

Charing Cross, Lahore: From Colonial Era to Modern Times

Ali Abdullah Kazmi^{1*}, Toobia Yousaf²

¹Institute of Architects Pakistan, Lahore chapter, Pakistan

²Usman Ehsan and Associates

Received: 15-11-24

Revised: 12-01-25

Accepted: 25-01-25

Cite it as :

Kazmi, A. A., & Yousaf, T. (2024). Chairing Cross, Lahore: From Colonial Era to Modern Times. *Journal of Architecture and Built Environment Research*, 1(2)."

© 2024 Author (s)

Abstract:

Lahore's Charing Cross is an important historical and cultural site that captures the city's changing urban character and colonial background. It was founded in the late 19th century, during British administration, and functioned as a hub for civic and administrative activity. Originally called after London's Charing Cross, the location included a large statue of Queen Victoria, a representation of imperial power. The site saw substantial change after gaining independence in 1947, when a contemporary sculpture known as "The Minar-e-Pakistan replica," which symbolizes pride and sovereignty, took the place of the monument. Today, Charing Cross is a busy intersection that represents Lahore's historical journey by fusing colonial architecture with modern advancements. This essay charts the history of Charing Cross, examining its colonial beginnings, post-independence development, and function as a center of politics and culture in contemporary Lahore.

Keywords: : Chairing Cross, Colonial, Lahore, Historical, Timeline, `

1. INTRODUCTION

Originally called Charing Cross, Faisal Chowk has seen substantial changes throughout the years, mirroring Lahore's overall urban growth. It was first built during the colonial era and has since changed from being a representation of British domination to becoming one of Pakistan's main cities. (Figure 1). This essay explores its historical development, highlighting the architectural and sociopolitical shifts that have influenced its character. Under British rule, Charing

Cross, which is similar to the famous Charing Cross in London, was meant to be a significant landmark (Robinson, 1995). In the square was a statue of Queen Victoria, a symbol of colonial rule (Ahmed, 2014). The area became a colonial administrative center because of the presence of surrounding buildings with European architectural influences, such as the Freemasons' Lodge and the Punjab Assembly Hall (Baig, 1999). Furthermore, the open space at Charing Cross became a major location for social gatherings (Rizvi, 2013).



Figure 1. Old picture The Charing Cross, Lahore.

Source: (https://www.youlinmagazine.com/article/changing-times-at-charing-cross-lahore/MjAyMw==#google_vignette)

*Correspondence: (Aliabduhahkazmi2@gmail.com)

After India was divided in 1947, Lahore became a part of Pakistan, gradually changing its colonial symbols, including the Charing Cross (Ali, 2015). The statue of Queen Victoria was removed in the early years of independence (Hussain, 2008). (Figure 2). As the city grew and evolved, Charing Cross transformed from a tranquil colonial square to a bustling traffic intersection due to its strategic location on The Mall (Sheikh, 2005). 1980 to 2000s During this period, Charing Cross saw significant urban growth (Baig, 1999). The neighborhood got more commercialized as more modern buildings and businesses appeared nearby (Rehman, 2011). The most noticeable change was the construction of a massive white marble monument next to Charing Cross that featured a copy of the Quran. (Ahmed, 2014). By symbolizing Pakistan's Islamic identity, this monument supplanted the colonial legacy with one that captured the post-colonial nature of the nation (Nasir, 2010).

Due to growing urbanization and traffic congestion, Charing Cross has seen a significant increase in traffic in recent years (Khalid, 2018). The area's geometry has changed as a result of road extensions and other infrastructure upgrades, like traffic management systems (Malik, 2020). It is an essential component of Lahore's urban landscape due to its close proximity to significant commercial districts and the existence of significant government buildings (Jalal, 2021).

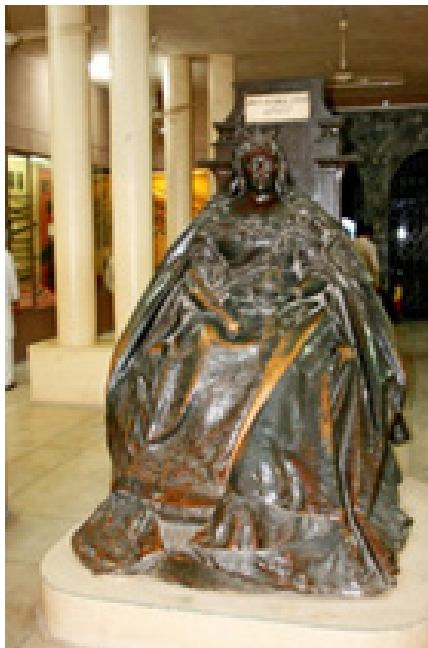


Figure 2. Queen Victoria statue

Source: (https://www.youlinmagazine.com/article/changing-times-at-charing-cross-lahore/MjAyMw==#google_vignette)

