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Lahore Fort as a Symbol of National Identity and Cultural Heritage in Pakistan

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Abstract

Lahore Fort, a witness to centuries of history, is situated on the northwestern side of Lahore. A monument, more than a collection of ancient buildings, is considered the finest example of a living chronicle of the empires, artistry, and cultural heritage. Its origin etched to ancient times, beginning with Emperor Akbar in the late 1500s. The Great Emperor, Akbar, transformed a humble mud-brick fort into a formidable stronghold, aimed at making Lahore the capital. Built on the city's edge, overlooking the Ravi River, the strategic location offered both defense and control. At present, Lahore Fort stands as a proud emblem of Pakistan's heritage, architectural evolution, and where echoes of the Mughal era, the reign of the Sikh Empire, and the colonial period still linger. The research investigates the process of selective preservation of Pakistan, which has a major effect on the nation's identity. It analyses the effects of government policies and ideologies on cultural heritage. The study aims to explore the tangible link between the Lahore Fort's representation as a symbol of national heritage and religious historical identity. The researcher employed a descriptive, analytical, and qualitative approach for the research.

Keywords: Lahore Fort, Historical Identity, Restoration, Preservation, National Heritage.

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1. Introduction

Historical monuments have been a symbol of national prestige and cultural heritage for any country. In Pakistan, historical monuments have acquired distinction after independence and have become a part of the national heritage. In the modern period, the consciousness has raised the importance of cultural heritage, and the monuments can be characterized as: those monuments which bear national significance, and the second one includes those that represent uniqueness in structure and design. The second kind of historical monuments is listed as world heritage and recognized as a part of civilization. Usually, their preservation is looked after with UNESCO's help. (Bernstein, 2013). However, ideological states like Pakistan take historical monuments more as national and religious entities to construct a shared sense of legitimacy, national identity, and collective memory. Primarily, use all these facts to foster patriotism and religious devotion among citizens. States choose selective preservation because they usually justify "authorized heritage" by picking certain pasts intertwined with current political strategies to push a selected political narrative (Jeffers, 2015). In this case, Pakistan is enriched by both types, national monuments and among those listed as World Heritage. The chosen world heritages range from the far back Indus Valley civilisation to the colonial era. Apparently, Lahore Fort is one of them and enjoys both statuses. Nevertheless, the research delves deeper, and it appears that history of Pakistan remains confused about which historical monuments could be designated as national heritage (Rahman, 1998). Following the ideology of Pakistan, based on the two-nation theory, is inclined towards defining monuments on the verge of religion, such as Muslim and Hindu monuments. Interestingly, this definition was fashioned by James Fergusson, a Scottish architectural historian (Fergusson, 2020). He classified the particular Indian architectural styles based on the religion and race of their builders in his work "The History of Indian and Eastern Architecture", published in the 19th century (Fergusson, 2020). Pakistan's ideological framework appears to have adopted this definition consciously. Lahore Fort is one of them. In this capacity, Lahore Fort has always been symbolized as a national identity at the government level. The Lahore fort always presented as a true reflection of the Mughal period, covering an area of approximately 20 hectares, comprising 21 architectural monuments and garden elements that represent the pinnacle of Mughal aesthetics and artistry (Khan et al., 2023). Pakistan's Islamic ideology covers every possible part of the Fort in its true representation of the Muslim Mughal Empire. Walking through the gates of Islamic ideological scholarship, each Mughal Emperor left a unique mark on Lahore Fort. Jahangir, Emperor Akbar's son, added the vibrant Picture wall and a mosaic depicting courtly life. Shah Jahan, famed for the Taj Mahal, brought white marbles, floral inlays, and built Sheesh Mahal. Aurangzeb, the last great Mughal, focused on military strength, adding the monumental Alamgiri Gate, now the fort's main entrance (Iftikhar, 2019). This gate, aligned with the Badshahi mosque, created a powerful axis of faith and authority. Each emperor's vision layered the strength onto the fort, making it a living record of Muslim empire ambition. The Lahore fort's architecture, was taken care by Pakistan's government to preserve Mughal art. From Akbar's robust red sandstones to Shah Jahan's ethereal marbles. Grand halls like the Diwan-i-Aam and Diwan-i-Khas hosted imperial ceremonies. The fort's gardens and the Sheesh Mahal, also known as the Palace of Mirrors, attract international visitors and contribute significantly to Pakistan's revenue (Khan, 2018). Every corner of the fort tells a story of creativity, power and refined taste. The Lahore fort remains a canvas of marble, mirrors and majesty. The Lahore Fort is not just a relic; it's a living symbol of Pakistan's cultural identity and pride. In 1981, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, drawing visitors from around the world to marvel at its beauty and history (Sarwar et al., 2024). After the Mughals, the Fort saw Sikh and British rule, each era adding new layers to its story. Despite wars and the passage of time, its wall endures, holding memories of dynasties

