

Journal of Art, Architecture and Built Environment (JAABE)

Volume 3 Issue 2, Fall 2020

ISSN: 2617-2690: (P) 2617-2704: (E)

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jaabe>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jaabe.32>

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JAABE>



Journal QR Code:



Article: **Analytical Study of Uniqueness of Culture of Pakistan**

Author(s): Khalifa Ahmad Muiz

Online Pub: Fall 2020

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jaabe.32.05>

Article QR Code:



To cite this article: Muiz, K. A. (2020). Analytical study of uniqueness of culture of Pakistan. *Journal of Art, Architecture and Built Environment*, 3(2), 55–71.
[Crossref](#)

Copyright Information This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution – Share Alike 4.0 International License

Indexing



A publication of the
School of Architecture and Planning
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Analytical Study of Uniqueness of Culture of Pakistan

Khalifa Ahmad Muiz*

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

This paper deals with the culture of Pakistan and specifically the uniqueness of the Pakistani culture. When we study Pakistan, we find that there are five provinces namely: Punjab; Sindh; Khyber Pakhtunkhawa; Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan. Every province has a different and unique culture, even within a province; different regional cultures are unique in themselves. The culture of Lahore is different from that of Karachi or Peshawar. Similarly, the culture of Lahore is different from Faisalabad and Sahiwal. In this paper, the culture of the walled city Lahore is discussed and some of its factors that are unique are dug out. As discussed above, culture can be studied through tools, ornaments, art, customs, etc. This paper uses one form of art i.e., architecture to study the culture of the walled city of Lahore. It includes all of the factors that influence architecture e.g. climate, norms, and values, etc. Various locations of the walled city were visited and a pictorial survey was carried out in order to look for the architectural elements in planning, sections, and elevations that have been developed as a result of a particular culture and whose study can lead us to that particular unique cultural value of the people of the area under study.

Keywords: culture, Pakistan, unique, Lahore, architecture

Introduction

Man is unique and he is the only living species that has a culture. By culture, we mean an extra physical, sequential variety of things and events. Specifically, and concretely, culture consists of tools, implements, utensils, clothing, ornaments, customs, institutions, beliefs, rituals, games, work of art, language, etc. People in all times, periods, and places possessed culture (White, [1959](#), p. 3).

The purpose and function of culture are to make life secure and enduring for the human species. All species of living beings act to affect their kind. Subhuman species execute this behavior by somatic means while the humans employ both somatic and extra somatic means that we call a culture to sustain and continue its existence and give it expression. On these bases, culture may be defined as an extra somatic mechanism employed to make life secure and continuous (White, [1959](#), p. 8).

*Corresponding author: khalifaahmedmuiz@gmail.com

The purpose of culture is to serve the needs of human beings. These needs can be divided into two categories: those that can be served only by exploiting the resources of the external world; and those that can be served by drawing upon the resources of the human organism only. Man needs food and materials of many kinds for clothing, utensils, ornaments, etc., that must be obtained from the external world. But man has inner psychic, social, and spiritual needs that can be fed and nourished without looking at the external world at all. Man needs courage, comfort, consolation, confidence, companionship, a feeling of consequence in the scheme of things that life is worthwhile, and some assurance of success. It is the business of culture to serve these needs of the spirit as well as the needs of the body (White, [1959](#), p. 9).

The fascinating labyrinth of the walled city of Lahore is colorful, festive, and mysterious. Throughout history, it remained a center of power and cultural excellence. It was an important town in the times of early local Hindu fiefdoms and a city par excellence under Afghan rulers, Mughal emperors, Sikh monarchs, and British colonizers. The enchanting life of Lahore attracted visitors, traders, historians, and scholars from different parts of the world, and they settled here. The legendary lifestyle of Lahories generated masterpieces in art, music, literature, poetry, and story writing. Being a treasure island, painters, scholars, musicians, singers, writers, and men of repute opted Lahore as their final destiny. Trade caravans never stopped coming to Lahore to make their fortune. Lahore possesses remarkable footprints of history in the form of gigantic and majestic monuments like Lahore fort, Badshahi mosque, decorated and embellished Havelis.

