



# BAGMATI PROMENADE

Transformation of City's History  
through the River

## Preface

Disclaimer : Please note that some information contained within this booklet is based on oral history, mostly relating to information that lacks documented records. There are also references from mythology as documented accounts are unavailable.

Since Ne Muni, the hermit after whom Nepal is believed to have been named, initiated a 17-day pada yatra (heritage walk) from Ketwal to Bagdwar undertaken as penance and to pay homage to the sacred Bagmati River according to the pre-recorded history (1400-800 BC). The people of Kathmandu Valley have worshiped the river for centuries. The socio-economic activities which started at the tirthas (confluence of two or more rivers) have now evolved into annual festivals celebrated round the year. Resting places, temples and ghats by the riverside, built by the affluent and ruling classes for cremation rituals, have withstood the test of time.

The 1.5 kilometre riverbank of Bagmati from Teku to Thapathali, which had remained clean throughout its 3,000 year old history, started getting polluted after "modern development" began in the late 1950s. Unplanned urbanization has turned the river into a stinking rivulet that reeks of garbage.



## Abstract

Bagmati Promenade, a historical and cultural walk along the riverbank of Bagmati from Thapathali to Teku Dovan, has been designed and conceptualised by StoryCycle and the British Council in collaboration with people living and working in the vicinity and/ or having a special affinity to the river. The walk has been conceived by combining stories from history, religion and social life, and their connection to the modern society. It has brought together people from all walks of life and a plethora of knowledge at one place.

This initiative is an attempt to revive and reinstate the site through the process of storytelling and mapping. In the due course of time, these walks are expected to take other forms such as guided tours and sensitivity walks run by heritage experts and artists who will help uncover and bring to light the significance of the place. A self-guided digital and offline "tourists trail" map or walkway of the area has been prepared that will help interested individuals go on the heritage walk by themselves.

## Background

DreamCity, a campaign designed by StoryCycle, focuses on empowering local youth and communities to take an active part in designing and making their places vibrant through the use of technology. The campaign focuses on attracting, nurturing and retaining talent, expanding economic opportunities and creating robust culture of civic engagement. StoryCycle has conducted various travel and residential camps in several rural and semi-urban areas of the country including Damauli, Surkhet, Barpak, Saptari, Sindhuli, and the Khumbu region. Together with the British Council, StoryCycle is leading the campaign from Thapathali to Teku Dovan area by engaging youth in heritage and governance through mapping and storytelling.

StoryCycle, an innovative alternative media platform based in Nepal, aims at collecting and promoting untold and unheard stories from rural hinterlands, and training professional journalists as well as citizen journalists from such overshadowed areas to collect, package and disseminate those stories.

# KHADGA

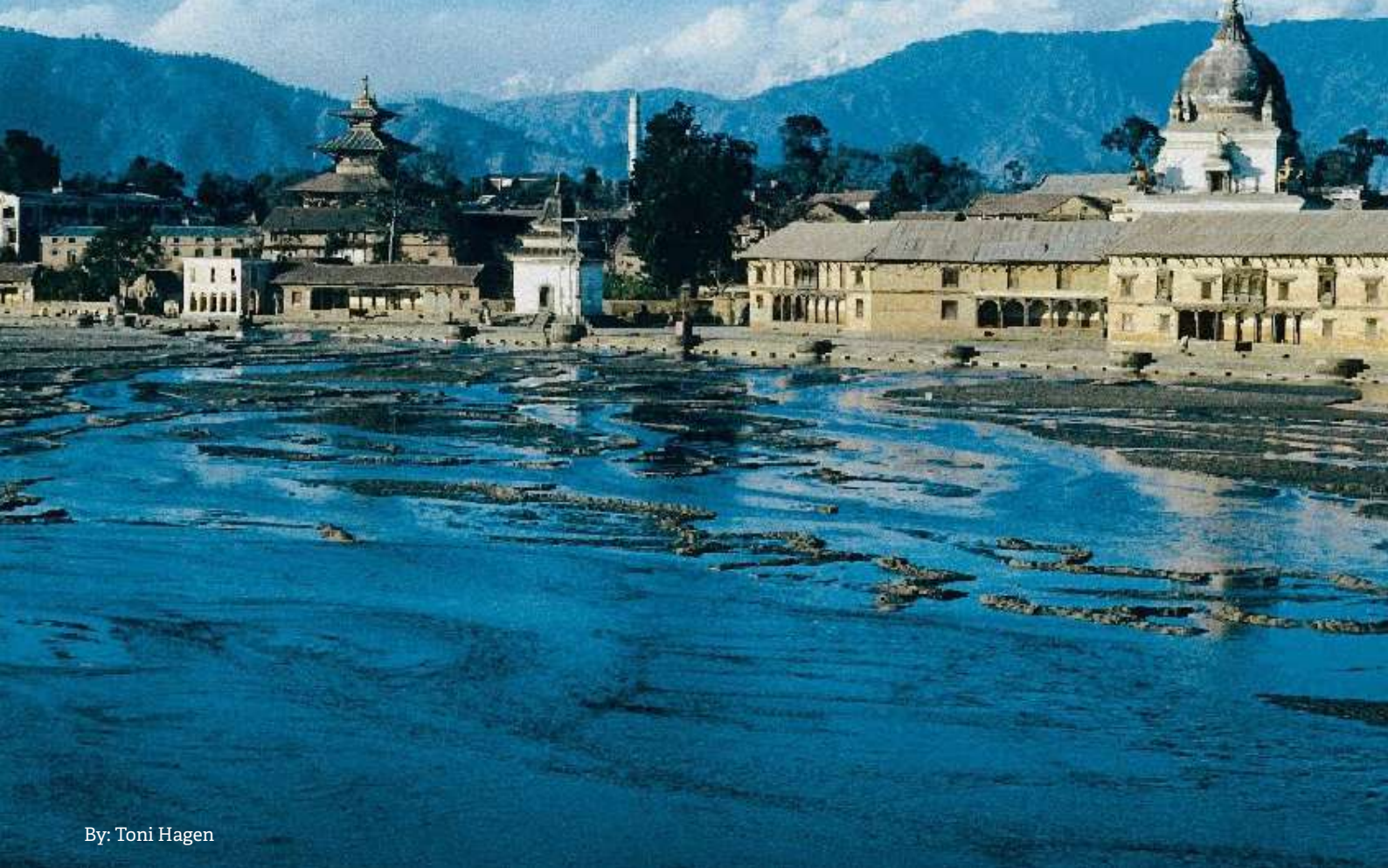
## Bagmati and the Kathmandu Civilization

