

publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

# HAMAZOR

4  
issue 2015



## The Chorus Line

**BPP's election furore and outcome**



Arman Home for the Elderly, p 39

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## From the Editor



As we come to the end of another year, it is the norm to reflect on what has been achieved, short comings to be looked into, yet, more fulfilling is what is still to come.

India looks forward to a new chapter with their recently elected BPP trustees taking the community forward in action and thinking. New Zealand's youth are no doubt pacing the floor in anticipation of hosting their congress, an anxious time but in the end a rewarding one.

Delhi are gearing up for a mega event in Spring with the Everlasting Flame Programme which will showcase three large exhibitions from London, Bombay and Delhi itself. This will continue till the end of May with a host of activities and events throughout the two months.

Karachi is not to be left unacknowledged! KZBM, the 103 year-old establishment of 'banus' have refurbished a home for the elderly, a first for our community in Pakistan. It is to be seen to be believed! Arman Home is a place that can be compared with any such facility, as it is comfortable, elegant and peaceful, a worthy place for any elderly person wishing to spend the evening of their lives.

The KPATF, the Anjuman in Pakistan, has once again shown its forward thinking policy. Keeping in mind our aged population, KPATF have set up a free clinic manned by four community doctors giving their service gratis on various days of the week. The clinic provides consultation, medication, x-rays, radiological tests, blood tests, ophthalmic treatments as well as emergency / hospitalization in semi private rooms at two of Karachi's best hospitals. Welfare for the children is also there by providing free orthodontics.

A note to the reader: The last page of this issue, is part of Minocher Vakharia's final project for his Bachelor of Communication Design.

On this positive note we conclude the year, and wish our readers a joyous festive season, a happy New Year with peace for all mankind.

*Ray Gargia*





## Chairman Shahpur Captain's Report at the AGM on 27 September 2015

presented in his absence by sammy bhiwandiwalla



**P**ast Chairman Darayus Motivala, WZO members and my fellow committee members, I welcome you all to our 35<sup>th</sup> AGM.

We hope that you have had an opportunity to go through the 2014 Annual Report and Accounts by now. The most striking change is the significant increase in our Balance sheet, thanks to generosity of our donors for the acquisition of Bridge House. I will come back to this later in my report. I offer my sincere thanks to Sammy Bhiwandiwalla for preparing the report and to Dinyar Modi for preparing the accounts.

Please allow me to update you on some of the projects we have been working on since the last AGM a year ago.

Ever since WZO received an offer of payment of £500,000 for a suitable office from Abtin Sassanfar in April 2013, we have been actively looking for an appropriate property. This was followed by a further donation of £1 million from the Firuz Madon Foundation last year. This effort was spear headed by Darayus Motivala, with others joining in. We saw a large number of properties in different areas and then finally set our hearts on a property in Feltham in the middle of last year. We then had several meetings with the owners and our lawyers on numerous issues. Finally, at the end of the year, we purchased Bridge House for £1.8 million.

It is in a leafy area, easily accessible from a mainline station and buses. Underground stations are a short bus or train ride away. It is a three storied building, with parking area for 22 cars and a public car park next door. The property is currently occupied by

a tenant (a school in fact) to generate income whilst we decide on our priorities for the refurbishments. Their lease is until the end of August next year after which WZO will start its refurbishment programme. Our plan is to use half the floor space and lease the remainder to short-term tenants to cover its running cost. Subject to the necessary funds being received, we shall have a Banqueting / Seminar Hall with AV facilities, a Setayesh Gah, a fully equipped kitchen, a library, an administrative office and a meeting room. We shall install a lift and make it fully accessible for people with mobility problems. We are working towards having the opening ceremony in early 2016.

WZO anticipates that the refurbishment programme will cost in the region of £750,000. Based on the donations already received and the rental income from the current tenant, WZO needs another £500,000 to fulfil its planned refurbishment programme. So any help that you and your friends can give, will be greatly appreciated. When ready, this community centre will host our seminars and some of our social events. Over time, WZO will celebrate special days in the Zoroastrian calendar with jashans and traditional events which are important for both Iranian and Parsi cultures. Most importantly, the centre will be open to all Zoroastrians and their families, irrespective of whether they were born into the religion or have chosen to take this path and also to non-Zoroastrians. It is WZO's plans to hold classes on the Gathas and organise cultural events. WZO will encourage the community to use its facilities for jashans, weddings and navjotes. When not in use by WZO, we will let the hall and its facilities to businesses and individuals for their own functions, thereby providing a revenue stream for its upkeep.

We reported to you a couple of years ago that WZO has registered a new Trust in New Delhi called the World Zoroastrian Organisation Foundation which has currently three trustees who are Indian citizens and members of the current WZO Board of Directors. The Foundation is now up and running and accepting membership and donations from the community in India. As with other regions, the Foundation will also be involved in interfacing with our members and recruiting new ones in India. As per our current procedures in the UK, our charity giving in India will not be restricted to Zoroastrian recipients only. WZO US Region continues to grow under the presidency of Kayomars Mehta. It annually supports the Fali Chothia Charitable Trust which provides scholarships to Zoroastrian students living in the USA. In 2014, they received and dispersed just over \$90,000 and this year to date, the WZO US Region has received and dispersed over \$400,000.

The cost of printing and distributing the Hamazor has been around £10,000 per year over the last few years. This cost is high and the current subscriptions received cover only a small portion of this cost. Therefore, we are reliant on our sponsors for the production of the Hamazor. You can help in two ways: Firstly, you could opt to receive your copy electronically thereby reducing our costs and secondly by agreeing to sponsor a single issue or making a donation. We are very grateful to all the individuals who have sponsored the Hamazor issues over the last few years. When mentioning the Hamazor, we must not forget to mention the exceptional work done by Toxy Cowasjee in editing it and raising its standards with each issue.

Our Summer Seminar in London proves to be a very popular event with increasing number of attendees. This year, the presenters were Dr Leon Goldman from SOAS who spoke about the Neryosangh and the Parsee Sanskrit Tradition. Our committee member from USA, Kersi Shroff, spoke of his findings on his archaeological trips to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. He has a

keen interest in archaeology and is particular interested in the prevalence of Zoroastrianism in these areas. Mobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani a young lady Mobedyar from Toronto who spoke with passion about her own experiences on wanting to become a Mobedyar and the training she had to go through to achieve this. We offer our thanks to the Firuz Madon Foundation who regularly contribute to the costs of our seminars.

This year, WZO is very proud to sponsor the keynote speakers at the 6<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in New Zealand. The keynote speakers are our committee member, Ervad Jimmy Madon and Jimmy Antia from the USA. Our thanks go to Tinaz Karbhari and her organising committee for what promises to be a memorable event for the Zoroastrian youth worldwide. The WZO NZ committee members, Darius Mistry and Rashna Tata, are working with the 6WZYC organising team.

Our Membership continues to grow with a greater proportion willing to sign up as Life members rather than pay an annual subscription. In addition to our normal areas, this year we have received membership applications from Azerbaijan, Italy, Sweden and Brazil. The number of Friends of WZO applications is also increasing. Our thanks to go Monaz Patel, our Membership Secretary, for the diligent manner in which she manages the membership system from India.

Our concentration to seek funds has been very much focused on the Property fund which has paid dividends by increasing our balance sheet significantly. Last year, we maintained a similar revenue stream for the other funds as we have done in previous years. So far this year, the revenues are slightly higher. We thank the Trustees of the ERSF in the UK for their continued support for our charitable activities. This year, they have increased their confidence in WZO by channelling all their grants for Zoroastrians through WZO. The donations we receive are from Zoroastrians and non-

Zoroastrians, individuals and charitable trusts. I offer 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. Our special thanks go to Rumi and Hilda Sethna as well as Behram and Rena Baxter for their continued support.

WZO has achieved all this with a small band of dedicated volunteers who serve on the Managing Committee. Since its inception, we have worked from our homes as the small office we have is barely large enough to hold our monthly meetings or hold our files and equipment. The acquisition of our new HQ will make a significant difference to our charitable and social activities.

We thank 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 for the substantial financial support they continue to give to the WZO Trusts in India. We also thank FEZANA in North America which raises 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. My personal thanks go to all my fellow Managing Committee members for their support and guidance which made my role that much easier. This year, subject to your approval, the committee will be strengthened by a dedicated Iranian Zoroastrian, Mrs Manijeh Parki. Later, you will hear more of her special qualities by her proposer.

Thank you to one and all for coming today and giving me your attention.



## WZO's Annual Seminar

by sammy bhiwandiwalla

**T**he WZO annual seminar held on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June at the International Students House was full of treats for those who attended covering aspects of religion, history and contemporary culture.

**Mobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani** is a full time student, double majoring in International Business Law and Human Resource Management, and holds the title of the First Female Zoroastrian priestess in North America\* and the Youngest in Iran.

Her story began at a very young age, being the only girl growing up in an orthodox Zoroastrian Persian family, always feeling that she was at a disadvantage when engrossed in religious/cultural activities and other masculine diversions, and the impediment sensation was a constant nuisance, right through her juvenile years.

Mahshad stated, "Our identities, beliefs, and self-confidence are shaped by the upbringing and environment that is created throughout our childhood. I recall numerous times where I had been cut short of an opportunity or impeded from activities due to my gender, 'Girls are to play with dolls, and boys with balls.' The prejudicial gulf between men and women is a demoralising reality. Certain class of men, accustomed to generations in power, see both their influence and 'their' institutions challenged by women, which can become a bruising and at times, ugly, contradictory and profoundly socially unjust battle.





The World Zoroastrian Organisation

"Thus, a change was what I desired, but I knew it had to start small in order to flourish into an anchored revision in our community. So I set forth to be the change I wanted to see. Growing up, I yearned the same right and freedom as my brother and other male family members. The rejection of the leeway resulted in disobedience and inquisitiveness to achieve fairness and justice in what I now view it to be an unripe manoeuvre.

"The Zoroastrian community erupted when I initially embarked on the quest to ply my aspiration of becoming a religious evolver at the age of 17, and to attain myself more than anything else – a strong (mentally and spiritually) and most importantly happy being; because their notion of a priestly figure/leader has always been of a man, therefore the idea of a woman doing the same was a fallacious deed. It was an intricate journey; but a diligent mind set was a blessing that steered me out of the intransigent clouds of wretchedness. The rapport and support of many was the benediction without which I would not have been endowed with the honour of becoming the First Female Zoroastrian priestess in North America and the youngest in Iran at the age of 20 (2012) – a flavourful fruit of my formidable venture."

As a young Canadian citizen Mahshad lamented the lack of knowledge of the faith and its impact throughout history. However she did not blame most people for the lack of knowledge, there are around only 150,000 Zoroastrians in the world, and which now has fallen into near obscurity. She aimed to be a torchbearer by imprinting equality and inspiring others to become competent in the Zoroastrian religion and prevent it from ebbing.

Mahshad offered the audience a simple but cohesive explanation of Zoroastrianism explaining the concepts of Asha (truth), Angra Mainyu (Destructive Mind), and the core teachings of Zarathustra, the Gathas, whose central theme is the practice of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.

Sadly, in recent times the Zoroastrian population has been in a state of decline

primarily due to low birth rates, the exclusion of children from mixed marriages (especially mixed marriages between a Zoroastrian woman and a non-Zoroastrian man), and the refusal to accept converts.

She requested that people would explore her words with an unbiased and open mind for this was solely her opinion and she hoped to avoid any hard feelings!

"One of the main ways that we can reverse the decline is by educating and allowing conversions to those who are interested in joining the faith and also accepting the children of mixed marriages. Unfortunately, there is stiff opposition to such thinking as many feel that it would dilute the faith or damage the religion. Such beliefs are unfounded.

"Millennia ago, Zoroastrianism itself spread through conversions and there are historical records of conversions to prove it. The insular and rather exclusionary thinking that several Zoroastrians hold today damages the true message of Zarathustra, which is to elevate the goodness in all. The exclusionary mentality serves the path of 'Druj' by strengthening xenophobia, fear and misogyny and scaring away those who wish to adopt and practice the faith. Such a message cannot be justified, and is based around themes and ideas that are not part of Zoroastrian Gathic message. It has been incredibly detrimental to the faith since it does not adapt, and it will result in an eventual religious extinction, unless ideas radically change and adapt to the 21st century. The most successful philosophies are also highly adaptable and spread their ideas quickly and efficiently while attracting new followers.

"By following rules and guidance that were usually written thousands of years before this time & demanding to fit into this life experience is identical to hammering a square peg into a round whole, that results for most part are frustration, confusion, and apostasy.

"By allowing those interested to convert to Zoroastrianism, we are opening a path and



introducing an option for those seeking companionship outside the religion – please be mindful that I have no intention of promoting such behaviour but I will also not be the one to terminate one's relationship based on such decisions or stop one from joining the faith!

"Please raise your hand, if you have ever dated or know of someone who is currently dating a non-Zoroastrian. The environment that we are exposed to is a world vast from the one our ancestors lived, and yet it is our obligation to alter this route to benefit our religion for the sake of the future generations.

"I believe that Zoroastrianism can find a way, to allow newcomers into the faith while preserving the original message of Zarathustra. As a Zoroastrian priestess, it is my imperative duty to ensure an enduring future for my religion, and such notion is feasible through Zoroastrianism's forthright message, to dedicate one's life towards Ahura Mazda and His work; and this core memorandum can remain while changing the cultural biases that impair Zoroastrianism today. A radical revamping of social, cultural and spiritual thinking has to occur. I hope this message can invoke the youth to start to think of such ideas and how we can implement them to ensure not only that we survive, but also prosper.

