



RESEARCH PAPER

A Historic Development of the Town Hall Lahore, Pakistan: Viability Analysis for Refurbishment to Attain its Cultural Identity

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is an attempt to explore the practical viability of conservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings in terms of their socio-cultural and historic merits. Recent developments and refurbishments have influenced the historic environment of the heritage sites at the cost of their historic integrity and identity. Victoria Jubilee Town Hall, Mall Road Lahore was constructed to function as a seat of the Civic Government during British period on the occasion of Golden Jubilee of the Queen Victoria. The historic monument is located at the finale of Mall Road Lahore and reflects a beautiful combination of Mughal, sultanate and Spanish architectural elements. The historic monument is deteriorating and it needs the attention to be conserved and restored, being a legacy of British period. The glory of the Mall Road Lahore can never meet its climax without mentioning the grandeur of Town Hall. In the conclusion, historic monuments and heritage sites which are learning institutions in themselves should be preserved and regenerated with focused plans.

KEYWORDS Historic Identity, Refurbishment, Viability Analysis, Victoria Jubilee Town Hall

Introduction

Pakistan is one of those countries which possesses a wealth of historic buildings and cultural heritage sites in different parts. However, among all of its cities, Lahore is remarkably famous for its bountiful and diverse legacy comprising of grand buildings with artistic ornamentations. The country is identified due to its monuments which enhance its esthetic values and it also eye witnessed the history. The characteristics of the building, flourished here, in this part of the continent is superb and extraordinarily rich in its context. Lahore, being cultural capital of Pakistan, is amazing for its variety in architectural styles in terms of three periods, i.e. Mughal, Sikh and Colonial. It has been ruled by multiple dynasties, which played a key role to describe the contemporary architecture and contributed to define the historic urban landscape of the city (Talbot & Tahir, 2017).



Figure 1: A view of Victoria Jubilee Town Hall - 1890 (Source: Jahojilal.com)

Pre-colonial (Mughal & Sikh) and Colonial rule contributed tremendously to develop the built environment of the subcontinent. Architecture expressed the power and authority of the rulers who built these magnificent and elegant structures such as mosques, tombs, temples, Gurdwaras and Forts. After the British annexation, Lahore moved towards a new phase of development and a new concept was introduced in terms of civic architecture. The architecture which is introduced by the British rulers is termed as Colonial or British Architecture (Bryant, 2020). Lahore legacies owed to British Empire for the provision of infrastructure, court of Law, Education system, irrigation and transport system including railways. Therefore, preservation of British period monuments are equally important (Din, 2018).

The Town Hall (Lahore Metropolitan Cooperation) is located on the west at the junction of Lower & Upper Mall roads. At that time, Gole Bagh (now Nasir Bagh) was extended up to the Town Hall (Aslam, 2019) .



Map 1: Lahore map 1926 (Source: Rehman, 2013) (modified by authors)

Formerly, it was constructed to dedicate the pleasant memory of 50th year of rule of the Queen Victoria, in February 1887, as Queen Victoria got the reign in 1837, and thus, it was named as Victoria Jubilee Town Hall. Its foundation stone was laid by the Charles Aitchison, Lieut. Governor of the Punjab, and the inauguration ceremony took place with inordinate fanfare and it was attended by Prince Albert Victor on February 03, 1890 (Chaudhry, N.A, 1998) .



Map 2: Map of Town Hall Lahore showing building blocks within site (Source: Map Box)

The Town Hall, Mall Road Lahore is a historic and grand structure located in the historic context of the Mall Road, one of the main thoroughfares of the colonial Lahore. The Mall road Lahore, itself, is a symbol of the city's past and it develops a link between traditional and modern Lahore. The Town Hall, Lahore was constructed during British Colonial Period in 1887 and it was Rai Bahadur Sir Ganga Ram who was a British engineer and father of Modern Lahore. He is known for the contributions towards development of the Mall road Lahore by the various architectural projects in British India (Vandal & Vandal, 2007).

The Town Hall Lahore was designed in Indo-Saracenic style, a blend of Mughal and Gothic architecture. The main architectural elements of the monument is red-brick façade, pointed arches with ornate detailing, presenting both traditional and British architecture. The building was constructed with a primary objective, focusing on the function. The town Hall Lahore was, initially, built to serve as an office building for the municipal administration, public events and official meetings. Historically, it remained as a hub for civic activities and official gatherings. Afterwards, it has hosted variety of events for cultural exhibitions, lectures and official gatherings (Latif, 1992).

