



RESEARCH PAPER

Identifying the History of Walled City Bazaars of Lahore

Engr. Mohammad Ali

PhD Art History Scholar, University College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: ma5208982@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Commercial activity in the Walled City of Lahore is a major urban morphology determinant. Commercial and residential functions are under one roof traditionally. River Ravi had acted as a trade artery for timber trade in medieval times. Historical record of last two thousand years only is available for Lahore. Trade between east and west greatly benefited the city commercially. Mughals established markets for public benefit like Akbari Mandi. Both primary and secondary data has been used for the study. It is a predominantly qualitative research. Social constructivism is the method employed-using satellite images and interviews with business owners. Bazaars study is a neglected area in research so far. Wholesale and retail go side by side. Mechanization has marred the traditional look and ways of doing business. It is still the most vibrant and industrious part of the city. Traditional goods of Papad Mandi and Bazaar Hakimian go hand in hand with industrial materials like Rexene and plastics. Increase in traffic has effected many businesses e.g. motor workshops of Masti Gate is now a Rim Market. Let not the concrete jungle replace traditional architecture. Tearing down havelis to build plazas is tolerable in modern Lahore. It should be avoided in Walled City at all costs.

KEYWORDS Bazaars of Walled City of Lahore, Colonial Lahore, East India Company, Gates of Lahore, Mughal Commerce, Mughal Lahore, Walled City of Lahore

Introduction

“Mughal trade significantly boosted the global economy by establishing vital trade routes across Asia, facilitating the exchange of luxury goods like spices, textiles, and gems. This not only increased wealth within the empire but also fostered economic connections between Europe, Asia, and Africa, setting early foundations for global trade networks.”

“It is this ‘Lahore of Great Mughal’ in which scholars and Sufis, learned men and painters, poets and administrators assembled and which, for about one century, surpassed in glory most other cities of the East.” (Schimmel, 1988, p. 19)

“Lahore has many faces: the imperial city, the international marketplace, and the city of scholars, poets and saints.” (Schimmel, 1988, p. 20)

“The hierarchy of the bazaars in the Old City appears to radiate outward from the centre, with perfumes, incense and books still clustered close to the center, at the great Wazir Khan Mosque. These markets are surrounded by jewelry, precious goods and textiles, Next are shoes, fibers, ropes and utensils, evolving into streets of carpenters, locksmiths, blacksmiths, butchers, produce merchants and basket makers. The *Bazaar-e-Hakimah* or Bazaar of Healers still offers the diagnostic and curative skills of men learned in the arts of healing. The streets are also lined with shops offering medicinal plants, herbs, oils and unguents. Close to and outside the walls come the more industrial trades of the tanners, potters and foundries. Even today, the more industrial modern trades such as lumber, tyres, auto parts and truck building are found outside the wall.” (Qureshi, 1988, p. 169)

“The Kashmiri Gate and the Delhi Gate opened onto the high roads that ran between Lahore and those great places, and it was probably no coincidence that the largest

caravanserai near the walls lay outside of the Delhi Gate. The magnitude of the Delhi Gate Bazaar and its connecting Akbari Mandi and Kashmiri Bazaar convey centuries of bustling activity and trade, in these great markets scaled for trading in enormous loads of grain, nuts, and spices. The Akbari Gate and the Shah 'Almi Gate are named for rulers Akbar the Great and Shah 'Alam Bahadur Shah, and they lead to marketplaces and bazaars which also bear their names. The Mochi Gate leads to the shoemakers' bazaar; its name is a mispronunciation of Moti, the name of an officer of Akbar who lived near this gate." (Qureshi, 1988, p. 170).

