

## **MUGHAL RIVER FORTS AROUND DHAKA: AN APPRAISAL**

**Ayesha Begum**

Mughal rule in India began with Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur's accession to the throne in 1526 A.D. But a long period of time elapsed before the final takeover of the authority of Bengal by the Mughals. For consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal the foundation of water forts was essential. From the architectural viewpoint there are evidences to prove that fort buildings in Mughal period deserve special attention for an independent and detailed study.

From the new outposts which were mostly river forts around the capital Dhaka, the Mughal viceroy Man Singh started the consolidation project which was completed by Islam Khan. From the functional point of view, the Mughal fort architecture can be divided into two major groups – the fortified defense centre for military use such as the river forts at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur. The new type of Mughal forts with artillery platform sprang up with the systematic development of defense devices. Naturally during the Mughal rule in Bengal siege type of fort did not grow as it had lost its significance altogether.

During the Mughal period palace fort did not play any dominating part in Bengal. None of the Mughal emperors lived in Bengal, even their Subahdars never stayed here permanently, hence a standard palace fort never came into existence. Even the Lalbagh Fort which was built as a palace fort was never completed.

A study of nature and evolution of medieval forts in Bengal under the Mughals reveals that the building activity was mainly confined in and around Dhaka, the provincial capital. In the consideration of the Mughal forts in medieval Bengal the purpose naturally influenced the design. Formative and stylistic consideration, therefore, enable us to further divide the fort buildings into three main categories: 1) River Forts, 2) Border Outposts and 3) Palace Forts. Among these categories river forts is of much significance.

In riverine Bengal, the river forts claim much significance with regard to its strategic importance. Through the erection of river forts at different strategically points the Mughals brought the whole of Bengal under their control. The Mughal river forts were those entry points over lands or water for keeping watch on the boundaries of Dhaka. Structurally, this type of forts consists of outer walls with a gateway in its front. The main emphasis was carried out by the bastions within which guard house was provided for watching the approach of the attackers. These types of forts were meant to keep on watch over the inroad of invading forces.

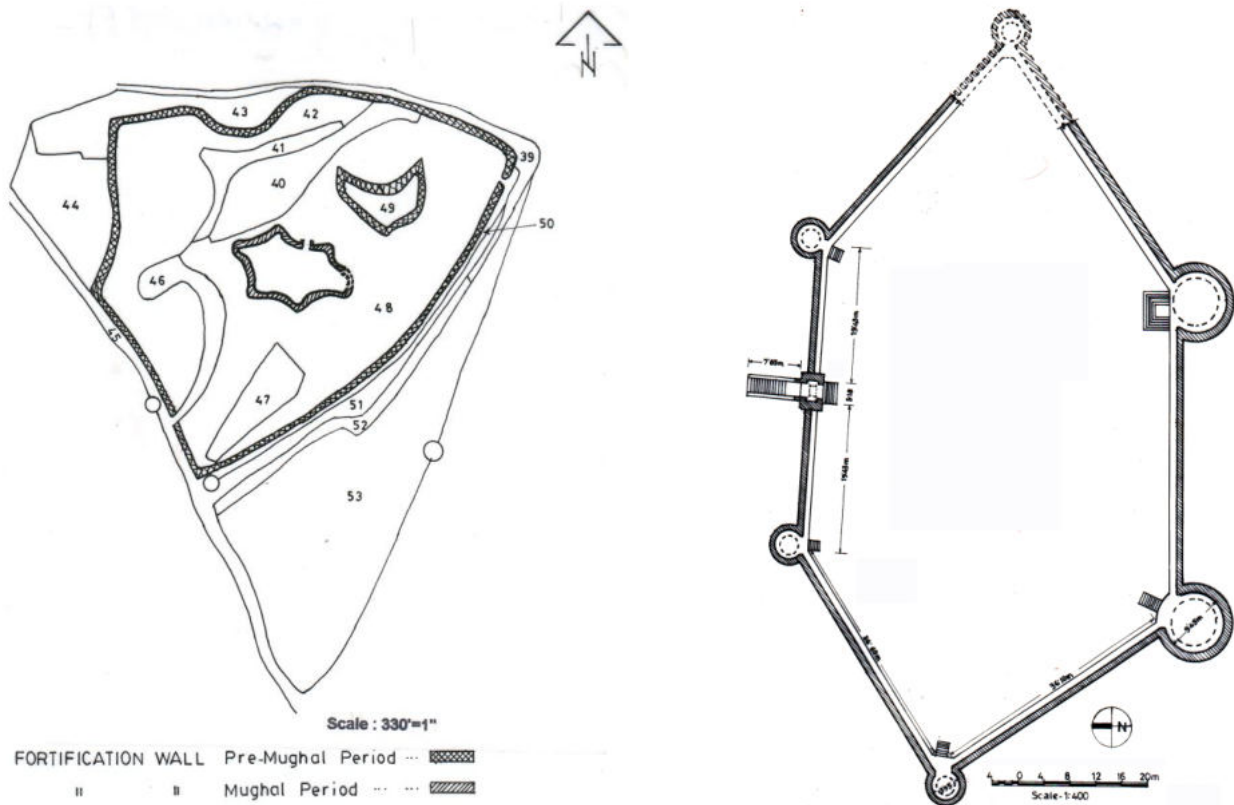
In asserting political stability the Mughals were able to study the topography of this country and give highest priority to the type of river forts. Thus the Mughals patronized, cultivated and innovated the river forts – that was not rooted in the traditions and conventions of North Indian architecture. As the forts of Bengal were characteristically mud built and the main defensive device was taken by the rivers, tributaries, canals and moats, it appeared to Mirza Nathan who writes, “In Bengal there were no ancient forts except of Gawr, Rajmahal, Ghoraghat, Dacca ...<sup>1</sup> The main building activity, as evident from extant fort structures, seems to have confined more or less to eastern region particularly around Dhaka. These forts are mainly river forts. The valid reason behind the growth of this type of forts is not far to seek. Bengal is predominantly a riverine country. The rivers are spread all over the country in such a way that only through these rivers even the remote parts of the land is approachable. This advantage is again expanded and increased to many folds during the rainy season when almost all the places of the land are full of water.