Because of its architectural and historical significance, Town Hall Lahore has been considered as a landmark for the tourists and visitors providing an opportunity to praise its esthetic value and to study its historic context. It is a civic pride & identity and it also achieved a central and dominant position in the historic urban landscape of the colonial Lahore. At present, the building is being used for the administration of local Government, holding of court sessions, official meetings and entertainments during official events. These buildings are used by the local officials, elected representatives and citizens for the purpose of addressing issues and disputes of the community.

This historic building is also being deteriorated due to the ignorance of the users as well as authorities. Moisture contents due to the seepage and rain are continually damaging the structure and proves of human neglect are visible at various places inside and outside of the building. Lack of maintenance can be resulted in the sheer decay of heritage. The building is being utilized at its full strength on the basis of the functions for which it originally built, with some additional purposes. Considering its high official usage and people mobility, it badly needs the attention of the authorities, for the protection and maintenance, securing its dynamic value and historic significance.

Literature Review

Evolution of Town Halls

The Town halls frequently function as a civic pride and identity. The architectural designs of such type of buildings reflect the historical values of the region and represent cultural heritage. Traditional Town Halls incorporate those elements which evoke a sense of unity with local heritage. The modern Town Halls emphasize accessibility and inclusivity. Being a public building to deal with the issues of the community, they should be welcoming for the residents of all backgrounds. There must be the provision of the features like ramps, elevators, restrooms and must be accessible to the individuals with disabilities (Radomski, 2022).

The clock Tower in the center of main façade and Domes in each corner have become a symbol linked with civic administration and authority. They also indicate the civic role of public institutions and their commitment with the community. The esthetic values are equally important as Town Halls are usually located at the prominent places

within the city. The interior of the Town Hall Lahore is composed of spacious galleries, halls, meeting rooms and large spaces for different functions and events. The interior décor is based on intricate woodwork, richly decorative ceilings with local crafts (Latif, 1992).

Traditional buildings were often reused with adaptive function over time, saving energy resources, accommodating the needs of housing. Adaptive reuse of the existing structures may help to extend their lifespan but Town Hall is one the significant buildings, that is, purpose based and continue to serve as a significant civic and cultural organizations in the city. Considering the value of modern technologies, Town hall designs must be revised to meet the current standards. These buildings serve as a seat of local Government and hosted a variety of cultural events, exhibitions and get-togethers. There must be open public spaces, seating areas and landscape around the built area (Gonzalez et al., 2013).

Historic Background

In the ancient Rome, Basilicas were multifunctional places served for justice, official meetings trade. During middle ages, Great Halls were performed as central space to the homes for feudal lords, living quarters, places for rule and court of justice. With the evolution of urban communities, these great halls transferred to castles and palaces.

During the British colonial period, these basilicas and great halls emerged in European towns, linking market spaces with rooms for civic activities. These structures were performed as dedicated "Town Halls" under the umbrella of local governance. The administration of the newly developed cities needs spaces for decision-making, the most significant are Cologne City hall, The Pallazzo Pubblico of Siena and Palazzo Vecchio of Florence. Transitioning to the middle ages and early modern period, communal market halls emerged in European towns, linking market spaces with rooms for civic activities. These structures foreshadowed dedicated town halls. The concept of town halls evolved alongside the rise of local governance. Representative-run cities required meeting spaces for decision-making, leading to iconic examples like the cologne city hall, the palazzo pubblico of siena, and the palazzo vecchio of Florence, each featuring meeting halls and administrative chambers (Hauck, 2009).

In the 19th century, the Town Halls comprised of academic roles, reading rooms and public libraries. The chambers within Town Halls became places for multiple type of events such as receptions, public entertainments and official get-togethers. In the 20th century, the function of Town Halls expanded to voting, disaster relief and information dissemination during wartime. The function of these Town Halls also started to establish office spaces for administrative purposes (Jayaswal, 1934).

Town halls in Pakistan

There were three Town Halls in Pakistan as follows:

- The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) Building in Karachi,
- Lahore Town Hall in Lahore,
- Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation Building in Rawalpindi

These Town Halls played a key role to connect local Government with the concerned community and nurturing a sense of public participation and responsibility.

