

## Rohtas Fort

Where grandeur is woven in history

Situated some sixteen kilometers north-west of Jhelum, the imposing Rohtas fort is one of the finest castles in South Asia. The gigantic fort of Rohtas is a symbol of strength and determination of its builder- Farid Khan, who is known in the annals of history as Sher Shah Suri. Its great ramparts, growing from the cliff like a Wall of china, produce an awe-inspiring sight. This enormous stronghold is so strategically positioned that it commands the old route from the north to the plains of Punjab, across the extraordinary Landscape of the Potwar Plateau. Commanding the gorge of the Kahan River, the fort was founded during 154 to 1543 to prevent the possible return of the mughal Emperor Hamayun who after his defeat at chaunsa had fled to Iran. The other purpose was to subdue the turbulent local Gakkhar tribes who held the control the valley and were the old friend of the Mughals.

### Accessibility

Rohats Fort is accessible by a seven km small paved road turning westward from Dina, located nearly 98 km from Islamabad and 210 km from Lahore, on the Grand Trunk Road, also built by Sher Shah Suri.

### History Of The Fort

As the legend goes, Emperor Sher Shah Suri commanded his architect, Shah Sultani, to build a huge invincible fortress to be built in 3 year. Unaware of the grandness of Sher Shah's designs, the fort that Shahu Sultani constructed was considerably smaller than the Emperor had visualized, and on seeing the completed structure, Sher Shah ordered the architect to be beheaded. As an act of clemency, however, he allowed the architect a further two years to build a fort more in keeping with his wishes. The construction of the desired fort started in 1543 A.D. But the fate did not permit sher Shah Suri to visit the Fort as he was killed in a battle some time later. His reign lasted barely for six years (1539-1545 A.D.) However, the construction continued a further decade and some additional buildings were erected by successive rulers. the fort is named after the fort at Rohtas in Bengal, science of one of Sher Shah's great victories.

### Cost Of Construction

The work on the fort was started with Todar Mal Khatri, Suri's Revenue Minister, as incharge of the project. The gakkhars were never happy at it and did their best to boycott the builders. They pledged that they would no even work as day laborers. Under these difficult circumstances the construction of the fort cost Suri treasury a huge amount of money.

### Tour of The Fort

The great fort of Rohtas (Presently Majestic Ruins) has special attraction for anyone having a taste for castles. The circumference, about 4km, is large enough to hold a couple of division of troops. covering an area of approximately 12.6 acres, the fort is said to have accommodated some 12,000 people. The fortification has 68 bastions or towers, 12 gateways and three baolis (stepped

wells) for self-sufficiency in water. It takes about 2-3 hours for a thorough exploration fort, and quite a lot of walking is involved.

Most parts of the fort are in ruins except several large, imposing gates and numerous posterns etc. Sohail gate, Place of Raja Maan Singh (Father-in-law of Akbar the Great) and a large execution Tower are worth seeing. Other building of note do not survive today except the rampart walls which are the prime attraction of this fort. Within the fort walls is the Rohtas village which cropped up in the later days and has all the civic amenities. The fort has been divided into two main zones; the north-west quadrant, separated from the rest of fort by an inner wall. It is called Anderkot or 'inner citadel', and Akbar in Attock has also an inner citadel.

### **Fortification Wall**

The most striking feature of the fort is its majestic and solid wall reinforced with 68 semi-circular bastions at irregular intervals. Besides providing strength to the wall, these bastions give a touch of elegance and grandeur to the fort. The wall, usually composed of two or three terraces, varies in thickness at different points, the maximum being 12.5 meters near the Mori gate. The terraces are interlinked with each other by way of staircases. The topmost terrace is the line of the merlon-shaped battlements. These battlements are generally one meter thick varying in height from 2.45 to 3.35 meters. The height of the fortification wall ranges from 10m and a considerable number of galleries have been provided in the thickness of the wall for the soldiers and for use as storage space.

### **The Gates**

The fort has twelve gates constructed at strategic points. Standing in the massive walls, these gates look imposing with elaborate architectural features. They were built in sand stone masonry combining strength with grace in a manner that was to characterize the coming Mughal architecture. The **Sohail Gate** is the most impressive and is built in the typical pathan style of the era. It represents the finest specimen of the world of Sher Shah's time. It stands 20 meters high and is flanked by two massive rounder bastions. The central gate is topped with seven defensive merlons. Its name is said to derive from a famous saint named Sohail Bukhari, buried in the south-western bastion of the gate. From Sohail Gate, a path leads to the Tilla Jogian. Continuing clockwise around the fort's perimeter, you pass through the **Shah Chand Wali Gate** in the wall that divides the inner fort, or citadel, from the outer main fort. It is named after a saint Shah Chand Wali who, as the myth goes, refused to get his wages for working on the construction of this gate. In recognition of his services the gate was named after him. The saint is believed to have died while working and was buried near this gate. To the north-west, is the striking **Kabuli Gate** deriving its name from the fact that it faces the direction of Kabul. Being a good example of rectangular double gate, it has two bastions on both sides though they are not so massive and strong as we see in the case of Sohail Gate. On the western side of the gate there is the Royal or Shahi Mosque tempting many to call the gate as **Shahi Darwaza** or the Royal Gate. Just close to the gate, a flight of sixty steps leads down to one of the fort's baolis, or fresh water wells.

