

CONTEMPORARY
ARCHITECTURE
BANGLADESH



INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS BANGLADESH

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Shena Kalyan Bhaban, Dhaka.
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COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

The 'indigenous' or 'old' parts of towns and cities predate the colonial era. Here a variety of uses and functions are inextricably woven into a complex pattern of interdependence. This has been the traditional pattern of urban development. Times have changed. The colonial rulers brought in 'civil lines', 'cantonments' and single-use designated areas. These have had a tangible influence on the growth and composition of cities. Areas given exclusively to residential, commercial, recreational or institutional uses emerged. The 'indigenous' towns referred to as 'native' (a term used with derogatory connotations) survived and flourished in spite of development inspired by new ideas.

'New' towns, as opposed to the 'indigenous' scorned traditional '*galis*' and 'bazzars', aspired towards modernity. Commercial areas were the preserve of offices, shopping, hotels and restaurants. The buildings here were conservative in layout and restrained in provision of services. Double or single-loaded corridors, identical rows of undifferentiated rooms, stacked one atop the other were essential features of commercial buildings. Such were the design paradigms for posterity to follow. The post-colonial development perpetuated this trend. Little, if any, attention was bestowed on support services such as toilets, circulation systems, fire or emergency escapes or the need for spatial flexibility to meet changing needs. Maximisation of profit rather than economic optimisation was the prevalent bias. The shopping centres too harped on the same theme—rows and rows of shops separated by corridors. Creativity and innovation were confined to shop fronts and aesthetic sensitivity of shop owners.

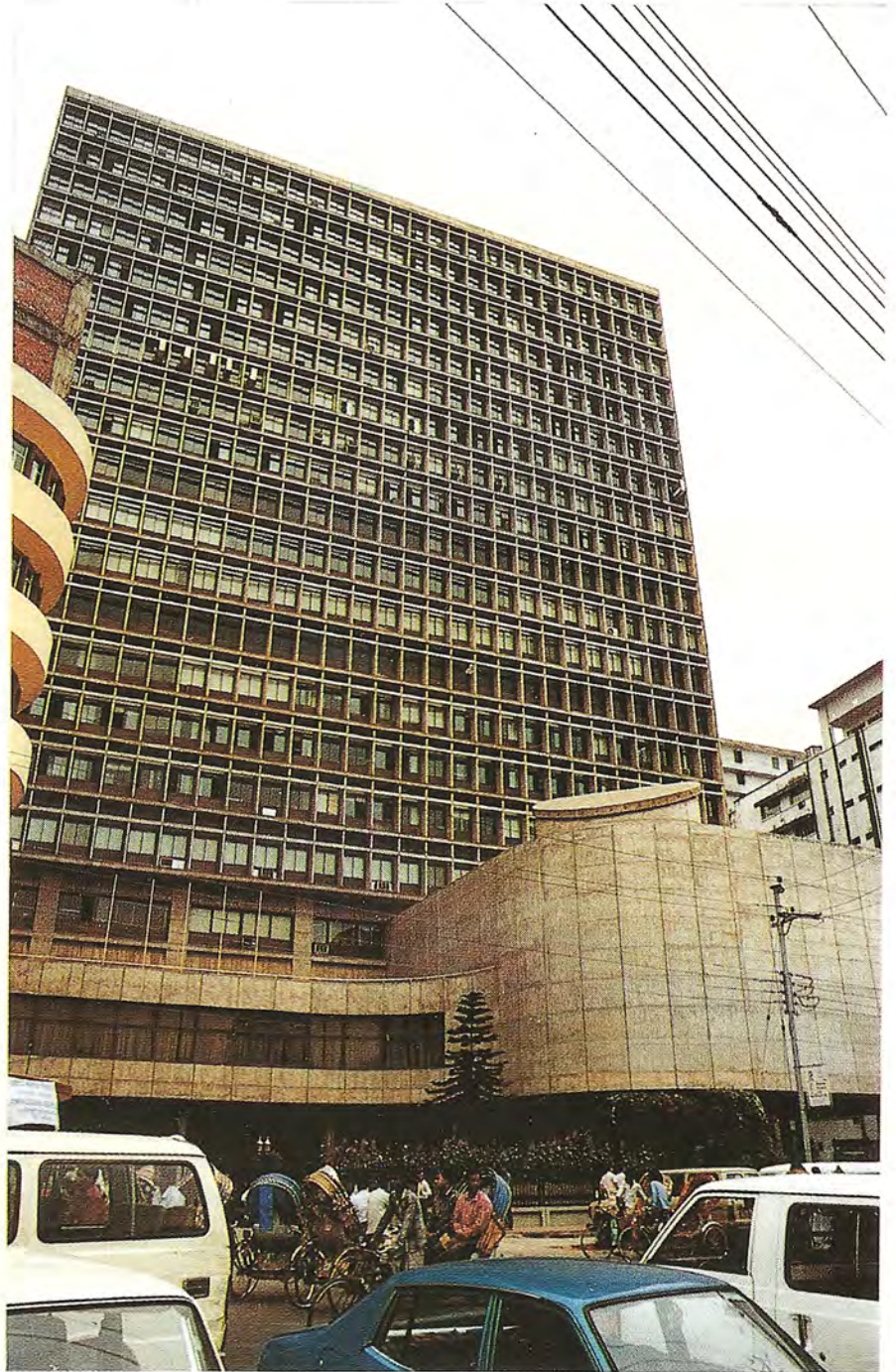
The architectural expression of commercial buildings were decadent, dominated by superficial visual elements that neither helped aesthetics nor function. Louvres, shades and screens were used without exploring or exploiting their potential. However, even in this milieu, some buildings of excellence or near-excellence were designed. But, being exceptions, good buildings were rare and far apart.

