

Throchi Fort, Azad Jammu, and Kashmir: Significance, History and Architecture

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Abstract

Jammu and Kashmir have enjoyed the limelight going back to ancient times, it was at one time, the heaven of many civilizations, and the impacts of those are still found in this beautiful place. Every civilization and empire has left some sort of imprint in one way or another on this valley. These traces can be seen in the culture, lifestyle, infrastructure, language, and economy of Kashmir. The evolution of architectural details and techniques can be seen through the various monuments scattered around Kashmir. In Kashmir's architecture, forts have always held a significant value. Throchi Fort in District Kotli of AJ&K is one of the important military forts found in Kashmir's history. This study is an effort to find out the history of Throchi Fort with a focus on detailed documentation of the building to highlight its architectural features. A descriptive, qualitative, and analytical approach has been used for purpose of this study.

Introduction

Location And Construction

Throchi fort is situated in Choroi Tehsil of District Kotli, Azad Jammu, and Kashmir. It is located next to Gulpur, a town in Kotli District, this town is located on the junction of the Kotli-Mirpur and Kotli- Rawalpindi road. Adjoining Gulpur is Throchi a small village and fort in Naoshera province, located about 10 miles south of Kotli city (Bates, 1873, p. 391). Throchi Fort is situated on top of a hill at a strategic location, for that reason, it is known as the crown of District Kotli.

The fort has been built on the left bank of the Poonch River, 13 km south of Kotli, near Gulpur village, by the Mangral Muslims under Nasir-Din Khan (Singh, 1988, p. 287). No further information could be found about the original date of construction of the fort or the life of the builder of this fort, but one thing is claimed by the locals of Throchi village that the name 'Throchi' comes from the name of some prominent Hindu personality.

Throchi is one of the few forts which are difficult to access and are commonly built on a rocky hill summit, because of its position and plan it is fully



*Figure 1: Location of Throchi Fort (Google Maps)
(Throchi Fort, Gulpur 15th March 2019).*

protected against an escalade (Drew, 1875, p. 95). De Bourbel mentions Throchi as a famous castle in Gulpur hamlet (Bourbel, 1897, p. 94).

Viewed from below, it seems to be perfectly situated, controlling both the roads that are within the range of rifle shots. It occupies the crown of the spur, which does not seem to be completely commanded from any side. The fort has naturally scarped sides and rises from the valley in three tiers (Bates, 1873, p. 391) (Fig.2, Pl.1).

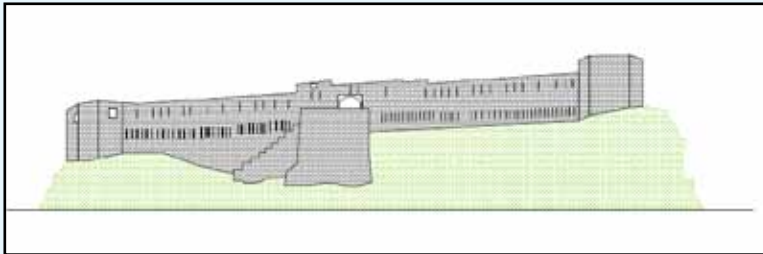


Figure 2: Throchi Fort- front view (drawing by Researcher)



Plate 1: Throchi Fort-view from Throchi village (photo by Researcher)

Throchi fort has always been an important military point, from here it was easy to exercise vigilance and have control over the surrounding areas and roads which included Kotli-Mirpur road, Rawalpindi-Kotli road (which is also an entrance into the Kashmir valley from Punjab), Sehnsa road, Gulpur city and adjacent areas of Kotli city, Nar and Khuratta., these areas were inhabited by the unruly tribes of Manghrabs, Nasma, and Chib Rajputs. The fort has its strategic worth since its first occupation by Maharaja Gulab Singh (Palit, 1972, p. 163).

Throchi Under Sikh Rule

Raja Sultan Khan, the ruler of the principality of Bhimber (which extended up to Kotli and a little beyond), employed Gulab Singh on a salary of three rupees per month and put him in charge of Throchi fort (Saraf, 1977, p. 149).

The fort fell to the Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1855 it passed into the possession of Maharaja Gulab Singh when he defeated Raja Jawahar Singh. Gulab Singh rebuilt the fort in stone in the 19th century, before that mud bricks were used as a construction material for this fort (Singh, 1988, p. 287).

Control over Throchi Fort changed with the rise and fall of different political powers in the valley. The Treaty of Amritsar and control of Dogras over Kashmir proved to be a turning point for Kashmir as well as Throchi Fort. From 1846 to 1947, the Dogra rule not only brought long-sought security to the state but also saw the scientific survey and documentation of the valley's antiquities, historical, archaeological, and ethnological assets.

Throchi Under Dogra Rule

As documented in 1873, the garrison of the fort consisted of thirty men, and the only water- supply came from the tanks constructed inside the fort. The village of Gulpur in which the fort is located only had twenty houses, situated on the lowermost shelf on the spur (Bates, 1873, p. 391).

After the Army reforms in 1921-23 certain forts held by the Army were brought under reduction, as the methods of warfare had changed the forts gradually lost their value as an important military weapon. (Singh, 1988, p. 167). As a result, the Maharaja set up a committee supervised by Thakur Kartar Singh to decide the fate of the forts keeping in mind their military as well as historical background. The matter, however, lingered on till 1936 when it popped up again and another committee consisting of Brig. Ghansar Singh, Maj. Gen. Janak Singh, and directed again by Thakur Kartar Singh was set up to resolve the issue once for all. After the committee's decision, Throchi fort was to be retained by Jammu Army along with three other forts. (Singh, 1988, p. 167). In 1937 it was garrisoned by a detachment of 8 rank and file of Fort Guards (Singh, 1988, p. 287).

The job of these Fort Guards was the protection of state property like magazines, gunpowder, muzzleloaders, and other equipment kept at Throchi Fort. There was also a signal communication station there operated by two JAK signalers (Palit, 1972, p. 163).

After the decision of accession of Kashmir in Srinagar, on 19th July 1947, the armed struggle started against Dogra rule. In the Kotli area, resistance against Dogra raj started from every corner, led by Col. Sher Ahmad Khan. Dogra forts were attacked in different locations and Muslim soldiers in the Dogra army mutinied and left the force to join the Pakistani fighters (Ahmad, 2003, p. 172).

