

Socio-Spatial Analysis of Urban Square as an Urban Public Space, a case of Dattatraya Square, Bhaktapur

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Abstract

The socio-cultural public sphere is significantly nourished by urban public space. Also, it is necessary for a community's social and behavioral health. An excellent urban public place also exemplifies responsiveness, communality, and purposefulness. Consequently, based on a study of the literature and empirical research, this paper assesses the key characteristics of urban public space through socio-cultural and religious activities. Via its socio-cultural and religious activities, Dattatraya Square, as an Urban Public Space of Bhaktapur, is investigated. This case study is being conducted in order to draw lessons from historical examples because this traditional urban public space demonstrates a constructive design with its exceptional capacity to support not only daily life but also socio-cultural and religious events on special occasions throughout the year. With today's urban neighborhood settlement, such traditional characteristics of public areas are being lost. Hence, in order to learn from it and offer some useful suggestions for the new urban public space design, this study tries to investigate the historic urban public space, notably the square, with regard to its socio-cultural and religious activities.

Keywords

socio-cultural public sphere, socio-cultural and religious events, urban public space, urban squares

1. Introduction

As an essential component of urban life, urban public space, particularly squares, not only cover a sizable portion of urban fabric but also serve as a venue for human interactions [1]. It is a location where a diverse range of public activities take place. Along with occasional cultural and religious events, it also has a variety of behaviors, uses, and activities, such as talking, shopping, walking, entertaining, relaxing, and even passing the time [2].

According to Madanipour's terms "they are controlled by a public agency, and are provided and managed in the public interest" [3]. A good public realm design is essential to the design of the urban environment since it affects this outdoor room of the urban fabric. Urban fabric that is physically and visually accessible to the public is intended to be public space [4]. One of the main types of urban public spaces are squares. Thus, public squares' indispensable function is the only way to improve the quality of urban life. Due to their openness and durability, squares serve as the focal point of civic activities and social networks.

Also, they serve as both a physical void and a breathing gap between the structures [5]. In his book "Image of City," Kevin Lynch claims that the city can be divided into five categories: roadways, borders, regions, landmarks, and nodes. The square is represented by the fifth element, node, which serves as the focal point for integrating, halting, converging, and orienting the streets [17]. Thus, the old city squares make a remarkable urban public place. The design of public realm has been harshly criticized for lacking "human quality" only after the introduction of contemporary movement in architecture and city development [1]. By examining the current issues with the definition and usage of urban spaces in the modern metropolis, Trancik, in his book "finding the lost space," defines a new term:

"lost space," which is distinct from well-defined and enclosed space (positive space) of historical precedent. He highlights problems with the modern approach to city planning without taking pedestrianization into account. Also, he described the idea of these modern spaces as unpleasant urban regions, or anti-spaces that don't add anything useful to their surrounds or users. Thus, it is necessary to rebuild these places [6]. "Learning from history and historical situations is not given appropriate space in the present urban planning," notes Tiwari (n.d.). He further advises that "traditional towns should reconsider their planning and design, especially the way their spaces and networks are planned and managed for changing the multicultural heterogeneity of urban living, so that towns for our own times will also be able to provide the foundation for contented urban life now and continue to do so in its own un-forecasted future." [7]. Regarding the aforementioned, modern cities encountered widespread criticism for losing the conventional spatial aspects in the formation of ill-defined urban spaces, and modern planners and designers were held accountable for their lack of consideration for historical precedents. If we carefully analyze the modern urban fabric of Kathmandu Valley, we find that this is also very much the case. Cities in the Kathmandu Valley's current urban fabric don't reflect any notable aspects of urban design. The suburbs are being consumed by freshly growing metropolitan regions that are situated outside of old city centers. Although being close to historic cores, modern urban design and development efforts appear to ignore the remarkable urban design elements of the cores, creating a chaotic urban environment that lacks a "feeling of place." Nearly all areas of new urban expansion, both planned and unplanned, are affected by this situation [1].

The ancient centers of Kathmandu Valley cities, in contrast, are discovered to be richly enhanced with quality designs in their

physical surroundings and spatial configurations. It is fascinating to see how well the city's streets and squares are intertwined in the urban fabric, creating a connection to the medieval towns of Europe that is unquestionable. Urban areas are scaled on a human scale, and they have never failed to adapt to the diverse ways that people live.

Bhaktapur is one of the oldest and earliest capital cities of the Malla, and it is one of the three historic centres of Kathmandu Valley cities. From its foundation as the first capital town of the Mallas in the middle of the thirteenth century, Tiwari (n.d.) emphasizes that "it has not extended beyond its original bounds and its overall physical shape and size have stayed identical." [7]. These factors led to the choice of Bhaktapur's city center as the study area. As a result, Bhaktapur might be a useful case study location for the investigation of social dimensions related to activities, safety, and accessibility of urban areas, particularly squares.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Public Space

A multidimensional approach including ownership, control, access, and usage may be used to describe public space. According to some writers, it refers to "place that is not governed by private persons or groups and is, thus, accessible to the broad public" [3]. Public space is defined as "publicly accessible spaces where people go for group or individual activities" by those who base their definitions on concerns of access and use [8]. For the sake of this study, public places are defined only in terms of their use, accessibility, and safety, rather than their ownership. As a result, public places are defined as those that are open to the public while being privately held, whereas private spaces are defined as those that are publicly owned but not accessible to the public. This essay's goal is to assess public space, especially squares, in the heart of Bhaktapur. According to Mehta (2014), "Public space not only defines the spaces between buildings, but also the items and artefacts inside, as well as the building edges that assist define the physical borders of the spaces"[9]. The term "public" is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "concerning the people as a whole, open to or shared by all the people, a sector of the community having a particular interest or in some specific relation," according to Thompson (1995) [10]. Urban places can be thought of as public if they are unrestricted areas with acceptable limits that let the public to have access to them physically and visually [8]. Despite the fact that urban public spaces have many different aspects, including morphological, social, phenomenological, aesthetic, visual, perceptual, and functional ones, this paper only focuses on the social dimension and is restricted to its activities and accessibility aspects because these are the metrics that are most desired for analyzing urban public spaces.

