WALKING THROUGH THE HISTORY: INTRODUCTION TO HERITAGE TOURISM AND TOURIST TRAIL FOR THE RENEWAL OF RAJSHAHI.

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ABSTRACT

Rajshahi, one of the large cities in Bangladesh, is currently experiencing the pressures associated with rapid socio-economic change, necessitating new development and redevelopment endeavours. Much like other parts of the city, in Rajshahi, the concept of urban renewal is often misinterpreted as the process of demolishing and reconstructing historical buildings and sites. Factors such as shifts in land use patterns, land scarcity, escalating land values, a lack of mature theoretical frameworks, and limited awareness of the importance of preserving the city's historical core have collectively contributed to the erosion of its unique identity. Introducing heritage tourism and establishing tourist trails in various parts of Rajshahi hold promise as effective and sustainable measures to safeguard heritage sites and the city's historical fabric. To understand heritage tourism's role in urban regeneration, our methods include in-depth interviews, analyzed planning documents, and observed field realities. Through rigorous data categorization and evaluation, we built a conceptual framework that yielded a vibrant and practical approach, ready to guide future initiatives in revitalizing the city's fabric. This study aims to explore various approaches to the development of tourist trails and heritage tourism within Rajshahi which beyond its positive economic contributions serves as a protection of intangible heritage resources. This framework will envision particular emphasis on how tourism can be leveraged to raise awareness among local communities regarding the significance of a balance between responsible tourism practices and the imperative preservation and protection of heritage sites.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage is an important part of any culture. In Rajshahi, the historic core is a unique physical space that has significant heritage value. One way to capitalize on this value is to develop heritage trails. Heritage trails are physical manifestations of the interactions between tourists, locals, and the host city. They create a mutually beneficial relationship between tourists and heritage sites.

Heritage trails must be responsive to the different aspects of cultural tourism, including conservation and rehabilitation, interpretation, and local economic development. Heritage trails can not only promote the rehabilitation of historic areas, but they can also have significant economic benefits.

In a growing city like Rajshahi, urban regeneration can threaten heritage sites. New development and redevelopment are tearing down the old fabric and socio-economic character of the city. However, heritage trails can be a direct application of local "bottom-up" approaches that not only conserve tangible and intangible heritage but also indirectly protect heritage by improving the lives and economic conditions of residents.

This study explores the potential of heritage tourism and tourist trail that approaches to ensure local community development in old Rajshahi. This approach is preferable to scattered tourism and conservation-oriented projects because it has the potential to create a more sustainable and inclusive form of heritage preservation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 What is Heritage?
2.1.2 Heritage trail.
2.1.3 Importance of Heritage Trail.
2.2 Historical Structures and TimeLine.

2.1.1 What is Heritage?

Heritage encapsulates the transmitted cultural, natural, and architectural components that shape the identity of a community. It comprises traditions, artifacts and landscapes inherited through generations, constituting a collective legacy. Safeguarding heritage is imperative for historical comprehension, nurturing cultural identity, and ensuring the perpetuity of a history and value of a society. This preservation involves a multifaceted approach to conserving tangible and intangible heritage elements, promoting an understanding of the past, and fostering a sense of continuity in the societal narrative.

2.1.2 Heritage Trail

A Heritage Trail is a well-planned path that leads visitors to several historically, culturally, or environmentally significant locations. These trails, which are frequently designated with guides or signs, invite visitors to explore and discover the history of a particular location. These immersive paths give insights into the history, architecture, and cultural identity of the region by including historic buildings, monuments, and cultural sites. Heritage trails are educational resources that promote a greater understanding of the region's past while boosting tourism, community involvement, and the preservation of cultural assets. They offer a well-organised and educational experience that helps individuals connect with the diverse fabric of their environment.

2.1.3 Importance Of Heritage Trail

Heritage trails have significance for historical cities, since they preserve and promote cultural identity. They promote tourism, educate tourists, and involve the community in historical preservation. These carefully chosen paths boost local economies, inspire community pride, and provide recreational possibilities while preserving the city's distinct past.
The Heritage Trail in Rajshahi can intricately weave a journey through historical and architectural landmarks, emphasising a strategic mapping sense. Progressing gracefully, the trail incorporates

heritage buildings within the Ghoramara region strategically, enhancing the values by visually connecting historical points. The careful selection of these structures contributes to participants' spatial understanding of Rajshahi's architectural legacy.