Situated in the center of eastern Bengal, Dhaka was able to command all the big water routes. Dhaka city not only stood upon the Buriganga but was itself criss-crossed by minor rivers and creeks, the most notable of which was the Dulai.<sup>2</sup> It had given the city an excellent network of internal waterways of great strategic and commercial importance.<sup>3</sup> It was this geographical location of Dhaka, upon the last bluff of higher ground in a low-lying region and its commanding portion on the water-routes of the country as a whole, which in 1610 A.D. moved Islam Khan to transfer the capital there from Rajmahal.<sup>4</sup> This move was made in order to intensify the campaign against the rebellions and independent Bara-Bhuiyas (Zamindras), Afgan chiefs, Firingi and Magh pirates, the English East India Company, the Dutch and the vassal chiefs of the frontier kingdom and so to establish Mughal hegemony in Bengal. Once the hegemony was established, Dacca became a provincial capital. It would also, later in the century become the base from which river defense against Portuguese and Magh raids was organized and the Mughal advances north into Coach Behar and Assam, and south-east to Chittagong and Arakan, were launched.<sup>5</sup> As an administrative and military headquarter Dacca expanded rapidly, a whole Mughal town growing round the old fort – now the central jail site.<sup>6</sup> The building of Lalbagh Qella, fortified Zinjira Palace and the river forts at Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur indicate Mughal speculation of defense strategy about the necessity of unhindered communication which was possible only by rivers at that time.

The still extant river forts around Dhaka are the forts at Hajiganj, Sonakanda, Idrakpur etc. For constructing the forts at strategic places the Mughal built up their defense mechanism along the lines of natural protection, not defying them. In the following pages an attempt has been made to give an introduction to some of the most important river forts still extant.

**The Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj:**

The Hajiganj River Fort is situated at a point where the old Buriganga flowed into Sitalakhya at Khijirpur (Hajiganj) in Narayanganj (Plates 53.1-53.7). The former name of the eastern locality of Narayanganj was Khijirpur, so the fort was also called Khijirpur Fort. It is 25.75 km (16 miles) from Dhaka city on the western bank of the Sitalakhya in the district of Narayanganj.



**Plate 53.1:** Hajiganj Mouza Map, J L No. 199, (Courtesy: A Howlader).

**Plate 53.2:** Ground plan of Hajiganj Fort, Narayanganj.

According to some earlier scholars the Hajiganj Fort is pentagonal<sup>7</sup> in plan. But if we scrutinize the spot comparing with the site-plan it may easily be evident that the fort plan (Plate 53.2) is hexagonal<sup>8</sup> rather than pentagonal. It has circular bastions of varying diameters at the corners. The fort is entirely made of brick. The Gateway to the fort is provided from the north through a flight of steps with a wide wall. The front view of the fort consists of a high arched portal on the riverside measuring 44.04 m (19.43 m +5.18 m+19.43 m). The opposite arms of the fort on the south are of same length while the other four arms measure slightly more or less 36.10 m. At present there are five rounded bastions of which two on the south side are larger in diameter measuring 9.44 m while the other ones are smaller measuring 3.95 m. Another bastion may probably be located on the east is not now in situ. There are high artillery platforms,



**Plate 53.3:** Gateway of Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj, view from outside.

meant most probably for mounting cannons, within the corner bastions of the fort. The bastions are filled with earth up to wider holes suggesting that they were meant for guns directing at the pirates proceeding up the river. The fort is extended from east to west. The entire fortification wall and the bastions are crowned by big merlons pierced with musket loopholes. The surrounding walls of the fort are about 0.1m thick and about 1.8 m high. The forts with numerous merlons are provided with varying holes for muskets. The loopholes are not always uniform in size and in number. Thus, the walls assume the character of battlemented parapet. As with many other medieval Mughal forts, there are no interior structures. The fort area is 1.5 m higher than the surrounding ground level. The fort is provided with a square watchtower with a gun platform facing towards the river. It is not certain if the tower was erected along with the fort or afterwards. The material, method of construction and size of bricks indicate the tower to be of subsequent construction. The only gateway is connected with both upward and downward flight of steps whose exterior one measures 7.6 m in

length. There are also some connecting steps to each of the attached bastions. A staircase with eight flight of steps is connected internally with the entrance gateway. The entire wall from inside 1.22 m above the ground level is provided with projecting flat wall. This wall path, nearly 0.61 m wide, is provided for the operation of guns at the attackers.

