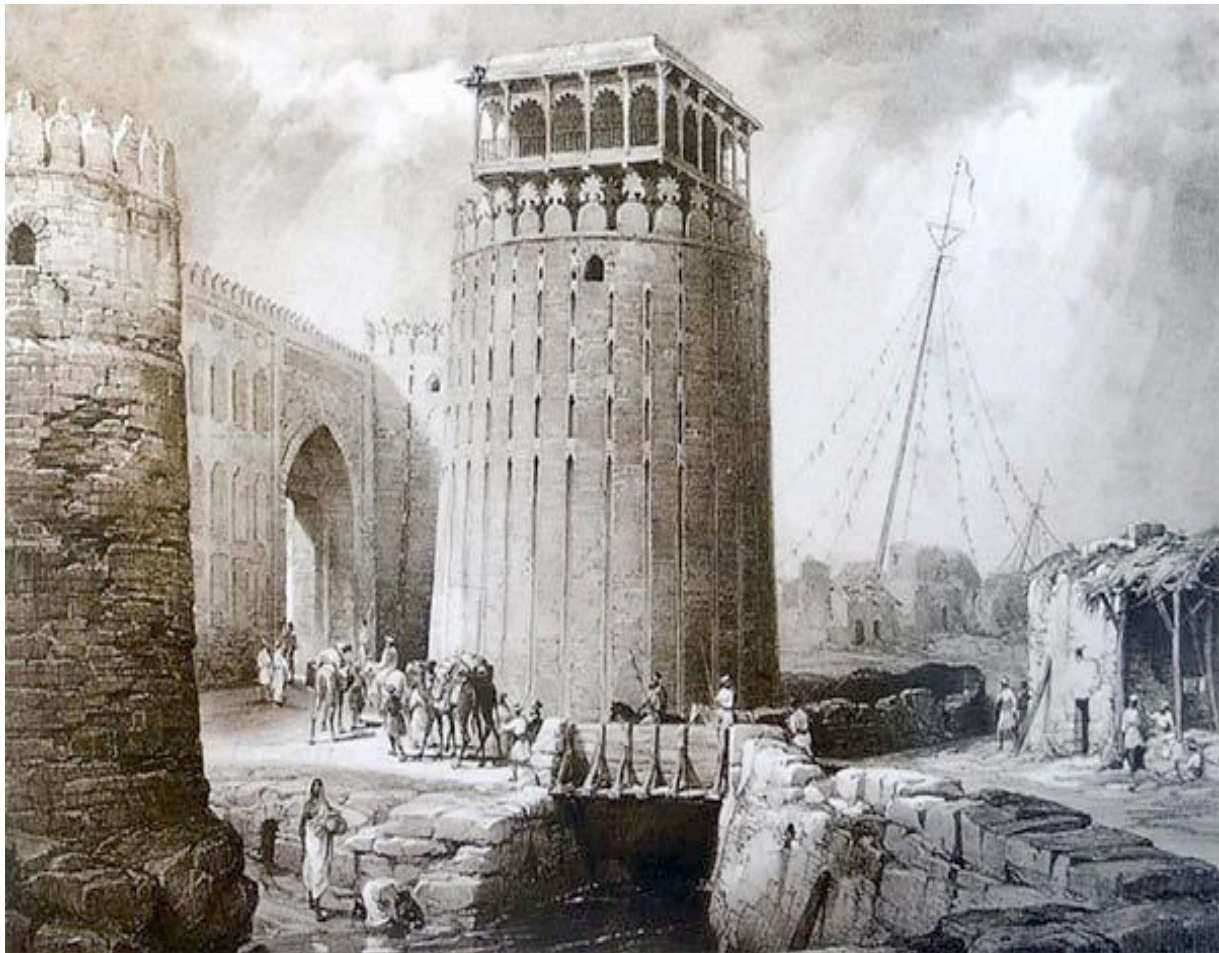


## The Forts of Pakistan

By Shaikh Muhammad Ali



This article is dedicated to my parents i.e. Prof. Mrs. Ameer Shahnaz Shaikh and Mr. Muhammed Ishaque Shaikh who inspired me to think, read and write.