Role of Throchi Fort During Kashmir's Freedom Fight (1947)

The main offensive in the Mirpur Brigade sector was launched in 1947 on the night of 8/9th October (Singh, 1988, p. 224). Major Nasarullah joined hands with Muslim troops and led them to Throchi Fort. The Throchi Garrison which comprised of Gorkhas was till now unaware of the murders at Juna, therefore, Captain Raghubir Singh and his men received their Muslim colleagues joyfully (Palit, 1972, p. 164). However, on 27/28 October night, Maj. Nasarullah and his Muslim company attacked the sleeping Gorkhas of Throchi and killed every one of them including Captain Raghubir Singh. Thus, Throchi Fort fell into the hands of Muslim freedom fighters (Singh, 1988, p. 236).

During the same time i.e. mid-October 1947, Col. Sher Ahmad Khan led the freedom movement in the area between Kotli and Sudhanoti. Subedar Khadim Hussain Khan, Major Feroz Khan, and Sher Dil Khan fought at Rajouri, Devi Gali, and Baral fronts, respectively. Fight at Fort Aahan (near Kotli, on the bank of Jehlum river) proved to be too much for Dogra Army, so it retreated towards Kotli. Dogra forces at Sehnsa and Punjera faced defeat at the hands of Pakistan fighters. All this chaos forced the Dogra army to seek refuge at Throchi fort, while they still had its control. It was here at Throchi fort that the Dogra army was surrounded from all the sides and forced to surrender in front of a group of native men commanded by Col. Mahmood Mangral. Defeated, the Dogra combatants decided to flee towards Jammu (Ahmad, 2003, p. 172-3).



Figure 3: Throchi Fort- Contours Map (drawing by Researcher)

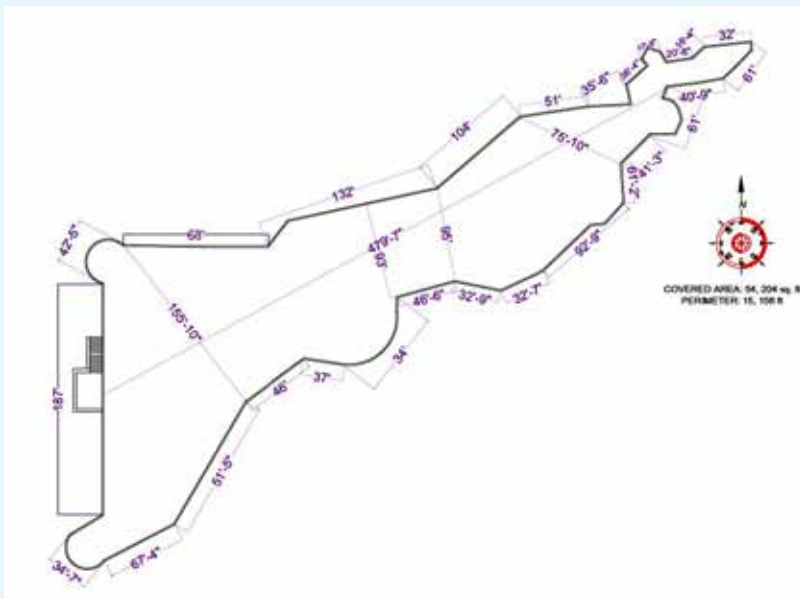


Figure 4: Throchi Fort- dimensions (drawing by Researcher)

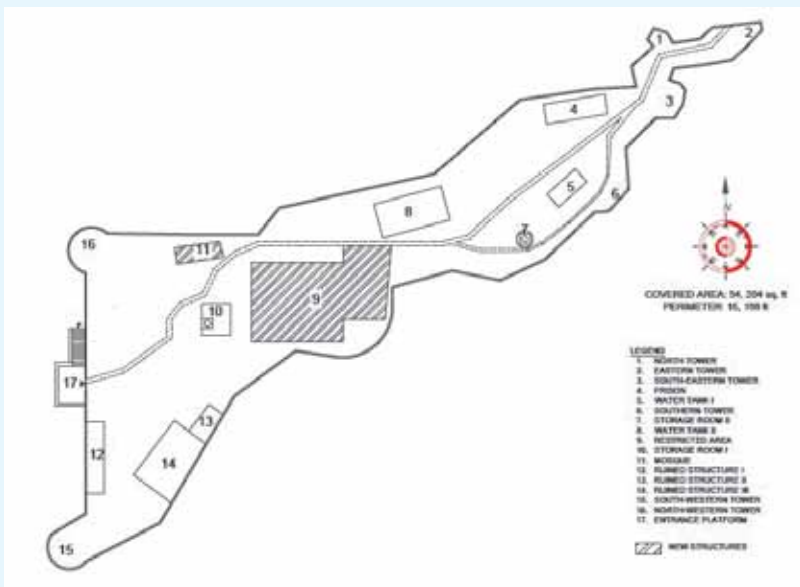


Figure 5: Throchi Fort- Layout (drawing by researcher)

Throchi After Independence

After independence, Throchi Fort went under the control of the Pakistan Army. Currently, it is managed by Pakistan Army and has a control room and signals tower of Special Communication Organization; a telecommunication network operating in Azad Kashmir. It is in a very poor state of preservation and needs immediate attention.

The architecture of Throchi Fort

a) Layout

The fort is situated on top of a hill at a strategic location, from where all the surrounding villages, hills, and fields can be seen. The layout of the fort follows the contours of the hill and has been built according to the natural course of the ground, therefore, the structure is in irregular shape and covers an area of 54,204 sq. ft. (Fig.3-5)

The walls of the fort are crenelated, while the watchtowers built at irregular distances show signs of a double-storied building, connected by limestone stairs. The upper floor with its beams¹ and planks² has completely vanished leaving only a few traces that indicate its presence in past.

b) Construction Material

The site is built upon a rock outcropping, using limestone blocks bound together with lime mortar. Whereas, mud bricks have been used for the façade of the fort.

