

YUVAYAN is not just an intellect-laden scholarly voice for arts, culture, traditions, and other such constructs of a society. Although it has yet to establish itself as a journal, this attempt, in its nascent stage, does promise stimulating write-ups from its contributors – specially drawn from regular readers.

We can affirm that YUVAYAN - a dialogue for youth, puts special emphasis on youth initiatives to promote active and sustained exchange, primarily among youth brigade of Bikaner. YUVAYAN believes in pursuing a dialogue among youth groups, activists, policy makers and professionals within the framework of new media and culture. This voice also reviews and analyses the relevance of research and documentation on issues related, but not restricted to preservation, promotion, and conservation of art forms that are on the verge of extinction. YUVAYAN is as much a dialogue as it is a debate for all those who are interested in social transformations through indigenous knowledge systems and values; therefore, it needs immediate dissemination through your contribution.

Please make it a success by pledging your support.



Yuvayan
Exclusive English Edition

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Issue Based Publication

Bikaner Havelis - The Heritage, Disappearing Near You!

Havelis (beautiful grand mansions with spectacular stone carvings and exquisite wood works) are the marvels of the architecture of the bygone era. The magnificent built heritage of Bikaner - these Havelis are situated in the narrow and serpentine lanes and one can see the majesty scattered everywhere in the walled-city. The Havelis are decorated with the golden painting works, wall paintings and other art forms of the supreme quality. The carving on the local sandstone obtained from nearby villages *Khari* and *Dulmera* used on the facades is a perfect example of an extremely refined craft.

The murals on the facades have high artistic as well as aesthetic value. The wood carving, ceramic glazed tiles etc. are of excellent quality to match up to the rest of the art forms used in a Haveli. The drawing rooms of these Havelis take us to the *Mughal* and *Rajput* era - a perfect blend of prominent arts of both epochs. Some of the Havelis constructed in the decades of 1940 to 1960 have significant British Colonial influence, visible clearly in the structural design and overall layout plan. The wood carvings in few Havelis are exquisite and are beyond imagination. Each Haveli has a pattern of its own - making it a distinct entity in the cluster of Havelis.

The artistic exteriors of the Havelis are unparalleled and perhaps do not exist anywhere on this planet Earth! They are undoubtedly the pride of Bikaner and are among the architectural achievement with a live history of over 450 years. It wouldn't be exaggeration that Haveli is a poetry delicately written on the sandstones with great precision and patience of the artisans.

Although a number of glorious Havelis are closed because the Haveli owners no longer stay in Bikaner, they are still an integral part of local life and locals continue to occupy and use the Havelis. The Havelis have been constructed using high quality materials and techniques and have a tremendous economic value. In fact, it is this value which is presently being exploited in both the regional antiques markets as well the construction market, since individual components of the Havelis are being dismantled and sold. The greatest value of these grand mansions is that residents of Bikaner continue to live in these historic structures in their ancestral properties and the Havelis are undoubtedly a part of their identity.

From last two and half years, our focus has been precisely to get attention of the people and all the capable agencies towards magnificent historical Havelis of Bikaner. Many of the Havelis are utterly neglected. On top of it, weathering of the Havelis over the time and some recent manmade hazards (systematic demolition to take out

carved stones, wooden ceiling, wall-paintings and all such artifacts used in the Havelis to sell in the so-called art and antiques market!) are making the situation no better!

We started an informal awareness campaign to make people understand the importance of these marvels of architecture scattered all through the walled-city. At the start of 2011, we requested for some help and guidance from Ms. Amita Baig (WMF India Representative) for the Haveli preservation and she did help us for preparing a dossier for the nomination in a prestigious list to get International attention. In October 2011, the World Monuments Fund, New York listed Historic Havelis of walled-city of Bikaner in its prestigious 'Watch 2012'-of endangered sites. The World Monuments Watch calls international attention to cultural heritage around the globe that is at risk from the forces of nature and the impact of social, political, and economic change. So, we have come thus far with help of concerned people and our sustained efforts.

