

# To Reveal the Emotional Value of *Khanabadosh* and Spirit of Huts

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**Abstract:** Who defines the standards of living? Is it something that has been given by the society? If it is so then how can people define a standard of living in respect to the space where they live? Personalization of space not only applies to luxurious homes and commercial offices but people who live in temporary homes like huts and shelters; they also tend to individualize their surroundings. Personalization of space is not dictated or handed down by any authority. It originates from the one who lives in that space, defines it and gives a meaning to it. The individual spending time within a space is actually the one who defines a space and gives meaning to it. This paper discusses the emotional value of people living in huts of Lahore. These people are known as nomads or “Khanabadosh” in Urdu. Their life is continuous struggle to reach a comparatively comfortable and successful state of being. It is not justified to call them homeless or vagabond, as they are neither without a home nor without a family to keep them rooted. They have families to look after and they work hard in daily life to feed them but society treats them as outcasts just because they follow a lifestyle different from their own. The present research also aims to gather insight into the attachments of these people with their simple, everyday used household products. In addition to that, the researcher also intends to explore the possibilities of up-gradation of temporary huts in Lahore through future research while focusing on the functional and emotional associations of their dwellers.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Value, Personalization, Khanabadosh, Huts, Gypsies

## 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology follows a mixed approach. Starting from the global context of homeless people and narrowing down to gypsies living in huts, locally called “*Jhuggi*” of Lahore, the study will identify the commonalities and difference between the two. Research is particularly established with the help of a review of archival documents and references are drawn from various relevant sources.

Numbers of articles have been written on homeless people, both the people who are born homeless and the ones who have been made homeless through the circumstances. However, gypsies have been sometimes categorized as “*Homeless people*” by the society. It is a time to put a light on the contributions of gypsies to the society and struggles through which they have to go through due to the problems created by the society itself. Some government departments are working to resolve these issues and initiatives have also been taken by private organizations. The present study will focus on raising the questions pertinent to this issue, the answers to which will demand another research. Literature review reveals that although considerable research has been done about the physical features of gypsy settlements however, very few scholars have written about the emotional values of gypsies, the significance of space where they construct their temporary homes and household items used by them. These are the things that make them similar to other strata of society instead of being labeled as outcasts. Researcher intends to shed light on this emotional side through discussions with writers, scholars and *Khanabadosh* themselves.

Interviews have been taken with nomads as a tool for data collection. These include several in-depth details regarding their living, work and family. Audio Interviews have been recorded with the permission of respondents. The data collected on the basis of interviews has been analyzed and communicated through graphs and images.

The intangible aspect mentioned as the “*Emotional Value*” is discussed through literary references about the gypsies. The thoughts are expressed by homeless people, recorded by the researcher and have given the form of literature to capture the emotional value of that moment.

Site visits and investigations have been done in context of space around huts in Lahore and particularly in developed residential areas like Johar Town. The understanding of reasons behind moving from one place to another, handling the circumstances and courage to start the life all over again at any new place has been observed. In addition to the above, the other qualitative aspect including sense of space, sense of enclosure and most importantly the emotional value within all these has been constructed through the above mentioned discussions.

A conclusion is drawn which discloses the importance of huts regarding their existence and emotional value of the people living in them. The phases of life felt by the gypsies, importance of their decisions for their betterment and the meaning of family according to them.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban population is reaching to an increasing extent. At the time when city dwellers bring together the greater number of population in 2007 considered to be the decisive change. Nowadays, people are migrating towards urban areas. Cities occupy more than 50% of world’s population as a thought of 2014 and it is considered to reach 66% by 2050 and the current population of Lahore which is about seven million, will exceed 10 million by 2025[1].