"My generation is immersing into a constant battle of self-identity and social acceptance. I have spoken to numerous youth community members who are frustrated to preserve and present their religion and also not be the odd one with a never heard of faith that is 'supposedly' the 1<sup>st</sup> one of the monotheistic faiths! They also are challenged to be social but not form a union with a non-Zoroastrian individual – a challenging task when inserted in a multicultural environment.

"Given that the current intellectual zeitgeist is to move away from religion towards secularism and atheism, many ask 'why follow Zoroastrianism at all? Is it really that different from the myths of old, and thus can

be debunked?' While these are questions any well-meaning rationalist person may ask, concepts of faith are subjective and open to an individual's interpretation. Faith is a subjective quality, and is in many ways similar to the other subjective experiences.

"With my searching, I came across my own answers as to why I follow Zoroastrianism. It is not because I was born into it (although that has helped), and I have explored and questioned my faith as well as other faiths. After years of research and reflection, I came up with my own intellectual framework as to why I decided to stay a Zoroastrian and take on a life of a priestess. Put simply, the word 'religion' translates to 'din' in Farsi that originates from the word 'day-nou' that means 'kherad' in Farsi or 'thoughts' in English. It was said by Zarathustra, that one does not need to be a Zoroastrian to be accepted. We are each 1<sup>st</sup> born as human being, then an Iranian or Parsi, and lastly a Zoroastrian.

"Zoroastrianism's main message is one of upholding the righteous path and of Asha. An atheist can be a Zoroastrian by dedicating his life to truth and goodness. In many ways, people who look for truth and strive to help others are far better people than people who may call themselves religious, but follow the ways of Ahriman through deceit and lies. The way of Asha, of goodness and order, truth and justice, can be practiced by anyone in any society. It does not necessarily need special incantations or modes of prayer, or rituals and religious figureheads. For every good thought, good word and good deed we do we are helping Ahura Mazda and each other grow and prosper as a society and civilization. And we have the choice to do so, since there is no compulsion. This gives us the concept of free will, and within this concept of free will we can choose to follow righteousness over deceit.

"And so, I will once again express my keen concern with the future of our religion and wish that no one present today is offended by my notions and suggestions, and can ponder upon them with an open mind and

hopefully generate a new lifestyle that would allow conversion along with maintaining the original message of Zarathustra.

"It is not I, nor you, who can make a difference. It is only when you and I join together to form 'we', that a solid and healthy change is attainable."

**Dr Leon Goldman**, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, spoke on the topic 'Neryosangh and the Parsi Sanskrit Tradition'.



In this talk, he drew attention to the little-studied collection of Zoroastrian texts composed in Sanskrit, many of which are attributed by the tradition to the Parsi priest Neryosangh Dhaval. As Dr Goldman showed, scholars have varied considerably in their estimates of when Neryosangh lived, with suggestions ranging over a period of some 700 years.

Basing their calculations on the family trees of priestly families, some writers have proposed that Neryosangh lived around the 12<sup>th</sup> CE, others the 15<sup>th</sup> CE. As Ervad Meherjirana noted however, such a methodology is problematic because of the unreliability of such genealogies. Instead, Meherjirana was of the opinion that Neryosangh likely lived in the early 8<sup>th</sup> CE. He based this assumption on the Parsi legend that it was Neryosangh Dhaval who led the Zoroastrians from Iran to India and negotiated for their right to stay there.

Whilst there are few, if any, certain facts pertaining to Neryosangh, the existence of

Pahlavi manuscripts containing Sanskrit colophons from the 1320s CE. demonstrate Zoroastrian priests at that time were using the Sanskrit language. Dr Goldman showed one such colophon, written by Mihraban Kaikhosrow, an Iranian priest who was invited to travel to India by a wealthy trader named Chahil Sangam.

Dr Goldman then proceeded to analyse the relationship between the Sanskrit language translation of the Yasna and the Pahlavi and Avestan language versions that came before it. Although the Sanskrit Yasna is explicitly stated to have been translated from the Pahlavi Yasna, Dr. Goldman presented evidence for the Sanskrit version being based, in places, on the Avestan language original. He concluded by considering some of the ways in which the Sanskrit Yasna reflects the Indian context in which it was produced.

**Kersi Bhikhaji Shroff** is an attorney in the United States specializing in international and comparative law. He graduated from a law school in Pakistan, qualified as a Barrister at Law in England, and achieved a Master's degree in Comparative Law in the United States. In his legal career, Kersi served the U.S. Government as the Chief of the Western Law Division and Co-Director of Legal Research.

An interest in archeology, sparked by reports of findings in Western China of funerary artifacts displaying Zoroastrian themes, led him to further research the presence of Zoroastrianism along the storied Silk Route.

In a presentation on 'Zoroastrian Features in Archaeological Sites in Central Asia – Some Recent Developments,' Kersi, took us on interesting journeys through the ancient regions of Sogdiana and Bactria, mentioned in the Avesta, located in present day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Based on visits in 2013 and 2014 of several archaeological sites in those countries, and



on archaeological work done by him in Tajikistan, Kersi related the findings of an extensive number of artefacts, documents, funerary items and temple structures indicating the practice of a form of Zoroastrianism from the 5th to 7th centuries CE.

He also presented research findings on other sites, including Zoroastrian elements in the architecture of *Aloukhona*, a house of fire, of Ismailis living in the remote Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan; Ai Khanoum, a famous Greco-Bactrian site in Afghanistan; recent discoveries in Chorasmia (ancient Khorezm) in Uzbekistan; and Sogdian artefacts found in China.

According to scholars, religious practices in these 'Eastern Iranian' regions were very different from the reformed Zoroastrianism of Sasanian Iran, and reveal many features that sometimes agree with accepted Zoroastrian traditions and sometimes depart drastically from them. Along with idols of deities, such as Sroasha, Verethragna, Anahita, Mithra, and 'Mehr-Ahura', religious practices also embraced others such as Shiva and Parvati, Nana, and Druvasp, a protectress of horses. The veneration of fire was common, but there was only one 'genuine fire temple' while other structures revealed places of worship where the various deities were honoured.

*Dakhmas* for exposing the dead in the traditional manner also existed, but under an Eastern Iranian variant, the bones after drying were preserved in clay urns, called ossuaries, which often had engravings depicting Zoroastrian beliefs. The ossuaries were also deposited in buildings called *naus*, housing together several deceased members of a family. According to a leading archaeologist, ossuaries constitute an essential source of information on Central Asian Zoroastrianism.

Kersi referred to the blossoming of Zoroastrian studies in China, where many of the people of Sogdiana migrated after the arrival of the Arabs. Among the rich findings in China is a document found in Dunhuang

which reveals a version of the Ashem Vohu prayer, the text of which is nearly 300 years older than any surviving Avestan manuscript.

Regarding the ancient region of Khorezm, Kersi reported on the work of an Australian Professor who has recently found new evidence of Zoroastrian imagery. In 2014, her team pieced together the painting of a 'colossal figure' thought to be Sraosha, which is the earliest representation of by five or six centuries of a well attested and purely Zoroastrian symbol. According to a report, the finding "should certainly provoke a re-evaluation of Khorezm's role in the history of Central Asian Zoroastrianism."

Kersi paid tribute to the Soviet and Russian archaeologists and scholars whose uninterrupted work from the 1860's, has revealed the rich findings that have become generally known in the west only after the end of the cold war. Now many western archaeologists have made significant contributions to the archaeological work in the regions.

He concluded by stating that it is essential for modern day Zoroastrians to know their past traditions in order to keep them grounded in the practice of the faith today.

Kersi displayed over 40 slides as part of his presentation.



Sammy Bhiwandiwalla together with his wife Ursula started their own company in 1970 supporting the foundry and industrial model making industry. After 35 years in business they decided to call it a day and devote some time to a rapidly expanding second generation.



Ursula and Sammy have always taken an active interest in community matters in the UK and were greatly influenced by the actions and sincere beliefs of individuals such as Noshirwan Cowasjee, Shirinbanoo Kutar, Shahpur Captain and many others, that in a changing world it was necessary to create a more balanced and equitable community within the UK. He joined the WZO Board in 1988 and since then has served in various capacities including Chairman of WZO.

*\*From the Editor: Hamazor had carried a news item of Mobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani in Issue 3/2013 p11 and then repeated in the special issue ie. Issue 3/2015 p40, informing readers that Mahshad was the first lady Mobedyar in North America. Now once again it is being written. Attention has been drawn that it was actually Guloo Austin who was North America's first lady Mobedyar. Credit where due, should be correctly given. Hopefully the Mobed Council of N America can solve this issue.*

# Marriages are made in heaven

farzana mojegani, trustee, wzo trust funds

**A**pparently, its true! Where else but in heaven would arrangements be made, such that a 70 year old man finds love, companionship and friendship in a 66 year old co-resident in a senior citizen's centre?

The two seniors had the courage to go through with their intended nuptials on Saturday September 12, at the very same WZO Trust Funds Senior Citizens Centre at Navsari, in which they are both residents. The entire centre was abuzz with activity, the air filled with festivity – beautiful rangoli all over, peppy music playing in the hall downstairs, sev and dahi being served in the morning with a delicious fancy lunch to follow; the Senior Citizen Centre in Navsari was truly celebrating the day in pomp and style. Everyone at the Centre was happy for the couple. The Trustees, the staff, the residents, everyone was clearly thrilled with the entire turn of events.

Havovi came to the Centre sometime in February this year, and found her life partner in Minoo soon enough. The two took to each other instantly, and their friendship quickly grew into something more serious and long lasting. All I can say to Havovi and Minoo – Congratulations – good for you! Better to have found someone who you really like and with who you can spend a few good years, than to be alone.

The wedding ceremony was held post sunset, through the traditional 'ashirwad' ceremony conducted by Er Zubin Amroliwalla and Er Keki Dastoor, in the presence of High Priest Dasturji Kaikhshru Dastoor Meherjirana. The Centre's hall where the marriage was solemnized was, to my amazement filled to full capacity – many of the guests had to stand outside – such was the encouragement for the bridal couple. The ceremony went off beautifully, with many people constantly taking pictures of the proceedings and the blushing bride with her proud groom.

The ceremony concluded to a huge round of applause from all present. The bride's brother had arrived with his entire family and with an amazing four-tiered cake for the couple – I was really touched and mighty impressed with the love and support shown.

After meeting with all the relatives, friends, staff, co-residents (and might I add, several



Farzana Mojgani



hundred pictures being taken), the party moved to Jamshed Baug for the dinner celebrations. Everyone who attended the ceremony joined the couple for an elaborate



and lovely dinner with some more peppy music in the background.

And then, the most amazing thing happened! As soon as we sat down for dinner (the second seating), a huge downpour hit the city, and within 30

sharing the stories of support and encouragement they received, not only from their co-residents, the staff, administration and trustees of WZO Trust Funds, but also from their families and very importantly the good grace and affection with which their union was accepted and acknowledged.

The entire event made everyone present happy, as every single person there seemed to have a relaxed dreamy content look around him or her. I also heard that the bridal couple may take off for a few days for their honeymoon!



seconds, the power in the entire area went off, plunging the Baug in complete darkness, and boy, did it rain! Thunder, lightning and a really heavy downpour for the next hour seemed to be the ultimate approval and blessing from heaven itself! We had an amazing cell phone-flashlight-lighted dinner for the first time in our lives, with much banter and laughter all around. It was truly a very unique, humbling experience – what I learnt is that it is never too late to find your companion, never too late to discover love and affection, even if it had eluded you for the better part of your existence. Minoo and Havovi found each other in their sunset years, and will now spend their remaining years in each other's company instead of being alone and lonely.

The couple were glowing and blushing, holding hands, and looking so very happy! All who participated in and attended the festivities were very touched to witness the elderly couple move around holding hands,



Bachi & Dinshaw Tamboly with the newly wedded couple

# Are you being served?

by homi khusrokhan

**S**ir Rustom P Masani, the first Indian to be appointed Municipal Commissioner of Bombay and later became Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University, in his biography of Dr Dadabhai Naoroji, commented on the enigmatic behaviour of Parsis in his own brilliant, inimitable style. In fact, he used the very same quotation in his foreword to a little book titled *The History of the Parsi Panchayet of Bombay* written by Sohrab P Davar and I thought it would be a good starting point for this piece.

*"Parsis are, at times, a puzzle to their neighbours, their virtues lie very close to their weaknesses. The same ardour and tenacity with which they cling to their religion bind them closely to their prejudices and the same lavishness with which they run to the succor of suffering humanity distinguishes them in the persecution of those whom they regard, during the wild excitement of the moment, as enemies of their faith."*

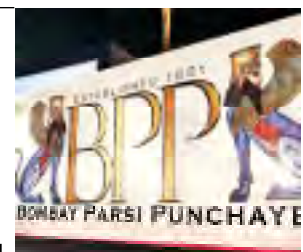
I wonder what he would have had to say today, had he been called upon to comment on the more recent happenings of the last two years and to write about the darkest period of ignominy in the history of the BPP. As with most catastrophes the learnings from the mistakes made are valuable and it may be well worth while for the gentlemen now sitting at the BPP Board Table to spend a full meeting within the next few weeks just capturing and recording some of these learnings, so that they are never repeated again.

So much has been written about the recently-concluded BPP elections over the last few months that it is difficult not to repeat some of what has already been said. Being a 'corporate animal' for most of my working life and having been fortunate enough to sit on some of the best-run corporate boards in the country, I am afraid I cannot but see the events of the last two

years as anything other than a total failure of 'governance'; a term which is much used today, but unfortunately, little understood. Ironically, this failure of governance took place within an organisation that calls itself the apex-body of a community that is known and respected universally for its ethics and integrity. The horrendous infighting that became public just before the World Zoroastrian Congress in Mumbai in 2013 and considerably escalated thereafter, shocked not only the entire community, but also non-Parsi observers and admirers of the community. Not only was very dirty linen washed in public, but sadly personal enmities took precedence over all rational thinking and reasoning. The damage that was being done to the institution and to the very purpose it was set up for was totally lost sight of. The BPP in fact came dangerously close to imploding and I fear that setting right the damage done over the last two and a half years is itself going to be a huge task for the new Trustees. One only hopes that some of the wet mud flung in the heat of the moment does not permanently stain the fabric and cause longer-term damage.

