

Use of Darkness in Religious Places.

A Study of User Perception on Use of Darkness for Enhancing Sense of Place

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Abstract - Architecturally we can control the sense of place by using darkness. Most of the time people turn into darkness when people want to live in their own thoughts. Religious places are places which has a huge relationship with human thoughts because it cures human mind and people usually look for the truth and inner peace. Identified matter was, there is a dark chamber in every religious place. Hindu kovils has chamber where the god lives. Catholic churches have altar space which covered from outside and light up only the god. Buddhist temples has buddha chamber which is dark inside. The question identify was why all religious chambers are dark? Does it give some kind of a spiritual feeling to the pilgrims? Does darkness can enhance the spirit of place? If the darkness can treat the human mind then as an Architects, we can use it to enhance the spirit of place. Then it will help people to create inner peace in their own places. This research focuses to identify how darkness affect pilgrim's thoughts and how feels the sense of place with darkness. Developed a questionnaire to identify the participant's perception about being dark the worship spaces and they got many different answers with equal base. All comments relate the darkness helps to concentrate their mind and helps to create a virtual gap with the outside busy world. After doing a survey test it proves that darkness helps people to concentrate their mind and calm down inner thoughts. Finally, architecture can use darkness for spaces that need relaxation.

Keywords – Darkness, religious places, sense of place, Dark spaces

I. INTRODUCTION

“Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it.”
Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man*

Darkness is the absence of colors. Most of the time people turn in to darkness when people love to be alone, when people want to live in their own worlds. It shows that the inner world knows that the outer world is an illusion. People get tired of that illusion because that is a lie. People tend to get tired of it.

Religious places are places where people usually look for the truth. Darkness has been used in religious places because it is coming from the tradition and the

culture. Darkness concentrates the mind in one point and leads us to the truth. According to my research people are less likely to go to places where the tradition is preserved with the darkness. It means that the people who concentrate the mind on one purpose are few and the vast majority of those who live with a mind scattered to the outside world.

In today's modern world also use dark places but instead of concentrating the mind and focusing on the truth, it focuses the mind on the external world. In cinema halls, night clubs are few of them. They use darkness also to please the inner. They don't focus the mind to get rid of this illusion. It doesn't have to be. The mind must be concentrated and focused on the truth. The truth means the inner world. Inner world shows the truth.

a) Research Problem

The study explores how dark places affect people's perception and thoughts about them. It examines the relationship between darkness and sense of place, focusing on whether it has a relationship with the darkness or just the sense of place. In the past, people believed fire and thunder as gods, fearing and respecting the darkness. Despite advancements in science, customs from the past still persist today, often in religious places. The question is whether there is a hidden spirituality in these dark places and if so, how to use them to highlight spiritual feelings.

b) Objective of the study

The study explores the use of darkness in religious sites, focusing on its historical significance and its role in fostering spiritual feelings. The research confirms that darkness is the primary cause of spiritual feelings in religious settings, providing a spiritual environment for busy individuals. By understanding how darkness can alter space, we can balance the darkness with the space, thereby creating the necessary sense of calm and relaxation. This research aims to understand the significance of darkness in religious settings.

c) Significance of the study

Most people today avoid spiritual and religious places due to the modern world's increasing demands and the loss of emotional happiness, as they become absorbed in the modern world. Spiritual development provides a free mind, leading to happiness and innovation. In the past, people seeking spiritual calm sought religious places, but today, people prioritize their lives over mental health. Busy people work quietly, even during short breaks, finding comfort in dark spaces. Light keeps them awake, while darkness provides inner peace and rest. Mental rest should be a spiritual break, as nightclubs and movie theaters can be both physically and mentally exhausting, as people relax and eventually get tired.

d) Darkness uses in architecture

Darkness begins at night, with the bedroom being the first experience for most people. This creates a strong sense of uncertainty, influenced by the imagination in a child's mind, leading to uncertain emotions. The fictitious image is often a result of fear or uncertainty in the dark, as people have learned to trust their own eyes from an early age, making them uncomfortable in the dark.

This essay explores the connection between the human mind's nature and its attraction to darkness. It highlights that darkness teaches us to live in the present moment, slow down, be sensitive, and be calm. This understanding helps us appreciate the subtleties of the world around us, allowing us to appreciate the beauty and complexity of the world around us.

“The present moment is the only moment available to us, and it is the door to all moments.” - Thich Nhat Hanh-

Sir Walter Scott's book emphasizes the importance of courage in the dark, urging us to remain strong and ready to face any challenge, as darkness leads to our deepest desires.