Murtaza Haider writes in his article of Dawn News “*Homelessness in Pakistan and Canada*” that Canada comes under one of the profuse economies but the present condition shows that 35,000 Canadians live as homeless every single night. However several reasons are involved in migrating from rural areas to urban cities like Lahore. Clean water, energy resources, shelter, healthcare and education are among the prominent ones [2]. United Nations performed a global survey in 2005 and it shows that worldwide 100 million people were living without appropriate homes (Habitat, 2015). According to Business Standard reports, in our neighboring country India, 78 million people are looking for homes which includes the street children around 11 million (Business Standard, 2013; Slum Dogs). Justin Healey mentions in his book “*Homeless People*” that the number of Australian homeless people are 105,000 and they live without any kind of safety, security

and reasonable shelter [3]. People from villages who migrate to cities in search of better livelihood often have to end in living temporary huts [4]. It includes not only males but also the other family members including females and kids. As a result they turned out as gypsies. It is one of the reasons that how one becomes a part of gypsies or nomads. The other form is that the gypsies, who are already living in huts and struggling in lives, call their other family members or friends living in rural areas and advise them to migrate in order to try their luck and take a chance to upgrade the standard of living. That's how the number of gypsies is increasing significantly.

To catch up with city life expenditures, they often start working on basic jobs. For example male members of family begin to work as daily wage labors and females start house cleaning jobs. Few kids go to government schools and most of them start scavenging junk from streets that they could sell at shops and earn few rupees. Their family life begins when they come back to their huts after the hard work of whole day. From outside the temporary huts looks very rough, dirty and uncomfortable but inside is the real light of candle.

### 3. AREAS

Gypsies lives in different areas of Lahore. It has been observed that specifically such people lives in areas alongside of River Ravi and try to get them settled near the newly developed housing schemes. This gives maximum chance to female members of family to get a job of housemaids in these newly developed areas. With the passage of time, these people have tried to create communities and live in form of groups. That's how they also occupy empty residential plot space with the permission of property owner. In return, property owners have caretakers to look after the property after complete assurance regarding members of gypsy family. In this way, they are not only specified to live outside of cities commercial or residential areas but also inside of this zone.

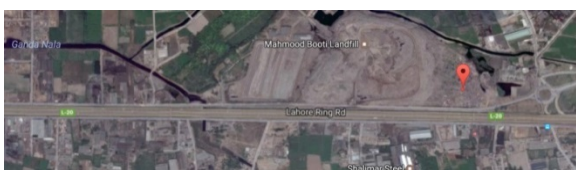


Fig. I. landmark 31°36'32.9"N 74°23'23.5"E near Mahmood Booti Landfill shows the gypsies community along of Lahore ring road



Fig. II. Group of gypsies living together and formed a community near Mahmood Booti Landfill beside service lane of Lahore ring road

Alongside of Lahore ring road near Mahmood Booti landfill (Fig. II and Fig. III) a community of gypsies has been living here from past several years. One of the community members Allah Baksh, 40 years old, shared that near about 170 gypsy families are living in this specific area which is

approximately of 170 Kanal (925650 sq. ft.). Shalimar society is near to it where the female members of families do job as housemaids. Male members are mainly involved in collecting garbage and recycled material and selling them to near markets. Few members go to construction areas near Ravi River for daily wage labor work.



Fig. III. Commercial construction site in Johar Town right next to place where gypsy's community were living from past 11 months

Emporium Mall is recently built in Johar town Lahore. The mall occupies the area of 2.7 million square feet and standing as eleven- storey high building. The numbers of gypsy families are living next to it [5]. Male members were hired as labors on daily wages and after the completion of this mall, these members are still here, doing same job but for different construction projects. Female members have been hired as housemaids in near residential blocks of Johar Town like J3 and R block.

From past three years many gypsies moved into Johar Town due to its development prediction at that time. Most of gypsy communities are living in different blocks. On the basis of data collection and site visits of different spots of gypsies' communities located in Johar Town, one can clearly see that how these people becomes the part of society and gradually they start building their numbers [Table I].

