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Living in the periphery: provinciality and domestic space in colonial Bengal

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This article focuses in detail on the domestic architecture of Indian town-dwellers within the context of provincial urbanisation in British colonial Bengal in the nineteenth century. It maps out the complex development of house-forms in provincial towns particularly in relation to rural-urban mobility and new social relationships brought about by the establishment of colonial governmental infrastructure in interior areas of the Bengal Province. Positing these domestic forms to be as important as the much-studied 'bungalow' in terms of typological complexity as well as the range of social, political and economic processes that they represented, the article foregrounds them as being significant spatial models of colonial urban domesticity and modernity. It analyses the development of residential architecture in the light of the varied perceptions of provincial towns held by different constituencies among the urban population—such as European officers or Bengali rural immigrants—from a range of socio-economic classes. It argues that urban-rural mobility and the nature of changing but continuing connections between rural and urban locations created an incrementally growing provincial urban domestic architecture characterised by malleable notions of work, home and leisure spaces. This produced a typological flexibility and specific articulations of public and private domains within residential premises.

The chief purpose of the paper is threefold: first, to make a case for Indian agency in the co-production of colonial architecture and urbanism; second, to argue the role of provincial spatial cultures and house forms as key bearers of colonial modernity; third, to explore colonial architectural history through on-ground mapping of everyday domestic spaces of individual families and varied social groups.

Introduction

Popular and to a large extent scholarly imagination of colonial domestic architecture in India, up until the turn of the twenty-first century, has often been dominated by the 'bungalow' as an architectural type. Brought into academic focus by seminal studies such as Anthony D. King's work from the late 1970s,[1] the bungalow is seen as the classic colonial domestic building, originating in India but gradually becoming an increasingly global product over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also considered to be a quintessential hybrid form epitomising transcultural processes—forged by spatially crossing European ways of living with the exigencies as well as benefits of tropical life—and one that then underwent continuous formal and semantic transformations in a range of contexts. Even though scholars such as King do acknowledge

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that the architectural development of the bungalow took place under the custodianship of both European and Indian agency, in terms of typology, it has often been projected as the single most significant building form produced within the Indian colonial context.[2]

While recognising the power of the bungalow idea in terms of its simultaneous ubiquity and localisation, this article foregrounds certain other sites, processes and models of domesticity that were equally part of the colonial spatial landscape. My sites of engagements are the houses of Indian town-dwellers in provincial areas of Bengal during the nineteenth century. Such an interest marks and is part of a larger turn in recent post-colonial scholarship (since 2005), for example in the works of Jyoti Hosagrahar, Anoma Pieris and Swati Chattopadhyay, that focuses on the role of indigenous agency as co-producers of colonial domestic landscapes and the ensuing spatial hybridities.[3] Crucially, my paper further extends this conceptual thread into the everyday residential architecture of the colonial provincial 'margins' or 'peripheries'.

By studying the domestic spatial cultures and everyday lives which emerged as a result of particular types of rural-urban movement that characterised colonial urbanisation in interior areas of India, the article argues that along with the European officer's or Bengali elite bungalow, various other types of upper-, middle- and lower-middle class houses in provincial towns also represented dynamic transcultural and trans-local processes (such as those involving urban and rural locations) and produced newer paradigms of living, working and leisure. More specifically, I make a case for the typological incrementality and flexibility in residential architecture that arose from the nature of urban-rural interface within the context. The architectural developments of these buildings, in fact, were also closely linked with and in parts drew upon, the bungalow typology itself: and in that sense all these together constituted the overall, rather heterogeneous, but agile, spatial culture of provincial domesticity in colonial Bengal. I thus suggest that being key bearers of a dynamic negotiation of change in a situation of political, economic and cultural flux, these provincial residential landscapes actively contributed towards a colonial modernity which is often attributed mostly to major urban centres and European agency, action and innovation.

The paper engages with smaller narratives of individual families within the larger developments in colonial provincial urbanisation in India. Rather than work merely with material housed in formal archives, I have personally studied and documented all the domestic premises mentioned in the paper through detailed first-hand measurement and drawings. I have also mapped the social histories of families and incremental development of house forms through drawings, interviews, conversations, a variety of formal and informal familial and governmental documents, biographies, personal memoirs as well as literary texts of the period.

Colonial enterprise and provincial urbanisation

Provincial urbanisation in nineteenth century Bengal took place largely around colonial commercial or administrative enterprise.[4] This paper focuses on the administrative towns, called *zilla sadar*

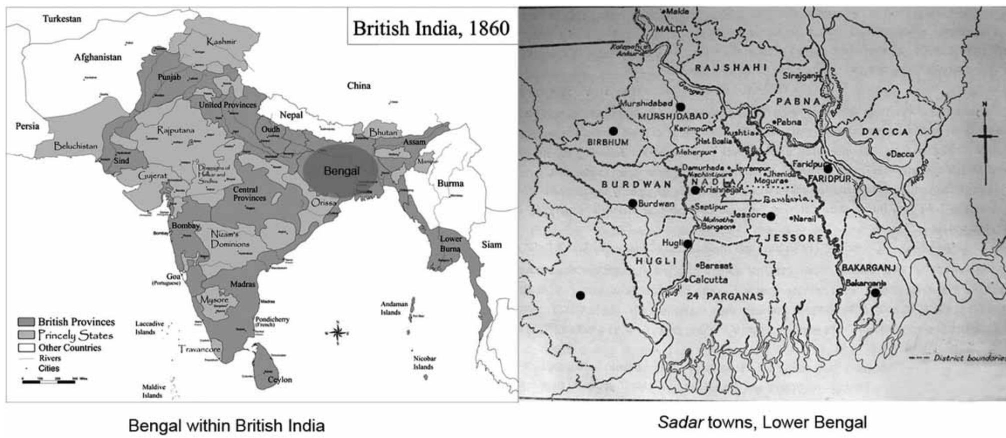


Figure 1. Bengal in British India and *zilla sadar* towns in lower Bengal.

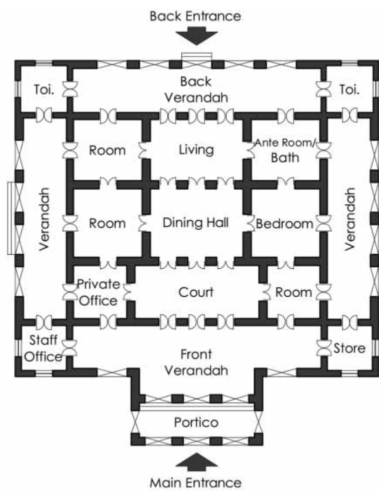
Figure 2. *Cutcherry* complex, Bankura.

(or simply *sadar* in common parlance) which were centres for the collection of agricultural revenue from vast hinterland regions. After defeating the *nawab* of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the English East India Company, formerly operating primarily as a trading agency, received from the Moghul emperor in Delhi the *diwani* or rights to collect taxes from agricultural land in the province of Bengal in 1765. In order to mobilise this, the territory was divided into revenue districts. In and around 1786, the post of the District Collector was created, with substantial administrative power delegated to this level, and headquarter towns for each district were also clearly designated (Fig. 1). It was this very territorial and operational framework of revenue administration, in fact, that later morphed into the political-administrative apparatus of imperial government after 1858.[5] The colonial office (called the *cutcherry*) complex (Fig. 2)—consisting of the revenue office, judicial and magisterial courthouses, land record rooms, treasury and sometimes other buildings such as district jails and police headquarters—formed the nerve centre of each provincial town around which the spaces of everyday life grew, such as those discussed in this article.

Characterised by a somewhat low level of provincial urbanisation, as analysed by M. S. Islam, Bengal had four broad types of towns before the late-eighteenth century: the metropolitan centres (eg, Dacca and Murshidabad) under Mughal and *nawabi* patronage; the *zamindari* towns under the patronage of the landed aristocracy (eg, Burdwan, Nadia, Natore, Dinajpur or Bishnupur); the European trade-based factory towns (eg, Chinsura, Hugli, Srirampur); and the transient *mufassal* [provincial] towns subject to the fast-moving flows of local political developments (eg, Bakarganj). In the decades following the Battle of Plassey, much of the *nawabi* infrastructure was dismantled. The land reforms instituted by the East India Company in 1793 (the Permanent Settlement)[6] saw the decline of a number of *zamindari* towns. Due to the shift in the nature of British colonial interest from trade to revenue administration and the increasing suppression of other European powers in the region, by the end of the eighteenth century most European factory towns also petered out. It is within such a context of other declining urban centres that *zilla sadar* towns, centered on colonial governmental functions, developed. They marked a new type of provincial urbanisation characterised by a more regularly distributed network of towns.[7] Most of the towns in question (such as Krishnangar, Bankura, Burdwan, Suri, Jessore, Barisal, Midnapur), however, had varying levels of pre-colonial inhabitation in the form of port or market settlements, merchant clusters, existing villages or populated hamlets under the patronage of feudal landlords. Various new layers of inhabitation associated with the operations of colonial revenue control were gradually grafted onto these from the early nineteenth century onwards.[8]

European officers and the provincial bungalow

The *cutcherry* drew diverse constituencies of people, driven by different imperatives and choices, to the *zilla sadar*. At its helm were European officers such as the District Collector or District Judge to whom the provincial town often



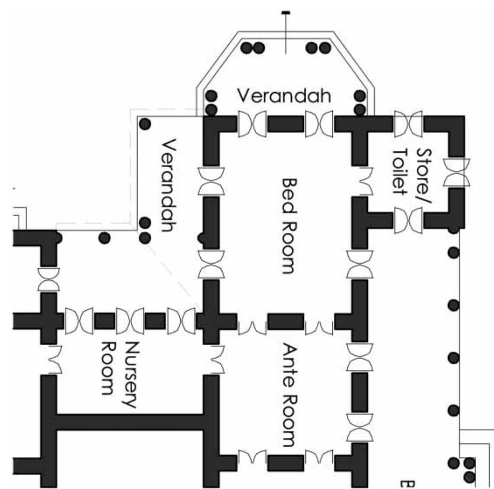


Figure 3. a. plan, Circuit Officer's house, Bankura, early nineteenth century; b. provincial bungalow compound on the outskirts of Calcutta: Frederick Fiebig, watercolour on photograph, 1840s; Copyright: The British Library Board (IOR, Photo 247/ 1 (45).

