



Living  
Waters  
Museum

# Talking to Water: Building Narratives on our Fluid Heritage

Sara Ahmed, and

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2<sup>nd</sup> WAMUNET Conference, 2018

# Understanding Research for Museums

- All museums undertake research to better understand their collections and mount scientifically grounded exhibitions.
- Till recently, seeing museums as institutions of research was limited as was/is funding for research.
- Additionally, curators need to communicate research to a diverse audience using various public engagement tools.
- How can museums engage in socially relevant research linking the past to the present and addressing societal challenges?

# Research: “doing digital and doing good”

- Sejul Malde, Research Manager @Culture 24, from whom we borrow this title, outlines the role of museums in an age of digital transformation – an important starting point for us
- Living Waters Museum is building a digital, knowledge repository on water heritage, tangible and intangible, in India
- This involves three Cs:
  1. **Collaboration:** with students, academic institutes, civil society
  2. **‘Curation’:** socio-ecological transformation around water
  3. **Communication:** making ‘water’ visible, “talk to water”
- Promoting outreach: pop-up museums, water dialogues, etc.

# Crossing The River

Researchers:

- Ar. Akshay Shete
- Ar. Amit Tandon

Stage 1 : Brainstorming

Stage 2 : Research

Stage 3 : Visualisation

Duration : 1 Month.

The purpose of the research was to explore indirect relationships between water and cities by exploring bridges as a medium.



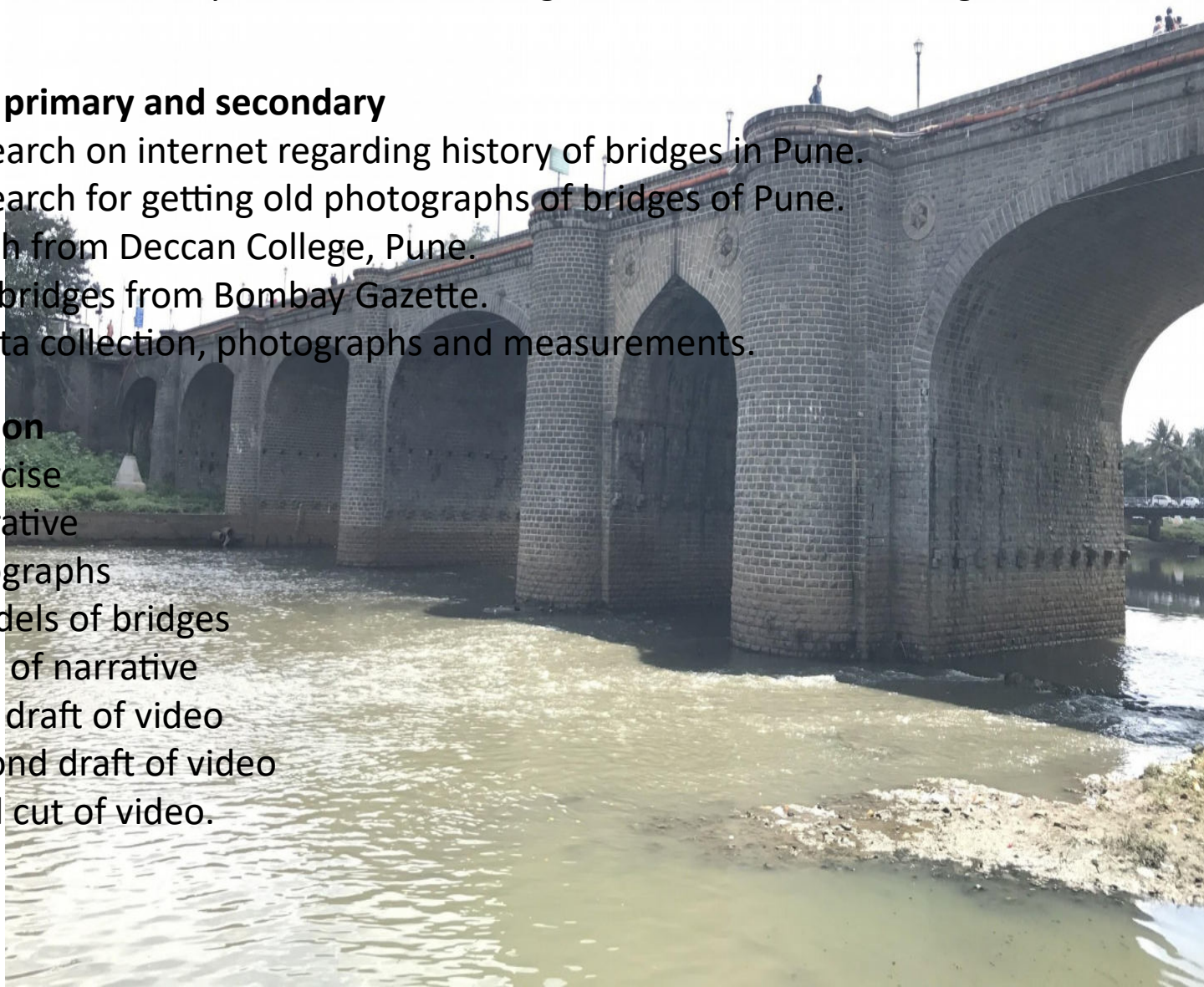
**Stage 1: Brainstorming:** to explore various aspects of water and tangible/ intangible elements that associates the city, Pune, with its bridges as a means of crossing the waters.

