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From the Editor's Desk :

Heritage is a subject that unites us in our quest for conserving the treasures of our past for the benefit of future generations. India with its ancient history and diverse regions can boast of a variety of experiences that can be savoured by the inquisitive explorer. Our own city of Vadodara is a reflection of this diversity. With its many historical eras, it has something of interest for everyone – be it the art enthusiast, the architectural buff or the naturalist, we have it all!

The Vadodara People's Heritage Week 2020 in November was ushered in with great enthusiasm. Heritage Trust organised two interesting walks – one at the well-known Kirti Mandir and the other at the comparatively lesser known Kamnath Mahadev Mandir- a group of temples situated on the banks of the River Vishwamitri. The walks were led by Chandrashekhar Patil, an Art historian with knowledge about the history of Gaekwad era. Precautions related to use of masks and social distancing was strictly observed. For those who missed these events, Sameer Gaikwad shares interesting photos and a write-up with us.

Later, in December, more than 100 Cycling enthusiasts got a great opportunity to explore some of the iconic heritage structures of our city. It was initiated and organised by the Cycling Club Of Baroda & SmartCity Vadodara and was supported by Heritage Trust along with other organisations that were part of this unique event.

These events received an overwhelming response and indicate the immense desire of Barodians to break out of their months of isolation to learn more about their city and partake of its many splendours.

Our Trust has taken proactive steps against the recent efforts to change the face of the Rajabaug complex (Railway Staff College) housing the majestic Pratap Vilas Palace that would not only uproot the old trees but also spoil the beautiful facade of the palace. As a first step, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition was filed in the Gujarat High Court. Jaideep Verma shares the good news that we have recently obtained a stay on further work in the area.

The winter months beckon us to explore the outdoors. In normal times many of us would have headed into the wilderness. However, travel restrictions need not deprive us of the pleasures of exploring and appreciating our vast natural heritage near our cities. It has been reported that with the lockdown in place, discerning humans were observing more of their natural surroundings with greater enthusiasm. We are fortunate to have a few remaining natural areas as the lakes, river and the Jambughoda forest close to our city. We bring you an article that talks about the importance of our natural heritage in combating environmental degradation, climate change, and even the dreaded pandemics.

Ashit Gandhi shares his passion of exploring the Wadhvana Bird Sanctuary to catch the beautiful avian life on his camera. Bird-watching or Birding is a very popular outdoor hobby the world over and the number of birders in India is steadily rising with the

availability of affordable equipments such as binoculars, spotting scopes and high-end cameras. Today's birders leverage the power of the Internet to share their sightings as well as document the species distribution through the ebird website – an internationally acclaimed platform used by birders worldwide. Changes in bird numbers and species is a useful an indicator of the changes in the habitat. The second and third week of January are designated as days for conducting the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC). Birders – new and experienced -- will flock to nearby water bodies to identify and count the bird species they see and upload their observations on ebird. This is citizen science in its true sense and such observations form the basis of scientific research and publications. So do explore and contribute to helping us know our environment better!

We wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May the yuletide spirit bring cheer, keep you safe and prepare you for the coming year!!!

Avi Sabavala



Image Caption: Glimpses from the Kirti Mandir Heritage Walk (Source: Shivani Pikle)

Vadodara Peoples Heritage Festival 2020: Heritage Trust's Walks attract large participation!

In the pandemic year of 2020, this annual Festival held during the National Heritage Week (November 19-25), of which Heritage Trust is a major participant, was a very, very modest affair. Yet, Heritage Trust managed to squeeze in two Heritage Walks, especially designed to be out in the open, away from congested inner city areas, so that participants could maintain social distance and be safe. Lead by heritage enthusiast Chandrashekhar Patil, who is very well informed about especially the Gaekwadi heritage of Vadodara, both the Walks, the Kirti Mandir Walk and the Kamnath Mandir Complex Walk, attracted more than 30 participants each.

Kirti Mandir Walk, November 20

#ConversationAroundConservation

The #NationalHeritageWeek celebrations by the #HeritageTrustofBaroda began with a walk of the #KirtiMandir precincts on a crisp Saturday morning, November 20. Given the C-19 protocols, only limited registrations (around 30) were accepted and the enthusiastic participants turned up at 8 am wearing masks. They diligently maintained social distancing during the entire duration of the two-hour long tour.

