

# Transformation of Urban Open Spaces of Lahore: From Charing Cross to Faisal Square

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## Abstract

*With historical roots in cities all over the world, public open spaces have been considered as a powerful component of urban fabric and means of transforming communities. Square, which is one of the expressions of such public spaces, has been identified as heart and soul of the cities by giving them identity. With the development of cities, the squares acquired more and more functions. At first, the squares were established at the crossroads of important trade routes where exchange of goods as well as ideas took place. Another important function of the public squares was that they served as an opportunity to exercise the power of rulers with military processions and parades. Since the invention of motorized traffic, squares were turned into vehicular crossings to facilitate safe and effective movement. Whatever, their manifestation, squares have, undoubtedly played an important role in the public domain of the built environment. Charing Cross, renamed, as "Faisal Square" in Lahore is one of the classical examples of urban open spaces lay down during the British Period. It acquired its present form over a century and thus, contains many layers of nation's history. Despite its historical, architectural and national significance, there is a dearth of available literature pertinent, to it. The authors being aware of its urban value felt inclined to unfold socio-political forces shaping its architectural configuration. Documentary search and office of the Chief Architect, Punjab archives provided the relevant material in compiling this research. This research paper would be beneficial to bridge the missing links for the architects, urban designers, historians, conservationists and above all for those who are in love with Lahore. This paper will not encompass detailed designing of the flanking buildings not to digress reader from the main topic.*

**Keywords:** Charing Cross; Mall Road; Basil M. Sullivan; British Pavilion

## 1. Historical Perspective

*Without the square there is no city...*

*There is no substitute for the spontaneous social conflux*

*whose atoms unite, precisely as citizens of the city [1]*

Throughout history, urban open spaces have been the most versatile component of urban fabric serving important functions with enclosed open space as the most dramatic. The principal form of enclosure derives from the Greek agora and the Roman forum, places integrating economic, political and cultural activities. They were at the same time marketplace, a place of assembly, public announcements and a setting in which festival, religious ceremonies and spectacles were performed. However, "this ancient integration of the spiritual and the temporal did not survive in the Middle ages" [2]. In Italian Renaissance cities, for example, there are two or three principal squares: cathedral square, secular square, market square, each associated with a distinct set of

activities. Spatial closure was created by the blend of civic, religious, commercial buildings and architectural landscape elements, e.g. colonnades, screens, terraces, plantation etc. It may also serve as a forecourt of an important building or a setting for a focal point like a fountain, monument, or statue [3]. But all this started to change in the modern period, when the public squares of cities started to be used as parking lots and the relationship between them and the public buildings around them almost completely disappeared. Under the thrust of technological change, increase in population, vehicular traffic they have lost their significance and are no longer the main nodes of the social networks. Lately, urban designers have realized their significance and creation/renewal of spatial enclosures has become a main prerequisite in urban designers. It has become absolutely essential for them to create "positive urban space" i.e. space enclosed by buildings with a strong solid void relationship rather than what is leftover after the construction of buildings [2].

Morris (1997) points out that there are semantic difficulties by different terms to describe such spaces which have been resolved by the English term “square” for enclosed open spaces in Britain and other European countries, with the exceptions of Italy and France for which ‘piazza’ and ‘place’ are used respectively [3]. In Pakistan, the term “square” is synonym with ‘chowk’ and is usually applied to a central area formed around the intersection of three or more streets consisted of some open area filled in with traffic islands and other traffic calming features. Most definitions of the public square suggest that its main requirement is its enclosed character, which offers closed vistas from any point within it. The center of this space is to be kept free and there is a need for a strong relationship between the public space and the buildings around it. “Most squares are clearly defined by the built form that surrounds them, and are in fact contained by the walls of such buildings” [4]. No particular shape of the square has been specified; may be either rectangular, triangular, oval, polygonal etc. Design styles and activities that take place in squares may differ from country to country due to cultural, architectural and religious variations.

