

# Heritage Values and Community Perception: A Look Into the Historic Ruins of Dinajpur Rajbari

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## ABSTRACT

The establishment of the value and effective protection of historical ruins comprises a subject of rising interest, as evidenced by an increasing amount of research involving several disciplines. In Bangladesh, debates on the relevance of such abandoned, degraded, deformed, or empty structures—unlike other intact monuments in heritage studies—rarely take into account the attitude of the locals towards these ruins. Analyzing the case of Dinajpur Rajbari, Bangladesh, the paper intends to explore the value ascribed to historic ruins by the surrounding community. The study uses a case study approach built on Mason's value typology, which has widely contributed to the identification of the significance of heritage sites. Using a mixed research method, data were collected through field observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with 100 respondents selected from members of the local community. The article concludes by informing policymakers and heritage conservators of the position of community perception and promoting its integration into the development of management policies for these historical ruins.

**Keywords:** heritage values, historic ruins, local community, preservation, cultural heritage

## INTRODUCTION

Derived from the Latin word “ruina,” a ruin generally refers to destruction or collapse. A ruin is a part of a structure or site with its original function or usefulness lost. It can display any shape, size, or volume. In light of this, Bailey (1984) articulated the sentiment by asserting that the question “What is a ruin but a useless heap of stones?” precisely captures the emotion. A ruin has several evolving definitions in the field of heritage beyond and in addition to its simple meaning. According to Burkhardt (2019) it represents an historic document that continually loses part of its original structure. In this sense, a ruined monument or site possesses the ability to recover or revive lost history. Likewise, consistent with cultural heritage studies, it stands for the parts of a building, with the remaining portion pointing toward the state of destruction as well as the significant journey of these remains from the past to the present (Frenda et al., 2020). However, how ruins relate to temporality is multifaceted, as they symbolize both decay and remnants (Kushinski, 2016).

The analysis of why and when ruins become ruins has been thoroughly investigated in previous studies. Dale and Burrell (2011) stated that there is a fundamental disorganization of architectural elements in the ruins, leading to the loss of regularity and predictability. According to them, ruins are unsafe and may invalidate the principles governing spatial organization, leaving no room for assumptions or for things to be taken for granted within the decaying structure. On the other hand, determining whether ruins should be identified as “waste” or “heritage” has, to date, raised perplexing questions. According to Petursdottir and Olsen (2014), archeologists understand better than others the struggle involved in handling such opposing arguments. Viney (2014) argument revolves around classifying the ruin as a form of waste, declaring that the ruin's expression of discontinuity is established through its connection to waste-time, rather than evident signs of damage or decay.

Yet, to many, the dilapidated state does not necessarily indicate loss of a ruin's heritage value. Scholars and researchers have long been answering the question of how historical evidence and time add value to the ruined structures. Szmygin et al. (2020) argues that

ruins can be valued for their evocative, historical, aesthetic, cognitive and other significances. Again, as Muceniece (2015) states, one can determine the historic, scientific, artistic, architectural, archeological, and ethnographical values of ruins. According to the Australian Heritage Council (2013), heritage values of ruins can be preserved by following the accomplishments of archaeological research and analysis, and engagement with the community. It is necessary to determine the quality and importance of the ruins, as well as identify the motives for their preservation and for whom they hold value (Frenda et al., 2020). Thus, the decision to allow ruins to decay or to preserve them should be made on a case-by-case basis, considering factors such as their heritage significance, structural stability, and potential benefits to future generations. For many years, discussion about the position of ruins and their practical application in conservation studies has involved notable contributions from Ruskin, Riegl, and Viollet-le-Duc to several present-day Western authors. While Western theories on the principles of ruin preservation do exert an influence on Asian countries, practical implementation reveals a complex position.

For instance, as per traditional Chinese belief, ruins have been classified as unappealing built structures with “chaos, disturbance, deficit, and misfortune” for a long time (Wieczorek, 2020). Nonetheless, the present-day realization of the significance of such sites has received substantial attention. Despite current efforts to protect ruins, the absence of suitable guidelines and actions has led to the disappearance of numerous such ruins in recent centuries. Bangladesh is not an exception. Heritage conservation is a fairly new concept in the country, with various isolated experiments for the preservation of heritage sites being carried out, but with inadequate frameworks and guidelines, and lacking specialized conservation strategies (Huq et al., 2017).

In certain cases, undiscovered ruins and ruined sites are still located away from heritage trails, while some cases show population expansion and poorly planned built structures encroaching upon historic settings. Therefore, questions constantly arise about the place of ruins as heritage in this country. Among very few projects, the Baro Sardar Bari has become a place of

admiration and high standing as it is an outstanding example of conservation work in Bangladesh. The transformation of the site from a dilapidated state into a museum was achieved through a restoration project carried out by a public-private partnership. According to the conservation architect, the endeavor consisted of documenting and preparing detailed drawings of the facade and ornamentation, along with reconstructing the inner courtyard and plastering the interior walls (Ahmed, 2018). In another instance, the ancient ruins of Panam Nagar, another prominent heritage site in Bangladesh, have undergone extensive research leading to the identification of conservation challenges and solutions.

In order to protect this site from both social and environmental interventions and pollution, Mowla (2008) suggested applying damp proofing to all buildings in the area and establishing a buffer zone beyond the surrounding canal, along with sufficient vegetation. That said, with respect to implementation of these recommendations, the conservation efforts for this site are currently limited. Similarly, the ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur listed as a World Heritage Site, have attracted significant attention and numerous studies have been conducted focusing on its preservation. One of the proposed approaches for safeguarding the site of the Buddhist Vihara includes the implementation of heritage education and awareness-raising activities targeted at the local community of the Paharpur World Heritage Site (Ahmed, 2012), which, as of now, has yet to be achieved. Moreover, as part of the "Masterplan for the Conservation and Presentation of the Ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur and the Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat," the Government of Bangladesh, in partnership with UNDP and UNESCO, has initiated an International Campaign aiming to resolve drainage, excavation, conservation, and public presentation issues of the monastic site at Paharpur (Nazimuddin & John, 1986).

Excluding a few of these types of sites, the majority of historic ruins in Bengal, comprising many Zamindar houses, temples, mosques, landmarks, and ancient palaces, remain neglected. While Ali and Islam (2020) stated that many heritage sites are exposed to vandalism, uncontrolled development, and poor maintenance, Afroz (2022) points towards

insufficient policies and ineffective approaches to their implementation as the reasons behind the endangerment of these sites. Over the past decade, a significant portion of the country's newspaper coverage of conservation issues has been dedicated to highlighting this neglect of ruined sites. Recently, a considerable portion of a published newspaper article highlighted the illegal demolition of a section of Bara Katra, a heritage site that is officially registered with the Department of Archaeology. Similar incidents are common in Bangladesh.

