WHAT CULTURE, WHOSE SPACE AND WHICH TECHNOLOGY? THE CONTESTED TRANSFORMATION AND THE CHANGING HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENTS OF SOUTH ASIA

Tasleem Shakur, Ishrat Islam, Javeria Masood

Abstract

Based on two case studies in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Lahore (Pakistan), this paper attempts to illustrate how the emerging cultures and spaces are continuously either negotiated or contested (Shakur, 2008). Historic Mughal city of Lahore (Pakistan), once the cultural capital of Asia, has expanded speedily over time. A prominent example of such a case would be Anarkali, a vibrant bazaar from the 17th century. Anarkali has adapted the modern living in a disorganised manner. Even today the inner you go to these galli mohalla, the richer the environ gets as a lot of old residents have still kept on with the indigenous aspects. A thousand miles away in the east but in a similar cultural setting of Lalabagh (in old Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh) is considered as one of the prime icon of Mughal architecture in Bangladesh. The magnificent fort, since 1678 experienced changes in socio-political and cultural contexts. The surrounding built environment has significant visual impacts on the inside space characteristics of the conserved fort. As a result, contradiction among the old and new, complexity between the space uses and the incongruity between architectural language raises question regarding appropriateness of this historic structure in its present milieu.

Keywords

Architectural language; contested space; cultural representation; post-modernity; regeneration; hybrid infratstructure.

Introduction

While the slums and squatter settlements of the developing world had been steadily increasing with densification and lack of infrastructure despite intervention by non-government and aid agencies, the historic mixed urban areas seem to have a different trend (Shakur, 2008). The South Asian subcontinent contains a glorious socio-cultural and political history. Monuments erected in various historic periods still carry the essence of the past. As a part of the subcontinent, Dhaka and Lahore are heir to a very old and rich heritage. Based on two case studies in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Lahore (Pakistan), this paper attempts to illustrate how the emerging cultures and spaces are continuously either negotiated or contested through various soico-economic, political, cultural and aesthetic factors with their implications from local to international world.

Backbround of Lalbagh Fort and Anarkali Bazar

Much of Dhaka's historic past has been eroded both by human and natural forces. Lalbagh

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Fort or Fort Aurangabad is one of the glorious expamples of Mughal structures. Construction of the Fort at Lalbagh was undertaken by Shahzada Walajah Muhammad Azam Shah Bahadur, son of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1678 AD (Ahmed, 1984). The scheme of the fort already initiated by Shaista Khan during the first term of his Viceroyalty from 1664 to 1677 at once attracted his attention. With some modification in the original plan, he set himself to the task of building the Fort, which he named after his father as Fort Aurangabad. Shaista Khan took over the Viceroyalty for the second time in 1680, and managed affairs for eight years. His daughter Pari Bibi died in 1684; her death greatly upset Shaista Khan, who abandoned the Fort project, considering it inauspicious. So, the surviving remains of the Fort stand unfinished from the very start.

The incomplete Fort was envisaged as a walled palace rather than a siege fort. Spreading over an area of nineteen acres, it appears to have been planned with a rectangular outline, 1,082 feet long and 700 feet wide. Some interesting parts of the Fort include the building complex in the south-eastern portion, consisting of a massive gateway, a large bastion and the adjoining pavilion. Other notable parts are the fortification wall in the south and west, a second massive gate standing in the north-eastern parts and a smaller incomplete gateway about 750 feet west of it. The central area of the fort is occupied by three buildings: The Diwan-i-Aam and the Hammam on its east; the mosque on the west; and the tomb of Bibi Pari in between the two (in one line, but not at equal distance) (Qadir, 1993). This glorious piece of architecture did not get attention as a historic structure before 1842 (Mamum, 2000).

In a similar setting, Anarkali Bazar in Lahore is closely linked with the Walled city, a historic and earliest settlement of the cultural capital of South Asia. The culture of which reflects a lot in that of Anarkali. The walled city marked not only the first point in the growth of Lahore but is also the only living example of the most culturally rich, indigenous rooted, pedestrian friendly and sustainable built community. The name Anarkali (Pomegrante Blossom) was given to one of the favourite inmates of the harem of Emperor Akbar. Akbar's son Emperor Jahangir built a mausoleum over the grave which lies near the Lower Mall. Anarkali Bazar has been a favourite of shoppers for decades (Lari, 2003). Named after this woman, the bazar sprang up on a piece of land occupied by British troops after the annexation of Punjab (Nevile, 2007).