and pivotal events. For Pakistan, Shahi Qila is a direct link to Mughal splendor and a source of national inspiration. Exploring its palaces, mosques, and gardens is a journey through time, where history feels immediate and alive. Preserving the fort ensures future generations can learn from its stories and be inspired by its magnificence (Sarwar et al., 2024).

The Fort's transformation illustrates the complexities of preserving monumental architecture amid infrastructural modernisation, historical trauma, and political transition. The study also highlights the notable efforts in conservation and restoration from the authorities, especially the Department of Archaeology and the Walled City of Lahore (Koch, E. (2014)). In this research, special attention is given to key restoration projects such as the rehabilitation of the Sheesh Mahal, Diwan-i-Aam, the Alamgiri and Shah Burj Gates, Imperial Kitchens, basements and the famous Lahore Fort Picture Wall. The research explores the incorporation of the fort into national and heritage frameworks and connects dots with the specification of historical identity. Drawing from historical records, conservation documents and government reports, this article examines how the Lahore Fort's post-independence narrative reflects broader themes of cultural memory, heritage politics, restoration and preservation of the symbol of identity.

2. Research Methodology

The researcher adopted the qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine the ideological framing of Lahore Fort as a historical monument and a symbol of national identity. The research involves a systematic inquiry into past events, aimed at accurately interpreting and reconstructing history. The study method includes analyzing relevant primary and secondary sources to understand past events, their causes, as well as impact on subsequent developments. Primary data of the study includes Mughal-era chronicles such as the Akbarnama and Badshahnama. In addition, the research added the colonial administrative records and gazetteers produced under British rule. The official reports of the Department of Archaeology, the official website of State Bank of Pakistan Museum, the Lahore Fort Archaeological Excavation, the Surveys, the UNESCO World Heritage nomination files, and the post-independence conservation documents related to Lahore Fort are included. On the other hand, supplementary material, comprising government policy documents, museum artefacts, educational texts, and tourism narratives, is also examined to understand Pakistan's role in constructing national identity through heritage to foster patriotism or religious devotion. Particularly, the state's negligence and later conservation of the Sikh-period Samadhis, deliver a critical analysis to examine the intersection of heritage politics as well as state-led identity formation.

3. Historical Background

Lahore is the capital city of Punjab, the province of Pakistan. The roots of this name, "Lahore", are obscured because multiple theories exist, and etymology is not definitively known. The first historical source found in the documentation of Alberuni's book "Kitab-ul-Hind. He particularly mentioned the city as "Lauhavar" (Chaudhary, 1991). He wrote that the city is located on the east bank of the river Iravati. Traditionally, historians attributed its name to the mythic Lau, meaning 'a son of Lord Ram', remembered as the 'hero of the Ramayana of legendary age' (Latif, 1892). Fort is situated on the corner of North West City. In the reign of Mahmood of Ghazna, the history of Lahore fort started from the 11th century B.C., was constructed with mud bricks. In 1241, the building infrastructure was destroyed by the Mongols during their invasions and raids. In 1267, the fort was reconstructed by the Sultan Balban. This Fort was again targeted and brutally destroyed by various Timur's invasions until the Mughals captured the Fort (Latif, 1892). This period was a clear depiction of its splendor and the peak of Muslim heritage. In 1556, the Mughal

Emperor Akbar ordered the construction of the Fort, influenced by modern architectural designs (Chaudhary, 1999). Fort is also an evolution of Mughal Architecture. Akbar gave orders to construct the buildings of red sandstone. Akbar's major contributions to the Fort included three buildings: the audience Hall, the mosque, the quadrangle, and the basements. Persian Architectural styles, with a few additions, were brought by Emperor Jahangir. The marbles and refinement were introduced to the region by Shah Jahan. Badshahi Mosque and Alamgiri Gate were added to the architecture of Lahore Fort by Aurangzeb (Khan, 1974).