A staircase having twenty-five steps leads up to the only entrance into the fort. These stairs are four feet

1 Relatively long pieces of metal, wood, stone, etc., manufactured or shaped especially for use as rigid members or parts of structures or machines.

2 A long, flat piece of timber, thicker than a board.

wide, have a one-foot high riser and eighteen inches wide tread (Pl. 2-3)

c) Main Entrance

After climbing the flight of stairs, one finds on a platform that has a gateway to the fort on its left side (Fig.6). This doorway is now boarded up with an iron gate which is standard six and a half feet high and three and a half feet wide. It is decorated with a pointed arch and niches (Fig.7, Pl.IV).

d) Structures near Entrance

Few structures found on the right side of the main entrance are in worst condition. Nature has taken over these buildings and nothing has been done to keep them from completely collapsing.

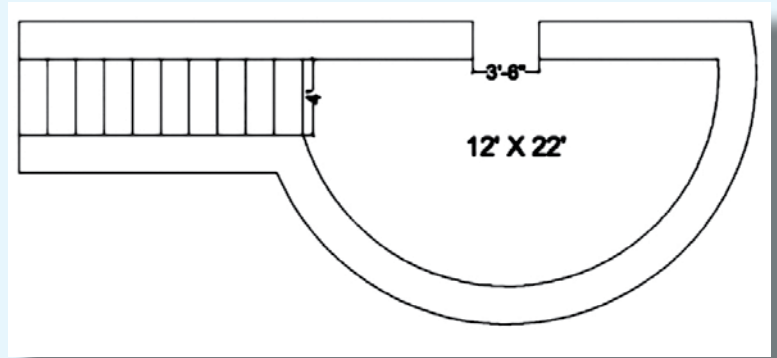


Figure 6: Entrance platform (drawing by Researcher)

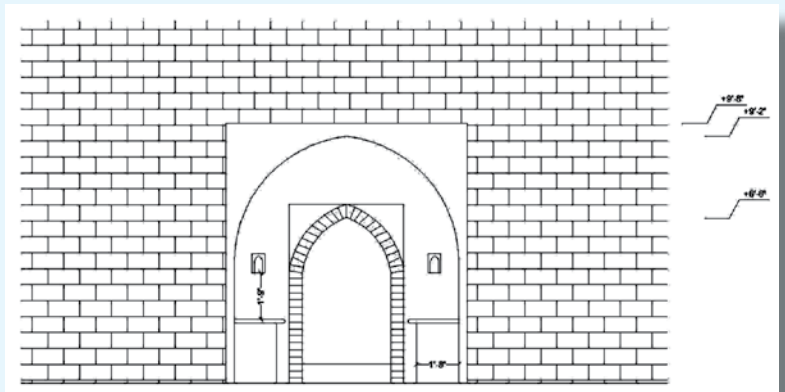


Figure 7: Main Entrance (drawing by Researcher)

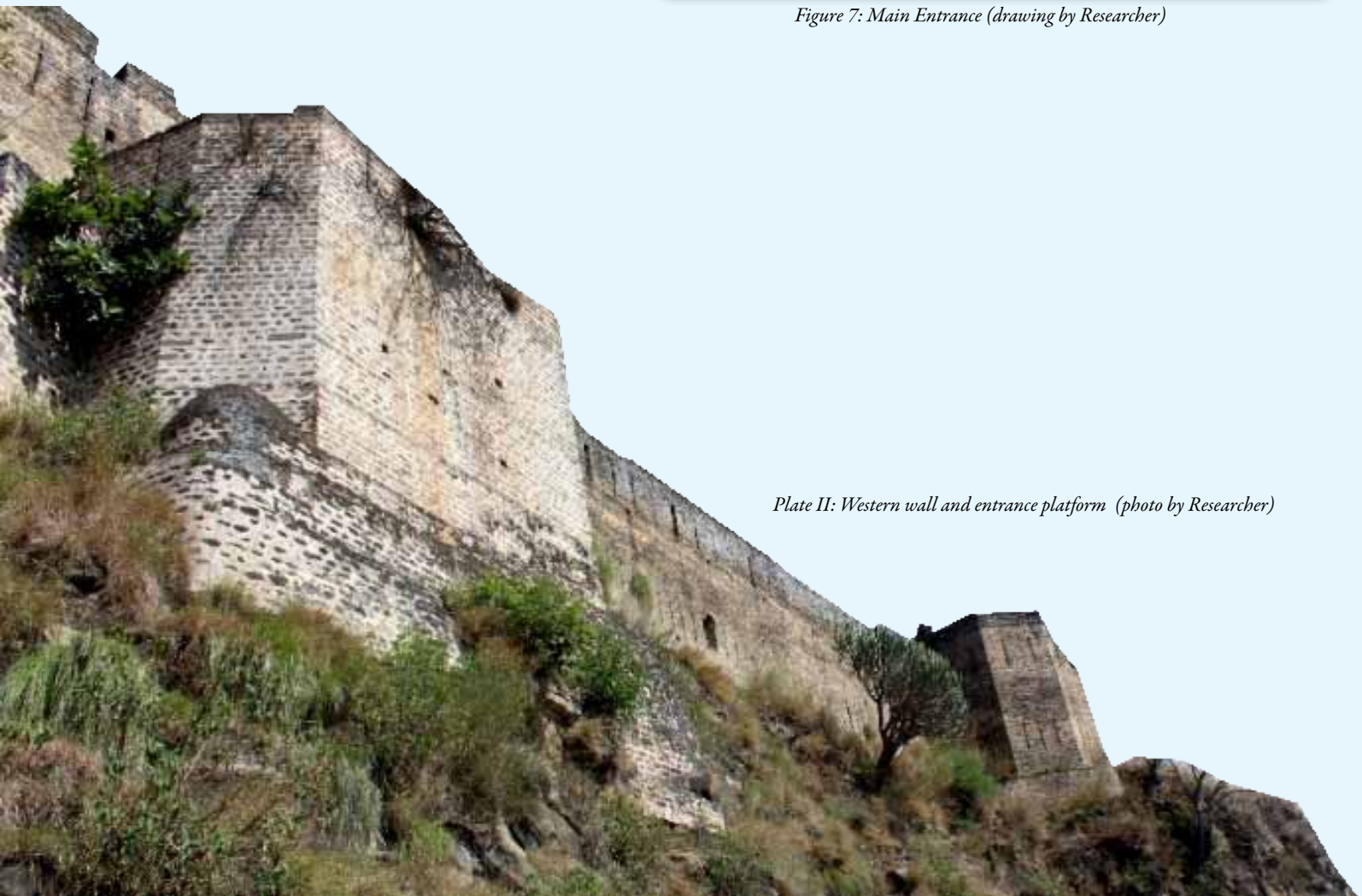


Plate II: Western wall and entrance platform (photo by Researcher)



