

Bhimgarh Fort: A Prospect for Heritage Tourism in Jammu

LOCAL



Bhimgarh Fort © INTACH, J&K (2012)



Bhimgarh Fort - Boundary walls almost collapsed ©INTACH, J&K (2012)

"...The situation of Riassi has added prosperity to the town and importance to the place.....(Riassi) contains some two or three hundred houses. It is built on a flat at the foot of the mountains, and separated by some uneven country from the plains. The castle does not appear to stand upon more than two or three acre of ground. It is one of the strongest and perhaps the strongest and best constructed, in the country..."

Charles Ellison Bates; Gazetteer of 1872

The region of Jammu has a varied natural and architectural heritage comprising lakes, mountain, rivers, forts, palaces, *baolis*, along with a rich tradition of crafts, dances and festivals which serve as living expression of our culture. Unfortunately many of these landmarks of yesterday have been ignored thus deriving both the local inhabitants as well as prospective visitors the opportunity to explore this important part of our legacy. Today **'cultural heritage'** commands one of the main sectors of tour and travel industry, not only helping in sharing of our common values but also ensuring economic benefit for inhabitants wherein these heritage sites are located.

Thus over a period of time preservation and promotion of heritage sites has emerged as **a key to sustaining culture and heritage, offering a vehicle to preserve and broaden understanding of rich history of the area, a major attraction for the travel and tourism a major step in revitalizing the economic, cultural fabric of the region, & enhancing the sense of belonging and pride amongst the local communities.**

It is in keeping with these objective that **INTACH J&K Chapter in collaboration with the state department of Tourism has formulated a proposal for the conversion of the historic *Reasi Qilla, located in Reasi* into a major centre for heritage and**

culture with the requisite facilities that depict the life, times and achievements of people associated with this historical area.

The town of Reasi is said to have been founded by Raja Rishipal Rana. From available historical references as well as local sources it emerges that in the first quarter of the 18th century AD, Reasi was a small independent principality ruled by Sail Rajputs. As such Reasi was a part of the prevailing geo-political landscape of this mountainous region which comprised of numerous small principalities in perpetual warfare with one another for political ascendancy.

To protect this small principality a fort, Bhingarh Qilla, generally known as the Reasi Fort located on a hillock approx 150m. High was initially constructed of clay. Later on one of the heirs of Raja Rishipal Rana, reconstructed it using stone. It was used by the royal family members for taking shelter during emergencies.

The construction of a new fort at the site was started by Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu in 1817 and continued till 1841. The construction and consolidation of Bhingarh fort was further advanced by the advent of Sardar Zorawar Singh. Zorawar Singh Kahluria was born in a village in Bilaspur (Kahlur) proved himself a true soldier in the endurance of the extraordinary hardship. Probably one of the greatest warriors born in the state, Zorawar Sing was responsible for conquering Ladakh, before being killed on his way to conquer Tibet. Zorawar Singh name is linked with that of Reasi and the fort of Bhingarh, a place that provided him with the initial success. The fort which was severely damaged in the earthquake of 2005 is presently in a derelict condition. As a part of its initiative to protect the built heritage of the land, INTACH has prepared a conservation and reuse plan for the fort. The reuse plan is to ensure

that the conservation of the fort will also lead to a sustainable development in the area featuring on revival of traditional arts and crafts.

It is for this objective that the historic *Reasi Qilla* will be converted into a major centre for heritage and culture with the requisite facilities, including:

- **Setting up of a Visitor Interpretation Centre dedicated to the Culture and history of *Duggar Desh*.**
- **Depict the life, times and achievements of General Zorawar Singh.**
- **A gallery of miniature paintings of Pahari School.**
- **Open air theatre for enacting cultural shows folk dances etc.**
- **Open Air Craft Demonstration Spaces**

As a part of the reuse strategy and to promote local economy, artisans shop space will be established within the fort in various open spaces (like erstwhile stable etc.) to encourage traditional local crafts. These will include rented “incubator” space for artisans & location for classes and participatory workshops.

