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## **RELEASING THE BARRICADES: REINTEGRATING CENTRAL JAIL THROUGH 'PLACEMAKING' IN OLD DHAKA**

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### **Abstract**

Jail is an essential organization to establish law and order in day to day functioning of a state. Tracing jail making and its evolving timeline reflects a society's social and political history. 'Dacca Jail' has been no exception since its inception in the early 19th century and later updated to central jail in 1879 (Muntasir Mamun, 2000, 90). Central jail located at the north of Chawk bazaar in Old Dhaka carries the glorious testimony of Colonialism, dating back to Mughal era as an al-legged site for fort and mint (takshal). It has been existing as a barricade in the central heart of old Dhaka detaching it from its surroundings by high perimeter walls but spatially being as integral part of morphology and infrastructure of old Dhaka. The recent government decision of relocating the overcrowded central jail has paved the way towards reintegrating the vacated area within its immediate surroundings with the far-fetched, multi-faceted implications for the greater Old Dhaka. The first urban sprawl along the river Buriganga hosts the old quarters of Dhaka city rich in history and heritage which sadly now have the highest residential density in the country. This old part of the city lacks breathing places like open spaces and parks which estimates only 17 acres for over 10 lacs of people. This dire need of locality can be addressed by sensitize reintegration of the vacated site within the framework of heritage management and involving the outdoor public realm in the way of 'place making' whose inspiration referents coming from the living and localities of Old Dhaka. This paper focuses on the sequential process of place making on the basis of urban morphology analysis of Old Dhaka and Central jail for the betterment of the locality and the city.

**Keywords:** Jail, Old Dhaka, Reintegration, Heritage site, Open Space, Place Making

### **1. Introduction**

Architectural structures and urban places which because of their inherited functions and features often survive for centuries, testifies the glories of the basic monuments of the past and the cultural development of the entire nation. Some historic places are not only evidence of its historic past but also give credence to the political significant interfolds. Situated in the main heart of the traditional Old Quarters of Dhaka, Central Jail holds the history dating back from the pre-mughal period to the ordinance passed in colonial period.

Government recent decision to relocate the age old central jail of Bangladesh arises the dilemma to the future possible reuse of this huge area in the rich urban fabric of Old quarters. In response to the widespread agreement that urban areas must change, or they will stagnate paves the thought to the issues about which possible way it could be reused, how it can be reintegrated with the surroundings and how its age old historic dimensions can be preserved?

The changing pattern of land use produces many blockade heritage areas which may rise an important urban design problems. These areas actually constitute the majority of "lost spaces" defined by Trancik (1986). In the recent few decades, the architectural intervention and redevelopment of these abandoned blocked historic areas has become an thoughtful field of urban design problem and the reintegration of these historic sites to the urban context has been brought into the spotlight.

For the dense urban setting like Old Quarters, the vacant historic site of Dhaka such areas might be illegally encroached, heritages may demolished and the context may fully violated. This reintegration

approach has a particular importance due to historical and political value of these historic Central Jail Complex which can help local communities to define their character more clearly by providing a strong link between past, present, and future and by strengthening the sense of belonging. The reintegration will help promoting a more desired image of public place since historic places with sociopolitical significance contribute immensely to the attractiveness, distinctiveness, and identity of places. In recent years, urban design have started to emphasize city's unique characteristics via bringing their historical values into the forefront by transformation of unoccupied heritage with new functions and making accessible to public realm accordingly. There are various approaches like transforming and re-integrating, or transforming and still in the integration process to the urban setting.

## 2. Background

Historic sites can be used as a tool to ensure breathing ground in an over populated urban context ensuring proper access, activity, safety and security. The lost piece can be bring back to the context by reintegrating in different levels of social, economic, political and cultural relationships in urban areas. At the local level, reintegration can resulted in increased surveillance and regulation of public space. Certain points for public space within the locality developing in the past historic spaces of important buildings or places in Old Quarters which carry historic importance can ensure healthy urban practice in the city.

