



Sarias In Kashmir Under The Mughals

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The construction of *sarais* or rest houses was not a new creation of the kings of medieval period. It was an essential for the highly centralized governments to keep their control and communication with the remote areas of their vast empires. The administrations had to erect and maintain structures in the form of rest-houses or *sarais* in their own interest as well as the interest of their subject. The earliest references to the construction of *sarais* comes from the period of Chandragupta Maurya apart from the mentioned in the seventh pillar Edict of Ashoka." The *sarais* built by Sher-Shah and Akbar on the Imperial routes or roads at the interval of two and five kros respectively. The construction of *sarais* during the period of Sher Shah and Akbar were to a great extent similar nature construction. Thus the tradition survived from the earliest period down to the sixteenth century onwards.

After the Mughal occupation of Kashmir a number of *sarais* sprang up along the trade routes. During the first visit of Emperor Akbar and his camp followers utilized their tents, but Jahangir during his visit of 1622 and his subsequent tours did not require tents for his encampment.ⁱ During his reign, inns were built on the way side of the *Pakhli* route as well as on the imperial road.ⁱⁱ After Jahangir, we also find that, during the reigns of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb a chain of new inns were built and the old inns were repaired and improved on.ⁱⁱⁱ

The first *sarias* was built by Muhammad Quli Khan at *Khampora*, situated in Chadura area of Srinagar and *Send-Barari*.^{iv} It was completed in 1597.^v It is square in plan and built of small baked bricks and red lime plaster. The site still preserves the standing remains of a Mughal saria or inn.^{vi}

But it was during the reign of Emperor Shahjahan that a number of magnificent inns were constructed along with the imperial trade roads. The main *sarais* or inns which were constructed during the time of Mughals are seen all along the Mughal road at various destinations, following is given the descriptions of those *sarias* or rest houses.

Noushahra^{viii} is situated on the bank of the river Tawi and is 48 kms away from Rajouri. This *sarai* is unique in its construction and is worth of attention. It is spacious and different from other *sarais* in their general layout and composition. The *sarai* has got double enclosure walls. The outer wall has double storied bastions at the corners. Each bastion is crowned by strong and massive battlements. The entrance of the *sarai* is in the middle of the west wall. It consists of arched cells facing a common courtyard looking similar to other *sarais* of the region.

Rajouri, ^{viii}*saria* which is located at *Shaji-Marg*^{ix} or *shadimarg* in district pulwama. It has been the largest inn of this route and is built during the reign of Jahangir.^x It is also square in plan built of well finished small baked bricks and red lime plaster.^{xi} Although it has been the most glorious saria in this route but these days its ruins are in utter neglect, its walls are in a bad condition. The *Hirapora*^{xii} or *Hurpur* is the last village from the Kashmir side where its dwellers have been permanently living since the period of Mughals. No such standing Mughal architecture exists at this village, except the ruins of Mughal *seria* which are still scattered in the middle of this town.^{xiii}

The next destination of this route called *Aliabad*^{xiv} *sarai*. It is situated on the left bank of Nallah Panchal below the feet of Ratinpeer Mountain. It was constructed by Ali Mardan Khan, *subadar* of Shahjahan.^{xv} The *seria* has also followed the Mughal architecture and is built of rubble stone and small backed bricks.^{xvi} Unfortunately this serai like other serais has lost all of its splendor and grace and has turned one of the most neglected sites of the Imperial route.^{xvii} From here Mughal route drives through a vast sloping meadow called *dadal* lower and upper and takes one of the top of Pir Panjal known as *Peergali* or *Peer ki gali*. It slopes down the Pir Panjal and reaches to the Panj Serai area of Poonch.^{xviii}

The Rajouri *sarai* was constructed by Zafar Khan who was also in charge of *Noushahra sarai* in Rajouri district which was transferred to Ali Mardan Khan (*governor*) in 1641-42.^{xix} This is the last *sarai* of the Mughal route from Kashmir side and is almost in ruins.

The Panj *Sarai*, is a Persian word means the five *sarais*. The Mughals constructed several rest houses or mud houses in this area.^{xx} Chandi Murh is the centre of this zone and the people of this area have its own social and cultural life different from Kashmiri people called mountaineering people.^{xxi} They like to live on hilly tops and have construct their houses locally called *kotha*. The Panj *sarai* comprises of the villages are *Poshana* (*Poshiana sarai*),^{xxii} *Digrian*, *Behramgalla* (*Behramgalla sarai*),^{xxiii} *Parkote Manza*, *Bagala Akroth* and *Pathri*. At *thanamandi*, there is seen one more *sarai* known as *Thana*^{xxiv} is almost well intact. The remains of one more inn are found at *fatepure* near the Rajouri town. And from here The Mughal or imperial route reaches the *Chingus*,^{xxv} another *sarai* of Mughal Period. It is that place where Jahangir is learnt to have lost his life when the Mughal caravan was back from Srinagar.^{xxvi} Nur jahan, the wife of Jahangir, have kept the death of her husband secret till the royal caravan reached the Lahore.^{xxvii} *Changas sarai* is a state protected monument and

is maintained by the State Archeology Department. After *Changus*, the last *serai* of the imperial route from Kashmir side is *Nowshetra* which is almost in ruins. There only few remains of this Mughal structure found at its site and from here the Mughal route leads to Gujarat, Pakistan.

