

Chapter 35

Rethinking ‘Heritage’ Based on Urban Space Transformations in the Colonial Town of Chandernagore, India



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Abstract Heritage is not just something associated with the past but also something that connects us with our present and accompanies us into the future. Heritage always calls for inclusion, but the inclusionary aspect of heritage is often underpinned when it comes to development. In the colonial town of Chandernagore, the urban expansion and fast rise of multi-storey buildings have begun to threaten the existence of urban-heritage structures at an alarming rate. In Chandernagore, one of the oldest municipal corporations of West Bengal, the urban and historic realms are inextricably linked. The study will attempt to map the co-existing colonial heritage units within the urban space and will try to explore the underlying causes of the conflict between heritage and urban planning. The major goals of the chapter are to find out ward-wise changing density of population on the basis of prior literature, decadal census data; delineate of spatio-temporal change of land use and land cover (LULC) over a span of almost 40 years (1982–2022) using supervised image classification approach with maximum likelihood classification and corroborating it with corresponding Google Earth images; and understand citizen’s perspective about the recent trend of urbanisation involving qualitative methods like key informant interviews, transect walk, passive observation and contextual interviews. If urban concerns are adequately addressed, the city has every chance of becoming a viable, sustainable heritage city. The action plan formulated on the basis of the study findings hopes to offer interesting insights to the planners and conservations to rethink and recognise the plurality of the heritage values through comprehensive up-scaling heritage initiatives.

Keywords Heritage scape · Urban-heritage · Urban space · Colonial town · Action plan

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Introduction

India has a rich heritage that includes both tangible and intangible elements. The concept of heritage has evolved from a narrow focus on buildings to a broader scope that includes all urban spaces and their contents (Taylor 2015). Heritage is not just something associated with the past but also something that connects us with our present and accompanies us into the future. Heritage always calls for inclusion, but the inclusionary aspect of heritage is often underpinned when it comes to development. Heritage in the era of development emerged as an interconnected network of diverse modes of living and creating rather than a monochrome monolith, connecting different social actors with the policymaking processes in the context of heritage preservation. The neoliberal paradigm alienates heritage from the mainstream notion in the modern era. Heritage is typically thought as something that binds us to our past; however, one needs to rethink, reconceptualise and re-orient the perspective and ask themselves, 'What does heritage mean to us?'. Today, heritage has become intertwined with the various hues of new urbanity and its socio-cultural idiosyncrasies and is frequently viewed as something individuals can live without. The urban sprawl deliberately ignored and underpinned the rich cultural values of the city. In the twentieth century, with the growing globalisation trend, a significant shift occurred where cultural practices and ethos became necessary to preserve locational uniqueness apart from objects and buildings. Arjun Appadurai, with the help of five scapes or flows: ethnoscapas, technoscapas, ideoscapas, finance scapes and mediascapas, explained how cultures around the world influence each other de-localised power structures (Rantanen 2006). Based on that, the concept of heritage scape was introduced by Garden (2004), where heritage sites were not viewed as a singular entity but existed within a wider physical and social spectrum. Di Giovine (2008) further popularised this, who views heritage scape as 'an authentic social structure constructed through the juxtaposition of unrelated, but similarly designated...heritage sites'. Thus, the urban-heritage scape became not only limited and concerned with the past and present but also a future-oriented, contingent and creative endeavour in which the values of intangible objects are given equal weight. In urban-heritage scapes, both human and non-human boundaries got blurred. Both are equally implicated, attached and embedded in a complex process that binds them across space and time. Heritage is thus viewed as a collaborative process where various actors and communities work together to make the past more vibrant and accessible. Cultural heritage is a multi-layered palimpsest of history, society and a way of life that manifests in the form of the urban built fabric, spatial planning, architecture, materials, construction techniques and life rituals. As a result, to achieve long-term growth, it is critical to safeguard and conserve the town's historic fabric, which will also help to promote its unique identity in the future. Thus, heritage has emerged as a coherent overarching concept in which the past, present and future are entangled as a process that requires special attention (Cathrine 2006).

Historicising Chandernagore

Hugli river, a significant tributary of the Ganges, is interwoven into a network of cultural and regional interactions and exchanges (Ivermee 2020). The crescent-shaped Chandernagore, located on the western bank, is the jewel in this spatial crown, drawing the limelight as a potential heritage site. Chandernagore, or the *Ville du Bois de Santal* or *Ville de la lune* in French (Land of Sandalwood) (Seth 1963), is a former French colony in Bengal. The entire stretch of the Hugli River connecting the dots, starting from Bandel and continuing through Chinsurah, Chandernagore, Serampore and Barrackpore, is known as ‘Mini Europe’ (Das and Chattopadhyay 2014) (Fig. 35.1). European powers such as the Portuguese, French, Dutch, Danes and British all left their imprints on the stretch, transforming it into an important commercial centre in the eighteenth century. This cultural mingling is the foundation of contemporary Bengali culture, as seen in the region’s architecture, town planning, literature and art. The five towns share the same water linkage with Calcutta (now Kolkata), yet all have different stories. Upstream from her renowned cousin – Kolkata, Chandernagore has been preserving elements of Indo-European heritage in public places, architecture and culture. European culture and town planning principles influenced the development of Chandernagore during the 250 years of possession by the French rulers. The French settlement in Bengal began in 1673 when Ibrahim Khan (a diwan) granted Du-Plessis, a French trader, permission to occupy a parcel of land on the northern bank of the Hugli River, today known as Chandernagore. Different papers and old historical documents produced uncertainty concerning the foundation of the French colony in Chandernagore, and thus, the actual date of the French presence in Chandernagore remained unknown. The enclave of Chandernagore was most likely created in 1690 (Annoussamy 2004).

