Search for Conceptual Framework in Architectural Works of Muzharul Islam

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To my Father
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Abstract

The thesis originated from the intention to examine a key architect of this country and his practical enterprises in the light of investigations whether his philosophies and practical endeavours have any bearing on contemporary thought and influence current theory and practices of architecture. Work of Muzharul Islam as case studies, it tries to explore the conceptual framework bearing on his own quest for relevancy and roots in architecture. In conclusion, the thesis shows that, despite the shorter period of his active involvement in the profession, the work of Muzharul Islam demonstrated an advancement of framing concepts derived from the vocabulary of certain contemporary western masters towards a more personal style. At the most abstract level, this advancement can be stated as a resultant effect of a dialectic process reflected through a progression of experiments carried out from his earlier work to the work of the late phase. This dialectic process can be summarised as a philosophical devise of 'causality' theory: having two factors acting together as a 'cause', and its 'effect' as a resultant phenomenon. The 'cause' factors are: 1) the knowledge of Modern Architecture in his formative period in the western countries and 2) the knowledge of adaptive techniques, he contrived in the practical application. The resultant 'effect' of the 'cause' shows that the architectural value in Muzharul Islam’s work exists in the synthesis of modernist inspiration and the inspiration emanating from his attitude towards the creation of a unity in mediating the conflicts and contradictions between modernist and traditionalist rules of expression.
Prologue

Following the partition of India in 1947, new context was set for revival of a new country within a new socio-political and geographical entity of East Pakistan. The then East Pakistan observed a period of some new architectural events that has not been seen since the era of Indo-European architecture of early 20s. Being trained in the West, Muzharul Islam, was believed to be entrusted with an opportunity to explore and initiate new approaches to design, as well as develop a profession, capable of articulating the needs of his country. Hence he assumes crucial significance in the architectural history of the then East Pakistan and consequently Bangladesh, for his contribution in the developed notions of architecture which recognised and celebrated the fact that no other architect of this region has ever attracted so much attention both locally and internationally beginning with his Art College, Dhaka University (1955). (Fig.1.)

In Bangladesh, since after its emergence in 1971, much has not been written or talked on architectural precedents set by its predecessors, the implication being, that the last fifty years of its architectural history were an aberration within a continuity of an overall study and practice of architecture. It is perhaps, for this reason that one denies the very lessons of those years, without which one would hardly be in a position to appreciate and, so to speak, rediscover one’s own.¹

One of the problems of examining the architectural precedents of Bangladesh lies in the prevailing lacuna in study and documentation of its architectural history as an intellectual

¹ Kazi Anisuddin Iqbal, (ed.): Portrait of Muzharul Islam based on an interview, in Sthapatya O Nirman, vol. 2, issue 1, Dhaka, January-March, 1992, pp.14-15. In the interview, Muzharul Islam referred to historical references to reinvigorate tradition and identity. The deepest concern for 'identity', for which Muzharul stressed in the interview, suggested that true architecture can only be a reality when it originates from its long cherished 'roots'. Also see Stanley Tigerman, pp. 63-64., to uncover Muzharul’s insight regarding his own tradition.
discipline. The question that comes up in any discussion on our local architectural history always fails to ascertain the proper influence bearing upon the ongoing development of architecture. Therefore, to interpret the history or to rediscover in the past in a truer critical discourse, major architects should be studied thoroughly assimilating the larger concerns of theory and practice framed within a comprehensive understanding of architecture.²

To create a critical discourse on architectural works of an architect entails appreciation of the coexisting architectural trends, relevancy of a particular context of a particular period. This would in turn encourage the students and professionals the very basis of evolution of their own architectural tradition. Perhaps for this, the thesis would contribute to the existing knowledge in architecture and will provide an opportunity to explore issues related to the theory and practice in a critical way. Record and analysis of an eminent local architect would be a source of inspiration and intellectual exercise to the younger generations. Architectural precedents are placed as durable symbols that remain in the cultural history as a testament to the lives of people, their spirit and aspirations³, and their civilisations. This thesis, in a way by examining some of those symbols contrived by a major architect, would help explore new patterns of pursuit and practice to meet the challenges of an evolving society with changed expectations. Then, there is the manifest debate between modern movement and 'contextualism' in architecture,⁴ which, in the present 'single entity' global context results in deepest ambivalences,⁵ related to cultural roots and relevances. A level of resolution of this international debate as contrived in the conclusion would allow this thesis to be related to a wider architectural milieu.

² Romi Khosla; Including Iconography and Images in Architecture, in the Techniques & Architecture: Architecture in India, Paris, September, 1985. p. 97. In search for architecture that links to the 'ethos' of a particular culture or tradition, Khosla suggested that the broad basis of architecture of a country entails detailed study of its major architects to reveal diachronic images and associations. In our local context too, the same implies when we go for studying one of the leading architects of this region - Muzharul Islam. Also see Colquhoun 1991, pp. 129-151, to comprehend the need for studying architects of a particular region to reveal the broad basis architecture is suggested.
³ Ibid., p. 97.
⁴ See, Sarayu Ahuja; Roots of Contemporary Style, in the Indian Architect & Builder, Rajul Shah (ed.), Business Press, Bombay, India; vol. 5 no. 5, January, 1992. p. 8-16. Probably it is one among the most crucial debates facing developing countries in the present days.
⁵ Ibid., pp. 8-16.
The thesis thus attempts to make a comprehensive study on architecture on the need to reinvent the local tradition and possibilities by examining one of its most influential architects - Muzharul Islam. Through this research, the existing information of architectural history, theory and criticism can be extended in an unexplored direction by investigating the ways in which the architect has thought about and studied architecture, the kinds of values and meanings he thought his works embody, and the extent to which his ideas have changed with the varying intellectual climate of successive generations.

**Defining the Conceptual Framework**

*Before you study the history, study the historian ... Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment. The historian, being an individual, is also a product of history and of society; and it is in this twofold light that the student of history must learn to regard him.*

( Watkin 1983 )

The implication of Watkin’s statement lies in tune with the basic purpose of this research, in which it is engaged to identify the theories/concepts that underlie the architect’s part in the making of architecture and to provide analysis of the contextual relationships between the architectural product and the historical-cultural development. Therefore, in the sequence of identifying Muzharul’s conceptual framework, it is intended to build upon and develop an understanding of architectural vocabulary as a whole, framed within a thorough investigation of larger implications of his architectural design. The implications entail Muzharul’s ability in the creative synthesis in the search for architecture within the boundaries of this region, the clarity of purpose in the making of architectural form, materials and construction techniques, and his ultimate sense of architectural judgements and actions. Finally, it is intended to explore the conceptual framework that underlie Muzharul’s work through the critical juxtaposition of those investigated information in an attempt to draw upon his personality in the development of the architecture in particular, and the intellectual atmosphere in general.

The research is largely based on case studies, supplemented by systematic documentation of Muzharul’s buildings and projects and review of relevant literature and treatises on him. A background research on available literature and discussion with the architect

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reciprocated the case studies. Specific emphasis is placed on a critical inquiry of the architect's different projects on the basis of architect’s skills in architectural form-making and representation against certain basic architectural tenets, such as:

1. Spatial organisation (attitude to space making through layers, from outside to inside, from profane to sacred etc.)
2. Ordering ideas (whether it accepted complexity and vibrant resolution of divergence or an apparent easy resolution of reducing them to singular unity)
3. Elemental laws concerning massing, circulation, structure and services and space definition etc.
4. Relationship between fundamental elements of architecture.

In this regard, these design precepts can be considered as the major criteria for analysing and evaluating whether his works are built upon those precepts and brings about a conceptual framework based on relationships between culture/context and general theory of ideas.

List of Case Studies

The projects taken as case studies are listed below:

- Art College (now Fine Arts Institute, Dhaka University, Dhaka.
- Public Library (now Central Library, Dhaka University, Dhaka.
- The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Laboratories (CSIR), Dhaka.
- The National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA), Dhaka.
- The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation office, Dhaka.
- EFU Building, Dhaka.
- Five Polytechnic Institutes (Rangpur, Pabna, Barisal, Bogra and Sylhet).
- Own Residence, Dhaka.
- New Campus for Chittagong University, Chittagong.
- Campus for Jahangimagar University, Savar.
- Housing for Limestone Mining and cement Works, Joypurhat.
- National Library and the National Archives, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.

The case studies selected cover almost all the representative works of Muzharul Islam. The projects not listed or taken as case studies for the thesis for the following reasons:

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7 This project was done in collaboration with Stanley Tigerman, a close-friend of Muzharul and classmate at Yale.
First, the architect does not want to ‘own’ those projects due to his personal dissatisfaction, which probably resulted from the professional complications he encountered throughout his career. Second, the unlisted projects have deficiency related to availability of information.

Outline of the Thesis

'The search for tradition, culture, architecture and art in newly independent and once-colonised countries is a continuing struggle. In architecture this task is extremely perplexing, especially when there exists in a country a contemporary trend of modernism which blindly follows Western models.' Probably, the main reason for the task to be perplexing is the predominant lacuna endemic to Bangladesh in all-intellectual discipline in the search for identity and the transition from colonial to independent rule. Despite this never-ending debate on the role of British colonialism on the Indian sub-continent, it is almost proved to be true that we can not leave out the ‘overwhelming spectre’ of colonialism even in contemporary times.

The analytical methodology adopted, first takes an overview of Muzharul’s career in a non-conceptual observation and then authenticates it against the critical findings from the detailed study of case studies. Second, the investigation ends with arriving at a synthesis by dialectically juxtaposing those observations.

The first chapter of the thesis provides an overview of Muzharul’s professional career through his thoughts as textual productions and chronological information about his projects. This chapter acts as a tool to examine the issues related to Muzharul’s notions and practices in the light of inquiring the being of consistencies and dilemma in his outputs.

8 Kazi Anisuddin Iqbal, (ed.); Portrait of Muzharul Islam based on an interview, in Sthapattya O Nirman, 1992, p. 15. The fact is, Muzharul enjoyed only twelve years of his calculated thirty-six years of professional career and rest of the time he was deliberately barred from designing for political reasons.

9 Saif-ul-haq; Architecture within the folk tradition: a representation from Bangladesh, in Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, vol. v, no. ii, , IASTE, University of California Berkley, California, Spring, 1994, p.72. Referred to Bangladesh situation while explaining the ‘neglect of tradition’.
The second chapter deals with the case studies. The individual cases are studied to explore the underlying concept Muzharul framed up in dealing with broad-based issues of architecture. The issues are identified as 'expressive languages' Muzharul lodged to form his architectural territory. The case studies are thus analysed critically to interpret the underlying meaning of formal elements, order and their relationships coherently expressed in the expressive territory of Muzharul Islam.

