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For much of Nepal, Shrinkhala Khatiwada first became visible through a crown. But the longer arc of her public life is less about pageantry than about design: how buildings affect dignity, how cities distribute opportunity, how green space becomes public infrastructure, and how a highly visible individual negotiates the distance between celebrity and professional work. From architecture at Pulchowk to Miss World, a health post in rural Makwanpur, and urban-planning research at Harvard, Khatiwada's story is

ultimately about trying to turn public attention into something more permanent.

For a generation of Nepalis, the image is still immediate: Shrinkhala Khatiwada wearing the Miss Nepal crown in 2018, speaking with a composure that quickly made her one of the country's most recognisable young public figures. She had beaten 24 other contestants, but what distinguished her public identity almost immediately was that she already had another professional language. She was an architect, a graduate of the Institute of Engineering at Pulchowk, and she repeatedly tried to position the title as a platform rather than a destination. Soon after winning, she said she wanted to be regarded as a role model rather than simply a model.

That distinction has remained central to the way Khatiwada presents herself. The beauty-pageant chapter made her famous, but architecture gave her a framework through which to talk about Nepal: reconstruction after earthquakes, public health, traditional buildings, poorly managed urbanisation, disappearing open spaces and the difficulty of coordinating different levels of government. Her later work at Harvard Graduate School of Design moved those interests from individual buildings toward the larger systems that shape entire cities.

The result is a public career that does not fit comfortably into one category. Khatiwada has been a beauty queen, architect, social-media personality, humanitarian campaigner, urban-planning researcher and design professional. She has also been a highly scrutinised public figure whose family background and visibility have periodically placed her inside wider debates about politics, privilege and inequality in Nepal. Understanding her therefore requires looking past both the glamour and the backlash and examining the professional thread that has survived through each stage.

Growing Up Around Public Life

Khatiwada comes from Hetauda in Makwanpur, a city that sits outside the political and cultural concentration of Kathmandu but is close enough to the capital to remain connected to national life. Her family was already accustomed to public scrutiny: her father, Birodh Khatiwada, built a long political career, while her mother, Munu Sigdel, also held political office. When Khatiwada returned to Hetauda after winning Miss Nepal, she recalled growing up hearing people tell her that she looked like someone who might one day compete for the title.

Yet her educational trajectory moved toward design rather than party politics. She studied architecture at the Institute of Engineering's Pulchowk Campus, one of Nepal's most competitive technical institutions. By the time she entered Miss Nepal, she

was not approaching the competition as someone looking for a first professional identity; she already had one. Kathmandu Post described her at the time as an architecture graduate, and the Miss World organisation listed architecture as her profession when she represented Nepal internationally.

Architecture is an unusual discipline because it exists simultaneously between art and administration. It asks how a space should look, but also how it should work; how materials behave, but also how people behave within them. In Nepal, those questions become inseparable from earthquakes, rapid urbanisation, heritage conservation, weak planning enforcement and the enormous gap between Kathmandu and rural communities. Khatiwada's later work suggests that these practical tensions interested her at least as much as architecture's aesthetic side.

The Earthquake and a Different Understanding of Design

The 2015 earthquake arrived while Nepal was already struggling to reconcile rapid construction with weak regulation and fragile infrastructure. For architecture students and professionals, the disaster transformed abstract lessons about structural safety and settlement planning into a national emergency. Khatiwada later spoke about the earthquake as a moment that revealed how much responsibility architects carried during reconstruction, especially

in preserving traditional architecture while making rebuilt communities safer and better planned.

That experience appears to have widened her understanding of what architecture could mean. A building was not only an object; it could influence health, dignity, community resilience and the everyday experience of people who might never think of themselves as consumers of “design.” In an interview with *Nepali Times*, she discussed how something as basic as ventilation could affect how a patient feels inside a hospital room. The point was simple but important: good design becomes most meaningful when it addresses ordinary human needs.

This perspective would later connect her architectural training to one of the defining projects of her Miss World campaign. Instead of treating the international competition purely as a stage for personal visibility, she built her “Beauty with a Purpose” work around a rural health facility in Makwanpur. The project gave her an opportunity to connect the profession she had studied with the public platform she had suddenly acquired.