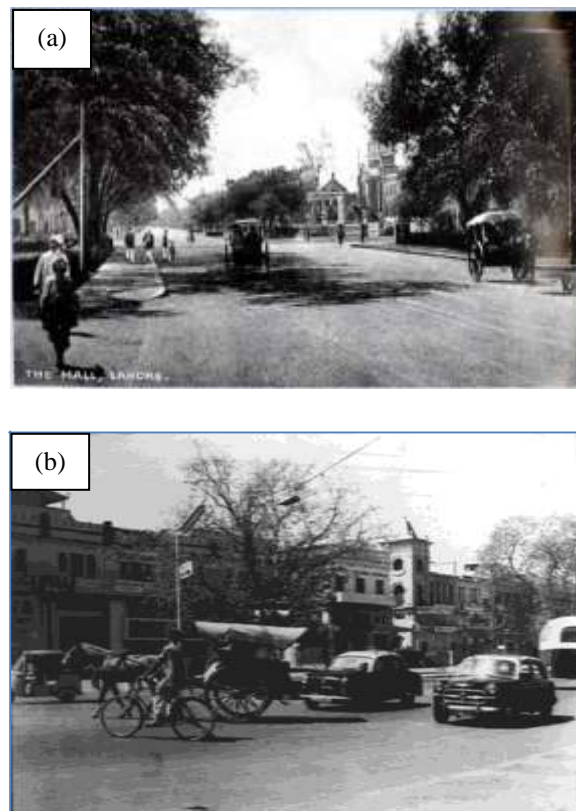
Charing Cross is a famous landmark of Lahore, which has witnessed a variety of historical events in the span of more than a century. Charing Cross is a name given to an open space at the West End of the Strand, London, near Trafalgar Square. Originally, Charing Cross was erected as one of the 12 Crosses, which marked the route of Edward I queen Eleanor's funeral procession and where her coffin rested overnight from Lincolnshire to her resting-place at Westminster, London [5]. Although it has been thought that the term *Charing* derived from Fr. *chere reine* (dear Queen), it is more likely to stem from the Old English *cearring*, meaning a bend in the river (at the site of the village of Charing, coming from Westminster, the Thames makes a dramatic 90-degree turn to the east). Later, road leading from the Charing Cross was named as Charing Cross Road, which runs from Trafalgar Square to St. Giles' Circus (the intersection with Oxford Street). In 1864, a tube station in London was named as Charing Cross Tube Station and Charing Cross Hospital nearby it.

In the context of Lahore, for the first time the term was used in a publication by G. R. Elmslie titled “Thirty Five Years in the Punjab”. According to him the name Charing Cross would appear to have been given to the area by the First World War [6]. It is commonly considered that history of cities is also contained in the names of their squares and streets. The names also reveal ruling elite's cultural and ideological preferences, as they change over decades through successive political regimes. In Lahore, the name Charing Cross, could supposedly be inspired

by the historical Charing Cross in London as it was laid and developed during British Rule (1849-1947).

### 1.1 Alignment of the Mall

The British led to the expansion of Lahore beyond the Walled City to find suitable places for the Imperial army and civilian officers. A new urban network evolved which “comprised roads that wove through or around the existing structures, mosques and tombs, interlinking the centers of power and logistic nodes in the most direct manner available. However, wherever possible, existing tracks and rights-of-way were respected, broadened, lined with trees and turned into paved roads” [7]. Every possible effort was made to save the existing trees. Goulding (2000) gives a detail resume of Mall from the time of its evolution in 1851 to its present condition describes that originally there was the one and only Mall, now known as the Lower Mall, extending from the Deputy Commissioner's court to the Multan Road Junction [8]. According to him the Mall running east to west was aligned in 1851 by Lieut-Colonel Robert a Napier, Chief Engineer Public Works Department at a cost of Rs. 10, 428, who described it as a direct road from Anarkali to Mian Mir. (Plate 1: a,b) Later, under the personal supervision of Mr. DuCane Smythe, Chief Engineer, whole length of the Mall was remodeled on its



**Plate 1:** (a) Mall looking eastwards, (b) Mall looking westwards.

present lines. Presently, the Mall is popular by two divisions: the track linking the Anarkali and fort stations is known as Lower Mall while track linking the Government Secretariat with the cantonment as Upper Mall (originally called Lawrence Road till 1876). Over the time, the finest public road became an axis of numerous imposing private and public buildings and had all the ingredients of a modern city: restaurants, offices, banks, insurance companies, shopping plazas, hotels, tailoring shops etc.

