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Parsi Food Festival-
August 11, 2019 @
Parsi Agiyari
Sayjigunj

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From the Editor's Desk

Our city of Vadodara continues to be at the crossroads of the old and the new. For the first time visitor, it has an eclectic mix of grand old structures of the past coupled with modern high rise buildings that denote a flourishing center of trade and commerce. This issue carries some interesting insights into some of the structural heritage of our city.

Tucked into a quiet corner near ONGC lies the beautiful home of Indrayani and Shivraj Gaekwad which is a heritage bungalow built for Madhav Rao Gaekwad, a cousin of HH Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III. Surrounded by lush greenery, this is a perfect home-stay for heritage lovers to explore right within the heart of the city. Arati Mehta shares her experience of visiting the structure and gives us an insight into the history of this magnificent mansion.

An area which is familiar to both the residents and visitors to Vadodara is none other than the Railway Station. For those who are not regular travelers, this is nonetheless a frequent thoroughfare connecting the busy Sayajiganj and University to the upscale Alkapuri. However, amidst the hustle and bustle of all the transport activity lies a great deal of history as well as remnants of what must have been a hub of old heritage buildings. Swapna Kothari takes us on a walk down memory lane in her Urbane Column and gives us a feel of some of the hidden treasures of this area.

Gujarat is known for its stepwells or "Vavs." Besides being excellent examples of good water management in the past, stepwells represent a story in stone, we have covered some step-wells in our very first issue. However, we bring you an article on the Sevasi step-well that lies forgotten on the outskirts of our city. It is a pity that this beautiful structure lies uncared for and almost forgotten today.

Heritage Trust brings you some interesting programs in the coming months. The announcements are in this issue so do mark your calendars and be part of our heritage movement.

We invite you our readers to share your articles and comments. Your experiences in visiting heritage areas would be most welcome.

Happy reading!!!

Avi Sabavala

Madhav Bagh- where the past meets the present

Madhav Bagh, a heritage residence in the city of Vadodara, has an interesting story to tell. Located in the centre of the city, opposite ONGC in Pratapnagar, Madhav Bagh is sheltered from the busy main road by its expansive grounds and trees. This regal mansion was the home of Madhav Rao Gaekwad, a cousin of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. When Sayajirao was adopted before becoming the king, several of his relatives moved to Baroda with him. It is said that when Sayajirao's father, Kashirao Gaekwad was offered land after it was decided to adopt Sayajirao, but he declined the offer and sought that his family should be settled in Baroda instead. Thus Madhavrao Gaekwad moved to the city with his father Gabajirao. Currently Madhav Rao's descendant, Shivraj Gaekwad (5th generation) and his wife Indrayani Gaekwad continue to reside here. While the owners reside in the upper part of the building they have restored the ground floor and converted into a Heritage home stay.

Built in 1892 in the Indo-sarcentic style possibly under the guidance of the architect Robert Chisholm (the architect of the Laxmi vilas palace,) on 1.5 acres of land, Madhav Bagh is an example of the architecture of that time. It boasts of an impressive red and white façade and the building is complete with arches and spires, motifs and carvings and Gothic turrets and jharoka style balconies. Indo-sarcentic architecture is a revival architectural style used by the British in the late 19th century for government and public building and palaces in the princely states during the British Raj. This synthesis of Mughal - Indo architecture was also an effort by the British to display that despite being an Imperial power, the British in India were a part of the Indian milieu. Yet this mixture of architecture remained British in spatial organization and composition as seen in the Laxmi Vilas Palace.



The Madhav Baug façade, image by Indrayani Gaekwad



On entering the grounds amidst the tamarind and mango trees a 200-year-old fountain from W. Whiteley, London, stands regally in front of the entrance. The ground floor which comprises of the home stay consists of 4 bedrooms, each which lead to an open courtyard, a dining and sitting room as well as several common indoor and outdoor sitting spaces. Several aspects of the superiority of the architecture of that time are visibly evident like the intact wooden girdles on the ceilings and the 18” thick brick and lime walls. Interesting facts related to the structure and construction of Madhav Bagh were discovered during the process of restoring and renovating the lower quarters. For example, the 10” diameter drainage pipes used during the time of construction are still working and run beneath the floors of each the rooms opening to a septic tank outside the mansion and there was a layering of bricks just beneath the stone flooring of the rooms. Though restored, Madhav Bagh has retained all of its original structure.



The ground floor of the mansion was the office of the Archaeological Survey of Indian from 1975 to 2001, after which it was rented out to companies like Novena for a few years. Among the umpteen heritage buildings the city has to offer, Madhav Bagh is one that is now open to the people. Restoring the ground floor of this Heritage residence and opening its doors to guests from the end of 2018, Madhav Bagh gives one a chance to experience the regality of royalty.