The third chapter deals with more representative projects short-listed from the broad-based case studies to render a more coherent image or reflection of the expressive vocabularies of Muzharul Islam. The analysis technique employed, to show the formalities and their consistencies in the projects, is based on a recognised tool developed by the School of Design, North Carolina State University at Raleigh (Utsey 1982).

The fourth chapter is the concluding chapter. It tries to bring about a synthesised opinion formed on the basis of studies and observations of the earlier chapters. However, this chapter also portrays Muzharul’s conceptual framework in a dialectic interpretation, which establishes the theoretical relationship between Muzharul Islam and the contemporary paradigms. It also provides an epilogue suggesting the inmost abstracted lessons of Muzharul Islam in contrast to any conclusive statement of polemical stance.

Chapter 01

Muzharul Islam: thoughts and practice
Selected Thoughts of Muzharul Islam

For more than forty years, Muzharul Islam (1923-) has fought his lonely yet committed struggle in the resistance of what he called ‘domination of Western ideas and Western culture’. Except for a short period in the early phase of his professional career, it is evident through his works that he has strongly believed and acknowledged the need for the ‘sensibilities’ of tradition and culture to be incorporated in buildings. There are two opposing views observed on Muzharul Islam. One has been accusing Muzharul Islam, and still is, of being ‘modernist, romantic, controversial’ and to the other, he has been praised, and still is, for his belief in ‘contextualism’, humanism, individualism, and appropriate technology. The fact still remains that Muzharul has created the nascent architectural culture of Bangladesh, carrying out a struggle against government bureaucracy, against political domination by engineers, and against academic sterility. Moreover, he has incarnated ethical architectural practice in Bangladesh (and Pakistan before 1971) and ‘progressively’ enlightened architectural endeavour. In his own words Muzharul Islam has been always persistent in formulating a Bengali sense of identity in architecture. His interpretation of tradition and the spirit of roots lies in an unconventional understanding of architecture and identity. The essential point of this understanding puts it to be ‘untraditional’ and ‘progressivist’. In summary form, his views on ‘progressivist ideology’ in architecture are expressed as:

‘To clearly visualise the forces which shaped the form and content of architecture in Bangladesh, it is necessary to examine the buildings from ancient times to present day. Unfortunately, due to the destructive activities of man and the ravages of nature very few ancient buildings survived up to the present day. For example, no traces can be found of the cities, which flourished, in ancient Bengal.

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11 Ibid, p. 55. The scenario of the then Bangladesh when Muzharul virtually launched a lonely struggle to develop a true architectural environment is depicted in Ashraf’s article.


13 Muzharul, Kahn and Architecture, p. 58.

such as Gange, Tamralipti, Kamasubarna, Kotibarsa, Panchanagari, Rampal, etc. The British cultural domination (during the British Period, 1757-1947) was so thorough and devastating that it completely severed the continuity of Bengal socio-cultural and economic life, including the development of regional architecture. They (British) put up their first buildings as exact facsimiles of buildings in Europe, visually executed in the neo-classical manner popular in Europe in those days. Examples include Calcutta Government House, Serampore College, Dhaka Old State Bank Building, etc. These buildings, in white plaster with their Graeco-Roman visual features, bore no sympathy to the site, the landscape or existing milieu of the region. Upto the advent of the Mughals whatever happened was ultimately Bengali with the root deep in the tradition and culture of the country. The Mughals came with an imperialist outlook and created the first disturbance in the continuity in the field of architecture. And the coming of the British saw a total severance of all ties with the existing culture of the country.” 15. (Islam 1985)

Muzharul portrayed British rule much as a cultural holocaust in the continuity of historical development of this region. Muzharul Islam not being superficial, categorically and chronologically showed how the cultural and geographical overtones of this region have been neglected and ignored. He was quite aware of the fact that the immense gap between various periods of development through the past is a reality and thus we are set to face this as an actual context of architecture. He acknowledges explicitly by saying that probably it may not ever be possible to bridge the gap in a real sense between the Sultanate period and present day Bangladesh.

Muzharul Islam, as a thinker, always expressed his concern over the ‘contradiction’ inherent in our current educational system modelled on Western curricula and the urge to react to actual context. His view on this dilemma affirmed that ‘there is no reason why any architect in our countries should have a view limited by the boundaries of our countries. It is obvious that technologically and culturally nobody can live in isolation. But then there is the question of pride in one’s own work. And that work can be the product

15 Ibid., p. 9.8. Reading this article would provide oneself with Muzharul’s discretion in the detailed study of history of this region.
of one's own creative activity'. Muzharul turned immediately to the 'regional manifestation of architecture' and said that 'without deep roots in one's own culture and the heritage of the people it is not probably possible to sustain a creative life. In this context, the regional manifestation of architecture and other art forms is inevitable. Regionalism can only enrich the idea of world cultures- without it the world becomes very drab indeed!'\textsuperscript{16} (Islam 1985)

Muzharul's forethought on patronising great architects of the world has proved to be worthwhile in lifting a nation's pride and esteem. \textit{Shangshad Bhavan (Fig.2.)} designed by Louis I. Kahn, now stands for our 'genuine national aspiration'\textsuperscript{17}. His inclination of conceiving buildings that symbolise human dignity and aspirations, and where such aspirations can lead to achievements, guided him to comment on Kahn's work; he believed that 'there are projects which due to their importance in national life can afford to be slightly extravagant.' Kahn's \textit{Shangshad Bhaban}, which triggered controversies and objections centred on cost, Muzharul, who actually was responsible for contacting Kahn, averted the 'critics' understanding of the project' by saying:

\textit{... They became extra sympathetic with our so-called predicament (cost-author). They shed tears about the poverty of Bangladesh, and the unwise squandering of money over the project and so on. But the irony of it is that those who object to}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 9.8. Reading this article would provide oneself with Muzharul's discretion in the detailed study of our history.

\textsuperscript{17} Muzharul, Kahn and Architecture, p. 58.
the spending of 40 million dollars for the construction of the National Assembly Complex would gladly sell us refrigerators worth at least that much in a year, or 100 million dollars worth of automobiles. We wanted a building all can be proud of, and, we think we got that at quite a modest price.18 (Banerji, 1988)

**Professiona Career: an overview**

Muzharul Islam was the first formally trained Bengali architect after 1947 in this region. He is arguably the leading architect in Bangladesh. He was educated in India, England and the U.S. in science, engineering and architecture.

Muzharul's professional life can theoretically be classified into three distinctive chronological periods:

1. **Early Phase (1953-64):**

   Being trained as a civil engineer, Muzharul preferred to study architecture and attended the University of Oregon in the U.S.A. and Yale University for post-graduate level education. Muzharul Islam joined the Communications and Building Department (C & B) of the government in 1953. There did not exist any private architectural offices at that time. He established his own office 'Vastukalabid' – more of a studio, the springboard for passionate movements by committed young architects (Ashraf, 1989) and began his design activities as a private practitioner in 1964. The construction of the Public Library (now Dhaka University Central Library) (Fig.3) and the Art College (Fig.4) in 1955 in Dhaka marked a particular and explicit shift in the architecture of the then East Pakistan. His early

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18 Banerji, Anupam; A Recent Conversation with Architect Mazharul Islam in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in Environments, Anupam Banerji (ed.); University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, vol. 19, no. 2, 1988, p.58. The conversation reveals that Kahn's Assembly Project is imprinted in Muzharul as a major phenomenon of admiration in the contemporary world of architecture.
projects from the late 1950s to works like NIPA (Fig.5.) and his own house (Fig.6.) constitute the first phase where, within his own experimentation, an unmistakable continuation of certain Corbusian-Rudolphian devices are legible (Ashraf 1989).

His academic training, which was mainly based on a modern-classical education at Oregon and Yale, is copiously demonstrated in his early practice. Throughout this period, his main elements and ideas stemmed from the then nonconformist International Style in the West. His work during this period, such as the Public Library and Art College in Dhaka, can be considered as evidence of his awareness of contemporary Western trends in the architectural profession. Nevertheless, one can easily recognise the young architect’s growing concern for enriching his designs contextually, which is ‘evident in the

\[19\] Paul Rudolph was his direct teacher at Yale.
innovation of climate control\textsuperscript{20} and, finally, in the manner the artefacts confronted the setting, more as an assertive and self-referential stance than a mediative one (Ashraf 1989). Even if some of those attempts actually refer to Corbusier, such as white cube on pilotis, sun-breakers and approach ramps in the Public Library and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research laboratories (CSIR) (Fig. 7.), yet the Art College remains essentially an explicit endeavour to the solution of a real ‘place and programme responsive architecture’. The use of jali in the east and west side of the Public Library building, and also in the CSIR, reflects a personal and unique locally-adaptive approach to design.

\textbf{II – The Intervening Phase (1964-71):}

This phase is characterised by Muzharul himself as ‘interesting years’, because to him, Dhaka (1964 to 1970) changed at that time and there were intense discussions, clashes of opinions and various meetings (Banerji 1988). Although he referred to this interesting phase to the three American architects Louis I. Kahn, Paul Rudolph and Stanley Tigerman, who were engaged in designing some of the large architectural projects in Dhaka, yet it does qualify a significant shift in the works of Muzharul Islam from his early phase. The international atmosphere that surrounded him considerably influenced him, and consequently, his designs began to attain a more internationalised direction; at the same time, he tried to relate to his own articulations that marked a distinct departure from accepted norms. Materials and construction, architectural elements of formal expression like planes, geometry, mass, shape and volume, all were experimented with his fine touch of personal vocabulary and finally appeared as a distinguished and definitive statement offered to the architectural realm of Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{20} Muzharul, Kahn and Architecture, p. 61. The umbrella roof of his own house ... in the sculptural animation created by varying reliefs, deep shadows and juxtaposition of materials; in the spatial composition as in the multi-levelled organisation of his own house.
It is in this phase that Muzharul was commissioned in large-scale projects, including five Polytechnic Institutes (Fig. 8.) in collaboration with Stanley Tigerman in different parts of Bangladesh. Tigerman was his classmate at Yale and both had Paul Rudolph as their teacher. To some critics, education at Yale and with Paul Rudolph there, influenced him greatly and turned him to enter into a new phase of design career characterised by the greater use of exposed brick and concrete work, and the manipulation of volumes and planes to achieve a play of light and shade which clearly shows the influence of the New Brutalist Language of Paul Rudolph. (Haque 1988)

In this phase, Muzharul took on the task of two university projects (Fig. 9 & 10.). These projects consisted of large-scale formality, and he indicated an interest in applying geometric design solutions. The preference for geometry probably stemmed from the concern to generate an ‘urbanised order’ by the formation of communal spatial enclosures, streets and continuous facades (Ashraf 1989). The diagonal geometry that
was utilised probably allowed him to achieve the desired 'order', not possible within conventional axial planning. The brick veneered individual buildings, where he played with carved-out voids in the huge masonry solid surfaces, the geometric coherence, all marked a clear shift from his two early works, which Saiful Haque described:

'In the design of the campus for Jahangimagar University ... one sees another shift in Muzharul Islam's design philosophy with the introduction of the planning principle of the tilted square in the north-south axis, which he considers a more appropriate layout for the climate of the region. In the use of materials, Muzharul Islam henceforth moves completely to exposed brick. His work in the sixties exhibits a constant search for a creative expression in the regional context, remaining at the same time faithful to the tenets of Modernism.' (Haque 1988)

During this period the large-scale gesture he showed seemingly did not conform to the same features of his earlier phase, but on deep observation it can be related to Muzharul's redefined modernism threaded into his continual search for an 'international level of awareness and enquiry locally'²¹.

