Memory of the space
A cognitive way of thinking

G.M.A. Balayet Hossain

Politecnico di Milano
DAStU - Department of Architecture and Urban Studies
E-mail: gm.hossain@polimi.it

If we trough a stone in a small pond it makes waves. And few minutes later it disappears. For the reason behind that, waves of the puddle have a transient character. In some extend our field of vision is like a wave of transient character and our vision of eye is like a stone which senses the space by producing a transient effect in our mind-set, later it transformed as a memory or smash. There are different eccentric of spaces around us, are converted into multi scale of identity by the human engagements with spaces. Subsequently, our transient mind always is exploring spaces by means of building memory with a nature and an art entity in our built environment. This paper reveals the space, memory and time as a connection of spatial structure in our built environment. And there impacts on our transient life by means of space. It is also convened the knowledge of Image, Memory and Place cannot be understood without the echoes of living being and their everyday life.

Keywords: Life, Memory and Space

1. Introduction

City is a constructed space and it is constructed in space. Its growth and extension depends on the behavior of spaces. Therefore the character of a city could be defined its identity and meaning of spaces. Spaces of a city are a field of visual waves where it has a harmony character and develop common places of memory. We are directly or indirectly linked with those common places of memories. We are not only the observer but also part of those common places and our echoes with those memories draw out the images of those spaces in our virtual mind. According to Kevin lynch those memories are inter-related with different elements of city where legibility, structure, identity and imageability are major key issues for understanding city and its milieu (Lynch, K., 1960). Those characters help to create mental images if those elements of the city are spatially well connected and make integrity as a whole city. Memory in a sense is a series of images and those images are fitted into our virtual mind of expression. On the other hand memories of identical spaces make everyday lives meaningful and directional by the spatial dimensions of spaces (Ardakani, M. K., and Oloonabadi, S. S., 2011). Therefore those imageable identical spaces have an impact on spatial structure for a relationship with city and its citizens. Afterward those spaces are become

a place of identity from local to global through social, cultural, economical to political background. Understanding of a city and its structure at this moment in contemporary time is contingent on mass population and economic power of growth. And these are becoming a foremost singularity to rethink city's images and its agglomeration as an old but new phenomenon in the contemporary cities. Past and present memory of identical space is fallen into a new challenge of transformation regarding the actual meaning of space and city images through structural links. Life and its pattern is transforming too much in the contemporary stages. However in the pressure of complexity of a contemporary situation is becoming a more important to re-look and reveal the significant images from the complexity by respecting the past memory of its exiting spaces. The city like Venice has a significant character of cityscape which is successfully linked with its water structure and city life (Cohen N., 1999). But the idea of a theoretical city is far beyond in a contemporary thinking of a city which are transforming city as a text for making it more moveable rather than the meaning of life and space. Nevertheless the mobility of a city is "The relationships between the direction of a walk (…) and the meaning of wards (…) situate two sorts of apparently contrary movements, one extrovert (to walk is to go outside), the other introvert (a mobility under the stability of the signifier)" (Certeau M., 1984). Therefore the articulation of the spatial pattern of space in a city is coinciding by the signifier which has a semantic appeal to the every footstep of its inhabitants (Barthes, R., 2000). Consequently meeting with the significant spaces is a process to find out the meaning of life by reflecting their imaginary with habituated spaces. Moving through the city is an experience which assists the citizens to read the language of the city by its art effects and reflections of images as a signifier of the spaces through creating memories in our everyday life. A great city is a linked city considering our common places of life, which built a good memory with its surface of art, architecture and landscape, where life is a moving elements and observer. In some extent those stationary of the city is telling us the life of our past movement. Bring out the past time of history from signifier of the spaces is depending on the link to observer which make a spatial memory, according to Michel De Certeau that it is generated from our everyday travelling, in addition all spatial memories are the 'travel mamories' and spaces are the responsible which contains the way of our daily activities. Conversely, city images could be distinguished by the flow of spaces where their memories of perspectives are illustrated in the way of their past times. In this research paper, it is to be discussed in a qualitative way that what makes better and create our mental images in our built environment - regarding the past history of a city Dhaka. And is there any significant rapport within spatial structure and city images from the history to till now?

