

KASHINATH BHABAN: A UNIQUE BUILDING OF PANAM NAGAR BEARS TESTIMONY TO COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The rich cultural heritage and cultural identity of Bangladesh is vividly expressed and traversed as a symbol of power, dignity and artistry during the Colonial period. In this research study, the authors selected a unique building of Panam Nagar, is an old settlement as a part of Sonargaon area of Bangladesh, named “Kashinath Bhaban” which bears testimony to the style and design of Colonial architecture in Bengal. It is undoubted that the building Kashinath Bhaban plays an important role to represent our cultural heritage or our glorious past. This study concentrates on the building Kashinath Bhaban of Panam which have precious and research worthy documentation or information. The overall research study conducted here is focused on the demonstration of the building’s plan layout, elevations, sectional details, structure as well as construction materials, decoration and ornamentation for representing own belief and cultural exclusivity to the architecture.

KEYWORDS: Colonial Architecture, Panam Nagar, Kashinath Bhaban, Structure, Construction Materials, Decoration & Ornamentation

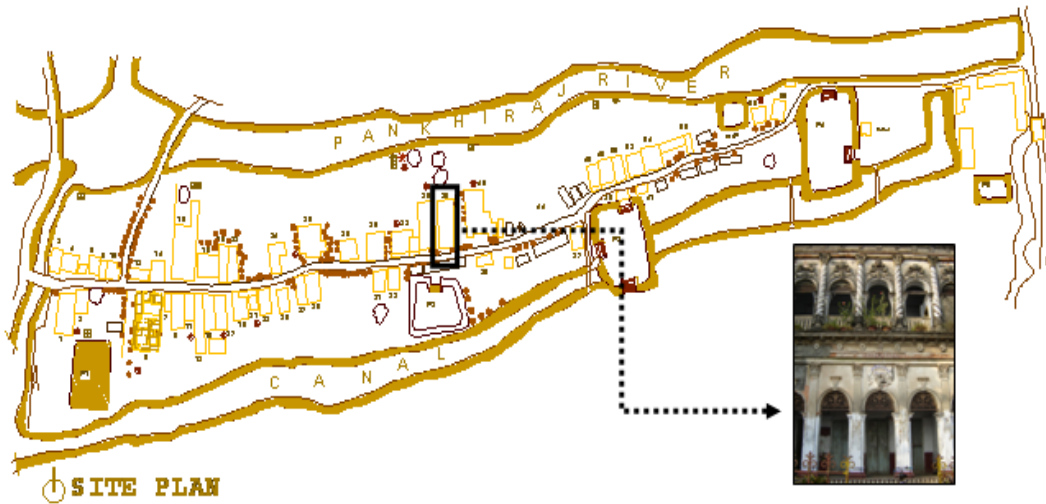
INTRODUCTION

In Colonial period the Colonial architecture represents a different character to that era. The British introduced new elements from the western architecture and merged those elements with the traditional provincial style of the Mughals. Thereby, a new hybrid style emerged known as the Indo-British or the Colonial style (Mowla and Reza 2000: 31-58). On the other way, the Colonial architecture meaning a combination style of European and indigenous architecture which is reflected more in the secular civic buildings than those of the buildings of religious character. The Colonial architecture is characterized by these structure-types (Hussain, 2007).

An important feature of Colonial architecture in Bengal is the expansive use of various structure- types hitherto unknown. Though this Colonial architectural style was developed by the British-Raj, the follow up was made by the local Zamindars and the Kolkata based merchants, known as *baniyas* (Hussain, 2007). Because of it’s fanciful and romantic character the style even persists today in the minds of those who love history and tradition.

In Bengal, one of the most significant examples of Colonial architecture named Panam Nagar, a residential quarter of Sonargaon, represents the Indo-British architectural style with improvised architectural ornamental features. They are extraordinary in a sense that nowhere in the whole of Bengal such a large assemblage of residential buildings exists (Rahman, 2007). Panam Nagar is the ancient city which is a part of Sonargaon area. Sonargaon was the administrative center of medieval Muslim rulers of East Bengal from early thirteenth century and today the area falls under Narayanganj district, Bangladesh.

