

Derawar through the Ages: A Military and Dynastic History

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Abstract: Once Derawar was included in the most important strategic locations within the desert of Cholistan. Its legendary fort was centre stage amid the Rajput and Daudputras rivalries during eighteenth century. Its geo-strategic position at the centre of the Cholistan desert made it a sanctuary for various rulers and their treasure hoards thus prompting the rulers of Jaisalmeer and Bahawalpur States to acquire it and turn it into state capital. Moreover, situated at the crossroad of caravanserais to Central Asia, Persia and Arabia, the town also attained an economic significance. This paper will focus on the history of Derawar and its renowned fort, how and why it became the much coveted prize and centre of historic battlefields in this region, and how it gradually lost its significance due to the dramatic political changes brought about by the appearance of the British in the local politics of this realm.

Keywords: Derawar Fort, Bahawalpur State, Daudputras

Introduction

Military conquest is generally accomplished through capture of strategic locations such as mountain passes, bridges and crossroads to win a symbolic victory and then by acquiring total control over the area in question. (Heuser, 2010, 76) Derawar was one such strategic location at the crossroad of several trade routes. The passing caravans taxed and flow of goods controlled from this location. Besides this advantage in trade and commerce, Derawar also possessed a central position in the politics of the region. "The expression of power has always been one of the functions of architecture" and "Military architecture is the most direct expression of power." (Grabar, 1978, 48) Derawar Fort was built up for practical rather than symbolic reasons but still it carries the expression of power and awe of its rulers. It served as a safe haven for his rulers against enemy forces because this fort is in Greater Cholistan where in daytime the heat of the desert and scarcity of water was unbearable, and tracks hard to find; making it a possible

graveyard for even the strongest and largest armies. If Russian had its General winter, Cholistan had its own General summer, natural topography being enough to ward off booty hunters and invaders.

Due to its position, Derawar became one of the most sought location for establishing and consolidating rule over the North-Western part of Great Indian Desert¹ which was the stronghold of several Rajput clans from eighth to twelfth centuries CE. In order to defend the location, Derawar was fortified and its importance enhanced further. Most battles in this region were fought around this formidable fort. By mid of eighteenth century this fort was conquered by Daudputra rulers of Bahawalpur.

Derawar Fort

Derawar is located at 28°46'04" N and 71°20'02" E. (Mughal, 1997, 153) Many names have been assigned to this settlement like Derajat, Dilawar, 2, Derarawal and Derawet; different

¹ The Great Indian Desert includes the Thar Desert in Sindh and the Rajasthan Desert in India covering an area of 10,399 sq. miles between 27°42'-29°45' N. and 69°52'-73°05' E.

² In Mahmudul Hasan Siddiqui's book *History of Arghuns and Tarkhans of Sindh*, the writer quoted *Tarkhan Nama*, which Derawar by the name of Dilawar. (Rashid, 10th August 2008)

folklore are associated with the origin of these names. Now days, most popular rendition among these names is Derawar. Widespread perception is that this fort was named as Derawar after the name of its founder, Dev Rawal. Archaeologists and historians believe that Derawar is one of the oldest inhabited sites in the Cholistan desert. Around 4000 BCE, Cholistan was the home of the Hakra valley civilization. The sites of this ancient civilization was position along course of Hakra River³ which was 300 miles long but its centre point was around fort Derawar, here this river divided into numerous tributaries and created a playa. Therefore, the settlement of Derawar remained well habitable at least during 4000-2000 BCE. (Mughal, 1997, 28- 31) The river watered this realm until 1200 BCE, whereas around 600 BCE it became irregular and eventually vanished. With the drying of river this place turned into desert but its fort is still standing high. (Mughal, 1997, 127) Apparently, Derawar lost its significance after the Hakra dried up. However, this place again came into lime light when the Rajputs gained ascendancy in the Great Indian Desert. According to records, the founder of this fort were Bhutta (cast) Rajputs and the Rajput clan's ascendancy in Indian history was between eighth to twelfth centuries CE. At that time, Jajja was the ruler of this area and in 830 CE, Dev Rawal, the son of Jajja's sister, built a fort in desert, with permission of his uncle. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 360) The fort was constructed with powerful crenulated mud-brick walls and reinforced by hemicycle

towers.

Rajput of Rajhistan

The Rajputs of Rajasthan were divided into 36 clans between 1000-1200 CE, and they were engaged in a continuous state of antagonism, either with some common enemy, or with each other.⁴ In the face of such hostility, Rajputs' existence was dependent relatively on fortified buildings, fortified cities, or caravanserais, finally yet importantly on military forts, and Derawar fort perfectly served this purpose. At this time, it was in the custody of Jaisalmeer State⁵ and because of its geographical position in desert this fort escaped from direct attack of Sultanates rulers, but Rawals of Jaisalmeer were still compelled to pay an annual tribute to Delhi Sultans in return for their safety. About initial years of this fort Tod says:

Their first capital was at Tanot, still in Jaisalmeer territory, which was founded about the-middle of the eighth century: but being ousted from this, Deoraj, the first chief to assume the title of Rawal, built Deogarh or Deorawar in 853, now called Derawar in Bahawalpur territory, and established himself there. Shortly afterwards, the capital was changed to Lodorva, an immense city with twelve gates taken from the Lodra Rajputs, the ruins of which lie 10 miles west-by-north of Jaisalmeer town. Lodorva was, however, ill adapted for defence, so Jaisal sought for a strong place and founded the

³ The Sutlej River originally fed this river and subsequently it ran from east to west. Ahmad, December 2005, 1)

⁴ For further details see (Tod, 1920). James Tod (1782–1835), in 1818, was appointed political agent for the states of western Rajputana, where he collected materials for his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (2 volumes, published 1829 and 1832), which detailed the contemporary geography

and history of Rajputana and central India along with the history of the Rajput clans who ruled most of the area at that time. Another book, *Travels in Western India* (1839), was published posthumously. He returned to England in 1823.

