

publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

# HAMAZOR

4  
issue 2011



## Preserving History



Prince Philip having the shawl draped on him, p 62

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Pages of T54, meticulously separated from each other. Damage from insects have stuck the pages together.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Courtesy of individuals whose articles appear in the magazine or as mentioned

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## From the Editor



As this issue goes to print, so comes the end of another year. We have had some major breakthroughs, achievements of individuals to be proud of, and yet some problems that never seem to get solved. As long as the majority in the community think with foresight and goodwill, we will progress and thrive.


When reading the Parsiana of 7<sup>th</sup> July, pp 14 & 16 – “Equal Rights for men and women”, one felt nothing but pride for the decision taken by the Chairman and Trustees of the Karachi Parsi Anjuman Trust Fund. Here in Karachi at least, we have moved ahead and kept abreast with changing times. Our own Dastur Dhalla would have felt delighted that his teachings have borne fruit today in his beloved Karachi. No sooner was this information printed in the Parsiana, persons who have diverse views and feel threatened with change, were vocal in various Internet forums. None of these were Karachiites to whom the change applies to, so why do those who are not affected, object or cause division. We as a community [Karachi] stand behind the KPATF and welcome their decision.

*“Hearken with your ears to these best counsels, Reflect upon them with illumined judgment. Let each one choose his/her creed with that freedom of choice ...”* Yasna 30.2 – Dinshah J Irani translation.

Our neighbour – Mumbai – is creating news of its own but of a contrary kind. Some orthodox individuals have objected to Government MLA funds, a generous amount of Rs1,000,000, being utilised for the repairs at Doongerwadi, as it is ‘causing them anguish at the thought of a “juddin” coming forward to assist’, though Parsis happen to be citizens of India and entitled to Government monies. The BPP have taken this assistance which makes sense, but one wonders at their sincerity of readily accepting the said money on one hand, yet not allowing non Parsis to attend the funeral ceremonies nor permitting them to pay their last respects. This applies also to spouses who are not Zoroastrians but their loved ones are.

And the latest – its movie time at the Khareghat Colony which is adjacent to the Doongerwadi for the shooting of Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s film. Bright lights, cranes and generators disturbed the peace of the residents for days, but to add insult to injury ‘a base camp for shooting’ comprising of dressing rooms, portaloos, garbage disposal units, etc., were set up on the Doongerwadi grounds. Dastur Khurshed Dastoor of Udvada happened to be passing by, noticed, tried to approach one of the Trustees who lives in the Colony and is in charge of the Doongerwadi, but was told he was asleep at just after 9pm! The Dastur sahib eventually spoke to the BPP Chairman who happened to be out of the country but was informed permission had been given to film in the Colony. The misuse of the Doongerwadi grounds was not referred to. On 16<sup>th</sup> October, through the Bombay Samachar, Dastur Khurshed responded to comments made about him on the WAPIZ Page of 14<sup>th</sup> October. A sad day for all of us, that a Dastur sahib who went out of his way to stop the misuse and to preserve the sanctity of the Doongerwadi grounds, has to justify his motives through the press. Is it because he is not a bigot and voices his opinion if he feels something is wrong that he is written about?

To end on a happy note, we congratulate ZTFE on celebrating their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary early this month, being the first centre for Zoroastrians in the West.

17 October, 2011  
  
 Toxy Cowasjee, 2A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530, Pakistan

## Fali S Nariman

by darius j khambata – Additional Solicitor General of India

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he photograph of Fali S Nariman on the inner cover of his memoirs personifies him. He stands in a dressing gown in his unkempt study against the backdrop of stacks of papers, and shelves laden with scores of books, staring defiantly at the camera – much like a proud lion, a victor of countless battles.

“Fali” as he is known to most members of the Bar (and “FSN” to some), in the early years of his practice was a “devil” of Khurshedji H Bhabha in the Chambers of Sir Jamshedji Kanga the doyen of the Bar. When many years later, I was to join the Bar, Khurshedji had told me that I should do so only “*If you have the stomach for a good fight*”. Fali still has that fire in his belly! Anyone who has heard his metallic voice rising to a fever pitch, directing wave after wave of relentless logic at a judge, will agree with that.

Fali is the sort of Counsel that a law student will rush to court to hear – I used to steal away from the demands of internship at a Solicitor’s firm, to hear Fali on his frequent visits to the Bombay High Court. But to truly witness his greatness you have to work with him. The vigour he brings to his argument is a product of intense preparation. He slaves (and makes his entire team slave!) over a series of lists of dates (of various shapes, sizes and detail) submissions and notes. He is an original thinker always probing for a new approach to a legal problem. He tunes and fine-tunes a point to diamond sharp ferocity. What is seen in court is only the tip of a very deep iceberg. He is the advocate par excellence, who always eschews technical or legally complex arguments in favour of a simplicity of approach that exudes sheer common sense. All this with the most formidable legal acumen and intellect to boot!

For the Bombay High Court however Fali is more than just the lawyer who dominated the Supreme Court in the 1980s and 1990s. He was and remains the pater familias.

Conferences with Fali are always highly charged affairs. It is not uncommon for him to lambast a client or a solicitor, who in their heart of hearts I think always felt that facing the wrath of a court was far easier. His conferences are strewn with now legendary admonitions to the lawyers present which often are of the nature of “*look sharp*”, “*write it down! write it down!*”. The stress levels have the remarkable effect of concentrating the mind!

When I first appeared with Fali in the early 1990s I was overwhelmed by the sheer scale of his intellectual and physical energy! In those early days of my career thirty minutes of an early morning conference (the earliest I have had with him has been at 6.30 am!) were far more exhausting than the actual encounter in court. When I used to recount this to my colleagues I was told that “*This is nothing, you should have seen him in the 1980s.*”

I did see Fali and his wonderful wife Bapsi not only in the 1980s but indeed from the 1960s onwards. They were and remain my parents’ dearest friends. They are the quintessential friends in times of need and always fun loving, warm and exuberant. One of Fali’s great attributes is his devotion and loyalty to his friends and there are several who have benefited from this. A stream of princes and politicians have flocked to his door for help and so too have his friends. So many for whom he appeared gratis. Friends who turned clients and clients who turned friends.

He has no airs about him at all. During conference at home, his preferred form of dress is a white collarless shirt with a red felt Parsi topi adorning his pate. It is not uncommon, when he is in a hotel (in the old days, always the Nariman Suite at the Oberoi) to see him personally serve and distribute pieces of cake during a conference. He has a great joie de vivre about him. An early memory is of him on the dance floor on New Year’s eve at the Race View Hotel in Mahabaleshwar resplendent in a tweed jacket and Himachali topi. Another is of him sportingly accompanying H M Seervai when that grand old man spontaneously broke forth into song (“*Wouldn’t it be lovely ...*”) one day at lunch at the Bombay Bar Association.

Fali has appeared in almost every important case before the Supreme Court since the 1970s. This is an unparalleled achievement. He wields a mastery over diverse fields of law including constitutional law, administrative law and commercial

law. He is a great jurist not merely a lawyer. To name but a few of his cases: the Needle Industries case (the leading case on corporate law in India), the Indian Express case (a defence of the freedom of the press), the Jehovah Witness case (a defence of the freedom of expression and religion), the T M A Pai case (concerning the rights of minorities to privately administer educational institutions), the Second Judges case (where the judiciary was conferred with participatory rights in the appointment and transfer of Judges), the Union Carbide case (defending the US multinational against claims in tort by the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy – an appearance he has now publicly regretted), the Cauvery Water dispute (for Karnataka against Tamil Nadu), I R Coelho's case (extending judicial review even to statutes placed in the Ninth Schedule to the Constitution), the Patel Engineering case (concerning the scope of the Court's powers in appointing arbitrators), the Renuagar cases (concerning judicial review of foreign awards) and the Jamshed Wadia case (which laid down the limits to rent increases by public authorities).

In his writings (and he is prolific) you see great intellectual depth and wisdom. When Fali speaks or writes he always does so to make some point which engages the senses.

Fali's court craft and turn of foot in a difficult case are legendary. It is said of him more than anyone else, that in rejoinder he can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. His philosophy of advocacy is to critically analyze and choose only the best of several points and to focus on one or two key areas. He speaks of the need to "think" about a case and regrets that more lawyers do not step back from their papers to do so.

Fali has now moved beyond extraordinarily successful practice to another level. As a member of the Rajya Sabha (and he made great sacrifices to diligently attend to his duties) he reveled in being able to chastise and lecture Members of Parliament. Although appointed by the Government of the day he did not hesitate to sharply criticize it for its indifference to the treatment of minorities in Gujarat and returned the brief he held for the Government of Gujarat in the Narmada Dam case. The honours he has to his credit are legion: the Padma Vibhushan, the Presidency of Law Asia, the 2002 Gruber Prize for Justice, President of the International Council for Commercial Arbitration, Vice-Chairman of the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce, member of the International Commission of Jurists, President of the Bar Association of India (for as long as the memory can stretch!) to name a few. It is fair to say that Fali is the face of the Indian Bar to the world and he has done India proud.

As numerous as are his achievements, of even greater value is what he has given up – his resignation as Additional Solicitor General when the emergency was proclaimed in 1975 was an act of great valour. Few know that he was at that point slated to become Solicitor General of India and fewer still that in later years he would refuse the offices of Attorney General and Law Minister.

Over the years Fali has mellowed like any great vintage but his courage is undiminished. He champions causes, howsoever unpopular they may be. He has now become the conscience keeper of the Supreme Court. In many senses he also represents an age that has gone by and his memoirs are a repository of great treasures and lessons from the past.

To speak of Fali without speaking of Bapsi would be to paint an incomplete picture. She is his alter ego, soul mate and life's companion. It is fair to say that Fali would not be Fali without Bapsi. She is a great chef and several of her exquisitely crafted cook books carry a dotting forward by Fali. We have all been beneficiaries of her culinary largesse but more importantly also of the largeness of her heart and of her warmth and hospitality. Several hours of her week are occupied by social service. Fali and Bapsi can now also revel in the great pride of seeing their brilliant son Rohinton appointed as Solicitor General of India. Their daughter Anaheeta has also done them proud by the dedicated work she is doing as a speech therapist with the handicapped and with disabled children. Their gracious and talented daughter-in-law Sanaya and their charming granddaughters Nina and Khursheed complete the Nariman family.

Fali and Bapsi are true Zoroastrians. He has the roar but also the heart of a lion, and couples that with humour, humility and integrity. He is truly the great Fali Nariman – a great son of India. ■■■■



## *The Chairman's Report presented at the AGM on 25 September 2011*



Past Chairpersons Ruby Contractor, Shahpur Captain and Sammy Bhiwandiwalla, WZO members and my fellow committee members, I welcome you all to our 31<sup>st</sup> AGM.

It does not seem that long since we had our last AGM. Well it is not surprising since it was only eight months ago since we had the last one which was postponed from last year due to the adverse weather. During this time WZO has moved forward and let me report on some of the highlights during that period.

My fellow managing committee members and I are very happy to present our Annual Report and Accounts to you. I hope that you have had an opportunity to go through it by now. If you have not and would like a copy, please come and see any of the Committee members present here today as we have some spares for you. I offer my sincere thanks to Sammy Bhiwandiwalla for preparing the report and to Dinyar Modi for preparing the accounts.

It would not be possible for WZO to move forward without the loyal support from all of you. You have made my task that much more worthwhile. My thanks also go to all the committee members for sharing the workload with me.

WZO continues to make new friends by actively participating at global Zoroastrian events. We were particularly pleased to hear that FEZANA unanimously passed a resolution at their AGM in April this year, acknowledging the good and benevolent work done by WZO throughout the world. Our thanks go to the FEZANA members for this endorsement. This year, WZO participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Vancouver. Our Youth Co-ordinator, Monaz Dalal, and our Social Secretary, Benafsha Engineer, not only represented WZO at the Congress but were given the opportunity to address the young attendees. Monaz discussed the Zoroastrian identity for our youth and how they are using Social Networks to share their thoughts and learn from each other. Benafsha debated whether Zoroastrianism is based on Spirituality or Rituality. Her conclusions were that our religion is based on Spirituality, however we should not discard or show disrespect to the rituals as they are an important part of any religion. Our thanks go to Monaz and Benafsha for the magnificent way they represented WZO to the other attendees. We also offer our thanks to some of our members who generously donated to WZO for covering the costs of their trip.

Every year, WZO organises at least four events where we can socialise with our members and friends, and raise the much needed funds to support our charitable activities. The Nowruz Dinner Dance in March had a Persian theme with Persian meal and music. Our committee member from India, Homi Khusrakhan, and his wife Dhanoo, thoroughly enjoyed the evening. The Summer BBQ is always an enjoyable day, thanks to our hosts, Alex and Valerie Burns who once again opened their gardens to us. WZO's committee member from India and the President of the Association of Inter-married Zoroastrians (AIMZ), Meher Amersey, attended and assisted at the BBQ. Thanks also to Rohinton Irani for his fundraising activities which helps to booster our funds. Our very special thanks go to our Social Secretary, Armaity Engineer and her daughter, Benafsha, for organising all these events and ensuring their success. In addition to the above mentioned events, our past Chairman, Rumi Sethna with his wife, Hilda, have been organising the Gala Dinner Dance in November for many years. For the past few years, they have been doing it from their home in the Isle of Man which makes it doubly difficult for them. They now feel that they would like someone else to take over organising the event and they would be pleased to offer their assistance. We do hope that someone will step forward to take over the mantle and help booster the corpus for our Aloo Vatcha Education Fund. We offer our sincere thanks to Rumi and Hilda for not only organising the event but also for their hard work in promoting the event to their family and friends for over 20 years.

The annual seminar was held at the prestigious Nehru Centre in June. The speakers this year were Ojand Hadinia whose talk was titled "Avesta, Avestan and the History of the Iranians" and Tenaz Dubash



who showed her film titled "Crisis in the Zoroastrian Faith" and then answered questions from the floor. As ever, we offer our special thanks to Shahin Bekhradnia, our President and Religious Co-ordinator, for organising the event.

Charity giving continues to be the focus for WZO. We provide substantial funds to the two WZO Trusts in India which are ably managed by Dinshaw & Bachi Tamboly. We are totally indebted to this lovely couple and the other Trustees for their magnificent work in the Gujarat area. In addition, we are supporting Zoroastrians in Iran through Pourchista and the Kerman Anjuman. In the West, we provide medical aid through the Noshirwan Cowasjee Medical Benevolent Fund and education grants through the Aloo Vatcha Education Fund.

Fund Raising has been difficult over the last few years as we all have had to tighten our belts during the current global economic crisis. However, I am pleased to inform you that we have increased our revenues this year, thanks mainly to the increased financial support from the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation and bequests left to WZO by some of our members. We offer our sincere thanks to the trustees of ERSF for their continued confidence in WZO. We would urge all our members to consider WZO when making their wills. We are pleased to report that through the prudent and judicious management of our investment portfolio by our founder member, Shahpur Captain, we have increased our income and performance from our investments, so far this year.

The Hamazor continues to remain the foremost magazine of its type under the dedicated editorial management of Toxy Cowasjee. After a break of over two years, we are very happy to report that the Hamazor is now restored to our members in India. This has only been possible through generous sponsorship for its global distribution. Our sincere thanks go to Smita Crishna, Fali Nariman and Soli Sorabjee for starting the ball rolling. I am sure you are all aware that, over the last few years, we have had to rely on sponsorship to cover the cost of printing for our members outside of India. This has come mainly from our members in Pakistan and from our past Chairman, Rumi Sethna and his wife Hilda. We offer our gratitude to Happy Minwalla from Pakistan, who has agreed to sponsor the printing of all the 2012 issues printed there. The current cost of printing and postage for each issue around the world is approximately £3,000 (US \$5,000). Could we please urge you to get together with your family and friends and consider sponsoring one issue or at least making a contribution towards it. Your sponsorship will be recognised in that issue, if you so wish.

At every AGM, we have to go through the election procedures to elect the next year's committee and we pride ourselves on our transparency. According to the notice sent out, all present committee members due for re-election have to lodge their desire to stay on the committee at least 72 hours before the AGM and we are pleased to say that seven out of the nine due for re-election have indicated their willingness to stay on. We are therefore sad to say 'goodbye' to the managing committee members who wish to step down and 'hello' to those who have expressed their desire to stand. We offer our sincere thanks to both the members who are leaving for their valuable contribution to the success of the WZO and I know that they will continue to remain loyal friends. In their place and with your agreement, we would like to have elected to the managing committee, the two new members. You will hear more of their special qualities during the election process later in the meeting.

I would like to end my report by offering the managing committee's thanks to all our supporters and donors for without their financial help we would not be able to continue our activities. I would like to name them all but time and space do not permit me to do so. Therefore, please allow me to mention a few of the individuals and organisations who have made a substantial contribution to WZO.

We are indebted to Behram Baxter of San Diego for his continued financial support, to Rumi & Hilda Sethna for their hard work in raising substantial funds and also to Shahpur Captain, our past Chairman and founder member, and his wife Inderjit, for their dedication and regular financial contribution to WZO over many years.



In the UK, the World Zarathushtrian Trust Funds, the Firuz Madon Trust and the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation continue to support us with substantial funds.

The WZO Trusts in India continue to receive significant sums from the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hong Kong, Canton and Macao.

In India, the Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Deed of Settlement Trust, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust and the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust provide the much needed funds.

FEZANA in North America continues to raise funds from their members for our charitable activities in India.

And we thank all of you for your continued support and confidence in us.

Finally, my personal thanks go to all my fellow managing committee members for their help in making my role that much easier. In particular, my thanks go to Shahin Bekhradnia, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla and Armaity Engineer in the UK for sharing my workload. In India, our interests are ably managed by Dadi Mistry, Meher Amersey and Homi Khusrookhan. In USA, Kayomars Mehta who has taken over the Presidency of the US Region from Keki Bhote who has had to step down due to failing health. WZO is totally indebted to Keki for his significant input and total commitment to WZO. And in Canada, Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli for his wise council on religious and community matters. WZO continues to gain strength across the globe and please be assured that the WZO managing committee is committed to work towards achieving freedom to worship for all Zoroastrians irrespective of their gender, beliefs and culture.

Thank you to one and all. ■■■■



## **WZO** BBQ held on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011 report from sammy bhiwandiwalla

**H**otter than Barbados! A 28.4c scorcher as August kicked off with a heat wave after days of endless rain and inclement weather. After weeks of being forced to swap shorts and T-shirt for a jumper and umbrella, we finally enjoyed some much-needed summer heat.

With food being central to any social occasion, this was no traditional style of BBQ with hamburgers and sausages, but an exotic choice of mouth watering Indian starters followed by salads, desserts and Parsi fudno (mint) tea and biscuits to get everyone in the mood to swing.

"Mustang" the group of Goan musicians who entertained us last year were back again with their groovy renditions of reggae, salsa and rock music. Their lead singer gave an admirable performance of "Rehab" one of the hit singles from Amy Winehouse, the talented singer who recently passed away. Their all round entertainment was well appreciated by our guests and many of them took to the dance floor throughout the day.

Each year we rely on Rohinton Irani's fund raising skills and this year we had some super prizes for auction. Six nights at the luxurious hotel Radisson Lexington, New York, the culinary delights of Master Chef Cyrus Todiwala OBE, at the famous Cafe Spice Namaste and dinners at Heathrow Hilton and the Runnymede Hotel. Our sincere thanks to Rohinton for his endless support to WZO and for encouraging large hearted guests to part with their money towards our charitable activities.

Sadly the game for guests to guess the weight of a huge watermelon never took place because unbeknown to us a group of boisterous youngsters had managed to get their hands on it and had promptly demolished it.