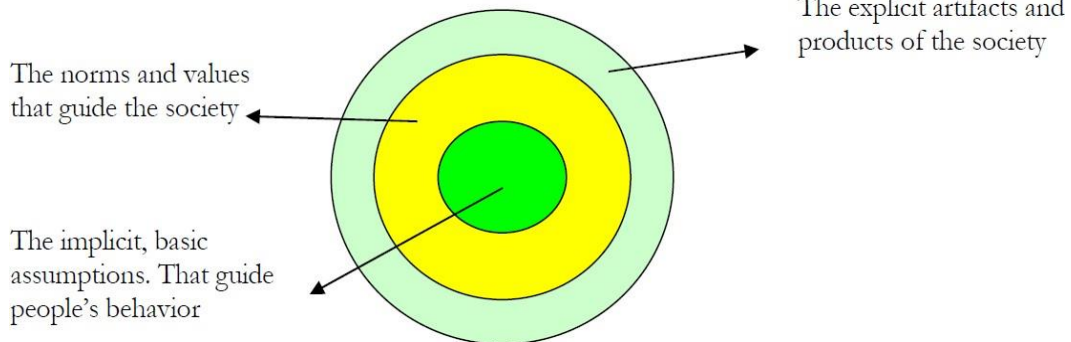
The traces of the early history of Lahore can only be found in tales and folklore. No historical account or travelogue is available. The archaeological investigations have not yet provided concrete evidence about the early history of Lahore (SDWCL, [2009](#), p. 3).

Research Methodology

The oxford dictionary defines culture as the expression of a particular civilization comprising of the art forms, customs, traditions, etc. that exhibits their norms and values. Hodgetts et al. ([2005](#)) defined culture in the form of concentric circles as shown in the figure below that generates the uniqueness of the same. The walled city of Lahore was surveyed and studied through the visual analysis of the architectural features that developed as a result of the unique culture present within the city.

Figure 1

Culture in the form of Concentric Circles



(Source: Hodgetts et al., 2005, p. 97)

Results and Discussions

By local Hindu traditions the origin of Lahore, like that of most of the princely houses of India, is traced to Rāma, king of Ayūdhya, the hero of Ramayāna, whose two sons, Luh and Qaṣṣu, are said to have founded the neighboring cities of Lahore and Qaṣūr. The word Hūr means city. Luh-hūr means city of Luh and Qaṣṣu-hūr means city of Qaṣṣu. Afterwards, the two names distorted as Lahore and Qaṣūr (Kipling & Thornton, 1860, p. 115-123).

According to another version about the history of Lahore, the founders of Lahore were of Rājput race, and that the city was probably the capital of one of the earliest of Rājput states established in the west of India (Kipling & Thornton, 1860, p. 115-123).

The core of Allah's name "La" seems to be the oldest word of the religious world which, have been in use of all of the religions with little variations. In the history, the important cities were named after the same core word La, e.g. Larkana, a city of Indus valley civilization, Labna, Mayan civilization city etc. Lahore is among the oldest cities of the greater continent. It dates back to Muhinjudaṛu and Harāppa. Lahore has been significant in a sense that it has never been destroyed. According to Assyriologists, there are two oldest cities of the world that have never been destroyed. These cities are Damascus and Arabella. According to a research, Lahore should be added in the list of the above mentioned cities as it dates back to the same time and was never destroyed. Lahore dates back to more than 3000 B.C. (Khawaja, 1962, p. 17-23)

People have always been proud of the unique features of their cities, giving rise to popular sayings such as 'All roads lead to Rome', 'See Naples and die' etc.

Lahore too, has received its share of baroque compliments. According to a Punjabi saying, ‘He who hasn’t seen Lahore, hasn’t been born’. Still the most popular saying is, ‘Lahore is Lahore’ (*Lahore Lahore hai*). Locals utter it every time they hear another city being praised (Suvorova, [2011](#), p.21).

When we compare Lahore with other South Asian cities like Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Hyderabad, and the other former capitals of the Muslim states in the Indian subcontinent, we find it quite different. Despite its architectural similarity to the Mughal cities of Delhi and Agra, Lahore stands out because of its preserved urban nucleus the inner or walled city (Suvorova, [2011](#), p. 22).

The walled city still retains the medieval zoned trading system that is identified by the compact settlement of groups of tradesmen and craftsmen, and by specialized bazaars connected to these groups. Modern supermarkets with everything under one roof are found in the modern areas of Defence, Model Town, Gulberg, etc. the inhabitants of the walled city buy kitchen utensils from *Bhanda bazaar*, near *Shah Alam* gate, woolen shawls at *Kashmiri bazaar* near *Kashmiri* gate, second-hand clothing at *Landa bazaar*, Bamboo ladders at *Bansa bazaar*, etc. (Suvorova, [2011](#), p. 23).