⁵ Jaisalmeer State was the most western and the third largest state of the States of Rajputana, lying between 26 41' and 28 23' N. and 69 30' and 72 42' E., with an area of 16,062 square miles.

fort and city of Jaisalmeer in 1156.
(Frowde, 1908, 1-3)

During late fourteenth century, the Rajput's power was decreasing in the Rajasthan desert (<http://www.Jaisalmeer.org.uk/history.html>). In wake of this decline in Rajput power, Derawar fort was twice plundered by Shah Hussain Arghuns in 1525. First attack was led by the Commander of Arghuns ruler Shah Husain—Baba Ahmad, Baba died in this venture. Then Shah Husain in person attacked Derawar fort. He sent a force in advance under Sambal Khan to make necessary arrangements for this attack. The scarcity of water compelled Shah Husain to sink 300 wells in dry bed of the Hakra river, and the army was thereby able to lay siege to the place and destroy the walls by mines, but eventually it was carried by assault, the Arghuns placing their shields on their heads and scaling the walls, sword in hands. In two successful expeditions Arghuns got a gigantic booty. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 45-6) Then Mughals entered the stage around the first half of the sixteenth century. By 1542 Humayun marched through Derawar on his way to Ajmer and he was followed by Sher Shah Suri. Humayun made some restoration work in the forts of this region.⁶ This was a time when first Jaisalmeer state encounter Mughals. Actually, Rawal Lunakarn (r. 1530-1551) stood against Humayun.

The Daudputras

According to State Historians of Daudputras, the

ruling family of Bahawalpur State is a offshoot of Abbasid of Arabia, and that the forefathers of Daudputras landed in Sindh after the debacle of Bagdad. Therefore, the history of this ruling family in India starts from their habitation in Sindh. First prominent member of Abbasi family was Chani Khan. After Muhammad Chani Khan his son Daud Khan and Kalhora Khan became foes of each other and from here this Abbasi family split into two well-known groups of Sindh history; Daudputras and Kalhoras. Kalhoras gave tough time to Daudputras (sons of Daud Khan) although according to Goldsmith, the Daudputras in Sind were "warrior as well as weavers"⁷ but Kalhoras kicked them out from Sind. Mubarik Khan I (Daudputra) died in the fort of Shikarpur (Sindh) in 1726 and Sadiq Khan I ascended the throne. After some time, Nur Muhammad Kalhora sent a large army to conquer Shikarpur, Daudputras ran away from there and their affiliation with religious personalities provided a heaven sent opportunity for Daudputras in the shape of invitation to visit by Bukhari and Gilanis of Uch, Daudputras accepted this invitation. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 52-3) Sheik Abdul Qadir Bukhari gave shelter to Sadiq Khan and introduced him to governor of Multan, Shah Nawaz Khan,⁸ in this meeting Sadiq Khan got a *talluqa* or district of Chaudhari (Now known as Liaqutpur). At the three mile distance Sadiq Khan founded a village, Allahabad (Ali, 1848, 21; The Punjab Government, 1908, 53) in 1729 which was first capital of Daudputras in this area. The

⁶ See the details of Sher Shah Suri and Hummayun visit of Cholistan in three books of Gareeb-ul-Allah Gazi, (1997) *Fort Abbas Mazi-o-Haal ke Aina Main*. Lahore: Izhar Sons,. Gareeb-ul-Allah Gazi, (2004) *Tareekh-e-Fort Abbas: Qabal-az-Maseh-ta-2004*. 2nd ed. Lahore: Izhar Sons, and Gareeb-ul-Allah Gazi, (2004) *Tareekh-e-Haroonabad*. Lahore: Izhar Sons,

⁷ Quoted from Sir F. G. Goldsmid from his Historical Memoir of Shikarpur, written in 1854 in (Hunter, 1887, 386)

⁸ Shortly after in 1141 H (1732 C.E.) Nawab Hayatullah Khan, *Subadar* of Multan granted a piece of land of Chaudhari. Din, *Gazetteer of the Bahawalpur State with Map 1904*, 52, 53. It was dedicated to Allah by Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan I about 1142 H (1729 C.E.) after he had received in *jagir* the *pargana* of Chandhari from Nawab Hayatullah Khan Governor of Multan.

modern history of Bahawalpur State starts from Nawab Sadiq Khan I (r. 1727-1747).⁹ First groundbreaking victory of Sadiq Khan-I in this region was to conquer the Derawar fort.¹⁰

