

LIFE LINE 2

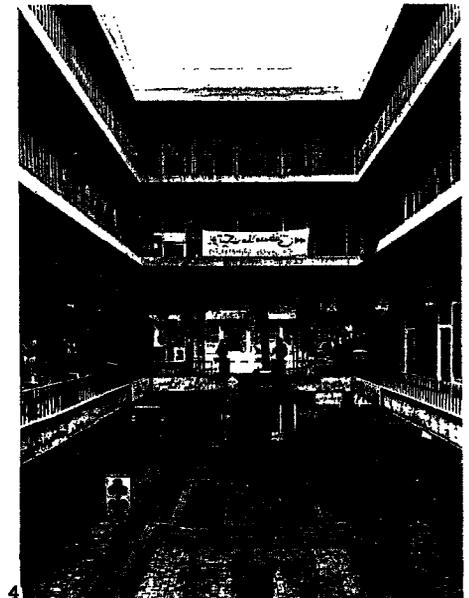
CHAHAR BAGH—MAIN STREET

When Coste visited Isfahan in 1840, the 250-year-old plane trees in the Chahar Bagh had reached full maturity, 1. There were four parallel rows, and they extended for the full length of both the upper and the lower Chahar Bagh, north and south of the river respectively—a total distance of some 4 km. The central section of the avenue was for pedestrians, and down the middle ran a water channel which was intersected at intervals by other waterways or widened into pools. On either side were lanes for riders, separated from the central pathway by broad strips of planting. Twenty pavilions still lined the two sides of the avenue, but they were no longer in use and falling into ruins.

Today the old plane trees have been replaced by new ones which are so closely planted that they are never likely to reach a comparable size, 2. The middle section is still reserved for pedestrians, but the water channels have been filled in and the side lanes asphalted for vehicular traffic. The pavilions and their gardens have disappeared without a trace, and the two sides of the avenue are now lined with shops, cinemas and offices. The great processional route of Shah Abbas and the gardens of the Safavid court have become an architecturally undistinguished but lively commercial street. To pedestrianise the section between the City Hall and the river, as is proposed, would put more traffic load on parallel streets, leading to further road widening and destruction. At least public transport should be maintained on the Chahar Bagh, though a restriction of this kind would, admittedly, create problems in a city in which private cars tend to become

The Chahar Bagh in 1840, 1, (from 'Voyage en Perse' by E. Flandin and P. Coste, 1851) and today, 2. Both views show the Madrassah of the Mother of the Shah on the right.

3, commercial development seen from the street. 4, inside one of the multi-level shopping courts.



taxis on demand. But the Allahverdi Khan bridge must be pedestrianised and the traffic, which has been the cause of serious damage and a major restoration project waiting to be put in hand, diverted westwards to the new bridges.

To demolish all the buildings on the east side of the Chahar Bagh between the City Hall and the eighteenth-century Boland Bazaar, as is also proposed, would reduce the commercial life of the avenue and expose it to the public gardens, for the preparation of which bulldozers have already flattened a large area.

It would surely be preferable to exploit the relationship of commercial premises such as the multi-level shopping courts, which already exist, 3 and 4, and the landscaping behind, which has still to be created (see pp303-304 for AR proposals).

On both sides of the Chahar Bagh there are a number of late Qajar and early Pahlavi buildings (respectively pre- and post-First World War) of considerable character, 9-11, and 15. Under the pressures of growing commercial affluence their future must be in doubt. Yet it is essential to preserve at least the best of them if the kind of soulless comprehensive redevelopment, which has already taken place just off the Chahar Bagh opposite the Shah Abbas Hotel, 7, is to be stopped from spreading indiscriminately. In the Chahar Bagh itself modernisation is under way. On the west side two large new blocks, one of which is illustrated, 8, make a respectable design contribution, but no one would wish the whole avenue to be rebuilt in this manner.

