

Dyal Singh Majithia & his Legacy of Crown Rule in Indian Sub-continent: Case of Dyal Singh Mansion

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Abstract



The research is an endeavour to pay tribute to a legend “Dyal Singh Majithia” and an effort to safeguard his legacy of the crown rule in sub-continent. Dyal Singh was entitled as a proud son of Punjab due to his contributions to introduce modern education. He bequeathed assets of worth around 30 lack Indian rupees in charity to establish various institutes through a trust. Under the umbrella of this trust, Dyal Singh College, library, a hall and a mansion was constructed in Lahore. Selected case study, Dyal Singh Mansion is a master piece of colonial era and remarkable example of Indo-Saracenic architecture in the historic urban fabric of the Mall Road, Lahore during 20th century. Apart from façade, rest of the faces is in a crumbling state and illegally encroached by residents and vehicular repair workshops. Data has been collected by using desk-based studies, from relevant departments. Visual surveys have been conducted to identify causes of decay. In the conclusion, we have to formulate a policy to conserve this heritage being part of Mall road and legacy of British period Sikh heritage during colonial period.

Keywords: Dyal Singh Mansion, Legacy of Crown Rule, Indo-Saracenic Architecture, Illegal Encroachments

Introduction

The Mall Road Lahore is a significant addition in the history of Lahore. With the historical background of Mughal and Sikh heritage, the area has been developed to facilitate British administration keeping in view the legitimacy of the local Architectural styles. With the British, Sikh & Hindu community also played a vital role to transform traditional city of Lahore into modern time. Dyal Singh Majithia is one of those who donated all his wealth in charity to establish educational, commercial and religious buildings in various parts of India. His contributions for Lahore are unforgettable as Lahore entered a new world due to his efforts to introduce western education in Lahore on the same pattern being followed in other cities such as Amritsar and Delhi (Wikipedia, 2022)

Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia born in 1848 and Died on September 9,1898 without an issue. After the partition of the country in 1947, Dyal Singh College, Dyal Singh Majithia Hall, Dyal Singh Mansion and Dyal Singh Library still exists by the same name, it is a tribute to Sardar Dyal Singh’s transcendent qualities that Pakistan Government retained his name for the college complex and mansion. According to an article written by Rana Asif , published in “Tribune” Dyal Singh Mansion is in the list of Protected sites in Lahore under Antiquity Act 1975 and Punjab Special Premises Ordinance,1985 but it is not proved as only Dyal Singh Library has been added. However, Mansion is a classic example of Indo-Saracenic architecture based on modern Palladian architectural elements. Dyal Singh mansion has been constructed in 1930 as written on a plate fixed on the face of the entrance (contributors, 2021).

It was designed to accommodate business families with luxury shops on the ground floor and offices on second floor and apartments on the top floor. There is a basement which is not functional due to neglect. The heritage site was a world of its own as it had its own power house on the back side of the building and also had its own water supply system. Servant quarters were on the backside. The elegant V-shaped structure is show-casing the glory of his past but urbanization, commercialization and motorization have swept all the breathing space in front of the façade and rest areas have been illegally occupied by the residents and workshops of the neighborhood. Dyal Singh

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mansion is in grave threat to be diminished in the near future. Before partition, the building was under the custody of trustees appointed by Dyal Singh in his will. After partition of India and Pakistan, the trustees of Dyal Singh Majithia migrated to India and it remained without any administrator. At present, the building is under the supervision of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) and witness for its existence nearly 100 years (Naeem, 2021) .

Literature Review

During the early period of British raj in Lahore, the surrounding area of walled city Lahore had been utilized by the European soldiers and they developed barracks. When British administration decided to shift British army in Mian Mir cantonment, barracks were removed and the plots were auctioned to the British high civilians. Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, son of Lehna Singh, a General in the armed forces of Ranjit Singh. Dyal Singh Majithia was the one of the wealthiest persons in Lahore and he purchased about 26 properties in Lahore out of this auction. He married twice in life but remained childless. He was a generous man and is remembered due his generosity with the youth. He bequeathed a huge amount of 30 lakhs in charity to establish various institutes, one of them was a complex comprised of Dyal Singh College, Dyal Singh Library and Dyal Singh Hall for the residence of students in Lahore. The trust also constructed an office building named as Dyal Singh Mansion for mixed use at mall road Lahore for the business community (Wikipedia, 2022).