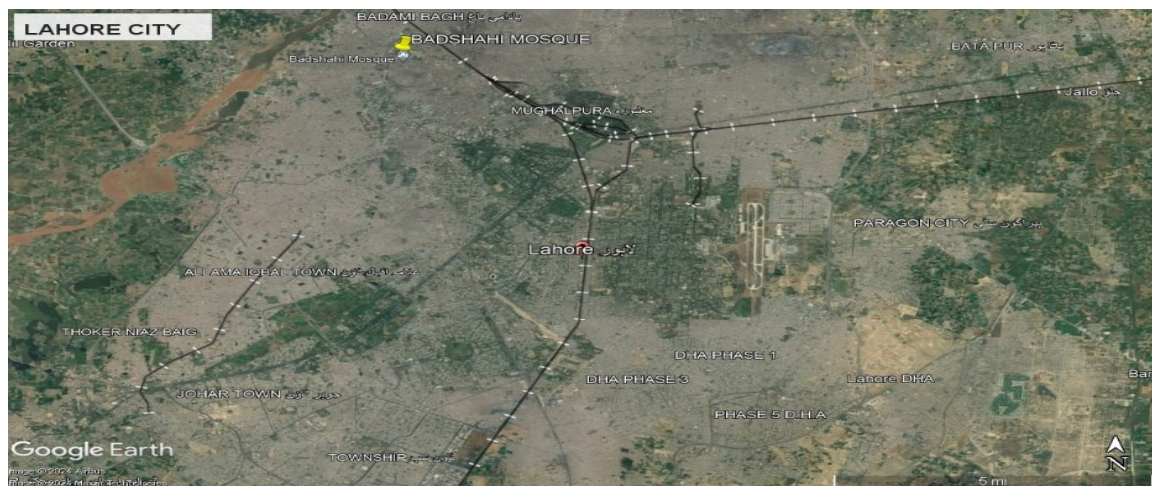
All photographs are by the author, except when otherwise mentioned.

If India was the jewel of the crown of the British Empire, then, Lahore definitely was the apex of the colonial project of East India Company. It has been the only corporation of the world history with its own army. Slowly but cunningly the East India Company infiltrated from the Eastern coasts of India and eventually held sway over entire Sub-continent. It is said that the British would not have been able to control India if first they had not been able to control Lahore (Fig.1).

G. B. Malleson writes in the introduction of his book *The Indian Mutiny of 1857*, that "In the history of the world there is no more wonderful story than that of the making of the British Empire in India." (Malleson, 1998, p. 1)

And this was possible only after conquering the most wonderful of the cities of the world i.e. Lahore (Fig.2). Early Britishers were in India for the sole purpose of doing business.

"The instructions which the agents on the spot received from the directors of the parent Company at home indicated, in the plainest language, that their business was to trade, that to trade advantageously, it was necessary to humor the native princes, to display courtesy and civility, to put away from them all thoughts of aggression. The object of the Company was to pay good dividends. Such a result could only be obtained by the development of peaceful enterprise." (Malleson, 1998, p. 1)



(Fig. 1) Map of Lahore. Satellite image through Google Earth.

All this changed and the British started eyeing the whole of India as a business opportunity and expansion of the Empire. "The East India Company is a bridge which connects the pre-modern with the modern period in history." (Tirthankar, 2015, p. vii)

India would have been a different country had Dara Shikoh become the emperor in place of Aurangzeb. It definitely would have been a more tolerant society. Most of India's

urban giants would not have become metropolises had the British not intervened. Lahore however was already a global city; culturally refined and a melting pot of different nationalities. It was Akbar’s capital for fourteen years. It was a favorite stopover for Mughal Emperors on their way to Kashmir in summers. Elite of the Mughals made Lahore their residence. They built *havelis* and mosques. There were around fifty tomb gardens outside the walls of Lahore. Lahore had been a springboard for Muslim conquerors into India. This started with Mahmud Ghaznavi in the end of 1st century A.D. His slave General Malik Ayaz’s tomb and Tomb Mosque are located in Rang Mahal Bazaar-a very bustling bazaar nowadays, but which was the eastern edge of Lahore in Mahmud Ghaznavi’s time.

