

# **Spirit of the place<sup>i</sup>: Evolution and transformation of Istanbul Chowk Lahore**

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## **Abstract**

The main focus of this research is the study of Istanbul Chowk<sup>ii</sup> Lahore from the perspective of its historical evolution during the British Colonial period and post partition transformation. This is the first chowk or public space on the west end of the Mall<sup>iii</sup>, institutional in character and is an example of 19<sup>th</sup> century Colonial planning. The theoretical aspect of ‘Colonial spatial imagination’ is discussed in connection with the design of this unified urban space in its form and character. The intangible aspects of urban culture contributing towards the construction of ‘spirit of place’ over a period of time extending into the post partition era have also been explored. This research paper also studies the post partition gradual transformation of this place and identifies the spatial changes and loss of urban heritage which played an important role in forming the identity and spirit of this place.

Very few scholars have written about Lahore’s urban history and theory. One is William Glover (2011) who has discussed Colonial spatial imagination and planning in his book “Making Lahore Modern”. The other author who has theorised the aspect of people’s association with public places with Lahore as case study is Ana Suvorova (2011) in her book “Lahore: Topophilia of space and place”.

There is a need to develop a comprehensive scholarship on history, theory and design of public spaces and its impact on the urban culture in shaping the public places of Lahore to serve as a theoretical framework for post-colonial/ post partition spatial imagination and design, especially in the projects related to urban up gradation and regeneration of historic urban centres.

**Keywords:** place making, colonial spatial imagination, genius loci, palimpsest, topophilia, space semantics, place syntax

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<sup>i</sup> Concept of Genius loci

<sup>ii</sup> The name 'Istanbul Chowk' was given later, named after the city of Istanbul in Turkey. This area was known as 'Exhibition Road' during the British times and Patras Bukhari Chowk after partition, named after the famous writer and the former principal of Government College Lahore.

<sup>iii</sup> The Mall Road is named after the central street of London, which leads from Buckingham Palace to Trafalgar Square. Ceremonial royal processions pass down the Mall. This road was planned in 1851 by Col. Napier to connect city with the new cantonment that was 7 miles in the east.