IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

NEGLECTED RURAL ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE: THE CASE OF NAUSHEHRA DHALA, PUNJAB

Rachan Puneet Singh
Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab, India.
https://doi.org/10.47211/idcij.2026.v13i03.002

ABSTRACT
Naushehra Dhala, a border village located along the Indo-Pakistan border in Punjab's Tarn Taran district, holds a significant position in Sikh history dating back to the 16th century. The town preserves a rich blend of historic built fabric, distinct architectural layers, and deep associations with prominent historical figures and socio-cultural events. Despite its tangible and intangible heritage values, the site remains largely undocumented and vulnerable. This paper identifies, documents, and evaluates the unexplored cultural heritage of Naushehra Dhala to advocate for its inclusion within broader heritage conservation frameworks and tourism infrastructure development. Crucially, the study argues that successful heritage conservation cannot survive in isolation; instead, it must transform into a public movement driven by community ownership and local engagement. By outlining the historical trajectory and structural significance of the town, this article provides an actionable baseline for localized protection initiatives and integrated regional development.

Keywords: *Naushehra Dhala; History; Heritage Conservation; Architectural Heritage; Community Ownership; Border Tourism.*

ORIGIN

The origin of Naushehra Dhala is tied to Mata Khari, who fled Padhana village (now in Pakistan) with her son to escape its hostile rulers. The saint Baba Sahaya granted them protection. He subsequently pardoned the rulers of Padhana on one condition: they must stay outside the perimeter Mata Khari could cover on horseback by sunset. Her ride secured nine Sandhu-owned villages extending up to Bhakna, establishing the foundation and name of Naushehra Dhala.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Naushehra Dhala is situated in the Tarn Taran district of Punjab, India, along the Indo-Pakistan border southwest of Amritsar. The site is accessible from the Amritsar railway station via Attari and Rajatal, covering a distance of 42 km. Additionally, it lies approximately 17 km from the Samadhis of Sham Singh Attari.

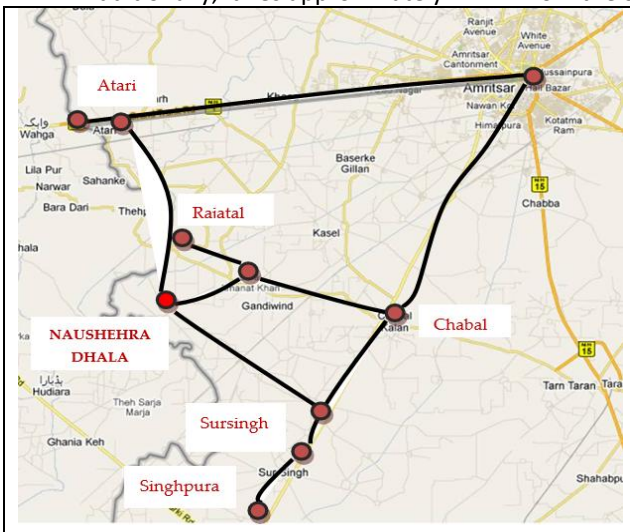

Figure 1 Naushehra Dhala and its linkages with significant places of Heritage and Tourism potential in the region

Figure 2 Google image of the village of Naushehra Dhala

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

VISION

Naushehra Dhala is strategically positioned within a regional network of high-potential cultural heritage and tourism sites. It enjoys direct connectivity to the Wagah-Attari border retreat ceremony, the Samadhis of Sham Singh Attari, and Sarai Amanat Khan. Beyond these established hubs, the region holds lesser-known historic landmarks such as Rajatal, Sursingh, and Singhpur, that require urgent research, exploration, and conservation. With its rich architectural heritage, profound cultural meaning, and deep ties to historical figures, Naushehra Dhala stands out as the most significant site in the area. Its excellent connectivity makes it an ideal, easily approachable destination for both tourists and pilgrims.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Naushehra Dhala holds a profound place in Sikh history through its deep-rooted associations with revered historical figures, ancestral lineages, and sacred architecture.

