

**Journey through Self: Design of contemplative spaces
inspired from the philosophy and lyrics of Fakir Lalon Shah
of Kushtia, Bangladesh**

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The core of the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah, a mystic poet and spiritual practitioner of Kushtia, Bangladesh talks of self-containment and to look for answers within self; to connect oneself to the cosmic energy and understand, over everything, self. This thesis is an attempt to explore those personal spaces that unite to be a whole. Like in Fakir Lalon Shah's lyrics- "the individual enlightened ones are not the fully ripen entities, but all the enlightened ones that light up the regal lamp altogether," the oneness of humankind free of class-differences achieved through personal journeys is the force that inspired this project to become physical. Physical representation of a philosophy, a lifestyle, an education requires putting up an eye-glass for atypical of genre in architecture while at the same time a lot of real issues needed to be accommodated within the short range of intervention. The journey is much spiritual and exploratory in nature. Any kind of designed space will be interpreted differently, individually. For that reason an analysis of the mediums of art which carry the message of the philosophy had been tried to incorporate to start with something tangible; may it be verbal (the songs and lyrics) or visual (architecture). At the end, a set of contemplative spaces have been derived from the essence of the lyrics to extract the philosophy which was intended to serve as an education towards a lifestyle restructuring the urban tissue around Fakir Lalon Shah's shrine in Cheuria, Kushtia.

Key words: journey, contemplative spaces, individual journeys, architectural and verbal language, Fakir Lalon Shah, Urban.

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My acquaintance with the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah had been a very personal fascination, emerging from my cultural background. It brought me closer to the idea of physical manifestation of a school of thought that is similar by all means to what different forerunners of different cultures and timelines spoke of, but only without the names. A comparison between the verbal and visual language have been explored but to establish it as a methodology requires taking part of linguist experts. However, the physical interpretation of something arbitrary has been practiced before and that is where Art flourishes. With my belonging preset in the field of architecture, the exploration was of much different to what we generally practice; as there were going back and forth in different fields for inquiries.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

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1.1 PROJECT BRIEF

My acquaintance with the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah had been a very personal fascination, emerging from my cultural background. It brought me closer to the idea of a school of thought that is similar by all means to what all these forerunners spoke of, but only without the names. The core of the philosophy talks of self-containment and to look for answers within self; to connect oneself to the cosmic energy and understand, over everything, self. This thesis is an attempt to explore those personal spaces that unite to be a whole. The oneness of humankind free of class-differences is the force that inspired this project to become physical. A physical representation (in the form of an institute) of a certain school of thought which is much spiritual and exploratory in nature, while at the same time requires in-depth analysis of the mediums of Art which carry the message of the philosophy. It's a place where people will come to take their individual journeys, and not to be named according to different user groups.

*Summary
Introduction !!*

1.2 PROJECT INTRODUCTION

- **Background**

To understand Fakir Lalon Shah'ji's linguistic covering that wraps the philosophy of his song contents, one has to take guidance of a mentor and indulge completely into the journey. Hearing from others or reading about what others have interpreted is merely looking in the wrong direction. My research evolved from a desire to find a way towards that knowledge for one who is eager, but haven't found a mentor yet.

Even being on a lookout of a direct mentor, every human being on this planet, in a progression of his spiritual development, tries to grab the higher stage of his mind either subconsciously or unconsciously or consciously. And all these stages exist within his own self. In man, there's strength and respect. In the same man, there's also weakness. Likewise, the sense of a godly being exists in the deep caveat of his mind.

From mind comes humane. Except human being, no other living beings can create, listen or understand symbolic languages. The philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah of Bangladesh talked about seeking the Great Power within self. He talked about the graces of human body and made sarcasm of the fact that how we want to find God elsewhere. For him, human body is the ultimate place where God resides, can be found and nurtured. For strength, we have to turn to the deep, intimate cave within.

In this world, in restless flow of phenomenon, there's nothing called you, me or him. But, when our ugly being called "judgment" takes over me, you, Lalon, Ali, Shiva, Buddha, Musa or Ibrahim, the conceptual segregation takes place. Our oneness as a race becomes divided and we lose our strength. This was another major theme of his philosophy.

Having peace of mind beyond the man-made class differences and the norms is the state- Fakir Lalon Shah'ji. Fakir Lalon can be found in different names through time's history; who talked of similar concepts, a philosophy that is larger than a generation's time. Baishnavs, Rastafaris, Dervish, Sufi, Mediating Buddhists, Tantrics, Witches etc- are again man-made classes. My personal religious view and similarities with my thoughts about spirituality led me towards a desire to preserve this philosophy and promote this as a peaceful lifestyle

Even though, the dreams are yet to be executed, and there will always be criticism; the desire of a preservation of philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah'ji lives on. Could it be a shrine, a complex or an entire city? We don't know yet. But it started as a thought process of a space which embodies such an idea like a space or place where people from all over the world will gather, yet only to engage themselves in their own journey. Something that is free from physical boundaries that differentiate you from me, your country from mine. It wants to be something physical, but welcoming to those who want to take the journey for a search of a God Within. It can travel beyond boundaries, can communicate beyond languages, and can be beyond physical. And, from that desire begins the quest of understanding architecture in such a setting and what it wants to be.

- **Thought of a Space**

When trying to envision a space that will house the practice of a philosophy, it appeared as a practicing and researching ground where alternative lifestyle practitioners will gather to exchange their knowledge, philosophy and ideas; at the same time philosophy scholars willing to research on the subject will be able to come in close contact with the practitioners. A space that will hold regular discussions, conversations and cultural practice as products of the philosophy and also regular academic research by professionals in order to analyze and understand properly and also to preserve the philosophy. The space may be of layers of public spaces, alternative lifestyle practice ground, a small residential units where the pilgrims and the researchers may stay, a large open space for annual gatherings during *baul* festivals, a museum and library archive for Lalon fans and devotees; even a bypass through the site to allow the city people use the urban space without having to attaching themselves to the whole theme. Thinking the human activities to be performed in the urban complex brings the idea of a functionality of a city (or replica city?) where people can relate in terms of human aspects. The complex may become a city icon which in future, the city people will preserve themselves and not only the complex of Lalon City of Universal Philosophy but also the essence of Kushtia, Bauliana.

Sixteen gangsters
Of the city
Are running loose, looting all.

The five wealthy ones
Are nearly lost;
the trade is at the point
Of breaking.

The king of kings
Is also chief
Of thieves.
To whom may I complain?

The riches all are gone
Leaving only an empty room
To me credit.
Says Lalon:
The room will pay
For tax claims.

Lyrics: Fakir Lalon Shah (shohore sholo jon bombaytey)

English Translation: Deben Bhattacharya

(Bhattacharya, D 2009)

Here the sixteen gangsters are; according to various opinions: ten sensory organs and six ripu (sins or unpleasant intentions); or; five working organs (hands, legs, voice, sexual organs, waste disposal organs), five knowledge intake organs (eyes, ear, nose, tongue and skin) and six ripu (sexual desire, anger, greed, obsession, pride and jealousy). (Hossain 2009)

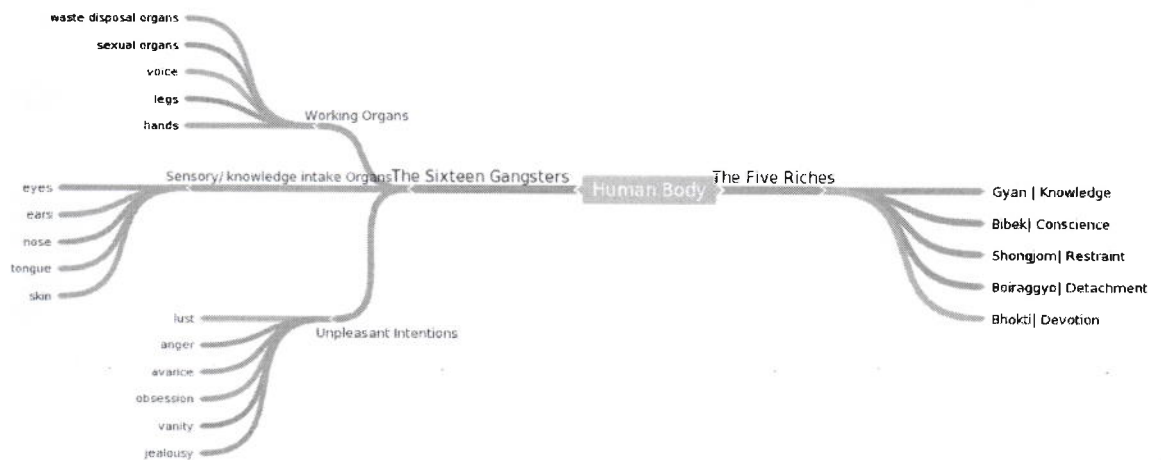


Diagram: showing relationship among the elements in human body inspired from the song "shohore sholojon bombaytey." / Source: — ?

