

Sustaining the identity of Farashgonj through the integration of development, disaster management and preservation

Syed Monirul Islam

Department of Architecture, Southeast University, Bangladesh

*Corresponding author E-mail: monirul1971@gmail.com

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Abstract

In the development process of Old Dhaka (The old part of Dhaka), the inherent issues of the area, like social value, heritage, culture and vulnerability, are often ignored. Including all these issues is commonly practiced in efficient city planning during urbanization. As an integral part of Old Dhaka embedded in the old historical sites, history must be considered as the area's socio-architectural resources and cultural value. The city developers often forget the history and heritage of Old Dhaka and ignore the history of the city's development and the inhabitants' social value. At the same time, they plan for the development of the city. So, heritage structures and historic sites must be included in the city planning. Natural or artificial hazards are another issue that significantly disrupts Old Dhaka's settlement. The study intends to explore how to develop Old Dhaka by including efficient approaches to mitigate existing hazards and prominent heritage structures following the efficient method of preservation, restoration and retrofitting. The study was conducted in Farashganj, a crucial mixed-use hub of Old Dhaka, which is very resourceful and has several historic sites. The research will show how the existing landmark sites can be sustained through the integration of development, disaster management and preservation of historic buildings.

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1. Introduction

History is an integral part of a city, and it is embedded in the old historical areas of the city. Protecting historic regions, particularly the city's old core, should be considered and included in the city's development planning. However, it is a widespread practice in developing countries that the flow of globalization enormously influences them, and they unthinkingly ignore all other inherent characteristics of the city in the name of development. City developers often forget their roots and glorious past and ignore the history of city development and the social value of the inhabitants. At the same time, they plan for the development of the city.

Dhaka, as the capital of Bangladesh, a developing country, is not out of this practice. As a rapidly growing city, Dhaka is going through many development processes, most of which are not following structured or comprehensive urban planning. History and historical areas are not included in the city's development planning.

The ignorance and negligence of historic sites and buildings ruin several socio-architectural resources. Most historic buildings are modified, altered, and even destroyed according to the personal choices of the authorities and individuals. Consequently, the land use pattern of Old Dhaka (the old part of Dhaka), which is very resourceful with historic areas, is continuously changing, ignoring the culture and history of the region. The rising density of Old Dhaka is creating another layer of complexity and pressurizing the adverse morphological changes there through severe destruction of its social trends, culture and heritage. While previous studies have addressed heritage conservation or urban hazards in Old Dhaka separately, limited research has examined how development, disaster management, and heritage preservation can be integrated within a single planning framework. This study addresses that gap through a focused investigation of Farashganj.

Another phenomenon that significantly disrupts the settlement of Old Dhaka is hazards, whether natural or man-made. The area's population density, age-old structures with poor maintenance, unplanned development, lack of open space, narrow and poor access roads, poor drainage and sanitation system, densely and poorly constructed buildings without following any rules and regulations, and hazardous mixed use of residential buildings with massive combustible material storage increase Old Dhaka's susceptibility.

This research aims to identify the problems and scope of preserving the culture and heritage of Old Dhaka. The study also examines how the existing historic structure can be integrated into contemporary development through appropriate, restoration and retrofitting. The study further addresses how the hazards facing Old Dhaka can be mitigated. The Farashganj area has been selected for the study as it is a significant historic area in Old Dhaka. By analyzing the problems and possibilities for preserving Farashganj's historic resources, the study seeks to inform policy-making and support inclusive development planning for Old Dhaka.

1.1. Background of the study

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has a long history of glory and pride. The city gained prominence when it became the provincial capital of the Mughal Empire and an important commercial center. It lasted as the capital of the Mughals for 75 years. After that, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Dhaka became a central Colony of European cities and the business center of Portuguese, Armenian, French and British. During this period, the city grew with many glorious and significant structures along the north Bank of the river Buriganga [1]. This part of the city is presently known as Old Dhaka. Many merchants, officers and institutes built lavish buildings along the streets of the old Dhaka. These streets and those old buildings are the social-architectural history of Dhaka, considered as the tangible resources that represent the glorious heritage of Dhaka, show its growth process and tell the story of the deception of the people at that time [2].

Many of these old buildings are under threat due to globalization. Many people, organizations, and government authorities are unaware of these heritage buildings. The heritage sites are disrupted through modification and demolition in the name of development works. These glorious structures and historic sites of old Dhaka are our roots and the socio-architectural history of Bengal [3], but it seems to be extinguished by the city dwellers. Many heritage sites and structures in the old Dhaka have disappeared rapidly in recent years due to the negligence of the authorities. All concerned persons are worried about demolishing these invaluable historical resources because of the improper protection and preservation, unawareness and lack of planning to conserve them. As a result of long persuasion, in February 2009, the government provided a gazette that Rajuk published regarding the declaration of a heritage site, which included the embankment on the north side of Buriganga named Buckland Bund [4]. Considering the architectural character and history of the buildings, 92 Heritage structures and 13 roads in four areas in Old Dhaka are identified as heritage sites. Under tremendous pressure from the residents of those areas, Rajuk changed the list of Heritage sites on November 29, 2017, where 18 heritage sites of the Mughal and British periods were removed [5]. As a result of this amendment, large demolitions of historical buildings were encouraged.