The Sikh and Colonial period brought many alterations to the buildings of Lahore Fort. Till 1849, Ranjeet Singh's family kept the Fort under their residence. The Sikh empire opened the gates of new conversions in the Fort. The religious identity was taken as a symbol of pride. The Moti Masjid was converted into a Sikh temple called 'Moti Mandir' during the Sikh Confederacy. The fort also served as a summer resort for the Sikh Empire. A three-door pavilion was also a major addition during Sikh rule. A few portions of the audience Hall as well as the Naag temple were destroyed under the Sikh empire. In addition, Mai Jindan Havelli was also modified by Sikhs. The colonial period also tried to construct one of its floors in the Lahore fort (Khan, 1961).

4. Lahore Fort: Under the Shadow of Pakistan

The partition of the subcontinent became a cause of the massive migration in modern times. After the Independence of Pakistan in 1947, Lahore city also suffered a lot of communal riots, violence and vehemence. At that time, the city had approximately 240,000 non-Muslim populations, comprised of Sikhs and Hindus (Tariq & Chawla, 2018). After the partitions, this population was forcefully led to the boundaries of India in return for about 400,000 Muslims who were living in the East Punjab and were dragged to make their way to Pakistan's borders, mainly Lahore (Tariq & Chawla, 2018). The demographic change became a hot button issue and brought lots of chaos, violence and butchery in the city. During the migration, lots of the population rushed to take refuge inside the ancient forts, tombs and old constructed buildings. Later, the governments of India and Pakistan decided to turn these heritages into refugee camps for the people forcefully displaced from both countries to the opposite directions (Dales, 1960). Millions of them died, and the rest were shifted into the refugee camps established in cities (Kabir & Hayat, 2016). The Lahore fort was also one of them. After the partition, Lahore was not the same city. During the communal riots, the old heritages, historic monuments, and colonial buildings were also under attack. Simultaneously, the Badshahi Mosque and the Lahore Fort were at the top of the list. At that juncture, Muslims were seeking refuge under these buildings, and the protection of these master pieces was of the last priority for them than their own lives (Kabir et al., 2017). During these circumstances, the Lahore Fort played a significant role as a refugee camp for the migrants, where people found shelter coming from India to save their lives. Under the heat of communal riots, Lahore Fort was under attack by others as a symbol of Muslim heritage. The Lahore fort's rich historical infrastructure was harmed unapologetically by the Sikhs and the British before independence. In addition, the rest of the buildings were damaged by the charged mobs during communal riots after independence (Kaur & Malhi, 2019). Furthermore, when the state of Pakistan officially announced that it would turn the fort into a refugee camp for settlers for an extended period, the fort became increasingly vulnerable to unexpected damage. At that time, it was clear that no one cared more about preserving old heritage than about protecting their own lives.

There were no delicate arrangements for refugees during the time of chaos; the people tried to settle wherever they found a place to adjust. The fort and palaces were of the least priority at that time (Imran et al., 2018).

At peace, Pakistan inherited the Fort as a symbol of national prestige. The government tried to renovate the ruins of Lahore Fort to modernize it. The entrances of the Akbari and Alamgiri Gates were sealed with bricks. The Postern Gate, built by the British, was opened to the public. Subsequently, the Akbari and Alamgiri gates were also reopened to the public and ticket counters were constructed inside them (Imran et al., 2018). Decades later, the Alamgiri Gate was closed again for security reasons, and the Postern Gate remained the only entrance for the public till today.

5. Lahore Fort as a Symbol of National Identity

Pakistan has represented the Lahore Fort as a powerful symbol of Pakistan's national identity with the amalgamation of Islamic ideology. The Lahore fort is a symbol repeated in state-sanctioned mediums like currency notes, tourism tickets, postage stamps, as well as official promotional materials by Pakistan. The currency notes, postage stamps and official tickets have been embedding images of the fort's most recognizable features, such as the Alamgiri Gate, a tower of Jahangir's tomb and the Naulakha Pavilion.

