

# Archiving Kolakopa - A Study on the Present Condition and the Architectural Features of an Evanescing Historic Settlement

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## ABSTRACT

Bangladesh, a land of profound historical and cultural wealth, holds numerous unrecorded heritage settlements that narrate the story of its glorious past. Among these, Kolakopa, located in Ancient Dhaka the ancient capital of Bengal stands as a remarkable yet endangered example of vernacular and colonial architectural synthesis. The settlement reflects a harmonious blend of Mughal spatial traditions and British Colonial aesthetics, showcasing the lifestyle and socio-economic identity of the region's elite merchant class during the colonial period. The courtyard-based houses, adorned with ornamented facades, arched verandas, and intricate detailing, embody both artistic excellence and climatic responsiveness. Over time, however, urban encroachment, neglect, and unauthorized modifications have led to the gradual decay of these architectural gems. Following the post-1971 socio-political shifts, many of these heritage houses were occupied or altered without regard for their historical value. As a result, structural deterioration, incompatible renovations, and weathering have threatened the settlement's original character. Despite its significance as a living repository of Bengal's cultural heritage, Kolakopa remains largely undocumented and overlooked by conservation authorities. This paper aims to document and analyze the architectural and spatial characteristics of the Kolakopa settlement, assess its current condition, and highlight the urgent need for systematic conservation. Through visual and descriptive documentation, the study seeks to raise awareness about the importance of preserving Kolakopa's unique architectural identity, providing a foundation for future restoration strategies and sustainable heritage management.

**Keywords:** Kolakopa, Historic Settlement, Architectural Documentation, Built Heritage, Conservation

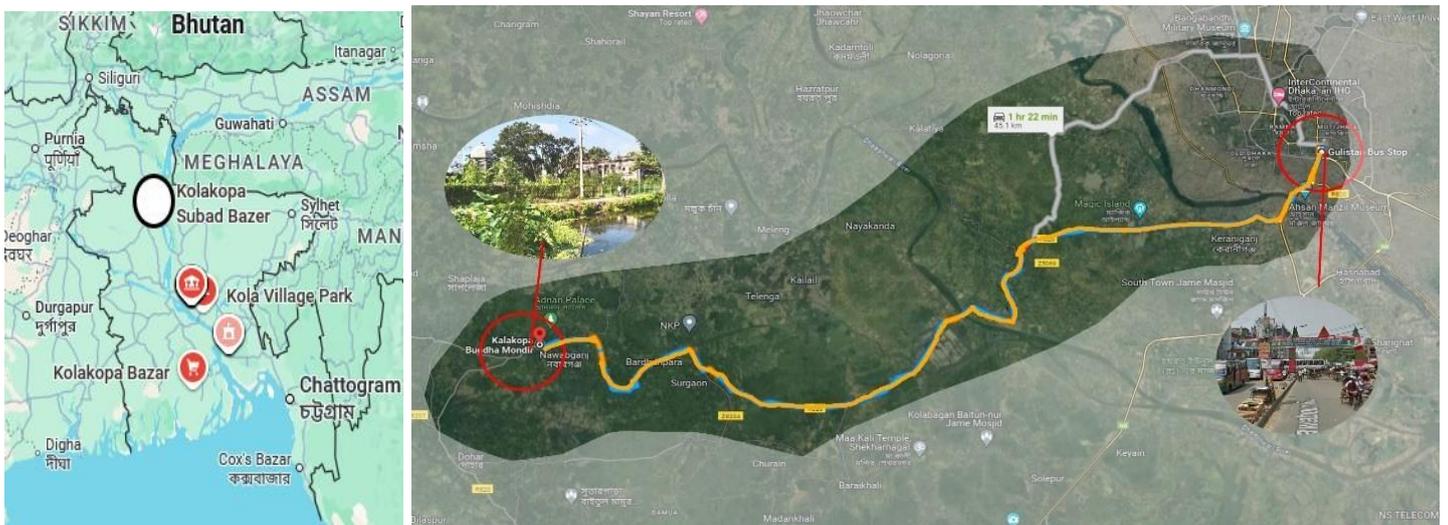
## INTRODUCTION

Architecture that transcends historical timelines serves as a vital conduit between the past, present, and future, embodying the cultural continuity of a civilization. Such built environments are not merely physical structures but also repositories of collective memory, reflecting the socio-economic, artistic, and political narratives that have shaped a nation's identity. In this regard, Bangladesh possesses a rich and diverse architectural heritage encompassing multiple historical periods. Yet, this legacy is increasingly under threat from rapid urbanization, unplanned development, and neglect, which continue to engulf historic settlements and diminish the nation's tangible and intangible cultural assets.

Among the endangered sites stands Kolakopa, located in Dhaka, a historically significant district of ancient civilization. During the early 19th century, under British colonial rule, a community of affluent Hindu merchants established a medium township in the Kolakopa area, constructed upon the remnants of an earlier ruined settlement (Rahman, 2017). The spatial pattern of this settlement—characterized by “street-front houses” arranged along a narrow alley locally known as Hindu Para—illustrates an intricate adaptation of colonial urban morphology within a traditional Bengali context. Historically, the area was bordered by canals and moats (khals),

which enhanced its environmental and aesthetic value. Although the original owners of these buildings have long departed, the structures remain inhabited, often in dilapidated and deteriorating conditions, with current residents largely unaware of their historic importance. The architectural ensemble of Nagar Kashba embodies the romanticized charm of colonial-era domestic architecture, blending stylistic ornamentation with vernacular sensibility. Given its unique cultural and architectural significance, this evanescent living archaeological site demands urgent documentation and conservation before irreversible loss occurs.

**Historical Background and Context:** Kolakopa is located within the Nawabganj Upazila of Dhaka District, a region deeply embedded in the historical and cultural fabric of Bengal. Once part of the greater Bikrampur territory, Nawabganj shared its legacy as a prominent administrative and trading zone that flourished from the early medieval period through the Mughal and British Colonial eras. Although the political center of Bengal gradually shifted—from Bikrampur to Sonargaon in the 13th century, and later to Dhaka in the 17th century—Kolakopa and its surrounding areas continued to thrive due to their strategic location along the fertile riverine belt of central Bengal. Enclosed by the Ichamati, Buriganga, and Dhaleshwari rivers, the Nawabganj region developed as an active commercial and cultural corridor, facilitating both inland and regional trade. During the Colonial period, this accessibility attracted wealthy Hindu and Muslim merchant families, who established residential settlements reflecting a distinctive fusion of local vernacular traditions and British Colonial architectural motifs. Kolakopa, as one of these historic settlements, became a vibrant microcosm of Bengal’s evolving urban and socio-economic character. Over successive centuries, Kolakopa retained its importance as a mercantile and agrarian hub, while its built environment reflected the stylistic transitions that accompanied changes in governance and trade dynamics. Today, the architectural remnants of Kolakopa stand as enduring witnesses to a hybrid cultural landscape, bridging the aesthetic, economic, and historical continuum of Bengal’s architectural heritage.



**Figure Shows: Location of Kolakopa at Nababganj in Dhaka; Distance between Dhaka to Kolakopa.**

The term Kasba (or Qasbah in Arabic) refers to an administrative and commercial settlement, typically situated between rural villages and larger cities. In medieval Bengal, particularly under the Bengal Sultanate (1342–1576) and later the Mughal Empire, kasbas played a critical role in regional governance, commerce, and security (Khan, 2016). These settlements were strategically located near trade routes, rivers, or other significant geographical features, which enabled them to serve as hubs for trade, local administration, and sometimes military activity (Nasser, 2020). A kasba was governed by local officials such as the kotwal, responsible for policing, and the quazi, who oversaw legal and religious matters. Kasbas functioned not only as market towns but also as the focal points of administrative control within larger districts (Rahman, 2018). Betila, located within the historical landscape of Manikganj, was likely one of these kasbas. Its advantageous location along the Kaliganga and Dhaleshwari rivers suggests it was a vital trade and administrative center during the Sultanate, Mughal, and colonial periods (Chakraborty, 2017). Though its significance may have waned over time, the term Kasba in Betila’s name continues to reflect its historical importance as a commercial and administrative hub in medieval Bengal (Hossain, 2015).

