

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### DHAKA'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*Syed Abu Hasnath and Saiful-Haq*

[The book *Dhaka Past Present Future* is edited by Sharif Uddin Ahmed and published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka in 1991]

The study of urbanization in history is an advanced intellectual exercise which essentially involves *inter alia* a grasp of literature in the entire range of social science discipline on urban affairs. The study of urbanization in Dhaka from a historical perspective and the conceptualization of its present state of affairs and future possibilities take no exception to that intellectual exercise. The historical pattern of urbanization in this city (region) has been recorded in a number of studies; only a few of them are thoughtful analysis of the interplay between chronology and important events. There is no dearth of description on the city's past physical infrastructure; however, the impact of authority structure on patterns of physical infrastructure and contemporary socio-economic development has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

While we are convinced that a historical approach to urban development is necessary to understand the role of a city in the rise of a centralized state, it is equally necessary to capture the historical trend and sudden shift in city structure associated with such phenomena as the growth (or decline) of population and economy. How do these developments unfold, and what is the causal nexus among them? We shall only learn by examining the city – on the ground, its creation, its physical elements and form, and the socioeconomic relations created within it – in a framework of urban history. We need to examine the city's past, recent past, and current history.

The pursuit of urban history – a complex field of urban inquiry – is concerned with the *human* experience of, and in, towns and cities. It studies the living conditions of the masses in urban communities in the process of human history, rather than the history of ruling authorities

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and dynasties and their power struggles. The students of social, political, and economic organizations would benefit by giving more attention to the discipline of urban history, while knowledge and skill in social science is apposite for doing research in urban history.

Against this background the present essay critically reviews *Dhaka Past Present Future* from an urban planning perspective.<sup>1</sup> The book is a compilation of selected papers presented at the International Symposium on Urbanization in Dhaka (Dhaka : November 16-19, 1989) organized under the sponsorship of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka. This is a rather unique volume in the sense that it attempts to provide an integrated perspective on Dhaka's temporal and spatial dimensions of growth and development, and examines the present 'urban explosion' of Dhaka in the light of the previous history of the city. It is also comprehensive, covering the urban, regional, and architectural history of Dhaka over 300 years, with attention not only to urban space in general, particularly planning, but also to the economic, social, and cultural conditions of its production. This set of events cannot be fully understood if it is not looked at in relation to the past. As such, the papers in this book afford both authors and readers an opportunity to appraise the level and direction of studies in urban history, what (if any) real advances have been made with the publication of this book, and what areas need to be addressed more forcefully in subsequent studies.

This essay extracts the essential elements of Dhaka's urban history from what is presented in the book and supplements material from other accounts. Our purpose is to give an outline of the theme for professional urban scholars and readers already knowledgeable of the city and its problems. The dominant theme in this essay is urban planning. Therefore, some of the notable papers in this volume dealing exclusively with the political and cultural history of the city have not been included in this review; although it is difficult to disassociate the study of urban history and planning from that of political science and cultural ecology. In fact, urban policies and programs tend to result from political decisions, rather than a rational and informed analysis of the situation that comes from academic research. The assumptions and theories about urban structure are also culture bound. Nevertheless, it may seem impractical for a critic to attempt to encapsulate diverse subjects in one essay; the advantage could be greater cohesion in scope, balance in format, and evenness in the level of treatment.

In this review we apply some basic standards—such as theoretical perspectives, methodological rigours, and relevance of the research to specific public policies – to the major papers in this collection, asking whether they make any essential contribution to the understanding of the urban past, present and future of Dhaka. Theories are given importance in this essay because no substantial analysis is possible without a good theoretical background. “Facts cannot explain; they remain mere facts; isolated and meaningless, unless they are tied together by some conceptual framework” (Reitsma and Kleinpenning : 1985 : X). The papers are also judged against methodological context and public policy content to see what is new, what is convincing, and what is missing in this prestigious volume.

#### **CONTENT AND THEMES**

The book is divided into five parts, containing 36 full papers and 6 short communications, in addition to the preface, foreword, acknowledgment, and the editor's introduction. The first three parts are arranged under the titles (a) History, Politics, Society and Culture (consisting of 15 papers); (b) Monuments and Paintings (6 papers); (c) Contemporary and Future Issues (11 papers). The fourth part is placed under the title (d) Urbanization and Urban History (4 papers); and the papers presented in brief have been arranged under the title (e) Short Communications. The editor provides the readers with information on the academic affiliation and research interests of the authors.

As the title of the book indicates, we envisage discussion on a broad front reflecting the importance of the subject which is essentially interdisciplinary in nature. There are, however, some overlapping discussions; but those are in different parts and tend to cover distinct material. Each part is summarized separately, and the discussion proceeds in the order the sections appear in the book; although we do not feel comfortable with the structure and logic of this organization. For example, part D, which provides a general introduction to the setting of urban history in Bangladesh and reviews problems and prospects of writing the history of Dhaka, might have appeared first, followed by parts A, B, and C—that give more specific manifestations of urban growth and development in the Dhaka region. The theme of urban history in part D, and the process of urbanization as presented in the rest of the text, intersect decisively at various points, which is another justification

for part D to find its place at the beginning of the book. While doing our review, we have taken the liberty to relocate some of the sections in the book. For example, we feel that Rosie M Ahsan's "Changing Pattern of the Commercial Area of Dhaka City" best fits in section A; some others have been rearranged accordingly, as well.

A large number of scholars – both national and international – participated in the symposium, and most of them are very distinguished in their respective fields. As might be expected, the majority of the contributions are from Bangladesh, with a few items from India and England. The papers in this collection average about 17 pages and are quite detailed, so our account of them is necessarily incomplete, and somewhat selective. Also, the book contains hundreds of references. At the risk of seeming incomplete, this review cites only a few relatively recent, more visible, and authentic contributions.

The historical development of the city – in terms of its politics, society, and culture – has received attention in part A while part B deals with the city's civic planning and building; all of these aspects nevertheless develop simultaneously. In fact, a fort, a mosque, or a court house – all are a city in the making. The buildings and built-up areas of cities form primary evidence of urban history, but the actual meaning of 'urban' and its interpretation in history are broad in scope and inclusive in nature. Part C makes a stride in many details of physical and functional issues (both contemporary and future) of the Dhaka metropolitan area. These characteristics reflect certain underlying qualities and built-in constraints inherited by the city from its colonial past – a theme developed in part D. Communications in part E fill some of the gaps that remain in earlier parts. Mohammed Ismail Hossain's short paper on "Financing of House Building in Dhaka" is a case in point. (This important piece could be incorporated fairly in part C as a full paper).

#### **THEORIES OF PRE-INDUSTRIAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

An illuminating approach to understanding the origin and evolution of an urban center, including the diversity of its institutional arrangement and physical form, is found in the theory of capitalism and material life by Braudel (1973 : 373–440). The principal characteristics of medieval cities that he explored and elaborated are : an unusual concentration of men and houses, close together, joined wall to wall. It is a demographic anomaly which increases tension, accelerates the

rhythm of exchange, and stirs up men's lives. The essential characteristic of a town is "the most revolutionary division of labour: the fields on the one hand and the activities described as urban on the other." Braudel's urban geography also consists of town markets, the existence of suburbs, and the relay towns that grew up at a certain distance from large urban centers.

