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THE FORGOTTEN FREDERIKNOGORE- DOCUMENTATION OF DANISH GOVERNMENT HOUSE, KOLKATA

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Abstract: This paper aims at documenting a building constructed during Danish settlement which is located in Serampore city of Hoogly district, West Bengal. Danish governance in Serampore was for around 100 years after which the power was transferred in the hands of British government. The historical significance of Danish settlement and growth during the urbanization phases can be seen from the buildings constructed by Danish rulers. Several eminent landmarks were made under the governance of Danish like Government House (1771), the Lutheran St. Olav's Church (1806) and Serampore College (1823) came up under Danish governance out of which is the 'Danish government house and the Tavern' has been restored under West Bengal government and Danish government jointly. This paper is basically focusing on documenting Danish Government building in terms of its architectural features, interpretation of plans, geometry of forms and through volumetric, functional and developmental analysis.

Key words: Danish settlement, geometry of forms, functional analysis

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SERAMPORE AND DANISH SETTLEMENTS:

Serampore is a city of Hooghly district in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is the headquarter of the Serampore subdivision and part of the area covered by Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA). Serampore is a pre-colonial city on the west bank of the Hooghly River. It was part of Danish India under the name Frederiknagore from 1755 to 1845. There were three main phases in the process of urbanisation of Serampore:

- I. The Pre-urbanisation phase (the period before 1755);
- II. The Urbanisation phase (from 1755 to 1854); and
- III. The Industrialisation phase (1854 to 1947).

The Danish East India Company was dissolved and reorganized in 1732 as the Danish Asiatic Company with the Danish Government as a major stockholder. In 1755 the Danish Asiatic Company was granted the right to establish a trading post at Serampore at the Hooghly River in West Bengal, about 25 km north of Calcutta (Kolkata). The name of the place was officially changed to Frederiksnagore in honour of the Danish King Frederik V, however, the local name was maintained in daily use. Serampore came under direct administration of the Danish Crown in 1777 and remained on Danish hands, with only a few interruptions, until 1845, when the trading post was ceded to the British together with the other Danish

settlement in India, Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) in Tamil

The major European powers had already negotiated commercial treaties with the local ruler, the nawab of Bengal, and they had acquired land and established separate posts or factories (meaning warehouses) along the lower part of the Hooghly River, providing an easy approach to the rich markets of northern India. The French was established at Chandernagore, the Portuguese at Bandel and Hooghly, the Dutch at Chinsurah, the British at Calcutta and now with the Danish settlement at Serampore, the European nations turned the area along the lower part of the Hooghly River into a 'Little Europe'.

