

## 'PALA SCULPTURES': A HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED AESTHETIC TASTE WHICH GREATLY INFLUENCED THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF BENGAL

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### ABSTRACT

Architectural practice in Bengal is notable from the Muslim period, more precisely since the Pre-Mughal as well as the Sultanate era, the architectural practice in this land started with the influences of many stylistic interpretations. The glorious historical monuments and sites are amazed and spectacular with unparalleled and brilliant craftsmanship, the influence of those innovations were directed by the religious belief as well as the spiritual sense of acclamation. 'Architectural practice' professionally started with the association of arts and performance in the spaces for offering the deity. To create the space as desired for the deity became powerful with the alliance of dramatic light, scheme of colour, textural eminence and over all with the 'Arty surroundings'. Arty or artistic surrounding is the arrangement where deities are transformed into a piece of art. Religious architecture is dull in absent of sculptural arts. This intellect is correct both for interior and outer facades of practicing architecture, the ancient architecture is the co-operational balance of putting thoughts of arts and architecture. During Pala dynasty (781-821 and 821-61) Bengal's art and architecture was full bloomed with the gorgeous craftsmanship by two heroes, According to the account of the the Tibetan Lama Taranath', during the reign of Devapala there flourished two famous artists-Dhiman and his son Bitopal who produced many outstanding works in sculpture and painting form for architectural majesty. This father and son partnership gave rise two distinct schools of Art which had many followers<sup>2</sup>. It is probable that many art centers were functioning simultaneously in the different region of the extensive Pala Empire. Sculptures became the inherent elements in practice of architecture. A large number of stone sculptures discovered throughout Bengal were perhaps the creation of artists from different schools; it is notable that those sculptures were perhaps embedded on the different monasteries or Buddhist structures. Stone has always been a precious material in Bengal and therefore, when Bengal and Bihar came under one rule during the Pala period, the access to the nearest stone quarry in Rajmahal hills of Bihar became much easier to the Bengal and the availability of stone ensured the creation of a school of artists to work in this materials. The research focus is to address the Pala sculptures and the architecture of those days were the soul and integrated part of practice, professional and connotation respected the architecture with the form of art, a brick terracotta façade was accomplished with the illustration of the brilliant stone sculptures. And the movement was entirely motivated in Bengal—an ancient architecture when it was born to built it was obviously associated with the artistic cooperation- a practice that became unique, rich, and spectacular and became the part of the Heritage. The research will also endow the components of artistic activities that determined and cherish the wisdom of spatial excellence of particular architecture in practice.

**Keywords:** spatial excellence, professional and connotation, architectural practice, stylistic interpretations, craftsmanship, spiritual sense, arty surroundings, sculptural arts, art and architecture, artistic activities.

### 1. Introduction

The growth of the Bengal Delta took places in stages. The older deltas were populated first, and subsequently the more recent deltas. It appears

that the older delta in North Bengal was to receive people as it was adjacent to the Chotanagpur plateau. This land form governed people to live with the house of God, the '*garva-griha*' which is the authentic space to let the Deity live. The

1. Alam, A.K.M., 'Sculptural Art of Bangladesh', Department of Archaeology and Museum, Dhaka, 1985, p. 34.

2. W.L.B.C.S. Heely, 'Extracts from Taranath's History of Buddhism, Indian Antiquary, Vol. IV. P.102.

preparation of ornamenting the *garva-greha* is the process of elaborative stone curving or the terracotta works on the surface. Both art and architectural practice in the Pala craftsmanship enhanced the God-goddess art form with the association of spatial environment in the temple. The Pala dynasty lasted four hundred years. During the long period the devout Buddhist kings actively patronized Buddhism and a number of large new Buddhist centers sprang up in various parts of Bengal and Bihar. The Buddhist monastery at Paharpur is one of the biggest of its kind in South-East Asia, was established by Raja Dharmapala (the 2<sup>nd</sup> ruler of the dynasty). His descendent Ramapala (c. 1082-1124) established the *Jagaddala Mahabihara* in *Varind* and the *Odantipura Mahabihara* in Bihar both which won international fame. *Nalanda bihara* was no exception from them. When the religious activities, incentives were created for the sculptural art in stone and cast metal as well as the painting. According to the account of the Tibetan Lama Taranath, during the reign of the Devapala there flourished two famous artist-Dhiman and his son Bitopal who produced many outstanding works in cast metal as well as black basalt stone sculptures and painting. The father and son partnership gave rise to two distinct schools of Art which had many followers.<sup>3</sup> It is probable that many art centers were functioning simultaneously in the different region of the extensive Pala epoch. One thing is very much focused that a large number of stone (black basalt) sculptures discovered and excavated throughout Bengal, especially at the ancient Gaur area. Stone sculptures emerged rapidly in the Pala period, whereas the practice were rare in the pre-Pala era and

became the practice in Architecture to plaque sculptures in the spatial form.

