

SO-CALLED TOMB OF KHAIR-UN-NISA NEAR ROHTAS FORT, JHELMUM: ITS HISTORY, ARCHITECTURE AND CONSERVATION PROBLEMS

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The Tomb is situated on the right side of Dina-Rohtas Fort road across the Kahan *Nalah*. In Hindi 'Roh' means mountain and 'Tas' means leveled place¹. The Rohtas fort was built on a levelled hill or mountain. In Bengal 'Rohtas' means *garh*² (castle, fort). Before the construction of the fort, this place was called *mandi*. It is pertinent to point out that any contemporary or later historian has not recorded the exact date of the construction of the tomb nor any inscription appears on the tomb itself. According to local traditions it is said that:

1. This tomb belongs to prince Khurram son of Sher Shah Suri from his wife Roshan Ara. Who was buried here temporarily. Afterwards his dead body was shifted to Bihar³
2. Sher Shah Suri's daughter, Zaib-un-Nisa, was buried temporarily in this tomb. Then her dead body was shifted to Bihar⁴.
3. Khair-un-Nisa daughter of Qadir Buksh, Quarter Master, was buried here temporarily, then her dead body was shifted to Bihar⁵.
4. Khair-un-Nisa was the daughter of Qadir Buksh, who was the minister for food during the reign of Sher Shah Suri, the tomb was empty and Qadir Buksh buried the dead body of his daughter. When Salim Shah came to Rohtas Fort, he was angry when he knew about the burial of Khair-un-Nisa. He ordered Qadir Buksh to shift the dead body of his daughter. He obeyed the orders and shifted her dead body to another place near this tomb⁶.

The architectural projects of Sher Shah Suri resolved themselves into two distinct manifestations: each produced under diverse conditions and in two different locations. The earlier phase emerged during the period that this accomplished Afghan adventurer was all powerful in the lower provinces, the mausolea of his family that were erected at his capital seat of Sasaram in Bihar, illustrating the fulfillment of the Lodhi Style.

The second phase depicts the building art after Sher Shah wrested the throne of Delhi from Mughal emperor, Humayun⁷.

Sher Shah Suri built the Grand Trunk Road, mosque, *Sarais baolies* and Dak posts along the G.T. Road at suitable distances for the convenience of public. The Suri dynasty reigned for 15 years. Almost all the outstanding buildings of the Suri period are now in India except two: the Rohtas Fort and a mosque within the Akbari Sarai at Shahdara, Lahore of the time of Islam Shah Suri (954 AH)⁸.

The tomb of Khair-un-Nisa is a unique building of the Suri period for being the only mausoleum of this period now extant in Pakistan. It was built in three receding storeys. The first and second storeys are built in semi ashlar stone laid in lime mortar, while the dome in small bricks.

The ground storey, measuring 39'x39' externally and 22'-9"x22'-9" internally, is 16'-3" high, built on a raised platform. The central portion of each side is projected and higher than the sides and is 20 feet.

The three entrances lie in the eastern, northern and southern walls. There is a *mehrab* in the western wall in the shape of recessed arched panel.

Each arched entrance is enclosed by rectangular frame, then further two arched frames outwards. A rectangular frame encloses the outer arch. On the sides of the door opening, there are two arched alcoves enclosed by rectangular frame on each side of the projected portion. Below the parapet is projected moulding. The parapet of central projected high portion is embellished with blind merlons while the rest is without any decoration.

The eastern and northern side elevations are similar. On the south side, there is a door opening meant for stairs-case in the left side recessed arched panel. Two stairs rise one each towards north and east side, special feature only found in this tomb.

The western facade is also like other except a small variation, which is without door opening because the *mehrab* exists in the west wall. The *mehrab* is not projected from the wall on its exterior like other tombs.

There are four kiosks hexagonal in plan; one on each corner and supported by pillars. The kiosk is surmounted by a cupola with six sided neck and crowned with lantern in the form of inverted lotus and finial.

On the ground square storey is placed the second storey, which is octagonal with each side measuring 8 feet wide and 8 feet high with a passage on all sides. Below the parapet is moulding. The parapet is decorated with merlons in stucco. The octagonal storey is surmounted with a hemispherical dome crowned with a lantern and a finial.