Dhaka Central Jail, the oldest and biggest Jail in Bangladesh was built inside the fort in 1788 during the rule of East India Company which later was converted into the Jail. Dhaka Central Jail was built on 36.76 acres of land. The area within the perimeter wall measures 17.55 areas of land and outside 19.21 acres of land. There are- 48 wards,12 cell building, 233 rooms in the cells, 5 kitchens,6 work sheds,4 training sheds for maintenance work, 1 jail bakery, 1 daycare center and a multipurpose shed inside the jail compound. The High peripheral wall separates the jail from the locality. In spite of being separate, it has become a part of the surrounding in a long course of time. Though the environment inside the prison is not the part of the society but the peripheral wall makes a relation with its surrounding.

This paper focuses on the reintegration problem of this blockade piece of penitentiary with its immediate settings rather than the transformation itself in today's cities. Therefore, this study aims to explore the value of blockade historic sites as a component of the urban setting and how their reintegration to the city impacts on the image of the city as an urban problematic.

## 3. Objectives

The objective of this paper is to identify; the necessity of preserving the socio-political significant history of a nation,

- the necessity of preserving the socio-political significant history of a nation,
- the necessity of open space in organically evolved Old Quarters of a city,
- the process of reintegration to solve the evolving need of addressing the vacant historic site,
- the importance of urban space in historic cities and some designed implementation of public space in the context of Old Dhaka,
- the failure of Old Dhaka in successful place making and historic preservation.

## 4. Methodology

The study was conducted through content analysis and site analysis;

- Content analysis: Relevant research works, books and literature were reviewed to get a general overview how historic sites are reintegrated in city fabric to serve the aspiration of local communities where it belongs.
- Site analysis: Through the survey of some particular areas of Old Dhaka and the detail survey of Dhaka Central Jail the use and impact of these sites over the period of time is identified. Its intermediate setting and needs of the locals are studied.

## 5. Literature Review

### 5.1. HISTORIC EVALUATION OF CENTRAL JAIL

The Central Jail bears a legacy more than 400 years old with history and context of Old Dhaka which proves that many important structures and architectures flourished all over the Old Dhaka throughout this timeline. Prior to 1608, before the arrival of Mughals the Jail area was used as Afgan Fort ruled by the governors descending from the Delhi Sultanate. From 1608-1764 during Mughal Period Nawab Ibrahim Kha built there a fort that was demolished by earthquake. Afterward, Islam Kha rebuilt the fort in 1638. There was a palace, a court and a mint (takshal) inside the fort where the maximum important public services were carried out. Around 1702, a market named 'Padshahi Bazaar' (presently Chawk bazaar) was built on the south corner of the fort by Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan. The city expanded around the 'Padshahi Bazaar' and some connecting roads were built around the market and 'Bokshi bazaar', 'Dewan bazaar', 'Pilkhana', 'Mahut-tuli' areas and people started to live and work in those areas. The central business district (CBD) was formed around the 'Chawk bazaar' and the Jail area was known as Badshahi Fort.

In 1757, after the Battle of Plessey, Company rule was established in this subcontinent. In 1765, East India Company Headquarter was established in this Jail area. However, Dhaka Jail was established in colonial period by the British government at the place of Old Mughal fort in 1800. In 1879, Dhaka Jail transformed to DHAKA CENTRAL JAIL. Afterwards, in 2016, Central Jail was transferred from Old Mughal Fort area to Keraniganj.

### 5.2. SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CENTRAL JAIL

According to Michel Foucault in his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* said, "Prison is one part of a vast network, including schools, military institutions, hospitals, and factories, which build a panoptic society for its members. This system creates "disciplinary careers" for those locked within its corridors. It is operated under the scientific authority of medicine, psychology, and criminology." The social significance of Dhaka Central Jail includes-

- The Central Jail was not built as a penitentiary with original master planning. It was the effect of colonial reuse planning which turned a fort into a prison. Setting on a historic footprint, it holds the glorious evidence of Afgans, Mughals and Colonial rulings in Capital Dhaka.
- 'Boro Katra', 'Choto Katra', 'Shahi Mosque', 'Chawk bazaar' and other adjacent historic sites were built focusing on the placement of this fort. So, during the period of its peak, this fort area hold immense social impact on early flourishing of the city.
- The location of Dhaka Central Jail is this densely populated socially and commercially vibrated area is inappropriate for both the locality and the prison authority. Though the confined environment inside the prison is not the part of the locality but the peripheral wall has made a dialogue with its immediate surroundings. Dwellers of the localities want the land free from prison but don't want the high wall vanish overnight as it is very familiar to them rather than the unknown world inside it.