These sixteen gangsters are living within the human body and constantly at war with the five riches (*Gyan* or knowledge, *Bibek* or conscience, *Shongjom* or restraint, *Boiraggyo* or detachment, *Bhokti* or devotion). According to Lalon Shah's teaching, with guidance, one can get their attachment free of all the earthly desires that we constantly absorb with the sensory and working organs; and engages himself into his personal journey by practicing the five virtues in human which takes us to the Higher Knowledge, understanding with self. My idea is to work with these five riches in human body and explore the relationship in the real space we live in, promoting an education to look into ourselves.

- **The place of philosophy in my project and Methodology**

“The outside is a peculiar place, both paradoxical and perverse. It is paradoxical insofar as it can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what it is not and can never be—an inside, a within, an interior. And it is perverse, for while it is placed always relative to an inside, it observes no faith to the consistency of this inside. It is perverse in its breadth, in its refusal to be contained or constrained by the self-consistency of the inside. The outside is the place one can never occupy fully or completely, for it is always other, different, at a distance from where one is. One cannot be outside everything, always outside: to be outside something is always to be inside something else. To be outside (something) is to afford oneself the possibility of a perspective, to look upon this inside, which is made difficult, if not impossible, from the inside. This is the rare and unexpected joy of outsideness: to see what cannot be seen from the inside, to be removed from the immediacy of immersion that affords no distance. However, this always occurs at a cost: to see what cannot be seen is to be unable to experience this inside in its own terms. Something is lost—the immediate intimacy of an inside position; and something is gained—the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others.” (Grosz 2001)

Philosophy has always taken a safe position criticizing other disciplines helping them ask question which set them out on further understanding. There's philosophy to everything. Philosophy could not have survived if not fed from everything. And, that is why I chose to explore how philosophy shapes up a certain built form, understand philosophical part of my designed architecture. I want to know what philosophy has to teach us, architects. Fakir Lalon Shahji's contribution to the timeline is beyond a cultural genre but a philosophy of a lifestyle, which is very advanced in my opinion and competes in the cosmic scale of philosophies. While concepts of the social, the cultural, the collective, and the communal have always oriented architectural interests, it is the outside condition of the community—the alien or the stranger—that serves to cohere and solidify a community as an inside. The place of the destitute, the

homeless, the sick and the dying, the place of social and cultural outsiders—including women and minorities of all kinds—must also be the concern of the architectural and the urban just as it has been of philosophy and politics.

I wish to ask questions to the outsides to incorporate other perspectives in my thought process and my intentions towards my project. I want to look at my project beyond my field, but from different disciplines and see if/ how those hidden layers of architecture can be revealed. I intend to interview experts from different disciplines by questionnaire and incorporate those inputs in the design process.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the project

An inseparable relationship between Kushtia and its pilgrims in search for a Greater Self Within, led towards a space that addresses containing of such philosophy in a local context of my habitation. When we will be able to dim out our voices and tone down our interventions, no matter how many layers of years-history it has gathered, we may be able to identify the uniqueness, the unique characteristics, the inner-self of a city. And, I believe, that *Bauliana* is the raw essence of Kushtia, and it deserves to be valued that way.

The talk of a "city" comes repeatedly, not as an end product of a design process but as a concept where a complex extends to be a "replica city" that allows the five virtues in human bodies to be nurtured, at least the education part of it, where people can relate to in terms of human courses and their attachment to a bigger scale of a real city where they reside. In a discussion in several essays in the book *Nurturing Dreams*, Fumihiko Maki showed the resemblance of functional cities to human body. Consuming, waste disposal, mobility, infrastructure are what we have adopted from biological operations in human body and therefore, the terms can work efficiently when people living in it can relate to it as smoothly as it happens in their own experiences. This complex may become the icon of the city, where every factors of a city will be taken under account; only with a specific set of functions; naming, for example, a research and learning institute for universal philosophy.

Fumihiko maki, also stated,

Public places we always thought were for groups have turned out to be in fact places for individuals or places for what might be called virtual family functions (such as Christmas parties and cooking lessons). Such developments, together with the advances in communication media mentioned above, suggest that a reversal in the roles of public and private spaces is indeed taking place. Although public and private domains still continue to exist, the emergence of other domains should be noted.

Recently a young woman told me: "I like to go to art museums because I feel I truly have a place of my own when I am quietly surrounded by paintings." For her, public places are private places in the most fundamental sense. Needless to say, she is not one of those visitors who crowd around popular works such as the Mona Lisa. What is important is that people are discovering in cities such places with dual meanings, and cities are increasingly being required to provide such spaces. (Maki 2008)

This is also a design intention that the individual experiences are promoted in a public space like a philosophy school which deeply focuses on “taking their own journeys.” People learn to look inside of themselves with experiential spaces; they may or may not use the auxiliary facilities.

When we talk of a “replica city” that is the “city icon¹,” an exposure to the world outside the city comes up. So, it is important that the whole imaginary story about it embodies the real identity of the city-specifically its inhabitants. In other words, they should get along with the internationally promoted identity about them. An iconic city cannot be superimposed; it does not only work towards strangers, but also for the people that live in the city. Because, they are the real city.

The aim is to educate you on the history of the city’s strength, what makes her so unique and appealing. This is not a proposal of designing landmarks to appear on postcards and souvenirs that represent the city but the city as a whole to represent what it stands for. It is rather an attempt towards Urban Education that is needed for the inhabitants to know their origin and discover their attachment to the city. It’s important that the locals accept the identification as part of the backdrop to their lives; and not only will they accept, but on a progression of the idea, they will grow to love, and protect, the unsung hero of a city being as defined as an iconic one.

For last, in global scale, the proposed complex will be a gathering ground for people who are eager to know and to practice a philosophy that might not have had a chance in the history, and have always been considered an “alternative” one; and is hoped to be looked at otherwise.

¹ Discussions on terminology on the next chapter

1.4 Programs

(User groups not to be named differently because of sensitivity to the project)

1. Practical learning
 - Experiential spaces
 - Gathering spaces for discussions and practicing of the rituals and cultural products of it.
2. Theoretical learning (Research facilities)
 - Research labs- analysis, translation, documentation and publication
 - Archive
 - Convention hall
3. Residential facilities
 - small-scale housing/ dormitories
 - Central kitchen facilities to support festival or international convention times.
4. Public spaces
 - Preservation of tomb space
 - Gathering spaces for festival times
 - Galleries
5. Supporting road network- local and regional scale

1.5 Client

Public Works Department (PWD), Segun Bagicha, Dhaka under guidance of Bangladesh Shilpokola Academy, Segun Bagicha, Ramna, Dhaka.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Terminology

- Baul, Bauliana and the God Within
- Universal Philosophy
- Human body, replica city and city icon

2.2 Confrontation with the outsiders (Interviews)

- Analysis of linguistic pattern in Lalon Songs.
- Analysis of melodic and beat patterns in Lalon Songs.
- Analysis of meditative rituals performed by and described in Lalon Songs.

2.3 Design intentions derived from the analysis

2.1 Terminology

- Baul, Bauliana and the God Within

In 16th century, the spiritual belief system emerged around this subcontinent, and was recognized by the common people of societies which had a unique philosophy of accepting all the global aspects of different religions and rejecting the narrow perspectives. These believers were named *Bauls* and it was accepted in midst of them later. The word "baul" comes from Sanskrit (some say Persian) word "Batul", and has often been conjured rudely as "going mad." (Haque 2007 p. 9)

Maqsoodul Haque also says,

The lampoon-isation as if, it were the lifestyle of a bunch of lunatics with some insinuations even implying this, as the aftereffect of all the 'wind' consumed in chillums (bongs) full of ganja or marijuana, with the word Batil or 'wasted' only a continuation of Batul. It is only but fair to say that cannabis smoking was never a part of the Baul creed (although many smoke it), with Lalon Shah cautioning (if not condoning) his followers of its dangerous after effects. (Haque 2007 p. 12)

The practice of the rituals amongst *Bauls* was influenced by Nath and Buddhist Shohojiya; but they used to share common interest in philosophy with Sufi and Chaitanya believers. In one word, Bauliana has been a strange amalgamation of *fakir-dervishes* from Islamic background; *bhikkhu* from Buddhist and *shadhu-baishnavs* from hindu. The bauls can be well delineated from excerpts in encyclopedia Britannica, while the Fakir and Dervishes are described as follows.