2. METHODOLOGY

Using a variety of techniques, including a literature review, field surveys, interviews, and photographic surveys, this study used a qualitative research approach. The study sought to investigate the urban development of Faisal Chowk (Charing Cross), Lahore, and its historical transformation over time.

2.1. Research Approach

The study used a case study methodology, concentrating on site-specific research to examine Faisal Chowk's architectural, historical, and sociopolitical changes.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

2.2.1. Literature Review To provide a framework for the study, a thorough literature review on urban change and qualitative research methods was carried out. To learn about the development of Charing Cross, pertinent books, scholarly articles, and historical records were examined.

2.2.1. Field Surveys In order to detect significant urban changes and the area's existing architectural elements, quick visual assessments of Charing Cross were conducted. These questionnaires assisted in recording changes in the body over time.

2.2.2. Interviews and Questionnaires

Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with key respondents, including

Elderly locals who have been there since 1947, when Pakistan gained its independence, or who are descended from early settlers.

Historians and urban planners with expertise in Lahore's architectural history.

Government representatives engaged in cultural preservation and urban planning. Purposive sampling was used to choose the respondents, guaranteeing that they were familiar with the historical and urban evolution of the area. The topics were covered in the interviews include recollections and firsthand accounts of the area's change, views of Faisal Chowk's colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary transformations and the effects of urbanization and commercialization on the region.

2.2.3. Photographic Surveys

Photographs from the past and present were examined to show how Faisal Chowk's infrastructure and space changed over time. Qualitative content analysis was used to compare the results of field surveys, historical documents, and interview replies with the gathered data. This made it easier to comprehend the sociopolitical changes and urban transformation patterns influencing Faisal Chowk.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Key findings from field study, photographic documentation, and qualitative information obtained from questionnaires and interviews are presented in this part. The area's identity in modern Lahore has been shaped by the historical, political, and architectural significance of Faisal Chowk (Charing Cross), which has changed throughout time. Charing Cross, which reflects Lahore's larger historical and urban development's, continues to

be a crucial political, cultural, and administrative center despite major changes.

3.1. Monument of the Holy Quran

The 1980s-erected white marble Holy Quran Monument is Charing Cross's most noticeable feature. The Queen Victoria statue from the colonial era was replaced by this monument, which represents Pakistan's Islamic identity. (Figure 3). The insights gained through interviews are as under.

1-A historian from the area said: "The installation of the Holy Quran Monument marked a cultural shift in Lahore's identity, moving from colonial heritage to an Islamic representation."

2- According to a store owner next to Charing Cross, "I remember when the Queen Victoria statue was here, but the current monument aligns better with our national values."



Figure 3. Monument of Holy Quran at Chairig Cross

Source: Author

3.2. The Mall Road (Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam)

The Mall, one of Lahore's most important thoroughfares, links important business, political, and historical locations. Because of its location, Charing Cross is regularly the site of processions, public meetings, and political protests. The responses of survey conducted are presented as under.

1- Because of its accessibility and historical significance, 75% of respondents said Charing Cross is still the go-to place for political protests.

2 -Older people said: "In the 1950s and 60s, this road was quieter, but with urbanization, protests and commercial activity increased significantly."

3.3. Proximity to Important Landmarks

There are different landmarks near Charing Cross. (Figure 4). First one is Punjab Assembly where important political discussions and legislative decisions are held. Alhamra Arts Council is another landmark. This venue often hosts art exhibits, music festivals, and cultural events. The Freemasons' Lodge is a colonial-era building with British architectural elements.

