

# **Buriganga Eco-park, Dhaka: Challenges and Prospects as a Public Space for Recreation**

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## **Abstract**

Food and shelter are more important than recreation to the people of Bangladesh. Yet, recreation does exist in the midst of poverty, ignorance and unhealthiness. The condition of recreation in Bangladesh has never been satisfactory and the recreation problem is acute in urban centers. Dhaka, the metropolitan city with fifteen million people (BBS, 2012) has less recreation opportunities. To satisfy recreation needs, it is natural for families to seek appropriate spaces, which provide fresh air with enthusiastic scenic beauty. As such, within a limited scope, concerns to identify the potentiality of eco-park as a recreation types and in the same time drawbacks and measurement of potentiality also been carried out in the research. However in Dhaka City, the areas are poorly provided with parks, recreation ground and other sports facilities. Recreation is activity or in-activity of special kind at leisure time. Unless an individual or a community has opportunity to use leisure hours for satisfying constructive forms of recreation, they can become a liability; instead of happiness and freedom, leisure brings boredom and dissatisfaction. Thus, this research hunts for the factors, which may attract people to this place through a physical, functional and visual portrait as well as also measured recreation potentiality of Buriganga eco-park and details responses from different stakeholders regarding present services facilities and satisfaction level of the services. The findings of this research reveal that, still now the conditions of Buriganga eco-park is very poor in terms of components of a eco-park as well as economically, environmentally and culturally. But in case of overall status, the Buriganga eco-park has only 14.26% of potentials through BIWTA trying to put more effort on it. In Bangladesh, BIWTA is not the sole authority to involve with this kind of tourism activities but the potentiality of Buriganga eco-park still now in the beginning phase. If government wants to make this an efficient and vibrant one, then special attention is needed for proper management of Buriganga Eco-park. This study is rational in the sense of providing recommendations for improving physical condition of “Buriganga Eco-park” as a vibrant eco-park, consequently regaining Buriganga scenic beauty and increasing the recreation facilities of old Dhaka.

## **Introduction**

A megacity may be blessed with a large number of industries, business establishments, shopping facilities and so on. But it falls short of its highest possibilities if it is wanting in those qualities of living that represent a more fruitful and happy life for its people. “There is nothing in the city

plan that may contribute more vitality to this richer life of the people than appropriate provision for recreation. There is nothing that deserves more earnest consideration” (Lohman, 1931).

Park is the base of any outdoor recreation. If we look at different developed country like the USA, the UK, France, Germany etc. then we can easily find that they have lots of park for their peoples’ outdoor recreation. Indian sub-continent is not different from this. Park is one of the most important preconditions of urbanization and is the most important part of any city life. In fact, park is not only a place of recreation; it is a place to pass time in leisure. An agglomeration of attraction encourages city inhabitants with an airy gesture.

Eco-park is nothing but a protected region of environmental and cultural values. In the same way, it can be said that eco-parks are locations which receive protection, because, of their recognized natural, ecological and or cultural values. Eco-parks are essential for biodiversity conservation. They are the cornerstones of virtually all national and international conservation strategies. They are as set aside to maintain functioning natural ecosystems, to act as refuges for species and to maintain ecological processes that cannot survive in most intensely managed landscapes and seascapes. Protected areas act as benchmarks against which we understand human interactions with the natural world.

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, with expanding new areas has been suffering from inadequate provision of recreation facilities. The city lacks miserably in providing recreational space and facilities to its people. The existing open space and park provisions vary widely between old and new Dhaka and are much below compared to the open space standard that should be maintained. In the older city areas there is too little space allotted for recreation. This is also true for many of the more newly developed areas. The areas are poorly provided with parks, recreation ground and other sports facilities.

In 1978, Dhaka city had a total open space area of 1916 acres (Nabi, 1978) which amounted to 0.55 acres of total open space per 1000 population. There is no open space standard throughout the whole city. There are considerable variations in open space standards between old and new Dhaka. With the exception of very few almost the entire old city is devoid of any recreational space whether public or private. The distribution of existing open space on the basis of acreage to population does not give any meaningful picture when measured against western standards

(Nabi, 1978). Not only that, existing park and open space management system is very poor in Dhaka city.