This election, which is the second one to have taken place after the new Adult Franchise System was introduced seven years ago, has been different in certain ways to some of the elections of the past and I'd like to begin by highlighting a few of the differences that have struck me:

✎ Firstly, despite the enormous amount of interest the subject aroused in the press, both Parsi and non-Parsi, the final turnout of voters was lower this time than it was in the last elections. Of course the most facile explanation is that the election, this time, was held on a single day as compared to being spread over five days last time. But is that being too simplistic? Could there be other explanations, such as: (a)





Homi Khusrookhan spent 29 years of his working life in the Pharmaceutical Industry. He retired as MD of Glaxo and Burroughs Wellcome in 2000 and then moved to the Tata Group and was MD of Tata Tea and later Tata Chemicals. Both Tata Tea and Tata Chemicals were ranked No 2 globally in the industries they operated in. After his retirement he was invited to advise the Government appointed Board of Satyam and assisted in the turn-around and revival of the Company. He retired from executive life in 2008 and now is an adviser the Tata Capital Private Equity Funds. He is an independent director on the Boards of several companies including the ICICI Bank.

Fatigue setting in because the subject was 'flogged to death' in the press before the election? (b) Diminution of the importance and relevance of the BPP to the community today as compared to the past? (c) a very large number of candidates (25, this time), many, not so well known, who may not have excited voters as being people who would bring about the much-needed change but would have also fractured the voting? (d) A bit of fatalism - will my vote really make any difference to the end result? Why bother?

❧ Secondly, this time there was no 'winning & dining' as part of pre-election meetings, thanks perhaps to a Code of Conduct proposed by Dinshaw Tamboly and a group of former trustees (together with some other senior members of the community) who felt that the election process itself needs change. The majority of the then sitting-trustees readily agreed to observe the code, voluntarily, which was an excellent sign both from the point of view of listening to the elders of the community and also agreeing to do the right thing.

❧ Thirdly, I felt, and this again is entirely a personal feeling, that far less overt use was made on this occasion than in the past of the "orthodox-card" by candidates seeking to garner votes. Correspondingly and very happily, there was no finger-pointing about some candidates being too 'liberal' or 'reformist' in their view. That to me was once again a good sign and it gives me hope that this could be the beginning of a turning point when the community realises that views on certain issues will differ and that peaceful co-existence is ultimately the only answer going forward. At the same time one cannot but help countenance the fact that fourth-highest number of votes went to a WAPIZ office-bearer, who by virtue of his seniority now becomes the Chairman.

❧ Three of the sitting trustees did not stand for re-election and decided to make way for fresh blood to come in.

One of course, the previous Chairman had completed three terms (21 years) and therefore could not stand again. This again is a good sign. Seven years is really a very long term and it is only right that one should move away at the end of the term and make place for fresh blood on the committee. Some degree of continuity is generally considered important in any change of guard and generally 33% to 50% of the total number of members stepping off a Board at one time is the accepted norm. Unfortunately on the last occasion all seven trustees resigned together and that perhaps was one of the reasons why it was so difficult for the last group of trustees, a complete mixed-bag, to function cohesively. It is for the consideration of the new Board of Trustees to consider moving an amendment to the Court-approved Election Scheme to shorten the term of Trusteeship (to say 3 years) and propose concurrently that only (say) 50% of the total number of Trustees should step off at a time. (The 50% who would step down on the first occasion, is generally decided by the drawing of lots).

❧ Lastly, I feel that I must commend Jehangir Patel for his brilliant idea of asking candidates a set of 21 "pointed but pertinent questions" and to then publish their responses in the 7<sup>th</sup> October issue of Parsiana. I believe this is the first time it has been done and I do hope it becomes a healthy precedent which will guide voters to make their choices more wisely in future elections. It not only gives the voter a clear idea of the candidate's views on some of the burning issues before the community but also some indication of what to expect from the individual. It is unfortunate however that there were some candidates who chose not to respond.

That having been said, let me now explain why I chose the rhetorical question "**Are you being served?**" as the title of this



piece. “*Serving*” beneficiaries is the primary purpose of any form of trusteeship, particularly in Public Charitable Trusts, where large sums of money have been donated by our forefathers, principally to take care of the needs of the poor and under-privileged in the community. The 1884 Trust Deed also enjoins the Trustees make available certain facilities for all Parsi-Irani Zoroastrians. The beneficiary of this Deed of Trust is therefore the key stakeholder and each trustee must realise that the beneficiary is therefore the reason for his / her existence as a Trustee.

What follows, in my view, is that two of the most important qualities for Trustees are therefore humility and empathy. The Trustee is there to serve, not to expect servitude from the beneficiary. Understanding the needs of stakeholders and engaging with all is the starting point of any process of good governance and I do hope that this group of trustees will engage with and listen to all their stakeholders, irrespective of whether the beneficiaries hold a majority or minority view. Often in the past the minority view has been ignored and set aside merely because the Trustees’ sights have been firmly set on taking populist decisions that will win votes in the next elections.

There are two more points I wish to make. The first concerns Governance. One of the fundamental principles of good governance is that when one sits at the board table of one organisation, one must think and act in the primary interests of that organisation. Figuratively speaking when one sits at the BPP table, a Trustee must “don the hat” of the BPP and not “hats” pertaining to other organisations or for that matter even allowing personal prejudices and views to interfere with what is in the best interests of the BPP. Sadly I have witnessed Trustees pursuing the agendas of other organisations and justifying their actions, like some of our politicians, by claiming that it is their bounden duty to satisfy the wishes of those who elected them.

Finally, and this is a suggestion for those who see things only as black or white. I once gave a talk to two warring factions of

the Pharmaceutical Industry (MNCs & Indian Companies) which I titled “The power of **And**” and the message of that talk was that if only people were to learn to substitute the two letter word “Or” with a three letter word “**And**” the industry would thrive and prosper as never before. When choices have to be made, it does not always have to be a choice between this ‘or’ that. A lot more can be achieved if one decides to do this ‘and’ that. I do hope we see the new trustees when faced with tough choices finally decide to make that small but powerful shift in positions before they are taken and agree to change the ‘or’ to ‘aur’ as we would say in *mathru-bhasha*.

Let me conclude by wishing the new Trustees all success in the years ahead. Initially it may be a difficult task, but if serious efforts are made at consensus building, rather than taking decisions by majority, I am sure that there will be rapid progress and the past will soon be behind us.

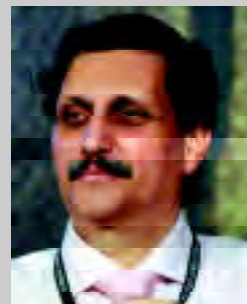


For the benefit of our Hamazor readers residing outside of India, it may be appropriate to introduce the Five Trustees who were successful in the last elections:

#### **Mr Yezdi Desai: (Chairman)**

Votes secured: 3705

The only sitting trustee of the BPP who stood for re-election. He was a founder Trustee of WAPIZ and says he would like to restore people’s confidence in the apex institution. He wishes to settle legal disputes and halve the number from 200 to 100. He also believes in people in colonies now paying something towards the benefits they receive. He would like to see the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India strengthened.



#### **Mr Noshir Dadrawalla**

Votes secured: 5571

Chief Executive of the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy. An expert on the management of Trusts and Non-profit Organisations, Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropy. He also serves on the Board of the US based International Centre for Non-Profit Law and is a member of the





Asian Philanthropy Advisory network. He would like to uphold the rights of all beneficiaries, particularly the poor and homeless restore dignity to the BPP.

**Mr Kersi Randeria**

Votes secured: 5031

An Industrialist and Proprietor of Parsi Times, he has been one of the community's vigilantes and an outspoken critic of some of the BPP's policies such as the selling of properties and charging high premium on transfers. He has also challenged the basis for allotments. He believes that BPP's priorities should be looking after the community's poor and homeless, aged and weak and supporting our youth. He feels the BPP needs a strong and professional CEO.

**Mr Zarir Bhatena**

Votes secured: 3793

A practicing Chartered Accountant and a Builder, he has served on the Board of the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital for 28 years. He would like to see the administration of the BPP strengthened, and good relationships with donors and the public. He wishes to move thinking from "charity" to "sustainable development" and provide direction to the younger members of the community.

**Mr Viraf Mehta**

Votes Secured: 3399

He is a Vice President of CLSA one of Asia's largest investment and brokerage firms. He was recently ranked as India's 3<sup>rd</sup> best trader in the Asia Money Polls and has several other achievements to his credit. At 38 he is probably the youngest Trustee to serve on the BPP Board. Being one of the founder members of ZYNG, the youth wing of the Panchayat he represents the voice of the youth of the community.

In addition to the five newly elected trustees,

**Armaity Tirandaz** continues presently as a sitting trustee. Her term ends in March 2016.

**Muncherji Cama** resigned in June 2015 but his resignation was not accepted by the previous Chairman. He no longer attends meetings and the decision of the Charities Commissioner on his resignation is still awaited.

Images of Trustees,  
courtesy Jehangir Patel, Parsiana

## ***BPP faces many challenges - Interfaith marriage remains the biggest***

by jehangir mehta

**T**he Bombay Parsi Panchayat trustee elections are over. The dust may have settled from seven long years of infighting amongst some of the trustees amidst allegations of corruption and bigotry. Serious challenges lie ahead for the Parsi Irani community in India, but will the trustees bring about a new dawn to restore cohesion rather than division between the liberal and conservative factions.

It is without doubt that voters would have cast their votes with one eye deeply focused on the issue of dwindling Parsi population and the number of Parsis marrying out. I read with interest an email by someone in Mumbai recently proposing that the new trustees standing for the 2015 BPP elections should not be married to a non-Parsi. They must be pure blue blooded. Really?

The whole crux of the main challenge facing BPP will be the rise of interfaith marriages and a paradigm shift is needed towards acceptance and restoring of greater harmony, rather than the current stalemate from the clergy and the conservatives. Would I take a dim view of someone who was married to a non Parsi and treated her with utmost respect love, and human dignity? I would certainly not. I would admire his or her qualities as a good human more than the rank, position, wealth or status in life. Instead I would take a very poor view of someone if he or she was married to a Parsi spouse but had no commonality or sense of pride in the partnership. In other words the marriage was a sham. Would that person then become a good role model in BPP and the community? Sorry but that trustee would fail my vote as a good human being. Incidences of interfaith marriage are on the rise in a society that is increasingly

diversifying and they do work well in an environment of mutual respect between two partners. World peace and for that matter peace within Parsi community lies in diversity, not uniformity. World is slowly marching towards spiritual advancement rather than bigotry of organized religions. People who are happily married in interfaith relationships can actually contribute constructively in passing the goodness of all religions to the children and youth of our community rather than a narrow minded bigoted approach. They would indeed provide spiritual maturity and harmony.

The Parsi community in Mumbai is distraught and deeply divided on religious lines, and this new distraction of who should and should not stand for BPP election on interfaith marriage preferences shows that battle lines are now being drawn on further division and rancor. Haven't we seen enough discord in last seven years of political infighting and disrepute by so called blue blooded trustees of BPP on factional lines†that we now want to introduce further qualifications of blood lines?

It is precisely people with such dim views on diversity and acceptance of non-Zoroastrian spouses that makes associations and communities around the world look so backward in the 21st century. It is a few minority conservatives who hold sway on the rest of the progressive community, that people simply switch off and move on with their own lives. Accept and welcome non-Zoroastrian spouses and children of mixed marriages, make a harmonious community like Indore, Delhi, Calcutta, Sydney, Hong Kong and other associations in North America. If we keep this blue blood sentiment, I am afraid there will be rancor and ill feeling. Then no matter how good the intent of the trustees, the community will remain divided. Zoroastrianism is a universal religion open to anyone who may wish to become a Zoroastrian.

Dina McIntyre in her lecture in Mumbai to ARZ and AIMZ in 2006 on this very topic said that opinions including her own aren't worth much, the question is what does our

religion teach on this issue. She said that the evidence of what our religion teaches is contained in Zarathustra's own words in the Gathas, in ancient texts and prayers written more than 1000 years after Zarathushtra, in formal opinions given by ancient and some modern religious authorities and in our ancient traditions and customs. Her lecture laid out the evidence from these sources, which showed that exclusionary practices are not supported by our ancient texts and traditions.

Dina who has lectured on the teachings of Zarathushtra worldwide and at the Parliament of World Religions in 1993, disagreed with the argument made by some people that we must accept non-Zoroastrians into the religion if we wish to survive. She said in her lecture, "Our Ashem Vohu prayer teaches us that we should do what is right because it is the right thing to do. In my view we should practice acceptance – not to survive but because it is the right thing to do. On the other hand it pleases me that our ancient texts whole heartedly support acceptance as the right thing to do."

Ervad Jehan Bagli who was the past President of North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) also supports this idea of universality. Quote "Divine light of God dwells in all members of the human race irrespective of their faith. Whether we address it as Ahura Mazda, Zarathushtra, Krishna, Buddha, Yehova, Christ or Mohammad. These are just names of the same Divinity. How then are the members of other faith different? Human race is one brotherhood and all are brothers and sisters from the same Divinity we call God."

Unquote. This might be an **inconvenient truth** to some, but it is the universal truth and the law of nature. Intolerance exists not only amongst the religious but non-religious, the fact is that religion creates an environment that fosters intolerance. It creates a thought process that my religion is better than yours.

