

Adaptation and Attainment of Colonial Character: The Transformation of Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Along with the English language, colonial, legal and administrative institutions, the buildings of the British are arguably amongst the most tangible and enduring legacies of the European colonisation. These provide an insight into the British understanding of the city and this determined and shaped the relation between the coloniser and the colonised. The present study seeks to encapsulate the historical phase in which gradual transition took place in the imperial character of the city of Lahore as a consequence of the establishment of colonial rule.

Lahore has evolved as a cultural hub with a continuous history spanning centuries. Owing to its strategic location the city has been an arena of political upheaval and transverse of various races in this region has resulted in the cultural efflorescence. The acculturation of various cultures has resulted in new forms of art, architecture, academics, administrative institutions, ideologies and lifestyles. Through its architectural forms the city has manifested the historical and cultural characteristics embodied in its evolution. The present study seeks to encapsulate the historical phase in which gradual transition took place in the imperial character of the city of Lahore as a consequence of the establishment of colonial rule. The paper is in response to the recent trends of changing the names of the places in the garb of nationalism and thereby erase from the collective memory any trace of a period so significant to the practice of a historian. These remnants of the bygone age are still in use particularly in smaller settlements, where time and familiarity have woven them into the local fabric as if they had emerged from vernacular building tradition.¹ It is instrumental to research this domain of cultural studies and reflect on the architectural heritage to make an objective study of the past to shed light on the present.²

Following a series of intrigues and two fiercely contested Anglo-Sikh wars fought in 1846–47 and 1848–49, the British annexed Maharaja Ranjit Singh's former kingdom. The formal surrender of the Sikh army took place in the Sheesh mahal which had been the private residence of the Maharaja where he stayed in great imperial grandeur. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had placed the supervision of his *toshakhana*³ located inside the Moti Masjid of the Lahore Fort under his trusted treasurer *mis* Makraj. The contents of the *toshakhana* were subsequently placed under the custodian ship of Dr John Login and the memorandum of the memorabilia of the *toshakhana* presented to the governor general in the most befitting manner.⁴

Opposite the Sheesh Mahal, in an arcade closed in with glazed windows and doors was placed the armoury consisting of a heterogeneous assortment of weapons and the uniforms worn by Sikh Army. Thornton testifies to the fact that the necessities of English military life had scant consideration for the relics of departed; in those early days of plunder and

conquest by the John Company the horses were stabled in memorial tombs and palaces; audience halls converted into powder magazines, barracks or offices of district magnates: whatever could be adapted or altered for use of the conqueror was spared, the rest pulled down. The regiment of the British royal forces that had fought in the battles of Mudki, Ferozeshah and Sabraon were stationed in the Badshahi Masjid and Hazuri Bagh. The agent of the governor-general was housed in Raja Suchet Singh Haveli and the various native infantry divisions were stationed between city gates.⁵ Subsequently the British Forces constructed many permanent barracks to station their soldiers. The First cantonment named Mian Mir was located at Anarkali south of old city.

The Proclamation of Queen Victoria in 1858 provided for transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown rule. Lahore became the provincial headquarters of Panjab Province in British India and placed in the nurturing hands of the most seasoned bureaucrats. The Board of Administration was established, high ideals of governance enshrined and various projects of material and moral progress undertaken to assuage the wounded psyche of the people. There was a significant pattern of governance and gradual transition in the urban pattern of Lahore. When the first generation of colonial officials occupied Lahore they were stranded in the unfamiliar terrain which was unmapped and unchartered. There lay the walled inner district of the city, with its Mughal-era monuments and pattern of streets and houses; Outside the city walls lay abandoned tombs, temple and gardens inter-spread with number of populous enclaves that must have been contiguous with these ruins but now formed more isolated settlements. The southwest and east sides of the city were surrounded by a brick wall which was formerly 30 feet but subsequently reduced to about 15 feet for better sanitation. A deep moat encircled the habitation, but since the extension of the Bari doab canal to Lahore this was filled in as it had outlived military significance and the space reclaimed with a tributary from the canal and laid out as a garden by the municipality.⁶