Lahore Municipality was established in 1862 under notification no.724 dated April 2, 1862 and administrated by 13 elected members (07 Hindus, 05Muslims and 01 Sikh) and

first committee started to work on May 01,1862 (Goulding, 1924). The meetings of the Municipality were conducted in a Banglow near Bhati gate and that Banglow was continued to be used as Municipality office till the establishment of Town Hall Lahore in 1890 (Tufail, 1962). The Designer “ Pogson” was awarded a prize of Rs.500 for his best efforts. The view of the surrounding area can please your eyes from its roof (Latif, 1992).

British Colonial Period

During the British colonial period in British India, The urban fabric transformed in the civic form. In the Indian sub-continent, the Indo-saracenic style, a blend of Indian, Islamic and European elements, was introduced in colonial commercial, residential and public buildings. Wide verandahs and pitched roofs were adapted to treat tropical environment, incorporating local art and craft. The new style is also termed as Neo-classical, Victorian and Neo-gothic styles. The architectural designs of Town Halls were diversified according to the region, but in this part of the world, Colonial architecture is characterized by the elements like

- Grand facades,
- Roman & Greek Columns,
- Pediments,
- Ornate detailing in ceilings

The buildings were envisioned to project the stability and power of the British rule in the sub-continent, providing functional spaces for administrative purposes. The town Halls in Pakistan are the historic assets and reflect the rich history. Restoration and preservation of these colonial buildings is essential to maintain the cultural identity of a place. They are significant as they introduced the concept of local governance, public participation and community development in the region. The grand structures of the Town Halls are, not only, significant historically and culturally but also a symbol of social unity through their strategic placement, in the center of the Town or city (Radomski, 2022).

Concisely, Town Halls provide accommodations the city and town council along with concerned Departments and working staff members. It also usually serves as the official residence of the Mayor of the city. However, Town Hall Lahore is purposely constructed with a specific objective e.g. administrative functions of the local governance. Despite passing more than 100 years, it is standing strong but the time has played its role to put environmental and climatic impact. Due to climatic, environmental and human influences, the structure has started deterioration. Lack of maintenance is one of the major causes. Therefore, it is needed to draw the attention of the authorities to preserve this heritage. Standing strong. However, the ravages of time have taken their toll, and these venerable structures now require restoration to address the damages experienced over the years.

Material and Methods

The work was started with the collection of data through site visits. Visual and pictorial surveys were conducted to evaluate the present condition of the structure as well as current function. Location map and architectural drawings were collected from the record room of the office of the Metropolitan Corporation of Lahore. Desk-based studies are conducted to understand the design and function of the Town halls and the historic evolution and cultural significance has been identified through publications. The drawings were reproduced by the authors and the causes of decay are identified by the observation of the damages to the historic structures.

Pakistan is part of the Indian sub-continent, one of the British colonies, and is showing rich Mughal, Sikh and British period. The British period is the latest before freedom and the structures of this period are still strong as the buildings have been constructed with concrete and metal (first time introduced by British). Therefore, they are facing less issues as compared to Mughal and Sikh buildings. Causes of decay are varied and impacts on materials are different. Human negligence and lack of maintenance are identified as major causes of decay with various other issues. Qualitative analysis has been done to conclude the conservation process, technique and procedure to protect the structure as the building is still functional and bearing heavy load of human traffic.

Case Study - Town Hall

Location and Context



Map 3: Location map of Town Hall, Lahore (Source: Map box)

Town Hall Lahore that was initially known as Victoria Jubilee Town Hall due to its existence at the celebration of Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria of her rule. It was constructed as a seat of civic Government of Lahore. It is located on the west at the node connecting lower and upper mall Lahore. Its context is comprised of Nasir Bagh, Punjab University College of Pharmacy, National College of Arts, General Post Office, Lahore Museum and Tolinton Market.

Architectural Significance of Town Hall

The Town Hall Lahore is double story building designed by an architect named Pogson resident of Chennai. The building is beautiful amalgam of Mughal, Sultanate and Spanish elements. The total cost of its construction was Rs. 60,000.00 and most significant architectural element is Lancel Arch fringed by massive two towers (three story) on each side, ending the roof line with castle-like "Merlons", the towers on each corner are captivated with a central dome and onion shaped copulas on each corner of towers. (admin, 2017), a characteristic of medieval period (Merriam Webster, 2023).

