

ON A GLOBAL TRACK

Ahmedabad is going global and the signs of these changing times are ample ...

Umang Hutheesing

The Ahmedabadi citizen is a globe-trotter leaving his footprints everywhere from the outbacks of Australia, safaris in Africa, monumental tours of Europe, cruises in the Mediterranean, or exploring the Andes to the Amazon or be it the glaciers of the Alaska. The presence of this global Ahmedabadi with his *thepla*, *khakhra*, *chevdo* and *chavanu* is felt everywhere.

To facilitate this global integration, Ahmedabad has come up with a swanky new International airport which is world class and the best of world airlines will love to take the Amdavadi explorer to yonder shores. Being global in the air must be matched being global at the ground and the Ahmedabad BRTS has won global acclaim and award in Washington making it a feather in Ahmedabad's cap.

With all flights and roads leading to Ahmedabad, the Vibrant Gujarat Investment Summit being held here with global partners will surely raise the business infrastructure to global competitiveness and global markets. Flying high on the international Kite Festival, the masters of this sport form across the world fly their dragons and butterflies over the Sabarmati sky, making it one of the most important kite festivals internationally.

Health is wealth and Amdavadis know it too well and we are the biggest drug producers globally and the Ahmedabad Pharma giants are succeeding in making the world a healthier place. The medical fraternity is doing their bit too and we have several global conferences for better health and longevity in our amazing city.

Education is the key for growth and global integration of our youth. With Ahmedabad University collaborating with Cambridge UK, one of the best education names in the world and NID leading the design forums across the world and contributing to stalwarts like Ferrari, definitely puts Ahmedabad in the fast lane. Ahmedabad

Saptak and the Guinness Book of World Records takes note of it. The Vikram Sarabhai International Art Festival which brings to the city the best of the Performing Arts and is recognised as an important festival across the world. Not just here but even in the cultural capital of the world- Paris, it is Ahmedabad which is shining. "Les Deniers Maharajas", an exhibition of

1.5 Lakh postings praising the exhibition will pop up just from Europe! And it was, Mallika Sarabhai who danced for the opening of Festival of India in France. It is quite obvious that the Ahmedabadis are taking the global cultural world by storm. Both these events were in Paris which is the hub for UNESCO and with Ahmedabad celebrating its 600 Birthday, we are ambitious and optimistic to be awarded the status of World Heritage City. The decision makers for this are all seated in Paris and it was a pleasure exposing them to Ahmedabad in their own turf. In time, when Ahmedabad becomes a World Heritage City it will proudly rub shoulders with great cities



Pierre Berge, Umang Hutheesing and Fredrick Mittrand (French Cultural Minister)

based NGOs are also a force to reckon with, Hansiba the Fashion brand launched by SEWA has roped in none other than Hillary Clinton as their Global Brand Ambassador, a heavy dose of power and glamour, Ahmedabadi ishstyle.

With infrastructure and economics in place, art and culture can't be far behind. Ahmedabad

has already kick-started the Ahmedabad International Film Festival which has brought globally acclaimed films to cinelovers of the city. This is enriching the entertainment scenario of our city and bringing the world to our multiplex.

Every New Year kick starts one of the longest and biggest Classical Music Festivals in the world,

Royal Costumes of the Maharajas was organised from here and put Ahmedabad in the vocabulary of Fashion Gurus globally. Karl Lagerfeld, Pierre Berger-YSL, Ralph Lauren, Fredrick Mittrand and several top end global celebrities paid homage to this three month Extravaganza. Use the search engine and more than

like Paris, Rome, Athens, Kyoto and the like and that would be a proud moment for all of us.

With our swanky new airport bringing in the best of the world has to offer and taking the wonderful spirit of Ahmedabad across the globe.

(THE AUTHOR IS A LEADING FASHION CONSULTANT)



REVELING IN ART POWER

Amdavadis can now extend their original thinking to understanding and buying art

Harssh Shah

Art is the ultimate luxury money can buy. For an economy to be able to generate a large number of art collectors, it needs to be robust and that too for several decades in a row. The West has an organised art market, educated and well informed art collectors and institutions and galleries promoting art. India is at the threshold of the 'economically arrived' status. Sales of lifestyle brands are at an all time high and will only increase. India is steadily evolving towards becoming a spending economy.

Gujaratis have the money, exposure, taste; but they lack the knowledge and awareness when it comes to art. What drives this lack of awareness, is limitation of choice. The predominance of certain trends and availability of works of a select few artists; lack of access to nationally acclaimed art critics and articles by art historians; low frequency of quality art exhibits, seminars and debates; and lack of availability of reputed art magazines are among the few factors contributing to this vacuum of knowledge.

The last decade has witnessed Amdavadis becoming aware about art, but what construes as art, is very limited. Art is treated more like an investment or a decorating tool for the house. Galleries promoting artists or art works with a guarantee of money doubling in few years, has added to the frenzy of the already calculative Gujarati, who is genetically engineered to think only about money and returns.

Amdavadis should be aware that merely buying a Husain or Raza is not going to get their collection entry into auction houses such as Sotheby's or Christies or for that matter get them a buyer when they want to sell it. Smart art collectors look out of which year Husain made a particular work, as they know that the artist was at his peak in those years. Documentation and provenance are also equally important while buying art.