Shaikh Muhammad Ali

I have been thinking of writing about ‘The Rohtas fort’ for some time now where I have been at least thrice since my stay in Islamabad but then the thought came to my mind that since I have a fan readership of a little over 875 people now and that too an international audience thus I must write not just about one fort but all the forts that I have been to from down south to up north in this ‘land of the pure’ called Pakistan.

Although during my travels to these forts which does not include all within the country, my age and my writing skills did not jive but still I do have photographic memories which I will try and jot down in this particular scribble.

I would thus start from the forts close to the high Seas of the Indian Ocean to the Roof of the world i.e. Hunza and many in between. Here we go:

**Kucha Qila (Weak Fort, Hyderabad):**

The first time I must have seen this one was when I was about 12 years of age when we used to visit my grandfather’s house in Hyderabad, Sindh. Incidentally, I neither had a camera at that age nor I remember to take it’s picture when I was growing up and it has been ages that I have been to Hyderabad again, wonder if it is still alive & intact in the first place.



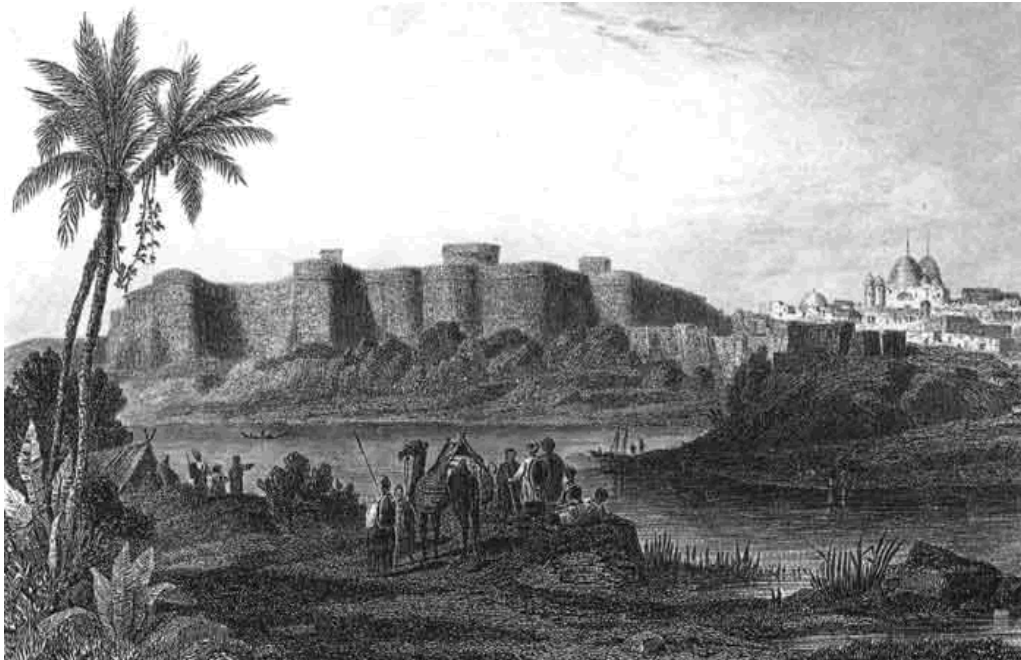
(The entrance of Hyderabad Fort and its Round Tower, 1900)

“Hyderabad pronounced [Haidarābād] is a city in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The city was founded in 1768 by Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro upon the ruins of a

Mauryan fishing village along the bank of the Indus known as Neroon Kot. Formerly the capital of Sindh, it serves as the headquarters of the district of Hyderabad. Before the creation of Pakistan, it was known as the Paris of India, for its roads used to be washed with river water.

The political boundaries stage the city as a district and the region has seen major political turmoil. From the battles fought against the British occupation to the civilian unrest in the 1980s, the city has lost its glory of past and much of its cultural and architectural heritage lies in tattered ruins.