### 1.2 Development of the Charing Cross

Survey Plan of the Charing Cross Ground (1913) indicates that the site of Charing Cross was originally a triangular open space on the Mall and off center the road linking to Ferozepur Road (named as Queens Road and renamed as Fatima Jinnah Road). The Queen's statue sat in the center of this triangular space (Figure 1). The open space was not enclosed by any structure except that of Rai Mela Ram's Buildings strategically abutting the Mall and the Egerton Road. Basil M. Sullivan Consulting Architect to the Govt. of the Punjab in 1914 made improvements to the Charing Cross as indicated in his plan. He conceived the junction of four major roads: Upper Mall, Ferozepur Road, Egerton Road and Montgomery Road as an urban square. His concept was based on creation of a North-South axis by remodeling the Montgomery Road in direct alignment with the Ferozepur Road. With this geometrical arrangement, the junction of the Ferozepur Road with the Mall was dramatically defined by a semi circular truncation (Figure 2). However the existing Queens Canopy became escued and had to be relocated in order to achieve focal emphasis. The transformation of the illegible space into a structured square was completed by 1915. A well-defined elliptical and semi-circular central open space punctuated by a radiating node to house the flanking buildings all in place (Figure 3). To commemorate, 2<sup>nd</sup> Islamic Summit held in 1974 the important urban node was renamed as Faisal Chowk to pay homage to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia by Lahore Municipal Corporation in 1981 [9]. Due to an increase in the vehicular traffic around mid sixties, it became difficult to manage traffic manually so a traffic signal was installed there. It took almost 70 years for the flanking buildings to be completed and to acquire its existing configuration (Figure 4).

## 2. Buildings Flanking Charing Cross

The Charing Cross, being a depository of some of the finest architectural, historical and cultural heritage is a showpiece of Lahore. It is apt to give a brief delineation of all the built features as they play a determining role to transform a road junction into a meaningful enclosed space (Figure 4). Description of

these buildings has been compiled on the basis of their chorological order as under:

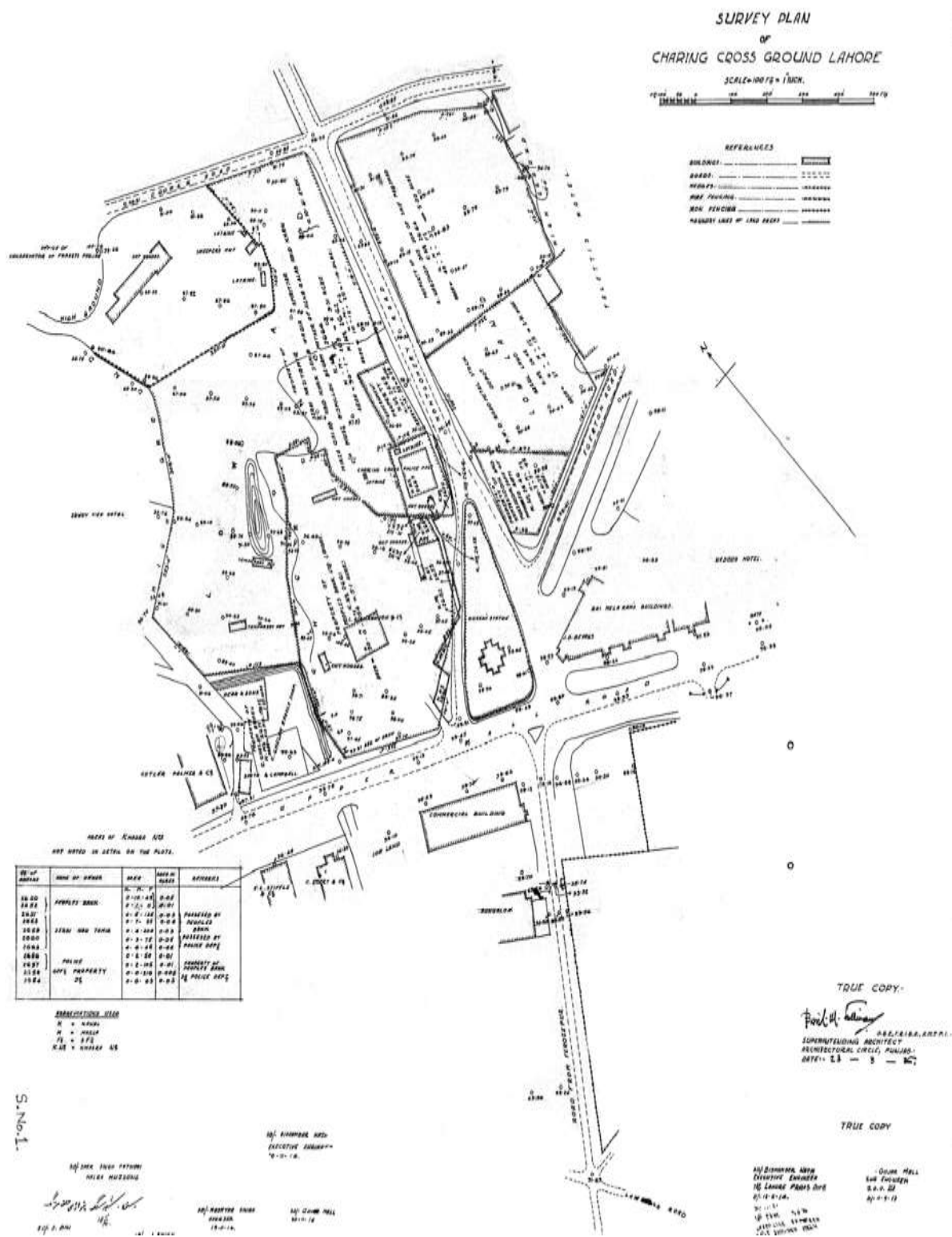
### 2.1 British Pavilion

The Charing Cross started assuming its architectural character with the erection of "Dome Shaped" British Pavilion to mark the Jubilee year of Queen Victoria, the first Empress of India (from 1876 to 1901) (Plate 2a). The pristine white marble pavilion was designed by Bhai Ram Singh Mistri, then Deputy Principal of the Mayo School of Arts Lahore [6]. Bronze statue of the Queen wearing her royal regalia with widow's veil was cast in London in 1900, a year before her death (Plate 2b). The statue remained there as a symbol of British authority for over 50 years. In 1951, it was unceremoniously removed and taken to rest in the basement of Lahore Museum on a bullock cart (Plate 2c). As proposed by Sullivan stated earlier, the Pavilion was shifted to the centre of the space dividing it into four sections after the remodeling of the Charing Cross (Figure 3).

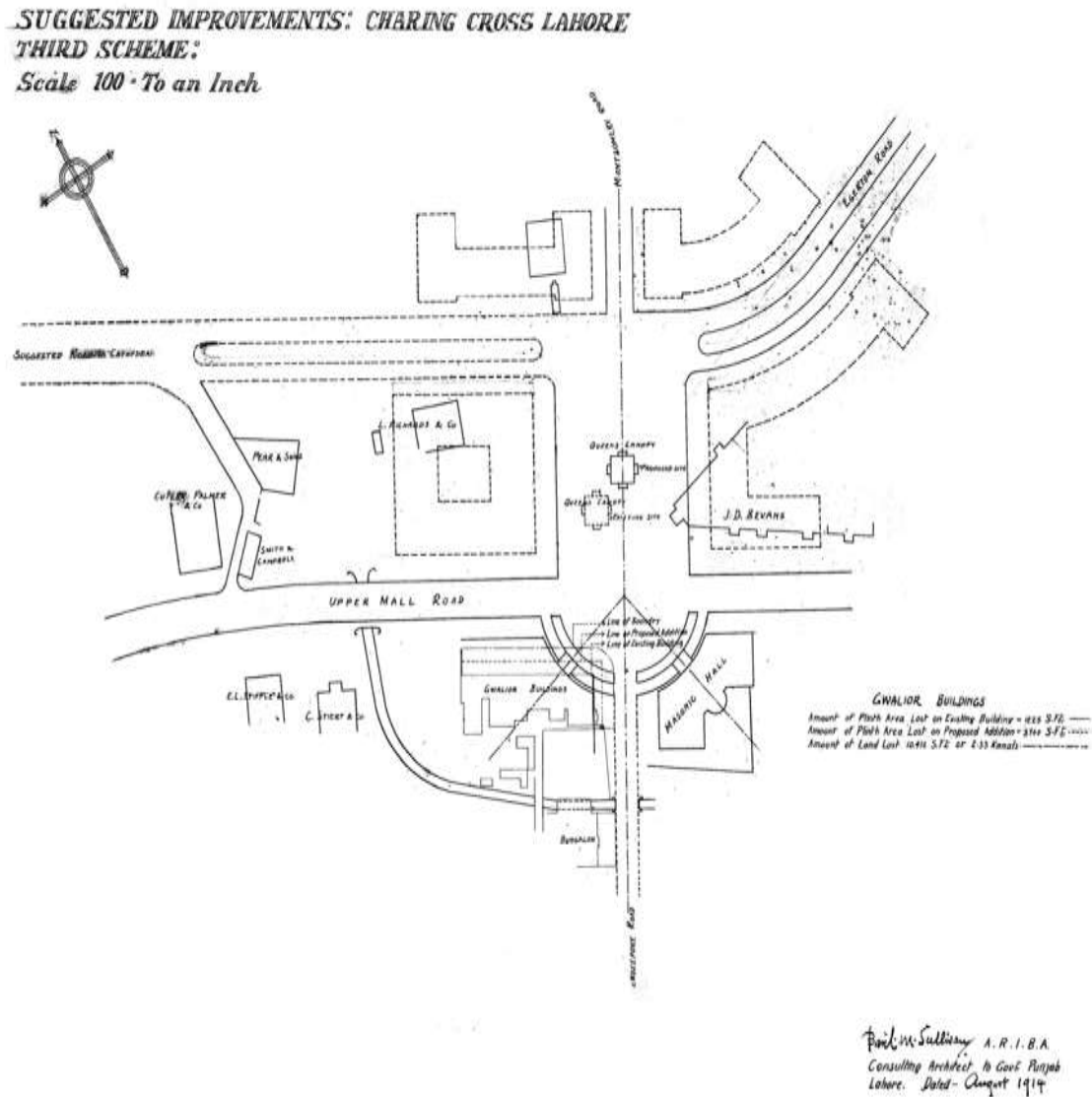
Even after many years of the statue's removal, the area was commonly remembered by the rickshaw and taxi drivers as "*malka ka but*" (Queen's statue). In its place now stands a model of the Holy Quran placed in east-west direction (direction of Makkah/qibla) mainly as a symbol of Islamic State (Plate 2d). The Pavilion was once again shifted to its original location, when Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulifiqar Ali Bhutto decided to build a monument to commemorate the Second Islamic Summit held in 1974.

