



Core Committee

Sameer Khera
Sameer Gaikwad
Arati Desai
Rati Desai
Jaideep Verma
Sandhya Gajjar

Editorial Team

Avi Sabavala
Sandhya Gajjar
Arati Desai
Alka Smart

Design and Layout

Pranjali Ambekar

Write to us at

623, GIDC Industrial
Estate, Makarpura,
Vadodara, Gujarat, India,
390010

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

An Event(full) Quarter!

The onset of the hot summer months brought in much action with events beginning early April and ending with the Virasat Lecture in June.

The first event saw the Sursagar Walk that was a great hit especially with the students and ended with a visit to the Shri Chimnabai Stree Udyogalay with its newly opened Gazra café. This is an initiative by our Patron HH Maharani Dr. Radhikaraje Gaekwad to provide employment to the LGBT community.

The month of May showcased the 4th edition of the regular Varsa ni Vaato as well as an encore of the popular Makarpura Medley. This time the Varsa ni Vaato saw two speakers; Curator Dr. Pratyush Patankar, the Curator of the Sayajibaug Zoo who regaled the audience about the heritage and history of the Zoo and our own Ms Swapna Kothari who unveiled the story behind the publications of the Baroda Collective a unique initiative to create an inventory of the built, natural and intangible heritage of our city.

On an early morning on the first day of June, 80 participants of all ages gathered at Sayajibaug. The goal was to explore the Zoo and see the efforts of the team led by Zoo Curator Dr. Pratyush Patankar to modernize and transform the Zoo by providing as much of a natural environment as possible to its winged as well as furry four-legged inhabitants.

Our Heritage Trust lays focus on collaborating and supporting efforts of other organisations that work for the heritage of the city. We supported the efforts of Life Spring Yoga Institute in celebrating the 10th International Yoga Day on July 21st. We have also collaborated with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) for their regular lecture series entitled "KALANUSANDHAN." The interesting presentation was by HH Maharani Dr. Radhikaraje Gaekwad on "Turban Jewels. Symbols of Divine Authority." The beautiful and serene ambience of the iconic Raja Ravi Verma Studio added a touch of nostalgia to the event.

The Virasat Lecture was the last event of the quarter. This time the audience got an insight about "the Grand Old Man of Baroda – Abbas Tyabji." Advocate of the Supreme Court of India, Mr. Anil Nauriya gave an interesting insight into the life and times of the legendary freedom fighter.

The rain gods have been kind to Baroda as well as the country as a whole, bringing much needed respite from the heat. We hope that the coverage given in these pages will encourage more of our members and readers to join us for our exciting events in the coming months.

Happy reading

Avi Sabavala

Viraasat Lecture 2024

The Viraasat Lecture, held on June 29, 2024, featured the esteemed writer and Supreme Court advocate Mr. Anil Nauriya. He delivered an inspiring talk on Abbas Tyabji, 'The Grand Old Man of Gujarat,' highlighting his remarkable contributions to the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements. Tyabji, a prominent leader and second-in-command to Mahatma Gandhi, hailed from Baroda, where his descendants still reside. This lecture aimed to shed light on this great freedom fighter from Vadodara, who remains not-so-very well known in his own city.



The Viraasat Lecture held at the Distillery
Alembic Art District



Mr. & Mrs. Nauriya

Heritage walk around Sursagar

The "Heritage Walk around Sursagar" was curated by Sandhya Gajjar, Founder-Member of the Heritage Trust, to celebrate World Heritage Day on 18th April. The walk was held on Sunday, 21st April and saw around 80 attendees. Conducted by Sandhya Gajjar and historian of Gaikwadi Vadodara, Chandrashekhar Patil, the walk highlighted the historically significant buildings around Sursagar, including Nyay Mandir, Lal Court, Music College, Pratap Talkies and Jubilee Baug.

The walk culminated at Maharani Chimnabai Stree Udyogalaya, which collaborated with us for this event. Participants enjoyed a light breakfast organized by Gazra Cafe, where Her Highness Radhikaraje Gaikwad shared the history of the institution.

The walk was a great success, allowing participants to rediscover, or perhaps discover for the first time, the beautiful Sursagar Lake and the remarkable buildings that surround it.



On the walk...