Hyderabad is a hot and humid city in the south of the nation. Rich with culture and tradition, the city is the largest bangle producer in the world and serves as a transit between the rural and the urban Sindh”.<sup>1</sup>



(Hyderabad Fort or the Pucca Qilla in 1845)

**Pucca Qila (Strong Fort, Hyderabad):**

This fort I also saw at the same age i.e. 12 but this one, as the name says; have survived due to the strength of the material used in building this mammoth although way back in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Ghulam Shah Kalhoro completed the construction of this glorious fort spread over thirty six acres, whose walls are made of baked clay bricks, in 1769 AD. Its name was advised to Mian Ghulam Shah by the Talpurs and other devotees of Hazrat Ali, the cousin of Prophet Muhammed. The `footprints' of Hazrat Ali, inscribed on stone, were later gifted by the Iranian ruler to the Talpurs. It was placed in the Qadamgah Moula Ali, which became a place of pilgrimage for many people, and it continues to be even today.

“The town soon started to grow and flourish slumping Khudabad, Nasarpur and other trade and commercial centers into oblivion. Artisans, craftsmen and traders from far and wide started to migrate and settle there, attracted by the strong fort, presence of ruler, peace and security of Hyderabad. The founder of the town lived only four years to rule over the fort he built with such an enthusiasm”.<sup>3</sup>



(Hyderabad Fort or the Pucca Qulla in 2008)

**Derawar Fort (Ahmedpur Sharqi, Bahawalpur):**

It so happened that I made friends with a colleague here at the HEC (back in 2006) who hails from Bahawalpur. He invited me to visit his hometown and during discussion, I remembered that the Derawar fort was in Bahawalpur. Now the city being extremely hot during summers since it sits right next to the Cholistan desert; I decided to visit his house & maybe the fort in winters.

Come the November of the same year, this colleague called Iqbal was flabbergasted to know that I was ready with lock, stock and barrel to take him to his city which is about 616 kilometers from my house in Islamabad and the fort slightly further in Ahmedpur, Sharqi. The irony of the story was that neither he nor any of his relatives had ever been to visit this God forsaken fort. Well, there is always a first time, they say.



(A black & white beauty pictured in 2006)

And on a short notice on a late Thursday evening, we packed whatever that could be needed for a trip that long in my 1993 Suzuki Margalla and we headed down south, of course with my family. Have you forgotten that my family always tags along even if I am going to hell? Well, I would certainly need company there,

wouldn't I. Laughter. This was one trip of a lifetime since it took us almost 13 hours to reach his house with constant non-stop driving on the highway, farm roads, jacked up and not so jacked up roads. And by golly, we reached there in the wee hours on Friday morning around 5:00 a.m.

The same day we headed approximately 45 kilometers further south and saw the grandeur of the fort called 'Derawar Fort'. Like most of the forts in Pakistan, this one too is dying a slow death. Well, when humans are dying like cats and dogs in a country of over 160 million blokes, why should any body care about bloody forts? If I were rich enough, I could have saved forts from dying. Only if wishes were horses!



(The Derawar Fort with all its grandeur)

“The Fort is located around 48 Km from Dera Nawab Sahib. It is still in a good condition as compared to other forts of Pakistan. The rampart walls are intact and still guarded by the personal guards of the Amir of Bahawalpur. The tombs of the ex-rulers of Bahawalpur and their families are located in this fort. The tombs have nice glazed blue tile work. Prior permission of the senior Amir of Bahawalpur is required to enter the fort”.<sup>4</sup>

“Derawar Fort is a large square fortress in Pakistan near Bahawalpur. The forty bastions of Derawar are visible for many miles in Cholistan Desert. The walls have a circumference of 1,500 meters and stand up to thirty meters high.

