

AN OVERVIEW ON THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL OF KUSAK FORT

Wajid Bhatti

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Email: wajid.arch@pu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Hameed

Chairman, Department of Archaeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Email: Hameed.arch@pu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Azeem

Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Email: azeem.arch@pu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Abrar

Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore

Email: royal_rana81@hotmail.com

Dr. Syed Ali Raza

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Email: alii_sha@hotmail.com

Michael Samuel

Field Researcher

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to highlight the historical values, importance and architectural integrity of the Kusak Fort. The Salt Range is replete with prehistoric ruins, places and historically significant sites, Kusak Fort is one of the hidden gemstone that swanks a rich history and fascinating architecture. It also encapsulates that this fort remained an important part of regional geopolitical and defensive structure. This paper reconnoiters that this fort is served as strategist outpost the region from invasions and also played an important role in defense structure. This fort is also witness to several significant events and occasions in the history of the Kusak state. Kusak Fort significantly contributed to ameliorate the plight of this region and also to protect the area from the invasions. This study is highlighted the existing condition of the fort and also suggests strategies to ameliorate the plight of existing condition of the fort and also to make it a cogent tourist destination.

Keywords: Kusak, Chakwal, Khewra Salt Mines, Salt Range, Fortification.

INTRODUCTION

The small village Kusak is accessible preferably by a 4 into 4 wheel vehicle. It is located some 2 km south-east of Walti, some 5 km east-south of Manhiala, 3 km north east of Kuppar- once a mini hill station for European residents of Khewara, 16 km east of Baghanwala or Nandana Fort and 5 km south-west of Saloi. The road to Kusak leaves Choa-Pind Dadan Khan Road at 11 kilometers sign from the former. At the time of survey, beyond this point it was un-metalled for about 6 km. On this road, somewhat irregular public transport is available but only up to Walti Piran. Beyond this point, the 3 km long road is jeepable but sheer adventurous till one reaches the small hamlet of Kusak.¹ The village Kusak is just at the southern foot of a 60 meter high precipitous hill which from a distances looks like a marooned ship. The Kusak Fort sits on top of this hill. It is 810 meters above the sea level. On all, except the southern side, the hill is non-scalabe. Though great Watli Water works is only a few kilometers away, he residents of Watli

¹ Niazi, Liaqat Ali Khan. *Tarikh-i-Chakwal*, (Lahore:Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), 10.

and Malot villages, depend for their drinking water collected in unhealthy ponds or even scarcer wells dug deep in the belly of the mountains. The sub-soil water is available at a depth of 22.50 meters. During the Pre-Partition days, Kusak was pre-dominantly a Hindu village.²

HISTORY OF KUSAK FORT

The fort was built in the 11th century by Raja Jodh, who was one of the sons of legendary Janjua Sultan, Raja Mall Khan Janjua who built the Malot Fort in 10th century. Keeping in view the constant threats of invasions, Raja Jodh used the best of his mind while constructing the Kusak Fort. The fort was built on 13 acres at the peak of the mountain which is also named as “Jodh Mountain”. All the construction was done by local red stone and soil. A palace for the king was constructed in a traditional way on the premises of the fort while 70 houses were also built for the troops.³

As the Salt Range served as an ideal pass for invading kings from Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, the Kusak State was attacked regularly with its rulers trying their best to save their motherland sometimes by responding the foreign invaders with the same coin and sometimes by making alliance with them to help them in establishing their domain in India. According to historians, the Kusak State suffered a brutal blow when Jalaluddin Firoz Shah Khilji, the first king of Khilji Dynasty in India, attacked it in 1290 AD. After receiving a crushing defeat by Khilji, the Janjua Rajputs re-established their hold in the area by the passage of time.⁴ The Kusak State was about to be destroyed again in 1398 AD when Amir Taimur started marching towards it but the then ruler of the state along with Janjua Sardars assured the invader that they would provide him logistic support in conquering Delhi. Thus he spared the fort from the attack.

The year 1810 proved worst for Janjua Rajputs as in the first month of this year the founder of Sikh Empire in Punjab, Mahraja Ranjit Singh, besieged the fort. The then king of Kusak State Sultan Fateh Mohammad Khan gave a tough time to Ranjit Singh. The Sultan kept on fighting for six months and kept Ranjit Singh at bay. Finding no other option, Ranjit Singh had to strike a truce with Sultan Mohammad. However, the long siege of six months cast heavily on the lives of the inhabitants of Kusak Fort as they ran short of drinking water and food. Having left with no other option, the Sultan along with all other members of his tribe relocated to Haranpur and stayed there for 40 years.⁵ The Sultan died in Haranpur in 1830 and his family returned to their motherland in 1850 where they laid the foundation of Lehr Sultanpur village which is adjacent to Kusak village. The lost Kusak State remained in the possession of Sultan Fateh Mohammad Khan's siblings and is still owned by his successors. Sultan Mohammad Hayat became a member of District Council Jhelum and was also elected as the chairman of Union Council Choa Syedan Shah during the British Raj. After his death, his son Sultan Azmat Hayat was crowned as the Sultan of the state. He was also elected as an MPA from the platform of the PML-N in 1997. After his death in 2003, his son Sultan Mohammad Azamul Ameer became the owner of the Kusak State. Currently, Sultan Ameer is in United Kingdom for his study while the state is being looked after by his sister Mehwish Azmat Hayat who is an active leader of the PML-N and also one of the inspirers for the ticket of MPA from PP-21 (Chakwal-II) in the upcoming elections⁶.