During the particular dynasty, the level of craftsmanship in making and creating the stone sculptures positioned with the unique style of Bengal-Sculptures. Distinctively the proportion, form, stylistic approach, expressions and the settings in the space with all concern –became glorious part for the religious architecture. The religious architecture in this region was nothing but the offering chamber or the *Garva-griha*. The Pala people always had the notion to integrate the sculpture with the association of the spatial situation, which happened both for the interior and exterior cases. Not only the terracotta works was the 'focused envelope' of an architecture but the glossy black and basalt stone were strongly incorporated on the façade to achieve balance as well as the visual stability by adding the large number of stone sculpture. Stone had always been precious materials in Bengal and therefore, when Bengal and Bihar came under one rule during the Pala period. That Access to the nearest stone quarry in the Rajmahal hills of Bihar became much easier to the Bengalis and the availability of stone ensured the creation of a special art school. The excellent works of Dhiman and Bitpala resembled the work of the *Gnaga*. The works of these and the follower traveled far beyond the territorial limits of Bengal.

The art and the architectural practice during the Pala period was the astonishing development, relationship with the spatial correspondence as well as the 'symphonized-happening' were rested during the time.

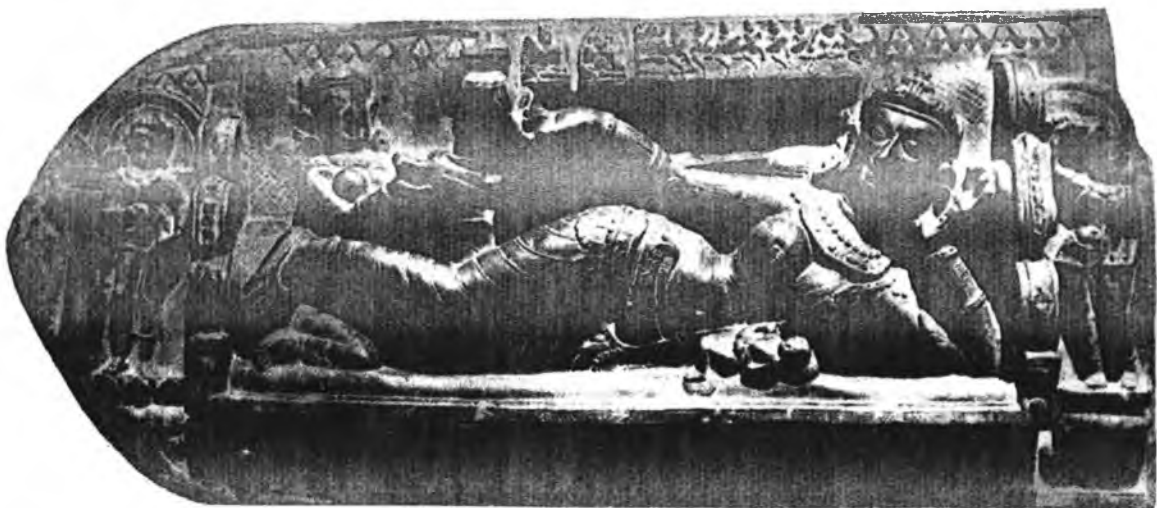


Figure 1: mother and child (10<sup>th</sup> Century), Blackbasalt, 67X28 cm, Mahasthan Museum

3. W.L.B.C.S. Heely, Extracts from Taranath's History of Buddhism, Indian Antiquary, Vol IV. P.102

## 2. Objective

The objective of the research paper is to focus on the excellence of the stone sculpture, how it is incorporated with the building structures, and the scale of level and the principal of understanding the articulating-scheme in the religious spaces are the addressing part of the study. The practice and the exercise of art and architecture during the Pala age are another point of focus of the research. So the paper will be trying to explore the glorious practice and the method of art surrounding through the critical analysis.

## 3. Methodology of study

Critical literature survey and museum visit along with the historical sites visit is the part of the study. Search for the formal relationship between the sculpture and the architecture by the section and proportion analysis. Lighting situation, colour and the textural quality would be the study methodology.

## 4. 'Concept of art' in space: justification

The concept of space is valued in various art-forms, starting from poetry, then to architecture, painting, and sculpture and culminating in music. "Imaginary space". In literature creation of an imaginary space is a common phenomenon other than the "physical space". Another kind of space, "metaphysical space", is also present in literature that is between different times, the linkage between which is established later on in the story of art and sculptures. In case of art surrounding these spaces are much more fluid with a lot of imagination. By eloquently narrating art situation unearthly spaces/connections overlaps and dissolves into each other in a very subtle manner along with a frozen time, referring to imaginary spaces in art and architecture Pala people were concern very much.

Sculpture is an integral part of the architecture of Greek, Roman, Indian and Renaissance times, whether because of religion, but one thing is clear that these buildings rise above their perceptible functions. Nevertheless they are at the same time perfectly balanced, a balance rarely found in painting as this would render the painting dull, boring and rather too obvious. There is one art form similar to architecture in terms of creating symmetrical balance; the art of pottery comes closest to the

architecture in its practice, however the surface decoration need not necessarily conform to that perfect balance.

