

PUBLIC PARKS OF KATHMANDU VALLEY: SOME HISTORICAL FACTS AND CURRENT STATUS OF SOME PARKS

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INTRODUCTION

A Park is a safe place in a benevolent setting where everyone is welcome. Plants are non-judgmental, non-threatening and non-discriminating. Garden containing scientifically ordered and maintained collections of plants, usually documented and labeled, opens to the public for the purpose of recreation, education and research. Thus, it may be simply defined as a place where people spend considerable time in interacting, walking, resting, doing meditation, yoga, meeting friends and dating, etc.

A public park is characterized by:

- Green and peaceful with plenty of vegetations and garden ornaments.
- Open space with grass or benches to sit and relax.
- Growing different types of trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials in well planned manner.
- Exclusive space for children, elderly and physically challenged.

Public Park is beneficial both environmentally and from health perspective. It absorbs dusts, noise, serves as watershed areas for recharging ground water and adds aesthetic beauty to the environment. It also provides space where people can meet friends, sit or talk, exercise to improve both physical and mental health.

In Nepal, the first Public Park was established in year 1990 BS. This park is Bhugol Park in New Road, Kathmandu. This park was also used as a temporary shelter for many people who were affected by the great Earthquake of 1990. However, this Park has significantly reduced in size. In Nepal, most of the Parks are maintained by the Kathmandu Metropolitan while some are maintained by community also. This survey was conducted in 2006 to study the Public Parks of Kathmandu valley with following objectives and methodology.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the historical facts of Public Parks in Kathmandu valley.
- To study the present situation including plant diversity of some Public Parks in Kathmandu valley.
- To study the preference of plants in Public Parks in Kathmandu valley.

METHODOLOGY

Field survey was done to locate Public Parks within the Kathmandu valley after reviewing literature and consultation with key personnel. Four Public Parks were selected for detail study with regards to current situation of Park, plant diversity and plant preference in the Park. Information on area of the Parks, management of Parks, etc. were collected from staff and officers involved in the management of Park.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Parks in Kathmandu Valley

The survey found 15 Public Parks (including one Botanical garden and one under construction) in Kathmandu Valley (Table 1). Majority of the Public Parks (12) are located in Kathmandu district with three in Lalitpur and one in Bhaktapur. UN Park is shared by both Lalitpur and Kathmandu. The total area is 4486 ropanis (224 ha) under Public Park in Kathmandu Valley. In addition about 100 ropanis (5 hectares) of green space may be available in different urban parts of the valley. These green spaces are sometimes less than 1 ropani in size. This added and after completion of Peace and Martyr Park, Gokarna, total Park or green space could reach to 5236 ropanis (262 ha). This paper briefly describes all the Parks and assesses the situation of four Parks.

Table 1: List of Public Parks/Green space in Kathmandu Valley

S.No	Name of Park	Location	Area (ropani)	Established (year BS)
1	Bhugol Park	New Road	3	1990
2	Balaju Park	Balaju	159	2018
3	Ratna Park	Bhotahity	32	2019
4	Godavari Botanical Garden	Godavari	1640	2019
5	Tribhuvan Park	Thankot	190	2029
6	Bhrikutimandap Park	Bhrikutimandap	27	2029
7	Coronation Park	Kirtipur	1080	2032
8	Shankha Park	Maharajganj	27	2036
9	Dakshinkali Park	Dakshinkali	1120	2037
10	UN Park	Shankhamul	1576	2052
11	Shahid Smriti Park	Bhaktapur	5	2058
12	Keshar Garden	Keshar Mahal	12	2063
13	GMS/JA Park	Ranipokhari	7	2063
14	Manmohan Park	Balkhu	8	2063
15	Peace and Martyr Park	Gokarna	650	Under Construction (2072)
16	Others		100 (approx)	
17	TOTAL		4486 (5236)	

Bhugol Park:

- Established by Judda Samsher Rana in 1990 BS. First Public Park of Nepal
- The style of design of the Park was an European type.
- Park also served as temporary shelter to 1990 BS earthquake affected people.
- Served as a meeting point of democratic leaders during Rana regime.
- Today it has been reduced in size.