5.1. The Currency Notes of Pakistan

On March 1st, 1949, the 1 and 2 Rupee Notes were issued by Pakistan. Bradbury Wilkinson & Company of Great Britain officially printed these two currency Notes. The green color was chosen for the 1 Rupee Note. A crescent moon and a star were dedicated to the front of the Note. Meanwhile, an illustration of the Naulakha Pavilion was printed on the back of the 1 Rupee Note (State Bank of Pakistan, n.d.). A tower of Jahangir's tomb with brown color was printed on the front of the 2 Rupee currency Note. The illustration of the Badshahi Mosque appeared on the back of the Note (State Bank of Pakistan, n.d.).

Similarly, in 1977, the vignette of the 50 Rupee Note was formed by an illustration of the Gate of the Lahore Fort. The Note was characterised by the portrait of Quaid-E-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, rich purple, multi-coloured print and a detailed vignette of the Alamgiri Gate on the reverse (State Bank of Pakistan, n.d.). Besides, adding the prophetic Hadith, "Seeking an honest livelihood is an act of worship", on the reverse of the Note created an impression of harmony between Islamic ethical values and imperial architectural triumph, a core tenet of Pakistan's state ideology. The careful selection of colors, signs and symbolism by Pakistani officials was deeply overwhelmed by Islamic ideological gestures at the national level.

5.2. The Postage Stamp Anniversary Series

On 9th July 1948, the first regular postage stamp series of Pakistan was issued. This postage stamp was designed by the reputable Pakistani artist A.R. Chaugtai and approved by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This series issued four stamps to mark the first anniversary of independence. The set had four designs of notable sights, and the Lahore Fort Gateways were one of them. The remaining three designs were the First Constituent Assembly building, Karachi Airport Entrance, and a crescent and star motif (State Bank of Pakistan, n.d.).

6. Selective Preservation and Ideological Framing

Despite the state's major focus on the Islamic Mughal era, the Lahore Fort significantly contains "non-Islamic" layers. That era seems blurred with the national identity of Pakistan. Before independence, Lahore had been the center of attention for British Rule. The English rulers used Lahore's Jail to imprison the independent activists like Bhagat Singh and Jatin Das (Kabir & Hayat, 2016). The British immediately occupied the Lahore fort after the subjugation of Lahore. The fort had been under British use after several changes and additions. Primarily, the existing

buildings of the fort were used for colonial purposes, such as barracks for the British military and hospitals. Later on, some portions of the Fort, such as the Summer Palace, were used as the storehouse for the Civil Defense Department (Khan, 1961).

The Pakistani government worked really hard to rebuild Lahore with the assistance of the United Nations. The government tried to erase the fears of communal violence by reconstructing the historic monuments of the city. The Lahore Fort was one of them. Lahore Fort also played a temporary role in providing shelter to refugees during the huge mass exodus between India and Pakistan. Initially, Lahore Fort continued to serve in various departments such as cultural and administrative (Khan, 1961). There were some key aspects of its significance at the initial level after independence. The government of Pakistan worked very hard to glorify the cultural heritage, tourism, administrative functions, preservation and restoration of the Lahore Fort.

Soon, after twenty years of hard work on its restoration, it had become the symbol of national identity in the heart of Punjab, Lahore. The government recognized its importance as a symbol of cultural heritage as well as its architectural importance. Specific efforts were made to preserve and protect the historic structures and artefacts of the fort. The government wanted Lahore Fort to attract tourists to Pakistan. The government initiated the preservation and restoration of the Fort to draw visitors' attention to the Muslim Mughal architecture, Sheesh Mahal, and Diwan-i-Khas of the Fort. On the other hand, the role of Fort had been centric to the specific administrative functions within its premises. The cultural exhibitions, ceremonies and hosting official dinners might be included in it (Talbot, 2022). With the help of the Department of Archaeology and the Walled City of Lahore authority, the Punjab government started multiple projects to restore historic monuments, Royal Trails from Akbar Gate to the Lahore Forts, Sheesh Mahal, Royal Kitchens, Barood Khana and many more. The Norwegian government and the World Bank also gave funds to preserve the Fort Heritage. The Sustainable Development of the Walled City of Lahore (SDWCL) project was initiated to develop, explore and highlight the economic potential of the walled City of Lahore as a cultural enrichment (Dales, 1960). In 1959, the project of excavation was started to explore the hidden history and the recovery of buried materials. During the excavation, a gold coin dated 1.025 CE was discovered in front of Diwan-i-Aam. The Coin belonged to Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, was found at a depth of 25 feet below the surface of the lawn. The excavation for buried historical material was continued to more than 15 feet (Ali & Naseer, 2019). The exploration of cultural layers indicated the presence of inhabited people even before the conquest of Sultan Mahmud. Other than the Mughal belongings, pre-Mughal objects such as terracotta, horses, mother goddess, bulls and other Hindu origin objects, were also found in the fort.

