



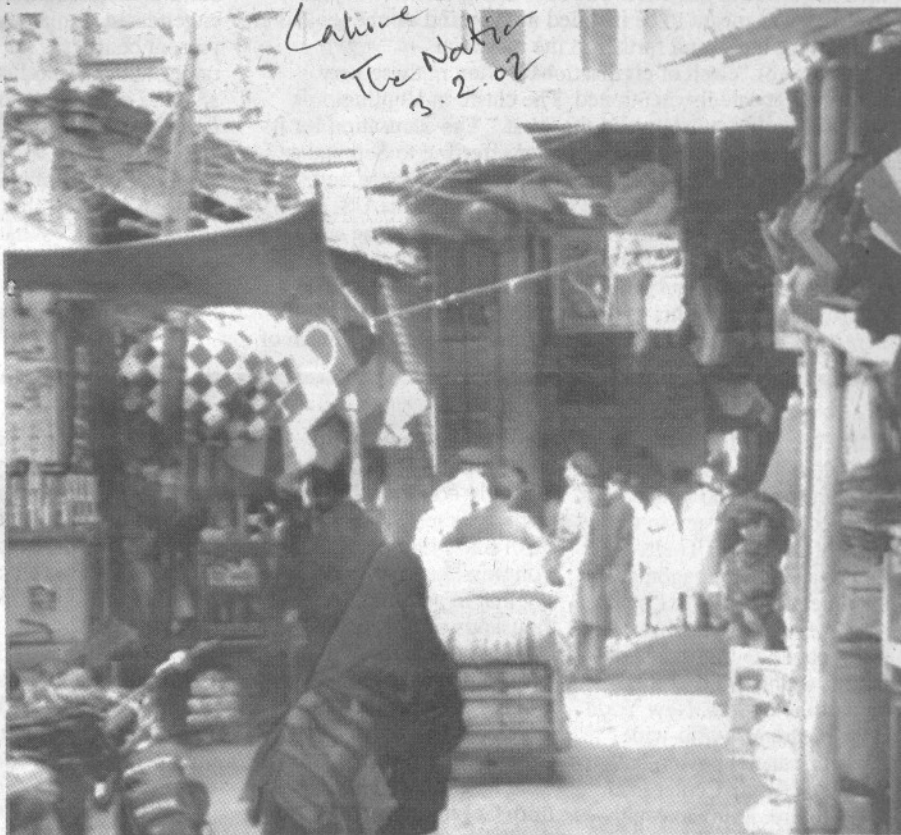
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SAJID ABBAS walks through an old quarter of the walled city of Lahore

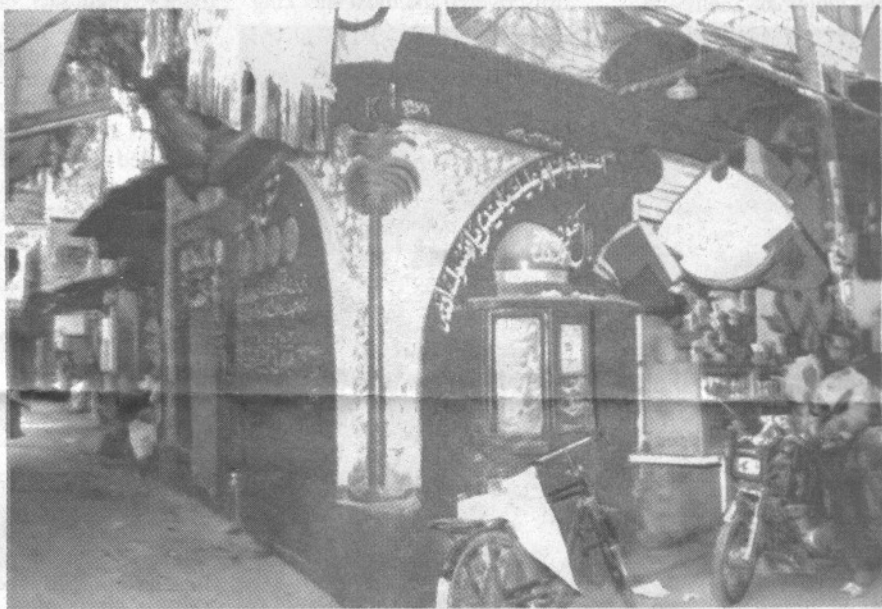
There was a time when the Mochee Darwaaza, the easternmost entrance of the old city in the southern part of the wall, was (mis)taken for an abode of the unruly, a home of roughnecks called Ghundaas of Lahore. Every body living in the Mochee Darwaaza precinct was taken to be, albeit quite erroneously, a bully, ruffian or hooligan. The wrong notion was further reinforced when one entered the precinct. One had to pass by the Police Station and Lines on both sides of the street and getting the impression that the place was under some sort of permanent surveillance. Even today the first thing that one sees is not one, but two police stations, one of the Mochee Darwaaza precinct and the other of Rangmahal. Nevertheless, one should not be that surprised, for, it has been a normal practice since ages to locate a police station next to the Darwaazas of the City.