Balaju/Mahindra Park:

- In existence as an open public space since Lichhavi period; King Pratap Malla built a copy of Budhaneelkantha at this park.
- King Jaya Prakash Malla built 21 dhunge dhara; King Ranodeep Shah added one more making it a '22 Dhunge Dharas'.
- In Baisakh Purnima people visit the goddess Nagarjun and take bath at 22 Dhunge Dhara.
- In 2018 BS renamed Mahendra Park by King Mahendra.
- In earlier stage, this Park also housed birds and animals.
- Park is well maintained and is popular venue for people especially in week end.
- It is also important venue for ceremonies such as picnic, marriage, bratbandh, etc.
- Entry fee charged.

Ratna Park

- Established by King Mahendra in the year 2019 BS in the name of Queen Ratna RL Shah.
- To serve as resting place for the people, play ground for children and space for morning walk.
- Park is not well maintained despite good staffing (45).

Royal Botanical Garden

- This Garden was inaugurated by King Mahendra in 2019 BS.
- The main objective was collection and maintenance of indigenous and exotic plants.
- Developing a recreation spot for naturalist and also impart conservation education.
- Develop technology for production of plants of economic value.

Tribhuvan Park/Sahid Smark Park

- Established by King Birendra in 2029 BS.
- This park has been beautifully landscaped and is a popular spot for picnic, etc.
- It is also a popular venue among locals for morning walks, meditation, physical exercise, yoga, etc.
- Well maintained park

Bhrikutimandap Park

- This park is located in Exhibition Road, Kathmandu.
- It was established in 2029 BS. and has not only green space but also amusement items such as Toy train, mini roller coaster etc.
- Entry fee is charged.

Coronation Park

- Established in 2032 BS to commemorate the auspicious coronation of King Birendra.
- This Park is located in the premises of Tribuvan University at Kirtipur.
- Of the total area of 1080 ropanis only 120 ropanis is landscaped.
- It was planned to develop as one of the best Park in the country.

Shankha Park

- Established in 2036 BS and inaugurated by King Birendra.
- This was PPP model between government and people of Ward # 4 of KMC.
- Park is a popular venue for morning and evening walks, exercise, play ground for children, meditation, yoga, etc.

Dakshinkali Park

- Established in 2037 BS and is located 21 km from Kathmandu.
- The venue is popular destination for people who want to worship at Dakchinkali temple and also be close to nature.
- It is popular destination for picnic.

U N Park

- Established in 2052 BS to commemorate the 50 years of U N involvement in the development of Nepal.
- This park spreads from Sankhmul to Teku Doban and was envisaged to protect and preserve river Bagmati, protect and preserve culture, religious and ancient property.
- Improve the environment of the city.

Shahid Smriti Park

- Established in 2058 BS in memory of six martyrs of 2046 BS Democratic movement.
- It is located in Byasi Industrial Area of ward # 15 of Bhaktapur.
- It is a popular place for walk, exercise among local people.

Keshar Park (Garden of Dreams)

- This Park was established in 1952 BS as a private park. It was established by Maharaja Bir Samsher which was later redeveloped by Keshar Samsher.
- This park is designed in European style.
- In 2063 BS this park was renovated by Eco-Himal and Ministry of Education and named as 'Garden of Dreams'. Entry fee charged.
- Best Garden in Nepal

Ganesh Man Singh/ Jana Andholan Park

- Established in 2063 BS in memory of Ganesh M Singh and the martyrs of the democratic revolution.
- It is a beautiful park in between Rani Pokhari and Ratna Park.
- People visit to relax and meet friends.

Man Mohan Park

- Established in 2063 BS as Private Public Partnership between the government and local people in memory of Manmohan Adhikari.
- It is located at the bank of river Bishnumati in Balkhu.
- People visit to relax.

Peace and Martyr Park (Under construction)

- This Park is currently constructed and is scheduled to complete in 2072 BS.
- This Park is located in Gokarna, Kathmandu.
- It will house a museum of Nepalese Martyrs, Peace garden, Bio diversity garden among others.

Situation of Public Parks in Kathmandu valley:

The situations of four Parks including plant diversity (Table 2) assessed during the survey are as follows.

Bhugol Park

- Almost 100% respondent felt depressed with the current situation of this park.
- An iconic place of the locality has been destroyed.
- Locals now go to Tudikhel for morning/evening walks etc.
- Majority of the respondents felt that the Park was demolished to rebuild.
- The plant diversity was only 8.