Buriganga Eco-park is the only eco-park in Dhaka city. It is located on the foreshore and eastern side of the river Buriganga. Bangladesh Inland Transport Authority (BIWTA) has developed the land as an eco-park recovering from encroachment. The authority (BIWTA) has developed the land in an engineering way, where there is lack of proper land use and management planning. It will not be effective and impressive without proper management planning. Even, this small amount of recreational spaces is not being properly maintained. Due to the lack of proper planning and management the conditions of existing parks and open spaces have become deplorable. Immediate attention, therefore, should be given to improve the situation of these parks and open spaces if the city is to offer its citizens places for leisure time activities.

### **Objectives of the research**

The research objectives are:

1. To present general situations of the eco-parks located in different places of Bangladesh.
2. To identify recreation potentials and drawbacks of the Buriganga eco-park.
3. To provide recommendation based on potentials of the eco-park as a vibrant recreation component.

### **Rationale of the study**

Bangladesh is a developing country with a huge population is about 15 cores (BBS, 2012). People of this country are struggling to solve their daily problems in various ways. There is an acute shortage of well-planned parks & gardens and open spaces for recreation both in urban and rural areas of the country. In urban areas this problem is an extreme level. In case of Dhaka city, it is a burning question as urbanization is triggering up at a high rate (4.2%) (BBS, 2012). Within Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area only 0.02 % of the total land is using as parks & gardens and open spaces for people's recreation and amusement. In Bangladesh, as everything like job,

higher education, better treatment and so on are mostly Dhaka oriented so, all classes and all types of people along with disaster/ climate refugees are coming and gathering in Dhaka city. At the same time, the land grabbers and big wigs are always trying to encroach every inch of land for making buildings or different structures for housing and business purposes. In case of Buriganga River it is absolutely true. All these are creating pressure on the development process and land use planning of Dhaka city.

Thus, this study tries to find out the responsiveness of park visitors. It hunts for the factors, which may attract people to this place through a physical, functional and visual portrait. This study is rational in the sense of providing recommendations for improving physical condition of “Buriganga Eco-park” as a vibrant eco-park, consequently regaining Buriganga’s scenic beauty and increasing the livability of old Dhaka.

### **Limitations of study**

This study was done as a partial fulfillment of a postgraduate degree. There was so much to do, but could do so little due to shortage of time and resource. Due to prevailing socio-economic scenario and visitors’ suspicious mind, they do not feel free to express their opinion independently, which is very much necessary for a successful research. In these research 80 samples has been selected for collecting the structured information regarding potentials measurement of eco-park. Moreover, very little work has been done on this subject matter in Bangladesh. So, there was available a very little secondary data, which handicapped my work.

### **Eco-park**

Eco-park is exploited as an amusement park without hampering its natural environment so that the bio-diversity remains unaffected there. Generally a particular area is demarcated and brought under intensive management for this purpose. Sometimes selected areas having special natural features are selected as eco-parks. Flora of the concerned area gets preference for such consideration. However protection and preservation of both flora and fauna get top priority. Beauty offered by the nature is opened to the visitors. Moreover, efforts to attract and entertain

the visitors are also visible in the eco-parks. For Buriganga eco-park it is playing an impressive contribution to the visitors for pleasures.

