

Around the

SAJID ABBAS visits a lively quarter of Lahore and recollects the chan

There is a spot, rather a fairly large area, in Lahore which remains busy, seemingly, twenty-four hours a day.

Some find the place interesting and quite a few find the life there very lively. It looks as if the inhabitants of the place are, apparently, so busy that they do not have time to sleep. But otherwise, people are quite normal out there, only that they have their own routines.

There is a time when those people too close their business. In a certain part of that place business is closed, surprisingly, for a whole month. The premises are, literally, turned inside out and given a thorough cleaning, even a white-wash. The furniture gets a fresh coat of paint. That happens once a year during Ramadan, for the premises are the restaurants and eateries, scattered all over the area, serving lunches and dinners to a hungry wave of visitors at all odd hours of the day (and night).

That is a part of Lahore around Abbott Road where it meets the McLeod Road, where one can find a concentration of restaurants, which abound the place by the dozen, some ordinary, some known for their speciality. The place has no special name and is known as just Abbott Road or Luxmi or sometimes even as Royal Park. These are the neighbourhoods where one finds oneself, apart from restaurants, amongst people of the film business and the printers trade. Here one will find motion picture makers and distributors, poster makers and banner writers, film publicity painters, printers, typesetters and others connected with the printing trade. Put together, the place is a part of a sort of the entertainment district of the city. Sort of, for, standards here are quite different to what one may find in Europe or Japan or other civilised part of the world. Entertainment in Pakistan



means something quite different. It could be a visit to a cinema show and a meal in a restaurant. That's about all. Limits of entertainment here do not reach anywhere near what they have in other countries.

Abbott Road is where most of the cinema houses are located. One comes across a variety of people around these cinema houses. Some are interested in viewing the movie that is on. Others, such as the riff raff who have all the time in the world, are seen loitering about the place, peering at the film publicity stills or lost in gazing at the bigger than life painting of their favourite film star. Practically, all the film distributors of Lahore have their offices there as do the film producers. Once these offices were frequented quite often by fellows who had the ambition to become a film-star but the

majority were not that fortunate.

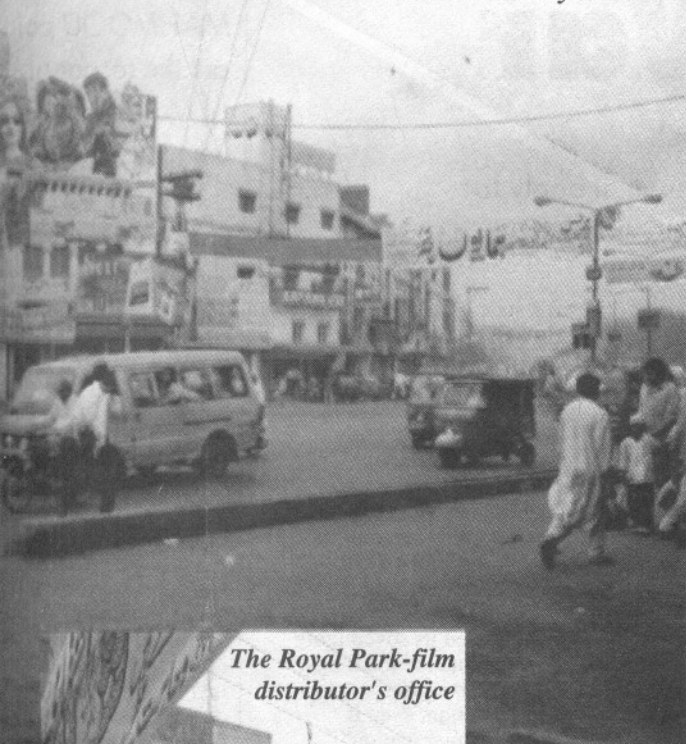
Many, many decades ago, the place was a sleepy quarter of the expanding City, sparsely populated. There were just a few bungalows, belonging to rich and affluent, mostly Hindus, each bungalow occupying a small corner or part of a very large plot of land. Further away there were the cinema houses, a large printing press, a very big and well-known publishing house, some hotels