**Stage 2: Research, primary and secondary**

- Desk based research on internet regarding history of bridges in Pune.
- Desk based research for getting old photographs of bridges of Pune.
- Archival research from Deccan College, Pune.
- Information on bridges from Bombay Gazette.
- Site visits for data collection, photographs and measurements.

**Stage 3: Visualisation**

- Storyboard exercise
- Developing narrative
- Editing of photographs
- Creating 3D models of bridges
- Audio recording of narrative
- Developing first draft of video
- Developing second draft of video
- Developing final cut of video.



# Journey of Sabarmati river

Researcher – Shalvi Suman



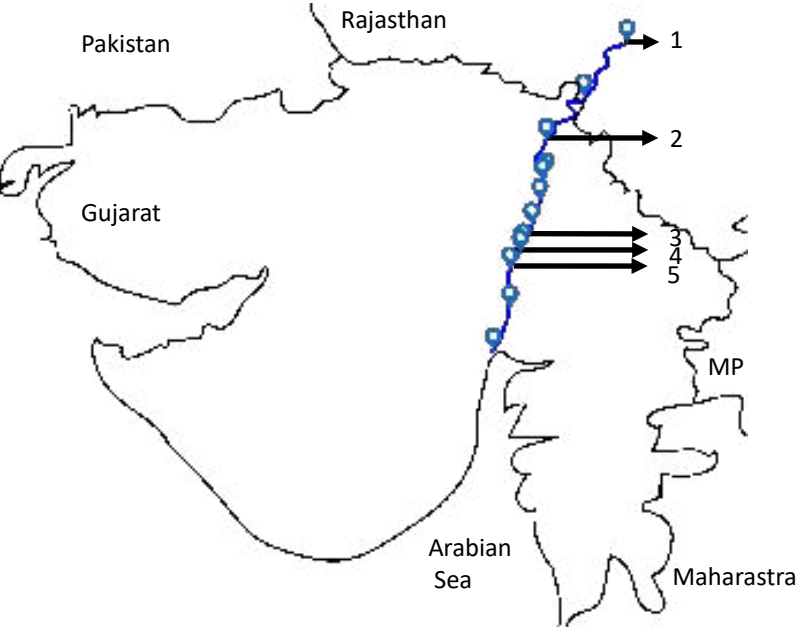
1. Sabarmati river's origin in the Aravali range locally known as 'Bhuj Talav'



2. Dharoi reservoir - Gravity dam over Sabarmati (1978)



3. Sant Sarovar Dam - Barrage in Gandhinagar (2006)



Map showing the path of Sabarmati river and major harvesting system

- Dry and wet scenario of Sabarmati in summers
- Water harvesting measures and their effects on the Sabarmati in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Role of Sabarmati in Ahmedabad - resource, livelihood, entertainment, aesthetics.
- Waste management including waste water irrigation.



4. Narmada canal (2008)



French wells for recharging the ground water level of the river bed



5. Vasna Barrage (1976)

A few frames from the animation clip

Animator – Shalvi Suman

## Objective:

- Creating an interesting narration to communicate research to a young audience.
- Exploring a different perspective to human-made and natural elements.
- Linking different facts and findings in a story to make it engaging for the audience.

## Narration:

- A crane flying down from the source of Sabarmati and exploring the river.

## Product:

- A 6-7 minute stop motion animation video with voiceover and original clippings from different sites explored during the research.



# Livelihoods around Sabarmati



Farming with waste water irrigation



River pollution near vasna barrage



Laundry Campus



Map showing the south end of Sabarmati in Ahmedabad  
Image Source : Google maps 2018

- Interviews of people whose livelihoods were closely associated with the Sabarmati river.
- Understanding impacts of water storage on river flow, people and their livelihoods
- Settlement around Sabarmati before the riverfront project and after relocation
- Water harvesting measures taken by these people during summers when the river used to dry up completely (well digging)
- Exploring downstream where all the waste management of Ahmedabad takes place.



Laundry campus situated at the south end of Sabarmati in Ahmedabad where most of the city's waste management takes place.



Archival images of the dhobi ghat at the banks of Sabarmati  
Image Source : Parmanand Dalwadi, Courtesy of NID



### Narration:

- By an elderly **dhobi** who is explaining how they used to wash clothes in the past to his young children who are marveling the washing machines and dryers given by the state government



### Product:

- A stop motion animation clip explaining the livelihoods and settlements associated in and around Sabarmati.
- Scenario before and after the riverfront project.
- Archival images





Rani ni vav, Patan



Adalaj ni vav, Adalaj



Modhera kund, Modhera

# Stepwells: A community water space

Researcher – Shalvi Suman

## Background:

- Use of stepwells by locals and travellers in the past (cool, water)
- Placement of a stepwell in relation to the settlement
- Well-digger community (traditional artisans, dying livelihood)
- Funding the building of a stepwell (rich women as patrons)
- Significance of a stepwell as a goddess (female names, worship)

## Story:

- Looking at the stepwell through community lens
- A well-digger explaining the working and construction details of the stepwell to the young generation of their community along with people's life associated with it.

