

# Knowledge Outside the Classroom – An experience at Gir National Forest

Pratik Jayprakash Patel<sup>1</sup>, Rahul Suryakant Patel<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Mody University, Lakshmangarh, Dist. Sikar, Rajasthan 332311

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, APIED, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat 388120

Email: ar.pratikpatel@gmail.com, rahulpatel16101962@gmail.com

*Abstract : Students often have to live, imagine work and even enjoy in the classroom for most of the time during the 5 years of their tenure during Architectural education. The initial years till 2<sup>nd</sup> year are for acquiring skills and knowledge and the senior years are for performing and acquiring advanced skills required for an Architectural Profession. The Authors through this paper state that students also require outside the class knowledge in culture, wildlife, village life, forest, conservation, wildlife and cuisine. Hence the Authors who themselves have keen interest Wildlife and Photography took the initiative to impart the knowledge outside the regular classroom and make nature as a classroom. Hence it was decided to take some students from the Fourth year to Gir National forest amongst one of the most famous, ecologically sensitive and rich zones in the country, most noted for being the only habitat for Asiatic Lion. It is the Authors who state that such kind of initiatives and knowledge imparting has been ubiquitous in contemporary architectural education where global efforts are made on conservation of the nature as well as cultural heritage. The Authors state through this paper that if Students are given hands-on experience and approach they learn more and the learning is for life time. Architecture can also be taught through experience and not only by conventional jury and exam method. This paper is a collection of various experiences between a teacher and student, in which the teacher was the nature and context.*

**Key Words: Nature, Wildlife, Ecology, Conservation, Photography, Forest, Cuisine, Holistic Development**

## I. Introduction

### The Learning Scenario

Present architectural education focuses on all aspects needed for a student to acquire skills to become a successful architect. The knowledge and skills imparted are essential to become an architect and it is up to the student to what level one can adventure and go in depth. The curriculum prescribed by Council of Architecture (COA) is around all round development of a student. Then the University and departments decide on a syllabus and the concentration as per the curriculum as per COA. This is more less an adopted system by almost all institutions which fall under the COA registration process.

But seldom the syllabus or curriculum refer to what intensity and theme the focus should be. For e.g. Material studio in second year can be modern materials or Vernacular depending upon the focus of the institute and the faculty's know how. The parameters to interpret are left upon the institute to decide. Hence it is in fact a good system if an institute wants to focus on certain issues and concerns that they think are good to explore

and research upon. It is also a loop hole in the pretext it is open to interpret and without any clear indication an easy way out option is preferred depending upon the circumstances, budget and time constraints. The major parameter side lined is the ability, approach, understanding and the knowledge of faculty who are actually the people running the show and deciding what students learn and how they learn. Teacher's job today is not only to teach but to coordinate, advocate and manage the teaching, and support students in their quest for their likings and area to explore.

Hence if teachers are willing to explore and experiment ultimately that will be transferred to students and the profession ultimately. The Authors through this paper will ultimately conclude that precise surgical incisions can bring in more change than sudden and out of the context changes in methodologies of teaching and knowledge sharing. This paper is based upon a non-pedagogical approach on how a careful intervention of 3 days can bring a change in students approach, understanding and sensitivity for rest of their careers.

This paper also focuses on how a teacher's vision and approach was understood, supported and accepted by the management. This paper will also conclude how management of an institute is an important factor deciding on what knowledge, mentorship and incubation of skill is done in their institute.

## II. Study Area & Methodology

Gir National Park is one of the most important, sensitive and most famous habitat around the world, notably for the Asiatic Lion. It is also an important destination for the tourist not only in India but in the Asian sub-continent.

