

RAMNAGAR: Unidentified glory of Jammu& Kashmir Heritage-A case Study

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Abstract- *The state of Jammu and Kashmir is known for its panoramic views i.e. tourism aspects as it is full of nature's bounties. The Architecture of the region is nevertheless not too far behind. Indeed, the Architecture of Jammu& Kashmir is as marvelous as the Indian Architecture has been over the years. Reason for this is obviously the time line of the state under so many rulers & dynasties. Indian Architecture for its historical essence & importance has occupied a special place in world Architecture which is a driving force in attracting so many tourists every year. Obviously, when I talk of Indian architecture or Jammu architecture it has to be the secular architecture i.e. Temple or Mosque architecture pre-dominantly. To add to it, state is also gracious with various architectural heritage marvels in both of its Jammu region as well as Kashmir region. These heritage structures are located in many such small towns of the state which historically were the capitals of some ruling dynasty or family. One such small town is Ramnagar, located in the Jammu region of the state about 105 kms from Jammu near to major city Udhampur of the region. Here is a small attempt from my side to bring into limelight various important heritage icons of this small town Ramnagar, which for a major part of its time-line is left neglected by tourists, administrators, most importantly the inquisitive academicians and thus by suitable agency for protection/preservation; more precisely, due to very little documentation about the same & the location of the town in the state.*

Key Words: *Heritage, Architecture, Dynasty, Jammu& Kashmir, documentation, India, Administrators.*

1. RAMNAGAR: Introduction and Background

The capital of erstwhile state of bandralta was situated at the latitude of 32 degree-48' and longitude of 75 degree-48' from sea level and about 105 kms from Jammu and 38kms

on west by Udhampur, towards to Dhar Road, to the south of Chanehni and it was bounded on the east by Bhadrawah, on the south by Mankot or open space on the left bank of the Ramnagar kad and junction with the Tawi. Between the tawi and Ramnagar in particular, they dip usually out an angle of about 45 degree with a steep abutment on the north. The capital was originally called nagar, as being the only town in the principality. And the ruling family took their dynasty of Bandralta from the name of the tract. It was founded by the royal family of Chamba belong to the chand dynasty about 1000-1020 A.D. The vansavali contains only twenty-one names down to the extinction of the state in 1822, giving an average of nearly forty years to each, which is very improbably. We must, therefore, conclude that many names have been omitted in copying. During the same period, there are thirty names in the Chamba roll of Raja (King)s.



Fig -1: Ramnagar City with location of Fort and Palace.

It is said a tradition of a Tahuraian period in ancient times, and much the same reason is given for the invasion of the tact as in the case of other states, viz, tyranny and oppression of their subject by the ranas and Thakurs. As a result, some of the Zamindars went to Chamba to ask help. Vichittar verma (980-1000 A.D) was then in power and unable to go himself he sent his younger brother, who vanquished the ranas and made himself ruler. A tradition is current which throws light on the methods employed to get rid of troublesome opponents. It is to the effect that the Raja (King) and the local Rana both availed themselves of the services of the some Baber who was bribed to cut the

Rana's the throat while shaving him. In this way a powerful rival was removed. Seventy-two petty chiefs are said to have been overcome by one means or another and the Raja (King) then assumed the name Bahattar to mark the fact.

1.1 Origin of Ramnagar

With the rise of the Sikh power in the Punjab, Ramnagar fell into the hands of the Sikh forces in 1822 A.D, thus, the Bandral dynasty was ended. The hill state was bestowed upon Raja (King) Suchet Singh, brother of Gulab Singh by Ranjit Singh, the tract was made over to him in jagir. The ancient line was then deposed but allowed to remain for a time. This, however, was soon found to be awkward, as an attempt made to recover the territory, and they were finally exiled from the State. They first retired to Kangra, where they resided for some time under the protection of Raja (King) Sansar Chand, but afterward went of tehri-Garwal and finally settled at Shahzadpur in the Ambala district. The last Raja (King) to exercise ruling power was Bhupendhar dev who died at Shahzadpur. He had been assigned a pension of Rs.3000 by government, which is still paid to the family. Raja (King) Suchet Singh took much interest in ramnagar, became the ruler of Bandralta from 1822. A.D to 1844 A.D .i.e more than a score of years, who renamed Bandralta as Ramnagar.

