



**METAMORPHOSIS OF CIVIC SPACES IN A THIRD WORLD METROPOLIS:
A CASE OF DHAKA CITY**

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Abstract: In the Third World, the civic spaces are undergoing rapid changes due to population explosion and fast development trend. Some civic spaces are flourishing while some are declining. As the social, physical and psychological needs of people vary from place to place, the character of civic space or image of an urban area also vary from region to region. There is also great variation in the quality of civic spaces between the Third World Cities. Considerations of such variations and an understanding of the local context are therefore essential for an urban designer in a developing metropolis. With this view in mind, this paper investigated the civic spaces of Dhaka and their evolution pattern. This paper studied selected eight important civic spaces of Dhaka City e.g. Lalbagh Fort, Central Martyr's Monument, National Parliament Building Complex, Dhanmondi Lake, Crescent Lake, Book Fair at Bangla Academy, Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University and the City Embankment for Dhaka. It is found that Dhaka has unique character of civic spaces created by their space quality, amenity, accessibility, man made and natural elements, and the social attitude of the people. It is also found that the proximity of a civic space, the variety of activities, legibility, intimacy, and permeability are the essential quality of the vibrant civic spaces of Dhaka.

Key words: Metamorphosis, civic space, urban design, open space, garden, monument

Introduction

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, situated almost in the middle of the country on the bank of the river Buriganga. The Mughals as the seat of the imperial Mughal Viceroy of Bengal founded the historic city in 1608 A.D., and it has a background of more than 2000 years. Dhaka was predominantly a city of the Mughals. In hundred years of their vigorous rule successive Governors and princely Viceroys who ruled the then province of Bengal (Bangladesh), adorned it with many noble monuments in the shape of magnificent palaces, mosques, tombs, fortifications and large impressive houses often surrounded with beautifully laid out gardens and pavilions. Among these, few have survived the ravages of time, aggressive tropical climate of the land, and vandal hands of man. Later, during 200 years of the Colonial Period, the British Settlers as well as the local elites in Dhaka built a number of beautiful buildings and civic spaces. After the partition of India in 1947, Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan, and its importance increased manifold. The most important and beautiful creation of this period is the Parliament Building and its surrounding areas of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, (designed by the famous architect Louis I. Kahn. After the Liberation of War of 1971, Dhaka became the capital city of Bangladesh, with its wide reaching role and importance at local, regional and international levels (Dani, 1962). From a very small township, Dhaka has now grown into a busy city of more than ten million people, which is growing very fast both in area and population. It has become the centre of industrial, commercial, cultural, educational and political activities for Bangladesh. Having a nice blending of the old and new architectural trends, Dhaka has been developing fast as a modern city since 1970s and is throbbing with activities in all spheres of life, be it industrial, commercial, cultural or political.