Figure 4. Partial plan, District Collector's bungalow, Bankura, late nineteenth century.

represented an unwelcome posting to a marginal and peripheral location cut off from the metropolitan life of cities such as Calcutta or Dacca.[9] But equally, in another sense, provincial posting meant a move from the big city to the countryside and represented a lifestyle, albeit largely disconnected from high-urban amenities, of close-to-nature living and luxurious spatial and service provisions. The officer's bungalow was the quintessential site where these contradictory relationships played out at the most extreme. Poised between isolation and exposure, denial of metropolitan amenities and plentitude of provincial provisions, it involved precarious trade-offs. In formal terms, the bungalow had a core-and-envelop arrangement, drawn from the Bengal rural hut (as shown by King, for instance) but also patterns derived from European precedents such as small neo-Palladian English villas.[10] The core itself comprised a 3x3 matrix of spaces housing main functions such as living, dining or bed rooms, and the envelop of a shaded *verandah* selectively enclosed in parts to form service-spaces such as store rooms, baths or lavatories (Fig. 3a). The bungalow was typically surrounded by a vast open space within what

was known as the 'bungalow compound', allowing possession of —and apparent command over—a large territory (Fig. 3b).[11]

The generous space standards in terms of room sizes or the massive grounds of a bungalow, the luxury of leisure spaces such as the *verandah* or the terrace, the profusion of servants available for tropical bodily care and domestic rituals, made the bungalow *de facto* the material embodiment of the experience of colonial power and plenty. Bungalows were typically characterised by a profusion of doors and windows, a requisite originally of the hot-humid climate of Bengal but translating, in effect, into a highly porous, low-privacy environment laden with the presence of native servants and support staff. Over the course of the nineteenth century the officer's bungalow developed into complex forms with multiple spaces plugged onto the basic format described above and invariably housed offices or work areas within domestic set-ups (Fig. 4). However, British officers actually comprised a miniscule percentage of the *zilla sadar*'s population; even in the late nineteenth century it was rare to find more than twenty European families in any *sadar* town, the average figure being close to six or seven. The bulk of the *sadar*'s inhabitants were heterogeneous groups of Bengalis, mostly moving from rural areas into these towns as colonial urbanisation took root in nodal points within interior regions.

Migrant Bengalis and the emerging urban dwelling

From the early-nineteenth century onwards, the movement of people from surrounding villages into *sadar* towns triggered off the latters' development as urban centres in the provincial landscape. The growing network of revenue, magisterial and accountancy offices, treasuries, record rooms and law courts in the *sadar* had the District Collector, Judge or Magistrate at their helm, supported by Sub-divisional Officers, Assistant Magistrates or Sub-judges. Other than the few upper-level officers, most provincial *cutcherries* were manned largely by native personnel. British revenue administration was also inherently dependent on an elaborate network of Indian tax-collectors and *zamindars*, operating from rural bases in pre- or early-colonial times. They too had an increasing presence and set up *cutcherries* in the *zilla sadar* in order to manage their tax payments and accounts as well as to attend to a plethora of land, revenue and other civil and criminal litigations in the district courts. By ensuring tax-collection contracts in perpetuity, the Permanent Settlement had conferred *de facto* feudal property rights in rural estates to *zamindars*, who accumulated huge surplus wealth from them.[12] This in turn was spent in developing their dwellings in provincial towns, embodying the material base of an emerging urban bourgeoisie. Most other rural migrants took up clerical and menial work in the colonial *cutcherries* or in *zamindari* establishments. Other than this, there was the emerging and increasingly powerful Bengali professional class (many of whom belonged to *zamindari* families)—consisting of lawyers, accountants, *moktars* [managers or representatives of men of influence], educationists and doctors—which grew steadily, especially after 1830.[13] Around all this also grew intricate

networks of commodity and service providers such as merchants in bazaar areas, priests and *mullahs* in temples and mosques, and prostitutes in the crevices of socially sanctioned town spaces.

The shift to an urban economy, fuelled by migration from rural areas in search of employment in and around colonial establishments, was thus one of the key drivers of the development of *zilla sadar* towns. However, there were wider life spheres from which this drew and upon which it had direct and indirect impacts. The increasing gradient between rural and urbanising areas in Bengal was gradually inscribing a rather uneven map of privilege in terms of resources such as health, education facilities or quality of domestic living space. The growth of new institutions of healthcare and systems of education in provincial towns also brought about perceptions of unforeseen redundancies in village-based dwelling patterns and traditional know-how.[14] A telling image of this emerging economic and cultural change and the ensuing rural-urban mobility is seen in an account by Kartikeyachandra, a middle-class Bengali gentleman, in the 1840s:

> By the time I attained youth, much had changed in terms of the quality of water and air, mode of education, behaviour and ettiquette, notions of hospitality and inter-personal relationships. Increasing environmental pollution makes it impossible now for reasonable cure of ailments by traditional doctors, and the emerging systems of education virtually render lessons by the Guru or the Ustad irrelevant. Cholera has emerged as the new demon, incidence of fever is more than ever before, eating habits have transformed,

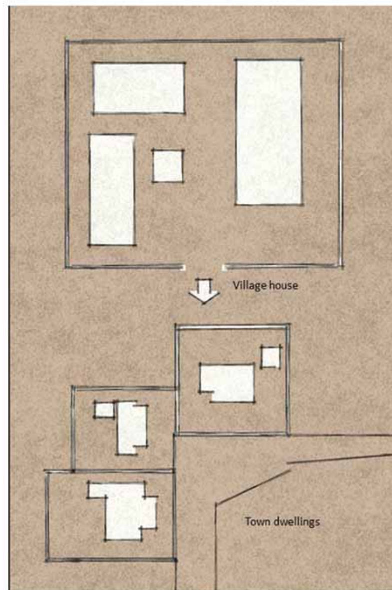


Figure 5. a. village house, Bengal (source: *Banglar Kutir* ['Huts of Bengal'], Ashok kumar Kundu, Indrajit Chowdhuri, eds., 2001); b. provincial urban middle-class house: the Mukherjee residence, Krishnanagar, mid-nineteenth century; c. apportioning of land into nuclear units in rural to urban transformation.

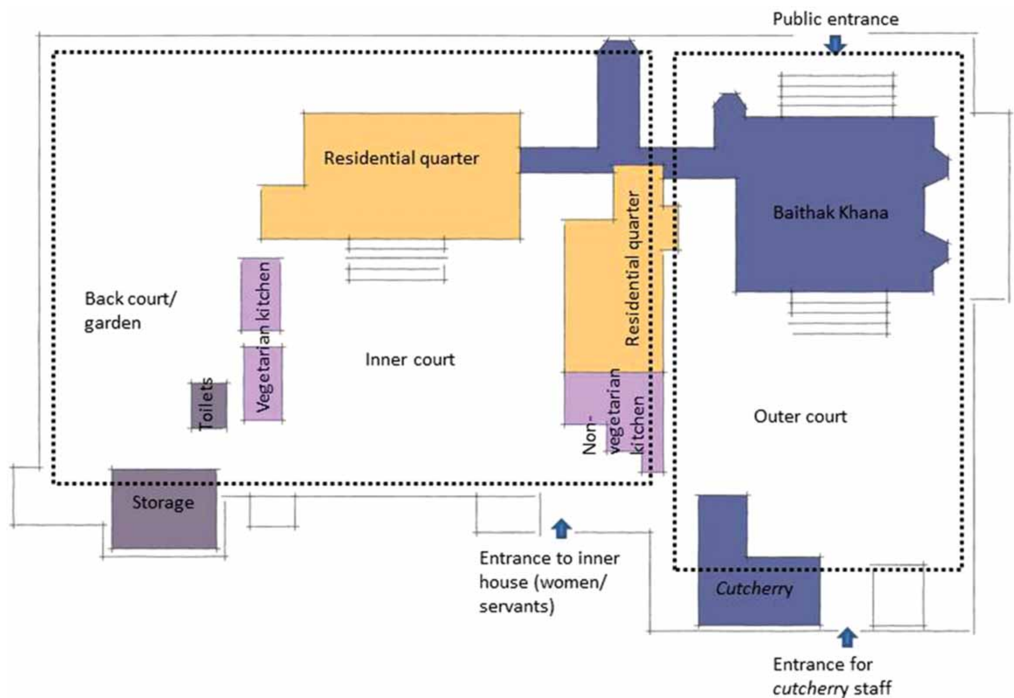


Figure 6. Components of upper- or upper-middle-class house: schematic diagram based on the Chakrabarty residence, Suri.

English education is being introduced—in fact, just about every facet of day-to-day life has witnessed a radical transformation. On top of this, our financial situation has undergone massive deterioration. Surviving and making a living in Baruihuda [the ancestral village] is therefore becoming a Herculean task … I have started actively to look for a suitable place to live in, in Krishnanagar [the nearest provincial headquarters town].[15]

Despite having more land attached, rural ancestral homes also housed large extended families within limited space and were increasingly perceived to be crowded and unhealthy. Due to this and later on the death of his son from an infectious disease, and his realisation of the limitations of the village in dealing with such exigent circumstances, Kartikeyachandra soon moved to Krishnanagar and gradually consolidated his urban house. In describing the nature of his preferred

urban dwelling in Krishnanagar, he in fact noted that:

> A place which affords a bit of land attached to the house so that one could have a garden, and that at the same time is in the midst of a neighbourhood of kin-folks, is what I [he] was looking for.[16]

In comparison to the village, therefore, the single family house with its own garden, a widely prevalent model for urban middle-class homes in provincial towns by the mid-nineteenth century, marked an apportioning of residential plots of land into smaller and more autonomous parcels for increasingly nuclearised urban living. Here, autonomy translated into one's own dwelling unit, some land for a private garden (albeit far less than in the rural property) and the freedom to shape one's own environment. But equally crucial was the advantage drawn from the 'collective social' in the form of rural kinship ties that continued into provincial urban neighbourhoods (Fig. 5a, b, c).

Work, home, leisure and service spaces and typological inter-changeability

It is the inter-relationship between work, home, leisure and service spaces within the provincial urban Bengali dwelling that determined the nature of the composite domestic space and its functional and social relationships.

Typically, in its most elaborate and developed form (eg, in a *zamindari* or wealthy professional household), the components of the urban dwelling in the *sadar* were (Fig. 6):

The outer house [*bahir mahal* or *bahir bari*] (office) (Work and leisure)	-The (*zamindari or* professional) *cutcherry* -The *Baithak-khana* (Guest entertainment/ leisure area)
The inner house [*andar mahal* or *bhitor bari*] (Home)	- Residential quarters - *Antur-ghar* (maternity room) - Children's tutorial spaces - *Ranna-ghar* or *Goshol-khana* (kitchen), wash areas - Bath, lavatories - Storage - Servants' quarters - Other ancillary spaces (eg, stables, cattle shed, rice-husking area) - Domestic temple and/or shrine

In its more rudimentary form (eg, in lower-level office clerks' or other lower- and lower-middle-class households), the urban dwelling consisted of:

The outer domain (Work and leisure)	- The *Baithak-khana* (guest entertainment/ leisure)
The inner domain (Home)	- Sleeping/living room/s - Kitchen, wash - Bath, lavatories[17] - Domestic shrine

Following on from rural practices, these functions were typically housed in a number of buildings

which were clustered together to make the overall dwelling. But interestingly, they were not necessarily discrete units. The primary functions regularly overlapped with each other. For example, the very same building could double up as a *cutcherry* and a *baithak-khana*, a *cutcherry* and a living quarter (usually for relatives or young male members of the family), or a *baithak-khana* and a living quarter. Different parts of a single building were either used for the different functions, or sometimes the very same spaces were used at different points of time for different purposes. At times even such spatial or temporal distinctions ceased to exist. An evocative account, for instance, of the way leisure and entertainment activities found their way into the work-space of the domestic *cutcherry*, was given by the eminent litterateur Rabindranath Tagore, speaking of his childhood in the late- nineteenth century:

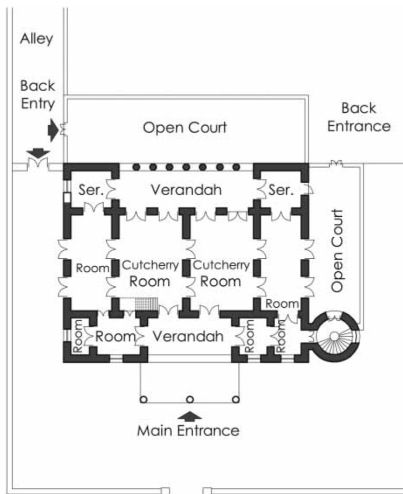
> After lunch, Gunadada [cousin Guna] used to come to conduct *cutcherry* [office] in this building. The *cutcherry* was virtually like a club for them—there wasn't much of a separation between work and amusement.[18]

