

These efforts... Many a book of those times proudly bears...

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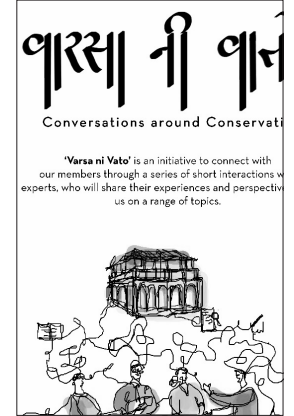
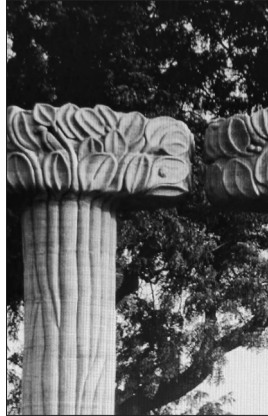
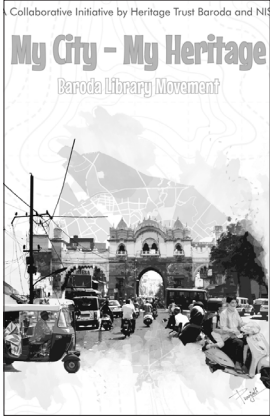
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Dharohar | a quarterly newsletter



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Heritage Trust brings many new initiatives

This past quarter has seen our Heritage Trust engage with many new initiatives that give visibility and highlights some of the important aspects of our city's past. Our outreach effort with the Municipal Corporation in putting up signages is a thrust in creating awareness amongst citizens about the importance of these structures. The symposium on Reimagining Vadodara saw the release of the Baroda Collective 2 which marks an important milestone in our efforts to document the heritage of our city that would aid in future policy making. Our President, Mr. Sameer Khera made an effective presentation on the need to make Baroda a UNESCO World Creative City with Design as an underlying theme.

Varsa ni Vaato is a special quarterly program that has been started especially to engage our members on various topics related to heritage. Read about this and the other interesting events this quarter. Our next program is on October 7th. We look forward to seeing you all. More details about it are in this issue where you can register by clicking the QR code.

This issue brings you Sandhya's Substack, an interesting read penned by our very own Sandhya Gajjar who reminisces about the Baroda of yesteryears.

We are finalising some exciting programs for the People's Heritage Week in November which will be shared with you and hope you will be able to join us and enjoy the festivities.

At the time of going to the press, we note with great sadness that the bungalow of Late Mr. Vijay Hazare opposite Polo Grounds is being demolished. Baroda has lost one more beautiful iconic structure and the memory of one of the greatest Indian cricketers from our city. Nation level people as the well-known author and historian, Ramchandrapuram Guha and a known TV personality, Rajdeep Sardesai, have conveyed their displeasure through social media.

The coming months will be one of celebrations including Navratri and Deepavali. We wish you all a Happy Diwali and prosperous New Year in advance.

