SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE GATED HOUSING COMMUNITIES: DEMISE OF LAHORE; THE CITY OF GARDENS AND COLLEGES

RAZIA LATIF

Razia Latif, Assistant Professor, Beaconhouse National University

Abstract

Lahore is a city known for its vibrant urban life, rich culture and celebrated heritage. The city is home to some of the most significant Mughal monuments. The old walled city of Lahore has its own unique character and urban life. The mall road boasts the colonial heritage of the city. Due to the significance of the city over centuries it has developed a rich architectural identity. The gated communities with their standardized plot divisions and house designs are in complete opposition to the urban character of the city of Lahore. The sense of community has been central to the Lahori culture where neighbours looked after each other. It is unfortunate that a city like Lahore now has walled compounds that make up safe communities. Moreover, it is daunting that the people of Lahore have started to find refuge in the imaginations generated by housing communities. And a lifestyle that is not a Lahori way of life is being marketed as the new ideal lifestyle. Some housing communities have gone overboard to make theme park like environments that bring the icons of world architecture to Lahore, or take Lahori's to the icons of the world architecture. Socially responsible development is necessary where people from all economic backgrounds can co-exist to make homogeneous communities and where what is significant about the culture of Lahore is celebrated.

Lahore remembered

The famous writer A. Hameed writes while remembering Lahore's past (Hameed, 2006):

"I can never forget Davis Road as it once was. There were brick footpaths that lay on both its sides. In those days, there was very little traffic on it. There were not many cars in Lahore then. In winter, on a clear day, with white pigeons flying in droves in the blue sky, Davis Road would shimmer in the sun, assuming a strange air of mystery. It remained quiet even during daytime, but at night it was draped in a profound and peaceful silence. When I look at this road today, I feel that the Davis Road I knew once now lies buried under the noise and pollution that are Lahore's hallmarks. There is so much traffic on it now that unless you are young and nimble-footed, you cannot cross it.

Lahore has become a big city but it is no longer a city in which you can walk. The footpaths, where they exist, are like parking garages. There is commercial pandemonium everywhere. No one seems to know anyone. Everybody is in a rush, running, running, running. I sometimes ask myself, Where are these people going and why?"

The city of Lahore is known as the cultural capital of Pakistan. Many renowned writers have lived in the city including Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ishfaq Ahmed, Habib Jalib, Saadat Hassan Manto, Abdul Hameed to name only a few. It is also the city of Saints; the most important settling here were Data Ganj Buksh Hajveri, Mian Mir and Shah Jamal. Their shrines are visited yearly by thousands of people from all over the country. It has been an important city during the Colonial rule, the Sikh rule, the Mughal rule and the 11th century Mahmood Gahznai's rule. The different rulers have left their mark on the city, leaving richness in the arts, culture and the architecture of the city. Many Mughal, Sikh and Colonial monuments are still present within the city. The walled city of Lahore is heavily debted to the Mughal influence on the city. While the newer areas such as the Mall road were developed during the colonial time period. There are some sites where we find multiple layers of history unfold. The Minto park (also referred to as the Allama Iqbal park) and adjoining areas are home to the Minar-e- Pakistan (the monument marking the Lahore resolution), the largest Mughal mosque Badshahi Mosque built in 1671, Samadhi of Rangeet Singh built by Sikh Maharaja Rangeet Singh, Hazuri Bagh(built by the Sikh ruler Rangeet Singh) and the Lahore Fort (the current fort was built by the Mughal emperor Akbar). Lahore was also a very important city during the formation of independent Pakistan. It was in
Lahore that the Lahore resolution was presented which became the basis for the creation of the Independent Muslim state of Pakistan.

The old walled city of Lahore is the real cultural hub of the city. The city of Lahore existed long before the Mughal empire but the inner city was fortified by the Mughals, this fortified area is now referred to as the walled city of Lahore although most of the old wall, the gates were destroyed by the British in 1849. The streets inside the walled city are like an organic growth and are not planned on a grid. Many of the monuments and historical buildings inside the walled city can be dated back to the Mughal time period. The nature of the old walled city makes it very densely packed as the area within is limited. With commercial and residential activity taking place side by side. The old walled city house is very different from the bungalow house, it is a multi-storey house sometimes a communal courtyard. Most houses are attached to other houses in the street and the roofs too attached and accessible. The roofs play an important role in the lives of the people living in the historic walled city of Lahore and many social interactions of different types happen on the roofs of the city.

