

Each time I step into the intricate lanes of Old Dhaka, I find myself captivated by the old buildings that speak of bygone eras. These architectures hold a unique charm for me, like time capsules carrying stories of the past. Let's get to know about three such houses that silently stand as a testament to the city's glorious past.

HERITAGE HOMES OF OLD DHAKA

A link to a bygone era



DHALA ZAMINDAR BARI

Dhala Zamindar Bari, situated on Rankin Street in Wari, is another such heritage building. There is little known about this grand red two-storied building. Some say it was a house of a wealthy merchant, others say the zamindars of Dhala built this beautiful house. It remains today as reminiscent of the architectural landmarks of Lord Curzon's time.

The stone floor of the century-old house is quite intact. The stairs to the second floor still have wooden handrails characterising a certain period of time in Dhaka's architectural history.

When I arrived at 38, Rankin Street, as directed by the locals, I was disappointed to see the board hanging on its gate. It said the building is now being used by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board.

Though the gate was open, the guard stopped me from entering the premises. After all, it was a government property being used as residential quarters.

After promising him that I would not enter any room and only take pictures of the building and its lobby, he reluctantly permitted me.

Despite a lack of care and conservation efforts, the building has somehow kept its charm.

The stone floor of the century-old house is quite intact. The stairs to the second floor still have wooden handrails characterising a certain period



In 1927, for the first time, two houses in Dhaka were lit with electric lamps – one was Ahsan Manzil, and the other one was Haturia House.

ELIZA BINTE ELAHI

HATURIA HOUSE

This particular house piqued my interest after it was featured in an article. Among the heritage houses mentioned there, Haturia House caught my eye – an unfamiliar name in a list of familiar ones.

Such a house shouldn't be unfamiliar to locals. However, it was tougher than expected to locate it.

One fine summer morning, taking direction from locals, I arrived at No. 14 Abul



it held within its walls.

Walking through the gardens on either side of the driveway, I reached a terrace that held the secret to its unusual moniker – Baghbari, the tiger house. It had several stuffed heads of animals. Among them, a tiger's head stood out, reminding me of the practices of Dhaka's elites a century ago.

Inside, the house held more treasures of the past – old furniture, tapestries and photographs dating back a century. Every nook seemed to breathe history.

As an uninvited guest, I was not sure how the residents of the mansion would react to my presence. Proving me wrong, Shiblee Mohammad Fazlul Karim, the heir of Haturia House, welcomed me with warmth.

Not only that, he narrated how these belongings, dating back at least a hundred years, had a lineage intertwined with the family's legacy.

Haturia House, built in 1917 by the then British Civil Service officer Khan Bahadur Muhammad Fazlul Karim, bore witness to the passage of time, evolving from a residence to Khankay-e-Allia, a religious institution.

Shiblee said, according to the will of his grandmother, Ulfatunnessa Khatun

Chaudhurani, the house is run under a waqf estate. And he is the current muttawali.

Ulfatunnessa, the wife of Karim, was the youngest daughter of the Haturia (now in Shariatpur district) zamindar Gulam Ali Chowdhury.

Many events – Oors, Kawali evening, Shabe-baraat, Eid-e-Miladdunnabi – are held here annually with reverence and those are open to all, he added.

Shiblee said their family lineage could be traced back to Sheikh Niamat Ullah, who migrated from Syria to Bikrampur a couple of centuries ago.

As I enquired further, he told me that the stuffed animal heads I saw on the terrace were trophies of hunts led by one of the family's patriarchs.

The house is linked with one of Dhaka's many firsts.

In 1927, for the first time, two houses in Dhaka were lit with electric lamps – one was Ahsan Manzil, and the other one was Haturia House.

Walking through the halls, I marvelled at the chandeliers, huge imported mirrors, and ornate glass, brass, and bronze artefacts. The dining hall, adorned with utensils that had once served generations, evoked a sense of wonder. As if I went back decades in time and witnessed how Dhaka's elites used to live.