Lineage and Marriage of Bibi Sukhan

Naushehra Dhala is heavily tied to **Bibi Sukhan Ji** (b. 1700), the daughter of Baba Gurbakash Singh (b. 1673). Baba Gurbakash Singh belonged to the sixth generation of **Baba Buddha Ji** and notably received *Pahul* (Sikh initiation) directly from **Guru Gobind Singh Ji**.

Facilitated by Sukha Rababi, a marriage alliance was arranged with the prominent Sandhu landlord family of Bhai Baba Ji in the Naushehra Dhala *pargana* (administrative unit). At the time, Sahib Rai Sandhu served as the Chaudhary. Because local accounts suggest Sahib Rai was childless, it is believed Bibi Sukhan married the son of his younger brother, Mehtab Rai Sandhu.

Solemnized by Bhai Gurditta Ji, historical accounts note that the wedding procession (*janjh*) was explicitly blessed at the Gurdwara for its strict adherence to Sikh tenets. Upon her arrival, the community bypassed standard familial titles to address her with ultimate reverence as "Bibi Sukhan."

Legacy of Baba Jallahn

The village is equally renowned for its connection to **Baba Jallahn**, a celebrated 16th-century saint and Punjabi poet who lived during the era of **Guru Hargobind Sahib**. Though originally from Bhadhan village (now in Pakistan), Baba Jallahn settled permanently in Naushehra Dhala. A dedicated Gurdwara complex stands at his former residence. This site preserves a historic *Samadhi* (shrine), an ancient water tank, and a heritage well. The complex has expanded to include a modern Gurdwara, a *langar* hall (community kitchen), a *sarai*, minor shrines, and a *divan* hall.

Commemoration and Modern Development

Following Bibi Sukhan's passing in 1777, **Baba Kharak Singh** of Bir Baba Buddha Sahib initiated construction on a memorial Gurdwara, though the initial project faced interruptions.

In recent years, the *Kar Sewa* (voluntary religious service) was successfully revived. This effort has been spearheaded by **Bhai Manjit Singh** (son of Sardar Piara Singh of Tharoo), with robust institutional backing from **Sardar Nirmal Singh** (SGPC Member), **Sardar Kanwarjit Singh Sandhu** representing local families, and the **global NRI diaspora**.

The site now features a completed five-story Gurdwara structure. It successfully balances modern community infrastructure with preserved heritage features, including the ancient well (*khui*) and subterranean chambers (*bhorey*) open for public visitation.

REMNANTS OF HISTORIC MAHAL

The Mahal served as the royal palace for the Chaudhary family and was the residence of Bibi Sukhan. Although the main structure deteriorated and was demolished between 2006 and 2010, the historic underground basements (*Bhorey*) survived. Most of these subterranean chambers are buried and require archaeological excavation, but one section remains accessible.

An octagonal well of great historical and cultural significance connects directly to this accessible basement segment. Historically, masonry-built circular pipes measuring 200 to 300 mm in diameter supplied water from this well to specific rooms. In total, the historic site spans an area of approximately 32 meters by 18 meters.

