

Urban Identity and Historic Preservation: A Study of European Club

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Abstract

The approach of preserving historically significant structures has gained much popularity in the modern world. However, the attention towards context and history seem to be missing in most adaptations of the concept. The structural significance is more emphasized than local identity or historical influence. Unless the place's spirit in a conventional urban setting is recognized, several issues will originate. To identify these problems, this article provides a case study of The European Club, which wears the history of British rule and Chittagong revolts in 1930 at Chittagong, Bangladesh. The paper begins by discoursing the historic value of the European club as well as the urban identity and context of the surrounding area, followed by the necessity of connection between local urban context and building preservation method through necessary comparisons. Lastly, the third part recommends an integrated approach to define and maintain the spirit of such place as an upshot. The study findings would assist in further decision making in preserving built heritage within similar urban context.

Keywords: *Urban Context, Historic Preservation, European Club, Local Identity, Heritage.*

1. Introduction

“How will we know it's us without our past?”(Steinbeck, J., 1939). And there comes the exigency of safeguarding of historical buildings within its owned context. Historical preservation is a discussion about the future with the help of history. This indicates the possibility of thinking, "What is important in the history?" and "Which pieces of the past will be preserved for the future?" Historical preservation is something that can be used to pass mankind's insights of the past to future eras. ("What is Historic Preservation? - Historic Preservation (U.S. National Park Service)", 2020) The activities, which are now available in developing countries like Bangladesh of different preservation methods, give preference to the appearance or the use rather than the local context of the building or the spirit of the place. However, correlation of local context and historical preservation is given much appreciation in the developed world since it is not easy for a building to preserve its history without the original context. Context refers to the meaning of a creation, a document, a statement or a context in which it can appear to be understood. The background for urban architecture is the enveloping world and its various constructions—physical, social, economic, ecological, cultural and so on. The challenge that arises when addressing the urban sense of architecture is that architecture develops and redevelops meaning through both its 'closeness' (architecture as a confined object) and its 'openness' (architecture as 'space'—related to all other spaces). (Bhuiyan, 2016) Hence, the preservation work is more difficult in an urban context where other buildings start to engulf the historic buildings even more its history.

Bengal was the promising ground for growth of intrinsic architectural character due to geographical strategic location, topography and climate. Since British colonial era heritage preservation, modification, restoration, demolition etc. have taken place in the Indian subcontinent. John Marshall formulated a law for the preservation of the historic structures of the country in 1904. In 1968, that law was cancelled, and another law was developed for conservation, called “Antiquities Act, 1968” during Pakistan period. After Liberation of Bangladesh, this Act was revised in 1976 without any fundamental changes. In this Act, the definition of ancient products or objects was replaced by “the preceding hundred years” in lieu of “any period prior to May 1857”. Part II of Bangladesh's constitution deals with basic concepts of state policy. The article 23 and 24 of the constitution

prioritize the need for alteration measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritages. In article 1.5, 1.16 and 3.8 of Bangladesh National Building Code, 2006 states that buildings and places of historical or architectural value must be conserved. It is also mentioned in this code that a building must have existed for at least 20 years from the date it was completed. (Talukdar, A., 2010). In Chapter 3 of Bangladesh National Building Code, 2012 establishes that the restoration, regeneration and adaptive cultural reuse of urban, rural and architectural heritage must be compatible with the sustainable use of natural and human resources. It also states that the approving authorities shall create an immediate buffer zone, but not less than 3 meters wide, adjacent to the heritage building, free of any construction or establishment of a similar nature that surrounds the heritage building or its component. But there is no rule concerning the context of the heritage site.

Heritage is a part and parcel of every city's history around the world. Chittagong has an opulent history. It is the witness of many rulers and a long timeline. The European Club is one of the important structures which convey the testament of this rich history. It is related to the first woman martyred for any revolution in Indian Subcontinent. It has a local urban context with lots of natural landscape surrounding it. But After British rule came to an end, the then government started to use this structure for official purposes ignoring its historical value and the necessity to conserve this building let alone the surrounding landscape. Fabrications with such distinctive identity should be protected, not only by preservation movements but through incorporating the local urban context around it to blend with the essence of the original environment.

For conservation of the heritage sites in a city, there should be a conservation management plan to accommodate a guide to the future care and use of heritage places including any new development. (Avrami, E., Maosn, R., Torre, M. de la, 2000). For this reason, the aim of this study is to state that every historic building in urban context has some distinctive features related to the local context and thereby prove the correspondence between local context and historic preservation. This relationship is explored through comparison of some heritage buildings in different urban contexts. This study may help to define how to identify and conserve the spirit of heritage sites according to its local context and the importance to do so.