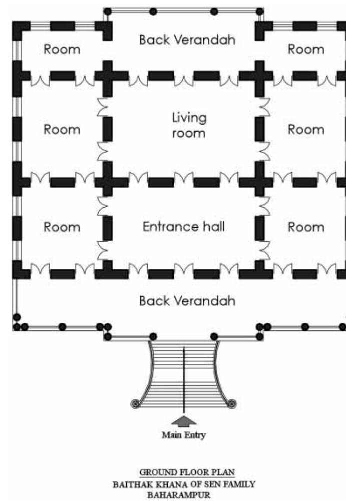
Describing his perceptions as a child growing up in the town of Chittagong (where his father was a *peshkar* or presenter at the *sadar* court) in the 1860s, Nabinchandra Sen also described the chameleon-like character of spaces such as the *baithak-khana*, which dramatically changed colour between daytime and evening:

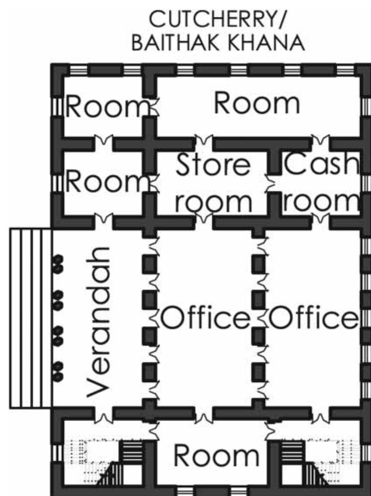
> My father exercised immense influence at the time. In the morning he sat down for his prayers; people swarmed into the *baithak-khana* —Hindustani cloth merchants with bundles of cloth, shopkeepers with their accountancy books, hungry applicants, relatives, people wanting appointments, a theatre leader and his troop of long haired boys, Brahmins who came from afar, a couple of *sadar-ala munsifs*, *ameen*, *sadar ameen*—filled up the *baithak-khana* and made it an intensely noisy place … …
>
> In the evening the *baithak-khana* was a different scene altogether; flooded with dazzling lights, filled with music and sounds of pleasure. The contortions of many an *Ustad*'s [maestro's] face and gurgling voice, the mellifluous sounds of gifted singers—I can hardly forget. People playing cards in one corner, chess in another; a comedian friend of my father eliciting giant eruptions of laughter in yet another portion; huge consignments of food such as sweets, fish and meat arriving as gifts from people who had just won a court-case in the morning …[19]

In the house of Narahari Banerjee, a lawyer practising in the District Court in Krishnanagar in the 1860s, the *cutcherry*, an office in the daytime, also served as the *baithak-khana* for entertaining guests in the evening and was converted into a sleeping space for male relatives and young boys of the house at night.[20] Within the urban domestic set-up of the *zilla sadar* such categories of space and functions as *cutcherry*, *baithak-khana* and living areas, or work, leisure and home, were thus fluid and malleable. This is especially true of the period up to the mid-nineteenth century.

One of the reasons why such interchange was possible was the generic nature of the basic building type which offered a reasonable fit with a range of functions. Plans of *cutcherries*, *baithak-khanas* and







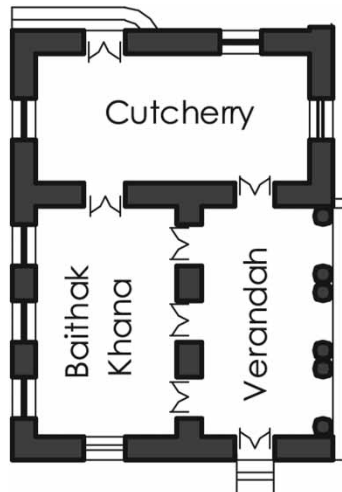


Figure 7. Hetampur *zamindar*'s *cutcherry,* Suri (left, above).

Figure 8. *Cutcherry* cum *baithak-khana*: the Chowdhury family house in Ghatbandar, Baharampur (left, below).

Figure 9. Ramdas Sen's *baithak-khana*, Khagra bazaar, Baharampur (right, above).

Figure 10. *Baithak-khana* cum sleeping quarters: the Banerjee residence, Goari, Krishnanagar (right, below).

mid-nineteenth century dwelling cum *cutcherry* or dwelling cum *baithak-khana* were virtually the same or near-identical: all based, in essence, on the 3x3, 3x2, 2x2 or 3x4 spatial matrix or its variants (figs 7, 8, 9, 10). This matrix arrangement was very similar, in principle, to the core space of the bungalow as well, although in this case, the annular *verandah* usual in a bungalow form was often not present or present only in parts. Like the bungalow, one or two spaces along the central axis were sometimes, though not always, larger and served as the main offices or entertainment rooms (typically 12-20 feet x 30-40 feet) buffered on either side by a set of relatively narrow (typically 8-12 feet wide) spaces housing smaller offices, store rooms and ancillary functions. However, while the bungalow was invariably a core and envelop arrangement, with a very clear hierarchy of primary and service spaces, *cutcherries*, *baithak-khanas* and living-space types consisted of a more generic spatial matrix, with such hierarchies sometimes acute and sometimes fairly diluted. It is thus important to note that the matrix arrangement was not exclusive to the bungalow or residential use but traversed a range of uses and with modification, allowed the formation of a number of variants and models of inhabited space with different functions and hierarchies. The other factor aiding multiple roles for the same building was the nature of furniture typically used in middle-class Bengali households. These were fairly minimal and flexible, the most frequently used in these buildings being *gadis* (simple mattresses), floor rugs or the *takhtaposh*: a low wooden platform, about 1 foot high, which could be used as a work surface, a low divan to entertain visitors, as well as a bed.[21]

Incremental domestic space

One of the most significant factors that affected the character of Bengali domestic spaces in the provincial context was the incremental nature of the development of people's urban bases. To large sections of the native population moving from villages into the *sadar*, it represented a movement to the town: the 'urban' location. In '*Atmacharit*' or his memoirs, Jogesh Chandra Bidyanidhi, a well-known Bengali academic, whose father was a *sadar-ala* or sub-judge in the district court in Bankura town, recounted his childhood impressions of their town-dwelling when he moved from his native village in the mid-nineteenth century:

> Our house in Bankura was made up of 3 buildings —[which] belonged earlier to a west-Indian merchant. One had to enter from the east, on the right was the east-facing, single-storeyed baithak-khana, in front the uthan [open court], on the left the indara [well]. There was a nice thatched room on the right. Behind this were Bel trees, other flowering trees and banana trees.[22]

The idea of a few discrete units having different functions connected by a central courtyard and enclosed by a wall was characteristic of early- to mid-nineteenth century rural habitation in Bengal across different socio-economic classes and scales of dwellings (see Figure 5a above).[23] For instance, feudal *zamindari* residences were typically spread over a large area, and in the hot-humid climate of Bengal, a number of individual buildings were clustered loosely around one or more courtyards (Fig. 11). Middle- or lower-middle-class village dwellings followed a similar principle at smaller scales. As

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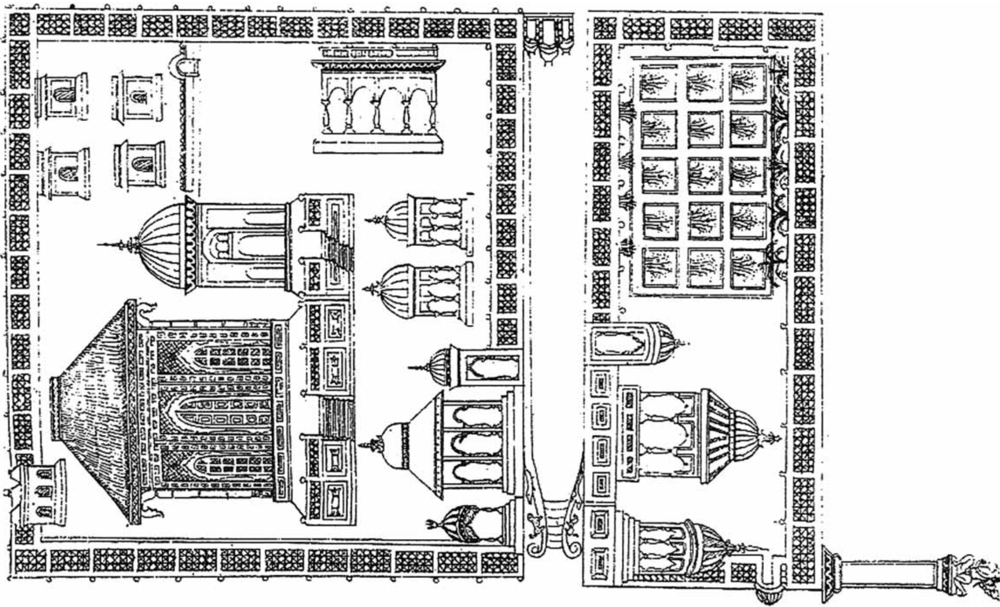

Figure 11. Drawing of the house of a wealthy provincial owner, Dinajpur (source, Robert Montgomery Martin, *Eastern India,* 1838). Note that Martin does not mention whether it is rural or urban, suggesting that the aggregatation of discrete built elements was possibly a common feature across these categories.

mentioned in the earlier section and also evident from Jogeshchandra's account, some of these characteristics obviously flowed into the residential spaces of the town. However, more often than not, compared to its rural counterpart, the initial home-base in the town was far more minimal; it then grew incrementally. An account of such incremental development of the urban dwelling was given by Kartikeyachandra, talking of his house in Krishnanagar in the 1840s:

> … I finally settled for the present site [in the periphery of Krishnanagar] and first dug a tank and built a small building with a *verandah*. Unfortunately, I couldn't build one that was suitable for bringing my family over to stay. … .. A few years later I embarked upon fashioning my own garden in the town … . After my garden and the *baithak-khana* were completed, I used to come there every evening from Baruihuda [the ancestral village] and my relatives came from Krishnanagar. All of us spent time there until fairly late in the night … ..A full year passed but I could still not build a place suitable for family-living due to paucity of funds. In 1854, my middle son suddenly contracted small pox … . Next day around 2 pm he passed away. Finding that it was not wise to continue living in Baruihuda, I built a few more rooms behind the *baithak-khana* and moved my family there.[24]

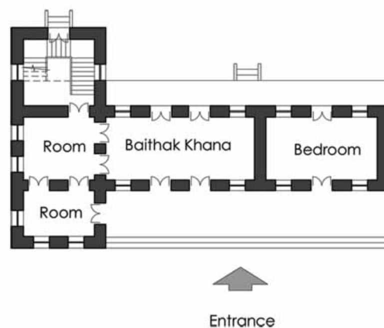

Figure 12. a. plan; b. front view: Ramtanu Lahiri's house, 1840s, Krishnanagar.