The history of Kathmandu civilization begins with the Bagmati River along with its tributaries. The Ichhmati or Tukucha River meets Bagmati at the Kalmochan Ghat, and according to religious texts, it used to be the water source around the expanded border of the first city Manjupattan believed to have established by Manjushree during the Satya Yuga (pre-recorded history).

Teku Dovan, the confluence of Bagmati and Bishnumati Rivers, was the home of Ne Muni who helped realise the value of water through heritage walk along the riverbanks. King Gunakamdev in 724 AD realised the divine value of establishing Kathmandu city in the shape of a sword "khadga" with Teku Dovan as its southern border buffer zone area.







By: Toni Hagen

Teku Dovan became the southern entry point to Kathmandu city. The area was popular amidst traders who used the space for resting. In the space, people bathed, performed rituals in memory of the deceased and visitors purified themselves before entering the city.

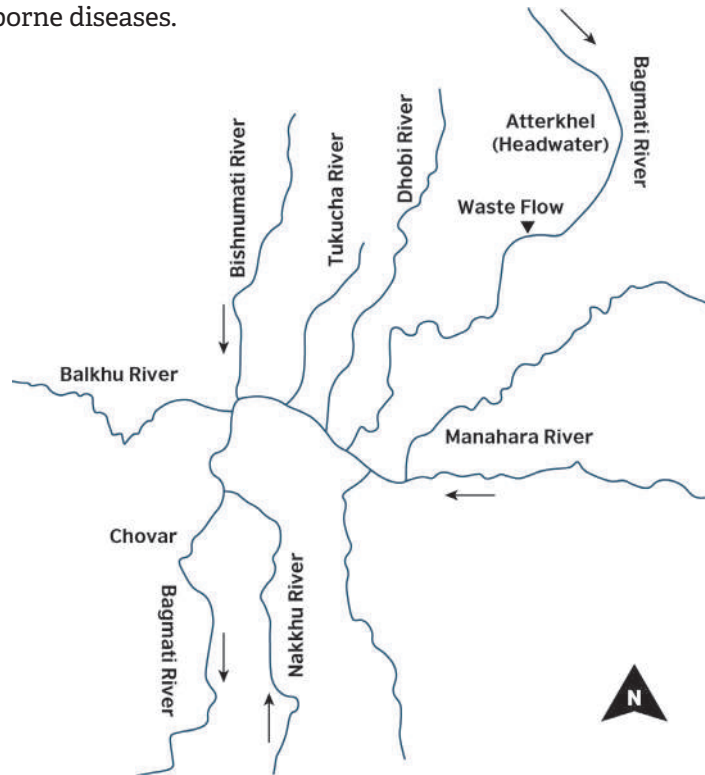
The Teku Dovan and Thapathali area houses more than 10 ghats, several crematoriums, sattals (resting places) and temples, and is a living museum.

# BAGMATI

## Bagmati & it's Tributaries

The Bagmati River originates at Bagdwar, 15 km northeast of Kathmandu in the Shivapuri hills. Its tributaries, originating at different locations in the Valley, feed water into this river.

The urbanization of Kathmandu Valley is strongly associated with the river systems. Its direct impact is especially visible in the Bagmati River along with its tributaries which are used as dumping sites for all types of wastes and for sand extraction along with land encroachment. Denizens say that about half of the fish species that used to be found in the river have disappeared indicating that the river is biologically dead in some parts of its river system. Shortage of water has forced certain communities living close to the river use the polluted water from the valley rivers for various purposes, exposing them to water-borne diseases.







Tukucha, also known as Ikshumati, originates from Maharajgung inside the Valley. It meets Bagmati at Kalmochan Ghat, Thapathali. At present, it is hardly anything more than an open drain. Most of the river area has been encroached by squatters and residential buildings, road construction, etc. At some sections such as from Royal Palace to Kamaladi, the river flows underneath buildings.

