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***Koochas* (piazzas) as street theatres In historic urban informal landscape of Haveli nau nihai singh, the walled city, lahore**

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Abstract

According to a demographical study^{1,2}, conducted in 2012, Lahore is the largest city of the Punjab, Pakistan with a population of about 10 million. The study also suggests that the population of this striving metropolis has been growing at a growth rate of about 3% per annum. The growth of population as compared to designed residential spaces is unbalanced. Lahore is facing a shortage of housing authenticated by the statistical data of 1980 and 1998³. With the increasing number of people we have a rapidly decreasing designed residential landscape required for the socialization of such a large population due to the profit-making strategy employed by the real estate developers merely observing human clusters as money machines. Our urban settlements are gradually becoming dead, lifeless spaces with no attraction, zeal and activity areas for all age groups. Question remains that how should we design our urban settlements especially residential clusters catering the growing population simultaneously having the same spatial qualities, urban benefits and aspiring planning techniques that are present in historically grown informal settlements. This manuscript analyzes an urban cluster located in the historic city center of the Walled City Lahore and documents those qualities and uncountable benefits that are being offered by the “Koochas” (piazzas or squares) of this historic informal settlement to its residents. The role of a “Koocha” in this informal settlement has been analyzed particularly in order to emphasize their importance in providing a luxurious space for routine gatherings and cultural events. Informal settlements like these are the most appropriate socio-culturally built environments that were developed (and are still developing) gradually with the passage of time over a period of several hundred years without the services of professionals. On the basis of characteristics of “Koochas” discussed different guidelines are developed in the form of conclusions so as to propose a basis for planning of futuristic urban settlements of Lahore.

Keywords: *Lahore, Rapid Population Growth, The Walled City of Lahore, Urban Informal Settlements, Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh*

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1.1. Introduction

With the increasing population of Lahore, the quality of designed residential landscape is declining day by day. Land-Use classification surveyed in 2001 suggests that residential usage (9.8%) is the second largest land consumption in Lahore after vacant/agricultural land.⁴ Spatial Growth of Lahore from Past (Pre-Muslim Period up to 1002) to the Present (Figure. 1) is projected concentrically depicting population growth. After partition in 1947, Lahore city started circular development around the Walled City. In 1960s the high population growth rate leads to the city's expansion in South and South-West along Ferozpur and Multan Road corridors. Expansion towards East was limited due to the India and was also affected after 1965 war and West ward expansion has been restrained due to Ravi River.⁵ Urban sprawl⁶ of Lahore is resulting in the energy, infrastructure and profitable land waste. As the archival trends recommend, Lahore till 2020 (Figure. 2) will be stretching far across the South-West direction exhibiting a luxurious residential landscape. If the spatial quality of this to be developed residential scenery will not be controlled it will be a considerable addition to the existing unplanned, ribbon organic growth that has taken place in the past fifty years. Among the several approaches an architect may opt for while considering the futuristic residential landscape, this paper analyses a historic cluster from the Walled City of Lahore as an alternative appraisal for residential problems that Lahore is facing today. Leaving many of the aspects of urban renewal or re-

development essentials such as capitalist approach, gentrification, economics, public involvement, infrastructure, public health and many other aspects aside, this paper only focuses on the spatial planning that "Koochas" are offering to their residents while touching just a number of cultural and humane aspects. "Koocha" is an Urdu word having the same meaning as of a square, plaza or a piazza. In all the cases, it is both an area framed by buildings and an area