Hearts and minds of majority cannot be won by a minority few who see interfaith

marriage as a scourge rather than a blessing. Fear not what children of interfaith marriage can take away from BPP institutions, rather what you would lose alienating them. God sees all humanity as his children. Quote from Dastur M N Dhalla's book *From Religions to Religion*. "Religion is righteous living and the religion of righteousness has all humanity for its following. A synthesis of all that is best in all religions will form man's future religion and mankind will not find it possible to think in terms of this or that religion but only of Religion. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, said there were no Hindus and no Mussulmans, and so the blessed prophets and saints and Mahaans repeat from the ethereal heavens that God knows his children, not in divided groups with differentiating religious designations, but as one great human federation, united in Gods universal religion to come."

The gentleman who sent such an email barring candidates on such grounds has gone on record stating that some of our high priests and ultra-orthodox scholars have strictly mentioned that inter-religious marriages have no sanctity in our religion. Really? Is that the opinion of the priestly who have yet to become enlightened? Do they know what enlightenment means? The concept of a position of becoming a high priest or a scholar cannot make a God or Goddesses. Neither the higher position in clergy and/or a scholarly position can confer enlightenment. How can a priestly attire contribute to your spirituality? No external symbol can confer spirituality on you. Question where in Gathas or our scriptures there is this law and the ruling about intermarriage. You have to research in which verse, para and chapter there is this distinction. Indeed no proponent of exclusion has been able to come up with any evidence to the contrary in any ancient Zoroastrian text.

To pass on an excerpt from an Enlightened Mahaan in India – quote "Talks and discourses and preaching's based on theories and general speculation cannot be complete, because they have not faced

real-life incidents. They have not come across Buddha or Mahavira or Jesus or Zarathushtra and the like who have realized the Eternal Truth and illustrated through their lives that one can lead a noble, divine life. Spirituality is an unlimited phenomenon. How can a human being analyze it? None can know it fully. Only those who have become Limitless can guide. One who is complete in all respects can show the way." Unquote.

Having said this I pray that the new trustees wishing to do good for the community, have the wisdom and compassion and no such boundaries should be placed about interfaith or intra-faith marriages. May Ahuramazda grant peace and harmony to the people of Mumbai who so deservedly have been wishing a tranquil and harmonious living for a long time.



*Jehangir Mehta is a marine pilot and lives in Perth, Western Australia with his wife Phyrooza. His love and passion for food and cooking reflects in his periodic foodie blogs.*



# December 25 & the Birth of Mithra

by k e eduljee

A trusted harbinger of the festive December season is the perennial discussion about links between Christmas and Roman Mithraism. This article examines if there is a relationship between Christmas and the birth of Mithra and when Mithraism (originally from Iran) was imported to Rome. We will start our examination with the pre-Christmas Roman festivals said to celebrate the birth of Mithra.

## 1. Roman Festivals of Saturnalia & Natalis Invicti

By the fourth century CE, Christianity began to establish itself as the dominant religion of Rome under Emperor Constantine (r.306-337 CE). Not long thereafter Romans began to celebrate Christmas, the nativity of Jesus, on December 25.

Two pre-Christian Roman festivals that were celebrated at the same time as Christmas were Saturnalia and Natalis Invicti meaning the 'nativity or birth of the invincible'. Some writers claim the latter festival was a Mithraic festival that celebrated the birth of Mithra. Others deny the claim, raising the question: Who is right?

Our quest for an answer starts with an oft-quoted early Roman record, the *Chronography of 354*. Its calendar has the entries 'Saturnalia' beside December 17 and 'N Invicti' (short for Natalis Invicti) beside December 25.<sup>1</sup>

The festival of Saturnalia was dedicated to Saturn, god of the harvest. By all accounts, Saturnalia was a raucous festival. In reality, Rome's festive season started on November 24 with the festival of Bruma. Fifth century CE Byzantium writer Joannes the Lydian states it best – that the cold season in Europe (starting in November) brought a stop to the work of farmers, hunters and soldiers who occupied themselves ... well, partying.<sup>2</sup>

The *Chronography of 354* is bereft of any details on these festivals. Since 'invicti' was a common title afforded to numerous Roman gods and emperors (Commodus onwards), the listing 'N Invicti' – universally recognized as standing for 'Natalis Invicti' meaning 'nativity (of the) invincible' – is not a definitive name in itself. While 'Sol Invictus' was one of the titles that incorporated 'invicti/invictus', there is no record of a festival called 'Natalis Sol Invictus'/'Natalis Solis Invicti'. Given that the author of the *Chronography of 354* calendar was a Christian who lists Jesus' birth date on December 25 in another section, it could even – as some point out – have referred to Jesus' birth. Two early Christian leaders provide further clarification.

## 2. Christian Accounts of Saturnalia & Natalis Invicti

Early Christian author Tertullian (160-220 CE), warned Christians not to partake in Saturnalia's festivities or to exchange gifts on either New Year's day and Midwinter's day (likely the solstice in the old Roman seasonal system) when "every pomp of the devil is frequented" and "games join their noise or else banquets join their din!" He continued to say that since the heathen did not celebrate either the Lord's Day or Pentecost, Christians should not partake in heathen festivals. (Following his conversion to Christianity, Tertullian had been accused of continuing his worship of Sol and praying facing east.)<sup>3</sup>



Fig 1. Antoine-François Callet's Saturnalia (1782-3 CE). The revelries culminated in Natalis Invicti. Image credit: Wikipedia.





Fig. 2. Greek Sun god Helios wearing only a chlamys, a Greco-Roman mantle, as he does in several Mithraic motifs, and an important identifier of his 'ethnicity'. Image credit: Wikipedia.

Pope Leo I (c.400-461 CE) in a recorded homily regarding December 25 stated, "Dearly beloved ... simpler souls are mislead with the pestilential notion that our solemn feast day seems to derive its honour not so much from the nativity of Christ, as from the rising of the new Sun. Such men's hearts are wrapped in total darkness and have no growing perception of the true light. They are still drawn away by the foolish errors of heathendom. ...Let not Christian souls entertain any such wicked superstition and portentous lie." <sup>4</sup>

[Nowadays the first sunrise following the winter solstice occurs usually (depending on the year) between December 21 to 23 of the Gregorian calendar instituted by Pope Gregory XIII on March 1, 1582. Before that date, Romans used the Julian calendar, which by the 4th to 6th century CE was somewhat out of phase with the actual occurrence of the solstice.]

Given these comments, there is a reasonable chance (but not surety) that the 'Natalis Invicti' celebration on December 25 more completely meant 'Natalis Solis Invicti' meaning 'nativity or birth of the invincible Sun' – celebrated in conjunction with Saturnalia. We have not been able to find a statement that makes the equation or that December 25 was celebrated in Rome as the nativity of Mithra. What we have found instead is a modern equation between Sol and Mithra, ie., Sol is assumed to be another name for Mithra. However, can we automatically equate Sol with Mithra as so many writers claim? As such, in the context of December 25 as a birth date of Sol, we need to determine if we can indeed equate Mithra with Sol.

### 3. Roman Worship of the Sun, Sol as God

In response to allegations that Christianity had brought about the decline of Rome, Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) wrote a retort in which he notes that the Romans worshipped Sol, the Sun, as a god from time of Titus Tatius, an eight-century BCE Sabine king who battled Romulus the founder of Rome.<sup>5</sup> Other writers also mention the early Roman worship of the Sun god Sol and Sol Indigitis/Indiges (indigenous). For instance, Roman writer Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) noted that a shrine to Sol stood on the banks of the River Numicius.<sup>6</sup> Pliny's contemporary Quintilianus (c.35-c.100 CE) made note of a temple to Sol on Quirinal Hill in Rome.<sup>7</sup> The counterpart to Sol was Janus the Moon.

Helios (the older Titanic Greek personification of the Sun as a god), Apollo (Greek god of Sun & light) and Sol (Roman god of the Sun) were part of the ancient Greco-Roman pantheon of gods that existed before the introduction of Mithra in the West.



In this context, we have found a different Aryan influence in Rome though it is not through Mithra. That discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

### 4. In Roman Mithraism, Can Mithra Be Equated With Sol?

Roman Mithraic altar scenes usually depict Mithra and Sol (as the personified Sun) separately. Besides being depicted separately as two different entities, in the artistic system used by Greco-Roman artisans, young Greco-Roman men are shown scantily clad or nude while 'Persians'/Aryans are usually shown fully clothed from head to foot. In Mithraic iconography, Mithra and his associates are invariable shown fully clothed in the typical 'Persian'/Aryan style, while Sol is often shown nude or with a chlamys around his neck.<sup>8</sup> While not necessarily an accurate portrayal of regional clothing, this was the system

Fig. 4. 2nd-3rd cent. CE Roman Mithraic altar scene. The personified Sun, Sol (almost nude) is at the top-center with Mithra in the top right-hand corner & Roman goddess Luna at the top-left. Three of the capped figures – Mithra, Cautopates & Cautes (Mithraic associates) are wearing 'Persian'/Aryan attire. Sol wears only a chlamys, a Greco-Roman mantle often shown on the Greek Sun god Helios. The four male figures hold barsom-like stick bundles. Roman Mithraic scenes show a syncretic blend of beliefs. This panel was discovered near Fiano Romano, near Rome, Italy in 1926 & is currently in the Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Image credit: Wikipedia.

employed by Greco-Roman artists to indicate the difference between Greco-Roman and 'Persian' characters – a system that might indicate the 'ethnicities' of the deities: Mithra was 'Persian' while Sol was Greco-Roman.

Though several Mithraic inscriptions mention Mithra and Sol together as in *Deo Soli invicto Mithrae*<sup>9</sup>, the reverse does not hold true. Non-Mithraic inscriptions featuring Sol alone have scant mention of Mithra (see fig. 5 and inscription<sup>10</sup>).

To summarize, while Mithraic inscriptions conflate Mithra with Sol, all the extant Mithraic iconography we have seen do not conflate the two. In non-Mithraic inscriptions, iconography and coins, we have not found Mithra mentioned or shown together with Sol. Nor have we found any evidence to suggest that we can automatically conflate Sol with Mithra.

### 5. Can The Aryan Mithra Be Equated With the Sun/Khor or Surya?

Turning to Zoroastrian sources, the Khorsheed (radiant Sun) Yasht makes an insightful statement in verse five on the role of Mithra (Meher) as the bond of companionship between the Sun (Khvar ie. Khor) and the Moon (Mah). The Khorsheed and Meher Yashts are separate chapters indicating the concepts behind them are different. The words used to describe the two entities are also different. James Darmesteter in his translation of the *Meher Yasht* notes that in the *Avesta*, "Mithra is closely connected with the Sun, but not yet identical with it, as Mithra became in later times."<sup>11</sup> What we see is that while in early times Mithra was mentioned separately from the Sun, Khvar, by medieval times Mithra was often conflated with the Sun.

If we were to look for signs of a conflation between Mithra and the Sun in ancient Aryan theology, a good place to look would be the oldest sacred Hindu text, the *Rig Veda*. The *Rig Veda* mentions Mitra (Mithra) at least 412 times – but only in a couple or so occasions in the same verse as the Sun, Surya. In a chapter dedicated to the Sun, Surya (chapter 50), we find no mention of Mitra at all. Importantly, the *Rig Veda* states, "Indra raised the Sun on high in heavens that he may see afar". Similarly, "In the sky's lap the Sun assumed this form that Varuna and Mitra may behold it (the work of the godhead)."<sup>12</sup>

We have found no reference in the *Avesta* or *Rig Veda* that equates Mithra/Mitra with the Sun, Khvar/Surya.

We will now turn our attention to the public face of Roman Mithraism and its supposed role in the December 25 festival of Natalis Invicti. A quick review of a Roman sect similar to Roman Mithraism will help us understand if Romans at large practiced Mithraism.

### 6. Roman sect of Jupiter Dolichenus

Another deity called Jupiter Dolichenus in Rome (Zeus Dolichenus in Greek) was worshipped in Rome around the same time as Mithra (the names Jupiter and Zeus only signify that the deity was the head god in the aboriginal pantheon from which it was borrowed). Since Jupiter Dolichenus was originally a god worshipped in eastern, ie., Syriac lands, some authors call Jupiter Dolichenus (and Mithra) an 'oriental' god.

Further, as with Roman Mithraism, the motifs depicting Jupiter Dolichenus (see fig. 5)

Fig. 5. Dedication slab with Sol the Sun god wearing a chlamys and emanating solar rays. Luna, the Moon goddess is in the background with a crescent resting on her head. The bearded male is likely Jupiter Dolichenus who is invoked with Sol in the inscription beside him. The slab – which does not depict or mention Mithra – was discovered at the barracks of the Equites Singulares, via Tasso, Rome and is dated to between 150 and 200 CE. Image credit: Wikipedia



depict the Greco-Roman deities Sol and Luna as well.

About thirty Mithraea – the temples of Roman Mithraists – and twenty Dolichenus temples have been found in Rome, giving us an idea about the proportions of their membership.

Since the iconography of the mystery religions of Mithra and Dolichenus feature the Roman deities Sol and Luna, both were likely syncretic religions – a blend of eastern and western traditions. It is also likely that they were subsets of the native Roman traditions where the worship of Sol was itself a subset – in much the same way that Hindu sects, which give prominence to the worship of an individual deity, remain subsets of Hinduism. We read that that were at least four such sub-sects in Rome around the same time.

This is also yet another instance where Sol is not the preserve of Mithraism.

#### **A. Doliche, Turkey (Syriac) Sites**

The name 'Dolichenus' is derived from one of the more prominent temples found on a hill near Doliche in south-central Turkey – not far from the Syrian border. In Roman times, this area was considered to be part of Syria.