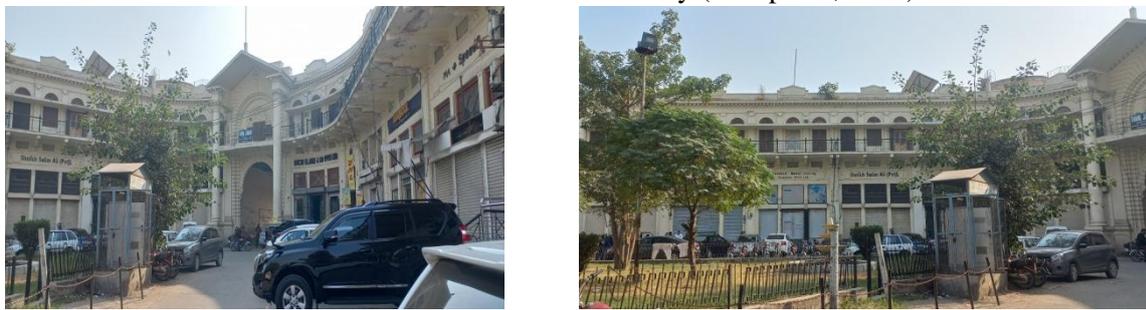


Figure 1(a, b) Views of Façade of Dyal Singh Mansion

Dyal Singh Mansion was constructed at one of the sites purchased from the auction of the barracks for the soldiers who shifted to Mian Mir Cantonment. The shops, offices and apartments are on rent by the Evacuee Trust Properties Board. The building has always been utilized by the renowned personalities and well known due to Shezan Restaurant which was a famous gathering space on mall after tea house. It couldn't be inhabited after an incident of catching fire. The fire was due to short circuit but it ruined a lot of offices. After conservation and repair by the Trust, the façade of the heritage site is still in a very sound condition but remaining faces have been neglected for lack of maintenance. The whole mansion is witness of its neglect.

Dyal Singh Majithia

Singh Dyal Singh Majithia was born in Varanasi in the well-known Majithia family of Punjab in 1848. His father Lehna Singh was a strong General of Ranjit Singh. His father died when he was only six years child. He got his education in India and Europe and he was very well aware of importance of western education. After completing his education, he preferred the business of Real Estate and was very fond of precious stones such as diamond and earned enormous wealth.



Figure 2SardarDyal Singh Majithia

He also left a collection of very expensive diamond stones in his legacy. He was first president of Indian Association of Lahore and performed this duty till death. He also managed Golden Temple for nearly thirty years and he also initiated a newspaper with the name” Tribune” in 1881. He was a founding member of Sadharan Brahma Samaj Trust and donated huge amounts for educational

institutes and libraries. With all his achievements, he was first Chairman, Board of Directors of National Bank which was established by his efforts in 1894. Being childless, he planned to donate all his wealth for the establishment of multiple institutes of various typologies in Lahore and other cities of India. He died in 1898 without any issue (Nadiem, 2017)

Legacy of Dyal Singh under Crown Rule

Dyal Singh owned 26 valuable properties including Dyal Singh Mansion comprised of 54 residential units on the mall road Lahore, lawyer's chambers on Fane Road Lahore, the exchange building which was later sold to Ganga Ram Hospital and a property which stands new campus of Punjab University. The lands which were owned by Dyal Singh in Lahore, Amritsar and Gurdaspur were sold by the trust to establish Dyal Singh Complex and Dyal Singh Mansion. He was a great supporter of western education and his core objective was to set up of Punjab University. In this regard, he spent a huge amount to Anjuman-i-Islamia and also laid foundation of Union Academy at Lahore, which laid the foundation of Dyal Singh School and college .sold according to his will. The earned money was invested to purchase a land, where now a days, new campus of Punjab University exists (contributors, 2021).