Chaudhuri (1990 : 338-74) – who acknowledges an intellectual debt to Braudel – finds little disagreement with the above view of urban development in pre-modern societies around the Indian Ocean. His set of urban characteristics comprises of defensive walls, the density of housing, the splendour of public buildings, concentration of people, and the presence of a market. A town is distinctly different from a village, a hamlet, an army camp, or any other objective category of space. The urban history of towns and cities is more than a history of material artifacts and concrete objects, Chaudhuri concludes. Implicit in this concept is a distinct activity pattern of people living in a large scale, non-agricultural, and plural society in contradiction to, but linked with, an indigenous peasantry. The linkages are, more generally, considered to be dependency ties with rural areas, but have never been perfectly defined.

The most comprehensive view on the non-Western city, in its most general form, is to be found in the work of Gideon Sjoberg (1960) relating to "pre-industrial city." He regarded pre-industrial cities as quite distinct from industrial cities in social, economic and ecological terms. The key setting was a simple technology and a small elite society.

Sjoberg's pre-industrial city is (i) generally small, walled, and agrarian, and is based on a rigid class structure. Technology is based on human and animal rather than inanimate power. There is little division of labor into skill. (ii) Urban settlement pattern is clearly exhibited by the pre-eminence of the central area. It is the place of residence of the elite, located at the end of a processional route and commonly arranged around a central square. Those imposing buildings (though relatively low, constrained by technology) symbolized by the political and religious power of the elite, represents centrality of functions and dominates the skyline. At the periphery of a city one will find lower order functions and residences of low-income outcast families. They perform most of the unpleasant physical tasks and provide the menial services. (iii) Within the cities, communities are segregated along ethnic, occupational and kinship lines. (iv) In contrast with the segregation of social and

occupational groups, there is little differentiation of land use within the city. Space is put to multipurpose uses, and part of a house, more often than not, is used as a warehouse, shop, or a place of manufacture. The city is highly congested because streets are winding, narrow, unpaved, and poorly drained.

Criticisms of Sjoberg's model have mainly come from Wheatly (1963), Cox (1965), and Langton (1975). Wheatly complains that the model does not do justice to the formal layout of some early cities, where wide streets divided the residential area into blocks. Cox's main criticism is of Sjoberg's failure to allow for the existence of different kinds of social systems in contrasted urban forms. Langton considers Sjoberg's model more appropriate to the cities of the Middle East and North Africa than those of South and East Asia. Sjoberg (1960 : 22) acknowledged that his field investigations concentrated "heavily on some of the better documented cities : Seoul, Peking, Lhasa, Mecca, Cairo, Fez and Florence or Bokhara." However, he consulted studies on social and ecological characteristics of other Eastern cities, including Indian cities, in order to enhance the representativeness of his typology of the preindustrial city (Sjoberg : 1964 : 144).

#### **ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF DHAKA CITY**

Two opening essays : "Origin and Development of Mughal Dhaka" by Abdul Karim, and "Physical Growth of Dhaka City" by A M Chowdhury and Shabnam Faruqui, are complementary to each other. Both the papers summarize the extant literature on the topic and tend to present the evolutionary character of Dhaka since 1608 A D. The year is noted for the appointment of Islam Khan as the first *Subadar* (viceroy or governor) of Bengal during the Mughal Empire in India (1526-1858). Islam Khan established a *thana* (a military outpost) at Dhaka—a new city in Bengal was founded on the northern bank of the Buriganga river. The river is a tributary of the Meghna-Brahmhaputra-Padma system. Although Dhaka's pre-Mughal past is obscure, archival records and several other scholarly publications, however, report a number of thriving urban centers that existed and spread around the borders of Dhaka since the eleventh century. Noted among them were Sonargaon, Bhawal, Bikrampur, and Bajitpur (Mohaimen : 1990).

Historically, the medieval cities in India are expressed in the major symbols of the fortress, the market, and the mosque. The marketplace

played an important role in the city's economic life. The city depended on food and other agricultural produce that were traded in the urban market; it was also a center for long distance trade. The export of Dhakai Muslin, a super-fine textile product, is a case in point (Hossain : 1988).

A dominating architectural symbol – often the crowning glory of the city – was the mosque located near by or some distance of, from the imperial residence. This was also evident in the previous capitals of the Sultanate period – Gaur and Pandua in the northwestern part of the country. Despite the architectural accomplishments of the contemporary master builders, the common people lived in squalid conditions. The streets were typically narrow wandering lanes, rarely more than 8 feet wide. While the homes of the imperial officers and of the rich – mostly the local collaborators of the imperial power – spread horizontally, the poor lived in the high density mud huts. Karim's article provides a good account of the impressive building activities in Dhaka (1610–1704). The Bara Katra (caravansari), Choto Katra, Chakbazaar Mosque, Lalbag Fort, Ramna Gate, Husaini Dalan, and the Satgambus Mosque were important among them.

The following article by Chowdhury and Faruqui supplements Karim's paper by doing a bit more work on the geographical aspects of the origin and growth of Dhaka City, with the help of a series of neatly drawn maps. They demonstrate the two long and short waves of the city's expansion, followed by subsequent contraction : the first from 1608–1704 and the second from 1905–1911. The first one related to the transfer of the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad (1704), the second to the partition (1905), and annulment of the partition (1911), of Bengal. During the later period (1905–1911) Dhaka was made the capital of a newly found province of East Bengal and Assam. As a result, the process of urban development (i.e. city building) was discontinuous. The period of contraction is marked by a drastic decline of urban area and the population size of the city rather than restructuring the character of urbanization at a place. If one expects such a process, urban history becomes a linear exercise in tracing the progress of urbanization in certain regions over time.

From the perspective of urban land use planning, Chowdhury and Faruqui identify some noticeable characteristics of a Mughal city in Dhaka. "The fort served as a nerve center of the city; the adjacent market places and the surrounding *mahallas* (neighborhoods) growing out of the

residential needs follow the well established pattern with winding roads, not really following any plan" (p 48). It is not until the second half of the 19th century that "the inner part of the city witnessed widespread rebuilding activities of roads and houses but again not following any definite plan. . . . The only locality which was developed as a fully planned residential area was Wari with broad roads and proper drains" (p 53).

A more comprehensive land use analysis of the "Changing Pattern of Commercial Area of Dhaka City," with emphasis on the retail activities, is provided by Rosie Ahsan. She sets herself three tasks in the essay : (a) to describe the evolution of the commercial area of Dhaka city from pre-Mughal to Bangladesh period; (b) to delineate the central business districts (CBDs) of the city, based on service area, land value, and land use; and (c) to summarize locational changes and extension of the commercial areas. In all counts she is mostly successful; her table on area and population estimates of Dhaka 1600-1981 is illustrative.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIETY**

The infrastructure component of public investment and organizational aspects of public institutions (e.g., Dhaka Municipality) have been the subject matters of two other essays : "Municipal Politics and Urban Development in Dhaka : 1885-1915" by Sharif Uddin Ahmed and "Provision of Civic Amenities in Dhaka : 1921-1947" by Nazia Khanum. Both of them considered transportation, water supply, health and sanitation, and urban civil services, including police and justice, as important components of urban infrastructure. Physical infrastructure-economic and social - occupies a position so dominant in the urban and economic development process that it is natural that it should occupy an important place in this book. The aspects of investment in urban infrastructure that have been emphasized in their essays are, however, the level of civic amenities, not the externalities it involves. The authors have not sought to establish the importance of infrastructure to private sector productivity and income growth.

