

Six ancient gardens of Lahore

By Majid Sheikh

*Lahore
Parks & Gardens*

IF Lahore is often described as the city of colleges and gardens, of poets and painters, of saints and seers, it is not without reason. But think not that these attributes are because of the British or the Mughals. These are ancient attributes, and ones on which the city still stands.

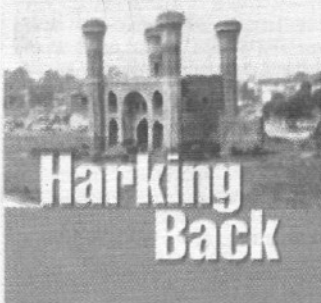
In this piece, let us take a peep into history to see the six famous ancient gardens of Lahore. One finds a reference to them in various old texts. These gardens are all pre-Mughal, and though all connected with Muslim rulers, they had a definite local touch. There is ample reference to three gardens in the pre-Muslim era, ones in which the Rajput rulers of Lahore, right down to Raja Anandpal, spent their time in relaxation. But we are going to describe the six ancient ones built in the 500 year period after the year 1,000AD.

If you walk down the famous Shahalam Bazaar and reach Rang Mahal Chowk, this now ugly market area, one that has eaten fatally into the history and culture of this ancient city, was once a beautiful garden. Called the 'Bagh-i-Ayaz', it was built on the orders of Malik Ayaz, the trusted slave and general of Mahmud of Ghazni. He also remained the governor of Lahore during the reign of Masood, the son and successor of Mahmud. Malik Ayaz died in Lahore in 1057AD (one account puts the date as 1051AD) and was buried in the garden laid out by him. This garden existed till the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had it demolished to build his new 'Taxal' - mint. One account by Abul Fazl describes it as matching in beauty and simplicity, but on a smaller scale, any of the great Mughal gardens.

The second great ancient garden of Lahore was the "Bagh-i-Zanjani". Mention of this can be had in 'Sakina-tul-Auliya', the famous book written by Prince Dara Shikoh. Mention of this garden comes in the context of a

meditation session by Hazrat Mian Mir. Although there is some dispute as to its location, most of the scholars think it was in the Chah Miran area of Misri Shah, where the tomb of the famous saint is located. This garden was there, though in a bad shape, till the Sikh period.

The third ancient garden, in a sense a pre-Islamic garden, was the one in which lies buried the oldest Muslim saint of Lahore. Called 'Bagh Shah Ismail', here lies buried the great Muslim seer Shah Ismail. In modern Lahore this grave is located on Hall Road, part of it being at the edge of the Cathedral School. One account says Shah Ismail died in 1056AD, but historian dispute



this, for he died almost a hundred years before Hazrat Ali Hajwari came to Lahore. One account describes this garden as having small hillocks. Given the location and elevation of the grave of Shah Ismail, this is not surprising.

The fourth ancient garden was the 'Bagh Qutbuddin Aibak'. This was located where Sultan Qutbuddin Aibak was buried after he fatally fell from his horse while playing Chaugan - old polo - in 1211AD. The garden vanished long ago, but his grave is located deep within the cluster of mohallah houses near Anarkali Bazaar. His grave once had a mausoleum built by his son-in-law and successor, Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmash. The area was archaeologically probed in 1961 for the extent or features of the structure. It was in 1972 that

ZA Bhutto ordered that a new mausoleum be built for the first slave emperor of Lahore. That can be seen today on Aibak Road off Anarkali Bazaar.

The fifth ancient garden was 'Bagh Shah Kaku Chisthi' where famous saint Shah Kaku Chisthi lies buried. The Sufi saint died in Lahore in 1325AD during the reign of Sultan Bahlol Lodhi. His tomb is near Serai Sultan in Mohallah Dara Shikoh. No trace of any gardens now exists thanks to encroachers. However, to the eastern side, as accounts tell us, the tomb of Shah Kaku Chisthi still exists. The garden was destroyed in the wars unleashed on Lahore by Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali.

The last of the six ancient gardens of Lahore was 'Bagh Daulatabad' about which very little is known. Daulat Khan Lodhi after whom this garden has been named was the Governor of Lahore (1517 to 1525AD) and is credited for inviting Babur to invade the South Asian Subcontinent. He is said to have founded a fortified quarter somewhere near Mozang, where he also built a grand garden, a 'serai' and a 'baoli'.

We have tried to locate it as we managed the other five, and it could be either the expanse to the west of the hill on Queens Road, as one British account informs us, or it could be the area to the north of Miani Sahib graveyard. Both are close to one another, but no definite fix is possible yet.

The old tradition of gardens seems to be very different to the orderly lay of Mughal designed gardens. The ancient ones were more natural and followed existing flora and fauna. As Lahore absorbed migrants from Iran, Afghanistan and other places of Central Asia, they all added their traditions to the gardens of Lahore. The Mughals added their own traditions in garden making. Thus an ancient tradition was taken forward, making Lahore the city of gardens.

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