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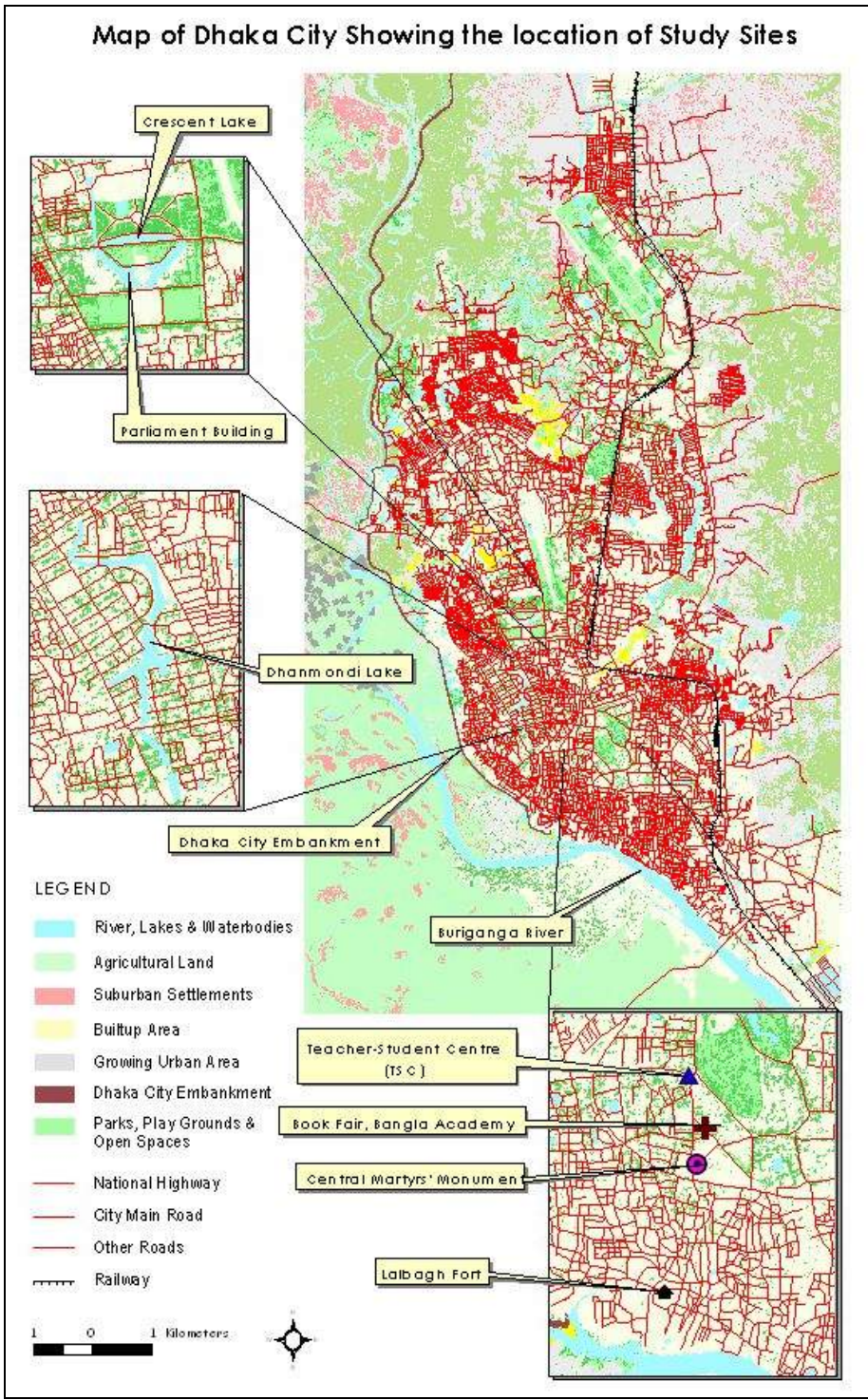


Fig. 1. Map of Dhaka city (source: compiled from SPOT image of 1995 and Dhaka Metropolitan Plan, 2000).

The most important places of interest in the city are Lalbagh Fort, Martyr's Monument, Parliament Building, Crescent Lake, Dhanmondi Lake, Baldha Garden, Ahsan Manzil, City Embankment, Dhaka University, Teacher-Student's Centre of Dhaka University, Bangle Academy, etc. Dhaka is also characterised by a number of ancient and modern mosques, for which it is known as the city of mosques (Ahmed, 1991).

In Dhaka, the civic spaces play a significant role in the formation of urban life. These spontaneous civic spaces are the major elements to the image of the city. Traditional urban spaces with their strong sense of enclosure and the sequential relationships from part to part of the city have languished as forgotten elements. In the new layouts, the roads, instead of being the arteries that fed the urban fabric, have become vicious scalpels that cut across the city, dividing it into a series of unrelated fragments. It is the inheritance that still dominates the thinking of the professional and policy makers in physical planning. In this context, mere statistics of transport routes, vehicles, employment figures, and demography cannot map all the terrain that a professional physical planner must cross (Mowla, 1997). However, this paper, through an overview of civic space development of Dhaka City, provides an account of its evolution pattern.

Definition of Civic Space

There is a difference in understanding and usage of the concept of space among various professional groups. Krier (1979) begins with an attempt not to introduce a new definition of space but to bring its original meaning back into currency, a meaning on which, to avoid value judgment, no aesthetic criteria are imposed. He therefore identifies urban space as the external space, all type of space between buildings in towns and other localities. This is purely physical space, which is geometrically bounded by a variety of elevations. His analysis of urban space is therefore confined to morphology, enumerating the basic elements of urban space (streets and squares) and its basic forms (square, circles and triangles) with a number of possible variations and combinations. Madanipour (1996) argues for a concept of space, which would refer to object physical space with its social and psychological dimensions. A dynamic concept, which, accommodates constant changes and associated embedded relationships simultaneously. A space that can only be understood by monitoring the way space is being made and remade, at the intersection of development processes and everyday life. An architect's conception and use of the term space are so clear and universally accepted among them that it is never felt necessary to explain the term. Space is continuous, every building function in the creation of two kinds of space: its internal space, completely defined by the building itself and its external urban space, defined by that building and others around it (Zevi, 1957). A space has two facets: a physical phenomenon and a condition of mind both influenced by the social process. Physical space can be understood easily by the senses but mental space needs to be interpreted. Lefebvre (1991) sees space as the space of social life, of social and spatial practice and a social product. Every society, and its mode of production, produces its own space. According to physical size spaces vary from intimate to monumental scale. Again according to activities or use patterns spaces varies from private, semi-public to public character. Civic spaces are generally monumental in scale and public in use-character. In the present study selected and more prominent open spaces of Dhaka city have been considered for analysis. The objective of the study is to investigate the characteristics of civic spaces in the third world city and compare that with the selected civic spaces of Dhaka. The parameters, which have been used in the study, are variety of events and activities, sense of space, social and physical protection, orientation, street and outdoor furniture. Furthermore the following characteristics of the civic spaces of Dhaka are also analysed (i.e. permeability, variety, legibility, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, and personalization).