In addition to demolition threats, poor maintenance has put some historic structures at risk of collapse. For instance, on July 17, 2019, a two-story building over 100 years old collapsed in Patuatuli, killing two people on

the spot [6]. Earlier, in June 2004, a six-story building in Shakhari Bazar collapsed, killing 19 people. Old Dhaka also faces hazards such as fire, environmental, air, and water pollution [7]. The road network in Old Dhaka is very congested, which creates severe traffic jams and obstructions during rescue and evacuation in case of any disaster.

Given these challenges, an integrated development approach for Old Dhaka is essential, one that balances heritage preservation with urban resilience and improved civic facilities. Development strategies should account for: (1) the historical value of the area, (2) building a resilient community, and (3) ensuring access to essential civic services. This study seeks to establish a framework that reconciles development needs with the preservation and restoration of heritage structures, recognizing these historic buildings as vital to the city's identity and collective memory.

1.2. Aims and objectives

This study aims to identify strategies for restoring and preserving the heritage of Old Dhaka while accommodating necessary urban development. The objectives of the study are:

- To explore and document the existing historical structures in the study area.
- To identify major challenges that might be considered during policy making regarding development related to development involving heritage buildings.
- To prepare a development guideline that integrates heritage preservation with contemporary urban needs.

1.3. Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of heritage preservation in Old Dhaka [8]. Both strands were used to confirm that historical and cultural narratives are complemented by measurable data on urban vulnerability and risk. The methodology is structured to support an integrated analysis of heritage value, urban risk, and development pressure.

Qualitative methods involved extensive literature review and field-based investigations. Historical information was collected through newspapers, academic articles, books, and archival sources. Field surveys of the study area were conducted to document the current condition of historic structures, supported by photographic evidence and visual mapping of the built environment. These qualitative insights highlighted the architectural features, cultural significance, and community use of the heritage sites.

Quantitative methods focused on generating measurable indicators of risk and urban change. Data on the number of heritage sites, frequency of building collapses, seismic zone classification, population density, and road network conditions were compiled from official records and secondary datasets. Sources included government agencies such as RAJUK, the Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh, and the Dhaka South City Corporation, as well as private organizations like the Urban Study Group (USG).

Integration of methods was achieved during the analysis stage, where qualitative narratives (heritage significance, historical value, community use) were cross validated with quantitative indicators (structural risks, density, hazard records). This triangulation allowed the study to assess heritage preservation not only as a cultural imperative but also as a measurable component of disaster management and sustainable urban development. This integration allows heritage preservation to be evaluated not only as a cultural concern but also as a component of disaster resilience and sustainable urban planning.

2. Study area: Farashgonj

Farashganj, located in the heart of Old Dhaka on the northern bank of the Buriganga River, represents one of the city's most historically significant neighborhoods. The spatial location and urban context of the study area are illustrated in Figure 1. The area is accessed primarily through two major roads: B.K. Das Road and

Ahsanullah Road. Historically, Farashganj emerged as a French trading hub in the late 18th century, when the French established their commercial center with the permission of Naib-e-Nazim Nawajish Khan in 1780. The settlement was known as French-Ganj due to the sizeable French community that resided and traded there during that period. Although the French departed in the early 19th century, Farashganj remained an active commercial and cultural zone, enriched by its proximity to the Buriganga and by the elegant architecture that grew along its streets (Figure 2) [9].



Figure 1. Google image of Farashganj



Figure 2. Historical structures of Farashganj

Today, Farashganj is a densely populated and commercially active area with wholesale markets that create congestion and strain on its historic fabric. The concentration and architectural character of late 19th- and early 20th-century heritage buildings are documented in Figure 2. Despite these pressures, the neighborhood retains

a remarkable collection of late 19th- and early 20th-century heritage buildings, which together narrate the socio-architectural history of Old Dhaka. These structures embody a blend of Mughal, colonial, and European influences, reflecting both the prosperity and cultural exchanges of the time [10]

2.1. Boro Bari

Boro Bari is a prominent historical structure in Farashganj on the B.K. Das Road at number 45 (Figure 3). It was built more than 100 years ago, around 1905. The name of the original owner of Boro Bari was Zamindar Prasanna Kumar Das [11].



Figure 3. Boro bari outer façade and inner court [11]

The outer facade and inner courtyard of Boro Bari, illustrating its spatial organization and architectural character, are shown in Figure 3. The "French ROCOCO Style" architectural features make the building elegant. The building has 3 ornamented balconies and 10 rooms in a 2-story front block and a 3-story rear block. All the features prove the aristocracy not only of the building itself but also of the whole area [12]. Currently, the building is occupied by several families, and the ground floor is used as a workshop and a printing press for textbooks for children. Recently, this splendid structure of Farashganj has been nearly ruined because of negligence and lack of preservation.