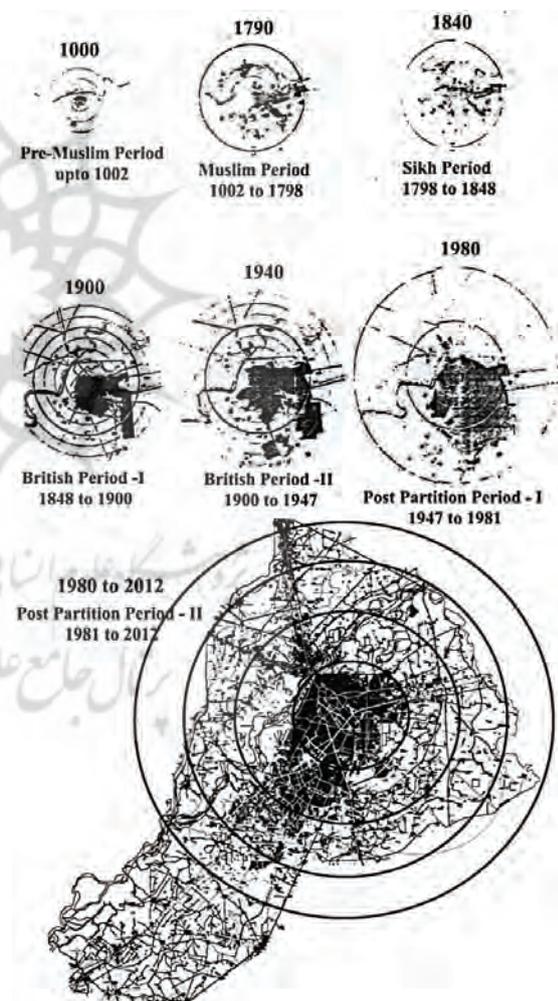


Fig. 1: *Spatial Growth of Lahore (2012)* Source: *The Urban Fringe of Lahore City – A Functional Study*, Department of Urban Geography, University of the Punjab, Lahore, p.56

designed to exhibit its buildings to the greatest advantage.⁷ Walled City of Lahore possesses a very fine tradition of “Koochas” just to name a few near the Delhi Gate area are:

- Koocha Chaudhry Muhammad Siddique (Figure. 3)
- Koocha Hussain Shah
- Koocha Namad-Garan, etc.

Although negligible work has been done in documenting the spatial qualities of Koochas of historically significant informal settlements of Lahore, examples from other parts of geographically and culturally compatible regions including India⁸, Afghanistan⁹, Iran¹⁰, Uzbeki-

stan¹¹ and Egypt¹² may be consulted. Furthermore different accounts^{13,14,15}, on the historical development of Lahore have been referred but they also fail in presenting a thorough documentation of the spatial characteristics of historically significant informal Koochas.

2.1. Selection Criteria of a “Koocha”

Among a large variety of “Koochas” existing in Lahore the ones from the Walled City and inner city areas offer an extensive insight regarding densification and mixed-use communities. Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh has been selected for a case study due to the

