Identifying the Morphological Transformations of the Old Core of Dinajpur City for Preservation

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Abstract

The old core of Dinajpur is losing its traditional urban texture due to land scarcity, increased land value, lack of theoretical guidance and the awareness of preservation. The old commercial streets of Maldah Patti, Kaiya Patti and adjoining areas are functioning vibrantly, but with few exceptions the age old activity pattern and built environments are being replaced with the trendiest building styles in each period. Preliminary purpose of this documentary research is to establish the historic and cultural significance of the place; to examine the recent conditions and morphological transformations of urban core. Adequate physical survey, analytical study of historical books, documents and evidences are considered to identify the old structures which have some historic, social or architectural importance for preservation.

Keywords: Old Core, Urban Texture, Morphological Transformation, Preservation.

1 Introduction

Dinajpur is one of the oldest town of Bangladesh is situated near the mythological river Punarvaba. But geologically the location of Dinajpur city established on the bed of a dead river Ghagra. At the preliminary period the shape and architectural fabric of Dinajpur was like a village market-town but it was gradually transformed into a city having remarkable urban texture with time. Initially the town achieved its urban prominence during early colonial period. But after the “Blue Revolt-1860” and arrival of Marwari merchants, the town has experienced a radical change in civic life, commerce, urbanization as well as architecture. At that time Dinajpur was renowned as “the city of Saat-Tola Aat-Patti” (seven nodes and eight streets). Lots of buildings with distinctive architectural features were constructed for commercial, residential, office or mixed functional use. Among the eight Pattis Maldahpatti, Kaiya Patti and adjacent streets became the most vibrant commercial hub as well as an inseparable civic heart of the town (Ali, 2002).

Observing the present situation, it would be difficult to explain whether the growth of Dinajpur is going to proper way or not. Age old land use patterns are changing, tiny plots are being occupied with tall buildings which are destroying the traditional scale, creating congested environment in small streets. Due to the land scarcity, increased land value, lack of theoretical guidance of preservation; the old buildings and traditional spaces of Pattis are being disappeared from urban texture. Very few of the buildings are survived but facing substantial degradation as well as functional declination and city is losing the legacy of cultural heritage. But there must be definable sequences of spaces and activity patterns; detailing in traditional scale and street fabrics in the historical legacies of a city and that must be addressed to compose the growth of the city in natural order other than superimposing a borrowed character of buildings (Alexander, 1979). The purposes of this paper are to establish the historic and cultural significance of the place; to examine the recent condition and morphological changes of the urban core of Dinajpur. This research also focuses to identify some old structures of Maldahpatti and adjoining streets which have some historic, social or architectural importance for their preservation.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the study is to examine the recent conditions to recognize the morphological transformations and also to identify old structures within study area which contains some social, architectural as well as historic importance for conservation.
1.2 Methodology
In the methodological frame work at first; reading of history books, old documents, photographs and evidences are analyzed to identify the historical background of study area; analysis of maps are prepared to recognize the evolution and morphological changes in specific chunk, plot and street level. In the second phase adequate physical observation, photographic survey and interview of people are considered to find out existing conditions, functional changes, materials of construction and formal expressions of old structures.

2 Historical Backgrounds
In Mughal period there were four established governments at Ghoraghat, Borkabad, Tajpur and Panjara of Dinajpur. Present Dinajpur area of Bangladesh was ruled by Ghoraghat and Panjara Sarkar. After the war of Palashi in 1765 British army defeated last Muslim Fouzder Mir Karam Ali Khan, ended the Nababi rule of Ghoraghat Sarkar and invaded the area of Dinajpur. From the beginning the capital of Dinajpur Royal family was established at Dinajpur Mouza under Panjara Sarkar in Mughal period. The capital and adjacent colonies named Gurgola, Borobondor, Rajganj etc formed a small town at the bank of Ghagra river. At the time of Raja Boiddonath (1763-1779), British government occupied the area of Dinajpur capital without any war (Ali, 2002). Because of the ungenial location and communication system of Ghoraghat, British government started migration of their secretariats from Ghoraghat to the Rajbari of Dinajpur Mouza in 1772 and in 1786 they established a district (Buchanan, 1833). In 1793 by the rule of permanent settlement they fixed the area of the district and named it “Dinajpur” (Strong, 1912). According to the historians in Mughal period Ghoraghat was called as “the city of Bayanno-Patti Tippanno-Goli”, and in British period Dinajpur city was renowned as “the city of Saat-Tola Aat-Patti”. Under the name of “Tola” the nodes are Nim Tola, Ganesh Tola, Kali Tola, Shashthi Tola, Bokul Tola, Lokkhi Tola and the streets under the name of “Patti” are Kaiya Patti, Maldah Patti, Basunia Patti, Churi Patti, Shakhari Patti, Dhakal Patti, ChauliaPatti and ThongaPatti. There are 26 wards in present Dinajpur but the number of Patti and Tola remains unchanged. In 1808 the city was divided in four major sectors Rajganj, KanchanGhat, Paharpur and Pulhat (Strong, 1912). Rajganj; near Ghagra River was the prominent commercial zone of the town. In 1860 after “Blue Revolt” the trade of blue was evicted, white merchants reduced their businesses and new Marwari merchants started to come in the business field of Dinajpur. They enlarged Rajganj area as Kaiya and Basunia Patti for iron & metal business, Maldahpatti for cloth business, Churi Patti, Gudri Bazar and Nimtola for rice, food product, jute and jute product business and urbanized the most vibrant commercial area as the “Liver of the town” (Buchanan, 1833).