Around 1687, a French commander named Andre Bourreau Deslandes began doing business at Bandel in Hooghly, but after many difficulties, he moved to Chandernagore by paying the Mughal government Rs. 40,000. In a letter from the collector of Hooghly, Mr. E Sterling, it was revealed that after a year, in 1688, the French

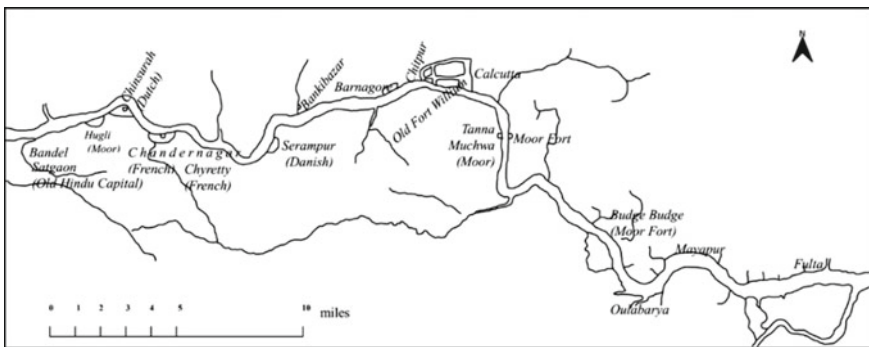


Fig. 35.1 Tracing the Hugli corridor on the basis of Hill (1903)

permanently occupied Chandernagore under an edict of Aurangzeb, the then Mughal Emperor of India (Hill 1903). By 1700, Chandernagore came under the control of the French. Hooghly was their major business centre in Bengal until 1711 (*Comptoir principal dans Bengale*, translated as Principal Counter in Bengal). The French East India Company gained substantial property rights in Chandernagore in 1688, which can be regarded as the beginning of French supremacy in India. The city under French rule outperformed all of Bengal's overseas colonies in trade and business. Chandernagore gradually transformed from a cluster of small villages to a vibrant city and became part of the more significant Calcutta urban agglomeration.

Farasiganj, formerly known as French Ghiretti in Chandernagore, was a 120-bigha stretch of land on the bank of Hugli River. The city witnessed many struggles; several times, a power transfer occurred between the British and the French. Throughout the eighteenth century, the city encountered a dynamic turn of political events, interrupting periods of English occupation between 1757 and 1763, 1778 and 1783, and again in 1793 and 1802. During the era of the Anglo-French conflict, many significant promenades and structures in the town were destroyed by the British (Ukil 1996). By 1800, the town's prior commercial prominence had faded, becoming a sleepy Calcutta suburb (ICOMOS 2017). However, despite everything, it is noted for its clean, wide thoroughfares with many elegant residences and structures along the river bank. When the whole of Bengal was under British rule as a province of British-administered India, Chandernagore, being part of it, created an independent tradition under French control. Because of its separate identity, Chandernagore developed and became a total of its own, even with its small area. Even though the town is geographically distinct from other Bengal townships, its inner linkage with others is intricately tied.

The river Hugli was vital to the growth and development of the city of Chandernagore and became Bengal's first urban riverine location. Aside from many heritage structures, the existence and identity of many lives are also rooted in the banks, which got intertwined with many stories, memories and ethos. The stretch along the river Hugli is a perfect example of a riverfront heritage scape, where the river simultaneously connects and reconciles both the past and the present by re-establishing the connection between the built heritage and the river and serving as a catalyst for economic and cultural revitalisation. Because of urban sprawl, the entire riverine portion along the Hugli stretches of Chandernagore underwent massive changes. Urban expansion is considered one of the significant threats to the heritage structures of the city. The ecological aspect also gained prominence in Chandernagore, along with hard (tangible) and soft (intangible) components. The Hugli stretch reflects the entwined realities of the river and space and tells the story of the river's coproduction and coexistence with the city. The city is rich in heritage structures, and only a suitable planning system can bring the city's decaying heritage elements back to life.

Trajectories of Urban Growth in Chandernagore

Chandernagore was proclaimed a free city in 1947 even though the French administration remained in place, holding a symbolic force. The de facto occurred in 1949, when G. H. Tailleux, the last French administrator, left Chandernagore, leaving it completely independent of French control. De Jure (formal) transfer took place in 1952 (Rai 2007). Finally, the administration of Chandernagore was handed over to the West Bengal Government on October 2, 1954, following which Chandernagore Municipal took charge of it as a municipal town in February 1956 (Seth 1961). It became a municipal town within the ambit of the Calcutta Metropolitan District. The city is under Chandernagore Municipal Corporation, an autonomous local government body supported by the Government of West Bengal; Chandernagore Municipal Corporation is responsible for the city's upkeep and management. Chandernagore's diverse and vibrant heritage feature has created and shaped its Indo-French cultural identity. The urban plan and built heritage of the French period, subsequent British period and elite landlords of Indian origin characterise various layers of the urban history of Chandernagore (Ghosh 1998).

The town's first phase of development occurred between 1673 and 1687. Before the arrival of Governor-General Dupleix, its early history was hardly documented. The early settlements grew and developed by the side of the river Hugli from north to south and for a little more than a mile from east to west (Bandhopadhyay 2003). The town's first phase of urbanisation began to the north of Chandernagore and subsequently spread to the south (Gondolpara). By 1744, Chandernagore emerged as a nerve centre for trading activities in Bengal (Crawford 1902). The most incredible preserved feature of the city of Chandernagore is its urban fabric. Throughout the eighteenth century, the town saw several ups and downs. The town's natural morphology was affected due to the long conflict between the English and the French. During the French administration, the city had the unique advantage of experiencing a blend of indigenous and French culture; this blending gave Chandernagore a distinct cultural character that set it apart from other metropolitan centres. The arrival of rail networks in 1854 accelerated the town's expansion. The East India Railway (Eastern Railway) traversed the city from the western end during 1854–55. Thus, the town's growth extended to the west, i.e. to Khalisani (Ghosh and Siddique 2018). From the initial phase to till the early twentieth century, the municipality covered an area of 9.5 km² with 27 municipal wards (Ukil 1996); from 1994 onwards, six more wards were added to the western part covering 12.5 km² (Ghosh and Mistri 2015) (Fig. 35.2). From a mere trading centre, Chandernagore progressed into a compact urban identity. Despite losing the colonial sheen, it still serves as a subdivisional headquarter (Basu et al. 2020).