2. MARVELS OF RAMNAGAR

- Ramnagar Palace
- Fort
- Samadhi
- Paintings of Ramnagar
- Baradari or Pavilion
- Raja ki Baoli
- Ramnagar Fort
- Samadhi

3. RAMNAGAR PALACE



Fig -2: Ramnagar Palace.

Ramnagar palaces were constructed by the Bandral lords but they were renovated and constructed by Raja (King) Suchet Singh, Where he used to reside and also a fort on

the chaugan which was held by a garrison. On his death in Lahore in 1844A.D. his ranis became sati, and the spot was marked by a garden. As he died issueless the jagir reverted to Jammu. At a later time it was granted as a Chief to Raja (King) Ram Singh, second son of MahaRaja (King) Ranbir Singh, and on his demise without the male heir, it again became merged in the Jammu state. The paintings of the palaces demonstrate that Raja (King) Suchet Singh like Raja (King) Sanasar Chand II of Kangra was a connoisseur of Bandral School of pahari paintings. The wall- paintings of the palaces reveal the socio-cultural, religious, political and economic history of the areas. Moreover, paintings depict the military achievement of the Raja (King) Suchet Singh and his lifestyle.



Fig -3: Ramnagar Palace- A Sketch View.

It consists of three parts:

- Purana Mahal
- Nawa Mahal
- Sheesh Mahal

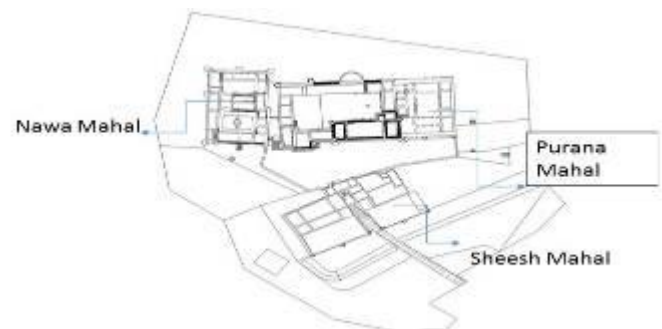


Fig -4: Ramnagar Palace- Constituents.

3.1 Purana Mahal (Old Palace)

Built by Raja (King) Suchet Singh, the Purana Mahal consists of a complex of rooms rising to three storeys having high walls with watchtowers at regular intervals. The walls of the rooms are decorated with stucco work and painted with floral designs. The wooden members of the ceiling are also profusely decorated. The corners of the roofs have projections in the shape of lotus flowers.

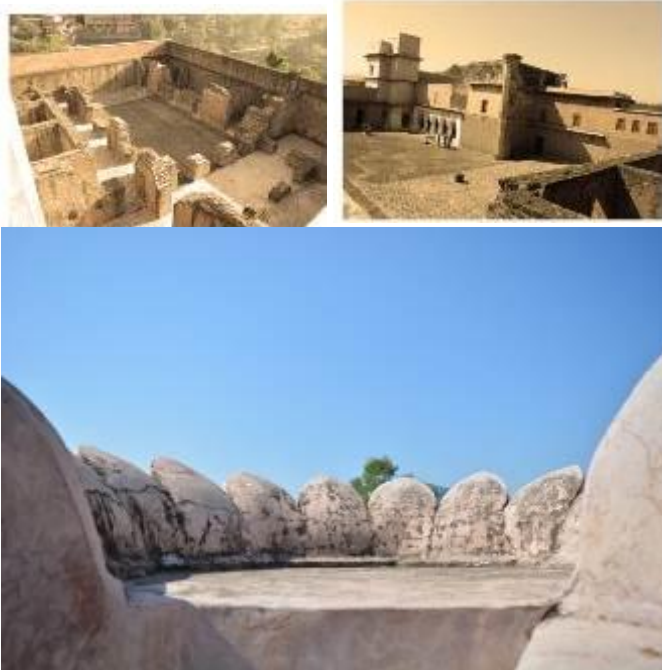


Fig -5: Purana Mahal-Ramnagar Palace.

