

## Murder at the Udyan

DR NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

ARCHITECTURE and poetry are massive branches in the tree of art, not that the former is rooted only to it. They have their distinctive similarities and stark differences. Both can caress the senses in their special way, create awe in the privileged mortal that stops to ponder. They sway together because they both have their own means and methods to touch the emotions.

While one exploits the arrangement of solids and voids to create visual wonderment for the beholder, the other can weave edifices at places where no man has tread or perhaps will. Both affect the finer senses and can be enjoyed as a spatial experience. While one form can only be initiated by a client with a need and means, the other can opt to flourish in the realms of the creator's regal privacy. The form of one is essentially public, however private the elements may be, the other can choose to be heard at the discretion of the creator.

Despite their natural and obvious differences, it is not surprising that they found common ground to raise their voices in unison when trees were slain in a fast depleting park in the city centre. They met at the Udyan because they were both concerned at the folly of fellow beings; the feelings of both have been scarred. And remain so.

The Ode to Nature is an outburst of the common man, which both forms of art represents. The authors have combined architecture and verse to remonstrate their viewpoint and protest against the heinous

crime. The presentation was an expression of respect and gratitude for the trees that the designers realise give them so much. The students of the Department of Architecture, BUET, have by their design pointed their fingers at the elders. One is only candidly reminded of the adage "Children may be wiser than the elders".

The virtues of trees need no elaboration. They help us to breathe. They provide the favourite parking space, a shade to lay the picnic basket or for romantic idling. They serve us in life with sustenance and at death we disfigure them into building and furniture material. They save us from the ravages of storm and noise pollution. Their felling can only hasten global warming.

Trees have been victimised for decades. They have been uprooted from the road in front of the DMCH, from the Shahbagh-Farmgate road, from Ramna, from in front of Sheraton, from the Jatiya Press Club area, from...

It may appear that we are trailing behind in this race to save our trees. Our hope is that this is but momentary. We shall have to continue our protests in every form and forum. We owe to the lungs of the city. Our anger and concern must be made known to the perpetrators of the monstrous felony and their abettors in the government, the Dhaka City Corporation and the RAJUK. The criminals must be made to retreat.

The author is Consultant to the Editor on Urban Issues and Dean, Faculty of Architecture, BUET.

### Recommendations

1. Institute a Monitoring Cell for the preservation, regeneration and plantation of trees.
2. Create greater awareness through the mass media regarding the importance of trees
3. Undertake a comprehensive programme to save and enhance development of trees by a proper action plan from concept through implementation to monitoring.
4. Introduce income-generating projects for tree plantation
5. Tag planning permission with tree plantation, e.g. one tree per every five katha of urban land.



## An ode to nature

HASAN AHMED CHOUDHURY

The main theme of my project was to represent the present and past situation at the same time virtually. The project has three main elements:

The memorial pointing downwards which symbolises the basic form of a tree. It is a low height transparent prism: the transparency refers to the fact that we realise the heinousness of the crime committed

on July 16, 2001, right in front of the Nagar Bhaban, where citizens' rights are upheld, and are silently supporting it by remaining passive. It will be lit at night and the elements point downward to the heart of Osmany Udyan.

