

ईषा पोखरी - इखा पोखरी - ईखा पुखू

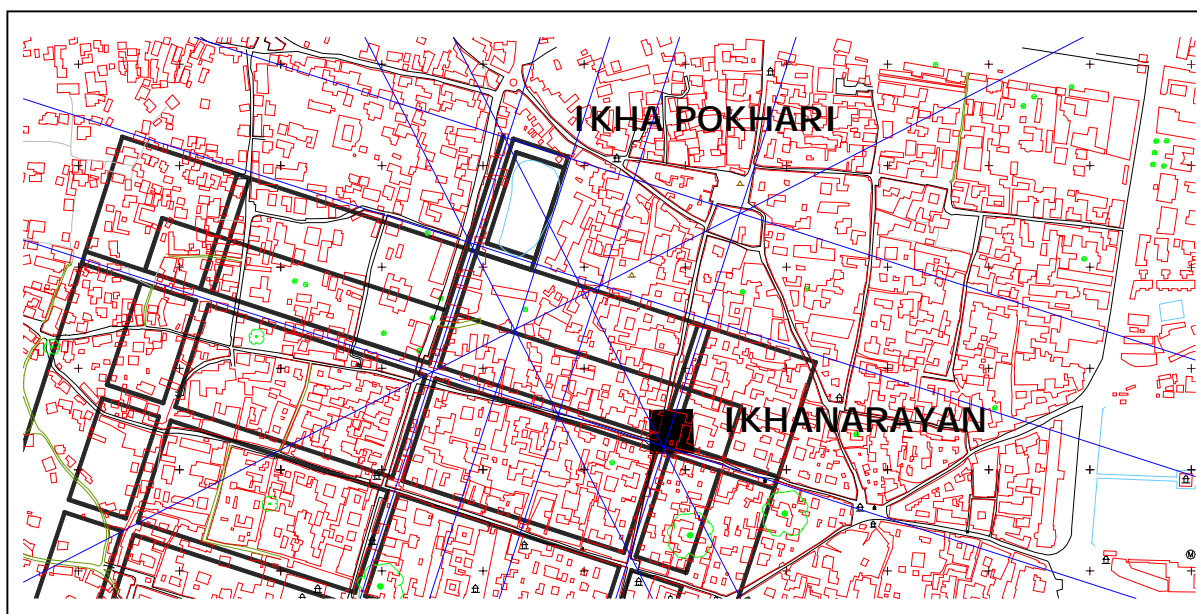
Conservation Plan

IKHA POKHARI, Chhetrapati

Summary: This proposal has been prepared by a committee of the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) under a study project funded by DUDBC/Division Office, Kathmandu. It aims at restoration of the historical reservoir pond of IKHA POKHARI and redevelopment of its edge spaces as a community open space. The objective mix of conservation and development is expected to add 'functionality' to the historical entity making it contemporarily relevant to the neighborhood. IKHA POKHARI, a water supply reservoir pond for the Lichchhavi settlement of Daxinakoligram was located strategically on the north-eastern edge following Vedic planning doctrines and imaging principles. Not only is its nomenclature telling of its Lichchhavi origins when observed together with its namesake IKHA Narayan at Bangemuda, both places have developed their cultural role over the centuries together also. Its relevance as public open space has been demonstrated in present times during the earthquake scare period of 1962 and the two huge local fires of the sixties, when the neighborhood temporarily camped in the open space around the pond. After restoration and redevelopment, the pond will not only provide water for emergencies like fire, but as a reservoir of harvested rain water with its associated edge space it can also form a model urban community space for relief, rest and recreation, displaying sense of environment and heritage/historical conservation at the same time.

Introduction: IKHA POKHARI is located in Chhetrapati behind the row of street-side commercial buildings and the Chhetrapati Free Clinic. It is on the western side of the front lawn of Kanya Mandir High School and to the east and south east of Chhetrapati Free Clinic. It is seen as pond in maps and air-photographs of the area from 1968 and was a sizable water body until recently. The cadastral survey records the plot as pond. Popular memory has it that the area between the plot and the street (now private and built), the area occupied by the KMH school as well as the CF clinic were open spaces associated with the age-old IKHA Pokhari. Much constricted and treated almost as a landfill, IKHA Pokhari is much degenerated and looks more like a grassy marshland plot. It appears to be at the very end of its survival and its historicity is just about as lost. As a pond and open space, its relevance to the neighborhood and the immediate community (both the children of the school and the out-patients of the clinic) can be as immense as its conservation would make cultural sense in the larger perspective of Kathmandu's historical urban open spaces.

