

## OWIN, A LOST AND RUINED FORTRESS AND DEFENSE WATCH TOWER IN KASHMIR AT THE EDGE OF PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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**ABSTRACT::** *This research paper is a case study of a lost small fortress or watch Tower that is not documented up till now. Actually this place Owin is not even mentioned on the Archaeological map, but the link of the area tells that this area must be an ancient hidden route to Kashmir. This small building tells us the story of brutality of human, who had Sufism in their roots, but it does not show any love for humanity. The oral information about this fortress makes one to realize that, how difficult it would have been for the people of that area to build that watch tower in such a faraway place. This research also reveals the facts that how the people of that area were able to construct it with powerful material, stone, that was available in the area. It will open a window to the past when these kinds of buildings were erected for mailing purpose or sending messages through light. The hardships that the people of this area must have faced while constructing this watch Tower can be felt. This small fortress is situated in between the rugged mountains and it is quite difficult to reach there even now after so much development. It will be concluded that it is human instinct to protect themselves from enemies, and for this they have always selected a high place like a mountain to build such watch tower. At the end Comparison of the building with other such buildings that were also erected with the same purpose along the rivers. The present research is a step of Taxila Institute of Asian Civilization Quaid-i-azam University to document such historical buildings that are situated at far flung areas and at areas that are not mentioned even in Archaeological Map. The purpose is to bring to light the hidden History of the area with the building. This research is significant because a lost and forgotten place is being discovered. This research and documentation might help the authorities like Ministry of Culture or Archaeology department of Pakistan to work for the restoration or just to locate such buildings like Owin Fort.*

**Keywords:** Undocumented building, security purpose, Story of Human brutality, Comparison with other structures.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

There are many archaeological sites in Pakistan, which require attention of the authorities. There are many places that are not even documented and mentioned on the Archaeological map. These places need to be discovered and documented. This research is based on two points. Number one is to bring the lost building, (which is at the point of destruction) to the notice of authorities. Number two is to find the historical link of the structure, Cultural and strategic value of the place. And to achieve these two major goals of the research. Archaeological survey of the place, its physical measurement and photography is done. Literature is being reviewed to find the history of this land and the general history of the area and different beliefs of the residents of this area. It is also been given importance, that why and how these innocent inhabitants were massacred due to lack of monitoring of the authorities at the time of partition of India and Pakistan. Rajatarangini by Kalhana translated by Stein gave a deep insight of the history of the Hindus who spread like particles of dust at far flung areas. This paper also shows the unbiased approach of the team about the non Muslim inhabitants of the area. Professor Hugh Van Sky hawk's book, South Asian Religions on Display, gave a detailed account of religious beliefs of the people of that time.

Dr Shaukat Mehmood's research also gave a good amount of knowledge related to the general structures of Hindus and Sikhs in this area of Subcontinent.

Gazetteer of Kashmir revealed lots of facts about this area of Rawalpindi. How people from different religions used to live in the past with their own religious beliefs and how their world view changed when they had to leave their land.

All these studies and actually travelling to the place encouraged to document the physical features of the building along with its history.

A team of TIAT (Taxila Institute of Asian Civilization, Quaid-i Azam University Pakistan) under the leadership of Dr Muhammad Ashraf Khan, Director TIAC (Taxila Institute of Asian Civilization), along with a team from the Department of History Quaid-i- Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan under the leadership of Dr Razia Sultana (Head of History Department) visited Owin. This visit was organized by a local resident and assistant Professor in History, International Islamic University Islamabad Pakistan visited an undocumented building of the Dogra period in December 2012. This hard journey opened a very informative window into the history of Dogra period.

**Map of Kotli:**



**Fig 1: Google Map of Kotli**

We were actually in front of a small fortress and kind of watch tower that was used for giving signals with light from the slits of the Bastions.

**2. GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF OWIN:** At the time of partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The Hindus of that area took refuge in this Fort. It is important to note that this place is not documented on the Archaeological Map. All this information was provided through oral sources from the elderly people of the family of Mr Akmal Shah, assistant Professor in History, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan (our guide to Owin).

Before discussing the location of the fortress, it is important to mention here that Rawalpindi, a twin city to Islamabad in Pakistan is on Potohar Plateau. It has been used from the ancient times as an important route for history and commerce. Rawalpindi district is irrigated by river Jehlam, which originates in Kashmir {1}. It lies at the foot of Margalla hills in between Soan and Haro river at an elevation of 510 meters above sea level. According to Professor Ahmad Hassan Dani, (an eminent, archaeologist and linguist of Pakistan) this area has a rich archaeological history, having many buildings on its face, and of course Taxila is also very close to Rawalpindi {2}. However this place Owin is in district Kotli. Kotli district is 141 KM from Islamabad the capital of Pakistan. It is a minor town in between Mirpure and Muzaffarabad. Kotli is linked with Islamabad and Rawalpindi via Sehnsa and Holar. From Kotli Rawalpindi is to the North, on East is India and Mirpure is on the Southern side. After travelling from Kahuta side, 18 kilometers from Rawalpindi, our team reached to Bure village. After travelling 30 Kilometers we reached river Jhelum, and we were touching a village named Holar tehseel Sehnsa. Sehnsa is a sub divisional head Quarter of Kotli district. Thereafter, the team reached Tull village opposite the stream is Sudhnati in District Palundri. The famous Saddozai Kashmiri Kabila or clan was settled here at the time or before partition of India and Pakistan. Owin comes in Mir Pure Kotli, the building touching river Jhelum on the Punjab side.