Kolakopa Union is a historic locality under Nawabganj Upazila of Dhaka District, in the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh. The entire administrative center of Nawabganj Upazila is situated within Kolakopa Union, which also serves as the cultural and civic heart of the region. Formed through a unique blend of geography, rivers, architecture, and folk traditions, this area has long developed as a hub of history, culture, and economic activity.

During the nineteenth century, the Kolakopa–Bandura area was one of the most important commercial centers in the southwestern part of Dhaka District. Located along the banks of the Ichamati River, the locality flourished rapidly due to river-based trade and transportation. The presence of affluent zamindar (landlord) families and the architectural landmarks they built still bear witness to that glorious past. Among the most notable local landlord families were Brajen Saha, Radhanath Saha, Loknath Saha (of Telibari/Mathbari), and the Kokilpeari family. Their residences—such as Braja Niketan (now popularly known as *Joj Bari* or “Judge’s House”), Telibari, Painnabari, and Ukil Bari—were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, following the Greco-Doric architectural style. These buildings stand not only as examples of architectural heritage but also as reflections of the social prestige, wealth, and refined taste of that era.

Kolakopa Union is also a shining example of religious coexistence. The region is home to several places of worship, including the Khelaram Data Bigraha Temple, Mahamaya Devi Temple, Kali Temple, and the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary (locally known as *Jopomala Rani’r Girja*), built in 1777 AD. These structures symbolize the spiritual traditions of both Hindu and Christian communities. The church, constructed in Gothic architectural style, holds particular significance; its intricate design, large bell, and yellow-toned structure make it one of the oldest surviving churches in Bangladesh. A fascinating local legend surrounds the Mahamaya Temple: it is said that the deity there is represented by a massive tree trunk, which once bled a red fluid when someone tried to cut it. Since 1335 Bengali Year, worship has been continuously performed here. Such folklore reflects the deep-rooted spiritual and cultural fabric of Kolakopa’s people.

During the colonial period, the Kolakopa–Bandura region experienced considerable commercial growth. Local entrepreneurs like Madhubabu of Painnabari, Loknath Babu of Telibari, and Radhanath Saha amassed wealth through diverse businesses. Industries such as oil pressing, betel trading, and handloom weaving played a vital role in the local economy. The traditional handloom craft of Samsabad and Alalpur areas was once a hallmark of this region, though it is now on the verge of extinction. Still, a few dedicated weavers strive to keep this ancient craft alive. At the heart of Kolakopa’s heritage stands Braja Niketan, also known as the “Judge’s House.” In the 1980s, the residence gained its current name when a judge’s family began living there. Today, it serves as a local tourist attraction, surrounded by trees and even a small herd of deer that draw visitors year-round. Unfortunately, many historic buildings—such as the residence of Radhanath Saha—have either fallen into ruin or disappeared under private ownership. Kolakopa Union, therefore, is not merely an administrative territory—it is one of Dhaka District’s most culturally and architecturally significant localities. Formed through the legacy of its zamindar families, religious diversity, river-centric economy, and rich folk traditions, Kolakopa remains a site of historical interest and a living testament to Bengal’s enduring cultural heritage.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach to analyze the architectural characteristics, present condition, and conservation prospects of Kolakopa House. Field surveys were conducted to collect primary data, including detailed measurements, photographic documentation, and visual observations.

Interviews with local residents provided insights into the historical background and cultural significance of the site. The surrounding environment, access routes, and supporting infrastructure were also examined to understand their influence on the building’s current state.

A comparative analysis was then carried out with other colonial-era residences in the region to identify similarities in spatial organization and architectural style. This helped position Kolakopa House within the broader context of Bengal’s colonial heritage. All collected data were systematically compiled and analyzed to propose potential conservation strategies. The objective of the study is to promote sustainable preservation of Kolakopa House as a vital element of local architectural and cultural identity.

**4. Evolution of the settlement of Kolakopa:** From the structural pattern of the heritage buildings, the chronological development of the area could be traced.



**Figure Shows: Historical Settlements of Kolakopa**



**Figure Shows: Historical Settlements of Kolakopa**

**5. The Present condition of the study area:** The actual number of heritage buildings remaining in the study area could not be traced completely due to the lack of evidence. Twenty-one buildings could only be found in Nagar Kashba during the study;

**5.1 Conditions of the Heritage Buildings:** Kolakopa House, a prominent example of colonial-era residential architecture, was originally constructed by elite merchants during the British colonial period. These doublecourtyard mansions symbolized the wealth, power, and refined taste of the mercantile elite of that time (Ahmed, 1984). The architectural layout emphasized both privacy and ventilation, blending local craftsmanship with colonial stylistic influences (Islam, 2003). Following the partition of India, the original owners of Kolakopa House migrated permanently to India, leaving the property vulnerable to encroachment. Over the decades, various individuals unlawfully occupied portions of the land and buildings, while others

purchased sections from those occupants (Rahman & Karim, 2019). Today, ownership is highly fragmented. Many of the current owners reside in Dhaka or abroad and benefit financially by renting out their portions rather than maintaining the structure. Initially, the mansion had a single owner; however, with family expansion and inheritance divisions, ownership has dispersed among numerous heirs. As the number of owners increased, the available living space became inadequate, and disputes over maintenance and usage grew more frequent (Chowdhury, 2015).

The physical condition of Kolakopa House has deteriorated severely due to neglect, low maintenance, and unsympathetic alterations. In an attempt to modernize the building, residents have made structural changes—such as adding toilets in courtyards, erecting partitions, or removing original walls and openings—that have compromised the architectural integrity (Islam & Hossain, 2017). Some sections have even been replaced with new constructions, erasing significant historical features. Wealthier owners have completely demolished certain parts to build multi-storied contemporary structures, perceiving them as more efficient and economically productive. Meanwhile, those unable to afford such redevelopment have continued modifying existing portions haphazardly. These unplanned interventions have resulted in the gradual loss of authenticity and cultural value (Hasan, 2020).

Rapid urbanization, increasing land values, and population growth have intensified the commercialization of the surrounding area. The trend of renting rooms to businessmen, students, and shop owners has become common, accelerating the transformation of the house's original character (Rahman, 2018). Authorities' negligence and lack of effective heritage conservation policies have further aggravated the situation. Moreover, socio-economic constraints discourage residents from preserving the property. Even when they acknowledge the building's heritage value, they lack both the financial capacity and institutional support to undertake conservation measures (Islam & Hossain, 2017). Kolakopa House represents an irreplaceable part of the region's architectural and cultural heritage. Yet, it is increasingly viewed as obsolete and unproductive—a burden rather than a legacy. Some residents fear that officially declaring it a protected heritage site could restrict their rights or reduce their control over the property (Hasan, 2020). Without urgent conservation efforts, this valuable historical monument may vanish entirely, taking with it the collective memory and cultural identity of its community (Ahmed, 1984; Rahman & Karim, 2019).

**5.2 Structural, Infrastructural and Environmental Conditions and Its Evolution:** The structural, infrastructural, and environmental conditions surrounding Kolakopa House are deteriorating rapidly. The overall state of the mythological and historical establishment has become extremely fragile, verging on collapse. The setting reflects a sense of chaos and disorganization. In the immediate vicinity, modern buildings have encroached both in front of and behind the heritage structure, leaving no setback or visual buffer. This haphazard urban growth has destroyed the harmony that once characterized the site. Previously, the Ichamati River flowed close to the Kasba, providing a natural linkage and ecological balance. Over time, however, the river has receded significantly, and its tributaries and connecting channels have disappeared. Many of the ponds and small water streams that once sustained the settlement have dried up, leaving barren areas now marked only by remnants of stone steps that once led to the water. The ghat, once a vital access point, is now neglected and deteriorating. Access to the heritage structure is further constrained by a narrow, congested road, which serves as the only route leading toward Kolakopa House. This passageway, frequently used by rickshaws, tempos, and CNG autorickshaws, also acts as a shortcut to neighboring communities. Consequently, it poses difficulties for pedestrians and creates an unsafe, chaotic environment. The area suffers from exposed electrical wiring, inadequate stormwater drainage, and widespread littering, further worsening living conditions. At the rear of the property lies an old well, which once served as a critical water source. Today, it no longer holds water, symbolizing the decline of the entire system. The overall structure stands in a perilous state, its collapse imminent unless urgent restoration and conservation efforts are undertaken (Rahman & Hossain, 2020).