The river stretches are used for dumping solid waste and disposing waster water generated from nearby houses. There are no river banks along the stretch due to channeling, therefore, waste is dumped directly into the river.

Bishnumati River is a major tributary of the Bagmati River. It originates at Bishnudwar (2300 m) at Shivapuri and flows southward. The Bishnumati River merges with the Bagmati River at Teku Dovan. Large volumes of water from Bishnumati is diverted for drinking water and domestic use near the source close to the foothills. Diversion is also done from tributaries such as Sangla and Mahadev Khola. In addition, pipes have been laid for pumping water directly from the river to individual houses.



## Bagmati Promenade

Thapathali-Teku

Length - 2KM

1 Thapathali Chess Park

2 Akhadas

3 Kalmochan Temple

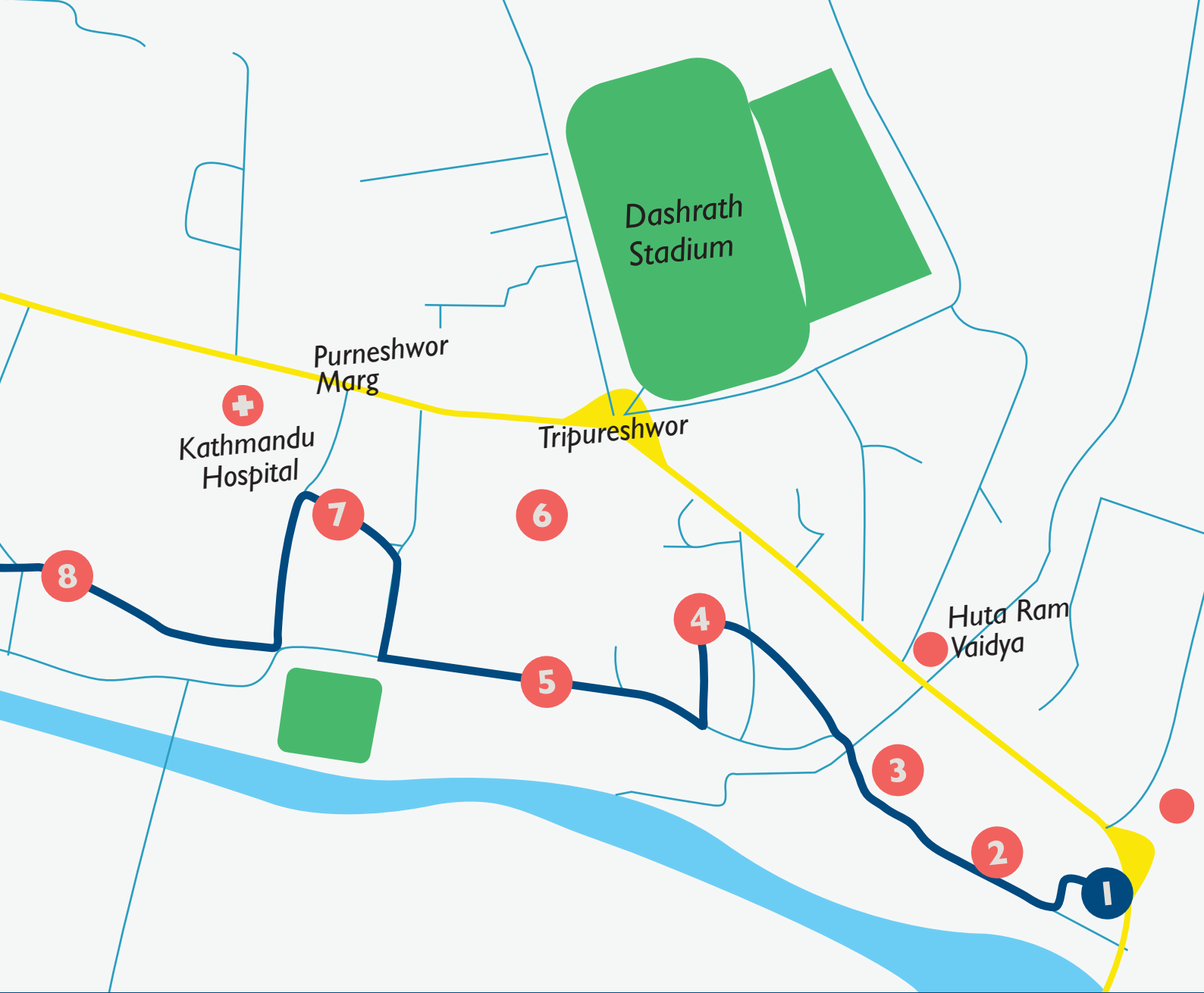
4 Tripura Sundari

5 Chandra Ghat

6 Eye Hospital

7 Purneshwor Temple





- |                |                      |                         |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 8 Puret Ghat   | 11 Pachali Bhairav   | 14 Radha Krishna Temple |
| 9 Hanuman Ghat | 12 Laxmeshwor Temple | 15 Teku Dovan           |
| 10 Tin Dewal   | 13 Suspension Bridge | 16 Jagannath Temple     |

## Heritage Sites

You will come across notable heritage sites while walking along the river bank from Thapathali to Teku Dovan.