3.2 Nawa Mahal (New Palace)



Fig -6: Nawa Mahal-Ramnagar Palace.

It was built by Raja (King) Ram Singh, son of Raja (King) Ranbir Singh. The complex has open courtyards surrounded by rooms with two entrances facing each other in opposite wings. The outer walls are high and are duly supported by buttresses. The rooms has false wooden ceiling and the interior walls are decorated with floral designs.

3.3 Sheesh Mahal

Built during the resign of Raja (King) Ram Singh, it comprises two forecourts having burjis at the corners. Behind these are halls and rooms flanked on either side of the central passage. To the right of the entrance is Dewan-e-aam with rooms at its back. To the left of entrance are Darbar Hall, Sheesh Mahal and Rang Mahal respectively. Raja (King) Suchet Singh was honourable courtier in the court of MahaRaja (King) Ranjit Singh of Punjab besides a great general. He, like that of Raja (King) Sansar Chand of Kangra, was a great connoisseur of art and architecture. Bandralta School of painting which took shape in the reign of Bandral feudal lords flourished in the reign of Raja (King) Suchet Singh. Raja (King) Suchet Singh gifted some rare monuments to Ramnagar, among them Sheesh Mahal is superb in its execution of frescos.



Fig -7: Sheesh Mahal-Ramnagar Palace.

Sheesh Mahal is a peculiar building constructed on the pattern of old Havelis with a wide decorated entrance flanked by lavish chambers profusely decorated with wall paintings. On to the right side of the entrance there are three prodigal halls popularly known as Darbar Hall, Sheesh Mahal and Rang Mahal. Darbar Hall is a big chamber having size of 46' x 18' the walls of which are profusely decorated with frescos. These wall paintings are done peculiarly in the pahari style of Bandralta School. Great epic, Mahabharata and Ramayana are the subject matters exhibited with due acumen. A few wall paintings carry the portraiture of Raja (King) Suchet Singh attending the Darbar along with his courtiers in enchantment. A few of the battle scenes with Raja (King) Suchet Singh in the centre of episode add a glamour to the whole atmosphere. This hall, as the name suggests, might have been in use as royal court. The wall paintings were well suited to the psyche of the courtiers. The second big chamber is smaller in size but profusely decorated in several panels richly adorned with the paintings of runners, creepers, trailers and flowery borders covering