Ahmed endorses the preceding description of Dhaka's physical growth presented by Chowdhury and Faruqui; in addition, he states that during the period of twenty years (1864-1884) "considerable progress had been achieved in civic matter under the guidance of British civil servants. A medieval town built in traditional manners, and later suffering from neglect and economic decline was given a tremendous



boost through road building, improved conservancy, filtered water supply and health care services" (p 151).

Quite a different story emerges in Khanum's paper. She is more critical about the poor revenue base of the Dhaka Municipality and its inefficient administration (during the last quarter of a century) by the colonial rule. The quality of water supply, sewerage, electricity and street lighting was not at all satisfactory. The resource of the Municipality was meager compared to the expanding demand for public services.<sup>2</sup>

Differences in observation notwithstanding, the readers will benefit from the opportunities to compare the urban development of Dhaka that took place in two consecutive periods (1885-1915 and 1921-1947). The essays provide a broad outline of the city's modern infrastructure development and note that the rate of Dhaka's urbanization during that period was significantly positive.

The level of infrastructure development from a regional perspective is further elaborated by Shirin Akhter in her essay : "On the Selection of Dhaka as the Capital of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905-1911." "Dhaka being situated at a crucial juncture in lines of trade and communication with other districts, was connected by regular steamer services as an adjunct to the Eastern Bengal Railway, running from Calcutta to Kushtia. The Railway service was extended upto the river port Goalundo on the Padma in 1871. Thus Dhaka and Calcutta were connected by steamer and rail routes via Goalundo and Narayanganj. . . . The tea producing areas of Assam were simultaneously connected with Dhaka and Narayanganj" (p 187).<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the dynamics of urban social structure, we come across two papers : Sirajul Islam's "Social Life of Dhaka 1763-1800", and K M Mohsin's "Commercial and Industrial Aspects of Dhaka in the Eighteenth Century." Together they present a socioeconomic-scape of the leisure and laboring classes of the eighteenth century Dhaka. The parameter they incorporate stem from colonial rule, contemporary political process and its interaction with the civil society, particularly with the upper class society.

Islam provides a description of how "the society of this . . . city was segmented into many status groups having distinctive characteristics" (p 75). The people enjoying the highest status were the remnant of the Mughal aristocracy- the noble families, high military officers, *Naib-Nazims* (puppet governors under the control of the British East India

Company), and their associates. They were followed by the trading (including currency trading) class (the *Mahajans*), and the manufacturing class. Among the inhabitants of the city, most numerous were the small traders, artisans, weavers, masons, shopkeepers, domestic servants, and so on.

Mohsin describes the residential pattern of the laboring class in relation to occupation types. "An important aspect of the city's economic life was the handicraft industries organized on household basis. . . . The same occupational groups used to live in groups, and in most cases the same house was used for the factory as well as residence. The position of the city as a manufacturing center is apparent from names of the localities specialized in different types of industries. Tantibazar and Juginagar (weavers market), Patuatuli (painters of textile), Banianagar (trader's area, particularly of gold and silversmith), Shankharibazar (shell-workers locality), Sutrapur (carpenter's area), localities of Kamarnagar (blacksmith), Jaluanagar (fishermen), Goalnagar (milkmen), . . . . and Dhanmondi (paddy market). These artisans, manufacturers and professional people settled in compact groups and produced goods both for local and external markets. The Mughal rulers had also established *karkhanas* or state owned factories (Malbus Khas Kuthi) in Dhaka for the manufacture of textiles (mostly finer quality of muslins) for the Mughal nobilities at Delhi and Dhaka. The royal patronage and external market encouraged the growth of textile industries in Dhaka to the height of its excellence and perfection" (p 65).

An earlier generation of scholars – mostly historians and a few geographers and statisticians – tended to investigate Dhaka's physical and population growth, and socio-economic conditions from a historical perspective. Most notable among them are : Bhattasali (1927, 1936), Taifur (1952), Dani (1962), and Karim (1964). A good part of the section draws heavily from these works. Nevertheless, several parts of the essays go into much more historical detail of their inception and subsequent development. We have a feeling that the interpretation parts of the essays leave much to be desired.

For example, the concept of social class, more germane to the study of urban structure, has been given atheoretical treatment in the essays under review. The authors could take advantage of the rich urban ecology literature developed by Park, Burgess, and Wirth, which introduces the basic proposition that the social relations of the city are structured in

space; and that there are systematic relations between the activities that take place in the urban core and the character of the concentric zones that succeed one another out into rural/peri-urban hinterland (Chapin and Kaiser : 1979 : 26-68). A more sophisticated factor analytic technique could be used to study human ecological relationship; that is, of individuals in their socio-environmental contexts.

#### **A NOTE ON ARCHITECTURE AND PAINTINGS**

The city of Dhaka preserves a large number of secular and religious buildings of historical importance, dating from the early Mughal period to the British period (Zahiruddin : 1991 : 97). The second part of the book comprises six essays, five on these buildings – mosques, tombs, churches, and magnificent gates – and one essay on the paintings of these buildings and the contemporary society of Dhaka.

S M Hasan's essay "Muslim Monuments of Dhaka" rapidly surveys the principal specimen of Mughal architecture – mosques in Dhaka. Hasan, a noted architectural historian of the country, also provides a short description of other edifices – forts, palaces, audience halls, and bath houses – belonging to pre-Mughal and post-Mughal periods.

In a wide range of synthesis from published material, supplemented by a number of works to the author's own credit, Hasan celebrates the benign imperialism of the Mughal rule in Dhaka, rather uncritically. However, he rightly observes that "the splendid mosques are unique examples of provincial version of imperial Mughal architecture, though they are certainly not blind copies. Under Mughal dispensation the style of building underwent drastic change compared to the pre-Mughal brick and terracotta architecture. Mughal mosques had to suit to new forms and techniques" (p 297). This kind of observations are made by several authors elsewhere (Anand : 1974 : 25-30, Islam *et al.* : 1985 : 23-29).

In a similar vein, Asma Serajuddin – in her essay "Mughal Tombs in Dhaka" – deals with one aspect of Mughal building activities : honouring the dead by raising tombs over their graves. The exclusive focus of her essay is on the kind of building activities sponsored by Shaista Khan, a popular Mughal Governor of *Suba Bangla* (1679-1688). Besides a careful analysis of types, structures, and material used for construction and ornamentation of the tombs, Serajuddin attempts – although timidly – at demystifying the Mughal image. "What is most interesting is the fact that all the extant tombs ascribed to the patronage of Shaista Khan in Dhaka

belong to women who are identified as his wives, concubines or daughters" (p 333). She is the lone author in this section who looks into the monument and its patron simultaneously and, to some extent, critically. However, the role of the flamboyant court culture – in disturbing the placid current of common people's lives – needs to be analyzed more critically.<sup>4</sup>

In the following article, a typological study of the Mughal mosques in Dhaka is written by M A Bari. To make the study purposeful and easily understandable, he has arranged 23 representative mosques into six typological orders. The arrangement is based on their varying ground plan and roofing pattern. Three domed type mosques constitute 15 out of the 23 mosques. The representativeness of this type is also supported by other studies. Zahiruddin *et al* (1990) note that "the Mughals introduced the three-domed mosques instead of the familiar multi-domed mosques of Bengal; the age-old tradition of rich surface decoration with terracotta tiles was replaced by plastered panels; typical curvature of the cornice of the earlier phase was also abandoned in favour of horizontal parapets, and so on" (p 19).

