

Managing

Committee

Vikram Singhal
Sameer Khara
Alka Smart
Rati Desai
Jaideep Verma
Sandhya Gajjar
Jal Patel

Editorial Team

Avi Sabavala
Arati Desai

Design and Layout

Swapna Kothari

Write to us at

302 A Square
Building, 82 Urmi
Society, Productivity
Road, Vadodara
390007, India

heritagetrustvadodara@gmail.com

Or visit us on

<https://www.heritagetrustbaroda.org/>

And on Facebook
[@heritagetrustbaroda](https://www.facebook.com/heritagetrustbaroda)

From the Editor's Desk

Travelers have long appreciated the need to explore different corners of the earth that are untouched and unknown to the general populace. The travelogues left behind by these adventurous explorers stimulate the desire in many of us to scour the world for some unique experiences. However, need we have to explore distant places for that experience? Our country and indeed our own city beckon us with many a hidden gem of history, culture and natural paradise! This issue has a different take on appreciating what lies beyond the regular tourist circuit with two insightful perspectives shared by Arati Desai and Swapna Kothari. It is about seeing different and interesting angles in what may seem like a common structure or an area that we pass by daily. Many of these areas may not lie on the regular tourist must see places but hold a wealth of historical and cultural treasures and are an important face of any city. The love of exploring off the beaten track gives us the satisfaction of gaining a deeper and extraordinary experience from the ordinary.

The year 2020 was ushered in with much hope and aspirations especially for us at Heritage Trust with exciting heritage walks covering two different areas of the city. The winter chill of early January saw the Christian Heritage Walk covering the cosmopolitan area of Fatehgunj formerly known as the Camp area. The route covered Churches belonging to three different Christian denominations, the Shrine of Our Lady of Forsaken and the Convent of Jesus and Mary. With the weather warming up, February saw the Alavi Bohra walk at Badri Mohalla starting from the Noorani Masjid and visiting three beautiful old houses which are still in use and meeting with the religious head, the Syedena. While we may have seen or heard about these areas or even rushed past these stately structures on a regular basis, this was a time to enter and feel the inner peace and beauty. Both events ended with a sumptuous dinner that showcased the traditional cuisine. For those readers who missed the events, we have covered them for you in this issue. We thank all members and leaders of the communities for welcoming us with such warmth and sharing with us their culture and history.

If January and February were eventful, little did we know what lay in store for March. Covid -19 the pandemic has affected humans across the world and reminded us how vulnerable we are!

For us Heritage lovers, it has put paid to many of our plans for some exciting events and has confined us to our homes in a lockdown that is expected to last three weeks. That is indeed a long time! However, it is also time for us to slow down, catch up with our hobbies, do some creative activities and hope for better days.

We wish our readers stay safe and take good care of yourselves.

Avi Sabavala



Top to bottom- Glimpses from our Christmas Walk held on 3rd January 2020 covering major churches in the Fatehgunj area and being led by Pastors to give detailed and correct information to participants. At the Trust, we believe community participation in heritage walks brings the real essence closer to us. Source: Heritage Trust.

A Walk in the Old City to explore the Alavi Bohra Heritage

The Alavi Bohra Heritage walk in Badri Mohalla was organised jointly by ad-Da'wat ul-Haadiyah ul-'Alaviyah and Heritage Trust of Vadodara, on Sunday, 9th February 2020. Around 50 heritage enthusiasts got a great opportunity to learn about the architectural, cultural, social, historic and religious aspects of Alavi Bohras. Apart from Devdi Mubaarak (the official residence of the Saiyedna saheb) and Nooraani Masjid (the main mosque), the group visited different houses that were constructed over 80 years back during the time of the 42nd religious head Saiyedna Badruddin saheb around 1930s. Badri Mohalla is in the heart of Wadi area and served as the centre of progress of Alavi Bohra community in all spheres of life. From the time this miniscule community migrated from Ahmedabad in 1699 AD, in the last three centuries this mohalla has witnessed various challenges. However, the ethos of unity, forbearance, love and respect for all people safeguarded this micro-minority from all odds.

