

# STUDY OF METAPHYSICAL LAYER: CONNECTION OF A CITY WITH PEOPLE

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## Abstract

*A city has its own specific spirit and charm. That spirit gives the identity and uniqueness to city. In present fast paced environment where there is rapid urbanization, it is very important to know and maintain the core values of a city before implementing the physical development plans. With the better understanding of metaphysical realm we can create better physical realm of a city for its people. To explore and find out the invisible character of a city which makes it unique and which connect people with their city is helpful to maintain its individual character, identity and values in this age of globalization. To study this phenomena a city of Lahore is selected for this research. Lahore is the cultural capital of Punjab, Pakistan with rich history. It is discussed in number of ways by writers and researchers even poets. The layers of centuries old history of Lahore can still visible in its architecture and culture. The aim of the research is to study and understand the core values of a city and how people relate with those values. The metaphysical layer is studied by collecting the various thoughts and emotional affiliation expressed by famous authors and poet.*

**Keywords:** Metaphysical Layer, Physical realm, Core Values, Invisible layer, identity

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## Introduction

A city has its own specific spirit and charm. That spirit gives the identity and uniqueness to the city. People often relate to some of the invisible characteristics of their city which are not there physically. City shapes the lives of people and it connects people. The bond which people developed with their cities are not just due to its physical form but because of some other core values of cities because cities are not merely have physical structure it contains many layers within itself. Louis I. Kahn said regarding the sense of awareness and identity a city can provide in following words

*“A city is a place where a small boy, as he walks through it, may see something that will tell him what he wants to do his whole life.”*

What kind of connection people feel towards their city and why? Physically a city consists of buildings, roads, bridges, parks and people. But when they are asked what they most liked about city, the answer is mostly abstract. Definitely the architecture and physical environment help in creating and enhancing that metaphysical picture but their descriptions are abstract.

The invisible and metaphysical character of a city cannot be ignored while constructing its physical realm. To explore and find out the invisible character of a city which makes it unique is helpful to maintain its individual character, identity and values in this age of globalization. Philosophical concepts are not operative and yet they situate the city and the urban - and the whole of society - as a totality. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with explaining the ultimate nature of reality, being, and the world. The term "metaphysics" has also been used to refer to "subjects that are beyond the physical world". Metaphysical is a characteristic that is beyond what can be seen or experienced by our senses. In his speech for receiving the Pritzker Prize in 1980, Luis Barragan, a Mexican architect, described his architecture using the words “religion”, “myth”, “inspiration”, “magic”, “serenity”, “silence” and “intimacy” (2017). These words refer to the metaphysical aspect of architecture. However, many are reluctant to use such words because they are difficult concepts to understand and communicate.

These invisible characteristics are hard to explain even in case of cities. The bond people develop with their city is far more complex than an impression of a building. Cities contribute in shaping lives of its resident.

Cities exhibit a particular character. When one visit the city it gets that very impression of the city which becomes important part of the experience“ Throughout the writings of Christian Norberg-Shulz book, *Genius Loci: towards a phenomenology of architecture*, the basic idea of human identification with a place means that a place has “character” every place has a unique presence or “genius loci” which is the spirit of the place.

The Ancient Greeks also thought that every city had its own ethos and values that helped to determine its institutions, political systems and the lives of its citizens. This idea is reintroduce by Avner de-Shalit and Daniel Bell in their book *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age*. In this they explained how cities hold a deeper meaning or ethos that differentiates them from other cities. In their quest to find the spirit of the cities, they portray nine cities through personal journeys. The ethos of each city is expressed in its political, cultural and economic life, and how the character of each city works against the excesses of nationalism and globalization. Bell and De-Shalit draw upon the richly varied histories of each city, as well as novels, poems, biographies, tourist guides, architectural landmarks, and the authors' own

personal reflections and insights to narrate a tale about each city. They tried to decipher in depth the city spirit and character beyond the physical realm. Though here one may disagree with them to just confine a city with singular trait whereas city may have varied significant characteristics at the same time.