The city had a strong culture of celebrating the annual Punjabi festival of Basant. The annual spring festival of Basant was celebrated each year (recently the government has imposed a ban on the celebration of Basant). The sky of the city filled up with colourful kites. People went up to the roofs of their houses and celebrated Basant with colourful cloths and by kite flying. Today the streets of the walled city are always crowded as the area within the old walled city is very small and the number of inhabitants has grown drastically. There is too much industrial pollution in the walled city and poor sewage systems and old weathering houses have added to this problem. Old housing has been taken down to construct commercial plazas.

The writer Majid Sheikh writes about the demise of the walled city (Sheikh, 2014):

"It dawned on me to visit all the major residential areas where my family has lived to see how life in Lahore has changed over the last 100 years. Off I went to the old walled city where my father was born in 1919, to Kucha Chabakswaran near Rang Mahal. I first visited this famed ‘mohallah’ with my father at the age of ten or 11. He showed me where Chuhtagai lived, where his mother, a Chishti, lived as did the Almakky family, what to mention Abdullah Malik, and nearby the family of Zafar Iqbal Mirza (ZIM). It seems that at the turn of the century this was where all the educated relatively well-off families lived.

I was appalled at the squalor and terrible condition of the houses. They are virtually collapsing. However, this is true of almost every ‘mohallah’ of the old ‘walled’ city, a reflection of the times in which we live.”
Lahore is sometimes also referred to as the Garden city. The city is famous for its beautiful gardens. Some of these gardens are attributed to the Mughals and others to the British. The Shalimar garden and Chuburgi (not much is remaining of this garden other than the entrance) are some gardens from the Mughal period. Mughals developed very elaborate gardens with complex watering systems which also cooled down environment in the hot summer sun. Most Mughal buildings are garden complexes, tombs being the most obvious in this category. The British followed this tradition and many gardens were made during the British period also including the Lawrence garden. The model town cooperative society was formed in 1924. This area was developed as a garden city with 19% of the land allocated to parks. Every year during spring flower shows and competitions are held in the different parks of the city.

The Model Town Society is planned on a pattern very different from the old walled city of Lahore. The Society is based on the idea of a Garden City. This society was registered under the Cooperative Societies Act II of 1912 and 1924. 4km$^2$ area was first allocated for the society but later the area increased to 5.9 km$^2$. The houses in the Model town society were to be large independent units of 16 kanal (Kanal is a unit of measurement used in Pakistan and Northern parts of India. It is one eight of an acre or 20 marlas. In Lahore it is equal to 4500 sq feet but the measurement differs in others parts of Pakistan) each acting as farming units that were to be
sustainable. A major area was also allocated to public parks, nurseries and playgrounds. Initially these houses were owned by retired judges, rich businessmen and traders. Today these houses have been divided and further subdivided into smaller units with the majority of houses now 1-2 kanal large. As, no by-laws restricting the size of the plots were established this housing society now caters to all economic groups. Although, the houses of the Model Town have been sub divided the public green areas are still present. Public interactions and social gatherings now happen in these spaces. The houses in the model town don't have the same character as that of the walled city but the sense of community is very much intact as cultural events and social gatherings that happened on the streets and the roofs of the old walled city houses now happen in the green public spaces of the model town society.

Rapid growth and new problems
In the previous few decades, the expansion of Lahore has been very drastic. This expansion has resulted in the segmentation of different social groups. The worst aspect of this segmentation is apparent in the walled housing communities, appearing on the previous edges of the city. These housing communities have their walled presence in areas that are still extremely low income like farms and villages. The facilities offered in these walled communities are comparable to the gulf and the first world countries. While the areas on the other side of the walls are completely undeveloped and have minimal resources. Some bylaws and plot subdivision restrictions make sure that only people with a significant amount of resource can afford to live in these secure walled pockets. This kind of segmentation of the city based on income and resource is a problem facing the city of Lahore.

