

## To Conserve a Sacred Place: An Investigation on Moha Tirtha Langalbandh

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### **Abstract:**

This paper proposes conservation of an ancient sacred place named Langalbandh. It is a well known pilgrimage area in Bangladesh which has a strong historical and religious significance. Every year, thousands of Hindu pilgrims from all over the world come here to take their holy bath at the Old Brahmaputra River with other ritual activities. To facilitate bathing for the devotees a number of bathing ghats have been built and several old temples and hermitages are established in this holy place. But this place has been in poor condition with lack of maintenance for a long time. In accordance with the minutes of some inter-ministerial meetings, this sacred place has been initiated to be developed as a tourist spot for its history, social and religious value. Comparing with other significant pilgrimage areas in and around this country, this 2-kilometer long sacred site of Langalbandh requires conservation with pursuing sensitive and analytic approaches. This paper aims to investigate existing physical and social aspects and focuses on establishing cultural and historic significance of Langalbandh. This paper also proposes some conservation oriented development strategies which could be helpful to develop a master plan for the total area so that the whole area could be developed as a sacred pilgrimage place as well as tourist spot while conserving the religious context.

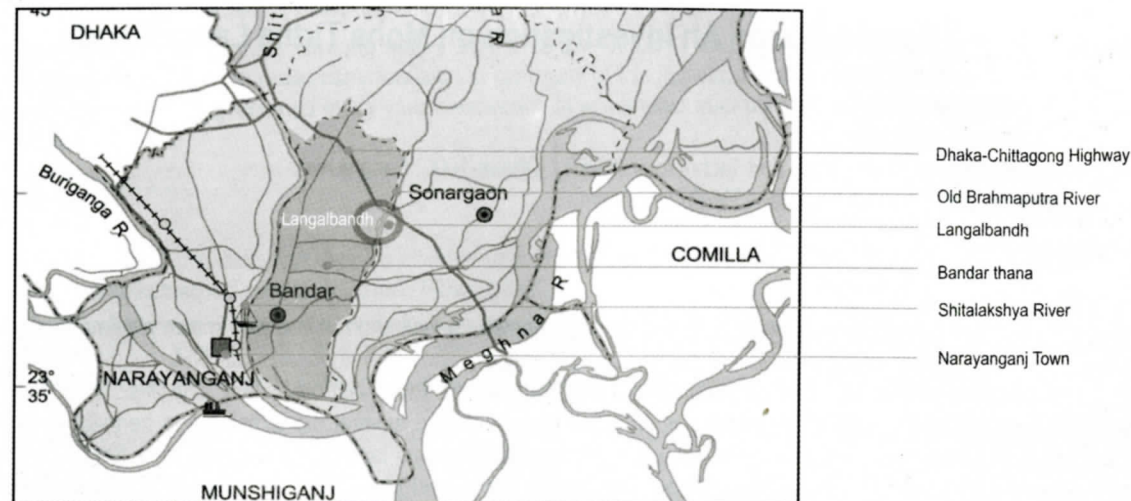
**Key words:** Conservation, sacred place, historical and religious significance, physical and social aspects, development strategies.

### **1.0 Preamble:**

According to the Hindu mythology, the word 'Langalbandh' refers to the place where a plough was stopped. It is a 2-kilometer long sacred place where pilgrims ('tirtha-yatri') come to take their holy bath since the ancient times (Acharjee, T. 2004: 91). Pilgrims, special tourists whose purpose is to visit place of religious significance (Alecu, I.C., 2010), come to this 'moha tirtha Langalbandh' situated at Bandar Thana (near Sonargaon) in Narayanganj district beside the Old Brahmaputra river (Figure 1), 20 km south-east of Dhaka on Dhaka-Chittagong highway (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 45). They come from all over Bengal and the adjacent regions (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal etc.) to congregate on the banks of the Brahmaputra river at Langalbandh for religious activities including "Holy Bath" at various 'ghats' during the established festival of 'Mahashtami Tithi' on the 8th day of lunar month falls in the Bengali month of Chaitra (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 45). The river on which Langalbandh is situated is called Brahmaputra, because, according to Hindu mythology, it is the son ('Putra') of Lord Brahma (Dev, P.R., 2005; Acharjee, T. 2004: 17). This paper initially investigates the existing physical contexts as well as the traditional ritual activities which are the main part of heritage of Langalbandh. As this type of heritage places can be used as a cultural resource to revitalize the economic base through promoting tourism (Bischoff, A., 2008), this sacred place is also proposed to be developed as a tourist spot. But, the development strategy of this place should differ from other developments and the natural sacred profile is needed to be considered as an important issue.

The objectives of the study are to investigate the existing ritual structures, social and cultural activities, infrastructures and other issues; to analyze the effects of the current proposals and to suggest the some necessary development strategies to develop the place as a tourist spot with conserving the sacred context. The paper may serve as a useful initial report to develop the site with conserving the existing structures and 'ghats' and suggested development strategies may act as useful guidelines to restore sacred profile of the place.





**Figure 1:** Map showing the location of Langanbandh

Source: <http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/Maps> (edited by author)

Relevant literatures about the history of Langanbandh, conservation, mythology, other sacred place developments have been reviewed. Field survey, including photographic and observational study, unstructured interviews on local inhabitants, writers and experts, has been conducted to know the existing condition of Langanbandh in 2007 and 2008.

## 2.0 Physical context

The Ghat area or the main land-water interface has always been a strong and significant component of settlement morphology (Kumar, M., 2009: 30). Langanbandh has a rural settlement with a 12 feet wide pitched road beside the river which acts as an embankment for the site (Figure 2). Some significant temples, ghats, moths co-exist with this semi-commercial road. Langanbandh village is under the Bandar Thana where approximately 17219 people live and among them about 9897 people are of Hindu religion. (Biswas, P. K., 2006: 278). The local Hindus had donated large area of land on the river bank declaring them as religious or 'Debottar Property' for the benefit of Hindu pilgrims. But after 1947, those Properties were usurped gradually for other constructions, residential and industrial units. As an effect, a certain percentage of land is already encroached and many unplanned stalls and other structures exist beside the river.

