



**Shanto-Mariam University of
Creative Technology**

Assignment on
**“The Golden Legacy of Bengal: A Field Study on the Architectural,
Folk and Traditional Culture of Sonargaon and Panam Nagar”**

Submitted to:
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Table of Contents:

Sl.	Title	Page
1.	Introduction: The Echoes of Suvarnagram	1
2.	The Golden Era: Trade and Resistance	2
3.	Panam Nagar: The Rise and Fall of the Merchant City	3
4.	Architecture and Old Buildings	4
5.	Preserving Traditional Folk Culture	5
6.	Conclusion	6
7.	References	7

1. Introduction: The Echoes of Suvarnagram

Recently, we went on an academic tour to Sonargaon (সোনারগাঁও) and Panam Nagar (পানাম নগর) in the Narayanganj district for our Folk & Traditional Culture course.

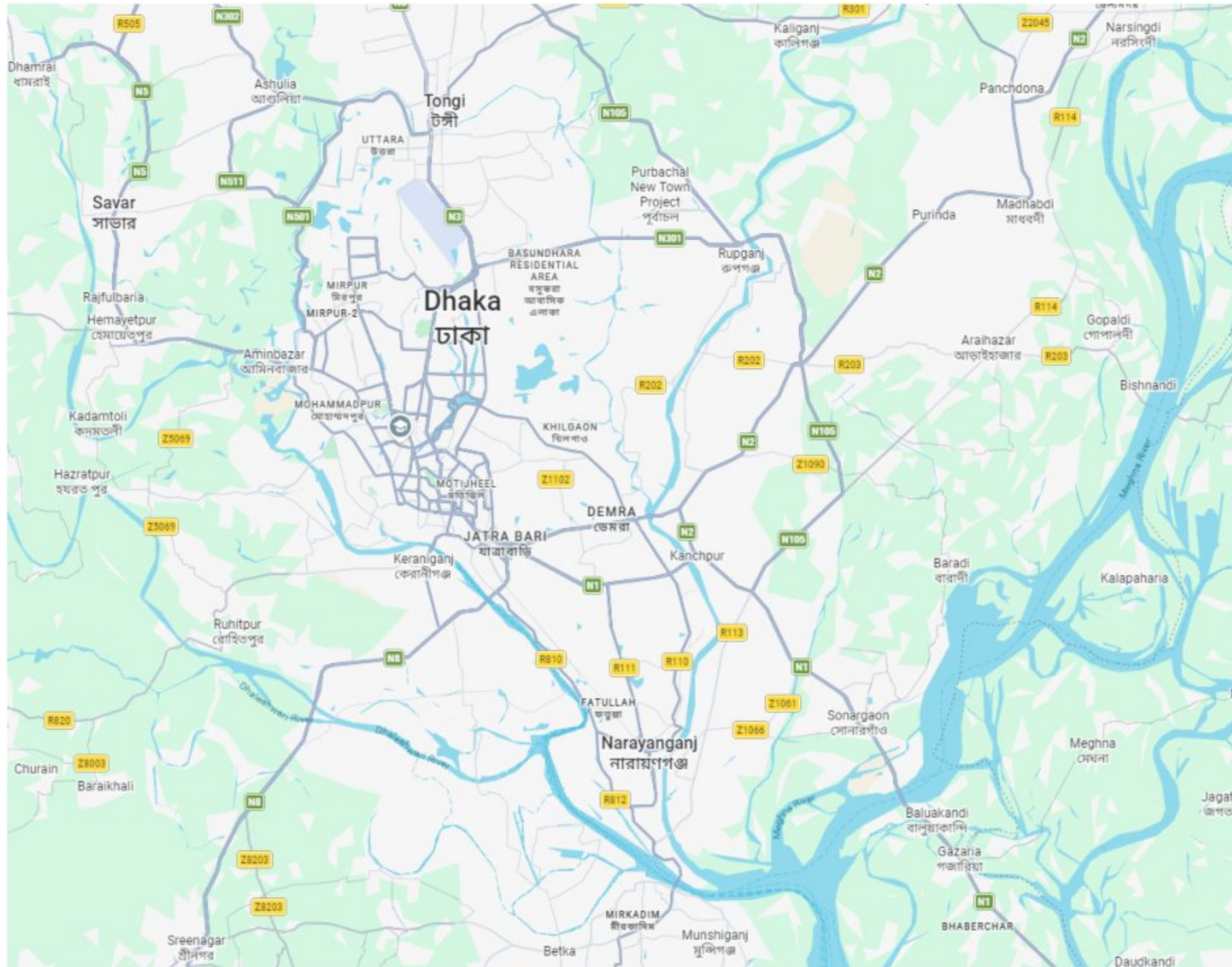


Figure 1: Geographic Location of Sonargaon

The word Sonargaon came from the ancient word Suvarnagrama, which means "Golden Village". In the past, Sonargaon was a very important capital city and river port of eastern Bengal. We went there to study the rich history, old buildings, and local culture of our country. This assignment will discuss the golden past of this area, the abandoned city of Panam Nagar, its architecture, and the folk arts we saw during our visit.

