

Reviving Lahore's Colonial Heritage: Conservation and Adaptive Reuse of Indo-Saracenic Edifices

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Abstract: *Indo-Saracenic architecture was developed in Lahore during the British colonial period, which represents a distinctive fusion of Mughal, Sikh, and European influences. During the British colonial period, Lahore's administrative and public buildings were designed in the Indo-Saracenic architectural style. Prominent administrative buildings, such as Town Hall, Bradlaugh Hall, and Montgomery Hall, exemplify this stylistic integration, serving not only as civic structures but also as cultural expressions of power, identity, and adaptation. The conservation status of three significant Indo-Saracenic administration halls, Town Hall, Bradlaugh Hall, and Montgomery Hall, has been analyzed in this research. These significant civic and political activity buildings are now threatened with decay due to urban development pressures or abandonment. To ensure their sustainability for future generations, the research proposes conservation and adaptive reuse possibilities, while also highlighting their historical significance, architectural elements, and the reasons for deterioration. This qualitative research methodology incorporates archival analysis, site assessments, and case studies to examine the architectural, cultural, and historical significance of these halls. The findings underscore the pressing conservation challenges while also revealing opportunities for adaptive reuse, for instance, transforming these structures into cultural, educational, and tourism hubs.*

Keywords: Conservation, Adaptive Reuse, Historical Preservation, Indo-Saracenic, Town Hall Lahore, Montgomery Hall, Bradlaugh Hall, And Architectural Heritage.

Introduction

Lahore is a cultural and historical city that showcases Pakistan's architectural legacy, shaped by Mughal, Sikh, and British colonial construction styles. One style that stands out is the Indo-Saracenic style developed in late 19th-century, which draws on Mughal domes and arches while utilizing European building methods. Bhai Ram Singh and other colonial architects practiced this style in several important civic buildings in Lahore.

The three important administrative halls-Montgomery Hall (now the Quaid-e-Azam Library), Bradlaugh Hall, and the Town Hall-are the representation of this great sophistication in architecture. Each hall was constructed for civic or political purposes and played a very significant role in the history of Lahore. Montgomery Hall was originally conceived as a social club but later became an intellectual hub. Bradlaugh Hall served as a considerable venue for various leaders of the Sub-Continent, such as

Allama Muhammad. Town Hall was the seat of governmental authority and a symbol of British domination. Beyond their architectural abilities, these halls stand witness to the social, cultural, and political history of Lahore.(A. Khan1, June,2013) (Kareem, september 2023)

Pollution and urban development are risks to the historic buildings, causing decay to the structures. The conservation status of the halls has been studied and analyzed in this research to highlight the threats and propose more sustainable adaptive reuse suggestions for these monuments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper examines the cultural, historical, and architectural significance of the building from a qualitative perspective, considering its preservation and restoration needs. The research includes an analysis of historical records, site assessments, and a review of existing conservation techniques to enhance the understanding of its heritage importance. By exploring the building's architectural features, materials, and historical modifications, the study evaluates both its structural soundness and historical authenticity. The suggested approaches are based on secondary research, including scholarly articles, archival materials, conservation documentation, and case studies of similar historic structures. These sources provide valuable insights into adaptive reuse and leading conservation practices, ensuring that preservation efforts align with globally recognized heritage management standards. Ultimately, this study presents informed suggestions for conserving the building and using it sustainably while preserving its historical integrity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colonial architecture is intrinsically linked with discussions on identity, power, and culture. During the British colonial period in South Asia, entirely new methods of construction were brought in and imposed in various countries. This created a transformation of urban space and converted the society's approach towards urban civic life. Furthermore, the ideas of grand spatial monumental constructions redefined indigenous performance standards within and between colonial states (Metcalf, 1989; Hosagrahar, 2005).

These building types, new structures of government offices, train depots, libraries, and courthouses, became paradigms for modernity, embedded themselves in local cultural contact zones, and represented stability. Heritage structures were also interpreted as an act of dominion, as another remnant, and cities such as Lahore also reflect negotiations, adaptations, and continuities over time.