2.2. Lakshmi Villa

Another building close to Boro Bari, which is seen from the B.K. Das Road is Lakshmi Villa (Figure 4). The building is also over 100 years old and was built in 1911 with a curve in its front façade. This magnificent building is also a great example of the historic buildings in Farashganj. The front and side facades of Lakshmi Villa, which reflect its distinctive curvature and architectural detailing, are presented in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Lakshmi Villa front and side façade [13]

The building is located on a plot, holding number 47 in Farashganj. The building mostly remains closed as no owner lives in this house. The house's owner was Basanta Kumar Das, who was later exchanged with Asraful

Hossain, a famous barrister of Kolkata during the partition in 1947. Lakshmi Villa was a graceful house with impressive architectural quality. The home had a vast hall decorated with grand furniture and a billiard table. This mysterious house carries the memory of the partition of 1947 [13].

The building is not in bad condition, though its owner is not using it. Some of its elements, like the pediments of the right balcony and part of the railings, are damaged. The maintenance of the building is inferior as it is not in use.

2.3. Ruplal House

The most prominent heritage site in Farashganj is the Ruplal House. It is located on the northern side of the Buckland Bund (embankment) along the north bank of the Buriganga River. The house's first owner was a famous Armenian businessman of that time named Stephen Aratoon. The house was built in 1825 and named Aratoon House, according to the owner's name. Later, the house was sold to 2 sibling merchants, Ruplal Das and Raghunath Das, in 1840.

The overall form and scale of Ruplal House, including its E-shaped plan and multiple architectural blocks, are illustrated in Figure 5. An architectural firm named Martin Company of Kolkata reconstructed the structure. It is a 2-story E-shaped building with about 50 rooms and an elegant dance hall. The Ruplal House was designed following the late Renaissance European Architecture [14]. The house was designed and constructed with 3 significant blocks separated from each other at the ground floor with different architectural styles. The blocks of the building are: 1. Ruplal Block 2. Central Block, 3. Raghunath Block [15].



Figure 5. Ruplal House [14], [15]

Ruplal house, at present, is occupied by illegal inhabitants and is nearly ruined because of the poor maintenance. The house is mainly used as a wholesale market, especially for the spice business. Several colonies of squatters are seen there; some claim to be the house owners [16]. It is very urgent to make the house free from illegal occupants and take necessary actions for the preservation of the house.

2.4. Mongalalaya

Mongalalaya, also known as the Putul Bari, is a century-old, architecturally rich heritage building on B.K. Das Road, Farashganj (Figure 6). Ashutosh Das, a businessman and landlord, constructed the building in 1915. Later, his inherent Dilip Kumar Das became the owner of the house.



Figure 6. Mongalalaya front façade [17]

The house's present owner is Hazi Shafiuddin Ahmed, a political leader [17]. The front facade of Mongalalaya, highlighting its symmetrical composition and ornamental detailing, is shown in Figure 6. Mongalalaya is a two-story residential building consisting of two symmetric blocks. Its façades are elegantly decorated and ornamented with various patterns. The building is improperly maintained as the owner intends to demolish it for new development.

2.5. Sri Sri Priyo Bollov Jiu Temple

Established between 1897 and 1898 by Zamindar Shams Babu, this two-story neoclassical temple is located at 3, B.K. Das Road (Figure 7). It remains one of Dhaka's oldest temples and continues to serve the religious community [18].



Figure 7. Sri Sri Bihari Lal Jiu Temple [19]

2.6. Sri Sri Bihari Lal Jiu Temple

Sri Sri Bihari Lal Jiu temple is another historical temple in Farashganj, which was constructed by Bashanto Kumar Das more than 100 years ago. This single-story temple is located at the west edge of B. K. Das Road on 27, B. K. Das Road [20]. The architectural form and present condition of the temple are shown in Figure 8, which shows its façade and setting within the streetscape. This temple is also in good use by the Hindus. However, the repair and renovation work has been done recently, changing many of its historic features.



Figure 8. Sri Sri Bihari Lal Jiu Temple [20]

2.7. Bibi Ka Rawjah

Bib ka Rawzah is a 400-year-old religious building located on 11 B.K. Das Road. It is known as 'Imambara', the oldest shrine of Shiites in Dhaka, which is much older than the famous 'Hussainy Dalan', another shrine of a similar type. The literal meaning of Imambara is the Imam's residence, a house where the Shiites gather to observe their ritual activities during 'Moharram' to honor the sacrifice of Al-Hossain, the grandson of Hazrat Muhammad (SA). The physical appearance and spatial character of Bibi Ka Rawjah are shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Bibi ka Rawzah [21], [22]

Bibi ka Rawza was built in 1600 CE by Amir Khan, but it was severely destroyed in the riot of 1946. Later, the damaged portion was renovated by a Parsi named S. M. Doshanji in 1861 [21]. Bibi ka Rawzah is still stable, used and maintained by the Shiites. Not only has the Sikh community come here, but people from different religions have also come to the Rawzah to show their respect.