2. Urban Heritage and Local Identity

Historic atmospheres with their buildings have provided a distinct visual image of the city before they were dragged up in a sea of cosmopolitan environments. Thence built heritage conservation proposes conceptions combining conservation and 'modernity' for future development. The historic urban context, confining a special attribute within itself, is actually a cultural antiquity, which has been ingrained by the process of historical evolution. Therefore, every context has a specific identity, modeled from its physical, socio-cultural, historical aspects such as natural elements, topography, location, current uses, customs of inhabitants, streets, hedges, archaeological areas and/or monuments, buildings and place names. (Rifaioğlu, Mert & Şahin Güçhan, Neriman.,2007)

3. International Heritage Acts & Institutions

As a case in point, since the 13th century onwards, the Old City of Dubrovnik, also called the 'Pearl of the Adriatic,' located on the Dalmatian coast, became an powerful Mediterranean Sea base. Dubrovnik managed to retain its magnificent Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque churches, monasteries, palaces and fountains, while heavily damaged by an earthquake in 1667. Damaged again by armed conflict in the 1990s, it is now the subject of a large UNESCO-coordinated restoration program. In this case, the buildings along with the surroundings that means the whole city is up for preservation not only the fabrics of the building. (Centre, 2020) Bangladesh has enacted this convention in 03 August 1983. The convention has 38 articles with the broad theme of which buildings to include in heritage and help with raising funds and international assistance.

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is another distinguished institute that works with heritage conservation in every region of the world. ICOMOS believes that the value of architectural heritage lies not only in its epiphany, but also in the authenticity of all its components as a unique result of its time's modern construction technology.. Their another main theme is that each interference should honor, as much as possible, the definition, techniques and historical significance of the structure's initial or earlier states, and leave evidence to be remembered in the future. (ICOMOS CHARTER- PRINCIPLES FOR THE ANALYSIS, CONSERVATION AND STRUCTURAL RESTORATION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE, 2003) ICOMOS don't participate directly in conservation rather they work through their national committees.

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is the only establishment of its kind with a global mandate to support the protection of cultural heritage of all types, both movable and immovable. As for example, ICCROM worked in the conservation of cultural heritage in the Arab Region. The Archaeological fabrics of the structures along with their structural problems were main concern there. But the surroundings were also given much importance and later it became a public place.

The guidelines for Identifying, Researching and Evaluating Cultural Heritage Landscapes in Thorold, Ontario, 2009 marked a defined process that should be followed in identification and evaluating cultural heritage landscapes. Rockcliffe Park is a neighborhood in Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward, close to the Centre of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. In 2016, the entire area, now a part of the City of Ottawa, became a Heritage Conservation District. The aim is not only the protection of individual structures, but of the area's park-like qualities. It means that lot sizes, spacing between homes, and streetscapes are still protected; new circular driveways, for example, are no longer permitted. A home-owner, who is also a developer, is currently attracting attention. City of Ottawa policy is to continue implementing the Heritage Conservation Program awaiting the results of a September 2017 hearing before the Ontario Municipal Board. ("Ontario Heritage Act", 2020)

There are some other acts as well according to different countries. Bangladesh has some rules as well for conservation of historic buildings. But these rules are not followed properly in most of the cases and the lack of implementation of the rules results in damage of the heritages.

4. National Codes & Regulations

The provision of heritage conservation is premeditated as national sense of responsibility elicited by the Government in article 24 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh as "The State shall adopt measures for the protection against disfigurement, damage or removal of all monuments, objects or places of special artistic or historic importance or interest". (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972)

Antiquities Act, 1968 for the Government of the former Pakistan, assign heritage conservation into effect in 1968. After independence of Bangladesh, this act was modulated in 1976 with no primary changes. In the former Antiquities Act' 1968, it was depicted that primeval product or object would be meant property or relating to any period prior to May 1857. In this Act, the criteria of a building to be selected for preservation were mentioned. After liberation of Bangladesh, the meaning of ancient products or objects was replaced by "the preceding hundred years" in lieu of "any period prior to May 1857". (Talukdar, A., 2010)