"Fakir," a term generally used in Arabic speaking countries for a medicant dervish, is the transliteration of an Arabic word meaning "Needy Person." It refers to men's spiritual need of God, who alone is self-sufficient. Although of Muslim origin, it has come to be applied in India to Hindus as well largely replacing goswami, shadhu, bhikkhu, bawa and other designation. Fakirs are common to all creeds of India, and in theory they belong to a religious order, but Muslim orders do not profess celibacy and Hindu and the others do not enforce it (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1964, vol 9, page 42).

"Dervish," in the Middle East is a member of a Muslim religious fraternity, whether medicant or not, resembling in some respects a Christian monastic order. The fraternities arose within Sufism, which is in origin, religion at an individual level, the single soul seeking its own salvation; occasionally such an individual would gather around himself a band of devotees under instruction, who shared his life and religious practices... Besides the Dervishes resident in the community there are many lay members (including women), both classes now being largely drawn from the lower levels of society (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1964, vol. 7, page 279).

(Ray 1978 p.752)

Anyadashankar Ray also says, there are other articles on Sufism too, but quotation is unnecessary. Dervishes are practitioners inspired from Sufism. Sufi mentors take the title *Shah* which in casual Bengali, get transformed into *Shai*. In this country, the migrated sufi mainstream is met with a new stream which is very local and a personal adoption. (translation:author). (Ray 1978 p. 752).

Maqsoodul Haque, a renowned musician of Bangladesh who also happens to be a Lalon researcher used the word "*Bauliana*" for the first time in his book *Bauliana: Worshipping the Great God in Man* and stated, on discussion of Bauliana often misunderstood as music associated with Lalon Shah,

Bauliana is a phenomenon with global resonance opening avenues to new cultural comparisons and is signified by an alternative way of life that has one of its many exemplars the Rastafarian belief system and the music that grew from it called reggae whose most famous and accomplished singer and composer was Bob Marley. (Haque 2007 p. 3)

Recognition of the concept *Bauliana* was first known by Md. Abdul Hai and he added to the theory that with our knowledge, work and being; trained up to come into unison; we can find our God in the God Within.

Speaking of the God Within, the term or the concept is varied within different groups, but it is old. Maqsoodul Haque makes the discussion clear in the chapter "*Shah: the Regal Lamp*"

although he adds a twist to the topic of *Shiraj Shah* who is known to be the mentor of Fakir Lalon Shah, and made his stand dissecting the linguistic aspects of the name suggesting, all the mentioning of Shiraj Shah refers to the greater power, the God, Lalon's mentor, guide to the journey of life.

He says,

'Shah' translated from Arabic or Persian means 'regal' or those worthy of the respect of a King... In Arabic and Persian among the many meanings attested to the word Shiraj is 'lamp', therefore in all probability, 'Shiraj Shai' could very well have been, the 'Regal Lamp' – the Maker. The God of the agnostic Fakir Lalon Shah, had deliberately to be coined in order it to make it meaningful, and to rise about the pettiness of organized Gods of 'religions' whose disciples had in the course of Bengal's history, thanks to British Imperialism, deviated and begun quarreling, as to the 'superiority' of their individual Gods. In any event the Maker knows best, and the TRUTH as the Baul knows all too well, is best not arrived at or revealed. Let the Regal Lamp and Light in all of us 'burn' nonetheless. (Haque 2007 p. 23)

Actual person or not, he is the guide through life. He is the lamp that lit many souls, many more lamps; holds the same flame that flickers through thousands of souls. This is why Fakir Lalon Shah insisted that we search within, because we are a part of the Greater Power or the Greater Being. The Higher Knowledge, Self Within are all the variation of terms to be used throughout the paper to express the same concept.

- **Universal Philosophy**

From frequent encounter with the concept of a God that exists within self led towards a question; how come there's so much relevance in the philosophy of quite a big number of belief systems that talk about spirituality and the peace of life; and have so many different names after which they are known? Buddha's nirvana, Krishna's bhakti, Mohammad's nobuywat- do they have a convergence point where they meet? Our constant obsession about an ultimate union with God or a Godly being brings us back to the mysterious door of life- a spiritual root of our soul. We want to worship God; we want to be in understanding with God. Where this urge come from is irrelevant; but the attachment is very primitive.

Humans have fantasized in mythological stories that Gods pray to achieve a human body, to live a human life, with human senses. It's amazing how human lives have been told with great importance, seen as a precious object, a gift. The idea of looking for God within self, not elsewhere- is very ancient and have been practiced with occasional deviation.

From a reading about Baishnav (the religion, is basically a common belief of a certain group of devotees, who are worshippers-to be more specific, fans- of God Krishna, one of the Gods from Hindu religion), the main theme of Vaisnav religion is bhakti or respect. There are six stages of this.

1. In first stage, the fans (bhakta) believe in, worship and pay their respects to a supernatural power/ being (Brahmanondo).
2. In second, the fans imagine the Creator as Four-armed Narayana and worship him (Shantoroti).
3. In third, the fans worship Krishna, the human form of God (Batshoroti).
4. In fourth, the fans devote themselves as Krishna's Slave. In this stage, the fans contain endless respect for Lord Krishna (Dasyaroti).
5. In fifth, the fans become Krishna's friend, as in, they share an understanding with the God, Krishna (Shokhhyaroti).
6. In sixth, Krishna is the worshipper and lover of the fan, as in, human will have achieved such a state of mind, when even Gods will respect them, as though a piece of God is there within human (Modhurroti). (Bhattacharya, S 2009)

The popular documentary series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* is another example where similar ideas have prevailed, only from a different point of view; Science. The energy that is present in human realm to mother nature and out in the universe is a sign of linkage and the presence of the star contents within human body has been adopted as a concept of understanding Nature, most importantly, nature through self.

It is not fully scientific, but it is, indeed, science. The topics are too big to be understood, in one lifetime. But one can, however, know it all. And, for that, he has to take his own journey. We are a part of the cosmos, we are made of star contents and we can find or understand cosmos through finding ourselves - was the main idea of cosmos.

Late Pop king of Bangladesh, Azam Khan, spread the word through the spirit of rock, ever since the war experience of a bloody and brutal '71; is known to look for salvation and freedom in looking inward, and such realization is told among the new generation with a dialect they can relate with, in words like these in the lyrics.

The one I seek

He lives in my heart

I keep losing him, even within my reach.

One moment, he is right here

Nowhere in the next

Takes shelter in my heart

The whole universe is where he rests.

In love, is found freedom

Desire is met in devotion.

[Lyrics: Azam Khan, ami jare chai re she thake mor e ontore,

Translation: Author]

The reason for dragging examples from different disciplines is to point at how this school of thought is prevalent everywhere. It is in our daily lives; it is our daily lives. To be in fine tuning with self is the way towards ultimate spirituality where peace can be found. The journey is spiritual and exploratory in nature. One has to take his own. Bob Marley and Fakir Lalon Shah are two different names with the same teaching—find yourself. Reggae and Baul music are the chariots that have traveled with the same idea through time. The philosophy empowers humanity as a whole- peaceful and introvert in manner. The objective of using the phrase “universal philosophy” is to address the content of the philosophy to be judged over different names.

- **Human body, replica city and city icon**

The idea of relating a space to the functions undergoing in a human body inspired from the chapter “Future, Cities and Architecture”, in Grosz’s book *Architecture from the Outside*. She presented a series of very brief postulates, or working hypotheses to explore how the very concept of the new and futurity (at least as they are presently embodied) impact on and may help reconfigure the way that bodies, cities, and their relations are thought. From excerpts of the postulates, the linking of bodies and cities can be understood well.