## Profile of the Buriganga Eco-park

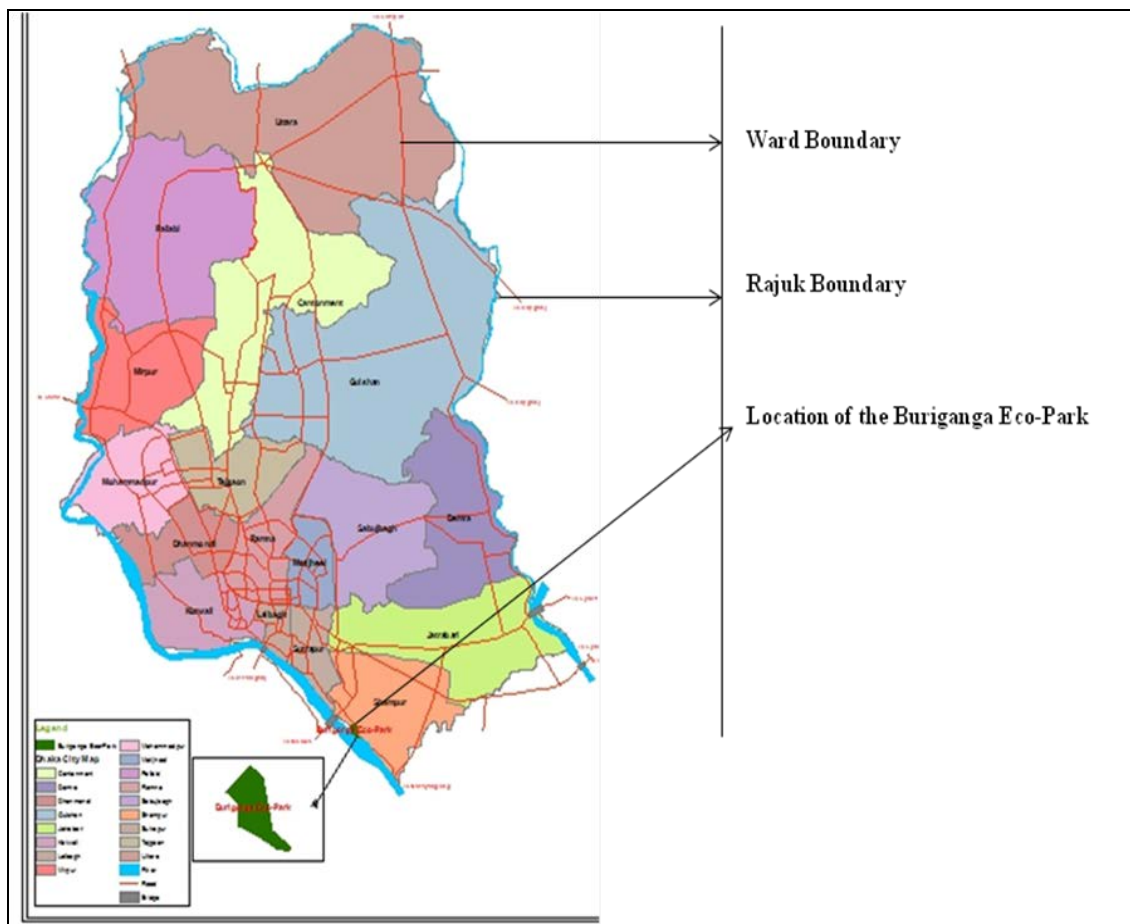
### Background

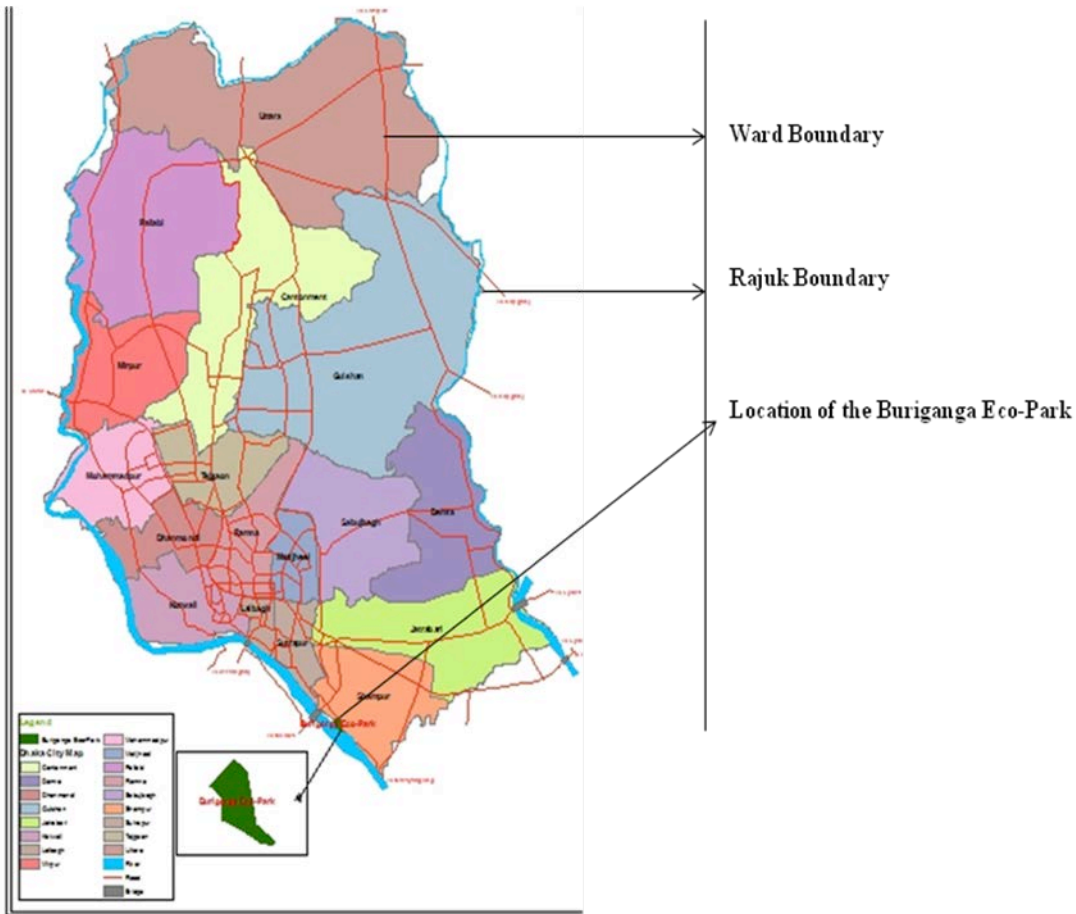
Buriganga Eco-park is situated in Shyampur, which is one of the metro Thana of Dhaka City Corporation. The name of the eco-park has been derived from the river Buriganga.