The fort provides access through arched gateway. It was conducted through half octagon towards the interior. In Hajiganj the gateway is comparatively larger than the surrounding walls and has direct link with the fort keeping the gateway within a protected fronton. The fronton is further distinguished by bordering in ornamental panels within a rectangular frame and topped by some marlons. The arched gateway of the fort is embellished with rectangular niches and is





**Plate 53.4:** Parapet wall with loopholes, Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj.



**Plate 53.5:** Surrounding wall, Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj.

filled with cusped arches which is similar to the facade of the mosque of Lalbagh Fort. The Hajiganj Fort is important because it marks a new type of fort building which is called a river fort in Mughal period. As there are no other structural remains within the fort, Ahmad Hasan Dani remarks that the fort was occupied only during the rainy season and the temporary people used to live in tents. There is no reason to assume, as has been suggested, that these types of fort were only used in the monsoon. Rather, since the danger of pirate raids was constant,<sup>9</sup> this type of defensive centers served as river forts round the year. “Tavernier who visited Dhaka in Shaesta Khan’s time saw big guns turned towards the river from some of the ramparts”.<sup>10</sup> It was a river-fort guarding the passage into the river Buriganga.



**Plate 53.6:** Corner Bastion, Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj.



**Plate 53.7:** Rampart Pathway, Hajiganj River Fort, Narayanganj.

The date of Hajiganj Fort is not exactly known due to the absence of any inscription. It is wrongly attributed to Mir Jumla as builder<sup>11</sup> and the year of construction is supposed to be 1663A.D. (1073 A.H.).<sup>12</sup> The date and description given by Munshi Rahman Ali Taesh is not free from inconsistency.<sup>13</sup> Sayid Aulad Hasan following Taesh stated “The fort is said to have

been erected by Mir Jumla to resist the incursion of the Mughls and the Arakanese.<sup>14</sup> The same view is repeated in the recently published *Dhaka Past Present Future*.<sup>15</sup> The book maintains: “The viceroyalty of Mir Jumla for three years from 1660 to 1663 was very significant as drastic measures were taken to extirpate the marauding pirates by the construction of three water forts in and around Dhaka, namely the Sonakanda Fort at Bandar, the Idrakpur Fort at Munshiganj and Khijirpur (Hajiganj) Fort in Narayabganj”.<sup>16</sup> In this respect S.M. Taifoor and A.H. Dani held a different view. According to Taifur, “Mir Jumla is said to have constructed the fort at Khijirpur (Hajiganj) in Narayanganj. But this is not a fact. In older Mughal times the fort of Khijirpur remained as the residence of Mughal subahdars...”.<sup>17</sup> Dani’s opinion helps us to investigate the date of the fort when he mentioned, “The older name of its (Narayanganj) eastern locality was Khijirpur, which even today is called Hajiganj. In that locality behind the Fire Brigade can be seen the remains of an old Mughal fort, which is wrongly attributed to Mir Jumla”.<sup>18</sup> He also said, “It has been built soon after Islam Khan established the Mughal capital at Dhaka”.<sup>19</sup> The contemporary sources *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* and *Akbarnama* help us to explore the time of Hajiganj Fort. In *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*<sup>20</sup> it is stated that Mirza Nathan with a large army made his head quarter at Khiljirpur Mosque and the Elephant Stable – *Hatishala* was established at a place beyond the reach of cannon fire. There was also an indication about the building of a fort nearby. The most dependable and primary source based on the *Akbarnama* gives us some important information about the existence of the fort in pre-Mughal time.

According to *Akbarnama*, “When the bank of the river Ganges near Khijirpur became an imperial camp, there were strong forts on two sides of the river owing to the spots’ being a thoroughfare. In a short time both of these were taken with severe fighting, and Sonargaon came into the possession of the imperial servants. They also reached karabuh? (katrabo) which is his (Isa’s) home. That populous city was plundered”.<sup>21</sup> From the above discussion it may conveniently be presumed that there was the existence of a fort at Khijirpur before the transfer of Mughal capital to Dhaka. Khijirpur was undoubtedly a place of strategically importance from long before and it was an important defense centre of both Isa Khan<sup>22</sup> and his son Musa Khan.<sup>23</sup>

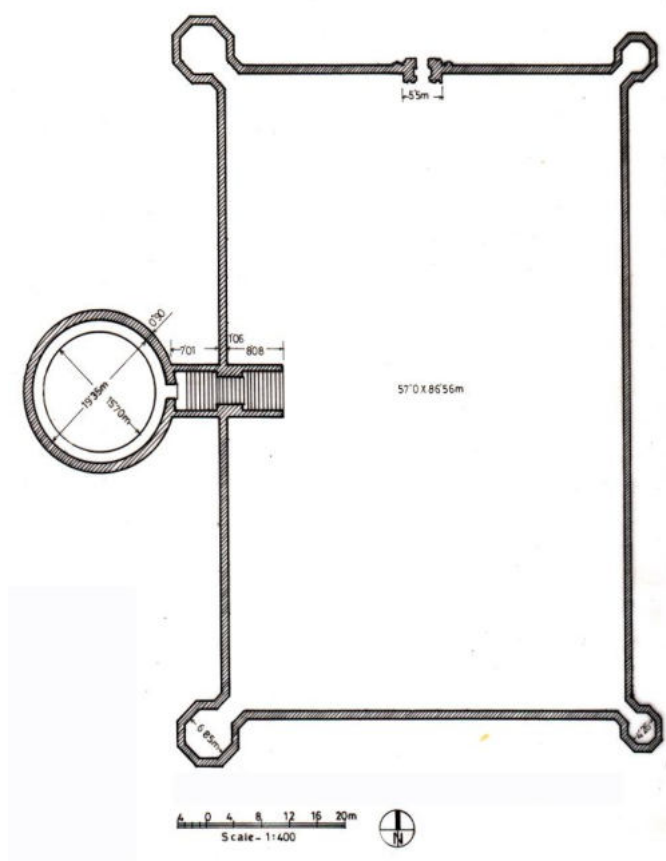
Finally, we have come to know about a British C.S. Map of Mauza Hajiganj under Narayanganj. The Hajiganj Fort area<sup>24</sup> (**Plate 53.1**) of about 25 acres are pointed out in this C.S. Map (J.L. No.199 and *dag* (plot), No. 40 to 50).<sup>25</sup> The survey map contained even the outline of the surrounding walls of the fort. It may be mentioned here that the area of about 25 acres were mentioned in the requisition report, prepared by the Department of Archeology and Museums, in 1920-21 A.D. From the above discussion it appears that there was an old fort at the site spreading over a much bigger area.

