



# On Sustaining Beauty

*Anna Heringer reflects on how her first experience of living and working in the small village of Rudrapur, Bangladesh, changed her understanding of architectural practice, One which has stayed with her throughout the decade since, and up to the present day*

Beauty isn't chic to talk about in the architectural scene. Architects seem to get a bit nervous when it comes to that expression. Aren't we as architects, though in the service of beauty – to facilitate others to live in beautiful conditions?

So let's talk about beauty.

My personal reflection about beauty started when I was 19 years old. I lived for one year as a volunteer for the local development organisation, *Dipshikha* in Bangladesh, which, as many people know, is both one of the most densely populated and poorest countries in the world. Poverty and the lack of job opportunities drive many people from the countryside into the cities. *Dipshikha*, have been working on giving the rural population perspectives and support to understand the value of their place in all its complexity.

When I packed my rucksack to leave for Bangladesh I decided to leave all luxury things at home. No earrings, no finger-rings, only old and well-worn clothes or functional trekking shoes. There wasn't any need, I thought, to take beautiful things to a poor country. It would only highlight the distance and difference of me coming from rich Germany and the local poor Bangladeshi people.

Once I arrived and began living in a small village, Rudrapur in rural Bangladesh, however, a strange thing happened. Wherever I went I was stared at constantly. They weren't really looking at me, though; – they were looking at my clothes. They seemed to think, 'that poor girl without any proper clothes or ornaments at all!' One day I was with some friends and we were talking, and one of them saw that I had three gold fillings in my teeth. That was the begin-