In 1981, UNESCO featured the Lahore fort and its initial 21 serving monuments as a World Heritage Site. Constructed within an inner fortification wall surrounding nearly 19.5 hectares of royal gardens and a unique structure, the Fort was built and underwent significant development throughout the reigns of four Mughal emperors, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb between 1556 and 1707 (Ali & Naseer, 2019).

7. Lahore Fort and the Department of Archaeology

In the early years of independence, the Lahore Fort was given under the control and care of the Department of Archaeology. The department was solely responsible for the conservation, preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of the Lahore Fort (Dales, 1960). Therefore, the Department of Archaeology took the initial steps by establishing new offices in numerous buildings within the Fort. For example, Haveli of Kharak Sing, situated in Jahangir's Quadrangle,

and places near the Royal kitchens, were chosen to establish new offices, and they exist to date (Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Punjab, n.d.). In addition, several other buildings, such as Roshnai Gate, Kala Burj, and British Barracks, were converted into staff residences (Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Punjab, n.d.). The office of the Director General of Archaeology was created in the Haveli of Kharak Singh. The department of archives and library was established in the specific portions of this Haveli. Since then, the entire worsen structure of the fort was not getting better. Although some part of it like Alamgiri Gate, Sheesh Maha, and Deewan-e-Aam, caught the attention of repairs and minimal renovations carried out constantly by the department of Archaeology (Gerstenblith, 2000). In 1981, UNESCO recognized the Lahore fort as a World Heritage Site. This was supposed to mean that the Lahore Fort holds the position of universal importance and immensely valuable for humanity as a whole. The specific designation was significance the fort as historical preservation and cultural heritage at global level (Imran et al., 2018).

8. Lahore Fort as a Museum

The Department of Archaeology and Museums decided to convert some parts of the fort into a museum. It was decided that the sleeping Chambers of Shah Jahan attached with the Rani Jinda's Haveli would transferred into a museum. Thus, the exquisite collection of Princess Bamba was exhibited on the upper storey of Rani Jinda's Haveli. In addition, the vintage sleeping chamber of Jahangir was used to display the old traditional arms in the museum. Where the replicas of the heritages and several other sites are showcased with some astonishing paintings and mosaics. Similarly, wall art and inscriptions aesthetically engraved into concrete tablets were pasted both inside and outside of the buildings in a similar fashion (Gerstenblith, 2000).

9. State Dinners at Lahore Fort

In the early 1970s, the Lahore Fort was glamorized as holding the state's official dinners and some other events. This tradition went at peak in 1980s. Most of the state dinners were organized in the Shish Mahal for the Head of the States and other officials who visited Pakistan (Batool, 2016). Simultaneously, the government started to conduct multiple events at the same time in different places, like hosting dinner at Diwan-e-Khas, the private music organized in Jahangir's Quadrangle and finally the fireworks in front of the Diwan-i-Aam podium (Kabir & Hayat, 2016).

In 2005, the Director General of Archaeology decided to ban all kinds of functions inside the premises of the Lahore Fort. According to the authorities, these events were drastically damaging the old structure of the fort ("Another function at Lahore Fort in violation of rules," 2011).

However, Pakistan's Federal Antiquities Act 1975 was also passed to protect the old heritages of Pakistan. The Act governed the Lahore heritages of Shalimar Garden and the Lahore Fort. The act prohibited any kind of damage, destruction, break, destroy, alter, deface, injure or mutilate, write or engrave any inscription, any antiquity or take manure from any protected antiquity. In addition, the act also stated that the protected antiquity would not allow to organize any kind of events except that directly related to its administration and protection ("Excerpt: Laws governing heritage," 2011).

