Workshop on Architectural Heritage Conservation Dept. of Architecture, NSU, and British Council

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ANCIENT edifices are the material evidence of our past, a major means of communication with the tradition and heritage of a nation. In absence of adequate historical sources and writings, architecture, as a vehicle of cultural expression and experience, is a veritable document- an exceptional common denominator between generations of people, linking the past to the present and the future. Buildings and monuments which symbolise a particular civilization, a significant development, or a historic incident, and reflect high points in human achievement, acquire greater significance in our cultural and national life with the passage of time. In addition to architectural, aesthetic, historic and even iconic value, these possess great emotional value as symbols of our cultural identity.

Products of accumulated wisdom expressed through the language of space and form, it is the moral obligation of one generation to preserve this inheritance for the future. Unscrupulous development interventions have endangered their survival, posing a serious threat to the preservation of cultural heritage. The older section of our cities or buildings of significance are to be held in trust by us for our future generations. A civilized society must know about its origin and roots in the local, regional and world contexts to be able to understand and appreciate its being and be able to charter its course into the future.

Bangladesh is yet to define its stand on the issue of architectural conservation. The legislations toward archaeological preservation cannot meet the present day need of architectural conservation. Besides resource constraint, for Bangladesh there are fundamental inadequacies- at the root of which is the lack of public or professional concern. Awareness in Bangladesh started in the 1980s, followed by a few conservation projects, one of which won the ARCASIA Gold Medal, providing impetus for several studies and projects.

Dhaka existed for centuries before it became a Capital city 400 years ago. Its traditional architecture is reminiscent of the Mughal and Colonial periods. There are a good number of aesthetically designed buildings like forts, mosques, temples, churches, gates and large mansions. Many of them are in use in an unsympathetic manner. Most surviving structures, a miniscule fraction of what the city had in its glory days, are in a dilapidated condition due to negligence and misuse, leading to faster decay.