2.8. Puthi Ghar

Puthi Ghar is a small but structurally significant historic building in Farashganj, located at 74/1 B. K. Das Road. It was built nearly 150 years ago and is currently used as a library, printing press and book storage space. The building is in good and stable condition. The scale and condition of Puthi Ghar, as documented in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Puthi Ghar (Photo credit: Author)

2.9. Mangal Abash

Jatindra Kumar Shaha constructed Mangal Abash for residential purposes. The building is owned by Kabi Nazrul College and used as a boys' hostel. The building still exists in a very stable condition. Kabi Nazrul College uses the building as a hostel for boys. The existing condition and continued institutional use of Mangal Abash are shown in Figure 11, which documents the building's exterior and context.



Figure 11. Mangal Abash (Photo credit: 1. Author, 2 & 3. Daily Star, September 17, 2022)

2.10. North Brook Hall

Like Ruplal House, North Brook Hall is another significant large structure in Farashganj. It stands at the western edge of the area on the northern part of Buckland Bund along the Buriganga River (Figure 12). The building is

also known as 'Lal Kuthi,' the local people named it because of its exposed red brick architecture. The architectural style of the building is a fusion of Mughal architecture and European Renaissance architecture, known as Indo-Saracenic architecture. The primary purpose of the complex was to be a hub of culture and entertainment [23].



Figure 12. Northbrook Hall (Lal Kuthi), (Photo credit: Author)

The architectural form and riverfront orientation of North Brook Hall are illustrated in Figure 12. In honor of the visit of Thomas George Baring Northbrook, who was the governor and viceroy of India in 1874. Zamindar Abhay Chandra Das, Kumar Rajendra Narayan Roy and Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah initiated the construction of a town hall and library. Northbrook Hall and Johnson Hall clearly viewed the Buriganga River, their main beauty. The building cannot be seen from the river because of the pier of the Dhaka River Port, which is located next to the building.

Several legal and illegal users occupy the complex. Some shoppers and businessmen encroached on the premises. The building must be freed from unlawful occupants, and legal users should be restricted from modifying the building from its original features.

2.11. Other structures

In addition to these major sites, Farashganj contains several lesser-known yet historically significant buildings, such as Shiv Temple, Banku Bihari Jiu Temple, row houses, and various unidentified residential structures (e.g., on plots 26 and 69). Collectively, they contribute to the layered historic character of the neighborhood and warrant systematic documentation and preservation [24].

In summary, Farashganj is not only an important commercial hub but also a living museum of Dhaka's socio-architectural evolution. Its built fabric reflects a period of prosperity, cross-cultural exchange, and urban growth, while its current state illustrates the consequences of neglect, unplanned development, and encroachment. Understanding the significance and challenges of these heritage sites is fundamental to developing an inclusive preservation strategy that integrates urban development with cultural sustainability.

3. Major challenges for the development of Farashganj

The challenges facing Farashganj are interconnected, where development pressure intensifies disaster risk and accelerates the degradation of historic structures as one of the most densely populated and commercially active neighborhoods, Farashganj suffers from congestion, lack of open space, structural vulnerabilities, and hazardous land use patterns. Based on field surveys, photographic documentation, and official data sources (mixed-method evidence), the study identified the following key challenges:

3.1. Encroachment of historic buildings

Encroachment is an endangering situation for historic structures in old Dhaka. Many syndicates are looking for abandoned buildings to occupy with the help of influential persons. Thus, several historical structures are encroached upon throughout the city [25].

A notable case is the Ruplal House, declared abandoned by the Department of Archaeology after the Liberation War. It is now illegally occupied by local wholesale merchants of spice and vegetables and has become a colony of illegal settlers. In the building, at least 32 shops and several households were established illegally with the help of some influential political and administrative persons. Several groups of persons claim ownership of the Ruplal house, and several cases are being filed in court [26].

Similarly, Northbrook Hall (Lalkuthi) has been heavily encroached upon and repurposed by various organizations, including local clubs, a councilor's office, and a community center. As a result, its original architectural features are deteriorating due to lack of proper management [27]. Survey data and secondary reports confirm that at least 36 historic buildings across Dhaka face similar encroachment, underscoring the urgent need for enforcement and recovery measures.

3.1.1. Unauthorized demolishing/ construction at historic site

The old structures in Farashganj carry significant architectural landmarks with unique aesthetics, different construction methods and innovative materials. It is evident that a number of the old structures of Dhaka were demolished and are on the way to destruction, so traces of the history of Old Dhaka must be removed. Several historic buildings were recently demolished, and many more are ready to be destroyed. These buildings are demolished in the name of development and replaced by modern residential or commercial buildings. These historic buildings are supposed to be protected by laws that are not being implemented or appropriately monitored; as a result, many unknown and significant structures were demolished, and many more are in the pipeline. The ongoing demolition of historically significant buildings is exemplified by the destruction of Jahaj Bari, a 150-year-old structure recognized as Dhaka's first commercial building (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Demolition of 150-year-old 'Jahaj Bari', Dhaka's first-ever commercial building [28]

Bangladesh government declared the Buckland Bund (embankment) and 92 other historic buildings on 13 significant roads, including B. K.Das Road under Farashganj, Shakhari Bazar Road, Hrishikesh Das Road, Tati Bazar Road, etc. as the heritage structure. It published a gazette by Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (RAJUK) in February 2009.