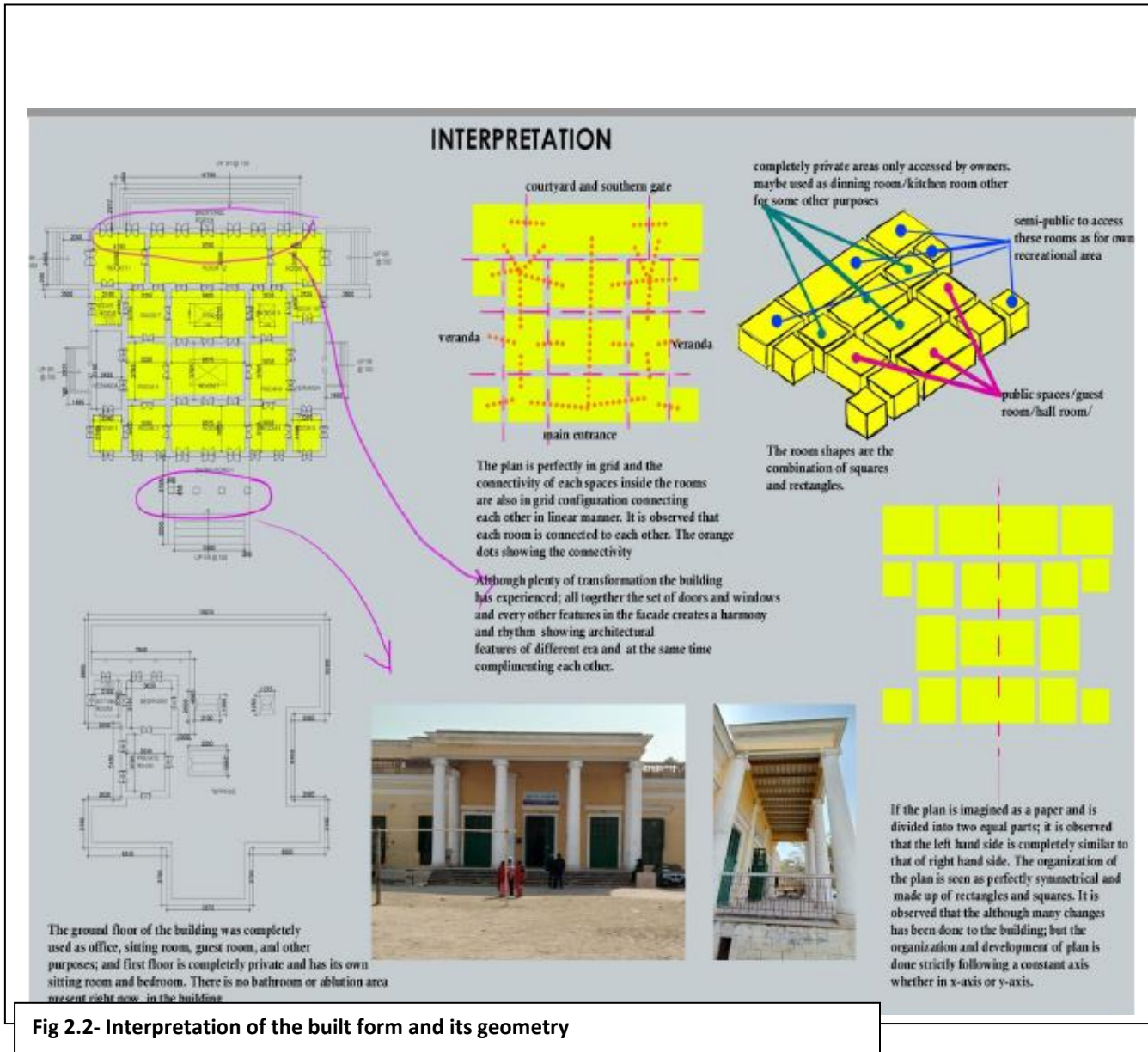
2. THE DANISH GOVERNMENT BUILDING

The Danish Government compound dates back to 1755 when the Asiatic Company established their trading post in Serampore. Due to the political unrest in the area at the time, the Company felt it necessary to surround the small estate by a protective wall. Within this wall, the government house was erected together with a powder magazine, a guardroom, a jail, a kitchen, a henhouse, a go-down and quarters for the staff and officers.



