

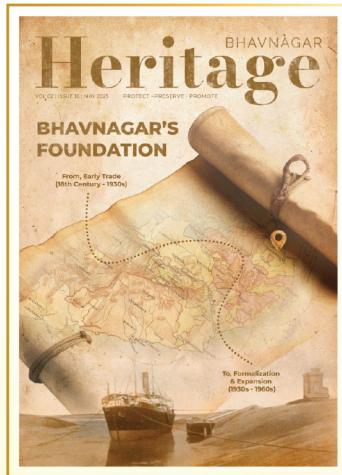
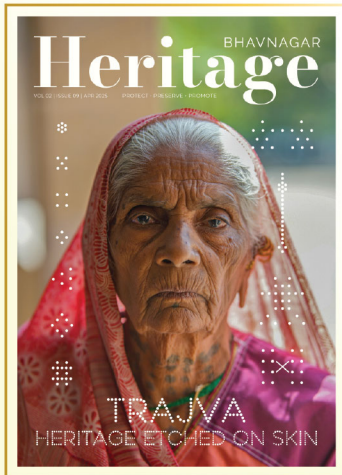
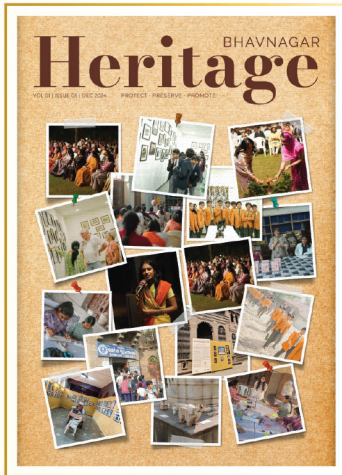
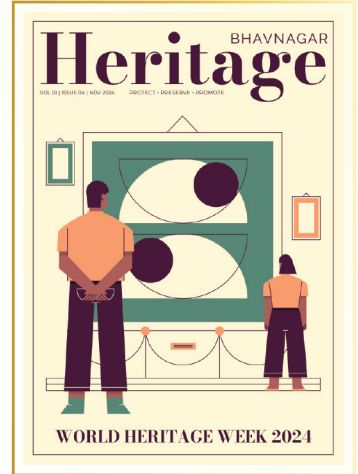
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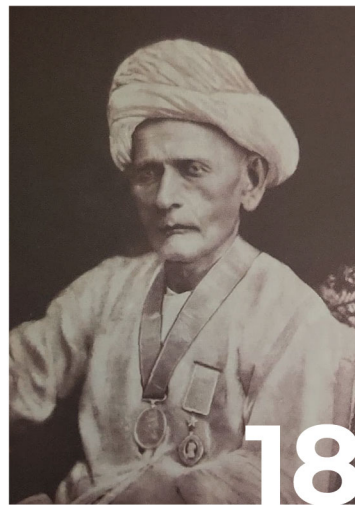
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AUGUST 2025

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HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT

BHAVNAGAR RAILWAY MUSEUM



India's railway network, one of the largest in the world, was born out of a colonial pursuit of efficiency and economic control. The first passenger train in India ran between Bombay and Thane on April 16, 1853. From there, a vast network of iron rails unfurled across the subcontinent. Over the decades, the railways became the backbone of the Indian subcontinent, reshaping commerce, communication, and connectivity. While the British government played a central role in laying the trunk lines, what is often less highlighted is the parallel and pioneering contribution made by princely states and among them, Bhavnagar stands tall.

Bhavnagar, a progressive princely state in Saurashtra, carved a unique niche in the annals of India's railway history. At a time when most princely rulers deferred to the British for infrastructural development, the Maharajas of Bhavnagar chose a different path, one of self-sufficiency, innovation, and long-term vision. The Bhavnagar State Railway (BSR) was conceived not just as a convenience or display of prestige but as a well-thought-out economic and administrative tool designed to empower people, move goods, and modernize the region.