The actual travel plan of Mr Akmal Shah (our guide to Owin fort) was that he will take us to the Owin Fort from Tull Village through a suspension *Doula*, or cart through the stream, but unfortunately it was out of order.

So he hired a jeep to be driven on a nonexistent road or track. Mr Akmal hired a jeep on a very expensive rate, but it was worth less to do that. The track that was to be followed was almost like a mountain, so after every 5 minutes there was a feeling that the jeep will be tumbling upside down. So we decided to walk instead of travelling through this jeep. The walk had to be also very slow but after travelling on foot for almost two hours having beautiful view of the site, The Team finally reached Owin.



**Fig. 2. Team of TIAC and HISTORY relaxing**

This small building of the Dogra Raj, is in the village Owin that is why it is named Owin fort.

#### **A view of Dogra Fort:**



**Fig.3. a view of Owin Fort**

It seems almost amazing how Hindu Dogras scattered to such far flung areas. But this statement of the great Muhammadan scholar Albiruni utilized every opportunity during his long stay at Ghazna and in the Panjab (A.D. 1017: 30) to collect information on Kashmir. His interest in the distant alpine valley is easily understood. He himself tells us the first chapter of his great work on India, how Hindus Sciences,

when the victories of Muhammad had made the Hindus "Like atoms of dust scattered in all directions," had retired far away from the conquered parts of the Country. They "fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach" {3}.

The above mentioned statement justifies this fact that Hindus after the arrival of Muslims in India scattered to far flung areas like Owin, so the presence of this fort at the edge of Kashmir and Panjab is no point of astonishment. The people on both sides continued to suffer untold miseries, unprecedented, brutal and inhuman repression has been order of the day on both sides, India and Pakistan {4}. Since partition of India and Pakistan is considered the greatest uprooting in the world. The transfer of power was unmonitored by Great Britain. The result was killing in Masses of all communities {5}.

Before the division of Subcontinent there was a lot of syncretism in different religions of this area. The reason for this syncretism was the Culture. The Cultural amalgamation with religion has been a source of influence for each religion. For example Muharram (a religious ceremony of Muslims) was not celebrated by Shias with Sunnis Muslims only (two different sects of Islam) in the subcontinent, but participated by other religious people, e.g Hindus of the Subcontinent, especially in Deccan {6}. Before discussing about the significance, architectural style, material and plan of this Fortress cum watch tower. It will be appropriate to discuss a little bit of History of Dogra Raj and its end.

### 3. HISTORY OF DOGRA RAJ:

Dogras are considered the Indo-Aryan group. Rajput Dogras travelled from Rajasthan to Jammu and lower areas of Hiachal Pradesh. Dogras generally lived in Jammu but also settled in adjacent areas of Panjab and Northern stem Pakistan. They generally speak Dogri language. Mostly Dogras are Hindus, but some are Sikhs and Muslims too. In 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century many Dogras accepted Sikhism. Dogra raj emerged with Maharaja Gulab Sigh, who got recognition from the British. Dogra Raj got Kashmir in 1846 with a large part of Panjab. The whole of Jammu and some areas of Panjab were ruled by Maharaja Gulab Singh Dogra. Still the history of Dogras is somewhat ambiguous. Jammu Dogras were generally Hindu Rajputs who ruled Jammu and Kashmir from 1846-1947. They are from the clan of Rama. During the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the state became a part of a Sikh empire of the Panjab. He gave the state to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and extended the kingdom to Kashmir, Ladhakh, Hunza, Gilgit and Nagar. After the first Anglo war in 1846, British gave the title of Maharaja to Gulab Singh in reward for his services to them. The last ruler was Maharaja Hari Singh, who did some reforms e.g. made primary education compulsory for all, abolished child marriage and united with Indian side in 1947. His rule was abolished in 1951; his son was made Governor of the area in 1964 gazetteer of Kashmir {7}.

### 4. HISTORY OF OWIN FORT:

According to the history of the area of Sudhnati (which can be seen on the map, touching Kotli), a small place worked as Head office. Khan Muhammad Khan, was in the Dogra parliament, who belonged to the Saddozai *Kabila*. This *Kabila* is famous in Kashmir as a warrior *Kabila*. Khan

Muhammad Khan organized the people of Kashmir, who participated in World War II. He set up camps in the forest to train them; they fought with Dogras and defeated them.

Dogras, who used this Owin Fort as an army fortress and a watchtower, were massacred extensively. This fortress was also used to protect this route to Kashmir from Dacoits and also acted as a defensive fort. The building was also used for giving signals through light. There was another river named as Tangi Mor. Through this river, things or objects could flow with the flow of the river from Indian occupied Kashmir and could be captured in Pakistan.

