



RESEARCH PAPER

Historic Urban Squares as Traffic Islands: A Case of Regal Chowk, Mall Road Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The research article is an effort to identify the features which are responsible to fetch changes in the historic character of these public spaces. The core objective of this paper is to review the causes of the transformation from traditional to modernity to provide social, Economic and environmental benefits to the public. Historic urban squares are sitting rooms for communal activities and symbolize the community in which they are positioned. Urbanization in the form of Urban sprawl shattered the historic environment and these squares / chowks were ruined and malformed into traffic islands. Case study method has been used to study the selected area, Regal Chowk Mall Road Lahore. The current situation of Regal Chowk reflects the amazing blend of traditional and modern architectural styles due to the increased commercialization. Analyzing the constraints, conclusions has been drawn to develop a framework for planned interventions in the historic urban environment.

KEYWORDS Commercialization, Regal Chowk, Traffic Island, Urban Interventions, Urban Square

Introduction

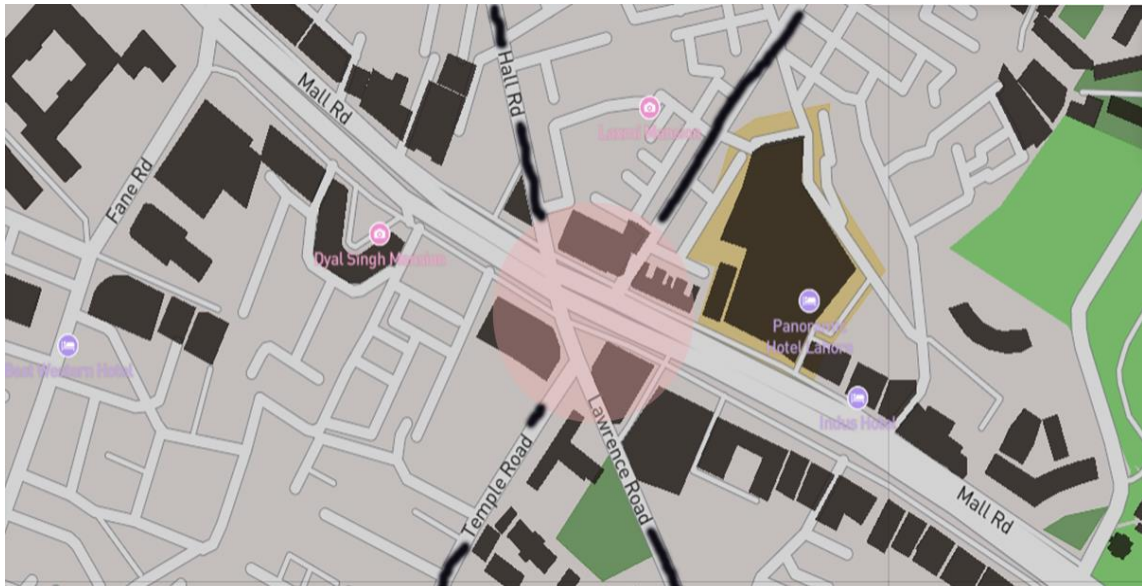
All over the world, historic urban squares have always been considered as a significant module of urban fabric and a powerful element of transforming settlements. Squares are a strong form of public space which helps to identify the shape and function of the cityscape. Usually, these public spaces were located in the central part of the city and performed as a space being utilized for military processions and parades to express power of rule. At first, these squares were developed on the intersection of trade routes for the trading and exchanging of goods as well as ideas. With the progress of cities, the function of these squares changed as per contemporary needs (Nawaz, 2019)

Each city has its own specific urban form with its various elements and every historic period has its own version of public spaces. Greeks Agora was center of commercial and communal activities and Roman forum performed same function and both were hub of trade and business activities. The terminology was different but function was same. Similarly, Public Square of the medieval period also served as a market place and Church Square was center of religious festivals and merchandise trading.

During the renaissance period, medieval square were refined with the addition of monuments and fountains. In addition, buildings around the square were ornamented to create pleasant view of the central space. In the Baroque period, the square established in terms of its function regarding people and events. Statues of human beings and animals, arches and columns were added as a mandatory element of these public spaces. Linkage of these urban spaces with road network was started to establish (Rodríguez et al., 1989).

