

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE IN
AKORA KHATTAK, DISTRICT NOWSHERA,
KHYBER PUKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN**

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This study is about some archaeological sites in Akora Khattak, an eastern located town of District Nowshera, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The town is well-known among the natives as being a birth and burial place of the great Pukhtun warrior leader and poet Khushal Khan Khattak. There are also many historical, archaeological and cultural sites in the town. The current, study is about three of such sites; Akbar's Caravanserai (*Rang Maḥal*), Sher Shah Suri's *Bāoli* (steps-well) and a Hindus' Spiritual Bath (*Ashnān Ghāt*) in the middle of the River Kabul. It also focuses on a brief history about the land and people of Akora Khattak with special reference to its archaeological localities. The study recommends further intensive studies and urgent renovations of the sites because of their historical and archaeological momentousness.

Keywords: Akora Khattak, Caravanserai, *Rang Maḥal*, *Bāoli*, *Ashnān ghāt*

Introduction

Akora Khattak is named after Malik Akore Khan (or Malik Akorey), Khushal Khan Khattak's great-grand father. The town is located on the Grand Trunk (GT) Road, about 9 miles towards east of Nowshera, (District Nowshera, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan). This village (now turned a town) was formerly known as *Sarai* (Inn) and Malik-pura by the historians. According to the sources¹ during the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (953AH-1014 A.H.), Malik Akore Khan moved from

his birthplace Karbighato Khowrra Nizampur (District Nowshera). In 989 A.H. Akbar nominated some Afghan *sardārs* (leaders) for conservancy of Royal corridors. Malik Akore Khan was allotted the vicinity from Nowshera to Khairabad in 1585. He was made accountable for tolls and taxes collection as well as Royal GT Road conservancy from Attock to Peshawar.² Thus, Akora Khattak is legendary with his name, similarly Malik-Pura with his title '*Malik*' (king). However, before the arrival of Malik Akore Khan it was a Royal *Sarai* (inn) of its locality on the bank of the River Kabul, provided a resonance resting place for the caravans and armies. Khushal Khan Khattak cited *Sarai* in his *Kuliyāt* too.³

Due to the ancient geo-strategic position of Akora Khattak, Malik Akore Khan successfully ruled over the area under the Mughul patronage up to his third generation Khushal Khan Khattak (son of Shahbaz Khan, son of Yahya Khan, son of Akore Khan). Although, from Akbar to Shah Jehan there were some Yousafzai's and Afghan insurgencies against the Mughuls but the Khattaks remained in power. Later, Aurangzeb Alamgir (1657-1707) imprisoned Khushal Khan Khattak for two years, four months and twenty days in Peshawar, Delhi and Ranthambore, a conspiracy plotted by Aamir Khan Subaidar of Kabul. This turned lifelong loyalty to the Mughul to a hostile rivalry of Khushal Khan Khattak. However, he did not succeed to unite the Pukhtuns against the Mughuls, although the historian quoted this area as strong Khattaks' confrontations.

Hitherto, in Akora Khattak, there are some eminent historical and archaeological relics of Mughul and Suri dynasties; ShahiLarr (Royal passageway), graves of Romantic couple of Pushtu Folktales; Shahi and Tordiley (Tordil Khan), Shrine of Akhund Adyan Baba Seljoqi, mausoleum of Khushal Khan Khattak, Caravanserai (The *Rang Mahal* (a painted palace), *bāoli* (steps-well) and Hindu *Ashnān Ghāt* (spiritual bath).

However, for the purpose of this study the principal author has chosen the *Rang Maḥal*, *Suri Bāoli* and Hindu *Ashnān Ghāt*, (she is a native of Akora Khattak), to highlight their historical and archaeological aspects that may pave a way for future researchers and archaeologists for these neglected but significant sights of Pukhtunkhwa culture heritage. Thus, our aims and objectives are;

- First explore historical and architectural account of selected sites of Akora Khattak with special reference.
- To describe the magnitude of the *Rang Maḥal*, *Sūri Bāoli* and *Ashnān Ghāt*.