The Crown That Changed the Scale of Her Life

On April 11, 2018, Khatiwada was crowned Miss Nepal World. The competition had followed weeks of training and involved contestants selected through auditions held across Nepal. She also

received additional pageant distinctions, but the national title transformed her profile almost overnight.

Khatiwada was unusually explicit about what she wanted to do with that visibility. Speaking shortly after her win, she argued that Miss Nepal should not be understood only through glamour and appearance, but through knowledge, diligence, confidence and the responsibility that came with being publicly recognised. That framing mattered because she was entering a cultural institution that has long produced intense debate in Nepal about beauty, representation, feminism, modernity and celebrity.

She also understood the mechanics of fame. In a later interview, Khatiwada described Miss Nepal as a platform capable of making someone famous almost immediately and argued that the important question was what a winner chose to do with that attention. Her intention, she said, was to use the visibility to support architecture and social projects rather than allowing the crown itself to become the endpoint.

That philosophy would soon be tested on a far larger stage.

Bharta: Where Architecture Met Public Health

For her Miss World “Beauty with a Purpose” project, Khatiwada focused on Bharta in Makwanpur, a remote Chepang community where access to healthcare was difficult. Contemporary reporting

described villagers facing a long journey to reach the nearest health post, while the community also struggled with problems including child malnutrition and inadequate sanitation.

Khatiwada's project centred on constructing a local health facility while also raising awareness about hygiene and preventive health.

The project is significant because it demonstrated how she was beginning to think beyond architecture as a commercial profession. A rural health post is not an iconic building. It does not produce the kind of imagery associated with luxury development or prestige architecture. Its value lies almost entirely in whether it reduces distance, improves access and makes a basic public service more usable.

Khatiwada described the initiative as the beginning of a larger interest in what she called philanthropic architecture. She spoke about using public recognition to support not only health facilities but schools, homes and infrastructure in disaster-affected areas. Her One Home Foundation was part of that ambition: design not as a marker of status, but as a means of solving practical problems.

The international pageant rewarded that approach. At Miss World 2018 in Sanya, China, Khatiwada won both the **Beauty with a Purpose** and **Multimedia** fast-track competitions and ultimately reached the Top 12. Her social-impact project and digital

campaign became central to the way Nepali audiences remembered her international run.

What Miss World Actually Changed

Khatiwada did not win Miss World, but she returned to Nepal with something arguably more durable than an international title: a vastly expanded public audience. Her introduction video circulated widely, and national interest in her campaign was unusually intense. Her Top 12 finish, Multimedia win and Beauty with a Purpose award created an unusually strong wave of public support.

The important question was what came after. Pageants create concentrated periods of attention, but attention is temporary by design. A titleholder eventually gives the crown to someone else, and public fascination shifts toward the next competition. For Khatiwada, the challenge became whether the identity built during 2018 could survive once she was no longer principally introduced as the reigning Miss Nepal.

Architecture offered a route beyond that cycle. Unlike pageantry, it rewards work that may take years before becoming visible. Buildings involve drawings, approvals, engineering, budgets, construction and maintenance. Urban planning can be even less glamorous: regulations, municipal departments, stakeholder meetings, zoning, public space, transport systems and institutional

jurisdiction. Moving from one world into the other required accepting a dramatic change in tempo.

That transition became increasingly visible in the years that followed.

From Individual Buildings to the City

Khatiwada's professional interests gradually widened from architecture toward urban planning. The distinction matters. Architecture frequently begins with a site and a building; urban planning asks how thousands of such sites interact through transport, infrastructure, public space, land use, ecology, economics and governance. In Nepal, the difference is especially important because many urban problems cannot be solved one building at a time.

Kathmandu is a clear example. The city's challenges are not simply architectural. They emerge from rapid population growth, fragmented jurisdictions, road expansion, air pollution, declining open space, poorly coordinated land development and the tension between heritage areas and speculative construction. A well-designed individual building cannot repair a city if the larger system around it remains dysfunctional.

Khatiwada eventually entered the Master in Urban Planning programme at Harvard Graduate School of Design. Harvard records from 2022 and 2023 identify her as a Master in Urban

Planning candidate and show her participating in research and public discussions dealing with city systems rather than only architecture.