Two underground Mithraea have also been discovered in Doliche side-by-side in an abandoned quarry. The existence of two Mithraea next to one-another rather than one large Mithraeum may speak to the limitations on the size of membership in each Mithraeum. The dating of when the Mithraea were established is disputed with some arguing for a date as early as the first century BCE (during the early Parthian era in Aryana and from about the time of the founding of the Roman Empire). Others prefer a dating of around the first century CE. The earlier date would make them two of the earliest Mithraea discovered so far and part of the discussion on the roots of Roman Mithraism.<sup>13</sup>

#### **7. Roman Mithraism – Public Religion or Masonry-like Private Society?**

Modern authors call Mithraism and the Jupiter Dolichenus sect, mystery sects – because entry into their temples was restricted to followers who had undergone initiation rites. As a result, the public at large did not know much about the sects' beliefs – they were a mystery to the general public and thus not 'popular' sects. Mithraism was more like a secret society somewhat akin to the Masons of today. Some Masonic websites state that Masonry and Roman Mithraism had common rites such as rites of initiation, and that Masonry may have descended from Roman Mithraism.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 6. Artist's concept of a 14-person Mithraeum scene.



Mithraea were usually around 10-12m long and 4-6m wide. Most were located in secluded and dark places – even underground. The open floor space was fairly restricted and narrow with barely enough room for twenty to fifty people.

Given that Roman Mithraism operated more like a private and secret society, it is highly unlikely that Roman Mithraism was a religion followed by a substantial part of the Roman population, or that it ever posed a serious competitive threat to membership in native religions or for that matter, Christianity. While claimed by several authors, we have not been able to find direct evidence that Mithraism was a widely practiced public or imperial religion. It is also unlikely that Roman Mithraists instituted large public festivals such as the *Natalis Invicti* on December 25.

In summation, we have found nothing in original Latin sources that suggests we can automatically equate the various references about the celebration of *Saturnalia* and the worship of *Sol* on December 25 – as well as the appearance of *Sol* on coins (that feature several local deities of which *Sol* is but one) – with the worship of *Mithra*.

While the development of Roman Mithraism is certainly an example of the influence ancient 'Persians' ie. Iranians had on Greco-Roman culture, there were other modes of Aryan influence that in aggregate had a stronger impact than Mithraism. That exposition must await another forum.

#### References & Notes:

1. *Chronography/Calendar of 354* produced for Roman Senator Valentinus (354 being the Christian year CE otherwise AD). The calendar's notation for December 25 is "*N invicti cm XXX*" i.e., "Nativity (birthday) of the unconquered, games ordered, thirty *circenses missus* (races)". In another section, the calendar notes that December 25 is "*VIII kal. Ian. natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae*", i.e., "8th (day before the) kalends of January (December 25), Birth of Christ in Bethlehem Judea." Elsewhere beside 1 AD it notes, "*dominus Iesus Christus natus est VIII kal. Ian*" i.e., "Lord Jesus Christ is born December 25."
2. Joannes the Lydian in *De Mensibus* at 4.158.
3. Tertullian in *On Baptism* at 19, *On Idolatry* at 10-14, *Apology* at 16.9ff & *To the Nations* at 1.13.
4. Pope Leo I in *Sermon 27 On the Feast of the Nativity* at 7.4 tr. to English from Latin by C. L. Feltoe in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* Vol. 12 (Buffalo, 1895) tr. edited slightly by this author for syntax.
5. Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* (The City of God against the Pagans) 4.23.
6. Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* 3.56.
7. Quintilianus 1.7.12.
8. Also see 'Clues Through Attire' at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/07/halicarnassus-mausoleum-pt-2-ethnicity.html> and Herodotus on Persian Attire at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/04/herodotus-on-persian-attire-perseus.html>
9. CIMRM 248 at M. J. Vermaseren's *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (CIMRM) (Hague, 1956/Springer, 2012) p. 436.
10. CIMRM 373 Inscription: "*Soli Invicto pro salute Imp(eratorum) et Genio n(umeri) eq(uitum) sing(ularium) eorum M. Ulp(ius) Chresimus sace[rd(os)] Iovis Dolich[eni] [dedicavit]*" meaning "[Dedicated to] Sol Invictus for the emperors' health and to the numerous genius of their singular horses, M. Ulpus Chresimus, priest of Jupiter Dolichenus."
11. J. Darmesteter in SBE's *The Zend-Avesta* Pt. II (Oxford, 1883) p. 122.
12. *Rig Veda* at 1.7.3 and 1.115.5 respectively.
13. A. Schutte-Maischatz and E. Winter in *Doliche* (Bonn, 2004) pp. 79-195.
14. See 'Mithraism: Freemasonry and the Ancient Mysteries' by Bro. Haywood at [www.mastermason.com](http://www.mastermason.com). "mithraism masonry" had nearly 10,000 results on Google.



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Eduljee is a past director of the Zoroastrian Society of BC and a founding trustee of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr trust for BC. His efforts in maintaining the Zoroastrian Heritage site are directed towards providing objective information on the Zarathushti religion and its heritage, promoting the good name of the community, and honouring the memory of Zarathushtis who through the ages have performed great sacrifice in order to faithfully preserve Zarathushti heritage and its core values.



## A Recent Tour of Iran

by jenny rose

**T**his photo essay documents a tour of some of the archaeological and cultural sites in Iran during the spring of 2015. I was the study leader for the tour, and responsible for interpreting these places within the context of Iranian history and religion. One of my fellow travellers was Aban Rustomji of Houston, who appears in several of the photos.



**May 12<sup>th</sup>** : Aban and I arrived a couple of days before the tour began, and had the opportunity to meet with Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary, the chief *mobed* in Tehran, to visit some Zartoshti sites in the city, including the Anjoman Adriaan *atashkadeh*, the main fire temple. Mobed RostamVahidi also came along to greet us. The fire temple is flanked by the Firuz Bahram high school on one side, and a wedding and meeting hall on the other.



We ate lunch in a popular restaurant near the fire temple, before heading to the Shah Varahram Ized shrine. I had wanted to visit this site since learning about its history from a Zartoshti friend in southern California, whose ancestor, Hormoz Varahramiyan, donated the house and land in the 1870s, after hearing a voice telling him to do so while he slept under the mulberry tree in the courtyard. At the shrine, we met a small group of Parsi 'pilgrims' from Mumbai.



**May 14<sup>th</sup>** : Once the rest of the group had joined us from various parts of North America, the tour began with a visit to the National Museum in Tehran, which chronicles the history of Iran from the prehistoric period on. This statue of Darius I (r. c. 522-486 BCE) is the only extant Achaemenid free-standing sculpture. It was carved in Egypt, but at some point was moved to Susa, where the French archaeological team unearthed it in late 1972. Darius' name is written in hieroglyphs on his belt. Inscriptions in Old Persian and Akkadian cuneiform run down one side of his robe, and one in Egyptian hieroglyphs down the other.



**May 15<sup>th</sup>** : From Tehran, we drove to Hamadan, thought to have been the capital of the Medes, and had a private tour of a tomb purported to be that of the Biblical heroine Esther, alongside the synagogue where Hamadan's few remaining Jews gather to worship.



Near Hamadan, we climbed the lower reaches of Mt. Alvand to view two important trilingual inscriptions (in Old Persian, Akkadian and Elamite) of Darius I and his son, Xerxes (r.c. 486-465). These inscriptions known as *Ganj Nameh* declare the creative activity of 'the great god Ahuramazda,' and the two kings' respective right to rule. Henry Rawlinson used the texts of *Ganj Nameh* and Bisutun to decipher the cuneiform script.



**May 16<sup>th</sup>** : Unfortunately, the relief and inscriptions at Bisutun were behind scaffolding when we arrived in Kermanshah province the following day, but en route we spent a fascinating morning exploring the hilltop sanctuary of Tepe Nush-i Jan, where an Iron Age fire temple (dating to the Median period) had been carefully preserved before the site was abandoned. The mud-brick fire holder on one side of the temple is no longer visible as it is now protected under layers of adobe, as is the exterior of the entire complex.



Near Bisutun, in the landscaped park at Taq-e Bostan, we came across this inauguration relief of a Sasanian king: on the right, Ahura Mazda bestows the diadem of rule, while both figures stand on the body of a Roman king - probably Julian the Apostate, who was defeated by Shapur II in 363 CE. To the left, the image of Mithra with rayed nimbus and *barsom* became a model for 19<sup>th</sup>-century depictions of Zarathushtra.



**May 18<sup>th</sup>** : As we travelled south from Kermanshah, we stopped to visit Chogha Zanbil ('basket mound'), the vast mid-13th century BCE temple complex constructed by the Elamite ruler Untash-Napirisha. At its center is a ziggurat faced with millions of baked mud bricks: many of these are inscribed with a dedication to Inshushinak, the 'lord of Susa.' From Chogha Zanbil we headed to Susa itself, the old Elamite capital, where Darius I built one of the four great Achaemenid administrative and cultural centers, at the southeastern end of the 'Royal Road.'



From Chogha Zanbil we headed to Susa itself, the old Elamite capital, where Darius I built one of the four great Achaemenid administrative and cultural centers, at the southeastern end of the 'Royal Road.' The chateau built for the French archaeologists still looms over the site, where stone-carved floral motifs are a reminder of the importance of gardens for the Ancient Persians.







**May 19<sup>th</sup>** : Near Ahwaz, we admired the Roman-engineered water mills and bridge at Shushtar, constructed under Shapur I (r. c. 240-270 CE). After a long drive from Ahwaz over the Zagros Mountains, we arrived at Shapur I's palace complex at Bishapur, which was also built using the labor of captured Roman soldiers. Roman aesthetic is echoed in the remnants of mosaic floors discovered in the audience hall and courtyard that lie behind the 'Temple of Anahita.'



**May 20<sup>th</sup>** : In Fars province, the heartland of both the Ancient Persian and Sasanian Empires, Shiraz is the nearest city to the

most important archaeological sites. In Shiraz, we visited the Narenjestan, a Qajar-era house, where from 1966-79, the Iranian branch of the Asia Institute was located, directed first by Arthur Upham Pope, and then by Richard Nelson Frye. The small museum underneath the main house displays several artifacts, including a Sasanian fire holder discovered near Barm-e Dilak. An inscription describes how a priest built a fire temple there in fulfillment of a vow after Shapur I's defeat of the Romans.



**May 21<sup>st</sup>** : After a guided tour of the buildings on the terrace of Persepolis, I climbed partway up to one of the Achaemenid tombs cut into the neighbouring hill, known as the *Kuh-e Rahmat*,. The view over the complex reinforces the visitor's sense of monumental grandeur.





**May 22nd** : On the other side of the hill from Cyrus's palaces and tomb at Pasargadae are these two large plinths, one with a staircase, which are thought to be extant examples of the plinths depicted over the tombs of Achaemenid rulers from Darius I on. They indicate that this 'Sacred Precinct' was where the king offered ritual reverence to fire.



**May 23rd** : Non-Zoroastrians must view the ever-burning Atash Bahram fire in Yazd through the glass. The fire is said to be over 1500 years old.



Our day in Yazd included a visit to the *Honarestan-e Pouruchista* (the Pouruchista Institute), an enterprise begun in London over 15 years ago to support the Zoroastrian community in Yazd. The institute, located just behind the Arbab Rustam Guiv *ab-anbar*, offers courses in computing, cosmetology, pattern-making and sewing; serves as a senior center; and encourages women *kushti*-weavers to pass on their skills to others.



We ended the day watching the energetic training of local *pahlavans* ('strong men' or 'heroes') at the *zurkhaneh*, a traditional gym, where some of the rituals and exercises are thought to date back to Parthian times, and others to incorporate Shi'a or Sufi elements.



**May 25<sup>th</sup>** : On our way back towards Tehran we spent two days in Isfahan, where the tremendous *Naqsh-e Jahan maidan* - ‘the square that is the image of the world’— is still a place favoured by locals and visitors from abroad, as it has been since it was first conceived by the Safavid king, Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629).



Many of the traditional *chai khanehs* (‘tea houses’) have been closed in recent years, but we managed to find this one in an alley within the Isfahan bazaar. The group sits under an array of glass lamps and Sufi *kashkuls* (begging bowls), munching on pistachio nougat, while awaiting a well-deserved cup of tea at the end of a rewarding adventure.



Jenny Rose is a historian of religion, with particular interest in Zoroastrian Studies. She has a PhD in Ancient Iranian Studies from Columbia University, New York. An abbreviated version of her dissertation was published under the title *The Image of Zoroaster: The Persian Mage Through European Eyes* (Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000), and her two most recent books - *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (I.B. Tauris, 2011) and *Zoroastrianism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2011) - have both received favourable reviews.

Jenny currently teaches classes on the Zoroastrian tradition for the Department of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, California, and is also a study leader for tours of archaeological, cultural and devotional sites in Iran, Central Asia, China and India. She was an advisor for the first Zoroastrian exhibition “The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination” held in London in the fall of 2013, which will be re-created in New Delhi in March 2016.

## *The longest and Oldest Mud House in the World*

by mira pawar

**M**ud houses may seem strange in today's world but in days of yore, many parts of the world where there was abundance of clay soil, bricks were made for use in construction of houses. The mud houses were considered sturdy and lasted for thousands of years. A mud brick is made of loam, mud sand and water mixed with rice husks or straw for binding purpose. These are then dried in the sun before putting to use for construction. There is mention of mud houses in Spain, Mexico, Syria, Ghana, Yemen, Israel and Timbuktu also but the mud house in Iran, the land of Zarauthushtra is the most significant of all.