Correspondingly, although the significance of a local community's role in heritage sites and its impact on the conservation sector is being widely studied across the globe, research in this area is still limited in developing nations like Bangladesh, especially for sites facing ruinous conditions. As such, there is a scarcity of information regarding any given community's awareness, appreciation, and perception of heritage concerning these deteriorating structures. The paper aims to address the research gap by investigating the local community's perception of the values associated with heritage ruins and how this knowledge affects the heritage management process and development. Selected as the study area, the Rajbari, or Royal Palace, holds immense historical importance in Dinajpur, making it an indispensable part of the city's rich heritage. Despite the city's remarkable historical landmarks like schools, temples, and grand structures once built by ancient rulers, their abandoned palace, now in ruins, raises concerns about its conservation and management status. Analyzing the case of Dinajpur Rajbari, the study intends to explore the perceptions of local communities towards the value of nearby historic ruins and investigate which factors have impact on such perceptions so that they might be included in the process of shaping management decisions in the future.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As this paper seeks to understand the values attributed to historic ruins by the community, it is essential to investigate previous assessments regarding the ruins' heritage values, the established knowledge related to heritage

significance and values, as well as prevalent studies on the local community's relation to the heritage sites. Thus, the relevant theories and studies covered by this chapter are arranged under three major themes emphasizing the studies on heritage value typologies, the value of historic ruins, and the practice of community engagement in the conservation process.

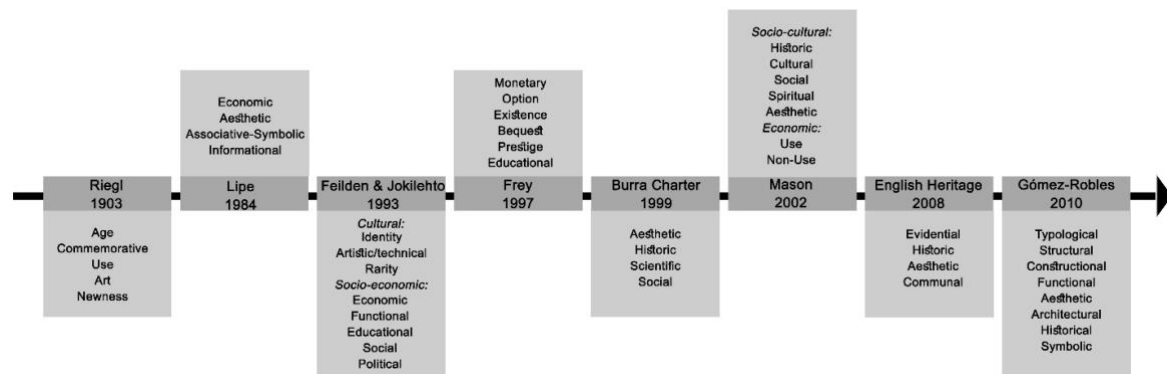
## Heritage Values and Value Typologies

Heritage elements such as monuments, cultures, archeological sites, etc. have distinctive qualities and values (Misni et al., 2022) that distinguish them from other objects, not only in their communities, but around the globe. They serve as a reference point or offer competence in determining a structure's heritage status, selecting buildings to finance, planning the future of an historic location, preparing interventions on a monument, and so on (Mason, 2002). Defining heritage as a social phenomenon, Edson (2004) discussed the authentic, artificial, cultural, natural, tangible, and intangible elements that it holds, along with past contribution to shaping societies and communities, and continuing influences of guiding the present and future. The term "significance" expresses an item's value as a heritage object (Armitage et al., 2013). This significance is carried by the value that shapes people's emotions, opinions, attitudes, dispositions, and so forth, and which is evidenced through their bond and association with it, highlighting the necessity for its preservation (Mensah, 2022). As defined by Fredheim and Khalaf (2016), an approach that prioritizes the recognition, preservation, and enhancement of the heritage significance, where significance represents the overall values of heritage or the total of its constituent "heritage values" is a value-based approach. Developed in the 1980s, the approach has become the most ideal conservation strategy in heritage conservation practices (Aslan, 2022).

For a considerable time, researchers have been categorizing values by taking essential factors into account. Morris and Ruskin were the first to

present and study its concept (Niglio, 2013). The division of value into 5 types, i.e., age, historical, commemorative, use, and newness, was proposed by Riegl (Riegl, 1903). Thereafter, Lipe (1984), Feilden and Jokilehto (1993), Frey (1997), The Burra Charter (The International Council on Monuments and Sites [ICOMOS], 1999) and other heritage professionals and organizations made efforts to detect and categorize the values connected to a heritage site. While The Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 1999) classified heritage values into aesthetic, historic, scientific, and social values, English Heritage (2008) divided them into evidential, historical, and aesthetic values. On the other hand, Mason (2002) categorized heritage values as socio-cultural and economic values. More specifically, he divided the former into cultural/symbolic, social, spiritual, and aesthetic values, and the latter into use and non-use values.

Noteworthy heritage values, as suggested in the 2017 UNESCO World Heritage Convention document, include a diverse selection, ranging from monumental, scientific, commemorative, spiritual, symbolic, technological, and traditional, to historical, aesthetic, scientific, ethnological, and anthropological values. Throughout the years, researchers have kept the essence of each typology intact while still introducing or discarding certain values of cultural heritage sites in an effort to define them. According to the comparative analysis, it has been observed that since 1984, aesthetic significance has consistently been added to nearly all typologies and is regarded as highly significant. Also, the inclusion of economic and social values has been frequently recognized as an important aspect in the majority of the studies. According to Torre and Mason (2002), heritage conservation has always been justified by its value. However, to reach a conservation decision it is possible not to attain a complete understanding of heritage values from a specific value assessment method (Mason, 2002). Opposing the orthodox value system where values are believed to be permanent, the heterodox heritage system views them as dynamic and constantly evolving (Wells & Lixinski, 2016).

**Figure 1***A Selection of Published Value Typology by Scholars and Organizations*

## Historic Ruins and Values

Ruin preservation is generally considered meaningful to acquiring knowledge about the nation and protecting the national past (Eriksen, 2014). To be precise, as part of cultural heritage, ruins serve as a vital building element of a cultural nation. The investigation of aesthetic, functional, and design elements of ancient ruins remains a significant pursuit among researchers, providing valuable insights into the heritage and cultural fabric of various regions. Zucker (1961) claimed that the romanticism of ruins, their architectural details and elements revealing historic documents, and their ability to rescue the earlier concepts of space and proportion represent their authentic and consistent aesthetic attitudes. As stated by Rizzi (2007), the allure of ruins lies simply in their ability to reveal their building materials, construction methods, design techniques, and structural principles as soon as the coating comes off. In addition, they play a significant part in interpreting the concepts of social identity and collective memory (Szmygin et al., 2020).