After the announcement of listing of Historic Havelis of Bikaner in Watch List 2012, we have done a number of activities, primarily to bring the issues on the surface so that other key players can make their mind and understand the urgency of the situation. So far, we have:

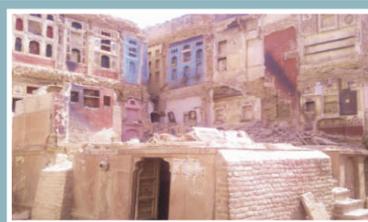
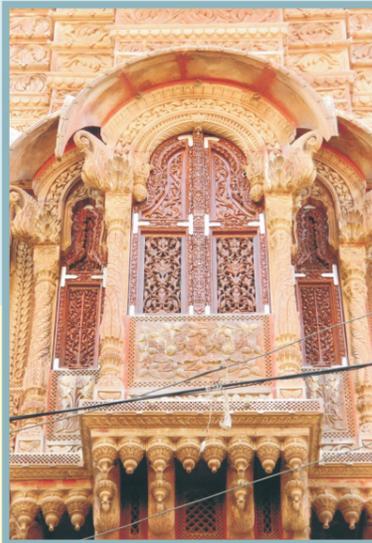
- Released a special issues focusing exclusively on Havelis of our organization's newsletter Yuvayan in Hindi.
- Released a poster received from WMF for Havelis.
- Organized a Photo-exhibition of noted

photographers of Bikaner on Havelis during International Camel Festival-2012, Bikaner.

- Released a folder with first hand info of Havelis, threats, initiatives and the need of participatory approach.
- Advocacy and awareness through talks, discussions and lectures at various fora.
- Attempting to connect with all regional and national agencies engaged and responsible for conservation, and maintenance of heritage.

All these activities were covered extensively by the local press and thus, our efforts are wide-known now. Even though the task of preserving these marvels of the built heritage architecture may seem daunting but let us pledge to save these unparalleled grand mansions that locals call Haveli.

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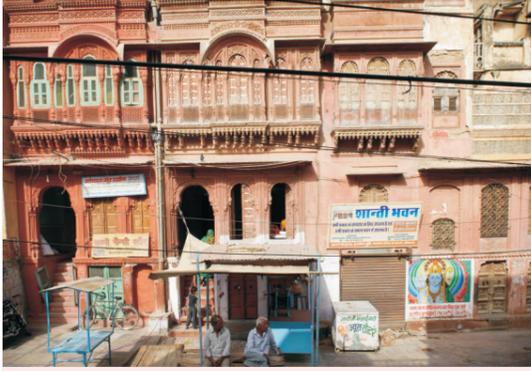
Demolition still going on...

Even after our sustained efforts, demolition of the Havelis is still happening. People are now more clever, make a scene as if it is necessary to take these 'dangerous buildings' down (See above pictures). The pictures say it all - supported by wooden logs, it was a 'created scene' so that no one should complain and they could easily take this haveli down. The artifacts, shown on the last page, are then sold in the market.

Rays of hope...

There are handful owners who still believe that these havelis are their identity! They carefully take the pieces of facade down, renovate the building, repair damaged pieces, do some changes in the internal structure as desired and use the facade like it was on the face of haveli when it was built.

When Things and Buildings Stop Being Things



This relation of common man with Havelis delights me. It is a relation which transcends popular and easily understood reasons like heritage and culture. Even their nostalgia can be explained and cherished. But when we see ordinary citizens, most of them

who never lived or could own such splendid Haveli's, arguing and protesting their dismantling, the reason is somewhere deeper.

When an ordinary middle aged man, pushing his bicycle pedals, with a cotton bag full of vegetables dangling from handle, passes these Havelis, he may not even look at them but their towering presence is a consolation.

He finds the same consolation as which is in his old and frail grandmother sitting whole day in chowk, occasionally coughing - occasionally asking "Paachho kane aasi?" (When will you return?). Be it Daa'saa's (grandparents) old charpai or Bhabhu's gediya (walking stick), there comes a point after history when things and buildings stop being things and buildings, and become our Buzurg (Elders).

Of course these Havelis are heritage, but I do not see them merely as material heritage or staple for tourist cameras. Again and again I wish to see them from that ordinary man's lowered eyes. Buffeted from every conceivable direction in his struggle to exist with grace in today's whimsically changing world, the ordinary man looks for a stable thing. For something which was there, is there and will be there. He perceives this unchangeableness in these Haveli's which he doesn't own but in a sense, is 'owned' by.

I lived my childhood in Bikaner. Then in Jodhpur and today I'm in Jaipur. At all the three places, if I return after a few months or years and find that an apartment has sprung where a khejri tree used to be or a mall has displaced an ever present home, I sense something disappearing in my personal past. And these Havelis are a collective past of a complete society, a city, a civilization called Bikaner. They are the features of city's face. Expression of its eyes and their presence lends the city a grace that comes with age. How, without them, will Bikaner be different from a newborn Noida or Gurgaon?