Another example of a basic early urban dwelling was Ramtanu Lahiri's house in Krishnanagar. Lahiri, an eminent educationist and Bengali liberal intellectual, also moved into the same neighbourhood as Kartikeyachandra in 1846. While the peripheral location of the site meant adequate land for a private garden, the building itself had to be modest. It consisted of a *baithak-khana*, sleeping space, store and servants' room, in a simple linear arrangement (Fig. 12a, b).[25] It was also such skeletal urban living, which many migrants from rural areas were forced to adopt in their early days in *sadar* towns, that possibly created composite building types such as the *baithak-khana*-house or the *cutcherry*-house, maximising the use derived from a single building.

Urban domestic incrementality also drew from a larger territorial gendering. During the period up to the mid-nineteenth century, a pronounced gender-split was inscribed between the village and the provincial town. Despite the presence of some pre-colonial habitation, *sadar* towns chiefly grew centered on the newer and emerging administrative functions, the uncertainties of which during the first half of the century, as well as the meagre scale of migrants' initial earnings, possibly got in the way of an outright movement to them of entire families, especially women, from rural areas. This anxiety is clearly apparent in Kartikeyachadra's account discussed earlier. The provincial town thus remained a predominantly male domain, inhabited by male family members and their servants working in the town. This was also reflected in the simple formations of the early dwellings. In his account, Jogeshchandra also talked about how their house in Bankura did not contain a prayer space, which was an integral part of his village home and of which the women were the custodians. Obviously, spaces specific to feminine use did not figure within these early town dwellings.

By the mid-nineteenth century, people in employment had made progress in consolidating their financial bases, making it easier to bring families to the *sadar*. A continuing lack of health and education facilities in villages and the Governor General William Bentinck's reforms of administrative

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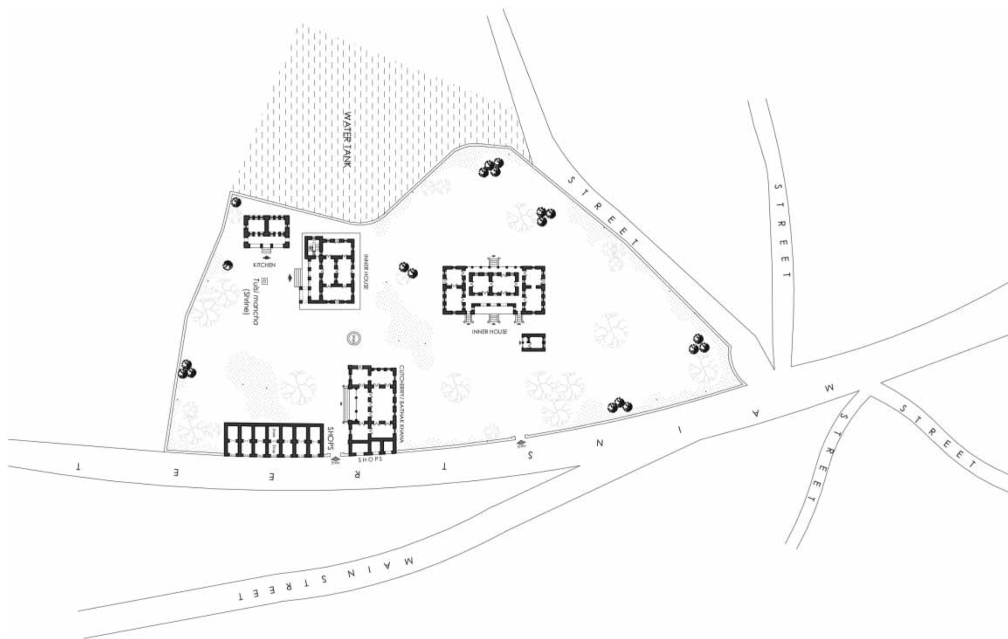
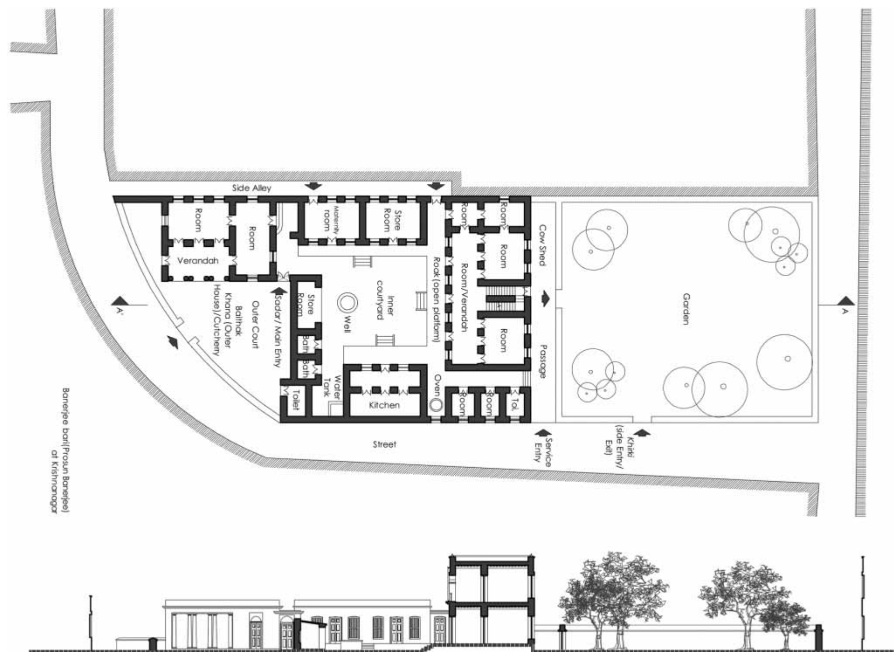


Figure 13. Plan: Lala residence, Suri.

languages and girls' education, encouraged the active use of urban health and English and vernacular education facilities by newer generations and, to some extent, even women. In such a scenario, town residences became the nuclei around which attempts were made to recreate the completeness of rural familial life and spaces. As the scope of urban homes gradually augmented after the mid-nineteenth century, more buildings were added to the spatial schemes. The full extent of the components of domestic structures listed above reveal, beginning in this period, the substantial proportion of spaces (eg, the inner house, maternity rooms, shrines, kitchen and other service areas) primarily used by the female members and servants of the household. The overall system also became more layered and complex, taking a number of different forms.

The first was a re-creation, roughly, of the loose-aggregate built-form reminiscent of the village habitat: an attempt to re-capture a familiar lifestyle. These were typically found in peripheral areas of *sadar* towns where the pressure on land was relatively low. Examples are the Lala house in Suri (Fig. 13) or the Chowdhury house in Ghatbandar on the outskirts of Baharampur. But, more

Figure 14. a. plan;
b. view from the street:
Banerjee residence,
Goari, Krishnanagar.



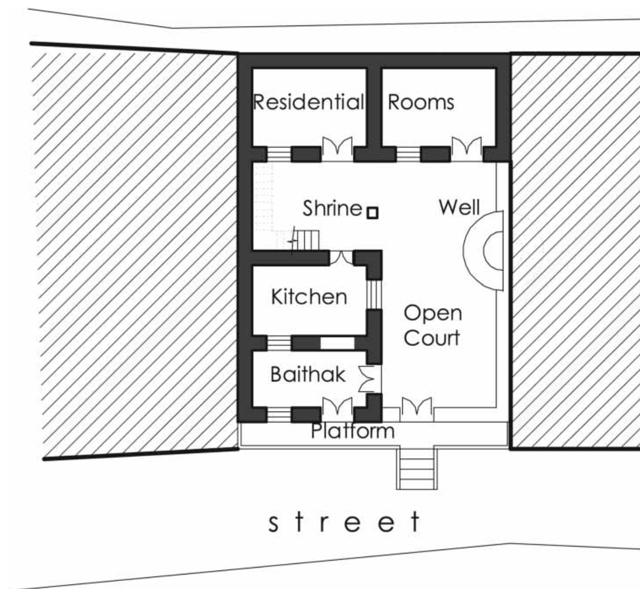


Figure 15. Courtyard house, Patpur, Bankura.

commonly, in large areas of the town where land was increasingly scarce, there was a tightening of this into more compact enclosures which offered an easier fit with small or medium-sized plots. Such a formation was seen, for instance, in the house of the barrister Prasun Banerjee in the Goari area of Krishnanagar, next to the district court complex: in the urban core (Fig. 14a, b). As mentioned earlier, here, the *baithak-khana* (built around the mid-nineteenth century)[26] in its early days trebled up as also the *cutcherry* and living unit. To this was added, in the late-nineteenth century, the inner-house—a compact cluster of sleeping and other multi-purpose areas, kitchen, maternity room and storage spaces around an inner court—to render it suitable for family living. Typologically, the compact courtyard formation could span a huge range: from large and medium-large plots, to tiny bazaar houses. Within the wide range of social classes and groups that the *sadar* housed, it thus found particularly wide application.

The courtyard type was used, for example, in the small houses of poorer town inhabitants in the Patpur area in Bankura (Fig. 15); in the medium-sized houses of clerks in the employment of the Maharaja (*zamindar*) of Krishnanagar (Fig. 16); or that of a *nazir*[27] employed in the *cutcherry* at Suri. It was used profusely in small and medium-sized

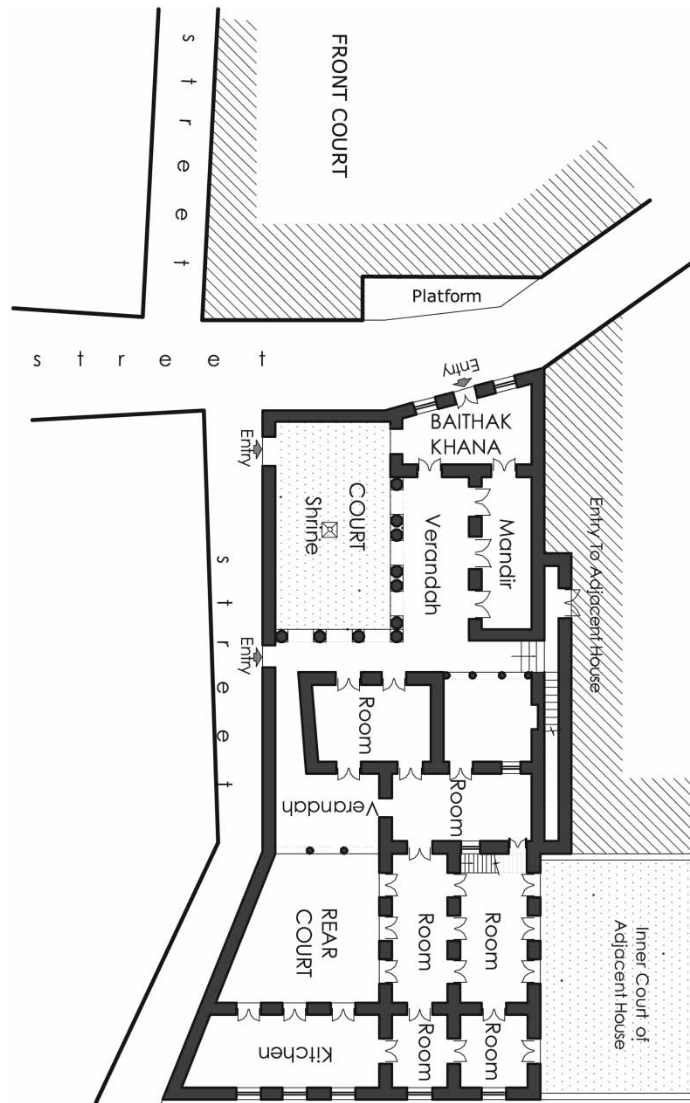


Figure 16. A clerk's house, Krishnanagar.

