

Islamabad: The Struggle for Pakistan's Identity

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ABSTRACT

“The capital of a country is the focus and the center of the people’s ambitions and desires, and it is wrong to put them in an existing city,” Pakistan’s President General Ayub Khan declared the need for a new capital for a young Pakistan in 1958. General Ayub’s desire required bringing about greater national unity by rejecting a cultural baggage of the past for a new national identity. This premise disqualified the cities of Karachi, a British colonial legacy, and Lahore, a link to the Indian past, for becoming the capital of Pakistan. And so, planned between 1959 and 1963, arose Islamabad. Pakistan envisioned that the new capital would assist in bringing East and West Pakistan together by becoming a symbol of national pride. Thus, the struggle for national identity as symbolized in the creation of Islamabad became closely tied to the Pakistani national struggle itself – inherent in both these struggles was a desire to start anew and fresh and the longing to claim what was uniquely its own. This led to an attempt to unfold a distinctively national style of architecture and urbanism which had two undercurrents: a drive to achieve modernity and progress as defined by the West; and the zeal for Islam as it was the driving force behind the creation of this

new nation-state. This paper focuses on how Pakistan attempted to achieve these goals and how successful it was in creating this national identity.

The First Capital

In 1947, British India was partitioned on the basis of religious demographics. This led to the creation of the sovereign states of Pakistan and India - the areas with a Muslim majority population became a part of Pakistan whereas Hindu majority areas became a part of an independent India. As a result of this partition, Pakistan at the time was geographically divided into two parts: the West wing and the East wing. All major cities previously used as national capitals and provincial capitals, such as Bombay, Calcutta, and New Delhi, were now a part of India. Thus, Pakistan faced the task of choosing a capital for itself from a list of cities that had not functioned as national capitals before. The newly-created Pakistan had three main urban centers: Lahore and Karachi in West Pakistan and Dhaka in East Pakistan. Despite the economic and demographic weight of the East, Pakistan’s government and military were largely dominated by the upper classes of the West. Friction between the two wings started in 1952 with the Bengali Language Movement and the Awami

League was pushing for autonomy as the political voice of the Bengali-speaking population in the 1960s. With such a volatile situation in the East, a government dominated by the West decided that the new capital be located in West Pakistan (Yakas 2001).



Figure 1 Map showing East and West Pakistan

(Source: Suburban Emergency Management Program)

This left the choice between Lahore and Karachi. Lahore, a main cultural center of the region, had a strong political history connected to pre-partition India: it had acted as the capital of Punjab for the various Indian empires, including the Ghaznavids in the 12th century, the Mughals in the 16th century, and the British in the mid-19th and early 20th century. But this regional capital for over a thousand years had a close proximity to Pakistan’s new rival, India. The inherent distrust of its neighbor prevented Pakistan from picking Lahore as its national capital. However, Lahore continued to act as the capital of the

province of Punjab of the newly-created country (Yakas 2001).

Karachi, the only remaining choice, was much smaller than Lahore at the time. But it was a bustling, port city convenient for communication and transport between the two ‘wings’. Furthermore, it provided ample opportunities for major growth through commercial development and was fast-growing as the center for industrial enterprise in the region. Thus, Karachi became the first capital of Pakistan (Yakas 2001).

Karachi’s Diminishing Importance

Karachi emerged as one of the subcontinent’s major cities during colonial times. However, colonialism was also the cause of the city’s uncontrollable growth and environmental decline. Karachi bears the scars of the human catastrophe that accompanied the partition of British India like no other South Asian city. The partition caused the transfer of fifteen million people across the newly-drawn borders: one of the largest mass migrations of people ever in history. At least one million died during this exodus. People who settled into the areas bordering the newly created states were able to integrate into the communities fairly easily because of the common culture and traditions. The situation was much different in Karachi. People fleeing what now became central India chose Karachi as their destination. In terms of culture and religious practices, these people had little or nothing in common with the people of

Sind, the province in which Karachi was located. Thus, Karachi's sectarian tensions started early on (Harding 2007).

