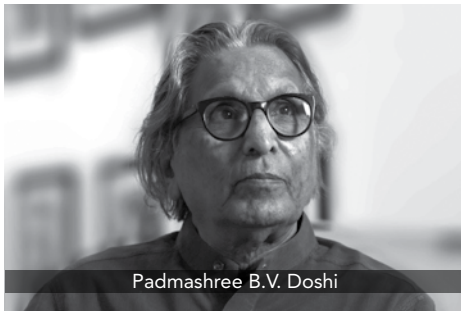


LIVING HERITAGE OF **ahmedabad** UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CITY

Heritage – cultural, social, and environmental – is what makes us who we are today and the way we live. The recent recognition that Ahmedabad has received as India’s first World Heritage City is a huge honour, one that should be celebrated yet cautiously controlled. This section features the invaluable views on Ahmedabad’s heritage from the pen of two stalwarts - Padmashree B.V. Doshi and Ar. Neelkanth Chhaya. They discuss about heritage being much more than mere tangible sites and properties. Heritage has more to do with Ahmedabad’s myriad people, their values of co-existence and compassion, and the 600 years of the city’s existence that accounts for shaping the tangible heritage that we see today. Their reflections on the culture and heritage of Ahmedabad and the insights into the process, challenges and the future of the city’s World Heritage status; is a treat to read and ponder.



Padmashree B.V. Doshi

Amdavadi Imprints

– Padmashree B.V. Doshi

TEXT COURTESY: Padmashree B.V. Doshi

The first question is, what is heritage? Heritage is, first of all cultural. A culture that is constantly changing, modifying, evolving; yet creates a heritage. So this heritage is culture which remains and continues over long period of time, which throbs inside our heart and our senses. It is like a flowing river. When the river is stagnant, it is no more the river, it is a *nala* and then it becomes a pond, maybe. Heritage is like a flowing river which is going towards ocean. It is a confluence of ideas. A small stream becoming a river, then it becomes multiple rivers, then it becomes a big river and goes to the ocean. And when it meets the ocean, it is the most modest

river that you will ever see. All the disturbances disappear, they become quiet, they become serene and there you give life to the whole place.

So to me, culture is a life-force. It cannot be only described in tangible ways. It is almost like saying, what is your soul. So, existence and indirect haunting of that existence is heritage. It is that heritage which you talk about, where you listen to your inner voice, in a like manner to Gandhiji’s thought.

I think the real Ahmedabad existed through the centuries: invasions came, went away... 600 years of history. There

is a hidden current of that heritage, that gets reflected in our subtle level of culture. It is not a crude culture. It cannot be measured, it is unmeasurable. Often when we talk of heritage, we talk about what is apparent, what is being transacted. Yet there is also what has been believed and what is it that nourishes life, sensitive life... what we call culture.

We classify heritage chronologically, and finally we talk in terms of tangible objects. We have gradually reduced our definition of heritage and now we are talking about only which is marketable. In the museum you see sculptures and then we talk about such and such a period and all that, but what do we know about the period, we only know that sculpture. And then somebody comes and says what is the price of this piece?... give it to me... So, this is really the fundamental thing we must understand. Now, we are looking in terms of building only, buildings without habitation... empty buildings, whether it is Sarkhej, whether it is Rani ki Vav or whether it is any building in the old city. They are without life. But actual heritage has a soul, and that soul is all the time murmuring and telling you I am there, I am there. So actually, heritage is our guardian, heritage is our inner voice, heritage is our spirit, and I only know that heritage through some examples of my life in Ahmedabad. In these 70 years lot of things have happened.

