

## **Forgotten Heritage: A Case Study of Temples in Wachowali Bazaar, Lahore**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses the remains of a number of temples found in Mohalla Wachowali within the walled city of Lahore. These temples were described in 1886 by Kanhaiya Lal, in his book 'Tarikh-e-Lahore and are compared with the state of these temples today through photographic documentation. As 'sites of memory', these temples enable the mapping of the dialogue between the material heritage of the Old City and the ideological narratives around history. These remains show the result of intangible narratives on the built form of the city, providing a counterpoint to the heritage conservation efforts currently underway. It discusses the inter linkages of material heritage with ideology and memory, and what implications it has for archaeological study within dense urban environments.*

**Keywords:** Hindu Temples, Lahore, Material Culture and heritage, ideology and memory

### **1. Introduction**

Lahore is often advertised as the cultural capital of Pakistan, with the Lahore fort and Shalamar Gardens on the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites since 1981, and three other sites on the tentative list, including Badshahi Mosque, Wazir Khan's Mosque and the tombs of Jahangir, Asif Khan and the Akbari Sarai . The Aga Khan Trust for Culture has seven ongoing heritage conservation projects in Lahore, namely the Shahi Guzargah (Royal trail) pilot project, Gali Surjan Singh Conservation Project, The Shahi Hammam, Wazir Khan Mosque Complex, Northern Façade of the Wazir Khan Mosque, Chowk Wazir Khan and Lahore Fort .

This paper focuses on an aspect of Lahore's architectural heritage that is not included in any of these lists. From its mention in Hieun Triang's travelogue in 630 A.D. to the formation of Pakistan in 1947, Lahore was home to a large non-Muslim population which

included Sikhs, Hindus and Jains. They left behind a rich legacy of temples, tombs and shrines that quickly got absorbed into the densely liquid urban fabric of the city. Their remains can still be seen scattered throughout the old city, inside and outside the Walled City.

The article tries to demonstrate how heritage and history are a fluid phenomenon, intertwined with ideas of politics, collective memory and identity. It follows the theoretical work of Pierre Nora (1989) and David Lowenthal (1998) on the role of memory and heritage, discussed in light of landscape and nation building by Paul Claval (2007), historic preservation (Farrar 2011) and the role of symbols in urban memory (Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryah, 2008). The inter linkages of heritage; memory and identity are discussed by Sara McDowell (2008). The temples studied in this paper are seen as 'sites of memory' where history and memory work opposingly. Although these temples are part of the architectural fabric of The Walled City, their place in the heritage of the city has been erased, forgotten and neglected due to ideological pressures and the structural process of nation-building.

The paper presents passages from Kanhaiya Lal's *Tarikh-e-Lahore* (History of Lahore), which was written in 1886. The selected passages have been translated into English by Adil Pasha for this paper. These passages describe the temples of Mohalla Wachowali as they were at the time. The juxtaposition of these descriptions of living temples with photographs of their remains today demonstrate the effect of shifts in identity formations through the process of building modern nation-states.

The research discusses the value-based approach to heritage conservation - driven by structural forces - as having a bi-directional flow between material and immaterial heritage. While heritage is the sum of a people's past, memory is constructed in the present. What is remembered in memory survives in the architecture of the city, while what is forgotten decays into brick and dust.

## **2. Literature Review**

The production of culture and its role in the formation of a collective identity is argued by Paul Claval to be a political project. The 'political', 'constructed' culture, as it operates in contemporary times is distinctly different from the 'vernacular', historical understanding of

culture (Claval, 2007, p. 85). For Claval, interest in landscapes is linked to their role as sites of memory. They become central in the building and preservation of collective identities (Claval 2007: 85).