Panam Nagar was established in the late 19th century (Figure 1) as a trading center of cotton fabrics during British rule. Hindu cloth merchants built their residential houses following Colonial architectural style with inspiration derived



(Source: Field Study, 2006)

Figure 2: The Existing Master Plan of Panam Nagar Showing the Sixty Buildings and the Building No.-38, Named “Kashinath Bhaban”

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study of this research paper is to explore and represent the unique building “Kashinath Bhaban” of Panam Nagar, which belongs to Colonial architecture in Bengal, along with its plan layouts, structure as well as construction materials, decorations and ornamentation details. The objective also includes finding out the influences and importance of the structure and construction materials, decorations and ornamentations of that historical building of Panam Nagar which is an evidence of our glorious past.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure the quality of the research study and compiled proper presentation as well as documentation the authors conducted a field survey (in 2006) on the selected building no.-38 named “Kashinath Bhaban” of Panam Nagar, a locality of historical Sonargaon. This selected unique building Kashinath Bhaban have precious and research worthy structure, construction materials, decoration and ornamentation details which represent our cultural heritage. Several field visits have been conducted by the authors (in 2006) to collect or examine the above details. An adequate number of photographs of that unique building have been taken by the author for the study. Some of these have been presented in this paper. For the presentation as well as documentation on that building the author has to draw necessary drawings with details regarding the buildings on the basis of field study (in 2006). Also these drawings with details have been presented in this paper. Some other sources e.g. books, journal articles, encyclopedias, photographs have been consulted for this study.

THE BUILDING “KASHINATH BHABAN”

In Panam Nagar locality the building “Kashinath Bhaban” is numbered as building no.-38. This building is surviving on the north side of the Panam Street. The facade of this unique live monument is perfectly expressed the desire for simplicity among ornately decorated work. Some important aspects of this unique building are described bellow with its structural, construction materials, decoration and ornamentation details.

Building Typology

This is a courtyard type building; where on end of the court is lined with the boundary wall (Figure 3). The concept of this type building is derived from centering on a courtyard. It means that the building activities and layout are

arranged around the courtyard. The courtyard (Figure 3) of this building is enclosed, paved and open to sky. And the courtyard is surrounded by verandah on three sides having arched openings. The surrounding verandah acts as corridor and gives access to individual rooms. The enclosing walls of the courtyard are extensively delineated with arched openings and pilasters.



(Source: Field Study, 2006)

Figure 3: The Courtyard of Kashinath Bhaban

Building Layout

This two storied building is rectangular in shape and elongated in the north-south direction. The depth is greater than frontage in this house. The width and length of the building facade is approximately 10.7m and 37m respectively (Figure 8.a,b,c). Facades of this building are axially balanced with flanking five openings at each level (Figure 4).

The floor levels are expressed externally with projected cornice (Figure 5). Parapets followed a uniform design and heights with vertical slit openings, rounded at the top and bottom (Figure 6). Raised plinth and verandah created the transitional space between the inner house and the street which creates the entry of the building (Figure 7).



(Source: Field Study, 2006)

Figure 4: The Front Facade or Street Side View of Kashinath Bhaban Showing Flanking Five Openings at Each Level



