



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

GANDARIA

Grand area no more!

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DIPAN NANDY

This is how the saying goes – back in the days, a British traveler arrived in the area and was so blown away by all he saw, he exclaimed, "What a grand area!"

Although no one knows the validity of this story, residents of Gandaria love to call it "grand area" based on that tale.

But these days, the area has very little to justify that claim. Once a planned residential area – full of greenery, ponds, playgrounds, courtyards in front of every house – it was the ideal place for a middle-class family, as only a handful of people lived here.

But with the passing of time, Gandaria has become bereft of its former glory. A trip around the area doesn't show any ponds, playgrounds or even any open spaces anymore. The houses that previously had courtyards are now modern multi-storey apartments. The once quiet neighbourhood has become plagued with honks and cries of vehicles, its streets full of traffic congestion throughout the day.

ORIGINS OF GANDARIA

Although there's no proof of the "Grand



locals to rely on rickshaws.

But as the roads in Gandaria are rather narrow, the presence of so many rickshaws cause near-endless traffic congestions, especially on the street that runs from Dhupkhola roundabout to Gandaria High School.

At the heart of this street lies the legendary ayurvedic medicine maker Sadhana Aushadhalaya. But with the advent of modern medicine, the apothecary has slowly fallen out of favour.

The Dhupkhola playground used to be a matter of pride for locals back in time. Also known as Eastend Club Field, people of the area grew up running around in the oo. But after the construction of a flyover, the field has been reduced to rubble.

For a long time, construction materials of the flyover were left here. Right when it was almost ready again, DSCC started building a Shishu Park there, which has once again made it inaccessible.

The area used to host four to five ponds, all of which have been lost to time, with the arrival of too many people.

Visiting the area, it was seen that other than the near centenary Gandaria High

"Katherpool". But none of these exist anymore.

In 1926, Gandaria played host to the then India's first women-only organisation, "Gandaria Mahila Samity". Revolutionary Ashalata Sen was its president, whose son Samar Sen was India's permanent ambassador at the United Nations during the Liberation War.

Kishaloy Kochi Kachar Mela played an important role in shaping the psyche of Gandaria's young ones during those times. There's a saying about the organisation, which is a part of Central Kochi Kachar Mela: there isn't a family in Gandaria which doesn't have a member in Kishaloy.

Another famed organisation of the area is Anzuman Mufidul Islam, formed in the aftermath of the Kolkata riots, to help with the burial rites of unidentified Muslim bodies. After the partition, one of its branches was opened in Gandaria.



GANDARIA TODAY

Over the years, almost all of its legacies have been wiped out. Standing at the Distillery Road, Adhunik Asgar Ali Hospital is the only hospital in the area. However, most residents of Gandaria don't have the income to afford treatment at the hospital.

The Dhupkhola roundabout stands right after Distillery Road. Now known as the 13 No. Bus Stand, it has remained closed for almost seven years.

The area has only one bus service, "Malancha Transport", going from Gulistan to Mohammadpur, which is under immense stress to cater to everyone. This leads the

On the east side of Gandaria stands the rail station. Trains leaving from Kamalapur make a stop here before moving towards Narayanganj. On the northside of the station lies Kadamarsul Mosque, which is said to host a stone with the prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) footprint etched on it.

School and Maniza Rahman School and College, there aren't any other quality educational institutes in Gandaria. Besides, there are questions about the quality of education in these two schools too. This is why many children of the area are sent to Lakshmi Bazaar's St Gregory's and St Francis schools, which are quite far away from Gandaria.

WHAT LOCALS SAY

Famed educationist Hayat Mahmud lived here for six decades before leaving for Jigatola in July last year. He told this newspaper, "I came to Gandaria in 1962. It used to be different from other parts of the city. Reading was in vogue. A lot of eminent figures used to live here. But the area has lost its lustre over time. A lot of issues, starting from busy streets to environmental problems, have been created as a result."

Manzar Chowdhury Sweet has been living in this area for 43 long years. "This place used to be a cultural hub. Many influential figures used to live here, under whose shadows we grew up. As these veterans left, the area started suffering from a crisis in taste. Over time, the area has become nothing more than a cluster of concrete," he said.

This correspondent found long-time resident Ajmat Ali in front of Gandaria's legendary Shona Mia Mistanna Bhandar. "This is not the same Gandaria anymore. It used to be open, spacious. Now it has so many apartments that one cannot even see the sky," he said.

