



In many instances, conservation by the government's Department of Archaeology has altered the ornamental works on the walls.

PHOTOS: BENGAL PIX

Shiban Bihara, Mynamati and on the ancient boat found in Kuakata," informs Rakhi Roy, Deputy Director, Antiquity.

She says that there is no special excavation team in the department, rather when archaeological sites are traced in an area, the Regional Director of the division, under which the area falls, forms an excavation team. An excavation team includes a minimum of ten people depending on the size of the site, generally comprising of officers with archaeology or history background, documentation officers and photographers. Day labourers are employed separately for digging. Sometimes officers from other divisions and head office join in to help with excavation and provide expert opinion, says Roy. Sometimes it becomes difficult to ensure logistical support while working in remote areas, she adds. Giving example of the excavation of the ancient boat discovered in Kuakata, she says that technical committees with external experts are formed whenever the need for further opinion or advice arises.

The main challenge in maintaining the archaeological sites in Bangladesh is to fight against the high air moisture and salinity of soil. "Most of the structures in Bangladesh are made of brick and they erode more quickly than stone structures," she says adding that during conservation or repair work it becomes difficult to match the quality of bricks with that of the ancient times. "We try to overcome these shortcomings as far as we can say by chemical conservation and such," she adds.

However, Dr Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, executive director of Oitihya Onneswan and professor of archaeology, JU, is not satisfied with the conservation activities of government's Department of Archaeology. "The conservation work done by the Directorate of Archaeology is not scientific, they change a site/monument while conserving," he alleges giving example of Bagerhat's Satgambuj mosque complex, Mahasthan citadel wall and Paharpur Vihara. Referring to the stone pillars of the mosque, he says, "They have covered the stone pillars with brick layers and white-washed it. Archaeological heritage conservation does not approve of such practices," he says adding that the authenticity of the structure is destroyed under such practices.

Sufi, a member of an inquiry team for this conservation activity, which was widely criticised, also alleges that the Department did not engage a structural engineer to evaluate if such brick casing was indeed needed. "The stones of the pillars are joined by iron nail. Because of our weather, moisture gets trapped inside these joints. They did not treat this dampness. Conservation chemists should have been involved in the conservation work. They would have washed the stones with necessary chemicals to prevent dampness after brick casing. Since that has not been done, the brick casings have gathered moss," he says.



A relic from Wari-Bateswar.
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Sufi makes a similar complaint about the conservation work of the walls of the Mahasthan citadel. "In case of Wari-Bateswshar and Bikrampur we have ordered brick of the same size and shape as was found in the structure. There should not be any alphabet inscribed on those bricks," he says, "If you go to Mahasthan, Paharpur and walk on the walls you will find bricks with English alphabets