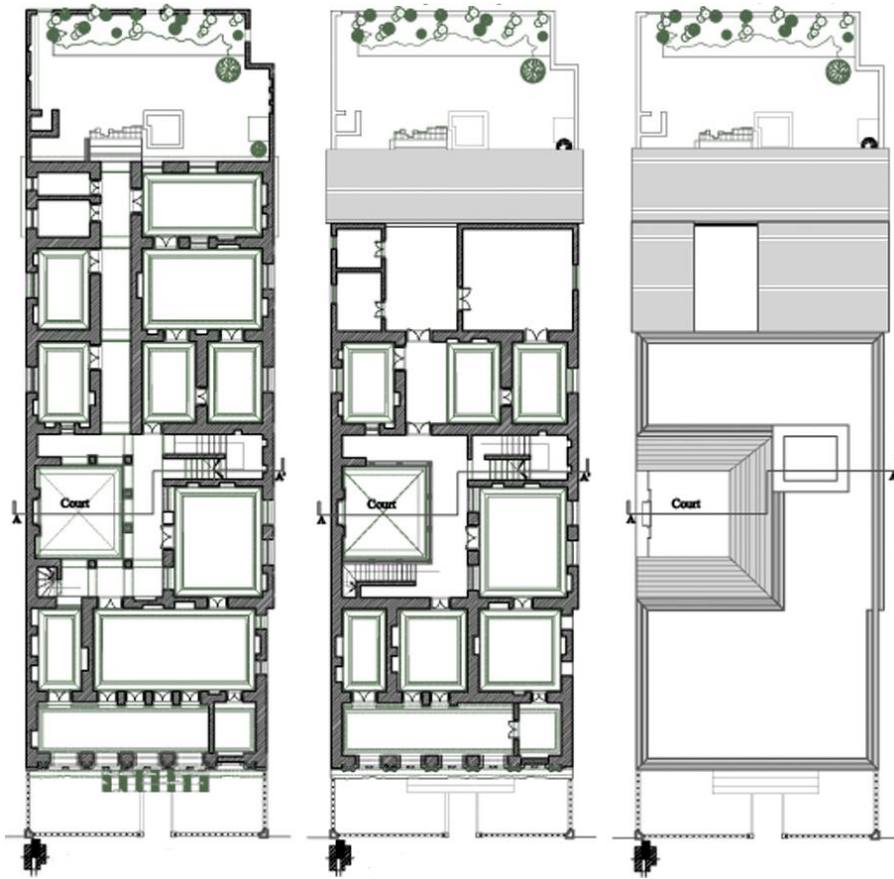
(Source: Field Study, 2006)
**Figure 5: Projected Cornice
 Expressed Floor Levels**



**Figure 6: Parapet Detailing
 in the Roof**



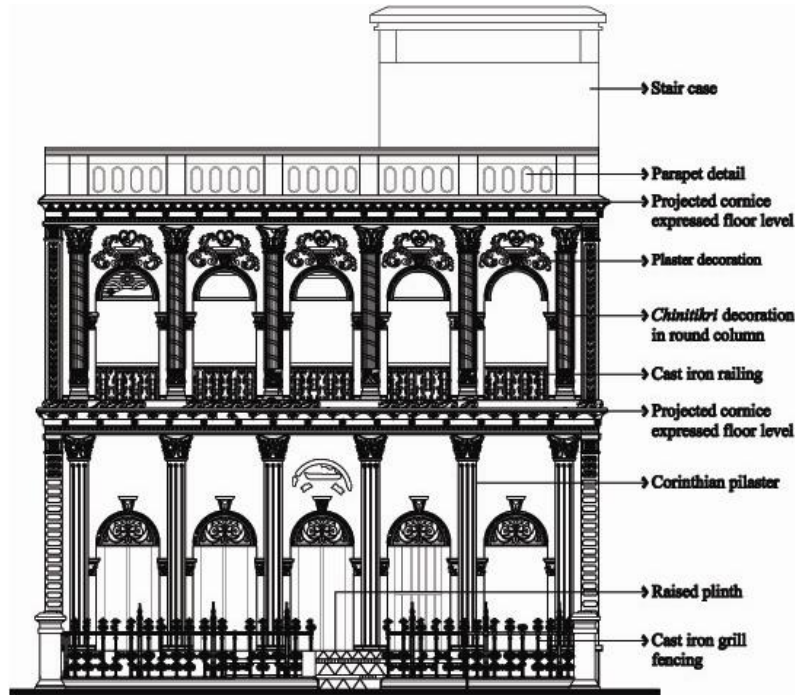
(Source: Field Study, 2006).
**Figure 7: Raised Plinth and
 Verandah Expressed Entry**



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

**Figure 8: a) Ground Floor Plan, b) First Floor Plan, c) Roof Plan of Kashinath Bhaban
 Expressed Building Layout with Building Structural Details**