The intrinsic values and assessment of the city include not only the built structures but also the intangible heritage assets that shape and define city life. The cultural aspect is severely being ignored when it comes to development. India is arguably one of the most popular destinations of cultural centres, with a rich and diverse history that allows for the exploitation of opportunities offered by the cultural heritage

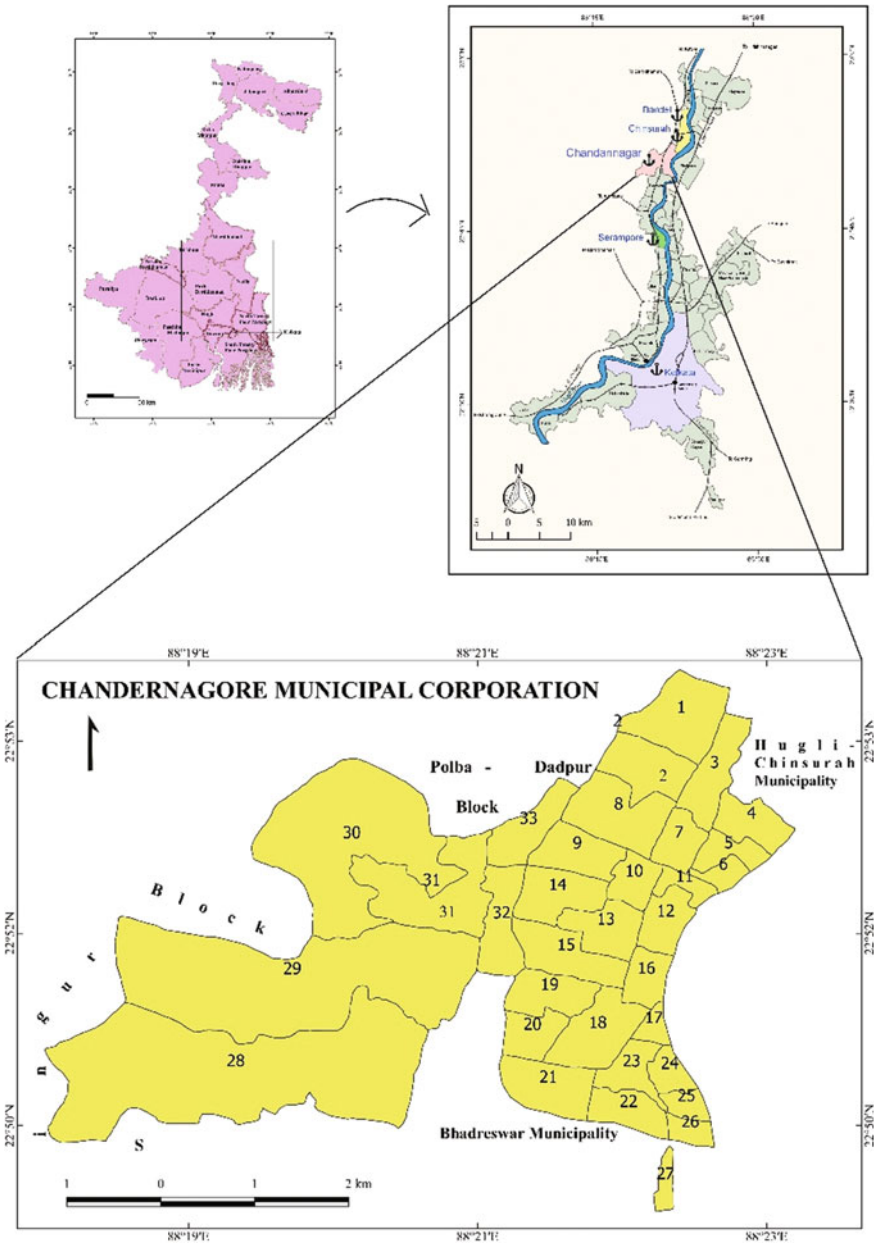


Fig. 35.2 Introducing the study area—Chandernagore city, a former French Colony in West Bengal, India, an important part of the urban-heritage tourism circuit ‘Little Europe of Bengal’ developed along the river Hugli

(Menon 2014). The city of Chandernagore, like others, has several heritage assets. However, in today's context, the town's rich cultural heritage is getting overshadowed by the construction of multi-storied buildings facilitated by the forces of transnational capital and real-estate speculation.

Objectives

Chandernagore is one of the oldest municipal corporations of West Bengal, the urban and historic realms are inextricably linked. The study will attempt to map the co-existing colonial heritage units within the urban space and explore the underlying causes of the conflict between heritage and urban planning. The primary goals of the paper are to find out the ward-wise changing density of population-based on prior literature and decadal census data; delineate the spatio-temporal change of land use and land cover (LULC) over almost 40 years (1982–2022) using supervised image classification approach with maximum likelihood classification and corroborating it with corresponding Google Earth images; and understand citizen's perspective about the recent trend of urbanisation qualitative methods like key informant interviews, transect walk, passive observation and contextual interviews.

If urban concerns are adequately addressed, the city has every chance of becoming a viable, sustainable heritage town. The action plan formulated based on the study findings hopes to offer exciting insights to the planners and conservations to rethink and recognise the plurality of the heritage values through comprehensive up-scaling heritage initiatives.

Materials and Methods

Since the chapter focuses on two aspects, i.e. presence of heritage sites and the gradual urban expansion of the colonial town of Chandernagore, mixed method approaches have been followed. The Census of India data (1901–2011) has been used to gauge the rate of increase in total population in the municipal area and to compare the inter-ward population densities too with the help of mapping (Fig. 35.3). From USGS Earth Explorer Landsat imageries, (Path 148, Row 44) and (Path 138, Row 44) acquired in March for the years 1982 and 2022 from Landsat 4 (MSS) and Landsat 8 (OLI_TIRS) missions having a resolution of about 79 and 30 m, respectively, have been downloaded and supervised classification using maximum likelihood has been carried out to bring out the spatio-temporal variations in land use and land cover involving ARC GIS v10.2.2. To corroborate the findings, corresponding Google Earth images of 1984 and 2022 have been used too. Through a review of past literature, oral interviews and intensive field visits important heritage sites have been identified along with the presence of modern, urban residential units alongside them with the

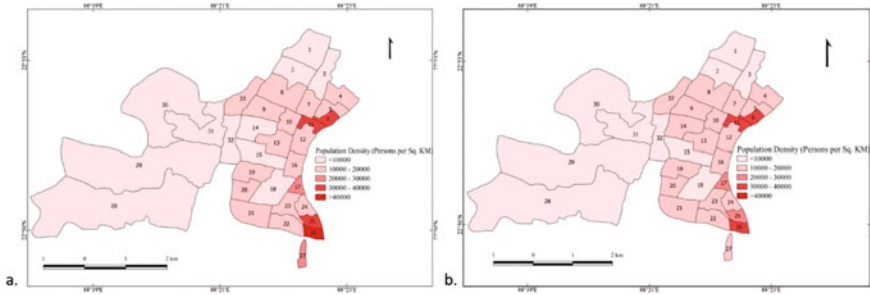


Fig. 35.3 Varying ward-wise population density (a 2001 and b 2011) of Chandernagore Municipality Corporation, West Bengal

help of g GPS Garmin Etrex 10 handheld receiver and plotted on the map using Q-GIS v3.16.

