

## Lahore: Pre and Post Industrial

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Lahore, golden city of wealth, dreams and opportunities captured the imagination of great conquerors from far and near. In its long history, Lahore has been home to the Shahi Kingdom, the Ghaznavids, Ghuris, Mughals, Sikhs and the British Raj, so it is no surprise they have left behind a melting pot of traditional, cultural and social marks. The people of Lahore, always welcoming and hospitable, observed and thus adopted the cultural and social persona of its monarchs and sovereigns; its culture manifests a unique blend of South Asian, Middle Eastern/Persian, Central Asian and Western influences.

The dominant forces which left a big impact on the socio-cultural environment were the Mughals, half a century of Sikh rule and the British Raj.

During Mughal rule, though considered to be a golden era, rich in culture, arts and architecture, economic prosperity for the commoner was regarded as a threat to the security of the state and was therefore discouraged. No investment was made for the growth of agriculture or industry. Be it art, culture or architecture, whatever development took place during the Mughal era, it was purely for the pleasure of the rulers. Social status was defined as rulers, *darbaris* and commoners. Lahore had never been an industrial city; whatever artisans were required for building projects were imported from outside Lahore. The Mughals kept Lahore as their private pleasure ground, all the great architecture, gardens and monuments were for the joy of the rulers and their *darbaris*. Even when Mughal power was dwindling and Ahmed Shah was knocking at their door, the famous saying in those days was "*Khata Peeta Wayai Daa... Baqi Ahmed Shahy Daa*" (we have nothing with us except what we eat and drink... the rest is all for Ahmed Shah).

Though peaceful and stable, the Sikh rule of Ranjit Singh was also unsuccessful in lifting the status of the masses of Lahore above the folds of poverty.

Pre-Industrial Lahore, a predominantly Muslim city, was cast out of two social and religious mainstreams, Muslim, being one and

always in the majority and the second being a melange of Hindus, Sikhs and others. Lahore being a society where people followed and continued with the occupation of their forefathers into which they were born, whole communities were separated according to their line of work. Money-lending, a crude form of informal banking and trade were mainly in the hands of the *baniyas*, a group of the Hindus. Muslim and Sikh peasantry tilled the land while their elite managed the administration and often fought with each other for the control of the city. During the heyday of the Mughals the Muslims formed the ruling class until, with the decline of the central Mughal rule, the Sikhs rose against Afghan, Mughal and Pathan rule. With the dominance of the Sikhs the Muslim elite took a back seat. Ranjit Singh in his wisdom was able to combine all sections into an effective administration taking the best from both Sikhs and Muslims and incorporating them into an effective army with European officers to train them in the Western tradition. Lahore thus became a significant seat of power and maintained independence in defiance of the great might of the British who had already conquered the rest of the Indian sub-continent. The Muslims were principally engaged in urban agriculture and its related segments where food was produced and distributed to the city and the surroundings, while some worked for the more affluent minority of Hindus and Sikhs. More than 60% of the Muslim population in and around Lahore belonged to the Arain caste.

Arains were the biggest influence on the socio-cultural tradition of the city. Arains are a Muslim agricultural caste settled mainly in the Punjab and Sindh, who are supposed to have come with the Arab armies of Muhammad Bin Qasim, and were chiefly associated with farming. Arain land-owners should not be confused with the more gentrified Zamindars such as the feudal landlords of vast holdings. Polo, partridge shoots and tea parties were therefore not associated attributes. Neither were the more negative and profligate practices such as "...dancing girls, drunken evenings listening to poetry, or numerous marriages".

For ages, working from their medium and small land-holdings, the Arain farmers dominated the agriculture related businesses in Lahore in particular, and the Punjab in general. Arain, being the urban farmer class, were not accustomed to a vibrant, lively and pulsating way of life. They were a down-to-earth and unpretentious class. They believed in a strong family environment and lived and worked as a single family set-up. Marriages within the caste were a normal practice. Thus, generations upon generations worked on the same fields and occupied the same market shops.