In times past, history and myth were often inextricable. Myth provided a vehicle for the past to be stored and transmitted from generation to generation. 'All that happened before the birth of the oldest members of the community was immemorial – it could not be known directly.' (Claval 2007: 86) Claval argues that 'writing transforms culture into objective memories' with this transformation having 'both temporal and spatial consequences'. (Claval 2007: 88) Identity is thus closely associated with these constructed memories and history serves as a tool, used to both 'construct and chart an understanding of the progress of particular societies.' (Claval 2007: 88)

Monuments can be considered as vehicles for coding 'collective memory', or as Kulisic and Tudman say: 'references for spatial and temporal interpretation, because on the one hand they are lasting and they transmit messages through space, but also they are themselves a message in the space, and on the other hand they evoke memory and remembering, sending off messages through time.' (Kulisic and Tudman 2009: 130)

Discussing the heritage value of religious sites, Rana P.B. Singh also holds that 'heritage is not an innate or primordial phenomenon', it is in fact a symbolic phenomenon that people created, which becomes 'associated with a belief system', integrating into its 'symbolic expressions and mythologies' (Singh 2017: 2).

For Singh, the potential for conflict and contention arises 'when one culture interacts with another culture holding different values', 'particularly if control or assets are at stake.' Instances of such conflict are more prevalent around the 'religious heritage landscape of South and South East Asia (Singh 2017: 2).

Given the 'created' nature of heritage, an implication for losing or forgetting certain aspects of heritage also exists. This is particularly true in urban landscapes, where the density of the built forms lend ease to change. Margaret Farrar holds that what is selected to be preserved always stands in counterpoint to what is neglected. 'Historic preservation, however, can have equally depoliticizing effects by conjuring up peculiar, selective, or even wholly imaginary pasts (Farrar 2011: 723).

This amnesia is often politically propagated, as an instrument of forces that require a certain shared value system to be propagated, most often being the state. For Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryah 'the city is a site for both symbolic control and symbolic resistance', in terms of how memory acts around places. For them, 'urban memory provides a "means of accessing how various strata of society and different communities construct the metropolitan world"' (2008: 162).

Peter Probst echoes this perspective, where 'heritage is defined in relation to history and memory, for which it acts as a substitute' (Probst 2012: 11). The formation of a heritage is especially problematic for new and emerging nation states, where 'the state instrumentalizes, manipulates, suppresses, and at times even abuses local memories in order to overcome its still fragile and fragmented nature' (Probst 2012: 10).

Discussing the ethics of culture and heritage, Constantine Sandis argues that 'where there are rights there are also duties, such as those of preservation, in memory or actuality.' (Sandis 2014: 19) Although nation-states enforce a particular perspective with regard to their heritage and cultural values 'removing something from one's culture does not eliminate it from one's heritage'. For Sandis, 'the acknowledgment of heritage forms part of the ethics of remembering, and it is important to remember both the good and the bad, atrocities as well as achievements' (Sandis 2014: 13).

As a result, 'histories can become distorted and permeated (often deliberately) with inaccuracies and myths during the selection process, making the act of 'forging' in memory construction just as crucial for the cultivation of identity' (Rowlands 1999: 130).

The prevalent idea in these debates is that 'the past is chosen deliberately and subsequently consumed as appropriate but, arguably, demeaning in that it trivializes that which people consider sacred (McDowell 2008: 42). Heritage is thus 'the selective use of the past as a resource for the present (and future)' (Ashworth and Graham 2005: 7) and that 'memory and commemoration are inexorably connected to the heritage process'. Forester and Johnson (2002: 525) believe that by contesting, supporting, ratifying or ignoring symbols in the landscape, political elites and communities engage with one another through 'symbolic dialogue'. Through this analysis of 'symbolic dialogue', we can 'map meaning' in the cultural landscape (Whelan 2005: 61); (McDowel 2008: 41).

Fast rates of growth and high population pressures have forced people to inhabit these sacred structures, which have been adapted through various interventions to suit human habitation. Many of these temples have been saved by these locals from destruction by religious fanatics when tensions between India and Pakistan increase (Sheikh 2015). The people around these historic landmarks live in a carefully negotiated space between respect, necessity, survival and memory.

This text seeks to explore the cultural fabric, through architectural traces, of a geography that was once famed for its multi-layered, complex, tolerant and syncretic nature. As Nehru remarked, the subcontinent is ‘an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously’ (Nehru 2005); (Natarajan 2013: 370).