Plate III: Entrance Stairs (photo by Researcher)

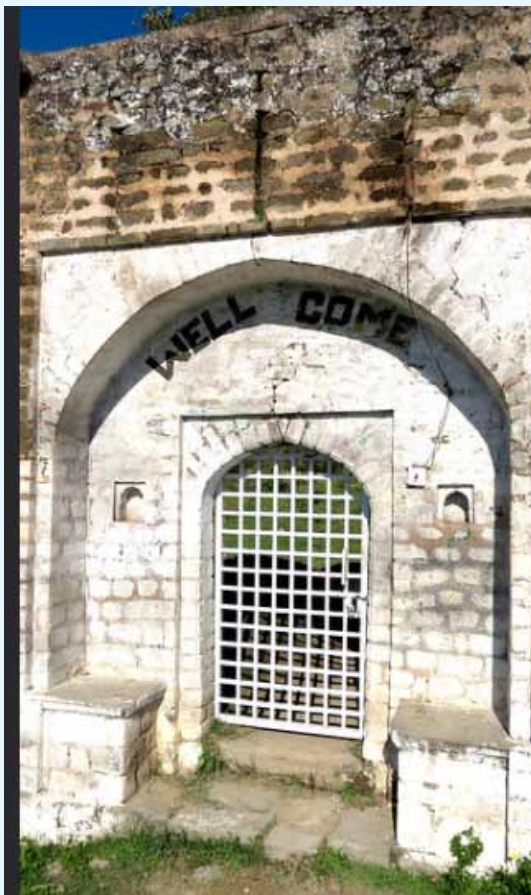


Plate IV: Main Entrance (photo by Researcher)

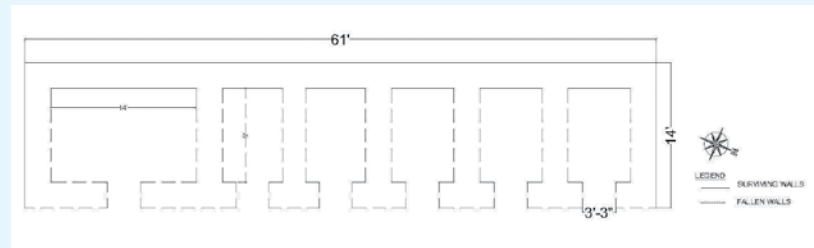


Figure 8: Structure I- layout (drawing by Researcher)



Plate V: Ruins- Structure I (photo by Researcher)

Structure I

Ruins of six rooms can be seen just beside the main entrance, located on the right side, together in a straight row. These rooms together cover an area of 732 sq. ft. All these rooms are east open and have separate entrances of standard width i.e. three feet three inches. Two feet six inches thick walls form this whole structure (Fig.9).

Unfortunately, this whole structure has fallen with only a few standing walls and traces of entrances. Overgrown vegetation is covering it from all the sides in such a way that at first glance it is hard to detect the presence of a building here (Pl. V).

Structure II

Another ruined structure which is thought to be a room is located at the right side of the main entrance along the southern wall of the fort with an entrance towards the north-west. The size of this room is 187.5 sq. ft. and its roof has completely fallen, even the walls are on the verge of collapse (Fig.9, Pl. VI).

Structure III

Adjoining Structure II, the ruins of this building show traces of two adjacent rooms with a verandah in front of them. Four feet wide entrance leads into a twenty-three and a half feet wide verandah (Fig.9).

Each room has a size of 143 sq. ft. Two feet thick wall separates these rooms from each other. Doorways of these rooms open towards the north-western side into the verandah in front of them.

This whole structure, roof, and walls of the room have completely fallen, every sort of overgrown weed and vegetation is covering this building. The main reason for this destruction is the growth of a tree that has torn through the walls and roof of the building (Pl. VII).

Watchtowers

Six watchtowers³ are found in Throchi fort at irregular intervals. As this fort was built for defensive purposes, these watchtowers cover all the sides of the hill and the common feature in all these towers is the presence of arrowslits⁴.

³ a tower on which a sentinel (guard/soldier) keeps watch

⁴ An arrowslit is a narrow vertical aperture in a fortification through which an archer can launch arrows or a crossbowmen can launch bolts

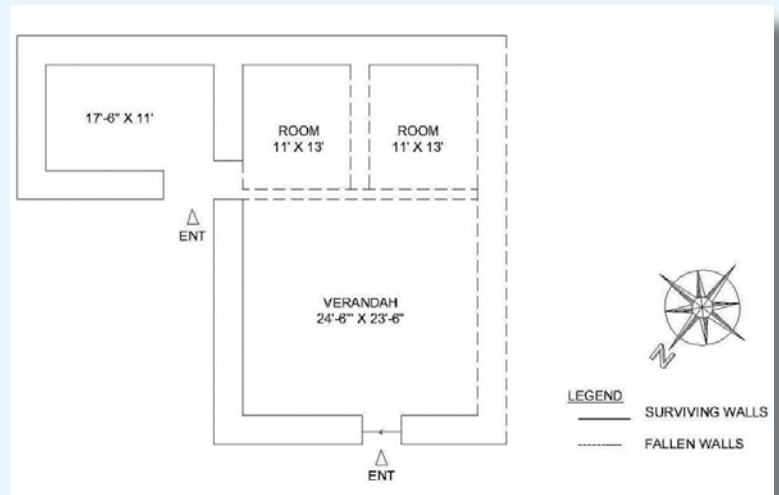


Figure 9: Structures II and III- layout (drawing by Researcher)



Plate VI: Structure II and III (photo by Researcher)



Plate VII: Southern wall and the tree that damaged the structures (photo by Researcher)