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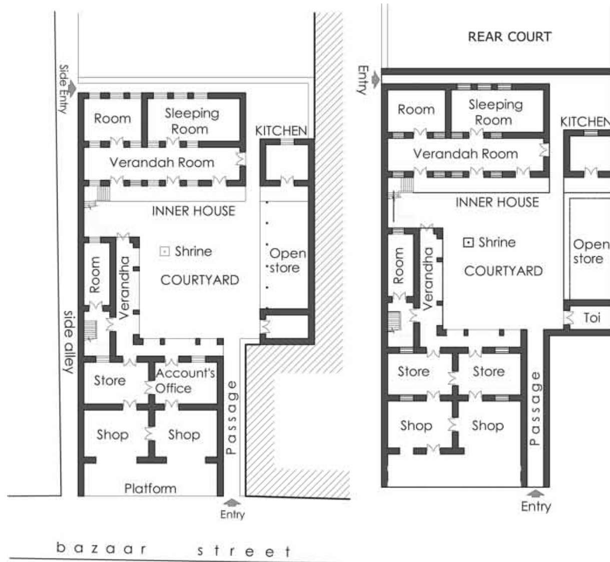

Figure 17. a. plan;
b. street view of house:
Bara Bazaar, Bankura.

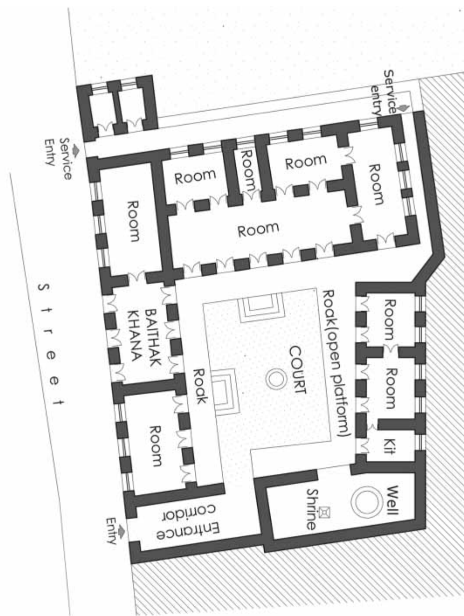

Figure 18. a. plan; b. courtyard house, Krishnanagar.

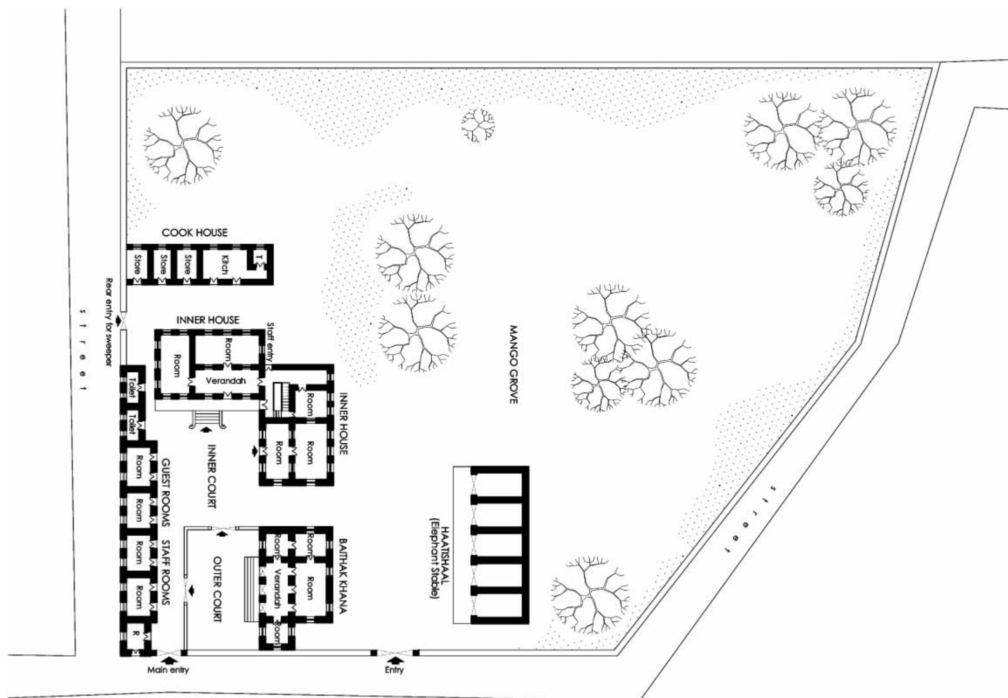

Figure 19. The Sinha-Roy family house, Goari, Krishnanagar.

bazaar houses of merchants and prostitutes (Fig. 17a, b). Often, these houses incorporated elements of European neo-classical or Victorian architecture on the exterior façade whilst retaining the traditional courtyard formation that could preserve much of the aspects of rural lifestyle in its planning (Fig. 18a, b). One of the key assets of the courtyard type was its versatility in negotiating outer and inner or public and private domains, diverse functions, and different relationships with urban elements like the street. The courtyard type could, for instance, sit directly abutting a public street (ie, in a built-to-edge formation) in dense urban areas while retaining the interiority of its more private spaces (see also figs 15, 16, 17, 18 generally). On the other hand, in many cases (eg, the Sinha-Roy family house in Krishnanagar) despite substantial plot sizes in town peripheries, the built component was still condensed to a compact courtyard form, leaving open grounds for gardens and orchards—instead of opting for a straightforward bungalow or villa form (Fig. 19).

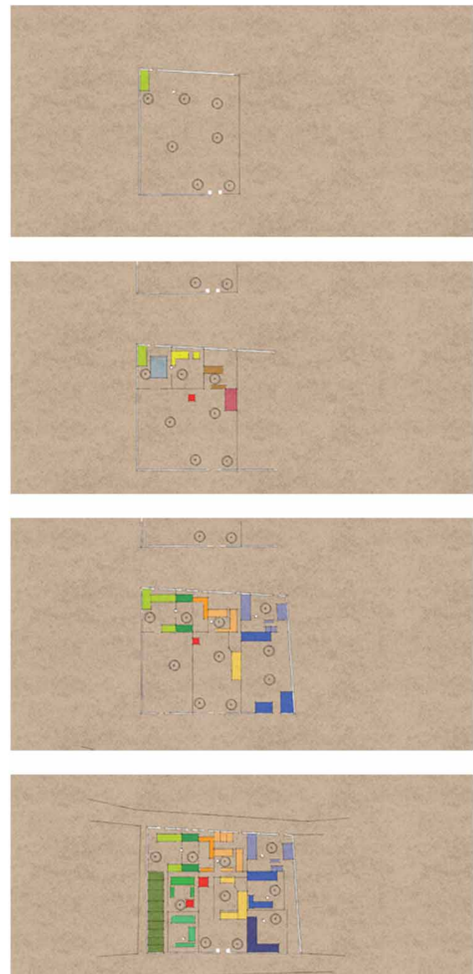

Figure 20. The Mukherjee residence, Kalitala, Bankura: a, b, c, d–successive stages of plot and built-form development over the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; e–view of the inner courtyard.

This was a conscious choice evidently, perceived as offering a closer fit with indigenous lifestyles centered on tightly-knit social and familial structures, whilst simultaneously allowing for outdoor spaces modelled on bungalow compounds.

The other major driver dictating the incremental development of residential premises was the process of sub-division and densification within a plot. Usually, each family reached a ceiling of land-holding size within the urban area by the mid- to late-nineteenth century[28] beyond which (or even before which) the plot was successively sub-divided over generations between the heirs, resulting in its densification (Fig. 20a, b, c, d, e). This was especially true of the central areas of towns where acquiring new land as and when needed was not easily possible. What is interesting though is that at every stage and within each cellular unit, there was a continuous attempt to preserve a spatial formation rooted in rural lifestyle, while overlaying it with the emerging conceptions of urban living. Each unit thus consisted of a cluster of structures around a central open space reminiscent of the rural home, with more public rooms like the *baithak-khana*—specific to the culture of urban living—placed on its outer edge.[29]

On the other hand, in some cases, as they expanded, some families chose not to build on the same site as the original dwelling; instead, further plots were acquired within the town for different branches of the family.[30] This was the case, for instance, with the house of Kalicharan Lahiri, the brother of Ramtanu Lahiri (Fig. 21) or that of Lalmohan Ghosh, the brother of the late-nineteenth century barrister Monomohan Ghosh, in Krishnanagar. Such instances also caused a partial break-down of the kinship basis of neighbourhood formations that *sadar* towns had been predominantly characterised by until the mid-nineteenth century.

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Figure 20. (Continued.)

In many ways, the *sadar* was a place for *trade*-offs. Another common form of dwelling was one which from the outside appeared like an extroverted villa sitting in the midst of vast grounds, but on the inside held a network of tightly knit, introverted buildings around a courtyard/s (see Figure 5b above; Fig. 22). Calibrated between urban and rural, and European and Indian paradigms, it was a response to the simultaneous demands of exteriority and interiority that the *sadar*'s `intermediate urbanism' evidenced. This in turn was linked closely to the evolving notion of private and public domains that developed in the *sadar*, especially in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Inner and outer domains

While some essential attributes of rural habitats flowed into the domestic spaces of the *zilla sadar,* one of the most significant aspects that clearly set apart the provincial urban dwelling from its rural counterpart was the strong demarcation of the *andar-bahir* or the inner and outer domains, and an increasingly reinforced delineation of the public domain *within* private houses. This effect was pronounced by the late nineteenth century. Within the simultaneous exposure and anonymity that urban living brought, this became a defining aspect of urban domesticity. Rabindranath Tagore's description in the novel *Jogajog* brought out this separation very effectively: 'In the tradition of the aristocratic rich, Mukundalal's life is also spilt into two quarters—the quarter of domesticity and the quarter of fun-n-frolic and company of friends.'[31] Compared to pre-colonial or rural habitats, such clear articulations of public-private and outer-inner domains, corresponding further to gendered male-female spatial renditions, was specific to colonial urban contexts. As shown by the historian Partha Chatterjee, this was, in fact, a key instrument through which:

> Anticolonial nationalism creates [created] its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins [began] its political battle with the imperial power. It does [did] this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside' … the spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the essential marks of cultural identity … .[32]

Feeding into this duality was also the complex relationship between the rural and urban sites of domesticity, the close tie between which continued well into the twentieth century. The 'home' was now a composite entity—spatially split into and spanning two highly interconnected sites—the