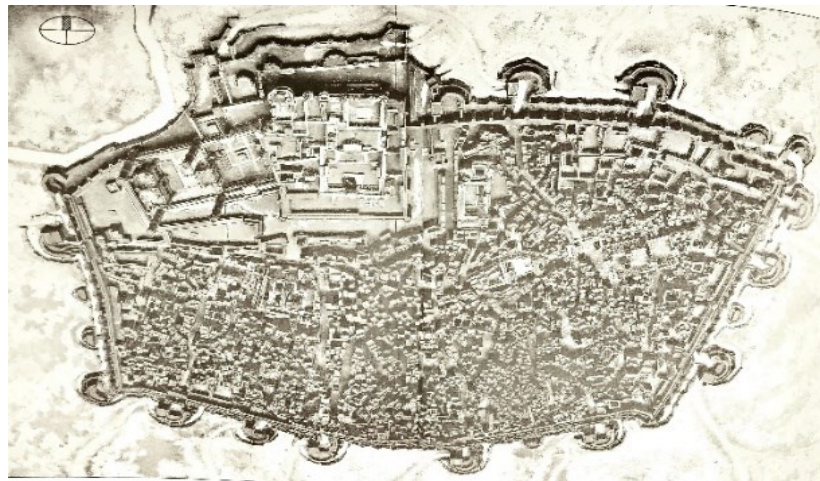
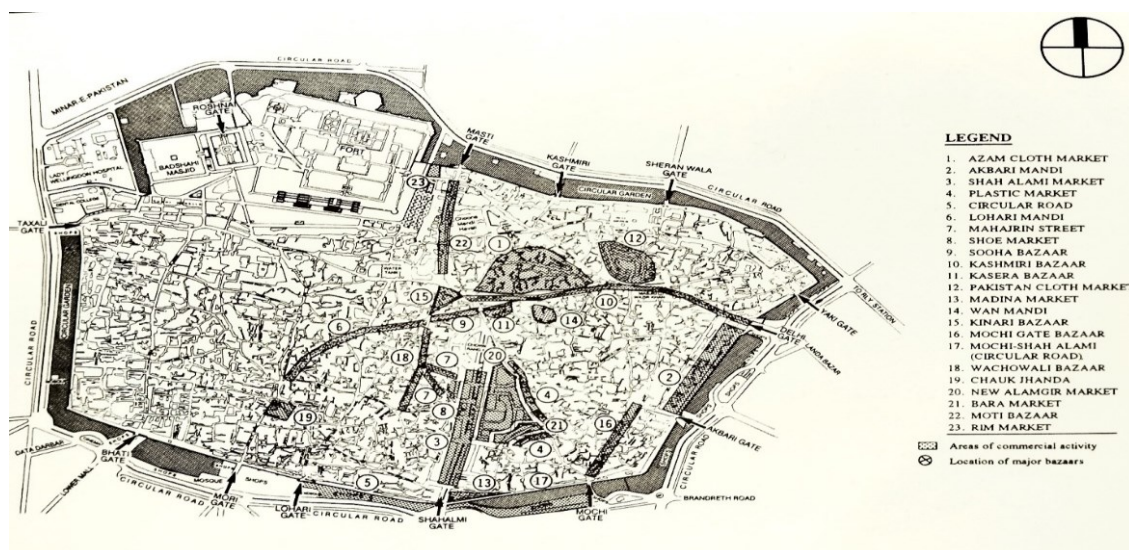


Fig.2 Wooden model. Victoria & Albert Museum (Aijazuddin, 2004, p. 39)

