

There's something about Ahmedabad

Anyone who has ever spent some years in this city that Ahmed Shah established will be taken in by it. Many people come here and hate its dusty and unruly traffic, but end up wanting to live nowhere else. Others have wanted to be here from the moment they set foot upon it, this includes visitors from other states but also from other countries.

I grew up in this city, then still more like an oversized town than the "Mega city" it is to become soon. Though it was on the new side of town far from the old cities *pol*s, it was still a quiet, sleepy, residential area. The sun filtered down on beautifully laid out bungalows through dusty *neem* and *asopalav* trees. The day started with the call of the vendors and the passing of school children with their knapsacks on their backs. We as children knew no fear of the traffic; we played and practically lived on the street as each season brought another game into focus. By midday the *pyalabarni* calls would start, that is when one exchanged old clothes or paper for utensils. Then at around four came the call that got all the kids into their hiding places from where we would call back.... *Oooooooooo* that was the milkman. He had this strange call when he arrived at his customers and we could not resist calling back to his great disgust.

The evenings were spent with the kids playing mainly on the streets or traipsing from one home to the other. As the street was mainly occupied by Maharashtrians and some Patels we of no religious or community background floated between them and took advantage of all the festivals that were celebrated. As darkness fell, we would head to our homes and dinner. Around nine o'clock it was the time for *Ram Roti*, and I think in every home the children were threatened, if they did not behave they would be given to *Ram Roti*.

It was only later as I joined art school that I got to know the old city. The monuments, the markets and the intricacies of *pol* life. We cycled everywhere that was possible in those days. Pollution was low, traffic was less though still completely without regulation. Picnics to Gandhinagar on cycle and to places which are now well integrated into greater Ahmedabad. We ruled the city on our bicycles, though girls cycling on the highway were still a strange sight. My friends from C.N. College of Fine Arts were a passionate lot, Apurva the hero of us all. We did everything differently, we did not participate in college politics and were not interested in class elections, and instead we partied.

This passion has not left many of us, we are all trying in our own small ways to contribute to the city. Today's traffic & pollution makes it impossible to cycle around, still there is hope that with the BRT taking off many of us will be able to go back to our cycle, even if it is only for short distances. A group of interested citizens gathers once a month to deliberate on issues related to traffic, our ideas are followed through and changes do occur. On the heritage side similar efforts are made and the walk through the old city has lasted in spite of the earthquake and riots. A little more awareness for the civil servants and citizens and Ahmedabad could once again rise like a phoenix from small town gossip land to the mega city where the contributions of its past *nagarsheths* are as much a part of.

After all Ahmed Shah did select the spot for his city because of its brave hares. A city with many achievements which were first introduced here and then carried forward elsewhere. So let it be the Mega City like it is no where else. Let it be my Ahmedabad, a city for every kind and creed (except the cows), a city of beautiful arts & crafts, a city of peace & greenery where business flourishes, where the old and the new integrate completely without shutting each other out. Let that be our Ahmedabad.

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