

Core Committee

Sameer Kherra

Sameer Gaikwad

Arati Desai

Rati Desai

Jaideep Verma

Sandhya Gajjar

Jal Patel

Editorial Team

Avi Sabavala

Arati Desai

Alka Smart

Design and Layout

Swapna Kothari

Shivani Pikle

Write to us at

623, GIDC Industrial

Estate, Makarpura,

Vadodara 390010.

Gujarat .India

[heritagetrustvadodara](mailto:heritagetrustvadodara@gmail.com)

[@gmail.com](mailto:heritagetrustvadodara@gmail.com)

Or visit us on

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From the Editor's Desk:

Festivals Unlimited

The monsoons have started to recede and it's time to welcome the festival season. With the celebrations of Ganesh Chaturthi and Navratri that have seen great fervor, especially after a two-year hiatus, we are looking forward to the next three months of joy and celebrations unlimited! This issue brings you a take on the nine nights of celebration.

Indeed, heritage lovers have much to cheer! Kolkatta's Durga Puja has made it to the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage for its initiatives to involve marginalized groups and individuals as well as women. India now boasts 14 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) components on the UNESCO list that includes Yoga and Kumbhakarna Mela. As per the article by Dr. Subhas Sarkar in The Print, we understand that our very own "Garba" has been nominated to the list for 2023. That surely will be a cause of great pride and celebration for all of us in Gujarat!

If intangible heritage of our country is being recognized at the international level, there's more good news again from the eastern corner of our country. Mawmluh Cave, or Krem Mawmluh, in Meghalaya has been listed as one of UNESCO'S 'First 100 IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences) Geological Sites 'in the world!

The cave story in our country just got better! Archeological Survey of India has discovered 20 Buddhist caves in addition to the existing 50 caves discovered so far in the Tala region of Bandhavgarh. These caves belong to the 2nd century CE to the 5th century CE. Bandhavgarh is known for being tiger country but also has immense appeal for its built heritage being part of the hunting grounds of the former princely state of Rewa.

Tucked away in the heart of our city, opposite the famed Sursagar lake lies an institution started by the late Maharani Chimnabai of Baroda. We bring you an article that covers the yeoman's service rendered to women over a period spanning 106 years.

There are plans for opening a cafe that serves traditional hygienic food slated sometime in December. So, when you visit the area next, it would be interesting to check out this place and lend our support for their wonderful initiatives.

While we look forward to relief from the hot weather of October, the chill of November will bring with it the week-long Peoples' Heritage Festival with walks, talks and many more events. Heritage Trust has planned various events including the Viraasat Lecture. So do mark your diaries to partake of the exciting events coming up.

We wish all our readers a Happy Deepawali and Prosperous New Year.

Avi Sabavala

MCSU: A project for women's empowerment in Baroda, that was far ahead of its time

I have been a Baroda resident all my life. And written extensively on its heritage buildings, history and what have you. But I had never seen this little jewel of a building, winking from behind a camouflage of leafy bushes and old trees.

Built in 1938 (or thereabouts, architect was Shri Talwalkar who trained under the British architect Robert Chisholm), the Maharani Chimnabai Stree Udyogalaya (MCSU) is a double-storeyed red brick and wooden building with broad arched corridors and airy large rooms, that overlooks the Sur Sagar Pond near the Akkalkot Maharaj Mandir, at the heart of the city, and has been a quietly working towards the upliftment and empowerment of girls and women for the last many decades.

I visited the building last week for Urja 2022, an exhibition of utility products, masalas and food items made by those supported by MCSU, crafts by expert artisans, premium designer wear, products from ethical brands, as well as those from the museum shop attached to the Fatehsinh Museum in the Palace campus.

Conceptualized and established in 1914 by Maharani Chimnabai II, the second wife of the far-sighted Maharaja Sayajirao III, who empathized with the unlettered, poor and socially disadvantaged women in her kingdom, the MCSU Trust's vision of educating and empowering women to earn a decent livelihood and live with dignity continues to bear fruit.