The story of this victory starts with the arrival of Khair Khan in the court of Sadiq Khan-I. Khair Khan, the head of Karkaich tribe in Sindh, asked for help of Nawab against his foes. Nawab knew it very well that Khair Khan was friend of Rawals of Jaisalmeer so Nawab gave a suggestion to Khair Khan to sought the military assistance from Rawals. (Ali, 1848, 22-3) Whereas major part of Jaisalmeer forces was already fighting on Bikaner frontier and now another regiment from Derawar fort was sent with Khair Khan. Taking the advantage of this situation Nawab launched an attack on Derawar. Actually, the Daudputra chief wanted to settle the scores of previous attack of Raja of Jaisalmeer on Uch and Allahabad.¹¹ Shahamet Ali narrates this attack in these words:

He in consequence led his force in person, and at once laid siege to the fort of Derawar, the pride of Jaisalmeer. The place was gallantly defended by the garrison; and the news of this invasion having meanwhile reached the force, it was detached along with Kheir Khan, who hastened his return, without accomplishing

the object for which he had been sent and directly proceeded to succor Derawar. The Ameer (Sadiq Khan) on receiving the intelligence of the approaching reinforcement left the infantry to carry on the siege, while he himself advanced at the head of his cavalry, to prevent a junction of the enemy's troops. Combat was started and two of chief officers of Rawul were killed so army became panic which caused a large slaughter. At same time siege of Deirawar was continued. (Ali, 1848, 23-4)

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of Rawal, Beika, received military aid from Multan so this allied force tried to defend Derawar but failed. Daudputras dug a mine in wall of fort, blew it up, causing a crack in the wall and entered in to fort. Daudputras assassinated eighteen high-ranked officers of Jaisalmeer State in this venture. (Ali, 1848, 23-4) However, after short span of time, in 1747 C. E. Rawal Rai, a commander of Jaisalmeer state captured the fort by defeating the forces of Bahawal Khan-I (r.1746-1750). Actually, during Maharawal Akhai Singh (r. 1722 to 1762) rule, the fight on Jaisalmeer and Bikaner state was stopped for a while so Jaisalmeer army was free to launch a attack on Derawar with full

⁹ Rulers of Bahawalpur State

Name of rulers	Time Period of Ruler-ship
Sadiq Khan I (from 1739 onwards he was Nawab)	(1727-1747)
Nawab Bahawal Khan I	(1747-1750)
Nawab Mubarak Khan	(1750-1772)
Nawab Bahawal Khan II	(1772-1809)
Nawab Sadiq Khan II	(1809-1826)
Nawab Bahawal Khan III	(1826-1852)
Nawab Sadiq Khan III	(1852-1853)
Nawab Fateh Khan	(1853-1858)
Nawab Bahawal Khan IV	(1858-1866)
Nawab Sir Sadiq Khan V	(1866-1899)
Nawab Bahawal Khan V	(1899-1907)
General Sir Sadiq Khan V	(1907-1966)

In 1727 Daudputras came to Multan Province and settled down here under headship of Sadqi Khan-I, in 1739 Nadir Shah assigned hereditary title of Nawab to Sadqi Khan-I.

¹⁰ Jaisalmeer lost this fort because from Sahal Singh's era (r. 1651-1661) to rule of Mulraj Singh Bhatti II (r. 1762-1819), Jaisalmeer was busy in tackling the attacks and threats from Bikaner state. This almost hundred year old enmity (1661-1761) weakened the Jaisalmeer state and strengthened its rival states; Bikaner, Marwar (Jodhpur), and Bahawalpur.

¹¹ It was established in 1729 by Abbasis. Sadeeq Tahir, 1971, 129)

force. In addition, all opponents¹² of Nawab of Bahawalpur helped and financed Rai Sigh in this adventure. Resultantly, Jaisalmeer State captured the fort and after this victory of Khawaja Rahmet, commander of Multan forces, shared this fort with Rawal Rai.¹³ So Bahawal Khan-I establishment the Bahawalpur City,¹⁴ on Sutlej, in 1747 C. E. (Shahab, 1977, 19) which was known as Bahawalpur City after his founder's name, and later on whole State was called after its capital city Bahawalpur State. Old rivalries simmered and Jaisalmeer was once again attacked by Bikaner, so in 1759 C. E., Rao peacefully forked out this fort to Nawab Mubarak Khan-II (r. 1750-1772) 15 (Ali, 1848, 47) on terms and conditions of getting half the tolls collection of this fort.¹⁶ Mubarak Khan accepted the condition and ever since, this legendary fort is in the custody of Royal family of Bahawalpur State.

Derawar during 18th Century

Almost every Afghan or Irani intruder of eighteenth century attacked Derawar Fort. In 1739 Nadir Shah of Iran (r. 1736-1747), sent his commander Tamasp Shah to plunder Derawar. In this attack, foes¹⁷ of Nawabs joined Tamasp. This

allied force moved towards Derawar, Shahamet says about this event:

This force besieged the Derawar fort but they failed to capture it then they use a tactic. Ex-servant of Dadputras named Moosa, who had now shackled hands with Noor Muhammad secretly, was sent to Deirawer fort. Moosa pretended to be a messenger sent by Sadiq Khan, who was in Afghanistan in the Darbar of Nadir Shah. Moosa gave a fake message to Governor Mohammad Maroof the then incharge Derawar, who out of fear of incurring Nadir Shahs displeasure let the allied force enter in the Deirawer fort to avoid further in convenience. Moosa also took the oath of his loyalty with dadputras. The governor along with some of his chief officers appeared in the camps of foes and they were surprised on their immediate arrest and imprisonment but it was too late. Now force of Daudputras was left behind without commanders so they could not resist therefore they ran away to the woods to join their tribe men. The force of Multan occupied vacant fort. (Ali, 1848, 28-9)

The Tamasp chased the fugitive Daudputras in

¹² Nawab Hayat ullah Khan, Subedar of Multan, Makhdum Sheikh Raju Rais of Sitpur and Khudayar Khan Kalhora.