2.1 Present Area Condition
Studying the present development scenario of Dinajpur; the age old land use patterns of the city are changing with unplanned type of functional uses. This transformation is happening very rapidly because of land scarcity, increased land value, lack of theoretical guidance and the awareness of conservation. The current changes have put these rich and diverse architectural legacies under the risk of disappearance or substantial degradation. As consequences; from study area of Maldahpatti and adjacent streets; old buildings and traditional spaces are almost vanished from the urban texture. Many of the old buildings has been disappeared and replaced by new buildings or under the process of disappearing. Some historic buildings have been damaged or extended or redeveloped or experienced change in functional origin. Very few of the buildings are remained same with historical fabrics for some reasons like legal ownership problems (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Showing existing conditions; recently vacant land, new buildings replacing the old and creating contrast skyline.

3 Analytical Findings
3.1 Demarcation of the Boundary of the Study Area
The survey area is bounded by Goru hati Street in the north, Nim Tola morh in the South, Gudri bazar road in the west, Ghagra canal and part of the Churi Patti road in the east (Figure 2, 3).
3.2 Morphological Transformation of the Area
Morphologically the area has gone through vital changes. In the early period of development the road side plots were almost filled with many old structures of similar architectural styles. From the study of CS map shows there was approximately 108 old road side structures were existed but only 28 buildings can be traced in present street fabric. Observing the skyline of streets there was only one or two storied buildings were existed in past but there are more than 15 new buildings added to sky line of study area which are more than two storey high which are destroying the overall scale of the road. Recent building trends are different from the old existing structures. Besides, the owners are being unable to renovate or preserve their property and being enforced to destroy, or re-erect, their properties. A large number of structures have been extended both vertically or horizontally, sometimes even without leaving any trace of it.

3.3 Identifying Historical Buildings and Sites in the Area
Identification of historic building is based on the following considerations –
- Scope for adaptive reuse.
- Excellence in Architectural characteristics.
- Positional importance.
- Historical background of economy, society and culture (Ifkat, 2010).

3.4 Categorization of Structures in the Area
To identify and classify different structures in the study area following categorizations are considered –
- Landmark.
- Row of Buildings forming an integrated texture of growth.
- Buildings of elite large complexes.
- Detached buildings, small and isolated (Imamuddin, 1993).

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Goru Hati Road
Historical background: Jhumormol, influential leader of Marwari association built the two storied elegant house. After the British rules he left the country and house was used by Ahsanul Alam but presently vacant. Other two buildings are partly demolished and existing parts are given to public as lease [Figure 4].
Use: Originally used as residences. Presently used as residence (RS 4763) and husking mill (RS 4787).
Architectural style: Arched verandahs with decorated columns in ground floor, double column in first floor and decorated cast iron spiral staircase that connects the upper storey of Jhumormol’s house. Alam & Sons house is
unique for front terrace in first floor and Latif house is identical for its half circular form that addressed the circulation allay beside it.

**Considerations for conservation:** These houses are in vulnerable condition but are the finest evidences of time. For historical importance, architectural features and scope of adaptive reuse these structures should be preserved.

### 3.5.2 Basunia Patti Road

**Building/owner:** Diamond hotel (RS-4863), Doinik Ajker Barta (RS-4854)  
**Construction:** 1880-1905.

**Historical background:** Diamond hotel was originally built by Marwari family but used as Australia Bank in Pakistan period, Rupali Bank after the liberation war and now as restaurant.

**Use:** RS 4854 used as chamber, grossery shop at past but as newspaper office, chamber and shop at present.  
**Architectural style:** Arched entry, front verandah, decorated wooden door, full height opening, cast iron rafter, rail, decoration over door and window are evidence of Marwari shop houses built in last of 19th century. Though there were several alternation and addition these buildings preserve the essence of the past (Figure 4).

**Considerations for conservation:** conservation of integrated linier development pattern of the area to recreate the previous charming streetscape.