Fig 2.1- The location map along with site and surrounding of Danish Government Building

The compound and all the related structures were laid out according to a north south axis leading from the Nishan Ghat with the flag staff at the river bank onwards through the northern main gate to the government house and to the southern gateway building.



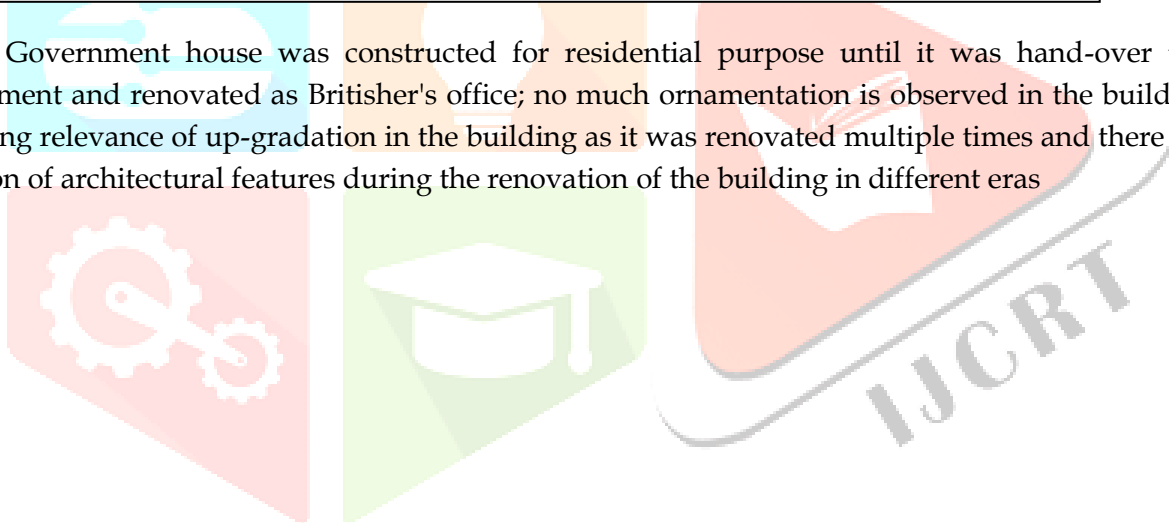
3.DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS



Fig :3.1 Measured drawing plans of ground floor and first floor

[REFERENCE TAKEN FROM (Indo-Danish Heritage Buildings of Serampore Survey report by the Serampore Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark August 2010 - Flemming Aalund & Simon Rastén) AND MEASUREMENT TAKEN.]

Danish Government house was constructed for residential purpose until it was hand-over to the British Government and renovated as Britisher's office; no much ornamentation is observed in the building. But there is a strong relevance of up-gradation in the building as it was renovated multiple times and there is an effective reflection of architectural features during the renovation of the building in different eras



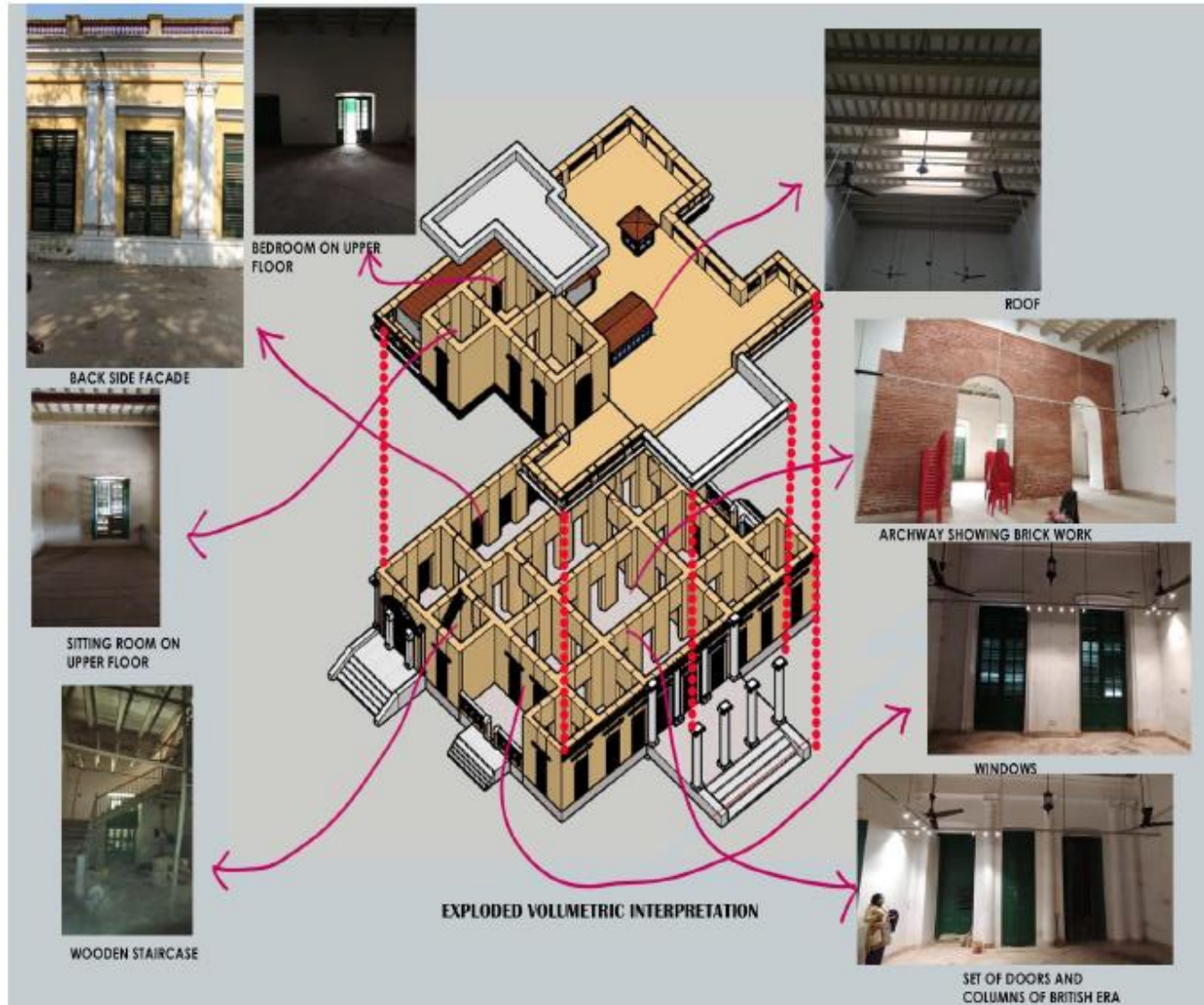


Fig 3.2- Volumetric Interpretation

4. DEVELOPMENTS OF SPACES IN TERMS OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL SETTING

Danish Government house was constructed for residential purpose until it was hand-over to the British Government and renovated as Britisher's office; no much ornamentation is observed in the building. But there is a strong relevance of up-gradation in the building as it was renovated multiple times and there is an effective reflection of architectural features during the renovation of the building in different eras.

- I. (1770-1773)-The building was first constructed in 1770; during that time it was constructed using material like mud and straw and consisted of a hall, four large rooms, two small rooms, two verandas and one godown until it collapsed in an unfortunate manner. Later on 1771 the remaining part was demolished and reconstructed using brick and lime by then Danish Head of Serampore, Johan Leonard Fix where the structure consists of consisting of a hall, two rooms and a veranda. In 1773; under Olie Bie the new Head of Serampore, two other room and a veranda was constructed. ^{3,4,6}
- II. (1816-1832)-. In 1832 the Government House was reported to contain 4 large rooms in the center, 5 smaller rooms with open verandas to each side, as well as a large veranda to the south with a terrace

- above. . The same year two additional rooms have been fitted up at each end of the southern veranda, most likely by adding two new partition walls inside the veranda-
- III. (1781)- Under Olie Bie the new Head of Serampore, funds were allocated for the construction of the new veranda, built as monumental front portico in the Ionic order, and two rooms were added at each side of the building, extending the whole length of the facade.^{3,4,6}
 - IV. British era-. In 1842 and 1843 an upper story was added with a roof pavilion, hence creating the proportions of an Italian palazzo. The two airy rooms on 1st floor were originally built for sleeping apartments.

