



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Ministry of Housing and Public Works  
Urban Development Directorate  
82 Segunbagicha, Dhaka-1000

PREPARATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR MEHERPUR ZILLA

## REPORT ON ASSIGNMENT-1

# TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE, URBAN FORM AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN WITHIN THE MEHERPUR REGION

June 2025

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# RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE, URBAN FORM AND SETTLEMENT  
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DATE: JUNE 2025

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# Executive Summary

This reconnaissance report presents a preliminary yet in-depth assessment of the traditional architecture, urban form, and settlement patterns in the Meherpur region of southwestern Bangladesh. The study seeks to uncover the cultural, historical, and spatial logic that has shaped the built environment of Meherpur and two of its upazilas, and to establish a foundational understanding for future heritage documentation, urban planning, and conservation efforts.

Meherpur holds immense historical and cultural significance, not only as the location of the proclamation of Bangladesh's first government in 1971, but also as a region that reflects centuries of vernacular building practices, indigenous planning wisdom, and harmonious integration of architecture with the natural landscape. Its traditional settlements—marked by inward-facing courtyard houses, organically developed street networks, and community-centered public spaces—embody a wealth of architectural knowledge that is increasingly under threat from modern construction, neglect, and policy gaps.

Through limited field visits, visual documentation, stakeholder interactions, and literature review, this report identifies key architectural typologies, settlement structures, and spatial patterns that define the region. The study finds that traditional homesteads in Meherpur commonly use locally available materials such as mud, bamboo, and laterite bricks, featuring elements like pitched roofs, extended verandahs, and multifunctional courtyards. Religious structures such as mosques and small temples exhibit craftsmanship unique to the region, often blending local styles with Mughal and colonial influences.

Urban patterns in the region demonstrate organic growth, with settlements typically organized around natural water bodies (*dighis*), agricultural zones, and religious/community landmarks. Streets are narrow and irregular, emphasizing pedestrian scale and climatic comfort. Despite their cultural and environmental significance, many of these architectural and spatial elements are facing irreversible transformation due to rapid urbanization, land pressures, and the absence of protective policies.

The report recommends a comprehensive architectural and cultural heritage survey, integrated with a participatory planning approach. It calls for urgent intervention through awareness campaigns, community-based conservation models, incorporation of traditional logic in planning regulations, and pilot heritage conservation projects.

The findings strongly support the need for further detailed research, policy development, and investment to protect and revive Meherpur's traditional urban fabric—not only to preserve its identity, but also to inform future sustainable development practices across similar regions in Bangladesh.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Report

This report has been prepared as a preliminary reconnaissance of the traditional architecture, urban form, and spatial patterns found within the Meherpur region of Bangladesh. The primary purpose is to gather initial insights into the architectural heritage and settlement morphology of the area and to assess their current condition, cultural significance, and conservation needs. This investigation is intended to inform future planning, heritage documentation, and policy interventions by government agencies, urban planners, architects, and conservation professionals.

The report acts as a foundational step toward identifying and protecting the region's built heritage, many aspects of which remain undocumented and underappreciated. By providing a snapshot of key characteristics and trends, the report aims to highlight both the unique values embedded in Meherpur's built environment and the risks it currently faces.

## 1.2 Importance of Studying Traditional Architecture and Urban Form

Traditional architecture and urban form are more than just physical structures; they are manifestations of a region's history, climate, social structure, technological evolution, and cultural identity. In a region like Meherpur, which has witnessed both deep-rooted agrarian traditions and pivotal moments in national history, the built environment tells a compelling story of continuity, adaptation, and resilience.

Studying traditional architecture offers insights into:

- **Climate-responsive design:** use of local materials, natural ventilation, and spatial layouts that reflect environmental adaptation.
- **Social cohesion:** structures such as courtyard houses and shared public spaces that foster intergenerational and communal living.
- **Cultural identity:** religious and civic architecture that embodies local craftsmanship, symbolism, and belief systems.
- **Sustainable practices:** vernacular construction techniques that align with ecological balance and material efficiency.

Similarly, understanding urban morphology—such as street networks, neighborhood clustering, and land-use patterns—helps planners and policymakers appreciate how communities have historically organized themselves in relation to geography, water resources, and agriculture.

In the context of rapid urbanization and architectural homogenization, documenting and analyzing Meherpur's traditional built environment is crucial for crafting context-sensitive development plans that preserve cultural heritage while meeting modern needs.

## 1.3 Scope of the Report

This reconnaissance report focuses on:

- **Traditional residential architecture**, including homesteads, courtyards, and vernacular house forms.
- **Public and religious structures**, such as mosques, temples, community ponds, and roadside pavilions.
- **Urban and rural settlement patterns**, including street networks, neighborhood layout, spatial clustering, and land-use relationships.
- **Cultural and historical influences** that have shaped the region's architectural evolution.

The geographic scope primarily includes areas within Meherpur Sadar, along with select nearby villages and historical sites. Observations are drawn from direct field visits, visual inspection, photographic documentation, interviews with residents, and a review of existing secondary sources.

#### 1.4 Limitations of the Report

As a reconnaissance study, this report presents only a **preliminary and non-exhaustive** understanding of Meherpur's traditional architecture and spatial patterns. Key limitations include:

- **Limited time and resources**: The study was conducted over a short period and did not involve detailed architectural surveys or mapping.
- **Partial geographic coverage**: Only select areas were visited, which may not represent the full diversity of Meherpur's built heritage.
- **Informal data collection**: Most interviews and discussions were unstructured and anecdotal in nature.
- **Lack of archival access**: The report could not consult all possible historical records or land-use maps due to availability constraints.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer a meaningful starting point and underscore the urgent need for a **comprehensive heritage inventory** and **strategic conservation initiative** in the region.



Figure 1 Administrative Boundary of Meherpur



## 2. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this reconnaissance study is to initiate a baseline understanding of the traditional architecture and urban morphology of the Meherpur region. This includes identifying key architectural features, documenting settlement patterns, and assessing cultural and spatial relationships within the built environment. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. **To identify and document key characteristics of traditional architecture** in Meherpur, including building typologies, construction techniques, and materials.
2. **To analyze the urban form and spatial patterns** of settlements, focusing on street layouts, land use, clustering of homes, and the integration of natural features.
3. **To understand the socio-cultural functions** of architectural and spatial forms, including the role of courtyards, ponds, religious structures, and marketplaces in everyday life.
4. **To assess the current condition and trends of transformation** in the traditional built environment due to urbanization, modernization, and socio-economic change.
5. **To raise awareness about the cultural and historical value** of the region's architectural heritage among stakeholders, including local communities, professionals, and policymakers.

This reconnaissance is intended as a preliminary study and is not a substitute for a detailed architectural survey or master planning exercise. Rather, it provides the foundation for future work by identifying priority areas and urgent challenges.



*Figure 2 Old Structures in Meherpur Boro Bazar Area*



*Figure 3 New Structure in Meherpur Mallick Para Area*

### 3. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this reconnaissance report is qualitative, exploratory, and field-based. It focuses on visual assessment, community interaction, and spatial observation rather than exhaustive architectural documentation. The steps followed in the study are outlined below:

#### 3.1 Site Selection

- Several **settlements and neighborhoods** in and around Meherpur Sadar, Mujibnagar and Gangni were selected based on accessibility, local knowledge, and the presence of visually identifiable traditional structures.
- Priority was given to areas where traditional buildings and original urban patterns were still partially intact.