Nonetheless, there were some residents of the Mochee Darwaaza who are remembered, by old timers, for their exploits. Those were elements of the local mafia who went about, more or less, in the same way as any other member of the brotherhood of crooks or racketeers would behave in the cities of Europe or the United States. As an example, the old timers used to say, a group specialised in petty larceny or picking pockets. They usually operated around the Railway Station, bus terminals or crowded shopping areas, such as the Anarkali Bazaar. Another group was that of comparatively 'senior' lawbreakers who had graduated from being small time felons to bigger operators doing something in line with their 'higher status', such as, managing gambling dens. Their job laid in skimming a part of the take of the den as commission of the 'Boss', or the joint's 'contribution' to the protection money fund or pool. A third group was the body guard or force of the 'Boss' maintaining 'order' in the ranks.

But the scene has witnessed a change during the last half a century. Physically, the old police stations have made way for newer structures. The older structure had a front resembling the old Tollinton Market, a long veranda with a sloping



Kites on sale in Mochee Darwaaza



'lal Khoo' Mochee Darwaaza

tilled roof, in front of a single storied long building, now the stations are double storied affairs made of brick and mortar.

Passing the police stations one reaches a spot where the street bifurcates in two.

The one on the right leads to the Akbari Darwaaza precinct and the Masjid Wazeer Khan via the Chowk Nawab Sahib and the one on the left to Rangmahal. The former track is,

Mochee Darwaaza

Lahore, once infamous for its rough residents, but now a really merry place



however, much more colourful.

The entrance to the street to Akbari is marked by a tiny mosque on one's left, (infact there are two, the other one being just twelve paces away across the street to Rangmahal). The tiny mosque is the Masjid Saleh Kamboh, named after a well-known chronicler of the times of Shahjehan, author of *Amal-e-Saleh*, a history of Shahjehan's days. The mosque is embellished by unmatched tile work still intact at many places. The whole edifice seems to be out of a fairy tale, it is so small that there is no place for a pulpit in it. They have a small wooden one which is removed after the sermon and stacked in a niche in the wall. The mosque was built some three hundred fifty years ago by Saleh Kamboh for the convenience of the shopkeepers and their customers and was never meant to be a Jamey Masjid to hold a congregation on Fridays.

The bazaar around the mosque is very busy. The shops are stocked with stacks of kites of all shapes, sizes and colours. Along with the kites one can find material that goes along for flying kites, such as, balls and reels of 'dör' or glazed



Mochee Darwaaza Bazaar

string of different quality and price. One can find a number of customers crowding the place all through business hours. Customers ranging from street urchins to well dressed connoisseurs making purchases with serious concern.

Right below the small mosque is a small shop where they sell 'khataaies', biscuit like cookies made of fine flour, semolina and sugar. The bakery is, however, at some other place. Things, such as, khataaies have made Mochee Darwaaza well known all over.

Then further up there are shops selling snacks, these are not restaurants but they sell mostly things such as fried and spiced chick peas or grams, potato chips, etc., either loose or packed in convenient sized plastic bags. These shops sell, apart from fried chick peas, crisp and spiced noodles made of chick pea meal ready to munch, wafers made of rice flour and similar stuff which form the favourite tea time snacks in many a Pakistani home.

A little further, the commodity of trade changes but the atmosphere remains the same, humming with activity and friendly. Now one finds eatables of a different kind. One comes across loads and loads of 'paithhay ki mithaai' a confection made of pumpkin or in simpler words, preserved pumpkin. It is sold in the form of large lumps, the size of a masonry brick. Crispies coated with sugar, plums dipped or conserved in sugar, imli or tamarind paste, slices of mangoes dried in the sun all favourite stuff of schoolgirls. These shops sell mostly wholesale and cater for retailers

who can be found pushing their carts outside schools for girls.

Sweetmeats are something for which Lahore is well-known not only in Pakistan but all over the world where ever Pakistanis have reached or settled and Mochee Darwaaza is the place from where the best confectionery is said to originate. Here happens to be a confectionery, seven decades old, known the world over for its barfi of heavenly taste.

Incidentally the shop is in a place that has history and legend behind it. The place is Lal Khoo, an age old well, now dry and filled up. According to legend, Guru Arjun used to bathe here when he was locked up by his Hindu tormentor, who lived close by. The well was in use some decades ago. People used to draw water by a boka or a bucket wound by a jackroll. When the level of water in the city went down, the well ran dry. Somebody filled it up, built a trough and connected it to the municipal water supply. That too seems to have vanished, now.

Another legend is current, perhaps, to give the spot an aura of mystery and sanctity. One can see an oil lamp burning in a niche next to the 'khoo', that is said to be for the 'Mae' or lady who is 'heard' but not seen to appear. Her presence is announced by the sound of 'ghungroos' or dancers bells in the dead of night on certain occasions !. all this seems to add colour to the already colourful precinct.