The way the figures are detailed gives the sculpture a kind of a movement in space. In music, the space is not at all mechanical instead it has a harmony which is known as *tail* (figure 2). Beautifully singing a piece of a *raag*, there is a form in music which actually is the space as the form is constantly moving, providing the capacity to the singer to stretch or hold it. Sound itself is space and because of this integrity it is referred to as the purest form of art in the world, especially the classical music.

## 5. Practice and principle of Pala Sculptures in spatial pattern

The features of Pala sculptures were developed from the late Gupta period style. However at a later stage the Pala style drifted away from its origin and developed its own style, known as the Pala School of Sculptural Art. Gradually the Pala School of Sculptural Art developed their separate identity.<sup>5</sup>

Not only the sculptural element but the basic features of the Pala School of Sculptural Art were also modified on the model of the Gupta style. The new style integrated a number of attributes that were common to the native Bengali sculpture and architecture. Most of the sculptures that have been discovered in Bangladesh and West Bengal have been carved out of Rajmahal black basalt stone. The 11th century artists have made these lifeless figures come alive on stone. The bronze sculptures also flourished simultaneously in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12th centuries.

Most of the sculptures in the Pala Empire were used for religious purposes. Hence these sculptures were built in such a way so that they could stand the rough weather. The sculptures of the deities were carved out of fine grained black stones. Such sculptures have been discovered in all over Bengal. However towards the 10th century a local school of sculptural art developed. During this era the artists had to work within certain limitations and they followed the established canons. Yet these artists were successful in separating their art from the early Pala period. In fact it is recorded that during the reign of kings Devapala and Dharmapala an artist named Dhiman and his son Bitapala resided in Varendra. It is this

4. Zaidi, Shah Nawaz, Professor, Trust for History Arts & Architecture, Pakistan, Lecture on The Concept of Space in Art, July, 30, 2011

5. [http://www.indianetzone.com/35/pala\\_school\\_sculptural\\_art\\_indian\\_sculpture.htm](http://www.indianetzone.com/35/pala_school_sculptural_art_indian_sculpture.htm)



Figure 2: *The Ganga*, (12<sup>th</sup> century) polished, 160 cm high, Rajshahi Museum

father son duo who established the two schools of Pala art.

An interesting change is noted in the way the contours of the main deity are carved out of the black stone. This process turns the aureole into 'prabhamandala' (halo). This method rendered a completely new artistic dimension to the Pala School of Sculptural Art.

The twelfth century sculptures have the soft, half-timid, sharp, amiable features that are prototypes of the Bengali style (figure 2).

The Pala Sculptors like Dhiman and Bitopal used to have some order in creating sculptures within the space, the spatial pattern generally governed art and sculptures on the other hand the thing was reversible, the technique of maintaining proportion, scale, balance and focusing on the façade or in the interior were the measuring or resourceful initiative. Based on the experiences and craftsmanship the Pala sculptors settled some grammar of instillation in architecture. Those are discussed below. *Figure 3: critically identifying the component of Pala Sculpture*

