

MAKING LAHORE MODERN:
CONSTRUCTING AND IMAGINING A COLONIAL CITY

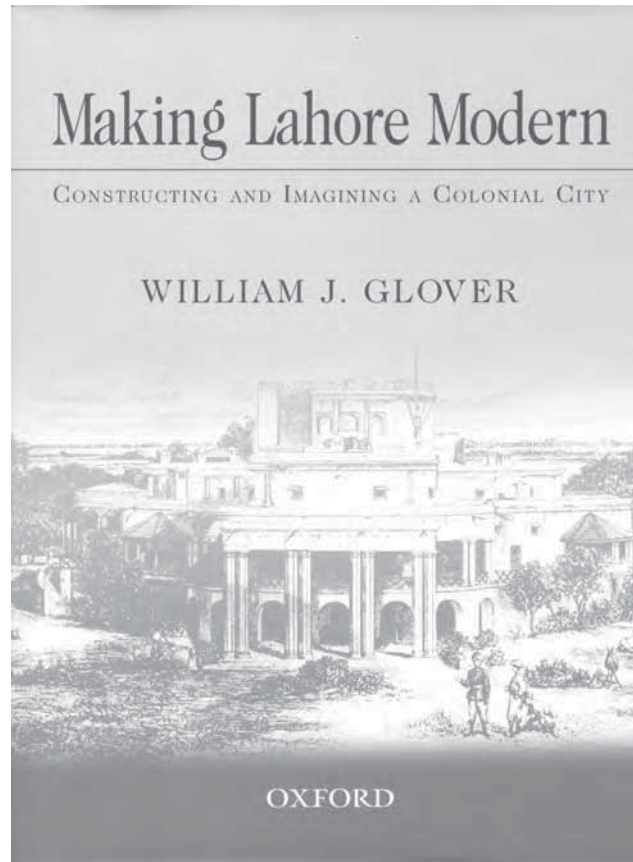
by
William J. Glover

Reviewed by Sarwat Viqar

In *Making Lahore Modern*, William Glover, while elucidating the forms of British colonial planning, draws attention to the ways in which this new discourse of architectural design and planning was constitutive of both urban form and urban subjectivity in Lahore. At the heart of British conceptions of urban planning was a preoccupation with what Glover terms the “object lesson.” Rooted in the utilitarian ethic of emerging European thought, the British colonial spatial imagination was preoccupied with and informed by “the systematic observation and analysis of material phenomena on the ground in an effort to render them useful to a discourse on the proper distribution of objects in space” (29).

The first chapter lays out the pre-colonial spatial configuration of Lahore in which we learn the important role that this configuration, composed of the old urban footprint, monuments, both ruined and intact, and old re-used buildings, played in the reinvention of Lahore as a colonial city. Glover outlines the older planning order of the city in which “ethnically diverse practices of place-making” (9) were constitutive of Lahore’s urban identity. His account of Lahore’s past also points to a dynamic process of urban development that had been underway long before colonial intervention, and features of which persisted well into and beyond the colonial period.

In the second chapter, Glover concludes that the colonial spatial imagination was able to exert itself most successfully in the suburban rather than inner urban areas of Lahore. This conclusion speaks to his earlier focus on the pre-colonial spatial order of Lahore, which he suggests, proved, to a certain extent, “inscrutable” for colonial planners. Thus interventions in the inner city were made in more of a piecemeal fashion and this is where the idea of the ‘object lesson’ became useful. While at the same time, much more intrusive and larger scaled interventions were taking place in the countryside. Indian villages became a major object of improvement in terms of new planning principles and sanitation regimes. Here, the over-riding concern was to



create an “exemplary milieu” as a way to achieve social reform.

The major part of Glover’s work concerns the making of colonial Lahore as a collaborative enterprise between colonial and local elites. The collaborative ethos was rooted in creating a certain kind of legitimacy for colonial rule, a rule of benevolence. Colonial historiographers working on other colonial contexts, notably Gwendolyn Wright have pointed to similar efforts at architectural collaboration in the colonies that created new architectural settings and idioms.¹ An interesting aspect of this collaboration that Glover covers

* See Wright, Gwendolyn. 1987. “Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy 1900-1930.” *The Journal of Modern History* 59:2. pp. 291-316

is architectural pedagogy. By examining the early architectural curriculums as well as the settings in which they were taught, he brings to the fore the historical particularities of the circumstances that created what were later adopted as the norms of architectural instruction and practice.