Chandrashekhar Patil led this walk, beginning from Kirti Mandir, the last Indo-Saracenic building commissioned by Maharaja Sayajirao III, built on the banks of the Vishwamitri with the river flowing behind it. The royal crematorium is just behind this impressive 'E'-shaped building. While the immediate royal family members are cremated open to the sky, for others in the family, the crematorium is a covered space. Kirti Mandir is designed as a lasting memorial

that houses the busts of the immediate members of the ruling Gaekwad family who have passed on. The Central Hall, the rising Shikhara above, has the bust of Maharaja Sayajirao III. The bronze ball of earth at the top of the Shikhara has an engraved image of the 'Akhand-Bharata' map of India that was Sayajirao's dream for the nation. The gallery which runs to form a square on the first floor of the Central Hall has four panels of tempera murals by Nandalal Bose depicting the philosophies entrenched in the poems of Mirabai and Kabir, the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, and the life of Buddha.

To its left, the Kirti Mandir complex houses an ancient Shree Dutta Mandir, one of the two such in Vadodara (the other one is in Sayaji Gunj opposite the post office). The Kirti Mandir complex, given its nature as a memorial, is dotted with several small and large *Samadhi-mandirs* (a Shiva temple commemorating men) and *Tulsivrundavans* (commemorating women). Right next to the main Kirti Mandir building is a *samadhi-mandir* for Anandrao Gaekwad. Further down are the two larger *samadhi mandirs* – Kubereshwar and Kedareswar – one for Ganpatrao Gaekwad and another for Sayajirao II. Behind that is a smaller *samadhi mandir* of Govindrao and across the dirt passage the *Tulsivrundavan* of Yesubai, the queen of Malharrao Gaekwad. This *Tulsivrundavan* is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen but in a complete state of neglect and disrepair. It is an extremely sad state of affairs specially when one understands that the royal lady it holds the memories of was once almost the Maharani of Baroda.

From the Kirti Mandir complex we walked towards the Vishwamitri bridge, at the end of which are two *Chhatris*, also memorial monuments. The one on the right is of Kashirao Gaekwad, Maharaja Sayajirao III's father. The one on the opposite was built for the mother but she passed away at Kaviana and so a few decades back the VMC converted it into a small office that monitors the water level in the Vishwamitri river.

The Walk then crossed over to the Vishwamitri river bank across the road to learn about the old and new part of the bridge. This bridge was first built by Sultan Ahmed Shah of the Gujarat Sultanate (who built Ahmedabad) and this is indicated by the thin bricks that can be easily seen in the lower part of the river bank under the VMC Chhatri. In the olden days large sculptures of fish and crocodile forms (three of them are still there) and carved images of the same on the *ghat* steps were especially placed at specific heights as they indicated the rising waters of the river during the monsoon and thus pointed towards which of the low-lying areas of the town needed evacuation for fear of flooding. The three surviving sculptures have been removed from their original place and dumped on the *ghat* area. The present bridge was built by Maharaja Sayajirao. We must remember that just a few years back, there was a strong official move to widen this bridge in the name of 'development of the Smart city' and in that process would have brought down Kashirao Gaekwad's *Chattri* as well. It was the efforts of a number of heritage and nature-river enthusiasts of the city that put paid to that outrageous and ill-conceived plan.



Murals @ Kirti Mandir



Samadhi Vrindavan



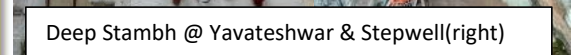
Fish Sculpture @ Ghat



Countess of Dufferin Hospital



Akhand Bharat map
@ Kirti Mandir



Deep Stambh @ Yavateswar & Stepwell(right)

While these sculptures of fishes and crocodiles and the images carved on the 'ghat' steps convey the importance of the thriving river of the past, the dead-black colour of the river water now, full of sewage and effluents, show how indifferent the present generation is towards what used to be the lifeline of the city.