Within a few months of independence, Karachi's population of about 450,000 swelled to over a million inhabitants. It became the center for General Ayub Khan's ambitious industrialization program after his *coup d'état* in 1958. This economic expansion led to an ever-increasing number of immigrants from other parts of the country. The impact of Ayub Khan's Green Revolution technologies also led to the migration of many rural workers to the cities. Karachi, on the other hand, was increasingly failing to provide adequate and secure housing for a significant proportion of its increasing population. Refugees occupied all open spaces including public parks, school buildings, and playgrounds. The government of the day was overwhelmed. The housing needs of government officials and civil servants who had moved to the new capital put additional pressure on the existing infrastructure (Harding 2007).

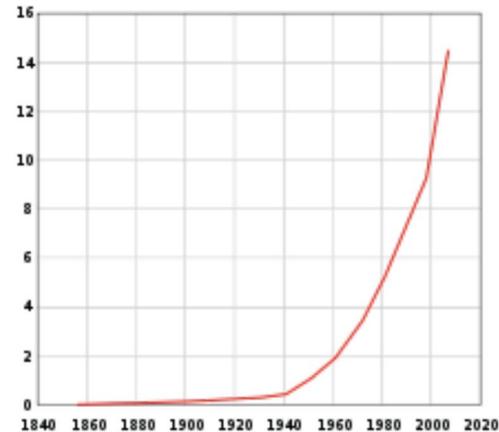


Figure 2 Trend of Population Growth (in millions) in Karachi (Source: Wikipedia)

With the realization that something had to be done soon to improve the situation, an authority specifically charged with dealing with the housing crisis was created in 1951. This new authority was initially called the Karachi Improvement Trust (KIT) but became the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) in 1957. KIT developed the Greater Karachi Plan in collaboration with MRV, a Swedish consultancy firm. The plan aimed to create a new administrative center outside Karachi which would be linked to the city by roads. This was to be accompanied by the construction of high-density, ten-storey apartment blocks in the central area of Karachi which would accommodate those who were occupying the central areas. However, the plan remained unimplemented due to a combination of political instability which prevailed in Pakistan until 1958 and because of a lack of funds (Harding 2007).



Figure 3 Karachi in the 1950s
(Source: Pakistani Defense Forum)

With the growing inability of Karachi to act as the capital because of overcrowding, sectarian differences, political tensions, and its inefficiency to accommodate the staff and equipment of a central government was the feeling that the capital was not a place merely to live and work. The capital had to symbolize the spirit of the people of the country. There was also an understanding that the capital city should aid towards the better organization and administration of the newly created state, represent the will of the people of the country, and become a symbol of the new state towards which all Pakistanis turn to for unity. All these reasons hinted towards the need for a new capital for Pakistan (Yakas 2001).

These aims for the new capital met with adequate opposition from economic divisions inside and outside the country. The critics of the idea felt that building a

capital from scratch was an unnecessary luxury: Pakistan had its hands full in order to develop its nascent economy and could not afford the creation of a new city. Proponents for the new capital, however, said these arguments did not take into consideration the factor of time – a new town could not be built in a few years and thus, it was possible to prepare the first 5-year-plan in such a way so as to not hurt the country's economy. The proponents also felt that the current situation in Karachi had made the allocation of funds for administrative headquarters compulsory. The government was housed in old buildings, some not even designed for this purpose. These buildings were also situated far from each other and so made the functioning of the administration inefficient. Creating the new government buildings in Karachi would have incurred a higher overall cost as well because of the very expensive land values. All these factors signaled towards a city designed exclusively for becoming capital (Yakas 2001).

“A Common Platform”

When Pakistan's first Martial Law Administrator and second President General Ayub Khan came into power in 1958, he embarked on an ambitious, centrally planned program for the industrialization and modernization of Pakistan. The idea of a new administrative center near Karachi was abandoned and the Greater Karachi Plan was shelved. Instead he decided that there should be an utterly modern and

entirely new capital of Pakistan at a site near the town of Rawalpindi on the Pothwar Plateau (Harding 2007). He asserted:

“The capital of a country is the focus and the center of the people’s ambitions and desires, and it is wrong to put them in an existing city. It must have a color of its own and character of its own. And that character is the sum total of the aspirations, the life and the ambitions of the people of the whole of Pakistan. With the two provinces of Pakistan, as separated as they are from each other, you want to bring the people on a common platform. The thing to do is to take them to a new place altogether” (Vale 2008: 147-148).