# 01

### Thapathali Chess Park

There is a Chess park between Thapathali Chowk and Kalmochan Temple, established 30 years ago by Bharat Dhimal from Morang District. Back then, very few people used to come to play chess but now the club produces national level competitors.



# 02

## Akhadas

Jung Bahadur Rana built “mini Kashi” for the Hindu pilgrims visiting Nepal during Shivaratri, naming them as akhadas outside his once Thapathali Durbar complex which today lies under the Thapathali bridge.



**Udasi Akhada**

Built by Jung Bahadur and renovated in 1935, the akhada houses temples dedicated to Lord Badri Narayan and Guru Grantha Saheb. The chief priest or mahant of the akhada provides food and shelter to pilgrims, saints or sadhus of Udasi sect when they visit Kathmandu.



**Dasnami Akhada**

Followers of Sankaracharya are known as Dasnamis or Sanyasis namely Saraswati, Bharati, Giri, Puri, Thirta, Ashram, Ban, Aryanya, Parbat and Sagar. Built by Jung Bahadur, the akhada was destroyed by the earthquake of 1934 but was restored in 1935. It houses a Shivalaya in the centre and is maintained by the Guthi.



**Nath Akhada**

This akhada houses a temple with the samadhi (tomb) and gaddi (prayer seat) of Guru Gorakhnath. Devotees visit this temple to pay obeisance to Guru Gorakhnath, especially on the occasion of Makar Sankranti festival.



**Bairagi Akhada**

Bairagi Akhada, built by Jung Bahadur, provides food and shelter to sadhus and saints of Bairagi sect. Inside the akhada are tombs of two great saints of Bairagi sect. The chief priest takes care of the akhada and the visiting pilgrims.

## 03

### **Jung Hiranya Hem Narayan Temple**

One of the most beautiful temples in Kathmandu, it is named after Jung Bahadur Rana and his queens Hiranya and Hem, followed by Narayan, another name for Hindu god, Vishnu. It was built by Jung Bahadur at Kalmochan Ghat in 1874 AD as part of the Thapathali palace complex. It is said that he built this temple to seek penance for the killings during Kot Massacre in 1846, where many high ranking officials were murdered.

The main temple is surrounded by six different temples with Mughal architectural influences juxtaposed alongside Hindu architectural stylistics. It has four legendary griffins on the cornice of the first storey. To the east of the temple is a bronze statue of Garuda, Vishnu's mount, and next to it is Jung Bahadur's life-size statue on a stone pillar. The temple, severely damaged by the 2015 earthquake, is currently being renovated.

### **Kalmochan Ghat**

Kalmochan Ghat, situated at the confluence of the Tukucha rivulet and the Bagmati River, is also called Kal Tirtha. At the confluence stands a brick and plaster temple dedicated to Navhareshwar Mahadev.

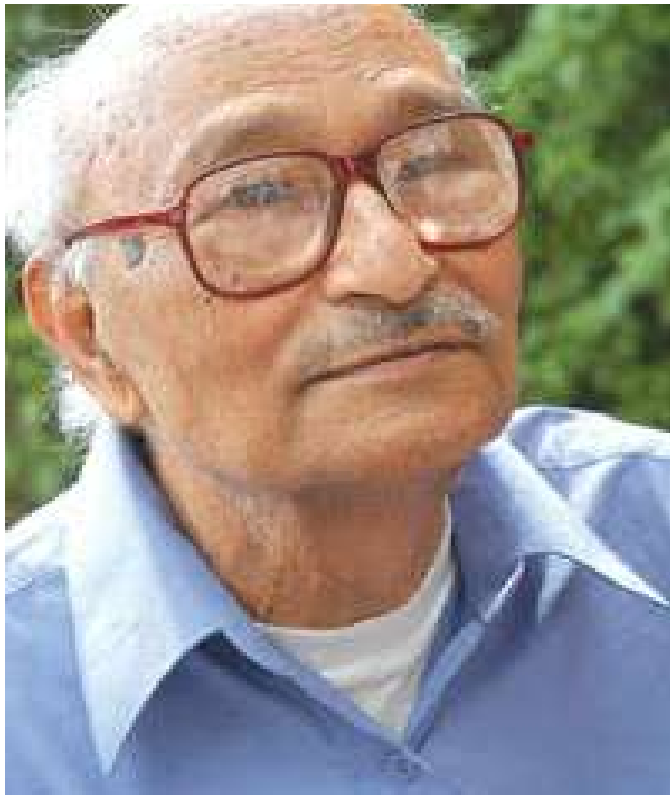






## **Tukucha Rivulet**

The Tukucha Rivulet originates at Maharajgunj in the Valley and meets the Bagmati River at Kalmochan Ghat. This stream, also known as Ikshumati, was the political boundary of Sankasya Nagar during the vedic age. The rivulet disappears under several houses in its regular route to Kalmochan Ghat.



## **Baidya Chowk**

Baidya Chowk is named after Hutaram Baidya, an agricultural engineer turned activist, who dedicated his life to saving the Bagmati River. He is also called 'Bagmati Ba' out of respect for his commitment. Seeing the gradual deterioration of Bagmati from a pristine and holy river into a cesspool carrying Kathmandu's sewage, he became a lifelong campaigner to save the river.

