Critical Appraisal of a Contemporary Residential Building: A Case Study in the City of Uch Sharif South Punjab Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: In the city of Uch, if one looks critically at the current practice of demolishing old traditional houses and constructing new ones, it can easily be ascertained that in any society or a part of society there are internal and external factors that influence the local trends in every walk of life including building design and construction.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Whether those trends are socio-culturally appropriate or not in their entirety, we need to enquire if there is a justifiable and positive balance between those internal and external societal factors that result in the demolition of the traditional houses. In the field survey of Uch Sharif, one contemporary building was evaluated as compared to a traditional building for selection based on the approximate age of the building.

Findings: The degree to which the original design was modified, its cultural appropriateness, environmental comfort in terms of temperature and relative humidity audited inside the building, use of local materials and techniques, plan type and presence of architectural elements. The results show that traditional buildings are fast diminishing causing irreplaceable examples of traditional wisdom and ingenious craftsmanship to be struck down one after the other by the cyclone of urbanization supercharged by market forces.

Implications/Originality/Value: Through research, it was concluded that the Contemporary buildings, which are replacing traditional buildings, are less responsive to the local climate, culture, skills, and the issue of cost which core of the design criteria of traditional buildings.

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Introduction

Critical appraisal is the process of carefully and systematically examining research to judge its
trustworthiness, and its value and relevance in a particular context (Burls, 2014). To ‘critically evaluate’, you must provide your opinion or verdict on whether an argument or set of research findings, is accurate. This should be done in as critical a manner as possible. Provide your opinion on the extent to which a statement or research finding is true.

A positive critique and experimentation can lead to an overall balance between internal and external influencing factors and can generate a sense of pride in a community towards what is from within. This in turn determines the trends which may strengthen what is local.

On the other hand, if the thinkers, intellectuals, academicians, decision-makers, and professionals in society fail to generate a positive critique, it certainly allows external factors to affect the healthy balance. A loss of pride and identity towards what is within facilitates a kind of trend that weakens what is local.

**Contemporary Residences in Southern Punjab**

Contemporary architecture is the architecture of the 21st century. Contemporary architects work in several different styles, from postmodernism, high-tech architecture, and new interpretations of traditional architecture to highly conceptual forms and designs, resembling sculpture on an enormous scale.

**Brief Description of South Punjab, Pakistan**

Southern Punjab is the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the Harappa Civilization. The remains of the civilization have been excavated in the 20th century on the left bank of a now dry course of the River Ravi, in the Sahiwal District. This historical place stands on an extensive series of mounds in which excavations since 1920 have disclosed the remains of a large city of the Indus Valley Civilization, second in size only to Mohenjo-Daro. The inhabitants were Dravidians and their cultural influence extended up to Tashkent through land communication in the north and the Middle East through the Arabian Sea in the south. Later the Scythian tribes occupied the area and spread far and wide because of their metal tools and their progressive agriculture. They traded through rivers and sea with Iraq and even with Greece. The cotton spinning and hand-weaving techniques were well advanced and were briskly traded even in those times (Islam, 2017).

Southern Punjab is defined to be the area constituting the divisions of Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Multan. These lie roughly between the Longitudes 70° and 73 1/2° and the Latitude 30 1/2°. The history of the region can be traced through the local crafts. Most of the crafts date back centuries and were the easiest and the closest source of people’s identification. The crafts of the region include hand-woven textiles, ceramics & glazed building decoration, lacquer work, and jewelers. It is also apparent that the works of Central Asian artists of the early Muslim period influence the local arts and crafts. Besides the major changes that colonization, industrialization, and globalization have brought in the role of traditional arts and crafts in everyday life, they have sustained both at popular and elite levels.

**Significance for Selection of the Building in Uch Sharif**

Uch Sharif is well renowned for its historical, architectural, spiritual, and monumental significance (Cheema, 2013 #14). It has been observed that contemporary residential buildings in the historic city of Uch are replacing the cultural heritage of the region which was established after a trial-and-error method since long time ago and is supposed to be the custodian of regional culture, built environment, and most appropriate for the user. Demolishing our cultural heritage and constructing new contemporary residences is vanishing wisdom that should prevail for the next generations (Islam, 2017).
In Uch, if one looks critically at the current practice of demolishing old traditional houses and constructing new ones, it can easily be ascertained that in any society or a part of society there are internal and external factors that influence the local trends in every walk of life including building design and construction. Whether those trends are socio-culturally appropriate or not in their entirety, we need to enquire if there is a justifiable and positive balance between those internal and external societal factors that result in the demolition of the traditional houses (Khalid, 2018).

A critical analysis of such selected residential building will evaluate it with the criteria of sustainability, cultural responsiveness, and cost-effectiveness which was present in the previous residence. After the critical analysis of this contemporary residential, we will be able to understand its compatibility in its context and possible measures which are essential at the time of design and execution to make it suitable for the user.