Ratna Park

- Ninety percent of the respondent felt the Park is not peaceful and is deteriorating.
- Park is over-crowded (more than 2000 people visit daily) due to free entrance.
- Park is not clean and beautiful as it was earlier; too many naglo shops and lack of sufficient funds for seasonal flowers.
- Plant diversity was 132 although small in size.

Shankha Park

- Majority of respondents (100%) of Shankha Park felt that the condition of Park is improving.
- Majority felt, needs to have more benches to sit.
- Lack of sufficient human resources is observed by the respondents.
- Plant diversity was only 42 although the size of Park is big.

Balaju Park

- Majority of the respondents (85%) felt that the condition of this park is improving.
- It is the only Park in Nepal with a swimming pool.
- Staff strength is best among all the Parks.
- Plant diversity was 138 and the highest among all parks studied.

Table 2: Plants diversity in four Public Parks:

S/No	Name of Park	Trees	Shrubs	Herbs	Others	Total
1	Ratna Park	52	21	48	11	132
2	Bhugol Park	06	02	0	0	08
3	Sankha Park	16	7	18	01	42
4	Balaju Park	69	17	43	09	138
5	Total	143	47	109	21	320

Plant preference of people in Public Parks:

The preference of plants among the Park users is as listed in below (Table 3).

Table 3: Plant preference of people in Public Parks of Kathmandu valley:

S.No	Name of Plants	Scientific name	Plant Type
1	Peepul	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Tree
2	Bar	<i>Ficus benjamina</i>	Tree
3	Rudrachya	<i>Elaeocarpus sphaericeus</i>	Tree
4	Dhupi	<i>Thuja compacta</i>	Tree
5	Salla	<i>Pinus wallichiana</i>	Tree
6	Kapur	<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>	Tree
7	Kabro	<i>Ficus lacor</i>	Tree
8	Parijat	<i>Nycatanthes arbor-tristis</i>	Shrub
9	Gulab	<i>Rosa hybrids</i>	Shrub
10	Dubo	<i>Cynodan dactylon</i>	Herb

DISCUSSION

Public Parks are a necessity in all urban townships. It has not only environmental and aesthetic value but also health benefits to its citizens (Maharjan, 2006). It is a place where people from all walks of life can visit. Children can play while the elders can walk or socialize. This can also be a place where urban people who run from one concrete block to another (home to office and back) on an everyday basis can take a break and be close to nature. It has often been referred that visit to a Park even for a short time (about 30 minutes) helps in de-stressing after a hard day at office (Pun, 2013). If we look at current situation regarding maintenance and expansion of Parks, the per capita space is reducing fast and, therefore, the park space for our children and their children looks very bleak. The current floating population of Kathmandu valley has been estimated to be about 4.0 million whereas as the last big park project was launched about 20 years ago and is still incomplete. It shows how ignorant we are regarding the need of Public Parks and urban landscape.

Public Parks in Kathmandu valley is mostly concentrated in Kathmandu district (11 plus one shared with Lalitpur), Lalitpur district (2 plus one shared with Kathmandu) and Bhaktapur (1). While Kathmandu needs to work on improving the existing Parks, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur needs to identify lands and start developing Parks especially in the inner city areas and out city areas.

The Public Parks in Nepal varies in size from 3 ropanis (Bhugul park) to more than 1000 ropanis (UN Park, Dakshikali Park, Coronation Park and Godavari Botanical Garden) (Pun and Maharjan, 2013). Among the four Parks studied in detail, two seem to be doing satisfactorily (Balaju and Sankha Park) but two were not performing well (Bugol and Ratna Park). It may be necessary to develop policy guidelines for Park so that they get due importance in urban planning. This may also include what should be the size of the Park, minimum facilities to be provided, who shall maintain, type of human resource, budget provision, etc. Recently, urban landscape guideline has been prepared by Department of Urban Development which, however, does not address Public Parks.

The plant diversity in Public Parks varied and this variation was observed irrespective of the size of the Park. Higher plant diversity, however, does not correlate to better performing Park as can be seen in case of Ratna Park. Plants preferred by the Park visitors are mostly trees and those that have religious importance. In all the 15 Public Parks, there is no horticulturist who could be instrumental in development and management of Park. This is another gap in the human resource for a Park which needs to be addressed by the policy guidelines. If this gap is rectified, it could facilitate creating jobs for at least 50 horticulturists country wide and improve the Parks significantly.

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