5.FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

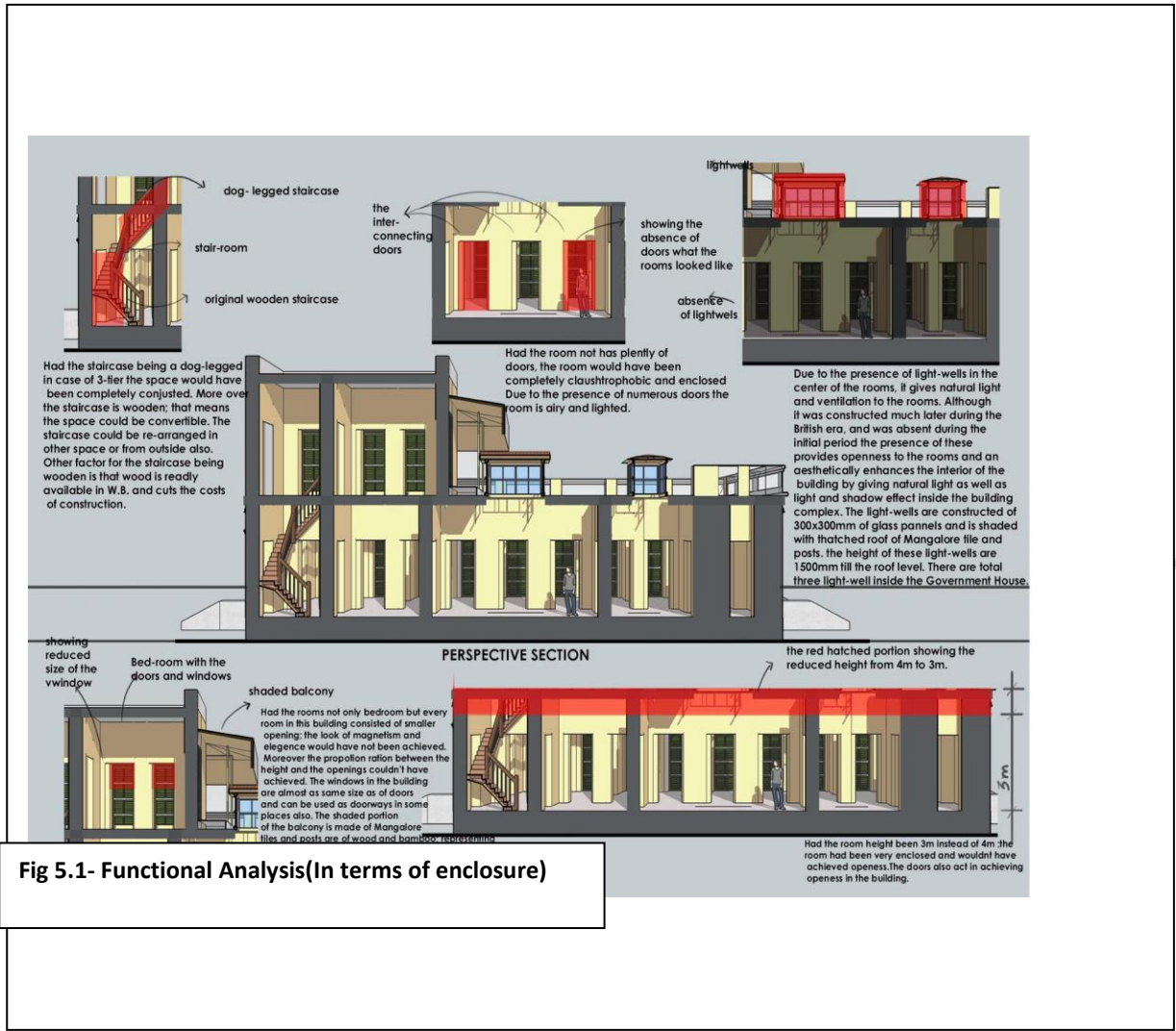


Fig 5.1- Functional Analysis(In terms of enclosure)