Additionally the birth anniversary of General Zorawar Singh be celebrated as a part of “**Bhingarh Festival**”, involving theatre performances, holding of heritage tour commencing from the fort and culminating at the residence of Zorawar Singh. Thematic painting exhibitions can also be held involving participation of artists from all the erstwhile hill principalities as well as local.

National Seminar on Heritage of J&K: Challenges & Prospects

Eminent academicians & researchers presented their papers, Convener INTACH J&K, M Saleem Beg delivered keynote address

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Jammu (J&K): A two day national seminar on 'Heritage of Jammu and Kashmir: Challenges and Prospect' was held at Govt. Gandhi Memorial Science College, Jammu. Prominent academicians, researchers and experts on heritage conservation were present at the occasion. Noted expert on heritage & Convener INTACH J&K, M Saleem Beg delivered keynote address. Among the other illustrious speakers were S M Sahni, Convener INTACH, Jammu Chapter and Prof B L Bhardwaj, eminent scholar and researcher.

In the inaugural session, Dr C K. Khajuria, Convener, UGC Heritage Project, dwelled upon the theme and objectives of the two day conference. The inaugural session was followed by two technical sessions in which academicians presented papers on diverse aspects of heritage, culture, religion and literary legacy of Jammu & Kashmir. The sessions were chaired by Prof R P Sharma from University of Jammu and Sewa Dass, former DDG, GSI.

Earlier, the Principal of the college, Dr. Ajeet presented a welcome address.

The seminar covered talk on diverse subjects like natural heritage, archaeology, conservation of built heritage, literary heritage. There were scholarly presentations of academicians from a wide specialization of literature, history, geology, sociology. Emphasized the need for ringing in content and participation of academia in cultural studies, the papers by lady Professors had depth of analysis and study.

The venue, erstwhile, Prince of Wales College, is the first institution of higher Education set up in the State in 1905 in one of the most significant heritage complexes in need of better maintenance and conservation.



J&K government turns public libraries to E-learning centers



Srinagar (J&K): Rejuvenating the culture of library, Jammu and Kashmir government on Wednesday launched E-learning program by installing computers in the state's public libraries, thus assisting students to prepare for competitive exams like JEE, CET and so on.

The SPS library at Moulana Azad Road has been the government's choice to initiate a program to provide quality coaching and comprehensive solutions to NEET, JEE and CET aspirants.

Students can avail the facility by filling a form in the nearest libraries. Resources like tabs, computers and the expert-designed study materials available in the library would be an additional benefit to the students to crack the competitive papers.

“Under the novel initiative, IT-enabled learning material, including video lectures, e-books and written notes, shall be made available free of cost in all the government libraries across the State to facilitate students crack NEET, JEE, CET and other competitive examinations,” said Finance Minister J&K, Dr. Haseeb Drabu.

“This is a move to reinvent libraries into a learning centre for the students to prepare themselves for the competitive examinations. Once the mission gets success, we have further plans to take it into a bigger platform like conducting lectures at the public community halls”, he added.

The program will be particularly beneficial to the students from far flung areas where quality coaching facilities are not available. The students will be continuously assessed online and they will be able to track their progress constantly. The library has collection of engineering, MBA, NEET, CET books availing the students to prepare themselves along with online programs where the students are continuously guided on several topics of their courses.

This initiative of the Kashmir Government is a game changer for the students to get through the competitive exams who would not afford to avail for paid tuitions.

Source: www.india.com



'Object of the Month' launched to showcase state's heritage

Epic poem 'Shahnama' put on display at Mubarak Mandi Heritage Complex



Jammu (J&K): In a bid to showcase to the public the state's treasure trove of heritage and history, Minister for Culture and Finance Haseeb Drabu today launched a pioneering project, named "Object of the Month".

Under the initiative, the Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums has started putting for public display a special museum object for one month each.

In the maiden series under the "Object of the Month" initiative for February, Drabu today unveiled for public display the rare manuscript "Shahnama" at Dogra Art Museum, Mubarak Mandi Heritage Complex here.

