Conserving heritage by being there

*Kesarba Kalyansiba Darbar*¹ was born about 100 years ago under the British rule. She vividly remembers that royals used to offer their ‘*hajri*’ (attendance) to the British at a nearby village. She says that she has led a wonderful, happy life without any worries or problems. This indeed is the secret to her longevity!

Kesarba lives in their ancestral home which is around 200 years old. She says that this house holds precious memories for her and she cannot think of going anywhere else now. Her great-great granddaughters based in Mumbai insist that she should come and stay with them, but Kesarba is adamant. She says that she cannot imagine living anywhere else, other than the place in which she was married.

She recalls that ‘*ghee*’ was priced at just one rupee per kilo when she was young!

She says ‘cemented houses’ miss the craftsmanship of yesteryears. The intricate designs engraved on the wooden doors, pillars, windows and staircases in her house are spectacular. “Carpenters of that calibre are not available these days,” she complains. Initially her ‘*haveli*’ was seven storied; now it remains at just two.

Kesarba was eldest of the three siblings and married when she was just 12 years old. Over the years she became the proud mother of four daughters and four sons. Interestingly, her elder son Prithivi, who is 80 years old, looks as old as his mother! Kesarba does not exactly remember the year her husband died but says that “you can check the engraving on the nearby well” (constructed in his memory). It said that he died about 30 years back.

Talking of the trend these days, she says it is tough to make out if the person is a boy or a girl as both dress alike. She chuckles and then quips “*aaikalna chhokra chhokareeyo ek prakar na kapdaa pehrey chhay*” (Nowadays both boys and girls wear same kind of clothes). She feels that women are not as feminine as they used to be. They wear jeans and trousers. Amusingly, she recalls how Prithivi was so happy when he wore trousers for the first time when he turned five!

She recalls that how she did not let any of her children wear tight fitted clothes ever. She would let her children enjoy their childhood and they were sent to school only when they were old enough.

¹(Tekra haveli, Village Aluva, Mansa Taluka, near Gram Bharti, District Ahmedabad, Gujarat)