The remarkable feature is the flag "Hilal-e-Istaqlal" hoisted at the façade of Town Hall at one side of the flag of Pakistan. Hilal-e-Istaqlal is an honor, granted to the civilians of Lahore, Sargodha and Sialkot in for showing bravery for the protection of their country during Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Flag hoisting ceremony is conferred every year on

Defense day (September 06) in the recognition of the courage of Laborites on that day (Tribune, 2017).



Figure 2: Clock Tower, Hilal-e-Istaqlal, Dome and Copulas (Source: Jaho jalal.com)

Victoria Jubilee Town Hall is a complex comprised of various buildings according to the functions, the building has to perform, being a seat of local governance. The building has been designed, adapting Mughal, Sultanate and Spanish architectural elements.

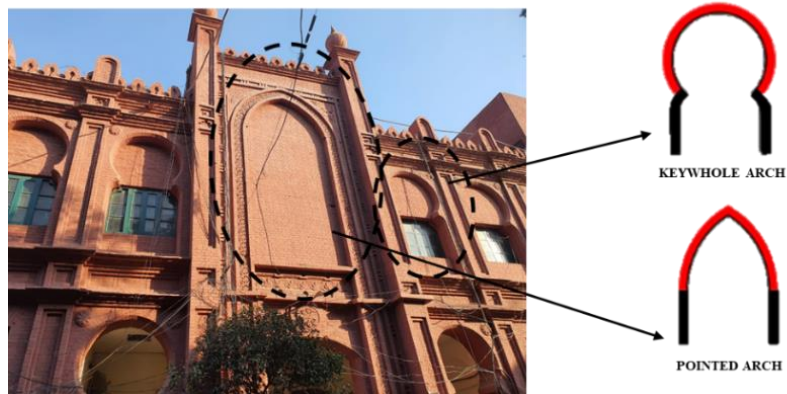


Figure 3: Keyhole and pointed arch on the façade of the building



Figure 4: Pointed Cinquefoil arch



Figure 5: Segmented arch

There is a remarkable fountain (green in color) in front of the main building named as "Jinnah Hall". This monument is presented by Raja Harbans Singh (Tufail, 1962).