2.2 Activities and accessibility as Social Dimension

In order to study humanistic behavior in public places, Gehl claims that the activities carried out in urban public areas may be divided into three categories: necessary, optional and social [12]. Going to work or school, waiting for people or vehicles are examples of necessary activities. In contrast, optional activities,

such as standing, sitting, watching, going for a leisurely walk, or lingering, only take place when the environment is ideal. Social activities, such as watching children play or chatting with people in the street for a long time, are the result of a high level of optional activities. The importance of urban public spaces depends on how well they function, are used, and favour users, as well as on how much time people like to spend there [12].

Public domain accessibility is the essential component. There are "three modes of access: visual, symbolic, and physical," according to Carr et al. (1992) [8]. Visual access or visibility is when people can see into a space before they enter it to determine whether they could feel comfortable, welcome, and safe there; symbolic access can be animated or inanimate, such as when a person or group is perceived as threatening, reassuring, or inviting, which may affect entry into a public space; and physical access concerns whether the space is physically available to the public, where physical exclusion is the inability to enter.

3. Methodology

This research takes qualitative as well as quantitative approach and utilizes a case study strategy within the post positivist paradigm to study the urban public spaces in Bhaktapur city core. Observation was carried out at site for quantitative method while for the qualitative method, photographs and maps were studied. Literature review of urban public spaces was carried out to evaluate good urban spaces through social dimension perspective.

4. Site Study

Dattatraya Square - Physical Elements

Dattatraya square is one of the oldest square in Bhaktapur lies at the eastern part of the city. The square is filled with the minor and major temples. The square consists of Gorakhnath temple, Bhimsen temple, Laxmi Narayan temple and Salan Ganesh temple. The Bhimsen temple is located opposite to the Dattatraya temple where both temples are oriented toward the center of the square. The Salan Ganesh is located on the north side of the square which is quite far from the square and behind it a manmade dedicated to the lord Ganesh called Ganesh Pokhari. The square is about 83m X 29m with the rectangular shape. The other thing made square so valuable, the wood



Figure 1: Urban public space of Dattatraya Square

carving museum and Pujari math. The pujari math of Dattatraya square now is a more renowned museum of 'Bhaktapur Dattatraya temple is one of the oldest temples of Bhaktapur with its significant Architectural expression. The other elements like Dhunge Dhara, Dabali, Patis, Sattals, wells have added its aesthetic value. The residences where beautifully carved windows can be seen on the south direction of the square.

Social Activities

The square is accessible from different alleys and streets as Jelan, Naagpokhari, Suryamadh, Inachho. The vendors from local area Newars and from different communities like Tamang, Chettri and Brahmin come to the square which also have created the inclusiveness in the plaza. The products like flowers, fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs are brought by the vendors every day. The continuous movement of people is during morning time like devotees and the passers visits the Dattatraya temple and Bhimsen temple. There are Sattals and pati where the people gather and interact with each other. The people come to the square to observe, feed the birds, and buy the vegetables in the area of Salan Ganesh. The activities like sweeping products delivery, worshipping, are the morning necessity activity in the square. During the day time, the visitors from the valley, tourists visits the square, taking photographs, standing and talking, sitting on the platform Dabali. The people participating in devotional songs (bhajans) in the ground floor of Dattatraya temple and Bhimsen temple can be observe and enjoy it during the evening time. The people gather in coffee shops, talking and sitting, observers are the also seen during the evening time.



Figure 2: (a) people sitting on raised platform of temple (b) vendors on a Monday of Shrawan month

Ritual Activities

Gaijatra (sapar)

Gaijatra is the festival of death, dance and satiric street performances. It is continuously celebrated for nine days. The



Figure 3: People celebrating Gaijatra (Saapar)

bamboo poles (tahamacha) are made roamed around the square every year. They follow the particular route called Pradakhsina marg. During the festivals the locals get busy observing the late-night acts like devi dances and street drama performances in the square.

Gathemangal

The effigy of Gathemangal is made with straw and reeds by local newars in the square. The local participation in making the demon can be seen in every part of the city. The effigy I then burned in the square in the evening time. The large number of people gather in the square where the effigy is brought from different locality.



Figure 4: (a) locals making effigy of demon gathemangal (b) locals burning the gathemangal in the square

5. Conclusion

The survey was conducted on morning and evening time in order to investigate the use of urban spaces. According to the field study, it is evident that the square is more vibrant and actively used during evening time. An approach to empirically assessing urban public open space has been described in this work. The study will be helpful for designing new urban public spaces by offering opportunities for outdoor activities of various categories, multiple accesses, and safety from social and physical factors. By providing a clear outline of the social dimensions and important variables of activities and accessibility, the study will improve the quality of space.

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