An Architect's Dhaka

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(Part Seven)

Born builders equipped with imperial spirit and technique, the Mughals created splendid pieces of architecture all over India. In Bengal these were constructed with local materials like brick. They used knowledge inherited from their central Asian ancestors, but paid less attention to the socio-cultural needs of the locals. Sympathy to the vernacular was limited to the consideration of local materials and climate only. Wherever the Mughal regality moved they moved with a large contingent of support services that included masons and craftsmen. Manucci, an Italian living in India in the 17C gave a vivid description of the paraphernalia. Before the Mughals made Dhaka the capital, it has moved among Tanda, Rajmahal and Lakhnawati (Gaur). Before Islam Khan's arrived in Dhaka, he sent Master of Ceremony and masons to make the existing fort ready (habitable) for him.

Many of the masons (ustagar) from the rest of India and middle-Asia who accompanied the Mughals and other foreigners coming to Dhaka in various times settled in Dhaka, and influenced the building activities. With the coming of the British, new ideas and (classical) orders in contrast to the prevailing practice emerged. An amalgamated British and Mughal architecture can be detected in the early-19C buildings. Trabeated roofing with tiles on timber rafters and purlins, and later on iron joists first used in Nimtali Kuthi (1765-66), replaced massive vaulted roofs; pure brick arches emerged in place of fluted arches; columns with modified Ionic and Corinthian capitals, classical entablature with distinctive parts of architrave, frieze and cornice were also used.



Northbrook Hall in Farashganj (on the river), popularly known as the Lalkuthi, surrounded by incompatible extensions done by the government. The civic hall, one of the best examples of Indo-Saracen architecture in Dhaka, is a listed building.