



Anila Naeem

# Urban Traditions and Historic Environments in Sindh

A Fading Legacy of Shikarpoor,  
Historic City

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Urban Traditions and Historic Environments in Sindh



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*A Fading Legacy of Shikarpoor, Historic City*

*Anila Naeem*

Amsterdam University Press

## ASIAN CITIES 4

Cover illustration: View of Papatmal Haveli courtyard; the delicate woodwork on upper floor balcony simultaneously contributes to the courtyard and the streetscape.

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*To my parents:  
the cherished memories of my mother,  
the fostering support of my father*

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# List of Acronyms

<b>AKTC – HCSP</b>	Aga Khan Trust for Culture – Historic Cities Support Program
<b>BL-IOR</b>	British Library – India Office Records
<b>CDGK</b>	City District Government Karachi
<b>CIDF</b>	Core Index Data Form
<b>CIHB</b>	Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>DAP-NED</b>	Department of Architecture and Planning, N.E.D. University
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Environment
<b>G+1</b>	Ground plus one storey
<b>GoP</b>	Government of Pakistan
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Sindh
<b>ICCROM</b>	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
<b>ICOM</b>	International Council of Museums
<b>ICOMOS</b>	International Council of Monuments and Sites
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature
<b>KBCA – KDA</b>	Karachi Building Control Authority – Karachi Development Authority
<b>N.A. Pakistan</b>	Northern Areas of Pakistan
<b>NFCH</b>	National Fund for Cultural Heritage
<b>R.C.C.</b>	Reinforced Cement Concrete
<b>TMA</b>	Town Municipal Administration
<b>TO</b>	Town Officer
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>WAPDA</b>	Water and Power Development Authority
<b>WHC</b>	World Heritage Center
<b>WHS</b>	World Heritage Sites

## Glossary of Local Terms

Amils*	Hindu sub-caste whose members had a strong tradition of acting as court officials; well represented in Sindh government during British period.
Aqaf	A self-financing autonomous body under the Provincial Government; generating its financial resources from <i>Waqf</i> properties through collection of rents/lease money, and incurs expenditure on maintenance and management of mosques and shrines under its administrative control, apart from other pious and charitable activities.
Autaaq	A guest house or guest room attached to a residence but having a separated entrance.
Badgirs	Wind catchers – a sail-shaped tower built in traditional constructions, especially in lower and central Sindh, for the purpose of ventilating the house interiors. The Sindhi term for these is ' <i>mangh</i> '.
Bania*	Hindu trader, merchant; often associated with money-lending.
Bazaar	A permanent merchandising area, marketplace, or street of shops where goods and services are exchanged or sold. The word originates from Persian word <i>bahau-char</i> meaning 'the place of prices'.
Cantonment	Originally, the term was used for temporary or semi-permanent military quarters; in the South-Asian context, these developed into large, permanent military stations. In Pakistan, large cantonment areas are owned by the military and are civilian residential areas as well.
Chajjas	Projecting eaves or shades usually supported on large carved brackets. In addition to providing shade, they act as heat sinks for buildings in hot regions.
Chatri	A domed kiosk on the roof of a temple, tomb or mosque. The domes are usually supported on four columns.
Cheroli	Plaster made with gypsum.
Dargah	A shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure, often a Sufi saint.



Dharamsalas	'Religious Abode'. A Hindi word referring to a shelter or rest house for spiritual pilgrims. Traditionally, such <i>dharamshalas</i> were constructed near pilgrimage destinations (often located in remote areas) to give visitors a place to sleep for the night.
Dhund	Term used for fresh water lakes.
Diya	Term used for oil lamps made of terracotta.
Fakirs	A <i>sufi</i> , especially one who performs feats of endurance; sometimes the term is used for beggars, particularly those at shrines.
Haveli	Term is used for a large mansion-like residential complex traditionally built for extended families, providing security and comfort in seclusion from the outside world. These were closed from all sides with one large main gate.
Hijri	Islamic calendar, calculated as starting from the year during which the emigration of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) from Mecca to Medina occurred. The holy days and festivals of Muslims are celebrated according to the <i>Hijri</i> calendar.
Imambargah	A religious congregation place of the <i>Shia</i> sect among Muslims. These are used for mourning rituals during <i>Moharram</i> ; sometimes combined with the function of mosque.
Jagirs	Territory granted by the ruler to an army chieftain in recognition of his military service. As per law the <i>jagir</i> was granted only for the lifetime of the grantee; on his death it was at the discretion of the Ruler to either re-grant it to the heirs and successors, or to a total stranger. In practice, these are hereditary lands.
Jalis	Term used for openwork screen or panels made of wood, gypsum, c.c. or stone.
<i>Kaffila serai</i> / Caravanserai	Complexes built on primary trade routes and cities along these routes, providing facilities for camping or accommodation of trade caravans.
Katchi Abadis	Informal settlements, also called squatter settlements, which usually start as illegal land grabbing activities; in the context of Karachi, they have developed into large settlements, most of which are now legalized by the government.