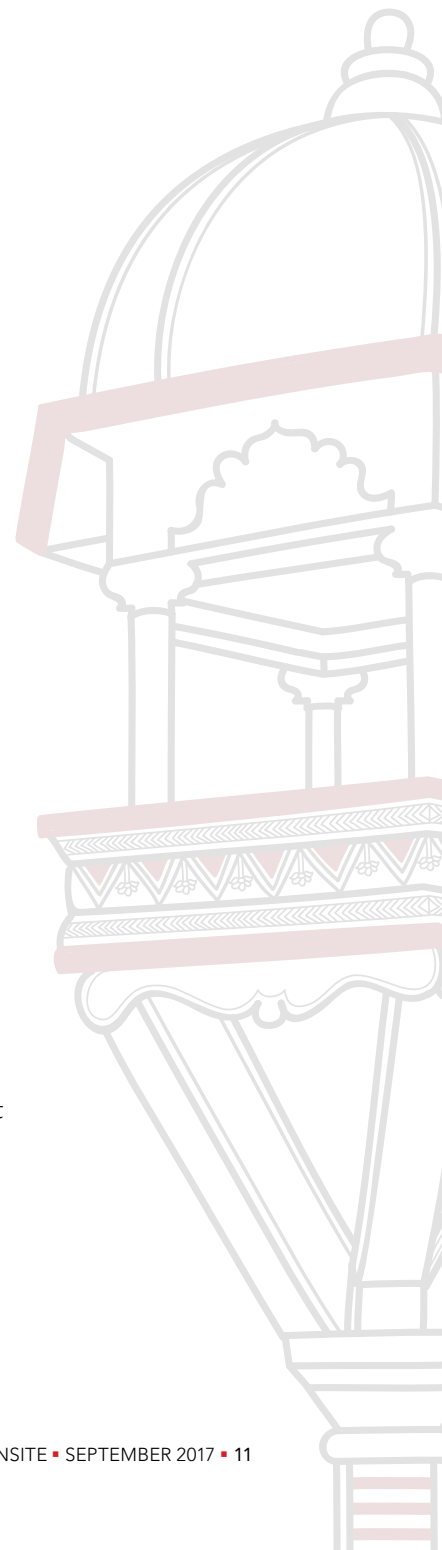
When we were putting together the city museum we had a great many images of the multiplicity of people and events that have shaped Ahmedabad. In all this, there was a hidden current demonstrating a spirit of generosity, of compassion, there was a spirit of sharing, there was a spirit of giving an added value to what we are doing and there was a spirit of saying that your life is supposed to be in the welfare of the society at large. And in that welfare, you would be talking about that culture which is our heritage. That is why museum came into Ahmedabad. Why Corbusier was invited for the

“I think the real Ahmedabad existed through the centuries: invasions came, went away... 600 years of history. There is a hidden current of that heritage, that gets reflected in our subtle level of culture”

museum? What is the name of the museum? 'Sanskar Kendra'. It is not an object. So, it represented the essence of what Ahmedabad culture stood for. So, museum was supposed to be the temple of Ahmedabad, open for all cultural, social, economic activities and deliberations. And so, *mazoor-mahajan*, all the industrialists and everybody supported that idea. And today, we don't talk about it.

How can we talk about heritage when what you are planning gets connected to only the market? How can you talk about it and then put a price tag?

How do you talk about heritage when things are in getting ruined? How do you talk about it when the city's peace is gone? And how can heritage be isolated as an island? Exactly the opposite of



the river, we are talking of the ocean and other side we are talking about pond. So, Ahmedabad heritage is like a pond, a little pond... why because, we are shrunk. The *shrestis* of Ahmedabad invited Corbusier to do the museum. They invited Corbusier to do two-three exemplary buildings. They invited Louis Kahn to design an institution.

If this spirit of openness had continued you would have had many more institutions of excellence. You would have a very different kind of a world and Ahmedabad heritage would have been a kind of University, in which the city would have become a city of the Universe. Actually, heritage city should be called 'City of the Universe' It is not so.

When I came here, I did not know anybody. Within one week I knew almost many many people, extremely hospitable, intelligent, well- trained, well-groomed industrialists, scholars, literary people, and I met them... the only discourse was culture... theatre, dance, music, debates. And how many scholars happened... Uma Shankar Joshi, Rasikbhai and others, Gandhiji. Why did Gandhiji came to Sabarmati? Why did he come? It was the Sabarmati or it was the place which had culture? So, if we talk of heritage, we should talk about revival of these qualities. There was generosity, there was compassion and there was a need to say we must do something. When I told Kasturbhai about the school of architecture,

“Actual heritage has a soul, and that soul is all the time murmuring and telling you I am there, I am there.”

immediately the second meeting he said to go ahead, do it. When visual art came, he said yes, do it. When university came, it was planned by Kasturbhai only and Amrutlal Sheth. Ahmedabad Education Society was planned by them only, industrialists. And what did they do? They did not ask for funding from anybody, they shared their expenses. So they bought huge amount of land with an idea that anybody who has intentions of setting a good institutions, we give him the land almost free. Today we talk of what is the price?