Research Framework

This research seeks to find commonalities in two geographically apart but similar cultural settings through identification and evaluation of existing trends of development around two historic sites and also study effects of the surrounding built environment. It may be interesting to note that while Dhaka's researcher undertook a more planning oriented methodology, the Lahore researcher opted for more of a morphological/perceptive method (architectural). Questions are being raised if the transformations without apparent active participation of governments, non governments or progessional groups have provided a successful regeneration? The outcomes of the research focus on the factors responsible for incompatible land use and to provide guidelines to preserve the appeal of these heritge sites.

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In the case of Lalbagh Fort, the chronological change of the structure over time has been documented here. It has also sought to give an overview regarding the change of its surrounding land use and its impact on this historic site. About 90 buildings surrounding the fort in four directions were surveyed to understand the present development trends in the area. For analysis of the heritage site, some variables are considered and according to those variables data was collected. Land use pattern, building height, construction year, building structures, ownership status, etc are included. The impact of the adjacent urban fabric on the historic site has been critically rviewed in this paper.

Lalbagh Fort in Passage of Time

The ownership and use related information about Lalbagh Fort is almost unavailable after departure of Shiesta Khan at the beginning of 19th century. It is assumed by the historians that this Fort was used by the Mughal soldiers until the shift of the Capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad. This fort became abandoned then. Most of the structures of the complex became dilapidated and unhealthy, including the pond (Mamun, 2000).

In 1842, the Dhaka Committee undertook a programme to develop the Lalbagh Fort complex as a recreational centrer of the city. This project ended in 1847. The government sanctioned money for this development work but at the same time convicted people who were in jail were employed in the repairing work. In 1853, the cantonment was shifted to Lalbagh Fort and used until 1857. During the Sepahi mutiny Lalbagh became a symbol of protest against oppression of British Rule. After 1857, for a long period till 1947, this Fort was used as the barrack of police force. By this time, this grand Mughal
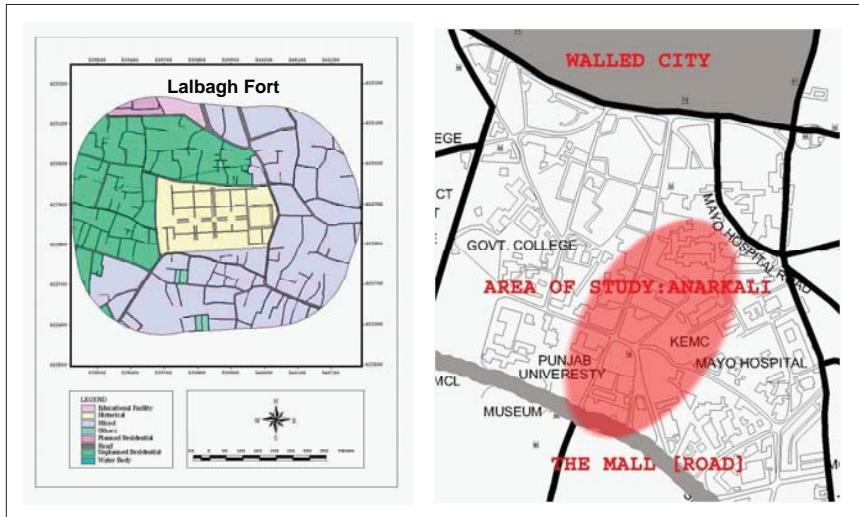

Figure 1: Site plan of Lalbagh Fort and Anarkali (Source: Authors).

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Figure 2: Mughal splendor of Bengal in British Period (1870) (Source: Authors).

Figure 3: View of Mosque and Paribibi's tomb after renovation (Source: Authors).

architecture has been declared as a historic conservation site. Archeological Department of Bangladesh under took an ambitious project to preserve this fort complex. The preserved and renovated structure gives an image of the glorious past of this fort. Now it has a museum inside and the gardens are maintained. This huge complex turned into a breathing space for the entire old Dhaka. Everyday it is visited by a good number of visitors. The following photographs (Figures 2 and 3) portray the history of Lalbagh Fort- transformation from a restricted military establishment to a centre of cultural and social urban space of interaction.

