

GLIMPSE OF THE UNEXPLORED – Forts of Solah Singi Dhar, Himachal

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Abstract— Himalayas which ranges from North- West India to North – East India is not only the biggest natural asset which holds enormous beauty like rivers, lakes and snow covered peaks, along with diverse flora and fauna but has also preserved India's ancient cultural and built heritage from decades. Many of these built heritages have got their place in India's map as cultural, religious and tourist destinations. Though these destinations are the prints of our built heritage, a true admirer of nature, art and architecture still looks for untouched and unexplored beauty. This study is an attempt to showcase one of such hidden treasure in foothills of lower western Himalayas (Fort of Solah Singi Dhar) to rest of the world. It also tries to develop these monuments as a part of tourist circuit and tracking destination in the tourist map of Himachal Pradesh. The research also shows that there is a huge scope for preservation and restoration of these forts which talks about the art and architecture of Katoch Dynasty.

Keywords— Built Heritage, Conservation, Fort, Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

POPULARLY known as the Devbhumi - "Land of the Gods", Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful hill state in India, nestles in north-west region of western Himalayas. The state stands apart from its neighbours in terms of its sheer topographic diversity and breathtaking pristine natural beauty. The earliest known inhabitants of the region were tribals called Dasas. During the Mughal period, the Rajas of the hill states made some mutually agreed arrangements which governed their relations. In the 19th century, Ranjit Singh conquered many of the state parts.

II. OVERVIEW OF DISTRICT UNA

UNA has been carved out of Hoshiarpur district (Punjab) in 1966 after the hilly areas of Punjab were transferred to Himachal Pradesh. It is adjoined with Kangra, Hamirpur and Bilaspur. UNA acts as entry gateway to Himachal Pradesh (Fig. 1).

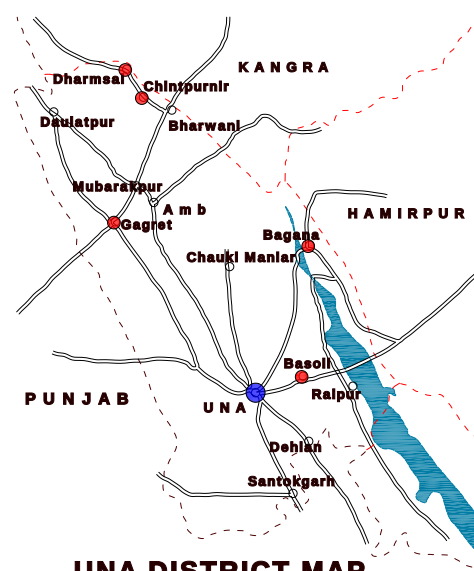
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HIMACHAL PRADESH MAP

Fig. 1 Himachal Pradesh Map



UNA DISTRICT MAP

Fig. 2 Una District Map

The town of Una is situated by the side of Swan River which is the tributary of the Sutlej River. Una is a small town having various Temples and heritage buildings. This region was mainly under the rule of katoach dynasty (Fig. 2).

III. KATOACH DYNASTY

Katoch is the name of a Rajput clan belonging to the Chandravanshi Kshatriya lineage. Their traditional areas of residence was Trigarta Kingdom, Jalandhar, Multan i.e. the areas of residence are mainly in the Indian states of Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu. The Katoch dynasty is considered to be the oldest surviving royal dynasty in the world. They first find mention in the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the second mention is in the recorded history of Alexander the Great's war records. One of the Indian kings who in the time of Alexander ruled area near Kangra is said to be a Katoch king. In Mahabharata they are referred to as Trigarta who fight Arjuna [2]. Raja Susarma Chandra fought Pandav Arjuna. He was ally of Duryodhana and sworn enemy of Virat and Matsya Kingdoms.

The katoch's were also known for their sword skills. In past centuries, they ruled several princely states in the region. The originator of the clan was Rajanaka Bhumi Chand. Their famous Maharaja Sansar Chand-II was a great ruler. The ruler Rajanaka Bhumi Chand Katoch founded the Jwalaji Temple in Himachal Pradesh. The history of the Katoch Dynasty has been show cased at the Maharaja Sansar Chand Museum adjoining the Kangra Fort. Forts of Solah Singi Dhar have been constructed by the same dynesty kings from 11th till mid 13th cen. for demarkiting their empire. Transition in architectural vocabulary of fort design can be easily seen in examples of forts in Kangra, Una and Sujampur region of Katoach kings. They are not only varying in scale but also in craftsmanship to a great extent.

IV. FORTS OF SOLAH SINGI DHAR

The sub-Himalyan hills commonly known as SOLAH SINGHI or JASWAN DHAR range commences near Talwara on the Beas with its highest point reach at Bharwain which is 2018 feet above sea level. The range runs towards Sutlej (Govind Sagar Lake), its north side submerging gradually into Beas Valley, but on the south it has an abrupt fall of 200 and 300 feet and between the main range and the plains This area, some 24 Kms. in length and 21 kms. in width is thickly forested. At a short distance south to Amb, the SOLAH SINGHI range/JASWAN DHAR range recedes eastward ceasing to form the boundary of Una district and the plains at this point form a kind of bay in the hills. Across the Sutlej the range breaks into a series of parallel ranges of no more height but rocky and at places precipitous though their slopes are well covered with grass and brush wood.

The two forts built by Kings of Katoach dynasty on hill top, overlooked the ranges and were located at very safe and strategic locations (Fig. 3). At present these forts can be visited by the link road diverting from Una- Hamirpur highway via Dhaneta. The bifurcation comes just at well known religious place, piplu [1]. These forts are on top of the hill and approached by means of tough terrine.