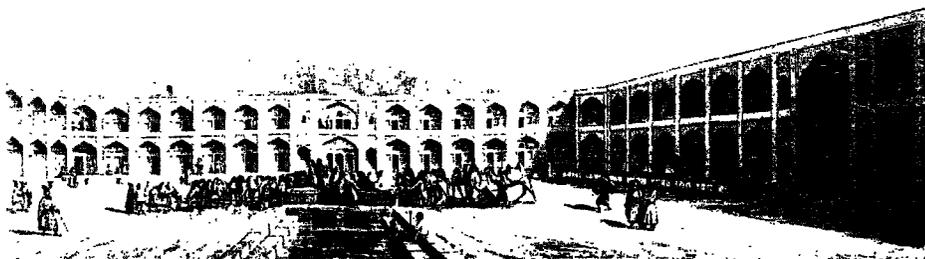
Opposite the City Hall the municipality have plans to enlarge the square by wholesale demolition which would sweep away a charming corner building, 15, and a large nineteenth-century caravanserai, 16. The money which the municipality are obliged to spend on new development might have been better used to heal the wounds inflicted by the bulldozer when cutting the new Ibn-e-Sina Avenue north of the Friday Mosque (see pp301-302 for AR proposals).

As a contrast to the commercial medley and the high rate of 'incident' in the Chahar Bagh, the Madrassah of the Mother of the Shah (1706-14), built at the expense of the mother of the last Safavid King, Shah Sultan Husain, graces the avenue with a dignified and restful facade. In its modern setting the 'madrassah' has taken on a new meaning in the contrast it now provides between the bustle of the street and the quiet of its courtyard, 12-14. The progression from the pavement, through the stalactite-vaulted iwan, into the domed vestibule where a great arch frames the most glamorous group of buildings in Isfahan, is an architectural experience with few parallels in the world.

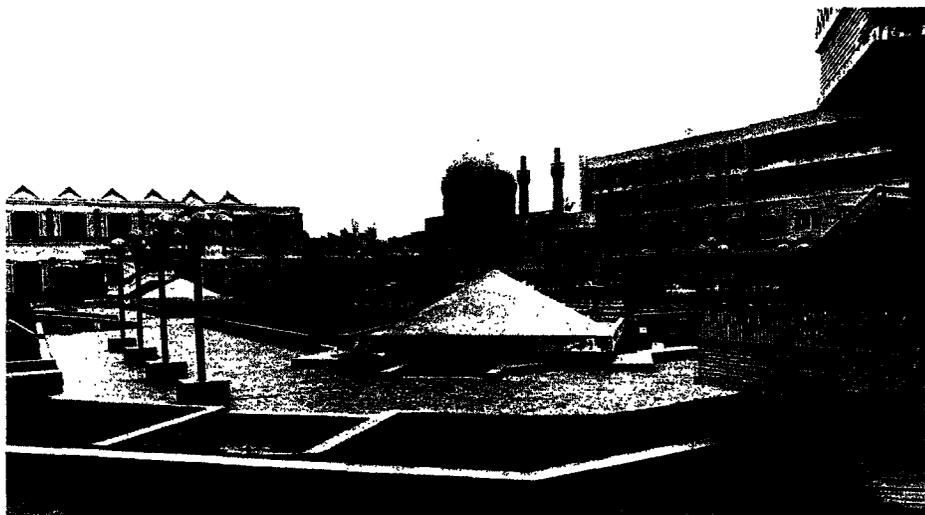
Off the Chahar Bagh in Shah Abbas Avenue, the early eighteenth-century caravanserai which was attached to the Madrassah of the Mother of the Shah has been converted into the Shah Abbas Hotel. 6, the caravanserai from Coote's 'Monuments Modernes de la Perse' and, 5, as it is today with a new, higher block on the left which houses the bulk of the hotel accommodation. 7, the new shopping development opposite the hotel with the dome and minarets of the 'madrassah' in the background. 8, new development in the Chahar Bagh by Ali Bukhtiar & Associates.