2. Cities have always represented and projected images and fantasies of bodies, whether individual, collective, or political. In this sense, the city can be seen as a (collective) body-prosthesis or boundary that enframes, protects, and houses while at the same time taking its own forms and functions from the (imaginary) bodies it constitutes...(grosz 2001 p. 49)

7. Thus, a final hypothesis: to the degree that technology is in the process of transforming bodies (at times imperceptibly and at other times markedly), only to that degree is it capable of transforming cities. The mode of futurity, that is, of becoming,

is a condition of bodily existence(This is what evolution teaches us, if it teaches anything at all): it is also the life and existence of the city. The technological does not threaten to supersede cities as we know them, for their transformation is in resonance with the transformations of the body. The cities of the future will almost certainly resemble cities as we know them today only to the extent that bodies will resemble our own and function according to their various modalities. In this sense, cities of the future, like cities of the present, will not be imposed on an unwilling populace, that is, from outside. The bodies of the populace require spatial conditions, connections between each other, and various locations that both map and interact with the bodies of cities, their modes of operation, their technological accomplishments and requirements. (Grosz 2001 p. 53)

“Replica city,” is however a special term that has been used in this paper to resemble a space that thrives from its resemblance to human bodies. In this case, an institutional complex that is unique where the five virtues in human will be demonstrated in terms of representations in architectural terms in city or designed spaces, to say vaguely.

“City icon” is a personal way of looking at the far-fetched ends of my project, what this might change into. The process of globalization has led a changing role of cities within this world. Cities have become the anchor points of our increasingly connected society. The world is a network and the cities are the nodes within that network. The importance of distance seems to disappear through digital networks, telecommunication and upgrading mobility. The cities or the bodies need to connect for the purpose of the philosophy under discussion.

2.2 Confrontations with the outsides (interviews)

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CHAPTER 3: SITE APPRAISAL

3.1 Historical background of Kushtia

3.2 Social and cultural background of Kushtia

3.3 The site

- History of the site.
- Surroundings of the site.
- Communication network.
- Environmental considerations.
 1. Topography
 2. Climate
 3. Future considerations.

3.4 SWOT Analysis

3.1 Historical background of Kushtia

Kushtia is known and proved to be the centre of ancient Nodiya, Jessore, Faridpur, Pabna etc. both physically and culturally. All of these places used to accommodate alternative lifestyle practitioners from different religions; Hindu-Baishnavs, Buddhist-Shohojiya, Muslim-Bauls etc. Many of these genres used to talk about their philosophy in forms of songs- religious or otherwise. There used to be huge gatherings among the Akhras- different communities of religious castaways. In these festival-like gatherings, there used to be discussions on different philosophies, perspectives and ideas- in forms of Kobi gaan (argumentative duet songs), Keertan (songs of praise and love for Hindu God Krishnan) and sufi songs (meditative songs in search of God Within). All of them talk of the same topic- search for a God Within. Dr. Upendranth Bhattacharya mentioned in his essay that Kushtia was in the centre of such cultural flourishing (Bhattacharya, U 2009). Md. Abdul Hai added Khulna along with those locations (Hai 2009 p. 798), Dr. Arunkumar Basu said Bauliana spread from Nodiya, Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur to Barishal, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Pabna; and, the bauls used to travel dispersing from the Akhras singing about their beliefs among general people and towards an epicenter to share ideas and songs with more practitioners of common beliefs (Basu 2009). From a published piece by Md. Hai, we come to know that the East Pakistan Government felt the importance of documentation in case of future research or direct practice of such lifestyle and put up the first library and research centre in Seuria expecting to provide those who'll need, preserving Lalon's thought stream, religious perspective and philosophy of life (Hai 2009 p. 803). In Dr. Abul Ahsan Chowdhury's own essay in the anthology, he traced back more evidences of people and their works who felt it important to contain Kushtia and its spiritual background of history; and showed, in 1965, there was a proposal made by the District Officer of that time, to change Kushtia's name in to Lalonshahi meaning "from/ like Lalon" or Lalon nogor meaning "Lalon city." (Chodhury 2009).

Looking back in history, it is evident that this certain region has played an important role in accommodating its pilgrims, a certain belief system, a culture, a society. Till to date, the *baul* festivals are big occasions of get together of, not only the alternative lifestyle practitioners from two Bengals, but also Lalon fans and baul music lovers. However, the present condition is

rather unpleasing. There have been numerous encounters with mainstream religious believers with the Baul dwellers of the region, constantly criticizing in an unhealthy way. The bauls of kushtia and other places in Bangladesh have gone through a lot of restlessness created by the opinionated classes.

3.2 Social and cultural background of Kushtia

Kushtia bears the sign of rich cultural heritage of Mughal period. A river port was developed in khustia during the period of Shahjahan. The East India Company made extensive use of the port, for the indigo planters and traders settled that the township began to grow. The Indigo Resistance Movement in Kushtia inspired all indigo farmers to refrain from paying government taxes subsequently the publication of the Indigo Commission Report an Act was passed.

Kushtia had significant contribution to Bangladesh Liberation War. A company of 147 member of the 27th Baluch Regiment of Pakistan army reached Kushtia on 25 March 1971 from its base at Jessore cantonment. By April 1, the Pakistany army was completely overpowered and the brave Bangali muktibahini took control of Kushtia. On April 17, 1971 the Bangladesh Government announced Proclamation of Independence at Baidyanathtala (Now Mujibnagar), a border area in present Meherpur district, then it was a subdivision of Kushtia district.

After the independence of Bangladesh, different development projects are undertaken in Kushtia.

Socio-economic data of Kushtia city

Population: 1,713,224. Among them 50.86% are male and 49.14% female.

Religion: 95.72% are Muslims, 4.22% Hindus and others 0.06%

Literacy rate: 25.8%, with 30.9% of males and 48.35% of females.

Main occupations: Agriculture 31.5%, commerce 15.34%, agricultural laborer 13.9%, etc.

Main crops: Paddy, jute, sugarcane, pulses, oil seed.

Main Exports: Tobacco, betel leaf, banana and sugarcane.

Economical contribution of Kushtia: Kushtia is the centre for tobacco manufacturing of Bangladesh. The area has a good production of Virginia Tobacco.

(Kushtia District Information 2011)

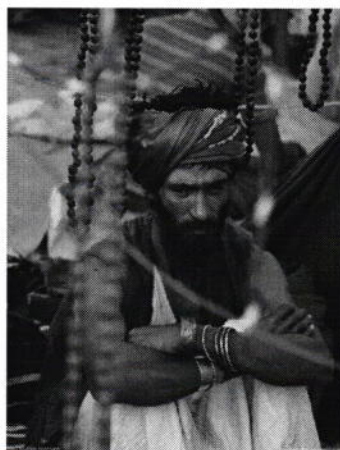
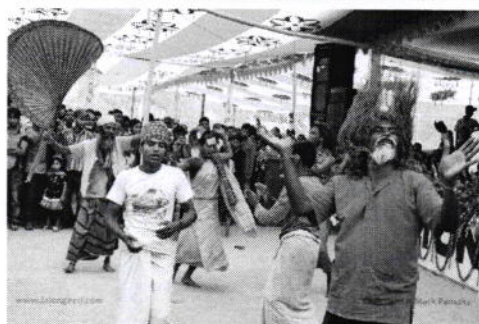


Photo
Collage:
Cultural
Practice in
the Akhra



The cultural and ritualistic practice within the Akhra is very unique. The undertaking of a new *baul* is done through much arrangement; and, the gathering of the baul-fakirs from different parts of the country also follows several conducts. The discussions are followed by musical ambience through which the devotees try to connect themselves to a Higher Knowledge that their beloved mentors talked about. Many attractive forms of art like puppet shows, argumentative duet songs, and various folk or songs of *bhakti* or devotion take up the festive mood during the dol-purnima celebrations. The casual practice is now often disrupted by many careless interventions by the government and non-government associations, thinking to be saving *Bauliana*.

3.3 The site

- **History of the site**

Once-a-nobody Lalon's Akhra in Seuria, Kushtia has a very interesting background history. The story of growing of the akhra and building of the mausoleum extracted from different sources shed light on the political intentions behind different architectural intervention different times. From Shudhir Chakrabarty's article, the sequence of events can be drawn as follows.