Based on early accounts of Lahore's building traditions which included colonial debates on what kind of changes could be effected in the built environment, as well as early building plans and permits and anecdotal evidence, Glover lays out the traditional patterns of use and appearance of the residential buildings of the old city and how they appeared to British observers. In the colonial mind, a comparison was inevitable – for example Compton observes that “Indian houses had no furniture” and “the size and quality of houses bore little burden in terms of annotating the status of households” (129). These observations offer interesting insights into the way expectations of what the appropriate built environment should be, were later incorporated into the design and use of buildings. Glover takes up the example of the Model Colony, relying on a catalogue published in 1937 and entitled Joshi's *Modern Designs*, to expose the way new residential layouts, linked to new patterns of living, were introduced and became constitutive of modern subjectivity. He posits that the planners of these new developments “had no hesitation in adapting for the purpose Howard's garden city, a scheme whose intellectual roots may have been foreign but whose principles and assumptions had been made familiar over time in a multitude of colonial projects” (157). However, he makes it a point to emphasize that these Model Towns followed their own development in terms of patterns of social use and the developing needs and aspirations of the residents who “took as much of the garden-city model as they wanted or needed, holding on to those elements of family and social life they wanted to preserve intact” (129).

It was not just Indians who were adopting and adapting to new ways of living, but the British as well. Seldom have colonial accounts been examined to understand the ways that colonial rulers were subject to local influences. In that, Glover's account of the British Bungalow and its expression of “anxieties at home” is a welcome addition to emerging scholarship on the way metropolitan subjectivities were constituted through the colonial experience.² Glover also shows how the evolution of Bungalow design expressed the

tension between the colonial desire to maintain separation and segregation from the natives and the dependence on native domestic labour to maintain the household. This tension expressed itself in the “anxieties and ambivalences” of lived colonial experience which consisted of at the same time colonial guilt over having usurped native space and the longing to “be at home” in this home away from home. Glover draws extensively on the writings of Rudyard Kipling, an understandable choice when considering that the domestic realm often featured significantly in his work.

In the final chapter Glover explores urban writing on Lahore, emphasizing how narratives on the city were meant to convey certain didactic messages. Thus, for the British “Punjab's cities were increasingly seen as effective sites for the presentation of didactic messages, since abstract propositions about progress and cultural superiority could be revealed through monuments in tangible, material form” (187). There were older Indian traditions of history writing, though, which also informed emerging narratives on the city. For example, Chisti's encyclopedia on the city of Lahore, written in a “literary Persianate Urdu” relied for sources on authoritative accounts handed down through the generations which also consisted of legends and hearsay. Second-hand information was accepted as credible in the Indo-Islamic historiographic tradition, but not, however, by British reviewers who considered this method as unscientific and unreliable. Glover's point is that, even though the colonial spatial imagination worked to effect changes in the material and conceptual realms of the urban, it could never be sure that such changes had been effected in the way they had been envisaged. Other conceptual and material realms found their way into the fashioning of the urban and in doing so destabilized the notion that “materialist reform entailed principles – and produced effects – that were universal in nature” (199). This is one of the most interesting insights to emerge from his work which has significant implications for the way liberal frameworks are seen to be universally applicable. Ultimately Glover's work speaks to the “diverse expressions of modernity that emerged” from the colonial experience in which the local did not remain separate and external but was constitutive of the modern experience.

Glover's work does a great job of particularizing and denaturing the planning practices of colonial governance and is an important contribution to emerging scholarship on

2 See Chattopadhyay, Swati. 2006. *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*. Routledge. Chattopadhyay looks closely at the demands of trade and property transactions in colonial Calcutta and concludes that when Europeans started living and working in the colonial city they started adopting patterns of space-use, multi-functionality between residential and commercial, for example, that went against strict notions of segregated spaces defined by their functions.

South Asian planning governmentalities. There are echoes of Mitchell's work on colonial Egypt which also engaged with the question of the universalization of the particularities of colonial governance.³ However, where Mitchell engages quite thoroughly with the political context of colonial rule in Egypt, an examination of this context in colonial India seems a bit thin in Glover's work. Perhaps it would have been useful to see how social upheavals like collective demand-making, the independence movement, rising nationalism also worked with the specific local planning practices to constitute urban subjectivity in Lahore.

3 See Mitchell, Timothy. 1998. *Colonizing Egypt*. NY: Cambridge University Press. and Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.