**6. Elite Hindu Merchants' & Zamindar Houses:** Kolakopa was once a prosperous settlement of elite Hindu merchants and zamindars, distinguished by rows of elegant two-storied houses built in British colonial and Indo-European architectural styles. Though not grand in scale, these residences reflected refined taste, with

columned verandahs, arched openings, and symmetrical façades. Over time, neglect and unplanned modifications have obscured many of their original features, making the initial layout and typology difficult to trace. Despite this decay, several buildings still preserve fragments of their early design. Two principal types dominate the area's built form: the courtyard-style house, centered on open inner yards, and the bungalow-style house, marked by wide verandahs and sloping roofs.

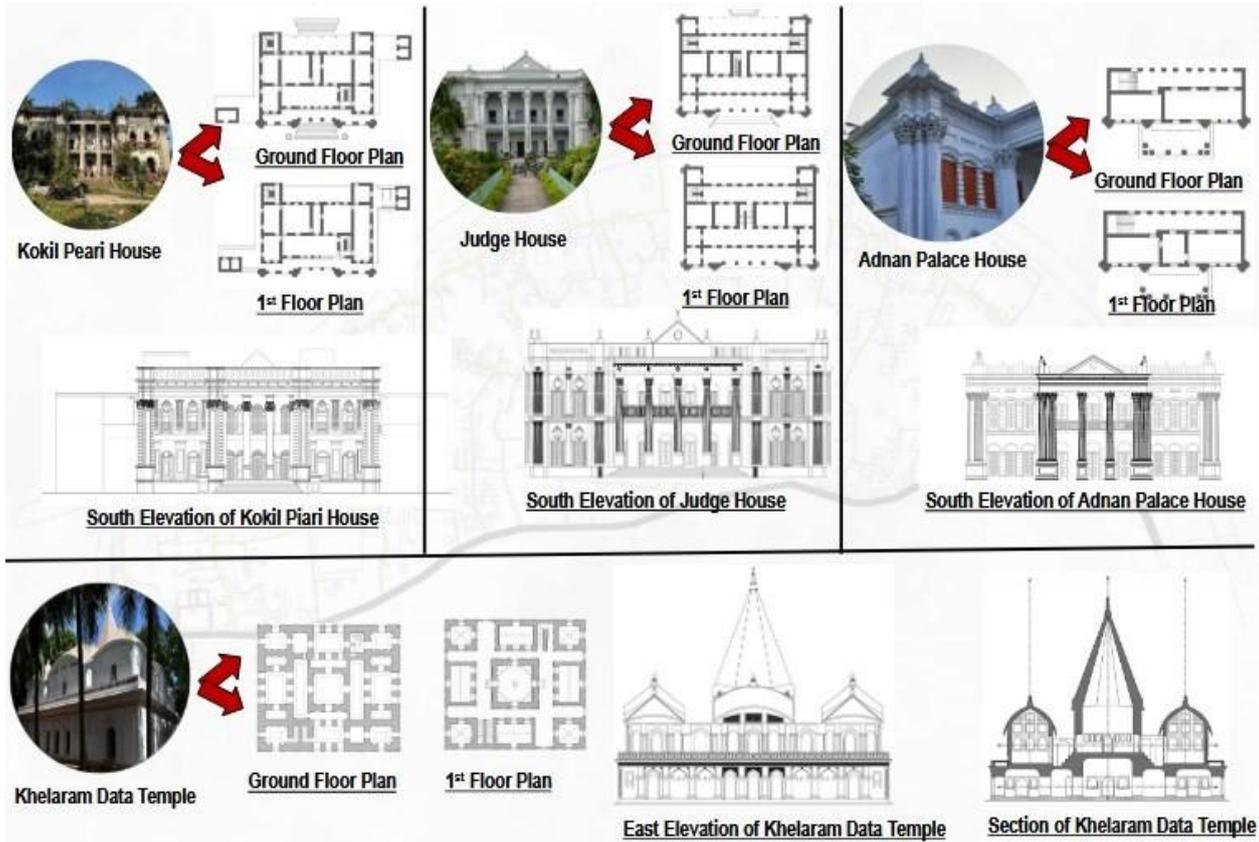


Figure Shows: Ground Floor Plan & 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Plan, Elevation, Section and Real View of the Heritage Houses such as Kokil Peari House, Judge House, Adnan Palace House and Khelaram Data Temple.

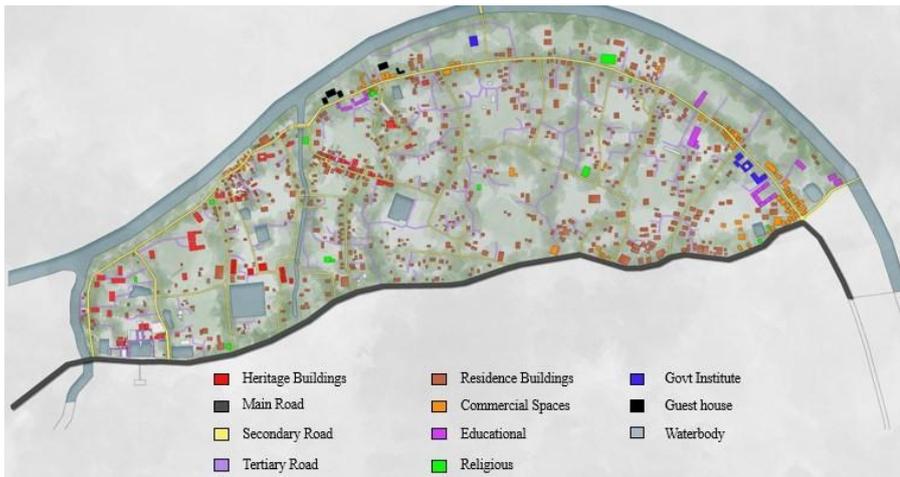
**Single Monolithic House:** A single monolithic house in Betila refers to a standalone structure that is typically compact and unified in design. These houses are characterized by being self-contained, often without distinct divisions or courtyards like the bungalow or courtyard-type houses. The design focuses on a singular, cohesive building structure rather than multiple components or spaces. These houses may consist of one story, and they typically have simple, functional layouts suited to the needs of the inhabitants, without complex room organization or external features. Single story buildings. Much more ornamented and fragmented. Building shows arts, aesthetics and appeals.

**6.2 Courtyard Type House:** The houses in Kashba feature two courtyards: the outer courtyard is used for public activities, while the inner courtyard is dedicated to private activities. Some of the buildings in the area follow this design. Based on the traces of previous foundation locations, it is assumed that other buildings also originally had two courtyards.

**6.3 Bungalow Type House:** Bungalow-type houses in Betila are characterized by having no courtyard. These are typically one or two-story buildings, featuring yards either in the front or back. There is no uniformity in the organization of the rooms across different buildings, offering a variety of layouts.

**7. Spatial Organizations:** The buildings in Kashba are organized around courtyards that separate public, semipublic, and private spaces. The front courtyard contains public functions like guest rooms and temples, and is used for cultural activities. The private courtyard, accessed through a passage, holds bedrooms and private areas. Colonnaded walkways surround the courtyards, and backyards include kitchen gardens and

restrooms. Each house has two service entries, and shared ponds are available for the community. A canal encircles the settlement, serving both as a service route and a security moat.



**Figure Shows: Land-Use Map of Kolakopa Heritage Houses**

**8. Architectural Elements:** The structures of Kolakopa are mainly British colonial architecture. Their structure shows the influence of European Renaissance and Victorian styles. Besides, they are built by local craftsmen, so they also have a combination of Mughal and Bengali indigenous architectural features. As a result, a “EuroBangla hybrid style” was developed. These were intended to maintain the building's sustainable strength, control temperature, and enhance aesthetic beauty. They reveal how local artisans reinterpreted foreign design principles to accommodate regional climate, materials, and lifestyles, creating a distinctive hybrid style that remains visually and historically significant (Metcalf, 1989). Building Materials include, Terracotta bricks, red bricks and Jeffrey bricks; Lime-surki and Limestone; wooden beams and Arches; Cast Iron and Corrugated Sheets; Chinni Tikri (pieces of porcelain glassware), corrugated tin sheets and stones (White stone, Black jhama stone, Pebbles) etc. Apart from these, other materials used are - surki, jaggery and eggshells, laterite stone, iron clamps and anchors, terracotta and wood carvings, coloured glass and European stained glass, plaster of Paris (POP) and lime plaster, ceramic tiles and marble pieces, metal elements (bronze and copper) and paints and coatings.