Civic Spaces in the Third World City in Context of Dhaka

Urban Design scholars agree that while the economics of transportation, design, and engineering now dominate the creation of civic spaces, the psychological dimension should transcend all other considerations. The position of a civic space represents the location of the space relative to its environment in the city. Usually civic spaces lie in the centre (not necessarily geographic) of settlements or some strategic locations where it has better links with both lower and upper levels of activities and events within and outside the settlements. As Moughtin (1992) puts it, the centre dominates the city in size, character and dignity, and it gives meaning to its existence as a place distinct from other places. In defining a responsive environment, Bentley *et al.* (1985) identified seven characteristics (i.e. permeability, variety, legibility, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, and personalization), that needs to be present in a popular space but how they work in different socio-economic environments needs the designer's understanding of the context. Some of the characteristics may be more important in some particular situations, for example, permeability though important, is not as important as personalization in Bangladesh context. In considering the centre, Lynch (1960) found that the node to be one of the most important of five elements (e.g. path, edges, districts, nodes,

landmark) which gives the city an image. According to him, the city is recognized and understood by nodes and other four elements. Nodes in the case of Dhaka have a hierarchy of scale and level, from neighbourhood to bazar, in relation to which the wider urban morphology takes shape. These civic spaces have the seven characteristics mentioned above in various degree of combination. Social dimension to this is added by the characteristics mentioned above in various degree of combination. Social dimension is added to this by the characteristics of people using them. This order in diverse space-hierarchy and functions, provide legibility to Dhaka's evolving morphology. It is because, pivotal agent of all the developments, adapted formal and informal are the same people. Therefore, it can be further argued that, physical and spatial development cannot be done in isolation from much wider concerned with the needs of the community and its people.

There is a tendency in man for a shared sense of space and aesthetics. This innate human nature has been found to express itself differently in different cultures, age, time and society. Spontaneous civic spaces are those, which have developed or emerged as successful social spaces with spontaneous participation, aspiration and socialization of the city dwellers. They have nothing to do with architects, planners, or other professionals. This is not to argue that the professionals have no place in creating popular civic space, but to emphasize the user's needs, values, and aspirations need to be taken care of. There is sometimes trade off between different attributes and the psychological need of the user group for example in religious and even civic setting, people is willing to sacrifice some conveniences. Such as long drive to pilgrimage in Mecca for the Muslims and to Benaras for the Hindus, which imply that the conscious creating of values surround some symbolic need, obliges such choices. The argument is that, if domination of the route is selected, the destination itself may disappear and that is precisely what is happening in contemporary developments. In Dhaka, the slow procession and overcrowding in the morning of 21st February (to commemorate the language day) is compensated by the joy of the carnival.

Characteristics of Civic Spaces in a Third World City in Context of Dhaka

Events and activities are always going on—some times people discover some hidden attributes that suits their taste and needs then they start associating themselves with it. This allurements attracts more and more people and consequently more events and activities—thus the metamorphosis starts. Streets or spaces having a suitable combination of attributes are transformed into a popular civic space. Socialization of spaces that have prevailed in Dhaka from the early period till today in similar or other forms are *uthan* (inner court), *galli* (lane), *mahalla* (neighborhood), *morh* (junction point), *chouk* (round about), and *bazar* etc. (Mowla, 1997). Besides this, tradition of seasonal fair (*mela*) has also transcended today. While former categories of civic spaces are of permanent nature, the later category is periodic in character. In different levels of streets, spatial elements coordinate to some extent the needs for primacy and community, and support the domains of activity of various groups of different ages and sexes. Of the four categories of civic space i.e. shopping precinct, streets, fair (*mela*), and symbolic space, the first two are more universal and permanent in nature, while the last two are periodic and emotional in character. However, the attributes for making a lively and popular space are common to all. Common characteristics of successful and popular civic spaces can be enumerated as follows:

Variety of events and activities: Ghel (1980) observed that it is not the building but people and event that need to be assembled to create a successful civic space. Concepts like floor area, site ratio, and building density represent nothing conclusive about whether human activities are adequately concentrated or not.