Break of cultural continuity and absence of architects were perhaps responsible for the *impasse*. Post-colonial architecture was in doldrums and there were no architects to face the challenge. Builders were designers and so were civil engineers, surveyors and draftsmen. Buildings were designed by people of doubtful competence. It was only in the late sixties that architects started making their presence felt.

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1. Bangladesh Shilpa Bank Bhaban, Dhaka.
Architect : Manjur Ahmed Tuku, Masum Kabir, Khurshid Sarwar, Puraloy Kaushali Ltd. and Dexterous Consultants.
2. Janata Bank, Head Office, Dhaka.
Architect : Mahbub-ul-Haque, Khairul Enam, BCL, DDC Consortium.
3. Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, Head Office, Dhaka.
Architect : Bashirul Haque, Bashirul Haque and Associates Ltd.

The birth of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign nation was an inspiration and impetus to overall development of the country. From a provincial town, Dhaka became a national capital. Population and activities multiplied manifold and so did the demand for spaces and accommodation of all kinds. Existing commercial areas expanded and new areas developed. Similar development, though of lesser intensity, took place in other major towns of Bangladesh.

From decadence and stagnancy arose life. There were perceptible changes in content and context of new buildings constructed. Buildings began to be responsive to new concepts, technology, materials and quality workmanship. Despite the rise in cost of construction, service functions were given greater importance; environmental controls were used and quality workmanship encouraged and promoted.

Commercial buildings shed the corridor-room-minimal-service syndrome to embrace the reality of change. Buildings designed today do not emphasize rooms but open spaces that may be divided and sub-divided to suit individual client needs. The open office planning resisted so far by status consciousness has now introduced a level of flexibility hitherto not practised in Bangladesh. The ratio of the served to service space improved substantially. Today, larger spaces than were considered adequate in the past are being provided for the service function of buildings.

The changes in the outward tri-dimensional expression of building is not apparent. The same vocabulary, with few exceptions, are being used, but a different rationality has replaced arbitrariness. Instead of creating absurd architectural expression of borrowed motifs and elements without functional or contextual relevance, facades today relate to internal functions as well as to the inherent purpose of elements used.

In a hot-humid climate, orientation of buildings and use of proper shading devices and appropriate fenestration can be used singly or in combination to achieve a desired level of comfort. While buildings dependent on natural ventilation and lighting are being designed, there are also those that depend on mechanical controls for comfort. The control of environment has assumed increased significance especially in commercial buildings where economic viability depends on the ability to sell/rent spaces at a profit. Electro-mechanical controls provide comfort, convenience, efficiency, and the prestige value which customers want. Installation of central air-conditioning plants is becoming common both in highrise office towers and shopping complexes.



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1. Century Arcade, Dhaka.
Architect : Khadem Ali, Associated Architects & Engineers Ltd.
2. U.A.E, Bangladesh Maitry Market, extension and renovation.
Architect : Lailun Nahar, Engineers and Consultants Bangladesh Ltd.
3. Shadharan Bima Shopping and Commercial Complex, Bogra.
Architect : Manjoor Ahmed Tuku and Fazlul Quader, Puraloy Kaushali.
4. Uttara Bank Head Office, Dhaka
Architect : Abu Saud, Rahman and Associates.



WASA Bhaban, Dhaka.
Architect : Manjur Ahmed Tuku, Masum Kabir, Khurshid Sarwar,
Puraloy Kaushali Ltd.and Dexterous Consultants Ltd.

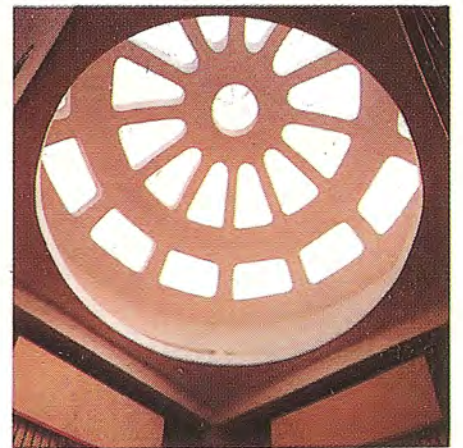
The development of commercial buildings exhibits an intricate pattern of transformation and adaptation. What began as shop houses in 'galis' ended as single-use-commercial buildings in designated areas. The process of transformation is by no means linear. The different streams of development have persisted and grown simultaneously in their own right. The different patterns together encompass the past, the present and are indicative of the future. There is yet no definitive stance. But the desire to experiment and try out new ideas and possibilities are evident. Architects are enterprising and creative professionals not afraid to face new challenges and realities. In resolving problems, reacting to traditions and new ideas in our own unique ways lie the future—the evolution of an architectural identity which belongs to the present but is yet reflective of building tradition and culture with roots in the past.



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1. Osmani Memorial Hall, Dhaka.
Architect : Shah Alam Zahiruddin, Md. Shahidullah, Mizanur Rahman, Department of Architecture, Ministry of Works.
2. Interior Space.
3. Detail of the Dome.