Serious and astute art collectors normally spot emerging talent at an affordable price and build their collections over a period of time. David and Chester Herwitz are prime examples of art collectors who have created a massive collection of Indian art works. They spotted Jogen Chowdhury, Tyeb Mehta, FN Souza and the likes, when they were still emerging and struggling. They

bought their works for peanuts and now are getting millions of dollars for each art work.

Gujarati art collectors need to graduate to the next level and start making informed decisions. It is very important to read the resume of the artist, research the background and kind of collector base the artist enjoys.

If Amdavadis can be original, novel and unique in their business ideas, why can't they extend that original thinking to collecting art? Budgetary constraints of art collectors should induce sensibility to buy an original work by an upcoming artist

BEFORE YOU INVEST IN AN ORIGINAL WORK OF ART, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- Has the artist done any shows abroad?
- Is he/she being pursued by any auction house?
- What is the media's take on the artist?
- Know your gallery: Which gallery is promoting the artist, does the leadership of that gallery know what they are talking about?
- How has the artist's work progressed over the years: is there any depth, pain, frustration, struggle, anguish in his/her works?

'The warmth of the people here made me stay put for 20 years'

Dr Pascal Chazot

October 1990. My Indian Airlines flight lands in a city called Ahmedabad. I have been sent here by my Government, where I am a category A civil servant, to head its French Cultural centre called Alliance Française. When I announced in France that I was going

to Ahmedabad, everyone looked at me with a big question mark in their eyes: Amedawhat? I came out of the airport, walking from the plane to the tiny terminal. And from then started my long journey into this city where, 20 years later, I am still staying put.

Upon arrival, I remember the trip from the airport to the hôtel, specially the beautiful big horses in clay at Usmanpura (which are unfortunately not there anymore). I recall also the Paldi crossroads with its very original decor of old copper pots and vessel (incidentally, these too have vanished). There are memories of poetry and music in beautiful mansions of Gujarat. But mostly, the warmth of the people I met here made such a deep impression on me that I became hooked to this city.

When I was asked by Ahmedabad Times

to write this article, explaining what is the USP of this city that made me decide to stay here, I had to think for some time, because, yes, there are not only pleasant things which come to mind, between the epidemics of malaria or chikungunya and the heat and dust. But, yes, there is something binding about this city. It is probably different for different people, but it has definitively to do with the extraordinary quality of some of the people we meet here. This is the city where I could find a group of fantastic people with whom I could create an incredible school, the Mahatma Gandhi International School. And above all, it is here that I met my wonderful spouse, for which I thank God every day of my life.

Amedawhat? Ahmedabad, the good city.

(THE WRITER IS THE FOUNDER OF THE MAHATMA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL)

An ode to the citizens of Ahmedabad



Garba goes phoren

Every year many garba groups from Ahmedabad go abroad during Navratri ...

Shruti Jambhekar | TNN

Swaying bodies. Pulsating music. Colourful dresses. Playful moods. And the addiction called garba. The revelry of nine nights of Navratri is sans frontiers now. Yes, it's not confined to India anymore. The magic of garba has spread its wings across the globe. Yes—garba is surely travelling continents. Those who have observed the Navratri in USA or UK often opine that people there are far more traditional when it comes to celebrating festivals. And that calls for performers from India to add a touch of tradition and authenticity to the celebrations. No wonder every year at least 25-30 groups from Gujarat and Mumbai head to various destinations in the United States and United Kingdom. Interestingly, now garba groups are also going to Australia, New Zealand and Bangkok for that dash of authentic touch. And there's no greater joy than to dance to the tunes of "pankhida....." under a starlit sky.

And detailing on garba going global, noted singer Devang Patel says, "Garba performances are very popular and highly acclaimed by people across the world. It has surely become an identity of Gujarat. A number of dance troupes and singers from Ahmedabad travel to destinations



like USA, UK, Australia, certain African countries. I never go abroad to perform during Navratri but post Navratri—I do go to the United States to perform. And last year, when I performed in USA on a weekend post Navratri, I remember the mayor of the city joining us in the garba and the performances going on till the wee hours of the morning. It surely is a delight to watch so many enthusiastic Indian crowd swaying to the beats of pulsating music outside the country!"

Are you wondering why singers are so eager to perform in foreign destinations? On being asked Vipul Trivedi, a singer from Ahmedabad who keeps performing in America says, "I have been performing in the USA during Navratri for last so many years. It is really an amazing crowd out there and the best thing is that they really are sticking to traditions and follow them very religiously. The artistes get lot of respect, love and affection from people abroad and it gives a very special feeling." Even a budding artist like Jignesh Shah, who has performed on a number of occasions in Bangkok says, "People were surprised when they got to know about me performing in Bangkok— but Gujarati people are going global and so is garba! And I really consider it as a great opportunity to per-



form for those who are out of India and miss celebrating festivals at home." And now interestingly garba is not just a part of the Navratri celebrations. As says Nehal Dave, who is part of one of the dance performance group, "Garba is no more restricted to performing during Navratri. We are busy all 12 months of the year. Our group travels to destinations like Russia, Spain, New Zealand and many other foreign destinations for cultural summits to represent Gujarat's folk dance." Even as Gujarat surges ahead in terms of growth and development, garba also adds a vibrant touch to the rich cultural heritage of the state. And the heart-warming beats of the dhol brings life alive in continents across the world.

