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FEATURE ARTICLES

THE TALE OF TWO CITIES: MYSORE & BARODA

By Vinay Parameswarappa

Vinay Parameswarappa, Founder, Royal Mysore Walks, is an engineer, who had been working in Singapore for a brief while. Inspired by the extremely well-organised walking tour of Singapore, he decided to return to Mysore, the city of his birth and try out this new venture here. Vinay first started off by organising walking tours of city for the trainee officers coming to the Administrative Training Institute (ATI) on Lalitha Mahal Road before launching his tours commercially.

I was in Ahmedabad recently on an invitation by the Deputy Municipal Commissioner of Baroda, who was in Mysore sometime back and attended a Walking tour by Royal Mysore Walks. He wanted me to experience the Walking Tours in Baroda. I just couldn't help but notice how similar this city is to our very own Mysore. With so many connections, it could just surprise you !

The Maharajas

Sayyaji Rao Road, the main thoroughfare in Mysore, is named after the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayyaji Rao Gaekwad. The legendary Maharaja is said to have been adopted by the Royal family. The story goes that as a young boy he was asked by the queen as to why he was called to the Palace and the boy grandly announced with confidence, 'I have come here to rule!' Impressed, he was appointed the heir apparent. Baroda's reformation as a cultural and academic city was due to his efforts.

One of the main thoroughfares in Baroda is named after Chamarajendra Wadiyar but is more familiarly known as Palace Road! Chamarajendra Wadiyar was an adopted Maharaja too! Historian Ramchandra Guha says, most Maharajas of India were useless except for two of them — Maharaja Sayyaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda and Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV of Mysore for their contributions to their respective kingdoms !

Raja Ravi Verma

The famous Fateh Singh Museum of Baroda boasts of good collections of the paintings of Raja Ravi Verma. Ravi Verma even had his studio next to the museum. But this Museum is surely one of the best kept ones in India with a great collection of paintings and sculptures from across the globe. Jagannohan Art Gallery in Mysore too has some priceless collections of Ravi Verma.

The Musicians

Ustad Faiyaz Khan, the court musician of the Baroda Kingdom, was an exponent in Hindustani classical music. In 1908, a grand competition was arranged in Mysore where he sang so splendidly that he eventually won the top spot for which the Maharaja of Mysore awarded him the title "Aftab-e-Mousiqui" meaning the 'The Sun of Music'. Veene Sheshanna, the famous veena exponent in the Royal Court of Mysore when on a visit to Baroda, performed for the Gaekwad Maharaja, who was so pleased with the recital that he had Veene Sheshanna carried in a palanquin in a procession.

The Markets

In the heart of Baroda you have the bustling and colourful marketplace Khande Rao Market in a stately building selling fresh flowers, colours and vegetables, built by Maharaja Sayyaji Rao in 1906 to commemorate the silver jubilee celebration of his rule and gifted it to the Baroda Municipality. Its resemblance to our century-old Devaraja Market is striking.

Clock Towers

You even find quite a few clock towers in Baroda just like how you find them in Mysore. It was generously erected in the city by the Royalty back then for the benefit of their subjects. You find a very prominent one very close to the Baroda City Railway Station.

Laxmi Vilas Palace, Baroda

The majestic Laxmi Vilas Palace in the heart of the city has more than 3000 beautiful stained glass windows, all imported from Belgium. The architect of the Laxmi Vilas Palace was an Englishman named Major Charles Mant, who committed suicide in the 1890s for fear he had got his calculations wrong and that the Palace would fall down ! It still stands strong even today ! Unfortunately this Palace is very poorly maintained and is still the private property of the Royal family of Baroda ! In fact the central Arch of the Amba Vilas Palace in Mysore is modeled after the Laxmi Vilas Palace !

Libraries

You also have an Oriental Library in Baroda which was inspired by the Oriental Research Institute library in Mysore, built in 1887, to commemorate the jubilee year of Queen Victoria reign. The century-old Central Library in Baroda with its scores of rare books has an entire flooring made of Belgium glass and when you walk on it in the first and second floors, it sure makes you jittery. The Central Library of Mysore might not be housed in a similar setting but set up in the Chamarajendra Technical Institute building, once upon a time it sure was a treasure for book-lovers !

Baroda is home to the famous Maharaja Sayyaji Rao University. Initially it started off as Baroda college and later on acquired the status of a University. The Mysore University set up in 1916 was the first among the Princely States in India, for which Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV sent study teams to great Universities around the world to come up with what is the best model for Mysore. Both are housed in beautiful Heritage Buildings !

One could go on with more such familiar sites in Baroda like the imposing Nyay Mandir, the Law Courts, the old city and its town planning, the beautiful man-made lakes, sprawling gardens, cricket grounds and lush green golf courses so much like how it is in Mysore. In fact a popular sweet in Baroda is called Maisur, which is also made from gram flour like our Mysore pak ! As in Dickensian 'Tale of two cities', there are so many stories that are common between these two cities!


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