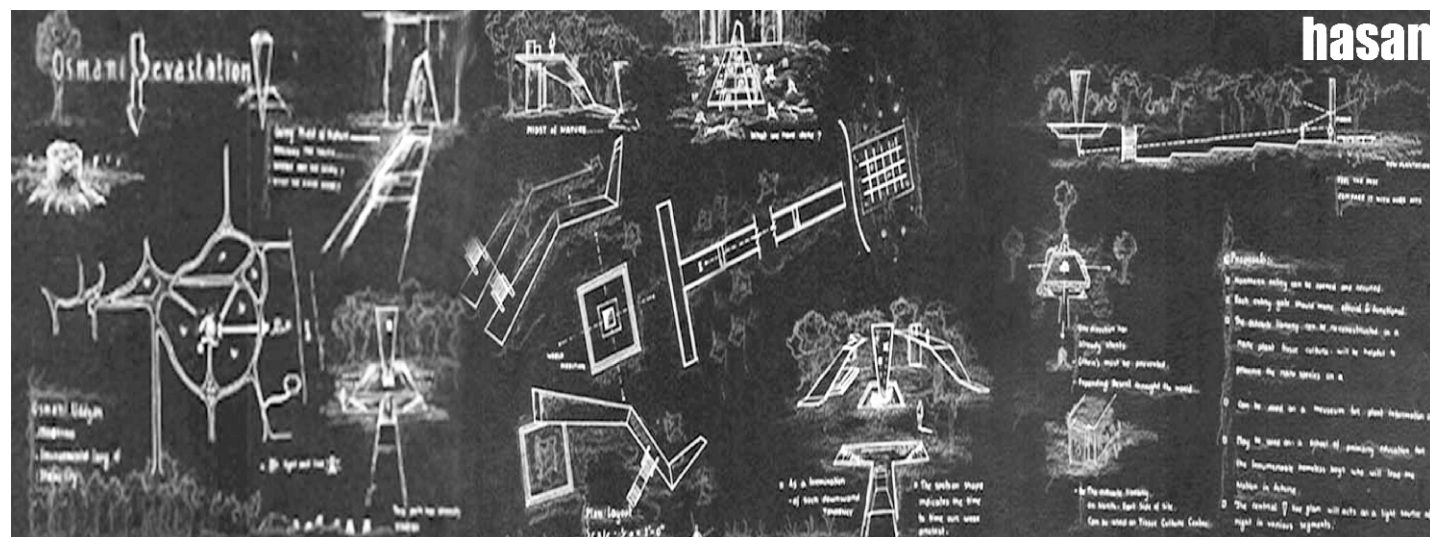
The elevated pathways will lead us into the midst of nature to feel the greenery and the benefits of shading.

The axial main processional way to the crash site, with 20' high mir-

rors angled to catch the reflection of trees behind, giving the virtual feeling of the crash site before the trees were cut. But as one approaches the end of the path one encounters a gateway, a gap in the mirror and crossing this is the devastation, the sight of the cut down trees. This will bring home the realisation of the loss the cutting down of trees has imposed on us. As the visitor turns one's back on this devastation, the downward memo-

rial will be revealed on the opposite end, and realisation of the gravity of the crime will be deeply felt.

The project does not require cutting down of any trees. The processional pathway is 240' long and slowly ascends to the ground level at the devastation site. As a programme for the rest of the site, rare species of trees can be cultivated and further trees should be planted.



## Rhythm in nature

TANIMA TABASSUM

An ode to nature means to create a rhythm in nature. Such a project has been given to us, because the rhythm of Osmany Udyan has been destroyed by the act of cutting down one hundred trees.

My aim was to symbolise the violent act and to create a memorial so that public consciousness can be raised by it. Moreover, I have tried to make the park a place of experience and a field of consciousness. To create this consciousness I have

worked with contrasts.