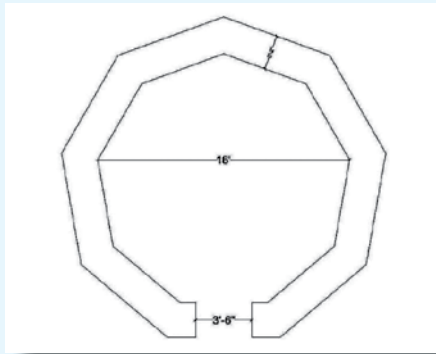


Figure 10: South-western Tower- layout (drawing by Researcher)



Plate VIII: South-eastern Tower (photo by Researcher)

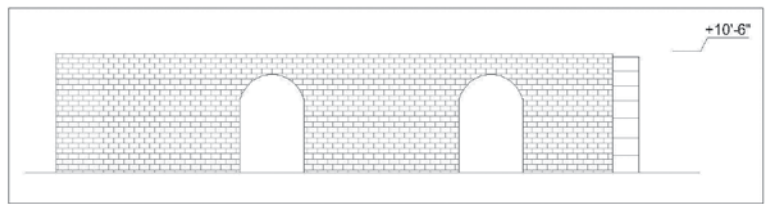


Figure 11: South-eastern Tower- front elevation (drawing by Researcher)



Plate IX: North-western Tower (photo by Researcher)

North-western Tower

Located on the left corner of the entrance wall, this tower is now in the most pathetic state. It can only be viewed from the outside because as we enter the fort, the area where this tower is situated is so badly covered with tall overgrown vegetation that is physically impossible to reach it (Pl..IX).

South-western Tower

Situated on the right corner of the entrance wall, this watchtower is in irregular shape and has a diameter of sixteen feet, and is thirty-two feet wide. The entrance into this tower is three and a half feet wide (Fig. 10, Pl. X).

South-eastern Tower

The layout of this tower forms an irregular semicircle. It has two entrances; both are three feet three inches wide. The inner dimensions of this tower are forty- and the wall opposite the entrance is full of different types of arrow slits.

Stairs leading to the upper story of this tower are situated outside the tower, however, the upper portion of this tower no longer exists. Though we can find traces of beams, planks, and fallen roof. Inner height is assumed to be nine feet and outer (including roof and parapet⁵) way may have been eleven feet. (Fig. 14).

⁵ Any low protective wall or barrier at the edge of a balcony, roof, bridge, or the like.



Plate X: South-western Tower (photo by Researcher)

Southern Tower

Situated at the corner near Water Tank I, this tower was also once a double-storied structure. Four feet wide entrance leads into this tower which is built on a raised ground as compared to the other towers. The southern wall of this tower is filled with arrowslits from top to bottom.

The existing height of the lower portion is deduced to be five feet nine inches and the surviving parapets indicate that this tower may have been ten and a half feet high. A staircase of five steps located on the left side of the entrance led up to the upper portion. However, the upper story of this tower has completely collapsed (Fig.12-13, Pl. XI).

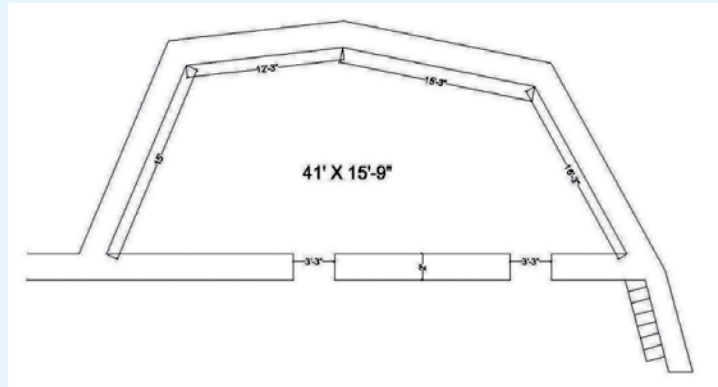


Figure 14: South-eastern Tower- layout (drawing by Researcher)

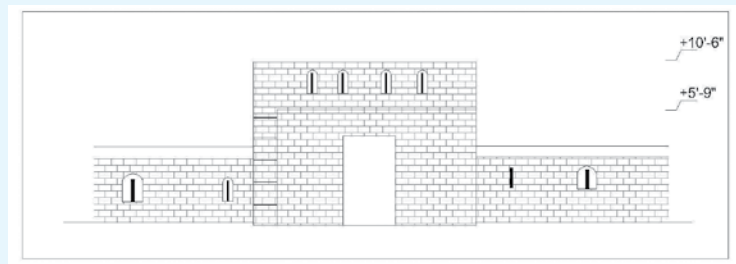


Figure 12: Southern Tower- front elevation (drawing by the researcher)

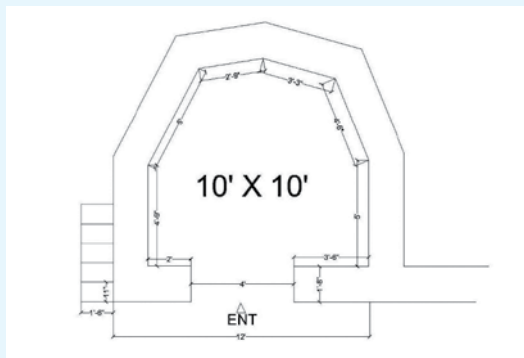


Figure 13: Southern Tower- layout (drawing by Researcher)



Plate XI: Southern Tower (photo by Researcher)

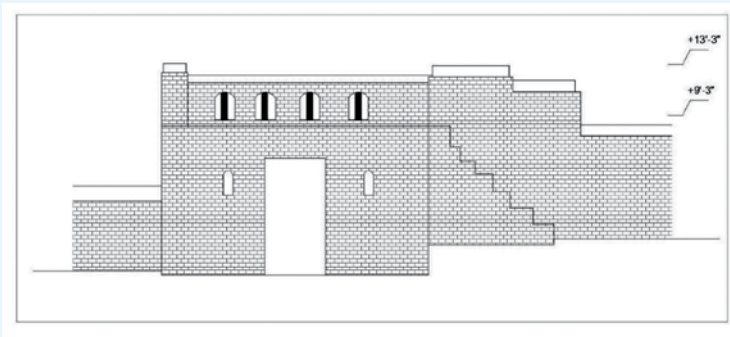


Figure 15: North Tower-front elevation (drawing by Researcher)