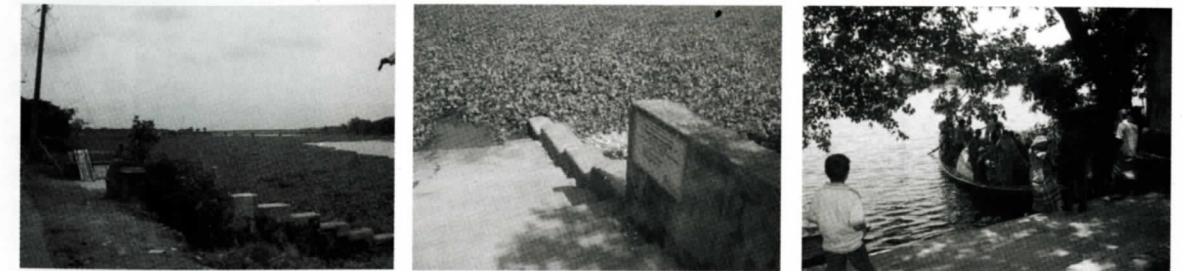


**Figure 2:** Existing river side road with the encroachments

Source: Author's photograph, 2007

Due to the changes of weather in different seasons in Bangladesh, the water level of the river varies. The maximum water level is observed in the June to August as precipitation rate is high. But during the main festival (March ~April) the water level decreases to the minimum level. Also due to excessive natural siltation and other reason the depth of the river decreases with time and it causes interruptions for aqua transportation during this period. Water pollution of the river and poor embankment with soil erosion are also important considerable issues for this sacred site.

The ghat area or the main land-water interface has always been strong and significant component of settlement morphology, deriving from a complex spiritual interpretation of the ghat system itself (Ray, R., 1989). The ritual focus of the place is the ancient sacred ghats, temples, ashrams, moths etc. To facilitate bathing for the devotees, philanthropic persons built a number of bathing ghats. There are now 13 such ghats (Figure 3) and these are: Premtala ghat, Annapurna ghat, Raj ghat, Bhadreshwari ghat, Gandhi ghat, Joykali ghat, Pathankali ghat, Srirampur ghat, Kalibari ghat, Kalidah ghat, Shankar ghat, Shikhri ghat and Rakshyakali ghat (Acharjee, T., 2004: 84-87). Most of the ghats are at the west side of the river as these ghats were built considering the Sun god which rises in the east.



**Figure 3:** Picture showing the Annapurna Ghat, Raj Ghat and Gandhi Ghat respectively.

Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

At Langanbandh, there are 10 Temples in this pilgrimage area. Among them 3 temple-complexes are operating properly all the time with its related activities. These three temples are: Shashan Kali Temple attached with 'Gandhi ghat', Durga Temple attached with 'Raj ghat', Mandir and ashram at Premtala (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Temple attached with 'Raj ghat', Shashan Kali Temple attached with 'Gandhi ghat' and temple at Premtala respectively.

Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

Other Temples are (Figure 5): Annapurna mandir, Jaykali mandir, Raksha kali mandir, PashanKali mandir, Gauranga mahaprabhu mandir, Bhadreshwari Shib mandir, Dhakshineshwari kali mandir, Shib Parvati moth, Rakshakali mandir-North (Acharjee, T., 2004: 84-87). These temples are partly encroached and the vehicular road goes through between the Temples and its adjacent Ghats. This road creates interruption to perform the ritual activities in these temples as vehicles such as rickshaws, vans, trucks and small buses always go through this road (Figure 6). Sometimes, heavy traffics also use this road for bypassing the other roads. As a result, the temples and 'ghats' which are the main structures to be considered for conservation are threatened.