The survey area selected based on historical relevance, architectural richness, and variety in urban/rural settlement patterns:

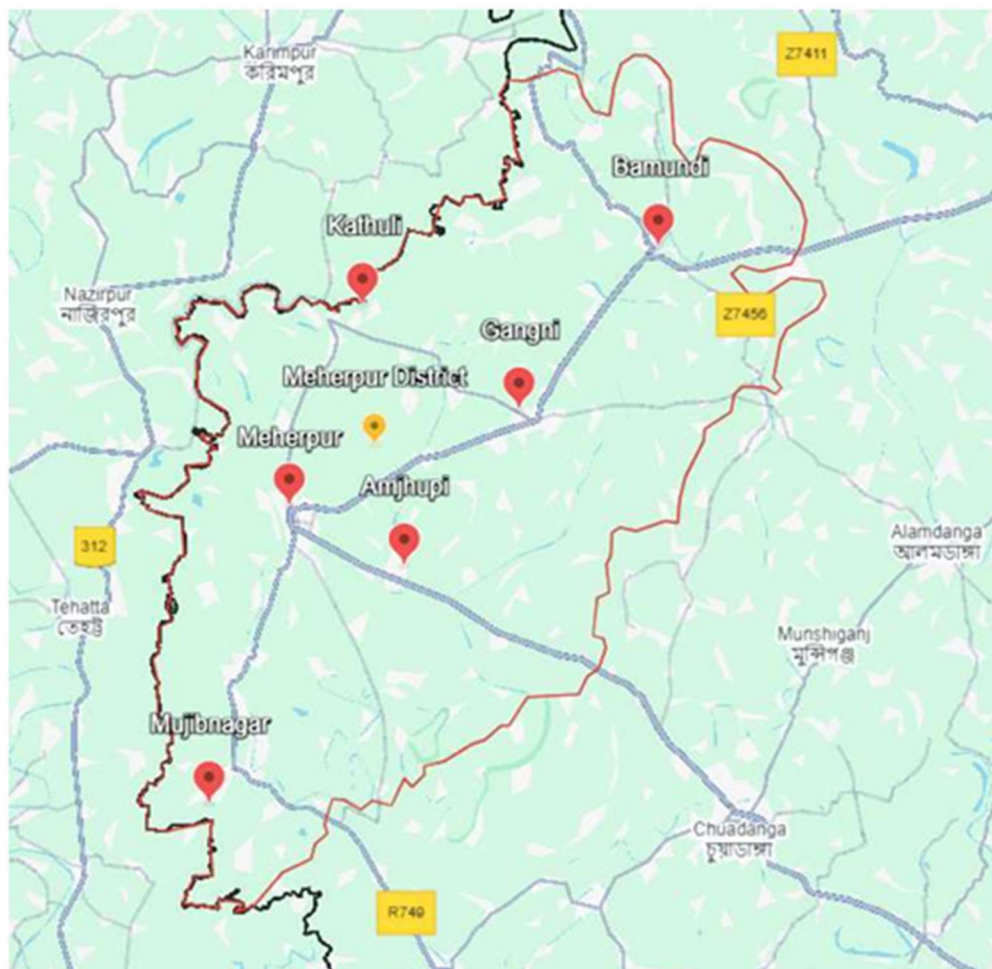


Figure 4 Survey Points

### 3.1.1. Amjhupi

- **Why important:** Site of the historic Amjhupi Neelkuthi (Indigo Factory), one of the best-preserved colonial-era buildings in the district.
- **What to observe:**
  - Colonial indigo factory architecture
  - Ancillary buildings and warehouse layouts
  - Traditional homes in surrounding village area

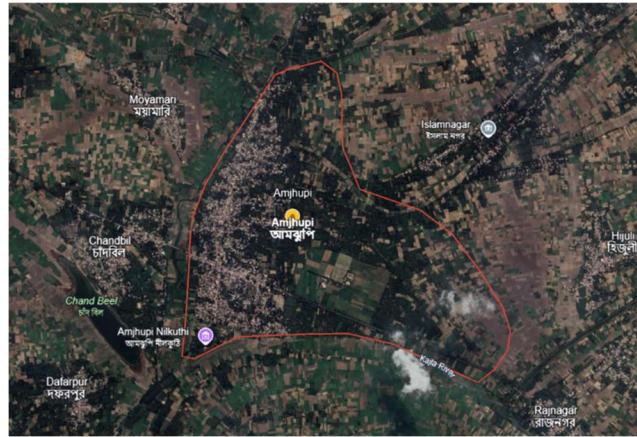


Figure 5 Amjhupi Satellite View

### 3.1.2. Meherpur Sadar

- **Why important:** Administrative and commercial center with remnants of older urban morphology.
- **What to observe:**
  - Traditional courtyard houses inside narrow lanes
  - Old mosques, temples, ponds, and religious landmarks
  - Markets and mixed-use building types
  - Evolving building typologies due to urban pressure



Figure 6 Meherpur Satellite View

### 3.1.3. Mujibnagar

- **Why important:** Symbolic capital of Bangladesh during the Liberation War; heritage and commemorative value.
- **What to observe:**
  - Traditional village homes nearby
  - Government-built commemorative architecture
  - Landscape integration and symbolic planning

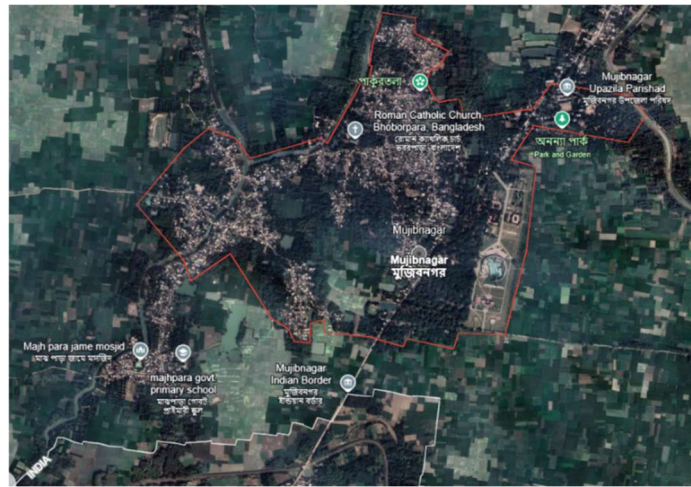


Figure 7 Mujibnagar Satellite View

### 3.1.4. Gangni Upazila Villages

- **Why important:** Rich in rural homestead typologies, pond-based layouts, and traditional settlement structure.
- **Suggested villages:**
  - **Kathuli** – for dispersed rural homesteads
  - **Bamondi** – for linear village form and traditional roof types
- **What to observe:**
  - Mud houses, thatched roofs, use of bamboo
  - Seasonal water management patterns
  - Sacred groves or village commons