### Area and Location of Buriganga Eco-park

Buriganga Eco-park is situated at the northeast part of Buriganga River and southeast of Dhaka city. The eco-park is bounded by Buriganga River to the southwest.

### Geographical Location of Buriganga Eco-park





Map1, Source: BIWTA, 2014

### *Administrative framework*

Shyampur is one of the metro Thana of Dhaka City. The Thana occupies an area of 10.17 sq. km. It is located between 23°40' and 23°42' north latitudes and between 90°25' and 90°28' east longitudes. Shyampur Thana is bounded on the north by Demra Thana, on the east by Narayangang Sadar Upazilla, on the south by Buriganga River and on the west by Suttrapur Thana.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has initiated move to save rivers from encroachment permanently as it has constructed an eco- park on the bank of the river Buriganga in the capital, an official said. The BIWTA, under the Ministry of Shipping (MoS) has completed the first phase work of the Buriganga Eco Park on seven acres at a cost of Tk. 14.7 million.

The construction work of the park was done as part of BIWTA's ongoing project on construction of port facilities and prevents unauthorized encroachment of the Buriganga River and its foreshore land. The first phase construction work of the park was started on August 1, 2011 and completed on June 30, 2012. There will be a 'boat museum' inside the park that will reflect years old rich heritage of the country.



**Fig 1, Pictorial Presentations of Buriganga Eco-park, Dhaka**

## **Assessment Indicators of Ecological Parks**

Considering parameters in this study for the design of eco-parks are divided into three different groups: 1- Physical and Ecological design 2- Environmental 3- Cultural and Educational. Each of the following sections has specific requirements, standards and indicators that should be considered with designers, planners and builders of ecological parks.

The main axis of Physical and Ecological design has four subdivisions of Buildings, Crossings and Pathways; Children's play spaces and Parking spaces each of which has ecological indicators. The main axis of Environment has been divided into six different subdivision: such as Energy, Plants and Animals, Environmental pollution, Waste recycling and Wastewater, Production of fertilizer.

## **Problems in Buriganga Eco-park**

Tourism is now a fastest growing industry in the world. The ever increasing growth of this industry and its market has increased the competition among the tourists importing countries. As a result, the success of any destination country depends on how well it can initiate and adopt the competitive marketing strategy over its competitors. The destination country needs to take the effective marketing measures so that they can gain the positive result through attracting more tourists to its destination.

Bangladesh is trying to attract more tourists to its destination through different measures. But the country lacks far behind to conduct the appropriate and sufficient measures regarding the marketing measures. The position of Bangladesh tourism in world context is very negligible even the country's position is at the bottom line in the South Asian region. Among the seven countries of SAARC in this region, Bangladesh holds the 6th position just above the position of Bhutan. One of the reasons of not succeeding is Bangladesh tourism is not effective in marketing plan undertaken for the sector. So, it is essential for the policy makers of the concern industry to consider the following issues very carefully and on the priority basis for the expected development of the industry.



**Table 1: Status of accommodation and others facilities in Buriganga Eco-park**

Facilities	Good	Very good	Bad	Very bad	Total
Rec. compo	18	10	27	25	80
Hotel	22	11	32	15	80
Tran & com	30	2	40	8	80

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2014

The study site, Buriganga eco-park is not an exceptional one with the increasing demand of the visitors but the problems associated with the visitors satisfaction depends on multi-dimensional issues.