Spurr (2012), referred to 19th-century author Ruskin's disapproval of material restoration of ruined structures owing to their aesthetic value. However, it should be highlighted that change may not always result in the loss of heritage values. The case of Ninfa Gardens in Cisterna di Latina, Italy, as presented by researchers Seekamp and Jo (2020), explains this point. According to them, originally a medieval walled city that suffered destruction and abandonment in the 1300s, Ninfa Gardens experienced a

transformation in the 1900s, becoming a site where plants and water harmoniously coexist with the ruins of its ancient structures. A visit to this once-abandoned city does not display the lessening of heritage values but, rather, involves a process of commemorating its memory while embracing new values that are formed through the garden's exceptional experience.

Gobel (2021) characterized urban ruins as sites where cultural value is formed. Though decay and deterioration lead ruins to lose their use-value, they retain the age value due to the aging process (Petursdottir & Olsen, 2014). For investigating historical human activities and the changing oasis environment, historic ruins provide essential data and evidence (Hu & Li, 2017). Incorporating evidential value as a heritage value in English Heritage (2008) applies to this particular point. In fact, Lwoga (2018) portrays the appreciation of the historic ruins by the local community for their historic, aesthetic, architectural, social, and economic values, saying that by preserving the collective cultural heritage with their narrative approach, age value, architecture, aesthetics, and historic evidence, they facilitate the re-appropriation of urban, physical, and cultural features (Coppolino, 2017). Alluding to aesthetic aspects, Petursdottir and Olsen (2014) argued that although the ability of ruin to be a heritage item varies, it is the aesthetic considerations that primarily influence the conception of what constitutes appropriate heritage. They stressed that along with aesthetics or desire, that value answers to social needs and requirements by enhancing social cohesion. Over several years, researchers and organizations have assigned somewhat similar

values to ruins, with only a few differences. However, it is expected that viewpoints will continue to develop due to the ever-changing nature of values. As Zanchetti and Jokilehto (1997) argued, these values tend to evolve with time, influenced by social-cultural movements, while being continually reproduced by societies.

## Local Community in Heritage Area

Although the relationship between heritage sites and local communities has been extensively studied in the past decades, there is a limited body of research specifically addressing the connection between such communities and ruined sites. According to Bonenberg (2020), through a heritage monument, the community expresses their shared pride and maintains a connection to their historical and cultural roots that require preservation. Widely discussed in the field of heritage studies, the concept of “sense of place” refers to the connection between individuals and their surroundings. According to one study, this connection originates from a sensory experience of the physical environment and is then interpreted to create a personal and subjective meaning of the place (Dameria et al., 2018).

The same study stresses that such a “sense of place,” being one of the quality indicators of cities with historical values, also plays a crucial role in creating an identity for such places. The variables for measuring community or place attachment, as proposed by Scannell and Gifford (2010), generally include the person and the degree to which the attachment is shaped by personal and collective meanings, the psychological process that motivates the attachment, and the item of attachment, including the characteristics of the place. Despite the difficulty of understanding “heritage” or “self-attachment” within the local community, providing clear explanations and interpretations of the essentials for their positions can encourage their engagement (Nur & Ismail, 2020). Conversely, when local communities are unaware of or hold misconceptions about their heritage, it can lead to the absolute neglect or destruction of valuable heritage evidence and interrupt the balance of the heritage environment (wan Shamsuddin et

al., 2022). As a result, this loss may impact the local communities’ sense of identity and pride as well as obstruct economic growth that could otherwise be obtained through heritage tourism. For instance, the limited awareness among locals about the historical importance of the ruins of Bara Katra, the renowned Mughal Architecture of Old Dhaka, Bangladesh has led to a lack of facilities and provisions for visiting tourists (Khondker & Tabassum, 2018).

Conservation experts and archaeologists often fail to fully explore the importance of personal connections of individuals and communities with the heritage sites, even though local communities are the most effective at maintaining and protecting them (Apaydin, 2015). A heritage area’s sustainable development is greatly impacted by the involvement of local community members, and the community’s inclination towards contributing to conservation activities depends largely on how they view their heritage area (Supriharjo et al., 2016). It cannot be denied that people from different community groups unite through their shared values. Fostering meaningful connections requires understanding and respect for the values of others, and heritage plays a vital role in achieving this unity (Avrami et al., 2019). Again, the perception of the past can vary from community to community as a result of diverse values and experiences (Apaydin, 2017). Moreover, benefits or advantages serve as a driving force in the process. The results of Hanafiah’s research (Hanafiah et al., 2020) revealed that community members who gained individual benefits from heritage tourism development had a more optimistic view of tourism, and, thus, displayed greater enthusiasm for supporting future development in their communities. Thus, the success of heritage tourism planning depends on the local community’s attitudes and perception of the potential benefits and costs of tourism development.

This draws attention to the economic or monetary importance given to heritage by community members. On the other hand, in the last 40 years, the increasing emphasis on social value, which refers to a shared connection to a place representing significant meanings and values for a community, has spurred a renewed belief in the significance of public involvement in heritage management (Diaz-Andreu, 2017). Factors that

influence the contributions of people to heritage management, as identified by research (Oladeji et al., 2022), include a sense of belonging, a link to the past, community unity, adherence to societal norms, an interest in cultural activities, and knowledge of the significance of heritage.

In South Asia, insufficient infrastructure development and maintenance often hinder the effectiveness of conservation efforts, making communities and their invaluable heritage assets vulnerable to natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and typhoons. On many occasions, political factors have posed challenges to maintaining a strong bond between communities and their heritage. A notable case occurred in Myanmar, where, during the period of military rule in 1990, communities were forcibly displaced from their homes near the ruins of Old Bagan, resulting in a lasting trauma (Coningham & Lewer, 2019). According to Coningham and Lewer (2019) study the discovery of multiple Mahayana Buddhist and Hindu shrines amongst the ruins of Nagarjunakonda, India led to a conflict situation when a proposal was put forward to build a massive reservoir for irrigation that would affect the shrines. The clash between safeguarding the historical ruins and continuing with the dam project was resolved in favor of the dam's construction by the Indian government. According to the study, there were minimal to no efforts to examine how the local communities expressed their identities in relation to the ruins, and little research has been conducted to analyze the influence of intangible customs

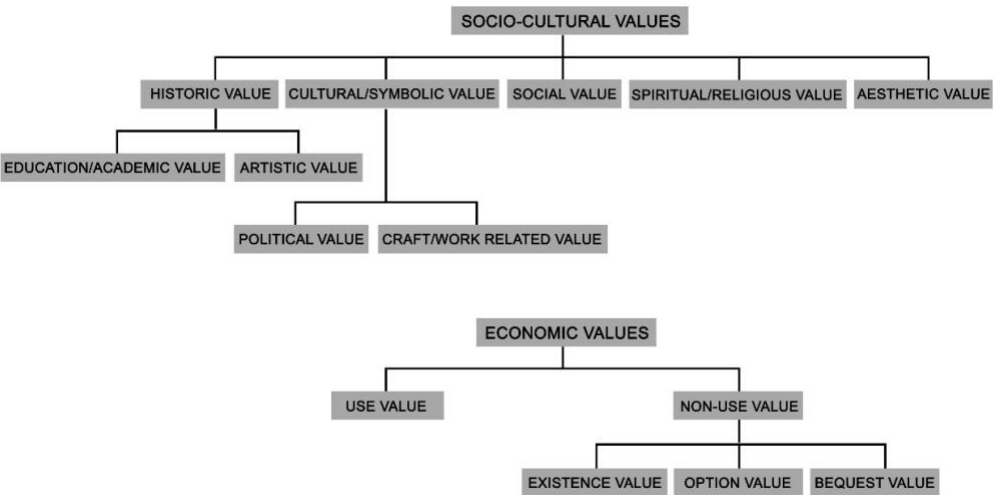
among the communities affected by the mega-infrastructure development.