### **3. Methodology**

This article presents an exploratory research on sites of cultural and archeological significance. It takes a phenomenological approach to studying the relationship of material and immaterial culture, with implications for heritage and conservation paradigms.

Through extensive photographic documentation, interviews with the inhabitants of these locations as well as the Department of Archaeology and Lahore Museum personnel, and a literature review of academic material and historical publications, this paper makes the case that more Hindu temples existed in Lahore than are currently documented. Anthropological data was collected to provide insights to the erasure of the ‘sacredness’ of these sites from collective memory as a cultural mechanism, resulting from a history of violence, politics of space and identity.

The paper also uses secondary sources of data collection. Secondary research was conducted at the Archaeology Department at the University of Punjab, Lahore and the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. This research uses Kanhaiya Lal’s book ‘Tarikh-e-Lahore’ as source and reference, as it provides one of the few existing historical accounts of these temples.

#### 4. Locale

*Mohalla Wachowali:* Mohalla Wachowali is located in the center of the Walled City, west of Shah Alami Road that bisects the old city (Figure 1). It can be approached via the Mochi Gate, through the Paniwala Talaab. It is adjacent to the Suha Bazaar. In the present time, Wachowali bazaar is a hub for the manufacturing of ladies' shoes, sandals, and slippers. Numerous small workshops are found in the buildings and apartments here, while many buildings on the ground level serve as storehouses for the brands these workshops work with.

*About Mr. Kanhaiya Lal:* Born in 1830 in the town of Jalaiser to a Hindu Kayasth family. Rai Bahadur Kanhaiya Lal was a civil engineer by profession, and served as an Assistant Engineer in the Public Works Department (PWD) during British Rule. His first appointment was in Lahore, in 1850, where he stayed for the remainder of his life.

Kanhiya Lal worked as an engineer on some of the era's architectural masterpieces, including the main building of Government College, Mayo School of Arts, Lawrence Hall and Montgomery Hall. Having a diverse and eclectic education, Kanhaiya Lal was both a poet as well as an amateur historian. He published two books of Urdu and Persian poetry before writing the *Tarikh-e-Lahore*. Till date, it is one of the most comprehensive historical records of the city.

#### 5. The Temples of Mohalla Wachowali

The following section presents excerpts from Kanhaiya Lal's work *Tarikh-e-Lahore*, written in 1886 (Lal, 2013 {1886}). The authors have translated these selected passages into English for the purpose of presenting a description of the temples when they were intact and in use. Kanhaiya Lal's book is one of the few historical documents that describes the names of these temples, their ownership and architecture to this level of detail.

*“Thakur Dwara Jwala Dai:* This Thakur Dwara is situated to the west at the forefront of the bazaar in Mohalla Wachowali. Its building is magnificent and solid, with plastered walls. The founder of this house was a woman by the name of Juwala Dai, wife of Ram Kishan, who dedicated the construction of the temple with her heart's compassionate intent. The foundation of the house is almost one story

high. Access is gained by climbing the stairs, after which a magnificent door has been constructed with sections and engravings. Proceeding ahead of this is a heavy ambulatory covered with a roof. Going on the path towards the south, this ambulatory opens to a yard. The yard is enclosed by the building on all four sides. On the east is the wall which adjoins the street of the bazaar. Towards the west are small apartments, kitchen etc. Towards the north a courtyard has been made with ornate construction. This courtyard has vaulted chambers with carved roofs of wood...On top of this courtyard is a second story, on which a grand sitting area has been made with windows. It has been constructed in the same style, shape and colour as the lower courtyard. The priest of the temple lives here. To the south of the yard is a magnificent temple to the Lord, made very beautifully and solid. The door of the temple faces north, and a beautiful verandah is constructed in front of the door. Entering the door of the temple one enters the sacrum of the temple. It has a vaulted ceiling and above it is a very tall, staged pyramidal dome. The top of the dome is gilded. The floor of the temple is made of marble and its walls are engraved. On the wall opposite the door, an ornate marble niche houses two statues, one of the Lord Krishna and the other of Radhika made beautifully out of stone. Both these statues have been dressed in proud raiment and jewelry. Countless people come here to worship at both times.” p.138

