ABSTRACT

The environment of a sacred place is a carefully composed dynamic piece, with diverse elements converging to reflect spiritual inclinations. Such integration of purpose clearly differentiates sacred spaces from all other forms of architecture, which may be construed as being merely profane in comparison.

Apart from the built environment itself, multiple elements contribute to the ambience of a sacred place. The most important being the devotional body; followed by the spiritual path, the sacred setting, symbols and orientations, rituals and devotional objects and the religious authority. These elements work alongside architecture in contributing towards the realisation of the “spirit of a sacred place”. Architecture can manipulate, to a great extent, the environment of a sacred place by its formal presence, symbolic connotations and experiential qualities. However, in a few cases, the building itself is seen to subdue the sense of the sublime, reducing a place of worship to merely a space that houses artefacts of devotion. In such cases, other elements come forth in defining the spirit of sacred places more clearly.

This dissertation attempts to understand these defining elements, whilst weighing the importance of the role of architecture in the construction of the ambience of a sacred place. This is achieved by applying the understanding of the stated elements to three sacred sites based in Karachi. The nature of this dissertation question suggests a more qualitative research methodology, especially when engaging in participant observations of the local case studies; allowing for anthropological understanding of the environment. The historical and geographical understanding of these case studies was gained by interviewing professionals
familiar with these spaces. The research conducted in this dissertation based on knowledge of the metaphysical, philosophical and historical aspects collected through various books, articles and images.