Arati Desai

(Top) *jharokha* and end pavilion resplendent in fresh colors at the Madhav Baug, (below) the 200-year-old fountain from W. Whitely, images by Indrayani Gaekwad

From our archives- A step-well Sevasi

Located about 6 kilometers to the west of our bustling city of Vadodara is a quaint village called Sevasi. At the entrance of the village and hidden behind a few shops lies an old step-well which we commonly refer to as the Sevasi Step-well.

The original name of the step-well is Vidya Dhar Step-well. It is an elaborate seven-storied Nanda (straight) structure constructed of sandstone. Bricks and lime have been used for constructing the dome. Constructed by Mohammed Begda, in the Mughal era, this structure dates far back to 1458 A.D.

While the construction is based on Hindu architectural tradition, the dome constructed of bricks and lime is based on Muslim architecture. Thus, this is an example of Indo-Islamic architectural traditions present at that time.

The step-well is laid out in an east-west direction with the wellbeing in the east and the entrance in the west. There are seven pavilion-towers and seven intermediate supporting frameworks. The six *Kutas* do not go above the ground level, their top platform ends below the ground. The round parapet wall of about half a meter height surrounds the stepped corridor and the well. However, Kuta seven rises above the ground level and is crowned with an oblong Mandapa with a dome in the middle. The pillars are of the Bhadraka (square with recesses) and Misraka type. The Misraka pillars are ornamented at various levels with a horizontal band with leaf patterns and a chain-and-bell motif on each plain of the octagonal section.

The lintels of the Mandapa are decorated with rows of elongated patterns of flowers between which garlands have been carved. The lintel over the middle pathway in Kuta one has an inscription at the back (facing east). The inscription is crudely carved into the stone slab in two lines. It is divided into two halves by a flower pattern set in a square. The entablature of the pillars which border the middle path way of Kuta two in the second storey is beautifully carved with sculptures. On each side of these sculptures is a frieze of a horse being led by its rider. The horses are decorated with bands and tassels and they have one leg raised resting on a wave. Some other panels show lively depiction of geese with scrolls hanging from their beaks as well as elephants.

This step-well is strategically located on the main road to Saurashtra passing through Khambhat with the River Mahisagar in the vicinity. Thus, it served as a source of water for weary travelers as they traversed their way on the long journey to the Saurashtra Peninsula.

Extracts from an article written for a Workshop in 2002 by Bhanu Pratap Sharma, who was a student of Archeology. The article has been modified for the newsletter.



The Sevasi Vaav, image by Arati Desai

The Urbane Column

No matter how far you travel, the diamonds are still at home. Moving from the lush green urbane areas of Fatehgunj explored last time, this time the column brings to you the common man's lifeline and prominent nodal stop in to the Banyan city. It was once a 'long narrow lane with trees growing here and there, and goats grazing.' We are talking about the lane that joined the Baroda Bombay and Central India Railways (BBCIR) now called the Western Railways located at the eastern end of Sayajigunj extending all the way to Chhani village. Today it is a street with remnants of the past that one could easily miss if they do not intend to see. Like all transit routes, this approximately 1.1-kilometer stretch, from the northern edge of the western railways front entrance to the underpass of the Pandya bridge is one of the busiest roads in the city and yet it offers an idea or two for the dreamer to imagine the place as it once was. Bound on its western edge by the Western Railway lines and the Bhuki Nala (a Vishwamitri Tributary) on its eastern side, the Old Chhani road seems to have lost its old-world charm, a time when the Railways played an important role beginning in the late 19th century to transport both goods and people to and from the city as well as play a vital role in its economy. The creek in its heyday must have also been the place to go for its lush environs providing for shade and respite from the busy road, although there exists no evidence of this.

Fun Fact: The Railway cavernous shed was a brick and stucco building with tiled roof home to the royal saloons, with a rail track that led directly to Laxmi Vilas Palace for goods and jewelry as well as the royal family- From Once Upon a Time... there was Baroda.

(From top) The Damajirao Dharamshala now covered by construction, The Rustom House built in 1984, The Sanjiv Hospital, a Gaekwad insignia on a house under the Pandya bridge, the remnants of once residences at the junction near Pratapgunj, images by Swapna



Now named as the Padmashri Dr. V C Patel Marg, the street houses an interesting mix of buildings and uses. Once chockablock with shops on either side, trees hugging buildings and service lines like nobody's business, the cleanup in the area has brought about a change in the architectural atmosphere with mimicked organic and humongous apes. With lack of shaded pit stops in the urban fabric, life still continues on at junctions hitherto unknown to the passing eye.