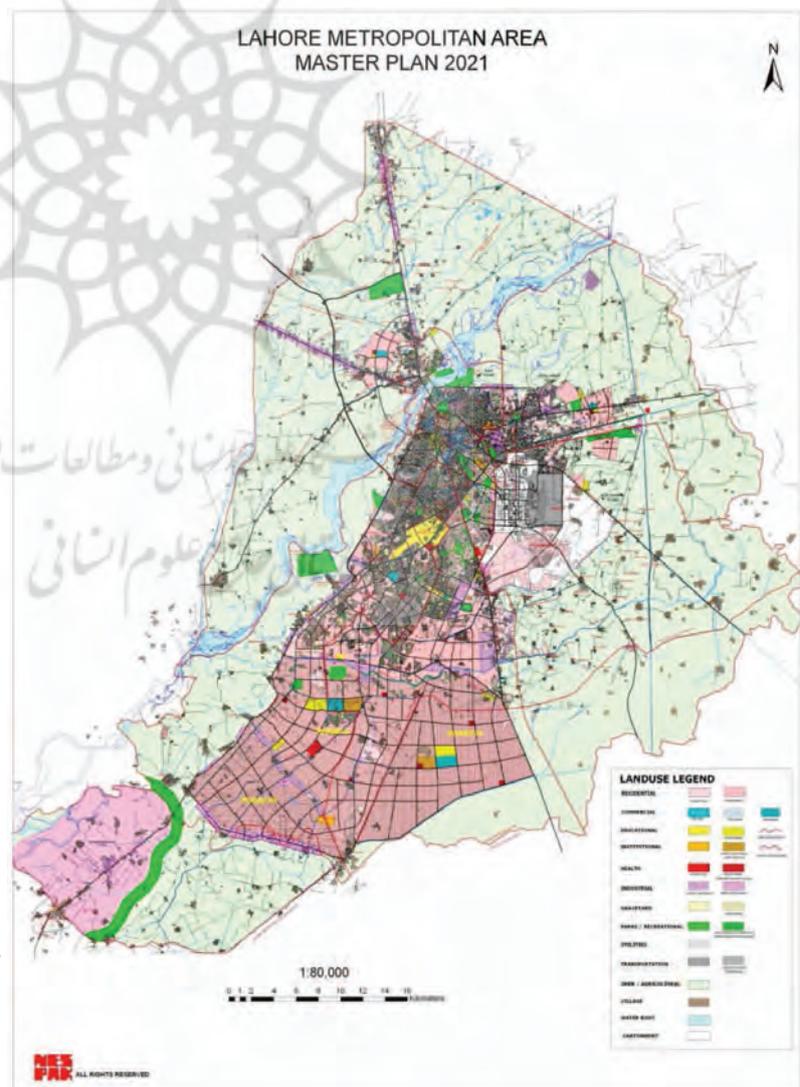


Fig. 2: Master Plan of Lahore 2021 (2012) Source: The Project for Lahore Urban Transport Master Plan (JICA), Vol. 1, p. 2-57

proximity of this Koocha with a historically significant heritage site of Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (declared as special premises by the Government of Punjab under the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance 1985) having layers of Mughal (dating back to five hundred years and more), Sikh (1790

– 1849) and British (The Raj 1850 - 1947) architectural styles. The analysis of Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh reveals numerous benefits as compared to the current planned piazzas in outskirts of Lahore. These benefits are listed as:

| Parameters | <i>Koocha</i> Haveli Nau Nihal Singh | <i>Koochas</i> in Out-skirts of Lahore |
|--|---|---|
| Density | Higher Density | Lower Density, dispersed activities |
| Walk ability | 10 minute (1320 ft, 1/4 th of mile) distances between daily activities. Pedestrian friendly passages | Roads are designed for motorists and not for pedestrians. Different facilities are placed far away from each other |
| Land-Use | Mixed Land-Use. Better places to Live, Work, Play and Shop | Single-Use, segregated land uses |
| Scale | Human Scale. Smaller buildings, blocks and roads/pathways. More detail, since people experience the urban landscape | Large Scale. Larger buildings, blocks, wide roads. Less detail, since people experience the landscape/builtscapes at a distance |
| Transportation | Multi-modal transportation focusing more on pedestrianization | Auto-mobile oriented transportation |
| Connectivity of Streets, Roads and different Linkages | Highly connected roads, sidewalks and paths, allowing relatively shorter distances for pedestrians | Hierarchical road network with numerous loops and dead-end streets, unconnected sidewalks and paths |
| Street Design | Mixed-Use streets accommodating a large variety of activities generation round the clock | Streets designed to maximize motorized vehicular traffic volume and speed |
| Parking supply | Limited supply and maximum management (although streets were not designed for this purpose) | Generous supply and minimal management |
| Public Space | Emphasis on the Public Realm | Emphasis on the Private Realm |
| Sense of Place | Unique Architecture with Paths, Edges, Nodes, Districts and Landmarks creating an identity | Monotonous planning of communities due to which people hardly recognize places as they are similar in appearance |
| Sense of Belonging/Ownership | Individual belonging to a place | Absence of individual responsibility |
| Sense of Security and Safety | Less crime rate due to eyes on street | Promotes crime rate due to lack of surveillance |
| Sense of Community/ Neighborhood | Social Interactive spaces providing gatherings | Absence of interactive spaces |
| Social Coherence | People know each other | Motorists dominate |
| Appropriate Behavior Settings | Women, children and aged people can use all spaces | Most of the spaces cannot be used by women and children |
| Density at Town Center and towards the Edge | Higher density at the town center and lesser towards the (assumed) edge | Lesser density at the town centers and increasing towards edges or outskirts |
| Quality Architecture and Urban Design | Human comfort for all age groups, disabled people and aesthetics in architecture | Discourages public amenities for different age groups, aesthetics and urban spaces (public realm) |
| Neighborhood Structure | Promotes traditional neighborhood structure completely in compliance with climatic and cultural conditions | Imitation of architectural styles of European countries that is highly unsuitable to be implemented in |