The shift was intellectually coherent. Her earlier work had asked how design could improve a rural health post. Urban planning asked a harder question: how could institutions produce better environments at the scale of an entire city?

Harvard and the Problem of Kathmandu's Missing Green Space

One of the clearest examples of this transition came through a student grant from Harvard's Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute. In 2022, Khatiwada returned to Nepal for research focused on urban greenery and open spaces in Kathmandu Valley. She worked through a Daayitwa public-policy fellowship and engaged with Nepal's National Planning Commission as part of the project.

The subject may sound modest compared with highways, airports or high-rise buildings, but public space is one of the most revealing tests of urban governance. Parks, trees, playgrounds, squares and urban forests generate social benefits without belonging neatly to one private owner. They require governments to value long-term public use rather than immediate commercial return.

Khatiwada's research examined a structural problem familiar throughout Nepal: too many institutions with overlapping responsibilities. Urban green space could involve municipalities, the Ministry of Urban Development, federal administrative bodies, infrastructure agencies and the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority. When responsibility is dispersed across organisations without a clear hierarchy, even relatively straightforward projects can become delayed by jurisdictional conflict.

Her research relied on interviews with officials at both local and national levels, including municipal leaders and government planners. She compared Nepal's institutional arrangements with examples from cities such as Boston and London, then proposed clearer administrative structures for public open space.

This was no longer architecture in the conventional sense. It was institutional design.

Designing Government, Not Just Buildings

Khatiwada's recommendations were strikingly administrative. At the municipal level, she proposed dedicated departments responsible for parks, playgrounds, squares, trees, urban forests and other public open spaces. At the national level, she argued for a dedicated open-space unit within the Ministry of Urban Development, alongside a broader national strategy for urban green infrastructure.

The logic was straightforward: a city cannot protect green space if no institution is clearly responsible for it. Nepal's federal structure has given municipalities greater authority, but technical capacity remains uneven, and national agencies can continue to overlap with local mandates. Khatiwada's research therefore focused less on designing the perfect park than on designing a system capable of producing and maintaining many parks.

That distinction reveals how much her professional thinking had changed since 2018. The Bharta health post represented architecture as direct intervention: identify a need and construct something useful. Her Harvard work represented planning as system reform: identify why many useful projects fail to happen and redesign the institutions responsible for them.

One works through a building. The other works through governance.

Gaatha Designs and Professional Practice

Khatiwada did not abandon architecture while moving into planning. A Harvard event biography from March 2023 described her as director of **Gaatha Designs**, an architecture firm based in Lalitpur, while also identifying her as an urban-planning student at Harvard GSD. The same biography placed her alongside planners, economists and public-policy specialists discussing how cities can adapt infrastructure to become more equitable and

participatory.

That combination is important because architecture and planning are often separated professionally even when they influence the same physical environment. An architect may design a building beautifully while a planner asks whether it should be located there at all. A planner may propose a green corridor, but architects and landscape designers eventually have to turn policy into physical space.

Khatriwada's trajectory has increasingly occupied the boundary between those disciplines. Her public work suggests an interest in the physical form of cities, but also in the institutions that determine who receives public space, how decisions are made and why seemingly obvious improvements can become stalled.

For Nepal, that intersection is particularly relevant. The country does not lack architectural talent; it often lacks coherent systems that allow good design to scale.

The Difficult Relationship Between Celebrity and Professional Work

Khatriwada's enormous public profile creates opportunities that most architects and planners never receive. A research paper about open-space governance would normally circulate among academics, municipal officials and professional organisations. When someone with hundreds of thousands of social-media

followers discusses the same subject, the idea can reach audiences who would never open an urban-planning report.

But celebrity also creates distortion. Public attention tends to focus on personality, fashion, relationships and social-media imagery rather than technical work. The architect can disappear behind the former Miss Nepal; a discussion about urban greenery competes with lifestyle photographs for the same audience.

Khatiwada has navigated this contradiction throughout her post-pageant career. Her visibility gives her unusual power to popularise subjects such as public space or architecture, yet the same visibility exposes every aspect of her life to intense interpretation. The platform that allows professional ideas to travel farther also makes it harder to control which parts of the public identity dominate.

That tension became especially visible in 2025.