2. Chronological Growth and movement

Dhaka city is now carrying out a long glorious past history from the 7th century when the name of the city was not derived and from that period this region was began to civilize with human settlement by the power of secularism. Historically the spatial settlement of this small area had been spread out with cultural shape of civilization and spatial movement from the early Premughal and British colonial period. Sequentially this region was diversely populated and popular for its variety of commodities, fertile land and access through water; after that it became a resort of various European powers- Portuguese, Dutch, British, and other foreign merchants, traders and bankers -Armenians, Pathans, Turanis and Marwaris came to Dhaka. During those historical movements, the eminence power of edifices' through land involvement with political power and resources also raised the city as a profusion of wealth which format this land of settlement as a leading capital city in the past era to till now (Habib, K., 2010). Furthermore the political movement of this settlement progress was highly engrossed and promoted by its hydrological and geographical position. Topologically, the growth of this city is originated and directed by the sustenance of the river Buriganga. And tremendous endowment of Buriganga, gave access in this region to build its history, culture, economy and identity. During that period, water transport thru this organism of this city became a vital part of the city life and this significant character had great impact to make a provision route to raise the city and its image to tie with other provinces. Water and the past memory of the settlement are clearly drawn 'Dhaka waterfront' with the character of different edifices like Bara Katra, Ahsan Manzil and Mosques etc. along the river bank Buriganga which were all the core edifices of

the Mughal period. Thus the city and its hydrological engagement with edifices made a pivotal role in the traditional to industrial movement of this region. Urban historian Eamonn Canniffe in his book 'Urban Ethic' addressed that the changes and continuities of urban life are connected in some extends with the element of water (Canniffe, E., 2006). In the traditional city the provision of water, scarcity and preciousness became the strategic subject of self-conscious celebration and life-sustaining frameworks of inspiration with divine character. The animation of civic realm and social systems were supported by the animation of water and its necessities for life. The liberal arts associated with water and its activities in the daily intellectual life, sculptural figure with fountain all predicted the mythical, religious and political reign of expression. Similarly in the eye of medieval period, the sacred character of water had been measured as a symbol of city's survival. He also reasonably argued that "… in the eighteenth century when industrialization initiates profound urban changes, water has an enhanced role, as a source of power for mechanization, as means of transport through the construction of canals, and as the site of pollution and diseases" (Canniffe, E., 2006). Afterward this ®evolution abused the environment very rapidly which characterized the traditional city to industrial city. In effect, one of the most essential objects of this city Dhaka was its hydrological Structure, which had a great impact in its spatial historical movement of sequential development. It is mentionable that in the Premughal time the periphery of the entire settlement in this region was surrounded by the water body and this hydrological structural ring around the settlements was the branch of the river Buriganga. Later this character of hydrological structure and spatial pattern of the city had been transformed chronologically and in the period of Bangladesh this hydrological loop was totally lost. The fluctuation character of the 'Buriganga' in the south which was origin of the city, built many landmasses thorough in its hydrological systems, which were chronologically transformed and added to the main body of the city floor around the river edges. In addition morphologically growth of the city and its orientation from Premughal to Bangladesh period were subjected by its hydrological order, where the city floor was expanding towards the river side. And this waterfront settlement from the Premughal to British colonial period was extended slightly north-east vertical direction, but significantly its move and extended horizontally west direction along the river bank. And therefore chronological development during this period could be considered as counter clockwise evaluation movement which growth was almost parallel to the river belt of the Buriganga. The depth of this growth was 3 km along the river and it was transformed towards west direction three times (each fold 2km) until colonial age. After the partition of Bengal division (1947) Dhaka city began to develop rapidly towards its north periphery, where the growth of this city floor could be considered as a clockwise evaluation movement. In this evaluation process north peripheral growth of the city found quite far relationship with its origin and movement like the character of sprawl. And sequentially this city was adapted into the colonial and post-colonial period of settlements thru always clutching new territory by giving a new dimension of city floor. But the indigenous patterns of historic structures and its significant edifices were played continuously pivotal role for growing and imaging this city with its water accesses from the Premughal period.
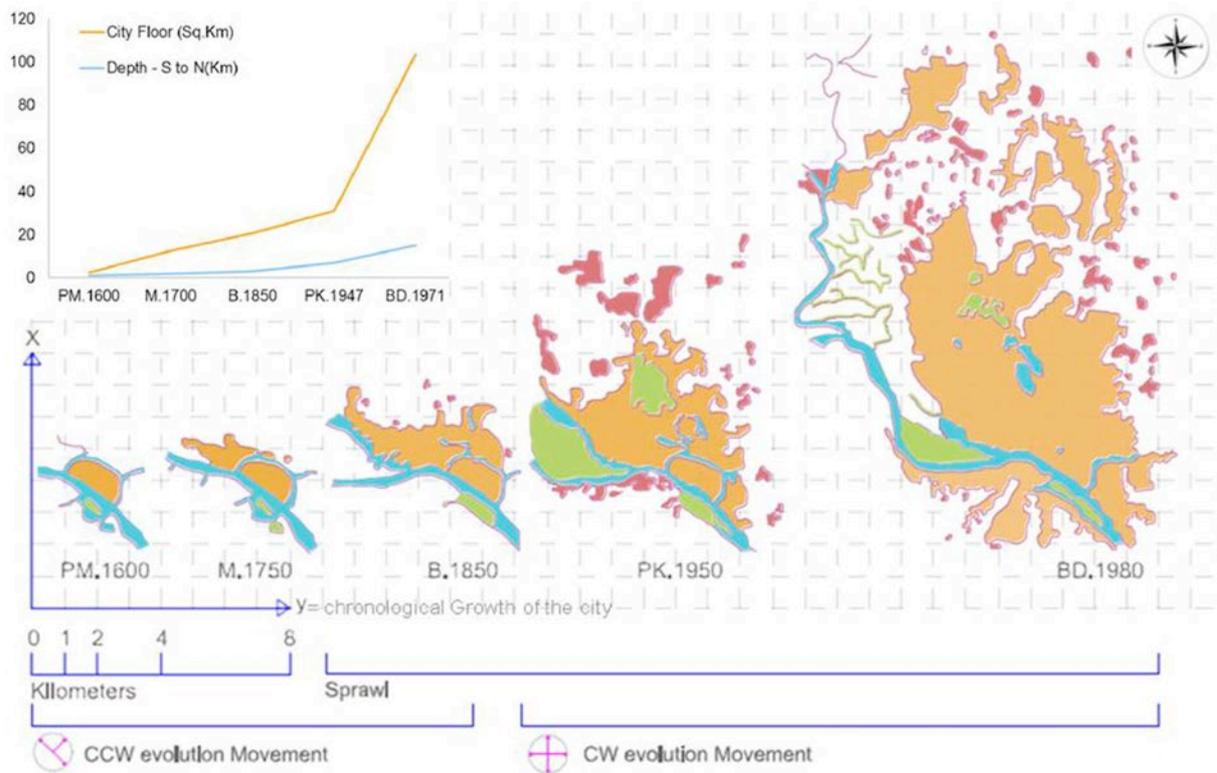
Figure 1. *Hydrological condition and chronological growth of the city 'Dhaka'*