**III - The Late Phase (1971 to date):**

This is the most unrecognised period of Muzharul's professional career. He was repeatedly confronted with incomplete or rejected projects in this phase. This led him to ultimate isolation and almost brought him to the end of his career. During this period, he was engaged in the Housing for Joypurhat Cement (Fig.11.) and Limestone Factory and the National Library and Archives (Fig.12.) at Dhaka. In the first project he again opted

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²¹Ibid., p. 58, Muzharul took the initiative to invite the American trio – Kahn, Rudolph and to expose the existing nascent form of architecture in the then East Pakistan to an international level of production. Indeed, the impact is discernible even in the works of Muzharul Islam that is marked by some distinct changes in the vocabulary of his later projects.
for geometry as a reminiscence of Jahangimagar, thereby showing his continued interest in using brick veneer and a layout he opinioned that was best suited to the climate. It was in the second project, where he encountered the physical presence of Kahn's capitol, the so-named 'citadel of institutions', and attempted to relate to it by using Kahn's own primordial geometry.

Fig. 12. Muzharul Islam: National Library (1980-84), Dhaka.

of the 'square', or in fact, twin squares. This project, perhaps, authenticates Muzharul's decisive statement of 'contextuality'; the ultimate artifact acknowledges more explicitly the conditions of the 'place'- the context and the contradictions.\(^\text{22}\).

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 62. The statement of Ashraf acknowledged the fact that the National Library stands as the most resolved work by Muzharul, which dealt with one of the most contemporary concerns of architecture — contextuality. Also see Azim 1991, p. 29 for enhanced understanding on philosophical/historical search for 'context'.
Chapter 02

Architectural Vocabulary:
Selected Buildings and Projects.
**Art College** (now Fine Arts Institute, Dhaka University, Dhaka, 1953-55)

**Public Library** (now Central Library, Dhaka University, Dhaka, 1953-55)

**The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Laboratories** (Dhaka, 1962)

It was upon his return to East Pakistan, and as part of his responsibilities within the ubiquitous Public Works Department (as no private architectural offices existed at that time) that he designed two edifices which are landmarks in terms of the recent history of the local profession: the Public Library (**Fig. 13.**) and the College of Arts and Crafts, Dhaka (**Fig. 14.**). The former was clearly organised in a Corbusian mode—a cubic volume on stilts, complete with ramps, sun-breakers and pristine white colour—but at that time it

![Fig. 13. Muzharul Islam: Public Library, exterior from the south, (1953-55).](image)

![Fig. 14. Muzharul Islam: east elevation, Art College (1953-55)](image)

indicated for Dhaka fresh qualities of urbanism and environment (Ashraf 1989). This is probably the best statement by Ashraf on an architect of this region in a way that suggests Muzharul as a great initiator of 'renaissance' in contemporary architecture for the then East Pakistan. Saiful Haque identified the dominant features in the Public Library are stated as: flat-roofed rectangular volumes lifted from the ground on cylindrical *pilotis*, a simple arrangement of masses, free-flowing and interpenetrating spaces (**Fig. 15 & 16.**), sunbreakers (**Fig. 17.**), horizontal protection device on the eastern facade (**Fig. 18.**) for cutting glare from the sun. (Haque 1988)

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23 Ibid., p.55.
Fig. 15. Muzharul Islam: plans of Public Library. (1953-55).

Fig. 16. Muzharul Islam: elevations and section of Public Library. (1953-55).
The western wing (Fig. 19.) of the Library stands in contrast to the main block of Corbusian genre with its crude brick louvered openings, with concrete frames and shell roofs. This project thus recalls the ‘dramatic’ contrast portrayed by Corbusier himself in his projects of Masions Jaol in Neuilly-sur-Seine (Fig. 20.) and Petite Maison de Weekend (Villa Felix) (Fig. 21.).

Although the formal expression of the west wing of the Library may have a kind of similar elemental relationship with that of the Masions Jaol, yet it was definitely an original articulation by the architect. It may be supposed that Masions Jaol and Villa Felix influenced Muzharul, but obviously not the construction of brick walls supporting concrete

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25 In conversation with the author, Muzharul expressed that he did not know about Corbusier’s experiments at that time.
lintels and concrete vaults based on Catalan brick vaults; the 'merit' of the projects which might have had influenced Muzharul was 'the intrinsic value of materials', 'the structural system, the choice of materials, the method of ventilation'.

Muzharul Islam was entrusted with responsibility for designing the Art College (Fig. 22.) the day he joined the architectural department of the government. "The area allotted for the project was a very beautiful wooded tract of land with a large open maidan on the east, which was used as a horse-racing course. The access road to the site is one of the main roads of central Dhaka connecting the University campus with the city. It also physically separates the college site from the racing-course maidan" (Haque 1988). Considering the structure of the project, the front block standing on round columns supporting a flat slab and the rear block of classrooms are designed with load bearing walls. (Fig. 23, 24 & 25) The proportional handling of Corbusier is easily discernible in the design and culminated with the aim of producing some flexibility and softness by using curvilinear walls enclosing the library and boys common room, resembles the derived articulation from the 'Golden Section'. There are also rhythmic contrasts between the materials and structures used in front and rear block, the free plan in the front block.

Fig. 23. Muzharul Islam: plans of Art College, (1953-55).

Fig. 24. Muzharul Islam: south elevation of Art College, (1953-55).

Fig. 25. Plan of Art College: west elevation, (1953-55).
and cellular plan in the rear. The contrasts (Fig.26.) he created in this project hints the genesis of a new vocabulary of his own, probably the theme he conceived showed a great deal of concern with traditions and with ways in which it ultimately came out as a modern expression. An arc of craftsrooms holds the linear block of classrooms stretching away from the front block – depicts the architect’s intention to introduce a simple traditional typology (Fig.27.) developed from the response to climate – the device that associates in tune with the conventional classroom arrangement. At the rear ‘wrench-like’ block of terra-cotta coloured brick, individual classes (Fig.27a.) and craftsrooms (Fig.27b.) are linked at the gound and upper level by means of a continuous ‘verandah’ (circulation space) on the south (Fig.28.). The principle demonstrates a concern for exploration of (both) the aesthetic possibilities of indigenous building materials and for means to ensure protection from the climate. (Haque 1988)
Fig.27a. Muzharul Islam: classrooms, Art College, (1953-55).

Fig.27b. Muzharul Islam: craftrooms, Art College, (1953-55).

Fig.28. Muzharul Islam: verandah on the south of the classroom block, Art College, (1953-55).

The approach of designing these three projects may almost go as far as to suggest that solidarity with the 'neutral box' was prompted by 'form-consciousness'\(^{27}\) as it was a world-wide phenomenon of the period. The spirit of rationalised expression of masses initiated by Muzharul Islam in the Public Library and Art College persisted with greater intensity in the BCSIR (1962) designed by him (Fig.29 & 29a.). (Haque 1988)

Fig.29 & 29a Muzharul Islam: BCSIR from the entry court, (1962).

Yet varied in their types of functions articulated within, the three projects of Library, College and BCSIR expressed the power of architecture, the way they were linked and synthesised within a clear and simple overall form. The precision in the relationship of plane and volume, of the dense and transparent, the heavy and the light in these early projects of his career hypothetically carried him to a more modernist 'expressionist' role

\(^{27}\) Expression of box-like masses on stilts as a predominant feature of the 50s and 60s gained a popular name to be called 'neutral boxes'. Also see Le Corbusier in India, Jean-Louis Veret (commissioneer); in Architecture in India, Exhibition publication by the Association Francaise d'Action Artistique, Paris, 1985. pp. 70-105.
in the future. Much of the necessary experimentation for an 'architecture of local manifestation' followed in Muzharul's successive years to come and the use of old 'Corbusian theme of the box on stilts' (Fig.29b.) (Curtis 1987, p.275) had gone on at these early projects and succeeded in extending the personal territory of expression in the projects to come.

Fig.29b. Le Corbusier: Cultural Centre, Ahmedabad (1958).

Housing for Class IV Employees, Azimpur Estate (Dhaka, 1963-64)
This housing for lower income group of employees of the government (Fig.30.). represents another landmark in the history of Dhaka's housing – the Ajab Bari (funny building) designed by Muzharul in Azimpur, Dhaka. The 'Funny Building' was like a cultural shock to the local people since they were not acquainted with such a non-stereotyped housing. The introduction of spatial quality with internally split-up levels probably prompted them to call it in local term ajab or funny. Historically as well as conceptually this project altered the precedent. The precedence was 'the Public Works Department, manned primarily by engineers and draftsmen. became the exclusive authority for construction-- and devastatingly, synonymous with architecture.'28 This department was responsible for most of the

Fig.30. Muzharul Islam: exterior of Housing for the Class IV Employees, Azimpur Estate, (1963-64)

28 C&B (now PWD) built housing for the government staffs in the 50s and 60s were a drab formulation of planning and architecture that resulted in unreasonable density of masses lacking essential community spirit. Examples are Motijheel Colony, Azimpur Colony and others.
contemporary government housing projects of Azimpur Colony, Motijheel Colony and so on. *The Ajab Bari* enabled Muzharul to realise a conceptual scheme and vocabulary, which the country needed to express with its aspiration for modernisation. In it he actually opted for Corbusier's long and narrow house concept in a novel way. His concept called for the creation of a linear block laterally arranging double-height blocks of flats opening to the southern verandah. (*Fig. 31.*) Here, Le Corbusier's double-storied long and narrow apartment units as best exemplified in the Unite d' Habitation, Marseille (*Fig. 32.*) is given a new translation.

