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Tourism Potential of British Period Heritage of District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan)

Abdul Hameed¹, Salman Jamil², Anas Mahmud Arif³, Fawad Ahmad Khan⁴, Adnan Anwar⁵

- 1. Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan (hameedarch2014@gmail.com)**
- 2. Associate Professor, SDAAT- School of Design Art and Architecture, Pak- Austria –Fachhochschule, Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, Haripur, Mang, Pakistan (salman.jamil@paf-iast.edu.pk)**
- 3. Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism & Hospitality, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan (anaschtm@gmail.com)**
- 4. MPhil Scholar, Department of Tourism & Hospitality, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan (fawadahmad149@gmail.com)**
- 5. Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan (adnananwar.khan@gmail.com)**

Abstract

Mansehra, one of the largest districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan is located on the easternmost part of the province. The region is presently inhabited by different ethnic groups including Gujjars, Sayyids, Swatis, Kashmiris, Tanolis, Awans, Kashmiris, Mughals and Turks. The archaeological remains reported from Mansehra confirm its continuous occupation by human populations from the 3rd century BCE to the present time. The different phases of human history (Buddhist, Hindu Shahi, Muslim, Sikh and British) are represented by human material remains of historical, religious, artistic and architectural significance with exceptional potential to attract tourists. This paper is an attempt to highlight the potential of the British period heritage for the promotion of sustainable cultural tourism, building on pervious articles focused on tourism (Hameed et al. 2022: 134, 2022:209). It focuses on eight sites constructed during the British era. These include an Iron Bridge connecting But Sung with Garhi Habibullah, a Hindu temple now converted to Government High School (Garhi Habibullah), Atar Singh House (Garhi Habibullah), Muslim Graveyard (Karnol), Shrine of Zinda Pir, Karnol (Karnol) British Period Jail, Agla Garan (Kaghan) and Gurudwara Guru Singh Sabha (Mansehra City).

Introduction

Mansehra, located to the east of the River Indus, is one of the significant districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. It lies between 34° 14' to 35° 10' North latitude and 72°55' to 74° 06' East longitude at an altitude of 1227 meters above sea level. Due to its unique strategic position, scenic beauty and cultural richness, Mansehra is also known as Takht-i Hazara (the Throne of Hazara) (Hameed 2012). Mansehra District is bordered by Kohistan, Batagram, and Diamir Districts to the north, Azad Jammu & Kashmir to the east, Abbottabad and Haripur to the south, Shangla and Buner to the southwest, and Swat to the west (Hameed 2012).

According to one of the traditions, the name "Mansehra" is attributed to Man Singh, the Governor General of Ranjit Singh, who established his headquarters in the town for administrative and military purposes in Hazara. According to Ahmad Hasan Dani, the name is derived from "Man Shahr," meaning the city of Man. Mansehra is strategically located on the Karakoram Highway, 28 kilometers from Abbottabad, and comprises four tehsils: Mansehra, Ogi, Balakot, and Baffa Pakhal (Hameed 2012).

Mansehra lies at the junctions of four important roads: the Karakoram Highway starting from Havelian and proceeding to the upper Indus, with two additional roads leading east to Kashmir and Gilgit via Kaghan and Babusar pass. This strategic location inspired Emperor Ashoka to inscribe his famous edicts here on stone boulders during the 3rd century BCE. The newly constructed CPEC road also passes through Mansehra further enhancing its strategic importance.

Mansehra has beautiful valleys, such as Kaghan, Naran, and Garhi Habibullah, attracting thousands of tourists annually, especially during the summer season. Diverse races live in the district, including Gujjars, Sayyids, Swatis, Kashmiris, Tanolis, Awans, Kashmiris, Mughals and Turks, who came from different the surrounding regions including Kashmir, Swat, Afghanistan and Central Asia as invaders, pilgrims, and refugees.