Jail, serving as prison or correctional facilities, broadly houses the convicted criminals or under trial individuals. Jail is a repressive weapon of the ruling authorities to hold individuals for imposing political control and appeasement. The political significance of central jail includes-

- The Central Jail on Nazimuddin Road witnessed many historical and political episodes. The facility housed many political prisoners, especially during the Language Movement of 1952, the Six-Point Movement and the Liberation War of 1971. In 1948, along with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, some other leaders were held at Central Jail that invoked people to burst out against the ruling party. In 1966, Sheikh Mujib was again prisoned for Six-Point Movement that intrigued a mass involvement across the country. A huge crowd was gathered outside the jail area in the Mass Movement of 1969 to free Sheikh Mujib from the Central Jail.
- Former Vice-President Syed Nazrul Islam, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh Tajuddin Ahmed, Captain (Rtd.) Mansur Ali, and former Home Minister A H M Quamruzzaman, these four heroic

national leaders were killed on 3rd November in 1975 inside the Jail premises. It is observed as Jail Killing Day each year.

- In recent years, War Criminals are prisoned at the Central Jail and a few of them are sentenced to death and hanged till death in the Jail premises. Among them Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Kama-ruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mojaheed, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Mir Quasem Ali are noteworthy. The whole movement was largely supported by the mass people nationwide and a platform called 'Gonojagonor Moncho' was formed claiming justice against the liberation war crimes.

### 5.3. TIMELINE OF OLD DHAKA: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

The Old Dhaka has its legacy for more than 400 years old which proves the significant history and context of Dhaka. The Pre-Mughal settlement was bound by the canal and river and Pathan and Afgan were settled here. In 1610, Islam Khan declared Dhaka as capital of Bangla and that was a revolutionary incident for Dhaka. Mughal Dhaka was much developed and many forts were established in that time frame like 'Choto Katra', 'Boro Katra', 'Lalbagh' etc. In 17th century the European traders came in large numbers to establish factories and thus Dhaka became the center of trade and commerce. Dhaka was most important for Mughal naval headquarters and it was abolished in 1769. From 1801 to 1840 the locality close to the city were largely abandoned. In colonial period, after taking over in 1757 the East India Company was granted the power of revenue collection and they shifted the power to Calcutta in 1772. In Pakistani period from 1947-71, Dhaka was the second capital of Pakistan. Some development work was done and it expanded as a city but it was also a place of oppression due to political issues. Now the Old Dhaka has become a national heritage for its rich cultural and historical value. It has become an enrich capital which has its history of more than 400 years old.

### 5.4. HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT: ACTS, ATTRIBUTES AND AMENITIES

The National Heritage site selection criteria states that- the heritage site should be minimum 100 years old and the heritage site should have outstanding historical and contextual significance. Some important articles for heritage management in Bangladesh includes-

- *The Constitution of Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh* (Art. 23&24) which specifies that the State shall adopt measures for the protection against disfigurement, damage or removal of all monuments, objects or places of special artistic importance or interest.
- *The Antiquity Act of 1968* ( Art. 16) states that if immovable antiquity is in danger of being destroyed, it would be under Land Acquisition Act 1894 as for a public place.
- *Dhaka Imarot Nirman Bidhimala 2008* ( Chapter 7, topic 61) suggests that for the conservation and preservation of historically important buildings and sites, any development activity with in 250m radius from periphery of the enlisted building or preserved area or Detail Area Plan (DAP) indicated specially selected area should be carried out by the rules set for the historic preservation of that area.

### 5.5. REINTEGRATION AS AN ART OF PLACE MAKING THROUGH CASE STUDIES

Depending on the need of the community different types of reintegration is seen all over the world starting from residence to housing, school to park, museum to concert hall etc. Laurel Hill, Virginia was formerly a prison named Lorton Reformatory which is located in a sub-urban area and potentially reintegrated as a mix-used development to the surrounding neighbourhood. Another great example is Bangalore's Freedom Park where a Prison is reintegrated into a place of celebrating freedom, free thought and citizen's right as much as it gave the city a public space like never before. Most of how the Freedom park stand today retains the original ideas but celebrating history while redefining spaces to meet the contemporary needs. Furthermore, a British colonial prison in Lagos was demolished in the civil war of Nigeria where some of their national heroes died. The new reintegration planning is done remembering the past making reference to the positioning of the old buildings and thus a place of sorrow is transformed into a place of happiness.