Historic Urban Landscape of Mall Road Lahore

Lahore has three major historic periods with reference to British annexation, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. During pre-colonial, Lahore has a strong history based on Mughal and Sikh footsteps. Lahore had absorbed the cultural and historical values of the invaders who attacked area and left their remains in the form of built heritage. There were a lot architects and civil engineers who were engaged to define urban landscape of the modern Lahore. The names of Bhai Ram Singh and Sir Ganga Ram are top of the list to produce an architectural style which was, later on, termed as Indo-saracenic style, a combination of European and indo-Islamic architecture. In the late 1900s, Indo-Gothic was used by European architects in India. Indo-Saracenic was a blend of British and Indian styles with British spatial organization and composition after British annexation. It also shows respect for the traditional architecture by the British architects. Indo-Saracenic style was applied on the Public, civic and religious buildings. The style got its peak during 1870s. Later on, in the early 20th century, Lahore entered into the Colonial Architecture (Sheeba & Dhas, 2018).

Mall Road Lahore is main spine of Colonial Architecture and there are precious gems such as Lahore High court, Museum, Tolinton Market, General Post office, National College of arts which represent the architectural styles by Bhai Ram Singh and Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram Agarwali through his love for art and architecture (Aslam, 2019). The history of the Development of Mall Road cannot be completed without the contribution of Sardar Dyal Singh whose memories are alive with Dyal Singh Mansion which was constructed according to the will of Dyal Singh for the official use of business community of British administration. The building is show casing the architectural style of Palladian elements and adding the beauty to area. Building is in white plaster finish with a monumental portico with semi-circular arches inviting the people to come and visit (Naeem, 2021).

Research Methodology

Selected case study, Dyal Singh Mansion is a valuable historical and cultural property under the management of Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). The rent received from the shops, offices and apartments are collected by the officials of the ETPB to meet the maintenance of the building. On the other hand, the residents also showing no interest to safeguard the building as they are not owners and utilizing this property since long time at a very cheap rental values. Building plans have been collected from Evacuee Trust Property Board who is currently serving as Trust of Dyal Singh Mansion, Mall Road, Lahore.

After desk-based studies and literature review, visual survey has been conducted and Interviews of the residents and workshop owners have been conducted. Residents were complaining against the trust for not taking care of the mansion. Architectural drawings have been collected from the Evacuee Trust Property Board which is current custodian of the legacies of Sardar Dyal Singh. Photographs of the selected site have been taken to identify the causes of decay and deterioration. On the basis of collected data and visual survey, deep analysis has been done to conclude the reasons of possible causes of neglect of a valuable cultural and historical property. After analyzing the whole situation, recommendations has been suggested to safeguard the legacy of colonial era. Development of strategic plan has been suggested for the smooth running of the commercial and residential activities in the mansion.

Case Study

Dyal Singh Mansion is a memorial of a legendary who is remembered due to his noble actions. The building is known due to its architectural and cultural values as it is one of the buildings constructed for official use. The building has been designed on Indo-saracenic style based on the Palladian movement which was initiated by Lord Curzon who thinks that European style should be identified in the buildings rather than combination of British and Indo-Islamic architecture. His movement ended with European Architecture with its unique elements. After attaining an age of about 100 years, the mansion is still catching the attraction of the passer byes. The space which was designed for the communal activities are being utilized by the car parking. One has to cross a series of parked cars to approach the commercial area of the mansion. These cars also creating hindrance in the human mobility in the area and also creating noise and smoke, deteriorating the beautiful façade.