Founded in 1878, the Bhavnagar State Railway was wholly owned and operated by the state, a rarity in colonial India. Under the dynamic reign of Maharaja Takhtsinhji Gohil and later his successors, the state invested heavily in railway infrastructure, laying down lines, building stations, procuring locomotives, and training staff. This wasn't just about connecting Bhavnagar to the rest of India; it was about integrating the economy, boosting trade from Bhavnagar port, and bringing remote villages into the fold of governance and opportunity.

One of the standout features of BSR was its early focus on design and adaptability. The stations built during the late 19th and early 20th century bore functional excellence and architectural grace. The choice of narrow-gauge lines in certain areas, the attention to cost-effective engineering, and the early adoption of signals and scheduling practices demonstrated the technical sophistication of the Bhavnagar railway enterprise. The state took pride in not just running trains but in running them well.

The Bhavnagar railway also demonstrated keen interest in local industry and labor. Workshops were set up to maintain locomotives and coaches, creating local employment and reducing dependence on British suppliers. These workshops, which once echoed with the clang of metal and the hiss of steam, became symbols of indigenous skill and mechanical aptitude. In a time when India was seen as a supplier of raw material and labor, Bhavnagar was quietly reversing the narrative by building, maintaining, and innovating on its own terms.

By the early 20th century, BSR connected Bhavnagar to other key regional centers and ports. It facilitated trade in cotton, salt, timber, and ghee, making Bhavnagar not just a port town but a railway hub. The synergy between the port and the rail lines was deliberately engineered, ensuring that goods could move seamlessly from ship to train and onward to markets across India. This logistical vision was decades ahead of its time.

When the process of integration with the Indian Union began post-Independence, the Bhavnagar State Railway merged into the Saurashtra Railway in 1948, and later into the Western Railway. The transition was smooth and emblematic of how well-structured and standardized Bhavnagar's operations already were. Though the flag of the princely state was lowered, its contributions continued to propel trains across the region.

Recognizing the richness of this legacy, the Bhavnagar Railway Museum was inaugurated in 2019. Unlike many regional museums that struggle for identity or authenticity, this one had a compelling story to tell, of a ruler who had dared to dream, and of a system that had once rivaled the best in efficiency and aesthetics. The museum today stands as a testimony to that golden age.

Spread across several rooms, the museum's collection includes archival photographs, blueprints, vintage instruments, ticket stubs, mechanical parts, telegraph systems, and station signage, all carefully preserved and displayed. It offers a journey into the past of Bhavnagar and into the broader narrative of how Indian railways evolved through both colonial intervention and princely innovation. There is a particular pride in showcasing how Bhavnagar's system stood shoulder to shoulder with British-run lines.



The museum is not static; it is dynamic in vision and intent. Documentation efforts are ongoing, with staff working to trace family histories of railway workers, mapping disused lines, and restoring lost photographs. Another highlight of the museum is its location. Situated within an active railway compound, the visitor is never far from the sound of a passing train, making the experience immersive and authentic. There's no attempt to isolate history in a glass case, instead, the museum invites interaction, questions, and wonder.



In recent months, efforts have been made to expand outreach. Educational tours, heritage walks, and collaborative exhibits with schools and colleges are being planned. The aim is not just to celebrate the past but to inform and inspire the future, especially in a time when India is again investing heavily in railway modernization.

What makes the Bhavnagar Railway Museum truly special is its local ownership. Maintained and curated with the support of local railway staff, heritage lovers, and institutions like INTACH, it reflects a community's pride in its past. This is not just a government initiative ticking boxes, it is a people's project.

In preserving the story of the Bhavnagar State Railway, the museum also preserves the story of a different kind of leadership. A leadership that believed in infrastructure before it became fashionable, that saw development not as a favour but as a duty. In this sense, the Maharajas of Bhavnagar were not just royal figures but early nation-builders.