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF GYPSY FAMILIES LIVING IN  
DIFFERENT BLOCKS OF JOHAR TOWN,  
LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Serial no.	No. of Huts	No. of Gypsy Families	Block	Approximately Area Occupied (Square feet sq. ft.)
1	30 - 40	35 - 45	F1	16335
2	25 - 35	30 - 50	N	13612
3	25 - 40	35 - 55	P	10890

Due to the continuous travelling of these people from one place to another, it is very hard to identify that how many families and huts have properly been established at any specific place. The size of residential plot or open area doesn't mean that there will be many gypsy families living there in huts. It has been found during research that in some cases, number of huts and families are greater in small size of plots or areas as compared to bigger ones. Meaning of trust and family is deeply rooted in gypsies and they have adopted a kind of nature that accept obstacles as blessings and move on in their lives.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Findings showed that majority of the respondents were illiterate and didn't get the facility of education from their early years. Very few of them have passed their primary level education. It's very rare that any of them have passed



Matric degree. Most of them were working on daily wages. In Lahore one earns RS.450 per day as manual worker but it is not a fixed job. There are days, respondents' report, when they don't get daily wages job and they sit idle. Some of them also work as garbage collectors and then sell them to garbage stores. Majority of the respondents were married and have average of 3 to 4 children. Few of them mentioned that they send their children to government schools. Whereas, not every child is able to complete his/her studies.

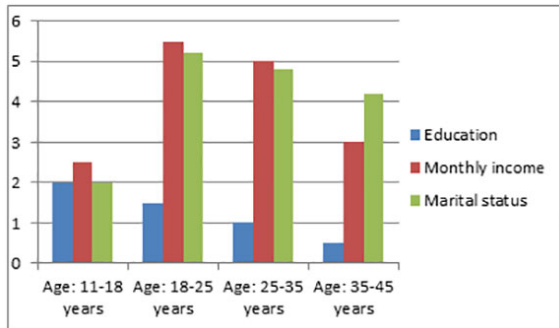


Fig. IV. Variation in education, monthly income and marital status on the basis of increase in age factor of gypsies

Children of age in between 11 to 18 years go to school for basic education. Government schools have been running in different areas where education is not very expensive which unfortunately effects on the quality of education provided in such schools. For age range 18 to 25 years, teenagers and adults start taking part into income resources while doing different jobs from garbage collector to daily wage labor. While coming towards 25 years and above, marital status gets prominent as it is considered to be the most suitable age for making family. Due to unavailability of good health, safety measures and illiteracy, any one member of couple, rather it's a male or female, gets trapped into some kind of sexually transmitted disease. According to survey report about HIV/AIDS knowledge among gypsies in Lahore and their preventive practices, it is found out that gypsies of Awan Town and Ehabab colony have generally inadequate knowledge about modes of disease transmission. Only 27.6% had heard the word AIDS and there was hardly any individual who knew the term HIV [6].

### 5. GYPSIES: LIFE AND EMOTIONS

In depth literature has been written on Homeless people, disadvantages and causes of being ended up as homeless. Such literatures manifest the obstacles and circumstances faced by nomads but few have tried to portray the emotional aspect of nomads. Gypsies have been stereotyped in our society and different names have been given to these people highlighting the negative side of their life. Whereas, positive side of gypsies have always been neglected. We live in a society which appears to be true or real only until examined more closely.



Fig. V. Boy standing under the structure of hut in a dramatic mood

'Changar' or 'banjara' are the labels given to gypsies alongside of river ravi and in residential area of Lahore like Johar Town [7]. As a researcher, the phenomenon of shifting spaces and inter-dependencies always intrigues me about gypsies

### 6. LIVING IN GROUPS

The numbers of gypsies have taken a shape of groups where they live according to their own choices. There are number of benefits of living together. It gives them chance to share loneliness. It helps them to celebrate every occasion like they have only dreamed of it in their lives. Gradually they are coming out of being outsiders and strengthening their own community. Few have taken an initial step and became an inspiration for others like Mohammad Sabir who is having a same background as gypsy and faced all the hurdles but now he is setting an example for other by working on education and sanitation issues of nomad community [8].

### 7. WEDDING CEREMONY

The occasion where most of the families members get together to celebrate an occasion is wedding. Rather than taking place in banquets or marriage halls, it happens in allocated plots. Meal is arranged according to the number of invited guest that brings a feeling of happiness and pleasure for everyone. On asking an adult about most exciting moment in life, the respondent replied "Marriage" with a shine in his eyes and smile on his face.