the frames of hunting scenes, working court scenes and portraits of kings and courtiers. Unique feature of this part of the palace is the beautiful portrait of Nayikas adorned with the transparent petticoats through his trousers peep out. Large elliptical eyes, narrow head, pointed nose and slim body catches the glimpses of style of Basohli and Jammu school of miniature paintings with still background. Nayika is well covered with upper garments ornamented with necklaces, earrings, nose rings and hairclips. The very balanced body depicting perfect body lines speak the acumen of the artists. A scene done in niche of Raja (King) Suchet Singh proceeding for a hunt is again a feast for the eyes. Raja (King) Suchet Singh, seated on the back of galloping white horses is led by a hunting dog followed by a servant carrying an umbrella to protect feudal lord the scorching sun. The painting is decorated with red, white and sky coloured border lines which again are bordered by golden leaflets, trailers and at the corners adorned by cut glasses of golden and blue colours. Some of the niches, once done with the paintings of princess and Nayikas are now replaced with portraits of English beauties of European origins. The most interesting and penetrating work of these paintings is done on the apexes of these niches wherein thousands of characters are painted with perfect division of spaces in such meticulous way that its character, despite its minute structure can be segregated with ease. They include battle scenes with thousands of cavaliers, elephants, armoured soldiers marching to the battlefields. They are equipped with weapons followed by guns on wheels. These battle scenes are so perfectly with due penetration that in very limited space, a world of weaponry and thrills of hand to hand fight surcharged with emotions come on the surface and onlookers are much fascinated. This part of the palace is known as the Rang Mahal. It might have been in use for entertainments, music and dance for the royalty. Usually the professional dancers and the singers were there in the retaining of the feudal lords. Some of the paintings depict such dancers in action. In addition of the above said paintings, the walls of Rang Mahal are decorated with a series of love frolics of Lord Krishna with Gopis. Several scenes are feast for the eyes. Ragas and Raginis personified in shining colours are again in a source of attraction for the art historians and art connoisseurs. All these paintings are bordered with the several running motifs, creepers, runners, trailers with alternate flowers and green leaves along with the number of geometrical designs in the form of multi angular structures. Tops and corners of these niches are decorated with beautiful red flowers again internally shining with golden colour.

Third chamber adjoin to the Rang Mahal is that of Sheesh Mahal. As the name suggest, the walls of this hall are decorated with cut glasses intermittently woven with fine paintings. These paintings are done in number of panels and the subject matter of these paintings is almost the same as those of the Rang Mahal. However, in the corners,

some paintings of English ladies have taken place of the paintings done by masters of Bandralta School. It may be possible that the original paintings done by the great artists of Bandralta School might have been taken away by the persons responsible for the upkeep of the palaces after the feudalism vanished. Who were these persons and how the portraits of English ladies came into existence, no one knows. Some people are of the view that before the merger of erstwhile states into the union of India, an English resident was residing in sheesh mahal. If it is true then the riddle is solved that he might have taken away the prized miniature paintings done by the master artist and to keep the frames straight and to set the records in right direction, he copied the vacant spaces with the portraits of English ladies. However, paintings in the form of frescoes are still preserved. The most fascinating wall paintings are those of the Nayikas painted on the upper panels of the corner slabs. Perfectly balanced body clad in ornamental attire adorned with semi-precious stones stuffed with the help of fine needle work and myriad shining colours are but a few of the features of these paintings. The features of these lady characters are conspicuously of Bandralta School which in its turn might have taken the impression from Jammu and Basohli School of miniature paintings.

4. PAINTINGS OF RAMNAGAR

4.1 Marriage Painting



Fig -8: Sketch-Paintings of Ramnagar.

In the wall painting of Ramnagar , the painter was very close to the Dogra society, he painted a marriages scene of Raja (King) Suchet Singh. In this picture, the rites and rituals of the marriage ceremony Dogra society have been highlighted. Women have been shown wearing colourful dress. Few ladies and a man are shown awaiting to receive the bride and bridegroom to perform the ritual at that time.

4.2 Ritual Painting



Fig -9: Ramnagar Paintings-A Sketch.

Ritual scene has also been painted by the Jammu painter, Raja (King) Suchet Singh has been proceeding on a war procession. Before the departure religious ceremony is shown performed by the religious guru of the Raja (King)'s. most of the people are shown assembled near the hawankund, they are praying for the safety and victory of Raja (King) Suchet Singh.

5. BARADARI

Baradari of Raja (King) Ram Singh is a composite form of actual Bardari or pavilion with 6 doors designed to allow free flow of air rather than 12 door. The structure has three doorways on one side of the square shaped structure in spite of every side.

It was built by MahaRaja (King) Ranbir Singh in 1844. Elegant carved pillars support delicate cusped arches. The central area, where MahaRaja (King) Ram Singh held court, has a mirrored ceiling. The pavilion consisted of two storey.



Fig -10: Baradari Ramnagar.