Perween Hasan's "Old Churches and Cemeteries of Dhaka" contains refreshingly new material for discussion. She describes the history of Catholic churches and the changing phases of Christian society in Dhaka over a period of three centuries (1620–1920). The descriptions of the major Christian monuments of Dhaka – the Greek Mausoleum, the Church of Holy Rosary, the Armenian Church of Resurrection, the St. Thomas' Anglican Church, the Holy Cross Church, and the Beck's Mausoleum – are vivid and pleasant reading. Some architectural interpretations of the monuments are given in the text, but they are very tentative. Nevertheless, the essay tries to fill an important gap in the urban history of Dhaka, dealing with a non-Muslim society; while most scholars cling to a theory of Muslim development in Dhaka.

However, Perween Hasan has also persuasively demonstrated the attributes of Muslim monumental complexes elsewhere (Hasan : 1984). In her masterful survey of the *Sultanate Mosque-Types in Bangladesh*, "the buildings have been divided into four groups–Mamluk, Early, Classical, and Late, according to stylistic considerations" (p i). In her concluding remarks, she emphasized "(s)ultanate architecture is found to form a continuum with pre-Islamic Buddhist and Hindu architecture... and, is therefore, identified as a manifestation of mainstream Bengali architecture" (p ii).

Another important piece on a specific aspect of Dhaka's architectural history, the "Gate Architecture of Dhaka," is by A H Imamuddin, S A Hasan, and W Alam. The paper gives an overview of the development of Dhaka and a careful analysis of its gate structures. Some interesting information is provided on gate structures and the circumstances behind ambitious public buildings. The changes in style of gate building have been traced from the Mughal to modern period. The study includes : the Southern Gateway of Bara Katra, Lalbag Fort, Husaini Dalan Gate, Nimtoli Gate, High Court Gate, Gate House of Dhaka Medical College, New Market Gate, Shishu Park Gate, and Dhaka Gate. These are landmarks of the city's history, development, and identity. They also play an important role in the socio-cultural milieu of the city. For example, the Muharam celebration takes place every year on the premises of the Husaini Dalan Gate. However, the authors observe that modern gates can be classified as "either a functional or symbolic structure, but rarely serve a dual purpose like those of earlier times" (p 379).

By and large, this is a very good paper, if not without a few limitations. The description part of the paper is forceful, but the conceptual section is not. The background description of gate building in the history of the Indian subcontinent is very brief, and moves abruptly from the Vedic Period (BC 1500-800) to Mughal Period (AD 1526-1757), leaving a huge gap. We presume that this is largely because the early history of gate building in India is extremely nebulous. What is not known heavily outweighs what is known. In the paper, the authors seem to have pursued a dual objective. One is the development of gate structures themselves, and the other is a comprehension of Dhaka's development based on the study of its gates. While any one of the two objectives could have been a manageable theme for the paper, together they do not deliver a clear message. However, the quality of analysis throughout the paper effectively compensates for these weaknesses. The essay is written in an engaging style, and is well served by clear photographs and drawings.

How the brushes of European and indigenous painters have depicted the glories of Dhaka (and its environment and people) is the subject of study in the lone paper on paintings in this volume, written by N K Majlis. She tries to show the monuments and social geography of Dhaka during the early nineteenth century, through paintings done by European and indigenous artists. The author chose 10 British paintings

done by either Sir Charles D'oyly (1781–1845) or George Chinnery (1766–1852), and two indigenous paintings by artists not identified in the paper.

For most of the article, the author gives a description of the paintings, specifying either the geography or archaeology of each painting. But the author does not attempt to describe the buildings or the society of contemporary Dhaka on her own. Near the very end, she gives a brief account of when British artists started to create paintings of India, two brief biographies of D'oyly and Chinnery, and explains the difference between European and indigenous painters.

Praise should be given to Majlis for writing such an original piece of work, for few scholars set out to write about a commonly known field from such a different perspective. Her originality lies in choosing the subject matter and making the paintings accessible to a wider audience, for they have not appeared in print before. However, it would have been appreciated if more information could have been given on the other European paintings of Dhaka, and on additional indigenous paintings as well.

Common to all of these studies is an attempt to understand Dhaka from the perspective of its rulers – the Mughals and the British, *not* the people whose land it had been before the arrival of the foreign rulers and their trading companies. There is a lack of historical scholarship in articulating the components of architecture and urban space into the fabric of political and social history. In this section attention is concentrated on individual buildings, with almost no emphasis at all on the broader process of the planning and development of the city.

To ensure their hold over Bengal, the Mughal built a permanent military camp in Dhaka. Perhaps they knew that a well-planned city did more to maintain peace and security than twice the number of soldiers. Also, they understood that the city was more than just a government, business, or religious center. All of these aspects were present, but more importantly, it had to be a place where people wanted to live. And to ensure better living, there is no substitute for planning. A more intensive study of Mughal Dhaka might reveal planning. We only hope that future studies of architectural history will situate Dhaka's monuments within the broader context of a host of environmental and planning considerations. That would greatly enrich the history of Dhaka, and the reader's appreciation of the discussion.

## **CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND FUTURE PROSPECT IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

Rapid urbanization in Dhaka is placing increasing strains on the absorption capacity of the city in terms of job creation, housing, and urban service provision. Its impact on urban poor is severe : more than a half of the city's population live in slums and on illegally acquired land, covered with crowded squatter settlements. Even this figure do not fully reflect the deteriorating quality of life in the city.

Urbanization, from the perspective of the poor and powerless, is the major theme of the following two papers : A Q M Mahbub and Nazrul Islam's "The Growth of Slums in Dhaka City : A Spatio-Temporal Analysis," and Nazrul Islam's "Dhaka in 2025 AD." Islam presents Dhaka's future in terms of areal extent, population size, urban land and housing condition, and the role of urban management for building a better Dhaka. The ubiquitous growth of unplanned urban settlement in this and other major cities of Bangladesh reinforces the cleavage between modernized and traditional sectors; political and economic integration becomes more difficult; conversely, progress in the housing sector is not only a key to development, but is also a vital element of total development process. Because of the failure to manage this process, Mahbub and Islam note : "the slums and squatter communities are slowly moving towards the periphery of the city," encroaching upon the scarce crop land of private individual.<sup>5</sup> The other findings of their papers generate an awareness of environment and information that is policy relevant.

For nearly two decades Islam and his associates, including Mahbub, have engaged in illuminating one area of urbanization in Dhaka : the issue of low-income urban communities. These poor people are squatters, slum dwellers, pavement dwellers, and floating population. Their migration pattern, employment prospects, and provisions of basic minimums for urban living, and their place in urban planning, are the subject matter of the two essays. Since the urban history of Dhaka presented in preceding sections often discusses urbanization in terms of macroeconomic and political forces of the rich and powerful, readers will find this emphasis on human actors a useful counterpoint.