The world is changing under various guises like development, modernization, usefulness etc. And some of them are even necessary keeping in mind the changes in world. But are all these changes and developments an emergency situation! Couldn't they themselves be redundant a day later! Nature too is constantly changing. But a Parijaat flower that blossomed one morning thousands of years ago looks and smells the same in 2012. If we site nature as an example of change, isn't nature an example of stability too! Can our creations too be lasting and what beautiful has been created, made to last? Instead of seeing reason in what world is doing can't we make the world understand the importance of stability, a human pace and grace that flows from past? Isn't it our duty too? As Nida Fazli says 'Jin Charagon Ko Hawaon Ka Khauf Nahin / Un Charagon Ko Hawaon Se Bachaya Jaye.' (The lamps that are not scared by the blowing winds, they must be protected against the wind)

Even literally these Havelis have stood the storms. Imagine the Bikaner decades ago, when desert would saddle the storms and visit its lanes almost everyday. And the Sun would make streets deserted. These Havelis not only protected those living in them but reined the storms passing through the lean lanes between Havelis. They protected and shaded the ordinary Bikaneri without asking for anything in return. Once they faced the storms for us, now that the 'modern' storms are about to devour them, who will protect them?

There can be an equally profound exploration of their architectural and anthropological worth. Some of which are so obvious reasons to save them with cooperation and consensus of every soul concerned with them.

-Himanshu Vyas
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A recipient of Swai Ram Singh II Award (2003) and IFRA Gold Award in Photography. Himanshu Vyas is the chief lensman at the Hindustan Times (Jaipur) where he also writes a weekly column.

Bikaner - A City of History & Heritage

My first introduction to Bikaner was limited to one neighborhood during the days that preceded the Rajasthan Kabir Yatra. During those days the extent of adventures in the town was limited to a few sq meters, but they were evidence to a larger promise.

I was back again within a month and this time, I was requested by my hosts to help document the Havelis of Bikaner visually with my lens. Each morning we set out before the sun got too harsh to walk about in town taking photographs of the various neighborhoods. Sometimes armed with a ladder, requesting access to households with a view to these intricate pieces of work, we walked, talked and shot whatever we could about the Havelis.

Various range of emotions of passed through me on our sojourns into the lanes. I was in awe of the craftsmanship of these buildings. Unreal, collective pair of human hands was responsible for this grandeur. Each of the Havelis is a story in itself - of the one who had it made and those who executed the work.

The stone in some places still speaks, in others its silence beckoning its owners living in faraway lands to come back. Voices seem to say, open the doors, air the rooms. Live again among the walls, witnesses to a glorious past.

A suppressed anger in me latent most times at all the destruction, neglect, apathy of the Havelis that is visible around Bikaner. Cement boundaries ever increasing; the new ever so rapidly creeping parasitically around the old walls. It's sad to see the contrast of the two.

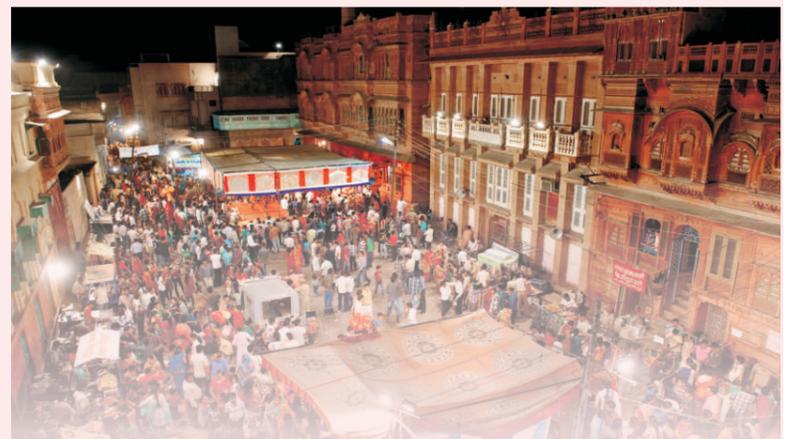
My heart certainly gravitates towards the past for without understanding a city's past one cannot put the present into context. What was, gives you a clue about what is and vice versa.