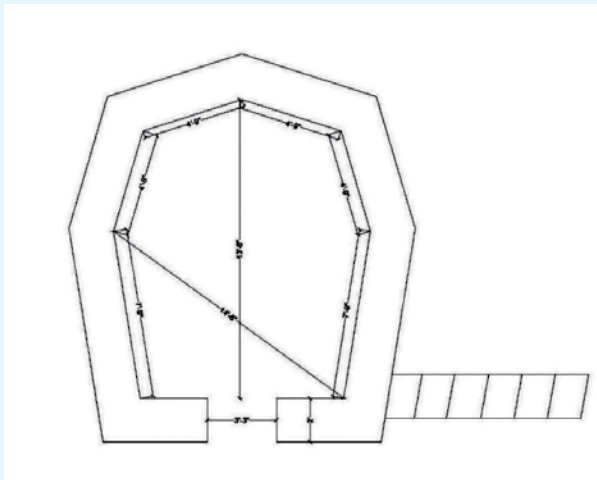


Figure 16: North Tower- layout (drawing by Researcher)

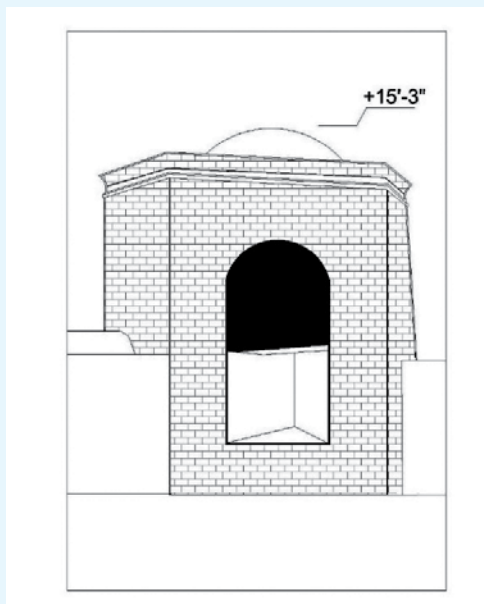


Figure 17: Eastern Tower-front elevation
(drawing by Researcher)

Northern Tower

A double-storied structure whose upper story and roof no longer exist. Three feet three inches wide entrance leads into this tower, which is in the irregular shape of seven sides, all of which are covered from top to bottom with arrowslits (Fig.14-15, Pl.12).

One and a half feet wide staircase of six steps is found on the right side of the tower, which is connected to the upper story of this tower. Only traces of the upper portion and ceiling are found, however, four feet high parapet having several arrowslits is still standing.

Eastern Tower

The only surviving tower is located at the eastern end of the fort, it is fourteen feet three inches tall including the small dome on its top). Unlike the other towers in fort, this is the single-story structure. (Fig.17-18, Pl.XIII).



Plate XII: North Tower (photo by Researcher)



Plate XIII: Eastern Tower (photo by Researcher)

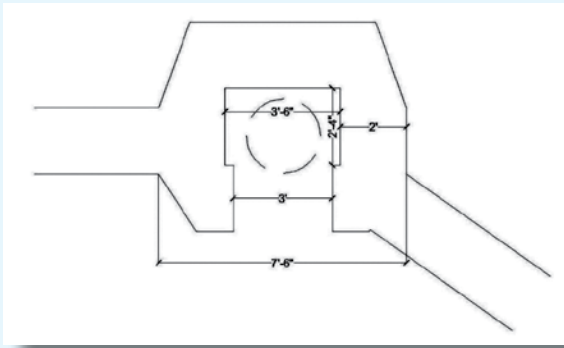


Figure 18: Eastern Tower- layout (drawing by Researcher)

It has small arched entrance and inside of the tower shows vertically partitioned interior. The upper shelf was probably used for sitting and keeping an eye on the area. Other features of the tower include niches on its exterior, windows, and arrow slits in the walls facing the valley below.

Prison

This is the only structure found in the fort that somewhat retains its original condition. Built in a deeper area of the fort, this structure was probably used for keeping war prisoners. Maybe the reason for building this structure in depth was to have an advantage of natural protection against any attack by the enemy. From the exterior, it appears as a single structure, but the layout of this building shows three vaulted cells and they are joined by entrances in the walls between them. The thickness of these walls is three feet and nine inches wide stone is used for this construction (Fig.19-22, Pl. XIV-XVIII).

The main entrance into the structure is through the southern wall of the middle cell (Pl. XVII). The Eastern and western walls of the middle cell have entrances into the adjoining cells (Fig.22). Niches are found in the walls of all three vaults. One in the western wall of the western cell has been converted into a window, which seems to be a recent transformation (Pl. XVI).

Water Tanks

Two water tanks of different sizes are found in Throchi Fort, their purpose was the storage of water for everyday use by the soldiers stationed there. These pits have been dug in proper shape in soft bedrock.

Water Tank I

This tank has a rectangular shape and the covered area is 576 sq. ft. (36x16 ft.). It is fourteen feet deep and its present condition is filthy and the interior of the tank is covered with vegetation and algae (Pl. XIX).

Water Tank II

Larger in size than the other tank found inside the fort. It is varying in depth from all four sides and the covered area is of this tank is 2,040 sq. ft. (60x 34 ft.). It has the same dilapidated condition as any other structure inside the fort (Pl. XX).

Along with these two tanks, a small now dry well is also found inside the fort near the southern wall.

Domed Structures

Two small domed structures are found inside the fort which has many assumptions and myths linked to them. These are small height structures and not very spacious.

