

The Lost Romance of the Streets of Lahore

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Introduction

I remember my first visit to the Walled City during the course of my studies at the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, (UET), and my fascination with it. It stayed in my mind and when I got the chance to conduct research, the first proposal that came to my mind was about my lingering fascination with the Walled City streets. I visited the Walled City once again with questions in my mind like: what makes the Walled City streets unique and different from other streets, particularly those of the new Lahore? What is the quality of the Walled City streets that is different from that of contemporary streets? Why had the change become inevitable? I studied the Walled City streets and also the contemporary streets to find out what had changed.

Streets serve the purpose of connecting spaces, allowing movement of goods and people. They also act as places of social gathering, of the informal assembly of people, where children play and emulate other people and learn from them; also where the culture of communities takes root and where integrated services are performed. As Noberg Schulz says, 'The Street, in the past ... was a "small universe" where the Character of the district and of the town as a whole was presented in condensed form to the visitor. The street represented, so to speak, a section of life – history had shaped its detail's'.¹ In terms of the public realm, no element of the urban environment is more important than the streets. This is where we travel to work, shop, eat, and engage in social interaction. Streets join the public and private domain and link various parts of a city. According to Moughtin, 'The Street has not been a mere means of access but essentially an arena for social expression'.²

After the French revolution (1789–1799), the development of new military tools and physical patterns for war led to an era in which all postulations and empirical standards about town planning were questioned *ab initio*. The old defense system no longer provided security against the innovative weaponry. War had taken on new facets and city walls lost their importance and were demolished. Defensive measures, to date, had played a defining role in city planning. The decline of

the use of the city wall overlaps in time with the onset of industrial development, which led cities into unique and unprecedented growth.³ The twentieth century further brought a change in the use and design of the streets. The interactive ambience and affluent culture of the street was replaced by the efficiency of roads. Some roads partially serve the integrated purpose of streets, while others are meant just for vehicular movement. The supremacy of pedestrian rights, one of the traits of the street, was lost in the process.

So far several terms such as, street, way, path, highway, avenue, route, have been employed almost interchangeably. It would be possible to expand this list to include other words such as, boulevard, road, mall and promenade, which have related meanings. Without going into a detailed debate on definitions, the major differentiation is to be made between “street” and “road” in this paper. The street simultaneously acts as both “*path*” and “*place*” and is characterized by the virtue and quality of the *street life and the facilities it offers* to pedestrians. It may be temporarily barred to traffic in order to secure or facilitate some other user, for instance: a street-fair, a procession, play space for children. Roads, on the contrary, offer supremacy to cars in comparison to public gathering and social interaction and all other users being of secondary importance, no blockage is encouraged. The increasing trend of street usage as roads, with the supremacy of vehicular movement in urban areas, has resulted in social as well as physical decline.⁴

Walled City Street

The Walled City, lying on an ancient mound in north-west Lahore, traces its history for over a thousand years. Latif in his book claims that to know the exact date of its foundation is impossible, but concludes that Lahore was an important town in the mid-seventh century.⁵ The Walled City evolved slowly, preserving historical structures, planning principles, traditions and cultures for each successive generation. It has been created neither by a single man or ruler, nor in one period. Urban development took place as an organic process along established planning principles, accommodating growth with a concern for the human senses. Like all informally planned cities, from Spain to India and the Middle Eastern cities, as Broadbent reported, the labyrinthine planning with narrow, sometimes, blind alleys often covered and ending in private courtyards, enhance the feeling of security and strong social interaction.⁶ Streets are straight for a short distance but mostly winding, twisting and turning into each other providing security and privacy, along with the delight of surprise.

The city lay-out forms a complex web of social and cultural

Type	Plan	View	Section	Use
Main street		<p>width varies from 20'0" 22'6"</p>	<p>20'0" 22'6"</p>	Ground floor Commercial & upper 2 or 3 storeys are residential
Second-ary street		<p>width varies but normally it is 6'0" 12'0"</p>	<p>6'0" 12'0"</p>	Residential but mostly With shops at G. floor
Tertiary street/alleey/Cul de sacs		<p>width varies but mostly it is 2'6" 6'0"</p>	<p>2'6" 6'0"</p>	Purely Residential

Figure 3

activities with private and public places merging into each other. Inside the Walled City, one moves through convoluted routes that are often only as wide as necessary for pedestrians. Tall buildings provide cooling relief below by protecting the narrow streets from severe sunrays excluding the rays with a shadow line (alleyways). The minimum open

space left is for circulation along the narrow streets, and the bordering buildings are typically in use for shops at the ground level, with family quarters on upper floors with a flat roof.⁷ These rooftops facilitate not only the sleeping in summer but also social exchange the year round.