Figure 14. Demolition of a 200-year-old house by Nicholas Pogose on Armenian street [29]

Later, RAJUK removed 18 Mughal and British structures by revising the former list. Withdrawal of such protection encourages the land grabber to demolish historic buildings. The consequences of such withdrawal

are visible in cases such as the demolition of a 200-year-old Armenian house by Nicholas Pogose (Figure 14). Later, after much struggle and pursuance in 2018, the High Court directed the restricting and preserving 2,200 British-era buildings in the list prepared by the Urban Study Group (USG), a conservation platform. According to this directive of the High Court, those historic buildings cannot be changed, modified, or demolished without permission. But the demolishing is going on. One such example is the destruction of the Government Agricultural Research Laboratory in Khamarbari, established in 1909 (Figure 15,16) [30], [31].



Figure 15. Demolition of Government agricultural research laboratory in Khamarbari, established in 1909 [31]

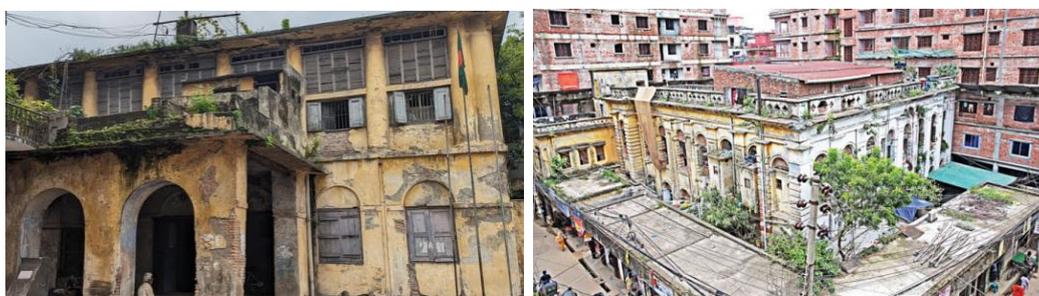


Figure 16. Attempt for demolition of historic building; 1. Dhaka Collegiate School, founded in 1835 [32], A 2-storied historic structure on 20 Pyari Das Road in Bangla Bazar [33]

3.2. Traffic congestion and environmental degradation

Traffic congestion represents another critical challenge in Farashganj, reducing mobility, disrupting livelihoods, and complicating disaster response. The primary causes identified during surveys include:

- Narrow roads (B.K. Das Road is only ~15 ft wide), heavily encroached by unauthorized shops.
- Absence of pedestrian facilities and traffic management.
- Illegal parking, street vending, and on-road loading/unloading.
- Uncoordinated road excavation for utilities.

Environmental degradation compounds the mobility crisis. Wholesale markets generate large volumes of organic waste, often dumped directly on roads, creating unsanitary conditions. The Buriganga River suffers from continuous pollution, while noise and air quality data confirm high levels of environmental stress.

These findings align with quantitative indicators (population density, vehicle counts, pollution levels) and qualitative field observations, reinforcing the significance of traffic and environmental issues as dual challenges.

4. Susceptibility of disaster in Farshganj

Farashganj is susceptible to different hazards like building collapse, fire hazard, water logging and environmental degradation etc. because of its population density, inaccessible road, narrow space between two buildings, historical fragile buildings, unauthorized hazardous uses of buildings, inflammable chemical storage within the residential areas and lack of escape route and open spaces which can be used as assembly point. The risks of the study area are described below.

4.1. Earthquake

According to the revised seismic zone map of BNBC 2017, Dhaka is located in Zone-2 ($z=0, 36$). But because of some demographic and physical characteristics, Dhaka has become one of the most venerable cities in the world [34]. Dhaka ranked 2 among the 20 most susceptible cities in the world, as indicated in Earthquake Vulnerability Index (EVI). Old Dhaka is the most vulnerable area regarding seismic hazards in Dhaka, and Farashganj is no exception [35]. Farashganj is susceptible to seismic hazards, mainly because of its settlement pattern and the quality of its structure. Factors that increase the susceptibility to seismic hazard in Farashganj are:

- Highly dense populated area.
- Weak old historic structure with a lack of maintenance.
- Close and poorly constructed buildings without following Building codes
- There is a lack of open spaces in the area that can be used as an assembly space.
- Inadequate evacuation and escape route.
- Secondary hazards may arise from the lifeline. Gas and electricity supply systems may become a source of fire hazard because of leakage and short circuits.
- Lack of modern rescue and evacuation facilities.
- The scarcity of open spaces can be used as an assembly space during the crisis.