### 2.2 Masonic Lodge & Shah Din Building

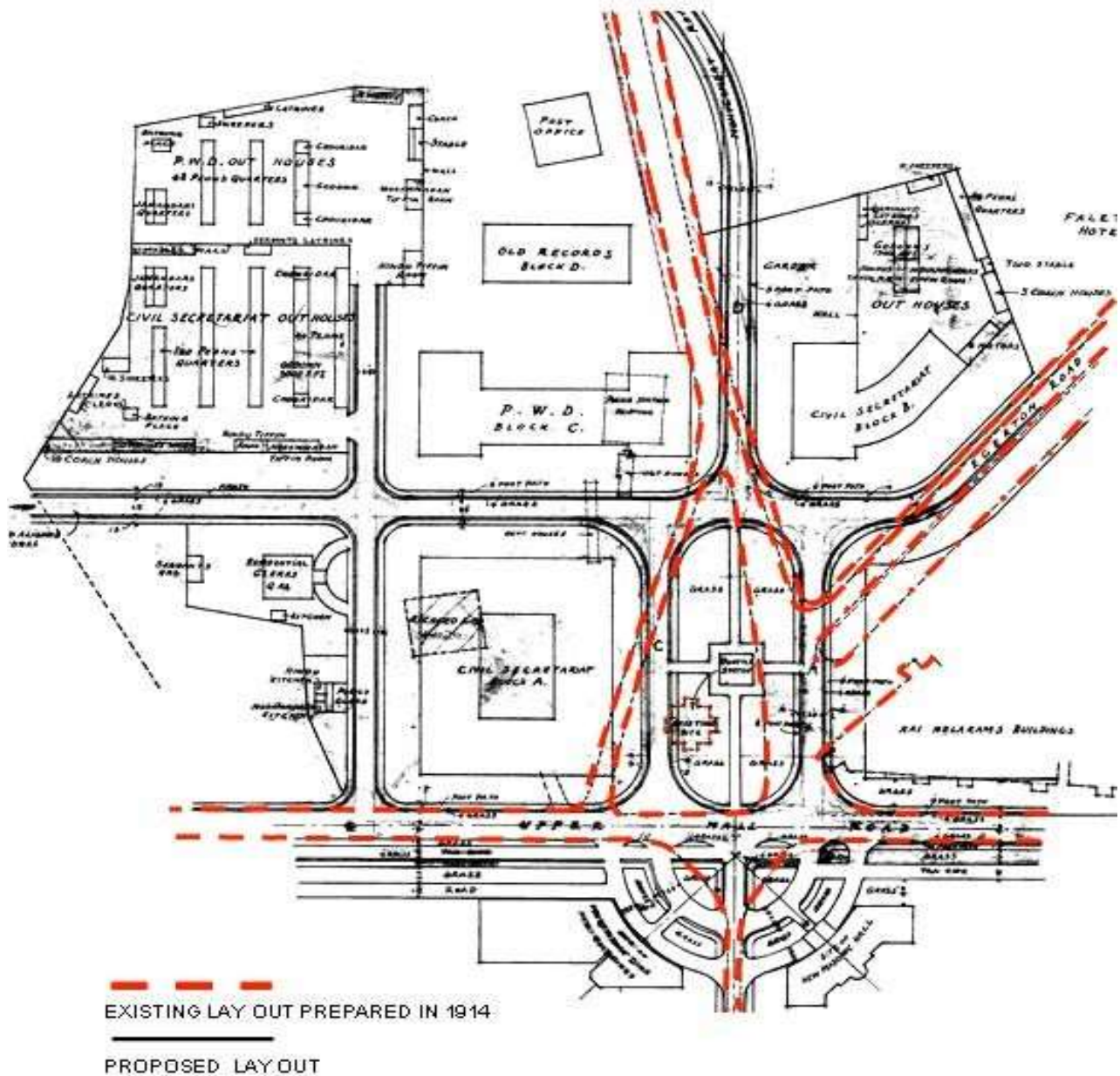
The Charing Cross started assuming character of an enclosed urban open space with the construction of Shah Din Building in 1914 and Masonic Lodge in 1917 (Plate 3a). These imposing buildings, like a mirror image of each other flank Queens Road at its outset. The two identical buildings brought much order into a disorderly collection of streets and illegible urban environment. Sullivan intelligently conceived asymmetrical designs to maintain urban integrity no matter however, disharmonious in their genesis. The Shah Din Building, named after the first Muslim Judge of the Punjab Chief Court as well as President of All-India Muslim League (1908) has an Islamic flavor whereas, Masonic Lodge, being headquarter of Freemasonry is associated with awe and suspicion due to its Jewish origin. The Masonic Lodge remained desolate for many years, as nobody had ever seen the entry or exit of any person or activity at the premises. Until early 70s this building was commonly called as "*Jadoo Ghar*" (a house of magic or witchcraft), a mystery replete in an enigma [10]. Coincidentally, both the Masonic Lodge and Shah Din Building were restored