Navigating through historical milestones during colonial-era structures like Baro Kuthi, Neel Kuthi, some architecturally significant residential buildings, educational buildings, religious buildings and places like social gatherings. sssThe Heritage Trail can complete its narrative, offering a comprehensive spatial understanding of Rajshahi's evolution within a curated and immersive experience.

2.2 Historical Structures And TimeLine

Situated in the fertile plains of Bangladesh, Rajshahi has undergone a rich historical evolution spanning centuries, characterized by dynamic shifts in political, economic, and cultural domains. From the amalgamation of Hindu and Islamic architectural influences in its early years to the subsequent Mughal grandeur, the city's story transcends its skyline.

1000 AD to 1400 AD:
During this period, Rajshahi's architectural landscape mirrors a fusion of Hindu and Islamic influences, with the construction of temples and mosques symbolizing the cultural amalgamation. Concurrently, structures dedicated to trade contribute significantly to the city's economic importance.

1400 AD to 1600 AD:
Witnessing the decline of the Bengal Sultanate, Rajshahi maintained its prominence in trade, showcasing a refined architectural synthesis. Notable structures include trade-related buildings, underscoring the economic vibrancy of this era.

1600 AD to 1700 AD:
The 17th century introduced Mughal influence to Rajshahi's architecture. Noteworthy constructions such as the "Baro Kuthi" exemplify Mughal architectural prowess. This period might also witness the creation of smaller administrative buildings and Mughal-style gardens, reflecting the grandeur of the time.

1700 AD to 1800 AD:
Amidst political instability, Rajshahi experienced a mosaic of Mughal, European, and indigenous architectural styles. In addition to the "Baro Kuthi," structures like the "Chhota Kuthi" potentially emerge, showcasing the architectural diversity of the era. The cityscape evolved with the construction of British colonial-style administrative buildings, contributing to Rajshahi's changing visual identity.

1800 AD to 1900 AD:
The British colonial period witnessed a transformation in Rajshahi's architecture. Alongside administrative buildings, churches, and railway infrastructure, structures like the "Shaheb Bazar Kuthi" may be erected. The proliferation of educational institutions, including the "Varendra Research Museum," adds to the architectural landscape, reflecting the convergence of cultural, administrative, and educational dimensions.

These timelines interlace to form a comprehensive narrative of Rajshahi's architectural diversity, extending beyond structures like the "Baro Kuthi," "Neel Kuthi", "Chota Kuthi" and shedding light on the city's historical richness.
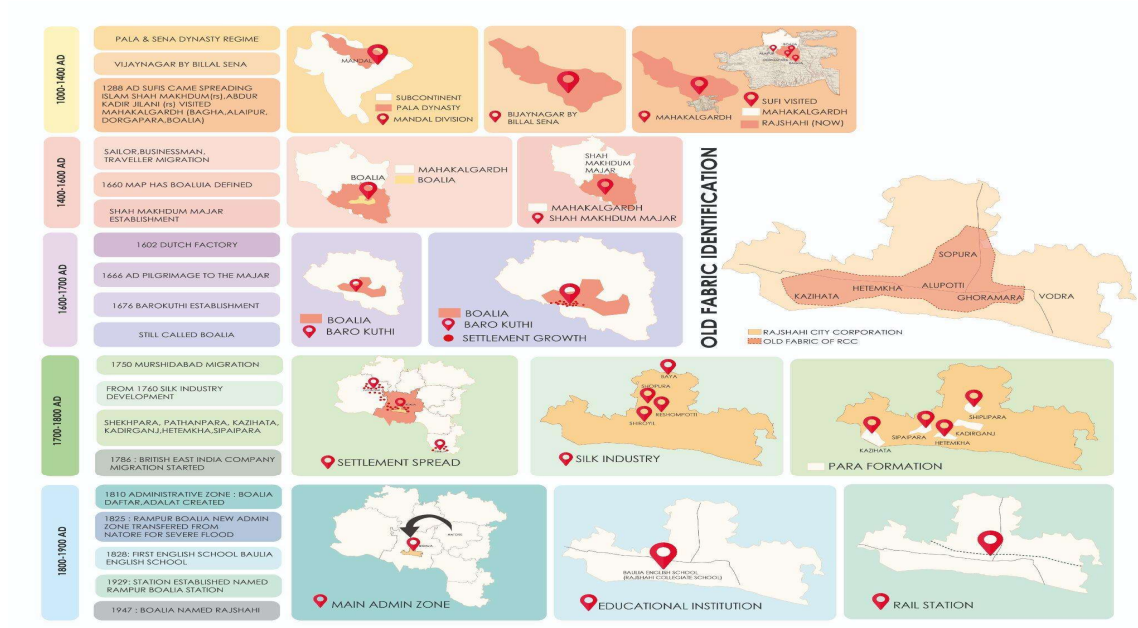
Figure 1: Historical Timeline of Rajshahi. Source: Authors' previous work