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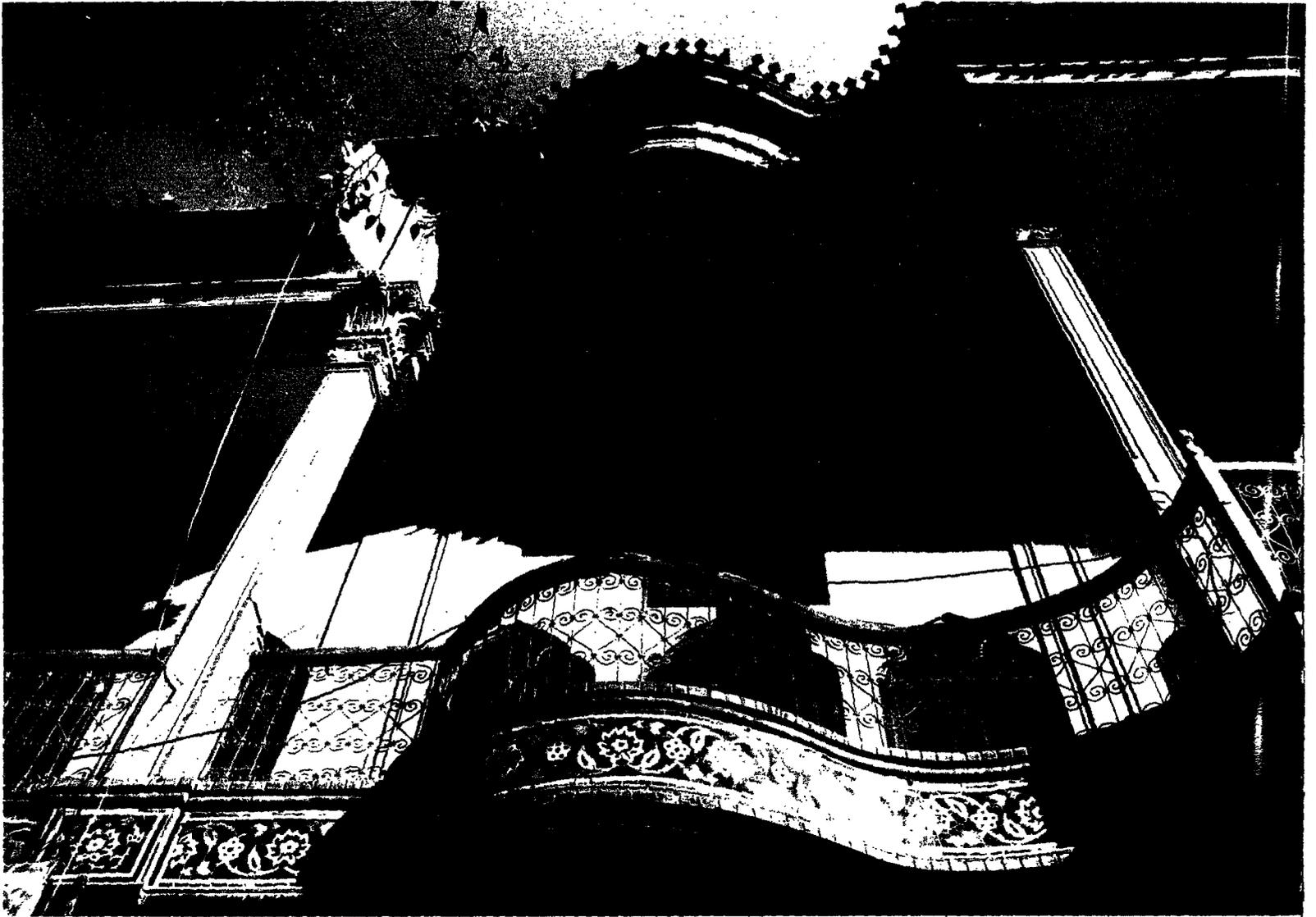
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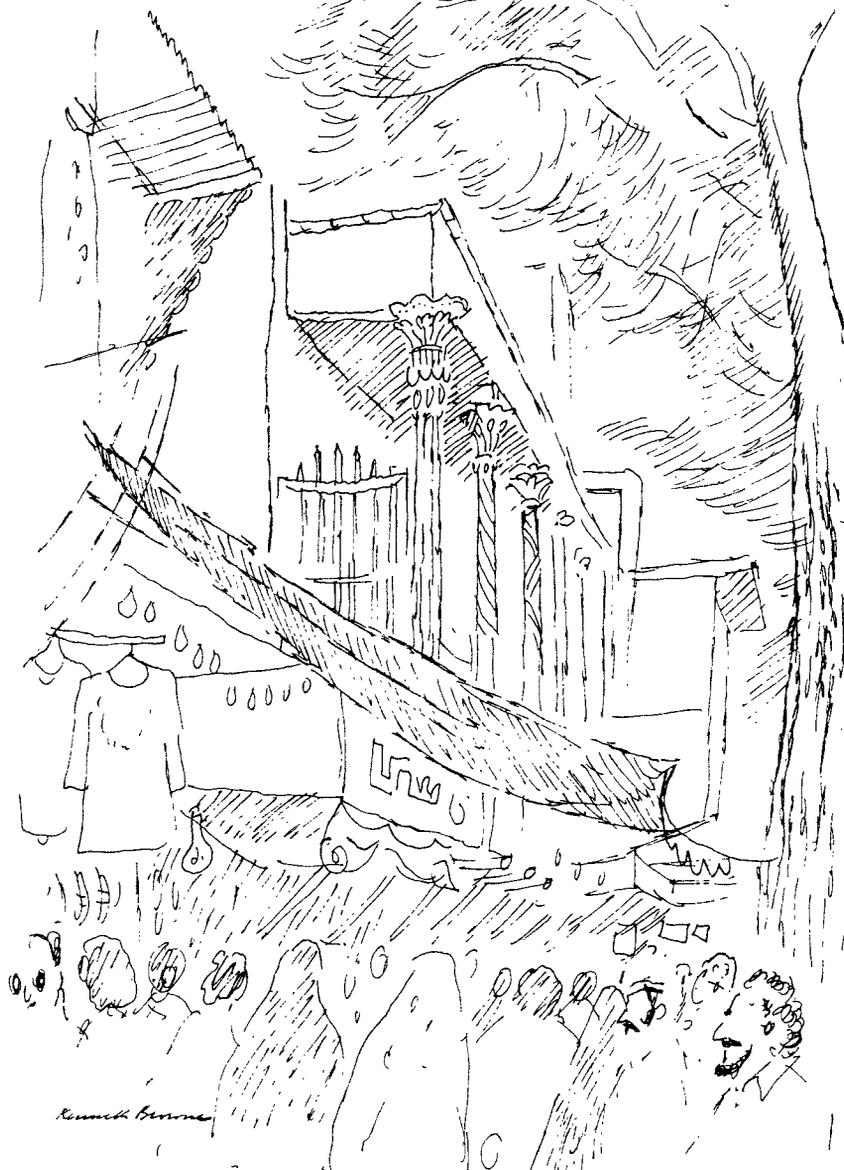


