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A Case Study of Innerscape - A Modern Urban Ashram

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Abstract: ***In a fast-paced urban world, many people struggle to maintain emotional balance, personal clarity, and a sense of inner grounding. The modern interpretation of an ashram offers a relevant response to this challenge by blending traditional principles of reflection, simplicity, and nature-based living with contemporary spatial design. This study explores the ashram as a restorative environment—one that supports mental wellbeing through quietude, mindful routines, natural materials, and spaces that encourage slow, intentional living. By humanising the concept, the work positions the ashram not as a distant spiritual retreat but as an accessible framework for designing healthier, compassionate, and psychologically supportive urban spaces. The findings highlight how such environments can nurture emotional regulation, stress reduction, and deeper self-connection in everyday life.***

Keywords: Ashram; restorative environments; wellbeing; urban design; nature-integrated spaces; mindful living; environmental psychology; human-centred design; contemplative architecture; slow spaces.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Contemporary metropolitan life is characterised by rapid urbanisation, demanding work cultures, and continuous digital engagement. Together, these conditions have contributed to growing levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue among urban residents. Most interior environments in cities remain oriented toward productivity, density, and functional efficiency, often neglecting the emotional, sensory, and spiritual dimensions that enable individuals to feel centred and connected. This disconnection from nature and the self has become a significant challenge for daily mental well-being.

A substantial body of research in public health, environmental psychology, and biophilic design highlights the restorative role of natural elements. Even brief exposure to greenery, daylight, natural textures, or organic materials has been shown to improve cognitive performance, enhance mood, and support stress recovery.

The InnerScape project responds to these conditions by proposing a *modern urban ashram*: a nature-integrated interior sanctuary situated within the existing fabric of the city. Designed for everyday access rather than occasional retreat, InnerScape incorporates bamboo, terracotta, hemp, jute, linen, controlled acoustics, and indoor planting to create a calming, inclusive, and sensorially rich environment. It aims to support meditation, yoga, quiet retreat, and gentle community engagement for students, office workers, and other urban residents experiencing chronic stress. This paper documents the design process, user feedback, and implications of InnerScape as a model for nature-integrated spiritual interiors in dense urban contexts.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Evidence across disciplines indicates that nature exposure reduces psychological distress and supports recovery from attention fatigue. However, most urban residents struggle to access high-quality restorative environments in their daily routines. In parallel, studies of spiritual centres and ashrams demonstrate their capacity to nurture emotional resilience, mindfulness, and community connections. Yet such spaces are typically located on the urban periphery or in secluded settings, limiting their accessibility for working populations.

Urban interiors—particularly within educational institutions and workplaces—rarely integrate natural materials, spiritual ambience, and community-oriented healing into a single, coherent environment. This results in a disjunction between what research identifies as beneficial and what everyday interiors actually provide.

The research therefore addresses the question:

How can an interior environment within a metropolitan setting function as a modern urban ashram, embedding nature, spirituality, and psychological restoration into daily urban life, especially for time-constrained users?

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III. OBJECTIVES

1) To document how biophilic principles and natural, sustainable materials (with a specific emphasis on bamboo) can be applied in the design of an urban ashram interior.
2) To evaluate how spatial zoning and atmospheric qualities support meditation, yoga, informal gathering, and solitary retreat.
3) To assess user perceptions of comfort, mental calmness, and sense of belonging after engaging with the designed environment.
4) To develop design guidelines for future modern urban ashrams that integrate nature, spirituality, and community within compact urban settings.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is significant in three key ways:

1) It translates robust evidence from environmental psychology—regarding the mental health benefits of greenspace—into a concrete and replicable interior design model: the modern urban ashram.
2) It demonstrates the suitability of bamboo-based, low-impact interiors for spiritually-oriented and wellbeing-focused spaces in Indian cities.
3) It contributes to contemporary interior design discourse by positioning nature- and spirituality-integrated interiors as necessary urban infrastructure rather than optional luxuries, supporting both individual mental health and collective social cohesion.

V. CONDENSED LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies by Barton (2017), Largo-Wight (2010), and Lomax (2024) consistently demonstrate that contact with natural elements reduces stress, alleviates anxiety, and enhances cognitive clarity. These benefits are observed across socio-economic groups and life stages, indicating the universal relevance of nature-based interventions.

Research on spiritual and ecological communities such as Auroville and Gandhi Ashram highlights how architectural forms can embody spiritual values through open courts, tactile materials, layered biodiversity, and the careful choreography of light and sound. Patel et al. further proposes “nature-experiential archetypes”—such as seasonal water bodies, open verandas, and biodiversity corridors—as key mediators of sensory connection in built environments.