1. From the book "Lalon Shah" by Abul Ahsan Chowdhury

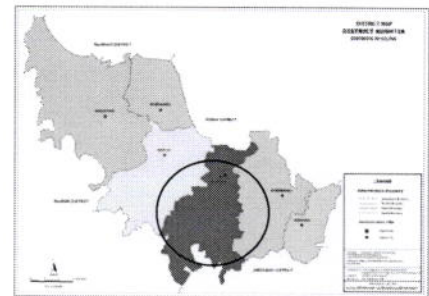
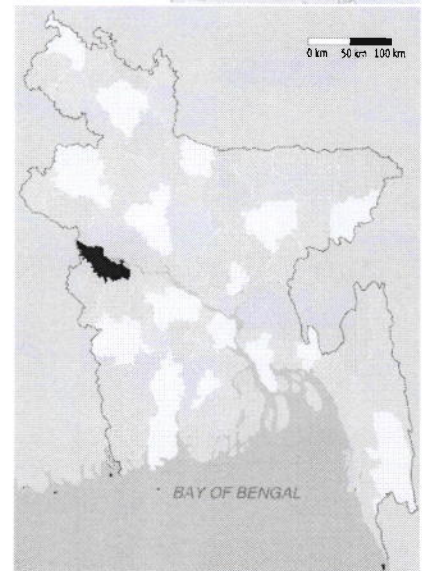
Lalon devotee Malam Shah donated 16 bigha (2,30,400 sqft) of land in Seuria Mouza (a division method of land) to Lalon Fakir. Over half of the land area, Lalon Akhra erected.

2. From a letter from Moniruddin Shah to Rabindranath Tagore

Bholai and Sheetal Shah, two other devotees who were son-like to Fakir Lalon Shah, built a mausoleum with lime and rubbles in commemoration to Shah'ji.

1948- thunderstorm brings down the southern part.

1949- "Lalon Shah Akhra committee" wanted to restore the structure but due to financial problem and and also an indifference to Lalon Shah at the birth time of Pakistan.



3. 1949- 1959: Lalon's tomb remains trivial for a long time, unnoticed.

4. After the birth of Bangladesh, the Managing Director of Kushtia Mohini Mill, Debiprasad Chakraborty attempts to erect the mausoleum again in his own expense. The old structure is brought down, but the new one doesn't make it.

5. 1963: In proposal to Md. Monsuruddin, a Lalon activist and in sponsorship of the Pakistan Government, Lalon Shah's shrine gets a new façade along with a folk-cultural centre. The designer was MA Hai, the appointed engineer from the Gonopurto Division of the government. The architecture was built in the idealistic inspiration from the architecture of the Maqbara of the muslim devotee Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi. (Chakrabarty 2009)



Fig: google map of site

And, through this step came the first Islamization of the topic of Fakir Lalon Shah. The irony of history is that Fakir Lalon Shah himself always kept quiet about his religious origin. But till to date, categorizing Lalon has always been a more intriguing topic than the philosophy itself.

Surroundings of the site

The site is a 1.5 km distance away from Kushtia town, at the south-east end. The entry to the site is through a walkway from the north into an open field where festival crowd takes place. The tomb of fakir lalon shah and the Mazar area is separated by a gate and a walkway on the east to further in to the isolated portion of the site. The open field is surrounded by canal that was once connected to the Kaliganga River on the north; and, there are single-storied corrugated SI sheet shaded structures on the other side of the canal. Inside the mazar area, there has been very recent intervention of the government; a three and a four-storied building that contains auditorium, and, administration, museum and library facilities consecutively. However, the services are yet not available. The restoration of the tomb space was rather much appreciated by the tourists for a formal place to pay respect to Fakir Lalon Shah.

Photo Collage:
Existing structures

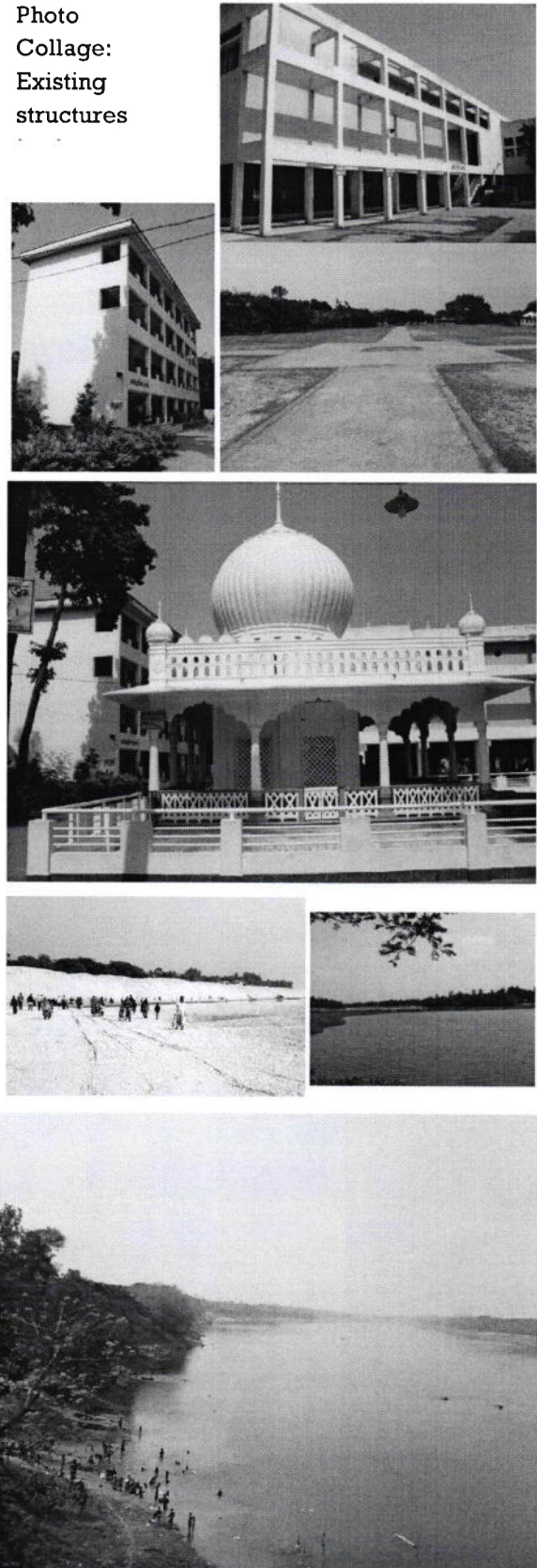




Fig: existing building blocks

The area is residential in manner in its current habitation. A few commercial buildings are there at the far north-east side of the site, but accessed through other entry roads of the area. I wish to take the whole mass of land under consideration towards a better urban solution that fits the project's purpose.



- **Communication network**



Fig: road network



Fig: water network

Both the road network and a water channel have potential to connect the site to national scale. The main roads that lead to the site is near the Dhaka-Kushtia Highway and also has direct short- distance connections to the city.

- **Environmental considerations**

1. Topography

There's not much variation to the topography to the site. It's basically a flat land surrounded by newly risen land caused by the drying out of Kaali River. The water canal that remains is below 20 feet (approximately) from ground level. The water body is however, lined with dense green volume.

2. Climate

The average high temperature is 37.8°C and the average low is 11.2°C. Annual rainfall: 1,467 millimeters.

3. Future considerations

Since the general condition of global climate change predicts a sea-level rise and it generally floods due to a combination of river-based land and monsoon weather in Bangladesh; the foreseen future under consideration would be addressing the increasing water level. It is also strongly suggested that an active water channel for communication grows from the site, because it is only logical that, as long as the water flows through the numerous vessels through the country, it can be a strong positive factor as well as it has its cons.

3.4 SWOT Analysis

- **Strength of the site**
 1. Kaali river on the south of the site.
 2. Open and separated land from *mazar* area
 3. Close proximity with highway
 4. Located in an suburban setting, a little away from the main town

- **Weakness of the site**
 1. The newly erected building blocks that hardly match the context

- **Opportunities of the site**
 1. The dead water stream can be connected to an active delta
 2. Direct connection to highway to establish a better communication
 3. The isolation of two parts of the site allows a different set of functions without having to interfere with each other

- **Threats of the site**
 1. Close proximity with live Kaaliganga River on north hence future flooding