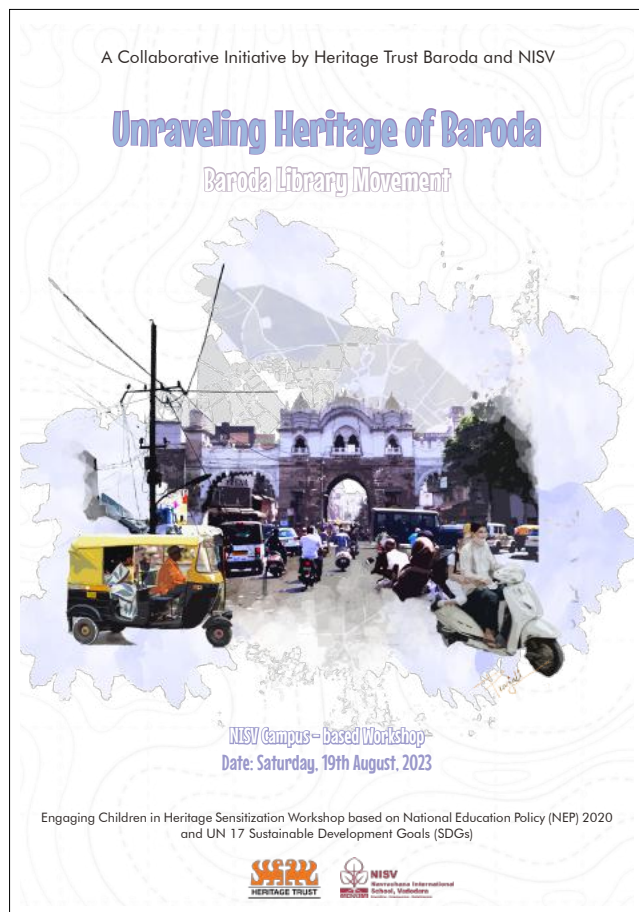
Avi Sabavala

Unraveling Heritage of Baroda

A workshop titled “Unraveling Heritage of Baroda” was conducted on Engaging School Children to sensitize them regarding heritage related matter by Heritage Trust in Collaboration with NISV on Saturday, 19th August 2023.

The workshop was curated for Grade 6 Children focusing on Baroda Library Movement. This is a 2 Day workshop where the first one was conducted on NISV Campus, Bhayli and the next one comprises of visit to Central Library. The workshop is designed based on National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Alka Smart and Advaita Jalan were experts for this workshop and the creatives were handled by Pranjali Ambekar.



Whose Sparrow is it any way?

The newly installed Chakli Circle in place of the old one has ignited heated discussions. Lots of for and against. So it might be a good idea to understand how and why small town Baroda became a big thing for public art on shrinking traffic circles ...

There was a time when this small town of mine was known for the innovative and interesting sculptures that graced the main traffic circles in the city. (These were mostly artworks by known and upcoming artists, so you can understand what kind of notional wealth was accruing with the Corporation!) No doubt, the first one was the majestic life-size statue of Maharaja Sayajirao III astride a black stallion, cast in bronze and designed by Francis Derwent Wood. Commissioned on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Maharaja's coronation, it was installed opposite the Sayaji Baug Main Gate and inaugurated by Maharaja Holkar of Indore.

The pedestal on which it stands is 8 feet high, rectangular in shape and with inscriptions written in English, Marathi and Gujarati on three sides and the fourth side is embellished with a relief of a standing European lady. The horse is almost as high as the pedestal with one front and one back leg raised. The Maharaja is dressed in full royal regalia with a sword at the side. He sports a moustache, one of the rare statues on which he does so. This sculpture stands on an island lush with flower beds, which unfortunately continues to shrink as the pressure of traffic increases.

Many, many decades later, in the 1970s, Sayaji Iron, a local corporate, commissioned Narottamdas Luhar, a past student of the Sculpture department of the Faculty of Fine Arts, MSU, who was engaged then in making sculptures for other industrialists in the city, in creating a large sculpture for them that also spoke of the products they manufactured. Perhaps the rhino was already a corporate symbol for Sayaji Iron, or maybe they made it after the superb job done by Luhar who created the majestic and powerful animal with an impossible-to-pierce metal-like skin that grew in folds. The rhino sculpture stood for the strength, weighing almost 3 tonnes. Luhar created it by welding pieces of metal scrap. It earlier stood at the entrance of the industrial works of Sayaji Iron and Engineering Company Ltd. at Navayard. The sculpture was later donated to the city and placed at the crossroads (which came to be known as Genda Circle) that connected Alkapuri with the then industrial hubs that housed the Sarabhai companies on one hand and Alembic and Jyoti on the other, with the Agricultural College nearby. Earlier, the poor rhino had a large grassy circle to make it feel at home; now it is reduced to just enough space to put all its feet on at the same time! Sad, but we all love the Gendo and I only wish the VMC sweepers at least clean around it once in a while ...



The newly installed Chakli Circle

Then, the Hindustan Brown Boveri Ltd. (now ABB) commissioned sculptor Mahendra Pandya to create a fountain sculpture to be installed near the University's Sports Pavilion. Mahendrabhai created an unusual abstract form in cement which was cladded with white China mosaic. Well, I haven't seen that fountain work in a long time but that sculpture has become part of that landscape ...