The farming class being in the majority had a great impact on the social and cultural behaviour of the city reflected in the sedentary and laid-back lifestyle of its residents. The distinctive lifestyle of the farmers who were a substantial majority, constituting 70% of the population at the time of Independence, was reflected in their day-to-day activity... they could be described as 'People of the Earth', starting their days at first light and ending them at dusk. The days and nights were timed not according to the clock but according to the position of the sun and the moon. Morning in the inner city, in those pre-industrial days, began with the call to morning prayers from the city's many mosques, while bells would be rung in Hindu temples to begin morning worship.

The common attire of the masses was the dhoti or lungi with a turban. The quality of the fabric indicated the status of a person. Being an urban agricultural market town, the population moved into their homes after the Maghrib prayer. The evenings were devoted to the enjoyment of quality food which became such a strong tradition that it still remains the gourmet capital of the entire sub-continent. Food artisans from around the continent came to Lahore to please the gastronomic desires of the city. Lahoris love food and prefer quality to quantity. People of pre-industrial Lahore always lived and worked in a joint family set-up. It was unthinkable for able-bodied men to seek work outside the family realm. Intra-caste marriage was a model practised by Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike, thus keeping the demographic balance.

Wealth was accumulated to such an extent that selling property or a business was unimaginable and considered taboo. Only a handful of Lahore's Muslims could be called affluent. Even in the Walled City of Lahore, most of the grand mansions or havelis belonged to Hindus and Sikhs. Almost all the business activity was owned by non-Muslims. Most of the Hindus who lived in the city traded in gold and silver, food grains and textiles, both wholesale and retail. All the moneylenders of Lahore were Hindu. All businesses in Suha Bazaar, Machhi Hatta, Gumti Bazaar, Bazaaz Hatta and Shah Alami were owned by non-Muslims. Dabbi Bazaar had a number of small bookshops, mostly Muslim-owned. Despite the economic and religious imbalance, all the communities lived in perfect harmony and peace; each other's religious practices were respected and honoured. Education, on western lines, among the masses was marginal; only a handful of Hindu and Sikh families considered educating their sons to become lawyers and lower officers of the civil services. On the other hand every child, including girls, did attend the traditional education centers mostly operating out

of Muslim mosques, Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras. Learning and reading of the scriptures, languages and mathematics was the simple syllabus. The colonial policies led to the decline of these native places of learning.

It was only during British rule that Lahore saw its first spark of the Industrial Revolution. It was a revolution, which not only transformed the social and cultural behaviour of the city, but also changed the economic demography of its residents. Industrialisation around the world happened during the last two centuries. Britain's Industrial Revolution not only helped shape values and public policies in Britain, but also fostered attitudes toward capitalism and modern industry in its colonies. It was the Industrial Revolution that accelerated a cumulative multiplication of productive power that transformed European society and challenged the very existence of traditional societies around the world.

## Lahore: Post Industrial

Lahore, in particular and the Punjab in general, easy-going and conservative, has always, except for the brief Sikh Period, been ruled by outsiders. The influx of the foreign rulers from far flung areas to come, conquer and rule this area of vast resources can be attributed, not only to the geographic position that attracted them, but also to the muted sort of easy-going social behavior of its residents which provided the new comers with enormous, pleasing and servile manpower.

For the Raj, the Indian sub-continent was a vast and complicated management task. The construction of a railroad network was central to maintaining a military policy of expansion, annexation, defence and internal security. The development of a huge railway network required imported technology from abroad but, also, it was absolutely necessary to have local expertise and support to maintain it. It was only during the Raj that true social and economic development started to take shape.

