

## FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF DHAKA

# Dhakaiyas drifting to new city

The deep, traditional bond loosening with time as reality takes the steering wheel

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Azim Baksh, a 61-year-old resident of Gulshan, always feels nostalgic whenever he crosses Fulbaria, where starts the Old Dhaka established more than 400 years ago.

Born and brought up in Farashganj area, Baksh moved to the newer part of the city in 2000 leaving behind the legacy of his four generations of predecessors, many relatives, close neighbours and probably a few foes in Old Dhaka.

Like him, many residents of Old Dhaka who identify themselves as the true Dhakaiyas are gradually moving to newer parts of the city giving birth to a whole new social phenomenon, changing a community that lived in harmony for centuries.

"During my childhood there was no such concept of Old Dhaka. What we know as old town today was the modern Dhaka then," said Baksh.

"As the city gradually began to grow a distinction appeared creating the concept of old and new. Fulbaria used to be the city's main railway station till mid 1960s and it was considered as the border line between the two parts of Dhaka," Baksh said.

Baksh explained that the community of Dhakaiyas had a deep bond, which began to loosen up when reality brought many new faces to the old town.

"We were introduced with something that never existed in our area. Hooligans took shelter in our part of the town, muggers became active even during the daytime," he said.

Alauddin Ali, a resident of Urdu Road, moved to Moghbazar area recently. His story is different. "As our family began to grow the house we inherited became narrower with more partitions between the rooms. We just had to move as there was no room," he said.

"I also had to move from Old Dhaka for schooling of my children. Today every reputed educational institution is situated in the newer part of the city. The



Dhakaiyas gradually moving to the new part of the city to live a life modern and free from dirt and congestion.

schools of old town where we studied lost their grandeur," Ali said.

The younger generation is more inclined to move than the older generation. "My office is in Banani Chairmanbari. The sufferings, the traffic jam that we have to go through getting in and out of the old town became unbearable. The alleys became narrower every day," said Abdus Shakur Munshi who moved to Nikunja from Lalbagh.

Dr Hafiza Khatun, professor of the Department of Geography and Environmental Science at Dhaka University in her book 'Dhakaiyas On the Move' published in 2003 discussed various aspects of the Old Dhaka dwellers' migration pattern.

"Intra-urban migration is a very normal phenomenon. It happens every day. Today's Dhaka was created by the

Dhakaiyas, a community with deep social bond, individual way of living, exclusive dialect, heritage, food and rituals," Prof Hafiza said.

"They lived together for a very long time. When they began to move away from their home it became a major social phenomenon," she added.

Prof Hafiza makes an effort to identify the true Dhakaiyas. "Dhakaiyas are the earlier settlers of old town who owned property in the cadastral map (a map that records property) of 1912 published by the then municipality of Dhaka."

Their identity is also associated with Banga Bhanga (the creation of two Bengalis in 1905). Those who lived in Dhaka before that period are also considered the original Dhakaiyas. Many came after that but they moved to other parts out of necessity.

Only the true Dhakaiyas remained in their ancestral homes, she added.

According to the professor, the oldest neighbourhood in Dhaka would be the places around Buriganga River originated according to the need of the businessmen. Then gradually the city began to spread horizontally.

Dr Hafiza mentioned Dhakaiyas have two communities among themselves - the Kutti and the Khushbash. "We consider all Dhakaiyas as Kutti. This is wrong. The Kutti used to be the working class and the Khushbash or Shukhbash had close connection with the administration and belonged to a bit upscale segment," she said.

She also noted that their dialect is also slightly different from one another. "The dialect of the Kutti has more Bangla with a

blend of Urdu while the dialect of others is more influenced by Urdu with a blend of Persian and Bangla."

According to her research, the migration was there even before 1971 and it continued during post-independence period.

However, it became a major trend in the 1990s and it is still going on. "One important pattern we have to consider is that it is a trend of those who can afford to move. Others with less solvency tend to remain in their ancestral homes," said Prof Hafiza.

Prof Hafiza mentioned economic factors as one of the main reasons behind the migration.

"Business moved to more modern and convenient part of the city as Old Dhaka did not appeal customers anymore. Property ownership to other part of the city also increased."