### 5.1 Composition in respect to the spatial pattern

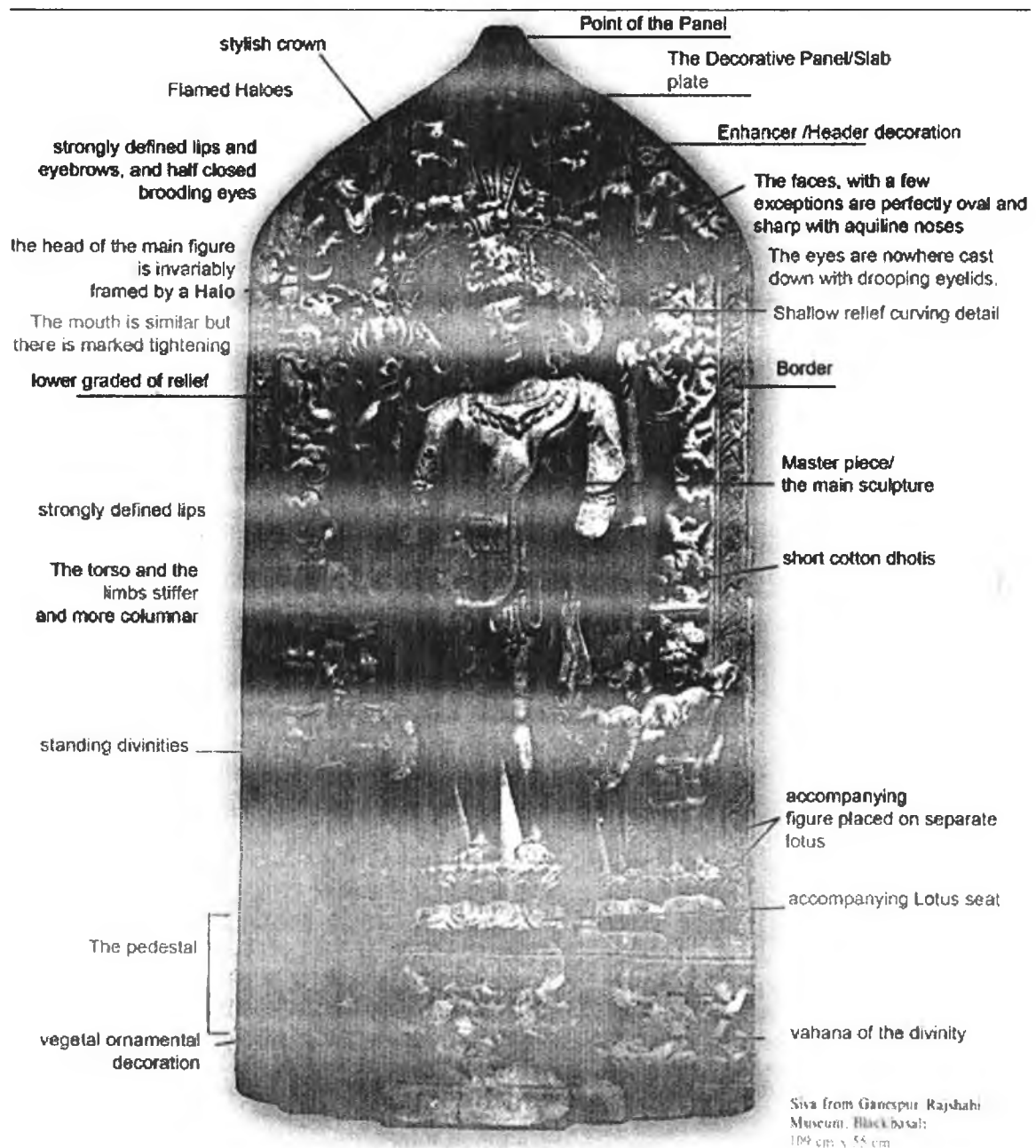
Most of the Pala Sculptures are carved in the relief in form of idol stelae. In the plate the centre of the composition is engaged by the main deity in high relief with the accompanying Lotus seat. On either side of the main figure appear the standing divinities and other accompanying figure placed on separate lotus, alternate figures are shown in smaller scale, in lower graded of relief. The pedestal below the lotus seat of the main deity shows on its main face and side, the vahana of the divinity represent, or vegetal ornamental decoration. The head of the main figure is invariably framed by a Halo. It is dominant that the feathers were embedded on the deity, all this ornamentation, panelling and the moulding were synchronized on the offering hall as well as the Garva-griha

### 5.2 Body Type and Proportion :

The human form of the Pala sculpture is clearly derived from the late Gupta ideal, but it is slimmer, longer and rounder. The torso and the limbs stiffer and more columnar, and the contour of the figure and articulation of the joints are sharper. The transition from one plane to another is also less subtle. In some respect the body of the early Pala sculptures is relatively shorter.

### 5.3 Facial Characteristic

The Pala sculptures show a marked departure from the Gupta tradition in respect of their facial characteristics. This is due to the nature of the people who are ethnically different and mentally more emotional. The faces, with a few exceptions, are perfectly oval and are sharp with aquiline noses, strongly defined lips and eyebrows, and half closed brooding eyes. The eyes are nowhere cast down with drooping eyelids. The eyebrows are formed by incision rather than by a raised line or a simple edge as was done in Gupta period. The mouth is similar but there is marked tightening so that the angles of the



**PALA Sculpture 9th Century:  
Analysis and Identification of Components of the art piece**

*Figure 3: critically identifying the component of Pala Sculpture*

eyebrows and mouth are more emphasised, giving the face a self-satisfied expression.<sup>6</sup>

#### 5.4 Haloes

Flamed Haloes were regarded by some scholars as one of the hallmarks of the Pala style.<sup>7</sup>

6. Ibid, pl.XXI. XXII

It is observed that plain circular haloes first appeared in the Kushana period and continued throughout the Gupta age. But they are all round and unframed. Gupta haloes are elaborately decorated, but the decoration is loti-form. The general development seems to have been from the circular and slightly elongated oval for the head haloes, while some of the

7. Artibus Asiae, Vol. XXV, p.314.



Figure 4: Colossal Buddha, Paharpur excavation 1982



Figure 5: four headed Bust of Vishnu 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Rangpur

later Gupta sculpture exhibit a tendency for / towards at the top. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries Pala sculptures became more pronounced fully flamed and stylised. It is noteworthy to mention that the size of the flames in the Pala haloes are small and narrow, the inner ring to which they are attached. The flames of the Pala stone image lie next to each other so that there are little, if any, spaces separating their tips.

### 5.5 Pedestal and Lotus Base

The common pedestal for the Pala sculptures is the pancharatna or five projection face. Pedestal with triratna or three projection face a representation of the vahana of the deity as well as representation of the donor and other decorative design. Above the pedestal rest the lotus seat on which stands or is seated the main image.

