

How about a Design Street & lights under Sabarmati

By Darlie O Koshy

Ahmedabad is an important city for its history, culture, commercial activity and intellectual property.

Historically, Ahmedabad is home to many firsts, one of which is the system of tax collection and local administration. In the field of culture, it is home to some of the best architecture and performing artists. Intellectually, it has some of the best institutes in the country, be it in management, design or technology.

With all these and nearly 50 lakh population, one would expect the city to have more prominence in the country and in the world. But that is not so. And, a lot needs to be done. For starters, historically impor-

tant sites such as the Sabarmati Ashram need a facelift. The neglect of places associated with Mahatma Gandhi is upsetting, particularly for outsiders. The association with the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi bestows Gujarat a special status and the city should see this in the global context. Ahmedabad inter alia also stands for non-violence and vegetarianism.

Then, there are environment concerns which need to be addressed. Ahmedabad is bursting at its seams with several shopping malls, restaurants and multiplexes coming up. The resultant chaos and cacophony, along with the heat and pollution, dampens the spirit of visitors and residents.

Much needs to be done to improve the condition of the city — increasing the green cover, developing water bodies and creating dust-proof pavements. This has not happened yet. The roads leading to the National Institute of Design, Sanskar Kendra and Kite Museum could have become better than a boulevard in Paris or in Milan provided some imagination was exercised while designing the roads at Paldi, including renaming the road in front of NID as "Design Street".

I am glad about the focus on the Sabarmati river in recent times. My official residence in NID overlooks the Sabarmati river.

Thus my life over last five years is intrinsically connected to the river. When I see the dry river most of the year and the stink it raises, my heart bleeds. There are seven bridges across the Sabarmati river. I have seen in Seoul that putting lights under bridges, that reflect on the water,

lends an ethereal touch to the city. It is not expensive and corporate houses in the city can come forward to do this.

I suggest that a group of architects, graphic designers and urban planners works as a team on pedestrian ways, signages and colour schemes. Railway level crossings in the heart of the city should be removed. I can't recall any leading city in India other than Ahmedabad which have them within the city.

A city becomes alluring when it promotes its character, style, harmony, culture, education, heritage and civic life.

Much needs to be done in all these areas, though the city's business like approach, focus on wealth creation and less bureaucracy are commendable facets. If business, aesthetics and civic sense can be combined, the city will have glorious years ahead.

(The author is the executive director of NID)