It was captured and rebuilt later by the Mughals. Naturally, the date of its construction by the Mughals may conveniently be determined immediately after the transfer of the capital of Dhaka in the first decade of 17<sup>th</sup> century. And subsequently the Hajiganj Fort was restored and renovated by Mir Jumla (1660-1663 A.D.) when he took a plan to strengthen the defense of the provincial



capital of Dhaka. The Hajiganj fort occupies the ancient area which conceals perhaps the ruins of a big pre-Muslim fort. This was connected with a high road leading towards Tongi bridge via Dhaka city.<sup>26</sup> In the south-east corner there is a tall square observatory tower. It is not an original work and may easily be considered as a subsequent construction. In all probability there was a high circular platform like other river-forts for the same purposes. The fort for the first time was taken under protection of the Department of Archaeology and Museums in 1950 A.D. It has been renovated and repaired for several times; excepting the south-east corner bastion the entire surrounding walls are now in situ. The brick-work and over all dilapidated condition of Hajiganj Fort before renovation (1950 A.D.) suggests a much earlier date than those of Sonakanda and Idrakpur. Furthermore, we know from history that in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. there was much necessity of erecting river-forts to protect the newly established capital of Jahangirnagar (Dhaka) and to resist the attackers and piratical activities. Thus, the Hajiganj Fort may conveniently be considered as the fore-runner of a series of river forts constructed in and around Dhaka.

**The Sonakanda River Fort, Narayanganj (Plates 53.8 - 53.12):**



**Plate 53.8:** Ground Plan: Sonakanda River fort, Narayanganj.

The Mughal river fort of Sonakanda<sup>27</sup> is situated at the junction of the Lakhya and Dhalleswari rivers.<sup>28</sup> It stands on the eastern bank of the river Lakhya<sup>29</sup> at Bandar in Narayanganj almost opposite to Hajiganj Fort. With the Mughal conquest Bengal lost its independence and became one of the twelve *Shubahs* of the whole Mughal Empire. For consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal the foundation of river fort (water forts) was essential. From the new type of forts the Mughals in Bengal started the consolidation project which was subsequently completed by Islam Khan.

Bengal is predominantly a riverine country. The rivers are spread all over the country in such a way that only through these rivers the remote parts of the land approachable. This advantage is further extended during the rainy season when almost all the places of the land are full of water. Situated at the centre of eastern Bengal, Dhaka was able to command all



the big water routes. It was this geographical location of Dhaka, upon the last bluff of higher ground in a low-lying region and its commanding position on the water routes of the country as a whole prompted Islam Khan to transfer the capital.<sup>30</sup> The program was undertaken in order to intensify the campaign against the rebellions and independent Bara-Bhuiyans, Afgan chiefs, Firingi and Magh pirates, the English East India Company the Dutch and the vassal chiefs of the frontier kingdom to consolidate Mughal hegemony in Bengal.<sup>31</sup> The emblematic group of homogeneous river fort erected by the Mughals deserves special attention for their distinctive building style they evolved. As a matter of fact, a number of river forts were erected in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which guarded the water routes to Dhaka and other places of strategic importance.



**Plate 53.9:** Gateway view from outside, Sonakanda River Fort.



**Plate 53.10:** Surrounding wall crowned with big merlons, Sonakanda River Fort.



**Plate 53.11:** Octagonal Corner bastion, Sonakanda River Fort.



**Plate 53.12:** Circular Platform within Sonakanda River Fort. (Courtesy to Abdur Rab Dulal).

The Mughal river fort at Sonakanda is quadrangular<sup>32</sup> in plan measuring 86.56 m × 57.0 m and surrounded by a wall of brick-work 3.05 m in height with inner and intermediate bastions. The thickness of the wall is 1.06 m. The wall is loophole for 0.91 m from the top, the bottom being solid. The fort is provided with a single entrance gate on the north and has four octagonal corner bastions.<sup>33</sup> There is a circular artillery platform with staircase. The staircase was most probably meant for “gun-post” and it was built in the interior towards the west. The merlons are generally pierced with three holes in a triangular form. During the Mughal period one of the common features of their fort architecture was the loopholes at fort walls for ease of gunfire. The outer walls of Sonakanda Fort are crowned with big merlones pierced with musket loopholes. Thus the whole walls assume the character of battlemented parapet. Excepting the artillery platform, there is no trace of permanent structure within the fortification walls. The corner bastions on both sides of the western wing are wider than those of the eastern wing which are 4.26 m while the other two on the western wing are 6.85m in diameter. The centrally raised platform is 19.35m in diameter and 6.09 m in height. The artillery platform is entered by a structure with 25 flights of step. At the end of the staircase a gateway<sup>34</sup> is provided to enter and there is a surrounding wall of the platform. A new feature of the Mughal river forts in Bengal was the presence of the artillery platform. The circular platform is filled with earth up to the level of rampart wall; this strongly built platform suggesting that it is meant for big caliber cannon aiming at the attackers proceeding up the river.