### 5.6 Costume and accessories

The statues of the Pala period are shown with scanty clothing. The upper part of the body form is nearly

always bare, except as the habit of ornamental choice, sometimes were adorned with personal conventional jewellery. Basically the male figure in sculpture are seen with clothed with short cotton dhotis. Some of the Buddhist images were seen with single clothing long covered towards the entire body with cotton texture. In some rare cases, the upper torso of the image is seen with a narrower scarf is completely diaphanous and the folds are shown schematically. Beside some Buddha images, the scarf is seen on some of the images of Shiva, Vishnu, Garuda.<sup>8</sup> Female sculptures were clothed with sari, the lower part of the figure was observed to cover with ornamental or rich edged decoration (figure: 1). The sari of modern day is completely different from the Pala sculptures sari. Most of the cases the upper part of the sculptures of female was elaborated with wide band or ribbon (ornamental lace). 'Ganga' sculpture (figure 2) has this kind of dressing with precious ornamentation.

8. Ibid, pl. XL, XXI.



In architectural spatial pattern, the accessories that were used in the façade had the similarities, the panelling works of the interior façade, niches, window palmate, ceiling and the organisation of the ceiling was cherished by the sculptures. Art and architecture of this period was deliberately dominant in space making. Relics, motifs and terracotta of the stone plaques were designed associating the sculpture's details, and embedded on the frontal faces.

### 5.7 The Crown

In Pala sculpture crowning is the essential part both for male and female; however it was decorated with rich detail. The stylish crown had the gradual development in ornamentation, it is easy to identify the age of movement (period). Male figures were having the cone shaped crown with tapering; in the Buddhist sculpture some varieties of the crown can be notched. The common type is a three pointed crown with more or less solid cones tapering to a blunted top. Crown has the related situation with architecture. Crown has mass, which helps to harmonize both the sculptor. Sometime the crown was designed as the replica of the temple's sikhara (figure 6). The profile outline of the crown was also used in the alcove or the main wall panelling. Though the crowning symmetric approach spatial pattern of the religious space was focused.

Various CROWNS of Pala Sculptures 9th Century AD

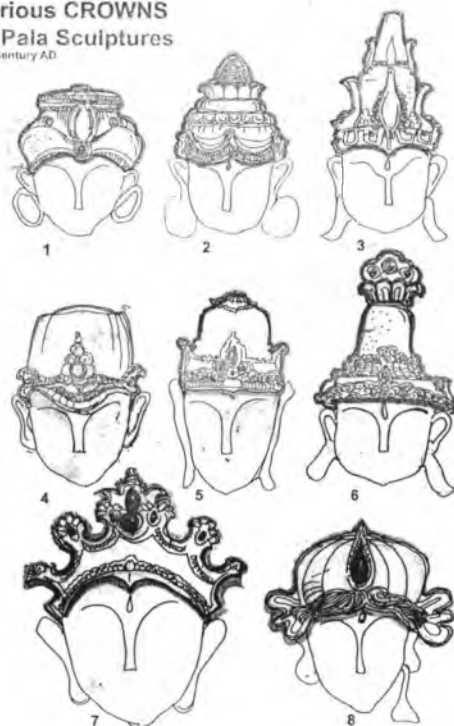


Figure 6: various form of crowns on deity

### 5.8 Ornaments

Like a typical Bengali woman Pala sculptures were ornate with necklaces and armlets were both common in male and female (figure 1).

Dhiman and Bitopal partnership took Pala sculptures to the height of arts in Bengal. The ornamentation and the form of arranging the elements to integrate sculptures posture and surrounding were distinct from the other sculpture art of the world. The partnership also excelled for the art and sculpture school to do better towards the close of the 10th century, the first renaissance of the Bengal School of Art took place when Mahipala I succeeded in establishing the second Pala Empire. At this point the artists of Bengal broke away from the shared traditions with Magadha. The revival of political power led to renewed artistic activities and the tempo was maintained throughout the 11th century.

Ornamentation and sculpture art became the prime identification for the Pala house pattern, the structural members were treated as the sculptural part of the spatial pattern. During the Pala period the entry door frame, the door itself, the column, the beams, brackets and lastly the partition wall whether it is perforated or not, were turned up to sculptural value. The head of the Pala style lion (figure 8), the ornamentation of the precious jewellery on the