With the change in traffic movement, motorized traffic took the place of these urban squares and pedestrian cities accommodated vehicles in the pedestrian streets and roads without segregation. These urban squares became the traffic island to facilitate efficient movement of new means of transport. Whatever the situation was, these urban squares lost

their tradition function and started to play their role as vehicular crossings. They are a significant element of built environment in the public domain (Mahfoud et al., 2022).



Map 1 View of Mall Road showing cross roads and neighborhood districts

Regal chowk Lahore is one of the icons at Mall Road Lahore in terms of communal activities during the colonial period. It contains layers of information regarding historic evidences of multiple nations in sub-continent. Regardless of its historical and architectural significance, there is a need to explore its traditional function in the historical and contemporary environments. The chowk is classic example of traditional Architecture with combination of modern styles.

Literature Review

The old city of Lahore was built on multiple layers of mounds, raising its considerable height up to 50' above the river Ravi, with depression on various points. The soil of the city was debris collected by the human activities in a long period of time. There was a 30' high wall around the city with a deep moat outside the walls since Mughal Period. Until Late century, the course of river Ravi was near the Lahore Fort but changed its direction towards North. Ravi with current course was only with an arm around the city deserting the old channels. In the result of rapid and unplanned urbanization, a drastic change take place and deserted area of the old Ravi was occupied by the illegal grabbers. The uneven lands were forgotten part of newly developed areas. Deteriorated mosques, gateways, arches, domes, heap of rubbish and old kilns were removed by the new rulers of the modern Lahore (WCLA, 2020).

Historic Background of Lahore

In 1810, the historic environment of Lahore was quite different, the alluvial plains changed into the successive cities flourished with public and private edifices. The gardens were turned into residential communities and streets were transformed into metallic roads. Height of the city wall was reduced from 30' to 15' and moat around the city wall was filled, developing in the form of gardens and named as circular gardens due to its geographical location (Rehman&Naz, 2013)

When the British came into power, there is no significant architecture appeared on the list of public sector. British rulers constructed public buildings, educational institutes, offices and gardens depending on the current needs within available financial resources. In 1847, after the annexation of Punjab, British subjugated India and established a network to

take care political and military affairs. British established Government of their own with a show of finance and power. Commissioner was appointed to head the Lahore as headquarter of the state. They formulated the development plan for the colonial Lahore. The significant were the establishment of Cantonment for their armies in Anarkali which was already occupied by the French and other Sikh army officials for their residences. The most important and historic monuments in the area were Tomb of Anarkali located in Wazir Khan's Baradari, British residency and chaurj gateway (Ovais, 2016).

Lahore as a Colonial City

Gradual increase in European population, Lahore started to expand towards eastwards. Debris was used in the construction of the roads and Civil Station. The expansion of the city was named on the officers involved in the planning. the newly developed area was comprised of

- Donald Town
- Lawrence
- Government House

In the year 1851-1852, the hygienic condition of the Anarkali was too bad to spread mortalities in the troops due to the cholera. Therefore, area was abandoned as cantonment to save the lives of the military. Another site for selected for new cantonment in the vicinity of Tomb of Hazrat Mian Mir, about 2 miles eastward further. The site was separate from the city with broken ground and contains plenty of trees giving a look of jungle. These trees were deficient in size and typology. There are number of kinar trees with few fruit trees such as piple, date, mangoes and palm. The site was not too picturesque to be claimed as a beautiful land. In the Mughal environment, Hindu buildings were almost of non-existing (Aslam, 2019).

To plan for the extension of the old city of Lahore and to establish a new British Lahore, Mr. Lawrence was selected as President of administration board of Punjab and Mr. Donald McLeod was given the duties as head of the commission. After the British annexation, Lahore came under the control British to move in the new world of progress. Projects related with public welfare were started to lay the foundation of modern Lahore. The most important are as follows:

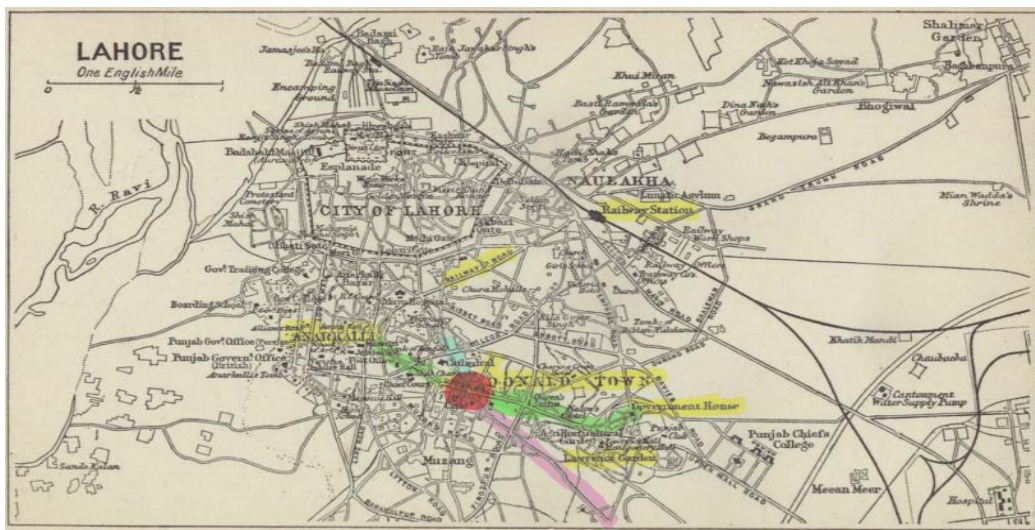
- Debris was replaced by metal roads
- Educational institutes were started to be established
- Railway system was established for the passenger and goods transportation. The biggest workshop for the assembly and manufacturing of railway trains and their accessories were laid in Mughalpura Lahore (Kerr, 1947) .
- The city was provided infrastructure and arrangements were done to provide water supply with proper drainage and sewerage systems.
- The center for means of communication such as telegraph and post offices were established.
- Irrigation system was established with a canal crossing Mian Mir and the city. This canal was originally a branch of Baridoab canal.

The mid 19th century experienced a short but architecturally a remarkable period. British developed a chain of colleges, hospitals, post offices, museums, cantonments, residential bungalows, railway stations, roads and bridges. The mid nineteen century saw the start of another short but architecturally significant period. By now the British had successfully taken over all the territories later to become Pakistan and set upon building new administrative institutions and infrastructures of their own. They were going to built collages, hospitals, post offices, museums, court houses, assembly halls, city halls, libraries,

country clubs, parks, stadiums, cantonments and residential bungalows, railway stations and yes architecturally significant bridges and tunnels (Malik & Jamil, 2021).