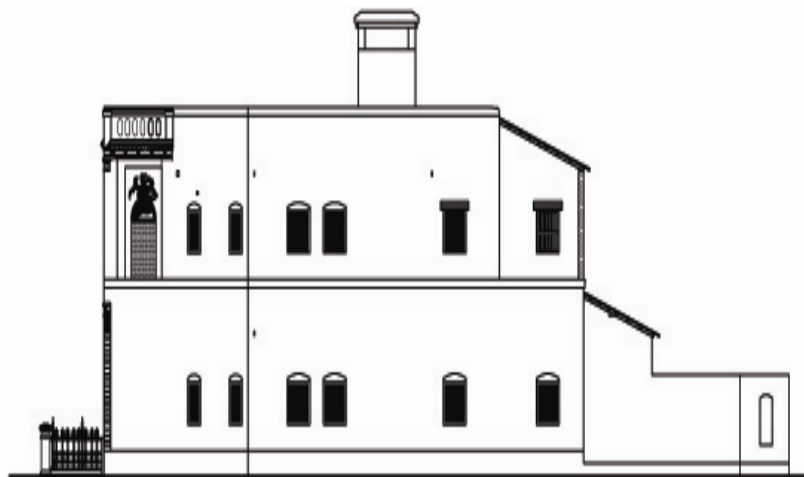
The building facades composition were extraordinary with Colonial architectural details. Here the four side elevations of the Kashinath Bhaban (according to field study in 2006) are given bellow in figure 09, 10, 11 & 12.



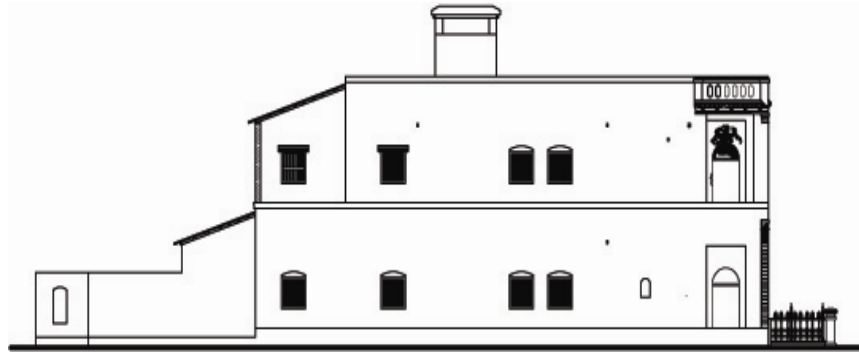
(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)
Figure 9: Front (South) Side Elevation with Detailing of Kashinath Bhaban



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)
Figure 10: Back (North) Side Elevation of Kashinath Bhaban



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)
Figure 11: East Side Elevation of Kashinath Bhaban



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 12: West Side Elevation of Kashinath Bhaban

Building Structure and Construction Materials

The primary construction material was brick, have been modeled in specific shape according to the need of surface articulation. Here bricks are plastered for facade delineation. The thickness of brick masonry walls vary between 50 to 70 cm (Figure 8.a,b,c) & (Figure 15). Lime mortar has been used primarily for bonding. On the top of upper level verandah, corrugated sheets were placed sloping down towards the courtyard (Figure 3) & (Figure 15). Plaster decoration have been extensively applied in facade design and interior decoration (Figure 13). False wooden doors and windows shaped with plaster were also applied as a common decorative element. Cast iron brackets, ventilators, window grills, railings, balusters had been extensively used. Ornamentation was made by lime *surki* and plaster (Figure 13). Decoration with broken china locally known as *chinitikri* work has been done in the columns of the front facade (Figure 13). Decorative colored broken tiles were used on the step riser in front of the entrance verandah (Figure 14). Structural details will be clear by a section through inner courtyard and stair case (Figure 15).



