

Historical and Spatial Portrait of Naulakha Bazaar, Lahore

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*“ Suna key loot ka bazaar sujney wala hey
Hir ik nazer mein mera ghar hey kya ki jiye”*

(Dr. Ali Ahmad Jalili)

The bazaar and urbanization have been interrelated through out history and no South Asian city can be imagined without its bazaar. The survival of a city was dependent on its economic power and the bazaar was the most important of the diverse public spaces used for economic and commercial activities. It was the nucleus of social life emanating from commerce, and citizens of the town and surrounding areas gathered in the marketplace for exchanging news and finalizing deals. Merchants and trade are esteemed in Islamic cultures and at the time of the rise of Islam, Mecca, the birthplace of the religion, was already a major center of local, regional, and at times, international trade dominated by the merchant patricians. After the advent of Islam, bazaars from Samarkand and Kabul, to Isfahan and Baghdad, bordered the main thoroughfares of the trade-linked Central Asian cities, usually located near palaces of rules or citadels and the largest Central mosques.¹ Friday became the day of congregational prayer in Islam because it was the day when merchants and townspeople would assemble for a weekly bazaar in the Arabian Peninsula.

Bazaars of Lahore

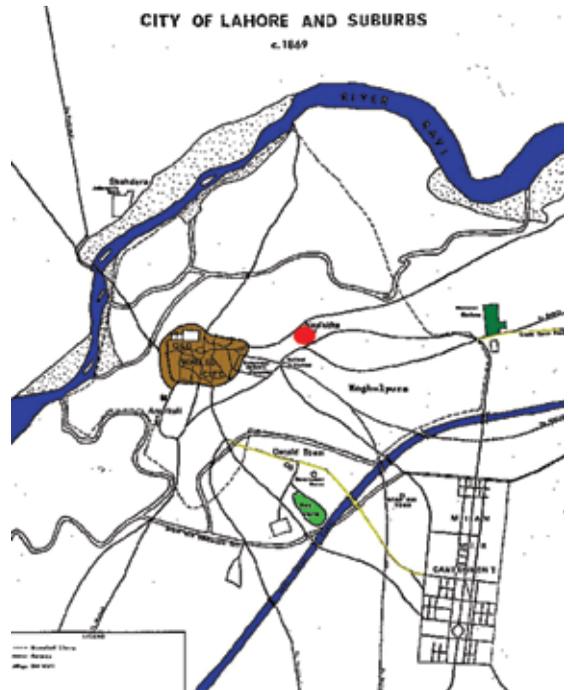
Lahore is a city rooted in history, tradition, art, culture, and festivals. The city has seen the zenith and collapse of many dynasties and provides visual reminders of its parental heritage, and its occupation by a series of rulers since the eleventh century. More than any other city, it represents Pakistan's vast, rich cultural heritage; a mosaic on which imprints of successive regimes are evident. During Mughal times, it was the administrative center of one of the great provinces. An independent Sikh kingdom controlled the Punjab for much of the first half of the 19th century until it was annexed to British India in 1849 and became the capital of the Punjab Province. Located along the historical Grand Trunk (G.T.) Road, Lahore is a city of strategic, political and cultural significance. Since, ancient times, this city has been one of

F.1

Map of Lahore and
suburbs.

the most important points that connect South Asia with Central Asia. Commercial trading with adjacent towns was easy as Lahore lies on a vast plain.

Lahore is a city of monuments, lively bazaars and truly a shopper's paradise. Its urban structure cannot be traced without studying the changes in the physical, social and economic status of old bazaars. For example, Sarafa Bazaar, the Copper and Brass Bazaar, Kashmiri Bazaar, Lakshmi Bazaar, Shah Almi Bazaar, Soha Bazaar, Dabi Bazaar, Anarkali Bazaar, Ichra Bazaar, Garhi Shahu Bazar, Landa Bazar, Sadar Bazaar, Urdu Bazaar, Naulakha Bazaar and others are traditional commercial magnets as well as living museums. Over time, shopping trends have been revolutionized and evolved to another level with the phenomenon of supermarkets, shopping malls, multistorey plazas, online shopping and so on but traditional shopping trends predominate. The Naulakha Bazaar, distinctive in its character, offers economical bargains and thereby enjoys a special position among the Bazaars of Lahore.