Sense of space: It includes scale, proportion of primary enclosures, as well as the presence and qualities of secondary enclosures. Surrounding heights, physical dimension of space (with visual limits) are also important factors in giving a sense of space.

Social and physical protection: The human quality of organic order have been shattered due to the aggression of noise, pollution, and crime, It is observed that place with less than 60 decibel sound level are more human friendly (Mowla, 1994).

Orientation: Quality of a particular way or route which leads to a particular space, quality of surrounding spaces and environment within, are very important for assembly of people. Therefore, it is fundamentally, location, environment, and hierarchy of activities leading to a space that constitute of orientation.

Street and outdoor furniture: A successful civic space must be sufficiently adorned with elements, which provide scale and are in harmony with the general sitting, seeing or standing habits of people. Dhanmondi and Crescent Lake (near parliamentary building area) may be compared in this respect. Presence of

convenient sitting places such as hard surfaces, steps, and tree base etc. acts as some of the important elements of attraction.

An Analysis of Important Civic Spaces of Dhaka City

There are several civic spaces in Dhaka City. However, for this study the following spaces are considered:

- Lalbagh Fort
- Central Martyr's Monument
- National Parliament Building Complex
- Dhanmondi Lake
- Crescent Lake
- Book Fair at Bangla Academy
- Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Dhaka University
- City Embankment for Dhaka

Lalbagh Fort: Lalbagh Fort of Dhaka, the finest specimen of the Mughal Period, indeed, represents the unfulfilled dream of a Mughal Prince (Ahmed, 1980). This edifice overlooking the Buriganga River is an imposing yet incomplete Mughal fort. Begun in 1678 by Prince Azam, the third son of the last great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the construction was taken up by his son Nawab Shaista Khan. Legend has it that, the death of his favorite daughter, locally known as Bibi Pari, caused a total suspension of the construction (Ahmed, 1980). Lalbagh Fort occupies the southwestern part of the old city, overlooking the Buriganga River, on whose northern bank it stands as a silent sentinel of the old city. Rectangular in plan, it encloses an area of 1082' by 800' and in addition to its graceful lofty gateways on southeast and northeast corners and a subsidiary small unpretentious gateway on north. It also contains within its fortified perimeter a number of splendid monuments, surrounded by attractive garden. These are: a small 3-domed mosque, the mausoleum of Bibi Pari, the beloved daughter of Nawab Shaista Khan and the bathhouse (Hammam) and Audience Hall of the Governor. The fort consists of long fortified walls with octagonal bastions. The main purpose of this fort, was to provide a defensive enclosure of the palatial edifices of the interior and as such was a type of palace-fortress rather than a seize fort (Hasan, 1980). Lalbagh Fort, once is situated in the midst of Dhaka City, now is located in a remote corner (due to rapid northern expansion of the city) of the metropolis. Till the 1970s, it was the main attractions for the visitors of Dhaka. However, in recent times, rapid development in its neighbouring areas, lack of improvement of the old zigzag narrow lanes, and heavy traffic congestion in the surrounding areas, has reduced the accessibility of this place to a great extent. At present, few peoples are interested to visit Lalbagh Fort accepting all the troubles and long journey time to reach this place. Loss of legibility and permeability can be said to be the cause of decline of the visitors to this public space. Photographs show huge congestion and traffic jam at the main gate of Lalbagh Fort.

Central Martyr's Monument: The Central Martyr's Monument of Dhaka is the symbol of the Bangalee nationalism. This monument was built to commemorate the martyrs of the historic Language movement of 1952. Although this movement was apparently for the recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of the then Pakistan, it was in fact, the first outburst of popular feelings against the unpopular and autocratic government. All subsequent movements in Bangladesh leading to her independence in 1971 owe their origin to this movement and, therefore, this monument has become a place of pilgrimage for millions of Bangladeshis. Hundreds and thousands of people with floral wreaths and bouquet gather on the 21st February every year to pay respect in a solemn way; celebrations begin at zero hour of midnight. The monument was renovated in the 1980's making spacious steps, squares, lawns, wider streets and outdoor furniture. Furthermore, the space was declared as a complete pedestrian zone, making it accessible for people of all age groups including children and the elderly.



Fig. 2. Bird's-eye-view of Lalbagh Fort, Dhaka.



Fig. 3. Crowded gate of Lalbagh Fort, Dhaka.



Fig. 4. Congregation of people at Martyr's Monument, Dhaka on the 21st February.