A quick walk past the Yavateshwar (Shiva) temple, the modest Stepwell beside it (we didn't even know there was one there!) brought us to the Deepastambh, although one wished they were not oil painted in red and white! Standing at the Jail Road, the group mused over the loss of abundant tree cover and important heritage structures in the area in the name of 'development' and 'beautification' during the recent past. Crossing the road, we moved towards the SSG Hospital premises, catching our breath at the wonderful statue of Yuvraj Fatehsinhrao Gaekwad - I, a winsome young man dressed in western wear, perched on a high pedestal with his favoured foil, a long thin sword used in fencing, a sport he loved and was very skilled in.

The next stop was at the double-storeyed red brick Countess of Dufferin Lying-in Hospital, the first maternity and nursing hospital facility, built in Baroda state. It was inaugurated by Lady Dufferin, then on a Vice-regal visit to Baroda State. That one hospital has developed into the vast Sir Sayajirao General Hospital and Baroda Medical College. It signified how the need for women's healthcare led to creation of medical care for the masses in buildings and infrastructure that came up much later.

The walk concluded within the Kirti Mandir premises with a request to the attendees to be more vocal and proactive in their individual and group capacity towards preserving the heritage values and symbols of Vadodara.



Image Caption: Glimpses from the Kamnath Mandir Heritage Walk (Source: Shivani Pikle)

Kamnath Mahadev Temple Complex Walk, November 21

The second heritage walk was held on a pleasant Sunday afternoon of November 21 to commemorate #HeritageWeek2020. This is one area that most Barodians have not visited, perhaps do not even know it exists!

The #KamnathTemple complex located along the Vishwamitri river can be approached from the Bal-Bhavan side, down the lane opposite the gate. The Kamnath Mahadev and the Ramnath Mahadev Temples are the two large temples here, with the Ramnath Mahadev's *mandapa* ceiling painted in Rajasthani style, featuring a host of heroes such as Rana Pratap whose figures are captioned with their names.

Around these two temples are a large number of *Samadhi*-temples and *Tulsi Vrundavans* built by the royals, noblemen and general public in the memory of their deceased loved ones. And as learnt from yesterday's walk, while the *Samadhis* are meant for departed men, the *Tulsi Vrundavans* are built in memories of the departed women. These *samadhis* and *vrundavans* go all the way down to the banks of the Vishwamitri. The walk down the short *ghats* brought us to the river level from where we could admire what the *ghats* and indeed the temple complex would have been in its heyday. Today it is encroached upon by squatters and sadly any upkeep is left to their generosity. Should the *ghats* be cleaned up and made functional, it would surely make a pretty sight. In fact there is one temple in that vicinity, which has a lovely curved seat overlooking the river, which has carved figures

inspired by Grecian and Tibetan figures! But this temple is so severely encroached upon that one can move only in single file around it.

Let the pictures do the talking while we hope this generates enough traction to revive the wonderful heritage at Kamnath Mahadev Temples Complex in our city and make it more accessible to general public.

#HeritageTrustofBaroda would like to thank Chandrashekhar S Patil for guiding us on both the walks.

-Sameer Gaikwad and Sandhya Bordewekar

Conserving our Natural Heritage - the Key to Human Well being

The year 2020 has seen the world live through the horrors of the pandemic resulting in a lock down. With restrictions on travel, movement, social restrictions has come enormous financial hardship to people across all sectors. Are there some lessons that we need to learn from this experience?

It is well known that the virus emanated from human interaction with Bats in the Wuhan province of China. Earlier virus epidemics as bird flu, swine flu and even the bubonic plague which ravaged Surat trace their origin with human interactions with the animal world. It is believed that many more virus strains are being harboured that can affect humans in future. Nature has numerous lessons for us if we would look deeper. World Environment day 2020 very appropriately focused on the theme "Care for Nature." It is indeed a wake-up call for Homo sapiens to take a long hard look at how we interact with our environment and the other species that we share our planet with! In the race to usher in economic development, we have focussed on mega infrastructure projects, acquiring high value goods and services that represent more of status rather than need with nary a thought about the impacts on either the local communities or the environment. The result is that we are facing global warming, rapid extinction of species as well as spread of diseases which were hitherto unknown.