As India speeds toward a future of bullet trains and electrified corridors, it is worth pausing at places like the Bhavnagar Railway Museum. They remind us that progress is not new, that even in the age of steam and semaphore, there were minds that dreamed of connectivity, productivity, and dignity for all.

And it is in these rooms, filled with rusted tools and faded photographs, that we find more than nostalgia. We find a vision that is clear, bold, and rooted in the belief that the railways could transform lives.

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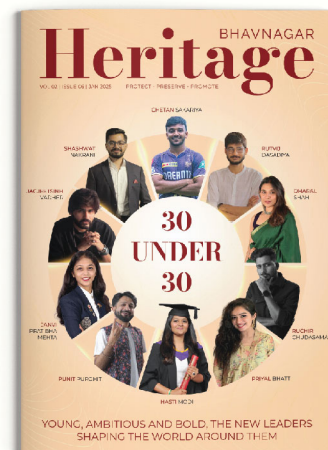
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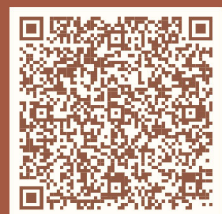
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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE PRACHI AGARWAL: REIMAGINING ACCESSIBILITY:



In a world where accessibility is too often an afterthought, Setubandh Foundation is redefining the narrative from the ground up. Based in Bhavnagar, Gujarat, this grassroots initiative is committed to the socio-economic integration of people with disabilities (PwDs), offering programs that span artisan empowerment, peer mentorship, inclusive hiring, and city-wide accessibility transformations.

In this candid interview, we sit down with the young founder of Setubandh, Prachi Agarwal, whose journey from corporate corridors to community classrooms is both inspiring and instructive. Rooted in Bhavnagar yet thinking globally, she shares how a childhood shaped by small acts of inclusion, an engineering degree, and transformative exposure to the deaf community led her to build a different kind of bridge, one that connects society to empathy, equity, and action.

What follows is a refreshing, unfiltered conversation about starting young, navigating resistance, imagining inclusive cities, and why giving back isn't just about grand gestures. It's about showing up, every single day.

Let's start from the beginning. You're from Bhavnagar?

Yes. My parents are originally from North India. When my dad was young, he didn't have many economic opportunities where he grew up, so he came to Bhavnagar looking for work. And this city gave us a lot—not just work, but also a sense of belonging. He eventually settled here when he was 24. I was born in Bhavnagar, and now this city is home. We're all from Bhavnagar now.

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BUILDING A BASKETBALL CULTURE: INDRAVIJAY GOHIL'S MISSION FOR BHAVNAGAR'S YOUTH

On the occasion of National Sports Day, observed every year on 29th August in honour of hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand, we turn the spotlight on a local hero who is redefining the sports landscape in Bhavnagar, not with a hockey stick, but with a basketball. Indra Vijay Gohil, a passionate sports mentor and community leader, has been instrumental in organizing tournaments, building youth engagement, and creating infrastructure for basketball in the city. In this candid conversation, he shares the challenges of developing a sports culture from the grassroots, his vision for Bhavnagar's youth, and the importance of discipline, opportunity, and structured support in shaping tomorrow's athletes.

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FROM PORTRAITS TO PIXELS: CELEBRATING WORLD PHOTOGRAPHY DAY WITH PRINCE STUDIO



Before the advent of photography, paintings and illustrations were the preferred way to document people and places. Royal and Noble families would have artists commissioned to create family portraits and document the sprawling landscape. Forts and palaces would be ornately painted while portraiture became an important subject for many artists.

The Mughal courts had their own atelier of artists who would paint important subjects and festivals in the miniature style using fresh pigments and dyes. Similarly, each region had their own school of art. These works of art have survived the ravages of time and are of immense cultural and historical significance today.