3.1. Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh
Historically significant informal settlement of Haveli Nau Nihal Singh is located inside the Mori Gate area within the context of two most important monuments of Lahore – Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (Constructed: 1837) and The Walled City - has been analyzed as a prototype to be replicated in new urban developments. Koochas acting as ceremonial urban spaces in these informal organizations not only provide the residents with a luxurious space for socialization and hundreds of routine activities but also act as gathering spaces during religious, cultural and political events.

There are two Koochas located adjacent to Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (Figure. 4). First is located at the West (Figure. 5)

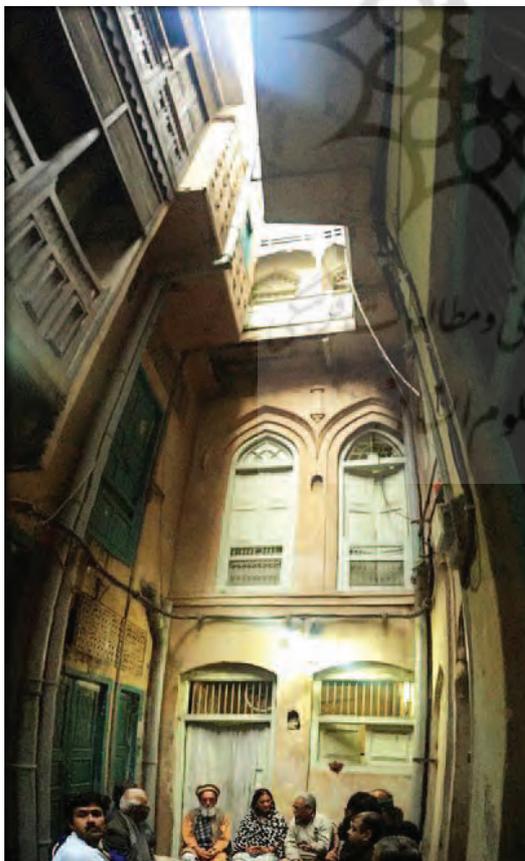


Fig.3: Koocha Chaudhry Muhammad Siddique (2016) Source: *The Lahore Project*, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=the%20lahore%20project>

and second (Figure. 6) is at the East of Haveli. Koocha at West is of a larger size as compared to the other one. Both of these perform the same socializing spatial qualities, urban benefits and aspiring planning techniques that are a characteristic of Walled City of Lahore’s informal settlements. Some of these characteristics¹⁶ are as the second table.

3.2. Urban Benefits being offered by Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh

Koochas in the informal settlement of Haveli Nau Nihal Singh have been formed by its users in such a way that benefits every age group – from toddlers to aged persons alike. The comparison

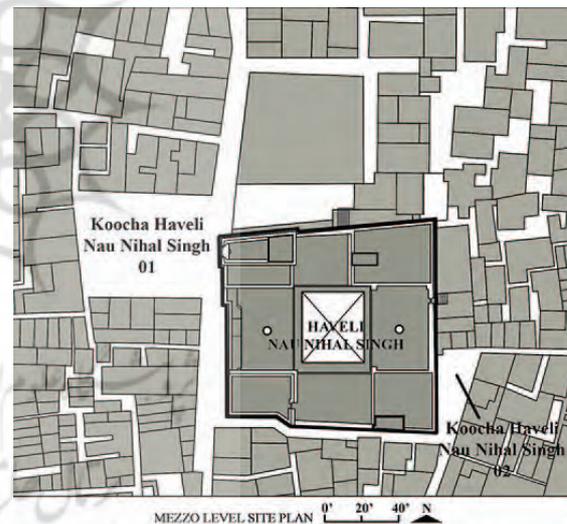


Fig. 4. Site Plan of Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (2015)