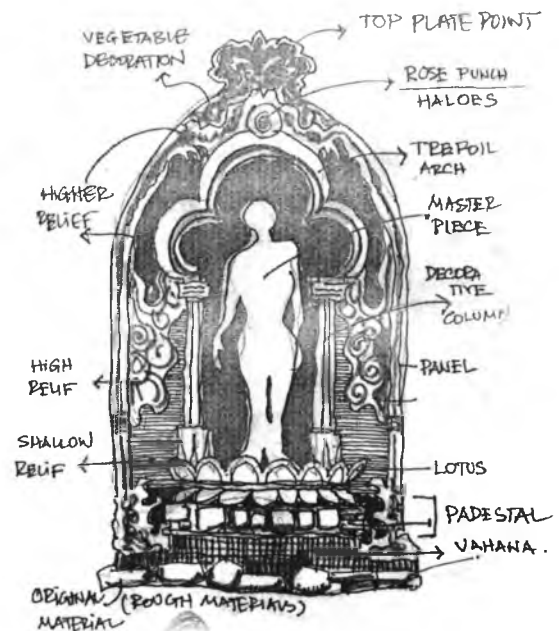


Figure 7: sculptural elements were influenced in architectural spaces design

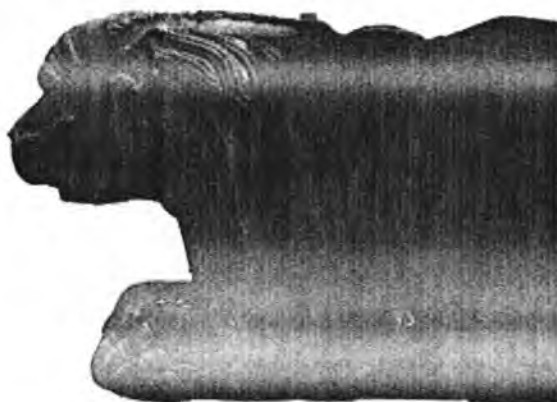


Figure 8: lion headed beam capping, 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 9: Column reflects the Pala arts

column shaft (figure 9), male and female figure on the column and Cornish all this phenomenon were influenced art and architectural practice during those time. Meeting the sense and sophistication art and architecture of the Pala dynasty had the exceptional mindset to secure the valued practice of architecture.

Point to be noted about the ornaments, they are always and invariably chiseled with utmost care and meticulous precision, with all their intricate workmanship. This is in striking contrast to the attitude of the body which hardly bears any evidence of a realistic approach to anatomical detail.