Location & Context

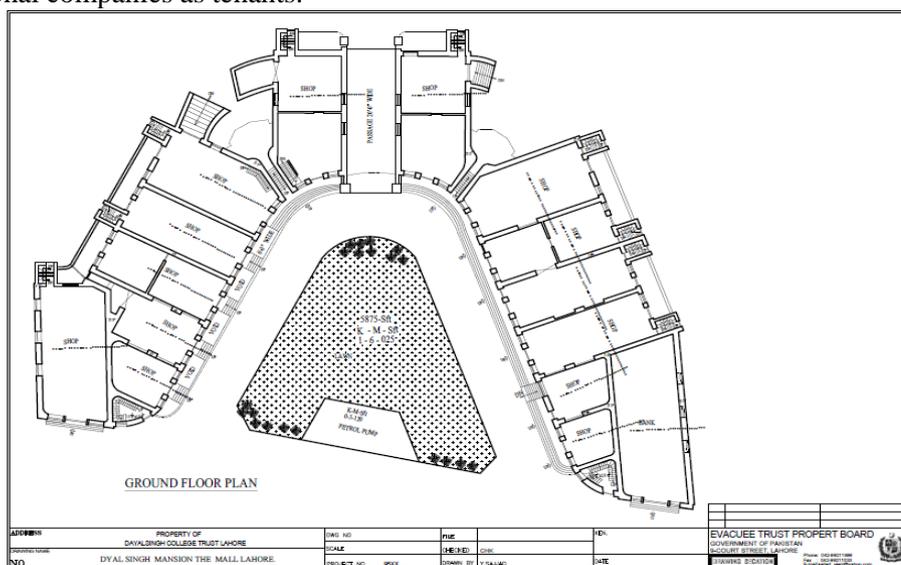
Dyal Singh Mansion is located on the main Mall Road adjacent to Sir Ganga Ram Trust Building on the thorough fare from Regal Chowk to Istanbul chowk. The building is adjacent to the Sir Ganga Ram Trust Building, MCB bank mall road branch, Punjab Bar Council, Lahore High Court and Faisal Bank Lahore. The mansion is located in the historic environment and part of protected area because part of mall road from chairing cross to Istanbul Chowk is highly significant with respect to buildings designed and constructed by Bhai Ram Singh and Sir Ganga Ram.



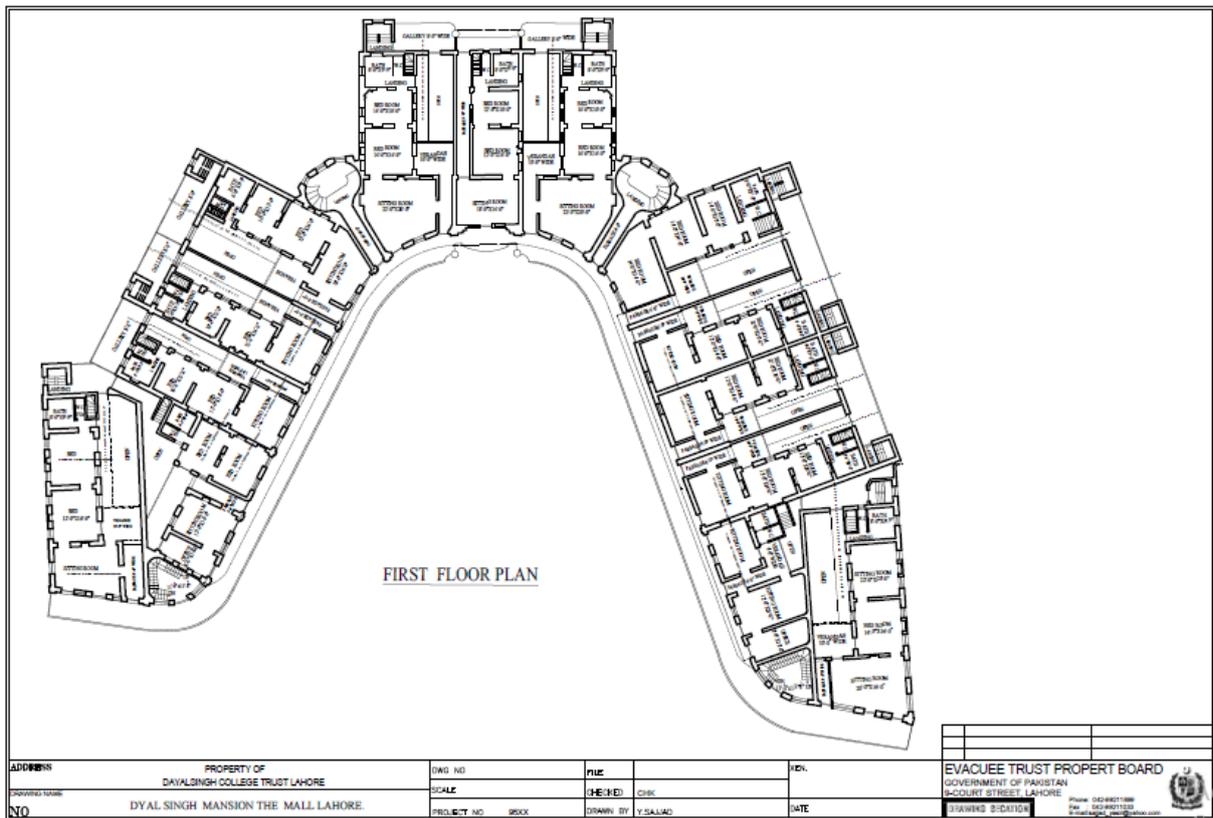
Figure 3 Location Plan of Dyal Singh Mansion with nodes Regal Chowk and Lahore High Court Chowk