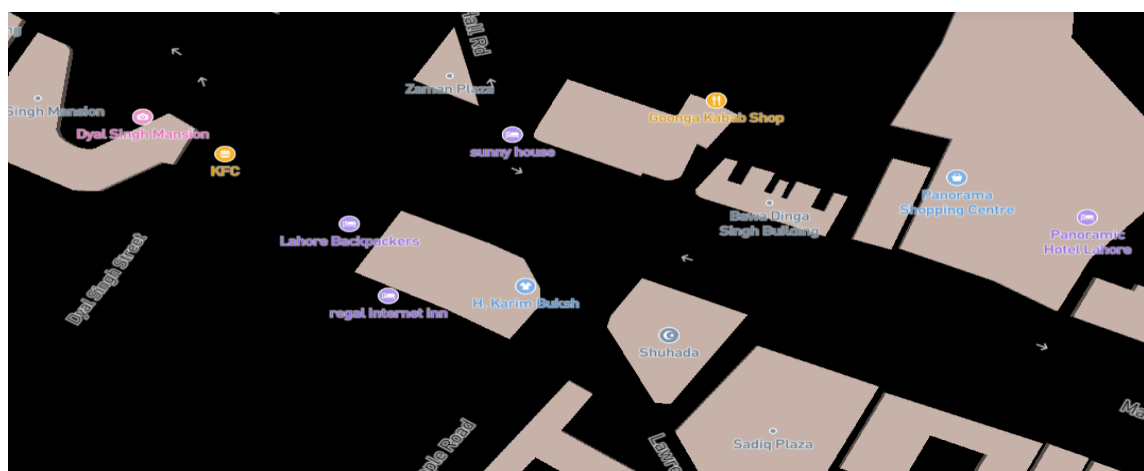
Development of Mall Road Lahore

Mall Road Lahore was first metal road in Lahore and it was constructed to join Mian Mir with Anarkali. With the construction of Mall Road, European population increased in the vicinity and mall road started its commercialization phase with the construction of shops and stores on both sides. The area around Lawrence Garden, Regal Chowk, Hall Road, Government House, opposite High Court and nearby localities were placed in a town named “Donald Town” named after Mr. Donald McLeod who remained lieutenant governor of Punjab from 1865 to 1870 and people called an extension road as McLeod Road. He was appointed as earlier president of Lahore Improvement Committee which was later named as Lahore Improvement Trust. This trust was renamed afterwards Lahore Development Authority (Aslam, 2019).



Map 2 Map of Lahore 1912 showing Donald Town with its context

During British period from 1849 to 1947, British architectural styles (Gothic and Victorian) combined with local architectural style (Mughal) .



Map 3 Figure Ground Relationship of Regal Chowk Lahore with its context

Sir Ganga Ram who is known as Father of Modern Lahore, has designed multiple buildings during that period on Mall Road Lahore such as General Post Office, Lahore High Court, Mayo school of Arts (now NCA Lahore), etc . On one side of the Mall Road is located the most prestigious university of Punjab. These buildings were neither designed purely on

British architectural style, nor on local architectural style. In stead, they are of unique style which was blend of European architecture with local Islamic architecture. British rulers also planned to preserve the historic architecture with the new constructions. Currently, most of the buildings constructed during the colonial period are structurally very stable, representing the most significant period of architecture in Pakistan(Rehman& Arshad, 2012).



Figure 1 Regal Center Mall Road Lahore



Figure 2View of BawaDinga Singh

Evolution of Urban Squares on Mall Road Lahore

Urban squares are open spaces located mostly in the center of the city and are hub of cultural and communal activities. These spaces are of two types, one is in the center of buildings and other is around any monument. The function of both types of open spaces is suitable for open markets, religious festivals, communal gatherings and music concerts. They are also termed as town squares and surrounded by small shops such as bakeries, meat markets, clothes etc. These squares have often a fountain, well, monument or statue in the center. These squares are also located at the intersection of the roads. The function of these squares expanded and transformed to manifest wealth and power. Contemporarily, these squares are being commercialized with the entertainment facilities such as restaurants, museums and restaurants. The increased motorized traffic destroyed the historic character of these squares and car parking got preference to a historical building (Juan et al., 2017).

There is a dearth need to save the historic character of these squares with contemporary needs with the help of technical processes, architectural authenticity and urban planning.

Material and Methods

Case study method has been adopted to evaluate the urban transformation at urban squares the Mall Road, an area developed during British period. Data has been collected by primary and secondary methods. Selected site "Regal Chowk" has been visited and visual survey has been conducted to segregate the traffic vehicles, building typologies and their period of construction. Urban interventions have changed the phase of mall road after independence. The points of intersection of roads which were serving as urban spaces, are now only traffic islands. Motorization has influenced traditional activities. Current building typologies consisting of British style and modern style have been analyzed with reference to modern function of the road crossings termed as urban squares or chowks.

Case Study – Regal Chowk Lahore as Public Square

Regal Chowk Lahore is an intersection of Hall Road, Lawrence Road and Mall Road Lahore and and very significant architecturally and historically. The square was used by the

people for political gatherings and musical festivals as its name shows. The meaning of the “Regal” is musical instrument.

Regal Cinema was also located on the extending road, Temple Road Lahore which is intersecting Mall Road through Lawrence Road. The function of this public square is same like other one and it is junction of the main roads and acting as a node. This chowk is also member of the urban squares like Charing Cross. The main activity of the surrounding area was food stalls.

Location and Context

Due to the increase in commercial activities, the area surrounding this square has become the hub of food markets. The activities with reference to food markets reflect the interest of residents of Lahore with food and eating behaviors. On one side is famous “Chaman Ice Cream Shop making the area blooming. The other side of the Regal is very famous DehiBhale, fruit chart and other food selling shops aligned in the ruined “Regal Cinema”.