3. METHODOLOGY

The research consists of a field survey with a theoretical component based on an examination of related material as well as views of related literature. The method of historical research is adopted in part to comprehend the growth across time and layout of the city of Rajshahi. Next, qualitative investigation techniques are applied to solve the research issues. That study employs two approaches, Literature survey and Field research. The research flow can be summerised in figure 1 below.
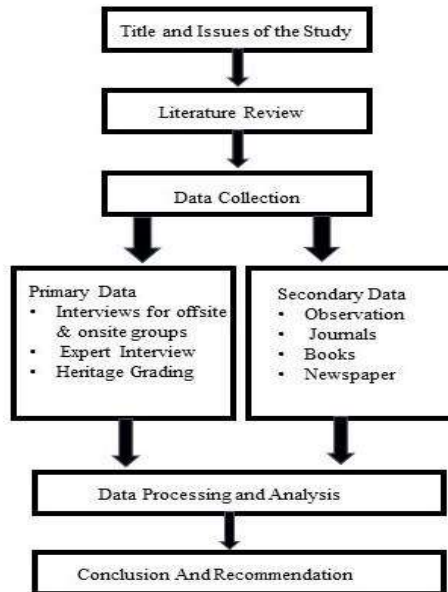

Figure 2: Flowchart of the Research

3.1 Literature Survey:

To comprehend the impact of sustainable heritage tourism and the tourist trail method for urban rejuvenation, a literature review based on secondary data is carried out. In order to determine the historically and culturally significant locations for the creation of tourism trails, primary and secondary data are gathered.

3.2 Interviews For On-Site And Off-Site Groups:

This section of the interview questions focuses on different on-site groups, including locals living in the city region but outside the ancient urban center, tourists, and local visitors. As a result, the specific questions for comprehensive responses vary slightly between the groups. For instance, it could be challenging for off-site participants to respond to questions on the streetscape and architectural peculiarity of certain areas (where the interview was conducted). Several interviews were altered to get enough responses; for example, the precise locations were changed to more general areas or precincts with comparable distinctive qualities. In addition, tourists may find it challenging to respond to questions concerning their feeling of place memory and sense of belonging, and interview questions centered on how these themes relate to their understanding and enhancement of experiences.

Table 1. The Key issues designed for the interviews

Built Environment and Physical Setting	1. First impression or overall evaluation 2. Built form and Architectural distinctiveness 3. The design quality of the route travelled
Cultural events, festivals and activities	1. Types of activities and quality of heritage sites 2. Traditional performances and cultural events 3. Active and passive engagement 4. Economic activity of the places 5. Characteristic features and people attractors
Meaning, memory and place image	1. Old city image and memorable elements 2. Sense of belonging 3. Sense of history and progress 4. Area identity and symbol 5. Influential elements for the place image

3.3 Experts Interview:

Elite city participants, including urban experts, academic professors, practitioners, and project authorities participating in urban regeneration, provided their perspectives for this study as well. Experts can be important providers of specific information about the political procedure and topical problems. The interview's layout gauged experts' opinions and gain access to their prior knowledge on the subjects covered by the conceptual framework and their participation in social elements of the urban renewal project. Among the concerns are planning policies and tactics, the organization and layout of public

areas, historic structures, and iconic sites, locations intended for residents or visitors, the image and legibility of the city, as well as individual choices and evaluation. 6 specialists were present.