Cutting-edge research was conducted using various methods, including historical and ethnographic methodologies, multi-stakeholder participation and exchanges, and audio-visual strategies and techniques. There were brainstorming focus group sessions with stakeholders involved in preserving the city’s heritage elements, where participants discussed laws that needed to be mobilised, funding avenues and ways to overcome the apathy of private heritage property owners towards conservation. The transect walk method through modified Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was used on the city’s major road network to formulate an understanding of the perceptions of the residents and tourists on the street networks and heritage demolition along the roadside (Table 35.1).

Table 35.1 An overview of qualitative method of analysis

Approaches involving primary sources		Secondary sources
Open-ended interviews with different stakeholders	Key informants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academicians • Government officials • Owners/Custodians • Heritage activists • Project volunteers • Citizen historians • Student community • Real-estate developers 	Books
Focus group discussions		Journals
Ethnographic observations		Census reports
Action research		Newspaper articles
Transect walk		
Observation through photo survey		

Source Compiled by authors, 2022

Changing Spatial Dynamics

The city of Chandernagore, which is located approximately 40 km north of the megacity of Kolkata, is a part of the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, and due to its proximity to the state capital and availability of transportation alternatives like roadways, railways and waterways, Chandernagore has been a viable alternative for the middle-class residents. In today's context, the city of Chandernagore is urbanising rapidly to keep pace with the demands of development. From the data of Census of India, this growing concentration of urban population becomes pretty clear from 26,831 persons in 1901, it rose to 49,909 in 1951 and in 2011 it touched 166,867. However, an interesting fact is that the population growth rate from 1991–2001 was 34.73% while that for 2001–2011 was 2.88%; so, this probably indicates that Chandernagore has already reached its demographic peak and resultant urban expansion. Interestingly, 9 wards (5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 17, 25, 26 and 27) have shown an adverse change in total population and consequently in population density too; ward 26 has maintained its leading position in terms of population density though faced a sharp decadal slump. The older municipal wards (1–27) and especially the ones on the eastern side, along the river Hugli which houses most of the heritage sites though smaller in areal dimension, have higher population density (Fig. 35.3), highlighting that the chances of urban renewal and transformation in those.

To understand the changing nature of land use and land cover of the study area, supervised classification has been used on the basis of maximum likelihood by means of spectral signatures with the help of training output creation through creation of region of interest (ROIs) and the resultant output is based on conventional colour coding having four macro-classes (waterbody, open space, vegetation and built-up area). Over the span of 40 years (1982–2022), there has been a vast change in the categories. Over the years, the settlement (built-up area) has increased from 36.50% in 1982 to 79.5% in 2022 allowing more residential space in expense of open spaces and vegetated areas mostly, which faced a sharp decline of 14.29 and 24.29% in the said period. With the increasing trend of real-estate development, water bodies decreased from 9.66 to 5.16% (Table 35.2 and Fig. 35.4). So, this changed LULC of the region reflects that in contemporary times many residential and development projects are coming up indicating rapid urbanisation.

Table 35.2 Area and percentages of LULC classes for the period 1982–2022 for Chandernagore municipal corporation (Wards 1–27)

Years	LULC classes							
	Waterbody		Open space		Vegetation		Built-up area	
	(km ²)	(%)	(km ²)	(%)	(km ²)	(%)	(km ²)	(%)
1982	0.92	9.66	2.34	24.61	2.78	29.24	3.47	36.50
2022	0.49	5.16	0.98	10.32	0.47	4.95	7.56	79.58

Source Computed by authors from satellite imageries of Landsat 4 and 8 for 1982 and 2022, respectively

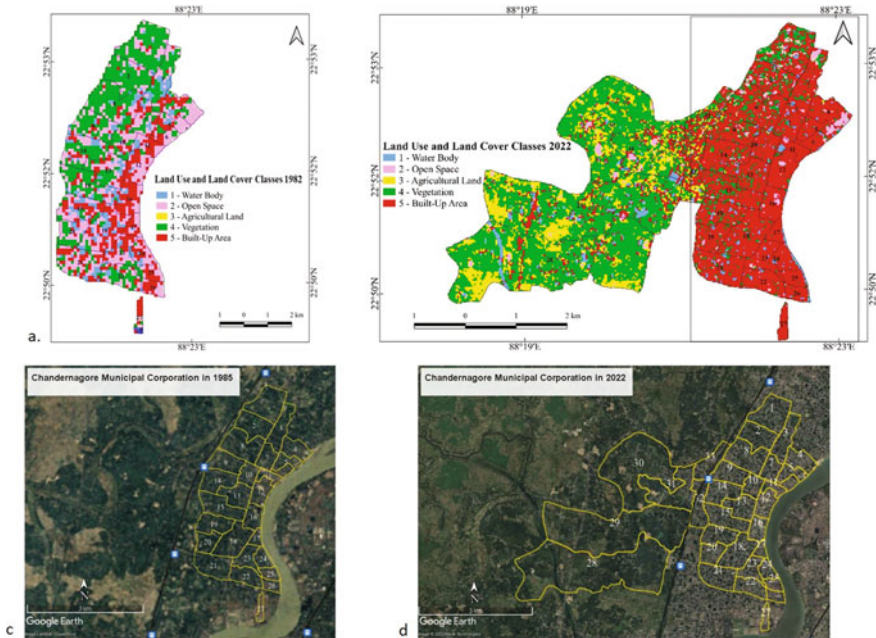


Fig. 35.4 Marked change in land use and land cover of Chandernagore, West Bengal. The LULC maps (a and b) with the help of satellite imageries of Landsat 4 and 8 for 1982 and 2022, respectively. The corresponding Google Earth images (c and d) of 1985 and 2022 also corroborate the same

To ensure the quality of classification, accuracy check has been done—the overall accuracy of 87.92% and kappa coefficient of 0.83 were obtained from the 1982 map while the accuracy was 91.82% for the 2022 map with a kappa coefficient of 0.89.

