PAPER #6.04

AN INQUIRY INTO THE GENIUS LOCI OF KARACHI'S BOHRI BAZAAR AREA IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Genius Loci or the 'Spirit of place' refers to the tangible and intangible characteristics of a place as regards several aspects. This concept relates to a deeper meaning of a place and its relationship with the environment. Genius Loci is not merely associated with the city's urban fabric; instead, it is infused within the experience/ setting of the place. The paper discusses the connotation of Genius Loci as an important lens or a possible vocabulary for a much more layered and in-depth analysis of the Bohri Bazaar area in Saddar Bazaar quarter in Karachi, Pakistan.

Bohri Bazaar is one of the early shopping streets developed during the British era in 1839, parallel with the concept of independent market buildings like Cunningham market (demolished in the late 19th century) or the Empress market, among many during British rule in Karachi. Its location within the Saddar Bazaar quarter in Karachi places it exceptionally at the central commercial spine of the city. The British designed the bazaar in Gridiron geometry to orient the users at their ease. The area is romanticized as an oriental bazaar because of its historical nature that homogeneously absorbs the local narrow street layouts and neighborhood context, giving a unique identity to its urban, architectural, and functional design. The methodology followed for this research is based on different sections. The first section is based on a literature review relating to the

concept of Genius Loci and then literature on the Bohri Bazaar. The second section is based on the fieldwork conducted between 2020-21 to articulate a description of the area according to the concept of genius loci by physically visiting the site and surveying the Bazaar. Both sections are combined to develop a discussion on the genius loci of Bohri Bazaar for collective conclusions/outcomes. These conclusions are not a singular or solidified statement but an invitation for further investigation.

KEYWORDS

Genius Loci; spirit of place; Bohri Bazaar; Saddar Bazaar quarter; British heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The relevance of research

Karachi, a city developed by the British, is one of the world's largest metropolitan cities. Due to the economic boost and increase in urban population, the country's largest port city faces many challenges related to the rise in population, shortage of land, and modern comfort amenities (Cheema, 2007; lqbal et al., 2022; Lari & Lari, 2001). Land developers and building owners are replacing the city's historic fabric with high-rise buildings to overcome these issues. Bohri Bazaar (Fig. 1), located at



the junction of main roads in Saddar Bazaar quarter, is also facing an existential threat due to land mafia. Bohri Bazaar is one of the early shopping streets developed during the British era in 1839, parallel with the concept of independent market buildings like Cunningham market (demolished in the late 19th century) or the Empress market, among many during British rule in Karachi. (Laiq, 2022).



Figure 1. Showing Bohri Bazaar location in Saddar Bazaar Quarter in blue color. Source: Cad Drawing HC-DAPNED, edited by Syed Hamid Akbar (first author)

The concept of bazaar originated from the oriental philosophy of a marketplace, sometimes also referred to as Moorish Bazaar by the west. This concept is generally associated with the middle eastern, Persia, and Indian regions. Bazaar not only has economic value but also has strong communal importance. These were/are the places with which people do not only associate in terms of user value; instead, they play a significant part in their everyday lives.

Traditionally, the bazaars used to be covered with high vaulted ceilings, often decorated with mosaic or frescos. Some examples of oriental-covered bazaars are Grand Bazaar Istanbul, Khan el Khalili Bazaar Cairo, Grand Bazaar Tabraiz, and Dhak (Covered) Bazaar Shikarpur, etc. At present, these bazaars serve as charming tourist destinations, not merely because of their architectural significance but also the experience and knowledge they offer of the ancient times.