The first fort on the site was built by Rai Jajja Bhutta, whose sister was married to Deoraj, a prince of Jaisalmer, India. It remained in the hands of the royal family of Jaisalmer until captured and completely rebuilt by the Nawabs of Bahawalpur in 1733. In 1747, the fort slipped from the hands of the Abbasis owing to Bahawal Khan's preoccupations at Shikarpur. Nawab Mubarak Khan took the stronghold back in 1804.

The nearby marble mosque was modeled after that in the Red Fort of Delhi. There is also a royal necropolis of the Abbasi family, which still owns the stronghold. The area is rich in archaeological artifacts associated with Ganweriwala, a vast but as-yet-unexcavated city of the Indus Valley Civilization”.<sup>5</sup>

**Multan Fort (Multan):**

This fort I visited along with my family on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2006 on the way back from the trip to Bahawalpur. “Multan Fort was built on a mound separating it from the city by the old bed of river Ravi. Its date cannot be fixed with accuracy. When intact, its circumference was 6,600 ft. having 46 bastions, including two towers at each of the four gates i.e., Delhi Gate, Khizri Gate, Sikhi Gate and Rehri Gate.



(The mausoleum of Hazrat Bahauddin Zakaria within the walled city of Multan)

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The fort was ravaged by the British to avenge the murder of one Mr. Agnew in 1848. At present it is survived by some parts of the old rampart and bastions besides the shrines of Hazrat Bahauddin Zakaria and Shah Rukn-e-Alam, an obelisk in memory of Agnew and a Hindu temple. The famous Qasim Bagh and a stadium are located within the walls of the fort. A panoramic view of Multan City can be had from the highest point in the fort”.<sup>6</sup>



(The mausoleum of Shah Rukn-e-Alam [Pillar of the world] within the Multan Fort’s premises)

**Lahore Fort (Lahore):**

The lesser I say about this one is better as this is apparently one of the best kept forts in the country since it falls right in the heart of Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan. So much has been written about this particular fort that I cannot write



enough on this particular beauty. Actually, it is a city within itself and a grand city for that matter.

I saw the Lahore fort for the first time when I travelled to Lahore with my grandmother, father & younger of the two older sisters that I have; in 1978. Yes, I was a young lad of 14 and just could not appreciate enough of the magnanimity of this behemoth.



(The Mughal fort of Lahore, a UNESCO World Heritage Site)

“The Lahore Fort, locally referred to as Shahi Qila is citadel of the city of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. It is located in the northwestern corner of the Walled City of Lahore. The trapezoidal composition is spread over 20 hectares. Origins of the fort go as far back as antiquity; however, the existing base structure was built during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605), and was regularly upgraded by subsequent rulers, having thirteen gates in all.

Thus, the fort manifests the rich traditions of the entire Mughal architecture. Some of the famous sites inside the fort include: Sheesh Mahal, Alamgiri Gate,

Naulakha pavilion, and Moti Masjid. In 1981, the fort was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site along with the Shalimar Gardens (Lahore).

The origins of Lahore Fort are obscure and are traditionally based on various myths. However, during the excavation carried out in 1959 by the Department of Archaeology, in front of Diwan-e-Aam, a gold coin of Mahmood of Ghazni dated A.H. 416 (1025 A.D.) was found at a depth of 7.62 meters from the level of the lawns. Cultural layers continued to a further depth of 5 meters, giving strong indications that people had lived here, long before the conquest of Lahore by Mahmood in 1021 A.D. Further mention of the fort is traceable to Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Ghuri's successive invasions of Lahore from 1180 to 1186 A.D".<sup>7</sup>

**Rohtas Fort (Rohtas, Jhelum):**

I came to learn about this particular beauty from a Pakistani friend who I met while going to school at the University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo, CO, USA way back in 1990. Asif Rao (May God bless him), hailed from Lahore and pressed upon me that while I was a travelling buff; I must visit the Rohtas fort at least once in my life.

And finally when I moved to Islamabad, I made it a point that I must visit this one. Indeed, I was able to go and see this dying fort for the first time in 2004 and since then I have been there thrice almost as a travel guide for people who are as crazy as I am and crave for history & culture.