Like Hajiganj Fort, here is also only one gateway on the north. The arched gateway is placed within a rectangular frame. The arch of the gateway of Sonakanda Fort was changed into the four-centered variety, recalling Persian influence. Both the sides of the gateway are divided into several plastered panels. The Mughal builders introduced paneling of the walls with rectangular frame and sometimes with niches. The gateway is topped over by the decorated merlons. The Sonakanda river fort has two main parts; one is a fortified rampart wall of enormous dimension which has numerous loopholes wide and narrow. And the other part, the most important one a raised outwork (circular in plan) on the western face. The platform has high surrounding walls which have merlons of wider holes. The purpose of building this platform was to mount heavy cannons<sup>35</sup> to operate in times of war and danger. As with many other contemporary forts, there is no existence of any interior structure.

In contrast to the Sultanate fort buildings, the typical Mughal fort structures have the plastered surface divided into rectangular panels, a straightened cornice of battlemented parapet in walls. Both cornice and parapet are often decorated with a row of merlons and arches are four cantered. The Sonakanda Fort stands for a type from which we can easily form an idea about the medieval river forts erected during the Mughal period. The platform has two circles of which the inner circle is 15.70 m and the outer circle is 19.35 m in diameter respectively.

The thickness of the surrounding wall is 1.16 m and that of the artillery platform is 0.90 m in diameter. The length of the staircase from the ground to the artillery platform is (8.08 m + 1.06 m + 7.01 m) 16.15 m. All the four octagonal corner bastions are vacant within and maintain the same level with ground. Unlike the bastions of the forts at Hajiganj and Idrakpur the bastions of Sonakanda Fort are octagonal in plan.<sup>36</sup> The Sonakanda Fort has been provided with entrances from outside. The entrance gateway to the platform is a cinquefoil archway.

The fort is not dated by any inscription. Though the construction of this is attributed to Mir Jumla<sup>37</sup> but there is no evidence to this. On the stylistic similarities with other Mughal river forts in and around Dhaka, it is datable to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The Sonakanda Fort is larger than the Hajiganj Fort and its architecture features are much more similar to those of Hajiganj Fort<sup>38</sup> than to those of Idrakpur Fort. Thus, it is presumed that the fort was built earlier than the Idrakpur Fort. At present the river has shifted about 91.44 m distant but at one time the Lakhya River must have flowed by the foot of the Sonakanda Fort. Now the fort is hidden behind the residential and industrial buildings of Sonakanda. Here the works of restoration and repair have been undertaken several times. The fort has been taken under protection of the Department of Archaeology and Museums (1950 A.D.).<sup>39</sup> The defensive walls and the massive artillery platform are still in existence. It is not incorrect to estimate that such a high platform was meant to take up a long-range gun which could shoot at the pirates and attackers from a distance. It may be presumed that the fort was used as check post round the year. The Sonakanda Fort had much more importance<sup>40</sup> as it stood on the conjunction of three rivers which formed outlets for the pirates. Thus, the fort at Sonakanda is one of the several river forts,<sup>41</sup> which the Mughals raised at various strategic points in their dominion. The river forts were significant innovations of defense architecture introduced by the Mughals in riverine Bengal. The battlemented parapet with machicoulis and the circular platform, lofty in height inside the walls of the river fort, attain both balances in plan and proportion in structural elevation. In view of the characteristic features of Sonakanda Fort it may conveniently be considered the best example of the river forts built by the Mughals.

#### **The Idrakpur River Fort, Munshiganj (Plates 53.13-53.18):**

The fort is situated at Idrakpur in Munshiganj district, 24.14 km south-east of Dhaka on the bank of the river Ichhamati which receded long before. Ichhamati River has shifted east-ward and the fort now stands on a silted up area. It is a river fort, assuming the charter of an outpost, guarded the water routes to Dhaka to resist the incursion of the Portuguese and Mugh.

Idrakpur River Fort consists of an oblong 59.60 m × 86.87 m enclosure, a simple arched gateway on the north. The archway is set in a projected rectangular fronton and carried under a semi dome. In comparison with the gateways of Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Lalbagh Forts it looks unimpressive and conducted through a four-centered pointed arch devoid of moderate height. The fort is entirely made of brick masonry with lime mortar. The ground plan shows close resemblance to the forts at Hajiganj and Sonakanda in respect of the crowning wide merlons and