In contrast, the Bohri Bazaar was conceptually developed as an open-to-sky shopping streets marketplace accessible to both pedestrians and vehicles. Usually these shopping streets were developed in the historical centers of the cities, with buildings (Historic and often enlisted properties in present time) with a dual functionality: commercial on the ground, and residential on the upper floors. Some examples from the world are Champs Elysees, Paris, France; Istiklal Street, Istanbul, Turkey; Nizami Street, Baku, Azerbaijan Chandini Chowk Bazaar Delhi,India and, Bohri Bazaar, Karachi, Pakistan. The area got its name from the Bohra Muslim community, which owned most of the shops in that area. Despite acquiring its name from a single community, Bohri Bazaar holds a special significance among the various communities residing in Karachi. The research focus is to investigate the spirit of this place in terms of urban, social, and communal attributes, in view of the concept of genius loci and its three core elements of environment, culture, and belonging as proposed by the Norwegian architect Norberg Schulz (1926-2000) making it highly relevant to be studied as a case study for this research

1.2. Methodology

The methodology for this study is devised into two sections. The first section presents a literature review of the concept of genius loci and then the historical background of Karachi, specifically focusing on the study area of Bohri Bazaar. The literature review of the concept of genius loci helped to understand the meaning of the word 'Genius Loci' and how it is related to people about their built architecture and the urban environment. The literature review regarding the historic development of Karachi and specifically Bohri Bazaar was helpful in understanding the target area's geographical location and the bazaar's grid iron geometry. The literature review guided the research towards the second section of the study, which was research fieldwork. The first author initiated the research fieldwork from December 2020 to January 2021. The purpose of the fieldwork was to visit the Bohri Bazaar area to have a personal experience of the site and record the observations by taking photographs of the area and interacting with the users. Some informal. semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the building owners and users in the Bohri Bazaar area based on the initial outcomes of the literature review. During the fieldwork, different archival departments were also accessed to collect historical maps, documents, and photographs of the area. The outcome of both activities were combined to provide a collective conclusion of the study.

The first section of the literature review related to the concept of genius loci and Bohri Bazaar helped develop an image of the area. But the second section of research fieldwork conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 and collecting the archival documents, as well as physically visiting the site aided in feeling the three core elements of genius loci: environment, culture, and belonging defined by Norberg-Schulz(Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

2. LITERATURE

2.1. Genius Loci as Concept

Human culture is very strongly linked to places (Vogler & Vittori, 2006). The combined characteristics of its atmosphere define a place, with every place holding unique characteristics that can be tangible and intangible in form. Scholars define these characteristics as the place's genius loci (El-Saqqa & Mohamed, 2011; Jiang & Lin, 2022; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Vecco,

2020). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines genius loci as the pervading deity or spirit of a place which was first coined in the 16th century . (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, 2022). But the origin of the concept of genius loci or 'Spirit of Place' goes back to Roman times. In Roman mythology, not only did humans have a special character or quardian angel but also the place had a protective spirit of a place known as the 'Genius Loci'(Christou et al., 2019; Vecco, 2020; Vogler & Vittori, 2006). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of genius loci became a metaphor in literature and poetry of many writers like Alexander Pope and Vernon Lee (Stepanchuk et al., 2020). In the modern world, the concept of genius loci was first used in 1976 by Relph to study the environment. But the Norwegian architect Norber Schulz in 1980 associated the term with the built environment (Jiang & Lin, 2022: Vecco, 2020). In his book (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), argues that genius loci is a long-term process of human interaction and its physical environment to pursue the personal identity and authenticity of the place to find its existential value or meaning. According to Schulz, genius loci fulfills the material and spiritual needs of the people. It is the intangible feelings of a tangible place which the people experience when visiting the site. Schulz and many other authors argue that this feeling can be perceived physically and spiritually (Christou et al., 2019; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Stepanchuk et al., 2020; Vecco, 2020). These scholars had explained and associated the connection of aenius loci to the built environment, whether it be a small room or an individual building or the urban layout.

Schulz has also proposed three core elements: environment, culture and belonging to understand a building's or an area's Genius loci. Different authors have tried to explain these elements in association to urban layout. According to them, 'environment' is the atmosphere which is created by user activities in an area; 'culture' is the architecture, forms, styles condensed in the area and belonging means the intangible association, relation

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or ownership of users with the area which is developed by the time (Jiang & Lin, 2022; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Stepanchuk et al., 2020; Vecco, 2020). Based on the definition provided by different scholars, it is clear that genius loci is the combination of the tangible and intangible aspects of a building or an area which comes together to present a unique character. In 2008, during the 16th general assembly meeting of ICOMOS declaration on the preservation of spirit of place was passed, which gave a precise definition of the spirit of place:

"Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place ". (ICOMOS, 2008)

The vocabulary based on the definition of genius loci or 'spirit of place' by different authors and ICOMOS and the three core elements proposed by Norberg Schulz Bohri Bazaar will be analyzed to investigate the genius loci of the area.