3.4 Observation By Non-Participants:

It is a research-led observation approach that can offer better knowledge when it comes to taking public space design quality into consideration. The clearest benefit of non-participant observation is that this method respects the privacy of other users and doesn't interfere with their routine's usefulness (Lukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1992). The researcher used a camera to record situations and occurrences that connected with the research purpose and themes from the conceptual framework, in addition to using an audio recorder for interviews and collecting notes during observation. The researcher was able to "recognize—simultaneously and within a fraction of a second—both the fact itself and the rigorous organization of visually perceived forms that give it meaning" (Cartier-Bresson, 1999, p. 16) because events made up of different elements were captured within the frame of the camera's shot displaying the observation on locations, the survey and the semi-structured on-site interview.

2.5 Heritage Grading:

It is a system used to assess and classify the historical, architectural, and cultural significance of buildings, structures, and places. The purpose of heritage grading is to recognize properties that have historical value and eventually help determine the heritage trail. Selecting buildings is a matter of dispute between policymakers and stakeholders unless the process is transparent & consistent. Selecting the traits and figuring out how to evaluate them numerically under which structures can be evaluated are the main challenges in developing such a framework. Here the potential of Multi-criteria Decision Making (MCDM) method to select heritage sites to be conserved, is discussed.

4. DESIGNING THE TRAIL

4.1 Heritage Walks

The heritage path is a planned route dedicated to teaching the trail users about the history, customs, architecture, way of life, and festivals of Rajshahi through exploring streets, buildings, and historical landmarks that comprise several historic structures and locations with supplementary information about local history and architecture forms as well as conservation techniques. Furthermore, it investigates the customary manner of life in Rajshahi by combining the locals and their actions as a crucial component of the path. There are several ways to get there: by walking, riding, trips in rickshaws, horse-drawn carriages, or even a mix of both of all forms of conveyance.

4.2 Heritage Trail

The proposed heritage trail activity is associated with the presence of historic buildings in a historic area. Shagor para area holds the most concentrated belt of historic buildings in Rajshahi.The buildings are categorized into 6 types to better understand the opportunities they present.

Figure 3: Proposed Heritage Trail. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

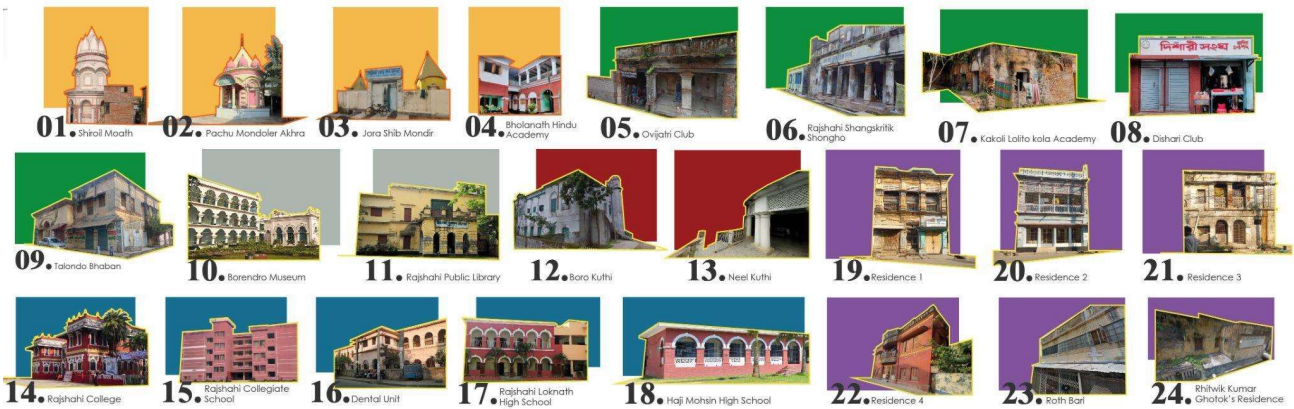The trail maintains a mapping-oriented approach.

