

Everyday Conservation: Exploring Informal Practices in the Katra Buildings of Old Dhaka, Dhaka

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Abstract:

This research examines the day-to-day conservation practice undertaken by the residents and users in and around Katra buildings in Old Dhaka, Bangladesh. As Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka is undergoing rapid urbanisation, which is transforming its infrastructure, neighbourhoods, and socio-economic dynamics. Consequently, Mughal-era architectural heritage, including Katra buildings—Bara Katra and Chota Katra, are increasingly threatened by urban expansion, industrialisation, and modernisation. Both sites are serving a living heritage, having everyday repair, maintenance, and spatial adaptation, without any formal institutional support or intervention. Drawing on a case study approach, this research investigates the everyday preserving, protection and management strategy by the residents and users in the sites. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research incorporates observation, interviews with the residents, property owners, and government officials, and examines the architectural changes, changes in the occupancy pattern, and socio-economic displacement and transformation of the sites. While these practices often challenge conventional notions of architectural conservation, they reflect a localised understanding of heritage that prioritises utility, safety, and cultural continuity. The outcome of the research critically analyses these informal strategies to illuminate the limitations of formal conservation policies and to propose a more inclusive, context-sensitive framework for heritage management.

Keywords:

Katra buildings, Conservation practice, everyday practice, community involvement.