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into

the answer.”

- Rilke – LINK

(<https://spiritualityhealth.com/blogs/downward-blog-a-life-in-yoga/2016/04/25/juliepeters-celebrating-darkness#>)

e) Sense of place and architecture

Place perception refers to the emotional connection between people and spaces, with sociology highlighting that every place has unique characteristics. People's perception of the environment varies based on factors like race, class, gender, and body. A place is crucial for individual and group development, human behavior, and mental health. Architects should focus on emotional and functional qualities, as well as providing symbolic attributes, to attract people to a space.

The study highlights the diverse ways people interact with a place, influenced by disciplines such as human geography, anthropology, communication, and tourism studies, emphasizing the importance of understanding the place's essence.

According to Jorgensen and Steadman (2001), place perception is the bond between a person and the cognitive and behavioral components involved. It is built in three parts.

- 1 Place attachment - person and his / her surroundings the growing positive bond between the environment
2. Place identity- to the physical environment in which a person lives it is the identity of the person.
3. Place dependence - is perceived as the strength of the relationship between a person and a place.

Place attachment, identity, dependence, and satisfaction are all influenced by the physical environment, social and cultural associations, and preferences. Environmental psychologists argue that the physical environment impacts human behavior and mental health. The symbolic quality of a space attracts people and creates a memory in the mind, with experience being a key factor in perception. This unique experience varies from person to person and is unique to the mind.

f) Relationship between darkness and sense of place

Religious places have been built not only as a monument to religious symbols and pilgrims but also as a universe. From a cave to a hut or wooden dwelling, the religious place has gradually evolved into a remarkable structure decorated with beautiful carvings, ornaments, and meaningful paintings and sculptures.

The interior of the temple was covered with darkness, and entering the temple was a ritual process. Pilgrims must walk through the darkness before entering the darkest altar. That journey is spiritual and physiological. When pilgrims walk through the darkness, their eyes and mind will gradually concentrate.

In the same way, a Catholic church receives the same kind of feelings that its pilgrims receive. Usually, the church site is an open area, and pilgrims enter the church through a narrow and tall staircase. Pilgrims are seen the god is standing straight ahead and above the next corner of a long corridor. Light the center of the path is slightly illuminated to a goddess and there is darkness around it.

When Buddhist temples are marked, there are three parts. They are the Buddha shrine, the bodhi and the chaitya. The place of the chaitya is an open place. But the Bodhi and the Buddha shrine are dark places. The Bodhi Tree is in a dark place due to the shade of its branches. It is considered as an ideal place for meditation. One of the unique features of this place is its resemblance to other religious places. That is, in other religious places, God was placed in the highest place, not in the dark or near. However, the statue of Lord Buddha is accessible to pilgrims and has been painted in a vivid and colorful manner.

I. METHODOLOGY

There should identify the user categories to gather information of who use the dark spaces before identifying the importance of using dark spaces. This test is a survey test.

This study is done to identify people's attitudes towards darkness. For that it needs to do survey of through rough topics to discuss with people and get information.

When it comes to selecting people, it has to choose people who come to visit these places. People come to these places because they have a sense of spirituality. Selected people randomly and interviewed them with discussions. The reason to use discussing method is to get more detailed information and can get more accurate data for my review.

Basically, discussed about,

- Why they visit this place?

- How they feel darkness when entering the religious place?

Sample population was 30 people from each religious place. Each 30 were categorized as 10 children between 10 to 16 years old, 10 young people between 17 to 30 years old and 10 adult people between 31 and above years old. Data recorded with the age difference for proper analyzation.

Since this inquiry is being conducted on places of worship, several religious sites should be selected for this purpose. It should be selected by observation and considering the life span of the site. In this essay it is investigating whether the darkness of the past still exists because of its hidden perception. Therefore, it is important to consider life expectancy.

a) Sample selection

As same, there can identified Buddhist religious places, Hindu religious places and Catholic religious places in Sri Lanka. Selected one Buddhist temple, one Hindu kovil and one Catholic church for this research.