In the 1980s, as the town grew towards Gotri and Old Padra Road, the little-used Jetalpur Road became a quicker alternative to the crowded Alkapuri Main Road. That's when a traffic circle was planned at those crossroads. Since it was supported by Transpek Industry Ltd, their architect Karan Grover came up with a design to show a flight of birds. The challenge was if anyone stood at any point on the 360 degrees outer circle and looked at it, they should see a



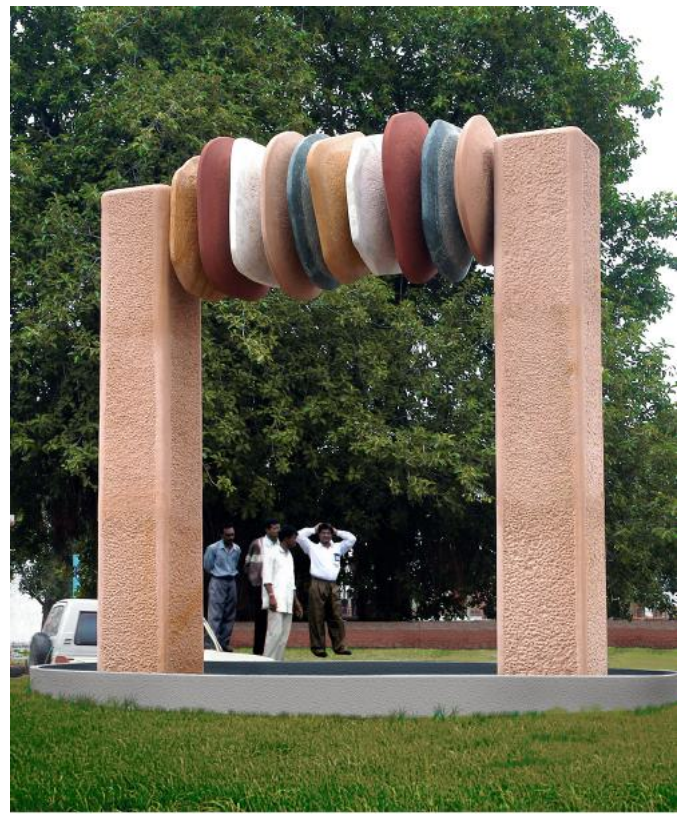
The Banyan Tree circle

clean flock of birds taking off without any other disturbing visual element such as half a wing or just the head of a bird getting in the way. So graphic designer Rahul Gajjar worked on the grid, the angles and the placing of the square plates on which the bird images would appear. Artist Jaidev Thakore designed the bird images that would be transferred on the square plates via small-sized sculptural ceramic tiles. The medium was chosen because it would wear well, exposed as it was to the elements 24x7. The circle came to be known as Bird or Chakli Circle.

Since the circle was a large one and maintained with a lush lawn, summer nights saw families come out and sit on the lawns and enjoy the cool breeze. After many years, when a number of tiles had fallen off and it began to look shabby, the remaining tiles were removed and artist Jayanti Rabadia painted the birds on the squares (I think by then the company manufacturing those tiles had shut down and Jaidev had passed on). The red and white flower Madhumalati vine, in the meanwhile, had covered most of the 'sculpture', and in fact, created an interesting coming together of real birds and painted ones. So, the Chakli Circle was good to go for a few more years.

Then came the two Nagji Patel sculptures that completely redefined public art on Baroda streets. Inspired by the historical toran architecture of Gujarat and the popular folk tradition of tying welcoming torans on doorways of even contemporary Gujarati homes, Nagjibhai designed two huge sculptures in stone. The first one, Banyan Tree, commissioned by IPCL, then a blue chip Govt. of India undertaking, was situated on the traffic island with a large neem tree on the Nizampura-Fatehgunj crossroads as it was then the gateway into Baroda from Ahmedabad. Its inauguration was a big affair with late Maharaja Ranjitsinh Gaekwad giving a classical vocal recital seated under the neem tree. (No wonder the Rajmata was cheesed off with the sculpture's later relocation, and vented her feelings at the VMC officials at a recent programme they organized to encourage Baroda as a tourism destination). The second one, Abacus, was sponsored by Transpek-Silox Ltd., and installed at the Akshar Chowk crossroads that was the gateway to the town from Padra-Jambusar side.