2. The Golden Era: Trade and Resistance

Sonargaon has a very glorious past. First of all, it was a world-famous center for making fine cotton clothes, especially Muslin (মসলিন). This beautiful cloth was made from a special type of cotton called Phuti karpas (ফুটি কার্পাস). The weavers used the water of the Meghna River and nearby ponds like Khashnagar Dighi (খাসনাসগর দিঘি), which made the cloth very white. The Muslin was so fine and thin that a whole sari could easily be folded and kept inside a small matchbox.

Besides trade, Sonargaon is also famous for brave heroes. In the 16th century, Isa Khan (ঈশা খাঁ) was the chief of the Baro-Bhuiyans (বারো ভূঁইয়া). He took the grand title Masnad-i-Ala (মসনদ-ই-আলা) and made Sonargaon his capital for the Bhati region. He fought bravely against the powerful Mughal Empire to keep Bengal free.



Figure 2: Boro Sardar Bari

3. Panam Nagar: Rise and Fall of the Merchant City

Near the Sonargaon museum, there is a historical place called Panam Nagar. During the British period in the 19th century, a group of wealthy Hindu merchants and talukdars (তালুকদার) built their houses here to do business in cotton fabrics. The English East India Company gave advance money to the local weavers to make clothes. This business process was known as the dadni (দাদনি) system. There were around 1,400 families of Hindu and Muslim weavers living in and around the city.

However, today Panam Nagar is an empty and abandoned place. It looks like a "ghost city" (ভৌতিক নগরী). It is a matter of sorrow that after the Partition of India in 1947, the 1964 riots, and the 1965 India-Pakistan war, the Hindu merchants became afraid and went to India. They left their beautiful houses to caretakers, hoping to come back, but their return never happened.



Figure 3: Panam Nagar

4. Architectural Typology and Built Environment

The physical layout of Panam Nagar is very well-planned. The whole city is on a single, narrow street which is about 600 meters long and 5 meters wide. There are protective artificial canals on all sides, like the Pankhiraj Khal (পঙ্কিরাজ খাল) on the north.

At present, there are 52 old houses surviving on this street—31 on the north side and 21 on the south side. The building style is a very nice mix of local Mughal style and European style. If we look closely, we can divide the houses into four main types:

1. Central Hall Type: These houses have a big double-height hall room in the middle.
2. Central Courtyard Type: These houses are built around an open-to-sky courtyard.
3. Consolidated Type: Most of the houses are this type. They do not have an inner courtyard or hall.
4. Compartment Type: These are very small and simple structures.

The owners decorated the houses very beautifully. They used cast-iron brackets, European pillars, and Chinitikri (চিনিতিকরি), which is a mosaic work made of broken China pieces. Some houses were only made for entertainment. The owners and their friends used to sit in the middle gallery and watch dances by professional female dancers called Baijis (বাইজি).



Figure 4: Panam Nagar in Google maps

5. Preserving Folk Culture

The most popular tourist spot in our tour was the Sonargaon Folk-Arts and Crafts Museum. The famous Bangladeshi painter Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin established this museum in 1975. The museum is inside a large, beautiful 1901 mansion called the Boro Sardar Bari (বড় সরদার বাড়ি).

Inside the museum, we saw many things that show the traditional lifestyle of rural Bengal. We saw everyday life tools, old wooden doors, agricultural items, and models of old riverboats. We also saw beautiful hand-made Nakshi Kantha (নকশী কাঁথা). These folk items really show the great skill of our local village artists.



Figure 5: Shilpacharya Zainul Folk and Craft Museum & Boro Sardar Bari Indoor

6. Conclusion

Overall, our field study in Sonargaon and Panam Nagar was an amazing learning experience. It took us back in time to understand how rich our country was in the past. From the beautiful Muslin trade to the big mansions of Panam Nagar, everything tells a great story. Nowadays, the Department of Archaeology is taking steps to repair and protect these old buildings. We must support this conservation work so that our future generations can easily know about the true "Golden Legacy of Bengal".



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