
THE HISTORIC AREA OF MISRI SHAH, LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

The north eastern side of the historic city of Lahore was always prone to floods, an alluvial area of river Ravi, fertile but destructive. The Mughals built several walls as barriers for the waters of river Ravi, still the area never attracted a permanent settlement. During his reign, Maharaja Ranjit Singh ordered his nobles to plant grand gardens in this area. The land was fertile, water was in abundance and the area had a large number of sweet water wells. Soon the entire area was converted into flourishing walled gardens with numerous trees and grasslands.

Nothing remains of these gardens, except some old Banyan, Peepal and Sumbal trees. Traces of the historicity of this area and the existence of these gardens now remain only in archival maps of Lahore.

During my research at IAC, my team could identify only three main streets which coincided with the historic streets of this area, and a handful of old surviving trees. Taking these as reference points, we traced the shrines which were historically located within various gardens, usually in proximity of a well, and under old Banyan trees. Once these references were marked on the current map, the overlaying of old archival maps became possible. This approach showed us the exact locations of the gardens, if they had existed.

What we discovered was tragic. Once an area dominated by gardens, was now a scrap metal industry, and a tannery. The entire area became a victim of massive city expansion, inappropriate development schemes, sub-standard implementation and virtually no maintenance.

Keywords: History, Misri Shah, Lahore

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INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted during one of IAC Faculty Research Initiatives focusing on the phenomenon of Urbanism. Ours was a sub-group of three faculty members (myself, Saniya Jafri and Meeza Obaid) who chose the north-eastern side of the Lahore city, known as the neighborhoods of Misri Shah and Chah Miran. The reason for choosing this part of the city was the sheer curiosity of not knowing the urban history of this area, the history of the area's name, and of the Sufi saint after whom this area gets its name. During the research, it was found out that we were not the only ones who were unaware of this saint and the history of

this area, but the local residents were also unfamiliar with the origins of the name of this area which they called their home.

During this research we managed to locate the forgotten shrine of Misri Shah, along with the locations of many vanished gardens and *Takia/s* of Sufis and saints. It was tragic to observe how an area which was once associated with gardens planted by rich noblemen, sweet water wells, and abodes of Sufi saints, got transformed into a low to middle income housing society/ies and an ever expanding industry of scrap metal (Figure 1 and 2).

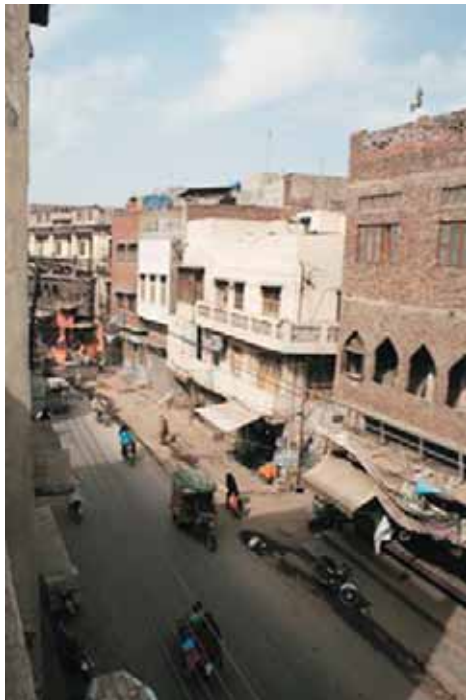


Figure-1: The Historic Street of Misri Shah.



Figure-2: The Scrap metal Shops.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR RESEARCH

As an initial step, the physical survey of the neighborhood of Misri Shah was undertaken for assessing the current situation of the area and for conducting a rapid Cultural Mapping. The process of Cultural Mapping involved:

- Retracing the original Street Layout of this area and identifying the original surviving streets / roads. For this task, a number of Archival Maps of Lahore were consulted. Some of these historic maps were available as published documents and others were obtained from the Punjab Archives collection catalogued under 'Maps of Lahore'.
- Recording / documenting of surviving historic structures within this area and along the identified original streets / roads. During this process, a number of old residences, apartment housing, and town houses were identified. A number of shrines were also identified including the Shrine of Baba Nakhudeh, a Persian title meaning 'the Lord of the Ship', the one who provides safe crossing. However, the Shrine of Misri Shah was not found during this survey.
- A number of old Banyan / Bohr, Peepal / Pipal and Sumbal trees.