I chose the *Guzar* of Dehli Gate for analysis, as it was the preferred entry for foreigners in the past.⁸ The streets have an hierarchy descending from *Guzars* (the main spine) to the *Mohalla* (neighborhood) then the *galli* (individual narrow Street) and finally the *band galli* (*cul de sac*). The main thoroughfare is the main axis. Secondary streets were perpendicular to these primary streets and, as these secondary streets went deeper, they assumed an organic form of tertiary streets that were more convoluted and generally blind-ended. Prior to the introduction of automobiles, people used bullock-carts, horses, camels and oxen for transportation.⁹ Streets were not only used by pedestrians but also by other modes of transportation as stated by Fra Sebastian, a Spanish preacher, who visited Lahore in 1641.¹⁰

“It is a handsome and well-ordered city, with large gateways and pavilions. I entered the city, a very difficult undertaking on account of the number of people who filled the streets, some on foot, some on camels, some on elephants, others in small carts, jolting one against the other as they went along. Those who could best, passed on first, this being the receiving hour at Court; many of the gentry were proceeding there, accompanied by as many as five hundred followers on horseback”.

The Street as an Informal Social Place

According to Trancik ‘a space acts as a place when it addresses human needs within their natural, cultural and historical contexts. For public space cultural values, social values of users are as important as enclosure and linkage values’.¹¹

The Walled City street acts as a place, as it provides the setting to the users according to their culture and natural context. Women in streets often stand in doorways or sit on the steps of doorways and



F.2

A cul-de-sac in the
Walled City

chat informally with each other because the physical design of a street provides privacy and shade from scorching summer sunlight. There is provision of some spaces in the Walled City's physical layout that fosters sociability among the residents, that is, *Katrah*. It acts like an outdoor room, a platform that attains a greater measure of privacy due to the blind end of the street. In it, social activities take place such as neighborly interaction, children's play, conversation and an occasional fight! The *cul-de-sac* (*band gali*) gives an attenuated privacy as no stranger can come through.

Robustness

"It is the flexibility to make use of a place for diverse purposes". Places that are used for several different purposes offer more choices to their users than those places which are designed to restrict them to their single use. The quality of an environment that offers such choice is called robustness.¹² This quality of urban space is usually achieved by the diverse use of the space. There is no segregation of activities in the streets of the Walled City. A street working well for residential activity also does well for commercial activity. This type of mixed use adds life and vibrancy to the streets of the Walled City. Robustness causes the intermingling of various people and activities and thus enhances the chances of sociability among people of that particular area.

Sense of Safety and Security

For a stranger, narrow streets look like a maze of *cul-de-sacs*, but in fact these streets offer a subtle, reference system of thresholds and buffer spaces which act as filters to keep strangers out. Thresholds are usually in the form of arches, door steps, low stone posts or simply the sudden narrowing and curving of a street. Women stand at door steps to watch people passing by and also keep an eye on their children playing in the streets, thus, conforming to the 'eye on street' concept by Jane Jacob.¹³ Windows open onto the street as a neighbor is



F. 3

'Eye on street' concept, Walled City

more familiar than a stranger, underlining security as the private space opens onto the semi-public space, offering more sociability and 'eye-on-street' by the household. Houses and other buildings address the street with entries, balconies, windows, *Jharokas* with woodwork detail, other architectural features and activities. They also help to generate a pleasant walking environment. Extensions from the house into the streets or a physical link of the house with the public space (the street) enhance the sense of ownership and natural surveillance as described by Oscar Newman¹⁴: "*windows and doorways, when facing streets, extend the zone of residents' territorial commitments*". Bentley talks about it under the name of "visual permeability".¹⁵ Windows, doorways and balconies add visual permeability between private and public spaces. This quality generates the feeling of safety among the users of the street with the feeling that they are not alone in the public space thus offering comfort and convenience by diminishing the feeling of being detached. Walkability is encouraged by variety and human-scale detail. These physical features manipulate the way a pedestrian feels about the surroundings as a place to walk as compared to the urban motorized road.