Ever so hesitantly and often pushing my host in the front to get access to vantage points, I entered many a Bikaneri homes. And I never left without my ever so temporary hosts offering some tea, snacks or cold drinks. Giving the excuse of the rising or the setting sun, we kept moving through the neighborhoods, shooting windows, doors, walkways, ceilings - whatever possible where the imprints of history can be seen.

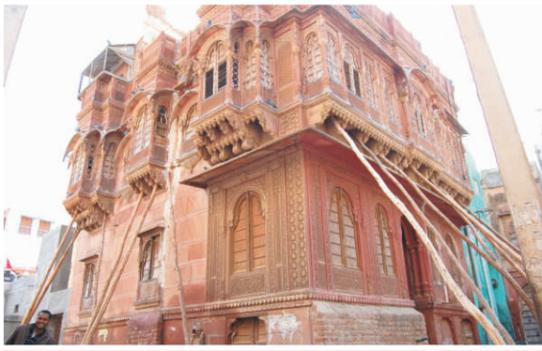
I am invariably drawn to things old. An old umbrella, a gramophone, old faded yellowed photographs, objects, and buildings - anything that connects me back to time. There is an unusual sense of belonging - a better sense of appreciation of the contrasts of my ever-increasing disconnected life. Each object space with a story of its own but somehow has a place within the larger frame.

Why do I care about these beautiful Havelis? None of my ancestors came from here; I have no connection to this land per se on surface. But I do, just as everybody does. We have a collective stake in the past. Remnants of a bygone era take us outside our world; we get a chance to escape and to relate to our ancestral times. In preserving the past, we learn and connect but we also learn on how to live in the future.

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Madhu Reddy is a Hyderabad based freelance photographer, traveller, writer and an ardent music lover. She visited Bikaner to photo-document the heritage scattered across the city.



Have you ever thought of destroying your own heritage? This every thought will scare you but in Bikaner, hundreds of architectural marvels known as Havelis constructed are left to be demolished and dismantled

lacking effective policies for heritage preservation. During our ground research it is disheartening to find the fact that as many as forty to fifty notable Havelis have been lost in Bikaner in last one year. The situation got quite grim when we noticed that ancient and historically important architecture of four Jain temples have been renovated with modern marble and tiles. Their old carved red sand stones have been sold without any permission from government authority in this medieval city. These temples and havelis' rich and ancient history have been standing for over 400 years in Bikaner and who would suspect that it could ever be endangered.

Present status

Bikaner is known most for its continuous of its culture, not to forget its contribution to literature, folk and classical music, miniature art and many other innumerable disciplines. One of the most long lasting consequences of this recent heritage shock in this city cannot be described more than anything but the immeasurable loss to its culture. This serious physical damage of its heritage is unfortunate and a blot on our cultural and collective identity since it is divested by its own people and place. There is no doubt that the wealthy merchant Marwari class, that profited from the trade route, was responsible for creating such an era of historical buildings in the form of Havelis 300 years ago but then what made them to think of such rude behavior towards their own created legacy? where has the sense of nostalgia to their own rooted identity gone (as this class is known for)? And are they not guilty if their self created history is being reduced to rubble? Do they stand to lose its culture?

Bikaner has identified 15 historical monuments in the list of protected monuments by states' Art & Culture department and its two historical temples have been listed as protected monuments under a national organization ASI which is one of the premier organization for the protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. But more than fifty ancient monuments of heritage importance are still waiting to be recognized by ASI in this small city.

Earlier in 2011, the Havelis of walled-city of Bikaner were proposed by a local organization Lokayan to be included in the World Monuments Fund's biennial list of the endangered sites that are facing severe challenges to survive today. In October 2011, these Havelis were successfully included in The World Monuments Watch (Watch List) as an endangered site. Being on the watch list is an advantage as the worldwide recognition helps its survival.

Being on Watch List

Amita Baig, WMF representative in India, says 'I hope that regional, state, national and international attention will help save the invaluable heritage of this city and that we will all work together towards this goal. We must ensure that development protects our past and not destroy that which we have inherited'. The next step to rescue and restore the beauty of these monuments should be covered by local authority by preparing a preservation plan and ensuring its necessary implementation to stop this disaster in progress. Taking on the same Sikha Jain, Director of the Delhi based development and research organization DRONAH, says "The Havelis of Bikaner are testimony to the invaluable stone craftsmanship of Rajasthan and I

hope that their placement on the World Monuments Fund 2012 Listing will lead to addressing the urgent conservation needs for this incomparable heritage. This achievement is realized today because of the initiatives taken by Lokayan. To achieve sustainable conservation, it is essential that the locals, government and NGO's (national and international) should collectively work for this cause."