Methodology

The researchers have followed historical, descriptive and analytical approaches in this, fieldwork study. Historical accounts of the selected archaeological sites were surveyed. Special care has been taken with measurements (scaling) and plans preparations. Both the available primary and secondary sources are cited in the literature review and data analysis to highlight the historical and architectural aspects of the *Rang Maḥal*, *Sūri Bāoli* and *Ashnān Ghāt*. However, at points the researchers have generalised the available data with the features of the art and architecture specific to the Mughul dynasty. Thus the sources are; interviews of the natives' surveys, books, articles of prominent experts of the subject, newspapers reports and official record of the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Archives and Museum, and the Department of Archaeology Islamabad. Unfortunately, the archaeological sites under study are still waiting recognition of the cultural value by the provincial and federal government. However, we, the authors are optimistic that the future researcher and the government of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa will trace, in turn these archaeological sites for further investigations, preservation and maintenance to open new avenues for future researchers and innovations on the subject.

Literature Review

The contextual history of *caravansarai* and *bāoli*, (*vaoli*, *vao*, and *van*) along the highways is Central Asian tradition tracing back to second century BC.⁴ Although very little information is available about *caravanserai* and *bāoli* till the early Mughul rule in the Indian subcontinent.

The first reference to road-side inns or *sarai* is found during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq (1324-1351AD), who constructed *sarais* at each stage between Delhi and his new capital Daulatabad.⁵

Similarly; Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351-1387 A.D.), built a hundred and twenty hospices and inns for travellers.⁶ This tradition of building *sarai* was followed by many successors; Mahmud Baiqara (1458-1511 A.D.) and Sikandar Lodi (1488-1517 A.D.) of Delhi who built along mosques, *madāris* and bazaars at all such places where Hindu had their

temples and ritual bathing sites.⁷ However, Sher Shah Suri (1539–1552 AD) was a land-marker and revived of the *Shahrah-i-Azam* (the GT Road) to facilitate the travelers and caravans.

It was Sher Shah Suri who revived the glory of the Royal-Road of Chandra Gupta Maurya and at the same time, excelled him in providing road-side facilities to the travelers to such an extent that today the Grand Trunk Road and Sher Shah Suri have become synonyms.⁸

And for a peaceful and safe journey;

He realigned the Grand Trunk Road from Sonargaon to Rohtas, widened it, planted fruit-bearing and shady trees on its sides, constructed *sarais* at a distance of 2 kos, each and introduced *kosminars* and *baolis* at more frequent intervals in between two *sarais*.⁹

Thus, *caravanserai* as an institutional building were constructed and promoted by Sher Shah Suri (but most of the *sarai* were made of mud. Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1559-1605 A.D.) further developed the legacy of Suri's *caravanserai* and *bāoli* by collecting tolls and taxes. Akbar and his ancestors specially built and renovated numerous *caravanserai*, but these were made of stones and bricks. In this regard Jahangiri *caravanserais*, during 1605-1628 A.D. are famous for their stone and burnt bricks collections and their proper refurbishment of sitting and bathrooms with fresh water facilities.¹⁰

Additionally, these *caravanserai* and *baoli* were not only inns for the travellers but an official *dākchaukis* [Post Offices] too. Thus, stepwells, mosques, temples, *gurdwaras* and churches art and architecture have an important place in the history and archaeology of South Asia. All the religions believe in physical and spiritual cleaning; therefore, most of these places of worships are built along the bank of the rivers, seashores, coasts or mountain or has a proper supply of water.

Similarly, Hinduism has a very sacred place for river water as a spiritual power. Most of the Hindu temples are situated along the bank of a river or have a pond, a special sanctified place in the water for the purpose of body, speech and spirit cleanliness. This spiritual cleansing was called *ashnan* and the place called *Ashnān Ghāt*. These *Ashnān Ghāts* are an essential part of the temple.