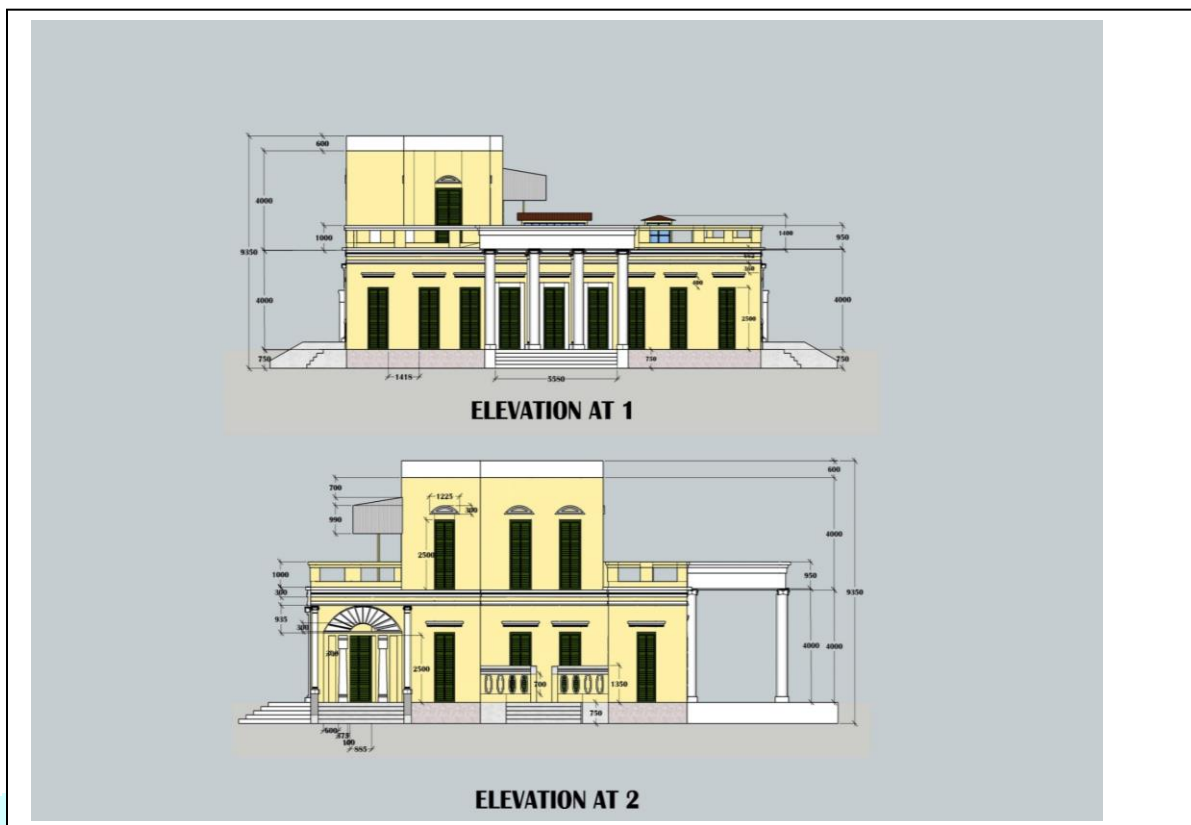


Fig 5.2- Elevations(refer Fig: 3.1)

6.ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

Since the Danish government house has experienced multiple transformations in different era, it has been observed that there is a change in style of ornamentation of facade reflecting style of that era. In the back side of facade, there is extensive use of colonial architectural elements. Each opening at the back acts as both door as well as window, with the upper part of the door being glass to allow natural light to enter inside the building and the lower part of having wooden shutters to allow ventilation. Each door has a set of ionic non-structural columns at both sides.

6.1 FACADE

In the front facade of the building it has eight ionic columns out of which four are at the front supporting the upper roof of the portico and four at the back. These ionic columns were added much later after the construction of the building under Danish governance, to give the effect of magnetism and arouse the feeling of power and importance of the building. In this facade it is clearly observed the difference in architectural feature. To the left hand side of the facade the windows and the chajja represents the architectural style of the Danish and to the right hand side it represents the ornamental architectural feature of colonial era. Although the two styles are different but it complements each other as a whole. The top bands below the parapet at the roof level of ground floor runs through-out the building giving an aesthetic and elegant look to the building

6.2 DOORS

Three types of doors are present(Fig-6.1). The first one is of British era during 18th century when the Danish government in Srirampur is taken over by the British. The door is very expressive of its era and beautifully ornamented with door panels, plain glasses, arches as lintel, and small pilasters on each side of the door and non-structural columns of ionic style on both sides of the door. The second pictures represents the picture of a

door constructed inside the residential Government building by the Danish government. It is not so much ornamental as other two doors, rather it gives a feeling of simplicity yet elegant vibe of a homely door. It is made up of wooden with slits or shutters of 50mmx450mm for ventilation with a slight arched lintel. The third door is also constructed during British era somewhat during 19th century when the building was transformed into court office. The door represents the robust vibe of power and dominance. the door is made up of wooden material with panels ;the lintel represents the architectural significance of colonial era which was prevalent during that era with two strong non-structural, ornamental columns topped with capital at head on both sides.

6.3 WINDOWS:

The height of the windows poses the same height that of doors and breath is slightly different(fig-6.2). It could be used as both door and window in some part of the building. The upper part of the window has glass panel of 100mmx300mm in size to allow light to enter inside of the building and the lower part has wooden shutters to allow ventilations. From the outside the chajja is of colonial architectural style and is very simple and there is absence of much decoration. From the inside the lintel is arched to showcase the window. The window has two parts; the outer side has wooden shutters and in the inside has glass and plain door panel.

6.4 MISCELLANEOUS

Shaded portion of the balcony in front of bedroom in the first floor. The shaded portion is made up of wooden posts and rafter and for support bamboo posts are used at the distance of 1500mm to 2000mm through the length of the balcony. And for the roofing material Mangalore tiles are used. The whole structure represents the vernacular architectural material which are easily available, and represents the architecture of the era as well as the locality.