Around the same time as the invention of photography, Raja Ravi Varma was born. The artist, whose works are a National Treasure today was an important figure in the popularisation of the western style of portraiture. A formal set up where form, structure and lines are of immense importance. Varma even did this with mythology, humanising Gods. He travelled across India, but unlike the Orientalists who travelled the East and painted the landscape, Raja Ravi Varma became the artist of choice for royalty and nobility. In finding patronage amongst the aristocracy of India he carved a niche for himself. He would paint royalty in all their refinery and regalia. His works of art continue to be a medium to study jewellery.

Soon after in 1855, the camera was introduced in India. But it was only by the 1880's that the camera became an acceptable medium of documentation amongst the noble families of India. Patronage slowly shifted from the painter to the photographer. Photographers and photography studios gained popularity with artists such as Raja Deen Dayal, who became the court photographer to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad. As time progressed and technology advanced photography became a powerful tool to document.

During this time, Bhavnagar saw the building of Prince Studio. Founded in 1938, with the support of Maharaja Krishnakumar Sinhji, the Studio has and continues to capture some of the most important chapters of Bhavnagar's history. For example, the Maharaja's generous gift of a prized bull to Brazil was documented by the Studio. This bull, a simple yet symbolic offering, would later be credited as a catalyst for Brazil's booming dairy industry. It was moments like these-seemingly small gestures with a global impact-that Prince Studio had the privilege of capturing.

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FESTIVALS AND FAIRS OF SAURASHTRA: A TAPESTRY OF TRADITION AND JOY

- Jalpa Padaya

The vibrant region of Saurashtra, nestled in the western heart of Gujarat, is a land of timeless traditions and jubilant celebrations. Predominantly agrarian, the people of Saurashtra have always turned to festivals as a means to escape the monotony of rural life, foster unity, and uphold their spiritual and cultural heritage.

Celebrating Life Through Festivals

Festivals in Saurashtra are not merely rituals; they are social glue that binds communities, transcending social barriers and religious divides. While Hindus and Muslims have their distinct observances, some festivals like Diwali are celebrated with equal enthusiasm by both communities, reflecting the region's deep-rooted harmony.

Hindu festivals follow the rhythms of the lunar calendar and the agricultural cycle. Nutanvarsh, Bhai Bij, Labh Pancham, Tulsi Vivah, Makar Sankranti, Mahashivratri, Holi-Dhuleti, Ram Navami, Ganesh Chauth, and Janmashtami are just a few of the many cherished occasions. Caste-based observances also exist - with Raksha Bandhan (Baleva) traditionally significant for Brahmins, Dussehra for Kshatriyas, Diwali for Vaishyas, and Holi for Shudras - although such distinctions have blurred over time.

After cooking for two-three days of Chhath, they participate in the fairs of the seventh and eighth days and enjoy themselves. Particularly notable are the seventh and eighth days of Shavan, when villages come alive with Janmashtami fairs, marked by joy, devotion, and community feasting. Even though modern influences have altered the outer expressions of these festivals, their spiritual essence remains intact.

The Jain community adds to this vibrant cultural palette by celebrating Paryushan, Siddhachakra Puja, Kartik Purnima, Mahavir Jayanti, and Samvatsari, all focused on introspection, forgiveness, and ethical living.

Fairs: The Soul of Saurashtra's Festivities

Religious festivals are closely tied to grand fairs held across Saurashtra, drawing crowds from cities and remote villages alike. These fairs are more than marketplaces. They are carnivals of faith, folklore, food, and fun. Some of the most celebrated fairs include.

Dwarka, Shankhodwar Bet, and Nageshwar – centers of Krishna devotion.

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THE KINESTHETIC MEMORY OF GUJARAT'S FOLK CULTURE

India's cultural landscape is rich with a mosaic of folk dances and traditions. From the snow-covered valleys of Kashmir to the sun-soaked villages of Tamil Nadu, movement has always been a part of how people here celebrate, express devotion, mark seasons, or simply come together. Dance in India is not limited to the classical grace of Bharatanatyam or the intricate storytelling of Kathak. While these classical forms have their roots in temples and royal courts, there is another world of movement that exists outside the grand performance halls—in farms, in fishing villages, in fields and streets. These are the folk dances of India, shaped by daily life, weather, harvests, weddings, community festivals, and often, by work.