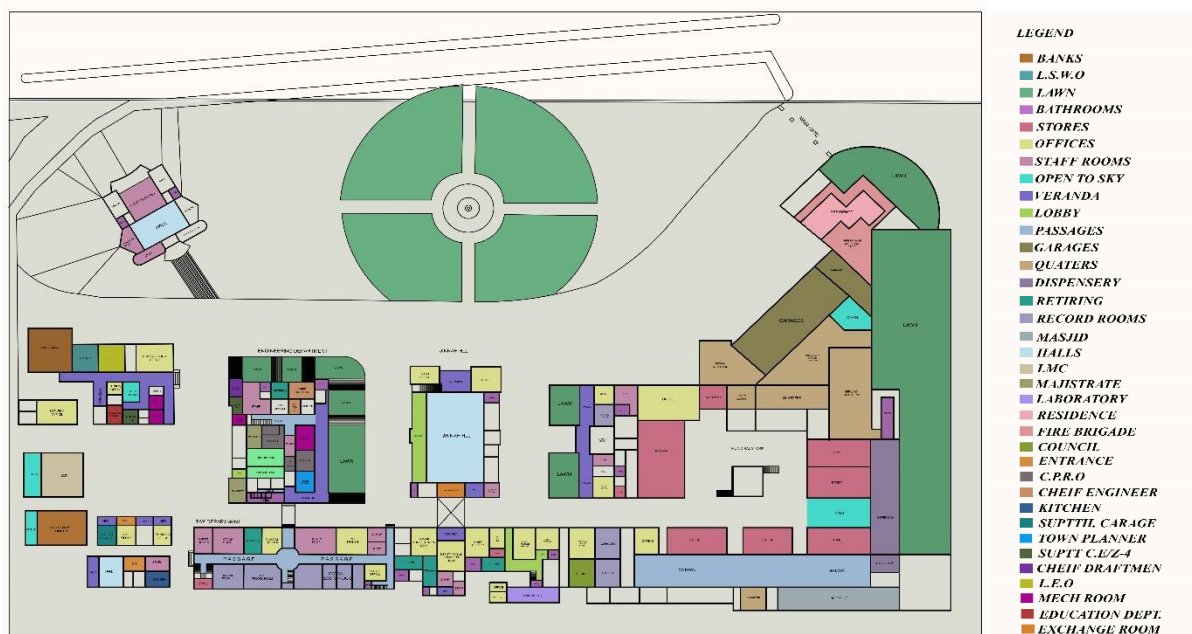


Figure 6 : View of Foundation and Garden in front of Town Hall

Architectural Plans

Historic Jinnah Hall is composed of various blocks in this complex with a magnificent landscape in front of Jinnah Hall.

- Jinnah Hall
- Mayor’s Office
- Emergency Department
- Engineering Department
- Health Department
- Taxation Department
- Fire Brigade & Garages
- Servant Quarters
- Municipal Stores



Map 4: Site Plan of Town Hall showing various blocks (Source: MCL - reproduced by authors)

Jinnah Hall

The Jinnah hall is located in the main block and is under the management of Metropolitan Corporation of Lahore (MCL) and is located on the first floor. The floor finish of the hall is teak planks. It is a place for the civil functions, meetings and public sessions. The size of the hall is 80' x 40'.

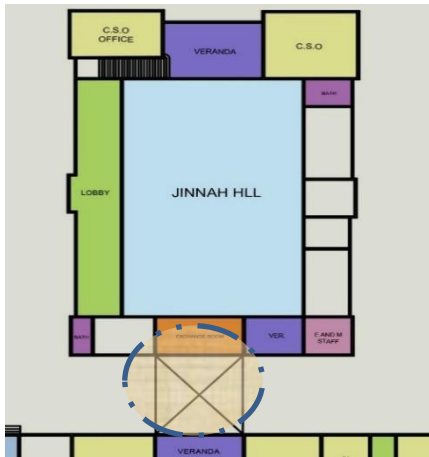


Figure 7: Plan of Jinnah Hall



Figure 8: View of Entrance lobby to the offices behind Jinnah Hall

It is beautifully ornamented and it was used for exclusive purposes such as dance, concerts and meetings during the British period against the desire of Prince who wished to utilize it for “wise and quiet debates” according to his speech at the time of inauguration of the Hall. In spite of its beautiful image and use of moldings, the detailing work is not heavily detailed.



Figure 9: Conference Room



Figure 10: Main Hall

Mayors / District Office

There is an office of District Nazim / Mayor with the offices for his staff and an administrative kitchen, conference room and Commissioner Office, on the ground floor of the main block.

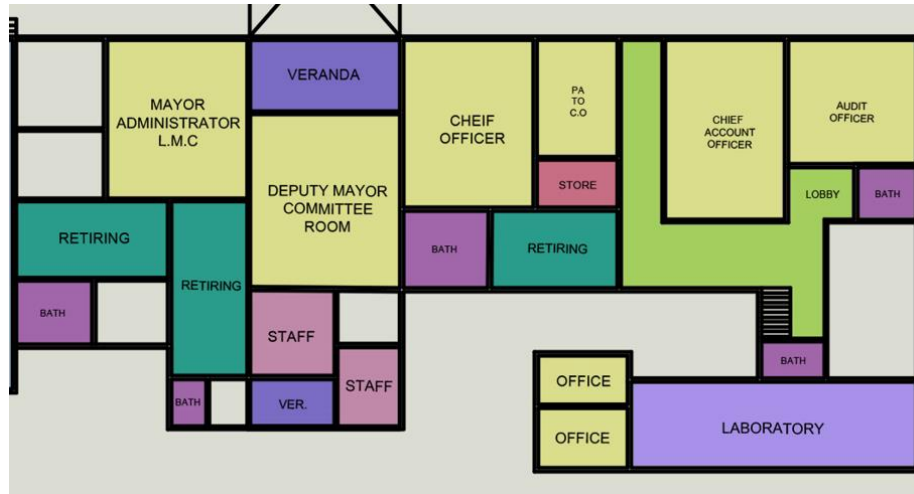


Figure 11: Plan of the Mayor Administrative L.M.C



Figure 12: View of Commissioner's Office & Conference Hall

Engineering Department and Taxation Department

There is an Engineering Department to deal the issues with Land and Properties under the administration of Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL). There are offices of Chief Engineer, Town Planner and architect with their staff offices in this block. There are offices of Surveyors with the provision of Land records to maintain the record in terms of ownership and transformations. There is also a Design section for monitoring, designing and managing the buildings under the umbrella of MCL behind the Engineering Department, Taxation Department is there to deal with the tax issue related with the properties under MCL.