**Figure 1:** Survey Plan of Charing Cross ground (1913) [11]



**Figure 2:** Improvement Plan of Charing Cross by Basil M. Sullivan Consulting Architect to the Govt of the Punjab (1914) [11]



**Figure 3:** Improvement Plan of Charing Cross by Basil M. Sullivan Consulting Architect to the Govt of the Punjab (1915)







**Plate 2a:** Placement of British Pavilion c.1920 [12]



**Plate 2b:** British Pavilion with Statue of the Queen [12]



**Plate 2c:** Down with Statue of the Queen



**Plate 2d:** British pavilion with model of the Holy Quran

for adaptive re-use as the Punjab Chief Minister's Secretariat in 2001 and Alfalah Bank in 2005 respectively (Plate 3: b,c.). Lari (2003) finds the adaptive re-use for the exclusive use of government officials in distaste and suggests for more public use of such treasures of the past [13]. Thanks to the architects for restoration without much damaging the original character. However, addition of controversial glass and steel dome with spiral crown atop Shah Din Building sets it apart from its replica building i.e. Masonic Lodge.

### 2.3. Punjab Assembly Building

The imposing Punjab Assembly Building (1935-1938) designed by Sullivan is occupying one of the most prestigious locations like a head of the square (Plate 4a). Originally built to house 271 members, neo-classical style building retains a stately and serene air of grandeur. The complex, which extends over an area of 112 Kanals (50, 4000 sq.ft.) was planned to be one of considerable architectural beauty. The longer axis (358 ft.) due to its podium

and imposing facade in yellow and red sand stone facing the square takes command of the enclosed space (Plate 4b). Over the time, need for additional accommodation was felt and the Chief Architect, Govt. of Punjab, is carrying out extension work. The extension comprises of the Assembly Secretariat oriented towards the Cooper Road and outwardly a replica of existing Punjab Assembly Building, sitting on the same axis, but inwardly treated differently. Between the two identical buildings a large shallow glass dome rises from cascading water terraces atop the sub grade new Assembly Hall. When completed in 2008 it would add an element of surprise to the Charing Cross.

### 2.4. Alfalah Building & WAPDA House

Alfalah Building (1962-64) and its counterpart WAPDA House (1963-67) located opposite to each other on the Charing Cross are the pioneering multi-story buildings in Lahore (Plate 5a). The Alfalah Building designed by J.A. Ritchie has an unadorned exterior emphasized with non descript horizontal and