4.2. Fire hazards

Old Dhaka experienced some of the deadliest fire incidents in Bangladesh's history of fire hazards. In recent years, the number of people living in the area has increased because of the reckless attitude of the inhabitants [36]. Farashganj is a dense settlement with hazardous uses of buildings and is also vulnerable to fire hazards. Because of these fire incidents, many people died or were injured, and huge property were destroyed, which disrupted the financial condition of the businessmen and the inhabitants of the areas. Major fire incidents in Old Dhaka are discussed below and visually summarized in Figure 17.

4.2.1. Nimtoli fire in 2010

One of the deadly fire events in Old Dhaka is the Nimtoli Fire, which happened on June 03, 2010, where 124 people were died and many others injured. Through investigation, it was found that the fire was generated from a chemical warehouse, which was an everyday use of the buildings of Nimtoli. Because of the area's dense settlement, the firefighter's movement was obstructed. Narrow Street and the lack of open spaces did not allow for an effective rescue and evacuation process. A series of chemical warehouses with many chemicals in the store triggered the fire and worsened it [37].

4.2.2. Churihatta fire in 2019

Another severe fire incident in old Dhaka is the Churihatta fire on February 20 2019, at Chawkbazar. Three multi-storied buildings in the intersection of Churihatta were affected by fire after an explosion from chemical vapor. A five-story building in the area named Hazi Wahed Mansion was the storage and wholesale business center of hazardous chemicals that were extensively flammable. The chemicals stored in the shops created vapor and triggered the fire incidents suddenly [38].

4.2.3. Devidwarghat fire in 2022

On August 15, 2022, a fire incident occurred in an industrial area in Old Dhaka in the Devidwarghat area of Chawkbazar. The area was full of plastic, polythene, and chemical factories where huge combustible materials were always stored. The source of the fire was a gas cylinder explosion in a hotel adjacent to the factories. After the incidents, 6 dead bodies were recovered from the hotel [39].



Figure 17. 1. Nimtoli Fire, 2. Churihatta Fire and 3. Devidwarghat fire [39]

From the analysis of the history of fire incidents, the reasons for the vulnerability of Old Dhaka are manufacturing industries, dense settlements, and narrow access roads. Because of all these factors, Farashganj, as a part of Old Dhaka, is more vulnerable than the other parts of Dhaka.

5. Recommendation

The following recommendations translate the study's findings into actionable planning and policy measures that integrate heritage preservation with disaster risk reduction and urban development. The historical structure of Farashganj is our root, representing our past, our glory, our chronological growth, and our story of deprivation and presently vivid activities of life and livelihood going on around it. Presently, the area's inhabitants are unaware of the historical value of these heritage buildings, and the buildings are deteriorating because of negligence. The unruly human attitude, lack of maintenance, and illegal uses and activities make the situation worse, and it should recover through the preservation of heritage prominence. The development of Farashganj is a prior demand of the government and the local community, and it is part of urbanization. However, it should be done considering all the factors related to the area's urban fabric. The development in Farashganj should be done to respond to the existing urban structure, places, and the vulnerability of the settlement to different hazards. Here are some recommendations for achieving an efficient development policy in Farashganj:

5.1. Preparation of a Risk Map based on hazardous areas in Old Dhaka

The study found that Old Dhaka is vulnerable to multi-hazards like earthquakes, building collapse, fire, environmental degradation, etc. Among the areas, some are more hazardous than others because of various factors like density, hazardous uses of the buildings, street patterns, etc. So, to prepare an action plan for the area's development, the areas of Old Dhaka must be categorized according to the severity of the risk through an analysis. By following this risk map, it could determine whether the area is safe or not for the inhabitants and future development. If the development of those areas is essential, then the map would guide the remedial measures taken during the development planning of the area. So, it is necessary to prepare multi-hazard risk zone maps for Old Dhaka to integrate the area's heritage buildings. It is also required to prepare a Map of risk information and other information, such as evacuation routes and the location of temporary shelters and critical facilities.

5.2. Development of Farashganj considering Risk-sensitive land use plan

After analyzing the multi-hazard map, a Risk-sensitive land use plan should be provided for Farashganj, including DRR in all development processes. This plan will reflect Farashganj's susceptibility to risk and capacity to cope. It will indicate policy-making regarding the development of the area. The hazard map showing the level of risk must be overlaid on Risk Sensitive Land so that the development plan might ensure safety when it occurs in a vulnerable area. The issues that need to be considered while preparing the Risk Sensitive Land Use Plan will be as follows:

- Preserving open areas, playgrounds, parks and water bodies so that they can be used as an assembly space and sheltering victims of disasters like earthquakes, fire and building collapse.
- Widen of the road must be considered where it is possible. A new road network should be improvised to ease the rescue and evacuation during any hazardous incident.
- Building regulations like BNBC Imarat Nirman Bidhimala must be followed.