Literature Review

The natural and cultural diversity of the region has evoked travelers, historians and researchers who have highlighted the unique natural and cultural legacy of the region. The first reference to the region as 'Wu-La-Shi' is found in the account of Xuanzang, one of the Chinese pilgrims who visited Hazara in the 7th century CE (Beal 1981). He informs us about the political dependency of the Hazara on Kashmir in the 7th

century CE. Xuanzang also reports the existence of significant Buddhist monument near the capital city, most probably the present Mangal located at the junction of Mansehra and Abbottabad. The Archaeological Survey of District Abbottabad 2007 conducted by the Department of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Management, Hazara University, revealed the remains of a Buddhist complex at Shah Kot also known as Mochikot about 20 km northwest of Abbottabad. This site has been proposed as the Buddhist remains referred to by Xuanzang (Ali et al 2009; Hameed, 2012).

H. Hargreaves, Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle, visited Hazara in 1920. He gave a detailed description of the Zar Dheri site, a large Buddhist complex located about 3 km northwest of Shinkhari town and 20 km north of Mansehra city (Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1922).

Other significant archaeological investigations include the work of A.D.H. Bivar, who has suggested Zar Dheri to be the most probable provenance of the stupa model (Bivar 1996). H.D. Watson (1907) updated the old Gazetteer of Hazara in 1907, adding information on the district's geography, natural features, population statistics, and economic conditions.

More recent contributions to the archaeology of Mansehra include the work of Inayat ur Rehman, who published an article on the Mughal period Turkish monuments at Guli Bagh (Rehman 1988), and Shama Habib (2000), explicitly discusses the Ashokan Rock Edicts located in Mansehra. The Tokyo National Museum's Archaeological Mission to Pakistan conducted excavations at Zar Dheri from 1995-99, uncovering numerous antiquities, including pottery, iron implements, bone fragments, and sculptures in schist stone (Youshihide 2011). The mission also added 17 new sites to the existing list of the archaeological sites already reported from Hazara region including Mansehra.

Hameed (2012) highlights the archaeological potential of District Mansehra, giving an account of 255 newly discovered sites from Mansehra including those of the British Period. Shah and Hameed (2013) discuss the architectural and religious history of the Muslim period monument at Naukot (Mansehra) associated with Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, a famous Muslim Saint of the 14th century CE. Samad (2010) also provides valuable information about the history and architecture of the Shiva Temple at Gandhian, Mansehra.

The above-mentioned literature has focused on pre-colonial heritage with little or no attention on the British period heritage of the region. The present research highlights the British heritage of the region and its importance for sustainable cultural tourism. Sites selected for the present study were for first time reported by the senior author during a pilot project "Mapping and Documentation of Cultural Assets of

Kaghan Valley Mansehra” jointly executed by Hazara University, Mansehra and UNESCO, Islamabad with the financial support of Thai Airways, Bangkok in 2006-07. Table 1 is a list of the eight sites with a description, location, and remarks.

Table1. Site Names/Location/Descriptions

S #	Site Name	Location/Description	GPS Coordinates	Remarks
1.	Iron Bridge Garhi Habibullah	An Iron Bridge constructed during the British period to provide passage over the Kunhar River. It connects But Sung village with Garhi Habibullah. The bridge measures 133.3m in length and 10m in width.	34° 23'58.13 north latitude 73° 22'37.38 east longitude about 819m above sea level (henceforth ASL)	It is the best-preserved British period heritage and has enormous potential for tourism. Information board needs to be installed highlighting the historical and architectural significance of this historical bridge
2.	Govt. High School, Garhi Habibullah	It is located near Sikh Bazar at Garhi Habibullah. It was originally constructed as a Hindu temple. After partition and displacement of the Hindu community, it was converted into a School. Remnants of the temple measured 46.6 x 9.1m in 2006. No traces of original structures were found during our revisit in 2022.	34° 24' 08.81 north latitude and 73° 22' 53.14 east longitude about 834m ASL	Completely damaged by the earthquake of 2005. The entire building has been reconstructed but many of the tangible portable remains are housed in the office of the principal which needs to be preserved and exhibited.
3.	Atar Singh House	This unique house bears close similarity with shops of the adjacent Sikh bazar in Garhi Habibullah; It is constructed of dressed stone blocks in ashlar masonry.	34° 24' 08.92 north latitude and 73° 22' 55.35 east longitude about 805m ASL	Partially damaged by the earthquake of 2005. Still in a better state of preservation. It needs to be promoted along with the entire historical Bazar.