¹³ Tod says at that time Derawar was capital of 'Khadal District, often mentioned in the Annals of Jaisalmeer' and this fort was 'inhabited by a branch of the Bhattis, broken off at a very early period, its chief holding the title of Rawal, and whose family since their expulsion have resided at Gharijala, belonging to Bikaner, on an allowance of five rupees a day, granted by the conqueror' which means Rawals were hit hard by the Abbasis capture of the fort. (Tod, 1920, 1302).

¹⁴ This city named after its founder and this state got name from this city. Similarly, Jaisalmeer city coined name from its founder Jisal and State was named after city Jaisalmeer.

¹⁵ Shahamet, *The History of Bahawalpur*, 47.

¹⁶ Until Sambat 1842 (1785 A. D) Rawal Rai Singh and his son Rungnath Singh received the stipulated sum; but after the latter's death his son Zalim Singh was content to receive Rs. 50 per monies as a gratitude, which he and his son Bhum Singh continued to enjoy till 1833 C. E. when it lapsed on the latter's death. The descendants of Bhum Singh, who lived in foreign territories, never laid claim to concession, but when a representative of the family appeared in the court of the Nawab he generally received a *Killat*. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 360-1).

¹⁷ Meean Noor Muhammad of Khodabad, Momin Khan governor of Multan, Sheikh Rao of Seitpur, and Nawab Jaunesar Khan of Dera Ghazi Khan took part in this venture. (Ali, 1848, 24-8)

person with his force. Daudputras first put their women to death than drew their swords. Great slaughter took place and royal army totally routed. A number of soldiers of royal force had fallen victim to the deadly desert heat, were wounded and fatigued but Tamasp managed to reach Sindh with his remaining few men. On the other side, Sadiq Khan-I was successful to win the trust of Nadir Shah. Resultantly, Sadiq Khan-I was sent to Tamasap along with a messenger of Shah, Mirza Askar Ali. Tamasp welcomed them on arrival in Shikarpur, and Sadiq's territories were returned to him. Nadir Shah not only returned this fort to Nawab moreover awarded him the hereditary title of 'Nawab'. (Ali, 1848, 28-30)

Then in 1785 C. E. Timur Shah (r.1747-1793) the Shah of Afghanistan, sent Sirdar Maded-Khan Durrani to invade Sindh. On hearing about the impeding Afghan forces Nawab hastened to strengthen and garrison his fortresses, especially Derawar.¹⁸ The Governor of Multan Muzaffar Khan joined Maded and this force assaulted Derawar fort twice. In first attempt they failed succumbing to the heat and scarcity of water. In the second attempt, Maded Khan succeeded but after receiving 60,000-rupee *nazrana* he stepped back from Nawab of Bahawalpur. (Ali, 1848, 77-80, 190-1) The *nazrana* being a gesture of allegiance and subservience was enough to placate Timur Shah temporarily. Soon in 1788, Timur Shah again moved his armies for second attack on Sindh. On his way he attacked Derawar with besieging machines which rendering the Daudputra forces totally helpless to defend the fort. After this victory, Timur Shah went back to his kingdom and he left Derawar fort under the

custody of Afghan garrison under the command of Shah Mohammed Khan, a Afghan of Badzai tribe and resident of Multan. (Ali, 1848, 77,79) After departure of Timur Shah Nawab, went straight for the Achilles heel and conquered the Sitpur fort in which all women of Afghan garrison were staying. Nawab brought them to the Derawar fort. In this way Nawab tactfully bargained Afghan families in return of Derawar fort. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 58) About this incident, Tod says:

About thirty years ago an army from Kandahar invaded Daudputra, invested and took Derawar, and compelled Bahawal Khan to seek protection with the Bhattis at Bikampur. A negotiation for its restoration took place, and he once more pledged his submission to the Abdali king, and having sent his son Mubarak Khan as a hostage and guarantee for the liquidation of the imposition, the army withdrew, Mubarak had to face exile in Kabul for three years, was at length restored to liberty and made Khan of Bahawalpur, on attempting which he was imprisoned by his father, and confined in the fortress of Khangarh where he remained nearly until Bahawal Khan's death. (Tod, 1920, 1302-3)

In 1799, Nawab Bahawal II dispatched a well prepared force from Derawar fort, under the command of Prince Sadiq Khan against rebellious Prince Mubarak Khan. Sadiq trapped Mubarak Khan and eventually imprisoned him in fort Derawar.¹⁹ Later on, to affect his escape, Khuda Bakhsh, an enemy of Nawab, his personal servant named Dilawar with sent his fifty army-men, who secretly released Mubarak Khan from

¹⁸ At that time, the Governor of Derawar fort was Alum Khan Belooch. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 61)

¹⁹ There is a contradiction about the imprisonment place of Mubarak, according to Tod Mubarak was confined to Khangarh but Shahamet Ali says he

was imprisoned in Derawar fort. Statement of Shahamet is more reliable because he wrote his book in the light of the Persian manuscripts of political agent to Bahawalpur state, Pir Ibrahim, whereas Tod Agent in Rajputana.