Meanwhile, non functioning of Bikaner chapter of the National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH), an autonomous non-governmental organization set up for the conservation of natural and man-made environment by acting as a pressure group whenever any part of it is threatened, failed in doing its duty and in keeping up its role of acting against all odds happening at local level. Also there was no concern showed by local conveners to create awareness and to render their expertise. This Heritage era has never been considered on serious note by District tourism department and Municipal corporation and it is pity that they haven't realized that tourism is the direct beneficiary of heritage preservation. No restoration work at any point of time at any spot has been implemented so far by any of these authorities.

As per the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) norms, 100 meters of area around a monument has to be kept free of any structure. But in old Bikaner, sub habitations are so close to the old boundary wall that people have "illegally" encroached the wall area adjoining their house. Enormous construction is taking place within the restricted area of 100 meters.

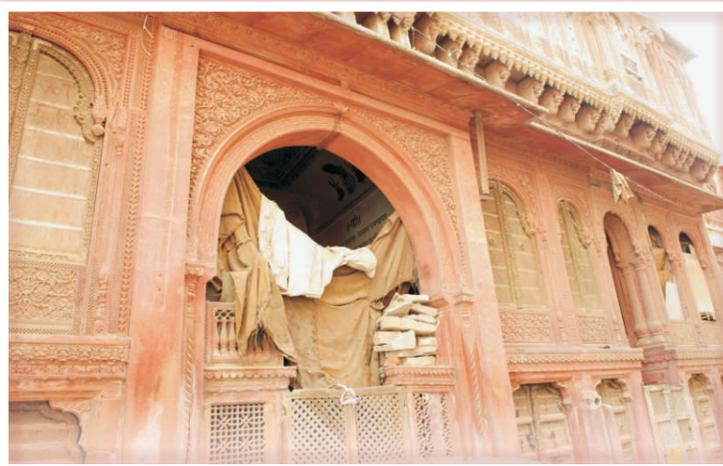
Issues in heritage conservation in Bikaner

1. Owners of heritage properties often take no interest for renovation/conservation/restoration processes because it is considered as a burden since there is no income generation from these properties.
2. Lack of specific and effective Monument and Heritage Properties Act, in the absence of which the uninterrupted demolition of the heritage properties continues.
3. Mafias are promoting owners to sell these building at high costs.
4. Present socio-economic conditions are inclined to give priority to infrastructure development activities rather than preserving the historical grandeurs.
5. Heritage issues are not in place with the city master plan and township agenda.
6. Lack of political will to save the city's heritage buildings.
7. Heritage conservation hasn't been counted as priority sector for any government department including local municipality.

How can it happen now?

We all have to ask ourselves- how this can be done? it is hard to find any single ray of hope of rejuvenation, if a historic city, like Bikaner, continues to be ignored and if no immediate attention is paid towards its preservation. The sadder part is that since past so many years, most of the city's portion has been dismantled by its own people. But at the same time we cannot directly blame the government only. Each of us, be it be a foundation, a public authority or even an individual, needs to be aware of the importance of this heritage and consider it as our prima facie duty to maintain the glory of this heritage. The most necessary and sustainable change will come only by partnering with local development authorities and tourism department and also by taking help of local people and organizations. Till now it should have been understood that development and heritage conservation will go hand in hand in complex infrastructure city like Bikaner. No identification of a single heritage site in recently made city Master Plan as a planning objective shows nothing but complete immaturity among right corridors of power where decisions are made. Before restoring these damaged historical monuments and Havelis, we need to restore our pride of our place as a center of cultural learning and then we can give future what they deserve.

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This no longer reflects my majesty
It has turned into somebody's stockpile of plunder
Being an inheritance pierces my soul
For centuries I was the proud reflection of this city
Now I lie crumbling

And what did I receive from this city
Which was once mine?
Amidst the sand dunes
I lie trembling and tossing in helpless desolation
As I am broken and taken apart.
And you?
You just watch unaffected, unmoved
Are you a stone?

They utter no cry
These plundered, dug out stones
But the eyes of the once splendid
- now helpless Haveli
Brim with tears
As we mercilessly scratch
- and gnaw at its delicate pink face

The spewing flames of the sun
Pierce through my shadow
Is this akin to witnessing my own death
As it paces around in my courtyard?