However, amidst the many challenges, noteworthy conservation projects In South Asia have been making a difference. The conservation project of the ruined city of Rakhigarhi initiated by a joint United States-Indian partnership, for example, focuses on involving the local community in identifying economic development possibilities surrounding the site, while also developing a comprehensive conservation and management plan with Indian authorities and the local university (Stubbs et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The suitability of the case study approach lies in its ability to address "how" and "why" questions, particularly when the researcher has limited control over events, as mentioned by Schell (1992). Thus, it was vital to adopt this approach for the present research. To ensure a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the outcomes, a mixed-methods research design was implemented, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. In this case, the utilization of this method became necessary as qualitative data was required used to study the community members' descriptive judgments and opinions about the heritage values, while quantitative data has been employed to precisely outline the focus and represent it in numerical terms.

Figure 2  
Mason’s Value Typology



Data collection took place between October 2022 and April 2023. The investigation involved the use of data acquired from books, documents, and reports. For the field research, the primary requirement was for the respondents to be local community members, whether they were youths or adults, who had resided in the area for at least five years prior to the data collection. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select a total of 100 participants, with the inclusion of youths with school-level education and college-

educated adults. In the initial stage, the emphasis was on inquiring about the educational and occupational details of the community members, followed by seeking their perspectives on the importance of the selected site. Based on the criteria set, only 100 respondents were chosen, and their responses are included in the study. After receiving approval, the interviewees were given assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

**Table 1**

*Value Typology Adapted from Mason (2002)*

<b>Socio-cultural values</b>	
<b>A. Historical value</b>	Based on the material's age, connection to important people or events, distinctiveness, technological features, and archival/documentary potential.
<i>A.1 Educational value</i>	Measured by the ability to provide information regarding previous events for future generations.
<i>A.2 Artistic value</i>	Depends on its distinctiveness, exemplariness, or authorship by a specific person.
<b>B. Cultural value</b>	Based on the ability to transmit ideas, materials, and habits across generations.
<i>B.1 Political value</i>	Based on the ability to promote civil relations, governmental legitimacy, protest, or ideological causes.
<i>B.2 Craft value</i>	Measured by the methods applied to design and construction, as well as the manufacturing process itself.
<b>C. Social value</b>	Based on the site's importance for social gatherings, such as markets, picnics, or sports, as well as people's strong emotional attachment to it.
<b>D. Spiritual/Religious value</b>	Depends on organized religion's teachings, but also involves secular experiences of awe and wonder, as can be encountered during visits.
<b>E. Aesthetic value</b>	Based on the design and development of a building, object, or location as well as include all the senses, such as smell, sound, touch, and sight.
<b>Economic Values</b>	
<b>A. Use value (Market value)</b>	Based on the goods and services that are tradable and priceable in present-day markets, such as admission fees, land costs, and worker wages.
<b>B. Nonuse value (Nonmarket value)</b>	Depends on economic advantages that are not traded or valued in markets.
<i>B.1 Existence value</i>	Based solely on its existence, regardless of personal consumption or interaction.
<i>B.2 Option value</i>	Based on an individual's preference to maintain the option to access services.
<i>B.3 Bequest value</i>	Depends on the aim to hand it over to the succeeding generations.

*Note.* Adapted from "Assessing values in conservation planning: Methodological issues and choices," by R. Mason, R., In M. Torre (Ed.), *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage* (pp. 5–30), 2002, The Getty Conservation Institute ([https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/pdf\\_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf)). Copyright 2002 by The Getty Conservation Institute.



The interview involved answering Likert-scale questions on the importance of the site, and both semi-structured in-depth interviews (SSI) and focus group discussions (FGD), guided by Mason's framework, to investigate the socio-cultural and economic values that people ascribe to the site. Among the closed-ended questions, the interview sought to determine how the community maintains a relationship with the site (examples: "Does the community have a strong association with the ruined site for religious purposes?," "Does the ruined site play an important role in displaying the evolution or pattern of the local area's history?," "Did the growing number of marketplaces around the site result in a rise in social gatherings in the area?").

Throughout the in-depth interview, the respondents were allowed to articulate their thoughts on the necessity of protecting the site, as well as to share their observations on its current status and the related individuals as perceived by them (examples: "Do the ruins need preservation? Why? What kind of preservation do the ruins need, according to you?," "Did the number of tourists increase or decrease in recent years? Why did the change happen?," "Is there a security issue inside the site? Why? Are the authorities aware of it?"). Such interview techniques, questions, and discussions assist significantly in assessing the perception and involvement of individuals within the cultural heritage management sector, as evidenced by research findings. An example of this is the study conducted in Buenavista del Norte, a small city in Tenerife, a part of the Canary Islands by Stendardi et al., (2020), which explored the correlation between local identity, heritage, and the influence of growing tourist flow, using the same method.

Mason's value typology was specifically selected because it enhances the clarity of the situation under investigation. Utilizing his theory, the division and subdivision of each category into detailed classifications enable the formation of comprehensive perspectives. This permitted the researcher to thoroughly assess the narratives and attitudes of the community people.

The initial approach involved the assessment of the similarities and differences between the responses and the value definitions. Following this, noteworthy common answers were documented to gain an overall perspective of the

participants' viewpoints. Lastly, the respondents' choice of words or phrases to identify the values were studied to establish connections between their answers and the theory. Moreover, information about the site's geographic location and physical condition was recorded through field observation.

