

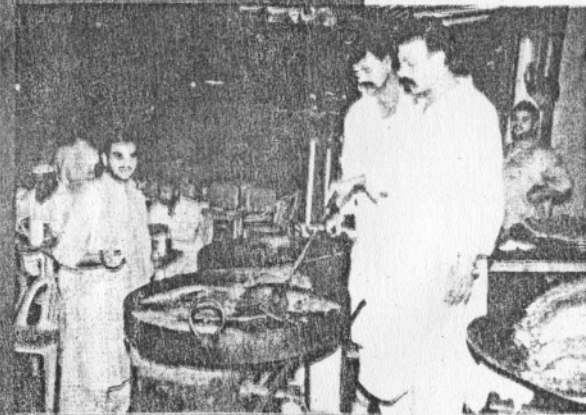
# Dolling up an old Street

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SAJID ABBAS visits a quarter that has become the most popular spot of Lahore, which imparts an impression that life with Lahorites is one big festival

**S**ince a couple of weeks, it seems to be a special time for the Lahorites. Looks like Spring is already here. Both the flora and fauna are showing signs of coming out of hibernation. Plants are coming back to life. Buds are reappearing on bare boughs of trees and bushes. The countryside is taking a more pleasant shade of colour presenting a livelier landscape. The return of Spring is marked by a noticeable change in weather, the days have become warmer but the nights remain cool, may be a bit chilly.

The expression of joy by people at the advent of spring is natural, for, their activities are regulated by the change in their environment. Since the change of season, this year, the Lahorites have had two occasions to celebrate. One in the shape of Eid-ul-Azha and the other, a few days earlier, in the form of Basant. Apart from Prayers and religious rites that go with the former, both were heralded with the usual fanfare and were a pretext for a more than a day of revelry and festivity. Everybody, friends and neighbours, young and old, participated in the rituals and festivities with the usual spirit of fun and frolic. Young ones adding colour to the festivities by putting on new garments and colourful dresses.

Saturday before last Lahorites were celebrating the Eid-ul-Azha. Nevertheless, Lahorites have their own way of celebrating festivals and enjoying events. The are fond of doing things in a grand way, activities in this connection are something of an epidemic. After the ritual sacrifice, the scene gradually turns into a grand party, for, savouring good food is the height of enjoyment of the Lahorites and other Pakistanis. So one can find them in places known for concentration of restaurants such as M. M. Alam Road, Gulberg's Main Boulevard or Old Anarkali and



similar venues.

But the most popular spot happens to be the Food Street of Gowlmandi, inaugurated not more than a couple of years ago. The place has an interesting past. It was once the milk sellers market, where they gathered early morning to sell what their herds produced. Then, in the later years, when the area was colonised by residents moving out of the crowded walled city, this area became the Harley Street of Lahore,

for, many physicians of Lahore established their consulting rooms there. Years later the street witnessed another change. Many newspapers, most of them owned by Hindus, had their offices located there, in Chamberlain Road. Now, there seems to be another transformation, the street seems to have taken the appearance of the local or Lahore version of St. Germain, the street famous for its sidewalk cafes in Paris.



A couple of years ago, Chamberlain Road, the present Food Street was a sleepy little place where people, mostly descendants of refugees from East Punjab, who had been driven out of their homes by the Hindus at the time of the Independence, lived and carried out their business. Most of the residents were of Kashmiri origin from Amritsar and were expert bakers, confectioners and restaurant or eatery owners by profession. The

place had, over the years, become known for baqar-khanees, naans, dairy products, regular dishes, fried fish, confectionery and a number of delicacies.

The business, in Chamberlain Road was, however, modest. There were just half a dozen stalls where they served steaming hot fish fried before one's eyes while one waited. There were a few traditional dairies selling the usual milk and yoghurt and of course serving falooda and the like

in summers and the conventional confectionery throughout the year. In another spot on the same street there was a tikka-wala busy at his spit serving tikkas, barbecues and even karhae gosht. The bakers could be found nearby who had tucked their ovens for baking naans or sometime baqarkhanees and of course not to be forgotten were stalls where one could get pakoras and other fried delicacies.

Then about two years ago, some body got the idea of transforming the face of the place and the fare that could be available. The place was given a face-lift and the old locality was dolled up. Now when one enters the street he finds it bright and well-lighted. The smell of savoury dishes permeating the air around. One finds abundance of food of divers sorts, meat of various domestic animals, chicken, quails and variety vegetable dishes all of different taste.

When one wishes enjoy barbecued meat or kebabs one has not to take the trouble of going another town as once the affluent did, the best kebabs, especially, Chapli Kebabs, not too hot in taste or hard to chew and digest, are available closer to home, literally at one's doorstep.

Though, not all sea food is available in the Food Street, fresh water fish, marinated in garlic and deep fried in a batter of chickpea meal, or fried plain or crumbed is served practically in all the fish stalls of the street. One may even find one of the tastiest dish of curried fresh water fish, on occasion.

For the diners, choice seems to be unlimited as most of the dishes of different parts of the country are available in Food Street. For instance, for the best Nihaari, one no longer has to go to Arambagh in Karachi. It seems that the cuisine from every nook and corner of this land can now be enjoyed right here in Lahore. Balochistan is known for its Sajji. Chiniot and Faisalabad for its mouth watering Handi Gosht. Punjab rich in mutton of the fat tailed sheep, the speciality of the Northern Areas, all such fare has been brought closer home, by the imaginative and enterprising chefs of the Food Street of Lahore. All that means that the culinary variety found in Lahore is large and interesting. ■