

Why not redeem our lost

By Majid Sheikh

WHEN the famous Chinese traveler Fa-Hian passed through Lahore in 399 AD, he found Buddhist monasteries alongside Hindu temples in the mud-walled city. "It was the very picture of harmony". He found many places where the Buddha had stayed and rested on his travels. They were places of pilgrimage.

We know from the work of Cunningham - "Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum" - that during the reign of Asoka (or Priyadasi) starting 275BC, Buddhism was at its peak in Lahore. Asoka tolerated Hinduism, even though its 'caste-based' order was abhorred by him. The compromise was Jainism, and for a very long time this was the dominant religion of Lahore. If you happen to walk the streets and lanes of old Lahore, you will see many Jain buildings, with the Jain Manzil in Tehsil Bazaar a landmark where today are parked buffaloes.

It was in the Jain era that Lahore was invaded by the Egyptian king Osiris, known by ancient Hindu chroniclers as 'Misrasthan' son of 'Ham'. Accounts of this Egyptian invasion are mentioned by Herodotus and Siculus with the view that the Egyptians built Thebes after gaining immense knowledge from the great cities of the East. Science and civilisation, the Egyptians claimed, had come to them from across the great riv-

ers of India. In Lahore today there is no sign of such a past, let alone trying to discover the once famous Buddhist places of pilgrimage.

The invasion of the Punjab and Lahore by the Egyptians was followed by the invasion by the Assyrian Queen Semiramis of Babylon. The Hindus started worshipping this queen of beauty, and still do, by calling her 'Sámi Rama' of the Puranas. They believe that she departed from Earth in the shape of a dove, the national symbol of modern Syria. Today that very symbol is called 'Maha Bhaga', the queen of prosperity. She was ousted by another Egyptian King Sesostri, who, according to the historian Diodorus was a Palestinian, and who, as Sir William Jones mentions in his researches as having camped on the banks of the River Ravi within range of Lahore.

Lahore has been the city where came many a conqueror, among them the ancient Scythians (or Tartars), as well as the Persian Faridun, son of Jamshed the Great. Next comes Darius I and then is followed by Alexander the Great, to be followed by Nausherwan of Persia. All these foreign invaders were resisted by the local Hindu rajas, all of whom we have chosen, deliberately, to ignore as part of our heritage. This piece is about these great heroes of

Lahore, who should be honoured. I will not dwell into individuals, but let us scan a list of a few that surely need to be remembered.

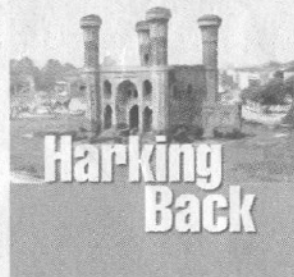
First and foremost we must, surely, remember Raja Loh, the man after whom Lahore is named. He was cremated in Lahore and his Samadhi exists even today inside the Lahore Fort just next to the premises that once housed the Royal Kitchens. Some excavations undertaken almost 35 years ago inside the fort showed up human bones, those carbon-dates was given as almost 5,000 years old. India's Sanatic Dharam Yodic Sabha has been in negotiation with the Government of Pakistan to rebuild this immensely important site of the Hindu faith, but no progress has been allowed. Surely Lahore deserves to remember its founder with some fondness, religious considerations aside.

Next is the ruler of Lahore in 263 BC, Raja Kirpal Rao. He built a major portion of the mud-walled old city of Lahore and his ancestor, Raja Bhati Rao, built the portion where today stands Bhati Gate, named after him. His tribe was known as the

Bhat Rajput clan, and every Bhatti today, Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, derives his or her lineage from Raja Bhati Rao. He died in Lahore and was cremated outside Bhati Gate in 102 BC. His Samadhi existed once at the curve where the moat turned to the north on the western portion of the gate. Nothing exists of this Samadhi today. Surely Lahore deserves to honour the original Bhat Rajput of Lahore.

Next let us focus on probably the greatest Rajput 'raja' Lahore has produced, and that was Raja Jaipal. He was not only a great warrior, but an amazing administrator. All the towns in his huge kingdom which stretched from Peshawar to Delhi and Multan were controlled from Lahore. He put into place an amazingly swift 'pony express' system, for within 36 hours he would get word of an emergency in Lahore. All his cities were well protected with huge mud walls, and the economy was such that every city was self-sustaining. Huge grain silos kept two years of grain, and the police and intelligence systems were excellent.

It was Raja Jaipal who defended



heritage?

i Lahore against the invader Mahmud from Ghazni. He failed and as per Rajput tradition he decided to commit the valiant act of 'johar', in which he cremated himself outside Mori Gate along the River Ravi as it flowed then. His Samadhi existed to the west of Mori gate till the time the British came, who destroyed it lest the Punjabis find a Punjabi hero in him. That site is well marked and it makes sense to rebuild the Samadhi, or just a simple memorial, to one of our greatest heroes.

Next to this samadhi was that of Raja Anandpal, son of Jaipal, who also showed his royal class and defended Lahore. He died in 1021 after carrying on an extended guerilla war against the invading Afghan forces. Till his last breath he kept fighting to regain Lahore, only to be killed in the effort. Surely this great fighter of Lahore deserves to be remembered, even if a plaque is put up outside Mori Gate in the garden next to the very old banyan tree, which legend has is as old as time.

From there let us skip to the Mughal era and we have the great Todar Mal, who was born and lived all his life in Lahore. He was a Minister of Emperor Akbar and is said to be the man who put into place the land revenue record system that we use even today. The 'patwari' system was

his creation, for he moved away from the Sanskrit system to use Hindi, with a better geographic 'location' system. He died in Lahore and was cremated along the River Ravi. His samadhi is said to have existed where today the Fakirkhana inside Bhati Gate along Bazaar Hakeeman is. Next is a former Governor of Lahore, Rana Bhagwan Das, during the Akbari era. His daughter was married to Prince Saleem. He was a great military commander and a very able administrator. He conquered Kashmir for the emperor. He is said to have his Samadhi next to that of Raja Todar Mal. It is said that the original plan to build the Shahi Mosque was planned by Rana Bhagwan Das. Surely this able man from Lahore needs to be remembered in some suitable manner.

Like a few examples given above, there are dozens of others like Chuggu Bhagat, Lala Rattan Chand, Dewan Misr Chand, Sadhu Choor, Sir Ganga Ram, Lala Mela Ram, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Brij Raj, Shiv Narain, Rani Raj Bansu, and dozens of others who made Lahore proud. We all realise that in this age where ethnic and religious leanings outweigh rational historical considerations, what we plead for is difficult. But a start has to be made one day. Why not do today what we will have to tomorrow?