Indo-Saracenic Style

Indo-Saracenic architecture developed in British India in the mid-19th century as a syncretic style that combined Islamic, Hindu, and British elements. It was extensively employed in administrative structures, railway stations, and civic halls. The table provides specifics on the following important aspects of the Indo-Saracenic style

Table 1: Key Elements of Indo-Saracenic Style

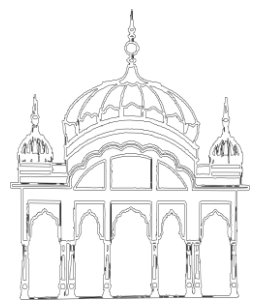
<i>S/N</i>	<i>FEATURE</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>PICTORIAL VIEW</i>
1-	Domes and Minarets	Large, Imposing Domes and Slender Minarets, Decorated with intricate stone or plasterwork	

Figure 1: Bulbulous Domes, Chattri and Minaret (Source: Namel Mushtaq, 2024)

2- Arches Pointed arches and cusped arches

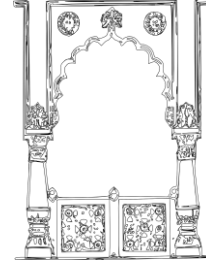


Figure 2: Cusped Arch (Source: Namel Mushtaq, 2024)

3- Decorations (Chhatris and Jharokhas) Carvings, intricate stonework, and decorative tiles with the use of floral and geometric patterns. Chhatris are elevated, dome-shaped pavilions and Jharokhas are overhanging enclosed balconies)



Figure 3: Victoria Memorial (Source: <https://housing.com/news/victoria-memorial-Kolkata>)

4- Local Materials It includes red sandstone, white marble, and local stone, combined with British brick and cement.

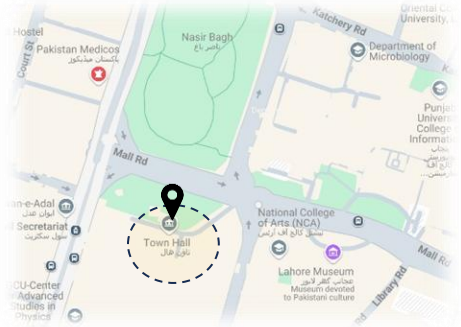


Figure 4: Madras High Court (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madras_High_Court#/media/File:Chennai_High_Court.jpg)

Indo-Saracenic Administration Halls in Lahore

Town Hall, Bradlaugh Hall, and Montgomery Hall are the three most prominent examples of Indo-Saracenic administrative halls. These famous structures represent the union of politics, power, and culture in the area and are more than just remnants of the colonial past.

Location

S/N	NAME	ADDRESS	MAP
1.	Montgomery Hall	Bagh-e-Jinnah Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan	
2.	Bradlaugh Hall	Rattigan Road, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.	
3.	Lahore Town Hall	Mall Rd, Anarkali Bazaar Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan	

MONTGOMERY HALL



Figure 3 Montgomery Hall or Quaid-e-Azam Library (Source: Namel Mushtaq 2024)

Constructed in 1886 in Lawrence Gardens, Montgomery Hall was initially a social center for British elites. It was named after Sir Robert Montgomery, the first colonial administrator of Punjab. The hall was subsequently converted into a library named Quaid-e-Azam Library in 1984 (Figure 5).

Architecture

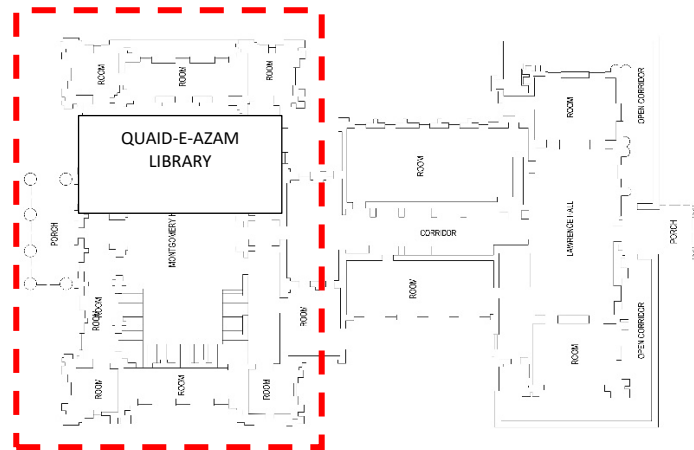


Figure 4: Plan of Lawrence and Montgomery Hall Connected Through Corridor (Source: Namel Mushtaq, 2024)

