

An edifice bequeathed by a *haka*

Lahore, like all other well-known and ancient cities of the world, was not built in a day. It was built, destroyed by raiders, then rebuilt, destroyed again and then rebuilt again, the process repeating a number of times during long periods that spread over many centuries. When things settled, to some extent at last, most of the rulers contributed their bit to build the City and improve its looks and amenities. Citizens, especially the elite, were encouraged to construct beautiful edifices not only for their residence or to enhance the beauty of the place, alone, but to provide more and more places for the benefit of the public.

One can still find such places (or their ruins) which speak of the grand old times and the glory they must have brought to this city. There is the palace built originally by Asif Jah, the father-in-law of Shahjehan and his viceroy in Lahore, some three and a half centuries ago. The place happens to be the largest mansion of the city outside the Citadel, occupying an area of some ten thousand square metres.

The *haveli* has seen many ups and downs over the centuries and has even been used for such fearful purposes as extraction of confessions of misdeeds by the lawbreakers. Today the place is in use for a very noble purpose. It is a college (and a fine one, too,) for the benefit of the girls and young ladies of the City and elsewhere. A very large number of young girls are on the rolls, reading divers subjects in various disciplines, such as the Sciences, Humanities and even learning Fine Arts. Readers would find it interesting to note that there is a Department of French, too, teaching the French Language to the under-graduates of the (conservative) city !. The department is, perhaps, the only one for girls, other than the one at the Kinnaird College.

There is another elegant *haveli* in the city reminding one of the glorious days of yore, besides, the intrigue and plotting that went round, though it was not built for the later purpose. The last regal occupant of the *haveli* was the young Nao Nihal Singh, the grandson of the Lion of the Punjab, Ranjeet Singh. Nao

SAJID ABBAS visits a spot in the busiest bazaar of Lahore, an attraction and worth a visit by tourists strolling in the walled ci



Interior of Wazir Khan's Hammam

Nihal Singh, was in a way, unfortunate to miss his coronation, for, instead of a crown (or be-jewelled *Pugree*) being placed on his head, he received a heavy stone or brick, hastening his despatch to the other world, just a few moments after he had put a light to the pyre of his father, Kharak Singh, who had died in the night before.

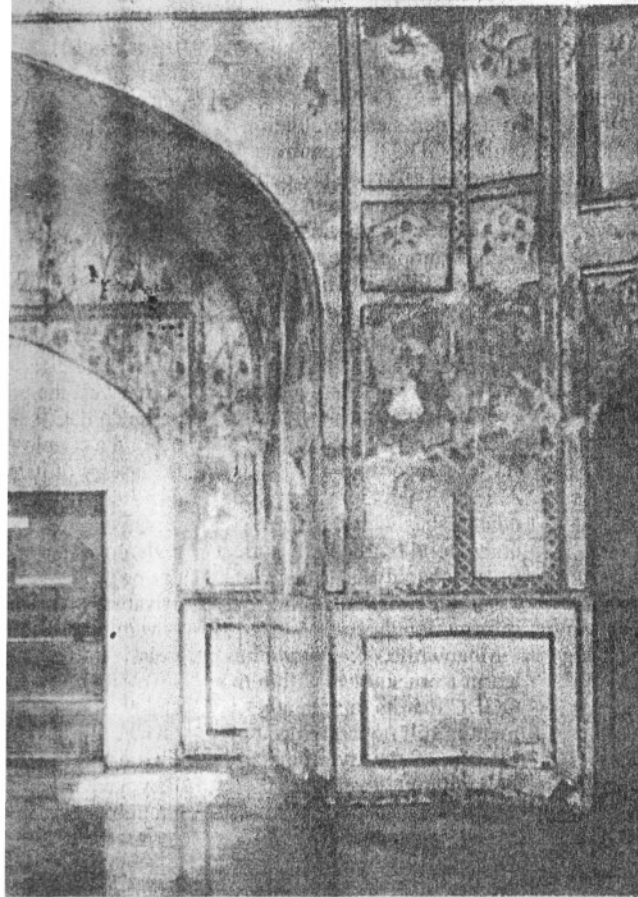
The mansion, still called the *Haveli* Nao Nihal Singh, is again, one amongst the large ones of the City and one of the tallest. In that building, a century and half ago, apart from holding bacchanalian orgies, a lot of conspiracies and plots were masterminded, including one, as it is said, the administration of corrosive

sublimate and arsenic, in controlled doses, to Kharak Singh, in order to help him hurry on his final journey, upstairs. Later, in the same mansion, even his widow, Rani Chand Kaur, was despatched to meet her Maker, albeit, in a more gruesome way. The royal brains are said to have been bashed out by the Rani's slave girls, on the wheedling and beguiling of the intriguers who wanted her to quit the scene and leave them to their favourite game and machinations.