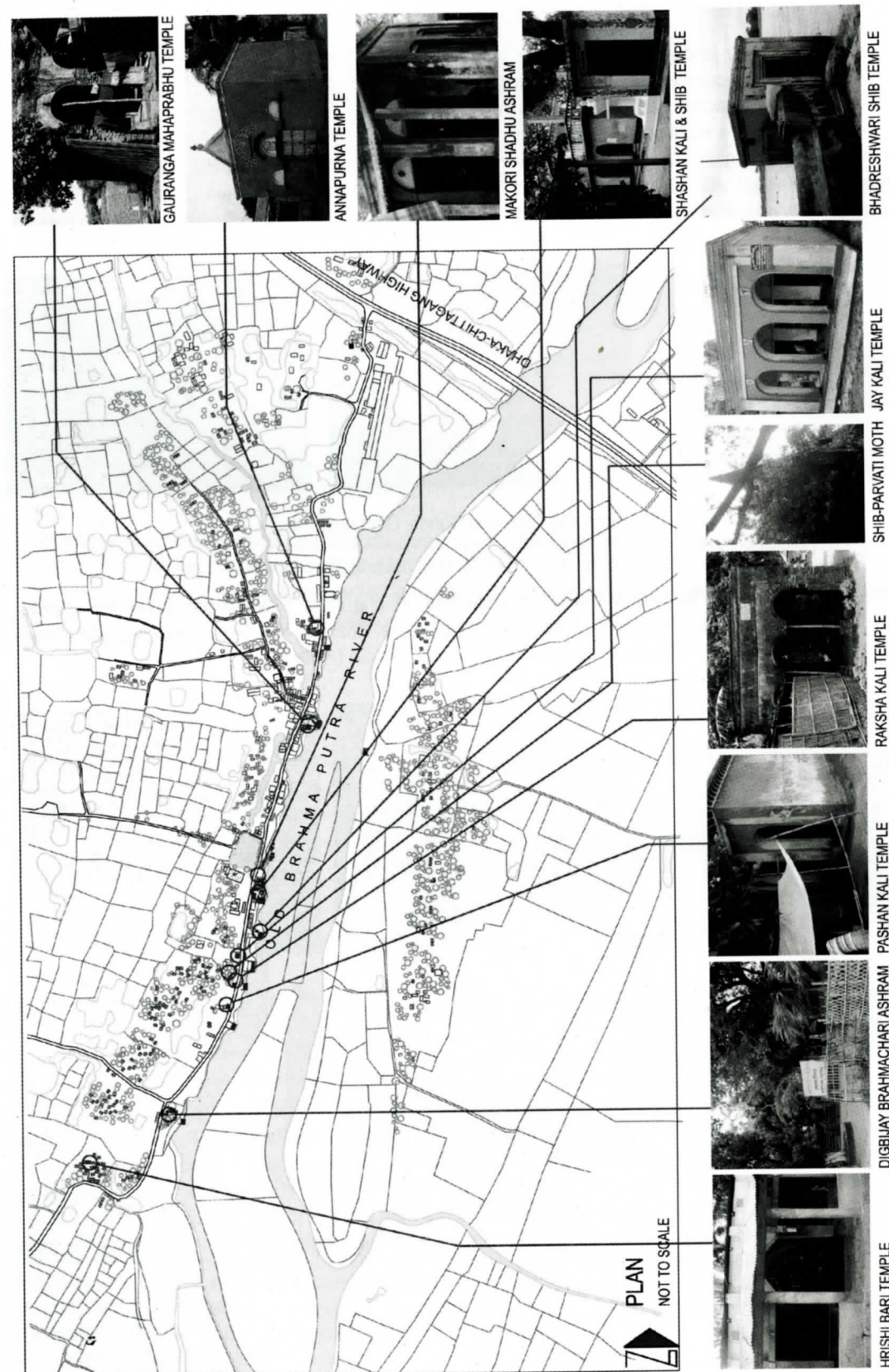


Figure 5: Map showing the location of the main temples and Ashrams  
Source: Author's photograph and self-drawn map, 2007.



Figure 6: Vehicles creates interruption in ritual activities  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

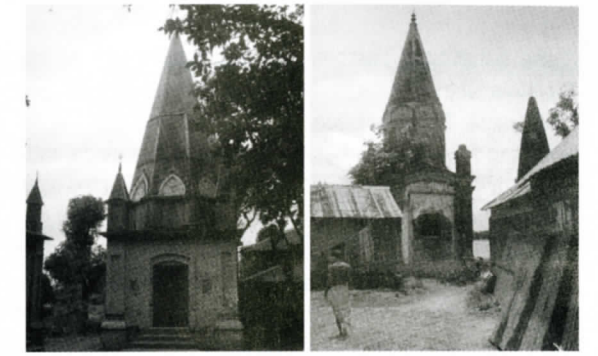


Figure 7: Lalit shadhu and other Ashrams  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

There are several Asrams (hermitages) for pilgrims (Figure 7). Many of them are of temporary structure. They are: Lalit Shadhu Ashram, Benimadhab Brahmachari Ashram, Makori Shadhu Shanti Ashram, Digvijay Brahmachari Ashram, Paresh Brahmachari Ashram (Acharjee, T., 2004: 89). During the festivals as well as on other occasions a few pilgrims take shelter and serve the god and people. A few pilgrims can take shelter at the main festival time in a rectangular permanent structure named "Tilak Yatri Nibash" (Figure 8). But the structure remains unused in the rest of the year. During the main festival, many temporary structures made of bamboo and cotton fabric are built by the various welfare organizations to provide the pilgrims with shelter beside the road. Some inhabitants also like to sublet rooms of their cottage for the same reason and it is also a source of income for the inhabitants.

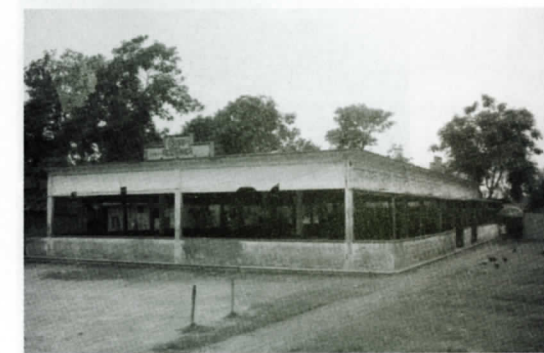


Figure 8: 'Tilak Yatri Nibash', a permanent shelter for pilgrims  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

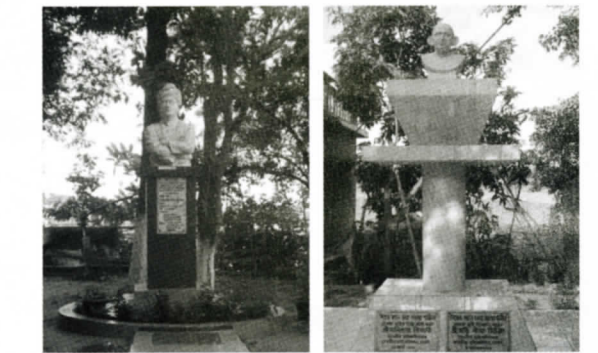


Figure 9: Statue of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.



Figure 10: shades for displaying Hindu Goddess  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.

