

Mughal monument needs immediate attention

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

On the bank of the Buriganga river, at the north end, stands two important surviving monuments of the Mughal era -- Choto Katra and Boro Katra -- in a dilapidated state and in need of renovations and conservation work.

The inns, Boro Katra was built in 1644 by Mir Quasem and Choto Katra by Nawab Shaista Khan in 1663, according to the design of the caravanserai found in Central Asia, which facilitated over-night traders on the major route along the Buriganga river.

Many shops and a packaging factory now occupy the Choto Katra along with several families who have occupied the space illegally.

The architecture on both sites of the building has been drastically altered or extended by the occupants seriously damaging its archaeological value.

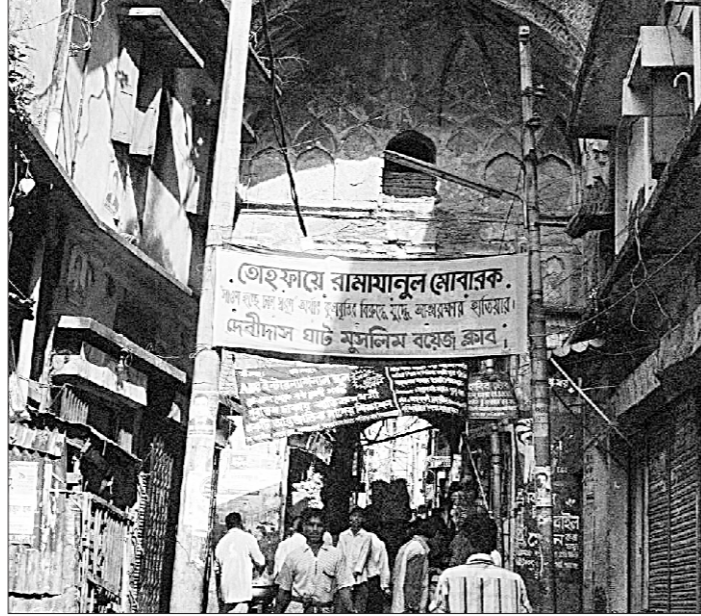
"It is a national heritage site and a landmark of great historical significance. It needs to be protected. Both sites are in need of immediate conservation work," said Dr. Shafiqul Alam, director of the Department of Archaeology.

Conservation, however, has become quite a difficult task. "Both sites must be evacuated before renovations begin," Alam said.

But occupants claim they have a legal hold on the sites and are not willing to move. The occupant of Choto Katra claimed that his father had bought the property before independence.

Boro Katra has lost its original features, being used by the Jamia Husainiya Ashraf ul Ulu Madrassah.

"Pir Abdul Wahab donated the property to us. Before him Hafej Hussain Ahamed was the owner and the madrassah was set up in 1932," said Mufti Mohammad Tayab of Husainiya madrassah.



(Is this the bara or choto?)

"Evacuation would be a costly process," said Dr. Alam. "The department faces a serious

shortage of funds and can neither afford compensation nor accommodation for the displaced," he added.

Other sites in Dhaka that require special attention are the Rose Garden, Ruplal House, Sutrapur Jamindar bari, Shankhanidhi House a few of the surviving edifices of the Mughal times, which the department has no control on.

Those who have inherited these places are now maintaining the sites. "It may be possible for the authorities to come to an agreement with the present owners regarding conservation, renovation and the use of property," said Dr. Alam.

But he added that in most cases, the inheritors are not willing to do so for one reason or the other. On the other hand there is more than one inheritor or the property has been leased out.

"These complex situations stop us to take progressive steps to preserve these magnificent architectural sites," Dr Alam said.



Two surviving monuments of Mughal era, Boro Katra and Choto Katra on the bank of Buriganga river, are in dilapidated condition in old Dhaka.

6x3

4x2

11x3

9x2

7x3