
FOUNDATIONS AND FORM: MEMOIRS OF A PAKISTANI ARCHITECT

Mukhtar Hussain

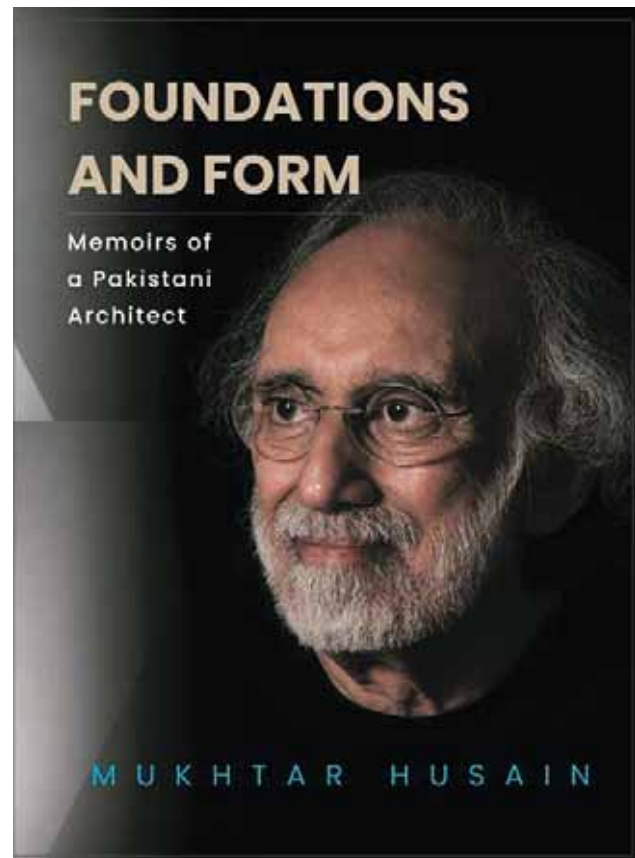
Reviewed by Dr. Hira Qureshi*

BOOK REVIEW

Mukhtar Husain's "Foundations and Form: Memoirs of a Pakistani Architect" is a compelling and multifaceted narrative that intertwines his background, professional accomplishments, and the sociopolitical climate of Pakistan. On the surface, the title might suggest a technical investigation of architectural theory and practice. But as it turns out, the memoir is a masterfully written story that incorporates historical details, cultural views, and personal experiences as Arif Hasan, in the foreword, aptly describes it as a "story, lovingly told, of people, places and events".

The memoir opens with a moving account of Mukhtar Husain's family origins in Ujjain and Indore, and the significant effects of India's Partition on their life. His life tale begins with the relocation to Karachi, which captures the vibrancy and formative years of the metropolis. Mukhtar Sahib's path through many career turning points, such as his participation in the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, offers awareness of the difficulties and rewards of operating in a politically sensitive workplace. His observations on world events such as the Vietnam War, the India-Pakistan War of 1965, and Bangladesh's birth that provide his story with a more comprehensive background. His architectural career is explored throughout the book, highlighting the frequently turbulent connection between creativity and political realities resulting in unavoidable disappointment and flashes of spectacular triumph. The anticipation grows as we read his book, which is methodically divided into three comprehensive sections.

Mukhtar Sahib's personal and professional journeys are intertwined with Karachi's urban and social development. His life and career are described in detail in the first section, which is especially interesting because of its vivid anecdotes



and reflections on his early years, his architectural education at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Turkey, his travels throughout Europe and the Middle East, and his four-decade-long career as an architect in Pakistan. A very

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intimate level of detail is added to the story in the second part which centers on his family. It is evident how much he loves his children and his wife Rumana, a talented author, cultural historian, and graphic designer. It offers a genuine contrast to his career accomplishments that aren't covered in the other sections of the book. Also, his humility and spirit of cooperation are further demonstrated by the admiration and respect that he shows for Professor Kausar Bashir and Sir Arif Hasan. The final part, which highlights his strong bond with Karachi and details how the city changed from being well-run in 1945 to being in terrible condition today, is truly insightful and moving, as he nostalgically recounts moving through various neighborhoods and witnessing the city's infrastructural changes, from trams and double-decker buses to the city's ambitious but flawed urban plans.

Engaging insights can be gained from his experiences, which include the divergent views of German and French experts on the Jinnah Airport project and his fortuitous help to an Italian family at the Wagah border. Along with capturing these historical and political contexts, the book also covers major events in Pakistan's history, such as the assassination of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the rise and fall of martial law, as well as the Vietnam War, political unrest in Turkey, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. He also offers a nuanced view of Pakistan's architectural landscape through suggestive descriptions and personal anecdotes. His architectural philosophy emphasizes sustainability, community-centric design, and the social duties of architects.

All in all, "Foundations and Form" provides an intuitive look at the life of a brilliant architect and the times he lived

in, making it a valuable resource for sociologists and general readers alike. The autobiography presents a man who has accepted all of life's experiences and difficulties and who is eager to remake himself while looking forward to the future with hope. The book's strength lies in its heartfelt storytelling and detailed recollection of personal and historical events. Karachi's social fabric and changes over time are vibrantly described between 1950 and 1960, making it a treat to read. The way the author describes his educational background and career obstacles is motivational and informative. However, if the readers are unfamiliar with South Asian history or architectural vocabulary, the story may seem overwhelming. Although the author highlights his admiration for architects and contemplates viewing the world from an architect's perspective, details of his design philosophies and methods at times may have been further added to enrich his described viewpoints.

As a final poignant nod to his beginnings, the book offers a sense of resolution and coherence. The story touches upon universal issues like identity, endurance, and the search for meaning in an ever-changing world. The book provides inspiration and insight, making it an essential read for anybody interested in architecture and cultural heritage. The author's journey demonstrates the power of architecture to shape society and promote cultural identity. As you turn the final page, you are left thinking about the lasting impact of his work and curious to see how future generations will build on his legacy.