They were,

1. Pilikuththuwa Temple, Wathurugama, Gampaha
2. Shri Ponnambalawaneswaram Kovil, Kotahena
3. The Basilica of our lady of Lanka – Church, Ragama

1) Pilikuththuwa Temple

The temple in Pilikuththuwa, Uruwal Peruwe, was built in 1910 and features a small Kandian period stupa on the right of the shrine room. The Pilikuththuwa Raja Maha Vihara temple, spread over 200 acres, features 99 caves, 3rd century AD Brahmin inscriptions, drip-caved caves, and natural ponds. The temple is home to a large number of trees and caves, including the "Dola" used by Sri Sumanga of Hikkaduwa. The Bana Maduwa, a stone building with a three-story roof with tiles, is a hidden gem, attracting devotees with its inner darkness.

The Buddha chamber is located adjacent to Boomalawa. It is built under a large rock and is carved out of stone. The shrine room with a tile roof was dark. The paintings on the interior walls were more obscure from the darkness. The thick forest around the temple grounds caused a sense of mystery and infinity. South side of the temple there is a house where the monk is staying. There are several caves around it. Almost all of the caves were covered with darkness.

2) Shri Ponnambalawaneswaram Kovil

Sri Ponnambalawaneswaram Kovil, a Hindu shrine in Colombo, has a rich history dating back over 100 years. In 1857, local minor Ponnambalam Mudaliar donated the site to Hinduism Colombo, who built a small shrine for Hindu protection. Later, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan inherited the temple, which was built in accordance with Hindu Vedic texts. The temple, designed in traditional style and made of black stone, resembles a stone block from the outside, with a main entrance designed to separate it from the street.

The main entrance of a dark and mysterious temple is a large gopuram with a large wooden door. Pilgrims are drawn to the building, which is made of stone and illuminated by dim lamps. The granite texture is enhanced by the light, freeing the pilgrims' minds from the outside world. The corridors, without oil lamps, are illuminated with rectangular roof openings and windows perpendicular to the corridor. The darkness concentrates the pilgrims' minds to infinity, preventing them from being concentrated in one mind. The back of the temple building also has darkness, with the statue in black. The silhouette of the chamber is visible from the light from the window behind the chambers.

3) The Basilica of our lady of Lanka – Church

The Lady of Ceylon established a church in 1911 for Our Lady of France. In 1948, native trees of Naem and Na were planted to rest future pilgrims. The foundation stone was laid in 1950, and the building has been meticulously constructed.

The entry to the church is impressive, with the main building visible at the end. The rubber plantations on either side evoke a sense of tranquility for pilgrims. The church entrance features dark verandas with large pillars and a statue of Jesus on a circular mirror. The main entrance is in darkness, and a statue of the Mother of God is placed in the dark. Translucent windows are placed above eye level to protect from glare. The church features a stunning design with a God statue visible from inside, allowing light to enter the mosque through a circular mirror, highlighting the silhouette of the statue. The dome-shaped building's dark roof evokes an endless universe, allowing pilgrims to see God with light. The focus on external objects is not due to the darkness surrounding them, but rather on the presence of God. Pilgrims walk through trees, surrounded by water and granite,

about the darkness and the sounds of plants, embracing the environment as Christianity teaches.

	Age between 10 - 16 years	Age between 17 - 30 years	Age between 30 ≤ years	TOTAL SAMPLE
Buddhist Temple	10	10	10	30
Hindu Kovil	10	10	10	30
Catholic Church	10	10	10	30
TOTAL SAMPLE				90

Table 01: Sample population chart

Source: Author

b) Scope and limitations

It was challenging to gather a significant amount of data because the study was being undertaken in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak. Thus, out of all the responses collected through the survey that was performed among pilgrims of the chosen three religious places, only 90 complete responses were filtered. The results of this study are interpreted using means and standard errors of means due to the small sample size.

c) Data analysis

The survey questions developed using previous literatures and it includes general questions for the pilgrims who visit the place. Generate the question type in a very simple manner.

General Questions:

What is the difference you feel when entering to this space?

Do you feel darkness when entering to the main chamber?

Darkness feels better

Darkness helps to concentrate the mind

Darkness helps to avoid distractions

Darkness gives you a safe feeling

Darkness gives you a hope

Do you want to light up inside the chamber?
(BOGARD, 2020)

With the help of first question, it helps to identify the purpose they visit the space. Filtered pilgrims who visit to find peace.

Second filtration was the feel of darkness when entering to the main chamber. Filtered up to 30 pilgrims from each place.

Main difference you feel when entering to the space.