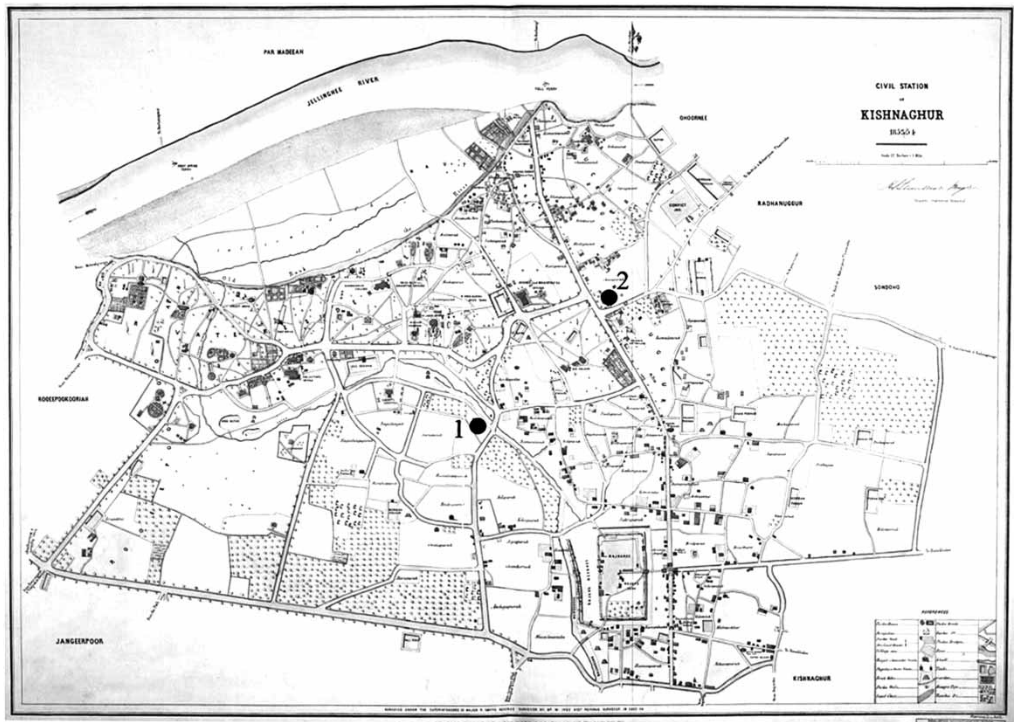

Figure 21. Fragmentation of familial territories: the houses of Ramtanu and Kalicharan Lahiri, Krishnanagar.

bari (the rural native place) and the *basha* (the place in the town). Town dwellers regularly visited their rural homes, as were members of the extended family frequent and often long-term guests in provincial urban houses. Younger male children came to the town to study and provisions from rural farms were routinely sent to supply urban households. In many ways, this two-pronged dialectic between the material and spiritual realms, and the urban and rural locations, constituted the very essence of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Bengali residences in *zilla sadar* towns: particularly visible in the houses of the urban bourgeoisie or the *bhadrolok*.[33] Spatially, this translated into an exteriority articulating their urban public role, on the one hand, and an interiority nurturing the familial spaces reminiscent of village life, on the other. The outer domain was also where the material connections to the modern world were forged, the inner where

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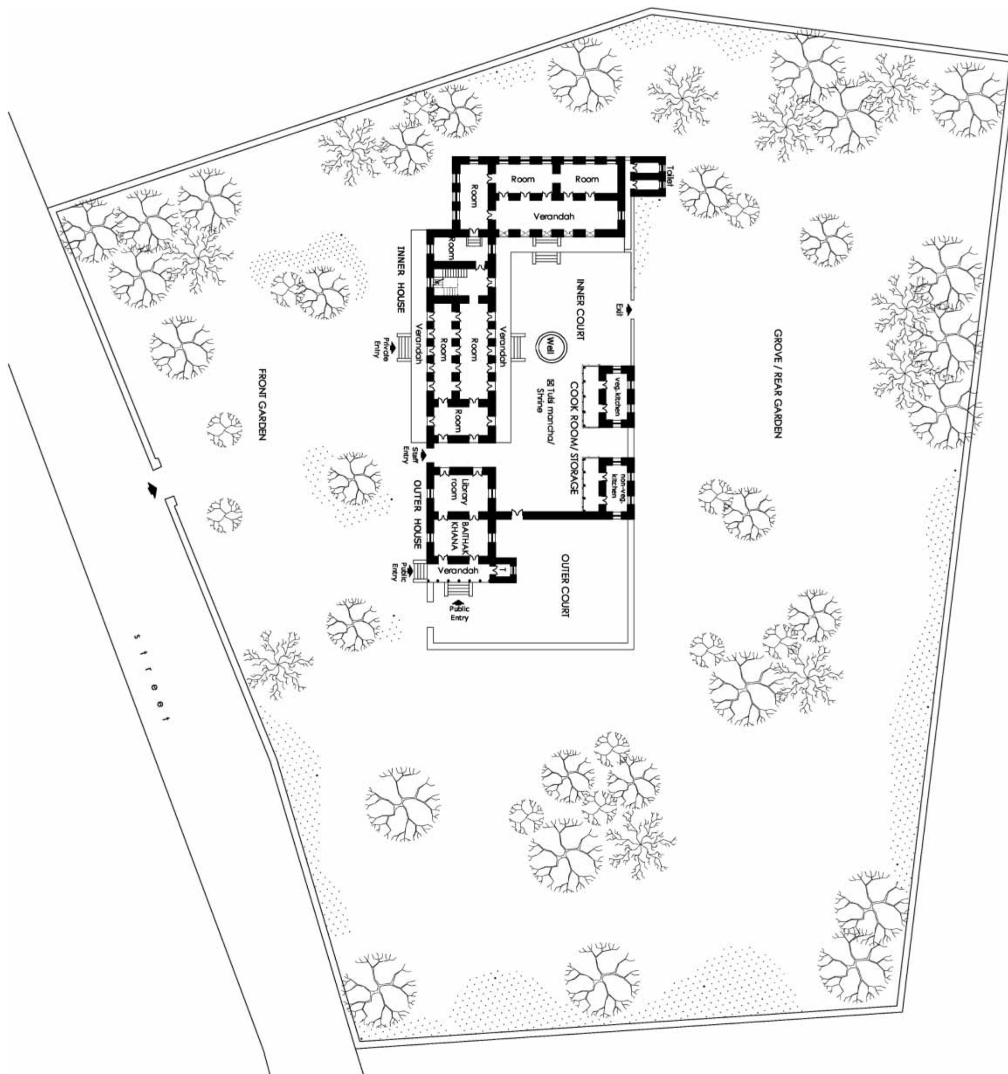

Figure 22. The Mukherjee residence, Krishnanagar.

inherited cultural practices and patterns were nurtured and developed.

Bought as a villa in the late nineteenth century by Satyakinkar Sahana, a mica merchant and chairman of the town municipality, the Sahana residence in Bankura was a classic example (Fig. 23a, b, c, d). Its elaborate outer quarters were gradually developed to include a *baithak khana* or drawing-cum-entertainment room, a dedicated 'wireless room' (*de facto* an auditory conduit to a larger modern world), guest rooms with attached lavatories, ornamental front gardens, and a portico and internal loop road to receive the new motor car. Equally, a series of introverted enclaves behind the outer-house accommodating cooking areas, maternity rooms, tutoring spaces for children and storage for staples and provisions arriving from the rural ancestral home, continued to inscribe the village within its interior spaces.[34]

The outer-quarters of provincial urban homes did not merely house the more publicly oriented functions of a largely private residential dwelling: they often acted as virtually an extension of the larger public domain of the town itself and, in turn, of the evolving urban public sphere with which Calcutta in the late nineteenth century had become *de facto* synonymous.[35] Provincial elite homes sometimes housed public libraries, mini-museums[36] and entertainment and performance areas. The Chakrabarty residence in Suri, for instance, boasted a grand, double-height *baithak-khana*, which became an important site for regular public performances for music, dance, poetry and theatre (see Figure 6 above; Fig. 24a, b). It had an entry through the outer court for close acquaintances and a separate, more grandiose entry, marked by double-height columns, directly from the street for the general public of the town. The double-height internal volume of the *baithak-khana* was surrounded by galleries on the upper level, edged with bamboo blinds to allow women of the house —who had direct access from the inner-house into this area—to view the performances. It thus allowed a trade-off between private viewing and public spectacle.

Baithak-khanas were also active sites for the *adda*, a quintessential Bengali pursuit, whereby people would regularly gather to meet friends and have involved exchanges on anything from anecdotal humour, everyday experiences, town gossip, to cultural and political discourse.[37] Added to this was the collection and display of an array of artefacts from different parts of the world: the *baithak-khana* in the Chakrabarty house in Suri, for example, apparently contained Belgian glass chandeliers, mirrors, Italian hand-painted tiles and Chinese pottery.[38] The provincial urban *baithak-khana* thus became a kaleidoscopic window crafted from diverse cultural fragments that connected the limited world of diminutive interior towns in Bengal to a global landscape.

At all levels in the *sadar*, big or small, the urban dwelling simultaneously played such dual roles: an urban entity with high public exposure and a private residential realm. One of the aspects through which this was modulated was the manner in which it fitted into the physical fabric of its urban context. While in large plots (especially in town peripheries) the front garden mediated the relationship between the street and the house, in

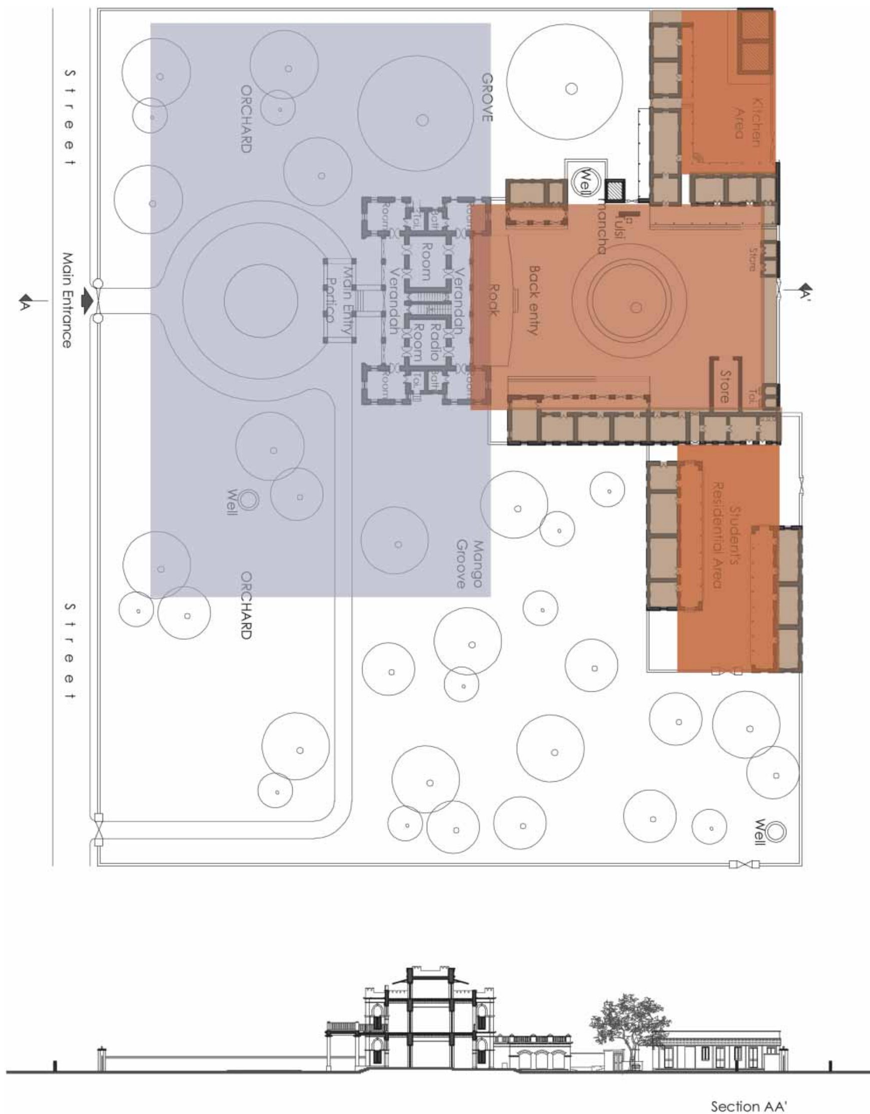

Figure 23. a. plan and section; b. front view; c. inner courtyard: Sahana residence, late-nineteenth/early-twentieth centuries, Bankura.