Baidya left behind a powerful legacy among the Kathmandu denizens about the need to restore the Bagmati River and his activism has led to several campaigns to clean up the river and its banks.

# TRIPURA SUNDARI

04

## Tripureshwor Mahadev

Built by Queen Lalit Tripura Sundari in memory of her late husband King Rana Bahadur Shah in 1822 AD, Tripureshwor's Mahadev Temple, with 19 small temples and shrines, is the largest temple complex in the Bagmati area. She donated 781 ropanis of land to be supervised by Raj Guthi at that time. It was later expanded with the addition of sattals and ghats by prime minister Chandra Shumsher Rana. It was renovated after the 1934 earthquake in the year 1936.

The temple sees swarms of devotees during Shivaratri, Bala Chaturdashi festivals and in the month of Shrawan. The temple brought down again by the 2015 earthquake is being renovated.

The temple is facing south with three tier roof made of copper sheets with attractive pinnacles. On the four corners of the lowest plint of the temple lies panchanyan dieties. There is a life size bronze statue of Queen Tripura Sundari—sitting with palms pressed together—on a stone pillare in front of the temple with seven headed snake as umbrella. The pillar has base of a large stone tortoise with inscription composed by the court poet Pandit Bani Bilas.





# 05

## Chandra Ghat

One of the longest and largest ghat complex at Bagmati, Chandra Ghat and Mushafir Khana were built by Chandra Shumsher. Also known as Purneshwar Ghat, it is now used by Zonal Police Office as its barrack.



# 06

## Nepal Eye Hospital

Nepal Eye Hospital is the first hospital in Nepal dedicated to eye care service established in the year 1973. Before the establishment of this historical hospital, eye care service was only available at the government-owned Bir Hospital with only a few beds to spare.



# 07

## Purneshwar Mahadev

This temple was made by King Rajendra Bikram Shah for the salvation of the queens of King Rana Bahadur Shah around 1822 AD. The guthi of this temple used to feed 200 homeless/ beggars daily at its premises. Destroyed by the 1934 earthquake, the present temple was restored in 1945. There are about 40 families (200 people) residing in the chaughera sattal of this temple.



# 08

## Puret Ghat

In Puret Ghat, there are three big brick and plaster temples built by Satyal family of Gairidhara. According to the inscription on a bronze bell, the monument can be traced back to 1883. Another inscription placed at the stairs of Narayan Temple dates to 1916 built by Shiva Raj Satyal. There is another main sattal on the eastern end known as Aryal Ghat.

# 09

## Hanuman Ghat

Hanuman Ghat has been named after a big stone statue of Hanuman facing west. The Ram Temple and sattal on the ghat were restored by descendants of Bom Bahadur Rana , Major General Yakshya Bikram Ran of Lagan tole. Devotional songs are recited twice a day at the temple.



By: Department of Archeology

# 10

## Teen Dewal

This temple was built by Bom Bahadur Rana in 1850 when he served as acting prime minister while Jung Bahadur Rana was on his Europe travel. Also called Bombikateshwar Mahadev Temple, the shikhara style terracotta temple is spread over 20 ropanis of land. The temple premises have small shrines of Hindu deities Ganesh, Vishnu, and Shiva among others.

# PACHALI BHAIRAV

11

## Pachali Bhairav

One of the most revered deities in the Kathmandu Valley, Pachali Bhairav was established by King Gunakamadev as a gatekeeper at the southern city entrance. In those days every door of houses, temples and dyochen were made in a triangular shape and painted with eyes and sword depicting Bhairav. King Amar Malla introduced the 12 yearly Bhairab dance in 1440 which is continued to this day.



## Pachali Ghat

A conglomeration of Hindu, Buddhist, Sakta and Vaishnava sects, Pachali Ghat is like an open air museum of stone art. In a small area of 50 meter radius there are more than 80 different stone sculptures belonging to different periods of history.

Among the many rest houses in the ghat, a sattal constructed by Ambal Bakhu Singh in 1813 AD lies in the western direction and in the eastern end other sattals constructed by Anirudha, Dhoj, Bhadra Sing, Bal Bhadra and Narayan in 1795 AD. The sattal with a small temple of Ramchandra on the right side on the way to Pachali Bhairav was constructed by Bhagiratha Devi Mulmi of Tangel tole in 1951 AD.



## 12

### **Laxmishwor Mahadev**

This temple was built by Laxmi Devi, the queen of Rana Bahadur Shah, in 1813 AD, according to the inscription. She donated 100 ropanis of land located at Lubhu and Thimi villages for the daily rituals and functions of the temple which is now under the Raj Guthi. This three-storey temple, surrounded by sattals in all directions, is one of the best representatives of Shah period.





# 13

## Kalo Pul

This black 400-foot-long suspension bridge was imported from Paris. Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher Rana opened this bridge in March 1939 to ease the life of peasants, gardeners and vegetable sellers of Patan to cross the river and for people of Kathmandu to visit "Raj Tirtha" on the opposite of Pachali Ghat where people could take a holy bath.



# 14

## Radha Krishna Temple

One of the most beautiful temples in Teku Dovan, this sikhar-style terracotta temple of the Vaishnavi sect was constructed by step mother of Prime Minister Dev Shumsher in 1937 AD. Destroyed by the 2015 earthquake, the temple is under renovation.