Another inn was constructed in between Noushahra and Bhimber which was assigned to Islam Khan. Jahan Ara Begum also got a *serai* built at Hirapora.^{xxviii}

These places developed into busy trade centres besides being busy trade routes. Although these rest houses or *serais* were basically constructed or maintained for the imperial use and also for the purpose of shelter for travelers, the importance of these stages did not diminish even during the later Mughal period.^{xxix} It seems that these inns were constructed as well as maintained by the state to promote trade and travel and also provide comforts to the Imperial officials and troops to traverse distances through the rugged hilly terrains.

Shahjahan entrusted the administration of each *sarais* to a highly reputed Noble. During the visit of Aurangzeb, we find that he also assigned the administration of *Chingas sarai* to Mohammad Azam, Rajouri *sarai* to Mohammad Muazam and Thana *sarai* to Murtaza Khan. *Chingas sarai* is the famous among Mughal *serais*. It still exists and is visited by a number of visitors every day.^{xxx}

Though these *sarais* were basically constructed for the imperial use but *sarais* for the travelers were also built on these sites.^{xxxi} In the course of time townships developed around these places promoting trade and travel and providing comforts to the imperial officials and troops to traverse distances through the rugged hilly terrains. The travelers were supplied with the food, fodder and for the purpose of shelter.^{xxxii}

ⁱ Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, 3 Vols, Vol. III, Eng. tr. H Beveridge, The Asiatic society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1939, rep.2000, p. 725.

ⁱⁱ Iqbal Ahmad, *Mughal Legacy in Kashmir*, Srinagar, 2015, p. 131.

ⁱⁱⁱ Abdul Majid Matto, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, Golden Horde, Srinagar, 1988, p. 181.

^{iv} In the text of *Akbarnama*, III, part- II, pp. 725, 540-41, it is *Nandi Brari* perhaps a clerical mistake Beveridge's translation, it is *Nari Brari*, III, p. 1083; Bernier, calls it Send-brary, p. 413

^v *Ibid*, vol. III, part -II, p. 725.

^{vi} Iqbal Ahmad, *Mughal Legacy in Kashmir*, Srinagar, 2015, p. 131.

^{vii} Naushahra (Rajouri district) is an important town lying in the territory of Kashmir *Subah*. A garrison was always stationed here.

^{viii} Fredrick Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories: A geographical Account*, Gyan Publishing House, Delhi: rep. 1971, p. 92.

^{ix} *Ibid*, p. 94

^x Iqbal ahmad, p. 131.

^{xi} *Ibid*.

^{xii} *Akbarnama* vol. III, part -II pp. 541, 725. Also see Frederic Drew, p. 94.

^{xiii} Iqbal Ahmad, p. 132.

^{xiv} The ancient name was, perhaps, *Dund*.

^{xv} *Waqiat-i-Kashmir*, p. 130-31; Frederic Drew, pp. 93-94.

^{xvi} Iqbal Ahmad, p. 134.

^{xvii} *Ibid*

^{xviii} *Ibid*

^{xix} Abdul Majid Matto, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, Golden Horde, Srinagar, 1988, p. 181.

^{xx} Iqbal Ahmad, p. 135.

^{xxi} *Ibid*

^{xxii} Frederic Drew, p. 93.

^{xxiii} *Akbarnama* vol. III, part -II, p. 540.

^{xxiv} *Ibid*, vol. III, part-II, p. 540.

^{xxv} *Akbarnama*, vol. III, part-II, p. 539; It is *Chouki Hati* as well as *Chinges Hati*.

^{xxvi} Iqbal Ahmad, pp. 136-7

^{xxvii} *Ibid*.

^{xxviii} Abdul Majid Matto, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, Golden Horde, Srinagar, 1988, p. 214.

^{xxix} Desideri, p. 71; Frederic Drew, pp. 90-94. G.T Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo*, 2 vols., London, Sagar Publications, New Delhi, 1981, vol. I, pp. 249-55.

^{xxx} Iqbal Ahmad, p. 136-7.

^{xxxi} Matto, p.214

^{xxxii} *Ibid*.