- Senior residents of the area who could narrate the changing urban environment of this area. Community interviews were conducted, neighborhood groups were approached, local shop keepers and whole-sellers were contacted, and influential people of the area were consulted. These individuals were identified as Local Resource People (LRPs).

The gathered data was then marked on the Google Map through their coordinates, which generated a comprehensive Map showing all of the above locations. These locations were identified as the Urban Reference Points (URPs).

In addition to the Cultural Mapping and retracing through Archival Maps, a comprehensive literature review was also conducted through books and other published material, such as the publication of (Latif, 1892) recording the history of Lahore, along with the publication by (M. Baqir and the Gazetteers, 1984) of Lahore and Punjab, are to name a few. These publications provided the base line information regarding these neighborhoods, its built heritage and its historicity. Through this review, the data gathered during the physical survey was verified, and a substantial narrative of the history of Misri Shah became visible.

URBAN REFERENCE POINTS – URPS

While defining the uniqueness of a space, (Lefebvre, 1974) states that ‘the production of space has been meaningful at every stage of human history’ rather than being a product of a designed geometric or practical layout, thus generating a specific ‘rhythm’ of the space. Within this rhythm is embedded the uniqueness of that space. Applying his concept of ‘rhythm analysis’ over this area of Misri Shah, a number of Urban Reference Points were identified which gave a unique meaning to this area.

The identified URPs, constituted of the Built Heritage, the Shrines, the Original Streets / Roads, and the old trees. Located on the Google Map, these URPs provided sufficient points for overlaying the Google Map upon the Archival Maps.

The main URPs marked on all the maps were:

- The *Mizar* of Hazrat Miran Hussain Zanjani (Chah Meeran), a well-established and well-documented shrine. This shrine provided the northern URP.



Figure-3: The Sketch Map of Lahore-1837.
Source: Rehman (2013) 57



Figure-5: The Sketch Map of Lahore-1867.
Source: Rehman (2013) 65.

- The three main Roads which were traceable in all the Archival Maps. These roads provided the southern URP.
- The main GT Road identified in early British maps, as the southern URP.
- The Railway Station which was mapped in the later British maps. This provided the south-eastern URP.
- The river Ravi providing the western URP, along with the Delhi and Yakki Gate of the walled city of Lahore.

PROCESS OF OVER LAYERING OF MAPS

After the URPs were highlighted, the Google Map was placed as the Base Map, upon which all the Archival Maps were layered (Figure 3 – 8) shows the archival maps used. The entire process was done digitally through Photoshop. Archival Maps had to be stretched so that the marked URPs on Google Map were aligned with the marked URPs of the Archival Maps.



Figure-4: The Map of Lahore-1846.
Source: Rehman (2013) 61



Figure-6: The Map of Lahore-1867.
Source: Rehman (2013) 66



Figure-7: The Sketch Map of Lahore-1893, 1907, 1931.,
Source: Rehman (2013), 75, 85, 184

Majority of the open garden spaces located along the main GT road were consumed by the Scrap Metal Industry flourishing in this area since the establishment of the Railways during the British era (*the red boxes in the following images indicate these gardens*). The railway workshop sheds dominate this area along with metal casting factories and scrap metal warehouses. Another historic industry located within this area is the Leather Tannery Limited open space has left this industry to rely more on the faulty drainage system for washing animal skins and disposing contaminated water from these establishments, developing an undesirable environment within this area.

On the other hand, some of the old trees marked on Google Map as minor URPs, coincided with the premises of various historic walled gardens which were once located within this area, away from the main GT road. These walled gardens planted by the Mughal and Sikh nobles are now transformed into densely planned residential housing schemes. A number of Water Towers coincided with the location of Water Wells marked on the Archival Maps. An old *Sumbal* Tree, once part of Rattan Chand's Garden, was now standing within a polytechnic college grounds.

The biggest find, however, was the Shrine of Misri Shah.