... and on the steps of Chimnabai Udyogalaya

Varsa ni Vaato

Varsa ni Vaato (Edition 4) was held on the 18th May at SEE, Baroda. The two speakers for the evening spoke on the necessity of preserving and conserving our natural and built heritage. Dr. Patankar is currently serving as the curator of Sayajibaug Zoo and is the In-Charge Director of Sardar Vallabhai Patel Planetarium in Sayajibaug. Through his talk, 'From Past to Present: Navigating Sayajibaug Zoo's Evolution', Dr. Patankar, amid much nostalgia, took the audience through the history of the much loved Zoo. He offered several insights not only into the history of the Zoo but also discussed recent initiatives as well as the Zoo's present and future endeavours.

"The making of a collective- A Midnight's Tryst", was also presented by architect Swapna Kothari to the Trust members in this edition of Varsa ni Vaato. It was a conscious effort to present the role of heritage in different sections while leading to its need in city planning.

The short talk included the journey of Ar. Swapna Kothari beginning with a shift from basic recording of our heritage to the fight for safeguarding it. The learnings obtained from various previous projects, led to the "midnight" conception of "Recognizing, Protecting and Celebrating" Baroda's heritage.

The Baroda Collective itself a journey of four years has made a benchmark in creating an accountable and detailed inventory of the city's built, natural and intangible heritage. With ongoing accessible digitization, Swapna's firm, CWRS, hopes this step soon leads to protecting heritage while we constantly converse around conservation.



Dr. Patankar speaks...



...Ar. Swapna Kothari being presented a memento by past President Vikram Singhal

Heritage walk at the **Sayajibaug Zoo**

Exploring the iconic Sayajibaug Zoo with Curator Dr. Pratyush Patankar was an experience for Heritage enthusiasts. The excellent aviary that sought to recreate the natural ambience for the birdlife was the highlight of the two hour visit. Heritage Trust thanks the Curator and his team for sharing their knowledge and insight with the participants.



Enthusiastic participants at the Aviary...



...Dr Patankar addresses the walk participants

10th International Yoga Day

Celebrating International Yoga day at Prof. Manekrao's Jumma Dada Vyayam Mandir

Heritage Trust in association with the Life Spring Yoga Institute celebrated the 10th International Yoga day at the historic venue with an event attended by more than 100 participants. The Life Spring Yoga Institute led by its founder, Dr Ritesh Patel, conducted a yoga session for the participants which was followed by a Rope and Malkhamb demonstration by the young members of the Vyayam Mandir.

The Managing Trustee of the Vyayam shala, Mr Rajendra Harpale spoke about the history of the institution and its premises, its distinguished faculty and visionary leaders. Sameer Gaikwad closed this inspiring event with a vote of thanks.



Kalanusandhan **IGNCA**

The Kalanusandhan Lecture Series for 2024-25 is organized by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), Regional Centre Baroda, in collaboration with the Heritage Trust. This series features expert speakers from various disciplines related to art and culture. The inaugural event was a talk titled "Turban Symbols, Symbol of Divine Authority," with HH Radhikaraje Gaekwad as the speaker. Held in the restored Raja Ravi Verma Studio at the Laxmi Vilas Palace Compound, the event was also graced by HH Rajmata Shubhanginiraje Gaekwad. The talk discussed the significance of the different jewels worn by the Gaekwad rulers in the past.



HH Radhikaraje addressing the gathering

The **Zoo Story**

As somebody who has grown up in Sayaji Gunj, the Sayaji Baug or what it was then known as, the Kamati Baug, was extremely dear to us –as kids, adolescents and young people. Just a hop, skip and jump away from my home, that vast garden offered us so many options to explore and entertain ourselves – the Museum, the Zoo, the Band Stand, the Toy Train, Elephant/ Pony/Bakra-gaadi rides, the Traffic Circle (where you could rent children's cycles, tricycles, paddling cars and learn simple traffic rules to follow), to tumble about on the Junglegym, see-saws, swings ...Then, as we grew older, it became the nearest and healthiest place to go for a brisk morning walk (not as crowded as it is today), and enjoy the wonderful seasonal flowers blooming in their beds that the gardeners were forever tending to.