Drq. 1: Lichchhavi Dandaka Plan overlay on Kathmandu City area about Ikha Pokhari.



History and Popular Memory: Ikha Pokhari area at present does not house any inscriptions that tell of its origin and use in history. An inventory of public buildings, water elements and green spaces prepared by Kathmandu Valley Town Development Planning Team in 2039 BS (AD 1983) lists Ikha Pokhari as a famous pond and suggests a very late date of its construction (16th century AD) but gives no source or reference for such dating¹. It give the measurement of the pond as 210' x 92' (or, 64m x 28m), which is considerably smaller than shown in 1968 air-photo-based map (93m x 47m). Cadastral registration records indicate area of pond as about 60000 square feet.

Toponymal², etymological and urban planning doctrinal considerations would place its construction to Lichchhavi period. It is known that Lichchavis laid out the town of Daxinakoligram in Dandaka pattern with its four grids south of current Hanumandhoka area and the other four grids to the north³. The main street of this settlement that stretched straight between Jaisidewal and Ikha Pokhari, is still in use. The Vedic doctrine for this planning pattern required placing the water tank for the settlement at its north and on the east of the main street and Ikha Pokhari exactly fits in the planning order.

Etymology of 'Ikha Pokhari' (or, Ikhapukhu) would suggest its origin to days when Sanskrit was state language. Anecdotal evidence of its long historical existence is seen in the popular memory that the waters of Ikha Pokhari had medicinal properties useful in curing eye infections support the view that the name originates from Sans. term 'Ekshya' (with a long 'e' and meaning vision)⁴. Since the pond is ritually linked in popular memory to Ikha Narayan temple at Bangemuda (Thayamadu), which also shares the same root name and houses a Narayan image from the Lichchhavi period⁵, Ikha Pokhari can be construed as constructed in Lichchhavi period. Moreover, since Ikha Narayan is located in the north-east corner of the grid-iron patterned portion of the town, it fits the doctrinal requirement of Vedic planning practice (*Dandaka* pattern) when applied by followers of Vaisnavism. As the Lichchhavis were fundamentally Vaisnav, all the other Narayan temples of Kathmandu established by them are located at the grid-iron pathway crossings south of Hanumandhoka area true to its Lichchhavi name, Daxinakoligram. Since, the northern portion of the town was occupied by the populace largely following mother-goddesses cult, the only exception was made to locate Ikha Narayan temple because of the ritual necessity. The location of Ikha

Pokhari itself on the highest level just north and outside the town further confirms the urban planning practice of Lichchhavi period.



Pic.1: A Copper plate Inscription from Ikha Narayan showing the name as 'Esha'.

¹ Inventory, 2039: KVTDP, Kathmandu, Nepal. Inventory no. pond (13), ward. No. 28, pp. 363. The date appears to have been speculated from the date available nearby from Srigha Chaitya (1552 AD) and the associated legend of Samanta Bhadra of Tachhe Bahal.

² For principles of toponym, see 'Sthan Nam-kosh', Shrestha, Krishnaprakash, Royal Nepal Academy, 2044, (pp. ga through tha).

³ Tiwari, Sudarshan Raj, The Ancient Settlements of the Kathmandu Valley, CNAS, Tribhuvan University, 2001, pp. 91-95.

⁴ See Shrestha, Yogendra Man's article 'Ikhapukhu' published in Newari. (attachment- 1). However Shrestha's suggestion that the root word could be related to 'Ikshyu' may not be accepted as 'Ikha' is spelled with a long 'e' (*dirgha*) whereas 'Ikshyu' starts with a short 'e'.

