

STEPWELLS OF AHMEDABAD

This exhibition is a collaborative effort of a diverse group of researchers, practitioners, young graduates, students and concerned citizens to bring to light important aspects of the city of Ahmedabad. This first endeavor is a documentation of 16 stepwells in and around the city hoping to garner interest and raise discussions not only about the structures themselves, but also larger issues of water, settlement patterns and social relationships to which these stepwells are connected. Within this framework, the exhibition aims to start a conversation on their present condition, their value and the issues of heritage in the context of the city.



Disclaimer

This is to state that all photographic, film and drawing material in this exhibition is original and is the intellectual property of their individual artist/author. Measured drawings of the stepwells were carried out between November 2015 and February 2016. Base drawings for the Bai Harir's stepwell and Rudabai's stepwell at Adalaj were taken from the CEPT Archives and Ekaggrat Singh Kalsi respectively with the required permission. However in both cases the stepwells have been re-drawn for the exhibition format. For the section on Gender and Patronage, the curators have referred extensively to the work of Purnima Mehta-Bhatt. Quotations from her work are used with the author's permission. This exhibition may not be replicated in part or whole without the permission of Anthill Design.

Water and Settlement

In the gently undulating landscape of North Gujarat, the relationship between surface water, percolation (soil), and ground water sources shape the pattern of settlement and the manner in which the larger human habitat is structured. Stepwells are buildings that make this visible, while functioning to serve daily needs.

Is there a contemporary manner in which timeless relationships are expressed in our cities today?

Gender and Patronage

Many stepwells were patronised by women, built by women, for women and were often dedicated to women or goddesses. The well had been a place where women met while fetching water, washing, bathing and cleaning. It was their space within the public domain at a time when access to most public spaces was often denied to them. The inside of many stepwells were decorated to celebrate the feminine.

Do these stepwells tell us about the diversity of approaches and attitudes towards the act of building?

Inhabitation

With the late 19th century ring worm epidemic, the British had most stepwells of the region filled in or covered over. This slowly brought to an end an age old tradition of building these water structures. Some of these structures are dilapidated and lie derelict. Many however, have been re-used by local communities, largely as temples dedicated to 'Maata' (goddesses) in different forms.

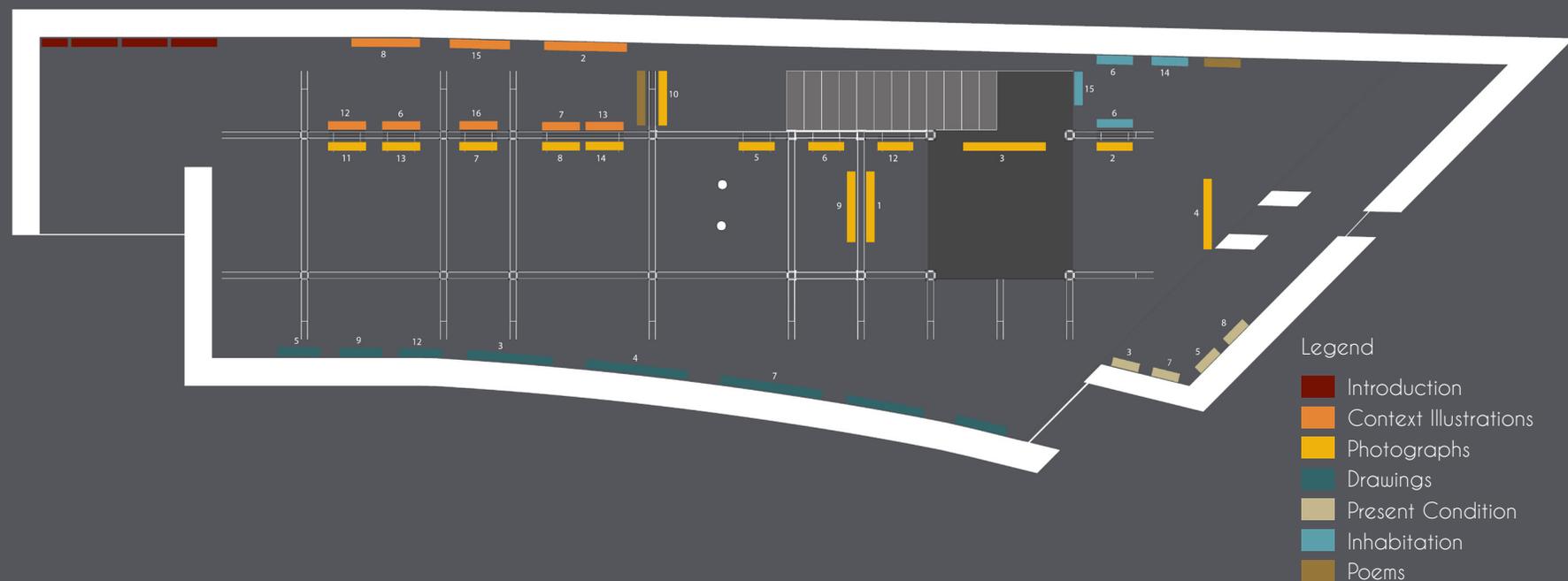
What is more important, the original use or the present use of these buildings?

