



## Murapara Rajbari Temples

# Meditation in Beauty

The temple is a mix of Colonial, Mughal and Bengali architectural styles.

At the beginning of the 19th century, some fabulously rich rulers or zaminders built residential complexes housing temples and *puja mandaps*, large backyards with ponds, wells and gardens, to serve diversified domestic and religious demands. Murapara Rajbari, located in Murapara village, about 25 kilometres southeast of Dhaka, is one of the examples of such complexes.

Usually, most zaminders were Brahmin and had a strong belief in their religious rituals. As a result, a space built with much ornamentation to perform their rituals was the most impressive part of their complex.

There were two types of space for worship and ritual purposes: one for the feudal class of society like Brahmin zaminder, where they used to perform their daily ritual in a small temple only for the zaminder family. And the other was a grand *puja mandap* for celebrating the annual Durga puja with their family, relatives, staff, guests and villagers.

Durga puja the only occasion where the common villagers were allowed to enter the palace complex and celebrate. On the other hand, the internal *puja mandap* was the place of interaction between the villagers and zaminders. This type of *puja mandap* also existed behind the main building of the Murapara Rajbari.

Looking inside through the main

entrance foyer of the complex, there is a large open paved courtyard, surrounded by different structures: a two-storey inner *mahal* in the east, a flat roofed single-storey temple or *puja mandap* in the north and an open single-storey *mandir* in the south.

The northern temple chamber has a large *mandap* and a frontal verandah of same width, entered by an elegant flight of steps from the paved central courtyard. The southern façade, relieved with a variety of floral design in plaster, reveals the taste and affluence of the feudal lord. This façade is composed of five semi-circular arched openings, supported by a bundle of Corinthian pillars -- eight in each supporting area.

Like the gothic window, the western and eastern arched openings are divided into two smaller semicircular arches supported by Corinthian columns and surmounted by a circular ring in the middle.

At present, the Murapara Degree College is using the *puja mandap* on the northern side and *natmandir* on the southern side as their classrooms. Wild vegetation is spoiling the walls that need immediate steps to save the structure from further deterioration.

Within the western perimeter and on the eastern bank of the Sitalakhya River, there are two small impressive temples, the original setting being replaced by an asphalt



road. The road connects Murapara with Vulta Bazaar, passing between the temples and the riverbank.

Both temples are facing south and placed side by side and rested on a low plinth. The smaller one with a frontal porch in the south is made of red sandstone, a very rare building material, imported from India. The less ornamentation proves that the local craftsmen were not accustomed to the material. No experiment could be made of making arched opening or curved surface, because of the large size of stone.

surface. According to the plan, it is a square-shaped shrine with a frontal veranda. The shrine surmounted by a ribbed dome supported by an octagonal base. Four kiosks, crowned by onion shaped dome, are also observed in each corner of the shrine, rested directly on Corinthian pillars. Projected eaves or cornice supported by ornamented console at the roof level is an important feature of this temple. The frontal façade is terminated by the Bengali *chowchala* dome. There is no space left on the surface of the temple, which is not attractively embellished with diverse floral pattern. Onion shaped dome with high shoulder of Mughal style, Corinthian pillars of Colonial period, *chowchala* dome of Bengali origin make the temple universal.

The temple is a mix of Colonial, Mughal and Bengali architectural styles. Even the use of different types of arch-pointed arch, trefoil arch and ogee arch in a single building reveals the intention of the builders to make the edifice superb.

Story: DR ABU SAYEED M AHMED  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, THE UNIVERSITY OF ASIA PACIFIC

Photos: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



### words of wisdom

When heritage is lost, the loss is not for any individual but for the nation as a whole. Nothing can make up for the loss. Money cannot buy it back.

-- Mustafa Monwar  
A master artist