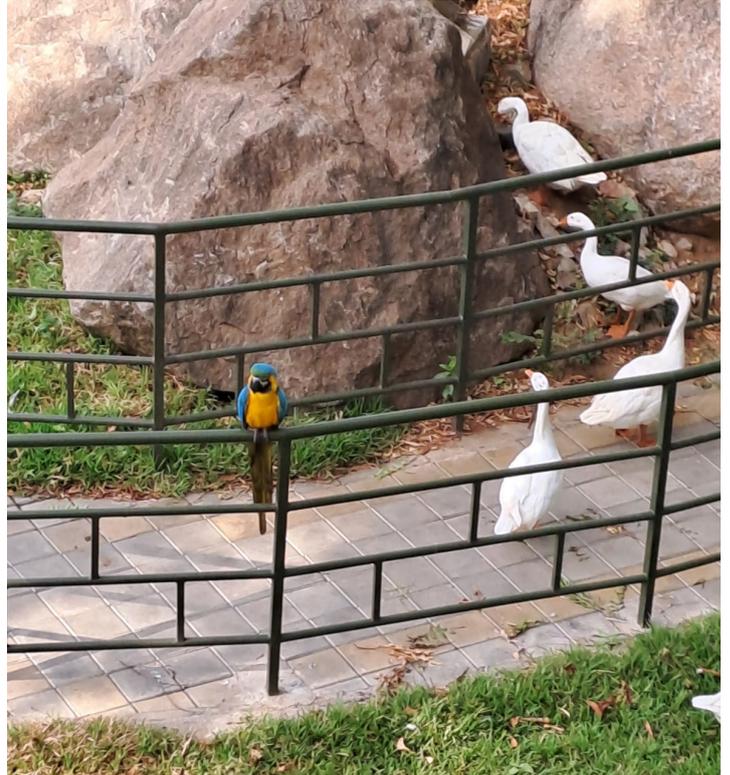
How we take the spaces we love for granted! Would you believe it ... even today the Sayaji Baug is the largest public garden (112 acres) in the heart of a city in all of Gujarat. It celebrated its 145th Foundation Day on the 8th of this January. Surprised?

This and much more interesting and inspiring information about our favourite public park was offered by zoologist Dr. Pratyush Patankar, who is currently the Curator of the Sayaji Baug Zoo and in-charge Director of the Sardar Patel Planetarium (1976) in the Sayaji Baug when he spoke about his Zoo at Heritage Trust's quarterly Vaarsa ni Vaato (Conversations around Conservation) event at SEE Foundation in Makarpura GIDC on last Saturday. The Park continues to serve as much-needed green 'lungs' or continuously generating ecological capital that helps set-off the increasing pollution levels in Baroda on a daily basis.

The Maharaja selected this land on the banks of the Vishwamitri river in 1875 that was then on the outskirts of the town, about 3 kms from the walled city, in a village called Kamatipura (it still exists, where the Kamdev Mahadev temples are situated on the Vishwamitri banks). Hence the garden was commonly and popularly referred to as Kamatibaug. The villagers of Kamatipura were relocated to Navi Dharti area. The land for the garden was specially selected by the Maharaja to create a more congenial relationship between the British Resident's army that was stationed in Camp (Fatehgunj) and the local people who were not happy with the British decision to send the earlier ruler, Malharrao into exile on apparently fake charges.

For the responsibility to landscape the earmarked land into a public park with multi-faceted uses, the Maharaja appointed William Goldring, a British landscape architect, with a reputation for having worked on several different and prestigious garden landscape projects in England alone. He was invited to India, specifically to Baroda, to landscape the 700 acres then surrounding the proposed Laxmi Vilas Palace as well as the planned Public Park. In 1875, he was in charge of the Herbaceous Department at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London. He was assisted by the young German horticulturist, Gustav Krumbiegel, then working at the Kew Gardens, London. The Maharaja also offered him employment as state horticulturist. Krumbiegel started his career in India in Baroda as Curator of the Botanical Gardens in 1893. He stayed in Baroda till 1908.

According to Dr. Patankar, while the Maharaja planned a Zoo in the Park as a part of an educational program for the people of Baroda, he also had a private zoo in the Palace campus. Interest in wildlife was a major passion with most royal families – while they enjoyed hunting as a sport (as against poaching which is a crime). For instance, the Maharaja had domesticated cheetahs, one of whom was named Alibaba, who were used to hunt blackbuck, the fastest antelope on the planet. Cheetahs are the only species amongst the Big Cats that can be trained; references related to cheetah-training are found in the *Akbarnama* as well, according to Dr. Patankar. There is a blackbuck sanctuary at Sunderpura, near Varnama village on the Vadodara-Mumbai highway, where there used to be a Shikharkothi, where the Maharaja and his friends would enjoy a bout of hunting.



In the Aviary...