The oldest and longest mud house in the world **Arg-e Bam** occupying about 44 acres of land is located in Bam city on the southern edge of the Iranian high plateau in Kerman Province, south-eastern Iran and very close to the Pakistan border. Bam city is more than 1000 meters above sea level in the centre of the valley surrounded by the Kafut Mountains in the north and Jabal-e Barez Mounts in the south. This earthen architectural construction has been traced back around 2,000 years ago to the Parthian Empire (248 BC – 224 AD). Most of the construction is believed to have been built during the Safavid dynasty. Due to an invasion by Afghans in 1722 the city was abandoned but gradually re-established until it was attacked again this time by invaders from Shiraz.

The gargantuan mud house **Arg-e-Bam** consisted of the Governor's residence besides the fortified residential areas. It was located in the center of the city for security reasons. The longest mud house was made of non-baked clay bricks. The castle comprised of barracks, mills, houses, water wells and stables for horses. The areas surrounding the castle consisted of the main entrance to the city and the bazaar besides 400 houses, schools and sports buildings.

**Arg-e-Bam** had 38 watchtowers, four entrance gates and outer defense wall



Mud house. Below : mud house from another angle



surrounded by moat. The Government quarters were on a rocky hill, protected by a double fortification wall. The most notable structures are the bazaar, the Congregational Mosque, the Mirza Na'im ensemble and the Mir House. Outside the citadel, there are other historic structures like Qal'eh Dokhtar (7<sup>th</sup> century), Emamzadeh Zeyd Mausoleum (11-12 century) and Emamzadeh Asiri Mausoleum (12<sup>th</sup> century). Bam occupied a very important place in the region and was famed for its textiles and clothes. For centuries Bam also had a strategic location on the silk roads connecting it to central Asia in the east, Persian Gulf in the south as well as Egypt in the west.

It is believed that in the good old days when the gate of the city was closed, no human or



animal could come inside Bam. The inhabitants could continue living for a long period of time in isolation as they had access to wells, gardens and domestic animals. In case the fortress-city was besieged, the inhabitants could remain in the city while the soldiers defended the citadel protected by high walls and towers. Bam is located in an oasis area, the existence of which has been based on the use of underground water canals (qanat system) and has preserved evidence of the technological development in the building and maintenance of the qanats for over two millennia.

As a result of the earthquake in 2003, *[Hamazor Issue 1/2004 pp 16-21 gave a wide coverage with images; and Zoroastrians all over the world came forward to assist during this calamity]* Bam city was badly affected and the Governor's residence in **Arg-e Bam** suffered damages in various sections which were restored following the use of traditional pattern, technique and material. It is believed that much of the lost fabric due to the earthquake was from modern restorations and not the original construction. Bam and its cultural landscape have been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It is protected since 1945 under Iranian national legislation. Illegal excavations are prohibited in Iran. The main management authority is the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and tourism organization (ICHHTO) an independent directorate who collaborates with other national and local authorities and follows a programme that is regularly updated. As a World Heritage Site, several countries like Japan, Italy and France have contributed towards the reconstruction of the city after the earthquake. Besides funding, Italy is believed to have dispatched a team of experts to restore the citadel's main tower. France has provided the map of Bam Citadel. The World Bank has also granted large sums of money to this project.



Bam citadel after the earthquake



Part of the mud house still in the process of being repaired





Repair work in progress



Cooling system inside the mud house which is restored



Inside the mud house



Mira Pawar is a freelance writer with an extensive writing experience. She worked for Gulf News Paper from Dubai, N Magazine from Hyderabad, India and Hans India News Paper from Hyderabad, India. She has contributed to the Chicken Soup Series and has also written for a book called "How the Phoenix Rose". She is an avid traveler and loves writing travelogues.

# The Everlasting Flame Programme



Dates: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Venues: National Museum, National Gallery of Modern Art, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi.

The **International Everlasting Flame Programme** is to be held, from 19<sup>th</sup> March to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2016, by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, MOMA, in collaboration with Parzor Foundation and the Culture Ministry of India.

This Programme will include **three exhibitions**, namely “*The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*” from SOAS, London, “*Painted Encounters – Parsi Traders and the Community*” from Bombay, and “*Threads of Continuity*” from Delhi, at the National Museum, NGMA and IGNCA, Delhi.

## **The events planned are as follows.**

- **19<sup>th</sup> March 2016, Forenoon: Opening Event at Vigyan Bhavan**  
**Participation and entry by invitation only. Programme to include:**  
 Penaz Masani, ghazal singer, singing Parsi prayer song (Monajat) three minutes and an introduction to the programme (10minutes).
- **19<sup>th</sup> March, 4pm:** Inauguration of National Museum – SOAS exhibition  
*Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination.*
- **20<sup>th</sup> March:** Inauguration of NGMA exhibition, curated by Pheroza Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree, “*Painted Encounters – Parsi Traders and the Community.*”
- **21<sup>st</sup> March, 11am:** Inauguration of Parzor exhibition *Threads of Continuity* at IGNCA.
- **21<sup>st</sup> March, 4pm, at IGNCA:** Navroze celebrations, with Navroze tables from India and Central Asian countries.
- **Dance Performance by Astaad Deboo**
- **Dinner: Navroze Feast to be hosted by the Platinum Sponsor Dr Cyrus Poonawalla, at IGNCA.**
- **22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March:** *Zoroastrianism in the New Millennium*, Academic Conference, MoMA-Parzor-NMI collaboration.
- **23<sup>rd</sup> March, Evening:** David Adams to launch the Film Festival
- Stained Glass Workshops by Katayun Saklat between **25<sup>th</sup> March and 11<sup>th</sup> April.**
- Shahnameh Exhibition with display of models, for one week between **27<sup>th</sup> March and 5<sup>th</sup> April** by Silloo P Mehta of USA.
- **26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> March:** Fashion show on Zoroastrian themes and symbols by Wendell Rodricks and Ashdeen Z Lilaowala, and a Puppet Theatre performance by Dadi Pudumjee.

- **29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> April:** Parsi Theatre performance by Yazdi Karanjia's Troupe from Surat.
- **Multimedia Talks** coming for the first time to India. (April to end May).
- **April: Conservation Workshop** at National Museum with participants from INTACH and Meherjirana Library, Navsari, etc.
- **April:** Toran and Kusti weaving workshops.
- **April:** Acknowledging Parzor's and the community's collaboration with national and international institutions through celebration of events like the **Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune Centenary Day** etc.
- **1st April to 20<sup>th</sup> May: Film Festival** with **Photographic Exhibition** by and on the community. It will screen both classics of Zoroastrian cinema **while a competition, to be announced shortly**, will encourage young film makers and photographers. Contact **Mahtab Irani** for details at [mahtabb@gmail.com](mailto:mahtabb@gmail.com).
- **Friday Muskil-e-Asan** participative story telling at IGNCa throughout exhibition period.
- **Parsi Food Courts at all venues.**

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## Ontario's Lady Mobedyar

*Ervad Tehemton F Mirza wrote to the Editor ...*



It is heartening to note that Zoroastrians worldwide have now acknowledged the importance of female participation in Mobedyar services.

I would like to bring to your readers' attention the selfless service of Mobedyar Guloo Austin to our Zoroastrian community.

Community service is natural to Mobedyar Guloo; being born into the benevolent Kavarana family. In addition to being a past trustee of Bombay Parsi Punchayat, her mother Siloo Kavarana's community service is legendary.

Guloo has all the qualities of a good Mobedyar. In spite of her very busy professional career, she has served the Zoroastrian community throughout South Western Ontario. Guloo started religious classes for children in London, Ontario in 1986 that grew from 5 to 25 children. In 1993, she was invited to be a moderator at a session presented

by Professor Stanley Insler at the First Gatha Colloquium organised by WZO London. She initiated and promoted the idea of female Mobedyars at various Zoroastrian Congresses and was instrumental in convincing the authorities to initiate females as Mobedyars.

Guloo successfully completed North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) prescribed Mobedyar training programme over two years and to the delight of the Zoroastrians of Ontario, she was initiated and certified as a Mobedyar by NAMC in 2012. She has earned the respect and admiration of our Zoroastrian community for her service in our times of joy and sorrow.

May Mobedyar Guloo inspire others to take up this noble service to their fellow Zoroastrians. ■■■

*Ervad Tehemton Mirza lives and operates his CPA practice in London, Ontario (about two hours drive from Toronto) and provides volunteer religious services to Zoroastrians in South Western Ontario and Michigan. He is an Executive and the Treasurer of North American Mobeds Council.*

# *Zarine Kharas: the accidental entrepreneur?*

Interview with Margaret Mountford

**Zarine Kharas was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in June this year, for services to charity and business. In 2009 she was awarded the Royal Society of Arts Albert Medal for democratising fundraising.**

Zarine was born in Karachi in June 1951, the 4<sup>th</sup> child of Cursetjee and Parin (nee Cowasjee) Kharas. Educated at Karachi Grammar School and Girton College, Cambridge, she qualified as a solicitor in 1977 and worked in law and investment banking in the City of London for over 20 years. In this interview she talks about her life and her passion for JustGiving, the company she co-founded with Anne Marie Huby in 2000.

What was your childhood like?

Extremely happy; our house was always full of family and friends. Lots of other kids would come round to play after school but my parents were strict about homework; we sat down to do it at 3 o'clock sharp every day.

Your parents clearly had a huge influence on you. What are the main attributes you learned from them?

The importance of doing the right thing. Generosity: my grandmother used to say that nothing belongs to you, it should all be shared. Good manners. And a strong work ethic, from my father.

Why did you choose Girton?

My parents believed that women should have an equal education to men, which was a pretty advanced view in 1960s Pakistan. We all studied in England; Aban, my oldest sister, read economics at UCL, then Zenobia studied law at Girton. So I suppose it was natural to follow her.

You started work as a trainee at Middleton Lewis, a shipping firm.

Yes, I knew of them because they used to act for Cowasjee and Sons. I specialised in private client work, advising on trusts and inheritance planning. A couple of years after qualifying I moved to Linklaters and Paines.

How did you get into investment banking?

While I was at Linklaters I switched to international finance work and in 1985 I

joined CSFB, a leading investment bank. I stayed in international finance for the next 22 years.

How did JustGiving come about?

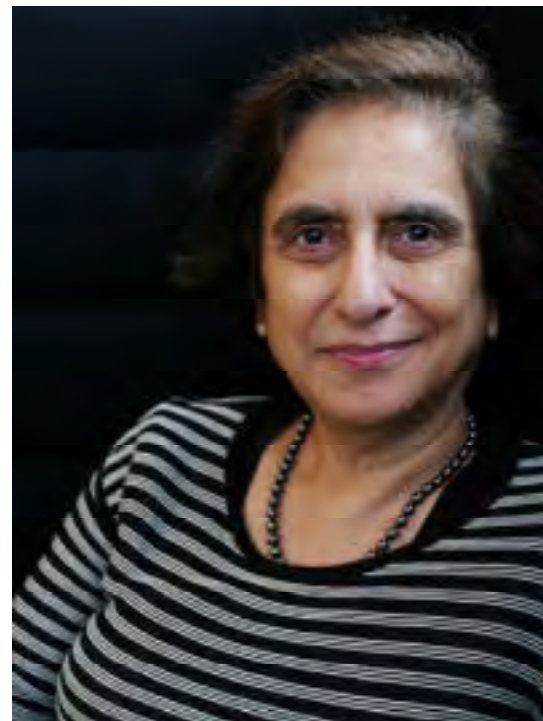
In 1999, I had recently left the world of investment banking to seek a new challenge. I had always wanted to run a business, but not on conventional lines. I believe that business and ethics go hand in hand. So I wanted to explore how business could operate both for profit and for good.

One night I received a call from a former colleague who was just about to start up an incubator for internet businesses. He was looking to add a charity sector organisation to his portfolio and wondered if I might be interested.

I told him I thought the idea was quite mad - I knew nothing about charity or, in truth, about running a business. But he needed an answer. So I said yes.

What shaped your early thinking?

Searching for inspiration, I remembered an incident from my City days.





I had been looking for a girls' education charity to support but couldn't find a single place with information on different charities and how I might support them. I wondered if there was space for an online portal for charities – a digital marketplace where people could learn about charities and make donations online. The principle seemed pretty simple, but we had no idea then just how difficult it would be to make payments work on the internet. At the time Amazon was still in its infancy – and not even present in the UK.

Who joined you on the journey?

I had been introduced to Anne-Marie Huby, who was running Medecins Sans Frontieres in the UK and had also been trying to find an online fundraising solution for UK charities. I convinced her to join me and together we hit the road. At the time, most charities believed the internet was a passing fad, but a few of the more visionary ones placed their trust in us. By the end of the first year, some 70 charities had joined the site.

How did you fund your business?

Just as we had got ourselves organised, the dotcom bubble burst. We were unable to raise any more finance for the business, so we had to live on our wits for a time, with any funds we did have going towards paying our skeleton staff.

In 2001, we were lucky enough to meet a very patient investor with an incredibly long-term view. His vision enabled us to experiment in radical ways and continues to do so today.

Were there any significant events that were defining moments for the business?

A key breakthrough moment came with the 2002 London Marathon.

The organisers were brave enough to let us loose on their runners, so we created a prototype 'online sponsorship page' to help them more easily galvanise the support of friends and family around the world.

It was an amazing success, with one individual runner raising £10,000 for the National Autistic

Society. And it got us thinking. To this point JustGiving had focused on enabling people to make individual donations. What the Marathon experiment taught us was that we could leverage the power of the web to change the way people give, by "democratising" giving.

How did this work?

We had learned that the web was full of people interested in causes, and causes looking for supporters. The common factor was people. We realised that giving isn't a money business, it's a people business.

People give in response to the stories of other individuals –and not just people they know, but people they have never even met. Stories unite us, they are contagious: the extraordinary outpouring of support generated by the distressing images around the Syrian refugee crisis has evidenced this in recent months.