The Government notified the large geographical extent of Sasan Gir as wildlife sanctuary on 18th September, 1965 in order to conserve the Asiatic Lion. It covers total area of 1412 square kilometers of which 258 Km forms the core area of the National Park. Indiscriminate hunting by the people of Junagarh led to their decrease in population drastically, while they were completely wiped out from the other parts of Asia. It was the kind effort of Nawabs of Junagarh who protected the queen royalty in his own private hunting grounds. Later in due course of time Department of Forest Officials came forward to protect the world's most threatened species. From a population of approximately 20 lions in 1913, they have risen to a comfortable 523 according to 2015 census. There are 106 male, 201 female and 213 sub-adult lions in the wilderness of these four districts. ([www.girnationalpark.in](http://www.girnationalpark.in))

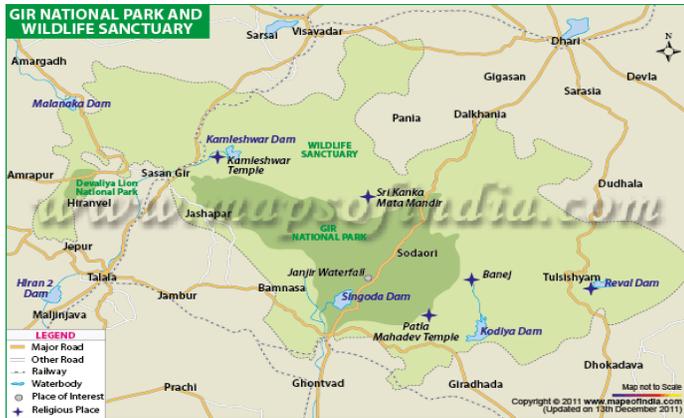


Fig 1 – Map of Gir National Park (Dark green) and Sanctuary, Image courtesy: www.mapsofindia.com

Everybody is aware of Gir as a notified area and a tourist destination for seeing the lions, but it is infact a habitat not only for the lions but also the indigenou people of the forest and along with its flora and fauna. It is actually a very live, vibrant region with its own culture, strong context and heritage. Hence it was planned by the Authors to arrange a trip to that place not only to see the lions but become sensitive to other aspects of the region along with its culture, vernacular architecture, farming, life style and the pace of life. These parameters were to be experienced and not only heard, as per the Author’s belief and approach. Cuisine is also essential part of any region’s identity hence it was decided to explore in that area along with traditional techniques of culinary art. For learning Architectural aspects of hospitality sector it was decided to stay in the forest lodge and not a hotel or resort of any type in the sanctuary itself. The entire experience was tailor made for the students to explore and experience through a short trip.

The Aim of the trip was to have a very non-pragmatic yet important experience of a strong context which is easily accessible, yet unexplored part of region with rich heritage. The objective was to share and not teach about the context. It was left up to each student to interpret, understand and absorb the context and surroundings in their own way.

Hence Methodology adopted was to have an un-conventional and informal approach of experience sharing and interactive sessions not only with the Authors but also with local people, visit to surrounding areas in villages and also travelling in public transport and not by cars. It was also a part of methodology to experience as a group and not individual. A total of 13 students from 4<sup>th</sup> year Architecture participated on voluntary basis and both Authors were part of the trip.

### III. The Intervention

The place of accommodation was Gir Retreat, a forest lodge which is water locked site by a stream on three sides at village named Rajasthali, on the border of sanctuary. The site itself is very unique in the nature that it is known to have no mosquitoes and free of dust due to its strategic location. The resort is known for its setting, ambience and great food amongst the regular visitors of Gir forest and region. Students travelled in private

buses overnight to reach the village and tractors were sent to pick them up rather than a bus or car.

No sessions were planned in general rather it was the entire experience from stay, leisure, knowledge, food and visits were part of learning and knowledge as Authors were completely involved and constantly improvising on the circumstances. Local people especially “Bharwads” from nearby village were called to interact with the students and talk about their life style. The students were taken to a nearby a forest villa designed by the Author named “Surya Villa”, which shares a common boundary with the forest. The design of the villa is very unique which responds to the surroundings yet is a place to see lions roaming around without harming the environment which the students found to be an element to study. Local farming techniques were explained through a visit to onsite farms in the lodge itself along with the mango plantation details and the importance of it. Conservation and preservation of forest was explained to students by local farmers and the Authors.