**Table Shows: Building Materials Used in the Colonial Architecture of Kolakopa**

No.	Material Name	Area of Use	Features and Purpose
1	<b>Burnt Clay Bricks, Red Bricks, and Jafri Bricks</b>	Walls, pillars, arches	Durable; helps in heat control; Jafri bricks allow light and air circulation
2	<b>Lime–Surki and Limestone</b>	Foundation, wall bonding, plaster	Acts as a natural cement; keeps interior cool; water-resistant
3	<b>Surki (Brick Dust)</b>	Roof, plaster, floor	Strengthens the structure; provides waterproof layer on the roof
No.	Material Name	Area of Use	Features and Purpose
4	<b>Organic Binders (Molasses, Eggshell, Oil, etc.)</b>	Mixed with lime–surki	Works as natural adhesive; increases structural durability
5	<b>Wooden Beams, Doors, and Windows</b>	Roof, verandah, arches, windows	Provides stability; used for carvings and ornamentation

6	<b>Cast Iron</b>	Windows, verandahs, stairs, railings	Enhances both strength and aesthetic beauty
7	<b>Corrugated Iron Sheets / Tin Sheets</b>	Roof	Rainproof, lightweight, easy to maintain
8	<b>Chinni Tikri (Broken China or Porcelain Pieces)</b>	Wall decoration	Adds ornamental sparkle and color reflection
9	<b>Stones (White, Black Jhama, Pebble Stones)</b>	Foundation, ghats, floor	Increases load-bearing capacity and adds visual elegance
10	<b>Laterite Stone</b>	Foundation and stairs	Strong and durable in humid areas; prevents erosion
11	<b>Iron Clamps and Anchors</b>	Wall and pillar joints	Maintains structural balance and prevents separation
12	<b>Terracotta Panels and Wooden Carvings</b>	Decoration, windows, roof edges	Reflects local craftsmanship and cultural identity
13	<b>Stained Glass (Colored Glass)</b>	Doors and windows	Diffuses sunlight to create colorful interior illumination
14	<b>Plaster of Paris (POP)</b>	Ceiling, cornices, column decorations	Creates smooth and artistic patterns
15	<b>Ceramic Tiles and Marble Pieces</b>	Floors and staircases	Keeps interior cool and enhances visual appeal
16	<b>Metal Elements (Brass, Bronze, Copper)</b>	Door handles, hinges, locks	Durable; symbol of elegance and affluence
17	<b>Lime Paint and Natural Pigments</b>	Walls and ceiling	Regulates temperature; prevents moisture absorption

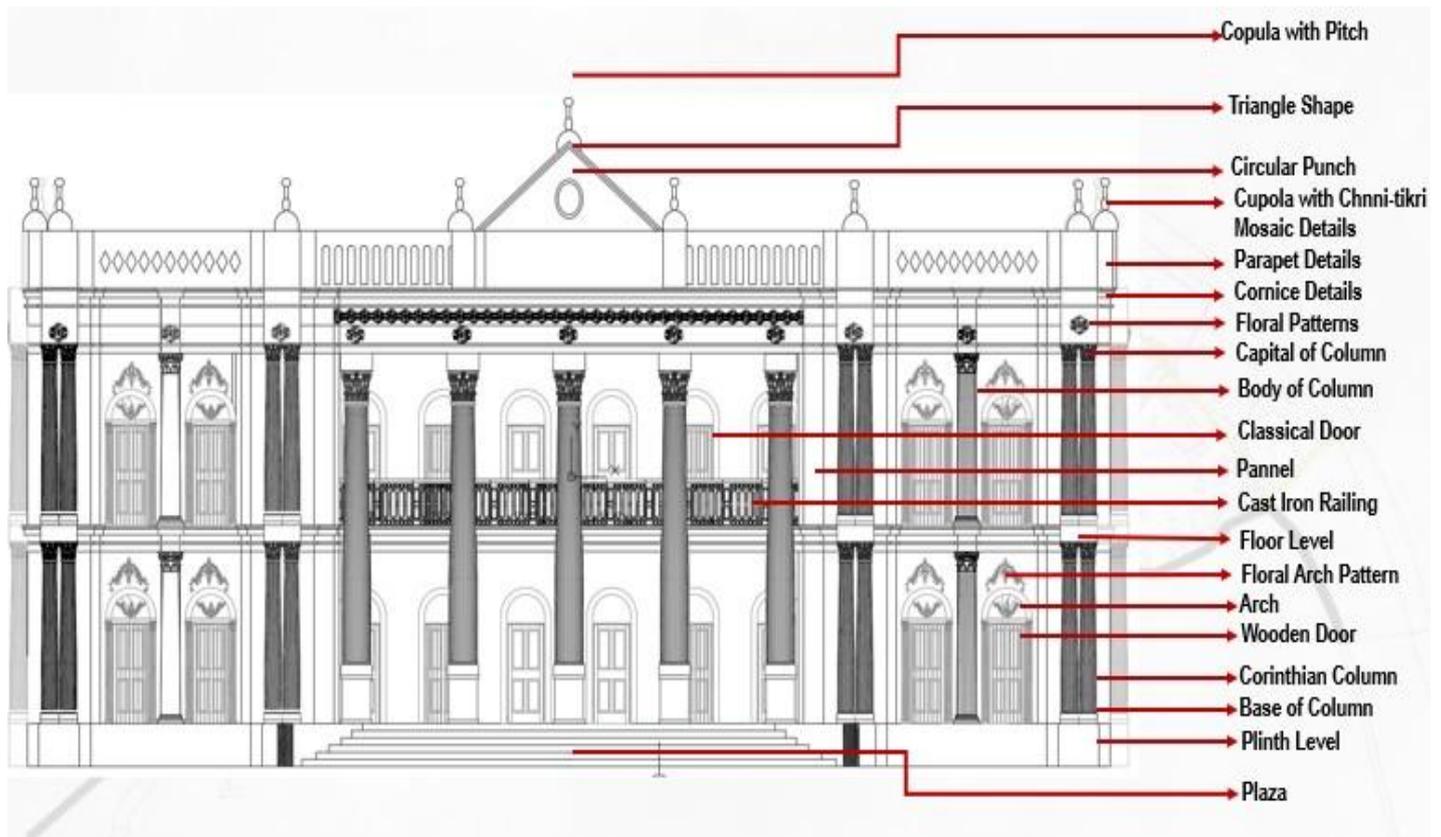
In plan and proportion, the buildings of Kolakopa display an impressive sense of order. Most of them follow a rectangular or U-shaped layout centered on a spacious inner courtyard. This courtyard, a key feature of Bengali domestic architecture, functioned as the heart of the household—ensuring ventilation, providing light, and organizing family life around a shared open space. The arrangement demonstrates a dialogue between the symmetrical order of European planning and the climatic logic of vernacular Bengal (Hasan, 2008). Around the courtyard were placed the living quarters, kitchens, guest rooms, and prayer spaces, all oriented toward crossventilation and natural illumination.

The entrances of these structures introduce a ceremonial quality to the buildings. Semi-circular or horseshoeshaped arches mark the thresholds, often framed by pairs of Corinthian or Ionic columns. The columns, with their fluted shafts and decorative capitals, express the elegance of classical architecture while simultaneously serving practical structural functions. Their repetition along extended verandahs forms colonnaded façades that evoke the dignity of Greco-Roman porticos. This rhythm of arches and pillars transforms the building front into a sculptural composition that merges European proportion with local craftsmanship (Ahmed, 1984).