Fig. 5. Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh 01 (2015)

of lively, joyful and safest public Koochas present in this informal settlement is to none. Some of the urban benefits of these small but lively, joyful and multi-functional piazzas can be listed as:

3.2.1. Categorizing Koocha Nau Nihal Singh

There are two main methods of cate-

gorizing squares – by function and by form. While analyzing the function of a square, Vitruvius said ‘it should be proportionate to the number of inhabitants, so that it may not be too small a space to be useful, or look like a desert waste for lack of population’.¹⁷ The types of space needed in a city are: the setting for a civic building; the principal meet-

| Parameters | Definition | Features | Contribution to Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh | Visual Presentation |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| House Extensions | Spaces that are a part of the public realm but have acquired private character through physical modifications | Stoop is an enlarged step of concrete less than 39 inches width being used as a step, seat, a workbench | The public nature of this part of the house allows a greater contact with street life in <i>Koocha</i> |  |
| Workplaces | Economic activities like small retail shops as <i>khokhas</i> , <i>koisks</i> etc | Simple hand tools and primitive techniques are used | <i>Koochas</i> are not just spaces for circulation and socialization but also being used as workplaces |  |
| Small shops | Extremely small in size, their commerce and intimate proximity makes them important | Located right in the <i>Koocha</i> at corners and on ground level of houses | In the case of tea-shops they function as neighborhood meeting places and informal social centers |  |
| Trees | Trees along with shade play the role of a public building in <i>Koocha</i> No.02 | The public square grows around the tree and is common in informal <i>Koochas</i> | Shaded trees are used as outdoor classrooms, meeting places, workspaces and as markets |  |
| Public Structures | Sitting platforms (present in front of Haveli Nau Nihal Singh) and entry gates act as public structures | Public structures provide identity to the public environment | Public structures act as landmarks and visual reference points in these <i>Koochas</i> |  |

ing places, places for great ceremonial occasions; spaces for entertainment around buildings such as theatres, cinemas, restaurants and cafes; spaces for shopping, shopping street, arcades and markets; spaces around which offices are grouped; spaces of a semi-public nature around which residential accommodation is arranged; (Figure. 7) and finally, the spaces associated with urban traffic junctions.¹⁸

Observing on a micro-scale, all the



Fig. 6. Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh 02 (2015)

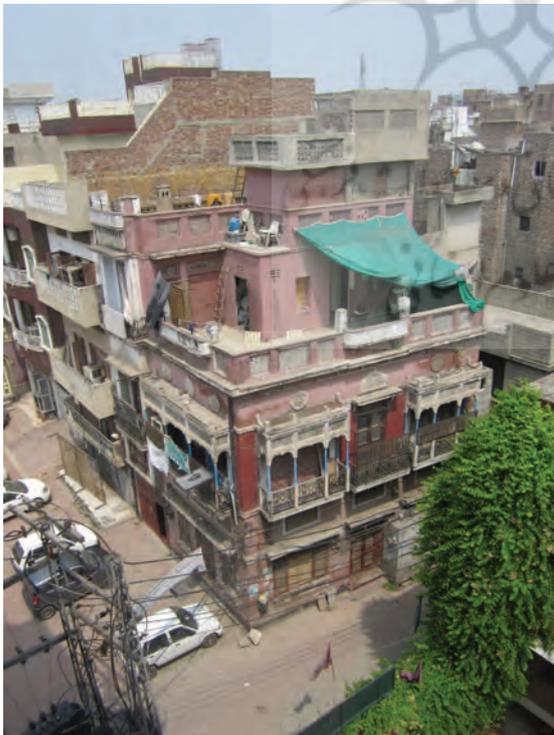


Fig. 7. A mixed-use building located in Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (2015)

above discussed characteristics are fully justified by Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh. The presence of Haveli Nau Nihal makes this Koocha a setting with a civic building providing a great ceremonial place (Figure. 8) with a lively mixed-use community. Semi-public nature with surrounding residential accommodation provides a greater level of security 24 hours a day.