Mostly it is the historical background and association that creates layers in a city. That is the reason why historical core of city is given so much importance worldwide. It provides connection of the present to past. The oldest the city is the more invisible layers it contains. The change in its physical realm over period of time still contain the traces from the past.

In his book, *The Architecture of the City*, architect Aldo Rossi states “It (city) absorbs events and feelings, and every new event within it contains a memory of the past and a potential memory of the future.”

The core and the substance of the city try to retain themselves and withstand the test of time not just in term of physical character but also try retain intangible qualities. People relate and associate with such core. There is an air of romanticism with the historic fabric of the city. The ancient cities have sense of mysticism and intriguing nature. These invisible layers and depth of cities attract people towards those cities.

Italo Calvino wrote in his book *Invisible cities* that

*“The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the Bagnos, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.” (Calvino, 2009)*

In his book *Invisible cities* Calvino envisions cities as ideas. Calvino discusses fifty five cities and provides descriptions of the various characteristics present in these cities, such as memories and desires. Each city represents a thought experiment,

*“You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.”*

How a city answer to one's questions and how one perceive it is far important than its mere physical character. The ambience and metaphysical layer of a city offers its visitors and resident something that is experiential and may be varied individually. The perception and the bond one formed with the city is the real essence of the city. *The Invisible cities* is a fictional book yet it contains philosophical ideas to grasp and understand about the present cities of the world and the metaphysical layers it contains.

Understanding the metaphysical layers of a city which creates the identity of a place, and to which people can relate emotionally is very important to understand along with the physical form. Like all other cities of the world, Lahore has more than one layer and this paper aims to trace those layers.

Lahore is the cultural capital of Punjab with rich history. The layers of centuries old history of Lahore can still visible in its architecture. It is discussed in number of ways by writers and researchers even poets. This research study the invisible layers of Lahore which is not there physically but still exist. What bond a city of Lahore creates with people and what are its core values with which people are charmed. It is an effort to understand the values a city holds. In present fast paced environment where there is rapid urbanization, it is very important to know and maintain the core values of a city before implementing the physical development plans. The

values which shape the city and with which people associates cannot be overlooked. With the better understanding of metaphysical realm we can create better physical realm of a city. The task is how to study and understand the invisible element which are not there physically. The feelings, emotions, attachments are very difficult concept to grasp for human mind. Similarly the invisible character of a city which some people feel and perceive are difficult for many to understand. But few of those characters are experienced and felt by number of people who think and feel deeply towards their cities. Who else can think deeply than the poet and authors? Their expression may exaggerate at some point but their sensitivity, emotions and feelings towards their city came from deeper understanding.

Mary Ann Caws (1991) in *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film* collected essays about city knowing through fiction. She wrote that fictional method is the experience of a city. The image of the city is not just the physical realm of the city. The stories and poetries describe cities image which usually shape in people's mind more vividly.

The cities which inspires and invoke the spirits of poets and author are cities that stand out from the rest of the cities which are all tend to become a global model of city without their own identity. Ernest Hemingway the famous American novelist and short story writer said about Paris

*"If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."*

Hemingway called Paris a moveable feast. Some other people may feel same way about the city but they don't know the exact expression and words. The author felt and expressed the invisible joy the city offered him. In the same way authors wrote about the cities they are charmed with. The methodology to study the invisible feature of a Lahore city is based on the observation of the poets, authors, Intellectuals and also on some of the general characteristics which exude by the city and felt by so many that even a common person associate with it. The content regarding the Lahore city is first collected and then the conceptual content analysis approach is opted for this specific research. To trace the metaphysical layer of a city is like to explain something unexplainable. The limitation of knowledge is there in explaining the invisible. The research is based upon the opinion of famous authors, poets, visitors, general perception of city and personal observations. The preconceived ideas and notions about the city are critically analyzed. The aim of the research is to have better understanding of the layers of Lahore and a bond city of Lahore offers to its people. What are its invisible features which makes it stand out among other cities.