The development of the city was no longer the elliptical consequence of an arbitrary or individual decision; it became a formalised responsibility, executed within framework of a linear imperial plan.⁷ The rhythm of Lahore life as a colonial

governorship was calibrated for the next century to the pulsation emanating from the imperial capital of Calcutta and after 1911 from the capital city of Delhi. Even though Lahore came into the imperial fold late compared to other Indian cities, its metamorphosis during the late nineteenth century was rapid.⁸ The alterations made to the city under the British rule silenced the perceptions of ruin. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the plain outside Lahore's city walls—only recently a desolate brickyard of ruins—was irreparably altered to make room for colonial institutions and residences. "Fortunately for the country and its people, times have now changed where desolation and ruin marked the surface of the land, luxuriant vegetation thrives, picturesque, public and private edifices have risen and gardens and plains, intersected by canals and metalled roads lined with shady trees, afford indubitable testimony at each step, to the beneficent influence of a settled Government and good order, to the progress made in the works of art and to the peace and prosperity enjoyed by the inhabitants."⁹

With an abundance of abandoned large structures scattered throughout the civil station which was the state administered property, the colonial government often chose to house major institutions in converted buildings rather than to build new ones. Most of these buildings were refashioned to suit the requirements of the new occupants. These institutions included the Civil Secretariat, which was located in Ventura's former house while the Public Works Secretariat was housed in a converted barrack from Ranjit Singh's period. When John Lawrence became the Chief Commissioner of the Province in 1853, he set himself up in an estate near Charburji on the Multan Road. The Deputy Commissioner was stationed in the tomb of Muhammad Kasim and was later turned into the Government House. The Company troops were quartered in the old Sikh barracks while the Nila Gumbaz mosque was used as a mess house. Similarly the mosque of Dai Anga near the railway station was earlier used as the residence of Mr Cope the editor of Lahore Chronicle and later used for years by the Railway as the Traffic Manager's office; the masjid of Shah Chiragh housed the accountant-general office and later was occupied by the session court. Thus in the initial years of British occupation, the colonial government resorted to retrofitting existing buildings to fulfil the administrative functions and social needs.

Just after the annexation of Lahore the urban governance was institutionalised in the form of a municipality and enacted through an era of record keeping and strict surveillance. The colonial intervention was controlled by the material setting of the city and conditioned by the spatial imagination of the British. The inner parts of the city were perceived by the British as a potential source of disease, social instability coupled with the difficulty to access and fathom them. Therefore the colonial state made its most significant investments in suburban tracts outside the cities—the most promising terrain among a range of other possible sites for establishing what British officials hoped would be an "effective and socially transformative civic milieu; effective in the sense of adequately serving the military, administrative and commercial needs of the new colonial province and transformative in the sense of providing an urban setting whose material qualities might foster more decorous modes of

interracial urban existence than could be provided by the degraded native city".¹⁰

Soon after annexation of Lahore, Robert Napier was appointed to execute all public works through the Board of Administration. Napier equipped with a Civil Engineering qualification from the Kent School of Military Engineering, United Kingdom, did pioneering work in the design and execution of civil, military and public works. He was an enthusiastic advocate of native styles and considered it far superior with reference to shade, coolness, ventilation, convenience and beauty. In order to establish the power of the British Empire on native soil, the development of public architecture went beyond practical needs and had to mirror the political aims and hopes of the colonial power.

After the dissolution of East India Company in 1857 and declaration of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India in 1876, there were two main streams of architectural discourse prevalent. The first one was stylistically neoclassical neglecting the native style and to pronounce the British imperialism found expression in the Montgomery Hall and Lawrence Hall. The second one incorporated the Indian elements in the Western forms to establish continuity and transition with the previous architecture of the region as seen in the buildings of High Court, Lahore Museum, Town Hall etc and later on, in early twentieth century they used the neo classical style of architecture as it was already prevailing in England and other European countries.

The region witnessed the evolution of a hybrid architectural style termed as Indo-Saracenic. Though Victorian in essence, the style combined in an intelligent manner diverse indigenous architectural elements with Gothic characteristics. The British who had replaced the Mughals as the main power of governance, drew inspiration from way back home; thus imitating the Neo-Romanesque, Neoclassical and Neo-Gothic styles. Most of the buildings were adaptations of the buildings designed by leading British architects of that time like Wren, Adam, Nash and others in London and other European places.