3. City's engagement and evaluation

Water and its engagement with traditional Dhaka city were rooted historically as a main spine of the city structure where it was connected all most all parameter of city's life and activities. From the very beginning it was working as an entrance point of this traditional city. Besides transport and trade thru water infrastructure; the river 'Buriganga' was also a symbol of cultural and heritage reason for hindu celebration, cultural boat sailing, fishing, boat racing and so on. It is also mentionable that most of the leading historical edifices were erected beside this river bank. In some extend those edifices were reigned us politically or religiously in the past history. Ahsan Manzil is one of the evidence which is still standing along the river bank as an identity of traditional city which now became a symbol of our heritage and cultural identity. Ahsan Manzil commonly known as official residential palace and seat of the 'Dhaka Nawab Family'. It is a magnificent indo-saracenic revival architectural edifice which was wonderfully coupled with water of the river Buriganga from its past decades at Kumartoli in the south historical part of Dhaka. Comparatively, the Basilica of St Mary of Health commonly known as the Salute, also stands on a narrow finger of land between the Grand Canal and the Bacino di San Marco making the church visible when entering the Piazza San Marco from the water. Both examples are harmonized of our bright past history thru the flow of water. Nevertheless the city Bath on the curve of the river Avon and the distant panoramic view of the river Forth from the city Edinburgh all possess historic cities as a sense of place and physical identity (Rodwell, D., 2007). However the contemporary city Dhaka and its imageability are now distinctly divided into two identical images by two different characters of edifices. One of them is above mentioned 'Ahsan Manzil' (type A) in the traditional city. And another one is the house of parliament locally known as Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban (type B) is now leading the contemporary image of the city. Equally memories of citizens are widely linked with those two distinct types of images in their everyday life and activities. Now Ahsan Manzil is representing the traditional history of the city, life and its vibrant culture. On the other hand Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban designed by Architect Louis I. Kahn is