### **Metaphysical character of Lahore**

The city of Lahore is the second largest city of Pakistan. After partition till now Lahore has gone through huge spatial expansion. The old historic core of Lahore has a charm in its invisible layer and its intangible culture. The charm of the city stem out of the historic center which still attracts people. Most of the people associate themselves with the ambience of Lahore, which is perceive differently by different individuals. But still there is a general perception about the Lahore city which is sketched by different authors and poets who spent their life in Lahore. The Suvorova, 2011 explained that it is the case with most ancient cities in the world, the historical and geographic image of Lahore has been taken up by literature and the fine arts, which have turned it into an artistic image.

The emotional connection the residents developed with the city explains their perception about the city and the impact that city has made on their lives. These values which people associates are actually gives a city its unique identity.

Pran Nevile an Indian who spent his early life and youth in Lahore wrote in his book.

*'Lahore's beyond any definition, it can only be felt.'* (Nevile, 1992)

What kind of metaphysical layers Lahore possess and how people perceive it in their thoughts. How a city of Lahore exude certain characteristics and are these characteristics associate with mere physical form or exist in its atmosphere or ambience invisibly. Lahore is unique city as with strong historic background its adaptability and openness to new ideas make it a liberal and progressive city at the same time. Though with rapid urbanization in past twenty to thirty years resulted in enormous expansion in its physical form disrupting somewhat of its balance and originality in its character. However people of Lahore still has the impact of the city character on them and which they try to retain somehow.

Lahore in itself is now a whole world carrying a multitude layers of the past and the willingness to accept the modernism and excel. Lahore is also referred to as the heart of Pakistan as it hosts most of the arts, cuisine, festivals, film making, music, gardening and intelligentsia of the country.

The few invisible layers and metaphysical characteristics which make Lahore “Lahore” has been studied in this research. The three such characteristics which cannot be explained solely through physical realm but it is how people feel about it are

### **Liveliness**

Lahore is a city of life, its brilliance and luster feel by many of its residents. The liveliness in its air seem to transform into it residents invisibly. There is generally an air of vibrancy and cheerfulness in its bazars and food streets. People of Lahore beside their busy city life are pleasant and carefree. They are hospitable and cheerful. The cultural festivals and the love of food depict their livelihood as well. Lahore considered to be hub for culinary activities. The writer and novelist Bapsi Sidhwa once said jokingly about Lahore “If you run an eating place in Lahore, you are bound to succeed.”

Lahore is a visually stunning because of Mughal architecture, surrounded by bustling and crowded bazaars with history floating through every corner of the city, it is a combination of tradition and passion weaved together. It is said that “Lahore has its feet in history and its heart and soul in food.”



**Fig. 1:**Left Hand: Famous Anarkali bazar ,Lahore, Right hand: Food street Gawalmandi  
Source: author

The hustle bustle at its bazars and food streets seem to exist here like forever. The Lahore thrive for passion for life. A famous urdu poet and resident of Lahore Nasir Kazmi praise Lahore liveliness in his verses as

*shahr-e-lahore tirī raunaqēñ daa.im ābād*

*terī galiyoñ kī havā khīñch ke laa.ī mujh ko*

*City of Lahore may your liveliness stay eternal*

*The breeze of your streets dragged me here*

The dragging of breeze is a beautiful metaphor and also explained the city charm and attraction felt by the poet.

### **Richness**

Lahore is a rich city not just in terms of money and revenue it generated but it is rich culturally, religiously, architecturally and intellectually. The richness is also seem to be embed in its nature. Being invaded and destroyed a number of time by afghans it still maintain its colorfulness and richness in its flavor. One of the reason a city attains richness is the openness in its ideology.