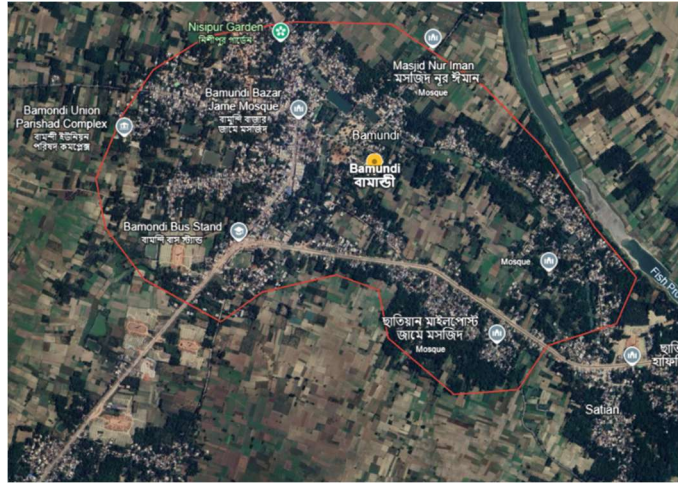


Figure 8 Bumundi Satellite View

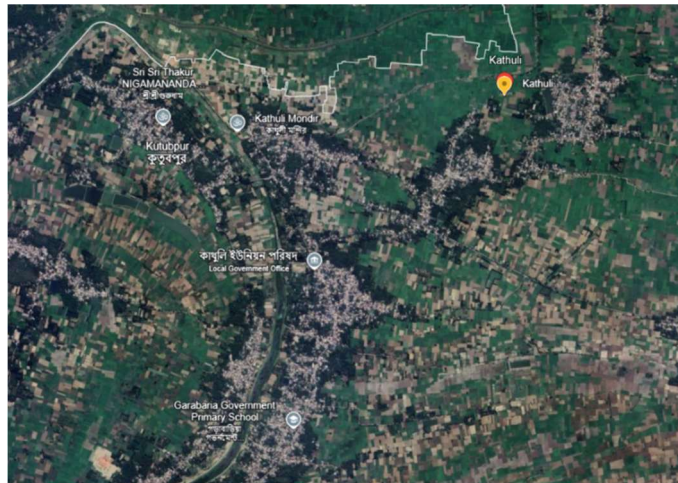


Figure 9 Kathuli Satellite View

### 3.2 Field Observation and Documentation

- **Field visits** were conducted over a defined period, focusing on:
  - Building typologies and architectural elements (roof types, facades, materials)
  - Street layouts, nodes, and access patterns
  - Relationship between built structures and natural elements (ponds, trees, agricultural land)
- Visual documentation was carried out using:
  - **Photographs** for recording facades, streetscapes, and spatial relationships
  - **Sketches and hand-drawn site maps** for interpreting spatial arrangements

### 3.3 Stakeholder Interaction

- **Informal interviews and conversations** were held with:

- Local residents, especially elderly members with lived memory of traditional practices
- Local masons (*rajmistris*) and builders familiar with vernacular techniques
- School teachers, imams, and community leaders
- These interactions provided insight into:
  - Cultural practices and symbolism in built form
  - Historical anecdotes and architectural evolution
  - Perceived value and current use of traditional structures

### 3.4 Secondary Data Review

- Secondary sources were consulted to support field findings, including:
  - Historical texts and district gazetteers
  - Academic articles and theses related to vernacular architecture in Bangladesh
  - Government records and maps
- These sources helped in framing Meherpur within broader architectural and urban studies.

### 3.5 Analytical Framework

- Observations were organized thematically under:
  - **Architectural elements** (materials, techniques, features)
  - **Settlement patterns** (form, function, orientation)
  - **Cultural relevance** (usage, symbolism, transformations)
- Comparison was made with vernacular traditions in other southwestern regions of Bangladesh to contextualize similarities and uniqueness.

### 3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

- **Limited temporal scope** restricted in-depth seasonal analysis (e.g., monsoon behavior of courtyards and materials).
- **Partial coverage** of Meherpur's rural and urban settlements due to time and logistical constraints.
- **Lack of architectural drawings or measurement surveys**, which are essential for conservation-grade documentation.
- **Absence of gendered perspectives** in architectural use and transformation, due to limited time for social research.

Despite these constraints, the methodology offers a practical, field-based foundation for further professional and academic inquiry.

## 4. Regional and Historical Background

### 4.1 Geographic and Environmental Context

Meherpur is a district located in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, bordered by Kushtia to the east and the Indian state of West Bengal to the west. It lies within the Ganges floodplain, a fertile and historically significant region that has supported agrarian settlements for centuries.

The landscape of Meherpur is predominantly flat, marked by seasonal rivers, canals, and scattered water bodies (*beels* and *dighis*) that play a vital role in both agriculture and settlement planning. The region's **subtropical monsoon climate**—characterized by hot, humid summers and moderate winters—has historically influenced its architectural form, with features like open courtyards, deep verandahs, and high-pitched roofs designed for thermal comfort and drainage.

The soil of the region is generally loamy and fertile, supporting paddy, jute, and vegetables, which historically anchored both economic activity and spatial organization of homesteads.



*Figure 10 Meherpur Landscape*



*Figure 11 Chad Bill*

## 4.2 Historical Significance

Meherpur holds a special place in the national history of Bangladesh. On **April 17, 1971**, the **Provisional Government of Bangladesh** was sworn in at Baidyanathtala (now Mujibnagar), within Meherpur. This event marked the formal declaration of the country's independence during the Liberation War and has bestowed the district with national symbolic value.

However, Meherpur's historical depth extends well before the Liberation War. As part of **Nadia district** during the British colonial period, the area was influenced by the administrative, architectural, and infrastructural changes introduced by the British Raj. Remnants of colonial-era schools, residences, and roads are still visible in parts of the district.

The region also bears traces of earlier **Mughal and Sultanate influences**, particularly in religious structures such as small mosques and tombs, often built with terracotta ornamentation and laterite bricks. Some of these structures reflect a hybrid architectural style, blending Islamic motifs with indigenous materials and spatial logic.



*Figure 12 Architectural monuments of Amdaha Village*



*Figure 13 Bhabanandapur Mandir*



### 4.3 Settlement Evolution

The settlements in Meherpur evolved organically around agricultural activity, water sources, and religious institutions. Villages are typically nucleated, with **homesteads clustered around ponds**, and **agricultural fields radiating outward**. Such spatial arrangements reveal a strong relationship between built form and ecological context, balancing private and communal functions.

Urban areas like Meherpur Sadar have grown along trade and administrative corridors, with newer developments expanding along linear road networks. However, older parts of towns and villages retain curved, irregular paths that follow topography and social logic rather than formal grid planning.

Settlements are often composed of **multiple 'paras' (neighborhood clusters)**, named after families, professions, or religious affiliations. This clustering reflects traditional Bengali rural social structures and informs not only housing form but also spatial hierarchy and movement.



*Figure 14 Traditional Settlement (Kathuli)*



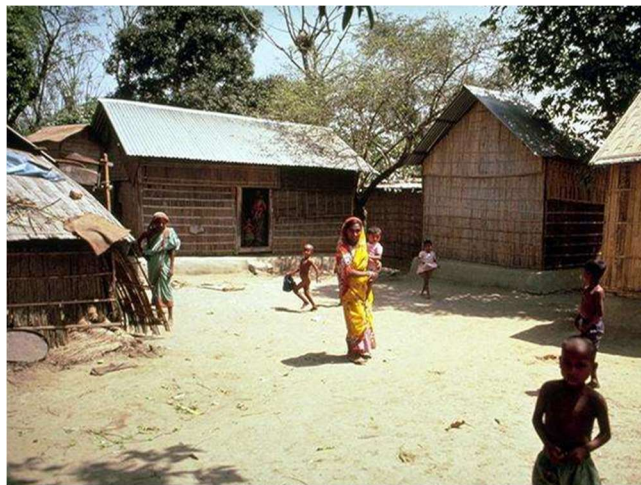
*Figure 15 Evolved Settlement (Kathuli)*

#### 4.4 Cultural and Social Fabric

Meherpur's cultural landscape is shaped by a mix of **Muslim and Hindu traditions**, agrarian lifestyles, and a deep-rooted sense of community. Local festivals, religious gatherings, and seasonal events (such as Nabanna or Eid celebrations) are often associated with specific architectural or spatial elements—courtyards, mandirs, mosques, and community *melas*.