Figure 23. (Continued.)

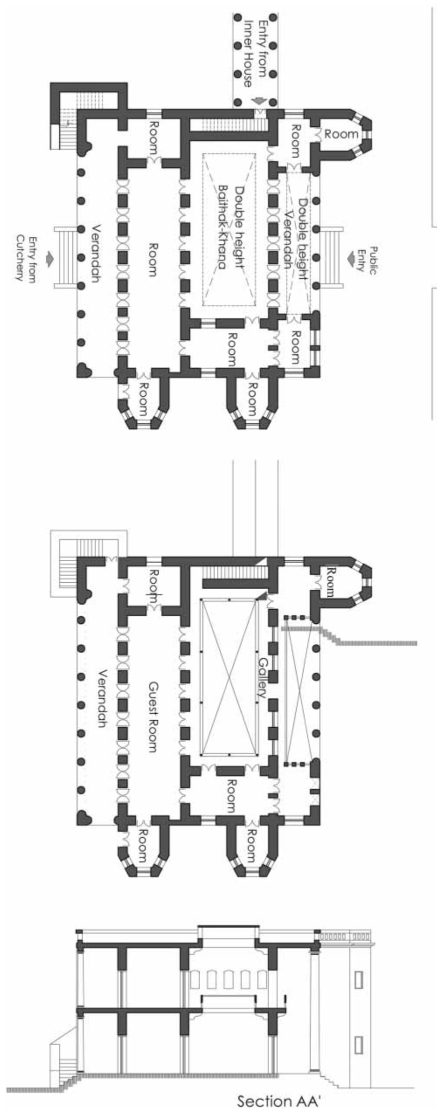

Figure 24. a. ground and first-floor plans, section; b. view from outer court: *Baithak-khanna* of the Chakrabarty residence, Suri.

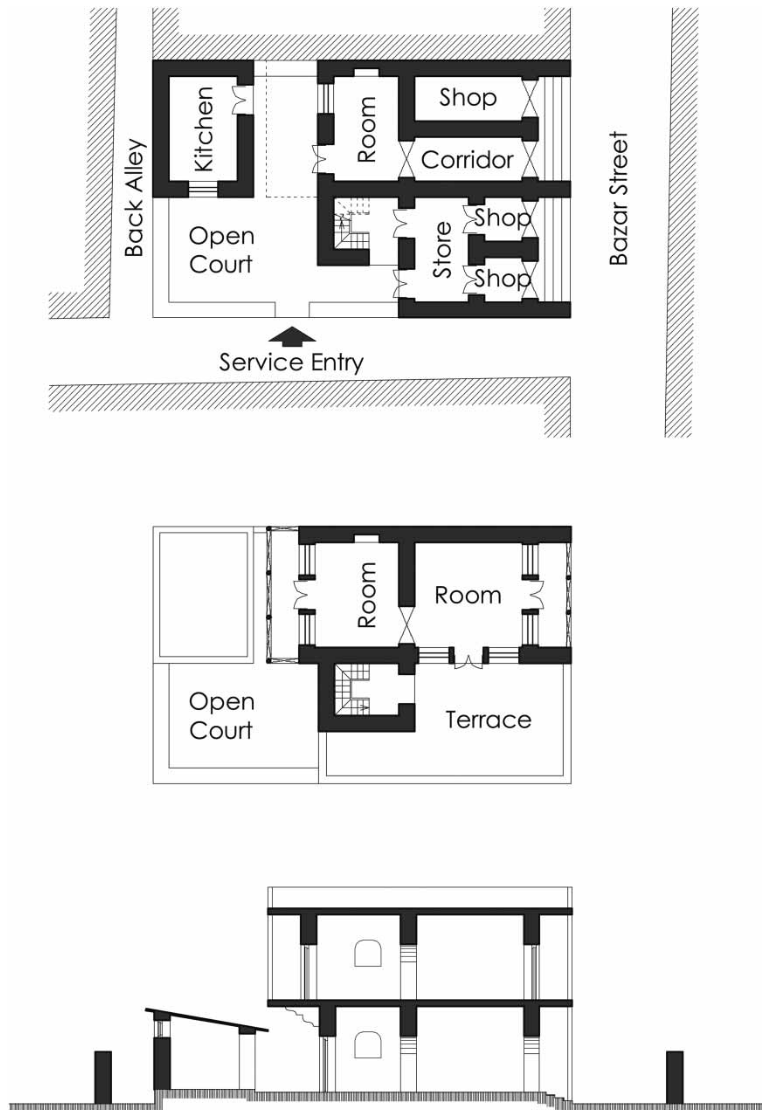

Figure 25. Ground and first-floor plans; section: Bazaar house, Churipatti, Jessore.

Figure 26. *Nazir*'s house, Suri.

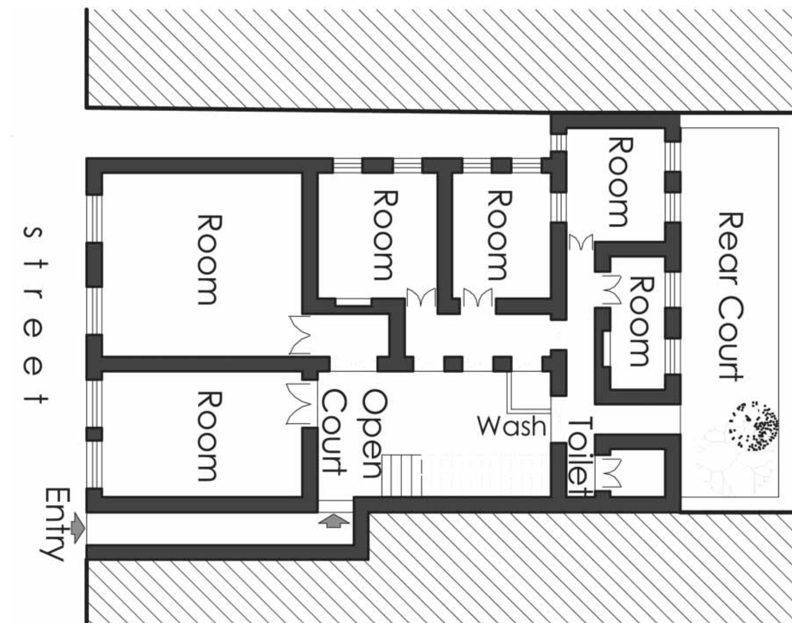

Figure 27. a. plan;
b. view of entrance:
brothel, Bazaar area,
Burdwan.

small town houses on *bazaar* streets the front was typically dedicated to a public layer of shops, the back to storage and the upper level or rear of the house to private residential quarters which were themselves clustered around an internal court (Fig. 25). In medium-sized houses in public streets (Fig. 26), the front layer contained the *baithak-khana* and shops, whilst the back and upper floor contained the residential quarters around an introverted court.[39] But even such renditions of public and private domains had, by necessity, to be graded and varied. In mid-to-late-nineteenth-century prostitute quarters, for example, blatantly public rooms such as the *baithak-khana* were often non-existent (Fig. 27a, b). Here the public domain was the street itself, and taking off from this were obscure alleyways, usually with at least one turn, that enabled only an indirect access to the inner house: negotiating the distinction between the outside and the inside. Even inside, rooms were accessed through subsidiary spaces, or indirect routes, to allow for privacy and an intricate interiority. In response to varying needs, a wide range of spatial relationships thus forged the dialectic between inner and outer domains.

Conclusion

The overall development of the domestic architecture of the *zilla sadar* took place within and was shaped by a far larger and complex cultural landscape of political, economic and social change related to the establishment of a colonial governmental apparatus within the interior areas of Bengal. Politically, this process involved the steady inroads of colonial (and later imperial) presence within areas previously out-of-bounds for the East India Company, and the emergence of new points of administrative control. Economically, it meant the consolidation of the Company's revenue collections through the linkage between provincial administrative towns and the agricultural hinterland, as also the emergence of a provincial urban economy centered on employment in colonial offices as well as professional services and bazaar-based commerce. Socially, it meant the gradual formation of a provincial European as well as a heterogeneous Bengali urban society consisting, among others, of a massive migrant population from rural areas. This in turn was galvanised by and produced different types of mobility of varied groups of people between big cities, provincial towns and villages.

Provincial urban domestic architecture thus inscribed the ensuing cultural meanings and transformations brought about by such complex processes and movements. Poised between peripheral marginality and provincial luxury, the domestic set ups of European officers, centered on the Bungalow—with its core and envelope format and generous internal and external spaces—typically epitomised the rural-idyllic notion of habitat. In this spatial imagination, the provincial urban dwelling was seen and pursued chiefly as an entity contiguous with the countryside. On the other hand, for upper-, middle- and lower-middle- class Bengalis the town dwelling had clearly urban connotations: involving completely different trade-offs between plot/land size, improved health and aesthetic potential, autonomy of self-expression and the continuity of kinship networks with respect to the rural domestic base. Although these paradigms sometimes

appeared similar (as in the case of the bungalow and the middle-class Bengali house with a garden, both of which were essentially modelled on 'built form surrounded by space') or actively drew upon each other (for example, the hybrid bungalow/villa-courtyard house discussed earlier), much of the actual internal formations, and the meanings that each held for their inhabitants, seem to have been distinct.

Colonial urbanisation in provincial areas was fundamentally instrumental to a rural-urban split along with a differentiated development of privilege and provision. But equally, these varied locations—city, town and village—continued to remain intrinsically connected, since most inhabitants of the *sadar* retained strong links with their ancestral places while enjoying the exposure to urban living. Provincial urbanisation also meant a degree of nuclearisation and fragmentation of families not only from villages to provincial towns but their gradual dispersal even within the towns themselves. However, despite such fragmentation, linkage between rural and urban areas, or between parts of extended family units, actively continued in other forms and in effect resulted, over the period of the nineteenth century, in complex domestic spatial patterns reflecting a characteristic incrementality. This is seen, for example, in the transformation from minimal and male-centred early urban dwellings to more layered, gendered and intricate ones by the late nineteenth century in order to absorb the inflow of staples and provisions, young male members, other relatives and, later, even women, from villages into urban households. Continuing rural-urban connections also affected the spatial structures of domesticity at varying *scales*, not only *within* urban residential premises but *extending over* an area spanning villages and towns. In fact, the rural and urban houses of each family together, spread over town and country, effectively constituted a composite domestic space. In that sense colonial provincial urbanisation signified a new type of territorialisation of domestic spaces with respect to social structures at different scales.