Derawar. (Ali, 1848, 103-4) After some time Mubarak was again captured and imprisoned in Derawar fort.

Derawar during Nineteenth Century

For centuries and centuries this fort stood in stoic manner; silently watching the bloodbath or bloodshed; unabated conspiracies; ruthless wars of succession; and grim killing triggered by vaulting ambitions. In similar manners, in February 1800, Mukhdum of Uchch sent two men Jewan and Gul Bag in the disguise of baggers, to kill Bahawal Khan II. Gul mixed up with the horsemen of Nawab and the other joined falconers. From these two Jewan somehow reached the palanquin of the Nawab but he was caught red handed and killed. (Ali, 1848, 103-4) But in 1809, Bahawal Khan II²⁰ died in this fort and was buried in royal graveyard near it. On 13th August 1809, Sadiq Khan II (r. 1809-1826) sat on the throne but he was not feeling safe since the rightful heir of throne Prince Mubarak was still alive, to nip the evil in the bud, Sadiq engaged the services of his Prime Minister Naseer Khan. Naseer engaged Usama to kill the Prince Mubarak. According to orders after taking out Mubarak Khan from Derawar, Usama killed and buried him in the sands of Cholistan. (Ali, 1848, 148-152) It was not end, during Sadiq Khan era, Derawar fort became the hub of activities of Nawab Sadiq Khan. After holding an official *darbar* to announce his ruler-ship Nawab Sadiq Khan-II returned to Derawar, in the same year Shah Shuja came into power in Khorasan, so to display Khan's loyalty to Shah Shuja a royal salute was fired and town and fort of Derawar was light up at night. In same year, Sadiq Khan-II celebrated Eid at Derawar. (Ali, 1848, 150-5) However, this tranquillity was troubled when an

assassin Sunji Khan attacked Nawab. He was hired for this task by two conspirators Fattah Mohammed Ghori and Ahmad Khan who were actually army officers of Nawab. However, Nawab escaped and arrived at Ahmadpur East safely. Nevertheless, to avoid further inconvenience, Nawab moved back to Derawar on same night along with his malcontent troops. When conspirators failed in their plans then both of these commanders decided that along with their friend Dhuman Sing left Derawar unnoticeably with their under command armies. Each of these three army officers had under their command 500 equestrians and infantryman. (Ali, 1848, 163) Making us draw the conclusion that in total 1500 horses and foot were stationed there. Eventually, Nawab's army fought courageously and against these rebels and imprisoned Ahmed Khan with his 50 followers. He was decapitated and his head was sent to Nawab staying in Derawar for his satisfaction. (Ali, 1848, 177)

Derawar continued to witness more and more conspiracies. Sadiq Khan, too fell a victim to such plot, when his brothers revolted to depose him. Actually, these brothers were imprisoned in this fort but men of influence in the tribe set them free. Then these brother murdered their guards, and eventually declared Ahmad Bakhsh Khan a new Nawab in Derawar fort. Nevertheless, the Khan came back on time and suppressed the rebellion by killing his three brothers and two nephews involved in this conspiracy, all²¹ were killed on 22nd March 1811. (Ali, 1848, 166-7) But this incident left unusual effect on Sadiq Khan, as due to this frightful event he stayed in his harem at Derawar for a month. He was afraid to allow anyone to approach him without interrogation. Therefore, he received all news and passed order

²⁰ Two years later, in 1802, Bahawal Khan II maintained good relations with Afghan ruler consequently in 1804 Afghan rulers officially bestowed the custody of Derawar fort to Nawab.

²¹ Brother were; Muhammad Bakhsh, Khudayar Khan; and one Nephews were, Ahmad Bakhsh son of Mubarak Khan, and Hajji Khan son of Khan Muhammad Khan.

on different issues through his herms. After reign of sixteen years, Sadiq Khan II expired at Derawar on 7th April, 1826 and he was buried in Derawar necropolis. On the same day, his elder son, Rahimyar Yar Khan ascended the throne at Derawar and assumed the title of Bahawal Khan III. (Ali, 1848, 178, 201-2).

From 1826 to 1852 Bahawal Khan ruled the State he was the Nawab who established his palaces at Dera Nawab near Ahmadpur East. Bahawal Khan III mostly resided at Dera Nawab, from here the decline of Derawar was started. Nawab Sadiq Khan-III (r. 1852-1853) ascended the throne at Derawar and imprisoned his brother Fateh Khan, but very next year Nawab Fateh Khan (1853-1858) became the defacto ruler of the State and Sadiq Khan III ran away to Lahore where he got shelter under British umbrella. After Fateh Khan, Nawab Bahawal Khan-IV (1858-1866) became ruler of State at Derawar. Most of the time of this Nawab was spent in suppressing internal revolts. In 1866, Bahawal Khan IV was poisoned so after him his four year old son, Sadiq Khan IV, titled as Nawab under the protection of first British Agency (1866-1879). (The Punjab Government, 1908, 67-85) All of these Nawabs ascended throne and died at Derawar fort.