5.3. Firefighting and evacuation facilities

The most disastrous susceptibility of Farashganj is Fire Hazard. Many residential buildings in the area are used as mixed-use buildings with lots of combustible materials, which may become a source of fire hazards. The authorities fail to control the buildings' hazardous usage and shift the warehouses of hazardous materials. In Farashganj, most buildings were not constructed following the building regulations and fire code. The scenario of this unplanned development worsens daily, and this should be controlled urgently to ensure the safety of the inhabitants of densely populated Farashganj.

The following issues need to be considered for the implementation of an effective fire control system:

- In Old Dhaka, during fire hazards, the firefighter cannot do their work correctly because of water scarcity. Buriganga River is adjacent to Farash Ganj, so the river's water can be used during the incidents.
- Modern firefighting technology, such as road fire hydrant systems, needs to be improvised. Fire hydrant systems can solve the water scarcity problem, and locally trained people can start firefighting immediately after fire ignition.
- Department of Fire Service and Civil Defense, Bangladesh, should be equipped with efficient firefighting systems. Volunteers from the local community should be developed through proper training and workshops. Regular fire drills must be introduced in schools, colleges and other buildings where mass people work together.
- A comprehensive strategic action plan should be provided by integrating relevant authorities to monitor and forecast firefighting and evacuation facilities.
- All buildings in Farashganj should have a minimum firefighting system, escape route, and evacuation space, which can be used during fire incidents.
- Open space must be restored, and the road in the area should be widened. All kinds of interruption/encroachment on the road have to be restricted strictly. All existing water bodies must be preserved, and new ones should be provided if possible.
- All kinds of hazardous use of the building must be restricted. Warehouses or chemical and other flammable materials storage must be moved to distant places.

5.4. Policy to reduce traffic congestion

The B. K. Das Road in Farashganj is not wide enough to support its existing function as it is full of wholesale markets. The internal lane in the area is very narrow, so the rescue and evacuation become complicated during any hazard. Widening of the road will not be the only perfect solution as many wide roads in Dhaka city face traffic congestion. The planned traffic and vehicle management can be the solution to the problem of road. Suppose Narrow Street in Farashganj should be restricted for some vehicles, and unauthorized loading-unloading and parking on the main road must be controlled. Farashganj has two major roads: B.K. Das Road and Ahsanullah Road should both be one-way in opposite directions. The wholesale market should have its own loading-unloading spaces. A comprehensive transportation plan should be improvised and, followed and monitored strictly. Water transport through the Buriganga River should be encouraged.

5.5. Preservation and adaptive reuse through renovation, restoration and retrofitting

It is necessary to preserve an area's heritage and culture to present its history. Renovation, restoration, and retrofitting for structurally weak, poorly maintained, and damaged structures are ways to preserve old and historically significant heritage buildings. Ahsan Manjil in Kumartuli on the bank of the Buriganga River and Boro Sardar Bari at Panam Nagar are the best examples of such historical buildings that are efficiently renovated and opened for public use. In Farashganj, heritage buildings such as Ruplal House, Boro Bari, Lal Kuthi, Jhonson Hall, etc., should be conserved according to the renovation, retrofitting and restoration guidelines. In Bangladesh, the initiative regarding the preservation of historic buildings is very insignificant; even many

buildings occupied illegally cannot be freed from the occupants. A strategic action plan must be introduced to start preservation following the guidelines about retrofitting mentioned in the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC). In Bangladesh, a comprehensive national preservation plan should be introduced to preserve historic buildings.

To make historic buildings (especially abandoned ones) viable, they should be converted to other functions that require adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse will make old structures beneficial and active with function so that people will not only admire the buildings from a distance but also take the essence of history from the inside with the usage of the buildings. The best examples of adaptive reuse of historic buildings are Ahsan Manjil (used as a museum), Manglabash (Hostel building), Old Rail station of Chattagram (Office), Sardar Bari (Museum), etc.

5.6. Providing laws regarding TDR (Transfer of Development Rights)

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is used in many countries to preserve historical structures. TDR is a voluntary program implemented to give an incentive to the owners of the heritage buildings as compensation instead of demolishing or modifying the buildings. Through TDR, owner sell or transfer their rights on property to another authority. In most cases, the owners occupy or use the property, which can benefit them financially. Rapid development works in the rapidly growing cities; heritage buildings are being demolished without considering their social and historical value. The existing rules and regulations are insufficient to protect this kind of demolition. Lack of incentive does not encourage local inhabitants to preserve their heritage buildings; instead, they choose to demolish or modify the buildings. So, in Farashganj, TDR should be proposed to conserve historic structures, which will benefit the owner and at the same time, give authority the right to preserve their property.

For a long time, the experts recommended introducing TDR for the private owners of the listed heritage buildings in Old Dhaka and influencing them to support the authority to conserve their property. However, the Bangladesh Government has no plan to implement the TDR program.