**Literature Review**

The situation in Southern Punjab as a whole, and specifically in Uch, clearly demonstrates the above-outlined framework. The traditional houses are a development of centuries of knowledge and experimentation (Vandal, 2011). They are no longer considered an element of personal and community pride and identity. The local community does not seem to turn to what is within for their ideas and inspirations for their houses. Modernity for them, therefore, is not a conscious break from tradition nor an extension of it. Instead, they seek motivation in some external ideas being practiced perhaps in nearby urban centers or even in remote metropolitan cities, and then bring them into practice, without realizing or considering that those solutions are in turn influenced by the said loss of pride and identity in the community who is practicing them (Hasan, 2009). With a conscious effort to avoid reductionism and realizing the fact that most commonly the issue of socio-cultural appropriateness is merely reduced to a balance between tradition and modernity, one can always take a critical stand on the whole issue of accepting, and so also negating, the new realities of emerging lifestyles and therefore the implications of such a discussion of socio-cultural appropriateness. South Punjab is an area that is vulnerable to extreme climate conditions (Aslam, 2017).

If one assesses the thinking of the local community in Uch, documented through interviews and field observation, their belief that old traditional houses are not compatible with new lifestyles, can easily be singled out as a major reason for the demolition of the old traditional houses and erecting new houses at the same or a new location.

Now if one tries to see this reality more rationally and more inclusively, one can always argue that it is true that the new lifestyles have developed new activities and requirements that cannot be accommodated in the old traditional houses. Without even going into finer details, the immediate reply would be perhaps yes. It can also be argued that lifestyles are influenced and reflect the production system which shapes the structure of the community. From a predominantly agriculture-based community, Southern Punjab is in an age where it is experiencing simultaneously agricultural as well as an industrial mode of production along with the new emerging services sector. This fact is restructuring the community and has implications for shaping new lifestyles.

One cannot negate the fact that old traditional houses were constructed for the activities and requirements of the lifestyle of their era. With time they were appropriated according to new forms of lifestyles. If we do agree that any development in the built environment reflects and should respect the needs of the community, then the question of socio-cultural appropriateness can be judged from altogether another angle. It can frankly be stated that any development that reflects the present aspirations of the community must be considered appropriate.

If the professionals can see the issue of socio-cultural appropriateness from both angles explained above, then one can always be open, positively, to accept the change. Perhaps a situation where traditions are
not considered a burden carried from the past and where changes are welcomed for a better future can answer many questions embedded in the issue of socio-cultural appropriateness.

Now to critically extend the framework developed, we can offer the following major concerns for further argument:

What are the different dimensions of quality assurance? How it can be guaranteed in contemporary times? What actions and actors are needed to attain quality assurance?

How has the system of governance affected the whole process of cost-effectiveness?

How do attain a balance between affordable technology and the best available technology? What are the practical and technical limitations to adapt old houses to state-of-the-art technology?

If we consider that the people decide to build a new house when their old property is insufficient to accommodate their changed life pattern, including increased spatial requirements, then the immediate response is to look for some extra space in the same house. Most often they convert verandahs, and in rare cases courtyards, into rooms. Most citizens of Uch cannot afford to buy land, hence either continue to live in their old houses or build on the land of their demolished houses. In the new house, they create more space by reducing the size of structural elements. Even when people can buy new land, they go for extra space to fulfill their space requirements, and in this way, they unintentionally agree to compromise the quality of energy efficiency or even cultural-appropriateness of their house.

As it is stressed and defended earlier that cost-effectiveness does not merely mean efforts to reduce the cost, keeping the same attitude, it is justified that the recommended appropriate methods and materials must consider the factors of material availability, the expertise required, social acceptance, security & safety concerns, aesthetic standards, and technological advancements (Foster, 2013).

To have a simplified overview and to be able to realize the variety of options available, among which we need to choose or which we need to modify for contemporary use, we can compose them under the heads of foundations, walls, roofs, floors, and finish (Barry, 1969).

**Significance of Research Methodology**

In the field survey of Uch Sharif, a contemporary building was selected and evaluated for selection because of the information below:

**Approximate Age of the Building**
The degree to which the original design was modified  
Its cultural appropriateness  
Environmental comfort  
Use of local materials and techniques  
Size of the building  
Plan type  
And the presence of architectural elements,

**Brief Introduction about Selected Residence**
The contemporary residential building was selected for detailed documentation on the conclusion of the field survey marked on the City’s map. This house is in Nawazabad Colony, about half km from the Shamas chowk, a reference point.