The BBQ was a fitting occasion to thank one of our committee members Noshir Umrigar, who had served as a Social

Secretary for nine long years. He was always a willing helper at the many social and community activities which we as an organisation regularly participate in. He had shown himself to be an able chairman and speaker at the annual seminars and because of his knowledge of music and dance together with his wife Freny entertained us at many of our social functions. He will be missed for his calm approach to all matters by his erstwhile colleagues.

The day's programme was meticulously planned and organised by the dedicated and hard working mother and daughter team of Armaity and Benafsha Engineer, ably assisted on the day by willing volunteers and well wishers and our sincere thanks to all of them.

To all our corporate and individual sponsors our heartfelt thanks for their contribution towards making this a day of fun and enjoyment a big success. The net receipts of £3180 indicated the generosity of those who attended and we thank them sincerely. All the monies collected will be allocated towards WZO's charitable activities.

Last but not least we are deeply indebted to Valerie and Alex Burns without whose help, support and generosity, this BBQ could not have been held. WZO wishes to record its sincere gratitude to Valerie and Alex Burns for their hospitality and opening their home and gardens for our fundraising event again this year. ■■■



Noshir Umrigar being thanked affectionately by Goody Irani



Meher Amersey on the left, with Armaity Engineer



L to R: Valerie & Alex Burns, Sammy, Rohinton Irani



A few of our Iranian friends

## **WZO Trust Funds - Bai Maneckbai P. B. Jeejeebhoy Senior Citizens Centre, Dolat & Hormusji Vandrewala Senior Citizens Centre at Pinjar Street, Malesar, Navsari**

dinshaw tamboly reports

### THE GENESIS:

The sad but stark reality in our community is that in many families, senior citizens either live all alone in small flats or in other cases as many as three, sometimes even four generations live together in small flats. This is in no way conducive to senior citizens spending the evening of their lives in peace and tranquillity.

Thus was born in 1996 our dream to do something tangible and positive for our senior citizens. It was our good fortune that the Trustees of Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Deed of Settlement Fund too shared this dream with us.

Vision without action remains a meaningless dream, action without vision is simply a waste of time, but when vision is coupled with action the positive outcome that emerges has the energy that turns things around and even changes the world for many people.

The culmination of the common vision shared by WZO Trust Funds and the Trustees of Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Deed of Settlement Fund was backed by tangible action resulting in the creation of our Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Centre for Senior Citizens opening its doors in the service of the community on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1998.

With growing popularity and patronage it was not long before we realised the need to expand the existing facilities. The biblical saying "cometh the hour, cometh the man" proved to be very accurate. Rena & Behram Baxter of San Diego, USA arrived on the scene. After just one visit to the institution they gave a commitment to fund the construction of another similar institution.

Divinity has always smiled on us and showered us with His bounties. We were very fortunate to procure property on the same street as our existing

Centre and link up both the facilities from the rear, thereby reducing our administration and service expenses.

Our Dolat & Hormusji Vandrewala Senior Citizens Centre too became a reality on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

### CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION, FACILITIES & GENERAL INFORMATION:

- ✦ To qualify for admission a resident must be 60+ in age and fully mobile, able to look after themselves and their needs. Should a resident become immobile then the family has to take them back or if they are unable to do so, then they are admitted to the Parsi infirmary at Navsari with whom we have arrangements.
- ✦ Residents are encouraged to go out for strolls, visit temples and do what they fancy, go for shopping etc. One thing we are very particular about is that they must all have their meals (morning and afternoon tea, breakfast, lunch and dinner) together as a family.
- ✦ Yoga classes are held Monday to Fridays for 90 minutes, they are at no cost to residents and voluntary; 20 out of our 55 residents attend.
- ✦ A physiotherapist comes daily from Monday to Friday at 4.30 pm, without cost to residents.
- ✦ The health of our residents being one of our prime concerns, we remain alert to their well being. Arrangements have been made for quality medical care and hospitalisation, when required. A sick bay has also been created to look after those afflicted by minor ailments. A doctor visits once a week; in case of illness, the doctor comes immediately. We have a tie up with a nearby hospital whereby a resident requiring hospitalisation can be shifted within 15 minutes. We raise funds from donors for residents who cannot afford to pay the hospitalisation / medical expenses.
- ✦ We take our residents out for short holidays spread over a week (at least twice a year) to our

very popular sanatorium at Sanjan. From Sanjan they are taken for a day trip to Udvada. We also take them out on periodic picnics (morning to evening) to nearby places.

✎ Bedlinen, towels, blankets are provided by us; a resident only has to bring their clothes and toiletries.

✎ We have single rooms, double rooms and a quadruple sharing room on each floor. Each room has toilet and bath attached, a bed, writing desk, chair etc (akin to a hotel room).

✎ There is a television set with a jumbo screen in the lounge. There are two other television sets at other places. Residents can also bring their own television sets, for which they have to pay the cable charges (presently Rs. 200/- per month).

✎ Laundry is done by our housekeeping staff; residents pay Rs50/- per month for these services and provide the soap / detergent that is required.

✎ For single room the charge (full board and lodge) is Rs3000/- per month; for the other rooms it depends of the financial capacity of the residents. Some pay Rs2000, to Rs500.

✎ Any Zoroastrian senior citizen from any part of the world can be a resident. We have had residents from USA, UK and Africa staying at our institution.

#### CHARGES:

Our charges are not only moderate but also flexible; they are levied looking to the economic conditions of our residents. Rs3000/- (\$67; £42) per month for a single room with full board and lodge is a steal in present times. For quite a few of our economically challenged residents we provide not only gratis board and lodge but also reimburse them with Rs1000/- each month, to enable them to procure their personal toiletries. At present, 19 of our 55 resident's reside with us completely gratis.

The facilities provided and enjoyed by all our residents, irrespective of their subscriptions, are the same with no

distinction being made between a paying or a non paying resident.

To run an institution and maintain set standards where expenses outstrip the income is a very daunting challenge. We have been blessed, and are indeed most fortunate and very grateful to the Trustees and Administration of Sir Ratan Tata Trust for their largesse over the years in supporting the day to day running and maintenance of our institution/s. It is only on account of their support and that of other donors, big and small, that we have been able to consistently provide and maintain quality services to our residents.

The centres are a home away from home where senior citizens live as an extended family, comfortably without any care or worry. We make it a point to keep the atmosphere, vibrant, happy and positive.

We share what some of our residents have had to say:

*"Here we feel absolutely at home living like one big family. In the village that we come from our neighbors were all non-Parsees and some were very violent and abusive in nature. It is a welcome change living with our own people in a clean and cultured environment."* - A retired medical representative and his wife.

*"I am so well looked after over here. I never feel lonely"*. - A single lady who has been with us since 1998.

*"Here I am very happy and comfortable. I go for walks, watch television and pray, what else would you expect a man of my age to do?"* - A single male, who in his hey days was a professional musician and sports enthusiast.

*"Most people go to heaven after they die. We are lucky to be in heaven here during our life time"*. - An energetic 82 year old who zipped around Navsari on his own moped, visiting friends and also doing odd jobs as an electrician.

Our residents are all happy and secure being an integral part of the extended family of WZO Trust Funds. The emotions and the



Dinshaw K Tamboly lives in Mumbai and is currently providing consultancy service in management and marketing. He is Chairman of WZO Trust Funds of India. He is also a Trustee of various hospitals, charity trusts and foundations and was previously a Trustee of the BPP. Till September 2004 he was a Member of the International Board of WZO.

affection of our residents not only make us feel humble, but also inspire us to identify with the great soul J R D Tata, who after re-enacting his pioneering flight from Karachi to Bombay 50 years later said – *“Despite all the difficulties, all the frustrations, there is a joy in having done something as well as you could and better than others thought you could.”*

Many senior citizens have taken advantage of the facilities that we offer and have transformed their golden years into the most happy and exciting days of their lives.

**For this we have to thank the benevolent Trustees of Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Deed of Settlement Fund and Rena & Behram Baxter of USA, for fully funding the construction and furnishing of the two respective institutions.**

Our happy band of residents symbolise the truth echoed by Robert Browning in his immortal words:

*Come grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life,  
For which the first was made.*

## The Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation, UK

by sammy bhiwandiwalla

Erach and Roshan Sadri were special and extraordinary people. They loved life and whatever they turned their minds to, they did it with determination and purpose. They met when Roshan Sarosh was in her early twenties, combining working in John Lewis stores as a sales assistant, while studying for a degree in social sciences. It was a whirlwind romance but a love that lasted a lifetime.



Shortly after their marriage they went off to live in Afghanistan. Roshan became a teacher in an international school in Kabul and Erach flew Dakota's, "old tin buckets", over some of the most dangerous terrains in the world. They both took everything in their stride and had a true pioneering spirit. After a few years Roshan and Erach returned to England. Roshan became a social worker for a number of years and Erach started 'Housemasters', a company that imported luggage, travel goods and household items.

### History of ERSF -

Erach passed away in 1990 and Roshan in 2003. In her will Roshan instructed her executors to set up a charitable foundation and in August 2005 the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation was established. The legacy at its peak was worth approximately £6.5 million. The objects of the Charity are for general charitable purposes according to English law anywhere in the world and in particular providing financial assistance for



The Local Committee of WZO Trust Funds at Navsari have over the years organised many programmes for the Zoroastrians of Navsari and South Gujarat. The objective of the various programmes focus on and endeavour to energise, encourage and motivate our youth and our senior citizens to develop, fine tune and release the talent lying latent within them. This year on 21 August, the focus was on bringing out the vocal musical talent of the community. The function that was attended by over 700 residents of Navsari.

education and welfare purposes, relief of poverty, alleviating homelessness and assisting members of the Zoroastrian religious faith. The breath of ERSF charitable giving is best explored on its clear and concise website [www.ersf.org.uk](http://www.ersf.org.uk).

It's most recent set of annual accounts to be published to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, state charitable distributions of £579,333 to 44 institutions and one individual. Its areas of operation are worldwide. Through the efforts of the Trustees a number of partnerships have been established with NGO's, companies and charities to achieve best value for the grants given. All grants given are closely monitored to ensure the funds are used for the purposes intended. The UK Charity Commission has complimented ERSF on the manner in which the Charity is operated.

From March 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011, grants totalling £3,002,773 have been given to deserving causes in UK, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Iran and Africa. Applications from individuals are not encouraged but are given to associations which are set up to select and monitor individuals. Of this princely figure nearly £500,000 has been applied towards Zoroastrian charities and institutions.

**Restrictions in charitable giving in India -**  
The existence of Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) may not be well known within Parsi charities. Consequently only a handful of Parsi charities have access to funds from abroad compared to the many hundreds of Indian charities which have reaped huge benefits from FCRA accreditation. Without the receiving charity having FCRA it is not possible to transmit funds from charitable organisations abroad.

**Co-operation between charities -**  
Paramount is the task of rejecting bogus applications, poor reporting and eliminating underperformance in the various projects. Duplication, wasted resources and requests for identical needs was a common observance by the Trustees amongst Indian charities in close proximity to each other.

The first step was to encourage co-operation, visit each other's facilities, exchange ideas and be more transparent. Many see foreign **charities as a bottomless pit to be tapped into to extract as much money as possible. Cooperation between charities receiving grants is now paying dividends and is clearly the way forward. Perhaps there is a lesson in this for Parsi charities to embrace.**

**The World Zoroastrian Organisation, UK -**  
is a participating partner and assists in the allocation and monitoring of all donations transmitted through its good offices to Zoroastrian and/or non-Zoroastrian charities when necessary. Since 2006/7 approximately £300,000 has been assigned to charitable causes through WZO. The funds have been utilised towards diverse needs including building homes for poor farmers, education of students from poor families and micro credit to help start-up businesses. [www.w-z-o.org](http://www.w-z-o.org)

**Charitable activities within UK -**  
UK charities operate within the UK or act as NGO's for charitable activities abroad and applications falling under the categories of welfare, homelessness and education are considered. It would be impractical to outline the depth of support provided by ERSF but a few are outlined below.

**The British Forces Foundation -**  
which deals with Frontline anti post-traumatic stress work for the military seeing service in hostile regions of the world.  
Jessie May: Education and care for terminally ill children. Bobby Van Trust: To help the vulnerable and victims of domestic violence. Religions for Peace UK  
Registered Charity:  
Training religious leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention in Sierra Leone.  
Sir Oswald Stoll



Foundation UK: Westway Beacons scheme for homes for homeless Ex Serviceman.  
Honeypot UK: Respite for 24 Young Carers aged five to 12 years from London. Saracens Sport Foundation: Rugby training for socially excluded children.

*A snapshot of International projects supported by ERSF:*

Calcutta Rescue's Talapark Clinic has been running for the last 15 years with the help of

volunteer doctors and staff. It was last renovated in 1995 and needed urgent renovation and reconstruction. Now, with overall renovation and improved working conditions Calcutta Rescue will have the opportunity to offer improved quality of service to the patients. An £8,000

grant from ERSF was spent on renovation/ construction of rooms for Mother and Child health, Physiotherapy & Disability Projects, Health Education and Wound Care/ Dressing. It has made the four well run clinics cleaner, safer and more hygienic. Better facilities are available to the patients who go to the clinics, in the form of clean and safe drinking water area, toilet facilities and waiting areas. With new computers & other Assets the administration system will improve considerably with better recording and filing system.

A highly effective charity established for over 30 years ago providing education, healthcare and vocational training. They educate slum children circa 500 pre and during state school education to give them a greater opportunity to succeed. They achieve a high success rate through a strict regime and continual monitoring with parents to ensure the children attend.

Sevac – Mental Healthcare, Training & Education  
Excellent facility built by international donations but now seriously lacking funds to

operate. Highly trained doctors & specialists provide free service during the day.

A £15,000 ERSF grant has been helping SEVAC with work at its Mental Health & Human Rights Resource Centre. The money has

been used to fund professional care and buy food and medicines. SEVAC has been working in India for people with mental illness for the past two decades, ensuring uninterrupted psychiatric treatment, human care and meaningful rehabilitation – as well as promoting their human rights. During 2010 SEVAC reached 2,137 individuals – 119 through the Crisis Intervention Unit and Halfway Home; 65 through the Day Care Centre; 453 through the Outdoor Clinic, 1,300 through the Outreach Unit promotion and screening programme; and 200 police officers through the Mental Health Education Programme.

Garden Reach Slum Development (GRSD) 'Livelihood Support Programme'

A £9,000 grant from ERSF was used to provide training programmes in embroidery, tailoring, carpentry, electrical wiring and kite making as well as staff payments, rent and electricity costs. Some 400 people in the community received the training designed to improve their skills and their chances of finding work or starting a small business. Many women are destitute and have no income but after training GRSD provide micro credit for women to start businesses to get out of the property trap.

SEED (Society for Educational & Environmental Development) engages in the protection and rehabilitation of children on platforms and stations. With the active leadership of the project team comprising multipurpose worker, Centre Educator, Doctor and





Vocational trainer, the problems of runaway children and street children have been addressed through the Day Protection Centre and temporary shelter. Runaway children are also sought by criminals at the station. Early intervention is made with the support of Railway Protection Force, GRP and secondary stake holders for repatriation and reunification of children with their family. Educational support is provided during bridging classes and recreational activity at a local picnic place. Grant £15,000.



School run by SEED in Slum Area clothing and food given. Meeting with Railway Protection Force Chief Officer Howrah station who advised no support given by Government and SEED only hope for children.

The Society for Crippled Children – Mumbai received a grant of £8,000 towards the purchase of a new jeep to replace obsolete transport facilities inadequate for physically handicapped children.



Many children from slum areas get education and food at this facility. Funding required towards tuition in English so computers can be used effectively for vocational training and printing, enabling children to get work and sell prints for raising funds. Toilets needed upgrading to improve hygiene and self-esteem so they could be used by disabled children without help.

#### *Projects in Pakistan.*

In 2009, Sadri Foundation awarded a grant of £10,000 towards CHAL an NGO that runs programmes for the rehabilitation of physically challenged children. The funds were to provide prostheses to children who had lost their limbs, many of whom were victims of the 2005 earthquake which had devastated Pakistan's NW Frontier regions. Nine children benefitted through ERSF's donation and they will continue to benefit into adulthood.



In 2010, a grant of £7,000 was granted to Janum, a network to improve maternal and neo-natal health in Pakistan, emergency obstetrics and neo-natal care combined with lifesaving skills.

In 2011, Friends Medical Helpline – Karachi a Zoroastrian charity received £10,000 towards treatment of serious illnesses and long term medical care.



#### *Projects in Iran*

The Pourchista Foundation based in the UK and Yazd, Iran received a grant of £18,500 towards the establishment of a

Skills Centre and Senior Citizens Day Centre in Yazd, Iran. WZO has been supporting the Pourchista Foundation for many years with their Skills Centre. Approximately half the sum will be used to equip the new Senior Citizens Day Centre.

Education Grants in Iran. ERSF have for the last three years provided grants to students pursuing courses in higher education through the Nikan Foundation-Kerman.

**WZO Rural Housing Project for Zoroastrians in Gujarat. Grants given 2007-2010. £86,500**



In 2006/07, WZO received its first grant from ERSF towards replacement cottages for the rural farming community. To date thirty mud and cow dung dwellings have been replaced with four room cottages built from brick and slate or tiled roofs bringing a significant change in their living standard.

Self-employment scheme



Farmers rehabilitation scheme



In 2010, four entrepreneurs were granted microcredit to set up their own businesses. Catering, auto-rickshaw service, development of agriculture land and a bone marrow donors register. Grant £15,000.

In 2009, eight farmers received grants under the Farmers Rehabilitation scheme towards setting up brick kilns, dairy cattle farms, diesel engines, pipelines, and repairs to wells and levelling fields. Grant £14,285.

**Education Grants.** Since 2007, grants to the value of £50,500 have been paid to students from poor and deserving Zoroastrian families in India and Iran. Each year between 40 and 50 students have benefited from this very generous scheme providing funds towards first degree courses in disciplines' such as medicine, dentistry, civil and electrical engineering, chemistry and biology, computer science, physical education, carpet weaving, business studies, music etc.

We are indebted to the Trustees of the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation for their generosity towards the Zoroastrian community and for their confidence in WZO to implement and oversee Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian projects routed through WZO.



## Karachi – A miniscule community takes major steps



The present, with the drastic changes in social orders, the discoveries by science and the rapid progress of technology, challenges every religion, old and new. Many of the religious rules and regulations appear to many a modern person as outdated, obsolete, and impractical. It is mostly the simple or blind faith, strengthened by interpretations, some of them esoteric, which is keeping many religious dogmas in place.

The story of Zoroastrians in Pakistan is different. Here the number is fast decreasing because of more deaths and less births. "Exodus" emigration and excommunication of persons marrying outside the community are also eroding the numbers. Experts on demography are warning of the day, not far, when the community will disappear. The faithful adherents express their confidence that it will never be so. Zealous inbreeding, they confidently predict, will keep the community alive and expanding.

*by pouruchisty sidhwa*

Zoroastrians today see other religious orders in their neighborhood. They stand fully exposed to non-Zoroastrian environments. Mixed-marriages between Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians have become a common feature, and the figures of mixed-marriages are showing a steady rise.

So far excommunication of persons marrying outside the community (especially the woman) has had the usual reaction. But this reaction does not seem to be working in face of new challenges thrown by the fast changing circumstances and these challenges cannot be brushed aside or taken lightly.