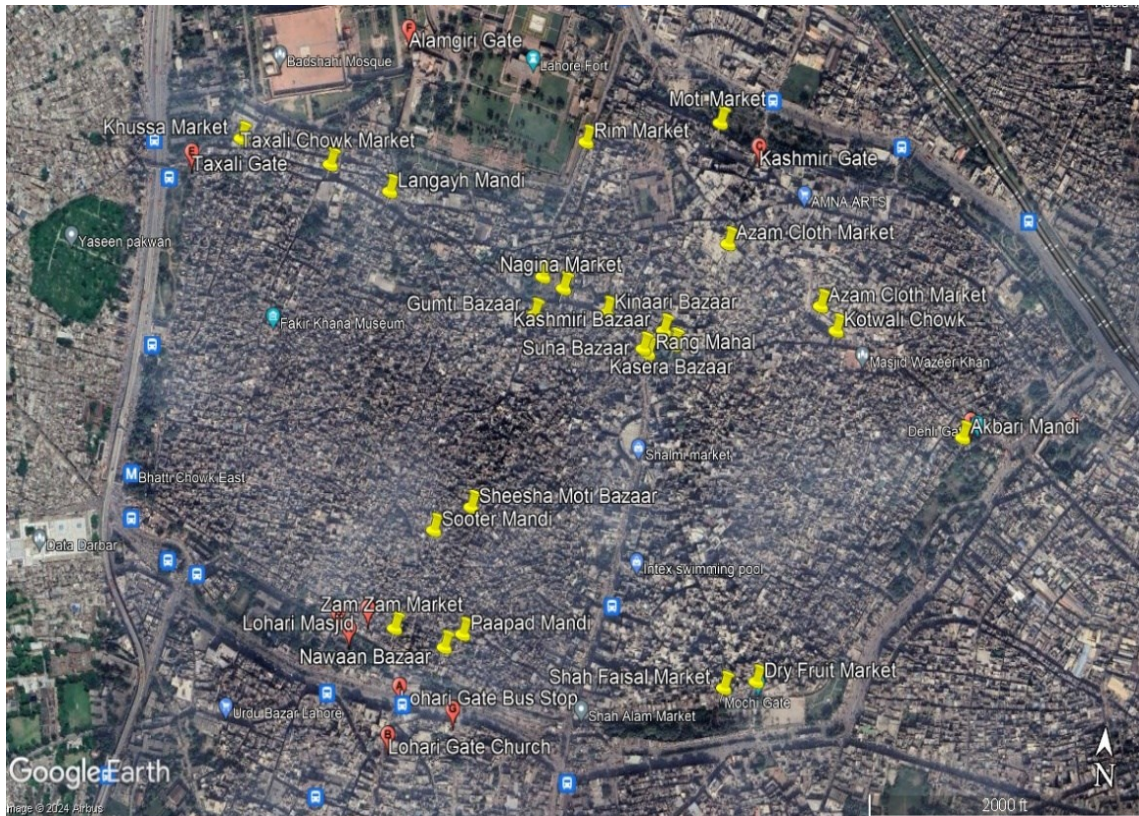
There had been a balance between residential and commercial activity in the city. This balance was disturbed when the Lahore Railway Station was built. The construction of railway station was an important urban morphology determinant-for the walled city particularly and Lahore overall generally. Its character became increasingly commercial. This commercialization and destruction of history continues unabated. Take for example Shahalmi Bazaar (Fig.3). There was a garden between the two sides of the bazaar. This was destroyed to make the double road wider.



(Fig.3) Location of major commercial activity (SDWCLP, 2009, p. 17)

Literature Review

“Indian tradition ascribes the foundation of the city in unknown times to the legendary Loh or Lav, son of Rama, and little is known about its early history. It is uncertain whether or not Alexander the great reached Lahore before turning south to Uchch and Multan. But its history may go back much earlier than Alexander’s days. For it is situated not far from the first known center of Harappa civilization, and may have played a role during the third and second Millenia B.C. It was probably a trading point, being the gateway to the Punjab Hills and Kashmir, and timber from the dense forests of the mountainous regions was floated by the town down the River Ravi, which, like the other four rivers that gave the Punjab (panj-ab, ‘five rivers’) its name, finally merges into the Indus so that goods could be easily transported to the Arabian Sea.” (Schimmel, 1988, p. 23)



(Fig.4) Google Earth image through satellite. Bazaars of walled city of Lahore

“‘To Agra and Lahore of Great Mughal’ extends the view of the newly created Adam when God showed him the great marvels which future generations will produce on earth.