During the British Raj, Lahore, by virtue of its location that connected the South with the North West, was selected to house one of the biggest railway workshops in India where technology transfer from England to the sub-continent took place and thus began a journey that led to the railway becoming a "network of iron and steel" in the

region. With that also started the industrial revolution in Lahore, which in future would not only change the social and cultural roots of the city but would also bring an incredible economic boom to the commoners in and around the city. The railway can claim to be the first industrial unit that initiated the transformation of the cultural paradigm of the population of Lahore. A new term, “Railwaaee”, was coined for the workers of the railway workshop. This industry began the public telling of time by announcing the change of shifts through sirens (*Ghugoo*). Moreover *Naukari* (service), once considered a derogatory occupation, began to be seen differently. Earlier, the preference had been for either farming or business and the order of preference was depicted by the saying “*awal kheytee, doam hati, nakhid chakri*” (first agriculture, second business and then, useless service).

“*Chal way chuddu... waj gya aye Ghugoo*” (Come on you stupid... the siren is blowing) is how the Lahoris reacted to this new vibrant and pulsating entrant into their otherwise sleepy and sluggish way of life. With the arrival of the North West Railway Locomotive Workshops in Lahore, colleges and training institutes were developed by the British to ensure the constant and steady availability of an educated and trained workforce. Though controlling the economic cycle of the city while being in a minority, Hindus and Sikhs still yearned to bring education to their families and encouraged at least one son from the family to gain a suitable education to get into the civil service or law or medicine. In contrast, hardly any Muslim family tried to change its easy-going farming and land-holding culture. The not-so-affluent Muslims either worked in the fields or as labor in the businesses of the Hindus and Sikhs. The first, and not-so-welcome, social change came when the city started to follow, not the cry of the muezzin and the mandir bells, but the siren from the locomotive workshops. With the arrival of the huge industrial set-up and the colleges, universities and training institutes, young people now started to look beyond working in the fields or sitting in the shops. A career in the service of the Government became a desirable option.

A new “Babu” culture was in the making. Emulating the mannerisms of the colonials, young people gradually began to shed the traditional attire of dhoti and lungi and started wearing the modern pants and shirts. This babu culture brought to the city new “locals” who challenged the orthodox and lethargic ways of their farming and landholding families and evolved a completely new way of living. The Hukka in the hands was replaced by a cigarette between the fingers. With newly established colleges and universities, now filled with students, new social behavior slowly started to surface where there was

life after Maghrib prayer which attracted people to a more vibrant life style around cinemas, theatres, clubs, bars and cafes. Slowly more and more people freed themselves from the necessity of producing food to go into city colleges and universities to be trained to take up industrial and urban tasks.

This era can surely be identified as a time when Lahore became a land of opportunities for the common man. The North Western Railway Locomotive Workshops at Mughalpura were a world in themselves. Almost all the activity in the workshops used iron and steel. The vast needs of these workshops and the need for satellite industrial set-ups became obvious. Again the people of Lahore, forever conservative and followers of routine, could not see this as an opportunity for themselves. They could not see that the world was changing in front of their eyes and in their back yard. Again they waited for outsiders to come and look into and develop this new and technologically advanced satellite industrial set-up.

Mukundilal Foundries, imported from Bombay, could be labelled as the first privately owned substantial industrial set-up in Lahore, though small foundries and mills were already operating around the Landa Bazaar area. The establishment was later sold to another outsider, Chaudhry Mohammad Latif from Batala, who after Independence made it into a stalwart of the engineering industry in Pakistan and called it the Batala Engineering Company (BECO). At its peak BECO employed 6,000 people and was the jewel in the crown of Pakistan's industrial set-up, manufacturing engines and machine tools.

Next in line to profit from the industrial revolution in Lahore were the two industrial concerns: the Qadri Steel Company and the Ittefaq Brothers. Qadri Steel was founded by two brothers Hussain Buksh and Karim Buksh, migrants from Kashmir. They began with a humble start, initially as a support industry for the Railway and Mukundilal Foundries. Later it developed into a giant steel concern and is a huge family-operated concern. Ittefaq Brothers was started humbly as a small foundry by a migrant family from Amritsar, India, headed by (Late) Mian Muhammad Sharif, a very hard-working individual, educated by the prevalent standards, highly intelligent, a thorough gentleman and also an example of how a young, penniless person with no means could develop an industrial base of gigantic proportions. He grew by involving the family in his entrepreneurship taking his industry to such heights, that all the contemporary industry

was dwarfed by his growth. Both the industry and the family rose to unprecedented heights through his sheer hard work and insight. He was a great visionary foreseeing the coming hurdles and planning to overcome them before they could stop him.