Naulakha Bazaar

Exact information on the history and origin of the Naulakha Bazaar is not available; however, historical accounts indicate that the history of the area is approximately 500 years old. In the early 16th century, Prince Mirza Kamran probably built his earliest gardens in the Naulakha area, just east of the Walled City; the area was later extensively developed by Asaf Khan and expanded by Dara Shikoh.² Fact or fiction, it is reputed that Naulakha derives its name from the cost of its construction (*nou lakh* – nine hundred thousand), a huge amount at the time. The most radical changes in the fabric of old city began

during the British period and Lahore expanded beyond the city walls as the old nucleus was not capable of accommodating the requirements of the modern life introduced by the British. The establishment of the Railway Station (formally opened in late 1864) in the Naulakha had a major influence on land use patterns of the area³. The maps below indicate the growth pattern of Lahore highlighting the location of Naulakha on the east side of the Walled City.

Naulakha Area

The Lahore Railway Station became the focal landmark and various roads were laid taking off to Badami Bagh, the Ravi Bridge, Delhi Gate and others. During the Sikh regime, *Nakhas* (Persian *nakhkhas*, meaning a marketplace for the sale of captives, horses and cattle taken as war prizes) had developed in this area⁴. There is a mention of Shaheed Ganj House with a bazaar west of which were many residences, a masjid and so on, and a courtyard carrying vessels of *bhang*.^{5a-b} The map indicates Naulakha and its adjacent areas in its present form.

Spatial Pattern

The bazaar, in its present form developed during the early part of the 20th century. The area was furnished with historical landmarks such as Sirai Mian Sultan, Hazrat Shah Kaku Chishti's grave (1477 A.D.) Moolchand Mandir, Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj, Gurdwara Bhai Taru Singh, Naulakha Church (1853), Government Technical College (GCT), Lahore (1889). These particular attributes have had a remarkable influence on the spatial structure of the bazaar, in such a way that the shops embraced these monuments. As a result, the commercial axis and the spatial distribution make loop-like configurations proceeding to the opening of one of the city gates, Delhi Gate. This development made for easy access between the Lahore Railway Station and the old quarter of the city. This kind of plan justified its importance by developing nodes at the intersection of streets. They are the places where people meet to have endless exchange of views which create a form of social life. The bazaar is the main urban space where important ritual ceremonies were conducted, which indeed, made it a very unique bazaar. This arrangement is not apparent to the casual visitor but the residents have a great sense of belonging.

Branching out from Zafar Shaheed Chowk, Railway Road and terminating at the historical Delhi Gate, the Naulakha Bazaar is an interesting blend of three distinct parts. The first part: Naulakha

F. 2

Naulakha Bazaar
acting as a bridge
between Lahore
Railway Station and
Delhi Gate

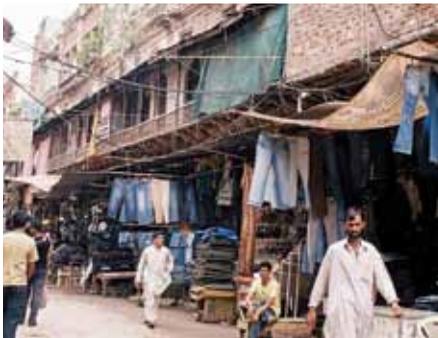


Bazaar, extends from Zafar Shaheed to Shaheedgunj Chowk; the second part, Loha Bazaar from Zafar Shaheed chowk to Shaheedgunj chowk and the third part, Landa Bazaar extends from Shaheed Gunj chowk to Delhi Gate. Being close to the railway station hotels it became a facility for passengers offering them beds and food in hotels such as the Naulakha, Patiala, Nizami Subhan and Dammam. 184 shops house numerous trades and crafts such as electronics, C.D. shops, video shops, male caps and joggers, walking sticks, mosquito nets, canvas sheets (*Tarpal*), blankets, bags, travel trolleys, *chadars*, T-shirts, trousers. A major development is that the bazaar has acquired a new commercial function as Landa Bazaar. This has become a dress designer's destination as well as a paradise for the poor and has resulted in a proliferation of shops that specifically cater for the low income group.

Despite ecological and demographic changes in Lahore, the bazaar continues to predominate as the loci of wholesaling, retailing, finance and production activities. Previously, important religious events were celebrated, but now restrictions have been imposed in order to avoid any religious disagreement. The map above shows *Loha* bazaar that developed in conjunction with the Naulakha bazaar and it also acts as a passageway linking with Landa bazaar. Naulakha Bazaar is more than a commercial center and indeed, a cultural as well as a social

F. 3

Shops in a Lahore
Bazaar



hub. Apart from the shopping area the location of religious places of three religions; Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism makes the bazaar unique in its character.