Two other essays – "Squatters of no Hope? A Critical Analysis of Spontaneous Settlements and Resettlement Camps in Dhaka" by Tasleem Shakur, and "Dhaka's Informal Sector and Its Role in the

Transformation of Bangladesh Economy" by A T M Nurul Amin – elucidate further the contemporary issues of low-income urban settlement and employment in Dhaka. Shakur and Amin also wrote their doctoral dissertations and published papers in reputed journals on the above topics (Shakur : 1988; Amin : 1981, 1987).

Shakur provides the necessary historical background of squatter settlements in Dhaka since the pre-Mughal period. "There are evidence that *langar khana* (refectory for the destitutes) existed during the Mughal period. The process of squatting during the early British period (1769–1787) was due to the famine of 1769–70 preceded by a sudden and long continued inundation in the Dhaka district that destroyed the greater portion of the crops" (p 523). History repeatedly records their plight, their misery and deprivation. When disease struck, Shakur notes, the people in these areas suffered most. We appreciate the author's effort for two reasons: (a) it coincides with the topical characteristics of the book, and more importantly, (b) indicates the fact that Dhaka's importance also lies in the suffering of these people. The heroism of Dhaka's history is to be found not only in the deeds of governors, but also in the struggle of ordinary people against the forces of nature and cruelty of men. While this point is often forgotten even by the most notable urban historians and architects of the country, Shakur presents an unequivocal detail of those charges. His narrative is based on an empirical investigation of squatter settlements in the city and evacuees in camps at the outskirts of the city. It efficiently blends objective analysis and subjective assessments.

A more challenging contribution – to the understanding of the role of a primate city and its informal sector – is made by Amin. A long period of working as a professor of development planning at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, has possibly led him to appreciate the comparative aspects of urbanization in Dhaka and Bangkok. The latter has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for economic growth during recent years in Thailand. Amin visualizes a similar role for Dhaka and attempts to integrate its economy and space in his discussion. His vision bears upon public policy.

Since the paper "is basically premised on the need of urban-industrial transformation of Bangladesh economy" (p 446), one would expect the author to address the issue of technological innovation and adaptation in formal as well as informal sectors. The paper falls short of



the analysis needed on the activities of informal sector units vis-a-vis organized firms, and the role of government that helps or hinders this sector.

Amin sets his analysis against the background of the role of city-size in accruing the benefits of economies of agglomeration in development. In the context of recent technological innovation, information flow, and the international division of labor, N Hansen (1988 : 318-30) argues that the substantial productivity advantage of large cities has lost ground relative to small and medium size cities. The idea was first statistically demonstrated in a paper by R L Moonaw (1981). Hansen's analysis - of the relevance of hierarchical diffusion of city size and city function in today's economy - is nevertheless richer and significantly different from that of Moonaw for theoretical reasons. In the context of developing countries, a more recent study "balances the engineering and planning view that greater population density lowers the cost of providing public services by documenting a U-shaped relationship between spending and density; except in sparsely populated areas, higher density typically increases public sector spending" (Ladd : 1992). However, Amin's point, that agglomeration economies still have a strong influence on the spatial pattern of banking, trade, services, and "the intense rural-urban interaction" in the context of Dhaka, is clearly meaningful. His effort to substantiate that important point stands out with a special attractiveness.<sup>6</sup>

The working conditions of the formal sector industries in Dhaka and Narayanganj are described and analyzed by Nizamuddin Ahmed. Based on a field survey of 51 industrial units, Ahmed identified a series of issues related to trade unions, labor laws, wages, health, safety, welfare, comfort, the efficiency of the workers, and their housing conditions. The working conditions in many of the factory buildings, and the living conditions of most of the workers are, as expected, deplorable.

In order to improve this situation, Ahmed recommends measures to be taken for the existing factory buildings and the ones of the future. The aspects of an industrial building design covered in his set of recommendations include : structural features, material handling, ventilation, lighting, acoustics, pollution and its control, accidents, safety symbols and signs, fire protection and control, and security and emergency lighting. This is a pivotal contribution that an architect can provide in the industrial building design and management process.

An extremely useful description of the problems and processes of urban housing in Dhaka as well as a critique of the significance of Turner's and Mangin's 'self-help approach' to low-income housing as applied in Dhaka, is provided by Charles L Choguill. His essay: "Building for a Better Dhaka: Policies for Housing and Infrastructure Development" is well written, intellectually sound, and reflects a high quality of scholarship. The objective of the paper is to compare the approaches of the Government of Bangladesh towards housing from the three temporal perspectives – past, present, and future.

During the first two years (1973–74) of the First Five Year Plan (1973–78), the Government constructed, 27,000 housing units as part of the war rehabilitation program. The War of Independence in Bangladesh (1971) rendered 10 million people homeless. "During the Second Five Year Plan (1980–85) there was a shift in the Government housing policy from the construction of high quality housing units to the provision of serviced land, adoption of lower standards and the introduction of measures to improve cost recovery" (p 499). In the Third Five Year Plan, Government considered the needed priority of improvement of urban infrastructure and environment over building and land development. In view of the scarcity of Government resources for urban development, and the necessity for improvement of infrastructure and services, the author supports the Government's shift in housing policy.

The other analytical aspects of the essay comprise those current urban policy issues which involve considerations of efficiency, equity, and welfare. The policy aspects of the paper include: (a) sites and services projects with least-cost lay-out and cross-subsidy method;<sup>7</sup> (b) the upgrading of infrastructural standards in the areas adjacent to old Dhaka; and (c) the Grameen Bank type housing program outside old Dhaka. The program is aimed at assisting the very poor.

Our only dissatisfaction with the paper is the author's limited judgement on the effects of the transfer of a portion of the Government owned housing stock to private ownership in Dhaka. While he is impressed by the advantages of this step as encouraging private sector investment and reduction in Government maintenance expenditure, he ignores the issues of distributive equity and justice.<sup>8</sup>

The other extreme of the people's location in inequality structure is the high-class/high-rise building complexes. Toufiq M Siraj and Md. Shofiqul Alam address the problems (and prospects) of apartment/real-

estate development in Dhaka city. The subject is important to housing scholarship, as well as critical to the management of urban development.

The discussion of the essay goes through the high land value in Dhaka and the work of private developers for profit motive. Dhaka has experienced an unprecedented increase in land value since the 1970s. "While between 1969 and 1979 the cost of living in Dhaka has increased 4 fold, the price of high class residential land has increased 25 to 35 fold" (p 475). Eleven causes of high land value have been identified. Most important among those include : (a) lack of investment opportunity in other sectors of the economy; (b) rapid urbanization and consequent scarcity of urban land; (c) uncontrolled land market; (d) inflow of remittances by Bangladeshis abroad, particularly from the Middle-East; and (e) the land speculation motive of real-estate developers.

An equally impressive description of the problems of apartment development in Dhaka is provided in the second half of the paper. The popular criticisms that go against the apartment development are : that the flats are expensive, but lack in certain services, and sometimes prevent social contacts. The authors' counter argument is that the critical point is not so much of the microeconomics of the construction firms responsible for the apartment development, but the extent to which the metropolitan region is planned and its building activities are properly regulated. We appreciate the authors' perceptions, particularly, their emphasis on planning. Urban planning in Dhaka is less effective. Further research is needed on the possible linkages between development control systems and apartment development for efficient land use in the Dhaka metropolitan region.