## Study Area

To the northeast of Dinajpur, lies the Rajbatika area, renowned for its rich cultural traditions. The region holds immense interest for the Hindu community, and its name is derived from the royal palace of Dinajpur, popularly known as "Dinajpur Rajbari." For 400 years, a total of 12 consecutive rulers reigned over the city (Ali, 2018). While traditional belief held that King Dinaraj founded the Raj family, it is believed by many that Raja Ganesh established the palace in the 15th century (Ahmed, 1986). The city was significantly shaped in numerous ways by the contribution of its rulers. For example, the Kings were responsible for the construction of several prominent structures in the city, among which the Kantanagar temples, Dinajpur Zilla School, etc. are notable. To meet water demands, they dug several huge ponds, such as Sukh Sagar, Mata Sagar, Ram Sagar, etc. Built on 16.41 acres, the palace complex consists of 4 major blocks referred to as "Aina Mahal" or Mirror Palace, "Rani Mahal" or Queen's Palace, "Thakurbari Mahal" or Temple Complex, and "Kachari Mahal" or Court Area (Biswas, 2014). The structures of the area symbolize the affluence, grandeur, significance, and dominance of the former rulers in the district. Referring to them as "picturesque ruins of the extensive royal complex," Nazimuddin and John, 1986 highlighted the use of exquisite ionic columns, spiral masonry staircases, large courtyards, white marble floors, and ornamental motifs exposed through the design and layout.

In 2017, the site was added to the list of protected declared antiquities of the Rangpur division. A notable increase in settlements near the complex has been observed in the last decade. Despite being a popular tourist and religious spot, the main palace blocks of the complex have been partitioned due to their ruinous state.

**Figure 3**  
*Research Instruments and Respondents' Data*

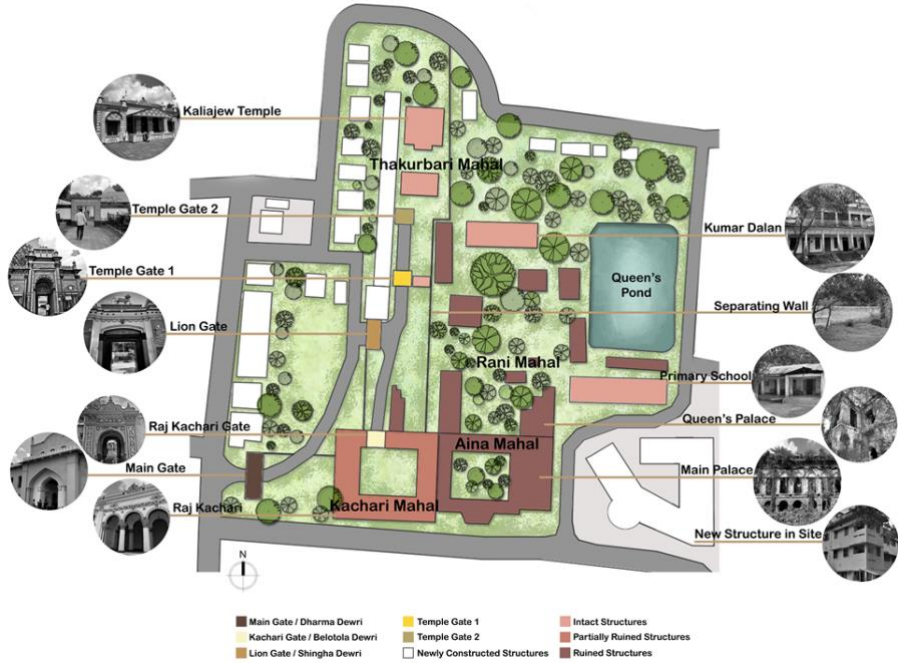
RESPONDENTS	NO.	INSTRUMENTS
Male (Adult)	42	SSI
Female (Adult)	28	SSI
Male (Youth)	17	FGD & SSI
Female (Youth)	13	FGD & SSI

**Figure 4**  
*Main Palace Block, Dinajpur Rajbari*



Note. Figure (a) shows the early ruinous state of the palace block, and Figure (b) displays the present condition of the structure. Adapted from *Buildings of the British Raj in Bangladesh*, by N. Ahmed, 1986, The University Press Limited. Copyright 2019 by The University Press.

**Figure 5**  
*Site Plan With Significant Landmarks and Ruins*



**Figure 6**

*Increase of Settlement Around the Complex*



*Note.* Adapted from *Dinajpur Rajbari*, by Google Map, 2023

(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Dinajpur+Rajbari/@25.6459164,88.6552616,378m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m1!1m7!3m6!1s0x39fb52c8f78346c3:0x3a9b573f3bd20212!2sDinajpur+Rajbari!8m2!3d25.6459402!4d88.6560121!16s%2Fg%2F11clt0f59l!3m5!1s0x39fb52c8f78346c3:0x3a9b573f3bd20212!8m2!3d25.6459402!4d88.6560121!16s%2Fg%2F11clt0f59l?entry=ttu>). Copyright 2023 by Google LLC.

The ruined palace blocks were specifically chosen as the primary research site for this study due to their rich connection to the city's history. Although the ruins and their conservation have received widespread media attention in recent years, the condition remains largely unchanged, with few or no proposed modifications. Nearly 70 years after the abandonment, field research observations reveal the adverse state of the site, along with an unclean environment with domestic animals freely moving around. Additionally, there have been instances of delinquent behavior among the youth and a steady increase in poorly planned construction taking place within the area.

The historic ruins have been largely affected by the construction of an unplanned children's home and an old age home, as reported by The Daily Observer (2016). According to many reporters, the significance of converting the entire structure into a tourist destination has been underlined by academics, historians, intellectuals, and members of the community.

## Data Analysis

### Community's Perspective on Socio-cultural Values

The concept of the historical and cultural significance of the ruined palaces was the subject of the questions asked of the

respondents. During the interview, it became apparent that the members of the community possessed a deep understanding of the historical importance associated with the ruins. Moreover, they demonstrated an understanding and recognition of the cultural and aesthetic value of the site. Some of their replies are summarized in the following quotes:

"I think these remains serve as a crucial educational resource for historians, teachers, scholars, and learners, while at the same time making it an exceptional site of memory with significant historical importance" (Anonymous01, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

"I am truly amazed by the architectural design and construction techniques that were utilized during that period. Even today, the palace shows amazing architectural design" (Anonymous02, personal communication, November 2, 2022).

"As a night watchman of the palace, my great-grandfather shared that the rajah showed great care for his employees' health and established the Sukh Sagar to tackle their water-related concerns" (Anonymous03, personal communication, November 3, 2022).

While discussing various topics, the question of attributing social and religious values to the historical ruins arose, although it wasn't

addressed directly. Community members' interview responses uncovered the place's aesthetic, religious, and social objectives. The following responses are examples of the most frequent:

"To me, this place is vital, and I am deeply concerned about its preservation. It is a place where different social groups and members of the Hindu community stay for a long duration. I wish there were adequate resources to maintain it" (Anonymous04, personal communication, November 2, 2022).

"When our parents were children, they would visit the palace during puja, and at that time, it was not yet separated from the main complex. Our family album has several photos from the palace and the puja fair of that time" (Anonymous05, personal communication, November 24, 2022).

"I do not know much about the history of the palace, but its beautiful ruins are worth preserving due to its grand structure and striking appearance. My friends and I frequently visit the site and we are amazed by its aesthetic beauty" (Anonymous06,

personal communication, December 7, 2022).

