

publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

# HAMAZOR

4  
issue 2012



BPP + Conservationists — Orthodox = Vanishing Vultures?



Gulbai Nusserwanji Mehta, Founder President of KZBM, p 45.

# Contents

04	The Chairman's Report
07	WZO Canadian Chapter
08	Influence of Zoroastrianism on Hinduism - keki bhote
10	Parsi Women's right to freely profess ... - shiraz patodia
13	"The Ring's the Thing" - farrokh vajifdar
17	XVIth N A Zarathushti Congress - report, behroze clubwalla
22	Vanished Vultures - mehli colah : homi khusrakhan : noshir dadrawalla : dastur khurshed dastoor
33	Corpse-bearers in Zoroastrian communities ... - anton zykov
38	Cyrus Mistry's "Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer" - review, anton zykov
41	Dhunjibhoy Bomanji Kalfati - rusi sorabji
45	Beyond the Mandate - sunnu golwalla
50	Educating the Heart - behroze taraporewalla
54	Sound & Light - freny manecksha
57	Ronnie Screwvala - niloufer mavalvala
59	SWADES Foundation - ronnie screwvala
61	A Summer in the day of Mary Poppins - philippa minoo vafadari
63	Celebrate, Remember, Fight back - rashna tata

## COVER

Graphic impression of an adult white-backed vulture.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

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

## WZO WEBSITE

[www.w-z-o.org](http://www.w-z-o.org)

In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

## Members of the Managing Committee



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

### London, England

**Mr Darayus S Motivala**  
**Chairman**

E-mail: chairman@w-z-o.org

**Ms Shahin Bekhhradnia**  
**President**

E-mail: president@w-z-o.org

**Mr Sammy**  
**Bhiwandiwalla**  
**Mr Shahpur Captain**  
**Hon Secretaries**

E-mail: secretary@w-z-o.org

**Mrs Monaz Dalal**  
**Membership Secretary**

E-mail:

membership@w-z-o.org

**Er Jehan Bagli**

President, Canadian Ch:  
Mississauga, Canada  
E-mail:

wzo\_canada@w-z-o.org

**Mr Dadi E Mistry**

New Delhi, India

E-mail:

dadi\_mistry@w-z-o.org

**Mrs Meher Amersey**

Mumbai, India

Email:

meher.amersey@w-z-o.org

**Mr Rustom Yeganegi**

Tehran, Iran

Email:

Rostam.yeganegi@w-z-o.org

**Mr Darius Mistry**

Auckland

New Zealand

E-mail: wzo\_nz@w-z-o.org

**Mrs Toxy Cowasjee**

Karachi, Pakistan

E-mail:

wzo\_pakistan@w-z-o.org

**Mr Russi Ghadiali**

Singapore

E-mail:

wzo\_singapore@w-z-o.org

**Dastur Kersey Antia**  
**Vice President**

Illinois, USA

E-mail:

vice\_president@w-z-o.org

**Mr Kayomarsh Mehta**

President, US Chapter

Illinois, USA

E-mail:

wzo\_usa@w-z-o.org

Note: WZO's committee is extensive, these are just a few of the names given for member's convenience

## Volume LXV - Issue 4 | 2012

### Printed by:

A A Graphics

1721/31 LAC No 2

Karachi 75420

Pakistan

### Funded by:

Happy Minwalla

Karachi, Pakistan

### Cover design by:

Tannaz Minwalla

Karachi, Pakistan

### Design & layout by:

Toxy Cowasjee

Karachi, Pakistan

## From the Editor

It appears the Parsis of Mumbai have the uncanny art of remaining in permanent conflict over some matter or the other, keeping those of us not residing in India on our toes. The present issue this season is the aviary.

Hamazor has obtained statements from two Institutions, both who are very involved in the project of vultures being reintroduced to the Mumbai dokhmas and one individual who was part of the establishment when the issue originally arose.

Of interest is a public statement received on 4th October 2012 from Dasturji Khurshed K Dastoor of Udvada giving his views on the aviary.

Whilst Dasturjis Jamasp Asa and Kotwal of Mumbai, Peshotan Mirza of Udvada and Cyrus Dastoor of Surat have welcomed the setting up of the aviary and called upon the BPP to expedite it, Dasturji Meherjirana of Navsari has expressed his dissent. It seems Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor has done considerable research on the present project and thereafter written his views for the community. It has also been made apparent in the Zoroastrian Indian press, that all the Trustees of the BPP are not in favour of the aviary.

Though it is not for me to give any comment on this subject, enough is being said regularly since June, one cannot fail to think. It is left to the readers of Hamazor in India, who are the ones very much involved, to voice their own concerns; but as an outsider and having nothing to gain one way or the other, my thoughts go to the obvious. Would it not be better to use these vast sums of money to improve the lives of the living – the elderly, indigent, needy individuals – rather than trying to revive a risk-laden custom that has proved impossible to maintain previously? It is understandable and laudable that conservationists will do their level best to safeguard all species of life including flora and fauna and we as Zarathushties believe in this concept, but to undertake the risk of eliminating our 'friendly' vultures once again to perpetuate a custom that has seen its day ... ?

I take this opportunity of thanking Happy Minwalla for sponsoring so very graciously Hamazor's four issues for 2012, without whose assistance there may well have been no publications. Grateful thanks are also acknowledged to the learned writers of our faith, the willing contributors on diverse subjects, all assisting to make Hamazor a readable publication. With this issue I complete ten years of being Editor and feel privileged to have come across a multitude of interesting individuals across the oceans. Thank you one and all for the support given so freely.

We as a community, rejoice and celebrate all occasions, so here's wishing us – happy Diwali, Eid, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year, celebrations that fall from now to end December. May 2013 shine for all!

*Ray Curajee*



## *The Chairman's Report presented at the AGM on 23 September 2012*



The World Zoroastrian Organisation



**P**ast Chairpersons Ruby Contractor, Shahpur Captain and Sammy Bhiwandiwalla, WZO members and my fellow committee members, I welcome you all to our 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM.

Wow! What a way to end the year with finally getting our new constitution accepted by the membership. We have spent several years in preparing this constitution and I would like to give my personal thanks to the managing committee members and in particular to our two past chairmen, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla and Shahpur Captain, our president, Shahin Bekhradnia and our treasurer, Dinyar Modi, for all their hard work in getting this constitution accepted.

This is the first major change to our membership criteria since 1993 when we welcomed non-Zoroastrian spouses to play an equal part in the organisation. Our purpose in proposing this constitution is to cater for all Zoroastrians and their families. There were other changes in the constitution primarily to bring WZO in line with the Companies Act 2006. For example, we can now, if we wish, take advantage of electronic communications when corresponding with our members. We can truly say that WZO now represents all Zoroastrians the world over and is an important conduit for bringing the community together globally. On behalf of the WZO managing committee, I thank you all for accepting the new constitution. It will now be sent to the UK Charities Commission for their acceptance.

We hope that you have had an opportunity to go through the 2011 Annual Report and Accounts by now. If you have not and would like a copy, please come and see any of the committee members today as we have some spares for you. As in the past, I offer my sincere thanks to Sammy

Bhiwandiwalla for preparing the report and to Dinyar Modi for preparing the accounts. So besides working on the constitution, what else have we been doing so far this year? We are very pleased to announce the formation of WZO Canada as a registered charitable organisation in that country. Our sincere thanks go to our committee member, Jehan Bagli, for his perseverance and dedication in forming this organisation. The initial Trustees for WZO Canada are Ervad Jehan Bagli (President), Sam Vesuna (Vice-President), Khushroo Mirza (Secretary) and Ervad Nozer Kotwal (Treasurer).

Since its inception, WZO has always supported Zoroastrians who face repression from whatever source, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity and cultural differences. Whilst this form of discrimination has been present in many places including India for many years, it has recently been headlined because of the High Court petitions filed by people like Goolrukh Gupta. For those of you who do not know, here is a Zoroastrian lady who is banned from entering her local Zoroastrian fire temple, on the grounds that she has married a non-Zoroastrian and deemed to have given up her Zoroastrian faith. We feel this is unjust and WZO is proud to lend her support in whatever way we can.

WZO continues to make new friends by actively participating at global Zoroastrian and interfaith events. Our representative in USA, Kersi Shroff, represented WZO at the Roundtable of Institutionalised Bodies Meeting, hosted by Fezana, just prior to their 25th AGM in New York at the end of July. Our Youth Co-ordinator, Monaz Dalal, represented WZO at the Youth Dialogue

and the European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN) annual summit held in Lillehammer, Norway. The World Congress of Faiths organised a special Service at the St Martin's in the Field church in London to encourage international friendship and goodwill at the Olympic Games where Vista Khosravi and I gave a Zoroastrian reading. Our President, Shahin Bekhradnia, spoke about Zoroastrianism at the meeting of the International Institute for Peace Studies, held in Scotland last weekend.

Every year, WZO organises several 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. The Summer BBQ is always an enjoyable day, thanks to our Social Secretary, Armaity Engineer and her daughter, Benafsha, who put their heart and soul into it to ensure its success. As ever, Rohinton Irani was at hand with his fundraising skills which helped to booster our funds. Our thanks are also offered to our President, Shahin Bekhradnia, for having provided an auction prize that raised a substantial sum of money.

Our past Chairman, Rumi Sethna with his wife, Hilda, organised their last Gala Dinner Dance in November last year after doing it for so 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. 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. Our Social Secretary, Armaity Engineer, and other committee members have now stepped in to organise this annual event from this year. We hope that more of our members will attend this very special event which is a great night out with fine wines, a delicious 4-course meal and fantastic line-up of entertainers and games.

Our Annual Seminar organised by our President, Shahin Bekhradnia, had three

very interesting speakers. Mr Farrokh Vajifdar spoke about the symbolism of the Fravahar. Dr Ilya Yakubovich debated whether the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians. Finally, Dr Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis discussed the Sasanian Empire, its coinage and religious iconography.

Charity giving continues to be the focus for WZO particularly so in India and Iran. We provide financial support to the WZO Trusts in India which are ably managed by Dinshaw & Bachi Tamboly. We support the Zoroastrians in Iran through the Pourchista Foundation and the Kerman Anjuman. Outside of India, we provide medical aid through the Noshirwan Cowasjee Medical Benevolent Fund and education loans through the WZO Education Funds.

Fund raising continues to be difficult during the current global economic crisis. In spite of this, we thank our members and friends, as well as charitable organisations such as the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation (ERSF) and the Firuz Madon Foundation for their generous contribution. Your support is extremely important to us for without it we would not be able to carry our charitable activities. 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* remains the foremost magazine of its type under the dedicated editorial management of Toxy Cowasjee. We know this is the case as, after each issue of *Hamazor*, Toxy is complimented on its content and production. This is particularly gratifying when it comes from another Zoroastrian publication. All the issues this year are sponsored by Happy Minwalla from Pakistan to whom we offer our sincere gratitude. We currently have sponsorship for the first two issues of 2013 and we urge you to get together with your family and friends and consider sponsoring one issue or at least making a contribution

## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

towards it. Your sponsorship will be recognised in that issue, if you so wish. The current cost of printing and postage for each issue around the world is approximately £3,000 (US \$5,000).

Our membership continues to increase with more new members becoming Life members and a number of our Ordinary members upgrading their membership to Life. This is partly due to the confidence that WZO enjoys in the community. Another significant factor in this increase is due to the hard work and dedication of our Membership Secretary, Khurshid Kapadia, who has decided to step down from the committee. She wishes to enjoy her retirement with her husband, Behram, and devote more time to her lovely grandchildren. Khurshid has been one of the best Membership Secretary we have had and WZO is losing a great asset. Khurshid, I am sure you will guide the next Membership Secretary into her new role and pass on your vast knowledge and experience. Thank you, Khurshid, for all your hard work and dedication.

At every AGM, we say 'goodbye' to some members of the managing committee members who wish to step down and 'hello' to those who have expressed their desire to stand. In addition to Khurshid Kapadia, Framroze Joshi and Sohrab Felfeli are stepping down and we offer our sincere thanks to them for their valuable contribution to the success of the WZO over a number of years and I know that they will all continue to remain loyal friends. In their place and with your agreement, we would like to elect Sam Vesuna from Canada to the managing committee. You will hear more of his 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 just 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 ERSF 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, the Bai Maneckbai P B Jeejeebhoy Deed of Settlement Trust, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust and the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust.

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

And we thank every one 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.

WZO continues to make new friends and to gain strength across the globe and please be assured that the WZO managing committee is committed to continue on this path.

Thank you to one and all.



# WZO Canadian Chapter



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

It is our pleasure to inform you that a Canadian chapter of World Zoroastrian Organization UK has been incorporated in Canada and registered as a Canadian charitable organization.

WZO Canada Inc. has a charity registration number: 844290304 RR0001. WZO Canada Inc. will receive and manage membership issues in Canada on behalf of WZO.

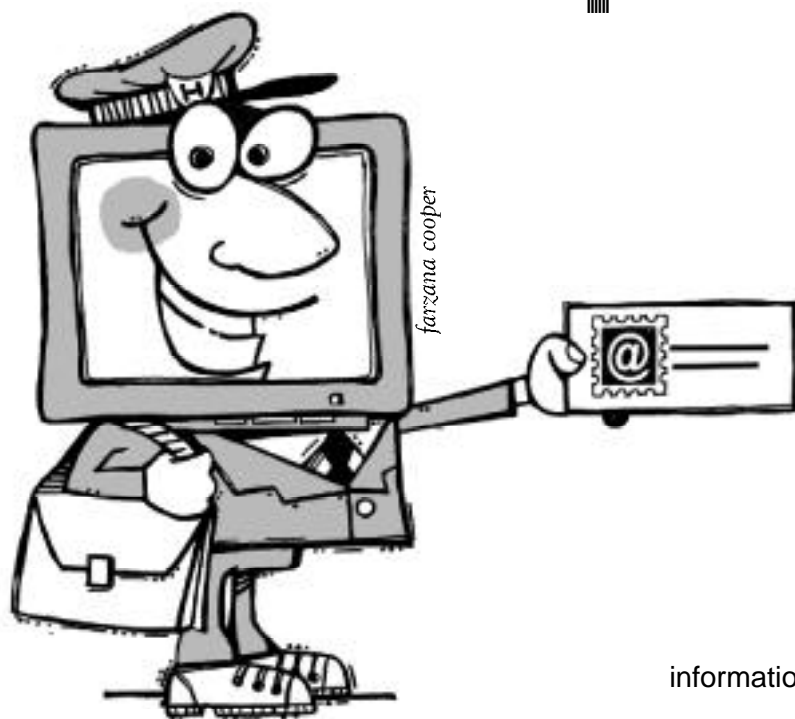
The Executive Committee consists of the following members:

President:	Ervad Jehan Bagli
Vice-President	Mr Sam Vesuna
Secretary	Mobedyar Khushroo Mirza
Treasurer	Ervad Nozer Kotwal

It is the objective of WZO Canada to follow the pattern set by WZO in UK. Our efforts will be directed to alleviate poverty and hunger, healthcare and opportunities in education, environmental sustainability to the humanity in general and Zarathushtis in particular. We shall also be disseminating information on Zoroastrianism through seminars and publications.

All donations to WZO Canada are eligible for tax exemption in Canada.  
Contact email: [jbagli@rogers.com](mailto:jbagli@rogers.com)

With Peace and Light from Mazda  
Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli  
President, WZO Canada



Knock! knock!  
*Whose there?*  
WZO London!  
*What's up?*  
Need your latest email id!  
*Email id why?*  
So we can check your  
mailing address is right!  
*Mailing address why?*  
For delivery of Hamazor!

information to: [membership@w-z-o.org](mailto:membership@w-z-o.org)



## *Influence of Zoroastrianism on Hinduism*

Fourth in a series of articles, how Zoroastrianism influenced other religions.

The strong historic and theological ties between Zoroastrianism and Judaism are well known. What is less publicized and glossed over by religious scholars is not only an equally close link between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism but also their common origin. Both grew out of the same heritage of the Indo-Iranians. Both arose at the dawn of history at least 4,000 years ago. Both had the same home in ancient Iran (now central Asia) and both shared a closely knit language – Gathic in Zoroastrianism and ancient Sanskrit – or Vedic – in Hinduism.

by keki bhote

In fact, “the affinity of the oldest form of the Avestan language (Gathic) with the dialect of the Vedas is so great in syntax, vocabulary, diction, meter and general poetic style that by the mere application of phonetic law, the whole of Zarathushtra’s Gatha stanzas were translated word for word into Vedic, so as to form verses, correct not only in form but in poetic spirit,” writes Professor MacDonell in his book – “Vedic Mythology.”

Despite this miraculous discovery and the uncanny parallelism between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism that we will explore, Hinduism is miscast, at least in the Western world as polytheism rather than the profound monotheism it really is. There is a component of Hinduism for the masses that can be characterized as henotheism, i.e. a belief in one God without denying the existence of others. This leads to Hinduism’s plebian conception that there is divinity in everyone and everything – a confusing pantheon of gods and goddesses, and even worship of animals, trees and stones.

Yet, true Hinduism has a rich and coherent philosophy, capsulized best in the Upanishads and the Vedantas of Sri

Ramakrishna in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and his famous missionary, Swami Vivekananda – the recent St. Paul of the Hindu world, who electrified American audiences with his brilliant insights into the real Hinduism. The extension of Hindu monotheism is monism, i.e. a metaphysical experience created through mysticism, wherein the self, the external world and God are considered a unified whole. The Sanskrit word for the soul of man is “Atman” and for the soul of the universe, of God, is “Brahman.” The towering philosopher and former president of India, Dr. Ramakrishna, stated: “*God’s dwelling place is in the heart of man. The immortal self and the great cosmic power are one and the same. Brahman is the Atman and the Atman is Brahman.*”

### **The Upanishads – Jewel of the Crown in Hindu Theology:**

Starting with the Vedas, Hinduism reached its theological apex in the Upanishads, which teach “*that man, by an effort at inner evolution, can attain an eventual stage, where he is unaffected by desire and fear, birth and death, space and time; where there is complete understanding of the nature of existence; and where there is oneness with the totality of that existence.*”<sup>1</sup>

## The Remarkable Theological Relationship between Zoroastrianism & the Upanishads <sup>2</sup>

There are strong philosophical, chronological, historic/geographic reformists and theological ties of a fraternal relationship between the “elder brother” Gathas and the “younger brother” Upanishads. In terms of theology, the parallels include:

1. The concept of One High God: Zarathushtra's Ahura Mazda is creator and architect of the universe, and that universe includes both its physical and spiritual vectors. The Upanishads focus on yet another vector – monism, or the metaphysical experience generated through mysticism.

2. The Search for a Vision of God and the Meaning of the Universe: Both the Gathas and the Upanishads, in beautiful poetic language and in identical thought-processes explore the mysteries of creation and a yearning for enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

3. Zarathushtra elevated the Aryan “Rta,” or order in the physical universe, to a corresponding order in the spiritual domain, calling it “Asha.” He made Asha the pivot around which his ethics revolves. The Upanishads embrace the Rta-Asha concept, extending the material order to a spiritual order. “The stress on ethics, so predominant in the Upanishads, deeply influenced India's epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana to create an encyclopedia of moral teaching.”<sup>4</sup> These epics explain why the villagers of India may be illiterate but are far from uneducated!

4. Knowledge and Duty: Zarathushtra lays stress on Vohu Manah (the good mind) and Armaiti (dutiful action) as God's endowment to every person. The Upanishads similarly stress “Gnayana” (or knowledge) as a key to life and “Dharma” (or duty and responsible, ethical action.) The Nobel prize-winning poet of India, Rabindra Nath, Tagore captures this Upanishad philosophy. *“This is the God who is the world-worker, the supreme soul who dwells in the hearts*

*of all men. Those who know him through the mind and the heart filled with the certainty of knowledge become immortal.”*<sup>5</sup>

5. The Search after Truth: Truth has a special place of honor in Zoroastrianism. Truth was a great virtue among the Zoroastrians of Iran and admired as a true Zoroastrian characteristic by the Muslims of Iran. The Upanishads follow suit in elevating truth as a central feature of Rta. Mahatma Gandhi, in his deeply religious style said: *“If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth by non-violent means. Truth is God.”*<sup>6</sup> We can see how Gandhi's satyagraha (non-violence) movement – the most peaceful liberation movement in the history of the world – had its inspiration in the philosophy of the Upanishads and in its predecessor, the Gathas of Zarathushtra.

6. Reason, Free Will and Freedom: Zarathushtra asserted and re-asserted that man is endowed by God with reason and freedom of thought, word and deed. The Upanishads too, cherish free will; assign the dogma to lesser minds. “The Upanishads ask the question: ‘What is the universe? From what does it arise? Into what does it go? The answer: In freedom it rises, in freedom it rests, and into freedom it melts away.’ The authors of the Upanishads were passionately attached to freedom.”<sup>7</sup>

7. The Inner Conscience – Daena and Atman: Zoroastrianism states that in the spiritual world there are three divine sensors in every person – a gift from God. They are the good mind (Vohu Manah), the loving heart (Armaiti) and the inner conscience (Daena). Of these, Daena is the deep-down God – thought, the guiding compass that distinguishes right from wrong. But it has to be developed and nurtured through study, through reflection and through meditation. The Upanishads' conscience – Atman or self – is the innermost soul in every human being, a divine gift. With the discipline of Bakhti (prayer), of suppressing the ego and of meditation, the Atman can advance to a stage of meditation and Gnosis where a person can visualize and experience Brahman (the ultimate reality).