Figure 4: Historically Significant Buildings of Rajshahi. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

Table 2: Heritage Grading

Atributes for grading:		Buildings	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	Avg.
	Historic Value(A1)	Borendro Museum	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.9375
	Architectural Value(A2)	Rajshahi Loknath High School	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5625
	Existing Condition(A3)	Rajshahi College	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	0.9375
	Socio-cultural Value(A4)	Boro Kuthi	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.8125
	Accessibility(A5)	Talondo Bhobon	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.4375
	Usability(A6)	Jora Shiva Temple	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	0.8125
	Townscape Significance(A7)	Rajshahi Shanskritik Songho	1	0.5	0	1	0.5	1	1	0	0.5
	Economic Value(A8)	Bholanath Hindu Academy	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.6875
		Abhijatri Club	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
Numeric Values of the Categories:		Roth Bari	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
High	1	Kakoli Lolito Kola Academy	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5
		Ghoramara Kali-mata Temple	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Medium	0.5	Pachu Mondol er Akhra	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1
		Rhitwik Kumar Ghotok's Residence	0.5	0	1	0.5	0	1	0.5	0	1
Low	0	Dishari Shongho	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
		Collegiate School	0.5	0.50	1	0.5	0.50	1	0.5	0.50	1
		Mohosin School	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1
		Neel Kuthi	1		0	1		0	1		0

Heritage grading system is used for prioritizing the existing buildings, based on their Historic value, Architectural value, Existing condition, Socio-cultural value, Accessibility, Usability, townscape significance, and Economic Value.

Figure 5: Heritage conservation categorization according to heritage grading. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

Figure 6: Example of Conservation. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

5. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

5.1 Preservation And Redevelopment

The Padma River played a significant role in Rajshahi's urban design and continues to do so. Due to changes in the river's channel and newly forced settlements, the historic fabric along the river bank has already lost its original approach from the riverside and inner city. The city is also experiencing a gradual loss of its ponds as a result of ongoing urbanization. The rapid expansion of urban areas, accompanied by infrastructure development and population growth, has led to the diminishing presence of these water bodies. At Least 80% of the city's ponds have been filled up in the last 8 years. This loss

not only impacts the city's natural landscape but also raises concerns about potential ecological consequences and the availability of water resources for the local community. Efforts to balance urban development with the preservation of these vital aquatic ecosystems may be crucial for sustaining the environmental health and overall well-being of Rajshahi city. To preserve the historical city's integrity and identity, the water bodies of this old city must be restored. To provide an interesting approach from the river bank of old buildings and to secure the preservation of lifestyle, old trades, communities, and traditional activities, the access linkage between the antiquities and the Ghats should be improved. Upon renovation, it is customary in our nation to adapt historic buildings.
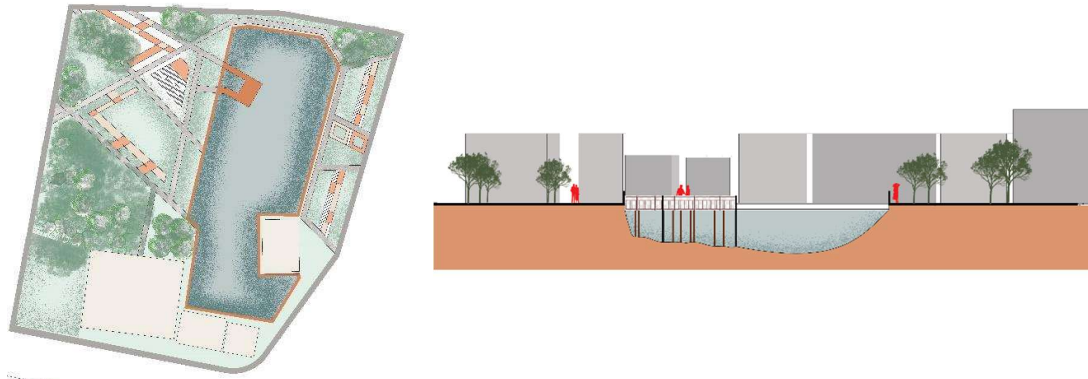

Figure 7: Preservation and redevelopment of Shonadighi with recreational facilities. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

