

## The heritage monuments of Kashmir: A study of some existing and ruined structures of later medieval period

Dr. Nazakat Hussain

Assistant Professor of History, Govt. Post Graduate College Rajouri, University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India

### Abstract

There are a large number of heritage monuments dotted on the surface of Kashmir soil like the Palaces, the *sarais*, the forts, mosques, temples and gurudawaras etc. Most among them are in dilapidating condition due to natural calamities, fire incidents, battles or ignorance of the later rulers. In this paper an attempt is made to elaborate the historical conceptions, structural taste and the existing condition of these structures. There are various types of structures only few are taken into study viz palaces, rest houses (*sarais*) and forts. The monuments were constructed during the later medieval period having almost the same artistic style which were laid down by the Mughal Emperors in rest of the country. The heritage structures on the Imperial Route from Nowshera to Srinagar are under study including some other monuments. These structures were erected by their governors on orders of the Mughal Emperors. It is observed after the analysis of the study of these structures most among them are in ruined and pitiable conditions and other require preservation are still in better form.

**Keywords:** Monuments, palaces, history, limestone, condition

### Introduction

It has always been the necessity and importance of the king, emperor or local ruler to construct buildings to protect themselves from foreign invasions or revolts they constructed forts. For the strong espionage system i.e. communication system, stay during their visit to another part of country and adobes for local rulers, the Emperors constructed *sarais* and rest houses. The construction of royal residences or palaces was beautifully handled with master hands where the royal family and nobility used to stay. The monuments constructed during the later medieval period in Kashmir are the sources of tourists' attractions. Most of the monuments ruined and dilapidating conditions other existing structures are neglected and waiting for restoration and preservation.

### Objectives

- To understand the basic history of construction of the monuments.
- To study the purpose of the construction of these structures.
- To analyse the existing conditions of these buildings.

### Palace at Nowshera (Rani Mahal)

Rani Mahal or Palace is magnificent monument overlooking the natural spectacular view. The structural remains of Rani Mahal provide a glimpse of the perfection and master skill of the artisans regarding the construction based on Mughal architecture. It is the unique structure on the Imperial Route (The Mughal Road) from Lahore to Srinagar situated on the eastern end in a Rest House or *sarai* built during Mughal period at Nowshera (Rajouri) (Tuzuk 1909.181) <sup>[1]</sup>. The architectural specimen is a double storied building constructed with dressed grey limestone.

During their visit to Kashmir Jahangir and his consort Nurjahan ordered to build a royal residence meant for their

stay. It was named after her as Rani Mahal. The upper story of this palatial complex had been used by them as it had all the essential amenities needed by the royalty. A decorated *baradari* provides a charming and beautiful scene of the river Tawi and beyond the river the green refreshing breeze of Pir Pangal range keeps the palace cool during hot weather.

Deodar wood has been used in the ceiling of the palace. The existence of Wood in its original form displays its long-lasting characteristics. The wooden doors of the Palace open towards the south. To approach the decorated upper Portion there is a flight of steps constructed with gray limestone. A feature of the palace is its mural painting on the external surface of the western wall still exists in spite of preservation. It needs immediate preservative steps to be taken to save it from destruction. The paintings seem to be based on the real event showing a queen walking in the garden. Red and green colours dominate the mural. The depiction of beauty of nature which attained the highest degree of interest during the period of Jahangir is quite apparent in the observation of the murals. Such type of natural demonstration has been the characteristic feature of Jahangir or the Mughals paintings. The Rani Mahal is still in good condition but it needs regular preservative measures to save them for posterity.

### Palace at Shahabad

It was built by Nurjahan (Vigne 1987.80) <sup>[2]</sup> the famous and worthy queen of Emperor Jahangir. It lies at Shahabad in Anantnag district of Kashmir. It was originally the royal residence of Akbar's nobles till the period of Samad Khan. The elegant monumental square building had been constructed with dressed limestone. The *baradari* or widows opens to riverside which kept the royal building cool and fresh during summer. The decorated wooden doors and roof have enhanced the elegance of palace quite considerably. The wooden door and roof have enhanced the elegance of palace

quite considerably. The wooden architecture is of typical Kashmiri style of architecture. Fine wood carving of Kashmiri artisans is well known since very early times. They attained an unmatched skill because of the royal patronage during Mughal period.