The newly added wards in the western part are less concretised till now but with the continuous rising graph of population pressure and urbanisation it is very likely that these open spaces will soon be converted into residential plots with mixed-uses. Apart from horizontal expansion, the city is also growing vertically with introduction of multi-storied buildings (Siddique et al. 2020). According to Ghosh and Sarkar (2021), because Chandernagore is one of the important Urban Local Bodies of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), the city's urban scape will gradually replace colonial structures with modern flat culture, as with the other units of the KMA.

Reality Check: Status of Heritage Sites

Chandernagore has diverse and vibrant built heritage structures that have created and shaped the city's cultural identity (ATA 2012). However, when planning goals are taken into account, urban-heritage preservation is not seen as a priority, and thus, established heritage buildings around the city of Chandernagore continue to be

relegated to the periphery of the urban plans. Chandernagore’s built fabric reflects the powers that have historically dominated and influenced the city, including the Hindus, Portuguese, French and British. Chandernagore has an established heritage with a diverse portfolio of tangible heritage assets. Although the city does not have a UNESCO World Heritage site, only one site, Institut de Chandernagore, is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). As mentioned earlier, most of the heritage building units are in the older municipal wards (1–27) and the concentration is highest in the two adjoining wards of 12 and 16. Some prominent built heritage structures of the city include Institute de Chandernagore, St. Joseph’s Convent, Registry Building, Sacred Heart Church, French Administrative Building, Hotel De France, French Jail, Liberty Gate, College Dupleix, Nandadulal Temple, Bura-Shiv Temple, Moran Saheb’s Bungalow, Patal Bari, Jora Ghat, Nritya Gopal Smriti Mandir, Lal Dighi, Thistle Hotel or the Chandernagore Subdivisional Court and French Cemetery, among many others (Kar et al. 2020).

Earlier the settlements in Chandernagore flourished along the river Hugli, the presence of the Grand Trunk (G. T.) Road, Strand Road and Burrabazar Main Road, as well as the railway line, aided in the city’s gradual urbanisation. Das et al. (2020) divided the city into three zones: (a) Zone-I (Residential Area) covers parts of wards 15, 17 and 18, having significant colonial imprint and at the same time bearing the brunt of modern transformation, (b) Zone-II (Administrative Hub) has the iconic colonial administrative buildings bearing French legacy, which are located in the neighbourhood of Burrabazar area, predominantly covering ward 13, and (c) Zone-III (Mercantile Zone) was once where Fort d’Orleans’ (later destroyed by British) was located and now the Urdi Bazar area. The ward 11 has become a prominent commercial hub for the city. Taking into account the population density, distribution of houses, road layout, distribution of open spaces and other socio-economic parameters Chandernagore can be divided into three morphological zones (Table 35.3).

The rise in the real-estate market has increased the land value in certain areas, resulting in unaffordable housing for low-income groups. Developers are buying land in the town’s main areas, demolishing heritage buildings and replacing them with

Table 35.3 Morphological divisions of Chandernagore, West Bengal

Zones	Characteristics
Zone-I: River-side area along the bank of River Hugli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical core • Administrative buildings • Old residential houses • Industrial belt
Zone-II: The Inland Zone along G. T. Road, in the east and the Eastern Railway in the west	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old historical buildings • New residential complex • Commercial areas
Zone-III: The Outer Zone along the city’s western periphery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly developed residential houses • Squatter colonies

Source Computed by the authors based on literature review and Field Survey, 2022



Fig. 35.5 Fading history—**a** A historically significant building in Gondolpara is being demolished to make way for an apartment; **b** Chabighar (Cinema Hall) in Chandernagore, West Bengal is being razed to make way for a mall; **c** Several flat complexes have sprung up along the whole stretch of Grand Trunk Road. *Source* Field Survey, 2022

modern housing with higher density to increase the land value (Fig. 35.5). Significant changes have occurred in the town’s main street networks (like Strand Road, G. T. Road, Bagbazar Road and Burrabazar Road).

The present scenario demands a detailed examination of ground reality rather than merely mapping the heritage units to bring out the gradual transformation the small town is going through to keep pace with the changing times. The area along the G. T. Road has good connectivity, and the land price is relatively high. For this, the real-estate developers have eyed this area for urban regeneration, and a host of old villa-type buildings are being demolished, giving way to swanky apartments for residential and commercial purposes, resulting in mixed land use. Due to the scenic beauty of the riverfront, the land price is highest along the Strand Road. Since most of the stretch has several important colonial structures and the promenade is a dedicated public space, land or building conversion has been very limited, and the local administration has been highly proactive in maintaining the colonial public realm. Another sprawling area is along the Burrabazar Road, which is almost the city’s centre, buzzing with several activities – administrative, judiciary, educational, etc. Here, the land price is also within reach of the middle class, and thus, many new apartments with modern amenities are replacing the old architectural charm (Fig. 35.6).

Understanding People’s Perceptions About Town’s Heritage Values

Extensive qualitative research was conducted to ascertain how residents and custodians perceive the town’s heritage assets. During the interviews, it was observed that many owners of the present generation (fourth to the seventh generation from the