The available literature is scarce about the analysis and historical accounts of under study archaeological sites. Saifur Rehman Dar's renowned studies are limited to *caravan sarais* and some *baolis* along the GT Road but have entirely overlooked the *Rang Maḥal* and *Sūri Bāoli*. The studies of Shakirullah researched the *Rang Maḥal* to explore the art and architecture of the *caravansarai* that further validated our field survey. However, Shakirullah's field survey was conducted in 1995¹¹ and this study discusses the present conservation and innovative historical analyses of the *Rang Maḥal*. Whereas, no record has been traced back about the *Suri Bāoli* and the *Ashnān Ghāt* neither in the Department of Archaeology and Museum Khyber Pukhtunkhwa nor by in depth studies of Saifur Rehman Dar.¹²



Location map of the sites, Akora Khattak, District Nowshera
(Source: Google Map)

Historical and Archaeological Descriptions and Analysis of the Sites

The data analysis is manifested by a blend of archaeology and history. As the art and architecture are significant aspects of this research but incomplete without their historical background. Thus both the features are combined.

1. The *Rang Maḥal* (The Painted Palace)

This historical place is situated in *mera* (wilderness/boondocks) of

Akora Khattak near Wattar Suriyah Khel, a place named with the founder of Suri dynasty, Sher Shah Suri, while the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Museum and Archives named the place *Valai* (a Pushtu word for spring water)¹³ located on Hawaii road, as mentioned in the location map above. According to Ahmad Hasan Dani;

Between Attock and Peshawar there are very few Mughul Monuments of importance now existing. Near Nowshera one tourist retreat is worth recording about two miles east of Nowshera there is a small village called Vatan Surya khel on the Grand Trunk Road. South of this road is a *kaccha* road goes under an iron bridge towards the village of Valai, where an ancient time was some sort of Buddhist settlement away from the main Grand Trunk Road which we have an old water spring just at the foot of a ridge in a small closed valley. This spring was taken advantage of the Mughuls and they built this garden (now no longer in existence). In the middle of this garden a temporary resting place was built of brick and plaster. It consists of a hall in the middle and two side rooms built on an arched terrace, underneath which flows the spring water. A staircase from the side gives access to the roof. The interior of the main hall is full of painting in the late Mughul style as is known from this area. The date of this building is not definitely known. The site is very attractive.¹⁴

Similarly Shakirullah affirmed;

The *Rang Mahal* is situated about 2km to the northeast of Ziarat Kaka Sahib near the village Valai in Nowshera District. The actual site lies in a picturesque little glen on the left bank of a seasonal stream which drains the hills around Ziarat and joins the River Kabul near the village Wartir.¹⁵

Thus, the location of the *Rang Mahal*, as defined above by the two renowned archaeologists made the position of this study more authentic and reliable for the future researchers.

a. Art and Architecture

The ruins of the *Rang Mahal* reveal a beautiful piece of art and architecture. It stands on raised platform having twelve arched entrances suggesting that it is a *Barahdari* (twelve gated palace),¹⁶ constructed under the Mughul reign¹⁷ although the exact Mughul era is unknown (Plate. 1).¹⁸ The colourful structure is perhaps a reason for its

nomenclature instead of a *barahdari*. The remaining portion of boundary along its eastern and western side's expose its proper boundary no longer exists now. (Plate. 2) No written material or epitaphic record was found within the structure to have an exact date of construction of the *Rang Maḥal*. So, by focusing on the style of art and architecture we may know the reign of Mughul Emperor who commissioned this piece of art.