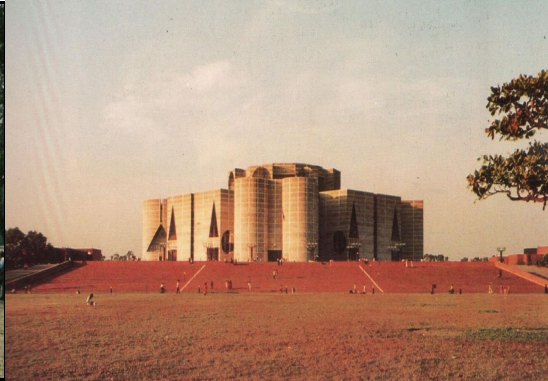


Fig. 5. Southern plaza of National Parliament building, Dhaka.

Regarding urban design criteria, the Central Martyr's Monument of Dhaka possesses the characteristics of legibility, permeability, variety, robustness, visual appropriateness and richness. In addition, the area provides a sense of space and solemnity; offer variety of events and activities (sitting, gathering, walking, standing, putting wreaths of flowers for the martyrs, and watching songs and open air drama etc.), and a feeling of clear orientation and direction. Furthermore, there are wide streets and outdoor furniture in this site. All these elements and characteristics can be said to be the vital signs of a vibrant civic space.

National Parliament Building Complex: The National Parliament Building Complex of Bangladesh, located at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka has distinctive architectural features, and it may be called an architectural wonder of this region. This is a colossal complex of geometrical proportion, and was conceived and designed by the famous American architect Louis I Kahn. This Parliament Building complex is now used as the centre of all decision making by the government and the opposition parties. The blue water of the surrounding lakes, the green lawns and beautiful trees and gardens give a pleasant feeling to the people in the midst of busy city life of this metropolis. Much like what is found in the Assembly Buildings in downtown Dhaka, many of Khan's most famous projects tended to utilize concrete and brick in an unorthodox manner. Some examples of this style include the Yale Art Gallery (1953), the Richards Medical Research Building, University of Pennsylvania, (1957–61), and the Centre for British Art and Studies at Yale University (1969–74). Credited with having said, 'Structure is the giver of light'.

Khan was well known for his use of and control of natural light. His approach to the issues of light here in Dhaka resulted in an incredibly heavy, geometrically chunky building but one that gives the soft impression of air and light via the positioning of windows and large open geometrical openings in walls, ceilings and partitions. Sitting on 200 acres of land, the 'Parliament Building' sits brilliantly in an enormous pool of water—which gives the whole complex the look of a post-modern castle complete with moat. The buildings do not just include the Parliament itself but also the members' residences and spaces for housing other functionaries and dignitaries. What was striking for those who had never experienced anything but hyper crowds, noise, traffic and filth in Dhaka was that this complex sat peacefully amidst a beautiful expanse of green fields and a forest of trees (Peterson, 2001). The Assembly Building of Bangladesh and its surrounding areas and precincts in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka has emerged as the most important civic space of the city. The lakes, green expanse of fields, lawns, gardens and trees attract thousands of visitors all the year round, particularly on weekends. In urban design terms, it has the appropriate characteristics of legibility, permeability, variety, robustness, visual appropriateness and richness. Besides, the area provides variety of events and activities (sitting, walking, eating, playing, gossiping etc.), a feeling of sense of space, social and physical protection, and clear orientation and direction. Furthermore, there are adequate streets and outdoor furniture in this site. All these are the vital signs of a vibrant civic space in a metropolis of a Third World City such as Dhaka.

Dhanmondi Lake: Dhanmondi Lake, which is located in densely populated central Dhaka, is one of the oldest wetland in the midst of this city. The Metropolitan Development Authority of Dhaka developed Dhanmondi residential area, in the 1960s centring the serpentine Dhanmondi Lake as the focal point. A number of roads crisscrossing the lake and many houses are facing this beautiful water body. However,

during the last couple of decades, due to negligence, lack of care and maintenance, the lake turned into a derelict water body for disposing of sewage and wastewaters of the residential units located around the lake. The government of Bangladesh take a massive programme in the 1990s to revitalize this beautiful lake and undertook various development works (such as building bridges, steps, footpaths, kiosks, amphitheatre, and gardens and so on). Moreover, the residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (father of the nation) located beside this lake, has been turned into a museum which contains rare collection of personal effects and photographs of the Father of the Nation and a large square was built connecting the museum and the lake. Hundreds of visitors come to this place to enjoy the beauty of the lake and also to visit the museum. The whole areas surrounding the Dhanmondi Lake turn bright red with the blooming Krishnachura trees in May. As soon as evening falls, the entire Dhanmondi Lake area turns into a hotspot for people seeking serenity and calmness in the midst of the bustling Dhaka City. People from across the city come to the lake to have a free gossip or a walk or to sit beside the lake. Many stay back even after the sunset and stay there till midnight.