2.2. Historic Background of Bohri Bazaar

In 1839, the British saw a strong opportunity in the port location and its activities for the future located at the important maritime trade route from east to west and took over the city of Karachi. It was a small mud fortified town with a population of 15,000 living in the fort city and its sub-urban areas known as 'Kolachi or Kurrachi (later as Karachi)' from its Talpur rulers. (Cheema, 2007; Lari & Lari, 2001). The native town of Karachi in 1839 was not big and impressive as compared to the city of Thatta and Hyderabad. However, it does share the similarity of spatial organization of organically developed narrow alleys with small semi-public and private spaces. (Burton, 1851; Pithawalla & Martin-Kaye, 1946). The British rulers started to develop the city beyond the native town on the European spatial patterns of grid iron layout. The Saddar Bazaar was among the initial areas they developed(Lari & Lari, 2001) Fig 2. After occupation of the city in 1839, the British troops were stationed one mile from the fort near the Rambagh area (a native sub-urban guarter). and later in the same year moved one mile north-east of the Rambagh area to establish a Cantonment area for their troopers, as well as the area adjacent to the cantonment. Their some temporary shops were also laid out to provide basic amenities to the British troopers and their families. The area was given the name 'Suddar Bazaar', which later became 'Saddar Bazaar Ouarter'. These shops are thought to be at the place which is now known as the Bohri Bazaar (Burton, 1851; Neill, 1845).

The layout of the Bohri Bazaar also followed the grid-iron patterns, with the open to sky model but the streets were laid out in the dense street network replicating the native narrow alley forms (Lari & Lari, 2001) (Figure 2).

This allowed the area to expand both vertically and horizontally. The temporary shops were in the form of tents to accommodate a large number of sutlers. Later, the tent shops were replaced by permanent buildings following the individual market concept with shops on the ground floor and upper stories for residential and storage purposes. Within no time, the Bohri Bazaar area became a famous shopping center for the European and British officers and their families. Later, in 1841 Seth Naomul Hotchand(1804-1878) constructed the first four houses with the shops in the bazaar and started his own business. (Baillie, 1890: Hotchand & James, 1982; Lari & Lari, 2001). This initiative by Seth Naomul also encouraged other traders to open the grain and cloth shops for the convenience of the resident of quarter. During research field work by the first author, archival maps and drawings of some buildings from Karachi Metropolitan Corporation(KMC) archives show that these shops were located in the area which is now known as Bohri Bazaar



Figure 2. Left-Plan of old town quarter of Karachi from 1874 showing the narrow and unplanned streets of the town. Right-Plan of Bohri Bazaar from 1874, showing the grid-iron pattern of streets. Source: Lari-2001

2.3. Analysis of Literature

The dual spatial quality of the Bohri Bazaar gave the area a unique status to become a famous landmark during the British time. Although, till the late 19th century, native people were not allowed to move into British developed guarters. But after 1880, when the British allowed natives to construct their own buildings in 'White Quarters', the Bohri Bazaar became a focus point for the natives to open their shops. Moreover, until the beginning of the 20th century, Bohri Bazaar was the commercial area where not only British/ European people came for shopping but also the central hub for natives. With the integration of British and native people. Saddar Bazaar became a central hub of social and cultural activities with many cinemas, restaurants and bars, while the Bohri Bazaar area of the guarter was the economic/commercial point.