3.2.2. Symbolic Meaning attached with Koocha Nau Nihal Singh

All great civic art is in tune with the profound depth of our emotions. There is an all-aesthetic experience, a deep core of valuation which owes little to critical judgement.¹⁹ Belonging to the nobility that once existed during the Sikh Raj (1799-1849) that influenced the whole Punjab region of the Indian Subcontinent, this Koocha holds a unique sentimental affect in peoples mind. It nurtures their sense of superiority, once acclaimed grandeur that has to be achieved again.

3.2.3. Koocha Nau Nihal Singh – A Node; A Strategic Spot in a City?

In The Image of the City Lynch found the node to be one of the elements by which a city is recognized and under-



Fig. 8. Eid celebrations in Koocha Haveli Nau Nihal Singh (2015)

Fig. 9. *Small scale kiosks in Koocha (2015)*



stood. In short, the node is ‘imageability’ or a strong image. As he says ‘Nodes are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is travelling’.²⁰ Koocha Nau Nihal may be classified as a ‘Definite Center’ offering a remarkable influence on the micro-settlement as if a reason binding that micro-urban fabric.

3.2.4. The Form of Koocha Nau Nihal Singh

According to Paul Zucker and Sitte²¹ five archetypal forms of a square are:

3.2.4.1. *Closed square where the space is self-contained*

3.2.4.2. *Dominated square where the space is directed towards the main building*

3.2.4.3. *Nuclear square where space is formed around a centre*

3.2.4.4. *Grouped squares where spatial units are combined to form larger compositions*

3.2.4.5. *Amorphous square where space is unlimited*

While analyzing Koocha Nau Nihal

Singh, a self-contained space having a direction towards dominated main building that is Haveli Nau Nihal Singh fits in the best (Figure. 9).

3.2.5. Ceremonial Arts in Koocha Nau Nihal Singh

Koochas enhance the sense of place by connecting the residents all together through socialization. In this way the anti-social behaviour such as theft, vandalism and arson is deactivated and youngsters are promoted towards physical activities such as sports and indigenous games. Not only these multi-purpose spaces (Figure: 5.1 and 6.1) accommodate numerous activities like religious celebrations including Eid, Pakistan Day celebrations (Figure: 7.1) but also help in increasing the morale of residents by enhancing cultural and political enthusiasm through adequate space provision. It is only through these Koochas that children have safest spaces for playing indigenous games while their mothers can keep an eye on them from the kitchens (bawarchi-khanas).

Major accessing streets are nearly pedestrianized having limited vehicular accesses ranging from push/pull carts, mopeds, scooters and four wheelers.