6. RAJA KI BAOLI

BAOLI or bavali (Stepped Well) is a masonry well with steps leading down to water level. but had not yet

invented mechanical devices to draw water out of it. Before masonry art was developed, baolis must have been only shallow pits with a sloping path down to the water, vertical walls and dented steps confined only to rocky regions. The images of gods were carved on the wall stones of baoli.



Fig -11: Ramnagar –Raja ki Baoli.

7. FORT

Old palace of Ramnagar was the fortified area as secure as a fort as such no separate fort was built. But during the reign of Raja (King) Suchet Singh the need of erecting a fort came into existence owing to the prevailing circumstances. A site was selected which was a ridge situated almost at a distance of about 800 meters from the old palace. It is a square in structure 42.65 x42.65 meters in measurement, a masonry work of huge cut stones mortared with lime powder and the paste of legumes. Four corners of the fort make the four turrets constructed on solid bastions. These turrets form the observation posts where guards were always there observing the activities of the enemy and they could watch these activities from miles at a distance. The fort is a perfect square in structure, the walls which are 200 feet in length constitute outer parapets of the fort. They are made of solid stones mortared with the help of lime and legume paste. There is a main gate opening to the east side of the moat which is almost 40 feet in height and 20 feet wide. Entrance of the gate is covered by two heavy wooden gates 20 feet in length and almost 5 feet wide each. The upper arch of the door is artistically carved the apex of which is decorated with an image of Shri Ganesha. On both sides of the gate we find images of god Hanuman and Durga. On the left side of the image of Durga we find another image of Bhairava. Perhaps these images were meant for security of the fort. There is a well just on one side of the door wherefrom water was used for daily requirement. There is another well at the back of courtyard serving the same purpose.



Fig -12: Glimpses of Ramnagar Fort.

Entrance to the fort is through a large Deodi (entrance hall) with measurement of 10.5mx4.4m supported by fluted pillars. On the right lateral side of the Deodi (entrance hall) there is a wide chamber attached with the main Deodi (entrance hall) through three arched entrances 6'x5.5' in area supported by fluted pillars the central entrance is the largest. This chamber was meant for the Deodi (entrance hall) (Fig.2) officer, a security officer of the fort.

The interior of the fort is well maintained with the help of lush green lawns, and toward west direction of the fort we find an ammunition chamber wherein cannon-balls of solid iron are well preserved. Earlier it was a temple with 4.5x6m dimensions. The fort is joined with the green land with the help of wooden bridge bridging the gap of the moat which is almost 15 feet wide and having the same depth.

8. SAMADHI

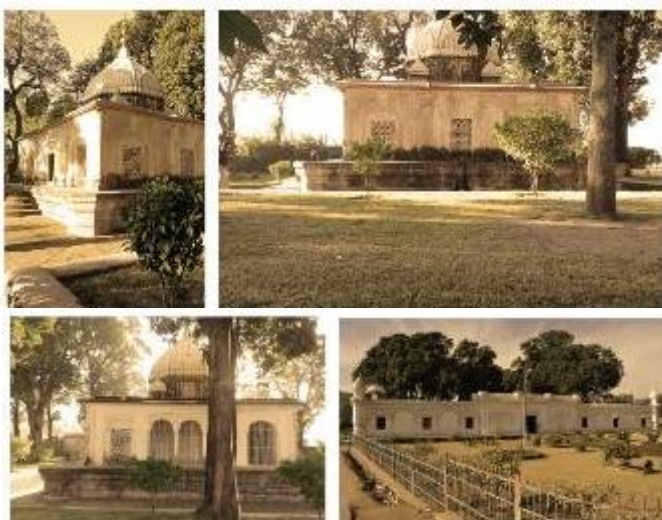


Fig -13: Glimpses of Samadhi-Ramnagar Fort.