*Fig. 31. Muzharul Islam: Housing for the Class IV Employees, Azimpur Estate, double-heighted façade from verandah, (1963-64).*

*Fig. 32. Le Corbusier: Unite d' Habitation, Marseille, (1945-1947).*
The National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) (Dhaka, 1963-64)
EFU Building (Dhaka, 1965-71)
Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation Head Office
(Dhaka, 1965-71)

The entrance to the building of NIPA (Fig.33.) is guided by a convergent series of spaces at the peripheries. The ground floor accommodates activities of a general nature, the first floor houses the classrooms arranged on both sides of a corridor, while the second floor consists of larger classroom facilities. The final roof was extended in all directions to protect the interior spaces from sun and rain. Climatic consideration was the main guiding factor in the adoption of the simple rectangular form of the building which provides for more air and minimum solar heat, as the longer sides of the building run in an east-west direction. The first floor was built as an ‘inside cantilever’ over the walkways at ground level and to contain classrooms. In turn it was supplied with a deep verandah to protect it from the sun. The second floor projecting out over the entrance level distinctly expresses the upper part of the building as finding its footing on the ground. However the overall idea was blended with Le Corbusier’s principle of the ‘concrete parasol’ (umbrella roof) evident in Sodhan Villa, (Fig.34.)
contemporary government housing projects of Azimpur Colony, Motijheel Colony and so on. *The Ajab Bari* enabled Muzharul to realise a conceptual scheme and vocabulary, which the country needed to express with its aspiration for modernisation. In it he actually opted for Corbusier's long and narrow house concept in a novel way. His concept called for the creation of a linear block laterally arranging double-height blocks of flats opening to the southern verandah. (Fig.31.) Here, Le Corbusier's double-storied long and narrow apartment units as best exemplified in the Unite d' Habitation, Marseille (Fig.32.) is given a new translation.

*Fig.31. Muzharul Islam: Housing for the Class IV Employees, Azimpur Estate, double-heighted façade from verandah, (1963-64).*

*Fig.32. Le Corbusier: Unite d' Habitation, Marseille, (1945-1947).*
and the floor levels projecting over each other evident in the Monastery of Sainte-Marie de La Tourette. (Fig. 35.) As one recognises La Tourette as an extended attempt in the principles of Corbusier's earlier ventures, NIPA and EFU (Fig. 36.) buildings similarly

Fig. 35. Le Corbusier: Monastery of Sainte-Marie de La Tourette, (1956).

Fig. 36. Muzharul Islam: exterior view of north-west corner of EFU (now Jiban Bima Corporation), (1963-64).

reflect Muzharul's departure from the initial 'Corbusian boxes' to a newer approach, using new elements in his architecture. Instead of cylindrical pilotis, there were now directional concrete pillars; instead of the thin planes of jalis, there were planes deep into the perforated planes of rows of pillars and instead of climate devices such as vertical wooden panels, there were concrete panels inserted into the fenestration membrane. It is certain that Muzharul attempted these deep-verandahs, projections and rows of pillars as an attempt to define architecture appropriate to our climate on the basis of a contemporary structural system – the concrete frame. Then again the EFU, NIPA and BADC (Fig. 37.) buildings attempted to pull together modern methods of component standardisation with a re-statement of old elements. The 'slab-like concrete pillars' (Fig. 38.) is a type of the old
order of *pilotis*, while the structural ribbed ceiling (**Fig. 39.**) is reminiscent of coffering. These devices were firm reminders of the fact that the thin skins and slender *pilotis* of the International Style had proved themselves inadequate to handling buildings of such scale. (**Fig. 40.**)

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**Fig. 37.** Muzharul Islam: exterior from the north of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), (1965-71).

**Fig. 38.** Muzharul Islam: an arcade of free-standing pillars of EFU, (1963-64).

**Fig. 39.** Muzharul Islam: structural ribbed ceiling of BADC, (1965-71).
The EFU building was composed of an overall form of considerable simplicity; at the top levels there was a marked horizontal emphasis which gave some contrast to the lower level of verticality. The lower level was conceptualised as public spaces in an important commercial node, penetrating a lower storey of arcades and suggesting a strong contrast to the nearby tall structures.

*Fig. 40. Muzharul Islam: exterior showing the transformed pilotis, EFU, (1963-64).*

However, this vital juxtaposition of layers in the urban scene is less coherent and probably not articulated in the BADC office building. The basic morphology of the BADC office is based on offset-slab type organisation. *Fig. 41.* The mass above ground floor level is supported on square *pilotis* of concrete. The structure is a reinforced cement concrete frame with strings of concrete in the ceiling has impacted on the features of the

*Fig. 41. Muzharul Islam: plan of BADC, (1965-71).*
façade. The rectilinear facades of the north and south forms a vast canvas of square grids of crates (Fig. 42.) and slabs cantilevered with the ribs beneath, which dominate the whole feature (Fig. 43.). The solid walls on the east and west reflects and consistent loyalty to his climate, consistent with the 'problem solving' disposition of modernism.

*Fig. 42. Muzharul Islam: north elevation of BADC. (1965-71).*

*Fig. 43. Muzharul Islam: section of BADC. (1965-71).*
Residences (1960s)

His house designs of the 50s and 60s were unexceptional extensions of the International Style. Most of Muzharul’s works of single family houses are located in the planned neighbourhood of Dhanmondi and Gulshan, in which in some ways he fulfilled the basic modernist principles. The house for Ispahani in Gulshan showed a stronger assertion of Muzharul’s confidence in problem-solving attitudes in tune with modernistic rationalism, which he had amassed since graduating from Oregon in 1947. The Mallick’s house in Gulshan and a house in Dhanmondi (Fig. 44 & 45) reflected the idea of Frank Lloyd Wright, where the plans were articulated within an architectural ‘L’. These ‘L-shaped’ residences arose from respect to the local context, demonstrated by the creation of a court for the occupants to enjoy outdoor activities, typically as in traditional houseforms practised in this country. The ‘L’ shaped houses, that wrapped around a green court of almost a quadrant of the site were given an unconventional treatment by establishing an ingenuous rationalist rule in the facades which embodied an interplay of simple panels of masonry walls and strips of horizontal concrete slabs. The residences for the architect’s family and prototype houses for executive engineers (Fig. 46) of the Roads and Highways Department decisively marked the shift in his prevailing ideas more towards a honed philosophy in tune with the level of expertise of the contemporary masters. His own residence and the engineers’ residence seemed to suggest his capability of handling complex problems, while comprehensively scrutinising the nature of problems in architecture that underlines the need for bringing harmony in function and aesthetics. The engineers’ houses showed a moderate shift in the manner of communicating with the facade treatment as in his earlier projects. Only in the mid-80s the visual language of
Bank Local Office reminds us of dealing with brick-arches attempted in the engineers' houses. (Fig. 47) The World Bank project seems not to be totally a resolved work and the sources although loosely resembles engineers' houses are still not absorbed sufficiently to suggest a coherent personal style. His basic parti in the design of his residence as reflected in the section and plan (Fig. 48 & 49) was articulated by dramatic interpenetrations of spaces in the interior and simple overall form in exterior with considerable contrast in planes and voids.

The residence originally designed for his family in 1969 at Dhanmondi is clearly of the basic Corbusian typology, probably a long-range descendant of the Shodhan Villa, Ahmedabad. The building's cubic form was carved out with voids to form terraces.
Fig. 48. Muzharul Islam: plans of own residence, Dhaka. (1969).

Fig. 49. Muzharul Islam: sections of own residence, Dhaka. (1969).

Fig. 50. Muzharul Islam: exterior, own residence, Dhaka. (1969).
and the whole capped by a floating slab (Fig. 50) on RCC columns recalls the Corbusian parasol (umbrella roof) against rain and sun. Saiful Haque indicated this umbrella roof to be in consistent with his major guiding principle in the design of this building. The idea was to create an interior environment that would be habitable, with minimum help from mechanical contrivances throughout the year (Haque 1988). Muzharul may have thought that this should be one of the central themes of any architecture of this region, variants on such theme had recurred in contemporary Indian architecture by Doshi, Correa and others33. In the design of the residence he has been conscious of the formal character of interior spaces and to create such formality he arranged the rooms articulated within the structure but separated from the roof and thereby attaining the predetermined heights and proportions of interior spaces. Internal rooms always held precedence over the exterior, allowing the facades to be more contextual in response to climate (Fig. 51). The house shows a definite Modernist logic and rationality in the treatment of its massing, formal organisation and material, but in the visual language that embodies the building, however, follows his ‘owned’ principles, evident in the sculptural animation made by varying reliefs, deep shadows and juxtaposition of materials, (Fig. 51a) in the spatial composition (as in the multi-levelled organisation of the house). This illustrates a more assertive and a self-referential stance of Muzharul than a meditative one34.

34 see Muzharul, Kahn and Architecture, p.61.
In this way, the residence clearly reflects his interest in both the notions of basic modernist idioms and personal formulation, possibly because of his ‘own’ residence had offered him with a great productive ground for experimentation. Much of Muzharul’s attention over the following years would be devoted to the university projects, housing and National Library and Archives, in which he allowed his ideas on ‘monumental expression’ and ‘contextuality’ focusing on climate, building materials, social aspects, derived from experience with Kahn from working on the Shere Bangla Nagar project, so he saw the principles operating from within.
Five Polytechnic Institutes
(Rangpur, Pabna, Barisal, Bogra and Sylhet, 1965-71)

In the mid-1960s, considering the diversification and expansion of technical education in the country, the World Bank came forward with assistance to prepare a scheme for establishing five polytechnics at Rangpur, Pabna, Barisal, Bogra and Sylhet. In 1966, the Directorate of Technical Education of the then Government of East Pakistan specified the academic programme for 2,000 students in each campus, primarily residential in nature, and awarded the consultancy services to the collaboration team of Vastukalabid, whose principal was Muzharul Islam and Stanley Tigerman in 1966.

