

Exploring morphological changes of the oldest core of Dhaka city for conservation

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Abstract:

The built heritage of Dhaka city is more than 400 years old. Its social, physical, cultural identity is transforming due to rapid urbanization, shifting economic activities and changing land use patterns. This paper focuses on some of the old historic structures of three major streets- Shirish Das road, Paridas/ Hemendra Das road and Rupchand lane which forms a part of the oldest core of Bangla- Bazaar area. The purpose of the study was to observe the present condition of those streets, try to find out any morphological changes, identify some of the old structures and form the basis for their conservation. The study considers identification of buildings from physical survey as well as critical reading of some books and analysis of historic evidences. The findings show that the area is going through major physical as well as environmental degradation and the situation is so worse that in few cases those buildings should be conserved immediately in order to preserving the history for future.

Keyword: Dhaka's oldest core, morphological changes, conservation.

1.0 Introduction:

The old core of Dhaka, once the glorious capital of the Mughal era is now on the verge of oblivion. During the Mughal period (1610- 1717) it was in its pinnacle of glory and a number of important monuments were constructed. However in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, under the initiative of the colonial administrators and the local elite, the decaying Mughal capital experienced renewal and rejuvenation. It started to grow again and this growth is still being continued. [Haque, 2002]

From Dhaka's current architectural and planning scenario, it would be difficult to answer that whether the growth is going in the proper direction or not. The land use patterns as incorporated in the city planning, has little scope for major changes as the core is densely built up. This high density is resulting into mixed use development in many residential areas like Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Bonani, Baridhara, Uttara etc which are forced to operate without legal prohibition and causing urban problems like pollution, traffic congestion and lack of urban open spaces for social and cultural activities. If we focus on the older part of Dhaka it has a certain socio- cultural, architectural character which is completely different from the recent growing Dhaka. This growth is influencing the socio-cultural and historic heritage of the oldest core- Bangla-Bazaar area of the city, defacing the look and also changing the life style of the people. In this situation certain part of oldest core of Dhaka was studied to have an overall idea about the present state of the area, its morphological changes and existence of age old buildings which have architectural, cultural, historical, social, political or religious importance and should be brought into focus for the sustainability of the oldest core as a living city. This paper particularly focuses on the present status and morphological changes the area has gone through in the street, block and plot level and tries to form a basis for conservation of buildings on either side of three streets - Shirish Das road, Pari Das/ Hemendra Das road and Rupchand lane of Bangla-Bazaar area.

1.1 Aims and Objectives:

Main objective of this paper is to -

- * Find out the morphological changes in street, block and plot level.
- * Identify old structures which have some historic, social or architectural importance for conservation.

1.2 Methodology:

The methodology followed in this particular study focuses on the evolutionary phases of Dhaka, its historical background and morphological changes in street block and plot level through analysis of maps. The methodological frame work of this phase is concentrated on critical reading of books and journals. In the second part survey work of

the site is done to identify the old buildings that has been demolished, extended or redeveloped or exist in the same way focusing on their historical background, architectural styles or simply because of socio economic importance. Moreover observation, interview and photograph have also been adopted as part of the survey work.