Architectural Plans of Dyal Singh Mansion

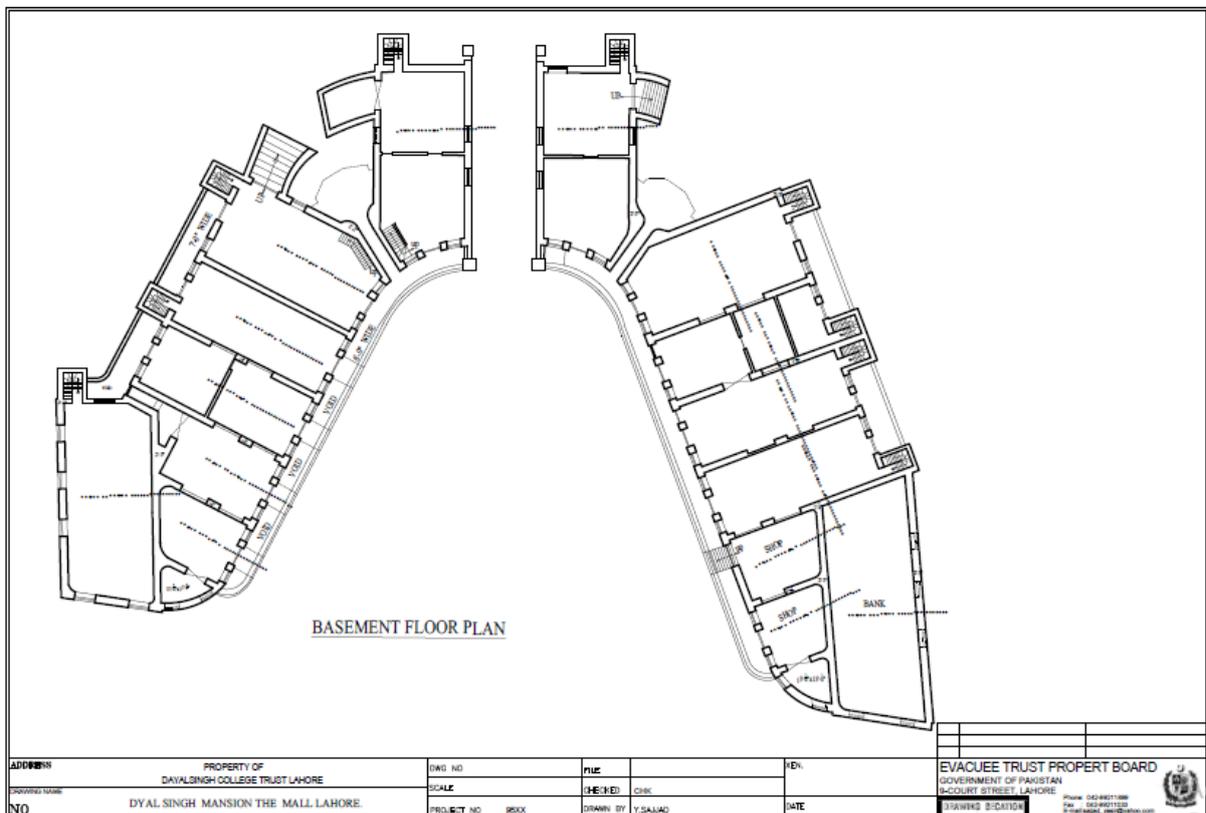
Dyal Singh Mansion is a double story building with a basement. It has a semi-circular plan, almost V-shaped with a portico in the center which is originally a passage to enter to another road, to access backside of the building. Architectural plans collected by ETPB are showing all the details of shops of multinational companies as tenants.