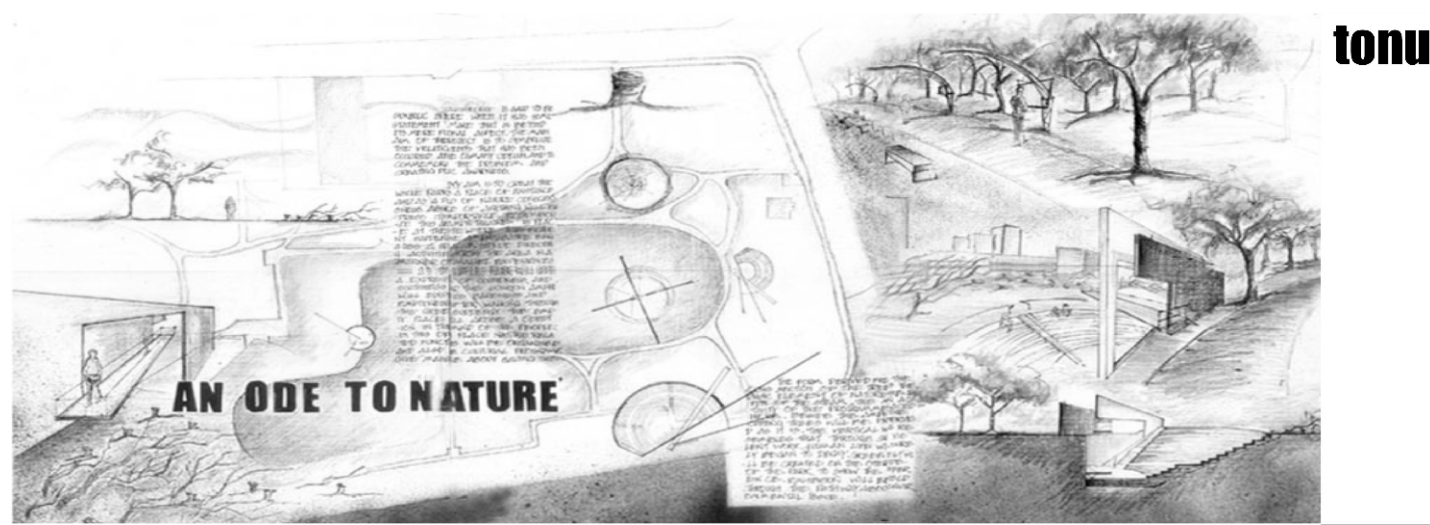
As a whole, the park gives an expression of harmony and peace. Its opposite is portrayed in the place where the trees have been cut down. My design brings out this contrast. The memorial has a long black wall, which symbolises the protest and makes the statement that through such sinful acts, human life will surely begin to decay and will lead to destruction. The wall itself protects the rest of the park from the view of the destruction. A curved sloping pathway rises up to meet a

gap in this black wall and passes through it. Once one passes through the gap one encounters the contrast of the bare stumps of the cut down trees, and the pathway continues for a while in this desolation. The pathway ends in the air, symbolising the dead-end that one is likely to reach if destruction of nature continues unabated.

At the place of the incident, an amphitheatre is placed which reflects the spatial difference in a manner of parallel experience,

where nature related programmes would be organised; the main message being 'Save Nature'.

Throughout the park on pathways there will be provision for exhibiting photographs, documents and newspaper cuttings about the violent act and other environmental issues. There will also be a restaurant on the west side of the lake, which gives opportunity to the people to gather and have their food and see the condition of the pond and the park as a whole.



## An effort to protest the sin

RAZIB HASSAN CHOWDHURY

What if? What if we changed and tomorrow were a better day? What if there were no more projects and seminars, and no need to talk about our sins and their misdeeds?

The objective of this project was to make a constant nagging reminder of the hideous and decisive incident at Osmany Udyan, while promoting regular activities within the park. This coexistence of reality of future with the events of the past will bring home to the user that one can never escape from their deeds.

The memorial I have proposed is a deformed form. I have placed it exactly where the trees have been cut, so that it acts as a materialised form of the pain we have caused by our activities. This sculpture can be entered and will act as an exhibition gallery of photographs, news, views and all published materials relating to the incident. The asbestos built structure imposes the feeling of discomfort and agony of the incident through intended abnormalities, which is enhanced by choice of material.

New trees will be liberally planted around the memorial.

But nature has its own way of healing and is even now trying to neutralise the wounds inflicted on it. As the newly planted trees grow and try to obstruct the view, new leaves try to shade the old sorrow. But even though shaded, the sculpture still echoes the sinful and shameful act.

To improve the part environment, I have proposed for a pavilion with lecture space and exhibition gallery, which will deal in environmental issues, but the major concern would be to promote wood alternatives, which will be liberally used on site. To ensure that the next generation has a close link with nature and that they don't repeat the destructive acts already taking place here, I have proposed to introduce child facilities within the park and among the trees, such as tree houses, see saws, swings, slides, etc. the presence of innocence will drive away the evils of anti-social activities.

To me the project was all about the day when we don't need to think about "What if?" but are faced with a better reality.

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An ode to nature

## Architectural symbolism to celebrate love of nature

DR. ZEBUN NASREEN AHMED

ONE of the main concerns of Dhaka City is to do with lack of open green areas, or parks. Pressures of population are slowly eroding whatever available green areas we started off with. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are slowly changing into an urban jungle hostile to nature. The few open spaces that we have are fraught with contradictions. We find them inaccessible. People cannot go in and out of them at will, because they have gates, which are often locked. And, of course, they are bounded by high walls. It is difficult to understand the psychology behind this. But the result is that, as people cannot use them, they become abandoned, ill maintained and gradually turn into crime areas, because they are so secure from inquisitive intruders.