The houses of Fakhruddin Amiruddin, Shaikhali Alibhai and Qurbanhusain Sharafali are well maintained and the old architecture has been meticulously preserved. The Bohra style of wooden wall cupboards, galleries overlooking the main chowk, "Naw-khaana" in the inner-most room called "awaas", the tradition of "Khaat", wide wooden staitcase, "maanni" for keeping crockery, kitchen and bathroom near the chowk, 4 poster wooden beds, a big space at the entrance "Ota" etc. The group was impressed to see such minuteness and care in the Bohra-style of living. The residence of Saiyedna Saheb in Badri Mohalla is the only living home in the entire Vadodara city where Quranic verses have been embossed in masonry work in its front.

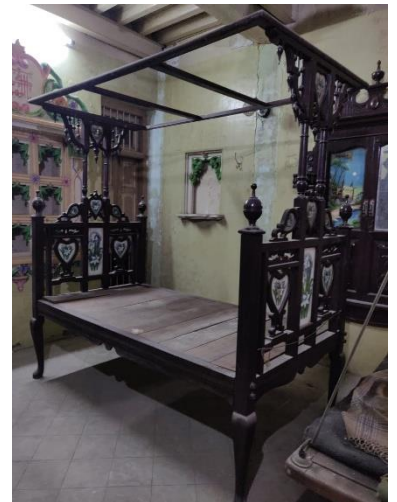
Saiyedna Saheb addressed the gathering at his residence which is 330 yrs old and said that, "We should work as a Team for the preservation of our city Vadodara's rich and unparalleled heritage. Members of Heritage Trust are doing a very well-planned effort by bringing together the culture of various communities of Vadodara and creating awareness about the importance of safe-guarding our splendid heritage. Our city is 2000 yrs old and so is its historical impact on Indian social arena. I hope, you and we have a common path to see our city throbbing with cultural liveliness."

The art and craftsmanship of Bohra topi-weaving and having the lazzat of Bohra cuisine were the main highlights of the Heritage walk.

Dr. Nuruddin Bhaisaheb



Top to bottom: Glimpses of the Bohra walk and the walkers. Source: Heritage Trust



Top to bottom: Further glimpses of the Bohra Walk.

Source: Heritage Trust Members and other walk participants.

Culture,

Never had a measured definition
If only it remained a miscalculation

An abundance of imagination
For some, a righteous tradition

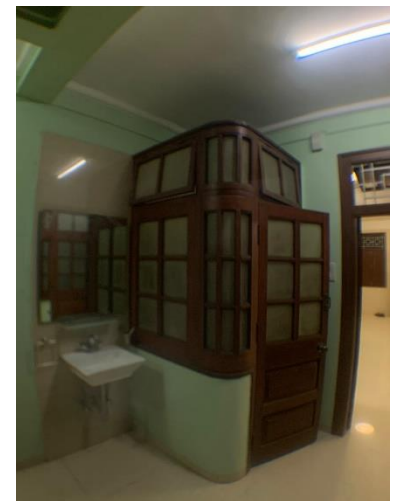
With unbound definitions

Vague stupefactions

Bold retractions

Yet bountiful attractions

(Swapna Kothari)