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

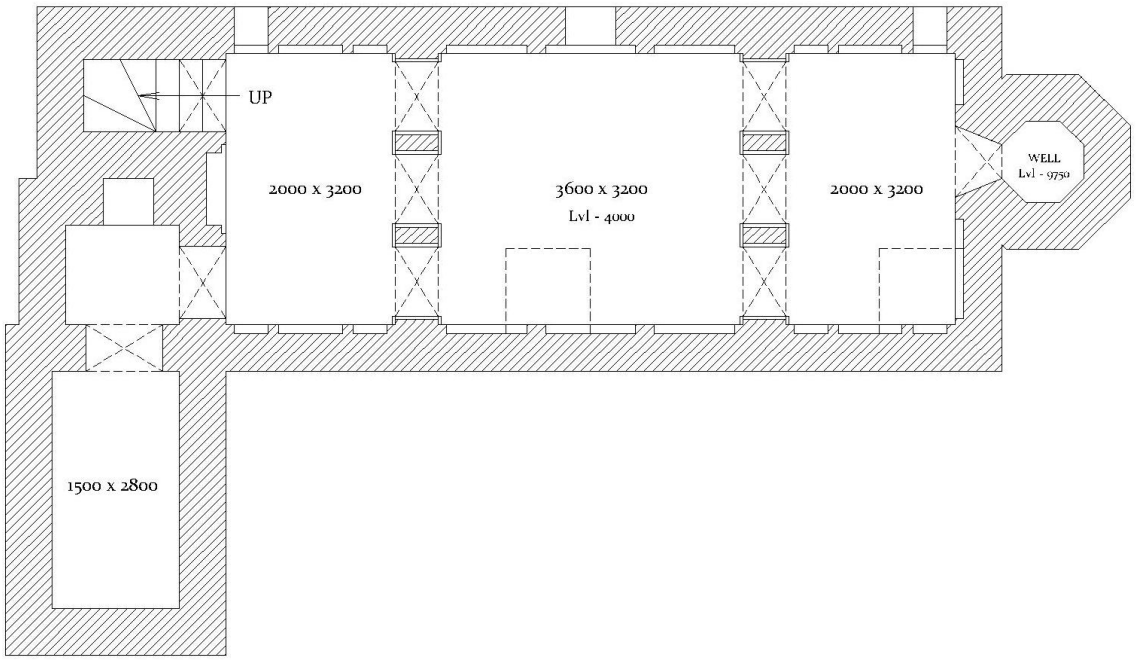

Figure 3 Floor Plan of Basement (*Bhorey)* and Well of the Mahal

Architectural Layout and Spatial Organization

Access to the basement is facilitated by a staircase featuring a tread of 0.28 m and a riser of 0.15 m. The primary entrance to the basement is oriented toward the east. On the western side, semi-circular arches partition the basement floor plan into three distinct bays: the flanking first and final bays measure 2.0 m × 3.2 m, while the central bay measures 3.6 m × 3.2 m. An octagonal well, with side lengths of 1.0 m, is situated at the extreme western terminus of the layout.

On the northern side, a semi-circular arch divides the space into two separate bays, measuring 1.17 m × 1.34 m and 1.5 m × 2.8 m, respectively. Ornamental niches with a depth of approximately 0.1 m are integrated into the walls, serving both as internal decorative elements and as historical recesses for oil lamps.

Internal Elevations

The primary elevation features three foliated arches; the central opening displays a multi-foliated profile, whereas the flanking openings consist of trefoil arches. The total vertical distance from the ground level to the keystone of the central arch is 2.1 m.

Pillars

The pillars serve as the primary vertical load-bearing elements designed to support the overhead roof, rafters, and arches. Structurally, each square pillar is comprised of three core components: the base, the shaft, and the capital. The shaft features a plain profile with eased, rounded edges. Both the base and the capital are styled as elongated platforms detailed with subordinate circular indents.

Arches

The entrance introduces an arcuated structural system utilizing trefoil arches. The apex of the pointed arch is softened into a minor semi-circle, resulting in a three-cusped profile that features a central top cusp flanked by two smaller variations. This design represents a specific foliated arch typology defined by multiple decorative cusps along the inner curve.

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

Figure 4 Basement of Mahal (Bhora) and Octagonal

Figure 5 Traditional roof construction of one of the

Materials and Construction Techniques

The structural framework relies on an arcuated system composed of domes and arches constructed primarily of traditional *Nanakshahi* bricks. These specialized, small bricks were historically selected to reinforce lime concrete within thick, load-bearing structural walls. The primary material palette consists of brick, lime mortar, and lime concrete. The flat domes are engineered from *Nanakshahi* bricks laid in a concentric, circular pattern bound by lime-based mortar and concrete. The floor finish is composed of a durable, brick-on-edge masonry pattern.

Figure 6 Historic octagonal well attached to

Figure 7 New Gurdwara structure

A Gurdwara now stands on the site to honour the memory of Bibi Sukhan. While the local panchayat owns the land, Sewadar Bhai Manjit Singh actively maintains the property. During an early 2011 interview, local caretakers pledged full cooperation for future archaeological excavations to uncover the Mahal's remains and conserve its historic structure. Today, the site serves as a local cultural hub, hosting major religious events for Baba Buddha Ji's birthday and Bibi Sukhan's death anniversary. It regularly attracts devotees from neighbouring villages, alongside occasional visitors from the Amritsar and Tarn Taran districts.