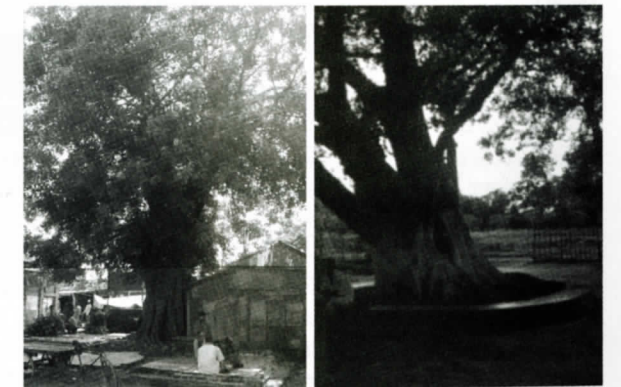
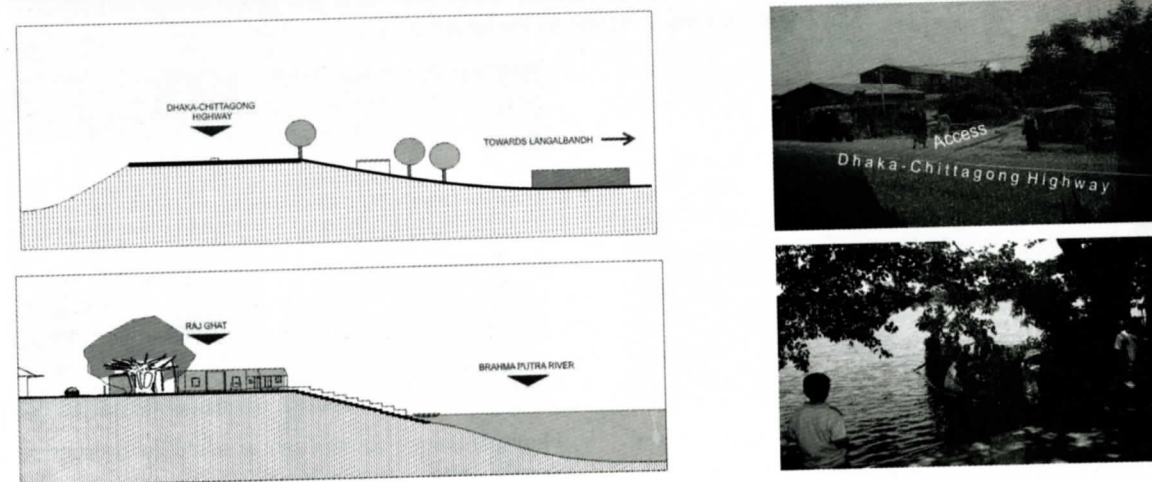


Figure 11: Old sacred Trees at Raj Ghat and Premtola  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007.



Some benevolent persons also built statues of 'Mahatma Gandhi' at Gandhi Ghat and 'Swami Vivekananda' at Premtola Ghat (Figure 9). According to the article "Mahatma Gandhir Chitabhosmo", published in the daily newspaper 'The Dainik Azaad', (issue no. 101, 14 February, 1948), the ashes of the Mahatma Gandhi were immersed here signifying how the great leader honoured this place and the ghat where the ashes immersed was named as 'Gandhi Ghat' (Acharjee, T., 2004: 88). The Raj Ghat is also significant for Swami Vivekananda as he took his holy bath here with his family (Acharjee, T., 2004: 85). Many temporary structures can be observed where many Hindu god and goddess of different names are placed for display and ritual purpose and earning money as offering from the pilgrims and visitors (Figure 10). These Hindu figures have no fixed place and these are covered all the time to protect from the natural calamities. These are uncovered when tourists or pilgrims come to visit the place especially during festival. There are many old trees (approx. 100 years old) which are important for Hindu community, as these are considered as sacred trees (Figure 11).

Various options of transportation toward Langalbandh can be noted. One can travel to this place by bus. In festival period, the huge numbers of pilgrims are provided with special Bus services (Figure 12). Transportation by boat is another option to come to this sacred place. During the main festival period the road is covered with temporary stalls and crowds. As a result, circulation of pilgrims becomes troublesome. During the festival period, the road acts as a pedestrian road. Among the community facilities there are a government primary school, mosques, a Kacha bazar, Musapur union office, Grameen bank, Kindergarten school with a small library, post office etc. at Langalbandh. Tube-well is the main source of water-supply here. All drainages are sloped towards the river or adjacent ditches. It is also a main reason of water pollution.



**Figure 12:** Existing Vehicular and Aqua transportation facilities at Langalbandh  
Source: Author's photograph and drawing, 2007.

### 3.0 Rituals and social dimensions

Ritual is an expression of cultural and social continuity. It serves to revive and express the memory of myth associated with an event, person and place (Kanekar, A.K. 1992: 12). According to the Hindu mythology, here Parshuram, son of the saint Jamadagni, is the person for whom the place became significant. He had found the holy water (the son of Brahma) in a cave at the bottom of the Himalayas (Acharjee, T., 2004: 60). He had brought the holy water from Himalayas by his plough for the welfare of the common people and stopped his plough here at Langalbandh. For this reason, the river is named as 'Brahmaputra' and the place as 'Langalbandh' (Acharjee, T., 2004: 60). Here the main event for the Hindu religion is the 'Maha Ashtami Snan' which held on the auspicious day of Chaitra (usually in the month of April). Thus, myth and rituals are very closely related. As there is a myth like: the holy river washes the place unceasingly, unending streams of people visit the place along the river at this time of the year in seeking blessings of Brahma. The prosaic life of riverside area is totally transformed to an unrecognizable degree during this main festival. This 'Maha Ashtami Snan' involves the entire settlement as well as places around them. Economy is one of the main reasons behind the fairs. Like other ritual of the pilgrimage events, this event also involves a journey of special

significance from one spot to another. Thousands of pilgrims take their holy bath at ghats (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 45) in a prescribe sequence like visiting temple, taking bath at ghats, visiting goddess at the temple again, receiving 'proshad', listening the ritual songs etc. (Figure 13).



**Figure 13:** Ritual activities during the main festival  
Source: Author's photograph, 2008 and Asad's photograph, 2006.



**Figure 14:** Langalbandh fair during the main festival  
Source: Author's photograph, 2008

On this occasion, a three-day long fair takes place. The main attractions of the fair are exhibits like pottery, products made of bamboo-cane and thread like hand fans (Figure 14). These exhibits are very popular among the devotees. There are also some arrangements to entertain the children like puppet shows, circus, and merry-go-round (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 47). Sweetmeat stalls do brisk business during the fair. Tourists also come to that fair to buy articles, arts and crafts.

During the "Ashtami Snan" festival, many welfare and charity-organizations and committees organize welfare programs for the pilgrims such as catering, health care, 'Proshad' making etc. But in various occasions all the year round, many of the organizations also arrange welfare program like free medical treatment, training, relief supply etc. (Figure 15).



**Figure 15:** Activities of the charity-organizations  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007 & 2008

In every purnima and in various Puja festivals (Ashare purnima, durga puja, lakshi puja etc) various people as well as pilgrims gather here in the temple complexes. The devotees also take the ritual bath on the occasion of Chaitra Baruni (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 47). Small temporary stall, cultural performance, 'kirtan', puja, 'vogh' etc



various types of activities are main attractions here. Shanshan Ghat which defines cycle of life to death also becomes the source of event all the year round.



