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1950s

Celebrate the history of our city and reminisce the Karachi of the 1950s featuring the music, cinemas, eateries, and much more from that era.



CINEMAS IN 1950s

Cinema going culture was very popular in Karachi, especially between the 1950s and the 1980s. Post-partition Karachi inherited a number of cinema houses including Majestic, Picture House, Plaza, Nagina, Taj Mahal and Light House. Regal and Mayfair were open-air cinemas and were referred as theatres or talkies. The suburbs, too, had a good number of cinema houses including four in Nazimabad and two in Liaquatabad area. Saddar had the first air-conditioned cinema, Rex, along with Rio, Mayfair, Paradise, Regal, Odeon, Star, and Lyric. Going to the movies involved planning a few days before the actual outing. There were separate counters for advance booking. On Sundays, the cinema screened one extra show of old hits for those who had missed earlier screenings. The front benches were booked at a cheaper rate of six annas or nine annas class whereas rich cine-goers used to sit in the balcony or in the dress circle. The first Karachi made film was 'Hamari Zuban' released on June 10, 1955.



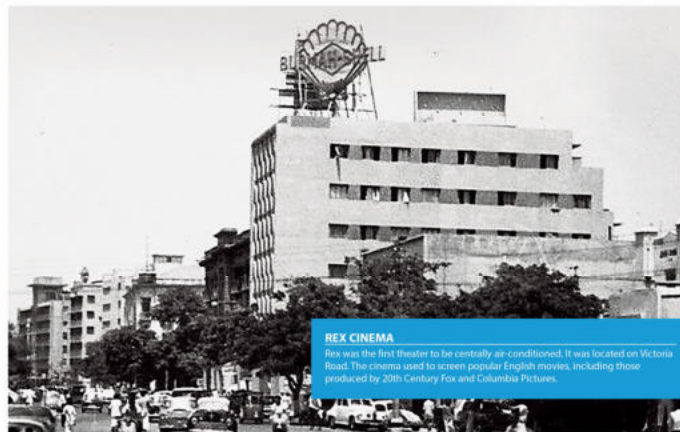
MAYFAIR CINEMA

Mayfair was an open-air cinema that was located opposite Marina Hotel on Club Road. It was perhaps the oldest of all cinema houses in Saddar, where only two shows used to be held after sunset. Mayfair was closed at the end of the fifties.



ODEON CINEMA

Odeon Cinema was another historic theatre that was opposite Capitol Cinema. It had shortest screen for just 35 mm films. Odeon was constructed before the partition but opened after independence in 1947.



REX CINEMA

Rex was the first theater to be centrally air-conditioned. It was located on Victoria Road. The cinema used to screen popular English movies, including those produced by 20th Century Fox and Columbia Pictures.



LYRIC CINEMA

The cheapest seats down in the stalls costed six annas. And for a rupee and eight annas, one sat in the comfort of sofas in the balcony.



RIO CINEMA

Rio, which made its debut with screening of Sophia Loren starrer 'Attila the Hun', catered to the viewers of English movies. However, Rio didn't have the kind of reputation that Rex and Palace or for that matter Capitol or Paradise enjoyed.



PARADISE CINEMA

One of the English Theatres of the 1950s was the Paradise Cinema. In 1950, there was a major cinematic event which took the city by storm. Samuel Goldwyn's classical movie 'Samson and Delilah' had its premiere at the Paradise cinema.



MUSIC IN 1950s

If you live or have lived in Karachi at some point, it is hard not to have been part of nostalgic conversations recalling the heydays of the city when music spilled late into the balmy evenings and the broadness of worldviews matched the bell-bottomed hemlines of its proponents. All parties, discos, weddings had live music with senior musicians. Initially all musicians were purely note-reading jazz musicians. The night clubs were exclusive to foreigners, the musicians were locals and meant to play popular music via sheets provided by the foreigners. Music was not static or played technically in tune and breadth but was treated as a dialogue.





RADIO PAKISTAN

Apart from the concerts and live performances, radio was a popular source of entertainment. The entire family would sit around this box and avidly listen to their favourite programs, including dramas, music and radio shows.



Interestingly, Radio Pakistan also acquired the role of a film and art academy as most TV and film artists began their careers here. PTV actors, for the initial ten years, were invariably drama artists from Radio Pakistan.



Radio Pakistan's contributions towards promoting classical and semi-classical music have also been enormous since ghazal singers like Mehdi Hassan got recognition in the musical fraternity after his performance on Radio Pakistan in 1957.



Radio Pakistan opened a new broadcasting house in Karachi in 1950. Radio Pakistan had two shows, one at 1:30 pm and the other at 10:00 pm with RJ Edward Carapet. The shows played half an hour of Western tunes, often followed by a one-hour live talent show where various people who played and sang in Karachi participated.