# TEKUDOVAN



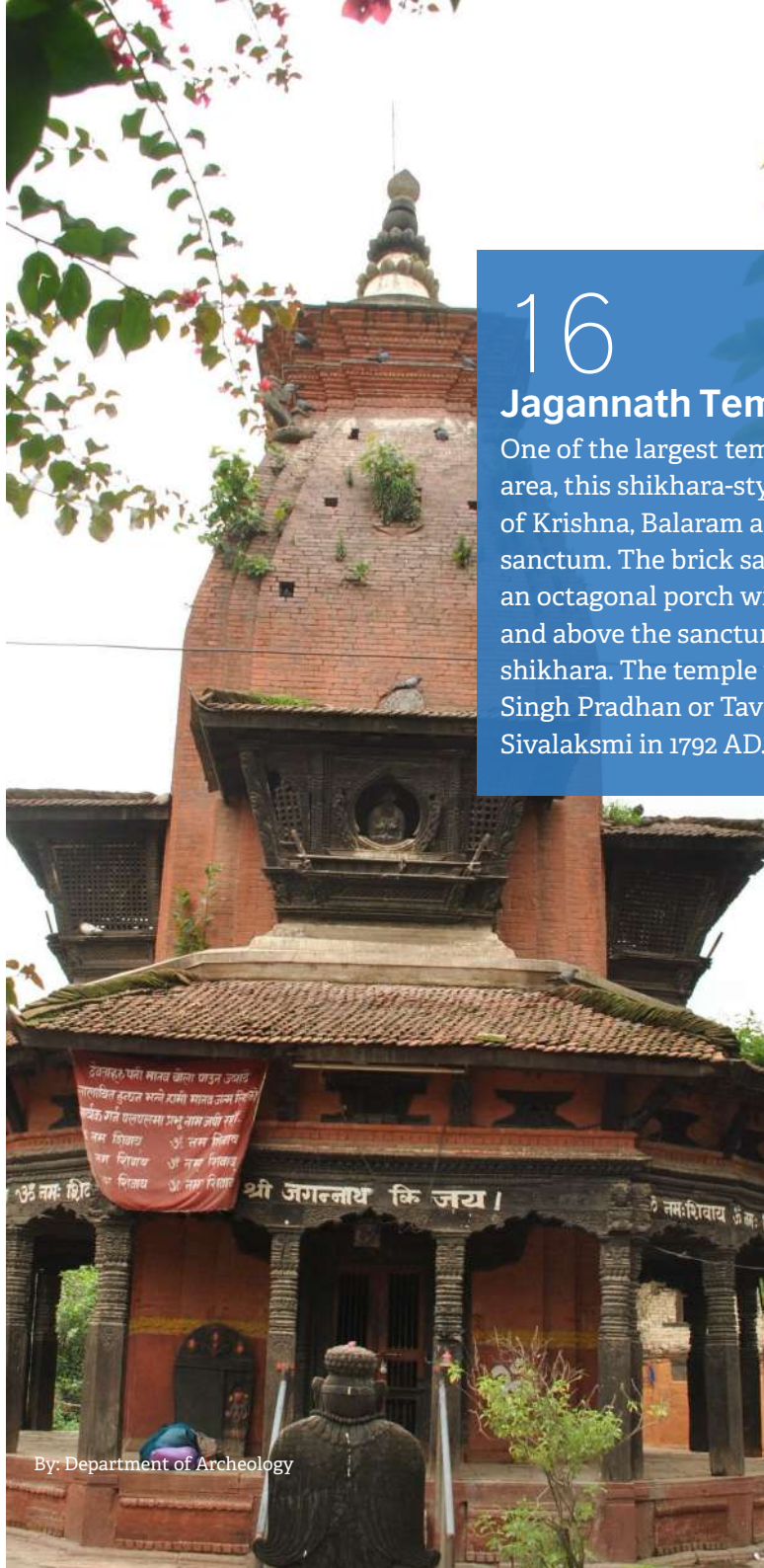
## 15 Teku Dovan

Teku Dovan is the conglomeration of two sacred rivers Bagmati and Bishnumati. Also known as Chintamani Tirtha for the Buddhist community of Kathmandu Valley, the confluence has more that 10 votive stupa or chaityas. The area is surrounded by many ghats or crematoriums.

This is the holy place of Ne muni who initiated the 17-day heritage walk praising the holy waters of Bagmati River holding more than 165 shrines along its river banks.