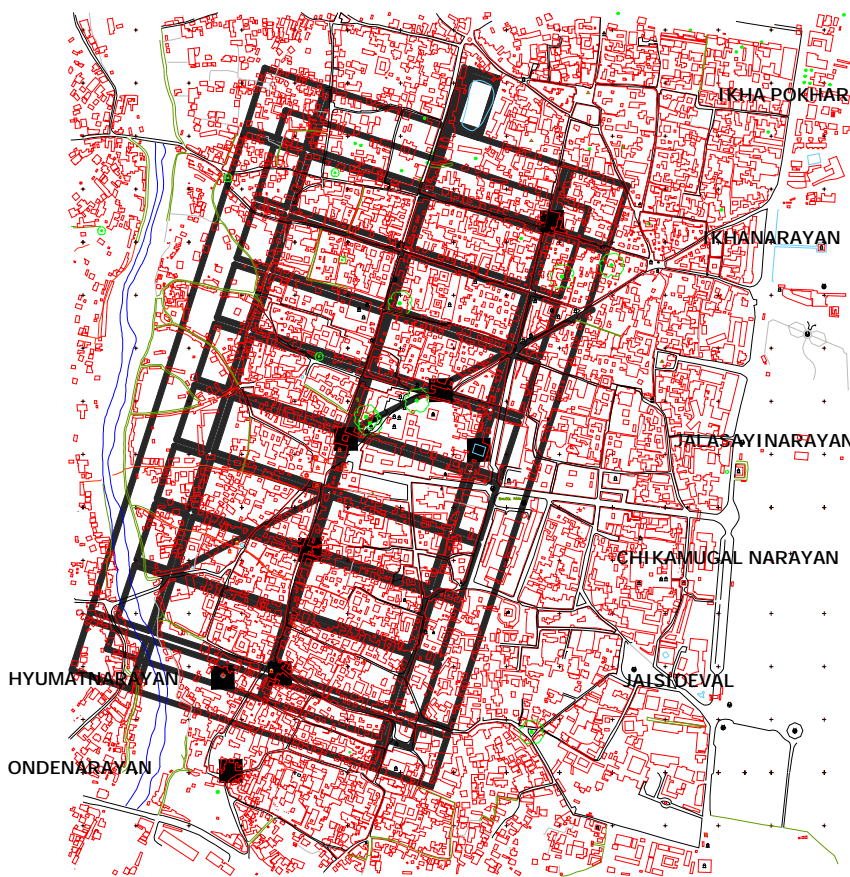
⁵ The image is of Sridhara Vishnu dated conservatively to late Lichchhavi period. The temple was rededicated in 1663 as per the earliest inscriptional record available there. (See HMG, Kathmandu Valley, The Preservation of Physical Environment and Cultural Heritage, a Protective Inventory, Vol. 2, inventory no. B/K-31).

A further note on etymology may be worth adding for the sake of correct understanding of the root word of Ikhapokhari. As older inscriptions at Ikha Narayan spell it as 'ईखा' as compared to new ones 'इखा', it becomes clear that 'Ikha' is a Nepali version of Sanskrit 'esha', (with a long 'e' and 'sh' like in 'bush', see Pic.1). The term actually could be meaning the shaft of an ox-drawn carriage (*gohale*), possibly an allusion to the festival of 'go-yuddha' very popular at Daxinakoligram of the yore. It is notable that the Lichchhavi inscription nearest to Ikha Pokhari, located at Koñbahal (Srigha Vihar), mentions about watching the festival of 'goyuddhotshava'. Although this new information seem to clash with the conclusion of linkage between the popular memory and the root word 'ekshya', it provides a stronger basis to conclude that both the pond and the Narayan are from Lichchhavi period. A closer observation of the temple, its design and images-on-the-struts, will make the temple still more mysterious and suggest still more ancient origins. Ikha Pokhari appears to have been named after Ikha Narayan and not vice versa.

Lichchhavi inscriptions of the valley indicate abundant use of ponds and reservoirs (generally termed 'khataka') on the fringe of settlements and monasteries for the purpose of water supply. Thus even as Ikha Pokhari offers no inscriptional evidence of its history, its Lichchhavi origin as an urban water supply reservoir may be taken as established.



Pic. 2: The Three Gha of Wongha.



The 'gha' places (e.g. Nagha, Wongha, Nuhgha, etc.) indicate the layout of the distribution channel alignment. From toponymal and topographical considerations, it can be conjectured that water supply distribution from Ikha Pokhari passed through Nagha, Ikha Narayan, Wongha, Yamgha(?) and Nhugha (Jaisi-dewal). Drg. 1 above shows the site and the overlay grid lines are conjectural Lichchhavi Dandaka plan of Daxinkoligram⁶, shown here (Drg. 2).

Drg. 2: Daxinakoligram and its Dandaka Plan overlay on Kathmandu Core (1968 Map).

⁶ Tiwari, Sudarshan Raj, Planning Theory (Manual), Institute of Engineering, TU.

Conjecture of Design and Size of Ikha Pokhari:

Lichchhavi planning grid based on doctrinal planning proportions and measures would indicate the original size of the pond to be about 100m x 50 m, its length would have measured twice as much as its width. It is obvious that the land area of the pond shown in cadastral registration records (about 60000 sq. ft. / 5600 sq. m.) as well as air photo data (about 4400 sq. m.) is tantalizingly close to this projected size. It is therefore likely that the size of the pond has been narrowed only in recent times due mainly to lack of cleanliness and infill encroachment from its edges inwards. The pond appears to have been close to its original size as late as 1948, when Kanya Mandir High School moved to its adjoining space in 1948.