**Figure 16: Friday 'Haat'**  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007



**Figure 17: Daily activities: pottery and boat making**  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007

The scenario at the festival time and the ordinary time is completely different. The rural inhabitants of Langalbandh culturally do many activities which attracts the tourist all over the year. Among the daily activities 'Proshad' making, pottery, boat making, wood and bamboo work, fishing etc. are significant ones (Figure 16). On every Friday, a large 'haat' is held with various kinds of activities in Langalbandh (Figure 17). Various types of daily necessary accessories and bamboo, grocery things, handmade crafts, clothes are also available here.

#### 4.0 Old structures, Decorations and Damages

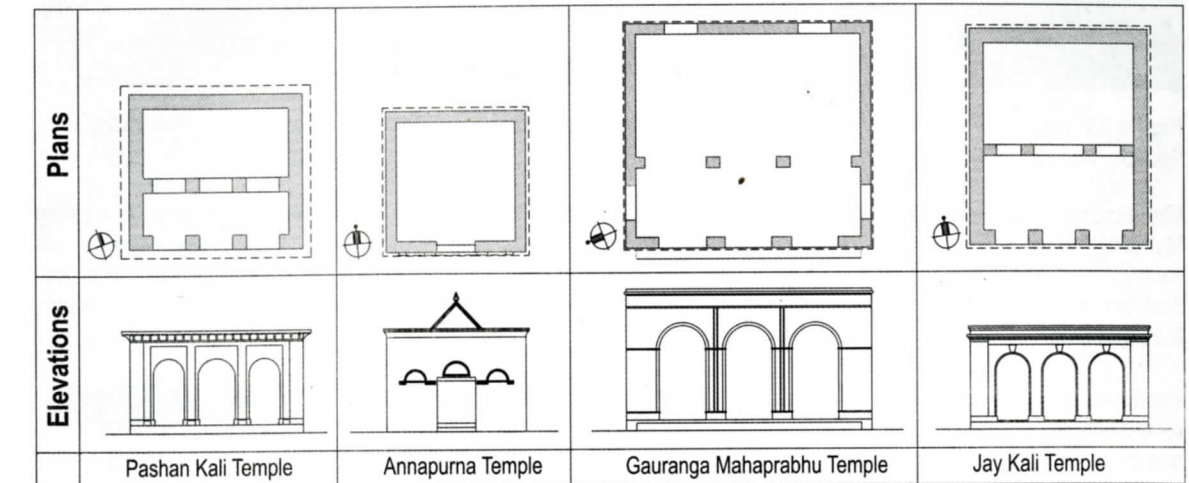
In Langalbandh, most of the structures are of brick masonry constructed with the design techniques of the mughal period. Special modules of bricks from local clay with lime mortar which are usually used in mughal buildings can be noticed in those structures. Some of the old structures have been refurbished with new finish materials such as cement mortars and neat cement finishes in course of time. The original load-bearing structures can be still observed. Among the ritual structures of Langalbandh area, many old structures carry some significant histories. Gauranga Mahaprabhu Temple, constructed by Sri Nandakumar Poddar 108 years ago (bengali year: 1308); Annapurna Temple, renovated about 70 years ago (bengali year: 1346) with the funding of Jitendra Nath Chakrabarti; Makuri Shadhu, established on Bengali year 1346 are the notable structures that need restoration (Acharjee, T., 2004: p. 84-90). Many of them renovated without paying attention to the appropriate techniques of restoration.



**Figure 18: Rich decorations in moth and damages observed in temples and 'ghats'**  
Source: photograph taken by T. Alim, 2009 and Achaejee, T., 2004, p. 36

Rich floral decorative elements embellish the moths of Lalit shadhu's ashram in the north and the Dakshineshwari moth in the south (figure 18) of Langalbandh. Majority of the temples consist of 'mughal' Arch of various proportions with minimum decorative elements where ceiling of the temples are of 'kori-borga' structure. There was also an old temple beside the Raksha kali ghat which was demolished in the near past. The old ghats and temples are damaged (figure 18) with prominent cracks in the ceiling and walls, external and internal walls and ghats, being destroyed pernicious vegetal growth. The main reasons behind these damages are excessive dampness, dust, natural disasters, vegetal growth and termites, vibration caused by traffic, encroachments, vandalism and lack of maintenance. There is no

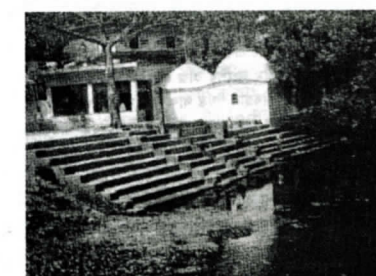
previous record of architectural drawings of the existing structures. Some of the drawings was done during the field survey within the scope of the study (figure 19). But, Damage survey as well as more extensive documentation of existing old structures such as ancient temples, ashams, ghats, moths with detailed drawings, structural analysis, preservation and consolidation are urgently needed.



**Figure 19: Plans and front elevations of some notable temples**  
Source: Drawn by the author from field survey, 2008

#### 5.0 Comparison with other pilgrimage places:

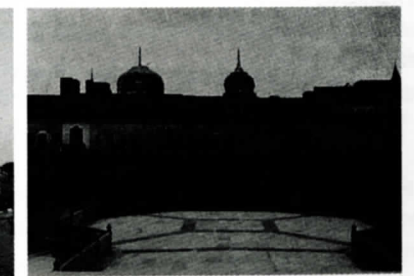
In Bangladesh, there is another pilgrimage place called "Chandranathdham" at Shitakunda 37 kilometer away from Chittagong (Figure 20) where the context is entirely different from Langalbandh. Here the pilgrimage pathway is in a hilly area between two main temples "Virupaksha Mandir" and "Chandranath Mandir" (Biswas, P. K., 2005: 115). A thousand-year-old Shiva temple stands at the top of the Chandranath hill. There are many other old temples situated at various parts of the 500m high hill. Thousands of devotees gather in the temple at night on 14th Falgun (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 25). In India there are many river side sacred places. Among them Varanasi (Kashi), Gaya, Mathura and Vrindavan Ghats, Haridwar, Ayodhya Ghats are noteworthy ones. In these important riparian towns the complex cycle of activities and interventions at the ghats, have given rise to an extremely beautiful and impressive array of structures that have become architectural assets in their own right.