# JAGANNATH



## 16

### Jagannath Temple

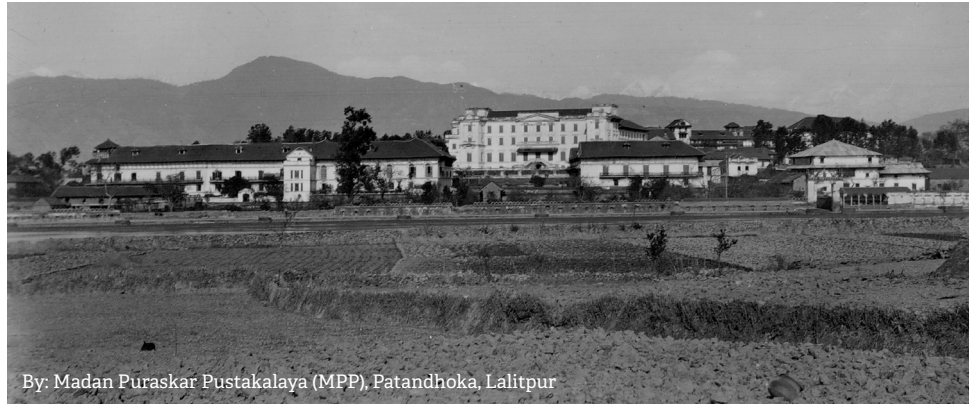
One of the largest temple complexes in Bagmati area, this shikhara-style temple has stone idols of Krishna, Balaram and Subhadra in its inner sanctum. The brick sanctum is surrounded by an octagonal porch with 28 large wooden pillars and above the sanctum is a tall tapering brick shikhara. The temple was constructed by Bhava Singh Pradhan or Tavidik Bharo and his wife Sivalaksmi in 1792 AD.

# THAPATHALI DURBAR

## Thapathali Durbar Complex

Thapathali is the abode of the Thapas, initially built by Nain Singh Thapa. Jung Bahadur Rana expanded his maternal grandfather's complex with more buildings, courtyards and gardens to the north of the Bagmati River in 1848.

These are old pictures of buildings located near Bagmati River which used to be a part of the Thapathali Durbar Complex.





# LOCAL FESTIVALS

## Local Festivals

Below are some of the important festivals celebrated along the Teku-Thapathali riverbanks of Bagmati.

## JAN 15

### Makar Sankranti

Makar or Maghe Sankranti is an ancient festival observed on the first day of Magh by bathing in river confluences, including the Bagmati River. Devotees visit the Nath Akhada bringing an end to ill-omened month of Poush when all religious ceremonies are forbidden.





# MARCH 21

## **Maha Shivaratri**

It is an annual Hindu festival in honour of Lord Shiva celebrated widely in Shiva temples throughout Nepal. Tripureshwor Mahadev comes alive on this day with devotees chanting prayers and paying homage at the temple premises. Akhadas under the Bagmati bridge specially Bairagi Akhada suddenly comes alive with Hindu devotees when “ganja” smoking is legal for a day!

# AUG 15

## **Janai Purnima**

Janai Purnima, the thread festival, falls on the full moon day in the month of Bhadra. On this day at the confluence of Bagmati and Bishnumati Rivers (Teku Dovan), men, women and children regardless of class and caste tie a doro (a sacred yellow thread) around their wrists as a symbol of protection from fear and diseases.

Kwati, a traditional soup consisting nine different beans, is consumed on this day to prepare the body for the change in season.





# Shrawan Month

The month of Shrawan is very important for the entire Indian sub-continent as it is connected to the arrival of the south-west monsoon.

It is a month of fasting. Many Hindus will fast every Monday, in the name of Shiva or every Tuesday for Parwati. Fasting on Tuesdays this month is known locally as “Mangala Gauri Vrat”. Tripureshwor Mahadev Temple witnesses women devotees with green sarees and bangles who come to worship.

## SEPT 23

### Krishna Janmashtami

Krishna Janmashtami is the day when Lord Krishna was born. It is an important festival to the Vaishnavism tradition of Hinduism. Jagannath Temple near the Kalo Pul of Teku comes alive on this day when the chariot festival is observed at the premises of this temple.

On this day, devotees perform and enact the life teachings of theory of bhakti and good karma which are narrated in Bhagwad Geeta.







# OCT 02

## **Dashain- Pachimarh**

Dashain is celebrated for 10 days, worshipping Shakti in all her manifestations. This festival is known for family gatherings, as well as for renewal of community ties. People living in the southern part of Kathmandu city celebrate the fourth day of Dashain as Pachali Bhairav Jatra locally known as Pachimarh. On this day a large metal pot symbolising Bhairav, filled with red and white liquor, is brought out with a procession chanting prayers. A special feast is organized to mark this day.

# NOV 25

## **Balachaturdashi**

This is the day to spread seeds in remembrance of the departed and as a form of prayer for the earthbound spirits to help them secure a safe place in heaven. Tripureshwar Mahadev comes alive on this special day when people come to pay homage to their beloved deceased ones.



## Samadhi – The final resting place

Bagmati Promenade will teach you about 3,000 years of cremation history. Between its tributaries of Ikshumati and Bishnumati, the river houses crematoriums that have been used during the funerals of different rulers and subjects through time.

The area could teach a person much about death rituals that were practiced during different times in Nepal and how they were all performed with the intention of attaining samadhi—the final resting place. With its monuments that bear important historical, social and religious significance, the space is like a museum in itself.

**Kalmochan ghat** - Samadhi of the modern rulers of Nepal including Ranas and Shah dynasty were held here.

**Pachali ghat** - Samadhi, during the Lichhavi period, were held for working class communities, astramatikas, Nath sect members, and kings of Simroungadh .

**Teku dovan** – Samadhi for the working class ayurveda practicing community and non-residents of Nepal were held here.

**Other ghats** – The other ghats in the vicinity have been used for the cremation of the bodies of priests, prisoners, men and ministers of the Shah Dynasty.