The architecture reflects this cultural hybridity. Homes often feature **ornamental entrances, bamboo screens, mud plasters with cow dung**, and intricately carved wooden doors—demonstrating both aesthetic sensibility and environmental intelligence. Many homes integrate **outdoor cooking areas, livestock spaces, and shrines**, indicating multifunctional and adaptive use of space.

The **decline of joint family systems**, out-migration of youth, and introduction of modern construction materials (e.g., concrete blocks, aluminum sheets) have led to significant changes in recent decades. However, many households still maintain fragments of the traditional spatial logic, such as maintaining the courtyard as the heart of domestic and communal life.



*Figure 16 Communal Courtyard (Bumundi)*



*Figure 17 Roadside Courtyard (Meherpur)*

#### 4.5 Relevance to Heritage and Planning

Understanding the historical evolution and regional context of Meherpur is essential for:

- Identifying patterns in traditional planning that can inspire **sustainable urban and rural development**.
- Informing **heritage conservation strategies** that are sensitive to local values and practices.
- Appreciating the spatial logic of settlements that align with **climatic, ecological, and cultural realities**.

As Bangladesh seeks to balance modernization with heritage conservation, regions like Meherpur offer rich lessons in **resilience, adaptation, and place-based identity**. Recognizing and preserving this legacy is not only an act of cultural responsibility but a pathway to more inclusive and grounded development models.



*Figure 18 Small Shrine alongside the road (Meherpur)*

## 5. Traditional Architecture of Meherpur

The architectural heritage of Meherpur reflects the social values, environmental adaptation, and craftsmanship of its communities. Though largely vernacular in nature, the traditional architecture of the region reveals a nuanced understanding of spatial hierarchy, climate-responsive design, and the integration of cultural practices within the built environment. This section highlights the key features, typologies, construction techniques, and symbolic elements of Meherpur's traditional architecture.

### 5.1 Residential Architecture

#### 5.1.1 Homestead Layouts

Traditional rural residences in Meherpur are organized around a central courtyard (*uthan*), with built forms arranged on one or more sides. The courtyard serves multiple functions—social gatherings, household chores, children's play, drying crops—and is often shaded by fruit trees such as mango, jackfruit, or guava.

Homesteads typically include:

- **Living quarters (ghar/kotha)** with separate rooms for sleeping, storage, and occasionally, worship.
- **Kitchen structures (ranaghor)**, often detached or semi-detached for fire safety and ventilation.
- **Cattle sheds and grain storage units**, usually located at the rear or in a corner of the plot.
- **Boundary fencing**, traditionally made of bamboo, jute stick, or mud walls, providing privacy and separation from the street.

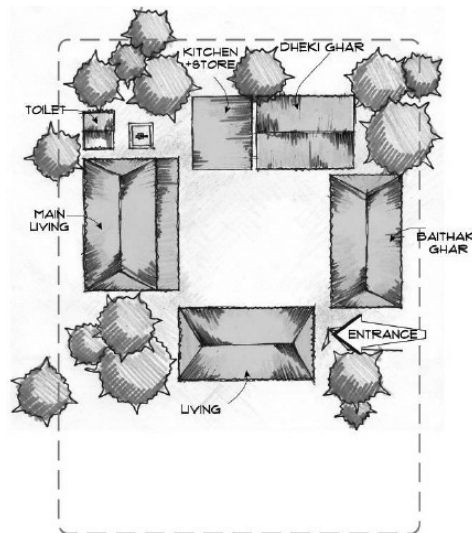


Figure 19 Rural Homestead Layout



### 5.1.2 Building Materials

Local, low-cost, and environmentally adaptive materials dominate traditional construction. Common materials include:

- **Mud and clay**, used for walls with occasional lime additives.
- **Bamboo**, for frames, fencing, scaffolding, and temporary structures.
- **Thatched roofs (khorī-tala)** made of straw or palm leaves.
- **Laterite and burnt clay bricks**, especially in wealthier homes or older constructions.
- **Wooden beams and posts**, often locally sourced and carved.

These materials allow for thermal comfort, ease of repair, and environmental sustainability, but they are increasingly being replaced by concrete and tin in newer buildings.



*Figure 20 Thatched Roof with brick structure and thatched wall with tin roof (Kathuli)*



*Figure 21 Brick Structure with Thatched and tiled roof and thatched wall with tin roof (Kathuli)*

### 5.1.3 Roof Types and Orientation

Roofs are typically **gabled or hipped**, with steep slopes designed to efficiently shed rainwater. The use of extended **eaves (chouchala or do-chala style)** provides shade and protects walls from rain. Many roofs include decorative elements such as curved ridge lines or terracotta finials.

Orientation of houses is usually dictated by practical concerns—access to sunlight, prevailing winds, and views—rather than formal geometric planning. However, many homes are oriented eastward, symbolizing auspiciousness and benefiting from morning light.



Figure 22 Juxtaposition of dochala and flat roof (Amjhupi)

## 5.2 Religious and Communal Structures

### 5.2.1 Mosques

The region is dotted with small, often centuries-old **mosques** built in the **Sultanate and early Mughal style**, using brick masonry, lime mortar, and terracotta ornamentation. These structures are typically single-domed or triple-domed, with recessed niches (*mihirabs*), arched entrances, and minimal but elegant decoration.

Courtyard spaces often adjoin mosques, and the surrounding land is used for prayer overflow or community gatherings. The proximity of ponds for ablution (*wudu*) is a notable spatial feature.



Figure 23 Typical Mosque (Meherpur)



Figure 24 Model Mosque (Meherpur)

### 5.2.2 Temples and Churches

In areas with Hindu populations, **small temples and churches** made of brick or laterite stone are common. These structures may include:

- Square or rectangular sanctum (*garbhagriha*)
- Pyramid-shaped *shikhara* (superstructure)
- Intricately carved niches, doorways, and boundary walls

Many such temples serve as centers for local festivals and rituals. Their architectural detailing reflects both Bengali and pan-Indic influences, often incorporating terracotta panels.





Figure 25 Shibaloy Asrom



Figure 26 Roman Catholic Church

### 5.2.3 Community Spaces

Traditional **resting pavilions (chaurasta chhata)**, **school verandahs**, and **market sheds (hat bazaars)** form part of the communal fabric. These structures often use bamboo or timber columns with thatched or tin roofs and are open on multiple sides for ventilation and visibility.

Ponds (*dighi* or *pukur*) associated with both homes and mosques are architecturally significant, with formal embankments, steps (*ghats*), and shaded areas used for bathing, washing, and social interaction.





*Figure 27 Hut (Bumundi)*



*Figure 28 Resting Pavilion (Bumundi)*



*Figure 29 Kachabazar (Meherpur)*

### 5.3 Decorative and Symbolic Elements

Traditional houses in Meherpur frequently feature **ornamental details**, reflecting both aesthetic values and symbolic meanings:

- **Carved wooden doors and windows**, often with floral or geometric motifs.
- **Plaster bands and cornices** on earthen or brick walls.
- **Threshold designs and wall paintings**, particularly around entrances during festivals.
- **Raised platforms (uthaans or machas)** used for sitting, watching, or performing rituals.

Symbolic architecture also plays a role in denoting **social hierarchy**, **family heritage**, and **religious identity**, with some homes marked by sacred trees, Tulsi stands, or commemorative plaques.



