

Loop Lines: The Unused Train Stations

Madiha Aijaz

PAIKHEL RAILWAY STATION, PUNJAB, 9 AM

There is an uneven, piercing whistle. The green and beige enamel paint glistens in the early morning sun. The passenger train eases out of the platform—the only one to stop here, through the day. Two men board it—one a worker at the Maple Leaf Cement Factory Ltd, and the other, a cloth merchant, travelling to Khushab.

Across the platform, in a whitewashed fortress-like building of the train station, sits one Mohammad Rashid in his symmetrically arranged high ceilinged office. Behind him hang two vertically aligned portraits of Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan—one a flaming orange and black, and the other a pale blue. Jinnah in blue is flanked on both sides by hastily drawn landscapes, scenes of calm and quiet. Below them, covering the two walls, are neatly lined, twenty-six green registers. The titles in stencilled writing, log multiple activities: Approximate Returns, Safety Equipment, Duty Rosters, List of Lamps, and List of Fog Signals—a gamut of human resource to equipment inventory. It is expansive for a station, which no longer functions on the main line. Mr Rashid rides a motorbike to work; his red helmet perched on top of the cupboard indicates that. It is perhaps the only piece of current times that finds a place in the stationmaster's office. Parts of the ancient also include some woven wooden chairs, two sets of black rotary phones, and two large Avery and Birmingham token machines to give a line of clearance to the trains. This is Pakistan Railways.

On this branch line station, which serves only a few passenger trains a day, there seems to be a luxury of time to read and write, or for that matter, stencil their duty rosters.

BADIN, SINDH, LOOP LINE, 7 AM

On a muggy summer morning in April, a red and blue Pepsi sign has sheathed Ashok Kumar's Cool Corner in Badin. A rivulet roofed by a large *peepal* tree and a group of men sipping *chai* are a reminder of the small railway town it once was.

It is here that the Badin Express begins and slugs for 60–70 kilometres an hour to get to Hyderabad in four hours or more. The loop lines themselves are becoming a rarity and only three working lines in Sindh have stayed, because of Dr Fehmida Mirza's efforts. Dr Mirza has been winning the Pakistan National Assembly elections from Badin for the past two decades and has a say in such matters. The other two trains run between Kotri and Rohri and then between Kotri and Larkana.

At the Badin Station, the Stationmaster Pirdino Dahri, three pointsmen, one gateman, and a cook narrate stories of being in the railways for decades, remembering the time when the trains would be packed and people wouldn't be able to find seats. In the 1990s, they closed down passenger trains for no reason. Now it is hard to get the customers back because of the parallel roads, they say.

In Matli, the Badin Express comes to an unscheduled long stop. The two cargo bogies attached to the passenger train are being loaded with additional luggage.

(Right) Record room, Badin Railway Station (est. 1908), 2017.



(Right) Stationmaster Mohammad Rashid at the Pai Khel Railway Station along the Kotri–Attock loop line.

(Page 70-71) Pai Khel Railway Station, 2014. Many stations along the Kotri–Attock Railway line were constructed as fortresses during the British Raj. The Kotri–Attock Railway line (referred to as Main Line 2 or ML-2) is one of four main railway lines in Pakistan.

(Page 72-73) Pointsman Mohammad Irfan stands near the ticket counter. Badin Railway Station (a branch line station), 2017.





گفت

COMPLAINTS SHOULD BE
MADE TO THE STATION
MASTER AS WELL AS IN WRITING
TO DIVISIONAL COMMERCIAL OFFICER
PSC

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50

گفت

SEE FARE LIST & EXAMINE YOUR TICKET &
CHANGE BEFORE LEAVING THE WINDOW

گفت

BOOKING OFFICE



گفت

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گفت

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50



ٹکٹ گھر
BOOKING OFFICE

ریلوے پولیس
ہیڈ کوارٹرز

FARE LIST		STATIONS	
FAKIR			
WALY			
MATLI			
TANDO ARSO KHAN			
MORAL SHARIF			
KHATHAR			
ZALAM			
HYDERABAD			
ASTRI			

TIME TABLE			
FROM	TO	ARR	DEP
15	KOTRI	KADIN	19:30

FROM	TO	ARR	DEP
15	KADIN	KOTRI	19:30





Stationmaster Pirdino Dahri has served the Pakistan Railways for the past twenty-seven years in multiple posts. Badin Railway Station, 2017.



Family and women/ladies compartment, Badin Express. Badin Railway Station, 2017.



A meticulously hand lettered board installed to give information about fares and train timings, leaves a few blanks to fill in. Badin Railway Station, 2017.