The whole outer surface is finished with glazed lime plaster over a base of *kankar* lime plaster.

The tomb is square internally. Each side has high arched panel in the centre enclosed by a rectangular frame. The spandrels of the arches are decorated with medallions of stucco work in the shape of lotus flower, arabesque, having 'kalimah', word 'Allah' etc. On each side of the central arches, there is recessed arched panel enclosed by rectangular frame but smaller in size.

For providing the zone of transition the first square is converted into 8 sides by providing half dome squinches in the corners. The spandrels of the squinches are also decorated with medallions. Pendants in stucco work are also found at the meeting corners. The octagonal is further converted into 16 sides by providing squinches in the corners or the circular base of the dome. Each side has recessed arched panel enclosed by rectangular frame.

The spandrels of the arches are decorated with medallions of stucco work. Pendants in stucco are also found at the top of meeting corners. Above the transition of 16 sides, a frieze is running all around having Quranic verses in Kufic *amaiz* thulth character. This character of calligraphy is also found at the tomb of Ibrahim Sur at Narnaul in India (cir. 1540 AD)⁹.

The construction of this tomb is inspired from the Chhota Khan-ka Gumbad, Delhi¹⁰, Dadi-Poti Gumbad at Kherara near Delhi built in the last decade of 15th century AD¹¹ and tomb of Ibrahim Sur at Narnaul (cir. 1540 AD)¹²

Causes of Decay

The following few major factors are considered mainly responsible for the decay of the tomb.

a. Natural causes having a prolonged action

- i. Physical causes: Age, water, humidity, temperature and wind
- ii. Chemical and Electro chemical causes: water and atmosphere
- iii. Botanical causes: the growth of autonomous plants
- iv. Biological and micro-biological causes algae

b. Natural causes having an occasional action

Rain water penetration and earthquakes

c. Causes depending upon human behaviour

Gratifies, house of cattle in the tomb

Present Condition and Proposed Conservation Measures

The plaster on the dome has bulged out at places and cracks have developed. Graffiti's are also appearing on all parts which mar the beauty of the monument. The surface of the dome is blackish due to algae. The decayed patches of the plaster should be scrapped and restored with the material similar to the original. Algae should be removed and the dome should be refinished with glazed lime plaster.

The plaster of the second storey is also decayed at places and is covered with algae. The algae should be removed. The decayed plaster should be scrapped and refinished.

The plaster on the exterior of ground storey is decayed at places. After dismantling the decayed plaster it should be replastered. Decayed and missing stone masonry should also be restored. All missing merlons should be restored according to original shape and design.

Vegetation growth is found on top of the roof. It should be removed. Restoration of the kiosks should be done and missing parts of pinnacles of three kiosks should be restored. Lime terracing on the roof and parapets should be re-done. The masonry of the two staircases, which is in very bad shape, should be restored.

In the interior, the soffit of the dome is mostly without plaster. It should be re-done.

The surface of the second and ground storey should be cleaned with great care and decayed plaster should be removed and re-done with original kind of material. The horizontal frieze showing verses of Holy Quran is missing at places. The entire band should be cleaned and the remaining original inscription should be preserved.

Instead, the local people house here their cattle at night. This practice should be stopped. There is no trace of grave in the tomb floor at present. The floor of the tomb should be re-laid and finished with lime terraced flooring.

The platform around the tomb is missing on the three sides. It should be restored. The floor should be finished with lime concrete as per original.

The surroundings of the tomb should be levelled upto a reasonable extent within which area jungle growth should also be removed.

Notes

¹ Munir Muhammad Safdar Hussain, *Tarikh Rohtas*, Jhelum, 1980, p-27.

² Raja Muhammad Arif Minhas, *Pakistan-kay- Asar-e-Qadeema*, Islamabad , 1997, p-279.

³ Ibid, p-279.

⁴ Ibid, p-279.

⁵ Ibid, p-279., Munir Muhammad Safdar Hussain, *Tarikh Rohtas*, Jhelum, 1980, pp-36,37.