So, Milton tells us in ‘Paradise Lost’; for him, as for his contemporaries in 17th century Europe, the city of Lahore was one of the most famous places in the East, an embodiment of fabulous wealth and splendor.” (Schimmel, 1988, p. 34)

“The modern administrators of Lahore have also inherited a number of major problems. Almost ironically in a country where the urban population is growing by more than 4 per cent each year, one of these problems is population loss. The quality of water, electricity and sanitation services have declined steadily over the years making the old city a difficult place to live. Between 1972 and 1981, for example, the population of the walled city fell by about 16,000 people. A parallel problem is the declining wealth of those who remain. The aftermath of the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 saw widespread burning of property in the Walled City and poorly maintained structures have continued to decay rapidly. Most residents, however, have few funds with which to support urgently needed conservation and restoration work. Pollution and ever-increasing encroachments onto public spaces have made the situation even worse.” (SDWCLP, 2009, p. 13)

“Even today, Kashmiri Bazaar is known for its woolen shawls and Landa Bazaar for its second-hand clothes.” (Ian Talbot, 2016, pp. 17-18)

Taxali Gate To Kashmiri Gate

We start exploring the bazaars of Walled City of Lahore (Fig.4) from Taxali Gate. Taxali Gate is the westernmost point of the Walled City. We move in an easterly direction. When we reach a Y-junction at Kinari Bazaar, we take the left turn and from Dabbi Bazaar we take a sharp left turn into a narrow alley. This is the start of Azam Cloth Market. After passing through the labyrinth of Azam cloth Market in the northerly direction we exit the Walled City at Kashmiri Gate. We make a left turn and we are at Moti market. We move westwards towards Masti Gate. Here we find the Rim Market.

We describe the markets encountered one by one.

Khussa Bazaar

The first market we encounter on entering Taxali Gate is the shoe market or Khussa Bazaar (Fig.5) This market started around forty years ago. Pathan migrants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa set up two or three shoe shops. On sensing good opportunity locals also started setting up shoe shops. Now there are around fifty shoe shops. The shoes are imported from Kasur, Multan, KPK, Quetta etc. A very few shops manufacture shoes as well. This is a retail market.

Peshawari Chappal and Multani Khussa of delicate embroidery or *tilla* work are the main items on sale in this market



(Fig. 5) Khussa shop in Taxali



(Fig. 6) Rexene shop in Taxali Chowk

Taxali Chowk Bazaar

From the Taxali Chowk starts the Rexene market (Fig.6). Rexene is a material used in furniture, shoes, belts, purse, sports goods-especially footballs- and so on. There are machines for lamination in a couple of workshops. Then there are cutting workshops as well. The market started in 1990. Businessmen from Sialkot set up business here.

Rexene is manufactured in Lahore. A vast quantity is imported from China as well. Sialkot has huge demand for Rexene. Rexene factories are also producing in Sialkot.

Langah Mandi Bazaar

Moving further east we come to Langah Mandi Bazaar (Fig.8). It is a market of musical instruments. Mostly local musical instruments are manufactured here but some guitars can also be seen This is a very old market and started in Mughal times. A shopkeeper insists that this is the oldest profession in the world and this business is here since the day

Lahore was founded. These instruments are used in the religious rites of Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims. The *qawwals* use these instruments. In short, the electronic musical equipment has made a dent in profits but still the business is good.



