



Lodhi Fort Ludhiana, Punjab: Historical And Architectural Aspects

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ABSTRACT

Lodhi Fort, situated in the Ludhiana district of Punjab, represents a blend of historical richness and architectural brilliance, though in utter ruins now. This study aims at exploring two important aspects of Lodhi Fort, its historical background, especially from the local sources in the form of oral traditions and intricate architectural details, of which there are faint signs due to neglect and vandalism. In such a situation, it becomes necessary to draw the inference from counterpart forts built by the Lodhis especially the Bayana fort and Agra fort. Constructed during the 15th century under the auspices of Sikandar Lodhi, the fort strategically occupied a prime location on the banks of the river Sutlej, might have functioned as a safeguard for trade routes and a formidable military stronghold. Across centuries, the fort bore witness to shifts in power dynamics, transitioning from Muslim to Sikh sovereignty before ultimately coming under British dominion. The fortification erected by Maharaja Ranjit Singh opposite the Sutlej underscores Lodhi Fort's strategic significance. Despite its historical importance, the current state of the fort reflects neglect, with changes in nomenclature and infrastructure deterioration obscuring its identity. This research endeavors to illuminate the historical and architectural significance of Lodhi Fort, advocating for its preservation and restoration as an indispensable heritage site in Punjab.

Key Words: Fort, strategic, Islamic, architecture, citadel, Lodhi, Punjab

Introduction

Spread over an area of 5.6 acres, the fort was strategically located on the banks of the river Sutlej which flowed nearby at that time but has since changed its course. The construction of the fort commissioned by Sikandar Lodhi was supervised by his generals Nihan Khan and Yusuf Khan in a town called Mir Hota which was named Lodhi's Fort. Given its location its primary purpose seems to have been to protect trade routes and offer military accommodation opposite the town's main entrance. thereby promoting its prosperity and transformation into a city named Lodhi-ana. The fort strengthened the Lodhi dynasty and later served as a stronghold for later Muslim rulers. Recognizing its strategic importance, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a powerful Sikh leader, built a magnificent fort on the opposite bank of the Sutlej. Exploiting the weakened Muslim rule in Delhi during the 19th century, Ranjit Singh easily captured the fort. However, as his rule declined, the fort gradually came under British control. In particular, a vital tunnel connecting the fort of Phillaur across the Sutlej was built inside the Lodhi fort during the reign of Ranjit Singh. Despite being well-maintained during the British rule and in the post-independence years, the fort now lacks any signage or information board indicating its historical significance. Formerly known as the 'Government Institute of Textile and Dyeing Technology', the current condition of the fort has deteriorated.

Local tradition about the construction of the fort reveals that Nihan Khan and Yusuf Khan, two chiefs of Sikandar Lodhi, were appointed for the purpose between 1479-1517 AD, who built a fort in a village called "Mir Hota". Mir Hota village was stationed at the site of present Ludhiana city. At that time, he was in a village called Mir Hota. Yusuf Khan crossed the Sutlej River in the Jalandhar Doab in search of the Khokhar's who were plundering the Doab and settled at Sultanpur, when Nihang Khan settled there and founded the present city on the site of the village of Mir Hota. The new city built after that was originally known as Lodhi-ana which means City of Lodhi. Later this name was changed to the present name of Ludhiana.

Historical background of Lodhi Fort

The historical beginnings of Lodhi Fort in Ludhiana can be traced back to the 15th century when it was built by the Lodhi dynasty. It was established as an important historical and architectural landmark in the surrounding area. Built during the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodhi of Delhi from 1489 to 1517, the fort represents the architectural originality and strategic importance associated with the Lodhi dynasty. The structure of this fort was built using mud bricks and mud. The fort served as a strong stronghold of the Lodhi rulers during their rule. Strategically located on the banks of the Sutlej River it gave a strategic advantage to monitor the surrounding areas and regulate trade routes as the fort overlooked the route from Delhi to Lahore. Due to which we can say that the main purpose of this fort was to keep an eye on trade routes. (Arihant Experts, 2019)

Located near the banks of the river Sutlej, the fort held significant importance as a surveillance and defensive outpost to protect the region from potential threats. Its architectural layout reflects a combination of Mughal and Afghani influences, characterized by fortified walls and intricately decorated gateways. With the arrival of the English Empire in Punjab, this fort was established as a military headquarters. This fort has witnessed many battles and conflicts. When Mangal Pandey rebelled in Meerut, the soldiers of Ludhiana Cantonment rebelled against the British rule in this fort. Under the leadership of Maulana Shah Abdul Kader Ludhianavi, captured the British cantonment which later came under the British again. This fort was under Maharaja Ranjit Singh for four years. After the treaty with the East India Company, Ranjit Singh made Phillaur fort his cantonment and the British made Lodhi fort their cantonment. Both these forts are on either side of the river Sutlej. (Jain, 2019)