In the Fatesinh Museum on the Laxmi Vilas Palace campus, there is a lovely sculpture of two cheetahs on leash with their handlers. Patankar's own parents who lived on Dandia Bazaar Road remember the handlers taking the blindfolded cheetahs for a walk down the road! Once the awareness of many species being endangered became globally widespread, the royal families were often the first to support, fund and become spokespersons for all wildlife-saving and protection initiatives. In recent times, Lt. Col. Maharaja Fatehsinh Gaekwad, Sayajirao's great grandson, was the Chairperson of the World Wildlife Fund for India. Sadly, cheetahs went extinct in India a year after Independence.

The idea of the Zoo is a European concept, explained Dr. Patankar. The whole of Europe was a conglomeration of different royal houses. When the world opened up towards the end of the Middle Ages, and ships sailed across the world discovering new continents, unknown countries, strange-looking animals and birds. This led to a flourishing trade in exotic species as well as spices! People were excited to see and observe animals and birds from a safe distance exhibited in enclosures called 'Zoo', that they could never see in their own forests. The idea caught on with Indian royalty too. Those states which were financially well off managed to establish large and well-maintained Zoos – these included Baroda, Mysore, Junagadh, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Udaipur, Kolhapur ...



The Ladies Club Building, a heritage structure with a vibrant history

The privacy of animals and safety of their keepers was very important in Zoo planning in earlier times too. Feeding of animals was never compromised. They were given the right food, enough of it and on time. Animals reproduced well in captivity, always a sign of a good Zoo. Also breeding was done systematically and scientifically so that the bloodlines were maintained. So in earlier times too, unknowingly nevertheless, Zoos were well managed.

In Sayaji Baug, the Zoo was designed smartly. The herbivores and carnivores were separated, mostly each on either side of the Vishwamitri river that flowed through the Park. Dr. Patankar maintains that the Waghkhana (tiger enclosure) with the open space behind the cages is one of the best designed enclosures he has seen with use of very strong material that made sure both animal and viewer were protected. We can't make that kind of building any more. So he has kept all of the old structures intact and repurposed them for other functions required in the Zoo.

While on the Waghkhana, I must share an unforgettable event. When I was in high school, one afternoon, a student from the Science faculty wandered into the Zoo and reached the open enclosure in the Waghkhana. A tigress (I forget her name now but I used to know it) was resting in the shade of a bunch of bamboos.

God alone knows what got into the young man's head, he jumped the broad *mehndi* hedge, climbed the 20+ foot high metal bars, jumped into the enclosure, and walked to the tigress, who was now awake and sitting up and probably puzzled as hell. The idiot then, as the rumour went, slapped the tigress. In a fraction of a second, the surprised tigress whacked him so hard across the head, it broke his neck and he slumped, dead. The tigress's claws almost wiped out a side of the student's face and it had begun to bleed profusely. It was believed that the tigress had probably tasted human blood so for a number of years, the poor animal, for no fault, was kept in isolation and the keepers were very careful during feeding time.

After this incident, the one single reason that all of us, then kids, had to go to the Waghkhana was to peer at this tigress alone in her cage. On one such winter morning, a bunch of us were in front of the Waghkhana (which now housed a few lions and lionesses as well), and an empty bullock cart rattled down from the main road (at that time there was a regular thoroughfare that allowed vehicular traffic from Karelibaug to cut across the Park, cross the bridge and exit the second gate opening on the Fatehgunj main road near the Fine Arts Faculty). As the big cats in their cages smelt and saw the bullock, they all got up, sauntered towards the front of their cages, their faces up against the bars, eyes fixed on the bullock, some of them emitting a low, hungry growl. The bullock sensed the danger and began to nervously paw and kick the ground, wanting to get out from that space in the fastest possible time. The empty cart shook and trembled. The cart-driver who was quite relaxed till then, with no deliveries to make and an innocent desire to look at the lions on his way to work, sprang to his feet, pulling at the ropes to control the terrified bullock and his shaking cart. As we crouched in a corner, hoping the bullock wouldn't rush in our direction, we saw the cart driver finally able to turn the bullock's head away from the lions, and drive the cart away.

I have never seen a heavy bullock cart scampering away so fast in my entire life!