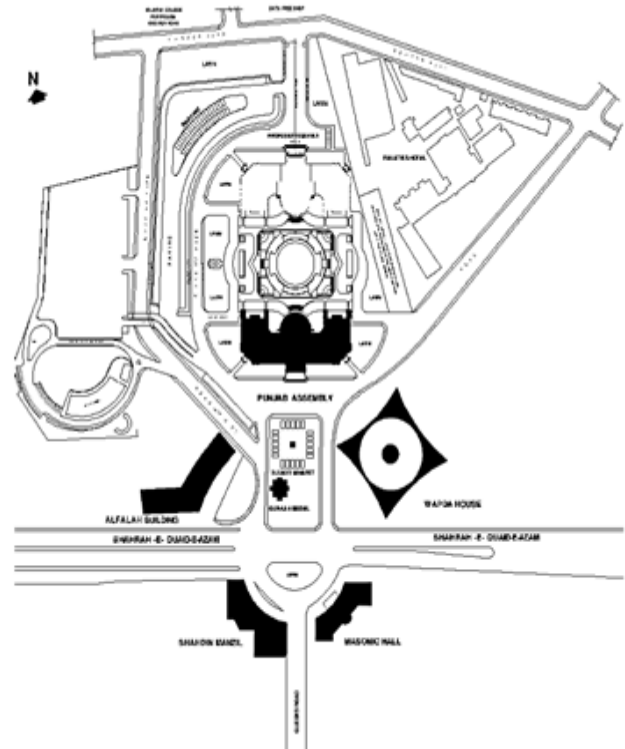


Figure 4. Existing plan of The Charing Cross, Lahore.

Source: (Mustafa & Imtiaz, 2018), (Naz & Ashraf, 2008)

3.4. Colonial Architecture

A combination of Mughal and European architectural features may be seen in the colonial-era structures surrounding Charing Cross, including the Punjab Assembly and other administrative buildings. Literature study showed that urban planners and architects wrote about this landmark. An urban planner noted: "While Lahore is modernizing, preserving colonial buildings is crucial for maintaining the city's historical identity."

3.5. Traffic Hub

Because of its strategic location, Charing Cross has grown to be one of Lahore's busiest crossings, acting as a vital hub for both vehicle and pedestrian traffic. (Figure). The observations from field survey highlighted some important points. The first observation concluded that because of its close proximity to business districts, it experiences extreme traffic at peak hours (8 AM to 10 AM and 5 PM to 8 PM). The second observation concluded that despite recent attempts at traffic control, jams are still caused by encroachments and unofficial marketplaces.

3.6. Political Significance

Charing Cross has historically been a center for political rallies, protests, and public speeches. The important responses from interview are presented as under.

1. "This place has always been the voice of the people, from the independence movement to modern political rallies," said a longtime resident.

2. "Frequent protests here have raised security concerns,

which has resulted in stricter traffic regulations," a government official said.

3.7. Commercial Surroundings

The area around Charing Cross is a commercial hub, featuring shops, corporate offices, and hotels. The data of survey shows important statistics. According to 60% of business owners, the area has become economically significant due to the development in commercial activity during the last 20 years. 45% of those surveyed expressed dissatisfaction about the swift commercialization that has resulted in the loss of traditional charm.

3.8. Cultural and Public Gatherings

Religious processions, national celebrations, and protests continue to take place at Charing Cross. Large people attend the yearly religious processions that take place close to the Punjab Assembly. A resident commented: "This place holds both political and religious significance—important speeches and national celebrations often happen here."

3.9. Transformation of Charing Cross Lahore

The layout, purpose, and symbolism of Charing Cross (now Faisal Chowk) have changed over time to meet the changing demands of Lahore's urban environment.

3.9.1. Layout

Originally a colonial-era square, Charing Cross has been transformed into a contemporary traffic roundabout that guarantees the smooth flow of cars and pedestrians along The Mall.

3.9.2. Central Monument

The Queen Victoria statue has been replaced by the Holy Quran Monument, signifying the Islamization of Pakistani public areas. The perception of people after survey signify 2 important conclusions. According to 80% of respondents, the monument reflects the values of the country. The second concluding opinion is that heritage specialists caution against the loss of Lahore's colonial architectural identity.

3.9.3. Surrounding Open Space

Although there were once more pedestrian-friendly areas around Charing Cross, growing urbanization has resulted in less open spaces. Interview Response about Urban change is highlighted as under.

"Encroachments and commercialization have reduced the walkability of Charing Cross," said an urban planner.

3.9.4. Colonial and Islamic Blend

The European-style government buildings encircling the Islamic Holy Quran Monument at Charing Cross are an example of the architectural blending of colonial and Islamic influences. Architectural Analysis of the

square is presented as under.

1-The Punjab Assembly Hall's arches, columns, and domes all have colonial charm.