"Tourists from all over come to visit this place. We feel proud when they admire our kings' magnificent residences" (Anonymous07, personal communication, January 10, 2023).

"It's doubtful that the level of detailed ornamentation, and grand architectural features, that we see in the palace could have been accomplished in today's age. It is crucial to safeguard these aspects as much as possible so that young designers can draw inspiration and learn from them" (Anonymous08, personal communication, January 10, 2023).

The following list presents the words or phrases frequently employed by the greatest number of respondents, which can be compared to Mason's definitions. They are organized below in order of their percentage distribution. Through the comparison of their responses to Mason's formal definition, it becomes evident that they possess awareness and appreciation of socio-cultural values.

**Table 2**

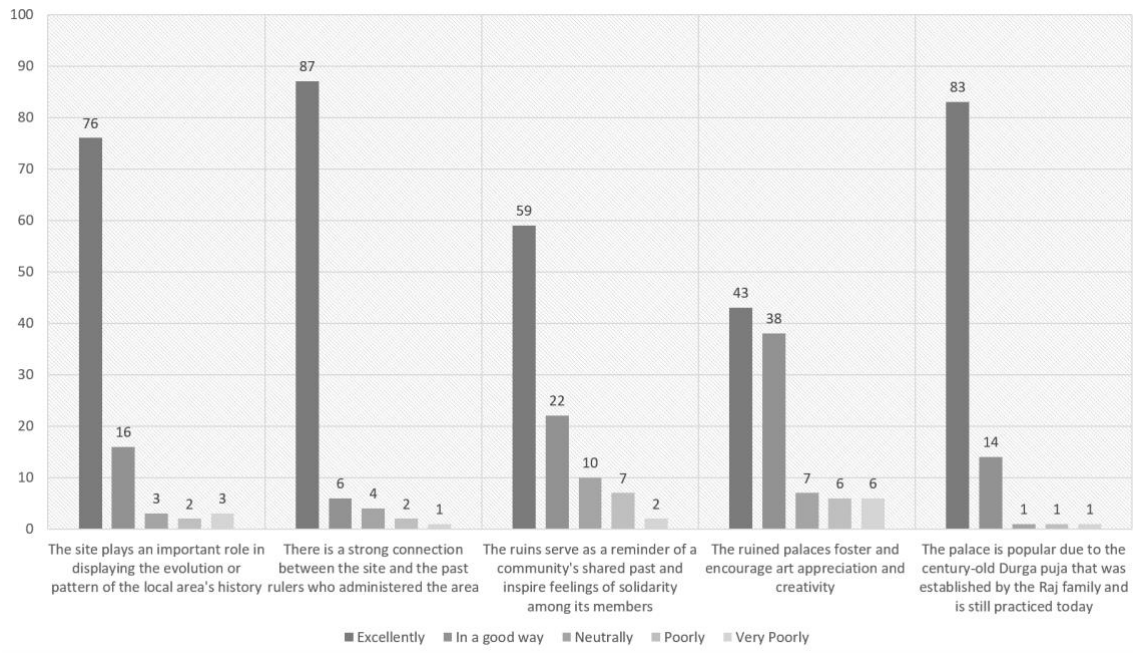
*Comparison of Common Phrases with Mason's Definitions (Socio-Cultural Values)*

Serial	Common words/phrases	Percentage	Mason's value definition
1.	Historic events	78%	Historical
2.	Unique design and structure	63%	Aesthetic
3.	Residence of historical figures	54%	Historical
4.	Traditional art	45%	Cultural
5.	Birth of the city	49%	Historical
6.	Rulers' contributions	71%	Historical
7.	Continuation of religious practice	84%	Spiritual/Religious
8	Stimulating experience of exploration	57%	Spiritual/Religious/Aesthetic
9	Community's pride	86%	Social
10.	Historical learning resource	60%	Historical/Cultural
11.	Religious fairs and festivals	52%	Social
12.	Unusual smell and sound	44%	Aesthetic
13.	Beautiful ornamentation	73%	Aesthetic/Cultural
14.	Beliefs and teachings of the Hindu community	81%	Spiritual/Religious
15.	The earliest form of government	58%	Cultural

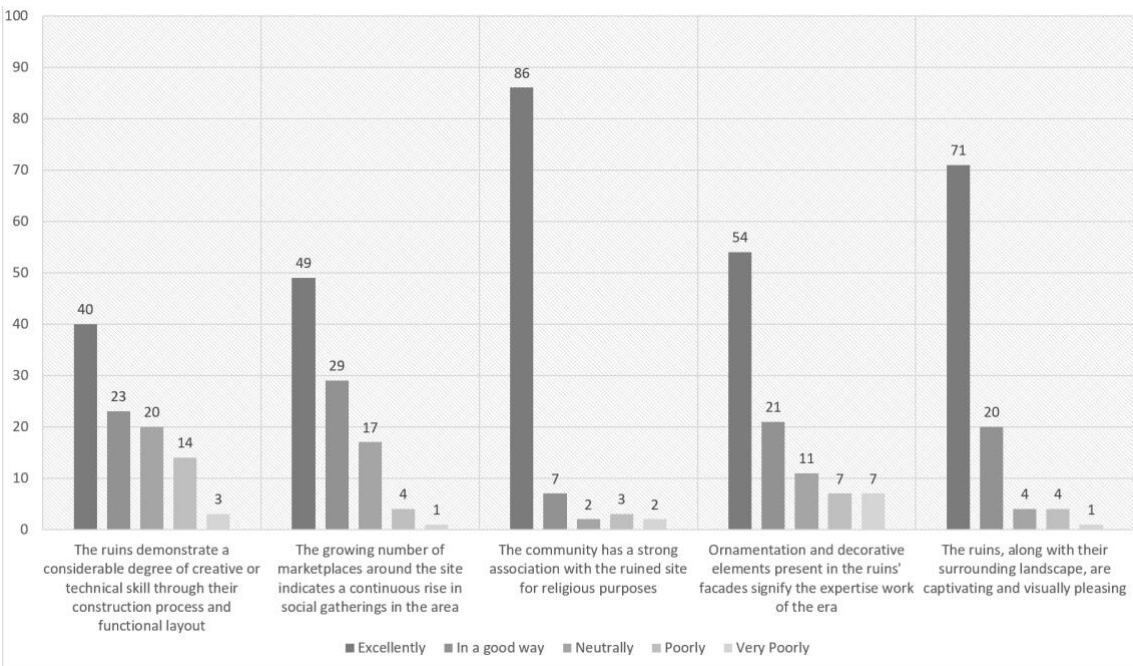
*Note.* Summarizing the answers received from the community, the Likert scale was employed.



**Figure 7**  
*Community Perception on Socio-Cultural Values*



(a)



(b)

**Community's Perspective on Economic Values**

The participants were questioned extensively about the economic importance based on Mason's categorization. The responses they provided are outlined in the quotes below:

"These ancient palaces, which have been ruined for centuries, are the only tangible

reminders of the kings' dwellings from four centuries ago. In my opinion, the city's authorities must take the lead in preserving them" (Anonymous09, personal communication, October 13, 2022).