FINDING MISRI SHAH

While searching for the Original streets / roads layout of this area, the consulted Archival Maps showed a location which was labeled as '*Takia Misri Shah*', providing a hint towards the approximate location of the Shrine of Misri Shah. This was highlighted for further investigation.

When the process of over layering of Maps was underway, the highlighted location of *Takia Misri Shah* coincided with



Figure-8: The Map of Lahore-1901.
Source: Rehman (2013), 66

a location which was now inside a narrow residential street. During the field survey, this street was not investigated due to its relatively new character and lack of any surviving or mentioned built heritage.

The Shrine of Misri Shah was found at the very end of this narrow street, marking one of the outer corners of a Government Girls High School. The old Banyan tree once located within the gardens of the shrine was now growing within the paved playground of the school.

THE CARTOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HISTORIC MAPS OF LAHORE

While researching through the Archival Maps, a total of 15 maps were studied some of these maps are shown in (Figure 3 – 8). The timeframe of these maps started from 1837 till the 1947, almost a 110 years of cartographic development of this area. Following aspects were noticeable in these maps:

- The north and north-eastern region beyond the Walled City of Lahore, especially the area between the city's Delhi Gate and the historic Shalamar Gardens, was dotted with gardens, with a larger part being used as camping grounds for the British troops and Sikh armies. This fact was also confirmed by both by (Baqir, 1884) and (Latif, 1892), when they narrated the event of war between Khizr Khan Syad, viceroy of Lahore (1421) and the tribal Gakhkhar armies. It is recorded that the invading armies camped near the tomb of Hassan Zanjani (Chah Miran). It is further stated by Baqir (1984) that when Maharaja Ranjit Singh's first attack on Lahore was unsuccessful, he is said to have retreated to an area known as 'Chah Miran'.



Figure-9: The Location of the Tomb of Misri Shah.



Figure-10: The Tomb of Baba Misri Shah.



Figure-11: The Interior and Sarcophagus of Misri Shah.



Figure-12: The Old Peepal Tree Now Disconnected From the Tomb.

- The earlier Maps have no significant settlements marked in this area except wells and walled gardens.
- River Ravi and its 'Bodha' (rivulet) is the dominant feature of this area, directing towards the written record that the river once flowed near the northern gates of the walled city of Lahore, and this area was prone to seasonal flooding.
- Almost all the Archival Maps show the existence of an area now known as Chah Miran. Many names have been used for this area, such as 'Meera Bagh', 'Khui Miran', and Meera's Khoi'. This area is famous for the *Mizar* of Hazrat Miran Hussain Zanjani (Chah Meeran), whereas 'Khoi' or 'Chah' means water well. These names can indicate an early reference of this area when it was associated with the water well and garden of Hazrat Miran Zanjani.
- A number of gardens have changed names through time, but same location.

- In some of the maps, only green blocks have been shown without any labeling. This was clarified by overlaying of maps with names upon maps without names. This showed coinciding garden locations, hence providing the identity of a specific unnamed garden.

A comprehensive table was developed as an outcome of this study. The following is a summary of that table, mentioning various gardens. Gardens with same location but different names are placed in the same row. The darker color represents those gardens which have been marked and labeled, whereas the lighter color indicates that the gardens have been marked but not labeled.

THE KNOWN GARDENS

During the Mughal period, Lahore became famous as the 'City of Gardens'. According to a comprehensive survey conducted by a total of approximately (Awan, 1996) 18 gardens and three garden gateways existed till the 1900s. From these only three groups of gardens and three garden

Table-1: The Name of Gardens as Marked Within Various Archival Map.