When Queen Victoria was announced the Empress of India in 1876, the British architects wanted to express the imperialism through art and architecture of the buildings. The architects of the day were faced with dilemma of whether a seamless transition was possible from the recent Mughal imperial architecture or were the Greece and Roman the only utopia of an ideal imperial architecture. The Public Works Department Member of the Viceroy's Council in 1877 advocated that buildings meant for indigenous purpose such as temples, mosques, colleges, schools, markets, hospitals, asylums should be built in some form of native architecture; whilst those designed, especially for the comforts and wants of Europeans such as residences, churches, offices, railway buildings ought to imbibe some features of European style and adapted to the various climates of India. In 1889 within the PWD a further modification of administrative arrangements were made to carve out a dedicated Buildings and Road Branch and was made responsible for design, execution and maintenance of public buildings and roads.

The colonial architecture was not a question of rule by the colonists, but in fact, at a deeper level, a constant remaking of the identity of the natives through the dominance of the military conquest. The British period architecture was structured by dominance-dependence relationship in which the ultimate source of social, economic and political power resided with the metropolitan society. This is the reason why the Railway Station was constructed in the form of fortress and located at an appropriate distance from civil lines as well as the Walled City. The Town Hall was opened in Feb 1890 and since then has been the hub of civic administration of the British.

The Industrial Revolution and the consequent advances in technology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also reflected their impact on the architecture of Lahore. Initially the British used bricks, lime mortar, wood, iron and different types of stones as was traditionally used by the Mughals. With the passage of time they started using English bricks with lime mortar and in early twentieth century, cement mortar, reinforced concrete and steel for the structures which was made possible because of industrial revolution and mass production. Through the introduction of new materials, like iron, glass, concrete, pre-fabricated sections and their applications there emerged a change in architecture of the buildings, their styles and mode of construction. Subsequently debates encouraging the exploration of connections between nature, materials, construction, industry and society gained ground which can be depicted in Government Officers Residences in Lahore in 1939 which drew inspiration from Garden City Movements.

The British built a new town for themselves towards the south and south east of the walled city, called the Donald Town. This plain was to be the site for a new kind of urban project in Punjab: the construction of a colonial provincial capital. Later, this became to be known as Civil Lines as it was built around the core of British national administrators and there were the offices, homes, clubs and shops comprising the total living environment of the British officers. The expanding administrative, revenue and judicial structure of the province and the social needs of the European community necessitated the construction of new buildings. Living in constant feeling of eternal exile this British community strengthened the ties amongst themselves through the institution of club and exclusive urban pattern. The Gymkhana became the epicentre of their leisure pursuits. Gradually, new and imposing buildings began to spring up along the Mall creating an ambience of exclusiveness. The bungalow along with its sprawling lawns and coterie of servants was often alluded to the empire by Annie Flora Steel in her treatise *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* 1888. The transplanted European in a colonial setting, through an industrious application of effort could enact the ideals of cleanliness, thrift and order required to run both the home and the empire effectively.¹¹ The interrelation between taste, morality and domestic design was deeply entrenched in the nineteenth century social history. Residential Hotels gained popularity; among these the Faletti's, Nedou's, Charing Cross Hotel were located near the civil station geographic centre. The civil station in Lahore depended in crucial ways on collaboration between British and Indian residents of the city. Wherever government institutions, commercial enterprises and places of public congregation were

concentrated, mixing among races and social classes was both legally accommodated and necessary. From *Anarkulli* the civil station stretched eastward for a distance of about three miles, with the Lawrence Gardens and Government house marking its eastern limit; the eastern portion of the station being known as Donald Town which was connected with the *Anarkulli* by the road called Mall.¹² Another distinct building dating to the early days was the Pipal's which was later used as residential club for the members of the legislative council Panjab. A detailed account is rendered by Goulding about this fashionable private residency of the heyday of the raj and the eventual fading glory from this part of the station. It was during the tenure of sir Robert Montgomery (1859 -1865) that the beautiful gardens which encircle the city of Lahore were planted and the canal which flows on its margin was excavated. The chiefs of Punjab erected a magnificent edifice in his honour after his departure to England which later took the form of Montgomery Hall.