3.2.6. Koocha Nau Nihal Singh as a Micro Lahore

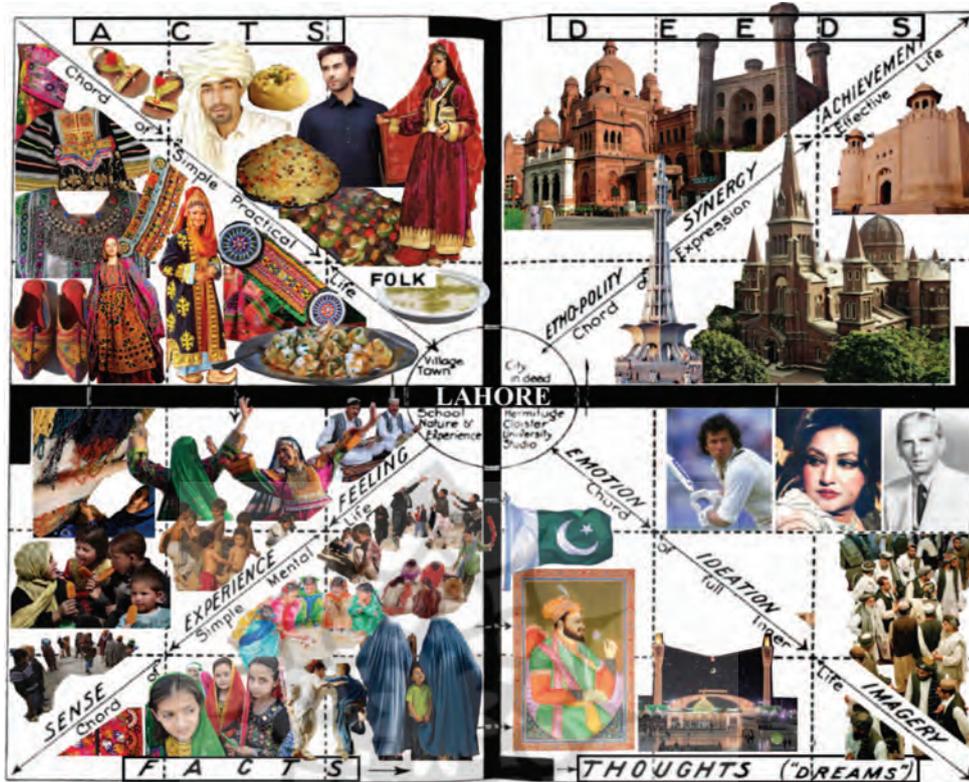


Fig.10. An overlay of Lahore's Life on Patrick Geddes Notation of Life (published: 1927). It helps in explaining the Lahore's Life experienced on a micro scale in Koocha Nau Nihal Singh.

4.1. An Overview and Conclusions

Due to the rapid population growth of Lahore, swift urbanization and modern movement's split function model of urban planning, in the next decade Lahore will be stretching far across South-West. Majority of the stretched landscaped will be consisting of residential land-use. If the current trend continues, residential schemes located on out-skirts of Lahore will be a deserted area after a certain period of day timings. A model of mixed-use lively community has been analyzed and a centralized foci has been discussed so as to inspire the upcoming generation of architects, planners and road engineers in order to convenience them towards the benefits of our traditional rather indigenous planning techniques. A Koocha has been studied in due course so as to present each cluster with its own community socializing point. Foci help in attracting the residents as if it is a magnet.

Koochas of a variety of sizes, form and function from the Walled City of Lahore are compared with present day trends and thus presented in this case study so as to portray that it does not matter what the Koocha physically possesses but the space that it offers, the socializing benefits it presents to all the age-groups are a point of consideration. Patrick Geddes "Notation of Life" has been overlaid with the "Life

of Lahore” so as to study the activities, efforts, benefits and leisures that Lahori life offers to its residents. The same can be experienced on a micro scale in Koocha Nau Nihal Singh.

Koocha Nau Nihal Singh acting as a self-contained space having a dominated Haveli Nau Nihal Singh abutting its side can be referred as a prototype for designing focal nodes of futuristic urban housing societies. We could also analyze different clusters of historic informal settlements in Lahore through archival research in the chronological order of their development and documentation especially to study those beautiful and unintentionally carved Koochas, recessed areas and pockets present in these clusters used by children for playing primitive games. As such no considerable work has been carried out previously in documenting these informal historically significant Koochas. A variety of public squares and other informal meeting places acting as socializing magnets with multifaceted activities that take place in these areas can also be analyzed and documented. These findings can be easily incorporated in futuristic urban landscapes.

All the parameters discussed in this paper are proposed as a little effort in convincing those real estate developers who consider residential schemes as money machines merely. With the incorporation of Koochas and other traditional urban crafts and benefits, these schemes may rise from mere money making machines to living spaces appropriate for Lahoris in particular and Pakistanis at large.

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