Storage Room I

This one is near the entrance is built under a tree, which local people have assumed to be



Plate XIV: Prison (photo by Researcher)



Plate XV: Prison- eastern view (photo by Researcher)



Plate XVI: Prison- western view (photo by Researcher)



Plate XVII: Prison- main entrance (photo by Researcher)



Plate XVIII: Prison- eastern cell (photo by Researcher)



Plate XIX: Water Tank I (photo by Researcher)

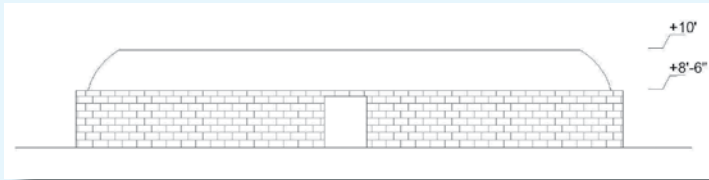


Figure 19: Prison- front elevation (drawing by Researcher)

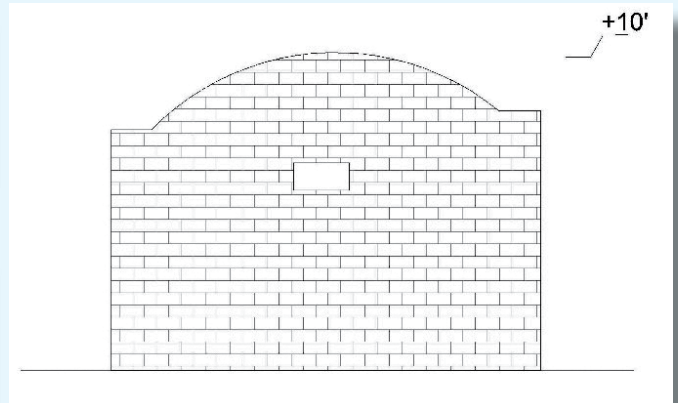


Figure 21: Prison-western elevation (drawing by Researcher)

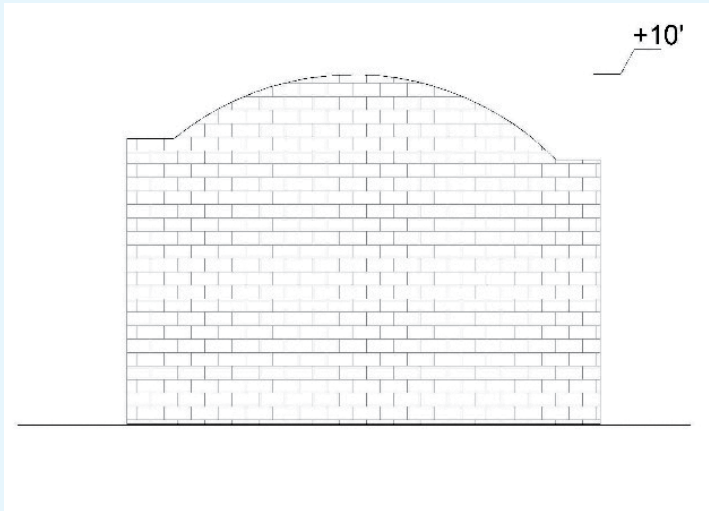


Figure 20: Prison- eastern elevation (drawing by Researcher)

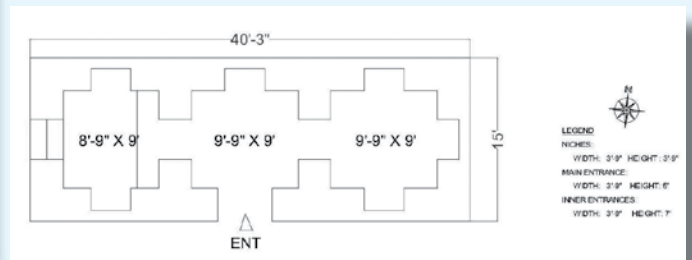


Figure 22: Prison- layout plan (drawing by Researcher)



Plate XX: Water Tank II (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXI: Storage Room I- front view (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXII: Storage Room II- front view (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXIII: Arrow slits in entrance wall (photo by Researcher)

a *chillah gah*⁶ of some *fakir*⁷. People have adorned this structure with a green shawl, small lamps, and a wreath of artificial flowers. However, this is only a myth that this place is linked to any pious personality. Such structures had no other purpose than being a small storage room for keeping ammunition.

One foot nine inches wide entrance leads into this three-foot-high erection. It has eighteen inches thick walls and is square. The area covered by this building is 42 sq. ft and has a two feet high dome on its roof (Fig. 23-24, Pl. XXI).

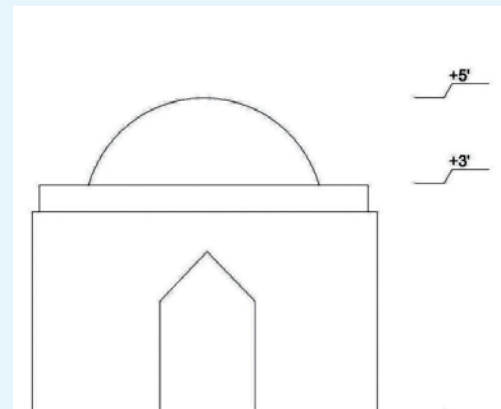


Figure 23: Storage Room I- front elevation (drawing by Researcher)

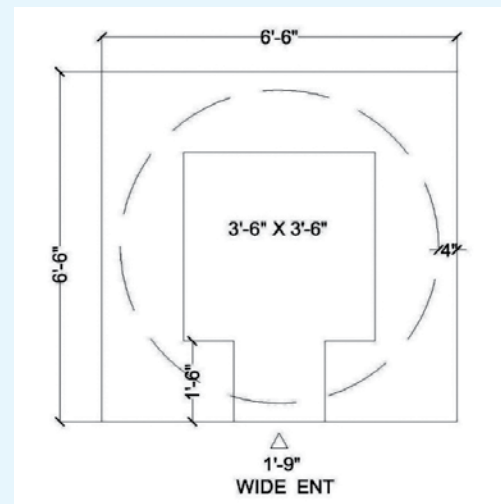


Figure 24: Storage Room I- layout (drawing by Researcher)

6 Place for meditation.

7 A fakir derived from faqr (poverty) is a Sufi Muslim ascetic who has taken vows of poverty and worship, renouncing all relations and possessions.

Storage Room II

It is found when we move further inside the fort, near the water tanks. Built on an octagonal base, it has a small height of only three feet high and covers an area of 56.5 sq. ft. The entrance of this room is facing towards the north and its roof is covered by a small dome that is measured to be two feet high (Fig. 23,25, Pl. XXII).