Map 1 Ground Floor map (Source : ETPB)



Map 2 First Floor Plan (Source : ETPB)



Map 3 Basement Plan (Source: ETPB)

Architectural Characteristics

The central portico has been designed with a magnificent Roman arch, and by crossing this passage which starts with this arch, we enter to an area of workshops, danter painters, repairing all kinds of

workshops. Architecturally, mansion has been designed in neo-classical order with a central portico with a roman arch, Corinthian column, fan windows with cusped arches, colonnaded balconies with brackets, and piers with overhanging eaves, awnings with lattice or without lattice.



Figure 4 Portico – front View

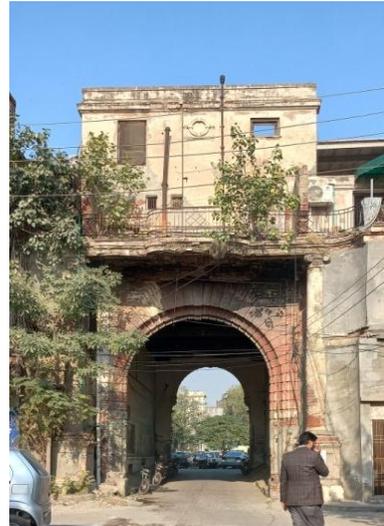


Figure 5 Portico View of back side

Unprecedented violence – February 14,2006

There was an unprecedented violence had taken place on the main roads of the city of Lahore which cannot be forgotten and had been considered as part of history. The protesters destroyed public property to condemn the derogatory cartoons in newspaper published in a Danish paper in the presence of police. In this run riot, major part of the buildings and commercial area such as shops were burnt but law enforcement agencies were stood still and were silent spectators. With other buildings and shops of the Dyal Singh Mansion,



Figure 6 View showing fire at Shezan Restaurant

Shezan Restaurant at Dyal Singh Mansion were also caught fire and turned to ashes. According to an estimate, there was loss of about Rs.5 million to Shezan due to this fire. This was not only financial loss but cultural also as people has lost a place which was meeting point, after tea house. This place was a meeting place of journalists, artists, academicians and professionals to resolve their issues and to plan regarding promotion of their ideologies (Asif, 2012) .

Present Condition

Building has series of shops on the ground floor, offices of the bar council members on the first floor and well maintained apartments of lawyers on the second floor. The basement has been filled by garbage and rubbish materials. The passage of the basement floor has been blocked and it is in no more usage. The open spaces around the mansion has illegally occupied, diminishing the boundary wall. The streets between the Dyal Singh Mansion and Sir Ganga Ram Trust Building has also been partially covered by the residents of the neighbourhood. Apart from front, all the faces of the building are in a crumbling state due to the negligence of administration and residents. The area which was

used for residences, once upon a time is now a workshop for car, motorbike repair and maintenance on the back of the mansion. There are about 50 shops of similar nature with various sizes. The area which was earlier designed with beautiful green lawn, now has been occupied by qabza groups and land grabbers. Power house and water system has now been story of the past. The memorial restaurant named as Shezan has been burnt. Big cracks have been appeared in the face of building and are marks which tell that building is waiting for its ends. A highly paid property is being used for such a purpose due to the unplanned and illegal encroachments and occupancies. The property is located on the most valuable and historic road of colonial period.

Common causes of Decay

- **Structural Issues**

Structurally the building is very strong, however, parts of the building is showing plaster peel off due to moisture content and dampness in the stairs for basement. The drain is running along the Dyal Singh road and underground water leakage has damaged the sub-structure.