So what if it was a stone?
To me it represented the divine
With its desecration- the desolation of death gripped me
How long can I survive in this state of intense anguish
Stripped from the protection of my maker?

I would definitely have survived the cruel vagaries of time
With stones as my companions
As they crumbled and mingled in my dust
But how can I suffer the neglect of those
Who built me year after years under the blazing heat of the sun?
This is the fear that gnaws at my heart

Translated by Apurwa Yagnik
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LOKAYAN is a non-profitable initiative, dedicated to the revival, conservation and promotion of the heritage of Handicrafts, Crafts, Folk music and all Practices of cultural importance. It was registered as a public charitable society in 1996-97 in Bikaner and brought together the energies of several performing artists, historians and visual artists deeply committed to the documentation of the culture of this northwest Rajasthan. The institute further expanded its archival and research work in many areas including audio documentation of Bhopa artists, the cultural survey of Bikaner region, listing of folk artists in this region, video documentation of performing arts, the oral history of Bikaner, culture surrounding the historic havelis and awareness about the heritage of Bikaner amongst school children and youth.

World Monuments Fund, New York

The WMF's premier mission is to preserve the world's architectural heritage of significant monuments, buildings, and sites through Advocacy, Education & Training, Cultural Legacy, Capacity Building and Disaster Recovery. Launched in 1996 and issued every two years, the World Monuments Watch is the flagship advocacy program of WMF. The Watch calls international attention to cultural heritage around the world that is at risk from the forces of nature and the impact of social, political, and economic change. It encourages everyone to make the past part of a better future. For more information, visit www.wmf.org/watch

Campaign for Havelis Preservation

Knowing the significance of these architectural marvels, the splendid exteriors and interiors, it is very disheartening to see these Havelis getting demolished and dismantled. The individual artifacts from Havelis are sold in the antique market - leaving the Haveli sites completely deserted. The recent urban developments in the city have actually compounded the issues. Several Havelis have inappropriate additions to the structures such as additional rooms, floors and changes to facade without any sensitivity to the historic fabric. Issues like growing vehicular traffic, lack of a proper system of waste disposal and improper drainage system do pose a significant threat to existence of the historic Havelis. There is certainly a lack of awareness of the historic and artistic value of these significant structures amongst the locals, which is the reason why there are no proven conservation initiatives in place for the Havelis. These issues require urgent attention for a comprehensive conservation strategy; conservation based systematic urban development plan and a way to enforce policies implementation.

Bikaner based social organization **LOKAYAN** (which translates as "dialogue among people") is spearheading the Campaign for Havelis Preservation through its team of young enthusiastic individuals coming from all walks of life duly supported by locals. It also brings together the energies of several performing artists, historians and other eminent personalities from Bikaner-deeply committed to the social cause. It is a non-profitable initiative, dedicated to the revival, conservation and promotion of the heritage of Handicrafts, Crafts, Folk music and other practices of cultural importance. The inclusion in WMF's prestigious Watch List - 2012 is intended to bring international attention to the challenges these Havelis are facing. It provides an important opportunity to promote the site locally and internationally, and to work towards its preservation and protection.

The primary objective of the Campaign for Havelis Preservation is to create awareness amongst locals and other stakeholders to protect, preserve and restore the cultural heritage of the entire walled-city of Bikaner.

Recent Updates

Some Visits

Mr. Edmund van Gilder & his wife visited Bikaner to explore the grandeur of the Havelis scattered all across the walled-city.

WMF Reps - Mark Weber, Field Projects Director & Amita Baig, India Representative.

Student Group : A group of 80 students from Sushant School of Art and Architecture did primary scholarly survey on the Haveli architecture.

Watch Day-2012

Lokayan has been selected for Watch Day-2012 program by WMF. Upcoming Watch day celebration on Oct 6-7, 2012 that will host a myriad of events to sustain tempo for the awareness campaign by engaging community.



To _____

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लोकायन : गीता सदन, बजरंग कॉलोनी
उस्ताबारी के बाहर, बीकानेर

स्वत्वाधिकारी प्रकाशक, मुद्रक एवं सम्पादक गोपालसिंह चौहान द्वारा सांखला प्रिंटर्स, शिवबाड़ी रोड, बीकानेर से मुद्रित एवं उस्ताबारी के अन्दर, बीकानेर से प्रकाशित (मो. 9928522992) e-mail : gopalbkn1@gmail.com