Earlier many began supporting the idea that the children of a mixed-marriage in which the father is a Zoroastrian should be initiated into the religion. Now, those who stand for equality of the sexes are pressing for the admittance of the children of a Zoroastrian wife. This opinion is strong in Europe and North America and now the miniscule community of Karachi, Pakistan has taken this very brave and progressive decision that it will not object initiation of children of Zoroastrian mothers and non-Zoroastrian fathers in the Agiaries or Anjuman properties.

The above decision taken by the Karachi Parsi Anjuman Trust Fund (KPATF) under the far-sighted and able leadership of its charismatic Chairman Mr Byram D Avari and his fellow trustees is a mature step towards recognizing the equal rights for men and women. For an organization that had long inducted females as trustees and given women equal voting rights this progressive step comes at a time when the community struggles for identity both in numbers and strength against its Muslim ruling majority. Mr Avari maintains that "every child (girl or boy) born in the faith has the right to remain in the faith as long as Baptism or any other non-Zoroastrian religious rite or ceremony has not been performed on the child".

The KPATF has also resolved that it will allow prayers of the deceased to be held in all their premises even if the deceased has chosen to be either buried or cremated. Parsis staying in the other parts of Pakistan ie. Lahore, Quetta, Multan & Rawalpindi are either buried or cremated and their funeral rites are conducted by the mobeds of their areas in their Anjuman premises. In Karachi until now because of the existence of the Towers of Silence, dokhma-nashini was the only option.

Yet another milestone achieved is the decision that has allowed the navjote of the children of a Zoroastrian mother and a non-Zoroastrian father to be conducted in the Agiaries. For now this decision only encompasses the Wadia Dar-e-Meher as the Dar-e-Meher's affairs are looked after by the KPATF while the Hirjikaka Dar-e-Meher has a separate Trust Board.



Mr Byram D Avari,  
Chairman KPATF

In answer to a query whether the Trustees of the Fire Temple can even allow such a rule to be followed, it has been recorded in the Saklat v/s Bela judgment delivered by the privy council somewhere around 1922 wherein the judges have recorded that the Trustees of the Fire Temple even have the right to admit the non-Zoroastrian to the premises if they think fit. This judgment is one that has been published in books printed in India. While each Trust Board as well as the Management of each Agiary have their own views and policies, it is not mandatory for them to follow the decision of the Saklat v/s Bela judgment. Both agiaries of Karachi having separate Trust Boards do not admit non-Zoroastrians into the Fire Temple.

While answering a question whether the entire Parsi community of Karachi was taken on board before taking these decisions, Mr Byram D Avari rightly said that it is inconceivable that there could be a 100% support for any decision. Yet, it is the responsibility of the Trustees to take decisions for the good of the community as is visualized by them. Although the community at large may not have been consulted in these decisions but till today there has not been a single Zoroastrian in Karachi including the mobed sahibs who have objected to KPATF's progressive overtures.

Mr Avari has rightly emphasized that we are a progressive religion and should be open in our thinking. Even the children of a Jewish mother are allowed to embrace the mother's faith. If there had been no conversion there would never have been any Zoroastrian religion. The custom in our

religion of allowing the navjote of the children of a Zoroastrian father and a non-Zoroastrian mother came about as a matter of custom and not as a matter of religious tenant. With men and women having equal rights including the ability to become voters and trustees confers the right on the Zoroastrian women to also have their children become Zoroastrians as long as the mother is a practicing Zoroastrian who has not converted through religious ceremonies.

In a letter to Mr Khojeste Mistree and all the Trustees of the Bombay Parsee Punchayat, Mr Avari has further clarified that although the KPATF has allowed the conversion of children whose one parent is a Zoroastrian, in case the other parent (ie. the father) is a Muslim then the child cannot be converted because under Pakistani Law a Muslim cannot marry a non-Muslim unless that non-Muslim is first converted to Islam. There is no concept of civil marriage under Pakistan law. Therefore, by just maintaining that one parent was or is a Parsi is not tenable as it is not possible under Muslim Law. Even otherwise, statistics show that the family of the Muslim spouse will ask the Zoroastrian to convert to Islam. This has caused a number of mixed marriage couples to migrate from Pakistan. The KPAFT is of the unanimous view that that we should not confine ourselves to narrow-mindedness and bigotry. If a person does not wish to be interned in the dokhma but desires to be buried we should not restrict the use of the Shezdegah for allowing that person to have his/her final rites.

With 1,620 Zoroastrians now left in Karachi the need to give dogmatic views and tradition a nudge is perhaps not enough but the above are steps in the right direction. These steps may prompt condemnation by the orthodox who wield power in every society but a bold step by a few in the future too may change the silent supporters of acceptance and consequently change the balance. ■■■■

*Pouruchisty Sidhwa is Group HR Director at the House of Habib a conglomerate of automotive, engineering, retail and allied businesses. Having spent 23 years in multinational banks like HSBC, Citibank & RBS, Pouru has now diversified into the manufacturing world. She loves acting, compering, hosting shows and writes poetry and articles in her spare time. Pouru is mother to a 13 year old daughter Sharmene.*



## *Is it a sin to be a woman in the Parsi community?*

I was born of Parsi parents, Dinaz & Adi Contractor at Valsad situated in Gujarat State. In 1991 I got married to Mahipal Gupta under the Special Marriage Act by way of a civil ceremony, without renouncing the Zoroastrian religion into which I am born.

The Trustees of Valsad Parsi Anjuman have always enjoyed the reputation of being fair, unbiased and pragmatic individuals. I did not realize till as recently as 2009 that the Trustees by way of a majority decision have adopted obscurantist policies in the matter of funeral ceremonies, having complete disregard for the rights of individuals and laws of the land.

*by goolrukh gopta*

To my dismay I learnt the Trustees did not permit two intermarried Parsi Zoroastrian ladies namely, Alloo Desai and Dilbar Valvi to attend the funeral ceremonies of their mother, whereas these two very ladies were allowed to participate in the funeral ceremonies of their father, who passed away in 1998, eleven years prior.

I too have attended without any restrictions many obsequies of Parsis at Valsad, both before and after my marriage. In fact I had in 2003 also attended all the obsequies of the Anjuman President Mr Jehanbux Chawda, without there being a murmur of dissent from any of the present Trustees, who were present in the congregation.

I therefore found such high handed action, taken in 2009, by a majority of the present Trustees to be very objectionable and demeaning for intermarried Parsi ladies.

Earlier Trustees of Valsad Parsi Anjuman were right thinking and pragmatic individuals who realized the trauma that a family suffers when a dear one passes away and did not allow dogmas to add further woes to those in times of distress.

Since both my parents are elderly, it became a cause of great concern to me, as

I realized that I too would be prevented from participating in and organizing their obsequies when their time came to depart from this world.

My next step was to plead with and write letters to the Trustees of Valsad Parsi Anjuman requesting them to accept realities of the times we live in and reconsider their harsh approach, but all pleas and requests fell on deaf ears.

I was sadly left with no choice but to approach the Gujarat High Court for justice. If a Parsi male marries outside his faith, he enjoys all the rights, of going to the fire temple, having his corpse consigned to the tower of silence without fuss, or having to swear an affidavit to prove that he had been practicing his Zoroastrian religion during his life time, which we women are made to do. There is no bar on having the navjote ceremonies performed of children of male Parsis, whereas it is not permitted for a child who has come forth from the womb of an intermarried Parsi mother.

Can this perhaps be on account of the Trustees of various Parsi Punchayets having generally been male dominated? We live in a world of equal opportunities. Why then such discrimination against Parsi women?

Apart from not being allowed to worship in our fire temples after our marriage, the Trustees of Valsad Parsi Anjuman also commit inhuman and insensitive acts of not allowing Parsi women to be present for the last rites of their own parents.

Is this the much hyped Parsipanu that Parsis always boast about? To pander to the so called "orthodox views" completely ignoring the law of the land, is not only shocking but blatantly wrong, illegal and against the constitutional rights enjoyed by every Parsi Zoroastrian woman who continues to follow the faith even after marrying to a non Zoroastrian by way of a civil ceremony.

Do such regressive minded Parsis not realize the bond that a daughter shares with her parents? Are our prayers so weak and fickle that by the mere viewing of the face of a deceased parent by an intermarried daughter, their soul will not progress to higher realms?

Nowhere in our scriptures are such rules mentioned. Each priest is entitled to have or give his opinion, but surely it does not mean that their opinion makes it a law.

Human beings came first into the world; religion followed thereafter. I believe that one cannot discriminate man from woman, treating her shabbily and preventing her from attending the last rites of her own parents. There can be no law in any civilized society prohibiting a female married outside the community from performing the last rites of her parents on any grounds. This is her fundamental and constitutional right guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

I have taken up cudgels against such antiquated and obscurantist practices on behalf of all Parsi ladies married to non Parsis by way of civil marriage ceremonies under the Special Marriage Act. I am indebted to my dear friend Mr Percy Kavina, senior counsel of Gujarat High Court, who is appearing on my behalf and selflessly fighting this matter pro bono as he believes

in this cause. I am also grateful to the Trustees of many Parsi Anjumans of India, Zoroastrian Associations overseas, and individuals who have all supported my cause by writing letters confirming that religious institutions under their jurisdiction do not prevent Parsi intermarried females from attending places of worship or participating in the obsequies of Parsis.

A Special Bench of three Hon'ble Judges in the Gujarat High Court is hearing the matter. As I write this on September 21, 2011, legal submissions on my behalf have been concluded, and the counsel for Valsad Parsi Anjuman will hereafter be presenting their side of the matter. I have abiding faith in Ahura Mazda and consider the cause I have taken up to be righteous and necessary. We live in a world of equal opportunities where there is no place for gender discrimination either in our personal or professional lives; the same yardstick of equity should be applicable in matters governing observance or participation in matters of the religion that one professes.

I am sure all right thinking Parsis will appreciate the position that I have taken and will continue to extend their moral support.



*Goolu Contractor Gupta graduated from Sydenham College with a BCom followed by two years at the Government Law College, both at Bombay. She works with her husband in their real estate business and has two children; daughter studying law, son still at school.*

***"Who is it that can tell me who I am?"***

from King Lear.

[This quote appears on the 76p stamp of UK, celebrating RSCs 50 years]



# The Persian Garden-

*an inspiration for the Taj Mahal, the Alhambra and other such earthly paradises*

by shahin bekhradnia

Since UNESCO recently recognised nine gardens in Iran as world heritage sites, it seems appropriate that we should consider the genesis of this quintessentially Persian feature.

Pasargad



and

Eram in Fars Province



Pahlebanpur

and

Dowlatabad in Yazd Province



Photographs courtesy of Mobed Mehraban Firozgari, Iran, which were in colour but Hamazor had to resort to black & white!



[L] Akbarieh in South Khorasan Province



Fin

and



Chehel Sotun in Isfahan Province



In doing so, it is of particular significance to note that both the Safavid kings and the Qajar kings who created a new capital for each of their dynasties, the former in Isfahan and the latter in Tehran, specifically employed Zoroastrian gardeners from Yazd to create the paradise on earth that would be considered an appropriate adjunct for their palaces. In their choice of specialist gardeners, there was an implicit recognition that Zoroastrians had a greater skill in successfully bringing together the elements within nature to create a perfect garden. This tradition that stayed so vital within the Zoroastrian community and was recognised by the kings of Iran in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries finds its roots in the ancient past.

Our religion teaches that we should respect and venerate the Wise Mind - Ahura Mazda - which created the regularity of the seasons and the harmony of the elements, through which in turn the beauty to be found within the natural world was generated. It is therefore not a coincidence but a reflection of Zoroastrian principles that there were renowned gardens in ancient Iran in which these aspects of Zoroastrian contemplation are brought together. This quality was recognised by one of the most popular Iranian poets of a much later age: the tranquility and calming aspect of a beautiful garden brings a spiritual uplift. The garden is a sacred space where an inner voice can be heard. They are places for sacred contemplation and spiritual nourishment, a place where serenity can be reached. *In a garden, renew your Zoroastrian faith. Yes, in the sanctuary of the magi they honour us, For the fire that never dies burns strong within our hearts.* (Hafez) As we know from our Ashem Vohu prayers, the pursuit of Happiness (Oshta) is the legitimate goal of humans during their brief lifetime. The delivery of pleasure to every one of

Shahzadeh Mahan (also known as Shazdeh) in Kerman Province



and Abbasabad in Mazandaran Province, for which there is no photograph.

our senses achieves a feeling of happiness and can be experienced in a typical Persian garden. In an arid hot environment which is typical of the Iranian plateau, a walled enclosed area could be irrigated and cultivated, but only by expending a great deal of effort, time and ingenuity. The Avestan word for a walled enclosure was *pairi daeza*, a word that was used by the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek Xenophon whose mouthpiece Socrates described the gardens for which the Persians had an exceptional inclination, since inside this walled enclosure the delights of an earthly paradise could be found: the garden fulfilled several roles; as a place of spiritual solace, as a meeting place for friends, and as a formal adjunct to the house or palace which it surrounded.

Within a delineated or walled area, it is possible to create a space where all sorts of trees can be planted, popular amongst which are the evergreen cypresses and cedars which represent continuity of life. Fruit trees are of significance too as their produce represents immortality through reproduction and of course provides edible produce which can be dried and stored. The welcome shade of trees can reduce the intense desert heat from direct sunlight. Skilled engineering and understanding of water principles allows water to be brought via the ancient qanat system to cascade and flow along channels, and where water flows the air is cooled and the senses are relaxed. The tinkling sound of flowing or falling water is a soothing sensation, and where water combines with the fertile soil of the desert, fruits and flowers of every variety abound – Iranian fruits are particularly rich in flavour and quality and amongst others the peach and the pomegranate are native. While fruits and a multitude of nuts can delight the tongue, the scents and perfumes of deliberately cultivated flowers such as the hyacinth, the rose, the narcissus, the lilac and the lily, are intoxicating. The eye feasts on the indescribable beauty of these flowers growing in profusion, brought together from the far corners of the country where they grow in the wild. This is truly a heaven on

earth – an earthly paradise, a Garden of Eden. When we are happy we can be serene; when we are serene, we can contemplate and think wisely.

Why else would the colour green be so precious to Zoroastrians except as a symbolic reminder that everything which we find in the representation of heaven on earth, the paradise that the garden creates for our sensual souls, depends on plant life – the photosynthesis plants undergo and made possible by the felicitous conjoining of earth, water and sunlight. However without the sun, which in Zoroastrian symbolism represents the creative energy of the universe, the earth and the water cannot be successful as is pointed out in a Persian proverb (found quoted in Vaux le Vicomte chateau near Paris):

*"Whoever creates a garden becomes an ally of Light; no garden having ever emerged from the shadows".*

It was not just Xenophon who clearly had great respect for the Persians and who commented (in the Economics & the Education of Cyrus) on the prevalence of the gardens and parks in which the kings delighted, (particularly for hunting since the vegetation was so intensely lush that many species found refuge there) and which they also personally worked in. Strabo mentioned that tree planting was a sacred duty and formed part of the education of boys, while Plutarch provided anecdotes to demonstrate the respect for trees that all Iranians showed in antiquity. The archaeological excavations at Pasargadae, the supposed location of Cyrus' tomb, suggest that there was a walled garden with water channels dividing the land into four courts or planted areas (the origin of the Chahar Bagh principle, which some believe to represent a later view of the world) and at the top of which was a pavilion for the king to enjoy his creation of earthly heaven. Certainly a king (and later other nobles) who could create a garden out of an infertile area, creating balance and order out of a harsh and dry environment could command respect and claim authority and legitimacy. Persepolis is likely to have had extensive

gardens surrounding or stretching in front or behind its buildings and 4000 year old patterns on Iranian pottery may represent garden design.

During the Zoroastrian Sasanian period (2 - 7th century AD) the importance of water was such that a cult of Anahita developed, and some say that the traditional love of pools and fountains probably took root in the psyche of the people at this time and has remained there ever since. Certainly the dynasty started around the temple at Istakhr, (a pool) and King Shahpur built a new city in the south west with an elaborate complex of water courses. European landscape gardeners like Le Notre who created Versailles or Capability Brown may well have traced their inspiration for watery landscapes to the Persian tradition.

And since the religious principles were applied so extensively and permeated everyday life for so long during the Zoroastrian era of Persian culture (almost 2000 years), it is not surprising that despite the attempted Arabisation of the country which Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is credited with stalling, many Zoroastrian values were completely absorbed into the very essence of Iranian culture. The tradition of the Persian garden is one such example which transcended the Arab conquest and the design of the Persian garden with a pavilion and water features can be found not only in all of the Unesco heritage garden sites of Iran (and particularly in the beautiful Bagh e Eram in Shiraz and Chehel Sotun in Isfahan), but also in the Persian influenced gardens of the Moghuls in India, and even in the gardens that are attributed to the spread of Islam such as that of the Alhambra, in Spain.

The respect for trees is maintained in Iranian Zoroastrian communities by the delightful practice upon the birth of a child which is still observed by some when a fruit bearing tree is planted in honour of the new born. Not only does the tree grow apace with the child but is beneficial by providing its productive harvest and will normally outlive the individual and in addition it

provides oxygen. Some Iranians will also plant a tree in memory of a deceased loved one as the tree will go on and outlive all contemporaries and therefore their memory will live on through the tree.

The concept of perfection to be found in a Persian garden is an aspiration transported into the Persian carpet so that within every Persian home, a paradise is found on the ground via the carpet. One finds flowers, trees and very often animals which may be incorporated as a representation of hunting. Persian carpets which have a long history, give us a good idea of what early gardens were like because these are stylized representations of the gardens. The borders suggest boundary walls and paths. The interior designs are usually comprised of four quarters of equal size, each being divided into six squares. They contain alternately flowerbeds, with flowers in square and circle patterns, and plane trees located at the inner corners of the four sections.

Zoroastrians have a tradition of horticulture, arboriculture, and agriculture – they have traditionally respected the environment and worked with it to produce adequate food, and to create sanctuaries inside which to recover from the harshness of daily life. Still today in Iran around Yazd and Kerman the Zoroastrians keep walled baghs (gardens/ orchards) into which water is diverted, fruit trees flourish and abundant flowers and vegetables provide a haven contrasting with the harshness of the deserts just outside their walls.

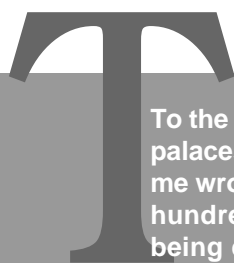


After her first degree from Oxford university in MFL, Shahin's Iranian priestly background inspired her to do post graduate studies in anthropology again at Oxford university. She writes articles and is regularly invited to speak to academic, radio and TV audiences about Zoroastrianism; participating in Interfaith activities to promote understanding and knowledge about our religion. As the WZO religious affairs spokesperson she answers email queries on behalf of WZO, acts as "expert witness" in legal matters, and organises their annual seminar.

In the last 10 years she has raised funding to set up the Pourchista Foundation in Yazd which runs a skills academy for females, a senior citizens' day centre and a kindergarten for the few Z children who are still left in Yazd is planned. Items such as sedreh and koshti made by the young Z ladies of Yazd are available for sale via Shahin.

## *i-india - a true inspiration*

*- my experience with a different reality*



To the tourist eye, Rajasthan is a State like no other – a magical land of opulent palaces, colourful festivals, impressive forts and ornate jewels. And don't get me wrong, it is all this and much more! But what the masses don't see, are the hundreds of thousands of individuals and communities that are frequently being displaced, further and further out of the city, in order to maintain the important influx of tourists.

I recently spent two months volunteering with an NGO called i-india which is based in Jaipur. I-india works with street children in dire circumstances, many of who are orphans, victims of emotional and physical abuse, or simply below poverty line kids, living on the streets and many slum regions in and around Rajasthan.