At the time of Independence Lahore was the Largest city in Pakistan. Today Lahore is the second largest city in Pakistan and the largest in Pakistan's most populous Punjab province. According to the 1998 consensus Lahore's population was recorded at around 6.3 million while more recently the government in 2006 put Lahore's population at around 10 million(Demographia World Urban Areas 2015). Lahore is now considered the 34th largest city in the world. The urban density of the city is very different from one area to the other. The old walled city of Lahore is extremely dense while newer developments are much less dense. The old walled city of Lahore has been discredited by its inhabitants who want to leave and go to newer settlements. In contrast to the old walled city new walled communities have opened up in the outskirts of the city. These housing communities are walled and gated so that security check points can be established at the entrances and the exits.

Housing takes up a large amount of area in the new development of the city of Lahore, resulting in a lot of horizontal growth. This horizontal growth has increased the urban footprint of Lahore. The reasons for this horizontal development can be many including societal, governmental or developmental. In Lahore residential apartment projects that are even 5 to 6 floors high have not been successful. Such apartments have been successful with bachelors and families temporarily moving in to Lahore for economic reasons. One reason for this can be that every Lahori wants to own the piece of land on which their house is constructed. The reasons for this are many including the lack of trust in the institutional systems that guarantee their ownership in the apartment building, not enough successful models, compromised quality of living, etc. Traditionally it has been common for several families to live in a single house as several generations continued to live together. But currently families have started to separate and move into new houses. The LDA (Lahore Development Authority) by-law restrictions have also prevented the houses from expanding vertically. This has resulted in the horizontal expansion of housing. The government planned expansion of the road network and widening of the already existing roads has also resulted in the increase in this horizontal widening as the outskirts of the city are now linked to main roads that allow quick access. Traffic light free zones and underpasses and over passes have been planned by the government which promise a smooth flow of heavy traffic from one part of the city to the other.

Gated Communities and Social Fragmentation
Most gated communities in Lahore are situated along Bedian road, Burki road, DHA road, Lahore Ring road and Raiwand Road. These are all developed on the outskirts of the city; as a large area of agriculture land is available in the outskirts. Gated communities offer their clients an opportunity to own a house which otherwise would not be possible in the congested urban areas of the city. Although land in gated communities is considerably more expensive than the land in their vicinity, this land is considerably cheaper than the land in the urban centres of Lahore. Some of these housing community developers include the Eden Group; which is one of the oldest of developers, the Bahria Town developers; which is currently the largest private housing community developer in Pakistan with housing communities in all the major cities of the country, DHA; which is an army managed development authority with many projects in several cities and other developers including
Lake city, Paragon city, LDA city, etc. Some new developments are empty unconstructed plots which have been bought as investment assuming that the value of the land will go up as the housing shortage increases in the future.

A mentioned earlier the largest privately owned gated community in Pakistan is the Bahria Town. The unique aspect of Bahria Town is that it has its own electrical power generation plant. The Bahria town generates its own electricity and sells it to the residents of the locality. This has become a unique selling point for Bahria Town as Pakistan has a huge energy shortage and electricity break downs are common with the inhabitants in most areas of Lahore spending 8 hours of every day without electricity. Bahria Town seems like an oasis in the chaos that has grasped the country with insecurity and a severe shortage of resources. But places like Bahria Town are not cheap to live in. Only the upper middle class or the upper class can afford houses in the Bahria Town. The Majority of Pakistanis cannot even imagine living in areas that cost as high as Bahria Town. This becomes another legalization to segment society and to introduce a new privatized way of giving those who can afford to pay facilities which should be provided to everyone. Until recently the elite had resorted to building high boundary walls around their own houses, hiring a private guard and using their own small scale diesel powered generator to generate electricity. It seems that the Bahria Town is doing this at a much larger scale and making this lifestyle affordable to more people. This brings a certain economic class together and gives them the facilities, isolating the other economic classes.