### 3.5.3 Gudri Bazar Road

**Building/owner:** Maizdi Kuthi, Sangeet Mahabiddaloy  
**Plot no:** RS 5489  
**Construction:** Early 19th century

**Historical Background:** Gokul Chandra Chowdhuri one of the successors of Gudrir Jamindar family initiated the construction of Maizdi Kuthi. [Ali, 2002] In this plot there was another large residence for Jamindar family [CS map, 1934], but untraceable today. Gudrir Bazar was named after Gudrir Jamindar family.

**Use:** Originally a residential building, from 1987 it is adapted as office building of Sangeet Mahabiddaloy.

**Architectural style:** Two storied fort like structure is amalgamation of Colonial and Mughal styles. First floor roof was renovated with new roof in 1987 with reduced height. Main features are Square plan, staggering three storied built form, roof terrace, octagonal tower with pointed ribbed dome at corners, painted exposed brick wall with rustic band, rafter-purlin with burnt tile for roof and stair construction, raking cornice, Venetian arch with brick column, pointed arch and semicircular arch in verandahs, segmental arch for stair case opening, pediment at the top of stair case with metal decoration, wooden hand rail with cast iron railing, screen wall at stair case opening, decorative metal ventilators and merlons parapet at the top [Figure 4].

**Considerations for conservation:** For historical, cultural, political importance, exceptional architectural features and options for adaptive reuse the building should be conserved as palatial building complexes.

### 3.5.4 Kaiya Patti Road

**Building/owner:** Marwari house & shop/ no legal owner;  
**Plot no:** RS 4874;  
**Construction:** Early 19th century.

**Use:** originally shop and residence but after 1947 remained vacant.  
**Architectural style:** A two storied L-shaped building with internal courtyard was constructed following Italian renaissance style with traditional mix. Two frontal verandahs at lower and upper storey are connected with three quarter turn stair. The main features are high plinth, brick wall with lime-chips plaster, rustic band, cast iron rafter-purlin with burnt tile for roof and stair construction, use of Venetian and semicircular arch in verandahs, use of oculus at parapet, raking cornice, wooden doors and windows [Figure 5].

**Considerations for conservation:** For distinctive architectural features and scope for adaptive reuse.

**Building/owner:** Shankar Bostraloy/Kalilar Agarwala,  
**Plot no:** RS 5310;  
**Construction:** Late 18th century

**Historical Background:** Agarwala family came from Rajasthan for business purpose, took the land from Jamindar as a lease and paid regular taxes for it [Figure 5].

**Use:** Residence; but frontal portion of lower storey used as shop and storage in both past & present time.
Architectural style: Two storied L-shaped building having internal courtyard and two lower and upper storey verandahs. Semicircular arches of lower level gives intimate scale but the upper storey is composed with columns made of circular cast iron pipe with decorative capital which gives lofty scale. Other features are the use of brick mouldings at corner columns, brick wall with lime-chips plaster, cast iron rafter-purlin with burnt tile for roof construction, use of hanging wooden louvers as a sun breaker in upper verandah, raking cornice, floral motif band under the cornice of upper storey, semicircular or segmental arches are used to provide wooden door and window openings and floral decorative screens of cast iron are used over the door.

Considerations for conservation: for unique features and a significant part of an integrated urban texture.

Building/owner: House of Shantosh Agarwala Plot no: RS 4889 Construction: around 1890-1900
Historical background: This structure was built as residence for Marwari businessman, Shantosh Agarwala.
Use: Residence; but frontal portion of lower storey used as shop in past but it is abandoned in present time.
Architectural style: Main architectural features are semicircular arched front verandah, brick masonry stair consisting winders, twin columns with banded impost, wooden beam and bracket [Figure 5].

Consideration for conservation: for the scope of adaptive reuse and a significant part of street fabric.

Figure 6. Churi Patti street fabric of 1990, 2009 & 2016 of RS (4840, 4835, 4834 and 4833)

3.5.5 Churi Patti Road

Building/owner/Plot: Shoronika Library (RS 4840), Blanket & Pillow shop (RS 4835), Marwari house (RS 4834) & Marwari shop cum house (RS 4833); Construction: Late 18th – early 19th century

Historical Background: from the earlier times these plots were occupied by some Marwari merchant families but ownership has been changed after 1947.

Use: Shoronika Library was one storied residence originally but functioning as a library cum house and shop in present time. The blanket and pillow shop originally was a residence. Functions of the two storied Marwari house (RS 4834) never changed and lower storey of two storied Marwari shop cum house (RS 4834) is successfully functioning as a lime shop and storage but upper storey does not exist today [Figure 6].

Architectural style: Architectural features of these buildings are the brick with lime-chips plaster, cast iron rafter-purlin, burnt tile, semicircular and pointed arches in verandahs, semicircular and segmental arches to provide door and window openings and cast iron decorated screens, metal rain spout, raking cornice and decorative metal ventilators, decorative cast iron railing and oculus at the top parapet.