An elderly person from the family of Mr Akmal Shah (our guide to Owin) told us that there was a massive killing of Hindus in Owin. Hindus who were not ready to change their religion were burnt alive in the fort. Almost all the people in this fort died, including those who wanted to escape the fort by jumping in the adjacent Jhelum River. This area of South Asia, which is famous for Sufi (Saints) religious traditions and syncretism in different religions, faced such Brutality over this mountainous land.

### 5. PLAN AND STRUCTURE OF OWIN;

The fort belongs to 18<sup>th</sup> Century Dogra period. It is situated in Kotli, at the edge of Panjab. Presently, this is not at all in use, and is almost in destroyed condition. But its existence of the fort in a mountainous area tells us that how people constructed such powerful structures at a far flung area like this. The exposed features right now are retaining walls and Bastions and the only artifacts collected from the nearby were Red pottery pieces.

#### 5.1. The only free standing structure of Owin Fort on the top of the Mountain:

Originally Owin Fort was double storied. There is water tank on the south Western side of the inner building, maybe to store water for use, because water source was at a distance from the fort. River Jhelum is on the Northern side of the Fort. The Fortress is square in plan, built on a Platform. The height is 29 feet from the ground and platform is five feet high. Measurement from all sides is 62 feet. There are four Bastions on all corners of the structure. The Bastions are Octagonal in plan. The place in between the Western Bastion is a flat resting place, maybe used for sight- seeing or observing the security situation from outside.



Fig.4. View of Owin with two Bastions

There are 6 slits in the Bastions which are each 3, feet, 7 inches long. The width is 1 and a half inch. There are few other slits on each side with 4 and a half inch length and 1 and a half inch width. They might be archery hole (arrow slits) or used for sending light messages.

### 5.2. Comparison of Owin Fort with other Forts:

If we compare the Bastions of Sangni Fort, another fort in Gujar Khan 55 Kilometers from the Capital, Islamabad, we will find a lot of similarities. For example, the slits are similar.



Fig. 5. A view of Sangni Fort

The major difference is the Parapet wall of the Bastion, which is missing in Owin fort. This fort has octagonal Bastions like Owin, but some are semicircular, hollow from inside.

If we compare Owin fort with another fort, at Dhan Gali 55 Kilometers from the capital of Pakistan, it also has Bastions at the four corners, but they are semicircular in shape.



Fig. 6. View of Elevation



Fig. 7. broken Multifoiled arch of the elevation

### 6. THE ELEVATION:

The elevation of the Fortress is in the worst condition and is almost destroyed. It is 557 feet wide. The gate seems to be with a multi foiled arch. This is almost in broken condition. There are remains of 6 steps, each with 6 inch width. The Entrance is on the Southern side of the fort. Sir Thomas Arnold records in his book, *The Islamic Art and Architecture* that “so many things in Muhammadan architecture are said to have been borrowed from non-Islamic sources, but some scholars actually hold that Muslims were mere borrowers of the architectonic forms and had no architecture of their own worth the name. To reach a conclusion on this Fundamental point, it is necessary in the first instance to attempt a brief outline of the origin and nature of Muhammadan architecture in general” {8}. This statement arise a lot of controversy about Islamic architecture, all will agree that this multi foiled arch is definitely a borrowed style from Islamic buildings. It was a common practice for the Hindu and Sikh buildings to adopt the architectural styles of Islamic architecture.

### MATERIAL USED IN THE OWIN FORT:

The material used in the construction is stone with Lime Plaster masonry, Ashlar masonry. The stone must have been acquired from the local quarries.

### 7. BAOLIES NEAR THE FORT:

Baoli is a kind of a stepped Well or a water Tank. This structure was commonly built by Lodhies and Mughals in general. The purpose is to get sufficient supply of water while travelling, during the war or generally travelling in the areas, those are away from drinking water. Baolies were used for providing water to both humans and animals.



Fig. 8. Baoli

Almost 200 kilometers from the Fortress there are two Baolies in sand stone. Both Baolies are 5x 5, feet. Presently there are 5 steps from Western to Eastern side in both Baolies.



Fig. 9. Baoli

There is no structure remaining right now on the well and lot of natural vegetation on top of it.

#### CONCLUSION:

The conclusion of this research is that people from all religions have tried to protect them self from enemies, and struggled till the end of their lives. On the other hand while

visiting this watch tower, the picture of human brutality also comes in front of us, that's how people having a religious back ground can show such brutality. There is no religion in the world that encourages innocent killing, but there have always been examples of ruthless killing. This small stone made structure also proves that these man made structures have more, longer life then its makers. It also concludes that death is predestined and pre- ordained, No efforts remain fruitful when the time to meet the creator comes. This beautiful place with all kinds of Natural beauty with the presence of this structure took us to the history that is saved in the hearts of the people of Owin only. No efforts have been made by anyone to protect the building. But this visit took us absolutely away from this material and mechanical world into the lap of nature.

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