Khankha/Khanqah	Also known as <i>ribat</i> , <i>zawiya</i> or <i>tekke</i> ; a building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood; it is a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation, often adjoining a shrine, mosque or <i>madrassa</i> . <i>Khanqahs</i> serve as hospices for <i>Sufi</i> travelers and Islamic students.
Kutchery	Means court in Urdu language.
Lac/Lakh	Amounts to one hundred thousand (100,000)
Madrassas	Islamic institutions for religious teaching; mostly subjects leading to graduation as a cleric called <i>maulvi</i> , <i>maulana</i> or <i>mulla</i> .
Medinas	The historic city centres in Islamic cities built by Arabs as far back as the ninth century. These are typically walled with many narrow and maze-like streets that are devoid of vehicular traffic.
Minar	Term used for a tower, especially those attached to mosques.
Mohajirs	One who performs <i>hijrat</i> ; an immigrant. In the case of the subcontinent, it refers to Muslims who migrated from India to the newly created state, Pakistan.
Mohallas	A term to describe a neighbourhood or locality in the cities and towns of Central and South Asia.
Moharri	Term used for timber decorative treatment covering the entire façade of traditional buildings in Sindh.
Mukhtiarkar	Local revenue officer.
Musafir khanas	Literally means travellers' house; term used for small-scale, traditional setups providing lodging facilities.
Pagri	Term of tenancy requiring an amount to be paid at an agreed time, and the monthly rent becomes a very nominal amount.
Pakka	Means permanent or firm.
Pir*	Spiritual guide, religious preceptor, a <i>sufi</i> or descendant of a <i>sufi</i> saint; in Sindh, powerful landholding religious figures, associated with <i>sufi</i> shrines.
Qasabas	Term used to identify limits of urban settlements in the Mughal times.
Sabeel	Kiosk or fountain, providing drinking water facility for the public. These are built as philanthropic contributions by individuals.

Sanad	Official document issued by the rulers or emperors, granting a favour or rewards to an individual, or entitling them to a certain authority.
Sehn	The courtyard.
Shahzada Nashin*	Literally means one who sits on the carpet; head of <i>pir</i> family.
Sharia	Islamic law based on the teachings of Quran.
Sufi*	Islamic mystic.
Syeds	An honorific title given to the direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).
Takia	Also spelt as <i>tekke</i> or <i>tekye</i> . Same meaning as <i>khankah</i> .
Tanga	Horse-drawn carriages.
Urs	The anniversary of the death of a <i>Sufi</i> saint, usually held at the saint's shrine or tomb.
Waderos*	Sindhi term for a big landowner.
Wah	A Sindhi term used for irrigation canal.

\* Source: Ansari (2005)

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## Author's Note

Why Shikarpoor? During the long years of involvement with Shikarpoor, I was often asked this question by people obviously puzzled by my choice, given my lack of any personal link or family background associating me to the place. Reflecting on this, I presume that the fascination is not so much 'place specific', but rather with the larger issues connected to the place: the issues of historic environments being consistently subject to callous destruction, the insensitivity with which invaluable reminders of our historic links are being erased, and the ruthlessness with which we are made to dishonour and disconnect from our roots. Hence, I chose Shikarpoor, but it could have been any one of the many other historic cities that once were the pride of regional communities, but which, today, are looked down on as a result of the consciously inculcated colonial mindset that resonates in our society, even after almost seven decades of Independence. The preference for everything 'modern' – which equates with everything 'Western' – dominates the prevailing post-colonial psyche that makes us resist acknowledging the ingenuity of such places and their inherent compatibility with our socio-cultural needs, embedded in tradition.

The seeds of such thoughts that forced me to break through the barriers of established norms came with exposures and experiences, including academic and international travel, during which I came across numerous examples of local traditions being appreciated as a source of pride, enriching the lives of all who come into contact with them. The disturbing state of apathy in Pakistan towards our traditional environments thus made it an inevitable choice to dedicate time and efforts for developing awareness and capacity building initiatives in the heritage conservation sector. My association with the Department of Architecture and Planning, N.E.D. University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, since May 2000, has thus been a conscious decision. The technical support and research activities for heritage conservation through the platform of 'Heritage Cell' (HC-DAPNED), established in 2006, have continued to make visible contributions, most notably the ongoing conservation/restoration of NED City Campus (in spite of all the administrative and financial challenges), the 'Karachi Historic Buildings Resurvey Project', the ACHR-ACCA Community-Based Heritage Research in three pilot study areas of Karachi and the ongoing 'Shikarpoor Heritage Safeguarding Campaign'.

Shikarpoor first caught my attention in 1999, when I took my first tour around Sindh with a group of students. Even on a three-hour whistle-stop

tour, the richness of bygone times was evident and the captured images left a lasting impression. Hence, in 2006, when I was awarded a PhD research grant, I already knew what my work was to be about. Since then, it has been a long and passionate involvement with Shikarpoor: revelations about its prestigious historical background; discovery of its hidden treasures and the agony of returning and not finding them there; understanding the city's evolution and transformation as connecting factors linked together. It has all been a source of intrigue, excitement and enthusiasm, combined with a sense of frustration and anger about the prevailing indifference. The dominant trends in development, planning and (mis)management of the city today leave no imaginable possibility of urban revival; however, gained insights on this important historic towns' unique urban fabric do not diminish my optimism. This book is intended to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of Shikarpoor's built environment and to provide insights on the urban history of the region. In its published form, it will hopefully help inculcate a sense of pride among resident communities and other stakeholders, and inspire heritage conservation efforts.

The general enthusiasm observed among a substantial number of the city's residents is reason enough to believe that, in spite of present socioeconomic degeneration, the resident community still appreciates its historic fabric and feels a sense of loss at the continuing pillage of the city's antiquarian valuables for the benefit of a privileged few. I hope that conservation initiatives that bring with them a socio-cultural and economic revival are soon initiated to secure the future of this unique and unrivalled example of Sindh's urban history.

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