So, what do you think of Ahmedabad?

You think the facades will stay and the inside will go, renovations will happen, hotels will come, traffic will come, because you need cars, you need scooters? So, what will you do? So, the planner will say, no no we must widen the roads. But the heritage was connected through mixed land-use. Heritage was connected to energy conservation, energy-resource conservation. Heritage buildings took care of climate, lifestyle, activities and multiple choices and saving of time and energy. This was heritage. So today are we going to do that or not is the question.

Second question is in the changing times, if you get recognition from outside and if you accept those controls, are we going to fossilize the place? You can't change anything. Suppose you want to change, I don't know how much controls are going to be there. But there are lot of buildings which are old, the walls may be broken, fallen.. What will you do then? So, you have two problems, one is the recognition of the world you take from outside and you have got into a straight jacket, so that your life is frozen. So I feel heritage must be seen at a much larger scale and it should be value-based, culture-based and energy saving-based time and energy. And then we should look at it and restructure this.

Now having accepted the heritage nomenclature, what are the things we must do? So first of all, we must

rethink about the essentials that made Ahmedabad buildings or *mohalla* or old city of Ahmedabad, the most important city which sustained over 600 years. So, we should ask that question, what sustains for centuries and let us find out that what is sustaining. Two things work in a society: one is energy, time and the second is collaboration, interdependence. And I think interdependence is what should be understood.

And why only Ahmedabad's old city? What happens to other places? Are they going to be a part of the heritage or no? These are very important questions.

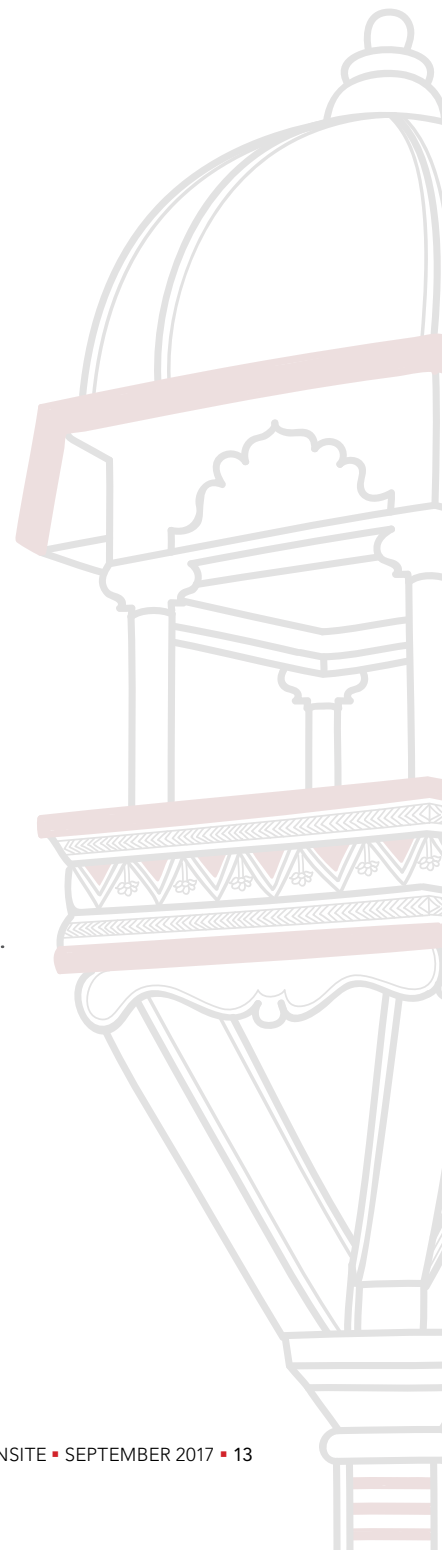
Lastly, most important, is heritage only to be made into a kind of Disneyland? These are the questions we need to talk about and we need to have a proper, organised, sequential meetings and get the people concerned, those who are residents, those who are outsiders and those who are concerned in real essence that we are talking about culture. And we are talking about that heritage which gave us that culture, what were the virtues of that culture and can we in the present context evolve similar culture today.