Samadhi constructed in mausoleum style with a door having pinnacles with four metallic pitchers gradually tapering up to the apex. The Samadhi is located at the place where the queen of Raja (King) Suchet Singh performed the rite of sati upon hearing the news of the death of the Raja (King). It is a rectangular chamber where the remains of the queen of Raja (King) Suchet Singh are buried. The interior of the Samadhi so formed was lavishly decorated with murals which are now in a very bad shape due to the smoke gathered by burning of continuous lamp inside the Samadhi.

9. TEMPLES OF RAMNAGAR

Ramnagar has few famous temples as well particularly the Narsingh Temple of Ramnagar is very famous from ancient times. Local people of Jammu, Udhampur, Ramnagar & surrounding areas visit this temple more comparatively particularly due to its location in proximity to Fort, Palace and Main Bazaar, Ramnagar. This beautiful also possess Choutra Mata Mandir & Shiv Mandir (Temple) in close proximity to each other with in the heart of Town. Most of the Local visitors pay their prayers at these temples too particularly Nar-Singh Temple while visiting Fort, Samadhi & Palace of Ramnagar.

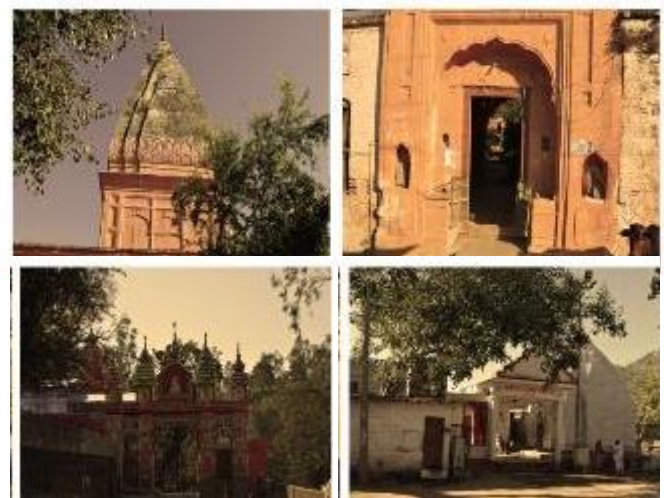


Fig -14: Ramnagar Temples- Clockwise from Left Top: Choutra Mata Temple, Choutra Mata Temple entry, Shiv Mandir (Temple) & Famous Nar-Singh Temple.

10. CONCLUSIONS

This becomes clear to the mind that Historical Marvels like Forts, castles along with temples were the hub of educational and political activities in ancient times. The main point, which needs to be driven to the mind of everybody, is that it captivates everybody who happens to

observe it. Though, I haven't touched the other parts of state whose architecture heritage may be indeed even more glorifying, still My idea of emphasizing the Importance of heritage of the region is to call on the administrators to rejuvenate & preserve these heritage marvels of Jammu region (Ramnagar) by making them the part of main tourist circuit e.g. Vaishno Devi shrine, Amarnath yatra, Jammu to Kashmir Road Route (Tourists). By doing this, this tourism gracious state can add another feather on its economy & additionally, it will add a great deal to enrich & spread the tones of ancient heritage Architecture worldwide. The call of the time is that we must preserve our ancient heritage monuments (ASI has taken over the Kirmachi group of temples-02 hours from Ramnagar) so that we could proclaim with the beat of drum that our past was great and illuminating.

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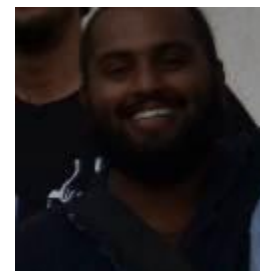
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Ar. Sanjay Sridhar has recently did his Graduation (B.Arch.) from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Katra. His interest basically lies in Futuristic Architecture & innovative Architectural Forms using 21st century Innovative Materials. Presently, he is engaged in self-practice in Chennai. His future interest lies in post-graduation from reputed Abroad University & working with some reputed Architects of the world before opening up his own office in India.