Heritage

Without living traditions and rituals of regular use, our built heritage is often rendered 'empty'. Empty of the meanings that make them relevant to the people of a given time. Stepwells embody the relationship between land, water, human settlement and daily activity. Historical circumstances and modern ways of accessing water have made these building all but redundant. Yet the relationship they embody is of timeless value to us all.

What is the alternative to the museum?

1. Rudabai ni Vaav, Adalaj
2. Bai Harir ni Vaav, Asarwa
3. Jethabhai ni Vaav, Isanpur
4. Ashapura Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar
5. Vaav at Vadaj
6. Khodiyar Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar
7. Maata Bhavani ni Vaav, Asarwa
8. Vaav at Bhadaj
9. Gandharva Vaav, Saraspur
10. Pournik Vaav, Bapunagar
11. Sindhvai Maata ni Vaav, CTM
12. Amritavarshini Vaav, Panchkva
13. Khodiyar Maata ni Vaav, Vasna
14. Ambe Maata ni Vaav, Malav Talav
15. Kali Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar
16. Vaav at Doshivada ni Pol

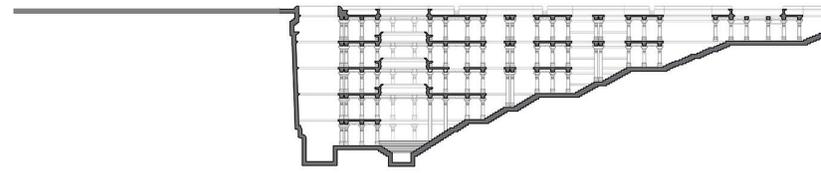


Legend

- Introduction
- Context Illustrations
- Photographs
- Drawings
- Present Condition
- Inhabitation
- Poems

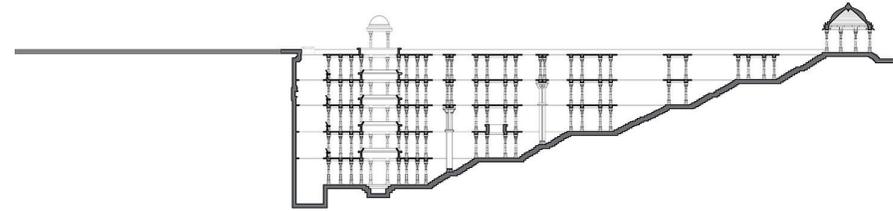
Rudabai ni Vaav, Adalaj 1

Built in sandstone, this stepwell is five storeys deep and it has an octagonal well supported by intricately carved columns. It shows a harmonious blend of Islamic floral patterns seamlessly fusing into Hindu and Jain motifs.



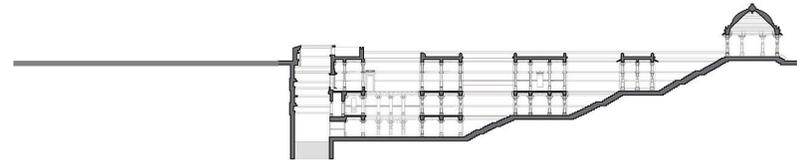
Bai Harir ni Vaav, Asarwa 2

Built around 1500 A.D. by Bai Harir, the superintendent of the royal harem of Mahmud Begada, it has an octagonal well at its western end and a mosque and a tomb is adjacent to the stepwell.