The section focuses on micro-and macro-level issues of urban housing and development. It critically examines the pattern of demographic, economic, and land-use change in Dhaka city by focusing on urbanization and migration, and by investigating the linkages between these processes. Description of individual urban problems—housing, employment, transportation, and environment—are adequate and often useful, but some of the authors' approaches to resolve these problems are simplistic. They resort to the existing mechanisms available to resolve the problems; only a few new perspectives emerge from their discussions.

Although the title of the section is : "Contemporary and Future Issues," only one or two essays touched on the future of urbanization in

Dhaka. During recent years there has been considerable growth in the study of economic forecasting and social change. The study of future urbanization is a vital ingredient in the urban planning process – for that matter in any economic, physical, and social planning process. More explicit treatment of forecasting the city's growth and designing its viable future are therefore required.

Instead of presenting a broad overview of land use change and housing conditions, the researchers could have brought their analytical resources to some of the key, unexplored areas in urban spatial structure—such as inter—and intra—metropolitan development—under the current phase of adjustment. The researchers could have examined the evidence available about housing demand elasticities, production possibilities, and conditions of factor supply for various housing sub-markets, and under several alternative scenarios. In that matrix of analysis, the supply of urban land to the housing industry could also be determined.

The researchers could also explore the roles of government and national development agencies, and foreign assistance and donor agencies in the process of infrastructural development of the city. What are the endogenous distortions of urban development due to market failure? What are the policy induced distortions due to the Government's failure? And, what are the external distortions due to the influence of donor agencies, like the World Bank. Can a bank-international or local-really afford to work towards the goal of a universal entitlement of affordable housing and other basic minimums of urban living? The answers are sobering and complex for academics and policy makers; particularly, for those advocating radical (if not reckless) moves towards liberalization. There are several other urban development issues, related to institutions and politics, which need to be addressed as well. The policy environment cannot be explained without reference to political factor.

The comment suggests that only a great deal of analytically oriented research of interdisciplinary nature, with the help of advanced state of the arts, will adequately serve the purpose.

#### **AN APOLOGY BEFORE CONCLUSION**

The study of "Urbanization and Urban History in Bangladesh" – in the broader context of the urban history of the Indian subcontinent – is

the theme of Part D. We have not reviewed this part. This is not because it is not worth reviewing; precisely the opposite is true. All the four essays are so well written that they should have been the first section of the book, allowing the reader a better picture of what lay ahead. They deal with such broad areas – as K M Karim's problems of writing urban history of Dhaka, M M Islam's urban centers in Mughal India, N Gupta's urbanization in the nineteenth century India, and M A Mohit's conceptual framework of Dhaka's urbanization in terms of spatial distribution of power and authority – that each of these will be the subject of a single review. The limitation of space provided does not allow us to go into enough detail about the subject.

We now wish to provide some evaluation of the book – in particular, to identify topics that are given insufficient attention, as we point out directions for research. It cannot be said that the selection of essays and their review, provided in the preceding sections, are unbiased. Certainly the reviewers' perspectives have been involved, and their limited competence to review the diverse topics may be reflected. Despite this, we trust that our critical comments suggest a more rounded view of urban studies in Dhaka – its past, present, and future. Our criticism begins with the beginning of the book : the Editor's Introduction.

1. An introduction is a useful place for an editor to outline his approach and to explain the contents of this volume. We expected the volume to begin with an excellent overview and summary of the book, an introduction to each part, providing a backdrop for the discussion it follows, and concluding with a chapter on how and why the roles of Dhaka and the status of urban studies may be inter-changed. This would have provided a secure foundation for future research. Instead, the editor provides a short sketch of Dhaka, reviewing a few articles. One wonders whether it is coherent enough to produce a viable introduction for the book. However, there is evidence of good editorial control in shaping and integrating what otherwise could easily have disintegrated into a series of loose essays. Nevertheless, there is a lack of process of dynamic integration between and among the essays. This is a perennial problem of the edited volume, particularly if it is a collection of seminar proceedings. If one judges each essay in the light of its purpose and integral unity, this book comes off rather well.

Sharif Uddin Ahmed is a competent scholar of Urban History and committed researcher in Social Sciences. His book : *Dacca : A Study in*

*Urban History and Development* (London, Curzon Press : 1986) is a highly informative and comprehensive treatment of the mid-nineteenth century Dhaka.<sup>9</sup> Ahmed's long 32 page paper, included in this volume, is also truly scholarly. One can look forward fairly to an extensive introduction of Dhaka from him, with a vision of urban studies and development. In his introduction, the editor could have seized the opportunity to emphasize : (a) the emergence of "Urban History" as a distinctive area of teaching and research;<sup>10</sup> (b) the historical approach to urban-ecological phenomena which offers the best hope for sound management of the metropolitan growth; (c) the interaction of urban history and social sciences, and finally; (d) the 'sense of history' in the national urban planning. But Ahmed missed that opportunity.

2. The writing of urban history in Bangladesh is in a state of infancy. As a result of this, scholars who seek to understand the contemporary or historical character of Dhaka (and other towns of Bangladesh) often find themselves grappling with some elementary conceptual problems. Consider, for instance, the definition of the terms "cities", "urban history," and "urban society" or "urbanism in history." What precisely do we mean by these terms? Obviously no great progress can be made in our comprehension of urban society contemporaneously or in historical perspective, unless such concepts are identified. Yet, we turn in vain to the book – and other literature on Bangladesh – for any measure of clarity.

3. Perhaps a more fundamental limitation of most of the essays is their atheoretical approach to urban study. Although this book does not presume to arrive at an integrated theory of urban history in Bangladesh, nevertheless an effort could have been made to put their dispersed findings and ideas into a meaningful theoretic framework. And the theory, methodology, and analysis could have been presented in a more integrated way. In that case, many of the conclusions reached in their essays could offer good working hypotheses for the study of other cities in Bangladesh, and in other South Asian societies. Attention has been drawn elsewhere by Smailes (1966, Ch 4) to the spatial configuration of South Asian cities as expressions of imperial expansion and the intrusion of conquerors, who seek security in urban concentration, and whose urban character also reflects their roles as administrators, traders, educators, or leisure class in contradistinction to an indigenous peasantry.

To raise the initial question of the nature of relations between the theory of pre-industrial built environments and the process of urban development in Dhaka, we have provided an outline of the theories of pre-industrial cities (section 3). It is not our goal in this essay to provide a comprehensive treatment on this aspect, but a number of insights into the spatial form and social process have been reflected in our discussion.

From the perspective of spatial form, there is a strong element of 'environmental determinism' in the historical process of urban development in Dhaka. The city "stretches from the bank of Buriganga in the south towards the north, particularly to the Tongi river. The stretch of high land is flanked on either side by low-lying marshes and old river beds. Often these low-lying swamps creep right into the heart of the high areas . . . and, as a result, the expansion of the city has not been easy and without difficulty" (p 44). The spatial structure of Dhaka city, in addition to natural and topographical features, is also a function of many other factors, including the transportation systems, housing and resettlement policies of the government, and the urban land market and peri-urban development (Siddiqui *et al.* : 1990 : 9).