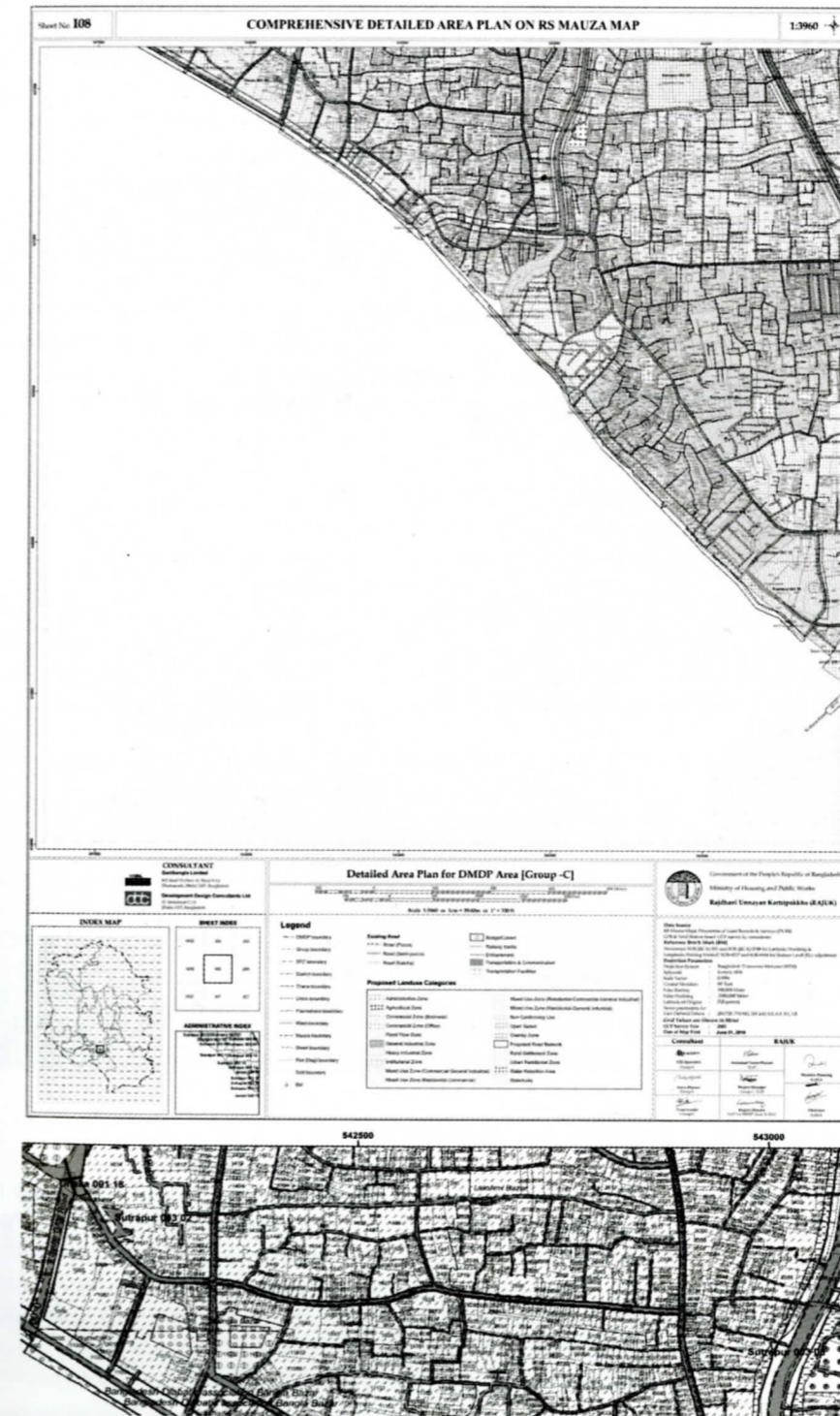


Figure 01: Comprehensive detail area plan on RS mauza map showing land use pattern of the area.

2.0 Historical Background:

According to some historians a city or town named Bangala either existed in the place of present Bangla-Bazaar close to the river Booriganga or somewhere in Shonargaon much before the time of the Mughals and from which the province derived the name Bangala. From records left by foreign travelers (in 1506 a Roman navigator Vartomannus visited the city of Bangala during the reign of King Hussain Shah) it is evident that a town named Bangala flourished during the last part of the 15th or first part of the 16th century and carried commerce in muslin, silk, sugar with foreign countries. The view that Bangala and Dhaka were identical places has further been confirmed by the fact that old writers never mentioned these place-names to indicate different places. Besides the following account of fortifications, mosques and mausoleums existing in Dhaka from Turkish and Pathan times further established the fact that the city of Bangala, or Dhaka, by whatever name it was referred to, existed in this place long before the Mughals appeared in the picture. [Taifoor, 1984].

According to historians the once known "Bahanno Bazaar Teppanno Goli" old Bangala town or the city is the present day Bangla-Bazaar. In the beginning of the last decade the name Bangla-Bazaar was changed to "P.K. Roy road". Later it was again changed to "Shubhash Bosh road". None of these names were popular among the general people, and it continued to be known as Bangla-Bazaar. [Majumder, Kedarnath, etal, 2003]

2.1 Present Area Condition:

At present the Bangla-Bazaar area has evolved as a hybrid development as an amalgamation of multiple functions which is evident in the land use pattern of that area. [Fig 01] In spite of dominance in book publication stores, press and storage spaces, this area still has the reflection of old structural styles found in the 400 years of history of the city. [Fig 02]



Figure 02, 03: Original street pattern of Pari Das/ Hemendra Das road

After independence the growth of the city has been phenomenal and brought changes of a greater magnitude than ever. This transformation is in both demographic and physical terms. The recent transformation has put this rich and varied architectural heritage under the threat of disappearance and disfiguration. Already many of Dhaka's historical buildings and areas have either totally disappeared, or are under the process of disappearing. Present demands and activities along with people's negligence, in preserving the old structures are the main reasons for such deterioration. Some of the old structures are being demolished and replaced with new ones. [Fig 04, 05, 06]



Figure 04: Old structures are being replaced with new 6 storey buildings

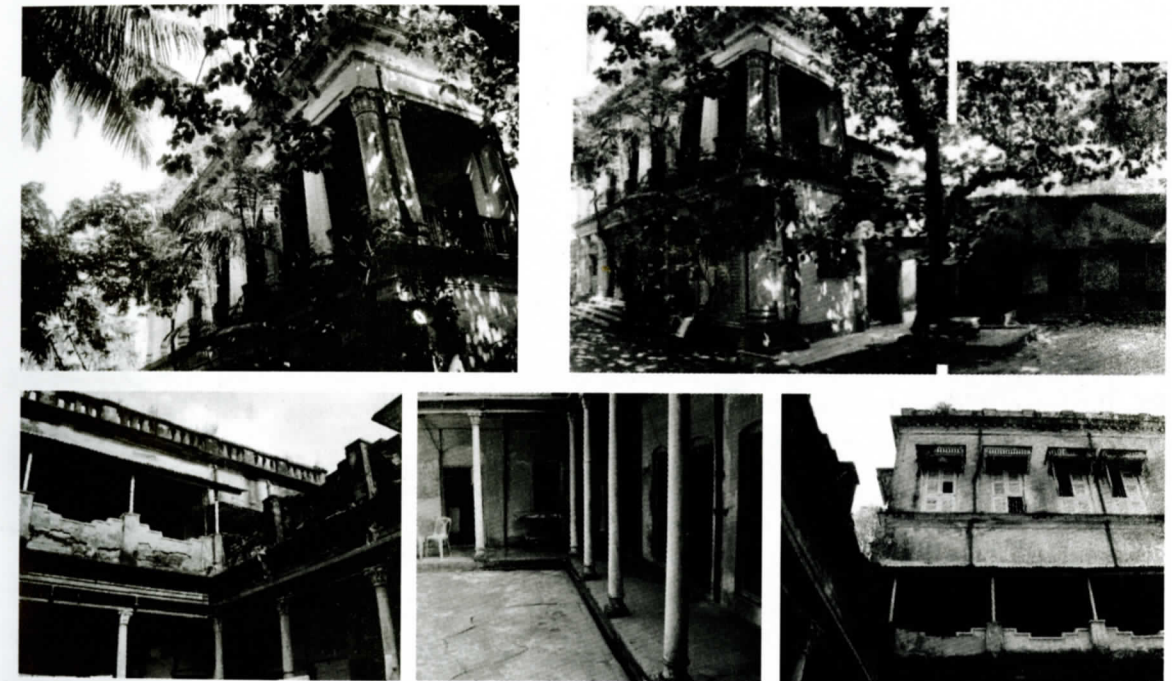


Figure 05: Early state - holding no 33, Paridas lane in 2009. [View- outer court and inner court]



Figure 06: Holding no 33, Paridas lane, currently [2011] in a vacant state, demolished for redevelopment.