Figure 4 Map showing Rawalpindi (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

General Ayub Khan’s reasoning to the public for the creation of a new capital was based on the new city’s iconic role in bringing together national identity after independence. Furthermore, the vast

difference in physical, economic, and social environments between the two ‘wings’ of the country produced the need for the creation of national unity on political grounds. This desired political unity demanded the establishment of a powerful administration in order to slowly decrease the differences and focus on features that people living in East and West Pakistan shared – the most important of which was Islam. Such a powerful administration realized the need for a national symbol and such a symbol would obviously be the new capital for the state (Yakas 2001).

The rhetoric, thus, focused on the new capital’s symbolic role in the consolidation of national identity in bringing together the two ‘wings’ on a “common platform”. It was highly unclear, though, how the linguistic, ethnic, and geographic gulfs between East and West Pakistan could be bridged when such a platform was situated to reconfirm the political and economic dominance of the western wing (Vale 2008).

A Military Mind

While General Ayub Khan’s public justifications for a new capital centered on the city’s role in the consolidation of a post-independence national identity, it was certain that there were other forces pushing for this move. It was not coincidental, then, the leading forces for this move were the country’s top military men. The creation of a new capital was becoming less a consequence of the independence of Pakistan and more of the

military takeover of 1958 by General Ayub Khan. There were other reasons that interested the military mind more (Vale 2008).



Figure 5 General Ayub Khan inspecting a new site in Islamabad (Source: drug-trafficking.blogspot.com)

Karachi, although the country's economic hub, seemed very vulnerable to several internal and external threats. Tensions with India were still high and an attack from the sea could not be ruled out completely. The President also found that the bureaucracy and civil service in Karachi were exposed to political instigators, corrupting influences, and a strong hold by the influential business and mercantile community. By taking it north to a physically and morally healthier climate, General Ayub Khan intended to give his government a new clean standpoint (Vale 2008).

The shift of the capital into West Pakistan's interior seemed bizarre at first: the capital was being moved away from the country's most developed region

instead of towards it. But the component that was the most developed in the interior, and hence, the deciding factor for the location was the army – Rawalpindi was the headquarters of the Pakistan Army. The move to the high plains was, thus, a move to a much safer location. There was an added advantage to the central location for travel to and from East Pakistan, the other half of this incredibly shaped country which had one thousand miles of India between its two "wings". In terms of transportation links, both real and imagined, the new Islamic leadership was also very interested in the new location's place on the historic trade route linking the great capitals of west Asia and the Arab world. Adding to the geopolitical and geostrategic attraction of the new capital's positioning was its closeness to the sensitive and disputed border areas of Kashmir, where Pakistan and India have fought several wars, the first one as early as 1947. The new site was also a safe distance away from the border Pakistan shared with the Indian province of Punjab. Considering all these reasons, the new site seemed befitting as a kind of a national citadel (Vale 2008).

General Ayub Khan's rationale did not rely on these kinds of reasons, however alluring they were to a military mind but on how the new capital would be "the focus and the center of the people's ambitions and desires" (Vale 2008: 147).

The City of Islam

Pakistan was initially a dominion in the

Commonwealth of Nations. With the adoption of a new constitution in 1956, Pakistan took on the title of *Islamic Republic of Pakistan*. With this newly added emphasis on Islam, at a meeting in February 1960, the cabinet decided to name the new capital *Islamabad* – “the city of Islam”. With such advancements, the situation in Pakistan became such that there became an irrevocable connection between the idea of purity and the glorification of Islam. As Imran Ahmed puts it, “Islamabad attempts to naturalize the new nation-state of Pakistan; through the rhetoric attached to the choice of site, through the choice of site, through the reference to a supposed Islamic geometry in its grid layout; through the Islamic references of its architectural styles, and through the network of Sector mosques” (Vale 2008: 147). Much like the Pakistani national struggle itself was the struggle to conceive and execute the creation of Islamabad. Ahmed reflects that “In Islamabad, the ideological agenda and its vitalizing narrative in architecture and urbanism has two roots: the urge to Westernization, where nationhood with its ostensibly colonial origins is taken as a sign of modernity and progress; and a will to fundamentalism, where the religious community of Islam is the original and omniscient source of the Pakistani identity” (Vale 2008: 147). With Islamabad, the Government of Pakistan promised the people a modern and pure white city to the north.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) was constituted in September 1960.