On the southeast side, which is the front of the house, there is a twelve feet wide road and is leading towards the Khair Pur Daha. On the northeast is the empty plot, on the Northwest is the land for
agricultural purposes and on the southwest is the land for commercial purposes.

Its construction was done two years ago in partially local and mostly imported materials. The noted temperature in this house is 37.5 & humidity is 38.8%, which is not comfortable.

No alteration has been made after its construction.

Two families live in this house owned by Khwaja Barkat. The total plot area is 1251.5 Sq-m. The ground-floor covered area is 544.6 sqm and the first-floor covered area is 248.4 Sq-m. Four bedrooms, living space, bathrooms, servant quarter, guest bed, garage, drawing/dinning, porch kitchen are on the ground floor and two bedrooms, living space, bathrooms, and kitchen are on the first floor.

The electricity connection in the house is made from the main electric supply to the city passing at a distance from the house, which is coming from Ahmadpur and Kot Khalifa grid station about 20 and 15 k.m from the Uch city. The water in the city is supplied by the city water management dept. The house is
located at a distance from the city, so no line is passing beside the house. The main source of water in the house is the electric water pump and water is stored in the overhead tanks.

No proper sewerage system is in the house; however, the water, coming from the house is collected in the front of the house in a covered gutter, and then that untreated wastewater is discharged through an open drain into the fields at some distance from the house. This gas supply line is not provided to the house due to the distance of the house from the city. Culture Walls are constructed in brick masonry with cement mortar, having the cement sand plaster on it, with ceramic tile finish. The roof is three inches thick R.C.C. with two coats of hot bitumen layers, two layers of polythene sheet, and 3 to 4 inches of mud for sloping and insulation purposes. The molding with plaster of Paris is done on the ceiling. Floors are terrazzo, marble, and ceramics tiles with marble skirting.

Analysis of House Based on Air Movement Pattern in Plans
All doors are wooden in wooden and iron frames with two shutters of 30 mm thickness. All windows are in wooden & Iron frames and wooden glazed casement. All lintels are reinforced cement concrete, and the lintel level is 2133 mm.
The staircase on the veranda is with wooden railing and balustrades and the finishing is marble. The presences of adequate and well-ventilated spaces make them environmentally comfortable. The structure is safe and sound and no attack by insects is reported.

**Analysis of House Based on Air Movement Pattern in Section**
Critical Appraisal & Conclusions

Contemporary urban structures which are replacing traditional buildings are commonly considered less responsive to the local climate, culture, skills, and cost efficiency - which were at the core of the design criteria of traditional buildings. Contemporary buildings are seemingly unable to replicate what traditional buildings offer. That is why the demolition of traditional buildings is considered irreparable damage to our valuable traditional asset.

Finally, if considering the new definitions of community in Uch, fueled by the new means of transport and communication, one can understand and explain the reasons for disrupting the neighborhoods based on community associations. In those situations, the whole neighborhood was the class symbol, in which
individual houses were the basic units. This old system was based on place-based associations and class-based groupings. The individual house was even then a class symbol but was contributing to the whole neighborhood to represent the whole group.

In contemporary times, class-based groupings are no more place-based associations but rather mental associations. Such a reality permits and facilitates that different houses at different locations can be a class symbol and can still be a part of a class-based group.

It is an identified reality that such a fractured and ruptured built environment is an attribute for most of the developing societies who still must face their transition from the agriculture-based lifestyle to industrial or even post-industrial lifestyle and still have all the hybrid variations in between.

There are some of the admissions of this research that need to be highlighted, especially regarding the spatial structure and the use of spaces in the contemporary houses as that of the old traditional houses. Also included in this discussion are the changing definitions of public and private.

A critical look at the selected documented houses demonstrates how new spaces evolved in the designs of the contemporary house. Most striking among them is the living room (also termed the lounge). As the activities of the family at home extended over the late evening times and as indoor activities took over from outdoor ones, a new multi-purpose space evolved in the center of the house which is a semi-private space. This space not only marks the change in the use of outdoor spaces but also presents new definitions of public and private domains.

Another interesting shift in the use of spaces is the new role of the bedroom (also termed as a sleeping room, and very often just referenced as a room). Its new role where it also serves as a sitting room reveals the hybrid levels of privacy and the corresponding spatial structure of a contemporary house. In the new lifestyles the precise definitions of private and public domains, male and female quarters, and even day and evening spaces, have changed, which used to be the characteristic spatial structure of the old traditional houses.

**Recommendations and the Way Forward**

By projecting the discussion of socio-cultural appropriateness and the positive balance of internal and external factors to the issues of societal and cultural maturity of a community and the issues of modernity and tradition in a development process, it can be further extended that the sense of pride and identity in what is local in a community, stems directly out of the combined efforts and attitude of thinkers, intellectuals, academicians, decision-makers, professionals which will produce a contemporary design solution.

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