**Figure 20: Shitakunda, Chittagong**  
Source: Biswas, P. K, 2007: 113



**Figure 21: Varanasi, India**  
Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varanasi



**Figure 22: Ayodhya ghats, India**  
Source: Ray, R., 1996.





**Figure 23:** Haridwar, India  
Source: IndiaLine, 2006



**Figure 24:** Mathura ghats, India  
Source: Ray, R, 1989.



**Figure 25:** Langalbandh, Narayanganj  
Source: Asad's photograph, 2006

Varanasi, or Benaras (Kashi), is one of the oldest living cities in the world (Figure 21). Varanasi's prominence in Hindu Mythology is virtually unrivalled. This is a city of spiritual light. It is also renowned for its art, music heritage, silk weaving and crafts. Again, Gaya is situated on the bank of Falgu River. This place is significant for both Hindu and Buddhist religions. It is surrounded by small rocky hills. Ghats and temples line the banks of the sacred River (Singh, R.S. and Singh, R.P.B., 2007).

Ayodhya is a city of temples which is situated on the right bank of the mythical river Sarayu (Figure 22). It is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It is known for its many famous temples and is one of the location for Kumbha Mela like Langalbandh mela. But scale of the 'Kumbha' fair is vast. This Hindu sacred occasion is the largest religious gathering on Earth (Ray, R., 1996). Haridwar is an ancient city on the Gangas River (Figure 23), located between the Gangetic Plain and the Himalayan foothills. It's a city located in northern India, in Uttaranchal state (Microsoft Corporation, 2007). It is one of the seven holy cities of Hindus, and its name means "door of Hari". According to the researchers the oldest fair started about 2,000 years ago in Haridwar (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, 2006: 01).

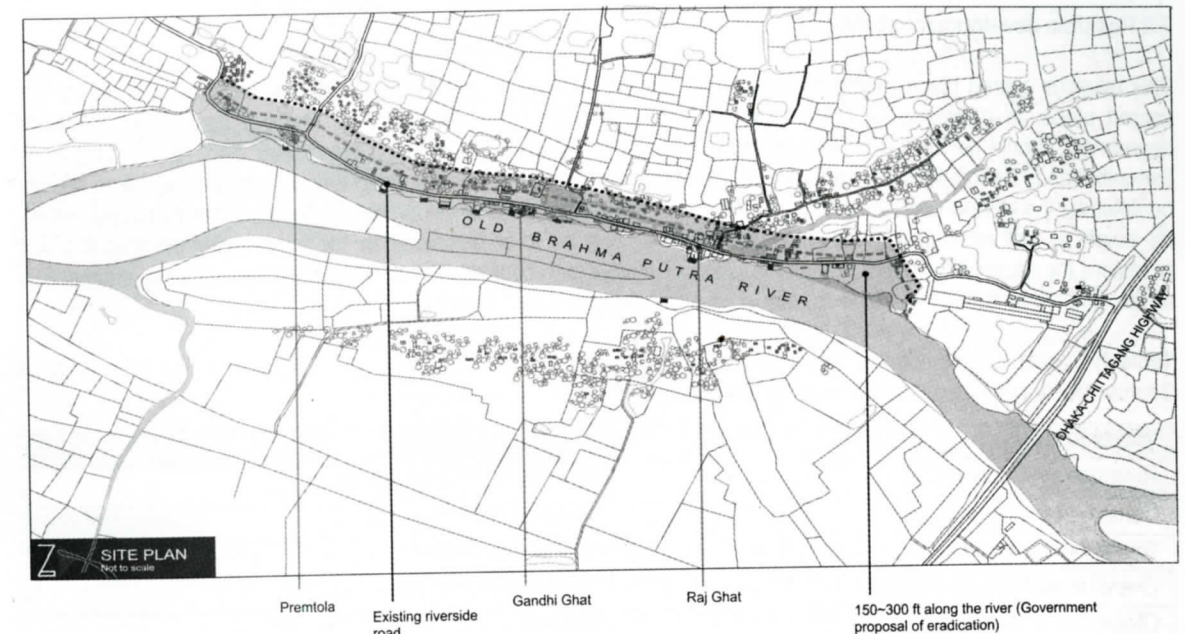
The context of Mathura 'ghats' (Figure 24) is similar to the area of Langalbandh. But, again Mathura's degree of development is larger and more developed. A special group had worked to conserve and revitalize a part of the area of Mathura named Sati Burj area (Ray, Rajat, 1989: p. 61). Their conceptual base was restoring the structure, developing land-river interface, infra structures, urban furniture and above all maintaining a self-sustaining nature. Another sacred place is the Vrindaban ghats. The ghat-edge is almost three kilometers long and convexly bends toward the river (Ray, Rajat, 1989: p. 65).

Analysing the all pilgrimage areas mentioned above, with extensive literature review, it can be noted that the context of Langalbandh (Figure 25) is very unique from historical and physical point of view. All of the above places had been started to develop from long time ago. So many developments were phased by the government as well as other organizations while continuing architectural conservation processes there. But Langalbandh is in initial developing phase. It is the appropriate time to take proper initiative to conserve this holy place so that it could be maintained as a sacred place in future.

#### 6.0 Current Proposals and the effects:

Langalbandh will be developed as a pilgrimage place as well as a tourist spot (Acharjee, T. 2004: 92). The decision came from an inter-ministerial meeting with Religious Affairs Adviser in the 07 May 2007 (2007, Meeting minutes, Ministry of Religious Affairs). The Deputy Commissioner of the district had been asked to submit a project plan on land requisition mentioning the quantity of khas and vested property to the ministry concerned. The meeting also decided that an 8-km area along the Brahmaputra River would be re-excavated and 14 ghats would be reconstructed by Water Ministry under the supervision of Religious Affairs Ministry as part of the proposed project.