2-Islamic symbolism is introduced via the Holy Quran Monument, which stands for post-colonial identity.

3.9.5. Symmetry and Balance

Although Charing Cross's original symmetrical urban arrangement is still there, contemporary construction has changed the area's aesthetic composition. Historical Photographic Comparison shows a remarkable change over the period of time.

3.10. Key Discussion Points

Historical significance of the square has evolved, the location continues to play a significant role in Lahore's political and cultural scene. Traffic & Urban Challenges include increased congestion impacts its usefulness as a public area. The perception of people about place is also analyzed. According to polls and interviews, opinions vary; some people favor modernity while others cherish its historical roots.

3.11. Final Remarks

Faisal Chowk serves as a bridge between Lahore's imperial past and its present metropolitan character. Even if modernization has changed its purpose, Lahore's changing landscape depends on striking a balance between urban growth and historical preservation.

4. CONCLUSION

Charing Cross, a microcosm of Lahore's past, shows the city's journey from colonial subjugation to pride in its freedom. Its development after independence mirrors Pakistan's greater struggle for identity and freedom, but it was initially designed as a symbol of British colonial power. In addition to a shift in administrative power, the replacement of Queen Victoria's statue with the Minar-e-Pakistan copy signifies a reinterpretation of cultural and national icons.

Charing Cross, a vibrant urban intersection that exemplifies the mixing of historical legacy with modern innovation, is a lasting testament to Lahore's dynamic political and cultural narrative. Its complicated history inspires reflection on how public spaces could evolve to better represent the objectives and values of the people they are intended to serve.

Supplementary Material: All the data used to support the findings of this study is included in the paper.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Author Contribution Statement: Ali Abdullah Kazmi, Conceptualization & Data Collection; Toobia

Yousaf, Data Analysis; Ali Abdullah Kazmi, Draft Preparation; Toobia Yousaf and Ali Abdullah Kazmi, Draft Revision.

Funding: None

Ethical Statement: Not Applicable

5. REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2002). *Colonial Lahore: Architecture and Society*. Oxford University Press.
- Ahmed, F. (2014). *Post-Colonial Identity in Pakistani Urban Spaces*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ali, N. (2015). *Partition and Its Aftermath: Lahore's Urban Identity*. Routledge.
- Baig, M. (1999). *Lahore's Commercial Expansion in the Late 20th Century*. Vanguard Books.
- Bell, Michael. (1997). The Ghosts of Place. *Theory and Society*. 26. 813-836. 10.1023/A:1006888230610.
- Hussain, I. (2008). *Nationalism and Urban Transformation in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Jalal, A. (2021). *Pakistan's Urban Development: Challenges and Prospects*. Harvard University Press.
- Khalid, R. (2018). *Modernizing Lahore: Infrastructure and Growth*. Stanford University Press.
- Khan, M. (1998). *British Lahore: The Colonial Cityscape*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Malik, S. (2020). *Traffic and Urbanization in Lahore*. University of Karachi Press.
- Mustafa, M & Imtiaz, H. (2018). The Charing Cross Unfolding a Genius Loci in the city of Lahore. *Cities People Places : An International Journal on Urban Environments*. 3. 10.4038/cpp.v3i1.33.
- Nasir, T. (2010). *Architectural Heritage of Lahore: A Historical Perspective*. Ferozsons.
- Naz, N., & Ashraf, A. Z. (2008). Transformation of Urban Open Spaces of Lahore: From Charing Cross to Faisal Square. *Pakistan Journal of Engineering & Applied Sciences*, 2(2008).
- Naz, N., & Anjum, G. A. (2008). Transformation Of Main Boulevard, Gulberg, Lahore: From Residential To Commercial. *Journal of Research in Architecture Planning*, 08(01), 48–61. https://doi.org/10.53700/JRAP0612007_4
- Pir, G. (2017). Depoliticization of Public Spaces in Lahore, Pakistan: Case studies of the Hazoori Bagh, Data Ganj Buksh and Madhu Lal Hussain's shrine. *THAAP*.
- Rehman, A. (2011). *Islamic Monuments in Contemporary Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rizvi, H. (2013). *Pakistan's Changing Urban Landscape*. Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, F. (1995). *Lahore in the Raj: Colonial Administration and Society*. Routledge.
- Rossi, A. (2007). *The architecture of the city*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Sheikh, K. (2005). *Economic Growth and Urban Expansion in Lahore*. Vanguard Books.