Fort Complex in Present Physical Context

Land Use in the Area
With the change of political and cultural history, the physical fabric of the areas adjacent to the fort has undergone drastic changes. With growth of population, land use all over the the Dhaka city is transforming at a very fast pace. Low density residential land uses have been replaced by high density mixed uses. In Figure 4,

the construction year for the buildings is shown. It can be clearly seen that the construction rate of buildings increased as time passed by. A major share of buildings was constructed after 1950. Before that, the most part of the fort adjacent area was vacant. About 92% plots are privately owned in the study area.

The trend of land use pattern has been changed notably in different times. The findings of the survey show that most of the structures were used for residential purpose and there was a significant number of vacant land as well. But most importantly, the mixed land use was absent in the original land use of a plot. Mixed land use was introduced in the 1970s, although that was very low in percentage with respect to residential use. But eventually, the commercial uses, like shops, offices, garage, storage etc have occupied most the ground floors of the buildings. To cope with this, the land use pattern has changed and the mixed type land use became dominant. From the Figure 5, it can be seen that, in present time a major share of the plot has mixed land use and commercial use.

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Figure 4: Percentage of Buildings according to construction period (Source: Authors).

Figure 5: Distribution of plots according to land use (Source: Authors).

Building Height Adjacent to Fort

While studying the development trends in the surrounding area of Lalbagh Fort, it is observed that the percentage of one and two storey buildings is higher (Figure 6). But most of these low storey buildings were constructed long ago. Most of the recent buildings are 5 storey or 6 storey. Replacement of old buildings is taking place at a high pace. But no special guidelines have been developed for this historic site to regulate new development considering the image and characteristics of the Lalbagh Fort.
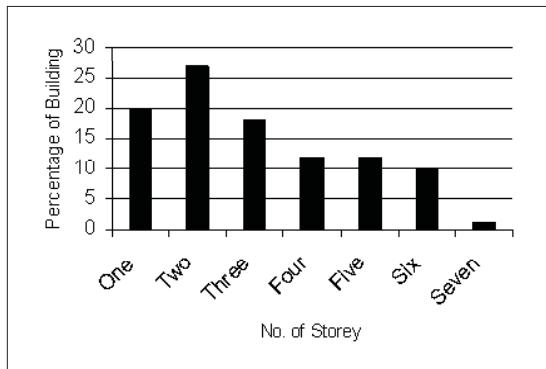

Figure 6: Percentage of Building According to Number of Storey (Source: Authors).

Visual Analysis of Surroundings

Effects of Building Height

Within the site there are a considerable number of buildings with a height that creates visual obstruction from the historic site. From the collected data, it is seen that a major share of buildings are three storey and above. But the most annoying factor is that the buildings constructed in recent years are five or six storied. So, the height of the buildings has negative impact on the historic site. The uninterrupted back ground of the fort is now obstructed with buildings of different height, color, texture and form. This visual obstruction causes the degradation of the attraction and historic appeal of the Lalbagh Fort. Figures 7 and 8 show the buildings surrounding the wall of the fort.

Impact of building color/material on Lalbagh Fort

The buildings around the heritage site have a great variation of colour. This is because of the difference of taste of building owners and another main factor is the lack of proper rules or guidelines. From a visual survey, it is found

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Figures 7 and 8: Incompatible height of the adjacent buildings causes visual obstruction to the fort complex (Source: Authors).

that a high percentage of structures are not painted and in has a dilapidated look. Buildings particularly painted green, violet, or yellow disturb the image of this historic site. Some of the recent buildings have doors and windows made of Thai glass on the front side of the buildings, which is totally incompatible with the appearance of the fort.

## SWOT Analysis: Prospect of Conservation of the Fort Area

It is evident from the survey findings and interview with the local residents that the historic image of the fort complex is under threat due to the unplanned development in the adjacent areas. The fort complex and the structures inside it have been preserved and maintained. But until today no attempt has been under taken to regulate development in the surrounding areas. As a result the historic appeal of the fort is affected. Considering this aspect a SWOT analysis has been done understand the constraints and potentials of conservation in the adjacent areas. Figure 9 shows the findings of the SWOT analysis. A list of intervention strategies has also been showed in the diagram which can be under taken by

both public and private initiative to protect this Mughal fort.