Doctrinal Differences Between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism:

The Upanishads, however, do not constitute all of Hindu theology, spread over a span of 2,000 years.

**Reference:**

1. Fritjof Schuon: "Gnosis, Divine Wisdom," John Murray, London, UK, 1959.
2. Keki R Bhote: "The Seminal Contribution of Zarathushtra and His Gathas to the Upanishads," Third International Congress, K R Cama Oriental Institute, India, January 2000.
3. The Ushnavaiti Gatha, Yasna 44:1.1.5 Taraporewala translation and the Nasadiya Sutka 129.14 of the Upanishads (translated by Michael N. Agler).
4. Ekwath Easwaran: "The Upanishads," Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1998.
5. Rabindrawath Tagore: "The Philosophy of the Upanishads," Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1994.
6. Javaarlal Nehru: "The Discovery of India," Meridian Books, London, UK, 1951.
7. IBID.

- **Monotheism vs. Monism:**  
Zoroastrianism is a towering monotheism; Hinduism reaches for monism – an experience of the infinite reality.
- **Salvation by Action vs. Withdrawal:**  
Zoroastrianism is pure ethicism – salvation by right, ethical actions to benefit society. Hinduism seeks individual salvation by union with the absolute.
- **Purpose of Life:**  
Zoroastrianism attests that the purpose of life is to help God in his unfinished tasks of moving the world to perfection. In Hinduism, that purpose is to escape from this life of dreariness and suffering, to eventually escape re-incarnation – that imposed cycle of birth, death and rebirth – and became reunited with Brahman.
- **The Caste System:**  
Zarathushtra broke the back of the old Aryan caste system by placing the farmer ahead of the priest. Hinduism deteriorated the caste system into a massive, abhorrent discrimination against the Untouchables.

In conclusion, our Hindu brothers should be proud of their Zoroastrian heritage; and we Zoroastrians should be proud of the luster that Hinduism has added to the religions of the world. ■■■■

Keki Bhote is a foreign correspondent in the Mumbai newspapers, journalist and lecturer specialising in Asia, contributor to the World Book Encyclopaedia, member of ABC TV panel, lecturer on Chicago Council on Global Affairs & UN Assoc., Illinois. He is author of 17 books and recipient of civic honours from the city of Chicago, UN and US Dept., of Defence. Keki's community work on the North Shore is extensive. In his professional life, he heads his own company, consulting with over 450 companies



## Parsi women's right to freely profess, practice and propagate her religion

by shiraz patodia

On March 23, 2012, the High Court of Gujarat, by a majority of two to one, held that a woman, Goolrookh Gupta, born as a Parsi to her avid Zoroastrian parents and initiated into the Zoroastrian religion by a navjote ceremony performed by an ordained priest had lost her Zoroastrian religion by virtue of her marriage to a non-Zoroastrian, Hindu male. This view was taken, notwithstanding the fact that her marriage was solemnized under the liberal and secular Special Marriage Act of 1954, without her ever having renounced her Zoroastrian faith and religion.

Curiously, the High Court's views are not restricted to Parsi women alone. In fact, in the High Court's view, "in all religion, be it Christian, be it Parsi, be it Jews, the religious identity of a woman ... shall merge into that of her husband" and "such principle is generally accepted throughout the world and therefore, until the marriage, after the name of the woman, the name of the father is being mentioned and after marriage, name of the husband is being mentioned for the purpose of further describing her identity". The High Court has declared that "when marriage takes place between a male and a female belonging to different religion, it should be presumed and considered that the woman after marriage has merged into the religion of her husband and such will be the identity of their family originating from their marriage in comparison to the society at large and such identity would stand extended to their children too."

Therefore, according to the Court irrespective of a woman's chosen religious faith, the moment she marries a man of another faith, she is deemed to have merged into his religion, losing her own in

the process. The High Court's creating this legal fiction, by which a woman entering into an inter-religious marriage is deemed to have automatically changed her religion upon her marriage to that of her husband, appears to be based on the ancient feudal notion of women being regarded as chattels – an expression essentially reflecting the position of men's dominion over women.

As I write this piece, being a Parsi Zoroastrian lawyer, I am both baffled and hurt. However, in order to present an objective overview on the matter, I am restricting myself, here, only to the law as it stands in India today.

There is no law in India which ordains that a woman must adopt her husband's name or religion upon marriage. In fact, way back in 1917, the King's Bench held that *"a wife acquires by the status of marriage, the domicile of her husband and is subject to the law of that domicile but she does not acquire his religion or become subject to the laws of his religion"* [Rex. vs. Hammersmy Superintendent, Registrar of Marriages: Mir Anwarudding Ex parte (1917) 1 K.B. 634]. This case was referred to by the Calcutta High Court, in *Rakeya Bibi vs. Anil Kumar Mukherji* [ILR (1948) 2 Cal 119] to note that a wife's religion does not change if her husband changes his religion.

Making one's religious identity dependent upon that of another completely flouts the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom which is enshrined as a fundamental right in Article 25 of the Constitution of India. With respect, the words *"all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion"* in Article 25 are rendered meaningless by the judgment of the Gujarat High Court. These words, which reflect the ideal of secularism, are meant to safeguard the right of each person, including both men and women, to profess, practice and propagate the religion of their own choice.

Implicit in the right to freedom of conscience and religion is the right of each person to

renounce one's religion and embrace another voluntarily. Changing one's religion to another is primarily the result of one's individual conviction and choice. The Law Commission, in its 235<sup>th</sup> Report while dealing with the mode of proof for conversion / re-conversion to another religion, notes that the reason for or propriety of conversion cannot be judged from the standards of rationality or reasonableness. Conversion, like marriage, is a solemn act, and has far reaching consequences – social and legal. Initiation into a particular religion is not always automatic or even by birth – in fact most religions mandate performance of certain ceremonies that mark the admission of the person into that particular religion. Thrusting a woman into the religion of her husband upon her marriage absent any ceremonies for conversion and irrespective of the lady's intention and/or desire to convert or the intention of the religious community of the husband to accept her into the community creates multiple socio-legal problems.

The Special Marriage Act, 1954 was in fact enacted as a progressive legislation – in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution and in stark departure from the Act of 1872 and the amending Act of 1923 – enabling two persons belonging to different religions to enter into marriage without either having to renounce his / her religion or convert to the religion of the other. The said Special Marriage Act 1954 in fact divorces religion from personal laws and provides for a 'special form of marriage ... irrespective of the faith which either party to the marriage may profess'. Interestingly, the reason for amending the earlier Act was to bring it in line with the constitutional values of secularism and an egalitarian social order that Independent India aspired to achieve. Therefore, under the present law, a woman upon her marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, continues to follow her pre-marriage religion unless she has expressly renounced her religion and successfully converted to another.

The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, enshrined in Article 25 of the

Constitution of India, extends to men and women alike and guarantees to each of them the right to *freely* profess, practice and propagate their respective religion. Article 15 of our Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The High Court's deem conversion of women cannot withstand, with respect, the mandate of Article 15. By restricting this deemed merger/conversion to women, and requiring them to furnish proof of not having converted by virtue of marriage, the High Court has only reinforced the age-old biases against the female gender.

The High Court's decision, in fact seems to be in direct conflict with the recent judgment of the Supreme Court of India, in which, while dealing with an inter-caste marriage issue, the Supreme Court rejected the argument that upon marriage the woman takes the caste of her husband.

*(Rameshbhai Dhabal Naika vs. State of Gujarat & Ors. JT 2012 (1) SC 515).*

More importantly, there is nothing in the Parsi Zoroastrian religion which permits ostracizing Parsi Zoroastrian women married to non-Parsi men. Both in India and overseas, such women are allowed access to Parsi Agiyaris, permitted to participate in Parsi Zoroastrian religious functions and ceremonies including prayers at the Tower of Silence.

The law as to admission of Parsi Zoroastrian into fire temples and as to their conversion, is governed by two landmark decisions of Bombay High Court: viz. *Sir Dinshaw Manekji Petit vs. Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy (1908) ILR 33 Bom and Saklat vs. Bella (1926) 28 Bom LR 161*, which held that: Zoroastrian religion not only permits but enjoins the conversion of a person born in another religion and of non-Zoroastrian parents; Although such conversion was permissible, Zoroastrians, ever since their advent into India, 1200 years ago, have never attempted to convert anyone into their religion and that the Parsi community consists of

- a) Parsis who are descended from the original Persian emigrants, and who are

born of both Zoroastrian parents, and who profess the Zoroastrian religion

b) the Iranies from Persia professing the Zoroastrian religion, who came to India,

either temporarily or permanently and

c) the children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers who have been duly and properly admitted into the religion.

In the instant case Goolrookh Gupta has stated that she is born of Zoroastrian parents and is Zoroastrian by religion and Parsi by race and has not converted to any other religion by virtue of her marriage and continues to follow Zoroastrian religion till date.

A right is recognized in absolute terms in every member of the Parsi community who professes Zoroastrian religion, to be able to utilize the Towers of Silence as a place for exposure of the dead and for the purposes of religious rites and ceremonies. No power of excommunication exists in the Zoroastrian faith (*Jamshed Kanga & Anr. vs. Parsi Panchayat Funds & Properties & Ors. 2011 (113) Bom L.R. 1047*).

Despite this legal position, denying Ms. Goolrookh Gupta who is a Parsi by race and Zoroastrian by religion, her right to enter the Parsi Agyari and participate in Parsi Zoroastrian ceremonies, including the last rites of her loved ones is deeply misogynist, unconstitutional and totally hampers women's empowerment in India.



Shiraz Patodia is a qualified Solicitor from The Incorporated Law Society Bombay and is an Advocate-on-Record of the Supreme Court of India. Her expertise lies in areas of commercial and corporate litigation including litigation pertaining to intellectual property rights, international trade & dumping & WTO-related matters, and

matters in connection with intellectual property rights. Shiraz heads the Intellectual Property and International Trade & Customs Practice Groups of Dua Associates. Shiraz is a member of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Bombay Incorporated Law Society and Bombay Bar Association and is an Associate Member of Delhi High Court Bar Association.

# “The Ring’s the thing” : Reviewing the Fravahar

M

Many a delicate wrist and fair neck of Zoroastrian ladies is seen graced with gold or silver bracelets and chains with winged-disc pendants. Brooches too occasionally bear the symbol. Their wearers have vague notions of what the winged emblems represent: are they worship tokens, protective charms, or just decorative trinkets?

An ugly turn in perceptions of the inherent symbolism of the *Fravahar-Farohar* prompted fresh examination. During a lecture delivered before an assemblage of “Zoroastrians” by a world renowned non-Zoroastrian iconographer whose professional career is devoted to ancient Middle Eastern artefacts, an outraged member of the audience loudly and lengthily objected to the scholarly interpretation of the winged disc as Ahura Mazda. The objector declared Ahura Mazda to be invisible, and so could not be depicted symbolically or in human form; the venerable symbol had been deliberately misconstrued by hostile outsiders!

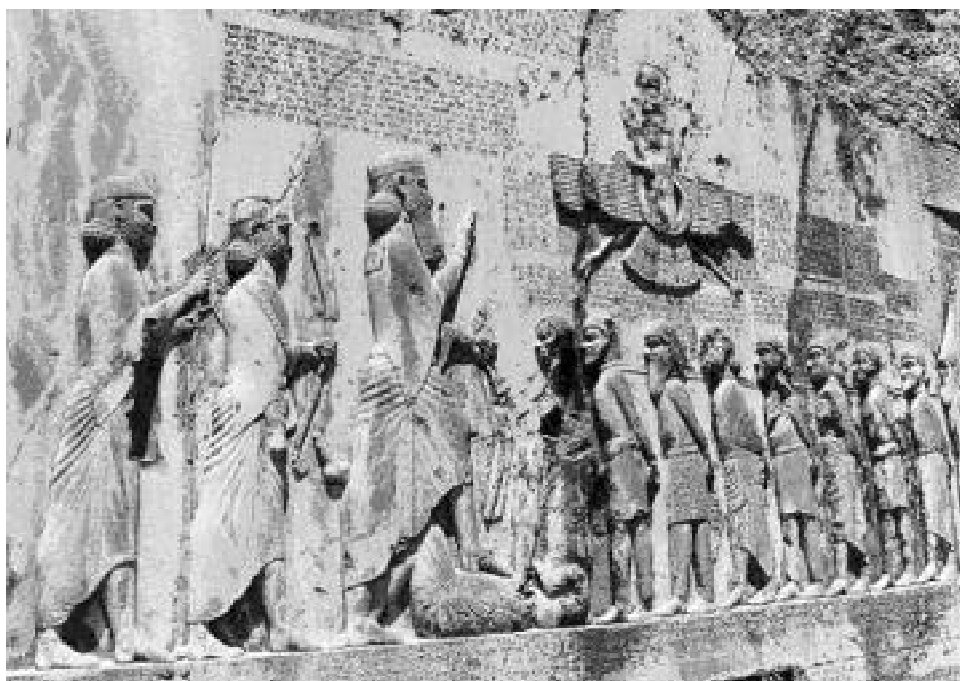
by farrokh vajifdar

Our enquiries into the significance the wearers attach to their adornments – some as mere baubles (“just for fun’s sake!”), others as objects imbued with sacral power – reveal a range of meanings: from “God” (so don’t mock!), “Jarthos”/ “Zartusht” (Zarathushtra), via “Fravashi” and “Khwarenah / Khwarrah / Khoreh / Farr”, to an amulet against the “Evil Eye” (!), and lastly “Ahura Mazda”. We maintain that the last is its *original* representation in Iran for reasons which follow.

Changes and shifts of perception within pre-Islamic Iranian iconography reflect the migrations of religious symbols within cultures. The depiction of supernatural entities varies over time and space. In Iran the borrowing of the winged disc motif – on the principle of “Adopt and Adapt” – was originally from sources as far located as Assyria, Babylon and Egypt.

Herodotus had recorded in his *Historia* (Book I.135): “Of all races the Persians most welcome foreign customs. ... Their luxurious practices are of all kinds, and all borrowed”.

Appearing in Iran firstly at the Behistun relief carved on the orders of Darius I (“the Great”, r. 522 – 486 BC), the hovering winged figure centrally dominates the massive panorama depicting the Great King with his two bodyguards. Led before him, in comic strip fashion, is a succession of individually named rebels, variously captured over three years, of whom the



Behistun relief

most troublesome was the defeated Median priest Gaumata. This would-be usurper is shown, with arms reaching up in supplication, being trodden underfoot by the king. The accompanying inscriptions, arranged in neat rectangles around the vast tableau, are in Akkadian (Babylonian), Old Persian (O.P.), and Elamite.

Darius / Darayava(h)ush is shown life-size, together with his trusted bodyguards, in right-pointing profile; all others, facing, are reduced. The Great King wears a fillet crown and Persian dress; his right hand is raised in acknowledgement to the wavy-winged figure floatng above. The story of his victory over the opportunist Magus Gaumata unfolds in O.P. nos. 12-14, and nos. 52 and 68 in passing; an embroidered version is found in Herodotus III.61-87.

It is this floating depiction placed above the procession of captured rebels which compels our attention. With spread wings, fanned out tail, outstretched predatory feet, and a ruffed collar, it recalls features of the Eurasian Cinereous vulture. The bust shown in left-facing profile rises from this disc, holding a ring in the left hand; the right is raised in return salutation to King Darius. Whose is this bust? What does the ring represent? Why the salutations?



Behistun. Ahura Mazda

In his "Aryan" (Old Persian) inscription the name of Darius' solely recognized Great Deity – Ahuramazda (as single word), his *baga vazraka* – occurs here over 70 times in specific contexts. Everything of his person, reign and achievements, is by the will – *vashna* – of Ahuramazda / Ahura Mazda.

Darius' Supreme Deity does not correspond in specifics with that of Zarathushtra's Mazda: there are certain divergences. The eastern Sage and the Western pan-Iranian monarch were separated by time and place. Questions of Darius' religion have loomed large in scholarly speculations. Because he never mentions Zarathushtra as Founder of the Mazdaic faith, it has been urged that the Great King be safely defined as Mazdayasnian – not necessarily of Zarathushtrian persuasion. Darius, as Sovereign, was not minded to play second fiddle to the Sage, and any "Church–State" alliance was a convenient affair of earthly and ethereal domains without benefit of prophetic revelation. The matter of the Achaemenid religion(s) remains in abeyance.

In his genealogy, (nos. 1-4), Darius claims he is ninth in line of kingship whose bestowal he attributes to Ahuramazda (no. 5). Darius declares that what he is, and the 23 satrapal "provinces" of tribute-bearing nations became his through favour of Ahuramazda. His exercise of sovereignty over these nations (nos. 5-7), and the loyalty of his new subjects (no. 8) were by Ahuramazda's will. His vanquishing of ten rebels – he calls them followers of the Lie, *drauga*: on the cuneiform labels attached to each (DBb - DBk), he names and shames them as having "lied", *adurujiya*; their rebellions were suppressed, all with the help of Ahuramazda. And so on ...

Within the Zagros mountain chain lies the town of Sar-pol-e Zahab near the Iran-Iraq border. There, on a steep rocky hillside, is seen the badly eroded depiction of a victory scene whose outlines are barely visible to the untrained eye. Despite great difficulties, a painstaking record was made, with much ingenuity, by 19th and 20th century

archaeologists. Dated to 2200 BC, It depicts the victory of the regional Lullubi king Anubanini over nine rebels. The goddess Ishtar, identified by her eight-pointed star, proffers with her right hand a ring, signifying victorious kingship, leading before the victor two of his nine vanquished enemies, stark naked and roped together with rings pierced through their noses.



Anubanini relief (Sar-Pol-e Zahab)

From this outline of the purposeful rock depiction of some 1,700 years *before* the advent of Darius the Great, specific comparisons are shown between the Sar-pol and Behistun reliefs to its east. Influences from such earlier figural conventions upon the Iranian sovereign for his personal and political propaganda are too evident to be dismissed as coincidental.

The figurations of the two rulers far apart in time show some close similarities: Anubanini poses with sandalled left foot treading on a defeated rebel whose arms are raised in supplication. His left hand clasps the arc of his bow to his chest, its

end placed upon the raised left knee. With his right, he grips the haft of his battle-axe with blade tip touching the ground. He is clad only from waist down with a knee-length hemmed skirt. His neck adornment and pudding-basin headgear complement his bearded features.

On the far less eroded Behistun panel, a neatly shod Darius is shown with left foot trampling the chest of the captured Magus Gaumata who, arms outstretched, pleads for clemency. The king's right hand is respectfully raised towards the winged figure in salutation; his left grips the upper end of his bow with tip resting on his raised left foot. He is fully clad with sleeved cape and calf-length skirt. His ringletted coiffure and neat beard complete his kingly mien.

Nine fully clad captives are led before him, in single file, roped together around their necks. Eight of these are the rebels defeated by Darius "in one and the same year", detailed in nos.16-56. The ninth, and a pointy capped tenth, were captured in Darius' second and third regnal years (522–520 BC). All ten of the Great King's victories over nine kings – and Gaumata the usurper priest – in nineteen battles are with the help and favour of Ahuramazda. In no. 57 Darius says he turns towards Ahuramazda to verify the truth of his victory claims, and indeed, the Behistun tableau shows him facing his "Great God".

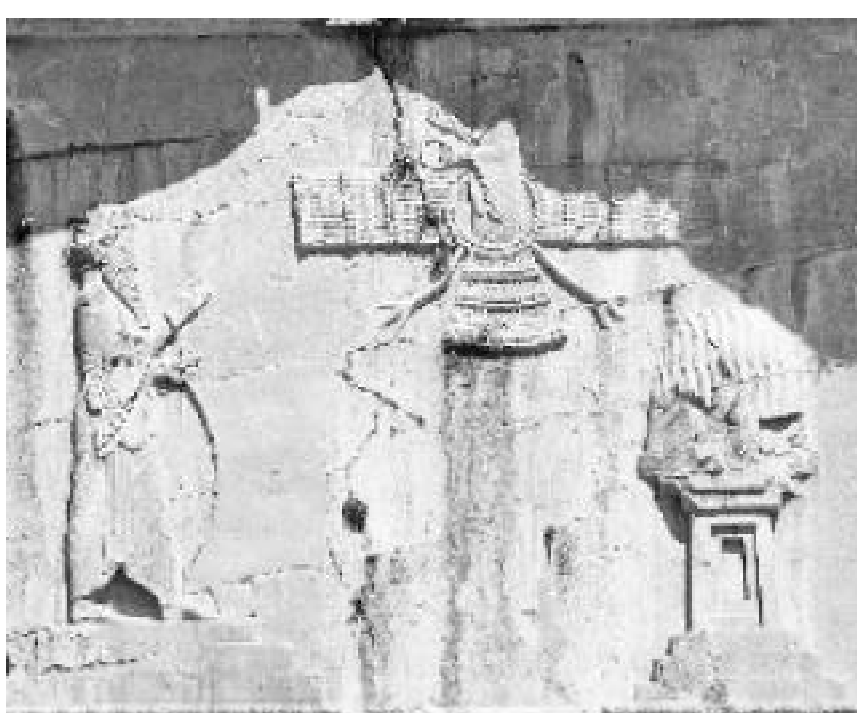
Furthermore, Darius boasts of his moral rectitude, impartial judgements and fair dealing character – qualities which Ahuramazda alone bestowed to aid him throughout. He concludes with Ahuramazda's blessing (and a caution!) on all who in future would preserve (or deface) this monument.