(The famous Sohali gate of the Rohtas Fort)

“Some 16 km North West of Jhelum, colossal Rohtas fort is one of the most extraordinary examples of military architecture on the sub-continent. It was started at vast expense in 1543 by the Pashtun ruler Farid Khan, better known as Sher Shah Suri, to protect the strategic Peshawar to Calcutta road from the Moghuls and their allies. Incidentally, he never lived to see its completion and work was carried on by succeeding rulers. The fortifications became redundant only a few years later when Akbar moved his frontier to Attock city and built a new fort there.



(The haveli [palace] of Raja Maan Singh, General of Emperor Akbar)

The fort is unfortunately in ruins now except for the crenellated outer walls and most of its 12 gates and 68 bastions but the site is vast enough to deserve a visit of three or four hours. Rohtas Fort is approximately 109 kilometers from Rawalpindi and can be reached from Dina, a busy stop on the Rawalpindi to Lahore road and easily accessible by bus from either place”.<sup>8</sup>

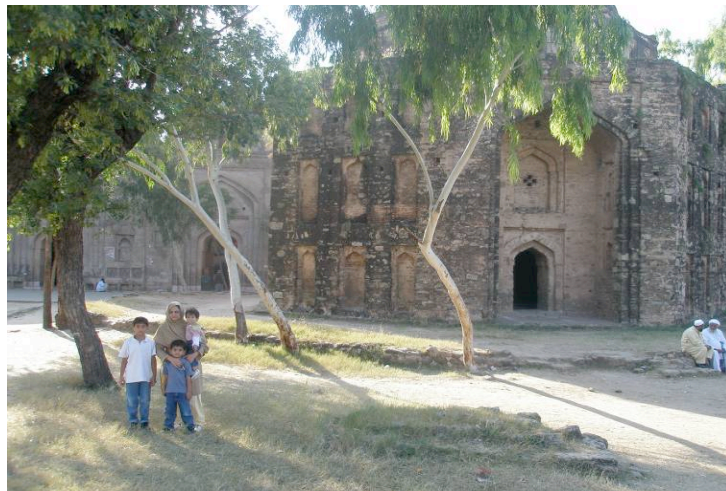
### **Rawat Fort or Ghakkar Fort (Rawat, Rawalpindi):**

I came to learn about this small fort in the year 2007 and as usual we packed our bags to go search for this one. Rawat Fort is located 17 km east of Rawalpindi, on the Grand Trunk (G.T) Road leading to Lahore.



(The dilapidated entrance of the Rawat fort)

“Gakkhars, a fiercely independent tribe of the Potohar Plateau built the fort, in early 16th century. The grave of a Gakkhar Chief, Sultan Sarang Khan is located inside the fort. He died in 1546 AD fighting against the forces of Sher Shah Suri. If one dares to climb the broken steps inside the tomb, one may get a panoramic view of the plateau and the Mankiala Stupa”.<sup>9</sup>



(The Shaikh family with Sarang Khan’s mausoleum at the back)

**Giri Fort (Taxila):**

We happened to fall upon the remains of this particular fort in 2006 when my son Adil read a sign board in the Taxila museum about the presence of such a fort and he became adamant that we must visit this one too. It took us forever to get to the remains of this fort since not too many people were informed about its presence in the first place and the road itself was a car breaker not to mention the fatigue that seeped into our exhausted bodies while taking this pilgrimage.



“The glen of Giri is located 8 km north-east of Taxila, at the foot of Margalla. It is approached through a rough torrent bed near two villages named Khurram Gujar and Khurram Paracha. There are remains of two monasteries and stupas, one on the top of the hill and other below it. The remains of Giri Fort are perched on the hill top, with spring water falling within it. The fort was built in 5th century by the Buddhist monks. Later, it was used by Sultan Masud, son of Sultan Mahmud of Gazni”.<sup>10</sup>

**Attock Fort (Attock):**

It is such a shame to write that the Attock Fort is out of bounds since it houses the Armed forces of Pakistan and is under their jurisdiction and control. Having said that, it is still possible to visit the fort if one knows the Core Commander of the NWFP province or an officer with the rank of Colonel or Brigadier; for that matter.