*“Makan Ram Dwara:* This auspicious house is also situated in the Wachowali Mohalla. Although it is on the bazaar front, the access to and from the temple is from a side lane. Its foundation is high. One climbs the outer stairs to enter the door. Crossing the vestibule to go inside, one finds a beautifully constructed square house. There are four wooden verandahs on its four sides. Three corners have small rooms attached, while the fourth corner, towards the north-west has an ambulatory. The western verandah has windows opening towards the bazaar. A period of six years has passed since this building was constructed and Harji Ram was appointed as the resident priest of the place...The recitation of holy books Bhagvad Gita and Ramayan is done daily and the worship of the deities is done with great focus and attention, so that whoever comes at the time of recitation is immediately given a rosary of tulsi (basil) in his hand and is told to worship Ram. As long as he is there he keeps reciting bhajan (chants) on the rosary. He keeps it back when leaving. In the middle of the circle is a huge pile of these rosaries and a man has been appointed to manage the rosaries..” p.139

*“Bheru Ji ka Asthan:* This auspicious place of worship is built on a side street from the main road towards the east in Mohalla Wachowali. There are three terraces built on top of one another. The first is made of brick with lime plastered walls, on top of it, although a bit lower in height, is a terrace made of red stone. Over this is a marble terrace and the building of the temple itself is also of marble which has two niches. One niche holds a lamp which burns day and night. The second niche, built on top of the first, holds an iron peg driven into it on which garlands of flowers are kept hanging. On top of this is a ‘small dome’ which should be called a half-dome and it has a little bit of gilding on it as well. On the lower terrace there is a small room to the south with a wooden door that faces north. It holds the necessary apparatus for keeping the lamps lit etc. Across the street from this temple there is a two storied hostel for the worshippers’ rest. It is a windowed house that faces the temple with only the street in between. This building has been made magnificently, with many windows and a solid construction and the worshippers come stay here and rest.” p.140

*“Mandir Bawa Mehr Das:* This is a building in Mohalla Wachowali that covers a vast area, with four magnificent temples in it. It might be appropriate to call this a collection of temples rather than a single temple. In the center is the building of Thakurdwara Mehr Das which is the first and the oldest building. It is not less than 200 years old. It holds a lot of stone statues of deities. The oldest idol, which is from the time of Bawa Mehr Das, is kept with great pomp on the lower niche. In other niches there are many other idols of Lord Krishna and Mother Radha etc. In the present time, i.e. 1936 Bikrami, a clothier by the name of Vas Dev has renovated this temple. He has greatly enlivened it with whitewash and other things. He has also placed two idols of Lord Krishna and Radha Ji by himself in it. He has also placed a marble brick with his name engraved on it at the front of the temple so that people will know that this temple was made by Vas Dev around 1936 Bikrami.

This building is not domed. There is instead a room with several niches which have idols placed in it. Every statue has ornate raiment. This temple is treated with great reverence because of its old age, and people come to worship here at both times.

The second temple is a grand building built behind the yard of Shwala Mehr Das. First there is a magnificent platform solidly constructed. The Temple is on top of this, its door being towards the east. Entering this there is a small stone platform for the temple. On it is the footprint of Lord Shiva. On this is a basin with a metal pitcher



which holds water. The walls of the temple are solid and engraved with an arched ceiling with an elongated pyramidal dome that is beautiful and the gilding shines on it. This shwala was made by Sukh Ram Das Khatri Kapur around 1930 Bikrami in memoriam of his deceased son Mela Ram. Jai Kishn Das, Sukh Ram Das' grandson looks after the affairs and expenses of the temple.

The third temple is an extremely well made shwala towards the right of Shwala Mehr Das. This temple is also placed in the middle of the yard with a solid and large platform. It also has a pyramidal dome which is gilded. Its founder was a paan-seller by the name of Bhagtan who ran a paan shop during Sikh rule over Lahore. This building was made around 1930 Bikrami as well. Thus both these temples were made in the same year with this yard.