4.	Karnol Graveyard	A Muslim cemetery located in Karnol, a small village located on the right bank of Kunhar river, the ancient graves are characterized by their sophisticatedly carved headstones.	34° 23' 08.21 north latitude and 73° 22' 53.04 east longitude about 781m ASL	An information board needs to be installed highlighting the historical significance of the unique graves and the traditional art (stone carving).
5.	Shrine of Zinda Pir Karnol	Shrine of an unknown Muslim saint locally famous as Zinda Peer (Living Shaman). It is a rectangular structure of dressed stone constructed around the grave of Zinda Peer. Only remnants of the stone pillars are visible along with foundations of the walls.	34° 23' 02.46 north latitude and 73° 22' 35.00 east longitude about 838m ASL	The structure was badly damaged during the earthquake of 2005. Information board needs to be installed highlighting the historical and religious significance of this historical shrine before it completely disappears
6.	Agla Gran Jail	A Jail constructed during the British period to control the rebellions. It is located in Agla Gran, a small village to the south of Kaghan town. It is a double story building constructed of stone with wooden ceilings and doors. While GI sheets have been used to cover the roof.	34° 46' 09.66 north latitude and 73° 31' 43.76 east longitude about 2022m ASL	Partially damaged by the earthquake in 2005. This historical monument still accommodates many important moveable objects of the British era. Some of these objects were donated to Hazara University which are now displayed in Hazara University, Museum, Mansehra
7.	Dak Bungalow	It is located to the right side of Mansehra Garhi road in the middle of a dense forest. It was originally constructed as a Dak Bangalow during the British period.	34° 24' 01.34 north latitude and 73° 20' 16.72 east longitude about 1056m	Renovated in 2007 Some of the moveable objects of the British period might be found in the renovated building, which needs to be preserved

			ASL	
8.	Gurudwara Guru Singh Sabha	Sikh Gurudwara located in the center of Mansehra city to the left side of Balakot road. It is the most beautiful specimen of British period architecture in the entire Mansehra district. After partition and relocation of the Sikh population it was converted into a school. The building is presently used as a municipal library.	34° 19' 54.17 north latitude and 73° 11' 56.86 east longitude about 1056m ASL	Still in better state of preservation and has the potential to attract the Sikh community due to its exceptional religious, historical and architectural importance

Discussion

The Intensive Archaeological Explorations in district Mansehra by Hazara University have uncovered hundreds of ancient sites and monuments dated from the 3rd century BCE to the British era. In our previous three articles we have highlighted the tourism potential of the Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh period sites and monuments in district Mansehra. Our current paper presents the potential of the most neglected monuments constructed during the British period. The eight monuments selected for the present study comprise the Iron Bridge at Garhi Habibullah which still provides passage to the people over River Kunhar connecting But Sung, a small village located on the right bank of the river with Garhi Habibullah, an emerging town and the first halting place for the travelers going from Mansehra to Muzafarabad and vice-versa (Fig. 1).