The responsibilities for the architects included surveying the sites, the preparation of master plans, (Fig. 52 & 52a in p.44) design of individual buildings and utilities and supervision of the projects. As the sites were located all over the country the research work for the preparation of master plans took more than a year.

Fig. 52. Muzharul Islam and Stanley Tigerman: Site Plan of Polytechnic Institute, Bogra (1965-71).

The architects realised that climatic considerations were of primary importance\(^{36}\) for the building designs and overall planning to be achieved. The architects decided upon a simple structure of parallel brick walls, concrete floors, a system that was extendable and easy to maintain. (Fig.53 & 54) They wished to maximise the flow of air while cutting down the impact of sun, while

\(^{36}\) Stanley Tigerman, Versus, p. 59. The following remarks by Muzharul's principal associate Tigerman reveals how differently they looked at the problems: The work of this fifteen year phase generally illustrates problem-solving interpretations of the 1960s and specially that of Chicago pragmatism. One atypical project spans almost the entire phase – the Bangladesh Polytechnic Institutes. Style, Structural Expression – all my earlier interests – do not form a part of the thought process of this stage. They somehow seemed inappropriate to an architecture emanating from post-Team-Ten attitudes and other problem-solving postures of the time. Also see p. 60 to understand the problems of climate and environment that concerned Stanley during the design phase.
in Muzharul's other 'brick projects' they decided upon a north-south orientation of parallel bays. The emerging formal language of juxtaposing deep-cut ledges of concrete floors and rows of parallel masonry walls in the southern and northern facades, (Fig.55) may be a result of same reaction Muzharul showed to the deep-cut ledges and row-pillars of concrete's in NIPA and EFU buildings. The academic buildings' north-south linear facades were composed of dramatic vertical masonry walls and horizontal concrete slabs to create the 'crates'. (Fig.56) At one stage the idea of one large, all encompassing form was considered, under which all activities could take place\textsuperscript{37} – probably as a concept of parasol against rain and sun, but the idea was abandoned due to unknown reasons. If it were the ultimate physical reality of the academic buildings, then it could in the long run be referred to as another offspring of Corbusian mode.

\textsuperscript{37}Saiful Haque, "Towards a Regional Identity," p. 31.
Fig. 52a. Muzharul Islam and Stanley Tigerman: master plan of five Polytechnic Institutes at Rangpur, Pabna, Barisal, Bogra and Sylhet, (1965-71)
New Campus for Chittagong University (Chittagong, 1965-71)
Campus for Jahangirnagar University (Savar, 1965-71)

If the work of Limestone Mining Works Housing illustrates a great synthesis of the Modernist idiom and the traditional notion of space, the two big university projects form a major shift of sorts and illustrates a transition in the mode of planning. The synthesis of different building typologies and the resulting open spaces within creates volumes that are varied and stretch out from enclosed courtyards to large, loosely defined greens. The various parts of the campuses, the student dormitories, the academic blocks, the staff quarters, etc., are all organised along a main artery of ‘urbanised’ street, where the articulated street facade defines different proportion of street volume. Their interrelationships at the level of the campus, however, are structured as part of the overall landscape with ‘romantic urban street’ and dynamic in-between spaces, more in the language of the Modern Movement.

Located in a relatively quiet and scenic suburb of Chittagong City, amidst moderately rolling hills, the Chittagong University has a sprawling campus on a huge 1600 acres. However, of the 1600, approximately 1220 acres are hills. To bring about visual order to the mutilated and chaotic landforms, a number of four to five buildings were erected on top of the hills by means of approximate earthwork operations. But this experiment could not avoid the sporadic erosion of land during monsoons. This also resulted in increased approach roads to be constructed. Although the experiment was aimed at enhancing the use of exterior spaces and a meaningful visual pattern, yet it could not regulate the wearing away of the surface slopes of earth in the site. Finally the decision was taken to build the buildings on the plateau which anticipated to prevent soil erosion on hills caused by the numerous water run-offs. However, the dispersed plateau frequently interrupted by hills necessitated an intensive master planning exercise where both the distinction and cohesion within a varied functional relationship could be achieved. Originally the plan was prepared to accommodate 7,500 students but flexible enough to keep up with an expansion of 15 to 20 thousand. The natural setting around the buildings were of a sloping or stepped character, which was manifestly complemented by the pervading terraced form of the buildings. (Fig.57) Location of individual buildings reflects the emphasis put on the need to maintain the environmental qualities of the sloping profile of
the site. The administrative building, faculty housing, student dormitory buildings, (Fig. 58) staggeringly grouped along the bottom edge of the hills and all their strong

Fig. 57. Muzharul Islam: exterior and sections of Administrative building. Chittagong University, Chittagong. (1965-71).

forms, obviously unconstrained by the site, (Fig. 59 & 60) generated from a clear geometric concept, acquired extra vigour from the straightforward use of the crude and rough local materials. Although the intention may have been to integrate the stepped character of hills, the plans of individual buildings were simplified to the extent that local

Fig. 58. Muzharul Islam: exterior of students' dormitory building, Chittagong University, Chittagong. (1965-71).
Material could be used for structural requirements. The plan of each building is a simple rectangle with all walls parallel in north-south direction, whether they are staggeringly grouped or laterally juxtaposed. The buildings are designed to exclude the sun, with the deep windows in masonry walls.

In the late 1960s, the physical presence and personal contact with Kahn probably may have had motivated Muzharul's major design project of Janhangir Nagar University Campus and led him to engage with 'type forms' based on primary geometries – the square and the triangle. This strategy behind his planning of Jangimagar may have a deep connection with Oregon's Bauhaus training. The circulation direction along a
primary axis and the strict geometric form-making recalls his Bauhaus training at Oregon and obvious conviction in Kahn's idealistic position in this regard. His plan for the Jahangirnagar University envisaged the institution as a network of streets, open spaces and the environment of living, which is expressed in a way so that architecture and urbanism are fused. In this connection the master plan is supplied with strong axes along the north-south two-mile long site. (Fig.61) The overall planning can be interpreted in a simplified version as an evolved order generated from a basic 'tilted square' the same principle employed in Joypurhat later. It can be inferred that the Joypurhat was further invigorated from the experience gathered in the exercise in Janhangirnagar University (Fig.61a). The strong axis of the master plan is terminated at either end by students' dormitories and teachers housing and the in-fill block of academic and administrative buildings.

![Fig.61a. Muzharul Islam: Site plan, Students' dormitory, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71).](image)

marks the focal point where the main entry to the campus, perpendicular to the axis, was designed. However, the original design is hardly evident from the present situation. Only a student dormitory, (Fig.62, 63.) Readers' Quarters (Fig.64) and class IV employees' housing were built according to the proposed plan of the Vastukalabid. In the student dormitory as named to be the M. H. Hall, he employed triangular courts (Fig.65) as an
automatic outcome of the tilted square can be referred to the memories of Kahn's Bryn Mawr project (Fig. 66) where the tilted square of the plans suggested the possibilities of vast diverse schemes.

**Fig. 62.** Muzharul Islam: plan of Students' dormitory, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71). the wall planes are arranged parallel to north-south in the 45° inclined blocks of the triangular shape plan and which continued to be a major referential stance for Muzharul in the projects to come.

**Fig. 63.** Muzharul Islam: exterior of Students' dormitory, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71).

**Fig. 64.** Muzharul Islam: exterior of Readers' quarter, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71).

**Fig. 65.** Muzharul Islam: showing the court of Students' dormitory from different angles. Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71).

**Fig. 66.** Louis I. Kahn: Bryn Mawr dormitories. (1964)
Fig. 61. Muzharul Islam: Master plan, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, (1965-71).
**Housing for Limestone Mining and cement Works** (Joypurhat, 1980-84)

The discovery of Limestone deposits just outside the limits of the town of Joypurhat led to an extensive development programme in both infra-structural and service sectors for mining workers in the region. Oil and Mineral Exploration Development Corporation acquired an area of 3 Lac square meter for this purpose. Besides the housing facilities for 2,000 employees, the programme as a whole included a clinic, 25-bed hospital, two primary schools, one high school, two clubs, play fields, a bazaar and a mosque. The site, is located near the two famous brick ruins of Paharpur and Mahasthangarh. From the beginning Muzharul thought of this housing project as a ground for experimentation in the field of climate peculiar to this country and extended the experiment of ‘tilted square’ he took on in Jahangir Nagar. (Fig.67) The solution to the problem of ventilation and heat insulation in Bangladesh has always been the primary task for architects, which entails the proper orientation of a building that would allow both ventilation and insulation where required. (Fig.68) The prevailing wind direction in the summer months is from the south and this suggests the buildings to be oriented in the north-south direction and the large openings to be placed on both these sides. Again this constraint also presupposes short walls in the north-south direction and long walls in the east-west direction.

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**Fig. 67.** Muzharul Islam: Site plan, Limestone Mining and Cement Works Housing, Joypurhat, (1980-84).

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38 Toward a Regional Identity, p. 36.
39 Ibid., p. 36.
Yet the problem of creating internal open space within the building remains unresolved, since an elongated building can not offer to create such spaces. If four buildings are placed perpendicular to each other and parallel to cardinal directions, it results in an open space with a definite sense of volume. But it is not possible to have ventilation in the north-south direction, and heat load due to sun insulation of the two buildings facing east-west would be disproportionately high (Haque 1988). Muzharul examined these problems and had achieved, with maturity and confidence, to solve the problem by leaning the squares of four building blocks at 45° and arranging the wall planes parallel to north-south. (Fig. 69)

Fig. 69. Muzharul Islam: blow up of site plan showing housing quarters showing the resolved composition, Limestone Mining and Cement Works Housing, Joypurhat. (1980-84)

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40 Ibid., p. 36. Haque explains how Muzharul involved himself in the search for geometry to deal with local climate.
The result of the experiment has contributed to credit Muzharul with a virtual authority on how to build in this climate.