The Government of Bangladesh has worked to enforce the recommendations set out in the master plan for the protection and presentation of the Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat prepared by UNESCO 1973/74-1977/78. While economic efforts have been made to address the salinity-derived conservation issue, this has not been completely resolved and dilapidation has sustained. Implementation of the management plan is not well regulated, including the environmental provisions. Conservation of the historical landscape, buffer zone and the

property has not yet been approached. On the other hand, The Sundarbans is an approximately 140,000-hectare mangrove forest on the Ganges and Meghna Delta in Bengal Bay. This was also designated as a natural world heritage site by UNESCO in 1987. Conservation measures are conducted to safeguard the Sundarbans from poaching and other human activities such as agriculture. Several initiatives are underway including infrastructure investments. Even though conservation efforts are being made, the region's topography and the hostile terrain and international border make it difficult to track and manage poaching and woodcutting.

5. Limitations of Preservation within Bangladesh

The First Round Table discussion on the Conservation of the Built Heritage of Old Dhaka in Bangladesh was jointly organized between UNESCO and ICOMOS Bangladesh on 21 May 2015. Limitations such as lack of expertise to fill the gap between local procedures and international advice have been illustrated in this discussion. It is important to reinforce the critical but underutilized role of print and electronic media in increasing national awareness to protect cultural heritage.

According to BNBC, All original buildings and architectural elements shall be preserved and restored. But there is no rules and regulations related to retention of spirit of local urban context. Prof Muntasir Mamoon, who has thoroughly worked on Dhaka's history, said that, “Destruction of heritage sites and historical monuments began on a moderate scale during the Pakistan period, but gained momentum following independence. Heritage properties suffered terrible devastation under military rule.” In addition, according to the conservationist architect Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, UNESCO has declined to designate Lalbagh Fort a world heritage site due to inadequate restoration work. It is clear from these dialogues that the rules concerning historic preservation are not followed properly in Bangladesh and the necessity of interrelation of urban context and a heritage building is anyway ignored. (Ali, 2008)

6. Methodology

This research entangles the statement that the heritage buildings in urban setting have some typical features incidental to the local context and thereby demonstrates the correspondence between local context and historic preservation. The principle example used to avow the above proclamation is “European Club” which is a heritage building in an urban context in Chittagong, Bangladesh with rich surroundings. But to verify the avowal, this study also involves comparison of this building with two other heritage buildings, namely P.K. Sen’s Building & Chittagong General Hospital, situated in Chittagong with different urban context. For this paper, mixed approaches consisting of face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect the primary data alongside surveying the sites.

6.1 Case Study 01: P. K. Sen’s Building

P K Sen Bhaban has latitude of 22.328366 and a longitude of 91.832490 in Sadarghat thana of Chittagong. The building was constructed about 1920 and it took approximately three years to complete the house. It is one of the Chittagong's traditional and ancient houses. During the British period it was one of the largest and highest Bhabans in Chittagong as well. This building on the bank of the Karnaphuli river was established by Zemindar Prasanna Kumar Sen, a generous man in Raozan. He belonged to an enormous area of land starting from the sadarghat thana port corner to the nearby Hotel Raj. P K Sen had to sell the entire land ownership after being bankrupt during 1946.



Fig 01. Location Map of P.K. Sen Bhaban



Fig 02. Front View of P.K. Sen Bhaban

This building is situated in a typical urban context. It is approached by a narrow lane of approximately 10 feet, at a distance from main Sadarghat Road. It is surrounded by multistoried buildings which rule over this building of high architectural value. The building is primarily four-storied, but with the Minar on top, the building has three more floors in height. The building is deigned in a very special, and very interesting hexagonal shapes. There are several huge, beautiful, geometric shaped ventilators. Large windows are the building's key features. It has more than 40 rooms and two separate entry and exit stairs. It had color glasses and very impressive decorative works but it is standing on the last legs in the present time. The house is a witness to many experiences, such as wwii, army battalion terror, Surya Sen-related histories (22 March 1894–12 January 1934), and many great and poor experiences are tucked into the building's old bricks. Currently this building is used as a residential one.



(a)

(b)

Fig 03. Buildings adjacent to P.K. Sen Building



Fig 04. Architectural details of P.K. Sen Building

As indicated in Fig 01. (Appendix), the location of the P. K. Sen Building also exhibits that it is encircled by tall buildings. Fig 02. & Fig 03. (Appendix) portrays the adjacent buildings and the gap between these buildings. Fig 04. (Appendix) represents the architectural details of the structure.