another successful image for the new part of the city which emerged during the period of Bangladesh. This modern edifice became a contemporary identity, where it was based on the traditional history, culture and social movement.

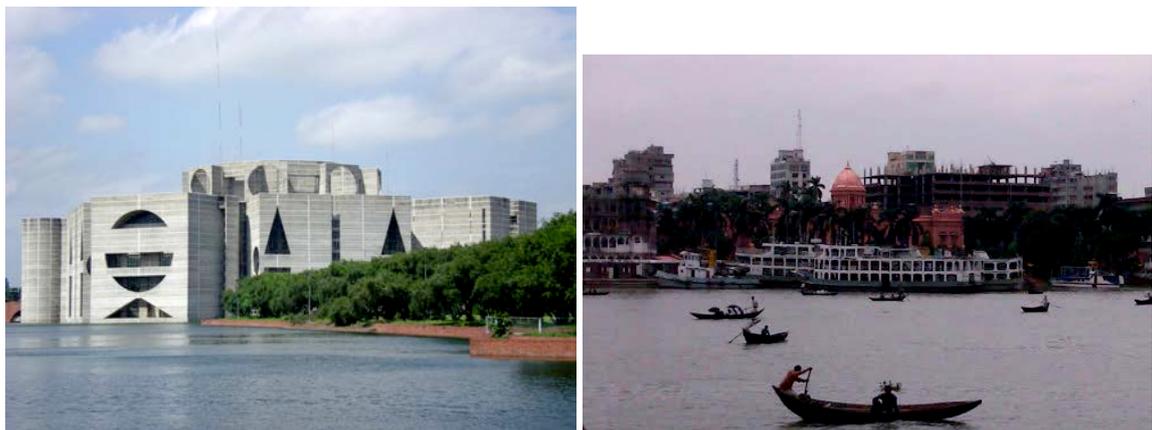Figure 1. *Ahsan Manzil, Dhaka (1869) and Basilica di Santa Maria, Venice (1687)*

Figure 2. *Cityscape A. Ahsan Manzil (1872) and B. Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban (1980)*

In favor of evaluating those two different type of images and their legibility with spatial structure should be consider for illustrating their meaning to the people. Lynch in his book 'The image of the City' clearly mentioned that environmental image could be analyzed into three components in an abstract way [1].

To understand the quality of environmental images, following three key points could be consider for examining above two types of built spaces:
- About the 'identity' where it was meant the distinct character from other things with recognizable entity or individuality;
- then secondly the image must be linked with (structure) spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer or other objects;
- and finally the object must have some 'meaning' for the observer where it is a resource of a relation but different than spatial or pattern relation.
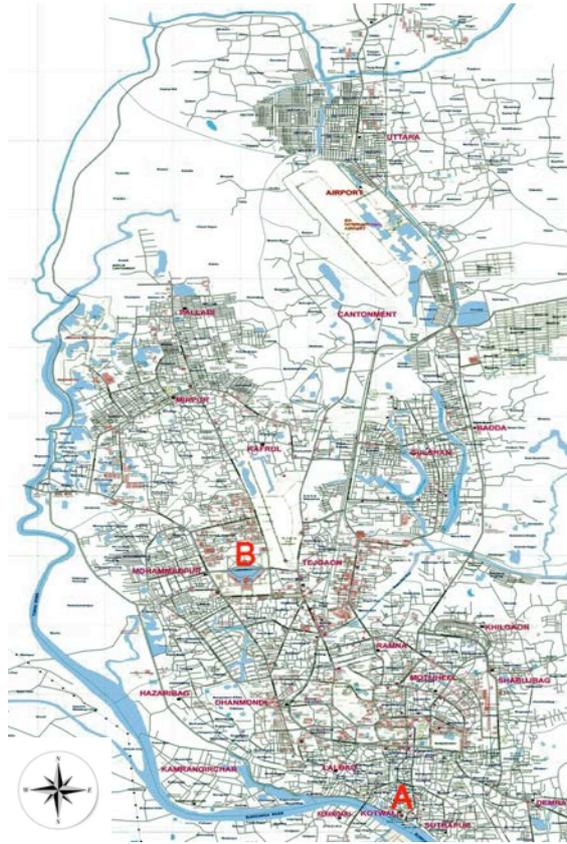
Figure 3. *Spatial positions of type A and B*