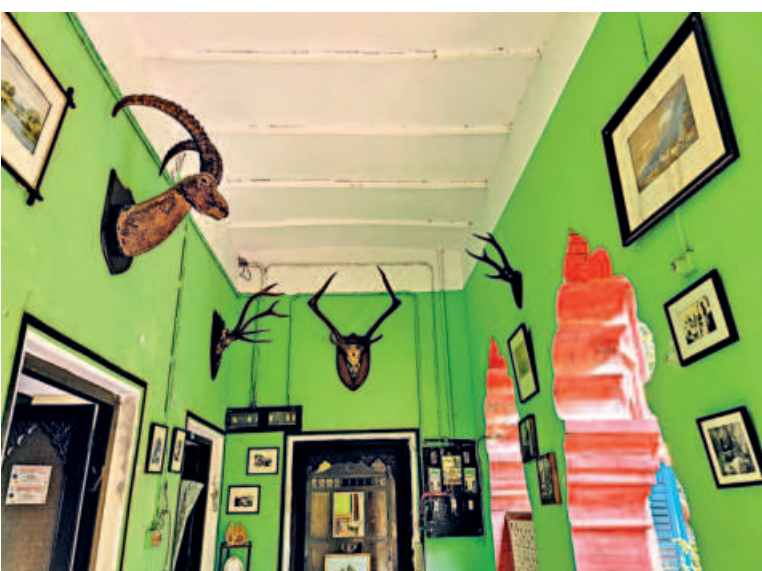


of time in Dhaka's architectural history.

I have already visited three old houses in Dhaka with wooden stairs – Pogose school, Bulbul Lalitkala Academy, and Burdwan House. I was delighted to see another one.

However, many questions remained unanswered about the origin and history of the house.

This treasure should be taken care of properly and at least a board depicting its history should be erected in front of the house. This beautiful architecture of Dhaka's glorious past deserves that.



Hasnat Road. A modest gate welcomed me. It was open. As I entered through it, a grand red mansion emerged before me, bathed in the soft morning light. Later, I found that the beauty of the house lay not only in its architectural grandeur but also in the stories

SUTRAPUR ZAMINDAR BARI

Would you believe if I say a heritage and architectural wonder of Dhaka is being used as a fire service station and home to dozens of families?

Situated at 33, Revati Mohan Das Road, the building which used to be known as the Sutrapur Zamindar Palace, is now a crowded government quarters.

Though the establishment is listed as a heritage site under the Department of Archaeology (DoA), I found no signboard on the premises listing it as a heritage site.

The palace was built during the time of Zamindar Ray Bahadur Satyendra Kumar Das. The adjacent road was named after Satyendra's father, Revati Mohan Das.

The zamindar palace is a combination of two adjacent buildings. The original building faces the south. Its 50-foot entrance has three Corinthian columns, with floral

structures covering them with a half-circle from both sides, while a circular design adorns the space below.

The north-facing building, built a few years later by a relative of Revati Mohan Das, has a 50-foot entrance as well. The entire establishment has 35 rooms in total.

The descendants of the zamindar family left the establishment and migrated during the partition of 1947. It later came under the jurisdiction of the government as vested property.

Seeing new illegal structures built for fire department quarters within the palace complex was painful on many layers. Not only do those harm the aesthetics of the site, but they also violate the laws of the country.

According to section 61 of the Dhaka Mahanagar Imarat Bidhimala 2008, construction of any establishment cannot take place without the permission of the Nagar Unnayan

Committee under RAJUK within the 250-metre radius of the heritage site. The proposed Antiquities Act 2015 states that no establishment can be constructed within the same radius without permission from the archaeology department.

It's sad to see such neglect of a heritage site.

The well-preserved Haturia House, the almost forgotten Dhala Zamindar Bari and the fading grandeur of Sutrapur Zamindar Bari – these homes tell stories of eras long past. It is our collective responsibility to preserve these treasures of our beloved city.