A Place to Linger and for Spontaneous Social Encounter

Culturally, shopping in Lahore in a bazaar is a long, drawn-out affair as goods are examined, selected and then bargained for in prolonged discussions in which all those present in a shop might also join. This also leads to spontaneous encounters with friends or new friendships might develop through the experience. Eateries like shops of Halwa and Lassi and the informal seating provided by street cafés, are the places where people linger. Alexander says that "people choose to linger in public spaces where they can enjoy a view toward some feature of interest".¹⁶ Perhaps to watch people is a great feature of interest in our culture. Spaces in front of homes that are technically not part of the public realm but have acquired a character through use, are favorites to sit upon and watch the world go by. Christopher called these types of seating "secondary seating" that encourage the effective use of place.¹⁷

Enclosure

"Enclosure" refers to the extent to which buildings, trees, walls, and other elements define spaces (streets and squares) visually. Work in neurophysiology suggests that enclosure is such an important feature of the environment that there is a specific region in the brain that responds directly to environmental enclosure.¹⁸ Feeling for enclosures is enhanced by the heights of buildings on both sides of streets which in

turn lead to sociability among the users. Sitte states that¹⁹, “Streets that are visually enclosed avoid the impression of being a thoroughfare and provide a better setting for the architecture”. Carrying the argument further Gibberd’s recommendation²⁰ for the design of the street is ‘...to reduce the width of the road itself and the dwellings brought realistically close together, then it is likely to evoke an urban quality which lifts the spirit.’

Buildings here respect each other and despite being different in detail, display enough commonality to be an integrated part of the whole composition. This adds to the quality and unity of the urban fabric. A curve also provides visual closure. A narrow curvilinear street, generates interest as the end of the street is not apparent from the beginning, converging into a spacious pedestrian space giving a pleasing surprise. Alexander also emphasizes the importance of enclosure in street design: ‘Streets should be for staying in, and not only for moving through, the way they are today.’ Therefore he proposed, ‘make a bulge in the center of the public path, and make the ends narrower, so that the path forms an enclosure which is a place to stay, not just a place to pass through’.²¹

Contemporary Streets

Brief History: The annexation of the Punjab by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century and the construction of the Cantonment and the Civil Station started the expansion of Lahore beyond the Walled City. A new urban network of roads lined with trees was evolved.²² A new rectilinear urban pattern of wide roads²³ was introduced in contrast to the Walled City’s labyrinthine pattern. Residential and commercial areas were separated and the Cantonment had wide, tree-lined roads.²⁴ The most distinguishing character was a regular road network with the separation of residential, commercial and recreational activities.

Soon after the Civil Lines developed, indigenous communities were developed with the clear demarcation of streets and plots surveyed by municipal engineers and sites were set aside for parks, clinics, school, mosques and temples.²⁵ At the time of Independence road network with a water supply system and sewerage at places was well-established. The Lahore Improvement Trust (LIT), was set up in 1922, for the development of the city in a planned manner. The LIT and its successor the Lahore Development Authority (LDA), developed housing schemes along ‘modern’ lines for instance, Shadman, Samanbad and Gulberg, with rectangular blocks, and wide streets in a regular layout. The absence of facilities for pedestrians on wide and long roads made a personal car a necessity for daily activities like a

