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Sherbet tasting at Harnarain Gokuldas

Chitra Narayanan

People in Delhi are putting on their walking shoes like never before. With various interest groups using walks as a medium to sensitise citizens on the problems facing the Capital, there are a variety of interesting rambles to choose from. From tree walks, heritage walks, food walks, biodiversity walks, bird-watching walks, Gandhi walks, Yamuna walks to even saree walks, the strolls have acquired a new sense of purpose.

"I firmly believe that walks are an activist medium," agrees Arshiya Sethi of Kri Foundation, who has curated a large number of walks in the Capital.

During her stint at the India Habitat Centre, she used to organise two walks a month. While there were the routine heritage treks, she also conducted a variety of offbeat rambles, among them a museum walk, a cactus walk, a walk into the Bhatti mines to show how the billion-year-old Aravallis were getting degraded, a walk-and-talk at the craft museum led by textile historian Jasleen Dhamija to showcase the art of Phulkari embroidery.

Arshiya says two things have driven the growth in city walks — curiosity to learn more about our heritage and activism.

Often the two are intertwined. Take Delhi Bird, the Northern Indian Bird Network, an organisation of birding enthusiasts which does weekend walks all year round and has been highlighting issues such as encroachment into the Okhla Bird Sanctuary, the drying up of Sultanpur, and so on.

While Delhi Bird's walks are free, some of the others have a nominal fee attached to them. Delhi Heritage Walks, for instance, is a one-year-old outfit run by five working professionals, whose love for history brought them together. It organises walks every weekend for a nominal Rs 200, but occasionally also takes on customised requests from schools and educational institutions on weekdays. Interestingly, Delhi Heritage Walks, which has grown through online publicity and word of mouth, invites experts on various subjects to be walk leaders. Says Kanika Singh, one of the founder volunteers, "We mostly do walks around monuments and heritage sites, but these are woven around a theme." Themes could be an 1857 walk, medieval culture, a Ramzan walk — pretty eclectic.

Kanika says it's mostly young professionals who sign up for the walk and on an average 20-25 register, with around a dozen finally turning up. Most of Delhi's walks are Internet driven, the word spread through blogs, Facebook forums and email invites. So, get set to discover Delhi — on foot

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