### Palace of Vernag

Vernag is famous for its Mughal garden. Mughal Emperor Jahangir and his empress Nurjahan built a beautiful garden which is irrigated and kept cool by the soft water of Chashma-i-Vernag. Within the garden a beautiful palace was also erected by him during his time. It is provided with octagonal water tank, which used to be full of fishes. Empress Nurjahan once put an inscribed gold ring in the nostril of a fish. The tank is connected with the fountainhead by the small channels. The adorned palace overlooks the other building. The palace is a nice example of architectural skill and interior decoration. The canal along with its fresh breeze passing through the palace is a perfect way of cooling it in warm weather. The nice woodwork is evidence of the deft hands in carving of the typical Kashmiri style of interior decoration.

### Jharogah-i-Shahi

The palace is situated on the Hari Parbat fortress which was built by Emperor Akbar during his first visit of Kashmir (Verma 1985.80) <sup>[3]</sup>. The entire monumental specimen was constructed by the grey limestone. The stone work was handled by the master builders from different parts of India. It is an open building which provides a picturesque scene. The entire city of Srinagar can be easily seen from this palace. The system of canals full of clean water and ambient greenery enhance the beauty the royal adobe.

### Royal palace at Achhabal garden

It was built by Emperor Jahangir in the middle of 1612-19 A.D. (Bernier 1934.413) <sup>[4]</sup> in Achhabal garden which is situated in Anantnag district of Kashmir. The elegant building was erected for the stay during their visit to Kashmir in summer. The water flows through a canal passing through the summer house where a monolithic seat is placed in the middle.

### Nowshera Fort

Nowshera is about 102 km from Jammu situated on the Imperial route (Mughal Road) leading to Kashmir valley served as a halting place for the Mughal Emperors. Near the fort there is another Mughal building which is a *sarai* built by Jahangir during his way to Kashmir. The Sarai-cum-fort was built by Akbar during his first visit to Kashmir (Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri.p. 181). The ruins of rampart are still surviving and are standing on the tableland of Nowshera. The fortress was constructed with local blocks of stones. The wall is provided with brick battlements at intervals. Each hexagonal bastion has strong battlements used by the soldiers during the time of battles. Series of battlements contributes to the beauty of structure. There were two gateways in entire fortress one of which is an arched main entrance having a vaulted roof. The interiors of each side there are small room like structures which might have been used by guards. On each corners of fortress there are bulky watchtowers with small canopied chamber for the use of security guards. Besides, summer houses, traces of small rooms, *hammam*, assembly hall and

garden could be seen. There is a tank inside the fortress most probably to fulfil the water requirements of men and animals. Now the area inside the fortress is under cultivation.

### Palace of Amir Khan

The palace was erected by Amir Khan (Forester 1997.14) <sup>[5]</sup> an afghan governor of Kashmir on the eastern side of the Dal Lake. The palace was fortified by a massive stone wall of about a meter width. It is difficult to guess the height of the fortress because of its dilapidated condition. The royal residential apartments had all the characteristics of a palace. The garden attached to it is a typical specimen of Kashmir architecture as they were constructed in the terraced style, plans and designs. The building material of palace would have been of inferior quality as it could not survive. It was destroyed and no attempt of its renovation has been anticipated during the succeeding periods. The palace and the garden do not exist today.

### Palace of Ali Murdan Khan

Ali Murdan Khan, a Mughal Governor of Kashmir was a great builder, who may be credited to have built a royal abode in Nowshera (Srinagar) (Didamari 1995.292) <sup>[6]</sup>. A beautiful garden having canals, fountains and cascades were attached to it. The palace is now in dilapidated condition.

### Rajouri Fort

Rajouri is situated to the south of the Pir Panjal mountain range (Stein.393.)Ancient name was Rajapuri). Being on the Imperial route it was the halting place of Mughal Emperors during their visit to Kashmir and Rajouri remained a subsidiary of the *subah* of Kashmir. The fort was strongly built by the Mughals with the help of stone blocks and baked bricks. There were mosques, gardens, rooms, assembly halls and *hammams*. All the structures except the ruins of a small mosque in the market are now occupied by the civil Hospital and forest department (AI-A Review 1985-86 p.35-36) <sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, it was not possible to trace out and prepare plans of the structures. Only the fortress wall towards the river Mini Tawi is standing there perhaps due to strongly built of huge stone blocks and bricks. These could have been the part of a river side summer palace which used to be a common feature of the Mughal buildings on imperial route leading to Kashmir.