Workplace and educational studies indicate that even minimal contact with nature—such as indoor plants, wooden textures, or outdoor views—reduces perceived stress and improves overall wellbeing. Parallel literature on bamboo underscores its rapid renewability, structural performance, and the warm, calming ambience it creates, making it well-suited for nature-integrated interiors.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the importance of accessible, daily engagement with nature and spirituality—yet they also reveal a lack of interior-scale models that respond to the realities of urban life.

VI. RESEARCH GAP

Despite strong evidence linking greenspace, natural materials, and spiritual environments to improved wellbeing, limited research focuses on:

1) Interior-scale, modern urban ashrams within dense city settings;
2) Every day-use spiritual interiors, as opposed to occasional retreats;
3) The combined influence of bamboo, spatial zoning, and spiritual programming on stress reduction and community experience.

InnerScape directly addresses these gaps through the design and evaluation of a compact, bamboo-rich interior intended for daily urban use.

VII. METHODOLOGY

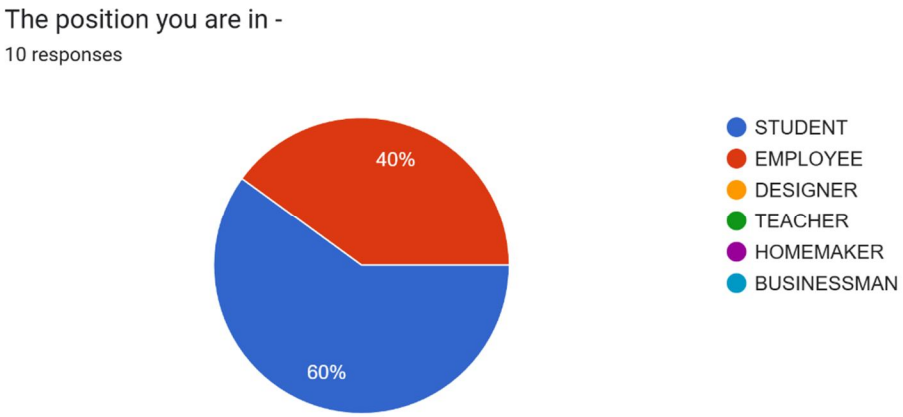
A. *Concept Development*

Literature on greenspace, biophilic design, urban ashrams, nature-experiential patterns, and bamboo applications informed the conceptual framework.

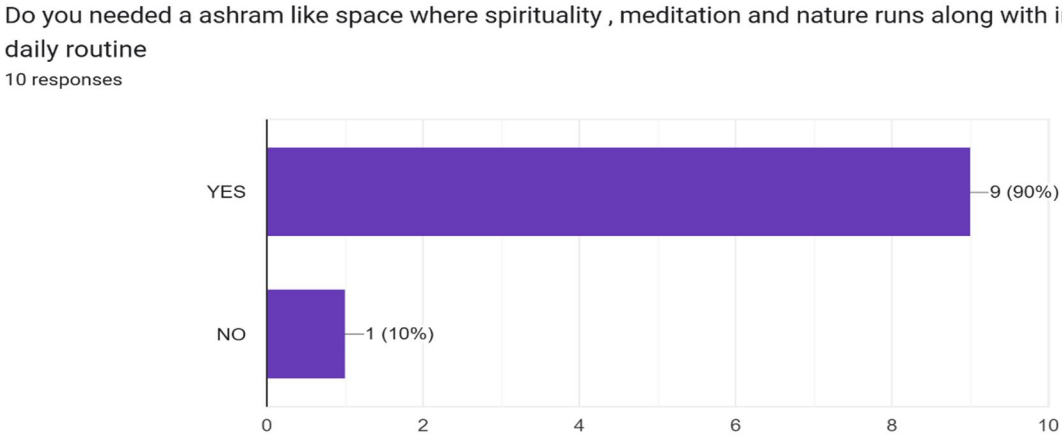
B. *User Research*

Semi-structured interviews and short questionnaires with students, faculty, and office workers helped identify stressors, coping mechanisms, and expectations for a city-based sanctuary.