The age of the building is almost 100 years and that's why it needs to be preserved. Besides, it has a great historic and architectural value. But the structure is not included in the historic preservation sites of Chittagong Metropolitan Master Plan. There are no steps taken to conserve the building even though it needs to be preserved. Currently the authority of Chittagong City Corporation is taking steps to demolish this building even though Chittagong Development Authority told the owner to renovate it. There are several cracks in the building and there is no buffering space between this building and the adjacent ones. In case of this building, the surrounding structures need to be considered during the preservation. The characteristics of those buildings should portray and respect the architectural features of P. K. Sen building. Moreover, the whole structure needs to be restored and obviously it should be listed in the heritage buildings in the first place.

6.2 Case Study 02: Chittagong General Hospital

Chittagong General Hospital was built in 1901. It was the first public hospital of Chittagong. It has two hundred and fifty bed facility. It was founded initially as a dispensary in 1840, and grew into a hospital afterwards.



Fig 05. Location Map of Chittagong General Hospital

Although the building is in an ordinary urban setting, the surroundings have some landscape features also. As it is situated on a hilly area, there is a good number of vegetation in the surrounding. The General Hospital compound has a group of buildings all of which are brick buildings following the colonial style. But the additional buildings, which were built later or have been made recently, did not follow the same style. The Rangmahal Hill on which this building is constructed is historically influential as the location of the Arakani Fort, burned and blighted by the Mughal Navy's action in their attempt to defeat Chittagong in 1666 AD. The fragments of a 2.24 m wide ruined wall are still traceable under an extension to the north of the hospital site. On 20 July 1904, a Dhyani Buddha (Buddha at meditation) sculpture was found under a Shimul tree on the Rangmahal Hill. Presently, this sculpture is housed in the Vihara Chittagong Buddha. ("General Hospital, Chittagong - Banglapedia", 2020)



(a)

(b)

Fig 6. View of Chittagong General Hospital



Fig 7. Front view of new building of Chittagong General Hospital

Fig 05. (Appendix) indicates the site of the building which also illustrates its milieu. Fig 06. (Appendix) portrays different views of the buildings. Fig 07. (Appendix) represents the building which was added recently without any consideration of the influence of the existing colonial structures.

6.3 An Elaborative study of European Club

6.3.1 Historical influence of European Club

The impactful tales of liberation movement of Bangladesh conceals the 200-year struggle for identity. To establish identity and national spirit one of the prominent armed revolution took place against the oppression of British raj unleashed in Chittagong in 1930, the first armed revolutionary movement against the British rule. In 1930, there was a mood of rebellion against the British rule, and small bands of revolutionaries began to spring up all over Bengal. The heroes of the country believed that it was time for women to stand up and take up arms along with their men and help them liberate their country from the control of the British Raj. The revolution was called “Chittagong uprising”. There were main 4(four) targets of the rebels in which they made their attack and became successful to make Chittagong free of the British Raj. One of these targets were Club house i.e EUROPEAN CLUB which was once the chattering space for the English people and here Pritilata Waddedar

comes in plot as she attacked this structure despite being a woman and became the first woman martyr. From the history, it can be seen that European Club is a structure which is approximately 100 years old and that's why it needs to be preserved along with its historical influence which means its context.

6.3.2 Structural Condition

European Club is situated in Ambagan Road, Chittagong, port city of Bangladesh, which was built around 1910 during English reign in Chittagong. It is the evidence of the attack of Pritilata Waddedar on the British people during revolution of 1932, who hung a signboard outside this building with the writing, “Dogs and Indians are not allowed”.

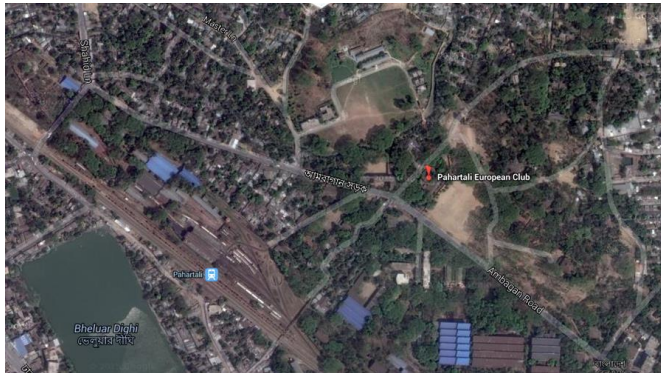


Fig 08. Location map of European Club



Fig 09. Front view of European Club

Although it is in the middle of the city, the surroundings are not like a typical urban context. It is in the middle of a rich landscape with lots of vegetations, hills and hillocks & 2 or more open playground. Some of the trees have rich history just like the structure that means some of them are more than 100 years old. There are some other structures around it which are of same age and probably somehow connected to the history of The European Club. The structure of the building is similar to those of colonial period like made of red bricks, incorporated with wooden structures and sloppy roof made of tin or wood.



