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# Talpur Palaces of Khairpur

 by [Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro](#) — May 18, 2018 in [Features](#), [Latest Issue](#), [May 18-24, 2018 Vol. XXX, No. 15](#)

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View of Kot Diji town from Kot Diji Fort

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Rule by the Talpurs witnessed a great deal of building activity in Sindh. They not only built impressive funerary monuments but also left behind a good number of imposing palaces located in Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Badin, Kot Diji and Khairpur.

The Sohrabani lineage of Talpurs ruled over Khairpur State (1783-1955). They erected palaces which are located in Kot Diji, Kot Bungalow and Khairpur town. The most impressive structure was erected by Mir Faiz Muhammad Talpur (1894-1907) which is named after him – Faiz Mahal (the Palace of Faiz). Mir Faiz Muhammad Talpur acquired renown in the field of palace architecture. He is believed to have erected, in addition to Faiz Mahal: the Shahi/Sheesh Mahal, White Otak and Takkar Bungalow.

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Faiz Mahal is one of the best specimens of the Sindhi haveli style of architecture. This haveli is a blend of Sikh and Sindhi architecture as most of the windows – and especially one that crowns the main entrance of the haveli – are typical of the Sikh style. A similar style of oriel window, the jharoka can also be seen in many Sikh shrines in Sindh and in Gurdwaras and Samadhis in the Punjab. It is believed that Mir Faiz Muhammad Talpur entrusted the responsibility for erecting a palace to a Sikh architect Gulab Singh who hired some artisans from Jodhpur and Bahawalpur. But the stucco work done on the walls of Faiz Mahal is typical of the Sindhi style than of Jodhpuri or Sikh style. The cupolas crowning the two minarets rise from the thickness of the wall of Faiz Mahal, resembling the cupolas seen on other Talpur-period havelis. It seems that Talpurs not only hired Sikhs, Bahawalpuris and artisans from other regions but also the local artisans – whose work can be seen in the most of the havelis built by the the Talpurs.

Likewise, the Shahi Mahal also called Sheesh Mahal, at Kot Bungalow near Kot Diji, was also built by Sindhi and Jodhpuri artisans and masons. The distinctive features of this palace are mural paintings which decorate the interior walls and the ceiling of the main hall. These are the finest mural paintings commissioned by the Talpurs of the Khairpur State.



Painting in Shahi Mahal

Breaking the skyline of Kot Diji is the shimmering white palace called the White Otaq. In scorching summer heat the white colour of the place, juxtaposed with pale-looking hills, give a most soothing effect to the eyes of beholder. The white Otaq is believed to have been erected by Mir Faiz Muhammad Talpur and is a great specimen of Talpur architecture in Sindh. Also called Mir Atta Hussain's palace now, it is a blend of local and foreign elements. It seems to have been greatly influenced by the Rajasthani palaces of local rulers. Both true and false arches give beauty to the palace. Three arched entrances lead to the main hall of the palace – which features painting, stucco and lacquer, reflecting the aesthetics and opulence of the builders from the Talpur dynasty. Ornatly carved doors, tastefully decorated niches ostensibly made for placing oil lamps and landscape painting all reflect the 20th-century lifestyle of the rulers of Sindh.

The balcony of the palace on its façade, with seven arches, symbolises the seven skies. Slender pillars and rosettes on the spandrels of the arches on the balcony all correspond to similar architectural elements in other parts of the palace.

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The interior of this palace is decorated with floral paintings. The painted wooden ceilings are combined with small mirrors which reflect the aesthetics of the builder of the palace. Painted lacquer pillars also decorate the main chamber of the palace. The stucco work is also one of the distinctive features of the White Otaq of the Talpurs. The wooden doors are also ornately carved. Almost all the Talpur palaces in the Khairpur State are decorated with mural paintings.



White Otaq at Kot Diji

Apart from Faiz Mahal, Shahi Mahal and White Otaq, the palace of Bali or Bali Jo Bungalow is another gem of Talpur architecture. The Bungalow of Bali is located close to the railway station in Khairpur Town. It is a beautiful combination of stucco and mural painting. The Bungalow of Bali, also called Dilshad Manzil, is surrounded by ramparts. It was believed to have been erected by Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur (1921-1935) for his beloved wife Bali. Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur was a great patron of art and architecture. During his short span of 14 years, he built many tombs, palaces and schools of which some still dominate the landscape of Khairpur Town. During his rule, music flourished and he invited some members of the famous Gharanas of India to his kingdom. Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur was himself a poet of great repute. He married a dancing girl of Lahore, who was popularly known as Bali – for whom he built that impressive bungalow. The Bali Bungalow has a vast garden with fountains and a few statues which probably were removed by the new owner of the House, a Unar notable who purchased it from the Talpurs – after whom now it is called Unar House. It has four rooms and a few halls, of which one is adorned with paintings. The painted ceiling of the building reflects the aesthetics and taste of the builder. The walls of this hall depict animals, birds and a variety of floral designs.

Behind the Bungalow of Bali (now Unar House) is a five-domed tomb where Bali was buried temporarily before her mortal remains were transported to Karbala. According to local legend, this was a temple which Mir Ali Nawaz built for Hindus, It functioned as temple for some time and finally was abandoned by the Hindu community. Later, this was used as burial place for Bali for some time. Later on, a female saint was buried in the tomb. Afterwards, this tomb came to be called the “Muqbaro of Allah Ditti Faqiriani” – who was a female saint of Khairpur during the reign of Mir Ali Nawaz. She was buried there by the orders of Mir Ali Nawaz Khan Talpur.



Crumbling Shahi Mahal

All the palaces except the Shahi Mahal are in a relatively better state of preservation. The paintings are fading and the wooden carvings of the Shahi Mahal are decaying. The present condition of the Shahi Mahal is in shambles and it needs to be renovated by the concerned authorities – who should convert it into a museum showcasing the rich material culture of the Talpur dynasty.

*The author is an anthropologist and has authored three books: 'Perspectives on the art and architecture of Sindh', 'Memorial Stones: Tharparkar' and 'Archaeology, Religion and Art in Sindh'*

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