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES

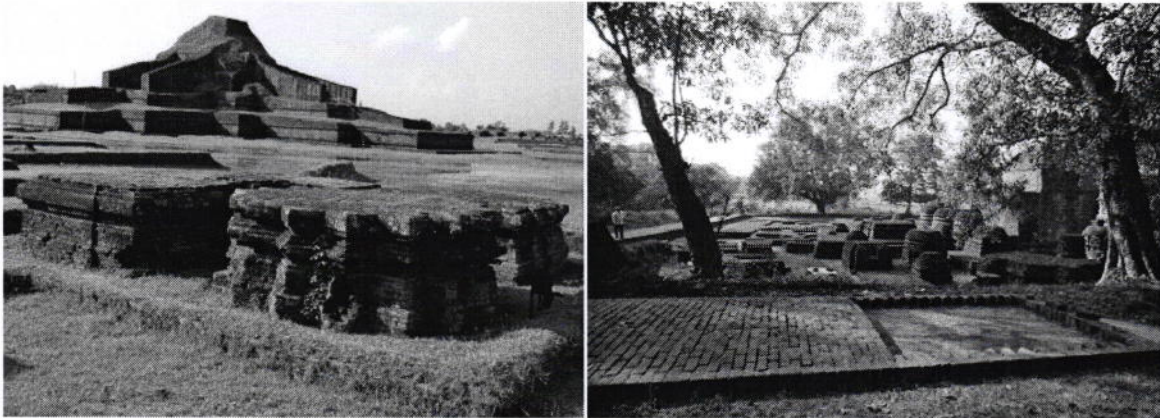
5.1 Projects

5.2 Comparative analysis

3.3 Conclusions



Somapura Mahavihara, Naogan, Bangladesh

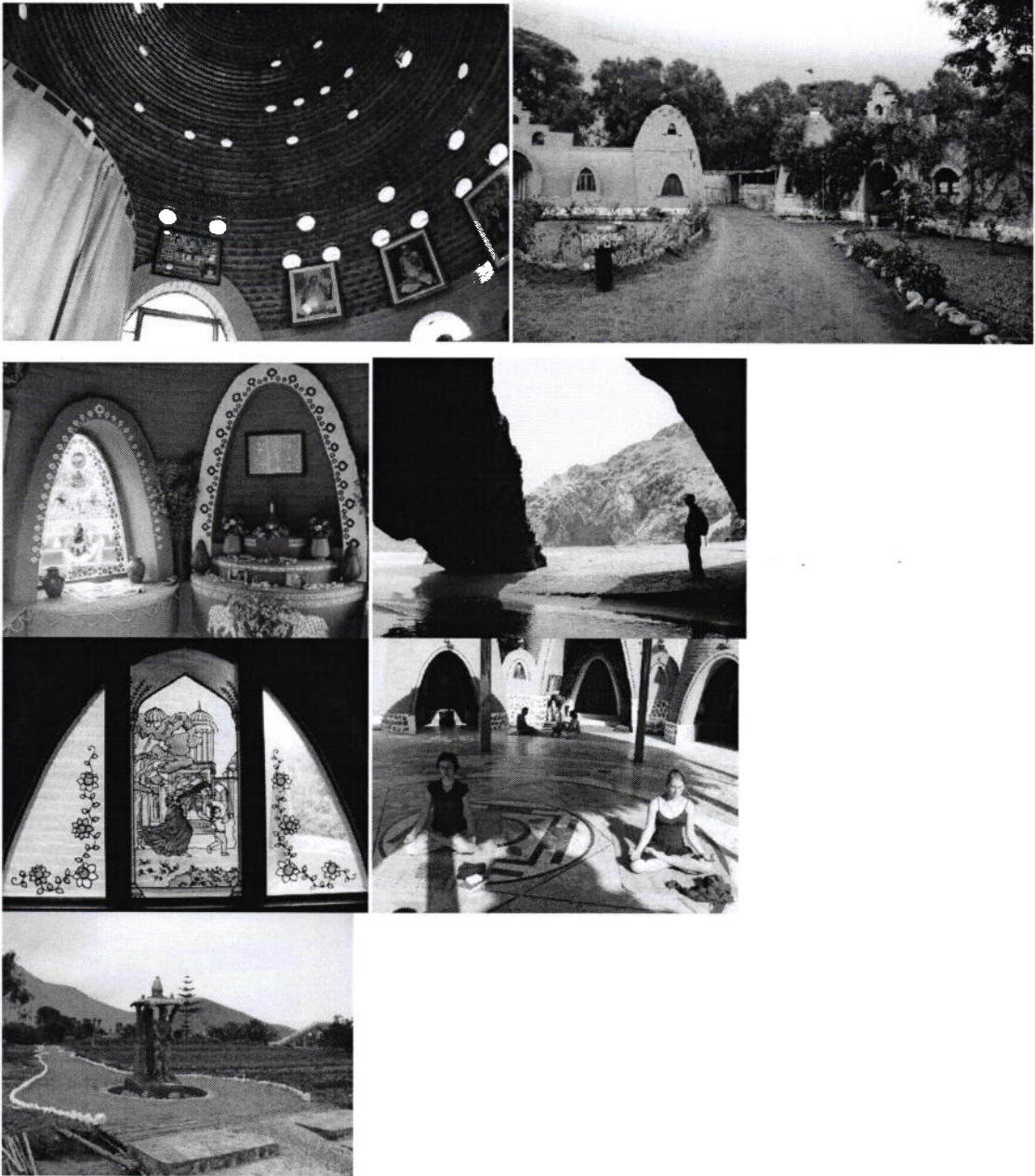


important intellectual centre

Established: Pala dynasty

- **Site Area:** 11,76,120 sqft (110,000 m²)
- **Footprint:** 9,14,760 sqft (85,000 m²)
- **Programs**
 - Temples
 - Viharas
 - Stupas
 - Ancillary buildings
- **Meditation space type:** cells;
177 no.

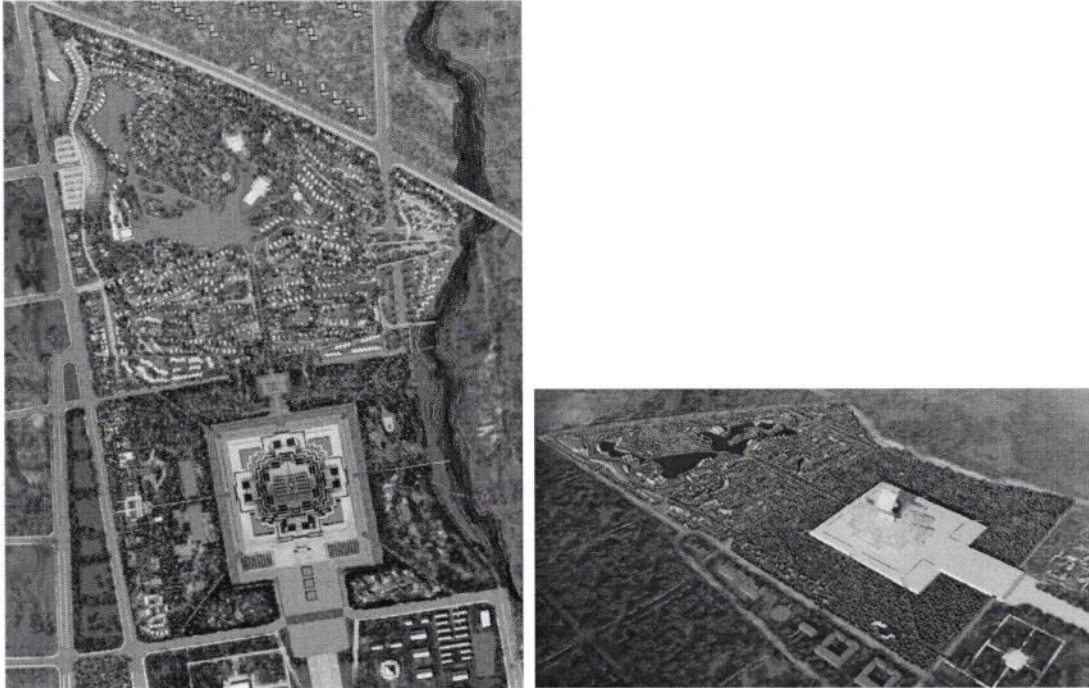
Eco Truly Park, Lima, Peru





- **Site Area:** 3,76,737 sqft (35,000 m²)
- **Footprint:**
- **Activities**
 - Maintenance and cleaning
 - Teaching yoga
 - Transportation
 - Construction
 - Biohuerto
 - Gardening
 - Cooking, baking and making pastry
- **Meditation space type:** truly, truly halls, courtyard and landscapes.