Another unusual feature of Bahria Town is that it is like a theme park. Bahria Town Lahore has developed areas on themes which include an area that has imitations of the ancient Egyptian monuments, the Eiffel tower, and a Trafalgar square. Houses are also built according to themes. As Bahria Town prides itself as being a piece of...
land that has first world facilities it has looked for inspiration outside the country. In its struggle to create its own identity it has ended up replicating icons of the world. It feels as if the Bahria town ownership wants the community to believe that this is place not in Pakistan but somewhere outside. This of course is very delusional as one has to step out of the Bahria Town vicinity to conduct daily tasks and as soon as that happens one is faced with the institutional, governmental, development and security issues that have gripped the country.

Figure 6 (a) View of a housing enclave inside Bahria Town based on Egyptian theme. (b) An obelisk inserted outside the enclave.

Figure 7 Sculptures of horses - Bahria Town Eiffel Tower in the backdrop.

The contrast between what is inside the walls of the Bahria town and what is outside the walls is startling. Inside one sees up to date infrastructure, carefully planted trees, shopping malls, cinemas, houses in rows, etc. Outside the walls of Bahria town one sees unhygienic living conditions with open sewers, garbage everywhere, narrow and worn out roads (in some areas only dirt roads), bare houses, walls decorated with cow dung, etc. Outside Bahria Town are the typical scenes of a Pakistani rural area but inside Bahria Town the infrastructure is better than that of the best urban areas in Pakistan. This gap between those who can afford to pay and those who cannot has always been a part of Pakistani society. But these housing communities are making the problem of infrastructure a problem only of the poor as now the rich can afford to buy better infrastructure.
Other than the societal disadvantages to this kind of housing society there are other issues. Although some of these housing communities claim to be complete towns with their own commercial areas, the fact is that they are only housing communities and people have to travel to and from. This creates frequent traffic jams and pollution on the main roads and areas connecting the city. There are also ecological consequences as most of the land used for these community was either farmland or wilderness. The lavish living comes at a cost to the city of Lahore. As now much of the land surrounding Lahore has become impermeable due to the construction of houses and roads, the water absorption of the soil has been reduced. This has resulted in the ground water table going down. If, this continues Lahore will face a water shortage in the near future. Damages to the wildlife are very obvious but undocumented as both the government and private individuals consider this to be the inevitable consequence of development.

Another mega housing project is the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) which unlike Bahria Town DHA is not privately owned. Lahore Cantt Cooperative Housing Authority was established in 1975 which was later converted to the Defence Housing Authority in 1999. DHA has procedures through which a file is transferred to a retired army officer, this file after development of a certain area is converted to a plot. The initial owner of a DHA file can only be either a retired army officer or a relative of a martyr. This initial owner is then allowed to transfer this file to anyone he/she wishes. The price at which the initial transfer takes place is only a fraction of the resale market price after development of the area is complete and the land is inhabitable. The plot size, number is determined by the rank of the officer. As the Army officers to whom these plots are allotted can sell these plots to anyone, not just other army officers this mode of land allocation becomes a monetary reward for the army officers and not just a housing means. Due to this nature of transactions the majority of people living in the DHA are civilian.
Many civilians buy land in DHA as the land is secure compared to elsewhere where illegal occupations are common and sometimes land transfer is not done after payment has been made. The transfer procedures are handled correctly by DHA and there are no fraud cases in DHA. Property in DHA also has investment value as this asset is safe and no one will come and take over the investor's land. In the newer schemes of DHA, golf courses and other such amenities are provided. But as the earlier phases of DHA did not provide such amenities we cannot owe the success of DHA solely to the provided facilities. Confidence that people have in the competence of the army run DHA administration has resulted in the huge success of this project. Students from the Beaconhouse National University (Dr. Fariha Tariq) conducted a survey trying to find out why people wanted to move from the old walled city to the newer settlements such as DHA. One unexpected response was that people shift from the walled city to areas where people of higher social status such as DHA live as when they have an address in DHA it becomes easy for them to arrange marriages of their daughters.