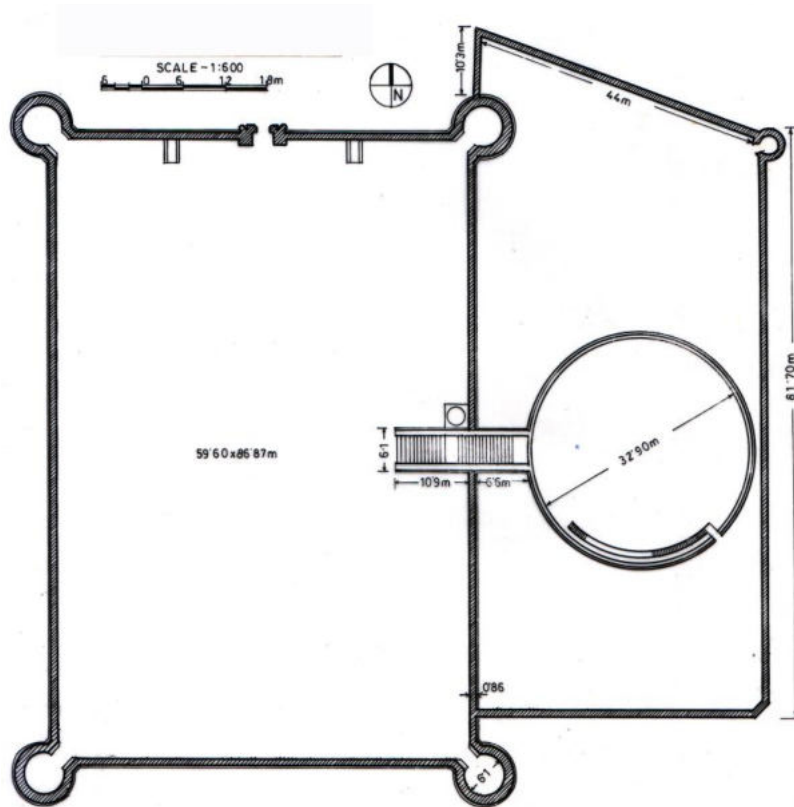


Plate 53.13: Ground Plan: Idrakpur River fort, Munshiganj.



Plate 53.14: Gateway of Idrakpur River Fort.



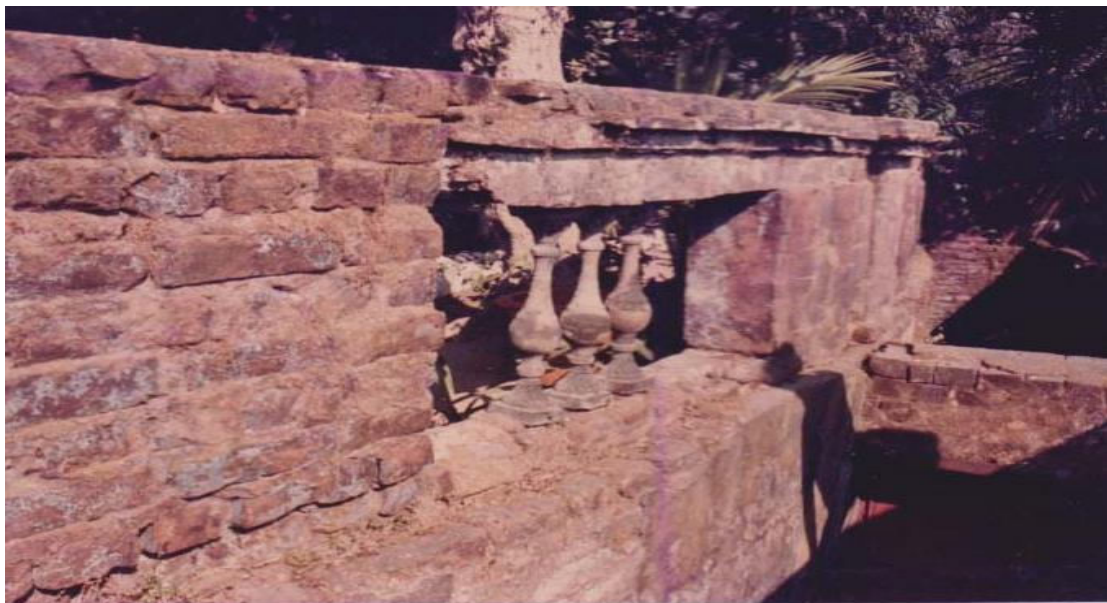
**Plate 53.15:** Idrakpur River Fort with high artillery platform.



**Plate 53.16:** Staircase leading towards Basement Chamber, Idrakpur River Fort.



**Plate 53.17:** Chief Bastion Lofty in height, Idrakpur River Fort.



**Plate 53.18:** Parapet Wall with Decoration, Idrakpur River Fort.

numerous musket loopholes on the entire fort wall, corner bastions and circular artillery platform. It is divided into two halves – eastern and western. The western part consists of 97 m × 52 m open ground surrounded by rampart walls with angle bastions. The eastern part 77 m × 44 m area includes a high solid circular platform. The platform is 9.14m in height from the ground and 32.5 m in diameter. A long staircase is connected with the circular platform from the western side. The platform is so high that it is supposed to have been considered as an observatory tower



to observe the activities of the enemies in times of danger. This is placed in a 44m wide annex with a small bastion at its north-east corner. The circular towers are filled solidly to rampart level and above this level the fort walls are pierced with numerous small and wide loopholes to place heavy cannons. There are other various types of slits within the merlons. Thus, the parapet wall is enlivened with merlons. The dilapidated western wall up to 3.40 m and the south-eastern corner tower up to 4.60m are in existence now. The angle towers measuring 6.1m have similar type of gun slits and loopholes for muskets. Thickness of the fortified walls is generally 0.88m wide. The only gateway is 2.10 m broad in the north wall of the fort and it is set within a rectangle. Both sides of gateway are provided with panel decorations. The eastern half of the fort is extended for about 10.3m in length when it is shortened on its southern side. Northern extension perhaps is done to meet more accommodation for the Mughal soldiers of that time. The curious feature of this river fort is a staircase leading towards the basement chamber. A staircase descends from the top of the artillery platform to a considerable depth and served in all probability the link with the armoury beneath. The surrounding wall is only 1.22 m (4 ft) high. The platform is approached by a flight of steps 1.9 m broad and 18.26 m (10.9 m + 0.86 m + 6.5 m) long across the eastern wall of the main defense wall.