Its colonial heritage is exemplified through its two contiguous halls previously reserved for British governors (Figure 6). The large windows and heightened ceilings ensure there is sufficient air circulation, enhancing indoor comfort. Its porticos and curved windows also enhance the distinctive colonial design. The main building material is brick and plaster, which is durable and eco-friendly. (Kamil Khan Mumtaz, 1999)



Figure 5: Architectural Features of Montgomery Hall (Source: Government of Punjab, n.d.)

Material

Its structure was constructed with local brick and finished with plaster to give it a smooth and polished look. It has high ceilings and large windows for ventilation and light, and is suitable for Lahore's climate. It was surrounded by lush gardens, which provided a tranquil retreat for colonial officials.

Conservation

In 2012, the Quaid-e-Azam Library, Lahore was renovated and expanded with the conversion of the historic Gymkhana building. The project involved the construction of two underground halls to provide additional storage and reading capacity, raising the library's capacity to hold 513 readers and more than 300,000 books. The original architectural details of the Old Gymkhana building were also restored extensively to maintain its original character. With the addition of the new basement areas, the overall

floor area of the library grew to more than 70,000 square feet. The construction and renovation work was carried out with the support of the Public Works Department (PWD). The renovation work and all the structural repairs were completed in 2012 and formally inaugurated in 2013 (Figure 8).



Figure 6: Renovation of Hall In 2012 (Source: PWD Department)

Causes of Decay

The library faced structural issues in 2009-10 due to a lack of maintenance, climatic effects, and air pollution. Humidity caused wooden structures to rot, fungus growth, and damage to foundations, where poor drainage caused cracks in materials. Air pollution caused chemical weathering and erosion, while biological factors like termites and fungi affected furniture.

Current Status

Montgomery Hall no longer serves its intended purpose and is currently underutilized. Although it is used as a library, it requires structural repairs, particularly to the woodwork and roof. The discussion about its preservation and potential conversion into a cultural or educational place continues under consideration to utilize the structure more effectively.

BRADLAUGH HALL



Figure 7: Bradlaugh Hall (Source: Namel Mushtaq,2024)

In memory of British statesman Charles Bradlaugh, Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore was built in the early 1893. In the colonial period, it served as a hub for social reform and education, and later it became a venue for political rallies. The hall was toured and addressed by prominent figures, including Dr. Muhammad Ashraf (Professor), Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (Journalist), Allama-Muhammad Iqbal (Poet), Malik Barkat Ali (Politician), and Mian Iftikhar-Ud-din (Politician). Bradlaugh Hall is historically significant as a site of action and resistance to colonial domination, even in its state of destruction.

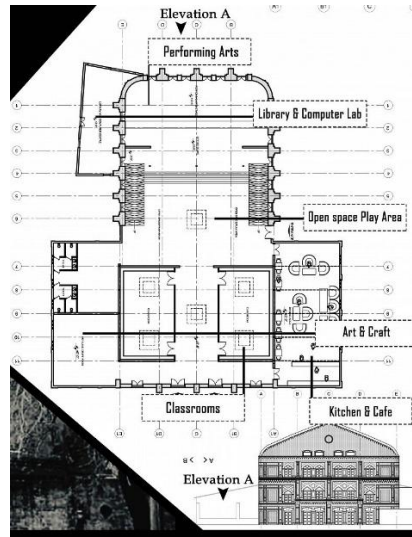


Figure 8: Plan of Bradlaugh Hall (Source: WCLA)

Bradlaugh Hall is a simple and functional structure that can host massive crowds and gatherings. It is constructed by incorporating Indo-Saracenic architectural features like pointed arches, high ceilings, and rectangular floor plans (Figure 10). High ceilings, balconies, galleries, and an iron-gabled roof for the large hall all point to its openness and breadth, compared to Lahore's Town Hall complex architecture.

Material

The structure of Bradlaugh Hall was built with wood, mortar, and brick. Due to neglect the structural integrity of the building was at risk and the wooden elements were weakened over time.