The housing scheme clearly shows a shift in Muzharul’s alignment with Modernist idioms. It is significant in that he denied essential fragmentation and individual expression of modernistic image of urbanism in this project, in a bid to link the parts to a whole. Thereby not only defining a collective character clear in its site plan and facade composition, but also developing a hierarchy in creating open spaces that recognises the individual. The joining together of domains is achieved in a variety of ways and has been an important compositional device in his quest to define architecture in terms of traditional morphology. (Fig. 70) However, unlike the traditional introverted courts, the inner open space at the tilted square flow into one another by means of a ‘walled-way’ (Fig. 71) created by placing the adjacent buildings disconnected at the corners and culminates with a long vista suggesting the direction of the High School. Thus a distinction between the open spaces and their respective hierarchy is suggested and the resultant effect again is of a continuous and surprisingly dynamic and moderately Modernist in nature. The visual language, on the other hand, is static, almost like sculpture within the surrounding fields. In keeping with the locale of neighbouring ‘brick ruins’ and local tradition, the project was
made of locally manufactured hand-made bricks. The overall effect of the silhouetted rooflines and rough exposed brick facades carry the eye further and beyond the edges. It may be right to say that light and shade have been employed as a texture integral to the buildings, Muzharul tried to create this by confronting the rational façade treatment with massive work of local masonry. (Fig.72)

Fig. 72. Muzharul Islam: exterior of club house, Limestone Mining and Cement Works Housing, Joypurhat, (1980-84)
National Library and the National Archives
(Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, 1980-84)

In the project for the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh, Muzharul had to design the National Library and the National Archives in a site of 4.16 acres in Kahn's Sher-e-Banglanagar, located at the northern end of what was to be Kahn's designed Citadel of Institutions. The National Library completed in 1985, sits alone without its twin, the National Archives. Viewed from the road, one is overwhelmed with the experience of ultimate austerity in the façade treatment yet 'imposing and heroic in scale' (Ameen 1987) (Fig. 73) Two blocks of idealised square geometry were planned apart from one another, one to house the Library and the other for Archives, sits parallel as if they were twins. (Fig. 74) The two parallel blocks of different functions required identity as well and the architect decided to express the distinction between the buildings not with varying their form or shape but by monumentalising and treating them as almost attached blocks with a common facility of cafeteria in between. As the site is besides the

Fig. 73. Muzharul Islam: view from the main road, National Library, Dhaka, (1980-84).

Fig. 74. Muzharul Islam: Site Plan, National Library and Archives, Dhaka, (1980-84).
main road through the Citadel of Institutions, not far from the existing ensemble of Kahn with the deep cuts of shadow, the glaring force of the sun and the rudeness of the material\textsuperscript{41} (Fig. 75) it may be that Muzharul was responding to the context in making his reactions in exposed brickwork, geometry (Fig. 76) and monumentality. ‘Solidity of the wall as a major part of architecture’ on the exterior is expressed manifestly which clearly owes debts to Louis I. Kahn. Kahn’s ability for effective monumental expression is

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\columnwidth]{fig75.png}
\caption{Louis I. Kahn: Shangshad Bhaban Complex, Dhaka, (1962-83)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\columnwidth]{fig76.png}
\caption{Muzharul Islam: Plan, National Library, Dhaka, (1980-84)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{41} Curtis William J. R.; Modern Architecture Since 1900, p. 315. Curtis’ remark on Kahn’s Dhaka project proves relevant when examined against Muzharul’s created ‘silhouette’ of Library project.
revealed in this project with its full potential. (Fig.77) The colossal solid facades of exposed brick also remind one of Kahn’s admirations for ruins, but it takes over one’s mind easily with its austere poetry of simple cubic shape. (Fig.78) The north, east and facades stand without meeting at the corners is carved diagonally into the building and the openings to these sides are protected by a system of flanking brick walls and overhangs. (Fig.79) The diagonal incisions serve to bring light into the 210 feet by 210 feet disordered square plan of the buildings and also divide the building into four functional components. Other openings tended to be on the enclosures of the facades to bring light into the building and high vertical openings on the southern and eastern facades (Fig.80) through their deep-cut ledges and flanking walls allow sufficient light and air to the individual, large open offices and reading rooms. Openings of the western facades (Fig.81) tended to be reduced to
Vertical slits cut deep through the outer skin allowing indirect light and thereby protecting direct heat gain to the spaces behind. Its consummate regularity and symmetry distinguish the composition of the plan. The axis is clearly expressed with the sequence of spaces from the exterior to the different areas of the interior that begins axially at the porch. Reading rooms and display areas on the two halves of the southern block flank the entry lobby of double-storied height along the main axis and meets directly with the stack volume. The resultant eastern and western components are supplied with the functions to
contain the administration, processing and storage facilities respectively. The entry loft, although relatively darker, accentuates the height of the stack mass located at the point of convergence of the building, 'brushed by light grazing its wall surface from skylights all along its periphery'. The interior (Fig.82) is dominated by the presence of this mass of stack area that the architect decided to express by distinguishing it by separating its solid walls from the rest of the functions by means of a space rising the height of the building. Muzharul probably created this deep zone of transition in the interior between the outer layer of functions and the stack to allow for circulation perpendicular to the main axis wrapped around the stack component and to create an all-pervading presence of this massive element throughout the library. The seven-storied component of the stacks forms the focal point of the library where he employed reinforced concrete, openings tended to be smaller and more protected. The outer three-storied components of load-bearing structure wrap around this mass, except the north that allows the study carrels to be supplied with natural light along the walls.

Muzharul had been working gradually towards the idea of 'layers', 'monumentality' and geometries in his immediate past schemes of Joypurhat and Universities. His design for the National Library and the Archives is clearly indebted to Kahn's First Unitarian Church and School, Rochester, New York (1959-69) although the geometry of the Library is quite rigid. In the Library project Muzharul probably received stimulus from the 'Unitarian Church which reflected Kahn's continued study of openings that moderated light' (Fig.83) Kahn's design of the church is reflected in the Library in at least two ways: firstly
in establishing the central focus of stack area in a similar manner to the square sanctuary (Fig.84) and secondly in the deliberate attempt on the outer facades of the Library which recalls Kahn's concept of 'enclosing walls in terms of a perceivable, faceted thickness, infusing ... building with a quality of exaggerated mass'. (Brownlee 1991, pp. 106-107)

However, this project, at the finale of his career, has also to be understood in Muzharul's accumulated knowledge which he gained throughout his career, which stretches back to his formative period to professional maturity. Muzharul probably wished to re-invigorate his deep feeling for the definition of institutions and reacted to 'a good plan would be one, which found the central meaning, as it were, of the institution housed'. Muzharul, on the basis of preparing 'a good plan',

avoided any creation of mere shape-making and derived a plan from the square, where the symbolic central space of 'a concentrated social character' (Curtis 1987, p. 313) dithered hierarchically to the surroundings by axes. The secondary spaces tend be set out as a fringe around the primary generator - the existence of a library around a stack. The form and the interior organisation of the Library express the response to climate directly. The building dramatises the natural elements of light and air in the interaction with the brick veneers and the resultant impervious quality of its visual language (Fig.85). suggests

Fig. 83. Louis I. Kahn: elevation study for the Unitarian Church and School, Rochester, New York (1959-1969).

Fig. 84. Louis I. Kahn: plan showing the central position of the sanctuary of the Unitarian Church and School, Rochester, New York (1959-69).

its association to local context. The obvious concluding quotation in this regard is that the 'distortion' of the idealised form (of the Library) itself become the generator of architecture; the ultimate artefact acknowledges more explicitly the conditions of the 'place' – the context and the contradictions. The building by its geometry, solidity and spatial order, makes a convincing dialogue with the neighbouring ensemble of Kahn, which has by now formed an important context or fabric in the north of Dhaka. While geometric abstraction (Fig. 86) and a consummate skill for physiognomic articulation provide a continuity in all his work, the urbanity of National Library is a world removed from the Public Library of 1955. (Ashraf 1989)
Chapter 03

Representation on
Elemental Laws of Architecture
It is clear from the works of Muzharul that he has amassed a great deal of competence from the elemental lessons and ordering ideas of Kahn and Corbusier. In his formative period his teacher Paul Rudolph influenced him as well. Stanley Tigerman, a close friend of Muzharul and classmate at Yale, played an important role in widening his social vision\textsuperscript{43} when working in collaboration in the polytechnic projects. Muzharul explored the common ground between the primary geometries of modern architecture and certain schemata from his own formulation. In the later works of his career he had gradually pulled away into expressive territories of his own which probe monumental qualities in the architecture of Louis I. Kahn. It is clear from Muzharul’s career that he struggled to synthesise the lessons of Corbusier and Kahn sometimes in a way by becoming ‘reformist-modern’ (relate to early phase) and sometimes by becoming a ‘late-modernist contextual’ (relate to intervening and late phase). It would be useful to analyse the influences in Muzharul through some basic idioms followed in architecture. These are Elements, Context (Relationships) and Order, which would help to understand the process that constituted the conceptual framework of an architect.\textsuperscript{44} The buildings selected for the analysis are based on typological and chronological reference so that they meet both the varieties in expression and ‘time’ that would reflect the sequence of his career.

\textsuperscript{43} Stanley Tigerman. \textit{An American Architect’s Alternatives Versus Stanley Tigerman}, p. 59. Stanley himself called his stay in Bangladesh as ‘Advocacy/Socially Conscious Phase’.

\textsuperscript{44} Adapted from the methodology employed in the book by Kevin Utsey (ed.); \textit{Analysis of Precedent: an investigation of elements, relationships, and ordering ideas in the work of eight architects}, The Student Publication of the School of Design, North Carolina State University at Raleigh, (first print in 1979), second print 1982.
Elemental Laws

Entrance and Circulation

Entrance generally characterises two features: one is to keep free the lower level of a dominant volume or mass and the other is to have a recess in the wall plane preceded by an entry porch. Circulation follows the general organisation of built form evocative of Kahn's practice.
Elemental Laws

Massing

In the Art College and Public Library the dominant form is expressed as a simple cubic mass with a mixture of subdued forms. Such resolved expression of Muzharul recalls Corbusian principles. The BADC office building is monolithic in expression. The residence is an apparent cube articulated with complex combinations of solids and voids. The National Library is a series of vertical walls against a backdrop of monolithic cube. All the three examples are closely related to Kahn's pedigree.
Elemental Laws

Structure

Two types of structure are utilised in Muzharul's work. The first phase of his practice resembles the Corbusian modular system, but reflects his own vocabulary when a columnar array is mixed with a walled system of structure. The residence and National Library on the other hand reflect the articulated manner of Kahn, which in turn contribute to their spatial organisation.

1. Art College
2. Public Library
3. BADC
4. Own Residence
5. National Library
Elemental Laws
Space Definition

Spaces in earlier works are defined by a collection of the major spaces and the implied spaces contained within, often linked by circulation. The later works formed spaces by defining with structural boundaries, major and implied spaces often expressed by distinguishing structural articulation, which recall Kahn's Exeter Library and Kimball Art Museum.

