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Professor Ibrahim Shah, PhD Department of Archaeology University of Peshawar

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# The Bradlaugh Hall Building (1900):

## A Neglected Historical Monument in the Walled City of Lahore

Ayesha Mehmood Malik, Muhammad Nasir Chaudhry and Syed Sajjad Haider

Abstract: Lahore is known as a city that holds through time, capturing and conserving the intelligent human growth in structural standing. The diversity of Lahore culture is unimaginable so is its architecture that unfortunately has affected some of these historical buildings badly in terms of its functional form. Due to this a public disconnect between the value of history and its function is found. This paper is an attempt to identify one such neglected legacy in the form of Bradlaugh Hall that holds a history of the Indian struggle against the British rule. A striking amalgamation of Victorian and Muslim-Indian design. However, it was locked down after the partition of India and was later allotted to a technical Institute by the Evacuee Trust Properties Board (ETPB). This paper discusses the architectural significance of the Bradlaugh building and the role of ETPB, especially with regards to the protection of buildings like the Bradlaugh Hall and many other buildings that need special attention. The study reveals that this vacant property is in a depreciated form that needs to be considered for protection and there is an urgent need to formulate an appropriate adaptive reuse plan for this structure and many others.

Keywords: Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore, ETPB, Colonial Architecture, British Raj.

## Introduction

The Bradlaugh Hall, situated on the Rattigan Road, Lahore, remained as an emblem of revolution in the entire British India for nearly a century. All the prominent leaders of India's freedom movement, including Bhagat Singh, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Lala Rajpat Rai and Jawaharlal Nehru regularly attended meetings here and remained associated with this historical building. Sadly, a monument worthy of best preservation efforts combined by both Pakistani and Indian scholars and governments lies in a perilous state near the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences today. Sad part of the story is that the awareness level with regard to the political and social history of the hall is alarming low and only a few citizens of Lahore are aware of its existence (Fig. 1).

Massive British bungalows occupied Rattigan Road in the late 19th century and was considered as an elitist part of the Lahore city. Charles Bradlaugh bought a piece of land here. This gentleman played an important role in the rise of secularism throughout Britain. He was a member of the British parliament, a liberal member from Northampton and consistently raised voice for the freedom of Indian subcontinent. With regard to religion, Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist and refused to take oath on religious terms that landed him in jail temporarily with heavy fines. As Member Parliament, he continued his advocacy for Indian independence and self-determination. He bought a large chunk of land as there was no hall in the Lahore city, which would allow him to express his supportive thoughts for the Indian cause. All other halls were under government's control and British government forbade any kind of freedom activities to congregate there. Charles Bradlaugh was able to win a contract for laying down railway tracks, which ended up in cancellation by the British government and he was asked to leave India. He resisted his deportation but was eventually forced to do so (Ali 2015).

Bradlaugh Hall was inaugurated by Surinder Nath Banerjee in the year 1900, after the departure of Charles Bradlaugh (Fig. 2). He was associated with the Indian National Association, which later became Indian National Congress. However, it was Lala Lajpat Rai who contributed the most to this hall. He was born on the 28th of January 1865 in Ferozpur. Her mother's name was Ghulab Devi. A chest hospital situated on the Ferozpur Road, Lahore, is named after her. He got his law degree from the Government College of Lahore. With an intention to form an institution where Muslim students would be able to get quality education without heading to government controlled and westernized institutions, Lajpat Rai established the National College inside the Bradlaugh Hall. Numerous star-studded meetings were organized at the hall against the Simon Commission in the year 1928. The Indians overwhelmingly boycotted the commission as it did not have any native-Indian representative. Most prominent political leaders of that era, like Maulana Zafar Ali Khan and Syed Attaullah Shah Bukhari spoke to large number of audience full of freedom fighters during the non-cooperation movement and the boycott of Simon Commission at this hall. However, it is the attachment with Bhagat Sindh that outshines Bradlaugh Hall compared with any other monument of the Indian struggle against the British Empire. Bhagat Singh and his comrades studied at the National College inside the hall. During his studies, he met Sukhdey and Yashpal, who would become his future companions in their armed struggle against the colonial order. Bhagat Singh also formed an Indian youth alliance named Naujawan Bharat Sabha at this college. Many cultural plays focussed on Indian freedom were performed in this hall. Shareef Mateen and many other members of Naujawan Sabha took refuge in the hall, especially during the case proceedings

against Bhagat Singh. The British government had to setup a check-post near the hall to monitor the movements of young freedom fighters (Ali 2015).