BURJ

Architectural Description

This octagonal, two-story structure is the last remaining monument of the four original watchtowers that once enclosed the Naushehra Dhala settlement. The bastion features flanking rooms on two sides, a traditional khatambandi (interlocking wooden puzzle) ceiling, and heritage wooden doors.

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

Figure 8 East elevation of the Burj

Figure 9: West elevation of the Burj

Built with Nanakshahi brick masonry set in mud mortar, the masonry joints are reinforced with lime mortar. The interior retains visible mud plaster, while the exterior presents mostly exposed brickwork with trace remnants of lime plaster near the parapet.

Figure 10: Distinctive traditional spaces at terrace

Figure 11: Staircase part detached from main building

Current Condition and Vulnerabilities

The monument is abandoned and highly fragile. Part of the staircase block is actively detaching from the main structure. Missing lime mortar in the masonry joints has caused loose bricks, structural cracks, and overall depletion of the walls. The decorative patterns of the khatambandi ceiling have nearly vanished, and its base panels are failing. The roof terraces are choked with mud and invasive vegetation. Severe dampness affects all wall surfaces. The lower half of the exterior has been improperly coated with modern cement plaster. Debris mounds and wild vegetation surround the base. The structure is enclosed on three sides by a newly built boundary wall. Originally belonging to the Sawarn Singh Shah family, it is currently owned by Mr. Harpal Singh, who resides in Amritsar.

Figure 12: Damaged traditional masonry and mud plaster

Figure 13: Damaged traditional khatambandi ceiling

HISTORIC MOSQUE

Architectural Description

Positioned directly opposite the Burj, this mosque shares the same boundary wall and ownership. At present, this structure is abandoned and used for storage of straw for domestic animals. Built using Nanakshahi bricks in mud mortar with lime-sealed joints. Surviving lime plaster on the eastern facade and parapets indicates the exterior was once fully plastered. Traces of historic wall paintings survive on the eastern facade, specifically on the central arch soffit and the decorative parapet petals. Faded Urdu, Persian, or Arabic script is visible in a panel above the central archway.

Current Condition and Vulnerabilities

The structure is abandoned and used to store animal fodder. All three original front archways have been sealed with modern modular bricks and cement mortar, blocking interior access and assessment. Lime plaster on the north, south, and west faces is destroyed. The lime plaster covering the domes is completely obscured by heavy algae growth. Missing lime mortar has pulverised the underlying mud-brick masonry. A small, historic circular well adjoins the mosque's eastern side.

Figure 14: View of Historic Mosque of Naushehra Dhala

Figure 15: Mosque is being used for storage purpose.

Terrace is covered with vegetation growth. Three archways on the front blocked with modular brick masonry in cement mortar and cement plaster is put on in patches over external wall surfaces. Wall paintings are left only

on soffit of central arch, partially on the surface of petals along the parapet and some text in Urdu/Persian/Arabian in panel over central archway.

HISTORIC WELL

This historic well is encircled by an octagonal platform, with an ancient Banyan tree growing on its edge. The well is completely filled with earth. An adjacent pond, currently used for village sewage, wastewater disposal, and livestock waste, poses an environmental threat to the site.

GURDWARA COMPLEX BABA JALLHAN

Cultural Significance

The complex serves as a vital religious and cultural hub, drawing pilgrims from the Tarn Taran and Amritsar districts—particularly during Baisakhi and the birth anniversary of Baba Jallhan. The historic core of the complex belongs to the local Bawa family.

Core Historic Structures

Samadhi of Baba Jallhan: One of the oldest structures on-site, built from *Nanakshahi* bricks with mud and lime mortar. It features traditional brick-on-edge flooring laid in a concentric pattern.

Figure 16: Gurdwara Baba Jallhan

Figure 17: Historic Well with octagonal platform and old tree

Water Tank: A historic reservoir that was recently renovated, masking its original heritage layers. However, ancient built fabric survives around an old Banyan tree nearby.

Historic Well: A circular, abandoned well located near the Banyan tree. It is partially filled with debris, suffers from structural loosening due to missing lime mortar, and has small banyan trees roots breaking through its interior walls.