(Fig.7) British era water supply works



(Fig.8) Langah Mandi shop

Gumti Bazaar

As we reach Pani Wala Talab, there is a road turning in the right direction across from the hydraulic works (Fig.7) building of the British times. This too is a Rexene market. It specializes only in Rexene shoes. This bazaar is an extension of Sooter Mandi Bazaar-the main shoe manufacture market. If we continue southwards on this road, we will reach Jhanda Chowk and further onto Lohari Gate. Across the road from Lohari Gate starts the world famous Anarkali Bazaar. Gumti Bazaar came into existence some twenty years back.

Nagina Bazaar

It is a fifty years old market. It is a market of gem stones (Fig.9). Some shops are of wholesale and some of retail. Gem stones cutting and polishing is also done in this market. The stones are cut to standard sizes and buff is also applied to bring out the shine of stones. Stones are imported from Bangkok, Iran, India, etc. In Pakistan the precious stones are mined in Swat, Hunza and other northern areas. Jewelers and stone lovers who like to wear precious stones are the majority of customers.



(Fig.9) Nagina Bazaar shop
Y-junction



(Fig.10) Hatta Bazaar Chowk

Hatta Bazaar Chowk

Around Hatta Bazaar Chowk (Fig.10), also known as Khambian Wala Chowk the following bazaars are found in close proximity:

- Kinari Bazaar
- Rang Mahal
- Kashmiri Bazaar
- Kasera Bazaar
- Dabbi Bazaar
- Suha Bazaar
- Kinari Bazaar

A narrow covered street to the right is the Kinari Bazaar. Fancy dresses such as *Lehngas* and other decorated dresses or *Gota Kinari* dresses are prepared here, and sold.

Rang Mahal Bazaar

Standing at the Y-junction, towards right is the Rang Mahal Bazaar. It's a multipurpose bazaar with dress, shoe, and jeweler etc. shops

Kashmiri Bazaar

The left arm of the Y-junction leads to Sunehri Masjid and Kashmiri Bazaar. Here you can buy jeweler, dresses, shoes etc.

Kasera Bazaar

The open end of the y is taken by the Kasera Bazaar. It is a bazaar of kitchen or dining utensils (Fig.11). In the old days copper, bronze, brass utensils were found in abundance. Now majority of the shops sell stainless steel utensils. Even film producers bought brass, copper etc. utensils here to give a touch of reality to the movies with a historical touch.



(Fig.11) Kasera Bazaar

Dabbi Bazaar

A small Bazaar before the Kashmiri Bazaar is known as Dabbi Bazaar. It is also a general-purpose retail market selling dresses, shoes etc.

Suha Bazaar

Near the Malik Ayyaz Mosque a street towards right leads into the Suha Bazaar. This is a wholesale jeweler market with some retail shops as well. Mostly local people do business here. It was started after the creation of Pakistan. It is a more than sixty years old bazaar.

Azam Cloth Market (New)

If we turn left into a narrow street from Dabbi Bazaar, we enter the Azam Cloth market. It was made by General Azam of Pakistan army. It was made after independence. It is Asia's biggest wholesale cloth market. After passing through a labyrinth of narrow streets in a northerly direction you reach Kashmiri Gate. Here you exit the walled city.

Moti Bazaar

As we turn left from Kashmiri Gate we enter Moti Bazaar. It is a wholesale market of shoes. Shoes are manufactured in Lahore, Kasur etc. Some factories are there in Badami Bagh. It is a more than thirty years old market.

Rim Market

The area in front of the Masti Gate was known as *Qillay di Ghaati* or *Qillay di Khaai*. It was a deeply uneven ground or a *Khaai* as they are called in Urdu. It started developing in 1957. When the Shahalami area was burned down in riots of 1947 a huge amount of burned down or destroyed building material waste was produced. All the material was brought here to the *Qillay di Ghati* and dumped to fill the *Khaai*. The area was made plain and habitable in this way.

Originally it was known as Motor Market or Shahi Qila Motor Market. There were motor workshops here. With time the area became highly congested. Heavy traffic was not allowed anymore. The workshops closed down. People started the work of second-hand rims. Old rims are brought here, repaired and sold when they are in useable condition again. In short, the rims are altered and sold. All the kinds of rims are altered here.