N.A.Faruqi, later to become its chairman, published the following note on the project and its outlook:

“Through a new country we, as a people, are an old nation, with a rich heritage. Inspired by a historical past ... (We are) eager to build a new city which, in addition to being an adequate and ideal seat of government, should also reflect our cultural identity and national aspirations” (Mumtaz 1985: 184-185).

Designing the *Dynapolis*

The master plan for Islamabad was designed by Doxiadis Associates, the firm established by Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis, a notable Greek town planner and father of Ekistics. The approval of the master plan took place in May 1960. The goal of the master plan was to allow Rawalpindi and Islamabad to grow at the same time through the siting of Islamabad on a fan-shaped area rammed between a wall of steep hills and the existing city of Rawalpindi. This was a tacit criticism of nearly all of the designed capitals that came before Islamabad, such as Washington, Canberra, New Delhi, Chandigarh, and Brasilia, and were designed as bounded areas and presented as static entities which would eventually be filled out. Doxiadis, on the other hand, promoted Islamabad as a *‘dynapolis’* – a city endlessly expanding in a linear fan shape from an initial fixed point. Thus, Islamabad would begin with one node in the top corner of the fan and, with time, spread to the southwest in one direction. Because it was being created near an

existing city, it would be a two-nucleus *dynopolis* and because growth would be guided and unidirectional, the two nuclei would spread in space and form a dynamic metropolis (Doxiadis 1965).

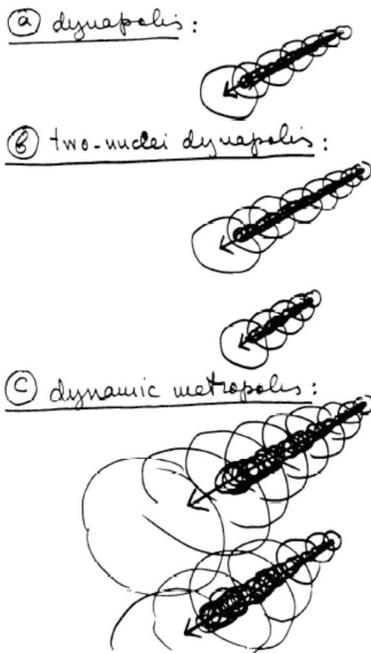


Figure 6 Towards a dynamic metropolis (Source: Islamabad: The Creation of a New Capital)

Doxiadis felt that a linear form could not be envisaged in dealing with a two-nucleus metropolis. He found the need to work with forms whose dimensions in two directions crossing each other at a right angle would not differ much. This led to the basic form of a concentric city with a pattern of radial and circular streets – very similar to a naturally growing settlement – or to a pattern of a grid of streets crossing each other at right angles. The circular was excluded because Doxiadis thought that suited a static city and not a growing one (Doxiadis 1965).

The grid was then chosen but the question arose as to what kind of grid – the elongated city blocks of the past, square blocks, straight or curved streets. According to Doxiadis, various considerations showed that the traditional elongated city block was a rational product of the fact that the block consists of plots which are in two rows of the same orientation. He added that unless the form of the landscape compels one to, there was no need for the main roads to be curved. Thereafter, not only the basic form of a grid was chosen, but also the basic form of squares which by conception (of a grid of squares) are all equal; these were the cells of the city (Doxiadis 1965).

In choosing the grid, Doxiadis used historical precursors as well: Mohenjo Daro, one of the first cities in history was based on a typical rectangular grid; Lahore, a prime example of Moghul planning, was based on a two-axial system. Thus, both present day requirements and the cities of the past led to the same conclusion: full respect for a geometric grid. This gridiron layout divided Islamabad into sectors according to urban functions (Doxiadis 1965).