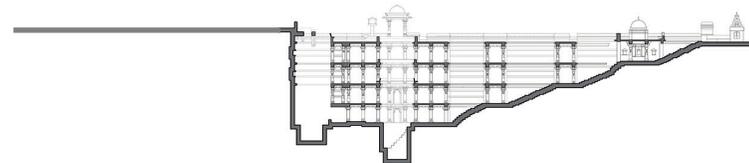
Jethabhai ni Vaav, Isanpur 3

Built by Jethabhai around 1860, this stepwell is peculiar in terms of column proportions as compared to the other stepwells. Sculptures depicting scenes from mythology adorn the structure and still has water.



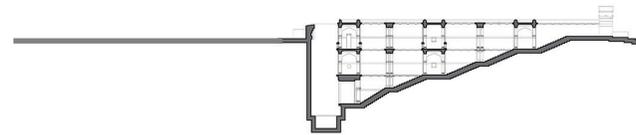
Ashapura Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar 4

The vaav houses a shrine dedicated to Ashapura Maata who is known to fulfill the wishes and desires of those who trust and believe in her. The stepwell is now surrounded by a dense settlement.



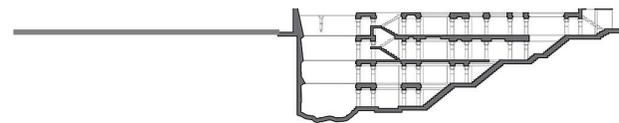
Vaav at Vadaj 5

The stepwell at Vadaj has arches that support the structure. Unlike other stepwells, there is just one bay with a direct connection to the well shaft.



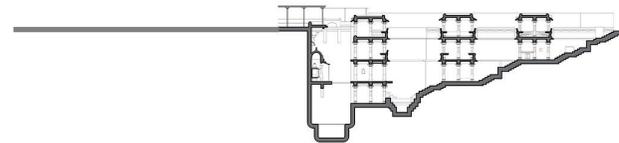
Khodiyar Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar 6

This stepwell now houses a temple dedicated to Khodiyar Maata. Only the primary well shaft of the original stepwell is intact and its remaining part is greatly modified for temple use.



Maata Bhavani ni Vaav, Asarwa 7

Built in the 11th century during the reign of Solanki dynasty in Gujarat, this stepwell gets its name from a shrine dedicated to Goddess Bhavani which was constructed later in the lower part of the stepwell.



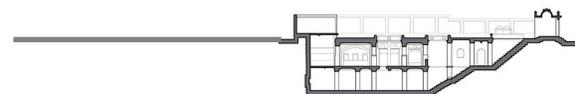
Vaav at Bhadaj 8

This stepwell is now in ruins and is believed to be seven storeys deep. There are smaller shrines dedicated to Goddess Kali around the stepwell.



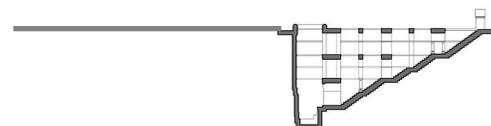
Gandharva Vaav, Saraspur 9

Unique arches supporting the structure are peculiar to this stepwell, and the main well shaft houses a shrine dedicated to Kali Maata.



Pouranik Vaav, Bapunagar 10

It has only one bay that is supported by arches. It is situated in a sparse fabric adjacent to the ward office of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in Bapunagar.



Sindhvai Maata ni Vaav, CTM 11

This stepwell is adjacent to a temple dedicated to Sindhvai Maata. Unfortunately, it is now used as a garbage dump.



Amritavarshini Vaav, Panchkuva 12

Its construction was completed in 1723 according to the Persian and Devanagiri inscriptions found inside. It has an L-shaped plan with three storeys and is sparsely ornamented.



Khodiyar Maata ni Vaav, Vasna 13

This stepwell is a narrow structure with a beautiful Banyan tree growing over the well and is surrounded by a dense settlement.



Ambe Maata ni Vaav, Malav Talav 14

This stepwell is situated adjacent to a lake called 'Malav Talaav' and is extensively modified to be used as a temple.



Kali Maata ni Vaav, Bapunagar 15

This vaav houses a temple dedicated to Goddess Kali and is surrounded by a community that maintains the temple.



Vaav at Doshivada ni Pol 16

A narrow Z-shaped structure in the old city fabric, this stepwell is now in ruins and is inaccessible.