² Shakih Khurshid Hassan, *Historical forts in Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical & Cultural Research Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2005), 34.

³ H.M.Elliott, *The history of India, Vol.III.* (London: Tubner Press, 1871), 23-45.

⁴ Mirza Muhammad Haider Dughlat, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* (London: Curzon, Press, 1898), 12-15.

⁵ *District Jhelum Gazatteer, Vol.I* (Lahore: The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1907), 67.

⁶ Alexander Rogers, *The Shah-Namah of Firdausi* (London: Oxford Press, 1907), 370.



Ariel view of Kusak Fort
(Courtesy: Picture taken by researchers)

IMPORTANCE OF KUSAK FORT

The road suddenly starts climbing up above the village of Choa-Saidan Shah. Then suddenly, one enters into a beautiful table land. Near Watli and Kusak one meets rugged mountains, outcrops, precipices and isolated and then suddenly the mountains start descending eastwards till these meet flood plain of River Jhelum, The river itself is some 8 km from Kusak.⁷ The small basin in which it stands and through which two old routes to riverine plain below pass, the village of Kusak once was a place of importance in connection with the salt trade from the great Khewra salt mines.⁸



Ariel view of Kusak Fort
(Courtesy: Picture taken by researchers)

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND MATERIAL

⁷ Malik, *Tarikh-i-Pind Dadan Khan* (Chakwal: Sadaat Publisher, 1998), 22.

⁸ Stanley Lane Poole. *Medieval India under Mohammadan Rule 712-1764*(Lahore: Oxford University Press,1979), 48.

The Kusak hill stretches north-south with both side-ends as well as the eastern side falling in sharp precipices. At about 60 meters' height along the western face, one meets almost vertical walls of lime-stone formation on top of which rests the built stone walls of the Kusak Fort. The initial few courses are in dressed yellowish lime-stone of large blocks. Above these are the finely dressed tile-like courses of smaller stone blocks of locally available red sandstone which forms a layer above the lime-stone formation. The solitary door is closer to the southern end of the western face and is strengthened by a sound bastion on its northern side. The western wall of the fort runs in a straight line from north-east to south-west. The southern wall runs east-west in a straight line from north-east to south-west. The southern wall runs east-west in a curved fashion answering the alignment of the rock formation below. At either end, are two huge octagonal bastions, hollow from inside.⁹ On the first floor were the machicolations. Several of these holes, used for hurling stones and hot water on assailants, are still preserved. Above them were huge merlons. At least one of them, is still standing in full height along the eastern side of the tower. Beyond these towers, the fortification wall extends considerably further for about 12 to 15 meters, Beyond these points, the vertical fall of the rock provides a natural fortification.¹⁰



Picture taken from front of Kusak Fort
(Courtesy: Picture taken by researchers)

OCTAGONAL SHAPE HINDU TEMPLE

Sir Aurel Stein visited this fort in 1930 and described it very briefly.¹¹ The surface inside the fort rises sharply eastern side of the tower. Towards east where at the apex near the south-eastern edge is a Hindu Temple, octagonal plan and domed in the elevation. It rests on a high oblong podium some 15 paces east-west and 18 paces north-south with staircase on the south. There are machicolations even in the parapet wall of the podium of the temple. The temple is octagonal in plan, both internally and externally, and has an arched door on the south, an arched window in

⁹ Anwar Beg Awan DhanniAdab-O-Saqafat (Chakwal: Janjua Publishers, 1968), 41-42.

¹⁰ Lepel Griffin. Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab, Vol. II. (Lahore: Urdu Bazaar Press, 1940), 210-13.

the eastern wall, and a niche in the northern wall probably to receive the cult statue. There are small niches for oil lamps in all the remaining five walls of the cell.¹² All the arches are rounded on the top like a niche seen inside the walls of octagonal bastions and the rooms on the northern side of the eastern gate and hence these are contemporary to one another. The dome from outside has ribs in relief. At the bottom of each rib there are petals in relief. The inner side of the dome is plain save for a lotus flower in the center with an iron ring for hanging lamp. Otherwise, the dome is constructed in small country bricks of the Mughal period. This is the only evidence of use of burnt bricks in this fort. Where were these country bricks manufactured? We are not sure. The rooms is plastered with glazed lime (*chunam*) in typical Mughal fashion. Over the plastered surface have been rendered non-figure paintings.