10. Summer Palace and Walled City Authority

The Lahore Fort had gotten the repute of multiple mysterious stories about its torture cells and basements. The Summer Palace, also known as Pari Mahal is also one of them. It is located right beneath the Sheesh Mahal of the Lahore Fort. The Summer Palace was built as a hidden private chamber for the Royal Mughal Family (Kabir et al., 2017). In 1631, it was given the new name of

‘Jewel Palaces’. In the British era, most of the information about this place was not revealed to the public (Kabir & Hayat, 2016). Even after the independence, the Pakistani government decided to hide most of the confidential information from the public. The British Civil Defence Department used this palace as a storehouse and prisoner cells during the Second World War (Schimmel, 2004). The Pakistani government used this place for the same purpose, and it was under the control of the Civil Defence Department until 1973. In 2014, the Walled City of Lahore Authority took charge of this palace and ordered the restoration of all the damaged areas, which were affected by the use of the storehouse (Schimmel, 2004).

According to the sources, the palace was built for the personal use of Mughal Royal Family in hot weather. The Summer Palace had very unique kind of arrangements for ventilation and lighting as the 15th century was deprived of an electric power system. The Summer Palace was designed with such expertise in ventilation that it kept the palace cold during the hot summer days (Khan, 1961). The basement was labyrinth styled with tunnels that led towards the secret escape route of the Mughal royal families. The secret tunnels opened to the waters of the Ravi River, which runs near the Lahore Fort at that time. The royal boats were used to park very close to the palace to facilitate the escape of royal families through tunnels in case of any attack. The Sheesh Mahal was constructed under the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan in 1631-1632 after the completion of the Summer Palace. These two palaces became the residence of Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Later, he also did some additions in the structure of Sheesh Mahal (Warraich, 2016).

Historically, the Mughal’s secret Elephant stairway was the only point of entrance to the Summer Palace. During British Raj, a small part of the wall was demolished to make another door to get through the palace. After the occupation of British Raj and Pakistan’s Civil Defence Department, the fort’s structure had suffered grave damages. In 1978-1979, the Federal Department of Archaeology mentioned in its annual report that the Civil Defence Department committed several ruthless alterations and additions in the precious arches of the building (Warraich, 2016). In addition, the report mentioned that the entire arch openings of the building were sealed or their sides bricked up to make a new, small space for doors or windows. This alteration and frequent whitewashing of the interior brutally damaged the very expensive fresco paintings and left palace in deplorable condition (Batool, 2016). Since September 2014, the Walled City Lahore Authority took the charge of maintenance and conservation of all the buildings of the fort. The Archaeology Department was bound to provide only expertise and assistance in the case of requirement only (Nadir et al., 2025).

Before this, the last renovation was made with the help of Norwegian government and UNESCO provided its full support. During this restoration, a comprehensive with the name of ‘Shahi Qila’ was submitted by the Heritage Foundation Pakistan. In 2014, another report was submitted named ‘Shah Burj Condition Report’ published. In this report, it was stated that even after the massive level of restoration work, the Summer Palace was unable to control the dampness in the walls (Nadir et al., 2025).

WCLA Director General Kamran Lashari said in an interview that when we had a deep look at the fort, the astonishing beauty of the fort mesmerized us, but at the same time, we went into deep regret to see the destruction and demolition of some particular places (Ahmed, 2024). He said that he had hired a conservation team to take some estimates and technical assessments for the conservation of the damaged parts (Ahmed, 2024). The Walled City Lahore Authority had planned to open it to the public after renovation work. He added that he believed in the view that the heritages suffer more damages if we did not give access to them. The very same was happened to

this masterpiece. He said that the Summer Palace had been an ignore wonder inside this Fort. It was not the right decision to keep its doors on the public. Even the people could hardly find any information about this palace on the internet. He had a hope that after the restoration, the Summer Palace would successfully to catch the attention of the audience and illuminate the entire fort. (Ahmed, 2024)

11. Series of Renovation

The Diwan-i-Aam is another important area of the Lahore Fort. The area, also known as 'hall of public audiences', was directly attached to Jahangir's palace in the Fort. Its northern had a trabeate hall, and the middle of it had exclusive court. The hall was designed to separate the private buildings from the public appearance functions of the Lahore Fort (Sheikh, 2023).

