

One Man Initiative Kathmandu's Kamal Pokhari (Lotus Pond) resurrected

It is said that "Nothing is impossible in this world" and this has been proven by the altruistic work of Mr. Devendra Gautam whose sheer effort has helped to restore Kathmandu's Kamal Pokhari to near its original condition. The pond is located at the center of Kathmandu City. It was formerly known as *Bhim Jujuka Pokhari*, famous for the lotus and was originally spread over 48 ropanies (c. 2.5 ha). Over time, however, due to continuous encroachment by the locals and different government bodies, this once pristine and famous pond became severely degraded, to become a grass field of only 34 ropanies (c. 1.73 ha). Mr. Gautam, a local resident of Kamal Pokhari area in the city's Ward No.1, independently instigated the cleaning and clearing of the *jal kumbhi* (water hyacinth) with missionary zeal, beginning in 1996. Gautam is a well known Nepalese journalist by profession, one with a strong determination to establish a clean neighbourhood. For this he is even ready to pick up the litter thrown around.

About 20-25 years ago Kamal Pokhari was a pristine pond rich in fish population and famous for fishing activities. But due to the release of sewer from surrounding localities and encroachment of its bank, it turned into a grass field, where one could easily walk through.



Devendra Gautam with laborers, cutting the water hyacinth

Kamal Pokhari had been encroached by all sectors of society including government organizations intent on obtaining land free of cost adjacent to such ponds. In the absence of strong policy, such activities are extremely difficult to control and have had adverse effects on the pond. Gautam, himself, initiated the task of removing the water hyacinth that completely covered the pond and later personally employed some laborers to complete the job. The major problems for the pond pollution are now reduced, as the government has banned the sale of the land around

the pond and are planning to divert the sewer lines that empty into it.

Now that Kamal Pokhari is clean, the local Guthi (Trust), the Kathmandu municipality and other organizations are claiming their right of ownership of the pond. Even some individuals have proposed the pond area for commercial use. Devendra Gautam, however, is strictly against this. He believes that Kamal Pokhari does not belong to any individual or organizations, but is the nation's property and that it is the duty of citizens to preserve and maintain its natural beauty. After Gautam took up the cause, other agencies and clubs, such as Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Kamal Pokhari Sports Club and Marwari Sewa Samiti, have also come to support this noble

cause by providing excavators for cleaning the pond, and life jackets and boats for use on the pond.



Devendra Gautam



Kamal Pokhari after the cleanup campaign

Since the pond can provide many beneficial values, Gautam is determined to preserve it. According to him, the stored water can be used in emergencies, such as during a fire. It can also be used on religious occasions like *Chhattha Parba* and, environmentally, it acts to recharge the area's natural ground water.

His endeavour to bring the pond back to its original glory is an excellent example of how a determined person can promote positive environmental change. "It is now the responsibility of the new generation to preserve and maintain the novelty of existing resources like Kamal Pokhari" were the concluding words of encouragement from Devendra Gautam, the man whose initiation and sole effort has saved Kamal Pokhari from complete degradation. **HYDRO Nepal** salutes Devendra Gautam for his exemplary contribution in preserving the environment.

(Based on a conversation with Kriti Gongal and Shovana Maharjan of HYDRO Nepal).