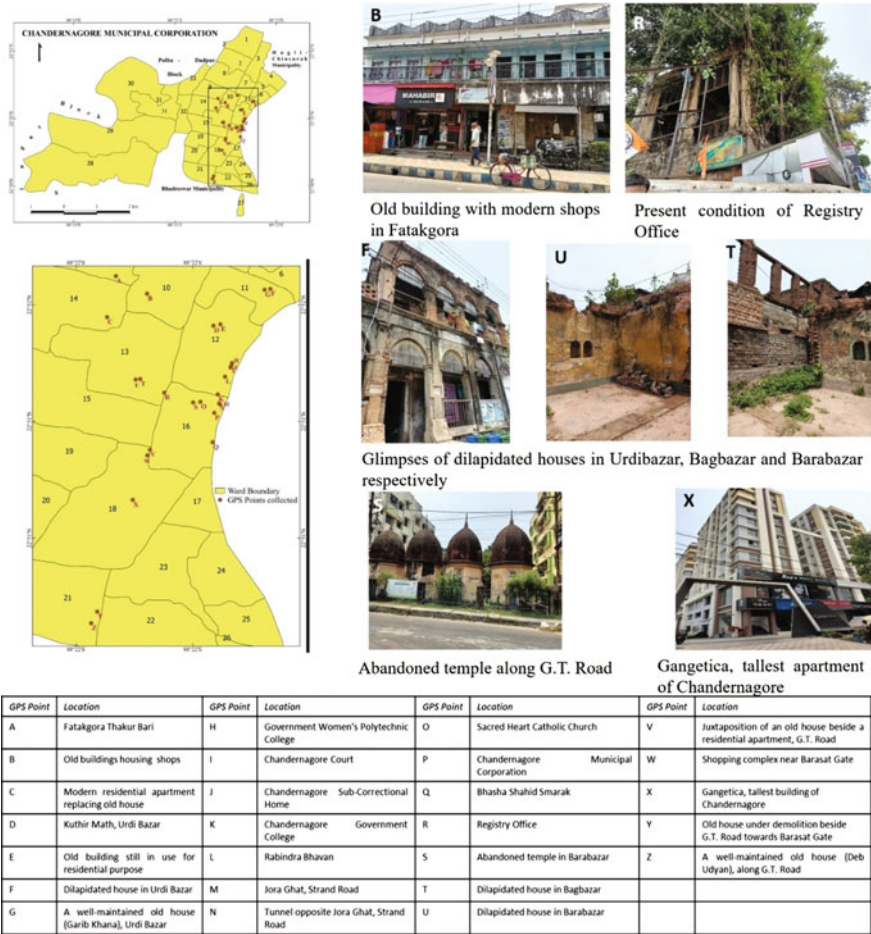


Fig. 35.6 Distribution and status of various heritage sites across Chandernagore, West Bengal. Source Field Survey, 2022

original owner/s) of old homes consider their buildings as liabilities rather than assets. Many owners do not have the funds or adequate economic resources to restore their old properties. The old buildings are often not suitable for the type of accommodation required by the present-day nuclear family structure (broken away from the traditional joint-family system), dissatisfying the present owners. Some family members relocate to new apartment buildings with modern amenities whenever the opportunity and affordability arise. Legal issues occur with buildings that have multiple owners. Buddhadeb Dutta (heritage enthusiast and the Key Informant Interview person) rightly informed that ownership issues centred around the old historic homes. The majority of the mansions are multi-tenanted or contested among families, resulting in a lack of upkeep and maintenance and strife, which has led

to many of them being taken to court. As a result, the lawsuits have been pending for years, and many families have relocated. Instead, they would rather sell their properties to real-estate brokers than appear in court regularly. For the last twenty to thirty years, many people from the adjacent towns have come to settle here in Chandernagore. The city's urban fabric has severely altered the original morphology of the entire cityscape. Mr. K. P. Jana (former Chandernagore Education Minister) is well versed in the city's rich heritage buildings and monuments. He moved here fifteen years ago, living in Kolkata, and stated that the city has recently experienced a new flat culture growth. The loss of historic buildings and construction was not as quick as some twenty years ago. Another person, Mr. Biswajit Roy (Officer of the Superintendent in Chandernagore Municipal Corporation), rightly stated that it is difficult to find any physical evidence linked to the reminiscences of French colonisation. Over time, the city saw several changes that weakened the diverse culture that previously subdued its homogeneous character. As a result, a routine commercial or ceremonial visit to Chandernagore without any intention of the investigation will easily ignore the French history of the city. Although the administrative bodies in Chandernagore implemented many plans and initiatives to restore the old historic buildings around the city, the issue remains as to why the city is losing its old historical structures. Mr. Kamal Banerjee of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) said that the town's population has increased in the last ten years because many individuals from Kolkata could not afford to live there settled here. People prefer to purchase a two-room flat than land, which is more expensive. This prompts real-estate brokers to give loans and discounts, and, as a result, vacant land and old historic homes become easy targets for construction.

Chandernagore is home to a diverse collection of heritage structures, including private and public ones. The power that has always ruled and impacted the city is reflected in the private mansions (including French, Portuguese and Natives). Similarly, architectural aspects of public historic sites across the city reflect components and themes that tell their own unique stories. However, public structures are always given precedence over private arrangements. Interviews and focus groups were conducted to gain a better understanding of two essential aspects: I. How rapid urbanisation stimulates the property market to produce more housing, resulting in replacing older buildings with newer buildings with higher densities and II. How the replacement of newcomers weakens the affection that local communities still have for their local heritage since newcomers are often not aware of the heritage value and regional identity.

- *Chandernagore is experiencing rapid urban growth. This creates significant problems in creating heritage awareness and identifying and awaiting opportunities (Commissioner CMC, Expert Interview).*
- *Urbanisation is a threat because many younger generations have left the city, and new owners have been replaced by traditional owners, who find old housing unsuitable for modern lifestyles (Official of Chandernagore Municipal Corporation, Expert Interview).*

- *To save heritage buildings and structures around the city, one needs to have a proper long-term plan involving the citizens and the owner-custodian of the house rather than conducting a day-long walk and talk (Official WBHC, Expert Interview).*
- *With its vibrant edifices and tangible and intangible facets, the city has the potential to become a heritage city (Official WBHC, Expert Interview).*