The skeletal nature of early- to mid-nineteenth century provincial urban domestic set-ups also often involved combined work-cum-leisure-cum-residential buildings, mobilised through typological versatility and flexibility. Such inter-changeability of functions within forms in fact came to be an enduring blueprint of provincial domestic architecture in Bengal right through the nineteenth century, even when residential formations became more elaborate. Urban dwellings also took a variety of (often hybrid) forms—eg, loose aggregate, tight courtyard, courtyard-cum-villa, ranging from small bazaar houses to elaborate mansions—depending on the plot size or their relative location within the town. As such, they could offer different fits with the needs of the various social groups inhabiting the *sadar*. Urban-rural dialectic also played out in the increasingly strong articulation of exteriority and interiority of provincial houses: pursuing the cohesive clustering of rural lifestyles in the inner, women-centred domain and the extroverted public-ness of urban life in the outer male-centered domain.

Through a range of such complex and dynamic processes domestic buildings in the provincial towns of Bengal thus came to act as sites where social, political, economic and cultural change was

creatively negotiated during the course of the nineteenth century. A large range of local Bengali actors played a key role in such negotiations between European and Indian or rural and urban spatial paradigms to forge newer pan-regional domestic landscapes and architectural types. These socio-spatial narratives in effect allow us to recover the key, but hitherto marignalised, roles of provincial urbanism and architecture as well as that of 'ordinary' spaces of everyday living and Indian agency within the larger discourse on colonial architecture, urbanism and modernity, disproportionately dominated so far by large urban centres and iconic buildings seen to be produced chiefly through European agency.

Acknowledgements

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Note: unless otherwise stated, all drawings and photographs were prepared by the Author.

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1. A. D. King, *Colonial Urban Development—Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); *The Bungalow: the production of a global culture* (London, Routledge, 1984).
2. The bungalow and its continuing legacies attract significant scholarly interest up to the present day: see, eg, Miki and Madhavi Desai, Jon Lang, *The Bungalow in Twentieth Century India* (London, Ashgate, 2012).
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4. A third type of colonial settlement, cantonments or military stations, were centres of specialised military training and did not usually become major drivers of provincial urbanisation.
5. After the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 (when Indian soldiers across the country rebelled against the British), the British Crown took over control of India from the East India Company in 1858.
6. The Company's land reforms in 1793 (called the Permanent Settlement) conferred perpetual rights of agricultural revenue collection to *zamindars* or tax collectors, provided they paid taxes on time. This resulted, on the one hand, in the confiscation of a number of defaulting *zamindaries* and, on the other, in the emergence of a new *zamindar* class who bought estates at auction. Timely revenue payment in effect translated *de facto* into perpetual property rights for *zamindars* and also fed directly into the exploitation of farming tenants to maximise wealth.
7. M. S. Islam, 'Life in *mufassal* towns of nineteenth century Bengal', in, Kenneth Ballhatchet, John Harris, eds, *The City in South Asia* (London, Dublin, Curzon Press Ltd; Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press Inc., 1980), pp. 226–230.
8. For an overview of the larger urban imagination of these towns, their relationship with the surrounding environment, notions of rural-urban picturesque and work-home-leisure relationships, ensuing urban spatial patterns and links between office and domestic building sites and typologies, see the Author's earlier article: Tania Sengupta, 'Between country and city: fluid spaces of provincial administrative towns in nineteenth century Bengal', in *Urban History*, 39, No.1 (February, 2012), pp. 56–82.
9. Provincial officers spent at least 3-6 months in Calcutta before being sent to interior postings.
10. For a detailed study of nineteenth-century provincial officers' bungalows, see the author's PhD dissertation: Tania Sengupta, *Producing the Province: colonial governance and spatial cultures in district headquarter towns of Eastern India 1786–c. 1900*, Chapter 6 (University of Westminster unpublished dissertation, 2011).
11. The residential bungalow plots of district officers were regularly of sizes between 5-10 acres, going up to 30-40 acres as, for example, in the Collector Anderson's *bagan* ['grove'] in Bankura (37.9 acres). Internal space standards were also generous, typically ranging from 16ft-20ft x 30ft-40ft for public rooms, 20ft-24ft x 16ft-20ft for bedrooms and 8ft-12ft x 8ft-30ft for anterooms and service spaces.
12. For authoritative studies on the *zamindari* system in Bengal, see, eg, Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); Thomas Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979); Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris, Mouton, 1963).
13. This was closely linked to the colonial government's policy, from 1836, of replacing Farsi (Persian) in official communications with English and Bengali, whereby English education became essential for governmental work, as also to the new system of public instruction espoused by the Governor General Bentinck. In addition to this, the increasing need for modern health care and the high levels of land litigation gave rise to professional groups such as doctors and lawyers.

14. This was felt acutely during cholera and malaria epidemics in lower Bengal in the early- to mid-nineteenth century.
15. Kartikeyachandra Roy, *Diwan Kartikeyachandrer Atmajibani* ['Diwan Kartikeyachandra's autobiography'] (Calcutta, nd), p. 116.
16. *Ibid*.
17. Bath and lavatory areas were often housed outside the residential premises in open communal areas.
18. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Barir Abohaoa' ['My home environment'], in *Jibansmriti* ['Recollections of my life'], Smritikatha (Calcutta, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1967), p. 128. Although Tagore recounts this in the context of metropolitan Calcutta, such attributes characterised even provincial urban homes.
19. Nabinchandra Sen, *Amaar Jiban* ['My life'], Sajanikanta Das, ed. (Calcutta, Sanat Kumar Gupta, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1959), pp. 11–12.
20. Conversation with Ratna Banerjee, the present occupier, recalling accounts of her mother-in-law, who in turn recalled narratives handed down from older generations (10th March, 2010).
21. By the late nineteenth century, European furniture had found its way well into Bengali homes, but was used mostly as an accessory in addition to the floor-based furniture described.
22. Jogeshchandra Roy, *Atmacharit* ['My life'] (Bankura, Ananda Kumar Rot, 2002), p. 13.
23. See, for example, the Reverend Lal Behari Dey's description of a typical peasant's hut in the Burdwan area around 1850 as having a central open courtyard (*uthan*) surrounded by individual units like the principal hut (sleeping room and family storage) with a *verandah* to receive guests, maternity room with a *verandah* for the rice-husking implement, kitchen (*pak-sala* or *ranna-ghar)*, cow-house (*gosala*), domestic granary (*gola* or *marai*) and straw stack (*palui).* Lal Behari Dey, *Bengal Peasant Life*; *Folk Tales of Bengal; Recollections of my school days,* Mahadevprasad Sinha, ed. (Calcutta, Editions Indian, 1969), pp. 23–25. Robert Montgomery Martin also discusses the practice, in rural Bengal, of not building one house, but rather, a separate house or hut for each purpose, surrounded by a common fence, to form a dwelling ('*vati*' or '*vari*'): Robert Montgomery Martin, *The history, antiquities, topography and statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. 2, Bhagulpoor, Goruckpoor, and Dinajepoor (London, W.M. H Allen & Co., 1838), pp. 117–118 (edited from Francis Hamilton's accounts of those districts, 1807–14).
24. K. Roy, *Diwan Kartikeyachandrer Atmajibani*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
25. An upper storey seems to have been a later addition. The original cooking, bath and lavatory areas (possibly made of temporary materials and not found on the site anymore) were most likely outside the main building, following prevalent Bengali customs related to notions of purity and pollution.
26. Based the oral account of Pradip Banerjee, the present heir, talking of his ancestor who was practising from the premises as an established pleader in 1862. The first building was thus constructed possibly sometime in the 1850s.
27. Post of accounts officer in the colonial *cutcherry*.
28. For example, in the case of Guruprasad Mukherjee, a *vakil* or lawyer of the East India Company in the district court in Bankura, this was about 1.86 acres of land by about 1865–70: based on family papers in the possession of Debashish Mukherjee, one of the present heirs.
29. Village dwellings up to the mid-nineteenth century usually did not contain a *baithak-khana.* As observed by Lal Behari Dey, in a typical rural dwelling in Bengal the *verandah* was the 'parlour': the place to receive and entertain guests, with little distinction between relatives, friends of the family and other visitors (Dey, *Bengal Peasant Life, op. cit.*, p. 23). Robert Montgomery

Martin also observed that only Muslim households had a separate structure in which to receive guests due to their higher requirement for privacy (Martin, *The history, antiquities, topography and statistics of Eastern India, op. cit.*). The role of the *verandah* as the 'parlour' in villages seems to have been formalised within the urban context into the *baithak-khana*, also enabling a more clear-cut division between private and public domains. Sometimes large *zamindari* houses in villages also contained a *baithak-khana,* but this pattern seems to have been a flow-back into the village from the town.

30. This was possibly linked to paucity of land for expansion of the dwelling within/ adjacent to the existing plot as also to preserve the 'house with a garden' model.
31. Rabindranath Tagore, *Jogajog* (Calcutta, Vishwa-Bharati publications, 1929), pp. 1–2.
32. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 6.
33. The *bhadrolok* (literally meaning a 'well-mannered person' in Bengali) referred to a new class of 'gentlefolk' in colonial Bengal, usually from upper castes and typically from *zamindari* backgrounds, professional classes, prosperous merchants or civil servants. Entitlement to being called a *bhadrolok* came with the refinement conferred by high levels of Indian and English education and a taste for the liberal arts.
34. Based on the Author's survey and documentation of the residential premises of the Sahana family, personal interviews with Manik Sahana (the present heir) and the study of family documents by the Author in 2007–2008.
35. For studies of the development of the public sphere and its relationship with the private domain in nineteenth-century Calcutta, see, eg, P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, *op. cit.;* Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton NJ, Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2008); Gautam Bhadra, *Jaal Rajar Katha. Bardhamaner Pratapchand* (Calcutta, Ananda Publishers, 2002). For a discussion on the relationship between public sphere and public space in nineteenth-century Calcutta, see S. Chattopadhayay, *Representing Calcutta*, *op. cit.*
36. A significant example of this was, for instance, the Ratan Library in Suri. It was set up possibly in the 1890s at his own house by Shibratan Mitra, a Bengali officer in the Suri Collectorate, and a literary enthusiast and collector. By the early twentieth century the library had a collection of over eight thousand books (including many rare ones), as well as antique sculpture, coins, images and maps. Its readership extended far beyond the house into a larger provincial region. See, eg, *Sukumar Sinha*, *Siuri Shaharer Itihaash* (Suri, Ujjal Sarkar, 2008), p. 47. Another such collection of books was that of Ramdas Sen of Baharampur, an eminent writer and scholar in the 1860s and 1870s. Sen's library (which held about 3,500 books at its peak) occupied the central space of his outer house and also served as a public library for large sections of the town's readers (based on an interview with Mrs Sen, the present heiress, and on information in the official website of the National Library of India, Calcutta, to which the collection was bequeathed in 1951: URL:http://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/nat_lib_stat/gift_collection3.html (accessed 27/07/10)
37. For a study of the *adda* as a cultural practice in colonial Bengal, see D. Chakrabarty, 'Adda: A history of sociality', in *Provincializing Europe*, *op. cit.*, pp. 180–213.
38. Interview with Prabal Chakrabarty, the present heir, recounting narratives handed down from his father and grandfather.
39. It is interesting to note here that it was usual practice in houses on public *bazaar* streets, for the doors of the *baithak-khana* generally to be kept open. With at

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least two to three external doors in a row, this meant a high level of connectivity and exposure to the public street. For urban houses, the key filter between the inside and the outside was therefore not at the layer between the *baithak-khana* and the street, but at the door that led from the *baithak-khana* to the inner house or at a separate door that led directly to the inner house from the street.