The fourth temple is dedicated to the Goddess of 84 bells. It is situated opposite the temple of Bawa Mehr Das towards the East. Its platform should be considered the same as that of Bawa Mehr Das' temple. This building is also made solidly out of lime plaster. In front of the door there is a ceilinged verandah. There are wooden shafts placed in the walls of the temple on which 84 bells have been placed. The door of the temple is towards the south. Going inside there is a stone idol of the goddess placed in a niche. It has lime plastered walls, vaulted ceiling and a penannular (onion shaped) dome above it. This goddess appeared here around 1931 Bikrami, i.e. 1875 C.E. It chanced that the priest started digging up some bricks from the yard. While they were digging out the bricks this goddess came out of the ground. It became known that the goddess has decided to appear by herself. In a short time, this news spread throughout the city and the believers gathered here in such large numbers that for some days there was a festival here. Thousands of rupees were gathered as donation. Finally, it was decided that this deity's temple should also be constricted in the same yard. The priest Cheetu Mehrotra Khatri spent his own savings to construct this temple and carved a brick with his name and placed it over the door of the temple. On this brick his name Cheetu and the date February 1875 C.E. is written. On the northeast corner of the yard there is an ambulatory, and on the southwest corner of the platform there is a wooden domed temple with tin metal sheets over it and a Shivling is placed in the center but there is no basin or pitcher." (p. 142)

## **6. The Temples Today**

In the 145 years that have passed since the writing of the above passages, a lot has changed in Wachowali Mohalla. There is no whole building existing today that fits the descriptions given by Kanhaiya Lal. However, fragments of these buildings can be seen emerging from the landscape. With the progress of time, the architectural fabric has grown denser inside the Walled City. With its outer boundaries restricted, the Walled city has grown vertically as well, and the once iconic spires of these temples are now dwarfed by the surrounding constructions (Figure 10).

It can be assumed that the parts of the temples other than the spires have been repurposed and remodeled to fit the needs of the communities residing in the Mohalla today. The spires have survived as they serve no other purpose, their bricks are irregularly shaped, and perhaps they still carry the essence of a sacred place and hence have not been destroyed (Figure 2)

The buildings that do remain appear as fossils embedded inside the city, around which the living city has adapted itself.

One has to go through narrow alleys to reach these buildings and once there, there is no way to get a good perspective on the building (Figure 4). The only way to get an objective view is to climb to the upper stories or roofs of the surrounding houses, which involves obtaining permission from the residents.

The structures are in a state of extreme neglect and disrepair, yet signs of their once ornate craftsmanship can be seen. The bricks used in the niches and jharoka of the shikara (spire) are individually constructed, and of dimensions unique to the structures. The lime plaster, although now darkened and eroded, still holds its form, preserving the shape of the temples' shikara (Brittanica, 2011).

The yards, terraces and platform that provided the negative space to these structures have vanished, being buried beneath the more modern additions as seen in Figure 3, characterized by the use of contemporary bricks (9x4.5x3 inches).

Figure 6 shows the view of the temple spire from above, with the lower left corner showing the piles of garbage that have accumulated in the spaces in between the shikara and the surrounding buildings.

Figure 7 shows the spire in context with another spire (detail in Figure 2) that is situated around 50 feet from it. Originally part of the same temple, these two structures now have three houses in between them.

Figure 8 shows another temple, with its inner sanctum and shikara being relatively intact. Its doorway arch is intact, showing delicate reliefs. The niches on the tower itself still hold pigments from frescoes that would have been decorating the towers along with the gilding. However, it is surrounded on all sides by high buildings, with its walls adjoining other structures. The room itself was being used as a store. The tower of this temple is more than 30 ft. high from the roof of the room, yet the surrounding buildings now dwarf it. Figures 9 and 10 shows other views of the same temple.

## **7. Discussion**

The change in these places from lively, gilded places of worship to derelict remains of an era forgotten came about not as a result of bureaucratic neglect or lack of policy but through the structural application of an ideology of nation-building that does not have room for such places in its cultural syntax.