The roof forms of Kolakopa’s architecture reveal both aesthetic sensibility and environmental adaptation. Many buildings feature gently sloping tiled roofs or corrugated iron sheets that allow quick drainage of monsoon rain,

while others possess domed centers that enhance ventilation and spatial prominence. The roofs are edged with carved cornices adorned with floral motifs and geometric bands. The builders used lime–surki mortar as a bonding agent, which not only strengthened the walls but also maintained cooler interior temperatures during the summer months. The combination of design and material choice shows how architecture here was as much about comfort and climate as about visual beauty (Alam, 2017).

The decorative program of these buildings deserves special attention. Ornamentation was employed with sensitivity and precision, turning façades and interior spaces into canvases of cultural expression. Wooden doors and windows bear delicate carvings of vines, flowers, and latticework, while cast-iron railings display intricate Victorian scrolls and rosettes. Colored and stained-glass panes diffuse daylight into vibrant shades, bathing interiors in an atmospheric glow. In this layering of decorative vocabulary, European motifs were transformed through local artistic idioms, producing an architectural language that was both familiar and novel (Tillotson, 1998).



**Figure Shows: Building Fenestration Ornamentation & It's Details.**

Materially, Kolakopa’s architecture represents a balance between durability and artistry. Builders relied on burnt clay bricks, lime–surki mortar, timber beams, and wrought iron—materials readily available yet capable of high craftsmanship. The reddish hue of exposed brickwork evokes warmth and solidity, while lime-washed walls in soft whites or yellows offer brightness and relief. Porcelain fragments, terracotta plaques, and marble chips were embedded into wall surfaces, creating a textured visual experience. Such materials, chosen with sensitivity to humidity and temperature, embody a sophisticated understanding of tropical sustainability long before the term entered modern architectural theory (Fraser-Lu, 1994). Kolakopa’s built environment also harmonizes architecture with nature. Many mansions were set within landscaped gardens featuring flowering plants, fruit trees, and ponds. Stone-paved walkways led from the entrance gate to the main courtyard, symbolically bridging the exterior and interior worlds. Ghats built along the ponds or rivers provided both practical access to water and spiritual retreat. This integration of built and natural elements reveals a distinctly Bengali aesthetic—a recognition that architecture must coexist with landscape and climate (Islam & Chowdhury, 2019).

Beyond residences, Kolakopa preserves temples, ghats, schools, and old clubhouses that enrich its architectural diversity. The temples exhibit domed sanctums and ornamental bell towers, while colonial schools and civic

clubs adopt simplified European plans with long verandahs and large windows for light and air. Brick bridges, bathing steps, and ghats constructed with lime–surki bonding continue to demonstrate the technical mastery of local masons. These varied structures together form a cultural mosaic, illustrating how faith, education, and social life were all expressed architecturally within a single regional idiom. The European presence in Kolakopa is unmistakable yet filtered through local interpretation. Neoclassical symmetry, Victorian ironwork, and IndoSaracenic eclecticism coexist with vernacular materials and spatial patterns. The architecture stands as evidence of creative translation rather than imitation. Builders and patrons absorbed the formal language of empire but reshaped it according to local needs, giving rise to an Indo-European hybrid identity that was both colonial and distinctly Bengali (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012).

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Kolakopa’s architecture lies in its environmental intelligence. The thick brick walls and high ceilings allow interior cooling, while wide verandahs and south-facing openings promote cross-ventilation. Lime–surki plaster resists dampness during the monsoon season, and courtyards act as thermal buffers. Each design decision reflects empirical wisdom accumulated through generations of builders who understood the rhythm of the local climate (Ahmed, 1994). Today, the surviving buildings of Kolakopa are not merely relics of a vanished era; they are tangible witnesses of an architectural synthesis that bridges continents and centuries. Crafted from brick, lime, wood, and iron, these structures exemplify how global ideas can take root in local soil. They speak of adaptation rather than dominance, negotiation rather than imitation. The architecture of Kolakopa, therefore, stands as a living archive of colonial modernity interpreted through a Bengali lens—an enduring testament to the creativity and resilience of local builders who transformed imperial forms into regional identity.

**Documentation. 01: Kokil Piari Zamindar House:**

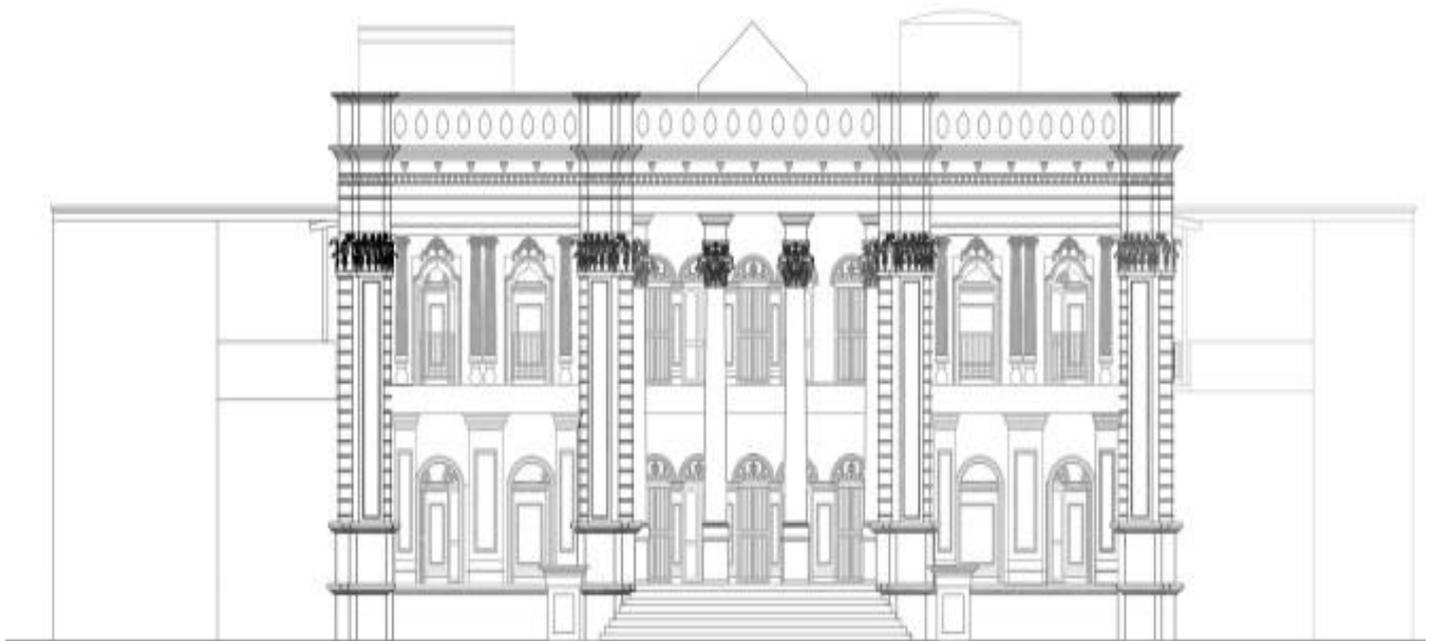


**Figure Shows: Kokil Piari House at Kolakopa.**

Nestled on the serene banks of the Ichamati River in Kolakopa, Nawabganj (Dhaka), the Kokil Peari Zamindar Bari, also known as Kokil Peari Palace or Braj Niketan, stands as a silent witness to the grandeur of Bengal’s zamindari era. Built in the early 19th century by Brojen Kumar Roy, popularly known as Sundarshan Roy, the mansion showcases an exquisite fusion of local craftsmanship and European architectural influences. Constructed using brick, surki, and iron rods, its symmetrical façade, ornate balconies, and arched verandas reflect both strength and sophistication. Surrounded by lush gardens and age-old trees, the palace once served as a luxurious residence for the illustrious Roy family. Over time, the property changed hands first acquired by an

oil merchant and later by a judge leading local to affectionately call it “Telibari” and “Judge Bari.” Today, though weathered by time, Kokil Peari Zamindar Bari remains a monument to Bengal’s aristocratic past, cherished by historians, architects, and travelers alike. It continues to evoke the charm and cultural vibrancy of an era long gone where art, heritage, and nobility coexisted in perfect harmony.