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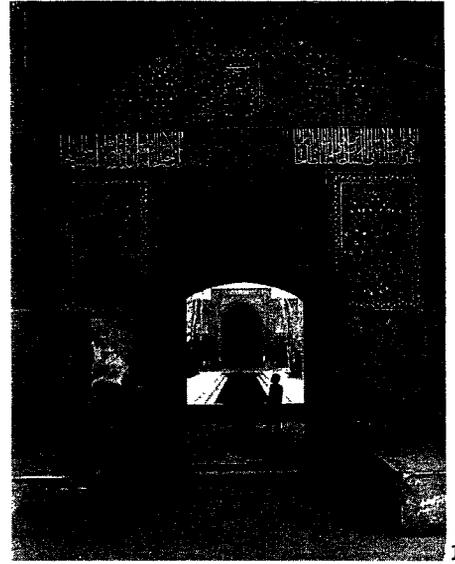
Kamal Binnu

9, 10, late Qajar or early Pahlavi buildings of considerable character which should be preserved.
 11, in the cool of the evening the crowds jam the pavements of the Chahar Bagh.

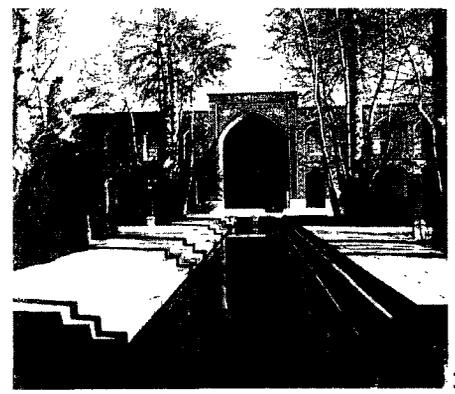
Chahar Bagh, a view into the courtyard through the gateway, and the courtyard itself.
 15, a building which turns the corner gracefully, but which will be swept away for redevelopment.
 16, a nineteenth-century caravanserai which will be demolished for redevelopment.



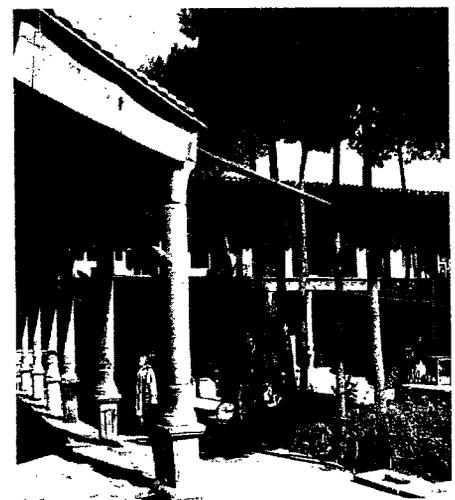
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