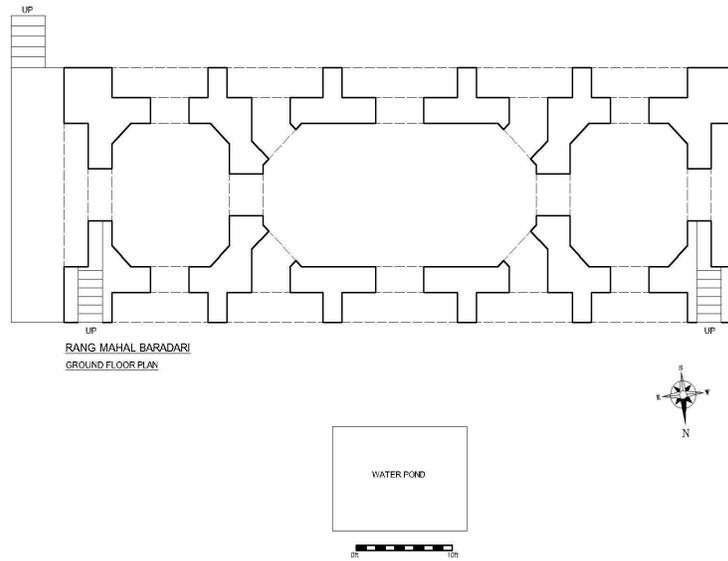
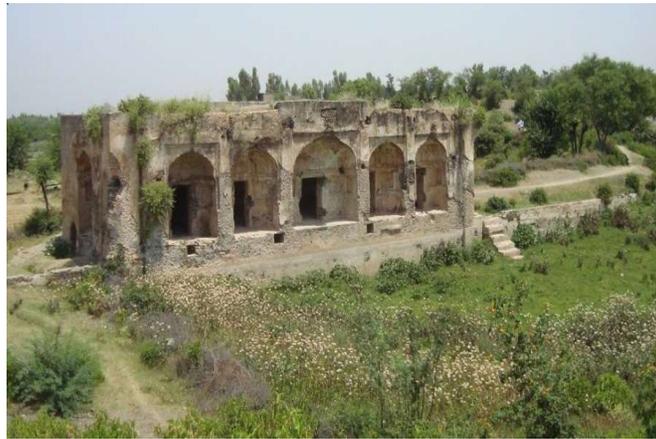


Plate. 1
Façade of the *Rang Maḥal*

**Plate. 2**

Rear side, showing the boundary on both Eastern and western sides

b. Plan

The plan 1 of the *Rang Mahal* is rectangular in shape measuring¹⁹ 70'EW/24'.5" NS consisting of two cells of 3.80 m.sq.20 with a larger hall in the center measuring 8.65/4.20m.sq. It is a single storey structure with the basement used a reservoir of water to keep the structure cool. The façade and rear sides are identical in design, however the façade has a small tank may had a function of fountain now filled with the grass and earth. The rear side of structure is deeper than the façade and has four small outlets of water connected to basement. (Plate. 2)

Two staircases are located on extreme corners of the façade on eastern and western sides lead to top of the roof whereas a small staircase is found on eastern side slightly outside of *barahdari* structure connects the backyard to the front (Plate. 2, 3, 4).

**Plate. 3**

Eastern staircase on façade.



Plate. 4

Western staircase on façade

The western and eastern sides of the *Rang Mahal* have single arched openings, one can see the small size of some round entrance at ground level with the eastern entrance (Plate. 5). The basement is now filled with earth, stands on stone columns as stone is more effective than brick to give support to water filled structure.



Plate. 5

Eastern entrance of the *Rang Mahal* showing opening to basement

c. Façade and Rear-side of the Rang Maḥal

Façade of the *Rang Maḥal* has five arches with the bigger and wider one in the centre, making it the main portal of the structure. The central entrance has double multi-foil arched entrance to the interior. The arches adjacent to the main arch are pointed in shape, and those on extreme corners again repeat the multi-foil shape similar to the main arched entrance but all these arched entrances have trabeate entrance to the interior (Plate. 1, 6), a similar kind of pattern is followed in the rear side. Some of the architecture features found in the façade of the *Rang Maḥal* are quiet interesting. Two entrances adjacent to the main arched entrance are slightly tilted instead of aligned like the others arched entrances the reason will be discussed later. The other is that at the top of both sides of main arched entrance have two small rectangular openings connected to roof and narrow water ducts can be seen on all sides except the façade (Plate. 1, 2, 5, and 7). In front of the rectangular openings water tank is created perhaps to collect the water. All these openings including the four small holes at rear sides should have linked with underground water tank and mechanism water must be made to circulate within this track throughout the exterior of the *Rang Maḥal*. Otherwise the openings at exterior especially at façade for only drainage of rain water from roof causes an ugly look to such a beautiful *Rang Maḥal* whom exterior is full of fresco once, and one duct would be enough for drainage of any structure.