The Secretary to Government, Department of Culture, Dilshad Khan, Director, Archives, Archaeology and Museums, MS Zahid and other officers of the department were present on the occasion.

"The initiative will facilitate display of rare and unique objects from the reserve collection of the museums in the state which could not be earlier displayed due to paucity of space in the museums," Dr Drabu said.

The Minister said the "Object of the Month" activity will continue throughout the year in Dogra Art Museum, Jammu, and Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar.

The minister also inaugurated a mini museum at Mubarak Mandi Heritage Complex on the theme "Archive's Selected Heritage" where historical documents, farmans, orders, books have been put on display for the public.

The museum also houses several handwritten manuscripts, including the scripts of Shahnama and Sikandernama in Persian that are of interest to history buffs.

Shahnama (the Book of Kings), is a long epic poem written by the renowned Persian poet Ferdowsi. He started writing Shahnamah in 977 AD and completed it on 8 March 1010. Consisting of some 50,000 "distichs" or couplets (two-line verses), the Shahnamah is the world's longest epic poem written by a single poet.

It is the national epic of Iran and tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Islamic conquest of Persia in the seventh century. Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and the greater region influenced by the Persian culture, including Georgia, Armenia, Turkey and Dagestan, celebrate this national epic.

Source: www.tribuneindia.com

China to help KP preserve archaeological sites



PESHAWAR: The governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and China's Shaanxi province on Monday joined hands for sustainable bilateral development under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project by signing a memorandum of understanding to preserve cultural heritage that connects both the historic regions rich in archaeological sites.

Chief Archaeology at the Silk Route Research Institution of the Northwest University of China Prof Wang Jian Xin and director at Xian Centre Li Tao along with other delegation members signed the MoU with the KP Directorate of Archaeology and Museums during a simple ceremony filled with a friendly atmosphere of mutual understanding and love for archaeology and cultural heritage despite language barrier.

Li Tao translated the conversations between culture and archaeology secretary Mohammad Tariq and Prof Wang, who were on the same page regarding the preservation of cultural heritage of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with opportunities that have emerged with the CPEC project.

Prof Wang said cultural ties between the cities of Peshawar and Xian could be further strengthened. He didn't rule out the possibility of having a cultural platform and a museum in Peshawar. The Chinese professor said Peshawar Museum's current building itself was a heritage. He said preserving archaeological sites and monuments on the CPEC route would be identified through surveys so that such sites were preserved and developed to the benefit of all.

Li Tao, while discussing cultural ties between the two regions, said he found out during a visit to Swat that a Chinese Buddhist monk, Song Yun (4th Century A.D), visited the area some 1,500 years ago.

The two sides discussed the need to highlight and celebrate bilateral ties before the MoU signing. Xian is a large city and the capital of Shaanxi province in central China. Once known as Changan (eternal peace), it marks the eastern end of the Silk Route.