A few years back, an unusual project was floated by the Municipal Corporation wherein they made a lot of metal scrap available to the local artist community to create artworks. Sculptor Anuj Poddar was put in charge of the project and the selected artists were paid an honorarium for their efforts. About 75 sculptures were produced over a few years in two phases. Some would go up at traffic circles, others would become part of a Sculpture Park planned on the Harni lakeside. Within a year or so, some of sculptures began to go up at traffic crossroads as soon as they were ready. The most popular was the Rockstar Circle, named thus by the public and not the artist, after the hit movie of the same name. The Airplane Circle near the airport was a playful take on the simple paper aeroplanes we all made as kids and it always brings a smile to the face when one sees it. Then there are the Squirrel Circle, the Bull Circle and the Lion Circle. The Rhino really led a bird-and-animal picnic on traffic islands! As it helped carry forward the tradition of creatively using scrap as sculptural material.



Abacus circle

Then came the flyovers. And they gave a very good opportunity to our political leaders to expose the amazing IQs most of them possess. When the Fatehgunj flyover put the fate of the Banyan Tree in question, one of them posed, why not slash a couple of feet off the Banyan's trunk? Fortunately, better sense prevailed and it was moved to the Chhani crossroads where it hides behind a burqa of foliage, almost destroyed like the rest of the vads of Vadodara. The Corporation almost sent a JCB to knock off the Abacus, until Transpek threatened to take it back to their premises. Again, better sense prevailed and it was relocated in Sama, at the entry from the Expressway from Ahmedabad.

One afternoon, I found Shiv Verma's huge Circle of People had vanished. It was a huge work, sculpted in the style of the wrought iron metal craft of the Gond tribals, and installed on the Race Course Circle near the United Way office (the circle also stood for the famous and popular Garba organized by United Way). Obviously it was also getting in the way of the flyover. Many months later, I found it at Rakesh Aggarwal's Artists' Village on the banks of the Mahi. Probably his company had sponsored it and when it had to be removed, he just took it back. Understandable, rather than letting it be violently uprooted like Vinod Patel's wonderful abstract sculpture which had replaced the Banyan Tree at the Fatehgunj crossroads, and dumping it in an undignified way on the banks of the Harni lake where a Sculpture Park has come up. "They did not even inform me about plans to remove it. I had screwed it down on the foundation and the whole sculpture could have been easily removed in one piece just by unscrewing those nuts. Instead they got some labourers to hack at the sculpture and totally destroy it," said the angry artist. Even the very popular Rockstar has been removed a couple of weeks back and moved to the Sculpture Park. Why? Because, I am told, some Yoga institute or Yoga promoters in that vicinity wanted to put a Yoga related image there.

By the way, when there was an official inauguration of this Sculpture Park, not a single artist/sculptor was invited. This is the kind of respect our town's administrators have for the artist and creative community of the town. And we want to promote our small town as Creative City. I think our City Fathers and Mothers need a lesson in good, decent behavior first.

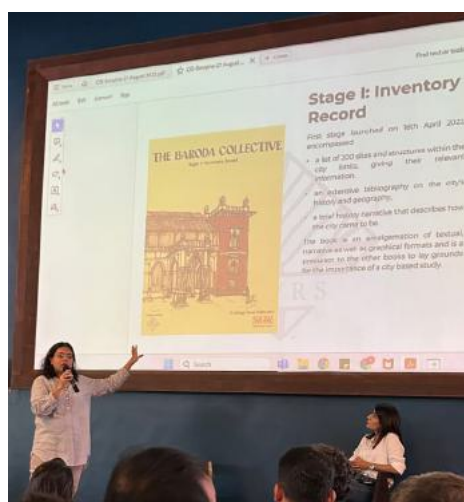
Sandhya Gajjar

(This piece first appeared in Sandhya's Substack post on the Net. To access more posts from the author, subscribe to Substack; it is completely free of charge.)