Every state has its own. In Punjab, there's Bhangra, born from the joyous celebrations of a successful harvest, where men jump, clap, and twirl to the beat of the dhol. In Maharashtra, there's Lavani, a powerful, graceful, and energetic form performed mostly by women, known for its swift footwork and expressive facial movements. Down south in Tamil Nadu, Kummi and Karagattam are danced during village festivals and community gatherings—simple, circular, and deeply connected to rural life. In Assam, Bihu marks the new year with quick, bouncing steps and songs of love and longing. The diversity is endless and each of these dances carries within it the memory of a people, a place, and a way of life.

In Gujarat, far from the glare of city lights and beyond the stages where commercial performances have become the norm, there exist two dance forms that beat with the raw, unfiltered pulse of tradition. The state is known internationally for Garba and Dandiya Raas, especially during Navratri, when towns and cities come alive with music, whirling skirts, and synchronized steps. But the state also holds lesser-known gems, two of which deserve special attention: Hudo and Tippani. They may not be as commercial or as widely performed as Garba, but they are rich in meaning and alive with cultural memory.

Let us first step into the rhythmic world of Hudo, a dance as earthy as the dust it rises from. Practiced by the Bharwad community, Gujarat's traditional shepherds, Hudo is deeply inspired by the natural world around them, particularly the energetic head-butting of sheep. To an outsider, that may seem like a strange source of inspiration. But when you live your days among animals, watch over them, care for them, and depend on them for survival, they begin to shape your imagination.

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CULTURAL FEAST- A RAINBOW OF MELODIES

A Soulful Evening in Bhavnagar with Musical Prodigy Parvathi Meenakshi, Graced by Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh and Curated by Cultural Visionary Nisheeth Mehta

Bhavnagar's ever-expanding cultural landscape is set to witness a remarkable milestone. On Sunday, 10 of August, 2025, Zaverchand Meghani Auditorium will play host to Cultural Feast – A Rainbow of Melodies, a celebration that brings together extraordinary talent, profound vision, and a legacy of artistic excellence. With the young and gifted Parvathi Meenakshi performing, the evening will be graced by the presence of legendary cultural icon Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh and curated by Bhavnagar's own cultural torchbearer, Nisheeth Mehta.

Parvathi Meenakshi: A Voice That Transcends Generations

From the moment she began training at the age of six under the late Pattammal Ganapati Iyer, Parvathi Meenakshi's journey has been guided by a spiritual calling as much as by talent. Today, under the mentorship of Geetha Anilkumar, an acclaimed Carnatic vocalist from Thiruvananthapuram, Parvathi's artistry blends technical finesse with rare emotional depth. Her grounding in classical traditions is complemented by academic excellence—she is a postgraduate student and a merit-holder in English Literature—underscoring her unique balance of intellect and intuition.

As a playback singer, Parvathi has contributed to multiple Malayalam film soundtracks and recently debuted in Marathi cinema alongside Javed Ali. Her wide appeal was evident when she emerged as a finalist in the 2024 national edition of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, having earlier ranked among the top 15 in its 2017 Marathi edition. Her international performances in London and Birmingham, alongside stalwarts like Kavita Krishnamurthy, Alisha Chinai, and Anuradha Paudwal, received standing ovations and cemented her reputation as a performer of rare depth and clarity.

With a voice that can shift seamlessly from meditative ragas to emotionally charged bhajans, Parvathi brings more than just melody to the stage—she brings presence, poise, and profound feeling.

Dr. Sonal Mansingh: The Embodiment of India's Cultural Consciousness

Lending her gravitas to the evening as Guest of Honour is Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh, one of India's most revered cultural figures. A dancer, scholar, orator, and cultural ambassador, Dr. Mansingh's work has continually illuminated the interplay between art, philosophy, mythology, and social reform.



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