



**Chandpura Mosque, Chittagong**

A swift drive along the Chandanpura Road will not catch your eye. But a slow stroll on the ever-busy road or a leisure ride on a rickshaw will draw your attention to the beauty, splendour and grandeur of an architectural marvel.

The Chandpura Mosque, located in the port city, has it all. Chittagong can boast of architectural heritages and the mosque is certainly one of them.

Abdul Hamid Master a zaminder at Chandanpura during the later part of 18<sup>th</sup> century. He built a big earthen mosque on a large piece of land, which changed through the passage of time in 1950 into concrete, yet holding together the original architectural design.

Abu Syed Dobash, one of

Hamid Master's successors, started the change in 1947 and it took three years to complete the work, which cost him approximately Tk 4 lakh, which was considered huge during that period.

After Dobash's demise, his nephew Ezharul Haq, who lived till 1971, supervised the mosque. Ezharul's sons Mazharul and Didarul are overlooking the mosque while Mazhar is the 'Motwalli' (caretaker).

A famous mason of the time, Abdul Jabbar from Lucknow India, was brought here to construct the mosque and the materials for this distinctive job were imported from different parts of India. A total of 100 workers put in their untiring efforts and skill to bring this wondrous work to reality.

The mosque is two-storied but its front view gives impression of a high-rise structure. The stairway on both sides is ordinary up to the first floor. Then it takes a spiral shape leading to the two minarets. The mason and his men so meticulously balanced the flight, dimension and form of the stairs, built of pure cement, sure to spellbind any connoisseur at first sight.

The architect cum artist from Lucknow has relied too much only on a handful of materials, i.e. cement, sand, brick, bronze, brass, paint etc, and which were obtained easily. One of the salient features of his craftsmanship is the emphasis on the exterior look, openness of the design and ventilation. His exterior treatment is superior than the interior, which he ignored to some extent.

Although the Lucknow-mason has given high thoughts

and put in his best effort for the sake of aesthetics, he seemed to have forgotten a few basics of masonry. The stairways were so upright that requires a careful climb. Otherwise, one can tumble with risk to physical injury.

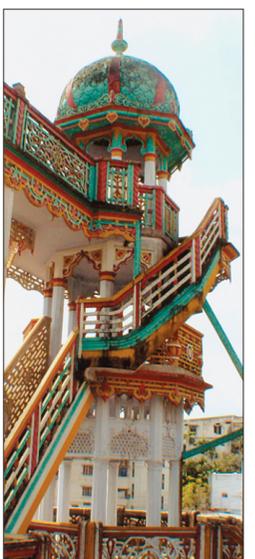
This fault aside, another mastery behind the architectural wonder is the creator's imagination and handling of harmony. The artist blended aesthetic search evolving from an Islamic posture and culture of the time during making of the mosque.

Originally, about 14 spectac-



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## A piece to be treasured



ular bronze-made turrets of various sizes were erected on top of the different parts. A big, beautiful and lofty dome crowns the centre. It was originally made with 10 tonnes of bronze. But the bronze motifs have been erased completely over the years. The dome and turrets were built and placed in such a way that rays of sun always create a unique reflection. This

reflection cannot be seen any more as the dome and towers have lost their original gleam because of the absence of bronze motifs. Name of some disciples (Sahaba) of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (S) like Abu Bakar, Ali, Osman, Abbas, Fatema, Hassan and Hossain were inscribed in Arabic around the dome.

At present, a close inspection of the entire mosque and its

exterior and interior profile will disappoint any visitor. The exterior look from distance still evokes some glamour but a step inside will bring a wave of sympathy to a valuable architectural asset of our 'heritage'.

Unplanned construction of commercial and residential structures also poses a serious threat to the existence of the mosque. Some markets and

residential buildings are being constructed around the mosque. And the clear view of the mosque will be no more once those structures become high-rises.

Many visitors are of the opinion that the mosque should be declared an architectural site and government must take immediate initiatives to preserve it. The present owners too feel the same.

"It's tough for us to carry out proper maintenance of the mosque because of financial constraints. We bear all expenses from our meagre family income which includes wages of the Imam and Muajjins and we don't know for how long can we go on," said Mazhar.

Mazhar told The Daily Star: "We won't mind if government come forward, take it, preserve it and rescue it from decay."

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