The notion of historic areas in such complex and crowded settings is almost unbelievable, thus providing for the inner explorer to search for means of respite from the external daily grinds and stand or wander within. Begin with the Damaji Rao Dharamshala, a lodge first used by the BBCI staff and then converted to provide respite for the travelers after the railway merger, which seems to be in line as its counterparts in the city, to soon lose its sheen to the multi-storey giant abutting it. Adjacent to this is a prominent South Indian temple replete with figurines and temple rituals.

The presence of several book stalls and popular *farsan* marts including Jagdish indicates the importance of food and a good read for any traveler. Between the temple and the Rustom House, a wonderful 1980's art deco house is the Sanjiv Hospital- converted by surgeons and physicians, Dr. T. B. Patel & Dr. Munshi as a TB sanatorium 150 years back under Sayaji Rao Gaekwad's rule. In the 60's, this old heritage building formally known as Contractor's Bungalow appealed to Dr. V. C. Patel who had come from the United Kingdom looking to start a surgical hospital and found this to be the most suitable place to do so. Till this date the place serves the underprivileged and has further added medical services in a new building in the compound.

The other eclectic places include the Punjab TMT steel factory, a cold storage, a lumber yard and also the Executive Engineer's Court. However, the primary transit nature of the street is once again evident on the northern part of this road with various road travel agencies, hidden railway official bungalows with Gaekwad insignia amidst chawls, and the Officer's Railway colony at this end. Between these and the factories, stands the Gaekwad Maharaja Salon, a private waiting room and platform for the Gaekwad family, which was once an opulent structure with stately facilities for the royal families and their guests.

The charm of such places mostly lies in its opulence seen in the recreational efforts it provides. Till recently there stood the Natraj Theater, a single screen theater- replaced by the multi-screen at the Bus stand, trees that gave respite from the scorching sun, traders for formalized shops- the list would continue.

Squinch an eye and walk on the road, a different sight can be seen, one beyond the white walls and non-existent creek- a street with lush green trees, pedestrian pathways and restored buildings. Replete with modern amenities and large plazas but filled with curiosities akin.

Swapna Kothari



(Left) The empty grounds of the theater (right) the Gaekwad Salon, images by Swapna Kothari

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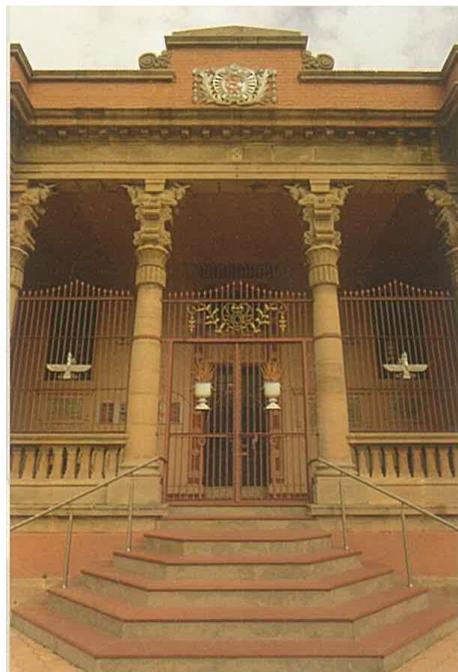
Want to collaborate or organize a tour?

Get in touch with us!



Snippets from *Once Upon a Time...there was Baroda*, story by Rani Dharker and photographs by Rahul Gajjar. The top image shows the Indira Avenue in 1899, now known as the Jail Road. Once upon a time it was lined with Banyan trees so dense that it felt like a forest and kids were warned to not go there after dark.

Bottom: The Parsi Agyari at Sayajigunj belongs to the Contractor family. It was built in 1922 and designed by Architect V R Talvalkar. The intriguing columns on its façade have twin bulls squatting at the top that appear to be glaring down at you. Framji Contractor has contributed to the construction of many buildings in Baroda.



Publications

Looking for books? The Trust has published more than half a dozen books, four of which have been on Pavagadh. Three other books on Baroda, one of which is for children, and is still available in print. These would make great corporate gifts in the coming festive season.

Available:

Once Upon a Time...there was Baroda- Rs. 3000/- copy

Children's book on Baroda (Gujarati) - Rs. 20/copy

Heritage Week Future

Events:

Come celebrate this year's heritage week joining us in welcoming renowned speaker Laila Tyabji, renowned for a Viraasat Lecture on the 24th November 2019