1. Art College
2. Public Library
3. BADC
4. Own Residence
5. National Library
The primary relationship between Muzharul’s buildings and their surroundings is focused on creating ‘silhouette’ effect with buildings against the surrounding landscape. But his primary focus on ‘context’ in terms of reaction towards adjacent situations, form language and geometry is expressed manifestly in several projects including National Archives, Joypurhat Housing and Jahangimagar buildings. Thus it can be suggested that, conceptually, the essential meaning of ‘context’ as expressed in Kahn’s projects can also be found in Muzharul’s work.
Occasionally a section is developed in a manner similar to articulations in plan and often derived from similar geometric organisations. And, sometimes the plan is more finely articulated than its section. In the projects of National Library and the residence, strong sense of similarity is expressed in both the plan and section but one being very much formal and the other being the informal, spontaneous.
Relationship between Elements

*Interior versus exterior*

Consistency with interior and exterior in his projects is expressed throughout his whole career. The transparency in the lower level of form is a primary feature in his work except in the National Library where the mass seems to hug the ground and thereby expresses its solidity and firm foothold.

1. Art College
2. Public Library
3. BADC
4. Own Residence
5. National Library
**Ordering Ideas**  
*Symmetry/Balance*

Apparent symmetry is visible in the exteriors of all projects. Although all his projects are not symmetric by reflection or about 'x' and 'y' yet the occasional presence of axiality in geometry attributes a balanced character to his buildings.

1. Art College  
2. Public Library  
3. BADC  
4. Own Residence  
5. National Library
Ordering Ideas
Geometry/Grid

Rectilinear geometry is dominant in almost all the projects and the plans are based on orthogonal grids coincident with the structural system. In the earlier projects the apparent golden section geometry is perceptible. In large-scale planning development, the overall plan configuration is generated from a tilted square and is best exemplified in the JU campus and Joypurhat Housing.
Ordering Ideas

Layering

A series of relationships in an orthogonal geometry is expressed manifestly in consistency with the structure, exterior enclosures and interior spaces. The layering of interpenetrations in the spaces of the built forms in general reflects simple juxtaposition.

1. Art College
2. Public Library
3. BADC
4. Own Residence
5. National Library
Ordering Ideas

Parti

1. Art College
2. Public Library
3. BADC
4. Own Residence
5. National Library
Chapter 04

Roots and Relevance in Modernist Inspiration:
Probing the underlying principles of Le Corbusier

In any discussion of the modern movement, Muzharul Islam’s College of Arts and Crafts (1953) (Fig. 87.) is notable for introducing a truly modern piece of work in this region. It can be stated that modern architecture started in Bangladesh with this project. In addition to this, seen in the context of Modernism in this part of this world, what Muzharul was able to achieve with the College of Arts was an architectural expression of inevitable modernisation facing the country. It was, in other words, an experimental use of the universal vocabulary of modern architecture developed by Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, fused with the traditional style of architectural expression known as Uthans typified as domains of different practical uses, and the use of other local elements such as jalis. Similar experiments were carried out in the Public Library and in the BCSIR (Fig. 88) but the College of Arts exemplifies the ultimate development of this style. It was among the first buildings, which could unmistakably be identified as modern in Bangladesh.
In this way he became a lone architect who led post-partition Modernism in Bangladesh in a comprehensive way, with skill, aptitude and expression. Nevertheless, why is it that Muzharul in Bangladesh can not be considered as a ‘forerunner of notion’ in the same way that Doshi or Correa of India are? This may be because he was the architect who built up a body of actual work rather than a collection of theories and ideologies.

However, it is clear in the Art College that he intended to create a new piece of International Style of architecture blended with personal articulation of elemental principles and organisation and the final building was quite a resolved one. Probably, this ‘Bengal’ variant of Modern Architecture was not the result of his conscious methodology at that time, but the result of unconscious inspiration emanating from his Bengali mind. The formal language, which he used, was of course the same formal language of Modernism he learned when studying Bauhaus pedagogical methods at Oregon, and under the direction of Paul Rudolph at Yale. Modernism actually provided him with a set of morals, democratic values and methodologies like the established rules of formalisation and abstraction. Nevertheless, he gradually realised that it would be possible to be a ‘Bengali’ by filtering his own inherent Bengali sensibility and adapted by a deliberate attempt to the process of architecture. Such adoption of traditional sensibilities by Muzharul can be justified according to the observation of Curtis. Curtis notes (Curtis 1987, p.307):

" - Le Corbusier’s forceful late style could prove useful as a starting-point for more sensitive talents who took over not only the external effects, but also the intellectual strategies for the transformation of precedents."

![Fig.89. (left) Muzharul Islam: The NIPA, Dhaka. (1963-64). Fig.90. (middle) Muzharul Islam: BADC office, Dhaka, (1965-71). Fig.91. Muzharul Islam: The EFU, Dhaka, (1965-71).](image)

His own residence, The NIPA, BADC office and EFU (Fig.89, 90. & 91.) are examples of such valid extension of earlier experiences and practices in tune with more contextual
appropriate character to suit the identities of different building typologies ranging from residential building to institutional and commercial buildings. The residence he once owned, exemplified marked shift from his other residential projects, the climate became one of the decisive factors in bringing the vital juxtaposition between the interior and exterior spaces. All the interior spaces were confronted with an essential exterior climate-control device of verandah or terrace, which in turn gave the building a formal character that proves to be one of his own expression of architecture. The NIPA was given a character of a true institutional building, whose identity implied both compactness and openness, which he achieved in a freer plan suggesting a coherent compactness of the classroom arrangement and an apparent quality of openness devoted to the circulation and service areas. The BADC and the EFU buildings offered a design, which showed a greater concern for their urban settings by being given the massive visual quality and perforation from the surroundings to blend the buildings with the existing 'urban landscape'.

While Niemeyer in Brazil, B.V. Doshi in India and Sert in Spain while being the direct followers of Le Corbusier, developed their own expressive territories to enrich the collection of 'Corbusian Works'. Characteristically Muzharul, not being the direct disciple of Le Corbusier, deepened the diversity of the 'Corbusian Pedigree' by fusing his own notions of context, adaptation and technology. In fact, Muzharul Islam was able to make his own statement because his sensibility was open to his own 'roots' and its implicit 'order'. He believed in reacting to the peculiarities of his own culture and identity and he was able to understand its 'true spirit' not in elemental law but in 'essence'. Muzharul thus became successful in transcending Corbusier, by investigating the inherent principles of his tradition and history and attempting to adopt them for the service of modern aspirations. For Muzharul, it seems that the relevance of Modern inspirations has not changed, as has the 'ethos' which was considered as a means to evolve appropriate architecture.
Search for Regional Expression

One can see that Muzharul's strength and importance lies mainly in his practical professional work and not in his theories. Unlike the great influential architects of the world, Muzharul hardly wrote anything, let alone a manifesto. One of the few things he wrote, clearly expressing his own thoughts excludes anything concerning Modernism, a text which is discussed in the chapter 01, included his views on only 'Regionalism'. As one can see from this discussion on his theories, Muzharul uses important terms that are pre-loaded with very important notions; one such term is 'regional manifestation of architecture'. In it he talked on history, culture and regional manifestation of architecture but interestingly avoided any issues relating to Modernism versus Regionalism. What does this mean to Muzharul? And how does his understanding fit into his modern principles? Although his view on 'regionalism' drew attention among many of the young architects of this country yet there is no record of his actually speaking against Modernism. From this, it may be discerned that Muzharul's true disposition towards modern architecture was discontinued at the time he wrote this text on 'Introducing Bangladesh: A Case of Regionalism'. One important phenomena that may have direct connection to his apparent shift in disposition towards architecture is, during this period of mid-1980s, he was almost deeply involved with the 'Aga Khan Award for Architecture' group, most of its members were engaged in the polemics of regional implications in architecture. However, at the *prima facie* Muzharul never seemed to be regional as far his works are concerned. Probably, the idea of 'regionalism' in him flourished from his association with the 'regional movement' by Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Muzharul, interestingly enough, throughout his article on 'regionalism' suggested avoiding the orthodox approach to regionalism that implies that tradition is only the only issue to be resolved in 'true' architecture. He finds it to be a probability that 'can only enrich the idea of world cultures'\(^{45}\). In this angle, this aspect of Muzharul could even be seen as a simple personal effort to try to incorporate something more humanistic or 'owned vocabulary' to add to the Modernist maxims. However, the most significant speculation on this particular leaning of Muzharul would be to consider it as a latent possibility of transcending Modernism.

\(^{45}\) This is described earlier in chapter 1 on Muzharul's selected thoughts.
‘Context’ Redefined:
Focus shifted to Kahn From Corbusier

As we have seen that the first phase of his career reflected his increasingly confident use of the Le Corbusian vocabulary of slabs supported on slender pilottes and curvilinear walls that exploited the possibilities for free planning within the structural systems used in Art College, Public Library, CSIR and NIPA etc. The architectural expressions of this period show distinct approaches and sets of influences derived from

Corbusier, filtered with sensitivity to harmonise with the local micro-environment which is best reminiscent in Arts College. Muzharul gradually exposed himself to a new way of handling old materials and thus brick and concrete were re-defined as man-made construction materials capable of expressing the innate craft skills of our construction workers. The Housing for Limestone Mining and Cement Works (Fig.92) and The National Library and Archives (Fig.93) showed the evidence of growing familiarity with the range of Louis I. Kahn’s recent works. The most convincing contemporary transformation of Kahn’s ideas is found in the National Library and Archives at Dhaka, virtually the last major work of his career so far. This crystallisation seems to have begun in his formative period at Yale University and to be prompted by Kahn’s stay in Dhaka during the Assembly project and through close interaction through Kahn’s repeated visits to his Vastukalabid office 46. Such collaboration with Kahn deepened into a friendship that had a great impact on his frame of mind and concepts in the later phase of his career.

46 In conversation with the author: Muzharul referred to Kahn’s visits to Vastukalabid.
In the mid-1960s when the apparent dissolution of the International Style was clearly perceptible, Muzharul Islam was engrossed with improving his vocabulary as relating to the issues of climate, indigenous materials and construction techniques. He was deeply involved with the handling of geometry in search for the universal in modern form but without neglecting the essential essence of 'context'. ‘Contextuality' became one of his prime concerns at the peak of his professional career. Similar to Kahn's, he was also able to read the ‘context' in its ‘intrinsic being’. He was capable of understanding the implications of ‘context' which underline the involvement of intellectual exercise in the broader scope of ‘time', ‘place', and condition (climate, technology etc.) and ultimately the achievement of 'context' through re-inventing reality, to make all new.