Concerning above components into the type A and B in the following table, we could come out with a comparative result of their environmental images. And those components could be achieved only if all three aspects are taken into account together.

Type	Edifices	Meaning	Identity	Structural link	Environmental Image
A	Ahsan Manzil	✓	✓	✕	= 1
B	Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban	✓	✓	✓	= 0
				City image = A + B = 1	

Table 1. *Credibility of two environmental images*

In the type A, we see the result of the image is scored by '1' which means type A has one lacking to complete its imageability. One the other hand type B is scored by '0' what it means it has no lacking of any components to complete its imageability. But in the correlation of type A and B is also scored '1' which indicates the overall city image (A+B) has one lacking to complete the total representation of the city Dhaka.

Figure 4. *Areal view of type A and B*

Type A historically established at the entrance point of old Dhaka and it was became a power of cultural, political and social identity of the traditional city. It is now preserved and transformed into a museum. But the rapid growth of the market oriented traditional city seized its legibility from structural point of view. And the relationships with its river now become more vulnerable from its citizens because it does not make any visual language with them. Even there are no spaces around it for public or traditional cultural activities. In a word the image of this traditional identity is day by day sinking into a mass concrete around it by cutting its magnificent relationship with water. And now this traditional city is losing its past attractions.

Type B on the other hand translated traditional culture very critically and philosophical way by linking with the superlative character of water which has the spirit of the traditional city within a city. Reimaging our traditional city web with scenic elements confer this whole complex a significant character of identity for the new part of the city in an abstract way to recall our past memory. Spaces around it make clear structural legibility and where its linked memory is mentally linked with every age of people and their activities around the city.

4. Conclusion

Cognitive images and its reflection in our everyday activity, depends on the process of widely biological and spatial link of our built environment. "Elements such as water, shores, river banks, are not to be lost in our present endeavor to maintain cities. A city will always have elements of nature to keep and relate to" [8]. From the above examination and exploration, unwanted building construction, boat terminal, heavy vegetation which is seized the visibility of Ahsan Manzil from the bank of river Buriganga, could be transformed into a public place for increasing its spatial relationship under the development of waterfront and urban conservation scheme. Also buildings heights should be regulated around this historical palace, so that it could be visually experienced with cityscape and spatially linked with its surrounding people and background environment. Expression of our human mind is actually experienced through the experience of physical environment. On the other hand, imageability of the space is inspiring and guiding us about the ethics and consequences of our everyday life. In the cotemporary period of movement our expectation from the spaces are more and that should be characterized with a degree of linkages in our everyday life with city images.

References

Ardakani, M. K., and Oloonabadi, S. S., (2011), *Collective memory as an efficient agent in sustainable urban conservation,* International Conference on Green Buildings and Sustainable Cities, Elsevier Ltd, Bologna, pp.985- 988.

Barthes, R., (2000), rethinking Architecture: a reader in cultural theory, Routledge, New York, pp. 165-167

Canniffe, E., (2006), *Urban Ethic. Design in the contemporary city*, Routledge, New York, p.37.

Certeau M., (1984), The Practice of Everyday Life, University of California Press, California, pp.103-112

Cohen N., (1999), *Urban Conservation*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, p.64, 251-257, 281.

Habib, K., (2010), *The Post Colonial Public Spaces and Cultural Diversity: The Case of National-Cultural Representative Public Spaces of Dhaka, Urban Knowledge & the Cities in the South*, Proceedings of the XIth N-Aerus-conference, LaCambreHorta- ULB- ASRO-KULeuven, Brussels, pp. 469-481.

Lynch, K., (1960), *The Image of the city*, MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-14.

Rodwell, D. (2007), *Conservation and Sustainability in Historic Cities*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, p.136.