The rectangular pond has in its bowels seven well-like structures made of 'huge' bricks – such observation was reportedly made when the pond was last cleaned under the auspices of Krishi Bivag (1959?). It is known that traditionally 'wells' were constructed in the ponds flush with its bottom – at least one was used for supply of water and another as flush out well for cleaning purposes, the latter was plugged by filling it up with black cotton soil. It is not clear as to what purposes so many wells served – it is possible that they formed intake for supply to various sectors of town.

Cultural Use of Ikha Pokhari:

Several festivals are linked to Ikha Pokhari. During the festival of Pañhchare (*Pishach Chaturdasi*) as associated with *tole*-clan of Tengal Ganesh and their Lukumadyo, the clan members, who prepare and offer roasted pig meat to the god, take bath in the waters of Ikha Pokhari as a purification rite. This practice was still in observation until recently. The Jha Brahmins of Indrachowk use the waters of Ikha Pokhari as ritual barrier in their '*upanayana*' (coming of age ceremony) ceremony of their male children. Several groups of numinous stones, used as Digu-dyo sites by particular clans of indigenous communities, exist in the northern and eastern edges. The extent of open space between these shrines and the pond tells of fairly large embankment and green space around Ikha Pokhari in its past.

The last impromptu community use of open space around Ikha Pokhari happened in 1962, when people of the neighborhood camped there in tents during the period of earthquake scare. The water of Ikha Pokhari has been used by the community to fight large local fires.

The open area east of Ikha Pokhari was passed on by the then Rana Prime Minister Mohan Sumshere for Kanya Mandir School in 1948 and a shed building for the school was constructed. The Chhetrapati Free Clinic moved to the area west of the pond as its building foundations were laid at the site in 1960. Both have since prospered as public service institutions of significant symbolic and practical value to the community.

Conservation and Development Concept:

The conjectural grid projection studies based on the dimensions and proportions of Lichchhavi Dandaka plan of Daxinakoligrama indicate that the open space envelop available between the line of commercial/institutional buildings on the west and Kanya Mandir School on the east is sufficient to fully accommodate the traditional pond of Ikha Pokhari. Since it seems likely that the encroachment of pond space is a recent phenomenon, its edge and bottom conditions may be almost intact under the infill debris.

Thus this concept plan for conservation and development of Ikha Pokhari is based on action research approach. An archeologically supervised cleaning and excavation activity is proposed to be undertaken first and this is expected to offer exact details of construction of its edges, bottom and its supply, distribution and drain-off systems/elements. The pond is however proposed to be restored to a size of 75 meters by 37.5 meters, a proportionate reduction keeping the south-west corner and the

edges on the south and western sides in its original alignment and some original water-body space is converted into open space for contemporary community use. A paved embankment walkway is proposed all-round. This paving will be finished in traditional materials (brick paving) in the south-west section and the remaining area will be paved in stone for a better weathering and wear-and-tear properties. It is expected that the bottom and edge construction will be found largely intact and only a few places would need restoration. Because of the reduction of size proposed, the sides on the east and north would have to be constructed anew – the construction detail proposed for this is drawn from the experience of restoration of Siddhi Pokhari, Pimbaha Pokhari and Purna Chandi Pokhari and is only indicative. If the findings from excavations about Ikha Pokhari show different details, the details so established will be used for the construction of the new eastern and northern edges. The black cotton soil needed for the restoration will be available in the pond itself.

A ‘Dabali’ platform is proposed located centrally on its southern embankment. Taking cue from the planning of other important ponds of the past, a ‘Pati’ is conjecturally proposed located centrally on the western side. On the north of the pond, a Mandap-like pavilion in two floors and in traditional architectural form is proposed – this is proposed to house a small cafeteria (in lower level) and rooms for the management (in first floor). Public toilets are located in the lower level. A basket-ball court, which is proposed as the school facility in day time, will be open for community use in the after hours. On special occasions, the court can be used as gathering /activity space. These spaces and facilities thus provide for contemporary local urban open space community activities of the three target communities – the school children, out-patients and visitors to the clinic and the immediate residents.

A back-up pumping facility utilizing a tube-well as well as a sump-pit with appropriate check valve and overflow systems that will collect rain water from the green and paved area is proposed. At least two of the wells at the pond bottom will be restored – one as supply well (the supply system from tube well will be linked to this) and the other as a drain-off well.

A interceptor drain is proposed along the northern edge of the site to intercept and exclude the drains from the neighborhood draining into the pond. This is proposed to be linked to the street system available.

The concept, design and details of construction/restoration are shown in the appended set of drawings.

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