*by zileena doctor*

### **i-india's story**

i-india's story is a special one. It is an organization that was founded on 'heart' and exists with the belief that every soul born, deserves equality. Through its various programmes and projects, i-india is assisting these children to climb the ladder of hope and build a better life for themselves.

Its story goes back to 1991 and was started by Abha and Prabakar Goswami, a husband and wife team, who came from humble beginnings and worked themselves up to being a teacher and professor respectively. In 1991, they were commissioned by UNICEF to conduct research into issues relating to street children and child prostitution. Abha was so emotionally moved by what she saw that she quit her job, rented a rickshaw and every day, would cook food and go to street sites providing food and water to the children and also educate them. And in 1993, i-india was founded as an NGO and today, it helps over 3,000 children on a daily basis.

i-india provides food, sanitation, education, shelter, medical assistance as well as emotional support and love. What sets i-

india apart from the rest is its emphasis on building projects that promote the integration of communities and also its focus on sustainability.

Education is provided in various ways. Many of the children permanently living in the shelter homes, attend private schools. Children that stay at the open shelters (where they may not be residing there on a permanent basis), receive informal education in Hindi, English and Mathematics, as well as learn to dance and a vocation. I-india also has a School on Wheels project where mobile buses go to slum areas daily to educate, provide food and medical assistance. There is also a Shower Bus that visits the street sites allowing the kids to play in the water whilst learning the importance of sanitation and cleanliness.

i-india's vocational centre is called Ladli and the children are taught to make jewelry and handicrafts in a fun and inspiring environment. This is pertinent to i-india's aim to achieve sustainability. Again in line with its aim to achieve sustainability, i-india is constructing a compound called Jhag



*Zileena grew up and completed her schooling in Singapore. She went on to study Law at the University of Nottingham in England and subsequently moved to Australia to continue her education. She has since worked in corporate marketing. About a year ago, Zileena resigned from her role as Marketing Manager at KPMG to pursue a few passions of hers, one of which was to volunteer with i-india. Since her return to Singapore, Zileena has continued to be actively involved with i-india and is very passionate about the organisation. Alongside her volunteer work, she has returned to full time employment and works as Asia-Pacific Marketing Manager with SunGard.*

Village which is an ongoing project. Jhag is a town just outside of Jaipur and the plot of land was given to i-india by the Rajasthan government at a nominal rate. The village is being built as a community project involving as many local workers as possible to provide local employment and involve the whole community. It currently consists of two shelter homes, a formal school and a medical centre for children and women in the community.

It is also a sustainable and environmentally friendly village. For example, solar panels for energy have been donated and installed and they are growing a vegetable garden where the children can learn to sustain their own needs.

The design has been put in place by local architects who really understand the local needs as well as the harsh weather conditions in Rajasthan. They are also hoping to build a cricket pitch, which the kids are really excited about, and a shaded area for the unbearably hot summer months.

I-india also focuses on empowering and educating women and one of its latest projects is to teach women a vocation and provide them with a means to sustain and protect themselves.

### My story

About two years ago, I came across i-india through an organization in Singapore (which is home to me), called Street Child Project (SCP). SCP is a registered society run by a committee of warm-hearted, truthful, selfless volunteers, who have come together for the pure good of humanity. A few months ago, I was fortunate enough to be asked to join SCP as an official committee member and was honoured to accept the position. All the money raised by SCP goes directly back to i-india and we are able to see first-hand where and how the money is being spent.

Having family based in Mumbai, I have visited India many times and feel very much at home there. As such, I am somewhat familiar with the dire circumstances that over-population and poverty has forced on

much of India's society. But I also knew that spending time working in Jaipur, would be a different experience altogether. And on planning this particular visit to India, I had no idea what to expect. I have watched videos and documentaries made by i-india volunteers and have often been brought to tears, publically. I wasn't sure how I was going to handle actually working with the children and experiencing their circumstances with my own eyes, feelings and emotions. But from the moment I was welcomed by the i-india 'family', I was nothing but inspired. Yes, it may sound ironic to be inspired by the circumstances I was living with and the pasts I was learning of, but this was reality – every step I took, I was placed with another parody; every corner I turned, was another experience; and every child I met, a new inspiration.

Every day I was amazed by the children themselves. Perhaps it is ignorant of me to think otherwise, but I was moved to tears, not by the poverty, but by the dignity, strength, respect (self as well as that for others), and overall personalities of these kids, which evidently shone brighter and far beyond the pain that haunts their past. They have learnt to accept their past and instead of using it as a sword against the world, they have risen above their misfortunes, realizing that they are fortunate to be given a second chance to achieve their dreams and goals – a lesson I believe many of us need to learn. Take Tulsi for example. The eldest of five children, she was an orphan at nine years old, left to look after her brother and three sisters. Her only remaining family, her aunt and uncle, wanted to marry her off at this young age. Tulsi was fortunate enough that someone in the village contacted i-india via its toll-free helpline and Tulsi and her siblings were rescued and given shelter at one of i-india's homes. This was seven years ago. Tulsi is now in her final year of high school and after she graduates, would like to go to University to study to become a social worker, so that she can give back what she feels fortunate enough to have been given herself. It is my opinion that she has already achieved that goal!

i-india has inspired many. In Singapore, we fundraise in numerous ways one of which is working with schools to create awareness with children born into more fortunate circumstances. This is a project very close to my heart. We also hold events and auctions in aid of i-india. And one of our main sources of funds comes from selling the beautiful Ladli jewelry, made through the children's vocation.

I believe that i-india's success is not just founded in its cause, but moreover in its soul. It started with an open, selfless heart and this transcends through both adults and children, not just in India but around the world. I recently learnt of a 12 year old schoolboy here in Singapore, who donated all his prize money from a competition he won, to i-india. The amount of money was equivalent to USD2,000. Children never stop inspiring and teaching me!

The two months I spent with my i-india 'family' opened me, changed me, inspired me and most importantly allowed me to understand that hurt and pain is a reality of life – you can allow yourself to be victimized by this or rise above it. If abused, tortured and orphaned children can, any of us have the ability to change what we want to.

As a final note to this small chapter, don't feel sorry for people that appear to be less fortunate; instead feel compassion and open yourself to make a difference, however small you *think* it may be.

<http://www.i-indiaonline.com/>  
[www.streetchildproject.com](http://www.streetchildproject.com)  
[www.i-indiaproject.org.au/](http://www.i-indiaproject.org.au/)

It's hard for just words to explain the beauty and love of i-india, I hope pictures can. Please take a few minutes out of your day to watch this:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UO\\_rKK-5As](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UO_rKK-5As)



## What it means to be a Zoroastrian

by fred sarkari

Keynote speaker at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress, Vancouver, July 2011. Watch the video on <http://www.mentalsidewalk.com/2011/07/zoroastrian-world-youth-congress-in-vancouver/>

As I travelled on the long winding road to Vancouver, I spent a great deal of time thinking about what it meant to me to be a Zoroastrian.

I live my life in a sort of seclusion as far as the Zoroaster philosophy goes. It's not like I run into a fellow brother sister walking down the street everyday and chat. So I live my life quietly with the principles and philosophies of the Zoroaster infused in my soul.

I've always been proud of the fact that I am part of something so great, so rare, so ancient, and so positive. It gives me a deep sense of simply feeling special being a Zoroastrian.

That is why I have always tried to incorporate our philosophy into my life motto. Always have good thoughts, always have good words and always do good deeds. Others that read those words may not understand where it comes from, but they can understand the power of those words when we live them within our lives. They are universal truths that can shape the world we live in.

So I live my life in a quiet tribute to this great philosophy but it is rare that I get to actually immerse myself in it. I didn't know what to expect from the World Congress, but I knew it would be life changing. When I arrived at the Opening Ceremonies I experienced a great sense of belonging, the feelings within me were unexplainable. I guess the closest feeling I could come up with to relate would be like coming home after a long journey. I was actually surprised and intrigued. I thought I knew what to expect from myself, but in fact, I was blown away by the depth of it all.

I felt a tear flow down my face as I sat there in the second row of the Chan Center. I was overwhelmed with the sudden realization, that I was part of something even more wonderful and amazing than previously thought.

Vista Trethewey was singing *Believe* with a group of adorable Zoroastrian children as her back up singers.

It was the perfect reflection of unity and future within our community; Indian and Iranian children singing *Believe* together as one.

It was not only the moment I truly realized what it meant to be a Zoroastrian, but more so, it was the moment I realized how proud I was to be a Zoroastrian.

Watching close to a 1000 Zoroastrians, Indian and Iranian, from all over the world connecting with one another, made me realize for the first time that we are part of a bigger calling. Our way of living is larger than we are as individuals.

Speaking on that stage was by far one of my greatest honors that I had the pleasure of experiencing. Before I went on I actually had to calm myself down. I am a man who is in touch with his emotions and I am not afraid to express myself, but I was bursting with pride, and for the first time in a long time, I was actually nervous to speak in front of everyone.

It is not that I was worried I was going to stumble on my words, it was that I was in front of so many like-minded and special people that I wanted everyone to know how important it was for me to be speaking there on that stage. Often in my talks I speak about being raw, being naked, letting your true self show but part of living that philosophy is embracing who you are in the greater sense. What I learned from the Congress is that I am not just Fred Sarkari. I am all of my beliefs and history as well. We are more than a religion, a community, a philosophy, or simply a group of people. We are an idea of compassion, of tolerance, of

peace. I truly believe that we together can and will impact the lives of all those that cross our path in this world. It's true that the big events direct the movement of mankind, but it is smaller things on the daily basis, that give us humanity.

Being a Zoroastrian is more than placing the text – good words, good thoughts and good deeds upon our walls and saying our prayers every day.

Being a Zoroastrian is turning those words into our everyday reality.† It is truly finding the courage to live the essence of those words in our daily lives with anyone that crosses our path.

By living every day with this philosophy deep within us, we shape the world around us. It is the smallest things that add up in people's minds and shape the way they see the world.

By living the way we do, we inspire others to do the same and that has a ripple effect that resonates around the world. You don't even need to read our books, study our texts, go to our temples, to understand the core of the Zoroastrian philosophy. It is a universal truth, independent of books. We radiate the light of kindness and it speaks to the souls of our brothers and sisters all around the world.

Standing there on stage, I could see and feel the glow of love that radiated in the audience. Giving my heart and soul a sense of true belonging. That will live in my heart and soul forever. It was like a snapshot of a perfect moment.

We have not only survived but thrived through centuries because of our soul connections within each other.

People who know little about us often think we worship fire. It is more so that they are trying to understand the spark that connects us all together. Zoroastrians have lived through much persecution throughout our long history; we've been bound together by common love and the spark that is in each of us. We do have our temples but more



important is the fact that each of us carries these ideals deep within us. We are our own temples.

Even though there are less than 200,000 of us left in the world, but from that stems a million times more power than the actual number itself. Experiencing the World Congress made me realize that how we live our individual lives impacts us all, and our world as a whole.

We must keep this light alive within us; it brings smiles to people's faces and chases away the darkness.

Thank you to all the people that made the 5th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress possible. While we already live this day-to-day it is more than just an event, it truly is an opportunity for us all to build bridges within our lives and remind us how rare and special we truly are.

I will leave you with this; it is the simple things in life that are the most extraordinary. If you pay attention to who you are and how you affect others, you can live a long, happy, and healthy fulfilling life.

Being part of this conference was a gift, it solidified and empowered me to be even more of who I am. I am a member of a great family and part of the universal language of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.

It is the essence of who we are and all we have to do is have the courage to live out our destiny. ■■■■



*Fred is considered an expert in human behaviour. He has facilitated to a broad range of organizations from start ups to some of the world's largest organizations, including Microsoft, Hilton, IBM, Coca Cola. He is the author of two best seller books: "How the Top 5% Think!" and "Courage To Be Naked".*

Visit him on his blog: <http://www.MentalSidewalk.com> and <http://www.facebook.com/fredsarkari>

## *The B D Petit Parsee General Hospital*

On this happy occasion we are proud to inform you that on 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2011 our hospital entered its 100<sup>th</sup> year of caring for the sick and less fortunate community members. Having reserved 53.6% of its total bed capacity of 222 beds for the poor and deserving members of our community, the hospital provides a substantial volume of charity care – the total cost of providing free and subsidized medical care during last year was approx. Rs8.42 crores, out of which, the cost of free medicine to the in-patients and OPD patients was Rs107.20 lacs and for diagnostic and specialized investigation services for such patients was Rs124.82 lacs.

Our free patients get free bed, medicines, food, and all diagnostic investigations including X'Ray, Pathology, Sonography, ICU etc. Even investigations / tests done outside the hospital, like CT, MRI, etc. are paid for by the hospital. The hospital is able to sustain such a large volume of charity care to the poor only due to the continuing financial support from kind, generous and concerned members of the community. The hospital management would be grateful if you would share our burden of caring for the sick by donating generously either on-line, through our website [www.bdpetitparseegeneralhospital.org](http://www.bdpetitparseegeneralhospital.org) in person, or by post. Your donations, big or small, will be used for the general purposes of the hospital and in particular for providing medicines and diagnostic services to the poor, upgrading medical equipment or procuring new equipment in our efforts at improving the quality as well as the range of medical services offered.

The hospital has four operation theatres with state-of-the-art instruments and a well equipped 16 bedded ICU with latest equipments including ventilators and round the clock services of well trained post graduate "Intensivist / Registrars" as well as trained nursing staff. Besides, the hospital has a well equipped Physiotherapy Dept., Path Lab., Sonography cum Radiology Lab., as well as state-of-the-art Component Level Blood Bank, all providing round the clock services. The 60 elegant air-conditioned / non air-conditioned rooms with attached bathrooms open out on a lovely broad verandah of the Heritage Building overlooking a beautiful verdant and flowering garden, resplendent with old trees, where a patient can enjoy a rare luxury in Mumbai – tranquility and fresh air! Patients occupying these high end, elegant and well appointed rooms get in return the services of the most renowned consultants in various fields as also resident doctors and caring nursing staff round the clock. Apart from offering one of the most exquisite ambiances in a hospital in South Mumbai, they also get the added satisfaction that, in a small indirect way, they help the hospital in looking after the free/ subsidized patients, at no extra cost to them, and that to at much less cost than is charged by other hospitals. We trust that our honorary doctors and the more affluent members of our community will make use of these high end facilities and rooms and increase their occupancy. - *Homa D Petit, President, The B D Petit Parsee General Hospital*

## Creative Quilter -

If, as Sylvia Plath said, “the worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt,” then the seeds of doubt were sewn in Khurshid Bamboat’s life at an early age. Now an enthusiastic quilter whose work has been exhibited internationally, Khurshid was born in Karachi and came to live in London with her parents in the late 1950’s. As a young schoolgirl her teachers told her she had no talent for art and that she should not bother to waste her time with the subject. Later in her life, when Khurshid found herself at home with young children, she felt a desire to be creative and this time she was not to be deterred.

by jenni mehta

On reflection, Khurshid realises that textiles have always held her interest. As a four-year-old she remembers her fascination watching the embroiderers when visiting the *Cowasjee Variawa Parsi Ladies’ Industrial Home*; this was a foundation set up by her grandfather Fakirjee Cowasjee in Karachi, to promote high quality embroidered merchandise and provide paid occupation to indigent single or widowed Parsi ladies. She recollects with horror emptying out small drawers of beads and sequins, beguiled by their glitter, “how those poor workers must have cursed me as they sorted the beads after my visits!” Later, trips with her mother to the Needlewoman craft shop in London held equal attraction. But for the young Khurshid, appreciation of the colours of knitting wools, beads and embroidery threads did not equate with artistic endeavour.

As an adult, a friend suggested they attend a short textile course. The event was not particularly inspiring, but it awoke an interest in Khurshid and later in 1982 she made her first small quilt of traditional patchwork blocks and a quilted cushion. A craft tutor suggested she apply to attend a City & Guilds course (educational craft and design courses run at all levels in the UK) to develop her design skills; a rewarding world of creativity

and friendship was about to open. Khurshid’s parents were supportive of her early efforts and though some family members expressed surprise that she should be doing anything “arty” her father was particularly encouraging, as he felt it was good to learn anything new.

Many think of a quilt as a homely bed cover, often in the 18<sup>th</sup> century American style, with hand-sewn blocks showing traditional motifs. Khurshid’s designs have developed far from this type and she is quick to point out that the oldest quilts were found at the Valley of the Queens in Egypt; in everyday life such decorative pieces would have ornamented walls, but their chief purpose was to insulate any surface from the heat, cold and damp. Made of at least three layers of fabric, all quilts have stitching (machined or hand sewn) holding the central layer in place and may be used horizontally, vertically, even diagonally and in motion – quilts have been used as wafting ceiling fans in Asia.

Khurshid describes herself as a “textile person”; although she sees what she produces as a craft *and* an art, she shrinks from the idea of calling herself an artist, she just enjoys the challenge of working with fabrics and all manner of findings to

Khurshid Bamboat - The Quilter





# Khurshid Bamboat

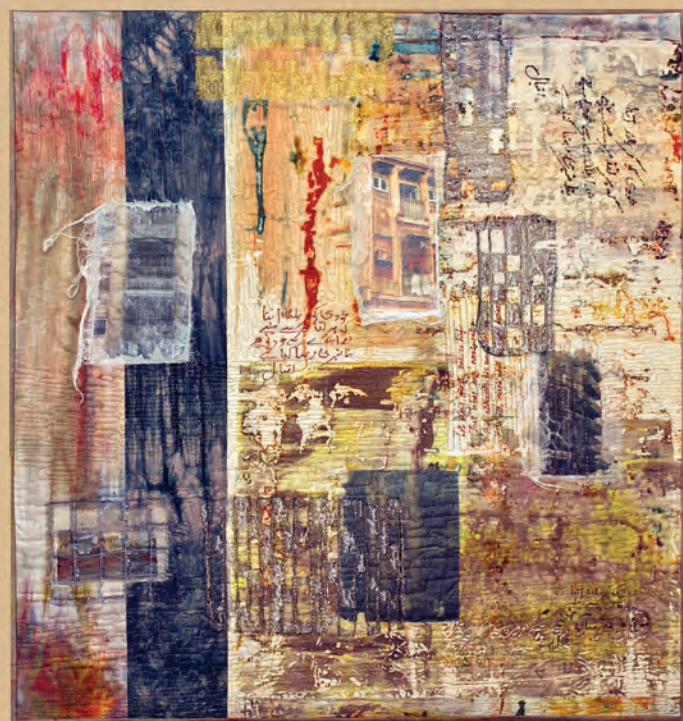


ORBIT - 2010. Hand dyed and commercial fabrics used in a repeating pattern. Machine pieced, embroidered and quilted. It is to be given to A Gift of Quilts at the end of October.



ALL THAT JAZZ - 2010

Machine pieced using bright hand dyed and some batik fabrics, graduating from pale to dark in value. The variance in width gives the movement and interest. Machine quilted (less than half an inch apart) in different coloured threads. At the moment it is touring as part of the UK section in the World Quilt and Textile Exhibition in the States.



KARACHI - Windows & Doorways - 2006

Background fabric has been dyed and discharged in areas. Writing has been screenprinted, as well as written directly on to the fabric. Transferred images - overlaid with organza and cut back. Machine quilted.



DANCING TRIANGLES - 2003

Made for the first Festival of Quilts exhibition in Birmingham/Quilters Guild Challenge - CONNECTIONS and it was juried for the catalogue (only a certain number were chosen for the catalogue). Each triangle was individually sewn and then assembled in strips. Machine quilted. Hand dyed and commercial fabrics used.