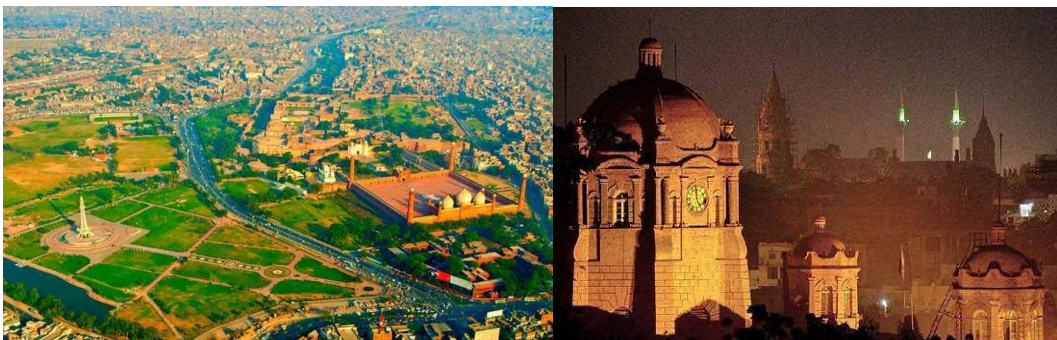
What makes Lahore a very different city with historic core is its acceptance and absorption of newness. Lahore has an air of openness and invitingness which is one of the reason of its richness and resourcefulness.

The events and festivals makes Lahore a very hub for cultural exhibit. Though the cultural forms and norms of events are changed with time.

“Saat din tai aath melay, kam karan mein keray wailey”

There are seven days and eight festivals, how can I find time to work.

The splendor architecture of Lahore still holding some of the structure from 16th century today. The layers of Mughal, Sikh and colonial era seem to leave the eternal mark on its character. Lahore has some of the finest architectural monuments of past including Badshahi Mosque, Wazir Khan Mosque, Lahore Fort, Havelis of walled city and the colonial buildings at mall.



**Fig. 2:** Left Hand: Ariel view of Badshahi Mosque, Right hand: Lahore Mall Road skyline  
Source: Flickr

These rich layers of history depicting physical realm seem to tell stories of past to the travelers who visits the city. The architectural richness is visible to the eyes but the stimulating force which maintaining the character and still appear appealing in people’s perception is unseen.

Another famous urdu poet Hafeez Jhalandari who also wrote Pakistan National anthem praised old Lahore in a nostalgic way

Zindingi aur milay aur milay aur milay

Shart yeh hai k purani wohi Lahore milay

May get more life, more life, more life

The condition is that get the same old Lahore

Lahore is also called as city of saints and Sufis as number if saints spent their life in Lahore and we found many tombs and shrines and mosques in Lahore. Lahore also has tomb of famous sufi saint hazrat dataa Gunj Baksh. It is also called as “Dataa Ki Nagri”.

Along with Islamic religious structure Lahore also has many churches, gurdawaras and temples. These all form a mystic layer and make city of Lahore religiously rich.



**Fig. 3:**Left Hand: Ariel view of Mosque wazir khan, Right hand: Data Darbar  
Source: author

Lahore is always an educational hub and attract intelligentsia of country. Lahore is socially, literally and culturally active city not today but since long. There are many poets, political activist, scholars, artist and literary fig.s of Lahore that are renowned for their work. Some of the few names as mentioned below

Sir Ganga Ram, Bhai Ram Singh, Muhammad Iqbal, Bhagat Singh, Krishan Chandar, Ustaad Daman, Faiz ahmed Faiz, Nasir Kazmi, Munir Niazi, Patras Bukhari, Dr. Ajaz Anwar, Shakir ali, Nayyar ali dada.

These are just named few out of many famous people who lived and spent their lives in Lahore. The Lahore shaped the lives of those people and those people in return given their life to Lahore and add richness in its character.