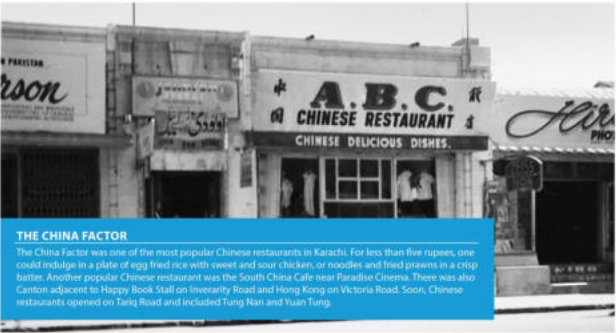


People relied on radio for news and current affairs programs while also being entertained by drama and music. Various singers, musicians, instrumentalists, poets and writers became associated with Radio Pakistan and a new era of cultural renaissance began in the country.



RESTAURANTS IN 1950s

Among the centers of entertainment in Karachi, from the 1950s to the late 1970s, there were many hotels in the city which hosted musical shows, dance parties, New Year and Christmas balls, with scrumptious food. While food streets like Burns Road offered quick bites and fast food, Karachiites had a number of dine-in options as well.



THE CHINA FACTOR
The China Factor was one of the most popular Chinese restaurants in Karachi. For less than five rupees, one could indulge in a plate of egg fried rice with sweet and sour chicken, or noodles and fried prawns in a crisp batter. Another popular Chinese restaurant was the South China Cafe near Paradise Cinema. There was also Canton adjacent to Happy Book Stall on Inverarity Road and Hong Kong on Victoria Road. Soth, Chinese restaurants opened on Tariq Road and included Tung Hui and Yuan Tung.



THE FRENCH CONNECTION
Le Gourmet was one of the high-end restaurants of the time. It was located in the Palace Hotel (now Mövenpick Hotel) and specialised in French cuisine. It was also one of Karachi's first nightclubs that had a variety of food, a well-stocked cellar, music and a congenial atmosphere, while also introducing the cabaret. There were also sophisticated magic shows, experiments in levitation and solo performances by a sensational local classical dancer called Panna.



THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE
For young people, there were two trendy hangout spots: Topsy's, near Rito and Rex cinemas, which served a wide variety of fuzzy drinks and the Manhattan Soda Fountain, which specialised in American-style sundae such as Knickerbocker Glory, Green Goddess, Purple Prince and Hangman's Blood. The closest thing to a burger in Karachi was Haniffa's hunter beef burger. The real western style burger was introduced by the Inter Continental Hotel in their coffee shop The Demi Tasse.

FOREIGN VISITS IN 1950s

1950



US Vice President, Richard Nixon, writing his comments on the visitors' book at Radio Pakistan's Karachi station in the 1950. With him is famous Pakistani radio personality, Z. A. Bokhari.

The Shah of Iran became the first foreign head of state to visit Pakistan in 1950. Warm relations between the two countries started when they signed the friendship treaty in Tehran after two months of the Shah's visit.



1952



Eleanor Roosevelt visited Karachi during her 1952 "Around the World" trip. She wrote about the trip in her autobiography saying, "We flew to Karachi, the capital of Pakistan, where I was the guest of the All Pakistan Women's Association." Eleanor Roosevelt is standing in the Children Ward of Lady Dufferin Hospital.

1953



Raymond and Nancy Schmale served as missionaries in India for the American Lutheran Church and visited Karachi in 1953.

1954



The legendary Jazz saxophonist and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie visited Karachi in 1954 as part of a US-sponsored cultural tour. He performed at the Metropole's 4,000 capacity garden.

1957



British fishing enthusiasts show off their big catch at one of Karachi's many beaches. This picture was taken in 1957 when these men (father and son) set a record by catching a 60 lbs Barracuda from the waters of the famous Sandspit beach of Karachi.

1958



According to a 1957 newspaper article in America's Washington Post, Karachi's beaches were some of the "cleanest beaches in Asia". American tourists enjoying a sunny day at one of the many beaches of Karachi in 1958.



American contralto Marian Anderson visited Pakistan in 1958 during a two-month goodwill performance tour of Asian countries. Here she is seen receiving a gift from Begum Wagarunnisa Noon following her performance at Frere Hall in Karachi. Her tour included other major cities of Pakistan.

1959



Duke Ellington's 60-member jazz band had two concerts at Karachi's Metropole Hotel in 1959. The band included famed musicians such as Johnny Hodges and Paul Gonsalves on the alto saxophone.



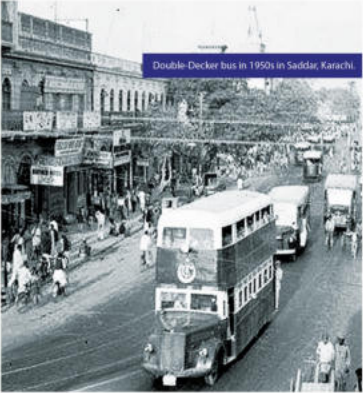
US President Dwight Eisenhower's visited Pakistan in 1959. People of Karachi wave Pakistani and American flags from the balconies of their apartments on Karachi's Burns Road as motorcade passes by. In 1959, the cover of LIFE magazine shows US President Eisenhower travelling on a horse carriage with Pakistani president, Ayub Khan, on the streets of Karachi. US President was also introduced to the Pakistan cricket team at Karachi's National Stadium. Eisenhower along with Ayub Khan watched the first session of a Pakistan vs. Australia cricket Test match in Karachi.