At Naqsh-e Rostam (NRM), some five miles to the north of the Parsa (Persepolis) complex, are four rock-cut cruciform tombs a little way up on a south facing cliff-face. From east to west they are the final resting places of Xerxes I (Darius' successor son), Darius the Great himself, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. All show the kings facing fire-



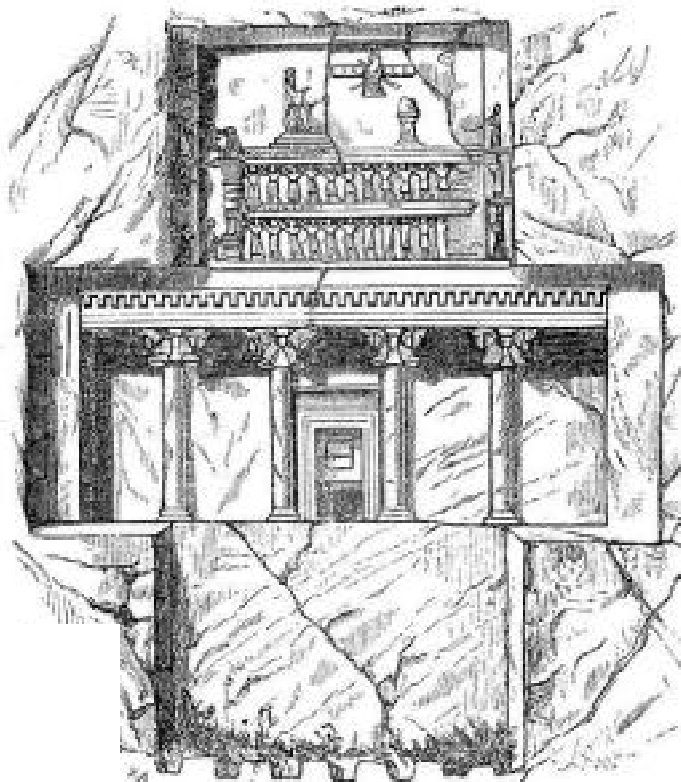
*Farrokh Vajifdar comes from a sensibly orthodox priestly family. Life-long student and independent researcher in Indo-Iranian cultures. Specializes in literature and languages of pre-Islamic Iran. Focuses on Zoroastrian religious beliefs and practices on which he writes, lectures, and broadcasts (radio and TV). He is referee and reviewer for (as Fellow of) the Royal Asiatic Society.*





Xerxes I tomb relief

altars and the winged figure. Only the Great King's tomb is provided with inscriptions – his two extensive epitaphs – referred to as DNRm-A and DNRm-B. Of close interest are the bas-reliefs of kings, hovering wavy-winged symbols, and fire-altars. The Parsa / Persepolis depictions are more stylized.



NRm. drawing. Darius I tomb



Fravahar relief (Pesepolis)

Here, faced with the ultimate reality of looking back over his life and achievements, the master propagandist Darayava(h)ush, “(one who) holds to the Good”, acknowledges (DNRm-A) Ahuramazda as Creator of sky, earth, and welfare for man. Then follow the Great King's Aryan lineage, a list of conquered nations, his suppression of their rebellions, and an entreaty for *protection by Ahuramazda* for himself, his family, and his empire from the three-fold menace of enemy armies, famine, and *drauga* – “the Lie” (Persepolis d).

In this clear context the wavy-winged symbol on his tomb cannot possibly represent the king's *fravashi*, popularly venerated as one's external protective “guardian angel”. *Fravashis* do not dispense *khshathra* or authority to rule, symbolized by the Ring; only Ahuramazda does, and is shown to do, with repeated avowals by Darius both at Behistun and Naqsh-e Rostam.

It is DNRm-B which holds the greater interest: following a similar preamble as in DNRm-A, the Great King's mental and physical qualities are detailed. Thus, Darius' adherence to *rasta*-, the Right, and his protection of both weak and strong against mutual injustice, affirm his Mazda-given high ideals and right-mindedness – it echoes DB no.63. *Rasta*- figures in his claim to be self-controlled, even-tempered, and not impulsive in matters of judgement. Good- and evil-doers are dealt according to equitable laws; the claims of litigants are considered by him carefully and impartially. Darius concludes his morally directed activity with a restatement of his mental capacity and control.

The Great King's physical aspects and activities are next presented: in the field of battle he is percipient in his actions and dealings; he notes his good horsemanship, spear and archery skills, being equally adept mounted or on foot – recalling Herodotus' summing up of a young Persian noble's education as learning "to ride, shoot, and speak the truth" (I.136). The nub of Darius' exposition of his acquired skills and other fine qualities is that all are due to Ahuramazda, and all are embodied in the Ring.

Darius has informed us, at Behistun, Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam, that his kingship was bestowed by Ahuramazda and none other. The Ring of Sovereignty – the *Khshathra* – held by his "Great God" is the solemn token of authority from deity to mortal to rule rightly – a clear earthly, visible actualization of the Gathic spirit of Zarathushtra where the Sage entreates his sole Ahuric deity, Mazda: *"May a good ruler – not an evil one – reign over us, with actions performed through good insight and Right-mindedness ..."* (Yasna 48.5).

It is this *Khshathra* or authority to rule through use or abuse of this divine empowerment that ultimately determines the *Khvarenah* / *Khwarrah* / *Khoreh* / *Farr* ("Kingly Glory / Fortune") as rightfully that of the sovereign. For Darius I, "the Great", it becomes evident through his inscriptional claims that he was fully deserving of this epithet, and truly worthy of his Mazdayasnian heritage.

Darius I perceived and pictured Ahuramazda as divine guide on the bas-relief "Fravahar" symbols chiselled at Behistun, Parsa, and Naqsh-e Rostam. His successor Khshayarsha / Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BC) largely followed his great father in his Mazdayasnian depictions. It becomes certain that the symbol originally depicted Ahura Mazda!

*May your Glory and Good Fortune increase likewise!*



## XVI<sup>th</sup> North American Zarathushti Congress in New York, 2-5 August 2012, lays the foundation for Zarathushti existence in the contemporary world ...

reported by behroze clubwalla

The rest is up to you. *"Chal Dikra, jaldi jaldi Registration ni Bags complete kar."* *"Mumbai na Hellen Keller Institute for the Deaf and Blind ma banavehli."*

*"Mehru Dikra, [Mehru Cama Chair, Logistics Committee] last meeting kaale karje."*

*"Piroja, [Piroja Press, Registration] banquet nu list, bandh karjeh .... we are at max 700."*

The sunny sky is a perfect blue in Rye, Westchester, New York. August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, the frenzy of preparations of two years is at its peak. Ten zealous ZAGNY members are ready to register the guests. *"Aunty, welcome ... tameh Sydney, thi aaya? Aye Badge aahkho vakhat pehrejho. Aehmah mini-program cheh. Bag ma bakhra, batasa neh chevro cheh."* *"Areh Vah."* 545 were registered. The non-issuance of US visas to 100 Zarathushtis from Iran dampened the mood.

Twelve Dasturjis with lights in their hands, led by ZAGNY's Ervad Pervez Patel chanted the ceremonial blessings in front of an afargani, and a picture of Zarathushtra. Soprano Tara Jamshidian filled the room with her passionate performance of *"Zarathushtra"* composed by Parizad Irani; Neville Dusaj on the piano. The Dasturjis led the gathering in humbandagi; the



*"Come dear, quickly complete the registration bags."* *"They were made in Mumbai at the Hellen Keller Institute for the Deaf & Blind."* *"Mehru dear, do the last meeting tomorrow."* *"Piroja, close the banquet list ..."*

*"... you have come from Sydney? Wear this badge throughout. Inside is a mini program. In the bag are some bakhra, batasa and chevro."* *"How great."* *Translations of Gujarati quotes.*

audience joining in with the words visible on two giant screens – filling the room with the comforting sound of our Avesta prayers. Zal Shroff sang the US national anthem with fervor, several ZAGNY members melodiously chanted *Khudavind O Khavind*. The flags of USA, Canada and the Congress were proudly marched in. A video salutes all the Zarathushtis who serve in the Armed Forces in USA and Canada; a moment of great pride.

Gev Nentin, President of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) and Co-chair of the North American Zarathushti Congress (NAZC), Ferzeen Patel, Co-chair NAZC, Bomi Patel, President, FEZANA, Shirin Khosravi, President of the Iranian Zoroastrian Association (IZA) and Daraius Bharucha, Chair, FEZANA, NAZC Committee welcomed the gathering. Gev noted that *“the next generation may speak the same language, but the future generation’s lens is less about separational issues, it is in search for a common vision for survival as a Zarathushti.”* *“Alliance is perfect, as we share the same beliefs, not bound by time, language or geography. We could learn a lot from each other,”* commented Shirin, referring to the need for greater collaboration between Parsis and Iranians. Daraius reminded the audience that this was a *“collective Zarathushti endeavor, let us debate, discuss and listen. We have established ourselves as a community. We have moved beyond surviving and economic prosperity to developing hopes, dreams and aspirations. We need to have a collective vision and a path forward that is nurtured by forums such as these.”* He encouraged the Congress to be *“an explosion of collective consciousness.”* Keki Dadachanji, NAZC Program Chair, noted that *“religion is intuitive, the new generation will have a less discriminatory perspective”* concluding that *“we must prepare for the future generations, but never compromise our core beliefs and values. Our continent is changing – we must adapt or we will lose relevance.”*

#### **Keynote Address: Trista Parsi:**

An anticipatory silence fills the room. Dr Trista Parsi makes his way to the podium. From Iran, a practicing Zarathushti; he grew

up in Sweden, is President of the National Iranian American Council; an expert on US-Iranian Relations, Iranian foreign policy; a well published author and a frequent guest on CNN, BBC and the Jim Lehrer show. Addressing challenges of **“Building a New World Order – The role of Zarathushti Values”**, Parsi asserted, *“Interstate relations were understood from the perspective of Machiavelli, where being feared was more important than being loved and respected; it presupposed that all men are evil.”* *“Humanity,”* he said *“is in need of the meaning and value of Zoroastrian ideas, values and thoughts. In today’s global world, there is a poverty of unhappiness prevailing. Humanity has never felt so lonely. If peace is impossible, perhaps we need to learn how to manage conflict. In doing so, we can adhere to and use the teachings of Zarathustra.”* He quotes Yasna 30.2, *“Man must make his own choice. A lie is a corruption of the truth and cannot exist on its own.”* *“If Ashem Vohu were mandatory reading for political science students, instead of Machiavelli,”* he asks, *“Would the world not look different today?”* He continues *“theology and international relations theory indicates that ideas inspire behavior, but the message of Zarathustra has applicability beyond traditional theology and philosophy. We must today focus beyond survival of our community, we need to be discerning on how we should bring the thinking of Zarathustra to the marketplace of ideas. Our core beliefs are beyond Humata, Hukhata and Hvarashtra. Yasna 29.1 says ‘Grant that I perform all actions in harmony with righteousness.’”* He challenges the next generation to be the *“force to solve the problems, not talk about them. Let us use the ‘fire’ within us to find our ‘wings’ to ‘bring righteousness to the world.’* He urges us to understand our religion more – *“understanding it would lead to involvement and, that in turn can make us proud of who we are, where we came from and help us bring the teachings of Zarathustra into our daily lives and into the global world.”* A brief presentation, but his messages were powerful.

**The Khorshed F Jungalwala Lecture:**  
**Dr Yuhan Vevaina**, currently teaching at Stanford University in the Department of Religious Studies, having obtained his MA and PhD from Harvard University, delivered

the lecture titled "Thinking with Zoroastrianism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

*"Academia has failed in providing you with engaging books. We have different things written for different audiences."* Yuhan invited us to think of the survival of the Zarathushti identity. *"There is an insecurity about what to believe and whom to believe"* he said. To do this he confidently said *"we need to think about our Zoroastrian heritage, support the development of knowledge about our religion."* He went on to add, *"Knowledge is power and knowledge can mobilize change."* He encouraged the youth to think carefully before being drawn to mainstream highly paid careers, and to consider becoming anthropologists, sociologists, geneticists and scholars. The participants cheered him and thronged around him all through the coffee break. His delivery was enthusiastic, insightful and spirited.

### Congress Triumphs:

**Harmonized Alliance:** This Congress shared successfully a collaborative alliance in its planning, structure and mission with the Parsis and Iranians from NY, NJ and Connecticut. It demonstrated that there is strength and success in unity supported by a common vision and faith. Every detail demonstrated the alliance from the entertainment, to the speakers, to the Iranian and Parsi recipe books in the registration bags. Shirin Khosravi, President IZA noted: *"I am so proud to be a part of this harmonized alliance."*

**Unity among Presenters:** The Congress aimed to bring in a variety of speakers both consenting and dissenting to norms, beliefs and traditions. In spite of this, a very unique, homogeneous and thorough dialogue emerged. The Congress speakers engaged the audience at all levels of their knowledge. The traditionalist, the conservative, the scholar and the Mobed ensured a healthy sharing of a wide spectrum of ideas and created an open forum for engaging the "Vohu Mano" – the good mind, to ensure the survival of the Zarathushti existence for the next generation. More importantly, many of the

speakers were young Zoroastrians; their perspectives and experiences were inspiring. Are they not the architects of the future Zarathushti existence in North America? Certainly they should have a voice in shaping their future Zarathushti presence.

**Electronic Polling/Social Media:** The Congress gave its participants "remote clickers" and posed challenging questions on three giant screens on Zarathushti Identity and other issues. This was technology at its best, thanks to Khursheed Navder-Dusaj of ZAGNY. The audience was polled, and the audience viewed the responses immediately on the giant screens. Amazing, yes it was; incredible, absolutely. Some questions polled were:

■ Are you traditional, 13%; progressive, 39%; moderate, 37% or none of the above, 11%.

■ How can we best focus on religious education: making available religious publications, 9%; use of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, 60%; reinforcing traditional practices, 31%.

■ In my opinion, a Zarathushti is someone who has both Zarathushti parents 14%; who has a Zarathushti father, 2%, who has at least one Zarathushti parent 10%, whose ancestors were Zarathushtis and wants to live in accordance with its teachings, 6% and who chooses for himself/herself the religion of Zarathustra, 68%.

This was mesmerizing information. The significance of hearing the results was *"awesome"* said one young participant from Houston, representing the largest group of participants from outside ZAGNY and IZA. *"I have hope for my generation"*, she said.

Social media was fully utilized, updates and photographs were posted on the NAZC website; Tweets kept the news flowing to the youth around the world. Arzan Sam Wadia, an architect by profession, was the backbone of all the technology and audio-visual presentations with his Technology and Audio-Visual Committee.

**A first at a Congress:** How often have you heard your children say *"I would do my Kushti prayers often, if I understood the prayers?"* Ervad

## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

Karl Khambatta, 18 years old, went to the ZAGNY religious classes since he was five, learnt his prayers on his grandmother's lap, did his Navar and Martab ceremonies in Mumbai by age 12, proudly stood in his Sudreh and performed the whole kushti prayer in an English translation. The text was displayed on the big screen, the audience was mesmerized, one could hear a soft reading aloud from those around you, and the entire audience was in awe at the spirituality that engulfed the room. Even the elders among the audience smiled. Some

before they have a special request of Ahura Mazda! [Please exam ma distinction marks apjoh! Harvard ma admission apjoh please!]

### Others Sessions:

The other sessions addressed: Core Beliefs; Intergenerational dialogue: Motivation, Inspiration, Action; Zoroastrian Empires: Common Themes and Changing Circumstances; Historical Review and Demographics of Zarathushtis in North America; Introduction to Zarathushti Identity; Basic Course in Zarathushti Religion; a PARZOR Presentation; Zarathushti Women's International Network (ZWIN); and Genetic Awareness; Rituals and Practices: Sudreh Pushi/Navjote and Kushti; Preserving Persian Heritage; Combatting Poverty in our Community Abroad.

Some of the thought-provoking quotes follow:

**Keki Dadachanji** – Program Chair, asked the audience to contemplate “How can we change and not compromise our doctrine and core values?” **Parastu Dubash** reminded us that “the Navjote is the starting line to lifelong learning.” Our challenge she said is “to see the navjote as an initiation to a lifetime of religious awakening.” How can you do this? She suggested: “Celebrate yearly the navjote anniversaries, invite the mobed to address the initiate in the language of the family.” **Ervad Mohsen Zandieh** spoke gently from his heart, “I am not a Zoroastrian, I am a sociologist, but I discovered humanity when I studied the Zoroastrian religion.” **Kobad Zarolia** challenged us to think about why “the community had wasted resources on building banquet halls and not Fire Temples.” **Professor Kaikhushru Irani** reminded us that “Zarathustra was the first enlightened messenger of humanity over 3000+ years ago. He offered us a religion with no prescriptions. We can use the ideal of Truth (Asha) to make our lives satisfying.” He further reiterated that “practicing our religion is a declaration of the will of the individual.” **Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli** noted that “Ahura Mazda is a divine energy pervading the Universe.” “The navjote” he said, “is just one pathway to the purity of life. It directs one to the ‘goal’ of a



FEZANA Presidents: l to r - Framroze Patel 1998-2002], Bomi Patel [2008-2012], Dolly Dastoor [1994-1998], Firdosh Mehta [2002-2006], Rustom Kevala [2006-2008] and Rohinton Rivetna [1987-1994] cutting the celebratory silver jubilee cake. [Permission & courtesy of ZAGNY, USA]

young participants were reflecting... this is a really meaningful ritual for me to embrace. Thank you Karl – you made a huge impact. His parents Kayomarz and Goolcher Khambatta smiled with pride. He has inspired many to do their kushti prayers. But interestingly, I suspect many of them will return to the memorized Avesta version they learnt at their navjotes and then reflect on the English translation. Progress – yes indeed, even if some only do the kushti

Zarathushti life.” Our prayer says “Fravarane Mazdiyasni Zarathosthi – Fravarane – means ‘I choose for myself (of my own free will)’ to be a Mazdiyasni Zarathosthi – a Mazda worshiping Zarathusthi.” Dr Ali Jafarey squarely laid the responsibility for education about our religion on parents. He also reminded us that “Zoroastrians must learn religious principles, then practice them and strive to then teach someone else.” He urged mobeds to be “scholars” of the religion. All the speakers were united in reminding us that “each one of us had to make our choice” of living the Zarathushti life of “Asha – truth and righteousness.” Many other speakers added their experiences and ideas to the dialogue, *Trity Pourbahrami, Ervad Poruz Khambatta, Dr Khushroo Patel, Jimmy Kumana, Aleyar Dabestani, Behram Khosravi, Dr Anahita Dua, Behrose Taraporewalla, Farzin Avari, Nahid Dashtaki, Pearl Satarawala, Vehishta Kaikobad, Daulat Kotwal, Dr Xerxes P Kotwal, Dolly Dastoor, Ferzeen Patel and Zareen Karani-Araoz* making this a really rich exchange of ideas to perpetuate our religion and beliefs.

*Ervad Cawas Desai* boldly pronounced his belief that “being born into a particular religion is not an accident of birth, but a part of God’s divine plan. Therefore, an act of conversion is tantamount to implying that God made a mistake and this will now be corrected. However, if an individual of his own free will and volition decides to adopt and follow the beliefs of Zarathustra, he is entirely free to do so and I for one will respect his belief.” *Roshan Rivetna* declared that “Demographics determines destiny.” The strength of the North American Zarathushti community she said is at 20,728, +23% since 2004, against the world population of 110,201, minus 12%. The largest concentration is in California, followed by Ontario and New York.

“Preserving Persian Heritage” outlined the neglect of pre-Islamic sites and Zoroastrian pilgrimage places in Iran. The efforts of bodies like the Iranian Cultural Heritage Tourism and Handicrafts Organization were noted. *Dinshaw Tamboly, Armene Modi* joined *Priyanka Sinha* by Skype reminded the gathering of the critical need for us to

support the underprivileged Zarathushti families. “How did we get to this level of poverty” questioned *Kaizad Cama*, the Moderator. On behalf of PARZOR, *Rosheen Kabraji*, called for “museum curators, translators, musicologists, photographers” and volunteers to keep the project moving forward.

“Sharing Roots” was an innovative programme presented by *Dinshaw Mistree*. He would like to bring 20 global youths to visit India, its fire temples, interact with the youth of the area, attend lectures, cooking demonstrations and be exposed to the Zoroastrian customs and lifestyle of the community in India.

*Natalie Gandhi*, WZCC Chair hosted an interesting gathering on “New Sciences and Commerce.” A beautiful exhibit displayed traditional garas, a Navjote Ceremony and countless beautiful Zarathushti artifacts. *Ushtavaithy Davar Canteenwalla* raised the consciousness of “genetics” and inherited genes among Zarathushtis.

Taraporewalla’s quote by *Dr Farrokh Mistree* summed up the Congress aptly: “If not now, when? If not you, who?” NAZC in New York has clearly launched a challenge ... now **it is up to all of us to act accordingly.**

For more details, please go to: <http://nazc.zagny.org>.



*Behroze Astad Clubwala*, is a ZAGNY member for 37 years and has dedicated much time and effort to support ZAGNY. She is currently the Human Resources Advisor, in the Bureau for Development Policy in the United Nations Development Programme in New York.



In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

## *Vanished Vultures - will they be bred at Mumbai's Doongerwadi?*

A controversy concerning whether breeding of vultures in an aviary at the two dakhmas is viable or not continues since June of this year. What follows are the inputs from two Institutions who are involved and two from concerned individuals. Hamazor solicited these viewpoints to give a fair overview of the subject but neither WZO nor Hamazor are in any way involved. Dates of submission have been included as facts may have altered since then. - Ed



Mumbai's verdant woods at the Doongerwadi. Photo credit Delzad Karani, courtesy Khojeste Mistree.