The domed ceiling have painting of plants, petals and flowers in green brown and yellow colours. The cornice that separates the dome from the walls below is also decorated with broad leaves. On the exterior and under the cornice, each wall is divided into two panels, horizontal-oblongs on top and vertical-oblongs below. The squares, triangles and pentagons. On the south side of the Temple but on a lower level is a single grave on an open platform. It is believed to be of some Muslim saint of unknown identity.¹³

Between the Temple and the fort gate are two water reservoirs one large than the other. Both are quite deep and plastered from inside. The larger one has about 10 steps, each 12" (30 cm high in the south-western corner of the tank).¹⁴

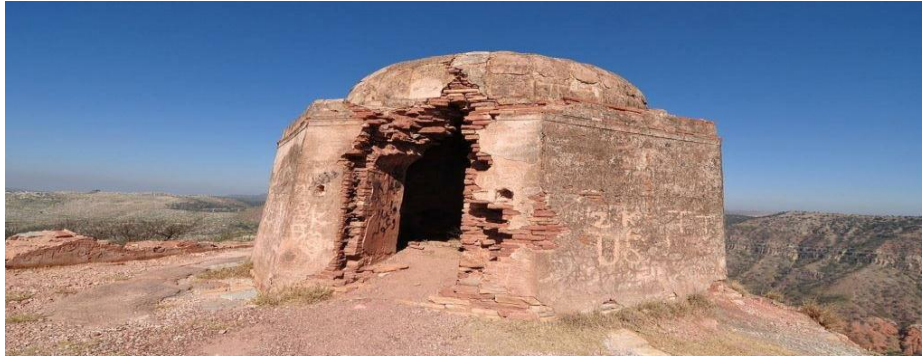
All along the wall, the inner side appears to have been considerably filled up with the debris of fallen houses and have considerably concealed the height of the fortification wall. Some 1.20 meters or 4 feet below the rounded top of the wall are series of machicolations or holes. Above them is the parapet wall. From outside the walls still stands upto considerable height at places 18 feet or 5.4 meters or even more. Immediately north of the entrance of the fort is a Guards post comprising of several rooms. Their roofs have collapsed. Near the bottom of their eastern and northern walls there are blind round arches in series. These are of the same type as seen in the northern bastions as well as in the Temple above. Along the southern side of the entrance, there is one small. Only foundations now remain.¹⁵ A little north of the Guards Rooms there are two more rooms, whereas along the eastern edge of the fort and north of temple can be seen foundations of three more rooms.¹⁶

¹² Ihsan H. Nadiem. *Forts of Pakistan* (Lahore:Al-Faisal Publisher, 2004), 56.

¹³ Ibid, 256-260.

¹⁴ Sarwar Khan, *Tarikh-i-Rajput Khokher* (Lahore: Sharkat Printing Press, 2004), 78.

¹⁶ Niazi, Liaqat Ali Khan. *Tarikh-i-Chakwal*, (Lahore:Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992), 72



(Courtesy: Picture taken by researchers)

CONCLUSION

Kusak Fort is a concealed jewel which brags a rich history as well as mesmerizing architecture and also remained an important part of regional geopolitical and defensive structure. This fort played pivotal role to protect the area from the invasions and significantly contributed to ameliorate the plight of this region. The condition of this fort has become dilapidated and deteriorated over time due to natural elements. The fort has not received adequate attention in terms of restoration, conservation and maintenance. The structural stability issues, erosion and weathering are threatening the fort's architectural integrity and historical values. This ramshackle condition is crying for attention of Archaeology and Tourism department. Moreover, this fort has significant historical value, therefore, proper excavation should be carried out in order to develop better understanding about this fort. Through this fort, reasonable revenue can be generated by promoting tourism. The treasure hunters are getting the antiquities by digging the walls and other areas of the fort illegally. It is being done with that brutality, the day is not far when our heritage would entirely remove from the pages of history.

REFERENCES

- Elliot, M.H. *The history of India, Vol.III*. London: Tubner Press, 1871.
- Dughlat, Mirza Muhammad Haider . *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* .London: Curzon, Press, 1898.
- District Jhelum Gazatteer, Vol.I, 67*. Lahore: The Civil and Military Gazette Press,1907.
- Rogers, Alexander.The Shah-Namah of Firdausi. London: Oxford Press 1907.
- Poole, Lane Stanley. *Medieval India under Mohammadan Rule 712-1764*. Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Malik. *Tarikh-i-Pind Dadan Khan*. Chakwal: Sadaat Publisher, 1998.
- Anwar, Beg Awan Dhanni *Adab-O-Saqafat*. Chakwal: Janjua Publishers, 1968.
- Griffin, Lepel. *Cheifs and Families of Note in the Punjab, Vol, II*. Lahore: Urdu Bazaar Press, 1940.
- Khan, Sarwar. *Tarikh-i-Rajput Khokher*.Lahore: Sharkat Printing Press, 2004.
- Niazi, Liaqat Ali Khan. *Tarikh-i-Chakwal* Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992.
- Hassan, Shakih Khurshid . *Historical forts in Pakistan*. Islamabad: National Institute of Historical & Cultural Research Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2005.
- Nadiem, H. Ihsan. *Forts of Pakistan*. Lahore: Al-Faisal Publisher, 2004.