**Architectural Documentation:**



**Figure Shows: South Elevation of Kokil Peari House at Kolakopa, Nababganj, Dhaka.**

**01. External Architectural Features:** The exterior of Adnan Palace exhibits a pronounced influence of the European Classical Revival style, a popular architectural language among Bengal’s aristocracy during the colonial period. The two-storied building presents a colonnaded façade, dominated by tall, evenly spaced Corinthian or Ionic columns with intricately carved capitals adorned with acanthus leaf motifs. A triangular pediment, reminiscent of Greek and Roman temple design, crowns the main entrance, imparting a monumental sense of grandeur. The ground floor is punctuated by large arched doorways and windows, while the upper floor features balconied windows that promote natural ventilation an adaptation well-suited to Bengal’s tropical climate. The balustrades and balcony railings, likely cast in wrought or cast iron, reflect the industrial craftsmanship of the late colonial period. The palace opens onto a formal courtyard garden, historically ornamented with flowering plants, stone pathways, and possibly a central fountain or statue-topped basin a symbol of luxury and refinement. The landscaping reflects the zamindari ideal of merging architecture with leisure, aesthetics, and social display.

**02. Interior Layout and Spatial Organization:** The interior design of Adnan Palace embodies a synthesis of opulence and practicality characteristic of zamindari residences. There are entrance and grand hall. Upon entry, visitors are greeted by an expansive central hall an auditorium-like space used historically for receptions, musical performances, and social assemblies. The ceiling, soaring approximately 18–20 feet, features a central chandelier suspended from decorative plasterwork, surrounded by stucco ornamentation on the walls. The residence follows a symmetrical floor plan, with rooms arranged along both sides of a central corridor. These include bedrooms, guest chambers, prayer rooms, and office spaces, organized around an open-air courtyard to maximize natural illumination and cross-ventilation. Construction materials include brick masonry with lime-surki mortar, sal wood joinery, mosaic or terrazzo flooring, and iron-beam-supported ceilings. Select doorways likely featured stained glass panels, reflecting both aesthetic sensibility and the influence of European decorative traditions.

- 03. Artistic Influence and Stylistic Interpretation:** Three major stylistic influences converge in the design of Adnan Palace: Neoclassical Aesthetic: Evident in its columns, pediments, and symmetry, the building reflects Renaissance ideals of order and proportion. Indo-Islamic and Vernacular Elements: The arched doorways, balconies, and internal courtyard align with climatic needs and traditional South Asian spatial sensibilities. Colonial Hybridization: The overall design demonstrates the adaptive architectural identity of Bengal's landed elite, who appropriated European styles as symbols of prestige and modernity while retaining local practicality. This hybrid character situates Adnan Palace within the broader architectural continuum of Bengal's colonial cultural synthesis, illustrating how architecture functioned as both an expression of wealth and a medium of identity negotiation.
- 04. Modern Transformation and Preservation:** In recent years, Adnan Palace has undergone considerable renovation to serve as Palace Park, a community-oriented recreational venue. Additions such as modern lighting, benches, paved walkways, and repainted surfaces have altered some of its historic fabric. However, the colonnaded façade, pediment, and proportional symmetry continue to convey the original zamindari elegance. The repurposing of the building has enhanced public accessibility, yet its heritage preservation remains insufficiently institutionalized. Without systematic documentation, conservation planning, and material restoration, the risk of architectural dilution persists. Nonetheless, the palace's adaptive reuse demonstrates how historical structures can retain relevance through functional transformation, bridging the aesthetic of the past with the social needs of the present.

**Documentation. 02: Judge House:** The Judge House (locally known as Judge Bari) is a historic manor situated in Nawabganj Upazila of the Dhaka District. Originally constructed over a century ago, this architectural relic reflects the grandeur of Bengal's zamindari era. The mansion was first established by Brojen Roy, also known as Sudarshan Roy, a prominent zamindar (landlord) of the region. He named the residence Brojo Niketan, a title symbolizing prestige and refinement. The structure showcases the colonial architectural influence common among affluent Bengali estates of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1984, the estate was acquired by a judge, leading to its modern name — *Judge House*. Since then, it has been a well-known landmark among locals, blending legal history with cultural heritage. Today, the property is listed as vested property under the Bangladesh government and recognized as a protected heritage site. It has become a popular destination for photography, picnics, and historical tours, attracting visitors intrigued by its aged elegance and tranquil surroundings.



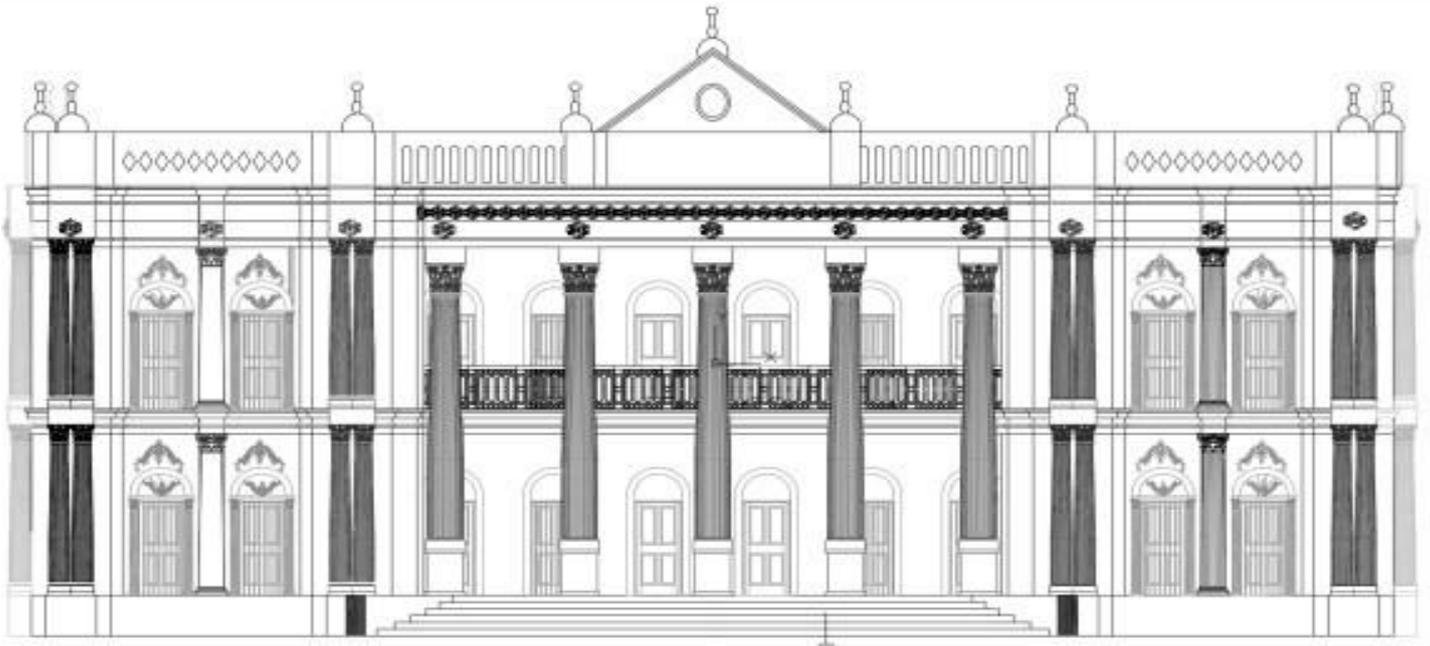
**Figure Shows: Judge House;**

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## Architectural Documentation of Judge House