Now with a strong industrial base in place and the opening up of a varied educational system by the British, people not only flocked to the colleges and universities from in and around Lahore, but education enthusiasts from all over the country and beyond gravitated towards the now well-established educational centres. This rapidly educated class also gave a new boost to the industry, commerce and financial sectors of Lahore. A new middle class was in the making, comprising the educated young from farming families as they started to distance themselves from the age-old family occupations. Nevertheless, as a whole, the farming communities, due to the fact that hundreds of years of family roots were strongly in place with the non-progressive attitude inculcated thereby, found the agriculture based lifestyle hard to give up. In general they were slow to adapt to this new modernist phenomena and varied commercial activity in the city. The family-based links and the cultural patterns remained unchanged. Even in commerce there were attempts to carry the family-based mode of behavior into business, which was not always conducive to success. Once again, therefore, outsiders were the ones who slowly started to move to Lahore, initially for education and then for jobs in the local industrial, commercial and financial organisations.

It was not until 1947, at the time of independence from the British, that the reality struck Lahoris. The exit of the Hindus and Sikhs, who were controlling the trade and finance of the city, brought a big economic vacuum to the financial design of Lahore. This vacuum again was not replaced by the local Lahoris, as they had no claim to the properties and businesses left by migrating Hindus and Sikhs, but by the Muslim migrants who came from India and settled in Lahore. With this historic influx the local Lahoris, always welcoming and hospitable, gave space to the migrants, contenting themselves with their routine lives. As industry in and around Lahore grew, the employment opportunities also grew and the size of the city grew to unmanageable proportions. Migration from all over Pakistan made it a metropolitan city. This influx of people and the amalgamation of different cultures from within Pakistan became a major presence and the real Lahori now became a rarity. The old Lahori families lost their Lahori touch. These days you hardly come across a true Lahori in Lahore. Most of them have either migrated elsewhere or have gradually lost their identity.

The real essence of Lahori culture was now slowly coming to terms with the industrial explosion in and around the city. In pursuit of their own interests, the British had introduced Urdu, not Punjabi, as the medium of school education and for use in their administrative system. Thus was born a new elite – an Urdu speaking elite. The Punjabi language slowly started to be replaced by Urdu, which became the language of fashion to be used when one wanted to be seen as moderate and educated in the local community, to the extent that slowly Punjabi became the language of one's private domain... that magical joint family system which had so beautifully seeped into the social design was now in danger of being ignored. One land – one family, now seemed a thing of the past. New opportunities in government services took people away from their families and new bases of relationships slowly started to develop.

The effects of the industrial revolution on Lahore were dramatic. In the old days, people used to live in harmony and foster communal co-existence among Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians; now with the arrival of evacuees and freebooters, who grabbed the businesses and residences left behind by departing Hindus and Sikhs, the real Lahoris went into deep isolation and were slowly becoming a minority in the city. The migrant behaviour pattern started to preside over the social and cultural life of the city.

With the British came the English language and the traits attached to it. Copying the British way of life became fashionable. Never heard of before, but now you could see young women driving cars and riding bicycles in the affluent areas of the Cantonment and Government Office Residence. Young people were trying to come to grips with their new found freedom and were experimenting with freedom itself. The Lahori went further into deep seclusion. Social and cultural behavior, a way of life which had taken centuries to mature, was now being replaced by another phenomenon and thus slowly started to pass away - a slow death. All the invasions and conquests, an array of 1000 plus rulers from the outside, could not take Lahoris out of Lahore. It was the partition and the resultant migration of 1947 which in true and tragic sense changed the face of Lahore. Lahoris became a minority in their own city. Those who still live in the city are not identifiable as true Lahoris as the dominant strains of the immigrants from around Lahore have overtaken the Lahori spirit which is no more.