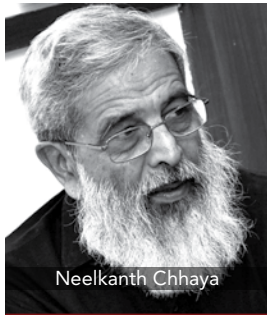
Why all the monuments are in ruins? I think best way would be to take all archaeological sites and restore them to the glory of the previous times. It will affect the heritage. Let's reverse the cycle. Let's say we make a campaign and create all the heritage buildings- maybe Hindu, Muslim, residences and what not. We make a plan of whatever was there about 150 years ago, whatever the time is. We make a map of that and then we also have the old city map. And we say we will improve all this because it is also, why only talk about the old city and why not talk about Ahmedabad as such and find heritage sites? Why not enlarge our scope? Then I think it will vibrate, because you will find Sarkhej and all the area to be changed, which we are not doing. It is like health. You cannot cure health by the modern technology. It has to be holistically done. ●

“We must rethink about the essentials that made Ahmedabad buildings or mohalla or old City of Ahmedabad, the most important city which sustained over 600 years. So, we should ask that question, what sustains for centuries and let us find out that what is sustaining”

Padmashree B.V. Doshi is known across the world as an architect, an urban planner, an academician, an institution builder and a mentor. In a career that spans across more than 62 years, Doshi has been instrumental in changing the discourse of architecture in post-independent India. Today, his internationally renowned projects are designed under the name of Vastu-Shilpa Consultants, with offices in Ahmedabad.

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Neelkanth Chhaya

Ahmedabad's World Heritage City status: Process, Vested Interests, Challenges and the Future.

– *Neelkanth Chhaya*

TEXT COURTESY: Neelkanth Chhaya

News of Ahmedabad's inscription in the Unesco World Heritage Cities List has been received with an air of jubilation in the city and the country. This is understandable and expected. However, such a status calls for a more measured and careful response.

Apart from various self-congratulatory announcements, there was also the sudden upsurge of champions of heritage, all of whom claimed to have done the most work to get this coveted recognition, and many who started building their personas in the media as experts in the field of conservation, heritage and Ahmedabad's history.

This desire to claim credit, whether or not based on facts, is an understandable manoeuvre. It gives political mileage to leaders and administrators who like to be seen as champions of the city's, state's and country's prestige. Experts and knowledgeable persons can benefit by facilitating and providing authoritative and privileged knowledge that would have business and financial value.

What needs to be remembered however is that "heritage" was generated over hundreds of years in the life of the city, by known and unknown people. The recent-most inhabitants and leaders of the city are only benefitting from the labours of their ancestors!

The Nomination Dossier as the Basis of Recognition:

It will be useful to understand how

a nomination is made by the "State Party" and processed by UNESCO, in order to understand how and why Ahmedabad has obtained this recognition and responsibility. (For a detailed understanding see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>)

To apply for a World Heritage City status, a country has to submit a "dossier" that shows how the proposed site fulfils the requirements of UNESCO's World Heritage Cities Programme. This is an elaborate document that requires detailed justification for considering the site as having "Outstanding Universal Value".

The claims for Outstanding Universal Value may be based on several factors. The tangible heritage would need to establish that there is a significant architectural, artistic and technological value that they represent. Settlements that show a distinct way of relating to the natural environment, and which supported a definite tradition could be demonstrated. These are some of the criteria that the dossier would demonstrate.

Intangible factors such as forms of social organisation and cultural developments would also need to be explained in terms of Outstanding Universal Values. Again, the details of such a documentation are varied and complex.

In addition, the dossier would have to propose measures for protection and management of tangible and intangible

aspects that compose the Outstanding Universal Values.