In the 1990s, the British Embassy collaborated with the then government to do a research survey of the socio-cultural context of the Teku Dovan promenade. The embassy employed British and Nepali engineers and experts to do a thorough research the output of which highlighted the importance of the stretch the dire need to preserve the tangible cultural heritage of the area. This led the British Council to further explore the promenade, which has immense socio-political, cultural and historical significance for the city.

As part of the British Council's 60-year in Nepal, British Council partnered with Story Cycle to engage young stakeholders from the area to do a series of mapping exercises wherein tools like audio/video, images and text were used to weave narratives exploring the socio-political and historical stories of the area. This booklet, compiled post the workshops, has been produced by StoryCycle with the hope that it could be used as guide material for tours of the area.

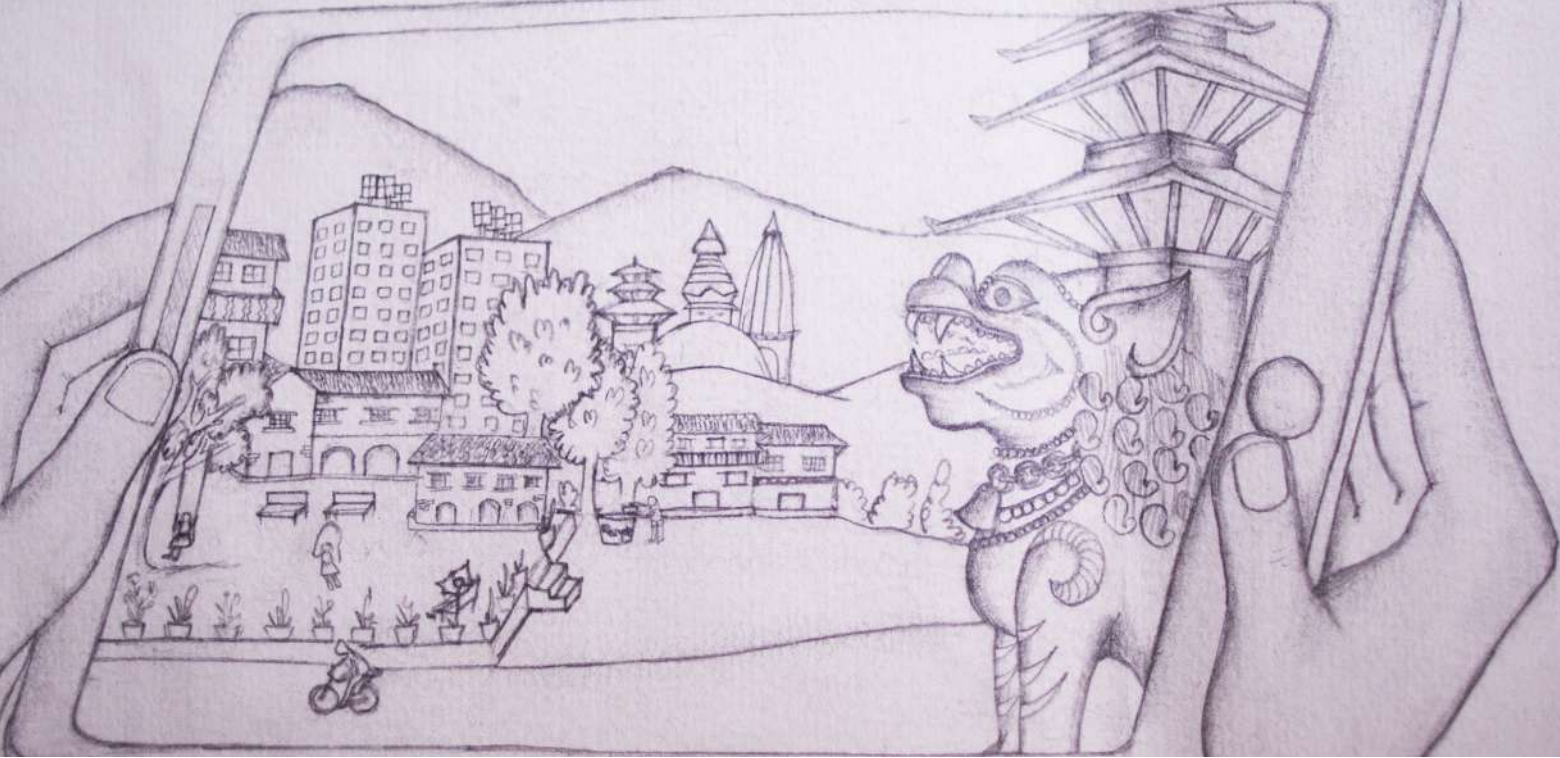
## The British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 75 million people directly and 758 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. Since 1934, the British Council has created friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and the wider world. Our work in the arts has been central to this mission for more than 80 years, seeking new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through creativity.

Our work in arts creates new relationships between artists, organisations and audiences to develop stronger creative sectors around the world. We help artists to break new ground, support creativity and innovation, increase capacity by building skills to support livelihoods and cultural enterprise, extend safe spaces for creative exchange and contribute to research and policy.





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