### **Intimacy**

The third invisible layer of Lahore is its intimacy towards its residents. The city exudes enormous amount of intimacy to people who came here. Even the people who live here for short period of time still has an impression of that. Krishan Chandar a famous Urdu short story writer and novelist who started his writing career in Lahore wrote about Lahore in a letter

“For people of my generation it is difficult to forget Lahore. It shines in our heart like a jewel, like the fragrance of our soul. “

The terms used by the author to express his love for the city are quite moving. It shows the level of affection and attachment one feels towards the city.

Shahnawaz Zaidi an artist, art educationist and poet of Lahore explain the intimacy of Lahore as

Ajab afsaano jaisa shehr hai

Apnaiyat jis kay

Theroon pai rehti hai

Strange fiction kind of city

Familiarity of it

Lays in its streets

Carl W. Ernst the Distinguished Professor of Islamic studies at the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill said about Lahore in Anna Suvorova book

Lahore is a city that creates loyalties. I have found that it has an extraordinary charm that few other places can claim."

The intimacy and charm felt by these authors in their words are expressed by them however felt by many.

The intimacy offered by Lahore is still there but it is mostly in the older part of Lahore where there is close knitted urban fabric still preserved and existed since many centuries. The old narrow winding streets ending into an open square where people sit to communicate and there are Jharokha windows through which women peep out and talk to neighbors as well. The people used to live like a large family. However with the passage of time, industrial revolution and dependency of automobiles, the cultural ways and norms are changed and people get distant in elite localities. Though the city is same and have that very layer of intimacy but the physical planning are not based on those ethos which city very nature offered. Though now a days the physical planning is not that shape the intimacy factor but still people who came to Lahore for work or study are owned by Lahore. They used to get attach with the city more than their own city.

The neighborhood culture, the close and intimate ambience of walled city Lahore is still a charm to many people who can feel and sensitive to such those features.

## **Discussion**

The metaphysical characteristics of Lahore may be more than what is being inferences in this research. However the liveliness, richness and intimacy is being deciphered based on writings, observation and general perception of the city. It is difficult to research and decipher all invisible layers about the city in totality. Like other metropolitan city, Lahore is becoming complex city day by day with numerous urban issues along. The physical structure and expansion changes its shape. But like all other historic cities it try to retain its character and ethos. The liveliness of Lahore still can be felt in its residents, richness can be felt in its architecture, resourcefulness



and intimacy can be felt in its air and ambience. It still difficult to prove these metaphysical aspects but it is very much there and expressed. The artist, authors, poets felt and expressed those metaphysical characters in their writings about Lahore. Like Calvino claim the city gave answers to their questions in a unique way.

### **Conclusion**

In this research few metaphysical characters of Lahore city are studied. It is those characteristics which creates bond with the people and impacting their life. Without understanding the core values a city offered the physical development is of no deeper meaning. These characteristics of liveliness, richness and intimacy are not mere words to use in literature. These are not just mere general perception or found in literature about Lahore, Lahore contained these characteristics. The city still holds some of its core values which should be retained to maintain its identity.

The economy and the politics involve in making a city modern, progressive used to overlook these metaphysical characteristics. Now a days the process of rapid urbanization in Lahore did not give ample time to think before planning. So the new physical realm adapted without thinking of its core to meet the urgent need due to urbanization. This all results in losing the very character of a city.

There is a lack in research on philosophical aspects of a city of Lahore and its core values. The writings of philosophers and intellectuals if any are often overlooked by urban planners and policy makers. It is the need of hour that planners and architects can see beyond what can be seen and to conduct research on those aspects. The metaphysical understanding is helpful in shaping a city true to its soul.

The city shapes the lives of people and in return people shapes the city by showing their sensitivity towards it. The way people perceived about a city and connection it makes with the people are far more important than its mere functioning like a machine. Lahore is festive, lively, rich and an inviting city. The city planners must not overlooked these core values of Lahore city. The Lahore city invisible features can be retained for the sake of its uniqueness in this era of globalization. The architects and planners must look beyond the physical realm to contribute more creatively and sensitively towards their city.

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