Figure 13: Plan of Engineering Department & Taxation Department

Health care Unit

Health care unit is located in the garden to facilitate the staff.

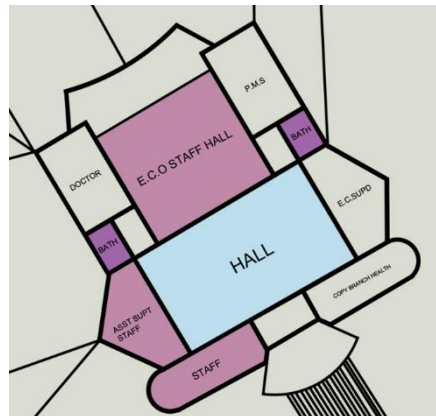


Figure 14: Plan of Health Care Unit

Miscellaneous Departments

There are few other administrative Departments such as Mayor’s Residence, Storage and Godowns for the storable items, Fire brigade office, garages, Driver’s & Servant Quarters, Municipal Store, Record Rooms, Window operations (MCL, HBL, Inquiry), Contractor’s office, Education Branch, Union office, Tehsildar office, main Kitchen and other miscellaneous offices for the smooth working of the Town Hall Lahore.

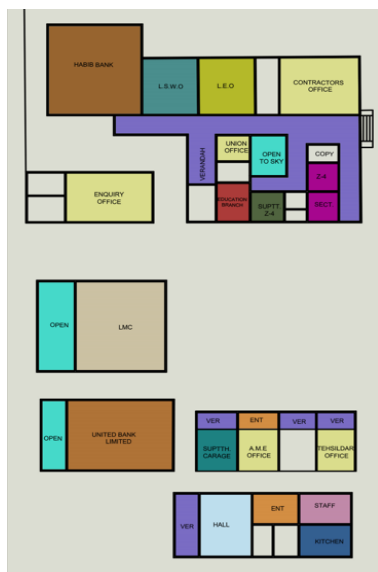


Figure 15: Miscellaneous offices on the left of Engineering Department

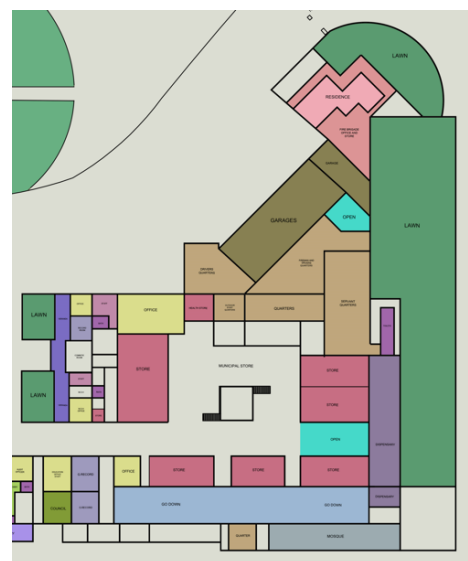


Figure 16 : Plan of Residence, Store, side Quarters & others

Front Garden with Fountain

There is a spacious garden in front of main building and the area is dominating by an elegant fountain, said to be a gift of Raja Harbans Singh. Other than central garden, there is parking place for high officials. Garages and firefighting area is located at the main entrance of the Town Hall. Health department is next to firefighting area.