## Product:

- A stop motion clip with voice over with drawings and constructional details of the stepwell.
- Travel itinerary



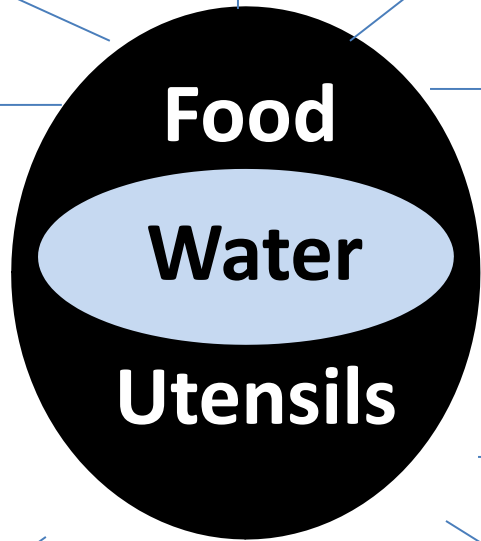
## **A Multimedia Exhibition at Vishalla Restaurant and Vechaar Museum**

*Building a value perspective on water by celebrating water wisdom and exploring the tangible and intangible heritage around water and food in Gujarat.*

Vishalla Prides itself on its presentation of Indian Culture and tradition in its village like environment with its museum of old utensils known as Vechaar.

Surendrabhai Patel the designer could not let our rich heritage pass with these vessels being lost in the kilns! He was determined to preserve them, and today, his dream is a reality in the form of this museum.

**Project by-**  
**Swarnika Nimje**  
**National Institute of Design**



Agriculture

Practices

Geography

Human body

Cuisine

**Food**  
**Water**  
**Utensils**



Fetching water



Traveller's bottle



Storing water



Food Preparation



Utility vessels

## How to 'source' content for proposed exhibition?

1. Research: museum catalogue, library, internet
2. Content conceptualization
3. Crowd sourcing content (proposed during exhibition, e.g. recipes from old families)

## How to communicate to different age groups?

1. Vishalla restaurant customers (all age groups)
2. Vechaar museum visitors (messaging for 11 yr)
3. Inviting schools to exhibition

## How to tell a story in physical and digital space?

1. Building a narrative for water utensils
2. Messaging for the exhibition (virtual water)
3. Designing the different mediums of communication: panels with photographs of pots in use and stories, activities, games , worksheets, videos (short film on Surendrabhai)



# Water utensils: telling their story

*“Do you know who brings water home for hundreds of rural families across Gujarat? Made of bronze, my long neck and wide collar help Jigna to hold me gracefully in the curve of her hip, as she walks back from the village well, careful not to spill water she has spent several hours collecting. On her head, she confidently balances another broad-based, brass pot, while sharing local news and singing along with her friends. I know its hard work for Jigna, particularly in the dry summer months, but she doesn’t complain even when she has to miss going to school on some days.”*





# There Was Water

A short animation film, made by Priyanka Kumari, NID

*Over the years, I, like everyone else, have been witnessing the drastic urbanisation and water-related impacts that have occurred in Bangalore, once called the city of thousand lakes. I have been a watcher of the captivating weather turning rebellious in a very short span of time. Those days of walks through less crowded paths, easy traffic and pleasant weather throughout the course of the year are now mere dreams of the residents and plans on paper. This huge concern called for my reaction through investigation into the history of lakes in Bengaluru, particularly the Bellandur lake.*

*This project led me to discover many facts and stories that are mostly unknown to people. The knowledge of history of the Bellandur lake has mesmerised me with its value in old times. Somewhere, the project welded organically where it led me from one source to another and then others and so on. I found that most of the information about the cultural history of the lake, including oral traditions, have got destroyed or lost with time and today hardly anyone cares about it.*

*Working on visualization of the history of the lake was quite satisfying to me as it gave me a sense of content drowning into the world of water which is perhaps unimaginable in today's hustle and bustle of the city.*

SeaPlane Channel in Bellandoor Tank 1942



# Methodology

## 1. Secondary research

- Books and blogs, archival research

## 2. Primary research: field visits and interviews with:

- Elderly Priests from old temples
- Caretakers of old cemeteries
- Fodder collectors, livestock owners who could possibly be found along the bank of the lake
- Former members of the village *panchayat* (elected local council)
- Old residents

## 3. Photographs and videos, recording sounds

## 4. Developing, illustrations and animation

## 5. Story telling, narration, review, edit, review, edit....



Froth now settles permanently on the surface of Bellandur lake.



A very famous old temple on the bank of the lake lies submerged in water and unattended today.