Around Lohari Gate

Just outside Lohari Gate is an Optics Bazaar. There are around a dozen shops selling eyeglasses and related services. On other side we see pharmacies. On the west side are optics and on the east of Lohari gate starts pharmacy bazaar. It is known as Zam Zam Market. There are around fifty shops as we move eastwards along the Circular Road. This market was established around 1960. They sell homoeopathic, allopathic and *Hakimi* medicine as wholesale. It is also known as Nawan (new) Bazaar.

After the pharmacy shops start plastic sheets and bottles bazaar. These sheets are used in building roofs for water-proofing and are known as Panni.

After plastics products starts paper bazaar which is also part of Nawan bazaar. There are discarded or offset paper sheets sold by kilos.



(Fig.12) Papad Mandi shop



(Fig.13) Sooter Mandi shop

Papad Mandi

We reach a road turning left into the Walled City. This area is the oldest part of the Walled City. It was established before the Mughals. With time the old city kept expanding. Papad Mandi Bazaar is famous for desi or *Hakimi* medicine shops. There are medicine shops (Fig.12) selling syrups, plastic bottles, herbal medicine and even packets of empty capsule shells-to be filled later.

The famous Neewin Masjid is in this bazaar. It is two stories deep. It was built by Humayun in the 15th century. One wonders what the street level in 15th century may reveal on being excavated. Continue northwards in the labyrinth and we reach Sooter Mandi bazaar. Further north it touches Shisha Moti bazaar.

Sooter Mandi

It is a shoe market. Here you can see many cutting shops (Fig.13), which cut different sizes of shoes. Male shoes are produced in Sooter Mandi, and female shoe material is found northwards in Shisha Moti bazaar. The name of the bazaar gives the hint of merchandise on sale. Sooter Mandi further north has extended into Gumti bazaar where Rexene is available for making shoes exclusively. Otherwise, Rexene has many other uses.

Shahalami Bazaar

Further eastwards on Circular Road we reach the starting point of Shahalami Bazaar (Fig.14). This is the most famous wholesale market of Pakistan. It was established in the time of Ranjit Singh. During the time of British double decker buses plied here. During the riots of 1947, the entire area was burned down. During restoration work the roads were widened, so that now all kinds of traffic can access it. The shopkeepers think that now they are better off. They are satisfied by restoration work. It is good for business.



(Fig.14) Shahalami Bazaar



(Fig.15) Akbari Mandi

Delhi Gate to Mochi Gate

Akbari Mandi

As the name suggests it is a very old market. It was established in Mughal times. This market deals in herbs, spices and dry fruit as well (Fig.15). The merchandise is imported from Karachi. Karachi is the center of spices and related items. These are imported from India and Iran. Red chilies are from Sindh. In Punjab the red chilies are harvested in August and September-hence its supply is seasonal. While chilies from Sindh are available the whole year round. It is a retail as well as wholesale market.

Delhi Gate Bazaar

Inside the Delhi Gate are shops (Fig.16) selling clothing, kitchen utensils, shoes, purse, and other items of daily household use.

Wazir Khan Mosque *Hujras*

The *hujras* of Wazir Khan Mosque have been turned into a very touristy market. It is a recent project of Punjab Walled City Authority. There are around ten *hujras* turned into shops selling books, clothing, handicrafts, calligraphies, paintings etc. (Fig.17).



(Fig.16) Delhi Gate Bazaar *hujras*



(Fig.17) Wazir Khan Mosque

Kotwali Chowk

Kotwali Chowk of old days is now Pathura Chowk (Fig.18). Here are shops selling *pathuras* and *halwa puri*. It is a Y-junction with the right arm leading to old Azam Cloth Market and left one leading to Rang Mahal and Shahalmi Bazaar.