5.2 Regeneration of Historic Structure and Public Spaces:

It is possible to view conservation as a planning principle and instrument that justifies the urban form by combining the new and the ancient to preserve urban continuity. Large open areas were once present in some older Rajshahi buildings; however, these areas are largely encroached upon by recently constructed informal settlements. The presence of these settlements makes it difficult to see and access the historical artefacts. Recovering such open spaces in historic buildings, such as Boro Kuthi, is needed to ensure proper access and visual exposure, as well as to establish a Substantial buffer for the historic buildings.
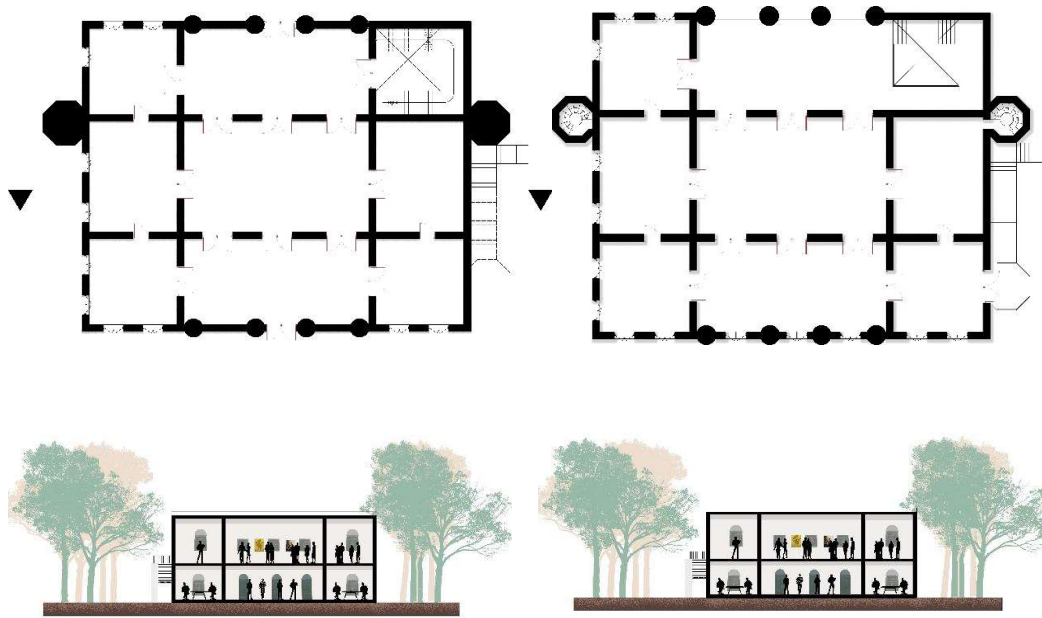
Figure 8: Regeneration of Historic Structure and Public Spaces (Boro Kuthi). Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

Figure 9: Tentative public activity in Boro Kuthi before and after regeneration. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