**Plate. 6**

Multi-foil and pointed arches at façade

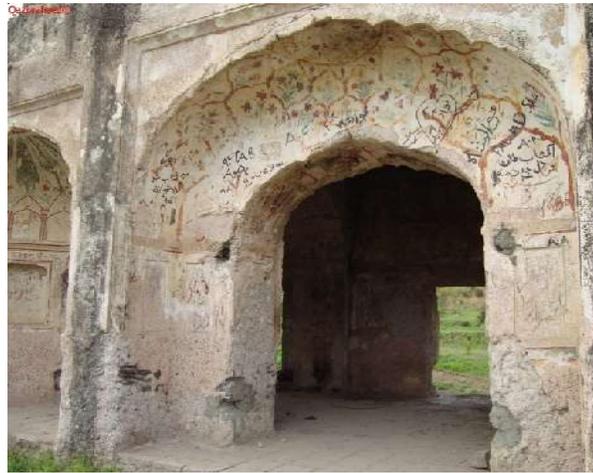
**Plate. 7**

Main multi-foil arched entrance at facade

d. Exterior Decoration

Embellishment of the architecture of the *Rang Mahal* is similar from all sides. Visually it can be divided into four horizontal parts. The dado, the part above dado; consists of rectangular shallow panels alternate with the elliptical square niches; both are devoid of any decoration only maroonish red outlines can be seen at boundary. Third division is the conches of arched entrances which depicts the most colourful part of the existing *Rang Mahal* with fresco paintings and the left upper part of the façade and rear side is again devoid of any decoration (Plate. 6, 7).

The main arched entrance is decorated with empty multi-foil arches in maroon outline at base level above which modified honeycomb pattern filled with three maroon flowers and green leaves in each section the pattern assembled at the apex of conch having different design; consists of semi circle in maroon boundary filled with same flowers (Plate. 8). Similar decorative pattern can be seen on extreme multi-foil arches, whereas pointed arches adjacent to main bigger arch bears different pattern than the others. Both arches have empty double pointed arched outline in maroon color above which cypress trees filed with green color and traces of maroon coloured flowers can be seen around the cypress trees. (Plate. 9, 10)

**Plate. 8.**

Decorative patterns at façade main arched entrance

**Plate. 9.**

Decoration at arches adjacent to the main arch

**Plate. 10**

Decoration at rear side of cusped arches

The arches on eastern and western corners has dado in ruined condition separating the upper portion with thick maroon red colour boundary an elliptical square niche and rectangular panel found on each side of entrance, all are devoid of any decoration. The conch of arch has shallow pointed arches at base level while the left part bears the modified honey comb patterns which are hardly visible. (Plate. 5)

e. Interior Decoration

Interior structure is another interesting part of the *Rang Mahal*, the exterior of the structure reflects five inter-connecting cells or one long-hall. However, the indoor consists of three divisions, the two small cells and one large hall. The standing structure i.e. ground level made of bricks showing clearly in interior and exterior from where the plaster is in ruined state. But in the interior the ruined condition reveal some stone structure as well that is evidence of the renovation of this architectural piece. The interior is standing on piers and the main hall has four multi-foil arches making some square formation, behind the multi-foil arches on eastern & western side; extension is given through slightly tilted piers which results in occupying the six openings into main hall and the tilted opening at facade discussed above. (Plate. 11)



Plate. 11

Main hall of the interior depicting entrances and traces of decoration at half dome structure

The side small cells are connected with main hall through rectangular openings; each small cell has four openings in total. The tilted piers here in this structure work as has squinches to convert the rectangular formation to half dome formation, (Plate. 11) resulting in a small dome shape at the tip. (Plate. 12)



Plate. 12

Domed ceiling showing the brick structure and extreme corners in stone witnessed during the renovation.

The structure shows the use of both stone and brick materials and even in interior depiction of both materials reveals the restoration and most recently in 2010 another restoration was done, as confirmed by Department of Archaeology and Museums, Peshawar. So, the *Rang Mahal* might have been commissioned by Mughul emperor Akbar for Malik Akore Khan Khattak and restored under Shahjahan period attributed to Khushal Khan Khattak.²¹ However, Shakirullah quoted Habibullah Rafi and Afdal Khan:

According to Sikander Khan, a well-known contemporary poet and son of Khushal Khan Khattak, it was named after the name of Ashraf Khan's son Afdal Khan and therefore called Afdalabad, on the pattern of Aurangabad. With the lapse of time the real name was forgotten and the place came to be known as *Rang Mahal* (i.e. the painted palace) or *Valai* which is the local Pashtu word for a 'spring'.²²