Causes of Decay

The building in Lahore has been badly damaged due to poor drainage, pollution, and harsh weather. It has been left to deteriorate, modified without considering historical conservation, and abandoned over the past decade due to a lack of funds. The wooden doors and windows have been damaged, and foundation problems have been exacerbated by the use of old materials, soil erosion, and plant growth.

Conservation

In 2023, Walled City Lahore Authority initiated conservation efforts for this magnificent structure. Restoration work includes the consolidation of the structure, where rusted corrugated roofing sheets, structural columns were replaced and a new drainage system was installed and clearing of surrounding illegal encroachments been done. A mix of replacement, reconstruction, and conservation has been implemented. Old materials were conserved and repaired, while wooden doors were conserved (Figure 11).

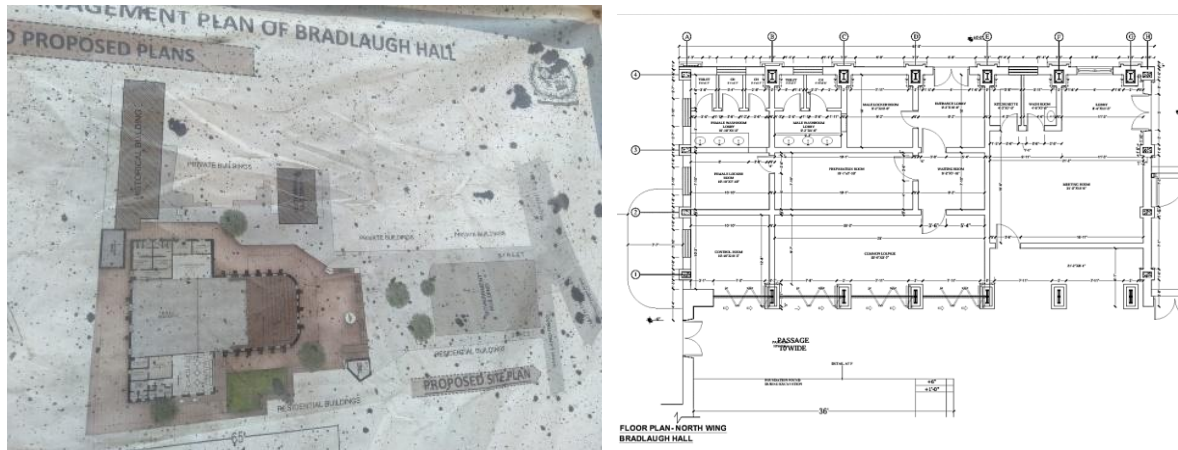


Figure 9: Proposed Plan for Reconstruction of Bradlaugh Hall (Source: WCLA)

Conserved Areas



Figure 12: Conserved Areas: Wall Behind Stage, Doors, Roof (Source: Namel Mushtaq, 2024)

The structure's conserved parts, as pointed out in Figure 9, encompass major architectural features like the rear wall of the stage, doors, and the roof. The parts have been restored with precision to maintain the building's architectural and historical integrity.

1. **Wall Behind the Stage:** The focal point highlights the preservation of the wall behind the stage. This was achieved through structural reinforcement and surface cleaning. The preservation work ensured that it remained true to history while maintaining stability and durability.
2. **Roof:** Figure 12 shows the restoration of the roof structure, reinforced with scaffolding, to protect it from collapsing. The maintenance involved repairing where there was destruction, strengthening the framework, and maintaining the architectural look. It was important for the structural support and historical credibility of the building.
3. **Doors:** Wooden doors were restored carefully by repairing or replacing rotten wooden parts, keeping intricate details intact, and applying protective coats to ensure their longer lifespan. Preservation of these doors is important to keep the building's history and functionality intact (Figure 12).

Current Status

The WCLA is now maintaining the hall and conducting conservation work on it.