**Plate 3a:** Charing Cross at the time of construction of Masonic Lodge and Shah Din Building (1920) [12]



**Plate 3b:** Shah Din Manzil after renovation



**Plate 3c:** Masonic Lodge after renovation



**Plate 4a:** The Punjab legislative Assembly Building 1940 [12]



**Plate 4b:** Punjab Assembly Building in 1940 [12]



**Plate 4c:** Recent view of Punjab Assembly Building [14]



**Plate 5a:** Model of Alfalah Building and Wapda House at the time of construction [15]



**Plate 5b:** View of Alfalah building



**Plate 5c:** View of WAPDA House

vertical louvers (Plate 5b). Consisting of five storeys (72 ft. high) was constructed at a cost of Rs.70 lakhs raised from the Benevolent fund of the Government Servants [16]. It is mostly rented out and poorly maintained. WAPDA House was conceived in early sixties primarily to house offices of rapidly expanding Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) with its headquarters at Lahore. New York famous architect, Edward Durrell Stone undertook designing of the building and work was initiated in Oct. 1963. For this purpose existing Mela Ram and Jodha Mal Buildings were purchased and demolished to obtain 33 Kanals and 6 Marlas of land [10]. Comprising of 9 storeys including 2 basements, 127 ft. high (12 ft. dome height inclusive) building was completed at a cost of Rs. 4,26,43,000. Designed on a radial concept with a large perforated curvilinear overhang crowned by a plexiglass dome (65 ft. diameter) and a roof garden make it stands out amongst all the surrounding buildings (Plate 5c). A

demonstrable attempt has been made to relate the building to the enclosing buildings of the square in terms of its concave building footprint. Late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1970-77) symbolized it with “new-colonialism” and white elephant due to its enormous cost [17]. Both of the buildings embrace Charing Cross and bridge the voids of the spatial enclosure of the urban open space.

### 2.5 Summit Minar

Summit Minar was constructed in 1977 to commemorate the Second Islamic Summit held in 1974 in the Punjab Assembly Building. Turkish architect, Vedat Dalokay, was commissioned to design the monument symbolizing unity and brotherhood among Muslim states. To make the site available for the Minar, the British Pavilion was once again shifted to its original location. An obelisk like Minar jointly designed by the Turkish architects,

Vedat Daloky and Ural Elhami, was completed within 20 months time gave new focus to the square. The Minar carrying inscription of *Allah-o-Akabr* on all four sides rise 160 feet from a pool of water nestled below ground and is framed by 20 red sandstone trapezoidal blocks (Plate 6a). A four-sided plaque set in a circular fountain (8ft. dia.), carrying excerpt from Prime Minister, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, in four languages: Arabic, Urdu, Persian, English, enhance the character of the semicircular space towards Queens Road (Plate 6b).

*“.... For long centuries, we have hoped for a turning point. That turning point has arrived. The break of a new dawn is not now a forlorn hope. Poverty need no longer be our portion. Humiliation need no longer be our heritage. Ignorance need no longer be the emblem of our identity.”*

Few benches installed besides the fountain have become the resting place of wanderers. It is ironic that a landmark bearing testimony to this historical event is in a dilapidated condition. The Minar, though added later due to its serenity and sheer height has become a pivot of the whole space.

When viewed in perspective the visual and spatial character of the Charing Cross does not lie in the individual buildings no matter whatever their significance. But, it is in the unique configuration of these buildings that makes the experience valuable and meaningful. Google aerial view 2004 captures the essence of the space (Plate 7).

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

Urban open spaces in the form of square world over play a vital role in shaping social life of people and to navigate in the city. For instance, St. Mark's Square, Venice, St. Peter's Square, Rome, Trafalgar Square, London, Times Square, New York City, Tinamen Square, Beijing, Connaught Place, New Delhi (personally visited by one of the authors) are giving unique character to the cities. Whittick (1974) argues that in the aesthetically satisfying square the sense of space is pleasingly stimulated and affects the visual sensibilities of people [18]. Though such spaces might be considered non-essential in the less developed countries however, their significance in the urban environment cannot be undermined. The Charing Cross, Lahore owes its glory to more than a century, each period adding its specific architectural values with the intent of conscious planning. It is like an open museum and stands testimony to Colonial, Modern and Islamic cultural values. Its location in the heart of the city of Lahore makes it a unit of measure of the architectural taste and must see for every traveller.

The nomenclature “Charing Cross Ground, Lahore”



**Plate 6a:** Summit Minar flanked by trapezoidal blocks



**Plate 6b:** Plaque set in fountain carrying inscriptions



**Plate 7:** Aerial View of Charing Cross in 2004 [19]

is not coincidental but, intentional and can be linked to the “Charing Cross Road” in London. The argument becomes meaningful, as all roads developed during British Period have been named after British dignitaries. For example, Beadon, Brandreth, Cooper, Lake, Hall and Nisbet Roads perpetuate the reigns of former Deputy Commissioners and Commissioners of Lahore. Shift from Charing Cross to Faisal Chowk after almost 80 years of its existence indicates change in



the preferences of ruling class. Sheikh (2003) criticizes that there is no need to name this crossing by any other name but by its original name [20]. Replacement of the statue of the Queen by the model of Holy Quran is another turning point and expresses an effort to shift the stamp of colonization to Islamization as Shah Faisal is a prominent figure in the Muslim World. Chaudhry (1998) condemns this act of removal of the Queen statue and considers it as an act of "little taste and respect for the monuments and sculpture" [10].