### **Problems identified by tourists**

Though the recreational activities were not hampered, the interviewed visitors identified some problem for the better management of the park in present or future. Sound pollution (26%) got the top most priority followed by bench shortage (25%), toilet limitation (18%), parking (17%) and accommodation (14%). actually during the research work, vehicles were allowed in the park. so there was some sound pollution. Demands of the visitors were so high that limited resources couldn't fulfill the desire.

### **Challenges for Buriganga Eco-park**

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### **Master Plan of Buriganga Eco-park**



**Fig 2, Source: BIWTA, 2014**

### **Findings**

#### ***Number of tourists visiting the park***

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), International tourist arrivals increased from 25 million to 903 million from 1950 to 2011. International tourist arrivals in 2011 increased with a growth of 6.6% as compared to 2010. Our tourist season is in winter i.e. October to March when there is an extreme cold in Europe and America and the tourist spots are not favorable for visiting. We are also in a favorable position from lengthy tourism season here. Our tourism industry has an extra advantage in terms of location too. All the tourist location is situated within a distance of 400 kilometers from the capital Dhaka (Uddin 2009).

From research it states that, tourists were significantly varied each year. In summer tourists numbers were varied significantly than in winter. Actually, winter (November to February) is the main tourist season in Bangladesh. Rainy season is very unusual season for tourist. In summer (March to June), environment is flexible. Therefore, tourist fluctuation is different Buriganga Eco-park, Dhaka, Bangladesh experienced 84% tourist in winter, where as 5% tourist at rainy season (Ali 2008). In that sense Buriganga Eco-park is providing tourist facility for all season.

**Table 2: Level of satisfaction by the visitors in the study area**

Status	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	0%
Moderately Satisfied	1%
Satisfied	16%
Poorly Satisfied	53%
Not Satisfied	30%

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2014

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations have drawn from my examination of the surrounding households in the Buriganga eco-park by the following ways:

- Small numbers of household currently participate in ecotourism sector in Bangladesh. There is a small scope for increasing local participation through tourism.
- There is lack of accommodation facilities so there need to be establishing hotel and motel with improvement in accommodation visitor can grow in number and the scope for local participation can increase.
- Household who do participate in the tourism sector have very little in term of landholding and literacy. Furthermore ecotourism facilities will improve the livelihood status of household who directly participate in this sector.
- The number of local jobs will be created from ecotourism such as shopkeepers, hotel & restaurants owners, transportations, guides, daily labors, etc.
- Public awareness about the Eco-park and its resources will be grown up.

- Involvement of local people in the management system is a must. Different systems of management will employ the local people. As for example, the security guard, ticketing system management will be provision for their employment.
- The authority should approve new infrastructures budget. It has been said in the design consideration part, that the new infrastructures must be compatible with the features of the Eco-park. To ensure this consideration some strict rules and regulation will be in operation.
- Training program for the park staffs will be arranged to make them skilled, so that they can manage the park efficiently and the visitors may have the good service.
- Entrance to the eco-park must be restricted by ticketing system. By this system the unwanted entrance will be prohibited and the authority will earn some revenue, which may be helpful for better management system.
- Social sentiment must be kept in mind, so that nothing could be happened unwontedly.
- Linkage between Eco-park authority, Ministry of Civil Aviation & Tourism, BIWTA, BRRI, RAJUK, DCC(S), DoE, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of State, Ministry of planning, Ministry of Forest and Ministry of Communication to be established for proper management and development of the Eco-park.

## **Conclusion**

Dhaka is a mega city which is expanding at an alarming rate. There is no eco-park in Dhaka city for recreation of the citizens. It is very clear that there is a crying need of an eco-park for recreation and fresh breathing of the people. Buriganga Eco-park is still a project, which is directly running by an especial management system of Bangladesh Inland Water Transfer Authority (BIWTA). From the study, it can be said that, there was a mistake in planning policy when the Buriganga Eco-park was designed. Bangladesh Inland Water Transfer Authority (BIWTA) is a strong and effective department of Bangladesh Government. If a joint venture enterpranership could be taken with the local community of Buriganga Eco-park it must be economically benefitted, vibrant and potential. The citizens of Dhaka will get an excellent eco-park for their recreation and fresh breathing. At the same time, Buriganga will regain its

succession by getting free from polluted environment. People will be able to enjoy the aesthetic view of the river Buriganga with long breathe.

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