Source: www.dawn.com

Suri, Khilji mosques: forgotten masterpieces of architecture



Sher Shah Suri Mosque

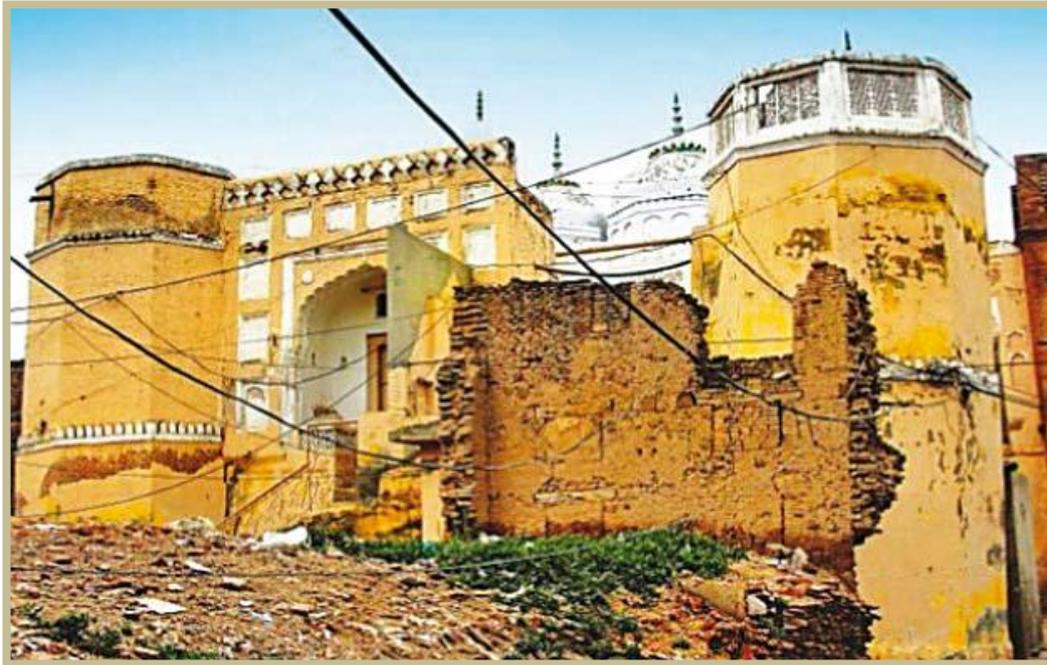
SARGODHA: Every locality in Bhera town has a building that dates back to the historical period. Consisting of a large number of Hindu and Sikh monuments, some buildings of the mughal period also grace the landscape of Bhera town. There are many historical mosques in the town of which those belonging to Tughlaq, Khilji and Suri periods are quite prominent. One of the well known mosques situated in the area is Sher Shah Suri Mosque.

In 1541, Sher Shah Suri, the founder of Sur Empire in North India, built a mosque and named it 'Sher Shah Suri Mosque'. The mosque consists of three domes and arched entrances that are most imposing and remarkable for their geometric designs. However, the mosque is entirely different from others built by Sher Shah Suri in different cities which are noted for their

intricate design and decoration.

After the death of Sher Shah Suri, the later rulers renovated and reconstructed some parts of the mosque. They also added new sections to the structure. However, the mosque was damaged during the battle in early 17th century between the mughals and Sikh forces. In 1860, mughal ruler Qazi Ahmeduddin Bugvi rebuilt the mosque as it lay in a dilapidated condition. He also built two halls for learning Qura'an and Hadith. Besides, a boarding house was also constructed for students. Later in 1926, the mosque was repaired by Qazi Zahoor Ahmed Bugvi.

In later years, a library and the Bhera Information and Research Centre was established in the outer premises of Sher Shah Suri Mosque. The library was built



Mosque built by Khilji rulers in a shambles

with original architectural design and consists of 300 invaluable manuscripts with a copy of Aaeen-i-Akbari and 10 copies of Qura'an from that period.

Despite being in a shambles, the mosques in Bhera still retain their old grandeur. One such mosque in Sheikhanwala Mohallah is noted for its monumental gate which was built by Khilji rulers. It is still standing tall despite harsh weather conditions and lack of government in restoring it to its former glory.

Historians say the mosque located in Sheikhanwala Mohallah was built by the Khiljis but its architecture appears to be of mughal period. It is likely that the mosque was rebuilt by the mughal rulers after they conquered the sub-continent.

The mosque consists of three elegant domes and two massive turrets which add beauty to the structure.

A few years back, the front of the mosque was whitewashed but traces of the original decorative work on the walls particularly it's main gate are still visible. The two octagonal towers on either side of the gate reflect the typical early mughal style. The boundary walls of the mosque look like a fortress reflecting the typical Central Asian style of mosque building. The government renovated the structure some time back that damaged the original beauty of the mosque. Formerly, the exterior wall was decorated with paintings but now they have vanished. However, there are still some paintings visible on the inner walls of the mosque.

Source: www.tribune.com.pk