



Changing face of the Mall

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SAJID ABBAS walks along the Mall, seeing places being brightened and reminisces about the once lovely road and an old monument existing no longer

Lahore seems to be receiving more than normal attention again. Though, efforts to improve its looks have been going on for quite some time now, one gets the impression that the toil is slow. Nevertheless, some places seem to have regained lost glory or have better looks now, while others display a different appearance. The change varies from place to place. For example, the old sleepy quarter of Gowalmandi has not only got a face lift but has acquired a metamorphosed ambience too. On the other hand the indolent and easy going life of Old Anarkali hardly showed any mutation despite its being promoted to a newer 'Food Bazaar' status.

Amongst other places which have received the attention of the Authorities, is the Mall. One can see a number of edifices along the Mall repainted and facades embellished to give them a look as close to what they, originally, had. Nevertheless, one sometimes gets the odd feeling that the effort is no more than the routine whitewash and some bit of customary repairs-measures, for, just looking at the surroundings and around the corners or edges of the edifices one finds laxity that went on for the last so many years or decades.

The Mall was once a wonderful place. It made its appearance when modern Lahore marked its presence a century and a half or so ago, when the city went under the direct Rule of the English, though, it had started seeing dawn of the present modern age a bit earlier. Built as a link between two important parts of Lahore, it gradually developed into and remained the most significant spot for a number of years after Independence. It had the best of everything. The best looking modern structures of Lahore, the best shops, the best restaurants, the best business houses and was frequented by the best dressed people of the City.

The Anarkali end of the Road turned, over the years, as the Civil Station and became the hub of social activity. There were the Anarkali Gardens, one of the earliest public gardens of modern Lahore. The place is said to be a lively spot in the early days of English Rule. One hears about the garden being frequented by the Sahibs and their Memsahibs quite often.



Rubbish bin near the market stretch

A band used to play regularly, it is said. Later, it played its role as a venue of public meetings. It is a pity that the place is more or less deserted now. Had not a literary society taken the initiative to meet in the structure at the northern end of the garden, the place might have turned derelict, altogether.

Modernity started moving along the Road. It was named the Lawrence Road some years later and got a new name, the Mall, over the years, when modern shopping areas sprouted close by. The Tollinton



Hawkers encroaching where the flower beds used to be

Market was the first modern structure to go up in 1864, the first example of any notable public work in Lahore. Over the decades came large showrooms on the Mall, no bazaars of the pigeon-coop variety which have, regrettably, cropped up now.

The shoppers of practically the whole of Lahore used to meet at the Tollinton Market and the

Commercial Buildings, located at the crossing of the Mall where the New and Old Anarkali meet. It became the beat of men, women and youngsters alike, the

ladies busy shopping, with youngsters escorting them and carrying their bags and men chatting over a cup of tea or coffee in their favourite restaurants of which there were quite a few around, but hardly any, today. Along with these, one of the casualties that has taken place during the years of change is hygiene in general. One can notice a big rubbish bin near the place where Stifles used to be, once.

Though narrower, the Mall was still a safe place to walk. There were clean footpaths for pedestrians, just conveniently high to step on, unlike the hurdles that one has to cross today. The surface remained in good repair for it was made properly and of good material. There used to be flower beds along the foot paths. Nobody was allowed to hawk his wares by encroaching upon it as it happens today.

There were other interesting things and spots, besides. Close to the gate of the High Court was the statue of John

Lawrence, the first ever to be erected in Lahore of modern times and the first one to be removed after the English left. The reason for its removal was apparently a despised phrase inscribed on its base, which was, 'Will you be ruled by the Pen or the Sword'.

When the statue had been standing for nearly twenty-five years on its site, somebody proposed, in 1911, in the Lahore Municipality to remove the statue to another place, but the matter was not pursued seriously enough. Nevertheless, the Congress used it as a drifting matter after its conference in Rohtak in 1920, nine years later. The issue lingered on till the country gained Independence and the statue was removed in the night between Saturday, August 25 and Sunday August 26, 1951.

Incidentally, the words of the offensive phrase were not of John Lawrence but of somebody else. The origin is said to have been a different occasion and in a

different context.

It was in 1848, that Robert Cust, Deputy Commissioner of Kangra, issued his Proclamation which was 'I have ruled this district three years by the sole agency of the pen, and, if necessary, I will rule it by the sword'. The Proclamation was made after the rebellion of the Kangra Hill Chiefs was suppressed.

How this proclamation was promulgated, is given in an account by Robert Cust who said that the headmen of the villages in the troubled parts of the Kangra district were summoned to meet at different points. At each place they assembled in scores, and when a sword and a pen were placed before them to select the instrument by which they wished to be ruled, the pen was grasped with eagerness.

It was Robert Cust, not John Lawrence who was the real author of the pen and sword phrase which was not an actual utterance of Lawrence. ■

A free growing out of a wall of an edifice recently repainted