(Source: Field Study, 2006)

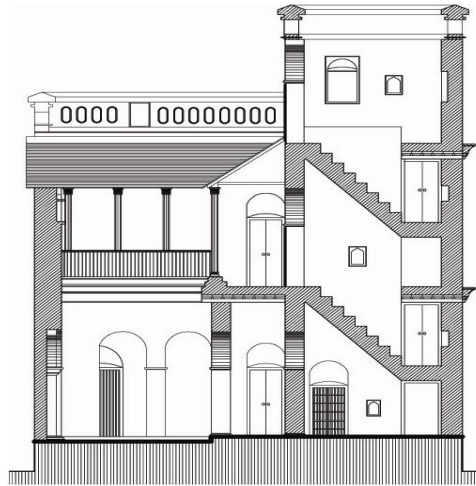
Figure 13: Plaster Decoration and *Chinitikri* Work of the Front Façade



(Source: Field Study, 2006)



Figure 14: Use of Decorative Colored Broken Tiles on the Step Riser

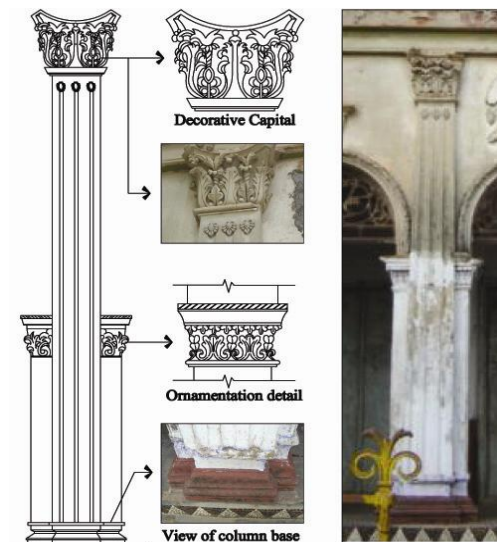


(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 15: Section – AA’ through the Inner Courtyard and Stair Case

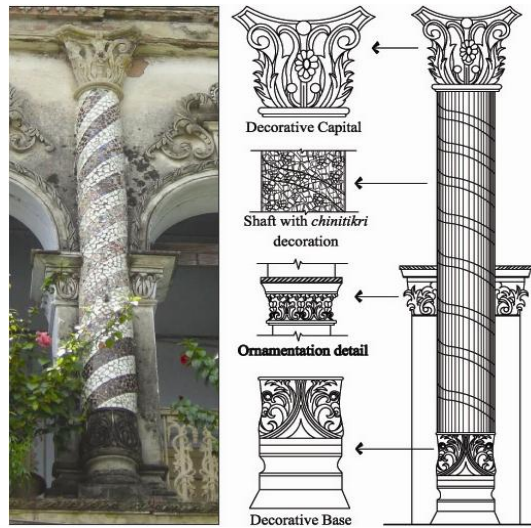
Building Decoration and Ornamentation

The ornamentation of the “Kashinath Bhaban” as an example of the colonial building of Panam Nagar is unique through combination of different types of decorative form and motifs from various sources. The ornamentations of this building are expressed through decorations on plinth and floor projection, door and window openings, pillars and pilasters, space between the arch and the roof, cornice and parapet, railing, bracket, building edge and ceilings etc. The plinth of this building is fairly raised from the Panam Street which has neat cement finish (Figure 14). Decorative colored broken tiles were used on the step riser in front of the entrance verandah or raised plinth (Figure 14). In this building the design of the entrance formed the focus of the facade composition. The front facade of this building was articulated by round columns with Corinthian capital in the upper floor (Figure 17) and Corinthian pilaster in the ground floor (Figure 16), semi-circular arches with pediments and various other decorative elements. The upper floor columns in the exterior facade have *chinitikri* decoration consisting of dark color spiral band in a distinct pattern (Figure 17). For the support of the upper floor verandah roof structure, where corrugated sheets were placed sloping down towards the courtyard, the painted cast iron columns are used (Figure 18). The pillars, columns and pilasters are all designed with well-defined base, shaft and capital with tremendous decorative elements (Figure 16, 17 & 18). Corner of the building is emphasized with decorative floral treatment (Figure 19 & 20).