Most of the rooms inside the building was constructed under the reign of Jahangir. These rooms were setup by the cloth canopies to shelter the courtiers. This setup was change with the addition of forty pillared hall built by Shah Jahan (Sheikh, 2023). The Sikh dynasty also did some alterations in this hall. The British rule built barracks to utilize these halls. In the 1960s, the government of Pakistan did little more than add and build toilets. There was also a canteen for use, but it was demolished after some time. In 2015, the Walled City of Lahore's authorities gave an order to rebuild these toilets after finding them in an extremely pathetic condition (Nadir et al., 2025).

Another development was done by the authorities in 2015, they decided to clean the area of Akbari Gate of the fort, which was entirely covered by the seven to eight feet high shrubs and bushes. The Akbbari Gate came after the Diwan-i-Aam hall, ending in its right front direction. The Akbari Gate ended next to a British built wall. The path that followed the British-built wall was covered with wild shrubs and bushes. They made it impossible to access the wall. The Walled City of Lahore worked effortlessly on the cleanliness of this heritage (Nasim & Malik, 2020).

Another feather in the cap of the Walled City of Lahore was added after the remarkable restoration of royal kitchens. The royal kitchens were situated in the neighbourhood of the Alamgiri gate and got the reputation of 'cook house' in the Sikh dynasty. This place was also neglected over time and filled with high shrubs and wreckage (Nasim & Malik, 2020). The Wall City of Lahore decided to clean this out and the procedure of conservation was completed in the two years from 2015 to 2017. The old maps of the fort showed that the royal kitchen were connected with the Shah Burj Gate. The British rule built a road to separate Musaman Gate, Alamgiri Gate, and Barood Khana (Khan et al., 2023).

12. Restoration of Samadhis

In 1992, the Samadhi of Vasti Ram and Samadhi of Bhai Vasti had suffered demolition and damage by the people who were angry because of the incident of the Babari Mosque in India. These two Samadhis were located outside the Lahore Fort. The Samadhis were stripped off its ornamentation by the charged mob (Kashif et al., 2015). The people were angry because the Babri Mosque suffered massive attacks and demolition in India. The mob brutally attacked and fired the Samadhis. They looted the rich decoration and destroyed the structures and ornaments of the Samadhis. Most of the parts were totally distorted. Over time, the bushes and shrubs grew around the ruined Samadhis (Nasim & Malik, 2020). This incident brings such embarrassment to the country. Lots of Sikhs and Hindus belongs to the minority community of Pakistan, and international Sikh Associations were hurt and disappointed to see the Samadhis condition. They decided to rescue them collectively and applied for its restoration to the Department of

Archaeology. After this, in 2017, the department restored them and declared Samadhis as protected monuments (Nasim & Malik, 2020).

13. Restoration of Monuments

In 2018, the restoration work of the monuments was started by the Walled City of Lahore. In the era of the British Raj, the fort wall of the eastern side was demolished and reduced by eight feet to build a Troop Station. This neglected area was cleaned up by the WCLA. The authority, during the conservation work, found a hidden tunnel near Musaman Gate and Barood Khana. This tunnel was reconstructed by the Walled City of Lahore (Munir & Jabeen, 2022). At the same time, during the restoration, another hidden area, the Shahi Hammam of Akbar's regime, was discovered from the backside of the Jahangiri Quadrangle (Iftikar, 2019). Later, further studies revealed that the Shahi Hammam was attached to Akbar's Sarai in the Fort. Simultaneously, the Musaman Gate and Barood Khana had been dilapidating for a long time. These ruined monuments failed to get the attention of the visitors because 150000 cubic feet of debris and long bushes were growing around these monuments (Munir & Jabeen, 2022). In 2018, these old heritages were cleaned up and restored for public visit. The British-era bridge was built to link Moti Masjid and Barood Khan. It had been destroyed because of ageing. The Walled City of Lahore also repaired this bridge to gain the attention of visitors.