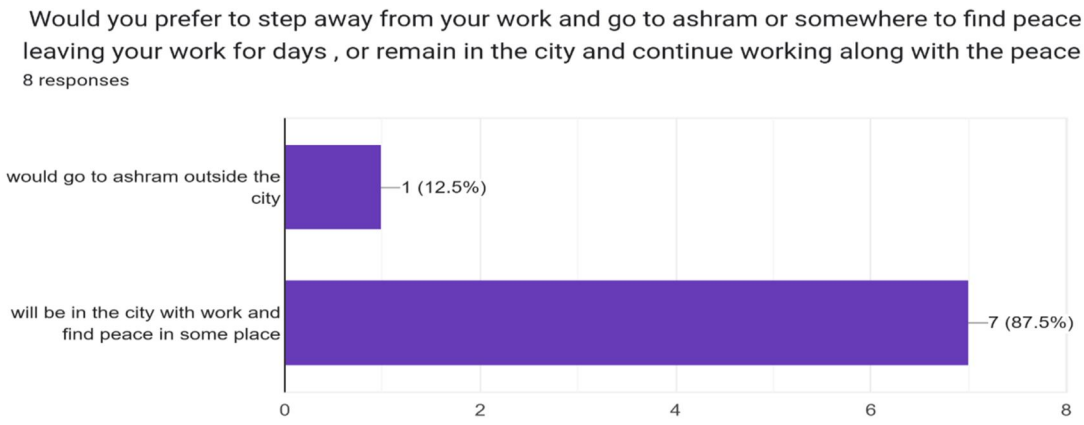
1) Type Of People Needed Space Like This



2) Do People Need These Kind Of Place



3) Do People Need A Space Like This In Their Cities



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C. *Design Development*

1) Zoning for reception, meditation/yoga hall, quiet nooks, community seating, library/reading, and support areas.
2) Material palette centred on bamboo, terracotta, natural fabrics, and indoor planting.
3) Lighting and acoustic strategies emphasising soft illumination and noise reduction. Visualization tools included AutoCAD, SketchUp, Enscape, and Photoshop.

D. *Prototype and Visualisation*

2D drawings, 3D models, and renderings were iteratively refined through faculty feedback.

E. *Post-Design Evaluation*

Twenty to thirty participants reviewed walkthroughs and visualisations. Feedback was gathered through short surveys and group discussions on perceived calmness, nature connection, and usability.

F. *Analysis*

User responses were analysed using qualitative coding and descriptive statistics to identify recurring patterns.

VIII. RESULTS

1) Perceived Stress Reduction: Most participants described the interior as calming, restorative, and supportive of mental disconnect from urban pressures. Warm lighting, natural textures, and greenery were repeatedly associated with these feelings.
2) Enhanced Connection to Nature: Users reported feeling “close to nature” despite being indoors. Bamboo finishes, plant clusters, and visual openness played significant roles in shaping this perception.
3) Clarity of Functional Zoning: Participants understood the zoning intuitively and appreciated the availability of both solitary and shared spaces.
4) Inclusivity and Cultural Neutrality: The non-sectarian, contemporary aesthetic ensured that individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds felt welcomed and represented.
5) Potential for Replication: Faculty reviewers noted that modular bamboo furniture and plant-based partitions made the design both feasible and adaptable across institutional and commercial settings.

IX. FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION

User feedback confirms the central hypothesis: a thoughtfully designed, nature-integrated interior can evoke many of the psychological and spiritual benefits historically associated with greenspace and ashram environments—*within* the everyday urban landscape.

Participants consistently valued material authenticity; recognising real bamboo and natural fabrics enhanced their sense of trust and comfort. This aligns with literature emphasising the psychological importance of tactile honesty and sensory engagement.

InnerScape also operationalises nature-experiential archetypes at an interior scale, using light wells, layered greenery, organic circulation, and natural materials to create multi-sensory restorative experiences. The findings resonate with research on stress reduction through nature contact, meditation, and yoga.

A. *Limitations Remain*

1) Feedback is based on simulated experience rather than prolonged, real-world occupation;
2) Results reflect a single climatic and cultural context (Bhopal), suggesting the need for broader testing.

X. CONCLUSION

The InnerScape case study demonstrates that a modern urban ashram—embedded within the metropolitan environment—can function as an effective daily sanctuary for mental wellbeing. Through bamboo-based materials, biophilic strategies, and inclusive spiritual neutrality, the design translates interdisciplinary evidence into a practical, replicable interior model.

The findings support the notion that nature-integrated spiritual interiors should be regarded as essential components of urban wellbeing infrastructure, offering accessible spaces for reflection, grounding, and community connection.