The formation and style of architecture under the reign of Shahjahan was at its climax and there was never seen such maturity in Mughul architecture before his reign. The use of marble, precious stones and delicate and intricate designs in embellishment of architecture is part of his reign's monuments and can be witnessed in Taj Mahal, Masjid Wazir Khan and many parts of Lahore forts. The decoration might have been restored by Khushal Khan Khattak in the period of Shahjahan as mentioned earlier by Ahmad Hasan Dani that these decoration are relatively from Late Mughul period.²³ Another point is the use of multi-foil arches which is not seen in Mughul period before the Shahjahan reign, but the use of pointed arches, stone, brick structure and especially the immature design found in frescos of the *Rang Mahal* associate this structure primarily to Akbar's period.

The ruins of boundary at both ends of the *Rang Mahal* on western and eastern sides, stairs leading to the backyard and gardens are mentioned by Shakirullah:

The actual building, now in a poor state of preservation, stands upon a raised platform having arched openings on the side of the reservoir meant apparently for letting water flow to keep the building cool. On the side the building is strengthened by turret-one in each corner-showing honey-comb design in the upper part. The material used for the construction of this edifice mainly comprises of locally available irregular blocks of lime stone fixed in thick layer of yellowish lime mortar.²⁴

So, a strong hypothesis that there might have been other structures constructed during different reigns causing the restoration and reconstruction according to fashion of that particular era as we witnessed in this structure.

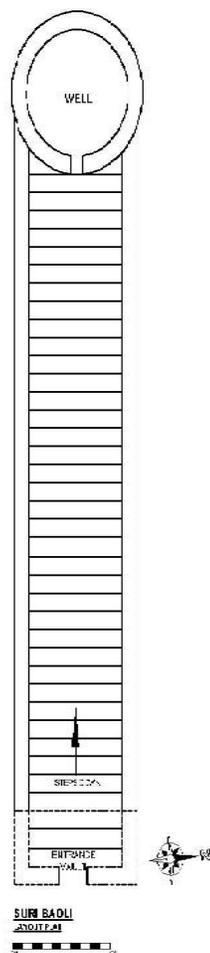
Suri's *Bāoli* (Steps-well)

The *bāoli* under study is located in the plain area of Akora Khattak, approximately few kilometres away from the southern mountains. However, it is very close to the tomb of Khushal Khan Khattak which is located at an isolated place in this mountainery area.

According to the sources in the second century BC the Sakas, in their second wave, introduced two types of wells in the subcontinent; *Sakandhu* (steps-wells) and *Karkandhu*- (the Persian wheel).²⁵ These *bāolis* were not only a source of fresh water but also a resting place for

caravans, travelers, horses and cattle rather than a night stay. The tradition of *bāoli* is has a pre-Asokan history.²⁶

There are variety of *bāoli* traditions in the subcontinent such as; rectangular water tank, square or circular well (commonly known *chah*). Similarly *chitti bāolis*, *bāolis* with short staircase and *bāolis* of deep staircase, have complicated structure and normally used as *caravansarai* with boarding and lodging facilities (i.e. Laosar *Bāoli* and Mahfoozpora *Bāoli*). Saifur Rehman Dar's in-depth study of *caravansarai* and *baolis* elaborates different uses of *bāolis* for religious and social services of the community. In this regard Brahmanabad *Bāoli* has an elaborate pavilion with attached mosques and garden; *Bāoli* Jandiala Sher Khan has a steps-well with multiple approaches to the surface of water; example is Rohtas *Bāoli*; and two shifts Vaola *Bāoli*; and with double minarets resembling a Kosminar, marking their entrance like Van Bachran *Bāoli* etc.²⁷



Thus, the Suri's *Bāoli* under study can be simply fit under the category of complicated structure of a deep well with long staircase (Plate. 1, 2). Furthermore; the *bāoli* cannot be associated with any religious rituals of any community.