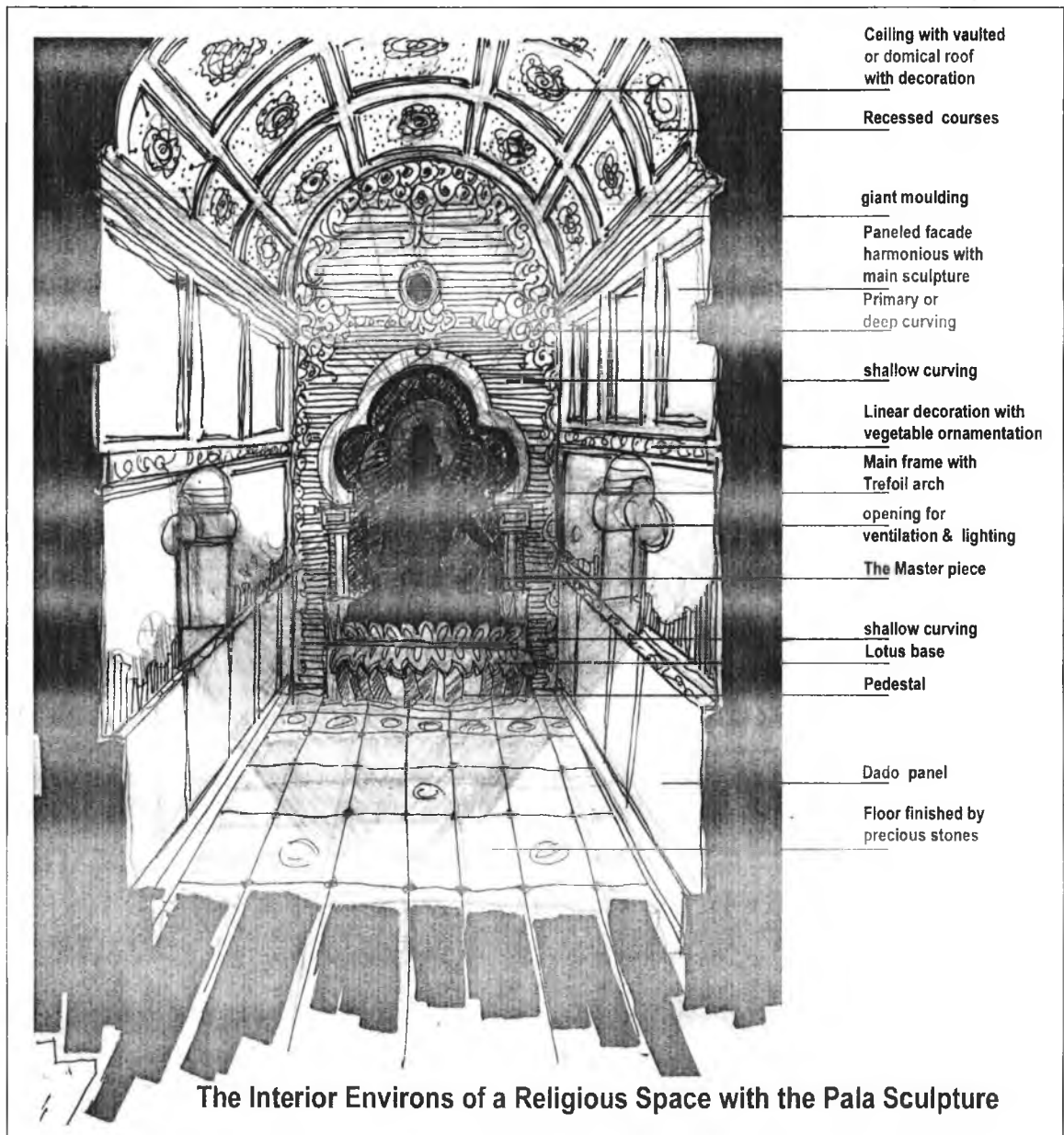
### 5.9 Technical perfection

The Pala and Sena sculptures are characterized by a precision of execution unmatched by any other schools of Indian sculpture.<sup>9</sup> The clean cut features and smooth finishing of many of the stone images gives one impression that they are imitations of metal work. The vast number of metal images discovered from Nalanda and Kurkihar in Bihar; Jewelry; Mainamati and many other places in Bangladesh are also marked with the same kind of stylized elegance and fondness for precise definition of detail. The mechanical skills of the casters technique became more perfected in the .....

The over emphasis on perfection and surface details no doubt has minimized sense of plastic conception of the stone images but they have made the Pala sculptures appear so different that they can now be easily distinguished from the rest of Indian specimens by the sharp clear-cut features of the figures and their glossy finish (figure 2,3,5). The forms and features of the Pala sculptures, described above in the abstract is based not only on the sculptures found in Bangladesh. In a process of long evaluation, the stone sculpture of the Pala period secure the plastic quality of art was consciously channeled and transmitted in to the correctness of its form. The artistic activities changed in the matured form movement. The school of art and sculpture of Varendra region had got the distinct formal expression of the sculpture as well as the style of the school or the institution, so it was a noticing matter that all different school had vale in making sculptures in Bengal. From the later part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century there is a tendency to impart superficial elegance by adding rich costumes and jewelries, in this stage the figure and outline of the sculpture changed and became more spontaneous. In broad outline the main technique that were at work at back of this creation in

9. Alam, A.K.M. Shamsul, Sculptural Art of Bangladesh, p. 140





The Interior Environs of a Religious Space with the Pala Sculpture

Figure 10: the spiritual spatial pattern, 'symphonized-happening'. Integrated with Pala arty surrounding

each successive stage beginning from the 9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

### 5.10 Colour and Light in Pala Sculptures

Colour and light always facilities the creators, the clear sky and sunshine hemisphere is a gift for us to do detail more and more, we do create pattern for this in art and architecture, the temple is the integrated part of the designed sculptures form the Pala period. The craftsmen are deliberated to play with light and shadow pattern.

Pattern development was derived by the craftsman ship in the locality; the basic practice was carried out for the thousand of years. Pattern of sculpture is the inherent characteristics of the Bengal's Brick temples; all were purposefully-built. The geometry of the temple and its east orientation helps to create the environment with deep cut shade-shadow situation. And that shade shadow makes a pattern with surrounding, interior and facades. A brick isolated structure has the power to shape order of light and shadow along with brilliant pattern by the sculptures in interior. Being a purpose-built building,