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 16: Corinthian Pilaster (Ground Floor) with Decorative Capital, Shaft & Base



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 17: Round Columns with Corinthian Capital (Upper Floor) with Decorative Capital, Shaft & Base

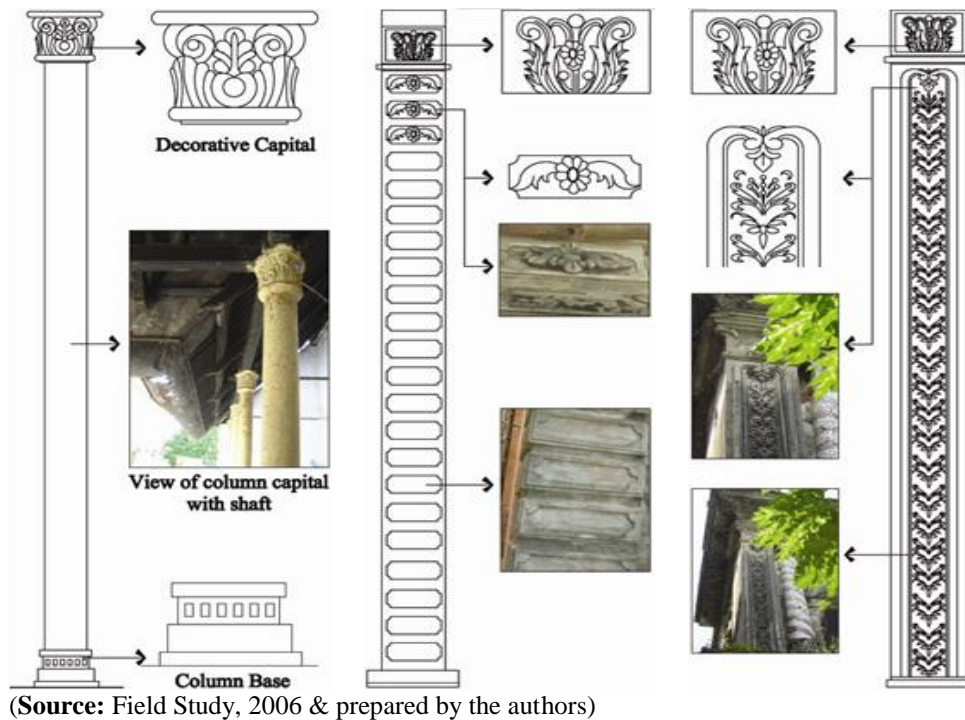
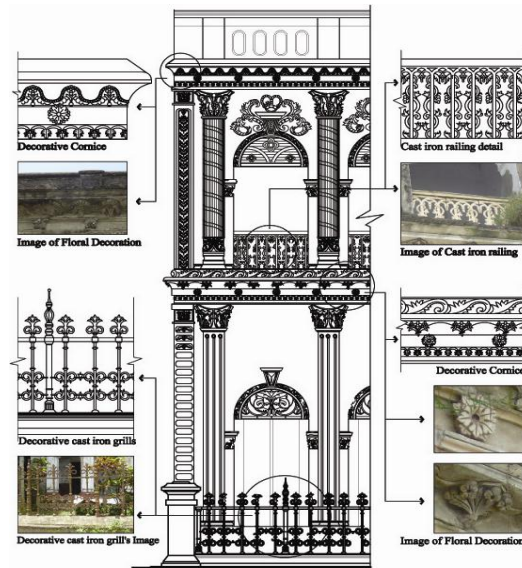


Figure 18: Use of Painted Cast Iron Column in the Upper Floor Verandah with Decorative Capital, Simple Shaft and Base

Figure 19: Corner of the Building with Floral Decoration

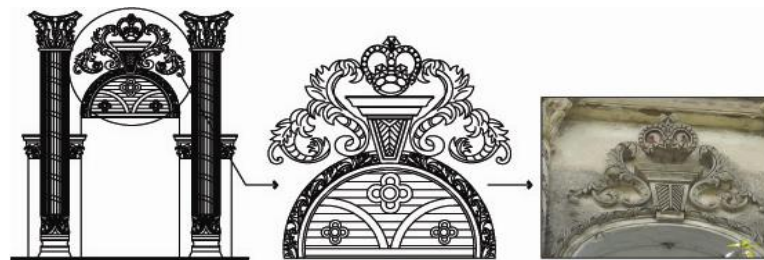
Figure 20: Corner of the Building with Floral Decoration