Historic tale of Gandaria

SIMANTA PATHAGAR

For 67 years, Simanta Pathagar (library) has been bearing Gandaria's torch. Established under the children's organisation Khelaghar Ashar, it is also located on Din Nath Sen Road.

The library was started by prominent communist leader Nasim Ali, who vacated one of the rooms in his house for it. A year later in 1946, it was shifted to Din Nath Sen Road's Ambika Charan Chakravarty's abandoned house, where it stands to this day.

During 1947's partition, many Anti-British revolutionaries, namely Satyen Sen, Gyan Chakravarty, Nepal Nag and Nivedita Nag took shelter in this same house.

In 1976, this library honoured Kazi Nazrul Islam in the presence of his family. Over the years, cultural personalities like writer-educationist Dr Hayat Mahmud, journalist Hayat Mahmud, music director Altaf Mahmud, Ali Zaker and more visited the place, some quite regularly. But with its reader-base decreasing alarmingly, the library has lost its lustre these days.

The Daily Star contacted its current general secretary Kazi Sultan Ahmed over the library's present condition. "It plays an important role in Gandaria's literary and artistic practices," he said. "In the past, many famed authors visited us. But our readers are almost gone now, especially after the pandemic. We're currently taking steps to bring them back."



SADHANA AUSHADHALAYA

Gandaria's name is almost synonymous with Sadhana Aushadhalaya. One of Indian subcontinent's most popular ayurvedic medicine producers stand on almost two acres of land in Gandaria's Din Nath Sen Road.

According to the Asiatic Society's "Encyclopedia of Dhaka", Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, son of Prafulla Chandra Roy, established Sadhana in 1914, after finishing higher studies from Kolkata, the United Kingdom, and USA.

After a humble beginning, it was turned into a modernised factory in 1917, with branches and agencies opening across the then East Bengal, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China, USA and more.

But the company was met with tragedy when Jogesh Chandra was killed in the hands of the Pakistan army during the Liberation War. With this, the glory days of Sadhana started to run out.

Today, some of their more popular medicines include Saribadi Salsa, Beauty Cream, Dashan Sangskar, Chavanpraash and more. The factory also shelters a group of stray monkeys, who is another of Gandaria's hallmarks.



CONTEMPORARY GANDARIA AND DIN NATH SEN

The Din Nath Sen behind Din Nath Sen Road was one of the pioneer figures of Gandaria during its formative years.

The then deputy inspector of East Bengal's schools was a visionary. Even back then, he could sense that the city was going to expand. Sensing this, he brought a lot of land in Gandaria, then known as Dolgaiganj, along with influential citizens Ananda Chandra Roy and Rajani Kanta Chowdhury.

However, the other two soon left the area. Ananda bought land in Kakrail and moved out. So did Rajani Kanta, though he built a farmhouse in Gandaria. Only Din Nath remained. He constructed a house on 17 bighas of land for his family.

After building his own house, he started encouraging relatives and friends to come to Gandaria too.

With this, rather unknowingly, he kickstarted Gandaria's origins as a middle-class residential area at the start of the 20th century.

The area was rather under-developed then. To help the locals go to the rail station, Din Nath constructed a road out of his own pocket. But there was one condition – no one can build contraband stores by his road.

Din Nath has another identity. He was the father-in-law of legendary actress Suchitra Sen, who married his son Barrister Diba Nath Sen.



Area" theory, what can be known from history is that the area was once surrounded by a dense forest.

A lot of "gandari", or sugarcane, was farmed here back in those days. It is assumed that the area got its name from this crop. Before this, it was known as Dolgaiganj.

In his book "Smriti Bismritir Dhaka", historian Muntassir Mamun noted that Gandaria was a jungle even at the start of the 19th century. In the second half of the century, Shri Vijay Krishna Goswami built an ashram here for meditation. Even at the start of the next century, a part of Gandaria was known as Bagha Bari, possibly because tigers inhabited the area once upon a time.

Muntassir Mamoon also corroborates the theory that Gandaria's name comes from "gandari" or sugarcane farming.

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There used to be two bridges that helped connect Gandaria's westside to the rest of the city. One was known as "Loharpool", made with bricks and stones. The other one was built with wood, and was fittingly known as