'pick-and-drop' for children to schools, and buying of daily grocery needs.²⁶

Johar Town's Streets

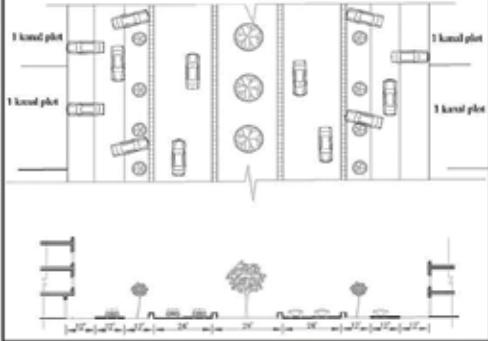
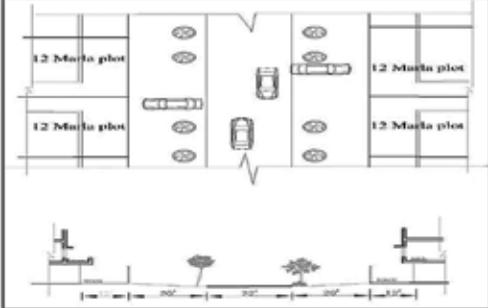
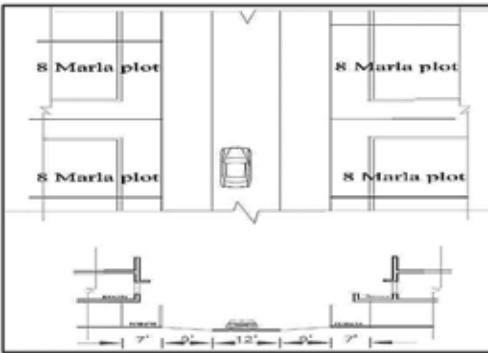
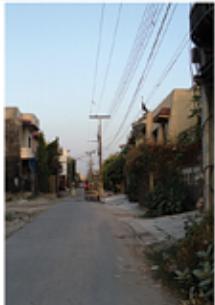
Johar Town (named after Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar) is located south of Lahore. This newly-established planned scheme is the largest residential society in Lahore developed by LDA.²⁷ Its link to the rest of the city is mainly by the Canal Road, where the Johar Town Underpass provides the link.

The whole scheme is laid out in a grid-iron pattern with wide and broad roads, having an hierarchy descending from the main road (connecting Johar town to the rest of city), the primary roads (connecting different blocks to the main road with plot size of minimum 1 kanal), the secondary roads (within one block with the plots of 12 Marlas) and the tertiary roads (within the block with small sized plots like 5 or 7 Marlas¹). Although separate residential and commercial areas were marked in Johar Town (according to zoning laws true for all planned schemes), unofficial development of commercial activity, by conversion of residences into shopping plazas and restaurants on the main road is evident in Johar Town, like other planned schemes, in defiance of the zoning bylaws of the city.²⁸

I chose 3 blocks, L, P, Q, in Johar Town, which share facilities of recreation and shopping, to analyze for this study.

An Informal Sociable Place

The three blocks have one common park situated in P Block, which is the only space for the children to play. This park may, perhaps, be considered sufficient for the residents living in P Block, as it offers them a sense of security and safety, but for the people living in L and R Block it is not adequate. It does not meet the condition mentioned by Jacob that mothers would like to watch their children playing outside through the window while working in the kitchen.²⁹ The streets are designed only for the purpose of vehicular movement as no footpaths or pedestrian domain is established. Therefore they do not offer an opportunity for people to go out for leisure walks and informally meet their neighbors.

Type	Plan/Section	View	Use
Main street		 <p data-bbox="690 480 938 521">Street width 125' along with 12' of set back for building on each side</p>	Commercial
Primary street		 <p data-bbox="690 928 938 969">Street width 62' along with 12' of set back for building on each side</p>	Residential
Tertiary street		 <p data-bbox="690 1327 938 1369">Street width 30' along with 7' of set back for building on each side</p>	Residential

A Sense of safety and security

According to building bylaws for residential areas, setbacks are necessary for each plot even if it is just 5 Marlas. Hence, no house owner can have windows directly opening onto the street on the ground floor.³⁰ The sense of ownership of the street and public place is thus reduced as opposed to the Walled City streets where the streets were considered as semi private space particularly in the poor residential areas.

If we compare the sections of the streets in Johar Town with those of the Walled City we find that these houses are set apart from the street and do not overlap the public space as in the Walled City.