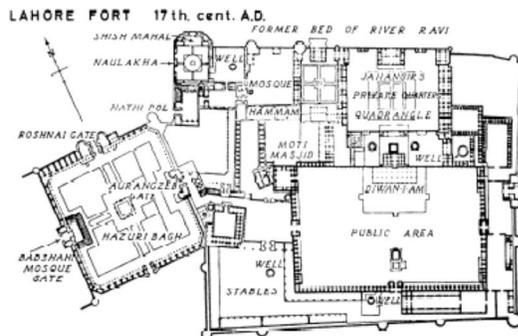
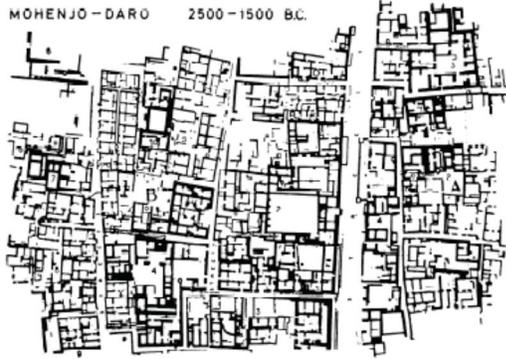


Figure 7 The forms of the past (Source: Islamabad: The Creation of a New Capital)

Islamabad’s capitol complex acted as the culmination point of a long axial way named Capitol Avenue by Doxiadis (now known as Jinnah Avenue). The Capitol Avenue was intended to act as a ceremonial route ending at the capitol complex where the President and the Parliament were neighbors in Islamabad’s elevated zone of government buildings, depicting Pakistan’s Parliamentary republic form of government where both the Parliament and the President are elected by the people (Vale 2008).



Figure 8 View of model along Capitol Avenue with the administrative center in the background and the civic center to the left of the avenue (Source: Islamabad: The Creation of a New Capital)

Doxiadis started to rethink the sequence of building priorities and criticized the planners of previously designed capitals for beginning design with “government buildings, the monumental areas and the high income dwellings” (Vale 2008: 149). “This process,” Doxiadis continued, “cannot lead to success for it is imperative that the lower income groups – those which can *build* a city are settled first. If this is overlooked, the result is a composite settlement consisting of a central monumental part and several other non-coordinated areas, including several with slums” (Vale 2008: 149). Instead, he claimed, “we must start by covering needs, and not by building monuments” (Vale 2008: 149). He thus, initiated a certain rethinking of the sequencing of building priorities, but his design did nothing to challenge previous attitudes toward the privileged position and the isolation of the capitol complex.

The process was adjusted but this part of the product remained routinely similar to the past ones (Vale 2008).

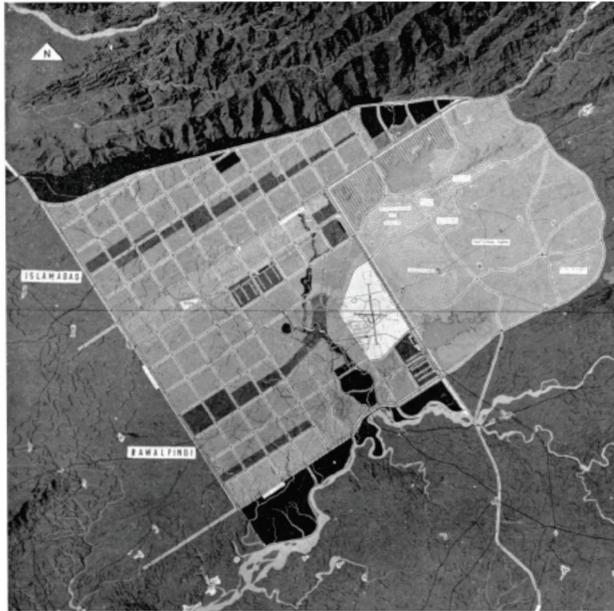


Figure 9 The metropolitan area of Islamabad (Source: Islamabad: The Creation of a New Capital)

Islamabad initially became a city only dominated by the institutions of government administration because other functions, such as housing, were directed towards Rawalpindi. As of 1968, the new capital could be described as “a little administrative island, neatly separated from the crowds of the big cities” (Vale 2008: 149) and affording “the feeling of complete isolation from life in the rest of the country” (Vale 2008: 149). A system of eight housing types correlated with civil service ranks was designed to include, at the least, a narrow range of income groups in each of the city’s residential sectors. Provision was also made for exclusively high end residential sectors in the areas closest to the capital

complex. Planner Richard Meier, in looking back at the first twenty-five years of the development of Islamabad, saw the convergence of a need to elevate the status of the government with the systems of rank in the military and the bureaucracy in the birth of most of Islamabad’s structure. In his view, the rectilinearity of the plan was reinforced by the capital city wanting a processional way that leads to the seat of power and a classification based upon squares imposed by the long view lines (Vale 2008). Meier then adds,