### 8. BASIC HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Gypsies rely on very basic household products for their use. Mostly female members of family get them from the place where they work. These are usually second hand products that have already been used many. Similarly, clothes, shoes, slippers, bags, blankets, water bottles and other useful household items have been donated to them. One of the respondents told that they actually accept anything that is being thrown away or discarded and what they do is, they actually try to figure out if any inch of the product could be used. They repair the products by themselves and bring them into use as long as it lasts (Fig. VI)



Fig. VI. Daily life household utensils use by the gypsies

One of the married male respondents shared on asking about the collection of household utensils that his wife is very keen in collecting different items that they can place inside their huts. Recently, she got a rustic and shred table lamp shade from her madam (house owner) and what she did with it is amazing. She covered the lamp shade with different patches of colorful clothes and sewed it together.

Instead of reusing it as light shade, she hanged it inside the hut with a bamboo shoot just above our *Charpai* (cot) and now we both keep looking at it while talking before going to asleep.

## 9. ROLE OF NGOS

In Lahore a Christian NGO playing a vital role in helping gypsy women entrepreneurs and according to project called as "Socio Economic Empowerment of Gypsy Women" 500 craftswomen and artisans were given chance to improve their skills and trades with respect to the market demands. USAID and Aurat (Women) Foundation also supports the "Gypsy Women Trade and Communication Center" in Lahore and provide a sale platform for such people so that they could be able to sell their products like hand fans, straw baskets, rugs, stitched clothes, decoration pieces and toys (AsiaNews.it, February 7, 2015) [9].

## 10. SPIRIT OF HUTS

Huts are among those enclosed space that have been noticed very rarely. People assume such space with feelings of dislike due to its ugly, dirty and rough appeal. Clutter, chaos and hostile emotions usually depict these spaces. One could easily identify the feelings of depression and suppression among the confined environment of huts. But for how long we let people perceive such sundry feelings. One should move on from such perceptions about one side and look on the other side of coin. It's in a power of human being to direct his own environment.



Fig. VII. Gypsy's hut at Mahmood Booti Landfill beside service lane of Lahore ring road

As a Japanese writer once said, "Some spaces are silent, others speak. Some which are more rare, sing" [10]. A silent space like gypsies huts contains the spirit and emotional value that is rarely noticeable. Such space doesn't provoke human attention [11]. The researcher intends to represent the emotional character and spirit of such space. This is a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement which is when investigated proved to be well founded that spaces like huts contains the emotional character in itself.

## 11. SHELTER

It's in a human nature that it feels secure and safe when something is covering its top and providing a shade. Roof of huts are just like mother's love. It let you feel that you are important and belong to some place. It doesn't matter if the roof is of brick masonry, concrete, metal or of bamboo. As mentioned by one of the respondents that "the roof under which we live just not provide shelter to our family members but also make us realize that we have something that no one can snatch from us that's why we always try to make our huts more and more comfortable for us depending upon the situations. For example in winters we

place plastic sheets found from garbage or any hard and warm material to feel warm inside the hut and in summers we place different cut-outs of light and breathable clothes to let the air pass into the hut."



Fig. VIII. Representing the bamboo structure for hut and cloth used as covering in summers

## 12. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the conducted studies and analyses, current research introduces an effective meaning to the inner life of gypsies and recognizing their concepts of giving meaning to their huts as space for living. A drive through the gypsies of Lahore will give an interesting insight into the minds of people and authorities that are dealing with this issue. This is an indication that how the city of Lahore also restrains the portion of gypsies even in the case of negligence of their existence. One should consider the existing of gypsies and nomads during the process of urbanism. Many architects, planners and sociologists investigate the living styles of people living in developing areas but current situations of Lahore shows that there is still more to do in this. Gypsies needs should be explicitly recognized in planning of housing schemes. Thus, government should also consider developing different policies for the development and progressive growth of gypsies. Some policies that have been used for homeless people don't apply on gypsies and neither will they help them in any way. In addition, people should take part in strengthening the community of gypsies as they play their role in prospering the society. We should all focus on mutual growth and freedom of expression together, and the faster we realize and rejoice in this, the faster we could come under the real meaning of progressive community.

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