The city of Chandernagore has diverse and vibrant built heritage structures that have created and shaped the city's cultural identity. However, when planning goals are considered, urban-heritage preservation is not seen as a priority. Thus, old heritage buildings around the city of Chandernagore continue to be relegated to the periphery of urban planning plans (Bose and Mukherjee 2022). The replacement of ancient buildings with new ones destroyed the city's social and cultural character and people's sense of place and identity (Vecco 2010; Yung et al. 2017). Today, it is not easy to find any physical evidence linked to the reminiscences of French colonialism. Over time, several changes occurred in the city that weakened the diverse culture that had previously subdued its homogeneous character. The majority of those who can afford to buy apartments are from the middle class. Those from the wealthy class maintain the old fabrics of their homes through regular renovation and restoration work. The social strata's uniformity is actually a hindrance to the overall system and mindset. The economic set-up further complicates the dichotomies between 'public' and 'private' spaces. On the one hand, it opens up private homes and spaces for heritage exploration and casual visits, creating a newer category of consumerist publics who devour on the distinct consumption of romance and nostalgia around the past. On the other hand, previously public properties that had been part of the city's collective memory have become exclusive elite spaces that are no longer open to the public. The economic strata significantly altered the social and economic structure of the town. The majority of the population is unaware of the significance of the old homes and thus sells them to real-estate brokers for a few rupees. As a result, a routine commercial or ceremonial visit to Chandernagore without any intention of the investigation will easily ignore the French part of the city. Today, the lack of convergence and conflict between multiple actors and networks is a severe hindrance to preserving heritage structures in and around Chandernagore. The dynamic stories related to the house have created and shaped the cultural identity of the city of Chandernagore. It is primarily understood that there is, in fact, no standard classification and valorisation approach towards the declared heritage houses in Chandernagore. The question is still left unanswered as to what type of heritage should be preserved, for what reason, and by whom.

The formal mapping often does not have a connection with the common man and for that involvement of them is much needed. So, while strolling through the city's lanes and byways, interactions with residents and tourists from nearby areas who frequented the city were made and requested few interested ones to draw sketches of the town's network. Later, the sketches were compiled using the modified PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) method of transect walk to formulate a layman's understanding of the town's street network and the location of old historic structures

along the roadside (Figs. 35.7, 35.8 and 35.9). PRA is a methodology adopted where the rural community is involved in identifying the issues, challenges and opportunities for their own progress by creating a bias-free friendly environment (Government of West Bengal 2016) and in this case similar technique has been applied in urban settings involving active participation of the local residents.

The town’s residents are well versed in the city’s historic structures. Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals, open-ended questions were addressed, and discussions were held on how to implement sustainable methods of restoring the historic structures that dot the landscape of Chandernagore. The transect walks can be viewed as the first attempt at community participation in heritage mapping and identification, with programs to raise awareness among the local population about

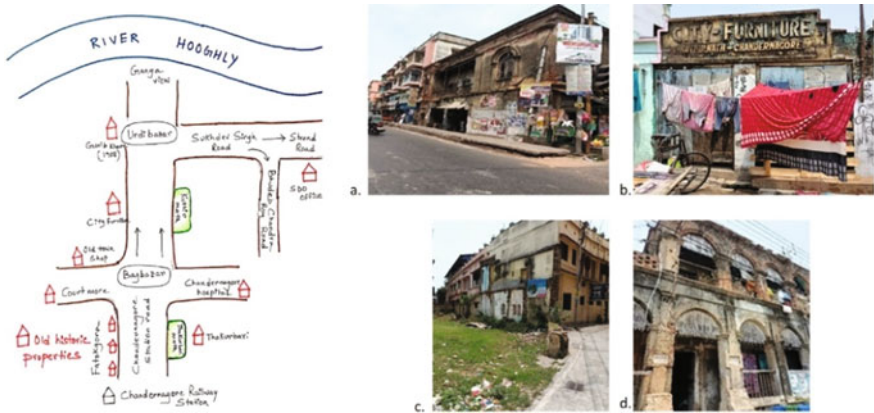


Fig. 35.7 Transect walk I—along the Chandernagore station road—Bagbazar road and Urdu bazar, in Chandernagore, West Bengal. **a** an old shop in Bagbazar area, **b** Old City Furniture shop, **c** Kuthir Math, **d** Gorib Khana (an old historic home). *Source* Field Survey, 2022



Fig. 35.8 Transect walk II—Along the Grand Trunk Road in Chandernagore, from Church Road towards Bhadeswar, in Chandernagore, West Bengal, **a** Liberty gate, **b** Deb Uddan, **c** Kundu house, **d** Kartick Villa, **e** An old town shop. *Source* Field Survey, 2022



Fig. 35.9 Transect walk III—Along the Barasat Road to Vidyalankar and Lokshmi Bazar in Chandernagore, West Bengal, **a** Gala Kuthir, **b** Nriya Gopal Smriti Mandir, **c** Lal Dighi, **d** Krishna Bhabani Nari Siksha Mandir, **e** French Cemetery. *Source* Field Survey, 2022

the importance of built heritage. The residents and the locals interviewed suggested rehabilitation of the structures. The walk along the lanes and by-lanes shows that the local people are aware of the city’s heritage aspect, which can be used as a positive force in maintaining or restoring the heritage in the future.

Rethinking ‘Heritage’ Through Action Plan and Outreach Activities

Heritage always calls for inclusion, but the inclusionary aspect of heritage is often underpinned when it comes to development. In the contemporary era, the holistic heritage approach has frequently degraded into layers of ignorance and low priority subjects. Rapid urbanisation in emerging nations has resulted in a complicated process of ‘peri-urbanisation’ and ‘urban sprawl’ on the outskirts of big metropolises.

United Nations New Urban Agenda 2016 (UNESCO 2016) emphasised that heritage conservation needs to be a part of inclusive urban economies and has an important role in Holistic Urban Development (United Nations 2017) which can be achieved through all-inclusive approaches (Lorusso et al. 2016). Riganti (2017) pointed out that absence of proper heritage conservation framework has led to unabated urbanising trend at the cost of heritage structures and suggested ‘smart heritage’ approach as a viable way out. Udeaja et al. (2020) presented a case of Surat city, India, where rapid urbanisation, increasing housing demand led to destruction of heritage at a disturbing rate and recommended avenues to maximise the potential of heritage through sustainable urban-heritage conservation into local urban development projects.