(The Kabul River with the Attock Fort in the backdrop)

“The Attock Fort is situated about 101 km west of Islamabad on the left bank of the Indus River. The fort was completed in 1583 under the supervision of Khawaja Shamsuddin Khawafi, a minister of Emperor Akbar. The Mughal caravan sarai (Rest house) outside the fort, which is almost on the G.T. Road, was also built during this period”.<sup>11</sup>

**Balahisaar Fort (Peshawar):**

Although this particular fort has also been with the Armed forces of Pakistan for some times now but I was privileged to be a part of a ‘Capacity Building Workshop’ in 2007 when our Regional Director of NWFP i.e. Mr. Farmanullah Anjum (one jolly good fellow) arranged a trip in order to meet the dignitaries of NWFP province and during the course of this trip a dinner was hosted by the Vice Chancellor of the Peshawar Women University in our honor.



(The periphery of the Bala Hisar Fort)

“The mighty Balahisaar Fort lies on both eastern and western approaches to Peshawar city. It meets the eye when coming from Rawalpindi or from the Khyber. It is a massive frowning structure as its name implies, and the newcomer passing under the shadow of its huge battlements and ramparts cannot fail to be impressed. Originally built by Babur, the first of the Moghals in 1526-30, it was rebuilt in its present form by the Sikh Governor of Peshawar, Hari Singh Nalva, in the 1830’s under the guidance of French engineers”.<sup>12</sup>

**Jamrud Fort (Jamrud, Torkham):**

I got a chance to visit the Torkham border with Afghanistan in 2007 (of course with the courtesy of our Regional Director i.e. Mr. Farmanullah Anjum again) and before you reach the border, you cannot miss this small fortress which is built on a hill.



(This was as close as I could get to the Jamrud Fort)

“Jamrud is a town located in the Khyber Agency, one of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The town is the doorway to the Khyber Pass, part of the Hindu Kush mountain range. The town has road and rail linkages with Peshawar city of Pakistan, and a pass connects it with Landi Kotal, located near the borders of Afghanistan.

Jamrud, lying in proximity to the Khyber Pass, has remained a location on the trade route between central Asia and the South Asia and a strategic military location. Jamrud is located at 10.2 miles (17 km) west from the city of Peshawar.

In 1836, Jamrud was occupied by Hari Singh Nalwa, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's commander but in April 1837 Dost Mohammad Khan sent a body of Afghans to attack it. This siege has been called the Battle of Jamrud”.<sup>13</sup>





(A picture of Jamrud Fort when the mighty British ruled the Sub Continent)

“The impression which resulted from the ensuing conflict was such as to convince the men of Dost Mohammad’s army of their inability to contend with the Sikhs. ‘Even if the victory had been more decided’ observed the author of the Peshawar Gazetteer sixty years later, ‘it would have been dearly purchased by the Sikhs, with the loss of so brave a warrior as Hari Singh’.

Jamrud was a strategic location and served as a base for a cantonment of the British Indian Army during the period of the British Raj. During the military operations of 1878-79 Jamrud became a place of considerable importance as the frontier outpost on British territory towards Afghanistan, and it was also the base of operations for a portion of the Tirah campaign in 1897-1898. It was also the headquarters of the Khyber Rifles, and the collecting station for the Khyber tolls. The population of Jamrud in 1901 was 1,848”.<sup>14</sup>

### **Baltit Fort (Hunza):**

We visited this fort when we took a first class / luxury excursion trip from Karachi to Hunza via the famous Walji’s Travel in July 2001. Once we reached Islamabad, we were driven to Hunza, a long and arduous 18 hour trail all the way up in the mountains. Adil, my oldest and the only child at that time was hardly two years old and I could not forget the German tourist who had just reached our hotel in Hunza from the other side of the Khunjerab border in China commented that he was overwhelmed to meet such a crazy Pakistani family.