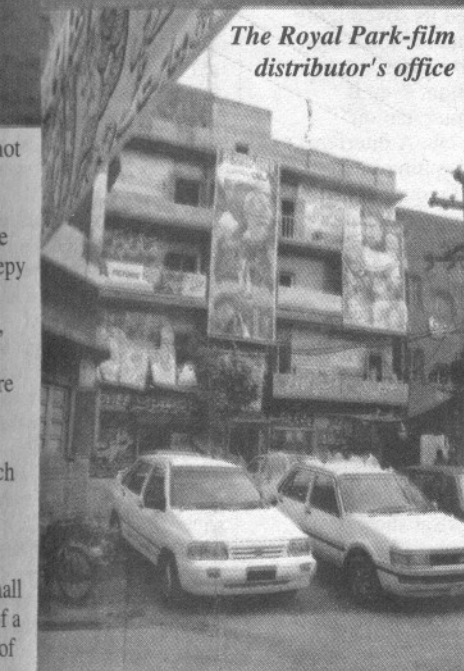
the royal park

and recollects the changes that have taken place there over the years

Outside the Royal Park



The Royal Park-film distributor's office



cinema houses, a large
very big and well-
ing house, some hotels

nor was or is there anything royal about it. It was a business cum residential habitat. Shops and businesses on the street level and living quarters on the upper floors. The residents were mostly Hindus and Sikhs.

The Royal Park was occupied by owners of small presses, who set up their machines on the ground floor at street level, while they occupied the

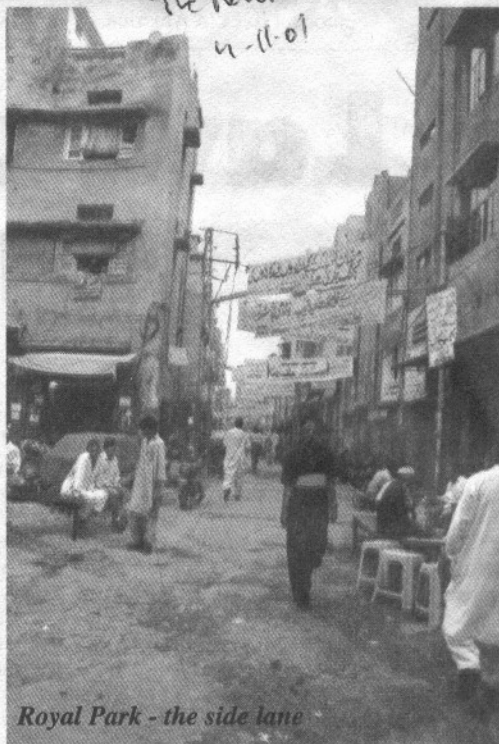
upper floors for living. These small presses did most of the small printing jobs passed on by the bigger ones for whom it was uneconomical to handle small items but could not refuse their regular customers. The arrangement was fine and made everybody happy, for, the customer got his job done, apparently by his usual printer, the big printer continued to have the account of his regular client and the small press owner got the job.

Most of the Cinema houses were located on a stretch of McLeod Road close to this area, so were the offices of the film distributors. The distributors used to have most of their publicity material printed and found it convenient to have the printing of their posters and other material done by the big and small presses situated next doors. Gradually, other printing help, such as the artists writing poster moved in close to the litho printers consequently bringing painters and

designers, too. The situation was ideal and business flourished.

Life proceeded at a happy pace till the residents of the place and the neighbouring areas, had to leave in the wake of events following Independence. The Royal Park was vacated and acquired a deserted look,

but not for long. The premises in the area were allotted to people driven out of their homes in Bharat by the Hindus and who moved to Lahore to take refuge here. After a lull of some months, things started perking up again and soon one could hear the clang of the presses once again. The place started humming with activity a second time.



Royal Park - the side lane

There came a time when the film business peaked. More cinema houses came up on the Abbott Road. The improvement in film business had a healthy effect on the trades connected with it, for, movie makers are known to be big spenders, but affluence didn't seem to last long, the Television took over entertainment in due course.

Printing and similar activity in the area, had to face, more or less, a similar situation, but here a 'technical relative' of the T. V. came to the rescue and saved the situation to a large extent. The computer, possessing so many advantages provided the composer or type setter unlimited possibilities, making his job easy. The printer can now do a neat job at a faster pace. The computer seems to have changed the pace of life in the Royal Park which seemed to be on the slide after the slump being faced in the film business. ■