Figure 30 Decorative Railing, Tiles work in old structure (Meherpur Boro Bazar)

### 5.4 Transformation and Challenges

The traditional architectural fabric of Meherpur is under increasing threat from:

- **Modernization and real estate pressure**, leading to replacement of mud houses with concrete or tin structures.
- **Loss of craftsmanship**, as younger generations move away from traditional skills.
- **Disaster vulnerability**, especially due to unplanned development and climatic impacts.
- **Neglect and abandonment**, with many traditional structures falling into disrepair due to maintenance costs and policy neglect.

While some transformations reflect legitimate aspirations for better comfort and durability, the **uncritical adoption of modern materials** often results in structures that are environmentally unsuited and culturally disconnected.

## 5.5 Opportunities for Preservation and Adaptation

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities to:

- **Document and digitize architectural details**, materials, and construction practices for education and policy.
- **Incorporate vernacular logic into modern planning**, using hybrid models of construction.
- **Train local masons in adaptive reuse and conservation**, promoting traditional techniques with new technologies.
- **Create demonstration projects or heritage zones**, particularly around historic mosques, temples, and ponds.

Preserving Meherpur's architectural heritage is not about resisting change, but about ensuring that development is **culturally rooted, climatically responsive, and socially inclusive**.

## 6. Urban Form and Settlement Patterns

The urban and rural settlements of Meherpur reflect organic growth patterns shaped by geography, water systems, agrarian livelihoods, and sociocultural traditions. This section explores the distinctive features of urban form, street networks, land use organization, and spatial hierarchies in both rural villages and urbanizing centers.

### 6.1 Typology of Settlements

Meherpur district features three broad categories of settlement types:

#### 6.1.1 Rural Villages

- The majority of Meherpur's population lives in nucleated rural villages (*gram*), with compact clusters of homesteads surrounded by agricultural land.
- Villages are organized in *paras* or *mahallas* based on kinship, caste, or profession (e.g., *Kumar Para* for potters, *Pathan Para* for descendants of Afghan settlers).
- Most rural villages are located near ponds, canals, or rivers, which are crucial for household needs and irrigation.



Figure 31 Rural Clustered Village (Kathuli)

#### 6.1.2 Semi-Urban Growth Centers

- Growth centers such as Gangni and Mujibnagar have emerged as rural-urban interfaces, where traditional homestead layouts coexist with small markets, educational institutions, and concrete structures.
- These areas exhibit linear development patterns along road corridors and growing demand for formal planning interventions.





## 6.2 Street Patterns and Circulation

The morphology of Meherpur's settlements features diverse street patterns influenced by historical evolution, natural contours, and sociocultural factors.

### 6.2.1 Organic Street Layouts

- In older villages and town cores, streets are narrow, winding, and informal.
- These paths respond to topography and property boundaries, forming a web of movement routes for pedestrians, rickshaws, and livestock.
- Shaded alleyways and informal resting spots foster social interaction.

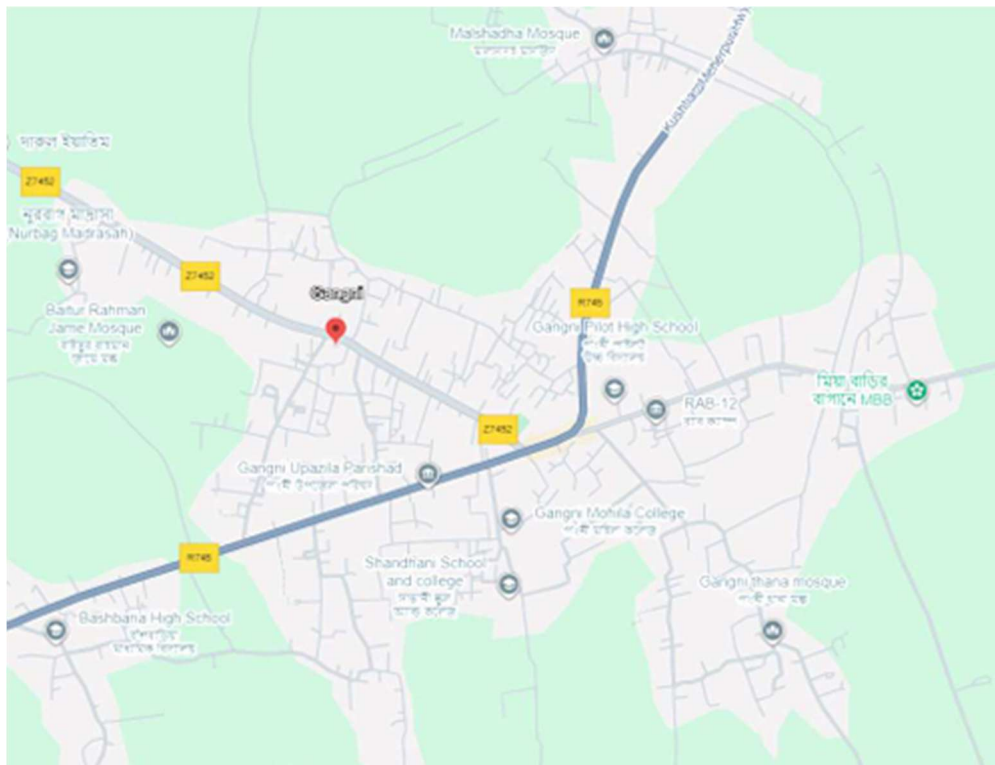


Figure 34 Organic Street Layout (Gangni)

### 6.2.2 Linear Expansion

- Many newer developments and commercial zones grow along major roads and highways (e.g., Meherpur–Kushtia road).
- This ribbon development pattern leads to congestion and fragmented land use but reflects economic dependency on vehicular trade corridors.

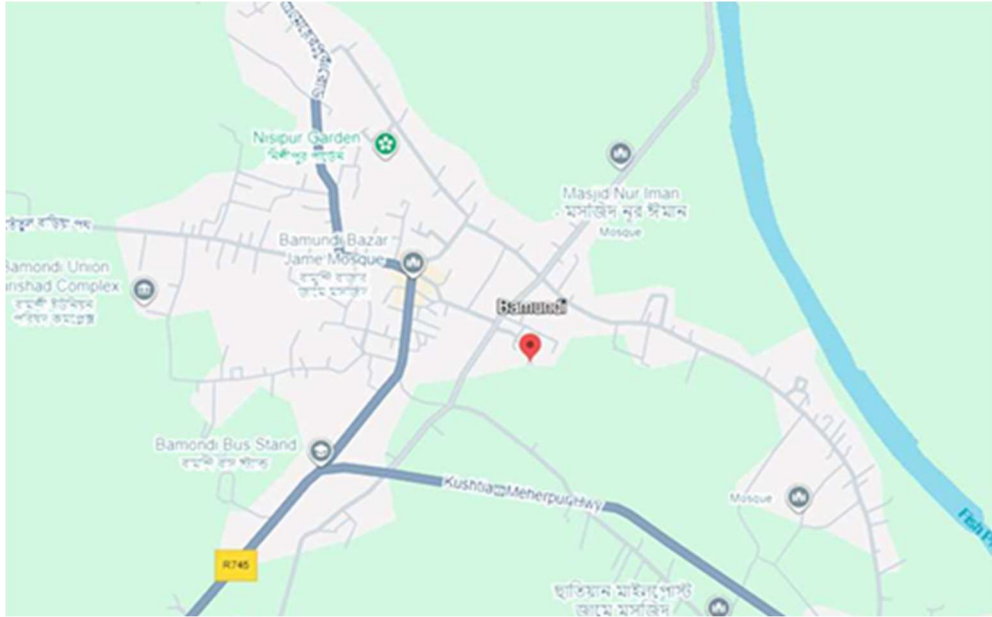


Figure 35 Linear Expansion (Bamundi)

### 6.2.3 Junction Nodes and Social Spaces

- Key intersections (*moras*) in towns and villages often serve as marketplaces, tea stalls, or transport stops.
- These become important **nodes for civic life**, where built form meets informal social infrastructure.