The Zoo Story: Part II

So I did the Zoo Walk on last Saturday morning. And what a delight it turned out to be! Our old zoo, of which we had many fond memories as kids, peeped out once in a while from under the new makeover the Zoo has undergone. These were largely the heritage structures that had specific functions in the old zoo. Fortunately, with Dr Pratyush Patankar as the Zoo Curator (and as a Baroda resident himself with happy recollections of time spent there as a youngster), he is fortunately aware of the value of the old structures and has re-purposed them to handle the several other functions, especially veterinary, that are essential for effective functioning of a good Zoo.

Now with the zoo adhering to the specifications ordered by the Central Zoo Authority of India (1992), we find that the number and variety of large animals has considerably decreased compared to the olden days. There has been a long-standing plan for many years to shift the Zoo to the Ajwa area for lack of adequate space at its present site. Perhaps as and when the Zoo acquires larger animals, they will probably be housed there.

For the last many years, the Zoo has been building up its collection of exotic birds and were successful in breeding them as well. And so, when the modernization of the Zoo was planned, the Bird Aviary became the focus of attention. Built at a cost of Rs. 15 crore, the new Walk-Through Aviary has been acknowledged by the Zoo Authority as one of the innovations in Zoo Design in India. It was opened for the public in 2022 and is designed for visitors to move along elevated pathways rising from ground level to a gradual ascent of 20 feet and then a slope downwards. Long metal pillars, at a distance from each other, rise at angles to hold up almost invisible-looking but very strong nets that form a vast canopy housing the several old trees and palms. Within this canopy, the birds can fly freely, nest in trees, feel at home as much as possible. On the ground, small ponds allow for aquatic birds like ducks, swans, geese, herons, cranes to swim around, congregate and bask on the pond edges. Patches of grass and little hay shelters are maintained for them to rest and nest. We saw some eggs laid in these too! As we are way above them on the raised pathways, they go about their business undisturbed. Already, more than 60% of the bird population in each species has multiplied through processes of natural breeding, artificial breeding, foster-parenting, and all techniques combined to get a number of healthy chicks of local and exotic breeds.



Macaws in the Aviary

Among the birds, the parrots/parakeets/macaws have muscular tongues and can therefore be trained to speak like humans. Many of them imitate regularly heard sentences or phrases also, and that too without training. In fact, a couple of African Grey Parrots in the Zoo had learned to imitate the Zoo security's whistle as well as his oft-repeated hustle, *Chalo chalo, agal vadho*. So whenever they saw large groups of people, they would blow the whistle and repeat the hustle after it, and people would fall in line and move forward!

We can't have all birds in the Zoo in the Net Aviary, explains Manav Mehta, the education officer of the Zoo, accompanying us. Birds also have their own 'social preferences', they do not always get along with all other birds. So even though the net canopy is quite large, it is still a good idea to keep certain species separate from others. So just behind the Net Aviary, are the bird cages. The old *chatri*-roofed octagonal bird cages were largely demolished, except one large *popat-bangli* that had eight cages, that were inter-connected with each other and has been deliberately repaired and put back into use. Sayajirao III believed in numerology and therefore a lot of what he built were eight-sided. Being respectful of the Maharaja's belief, the new Aviary has also been designed as an octagonal structure.

The new bird cages are very large and generally house only a male and female of the same species. An important, and sensitively, designed aspect of these cages are that a large part of the roof is open to the sky, though barred, allowing for sunlight and fresh air to stream in. Shortly Phase 2 of the expansion of the Aviary will begin.

We then walk across the old tarred bridge over the Vishwamitri to the Waghkhana/Reechkhana. It is the best view of the Vishwamitri one can get in the city, with both its banks lush with canopied trees and thick undergrowth. We even spotted one large turtle and a crocodile lazily basking in the water! The bridge is considered unsafe for any kind of heavy traffic movement. So it is banned for the public too. Only Zoo and Garden employees are allowed to walk or bike across by special permission. Otherwise, you have to get out of the Park and come in from the Bal Bhavan side. The tigers and the lions in this part of the Zoo are in large open-to-sky areas on opposite sides of the road. A deep and wide ditch, shored with a high enough boundary wall keep the big cats safe to saunter about in their large open yards with bamboo groves. Beyond the wall, visitors can stand and watch them, hopefully without whistling or yelling or making funny noises to get the animal's attention. As a special treat, we were taken to the old Waghkhana, and one of empty cages unlocked for us to go in and check them out. These series of cages further opened into the largish open-to-sky enclosure, an unusual structure in its time. That part of the Zoo is now off-limits to the public but the old facilities are used for quarantining of animals and other Zoo activities.