(A panoramic view of the Baltit Fort, Hunza)

“Baltit Fort or Balti Fort is an ancient fort in the Hunza valley in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. In former times survival of the feudal regimes of Hunza was ensured by the impressive Baltit fort that sits on top of Karimabad. The foundations of the fort are said to date back around 700 years, but there have been rebuilds and alterations over the centuries. In the 16th century the Thum married a princess from Baltistan who brought master Balti craftsmen to renovate the building as part of her dowry. The architectural style is a clear indication of Tibetan influence in Baltistan at the time.



(A view of the Hunza Valley from Baltit Fort in Pakistan)

The Mirs of Hunza abandoned the fort in 1945, and moved to a new palace down the hill. The fort started to decay and there was concern that it might possibly fall into ruin. Following a survey by the Royal Geographical Society of London, a restoration program was initiated and supported by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture Historic Cities Support Program. The program was completed in 1996 and the fort is now a museum run by the Baltit Heritage Trust".<sup>15</sup>

### **Red Fort (Muzaffarabad);**

This fort we visited in Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir (outside the territory of Pakistan) in July 2005 about three months before the massive temblor (7.6 on the Richter scale) that hit Northern Pakistan and adjoining areas. I was accompanied by my mother, wife Sabeen, Adil and Mohsin while Ayesha was still deciding to grace the planet, Earth.

It was on the confluence of the scenic Neelum and the Jhelum rivers and was standing there as hard as a rock.



(The Muzaffarabad fort before the July 2005 earthquake)

“Border skirmishes between the armies of renowned Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Chak rulers of Kashmir were common. To ensure safety of the people, and the land, the Chaks realized to raise defense posts and efficiently countered the offensives.

The construction of the Red Fort was finally completed in 1646 by Sultan Muzaffar Khan, the founder of Muzaffarabad city. When the Moghuls overtook the Kashmir rule, this fort lost its importance. The Moghuls were more interested in Kabul, Bokhara and Badakshan. During the Durrani rule, the fort again came into limelight and its importance was rediscovered.

Maharaja Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh, the Dogra rulers, reconstructed and extended the fort for political and military operations. Towards the end of 1947, the Dogra forces fled away leaving the fort wide open to anybody.



(The Muzaffarabad Fort after the earthquake in 2009)

The architectonics of the fort show that great experts in design and structure participated in its construction. It is surrounded on three sides by Neelum River formally known as Kishan Ganga. The northern part had terraces with steps leading to the bank of the river. The Eastern side of the fort was very well protected from the hazards of flood waters but some parts in the north were slightly damaged. There was an inn at the entry of the fort which has traces left now”.<sup>16</sup>

**Three important forts which unfortunately I have not been able to visit so far in Sindh Province and are worth mentioning here are:**

**Kot Digi Fort (Khairpur, Sindh):**

“The Kot Diji Fort, formally known as Fort Ahmadabad, dominates the town of Kot Diji in Khairpur, Pakistan about 25 miles east of the Indus River at the edge of the Nara-Rajasthan Desert. The fort was built between 1785 to 1795 by Mir Sohrab Khan Talpur, founder of the Kingdom of Upper Sindh in 1783. In addition

to the fort, a 5 kilometer, 12 feet wide mud wall was built around the city. This defensive wall had bastions throughout its length and a huge iron gate served as the city's only entrance.

The fort was considered invincible and served as the residence of the Ameers of Khairpur in times of peace. It is, therefore, the ancestral home of royal house. During war time, the zenana (female members of the royal family), would be shifted to Shahgarh Fort, formerly within the realm but since 1843, after the conquest of the rest of Sindh, it is in the Jaisalmer desert, now in India. When the Zenana moved into the comfort of palaces, it stood mainly as a decorated reminder of more violent times. Throughout its whole history, however, Fort Kot Diji was never attacked”.<sup>17</sup>



(The Kot Diji Fort in Khairpur, Sindh)

“Kot Diji is a very practical fort constructed on a limestone hill with kiln-baked bricks. Bricks were used because the locally available limestone rock was very brittle and would have shattered easily on impact with a cannonball. The hill is about 110 feet high, above which the walls of the fort rise another 30 feet. It has three strategically placed towers about 50 feet tall.