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XI. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

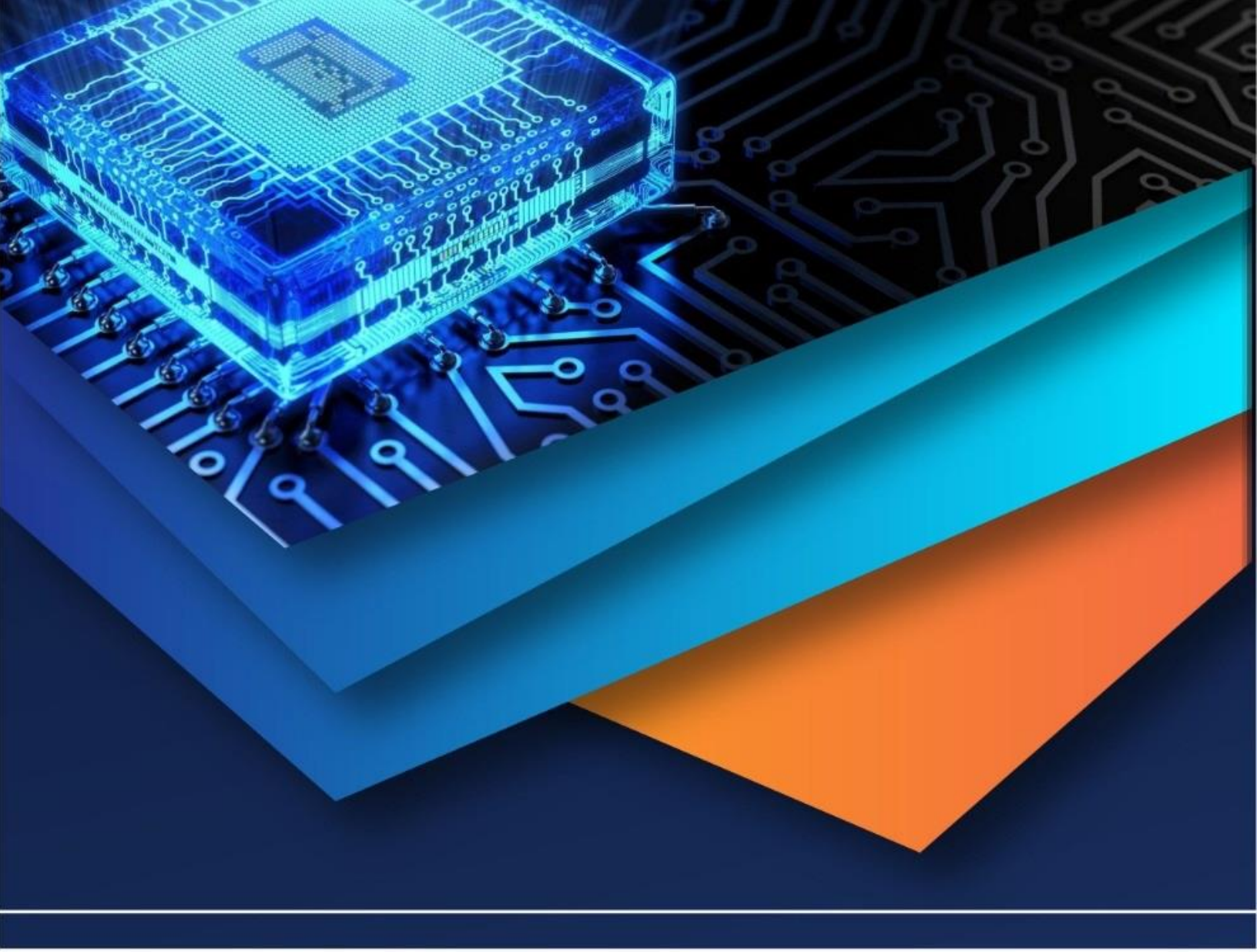
1) Implement a real-world pilot to examine long-term changes in stress, mood, and social interaction among regular users.
2) Explore advanced bamboo technologies to enhance structural performance, acoustics, and durability.
3) Compare different urban-asylum typologies—office-integrated, campus-based, neighbourhood-level—to understand context-specific design needs.
4) Integrate physiological stress measures with qualitative phenomenological interviews to deepen understanding of embodied experience.
5) Develop a design guideline toolkit with clear recommendations for materials, spatial proportions, and nature-integration strategies for broader application across urban contexts.

Together, these directions can build a stronger evidence base for InnerScape-type interiors and advance the larger goal of designing cities where nature, spirituality, and daily life are meaningfully interwoven.

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