Osmany Udyan is one such large open space in the heart of commercial Dhaka. With the Nagar Bhaban on the south, the Ramna Shopping Complex and Gulistan on the east, government offices and Osmany Memorial Hall on the north, this park is the latest victim of unplanned urbanisation.

Earlier this year the newspapers published a report that about a hundred trees in this park had been cut down during the night, in the name of an individual to build a hotel in this area. This was a blatant crime against the spirit of Dhaka. Protests rang out from all quarters, and thankfully, the cruelty was stopped... but only for the time being. Except for very concerned citizens and some environmental groups around the country, the event lost its immediate urgency. Everything was forgotten.

But can we afford to forget? Such acts of encroachment are going on wherever the public is complaisant and unaware. Commercial concerns

continue to outweigh considerations of nature and ecology.

It was to instil a permanent memory to the cruel crime against nature at the Osmany Udyan that teachers at the Department of Architecture, BUET, gave third-year design students (Level 3, Term 1) a project to design a memorial to remind general public of felling of these trees, and of the need to keep protesting against such acts. The teachers are Shamim Ara Hassan, Dr. Zebun Nasreen Ahmed, Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed and Ruhul Amin.

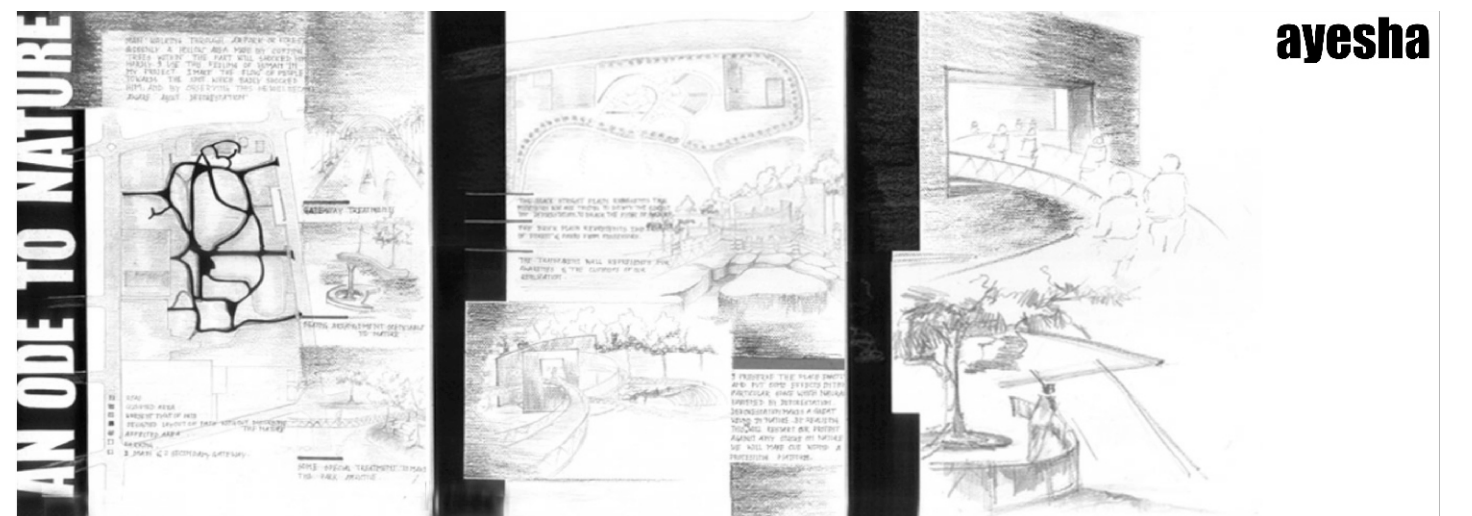
We called it an Ode to Nature. An ode is a verse set to music. We called it 'ode' because the objective of the project was to create with architecture a poetic statement, which conveys the sense of music. Music has long been associated with architecture, both art forms being the ultimate abstraction of the senses. Symbolism is the key to success in both art forms.