British interference

The British, fully cognizant of Bahawalpur's economic and strategic value, signed treaties with its rulers on their own terms and conditions, it had become a coveted prize for the British not only from trade aspect but for military expeditions as well. It was in the end of the 1838 and start of 1839 when British troops crossed Bahawalpur on their expedition to Afghanistan. In fact by start of nineteenth century British realized that to cross

the Marwar desert for Afghan expedition the help of Bahawalpur State was essential. Resultantly, they sent their agent to Bahawalpur chief. The Governor General of India ordered Mr. Seton, the Resident at Delhi to send a ambassador to Nawab of Bahawalpur to initiate friendly terms with him. Consequently, Mir Izzatullah Khan, dignitary of Delhi, was sent to Bahawalpur court with a letter from British Government. The meeting of Mir and Nawab held at Derawar fort. Bahawal Khan-II assured the British of his full co-operation. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 142) Thus, this agreement opened the way for a century of servitude and colonial exploitation of the land and its resources. Bahawalpur soon acquired the status of a front-line state for British the missions and campaigns to Afghanistan, Punjab and Sindh.

The records of British travellers have a unique significance to reconstruct the history of Derawar fort as these travellers are giving eyewitness accounts of Derawar in different period. Most of the traveller visited this State during first half of the Nineteenth Century. The first half of Nineteenth Century was a time when State was not regularly keeping records of a variety of things. Therefore, to complete the history of a fort in far-flung desert travellers accounts are one of the main primary sources. In 1808, a mission to Kabul reached Bahawalpur under the command of Mr. Elphinstone. (Elphinstone, 1839, 9-27) In 1826, Charles Masson²² travelled through Bahawalpur State, during this journey he recorded about Derawar fort as:

Durawal, a fortress, eighteen *cosses* distant in the desert, where, it is understood, he [Nawab] keeps his treasures, as in a safe place, and where he frequently

²² In 1835 Charles Masson became the Political Agent to the Government in Kabul until his return to England in 1838. The diaries of Charles Masson (1800-1853) who explored Punjab, Sind Baluchistan, Afghanistan and Iran are a fascinating

account of the experiences of an explorer and Orientalists over a period of thirteen years from 1828 to 1841. Included are not only details of the scenery and routes but maps and sketches.

resides...equidistant from Ahmadpur and Bahawalpur, or eighteen cosses from each. It is represented as strong and possibly some care has been bestowed upon it, as the khan have always selected it for the deposit of their hoards, and for an asylum in case of invasion. Its chief dependence in such a case would appear to be in its situation, and the difficulty a besieging army would find in subsisting near it, there being no water to be procured without the walls at a shorter distance than nine *cosses*. It has been seen, that the desert between the capital and Bikaner is abundantly stocked with fortress, which were formerly more needed than at present. (Masson, 1842, 5, 25)

Furthermore, Derawar next to Ahmadpur East in manufacturing of gunpowder but this gunpowder was in crude form. In 1837, Derawar fort contained 18 guns but all were dysfunctional. (Leech, 1839b, 81) In 1828, Hamilton, says 'the strongest place is fort of Derawul, which owes its ability of resistance to the utter sterility of the sands that surround it; yet it was the usual residence of Bahawal Khan, the founder of the dynasty.' (Hamilton, 1828, 112)

In 1835 Boileau observed during his visit to Bahawalpur that the principle abode place of Nawab was Derawar fort. (Boileau, 1837, 184) In 1837, the entire transaction of Khan's business in the hands of two merchants Ramdass and Ramchand Bhabra of Derawar. This fort was Nawab's residence as well as it contained all his treasures, which was amounting to 3,00,00,000 rupees. Whereas, total revenue of State was in total 9, 00,000 Rs and alone Derawar fort was collecting 31,000 Rs.²³ This money was mostly collected as fair, taxes and customs duty on the import export. (Leech, 1839b. 80) In 1846, State

owned forty cannons, from these in 1904 only twenty-five were serviceable and from them five were placed at Derawar fort. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 336) The Fort's value and standing remained quiet intact during his regime.

On 16th March 1866, Bahawal Khan IV expired, no sooner Hageem Sadullah along with other Daudputras set Muhammad Jafar Khan free. Jafar Khan was a brother of late Nawab, who declared himself a Nawab on 25th March 1866. Sadiq IV was at that time a four years old kid so in this situation queen mother along with other *darbaris* requested British Government to take notice of Jafar Khan's action. British time-honoured the request and dispatched a force to help the young de-jure Nawab. Mutineer fixed their guns on Mosque of Derawar, which was opposite to main gate of the fort. Vigilant actions of British troops forced the opponents to confine themselves to the fort. Now British fixed their guns on the roof of Mosque and furious fighting broke out. At last, British became victorious and rule of little Nawab was resumed under the command of British Political Agent. Afterwards, on 28th November 1879, when Nawab Sadiq IV reached the age of eighteen, he was installed on throne with full power at Derawar fort. His first morganatic relation was also tied up at Derawar in 1879 (<http://www.royalark.net/Pakistan/Pakistan.htm>).