Left: Adult white-backed vulture in the wild. Courtesy Homi Khusrokhhan

# The Vultures & the Mumbai Dakhmas

The CEO, Mr Mehli Colah submits this statement to Hamazor, for and on behalf of the Board of Trustees, BPP, Mumbai.



The rites and rituals of passage namely of birth and death are integral to any religious order. In Zoroastrianism, the mode of disposal of the dead is to consign the body into a *dakhma*, popularly referred to as the “Tower of Silence”. This practice of exposure to the sun and the elements, with birds of prey effectively consuming the corpse, can be traced back to over 2500 years. Herodotus, the Greek historian, records this practice, as the one followed by the Persian Zoroastrians in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC.

This eco-sensitive method of disposal of our dead, stems from the belief that death in Zoroastrianism, is seen as the temporary triumph of evil and not the work of Ahura Mazda and therefore the body upon death, is viewed to be in a state of ritual impurity (*riman*). As a result of this theological position, where a *dakhma* exists, it is religiously prohibited to burn, bury or drown the impure corpse; as such acts desecrate, pollute and sully the creations of fire, earth and water. Zoroastrianism, advocates conservation of the elements as an act of faith and therefore the mode of disposal is seen to be hygienic and ecologically friendly.

There are three functioning *dakhmas* in Mumbai, of which two are always in use, with one *dakhma* being “rested”, periodically, for a few weeks at a time. Each *dakhma* can be used for over 150 corpses which are exposed to the natural elements of the sun, wind and rain, whilst the flesh is devoured by the crows, kites and vultures.

In the last 20 years, the vulture population has disappeared not because of high-rise buildings or an increase in urban population, but because of the drug diclofenac, injected by veterinarians, as a pain killer to livestock, mainly in the rural areas. It is now recognized, that the veterinary use of diclofenac is mainly responsible for the near extinction of the vulture population right across the Indian subcontinent and in parts of South-east Asia. It took a few years for scientists to discover that the use of diclofenac caused severe renal failure in the vultures. In the

case of the vulture, its habitat has not been invaded by man, but it is through the use of the drug diclofenac in the livestock population, which has resulted in the near disappearance of this noble bird. Hence, it is easier to arrest the decline of certain species of vultures by stopping the use of diclofenac in the veterinarian world and by using instead an alternative drug such as meloxicam. A step in the right direction was taken when the Government of India in 2006 banned the use of diclofenac for veterinarian use but unfortunately not for human use.

To enhance their understanding, some of the then BPP trustees visited the facilities both at Dr Vibhu Prakash's (BNHS) aviary in Pinjore, Haryana and one in Gloucestershire, England. In 2007, the then BPP board of trustees made contact with the director of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Dr Asad Rahmani, to see whether it was possible to build an aviary





over and around the Tower of Silence. Dr Vibhu Prakash, an expert in vulture breeding and management, visited the Doongerwadi complex and felt confident that an appropriate aviary could be constructed over and around the Tower of Silence, in order to house vultures in captivity. He prepared a viable plan and submitted a detailed costing for such a project. For similar objections as is being witnessed at present by certain factions, the project was not implemented by the BPP at that time. Over the years scientists and experts have gained greater hands-on knowledge on what caused the death of vultures and developed the expertise of how to breed vultures in captivity both in India and abroad.

In February 2012, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN-Asia) under the stewardship of Aban Kabraji, requested the Government of India to host a high powered symposium, in New Delhi in May 2012, with the cooperation of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and Homi Khusrokhhan (BNHS). Top scientists and experts from India and abroad, senior Indian Government officials and government representatives from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal attended this 2-day workshop. The BPP was represented by the Chairman and a Trustee at this symposium. A special breakaway session was held to specifically discuss the vulture issue connected to the Parsi mode of disposal of the dead, and so it was agreed at this session, that a follow-up meeting would be organized in Mumbai, and Government officials from New Delhi, namely the Central Zoo Authority representative, B S Bonal, the Director of the Wildlife Institute, P R Sinha, and some senior officials from the International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN) including Aban Kabraji would attend a follow up conference in Mumbai. Some office bearers of the BNHS and all the trustees of the BPP would together discuss and decide the modalities of how and when to set up the aviary facilities first over one and thereafter over two of the three *dakhmas* located in the Doongerwadi grounds.

This meeting was hosted by BNHS on the 19 July 2012, when aside from the above dignitaries, members of the Doongerwadi Advisory Committee including a few of the clergy attended. Broad agreement was reached by the concerned authorities as to the viability of the project. The main Aviary project would be set up at or around the Borivali National Park and a satellite aviary at Doongerwadi. We are just informed that the Government of Maharashtra have approved the project and the giving of land at Borivali for implementing the same. Once this is done the funds aspect will be catered by the CZA.

What is heartening is that the authorities are ready to give us up to 60 juvenile and adult Himalayan Griffon vultures for each Dakhma. These are non-endangered species and being the largest are more resistant to diclofenac and their life is well over 50 years. Thus these vultures can



Himalayan Griffon in captivity in VCBC, Pinjore. Courtesy Homi Khusrokhhan

immediately start feeding on our corpses. But with one corollary – that all corpses consigned to the Aviary Dakhma have to be ensured that they are diclofenac free atleast 72 hours before demise. We are hopeful that the necessary permissions will be given by both the State and Central Governments to the BNHS which will run this project as a contractor on behalf of the BPP. Chairman of the BPP, Mr Dinshaw Mehta stated that, *“the return of the vultures to the Towers of*

*Silence has long been a dream of the BPP. Today, we have taken the first – but a very significant step – towards making that dream a reality.* Thus in the interest of upholding the practices of our faith, Parsis and Iranis wishing to take the Dakhma-Vulture route will have to ensure that they do not take diclofenac in any formulation whatsoever. For this to happen, an aggressive educational and media campaign will be launched by the BPP.

It is to be noted that diclofenac is not a life saving drug but only a pain killer, the most commonly used formulation of which is 'voveron' for which there are umpteen equally potent substitutes available like 'combiflam' which does not contain diclofenac. We are now awaiting the verdict of the Council of Priests on the religious aspects of the project after which we will be approaching the community at large by holding Samast Anjuman meetings as well as going to each and every colony and baug to ascertain the views of the rank and file before implementing the project. The bringing back of the vultures by the construction of an aviary over and around the Towers of Silence will be a superb example of the possible close integration, of religious practice and modern conservation techniques. This historic project will not only support the integration of science and technology with the practice of an ancient faith, but it will also in turn reflect the Parsi Irani community's commitment to conservation.

It is the presence of the Parsi Towers of Silence, which has enabled the survival of an urban forest largely untouched for over 300 years; this forest is also the only green lung, in the heart of South Mumbai. It is in this urban forest environment, that the present Board of the BPP Trustees would like to bring back the vultures as a consequence of a natural alliance between Religion and Conservation.

[Received on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012]



## Can Vultures return to Doongerwadi – some pros and cons

Homi R Khusrookhan, President of BNHS and a Member of the WZO Managing Committee places the facts before Hamazor readers.

**T**he sudden loss of South Asia's vulture populations has created enormous problems for rural communities in India and neighbouring countries that once relied on these natural scavengers for the swift and cost-free disposal of the carcasses of large farm animals. One solitary urban community that has also suffered in terms of a pressing social need have been the Parsis of Mumbai, where at Doongerwadi they have been struggling to maintain the semblance of a once efficient system that, in the opinion of some, has with the disappearance of the vultures, broken



A flock of adult Long-billed vultures in captivity

down. In 2004, it was proved beyond doubt that the indiscriminate use of diclofenac a non-steroidal anti inflammatory drug (NSAID) on farm animals had resulted in the catastrophic fall of 97-99% in vulture populations. Any talk of bringing vultures back to Doongerwadi was earlier met with the response that the birds would soon be wiped out because Parsis, like most other humans, did use the drug diclofenac for

relief from pain and inflammation. Conservationists felt strongly at the time that in no way should an endangered species of birds be exposed to this additional hazard.

At a recent Scientific Symposium in Delhi, where conservation organisations like IUCN

(International Union for the Conservation of Nature), BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society), RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and the representatives of the Governments of India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh and Nepal met, a concerted pan-regional programme for Vulture Recovery was drawn up based on, among other things, the work started

by BNHS-RSPB-Government of India in 2006 and the successes achieved by countries like Nepal in creating vulture-safe zones. In one of the break-out sessions at this seminar, a group met to discuss how, if the recovery programme of the BNHS, presently running in the North and East of India is now extended to Maharashtra, it could become possible to restore the vultures to Doongerwadi. The group felt it was workable if done along the following lines:

(a) Together with the Main Vulture Breeding Centre proposed to be set up on the outskirts of Mumbai (at Govt. cost) there could be another Satellite Centre at Doongerwadi

(b) This satellite centre would become the fifth such centre managed by BNHS,

(c) The BNHS staff would maintain and carefully monitor the requisite bird populations needed for captive breeding and these same birds which would be held in large enclosures similar to those at the centres in the North and East (over one or two Dakhmas), so that they could also provide the scavenging service that they have carried earlier out over the centuries,

(d) The Wildlife Institute of India and the Central Zoo Authority would permit a non-endangered surrogate species of vulture (the Himalayan Griffon) to be placed at this centre for a year or so, till the safety of the birds was assured. These birds would thereafter be replaced by an equivalent number of Oriental White Backed Vultures and Long Billed Vultures (the traditional inhabitants of the Doongerwadi forest) if the initial results are successful.

The big question-mark during the discussions was how one would ensure that bodies placed in these Dakhmas are diclofenac-free? While an invasive post-mortem test would be the only conclusive way of providing a risk-free environment for the vultures, it was clear that with the aversion most middle-eastern faiths like Parsis and Jews have to autopsies, this would not be possible. However, it was felt that because we are dealing with a literate and educated community it should not be difficult to encourage those of the community who wish to opt for Dokhmenashini to stop using the drug. Diclofenac is retained in the body of a living person for 48 hours (maximum 72 hours) before it is excreted. This it was felt was not a big 'ask' for people who feel passionately about the system, particularly when the drug in question has substitutes and is not life-saving, to choose another substitute. The BPP would have to carry out the



Adult Long-billed vulture perched

necessary awareness and education campaign among the community. Self-discipline and a (truthful) declaration by relatives were seen as being workable and hopes were held out that a non-invasive dip-stick diagnostic, presently under development, if proved successful, could also be employed. The other safeguard agreed was to continue to retain the solar concentrators over one / two Dakhmas for cases where there is a risk of exposure to the drug during the last 72 hours before death.

Unfortunately, as often happens within this community, news about the project was greeted with mixed views – blessings and expressions of gratitude that at last someone was doing something positive about the Doongerwadi problem at one end of the spectrum and skepticism, unfortunately based on alarmist and misleading press reports, together with allegations of misuse of Charity Funds, at the other.

The 'Pros' in this case are, undeniably, the restoration of a traditional system of disposal of the dead that the original donors of these properties had in mind when these were handed over to the BPP in 1884, retaining the forest cover of the land – one of the last remaining lung-spaces of the city and an improvement over current practices employed today at Doongerwadi in the absence of the birds. The fortuitous coming together of conservation organisations and the Government in this case which makes the initiative possible today is not something that is likely to recur in the near future, if this opportunity is missed.

The 'Cons' are, of course, the cost of the project, the questionable chances of success, concerns from the orthodox about juddins entering the property and the risk that the BPP would be exposing itself to the risk of loss of the property. Some argue that the money could be better spent for the living than on the dead.

It would be inappropriate for me as President of BNHS to go into the merits and

demerits of each of the above. The answer to me lies in keeping an open mind, not committing excessive amounts of charity funds till it is proven that the system works and maintaining an openness and transparency throughout the process of dialogue, that should be seen as inevitable and in fact desirable when it comes to social change. It also means striking the right balance between the judicious apportionment of funds between benefits for the living and respect for the dignity of dead – something where each individual must take his or her own personal view.

[Received on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012]



Long-billed vulture nestling



A Chartered Accountant and a MSc. (Econ.) from the LSE, Homi Khusrookhan worked for 29 years with Glaxo in India and retired in 2000 as MD. Thereafter he was appointed MD of Tata Tea and later Tata Chemicals. After his retirement in 2008 he served as Special Adviser to the Government-appointed Board of Satyam to assist with the turnaround of the company.

## *Aviary at Doongerwadi - A Perilous Proposition*

**I**t is a pity, nay a crying shame that today the community is destroying itself from within due to the cussedness of just a few. It is a fact that today in the absence of the big birds of prey the system of *dokhmenashini* has been considerably weakened. But, it is also a fact that way back in 1973 when there were reasonable number of vultures, the then sitting trustee of the BPP, Late S R Vakil had entered one of the *dokhmas* and warned about the system being a potential health hazard.

It is to everyone's knowledge that the huge *doongerwadi* estate and its entire infrastructure is held in trust for the sole purpose of disposal of the dead through the system of *dokhmenashini* and not for risky scientific experiments and bird conservation programmes (no matter how laudable) involving partnerships with various government, semi-government and quasi-government organizations.

*by noshir dadrawala*

The idea to construct an aviary at *Doongerwadi* is at least a decade old. The idea is now back in the news. For the uninitiated an aviary is a large enclosure (a cage if you wish to sound crass) to keep birds. Doubtlessly, the aviary project is not only ambitious but adventurous too, and it may well turn out to be a remedy worse than the malady.

The purpose of the aviary is seemingly laudable. However, rather than solving the problem, it is likely to create fresh tribulations leading to total system failure. This is what the trustees need to keep uppermost in mind.

Public memory is short and one needs to be reminded that when the Internationally renowned expert on raptors, Jemima Parry-Jones of The National Birds of Prey Centre in the UK, visited Mumbai and the *Doongerwadi* complex in the year 1999, she had made a few objective observations.

Among other things Jemima Parry-Jones had observed that:

- “The aviary would require about **300 vultures to perform the daily task** of removing the bodies and that **the idea is fraught with potential problems**”;
- “First we have to find 300 healthy vultures, and **nobody has ever put 300 vultures in an aviary before** — we don't know what will happen if these birds are fed exclusively on human flesh. Wild birds have a much more varied diet. And with such a large number of birds, extensive maintenance would be required to keep the birds healthy and the aviary looking and smelling clean”;
- “There is also the issue of creating an aviary large enough for the birds to feed, bath, roost, and fly”;
- “The Parsis have relied on vultures for two thousand years to sort out their dead, but, this community wants to continue an ancient tradition in a modern world **without having any understanding of the needs of these birds**”.

Indeed, the vulture is a very shy bird. It's one thing confining them in an aviary and quite another expecting these birds bred in captivity by humans and fed on freshly slaughtered animals to swoop down and devour human corpses!

Also, considering an average 600 bodies being consigned to the towers in Mumbai every year, will there be enough birds to dispose the number of bodies consigned? And, when the aviary is constructed will it be constructed by Parsi volunteers or non-faith members?

Further, once the aviary is built over one or more *dokhma* there is no way the body will receive adequate sunlight defeating the scriptural principle of *Khurshed Nigerashni* or exposure to the purifying rays of the sun!

And, one simply shudders to think how cleanliness and maintenance will be managed inside the aviary and by whom and how? Not only will the natural ambiance and aesthetics of *Doongerwadi* get marred by this grotesque enclosure but it will be an eyesore for mourners to see the mortal remains of their loved ones being taken to a bird cage.

The pain killer Diclofenac seems to be one of the causes for vulture deaths and there are said to be 1,051 combinations of Diclofenac. Prof Green and others have stated that even inconsequential amounts of Diclofenac in a cadaver, ranging from 0.004-0.16 ug/g are enough to kill vultures. And, of course, NSAIDs (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) such as indomethacin, flunixin, meglumide, ketoprofen, metamizole, naproxen, phenylbutazone, analgin, nimesulide, paracetamol, carprofen, flunixin, and ibuprofen could also cause mortality in vultures.

Every corpse taken to the aviary would have to be tested very carefully for the above drugs. The slightest error could kill all the vultures. Testing of corpses at *Doongerwadi* will be yet another trauma mourning families must subject themselves to.

All said and done, the idea of constructing an aviary at *Doongerwadi* is fraught with several dangers. It is an experiment that's just too risky. The question that each of the seven BPP trustees should ask himself / herself is:



Mumbai's dakhma with the wooded land, taken 40 years ago. Courtesy Jehangir Patel, Parsiana

**“If this experiment was on my personal estate, at my personal expense, using my own private wealth, would I take this risk?”** ■■■

[Received on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012]



Noshir H Dadrawala is Chief Executive of the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy and a Director on the Board of the International Centre for Nonprofit Law. He is also member of the Asian Philanthropy Advisory Network. He is author of several books and teaches at a number of Business Schools in India. He often speaks and writes on community issues.

## *Excerpts from Dastur Khurshed Dastoor's Public Statement on the proposed Aviary - 4 October 2012*

As Dastur Khurshed Dastoor's statement received by me is rather lengthy on the proposed aviary at the Doongerwadi, I have taken the liberty of sharing the pertinent points. - Ed.



**T**he proposal to establish an aviary is nothing new. It was considered earlier too in 1999 / 2000 by BPP but did not fructify as some of the aspects of the aviary were found to be doctrinally unacceptable, and about which some of the Dasturjis had written to BPP.

I am rather surprised that the views found in 1999 / 2000 have now been given a go by in 2012.

There are three important issues that should be considered and resolved before the aviary proposal is introduced.

- ◆ Some contradictions on the issue of feeding alternate diet of different meats to the birds in the aviary.
- ◆ The issue of vultures being mortally affected by diclofenac administered cadavers.
- ◆ The issue of netting covering the proposed aviary with an active Dokhma.

### **Some contradictions on alternate diet to be fed to the vultures:**

This is an extremely contentious but vital issue about which contradictory statements have been made.

- ◆ Excerpts from letter dated June 21, 2000 addressed to BPP by Dasturji Kaikhusroo M Jamasp Asa & Dasturji Firoze M Kotwal:

**“We see no objection to providing alternative diets for the vultures within the aviary complex, providing it is done discreetly, without affecting the visual sentiments of our people”.**

- ◆ Excerpts from letter dated June 23, 2000 addressed to BPP by Dasturji Dr Hormazdiar K Mirza, Er's Rooyinton Peer, Parvez Bajan, Peshotan Mirza & Dr Homi Dhalla:

**“Of all the priests present at the meeting, Dasturji Dr Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa was the only one who gave his opinion, although hesitantly, that placing of carcasses outside the dokhmas is permissible. Dr Hormazdiar Mirza expressed his objection, but in the melee, he was hardly heard. All of us voiced our dissent too. We would like this to be minuted”.**

- ◆ Excerpts from letter dated June 30, 2000 addressed to BPP by Dasturji Kaikhusroo M Jamasp Asa:

The letter mentions – “In view of the letter dated 23 June 2000, written by my revered colleague Dastur Dr Mirza and others, I do not wish to be involved in the present Doongerwadi Controversy.

“However, I wish to clarify once and for all that I have always maintained and strongly preferred that the Dokhmenishini system should continue, that is to bring back the vultures to Doongerwadi; **though I am not happy at the thought of an aviary.**”

- Excerpts from letter dated November 09, 2000 addressed to BPP by Dasturjis - Late Hormazdyar Mirza, Jamasp Asa, Kotwal, Late Meherji Meherjirana, Late Noshirwan Dastur, Late Kaikobad Dastoor, Late Hormazdiar Dastoor.

In the above communication excerpts from the interim report of Ms Jemima Parry Jones regarding the necessity of feeding supplementary diet to birds of goat, cows etc has been mentioned; also training fledgling vultures to feed.

**On being informed that such actions would violate the very principles of dokhmenishini, it has been mentioned that Ms Jemima Parry Jones response was “Then there will be problems”.**

The signatories of the above letter have therefore categorically concluded **“Before any money of the community is spent on the questionable project, we urge the Trustees of Bombay Parsi Punchayet to take note of our serious protest to this most obnoxious practise which is proposed to be introduced on the doongerwadi premises”.**

On page 16 of the present proposal of BNHS, (which Dasturjis Jamasp Asa, Kotwal, Mirza & Dastoor have not only endorsed but also advised BPP to undertake expeditiously), it has been mentioned – “The vultures at doongerwadi may not require any supplementary feeding but during quarantine they will have to be given diclofenac free goat meat”. The same paragraph later goes on to say “It is important to have an understanding about feeding the birds at Doongerwadi during emergent situations should they arise. They may have to be fed chopped up goat meat if supplementary feeding is required in emergencies and an agreed process for doing this that will not interfere with religious custom / sentiment may require to be agreed in advance.”

- The WAPIZ page of 28<sup>th</sup> September 2012 mentions the following about providing alternative meats to the vultures in the aviary:

“Some of the ultra orthodox feel strongly about alternative feed being fed to the vultures at Doongerwadi. The vultures will feed ONLY on human corpses at Doongerwadi. No alternative feed will be given to the vultures at Doongerwadi. This is an assurance given by Dr Vibhu Prakash, the Vulture expert who is setting up the aviary. In fact he has said that no meat will be given to the vultures even at the facilities set up at Ambavadi, which is the place where the BPP’s non-Parsi staff are housed”.