Anarkali

Historic Mughal city of Lahore (Pakistan), one time cultural capital of Asia, has expanded speedily over time. Initially it covered an area of 2.56km2 but today covers an area of 1,772km2. This evolution has come about as a result of a number of factors e.g. trend of urbanization, increasing population, commercialization etc. and their factors have acted as catalysts to all the ad-hoc urban fabric that we experience in the city including old settlements which have in an effort to accommodate the increasing needs and changing lifestyle trends have ended up being undesirable for everyday living. A prominent example of such a case would be Anarkali, a vibrant bazaar from the 17th century, located in the heart of the old city close to the famous fort and Badshahi mosque (Figures 9 and10). Lahore is a city whose various sections not only were developed in different time periods but were also meant to be self-contained to distinct social groups, economic functions and technologies.

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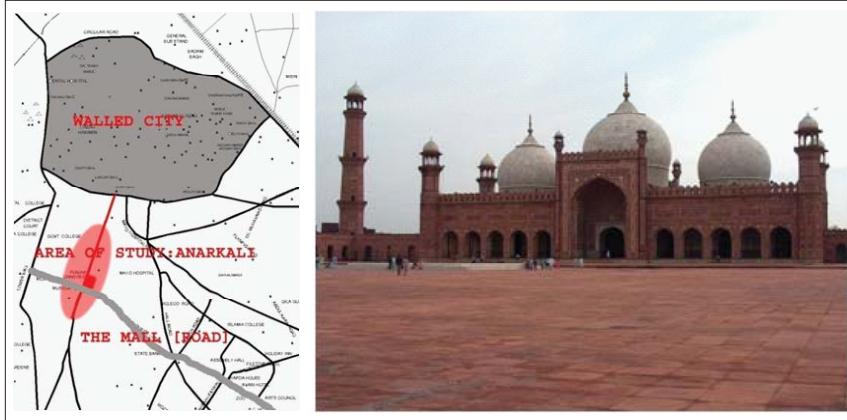
Figure 9: Map of a chunk of urban fabric of Lahore showing Anarkali, Walled City, The Mall Road (Source: Authors).

Figure 10: Badshahi Mosque. (Source: Authors).

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"The world in general has few cities that interweave so seamlessly a great vitality today (the city is about the twenty-fifth largest on the globe) with an unbroken and luxurious history (spanning the last two millennia). Only in Lahore do you find the sepulchre of the legendary Anarkali, the star-crossed dancing girl buried alive for her love of the young prince Salim (the film Mughal-e-Azam is a version), inside the dusty Archives of the Punjab Secretariat, which was a mosque that the British whitewashed, and is now decorated with portraits of British colonial governors. Layers and layers: it's that kind of place." (Pakistan Paindabad, 2009)

Anarkali bazaar is a famous bazār (market) in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. It is one of the oldest surviving markets in South Asia, dating back at least 200 years. The market derives its name from a nearby mausoleum thought to be that of a slave girl named Anārkalī, buried alive by order of the Mughal Emperor Akbar for having an illicit relationship with the Emperor's son, Prince Salīm,

later to become Emperor Jahāngīr.

Anarkali Bazar is the oldest bazaar of Lahore, Pakistan, yet it has coped with the changing times by introducing new trends in business. Today it can be considered as one of the best business centers of Pakistan. Anarkali Bazar is divided into two portions, the Old Anarkali Bazar and the New Anarkali Bazar. The Old Anarkali Bazar is famous for traditional food items while the New Anarkali Bazar is famous for its traditional handicraft and embroidery cloths. Babar Handicraft and Gift Centre is the oldest shop located at 110 New Anarkali. It is famous for its quality of hand made products. (Wikipedia Anarkali Bazar, 2009)

Unique Location

The geographical location of Anarkali is very strategic. Its link with the Mall puts a stop to the inner-city and the modern city to come in contact. It is very interesting as there is an

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interaction between the two sets of environs but neither enclaves the other. Though, now it does seem that the modern elements of the built environment and the culture have been very welcome in to the older masses.

Perpendicular to the Anarkali runs The Mall (Figure 9); one of the major arteries of the city, stitched on to which are some of the very important Government and private Built masses; High Court, GPO [general post office], National Assembly, Town Hall, major academic institutes i.e. National College of Arts, Punjab University, Town Hall just to name a few. This is the connective spine of the old Lahore [Walled city] to the new Lahore [Cantonment up to Defense and so forth]. The Mall also marks a boundary to Anarkali and has also played an important role in stopping the modernistic uncontrolled commercialization to totally hack the older settlements of the city. The frontal facing the mall road is treated very modern. The material used, the interiors, lighting, usage are all new and take over the older indigenous structures that to date can be experienced as we move inwards into the area.