In the face of injustice, illness and tragedy, it is easy to feel powerless. But if we could help people to unite in response to the stories of others, then together we would all have the power to be a force for change – to help make good things happen.

This understanding of the social nature of giving has shaped our business – we focus on helping organisations and individuals garner as much support as possible for their causes, not just from their friends and family, but from the broader giving community, by finding ways to share their story with 'like minds' who share a common passion.

As a result, JustGiving became one of the earliest 'social' applications on the web. It's now the third largest social network in the UK, and the fastest growing giving platform in the world. It is helping 15 million registered users to easily tap into their vast social networks and has enabled more than US\$3.5 billion to be raised for charity.

Do you have any specific principles by which you run your business?

We try to innovate at every turn, which means minimising rules. We have a flat structure without much hierarchy, and we

take a very long-term view of the business, so rather than extracting profits, although we are a for-profit organisation, we have re-invested in the business. We strive to build true partnerships with our charity clients. But above all, we simply trust everyone to do the right thing, because in a knowledge economy we believe it brings out the best in people and therefore works better for the company.

What does the future hold for JustGiving?

The response to the current refugee crisis shows how the nature of giving is evolving. Whilst people continue to support charities in their missions to do extraordinary work, there is also an increase in individual fundraising for causes. From wheelchairs and life-saving operations to community gardens and junior football strips, people are increasingly using the power of the crowd to generate funds for social and community projects that don't involve charitable institutions.

Our founding vision of a fundraising marketplace still holds true, so we are evolving our approach and technology to support people in this new crowdfunding area, as well as continuing to innovate in support of our thousands of charity partners.

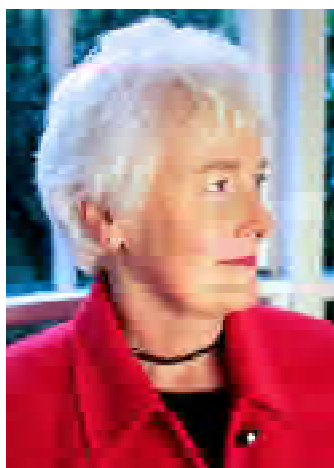
We believe that becoming the place where the world goes to give can benefit all types and all sizes of causes and charities. To that end, any charity or individual, regardless of size and scope, can use our platform, so they don't have to invest their own funds in building and maintaining their own technologies.

What advice you would offer other entrepreneurs?

I would encourage all business leaders to experiment. Our organisation has learned most where we have tried new things. We believe that if we are to continue to lead, we must also continue to break new ground. This means continuing to invest in innovative technology for the good of our partners and finding new ways to help all our users better tell and share their stories.

I would also encourage business leaders to understand what really drives their business. At JustGiving, we know that our success rests on our ability to respond to the innate human desire to unite together to make a difference.

I believe that technology and business work best when they respond to our humanity. In the end, when it comes to making good things happen there is only one thing you really need. And that is other people.



*Margaret Mountford met Zarine Kharas at Girton, where they studied law together; they have been close friends ever since. After 25 years with the law firm Herbert Smith, Margaret returned to academia at UCL, and obtained a PhD in papyrology in 2012. She appeared on five series of the BBC's "The Apprentice" programme and now chairs a privately-owned group of food companies and sits on a number of charity boards.*

## *A Gift for the Elderly*

**K**

ZBM (Karachi Zarthoshti Banu Mandal) is an important philanthropic institution of the Parsis of Karachi. Over the past 100 years, the Mandal has been serving the community at large in different capacities. We have made efforts to assess and fulfill the communities' requirements, to prioritize what the present day needs are and from time to time have endeavored to focus our assistance on the demands of the day. Many decades ago our main focus was on providing the youth with quality education, both local and foreign as well as scholarships for higher learning. Today the focus has shifted to the health and welfare of our aging community.

*by meher cawasji*

Over the last decade many young Parsis have migrated from Pakistan seeking better professional careers and quality of life. As a result, the size of the community has been in decline. Probably more than half of the population remaining in Pakistan is over the age of 60. The older community is left behind either out of necessity or out of choice. Many older Parsis have followed their children abroad but in majority of cases this has not been possible due to a variety of factors. The Parsi General Hospital has had the onus of solely looking after the aged community for many years now. The hospital has taken the responsibility of housing and taking care of our frail seniors to the best of its ability.

### **A Vision**

In 1995, the then president of KZBM, had foreseen the need of an assisted living facility for the community's senior citizens. The idea was to have a purpose built home where their day to day needs would be looked after yet they would have the freedom of leading a private life. To raise funds for such a facility, a fundraiser was simultaneously planned which laid the foundation stone of the fund that KZBM has for senior citizens today. In spite of all the efforts, unfortunately, this project did not materialize for various reasons.

Even today, the concept of assisted living is nearly nonexistent in our country, Pakistan. The younger generation is culturally mandated to take care of their parents in need and therefore the concept of assisted living has never been institutionalized. But slowly, this tradition is being changed by the increasing number of families that are geographically dispersed or families in which both spouses have to work and many sets of parents find themselves in 'stand alone' mode, left at the mercy of, most of the time, untrustworthy hired help. It is time to recognize this need and find a viable solution.

### **A Dire Need**

As far as the Parsi community of Karachi is concerned such a facility has become a pressing need as there are a sizable number of elders living alone, especially those who are single or those who do not have any children or family members to look after them.

Realizing this need, the present Managing Committee of KZBM had been on the lookout for a suitable premise to convert into an assisted living home in the Avari / Cyrus Colony since the past couple of years. This gated colony is where the



largest number of our community members reside. It has flats as well as individual bungalows. A very pleasant and peaceful colony, its biggest advantage in today's times is the security it offers to the residents. The colony is also situated very close to a hospital where in case of any emergency, it is easily accessible to the residents.

For nearly three years the search for the right premises went on. Building a purpose built home was not an option at present as we had limited funds and the houses that were on sale were either too small or not suitable enough for this Project.

### The Gift

God Fuels Good Intentions.

As luck would have it, Kaikobad and Narges Kakalia, both born and brought up in Karachi but now living abroad wanted to dispose off their parents' bungalow after their mother's demise. They considered selling it until it was suggested that the house be turned over to KZBM for their new venture. Once the whole project was explained to them, it reminded them that their mother's ardent wish had been that such a facility be available for the elderly Parsis in Karachi. Arnawaz Kakalia, their mother had the option of going and living with her son in England after her husband passed away, yet she chose not to because the climate was not conducive to her health. During this period, both of her children were exposed to the day to day challenges of their elderly mother living alone. Despite the fact that all her monetary needs were taken care of by the resources her children provided, she still felt lonely. To overcome this challenge for the other members of the community, her children decided to give their bungalow to KZBM as a gift to be used for the community's elderly. Their only request was that it be named ARMAN after their parents ARnawaz and MANeck. After the necessary permission from the Anjuman was granted, and the new plans made, the tedious task of renovating the building finally began.



Arman Home for the Elderly, B16 Dinshaw Avari Colony



Entrance into Arman Home, with suitable ramp for the handicapped, steps with handrail



## Arman Home

Arman Home can accommodate a maximum of 16 residents. Rooms are on twin sharing and individual basis with en suite bathrooms specially designed with all specific needs for the elderly. Each of the rooms has split level air conditioners, as well as a lift. There is a general kitchen, a dining hall, a lounge upstairs and downstairs with a wonderful patio attached to the one on the ground floor. The house could have done with a bigger garden but the size will be sufficient for the number of residents the facility can take. A lot of attention has been paid to detail from choosing the right anti-skid tiles, to grab rails, to making it into a wheelchair friendly premises. From choosing appropriate furniture to getting the right wall fixtures, it has been a labour of love.

Arman Home is a non-profit, subsidized facility. We plan to offer assistance with daily living activities eg. bathing, dressing, toileting and medication administration where required, with a central dining programme that includes three to four meals a day. Housekeeping and laundry services along with organized recreational activities would also be provided. Besides an administrator, a full time attendant will be available on each floor. Our aim is to create a vibrant environment where our residents can thrive in mind, body and spirit.

This venture is a small first step to fill in the present day need we face. Hopefully its success will enable us to build a better and bigger facility in the future.

## Opening Our Doors

As the renovation tasks have come to an end, with God's blessings we have opened our doors. A Jashan and soft opening took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November. Besides KZBM members and past office bearers all the heads of the different trusts were invited as many have given generous donations towards this project. The donor flew in from London where he resides, for the opening ceremony.



Drawing room, with French doors which lead out to a large patio with a concrete ceiling



Ensuite bathroom, with toilet & grab rails reflected in the mirror. Toilets and basins are raised to a comfortable height for the elderly.





Shower area in the bathroom, sitting facility, with both hand and overhead showers



Toilet with grab rails



Double bedroom with the ensuite bathroom

It was a warm and humbling experience starting off with our prayers which set the mood that we have so much to be thankful for.

The KZBM president was very generous in her thank you's to all the various persons

who had played major roles in making this dream come true.

After the ribbon cutting our months of hard work was put to display. The appreciation was overwhelming!

There was joy and celebration over scrumptious snacks.

We pray to Ahura Mazda to bless our Arman Home and to guide us in making its residents happy and cared for members of the community. With this prayer, we will

open Arman Home for our residents on the 1st of December to provide assisted living facilities to our respected elders.



More images over leaf



Sponsored by Mehroo Bhote & WZTF London



Dining room with large windows overlooking garden. Paintings are placed throughout the common areas of the Home, donated by our young Karachi Parsi artists.



The glass walled lift



Stairwell with steps leading to the first floor



A very large well appointed kitchen.

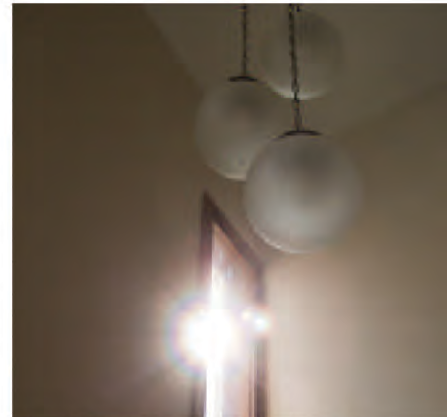
photo credit Minocher Vakharia







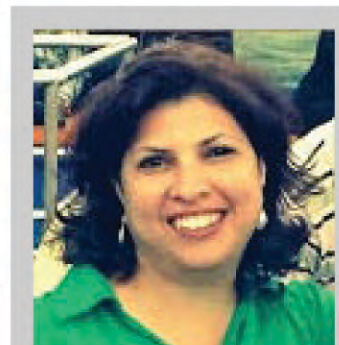
Jashan being held on the patio



May the sun never stop shining on Arman Home



Kaikobad Kakalia opening Arman Home. Below visitors viewing the residence.



**Meher Feroze Cawasji**  
Born and brought up in Lahore Pakistan but settled in Karachi since 1986. A certified Special Needs teacher by profession, she has been working with Mentally Challenged children since the last 25 years. At present she is running a school for Special Needs children in Karachi. Meher joined K'ZBM in 1997 in the education sub-committee to help the community's children with learning problems and since some years is a member of its managing committee as the Education Chairperson.



**Minocher Naval Vakharia**  
A freelance photographer and video maker of Karachi. Currently he is working on the elderly Parsis of Karachi on Facebook. He requests you to visit his page, write your story and make the elders happy.  
[www.facebook.com/karachi-Parsis-839640906153356/](http://www.facebook.com/karachi-Parsis-839640906153356/)



## Not So Ordinary, After All!

T

The Parsis of Chennai, a meager 250-300 in numbers, are an ordinary bunch, you would say. The usual crop of young and old, more old as is the norm nowadays, teachers, entrepreneurs, a sprinkling of doctors, airline, IT, automotive, travel agency and hotel personnel. The run of the mill!

Ah no, that would not be completely true. For there is a wealth of colour and character that livens that image, so that it isn't even remotely like anything or anywhere else.

by *tehnaz bahadurji*

Let's start with the little, white haired ladies. And woe betide anyone who calls them Aunty! Or Old! We have a bizarre anachronistic situation here with 45 year-old Meher, whose biological mother, Dinaz, confesses to no more than 25 herself. And Banoo, whose size 3-feet are probably the result of nothing growing in the shade, for she takes great pride in the fact that her ample assets are genuinely her own - no false augmentation! We have fabric painters and embroiderers and bakers. Sarahmai happily bakes cakes for everyone's birthdays, even though age and infirmity should have slowed her down. And a bite of her chocolate cake can make a grown man stagger - there's likely a whole bottle of rum in each one, though she insists it's only a small splash.

Many of the social service institutions of the city have been carried on the backs of Parsi ladies, past and present. Najamai and Tehmina can walk into anybody's office or living room, give him an almighty big hug and extract a fat cheque from him, or empty his wallet before he knows what's what. Languages seem to be another forte - we have very sought after teachers of French, Hindi, Japanese and Spanish and other strange what-nots. And we also have Dinoo, the "mature model". (Wait a minute and I'll explain!) She once told me that when they want someone in their 60's, they call her ... and then protest because she looks much

younger than her age. We have Pervin, the serial beauty parlour entrepreneur. She started with one, and she's into double figures now, and may the numbers continue to grow.

We have some truly intrepid traveling couples. Age and fitness is no deterrent. At the least opportunity Pesibhai and Hilla will pop into a train (earlier it was a car until their grown up kids threw a tantrum and stopped that nonsense) with their *mamai ni musafiri* baggage, and set off on a journey where the most splendid thing to look forward to is old friends and new foods. Noshirwan and Rhoda are determined that they will tread every corner of the earth that a tour guide can take them to. Their holidays are long and frequent despite bad backs and sundry other ailments. And they're out everyday on tour from breakfast to past dinner time. Folks in their forties blanch at their travel itineraries.

