

A relic at mercy of the present

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

I have thought of the road to Dewanbari ever since I took on the herculean (to me) task of writing about it. I imagined the place when it was being constructed in the marshy lands near present-day Aminbazar. I imagined Alhaj Janab Ali, a revenue collector of the British East India Company, steering his boat on the banks of the Karnatoli River and walking the dirt road to see his house being built, brick by painstaking brick, stone by little stone.

Images, vivid ones, are conjured up in my mind about the imposing structure. Once Alhaj Janab Ali completed building the house, it must have stood tall in its silent, brooding grandiose. Because there was nothing quite like it around the 106 decimals of land that could even challenge the resplendence of Dewanbari.

Just minutes away from one of the busiest gateways out of present-day Dhaka is Aminbazar, and only a kilometer south stands Dewanbari, now a far-away memory of its old self. There was once a time it could be seen from miles away—from the Dhaka-Aricha Highway, to be precise.

The mosque is pretty much what catches

anyone's eye at first. The spectacular Chini-tikri mosque sparkles in the middle, a testament to the glorious past of the nearby merchant Janab Ali's house.

The mosque lies on the northern side of a big pond and has a sprawling courtyard on the western side of its compound. And right in front is an almost endless flight of stairs (ghat), which was used for ablutions performed before prayer, says Bashir Ahmed, a fourth-generation owner of the compound.

He remembers, fondly, of the times he spent here as a child. The structure, though more than a hundred-years-old now, still bustles with life, even in its currently dilapidated state.

Laundered, yet somehow still grimy, mosquito nets hang on one boundary wall; tall palm trees sway in the summer wind on one side, starchy pink sarees sit stiffly on the washing line, and the crumbling ruins stand guard over it all.

Bashir recalls his childhood, spent among the boundary walls of Dewanbari. The massive pond would fill up with Kochuri pana or water hyacinth during the dry season. During the rains, they would



The Chini-Tikri mosque at the Dewanbari complex. PHOTO: FATIHA POLIN

sit inside the courtyard for hours, playing with cousins and relatives inside one of the four similar inner and outer courtyards which were surrounded by residential living quarters.

In these quarters, the women of the house would spend hours stitching Nakshikantha quilts during idle summer afternoons.

The east, west and northern blocks are essentially the same. Each of them has three compartments and a long connecting corridor facing the court. The corridor, which also acted as a veranda, is decorated with simple semi-circular arched openings. Almost all the attractive cast-iron decorations on the archway are now gone. Only the main house is currently in a liveable condition but lacks most modern facilities. The kitchen and lavatories were in the north-east corners, but at present, they lie in ruins.

The entire Dewanbari compound is surrounded by a low boundary wall, which is also considered another unique feature of heritage sites which date back to the colonial period, says Fatiha Polin, an architect and independent researcher.

The three-domed Chini-tikri mosque also boasts unique features that are typical of the colonial period of architectural styles in Bengal.

According to Mosque Architecture in

Continued to page 12



The Dewanbari complex. Taken from the book 'Mosque Architecture in Bangladesh written by Dr Abu Sayed M Ahmed'.

PHOTO: ZAKIR HOSEN

us on f /Sandalina



ঐতিহ্যের আর এক নাম আধুনিকতা
ঠিক যেমন রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য মানেই

অ্যান্ডালিনা
সোপ

রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য...



KOHINOOR CHEMICAL