Popular Gaddar movement is also associated with the Bradlaugh Hall, many activists from the Kisan Tehrik, Gaddar Movement and Pagardi Sambhal Jatta had to seek refuge here. Ajit Kumar, uncle of Bhagat Singh and the person who brought him to the national college, was also a shining star of the Gaddar Movement. Famous Mohan Roy, member of the International Communist Manifesto and founder of All India Communist Party, presented a remarkable speech here and urged the Indians to fight against the imperialistic British government and safeguard their rights. Many public meetings were held here against the Rowlett Act of 1919 at this very hall. Indra Kumar Gujral, was a student leader and political activist and later Prime Minister of India, also mentioned that the Bradlaugh Hall was the place from where his political career began, when they formed their own student union. They used to attend meetings here and heard life-changing revolutionary speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru and Josh Malihabadi's poetry. Dr. Saifuddin Kachlo, Mian Iftikhar-ud-din, Dr. Muhammad Ashraf and Haran Mukherjee were also heard here by large gatherings. In the year 1933, first film studio was established in Lahore and was gathered in the



Figure 1. Side view of the building (Photograph: Author)



Figure 2. Tombstone (Photograph: Author)

fields next to the hall (Qureshi 2017).

## Materials and Methods

The material for this study on the Bradaugh Hall building, was collected from secondary sources such as books, research papers, newspaper clippings, interviews, blogs, theses and questionnaires from the authorities and people living in the vicinity, which were further verified by examination of the building followed by frequent visits to the monument. Thus the collected data were analyzed with reference to its urban configuration of the site and horizontal and vertical measures of the building.

## **Results and Discussion**

After a detailed study of the building and its glorious historical and cultural significance that leads us to establish architectural significance of the Bradlaugh hall. Its architecture and design is a gem among all the colonial period buildings of Lahore. The area around is converted into printing and packaging industry. Built in the 19th century, the building although appears to be very British in style, is well suited for local requirements and climatic conditions. However, understanding the architectural importance of Bradlaugh Hall building it was important for us to study the building that played an important role in history. The buildings seem to be hidden from the busy life of the city that is why it still stands in its original condition and has not been layered with mounts of plaster and its original ornamentation is still intact. The site is hardly visible from the main road via access lanes hardly 10-15 feet wide towards the building extremely narrow yet covered with overhead electrical cables and poles.

The Bradlaugh Hall has several rooms, a pavilion and a vast area for public gatherings (Fig. 3). Just like the Lahore Railway Station, the entire building is covered with an iron gabbled roof (Fig. 4). Window design is a beautiful amalgamation of western and local styles, with its mihrab like Gothic arches (Fig. 5). Door frames have segmented arches above them. But the complete façade, especially buttresses (Fig. 6) have an outlook of the Victorian period buildings, like the Leicester Secular Hall. Fair face bricks have been used for the protection of the facade. The builders of this hall seem to have accommodated the local architectural norms in their design (Khan 2011:16). The designers of the Hall wanted to prove their loyalty to a cause. First, they did not want to associate the building with any single religion, as they wanted inter-faith harmony in pursuing the cause of Indian self-determination. Secondly, they wanted to protect their meetings

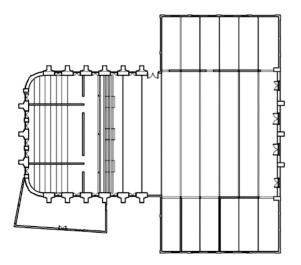


Figure 3. Plan of Bradlaugh Hall (After Khan 2011: pl.16)

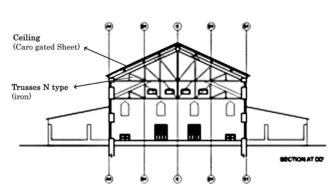


Figure 4. Sectional Elevation of Bradlaugh Hall (After Khan 2011: pl.16)

from government intrusions. For that purpose, the design seems perfect as well. Many freedom fighters could take refuge in this Hall mainly because of its secure design. The approximate area is 64609 sq ft with covered area 30596 sq ft and open area 34013 sq ft (Khan 2011:17)

The ground level has been raised about 3 feet. The ground at the western end of the building has been raised by another 2 feet due to the accumulated garbage. The floor level is also raised inside around 3 feet. Before partition, the Hall was used as steel mills until the 80's and the extensions made during this period are obviously different from the original structure yet which blends in completely.

