A Park, A Community, and the Quiet Strength of Women:

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In many neighborhoods, there is always a space that quietly holds everyday life together. It is where conversations happen without planning, where children spend their afternoons, and where people gather without needing a reason. Some of these spaces are designed with intention, while others take shape over time. Often, it is these simple, in-between places that carry the strongest sense of belonging.

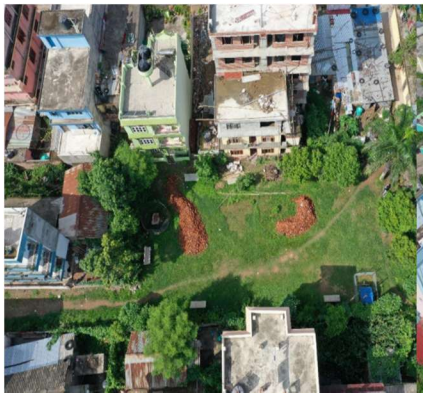


Figure 1:Pravat Park



Figure 2:Naulapur Park



Figure 3:Ganesh Park

In Birendranagar, parks like Prabhat Park and Ganesh Park reflect this kind of everyday life. They are not large or formally designed public spaces. Instead, they feel more like shared courtyards, or an *aangan*, woven into the surrounding homes. Modest in size and surrounded by dense residential clusters, they are used by nearby households in ways that go far beyond what their physical form suggests.Located near places like Surkhet Multiple Campus and Surkhet Stadium, these parks support a wide range of activities. Children play here, neighbors gather, and cultural events and Aama Samuha meetings take place regularly. At times, they also serve as places of refuge. Over time, they have become more than just open spaces. They hold memories, routines, and a sense of familiarity for the people who use them.

One of the most important aspects of these parks is their connection to women's daily lives.Women are among the most regular users of these spaces. They come not only to sit, but to interact, observe, and stay connected to what is happening around them. For many, the park feels like an extension of home, a place where the line between private and public life is not rigid but gently shared. Even so, their presence and needs are not always reflected in how these spaces are designed.The physical condition of the parks shows both strengths and gaps.

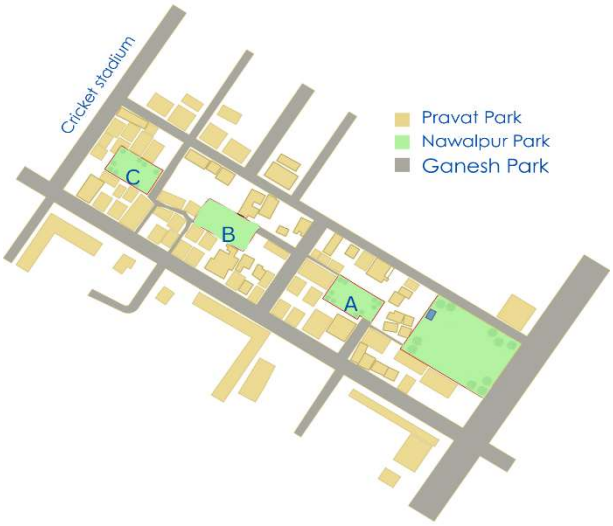


Figure 4:Top View of the three parks

Prabhat Park feels enclosed and somewhat disconnected because of its high brick boundary.The space inside lacks clear organization. There are wild grass, very little shade, and existing features like a footpath, a shaded structure, a well, and a public toilet are not fully used due to poor maintenance. It can feel unfinished, even though people continue to use it every day.



Figure 5:Proposed Planning Of Parvat Park

Ganesh Park feels more open and active, especially in the mornings. Mango trees, flowering plants, and greenery give it a lively character. At the same time, it faces its own challenges. Poor lighting raises safety concerns, especially for women, and drainage issues during the rainy season make parts of the park difficult to use. Elements like fencing, the entrance layout, and a water line cutting through the site also affect how people move and gather.

What stands out is that, despite these issues, both parks remain central to community life. This shows that a space is not defined only by its physical design. What really matters is how people relate to it. For the residents, these parks are not neglected. They are simply incomplete, waiting to be improved in ways that reflect how they are actually used.

To understand this better, a participatory and gender-sensitive approach was taken under the Cities 4 Women framework. The process did not begin with fixed ideas. It began with listening. Through site observations, mapping, surveys, group discussions, and co-design sessions, the everyday experiences of users became the basis for design decisions. Women, children, and elderly residents shared what they needed, not just in terms of function but also in terms of comfort and feeling.



Figure 6:Proposed Planning of Ganesh Park

Women spoke about wanting shaded seating and spaces where they could sit and talk without feeling exposed.

Children wanted play areas that felt safe but still allowed them to move freely. Elderly users preferred quieter spots with sunlight where they could sit comfortably and still feel part of the surroundings.There were also common concerns across all groups. Lighting was inadequate. Drainage needed improvement. Maintenance was inconsistent. Accessibility was limited. These were not just technical problems. They shaped how safe and comfortable people felt using the space.The design responses came directly from these insights. Instead of completely changing the parks, the idea was to strengthen what was already there.



Figure 7:Proposed View of Ganesh Park

A chautari and a community pavilion were introduced as central gathering points, creating a sense of identity and place. Walking paths were added along the edges to encourage movement. Seating was placed in different areas to support both group interaction and quiet use.Play areas for children were made clearer and more visible to improve safety.


Figure 8:Proposed View of Parvat Park

Environmental strategies such as rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable surfaces were used to deal with water and drainage issues. Basic facilities like ramps, better entrances, drinking water, and accessible toilets were included so that the parks could be used more easily by everyone.Beyond the physical changes, the process itself became just as important.

Co-design helped build trust and a sense of ownership. It showed that the people who use a space every day understand it in ways that cannot always be captured through drawings or plans. By involving women, children, and elderly residents, the design became more grounded in real experience.These parks show that even small neighborhood spaces can have a strong impact when they are approached with care. Looking at them through a women-centered perspective does not only address safety. It changes how we think about comfort, connection, and everyday use.



Figure 9:Codesign process where the women are participating in the design of the park



Figure 10:Community Interaction to understand the needs and requirements of the local women in the society

Ultimately, the improvements made on such parks are not simply a matter of introducing new elements into the environment. Rather, one has to understand the need for a sense of belonging to be nurtured and cultivated in such places. In effect, there already exist a number of experiences that people have in relation to the place, even if it only exists as a place of everyday encounters and events in people's lives. In doing so, the idea is to make design itself responsive to what people experience in their everyday lives. Ultimately, the result is not to leave the park simply as a neutral or unoccupied space, but as something that one can recognize as part of their personal experience. This work was made possible through the support and guidance of the Cities for Women team, whose approach helped ground the process in participation and inclusivity. Sincere gratitude is extended to Prof. Sanjaya Uprety for his thoughtful guidance in shaping the design direction. Appreciation is also due to the local community of Birendranagar for their coordination, openness, and active involvement throughout the process. Their insights, experiences, and everyday interactions with these spaces formed the core of this study, making the journey both insightful and meaningful.



Figure 11:Participatory co-design team in Birendranagar aimed at creating inclusive, women-friendly spaces.

Thankyou.