The larger enclosures for exotic birds

When the Zoo was donated by the Maharaja to the city Municipality, the trained staff was transferred as well. The Maharaja was very particular about picking up the right persons who would look after the animals and the skills they had. This is a fabulous blessing according to Dr Patankar, since he is now working with staff who are third or fourth generation zoo keepers, who have often lived and grown up in the zoo, watching their parents look after and interact with the animals and picked up valuable skills along the way. They are not very educated but their deep knowledge and understanding of animal behavior is unbeatable and extraordinarily useful, especially in emergencies. Even today, the animal keeper is always consulted before taking any decision regarding that animal or bird or reptile. Experience is better rated than book knowledge. Most of them have got their jobs in the 'varsai' (inherited) category when their fathers died in service. Sometimes they sit with the Zoo team and recount stories of how they saw their grandfathers and fathers work with animals and what they did. Dr. Patankar believes that these people are really the backbone of the Zoo. They minutely observe each and every animal in their care and report to him about whether the animal is refusing food or water, whether it has vomited or whether there is any change in its shit, or behaving strangely in any way. This information is conveyed to the veterinarians which helps in making sure the animal is well-looked after!

Dr Patankar has also treasured the *varsai* of the names given to each animal wing by the Maharaja – popatkhana, waghkhana, reechkhana, hathikhana, harankhana, bandarkhana, chidiyakhana. He has kept the same names and for every new section he develops, he tries to have a name that can have a *-khana* after it. And that's as it should be, he maintains. The Zoo Authority prefer to give modern English names – Cat Complex, Primate Plaza, and so on!



The old bridge dividing the Zoo



Paresh tiger roaming in a large enclosure

When we were at the old empty hathikhana (near the Ladies Club Building), Dr. Patankar remembered the three cow-elephants that the Maharaja had gifted to the Zoo – Anarkali, Champakali, Gulabkali. How clearly I remember that because each had her name written in coloured chalk on her forehead! Then, there used to be elephant rides (animal rides are now banned by the Zoo Authority) for kids and a cement and concrete structure probably still stands on the tree-lined walkway to the Bandstand which was used for the elephant to stand while the kids climbed up from the staircase and onto the *howdah/ambary*, the rectangular wooden cushioned seat, that was tied to the animal's back. There were also *bakra-gaadi* rides for smaller children, the majestic white long-haired he-goats standing a good five feet tall (you don't see such large goats these days), with curled horns, a long beard, twinkling eyes, trotting along pulling a colourfully decorated little cart with laughing children in them, and with ringing bells that warned people to get out of the way! The cart is still with the Zoo and one of Dr. Patankar's pet projects-on-the-anvil is to have a small Museum where these heritage items related to the Zoo can be displayed.

Could the abandoned Ladies Club building be used for the same?

