

Time to let Lahore's greenery grow

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By Majid Sheikh

IN THE lazy winter afternoon sun, lying just next to the white side screen of the Lahore Gymkhana cricket ground, in white cricketing flannels a young lad is thrashing Javed Zaman all over the place. The veteran spinner time and again nips a fast one past the flashing blade of the young buck. My youth comes running back in torrents.

Over 40 years ago, I came to watch the West Indies play Pakistan at this ground, and Rohan Kanhai played havoc. My father played havoc with me after being informed that I had eaten *pathooras* on the sly. I was still in school and I remember Wes Hall running in all the way from the boundary edge to bowl his thunderbolts. His huge hands

wrapped round the "little" red cherry and his huge fingers made the ball do things we had never seen. On this very ground last Sunday, it was a liberating experience. Finally in life I am able to do the things I have craved to do, unrestricted by the ways of the world.

My father used to bring me here and ask me to sit on the wooden bench and try to count the number of shades of green in the huge trees that ring the magnificent cricket ground, probably the finest in Pakistan. He used to say it resembled the Worcester cricket ground, where he and his friend John Arlott, who had joined the BBC on the same day and shared a room in London, used to comment on cricket matches. So by default I attach a romance to this ground, its greenery and its excellent pavilion.

Many years ago, I happened to

visit Worcester and it struck me as having a touch of Lahore. Last Sunday made me realize that though there is a lot wrong with the way our city is being handled, like crudely commercializing Model Town destroying in its wake the world's finest 'model' town, there are still spots where the finest of old Lahore still exist. They need to be preserved. Our friend Kamran Lashari once organized a 'mela' on the ground. Swimmers are known to have done stranger things. But trying to destroy the finest pitch in the country is no laughing matter. But I enjoyed Javed Zaman being hit around just because he brought the game into disrepute by not protesting when Nawaz Sharif barred Lahoris from enjoying their favourite sport.

But there is much more to the Lahore Gymkhana Cricket Ground than meets the eye. This is the spot, or nearby, where the club sandwich was said to have been invented. A

scholar in India disputes this claim and gives the origin of the sandwich as being either in the camps outside Delhi in the siege of 1857, or perhaps earlier in the military camps at Kolkata. But several sources, including Capt Hodson of Hodson's Horse, refer to Lahore as the place where the first 'fast food' was being created because of the critical military situation. The story goes that just outside the military encampment that is now the Governor's House, British soldiers in 1857 were riding in and out of Lahore, which had become the military nerve centre of the British occupation forces. The Sikhs and several Muslim Punjabis were siding with them, and so they managed to keep their forces intact, and, ultimately, beat the natives and take over the land.

A huge military canteen was established in the spaces that today constitute the Bagh-i-Jinnah, originally called Lawrence Gardens. One is all

for calling it by its original name. Here the hungry cavalry horsemen would ask for a quick, but filling snack, and wrapped in huge military bread slices were boiled eggs, cheese, tomatoes and cucumbers, laced with lots of butter. This was a complete meal, as the records of the East India Company were to tell us much later. The snack was always "fresh, juicy and yet crispy." Two slices did little to damage the hunger of the horseman out of the dusty Punjab plains. Three of the best did the trick.

The joke was that the snack was from the Piccadilly Club, and so the club sandwich was born, or so the legend goes. A few years later, the Lahore Gymkhana building, now the Jinnah Library, was built near this spot, and a befitting cricket ground laid to remind the Raj of what was the best the British had to offer. The grass was spotless, the pavilion an exact copy of the one at Worcester,

all plant in the garden. They sought the
of assistance of the Government
College, Lahore, which established
ch its Botanical Gardens there, thanks
ng to a lot of help from scholars at
his Cambridge. But our bureaucrats
en, have done their overkill job to
ve please the powers that be. They have
tr tried to fit in a small concrete
d Shalimar there. Imagine that! Our
ne bureaucrats love concrete structures
as instead of patiently letting nature
et take its own unique and beautiful
n- course. If that was not enough, we
or organize 'melas' there to destroy the
t- trees and grass that is so pleasing to
e the eye.

g May be a time has come to return
s to the spirit of the Lawrence Gardens.
y There is a need to revive the
e Botanical Gardens of Government
e College, Lahore, and to make sure
l every silly concrete structure is
l demolished to make way for the
1 finest garden left inside the ever
growing city of Lahore.