> BRADLAUGH HALL 43 Rettigan Road , Lower Mall Lahore

> > **Construction date** = 1900 **Present ownership** = ETPB

**Original function** = Hall for gathering – educational, political

**Present function** = currently vacant

Present architectural features

Wooden Balconies, Wooden Doors, Wooden Windows, Wooden Ventilators

#### Exterior façade characteristics

Ornamentation (brick design), Windows, Ventilators, Doors, Buttresses (Fig. 7)

Construction material = Brick and steel

#### **Present Condition**

Doors, windows and ventilators are in a very poor state of preservation

The structure, however, seems to be in a fair condition Brick finish construction (Fig. 8)

- 1. Walls = Original construction used 2 feet walls, later construction was 9 inches
- 2. Columns = Original 2x2 feet columns, later added steel columns 0.5x1 feet (Fig. 9)
- 3. Roof = Sloping roof, truss construction of steel

#### Ornamentation

Brick ornamentation around the building in fairly good condition

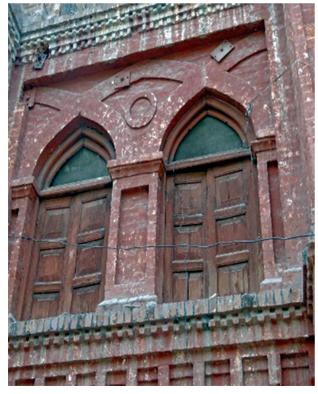


Figure 5. Gothic Arches (Photograph: Author)

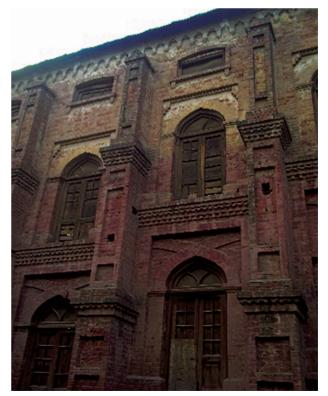


Figure 6. Flying Buttresses (Photograph: Author)



Figure 7. Buttresses on the external façade (Photograph: Author)



Figure 8. Brick flooring in the inner hall (Photograph: Author)



Figure 9. Steel Section (I-Columns) (Photograph: Author)

#### Interior characteristics of buildings

- 1. Construction material= Burnt bricks
- 2. Present condition = new construction done in cement
- 3. Exterior finish= poor condition
- 4. Alteration in the original structure of walls, columns, roofs, doors, windows= a few walls have been pushed out and some new constructed but there is a visible difference between the two.
- 5. Types of doors and windows= wooden but in poor condition (Fig. 10)
- 6. Other architectural elements, their condition and alterations= The internal floor is poorly constructed in brick and about 3 feet higher than its original level.

Importance of public spaces can never be denied in any urban setting. The walled city of Lahore had many such places known as the *kuchas* but they were all open spaces. People used to gather there for religious and political purposes. It improved the cohesion between the inhabitants

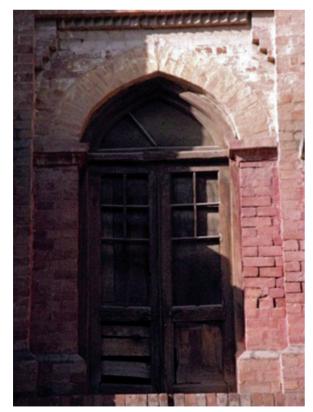


Figure 10. Four-centred arched-window (Photograph: Author)

of the Walled City and gave them a sense of security. Apart from getting the community gelled together, such public spaces improved mobility within the Walled City, where narrow streets are a norm and necessity (Ahmed 2016). Need for a formal and dedicated public space is always there, especially where occasional gatherings can take place. In times before the electricity and modern audio technology, halls like the one under review provided such location, where people could congregate in large numbers, within a secure environment, free from thoughts and any other interruptions.

After partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, rallies and meetings mostly took place in open spaces. The Bradlaugh Hall could have sustained easily as a public meeting place if the government had allowed any kind of activity there. Fee charged for holding meetings could have been used for the repair and redevelopment work. Revival of this hall in a better state would have easily led to global appreciation and grants for the local and provincial governments.

Soon after partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, most of the Hindus and Sikhs living in Pakistan, left their properties and migrated to India. These properties are called 'evacuee properties'. On the other side, the Muslims living in India migrated to Pakistan and were allotted these evacuee properties. However, emigrant properties linked to trusts presented a major challenge. For that purpose, Evacuee Trust Properties Board (ETPB) was created in 1960, which is responsible for the management and disposal of such evacuee properties attached with religious, charitable or educational trusts/institutions. These properties are called 'Evacuee Trust Properties'. The ETPB works under the Evacuee Trust Properties Board (Management and Disposal) Act 1975. The Board is constituted by the federal government and has powers to acquire, hold and dispose of evacuee trust properties. It can also mortgage, lease or let any evacuee trust property while levying lease or rental fee. The chairman of the Board has strong discretionary powers in determining the status of evacuee properties under the Section VIII of ETPB Act, if they are attached to any religious, charitable or educational trust or not. Once an evacuee property is declared evacuee trust property, the chairman may order to cancel the allotment of the property and assume its administrative control.

The ETPB manages both rural and urban properties in accordance with two schemes namely, 'Scheme for the Lease of Evacuee Trust Agricultural Land 1975' and 'Scheme for the Management and Disposal of Urban Evacuee Trust Properties 1977'. Properties like the Bradlaugh Hall come under the second scheme designed for urban evacuee trust properties. These scheme rules clearly state in Sub-Clause 3(i) that the tenants of evacuee trust properties shall pay monthly rent or annual lease for their tenancy and shall not sublet or transfer the property to any other person. Mostly, monthly rents are quite less compared to the market rates. Tenants are also bound to use the property for the same purpose for which the tenancy is granted and any change of purpose will require approval from the Board. Tenant shall also pay the utility bills and other taxes due for such a property. In case of violation, they are subject to ejectment.

The ETPB can also sell out properties, which are difficult to manage or otherwise uneconomic properties through a public auction, only when selling them appears to be the best course of action, in accordance with Sub-Clause 8. Mostly, properties facing prolonged litigation come under this category. However, there is a significant emphasis on conducting a public auction. Sale through negotiation can only take place when bids received during public auction are less than the reserved bid, which is determined on the basis of average market place. Similarly, the Board can proceed with development or redevelopment of an evacuee trust property, under Sub Clause 18D of the ETPB urban scheme. The Board can also engage an architect or a consultant for such projects. Later, Board is allowed to rent out developed properties through a public auction. Encroachment is another common problem affecting many evacuee trust properties. Same is the case with the Bradlaugh Hall. The ETPB has a strict procedural guideline for dealing with encroachments (ETPB 1984). According to Sub-Clause 8(i) of the ETPB Urban Scheme, such

properties can be sold at the prevailing market rates plus 50% penalty and 10% surcharge. Such clauses make it easier for encroachers to legalize their occupancy which is detrimental for the whole property, like in the Bradlaugh Hall's case. Numerous other cases of encroachment on the ETPB's agricultural and urban lands have been reported in the media. Whenever the Board has tried to vacate such encroached properties, stiff resistance has been observed ('Anti-encroachment' 2016).