Through the project, the students would not only create the memorial at the site of the destruction of the trees, but would also propose a programme for the site which would keep the green area green and also create awareness among the general public about the need to live with nature. The memorial would be a constant reminder to the public about the hazards of putting individual selfish needs above those of nature.

The assignment was a sketch project of two weeks only. It called for implementation of the student's own conceptual ideas into architectural forms. All the projects thus designed were displayed in an exhibition, which accompanied this workshop. They are the products of this two-week design exercise, all being symbolic in nature, i.e. they all have some statement to make beyond mere functional aspects.

Seven of the varied responses to the project were selected by the teachers for presentation by the designers themselves during the workshop. The selection was made on the basis of creativity, contextual relevance, symbolism, and design excellence. The students were to display their sensitivity to nature, refraining from over-designing and cutting down further trees to make way for architecture. In the existing greenery therefore built structures and hard surfaces, without adequate justification, were discouraged. A brief description of the salient features of each of the individual projects, as described by the students, are presented in this feature.

Dr. Zebun Nasreen Ahmed is Professor, Department of Architecture, BUET.



## Platform for protest

AYASHA SIDDIQUA

As a person walks through the beautiful greenery that is Osmany Udyan, and suddenly encounters the destroyed space made by cutting down trees, there is feeling of shock, which shakes one to the core. Using this feeling I have prepared my project. Here a person will

pass through the enjoyments of the park, then on reaching the destroyed place will be able to understand the terrible condition of deforestation and attain awareness.

The memorial is created with the help of three planes homing in on the exact destroyed spot. The black plane represents the obstacles of truth, beauty and green.

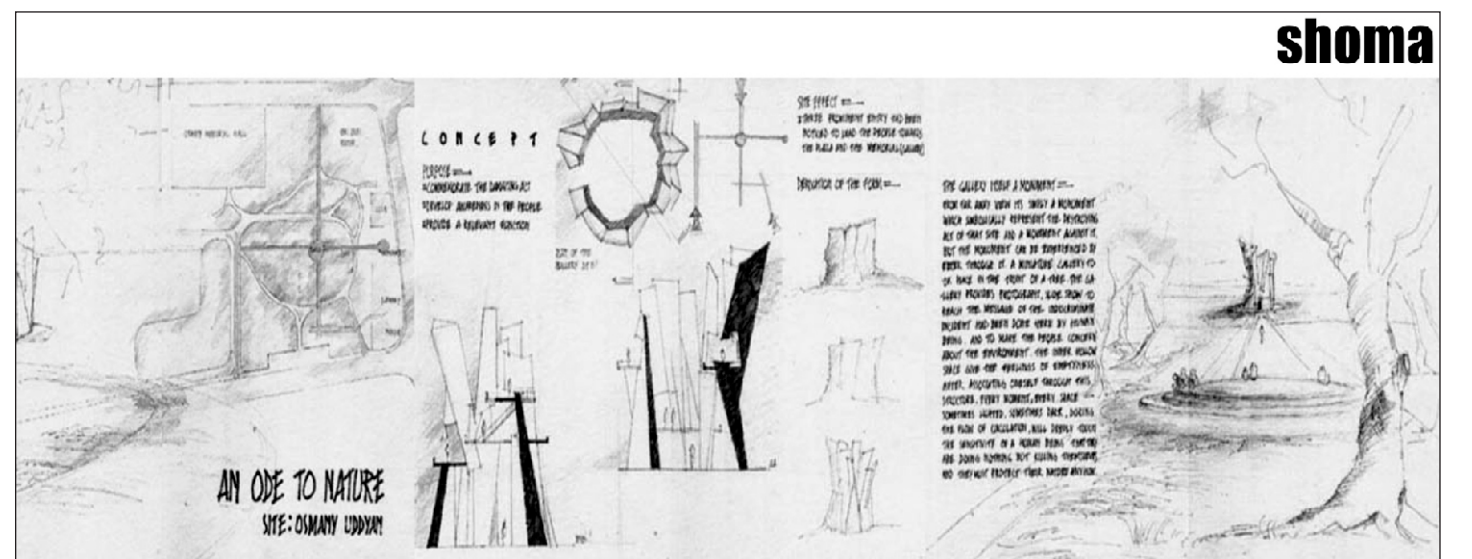
The brick plane represents our safeguard against evils.

