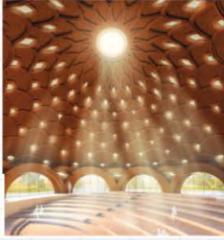
## 60-SECOND INTERVIEW

# MOULSHRI JOSHI,

# PARTNER AND CO-FOUNDER, SPACEMATTERS





SpaceMatters, the multidisciplinary, research-based design practice helmed by partners and co-founders Amritha Ballal, Moulshri Joshi and Suditya Sinha, won an open national competition to design the Baha'i House of Worship at Bihar Sharif. We find out from Joshi what the design for the country's second Baha'i temple entails.

## What is the design language employed at the Baha'i House of Worship?

The concept for the Baha'i House of Worship at Bihar Sharif draws from Baha'i teachings and the design brief – both emphasise light, celebration, joy, perfection, and a house 'belonging to the land from which it has risen'. The design needs to offer a setting for the experience of the divine, while being anchored to its surroundings and the local Baha'i community. The architecture of the edifice is an exploration of the universal sacred geometry as expressed in nature. The essential form of the Baha'i House of Worship is a nine-sided dome. The relief work on the dome draws from the Madhubani folk art of Bihar and the ubiquitous fractal patterns found in nature. A complex combination of arches and squinches rises up – creating playful patterns and apertures filtering light, culminating in an oculus.

### How have you ensured that the structure is a socially-responsive one?

In Bihar, brick is the ubiquitous material of choice – visible in the ordinary, as well as monumental architecture such as the magnificent ruins of Nalanda. While bricks are abundant, the skill and resources to undertake a technologically precise construction remains a challenge at the location. We see the project as an osmosis, an opportunity to make a two-way knowledge transfer – between rural artisans and cutting-edge technology; not frequently encountered in rural contexts of this region. This is a chance to build something exceptional within and with a rural community. In the overall campus, use of materials such as terracotta, mud and jute in collaboration with indigenous artisanal skills is integral to the community asset building mandate of the project.

## Elaborate on the sustainability features that have been incorporated into the design.

The main edifice envelopes a circular hall accommodating about 210 people in a fixed seating arrangement, and 500 people at full capacity, who face the cardinal direction – Baha'i Qiblih – while praying. To cool this space, we are employing passive cooling, relying on a low-cost system that utilises the geothermal heat sink of the surrounding earth to cool the edifice from below. The building skin is being engineered for maximum thermal comfort, and the natural lighting optimised for minimal heat gain. The native tree cover will be increased substantially, with sacred groves that are integral to the experience of the site. We are developing a plantation scheme to support the habitat of native bird species. The water pools are an important visual and micro-climate element. Our approach is to construct a sustainable living system hosting a combination of bacteria, nematodes, insects and fish. Our philosophy is to respond through local and slow, ecologically restorative solutions. The planning of the ancillary facilities draws in the rural character of the surroundings into the campus; reducing the contrast between inside and outside while learning from the vernacular intelligence of the traditional rural forms. The focus is on organic forms, clustered around trees and community spaces to design a space truly for the people.

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