4.0 Analytical Findings:

The preliminary stage of analysis was done considering the following steps:

- 4.1 Demarcation of the boundary of the area being surveyed.
- 4.2 Morphological transformation of the area.
- 4.3 Identification and listing of historical monuments and sites or other facilities in the area.
- 4.4 Classification of buildings in the area.
- 4.5 Data analysis.
- 4.6 Findings.

4.1 Demarcation of the Boundary of the study Area:

The survey area is bounded by Patla Khan Street in the north, part of Pari Das Lane and part of Rupchand lane in the South, North Brook Hall road in the west, Hrishikesh Das Road in the east. [Fig 07]



Figure 07: Boundary of survey area

4.2 Morphological Transformation of the Area:

Morphologically the area has gone through some changes. In the beginning of the capital city in the pre Mughal period, there is existence of places like Bangla -bazaar. The area started to develop with activity of different professional groups and started to grow both physically and in density. The study of the streets- Shirish Das lane, Paridas/ Hemendra Das road and Rupchand lane in CS map (1912-15) shows that the survey area had around 296 buildings, which grew to 578 numbers of buildings as found in the GIS map (2003). Around 163 new developments have been observed in the study of the GIS map.



Fig 08: Ward no 79, survey area_ Bangla Bazaar_ street_ Shirish das, Pari Das and Rupchand in CS map



Fig 09: Survey area_ Bangla Bazaar_ street_ Shirish Das, Pari Das/Hemendra Das and Rupchand at present goggle image.

The new developments are more or less six storeys, or in some cases higher, which is destroying the overall scale of the road and the area.



Fig 10: Extension work is common feature



Fig11: Use is replaced - residence-turned into storage space

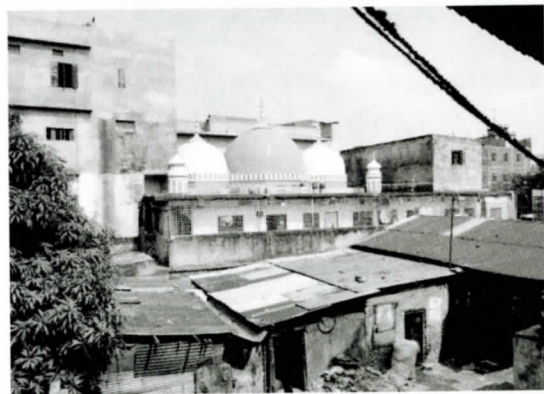


Fig 12: Singtola Mosque from late Mughal period being surrounded by new extension without leaving any trace of the original structure.



The architectural styles are different from the old existing buildings. Moreover, the owners, being unable to restore or conserve their property, are being forced to demolish, or rebuild, their properties. A large number of buildings have been extended both vertically or horizontally, sometimes even without leaving any trace of it. Again large plots are being divided into multiple plots. Thus the area, which was once a posh area with large buildings having courtyards and open spaces are getting destroyed. [Fig 10, 11, 12]

Transformation of Shirish Das road in map

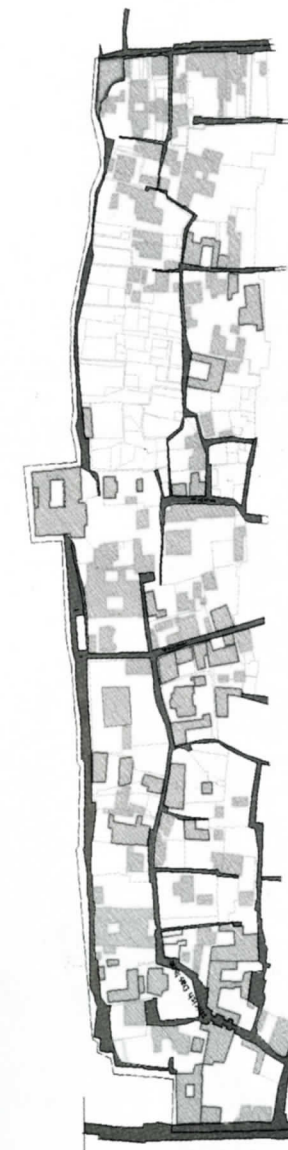


Fig 13: Shirish Das lane in CS maps 1912-15.

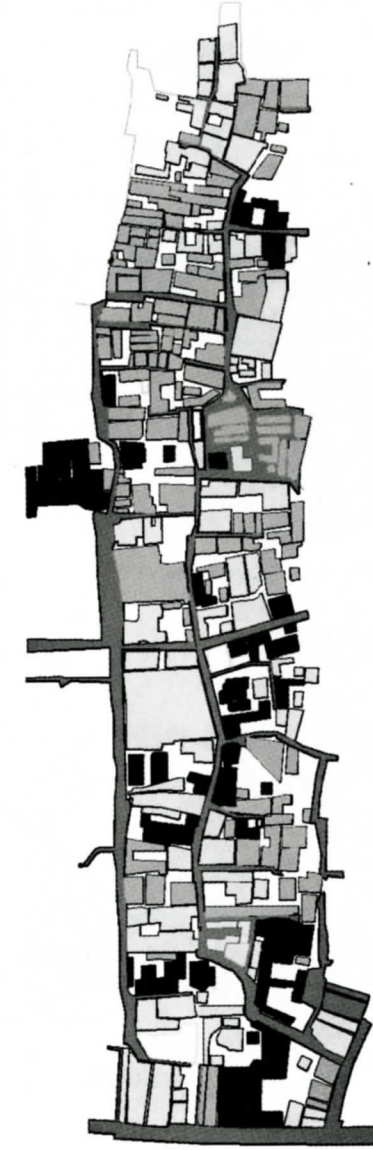
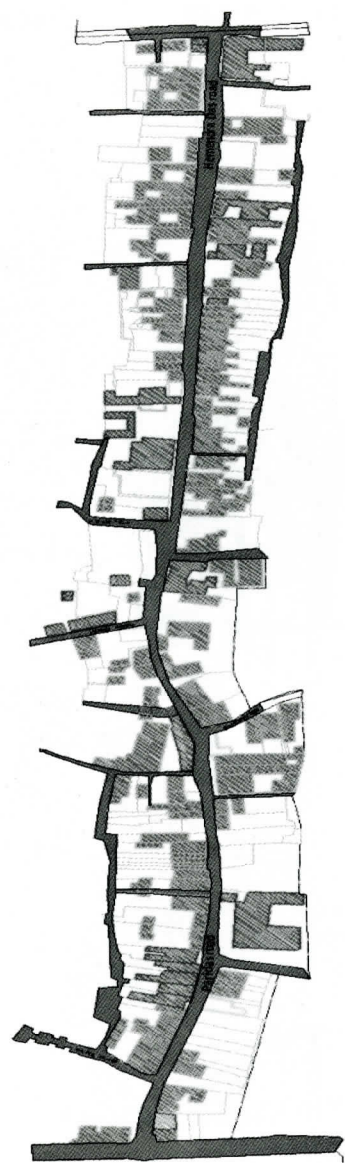