Facing the Kahan River is the **Shishi Gate**, taking its name from the glazed tiles used in the spandrels of the outer arch. The glare and reflection of the tiles having Persian blue colour, gave it the common name of Shishi or Shisha Darwaza, meaning the Glass Gate. Other gates on the inner fortress include the 15 meters high Langar Khani Gate and **Talaqi Gate**. The word "Talaqi: means divorce, although it is also used in the meaning of 'condemned'. It is said that this name stands in memory of the mishap to Sabir Suri, who, according to a common story, entered the gate and had an attack of fever. Thus regarding it as a bad omen the gate came to be known as Talaqi.

On the north wall stands **Kashmiri Gate** (facing Kashmir). It is also called Mori Gate because of its crooked look as of a drain (Mori). Next one is the splendid **Khwah Khani Gate**, named after the loyal commander of Sher Shah. This gate is the main entrance to the fort as you arrive from Dina. It is a single gate rectangular with off sets. The gate is nearly 9.15 meters high and 6.1 meters deep. The arches have sun flower bosses spandrels. The crest of the gate is decorated with seven battlements. Outside the gate lie the remnants of Sher Shah's old Grand Trunk Road which is no more in use. The gates along the east wall- Gatali, Tulla Mori and Pipal Wala – are smaller and less interesting than those on the south, west and north sides.

### III. Other Buildings

It is very strange that in such a large Fort very few buildings were constructed. Among these buildings there is one mosque known as Shahi Masjid, a few Baolis and Haveli were added later by Maan Singh. In the absence of places, the Mughal emperors, while passing through the area, used to stay in the fort in tents. As the fort had only strategic position, no late ruler thought of building any luxurious structures for stay here.

#### Shahi Mosque

This small but beautiful mosque is situated near the Kabuli Gate. It consists of only a prayer chamber and a courtyard. The prayer chamber which is 19.2 meters long and 7.3 meters deep is divided into three bays with arched openings. The face of the sanctuary had three arched openings. Although the roofing of the prayer chamber is domical from inside, it has no domes on the outer side. The mosque on the whole is a fine specimen of compact decorative and elegant religious architecture of the Suri period.

#### Baolis

To achieve self-sufficiency in water, baolis were made<sup>4</sup> by cutting deep the lime rock. One of these lies near the Kabuli Gate and the other near the Mori Gate. There are small chambers around the baoli presumably to be used as baths for the royal family.

#### Haveli Maan Singh (White Palace)

The haveli named after the trusted general of Akbar's court who died in 1614 A.D. is the most conspicuous structure built on a rock at a very uneven site. It is

a very double-story building and is built with bricks and plaster, rather than the stone used elsewhere in the fort. Its domed roof is topped by a Hindu style lotus emblem.

### **Rani Mahal**

Located about 300 meters beyond the Haveli is the Rani Mahal which has a minaret 80 feet high with engraved flowers in sandstone. Here were chambers for the guard and a door connecting the two castles.

### **Execution Tower**

Immediately to west of the Haveli stands the execution Burj (tower), primarily dealing with rebellious prince and other royal traitors. The execution tower has a raised platform with a hole at its center through which the unfortunate victims were thrown. The execution used to be done in the presence of the ruler living in the White Palace.

### **Takiya Khair-un-Nisa**

Outside the Khawas Khani Gate, on the road to Dina, is the shrine of Khair-un-Nisa, the daughter of Qadir Baksh, Food Minister of Emperor Sher Shah Suri. She was a brave soldier and a warrior of repute and she fought alongside her Emperor at a number of battles.

### **Attractions Around Rohtas**

#### **Tilla Jogian**

Tilla Jogian, the highest peak in Salt Range (3200 feet above sea level), is 12km to the west of Rohtas Fort and is a pleasant picnic spot. It is famous for the extensive ruins of a Hindu Temple which dates back to the time of Alexander the Great. From the top, there is a magnificent view down over the endless fields of the Potwar Plateau. Tilla is also mentioned in numerous folktales of the region.

#### **Srichola Sahib**

In the north west of the Fort is the 'Srichola Sahib' which was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The building has now become a place of worship for the Sikh community. According to a legend, the Sikh spiritual leader Guru Nanak (1469-1543) had told Emperor Babur that he would rule India for seven generations, and the prophecy came true.

#### **Mangla Dam**

16 km east of Dina lies the third largest earth filled dam in the world with a large lake spanning about 160 sq km and offering panoramic views. There is also a power house with a stunning 20m by 100m mural painted in 1967 by the famous Pakistani artist Sadequain. Mangla Dam and Rohtas make a good weekend excursion from either Islamabad or Lahore.