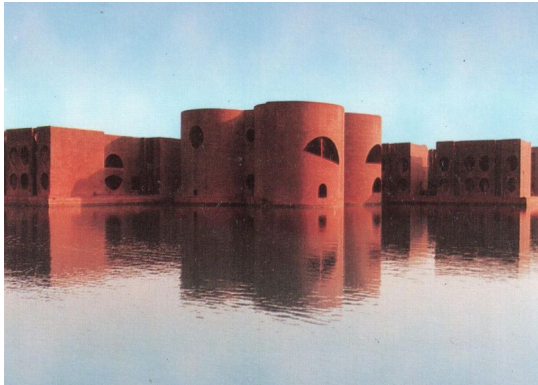


Fig. 6. The lake surrounding National Parliament building complex, Dhaka.



Fig. 7. People sitting and gossiping in front of the Parliament building, Dhaka.



Fig. 8. Food vendors in front of the Parliament building, Dhaka.



Fig. 9. A view of Dhanmondi lake, Dhaka with the newly built steps.

Crescent Lake: This lake is situated on the northern precinct of the Parliament Building of Dhaka, and is part of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Master Plan of Dhaka City, designed and prepared by the famous architect Louis I Kahn. The name ‘Crescent Lake’ is derived from the crescent shape of the lake. The lake is flanked by the green and beautiful Chandrima Garden (where lies the mausoleum of Late President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh) on the North, and on the South by a wide avenue, with large pedestrian malls. From this pedestrian mall, wide steps have descended down onto the bottom of the lake, and people can easily touch the crystal clear water of this lake. Moreover, there is beautiful fountain in the middle of the lake, which sprinkles and sprays water to a great height, creating further visual attractions for the visitors. Though the size of crescent lake is not large (around 5-6 acres), but, every day a large number of people visit this place. One interesting thing to note here that Crescent Lake provides the connecting link between the Parliament Building Complex and the Chandrima Garden of Dhaka. As a result, the visitors of both these two sites (e.g. Parliament Building and Chandrima garden) normally travel to Crescent Lake to enjoy its beauty.



Fig. 10. Dhanmondi Lake (with footpaths and kiosks), an emerging open space of Dhaka city.



Fig. 11. Recently built Amphitheatre on the edge of Dhanmondi lake, Dhaka.



Fig. 12. Crescent lake (with steps and fountain) of Dhaka in the evening.



Fig. 13. Crescent lake (alongside Chandrima garden), a successful public space in Dhaka city.

Book Fair at Bangla Academy: The book fair of Bangladesh take place every year in the premises of Bangla Academy, which is the main government agency responsible for research and development of Bengali language. Bangla Academy is located in the midway between TSC and the Central Martyr's Monument of Dhaka. Every year, the book fair starts on the 1st of February and it continues up to 28th February. On an average, around two hundred new titles have arrived at the Book Fair of Bangla Academy, and normally novels dominate the lot. Organised by Bangla Academy, the month-long book fair began on February 1 commemorating the language martyrs. Different publishers brought about new publications every year. This book fair's main focus is on the creative pursuit of local writers and the country's book industry; this one has the option to bridge the gap between our literary works and those of the world. Thousands of people visit this book fair every year, and also enjoy other cultural activities and festivities in the surrounding areas (e.g. listening to song, watching drama and dancing etc.).

Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University: This is the focal point for congregation and gathering of students, teachers and people of all walks of life of Dhaka. The American Architect Stanley Tigerman designs the TSC complex. However, except from some official gathering and meetings, all other activities take place in the outdoor arena, where there is roundabout with a beautiful statue and triangular green lawn for sitting. TSC complex is in close vicinity to Bangla Academy, Central Martyr's Monument, Library and Arts Building, and major halls of residences of Dhaka University. Furthermore, it is also very close to Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Fine Arts Institute and Medical College of Dhaka. As a result, TSC is the main focal point of students' congregation of Dhaka City. In addition, many historic meetings, processions and events took place at this place. Lastly, but not the least, wide streets, and easy accessibility and presence of malls, lawns, plaza, fountain and statue make this place very attractive to all the visitors.