“The rank of a person could determine the section of the city in which he would live. In the military hierarchy, ordinary soldiers were assigned places in the barracks on the periphery, but each level above merited increasing levels of privileges. Non-commissioned officers deserved a bit more space, according to the rank, and junior officers needed an extra room for a servant, but those at the top of the pyramid were allotted quarters for four servants. Civil ranking could exactly parallel the military, except that the unskilled workers were granted 1 ½ room flat roofed raw brick hutments instead of barracks! Islamabad’s socio-economic segregation was not carried out in quite such rigid terms, but its inhabitation was initiated on the expectation that all comers to the city would be assigned a residence according to their salary and that, with the exception of the high government officials and diplomats already provided with special housing, all other would be

expected upon promotion to change house and settle into a higher class of community” (Vale 2008: 151).

“Public order in a capital city,” Meier continues, “was easier to understand if like lived next to like” (Vale 2008: 151). This privileged treatment for residential districts became even more obvious when it came to the capitol complex. A new administration’s desire to advance public order was established through the medium of urban design, exactly like designed capitals built before and after Islamabad (Vale 2008).

The Architectural Conflict

The most prominent public buildings of Islamabad are a great illustration of the conflicting and changing ideals that have defined a great deal of contemporary architecture in Pakistan: professional architects like to push the envelope towards what they consider to be modern whereas the people of Pakistan have an affinity for architecture that reminds them of their Islamic heritage.

Unlike Chandigarh and Dhaka where Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn prepared the master plans and also designed the major buildings, Doxiadis, not in any case known as an architect, did not design any major buildings in Islamabad. Unlike the other two capitals, a panel of international ‘signature’ architects of the time was assigned the task of designing the major buildings of Islamabad. Robert Mathew Johnson-Marshall from Britain prepared the overall plan of the administrative sector and also designed

the National Museum and the National Arts Gallery. The Government Hostel and the Secretariat Complex were designed by Italian architects Ponti, Fornarolli and Rosselli. Kenzo Tenge from Japan designed the Supreme Court, and following an international competition, Turkish architect Vedat Dalokay built the King Faisal Mosque. A team of architects working under the Colombo Plan was responsible for the municipal offices, schools, housing, and markets in various sectors. Derek Lovejoy and Partners from Britain were responsible for the city’s extensive landscaping. Other famous international architects involved were Arne Jacobsen from Denmark and Louis Kahn and Edward Durrell Stone from the US. All of them prepared a number of proposals for the Parliament Building and the President’s House, with Stone’s design being eventually built (Malik 2003).

When the Parliament building was first proposed in 1962, for instance, it was suggested that, “if the Parliament House is then to be built ... the building will be of a substantial size and in order to be architecturally impressive, it will have to be carefully designed to reflect our past culture, at the same time utilizing modern methods of construction” (Mumtaz 1985: 187). Arne Jacobsen’s uncompromising ‘modern’ design for the Parliament building was criticized for not being ‘national’ and the Capital Development Authority suggested that some “Islamic features be incorporated in the form of some arches in the cylinder, a dome

above the cylinder, or some additions to the fore-courtyard” (Mumtaz 1985: 187).

Louis Kahn replaced Arne Jacobsen but even his final designs were not accepted because of their failure to reflect the demand of Pakistan to introduce Islamic architecture in Islamabad’s public buildings. Edward Durrell Stone was then contacted because of his love for Mughal architecture and the spirit of grandness Mughal buildings casted. There was a strong sentiment, thus, connecting the desire for Islamic architecture to the subcontinent’s Mughal past. This feeling was verified by the chairman of the CDA, N.A.Faruqi who said that “since we have lost the best specimens of our architecture in Delhi and Agra, we are anxious to have some semblance of our architectural treasure. It is the form that matters and not the details such as the use of precious stones, etc., which are no longer available” (Mumtaz 1985: 187). Mr.Faruqi’s eagerness to have the Islamic heritage of architecture reflected in the public buildings of Islamabad led him to consider Stone for the design of all four buildings in the most prominent square of Islamabad: the Supreme Court, the Parliament building, the Foreign Office, and the President’s Secretariat (Stone’s designs for the Parliament building and President’s Secretariat were chosen). Mr.Faruqi reminded that “there is a grave dissatisfaction in the Government and among our people regarding the architecture of the public buildings put up so far in Islamabad” (Mumtaz 1985: 187). He insisted on a modern internal