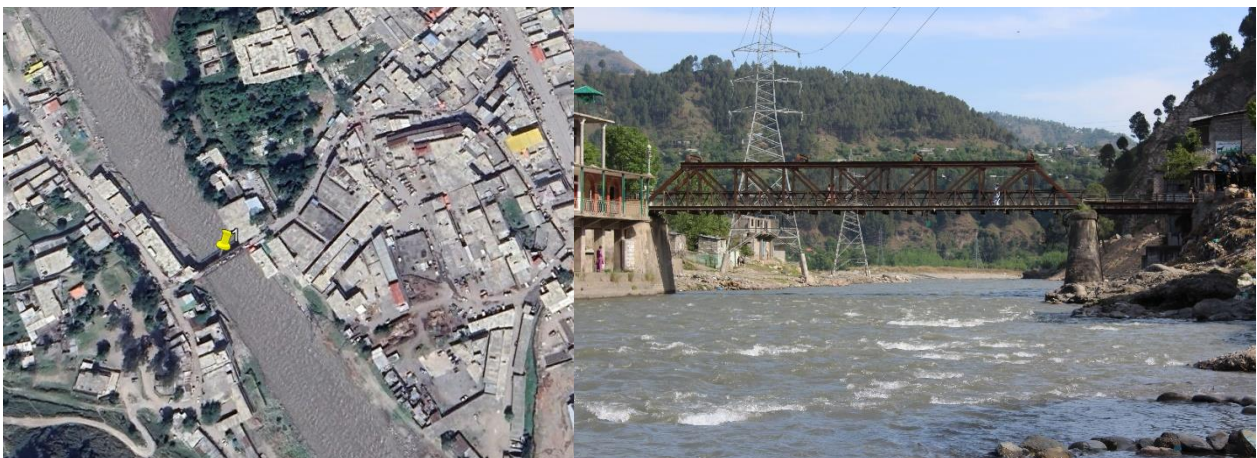


Fig. 1. British Period Bridge connecting But Sung village with Garhi Habibullah

The second important monument is a Hindu Temple constructed during the British period. After partition, and with the displacement of Hindu population, the temple was converted into primary school which was later upgraded into middle and high school. The old building was demolished by the earthquake of 2005. It has now replaced by a new building of Government Boys High School, Garhi Habibullah (Fig. 2). Authors have noticed many tangible objects of historical importance during their visit to the school in 2022.

The third building of architectural significance is a house constructed of dressed stone blocks in ashlar masonry. This house was constructed during the British period along with the many shops made of the same material. This house (Fig. 2) is generally attributed to Atar Singh and presently owned by Aftab Shah, a local resident.



Fig. 2. Map showing the location of British period Temple (now converted to High School) and Atar Singh House on either side of Sikh Bazar at Garhi Habibullah, Manshehra

The fourth important site is a cemetery site (Fig. 3) located in Karnol, a small village located on the left bank of the Kunhar River. This site has been used as a graveyard by the Muslim population for the last two hundred years. The ancient graves are constructed with dressed blocks of kanjur (a type of porous stone which is easy to carve) and are represented with unique headstones elegantly decorated with floral and geometrical designs. The fifth site is a shrine (Fig. 3) of a Muslim saint of the early 20th century. The saint is generally known as Zinda Pir Karnol. Though it is not a very famous shrine and was also badly damaged by the earthquake of 2005, nonetheless, it does have a historical, religious and architectural significance that deserves to be highlighted before it completely disappears.