Considerations for conservation: Row of Buildings forming an integrated texture of growth.

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Building/owner: Kundu residence & Ramna Transport Agency at ChuriPatti, Marwary house, Industrial Bank & Ram Sinhala house at Maldah Patti.

Building/owner: Kundu residence; Plot no: RS 4906; Construction: mid 18th century.

Historical Background: Famous Kundu family is living by generations. Use: Residence [Figure 7].

Architectural Style: Two entrances from the road one semicircular arched entrance and another is through the verandah. Decorated round columns with raking base and capital, at lower storey semi circular arch over doors and windows but for the upper storey segmental arch is used. Full height window gives it a distinct character with a wooden lattice over cast iron grill. Bick masonry work is done with lime mortar. Wood and metal is used as rafter-purlin. Decorated parapet is used at the top. Cast iron pipes are used as gutter and drainage pipe. Floor is finished with black stone tile. There is a well for drinking water at the back courtyard of the building.

Considerations for conservation: Row of Buildings forming an integrated texture of growth.

Use: Ramna Transport Agency was a hotel at its first period but now a commercial agency building.

Architectural Style: Architectural features are brick masonry and lime mortar plaster work, mezzanine floor,
cast iron rafter-purlin, segmental arch, raking cornice and decorative cast iron screen work [Figure 7].

**Considerations for conservation:** Building in a row and unique architectural style.

### 3.5.6 Maldah Patti Road

**Building/owner:** Ram Sinhala  
**Plot no:** RS 22, 24 (JL 94);  
**Construction:** 1830-1850

**Use:** Upper storey for residential and lower storey for commercial purposes from the earlier times.

**Architectural Style:** Two storied building has three connected gable ended pitch roofs are used for the roofing of the upper storey using corrugated CI sheet supported by wooden frame. Jaffri work of perforated CI sheet is also visible at the edge of roof. The walls are Brick masonry with lime mortar plaster and a stairway at the middle directly connects with the upper storey which is visible form road [Figure 7].

**Considerations for conservation:** This building has a monadic architectural style. It gives a different architectural fabric in Maldah Patti. It is an example of architectural excellence of that time and the street.

**Building/ owner:** Marwari house/no legal owner  
**Plot no:** RS -5260.  
**Construction:** around 1866-1900.

**Historical background:** This building was built by a Marwari merchant, but remained vacant after 1947.

**Use:** originally a residence and shop but now it is vacant [Figure 7].

**Architectural style:** Two storied structure at the corner plot with simple semi-circular arch at lower storey and ogee arch at upper storey. Brick masonry work with lime plaster, cast iron rafter-purlin and burnt tiles are used.

**Consideration for conservation:** This building was not gone through any morphological changes but collapsing day by day. For distinctive architectural features and scope for adaptive re use the building should be preserved.

**Building/owner:** Industrial Bank of Dinajpur;  
**Plot no:** RS 2, Balubari-94;  
**Construction:** later18th century

**Use:** Originally it was a bank but after 1947 used for shop and residential purpose but now is vacant [Figure 7].

**Architectural Style:** Two storied building with brick masonry work, segmental arch for openings, Cast iron rafter-purlin, saal wood beam and corrugated iron sheet roofing. Pediment, urn, raking cornice, cast iron grill and iron sheet cut Jaffri are also found.

**Considerations for conservation:** For historical value and excellent architectural features.

### 3.6 Findings

The survey and study result identified some major elements and styles from old fabric of Maldah Patti, Kaiya Patti and adjacent streets. The old skyline was limited in very intimate scale of one or two storied buildings and three types of functional structures; one storied shops, two storied mixed use buildings and one or two storied residences. Shops and mixed use buildings are located at major streets and residences at secondary streets. Mixed use buildings are mainly shop at lower front level and residence at lower back and upper level. From the observation of CS map, an internal courtyard with deep well is typical planning pattern of plot level. Dog leg, spiral or quarter turns stairs are used as vertical connection of two frontal verandahs is common feature. Architectural features of European, colonial, Mughal and traditional styles are found in old buildings. From data analysis 26 old structures have been identified as they are existed from mid and later 18th century has gone through some morphological changes; but need to be conserved [Figure 8].

### 4 Conclusions

This study recognizes a number of Marwari shops, houses and other commercial structures which are witnesses of first civic development of Dinajpur and contains some historical character. But uncontrolled and insensitive constructions are destroying the old fabric of streets and growth of timeless character. Conservation and restoration of the significant buildings or entire area may recall the architectural integrity and identity of old town. Different degrees of interventions for conservation, formulation of policies and plans, encouraging community participations and public awareness are needed to protect and restore the age old urban core of the town.
References