Fig 14: Shirish Das lane in GIS maps 2003.

morphologically transformed old buildings
 new buildings according to GIS maps
 old buildings according to CS map

- Structures that changed morphologically
- Addition, extension, divided.
- Structures that remained more or less unchanged
- Vacant plots

Transformation of Pari Das/ Hemendra Das road in map:



morphologically transformed old buildings
 new buildings according to GIS maps
 old buildings according to CS map

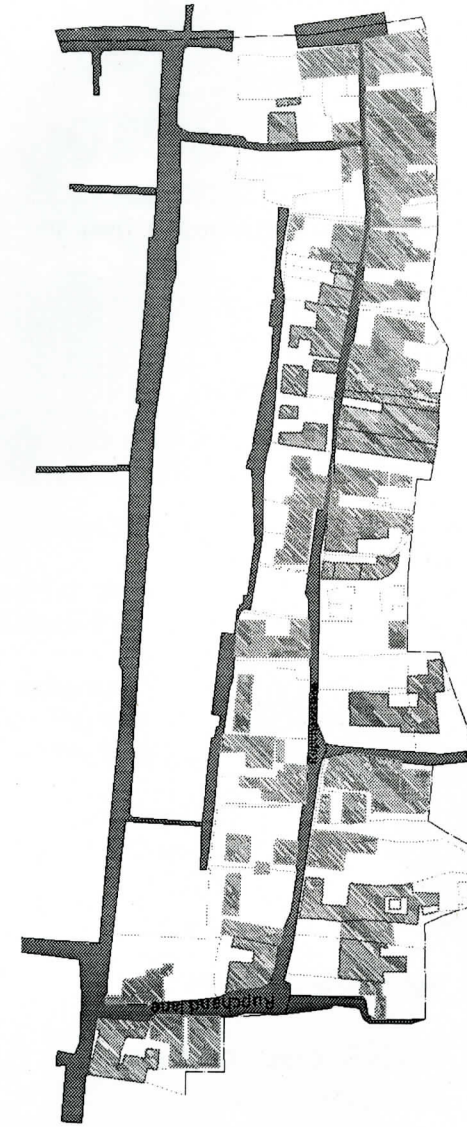


Fig15: Paridas lane in CS map 1912-15

Fig 16: Paridas lane in GIS map 2003

- Structures that changed morphologically
- Addition, extension, divided.
- Structures that remained more or less unchanged
- Vacant plots

Transformation of Rupchand lane in map:



morphologically transformed old buildings
 new buildings according to GIS maps
 old buildings according to CS map

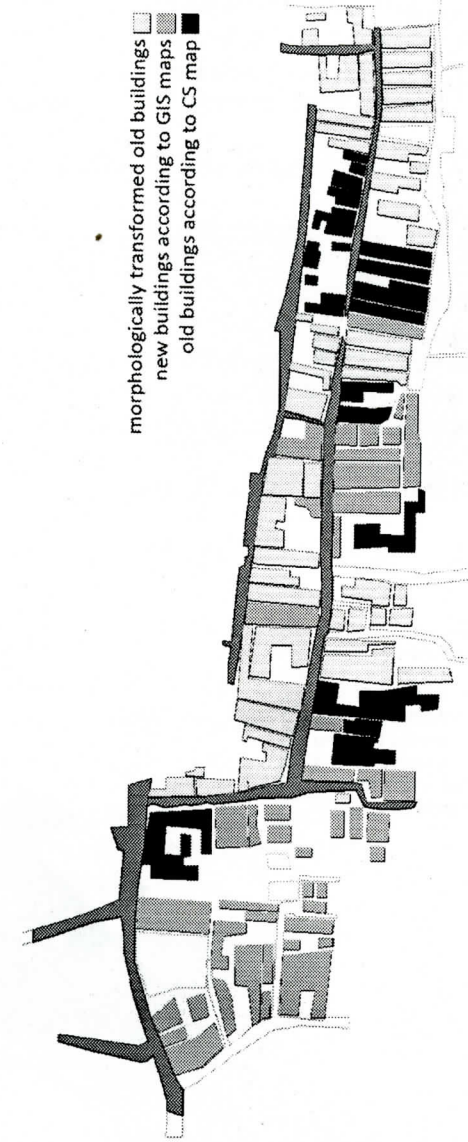


Fig 17: Rupchand lane in CS map 1912-15

Fig18: Rupchand lane in GIS map 2003

- Structures that changed morphologically
- Addition, extension, divided.
- Structures that remained more or less unchanged
- Vacant plots