Political Family, Privilege and the 2025 Backlash

During Nepal's 2025 Gen Z upheaval, social media campaigns targeted the lifestyles of politically connected families, often using the term "nepo baby" to question whether children of political elites had benefited from inherited access or public wealth.

Khatiwada became one of the most prominent individuals caught in that backlash because her father had been a senior politician

and health minister and her mother had also held political office. International and Nepali reporting described activists contrasting images of politically connected families' lifestyles with the economic frustrations facing ordinary Nepalis.

The allegations circulating online were broader than the evidence publicly established. Khatiwada rejected claims that her achievements or lifestyle had been financed through political privilege and defended the independence of her own professional and personal trajectory. The episode therefore should not be treated as proof of corruption or wrongdoing; it is better understood as part of a wider public argument about political families, inequality and perceptions of access in Nepal.

For Khatiwada, the controversy complicated a public identity that had long emphasised education, individual work and social impact. To supporters, her architecture degree, international awards and Harvard work represented achievements with clear professional foundations. Critics argued that political family background itself confers forms of visibility and social capital that cannot be measured only through income or academic credentials.

The larger question is not unique to her. Public figures born into politically connected families often find that individual achievement and inherited advantage become impossible to separate in public debate. In Khatiwada's case, the intensity of her

celebrity made that debate far more visible than it would have been for a less famous professional.

Why Her Architecture Work Still Matters

It would be easy to allow the politics of celebrity to swallow the rest of Khatiwada's story. But doing so would obscure the most consistent intellectual theme running through her career: the relationship between design and public life.

The health post in Makwanpur, her interest in post-earthquake reconstruction, work connected to urban parks and open spaces, and study at Harvard all point toward the same underlying concern. Buildings and cities are not neutral backgrounds to human life. They influence health, access, mobility, social interaction, resilience and the everyday dignity of the people who use them.

This idea is particularly important in Nepal because the country is urbanising faster than many of its institutions can adapt.

Kathmandu's growth has demonstrated what happens when land values, construction and vehicle ownership expand faster than planning capacity. Open spaces disappear, roads struggle to accommodate demand, heritage environments face pressure and public infrastructure is forced to catch up after development has already occurred.

Professionals who can communicate these problems beyond technical circles are valuable. Khatiwada's advantage is that she can speak simultaneously to audiences interested in design, young people who first knew her through Miss Nepal, and a much broader social-media public.

The challenge is converting visibility into durable work.

Beyond the Crown

The most interesting way to understand Shrinkhala Khatiwada is not as a beauty queen who later became interested in architecture. Architecture came first. The crown dramatically expanded the audience around a professional identity that already existed.

That sequence changes the meaning of her story. Miss Nepal was not the beginning of her ambitions; it was an accelerator. The international competition gave her enough visibility to raise funds, mobilise support and attach national attention to a rural health project. Harvard later gave her a different kind of platform—one built around research, planning systems and institutional analysis rather than stage performance.

These worlds appear very different, but each revolves around communication. An architect has to persuade a client. A planner has to persuade governments and communities. A pageant contestant has to communicate a story to judges and an audience.

A public figure has to explain why any of those things should matter.

Khatiwada's career has repeatedly depended on moving between those forms of communication.

The Question Ahead

What comes next is harder to measure than winning a competition. Architecture and planning rarely produce instant outcomes. A successful public-space policy may take years before the trees are mature enough to create shade. Institutional reform can take even longer, particularly in a federal system still negotiating the boundaries between national and local authority.

Khatiwada therefore faces a different test from the one she faced in 2018. Then, success could be measured through titles, rankings and awards. Professional success in urban planning has no equivalent crown. It depends on whether ideas become policies, whether policies become projects and whether projects continue functioning after the attention has moved elsewhere.

Her public identity will probably always include Miss Nepal. That year changed the scale of her fame and placed her permanently inside Nepal's popular culture. But it does not have to define the limits of her work.

The more consequential part of her story may be the quieter transition that followed: from thinking about buildings to thinking about cities, from designing individual spaces to studying the institutions that decide how space is distributed, and from using fame as an end in itself to testing whether fame can support work that lasts longer than a news cycle.

Shrinkhala Khatiwada became famous because Nepal saw her on a stage. The longer story is about what she chose to study once the spotlight moved elsewhere.

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