She said, "There was a time Dhakaiyas used to marry among themselves. This tradition also changed. Marriage to other community is another major reason."

The migration pattern however is prevalent among the Muslims. The Hindus living in old town tend to cling to their place of birth for many reasons.

Babul Das, a fourth generation jeweller in Tantibazar, said, "We simply cannot think of moving away from Tantibazar. This is my home. All my relatives are here. Every inch of this alley evokes memories of my predecessors."

"Most importantly the temples are all in the old town. It will not be possible to perform Puja or other religious rites in the other part of the city like we do here," he added.

Besides, moving from here might mean losing our property as happened to many Hindus in many parts of Bangladesh," Das said.

With migration the communal bond however is not entirely severed. Nostalgia brings every true Dhakaiyas back to the intricate alleys every now and then.

"The train line is no longer there in Fulbaria, yet the feeling of invisible border still exists. Every time I cross that line I have this special feeling that I am back to my home. As I enter the intricate alleys I feel very nostalgic," said Baksh.

Baksh still performs Tarabi prayer during Ramadan and Eid prayer in the mosque of his old neighbourhood. Animal sacrifice during Eid-ul-Azha also takes place among his relatives in Farashganj. "I miss the cultural bond, the social programmes. At the mosque we meet old friends. This get together helps us cope with the new town," he said.

Munshi on the other hand misses the deep fried delicacies of old town. "The scrumptious items that Chawkbazar still offers cannot be found anywhere else in the city. The taste is simply divine and cannot be compared with anything that the new town offers."

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"The Election Commission is a little bit frustrated, as the number of quality candidates is not as many as expected to be in the race."*

-- ATM Shamsul Huda  
Chief Election Commissioner

Told reporters at his office, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Now we, the indigenous people, have become a subject to research but we find no change in our fate."*

-- Pramod Mankin

A former lawmaker belonging to the indigenous community  
Said at a workshop titled 'Protect the Sal Forest of Modhupur and Rights of Forest Dwellers' jointly organised by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and Joyenshahi Adivasi Unnayan Parishad, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"How will the teaching go on when the money is one-third of a day labourer's salary?"*

-- Prof Abul Barakat  
Economist

Said at a discussion organised by Bangladesh community-primary teachers association, on Thursday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

*"Right at this moment let's shelve the thought of uprooting corruption. Just think about bringing it to a tolerable level."*

-- Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury  
Chairman, Anti-Corruption Commission

Said at a view exchange meeting at Panchagar, on Monday. Source: Prothom Alo

*"I am the only one who has led an ideal life among the 60 ministers of the alliance government."*

-- Abdus Salam Pintu

Former state minister and defendant of August 21 Grenade Attack  
Said during the court hearing of the case, on Tuesday. Source: Prothom Alo

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

# Death of a heritage site

Churihatta mosque still evokes sad memory

DURDANA GHIAS

The 350-year old Churihatta Mosque, the only mosque in the city with *chou-chala* or bungalow type roof demolished about 50 years ago evokes a sad memory as Dhaka prepares to celebrate 400 years.

The mosque was at Churihatta of Chawkbazar in the old part of the city.

According to a book by Dr Ahmad Hasan Dani the mosque was built in 1649 by a Mughal officer Muhammad Beg when Prince Shah Suja was viceroy of Bengal.

The book said that the mosque was rectangular in shape with towers on four corners. The eastern side had three doorways, each of which opened through two successive arches.

The façade was marked with numerous square and rectangular panels and the cornice, which was straight, was faced with blind merlons, ornamental battlement in the shape of rosebuds.

The interior hall was covered with an intersecting vaulted roof, which was a modification of the north Indian pyramidal type. The line of intersection and the central ridge was curved. It did not have any long drawn eaves as found in the Bengali type.

According to historians the mosque was renovated in 1961, which means that its main features were intact until the structure was torn down later by the mosque committee.

"It was the only mosque that had *chou-chala* roof in the interior. In the exterior the roof was flat. It was quite a unique feature

of the mosque," said Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, conservation architect with expertise on mosque architecture.

But the mosque committee claimed that the original mosque was torn down by a non-Bengali Abdur Rashid Dilliwala, to build a new structure in 1962. Therefore the structure they destroyed was not anything historical.