4.3 Identification and listing of historic monuments and sites in the area:

Identification of historic monuments are based on the following considerations -
 " Architectural excellence or style of any particular period.
 " Socio-economic or cultural history.
 " Proximity to any historically significant structure.
 " Potentiality and suitability for adaptive re-use [Hussain, M.Arch,1997]

4.4 Classification of listed monuments in the area:

The aim of the following classification is to identify and categorize different structures in the area. These are -

- " Religious buildings.
- " Landmarks
- " Secular buildings
- " Isolated individual buildings, relatively small buildings and detached structures.
- " Buildings in rows, road side linear structures forming an integrated pattern of development.
- " Palatial large building complexes. [Imamuddin,1993]

4.5 Data analysis: 4.5.1 Shirish Das road:

- identified for conservation
- 1 storied building
- 2 storied building
- 3 storied building
- 4 storied building
- 5 storied building
- 6 storied building
- semi pacca building
- under construction

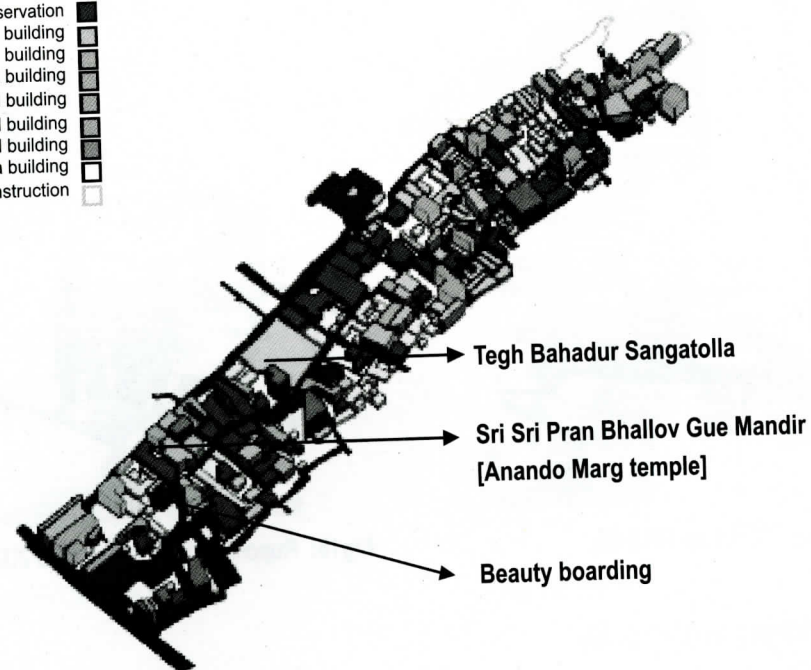


Fig19: Identified structures for conservation in Shirish Das road

Old buildings in Shirish Das lane:



Fig 20: 1, 2_Shirish Das Lane_ arched approach acts as a gateway.

Holding no: 1, 2 Jamindar Bari [residence of Shirish Babu], Beauty Boarding. The residence continues from North Brook Hall road to Shirish Babu Lane and stretches over the lane in the form of a gate way.

Historical background: This was the house of Shudhir Babu, Father of Shirish Chandra Das. The house is known as Chadchi Bari. They were landlords, having lots of property in that area. According to the people most of the buildings in this road were their family property. The street was named after him.

Use: Originally a residential building, part of which was later converted to Shonar Bangla press and existed till 1948. After that from 1950s the press was converted to a Boarding named Beauty Boarding. At present the main part of the building is used as Farida Bag police station and residence at the same time.



Figure 21: View of the police station and residence from the Shirish Babu lane.



Figure 22: view of residence from the North Brook Hall road.



Fig 23: Front court of boarding house.



Fig 24: Press currently used as boarding



Fig 25: Arched approach acts as a gateway stretching over Shirish Babu Lane

Period of construction: Constructed in around (1850 -1900) approximately as it exists in the CS map of 1912.

Architectural style: The building's arched entry/ gate way towards the Shirish Das lane gives the building a kind of land mark effect. It is assumed that it was built in the late 17th century or in the early 18th century containing certain elements of colonial style, such as the use of Corinthian/ ionic columns, wooden sun breakers, steel beams (kari barga), cast iron railing and arches. Different types of arches have been used in the different facades. The construction material suggests that the time period of construction may be in Mughal period, and it appears to be an amalgamation of different architectural styles of different period.

Consideration for conservation: Beauty boarding has historic, cultural as well as some political importance. The place had been used by film makers, journalists, writers, movie makers as place of congregation. The front court yard is still used as space for people to gather, as well as an entry to the boarding house. Though both holdings no. 1 and 2 have been identified as risky buildings in the City Corporation data base, 2004, they should be conserved as landmarks, due to the social and cultural influences in the area, as well as their distinct architectural features.



Fig 26, 27: 33_Shirish Das lane_ Sri Sri Pran Bhallov Gue Mandir [Anando Marg Temple]

Holding no: 33, Sree Sree Pran Bollov Gue Mandir [Anando Marg Temple]

Use: Mandir (temple), religious purpose. There is a school within the Mandir property.

Period of construction: Constructed in the early 18th century.



Fig 28, 29: Cast iron grills and use of stained glass in the doors

Architectural style: The Arched entry and Corinthian columns suggest that the time period of construction may be in the Colonial period. There are two balconies on both sides which are very intricately designed with wooden lattice work. The cast iron grills and stained glass in the doors and diagonally tiled marble floor represents its excellent architectural features.



Fig 30: Wooden lattice work in the balcony



Fig 31: Diagonally tiled marble flooring.

Consideration for conservation: As a religious building the structure serves both social and cultural needs of the area. Moreover, due to its excellent architectural features and style, the temple should be preserved.



Fig 32: 14_ Shirish Das lane_ Shikh temple- Tegh Bahadur Sangatolla.

Holding no: 14, Tegh Bahadur Sangath Hall.