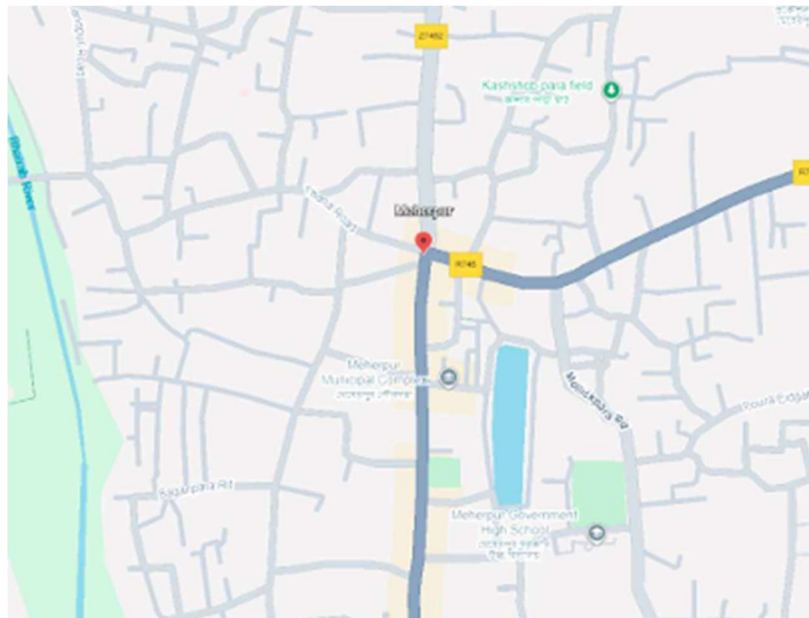


Figure 36 Civic facility at junctional node (Meherpur)



### 6.3 Land Use and Functional Zoning

Traditional settlements in Meherpur demonstrate a layered and functional spatial organization, even in the absence of formal zoning:

- **Residential Areas:** Centrally located, often with a hierarchy from wealthier households at the core to marginal groups at the periphery.
- **Agricultural Land:** Radiating out from the village core, delineated by earthen embankments, bamboo fences, and irrigation ditches.
- **Religious and Communal Institutions:** Mosques, temples, and schools often lie at the edges of clusters, accessible yet distinct.
- **Ponds and Water Bodies:** Interspersed across the landscape, these are multifunctional—used for bathing, irrigation, and cultural rituals.
- **Markets and Bazaars:** Weekly markets (*haats*) form part of rural economic life, usually held in open fields or near road crossings.



Figure 37 Showing Land use and functional zoning of Kathuli



In urban areas:

- **Administrative and Commercial Functions** are concentrated around town centers and key roads.
- **Residential zones** are increasingly mixed in use, with shops and small enterprises operating from homes.
- **Public spaces** such as parks or plazas are scarce, though some school fields serve informal recreational needs.

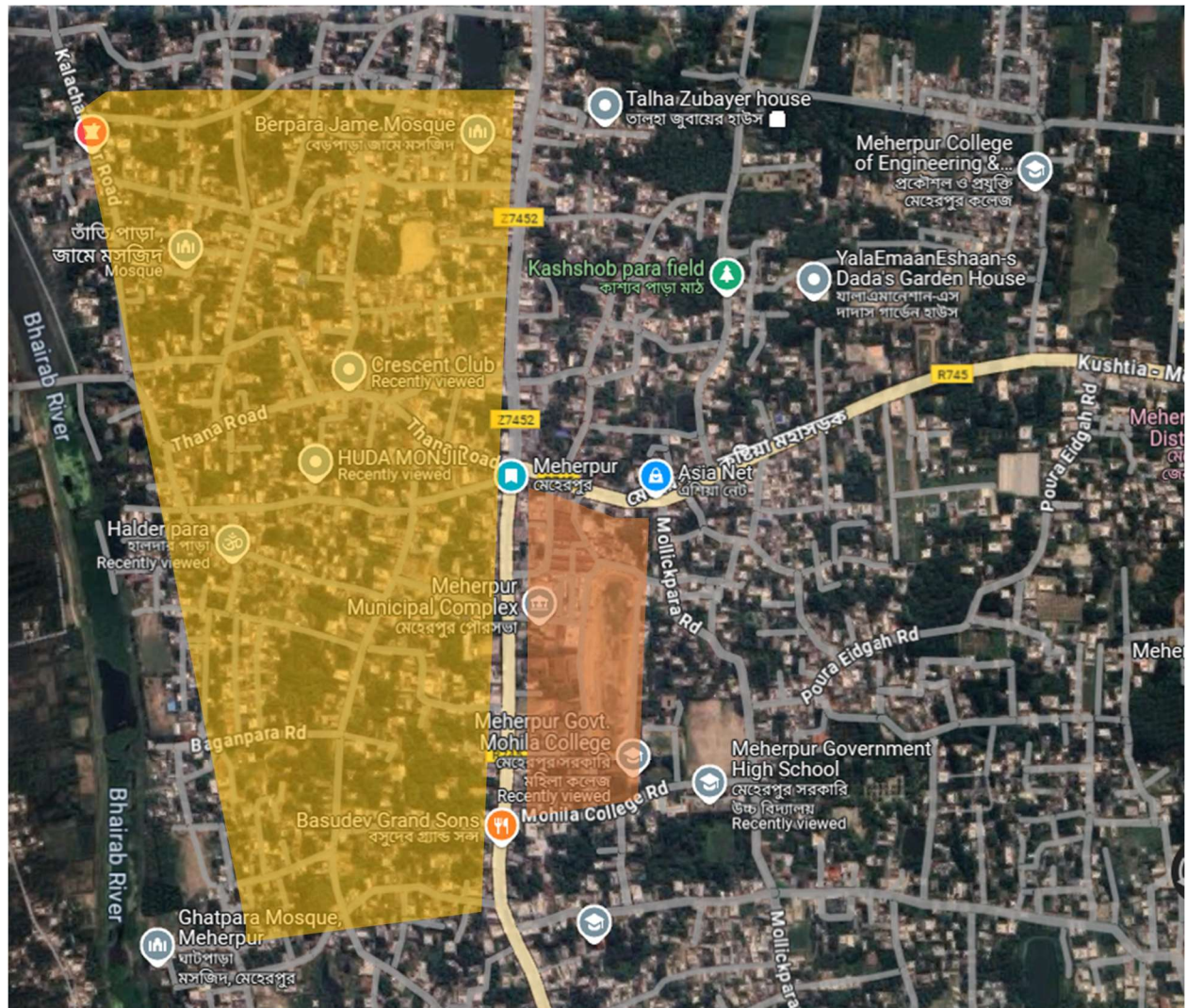


Figure 38 Showing Land use and functional zoning of Meherpur City

## 6.4 Spatial Hierarchies and Social Logic

The layout of settlements in Meherpur often mirrors the social structures and collective memory of its inhabitants:

- **Kinship Clusters:** Households of extended families or same-lineage groups are located adjacently, fostering cooperation and shared space.
- **Caste/Ethnic Patterns:** Some spatial segregation persists, with minority communities sometimes located in distinct sections of a village or town.
- **Gendered Spaces:** The inner courtyards and kitchens form part of the private, female domain, while outer verandahs and tea stalls serve as male-dominated spaces of interaction.
- **Sacred Geographies:** Trees, shrines, and water bodies have symbolic and spiritual associations, guiding placement of built forms.