"This site has tremendous potential as a tourist attraction. Even though the ruined site is no longer connected to the main complex and has a separate entrance,

tourists understand its importance. I suggest that the government should encourage and facilitate the promotion of this site and assess its employment potential”

(Anonymous10, personal communication, October 13, 2022).

“As the number of markets surrounding the site is increasing, I think that business is flourishing in this area. It obviously suggests

the potential for the place to become a prominent tourist destination and a more significant landmark than it is now”

(Anonymous11, personal communication, March 3, 2023).

Presented below is a table detailing the percentages of common words and phrases employed by individuals in order to compare them with Mason's value typology.

**Table 3**

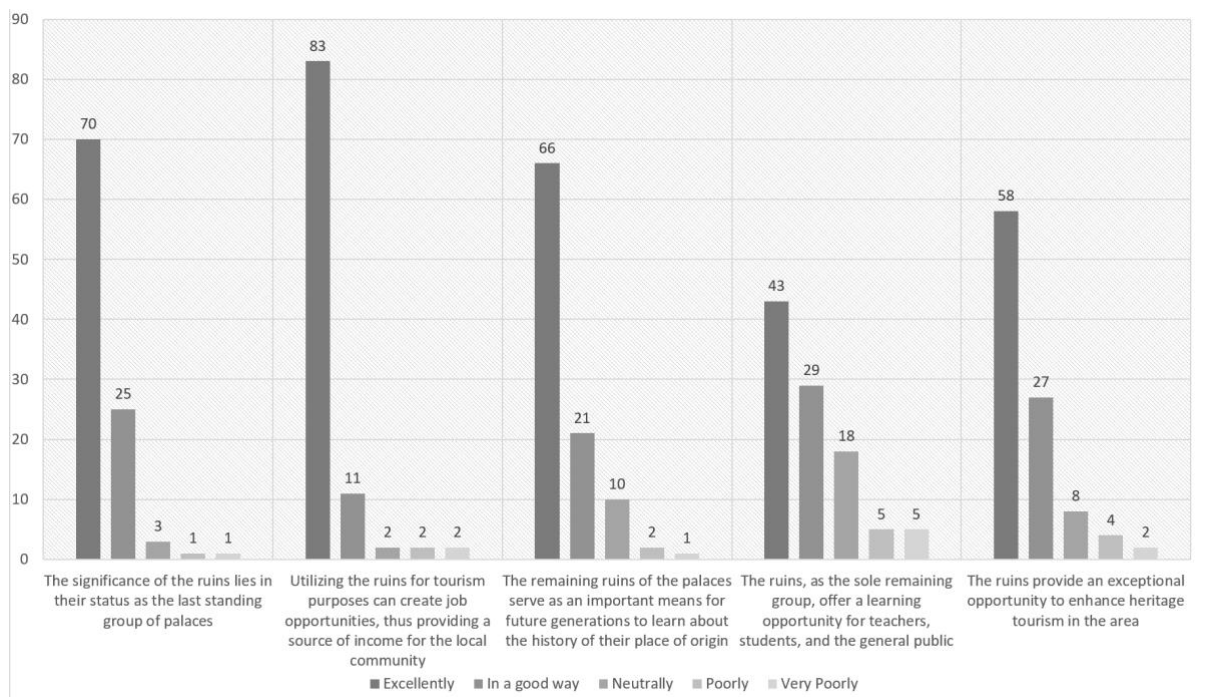
*Comparison of Common Phrases with Mason's Definitions (Economic Values)*

Serial	Common words/phrases	Percentage	Mason's value definition
1.	Last standing evidence	68%	Non-Use
2.	Tourist attraction	81%	Use
3.	Gathering of religious group	74%	Non-Use
4.	Employment opportunity	55%	Use
5.	Learning source for future generations	62%	Non-Use

*Note.* The common responses regarding economic values were summarized and then the Likert scale was utilized.

**Figure 8**

*Community Perception on Economic Values*



Community's Perspective on Retaining Heritage Values

The community's concerns regarding the possible loss of heritage value in the future were documented during the interview, along with discussions about key issues affecting the site's current state. Moreover, a few potential solutions were also noted during the process. Safety concerns were one of the key issues raised by most participants. In addition, according to them, a lack of proper education has been leading to a limited understanding among young individuals about the importance of the site. The following are responses by certain surveyed members.

“The site holds immense value, but safety must come first. Nevertheless, I recognize the significance of preserving our heritage and hope that we can find the resources to maintain both the site's safety and historical importance” (Anonymous12, personal communication, November 24, 2022).

“The issue, in my opinion, lies in the inadequate education provided in schools regarding this matter, which prevents individuals from having a clear understanding. Although everyone has a fondness for this place, I cannot recollect the site's founding date from my educational experience. I suggest establishing a museum and promoting more awareness” (Anonymous13, personal communication, March 28, 2023).

Figure 9  
Perception on Young vs Old Awareness (a) and Perception on Ruin Location (b)

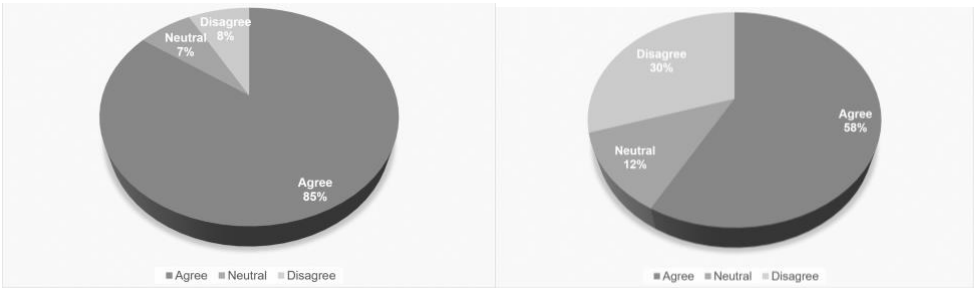


Figure 10  
Perception on Security (a) and Perception on Place Attachment (b)