The WAPIZ statement reproduced above is nothing but misinformation to mislead the community. **On enquiring with other BPP Trustees I was informed that no assurance has been given by BNHS or any of their personnel in line with what has been published in the WAPIZ page.**

### **Issue of vultures feeding on diclofenac administered cadavers:**

- In the minutes of the Doongerwadi committee meeting held on July 31, 2012, which excepting Dastur (Dr) Peshotan H Mirza and I, no other Dasturjis attended, it has been recorded that Dr Homi Dhalla once again emphasized by quoting Dr Green, a global



authority as having determined that even 0.008% of diclofenac in a human cadaver can kill a vulture and hence one diclofenac administered cadaver has the potential to exterminate 200 vultures at a time.

- ◆ No action has been taken as on date by BPP to obtain written opinions of well known doctors whether they would be agreeable to forgo use of the pain killer drug 'diclofenac' in Parsi patients. The correct course of action should first be to ascertain whether it would be legal for medical practitioners to consider non medical issues such as welfare of vultures when treating patients to relieve their pain and discomfort due to various ailments.

Are we seriously so naive as to believe that except for a minuscule minority, community members would opt to endure pain just for the welfare of vultures?

- ◆ It is also very important that before embarking on the project, BPP should first present a scientific paper on the methodology they would use to differentiate which human cadaver contains traces of diclofenac and which are diclofenac free.
- ◆ Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of BNHS, has in a letter dated August 17, 2009 addressed to Mr Khojeste Mistree, Trustee of BPP written - **"I hope you will remember that we had detailed discussions on this issue with you and your colleagues and we had specifically said that unless members of your community stop using diclofenac, it will not be advisable to use the vultures for disposing off the bodies because they will die of kidney failure, as happens when they feed on live stock carcasses injected with veterinary diclofenac"**.

In the same letter it has been mentioned in the penultimate paragraph **"Looking to the situation of widespread use of human diclofenac as a pain killer by your community, we are not interested to start any vulture conservation breeding centre in Mumbai"**.

**After these categorical views have been made known, in my opinion, it would amount to a breach of ethics on the part of BPP Trustees to rush into this project before first taking necessary steps to eradicate the use of diclofenac drug in the community?**

### **The issue of netting covering the proposed aviary with an active Dokhma**

- ◆ Dasturji (Dr) Kaikhusroo M Jamasp Asa in a letter dated June 06, 2001 addressed to Dr Homi Dhalla, whilst expressing reservations about solar panels has written the following:

**"In my opinion, from a strict doctrinal point of view, the rays of the sun must fall naturally upon the body to ensure khurshed nigarishni as understood in the texts"**.

**Further, I have grave reservations if it will be possible to construct an aviary and connect it with an active dokhma through netting by using an exclusive Zoroastrian volunteer force. Even with the best of intentions, skilled labour will be required for such a project.**

**I have come to the conclusion that to introduce the aviary project without addressing the various concerns will not be in the interest of the community but will ultimately result in the total collapse of the system of dokhmenishini.**



# Corpse-bearers (*nasusalars*) in the Zoroastrian Communities of India and Iran: Origins and Transformation

A

## Corpse-bearers in the Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India :

According to the tenets of the Zoroastrian faith described in the 19th book of Avesta entitled Videvdat (Vendidad) or the “Law Against Devas (Demons)” a body after death is possessed by the demon *Nasu* that defiles it: “Directly after death, as soon as the soul has left the body ... the Drug Nasu comes and rushes upon him, from the regions of the north, in a shape of a raging fly ...”<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, any contact between the dead matter and what is regarded by Zoroastrians as ‘pure spheres’ like earth, water and, especially, fire, is prohibited. Videvdat established ritual regulations in dealing with *Nasu*. The most appropriate way to dispose of a corpse in ancient Persia was its exposure in a dakhma, a place where it was left in order to be consumed by wandering scavengers, chiefly the vultures now days known by the Persian name (*lashekhora*) or corpse-eaters, and wild dogs: “O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Whither shall we bring, where shall we lay the bodies of the dead, O Ahura Mazda? – Ahura Mazda answered: ‘On the highest summits (on the top of a mountain), where they know there are always corpse-eating dogs and birds’”.<sup>2</sup>

by anton zikov

This mode of disposal was in use in Iran till the 1960s and is still prevalent over the traditional Parsi sites of India, primarily, in Gujarat and Maharashtra.\*

As mentioned, Zoroastrian purity laws also put a strict ban on any contacts between the dead and living beings. Even relatives of the deceased are not allowed to touch the dead. A body is carried to dakhma by corpse-bearers or *nasusalars* (“the ones who control the demon *nasu*”). They are thus contaminated by *Nasu* until undergoing a purifying bath (i.e. special ceremony of washing the body with *gaomez* (Avest) or *taro* (Guj) or bull’s urine), which is called upon to clean them from the contact with the demon. In Iran, where burial in cemeteries or *aramgahs* has replaced dakhmas, no *nasusalars* can be found at present, except for one person and his son, who used to do this work at the dakhmas of Qasimabad, a village on the outskirts of Yazd before it was banned in the Shah

period. In India *nasusalars* that work in dakhmas are now very few in numbers, according to our preliminary estimates they are about 34 \* with 17 working at the *Doongerwadi* site in Mumbai, six in Surat, five in Navsari, five in Pune and one in the village of Bharuch.

This article, due to its limited format, explores the origins of the ‘*nasusalar*’ phenomenon in Avestan texts and its latter commentaries and further the historical mentioning of *nasusalars* in Iran and India in modern period in both internal (Persian Rivayats) and external (European traveller’s accounts) sources. It tries to answer a question who were the *nasusalars* in the Parsi community since its settlement in India as compared to the original idea attributed to this term in Videvdat. The original thesis which this article is based upon goes further and intends to cast light on the social position of *nasusalars*, with particular attention attached to the current

situation in the Parsi community, based on author's field research conducted in 2010-11, to which this article can be regarded as a necessary historic introduction, that, to a large extent, explains the current situation.

### What does Videvdat mean by the term 'nasusalar'?

The translator of the Videvdat, James Darmesteter, makes the following note: "[These people are] corpse-bearers or *nasu-kasha*. 'The corpse must be carried by two persons ..., no matter who they are; they may be a man and a woman, or two women'"). From this text we see no reference to a particular class or group of people in charge of the funeral ceremonies. Interestingly, the term "nasusalar" in other parts of Videvdat is used as an attribute and describes not only those who actually carry the dead body but to the priests who lead the ceremony. "Afterwards the corpse-bearers shall sit down, three paces from the dead, and the holy Ratu\* shall proclaim ..."

According to another Darmesteter's note: "The priest who directs the funerals [is] 'the chief of the *Nasu-kashas*'.<sup>3</sup>

In the translation of the Pahlavi Videvdat the passage that first mentions the term "nasusalar" bears a slightly different meaning: "They shall find out two men for-it [to conduct a funeral - AZ], most agile (most industrious), cleanest (most instructed for the work); naked, without clothes (again those who carry to the whole) on the support of earth or of stone in mortar lining (to the kata). They shall lay

him [the corpse - AZ] down on the earth, over which the corpse-devouring dog or the corpse-devouring bird may certainly know him."<sup>4</sup> This translation emphasizes the qualities of the people who are to execute the nasusalar job, in other words the criteria for eligibility to carry *nasu* or dead matter. These criteria do not include a person's descent from a certain class of people (or prohibition of this job for people of a certain social, for instance priestly, origin), but basically stress that the body should not be carried by the one who is not prepared ("most entrusted" or "skilful" as in Darmesteter's translation) for the job. The Videvdat drives us to a logical suggestion that the work of nasusalars could have been undertaken by any man or woman from the Zoroastrian community. A corpse-bearer had to recite certain prayers while carrying the body and to have undergone the purification ceremonies open only to those who were initiated into Zoroastrian religion. Thus, according to the Videvdat it was impossible for a non-Zoroastrian to do the nasusalar job. Thus the nasusalar job is represented in the Videvdat not as a professional post or hereditary occupation of a certain group of people, who were to remain in it, but rather as a service, either paid or voluntary, that was undertaken by anyone.

### Understanding of 'nasusalar' in the Persian Rivayats

The Persian Rivayats are "mostly the compositions of the dasturs of Persia, who lived in Persia in the XV to XVIII century", or "collections of religious traditions ... contained the replies and information collected by some special messenger who had been sent by some of the chief Parsis in India, to obtain the opinions of the Parsis in Persia regarding certain particulars or religious practice"<sup>5</sup>. Most of the Rivayats discuss the instances of implementation of the rules described in Videvdat, including those concerning the treatment of *nasu* and the nasusalar duties. Unfortunately, none of the Rivayats give a straight definition of nasusalars' origin, however many of them specify persons who



Mr Shahriye - the last nasusalar of Yazd. He worked in the Qasimabad (a village on the outskirts of the city) since the age of eight and saw the ban on its use by the Shah authorities in the mid-70s.

can act as nasusalars in certain circumstances.

The Kama Bohra Rivayat (1528) while describing the weather conditions under which the corpse should be carried to dakhma mentions "... then several persons (i.e. nasusalars) should form themselves into pairs (with a *paivand*) and there where they want to place the nasa (on the road when it is raining) they should hold the ends of the blanket ..." <sup>6</sup>. In the Kaus Kama Rivayat (1694) on the same matter we also find: "the dead bodies should be taken away (in the manner prescribed above) because both (nasusalars, as well as the other carriers) should have their hands over that" <sup>7</sup>.

The quoted translation was done by the Parsi scholars and published in 1932 (reprinted in 1999). If we compare it with the collection of the original extracts from the text in Persian published in 1922 <sup>8</sup> we see that the parts in brackets are added by the translator. Speaking about the first quoted piece the author of the Rivayat just puts the Persian verb in the plural when speaking about the subject of action. The author does not mention the word "nasusalars" when he talks about the people who should carry the body. The second quoted piece is even more interesting. In English translated from Persian, "When (they) are carrying (or lifting) *nasa* every one among these people who are in pairs must put his hand on it" <sup>9</sup>. This part of Rivayats is an example that demonstrates that when its author referred to the nasusalars or the corpse bearers he probably meant "they who carry the body, i.e. do the nasusalar job" must do it so that this job should be taken care of in a certain way. In the translation however, we frequently find the word "nasusalar" put in brackets instead of simply "they who carry", as the author most probably referred to a particular professional class of persons, served as nasusalars, that exists in the Parsi community. This class of professional nasusalars was used by the author as synonym to the plural pronoun use in the original text.

The same Rivayats however provide us with the eligibility criteria for conducting the nasusalar service. With the reference to Kama Bohara and Kaus Kama Rivayats the author of the book dedicated to laws on purity and pollution in Zoroastrianism Jamshed Choksy provides the following explanation of the nasusalar profession: "In order to prevent spread of pollution and attack by the Corpse Demoness, a *special class of persons arose whose profession involves transport of corpses to funerary towers* [italics added]. These individuals are termed corpse-bearers ... Men, women in menses or who have miscarried or had still born child, men and women together, or boys over the age of eight may serve as corpse bearers" <sup>10</sup>. In the original translation of the Rivayats this passage is as follows:

"He who knows how to dispose of the corpse (in a proper manner) should carry it. A boy eight years old, who knows how to dispose of it properly, can carry it away. Two menstruous women will do. Two nasa women, ie. who have brought forth still born children may carry the corpse" <sup>11</sup>.



Dakhma in Qasimabad



Inside the dakhma in Qasimabad

The part of this text, which immediately strikes the reader, contains the permission for women who have given birth to a

stillborn child or, moreover, women in their period to carry the dead bodies, which would be a difficult job to do for them for simple physical reasons. The translator of the 1932 edition of the Rivayats Bamanji Dhabar explains this inconsistency by a mistake of the original translator from Pahlavi if this particular part, which in his view should be properly rendered as: "*Every one who understands the care of nasa will do* [italics added]. Two boys, eight years old, who understand the care (of nasa) will do. A woman free from menstruation or, a woman, who has not given birth to a stillborn child, or a man or a woman and a boy eight years old will do"<sup>12</sup>. This translation resolves the controversy demonstrating that the translation of the Rivayat from Pahlavi into Persian was done wrong, misleading its later commentators. The correctness on this version is proved by extract from the other Rivayats, such as Rivayat of Shapur Baruchi (precise date unknown but approximately 1560) that explicitly prohibits this practice: "If nasusalars are (two) unclean women, it is not proper [the word "two" in brackets is added by the translator – AZ.]"<sup>13</sup>.

However the most interesting phrase in the given passage is the first: "He who knows how to dispose of the corpse (in a proper manner) should carry it. This phrase suggests that actually the job of nasusalar could be done by anyone who knew and was able to carry it out in the prescribed way. This explanation of this phase correlates with the earlier note on the translation of the Rivayats, where the Persian uses the plural form of the verb and the translator adds the word nasusalars in brackets.

The original authors of the Rivayat by omitting the word nasusalars and deliberately using the plural form of the word might have simply meant the pronoun they, in the sense of all those who know how to do and can do that job. In other word the translation of the earlier quoted bit from the Rivayat of Kaus Kama should be understood in the following manner: "the dead bodies should be taken away (in the

manner prescribed above) because both (people knowledgeable of doing this job or acting as nasusalars (conducting the nasusalar service) on this occasion) should have their hands over that"<sup>14</sup>. In other translation provided by Dhabar this interpretation is demonstrated even more vividly: "Every one who understands the care of nasa will do".

Although the Rivayat above contains the list of various types of persons able to conduct the nasusalar job the Rivayats generally assume that this person, notwithstanding their sex must be a Zoroastrian or Behdin. However, this rule was not always strictly observed by the Parsis in India. In the Rivayat of Nariman Hoshang (1478), considered to be the earliest collection of correspondence between the mobeds of India and Iran there is a continuous mention of "misconduct" of the burial ceremonies by the Parsis from the Iranian Zoroastrians point of view. Particularly, the Iranian mobeds disapproved of the India practice of using non-Zoroastrians as carriers of the Parsi corpses. "The corpses of Behdins should not be carried by unbelievers (kafir) to the dakhma. Whether (the corpses be of our) grandfathers or fathers, these, if uplifted, should be uplifted by Behdins, but it is not proper according to the good religion that unbelievers may uplift them"<sup>15</sup>. The later translator of this Rivayat Ervad Bamanji Nusserwanji Dhabar adds the following note to this text: "As said here, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and thereabout, the corpses of Zoroastrians were handled by Jud-dins and as said in another Rivayat, even the gahan (ie. the bier) was made of wood"<sup>16</sup>. Later in the same Rivayat we find another mention of the same Parsi "wrongdoing": again, it has been represented (to us) that the nasa of men, dogs and other nasas are ordered to be lifted by infidels and juddins and they take them to the dad-gah. This is bad, odious and not good. There is greater crime thereof, because it is said in the religion of Ormazd and Zaratosht that is they knowingly order juddins to lift up these nasas, then if the juddins go near water of fire, that person who has issued orders is responsible for the sin. Lifting up a corpse is

the work of Behdins”<sup>17</sup>. In the other Rivayat of Jasa we also have the same strict attitude toward the religion of the corpse-bearers: “Two nasusalars who are men of the good religion are essential”<sup>18</sup>. These texts evidently show that non-Zoroastrians were used in India as nasusalars at least in the XV century, quite contrary to the regulations of Videvdat.

Part II to be continued in the next Hamazor, Issue 1/2013.

### Notes:

✦ The present article is based on the Master’s thesis defended at the University of Oxford in 2011.

1. Vd 7.2: Darmesteter J. *The Zend-Avesta*. Part 1. The Videvdat. Oxford: OUP, 1887 (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, reprint 2005), p.75.

2. Vd 6.45: Ibid., p.73.

✦ Dakhmas are in use in other places, where Parsi colonies traditionally existed, such as Pakistan’s largest city Karachi. In diaspora dakhmas are neither in use by Parsis nor Iranian Zoroastrians.

\*Author’s own estimate. When speaking about the Parsi community, it is important to distinguish between nasusalars and khandias, the first normally having direct access to dakhmas and the second usually carrying the bier with the body on their shoulders (khandha in Guj) outside.

3. Vd 8.10: Darmesteter, p.95-6, n.2.

4. Vd 8.10: Anklesaria B.T. *Pahlavi Videvdat* (ed. By Kapadia D.D.). Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1949 (reprint 2002), p.189

5. Dr West quoted by Modi J J *Oriental conference papers: papers read at the Oriental conferences held in India / by Jivanji Jamshedji Modi*. Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1932, p.255-6.

6. Dhabar B.N. *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framroze*. (1932) Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1999, p.120.

7. Ibid.

8. Unvala M. R. *Darab Hormazyar’s Rivayat / With an introduction by Shamsul-ulma Jivanji Jamshedji Modi*. Volume 1, 2. Bombay: British India Press, 1922.

9. Ibid., p.116.

10. Choksy J.K. *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism. Triumph Over Evil*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989, p.107-8.

11. Dhabar B.N. *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framroze*. (1932) Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1999, p.120.

12. Ibid., p.121.

13. Ibid., p.122.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p.108-9.

16. Ibid., p.109 n.2.

17. Ibid., p.162-3.

18. Ibid.



Anton was born in Moscow, Russia. He has developed his interest in Indian studies while being educated at the Moscow Hindi Boarding school. He did his BA in Oriental Studies from Moscow State University of International Relations†and currently is a candidate for MPhil in Modern South Asian Studies at the

University of Oxford. His interests include social hierarchies in Aryan societies, caste in non-Hindu religious communities and narrative of purity and pollution in Zoroastrianism and Judaism. He has a linguistic background in Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Hebrew.

## PARZOR’s Project

Textile designer Ashdeen Lilaowala’s *Threads of Continuity*, currently a work-in-progress book on kusti weaving is to be launched by Parzor Foundation on NowRuz 2013.

For the book, the weaving intricacies were documented in Navsari, the twin city of Surat in Gujarat, which has a small but steady Parsi population and where women still weave it in the traditional way. The book will have interviews with practitioners of the craft, priests closely associated with the Navjot ceremony, academics, historians and cultural experts commenting on the link between craft and ritual and ordinary Parsi women who practice Zoroastrian customs even now.

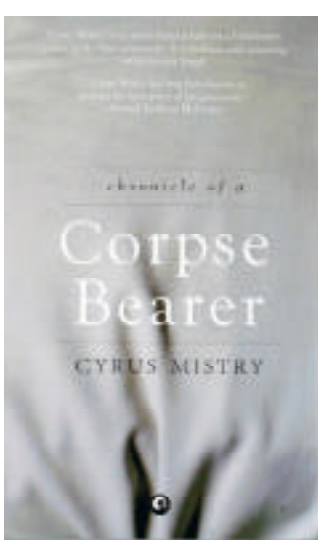
Order for the book can be placed in advance.



In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

## Cyrus Mistry's "Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer"

reviewed by anton zykov



Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer  
(Novel)  
By Cyrus Mistry  
Aleph Book Company  
ISBN 8192328058  
224pp.



Cyrus Mistry

A lot of Arabian Sea water has flowed under the bridge since 2006 when Dhan Baria put to the public scrutiny the notorious photos, exposing the misfortunate state of affairs in *Doongerwadi*<sup>1</sup>. Some called her a brave woman and a reformer, whereas others referred to Ms Baria as a renegade, quite a popular definition awarded by the more Orthodox-minded Bombay Parsis to their opponents. The conflict however was not sparked by this situation, but rather fuelled one of the everlasting debates in the community, others being mixed

marriage, conversion (or 'the Russian threat'), preservation of rituals, etc.

The discussion over the situation in the *dakhmas* has been raised endlessly in the Parsiana and Jam-e-Jamsheed editorials, web pages of ParsiKhabar and Anjuman meetings that discussed everything including the installation of solar lenses, possibility of cremation, alleged use of acid, replacement of *gaomez* or *taro* with pomegranate juice, the vulture extinction issue, etc., etc. However, the debate concentrated over the system of *dakhmenashini* often failed to mention the fate of *nasusalars* that work in these grave conditions. The recent book by Cyrus Mistry, brother of a famous Indo-Anglian writer and author of Parsi-focused *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, fills in this omission to a certain extent.

The narrator of the *Chronicle* ... is a 26-years old young Parsi who enters the *nasusalar* profession thought marrying a corpse-bearer's daughter. Mistry deliberately chooses this character that by virtue of possessing originally a higher status in society is able to look at the state of *nasusalars* from the view of an educated Parsi, at the same time being among his

fellow co-workers deprived of this level of education. For this purpose he even sacrifices the story's accuracy: Mistry makes his narrator an *athornan*, by mentioning his priestly origin (his father being a high priest in one of the Bombay's *agiaries*). Even more, Phiroze himself is 'training for the priesthood', whereas the Parsi tradition would not allow someone from the priestly class to conduct the ceremonies assigned or a corpse-bearer.

The romantic story between the main protagonist Phiroze and *nasusalar's* daughter Sepideh sounds slightly surrealistic when it comes to the real life. As a bit Mexican soup-opera like is the behavior of his father-in-law, Temoorus, a corpse bearer who dictates the son of an *agiar's* head priest "to live and work in the Tower of Silence" as the condition for his consent for the marriage to revenge for his sister's Rudabed life, ruined by Phiroze's father. Neither the motives for such a demand, nor the whole situation can find their reasonable justification or simply reflection. The later confession of a dying Temoorus, that he actually did not mean what he did even more complicates the whole plot.

But the complexity of the story can be sat aside when it comes to the main social message of the *Chronicle* ... Mistry uses the romantic line of his story as a tool that vividly demonstrates the contradiction between Phiroze's ordinary human wishes to be with his beloved and his father Framroze's 'hatred' and despise for the profession of a *nasusalar*, that he regards as "an insult to ... the family" of a priest. The author employs the father's voice as an example of a convinced orthodox, an advocate of purity, champion of religious dogmas, the type that one can easily find in the community today. This attitude is

epitomized in the following characteristic that Mistry gives to his personage: "personal hygiene and purity – the rules [that - AZ] according to my father, ... were essential prerequisites to spiritual progress".