The Indian sub-continent is considered one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world. Two of the world's Biodiversity hotspots {Western Ghats and North-East Himalayas} are located in our country. With around 400 mammals species, 1300 bird species, a large percentage of herpetofauna, insect and plant life as well as other minutiae, India truly boasts of a natural heritage that equals some of the richest in the world. We are home to some of the most iconic species as the Royal Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Asian Elephant, Indian One-horned Rhinoceros, the only remaining country with a population of the Asiatic Lion. We also had the Asiatic Cheetah which we drove to extinction. Truly a haven for wildlife!

Are we proud of our rich bio-diversity and leveraged the many opportunities that we have to show-case this vast natural treasure to the world? Careful environment planning and management will ensure that we live in a clean and healthy environment that not only enjoys economic prosperity that is socially inclusive, but is also environmentally sustainable for future generations. Ecological systems commonly referred to as ecosystems provide us with very useful services as

1. Provisional – food, water, air, materials for clothing and shelter
2. Regulatory- converting waste e.g. Carbon dioxide(CO₂) to oxygen (O₂) through photosynthesis, control of harmful species
3. Maintenance - Recharging groundwater by waterbodies, conversion of organic waste to fertilizer
4. Aesthetic, spiritual - refreshing and rejuvenating to the senses, a great stress-buster.
5. Economic – eco-tourism if managed well can be an excellent economic driver. The economy of many African countries depends upon the revenue generated from wildlife tourism. In our country too, the economy of local communities living near wildlife parks and protected areas situated in remote areas are

are driven by revenue from eco-tourism. It is desirable that local initiatives as home-stays, training of tour operators, guides, drivers and support personnel should be an on-going process if we are to sustain the livelihood of local communities.

It is not only desirable but incumbent on each of us as citizens of the largest democracy to support and actively conserve our natural heritage. The plethora of laws related to environment in our country include Art 51 (A) (g) enshrined in our Constitution which states that the duty of every citizen is "To protect and improve our natural environment including forests, rivers, lakes and wildlife." Observing our laws in its true spirit rather than focussing on ways to find loopholes or diluting the efficacy of the legal framework should be our primary focus for the future.

Traditional Indian Ethos shows not just tolerance for the world around us but a pro-active approach to protecting and conserving all species and the natural habitat. It is so good to see how the groundnut farmers in Saurashtra allow the migratory Common and Demoiselle Cranes to feed on their crop without harming the birds that come to their field despite incurring some damage. At the same time, many local communities as the Bishnois of Rajasthan, the Bharwads and Rabaris of Gujarat and many tribal communities adopt a pro-active approach by actively protecting and sustaining the plant and animal life around them. They are the true naturalists and green warriors of our world!

In these unusual times, let us look to our natural world for much needed solutions that are socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

- Avi Sabavala

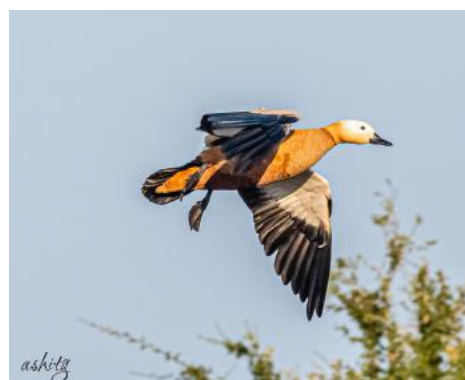


Image Caption: Birds from Wadhvana (Source: Ashit Gandhi)

Wadhvana Bird Sanctuary

Wadhvana is a century old tank, constructed by erstwhile King Gaikwad in 1909-10. This tank has a catchment area of 860 sqkm, deriving its water from Orsang river. This tank provides irrigation to 25 villages.

Some of the birds seen around the lake are: Coots, Ruddy Shelduck from Ladakh, Eurasian Wigeon Duck, Teal, Northern Pintail, Swamphen, Comb Duck, Little Grebe, Common Pochard, Greylag/Bar-headed Goose from Northern Europe, Glossy Ibis, Common/Pied/White-throated Kingfishers, Common Sandpiper, Openbill Stork,

Little Cormorant, Darter, Pond/Purple Heron, Intermediate/Large Egret, Black-winged Stilt, Red-Wattled Lapwing are seen. Large numbers of Wire-tailed Swallow fly around the lake. The local Hoopoe, Paddyfield Pipit and the migrants - Common Stonechat and White/Yellow Wagtails - including the scavengers - Black Kites and Marsh Harrier – are also seen.