In regards to the social process, it has become increasingly apparent from our discussion that the principal components of medieval cities in the F Braudel model – the concentration of men and houses, division of labor, town markets, and existence of suburbs – do account for the pattern of urbanization in the early history of Dhaka. G Sjoberg's theory has also been understood in this essay as an attempt to provide a foundation for the urban social development; which is grounded in reason of pre-industrial economy. We recognize the significance and basic application of Sjoberg's model in the context of Dhaka city, but it does not seem to apply entirely. Largely because, the Mughal Dhaka was not a "pre-industrial" city in the Sjobergian sense of term.

Most of the important elements in Sjoberg's model of pre-industrial cities – pre-eminence of central area, political and religious power of the elites that dominates the sky-line, segregation of communities (along occupational, ethnic, and kinship line), haphazard organization of land use, and space put into multi-purpose use – found common in Dhaka. (See pages 65 and 402.) In conformity with the Sjoberg's model, the elites lived close to the rulers in well-built pucca houses in the inner part of the city, but so did the laboring class and service people, occupying the mud-huts in the inner-city squalor; not all of them moved to the urban

periphery. The traditional elites needed the services of menial laborers, and the pre-automobile transportation system did not make it efficient for the menials to live in a distant periphery.

More importantly, the history of urban growth in Dhaka contradicts Sjoberg's model from the idea of its modest population growth and small city size. The main period of growth of the Mughal Dhaka (around 1700 AD) witnessed a built-up area of 50 square miles and its population rose to about 1 million (p 389). Most of the growth was due to the service sector, followed by commercial and small scale manufacturing sectors. The city, along with its suburbs and relay towns, became an entrepot for the whole of Southeast Asia (p 389).

It would be useful to note that many possible aspects of a theoretical proposition such as Sjoberg's do not always appear in combination and do not always go hand in hand with the development of a particular kind of urban society. The entire set of elements combine only in specific circumstances. For that reason, it is necessary to understand what Sjoberg *signifies* rather than what he writes about 'pre-industrial cities.'

4. Inadequate attention has been given to the British period. The inclusion of a more comprehensive study of British colonial cities in general and Dhaka as a case study would have been both conceptually logical and methodologically desirable. It responds to both the logic of accumulation and of social struggles. In the case of Bangladesh, it provides an entry point to the study of urbanization under the short-lived Pakistani neocolonial rule (1947-1971). The two colonial periods are nevertheless important stages for today's urban development in Dhaka.

The historical experience of colonialism and its interpretation in terms of social process and spatial form have been undermined in the literature, including this book. To explain this phenomenon, several authors use their nationalist feelings, instead of scientific concepts and analytical methods of colonial urbanization.

The authors too often attack a straw enemy (the British rule) and demolish caricatures rather than the real demons. They attribute a vision of wealth and prosperity during the Mughal rule in harmony and partnership with people, which is far from the data and analysis they present. Even an author like R C Majumdar, the doyen of the History of Bengal, had been trapped by this incomplete history. These kinds of



analytical pitfalls are ubiquitous in the minds of senior and young academics and professionals alike, e.g. Ahmed (1989), Zahiruddin, Imamuddin, and Khan (1990). It symbolizes an obsession with the more distant past (Mughal rule), not the recent past (British and Pakistani rules), and a nostalgia for a way of life which has now disappeared, but which is fondly imagined to have existed within the Mughal style of living. This is recalled in romanticized forms by countless museums and heritage pieces.

All in all, we completely agree with those authors' point of view that the British exploited Bengal; its agriculture and the native craft and arts decayed. It is commonly taken for granted that because of the exploitation by the British, Bengal's handloom-cloth industry ceased to exist. However, one will find that the textile revolution took place during that period in England. So, even if the British had not exploited Bengal's hand-loom industry, the industry would have deteriorated, if not collapsed, in the face of competition from manufactured British imports (Simons : 1985, Harnetty : 1991).<sup>11</sup>

In this sort of enterprise it has become necessary to move beyond simple condemnation of British and Pakistani exploitations and imperialism, and to examine in detail the means by which imperial control was enabled, accorded legitimacy, and how its authority was perpetuated – not only from the stand point of London and Islamabad, but also in the minds of the subjects of Dhaka. This may set forth the objective outline of future studies in the urban history of Dhaka and Bangladesh.

Despite the exploitation, there is no denying the fact that the British introduced, among other things, a new system of knowledge and helped develop the foundation of modern science and technology in the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh. They built railroads and highways, and established colleges and universities that produced not only clerks to work in the British East India Company – as usually blamed – but also trained lawyers, engineers, doctors, fine academics, and senior administrators for the society at large. For posterity, the advanced education, infrastructure, and modernization have assumed an increasing importance in the economies of core cities, including Dhaka.<sup>12</sup>

5. Next, we examine the methodological perspective. A city is not typically a unit by itself, separated from the surrounding countryside

and villages, but cultural and administrative center of a large district that includes villages, farms, and other small towns. There is a debate whether the production of an agricultural surplus enabled pre-industrial cities to develop, or whether the natural growth of trade between complementary regions allowed accumulation of surpluses and provided opportunities for cities to grow on their own. But there is little doubt that there is a rural - urban continuum in the process of urban development (Hasnath : 1974). In this volume, however, most of the authors studied Dhaka's past, present, and future, concentrating on the built-up area of Dhaka city alone. This common method of holistic study of a single city, based on the enormous assumption of self-sufficiency, has serious limitations. The city of Dhaka (with all probability) was not self-contained economic and socio-cultural whole (like a primitive tribal village) and could not be studied by itself. It should be studied in terms of its inter-regional linkages. For operational reasons, Dhaka may be regarded as an independent unit.

Within the built-up area of Dhaka, the authors primarily examine the individual buildings and complexes as pieces of inanimate objects, not as instrumental elements of political discourse. The field of urban history is currently sustaining remarkable change, much of it along new avenues of inquiry in anthropology, global system theory, and subaltern studies. Unfortunately, we do not find any such effort in this book, although the editor has allowed an acceptable level of diversity to exist.

6. Finally, there is the chronological gap. While it is true that it was the Mughals who developed Dhaka, it is also possible that they did not start from scratch. The Mughals, having court historians and being prolific builders, indeed left behind a wealth of historic information to be read and to be analyzed, and perhaps that is being done ardently by present day researchers. Extensive studies have been conducted on the pre-Mughal situation in Bangladesh, but in terms of location, the connection has not been credibly established with Dhaka. A basic question one might ask is why the location was important to the *Mughal Subeders*. Perhaps the answer to this question demands more rigorous research into the pre-Mughal situation rather than accepting the simple answer of the 'strategic military importance' of Dhaka.

Two other arguments which historians have examined extensively are : (a) The location of Dhaka on the bank of the river Buriganga, which provided the city with an abundant supply of water and an easy means of

communications with other parts of the region;<sup>13</sup> and (b) The capital was in the central part of the state, *Suba Bangla*. Fundamental to the Central Place Theory is the assumption that goods and services are produced at a few necessarily central points in order to be consumed at many scatter points. It is trade, rather than the result of urbanization, which may have been one of the major establishing factors in the rise of Dhaka.