Sponsored by Bapsi & Fali Nariman



GREEN ISTHUMUS : 1967. Oil on  
canvas - 40 x 30"



The Gentleman Painter





OF CLIFF AND FALL: 1978. Oil on canvas -140 x 85 cms



PURDAH I: Oil on canvas - 46 x 70 cms



SEASCAPE: 1986. Oil on canvas - 115 x 115 cms

## Jehangir A Sabavala (1922-2011)

All illustrations of paintings are through the courtesy of Pheroza Godrej



## A Gentleman Painter - Jehangir A Sabavala (1922-2011)

*"To me art is a honing of the spirit, an extra refinement that carries one above the realm of the everyday."* - Jehangir A Sabavala

by pheroza j godrej

**M**umbai, India - Friday, September 2, 2011:

Dark grey clouds hung heavily over the Arabian Sea and a prolonged monsoon lingered, with no promise of fair skies. Inclement weather apart, worse followed. The news was sad. His final call had come, it had to be answered. Jehangir Sabavala, world-renowned artist bowed out, and the curtain unfolded on a life well-lived. Outside Breach Candy Hospital, where he lay, the sigh of the wind and the lashing of angry waves, made a lamentable seascape. On receiving the sad news, I hastily sketched in my mind an image of this always dapper gentleman-painter, bidding adieu to all that he loved and cherished: his beloved and encouraging wife, Shirin; his pride-and-joy, daughter, Aafred; his neat and tidy get-away studio of inspiration and solace, and his every work – those which he retained and those

which are proudly owned by collectors world-wide, including myself. To him, each of his work, sketches or paintings, small or large, was an integral part of himself. He poured into them aspirations and dreams, the ones he realised and those which remained dreams. Ultimately, except for the soul, all else is left behind.



THE WOMEN III: 1991. Oil on Canvas - 45 x 45"

In quietude, over the week-end that followed, my thoughts went back to the time I had spent with the amiable Sabavalas. It was always a pleasure to be in their company. I was inexperienced then - this was 1971, but idealistic, nonetheless, and consumed with a passion to set up an art gallery with a difference. Bombay had only a handful of private and public art galleries. The art scene was very different, it was evolving. The profession itself was not taken seriously nor given the importance and respect it deserved. It therefore took a lot of courage to even articulate my plan. Jehangir and Shrin were two people I shared my ambitious plan with. I was relieved to have done so and contrary to my apprehension, their very positive and spontaneous response was just what I needed to be fully convinced. They endorsed my idea whole-heartedly, and encouraged me to carry forward my plans. Suggestions of what I should venture into and what I should not even consider emerged from the several discussions I was fortunate to have with them. Coming from a senior, successful, much admired and respected painter, my mother and father were both reassured that that I was on the right path. My parents, Mitha and Phiroze Shroff, as well as my husband, Jamshyd's parents, Soonu and Naval Godrej, had also known the Sabavalas. Together we shared memorable occasions in their home as well as in ours. We pass on this friendship to the third generation - Aafreed and our children, Raika and Navroze, have got to know each other rather well.

Jehangir Aredeshri Sabavala hailed from good lineage. Born in 1922, into an affluent and socially well-reputed Zoroastrian family, his mother belonged to the distinguished Cowasjee Jehangir family that ran flourishing businesses and were equally great philanthropists. They believed that wealth is good when it brings joy to others. It was because of their continuing generosity that the people of Bombay benefitted from the several schools, hospitals, the University Convocation Hall, Elphinstone College, the Jehangir Art

Gallery, the erstwhile Cowasji Jehangir Public Hall – now the National Gallery of Modern Art, and other landmarks. His father, Ardeshir Pestonjee Sabavala, hailed from good Surat stock and was a well-educated and qualified barrister from the Inns of Court, London. The initial euphoria of a marriage of choice, unfortunately, did not grow to be a congenial one and sadly ended in separation, traumatic for the couple, as well as for Jehangir and his sibling, Sharoukh. Jehangir has been very open about his turbulent childhood. Those unsettling years consciously or unconsciously would have influenced his psyche and, subsequently, I surmise, found expression in his thought-provoking paintings – those pilgrims and migrants constantly following an unknown path, journeying through desolate terrain, chasing a chimera. As an inspirational writer so correctly surmised: “Adversity is the rain in your life, cold, comfortless and unfriendly. Yet from that season are born the lily, the rose, the date and the pomegranate.” His luminous landscapes – distant, penetrating, colours flowing into each other, saying everything and nothing, inspiring, insightful and simultaneously disturbing, beautiful and, at times, terrifying. Mysterious is a more apt word, for the same painting evokes different emotions at different times to different people.

He was in and out of schools in various places, including Switzerland. In Bombay, for four years at a stretch he attended the Cathedral & John Cannon School. After graduating from Elphinstone College in 1942, he pursued Art at the J J School of Art, Bombay. He left for London in 1945 to train at the Heatherley School of Art. In 1947 he moved to Paris to study at the Academie Julian and the Academie Andre Lhote until 1951. He returned to the Academie Julian in 1952-54, and to the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in 1957. Thereafter, he returned home to settle in India, except for brief visits abroad. His career has been described as a steady progression, a journey – “with the paintings as steps, in a difficult, highly formalised pilgrimage towards a metaphysical truth”.



Sabavala was more or less set in his choice of themes. Experimentation and innovation was not his cup of tea. At the age of 65, in an introspective interview, Kamala Kapoor, well-known journalist and writer, prodded him and he retorted with deep conviction: "A volte-face? No, I don't think at this stage of my life and career a volte-face would be possible. However, with each exhibition I feel the painter in me evolves, faces challenges and feels renewed freshness. If I ever felt I was only plateauing, or static, or repeating myself, I'd certainly stop painting." That was Jehangir, a blank canvas, he once said, terrified him. However, when he started painting, he did so as though he had no peripheral vision. Focussed with precision, the entire painting already imprinted in his mind, he transferred the visual onto his canvas.

Jehangir left for his eternal abode, an inconceivable realm, but his works will live on to tell his tale; the many stories he painted in landscapes of timelessness, human figures of deep spirituality, yet appearing emotionless, and still life that left so much unsaid. A great thinker and a thinking painter, Jehangir was gifted with the ability to express himself as clearly in language as well as in painting, for which he had an unerring eye. His romance with his palette and brush ended on a sad note, with his two-year struggle against lung cancer. Bravely borne with great fortitude and resignation, the wasting disease sapped his energy, but not his spirit, which he kept alive until he succumbed to it. At the grand age of 89, Jehangir achieved in his lifetime a magnificent collection of envious honours, which included the Padma Shri Award in 1977 and the Lalit Kala Ratna Award in 2007, both presented to him by the President of India. This recognition made him, his family and India proud to own a painter of such high calibre. More than anything else, the Zoroastrian community was elated, for they held him in high esteem. In conversation with his friend of many years, Nancy Adajania, culturist theorist, art critic and independent curator, Jehangir admitted: "In principle, I would say that my work is not overtly related to Zoroastrianism, but in the deep subconscious, perhaps it is. In a way it has to belong to a person who belongs nowhere and yet everywhere."

To those who did not have the opportunity to know him closely, Jehangir, because of the aura of propriety that he exuded, appeared

unapproachable, or rather, people hesitated to have a dialogue with him. But ask the many young artists who plucked up enough courage to break the ice – they quickly realised that they had misjudged him entirely. The daring ones won, they learnt from him practical lessons in art, and benefitted from the advice he so readily imparted, which most professional artists hold close to their chests. Being a recipient of his thoughtfulness and generosity, a few months prior to his passing away, I was overwhelmed to receive from him a neat pile of well-preserved art catalogues and magazines, which he knew would be useful at Cymroza Art Gallery. Always ready to give a helping hand to worthy causes, many NGOs benefited from his largesse. I remember his beautiful fern series, which he spontaneously offered World Wide Fund for Nature-India, to reproduce in a wall calendar, the proceeds of which helped nature conservation efforts. He did it for the cause; moreover, his brother, Sharoukh, and Sohrab P Godrej were trustees of the Fund. Sohrab and Jehangir shared mutual interests: art, philanthropy, the less privileged, nature and heritage. These men of old wisdom belonged to a rare breed of visionaries, each outstanding in their own chosen profession and unique in their humanness – they believed in and practiced the virtuous concept of noblesse oblige, and innumerable people have benefitted from their magnificent generosity of purse and spirit. And his magnanimity continues in the form of his seminal work, "Cobweb Cloud", estimated between \$220,000-280,000 (Rs1-1.3 cr.). The proceeds of this work, auctioned at Sotheby's, went to the Sir Shapurji Billimoria Foundation Trust, a Mumbai-based charity, which plans to set up an institute that will focus on integrating children with disabilities into mainstream school.

*"I, who have travelled so much in my youth have grown rooted like a banyan tree. Mine is not the temperament that can plant a creative seed in different places and in different climes with a natural flourish. I need the un-eventfulness of my monastic studio to enter my inner realm, to think, and perhaps create something that is fulfilling."* - Jehangir A Sabavala

Jehangir, remained to the end the very private person he admitted to being. A painter among painters, if there is a special abode for his profession in the Elysian Fields, Jehangir has, undoubtedly, been allotted a niche, a comfort zone, his exclusive studio in the sky.



Pheroza J Godrej, BA. (Hons.), BEd., MA Eng Litt., MA Ancient Indian Culture; Art Historian, Writer, Gallerist and Heritage Supporter. Publications include, "Scenic Splendours : India through the Printed Image", "A Pageant of Prints", "Under the Indian Sun", "Bombay to Mumbai – Changing Perspectives" and "A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion and Culture".

**Continued from p 30**

create innovative textile pieces that please and stimulate. Her style is mostly abstract and she favours natural darker shades, with artists such as Van Gogh and Monet influencing her colour palette. Often Khurshid screen-prints or dyes her own fabrics in order to achieve an exact colour or pattern for her project. There are many complex processes in dying - just one of the many skills she has learnt by attending creative workshops. Dying or discharging (removing colour from) her fabrics, ensures that each quilt is truly original and often the almost accidental outcome of dying is the inspiration for a new design. Khurshid is always developing new design ideas; recently inspiration was found at the London Tate Modern exhibition of works by MirÛ. An extraordinary collection of art, yet Khurshid photographed the intricate shadows created by the artist's sculptural pieces, which will perhaps provide an exciting new design. Similarly, in the Bamboat household, a vase of tired tulips will never be thrown out until their graceful lines have been graphically recorded, and on holiday Khurshid's husband Eddie accepts with equanimity that photos are far more likely to be of an unusual tree bark pattern than of him.

Khurshid considers herself fortunate to have been associated with the Dulwich Quilters group in south London since 1993. They meet in members' homes twice a month and are regularly issued a challenge - a particular theme for a new quilt design - by the chairman. The resulting quilts are exhibited bi-annually in a popular exhibition at Dulwich College. Completing various City & Guilds exams and meeting with the Dulwich Quilters group have taught Khurshid to "learn to look, not just to see - to really perceive." Both experiences have educated her to try anything and to have a good laugh trying - "it's better than meditating," says Khurshid. As she becomes older she sees being open to new ideas in design as a way of developing herself and consequently her style - "quilting has given me my own identity" she says. She enjoys being with other like-minded people with whom she can discuss her

designs and bounce ideas off. She is never bored when working on a quilt - each item requiring many satisfying hours of preparation and execution, yet often providing excitement and total frustration in equal measure. Two recent designs of Khurshid's, in gloriously faded fabrics and stitching, are themed on old Karachi and include images of buildings, animals and handwritten script. They are a eulogy to the more romantic past of a city that has now virtually vanished amidst the sheen of flashy 20<sup>th</sup> century construction. Based on Khurshid's geographical roots, she is keen to develop a series of quilts on this theme.

The group has also given Khurshid the opportunity to reach out to others through the Dulwich Quilters' workshops she has organised over the past 15 years. A particularly successful one was held for visitors at a local hospice; the classes provided those attending with light-hearted enjoyment and companionship away from their poignant circumstances. When she talks about this event you can tell by her animated sparkle that it gave Khurshid a great deal of pleasure and fulfilment.

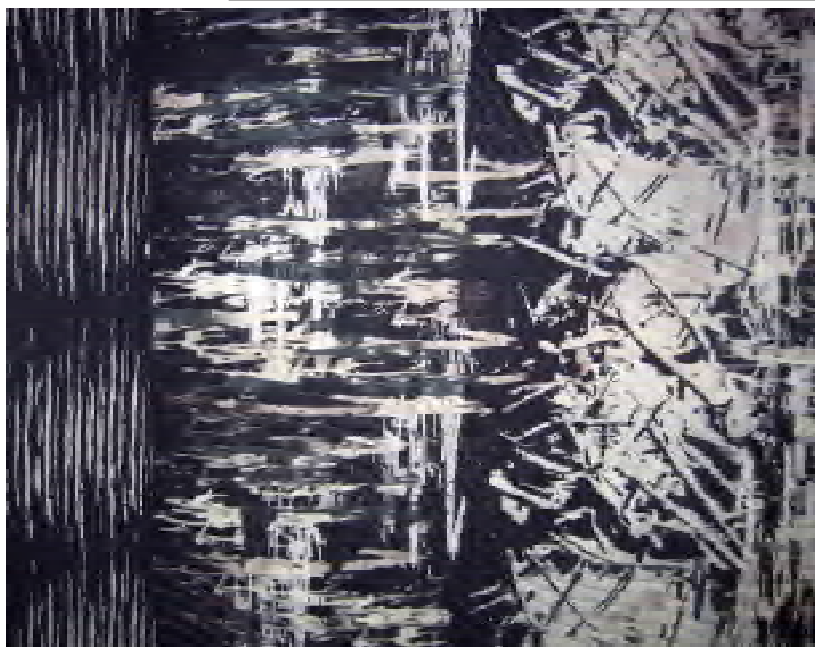
**A personal highlight for Khurshid was when a favourite quilt, "Chaos" - a work of monochromatic subtlety - one of 46 chosen out of 250 submitted internationally, was exhibited at the European Quilt Triennial in Heidelberg; the quilt then travelled on display around Europe.**

"Chaos" was one of two quilts selected originating from the Dulwich Quilters, praise indeed for the relatively small London group. Two more of Khurshid's quilts are currently leading nomadic lives in USA galleries, and the 7<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress 2000 had two of her especially designed quilts that are still displayed in Houston. In 2012 her quilt "Orbit" is to be exhibited at the London Olympics and will be officially presented to one of the participating countries.

Khurshid considers she still has much to learn and looks to the works of American



*Jenni Mehta was born and lives in London with her husband Soli and has two adult daughters. Trained in textiles and stained glass design, Jenni enjoys the varied London arts, music, film and theatre. She is fond of visiting woody British landscapes in autumnal weather and major artistic European cities - always realising her schoolgirl French is almost totally inadequate.*

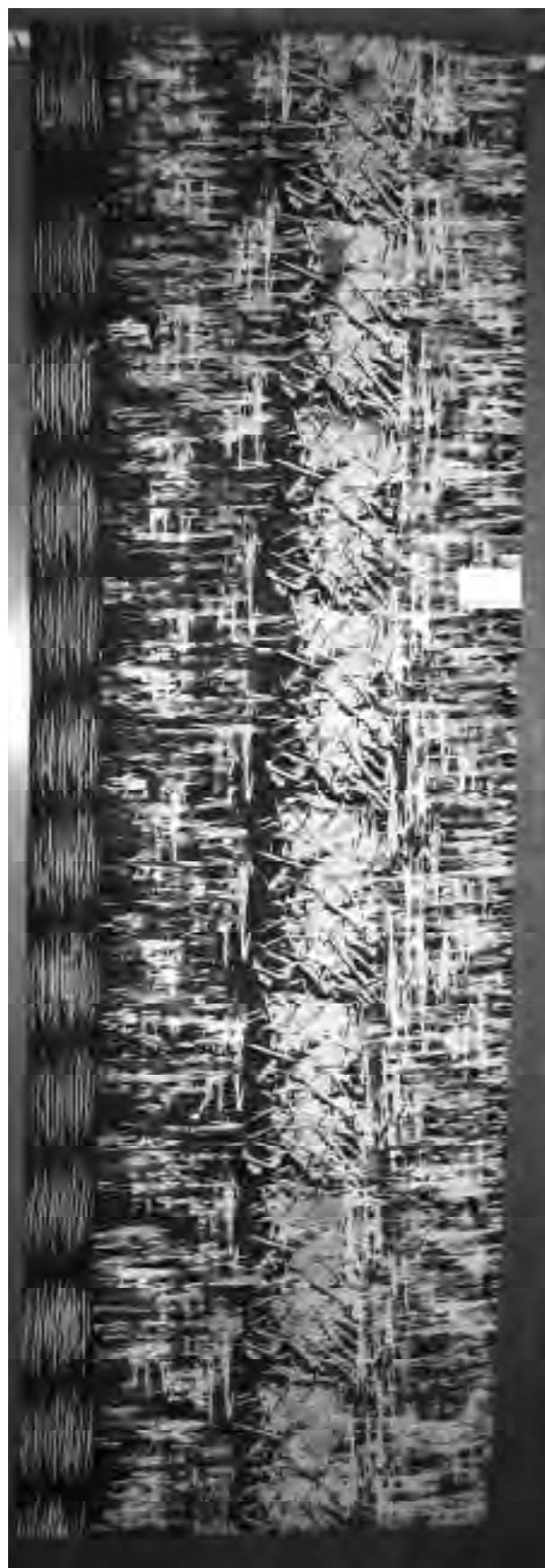


CHAOS - 2009

Black cotton sateen has been discharged several times using Khurshid's own designed screens. Over printed with screen inks and machine quilted. Chaos was juried into the 4th Triennale in Germany and exhibited in four different exhibitions in Europe. Above is a close up of 'Chaos'.

quilter Nancy Crow together with artists such as Mondrian and Bridget Riley, as her muses. She would like to spend more time studying the theory of colour and attending more workshops, enjoying the exploration of a new technique. She has hopes of one day having her work accepted for display at the prestigious European Art Quilt Foundation or Quilt National in the USA, "that would be the pinnacle for me."

Khurshid occasionally works to commission. She says the handover is somewhat "like giving a little of yourself away," but when she sees that the piece will be loved by the owner the emotion is bearable. She is grateful to have realised a creative life for herself, despite the dispiriting comments of her schoolteachers, and would encourage everyone to seek the same. Khurshid hopes that in the future her descendents will treasure her striking and remarkable quilts; meanwhile, she has her eye on an assortment of Eddie's redundant 1970s silk ties - perhaps one day they will make a very 21<sup>st</sup> century quilt.



## A rich legacy in humour



For decades Bollywood appropriated the Bawaji and his eccentricities as a means of providing comic relief but the Parsi community itself was not bothered about demanding censor cuts. It continued enlarging its rich repertoire of jokes, (*koyla* and otherwise) and more importantly celebrating the ability to laugh at oneself. Nowhere was this more evident than in the hoary cultural institution of the twentieth century – the Parsi naatak.

Laughter and joie de vivre were the hallmarks of festivals and no Pateti or Navroze was deemed complete in Mumbai, Poona, Ahmedabad, Nagpur and Calcutta without the mandatory naatak.

by freny manecksha

*Laughter In The House* by Meher Marfatia and photographer Sooni Taraporevala, with a foreword by Bachi Karkaria chronicles this rich tradition of Parsi theatre which, in its heyday, entertained and regaled not just Parsis but also Gujaratis, Bohras, Kutchi Memons, Khojas and others. Its invaluable links with the Indian National Theatre enabled it to embrace a much larger national ethos.