In the eyes of his father Phiroze becomes 'a pariah', joining a 'sub-caste'. Mistry, maybe not too accurately theoretically or rather anthropologically, but obviously correctly *de facto*, openly calls *nasusalars* 'Parsi untouchables', who represent "a hereditary profession" that for generations is conducted by certain families that are subject to "self-imposed and socially enforced isolation". The last point remains relevant in the community till today with the rules of purity prohibiting corpse-bearers to dine with the rest of the Parsis, or directing them, when present at *jashans*, occupy a separate space away from the others, whom they potentially can defile. This perception of **permanent** contamination attached to *nasusalars* remains persistent, having although no basis in religious text, that rather regard a corpse-bearers fully clean, given that he has overcome a purifying ceremony, including the *nahn*.

Framroze, a passionate and strict ritual observer however finds his antagonists in the book in his own wife, Phiroze's mother Hilla and main character's school buddy Rohinton. Rohinton shows a substantial neglect for the necessity of the ritual. When Phiroze advises him to take a mandatory bath after getting back home from *Doongerwadi*, he dismissively cries: "*Aaargh* ... [italics by the author] Bullshit, all bull shit. Baloney. Makes no sense at all ...". Same attitude to the observance of purity is demonstrated by Hilla, who "would go into her monthly cycle ... without accepting quarantine. She would leave the menstruating room at will, wander around the house, touching anything and everything", thus committing a pure sin in the eyes of her own husband or, for instance, the Panchayat trustee Coyaji, as well as his other colleagues (upon entering the premises of the Panchayat the *khandias* and *nasusalars* are ordered the following: "Walk in quietly, please. Don't fidget, or touch anything along the way").

Mistry briefly touches upon other issues connected to the Parsi mode of funeral, such as drinking problem among the *nasusalars*, depicted in the figure of Temoorus; the extinction of the vultures from the Towers of Silence, witnessed by the main character himself throughout the decades of his service in *Doongerwadi* ("vultures have become extinct, even before Parsis could" - ironically states the narrator); installation of the solar lenses called upon to catch the sun rays that should improve the vulture's job. In an episode with the funeral of a Catholic raised half-Parsi, Mistry again, as in the case of Dhan Baria, combines the real history and debates in the Parsi community with his fiction.

Notwithstanding certain factual misinterpretations, that are certainly excused for an author of a fiction book, the author manages to bring to his audience the main idea – the somehow awkward doublespeak of certain community members when it comes to *nasusalars*, that are, as Phiroze unequivocally describes, "treated as dirt, the very embodiment of shit ... untouchable to the core".

These details depicting the ostracized position of corpse bearers among the other Parsis are stretched throughout the text. When Phiroze comes to his Dad to ask for a favour to do the *najvot* for his acquaintance born in a mixed marriage, who, being on the verge of his death, wishes himself to be consigned to a *dakhma*, he has to be very apologetic before his own father: "don't worry Papa, I've washed myself very carefully ... including application of *taro* ... as you taught me. (The mixed marriage issue is also slightly touched by the author, when Framroze, denying his son's request questions if "the vultures ... be willing to consume the product of a mixed marriage).

After the strike, yet another true story based plot that the first part of the *Chronicle* ... is dedicated to, the *Doongerwadi* workers are summoned for a reconciliation meeting with a trustee Coyaji in the time of which sandwiches and tea are served. The



narrator then wonders if “they smashed the cups and saucers after we drank from them”. (The willing of the Panchayat members, with all their fastidious attitudes, to accommodate the interests of the corpse-carriers on strike is explained by Mistry quite simply: “... nor would any self-respecting Parsi allow his near-and-dear ones to be handled by an untouchable Hindu or Muslim beggar”.) In the other episode, Phiroze “is almost certain ... that [a prayer at the fire temple - AZ] will save Seppy’s [his wife’s] life”. But he immediately drops this idea as “even just to set foot under the temple’s porch” Phiroze has to “first undergo a nine-day retreat of cleansing and self purification [*bareshnum nahn-e-dah shab* - AZ]”. The ritual isolation is combined in Mistry’s book with social stigma that extends not solely on corpse-bearers but their relatives as well, like in the story of a *nasusalar*’s daughter Vera, who after managing to secure a normal job, is fired after her boss’s son makes her a marriage proposal.

The stigma along with poor socio-economic conditions that gives way to the demand for the social rehabilitation and economic betterment has been put forward by *nasusalars* themselves as the strike story shows. In the author’s note Mistry describes this “unprecedented and never-to-be-repeated strike of *khandhias*”. In real life, if these demands are not taken seriously, sooner or later it will lead to the extinction of the corpse-bearers as it is gradually happening in some traditional Parsi centres, like Bharuch. Although many, if not the majority, of Parsis start realizing that *nasusalars* are, using the words of Dr Ramiyar Karanjia ‘an asset of the community’, but the “abuse [they] receive for doing a job no one else will touch”, well pointed out in Mistry’s book, remains there. Same opinion of corpse-bearers’, as Mistry puts it, “tremendous religious and social significance for the entire community” is expressed by Sepideh, or Seppy, the narrator’s wife: “if you guys [*nasusalars* - AZ] are so important to the Zarthostis, why don’t they provide you better working conditions?”

Parsi activists, from the part of community that is not ready to abandon *dakhmenashini*, do a lot to preserve it, putting their efforts in properly maintaining *Doongerwadi* and restoring the population of vultures, that have almost all together vanished in the last two decades. With the enthusiasm, stamina and commitment inextricably linked with the Parsis, this enterprise is likely to be successful. However, for obvious reasons, there is no room to apply the same strategy when it comes to *nasusalars*.

More liberal-minded in favour of cremation or ground burial are of the opinion that the *nasusalar* issue will be gone with the *dakhmas*. However, even the abolition of *dakhmas*, as it happened some 45 years back in the Zoroastrian community of Iran, will not be, as some might think, a remedy, as someone will inevitably have to conduct the last rituals. Thus, the problem is not in the *dakhmas per se* but rather in the attitude to, as Mistry refers to them, ‘the Lords of the Unclean’, which must be changed.

Alternatively, there is another way out of the existing situation, as the Baroda Parsi Panchayat (oddly enough also BPP) has recently demonstrated. After the passing away of the last corpse-bearer in the city the Anjuman decided, rather than to ‘import’ new ones from Bombay, to assign this duty to the Panchayat members, turning mostly hereditary profession into a volunteer service, the way it is described in *Videvdat* or the Kama Bohara and Kaus Kama *Rivayats*, that, elaborating on the eligibility criteria for conducting a *nasusalar* service in the beginning clearly states that “he who knows how to dispose of the corpse (in a proper manner) should carry it”<sup>2</sup>.

All and all, it is yet for the community to decide the future of their afterlife, but it is more important to give a thought about the present of *nasusalars*’ **nowlife**, something that Cyrus Mistry’s book, makes one consider.



## Notes

1. This real episode also finds its place towards the very end of the novel: “There was an incident as well, in which a middle-aged Parsi woman, who had recently lost her own mother, entered the restricted space of one of the Towers and took photographs of half-eaten corpses in an advanced state of decomposition. The photographs, published by a Parsi tabloid, immediately caused a great furore.

2. Dhabar B N Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framroze. (1932) Bombay: K R Cama Oriental Institute, 1999, p.120

# *Dhunjibhoy Bomanji Kalfati : 1862 - 1937*

A New Zealander, whose father was 'a kind of second cousin' has researched the life story of the "hale fellow, well met" Sir Bomanji, from what his father told him. Rusi Sorabji of Campbell, California, the writer once lived in Kalfati Mansion on Ghoga Street, Fort, Bombay having researched the rest from what is available on the Internet. Between the two, they have put together an interesting article so that Zarathushtis worldwide are aware of this protector of the our fire temples, Atash Behrams and agiaries of Bombay city and state, a hundred and one years ago. - author.



Through hard work, foresight, a little bit of luck and the proverbial gift of the gab, this tall and charming young man was able to amass a huge fortune from a young age. Dhunjibhoy arrived on the business scene in India with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in England and the arrival of the steam ships in India. For the first time there was a huge demand for labour required in the construction of cotton mills, gin factories and for servicing the requirements of the ever increasing number of ships steaming into the port of Bombay. Dhunjibhoy soon became a very large labour contractor and a coal loading contractor on steamships, first in Bombay and later England.

In 1911 when King George V arrived in Bombay, for his Coronation as Emperor of India and the Durbar in Delhi, the Parsis organized themselves to welcome the King. This was against the general wishes of the local population and the declaration by the majority of the citizens to boycott the event. It caused great animosity amongst the citizens and resulted in several days of rioting against the Parsi community. The angry crowds knowing that Parsis do not allow others from entering their fire temples, threatened to forcibly occupy and defile them.

*by rusi sorabji*

Dhunjibhoy, fearing the damage to the Atash Behrams, agiaries and defilement of the consecrated fires, called upon the strong men in his work-force, mostly Zoroastrians, to guard these houses of God from the rioting mobs. He armed his men with bamboos and other necessary but legally permitted arms to civilians at the time, making sure these men had a regular supply of the best food and drink. He personally visited all the fire temples throughout Bombay day and night, and at times accompanied by the British Commissioner of Police. Remember it is 1911, most of the time they walked through narrow streets and lanes. There were no cars and transportation was of the primitive horse and carriage. Because of this show of strength, influence and protection provided, the rioters were kept at bay and the fire temples were safeguarded.

Today, very few in Bombay (now called Mumbai) remember the trouble and actions taken by this 6 ft 6 in giant of a Zarathushti in keeping our consecrated fires hallowed and our places of worship safe. People like him elsewhere are immortalized in statues but unfortunately Sir Bomanji has been overlooked. Today through Hamazor it is possible to celebrate the initiative of Dhunjibhoy Bomanji Kalfati especially as its the centennial year or more correctly 'eak soe eak sal'.

When our hero and Lady Bomanji moved to England is not known. But according to The Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore's web page which lists "Illustrious Parsis" in different countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century, a mention is made of Bomanji.

## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

*"In the UK, the most prosperous Parsee family was Lady Freny and Sir Dhunjibhoy Bomanji Kalfati. The family lived in opulent luxury in a large estate along the banks of the Thames at Windsor named appropriately as The Willows. The current seat of the family is at Harrogate in Yorkshire".*

He is said to have owned a specially built Rolls Royce with an extra high roof. It is not known if it was a back problem that made it difficult for him to bend while entering it, or just that he detested bowing his head while getting into the Rolls. *[actually it was due to his height and having the means to have a custom built Rolls – Ed]*

He was a shrewd businessman but a very charitable soul. He was a well known donor in India as well, but he kept no records of the donations made. At a charity event in England, he outbid the highest bidder sought from the wealthy British nobility assembled, receiving the privilege to kiss Greta Garbo, - the famous and beautiful actress of the time, - on her forehead.

At the end of World War I, to honour the victorious Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armed Forces, he commissioned a bronze statue of the C-in-C on horseback. It may be of interest that it was Earl Haig who founded the Poppy Appeal way back at the end of the World War in 1918 or thereabouts. The poppy that was once worn all over the British Empire on 11<sup>th</sup> November as a day of remembrance of the fallen soldiers and to mark the Armistice Day, is still worn in the UK and Downunder.

Two theories which I came across were, that this 'act of thought-fullness' won him the knighthood; the second as reported on one of the web sites, that *"Sir Dhunjibhoy had given £1,000,000 (a considerable amount in those days) towards the war effort and his knighthood was in recognition that fact."*

For years the statue of Field Marshall Earl Haig on horseback stood at the entrance of Edinburgh Castle in Scotland exposed to the elements. However, some years ago it

was shifted inside the museum for restoration and preservation for posterity.

Of the English high society dinners during 1922, the much talked about, was the one which Lady Freny and Sir Dhunjibhoy hosted at the Ritz, London, on Novruz Day, March 21<sup>st</sup>, which was attended by a 'huge' number of dignitaries. Basking in the English high society they did not forget their roots nor the celebration of the Parsi religious festivals. Lady Bomanji was always at her elegant best, dressed in a sari worn the Parsi style.

It is said, that Sir Dhunjibhoy or the Kalfati family owned a lavish sea-front property with hundreds of acres of orchard land some 50 or 60 miles north of Bombay. This property was later turned into a naval base, off limits to the public.

The pictures taken from <http://theroyalwindsorforum.yuku.com/topic/679/Solved-Sir-Dhunjibhoy-Bomanji-and-The-Willows> throws additional light about this great Zarathushti's personality, lifestyle and the place he held in the British social circles. He passed away in 1937, survived by his much younger and beautiful wife. According to Lady Bomanji's letters to her son in 1940, the British Government requisitioned much of late Dhunjibhoy's original property during the Second World War and had to make do with reduced help in the house. Ultimately she moved out from the Willows for a smaller manageable accommodation. Her long letters to her son are available on the Internet.

[Written by Rusi Sorabji, Campbell, California  
Some information provided by Geve Narielwalla, New Zealand]

*Note: This brief account was sent by Mr Sorabji mid December 2011 for printing in Hamazor, Issue 1/2012. He also shared it by email to a couple of friends which somehow gravitated into a mass forward via email, though not carrying the author's name. Sharing knowledge / information is fine but one would expect the sharer to give due credit to the author. As there has been adequate lapse in time, the article is published now.- Ed.*





Sir & Lady Dhunjibhoy at the races



Mr Dhunjibhoy Bomanji handing the cheque for £5,000 to Princess Alice. (Occasion and date to be identified)



Sir & Lady Dhunjibhoy Bomanji  
National Portrait Gallery, London. By Bassano, whole-plate glass negative, 24 June 1922. Given by Bassano & amp; Vandyk Studios, 1974



Navroze dinner 21<sup>st</sup> March 1922 , at the Ritz Hotel, Piccadilly, London, hosted by Sir Bomanji, though the menu read The Parsee Association of Europe.



The original caption to this picture, believed to have been written by Lady Bomanji herself, reads: "Sitting from left: Mr Dhunjibhoy Bomanji, H.R.H. Princess Alice, Earl Haig, Mrs Dhunjibhoy Bomanji, The Earl of Athlone, Lady Mary Crichton. Standing from left: The Countess Haig, Captain Donald Simson, Mrs Carteret-Carey, Lady Campbell, General Carteret-Carey."



The ex-Servicemen with the two VC's of Windsor at the back



The march past of three hundred war orphans



Earl Haig addressing the crowd. The Hatch, Windsor. Location of the Hatch to be identified. Bullocks Hatch Bridge was on the old Maidenhead Road, now a cul-de-sac beyond The Willows and the marina.



Lady Frainy Bomanji



Sir Dhunjibhoy Bomanji



Young-at-heart, multi-talented and innovative personality, Rusi Sorabji is an award winning photographer, avid traveler, having hobbies which include music, flying [preparing for a pilot license], writing for pleasure for over 60 years, chocolate making, gardening, trekking, building & flying radio-controlled aircraft; besides being an all round sportsman, excelling in cricket, badminton, tennis and table tennis. He was the first umpire in Sharjah & Dubai for International Cricket matches and also is a culinary award-winning chef from the Zarthoshti Anjuman of Northern California. During his working life, Rusi was an economist turned engineer having a diverse career for 47 years in India and the Persian Gulf.

## Beyond the Mandate



Core activities of Karachi Zarhosti Banu Mandal have been written about and spoken recently in other publications and forums, therefore to retain reader's interest land-mark activities of the Mandal are highlighted here with a brief introduction to the association and its main aim.

Gulbai Nusserwanji Mehta founded Karachi Zarhosti Banu Mandal on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1911 to improve the lives of the indigent of the community, with the motto *seva anay sukhawat* (service and charity). From this simple beginning dedicated Zarhosti ladies from various walks of life worked together to brighten the lives of its people and Gulbai's initiative has largely mitigated poverty among our people.

Mandal also worked in collaboration with other Zarhosti associations to honour men and women of the community for their role in uplift of people, and world personalities when they visited our city. Couple of outstanding ones are feting Poet Laureate of the Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Karachi in 1923 with a traditional shawl, and receiving the American President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt at the airport with decorated camels, in 1952.

by sunnu golwalla

Conferences have appealed to the Mandal ladies and they have participated, organised and sponsored delegates to such events. At Mandal's Diamond Jubilee in 1972 a conference on "Parsi Problems" was dedicated to the memory of Manijeh Mehta late president of KZBM and Sohrab K H Katrak, late president of YMZA. Mandal ladies articulated the problems they observed and suggested solutions which were largely endorsed by the chief guest Dr Jal Bulsara, the president K R Cama Institute. In 1993 a Youth Conference was initiated by the Mandal on topical issues of inducting youth in social service, reversing dwindling population, parsi charity and unified calendar, infusing more than sixty young men and women to research, deliberate and deliver collective thoughts on their subject



Gulbai Mehta - President 1912 - 1913

of choice. A contest was launched by the Mandal in 2000 for its winner to be sponsored to the 7<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress in Houston, but its robust activity led to sixteen youth being sponsored to the event.

The original mandate of the Mandal always remained in focus and attention given to the working committees meeting changing needs of the community by expanding their scope. Medical needs of the community were addressed through G6PD testing, complimentary mammograms and gene marker testing, as well as

setting up Friends Medical Help Line for the retired middle class. The beneficiaries are entertained and presented gifts on Navroze. Spirit of enterprise in the community is encouraged by business loans, but it is the



## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

Education loans, commenced in 1968 for higher study locally and overseas, which has had stronger impact in brightening the lives of hundreds of youth. Children with special learning needs have been tended into useful adults. In the 1970s children in Mandal's Child Chapter had the time of their lives with trips to Mohenjo-Daro ruins, tour of Lahore, picnics, early morning walkathon, summer camps, visit to ice-cream factory, art and handcraft sessions and quizzes. To the Programme committee's credit is a memorable trip to Iran in 1971; *"Parsi tradition, artistic ability and love of gaiety were all revived when KZBM held a toran evening with 150 beautiful beaded heirlooms"* said an admirer of a programme, and Sari Extravaganza was another marvel by the Mandal with models of all ages, and also men in daglas gracing the catwalk.

Serious matters such as timely and appropriate registration of the Mandal with concerned government agencies was undertaken with guidance from Mulla & Mulla & Craigie Blunt & Caroe Solicitors of Bombay. Similarly, constitution of the Mandal was amended in 1998 to keep it progressive. A youth representative was added to the managing committee, mandatory minimum service by members on subcommittees before being on executive committee, stipulating a retirement age and other administrative fine points were deliberated and accepted at a Special General Body meeting. The Mandal has a reputation for wise investment of donations and judicious use of funds encouraging many to donate, which largess has enabled the Banus to widen their reach.

The association has also ventured into publication. *"KZBM served up Manna of the*



Eleanor Roosevelt being received at the airport in 1952. These ladies are from AWP, who were also present with KZBM for this occasion.



1971 - Trip to Iran. Ladies at Persepolis. Soona Panday, Secretary of Programme committee who is far left in the forefront, Mehra Minwalla, President of Programme, 2nd row, 2nd left. Others were Dolly Abadan, Roshan Rustomji, Mehra Vatcha, Hilla Jamasji, Nargis Gyara & Homai Dubash.

*Angels – a treat for gourmets everywhere",* said Parsiana of October 1991, about Mandal's landmark cookery book. The



H J Rustomji Home where KZBM operated from the ground floor given for their use for 50 years. Photo from The Karachi Zoroastrian Calendar, Jehangir Punthakey, 1912.



L to R: Manijeh Homee Mehta, young Sorab Mehta [standing], Rabindranath Tagore, Jamshed Nusserwanji Mehta [all sitting], Karachi 1923.



## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla



KZBM, Manijeh Mehta Building, Katrak Parsi Colony. Photo credit Toxy Cowasjee.



KZBM Managing Committee, Jashan to mark the beginning of the centenary year November 2011: Sitting l to r: Farahnaz Marker (Secretary) Kermin Parakh (V President) Navaz Aga (President) Roshan Mehri (Treasurer) Sarfaraz Golwalla (Secretary). Chairpersons of subcommittees, standing l to r: Meher Cawasji (Education) Dr Bakhtawar Rabadi (Medical) Dinaz Irani (Programme) Dr Parinbanoo Virjee (Member), Spenta Khambatta (Welfare), Niloufer Noshirwani (Rehabilitation), Alan Rustomji (Member), Mitra Irani (Child Chapter). Photo courtesy Sunnu Golwalla.



Above right: Navaz Aga & Kermin Parakh welcoming the guests on Gala Night. Photo credit Ronnie Dubash.



Cake cutting after Jashan. L to R: Dr Gool Talati, Navaz Aga, Perviz Daroga, Toxy Cowasjee. Past & present presidents. Photo courtesy Sunnu Golwalla



Ladies in garas at the Gala Night in February 2012. Photo credit Ronnie Dubash.

Manna is on the bookshelf of Her Majesty, The Queen : the six Libraries of Congress in the US : BBC Food UK : Chef Cyrus Todiwalla MBE and a host of others. In April 2011 the book went into its third print to meet pressing demand for the book. It is, in fact, Mandal's ambassador overseas. To prepare the youth for approaching 21<sup>st</sup> Century a series of workshops were organised for career choices : know-your-child : Gathas : trust building : self-promotion skills : careers in computers : understanding dyslexia and HDD and creative leadership. Sheriar and Shervin Shariari of North American were invited to stimulate the youth with their unique presentations of Paradise, 1+1=3 and Change your Paradigm. Induction into IT was made with novel email facility of decoder-TV screen-cordless keyboard. Soon to follow was Mandal's website creating cyber waves in the community here and abroad.

