

Parks and Recreation

The Hidden Rhythms of a Neighborhood *Deepika Varadarajan*

If you've lived in Bangalore long enough, you can spot the green and yellow-painted compounds of the neighbourhood parks. I consider myself fortunate to have moved into a first-floor apartment facing one such park during the second wave of COVID-19, just as the lockdown began. Taking time off work to reflect and recalibrate, I later positioned my desk by a window overlooking the park. What started as a passing distraction gradually became a profound connection, and these daily scenes, quietly unfolding below, have shifted my perspective on life in more ways than I can count.

The park is a microcosm of the world around us, teeming with diverse lives, rhythms, and routines. Right from the time the park lights are switched on at 5 AM, I get to see and observe people and how they transverse through life with their varying human experiences.

Hailing from a city that had more playgrounds than parks, I was initially struck by how this park fosters a walking culture that goes beyond physical exercise. I believe that meetings and conversations greatly influence people's mental health and well-being. It almost feels like everybody who walks the park has a different agenda—some who just want to get the exercise out of their way, some who have been advised to walk, solo walkers who have a phone in their hand in the 90-degree position and watch old Kannada songs while they walk, some IT professionals who get their work calls done during the walk, some women who come in small groups and discuss their private lives, young parents who converse about how they get through their hectic lives and parenthood, and dog moms/ dads stopping by as their dogs play with each other.

Equally intriguing is how the park and its approach road serve as a backdrop for varied moments of life - photoshoots/ video shoots for pre and post-weddings, pregnancies, and birthdays, capturing life's varied milestones against a natural setting. Photos with blooming Bird-of-Paradise plants, Instagram reels and YouTube shorts never fail to entertain me.

The approach to the park, where the rich canopy above and the fallen leaves below provide a peaceful setting for quiet reflection



The park's ability to provide a consistent backdrop for diverse activities is truly captivating. For instance, from 11 AM to 3:30 PM, the gardener has the park to himself, often humming while diligently tending to tasks like de-weeding, cleaning, composting, and watering the plants and trees. It's heartening to witness his children playing joyfully with the water sprinklers, dragging dried palm branches, and racing around the park on an old bicycle at high speeds. The park offers a peaceful afternoon shade to the BBMP workers who diligently sweep the leaves from the streets each morning. In the afternoons, it becomes a setting for their friendly banter, adding a sense of camaraderie to their routine.

Though these moments are as fleeting as the shifting light in the park, they are also constant in their return. I've come to notice the rhythms—the people who arrive at the same time each morning, the familiar faces who pause for a chat or a shared smile, and the sense of community that quietly flourishes.

The park also gives me the space to reflect. Over time, I've become attuned to its daily rhythms. I hear the songs of birds every morning as I wake up, and as the park slowly comes to life, I too find myself anchored. There is a meditative quality in these daily observations, like watching a slow, unfolding symphony. Whether it is the father wearing his daughter's bright pink Dora bag after preschool walking with her, the oldest ajja or the friendly custodian of the street with his walker who stops and has a conversation with almost every passerby, or the neighbourhood dogs that get belly rubs from the kids and the garbage collector, or the man in the RCB t-shirt, with his oversized headphones as he takes his evening walk, or the brown street dog that follows a regular walker and does exactly three rounds in the morning, or the middle-aged woman who used to gently hold her husband's hand during their morning walks, especially when his illness made it difficult for him to stay on course. Additionally, there is the man on his morning walk with a bag of chips, adding a simple yet delightful moment. His relaxed demeanour and enjoyment