The book, lavishly mounted, chronicles this growth through short histories and biographical sketches along with hundreds of photographs from the plays, posters and reproductions of programmes that were also designed to be rib ticklers. The careful attention to detail is evident in one such programme which proclaims “PARSI OPERA Paanch Aannano /Pogram No/ Liberal Libratto.”

One learns how Parsi theatre, which began in the 1850s, formed a confluence of various genres – Urdu epics, classical Persian sagas and Indian mythologicals. A time of baroque theatre with high histrionics, some companies began incorporating social messages inspired by the freedom movement into the plays. Interestingly, the female actors who parroted the lines were European as it was taboo for Parsi women to be associated with theatre. It was

Kaikhushru Kabraji who promoted women's independence and enabled women to accompany the men to performances. In a bid to attract more patronage the Naatak Uttejak Company even arranged to provide a crèche for children during its shows of *Harishchandra*.

But a more significant pointer of things to come was the way Bomanji Kabraji began introducing comic characters like Galipadu Chinwala and Dosu Dafaasya in his tearjerkers. These precursors helped in the evolution of comic theatre which made its full blown entry with the arrival of Adi Marzban and his Co-operative Players in the 1930s.

The son of Phirozeshah Jehangirjee Marzaban, a playwright and Jam-e-Jamshed editor, Adi Marzban combined his knowledge of theatre arts, (he studied at the Pasadena Playhouse in the USA) with a flair for script writing and accomplishments like music and dancing. His ability to turn the mirror on social foibles and to use quintessential Parsi humour to explore contemporary themes of love, marriage, inheritance and so on helped foster a vibrant theatre culture which flourished over weekends.

Marzban's genius was accompanied by a flowering and nurturing of huge talent that

included actors like Dinshah Daji, Ruby and Burjor Patel (who went on to pioneer their own productions with the Indian National Theatre), Piloo Wadia, Dinyar Contractor (also now producing his own plays), Jean Bhowmgar, Jangoo Irani and many many others. The period also saw the growth of writer, director, actor Pheroze Antia and Dorab Mehta, singing stars like Bomi and Dolly Dotiwalla, costume designer Mani Rabadi who went on to earn accolades in Bollywood and Sam Kerawala whose stunning work with lighting brought him awards like Thespo Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

Although the mood of the plays was most often frothy and light it was performed in a completely professional setting. So if a cancan had to be performed on stage as for *Thodik Aisi Thodik Taisi* then Hungarian Lodzig Holosey would be roped in to teach the cast. The professional setup attracted non-Parsis like technical director Gautam Joshi, director Pravin Joshi and set designer Anand Pai. They helped to bring in multi-piece revolving sets and technically accomplished lighting.

Burjor and Ruby Patel recall how *Pirojsha Bhawan*, broadly based on George Kaufman and Moss Hart's *George Washington Slept Here*, and widely accepted to be the mother of all Parsi naataks, was skilfully adapted to a Parsi lifestyle. However, its cast also included non-Parsi actors like Vijaya Jaywant, Kanti Madia and Amir Merchant and it was their appearance on stage that began attracting still wider audiences.

The growing eclectic flavour was reflected in the collaboration with the Indian National Theatre (INT). In the fifties Pheroze Antia directed plays like the *Rangilo Raja* series and his own *Behram* series incorporating several seasoned INT non-Parsi actors. In the sixties and seventies it was Ruby and Burjor Patel, Dadi Sarkari, Dinyar Contractor and others who joined hands with INT to produce what Maltiben Jhaveri (wife of Damu Jhaveri founder of INT) describes as magic.

It was this synergy that led to a creative outpouring. Gujarati poet and dramatist Sitanshu Yashashchandra observes how the characters became multi dimensional with a human story to tell, a subtle and Indian interpersonality to explore. In his tribute Yashashchandra says that it was the Parsi naatak with dialogue that had moved closer to actual spoken Gujarati which now enabled non-Parsi audiences to laugh at themselves.

Noted Gujarati writer director Tarak Mehta, quoted in the book on the basis of interviews given to various newspapers and magazines, acknowledged the superiority of Marathi and Bengali theatre but declared that when it came to comedy Parsi Gujarati plays had no parallel in regional theatre. The collaboration of Parsi with non-Parsi actors led to evolution of genres like suspense thrillers and social dramas which met with huge box office success. These plays included *Khunnas*, *Lafra Sadan* and *Hello Inspector*.

The book also encompasses activities of theatre groups outside Mumbai like the Calcutta Parsi Amateur Dramatic Club which staged plays replete with songs and ditties and the Karanjias of Surat who took their plays to Pakistan and where the *Karachi Tribune* front-paged their performance of *Kutra ni Puchhri Vaaki*. In his interview Yazdi Karanjia comments how the Karachi viewers "*Pag uchki ne hase*" (They'd lift their legs off the ground and laugh).

There is an account of Nozer Buchia, now settled in the US and committed to keep the naatak going even on foreign soil. Buchia draws parallels between theatre and life explaining how "theatre teaches you to be always prepared and never take things for granted." He says being on stage has taught him to be more adaptive and better organised in his business.

Another interesting facet of Parsi comic theatre was the contribution of the medical fraternity who took time out of their own particular theatre of operation to perform on



Freny Manecksha is an independent journalist from Mumbai interested in covering issues on development, human rights and culture.



stage for charity. They were responsible for spoofs like *Hamlet no Omlette* and *Manchoo Macbeth* and again they also contributed towards bringing in non-Parsi audiences including iconic artist M F Husain who had initially gone to see Dr Sidhva about an X ray.

The book is replete with many such valuable nuggets and is a real wealth of information but perhaps a judicious mix of collation and pruning with more analysis and less of personal reminiscences would have helped sharpen the focus. For example the chapter *What Lies Ahead* comprises of snippets by passionate thespians. It would have helped the reader if views and opinions had been summed up and analysed in an incisive essay by the author herself. This is unarguably a chapter that is pivotal to the very future of the community. In her forward Bachi Karkaria notes that our fading sense of humour is far more ominous than dwindling numbers. "And it is creeping upon us with grimly pursed lips."

Are we as a community losing not just our grand legacy of theatre but also our flexibility, our ability to adapt, our ability to collaborate? ■■■



Dolly Dotiwala, Piloo Wadia, Dadi Sarkari & Homi Tavadia in Maatidao ne Udha Paaro



Dinshaw Daji and Piloo Wadia in Hasta Gher Vasta

Dinshaw Daji & Piloo Wadia in Hasta gher Vasta

## LAUGHTER IN THE HOUSE ! 20TH-CENTURY PARSİ THEATRE



MEHER MARFATIA  
Photographs by Sooni Taraporevala

Wanted Girls  
for our Best Drama  
Dinshaw Daji, Piloo Wadia, Dadi Sarkari, Homi Tavadia, Dolly Dotiwala, M F Husain, etc.

Courtesy: Indian National Theatre

Images courtesy of Meher Marfatia

## *Rare Zarathushti Manuscripts restored for future generations*

Over ten years ago, two precious Zarathushti handwritten manuscripts [T54 (Yasna-Gatha Manuscript); and E1/F4 (Khordeh Avesta Manuscript)] which lay under decades of dust, devoured by insects and near the brink of total loss, were rescued and the saga of their meticulous restoration began. Now, under the project leadership of Mr Malcolm Deboo (ZTFE), the Royal Library Department of Conservation in Copenhagen has just completed the painstaking conservation and re-binding of these 250 year old manuscripts – holdings of the First Dastur Meherjirana Library in Navsari, India.

FEZANA was instrumental in initiating the 10-year effort of restoring these manuscripts. In 2002, Malcolm Deboo (ZTFE) was invited, through FEZANA, to the North American Zoroastrian Congress to raise awareness of the condition of these manuscripts. With the financial and moral support of FEZANA, Firdosh Mehta and others, including Mr Tahamtan Aresh, the restoration project commenced. Nearly a decade later, the two handwritten manuscripts have been painstakingly and professionally restored. Soon, the restored manuscripts will be returned to their home in the First Dastur Meherjirana Library, a fitting end to their long journey.

The entire conservation process was conducted in a workshop at The Royal Library Department of Conservation in Copenhagen, Denmark and was executed between 2008 and 2011. When the manuscripts arrived in Copenhagen, they were severely insect ridden. The manuscripts had been fumigated in India to combat the damage. One of the first steps of the conservation process was to place the manuscript pages under a fume hood for six weeks to disperse the chemical residue. Next, to repair the insect-damaged pages, a conservator carefully mended each area of insect damage by individually placing strips of a very thin Japanese paper to the damaged parts. Also, many pages had broken loose from their bindings. They too, were carefully rejoined with strips of Japanese paper. The pages were sewn back together and compounds were applied to prevent further insect attacks. Finally, the manuscripts were professionally hand rebound, complete with book boxes and gilded 22 carat gold folios to prevent tarnishing or oxidation.

Ancient manuscripts help chronicle history and bring us awareness and knowledge of our past. Without undergoing this crucial restoration process, these precious manuscripts would have turned to dust and with that a physical connection to a bit of our rich history would have been lost. FEZANA is proud to have partnered alongside many others in the process of bringing these irreplaceable manuscripts back to life.

[Courtesy and with permission: FEZANA bulletin, August 2011 / Volume 1 – issue 2  
Powerpoint showing the various stages of restoration – courtesy Malcolm Deboo from where the photographs have been taken. Photographs by Karsten Bundgaard.]



Above: The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark.  
[R] From L to R: Conservators Inger Hoby & Hanne Karin Sorensen, bookbinder Hanna Munch Christensen.





The manuscript had been fumigated in India. To remove the chemical odours, the manuscript was kept in a fume hood for six weeks. The old binding was kept in place.



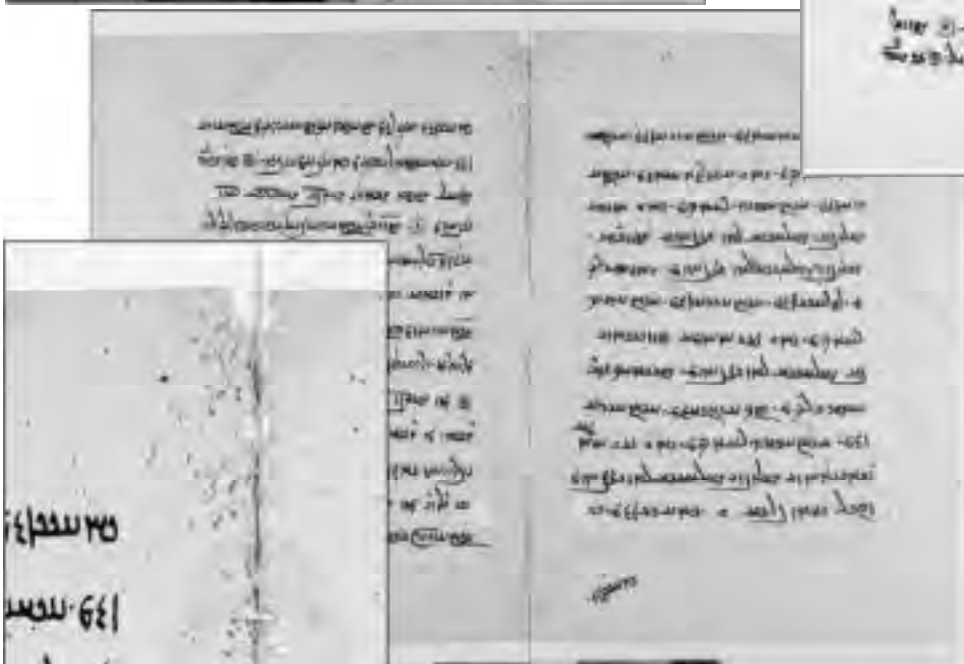
Removing the old sewing structure from T54



[L] The joints had to be reinforced to create a basis for the sewing and rebinding.



Above: two pages after treatment. The insect holes were filled in with thin tissue paper.

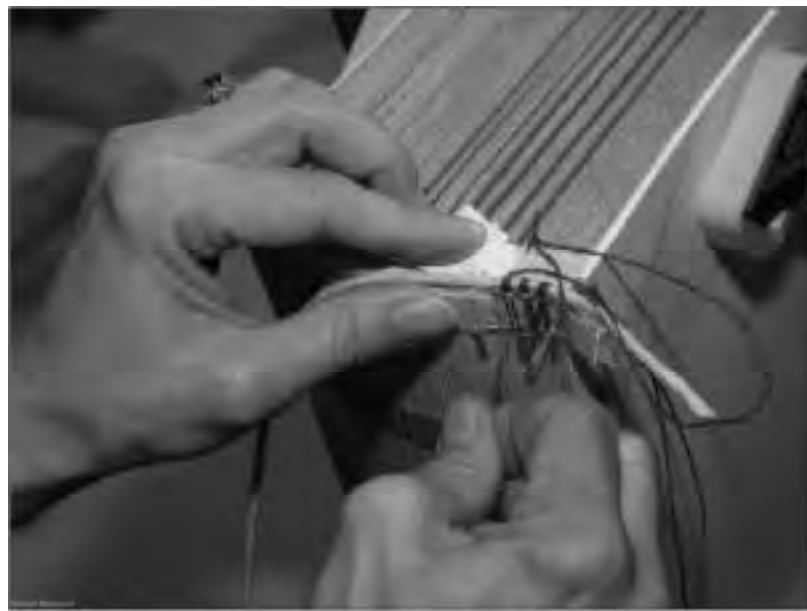


[L] T54, two pages before treatment. The paper was damaged by insects as seen on the enlarged detail.





When the sewing on of tapes is finished, they are positioned before glueing the back.



End bands are made by hand and sewn with linen thread on a thin piece of linen cord and a piece of tape to reinforce the structure.



T54 ready to be covered. The original quires have been sewn to loose guards in order to prevent the fragile old paper from adhesive and to create a sufficient opening for the manuscript.



Far left: T54 before restoration and rebinding. Above: The final result.

Left: The brass cliché for the afarganyu which has been used to emboss the leather.

## “Joyous Flame”

**J**oyous Flame, a new children's book by Rukshana Shroff and Kerman Metha, is a timely publication much needed by the community. This book, which makes for easy reading about our religion, history, customs, and traditions for Zoroastrian children as well as their parents, will also be an ideal way for members of other communities to be introduced to the Parsi Zoroastrians. But its most important function will be to impart the basics of our faith to Parsi children preparing for their *navjotes*.

*reviewed by ava khullar &  
dinyar patel*

The book covers material on three basic themes: the historical trajectory of our community since the time of Zarathushtra, important beliefs and ceremonies, and Zoroastrian and Iranian stories and legends. All of this is told in a straightforward and lucid manner, condensing down otherwise complex material into a text that is accessible, simple to understand, and engaging. The book is also visually appealing, featuring illustrations done by Naasha Mehta, who studied graphic design at Sheridan College in Toronto, Canada, and who is part of the Delhi Parsi community that played an important role in creating this book.

The first chapters chronicle the early history of the Iranians and Zoroastrians up to the fall of the Sasanian Empire. Readers are given a helpful timeline of the various dynasties and important rulers of Iran. Following this, Shroff and Mehta describe the migration of the Parsis to India and take the story up to the present day, covering important events while the community was mostly in Gujarat and when Parsis started to prosper in places such as Surat and Bombay. An especially useful section for young Zoroastrians will be the book's coverage of the life and teachings of Zarathushtra. Aside from including stories about Zarathushtra's family and his struggle

to establish a new religion, the authors explain the most important tenets and principles of the faith such as the conflict between good and evil, the importance of truth and honesty, and the active role that humans must play in this world through their good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.

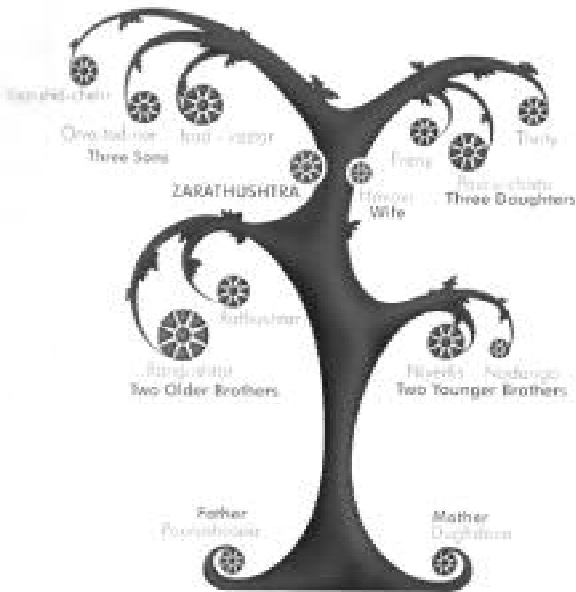
*Joyous Flame* provides a detailed look at the most important religious ceremonies such as those surrounding birth, the *navjote* and marriage ceremonies, and death rites. Before this, the authors devote time toward explaining the importance of fire in the religion and how, through different types of fire temples as well as the practices observed inside them, Zoroastrians have venerated fire. A large diagram identifies the various components and items found within temples and their sanctora. Adults might also benefit from their descriptions of ceremonial items such as *gulabbas* or *kankoodanis* found in the traditional *ses*, or the significance of certain performances in the *achoo michoo* ritual. Equally useful is the simple explanation of one of the most complex aspects of the Zoroastrian faith, the religious calendar. Aside from describing some of the most important religious holidays and *parabs*, the authors go over the differences between the *shenshai*, *kadmi*, and *fasli* calendars.

*Joyous Flame* lists some of the most important Zoroastrian prayers as well as their English translations. The final section of the book is devoted to another staple of the Zoroastrian tradition: stories and folklore. Condensed versions of famous Shahnameh stories — such as that of King Jamshid, Zal and Rudabeh, and Rustam and Sohrab — are presented along with that of the Mushkil Asaan.

The book has already generated a good deal of publicity both inside and outside of the community. The Dalai Lama, who agreed to write a foreword to *Joyous Flame*, noted that it “will not only enable Parsi children to appreciate their own cultural heritage, but will also educate children of other faiths about this valuable and vibrant community.” On 5 August 2011, Parzor released the book before a packed auditorium at the India International Centre. Aside from speeches from Fali Nariman and Wajahat Habibullah, currently the chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, members of Delhi’s youth religious group, “the Farohars”, performed *monajats* and songs.

Parsis of an older generation, who were brought up amongst Parsi neighbours and extended families, imbibed the religious and cultural practices of the Zoroastrian faith almost as if by osmosis. They saw their parents practice the values taught by the faith and they naturally followed suit. As the joint family system broke down and Parsis became a part of the urban fabric of multicultural Indian cities, members of the younger generation have had less of an opportunity to be exposed to Zoroastrian traditions and Parsi culture. *Joyous Flame* will be a useful resource, therefore, for imparting our traditions and making sure that our youth grow up as knowledgeable practitioners of the Good Religion. ■■■

Ava Khullar was affiliated with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi, where she carried out demographic work on the Parsi community. She is a trustee of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman as well as a member of the executive council of Parzor Foundation. She is particularly involved in Parzor’s work to revive Parsi embroidery.



Delightful illustrations in colour.  
Top: Zarathushtra’s family tree.  
Middle: Baby Zarathushtra born laughing.  
Below: Noshirwan-i-Adil with the old cow.



Dinyar Patel is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Harvard University, where he is working on a dissertation on Dadabhai Naoroji. He is currently based in Delhi a Fulbright scholarship where he is conducting dissertation research at the National Archives of India.



# Happily Equal After

Our scriptures hold women and men as equal, but do we practice what we preach? We are quick to boast that Parsi girls were the first to be educated along with boys, or that the *navjote* ceremony for boys and girls is the same, but do our actions hold up to more than just self-congratulation?