In August 1959, only seven months after the Cuban revolution, a nine-member goodwill delegation from the country made a private visit to Pakistan. The delegation led by Che Guevara met President Ayub Khan on August 10. Foreign Minister Manzoor Qadir can also be seen in the picture. Guevara stayed for a short while in Karachi during his whirlwind tour of Arab and third world countries.

TRANSPORT IN 1950s

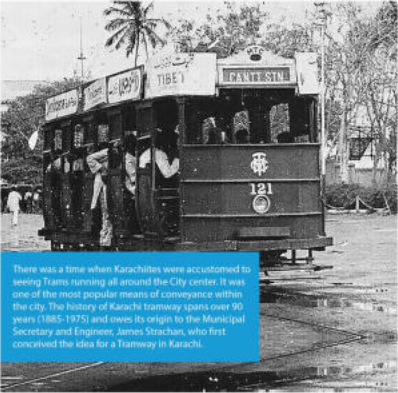
Public transport was easily accessible and available during the 1950s with multiple options of commute including camel carts, buffalo taxis, trams, double decker buses and an efficient airline service by the name of Pakistan International Airline (PIA). On 1st February 1955, the airline flew its first international service, between Karachi and London via Cairo and continued to grow into a world-class airline making huge profits till the late 90s. Karachi, specially, was known as the 'Gateway to Asia' since various international flights from Singapore Airlines, Pan Am, and Air France, amongst others, would stop over at Karachi.



Double-Decker bus in 1950s in Saddar, Karachi.



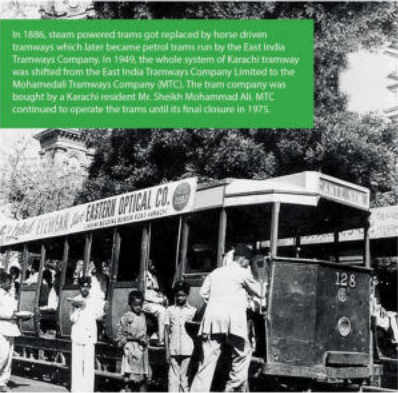
A Tram alongside a camel cart on M.A. Jinnah Road.



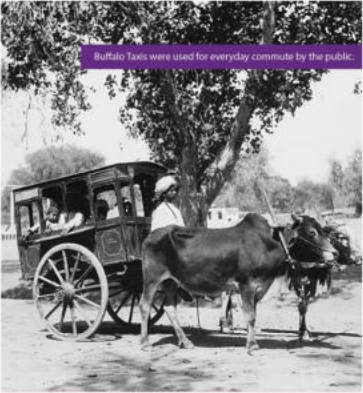
There was a time when Karachiites were accustomed to seeing Trams running all around the City center. It was one of the most popular means of conveyance within the city. The history of Karachi tramway spans over 90 years (1885-1975) and owes its origin to the Municipal Secretary and Engineer, James Strachan, who first conceived the idea for a Tramway in Karachi.



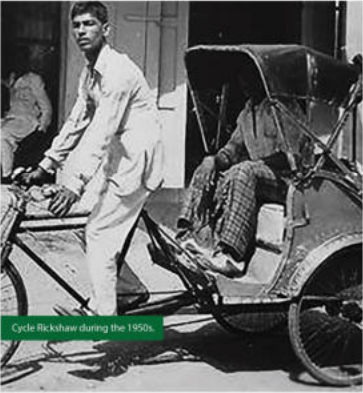
Orient Airways began operating in 1947 and was later renamed as PIA.



In 1886, steam powered trams got replaced by horse driven tramways, which later became petrol trams run by the East India Tramways Company. In 1948, the whole system of Karachi tramway was shifted from the East India Tramways Company Limited to the Mohamedali Tramways Company (MTC). The tram company was bought by a Karachi resident Mr. Sheikh Mohammad Ali. MTC continued to operate the trams until its final closure in 1975.



Buffalo Taxis were used for everyday commute by the public.



Cycle Rickshaw during the 1950s.



Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was established in 1951 and the airline flew its first international service in 1955, between Karachi and London. In 1955, Orient Airways, a private airline was taken over by PIA and eventually, the merger became one of the fastest growing airlines in the 1960s. PIA was also the first airline to introduce in-flight entertainment.



This photograph shows air-hostesses of Pakistani airline, PIA, on the runway of the Karachi airport. The uniforms of PIA stewardesses and air-hostesses were designed by famous French fashion designer, Pierre Cardin.