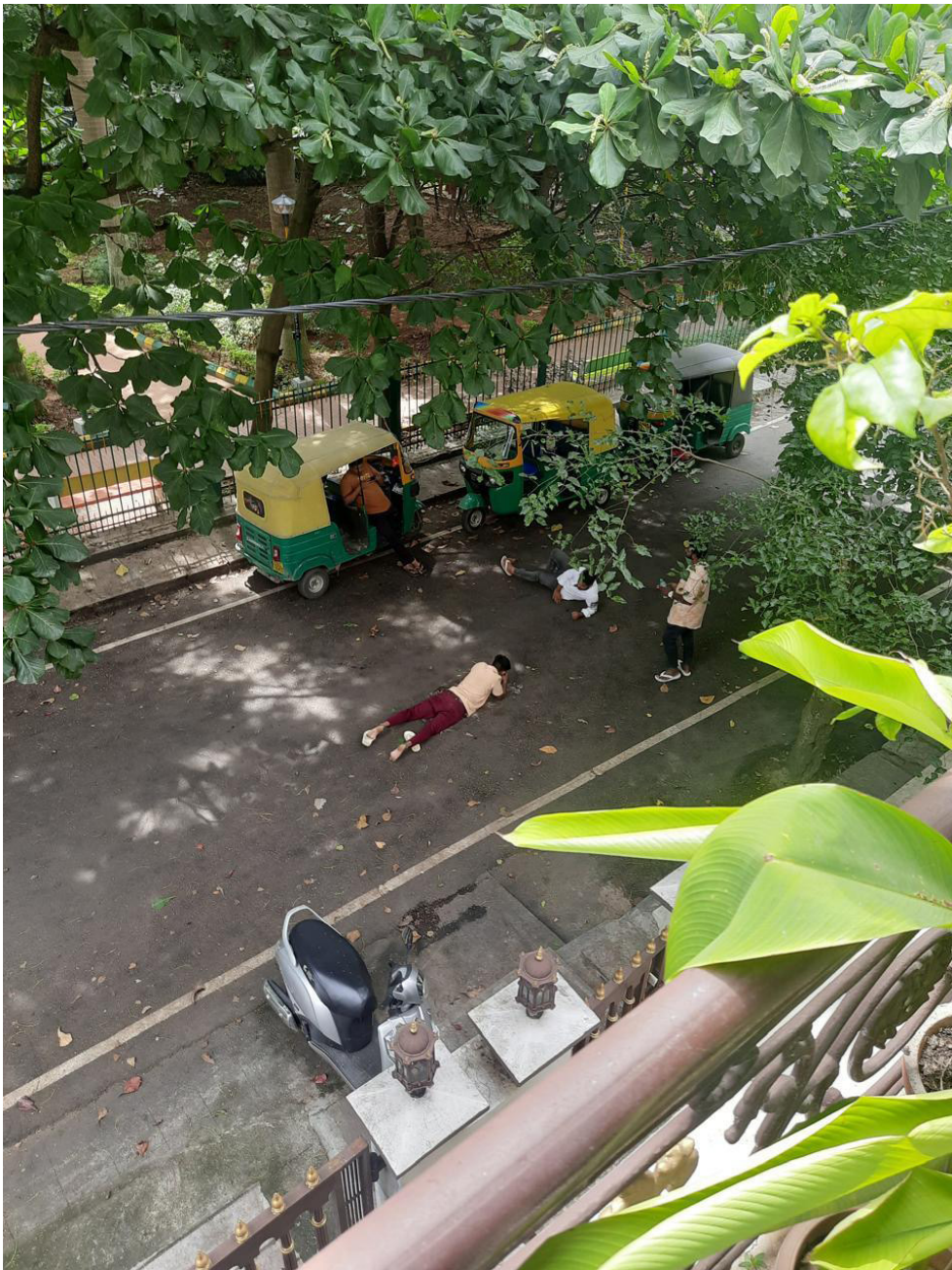
of this small indulgence amidst the natural surroundings further enrich the diverse experiences that unfold daily in the community park.

During the lockdown, the rhythm was simply watching from my window. The park was my anchor in a world turned upside down, a steady presence that allowed me to recalibrate. Over the past three years, as life has slowly returned to its usual pace, the park has remained a constant, its presence comforting in its predictability. Even now, when I look out the window, I feel a sense of connection to something larger than myself. Over time, I've grown attached to these small,

quiet moments—the absence of certain individuals leaves a lingering sense of concern, and their return brings a quiet joy.

Each day, the park and its surroundings evoke emotions—a sense of joy, a touch of jealousy, a moment of tranquillity, a cry for help, a realization of contentment, a sense of wonder and awe, an inspiration for life, a love for the unknown, and gratitude for everything I have. Just as the gardener finds solace in his humble hut in the corner of the park, I, too, find a sense of grounding here. The park has become a sanctuary, a quiet place where life unfolds in its many forms and where I, too, find moments of peace amid the bustle of daily life.

Deepika Varadarajan is an architect and an academic with over 10 years of diverse experience. Her career has been marked by a series of impactful teaching roles across architectural institutions. Her architectural pursuits are grounded in holistic building traditions and approaches, such as encouraging locally available materials, traditional construction processes, and culturally and climatically appropriate building design. Some of her research interests include architectural philosophy, architectural theory and history, and climate and the built environment.



Dogs to pet, cats to admire, and snakes to spot – life in and around the park in ever amusing

Photos and Instagram Reels being shot - the park turns into a photo studio, and everyone is a model for the day