Sirai Mian Sultan

The most important of the neighborhood monuments is Sirai Mian Sultan, a contractor of the railways during the British era. In the beginning, Mian Sultan was associated with the soap industry. His hard work and honesty helped him earn a good fortune with which he entered the construction industry. In a few years, he was counted among the prominent contractors and the British Government granted him the contract for construction of many important buildings such as the Lahore Railway Station. His major income was spent among the poor, and he himself led a simple life. He built the Sirai, bearing his name, next to the Naulakha bazaar, which proved to be a great boon to the low income travelers. For some reason, he incurred the wrath of the British Chief Engineer and as a result was subject to heavy fines. Mian Sultan sold his property (which included Sirai Sultan, Ahata Maila Raam, Ahata Kirpa Raam and related property) to the Maharaja of Kashmir to clear the heavy fines. Even today this property is considered the possession of the Maharaja of Kashmir.

Masjid Shaheed Gunj

Masjid Shaheed Gunj was built under the supervision of the *Kotwaal* of Lahore, Abdullah Khan, (1653) in Aurangzeb's era with three domes and arches. On the night of 9th July 1935, with the help of the British police and army, the Akali party destroyed this mosque. A Gurdwara was built after razing the mosque to the ground, to mark the place where the last Mughal governor, Mir Moen-ul Mulk, had massacred Sikhs. George Runkin gives a detailed account as under⁶:

Before 1935 there had stood for many years to the south of what is now called the Naulakha Bazaar, in the city of Lahore, a structure having three domes and five arches, which had been built as a mosque (masjid) and which retained, notwithstanding considerable disrepair, sufficient of its original character to suggest, or even to proclaim, its original purpose. It had a projecting niche (mehrab) in the centre of the west wall such as is used in mosques as the place from which the imam leads the prayers. Its dedication is no longer in dispute, having been established as of the year 1134 A.H. or 1722 A.D. by the production and proof of a deed of dedication executed by one Falak Beg Khan. By this deed, Sheikh Din Mohammad and his descendants were appointed mutawalis... The deed speaks of a school, a well and an orchard as

F. 4

Cenotaph of hazrat
Shah Kaku Chisti



F. 5

Mausoleum of
Moen-ul-Mulk



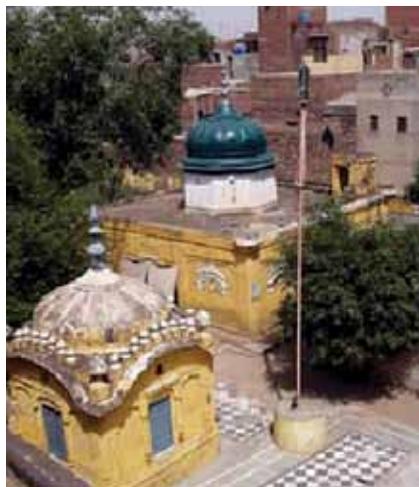
being among the appurtenances of the mosque and gives the total area of the dedicated property as three kanals and fifteen marlas.

Presently, there is a walled compound of 7 kanals, housing the remains of a mosque, Gurdwara Bhai Taru Singh and a mausoleum over a grave most probably of Moen-ul-Mulk (also known as Mir Mannu Mutawaffi) and a few baths. However, the grave carries the cenotaph of Hazrat Shah Kaku Chishti, year 1477 A.D. This is a reaction by the Muslims of the area to the court decision in favor of the Sikhs.

Gurdwara Shaheed Bhai Taru was built to pay tribute to Bhai Tara Singh, a devout Sikh who liked to help the needy of every caste and creed. He was executed brutally in 1745 on the orders of the Mughal governor of the Punjab, Zakaria Khan. The Sikh and Muslim

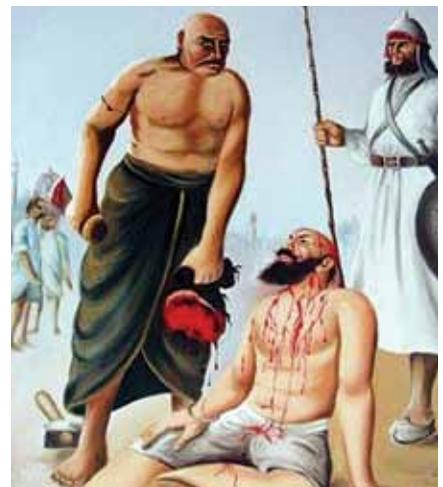
F. 6

Gurdwara Shaheed
Bhai Taru



F. 7

Execution of Bhai
Taru Singh on orders
of Zakaria Khan



communities from time to time have been filing cases about the possession of the disputed sacred sites in the court.