- **Climatic Causes**

Climatic causes of decay includes thermal expansion due to changes in temperature, cracks are visible on the upper part of the building. Rain water is also destroying the faces, other than front. Front is being maintained by the shop keepers.



Figure 7 View showing access to the basement

- **Botanical & Biological**

Due to the negligence in repair and maintenance, self-growing plants and creepers can be seen in the back face of the building, even on the face just touching Mall road. Which is damaging structure of the mansion?



Figure 8 View showing Biological impacts

- **Atmospheric Pollution**

Atmospheric pollution due to the motor vehicles and drain is causing structure permanently as the front of the building is a huge mess of cars only, open space has been transferred into parking area to accommodate the purchasers and visitors to the chambers of the lawyers. The ill smell of the drain has also damaged the activities as there is no buffer zone between the drain and mansion. At the same time, the equipments being utilized by the motor workshops are also causing noise pollution making historic environment unhygienic.

- **Inappropriate repair and neglect**

Major Root cause is inappropriate repair and maintenance. The major part is on the shoulders of the Evacuee Trust Property Board, Punjab but residents are equally responsible. After paying rent to Trust, they transferred all their responsibilities to the administration. Although little care of them can enhance the life of the building. But the main reason is this that they are enjoying, historic asset on very cheap rate without any check. Strict compliance of rules is required on the part of board.

Results & Discussions

Dyal Singh Majithia was belonged to a feudal family and he himself is a Philo-therapist. He has done all his efforts to upgrade social life of people through introducing western education and donated all his wealth in charity to establish educational institutes. He laid the foundation of a newspaper named “Tribune” and was chairman of first bank named as “National Bank”. All these are not the common achievements. These are special and gave Dyal Singh eternal life due to his noble tasks. The mansion is adjacent to Sir Ganga Ram Trust Building.



Figure 9,10,11 Views of the back side showing Human neglect resulting decay of building

Architectural Characteristics are of the same period. Dyal Singh Mansion was constructed in 1939 after the death of Dyal Singh under the umbrella of a Trust constituted to fulfil the “will” of the Dyal Singh. The building is located on the prime area of Mall Road and bears the architectural elements which distinguish it from the rest of buildings on mall designed by Bhai Ram Singh who played vital role to define the architectural style of colonial period. At the same time, Sir Rai Buhadur Ganga Ram is taking British Lahore towards modernism. The building is elegant with a high portico with Roman arch. Similarity is the basic principle followed while planning the mansion. While going through the Regal Chowk to Istanbul Chowk, V-shaped, semi-circular building with its open space in front of the façade, forces the passerby’s to have a look and visualize its beauty. It has not mentioned that this building has been designed by Sir Ganga Ram but visual survey of both buildings, Dyal Singh Mansion & Sir Ganga Ram Trust Building enforce to assume that both buildings are masterpiece of the same artist. The building has been neglected by the Evacuee Trust Property Board and stake holders.

All the above discussion, proves that the building is our heritage and should be protected. The main function of the building is related not only one stakeholder, instead, multiple stake holders also made it difficult to decide its future. All these factors were root cause of its deterioration.

Conclusions

There are three main factors which are responsible for the current status of the heritage site, one is urbanization, second is commercialization and third is motorization. Ever increasing urban population and undue pressures on the urban areas resulted in illegal encroachments, in the case of this mansion; motor workshops are major encroached areas. The worst encroachment is in front of the mansion in the form of car parking, a buffer zone between the visitor and the building. It is mandatory to plan the following activities.

- Financial and administrative plan to safeguard the mansion.

- Proposal for the smooth running of the activities of the building.
- Maintenance plan of the building and removal of encroachments should be priority.
- Alternate space for car parking to regenerate the open urban space in front of mansion.
- Removal of plants from the exterior and interior walls of the building.
- Protection of sub-structure from humidity and moisture content.

Evacuee Trust Property Board should satisfy the needs of the residents with taking all the measures to maintain the building and residents should also take care of their occupancies as there are a lot of damages are only due to the carelessness of the present owners on behalf of ETPB.

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