There are watchtowers placed at 1 km intervals on the periphery of the lake. Forest dept. has deputed personnel with fairly good knowledge about the local flora & fauna.

-Ashit Gandhi



Image Caption: Glimpses from the Heritage Cycle Ride
(Source: Raghu Vishal & Burzin Mysorewala)

Cycling through the City

It was an honour with a sense of purpose to have led more than 100 enthusiastic citizens on a Heritage cycling tour of the city. The initiative was led by @thecyclingclubofbaroda and @smartcity_vadodara and ably supported by @heritagetrustvadodara

The trip started from the #vishwamitri river ghat near #Kalaghoda appreciating the #yavateshwartemple , the adjoining #deepstambh and the #stepwell . The touring party began their trip by cycling along the service road adjacent to the Jail road and reached #jaisingraolibrary near the #kothikacheri record rooms. Many were unaware of this hidden gem of an edifice right alongside the thoroughfare.

Passing through the #raopuratower the group reached #nyaymandirvadodara and mulled over the crumbling property now that it's emptied &

& closed. Passing through #lehipuragate and #mandvigatethe group stopped at #gendigate to appreciate the #walledcity of the yore and #intermingling of #faith .

The next stop was at #navgruh_mandir beside #pratapnagar bridge and the sad state of its Stepwell was witnessed. The structure was built to commemorate the great king #sayajiraogaekwad III overseas trip to lay the foundation for the kingdoms business and #cultural contacts with the #westernworld . Crossing the bridge, the next stop was at the tomb of #hazira and its lush green environs followed by a walk across the road to the #koyalistepwell which again was found in a state of neglect.

On the return journey, the group reached the #khandobamandirvadodara precincts which was closed. The nearby #jalmandir that housed a small Stepwell was visited. The final stop was at the #siddhnath_mahadev #talav and the group visited the old temples in its neighbourhood.

The ride passed through the busy #khanderaomarket , #kirtistambh #palacegate and the cyclists ended their city tour at #sayajinagargruh . Their enthusiasm was rewarded with a scrumptious breakfast .

-The Cycling Club Of Baroda

-SmartCity Vadodara

Become a member

As a non-profit, we rely on your support as our member and encourage you to send more heritage enthusiasts our way.

Patron Member

Rs. 100,000

Donor Member

Rs. 25,000

Life Member

Rs. 5,000

5 Year Member

Rs. 500

Corporate Patron

Member

Rs. 2,00,000

Corporate Donor

Member

Rs. 50,000

Corporate Member Rs.

25,000 / year

Have an idea you would like to explore?

Want to collaborate or organize an event virtually?

Get in touch with us!

Plight of Pratap Vilas

Around the beginning of the year, Baroda woke up one morning to read the news that the Railways were in the process of constructing a four storey office building right in front of the 106 year old Pratap Vilas Palace, Vadodara (PVP) i.e. between the palace and the palace gardens. PVP is an ancient monument having historical, architectural and artistic value and protecting the ecology and gardens surrounding the same was imperative and inspite of online petitions and campaigns against the said construction, the Railway authorities seemed unmoved in their endeavor to destroy the beauty of PVP, by going ahead with the said construction. This issue was taken up by HT by way of filing of a Public Interest Petition (PIL) in the Gujarat High Court. The Hon'ble Court heard the matter at the admission stage and has passed an order staying all further construction by the Railways till the matter is heard at length. This is a shot in the arm for the preservation and conservation of our ancient heritage and HT once again rose to the occasion to champion the said cause.

- Jaideep Verma



Image Caption: Progress or Problem
Artwork by Shivani Pikle

Publications

Looking for books as gifts? 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

Future Events:

We hope to come back with physical events soon, but till then we will be planning for online lectures- look out for announcements on our social media!