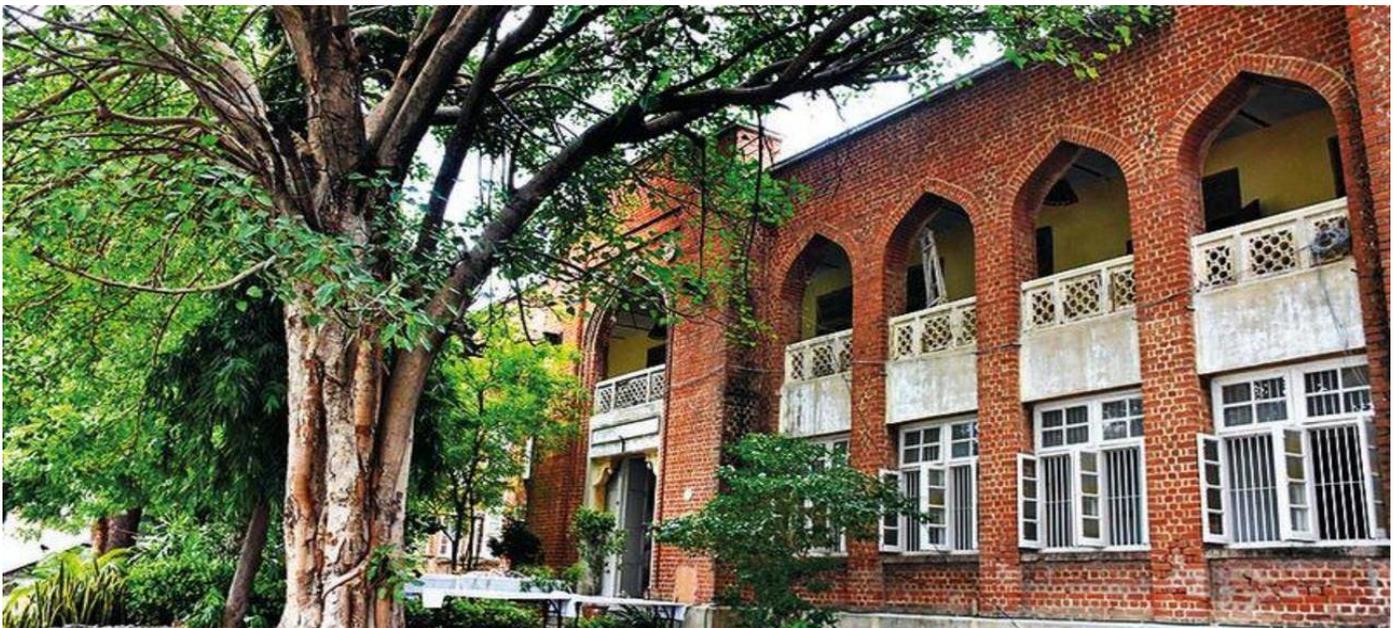
In its initial decades, the skill training included basic literacy and numeracy skills strengthened by income-generating vocational training in tailoring and embroidery, expanding to book-binding, hand block-printing, and later to beauty treatments. In recent years, teacher training and computer courses have been introduced as well.

The Maharani's detailed working model for women's emancipation was certainly ahead of its time and continues to be relevant even today. But she needed money to put her dream into practice and the Maharaja was not one to easily loosen the purse-strings. He challenged her to get the consensus of the people first.

"Always ready to take a dare," smiles the Shrimant Radhikaraje, the present Maharani, "she graciously accepted the condition and organized what might have been the first fund-raiser in Baroda!"

Chimnabai, who was the first president of the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927, chose the Central Hall of the imposing Nyay Mandir building as a venue for her fund-raiser where she would create a 'sensational sensorial experience' for art and music lovers and the culturally aware Baroda public of those days. The building was decorated beautifully with flower pots, lighting and fountains and the Royal Band played to an admiring and amazed audience.

Needless to say, the gala affair was a runaway success making a profit of a whopping Rs. 3500. It also received a donation of Rs. 10,000, as promised by the Maharaja.



