

SPOTLIGHT

# SHISHU PARK HOPING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

*'Amader deshta showpropuri,  
Sathi moder fulpori  
Fulpori, laal pori, laal pori, neel pori  
sobar sathe bhaab kori'*

As the ever-memorable song starts playing, children, sitting on the metallic horsebacks, delightfully start going round and round. 35-year-old Salma Akter holds her daughter Taskia (3), who is too young to manage herself on the ride.

The Shishu Park is a place we all have some memories and nostalgia associated with. The only public sector children's amusement park of our city, in fact, Shishu Park is the first amusement park for children in Bangladesh.

Established on 15-acres of land, adjacent to the Suhrawardy Uddyan (former Ramna Race Course ground) in 1979, the Shishu Park was a profit making project of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC). Later on, in 1983, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) took the responsibility to look after it. At present, the park offers a total of 15 rides for the children, including four that are being managed privately. After the recent shut

down of the 'Shishu Mela' at Dhaka's Shamoli, and the 'Wonderland Park' at Dhaka's Gulshan, Shishu Park is the only place in the city for children to amuse themselves within affordable costs.

There used to be a time when the popularity of Shishu Park was immense and it was regarded a vibrant place for teenagers and adults alike. However over the years, the scenario has changed immensely. At present Shishu Park faces an ever-increasing competition with the private parks, as the theme park rides and attractions of the privately owned entertainment parks are in much better condition and modern than those of this park. But, these private enterprises are not always affordable for people of all social classes. And this is the reason why Shishu Park has always served as the ultimate source of entertainment for the children of the middle-income or lower income families.

But how successful has the park been in attracting children?

"I have come here several times, and I am tired of seeing the same old rides", says 12-year-old Rafi Ahmed, who has come to visit the park with his father. As the park authority has not got any significant additions in terms of rides in past 37 years, and the condition is also not very attractive, children sometimes get bored as there is no variety.



"The rides that we can enjoy in the private amusement parks are more fun though, but compared to Shishu Park, they are expensive. We face a difficult time affording the rides and the entry fee every now and then," says Moshir Ahmed, Rafi's father. On the contrary, there are many visitors who are happy and content with whatever rides they are enjoying with such minimal expense."

Some of the oldest rides at the Shishu Park, for example, merry-go-round, new trabant, wonder wheel, trampoline, battery car, chair tower and flower cup ride were installed by Japanese technicians back in 1979. Experts believe that these rides are supposed to have a maximum life span of ten years. But, even today, these are being used in full swing without any major renovation. In fact rides

like new trabant are just lying around a corner for a long time, as it has gone beyond repair.

When visited, the boundary wall of the ride Battery Car was found broken, which could cause accidents any time. Also, few rides don't have the minimum safety equipment like seat belts, shoulder harness, or lap bar chains.

"All the rides of the park are running

smoothly, as we monitor and update the machineries and tools on a regular basis", says Md. Zakir Hossain, deputy assistant engineer of the park. "The broken boundary walls have come to our attention and we are working accordingly to repair this immediately", he adds.

As every day, on an average, eight to nine thousand visitors come to visit the park; it is very difficult to maintain

maximum cleanliness always. But compared to the whole park, the scenario of the lavatories is even worse. Apart from these, the lights of a few spots are also out of order making it very hard and risky for people to move about in the evening.

"We are planning to set up some electric polls and introduce LED lights in the entire park", says Md Nuruzzaman, assistant engineer of the park. "If everything goes well, this problem will be solved within a very short period of time", he adds.

However, according to various news reports, the DCC had prepared a project proposal for new additions, and renovations of the park, which was postponed for a long time due to bureaucratic-tangles. But, according to the officers who are responsible for the maintenance of the park, the High Court's prohibition on maintenance has already ended, while the proposal has received a verbal approval from the Government. They are hopeful that the project will start by the beginning of the next year.

"We are planning to install 16 more rides for the children, and except two or three rides, we are going to demolish the existing dilapidated rides", says Hossain. He also mentions that the park lacks manpower. Earlier, there was a total of 36 operators, whereas only 27 of them are working now. The park is supposed to have 40 security guards in total, but in reality, it has only nine.

At present, Shishu Park charges 15 takas for entry per person and 10 takas for each ride. The park remains open on

Mondays through Thursdays from 2 pm to 7 pm, while on Fridays it is open from 2.30 pm to 7.30 pm. On Saturdays it follows the usual timing while it remains closed on Sundays. Every Wednesday, Shishu Park offers free entrance and rides for impoverished children living on the streets.

In spite of some irregularities, there is no scope to undermine the value of this park. Those who come to visit, even today, think that it is the best means of entertainment for them. This is why, the visitors claim a major renovation of their beloved park. As our younger generation has to deal with a daunting amount of study load, they can hardly manage the opportunity to engage themselves in an open and entertaining environment.

"According to child psychologists, the more a child observes and experiences diverse things in their childhood, the more their brain develops," says Dr. Mekhala Sarkar, Assistant Professor (Psychiatry), National Institute of Mental Health. "So when they go to a park, they can experience a new environment with lots of new stimulation together with the new challenges that are totally different from those in their homes. They can mingle with other children coming from socially diverse backgrounds. By playing with other children, they can learn different rules and regulations, and the power of adapting, which helps them in the future. And by going to these parks, these children, can get an opportunity to grow both mentally and physically," she adds. ■