Gardens	1837	1846	1867	1893	1901	1907	1911	1912	1914	1921	1924	1931	1932	1933	1947	
Merra Bagh										The Entire Area Has Been Marked Within a Dotted Line and Named 'Khui Miran'						
Village																
Meera's Khoi																
Khui Miran																
Chah Meeran																
Raja's Garden																
Raja Kapurthala's Garden																
Lehna Singh Garden																
Lunatic Asylum																
Radha Ki Shan																
Sham Das Garden																
Ventura's Garden																
Rattan Chand Garden																
Kirpa Ram Chopra Garden																
Dewan Kirpa Ram Garden																
Dahau Kul Singh Garden																
Teja Singh's Garden																
Sham Singh Garden																
Sham Singh Utlari Wala's Garden																
Maharaja Daleep Sings Garden																
Bakhsi Bhagat Ram's Garden																
Takia Misree Shah																
Takea Misri Shah																
Bhai Vasti Ram's Garden																
Basti Ramydia's Garden																
Raja Deenanath's Garden																
Dina Nath Garden																
Raja Dena Nath's Garden																
Seeltanpura																
Sultanpura																
Hadi Shah's Tomb																

gateways survived till 1996, all of which belonged to the Mughal period. These were:

1. Shalamar Gardens
2. Gardens within Lahore Fort
3. Gardens of Shahdara
4. Gulabi Bagh Gateway

5. Chauburji Bagh Gateway
6. Nawankot Garden Gateway

There is no mention of the gardens planted, or maintained, by the Sikh court noblemen during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The followings gardens of this era are mentioned by Latif (1892), but none are mentioned in later publications:

Table-2: Name of the Gardens mentioned by Latif as well as Marked Within the Archival Maps.

Name of Gardens Mentioned by Latif	Marked in the Archival Map
Ahluwalia Gardens Attached with the Gardens of Ali Mardan Khan	
Garden of Khushal Singh	
Garden of Raja Teja Singh	*
Garden of Raja Dina Nath	*
Garden of Diwan Rattan Chand	*
Garden of Bhai Maha Singh	
Badami Bagh	*

The publication of Steinbach (1846) mentions that not many gardens were found within the city, however, a large number were planted outside the city walls near the rivers of Punjab, as these areas were ‘greater fertile land’, had ample water and were scenic locations. These gardens yielded guava, date, mango, lime, lemon, peach, apricot, fig, pomegranate, plum, orange, mulberry, grape, almond, melon, apple, cucumber, carrot, turnip and a variety of flowers.

THE MAPPED GARDENS

The Gardens marked within the Archival Maps, once existed in an area between Badami Bagh, Walled City of Lahore and Shalamar Gardens. Majority of these gardens are credited to the Sikh noblemen. Only a few of these gardens and their owners were traceable through a comprehensive literature review. The over layered Google Map and one of the Archival Map with names and marked gardens is shown in Image 13. The red dotted lines show the old road networks and the yellow dotted lines show the existing roads. As a URP, majority of these roads overlapped with each other, showing the correct proximity of the over layered maps.

Some of the marked Gardens are:

Sham Singh Uttari Wala’s (Atariwala) Garden

Various Atariwala / Uttari Wala family members are mentioned in archival documents as noblemen associated with the royal court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Sham Singh Atariwala / Uttari Wala was a general of the Sikh empire, father-in-law of Prince Nau Nihal Singh, and part of the Council of Regency for Maharaja Daleep Singh.



Figure-13: Overlay of Google an Archival map showing marked gardens with names..

No mention of his Garden was found in any written source, except the Archival Maps.

Raja Kapurthala's Garden

This garden belonged to the Ahluwalia royal family of Kapurthala. It is recorded that the family owned approximately 30 villages in the districts of Lahore and Amritsar. The most possible owners can be Fateh Singh, Nihal Singh or Randhir Singh Ahluwalia, all Sikh noblemen in the royal court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and commanders of his armies. The later family members were also part of the British administration. Specific mention of this Garden was not found in any literary source, except the Archival Maps.

Rattan Chand Duggal / Darhiwala's Garden

This garden is described as "a place of great interest". It is said to contain 'picturesque buildings, elegant reservoirs and fountains along luxuriant walkways'. It had numerous fruit trees. It was looked after by Lala Bhagwan Das, son of Diwan Rattan Chand.

The digital records of the British Library have the only surviving image of this Garden, the water tank and the Shiv Temple constructed by Diwan Rattan Chand at Lahore. The records state that Rattan Chand was a small boy when he came to the courts of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and grew into an individual who served the raja with great honor. This prime land was given to him by the Maharaja for his great service to the court. Diwan Rattan Chand was also part of the British administration. It was during this time that he constructed a huge water tank and planted various species of fruit trees in his garden. He died in 1872. It is further recorded that the temple and gardens were 'irretrievably' destroyed during the partition riots.