Subsequent to the submission of the document, UNESCO has a number of ways in which experts in the field of conservation and heritage would assess and verify the claims made in the document. This peer-review is professional and not affected by political pressures.

The proposal dossier is thus the most important part of the application for World Heritage City Status.

It is instructive also to see how the nomination process for Ahmedabad came about.

In December 2009, when Nicole Bolomey (an expert from UNESCO's India office) was visiting CEPT, the possibility of putting forward Ahmedabad for World Heritage City nomination was discussed with Prof. Vasavada, then Head of the Masters Programme in Conservation and Head of CEPT's Centre for Conservation Studies (CCS). It was thought that this would be most appropriate in view of Ahmedabad's completing 600 years in 2011.

Prof. Vasavada and his team at CCS immediately started working on the base material for the proposal. In April 2010 Government of India submitted a letter of application to UNESCO indicating intention to submit a proposal for inclusion of Ahmedabad in the tentative list for nominations. This was simultaneously announced at an International Conference on World Heritage convened by Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

UNESCO announced inclusion of Ahmedabad in the Tentative list for nominations on March 31st 2011. Centre for Conservation Studies and Prof. Vasavada were then formally given final responsibility for carrying through the work on the dossier and for assisting the government officials throughout the

nomination process. During this period clarifications, additions and assisting UNESCO assessors was done by the team.

Finally as we know, Ahmedabad was nominated and listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Cities List in July 2017.

Being professional, and realising the sensitivity of this document, neither Prof. Vasavada nor the CCS tried to garner fame or glory through the media. (For the documents, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1551/documents/>).

While the whole process was on, there were speculations regarding the dossier in the media and statements made by individuals in the field of heritage. It was claimed that the dossier was not properly made, that there were errors, that the claims were not sufficiently supported and other critical comments.

Even after the World Heritage City Status had been granted, these individuals claimed that the nomination had been accepted due to political manoeuvring, and not on the basis of the contents of the proposal dossier.

Yet, the same organisations and individuals very soon started claiming credit for the nomination!

Heritage As Real Estate?

For various reasons, it becomes advantageous to be part of the heritage scene. Being an expert in the field of heritage can enhance prestige and accrue financial benefits as well.

World Heritage City status becomes a tag for attracting tourism and for generating interest in real estate within the heritage city. Immediately after the announcement, there was much discussion in the media regarding the probable rise in property values in the city! Not much was discussed about how to protect the heritage, but there was speculation regarding land and property values!

“What needs to be remembered however is that “heritage” was generated over hundreds of years in the life of the city, by known and unknown people. The recent-most inhabitants and leaders of the city are only benefitting from the labours of their ancestors!”

The “Transfer of Development Rights” (TDR) that is granted to those who protect and preserve heritage properties is meant to compensate the owner who gives up redevelopment, as well as to support the owner in costs of preservation. In turn the owner can sell or use TDR for developing non-heritage properties, and build extra over and above the legally allowed limits there. While this measure is well-intentioned and useful, it can also trigger commercial transactions of heritage properties. And here is where being knowledgeable about heritage can allow individuals and organisations to facilitate deals and thus make financial gains!

The wholesale conversion of heritage to tourism bait makes the place become an empty shell, a museum-ised display with no living processes that are inherent to its authentic existence. Across the world, cities that cashed in on this now regret their actions. A recent example is of Jakarta (https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/nov/23/fata-square-unsubtle-gentrification-jakarta-old-town?CMP=share_btn_link).

This process of turning over the city to those who had little to do with its living culture is known as “gentrification”. Due to gentrification, ongoing or traditional societal processes are brought to an abrupt end, heritage is objectified, and life processes are displaced. In the same manner, treating the city simply as real estate, results in the same objectification and freezing.

The Challenges:

World Heritage City status can easily spark off a dynamic of change that can be a threat to the very heritage that led to recognition. What will be an important challenge to citizens and administrators alike is how to guide and regulate changes in a manner that the original impulses do not die out. So the first challenge is to assimilate change in a healthy manner. Commercial and touristic benefits will have to be secondary.