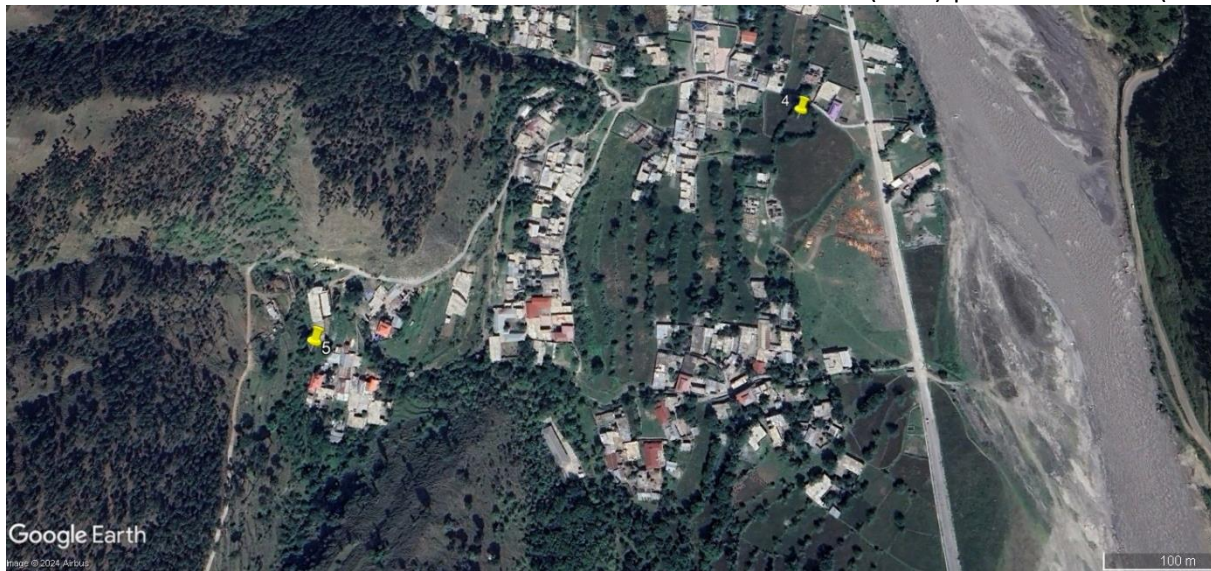


Fig. 3. Google Map showing location of the Karnol cemetery and Shrine of Zinda Pir Karnol

The sixth important building is a Jail (Fig. 4), constructed during the British period to imprison the public as punishment for various crime and to control rebellion against the British government or the feudal lords. This historical building was also badly damaged by the earthquake of 2005. The structure is in a very dilapidated condition and needs to be restored urgently before it completely collapses. This building is also feasible for tourism promotion due to the associated stories of historical significance and the tangible artefacts of the British period.

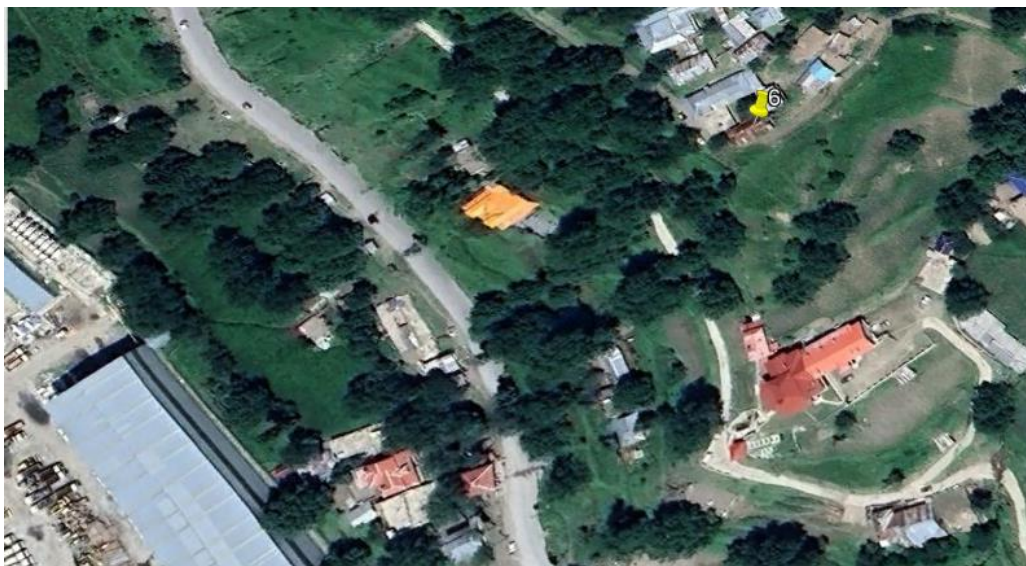


Fig. 4. Google Map showing the location of the British period Jail at Agla Garan, Kaghan Valley, Mansehra

The seventh important British period building is the Dak Banglow (Fig. 5) located to the right side of Mansehra-Garhi road. It was one of the rest houses constructed for officials from the postal department. This important building was also hit by the earthquake in 2005. In 2007, it was completely renovated and since then it has been used as guesthouse.



Fig. 5. Google Map showing British period Dak Banglow

The eighth important monument from the British era is the Gurudwara Guru Singh Sabha (Fig. 6). This is perhaps the most beautiful historic building in Mansehra, still in the best state of preservation. Originally it was built as a Sikh Gurudwara and was later converted into a school and then a municipal library in 2002. The three-story building is made of brick. While marble and stucco are also used for further ornamentation. The interior side of the building is elegantly decorated with paintings depicting religious and mythological features and the inscriptions are done in Gurumukhi and Arabic scripts.