Rediscovering your own city as a local tourist

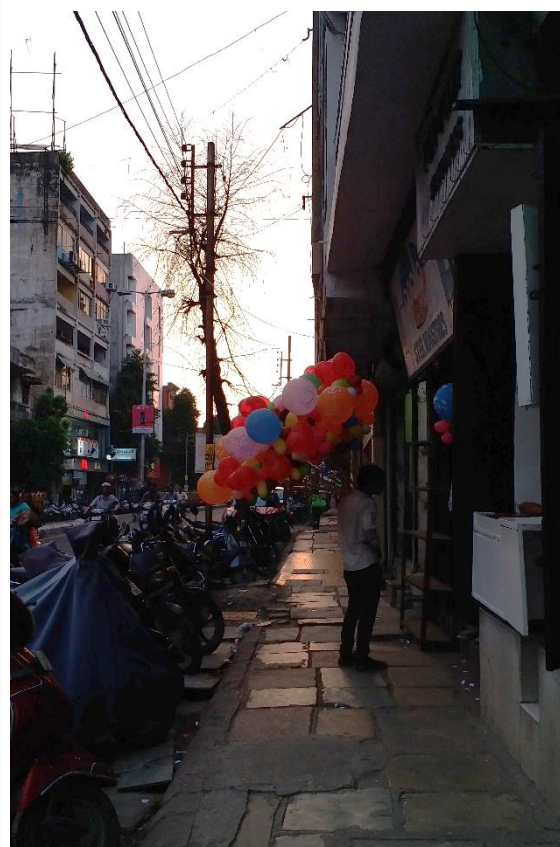
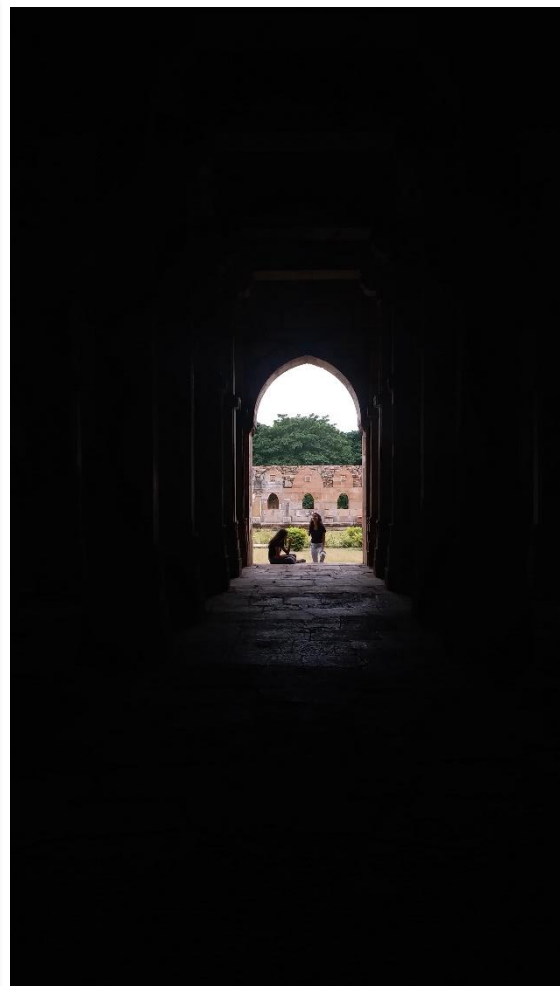
Local sightseeing is mostly you showing your relatives from out of town, the so to say “touristy places worth seeing “in one’s own city. But beyond this, are the several facets of cultural traditions, heritage as well as history that gives a particular place a soul, mostly of which the local resident are ignorant of. Becoming a tourist in your own city has many a charm. Places you never knew existed, stories you have not heard, reveal themselves. Tourism shouldn’t be confined just to travelers but should include its city’s citizens too. In addition to the exploring factor, local communities can partake in aiding in the preservation of the city’s history, heritage and culture through promoting local tourism.

While a visit to the local museum or palace is a definite must there are several ways to immerse oneself in their city. New people and new experiences are on the bucket list of every ardent traveler. At home, a simple change in perspective can allow you this. Visits to a different religious place, attending a sporting event, a visit to a café of your parent’s time are some examples. Heritage walks and nature walks are options one can avail in most cities. These walks prove great as not only do they allow you to meet likeminded people but also offer insights to the familiar in a more detailed manner.

A peek into a city’s history, architecture and diverse communities (with their specific ways of living,) encourage an understanding of the very people and places we think we know well but actually don’t. Each city has a history embroiled in a cultural structure. A small search into the history books would help you to recognize the oldest buildings, temples, schools, cafes, gardens or even restaurants. There will be some places you have never been to. What better way to see the old than with new eyes?

A very simple way to change the perspective of a familiar place is to walk the route that you travel on every day by car, allowing yourself to stop whenever you please, for a cup of tea or quick bite at a street side shop and a chat with the chaiwallah. The familiarity of your own city allows you to travel on your own so visit the local wholesale markets, vegetable, fruits, flowers or even textile. Every extensive marketplace has a charm of its own. When abroad, everyone seems to have this on their itinerary but back home not many venture into their own back yards. Sit in a local bus till the last stop...and see where you land. Create your own adventure!!

