



llan B. Jacobs in his classic work, *Great Streets* has outlined characteristics of such streets: places for people to walk safely, physical comfort, a well-defined form and character, memorable qualities, transparency, maintenance and a distinct quality of construction, structure and design are the features that determine the overall character of a street. Few streets in Pakistan fulfil this criteria. However, one example which is now evolving to join the cadre of truly outstanding streets of the world is the Gawwalmandi Food Street in Lahore. An outcome of thoughtful public sector initiative, public-spirited private investment, people's participation and a sensitive urban design, Gawwalmandi Food Street has become a noteworthy place, popular amongst all categories of people. Its popularity is observed to be increasing everyday.

Gawalmandi Food Street is located in the vibrant urban setting of Lahore branching out from the Railway Road. Historically, this place was a small village famous for milk trade, obvious from its name. Around partition in 1947, Gawalmandi was ameliorated in the urban setting and it soon became a busy street. In fact the whole area of Gawalmandi encompasses an all absorbing context of various urban activities including eating outlets, cinema houses and other recreational pastimes. With the rise in public movement in the area, congestion, pollution and vehicular-pedestrian conflict emerged as the most pressing problems. Repercussions to this effect had a direct bearing on the space quality of the street, which was in desperate need of a planning and urban design input. Concerned local authorities in consultation with the various stakeholders initiated a pioneering project: urban renewal of the Gawalmandi Food Street. The objective of the exercise was to create a lively street free from environmental and physical hazards that could provide a conducive context for people to walk, eat and enjoy the ambience of the space. In order to attend to this challenging preservation-upgradation project, the work was awarded to ICON-a Karachi based architectural practice run by Architect Hanif Daud and his colleagues. Hanif is a graduate of Dawood College of Engineering Technology, Karachi and specialised in the subject of Architectural & Urban Preservation from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge. The project was sponsored by a leading corporate house of the country.

Food Street has been entirely pedestrianised for evening and night hours to create a unified space for movement of the people. In



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SAMAN MAHMOOD looks at the Food Street facet of Lahore

conformity with the project guidelines, the shopkeepers have undertaken basic refurbishment of their respective premises. However, the architect has devised a distinct theme for the design of the various objects and spaces to weave out an all-encompassing suavity in the space. Thus shops and restaurants of varied character, cuisine, orientation and clientele are now part of a common urban tissue sensitively conceived and diligently executed.

The entrance gate is the first element that unveils the design concept. It creates a threshold and enclosure for the street space. Local traditions depicted through the composite construction in reinforced concrete and metal work enhance the space quality. Hanif explains the design in detail: "Designed and executed in mild steel, the gate simply enriches the quality and texture of the street awarding a sense of pride to the entrants. The design retains a flavour of the Mughal tradition, pertinent to the historic architecture of Lahore, and creation of a gateway entrance is both functional and compatible with the street configuration. Vertical mild steel members with proportionately embedded details provide a fascinating combination. This ambience is derived from skilful ornamentation that frilly realises the potential of local craftsmen, displaying the

finest quality of workmanship. Explicitly detailed bollards are installed at regular intervals which control the flow of people. Jails cast in aluminium and brass finish demonstrate fine workmanship and are also a direct outcome of inspirations from Mughal architecture".

Contextually aluminium cast carved light brackets and poles in wrought iron finish are an elegant addition. These lamp posts, envelope the entire street into the design bond which is aesthetically complete and mature in composition. Corporate images of the sponsors are so incorporated that they add to the visual quality, avoiding negative super imposition, otherwise common place in commercial areas. The architect's aim was to, in his own words: "make an extremely calculated and careful architectural intervention which compliments the existing historic urban themes rather than compete with it."

The street is also dotted with two kiosks for sponsors. The kiosk design hinges on the parameters of functionality, appropriateness and composite construction under a modern language. It strongly relates to the activity profile providing a clear direction to the users. Its curvilinear space delineates a uniform relationship between the vendor and vendees. Use of bold red coloured wall firmly places the kiosk in its surrounding, not

letting the passer-by to miss the charm or the corporate image. Its hovering roof done in semi-circular profile and metallic outfit renders a unique experience for its audience. The kiosk is purposefully juxtaposed to ensure high visibility.

This project proves the fact that when popular aspirations are understood and translated by the design, local traditions and crafts are thoughtfully applied and diligent supervision is involved in the execution, the result is a truly brilliant one.

Certain aspects need consideration for success and sustenance of the project. Heavy vehicles should be prohibited from plying on this street as they can cause damage to the pavements and curbstones. Loading and commercial vehicles also need to be controlled especially animal drawn carts for the overall safety of the embellishments. Gradually the suspended overhead electric and telephone wires must be put in underground conduits to remove hazards and visual obstructions. Regular disposal of solid waste and sweeping needs to be ensured, mainly under the active management of the area operators. To conserve the indigenous feet of the project, fast food chains should not be allowed to enter into the street. In addition, Hanif points out at some facilities that must be added later, maybe as a second phase of the project. These include public toilets, hand wash areas and waste bins. He also stresses for a need to respect old structures and thus controlled and monitored alterations in the exterior finishes and shop renovations. A system of standardised signages should also be implemented.

The architect concludes with a remarkable suggestion: "While Gawalmandi Food Street is a beginning, many streets of Pakistan with similar function can be revitalised. Burns Road, Zamzama Street or Marine Drive along Seaview in Karachi, streets leading to *Ghanta Ghar* in Faisalabad and parts of Blue area in Islamabad are options which require careful exploration and investment. Authorities, urban planners, architects and investors should join hands for such projects." His proposal matches closely with Stanford Anderson's comment in his book *On Streets*, "The actual and potential characteristics of streets are too little considered. Architects often bury themselves in individual building projects, ignoring any responsibility to the public space of the city; planners work at a scale where the street is seen only as a traffic channel or emphasise social and economic factors that cut through urban phenomena in such a way as to allow streets to remain unrecognised and lost in their negative connotations." ●