All the housing in DHA is based on strict by-laws that do not allow the division of allocated land; a one *kanal* (4500 sq feet) house cannot be divided. There are strict height restrictions and the by-laws even detail how tall the high floor to floor height of a room inside the house can be or what the minimum size of a room can be. Areas for certain sizes of houses are fixed and plots cannot be further divided. The majority of the houses in DHA are 1 *kanal* houses. Only small areas is allocated for 10 *marla* (2250 sq feet) or 5 *marla* (1125 sq feet) houses. As, DHA plots cannot be subdivided the density of the whole areas is very low. Smaller houses are commonly associated as for the poor people as these houses become affordable. But due to DHA’s subdivision rules only people from certain economic class can live in DHA as the land is extremely expensive and the bylaws restrict high density accommodation.

DHA has XI phases, all of which are walled in areas that were previously in the outskirts of the city and the land is acquired from villages. Previously land was taken from the villagers and monetary compensated made. More recently an area of land is allotted to these villagers in DHA, this area is residential and very small compared to the farmland they had been using previously. Those villagers that refuse to move have their sewage and access is cut off by DHA as the surrounding area is purchased by DHA.
Figure 11 A white painted house in DHA sits outside the walled in village.

Figure 12 Commercial area in DHA
Looking towards the past for inspirations for the future

Walled housing communities are expensive housing which is not affordable for the common people of Lahore. Rural land is used for such developments. The rural land is bought at very low rates from the owners. By the time the land is developed and is inhabitable the price of the land has increased to such a degree that it becomes completely un-affordable to the poor. The poor who were the initial owners of the land are intentionally cut off from the benefits of the development of the land they had previously owned. In the name of giving the people of Lahore 'a world class lifestyle', discrimination is carried out and communities are segmented on economic grounds. As in the case of Bahria Town and DHA we have seen how the people outside the walls of these gated communities are deprived basic infrastructure while inside the walls the infrastructure is well developed and well maintained. These housing communities only helps to lift the living standard of some people while alienating others in the society.

Lahore is the city that is known as the cultural heart of Pakistan. The city is known for its festivities, food, beautiful gardens and monuments. There is much that architects and planners can learn from the city of Lahore, its past and present. The old walled city is an example for us to look at and understand. The old walled
city shows us how people when they are not restricted by by-laws create spaces that have evolved over centuries. These spaces play out the social ideals in the form of architecture and create a holistic society. Housing community developers when developing newer communities should be enforcing by-laws that enforce cultural ideals of community interaction and social concerns instead of codes that limit the diversity of the architecture. Instead of owning the heritage of the city and preserving and further enriching the heritage of Lahore the focus to newer areas where a new cultural identity of Lahore is being fabricated, one that is adapted from others and is not indigenous to the land or the people.

The city is becoming a combination of smaller units that are very independent in terms of the architectural and cultural identity of these areas. People can just live in these small units without knowing what is in the other parts of the city and different social and economic groups don't have to mingle with each other. In contrast to the perfectly organized divisions of the walled housing communities there are perfectly disorganized and overcrowded subdivisions of housing only across the walls. As people don't get to celebrate events and festivities together. The significance of the different festivities is different in different economic and social groups of the society. The people who own cars live in a certain section of the city and those who don't own cars live in other segments of the city. The city has become car driven: roads have become more important than the public spaces and the gardens of the city.

The current social and economic conditions of the people and the fear and insecurity people are living in every day can be seen in these new developments. The inhabitants of the city do not want to be in Lahore they want to be somewhere else and these walled communities give them a false sense of being away. This approach towards the city in which the true problems of the city are ignored and a fictional world is created has become a great commercial success. The reason for the commercial success of such projects is obvious, these projects promises an imaginary world to those who can afford it. But what these projects do is that they create a wall between those who can afford this imaginary world and those who cannot. Ancient fortification was meant to protect the city against invasions from outsiders. These new walls symbolic gesture that whatever lies beyond is dangerous. The wall is there to protect the inhabitants from all that lies beyond the wall.

References

Books

Reports

Newspaper articles

Websites