This embedded spatial logic sustains community resilience and social cohesion but is under pressure due to urban migration and modern building practices.

## 6.5 Transformation Trends

Significant changes are underway in Meherpur's urban form:

- **Increased Formalization:** Local government and municipal authorities are promoting structured layouts and paved roads, particularly in town centers.
- **Real Estate Pressures:** Land fragmentation and rising land values are driving haphazard densification, often without basic infrastructure.
- **Migration Effects:** Remittances from abroad and rural-to-urban migration are altering the character of both housing and land use.
- **Commercialization:** Traditional markets are giving way to permanent shops and brick-and-mortar establishments, affecting street life and open space.

## 6.6 Need for Responsive Planning

Given these dynamics, it is critical to:

- Preserve organic street patterns that support walkability and social cohesion.
- Protect water bodies and green zones within expanding settlements.
- Integrate traditional planning logic into municipal zoning regulations.
- Encourage **participatory urban design**, where residents can shape the transformation of their environments.

Recognizing the urban and rural forms of Meherpur as living cultural landscapes offers an opportunity to create planning models that are rooted in **place, memory, and sustainability**.

## 6.7 Urban Form and Settlement Pattern of Meherpur City

Meherpur City showcases a transitional urban fabric—melding traditional rural layouts with emerging formal grid systems. The older core of the city is characterized by narrow, winding lanes, compact residential blocks, and shared courtyards. Areas like Mukherjee Para still reflect colonial-era morphology with symmetrical houses and tree-lined streets.

The expansion of the city post-independence has introduced more structured zoning—educational, residential, administrative—often disrupting older organic systems. Nevertheless, elements of traditional urbanism persist, including front-yard social spaces, water bodies integrated within neighborhoods, and mixed-use roadside clusters.

Despite increasing densification, Meherpur City retains elements of its historical logic: proximity to religious and civic landmarks, shaded streets aligned for airflow, and neighborhood identity based on community or caste-based clustering. The city exemplifies a layered urban pattern where history, topography, and socio-political changes converge.

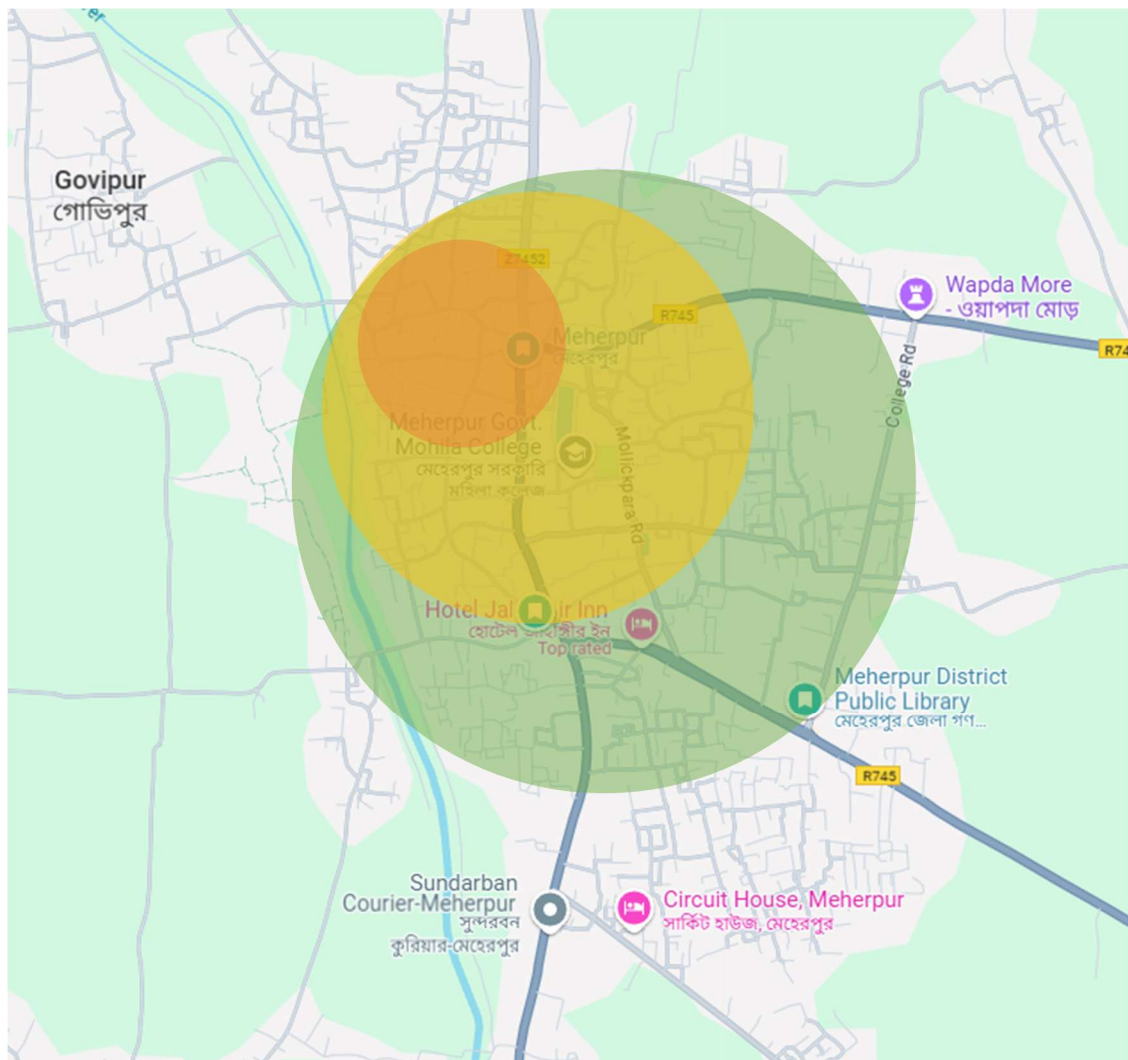


Figure 39 Meherpur City Historical & Future Growth



## 7. Challenges and Threats to Traditional Urban Fabric

The traditional architecture and urban form of the Meherpur region are under increasing pressure from rapid socio-economic changes, environmental vulnerabilities, and policy neglect. This section identifies the key challenges and threats affecting the preservation and sustainability of the traditional built environment in Meherpur.

### 7.1 Unplanned Urbanization

The absence of proactive land use planning and weak enforcement of building regulations have led to:

- **Haphazard growth** of settlements, especially in urban fringes and roadside areas.
- **Encroachment of public land**, ponds, and communal spaces by unauthorized structures.
- **Loss of spatial hierarchy**, with traditional zoning between residential, agricultural, and sacred spaces becoming blurred.
- **Destruction of visual and cultural continuity**, as traditional homes are replaced by incompatible structures.

This results in fragmented and inefficient urban environments, lacking infrastructure and social cohesion.



*Figure 40 Example of unplanned urbanization (Meherpur)*

## 7.2 Displacement of Traditional Materials and Techniques

With the growing preference for modern materials like concrete, glass, and tin, the following trends are evident:

- **Abandonment of mud, bamboo, and thatch construction**, which are more suited to the climate and environment.
- **Erosion of craftsmanship**, as younger generations move away from traditional trades.
- **Rising construction costs**, as imported materials replace affordable local ones.

This shift compromises thermal comfort, sustainability, and the vernacular character of settlements.