Historical background: Tradition says that the ninth Shikh guru, Tegh Bahadur (1) visited Dhaka during the reign of Aurangzeb and built a Sangat hall in moholla Sangattola in Bangla-bazaar of Dhaka. The original building does not exist now, but on the old site a comparatively new building exists, though it has been listed under risky buildings, by the City Corporation data base, 2004. [Taifoor, 1984]

Use: Used for religious purpose, congregation space.

Period of construction: early 18th century.

Architectural style: The arched entry, steel columns, suggests that the time period of construction may be in the Colonial period.

Consideration for conservation: As a religious building and for distinct architectural features it should be preserved.

4.5.2 Data analysis _ Pari Das/ Hemendra Das road

- identified for conservation
- 1 storied building
- 2 storied building
- 3 storied building
- 4 storied building
- 5 storied building
- 6 storied building
- semi pacca building
- under construction

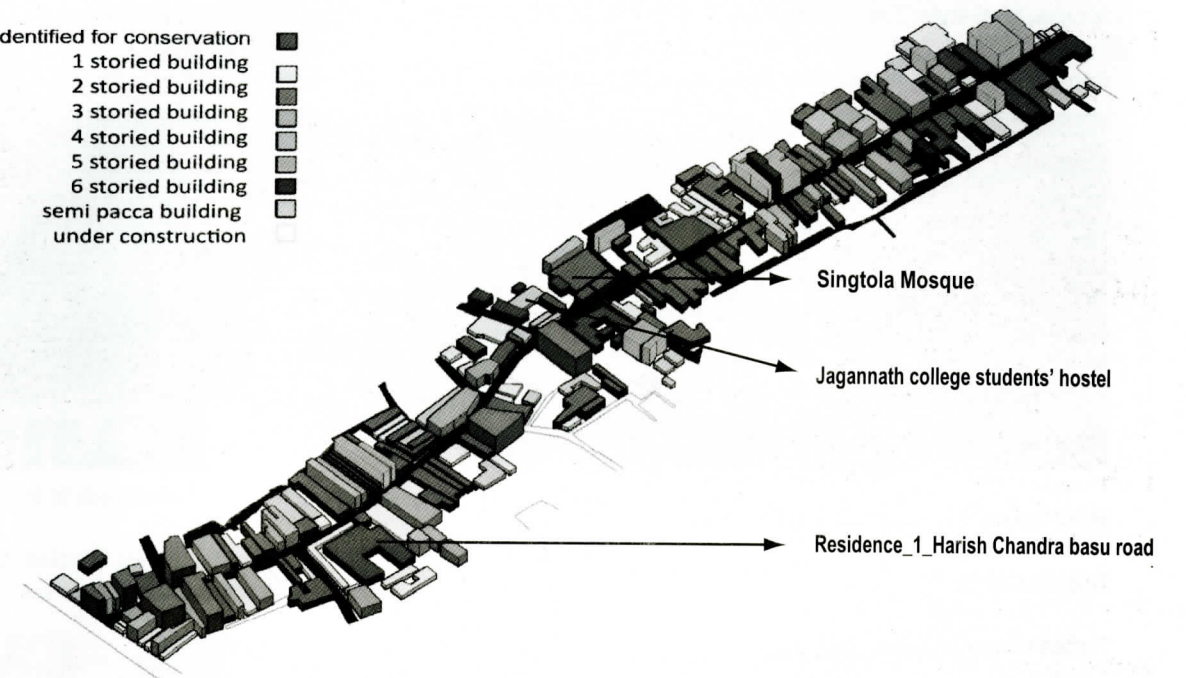


Fig 33: Identified structure for conservation in Pari Das/ Hemendra Das road

Old Buildings in Pari Das/Hemendra Das road:

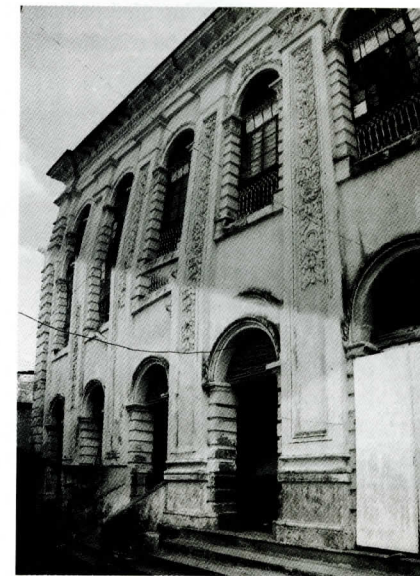


Fig 34: Arched entrance at 1_ Harish Chandra Bashu road



Fig 35: View from Pari Das road side

Holding no: 1_Harish Chandra Bashu road.

Use: Originally residence, presently used as press and storage.

Period of construction: Colonial period after 1890.

Architectural style: The building is constructed in the Colonial style and is grand in scale and well-maintained.

Consideration for conservation: Due to its architectural features it should be preserved.



Holdings no: 32, 61, 54, 63 Pari Das road.

Use: Residence

Period of construction: 1910-12.

Classification of buildings: Religious building+ residential buildings.

Architectural style/ features: Colonial with temple architectural style. Chun Shurki (lime concrete) and Jafri brick (brick designed for screens) is used in construction work. Steel column, cast iron railing suggests Colonial style.

Consideration for conservation: Religious structures as well as buildings in rows, forming an integrated pattern of linear development and historic properties behold the ambience of the whole area, which should also be considered for conservation.