5.3 Conservation and Adaptive Reuse of Buildings

As we discuss preserving the historic center of the city, one's first thought is, "What to conserve?" & "How to preserve?" in the historical setting of Rajshahi, it is vital to preserve not just the vacant, lonely historical architectural artifacts, but also the vitality and the inherent character of the city's living quality. Enduring reusing historic buildings in creative ways ensures the preservation of customs, old trades, communities, and way of life. In our nation, it is customary to turn a historic structure into a museum following renovation. It might not be necessary to turn historic structures into museums alone. The old structures can be converted into hotels, restaurants, gift shops, galleries, artisan stores, administrative offices, and other sustainable and revenue-generating spaces.
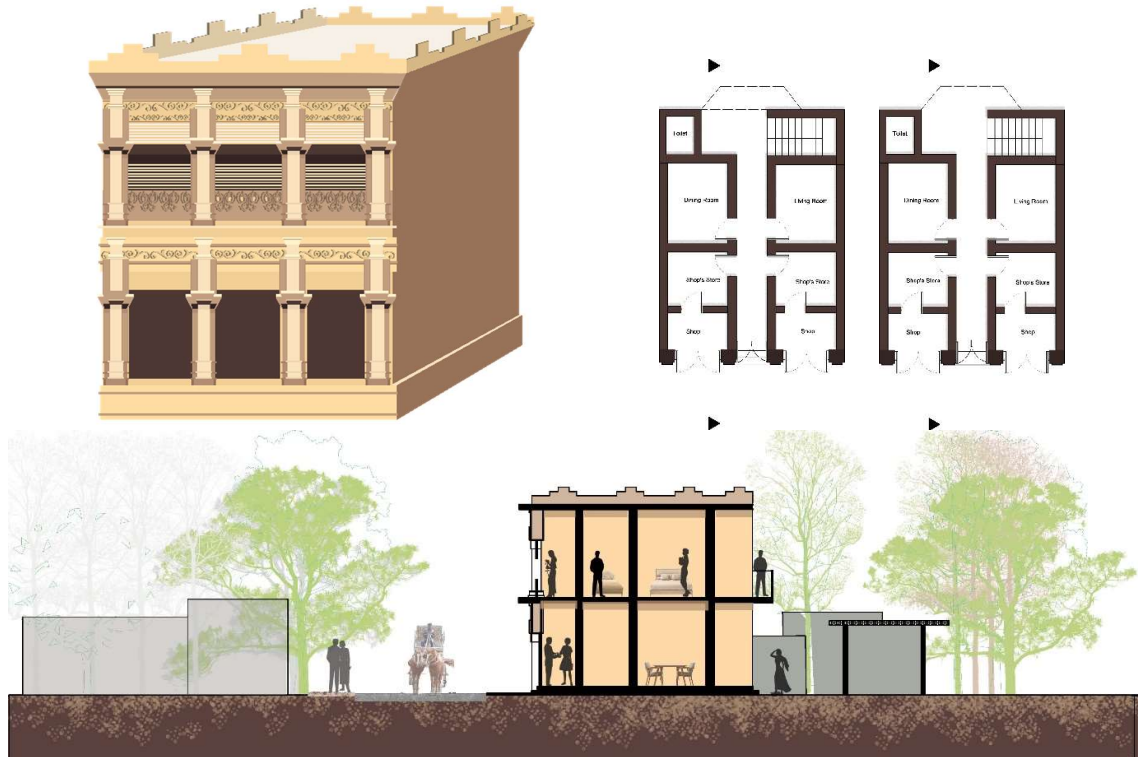
Figure 10: Proposal of adaptive reuse (Heritage Homestay) for Residence 1. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

Figure 11: Proposal of adaptive reuse (Cafeteria) for Residence 4. Source: Authors' work from B.Arch Program

5.4 Community Participation and Management

In order to preserve the legacy, it's critical to give the community the means to carry on with them and, above all, to express their opinions and actively engage in heritage management. Since the success of heritage conservation at living heritage places depends on the active participation of various stakeholders, knowledgeable heritage professionals, traditional craftsmen, and the community at large, community support and engagement are essential.

6. CONCLUSION

Heritage protection has emerged as a vital lifeline for Rajshahi, a city grappling with the delicate dance between progress and preserving its cultural spirit. While rampant development may threaten to erase its soul, pockets of resilience exist in ancient neighbourhoods and vibrant local communities. Recognizing this precious legacy, this study embarked on a crucial mission: to map the hidden veins of history and culture coursing through the city's fabric. Beyond mere identification, this endeavor seeks to weave a tapestry of connections, crafting a user-friendly guide for both domestic and international visitors.

The trail serves as more than just a guide; it embodies a vision for sustainable development. It proposes development pathways that embrace the historic fabric, integrating the whispers of the past with the city's modern pulse. The journey envisioned by this study transcends mere tourism. It aspires to foster a deeper appreciation for the city's cultural tapestry, forging a stronger bond between residents and their heritage. By providing access to the city's hidden gems, it empowers residents to become custodians of their own history, actively participating in its preservation and evolution.

Ultimately, this study proposes a roadmap for navigating the crossroads of history and future in Rajshahi. It beckons the city to embrace its heritage as a cornerstone for development. This is not just about preserving walls and structures; it's about safeguarding the very soul of Rajshahi, ensuring that its unique cultural identity continues to shine brightly for generations to come.

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