City Embankment for Dhaka: After the severe flood of 1988, the government of Bangladesh decided to build a flood protection embankment-cum road surrounding the city. Building of the flood protection embankment-cum road started in 1990, and it made many low-lying areas of the city accessible and permeable. The first phase of the flood protection embankment is now complete (Hasan, 1998). As rivers surround Dhaka City on all four sides (e.g. Tongi Canal on the North, Balu River on the East, Turag River on the west and Buriganga River on the South), it is anticipated that this embankment will greatly reduce the gravity of flood damages for Dhaka, and will provide an environment to the city dweller's, which is safe to lives and properties, and thereby reduce the losses (due to flood) to acceptable tolerant limits. The width of the embankment at the ground level was about 66.5 meters and average height from the ground level to the crest is about 3 meters. One important aspect of the flood protection embankment for Dhaka is that it is mostly developed by earth consolidation and compaction method (Tariquzaman, 2002). Now, the flood protection embankment is often used as a bypass road for the city and a recreation space. The embankment-cum road provides a panoramic view of the rivers adjoining the city as well as the nearby wetlands and the distant villages. Furthermore, visitors to the embankment-cum road can enjoy the fresh air and a serene environment far from the maddening crowd of the city.



Fig. 14. Book fair of Ramna area of Dhaka city during annual language festival of 21st February.



Fig. 15. Teacher Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka university, an important gathering place for students.

Evolution of Civic Spaces in Dhaka City

The civic spaces in Dhaka City have gone through a long process of metamorphosis, old spaces have dwindled, declined and new spaces have emerged. With the evolution of new open spaces, the focal point of the civic spaces in the city has changed. Dhaka was once a mono-centric city having the centre at the racecourse. Now it is a city of multi-centred civic spaces, different spaces are scattered throughout the city, having distinctive characteristics, spatial and temporal variation with differing values for the people of diverse needs, feelings, and aspirations. In Mughal Dhaka, the Lalbagh fort was the most important civic space. After the advent of the British rule after 1757, new civic spaces appeared on the landscape of Dhaka. The English settlers cleared the swamps adjacent to the Buriganga River, and built an embankment (Buckland Embankment) for movement and recreation. Important residential buildings of the British officials and local elite were located along the embankment of the Buriganga River. The racecourse was another place developed by the British settlers. All the important edifices and government office buildings of the British rulers were located around the racecourse.

After the partition of India in 1947, new civic spaces started emerging in the metropolis as the city expanded. The New Parliament Building of the East Pakistan was developed at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. It had a spectacular lawn in the front, and a crescent sized lake at the rear. Moreover, a number of lakes such as the Dhanmondi Lake, several small parks, gardens including the botanical garden and the zoo were developed. During Pakistan Period, a martyr's monument was built in the Ramna area of Dhaka to commemorate the martyrs of the language movement of 1952. This became a place of mass gathering for a long period and probably for the years to come. Moreover, a number of spaces like the Bangla Academy Precinct (where the annual Book Fair is held), and the Teacher Student's Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University. During Pakistan Period, all the previously developed civic spaces were functioning properly along with the new ones. However, after the Independence of Bangladesh in 1971, congestion and overcrowding degraded many of the

previously developed public spaces. In Old Dhaka, the Buckland Embankment along the Buriganga River (built by the British Settlers) became so congested that people no longer visit the place for recreation. The Mughal Fort at Lalbagh is now in the midst of the most congested area of the city, and people have nearly stopped visiting these places, except for some festivals. The racecourse (developed by the British Settlers) is now planted with large trees, and it has gradually become a green park, not an open space any more.

However, the martyr's monument at Ramna and its adjoining area have transformed into better places and this is now the cultural capital of Bangladesh. Everyday, in the afternoon some open-air entertainment activities (e.g. like dance, music, recitation, drama etc.) take place there, and the area is always overcrowded with young people. The language festival takes place in the month of February each year, which is some sort of a carnival and is expounded by the annual book fair that also take place in the same time. Such temporal occasion has given the civic spaces of Bangla Academy a new dimension. New civic spaces have started appearing in the urban fabrics of the city. The precinct of the Parliament Building at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar is now a vibrant civic space. Hundreds of people flock there every afternoon. After the government intervention to revitalize the Dhanmondi Lake, it is turned into a successful civic place, and people are now flocking there during day and in the evening. The new bridges built over the Buriganga, have emerged as a place to see the river view. The newly built flood protection embankment around the city is gradually becoming a place of recreation for the people of the metropolis. The flood protection embankment has given new opportunities to the city dwellers to enjoy and view the wetlands and rivers surrounding Dhaka City.



Fig. 16. The flood protection embankment of Dhaka, an emerging open space.

Important Features of the Civic Spaces of Dhaka City

Certain activities and festivities were rooted in Bengali culture, a psychology that got expression in the Ramna area of Dhaka City, which has become a hub of activities and events periodically i.e. during commemoration of the language movement in February, such as the annual book fair at Bangla Academy, TSC area, poetry festival and mass gathering at TSC roundabout, and cultural performance at the central martyr's monument. Nevertheless, the selection of this location is not arbitrary for these activities. Existence of Dhaka University and other educational institutions in the locality, presence of the central martyr's monument, children's park in the locality, Academy for Fine Arts and Performing Arts, and the TSC together give vitality to this area. TSC Round-About is the regular place for mass gathering of students and people.