SIDE FACADE

WINDOW FROM OUTSIDE

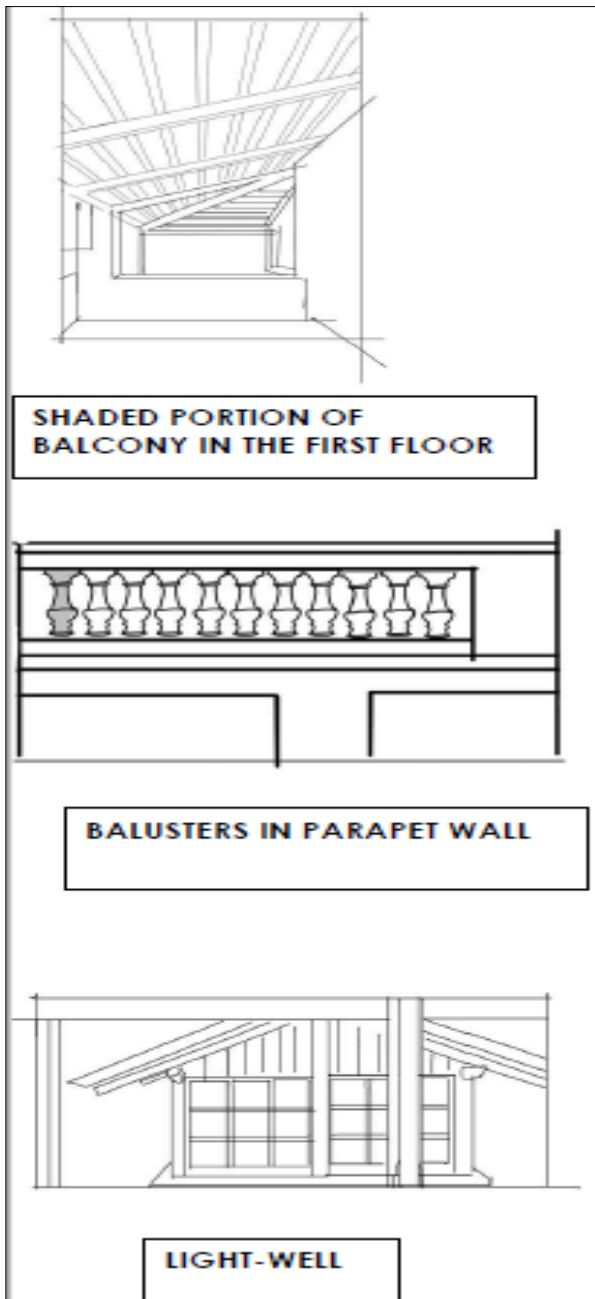


Fig 6.1- Doors

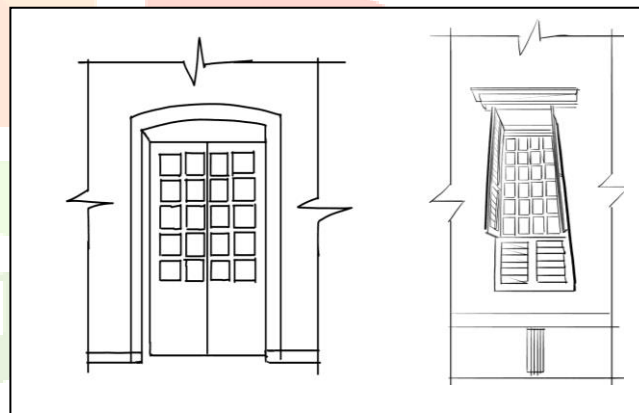


Fig 6.2- Doors

Fig 6.3- Balusters & light well

The balusters are very common in style and is still in use. Initially the balusters were made up of mud and it was restored by the Indian government as it used to be only this time it is made up of cement. It is observed that not only in Danish Government House but these balusters were used in Srirampur Raj Bari, Goswami courtyard house and other building of that Era in its surroundings.

The light-well was initially absent in the building and was introduced after the ownership of the house was transferred to the British Government. The light-well has brickwork up to 100mm level and above that level it consist of glass of 300x300mm and mullion of 25mm thick. At the top level a wooden post is provided for support of the roof. The roof is two sided slopped roof of Mangalorean tiles. The Light-well is 1500mm high from the terrace level and completely enclosed and was used for natural light only.

7. CONCLUSION:

Although the building experienced many modifications in both the era i.e., during the Danish era and the British era and later under the Indian government, when looked at, the modifications complement each other and bring forward the beauty and uniqueness at once along with the sense of power and resonance of importance of the building in the past.

In terms of plans it is observed that it is a combination of the basic geometry of squares and rectangles, and the plan follows a constant x-axis symmetry. It is observed that the ground floor was completely dedicated to semi-public and public activities and the upper story consists of a large bedroom, a private sitting room, and a portico which is made up of locally available materials. The height of the floor-ceiling is quite high if considered today's standard. For the restoration of the building, the consistence and resemblance of the building is kept as much as possible. At present, the Danish house is used as BDO office for Serampore and other buildings inside the complex is under the Indian Government and fully facilitated as a government office.

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