The main economic activities and personal interactions in society took place around the gates i.e. in the adjoining bazaars, caravanserais, exchange offices and craftsmen’s shops. In the Fort, contacts were determined by class subordination and court etiquette i.e. by non-economic factors. The names of the certain gates were originated from the surrounding settlement patterns of the caste, occupational groups etc. e.g. *Mochi* gate, *Bhati* gate etc. while others bore elements of the urban infra structure e.g. *Taxali* gate pointing to socio-economic ties (Suvorova, [2011](#), p. 42).

Based on the activities of the people of Lahore, the spatial organization of the walled city can be explained in terms of the bazaar, *muhalla*, and *guzr*. The bazaar is a spatial category that refers to an intensely used public route that is lined with 2-5 story high buildings. A *muhalla* refers to a relatively quiet, densely packed quarters that abuts one or more bazaars. Many *muhallas* together make up a *guzr* (Bajwa, [2013](#), p. 169).

The above mentioned spatial organization is a result of the centuries-old living style and traditions of its inhabitants. Whether it is urban design or building design, it has become reality as a result of the norms, values, and culture of the people of Lahore. The people of Lahore are vibrant, colorful, and love life with a joy and zest that has become a cultural idiom. In Lahore, every occasion becomes a celebration.

Spring brings *Basant* and the excitement of the horse and cattle show. The Alhamra, the center of performing arts, has a year-round schedule of theatre, drama, and music shows. Art exhibitions are held on a regular basis in numerous art galleries all over the city (walled city and modern Lahore).

Lahore has always been a city of writers, poets, artists, and thinkers. It is not just a city but a way of life that goes beyond boundaries and territories and is remembered with nostalgia and a yearning to return. It is a city of memories and the continuation of memories from one generation to another. Lahore of the crisp winter morning, the balmy evening air, the scorching summer heat, the fragrance of the flowers that bloom at night and above all, the people; warm, hospitable, and giving, who make Lahore the city that it is (Abbas, [2006](#), pp. 102-103).

If we look at the planning of walled city Lahore we find *muhalla* planning. Many people of the same family are living together in a *muhalla* or different families are living together for generations in a *muhalla*. This has generated a family-like living and when sitting together it becomes very difficult for the stranger or newcomer to tell that which child belongs to which house. This family-like living has given rise to a unique culture of safety and whether it is a man, woman, or child, everyone roams about in the streets safely. As the children play together most of the time, the friendship level is far higher than the other parts of the modern city. It is this friendship that is carried forward to generations and lays foundations for a family-like living.

Figure 2

Friendship Starts at Childhood



Figure 3

Friends since Childhood



Another architectural feature that helps in determining the culture of the people of the walled city Lahore is the width of the streets and the construction style of the houses in a *muhalla*. Narrow streets are a result of either a harsh climate or a self-defense system. The harsh summers of Lahore compel many of us today to keep our windows close with curtains on. But this is not the case in the walled city. Narrow streets along with the flanking high buildings keep the sun away from the ground and thus one finds the windows of the buildings in the streets open most of the time.

Figure 4

*Narrow Street and High Buildings
Shield against Solar Penetration*

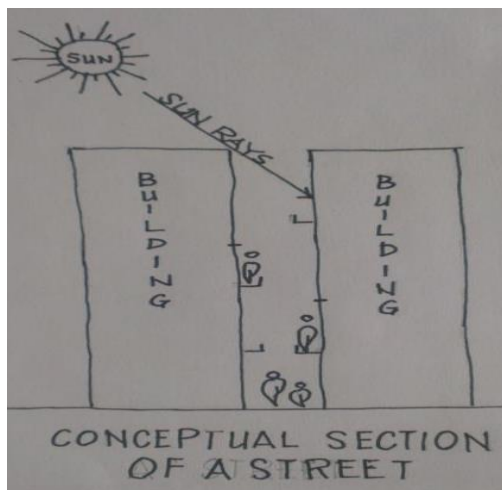


Figure 5

Bazar during Day in the Walled City



The narrow streets were also planned as a measure against the intruders. Narrow streets offer greater resistance to the intruders and help the locals to fight against and safeguard their area.

Besides the narrow streets of *muhalla*, one finds small houses built in teeth like manner. Today, we admire these houses for being stood for centuries. The teeth-like construction is a root cause for this durability as the houses in the walled city act as teeth in the mouth. Together they can stand for centuries as they have but if one member collapses it will lead to the gradual collapse of the adjacent buildings and this process goes on. The teeth-like planning was also done as a protective measure against the harsh sun as in this case the sides and the back are automatically protected from the sun because of the attached house. The front is also protected as the sun cannot penetrate the narrow and deep street. Though the statement, given

by many architects and planners that the small houses and teeth like planning were a result of the economic condition of a common man also looks valid, but the fact is that the narrow streets and the small teeth like houses are a result of the extrovert and vibrant nature of the people of Lahore that gave rise to a culture unique in its self.