Besides, the Architecture Department would formulate a master plan following which the ministries concerned would reconstruct the temples, set up shades, guide-walls, roads and other necessary infrastructures. The Ministry of Forest and Environment would set up tree-shadows, a tourist corporation and a restaurant as a part of the project. A police station would also be set up to ensure public security in the area.



**Figure 26:** Map showing the approximate area of government's proposal of development  
Source: Author's self-drawing

The current proposal for this sacred place is encouraging and appreciable. But more sensitive and analytic approaches which are related to restoration of the historic sacred place (Cartwright, R.M., 1980: 127) and development of the total master plan are required to be adopted. The initial proposal is to relocate the illegal as well as legal inhabitants which covers approximately 150-300 ft along the edge of the river to setup a clean area for development (Figure 26). But it may be an incorrect approach to conserve the area. The decision of eradicating the rural settlement along the river may take off the traditional life of Langalbandh. From the observations, it is found that some of Hindu families that use to serve the temples and ashrams for a long time are the part of this rural area. Some stalls and small factories which act as threats for conservation could be relocated. But total context of this sacred place which consists of riverside natural landscape, rural settlement, ancient temples, ashrams, ghats, daily activities of people should be restored to retain the traditions.

In reference to the current proposal, the existing riverside vehicular road would be widened with new designed landscaping. But for this approach, the natural profile would be totally changed into an artificial context. The existing 12 feet wide road with heavy traffics acts as a stumbling block for ritual activities of some temples and adjacent ghats, as the road goes through between them. The sustainability of the ancient temple structures is in threat for noise of the vehicles. Though the road is the only way to access to the place, widening the road with vehicular access would rather increase the problem.

A tourist complex, recreational facilities, children amusement parks etc. are also going to be developed here in future. But these features should not be located in the pilgrimage area as it may change whole definition of the sacred place and the place of worship would be changed into a recreational tourist place. The major negative effects of the current proposal can be mentioned as follows:

Eradicating the existing rural settlement along the river may disrupt the traditional life of Langalbandh.

Widening the existing vehicular road would rather increase vehicular traffic and heighten the problem of obstructing the ritual activity and conservation of old structure.

Tourist recreational facilities within this site would destroy the sacred profile of this place of worship.



## 7.0 Possible development strategies

This religious sacred place should be developed with some sensitive approaches which will be help to conserve the sacred place. In reference to various sacred places that are being developed in India, a designated group or department should be formed for proper analysis of this sacred place to develop the master plan. As the context of Langalbandh in Bangladesh is completely unique from other pilgrimage places, special decisions and regulation should be taken by the government for restoring of the place. Besides the new development works, government should restrict the height as well as other aspects of the buildings that is going to be developed in the future within the area in order to restore the sacred profile and the rural landscape. Master plan could be developed and implemented in phases. But all the concerned authorities (Table 1) should co-ordinate properly to achieve that goal.

**Table 1:** Concerned authorities of the action plans  
Source: Meeting minute, 2007, Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Works to be done	Concerned authority
Riverside development	Ministry of Water Resource
Conservation of temples	Ministry of Religious Affairs
Tourist facilities	Tourist Corporation
Overall master plan and details	Department of Architecture, PWD
Others	Ministry of Culture

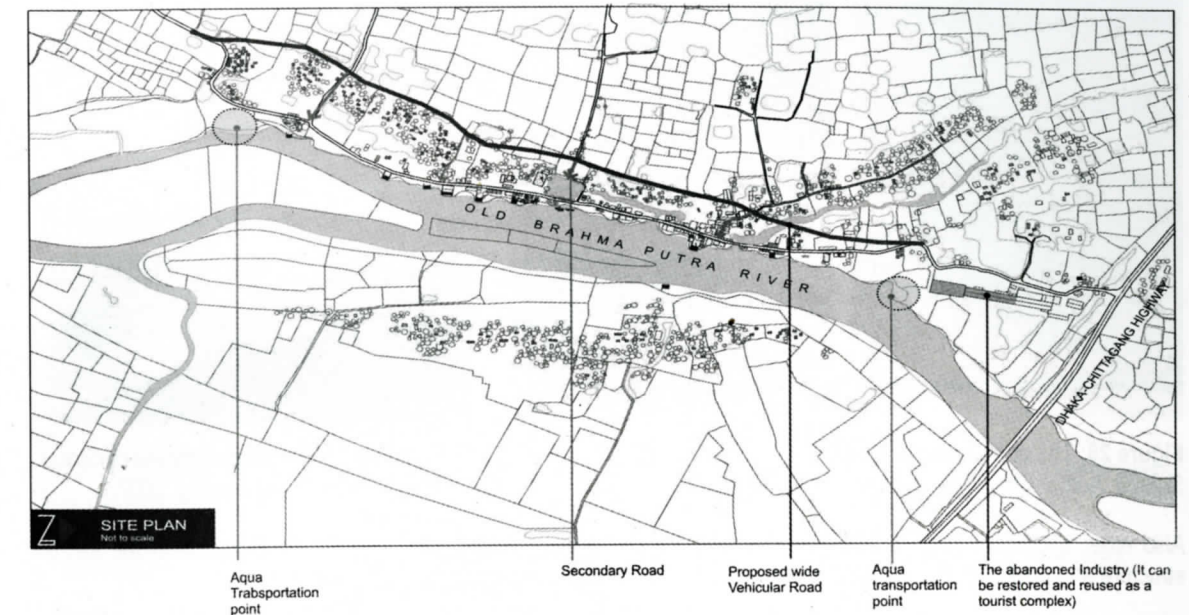
The master plan should have many layers considering architectural conservation as well as other technical aspects. The possible layers of developments could be:

- Consideration of Transportation: (Pedestrian, vehicular and aqua transportation)
- Access and circulation (pedestrian and Vehicular road network and nodes)
- Parking system for tourist and pilgrims during the festival and at other times
- River side development to conserve the place of worship (river-land interface)
- Conservation of Individual ancient temple complex with adjacent ghats
- Tourist complex (tourist facilities)
- Allocation of space for fair, camping and other temporary facilities for the festival.
- Spaces for supporting community and welfare facilities
- Development of services (toilet and dressing facilities during festival, water supply, drainage and others)
- Safety-security system of the area

The master plan should have a conceptual base which would guide the whole process (Ray, R., 1989: 65). Following the conceptual base some action plans can be developed consulting with all special groups to implement systematically. For facilitating the tourist and pilgrims and to keep the sacred profile of the Langalbandh site, it should be developed with a conservation oriented master plan. The master plan can be developed and implemented through 2-3 phases. The development strategies with possible design ideas of these phases could be as follows:

### 7.1 Phase one

The first work should be repairing and restoring the existing ancient temples, ashrams, moths and Ghats with proper analysis of the structural system, materials, color etc. Documentation of all the old structures should be carried out with the support of special archeological and conservation team. By relocating minimum illegal houses, stalls, small factories, these sacred structures could be kept secured with participatory surveillance approaches. The depth of Brahmaputra River rationally designed and the main connecting point from the highway should be widen to enhance the transportation. At certain point of the riverside some new and separate landing platform should be provided for aqua transportation (Figure 27) to restore the existing 'ghats' for only ritual purpose. The existing infra structures should be analyzed with the support of technical department and make some action plans in order to develop drainage system, prevent the water pollution and other services.



**Figure 27:** Map showing the proposed road network, transportation and existing abandoned industry.  
Source: Author's self-drawing

### 7.2 Phase two

A wide peripheral vehicular road could be proposed parallel to the existing riverside-road, outside the rural area, without eradicating the rural settlements (Figure 27). This road would be the main road for vehicular access towards the sacred site and existing secondary roads could be connected with it and stopped before the river-side to restrict the vehicular circulation. It could be an option to restore temples as well as to revitalize the temple activities with the adjacent ghats without disturbance of the vehicles. The existing riverside road could be developed as a wide pilgrimage pedestrian pathway for performing all ritual activities uninterruptedly. Restoring all the existing old sacred trees, some new trees could be proposed for enhancing the landscape. These could be some holy trees like Krishnachura and Radhachura trees to make the pathway colourful during the main festival in April. Also at this phase, the embankment is an important issue. To maintain the natural contour and landscape of the riverside new technologies like use of geotextile can be implemented here. It may also decrease the soil erosion of riverside land which is now a serious issue. Every temple complex consists of a temple, adjacent ghat, common activity space etc. Justifying the public, ritual and contemplation zones, individual temple complexes like Arnapura temple, Jaykali temples, Pashan kali temples etc. with their adjacent ghats should be developed to define activities of the individual temple-complexes (Figure 29). Toilet, dressing and other services should be provided according to the need analysis.

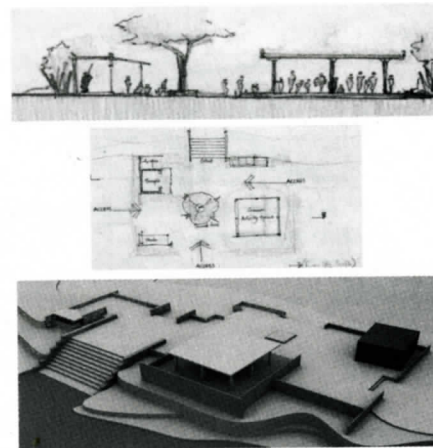
### 7.3 Phase three

After conserving the total sacred place, Tourist complex with entertaining facilities could be developed at this phase. But it should be constructed outside of the sacred profile. At Langalbandh there is an old industrial structure which has been abandoned for more than 10 years (Figure 27 and 28). It is located at the entry point of Langalbandh near the Dhaka-Chittagong highway (Figure 27). As the government is trying to procure this site from the owner, the tourist complex with its necessary functions like restaurants, library, multipurpose space, boating club, tourist guide and residential accommodations could be retrofitted here without demolishing the structure of the industry. Some structures for community facilities and welfare facilities could be developed. At this phase, new continuous ghats could be constructed with all facilities, as the limited number of ghats cannot facilitate the large number of pilgrims to take holy bath during the festival.





**Figure 28:** The abandoned Industry  
Source: Author's photograph, 2007



**Figure 29:** revitalization of temple complex  
Source: Author's self drawing, 2007

Also other alternative phases could be proposed for sustainable development with the conservation of the sacred structure and places in an integrated master plan of Maha Tirtha Langalbandh.

## 8.0 Epilogue

Every year innumerable pilgrims come to Langalbandh. This holy place occupies an important part in the heritage of Bangladesh. As the place has the religious as well as historical significance, sustainable development of this place of worship involving conservation as well as a detail master plan design is a dire necessity. Considering the unique nature of the project proper procedures and analysis should be followed to develop this sacred place. If the development in the considered phases is accomplished successfully, more pilgrims as well as tourists will visit the historical holy place all the year round and it will be a powerful impetus to develop the economy of the place and the country.

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## Notes

- i. A **Tirtha** is a holy place where there is a well, pond, lake, river or sea, the waters of which are considered to be holy. The Sanskrit word Tirtha, meaning 'water' has come to connote, by religious tradition, any place of pilgrimage on the banks of sacred streams of water. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirtha\\_and\\_Kshetra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirtha_and_Kshetra)).
- ii. As used in many parts of South Asia, the term **ghat** refers to a series of steps leading down to a body of water. In Bengali-speaking regions, this set of stairs can lead down to something as small as a pond or as large as a major river ( Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghats>).
- iii. In religion and spirituality, a **pilgrimage** is a long journey or search of great moral significance. Sometimes, it is a journey to a shrine of importance to a person's beliefs and faith. Members of many major religions participate in pilgrimages. A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrimage>).
- iv. Traditionally, an **ashram** is a religious hermitage. It would typically, but not always, be located far from human habitation, in forests or mountainous regions, amidst refreshing natural surroundings conducive to spiritual instruction and meditation (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashram>)

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