*Figure 41 Ignoring the tradition completely (Meherpur Govt High School)*

## 7.3 Cultural Homogenization and Aspirational Modernity

A significant challenge to traditional architecture is the aspiration toward a "modern" lifestyle, often equated with:

- **Concrete buildings with glazed windows**, regardless of climatic suitability.
- **Western-inspired layouts**, that ignore the social and environmental logic of traditional homesteads.
- **Standardized forms** that erase regional diversity in building design.

This cultural shift contributes to a loss of identity, memory, and local pride.

## 7.4 Environmental Degradation

The traditional urban fabric is deeply interlinked with its ecological context, but this balance is now at risk:

- **Filling of ponds and wetlands** for construction has reduced resilience against floods and water scarcity.
- **Removal of shade trees and vegetation** has increased heat stress in compact settlements.
- **Increased pollution and waste mismanagement**, particularly in semi-urban markets and transport hubs.

Climate change further intensifies these risks, threatening both heritage and habitability.

## 7.5 Infrastructure Deficits and Overburden

While infrastructure expansion is necessary, it often comes at the cost of traditional forms:

- **Road widening projects** frequently demolish heritage structures and narrow alleys.
- **Electricity and telecom installations** disturb rooflines, facades, and spatial continuity.
- **Drainage and sanitation systems** are often inadequate or improperly integrated, especially in older areas.

Poorly planned infrastructure ends up reinforcing inequality and undermining local architectural logic.

## 7.6 Weak Policy Framework and Institutional Gaps

There is little formal recognition of traditional architecture and urban heritage in Meherpur:

- **Lack of heritage listing or conservation zones**, even for historically significant structures.
- **Absence of local design guidelines or building codes** that respect traditional aesthetics and materials.
- **Limited coordination between municipal authorities, heritage departments, and local communities.**

This policy vacuum allows unchecked transformation and irreversible loss.

## 7.7 Socio-Economic Pressures

Poverty, land fragmentation, and out-migration further strain traditional settlements:

- **Lack of investment in maintenance**, causing deterioration and abandonment of old houses.
- **Overcrowding and informal settlements**, especially where large families share shrinking plots.
- **Neglect of communal resources**, such as ponds, temples, or gathering spaces, which lose relevance or fall into disrepair.

These pressures create a cycle of decline, making traditional areas less desirable and less viable.

## 7.8 Knowledge Loss and Educational Gaps

Traditional architectural knowledge is largely oral and experiential. However:

- **No formal documentation or transmission mechanisms** exist.
- **Architects and engineers trained in modern institutions** are often unaware or dismissive of vernacular wisdom.
- **Youth disengagement**, with younger generations viewing traditional forms as backward or irrelevant.

Without active efforts to bridge this knowledge gap, the intangible heritage of Meherpur risks being forgotten.

### Conclusion of Section

The challenges to Meherpur's traditional urban fabric are multifaceted, spanning physical, social, economic, and institutional dimensions. Addressing them requires **a holistic, community-driven approach** that balances development with preservation, and modernization with identity. Without timely intervention, the region risks losing an irreplaceable legacy of architecture, urban form, and cultural continuity.

## 8. Recommendations and Strategic Directions

In response to the challenges facing the traditional architecture and urban form of Meherpur, this section outlines strategic recommendations aimed at promoting sustainable development, heritage preservation, and inclusive urban planning. These recommendations are framed to assist local and national government agencies, planners, architects, and community stakeholders in forming an actionable roadmap for Meherpur's built environment.

### 8.1 Heritage Preservation and Documentation

#### a. Inventory and Listing of Traditional Structures

- Conduct a comprehensive survey to identify and map historic buildings, homesteads, religious sites, ponds, and community landmarks.
- Create a public database or heritage register with photographic and architectural documentation.

#### b. Heritage Zoning and Protection

- Designate special conservation areas within towns and villages.
- Introduce legal safeguards against demolition or alteration of identified heritage structures without appropriate review.

#### c. Cultural Mapping and Oral Histories

- Engage local residents in narrating histories of buildings and neighborhoods.
- Archive intangible cultural heritage, including craftsmanship, rituals, and settlement lore.

### 8.2 Community Participation and Capacity Building

#### a. Community-Led Development Committees

- Form neighborhood-based planning and conservation committees.
- Involve citizens in identifying priorities and monitoring implementation.

#### b. Skills Training and Revival of Craftsmanship

- Support vocational training in mud plastering, bamboo work, terracotta decoration, and wood carving.
- Encourage youth involvement through workshops and mentorship from older artisans.

#### c. Educational Programs

- Incorporate local architectural heritage into school and college curricula.
- Partner with architecture schools to run field studios and documentation projects in Meherpur.



## 8.3 Economic and Tourism Development

### a. Cultural Tourism Initiatives

- Develop guided heritage trails through historic neighborhoods, mosques, temples, and local crafts workshops.
- Create cultural festivals or events that celebrate Meherpur's identity.

### b. Homestay and Eco-Tourism

- Support traditional homesteads to become part of local tourism offerings.
- Ensure tourism development is community-based, environmentally responsible, and culturally respectful.

### c. Local Product Branding

- Help artisans market traditional building materials and crafts (e.g., bamboo, terracotta) with regional branding.
- Facilitate access to markets through cooperatives and online platforms.

## 8.4 Institutional and Policy Recommendations

### a. Strengthen Local Government Capacity

- Equip municipal and union parishad offices with planning professionals trained in heritage-sensitive development.
- Provide technical assistance from national institutions for complex conservation efforts.

### b. Inter-Agency Coordination

- Foster collaboration between the Department of Archaeology, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Department of Architecture, and Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

### c. Policy Integration

- Align Meherpur's development initiatives with national frameworks such as the National Urban Policy, Climate Resilience Strategy, and Delta Plan 2100.

## Conclusion of Section

Preserving Meherpur's traditional architecture and urban form is not a matter of nostalgia—it is a strategic investment in climate resilience, social cohesion, and cultural identity. With proper planning, community involvement, and institutional commitment, Meherpur can serve as a model for place-based development that honors the past while building a sustainable future.

## 9. Conclusion

The Meherpur region, with its deeply rooted heritage, diverse settlement patterns, and resilient architectural traditions, presents a rich yet fragile tapestry of built and cultural legacy. This reconnaissance report has sought to provide a foundational understanding of the traditional architecture, urban form, and settlement dynamics of the area. It has also highlighted the value of preserving these unique spatial characteristics amidst the pressures of modernization, urban expansion, and socio-economic change.

The findings of the study reveal that Meherpur's traditional urban fabric—characterized by its climate-responsive homes, organically evolved neighborhoods, community-centric planning, and harmonious relationship with the natural environment—is not only a historical asset but a living system that can offer sustainable solutions for the future.

However, the region faces significant threats: unplanned development, loss of local materials and skills, policy gaps, and environmental degradation. These challenges are compounded by a growing cultural disconnect, where younger generations are increasingly detached from their architectural and spatial heritage.

The way forward demands a multidimensional and inclusive approach. Preservation efforts must go beyond mere restoration—they should integrate heritage into everyday life and future development plans. Strategic interventions must empower communities, incentivize vernacular building practices, and mainstream heritage into policy, education, and economic development.

Meherpur's traditional urban form is not static—it has evolved over centuries, adapting to changing needs and contexts. Today, it must continue to evolve—but in ways that are conscious, informed, and rooted in the values that have sustained it. By recognizing and reinforcing the strengths of its traditional architecture and urban patterns, Meherpur can forge a path of culturally grounded, environmentally sound, and socially equitable urban development.

This reconnaissance report serves as a first step—a call to action for local authorities, planners, academics, and communities to preserve, promote, and reimagine Meherpur's built heritage for generations to come.