The Centenary celebration being in full swing, it is befit to conclude with a flavor of our landmark anniversaries. While all of them were celebrated with style and gusto, the most outstanding one was the golden jubilee in 1962. Sorab Mehta gifted well-planned and spacious Manijeh Mehta Building to the Mandal in memory of his

mother, and the Mandal shifted from H J Rustumjee Home which was its registered working office for 50 years and the Rustumjee family was sincerely thanked on the occasion. There was a break-of-dawn jashan at the opening of the building on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1962 followed later in the week by a tableau "Pachas Sal No Soneri Chitar (Narration of 50 Golden Years) enjoyed on a revolving stage by an audience of 500 seated around in the park of the new location. There was another grand display of "Parsi Creed, Culture and Costume" for an audience 1,000 at Hotel Metropole and year-long celebration with a mela, ghambar, natak, gifts and greetings from the community.

The Mandal's centenary celebrations commenced on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011, to honour the initial meeting at Gulbai Mehta's home 100 years ago to the date, with a jashan and cake cutting. February 2012 had a gala event with a slide-show "Mandal Lights" documenting 100-year major events and, a medley of catwalk : Broadway number : natak song : kids parading in saris, followed by an elaborate Parsi sit-down dinner. There was also an arts and craft exhibition with 25 ladies displaying torans, embroidery, paintings and modern-day bead jewellery. A natak in collaboration



Sunnu Golwalla was actively involved with the Mandal from 1994 to 2008 during which time she wrote "Sands of Time" which is the history of the Mandal with brief sketches of Zarthosti Associations in Karachi. Work-wise she is an HR professional in a national insurance company, editor of their newsletter, rep for Corporate Social Responsibility and focal person for her company's rebranding team.

with YMZA titled, "Boeing Boeing" in October and a surprise finale in November 2012.

Like any institution, the Mandal has had its heyday and quiet times, but Gulbai's life precept of 'Happiness unto her to bring happiness to others' has always guided our donors and volunteers over the years.

Our four living Presidents have shared their thoughts on the Mandal:

**Perviz V Daroga [1990-1994]**

"When KZBM was formed in 1912, it was already a century ahead of its time embodying the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ideals of "women power" and "community services". Women professionals and housewives have voluntarily given their time and expertise with passion, bringing zeal and enthusiasm into every event. The KZBM will continue to be a beacon of enlightenment and service into the next century."

**Toxy C Cowasjee [1994-2001]**

"As KZBM celebrates her centenary, one feels privileged to have been part of its history. Having worked with five presidents during those 30+ years, and falling in love with this 'Lady' of ours, it was an honour to be elected as President thereafter, carrying on the tradition of my predecessors. I will forever be thankful for the opportunity given to serve our community, whom I deeply care for."

**Gool J Talati [2001-2009]**

"As a child my mother's visits to KZBM's sewing evenings for sadras, linen was my vision of Banu Mandal, till Toxy pressured me to join this august institution. What impressed me most was the funds of benevolent donors well invested and resources utilised judiciously. The committee members with their dedication have touched the lives of many and we stand united in good times and bad, thanks Seva and Sakhavat guiding our dear KZBM."

**Navaz K Aga [2009 to-date]**

"I am humbled to be the president of the Mandal during its centenary year and my 40 years attachment with it is filled with fond memories and friendships: In fact would say that Mandal is not just an institution but like a mother's home, which in effect you never leave. What Banu Mandal is today is for the vision and work of our committee members, each leaving a quiet mark. May our beloved Mandal continue into the next century and beyond!"

## Educating the Heart

by behrose b taraporewalla

*Note: Two separate articles follow, yet both connected together as they 'educate the heart'.*

### Teaching with Heart through Motivation, Faith, Hope, and Love -

#### Learning at a young & old age

As children we grow up thinking that life has one set path for each of us to take. However, as we grow into adults, we realize that life is a journey that has many significant twists and turns along the way. Throughout the journey we encounter many moments that shape our minds, create our personalities and make us individuals. Some of these moments are instantly recognizable, while others provide quiet lessons for which we may not fully grasp their importance at the moment. Throughout my life I have encountered many lessons that have shaped my perspective and enabled me to develop into the person and educator I am today.

One of my most profound life experiences occurred at the tender age of nine. On September 18, 1996 my world as I knew it drastically changed—my father was in a near-fatal car accident. The accident left him in a deep coma, grasping for life. Within the first week of the injury the doctors lost all hope in a good prognosis for my father. My family was told that my father would most likely never wake from the coma, but if he did, he would live his life in a vegetative state. My mother was not willing to accept that diagnosis and taught my sisters and me a very important life lesson: **TO HOPE**. Day after day we maintained our strong hope that my father would recover from his injury. Thirty days passed without any type of improvement. My father's eyes remained shut, and the doctors told us day after day to pull the plug. On the thirty first day, my father's forty-fifth birthday, something wonderful happened—he opened his eyes.



He woke up from his coma. His waking up shocked the entire hospital staff, yet his doctors continued to be pessimistic and told us that his waking up was most likely going to be the extent of my father's recovery. Yet we continued **TO HOPE** for the best recovery possible, and many wonderful improvements followed. It was at this time that I learned another very important lesson, one that I try to pass on to my students every day: with the proper **MOTIVATION** and **FAITH** of others, one can often achieve what is believed to be impossible.

My family put all of our energy into my father's recovery process. We were told that he would never talk, walk, or take care of himself. We refused to accept the given prognosis and believed that our **LOVE** and **FAITH** would **MOTIVATE** him to fight to recover and get back to his previous lifestyle. Every morning before school, my mom would bring my sisters and me to wake my father up with hugs and kisses. We would help get him dressed for the day and have breakfast as a family. Then my mom would drop my sisters and me off at school and then return to the Casa Colina Center for Rehabilitation to work with my father. After school was over my mom would pick us up and help us with our homework for an hour. We would then return to the hospital to work with our father. My father was in the rehabilitation hospital for over two years, during which my family worked day and night to help him recover. After the years of rehabilitation, my family was told that my father's progress had reached a plateau, and that we should not expect any further progress. We were advised to put him in a nursing home and go on with our lives. We refused to accept that and instead brought my father, still unable to speak or walk, home. Much to our relief, my father continued to improve once he returned home. Every day after school, my sisters and I would rush home and along with our mother, spend countless hours teaching my father to walk and talk—things that had previously been effortless. My father's home recovery was slow and often times frustrating, yet we never lost **HOPE**. On one afternoon, after everyone had given up on

him for the day, I took my father's hand and said: "Daddy, just try for me one more time." At that moment he rose from his wheelchair and took his first step in over three years. The years after the accident were some of the hardest of my life, but I know that they were even harder for my father. I believe that the **FAITH** we had in my father **MOTIVATED** him to persevere and defy all medical odds. Helping my father relearn everything opened a new door in my life and evoked my passion for helping and educating others.

The lessons that I learned as a young child have stayed with me as I have developed into an adult. I hold these lessons close to heart, and as I teach my students, I maintain the philosophy that *"if a child has the proper motivation and the knowledge that their teacher, family, and friends have faith in them and their abilities then they can accomplish anything."* During my teaching experiences I have encountered students from all walks of life with various abilities. Many of these children have been nurtured and told that they are "smart," and these children tend to work to their full potential and do well in school. However there are many more children who have been labeled as "poor achieving" and in turn have been basically ignored because of their perceived lack of ability. That mentality is incorrect, and I believe that given the correct **MOTIVATION**, any child can succeed.

During my first year of teaching, I had the great opportunity to work with a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder named Teddy. Teddy had been written off by many teachers and was deemed to be unteachable in both the academic and social realms of education. However, during my first interactions with Teddy I could see that he had many special gifts that could be developed and built upon. I wanted Teddy to know that many people had **FAITH** in him and **BELIEVED** in his abilities to succeed. In speaking with Teddy's parents, I learned that throughout Teddy's schooling many teachers discounted his abilities because of his behavior, but there had been one teacher who had looked past that and used

## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla



a humanistic teaching approach to teach Teddy prior to his diagnosis. This teacher instilled **HOPE** within Teddy's parents and motivated them to search for other professionals who would be willing to spend the time to look past Teddy's disabilities and focus on his strengths.

In working with Teddy I felt that that in order to succeed in his academics, he first needed to feel valued and accepted by others. Thus, I felt that if I could teach Teddy how to socialize, it would enable him to feel accepted and part of the mainstream classroom. I accomplished teaching Teddy socialization skills by encouraging him to partake in everyday school activities like the third grade Friendship Club, a group of third grade students that meet at lunch every week to promote friendship and acceptance. At first, Teddy was apprehensive and engaged in antisocial behavior like stimming (self-stimulatory behavior). However, I accompanied him several times, which enabled him to relax and interact with his fellow classmates. Over time I was needed less and less, and the students that sat with him became his friends, advocates, and greatest supporters. Teddy was able to gain a greater sense of self, and his classmates were able to learn that we all have differences but we are all people that can make the world a better place.

With Teddy's new-found confidence, I began to focus on enriching his academic skills. To motivate Teddy in reading with comprehension I made stories come alive by reading with conviction and dressing up as story characters to initiate understanding and interest. I found that when I could hold Teddy's interest he was better able to comprehend what was taught and partake in class discussions rather than being "pulled out" to review the story with his one-on-one aide.

My reading theatrics also motivated many other students in the classroom who were struggling with reading. Many of these students were English Language Learners who had parents who also were learning English for the first time, and thus struggled

to provide instruction for their children. As the year closed, many of these students were reading at (or above) grade level and had an intrinsic love of reading. By integrating literature into all academic disciplines, I was able to teach social stories, develop personal character, elicit higher-level thinking skills, and teach students that their actions speak louder than their words.

There are basic fundamentals that we all must learn as we define our paths in life. I believe that as a teacher, it is my responsibility to instill these fundamentals within my students. Students must learn **TO HOPE** because anything is possible. Just because one cannot do something the first time does not mean they will ever be able to accomplish it in life. Through proper **MOTIVATION** as well as having **FAITH** in our students, teachers can motivate and inspire students to achieve their highest potential. Most importantly, as educators and child advocates we must show our youth **LOVE** and acceptance. We must dance with them when they celebrate their accomplishment and lend a sympathetic ear with they are struggling. As a teacher, I must realize that all children are not the same, and that I must use creativity in our instruction to capture and draw out the student's individual creativities and talents. Such mindful and intentional teaching practice will serve to awaken the inner genius within every child.

### *Every Child, Every Time*

#### Effective teaching

Every child can learn. The achievement gap in our nation is therefore inexcusable. The quality of a child's education should not be defined by their zip code but should be enabled by their inner capacity and natural drive to learn. Teachers are leaders who engage children in developing their confidence, motivation to learn, and aspirations to realize their highest potentials. An effective teacher's devotion

Behrose Taraporewalla believes being a Zarathushti has shaped her as an individual; constantly motivating her to create and mobilize positive change in this world. Taraporewalla graduated Summa Cum Laude with a BA in Liberal Studies and Human Development. Upon graduation she studied at the Claremont Graduate University, where she earned her MA in Educational Studies and graduated in the top 1% of her class. She taught as a Peter Lincoln Spencer Fellow and has presented at several educational conferences and universities. As an Education Specialist, holding credentials in Special Education as well as General Education, she has had the opportunity to educate people of all ages and walks of life. Her life goal is to help narrow the educational achievement gap, so all children can achieve academic success.

In her spare time, Behrose enjoys volunteering, cooking, and engaging in activities that allow her creativity to shine. She is a marathon runner and an avid supporter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

decides whether a child moves ahead, stands still, or falls behind. An effective teacher reaches out to an unmotivated child where others might give up. An effective teacher inspires all children to believe that they can achieve anything they set out to do. I will be that teacher.

There is no human activity more important than learning. As an educator my students will succeed in school and life. Through the use of culturally relevant teaching practices I approach teaching and learning in order to serve students intellectually, socially, and politically. My classroom is a safe environment for students to ask questions, learn from their mistakes and errors, and learn from each other; it is a place of discovery. It is also be a place of high expectations, rigorous academics, and strong discipline, but it is too a joyful community of learners.

Academic excellence only flourishes when it is rooted in positive self-identity. The classroom is a fertile environment that can impact a student's values and character. Community service is integrated in the curriculum to plant the seeds of purpose, leadership, and resilience. When students are given opportunities to engage with and help others, their own sense of achievement, motivation, and efficacy increases which translates to higher academic progress.

The ability for me to use data to bridge the achievement gap is the greatest marker of my success as a teacher of a diverse groups of students with diverse exceptionalities. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, students demonstrate academic growth; students show proficiency in learning, because they have mastered the content. Test scores alone are not enough—I strive to educate the whole child. Collaboration sets the foundation for achievement; all stakeholders, students, parents, families, school, and the wider community working together to encourage every student to actualize their utmost personal and academic potential. Students

receiving an “A” on an exam, raising their hand to participate for the first time, feeling excited about school, or dispelling the myth that underrepresented minorities cannot achieve, showcase my triumph as a scholar-practitioner.

Teaching gives me the opportunity to promote social justice, accountability, integrity, and equity for all children. One child at a time, I hope to narrow and close the achievement gap. I know the world will not be changed by my efforts alone, but if I can make a difference in the life of just one child then I know I will have done my job.

*I am in the world to change the world -*  
Kathe Kollwitz



*During the many exchanges Behrose and I had whilst finalising her submission, she wrote this to me which I find quite profound.*

*“Teaching is my passion. Having worked with every single grade level (kindergarten-university), in multiple settings (jails, high and low performing schools, girls in foster care on parole, street children and slum adults in India) I believe ALL students can learn. Teaching efficacy is what has lead to my success in dispelling that certain individuals can’t learn (and furthermore, narrowing the achievement gap). Holding multiple credentials and authorizations allow me to teach ALL learners, so even if you asked me to talk about my work as a Sped Teacher, I broadened up the field because I am traditionally a consultant and inclusion specialist and believe the least restrictive environment for a child is generally with a diverse group of all types of*

*individuals and learners (just like the “real world”).”*

*How fortunate we are to have young and caring professionals in many walks of life, belonging to our community. These are our unsung heroes. -*  
Ed



## *Sound and Light: Parsi pioneers of Indian cinema*

T

The weather turned inclement and the rain was lashing down when a worried staffer contacted his boss and asked if he should refund the money to two spectators who had entered the tent. “No,” said the enterprising organiser. “Let them see two films for the price of one.” This was Jamsetji Framji Madan, displaying his signature business acumen towards the two patrons who had come to view one of his “bioscope shows” held on Calcutta’s *maidan* in 1902.

Jamsetji Madan, hailed as the pioneer of cinema in South Asia, was born in 1856. He began his association with the performing arts very early in life by working as a “property boy” at the Elphinstone Dramatic Club in Bombay after his father lost most of his money in the collapse of the Bombay Reclamation Bank.

*by freny manecksha*

From around 1875 he began travelling along with a business partner to supply goods to military camps and cantonments and became a successful businessman. But he did not give up his early passion and purchased two theatre companies – Corinthian and Alfred which used to stage plays by Hindu and Parsi troupes – after moving to Calcutta.

In 1902 he began his “bioscope shows” under the banner of Elphinstone Bioscope Company. Short, silent, films were screened in tents on Calcutta’s *maidan* with equipment procured from Pathe Freres of Paris. In 1908 this cinema business expanded with the acquisition of an agency for cine projection. Films were now also screened at the Alfred theatre which he had purchased and the Elphinstone Picture Palace which still exists today and is known as Chaplin theatre.

From screening films it was a logical progression to making and producing films drawing initially from the traditions of



Jamsetji Framji Madan

theatre. *Satyavadi Raja Harishchandra*, based on the mythological play of the same name was made in 1917 and in the following year Bengal’s first film *Bilwamangal* was screened under the Madan banner. In 1919 Madan Theatres Ltd was established. It was to be South Asia’s largest production, distribution and exhibition company of that time.

The films which drew on subjects from Indian mythology and folklore replete with grandiose sets were sophisticated in terms of technology and for this

purpose foreign directors were brought in. Interestingly foreign female actors were also brought in to act as there were few Indian women willing to face the camera. Patience Cooper starred in *Nala Damayanti* in 1920 which was directed by Italian Eugenio de Liguoro and in 1922 she won accolades for her role in *Ratnavali* directed by Camille Legrand.

Jamsetji Madan died in 1923 leaving behind many sons but it was J J Madan who



donned the cinematic mantle. One of J J Madan's significant contributions to the cinematic legacy was a collaboration with Ezra Mir who was later hailed as father of the Indian documentary and who became chief producer of Films Division.

In 1929 Madan Theatres screened the first talkie in India - Universal's *Melody of Love* at the Elphinstone Picture Palace which was the only hall at that time capable of screening a talkie. By the next year there were at least 30 halls who had installed the necessary sound equipment. The company then began work on an ambitious project – South Asia's first talkie. But this venture was pipped at the post. *Alam Ara*, Ardeshir Irani's audacious attempt proclaimed as an "All Living, Breathing, 100 per cent Talking Peak Drama, Essence of Romance, Brains and Talents Unheard of Under One Roof" stole a march and was screened on March 14, 1931 at Bombay's Majestic theatre.

Born in 1886, Irani who had studied at the J J School of Arts joined his father's business in phonographic equipment and musical instruments and then became a small time exhibitor along with Abdulally Esoofally.

In 1914 he acquired Alexandra theatre on Bellasis road (the heart of the red light district!) in Mumbai and later the Majestic theatre. Alexandra theatre continued to be an institution in Bombay's history until it shut down in 2007.

It was the housefull shows of Dadasaheb Phalke's *Krishna Janam* that perhaps kindled Irani's interest in film making and Majestic Films was born in 1925 followed by the Imperial Film Company.

Inspired by Universal's *Showboat* and fired with the ambition to be the first to make an Indian talkie meant that Irani had to settle for less than perfect conditions and labouring for six months. An American engineer Wilford Deming came down to India and assembled the single system Tanar recording equipment. He taught Irani and his friend Rustom Bharucha the rudiments of sound recording. Irani later said that the absence of sound-proof studios meant that they had to

shoot indoors and at night after the last local train had stopped running. There were no booms and microphones had to be hidden in incredible places to stay out of the camera range.

The result was amateurish. A critic of sorts, who called himself Filmstar, wrote a letter in the March 23, 1931 edition of *The Times of India* saying that whilst the synchronization in the film is syllable perfect, the



Ardeshir Irani



Elphinstone Picture Palace now Chaplin Cinema

voice production is "somewhat patchy due to inexperience of the players in facing the microphone and a consequent tendency to talk too loudly."

But none of that really mattered for the excited crowds. Irani's partner Esoofally recollected how there was no queue system in those days and consequently the booking office was "literally stormed by jostling riotous mobs, hankering somehow, anyhow to see a talking picture in the language they understood. All traffic was jammed and police aid had to be sought to control the crowds."

The storyline of *Alam Ara* (The Light of the World) was familiar territory. A love story



## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

between a prince and a gypsy girl, it had been the subject of a play performed by a Parsi troupe. For the talkie the writer was Joseph David who was later hired to write more screenplays for Irani's movie companies.

Veteran film journalist, Rauf Ahmed who recently penned a piece on Irani and India's first talkie in Outlook magazine, recounts an amusing incident during its making. It seems that Mehboob Khan who was part of the Imperial Film Company was first approached to play the lead and eagerly rushed off to get his costume tailored. But he was later unceremoniously dropped in favour of a bigger star – Master Vithal. Perhaps it was this disillusionment that propelled Mehboob Khan towards film direction!

The casting of Vithal, a star who used to play Douglas Fairbank-like roles grafted onto Maratha legends, presented its own set of problems. He was under contract to Sharada studios who promptly dragged him to court. And none other than Mohammed Ali Jinnah represented him and won the suit.

The female role was played by Zubeida, daughter of Nawab of Sachin and Fatma Begum. Among others in the cast was the legendary Prithviraj Kapoor. But it was Wazir Mohammed Khan, as a fakir, who made history when he opened his mouth with “*De de khuda ke naam pyaare...*”. Indian cinema's first song went on to become a super duper hit especially among the beggars. There were seven other songs in the film and as film

director Shyam Benegal pointed out *Alam Ara* was not just a talkie. “It was a talking and

singing film with more singing and less talking. It had a number of songs and that actually set the template for the kind of films that were made later.”

A few months after *Alam Ara*, Madan Theatre's *Shirin Farhad* was released. It was technically superior because of crucial advancements whereby sound and images were shot separately. *Shirin Farhad* too went on to become a huge hit with enraptured audiences.

One significant feature of both the Madan Theatres and Irani's Imperial Film Company was that they were cross-linguistic. Films were made in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Telugu and uniquely even Farsi. To Irani goes the credit of making the first Farsi talkie *Dukhtar-i-Lor* which became a box-office hit. However Irani was not so lucky with the colour film



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



Imperial Film Company



Master Vithal & Zubeida in Alam Ara

*Kisan Kanya* in 1937. It flopped badly and dissuaded others from venturing in this direction for more than a decade. Another important factor was that Irani believed in laying the foundations of cinema firmly on Indian soil by sending people abroad to learn techniques and the craft rather than hiring foreigners.