Figure 6. Gurudwara Guru Singh Sabha, Mansehra

Potential of the British Heritage in Mansehra for Sustainable Tourism

Contrary to the Muslims and Buddhist period sites, very few colonial heritage sites have been reported from Mansehra District. Nonetheless, these sites do have the potential for the development of sustainable cultural tourism if properly managed and promoted. For this purpose, the following measures are proposed:

- The Most endangered sites and associated artefacts may be conserved and protected on urgent basis
- Public Outreach Programmes need to be initiated in the areas where these heritage sites are located to educate the local community about the historical and architectural significance and tourism potential of these sites.
- Tourist facilities need to be provided in the vicinity of these sites.

Conclusion

Contrary to the number of Buddhist, Islamic and Sikh period monuments, very few buildings of the British period have been reported from district Mansehra. Probably due to the political instability and continuous revolts of the local population; the British were not able to commission any mega construction projects in the region. Nonetheless, there are monuments (Fig. 7) with exceptional architectural, religious and historical values, which can be used for sustainable cultural tourism after proper conservation and restoration.

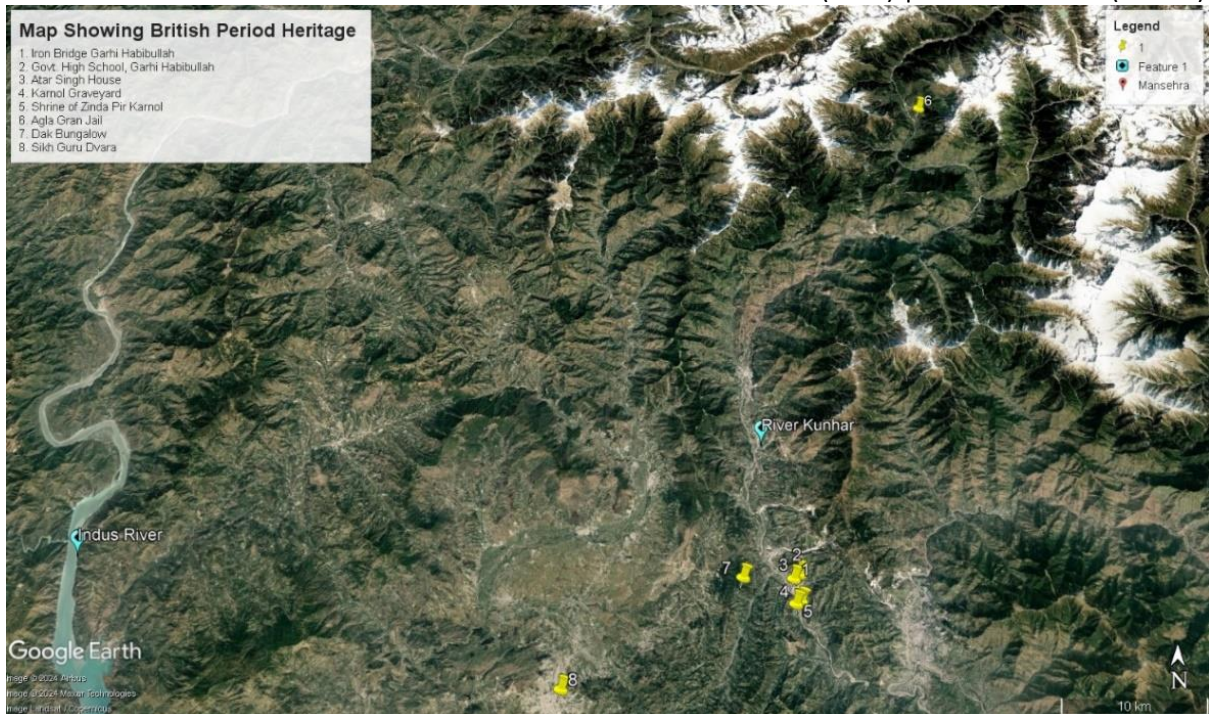


Figure 7. Map showing British Period Heritage Sites in District Mansehra

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