In order to do this the government, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, citizens and citizen groups and financial institutions will have to discuss and develop policies, laws, mechanisms and institutional formats for managing change. New technologies, new modes of living, new economic arrangements and new social forms will all have to be taken into account.

Secondly, maintaining continuity of the spirit of “Universal Human Values” that are part of the inscription would require much societal introspection and effort. The nomination suggests that the city is a valuable example of accommodating diversity. Various religions, languages, ethnic groups, economic classes have co-existed in the city over a long period of time. While there have been times of friction, on the whole there has been a societal value given to the acceptance of diversity. This has affected the architecture and the urban pattern of the city. As such there is much to learn from that traditional knowledge.

Thirdly, it is a city that has learned to husband and nurture its natural and human resources to bring about a balanced and non-destructive inhabitation and socialisation. Again, there are lessons that need to be integrated in any approach to the new.

All these are questions that need sustained and serious thought and creative action. Is Ahmedabad prepared to tackle these questions ?

The Intangible Values ought not to be Forgotten:

While almost all attention is presently focussed on tangible heritage, it is necessary to bear in mind the spirit that animated this heritage. We can begin by listing a few aspects of the intangible values as demonstrated in the events that shaped Ahmedabad.

A City of Religious and Ethnic Diversity: The city was founded by a Muslim sultan, adjacent to and as an extension of a

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Bhil settlement, intelligently weaving together existing patterns with new ideas of urban form, while carefully taking into account the topography, drainage and climatic aspects. Jain and Hindu merchants and artisans, Persian scholars and businessmen, people of many ethnic origins were part of the city and partners to its development. Parsi and Jewish communities found a place here. The Marathas and the Dutch and British had their own effects on the city. All this diversity was part of the city, and the city found ways in which the diversity could peacefully co-exist and synergise. As Ahmedabad grows, we need to respect and strengthen this attitude of inclusiveness.

The Languages of the City: This was a city where Gujarati, Urdu and Farsi languages and literatures developed. Gujarati happily adopted the Ghazal form from Farsi and Urdu, the novel and various poetic genres from English and even haiku from the Japanese language. In turn, Farsi, Urdu and English all developed distinct expressions here and were enriched by the cross currents of contact. With migrations from all parts of India during the phase of industrialisation, many other language communities established themselves. This rich heritage ought to become even stronger. Dialects and neighbouring languages and literatures, stories and myths all need to be celebrated and given free impetus.

Towards an Equitable Society: Ahmedabad's record in fighting for an open and equitable society is notable, especially in the 19th Century reform movements and the Gandhian period. The status of women was questioned and many movements to bring about healthier and more equitable gender relations became part of the churning of social reform. Caste discrimination was also challenged and, like gender, continues to be the subject of societal concern. This attitude of questioning societal inequities, and the participation of all sections of society in this process have been part of Ahmedabad's heritage

and need to be continuously kept alive. For this, allowing the airing of differing views, the freedom to state beliefs and the freedom of action to bring about change all need to be zealously guarded and maintained. Ahmedabad also was a pioneer in testing various models of relationship between the industrialist and the labour class. These efforts need also to be reinvestigated in this period of global economy.

Trusteeship and Wealth For The Community: An unusual aspect of Ahmedabad's business ethic was the idea that wealth was to be used for the common good. This abstract principle was the basis of many institutions that the city generated. Gandhiji suggested the idea of trusteeship and this was something that had strong effects in Ahmedabad. It would be interesting if the germinal thoughts of this value are nurtured further in Ahmedabad.

Over a period of time, Ahmedabad welcomed many different people, different languages, different social and cultural practices and different ideologies. It was open to discussion and questioning. It was sensitive to injustice and inequity. It based its survival on frugality and cooperation.

These values are the deep heritage of Ahmedabad, on which the superstructure of tangible heritage is built. It does not fear change but is not dazzled by newness. This is the real heritage.

Are we open enough, generous enough, wise enough to maintain this heritage that Ahmedabad has? ●

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Neelkanth Chhaya is an architect practicing out of Ahmedabad. He has taught at various places including at CEPT University, where he taught for over 25 years. He retired from CEPT as Dean of the Faculty of Architecture. He continues to teach at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology at Bangalore.
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