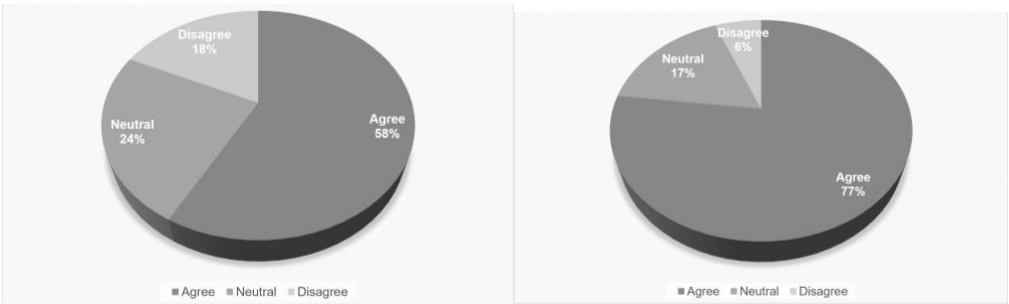
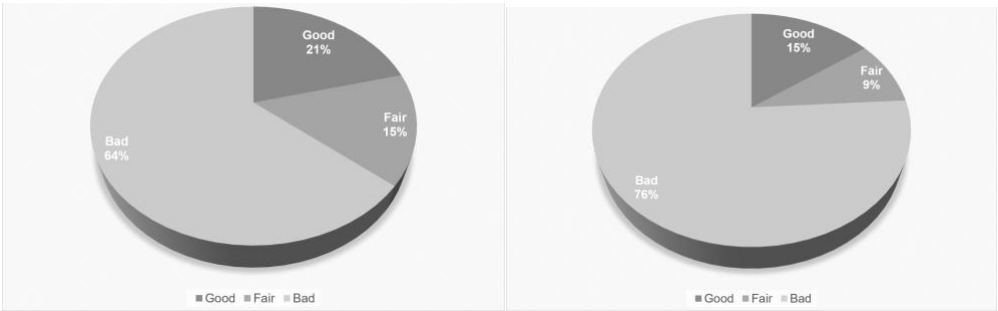


Figure 11  
Perception on Accessibility (a) and Perception on Maintenance (b)



While addressing funding and financial issues, the survey participants highlighted the absence of tourist services and job opportunities at the site. A few common responses are outlined below.

“While funding could be a factor, I believe that the absence of amenities such as guided tours, food and drink facilities, and informational materials like maps and brochures indicate a significant planning issue that needs to be addressed” (Anonymous14, personal communication, February 2, 2023).

“With no economic benefits gained from the site, I think the locals are losing their sense of belonging to this place. I believe it is also leading to a decreased sense of duty on their part to look after the site” (Anonymous15, personal communication, March 23, 2023).

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Despite being recognized as having heritage significance by a majority of local residents, the site's maintenance has been disregarded due to reduced community attachment and a deficiency in the framework and regulations concerning the act of conservation in recent years. The conservation plan has been frequently disrupted, resulting in an adverse outcome, pointing out a lack of research expertise. On the other hand, while the older generation has a good understanding of its importance, a large number of young people were found to be neutral during interviews, indicating a lack of knowledge about the site's value. Approximately 56% of the younger respondents were not well-informed and lacked knowledge about important factors connected to the site. Due to the lack of specific tourism guidelines for the site, it is crucial to introduce a well-designed policy. The present-day approach to managing ruins should go beyond just conservation concerns, and, instead, focus on ways to utilize and develop the ruins for their potential benefits (Fortuna-Marek & Szmygin, 2018). The local community should be provided with employment opportunities, and tourists must have convenient access to the

location. Proper planning for circulation patterns, city routes, pedestrian zones, and designated fairgrounds is critical to the process. The provision of maps and brochures, as well as the establishment of an information desk, is critical. Furthermore, a museum to exhibit significant artifacts and documents from the palace at the site (they are presently exhibited by the Dinajpur Museum) will enhance the knowledge and interest of the area's inhabitants.

A protection plan (conservation, restoration, etc.) for the ruined site must be established through structural analysis and heritage impact assessment. Appropriate architectural documentation and conservation work should be carried out with close monitoring and quality assurance at the same time, with the appointment of archeologists, heritage conservators, and other experts in the field. Climatic and environmental factors must be taken into consideration. The successful implementation of these measures relies on the assistance and financial support of the authorities. While Bangladesh has developed necessary conservation laws and policies to safeguard heritage ruins, their implementation leaves much to be desired. It is crucial to protect heritage structures from unplanned development, necessitating proper monitoring and the guarantee of strict punishment for criminals. To ensure safety and security, the strict enforcement of these laws is necessary, with both community members and visitors expected to adhere to conservation regulations.

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the need to recognize and respect the significance ascribed to ruins by local communities. The investigation focused on understanding the values the community attaches to heritage ruins, the reasons behind these values, and the potential impact of considering their opinions on conservation efforts. The study found that the majority of members of the local community is familiar with the heritage values identified by Mason's typology. Incorporating their viewpoints into conservation management can enhance current preservation practices and lead to positive



outcomes. By doing so, heritage managers can also promote more inclusive and sustainable heritage management practices that will ensure the preservation and promotion of these valuable cultural assets. The study also emphasizes the importance of community involvement in heritage preservation and management. By engaging with local people, heritage managers can create more effective and sustainable strategies for the preservation and promotion of ruins.

However, the study has limitations that may affect the generalizability of the results. The findings and recommendations of this study may not be directly applicable to other locations due to the unique characteristics and context of each place. In addition, the study is based on a limited sample size, which may not be representative of the entire population. Since Mason's value definitions served as a standard for evaluation of interview responses during data analysis, alternative theories have not been examined. To be precise, the heritage values and preservation efforts of other sites may differ based on the historical, cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors that shape their identities. For instance, due to historical complexities, the perception of Germany's Nazi heritage ruins vary among individuals, with many demanding their demolition, and many considering them as historical reminders and arguing for their conservation (Macdonald, 2006). Moreover, the study mostly relies on qualitative data, which may be subject to researcher interpretation or bias. Therefore, it is important to consider the specific context of each location when developing strategies for retaining heritage values.

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## APPENDIX

Due to the prevalent lack of educated people among the site's population, selecting participants proved to be a challenge. By using purposive sampling, assurance was established right from the beginning of the interview that participants had achieved a certain educational standard and possessed knowledge of the heritage site. The heritage perspectives include gender-based identities as they facilitate the comprehension of shared thoughts among both men and women. Again, in the analysis of interviews, attention is directed toward understanding the similarities and differences in opinions between adults and youth. The selection of the 15 interviewees ensured that their opinions and statements covered the majority of the interview summary.

<b>Lists</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Anonymous01	49	Male	College-level education	October 10, 2022
Anonymous02	32	Female	College-level education	November 2, 2022
Anonymous03	64	Male	College-level education	November 3, 2022
Anonymous04	71	Male	College-level education	November 2, 2022
Anonymous05	17	Female	School-level education	November 24, 2022
Anonymous06	16	Male	School-level education	December 7, 2022
Anonymous07	20	Male	School-level education	January 10, 2023
Anonymous08	52	Male	College-level education	January 10, 2023
Anonymous09	47	Male	College-level education	October 13, 2022
Anonymous10	29	Female	College-level education	October 13, 2022
Anonymous11	40	Male	College-level education	March 23, 2023
Anonymous12	36	Female	College-level education	November 24, 2022
Anonymous13	29	Female	College-level education	March 23, 2023
Anonymous14	55	Male	College-level education	February 7, 2023
Anonymous15	51	Female	College-level education	March 23, 2023