Latif (1892), states that Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court had two individuals by the name of Rattan Chand. To distinguish between them, the raja titled one as Rattan Chand *Darhiwala* (with a beard), as the other one's full name was Rattan Chand Duggal. The text mentions that the garden belonged to Diwan Rattan Chand, which can either be Duggal or Darhiwala. The Archival Map of 1867 labels the garden as 'Rattan Chand Duggal Garden'.

Sultanpura Garden

The area of Sultanpur is mentioned as a suburb of Lahore city, in the memoirs of Emperor Jahangir, when he narrated the crushing of Khusraw's rebellion

Bhai Vasti Ram's Garden

Bhai Vasti Ram (1708-1802) was a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and a resident of the city of Lahore. He became famous for his medicinal knowledge and skill of apothecary which he practiced through using indigenous herbs. The popularity of his healing powers was known by many Sikh courtiers including the raja himself. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also used to seek spiritual guidance from Bhai Vasti Ram. Upon his death (1802), a white marble Samadhi was constructed next to the outer defense wall of the Lahore Fort, where it still exists.

Bakhsi Bhagat Ram's Garden

Bakhsi Bhagat Ram was a General in the armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is said that within his gardens, he commissioned the 'most splendid and popular' temple for Shiv worship for the Hindu believers.

Teja Singh's Garden

The Bagh is described as located within the 'village' of *Khui Miran*. It is described as once being a 'splendid garden' with a summer house, numerous fruit trees and a canal running through the garden. The first mention of this garden is as the Gardens of Dhaukal / Dhau Kul Singh, who was a loyal commandant in the Sikh armies of Ranjit Singh. He played a major role in the sale of Kohi-i-Nur for Maharaja from Shah Shuja. The same garden was later labeled as Tara Singh's Garden. Tara Singh was one of the eight sons of Ranjit Singh, a twin brother to Sher Singh. However, this garden might also belong to Bhai Tara Singh (1717-1807) who was an ally of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and has helped him during his early expeditions.

The same garden is later labeled as Teja Singh's Garden. Raja Teja Singh was the nephew of Jamadar Khushal Singh (later the title of Raja was bestowed upon him by Maharaja Ranjit Singh) and a commander in chief of the Sikh Khalsa Army during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Dewan Kirpa Ram's Garden

Kirpa Ram was a civil administrator, soldier and a statesman in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. No mention of his garden is found in any literary source, except the Archival Maps.

Raja Dena Nath's Garden

This garden is said to be located along the old road to Shalamar garden. This garden is said to be 'unrivaled' for

its beauty, fertile trees, and elegant layout of flower beds. It had reservoirs of water, tanks and splendid summer houses.

Raja Dina Nath was a Kashmiri Pandit who served as the Finance Minister (Diwan) in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He also served the raja's court in the capacity of civil administrator, counselor and the keeper of the privy seal.

LESSON LEARNT

Every urban settlement experiences expansion, pressure of creating new housing schemes which are space and cost effective. All urban expansions, on the other hand, require open green areas as Urban Breathing Spaces. However, these spaces are usually kept at the lowest priority. If sensitively designed, these Urban Breathing Spaces can become unique features in the urban expansion planning. The historic structures, gardens and natural features of the landscape can provide opportunity for developing such open spaces within a densely planned housing scheme.

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If this sensitive approach would have been employed in the area of Misri Shah, by saving a historic garden, or a vital Character Defining Element (CDE) from each of the gardens, and developing this space into the new planned green spaces, then we could still have the evidence that Lahore was, indeed, the city of gardens.

In a fictional novel Marco Polo describes an imaginative 'perfect city' to Emperor Kublai Khan as one he would like to ".....put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them.....".

For me, these intervals can be the Green Urban Spaces, and signals can be the Pockets of Fresh Air full of Fragrance within densely populated urban spaces. These can be some of the features which can make our cities almost 'perfect' for us. These sensitive safeguarding interventions will not only create a new rhythm for a historic space, but will also sustainably conserve our heritage assets.