

Lores & Legends

Garde



here was news a few days ago that the concerned authorities plan to develop model parks in a number of spots in Lahore. Places where these parks will be developed include areas such as Ichhra, New Mozang and Samanabad. Besides, a park exclusively for ladies is planned complete with a boundary wall to keep men out.

The tidings were news indeed, for, Lahore seems to have been, literally, caught by the throat. The City is choking, its air seems to be highly polluted. Just look at the Lahore sky in the night and you will hardly see any stars. They have not vanished, only the muck in the atmosphere has formed a veil to conceal them from view.

Nevertheless, it seems that we reverted to our age old habits and traits after Independence. Perhaps, we liked to live a life of mere existence without any refinement. When Babar arrived in Lahore, in 1524, he noticed that Lahore was devoid of quite a few nice things that would make life worth living. He laments in his Memoirs, that there were no gardens for recreation, no good fruit, no melons—one could not even find good candles to light ones premises. So when he was settled, Babar got down to beautify this land and started by laying gardens. The first one was, perhaps, near the spot where the Lawrence Road meets the Mall. His sons and grand children built more. The most impressive and well-known happens to be the Shalimar.

Over the years, the number of gardens increased, some were uprooted and replaced, some other were cleared to make way for different use, till one finds that the tally rose to one hundred and twenty-eight, big and small ones, at the time of Independence in 1947.

There were some legendary

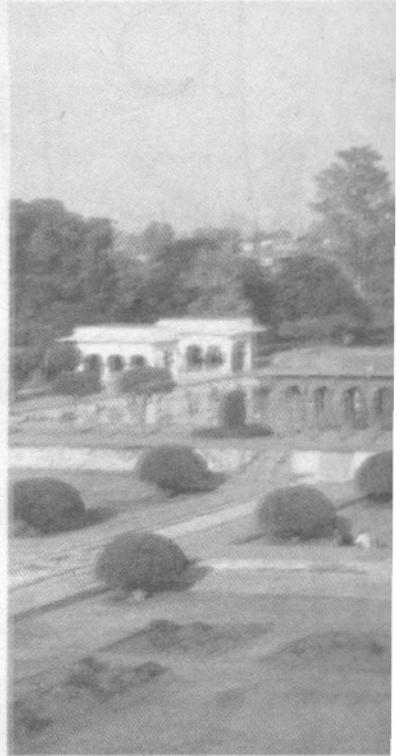
ones which vanished in the meanwhile, especially during the century before last. One of these was the Badami Bagh. As a small boy, this scribe remembers the scenes that the mention of Badami Bagh used to conjure in his imagination—some place full of trees blossoming in the Spring and heavily laden with the almond fruit and delicious nuts in the Autumn. But there was an element of disappointment when this scribe learnt, from old-timers, that never were any almond trees there and the place was actually named after a princess.

The garden was built in the first half of the 19th century, by Ranjeet Singh who named the place after Gul Badam or the 'Almond Blossom', presumed to be a princess. Who was she or who was her father or husband? It is not clear, but she was reputed to have been buried in an impressive mausoleum that once used to be between the Mastee and Sheranwala Darwaazas.

This scribe learnt from Fakir Syed Saif-ud-Din Bukhari that, according to the diaries of his ancestors the mausoleum of Gul Badam was striped off the marble veneer and decorations, during the Rule of the Sikh Triumvirate, leaving the brickwork exposed to the elements to decay in due course with time. By the time Ranjeet Singh built the garden and named it Badami Bagh, after the princess, all the lovely and exquisite work had either vanished or turned to dust till no trace of it was left to exist.

When the troops of the East India Company occupied Lahore in 1846, they were stationed in the then cantonment of Lahore, which was in the vicinity of the tomb of Anarkali and the Baradaree of Nawab Wazeer Khan. Both of these spots were in the midst of

SAJID ABBAS visits lost garden



The Shalimar



Ramparts of the Fort beyond which

large gardens. Later when Daleep Singh was deposed and the Government of the Punjab was taken over by the English, finally, the population of the English

ns of yore

Gardens of Lahore

Park & Gardens

4/7/04

The Nation



ch were parts of the Badami Bagh a century and a half ago

here, started increasing. With the Civil and Military administrators came their families. They were followed by English and other European merchants, business-

men and callers of other trades. The foreign community started growing and so did their needs.

To the north of the Fort or rather the Mastee Darwaaza, was

the old Badami Bagh, which, at the commencement of the Company's rule, was derelict. Consequently, it was trimmed and tidied and made fit for the use of the foreign community of the station. It seems that the Government of the day was tight-fisted, for, it is said, that the affairs of the garden were managed privately, perhaps, by a committee. One hears of Henry Cope, the editor of the ancient most English language newspaper of Lahore, The Lahore Chronicle, the predecessor of *The Civil and Military Gazette*, as the executive managing the day to day affairs. One further hears that English ladies and their escorts flocked to the Garden where a band used to play and entertain visitors in the afternoons. As time passed the place lost its popularity, for, by

Ranjeet Singh's period was not that bad as far as the environments of Lahore were concerned. During that period the outskirts were known for the gardens that dotted the area, nevertheless, hardly any one of those belonging to that period are now existing. The garden of Ali Mardan Khan in Naulakha and buildings of Ahluwalia gardens nearby were destroyed in 1875 owing to natural calamity. Rattan Chand's garden and sarai, both of them on the Hospital Road, were, till Independence in a reasonably good shape. There were temples and a pool, too, with fountains and other paraphernalia, even fruit trees, in the premises attracting a fairly large crowd of visitors at practically all hours of the day. The place was well maintained by the descend-



The wall of the Shalimar needs attention

then another public garden was built on the Mall of those days or the present Lower Mall, which became the fashionable place of recreation and the 'gossip-exchange' of those days. That place is the Gole Bagh of today.

By 1868 the Badami Bagh was sold by the authorities and the proceeds used to purchase part of the land for the Lawrence Gardens or the present Bagh-e-Jinnah. No trace, whatsoever, of the Badami Bagh exists today, the main railway line, to the north of Lahore cuts through it and the surrounding shabby area. The only reminder of the place is the small railway station of that name.

ants of Dewan Rattan Chand, but after they left the place in 1947, it was neglected till the area around it took, more or less, the shape of a slum.

Lahore has expanded, over the years at the cost of its lungs. The number of gardens, one hundred and twenty-eight or so, reputed to be in and around Lahore half a century or so ago, seem to have dwindled. The large circular green patch once surrounding the City, seems to have been encroached upon by unsightly shops, even the suburbs and outskirts once dotted with many green spots seem to be turning into concrete deserts. Can the trend be reversed? ●