## 6. Contextual Analysis

### 6.1. CHANGING PATTERNS OF THE SURROUNDING LAND USES AND TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

'Central Jail' and its surroundings established a long time ago and carries a lot of memories to its people and existing structure. In 1971, most of the building were burnt down and after Liberation War most

of the buildings were reconstructed along Nazimuddin road, Urdu road, Chawk Bazaar road and Central Jail road. In recent years, most of residential buildings along the road have been transformed into mixed used buildings using ground floor as general stores. Variation of skyline is decreasing rapidly due to the incremental rise of building height alongside the road.

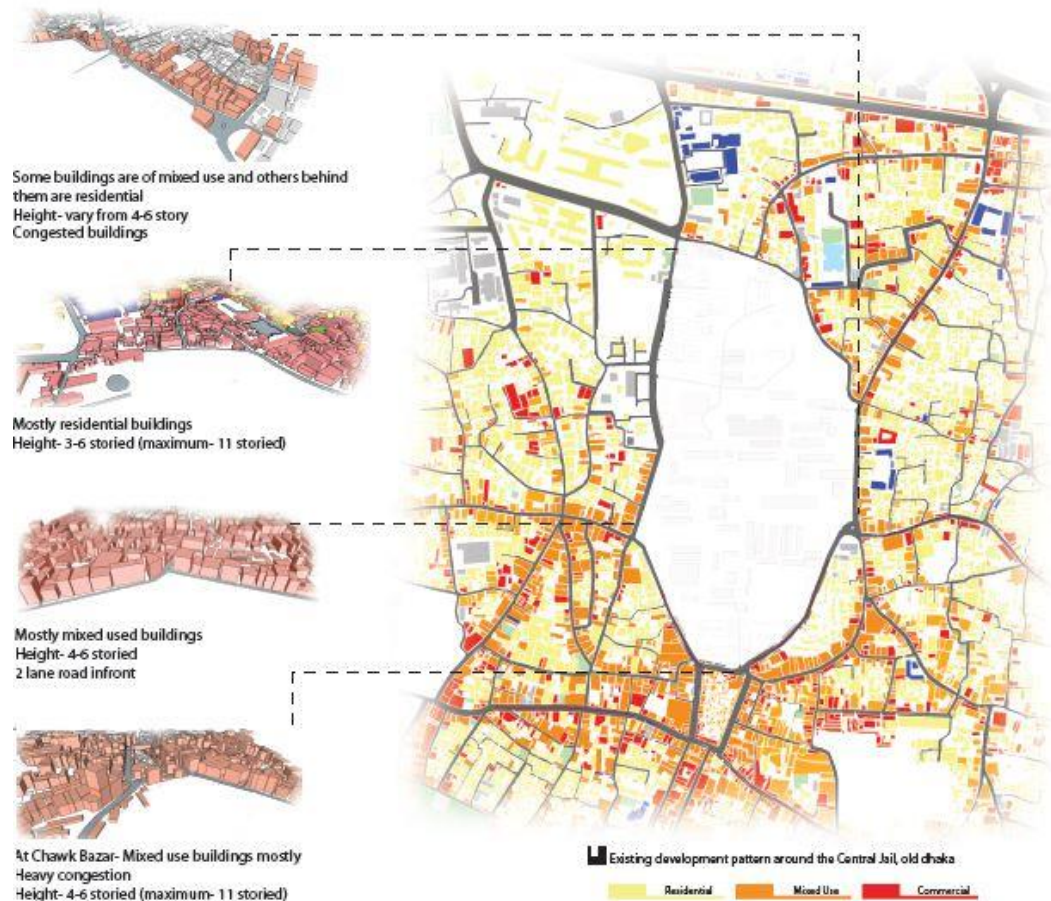


Figure 1. Existing development pattern around central jail (Source: Author)

Pedestrian, horse and elephant driven cart were the initial media of transportation in Old Dhaka. The roads along the fort area was developed organically which is now quite insufficient to meet up the present traffic load. One of the primary roads around old Jail site was Nazimuddin road which is 29 ft wide road on the eastern side of the project area is an important primary road which connects the project area to new Dhaka. Jail road, while encompassing the Central Jail area connects 25ft. wide Abul Hasnat road on the eastern side and serve the Bangshal area. The Jail road connects Urdu road which is 24 ft wide from the west and serves Chawk Bazaar area in the south and Palashi area in the west. The other access to this area is by Bakshibazar road, which is 25 ft wide.