These decks acted as a sitting space for the ladies in the morning and for the gents in the evening. In the morning the ladies used to meet on these decks and besides preparing for them daily gossip and discussions on various issues take place here. Sometimes matrimonial matters are also discussed on these decks. In the evening, after returning home from the office and taking a rest, the gents of the *muhalla* use these decks as meeting places and these sittings continue to occur till late night. At dawn, the elderly people of the *muhalla* used to go to the mosque and in this way, a unique culture of surveillance emerged out of *muhalla* system planning and the extrovert nature of the people of Lahore.

Figure 6

Deck outside a House



Figure 7

Meeting at the Doorstep



Due to mixed-use planning, the shops in the bazaar and the *muhalla* also play a vital role in the surveillance of their area. Most of the shopkeepers having shops in the bazaar have houses in the adjacent *muhalla*. The shopkeepers keep an eye on the passersby. Moreover, the shops in the *muhallas* act as a node, and the people and shopkeepers take an active part in the surveillance of their area.

Figure 8*Shops in the Bazar***Figure 9***Shop in a Muhalla***Figure 10***A Shop where People usually Gather for Talks*

The colorful indoor depicts the colorful and vibrant culture of *Lahories*. It also depicts the colorful and full of life nature of the people of Lahore and because of this nature and culture, they make any event a celebration.

Figure 11

Colourful Glass in Fan Window



Figure 12

Colourful Floor



Figure 13

Colourful In-Door Decoration Window



Figure 14

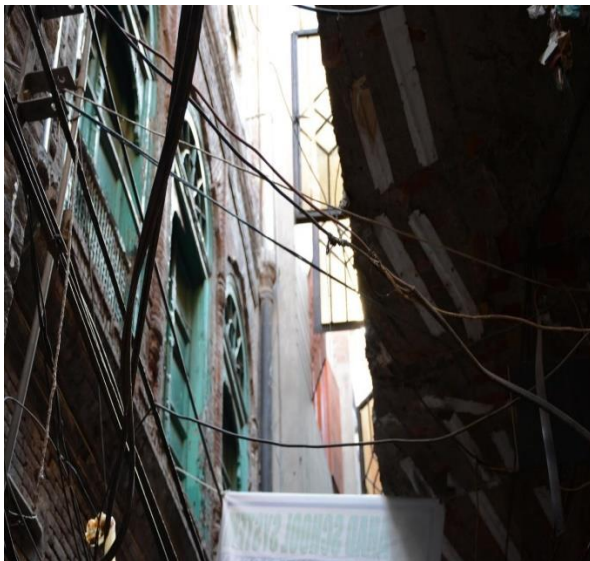
Door and Window are Painted Colourfully



In order to celebrate an event like a wedding ceremony or a festival like *Basant*, *Jashn e Azadi*, etc. larger space is required. The teeth-like planning of the houses have joined roofs that give a larger space for celebration.

Figure 15*Teeth Like Planning and Joined Roofs***Figure 16***Teeth Like Planning and Joined Roofs*

Small houses with shared roofs and narrow streets with close-by windows reflect a very unique culture of the people of Lahore i.e. sharing. The extrovert nature and shared resources have developed a culture of ownership. Every individual owns his *muhalla*. Due to this reason, the guest of a house is considered as the guest of the *muhalla*. In certain cases, the close-by opposite windows offer no hindrance in exchanging goods. The shared roofs also act as a large space to accommodate guests.

Figure 17*View of Close-By Opposite Windows from Street***Figure 18***Opposite a Close-By Window*

Elements like a mug, ventilators with tapered sills and lintel, *sehn* at upper floors depict the extrovert nature and love for nature of the people of Lahore. Though the houses are small and cannot afford to have lawns and patios like most of the modern houses of today but, they have devised ways to remain in contact with the outside world while being inside. This also depicts the desire of having larger space which ultimately leads to the free and frank nature and culture of *Lahories*.