### Sher Garhi Fort

The rampart of the fort is about three miles from the Hari Parbat. It was originally built by Amir Ali Jawan Sher an Afghan governor professing sunni faith.The fort was built in 1770-76 A.D. The name Sher garh is derived from Shia but not from Sher (lion) (Hugel.122). The Afghans ruled over Kashmir for a period of sixty-six years after the Mughal decline in 1753 A.D. They could not continue the building interest as their ancestors (Mughals) had. Afghan rulers were quite oppressive. The Shia-Suni conflict and the rapidly declining economy were some of the strong factors diverting their attention from constructive works.

The stones for the construction shifted from Pathar Masjid. It is said that it was built at the site where King Ananta of Kashmir had built his Palace in around 1060s A.D. During the Dogras period it was renovated with new architectural

designs. The palace was again renovated at the end of nineteenth century by providing some features of Greco-Roman style with Grecian pillars. In late 1970s it once again became the victim of fire.

Built by the stone blocks the fortress has a height of 22 feet. It is not strong as Hari Parbat. The fort was rectangular in shape. The fort was defended by towers erected all over the surrounded wall at intervals. A ditch was also dug out about thirty feet wide and deep as compared to that of southern and western side. The northern side was protected by Kut-i-kul canal (Shali.287).

The inner wall of the fort is made up of the local stone material. The inner wall was erected for double protection. In between the outer and the inner wall there is passage. Along the interior wall there is a palace in the southeast corner along with other buildings and shops. A tower on the north of the fort was built. The upper story of the tower has enough space to accommodate. The building covered with Chinese Style roof having an angular drop of edges.

### **Sarai at Nadpur**

Nadpur is a small village in between Rajouri and Nowshera, which is 38km from Rajouri town and 10 km from Nowshera. The *sarai* (IA-A Review 1977- 78.29) is situated on the western side of the road. The *sarai-cum-fort* is of typical Mughal style having two main gates opposite to each other one is in the northern wall while the other one in the southern wall of the square building. The gates are about 12 feet in high and eight feet in wide. On the western side of it is dense mountain forest of pine trees and on the other side a river Mini Tawi flows. The height of walls is 8 feet at some places because of being damaged but wherever it is intact and attains a height of 10 feet. Building material used in construction are the local stones that mud mortar has been used as cementing material. This type of mortar is a general feature of construction which may be witnessed in almost all the *sarais* on the way leading to Kashmir through Pir Panjal mountain range.

### **Sarai at Nowshera**

Nowshera is situated on the bank of the river Tawi and is 48 kms from Rajouri. The *sarai* and other buildings were originally built during the time of Emperor Akbar (IA-A Review 1989-90.34). This monument is unique in its construction and is worthy of attention. It is spacious and different from other *sarais* in their general layout and composition. The *sarai* has got double enclosure walls. The outer wall has double storied bastions at the corners. Each bastion is crowned by strong and massive battlements. The *sarai* also has rows of alcoves. The entrance of the *sarai* is in the middle of the west wall. It consists of arched cells facing a common courtyard, a feature to other *sarais* of the region. A mosque is standing on the opposite side of the main entrance of the *sarai* also built by the Mughals. The mosque has all the architectural characters of the period and is still being used by the Muslims of locality.

There is another *sarai* in Nowshera some three to four kms apart from the above mentioned *sarai*. It is not in good condition, has a single enclosure wall and two entrance points in the middle of the opposite walls. There have been the residential areas lying towards the southwest corner of the enclosure wall.

### **Sarai at Nariyan**

The Naryan *Sarai* is only a few kms away from the famous *sarai* at Chingus which lies at a distance of (23 kms from Nowshera). It has the same architectural features as the other *sarais* of the period on the Imperial Route (Mughal Road) leading to Kashmir while coming from Lahore. The enclosure wall of the *sarai* is about three feet in width in which local stone boulders have been used. The building is in dilapidated condition. It has its main gate in the middle of the western wall. On each of the corners there are well built bastions. The whole complex has single storied buildings.