The fort of Idrakpur is not dated by any inscription. It is stated, “this fort was built during the time of the Emperor Aurangzeb...”. The fort is known to have been built by Mir Jumla, the Mughal Governor of Dhaka in 1660 A.D. Based on architectural similarities of Idrakpur Fort with other contemporary forts and fortifications, a mid-17<sup>th</sup> century date may be assigned to it. It has been known from long before that “within the enclosure wall are situated the residence of the Sub divisional Officer of Munshiganj and the Lock-up. The first of which is built upon the top of the chief bastion”. At present some other new structures including the quarter of D.C., Munshiganj are erected on the top of the drum like platform. Moreover, the fort itself is being used as jail. The Idrakpur Fort was declared a protected monument under the A.M.P. Act (Act VII of 1904) in 1909 A.D.<sup>42</sup> and came under the occupation of the Provincial Government of Bengal and later established the Munsiganj Sub-Jail inside the fort area and also constructed the Sub divisional Officer’s (Civil) Bungalow over the entire platform of the fort. After establishment of Pakistan, the Government of East Pakistan was requested by the Department of Archaeology to evacuate the structures. According they approved a scheme (costing about Rs. 15 lacs) during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five Year Plan and placed a sum of Rs. 3.5 lacs during the year 1967 to 1968 A.D. and a new site for the same were also selected. But the actual construction work of the Bungalow could not be taken up for reason not known. An attempt has recently been made by the Department of Archaeology to evacuate all the irrelevant structures including D.C.’s Bungalow from the fort area for its proper maintenance.

The most noteworthy and striking feature of the fort is its circular platform enormous in size and lofty in height. In view of this peculiar characteristic feature Idrakpur Fort claims special importance among the Mughal forts in Bengal. To investigate the purpose of the



huge platform and the flight of steps leading to the basement chamber it is also presumed that the underground chamber of the platform was used as the armory of the fort. It is not incorrect to note here that the half buried platform of armory of the fort most probably was the ready stock of arms and ammunitions. Some experts pointed out the weakness of the fort by showing the low fort walls.<sup>43</sup> As the main purpose of the river fort or outpost was to keep away the raiders advancing through the middle of the river, so walls of lofty height should not be a requisite feature for defensive purposes of this type of forts. The target was on the on coming raiders through river by boat or ship. Impregnable high defensive wall is prerequisite to that type of fort which is designated as 'siege-fort'. Furthermore, the big drum of lofty height was meant for mounting a massive cannon which indicate the strength of Idrakpur Fort rather than its weakness. Strategically the Idrakpur Fort claims much importance as an outpost because "all Mughal conquerors passed through Ichhamoti river while proceeding towards Dhaka".<sup>44</sup>

In general, the architectural features of Mughal forts follow the previous patterns. But in keeping with the changed topographical situation and strategic position there was a strong necessity to evolve a different type of defense center in Bengal. The purpose especially helped here to determine the type of the fort building. The forts of Hajiganj, Sonakanda and Idrakpur are good representatives of the type of river-forts. The forts of Mughal types which developed here were marked by some regional individuality determined by topographical situations and climatic conditions. The patrons and builders brought with them the Mughal Architectural heritage, but wrought them to meet these new conditions.

The Mughal palace forts in Bengal were not at all built on an experiment basis as the builders brought with them the long maturity in this field. The works show poverty in imagination due to stringent economic circumstances. In the light of the above study it is evident that the Mughals in different topographical contexts, absolutely unfamiliar to them, took necessary measures and innovated new types of forts particularly river-forts.

From the architectural point of view, the general features of the Mughal forts in Bengal are similar to those in North India but the forts differ radically in their conception and purpose. The Mughals were not familiar to the nature and geographical feature of Bengal. The river fort of the Mughals in Bengal was experimental in character, because it carried out a structural scheme which was not at all traditional. The river fort, without doubt, was not an inspiration which came from outside. The Mughals built up their defense mechanism along the banks of the rivers in conformity with the topographical position. Thus, the river forts mark a happy fusion of the defensive requirements of the Mughals and the geographical peculiarities of Bengal. This type of architectural contrivance exerted much influence on the evolution of fort architecture in medieval Bengal.

Compared to imperial Mughal surface decoration it should be noted here that in Bengal the Mughal forts are very simple in these respects. The battlemented parapet with machicoulis especially the circular platform lofty in height, inside the walls of the river forts, attain much significance. The emblematic group of homogeneous river forts erected by the Mughals deserve special attention for their distinctive building style they evolved. As a matter of fact a number of river forts had been erected in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which guarded the water routes to Dhaka. Though the river forts of Mughal under study cannot boast of magnificent building made of stone yet even in brick it shines out some noteworthy innovations original, rare and exceptional in character.