Being the centre of cultural activities for half century, the Bradlaugh Hall witnessed a turn of events after the partition in 1947 it was used as storage for food supplies until 1980's when it was being used as steel mills. It reopened when it was allotted to a technical institute 'Milli Techniqi Idara' after the Institute's head made an application to the Minister for Law and Rehabilitation of that time. The ETPB allotted the Bradlaugh Hall to the Institute for a period of 99 years, in the year 1957. Transparency of the whole allotment process remained low, especially to an Institute that lacked the powers to sustain itself and in few decades got entrenched in internal tug-of-war between its trustees. There is no mention of public auction in any source of information for the lease of such a valuable property and that too for such a lengthy period. It is evident from the facts that the allotment was wrong and short-sighted. Landgrabbing was rampant within the Bradlaugh Hall premises during the Institute's occupancy. The administration had also rented a major part of the property to the neighboring private academies, as they were unable to sustain financially, even though subletting of the ETPB's property by any of its occupant is a violation of the ETPB rules. During this period, the hall's building suffered severe structural damages.

After so many years of struggling, the ETPB finally got the possession of the building back from the technical Institute, in the year 2009 but locked the facility down. Presently, there are no signs of selling or redeveloping the Bradlaugh Hall. The ETPB has struggled many times to protect its properties from land-grabbers and illegal occupations, while the notion of redevelopment seems quite distant. Even though, there are several clauses in the ETPB's Scheme for the redevelopment of its urban properties, but only few examples of renovation can be found at some *gurudvaras* and shrines as they attract lots of religious pilgrims every year. Financial assistance available to the Board is precarious both from domestic and international sources. Several international Hindu and Sikh communities are interested in the preservation of properties linked with their religious trusts but the ETPB's reputation is a big stop sign for many donors. In the Bradlaugh Hall's case as well, various British and Indian civil societies have highlighted the architectural and historical significance of the building and showed concerns for its protection.

Keeping the building locked and not engaging in any repair or redevelopment will never cease the architectural and structural decay of the building. As discussed above, the ETPB financial condition would not allow it to perform redevelopment of the Bradlaugh Hall. The Board's Scheme for urban properties clearly states that the ETPB can sell uneconomic or difficult to manage properties but only through a public auction. Selling the Bradlaugh Hall to a firm proficient in the adaptive reuse of historical building appears to be the best route.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Bradlaugh Hall building, being a historical significant heritage, shall not be undermined or ignored. Being part of a great historic event, people from both sides of Pakistan and India have strong affiliation and deep emotional attachment with the place. There have been many petitions on social media and news articles to save this glorious entity as this monument is a symbol of our glorious struggle against the British Raj. This shared history demands collective responsibility for the protection of the historical monument and stereotyping it with certain creed, religion or political class will lead us to further self-denial. The hall should be preserved and given an open public access. There are options available to the ETPB, which include selling or redevelopment. If so the building still needs a function that can be achieved in the form of an adaptive reuse of this structure as a school, library or exhibition

hall making an extension to the central model school or any other body taking full responsibility that can add to the education system here in this area. This adaptive reuse might help in reviving the old legacy of the Bradlaugh Hall building that is now just a neglected structure in the area like many others. Heritage needs to be preserved no matter what the background is as heritage has no religion, caste or colour.

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## Contributors

ABDUL HAMEED, PHD

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

ABDUL SAMAD, PHD

Director, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar, Pakistan

Abdur Rahman, PhD

Former Professor/Chairman, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

## AYESHA MEHMOOD MALIK, AR

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

BRIAN E. HEMPHILL, PHD

Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775 USA

#### GUL RAHIM KHAN, PHD

Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

## JONATHAN MARK KENOYER, PHD

Professor, Department of Anthropology, 5240 Swell Social Science Building, 1180 Observatory Drive, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

#### LUCA MARIA OLIVIERI, PHD

Director, ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan, 31-32 College Colony, Saidu Sharif, Swat, Pakistan (and Hagelbergerstr. 47 10965 Berlin, Germany) MAMOONA KHAN, PHD

Professor and Head, Department of Art and Design, University of Gujrat, Sub Campus Government Postgraduate College, Satellite Town, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

#### Muhammad Adris Khan

Research Scholar, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

#### MUHAMMAD ZAHIR, PHD

Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

#### Mukhtar Ali Durrani, PhD

Former Professor/Chairman, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

#### MUHAMMAD NASIR CHAUDHRY, AR

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

#### RIFAAT SAIF DAR, PHD

Director, Institute of Visual Arts and Design, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan

#### SHAKIRULLAH, PHD

Associate Professor/Chairman, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

#### SYED SAJJAD HAIDER, AR

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

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