Locals of the area have a mixed feeling about the mosque as many of them do not know that there was such an old mosque in their vicinity. Many said that the mosque was demolished some 50 years ago.

"I heard that there was an old mosque at this place in Churihatta, which was older than the Chawkbazar mosque. But I can't say exactly when,

because I was a child at that time. It was rebuilt by a non-Bengali during the Pakistan period," said an elderly resident of the area.

Noted historian Prof Sirajul Islam said it is a 'crime' to tear down such an old structure.

"From a book by historian Ahmad Hasan Dani it is known that in 1961 he got it intact when the mosque underwent renovation or repair. That means the original structure was there until then."

"There is a four-storey new building beside it. Wasn't it enough for accommodating more people?" he said.

But according to the mosque committee the space in the new building was not enough as the population of the area was rising because of increasing commercial activities.

The committee said, the original mosque was a small structure of 30x16 sq ft. It had little space on its two sides owned by a childless non-Bengali affluent Abdur Rashid Dilliwala. Dilliwala donated the spaces and in 1962 rebuilt the mosque, which was already dilapidated at that time.

"We would have saved it had it been the original mosque. But what we have torn down was built in 1962. Therefore we did not demolish anything historical," said Syed Sirajuddin Ahmed, vice-president of the committee.

There is a shilalipi (stone plaque) inside the mosque stating verses from the Holy Quran and the name of Muhammad Beg during the reign of Shah Suja. The stone plaque is the only thing that is left intact of the original structure.

"We have placed the stone plaque inside our new building. Once the whole building is constructed we will join the two parts," said Ahmed.



## RUNDOWN PUBLIC TOILETS-II

# 'Too dirty, it makes you vomit'

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

"It's too dirty to use. This makes you vomit," said Mustakim, a shopkeeper, showing the floor of a DCC-run public toilet at Jatrabari, overflowed with filthy water.

People have to stand in front of the basin or urinal very carefully to escape from the dirty water always overflowing the floor. The lessee of the toilet just collects money from the users but spend almost nothing on cleaning the toilet, alleged Mustakim.

This is a general picture of most of the public toilets in the city. Due to poor maintenance most of them are unusable. Their dilapidated condition clearly shows that the contractors used substandard construction materials and toilet fittings.

But people are forced to use

these toilets despite the unhygienic condition.

Ruplal (not his real name), sweeper of a public toilet, said most of the time he cleans the toilet only with fresh water as his employer does not provide bleaching powder regularly.

DCC sources said there were some special provisions in the plan for public toilets that included both high and low commodes, urinals, basin, breast-feeding space and dressing room for women and separate entrance for men and women.

In reality, most of the toilets do not have these facilities. The contractors used low quality construction materials and toilet fittings. As a result, the pans and basins of the toilets have become unusable within a very short time.

An official of Dhaka City

Corporation (DCC) admitted the poor management of the public toilets. He said most of the toilets could not be maintained properly due to legal tangles between the city corporation and the lessees.

These lessees rarely follow their contracts and they often do not pay the promised rent to the DCC, he said.

The zonal offices of DCC handle lease and monitoring of the public toilets while the estate department deals with the cases pending in courts for a long time.

Some of the cases have been pending since 1995, the DCC official said adding that the lessees showing excuse of the cases do not pay electricity or water bills.

The DCC took money from the donors and government for constructing the public toilets but the way DCC implemented the pro-

ject is really surprising, he said.

The city corporation planned to construct 100 public toilets and Asian Development Bank provided about Tk 6 crore for construction of 70 toilets.

The DCC now has only 69 public toilets for over one crore city dwellers. But a large number of them are either shut it unusable.

In 2004, DCC floated tender for 56 toilets out of 100. But later it constructed 38 toilets as the authorities failed to allocate space for 11 toilets while construction of some toilets was postponed due to objection from local people or organisations.

Officials of the zonal offices of DCC declined to say anything about the maintenance and legal disputes over the public toilets without instruction from the higher authorities.



Construction of a new mosque building is going on in full swing at the site where once stood the Churihatta mosque, inset, the 350-year old stone plaque saved from the original mosque.