The British buildings are dominated by brick structures and represent separate school of architecture which is easily identifiable due to their particular architectural characteristic. It can be seen in railway stations, cantonments, courts, colleges and schools, churches, bridges and museum designs. A lot many churches were constructed during this period to meet the religious needs of the community living in the area. In 1851 the seventeenth century tomb of Anarkali was chosen to be the site of Lahore Anglican church. Later on when Lahore Diocese was constituted St James church came to be known the ProCathedral church and Dr French was appointed its first Bishop. Saint Joseph Catholic church in Lahore Cantt was originally a small wooden church which was later reduced to ashes owing to the outbreak of fire. It was almost contemporary of Saint Mary Magdalene Church at Mian Meer Cantonment. A different character and scheme was introduced in The Holy Trinity church built in 1881 near the Neela Gumbad, Anarkali. Instead of lofty tower, a square arcaded *verandah* as vestibule is a distinctive feature of this church. The Gothic style is missing here and outlook of the building resembles many other British period utilitarian buildings. The elegant Cathedral church of Resurrection was built in Lahore in 1887. From the architectural setting of this church, it can be observed that colonial traditions had established strong roots.

At the close of the year 1881 an Exhibition of Industrial Arts was held at Lahore with the twin object of ascertaining the progress made in this respect since the last exhibition in 1864 and of encouraging the production of genuine local work of original oriental designs. The exhibition which was formally inaugurated by Sir Robert Egerton exhibited the intricacies of hand labour and provided insight into the indigenous art "from peasants needle to the jewelled ornament."¹³ The celebration of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887 at Lahore provided the occasion for laying the foundation stone of Victoria Jubilee Hall at Lahore and a Technical Institute was envisaged to be established at the city in connection with the school of Art. The visit of Prince Albert Victor of Wales in the beginning of 1890 provided a further impetus to the promotion of Art and the foundation of new Jubilee Museum and Technical Institute in Anarkali was laid.

John Lockwood Kipling who started his professional life as an architectural sculptor at the South Kensington Museum, now better known as the Victoria and Albert Museum London, arrived India in 1865 to reshape the visual history of this land. Lahore and Kipling enjoyed association for almost two decades; shaping and enhancing each other distinctiveness. His stay in India, especially in Lahore 1875 onwards, helped him to assimilate his expertise with the local aesthetic principles to bridge the theoretical and philosophical divide between the East and the West, precisely through academic art focusing on the revival of historical crafts and styles with their possible adaptation for the modern needs. His pupil Bhai Ram Singh played a great role in application of the new principles of architecture termed as Indo-Saracenic in the design of the buildings. Kipling played a vital role in reviving crafts indigenous to the subcontinent and adapting them to modern needs. His instruction at Mayo School, established in 1875, laid the foundation for new generation of craftsmen. The school eventually became the National College of Arts. It became the philosophical, historical and aesthetic ground for the British in India to nurture the indigenous arts of the region. Lahore museum that presents a profusion of domes, small balconies, exquisite red sand stone lattice work and a marvellous façade is another masterpiece of colonial architecture. Lockwood Kipling incorporated the Lahore fort armoury collections into the museum and himself designed a new carriage in wood and iron with brass ornaments for the famous *zamzama* gun that stood outside the Museum. This was for the dual purpose of reviving an interest in traditional arts and crafts and of creating new styles and forms through the alignment of contemporary India with the traditional works

in the Museum. The Panjab Chief's College also known as Aitchison College established at Lahore in 1886 for the education of sons of ruling chiefs of titular and other prominent men is another expression of colonial refinement. Among the other fine example of secular architecture in Lahore was the magnificent building of Government College and the illustrious Panjab University which became important centres of learning.

Thus the architecture that evolved through the interaction of the colonial and the colonized was manifested in the interior and exterior of then designed buildings. In the Indian palaces, old reception rooms were replaced by the *darbar* halls and new rooms spaces to entertain the European guests were designed. Drawing and dining rooms were introduced in the houses; fireplaces, marble fountains, oil paintings, statues and stuffed animals began to be displayed in the halls and drawing rooms there by ushering in the new styles of architecture and building layout designs. Thus by the end of the British rule, Lahore stood transformed with a dual-faced identity. On the one hand was the old city and on the other, were the colonial additions of the Cantonment and the Civil Lines. The contrast was blatant not only in the relative hygiene of the areas, but also regarding the urban pattern, house design, shopping habits, living styles and cultural ethos. Indeed Lahore enjoys a rich cultural diversity and exceptional architectural legacy which evolved within the course of centuries and stands the testimony to each historical period individuality and distinctiveness. These buildings are shared cultural legacy and this heritage has to be acknowledged, cherished and objectively assessed.

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