The survival of these buildings can also be attributed to local indigenous memory, operating on a mythical and almost subconscious level that has prevented the destruction of these buildings.

The complex as it exists today is inhabited by several families, who no longer view the 'shikaras' and the sanctuaries as sites with any religious significance. However, the fact that they have not demolished the structures points to an implicit understanding of their 'sacred' significance. The remains of the temples remain separated from the profane residential spaces which have surrounded and even absorbed some parts of the temple structure.

When asked about their perceptions regarding the temples they inhabit, these families were of the view that 'this is our home, the people who built these have gone away long ago, and we have resided here since the time of our grandfathers.' They also add that although some visitors come to see the temple every year, their number has gone down, adding that 'most of the visitors are foreigners (white people), and no Hindu has visited these sites for many years.'

During our research, all residents stated that they have 'always inhabited this place, since the time of our grandfathers.' These

structures had also 'always been there', but there the dialogue between them and the places they inhabited ends. This dialogue, that has all the characteristics of a 'cultural amnesia' discussed earlier, serves to prevent the inhabitants being in ideological conflict with the structures they inhabit.

These remain, although still distinguishable as sacred places, and having all the characteristics of the religious architecture of Hinduism. Over the years, they have slowly submerged below the conscious recognition of the inhabitants of the Walled City. Now they serve as the ground upon which the contemporary landscape is built. This conscious amnesia has interesting implications for archaeological research in densely populated urban areas. This phenomenon is analogous to witnessing the formation of the archeological strata we find in the excavation of ancient cities.

Any detailed survey work of these and similar sites will also have to adapt new methodologies, in order to deal with the resident population for whom these 'sites' have been home since the formation of the country. These sites present a highly active, fluid architectural fabric that is undergoing rapid change. A single wall can have bricks from as long ago as the Mughal Era to the present day. These bricks are also reused, while newer modern bricks are often used to repair old walls (Figure 11).

## **8. Conclusions**

The evidence presented above lays the grounds for a widespread Hindu presence throughout the Walled City, with a vibrant and flourishing architectural tradition. At present however, these temples have lost 'ownership' among the community as temples, and are seen simply as 'structures'. The sanctity that accompanied the temple space seems to have been withdrawn with the departure of Hindus from the city. The structures are seen as relics from a past that has little to do with the lives of the inhabitants, yet still occupy a vaguely sacred position that prevents outright destruction.

It is also evident that a lot of strain on these temples comes from population pressures, especially in the Inner City. The habitation of these temples is often not the most convenient of living arrangements, but the highly fluid nature of urban dynamics in these areas is swiftly taking over the fragile temples- whose existence

depends directly on the conscious or subconscious perception of value among the people of 'androon'(interior) Lahore.

The findings presented in this paper aim to lay the groundwork for more detailed study into the historicity of the temples existing within the Walled City of Lahore, which as an urban center is subject to high pressures of population growth and urban dynamics, exerting a strain on these cultural heritage and material culture in the context of Hindu temples.

Lahore has several such sites of historical and archaeological significance that have not come to notice of any study or documentation. These sites can be classified as highly vulnerable to the forces of modernization, population growth, urbanization and development. They are made even more vulnerable by not falling under any conservation or protection agendas, which are mostly used to promote dominant political and cultural ideologies.

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*...Temples in Wachowali Bazaar, Lahore*



Fig. 1 - Aerial View of Walled City, Lahore with Mohalla Wachowali marked in red. Data Darbar is on lower left and Lahore fort at the top of image.

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Fig. 2 - The spire of a temple peers out of a staircase.



Fig. 3 - The walls of a temple form the end of a narrow street.





Fig. 4 - Street view of a temple, showing pillars and shikara.



Fig. 5 - View of shikara from roof of opposite building.



Fig. 6 - View from above.



Fig. 7 - View across, showing remains of another shikara in background.



Fig. 8 - A temple embedded in the surrounding buildings.



Fig. 9 - The base of the shikara.



Fig. 10 - The shikara in context to surrounding buildings.



Fig. 11 - A construction site showing the use of multiple types of bricks.