Doorways are regular and simple. The windows are designed with semi-circular arches enclosed in a rectangular or square frame. Closed window, blind arches and shuttered doors create a noticeable tendency to illusionist representations. Regional floral pattern are used exclusively at the apex of the semi-circular arches to express a local identity (Figure 21, 22 & 23). The use of cast iron decoration in the arch opening on both floors is derived from English neoclassical buildings. In this building cast iron brackets, ventilators, window grills, railings, balusters had been extensively used with excellent floral decoration (Figure 21, 22 & 23). Parapets followed a uniform design and heights with vertical slit openings, rounded at the top and bottom (Figure 24). True to the style, railings, key-stones, column capital, base etc. have been thoroughly decorated.



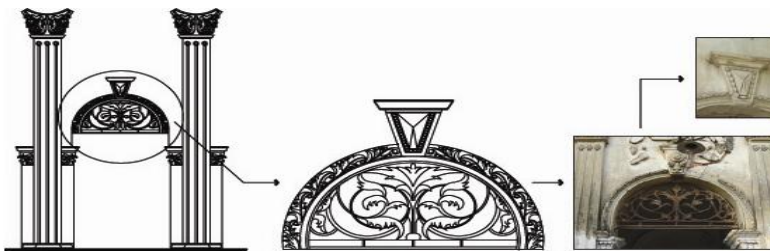
(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 21: Architectural Decoration & Ornamentation Details of Kashinath Bhaban



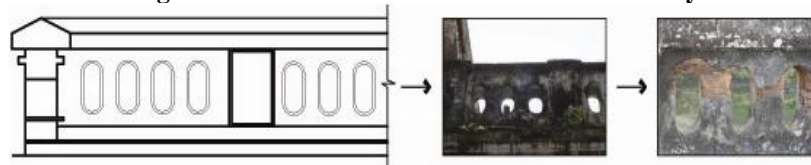
(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 22: Decorative Arch with Lime Surki & Plaster



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 23: Cast Iron Decorative Arch in Doorway



(Source: Field Study, 2006 & prepared by the authors)

Figure 24: Parapet Details with Vertical Slit Openings, Rounded at the Top and Bottom

Building Present Condition

At present existing interior building condition is good for living after reconstruction of the building. But the condition of door, window, and ornamentation of exterior facades is gradually destroyed for lack of preservation (Figure 26). Recently the archeology department of government of Bangladesh, as a part of taking an action in preservation process, colored this historical building “Kashinath Bhaban” into Pink color (Figure 25). This has an impact in destroying the originality of the structural, materials, and architectural ornamentation details gradually, which were the historical and socio-cultural evidence of our past.



(Source: Field Study, 2012)
**Figure 25: At Present, Front View
of Kashinath Bhaban**



(Source: Field Study, 2006)
**Figure 26: Previous Front View
of Kashinath Bhaban**

CONCLUSIONS

From the aforesaid discussion it is apparent that the colonial architecture developed in Bengal, had an individuality of its own. As a reflection of Colonial architecture, the unique building named “Kashinath Bhaban” of the ancient Panam Nagar settlement is undoubtedly made a profound contribution to the socio-cultural history and heritage of Bangladesh. This building of Panam with its structure and materials, decoration and ornamentation is unique which make a strong and glorious image of our past. Presently, this building of Panam Nagar is striving to survive among the face of contemporary developments, climatic adversaries, misuse and scarcity.

On the above circumstances an authentic representation and documentation on this unique historical building named “Kashinath Bhaban” of Panam Nagar is topmost need. In this regard the authors try to represent a research worthy presentation as well as documentation (based on the field study in 2006) on this unique building of Panam Nagar which will help the present and future generation to tell our true socio-cultural historical past.

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