One way to prove the legitimacy of a stated belief is to examine rituals and customs. Rituals give us a sense of belonging to a group with whom we share proximity, culture, language, history. They affirm our place in society, but they can also reinforce and perpetuate potentially oppressive messages, not only about gender, but class, race, sexual orientation as well. The scope of this article only allows a quick look through gendered lens at Parsi wedding traditions because, as a vital part of our lives, they inherently demonstrate our values and beliefs. One of the obvious instances of equality of sexes related to our wedding traditions, and one that Parsis are proud of, is that we do not demand dowries. Another is that the cost of the wedding party is usually shared equitably by the bride's and groom's families (or the couple themselves) rather than the bride's family shouldering the major cost as is common in Western and Indo-Pak traditions.

*by farishta murzban dinshaw*

However, if we dig a little deeper into the patterns of behaviour, values, and power dynamics in Parsi wedding rituals what will we find? Will they live up to Zarathushtra's ideals or will centuries of patriarchy, which creates hierarchy of male privilege and power over women, show its mark? Some people may believe that weddings are about tradition and family, and not about making a political statement, so it is best to just enjoy the occasion and let sexism be addressed at another time. My point of view is that it is important to examine the subtle messages about our values and beliefs contained in all our rituals so that we can make informed decisions about whether to continue these rituals as they are or change them. Wedding rituals and traditions have changed over time and through migration within the Parsi community. Arranged marriages are no longer the norm, nor are child marriages. Western traditions such as bridal showers, bachelor/bachelorette parties, cake and wine, the couple's first

dance are now a common part of the modern Parsi wedding in the West as well as the "mother countries" India and Pakistan. So changes can be adopted if there is a will to change outdated, oppressive traditions.

## COMMON ISSUES

Parsi weddings share some patriarchal symbolism with Judeo-Christian and other cultural weddings customs.

### *The Proposal*

Let's start at the very beginning as there wouldn't be a wedding without a proposal. A proposal requires a man to ask the woman to marry him (bended knee is optional). This exchange illustrates that men are initiators of the exchange, and control when the relationship is taken to the next level. Even after women's liberation, few women will risk being considered aggressive, or worse desperate, to take the step of proposing to a man, even though they may have been

dating for a long time and are an established couple.

### **The Bride Price**

The engagement ring marks the woman as taken. It is a prettier version of the “paid for and off the market” bride price. The Parsi rupiya pehnavna is a less tactful show of this idea as is the exchange of coins at the adravanu (engagement) ceremony. Interestingly, although the tradition of the bride price is no longer practiced, it still exists in the Parsi wedding ritual when the officiating priest first asks the groom’s representative if he agrees “... in accordance with the rites and rules of the Mazdayasnians, promising to pay her [the bride] 2,000 dirhams of pure white silver and two dinars of real gold of Nishapore coinage?”, and then asks the bride’s witness whether he will accept the gift on her behalf. It is only after both representatives have answered in the affirmative that the priest seeks the consent of the bridal couple. This exchange is blatantly oppressive to women.

### **Giving Away the Bride**

This wedding ritual of the father walking the bride down the aisle to “give her away” dates back to the time when daughters were considered property and were given away (though, a more accurate term would have been sold) to the most valuable bidder and became his property from then onwards. Although the ritual is rooted in inequality, in recent times it has taken on sentimental connotations which brides may not wish to give up. However, it can be easily adapted to current mores – brides and grooms could be escorted down the aisle by both their parents as a

testament to their supportive and “giving” roles in their children’s lives.

On 29 April 2011, one of the most watched weddings in history missed the opportunity to buck tradition. Mary Hunt, feminist theologian, wrote: “First, while much was made of the fact that Kate would not vow to “obey” William, she was still escorted by her father (the mother looked on), “given” in marriage to her husband by her father via the priest. The father literally handed (by the hand) her over to the priest who then handed (gave her hand) her to her husband. After decades of feminist theology this is as far as we are? I thought Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was a theologian first. Surely he knows something about how offensive it is to think of any woman being “given” to any man or vice versa. That they embrace one another mutually in a covenant makes more sacramental and social sense even if one is royalty and the other not.” (Hunt, 2011)

### **Name Change**

I confess that as a teenager I was one of those girls who practiced writing their future married name, which inevitably corresponded to the surname of the crush du jour.

Across the globe, women give up their maiden names and take their husbands’ surname upon marriage because it is expected in our society. The term originally used by Parsis for the engagement, *nam padvun*, was derived from the Persian term *namzad kardan*, which means “to be spoken for” as traditionally after the betrothal, the bride adopted the name of the groom. Till the time she becomes affianced a woman was considered *na-kardeh-nam* meaning “unnamed”. In subsequent religious ceremonies, the the bride-to-be’s name is connected with her fiancé’s name. In essence, a woman had no identity, was as good as invisible, before she got married. This is at odds with older Sasanian Iranian tradition in which women kept their own names even after marriage or took on hyphenated names.

Some people might say, “What’s the big deal about taking on a husband’s name? And it’s better for the children’s sake not to



Father walks the bride down the aisle

have all this confusion.” Your name is a powerful source of your identity, your history, your reputation. For women to have to give it up as a matter of expectation is “the abandonment of their identity into the identity of another.”<sup>1</sup> And, if it really isn’t such a big deal, men could just as easily volunteer to change their names for the sake of future offspring.

## PARSI EXTRAS

Many of the more skewed traditions in Parsi wedding customs were adopted from their Hindu neighbours. Unfortunately, they have been entrenched into the ceremonies so firmly, their origins are forgotten and we continue to perpetuate them as “ours”.

### ***The Tilli (vermillion mark on the forehead)***

Jamshedji Jivanji Modi (1921) explained the significance of the *tilli* on the foreheads of the bride and groom: “The long vertical mark symbolized a ray of the sun, who is the fructifying agent in nature. The mark on the forehead of the bride is round, and it symbolizes the moon, which shines by the absorbed rays of the sun, and which therefore is represented as a conceiving agent. Man is in relation to woman, what the sun is in relation to the moon” (Footnote 6). Parsi brides should advocate for long vertical marks too as women are equally radiant in their own right and do not need to bask in reflected glory.

### ***Var-behendoo (“hand dipping”)***

Parsis do not accept dowries anymore, but at one time it was the norm. The *var-behendoo* ceremony is a throwback to the time. A young woman from the bride’s family offered the groom a metal pot filled with water as a symbolic representation of the dowry of furniture, linen, and kitchenware that had already been carted off to his house. As a gesture of acceptance, the groom dropped some silver coins into the pot that the young woman may keep for herself as a gift. The whole ritual reeks of unequal power dynamics

with the bride’s family taking on the subservient role of waiting for the acceptance of the dowry before proceeding with the legalities. Even the giving of the token coins is a gesture of “benevolent” power. It is reasonable to assume that there must have been some instances of the groom’s family holding the bride’s family hostage at this stage by demanding more in the dowry considering that such occurrences happened in non-Parsi families in villages. Although, in today’s tradition, the incidental “hand dipping” is the focal point of the ritual one shouldn’t forget that the origins are oppressive.

### ***The Washing of the Groom’s Feet***

Hindu weddings throughout the country, including Gujrati, Sindhi and Telegu

weddings, have ritual in which someone from the bride’s family, in some cases a young unmarried woman, in others a family elder,

washes the feet of the groom. In the Telegu custom, the bride’s father washes the feet of the groom to signify that he hands over the responsibilities of his daughter to him. The Gujratis call the ceremony

*madhuparka* because the groom is also offered milk and honey. The Parsi version is now merely symbolic as once the grooms started wearing English-fashioned shoes, it became inconvenient to

remove them for the washing, so the ritual evolved to simply sprinkling water on the shoes. We have assimilated this paternalistic ritual, symbolizing the gratitude of the bride’s family to the groom for taking over the responsibility of looking after the bride without realizing that it demeans women’s self-sufficiency and independence.



Male & female tilli



“Feet washing”



“hand dipping”

### ***The Witnesses***

In the olden days, when literacy was not common, the brides’ and groom’s fathers stood behind the bridal



Two male witnesses

couple to agree upon the bride price in front of the assembled crowd. Witnessed by a large crowd, the contract became binding and the families could not renege after the wedding. As mentioned, the bride price is no longer negotiated, but the tradition carries on as part of the ceremony. Nowadays, it is not necessarily the fathers who represent the couple, but two

married men usually close relatives, who take on the role of witnesses to the union as required by modern law. Although the essential role of the two relatives has changed, the sex and marital status remains the same. Witnesses in modern Western weddings can be men or women, their marital status irrelevant. It is time Parsis caught up with this practice.

### **Ashirwad (blessing)**

The *Ashirwad* portion of the wedding ceremony comprises a later Pazend version and an older Avestan version. The senior priest recites in Pazend the following words of benediction:

*May the Creator, the Omniscient Lord, grant you a progeny of sons and grandsons, plenty of means of provision, heart-ravishing friendship, bodily strength, long life, and an existence of 150 years.*

Parsi brides should campaign to have the gender of the progeny deleted from the blessing. This sentiment of sons being more valuable than daughters is outdated and should not be part of such an important ceremony. Compare this version which is obvious discriminatory to the Avestan benediction that Zarathushtra recited, ostensibly at his own daughter's wedding.

*Yasna 53.5: I say (these) words to you, marrying brides and bridegrooms! Impress then upon your mind: May you two enjoy the life of good mind by following the laws of religion. **Let each one of you clothe the other with***

*righteousness [author emphasis]. Then assuredly there will be a happy life for you."*

*Yasna 54.1 (Airyama Ishyo): May the much desired and lasting friendship come, in the pursuit of this noble purpose of the Good Mind, to the support of the men and women of Zarathushtra whose Inner Selves seek to earn this precious reward. I will pray to Asha for the bestowing of this righteous blessing, you so desire, which Ahura Mazda has intended.*

Gender equality is about appreciating women and men equally, celebrating their similarities and their differences without assigning value to one over the other. The foundation of happy, healthy families and communities is equal, respectful relationships between men and women. Or as Zarathushtra believed, marriages based on lasting friendship. Shouldn't our wedding rituals reflect this as well? ■■■

Note:

<sup>1</sup> From The Lucy Stone League website (<http://www.lucystoneleague.org>), named after a leading figure in the women's rights movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. "This tradition of name-abandonment by women is so much a part of US culture that few recognize it for what it is: a powerful instance of sex discrimination which has a major effect on women."

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Farishta Dinshaw has teaching in her genes. Currently she works as a Community Development Worker, Family Violence Initiative, supporting 11 ethno-cultural agencies in Toronto to raise awareness about violence against women, children & elders. She has presented papers on various topics relevant to the Zoroastrian religion and community at three international congresses. Farishta is also the author of the insightful story of a fictional boy befriended by Zarathushtra called "Discovering Ashavan".

## Talent is a gift

I am a Commerce graduate from Bombay University but have always had a passion for arts and crafts. Colours fascinate me and have fun experimenting with new ideas. My works are one-of-a-kind; the stroke of the brush is always different so no two pieces painted are the same.

A couple of years ago my teenage daughter Arnaz liked a design on the internet and wanted to have it on her T-shirt. While she was at school I just bought three fabric paints, orange, white and green and painted the Indian tri-coloured patriotic thumb design for her with the caption below, "Don't Ask Me Who I Am." She was thrilled and her joy was the best reward I received for my work. This was followed by another painted T-shirt I did for my son Shayan and later other family members too. My work even went to my brother Urmez and his family based at USA. Slowly and steadily this hobby turned into a passionate profession and the colours of "VIBGYOR CREATIONS" were created. Though I have never attended any art courses, inspiration came. I have inherited these artistic talents from grand-parents and my parents Dr & Mrs Kersi Hozdar.

*by hoofrisha bisney*

Orders started coming in from friends, their friends and soon the word spread like fire. Even fashion designers started approaching me to get designs painted on their garments. My main aim was to see the satisfaction on my customers' faces, as they started getting exactly what they needed. Many animated character T-shirts are not available in India, so when the kids got their favourite hero on their T-shirt their faces just brightened! Most of my T-shirts are customized as per the individual requirements and are thus highly appreciated.

The cost of painting on a T-shirt all depends on the time involved in that particular design. I use only good quality T-shirts so that they hold the paints well and have durability. The T-shirts are painted with high quality fabric paints and are washable at home. They do not require to be dry-cleaned.

Along with painting on T-shirts, I experimented by paintings on jute bags. I first painted one for myself to check out if jute could hold the paints. That bag was appreciated by many, so I pursued painting various designs on an assortment of jute

products. These include ladies handbags, clutch purses, large shopping bags, backpacks, lunch bags, water bottle covers, mobile pouches, file/folders, table mat sets with matching coasters, serving trays and a lot more. Jute often called "the golden fiber", is an agro based natural fiber having strength, durability, and is biodegradable. Bags made from jute fabrics have the advantage of good looks, strength and reusability. The current consciousness of environmentalism is causing an increased demand for natural jute bags as more people realize the eco advantages of these fibers. Bags in all colours are available to compliment personal outfits and the rates are very reasonable starting with rupees forty.

### Painting with coffee

I came to learn about painting with coffee powder from an art teacher at a workshop conducted by the fabric paint manufacturing company. I initially just did one painting at her workshop. Everyone was fascinated with this new form of art, so began painting new designs without using any paints. I just paint on the canvas board with a mixture of coffee powder, some water and special glue.



Coffee is an interesting medium to create art. On questioning people who view the work, they are amazed that the artwork is painted entirely with pure coffee. Painting in coffee is a refreshing break from works in oils, watercolours and other mediums. It is a successful experiment using coffee to obtain the old-look effect in painting, ending up smelling great! The coffee-on-canvas resembles antique sepia and gives a unique effect which no other medium offers. Coffee paintings are charming, warm, aromatic and revolutionary, producing an everlasting shine! An art with aroma!



*Hoofrisha Jehangir Bisney, is from Mumbai. Settled in Secunderabad, India with her husband and two kids Arnaz and Shayan, she specializes in making customized hand-painted T-shirts, painting on eco-friendly jute bags and unusual paintings with coffee powder. She may be contacted on +91-98493-38101 or 4bisneys@gmail.com*

Last October I organized an Art & Crafts' Mela at The Parsi Dharamsala, Secunderabad, bringing together 15 artisans like me working from home, who did not have many customers. They were able to display their talents in their respective fields of art and crafts and ultimately went home satisfied. My main intention was to give an opportunity to these specialists as well as amateur craftsmen and artists to display their talents and provide a market for their products, thereby promoting awareness. The response was very good and all stallholders were satisfied gaining new clients.

As I comfortably work from home, I paint as and when there is free time, which enables me to look after the family, home and work at my art. I have no wish to appoint any other artist to help me, as it may affect the quality of my creations. "Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution." I prefer to paint everything on my own giving the customer and myself maximum satisfaction. Orders are taken as per my abilities and try to finish the assignment before the due date.

Once a week I teach at school on an honorary basis. The junior students are taught calligraphy, which is the art of decorative handwriting, and senior students are taught coffee painting. Teaching kids is also my passion and I do not charge to teach. Part of my earnings, I donate for the use of needy and poor patients.

I make useful articles from unwanted products by converting plastic powder boxes or shampoo bottles into stationery holders painting on them which ultimately look new. Decorative envelopes for gifting and 'pehrarnis' is part of the selection available.

My husband Jehangir has always been my backbone, guiding me silently with the advertising and marketing of my creations, with my two children sharing their ideas for creating new art.

Advice to those born with natural talents – pursue with what you have been gifted. Make use of your inner strengths and develop your work with passion. If you work with interest, the results will surely be successful. Aim should not be to make money or to seek fame; with effort success will come. Ultimately, always be thankful to God at the beginning and end of each day for having blessed you. Prayer is not for asking; it is to THANK what has been given to us. "Working towards success will make you a master, but working towards satisfaction makes you a legend."



Painted with coffee only

## Teenaz Javat

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Teenaz Javat is an award-winning journalist whose work with CBC Radio has shone a light on the pressing issues facing the diverse communities in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. Her research and leadership has garnered recognition from news organizations and community groups, both nationally and locally. Her stories have appeared in many print and online publications in Canada, India and Pakistan. [including Hamazor].

As a senior writer for CBC, Teenaz contributes in-depth online features; researches story ideas for local television *News at Six* broadcasts, produces headline news for the CBC News Network and is a producer and researcher for CBC Radio's *Metro Morning* show in Toronto.

Teenaz was the lead researcher and producer of the show's 2010 Townhall feature *Turning Point* which discussed several high profile domestic murders of South Asian women as well as other South Asian community issues. The programme won the national and regional 2011 Adrienne Clarkson Awards for Diversity from the Radio Television News Directors Association of Canada.

As prestigious as the award is, the Townhall did something more important for the community by bringing more awareness to a situation that was affecting a large segment of the GTA population. In early 2011 that discussion turned into government action when delegates from four GTA Police forces assembled for a conference at Queen's Park on violence in the South Asian community and Teenaz again played an integral role as the emcee.

"I was really happy that something I did on radio has made such a big

impact on the community," says Teenaz.

"Violence in South Asian families wasn't on the news. She made it a subject that people wanted to hear about and brought it to the forefront," adds Joyce Wayne, Coordinator of the CJITW programme during Teenaz's tenure.

Joyce had enough confidence in Teenaz's abilities to hire her as a part-time faculty shortly after graduation. Teenaz welcomes the opportunity to pass along her years of experience to up-and-coming journalists.

"I think it strikes a chord that I'm giving back and more," says Teenaz, who has also received recognition for her contributions in the form of two awards from the Ontario government in 2007. As well, she was featured in an exhibit celebrating the GTA's 1,000 creative women at the 2008 Luminato Festival.

Teenaz came to Canada from Karachi in 1997 with several years of experience



as a professional journalist but with a young daughter at home she was not ready to make the career transition right away. When she discovered a programme that was designed for foreign trained professionals, her career took off.

"I don't think I would have achieved even half as much as I have without Sheridan," says Teenaz, who also holds a Master of Economics and received the President's medal upon her Sheridan graduation.

In an industry where the strength of your contacts is of paramount importance, developing a network was a key task. For Teenaz, that started the very first day she stepped onto campus as she actively sought meaningful connections with both professors and peers.

"I found a rich network of people at Sheridan which is so fantastic – you're only as strong as your network as a journalist."



## *Can one call it a car?*



Ratan Tata unveiled the Rs 22-crore [Rs220,000,000] Nano - a one-off showpiece version that sees 'the People's Car' encased in 80 kg of 22 carat gold, 15 kg of silver and 10,000 semi-precious and precious stones, including rubies and pearls!

The one-off version will tour Tata-owned Goldplus jewellery stores across India and is said to celebrate 5000 glorious years of jewellery making in India. The Goldplus Nano Car is billed as the world's first ever gold jewellery car.

**AND**

a customised number plate, obviously of a Parsi!



[A literal translation would be - Your Father]

## Zoroastrians of Oman Take Pride

*Institution of Shri Dadabhai Naoroji Prize & Dr (Mrs) Cashmera P Bhaya Gold Medal at Sardar Patel University of Gujarat, India.*

Sardar Patel University is a leading and progressive university of India, which is named after Shri Vallabhai Patel, popularly known as Sardar Patel. He was one of the great freedom fighters of India, who played a Herculean role in unifying India as a nation, by integrating more than 500 feudal states into Indian Union, peacefully and in a record time, immediately after its independence. During its Golden Jubilee celebrations Sardar Patel University set up the Golden Jubilee Fund and decided to promote various schemes to encourage its students and teachers to improve their academic performance by rewarding them for the pursuit of excellence.