Knowledge on Asiatic lion and the efforts to conserve and preserve their habitat along with the importance of “Maldharis” who are the indigenou people living in harmony with lions in the core forest was explained.

In between during the day students were given enough time to relax and gather their own experiences in groups along with leisure time and proper rest. The students also took part in the cooking and interacting with the Authors on Culinary art of Gujarat and the Maharajas. The entire cooking session from early evening to dinner time was attended by the students learning the culinary art and sharing their own experiences.

The day ended with a long evening session over dinner party, talent session and star gazing as Gir possesses very clear skies at night. The session also consisted of talks on our culture, mythology and history with local song and dance performances by “Bharwad”.

The main objective was to learn between harmony of nature and man, and the experience which the students had not done before.

### IV. Student Experience

The students compiled and shared their experience through a monograph titled “The learning Tree” and following are some of the highlights of it:



The Gir trip was among the most enriching and enjoyable experiences of college. There were many unique events at this trip that made it one of the best. These included stargazing, lemon picking and food, and enjoying an evening with the bharwad, by sharing songs and epitomes that gave me an insight into their lives, which are greatly different from ours. It seemed like we belonged in a different world - away and free from the busy schedules and fast lives! We also spoke, may times, about ours and sirs' various interests. Best of which were the wildlife photography and cooking. These are some things that we were not experienced at, and listening to the epitomes and stories behind it just filled us with awe. It was great bonding, and my only regret is that we didn't get to see a lion!



PRAGYA



# GIR EXPERIENCE

જો જો રહી ના જતા રાહુલ સાહેબ ના રીસોર્ટ મા જવાનું....

freedom of expressing ourselves within nature

મયાન પર બેસીને આકાશ ને જોવાની મજા માટે શબ્દો નથી

knowing that there is something more than architecture for a person to become a successful architect was inspiring

પ્રકૃતિ સાથે ના સંબંધનો એલસાસ કર્યો

learn how a good & delicious food is cooked as "cooking needs all 5 senses working at a time which is more than architecture"

રાજાભાઈ ભસ્વાડ જેવા નિરાશ્રિમાની માણસ પાસેથી જીવન જીવવાની ચાવીઓ શીખવી એ નસીબ ની વાત છે

making out money cover from natural elements was fun

Energisers by Ar. Rahul Patel

live like a king, man !

live your today !



મોલિક પાવાગઢી



## My Experience in GIR

Meet patel

On beautiful sunny day we reached at the Gir retreat resort. It was Saturday usually we used our weekend for realizing our laziness but on that was some different . It seems very fresh and active morning because of there environment.

It was very healthy and refreshing . finally we are with the nature. APART FROM THE ARCHITECTURE. BUT WITH SOUL OF THE ARCHITECTURE.

There was not just a fun trip . I learned lot than the fun from it. That how the life is surviving in the nature and how the nature is supporting the life we met some people there who had some good memories which they shared with us. It was wonderful experience for me because I learned something from that which was not thought by trip. That's why its not just trip but it's a learning trip. I am very thankful to rahulsir and pratksir.



## My Experience in GIR



GIR SASAN, It is a place connected to nature and also holds communities that are in touch with nature and the environment around. It was a trip of valuable experiences and a trip of knowledge of life.

When in GIR we had a new experience with nature. The rawness of the town from the roads to the house facades. We entered the town in a tractor which was a whole new experience in itself. Our journey to the life of Gir started then.



Rahul sir (Ar. Rahul Patel) met us at his place the Gir Retreat Resort. The resort was a nicely planned and a worth seeing place as an Architecture student. Apart from the resort his own house is a dream come true place within the jungle. At night the place gives the experience of being inside the jungle.



Apart from all the experience of places, it was a great experience to interact with Rahul sir himself. The way he lives his life is adorable. A person who is full of life with a knowledge from around the world. A knowledge to live life with the best people, in the best surrounding and also an experience of living with the common people and living with the common and in places of nature. It was a trip of valuable experiences and a trip of knowledge of life. The knowledge of experiencing life in a better way. A new view towards life was learned.