Maharani Chimnabai Stree Udyogalaya (Source: *The Times of India*)

In spite of the training institute being supported by the State, and personally by the Maharani at that, families of the girls and women that the training was directed at still refused to send their daughters to the institute. A forceful door-to-door drive was then organised with the involvement of the wives of officials in the Gaekwad Court, convincing families that their daughters and young widows in the family as well as the destitute women in the neighbourhood, that these women would be safe at the institute and as times modernized, they needed skills that would help them earn a living.

The Institute was first housed in Lal Bahadur's Haveli in Mehta Pol near the Mandvi pavilion with an initial course in tailoring, wherein raw materials and equipment was provided to the students who were also given a monthly stipend of Rs. 2. As the students increased, training in lace-making and embroidery were added. Orders were accepted for preparation of spices, jams, pickles, and traditional snacks as well.

In 1927, Maharani Chimnabai's daughter-in-law, Shakuntalaraje Gaekwad became President of MCSU and wanted the Trust to have its own building. The Maharaja allotted a plot of land on the north side of Sursagar Lake for the institute building.

With more funding coming in from the George V Silver Jubilee Fund, Sir Sayajirao Diamond Jubilee Fund and other donors, the present building was finally designed and constructed in 1938 to meet the needs of the Udhogalaya. In 1939, boarding facilities were started for students from nearby towns and villages and diploma examinations were held which gave it formal sanction and more students started joining.

Over the last few years, Radhikaraje has taken active interest in several of the unusual initiatives introduced over many decades and generally lying about lacklustre.

MCSU was one of those doing comparatively better and it has got a vital shot-in-the-arm with Radhikaraje introducing more vocational courses in Geriatric Care, Child, and Infant Care amongst others as these skills are now in great demand with more working mothers and wives in formal employment. Courses in Banking, Spoken English and Personality Development will be shortly added to ease the students in employment/entrepreneurship.

Under the brand name of Padmaja, MCSU promotes a number of aesthetically designed hand-made products such as home linen, table décor and traditional and speciality packaged foods.

MCSU also offers 100% confidential and free online counselling to promote mental wellness amongst whoever needs help – this has been introduced in wake of the pandemic that has caused severe stress, depression, feelings of inadequacy and loss of control over one's life.

Future endeavours at MCSU include two dream projects – Project Pink Line, and Satrangi. Project Pink Line envisions training women to be competent auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers and then placing them in agencies that drive children to and from school, work with senior citizens homes driving the elderly to the market, for medical check-ups, to meet friends as well as those solitary women travelers preferring the safety of being driven by a woman. This project will facilitate their driving lessons and licenses, and help with loans if they want to purchase their own vehicles.

The Satrangi project focuses on the LGBTQ+ community, beginning with the transgenders. MCSU has identified 250 transgenders in Baroda and the intention is to support them with dry rations, identify and help solve their core problems, groom, and train them for vocations and find employment accordingly. In short, try and create an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusivity for the community.

MCSU is contemplating opening the Gajra Café where the LGBTQ+ and differently abled will be employed and where mainstream people can interact with them in an unbiased space.

As a sustained annual fund-raiser for these many philanthropic ventures, Maharani Radhikaraje has also introduced the Lukshmi Vilas Palace Heritage Garba a couple of years before the pandemic stepped in and halted such events. This year, the Garba has become indeed very big and was organized at the historic Motibaug Cricket grounds, with the popular Sachin and Ashita Limaye at the mike.

Radhikaraje says, "I am only taking forward what my illustrious great great grandmother-in law did. MCSU is the outcome of out-of-the-box thinking by an enterprising lady who walked the talk and proved that women meant business!"

Sandhya Bordewekar

This article first appeared in the news portal, NetIndian. <https://www.netindian.in/news/features/mcsu-a-project-for-womens-empowerment-in-baroda-that-was-far-ahead-of-its-times>

Navratri – When the city becomes One

Community, a passion for dancing, reconnecting with friends, making new ones too, that's what garba means to me. Age, religion, societal status, none of it matters during the festival of Navratri. Baroda normally known for being a quiet city, transforms itself into a buzzing city at night. There is an energy in the air during these 9 nights and anyone venturing out of their homes is bound to feel it. With the city being home to the largest garbas in the country with more than 50,000 dancing in a single venue (multiple venues all over the city), Garba is synonymous to the culture of Baroda.