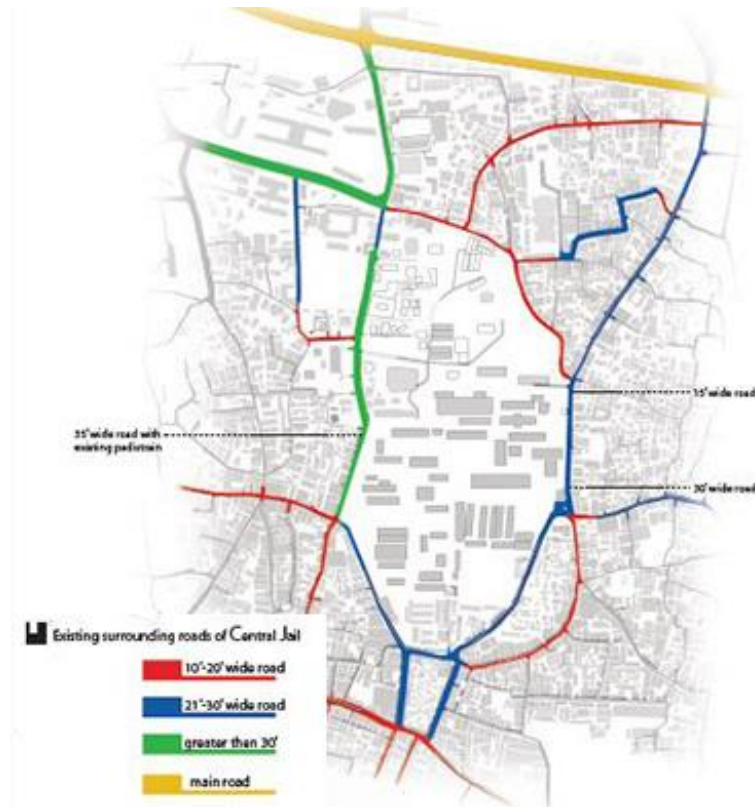


Figure 2. Width of existing roads surrounding the Jail area (Source: Author)

## 6.2. SURROUNDING PUBLIC PLACES AND NODAL CONDITIONS

Central Jail is connected to Lalbagh fort through Urdu road on the western side. Curzon hall, Hossaini Dalan is located on the northern side of Jail area and Shahi Mosque, Chawk Bazaar, Boro Katra, Choto Katra, Ahsan Manjil is located on the southern side. Heavy traffic congestion and over pedestrian flow is observed in Nazimuddin road and Chawk bazaar area. The nodes are overcrowded and under the illegal encroachment of street hawkers.