Aabha Contractor



## My Experience in GIR

Gir is a wildlife sanctuary and the very idea to live adjoining the Gir Sanctuary was amazing!

Being away from the city life, the stay at the Gir Retreat Resort had been like that in the lapse of nature.

The visit to Gir was more of an experiential journey through the life of Rahul Sir (Ar. Rahul Patel), his ideas of approach towards life and architecture.

His story taught us to find what we are actually interested in and follow our heart. We learned the importance of giving our best in whatever we do, from architecture to life.

The visit to The Surya Palace, the rides in the tractor, the long talks about the lions, the dinner night with the Bharwad, the sky gazing from the Machaan and the amazing chicken cooked for us – are some of the memories we took back with us, which we will never forget. The visit to Gir had been a once in a lifetime experience.



Anmol Shamani



Going to Gir forest was one of the remarkable experiences of my life. Learning about the fauna and the stay amidst the jungle couldnt be forgotten. The best part was Bhrawads songs and the charm of the night.No better stargazing can be thought of.The architects vision for creating such eminent space was very noteworthy. Else I was fascinated by Khan babas food , the hospitality and the humility of Rahul Sir. Thank you Sir, for making us go through such wonderful trip and yes, the tractor and motorcycle rides were extraordinary.



Shivani Bhandari

## V. Conclusions

The Authors were very confident in the belief that such trips would prove utmost essential not only as break from regular coursework during the semester but also the entire setting of the place along with the knowledge sharing would prove noteworthy if not effective. The primary vision was a break from pedagogical architecture approach and methodology, where a student learns to respect nature and culture first, not only the site.

Vision and approach was the key and equally accepted by teacher and students together for the experimental trip which was noteworthy. The learning outcome was more than knowledge and experience but a holistic view towards certain aspects of life that none of the subjects in any curriculum could teach. It is also inferred that if interpretation of syllabus is done

in the non-stereotypical way then effective teaching-learning can be achieved.

Focus on traditional values, culture, heritage and surroundings is of utmost importance and the curriculums seldom address them. We as teachers have to find a way to conserve and create awareness for our own context and not just impart global knowledge. Vernacular architecture and ecosystems should be taught in depth if we want to move ahead and preserve our surroundings for the future. Even green architecture/buildings have a lot of design parameters towards local style, materials and their applications. Architects and especially the students are the future of our Country and our identity is in the hands of them hence we should invest in them to be sensitive and acquire good knowledge on local aspects and global phenomenon both. Further more on the subject, short sketching trips could be also planned with students and thus teacher-student relations get stronger and learning can be outside the conventional classroom.

Management of an institute needs to be pro-active and willing to accept the vision, without which teachers and students both cannot explore. Related study programs can be made little bit informal and students made more sensitive towards nature and environment along with culture and heritage.

should be encouraged to take up research and design projects in Vernacular Architecture through study trips. Focus should be increased on environment and sustainable architecture through such trips.

Though a hands on approach is needed to study local and vernacular style, more documentation, books and database should be encouraged by each institution and budget for it should be prepared separately to support it.

Learning under the tree is the way forward.

#### Acknowledgement

This paper is dedicated to 12SA students of APIED - Maulik Pavagadhi, Meet Patel, Rahul Makwana, Nihal Galathia, Lakshya Wadhvani, Krupesh Patel, Aabha Contractor, Anmol Shamani, Pragya Chauhan, Shivani Bhandari, Divyakshi Khale, Surali Sadiwala and Parita Babu.

The authors acknowledge the entire staff of Gir Retreat forest lodge especially Khanbhai, Nejadhari Travels for transport and all the wonderful people of Gir Forest especially "Bharwad" for their eagerness, support and assistance.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

[www.girnationalpark.in](http://www.girnationalpark.in). (Accessed November 2017)  
[www.girretreat.com](http://www.girretreat.com) (Accessed November 2017)