International Conference on Research in
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
27 - 29 November 2026 Vienna , Austria

The Muhalla in Bhairovasthan Temple: An Ethnographic Study of Community and Space, Lahore

Fareena Munawar Ahsan

National College of Arts, Pakistan

Abstract

This paper presents an ehtnographic study of the Bhairovasthan enclosure in Ichhra,Lahore. It was a 19th CE Hindu temple complex that was repurposed, after partition of the subcontinent, into Medina Colony, a residential muhalla for Muslim immigrant families. The study examines how communities construct belonging within inherited and contested built environments, using the methods of spatial mapping, participant observation and in-depth interviews with the long-term residents of the colony. Though the initial assumptions framed the site through its religious past, the fieldwork revealed that the residents relate to the enclosure primarily through communal life, kinship and mutual trust. The research documents the spatial rhythms of the muhalla, the role of ehata (shared courtyard) and the residents' expression of security and coexistence. The findings complicate the existing scholarship that defines muhalla boundaries as mainly perceptual, instead it shows a strongly physical and bounded urban community with a reconstructed identity around habitation and not heritage. The study contributes to urban heritage studies and South Asian ethnography by showing how communities repupose colonial-era religious architecture into sites of everyday living. It raises broader questions about the afterlives of contested sacred spaces and informal heritage management in post-partition Pakistani cities.

Keywords: Built environment; Kinship; Migration; Partition; South Asian urbanism