Unfortunately the print of *Alam Ara* was destroyed in a fire at the Film Institute of India, Pune, and this great legacy now lives on only in memory, posters and a few memorabilia. ■■■

## Ronnie Screwvala - dynamism personified



Soft spoken, kind and gentle, largely generous is Ronnie Screwvala. This is how RS may be best described. He has an infectious smile and a twinkle in his eyes, which is hard to miss. Looking much younger than his years, he is definitely a pukka Parsi gentleman of this century.

I first met him many years ago in Bombay as part of my cousin Zarina Mehta's circle of friends. He was a man of few words but with a sharp mind and big ideas; a high achiever reaching for the stars. Three decades on, not much has changed in character or traits and Ronnie is still more comfortable surrounded with few people and continues to be a man of few words; having achieved his dreams and perhaps a tad more.

Living in a beautiful flat in Mumbai, overlooking the gorgeous Arabian Sea, just a couple of steps away from the sandy beaches, his home is warm, friendly and most inviting. Neat as a pin, and decorated in an almost eclectic style, nothing in there is over the top or abhorrently gaudy. To me it seems to be the perfect place to relax and unwind after a long day at work.

*by niloufer mavalvala*

Fortunate enough to have spent my last winter holiday with him, Ronnie is just one of us; no airs, just most charming. His passion and drive for his work is obvious and apparent. If I am even allowed to judge, I would safely state that he is almost shy, most humble and far from being a proud man, in spite of his incredible achievements in life.

His wife Zarina, his daughter Trisha and his beloved dog Sprite are his world. Very family minded by nature, his own parents as well as Zarina's, are a part of his daily life.

Starting off in 1981, at a local television studio as a cable man and later being a TV producer, Ronnie set out to learn all that he could and started his climb to the top.

A decade later he created UTV, launching the first organised cable TV venture in Mumbai. Within a few years, thousands of households in the area had subscribed for

the network. He initiated the idea of producing a daily soap opera in India making it more exciting to follow rather than awaiting it to air each week. Soon the second leg of the journey began which under his able leadership spanned from TV production to film production and with this addition, soon making UTV the largest film studio in India. His moment of truth happened when Disney decided to purchase, invest and acquire a major share in his company. It created a new dimension to the company giving him opportunity and a larger exposure to the world market. Part of his success is due the fact that he continues to keep personal control over what goes on in his worldwide offices. Every single script chosen is only with his personal approval. He has always maintained that it is spotting a great script that is the centrepiece from which the success of the next box office hit is born.

Over the years, Ronnie has created tremendous value for his shareholders. UTV

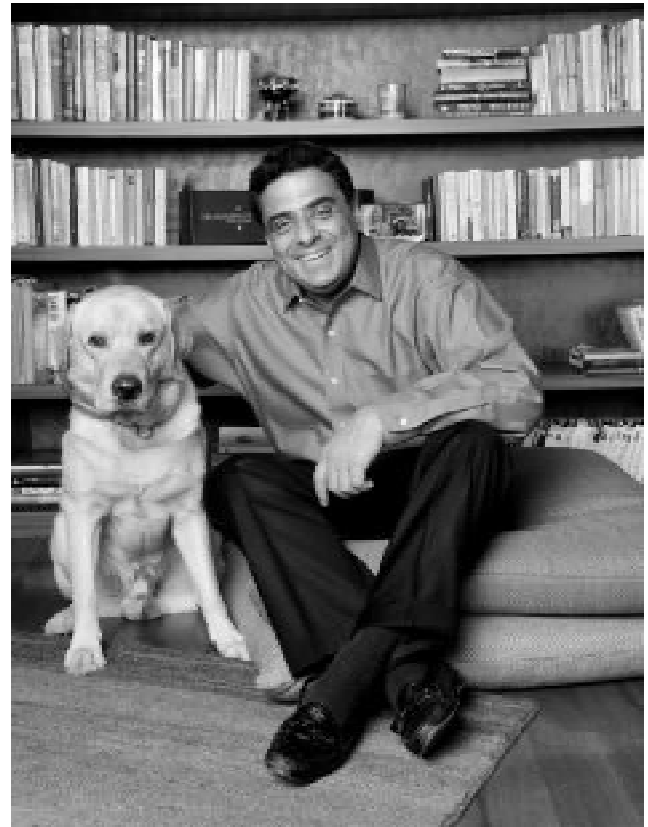
## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

began its journey as a listed entity with a \$55 million market capital in 2005 and ended with an acquisition by Disney enterprise value of almost \$ 1.4 billion to date.

His forward thinking mind and amazing vision well ahead of the rest, helped turn this television company into a multimedia billion dollar conglomerate, which has now got the ever popular gaming, websites and niche broadcast segments besides the television shows and film productions and distributions. He truly believes that the next big step is to bring easy video downloading on one's telephone, but keeping the cost low making it easily affordable to many. Working on the concept of volume, he is planning on working on a percentage of the younger Indian population who may already think cable television is a thing of the past. Screwvala claims this niche market will eventually be much bigger than cable television itself. Besides receiving umpteen awards Ronnie has had the amazing honour of being chosen as one of the 100 most influential people on the planet by Time magazine. He has also been rated by Fortune magazine as one of Asia's 25 most powerful and by Esquire magazine to be amongst the 75 most influential people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Wanting to share his success with the less fortunate, Ronnie Screwvala founded SWADES - a society to heal, aid, restore and educate - a trust that works for the betterment of the underprivileged. The trust has adopted 160 villages in Maharashtra and works with them in acquiring self-sufficiency through rain water harvesting, education, vocational training, kitchen gardening, self-help groups and more. It now plans to cover one million people over the next five to seven years.

Ronnie has been best described by no other than his supportive wife and partner Zarina Mehta as an 'Adventurer'. "He wakes up each day with a new idea. For him success and failure are mere outcomes. The real fun is the work itself," she says. ■■■■



Ronnie with Sprite

Ronnie Screwvala believes "Unless the rest of India uplifts rural India which today still forms 60% of where our population resides, we can never be in the top three economies of the world. We must come together and work on this and think on the larger scale."

*Incredibly diverse, is how her life is best described. Born and raised in Karachi, Niloufer's creativity and enthusiasm to learn has given her every opportunity, from banking to medicine, business to catering gourmet meals, she has found her niche teaching international cuisine. She pursues community work and travelling. Her present endeavor is Property Management and working on a jointly published cookbook. Residing in Mississauga, Ontario with her wonderful and supportive family she continues to be a free spirit.*



**SWADES FOUNDATION:**

[Swa means 'my', Des means 'country']

*Message from the Founder, Ronnie Screwvala*

As the world moves towards greater economic development, I ask myself the question – would this be inclusive and equitable growth; and can India lead with a new model of sustainable and prosperous rural economy? It is clear that the only way India can achieve world leader status is to harness the approximately 70% rural population of our country and empower them to become key economic drivers of India's future growth. Clearly, our urban metros alone cannot lead the way to that scale of growth.

The gap between the fortunate and the underprivileged has to be bridged. While we know that transformation is possible we are looking for answers to questions like - "What does it take to bring change into the lives of the many impoverished people around us?" Heroism alone isn't enough. Neither is money.

In 1990, a few years after it was started, SWADES embarked on a series of health and education-related initiatives in the Raigad district of Maharashtra. SWADES team believed that education is the backbone for creating any sustainable and permanent change and health-awareness intervention is critical for healthy active living. The programme, however, was poorly received. The girl child was not sent to school unless her family had easy access to water, a huge problem faced by the majority of rural Maharashtra due to the scarcity of ground water in the area; and without a steady household income, health concerns seemed unaffordable and irrelevant. Here began our path of learning and evolution.

We embarked on a new journey at SWADES, away from isolated programmes and towards holistic development, three-sixty-degree interventions across water, agriculture, health and education, based on each community's needs.

Many times I have been asked, "Why is philanthropy at such a low level in India,

particularly as compared to India's needs and when our cultural ethos is all about "sharing"- sharing happiness, sharing resources, sharing knowledge et al". After all, in the USA it is 2% of its large GDP and in India it is just 0.2%. The answer seems to lie in the fragmented efforts spread over some 3.3 million NGOs – an amazing number but relatively low in collective impact, awareness and sustainability.

I believe the only real solution is a strong system of Private Public Community Partnership (PPCP) between the Communities, Government, Corporate India and the NGOs where each brings its unique strengths into play.

Importantly, I also believe, corporate India needs to play a larger role with money, time and skills, not just on an altruistic level but because it makes immense business sense too. Rural markets are the markets of the future. The fact is that India's rural poor are remarkably smart. The advent of satellite TV has opened up their minds to the rest of India and even the outside world. Given the right partnerships, empowerment and opportunities at the right time, rural India is ready to participate in and lead the next phase of our "development".

To ensure that the impact of exemplary work done by our team today is sustainable and replicable, we partner with communities, government, businesses and other philanthropic organizations. We are working towards creating a world class NGO/ Trust which follows principles of corporate governance, high integrity and transparency, that is as professional and efficient as any leading corporate yet working as grassroots workers to touch lives of over one million people.

At SWADES, we have committed to create a scalable model with a mandate to create fully self-sustained villages through the right partnerships in Water, Health Sanitation, Education, Agriculture and Livelihood. The core value of SWADES lies in supporting those who choose to help themselves. Currently we work in 160 villages and now plan to cover one million people over next five to seven years. Hence by empowering villages to take charge of their lives, the goal is to create communities that can contribute to being part of a 21st Century India and lead to an irreversible change for good.

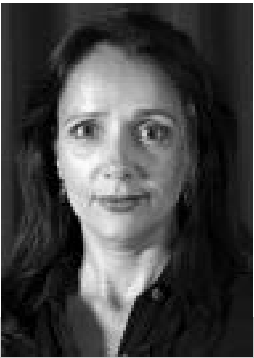


In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

## *A Summer in the day of Mary Poppins*

To be honest, I was a bit cynical about the Olympic Games in general and the Opening Ceremony in particular. An expensive waste of money that had been diverted lottery funding from arts projects and charities. A few of my friends auditioned for the role of Mary Poppins in November 2011 but I hadn't been able to as I was in India on tour with our current production, 'Mind Walking'. 'That's that, then, missed the boat', I had thought, philosophically.

by philippa minoo vafadari



Philippa trained as an actress and after working in regional repertory theatre including the Royal Court Theatre, London, went to train as an aerial artiste at The Circus Space, London. As Artistic Director of BandBazi she aims to integrate narrative theatre with aerial metaphors in what the company calls 'Aerial Drama'. In 2011 she co-produced *Mind Walking* with Q Theatre Productions, Mumbai which toured the UK and India, with a further national UK tour in early Spring 2013. She is currently producing, 'Like Sugar in Milk: Stories of Zoroastrian Migration to the South East of England'. An oral history and photographic exhibition showing the personal journeys of Zoroastrian men and women from India, Iran and East Africa to the UK.

Then I heard that they still hadn't cast it completely - they wanted 32 female aerialists for the role of Mary Poppins. This would be a paid rather than voluntary role owing to the expertise required to 'y into the stadium from 45 metres. There were more auditions in February this year. I again found that I wasn't available - I was working in Newcastle for theatre company Zendeh and the audition was on the 'rst Friday of rehearsals. I asked Nazli, the director, if I could have the day off and she said 'no', but then relented admitting she's a big fan of the Olympics. I left Newcastle at 5am on the Friday morning, auditioned all day with about 12 other women and didn't think much more about it.

It wasn't till early April that I heard I had got the part. I had pretty much given up hope by then and was thinking I would have a quiet summer... I braced myself when I saw the contract. We were to be on 'rst call' for six weeks. In other words, we had to drop everything and sit around waiting for them to say when they needed us. I couldn't plan anything - either with work or family. Weekend birthday parties or family gatherings became something that I turned up to at the last minute or missed completely. I thought I would resent this, but I found it strangely liberating. I couldn't 'll my diary with appointments and activities and could just live in the moment,

something I haven't had the leisure to do for a long time - since starting up my theatre company in 2001 in fact. Rehearsals were tough. Commuting to Stratford from Brighton. Sitting around for hours on end in the Olympic Stadium in terrible weather, dressed in plastic capes provided by the LOCOG. Climbing up to the roof and being blown about in the wind and rain. Arriving home late. But the camaraderie was great - all girls together some of whom I had known for years, others who have since become - 'rm friends.

There were a few technical hitches initially. The 'rst idea was to 'y four groups of eight Mary's from the roof in four 'clouds' that we would pop out of one by one. But the descending system we were meant to be using kept jamming and they couldn't guarantee that we would descend or be stuck dangling 15 metres in the air!

We were laid off for a few days, which was great as it meant I could do the laundry that was piling up and go to a few of my children's summer term concerts and prize-givings that I thought I was going to be missing, whilst the fantastic technical team worked on 'Plan B'. We were called back in and shown the new system - four groups of eight, each on our own giant 'mobile' dangling in the air and then descending into the centre of the stadium on winches.

The first time we tried it was quite nerve wracking. Would it work and would it be as theatrically affecting as the original idea? There weren't many people in the stadium to watch, but those that did started clapping and cheering as we came in. Once we had landed, Danny Boyle (the director), came up to us and we all gathered round as he said how fantastic we looked. That was the great thing about him, even though there were about 8,000 professionals and volunteers taking part in the Opening Ceremony, he made everyone feel special and integral to the 'nal production.

He was particularly committed to the volunteers and their incredible contribution to the piece. When it was found necessary to cut 20 minutes from the show because London Transport was concerned that people wouldn't be able to get tubes and buses home, he cut 150 professional BMX cyclists in preference to any volunteers.

Personally I never tired of watching the Ceremony from my privileged position up on the roof – we entered from the same place as the Olympic rings - about 45 metres up. The wonderful details in the opening Green and Pleasant Land (GPL) section, with the farmyard animals, ladies with parasols, cricket match and maypole dancing. Then the transition from GPL to the Industrial



© SCOTT HORNBY/ NOPP  
The Mary Poppins. Philippa is highest in the photograph, 2nd from the right. Photo courtesy Scott Hornby

Revolution with its incredible, driving music and stunning visuals of the chimneys rising one by one into the air. The suffragettes and the 'Isambard Kingdom Brunels'. The stunning drumming and incredible physicality of percussionist Evelyn Glennie I found truly moving.

When our turn came and we entered from up above I think it took a while for people to realise what was happening until we opened our umbrellas and put our lights on. I have seen most of it now on YouTube and think it was 'lmed really well considering it was a live stadium show, not a piece for television. I think this is due to the fact that Danny Boyle used his regular 'lm crew to 'lm for television, not the sports camera team, so it had a cinematic feel and the television audience got the best possible experience – apart from seeing it live, of course.

I feel very privileged to have been a part of the Opening Ceremony which celebrated

## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla



Fellow 'Mary' on our 1st day of induction on to the roof. No helmets after that day!

the contribution of ordinary working men and women to Britain both past and present. I loved the subversiveness of May Pole dancing, traditionally done on May Day – International Worker's Day - and the celebration of the National Health Service a unique and wonderful institution that British people are so lucky to have. A comment on Twitter summed it up - 'Danny Boyle's Opening Ceremony has celebrated everything the Tory party is trying to destroy'.

I felt very humbled by the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers after my initially scepticism. I was paid to do this – this – is my job after all. I was incredibly well-treated and my safety and comfort was

a priority to the technical team. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

Interestingly, during the summer I met up with some of my Iranian cousins who are quite politically minded and one of them said that it showed that Britain is a defunct society with no future. To my mind it showed that we have a future. It may not be in heavy industry, but it is in its commitment to the welfare state, belief in the power of youth and strong community identity.

Ai Wei Wei, Chinese artist and activist, writing in the Guardian the next day said: *"In London, they really turned the ceremony into a party – they are proud of themselves and respect where they come from, from the industrial revolution to now. I never saw an event before that had such a density of information about events and stories and literature and music; about folk tales and movies"* - The Guardian, Saturday 28th July 2012.

Postscript: I went on to perform again for London 2012, this time in the Closing Ceremony of the Paralympics on 9th September. It was quite a different piece, but again very British,

celebrating the seasons and festivals, all to the UK band Coldplay. (Of course such celebrations are universal and are reflected in the Zoroastrian calendar with its own celebrations of Nov Ruz, Tir e gan; Mehr e gan, Yalda, etc). I was an 'aerial firefly' (see photo). We flew in once again from the roof of the Stadium and then performed on high to the track 'Paradise'. It was a much more relaxed and less pressured experience. We were all old hands at it by then. It can be seen on the YouTube site of Paralympic Sport TV if you are interested.



All the Mary Poppins. Philippa, back row fourth from the left



## Celebrate, Remember, Fight Back

**I**ndividually each of these words mean so much! Put these words together and they become extremely powerful and pack quite a punch. They take on a whole new significance. They become the daily creed of every cancer survivor.

Cancer survivors are amazingly special human beings, who live life to the fullest every day with renewed vigor, immense courage and a very deep conviction in their beliefs. They have come out of a very long, deep, dark tunnel, having put themselves through a whole gamut of emotions, most of them unbelievably unpleasant. A tumultuous journey of self denial, fear, anger, depression, tears and unwilling self acceptance, finally sealed by a silent pact with themselves, that they will fight all odds, never completely aware of the long hard journey ahead and not all so fortunate.

*by rashna tata*

The lucky survivors in most cases come out mentally stronger and possess a renewed zest for living. Every new day seems like a special rebirth, every sunrise and sunset takes on a special meaning and every small step forward towards normality, becomes a huge well deserved victory.

**The Relay for Life**, is an annual event organized by the Cancer Society of New Zealand. An event of great significance for the survivors, their families and friends. The Relay is a remarkable overnight team event; its aim is to raise money for the incredible work done by the Cancer Society of Auckland, while joining together to: **Celebrate and acknowledge cancer survivors, remember loved ones lost to cancer and fight back against a disease that takes so much.**

Teams of ten or more camp out and take part in a walk / run relay while enjoying a carnival type atmosphere with entertainment, prizes and lots of fun. It is as much an event that remembers the special people lost to this disease and celebrates the ones that survived.

Shernaz Petigara of Auckland is one such survivor. Diagnosed with leukemia in 2009,

this active and extremely community focused member, had her happy, contented world turned upside down in a fraction of a second. It left her and her husband Sarosh and daughter Perzen shattered.

Shernaz is a well respected and popular community member, especially close with the little Parsi kids who attended her regular prayer classes. Her work with me on the Zoroastrian Association Managing Committee was valuable and much appreciated. She was a tireless volunteer with all community affairs.

At first, as is with all cancer victims it was one big moment of self-denial. "Why me"? The immediate family banded together and with the support, encouragement and good wishes of Sarosh and Perzen, community members and close friends, Shernaz decided that with the grace of Ahura Mazda she was fighting back. Giving in was never going to be an option.

Months of treatment followed with its own trials and tribulations. Every small step forward, sometimes came with ten steps back. Life was immensely stressful, but every small victory meant a new lease of life. With her deep faith in the effectiveness



## In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

of her prayers, Shernaz never once wavered in her belief that she would come out healthy and smiling.

A long hard seven months later, she was finally declared a very lucky survivor. Since then Shernaz vowed to give back as much as she possibly could to the disease that tore her life and family apart. With the support of her family she started volunteering her services; she drove cancer patients for their treatment, cooked meals and offered support to patients and their families. The Cancer Society of Auckland survives on the services and generosity of people like Shernaz.

Her chance to do more came with the **Relay of Life**.

Friends and family who had all been with Shernaz during her darkest days, rallied around to encourage her in forming and registering the first all Parsi team – 28 Zoroastrians of Auckland bonded together to become the **“Love & Peace Team”**. The youngest team member was 10 years old and the eldest 67 years.

They joined hands to walk/run all night in the 2012 Relay for Life, which began on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February at 4pm, at the Mt Smart Stadium in Auckland and finished at 10am on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. In all 44 teams took part that day.

It proved to be an amazingly moving and rewarding experience, for all the people both young and old gathered on that day, spectator or survivor, was there because they cared!

The most incredible and heart wrenching part of the whole event was the **Memorial Candle Ceremony**, which was held at 8pm. The entire periphery of the stadium was filled with candles in white paper bags which had been decorated with special messages by families and friends in memory of those who had not survived.

All teams walked a special lap of the entire stadium, in complete silence. It was a

moment to reflect and ponder on the enormous toll cancer takes on human life and the families that have been torn apart due to the loss of a loved one.

The **“Love and Peace team”** walked 1500 laps in 18 hours nonstop, (1 lap = 400 meters). In total they walked over 600,000 meters. Some of the younger team members putting in an incredible 100 laps each. The Auckland Parsi team took home the prize for the most “Intelligent team”, winning the General Knowledge Quiz which was held at 4am in the early hours of the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

The all night bands, Zumba sessions and live entertainment proved extremely successful, in keeping spirits high and were an effective attempt by the organizers to keep every team motivated and walking throughout the night.

The **Love and Peace Team** collected a total amount of NZD \$3890 for the Cancer Society of Auckland through their various fund raising efforts, against an initial pledge of \$1000. Proving once again “Parsi thy name is Charity”.

The Auckland Parsis plan to keep **“Team Love and Peace”** a regular feature in future **Relay’s for Life**. ■■■



*Rashna Tata lives in Auckland, New Zealand with husband Dorab and son Piran. She was the President of the Zarathushtrian Association of New Zealand from 2003 to 2009 and is a very active member of the close-knit Auckland Zoroastrian community and proud to be part of it. Rashna is the local trustee of the World Zoroastrian Organization.*



“...Yes, Wise One, (grant)  
to me Thy proper support,  
which an able man,  
possessing such, should  
give to his friend...”

Yasna 43.14

*Insler translation*



The World Zoroastrian Organisation