Arati Desai



Widen your horizontal visions and explore your city more. Source: Swapna Kothari

The Urbane Column

(Disclaimer- The author takes a detour this time, to explore in the third person narrative, heritage walks and its ephemeral yet distinct impact on life)

When we first walked, she mentioned not having seen the sun rise so bright amidst the density of brick and stone. The empty streets provided for a full view, and the birds chirping reminded her of what was written about it in the books of yore. That the breeze felt cool and the people amiable, more together like men on a mission. Eager to learn, and walk down the trodden cobblestone lane wanting to pucker, all the treasures being laid on them- that they could in their lens.

“Yes, that was a good one. Monuments Men.

We must watch it on the weekend. Even better watch it with friends, in these times of pain.”

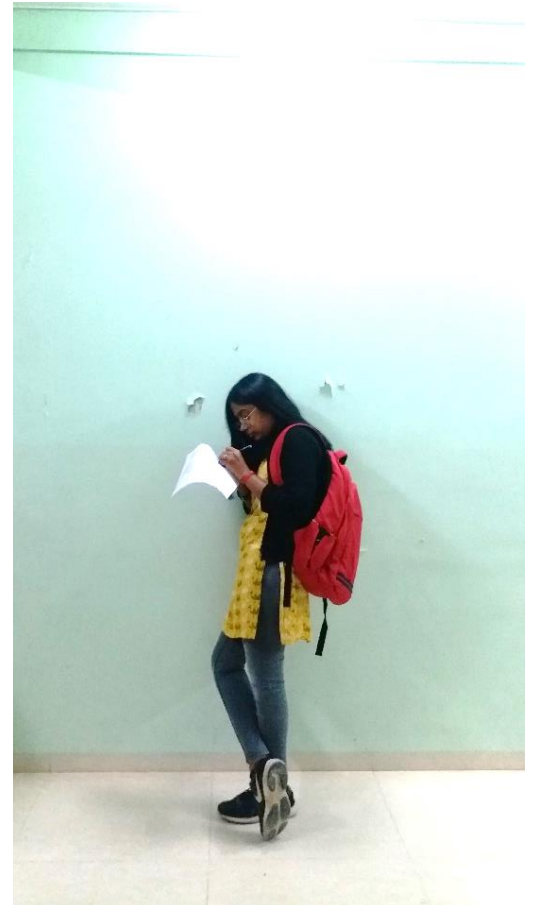
Getting back to the work at hand, she delved further into the depth of thought.

She had long believed physical boundaries between the built get blurred, some in the pretext of progress while some, victims to time. Planned walks to these places tingled the senses to one’s who looked behind even if momentarily. Chaotic and busy just an hour after dawn, the inner city provided what she sought the most- a familiarization to a city, she had begun to call home from the past twenty years. Once with so much antiquity that she felt connected to, more than her own birthplace, a metropolitan with forced history. Celebrations like these connected her to the youth and others alike, building a comradeship that embodied culture as a means to re-live and enjoy.

In the times of social distancing, when physical boundaries take a different meaning, the distance between man and its historic surroundings become clear. And the means that allowed to experience this, heritage walks, which are being cancelled and sanitized spaces taking an altogether new meaning- these small community activities become but a memory of recent past, awaiting to be done again.



The yin-yang of observation and record on the same walk by different participants on different medium,
Source: Swapna Kothari



On the last walk, she had exclaimed, she needs to learn more. The lives of a community and the food they eat- the places they grew and flourished for centuries is yet unexplored and information askew.

How much does the common man yet not know? Beneath the coffers and the kind, beyond the trees and plaques lies heritage of our kind.

One that provided her to walk leisurely- a happy medium, as she was not expected to exert a lot nor expected to match someone else's pace. She could stand in awe of a place and not be bothered by the others' enquiring gaze. The city's local heritage lay in the hands of its people- the transformation, a part of its continuation. But reverence to the past via its built tradition, an ode to its food, arts, business and other cultural heritage was what one could easily associate to. There lay the charm! the community and its past. Because when the world around wanted the nouveau-rich to be bit by wanderlust and travel around the globe, history lied awaiting in the country's own regions or city's backyard-shifting the dust.

