burning a gate down and offering to allow the rebel troops to plunder the city for seven days, as an incentive, and to carry the females away once they break into and occupy the capital. The garrison in Lahore held out and succeeded in denying the attackers entry by replacing the burnt gate and building barricades. Then came news that more troops were converging upon Lahore from the south. Khusrow decided to meet the forces



from Delhi half way between Amritsar and Jalandhar but lost the battle. In the action Khusrow lost about four hundred Aimaqs and a number of Badakhshi horsemen.

Khusrow lost heart and made for the Chenab in search of safety by crossing it, but, before he could reach the river he was met again by the men of Sheikh Farid and a second action took place. Khusrow's boxes of treasure and jewels fell into the hands of the Royal supporters. Khusrow, his troops decimated, escaped to Sodhra but could not cross the river, for, the boatmen had made themselves scarce, taking the oars along. The Prince and whatever remained of his men were rounded up.

Jehangir was camping in the garden of Mirza Kamran on May 10, 1606 when news was brought to him that the rebellion had been crushed and Khusrow made captive. Soon the leaders of the rebellion were brought before him. Khusrow in chains, dangling on his left side in accordance with the ancient custom of the Moghuls, from the days of Chingez Khan. He was flanked by Hussain Beg and Abdur Rahim his erstwhile cohorts.

Hussain Beg and Abdur Rahim were

'stitched up' in freshly dressed skins of an ox and a donkey and taken on a round of the city, perched on asses with their faces to their tails, for every body in the city to see. The hot weather of May helped dry the skins of the animals. As the skins dried and shrank, the culprits inside were squeezed,

slowly but certainly, till they could breath no longer. It is said that it took Hussain Beg more than six hours to finally meet his Maker.

Other rebels and those who helped the defiant prince, too, were punished. Sultan Shah Afghan, who had helped Khusrow escape from Agra, when apprehended was made to stand in the 'parade ground' as a

target for arrows of the sharp shooters. For the seditious Aimaqs and others, wooden poles were set up from the garden to the city, on which they were impaled to die a slow but sure death. It is said that more than seven hundred hapless victims were spiked.

It is said that Guru Arjan, too, who had helped the prince, was punished with death, but, here one comes across a discrepancy, for, Guru Arjan vanished while taking a bath, — his last one, — in the Ravi. He was tortured by Diwan Chandu, a Hindu, for refusing the Diwan to letting him marry his daughter to the Guru's son. ■

The Baradari, no longer surrounded by a garden