Fig. 3 View of forts from approach road

V. OLD FORT, UNA

This fort was built by a cadet of the Katoch line about A.D.1170, whose name is said to have been Purab Chand. Fort is a beautiful piece of architecture and portrays ages old delicacy of stone craftsmanship. Having no proper pathway the approach path is like mountain climbing. Only mentally strong and physical fit person can reach the fort.



Fig. 4 First Glimpse of forts

As this fort is not easily accessible, no infrastructure is available around the monument. The slope of hill ranges from 60 – 85 degree and at some places one has to jump over deep valley ring are intend hill side making trip really daring and interesting. Fort is almost in ruined condition with internal court, exterior wall, and entrance gateway and watch tower. Whole place is dominated by small shrubs and trees. Though built form is almost gone glimpse of stone architecture is still visible. Walls with mud and dry masonry are nearly one meter thick. Sitting on top one can view the whole area (Fig. 4). It is really pleasant feeling being at this place and cold wing even



Fig. 5 Dilapidated Wall of Fort Telling the Story of Its Lost Identity in month of June makes you feel as if its heaven. Sitting here and moving in fort is really fun. Fort has lot for all its visitors.



Fig. 7 Internal Court of The Fort, Now Covered With Bushes



Fig. 6 Entrance gateway giving the glimpse of sky signifying the old glory

Entrance gateway is made very small with low height and only one person can enter easily at one time (Fig.6). Most interesting fact is that one can only enter the fort from front side only. Other three sides are deep cliff and not at all accessible. As old fort is on top of hill one can have visual glimpse of new fort built on next hill top. This fort comes first on route and fun of exploring other fort increases once you are on top of its massive walls looking at next unexplored. Going down the hill is more dangerous due to its slope. As this is on rocky terrain it is difficult to get grass for holding. Although one has to be very careful at this place but joy of this wonderful trip will remain in mind for years. Small village at foot hill is a nice resting place.

VI. MAIN FORT UNA

The fort is on top of hill and approached by means of pathway. The path for this fort is better than the previous one but much higher. This fort was built in late 12th cen. by Katoach dynasty. This fort is marvelous piece of architecture. Though it is in dilapidated condition (Fig.5) still by being at this place one can feel the complete essence of that old time (Fig.7). Presently construction is carried out around the old structure to retain the remains. There is one beautiful temple on the way to fort. Best thing of the fort is the deep well which

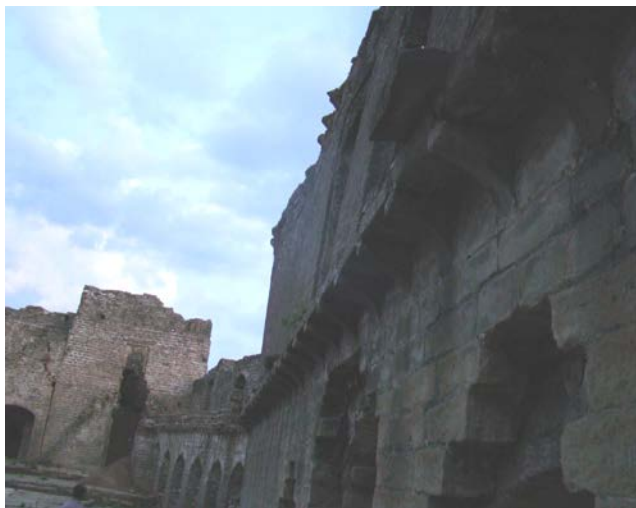


Fig. 8 Stone Carved Cornices and Arches Portraying the Architectural Vocabulary



Fig. 10 View Of Court During Night Time

has been constructed on top of hill and still having water. Fort has large Court (Fig.10) and number of chambers with separate place for king, queen and his ministers. Castles are often built on sites that were naturally defensible, for example on cliff tops or mountain tops. If no mountain top or cliff was available then at least a hill could be constructed. These forts are really good examples of old heritage. These are fine example of fort architecture of katoach dynasty [1]. Fort is mixture of Hindu and Muslim architecture having spaces from Hindu architecture and elements from Muslim architecture. Fort is basically two storeys with central court (Fig.8). Upper portion was for private residence and court is also divided in two zones, front one as public and back one as royal court (Fig.9). Fort can be approached from two sides and other two sides are steep and deep cliffs. Whole of the fort is guarded by the high ramparts and massive stone wall. Major attraction is design of cornice and arches. Most of the upper part is fallen but one can go on top from rear most part. This place is slightly preserved and well is still used by the local while coming for grazing around fort. Nice pattern of stone can be observed on the floors distinguishing the space as per use. As these forts have no



Fig. 9 Main Face of The Dilapidated Wall, Giving First Glimpse of The Fort

amenities around them one needs to carry food and first aid kit in case of emergency. As per locals some time leopards are seen in theses area making visit only day time affair. Away from commercialized heritage destinations these forts stand alone and tell their story to rest of the world in silent way,

VII. EFFORTS BY GOVERNMENT

State government is working on creation of quality tourism infrastructural facilities under Una-Chintpurni-Bilaspur Circuit. As Una district has a number of heritage and off beat destinations which can be developed to attract maximum visitors the idea is to connect religious places with such tracking locations. Camping sites at Solah Singhi Dhar and fort at Aloah will be developed by spending Rs. 45 lakh .

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The most evident revealing fact about this work is to appreciate, how fort architecture has been practiced in this region. The dry stone works done by local craftsmen's and old well have been preserved in its original form. The way of practicing context based architecture is an inspiring example for all of us which should be seen in our design approaches. Restoration and preservation by common people also suggest that respecting once identity (cultural and social) helps in maintaining architecture of particular area. There is no doubt in the fact that this heritage site is one of its kinds in India. Finally author suggests that such fine architecture work should be placed in the historical map of India and be showcased to rest of the world.

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