Figure 18: Samadhi Baba Jallhan adjoining water tank

Figure 19: Remains of a historic wall

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

SAMADHI BABA SAHAYA

Built in memory of Baba Sahaya, the 16th-century saint who protected Mata Khari and her son during the founding era of the settlement.

Figure 20: Samadhi Baba Sahaya

Figure 21: Present context of traditional house

HISTORIC HAVELI

Architectural Description

This is the oldest and only unaltered traditional haveli remaining in the settlement, entirely free of later colonial or modern architectural modifications. Constructed of *Nanakshahi* bricks in mud mortar with lime-mortar joints. Remnants of historical lime plaster are preserved on interior walls.

Figure 22: Courtyard (divided) of the haveli

Figure 23: One of the owner of the haveli

Current Condition and Threats

The two-story haveli is split between two owners by a modern central dividing wall. Encroaching new structures partially block the front facade. The upper floors are completely abandoned and structurally unsafe. The ground floor is restricted to livestock housing and fodder storage. The current owners, Mr. Hari Singh and Mr. Gurnam Singh, initially planned to demolish the haveli for a modern house. However, they are open to preserving and adaptive re-use after learning about heritage restoration. Following professional conservation, this structure is an ideal candidate for a **Heritage Rest House** for tourists, managed by the owners in coordination with the Department of Tourism.

IDC INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OPEN ACCESS
International Online Peer- Reviewed, Referred, Indexed Journal *May - July 2026* Volume: 13 Issue: 3

Surrounding Fabric

A few more old havelis exist in Naushehra Dhala, but they have lost architectural integrity; some retain only traditional facades with completely rebuilt modern interiors, while others feature a hybrid of traditional haveli courtyards masked by colonial-era facades and verandas.

PROPOSED LEVEL OF INTERVENTIONS

Sr. No.	Name of Structure	Ownership Status	Present Use	Proposed Level of Intervention
1.	Mahal	Panchayat	Not in use	- Archaeological Investigations to reveal remains of mahal underneath earth surface. - Structural Consolidation of basement of mahal.
2.	Burj	Private	Abandoned	- Structural Consolidation. - Adaptive reuse as an Interpretation Centre. - Landscaping & Site Development
3.	Mosque	Private	Abandoned	- Structural Conservation - Restoration of Wall Paintings
4.	Shrine Baba Jallhan	Private	Place of worship	- Structural Consolidation of Shrine, adjoining platform & historic well
5.	Shrine Baba Sahaya	Panchayat	Place of worship	- Restoration.
6.	Historic Well	Panchayat	Abandoned	- Restoration of well and its octagonal platform.
7.	Traditional Haveli	Private	Cattle yard	- Restoration - Adaptive reuse as Tourist Rest House.

REFERENCES

1. Gandhi, Surjit Singh; Sikhs in the 18th Century; 2012; Singh Brothers, Amritsar.
2. Singh, Harbans; The Encyclopedia of Sikhism Vol I and Vol IV, 2012; Singh Brothers, Amritsar.
3. Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh; Mahan Kosh; Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab
4. Tarntaran Bahupakhi Sarvekhan, Publication GND University, Amritsar
5. Kapoor, Pritpal Singh; Guru Arjun's contribution martyrdom and legacy; 2009; Singh Brothers.
6. Singh, Pashaura; Life and work of Guru Arjun; 2006; Oxford University, New Delhi.
7. Singh, Baba Nirmal; Bhagat Jalan Das ji Jeevan Rachna; local booklet, Naushehra Dhala.
8. Architectural documentation; batch 2008-13, Department of Architecture, GNDU, Amritsar.
9. Interactions with the villagers during the visits to this village.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachan Puneet Singh is a Conservation Architect with over 15 years of professional experience and a decade of teaching at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He holds a Master's in Architectural Conservation from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi (2009). His portfolio includes extensive heritage conservation, restoration, and adaptive reuse projects funded by Asian Development Bank, World Monument Fund, Central Government and State Governments across India, including Punjab, Leh-Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Odissa. Currently an Assistant Professor at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, his research focuses on historic architecture and traditional building knowledge systems. He employs a student-centered pedagogical approach that bridges theoretical frameworks with professional application.