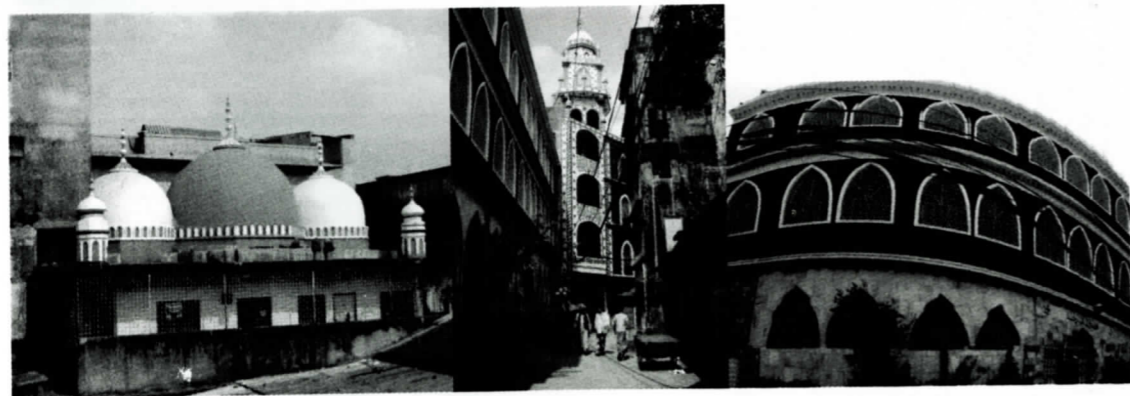


Fig 37: Singtola Mosque- view from rear side **Fig 38:** View from- Protab Das lane_entry side

Similarly there are few other structures which are worth mentioning, like-holding no. 5_ Protab Das lane_Singtola Mosque or Sitara Begum's Mosque in Singtola which was constructed on a raised platform in late Mughal period (1814). The original part of the mosque is surrounded by a new structure leaving no trace of the original part.



Fig 39: 1_Ishwar Chandra Das Lane, Paridas road- Students' Hostel

Holding no: 1 _ Ishwar Chandra Lane.

Use: Students' hostel, currently used as Jagannath University employees' residence.

Period of construction: In the late 17th century to early 18th century approximately.

Architectural style: Certain features of the building followed the Colonial style, like the arches, cast iron railings, etc. There is a small temple in the inner court.



Fig 40: Temple in the inner court



Fig 41: Entrance to hostel

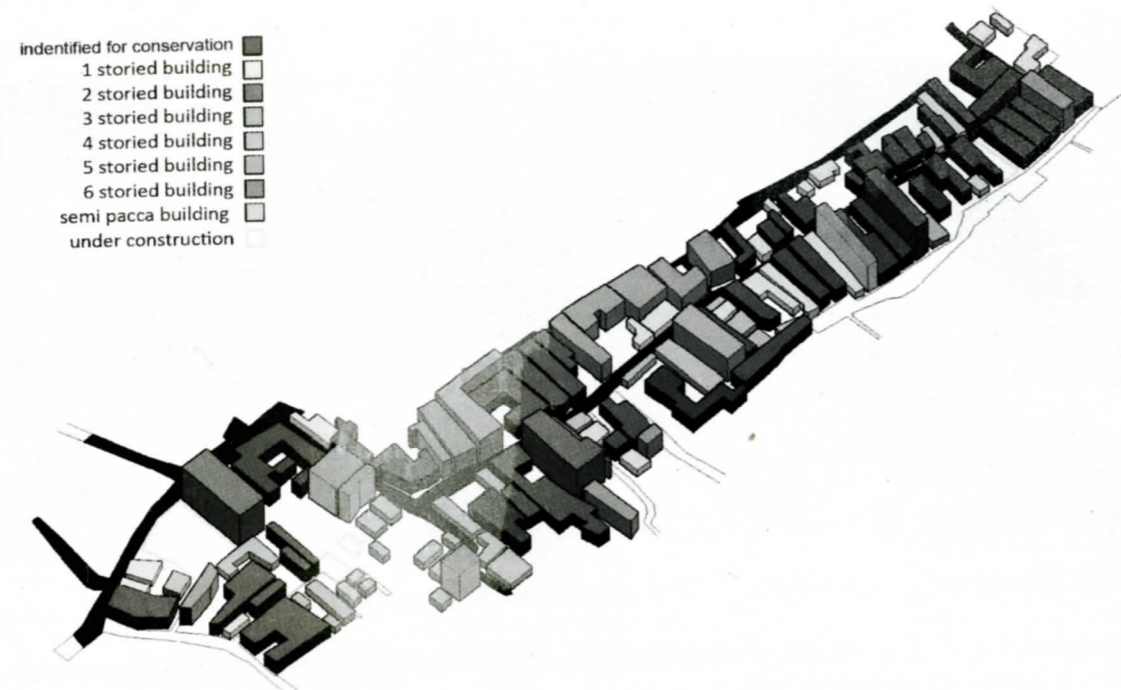


Fig 42: Identified structures for conservation in Rupchand lane

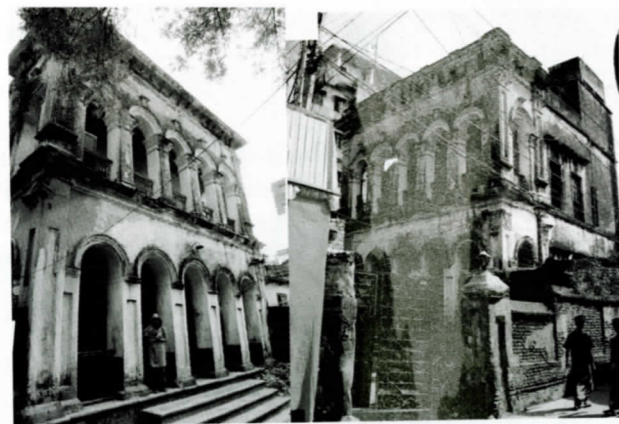


Fig 43: 41, 42_ Rupchand lane_ arched entrance_ residence.

Holdings no: 41, 42_ Rupchand lane.
Use: originally residence, presently storage space and residence.
Period of construction: 1910-15 approximately.
Architectural style: The building is grand in scale, and is constructed in the Colonial style, as suggested by the use of Corinthian columns and arches.
Consideration for conservation: Example of architectural excellence.