Arati Desai

What it Really Means: The Garba

How does one describe the nine nights of Navratri? Words always fall short but I will try. To anyone who asks me, I say please join in. The call "e haalo!" Meaning, 'let's go'. Really sums up the energy that is felt on the garba grounds. The smell in the air changes a few days before Navratri. From lighting a lamp in the Garbo, to playing garba all night, it is an emotion that takes over. The festival of 9 nights energizes the minds and probably rebalances the masculine and feminine energy, not just in those who participate but even those who just observe. Going in circles with such vigor starts seeming symbolic of life as does matching our rhythm and footsteps to those rest to us. The Urban and the rural celebrations are very different however what remains unchanged is the essence and the spirituality of the festival.

To know more about this festival and how it is celebrated in Vadodara you can watch the film Ramji Thakkar Bhimji Thakkar on YouTube. <https://youtu.be/XFAWZJzjZEM>

Shwetal Bhatt, independent researcher, artist, educator, and designer.

rtbtmovie@gmail.com

www.RamjiThakkarBhimjiThakkar.com

www.facebook.com/RamjiThakkarBhimjiThakkar

The Navratri's of Baroda

Having been born and bred in maximum city - Mumbai, Navratri season used to be a cacophony of sounds and beats over the dandiya nights in the streets late at night.

When my job got me to Baroda back in 1989, I was forcibly taken by friends to the garba grounds where I was surprised to discover that melody, divinity, and synchronism goes hand in hand. I was mesmerised by the sight of young and old by the thousands moving in unison to the beats of traditional Raas garbas tuned to 'sugam sangeet' rhythms that the multi-cultural city of Baroda offered.

It certainly hooked me on and it's been 33 years of not looking back.

Baroda's garba is an emotion.

Sameer Gaikwad



Garba to me is energy flow tradition Gujarati folk music rural folk steps ritual. The vibrancy and simplicity of these traditional garbas which have been followed for more than 50 years, is what draws me to the Faculty of Fine Arts - Homiyar

Garba @ Baroda

(Source: Homiyar Tavadia, Shwetal Bhatt & Sameer Gaikwad)

Heta Pandit to deliver Viraasat Lecture 2022 on Sunday, November 27

This year's Viraasat lecture will be delivered by Heta Pandit at 6 pm on Sunday, November 27, as part of one of the Heritage Trust's events in the annual Vadodara Peoples Heritage Festival. She will speak on, The roller coaster ride called Heritage Activism in Goa.

This year's Lecture will be held at the Federation Auditorium, Gotri-Sewasi Road. High Tea will be held from 5.30 to 6.00 pm.

Originally from Vadodara, Heta Pandit currently lives in the village of Saligao, Goa. She has had a wide range of career stints in advertising, journalism and working with Dr. Jane Goodall in the field of chimpanzee research in Tanzania. After pioneering multiple heritage awareness and action movements in Bombay, she has been living in Goa 26 years now, where she co-founded Goa Heritage Action Group in the year 2000, that is dedicated to the advocacy of preservation, conservation, and restoration of Goa's natural, built and cultural heritage.

Widely regarded as a treasure trove of information, she has written ten books, with two more in the pipeline, all aiming at bringing to light the art, culture, and history of Goa, with many of them featuring at prestigious Literature festivals across India. Her book Grinding Stories Retold: Songs from Goa, sheds light on oviyos, songs sung by women as they work at the grinding stone, a household chore that began a woman's day in rural Goa. Most are songs of sadness, suppressed anger, envy, expectation, words of wisdom and frustration.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/heta.pandit>

Instagram: https://instagram.com/heta.pandit?utm_medium=copy_link

On this occasion, Heritage Trust will also host the release of Heta Pandit's latest book, Stories from Goan Houses. This book will be on sale (Rs. 2500 approx.) and autographing by the author, after the Lecture.

Sandhya Bordewekar

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

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Get in touch with us!

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" In addition to the various Heritage related activities, takes its statutory responsibilities very seriously and has recently been granted a copyright for its new publication " Baroda Collective".

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:

National Heritage Week Events will be announced soon!!!! - look out for announcements on our social media!