

Symbolic Morphologies: Built Form and Religion in Sylhet City, Bangladesh

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Abstract : Sylhet, Bangladesh's third-largest city, has transformed into a holy city due to its unique, dynamic, and informal religious practices. Its unique blend of Muslim and Hindu traditions, such deviation is rooted in Buddhist folk culture, creates cooperation rather than conflict between the two mainstream religions. Urban morphology and symbolic sacralization in South Asian cities like Sylhet are interrelated, while such 'leaky' relationships are often overlooked by Western researchers, as they are also not hopeful about the future of religion. Religion's presence in public spaces impacts spatial practices as vital nutrients for survival, even in contemporary everyday life. However, despite extensive research on urban morphology and religion separately, there is very limited literature to capture religious perceptions and experiences in urban spaces from the same platform. This research aims to fill an existing gap in third-world contexts, which also comprises its novelty, but using Western sociological and philosophical tools (mainly Baudrillard) never highlighted before. The methodology of the research will map key morphological and religious 'dissonances' in the city, which might include festival trajectories, street life observations, pedestrian densities, informal and formal religious activities, public and private interface types with religious commodification, and the identification of blurred boundaries between sacred and profane on smaller to broader urban scales. To relate the derived cartography, illustrative (not representative) interviews with inhabitants about religious signs and symbols will be conducted, coded, and compared accordingly. The study aims to explore the impact of urban morphology on sacred experiences, the relationship between consecrated entities and religious activities, and the unexplored connection between sacred and urban morphology.

Keywords : Sylhet, religion, urban morphology, symbolic exchange, Baudrillard

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