The most fascinating attribute of the Charing Cross is that masterpieces of five prominent foreign architects: Basil, M. Sullivan (British), Bhai Ram Singh (Indian), J. Ritchie (Italian), Edward, D. Stone (American) and Vedat Dalokay (Turkish) are agreeable with a harmonious skyline. Undoubtedly, Sullivan's contribution takes the lead as he was the master mind behind the plan that turned the illegible intersection to a coherent open urban space and designed the elegant buildings of Punjab Assembly, Freemason Hall and Shah Din. Yasmeen (2003) describes that major focus of Sullivan's master plan of the whole neighborhood and realignment of the roads, was to provide dignified setting to the Victoria Memorial. She writes that to enjoy Sullivan's grand concept of Charing Cross can be enjoyed most while approaching it from Ferozepur Road [13].

*".....the pristine marble pavilion with its elegant cupola, against the backdrop of the Punjab Assembly building the whole ensemble framed by similar buildings on two sides-the original Masonic Lodge on the right (east) and Shah Din Building on left (west)."*

The commercialization of Queen's, Egerton, Davis, Lawrence, and Montgomery Roads signaled a new stage in the development of Charing Cross. It became a point of mixed functions, the focus of new breed of activities emerging with economic development. With the completion of Alfalah Building in 1964 and WAPDA House in 1967 Charing Cross started gaining vertical emphasis. The verticality became more pronounced with the construction of obelisk like Summit Minar in 1977 acquiring the most prominent position of the British Pavilion. It could have never occurred to Sullivan that the British Pavilion, most dear to him would suffer from this unrest and would be relocated to its original location after a gap of almost 55 years. Zahra (2007), in a separate article describes the minaret a change from a terrestrial to a celestial center of gravity [21].

*The symphony reaches its climax and the music rises to its crescendo in the tall white marble clad concrete minaret by Vedat Dalokay. Both concrete*

*and marble are by nature inert, but through the hands of Vedat Dalokay these inspire with a heavenly inclination. The free standing slender minaret radiates an upward tendency, yet having nothing to support, it is altogether without tension... The square has taken meaning. A pure spiritual experience triggered by sensory confines. Dynamic if you reflect. Static if you do not.*

Dalokay tried to make the square dynamic open space by constructing museum, gallery and conference hall in the basement of Minar. Unfortunately, that character could not be retained as the peaceful square is now being threatened by the traffic congestion and public protests. Ever since Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's rule, the square has witnessed agitation stemming from political and international issues in the country and acquired an equivalent status to Hyde Park of London. So much so that several anti-government rallies end up here with a concluding speech or slogans raising in front of the Punjab Assembly Building. The semi-circular open space created by Sullivan has become a refuge place for the protestors. Character of the derelict open space may be enlivened by upgrading functional and visual quality of the soft and hard landscape features.

Lahore is being threatened by the multinational companies so the square has become a publicity getter. Huge bill boards atop Alfalah Building and around are disrupting its physical and visual quality. The growing size of Lahore has also dismantled the symbolic and functional coherence of the square. The speed of movement has weekend the close physical interaction between people and its built environment. The predominance of cars has transformed the character of square and made pedestrian movement an uncomfortable experience. The lush green character of the central space has been eaten away by the rising air pollution. In short visual, physical and spatial confusion reign supreme in the square. Sheikh in his article writes [20].

*The days when Charing Cross was the place to be at have long since gone. It must be said that the basic of rebuilding the glory of days gone by definitely exist...A beautiful future awaits Charing Cross, provided the will not to forget the past exists.*

It is concluded that the Charing Cross may be ranked as more than simply the junction of roads. It is imperative to preserve its character as it symbolizes our cultural and architectural heritage. As the square constitutes the public domain therefore, must be coordinated and based on perception of the people. The success of a square is not just related to how it was formed, what contains it or what it contains, but also what happens within it. The question is are we retaining its character or expediting its decay? Its existing condition reveals that we are certainly not



doing enough. A conscious effort has to be made to provide a better relationship between people and the square. It is proposed that its first centenary may be celebrated to remove obscurities related to its development. Architects, urban designers and planners may be invited to submit their proposal for its renewal to make it a place of joy forever. A ray of information acts as a spark so it could lead to a beginning in the urban renewal / revitalization of the Mall. The journey forward lies in creative involvement of people and sense of identity with the built environment of Lahore.

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