Over time, the fort underwent several changes under different regimes, each imprinting its unique architectural style and structure. Today, remnants of its former glory serve as a testament to Ludhiana's vibrant history and the enduring legacy of the Lodhi dynasty. Further research into the architectural significance and historical context of the Lodhi Fort in Ludhiana provides valuable insight into the cultural heritage of the region. ("The City Skyline of India, 2006: Top 100 Cities to Reside, Earn & Invest In," 2006)

Architectural significance

Lodhi Fort in Ludhiana, which is also known for its architectural excellence. It is an impressive proof of the region's deep heritage. Built during the 15th century in support of the Lodhi dynasty, this magnificent fort was designed in a square plan, covering a vast area of about 5.6 acres (22,662.3 sq m). Its architectural design intricately combines Afghan and Mughal style influences, representing an attractive combination emblematic of Lodhi rule in India.

Administered by the great ruler Sikandar Lodhi, the fort was enlivened by the skilfully technique of his revered generals, Nehan Khan and Yusuf Khan. The fort was cleverly fortified with two separate gates: one served as a guard gate that alertly guarded the entrance and the other gate provided access to the interior of the fort. The doors attached to them were made of a solid wood and slatted. The design of this double-gate underscored the important role the fort played in protecting the area around it. The fort showed its strategic importance in times of conflict and peace. The magnificence of the Lodhi Fort is further enhanced by its intricate wall carvings and exquisite arch designs, which testify to the exceptional craftsmanship of the artisans of that era. These fascinating details have been carefully preserved over the centuries offering a wonderful glimpse of the richness and hardship of the Lodhi era. These elevate the fort beyond a mere architectural structure to an enduring symbol of cultural heritage and artistic prowess.

However, the glory of the fort goes beyond its architectural splendour. It also holds a fascinating story of originality and ingenuity within its walls. The clay used to make the solid bricks of the fort was obtained from the nearby village of Sunnet, which was entrusted to Nahan Khan's son Jalal Khan. This strategic choice not only ensured the structural integrity of the fort but also reduced the risk of further deepening the surrounding area as local clay was not used to make bricks for this fort. Historians estimate that the elevated topography of Sunnet village at a distance of about 6.6 km made it an ideal source of soil. Which gives a valid rationale for Jalal Khan's decision to get soil from this place. In short, the Lodhi Fort stands as an enduring monument to the resilience and creativity of its creators, while at the same time a poignant reminder of the region's rich cultural tapestry and historical heritage.

Secret way or Tunnel

Beneath the surface of the Lodhi's lay a network of secret passages, hidden from prying eyes. These paths were built very cleverly. These routes serve a variety of purposes, from secret communication and escape routes to secret military exercises. But a closer look at this fort reveals that Lodhi Fort and Phillaur Fort are connected by an interesting tunnel which adds mystery and historical significance to these magnificent structures. What makes this fort even more interesting is the underground tunnel passage. It is said that when Jalal Khan constructed this fort, he made this route to get out of the fort during any kind of attack. But historians say that when Maharaja Ranjit Singh occupied this fort, he had constructed this road to go to Phillaur fort. This route connects the Lodhi fort with the Phillaur fort on the other side of the Sutlej. which serves as a secret passage for rulers and soldiers in times of war and invasion. However, its exact length and purpose remain the subject of speculation. The existence of this tunnel adds an air of mystery and intrigue to both the forts.

Conclusion

As Ludhiana moves towards modernity, the Lodhi Fort remains a steadfast stronghold, bridging the gap between past and present. Its towering structure serves as an impressive reminder of the city's enduring heritage. Inspire future generations to preserve and preserve its cultural heritage. Its threads are connected to the Sikh empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the greatest of Sikh history as Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled here for three years. With each passing year, Lodhi Fort stands as a beacon of resilience, a beacon of resilience to all who see it. Invites people to travel through time and imagination. The Lodhi Fort in Ludhiana stands as more than a monument of stone and mortar. It conveys the spirit of a city steeped in history, resilience and cultural richness. As custodians of this unique heritage, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that its legacy lives on for generations to come. Serve as an eternal symbol of Ludhiana's glorious past and glorious future.

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