She was accompanied by long term residents and some who belonged to the floating population- each here to experience while mobile on foot, seeing places to create memories and associations to the place they now call home. At once instance, she remembers- a slow walker confided in her,

"Isn't it beautiful, how as a regular traveler you do a lot of sight-seeing, visiting only those glorified travel book landmarks? Yet you only feel satisfied when you go on the off-beat, carefully curated local heritage walk! There lies the beauty my friend, and there the exposure to the true tradition of life, be it Italy, China or India!"

Words from that seasoned traveler brought her back. Connection to a place was what heritage walks offered. These apparently 'cool' things to do, are actually an important tool for many cities. It makes sure not all gets lost- that the rich and mixed cultural pasts of small towns and cities could be showcased. One group at a time, that its diversity be highlighted in a variety of unique ways and reach further beyond the history books. Different facets could help people open their minds and help absorb multiple layers of history of a place and connect to it, one walk at a time.

From stories of kings and queens, to the common man, the lane that intrigues and the friend you find, the built that brings you peace and the connect you find amiss, a walk in its own right to the heritage of her city was what kindled a fire to remain.

Note from author- Generally, the column takes you down a place and urges you to walk through it, but today is a time of reminiscence. To the time when the author was never nagged for walking on the road and staring at buildings. When trees provided shade in hot summers and its trunk- a base to sit, that was when the journey began to see beyond the yesteryear imagery in history books and explore more physically. It's been a learning curve and will continue as more means of connection to a place are established for a wider variety of people.

-Swapna Kothari

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.

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Donor Member

Rs. 25,000

Life Member

Rs. 5,000

Ordinary Member

Rs. 1000 / year

Student Member

Rs 200 / year

Corporate Patron

Member

Rs. 2,00,000

Corporate Donor

Member

Rs. 50,000

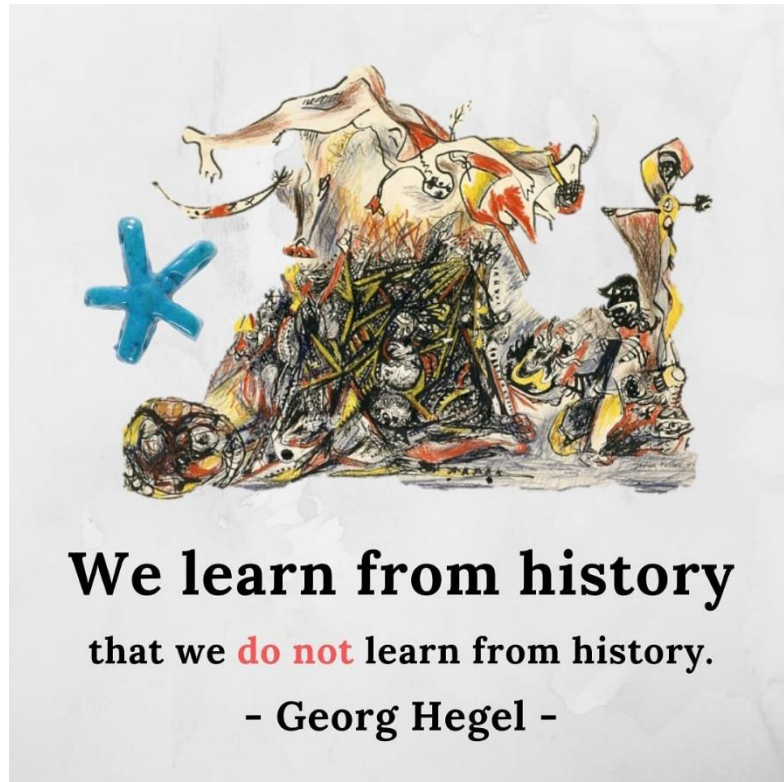
Corporate Member Rs.

25,000 / year

Have an idea you would like to explore?

Want to collaborate or organize an event virtually?

Get in touch with us!



Humor- Seemed apt for what has been going on, buckle up coz' 2020 has just begun. Source: As credited on image



Click of this Quarter- To hidden gems we await to explore once we are able to socialize again. Source: Swapna Kothari for the Heritage Trust

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:

All events stand suspended including the Bohri food walk and our Annual Viraasat lecture on 18th April 2020