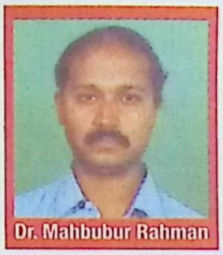
An Architect's Dhaka

Part Twelve


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THERE is no government policy as such on architectural heritage conservation in Bangladesh hardly any specified methodology or procedure has been followed by the government or any other organisation. An Antiquities Act was enacted in Pakistan in 1968 following a similar one in other sub-continental countries; it was further amended in 1976. The Department of Archaeology usually carries out architectural restoration in the country. The Department of Architecture under the Ministry of Public Works too undertook several significant architectural conservation projects, though not as part of a consistent policy, rather out of personal decisions and methods adopted by the architects and other professionals engaged in the process.

The Indian Conservation Manual prepared by John Marshall in 1922 for the newly introduced archaeological works in British India is followed in Bangladesh, as well as in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Marshall laid down the broad principles for the repair and preservation of monuments. However, it caters mainly for archaeological conservation that is different from architectural conservation. Yet due to the absence of knowledge many often view archaeological conservation same as architectural conservation, leading to resentment among different professionals and agencies, overlap, contest, and jealousy regarding jurisdiction, adopting wrong methods or involving amateurs. These led into indifference and blatant ignorance, and hence more incidents of destruction/defacing than preservation occurred.

Many countries have manuals of their own taking into cognisance of their specific context and constraints. Due to an introduction of related academic studies about a decade ago and access to internet, some useful and supporting literatures have only recently become easily accessible. That developed by INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) for India could be followed in Bangladesh until it develops, adopts and makes use of its own manual. Of particular interest in this context would be the development of a National Conservation Policy that could put the issues into broader context of government's socio-economic and cultural goals and developments, and define its stand in this regard.


Chummery House in the 1970s before restoration

INTACH was set up in 1984 in Delhi to protect and conserve cultural heritage of India. The pioneer of heritage conservation there has 117 chapters comprising more than 2 million enthusiastic members all over the country. INTACH strives to spread heritage awareness among public; protect and conserve India's heritage; document cultural resources; and train and develop skills and related professions. Its objectives are to sensitise the public about India's pluralistic cultural legacy; instil a sense of social responsibility towards preserving its common heritage; protect and conserve the natural, built, and living heritage; document unprotected buildings of archaeological, architectural, historical, and aesthetic significance and cultural resources; develop heritage policy and regulations; and intervenes to protect heritage.

In the past, the government's architecture office did undertake some important conservation projects that included the conservation of the Collectorate Building in Jessore, the Ahsan Manjil, the Old High Court Building, the Chummery House and the Mahanagar Pathagar in Dhaka. I have already written about the Ahsan Manjil and other buildings in Dhaka owned by the Nawabs; today I shall briefly present another restoration project done by the Department.

Chummeries have been built all over British India to house the bachelor officers of its civil administration. The two storied cottage type building opposite the present National Eidgah gate was built in 1920 in a late Georgian vernacular style.

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