It is interesting to note how these decades old structures have adapted the technology. In the middle of the brick and wooden built stands a telecom tower, transformers. One cannot miss the thick wiring running all over and around the buildings, the inserted air-conditioners (Figures 11 and 12).

The Magic of Anarkali

Going to the Anarkali Bazar was an exhilarating experience. The street, however, appeared narrower. The current vistas on the street are of
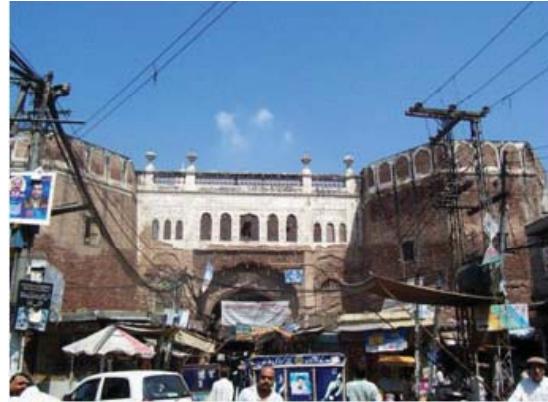
Figure 11: Old historic structures of Anakali (Source: Authors).

Figure 12: Old historic structures of Anakali (Source: Authors).

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banners and electric wiring havoc. The vision of a user upon entering the bazaar is blocked by the havoc of the parked vehicles. The old and new structure knitted together; with the hustle bustle of people of all ages give the place more cultural and social quality. The older buildings have adapted a newer face winded with modern insertions that make an interesting combination. The upper stories are somewhat still the same in appearance in terms of language, the condition though is very poor. The lower stories are all active in public use [commercial i.e.], are very fancy in material. Huge glass display windows showing off shiny interiors and bright lights. (Figures 13 and 14)

We surveyed a retail cloth store during one of the visits to Anarkali. It was a fusion of old structure and new technology. Air-conditioned and well lit with latest lighting technology, the inside looked a complete contradiction of the outside which is a typical [for that area] brick building with wooden Jharoka [balcony] (Figures 15 and 16).

In our quest for information for this research paper we have had the opportunity to interview some old residents of this area and it is in their narrations that one gets a flavor of the true, then Anarkali. Much they say have changed but it is credible that the area and its people have till today been able to maintain a certain language of the urban fabric. Their architecture being very impactful articulates their social and cultural lifestyle.

We also interviewed few people who initially were the residents of walled city and Anarkali but later moved to modern settlements. One such couple who now live in Model down says that not only has their built environment changed but their whole lifestyle has taken a 360o turn.

'I personally knew everyone from Anarkali, our street, the next or the next and here it has taken us more than a decade to get familiar with our very next door neighbours', says Mr. Inam Mahmood.

'I could not figure out how to spend my day, in Anarkali we, the women would all sit together in our shared courtyards and does our house hold work and daily chores. We were like a family, the whole locality, a part of each other's sorrows and happiness. And other women from nearby

Figure 13 and 14: Present day happenings and cluttered Anarkali (Source: Authors).

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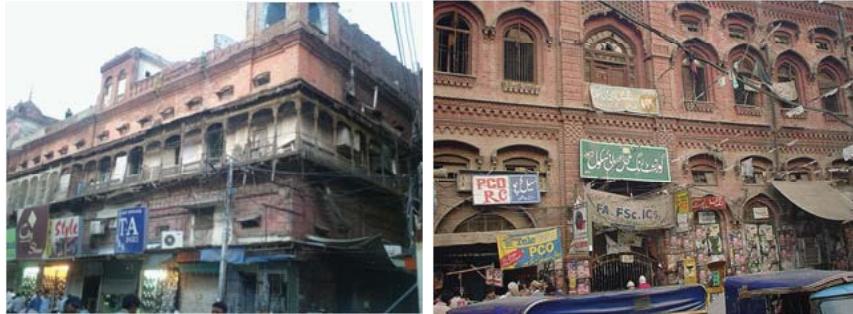
Figure 15 and 16: Adaptive reforms. An old building at Anarkali enameled by the web of electric wires and billboards.(Source: Authors).

would greet us from over their walls and roofs. There is no social interaction here. A house on our street had their daughter's wedding and we were not even invited. I found it very difficult to adjust in this cold environment', narrates the nostalgic Mrs Inam.