Figure 3 A view of Regal Chowk Mall Road Lahore

Present Condition

Along with commercial activities, Regal square is also part of historic buildings as a display case of the power and wealth of the rulers. Original character of the square has been destroyed by the ever increasing commercialization and motorization. Bill boards has played vital role to depress the elevation of the buildings. The intersection of historical roads witnessed variety of activities for decades but now the square has lost its identity and has been transformed in motorized island.

The bicycles has been replaced by motor Cycles and four wheel vehicles. This traffic has also limited the food and commercial activities towards indoor restaurants. Lahore was city of gardens and was famous for the company of poets, performers and artists. Visual effect has also been destroyed (Ovais, 2016).



Figure 4 View showing BawaDinga Singh Building with adjacent, Contemporary Structure and pedestrian space for parking of motorcycles and cars

Architectural Characteristics

Mall Road Lahore is overcrowded by the multinational companies and brands converting chowk as public getter. Atop bill boards have destroyed the visual impact. The growing population of Lahore has also been dismantled the symbolic character of mall road with its squares. Due to the vehicular movement, pedestrian movement is not possible. Spatial confusion is the major deteriorating element of the space. Buildings are most articulated element of Urban design – they shape the space with well-designed buildings such as Regal Center and BawaDinga Building. The buildings around the square is combination of Historic and adjacent modern styles creating a sense of place. Vehicular traffic was also a cause of deterioration. There are traditional building around the square.

Regal Center

Regal Center now termed as Ahmed mansion on the right side of entrance to Hall Road from Mall Road. At the corner, shop of famous tailor Suba Khan was located which now has been vacated. the current status of the building is commercial. Shops of cloths, shoes and other merchandise goods can be seen. The front facing Hall road is occupied by the Huge bill boards which can be dangerous at times.



Figure 5 Regal Center with Motorized Traffic Parking in front

BawaDinga Singh Building

BawaDinga Singh Building is located in between Hall Road and Beadon road, built by Rai BehadurDinga Singh constructed in 1921 by a Hindu Engineer Chand AMIE as engraved on the name plate still visible on the face of the building. The building is a beautiful combination of Hindu and Sikh architectural elements. The owner was named as Raees-e-azam due to his wealth treasures. The Building was renovated in 2014 but still in a very bad condition, especially inner side.



Masjid-e-Shuhda

It is located on the corner of the historic Lawrence Road on mall Road near Regal Chowk. It was constructed in the commemoration of martyr of 1965 war between India and Pakistan. A large size dome erected on pillars, has covered the entire prayer hall of the mosque with a cone shaped minaret located on the backside. Exterior has been decorated with white marble, while interior has been intricate pendant light.



Figure 6 Masjid e Shuhda Mall Road, Lahor Figure 7 Masjid e Shahda and H. KarimBakhsh

H. Karim Bakhsh Store

On the other corner of the Lawrence Road at the junction of temple Road, H. karim Bakhsh Store is located. The store is in the use of cloth brands and show rooms. There was a store established at this place with the name of Lila Ram Kirpa Ram store which was developed in 1839 before independence (Rehman& Arshad, 2012).



Figure 8H.Karim Bakhsh Mall Road Lahore

Regal chowk Lahore is one of the significant European squares and was hub of people gatherings and food activities. People all over Lahore were used to come to Mall Road for shopping of clothes, shoes and other necessities. Secondly, regal chowk was center for food stalls and restaurants. These activities were performed in the open spaces. Due to the pressures on the new Lahore due to commercialization and motorization, the area became congested minimizing outdoor activities, leaving no space for traditional functions of historic squares. The chowk transformed in road crossing but still, chowkis significant due to the presence of historic monuments around the square. With the historic monuments, there are newly constructed buildings are also giving a fascinating look to the area. Bill boards on the face of the buildings destroyed the visibility of the old historic structures. Parking of vehicles is also a major issue to be addressed to avoid congestion. Moveable stalls and hawkers are creating a mess. Static shop fronts should also be treated carefully. Now the area has been declared as heritage site and will be protected by the authorities.

Conclusions

Considering the unplanned interventions in the historic areas, it has been concluded that there is a challenge ahead to protect these areas with the provision of modern needs. Its first and foremost duty of the city authorities to develop proper understanding of the policies for the interventions maintaining the authenticity and esthetic value of the built environment. Secondly, there is a need to develop policies for the security of the citizens. Action plans should be identified by the institutional responsibilities.

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