Sandhya Gajjar

Heritage Humour

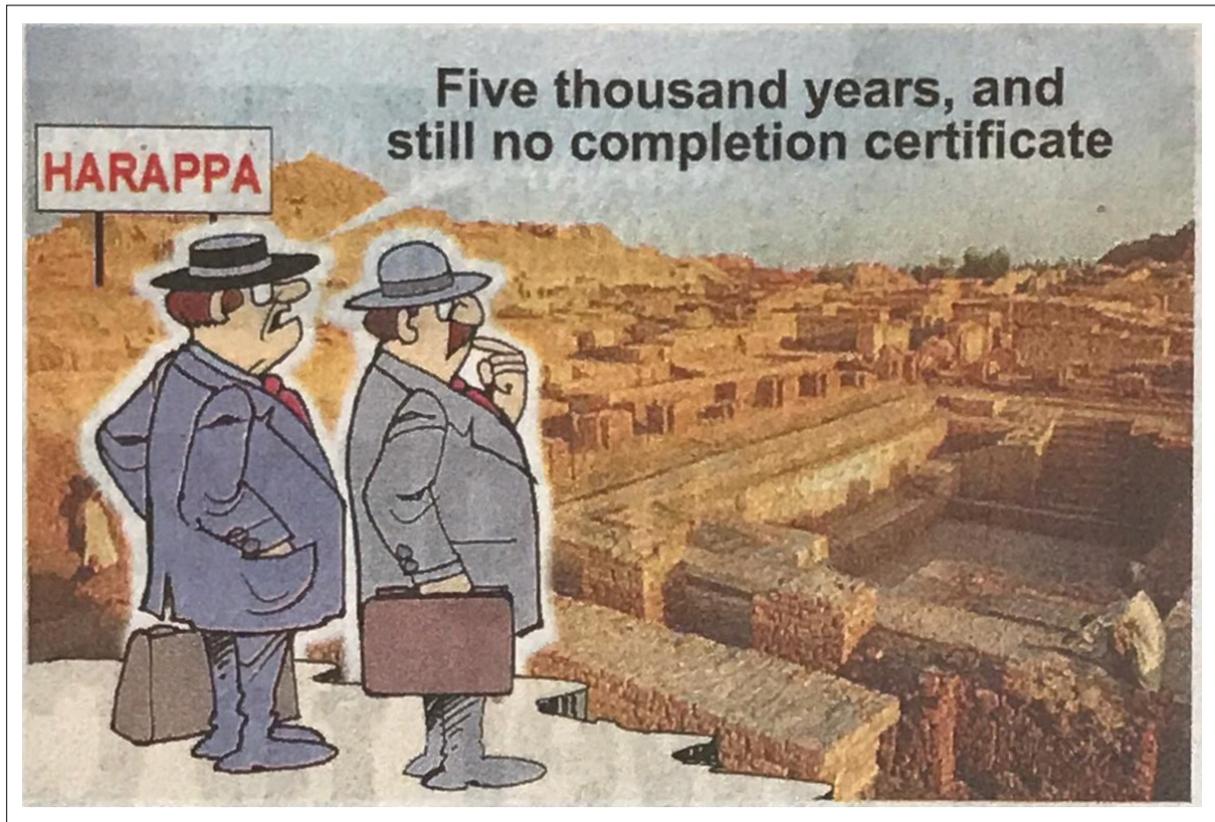


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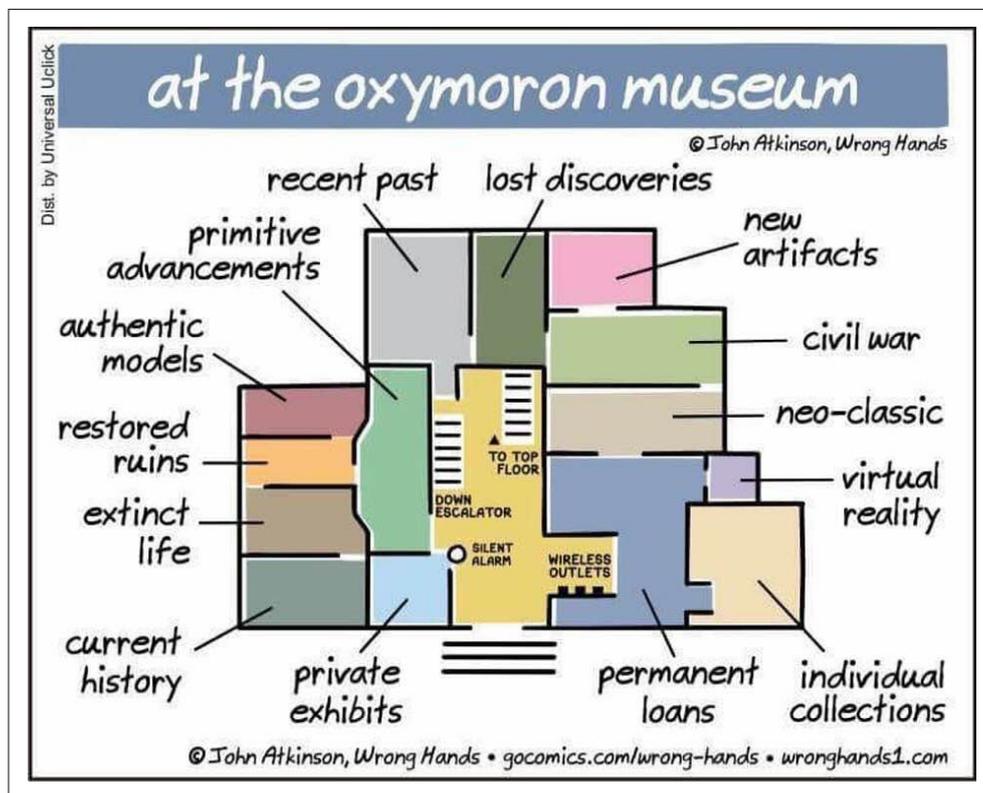


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