TOWN HALL



Figure 13: Lahore Town Hall (Source: Liaqat Ali Vance)

Lahore Town Hall, also known as Lahore Metropolitan Corporation Office, is a famous building in Lahore, Pakistan, designed by Sikh architect Bhai Ram Singh between 1883 and 1889 during the British colonial era. Originally dedicated to Queen Victoria's reign, it has a significant influence on British urban planning. During the British colonial era, it served as the hub of civic governance. Town Hall was essential to the city's administration and governance, in contrast to Montgomery Hall, which served mainly as a social center. Housed there were municipal offices and significant government gatherings, signifying British dominance over civic life in Lahore. Council meetings, formal events, and public ceremonies were held at the Town Hall. Mainly, it was used by British government to control city affairs, issue statements and establish its dominance over the local populace.

Architecture



Figure 10: Site Plan of Town Hall showing various blocks, Source: (Jabeen et al., 2023)

The Town Hall Lahore is a two-story structure designed by Chennai-based architect Pogson. The structure is a stunning fusion of Spanish, Sultanate, and Mughal architecture. The structure's most notable architectural feature, which cost Rs. 60,000.00 to build, is the Lancet Arch, which is surrounded by two enormous, three-story towers on each side and ends the roof line with "Merlons" that resemble

castles. The towers on each corner are adorned with central domes and onion-shaped cupolas, which is a feature of the medieval era (Jabeen et al., 2023; Merriam-Webster, 2023; Walled City Authority, 2017)

The building's doors and windows feature indented sharp arches, which are an unmistakable signature style of Gothic as well as Mughal architecture. These arches are an add-on to the beauty of the design but serve the purpose of increasing ventilation and sunlight which is necessary for the hot weather in Lahore. An additional trademark style of colonial architecture in Lahore is the red-coloured brick front of the structure made from locally sourced bricks. Alongside its architectural beauty, the front has elaborate stone sculptures and other pieces of art that are complemented by the careful and purposeful placement of brickwork. This showcases an exquisite and bold style. The smaller minarets and domes surrounding the larger central dome are the Town Hall's most prominent features, which are a representation of Mughal architecture. In colonial architecture, domes and minarets were often used for grandiose features to symbolize power and domination.

Materials

Locally produced brick and red sandstone, which were common in Mughal design, were used in the construction of the Lahore Town Hall. Utilizing native materials not only helped the structure blend in with its surroundings but also demonstrated how hard the British tried to incorporate their construction into the regional vernacular. The facade's finely carved details and complex brickwork are evocative of Mughal architectural artistry.

Current State

The Town Hall in Lahore is the last monument along the mall route, but the government has ignored it despite its significance. It ought to remain the seat of the local government so that dignitaries and community representatives can be hosted there. But things are bad here; the structure failed for several reasons that are easily fixed if the proper steps are taken. The building envelope has damaged windows and doors, and no planned repairs have been completed. The exterior walls are affected by moisture, and it is still unclear what causes this dampness. Half of the healthcare buildings are painted, and the other half are not, as a result of negligence and murky conditions. (Jabeen et al., 2023)

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The prosperous colonial building heritage of Lahore relies on the conservation and adaptive utilization of its Indo-Saracenic halls. Some crucial observations are brought out by a serious investigation into the potentialities and challenges associated with these historical buildings:

Conservation Challenges

Environmental Degradation: Material used in construction has weakened due to exposure to Lahore's extreme weather, including high humidity and air pollution. Acid rain and temperature fluctuations have acted together to quicken structure disintegration.

Urban Encroachment: Due to increasing urbanization, the original architectural structure of these heritage buildings has been threatened by changing infrastructure. Unchecked commercialization and encroachment nearby are an added threat to their conservation.

Neglect and Lack of Maintenance: Due to a shortage of government funds and policies, several of these buildings have fallen into neglect. Physical damage, including weakening foundations, wall cracks, and decayed timber elements, has resulted from infrequent maintenance.

Lack of Public Awareness: These corridors are underutilized and unattended due to the overall lack of awareness of their historical and cultural importance.

Opportunities for Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse, though practiced informally since prehistoric times as a pragmatic approach to resource utilization, has emerged as a distinct conservation strategy for built heritage since the 1960s (Plevoets & Cleempoel, 2011). Traditional preservation methods, while significant for maintaining cultural continuity, are often financially demanding and technically challenging, especially in the context of aging historic fabric (Jokilehto, 2002). In developing countries such as Pakistan, the scarcity of financial resources and institutional support frequently results in the neglect and gradual deterioration of historic buildings (Iqbal & Van Cleempoel, 2021).