arrangement of the buildings, yet, wanted aesthetics that looked “native to the soil” (Mumtaz 1985: 187). He stated that the buildings of Islamabad should be a reflection of the pride that the people of Pakistan take in their long and beautiful architectural heritage – he wanted the buildings not to look like they were cheap copies of buildings build somewhere else but like buildings that were inherently Pakistan’s own.

In consistency with his understanding of Mughal concepts, Stone designed a layout for the capitol complex with a formal symmetry. At this complex, the President’s Secretariat is flanked by the Parliament building and the Foreign Office. The pyramidal design of the President’s Secretariat consists of receding tiers with white walls and louvered windows. The Parliament building takes a similar tiered form. Both the Parliament and the Foreign Office are given austere facades (Mumtaz 1985). Although the exterior of all three buildings was stripped of any ornamentation, they are all connected by means of very extensive landscaping. The interior of the Parliament building, however, is very reminiscent of Mughal ornamentation. The ceilings and walls are decorated by means of geometric patterns and calligraphy.



Figure 10 Stone's Parliament Building (right) and President's Secretariat (left) (Source: Architecture in Pakistan)

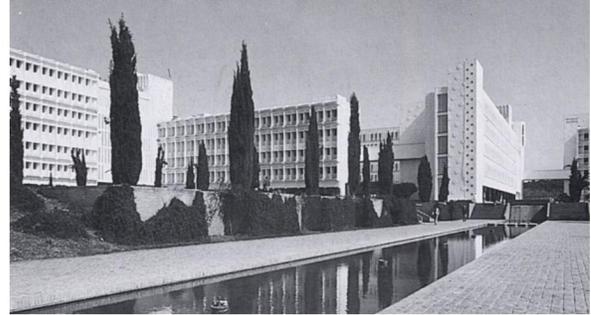


Figure 12 The Secretariat Complex (Source: Architecture in Pakistan)



Figure 11 Interior of Parliament building (Source: www.urbanpk.com)

The Secretariat Complex designed by Italian architects Ponti, Fornarolli, and Roselli is a grouping of buildings into a well-integrated unity. The use of water and terraces at many levels is reminiscent of Mughal landscaping. The spaces are self-defined in a series of quiet enclosures which flow into each other through the building masses (Mumtaz 1985).

The Government Officers' Hostel designed by the same team of Italian architects attains its architectural integrity from an organic unity of form, structure, function, and materials. The building also makes use of barrel vaults as lightweight sun protection in the form of a ventilated double roof, though barrel vaults are not a common form of traditional construction in the region. Also present is the traditional courtyard. The bricks used have the traditional slim proportions but are without the accompanying thick bed of lime mortar. The so-called Mughal Garden in one of the courts is only loosely derived from the traditional form (Mumtaz 1985).

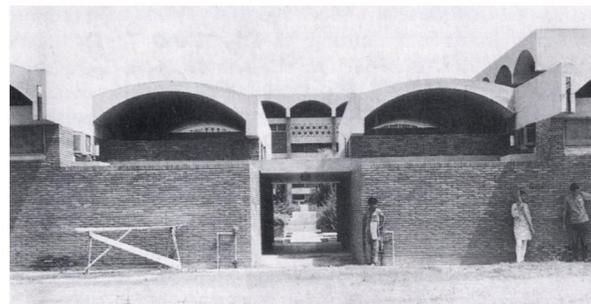


Figure 13 Government Officers' Hostel (Source: Architecture in Pakistan)

The Supreme Court building is flanked by the Secretariat Complex to the south and

President's House and the Parliament building to the north. Designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tenge, the monumental complex consists of 13 peripheral blocks rising five stories tall and a high rise central block and gives to unexpected angles. The building is entirely covered in white marble.