Famen Temple Zen Meditation Centre, China



Eightfold Path Forest Masterplan

Design: Office for Architectural Culture (OAC)

Location: Xi'an, China

London's OAC brings history, religious philosophy, soul, architecture and environment together on the Buddhist holy place

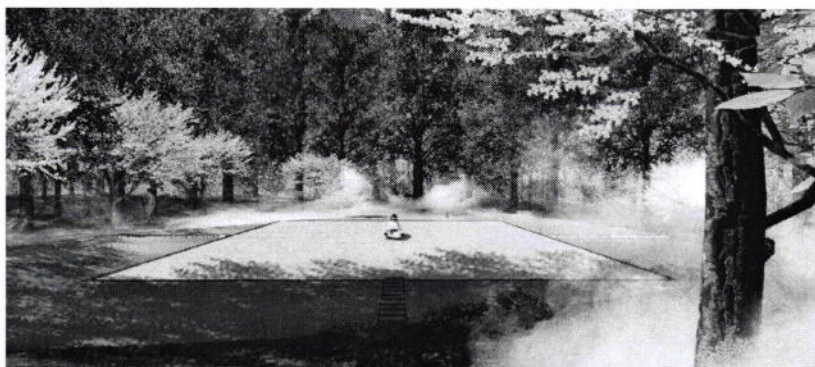
- **Site Area:** 13454887 sqft (1,250,000 m²)
- **Footprint:** 3229173 sqft
(300,000 m²)
- **Programs**

- 1km square 'Eightfold Path Forest',
- four museums
- manuscript-copy halls,
- several large venues for meditation activities, and over a thousand meditation lodges for meditators.
- a Buddhist academy,
- an art complex, a music complex, a concert hall, a performing arts theatre, a 5-star Zen-theme boutique hotel and a 5-star hotel.

- **Meditation space type:**

personal lodges, halls, large venues, landscape





CHAPTER 6: programs and Development

6.1 Programs

1. Spaces of contemplation- [Landscape] - total 2,10,500 sft

-Natural meditative spaces (environment, landscape, art installation) - 1,68,500 sft (80%)

-Built meditative spaces-

a. Collective meditative spaces (meditation halls, lodges etc) - 31,575 sft (15%)

b. Individual meditative spaces (cellular/ modular contemplative space)- 10,525 sft (5%)

2. Cultural ground- [Public]-total 2,20,000 sft

-Open amphitheater (~5000 persons)- 50,000 sft

-Plaza

-Museum/ Gallery space- 5,000 sft

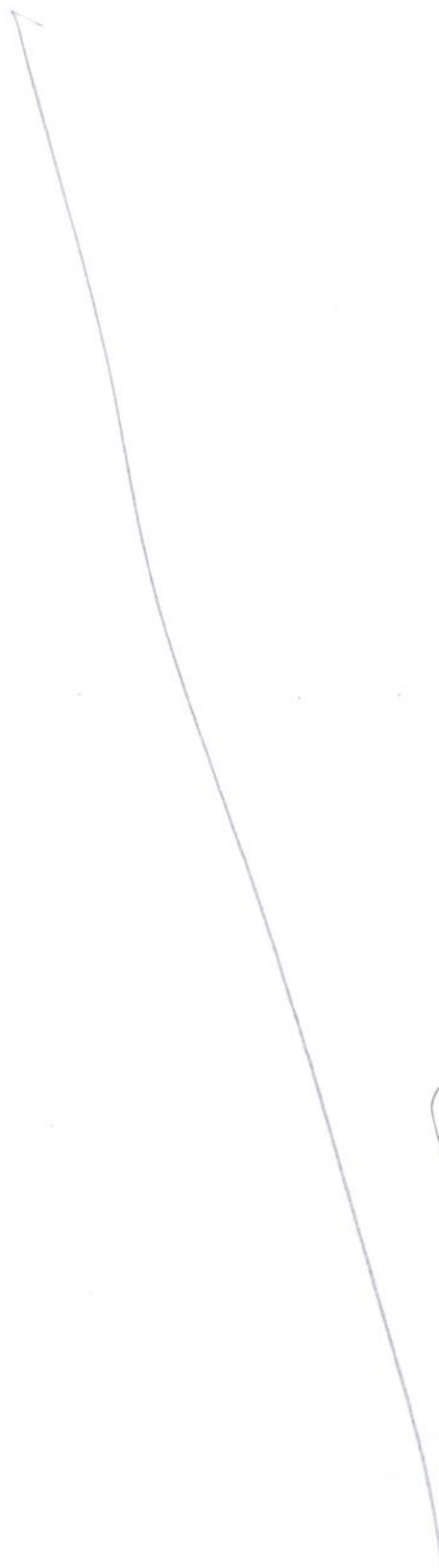
-Shop houses- 5,000 sft

-services

3. [Semi-public]

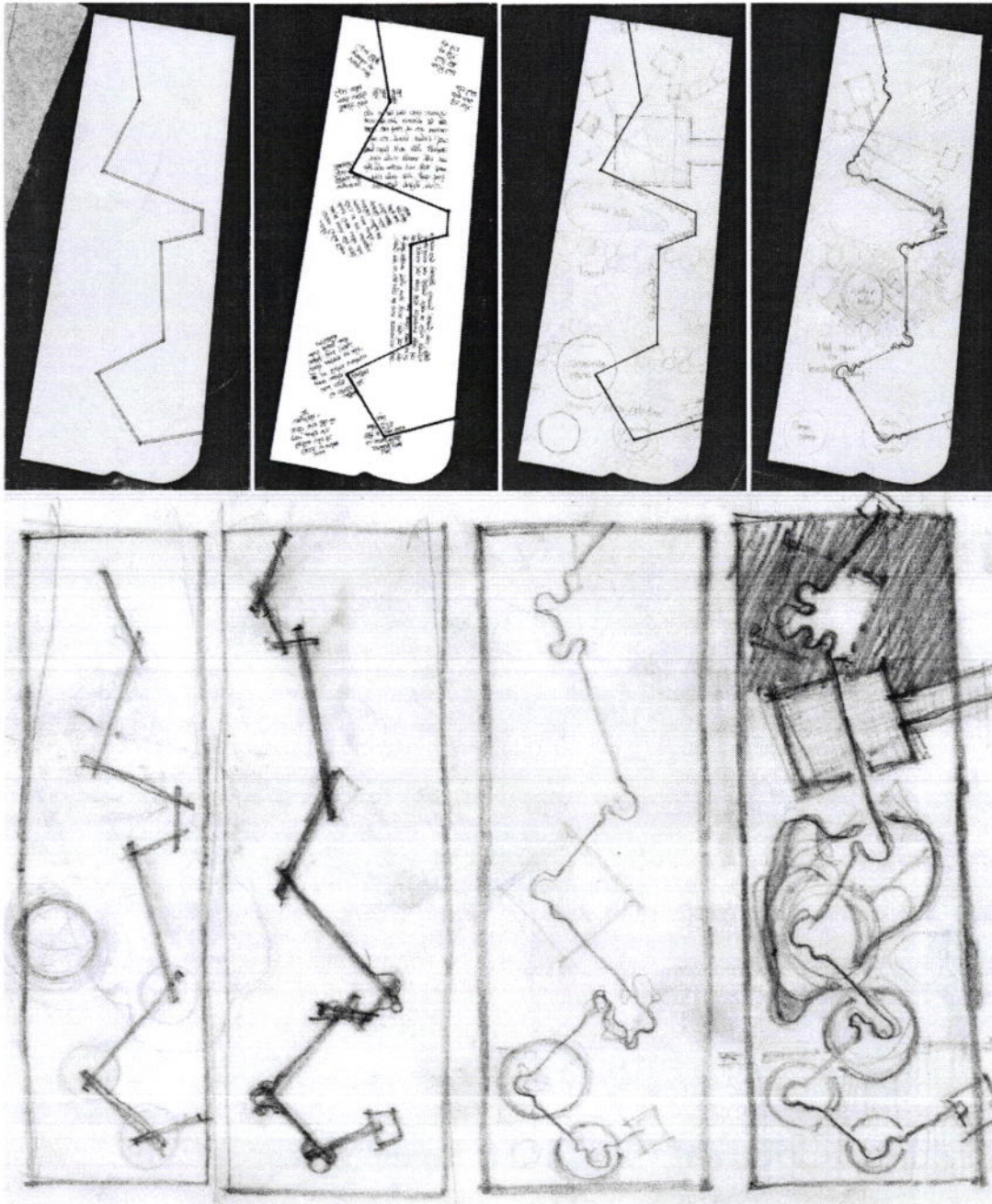
-Residential and kitchen facilities

- Academic (redesign)