Aziz-ur-Rehman says that Derawar town was flourishing place even in 1895 C. E. and he sounds right as in 1880 Prince Rahimyar Khan, was born at Derawar fort from the favorite wife of Nawab Gaman Bibi. These evidences speak volumes about Derawar fort's significance. Later on, this Prince died in an accident at Derawar so Gaman Bibi forced Nawab to abandoned this fort where they lost their son and accordingly Nawab moved to Ahmadpur East.²⁴ The second son of Sadiq Khan-IV was ignored by Nawab and even

²³ At that time gold was of 17 ½ rupees the tola. (Leech, 1839a, 63)

²⁴ For details of this inter-Zanankhana rivalry see (Aziz, 1939, 9-14).

house arrested in Derawar fort until the age of ten. Then this son of Nawab Sadiq-IV appointed as Heir Apparent. On 14th February 1899, after death of Sadiq Khan-IV Bahawal Khan V became Nawab under the supervision of British Agent. At that time, *toshakhan* and treasure of Bahawalpur state was placed at three places Bahawalpur City, Ahmadpur East and Derawar fort. Colonel Hutchinson personally visited these places on 19th February 1899. On 12th November 1903 Nawab reached to the age of eighteen so he was invested with full powers, by the Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, in person, at Bahawalpur City. (The Punjab Government, 1908, 87)

Derawar at the Crisscross of Transit Trade

Caravan trade routes were also crisscrossed Derawar fort. These routes connected India with Central Asia, Egypt, Persia and Arabia. The geo-strategic position of this fort made it perfect to stage a check-post to impose taxes and customs duties. Moreover, Bahawalpur State was exporting different kind of cloths, indigo, cotton threads, *mung*, ghee, wheat, rice, red tobacco to Kabul, Delhi, Shikarpur & Khairpur, Khorasan, Hyderabad & Allaiyar, Marwar. Khorasan and Sindh was the biggest purchaser of Bahawalpur cloth whereas most of the English cloth, coming to Bahawalpur markets was from Bombay. Bahawalpur was also importing *nawabi* silk, black-pepper, English cloth, copper, pewter, lead, needles, woolen cloth, *haldee*, iron, brocade, sugar, metals, cloths, cotton, *madarpat*, brass-utensils, velvet, silk, ginger, *hareer*, rock-salt, *kandhari-takas*, *lokars* etc. from Bombay, Marwar, Delhi Amritsar, Ludhiana, Dera Ghazi Khan & Multan, Jaisalmeer, Umerkote, Jaipur, Saidawad (near Delhi), Allaiyar, and Shikarpur. From Khorasan, Kabul, Bokhara and Heart, different kind of Silk, gold, *ashafis*, silver, horses,

dried and fresh fruits, almonds, brocade, *posteens*, *choghas*, coral, precious stones, asses, needles, *bojgand* pepper-wort (used to clean silk), *hing* (used in colouring the cloth), and different colours²⁵ to colour the Bahawalpuri cloths. (Leech, 1839 a, 55-67; Lal, 1839, 71-8) Derawar Fort was a check post and toll collection centre between all routes which were crossing Bahawalpur State from east to west and north to south and vice-versa. Going by the this ferocious trade activity, one can easily gauge the immense importance attached to Derawar. So whether it was trade between North and South India or between Afghanistan and Eastern India, Bahawalpur State was center of all the trade routes. Like caravan of the Lohanis were bringing all kind of cloth from Calcutta, Benaras and Farrakhabad to the value of 500, 000 rupees, they did not sell any part of their articles in Bahawalpur State, main market being Khorasan, but they had to pay all the duties of import and exports. (Lal, 1839, 73)

The caravans while crossing the desert usually took their path through the dry bed of Hakra. Derawar fort was an important check post and caravanserai because it was on the dry bed of Hakra River, the river bed had converted in to hard land which was good for trafficking. F. Mackeson, says 'as it is to the forsaken bed of this river that we are indebted for the opening to us of a road though the desert.' He observed 'a continuous line of villages traversing its whole extend from E. by N. to N. to W. by S.' he concluded that this habitations sprung on this road due to some facilities which this dry bed of river provided, as 'wells dug in it are generally found to have sweet water, while the water of well dug at a distance from it either North or South' was 'usually brackish.' So this dry bed was serving as a hard road, and safe because it

²⁵ These colors were taxed 1 ½ rupees per cent. The dyer received 6 *anna*, when he has expended one

ser of these articles in colorings his cloth. (Lal, 1839, 74)

was more populated than other desert areas and most importantly the water of this bed was sweet. (Mackeson, 1844, 299)

In the first half of the 19th century, from Sikarpur to Bahawalpur City or Ahmadpur East city via Derawar, the duty was 6½ rupees the one camel load. On this route traders were importing and exporting grocery, cloth, metal. Whereas, on route from Bahawalpur via Derawar to Jaisalmeer tax was 4¾ rupees a camel or 8 maunds' (Leech, 1839 a, 57). From Jaisalmeer Bahawalpur was importing Lokars, a white woollen fabric with Lake Border of 2 inches, and 100 Lokars yearly imported. *Kamals*, a fabric like the above but coarser 25 *kamals* imported yearly. Bahawalpur state was exporting two hundred loads to Bombay via Jaisalmeer route. (Lal, 1839, 73) On another route from Phulowdee to Bahawalpur via Derawar, duties were: on one camel groceries 6½ rupees, cloth 8¼ rupees, *kirmiz* 4½ annas. (Leech, 1839 a, 57)