These interviews identified some very important aspects of the various living styles in context with the anthropological evolution of humans and also the adaptive measures of built environment.

Emerging Trends at Lalbagh Fort Area (Dhaka) and Anarkali Bazar (Lahore)

Anarkali at a time was one of the most active and lively strips of the city. Now it has adapted the modern living in a disorganized manner and has thus created disturbance for the traditional old residents. The culture has been forced to take a backseat. The art and architecture [true representation of a civilization] have been ignored too. Even today the inner you go to these galli mohallas (inner city neighborhoods), the richer the environ gets as a lot of old residents have still kept on with the indigenous

aspects. But as you move outside towards what can be called New Lahore, this cultural, social and architectural identity fades into the modern influential images. Similarly, the area adjacent to Lalbagh fort has rapidly transformed into a mixed and high density residential area. Like Anarkali, here too with the advent of comparatively high rise buildings (three to six storied apartment housing), there had been a dramatic change in the architecture and cultural identity. However, there seems to be more demolishing of old buildings and construction/ conversions to commercial housing blocks in Lalbagh than in Anarkali. While there are still a large number of relatively old and dilapidated buildings (many in ruins) in Anarkali, near Lalbagh the emerging architecture and planning is very much at odd with the historic site of the adjacent fort. Both the sites have undergone major changes of land use from military to mixed residential/ commercial area, but the changes of the urban fabric of Lalbagh appeared more incongruent with its surrounding than what observed at Anarkali. There is still an ambience of Mughal and Colonial architecture in Anarkali which seemed absent near Lalbagh area. What emerges from the analysis of both the sites that

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there is a kind of repoliticisation of the historic community without a singular identity in cultural representation, definition of space or use of technology.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In a way this was more of an experimental comparative study with two similar historical settings in the same region of South Asia but geographically wide apart and with different research approaches (including empirical and participant observation methods). The team members from architecture, urban planning, design and social science have provided a set of composite findings but similar recommendations. The outcomes of this research attempted to focus on the factors responsible for incompatible land use and to provide guidelines to preserve the appeal of these two heritage sites. In analyzing the transformation of both the 'locales', it appears to fit the notion of 'negotiation' and 'contestation' (Shakur, 2005). In cultural terms there are aspects of 'globalization' reflected in 'commercialization' of traditional residential land uses and rise of 'consumerism' at both the historic sites. At Lalbagh (Dhaka, Bangladesh) the commercialized spaces of housing, adjacent to the fort site, definitely seems to contest the historic conservation area while in Anarkali (Lahore, Pakistan), although much commercialized but still appear to be negotiating with its 'Mughal' and 'colonial' surroundings. With a bizarre mixture of 'traditional' and 'modern' cultures Anarkali has more bearings of a 'post-modern cultural space', bursting with energy while the transient 'commercialized residential spaces' of Lalbagh reflect more of a revival of 'modernism', not necessarily interrogating the global and post-

colonial cultures and their impact on the built environment (King, 2004). Here the distinction between 'Mughal' and the 'modern' period is much sharper providing very little evidence of the transient 'Colonial' culture. The emerging 'culture-space relationship' is complicated by both the subtle and aggressive use of the technologies in both built environments. Use of traditional/ archaic and cutting edge technologies (from donkey carts to split air-conditioners) go side by side in Anarkali while Lalbagh have embraced a curious mixture of local and modern derivations of the built environment (e.g. use of Thai aluminium for doors and window frames to iron bar fencing).

Although with the challenging prevailing socio-political conditions in both Dhaka and Lahore it is difficult to implement progressive user friendly 'sustainable environmental /developmental policies', the recommendations suggested are similar to those global solutions in the rest of the world. These include immediate preservations of the old buildings, formulation and implementation of 'conservation policies'. There are strong suggestions for more public interactive spaces with facilities like seating, public toilets, drinking water and shades. Antalkali has the potential to be turned into a pedestrian only strip/ branching strips. Proper parking facilities would benefit both the shoppers and the owners. It is obvious that should such recommendations be implemented, it will not only reduce the carbon footprint, benefit the environment and promote sustainability but will also reclaim public spaces initiating more activities, more interaction among people of different social standards. Finally, it still remains a debating issue whether 'the acceptance of new and modern/post-modern features' could

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be a very positive stance provided they are applied in a rationalized way.

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