Our forefathers did not notice any religious ritual use of this baoli except horse-riders going inside up to the water surface and coming out.²⁸

It is noteworthy to bring attention of the readers that the *Sūri Bāoli* is located on the same route of the GT Road that is mentioned in Saifur Rehman Dar's study.²⁹ However, neither his survey team nor the Pukhtunkhwa Archaeology and Museum notice this significant chain of *Sūri Bāoli*.



Plate 1.

Down staircase to the *Sūri Bāoli*

The *bāoli* measures 18m in length and its includes a circular well, 4m in diameter, staircase of 35 steps descending down to the surface level of water (Plate. 3). Steps are built in dressed schist stone slabs, while the walls are constructed with concrete stones. Each step is 0.5m

in height. The width of the *bāoli* is 3m and height 5m respectively (Plate. 4).



Plate. 2

Staircase to the water

Its structure is similar to Kenthala Baoli near Shah Allah Ditta Cave, Islamabad. *Sūri Bāoli* is not mentioned in any official record of the Government of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, therefore no sign of its preservation could be observed. It is almost in a ruined condition. The local people bring their herd of cattle for drinking water to the *bāoli*. One of our native interviewees added;

My grandfather said, the caravan of Sher Shah Suri used to follow this route from Delhi to Kabul [GT Road] therefore their horses and camels have an easy access to the water. Also after every 3 miles such *bāolis* or caravanserais could be found frequently along the ancient routes constructed during the Sher Shah Suri and Mughul Periods to facilitate the travelers.³⁰

Thus, this rectangular shaped *bāoli* is located 7km from the *Rang Mahal* south-east of the town Akora Khattak on the right side of the road leading towards Peshawar.



Plate. 3
Outer-side of the *Sūri Bāoli*



Plate. 4
The western entrance of the *Sūri Bāoli*



Plate. 5
A top view the *Sūri Bāoli*

Hindus' Spiritual Bath (*Ashnān Ghāt*)

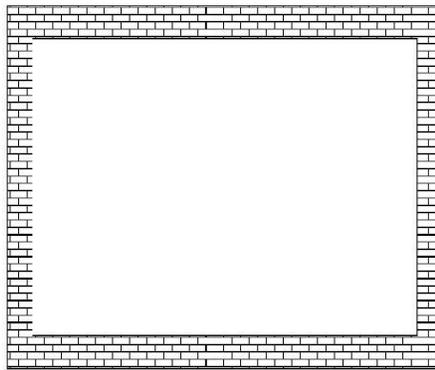
The *Ashnān Ghāt* is located on the left side of the G.T. Road, between the *Rang Mahal* and the *Sūri Bāoli* that is located on the right side. The current size of the *Ashnān Ghāt* is 35x15 fts. and is in rectangular shape. The construction materials were burnt bricks and lime stone with plaster of lime mortar but most part of the structure had been damaged by river water. The distance between these archaeological sites are few kilo-meters from each other. A tourist can visit all the three places within couple of hours.

For Hindus, morning cleansing with water is a basic obligation for their worship. The core of every religion is cleanliness of mind, speech and body and water plays thus an essential role. Every temple has a pond near it and devotees are supposed to clean themselves before entering the temple. Before doing worship cleanliness has to be observed by sipping drops of water while chanting specific mantras (*acamana*).

The Pakistan Hindu Rights Movements revealed 428 temples in Pakistan. However, only 20 have survived but ruined due to the negligence of Evacuee Trust Property Board or converted to other government usages.³¹ Similarly the *Ashnān Ghāt* under consideration is located on the bank of the River Kabul (*Lande Sen* (Small River) by the locals) nearby a Hindu temple. However, a government primary school was set in the temple after the partition of India but later on the provincial government dismembered the temple and allowed the local education authority for refurbishing a new middle-school commonly called '*Sen School*' (the river side school).

In the first place, the education department converted some area of the temple for girls' classroom and reserved the worship area where idols were fixed in the wall. [the interviewees pretended that he recalling his memory] I do not remember that from the last 40-50 years any of our Hindu brothers came here for worship. And the flood of 2010, wiped down the remaining relic of the temple. As it was a government property therefore it was converted to a primary school first, and now upgraded to a middle school.³²

We would argue that religious discrimination is not encouraged by our peaceful religion Islam and neither the constitution of Pakistan. Therefore, all the religious monuments should be preserved and protected for the minorities of Pakistan.