Decrease in the significance of Derawar Fort

After decline of Mughals, when British appeared as only political power capable of controlling India, they signed various treaties with all Rajputana states, which compelled them to finish their inter-States mutual rivalries. Wars and rivalries were a huge offset to their trade and commerce activity. In 1818, Jaisalmeer State became British Protectorate State after signing a treaty of friendship with British. This treaty protected Jaisalmeer from intrusions and supported royal family in matters of successions. In return, Jaisalmeer had to provide the services of the British in 1829 to ward-off a war with Bikaner. <http://www.Jaisalmeer.org.uk/history.html> Bahawalpur got protection under British umbrella in 1833, when State signed a treaty with Paramount power. This treaty ensured defense against attack from western side, either by Sikhs and or by Afghanis or Iranians. Previously when

these powers attacked Bahawalpur State from the right bank of Sutlej River, Nawabs took refuge in the Desert and Derawar fort. Forts of Rajhistan or Cholistan served as haven for defender rulers; therefore, extraordinary attention paid to fortify these fortresses. Additionally, its geo-strategic, isolated and safe location of these forts made them perfect for Royal courts, Harems and treasures. Nevertheless, the signing of peace treaties after 1833, rendered these services useless, security and defense was no longer required so Derawar too lost its importance as the Safe House. That's how a gradual decline of its fortunes began. It thrived on conflict and Wars of successions, with the coming of one colonial master and the increased dependency on safe and secure trade routes, Derawar lost its one eminent position. Finally, in March 1845, British demarcated the borders of Bikaner, Rajputana and Bahawalpur that ended the wars for more land among these states. (Shahab, 1977, 26) Now even Bahawalpur State was safe from attacks of eastern state Bikaner and southern State Jaisalmeer. With these steps, the man-to-man warfare on boundary disputes and threats of invasions were ended. Of course, this situation affected the importance of fortresses in desert. Consequently, the race of capturing, building and strengthening the defensive fortifications of Rajhistan was ended, and Derawar was also one of those forts.

The tax collecting activities were affected by the intervention of British because after 1833 signing a treaty with Bahawalpur State British started trade through Sutlej. Mackeson recorded the opening of these rivers for British in early 1833 four boats laden with 2700 maunds of merchandize, this number of boats increased yearly unusually that in 1843, after ten year it was almost 280 % increase in number of boats with total 1125 boats cross Sutlej to Mithankot laden with 2, 44, 416 maund. (Mackeson, 1844, 313)

This extraordinary volume of trade decreased the value of land trade routes especially the routes which were crossing desert, because travelling in desert was cumbersome. Decrease in trade meant less caravans and less taxes and this phenomena diminished the importance of caravanserais and Derawar being the biggest desert caravanserais of Bahawalpur State which also became the victim.

Moreover, under British, renovation of old roads and construction of new roads and canals opened new trade routes with better facilities. But more than any other factor, it was the coming of railways which drastically changed the trade patterns and routes. As Empress Bridge (Railway Bridge) on Sutlej was opened in 1878 and Lahore-Karachi Railway line built in 1880, moreover in 1898 Southern Punjab Railway line crossed from Bahawalpur State. In a nut shell, from 1833 to the turn of the Nineteenth Century Derawar fort gradually lost its worth, both politically and financially, as is evident from the fact that in 1833 it was producing 31,000 Rs revenue but in 1867 was roughly estimated at 20,000 Rs a year. (Leech, 1839 b, 80)

In the changing scenario under British Raj Nawabs also adopted the British living styles. Second half of nineteenth century was marked with slowly and steadily shift of Nawab of Bahawalpur's towards royal palaces in the cities from the forts in deserts. Residences were shifted from medieval forts of the Cholistan desert to newly styled palaces as Nur Mahal was constructed (1872-1875) at a cost of 1.2 million rupees by Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan VI for his residence. Daulat Khana 1881 was built by Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV for his residence at a total cost of 0.2 million rupees. From 1882-1895 Sadiqgarh palace was constructed by Sadiq IV for residence at a total cost of 1.135 million (Dar, 2007, 122; The Punjab Government, 1908, 332, 357) so till the end of Nineteenth Century Derawar fort was forgotten.

Last nail in the coffin was from its owner Nawab Bahawal Khan V. Actually, Sadiq-IV was blessed with his second son in October 1883, who later emerged as Bahawal Khan-V. This Prince was born from Nawab's second wife who was a less likened wife. Due to internal-politics and jealousies of harem this queen and her son was confined by Nawab in Derawar fort from 1884 to 1894. This exile left immense effect on Bahawal-V hated this place for his whole life and always tried to avoid the memories of Derawar fort, (Aziz. 1939, 10-3) although in 1905 Bahawal Khan V visited Derawar fort (Tahir, 2010, 212, 247) but he never wanted to visit that place again. This was the time when eventually this fort lost into the dark clouds of ignorance and is still positioned in retreating condition in the hope that someday a Nawab will come and restore it to its prior prestige and glory.

Conclusion

Although today Derawar is forsaken and forgotten a fort, but time was kind to its once, it had held the key to Rajasthan desert, protecting this realm against intruders from Iran and Afghanistan. It was situated on the cross road to Central Asia, India, Afghanistan, and Iran. It was an ideal post for collections of toll-tax, transit duties and customs duties. Every trader and traveller on these routes had to pass this fort. Rulers of Bahawalpur State considered as safest place to take shelter and hide treasure due to its geographical conditions. It was place which used to decide the rise and fall of Nawabs of Bahawalpur Princely State whosoever won the keys of Derawar fort became the King. This fort lost its position when British emerged in this realm and opened riverine trade route through Sutlej and Indus by 1833. Eventually, introduction of Railways jeopardized all ancient trade routes of this area.

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