Future City Talks

The Heritage Trust is a partner for a series of talks organised by Chhatra Sansad in association with Our Vadodara .

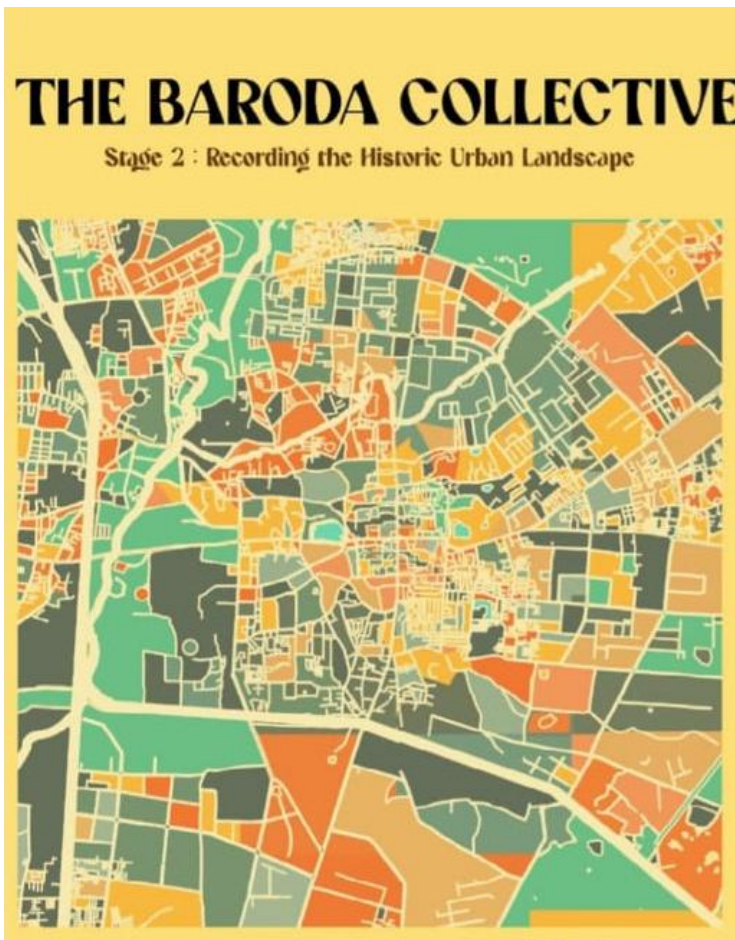
Heritage Trust members, Sandhya Gajjar spoke on Champaner Pavagadh: Lessons from Ancient Cities for Future Cities and Swapna Kothari spoke on the Heritage Trust Publication: The Baroda Collective: A conscious effort to bring heritage to city planning.



The Baroda Collective and Signages Project

At the Symposium on Reimagining Vadodara, the Stage 2 of the Baroda Collective, published by Heritage Trust, was released by the Hon Minister for Tourism and Culture , Shri Mulubhai Bera in the presence of Shrimant Samarjitsinh Gaekwad, Shri Balu Shukla and other dignitaries. This expands on the work earlier done in Stage 1 and will provide a valuable repository for town planners, academicians and students as also the public at large and sensitize them towards the rich tangible and intangible heritage of the city.

The Vadodara City Historic Landmark signages was also launched with the unveiling of the first signage at Mandvi. With content in both Gujarati and English, along with with a QR code, is an attempt to bring the Heritage of Vadodara to the fingertips of every citizen.



Varsa ni Vaato

Varsa ni Vato, is our new initiative to connect with our members more frequently through an organised a series of short interactions with experts, who will share their experiences and perspectives with us on a range of different topics. Our first edition of this program was held on the 8th of July.

Speakers for the evening Ishan Grover spoke on Adaptive Reuse and Heritage, Sameer Gaikwad spoke on The Narmada Parikrama of Ages and Varsha Ganguly spoke on Vadodara city's Architectural Perspectives.