5.7. Community participation

Local stakeholders can play a significant role in preserving historical buildings in Farashganj. The community in Old Dhaka has a committee with a practical and integrated social management system that sometimes works beyond the influence of formal authorities. One such community body in Old Dhaka is 'PANCHAYAT', which is formed by the community's people by keeping senior and influential persons in leading positions. This Panchayat committee decides many issues in the community and solves many problems with collective decisions. Panchayat is also responsible for managing historic buildings in some areas in Old Dhaka. The study found that some communities in Old Dhaka have sufficient financial capacity and administrative influences, which helps them to have stable social capital and make it possible to manage the historical buildings within the neighborhood. It is also seen in Old Dhaka that the historical buildings used by the local community are in good condition. For example, Kosaituli, Star mosque, Community Pond of Bangshal, Armanitola Church, Pogose School, etc. Some of the historical structures also have adaptive reuse such as Mangal Abash, which is now used by Kazi Nazrul College as hostel building and Kosaituli open space are, used as a playground by the community. Many historical buildings have been used, but the difference is that those are occupied by illegal occupants who do not have a sense of belonging and are not responsible for repairing and maintaining the buildings.

6. Conclusion

Local stakeholders can play a significant role in preserving historical buildings in Farashganj. The community in Old Dhaka has a committee with a practical and integrated social management system that sometimes works beyond the influence of formal authorities. One such community body in Old Dhaka is 'PANCHAYAT', which is formed by the community's people by keeping senior and influential persons in leading positions.

Synthesis of findings

This research examined the heritage, vulnerabilities, and development prospects of Farashganj, a historically rich but critically endangered neighborhood of Old Dhaka. By employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative field surveys, photographic documentation, and archival research with quantitative data on hazards, density, and infrastructure, the study demonstrated how the socio-architectural identity of Farashganj is both a cultural asset and a point of fragility. The findings reveal that encroachment, unauthorized demolition, traffic congestion, fire risk, and environmental degradation have significantly eroded the heritage fabric, while institutional neglect and weak enforcement of protective policies exacerbate the risks.

Despite these challenges, the study affirms that Farashganj retains extraordinary potential to become both a thriving heritage site and a functional urban hub, if redevelopment is guided by integrated planning that brings together development, disaster management, and preservation.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, the study advances the idea that heritage preservation in rapidly urbanizing contexts cannot be treated as an isolated cultural project. Instead, preservation must be understood as a component of urban resilience. The integration of disaster management with heritage conservation reframes historical structures not merely as relics of the past, but as living assets that can support community safety, identity, and sustainability.

Practically, the findings point to several policy implications. Risk-sensitive land use planning, stricter enforcement of building regulations, and the introduction of adaptive reuse strategies are essential. The potential use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) could offer a viable incentive for private owners to preserve historic structures. At the same time, community-based mechanisms such as the Panchayat system demonstrate that local actors can play a vital role in protecting and maintaining heritage sites when empowered with resources and recognition.

Limitations of the study

While comprehensive in scope, this study has certain limitations.

- **Data constraints:** Quantitative data relied heavily on secondary sources, which may not fully capture the complexity of current structural conditions, traffic patterns, or hazard vulnerability.
- **Limited community perspectives:** Although the study referenced community practices, systematic interviews and participatory workshops were not conducted, which could have provided deeper insight into social attitudes toward heritage conservation.
- **Temporal scope:** The study focused on the present conditions and historical background but did not conduct longitudinal comparisons to measure change over time in a statistically robust manner.

Recognizing these limitations allows for a cautious interpretation of the findings and highlights areas where further inquiry is needed.

Future research directions

Future work should aim to expand the empirical foundation of heritage preservation in Old Dhaka. Three key directions can be proposed:

- **Participatory Approaches:** Engaging local residents, business owners, and cultural groups through participatory mapping, surveys, and workshops to integrate community perspectives into redevelopment plans.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Studying similar heritage districts in South Asia or other global cities could provide comparative lessons for balancing modernization and conservation.

- Quantitative Modelling: Employing GIS-based hazard mapping, seismic risk assessments, and simulation of traffic flows to more rigorously evaluate the intersection of heritage, vulnerability, and development.
- Policy Evaluation: Examining the feasibility and potential outcomes of implementing TDR and other incentive-based mechanisms in Bangladesh, informed by case studies from other countries.

Final reflection

Farashganj stands at a crossroads between deterioration and revival. Its heritage structures narrate stories of Mughal grandeur, colonial exchanges, and socio-cultural evolution, yet they also face the imminent threat of disappearance through neglect and unregulated development. This research underscores that safeguarding such a heritage landscape requires more than isolated conservation, it demands integrated governance that aligns urban development, disaster preparedness, and cultural preservation.

Ultimately, sustaining the identity of Farashganj is not only about saving buildings; it is about affirming the collective memory, resilience, and identity of Dhaka itself. The challenge lies in transforming policy intent into coordinated action that bridges state authority, local communities, and civil society. If addressed comprehensively, Farashganj can serve as a model for inclusive urban revitalization in Bangladesh and beyond.

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Informed consent

Informed consent for the publication of personal data in this article was not obtained because the manuscript does not contain identifiable personal images, personal details, or other distinguishing characteristics, and all information is reported in an anonymized form.

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