Places to Linger and for Spontaneous Social Encounter

There is a dedicated small commercial space (for daily life needs like groceries) in P Block. This space is sufficient for the grocery needs of all three blocks. People go there to shop in their personal cars although the distance is not much. People do not want to walk as the roads are uninviting for pedestrians. The trend of using a car even for small trips makes the spontaneous social encounter rare. There are no house extensions (stoops or secondary seating) as mentioned earlier, where people can sit and watch other people. The features of visual stimulation, windows opening onto the street, *Jharokas* with woodwork detail, other architectural features and activities that help to generate a pleasant walking environment are uncommon. These physical features manipulate the way a pedestrian feels about the surroundings as a place to walk rather than using the urban motorway. As Colin Buchanan says, *'Walking is also an integral part of many other matters, such as looking at shop windows, admiring the scene, or talking to people. In all, it does not seem to be far from the truth that the freedom with which a person can walk about and look around is a very useful guide to the civilized quality of an urban area.'*³¹ Even the street amenities like benches (primary seating facility³²) and paved walkways to attract and facilitate pedestrians are missing. As a result of the absence of such amenities of the public realm people prefer to live in seclusion and indifferent behavior is becoming common in our society. The absence of pedestrians on streets makes spontaneous social encounter a forgotten tradition.

Robustness

Streets, with diverse functions invite different people at different times to the same place, offer an opportunity to the people to meet and enhance their acquaintance thus improving social cohesion. Different theorists like Alexander and Jane Jacob discussed the importance of diversity and emphasized that in "the City is not a tree". Alexander argued, "If design of a place does not consider the diversity among connections of activities, places and people it would be a failure of the design".³³ The variety of uses helps to determine the vibrancy and life of a place. As mentioned above, all planned schemes are designed with the segregation of different uses. This is also the case with Johar Town. As a result one might have a feeling of monotony and boredom while walking down a street as there is no diversity or complexity.

Enclosure

The enclosure of a space also adds to its quality to facilitate users. It refers to the extent to which buildings, trees, walls, and other elements define spaces (streets and squares) visually. Spaces have a room-like quality provided the height proportionally relates to the breadth of the space. The street is an area which serves a group and not one specific family. As a space serving a group, it is to some extent a closed social system. It has a predominant function as an enclosed space rather than as a public thoroughfare. The narrow walking street with enclosing walls higher than the width of the street works well for its function as well as being an attractive place. The street presents a sense of enclosure and completeness when, streets are 20–30ft and bordering buildings 3-4 storeys high.³⁴ According to Fig we find a weak definition of enclosure in the roads of Johar Town according to the above mentioned statement of Raymond Unwin. People simply pass through without any desire to stay on the road.

Conclusion

In street designing there has always been a great concern for travel and transportation along with a social and psychological impact. Furthermore, the widths of streets always catered for the ways of transportation, whatever means for movement were used in those times. For instance, in the medieval period street width was determined according to the width and area required by laden camels or the bullock carts and more importantly the necessity to make a straight street was only felt to facilitate the carriage.³⁵ Social and defensive concerns are also evident, for instance, the concept of the *Fina* and *cul-de-sac*. Several examples in history show the concern for designing a street as a 'place' for the public rather than a mere path. The twentieth century brought a one-eighty degree shift both in the use and character of the street, with the frequent misunderstanding that transportation is the defining characteristic or even the ultimate purpose of the street.

Defining a street as a road is not the same as designing it as a 'place'. Roads designed by engineers to provide so many passenger car units (PCUs) per hour makes a street a conduit which facilitates the efficient movement of necessary activities like, going to work or school, waiting for a bus and shopping. People's quality of living can be improved if the places in which these activities take place are healthy and well-designed. Optional activities like, sitting, standing and walking for fresh air, can only take place if the weather or place make the setting pleasant. Propagation of social activities takes place with both optional and necessary activities. Social activities entail the

presence of another person for example, conversations and greetings, and passive activities entail examining and watching other individuals or groups. The design of the public space, particularly the street, has apparent effect upon the prospect that can happen for such social activities. The reduction of the use of streets by pedestrians, because of traffic, pollution and noise, induced the diminution in social interaction of adults and play for children. As Roger pointed out, "The problem is that we don't think of cities as people friendly space".³⁶

The intent is not to present a recipe or a formula, but to make ourselves conscious about the present condition that might help to improve the street condition of Lahore in the future. In most areas the street has become a place of risk for pedestrians due to fast traffic and so it is unsocial and unsafe. People tend to stay within their houses and move about only in their personal motor car. The street's significant purpose is its use as a place of casual interaction, including conversation, entertainment and reaction and as a site for ritual ceremonies.³⁷ It strengthens people's social desire. As Allan Jacob wrote, "if you can't walk along the street, you possibly can't meet any other person".³⁸

Endnotes

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