- 01. External Architectural Features:** The Judge House stands as a testament to the hybrid colonial–Bengali architectural style of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The building’s façade displays symmetry, classical proportions, and ornamental detailing that reflect the influence of European neoclassical design blended with local craftsmanship. **Structure and Materials:** Constructed primarily from brick masonry with lime plaster finishing, the structure emphasizes durability and visual harmony. The walls are thick, providing natural insulation against the tropical climate. The roof is a sloping pitched type, typical of colonial-era residences in Bengal to allow rainwater drainage. The arched windows and doorways, framed with stucco moldings, add rhythm and grandeur to the elevation. The front façade features a spacious veranda supported by Tuscan-style columns, offering both aesthetic appeal and functional shade. This element served as a semi-public space for visitors a hallmark of zamindar residences. The mansion is surrounded by lush greenery and open courtyards, with an approach path that once led through a formal garden. The placement of the building on slightly raised ground gives it prominence and dignity within the estate.
- 02. Interior Layout and Spatial Organization:** The interior of Judge House reveals a well-considered spatial hierarchy that reflects both functional zoning and social order typical of elite residences of its time. The main entrance opens into a large central hall, which once functioned as a reception and meeting area for guests and tenants. High ceilings and ventilated clerestory windows allow ample daylight and cross-ventilation. The layout divides the structure into public front spaces (for guests and administrative affairs) and private rear quarters (for family use). Side wings may have accommodated servants’ rooms, storage areas, and kitchens detached or semidetached for safety. A grand staircase, possibly made of polished wood or cast iron, connects the floors. Internal corridors link rooms while maintaining privacy—a reflection of colonial domestic planning. The interior features ornate plaster ceilings, wooden panel doors, and occasionally floral floor tiles. Even in its weathered state, traces of intricate craftsmanship remain visible.
- 03. Artistic Influence and Stylistic Interpretation:** The Judge House embodies a fusion of European neoclassical style and Bengali vernacular traditions. That depends on colonial influence. The use of columns, pediments, and symmetrical proportions shows the impact of British neoclassical architecture prevalent during the late colonial period. These features projected authority and refinement qualities desired by local elites emulating colonial tastes. Elements like wide verandas, high plinths, and open courtyards adapt the Western style to the local climate and social lifestyle. The open circulation allows air flow, vital for tropical comfort.

Decorative motifs include floral plaster reliefs, ornamental cornices, and arched niches a blend of Western ornamentation with South Asian aesthetics. The artistic restraint of the exterior contrasts with the intimacy and color of interior ornamentation.
- 04. Modern Transformation and Preservation:** Since its acquisition by a judge in 1984, the building has undergone limited but notable transformation. Some rooms have been repurposed for administrative or residential use, but much of the structure retains its original layout. Temporary repairs with modern cement plaster and paint are visible in several sections. Exposure to monsoon humidity, vegetation growth, and neglect have caused surface decay, plaster peeling, and structural cracks. Lack of systematic conservation threatens the building’s long-term stability. Currently listed as vested property under the Bangladesh government, the Judge House is recognized as a protected heritage site. This designation offers potential for conservation funding and community-based heritage tourism. Restoration could transform the Judge House into a local heritage museum or cultural center, highlighting the evolution of zamindar architecture and early colonial urbanization. Such initiatives would preserve both its material integrity and its historical memory.



**Figure Shows: South Elevation of Judge House at Kolakopa, Nababganj, Dhaka.**

**Documentation. 03: Adnan Palace:** Adnan Palace - once known as the residence of Zamindar Radhanath Saha, a wealthy and influential businessman stands as a significant reminder of Bengal’s aristocratic past. It is believed that the house originally belonged to the son of Zamindar Jadunath Saha of Bhagyakul, although the exact relationship between Radhanath Saha and Jadunath Saha (whether father and son or otherwise) remains uncertain. Until about a decade ago, descendants of the zamindar family continued to live in the mansion. Later, they sold the property to Shamsul Alam Pokhraj, a local stone merchant, who renamed it “Adnan Palace” after his son. At present, the site serves as a public leisure area known as Palace Park. Despite renovations and repurposing, the building’s architectural style retains the essence of British colonial and zamindari-era design, closely resembling other grand estates and palaces of Bengal such as Sonakanda and Murapara Palace. Thus, Adnan Palace not only reflects the historical grandeur of Bengal’s feudal elite but also stands as a bridge between past aristocracy and modern adaptation.



**Figure Shows: Real observation of “Adnan Palace”, another named “Houses of Radhanath Shah”, It’s features.**

**Architectural Documentation:**

**1. External Architectural Features:** The architecture of Adnan Palace shows a strong influence of the European Classical Revival style, which was prevalent in the late 19th and early 20th-century zamindar (landlord) mansions. This building shows colonnaded façade. At the main entrance, there is a row of tall, evenly spaced columns that give the façade a sense of grandeur and royalty. The capitals of these columns

display Corinthian or Ionic designs, intricately carved with leaf motifs. Above them sits a triangular pediment, modeled after Greek-Roman temples, enhancing the palace's majestic appearance. The building is two-storied, with high ceilings on both floors. The ground floor features large arched doorways and windows, while the upper floor has a series of balconied windows, allowing ample light and air circulation suitable for warm climates. The balcony railings likely used cast iron designs, a common feature in British colonial architecture. In front of the palace lies a spacious courtyard or garden. At its center may stand a fountain or statue-topped fountain, symbolizing the refined elegance of classic palaces. Surrounding it are flower gardens, walking paths, and rows of trees, representing the comfort and leisure of aristocratic life.