ASHNAN GHAT



Plate. 1

Rectangular 'Ashnān Ghāt' in the River Kabul Akora Khattak



Plate. 2

Rectangular 'Ashnān Ghāt' in the River Kabul, Akora Khattak

Analysis and Discussion

This archaeological reconnaissance of Akora Khattak (District Nowshera, Puktunkhwa) has immense significance with reference to Muslim archaeology in the region because of their location along the G.T. Road and on the other side placed on the bank of the mighty Kabul River. The previous archaeological investigations in the region attest that the area was rich in human cultural activities from the time immemorial. The art and architecture of these sites (the *Rang Maḥal* and *Suri Bāoli*) were scientifically studied in contrast with the Islamic period of monuments. Thus, our systematic study explored the *Rang Maḥal* (Plate. 1, 2) is as a *caravansarai* which was commonly built by Akbar the Great, while Shakerullah called it a palace because of 'Maḥal' translation of English. And because of its location in the Khattak Territory, he related the place with the eldest son of Khushal Khan Khattak, Ashraf Khan (father of Afdal Khan), who was a great Pushtu poet like his father. Ashraf Khan aesthetic sense was attracted by the beauty of the *Rang Maḥal* location, so, he developed and built this little resort for his pleasure.³³ In contrast, this study stance is that most of such *caravansarai* were built by the ruler for the recreational purpose as the literature search highlighted. Similar kinds of *caravansarai* existed on the other side of the River Indus in District Attock too. The authors explored another *caravansarai* that is located further down to the Attock Fort, while carrying out a survey in 2008. The decoration and colour scheme (Plate. 7, 8, 9) of the *Rang Maḥal* have similar pattern of the Mughul painting in the Badshahi Masjid and the Lahore Fort. Such type of fresco painting continued to the later Mughul period when various shrines and tombs of Potohar region were built. Nevertheless, later on most of the Sikh *gurdwara* and Hindu temples followed similar rich fresco paintings of the Mughul art and architecture. The *Sūri Bāoli* (Plate. 1, 2, 4) represents a sophisticated art and architecture of the Mughul and Suri dynasties. Therefore, the *Rang Maḥal* and the *Sūri Bāoli* located on the right side of the G.T. Road approximately 5/6km. Most of the *bāolis* have almost similar architecture; having deep stairs and arched opening, constructed with small bricks and lime plaster application (Plate. 1, 2, 3). Furthermore, South Asia has numbers of religious monuments of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim that are lying deserted. This study also explored such a religious ceremonial place of Hindu *Ashnān Ghāt* (Plate. 1, 2), which is still intact in the River Kabul (Akora Khattak). This place was used for sacred bath by local Hindu community before the partition of the Indian

subcontinent (1947). The place is with rectangular shape has bricks and stucco plaster. The structure is within the Kabul River therefore, it has been damaged by the constant water flow.

Conclusion

This systematic study of archaeologically important sites in Akora Khattak show that the area was of strategic importance to the region in the medieval period. The rich art and architecture especially the *Rang Mahal* and the *Sūri Bāoli* show that architectural activities started by the great Mughuls in medieval India could be witnessed in this small localities of present Khyber Puktunkhwa. As there is only scare information available about these archaeological sites of Akora Khattak, more in-depth research is needed to be done by the future researcher because Jalaluddin Akbar and later Sher Shah Suri's son Islam Shah Suri further in the particular developed their fathers' legacy (developing and perfecting road-side facilities) but no further details are available about such expansions. Similarly these sites are incredible style of the Mughul and Suri art's architecture. The construction style of these sites is still a visible example for future comprehensive studies. The Department of Archaeology and Museum Government of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Ahmad Hasan Dani and Shakirullah's intensive studies about the Mughul Monuments in District Nowshera explored some archaeological and historical aspects of the *Rang Mahal* but the remaining two sites were completely ignored. These locations could be a landmark for promoting tourism in the area. Since the condition of these monuments are not satisfactory and direly need necessary repairing and conservation to preserve for future generations. Thus, special attention and care is needed for renovation of these sites because most of the constructions are falling apart.

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