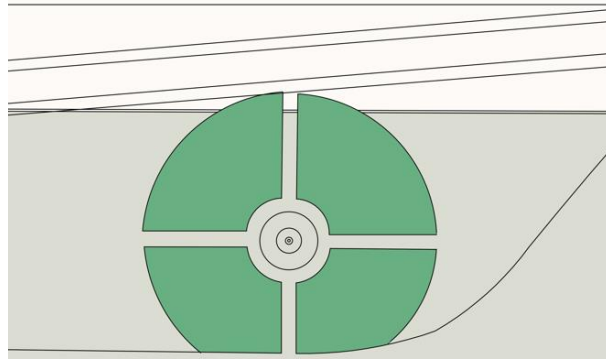


Figure 17: Plan of Central Fountain gifted by Raja

Present Condition

The Town Hall Lahore is last landmark at the mall Road Lahore and it has been neglected by the administration, in spite of its function. Being seat of local government, it should be maintained to enable it for the reception of high officials and community representatives. But the condition is verse and the structure started to deteriorate due to the various causes which can easily handled be through appropriate measures. In case of building envelop, doors & windows has been broken down and no repair work have been planned. The exterior walls are subjected to moisture leaving its impacts on the wall surfaces and root cause of this dampness is yet unidentified.

There is an uncertain condition and irresponsibility that half of the building of healthcare is painted while other half is left unpainted. The broken windows were covered with boards and papers, making it difficult to repair. Terra cotta is also exposed to water content and moisture infiltration, making cavities, causing freeze-thaw damages, corrosion of reinforcement, and all these situations opened the way to further cracking and sagging.

The conference rooms are well maintained but galleries are in worst condition, and marble floors of kitchen and bath have been caught by stains due to lack of cleanliness, giving a dirty look, leaving an image of untreated for a long time.

Causes of Decay

Efflorescence

Due to the climatic impacts, some of the walls are caught by the efflorescence and it has been neglected. The salts appearing in the form of white deposits are destroying, not only the exterior surfaces, but damaging the structure of the building.



Figure 18: Efflorescence has damaged the outer surfaces

Water Seepage

The ceiling of Jinnah Hall is deteriorating due to the moisture content and seepage of water. Perhaps, it is due to the lack of maintenance and negligence of the users. Due to this seepage, the metal in the reinforcement has started to rust and ultimately, it will result in the permanent deformation.



Figure 19: Seepage has destroyed the internal surfaces

Thermal Behavior of Materials

There are cracks in ceiling and walls due to the thermal movement of the materials in severe weather. These cracks can be transformed in structural cracks, if not treated well in time.

Lack of Maintenance

Lack of maintenance has opened the doors for the botanical and biological attacks resulting in an unplanned plant growth and germination of creepers.



Figure 20: Lack of maintenance can harm structure more than any other agent

Results and Discussions

On the basis of literature review, collected data, site visits and visual and pictorial surveys, it can be said that Town Halls are one of the building typologies of the British period which were constructed purposefully and they are still existing with their original use. The structure is associated with the high ranking people such as local administrative and community based of economical groups. There is a difficulty in order to maintain law and order. These Town halls are linking local government and community, coming here to resolve their issues.

It is a challenge to maintain such a place, where security is also an issue. The timeline shows that in spite of age, more than 100 years, it is stable structurally. But it has been neglected for maintenance due to heavy workloads and continuous movement of the public to the offices. At present, this landmark at Mall Road Lahore needs attention of the users, stakeholders and authorities.

It is still at the stage of monitoring and maintenance rather restoration and preservation. It must be taken care and a specific budget has to be allocated for the smooth running. There must be some measures which should be taken to safeguard this jewel in the crown of British Empire.

Conclusion

Historic monuments are record of activities of the human performed in the past and also serves as basis for the future developments. They are part of nation's treasure and wealth, also represent civic pride. The whole research is concluded as:

- The envelop of the Town Hall should be protected to save the interior from the hazards of outer environment. It will also save the building from wind, sun and rain and help to develop comfort zones for the users.
- The damaged and broken parts of the building envelop should be repaired and replaced, if needed.
- The root cause of moisture absorption and water seepage have to be dealt, to save the building from the structural cracks.
- Pubic mobility within the structure have to be planned to save it from human vandalism. Even, community should be facilitated by the online services, it will help to minimize human movement inside the building.
- Protective measures should be adapted to save it from deterioration in future.
- There is a need to apply modern technologies to improve its functionality.

In nutshell, the building is significant due to its historic, architectural and cultural value. The building is unique in terms of its typology and function and it has, still, functioning on the basis for which it was constructed. However, there is a need to enhance its functionality through the application of modern technologies. There must be a comprehensive plan to protect this gem of the crown of British rule.

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