The transparent plane represents our understanding about the existence of green and the hazards of deforestation.

Deforestation makes a wound on earth and from this wound is raised awareness. In this memorial a platform is made over the wound

and it will act as a platform for protesting and criticising crimes against nature.

The design proposal also includes: four designed gateways, designed pathways, seating arrangements, lilies on the water, children facilities, a walkway over the lake and the pathway leading to the memorial.



## Protesting a lifeless future

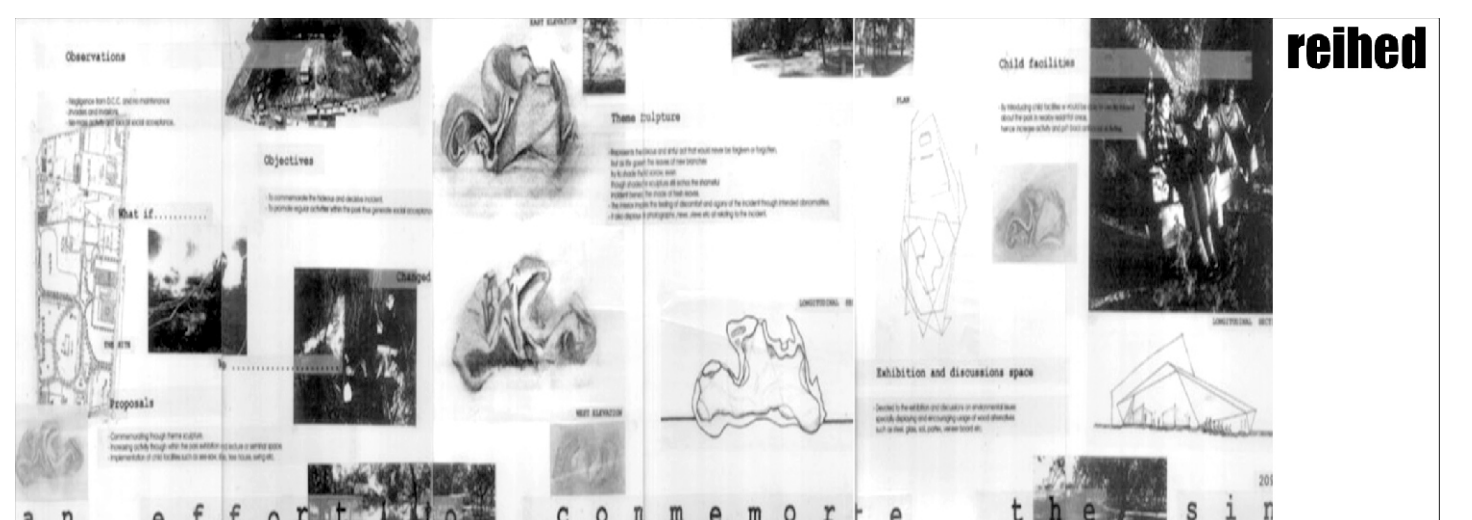
AJMERI NUSRAT SHOMA

Lifeless - this is the key concept of my design approach. Abstract representation of a destroyed tree, which now remains as a lifeless trunk, will be the form monument to commemorate protest of the damaging act.

To develop awareness in the people this monument is walk-through and will serve as a gallery. From far away the view is simply of a monument, a symbolic representation of destruction on the site against a backdrop of existing trees. A miniature gallery is designed within this abstract tree trunk, which

will have photographs and slide shows depicting the indiscriminate incident that was perpetrated here by human beings. The ultimate objective will be to create concern about the environment among the people. The hollow inner space in the trunk will convey the feeling of emptiness. After associating one-

self to this structure, every moment, every space - sometimes lighted, sometimes in darkness during the circulation, it will deeply touch the sensitivity of a human being that they are doing nothing but killing themselves in killing nature and that they must protect nature by all available means.



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