14. Role of the Aga Khan Trust & "Picture Wall" at Lahore Fort

The Lahore Fort has approximately twenty-one preserved monuments within its boundaries. The Fort has given extraordinary aesthetic visuals of the Mughal architecture and art at the same time. The Picture Wall at the Lahore Fort is one of them. The UNESCO World Heritage Site had mentioned it as one of the principal features (Khalid, 2022). The Wall showed a true picture of exclusive embellishment with tile mosaic, brick imitation, fresco panel, exceptional craftsmanship and filigree work of the Mughal period. The average height of the wall is 16 meters and 460 meters long. The Picture Wall, built 400 years ago, made the main entrance of the fort with the attachment of Shah Burj Gate (Khalid, 2024). Initially, in September 2015, the Walled City of Lahore Authority engaged the Agha Khan Trust for Culture Service- Pakistan and its affiliated authorities to sign multiple partnership agreements for conservation of the Lahore Fort (Khalid, 2024). After the detail studies on the world's largest Picture Wall, the detailed documents were supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy. The comprehensive studies showed that the wall, which covered Sheesh Mahal and Shah Burj Side, was highly damaged and required immediate restoration (Kalhor, 2017). The thorough study on the Wall involved using an Electronic Distance Measurement device, a 3-D Laser Scanner, and high-resolution ortho-rectified photography. After the compilation of a thorough study and documentation, a technical review of the expected challenges to the conservation of multiple decorative elements had been taken into notice. The detailed review drew attention to the choice of a 15-meter-high, 10-meter-wide section of the western façade of the Pictured Wall for prototype conservation. These details were aimed to inform the wall's conservation methodology and principles. The proper restoration began in 2016 and lasted until the end of 2018. On May 4, 2019, Imran Khan, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, was called for the inauguration of the restored Pictured Wall at Lahore Fort (Khalid, 2022).

15. Conclusion

Pakistan has diversity in culture and a multi-layered, profound heritage. The cultural tapestry that spans centuries is braided with threads of history, traditions, and art. The giant historical buildings and ancient monuments mirror the mosaic of national heritage and national heritage within the

borders. Pakistan owns Indo-Persian culture matrix that is a true reflection of South Asian Muslim identity. Living in the heart of historical identity and national heritage, the giant building of Lahore Fort is a true depiction of prestige and pride. Lahore Fort does not represent a single static monument but its living history of built and rebuilt stretches back centuries. Lahore Fort experiences Pakistan's confusion between owning the Muslim Mughal Legacy and disowning the imprints of Sikh and Colonial powers on the architecture of the Palace. The conflict among all these three different powers is clearly visible in the monument's multi-layered history.

The finding of the study indicates that the fort's positioning lies between the confusion of balancing preservation approaches with meeting the needs of the tourism industry to attract as a historical identity. There is a challenge to preserve and restore history without touching the edges of biases regarding historical sites to meet the state's narratives.

Lahore Fort is not merely a representation of edifices of stone and mortar, but rather it holds a cultural and social utility. The representation of political, power, cultural and social history through different parts of the fort revealed the hidden meanings and symbols of the times. Such as the preservation of the royal residence of the fort meant to indicate that the roots of this soil show contact with aesthetics, engineering intelligence, emotional connection with people and attachment with the religion. The Fort's hall of public for its audience signifies the royal interest in contact with common people, as well as the hall of private audience glorifies the king's close association with his nobility class, culture, and aesthetic.

Suggestions:

- There is a need for heritage initiatives to incorporate all historical layers of the Fort, such as Mughals, Sikhs and the British, despite the religious fact. By Recognizing all these multidimensional historical influences will help to create a more authentic and inclusive understanding for future studies
- The Department of Archeology, with the help of the government of Pakistan, should revise the policies regarding restoration and preservation of the heritage of the country, aiming to achieve academic accuracy rather than following ideological representational boundaries
- For the restoration of the building, there is a need to introduce modern technology and allocate the maximum budget
- Advanced research, educational activities and museum displays should be conducted to decode unrevealed historical dimensions, international representation and fostering respect for Pakistan's cultural roots
- The Sikh Gallery and other sections related to British influence need more budget and attention, and budget for conservation and display. This gesture would represent the sense of acceptance towards the unbiased history, as well as it would reinforce the Fort's identity.

Conflict of Interest

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