### **Sarai at Muradpur**

The structural complex of *sarai* of Muradpur is seven kilometres from Rajouri and forty one kilometres from Nowshera. It has been constructed on the high table land and overlooks the green field around the banks of Mini Tawi River. The structure is not in good state of preservation due to lack of maintenance of monuments. It is an interesting structural complex having a mosque, with all its features. There is a big Assembly Hall which would have been Diwan-i-khas during Mughals. The structure is in dilapidated condition having its roof in the form of debris. The enclosure wall is in good condition. Each corner of the *sarai* has bulbous bastions but the upper portion is damaged. The thickness of the enclosure's wall is not uniform ranging from one to two meters. It is built by rubble stones with lime mortar. The structure includes a number of rooms. It is now under the use of local population.

### **Sarai at Andarkot Rajouri**

Andarkot is in the southern portion of the Rajouri town situated on the top of table land at the confluence of the Tawi river and Kotli nalla. There is no complete structure except the mosque of Mughal period. These structural remains noticed earlier by ASI, tell us that once there stood a fort, palace compartment (cells) *Hammams*, Assembly hall and gardens. The *sarai* contained all these structures earlier but in a dilapidated condition. The special feature of the monument was a palace inside used by the Mughal Emperors during their visit to Kashmir. Except for few traces the area is now occupied by the local people for their residences and a post office.

### **Sarai at Rajouri**

The *sarai* and other structural complexes are on the left bank of the river Mini Tawi. It is an interesting structure had a picturesque palace. The fortress contained mosque, Assembly Hall *Hammam*, dwelling compartments and gardens. It was one of the largest monuments on the Imperial Route (Mughal Road) to Kashmir. There are bastions known as *Burj* on each corner of the *sarai*. Only the Western Wall exists today. The building material used comprises of rubble stones and bricks with lime mortar. The wall is approximately 2 meter in width. All the surviving structures are now occupied by Old District Hospital and Boys Higher Secondary School. All the components are in ruined except the western wall of a mosque on the western end of Higher Secondary School. The wall contains *mehrab* in the middle and arches on both the ends. The mosque was not in use for prayers due to most of its parts were damaged since 2016 the local Muslim population of the town renovated and restored for prayers.

### Sarai at Fatehpur

It is six kilometers from Rajouri town in the Imperial Route. The *sarai* has a strong enclosure, which still exists. There are two gates in the entire structure existing in the opposite walls of North-south direction. The gate of the southern wall is larger than the northern gate which was perhaps the main entrance of *sarai*. The western wall is stronger than others and is about two to three feet in thickness. The interior enclosure is about 60 x 45 metres. The structure is rectangular with bastion on each corner. The walls are built of local stones having lime and mortar. In front of the main entrance there is a structure resembling with a pound below. The structure is measured about 15x15 feet. Perhaps it was used for water for animals only.

### Sarai at Thanamandi

Thanamandi is 21 km from Rajouri Town. It is perhaps last halting place of Mughal before the Rattan Shah Pir mountain range. It is surrounded by mountains from all sides except south speaks of its magnificent view. The interesting structural complex has remarkable construction. There are two enclosure walls built one after the other. These walls mix a new brilliance to the monument. The technique of double wall shows an extra protection introduced by the Mughals. The *sarais* contains residential rooms, *hammam*, and garden in the centre of the enclosure. The doors of all the rooms around open towards centre. There are two gateways on opposite walls, one opens towards west and the other main entrance exists towards east. The *sarai* is in good condition. Now it is occupied by the India Army after the commencement of confusion and chaos in the valley since 1989. Before occupation of the army it was maintained by a private Educational Institution.

### Sarai at Hirapur

It is situated on the Imperial route at Hirapur after crossing Pir Panjal range. The *sarai* contains two gateways in the opposite walls. The rectangular structure is enclosed by four walls. Each wall is about five meters high and two meters wide having small room like structures in a row with arched open towards the open hall. The *sarai* provided with bastions and battlements.

### Conclusion

The study after the survey of the existing monuments shows the spectacular architectural styles, topography, construction and master skills of the structures. The local sandstone and bricks were used in existing buildings provided with simple or adorned arcades, niches and vaults etc which are the specimen of the beauty of monuments of the aforementioned period. Most of the structures evident only in the folios of the contemporary literary sources but do not exist today. These heritage structures are on the verge of dying and decay if they are not renovated and preserved.

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