Although there was the Cunningham market in Saddar Bazaar quarter in the 19th century and in 1889 Empress market was constructed on the independent market concept, but by the end of the 19th century Bohri Bazaar became a commercial center with a different typology of buildings with ground floor having shops while the upper stories were used as the residential or storage floors. The historic timeline of key changes of Karachi in relation to Bohri Bazaar can be seen in the Table 1 below:

3. EXPERIENCING THE GENIUS LOCI OF BOHRI BAZAAR

In the built environment of Karachi, without any doubt, the Empress market is the most famous landmark of British era in Saddar Bazaar quarter and has played an important role in the socio-economic development of the area(Soomro et al., 2020). But Bohri Bazaar also holds a unique status throughout the history. The narrow congested grid iron alignment of streets with commercial activities related to daily use items have created a unique charming environment in the area.

If we see the Bohri Bazaar area according to these elements, then it is the atmosphere of narrow streets, with its user led continuation of commercial activities (environment) which still gives a feeling of a dual spatial quality when visiting the area. Due to the increase in the population of Karachi, the Bohri Bazaar streets have become more and more crowded. Furthermore, the shops' owners use the street to extend their business and put their stalls in the street to extend their businesses in informal way. This has made the streets more congested and difficult to walk through, but it also creates a more local atmosphere for the users (Figure 3).

S.No	Year	Milestones/Key Changes	
01	1839.a	Occupation of the Karachi by British, temporary tent shops laid-out at the area	
		Known as <mark>Bohri</mark> Bazaar.	
02	1839.b	Development of new quarter by the British on Grid-iron pattern.	
03	1841.a	Seth <u>Naomul Hotchand</u> constructed the first four houses with the shops in the bazaar	
04	1841.b	Grain and Cloth shops in Bohri Bazaar.	
05	1843	Karachi as the Capital of Sindh Province, Saddar Bazaar Quarter as the main shopping area for Europeans	
06	1880	Native people allowed to move to British Quarter,	
07	1889	Construction of Empress Market.	
08	1888	Boulten Market (circa)	
09	1888	Lambert Market (circa)	
10	1888	Mesham Lea Market (circa)	

Table 1. Historic key dates and milestones of the Karachi city, related to Bohri Bazaar- Table is based upon the literature review and archival data collected by the Syed Hamid Akbar & Tania Ali Soomro (first & second authors)



Figure 3. Present condition of narrow and congested streets in Bohri Bazaar with street encroachment by shop owners Left-View into the Albert Street in Bohri Bazaar from Zaib un nisa Street. Middle- View into the Wood Burn Street in Bohri Bazaar from Zaib un nisa Street. Right-Street view of Bohra Street Source: Images taken by Syed Hamid Akbar(First author) during 2020-2021 fieldwork

During the field work, exploring the streets and photographing the environment of the streets gave a feeling of walking in some old walled city from the Mughal era time. But looking at the facades and the material of the British era buildings, of which mostly are in partially demolished or partially maintained condition, aligned in the streets laid out in the European urban form revealed the symbols of the British past creating a unique culture (Figure 4, Figure 5).

While visiting, interacting with the area users was the key moment to understand that the

narrow street layout with British/European style buildings and the present congested spaces in streets is creating a sense of ownership, integrity, and an intangible connection between the people and area. Moreover, users whether they are building owners, businessmen, shoppers or passersby feel a connection of belonging with the area. The whole atmosphere of the Bohri Bazaar streets aligned with historic buildings from British era with the dual spatial quality of commercial and residential activities provide a picturesque backdrop of the past in the present.



Figure 4. Panoramic Street view of Bohra Street in Bohri Bazaar showing the condition of British era buildings and multi-functional activities going-on in the area. Source: Images taken by Syed Hamid Akbar(First author) during 2020-2021 fieldwork



Figure 5. Panoramic Street view of Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road in Bohri Bazaar showing the condition of British era buildings and multi-functional activities going-on in the area. Source: Images taken by Syed Hamid Akbar(First author) during 2020-2021 fieldwork

4. DISCUSSION: GENIUS LOCI AS A VOCABULARY FOR BOHRI BAZAAR

To conserve a place or a building according to users' changing requirements is a difficult task. Specifically when a place has historic value, it is even more difficult to look for the vocabulary to analyze and understand a place. In the context of Bohri Bazaar area which has historic, social, cultural and economic value, the concept of genius loci can be a moderation point. Analysis of the Bohri Bazaar apropos the three elements of genius loci which Norberg Schulz has proposed in his book show that the area has a unique spirit of place.