While Bangla Academy area is the centre for program related to the commemorative festival (such as book fair) in the month of February. Therefore, together the area remains a centre for recreation for about a month.

The annual book fair starts on the 1st of February each year and at Bangla Academy premises, but soon it is overflowed with people and over-spilled crowd move beyond the Academy premises to capture surrounding areas to TSC Roundabout. The area becomes a pedestrian space during the occasion, the stalls along the road, suspending banners and festoons of different colour and designs, people of various age groups and in varieties of dresses, and various types of events and entertainment facilities transform the environment of the whole area. A patriotic feeling and emotion for culture and heritage are the driving factors in the popularity of this particular area—this would not be the same had the book fair shifted to some other location—in fact book fair acts as co-ordination agent for many other ingredients that together make an area popular and attractive. In the first set of civic spaces of Dhaka City (e.g. Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Book fair at Bangla Academy, the Central Martyr's Monument etc.), function and economy are the driving factors to make the places popular. In the second set (e.g. Dhanmondi Lake, Parliament Building Complex, Crescent Lake and the City Embankment) recreation and symbolism plays the vital role. First set of civic spaces owe their popularity due to their multifunctional social characteristics—the liveability of the urban civic spaces depends on how well they are served by some or all of the following functions: productive, protective, ornamental, recreational and emotional. The second set is categorized according to their dominant role or attraction. Some of the spaces that are popular may be traced back to their symbolic value e.g. Book Fair at Bangla Academy, Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) area, Parliament Building precinct, and the Central Martyr's Monument area. In terms of variety of events and activities, the civic spaces of Dhaka are vibrant. In the front premises of the Parliament Building, the lawns provide the option for varied activities. Mothers with their kids and children often visit the place. Young boys and school going children play cricket and football in the field. Hundreds of young boys, girls, and couples roam around the place. Moreover, there are large number of food vendors and hawkers. In the Ramna area of Dhaka University, varieties of events take place every day. There are places for chatting, reciting poems, dancing and acting. There are also hawkers and vendors all around. In Dhanmondi Lake, people mainly visit the place for a stroll or to enjoy the scenic beauty. Many hawkers and vendors roam around the place.

In Dhaka's civic spaces, the sense of space is very strong. Trees, statues, fountains, monuments, bushes, lawns and buildings create these senses. Often the grouping of people in different places creates temporal spaces. Orientation is also clearly found in Dhaka's civic spaces. The Parliament Building provides a clear orientation in its front premises. The statue in TSC and the martyr's monument in Ramna give a clear orientation. In Dhanmondi Lake, the bridges and kiosks provide some kind of orientation. There is very little outdoor furniture in Dhaka's open space. The paved area, steps, and lawns work as sitting area for people. The gathering of so many people at a time in Dhaka's civic spaces nullifies the utility of outdoor furniture. Moreover, the people are fond of enjoying the place standing and walking. Despite not having enough outdoor furniture, the civic spaces of Dhaka are still very responsive and vibrant.

Conclusion

The urban design contexts in a Third World City are often different from the contemporary western metropolises. Increasing pace of urbanization and population explosion in some of the Third World Metropolitan Cities has greatly influenced the evolution of their civic spaces. In the first world, pastime is often an active recreation. But in the Third World, due to social norms and bindings, recreation is normally limited to social gathering, talking, chatting, walking, and sitting leisurely. In the exploding metropolitan cities like Dhaka, the urban spaces are mainly the arena for the above social activities. Due to an acute shortage of open space, the present available open spaces are now filled every day with a huge crowd. The open spaces are simply the breathing spaces for the people in a bustling metropolis. Even the open spaces, which are not carefully designed, also attract a large number of people. The analytical tools for judging and analyzing an urban space (e.g. terms like permeability, variety, legibility, and robustness) are developed in the west, and it is found that these are equally applicable for a Third World Metropolis. But in a Third World City, some added parameters might be needed like communicability, accessibility and connectivity. Open spaces, which are located in the congested areas of the city, without having good connectivity and accessibility, are deteriorating fast. The open spaces of Dhaka pinpoint this point with some force. Another important issue is the environmental degradation of the open spaces in these cities. Many public spaces of these cities are now in a state of dilapidated due to obsolescence and poor maintenance. The planners and

urban designers of these cities should attempt to revitalize these old urban spaces to create new breathing spaces for the inhabitants.

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