#### Notes and References:

1. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, translation M.I. Borah, Gauhati, Govt. of Assam, 1936, p. 57.
2. S.U. Ahmed, 1966, *Dacca – A Study in Urban History and Development*, Riverdale, U.S.A., Riverdale Company, p.10.
3. Ayesha Begum, 2013, *Forts and Fortifications in Medieval Bengal*, Dhaka, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, pp. 262-270.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.11.
6. *Ibid.*
7. A. H. Dani, 1961, *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, Dacca, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, p. 225.
8. The researcher visited the site personally. **Plate 53.2**, Hajiganj Fort, Narayanganj.
9. G. Michell (ed.), 1984, *The Islamic Heritage of Bengal*, Paris, UNESCO, p. 137.
10. S. M. Taifoor, *Glimses of old Dhaka*, Dhaka, S. M. Perwez, 1956, p. 137. Of the cannons kept in these forts two of Mir Jumla's cannons one of them – named 'Bibi Mariam', now placed in front of the 'Osmani Uddan'.
11. *List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal*, Calcutta, Government of West Bengal, 1896, p. 206.
12. Munshi Rahman Ali Taesh, *Tawarikh-e-Dhaka*, translation A. M. M. Shorfuddin, Dhaka, IFB, 1985, pp. 15, 58.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Sayid Aulad Hasan, 1904, *Notes on the Antiquities of Dacca*, Dacca, M. M. Bysak, pp. 59, 71.
15. S.U. Ahmed (ed.), 1991, *Dhaka Past Present Future*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, pp. 32, 293.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
17. Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p. 254.
18. A. H. Dani, 1962 (reprint 2009), *Dacca: A Record of Its Changing Fortune*, Dacca (Sufia Dani), p. 226.
19. A. H. Dani, *MAB*, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

20. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghabi* (tr. Khaleqdad Choudhury) Dacca, Bangla Academy, 1978, p. 69.
21. *Abul Fazl, Akbarnama*, vol. III (translation, Beveridge), Delhi, S. S. Publication, 1977, pp. 648-49.
22. A. Karim, *Barabhuyan Parichiti, Professor A. B. M. Habibullah Felicitation Lecture, Bangladesh Itihash Parishad*, 1<sup>st</sup> March, Dhaka, 1992, pp. 2, 20; A. Karim, 1992, *Banglar Itihash: Mughal Amal*, Vol. I, Rajshahi, IBS, pp. 42-143.
23. H. Khatun, 2006, *Iqlim Sonargaon History Jurisdiction Monuments*, Academic Press and Publisher Library, Dhaka, pp. 59-6; H. Khatun, 'In Quest of Katrabhu', *JASBA*, vol. 31, No.2, Dhaka, (ASB, 1986), pp. 37-40.
24. **Map 53.1**, Mouza Map, Mouza Hajigannj, J. L. No. 199 scale: 330=1" (Courtesy A. Hawlader Retired Draftsman), Department of Archaeology, GoB.
25. Cf. C.S. Map, Mouza Hajiganj, J. L. No. 199, *dag* (plot) No. 40 to 50. Courtesy: A. Hawlader.
26. S. M. Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
27. S.M. Taifoor, *Glimpses of old Dhaka*, Dacca, Laila Bilquis Banu, 1956, p. 137. According to Taifoor, "local tradition gives this place name to Sonakanda Fort and Sona Bibi, Daughter of Chand Roy, the Hindu chiftain. Old ballads say that in this place there was a fight between Chand Roy and Isa Khan in which Chand Roy was defeated and Isa Khan carried away the pretty Sona Bibi as the trophy".
28. *List of Ancient Monuments of Bengal*, Calcutta, *op.cit.*, 1896, p. 206; *Bangladesh District Gazetteer Dacca*, Dacca, GoB., 1975, p.109.
29. *Protected Monuments and Mounds in Bangladesh*, Dacca, Monument No.10, Department of Archeology, 1975, p. 13.
30. Sharif Uddin Ahmed, 1986, *Dacca*, Reverdale, U.S.A: Riverdale Company, p.10.
31. *Ibid.*, p.10.
32. S.M. Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p.137.
33. Taifoor wrongly remarked, 'The fort was built in a semi-circular fashion'.
34. George Michell, 1984, *The Islamic Heritage of Bengal*, Paris, UNESCO, p. 45.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Ayesha Begum, 2013, *Forts and Fortifications in Medieval Bengal*, Dhaka, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, pp. 263-269.
37. Sayed Aulad Hasan, 1904, *Notes on the antiquities of Dacca*, (M.M. Bysak), p. 58; Munshi Rahman Ali Taesh, 1958, *Tawarikh-e-Dhaka*, (IFB), p. 217; S. U. Ahmed, 1991, *Dhaka Past Present Future*, Dhaka, ASB, p. 31. Taifoor wrote, "The construction of this fort is also attributed to Mir Jumla. But Sonakanda Fort was a Pre-Mughal fort, perhaps built by the Turks or Pathans to check inroads of the Arakanys"; Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p. 137. According to Dani, "It was probably built at about the same time as the above fort (Hajiganj Fort)". A. H. Dani, 1961, *Muslim Architecture in Bengal*, Dacca, ASP, p. 226.

38. Mohammad Abul Hashem Miah, 1988, 'Medieval Forts in Bangladesh, 'Proceedings, Third South Asian Archaeological Congress', Islamabad, Department of Archaeology and Museums, p.166.
39. *Bangladesh Archaeology*, Sonakanda Fort, (Bengali), No. F-16-78/50-EST 16.11.50.
40. A. K. M. Samsul Alam, 1984, *An Album of Archaeological Relics in Bangladesh*, Dacca, (Department of Archaeology and Museums), p. 13; Nazimuddin Ahmed, 1984, *Discover the Monuments of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, U.P.L., pp.198-199.
41. A. Begum, *op.cit.*, p. 266-467; Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p. 131. Unlike Pathan the Mughals proved weak in riverine warfare- they were always afraid of the approach of pirates. Thus they constructed a good number of river forts.
42. Number and date of protection, No. F2709E, dated 1.10.1909. Protected Monuments and Mounds in Bangladesh (in Bengali), Department of Archaeology, GOB, 1975, p. 12.
43. Dani, *Dacca, op.cit.*, p. 259.
44. Taifoor, *op.cit.*, p.136.