⁶ M. Yawir Hussain Saqi, *Qila Rohtas Ka Tarikhi Safar*, Jhelum, p-27,28

⁷ Brown P, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, Bombay, Seventh reprint, 1981, p-84.

⁸ Kamil Khan Mumtaz, *Architecture in Pakistan*, Singapore, 11989, pp 53, 67.

⁹ Catherine B. Ashler, *Indian Epigraphy*, "The Tomb of Ibrahim Sur", New Delhi, 1985, pls. 261-63.

¹⁰ Brown P, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, Bombay, Seventh reprint, 1980, pl. C V.

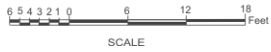
¹¹ Ibid, Pl. CVI.

¹² Catherine B. Ashler, *Indian Epigraphy*, 'The Tomb of Ibrahim Sur', New Delhi, 1985, pp-275, 276 & Pl. 252.

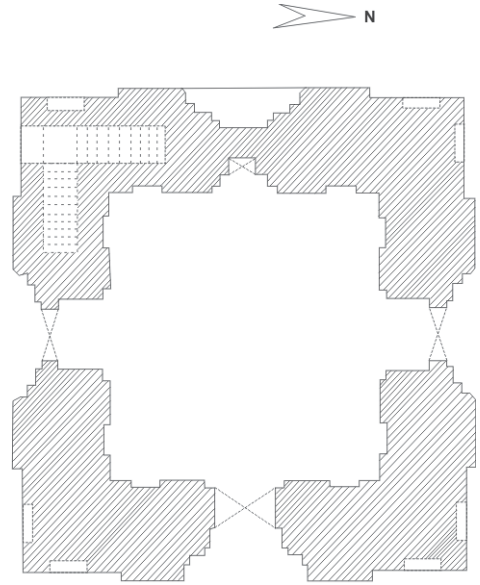
TOMB OF KHAIR-UN-NISA NEAR ROHTAS FORT DISTT. JHELUM



ELEVATION



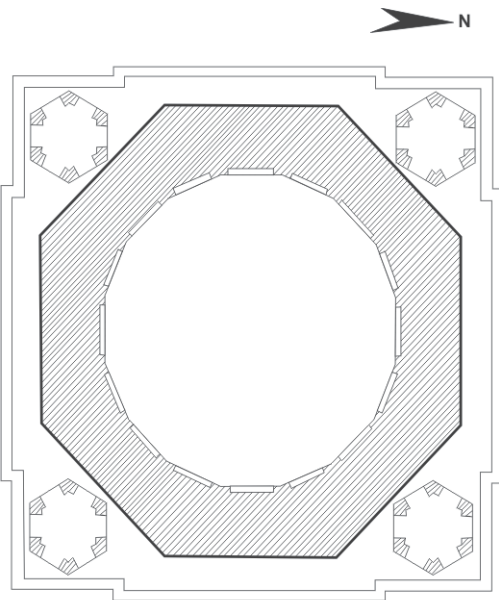
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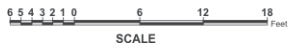
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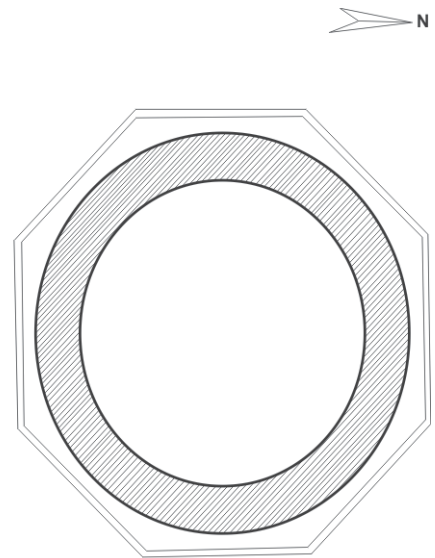
TOMB OF KHAIR-UN-NISA NEAR ROHTAS FORT DISTT. JHELUM



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



TOMB OF KHAIR-UN-NISA NEAR ROHTAS FORT DISTT. JHELUM



2 ND FLOOR PLAN