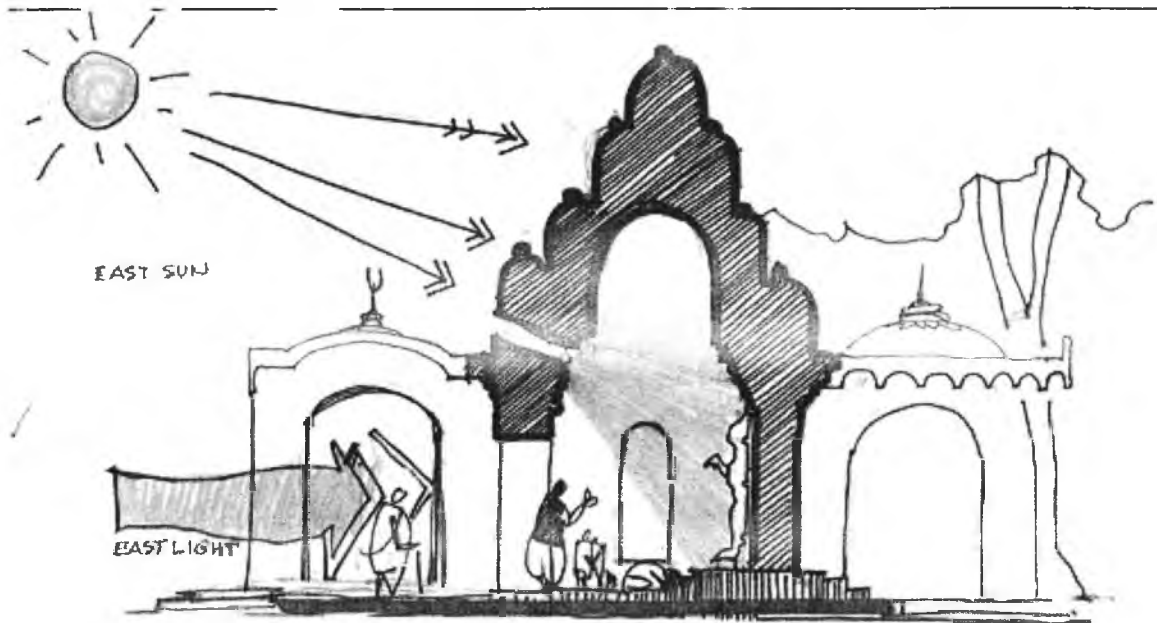


Figure 11: shade-shadow pattern and the illumines of lighting on the sculpture and surrounding

the light, colour, texture and the shade-shadow pattern creates the environ for the pilgrims. The vocabulary of the shade-shadow pattern and the illumines of lighting on the sculpture and surrounding, is motivating and ever freshing for pilgrims.

#### 6. Summery and observation

The Pala School developed its own style of expression as early the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. this school, soon acquired its own individuality. It is really a nationalistic movement in the field of art and architecture. In all branches of art and architecture, sculpture both in stone and cast metal, painting and in architecture, great enthusiasm was created by the stable political condition.

A renaissance was brought about in the field of art and architecture at this stage. All local style were assimilated. North Bangle was precisely known as the empire ship of CHANDRA King, with his patronizations sculpture school and art culture excelled to full invention.

The main characteristics of the renaissance (9<sup>th</sup> Century) period and the century following it, are the popularity of stone sculptures and the increase in Brahmanical image. The art of bronze sculpture show the better and more detailed execution.

It is however from the plastic point of view, the sculpture became stereotype, because they

emphasized more on the decoration and physical charm. The height of perfection was attained in the technique of execution.

The stone sculptures are very much well known for their smoother polished finish as well as detailed curving. Some of the bronze sculptures of this period are of extremely in fine quality.

'*symphonized-happening*'- indeed the main addressing point is the association and practices of architecture with the Pala art, some remarks are as followed:

#### 6.1 Thick mason walls punches and lighting sensitivity on the black basalt sculpture

Scientifically thick brick mason wall helps to retain prayer hall cool. So temperature has the quality to manipulate the lighting condition. Lighting gets the quality of comprehensiveness and has the sensitive impact on human mind. That is why space for the prayer remains restful and spiritual climax. Moreover the black shiny and smooth plastic form of sculpture reflect the east sun light, make the spatial pattern more dramatic and spiritual.

#### 6.2 Locale-hue and Black basalt stone sculpture

A terracotta brick temple is the place for the people of the region and becomes familiar only when it looks as 'locale-hue'. 'Locale-hue' is nothing but the colour that is experienced by the local people in their

everyday life, so mud and clay when turns into terracotta brick the hue or the colour remain almost same. The lime pining thin layer of coating when execute on the facade that has the quality to rebuild the façade colour just about the same as the clay hue. These results a very native impact evolves on the human mind, building with belongingness. With the addition of the stone sculpture on the bottom of the structure creates a balanced color composition with the terracotta. So colour has the quality to make human mind intimate and friendly.

### 6.3 'Pala Sculpture'-as the living canvas on terracotta facade

The detail of the terracotta is nothing but elaborating the social lifestyle, household materials, granary, floral motifs and decoration along with trees and other plants development and lastly rose and lotus are very common in terracotta. These series of elaborative terracotta are so seen and contextual for the neighbour. The stone sculpture is bigger in dimension and appears the focal strip before the terracotta façade, so the stone curving on the red tinged background is a healthy creation of art, and still they are the living heritage and a canvas of time telling (Paharpur wall façade). Meanwhile light has the quality to carry out the whole blackish-reddish façade in a living canvas for the human being. It is however for the pilgrims to receive the architecture with the quality of colour and light.

### 6.4 Climate and craftsmanship

Climate and craftsmanship justify our local art and architecture in identical approach; it is not very unusual for the sculpture of Pala period also. The influences of the indigenous manner mould Pala Sculpture schooling in unique shape. Climate responded in the sculpture's costume, long length cotton clothing with Buddha is seen in 9<sup>th</sup> century sculpture, the ornamentation and the motif of the

sculpture were influenced by the local and daily use materials. So it was easy for the Pala sculptors especially Dheman and Bitopal associates, to give importance on the costume and culture.

### 6.5 Intellectual morphology and relationship

But behind this intellectuality it is noticeable that the bright sunshine, climate and craftsmanship shaped the rhythm of spontaneity for the people. The morphological analysis has the clear understand with light and narrate integrated relationship.

### 6.6 Clear hemisphere and formal appearance

Lastly nature and land form govern the formal appearance along with colour, texture and clear hemisphere to create masterpiece in each remote and localize area. At the same time human being were also attracted by the glory of its luminance and intelligent forming.

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