Every July, Sikhs have held religious ceremonies to commemorate his sacrifice.⁷ Recently, in July 2011, when the Sikhs went to set up their musical instruments, they were thrown out by men of Dawat-e-Islami and prevented from re-entering the shrine. The police was deployed outside to avoid any sectarian clash and the complex has been barred from entry. According to Harris Kakar, General Secretary Anjuman-e-Tajran, this year the residents managed to offer their Eid-ul-Fitr prayer in the disputed masjid.

Gurdwara Shaheed Gunj Singhania

Gurdwara Shaheedganj (*shaheed* = martyr, *Gunj* = hoard, treasure) is in memory of Sikh martyrs of the eighteenth century. The word “Singhania” became inseparably attached to “Singh” as part of the Ardaas. The Nakhas, long soaked with the blood of martyrs, became for the Sikhs a sacred spot and, after they came into power in the Punjab, it remained in the possession of the Sikhs. Gurdwara Shaheed Gunj Singhania is a monument to the unique feats of courage and the great sacrifices made by ordinary people for human dignity and freedom. According to historians, in the 18th Century over 250,000 men and women lost their lives.⁸

Here Moen-ul-Mulk (Mir Mannu, in Sikh chronicles), governor of Lahore (1748-53) raised a building shaped like a mosque sitting where the muftis, Muslim judges, gave their summary judgments after giving their victims a straight choice between conversion to Islam and death. The victims invariably chose the latter. When Diwan Kaura Mal persuaded the Sikhs to help Mir Mannu at the time of the battle of



F. 8

Gurdwara of Shaheedganj Singhania and residential quarters for students

Multan he handed over this place to the Sikhs who made it a place of worship. The Gurdwara is related to the misery of many Sikh women who were imprisoned here to grind wheat and their sons who were beheaded and thrown into the deep well next to it. Sikh women and children were kept in narrow cells to suffer a slow death through hard labor and starvation. Initially there were seven wells, however the remains of one of the wells is still there. Though the Gurdwara was taken over by the Evacuee Trust Property Board after Partition, Sikhs are allowed to continue using it with relatively few restrictions.

The architecture of the Gurdwara is an interesting blend of the old and new. The white majestic building of the temple with an elegant portico stands on a podium in the center of the compound enclosed by the old residential quarters for the students and the remains of cells. The interior is richly decorated creating an ambience of spirituality.

Moolchand Mandir

Moolchand Sirai which was actually a *Mandir* is a masterpiece of Hindu architecture. Moolchand was believed to be a rich man of his times who established a mandir and developed allied facilities such as a 'sirai' (a place to stay for out of town visitors). It was opened for residential purposes in 1947 to shelter immigrants. Apart from serving the visitors of the Mandir, it also served any poor person who came from other parts of India. Later on, the temporary shelter turned into a permanent home for them. It still houses the Ghousia dispensary which was set up at the time of Partition. The majority of the people came from Lucknow and Delhi originally, however people from some parts of Pakistan have also settled here. The temple is in a very bad state but the main entrance atop a multifoil arch enclosing a *jhroka* and the rising *Sikhara* still speaks of its beauty. After the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India, by hardline Hindu activists in 1992, the Muslim residents destroyed the *Moorti*. Presently, it is in the custody of the Evacuee Property Trust Board (EPTB). Today, named officially as Ghousia Street, it inhabits are 300-350 people living in the residential quarter.

Conclusions

The historical city of Lahore has been the seat of many imperial dynasties leaving behind an interesting architectural heritage. Like many Middle Eastern cities, its historical bazaars have played an important role in economic development. The Naulakha area with approximately 500 years of history is a living witness to the process of Lahore's urban development. Though there are evidences of a market for the sale of captives, horses and cattle during the Sikh regime, the present structure of the Naulakha bazaar was laid during the early years of the 20th century. The existence of historical monuments within the bazaar makes it a unique example of urban morphology and will continue to exert considerable influence on the life of the area. It accommodates a wide variety of commercial activities and the fascinating atmosphere to some extent is still preserved. The alleys and lanes are full of exciting wares, especially household items. New constructions are being carried out without paying any attention to the spatial and functional character of the old. Though the bazaar is still a lively place many of the parts are lying abandoned and dilapidated. The Naulakha bazaar is waiting for its rebirth as a cultural hub of Lahore. Rather than focusing on the new construction, the most important step should be to develop urban regeneration strategies and find ways to diminish its lost grandeur and deterioration.

Endnotes

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