The above points are nothing more than inconclusive statements. The groundwork for future archaeologists and historians to work in the pre-Muslim era of Dhaka has been done by the scholars who participated in the symposium. More appropriate methods and tools for intensive study on this point are needed. If that could be done, then not only would new concepts of Dhaka city emerge, but also a sense of identity would develop.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Having said all these things, it should be mentioned in conclusion that the authors have produced a major contribution to the urban history and development literature of Bangladesh. The overall standard of the book is satisfactory, and its publisher, the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, members of the board of editors and the editor, Sharif Uddin Ahmed, deserve special mention.

We would also like to mention two other interesting aspects of the book. First, the papers we particularly enjoyed are those, paradoxically, that go beyond Dhaka in their vision and arguments. Examples are : M Islam's 'Urban Centers in Mughal India' and N Gupta's 'Urbanization in South Asia'. Second, those who add substantially new papers to the literature, integrating recent works on the subject, are relatively young scholars, like A H Imamuddin, M A Mohit, Nizamuddin Ahmed, Perween Hasan, and A Q M Mahub. They are also more interdisciplinary in their approach and go deeper into the issues at hand. They write with clarity of thought and economy of technique.

In its regular publishing venture, the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (ASB) has picked up a worthy project to support. Aside from proof reading of the tables, figures, and bibliography, where there are a few misprints, the production quality of the book, produced by the BRAC Printers, Dhaka is superb. The maps and photographs are excellent and the reprints of paintings in particular will reveal an exciting aspect of this volume. The frequent inclusion of maps, plans, elevations, and

photographs, previously rare in large scale interpretive works such as this, is another innovative aspect of the book.

While there will be many differences of opinions arising out of the content and context of this volume, it represents the type and level of analysis of Dhaka's past and present (if not future), that speaks eloquently to the thoughtful reader about the importance of the interdisciplinary character of urban history and development studies. As such, the book is destined to influence the course of urban studies in Bangladesh in this creative tradition for decades to come. There is little academic mileage to be gained from yet another uni-disciplinary approach to urban studies. We can use the lesson from the experience of this impressive book. Although this gives ground for optimism, we would be wise to find links between urban studies and other disciplines with judgment and prudence.

#### NOTES

1. We assume a generally accepted definition of Urban Planning which is "a social and governmental process whereby the spatial organization and content of cities are evaluated, designed, and regulated. Urban planning is more than the development of streets, residential areas, parks, utilities, and public buildings. It also involves less obvious but critical decisions related to underlying social and economic well-being of the cities" (Witzling : 1991 : 806). We do not presume that urban planning will solve all the problems of urban community, or that planning by itself is adequate to preserve our national heritage and ensure optimal allocation of resources. Without creative planning, however, we will not begin to achieve a livable environment for our community.
2. The analysis presented in this paper draws extensively on her monograph : Khanum (1982). Some of the empirical findings briefly referred to here have been discussed in greater detail in that work and also in a collection of papers (Ballhatchet and Harrisson : 1981).
3. A similar observation is made by S Ahmed (1986). "Although road communications with the city were still appalling, but Dhaka had excellent river links which from the 1860s were used by regular steamer services, themselves an adjunct to the Eastern Bengal (Narayanganj-Dhaka-Mymensing) State Railway" (p 98). Neither Akhtar nor Ahmed examined the effect of improved transportation on the development of rural hinterland in Bangladesh. In fact, it required the countryside to produce goods which were to be exported on unfavorable terms of trade.

4. The unbelievable opulence – wealth and power – were extravagantly displayed in the splendor of court life. The rulers lived in luxurious places decorated with ebony and teak, where they surrounded themselves with hundreds of servants, courtiers, and bejeweled dancers. The memory of their lavish ways of life still persists in the imagination of our authors, unfortunately.
5. In a recent monograph, Islam (1990) analyses the trends in fringe land development in the Dhaka Metropolitan Region (DMR) more elaborately. The monograph provides a clear understanding of the current process of land and housing development in the fringe with particular reference to the urban poor's access to land and housing (p 14). The eastern fringe of the DMR – a zone of intense land use conversion – is selected for a case study. Islam views public policy responsible for this process of development as both inefficient and inequitable.
6. Many Bangladeshis have begun to question the largeness of Dhaka city as a feasible form of human settlement. Given the growth of population and expansion of the urban economy, perhaps it is inevitable that some form of an Asian scale metropolis would emerge in Bangladesh. Amin views rapid urbanization of Dhaka as a positive feature that should be encouraged. He also suggests to capitalize on this growth potential in favour of further industrializing Dhaka (Bangladesh).
7. For a more technical analysis of sites and services projects with least-cost lay-out and cross-subsidy method in the context of Dhaka, see (Hasnath : 1982).
8. His motivation for expecting gains from this measure was perhaps his experience of 'selling the welfare state' back home in Britain. Since 1980 the housing policy in the UK has been dominated by the privatization of public housing in general and the sale of council houses in particular. Apparently the policy achieved a limited success within the Thatcher Government's wider social, economic, and privatization policies (Forrest and Murie : 1991). The case of Bangladesh is a different ball game. For an illuminating discussion on the transfer of assets through disinvestment in Bangladesh, see Abdullah (1991 : 20-51).
9. In reviewing the book, Professor Howard Spodek (1989) comments : "This well-researched, workmanlike history will be very useful to scholars interested specifically in Dacca or seeking case studies from which to construct their own more comparative assessment of urbanization in nineteenth century British India".
10. For contemplation about how well urban history might serve as the focus on an entire liberal arts and social science curriculum, see Warner, Jr. (1991).

11. "In the predominantly agricultural economy of Bengal with rice as its staple crop, introduction of machinery for dehusking rice was important development. The enterprise, using new techniques, and competing with the previous traditional system of hand-pounding rice had brought about significant changes in rural Bengal, comparable to those produced by the introduction of cotton yarn and twist and the importation of machine-made cloths in Bengal in early decades of the nineteenth century. As the new industry, rice-milling grew, the existing needs of dehusking rice gradually fell into disuse. The rice mill, therefore, reduced a considerable employment opportunity requiring little skill and low cost inputs" (Sarkar : 1989). See also BRAC Study on Dheky (hand-pounding/rice-milling).
12. Of late, more balanced comments about the British rule in Bangladesh, from the perspective of cultural continuity, appear in print, although infrequently. For example, referring to the comments of Nazimuddin Ahmed (former Curator, Dhaka Archives) on the buildings of the British Raj, Ali (1991) writes : "(T)hey (the British) are blamed for everything that is not right. They are accused for desecrating the very cultural fabric of the society and disrupting the cultural continuity in the field of Art and Architecture. This probably is not true. Walter Holzhausen, a German who spent quite sometime in Bangladesh puts it rightly by saying 'Bangladeshis is of this generation may still find it difficult to appreciate fully the cultural legacy of the British period. Insufficient time has passed - historical distance is too short. But future generations no doubt will think differently, . . . Just as we Europeans today see Romans, so the Bangladeshi will one day appreciate the legacy of the British; a legacy they need not be ashamed of for despite the impact of colonialism, Bangladesh should take pride that it has retained their treasured traditional values and culture. And Britain was after all a great progressive force whose influence will continue to be felt throughout the Indian subcontinent as it has in many other parts of world and will be felt in the centuries to come" (p 13).
13. Akbar's own capital city, Fatehpur Sikri, for all its strength and beauty, stood uninhabited for three hundred years, because it lacked an adequate supply of water (Norton : 1984 : 37).

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