A city in West Bengal named Chandernagore, located in the Hooghly region of Bengal, has seen urban expansion since the time of the French occupation. The city still has important historical structures, but due to urban expansion, the city’s

rich heritage structures are being eclipsed by the erection of multi-storey buildings. Heritage destruction in Kolkata, its adjacent city, has become a real concern, attracting everyone from ordinary citizens to celebrities to go into the streets to denounce the demolition of old historical monuments around the city (Majumdar 2019). Kolkata, the centre of British authority during the colonial era and home to important British architectural buildings, is the focus of media firms and news networks. Interestingly, media attention and discussions of big conservation projects are mainly limited to big cities like Kolkata. At 40 km from Kolkata, Chandernagore is also caught in the same struggle; however, there has been less emphasis and attention paid to upscale the historic conservation project to raise our own ancient French town. Heritage is frequently viewed from the monument-centric perspective of officially recognised and legally protected buildings and structures that may not be linked with the personal histories, experiences, practices and identities of the people who inhabit and bring a place to life. The town has been holding on to remnants of French traces in public spaces, architecture and culture, despite being upstream from its more well-known cousin, Kolkata. Rapid urbanisation has put the French household architecture, cultural practices and legacy of this trading post at risk, necessitating quick protection. It is crucial to resurrect the town's opportunity by implementing an appropriate historical conservation and management strategy.

The inclusive heritage plan will instil a deep awareness of the river's significance as a conduit for cultural heritage linkages in the minds of all of its activists and scholars. The plan will present a new perspective to galvanise and rethink the understanding that a peripheral city's cultural heritage is equally important in the urban setting within the conventional notions of core and periphery (Fig. 35.10). The field trips also provided a counter-narrative to what is common in the city's core zones, barring the riverside promenade. Wards (31, 32 and 33) in the Chandernagore are well managed with grid patterns, and heritage structures have also received much attention in the wards. The mingling of old and new in open spaces shows us why there is a need to constantly rethink and re-imagine heritage as both a dynamic and fluid process that shapes the town's identity and historical values within its limits (Table 35.4).

The conservation of the heritage buildings is needed for the greater interest of the society which has not only historical facet but also economic, cultural and environmental angles which are also intertwined and procedural guidelines that are well etched in the guidelines of Central Public Works Department 2013. Heritage is frequently portrayed in development discourses as a financial liability for developers and lobbies. A shift from an 'expert-driven approach' to a 'value-based approach' should be made, where values associated with a building should be recognised. The action plan developed here will offer interesting insights to planners and conservationists to rethink and recognise the plurality of heritage values through comprehensive up-scaling of heritage initiatives across the urban fabric (Menchawy et al. 2011).



Fig. 35.10 Charting an inclusive urban-heritage planning model for Chandernagore, West Bengal. Computed by the authors, 2022

Conclusion

The city of Chandernagore is in transitional mode where for urban governance and development bottom-up approach is now being pursued, ensuring multiple stakeholder participation. The micro-urban plans aim to maintain the balance between colonial identity and futuristic modernisation through mixed land use promotion ensuring urban vitality. The resultant heritage tourism and associated businesses can help in developing urban space, unique city centre and prosperous living. Heritage urbanism considers the revitalisation and enhancement of cultural heritage in spatial, urban and landscape contexts, and it explores models for its inclusion in contemporary life (Obad Šćitaroci and Bojanić Obad Šćitaroci 2019). As architecture has a direct bearing on urban form, the authorities have to keep a check on illegal construction and deliberate defacing of heritage units in the name of urban transformation and modernisation. To keep the charm of 'Little Europe' intact, Chandernagore has to develop as a heritage-based smart city providing unique living experience within the KMA.

The ethnographic investigations and heritage mapping crafted in this chapter will deeply ingrain in the minds of academics and professionals a fresh new understanding of how we might 'rethink' heritage. The city's heritage richly manifests culture and architecture. The 'heritage' of the town today has predominantly entered the urban

Table 35.4 Decoding inclusive urban-heritage action planning model for Chandernagore, West Bengal

Building partnerships	Community engagements	Creating a holistic urban-heritage legislation	Establishing a heritage committee	Engaging technical expertise
<p>Identifying potential and strategic partners for management, implementation and knowledge sharing Nurturing private–public partnership Developing coordination of various activities among different actors involved in heritage conservation Focusing on long-term planning and goals rather than short-term plans Initiating collaborations to mobilise funds from targeted state, national and international funding agencies towards more elaborate, comprehensive and sustainable deliverables Designing partnership development program (like online courses and consortium projects) to ensure more participation</p>	<p>Creating a community engagement program by involving the town’s communities Organise heritage walks, tours and events to reach citizens and visitors Conducting surveys and interviews with varied age groups to understand their perceptions and aspirations about heritage Strengthening community’s knowledge on tangible and intangible assets of the town Developing a collective strategy to comprehend the unique values of various communities involved in heritage preservation Initiating a civic engagement platform for knowledge sharing and idea generation</p>	<p>Integrating local heritage policies in line with national planning interfaces Recognising and valuing tangible and intangible cultural heritage strengthens social cohesion and fosters a sense of place and belonging Enacting laws for heritage units in Chandernagore town so buildings can be restored from further deterioration Promoting a shift from a monumentalism approach to one that addresses heritage and its urban fabric and associated intangible heritage</p>	<p>Establishing a local heritage cell will help to look at the heritage aspects and development more closely Formulating a heritage cell that will thoroughly assess the city’s natural and cultural heritage Keeping detailed records of the historical documents Identifying the stakeholders and reaching out to them Form an inclusive heritage group (NGOs, the administrative department, neighbourhood groups) who will do the listing, grading and valuation</p>	<p>Initiating collective mapping and documentation of old heritage buildings and areas Involving technical persons to demonstrate 3D visualisation and share success stories Promoting digitalisation fosters better collaborations and allows people to experience the space digitally Constructing up-to-date and informative websites can act as repositories of information Funding tech-driven restoration activities to boost tourism and that would pave the way for socio-economic development</p>

Source Computed by the authors, 2022

planning discussions. Unfortunately, discussions on heritage are mainly limited to the big cities like Kolkata, while the regional dynamics around the land in other small towns remain largely unexplored. Heritage today needs to be incorporated into the larger domain of policy circles. The people own the city and should know why they need to conserve it. A well-developed strategy will benefit both the city and its residents. The recommendations formulated here provide the city with a fresh new perspective; Chandernagore has a rich history that is distinct from its neighbouring cities. This chapter mapped the city's challenges from heritage conservation perspectives and developed and delivered a sustainable, indestructible, immutable and persistent strategic plan. This plan gave the heritage a chance to function in the community's life and finally provided a chance to integrate and assimilate the protection of the heritage conservation into comprehensive planning programs, through which its history can be retained in contemporary times, facilitating overall urban regeneration of this region.

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