Fig 10. European Club



(a)

(b)

Fig 11. Adjacent vegetation

Fig 08. (Appendix) shows the location of the European Club which also exhibits the context of the building. Fig 09. (Appendix) portrays the structural system of the building as well as the architecture of colonial period. Fig 10. (Appendix) represents the glimpse of vegetation condition surrounding the structure. As indicated in Fig. 11. (Appendix), it can be seen that the area is surrounded by adjacent vegetation.

As it has already been about 110 years old, it should be preserved according to the law. Besides, it not only fulfills the age value but also has a great historic value as it is related to the historic revolution of 1930. The structure is already included in the historic preservation sites of Chittagong Metropolitan Master Plan but not recognized by any of the international organizations like UNESCO. But there are no steps taken to conserve the building even though it needs to be preserved. The building is currently being used by the railway authorities, who have used the club as the office of their divisional engineer and have begun to restore the structure that would ruin its unique historical appeal. The facades have been colored red to seem like brick rather than restoring its own facade. As there are no precautions, the structure is decaying day by day. In case of this building, the surrounding landscape should also be preserved along with the building as the circumjacent environment is related to the historic revolution as well as the building. As there is no building immediately adjacent to this structure, it will not be difficult to preserve it.

6.4 Questionnaire Survey

To compile the primary data, a semi-structured questionnaire was used for surveying the population. Such questions are intended to gage the attitude of the respondent about the value of ranking various factors in urban context for the conservation of heritage buildings. Through a given numerical scale ranging through 'Not Important' to 'Very Important,' they were to determine their significance. The interviews were held randomly within Chittagong city in public spaces. Questionnaires were distributed arbitrarily. Before questions were asked, the respondents were briefed on the survey's goals and intent. Table 01 (Appendix) indicates the level of importance public gives to certain factors in conservation of heritage buildings in different urban context. Here “the building” means any heritage building.

Table 1. Level of importance of factors related to conservation of heritage buildings

Factors	Not Important	Slightly Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important
a) To protect the scenic beauty of the building	0%	12.5%	25%	62.5%	0%

b) To preserve surrounding landscape of the building	0%	0%	12.5%	25%	62.5%
c) To sustain history of the building in case of city's existence	0%	0%	25%	12.5%	62.5%
d) To document all past activities surrounding the heritage building	0%	0%	12.5%	50%	37.5%
e) To preserve the building as living evidence for future generation	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%
f) Influence of the heritage building should be present in structures surrounding the heritage building	12.5%	12.5%	25%	37.5%	12.5%

It is interesting to learn that most respondents agree positively on the value of the above-mentioned components relating to the protection of heritage buildings in urban settings where most replied 'Important' and 'Very Important'. It is a good point that people think it is very important to preserve the surrounding landscapes and to sustain history of the building both of which relates to the context of a structure and essential to preserve the spirit of the place.

7. Identification and Preservation of spirit of place in case of European Club

The essence of the place depends largely on the components of the site and the rational relationship between the location and the inhabitants. In the case of an urban heritage building, the "spirit" may be described as the relationship between the building and the site, the site and the boundary properties, the philosophy behind the construction of buildings according to the lands and how their owners use them, and the benefits and liabilities between the adjacent plots and the building. As a historic building, European Club also has some relationships with the surroundings, which define the spirit of place for the structure and preserving this spirit can help greatly in the conservation process of the building.

8. Conclusion

The idea of conservation is almost an anomaly in Bangladesh. Here old buildings, connected to history, receive little attention. In any historical preservation in an urban area, the context plays a great piece and that is why the connectivity between local urban context and preservation of a building is so necessary. The structure and materials are given more prominence in Bangladesh turning a blind eye to the context while the spirit of a place plays an important part in the history of any structure.

Within the ambit, the case of European Club is presented to present the possible way of adaptation of urban context as a conservation tool. It is also demonstrated how there is a relation between context and historic building. This research can be seen as a significant move forward in the union between heritage restoration and the local urban setting, which is still far from being a common occurrence at present.

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APPENDIX

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