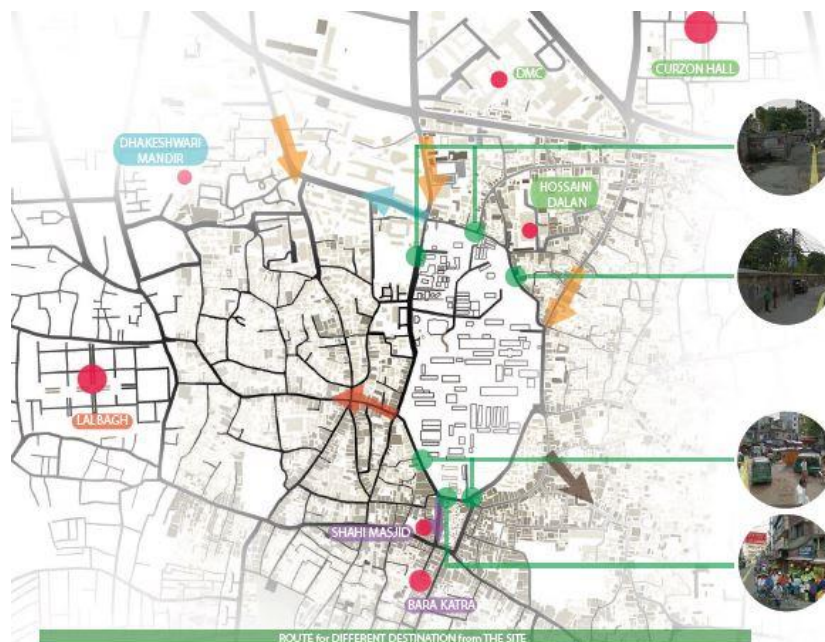


Figure 3. Routes and different destination from the site (Source: Author)

### 6.3. OLD DHAKA DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MECHANISM

The Development in Dhaka has not been consistent through centuries. From Mughal planning in 17th century to DAP of 21st century, numerous development planning projects have been undertaken. Development of Dhaka has been evaluated according to these planning projects. Furthermore, Old Dhaka has a lot of heritage sites within, which are being destroyed due to lack of maintenance and consciousness. The control of development of Old Dhaka as a heritage site has been mentioned in various acts and rules.

- 1917: Dacca Town Planning Report
- 1948: East Pakistan Planning Sub-Committee
- 1959: Dhaka Master Plan
- 1981: Dhaka Metropolitan Area Integrated Urban Development Project
- 1995 : Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP)

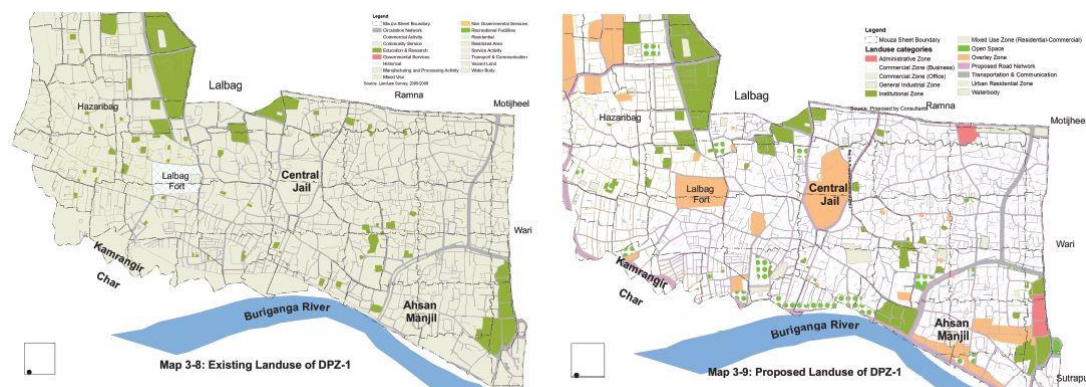


Figure 4. Existing and proposed land use in DMDP (Source: DAP)

### 6.4. LOCAL USERS DEMANDS: NEEDS FOR OPEN SPACES

Taking nearby six wards (30,31,32,33,34,35,36) into count five major open fields are identified including- Bangladesh filed (area 43,777sq ft) along Aga Sadek road, Sabistan Field (area 68,868 sq ft) along Armanitola road, Armanitola Playfield (area 34,353 sq ft), Rahmatganj Playfield (area 96,137 sq ft) and Bakshi bazaar playground (area 54,334 sq ft). The total open area is 6.82 acre and the population as per BBS census 2012 is 210006 persons estimating .0325 acre open area per 1000 people. Considering Jai area as open space the total open space can rise to 45.82 acres and the ration would be .218 acre open area per 1000 people.

## 7. Conclusion

Old Dhaka was developed as the centre of city during the Mughal period. It has been the heart of Dhaka until the contemporary Dhaka developed. It developed through densification, rather than physical expansion. The existence of historic structures like, Ahsan Manjil, Lalbagh, Bara Katra, Choto Katra etc. have made the whole city as a heritage site. Unfortunately, the historic structures are on the verge of ruin due to lack of maintenance, which if preserved could be developed as tourist spot.

Though there are rules and regulations about development control in the city and heritage site management policies, these are hardly followed in the practical field. So the scopes and opportunities of reintegrating Central Jail in the Old Dhaka within the formulated rules and acts are discussed as to control the uncontrolled and irregular growth.

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