	Darkness	Any other else
Buddhist temple	30	02
Hindu Kovil	30	04
Catholic church	30	00
	90	

Table 02: Filtration of samples
Source: Author

Applied each question through a survey after filtering 90 samples and below chart shows how they respond to the darkness inside the chamber.

	yes	No	Not Certain
Darkness feels good	84	00	06
Darkness helps to concentrate the mind	78	05	17
Darkness help to avoid distraction	81	00	09
Darkness gives you a safe feeling	73	06	11
Darkness gives you a hope	86	00	04
Do you like to light up the chamber more	00	88	02

Table 03: Responses for the darkness
Source: Author

As the results can identify the darkness can affect to the human mind in different ways.

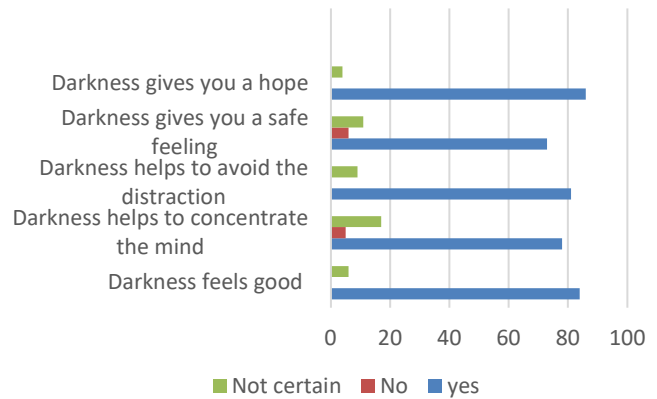


Chart 01: Result summary on Darkness

Most of them were like to keep the chamber dark. It proves when asking about whether they like to light up inside the chamber, a higher percentage were responded as "NO". Shown in below chart.

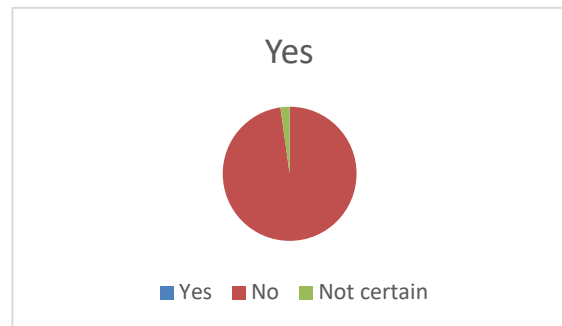


Chart 02: Respond for lighting up the chamber

II. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Most of the answers were related to the darkness and the inner darkness feels better and calm the mind.

When considering about the case studies, Buddhist temples they have dark Buddha chamber with large Buddha statue. As mentioned above pilgrims visiting the Buddhist temples said that when they enter the Buddhist chamber, they feel their minds completely free from the outside world and their minds aligned to the Buddha statue. They say that it is because of the darkness inside helps to concentrate their inner mind.

In Hindu kovils they have a middle chamber with main god statue. Middle chamber was a darkest place. Addition to that they have some amount of small dark chambers too. When discussing with the pilgrims who visit the kovil, they said that when the chamber is dark, they feel the god is live inside the dark chamber. The connection between the mind and the outside world was cut by the darkness inside the chamber. They tend to stay in dark and worship god. The light of the flame

falls on the smoke and creates a mysterious and pious feeling in the pilgrims. The cause of the feeling is the darkness in the chamber.

Catholic churches have vaults and the height of those vaults were high. As mentioned above pilgrims stay inside and the darkness and pray god. The space was dark and the mind was focus on the god statue. When discussed with the fathers of the church and they said that they make inside the church as dark because they want to separate pilgrims from outside world and want them to focus on god. When discussing with the pilgrims who visit the church, they said inside the church is very calm and when entering to the building they forgot outside world and they adapt to the worship.

Overall, the religious views of all religious places are similar, and they have used darkness in a variety of ways. Although the way it is used is different, the purpose it is used for is the same. That is to say, the darkness has been used in the past and the objectives that have been used up to the present day must be the reason pilgrims are still attracted to it.

The effect that the Pilgrims have on the minds of all religions using the darkness is almost the same. Similarly, it has existed from the past to the present due to some truth. It is 100% indescribable, one of the most unchanging emotions from the past to the present.

“first caves represented the womb in which an embryonic ‘humanity’ was gradually taking form under the pressure of a consciousness soon to be born into history.”

- Olivier Marc, *Psychology of the House, trans. from the French by Jessie Wood (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 12*

The main object was to know the human perception of the dark spaces, special reference to religious places. Whether people attract to the dark space or reject. According to this study, the result was, most of the people like to stay in darkness with religious mind. They see their religious leader or leaders in darkness in different way.

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