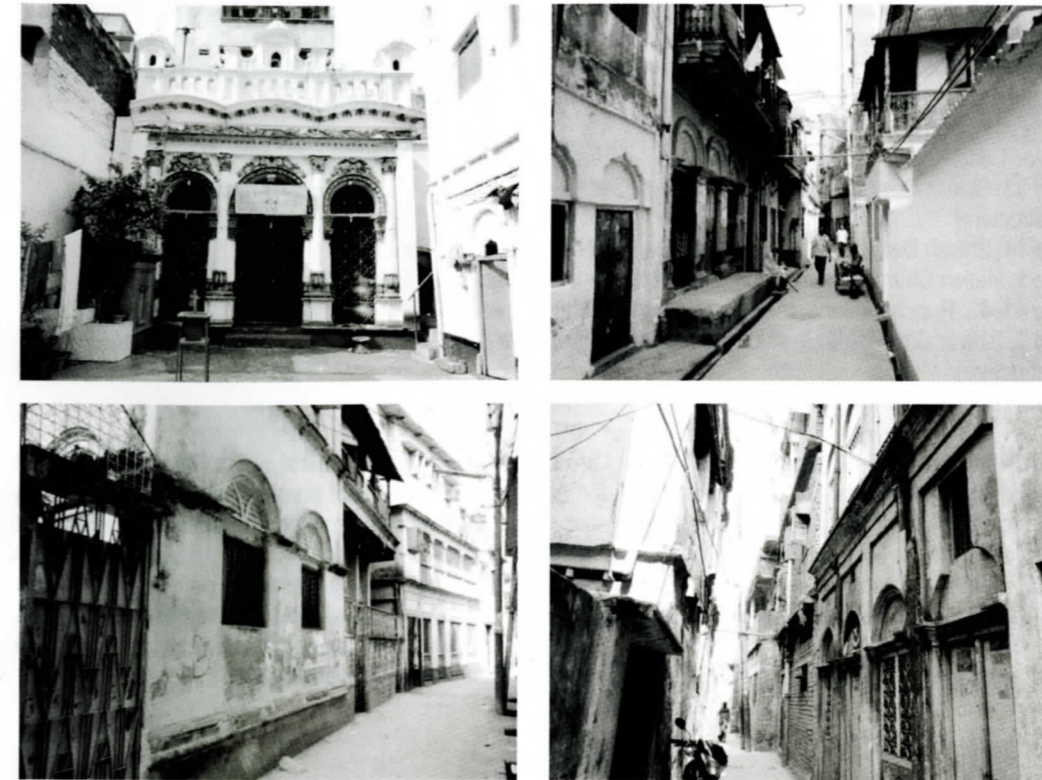


Fig 44, 45, 46, 47: Rupchand lane_ overall street pattern.

Street pattern: The road is narrow and pedestrian. On both side of the road the buildings are more or less two to three storeys high, and haven't changed structurally. Furthermore the presence of few religious structures and the styles and conditions of the buildings reflects glimpses of old days.



Fig 48:8/2_ Sree Sree Krishna Chandra jee Bigraha temple Fig 49: 16_ Hazrat Baba Shah (R :) mazzar.

Rupchand lane is one of those few streets which haven't changed much morphologically, so it is possible to bring this road under area conservation because this road is very important in the matter of heritage integrity and preserving ambience of the whole area.

4.6 Findings:

The survey result identified a number of old structures which have existed from the early 18th century. There was another category of structures, which in spite of their existence in the CS map 1912-15, has gone through some

morphological changes. Further categories were constituted of demolished structures and of those newly developed. In this critical situation, it was very difficult to actually identify the old structures which are to be conserved. Seven structures have been identified which need to be conserved because of their architectural style, religious importance, or simply because of their socio-cultural value. These seven buildings are listed below:

- Holdings No. 1 and 2, Shirish Das lane, Jamindar bari, [Architectural feature and Land mark]
- Holding No 33, Shirish Das Lane, Sri Sri Pran Bollov Geo Mandir - Anando Marg Temple, [Architectural features, Religious structure]
- Holding No 14, Shirish Das Lane, Tegh Bahadur Sangath hall. [Religious structure]
- Holding No 1, Harish Chandra bashu road, paper storage and press. [Architectural features]
- Holding No 41, 42, Rupchand lane, residence. [Architectural features]
- Holding No 1, Ishwar Chandra lane, students' hostel along with the small temple inside. , [Architectural features, Religious structure]
- Holding No. 5, Singtola mosque, Protab Das lane. [Religious structure]

Recently RAJUK has brought a number of buildings and area under conservation, amidst which Shutrappur area and one of the surveyed roads, Pari Das/ Hemendra Das Road has been brought under area conservation. Regulations have also restricted any removal, reconstruction, modification, extension, addition, from/on any old structures without the permission of RAJUK in the Gazette published in February 12, 2009. Despite this, on 19 August, 2009, a historic building at 33_ Paridas Road was pulled down to redevelop the site. The building was most definitely one of the important structures of the Shutrappur area and the historic road, yet it was demolished violating the rule. In this situation, the study along with the seven structures, also identifies Rupchand Lane as another street which should be taken under area conservation due to its overall integrity of heritage, historic and religious elements.

5.0 Conclusion:

The study and survey suggests that the area has a number of old structures which still retain their traditional character. But the way the area is getting reconstructed in the name of development is actually destroying the whole socio-economic and cultural aspects, as well as architectural features, that exemplify the excellence in development in the past. So it has become our moral duty to help restore the environment, by bringing the whole area under area conservation or at least by conserving the buildings. If area conservation is not possible, it should at least be ensured that existing historic buildings are not destroyed due to development and other needs. For example, the empty plot of holding No. 33, Pari Das road could be used or developed as a public open space, instead of redeveloping it with a high rise building, since the area lacks open spaces. For this if necessary, rules and regulations should be set out by the Government, restricting new constructions under certain guidelines and control, within the purview of area conservation. At the same time, people should be motivated, by making the general people conscious of their heritage through the historic built environment and by awakening an active interest in its cultural, social and economic importance. Moreover, the public should be made aware of their responsibilities in the process of conservation, preservation and maintenance.

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