CHAPTER 7: Conceptual stage and design development

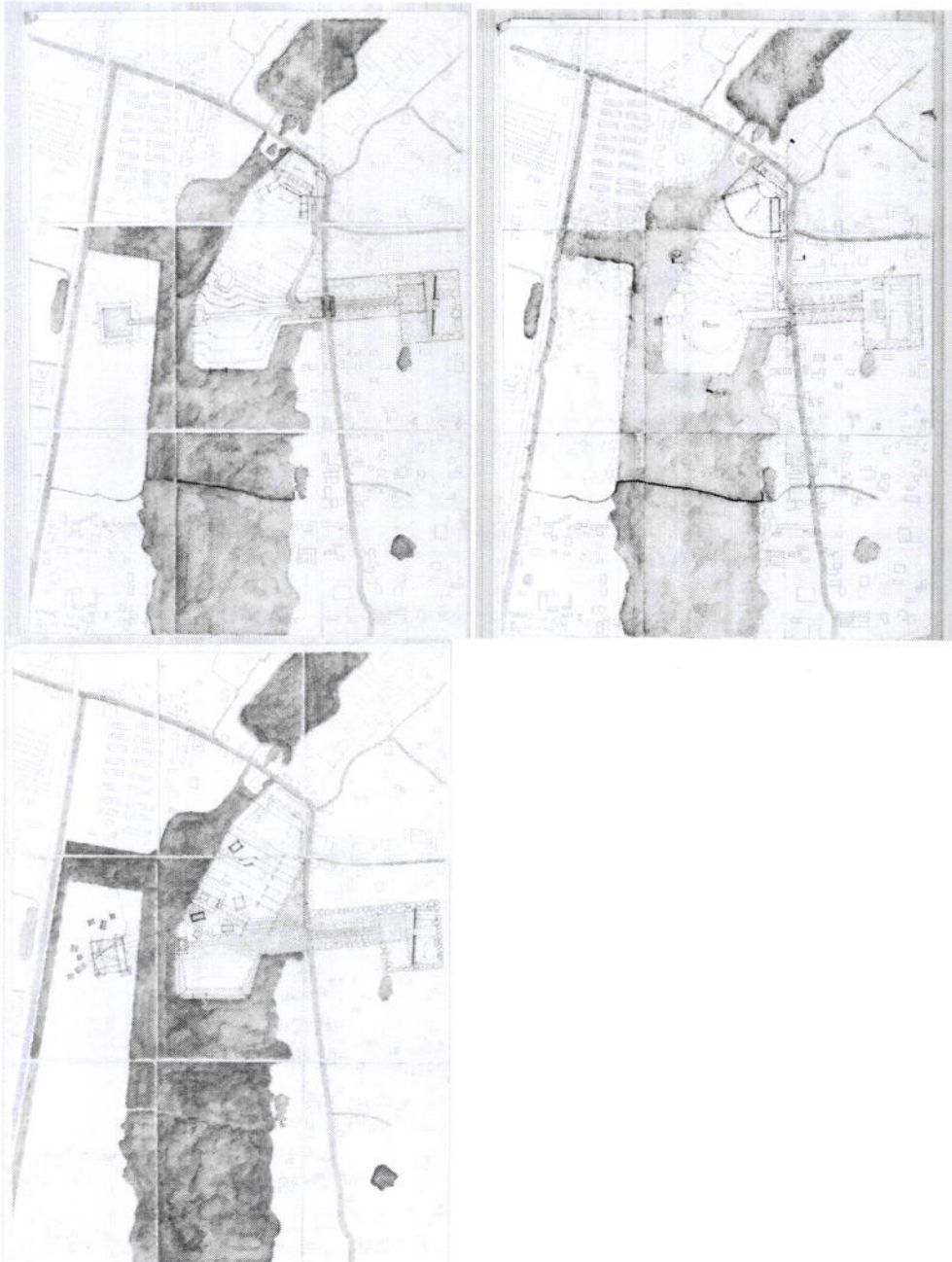
7.1 Developmental Phases



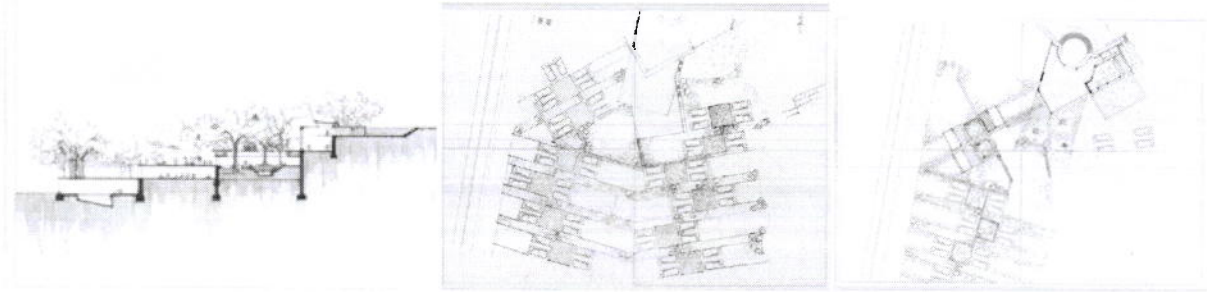
Developmental phase 1: conceptual sketches of the path designing.



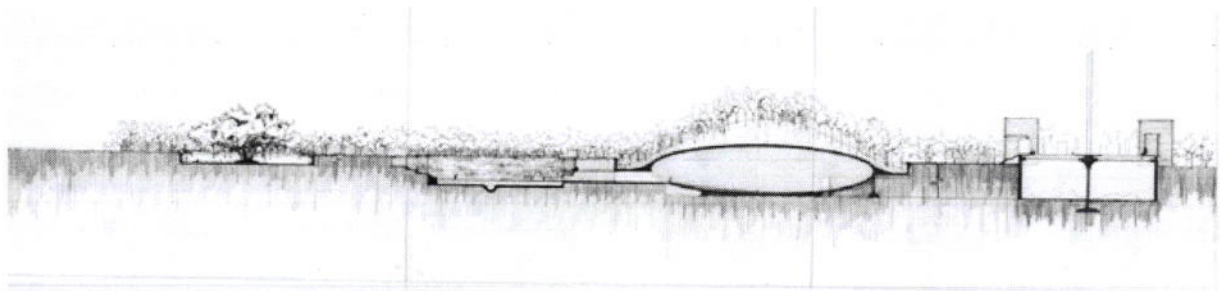
Developmental Phase 2: Design decisions in master plan deriving



Developmental Phase 3: Space allocation in master plan

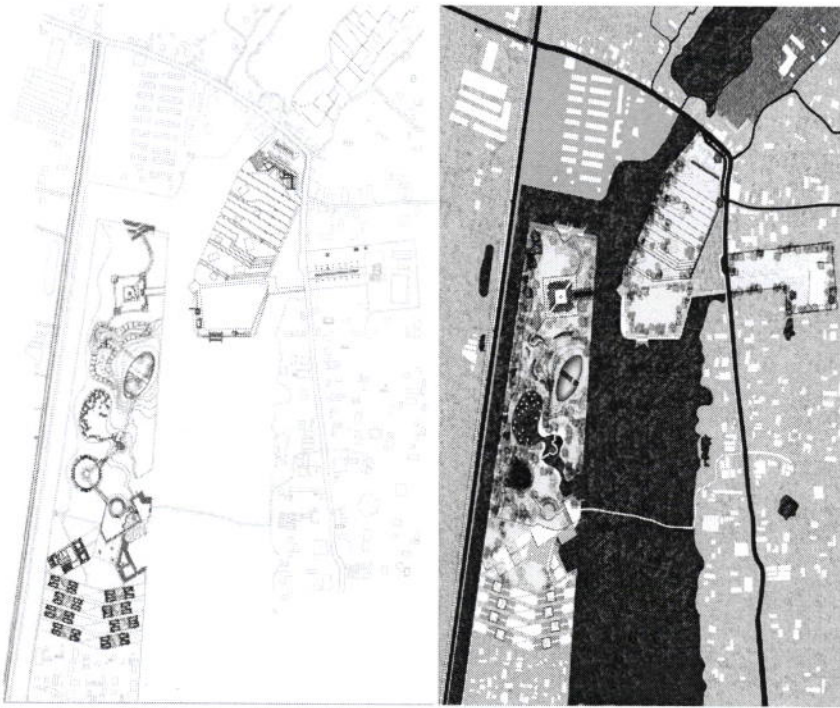


Developmental Phase 4: Accommodation



Developmental Phase 5: conceptual sketch and model of the meditative spaces

Final boards: master plan



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