In this connection, Dr Cashmera Bhaya (nee Bharucha), a resident of Oman, and who was a teacher of medical Sociology at the College of Medicine, Sultan Qaboos University of Oman, decided with the support of her family and friends to sponsor two schemes at Sardar Patel University to encourage its postgraduate teachers and students to perform better by rewarding the meritorious among them with handsome prizes.

One of the schemes instituted from the donations collected through her efforts is a Shri Dadabhai Naoroji Prize, a cash prize of Rs8,000/-, which is awarded annually to any Social Science teacher of Sardar Patel University for publishing research papers of high quality in reputed Indian and/or foreign academic journals in the field of Social Sciences.

Dadabhai Naoroji was one of the greatest leading spirits of India who laid the foundation of the freedom movement of modern India in the 19th century. He was an eminent scholar of economics and had a rare distinction of being the first Asian to be elected in the British parliament, where he tirelessly fought the cause of Indian independence. In his memory many members of the Zoroastrian community of Oman, UAE, New Zealand, US and India, as also many other non-Zoroastrian admirers of this great son of modern India have donated huge sums towards Sardar Patel University Golden Jubilee Fund to institute this prize, **the first of its kind in any Indian University**. The historic MoU for instituting the prize was signed between the University and Cashmera.

Secondly, from Cashmera's personal donations, the University decided to institute the Dr (Mrs) Cashmera P Bhaya Gold Medal which is awarded every year to an MA student of Sociology of Sardar Patel University, obtaining highest aggregate marks in MA Part I and II annual examinations. It is noteworthy that Cashmera herself is a Sociologist, being a recipient of the National Merit Scholarship by the Government of India and gold medal by the Baroda Parsee Panchayat for securing first rank at the MA examination of M S University of Baroda. Incidentally, Cashmera Bhaya has also been instrumental for the institution of Professor I P Desai Scholarship in Sociology at the under graduate level in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda where she spent 10 years as a student and teacher of Sociology.

The Dadabhai Naoroji Prize and the Cashmera P Bhaya Gold Medal are awarded to the winners by Sardar Patel University at its annual convocation each year, and I P Desai Scholarship in Sociology is awarded yearly by the M S University of Baroda, Vadodara, to a meritorious undergraduate student of Sociology.

Readers may recall that under the auspices of the World Zoroastrian Organisation, the Bombay Parsee Panchayat and the Surat Parsee Panchayat, Cashmera had offered her services as the Honorary Director of the "Socio-Economic Survey of Rural South Gujarat Parsees" and presented the Bhaya Report way back in 1988 on the basis of which the WZO has taken up to date, the stupendous challenge of ameliorating the condition of the needy Parsis in the villages of South Gujarat. Presently, Cashmera is based in Muscat, Oman with her family and she continues to contribute for the welfare of the community and takes an active part in the local socio-cultural activities and charity drives.



## “River of Smoke”

**I**n September 1838, shortly before the start of the Opium Wars, a fierce storm blows up on the Indian Ocean. Caught in the storm are the *Ibis*, a ship carrying a cargo of convicts from Calcutta to Mauritius, the *Anahita*, an opium carrier out of India, and the *Redruth*, on a horticultural expedition out of Cornwall. *River of Smoke* follows the lives and fates of the storm-tossed passengers of these three ships as they end up in the ports of China. Among them is Bahram Modi, the impoverished son-in-law of a wealthy Parsi family. Desperate to make a name for himself and earn the admiration of his snobbish in-laws, he has risen from obscurity to become one of the wealthiest opium merchants in China, a Tai-Pan.

review by zehra bharucha

The *Anahita* is carrying opium worth forty tonnes of silver – a priceless cargo. With part of his cargo destroyed, the storm has resulted in a significant loss of revenue. In addition to this, Bahram is tormented by thoughts of his dead Chinese mistress Chi-mei who has been killed in his absence and his estranged and unacknowledged son Ah Fatt, or Freddy. Desperate to recoup the losses that he has suffered during the storm, Bahram finds himself and his fellow merchants in direct confrontation with the Chinese government as the powerful English and European merchants manipulate and network in a never ending cycle of intrigue and double-dealing to claim the richest of all prizes – the almost staggering wealth that was the reward of nineteenth-century opium merchants. Bahram, as the doyen of the ‘Achha Hong’ – the Indian merchants, so called because of their use of the word ‘Achha’- is an important and well-respected figure and one of the richest. Feted by the Canton Chamber of Commerce, on intimate terms with the Chinese mandarins and an important ally of the British, he finds himself torn between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman – between the doctrine of Free Trade and the knowledge that the opium he sells is responsible for untold misery. Determined to sell one last, gigantic consignment, he

embarks on a series of actions which could have devastating consequences for himself and his business.

Other characters caught in the storm are the orphan Paulette, the Bengali Raja Neel and the Cornish horticulturist Penrose Fitcher determined to harvest the biggest treasure of China hiding in plain sight - plants that heal. Of particular interest to Fitcher and Paulette is the story of the English explorer who painted a rare golden camellia without revealing its location. Their quest to find this rare flower forms yet another thread of this story. Paulette enlists the help of her childhood friend the artist Robin Chinnery, whose adventures as he lives and works in Canton make for fascinating reading. It is Robin’s letters to Paulette that provide the comic relief of the novel as he seems to channel Jane Austen in a particularly Oriental setting. This contrasts with the pidgin English of the Chinese and the traders and the Hindi and Gujarati that pepper the language of the others.

Ghosh expertly draws out these parallel stories as this motley cast of characters gradually converge in Fanqui-Town or the Foreign Enclave of Canton. There, in spite of the efforts of the Chinese Emperor to

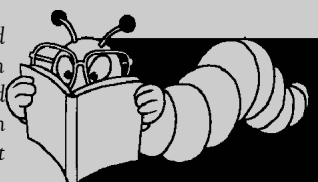
stop them, ships from all over the world exchange their cargoes of opium for the riches of China. As the import of opium into China was illegal, the English East India Company was reluctant to get involved in it directly, instead encouraging Indian and European merchants to engage in the trade and part with the proceeds of their sales to its representatives in Canton.

Blending fact and fiction, using real historical characters and richly drawn fictional ones, Ghosh creates an atmospheric and spell binding novel that may be historical, but has a powerful contemporary resonance.

The blind quest for money, the primacy and all-pervasiveness of the drug trade, the concealment of greed and avarice behind the rhetoric of freedom, the hypocrisy of those engaged in the opium trade justifying their business by insisting that the millions of Chinese opium addicts had a 'choice': in *River of Smoke* themes that are still as familiar in the twenty-first century as they were in the nineteenth meet in a powerful saga that transports the reader, as if in an opium dream, to the richness and opulence of the Orient. An adventure, a tender love story and a quest for acceptance, the book's scope and breadth of vision ensure its reputation as one of the classics of twenty-first century literature. Readers will find the language enchanting, the descriptions of the food and costumes historically accurate and the descriptions of life in Fanqui-Town utterly compelling. The novel is a remarkable feat of research, bringing alive the hybrid customs of food and dress and the competing philosophies of the period, along with a fascinating insight into the spread of English and its local variants, which was one of the many by-products of the Opium Age. The novel can be read as a stand-alone one; however those who first read *Sea of Poppies*, the first in the trilogy (Man Booker Prize nominee in 2008) will find it easier to grasp the various characters and the way they are all connected to each other. The third novel in the trilogy is expected in 2013 and is already eagerly anticipated. Readers will find these novels utterly compelling and a welcome addition to contemporary literature by a writer of formidable learning and great intellect. A fascinating read and highly recommended.



Originally from Karachi, Zehra Bharucha has lived and worked in Sydney, Australia for the last 11 years. When not at work, she can usually be found with her nose buried in a book. When she stops reading, she heads for the kitchen where she is famous for turning out exotic foods to the great delight of family and friends.



**River of Smoke - Amitav Ghosh**  
2011,  
John Murray  
(Publishers) UK,  
Hardcover 522pp,  
R.R.P. £20

## And some humour ...

Bawaji at his best

A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Parsi were in a discussion during an Antique Collectors dinner.

Christian: "I have inherited a large fortune. I want to buy 10 of the worlds rarest old pens!"

Hindu: "Pens? I am wealthier. I will buy the best 20 antique watches in the world!"

Muslim: "That's nothing - I am a rich prince. I intend to purchase the best 50 Vintage Cars!"

They then all wait for the Parsi to speak ... . He stirs his coffee, places the spoon neatly on the table, takes a sip of his coffee, looks at them and softly says: "I'm not selling!"

## Wake up call to save Dadabhai Naoroji's home

Dinyar Patel, a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Harvard University, where he is working on a dissertation on Dadabhai Naoroji, sent out an email to some of us on 13th October. This is what he writes:

*"Is this how we remember one of the greatest Zoroastrians of recent times, by letting his ancestral house fall into ruins and then be sold off to a builder?"*

<http://videos.sify.com/DadaBhai-Naorojis-House-SIFY-watch-jeivLTageac.html>

*Note that this video is a few years old, and that it is incorrectly referred to as Naoroji's birthplace (he was born in Bombay in what is now Bhendi Bazaar). There were rumours one-and-a-half years ago that the house had been bought by a Navsari Parsi in order to preserve it, but this does not seem to be the case and I have never been able to receive verification. If anyone in Navsari does have news to report on this, please let me know.*

*I saw this house two years ago and it was in a deplorable state.*

*Naoroji's last home, "The Sands" in Versova's Saat Bangla, was knocked down 25 years ago to make way for a garish apartment building. In any other country, buildings like these, of great historical importance, would be preserved, especially by the community to which Naoroji also rendered great service."*

As Dinshaw Tamboly visits Navsari often to oversee the work carried out by WZO Trust Funds, the quickest way was to send him an email for verification. Promptly came the reply:

*"The property has not been purchased by a builder but by Dara Deboo of Navsari and others who have formed a trust for the purpose of restoring the property. I have had a telephonic conversation with Dara and am informed he has entrusted the project of restoration to heritage architect Jamshed Bhiwandiwalla and will involve Dr Homi Dhallia and others after the same has been restored to its original position."*

It seems, all is in order for preserving Naoroji's ancestral home. - Toxy Cowasjee



Photographs from Dinyar Patel, taken in 2009. Dinshaw Tamboly sent fresh ones taken on 14th October 2011 which are identical, leading one to believe restoration has not commenced.

# 150 years ago in UK ...

**Seth Muncherji Hormusji Cama's letter** to establish an Anjuman, dated 15th August 1861 written by hand in Gujarati, is the oldest document in the archives of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe.



Seth Muncherji Hormusji Cama

To the Zoroastrians of England

Sirs,

Our people go abroad to several countries for business. When there, each person could give according to his means for religious and charitable purposes. This would enable them not only to perform good deeds but also to live in harmony with one another in good and bad times. Currently by the grace of God, we are about 50 including students who come here for higher studies and our number is likely to increase year by year. For this reason, it is essential to consider this matter urgently.

If this idea appeals to you, we can arrange to meet at some place, listen to one another's views and reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Signed: Muncherji Hormusji Cama

This letter was hand delivered to Dr Dadabhai Naoroji whose reply is dated 17<sup>th</sup> August:

*"The proposal as contained in Mr Muncherji's letter is very good. If others are agreeable, we can meet at a place and discuss the matter further."*

Signed: Dadabhai Naoroji

which was then hand delivered to various other Zoroastrians residing in Britain and 11 more signatures were added to the handwritten letter in Gujarati. Following this letter, an initial meeting was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1861 not far from Paddington Railway Station at 24 Devonshire Terrace, London W2 3DP.

[courtesy Malcolm Deboo, President ZTFE]

## 150 years later ZTFE celebrates with style ...



## 150 years as a Community in the UK - The ZTFE celebrates!

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1861, 15 Parsi men met in London to establish charitable funds for the welfare of their co-religionists in Europe. This, their second meeting, was instigated by Seth Muncherji Hormusji Cama. He had suggested that the small community of 50 or so Zoroastrians in the UK should contribute funds, 'each according to his means', for religious charitable purposes, education, religious scholarship, welfare, burial, and for assistance in emergencies. He set out his vision in a letter dated 18 August 1861, addressed to 'Zoroastrians of England': the funds would enable them 'not only to perform good deeds but also to live in harmony with one another and be with one another in good times and bad.'

by soonu engineer

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2011 nearly 400 Zoroastrian men and women gathered, at the Zoroastrian Centre in London, to celebrate the fulfilment of this vision. Over the past 150 years, Zoroastrians in the UK have come together, under the auspices of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE), 'in good times and bad', to participate in religious ceremonies, cultural and social events, children's fun clubs, religious education courses, seminars and symposiums and international congresses.

The celebrations began, in the Zartoshty Brothers Hall, with the lighting of the *atash* in the silver *afarganyoo*, and the recitation of the *Afringan-e Dahman* by six mobeds. During this sacred invocation of blessings for the people and for the ruler of the land, the Chief Guest, HRH Prince Philip, sat amongst the congregation, his head respectfully covered with a black, velvet *vatko*. He continued to wear it, when invited on to the stage, after the thanksgiving ceremony.

The hall was filled with Irani and Parsi Zarthushtis. The guests included the Mayor of Harrow Council, other local politicians, and representatives of



Nearly 400 Zoroastrians celebrating 150 years



The six mobed sahibs

different faiths and of Inter Faith organisations. Various Zoroastrian associations of India and North America had sent representatives; and the Editor of the 199 year old, *Jam-e-Jamshed*, was also amongst us.

Malcolm Deboo, the current and 26<sup>th</sup> President of ZTFE, gave the welcome address. He praised the foresight of those pioneering Zarthushtis in laying the foundations of the Association in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the beneficence of the Zartoshty Brothers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was recorded later, in the three hour ceremony). The presence of the Monarch's consort was duly appreciated. Malcolm went on to speak of the freedom of worship enjoyed by all faiths in the UK and the restriction of this freedom 'in the land that gave birth to our Prophet, Zarathushtra.'

Next, there were Power Point presentations of the history and activities of the association, its development from humble beginnings to its current installation in the stylish art-deco premises of the Zoroastrian Centre in Harrow; its illustrious founders; the three Parsi Members of Parliament, 1892 and 1929; a wonderful photograph of a grand Nowroz banquet in 1904, graced by a dapper Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; the public service given by more recent past Presidents and members; the munificence of the charitable Zartoshty brothers in endowing not only the ZTFE premises but a Chair of Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS; and, finally, mention of our one and only member of the House of Lords and ... of Freddie Mercury, the late Faridun Balsara (who was definitely not encouraged by the association, in his heyday).

Lord Karan Bilimoria rose to eulogise the Prince - and the Parsis. We seem to be good at just about everything, he said. There is 'no such thing as a Bad Parsi', he assured us. According to one Narayana Murthy, we have 'big brains



Prince Philip being "tillied" with Malcolm Deboo smiling



Prince Philip assisting on putting the har (garland of flowers)

and big heart.' And there was more of that sort of self-praise we are so fond of! Karan redeemed himself by recounting an amusing anecdote: He was at a function where the demise of the vulture, due to the pesticide,

Diclofenac, was being discussed. Prince Philip came over to Karan and quipped, 'Nothing to do with Diclofenac – there are not enough Parsis to eat!'

In the presentations and speeches there was evident glee at the inroads made by Tata Group into British tea, steel and the car industry. (An elderly man near me growled his disapproval.) There was even a special place on the platform for a Director of the Group, who gave us mind-boggling statistics of the immense wealth of the company in the UK, which naturally raised our expectations that an announcement, of a grand charitable donation, was imminent. But none came! Some of us wondered what all this had to do with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ZTFE. It was in this context that Prince Phillip made the dry observation, 'It occurred to me that I arrived here in a Zoroastrian car'.

The Duke of Edinburgh was definitely the most entertaining speaker that day. He told us that he had received great hospitality from the folk at Jamshedpur where he used to land his plane, because 'if you go to a big airfield, no one pays any attention to you.' He noted with a smile that, 'we're all for religious freedom these days but it helps if it is peaceful as well.' This was received with good-natured laughter. Finally, he pointed out that everyone was going on about 150 years but '150 years is peanuts! You've had, what ... 3000? I hope you are still here in 2000 years time' - which is just what our grandmas would have said: '*hajar saal jivjo!*'

Prince Philip was presented with a shawl and other gifts from several quarters and he was asked to present awards to people who had given outstanding service to the association. This year the Prince has turned 90 and it was an inspired gesture to present three Parsis who also turned 90 in 2011: Nariman Contractor, Ervad Jal K Karkaria, and Dara E Marchant.



Prince Philip having the shawl draped on him



Prince Philip entering the Satayash Gah

Nariman reminded him that they had met six decades ago in India, where Nariman, as research chemist of the national Aaray Dairy, had offered him a glass of milk flavoured with saffron. The Prince said he remembered that.

*[Nariman is the husband of Ruby, who was chairman of WZO for five years - Ed.]*

The Prince later joined some young people for lunch. He visited the *Setayesh Gah* where the Atash was being tended by Ervad Rusi Bhedwar and children were reciting their *ashem vohus*. Before leaving, he inaugurated the 'Donors Gallery' and unveiled a plaque dedicated to major donors.

A final Guard-of-Honour was provided by members of the Inter Faith movement and some other notaries. Humorous to the last, Prince Philip stood stock still and stared quizzically at a young woman who had been introduced as the representative from the Office of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. Finally, she threw up her hands and said, 'What?' And the Prince rejoined, 'What! A woman?'



L to R: Malcolm Deboo, in the centre Prince Philip wearing his vatko, far right Lord Bilimoria and the six mobeds.



[L] Past President Rusi Dalal, Lord Bilimoria, Prince Philip, Malcolm Deboo President, far right Er Rusi Bhedwar.



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## *Statue of Zoroaster, New York*



Appellate Court Building, Zoroaster is on the corner. Photograph courtesy Nerina Rustomji.

Statue of Zoroaster by Edward C Potter (1857-1923) in New York

A life-size marble statue of Zoroaster by Edward C Potter (1857-1923) stands on the cornice of the New York Appellate Court Building in Madison Square Park representing Persian Law since 1950.

Author William Culiacan remarks that the “Laws of the Medes and Persians became a by-word of judicial incorruptibility and harshness, throughout the subject lands. Execution by crucifixion is a Persian invention. It was the Persians who gave the world legal principles enshrined in the law of evidence and procedure. Legal concepts like arbitration, release on bail, representation by a lawyer, power of attorney and execution of wills are of Persian origin, later picked up by the Greeks and Romans.”

In recognition of Zoroastrian contribution to the development of law, a statue of Zoroaster stands in the Court of the Appellate Division with other law givers like Moses, Manu, Charlemagne and Alfred the Great.

This is the west sculpture on the East 25<sup>th</sup> Street side of the building which was formerly occupied by the figure of Mohammed by Charles Albert Lopez. However, in the Muslim religion, it is not permissible to depict the human figure. In 1955, because of protest from the governments of Indonesia, Egypt and Pakistan and a formal request from the State Department, the sculpture was removed. All the others were moved over one position to the west.

[A.Faramarzi in the ZNA Digest of 8 September brought this statue to our attention, by sharing a photograph through the link - [http://www.fouman.com/history/img/New\\_York\\_Prophet\\_Zoroaster\\_Statue.jpg](http://www.fouman.com/history/img/New_York_Prophet_Zoroaster_Statue.jpg)]

Information shared by Aban Rustomji & Deenaz Coachbuilder, USA.

“The priest who is just, in  
harmony with truth, is the  
offspring from the best spirit ...  
he is allied with that  
(good) thinking...”

Yasna 33.6

*Insler translation*



The World Zoroastrian Organisation