The spirit in Kahn’s work with regard to transcending mere functional diagrams to a higher meaning of architecture (Curtis 1987) seemed to prompt Muzharul to take an idealistic stance towards re-defining his architectural vocabulary. His architecture tended to be more idealistic than ever expressing new aesthetic possibilities by extending ideas absorbed in his deep-rooted study of indigenous material, climate, social implications and overall ‘context’. This led him to clarify his basic parti of 'tilted geometry' employed in Joypurhat, Jahangir Nagar campus and National Library and Archives, in which the primary meaning of climate is expressed in an attempt to contain the ultimate aesthetic possibilities by universalising abstractions. The intrinsic value of materials, as expressed by Kahn with a broader aim of respecting culture and aesthetics, National Library, Jahangir Nagar Buildings, (Fig.94) Polytechnics (Fig.95) and Joypurhat Housing reflect the same inspiration in which brick is exploited with its maximum potential through tectonic and tactile quality. In campus planning, the priori geometry as growing with a series of triangles and changing its direction proves his capability of expanding the basic ‘type forms' of Kahn into a more coherent personal style. Muzharul transformed ‘geometry' to his own purpose and blended with his experience gathered in earlier practices over the years. He explored common ground between the geometric restrictions imposed by

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47 Brownlee, Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture p.13. in the Introduction, Vincent Scully best described the implied meaning of ‘contextuality' for which Kahn strived throughout his career.

48 Brownlee, Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture p.13. see Vincent Scully’s introductory notes.
modern architecture and certain priorities that were set when adaptation assumed
importance. Although this may be loosely evocative of Kahn's admiration for geometric
forms, yet this should be regarded as Muzharul's finest contribution offered from his 'own'
vocabulary translated into a modern expression.

Monumentality, to name an important concern in the work of both Kahn and Corbusier,
is expressed in Muzharul's work not by a mere formalist's manner of form-making but by
a broader agenda to satisfy 'honorable themes and moods'. (Curtis 1987, p.310)
Monumentality to Corbusier as was exhibited in Chandigarh was an achievement by
expanding his pre-existing rules of architecture (the 'five points, the brise-soleil, etc.) with
certain devices from classical tradition - the 'grand order', portico etc. (Curtis 1987,
p.277) On the other hand, Kahn evolved monumentality from the aspiration of giving
architecture a spiritual quality inherent in structure and conveying the feeling of eternity.
(Brownlee 1991, p. 43) In Muzharul's works, the early phase of 'Corbusian resemblance'
in the large-scale commissions of the 1960s onwards, expressed his manifested quality of
monumentality without degenerating into pastiche of the masters and reflected his
ultimate sensibility which avoided any superfluous grandiosity or mere formalist
exhibitionism. Muzharul in fact proved his talent and restraint at the same time while
dealing with monumental expression. He seemed to be quite articulate regarding the
techniques to fuse together modern constructional means with traditional methods. In the
projects of Art College, Public Library and BCSIR, he employed simple geometric plans
to create pure mass or volume of perforated veneers (walls and suspended horizontal shading devices of *jalis*), use of cylindrical columns carefully proportioned and the hovering mass above, which recall the idea of strong expressive rules as strongly manifested by the contemporary masters. All the 'brick projects' of the intervening and late phases manifest his clarity in evolving monumentality, the punctuation by solid brick panels and the deep-cut layers of openings fused in the architecture his maximum austerity and respect for 'indigenous origins'. This ultimately suggests that he knew how to incorporate tradition and modernity and fuse them together to simulate architecture with an essential quality of 'context' and in abstraction to be called monumental.

**Epilogue**

Muzharul’s formation took place after Modern Architecture had established a firm foothold in the overall scene of world architecture. He was trained in the Bauhaus system at Oregon where he had undergone an extensive and rigorous training on the ‘Bauhaus idea’ of basic design, climatic and technology studies and studio projects. In Yale University, under Paul Rudolph, he had intensive design exercises with devices of rationalist principles of element, proportion, order and geometry. But the abstract lessons of great architects such as Le Corbusier and Louis I. Kahn have been imbibed by him during his professional endeavours and showed a great deal of improvisation in dealing with issues of climate and expressed the aspiration of a modernising traditional society. The projects of the intervening and late phases of Muzharul’s work offer examples of this tendency.

After a few attempts during his early works to incline his concepts and ideas to contemporary masters of international style, Muzharul seemed to realise the excessive self-confinement to a particular style and consequently decided to do somewhat his own devising, especially when dealing with climate. The following decade, the Intervening Phase, is the most productive phase of his life. Ranging from his own residence to the campuses for two universities, he applied more of his honed philosophy with the amalgamation of already established modern principles. Muzharul, at that time, had nearly developed his architecture to a state of perfection. His designs of this period show a high level of maturity in dealing with ‘context’ (Kahn’s ensemble), ranging from confronting Kahn’s ‘citadel of institutions’ to housing the mining workers. Also, at that
time, he became very involved with the idea of 'monumentality', where he began to try to impose this idea on both the Housing project and the National Library and Archives.

Not to be conclusive or being moved by making any final statement on Muzharul's philosophical construct, some significant features can be identified in tune with his continuous struggle for making something more than just architecture and the critical investigation the research pursued. These are:

He has been engaged in the search for roots and relevance in the abstract principles of design of the 20th century. To Muzharul, the relevance of Modern inspirations has not changed but the means with which to give expression to the 'ethos' of a country assumed more importance.

Materials and 'response to climate' as key elements of cultural identity. However, the most significant contemplation on place-responsive architecture of Muzharul can be understood as his quest for the possibility of transcending Modernism.

A democratic approach to architecture to uphold the society's ultimate aspiration. All of his buildings in a project whether they were a VC's house or a staff's residence, were treated consistently with similar elemental laws, order, materials and relationships. This is one of his unique ways of responding to the creation of 'context' probing the underlying inspiration of Kahn's attitude towards social vision.

The spirit in Kahn's work with regard to transcending mere functionality to an abstract realm of architecture, where 'spiritual' insight for time-place transforms the architecture to attain a timeless aesthetic value, prompted Muzharul to take an idealistic stance towards redefining his architectural vocabulary. 'Monumentality', intrinsic value of material and 'contextuality' to name, became the genesis of his newly-defined and probably the most matured phase of his career.

Muzharul Islam can be regarded as a leading architect for two reasons: firstly, for his concern for the fundamental tenets of modern architecture which imply the gamut of

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49 Muzharul, Kahn and Architecture, p. 59.
'rationalist' approaches and secondly, for his concern for tradition and regional ‘ethos', and the search for an evidently democratic and humanistic approach to architecture.

Muzharul’s career progressed with his continuous struggle for understanding the ‘existing' (first phase) ‘probabilities' (intervening phase) and ‘prospects' (late phase) in architecture and synthesising them at a higher level of ordering ideas. At times we find him aligned with pure ‘modernism' to studying the ‘local probabilities' of materials and climate and then experimenting on the synthesis of conflicts and contradictions of ‘modernism and regionalism'. The resultant synthesis in Muzharul’s architecture may not seem as resolved as his fundamental quest implies but can be understood in the long run when the psyche has transcended the dilemmas and contradictions of identity; his architecture will then find its own natural expression. But most importantly, Muzharul’s architecture provided a creative spark to his followers in this region and this is the concern that proves to be seminal in inspiring conscientious architects today and this is where the true significance lies, which Muzharul Islam endeavoured for throughout his career.

Appendix
Biography

Muzharul Islam, son of late Professor Omdatul Islam and late Zakia Khatoon, born in 25th December, 1923; served the Communications and Building Department of the Government of East Pakistan from 1953 to 1964; his own firm Vastukalabid was formed in 1964 and till to date has been working as principal of Vastukalabid; lives in 3 Paribagh, Ramna, Dhaka.

Academic Qualifications:

1942: Bachelor of Science, Calcutta University, India.
1946: Bachelor of Engineering, Calcutta University, India.
1952: Bachelor of Architecture, Oregon University, USA.
1961: Master of Architecture, Yale University, USA.
Scholarships:

1950-52: Scholarship under Post-War Development Scheme.

Special Honours:

1980 to date: President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh.
1997: Member, Jury Board for the Selection of the Best Design for Victory Monument at Suhrawardy Udyan, Dhaka.
1993: Gold Medal by the Institute of Architects Bangladesh.
1989: Citation by the Indian Institute of Architects, West Bengal Chapter.
1980: Member, Jury Board, First Aga Khan Award for Architecture.
1978-80: President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh.
1972-75: President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh.
1972: Member, Jury Board for the Selection of the Best Design for the Monument at Savar.
1970: Member, Master Jury for the Selection of Design for the Grand Mosque, Islamabad.
Chronology of Some Selected Works

1953-55:  **Art College** (now Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University), Dhaka  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

**Public Library** (now Central Library, Dhaka University), Dhaka  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

1962:  **The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Laboratories**  
(CSIR), Dhaka  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

1963-64:  **Plan for Khilgaon Railway Rehabilitation Zone**  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

**Plan for New Rangamati Town**  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

**Housing for Class IV Employees, Azimpur Estate.**  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department

**The National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA),**  
Dhaka University  
Architect: Muzharul Islam  
Consultant: Communications and Building Department
1965-71:

**Head Quarter Building, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation**, Motijheel Commercial Area, Dhaka
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

**EFU Building (now Jiban Bima Corporation)**, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

**Five-Polytechnics** at Rangpur, Pabna, Barisal, Bogra and Sylhet (1966-71)
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid) in collaboration with Stanley Tigerman

**Chittagong University**
Master Plan and Designs of Students' Hostel, Humanities Building, Science Building, VC's Quarter, Professors' Quarters, Storage Godowns. (1968-71)
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

**Jahangirnagar University**
Master Plan and Designs of Students' Hostel, Readers' Quarters and Class IV Employees Quarters (1968-71)
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

**Architect's Own Residence**, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

1980-84:

**Joypurhat Limestone** Mining and Cement Works Project:
Master Plan, Housing for 200 Officers, Housing for 1700 Employees, Club Houses for Officers and other Employees, Clinic and Hospital, Bazar and mosque, Joypurhat
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)
National Library, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)

National Archives, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka
Architect: Muzharul Islam (Vastukalabid)
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