(View of the town from the Kot Digi Fort)

The fort was built at a time when cannons had become common and its design and position reveals that. It includes a multitude of stations for cannons and, because it is positioned high on a narrow ridge, enemy cannons would have had to fire at a great distance, permitting little accuracy. Cannonballs could either hit the hill or perimeter or would simply fly over the fort and fall on the enemies' own forces on the other side".<sup>18</sup>

**Ranikot Fort (Sann, Sindh):**

“Ranikot Fort is the world's largest fort with a circumference of about 29 km or 18 miles. Since 1993, it has been on the list of tentative UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

It is located in the Kirthar Range, about 30 km southwest of Sann, in Jamshoro District, Sindh, Pakistan. It is approximately 90 km north of Hyderabad. It has an approximate diameter of 6 km. Its walls are on the average 6 meters high and are made of gypsum and lime cut sandstone and total circumference is about 20 km. While originally constructed for bow and arrow warfare, it was later expanded to withstand firearms”.<sup>19</sup>



(The amazing Ranikot Fort with all its grandeur)

“It is reputed to be the largest unexplored fort in the world. The purpose of its construction and the reason for the choice of its location are still unknown. Ranikot is the most talismanic wonder of Sindh. Visible from five kilometers away, its massive undulating walls twist and dip over the hills. With the circumference of about twenty kilometers, its walls, built with dressed sandstone and reinforced with 45 bastions along the outer wall, of which 7 are rectangular and the remaining are round. All modified through the ages to accommodate the use of gunpowder, this perhaps makes it the largest fort in the world.

Who constructed it first and why is an enigma yet to be resolved by researchers. Some archaeologists attribute it to Arabs, possibly built by a Persian noble under the Abbasids by Imran Bin Musa Barmaki who was the Governor of Sindh in 836 CE. Others have suggested a much earlier period of construction attributing to at times the Sassanians Persians and at times to the Greeks. Despite the fact that a prehistoric site of Amri is nearby, there is no trace of any old city inside the fort and the present structure has little evidence of prehistoric origins. Archaeologists point to 17th century CE as its time of first construction but now Sindh archaeologists agree that some of the present structure was reconstructed by Mir Karam Ali Khan Talpur and his brother Mir Murad Ali in 1812 CE at a cost of 1.2 million rupees (Sind Gazetteer, 677)”.<sup>20</sup>



**Umerkot Fort (Umerkot, Sindh):**

“Umerkot, also known as Omarkot, is a town in the Umerkot District in Sindh, Pakistan. The city is well connected with the other large cities like Karachi, the provincial capital and Hyderabad.

Once, it was the capital of Greater Sindh Province (including some parts of present Rajasthan state of India). It also became prominent during the time of the Mughals and during the British Raj. The great Mughal king Akbar was born in Umerkot when his father Humayun fled from military defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri. Rana Prasad, a Hindu Sodha Rajput ruler of Amarkot, gave refuge to Humayun. Akbar later became the King of India and was a popular figure with both Hindus and Muslims. Umerkot has many sites of historical significance such as Mughal Emperor Akbar's birthplace at Umerkot Fort on October 15, 1542”.<sup>21</sup>



(A side view of the Umerkot Fort in Sindh)

“Another significant story relating to Umerkot is that of Umer Marvi. Marvi was a young Thari girl abducted by Umer, then-ruler, who wanted to marry her because of her beauty. Upon her refusal she was being imprisoned in the historic Umerkot

Fort for many years until her ultimate release. Because of her courage, Marvi is an ideal for the local people”.<sup>22</sup>

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