Figure 19

Sky Light in a House



Figure 20

Ventilator with Tapered Sill



Figure 21

Ventilator with Tapered Sill



Figure 22

Ventilators in the Basement with Tapered Sill

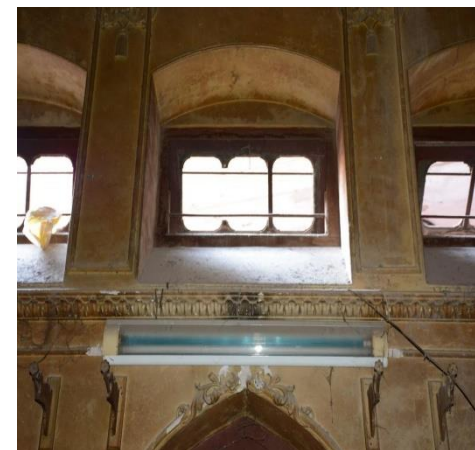


Figure 23*Sehn at an Upper Floor*

Simple interiors and embellished exteriors also show that the *Lahories* love to spend time outdoors. They love to sit in open spaces, have long discussions at *tharras* and they also love to eat either at a street hotel or have a feast at *tharra*. As most of their time is spent outdoors, and according to many people they only go into the house to sleep, the exterior is decorated for joy. If we look at the decoration done at the exteriors of houses, the colorful and joyful nature of the people of Lahore can be well understood. The decoration is done mostly in bricks and timber.

Figure 24*Hotel in a Bazar in Walled City***Figure 25***Pehelwan; A Famous Character of Walled City*

Figure 26

Milk and Yogurt Shop in Walled City



Figure 27

Lahories Gathered to get Halva Puri for Breakfast



Figure 28

Decorated Exterior of a House



Figure 29

Beautifully Carved Timber Arch at the Entrance of a House



Figure 30*Blow up of the Carved Timber Arch***Figure 31***Balcony in a Street*

Another element that is part and parcel of the lives of the people of Lahore is the balcony. Balcony and sometimes window has many usages in the life of the walled city. It is part of an embellished exterior, an efficient element of ventilation, an active means of vertical communication, etc. If we analyze the usages of the balcony we come up with an interesting and unique feature of the culture of the people of the walled city. As the people in the walled city are living there together for generations, they know each other. The shops in the *muhallas* have a strong connection with the balconies.

Figure 32*Window with Chikka System***Figure 33***Balcony Over a Bazaar*

People, instead of coming downstairs to get groceries, etc. call the shopkeeper or the passersby from the balcony with a request to send the desired goods up through the balcony. For this purpose, a basket locally called as *chikka* tied with the rope is hung down. Sometimes the money is also sent down along with the *chikka* but most of the time the transaction is registered in a register called *khata*. The dues are usually cleared by the male member of the house in the evening or on availability.

Figure 34

Low Heighted Door



Another architectural feature that tells us about the unique culture of respect of the people of Lahore is the low heightened doors. The low heightened doors of the houses compel people to bow at the entrance thus makes the house a place of respect. Though, some people associate this with Hindu and Hindu culture, as they bow at temples, etc. but the fact is that it is there. According to the old *Lahories*, the low heightened doors and bowing while passing through these doors is symbolic. It shows that the people of Lahore are not only colorful and joyful but they give respect to their place, belongings, people, guests, in fact, everything and everyone.

Conclusions

The study of the walled city of Lahore concluded with the unique features as discussed above. Though this uniqueness of culture persists and one can still feel the warmth of relationship among *Lahories* but the fact is that this glorious city is under tremendous pressure and threat due to unplanned urbanization, environmental pollution, and excessive trade activity. The city which was famous for its cultural life seldom witness its age-old tradition of music, poetry rendering and festive atmosphere of its market places. The government is making efforts and some efforts have already been made to revitalize the famous festive life of Lahore. The *Lahories* have always been concerned about the decaying cultural life of their beloved city and are also taking an active part in the efforts made for the awareness of the public.

References

- Abbas, H. J. (2006). *Pakistan: The land and its culture*. Pakistan National Council of the Arts.
- Bajwa, K.W. (Ed.). (2013). *Urban Pakistan*. Oxford University press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/urban-pakistan-9780199063376?cc=pk&lang=en>
- Hodgetts, R. M., Luthans, F., & Doh, J. (2005). *International management: Culture, strategy and behavior* (6thed.). McGraw-Hill
- Khawaja, A. R. (1962). Lahore --- Tareekh e qadeem ke nazar main. *Naqoosh, February*, 17-23.
- Kipling, J.L.,&Thornton, T.H. (1860).*Lahore as it was: Travelogue, 1860*. NCA publications. <http://m.nca.edu.pk/publications.php>
- Sustainable Development of Walled City of the Lahore (SDWCL). (2009). *The Walled city of Lahore*. Author.
- Suvorova, A. (2011). *Lahore: Topophilia of space and place*. Oxford University press. <https://www.amazon.com/Lahore-Topophilia-Space-Anna-Suvorova/dp/0199063559>
- White, L.A. (1959). *The evolution of culture*. McGraw-Hill.