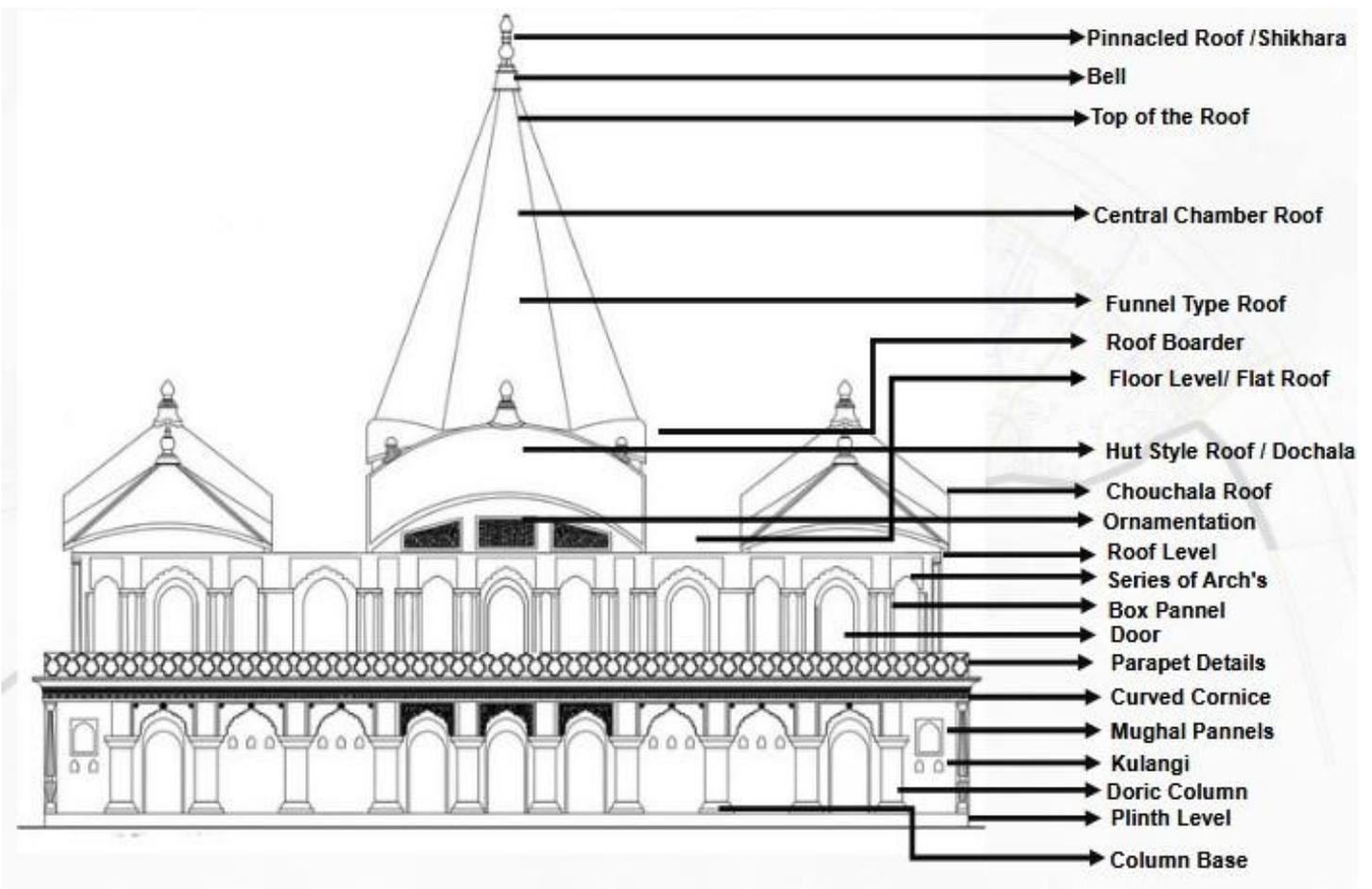


**Figure Shows: South Elevation of Adnan Palace at Kolakopa, Nababganj, Dhaka.**

2. **Interior Layout and Design:** The interior design combines luxury with functionality. There is a grand hall inside the building. Immediately after the main entrance stands a large auditorium-like hall, used for receptions, musical gatherings, and social events. The ceiling rises about 18–20 feet, with a chandelier hanging from above, while the walls are decorated with stucco or plaster ornamentation. Rooms are aligned on both sides, connected by corridors, with an open courtyard in the middle to allow natural light and air. There were bedrooms, guest rooms, prayer spaces, and business or office rooms, each planned for specific purposes. Traditional materials such as lime-surki (mortar) and brick were used, with mosaic or terrazzo floors, sal wood doors, and iron beam ceilings. Some decorative doors may have featured stained glass, adding to the interior beauty.
3. **Artistic Influence and Aesthetic:** Three distinct stylistic influences are evident in Adnan Palace's architecture: Neoclassical design, Indo-Islamic and Vernacular design and colonial blending. The columns, cornices, pediments, and symmetrical balance all reflect Renaissance-inspired European design. The arched windows and doors, open balconies, and high ceilings suit the local climate blending Western aesthetics with Eastern practicality. During British rule, Bengal's elite class often adopted European architecture to display their social status. Adnan Palace stands as a symbol of that heritage.
4. **Modern Transformation and Preservation:** Today, the palace is repurposed as "Palace Park," and some of its original features have been modified. The walls and columns have been repainted, with new lighting,

benches, and walkways added for public use. Despite these changes, the original grandeur especially the colonnaded façade and pediment continue to impress visitors. The conversion into a park has made its historical and aesthetic significance accessible to the public, though better preservation and maintenance are still needed.

**Documentation. 04: Khelaram Data Temple:** The Khelaram Data Temple, situated in Nawabganj near Dhaka, stands as a timeless symbol of Bengal’s heritage, blending history, architecture, and legend into one captivating story. This three-storied brick temple, adorned with elegant carvings and traditional motifs, has no recorded date of origin. Archaeologists suggest that the structure was built between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, showcasing the refined craftsmanship of that era. According to enduring local legends, Khelaram was a generous figure often likened to Robin Hood who seized wealth from the rich to help the poor. The title “Data,” meaning “the benevolent one,” reflects his compassionate nature. Folklore further claims that one mysterious night, the grand temple miraculously emerged from beneath the earth. Another tale speaks of a hidden underground tunnel linking his house to the Ichamati River, said to be used for transporting treasures. Khelaram’s story ends in tragedy and mystery: in an attempt to save his mother from drowning, he leapt into a nearby pond and was never seen again. Today, the Khelaram Data Temple remains not merely a place of worship but a living testament to courage, faith, and folklore preserving the echoes of a man who became a legend.



**Figure Shows: Construction Part of the Khelaram Data Temple**

### Architectural Documentation of Khelaram Data Temple

**1. External Architectural Features:** The Khelaram Data Temple is a three-storied brick structure showcasing the classical traits of late 19th-century Bengal temple architecture. The exterior walls are crafted with burnt red bricks and adorned with ornamental terracotta patterns, reflecting both strength and elegance. The temple stands on a raised plinth, symbolizing sanctity and separation from the mundane world. Its arched entrances and curved cornices (chala style) mirror the aesthetic essence of traditional Hindu temples in Bengal. The symmetry of its facade and the intricate geometric carvings give the structure a majestic appearance, visible from a distance.



**Figure Shows: Existing (Collapsed) & Present (after Restoration and Renovation) view of Khelaram Data Temple, Source: Department of Archaeology (DOA);**

**Interior Layout and Design:** Inside, the temple follows a vertical spatial arrangement, with each floor serving a distinct spiritual or functional purpose. The ground floor typically houses the main deity (Bigrha), while the upper levels might have been used for ritual observation or offering space. The interior walls are comparatively simple, focusing attention on the sanctum. Narrow stairways connect the levels, emphasizing vertical devotion—a symbolic link between the earthly and the divine. The use of natural ventilation and small arched windows ensures soft light and airflow throughout the structure.

**Artistic Influence and Aesthetic:** Artistically, the temple reflects a synthesis of Bengal terracotta art and European neoclassical inspiration, seen during the colonial period. Floral motifs, mythological figures, and abstract geometric forms decorate parts of the structure. The visual harmony of symmetry, proportion, and rhythm gives the temple its aesthetic depth. Despite its religious purpose, the temple stands as an architectural artwork, representing the craftsmanship and devotion of local artisans who mastered blending local tradition with evolving artistic sensibilities.



**Figure Shows: Internal Ornamentation (Floral Patterns) and Aesthetics of Khelaram Data Temple. Source- Save the Heritage of Bangladesh (Pages)**

**4. Modern Transformation and Preservation:** Over time, the temple has experienced weathering, erosion, and partial structural decay. Local communities continue to maintain it informally, using traditional materials to preserve its authenticity. However, without formal restoration by the Department of Archaeology, parts of the

structure remain vulnerable. Recently, efforts by residents and heritage enthusiasts have focused on raising awareness and preventing modern alterations that could harm its original character. The temple now serves as both a religious and cultural landmark, reminding visitors of Bengal's enduring architectural legacy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The historic settlement of Kolakopa is increasingly vulnerable to the pressures of modern urban expansion, climatic uncertainty, and economic instability. These factors collectively threaten its distinctive architectural and cultural character. To address this, immediate and well-structured conservation efforts are imperative. The initial step toward any sustainable preservation plan must involve systematic documentation of the area's existing architectural features, spatial configuration, and environmental context, establishing a factual basis for future intervention (Ikiz Kaya, Pintossi, & Koot, 2024). Conventional, government-led conservation programs often result in a form of "static preservation," where the organic vitality of a heritage site becomes frozen in time, creating long-term management challenges. Therefore, any conservation initiative for Kolakopa must adopt a people-centered approach, integrating the social dynamics, cultural practices, and daily needs of its inhabitants (Shahi et al., 2020; Kaya et al., 2024). To achieve lasting success, policy frameworks should encourage collaboration between public institutions, private stakeholders, and local communities, fostering shared stewardship of the heritage environment (Jokilehto, 2023). Strategies such as adaptive reuse of historical structures, community-led tourism initiatives, and context-sensitive architectural interventions, guided by heritage specialists, can effectively revitalize the settlement (Smith & Watson, 2025). Through such an integrated and participatory model, Kolakopa's historic fabric can be preserved not as a relic of the past, but as a living, evolving cultural landscape balancing authenticity with contemporary relevance and ensuring resilience for generations to come.

## CONCLUSION

The historic dwelling architecture and spatial organization of Kolakopa, Nawabganj (Dhaka), reveal its outstanding heritage value and make it a strong candidate for systematic conservation. The linear arrangement of colonial-era houses, coupled with the area's strategic geographical setting, establishes Kolakopa as a site of remarkable cultural, historical, and architectural importance. The study's documentation and analysis capture the social, political, economic, and environmental conditions that once shaped Kolakopa, serving as a valuable reflection of Bengal's vibrant historical landscape. Beyond identifying its architectural merit, this research emphasizes the urgency of reassessing and safeguarding this living heritage before it fades further. Comprehensive conservation and adaptive restoration can reinvigorate this declining settlement, preserving Kolakopa's distinctive architectural language and cultural identity for future generations. The findings of this research lay the groundwork for informed conservation policies and cultivate a deeper understanding of Kolakopa's enduring role within the broader continuum of Bengal's built heritage.

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