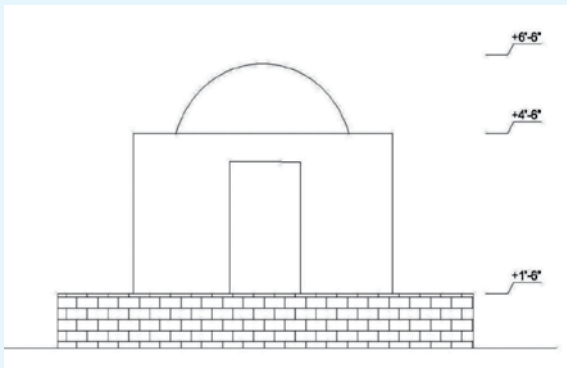


Figure 25 Storage Room II- front elevation (drawing by Rezeearcher)

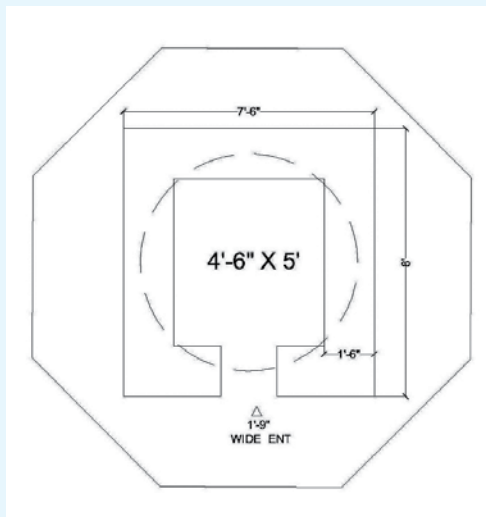


Figure 26: Storage Room II- layout (drawing by Researcher)

Other features

Throchi fort was built for defensive purposes, which is obvious from its architecture, it has all the necessary elements of a military structure.

i) Arrowslits

Arrowslits often also referred to as an arrow loop, loophole and sometimes a balistraria is the most common feature found in all the defensive fortifications.

They were used for bombarding the enemy with arrows while being protected by the walls. The interior walls behind an arrow loop are often cut away at an oblique angle so that the archer has a wide field of view and field of fire. In Throchi Fort, one can find different types of arrowslits that include single arrow slits, double arrow slits, and triple arrow slits (Fig. 27-28, Pl. XXIII-XXIV)

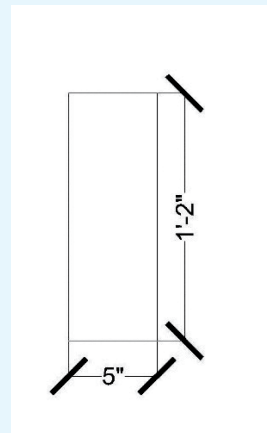


Figure 27: Double arrow slit (drawing by Researcher)

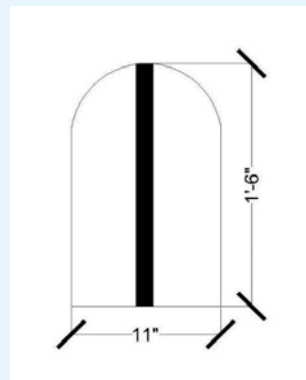


Figure 28: Double arrow slit (drawing by Researcher)



Plate XXIV: Double arrow slit in wall (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXV: Niche in North Tower (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXVI: Niche in wall (photo by Researcher)

Niches

The fort was built during times that did not have any technology, so the concept of electricity was completely alien. They used oil lamps, wax candles, and fire for light when the sun went down.

Niches are another common feature of old forts; hence found in Throchi Fort. They were built in walls and their purpose was being a place where lit lamps and candles were kept (Pl. XXV-XXVI).

Windows

Small windows are found in the boundary wall and the walls of the towers. The purpose of these windows was probably to keep a vigilant eye over the area for the sign of any suspicious activity by the enemy. The purpose of windows at Throchi was no ventilation (Pl. XXVII).



Plate XXVII: Window in boundary wall (photo by Researcher)

Restricted Area

Throchi fort is now under the control of the Pakistan Army. Army has added new structures inside the fort according to their needs, it is in use by their signal corps as a control room for signal transmission. The area covered by these structures is approximately two kanals⁸ (Pl.XXX).

⁸ a unit of area used in parts of northern Pakistan. It is generally considered equivalent to 4500 square feet or one-eighth of an acre.

Other than control rooms, a small mosque is also found near the main entrance, which is also a modern structure added by the army.

Analysis

The architecture of this fort fully depicts its purpose, as it has all the necessary elements of a defensive fort. Fort at the peak of its glory had double-storied watchtowers located at regular intervals that cover all the sides of the crest. The crenelated walls of the fort are full of arrow slits and windows for keeping an eye on the area. Inside the fort, we can find a prison, water tanks, a well, and some rooms, which show us that this fort was fully equipped for being a proper garrison.

The once magnificent fort is now in ruins. The now existing structure is not what it was built originally, the roof and upper story of watchtowers have completely vanished, only traces of planks and beams are found, leaving only single structures without roofs. Though it is still in much better condition than the other forts found in the area maybe because it has not faced vandalism by locals. The present condition of this fort is due to natural disasters, but that can also be dealt with if old structures are preserved and conserved regularly.

The fort is in a bad state due to overgrown vegetation which makes access to some areas of the fort difficult. The major cause of the destruction of this fort is out of control vegetation and trees that have grown through the walls and roofs of the buildings. The existence of some of the structures specifically rooms near the main entrance is now only represented through a few standing walls. The sort of vegetation that is found there ranges from prickly weeds, shrubs, algae on walls to Banyan tree.

Authorities need to pay attention to this fort. Although it is under the control of the army, nothing is being done to keep it from falling into shambles. The factors responsible for its destruction can be easily

dealt with, regular mowing and cutting of the weeds and trees prohibits any major harm to the buildings. The fort just needs some love and care!



Plate XXVIII: Natural flight of steps in the fort (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXIX: Eastern view (photo by Researcher)



Plate XXX: Southern view (photo by Researcher)

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