The *Haveli*, being property of the Ruling Family of Lahore, was taken over by the Government of the day, when the English occupied Lahore in 1849. Some decades later it was put to use for public

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Lahore, apparently obscure, but still a place of
walled city

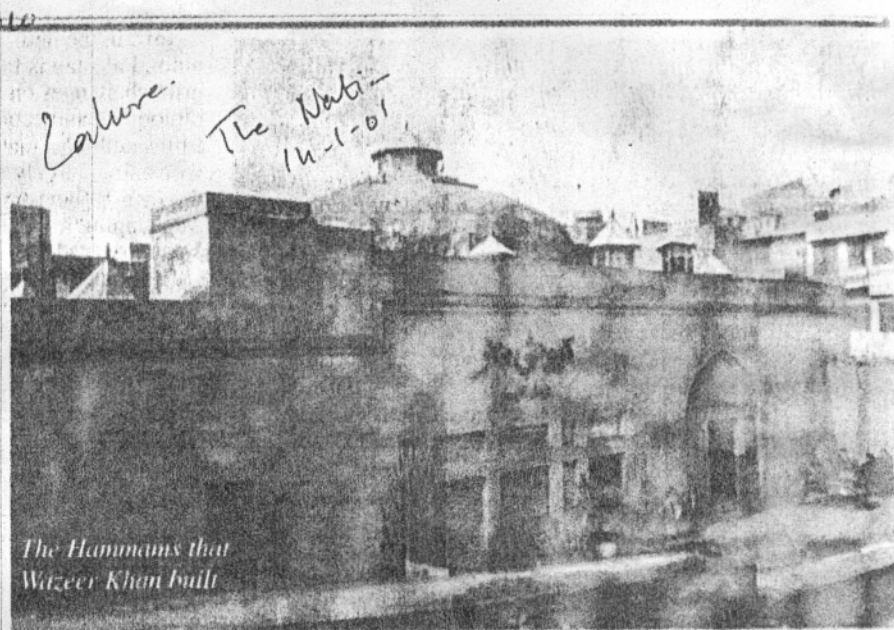


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benefit by converting it into a school for girls of the city. It still is. In recent years a college has been added to it.

Politically, culturally and commercially Lahore has always held a position of importance. It became the Capital of the Moghul Empire during the days of Akbar, when he resided here between 1585 and the end of the sixteenth century. Most of the Old City within the Walls that one sees today dates back to those days. The Fort of Lahore was built in brick and mortar by Akbar. But it was his grandson, Shahjehan, who gave it a look that was admired by all, natives and foreign visitors, alike.

In the days of Shahjehan, Lahore had



The Hammams that
Wazeer Khan built

Dilli Darwaza Bazaar: The
Hammam is on the right



expanded manifold compared to what it was in the days of Akbar. New suburbs or *guzars* had sprawled over in all directions beyond the ramparts of the city. A number of people desired to settle in or near the city in search of livelihood. The population expanded. The first place that seemed to be affected by the increase in the number of residents of the city was the Jamey Masjid of those days, that was one which is known as, Masjid Marium Zamani or Masjid Begum Shahi, today. It happens to be near the Masti Darwaaza. So, Shahjehan decreed that a new Jamey Masjid be built for the weekly congregation of the faithful. That was done under the supervision of Hakeem Ilm-ud-Din Ansari, alias Nawab Wazeer Khan, the then governor or viceroy of Lahore.

The Masjid Wazeer Khan happens to be one of the most attractive and artistic sights of the world having no duplicate

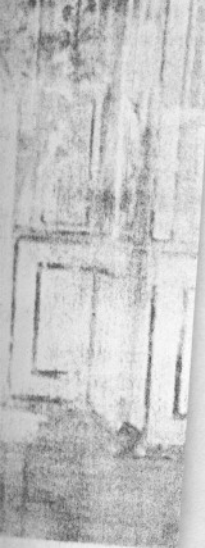
except for a structure in the Registan Square of Samarkand which resembles the portal of the main prayer chamber of the Mosque.

Nawab Wazeer Khan had become a very rich man in the days of Jehangir, Shahjehan's father. He had performed a surgical operation on the royal sole of Noorjehan, Jehangir's consort, reliving her from pain and agony. The remuneration for his services amounted to two and a quarter million rupees, in cash and kind.

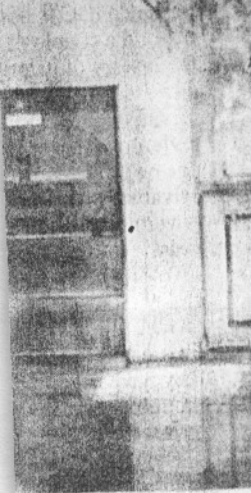
After completing the Mosque, Wazeer Khan built a whole bazaar of shops between the mosque and the Dilli Darwaaza. At the end and adjacent to the Darwaaza, is a domed structure, which can be accessed through an iron grilled gate. This structure, the Nawab built as a set of *hammams* or baths for the use of the public. It is no longer a public bath but the place has been renovated and repaired and is an information office for tourists visiting the Old City. The sign on the building, nevertheless, declares it as a community centre.

The pools in the *hammam*, have been filled up and covered by marble tiles and brick work. Till recently a portion of the structure was used as an exhibition hall by the Department of Industries to exhibit books and items of interest to tourists. The rest of the building was a vocational school for girls, who have now moved to another place in the vicinity. One wonders if such changes have made the Nawab turn in his grave.

Nevertheless, the place is now being readied for repairs and renovation. One learns that plans are afoot to dig and restore the pools as they once used to be, providing maybe, some bit of comfort to the departed soul of the Nawab. ■



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