Karachi is also known as a dual city(Lari & Lari, 2001) holding the spirit of the colonial past and local traditions, planning, and culture all condensed to each other. The Bohri Bazaar area has this dual spatial quality or we can call it a unique spirit of place. And this genius loci has become one of the main reasons the area has survived in its urban and architectural layout till now. The genius loci of Bohri Bazaar has made it possible to withstandthe increase in population growth and changing user requirements.

The spirit of the place of Bohri Bazaar represents both tangible and intangible attributes (Table 2) which make it an outstanding landmark till today since its formation in the early 19th Century.

In terms of value assessment, the organic nature of Bohri Bazaar has always conferred a sense of integrity to the traditional urban culture of the city. It has served not just as a focal point of trade but as a place of socializing and gathering. Besides trade and small-scale industrial/ economic activities, it also operates on a multifunctional bases comprising of various services like eateries, juice shops etc, and even cultural tourism. This emphasizes the importance of the multifunctional character of the area.

Bohri bazaar is a one of its kind open to sky bazaar built during the British era that still survives. The area has not changed much except for the little encroachments and illegal expansions, which are temporary in nature and certainly can be reversed. These are making the streets more congested but create a sense of belonging in the users. In the present time, the concept of shopping streets has somewhat shifted to the centrally airconditioned shopping malls and plazas, following contemporary design and feel of modern urban centers. But the Bohri Bazaar is still a center of commercial buying and selling activities for many people. The shopping streets of Bohri Bazaar still bestow the oriental feel of a souk where the shops are set up in an organic format, often romanticized as middle eastern traditional markets, thus making it a unique asset of the city.

Tangible Values	Intangible Values
Form & Design (Building Facades), temporary encroachments, materiality of buildings and pathways/streets, <u>Bohri</u> Bazaar Location in Saddar Bazaar Quarter.	Street pattern (gridiron layout), uses & functions, Users sense of belonging to area, <u>Bohri</u> Bazaar Connection to its neighborhood. Personal feeling visiting the <u>Bohri</u> Bazaar(by first & second author).

Table 2. Different attributes studied, observed & analyzed to understand the Genius Loci of the Bohri Bazaar

The Bohri Bazaar streets are aligned with heritage buildings are very picturesque and can be compared with the Istiklal shopping street in Istanbul, Turkey and Nizami street in Baku, Azerbaijan. Unlike Bohri Bazaar, the neighborhood of the latter two examples have been gentrified to a great extent and purely dedicated as tourist destinations. incorporating high end retail shops. Perhaps, this has caused a good impetus to the economy of the country but has deprived the lower income group of society from benefitting from it. Bohri Bazaar, to great extent, has preserved its original retail typology benefitting all social and income groups of society. In addition, the design that allows/allowed merely pedestrian accessibility bestows a sense of freedom to all the users, without compromising the experience and the touristic attraction of the shopping streets in Bohri Bazaar.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the Genius loci or the Spirit of the pace is a challenging task, given that its attributes can be found both in tangible and intangible aspects of the place. The study shows that studying Bohri Bazaar from a tangible characteristics' perspective has helped in better acknowledging the intangible concept of the spirit of the place. The spirit is deeply rooted in the 'experience' of the place in presence of the historic ensemble of the city. Thus, it will not be wrong to say that the rich setting of the Bazaar and the heritage buildings create a historic cultural landscape. At present, the Historic Urban Landscape(HUL) of the context has been altered to a great extent, given the fact that most of the colonial buildings have been gutted down and replaced with new (out of the context) structures. But the dual spatial quality of the area has helped it survive the wrath of time and changing requirements. Despite lack of maintenance and neglect. the architectural heritage of the Bohri Bazaar

still shows potential to be preserved, which eventually can support in preserving the spirit of the place of the bazaar too. To conclude, it is said that Genius loci is not merely associated with the urban fabric of the city, it is infused within the experience/setting of the place, underlining an invisible wave of the culture.

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