(Fig.18) Kotwali or Pathura Chowk Market



(Fig.19) Old Azam Cloth Market

Old Azam Cloth Market

This is a market present since Mughal times. It is a market of fancy ladies dresses (Fig.19). It is a wholesale as well as retail market. The shops are called arts shops rather than dress shops. A look at the dresses is enough to be convinced to be called pieces of arts. The cloth is imported from China and Pakistani cloth is also available.

The narrow street ends in Chuna Mandi Chowk (Fig.20). Chuna Mandi was a Bazaar of *chuna* or Lime used in building construction and painting. Now it has become a part of old Azam Cloth Market. We have to turn eastwards to Mochi Darwaza so we head back to the Y-junction of Kotwali Chowk. A narrow street turning eastwards takes us to Mochi Darwaza. On the way we see the famous Khalifa Sweets. It sells the best *Nan Khatai* in the whole of Pakistan.

Mochi Gate

At the Mochi Gate we see a dozen or so dry fruit shops. The countries only dry fruit *mandi* is in Quetta, from where the dry fruit is supplied all over the country. Dry fruit from America-walnuts and *kaju*- Australia, Iran etc. is imported and collected in Quetta dry fruit *mandi*. Mochi Gate dry fruit market has been there for thirty or so years.



(Fig.20) Chuna Mandi Chowk



(Fig.21) Shah Faisal Bazaar

Shah Faisal Bazaar

As we move westwards from Mochi Gate we come across fifty or so plastic shops (Fig.21). The plastic is manufactured in Sheikhpura. Shopping bags and plastic bottles are sold here. Plastics for use in waterproofing of buildings-in the shape of sheets- is also sold here. This market was established some thirty years ago when plastic overtook paper bags and became a most versatile, strong and cheap material. It has its downside in the shape of environmental degradation.

Bazaar Hakiman

Writing a few lines about Bhati Gate bazaars; when we turn left or south from Taxali Chowk, we enter the street that leads to Bhati Gate. Bhati Gate is on the South-west corner of walled city. This area is famous for its Hakims and Veds. Close by are various cinemas of old days. Due to the artistic activity close by, this area was called *Lahore ka Chelsea* (name of biography of Hakim Ahmed Shuja, published in 1967).

“Astrologers as well as practitioners of Tibb (traditional medicine practiced by Muslim hakims) and Ved (traditional medicine practiced by Hindus) drew clients to the walled city. Pundit Ragbhir Dyal Jotshi, who resided in Bhabron ki Tharrian in Tehsil Bazaar of Bhati Gate, was especially renowned. It was reported that thousands of visitors from all corners of the Punjab flocked to his house for over fifty years.” (Ian Talbot, 2016, p. 48)

Conclusion

Hence it can be said that the Walled City of Lahore is a bustling, vibrant and most industrious part of Lahore city. Business activity aside, it is very encouraging that the heritage value of this area is known to all the concerned authorities. A lot has been done and a lot more needs to be done if this gem of our collective memory is to survive. Its tourist attraction potential has been acknowledged and a lot has been done by international community. Local population in sync with the local authorities have turned the attention of the whole city towards itself.

“In many small but significant ways, the rhythm of life within the teeming old city remained unchanged over the centuries. Minds did not open and therefore neither did the streets, filling up like a cove each day with an incoming tide of humanity and emptying by nightfall.” (Aijazuddin, 2004, p. 78)

References

Aijazuddin, F. S. (2004). *Lahore Recollected*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications.

Malleson, G. B. (1998). *The Indian Mutiny of 1857*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications.

Qureshi, S. (1988). *Lahore The City Within*. Singapore: Concept Media Pte Ltd.

Schimmel, A. (1988). *Lahore the City Within*. Singapore: Concept Media Pte Ltd.

SDWCLP. (2009). *The Walled City of Lahore*. Lahore: PEPAC.

Tirthankar, R. (2015). *The East India Company*. London: Penguin Books.