Figure 14 Supreme Court

(Source: www.urbanpk.com)

An international competition was held in 1970 calling for designs for a Grand National mosque. The jury rejected designs that “could not carry the basic design ideas to their local structural and architectural conclusions” (Mumtaz 1985: 188), or “did not fit the contemporary planning and design ideals of the modern city of Islamabad” (Mumtaz 1985: 188). The winning design by Vedat Dalokay, a Turkish architect, with its “simply straightforward covering of a large space by four double diagonal supports counter-balanced by the four minarets” (Mumtaz 1985: 188) was appreciated as a satisfactory solution. According to the jury report “the classical approach of formal mosque architecture was blended

in this project with modern form and technology. The simplicity of the general layout and interior space was appreciated” (Mumtaz 1985: 187).

The mosque’s architecture is strikingly modern and unique, lacking both the traditional domes and arches of most other mosques around the world.



Figure 15 King Faisal Mosque

(Source: Wikipedia)

Conclusion

With a scenic location in the foothills of the Himalayas, a world renowned master planner, a dozen world-famous architects, and a young country on the quest of building a capital expressive of its national identity, how should Islamabad be evaluated as a city? In terms of urban planning, Doxiadis may have derived his layout from sources that were native to Pakistan vis-à-vis cities in the Indus Valley Civilization and the Mughal Empire. However, the gridiron plan and separation of the city’s functions into separate sectors are not very different from Le Corbusier’s plan for Chandigarh that followed the modern city planning principles of *Congrès International*

d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in terms of division of urban functions and an anthropomorphic plan form. As far as the major buildings of Islamabad are concerned, the architecture attempts to conform to the country's Islamic roots through geometric layouts, landscaping, and interior ornamentation. The majority of the design elements, however, are very much like the Modernist and Brutalist architecture of the time. All the major government buildings are very similar to what Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier were doing in Dhaka and Chandigarh respectively – monumental forms and simple construction and materials such as brick and concrete; the drama of grandiose geometrical forms; and “honesty of materials.”

Hiring foreign architects and planners had as much to do with the desire to undo the old stigma of “backwardness” as it was by the lack of local architects and planners capable of undertaking projects of such elaborateness. Foreign consultants and their ideas of planning and design, methods and materials of construction, and dependence on foreign aid substantiated this move of architecture and urban planning from the environmentally more appropriate local to the ill-affordable and energy-intensive international modern. It was only later that the issues of the nature and relevance of modernity and modernization came forward and still need to be addressed today. While those in the urban professions in Pakistan seem to more culturally and socially aware, it is

hard to say whether this is because of the modernity brought about by Islamabad. Similarly, given the generally dominant modern ideology and foreign training of architects at the time, it is hard to say if the few local architects would have done things differently (Malik 2003).

With respect to lifestyle and urban environment, Islamabad does not relate much to the country in which it exists. In fact, it is least accessible to the vast majority of the people of Pakistan. Unfortunately, it is a city designed and built by and for the government, to be inhabited by those who govern. It thus, manifests the ambitions and goals of the politicians and decision makers who assumed power after independence and of the international planners and architects that were hired to design the city. Islamabad in its present form shows not only the prevalent ideas of the time but also what kind of impact political constraints and vested interests have on design (Malik 2003).

Islamabad neither produced a uniform urban character for Pakistan nor did it lead to any sense of national identity. It did however create a fragmentary hybrid character in a deliberate attempt to break away from history. It has not done much to improve architecture and urban design or provide any direction for the future (Malik 2003).

Cities are a realization of the culture and civilization of the people who build them and manifest the choices they make as a society about the built environment they

want to live in. Islamabad was not successful in showing how Pakistan learned from its history and in using contemporary technologies to deal with the spatial needs of its population. Islamabad may well be able to compete with other capitals when it comes to monumental chutzpah but missing is the dense urban web, the variety, the hustle and bustle. It does what a lot of other cities designed purposefully as an expression of identity rather than simply a good place to live and work do. Most of what has been published about Chandigarh and Dhaka, for instance, has been more about their brand name architects than for their relevance and appropriateness or otherwise as functioning cities. In hindsight, Pakistan needed a capital city that was more expressive of its history and culture and inclusive of its diverse population. It needed a city based on its own urban history that was well-suited to its climate and culture. It needed a city that could have been more affordable and less about exorbitant monuments for the government. Islamabad failed to do any of that.

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