Adaptive reuse offers a sustainable alternative by reintegrating historic structures into contemporary socio-economic frameworks. By assigning new functions to heritage buildings, adaptive reuse not only ensures their continued use but also provides economic viability through stable income generation (Langston et al., 2008). This functional continuity, coupled with financial sustainability, plays a crucial role in the long-term conservation and upkeep of historic assets (Bullen & Love, 2011). Thus, adaptive reuse stands as a pragmatic and sustainable means of safeguarding built heritage in resource-constrained contexts.

Pakistan, as a financially constrained nation, requires innovative strategies that align with the principles of adaptive reuse to ensure the long-term conservation of its historic built environment. Approaches that integrate sustainability, respond to the needs of local communities, and remain relevant to contemporary socio-cultural contexts are particularly vital. Such strategies not only support heritage preservation but also contribute to broader goals of social inclusion, cultural continuity, and sustainable urban development.

A number of international case studies exemplify successful social and cultural integration through the thoughtful adaptive reuse of historic buildings. One notable example is the Dominican Church in Maastricht, Netherlands, a 13th-century structure that was transformed into a bookstore in 2005, now known as Boekhandel Dominicanen. Another instance is Park Spoor Noord in Antwerp, Belgium, where an old railway yard has been repurposed into a vibrant community park, complete with a restaurant, indoor games, and outdoor recreational areas (Figure 17). Professor Dr. Koenraad Van Cleempoel and Dr. Bie Plevoets of Hasselt University in Belgium have compiled a series of case studies on adaptive reuse in their book titled “Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage.” The discussion highlights how these sites can become vital anchor points in society through effective adaptive reuse strategies (Plevoets et al., 2019).

Based on the site study, interviews, and literature, below are some recommendations that can be explored for historic sites in the city of Lahore



Figure 15: Boekhandel Dominicanen Maastricht, Netherlands (Source: Naveed Iqbal, 2021)



Figure 16: Park Spoor Nord Antwerp, Belgium (Source: Naveed Iqbal, 2023)

Culture and Education Hubs: Replacing these buildings with museums, libraries, or cultural centers could provide spaces for lectures, exhibits of history, and community participation. A case in point for how adaptive reuse extends the lifespan of historic buildings is the renovation of Montgomery Hall into the Quaid-e-Azam Library.

Tourism and Economic Development: Maintenance of these structures can be partly supported by heritage tourism. Structures that have been well restored can attract visitors and serve as sites for local festivals, art exhibitions, and guided historic tours.

Event & Performance Spaces: Formerly utilized for political activism and gatherings, spaces such as Bradlaugh Hall can be repurposed into theaters, conference facilities, or performance halls so that they may continue to operate financially independently but still serve their original purpose.

Collaboration with the Private Sector: Financing and technical expertise for restoration projects can be provided through joint efforts among the government, private sector, and heritage preservation groups. Conservation work could be helped even further with involvement from international preservation organizations such as UNESCO.

Sustainable Restoration Practices: Bricks and lime plaster provided by local suppliers are samples of historic building materials that can be incorporated into restoration projects to maintain the buildings' integrity and resistance to environmental factors.

CONCLUSION

The conservation of Indo-Saracenic heritage halls requires a carefully planned approach that balances preservation with adaptive reuse. The Town Hall, Bradlaugh Hall, and Montgomery Hall stand as irreplaceable landmarks of the city's architectural and cultural history. Yet, they face serious threats from urbanization, environmental degradation, and prolonged neglect. Adaptive reuse presents a viable and sustainable strategy to safeguard these structures by integrating them into the contemporary urban fabric as cultural, educational, and tourism hubs. Such an approach not only ensures their physical survival but also revitalizes their relevance in modern society, fostering economic development and community engagement. Effective conservation, however, demands strong government policies, public awareness, and environmentally sensitive restoration practices that respect historical authenticity while accommodating contemporary needs. By adopting these measures, Lahore can secure the future of its Indo-Saracenic masterpieces and preserve their legacy for generations to come.

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