Then there's the young couple, Jiggs and Laila, who have given up their day jobs at what would seem the height of their earning ability. They've set themselves up with automatic income from property rentals and busy themselves doing fitness and adventure activities and helping friends and neighbours. Art is a family business here in Chennai. It started with a small framing shop, and has gone on to represent big name artists of Southern India and elsewhere. Many of us have been introduced into the art scene by

being permitted to buy our first little painting on installment here at Pilloo's.

Biking is a popular pursuit in the city. Superbikes. The big ones whose *vroom vroom* can actually make you break a sweat. They drive out in big gangs on the beach road on Sunday mornings, or on weekend trips up into the Nilgiris. They're decked out properly in leather and boots and helmets. But they drive at a sober grandad pace. Even this lot has their BossMan, Maneck, who's a self taught whizz with bikes and can set anything right. A hot honcho cricketer sends him a private airplane to fly abroad to source parts and stuff for his superbikes. And nobody knew, till one day the information spilled out from somewhere else.

Of course we have our share of motor racing Marshals and antique car aficionados and Ham radio operators. And our platoon of innocuous looking cancer survivors. You'd never know the vicious battles they've fought and won. As supposedly brainy South Indians, we'd be shame faced if we could not include at least one doctor - a pediatric surgeon no less, who works with the underprivileged. And an academic - a business school founder. And a long flank of bridge and rummy players.

Our little community boasts a young Dronacharya awardee too - Mehlli, a squash player himself who took to coaching and then to working with the India team. And we have our own special Marathon Man, Hormuzd, who runs, cycles, pits himself at the toughest of physical tasks, all to raise money for the deserving. There's Sarosh who can never turn away a request for help - big or small. His heart goes out to the old, the young, the sick, the homeless, the girl child, every category you can think of. And educational, medical, palliative, constructive, every support you can name.

An unlikely candidate, Katayoun, makes *torans*, keeping alive a dying art, and is even eager and willing to repair old ones. In fact she gets so excited over having a challenge, that she stays up all night to get it done by daybreak. And Jamshed, whose hands are less than functional has the strangest hobby. He makes model ships - with fussy little bits and intricate parts that have to be handled

with tweezers and glued painstakingly in place. Truly a monumental effort of patience and forbearance.

Of course we have our natty dressers, the nattiest of all bring the silver haired Ardeshir, who would never be seen in less than a brilliant black suit, sparkling white shirt, gold cuff links and a dapper tie - when all around him were melting in cotton bush shirts. The one time we saw him in a short-sleeved shirt, with the tails hanging out, we were all convinced something was seriously wrong. But it was just a mis-step. He soon returned to his usual crisp attire.

And would we be a Parsi community worth the name if we didn't have our food specialist? Homi and Bakhtawar makes Parsi food, of course, but they're renowned the length and breadth of Chennai for their delicious and wallet-friendly biryani.

When I look over this litany, and see my friends behind the portraits, I feel so grateful for this rich and vibrant community here in Chennai. This seamless intermingling of the young and old. I have friends here who are my parents' age, and I call them aunty or uncle but I treat them as peers. They call me *dikraa*, but never talk down to me or expect to be venerated because of their silver hair. They are a wonderful full-of-life lot. They are up and about, going for movies and plays, traveling the country and the world, insisting on their God-given right to eat their eggs and bacon no matter what, and not to be relegated to the League of the Ancients. They hardly ever complain, even in the face of spiraling costs, reduced Fixed Deposit returns, failing eyesight and everything else. They inspire me to fight the good fight and never give up. They are a really special group of people. Nothing can dampen their irrepressible verve and zest for life. They say Old Age is much to be desired, because, hey! look at the option! But if this is Old Age, I'm ready for it. It can catch up with me anytime it wants. If it *can* catch up, that is.

All names have been changed to protect the identities of the people.



Tehnaz Bahadurji

*Convinced that lifelong learning is a window through which one looks upon the world.*

*Believe that one should keep an open mind, but not so open that one's brains fall out.*

*Agree with Shakespeare that there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so, and with Picasso that art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.*

*Love to read, travel, help and empower people, and to rejoice in family, friendship and the many splendours that life has to offer.*



## Passing the torch of an ancient faith

a report sent by ozcf, canada

**I**t helps to have the country's weather network in your riding when 30 Mobeds, all from Ontario, assemble in the outdoors on the longest day of the year, to perform a Khushali-noo-Jashan in the Baug organized by the Ontario Zoroastrian Community foundation (OZCF).

While the weekend forecast promised a wallop of thundershowers for Sunday June 21, the organizers were hoping to beat the odds, as is always the case with any outdoor event held in Canada. And the weather God, as did the weather network complied.

And just as the 10-acre property which is home to the Zoroastrian Religion and Cultural Centre (ZRCC) came alive with Avestan chanting, the cloud cover moved, giving way to sunshine ... and staying that way for the duration of the event.

A group of 28 Mobeds and two female Mobedyars ranging in age from 12 to 88 were led in prayer and the historic event, witnessed by an adoring audience of over 650 people sitting under the shade of two tents set up on the lawns of the ZRCC. The event was live telecast the world over, as was a drone overhead taking pictures.

The event was organized to honour the mobeds who have served the Zoroastrian community in Ontario for over four decades while also encouraging the passing on the torch to the young mobeds who will be taking this tradition forward.

As well, the Afarganyu once housed in kebla of the Zanzibar Agiary was on display at the Jashan.

Several hundred man-hours went into putting up the event and for many visitors and guests it was the best bang you could get for \$10 per person, as post jashan and speeches, all were treated to a sumptuous meal of dhun-dal, shrimp patia, sali chicken and a plethora of mouth-watering home-made desserts of sev, dahi, ravo, malido and dry fruits.

While the local town councilor Tom Adam was invited to grace the occasion, so were some out-of-town guests. FEZANA President Katayun Kapadia and Vice President Homi Gandhi came bearing gifts. They presented a purse of \$501.00 to the OZCF President Percy Dastur, as well as the replica of the Cyrus Cylinder from the 6th Century BC.

A post-lunch entertainment session of music and dance culminated in the grand finale wherein the final OZCF raffle draw of a trip for two to South Africa was won by Mehroo Kazak of London, Ontario. ■■■

Photos courtesy of  
<http://s1135.photobucket.com/user/ozcf/library/Jashan%20in%20the%20Baug%202015?sort=2&page=1>



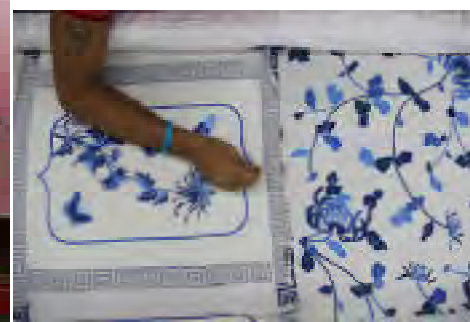
## His Needle and Eye

Ashdeen Z Lilaowala's eponymous label is the first port of call for those wanting to buy a gara. Now, he's taking Parsi embroidery to new audiences and places.

- Parth Phiroze Mehrotra

**A**s a designer, you know you've arrived when people can recognise your work," a prominent Delhi-based textile and apparel designer recently told Ashdeen Z Lilaowala, founder of the eponymous hand embroidery design house, ASHDEEN. The former was referring to Lilaowala's latest coup: In a display of Indian textiles at the swish new New Delhi airport, Lilaowala's work has been featured as a superlative example of Parsi embroidery. Congratulatory messages have been pouring in from friends and clients who've — and this is the significant part — happened to chance upon the panel by Ashdeen. In a sector where designers dip into a common pool of historical creative material — motifs, themes, colour combinations — a piece from ASHDEEN is instantly recognisable by those in the know. His highly sought-after crane sari, for instance, in which elegant cranes wade and frolic in a lotus pond replete with graceful reeds, has become a signature of sorts, and is the theme of the gara embroidery panel at the Delhi airport.

The thing about ASHDEEN creations is that the embroidery isn't an unimaginative and lazy lift from classic, old garas. No, an ASHDEEN gara is best described as a contemporised version of a classic. The essence of a long-time community favourite is distilled and then imbued into a modern creation. So, while at first glance, some of ASHDEEN's themes may seem familiar — pagodas, *china-chini*, roosters, bamboos, and birds of paradise rendered with striking realism and detail — its saris are distinctly modern. Even when they are ornate, they are light, not stodgy. And they can be decorous and playful at the same time. The prices are, frankly, quite reasonable considering the exquisiteness and rarefied nature of the product. And alongside the contemporisation, Ashdeen is pushing the



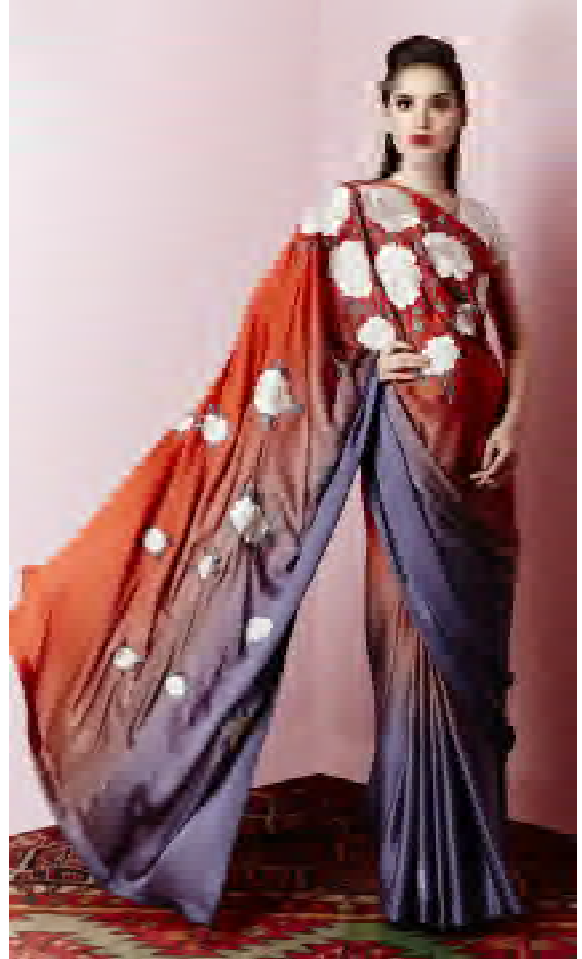


envelope — think saris with peacocks, medallions and geometric lattices embroidered in satin stitch in myriad colours. Our grandmothers certainly didn't have any like these.

Given ASHDEEN's preeminent position in the field of Parsi hand embroidery, it is then surprising to be told that the house is just three years old, and Lilaowala, an Elle young designer award recipient, just 35. Founded in October 2012 and having shown at three fashion weeks till date — Lakme Fashion Weeks in Mumbai for spring-summer 2013 and 2014, as well as winter-festive 2015— ASHDEEN has become the first port of call for those looking to buy a Parsi gara. ASHDEEN clients privilege exceptional craftsmanship and exquisite design — as well as understatement and discretion. They range from leaders of industry to glamorous film stars (you can spot an Ashdeen sari on Sonam Kapoor in Dolly ki doli — famously guarded, that's the only name Lilaowala revealed on the record). From the leading lights of the Supreme Court bar to faceless and anonymous patrons of this luxurious tradition — and not just in India. Lilaowala has held exhibitions in Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Recently, a client in South Africa commissioned a one-of-a-kind pashmina shawl with gara embroidery all over. This commission was requested over email — the brief was cryptic and based on a dream of many years. After countless rounds of back and forth to narrow in on the specifics of the project — including design, exact Pantone shades of colour, and size — it was executed and couriered to the client. On a different continent, a Malayali woman in Australia remotely ordered a white gara sari to get married in to an Australian man. It certainly takes a rare talent, and patience, perhaps even generosity of spirit, to be able to execute something as special and specific as these commissions without ever even having met the client face to face.

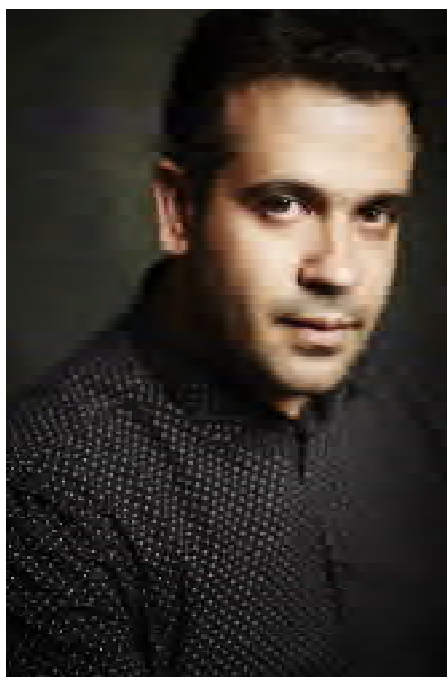
This, perhaps, is the most important thing about Lilaowala himself: Unlike other



purveyors of luxury who can be inaccessible and have a forbidding hauteur, he is eminently approachable. Just ask the tens of clients who have come to him in despair with disintegrating heirloom gara saris and textiles that urgently needed restoration. In one case, the exceptionally talented craftspeople at ASHDEEN dexterously lifted century-old petit point embroidery off a Parsi kor and delicately stitched it onto a new border. What started off as informal restorative help for clients has now become part of what ASHDEEN is known for.

Of course, the challenge before Lilaowala is to take gara embroidery to a wide variety of people across India and the world, not be limited to Parsis alone. So, for starters, the house has started producing wedding lehengas embroidered with typically Parsi chrysanthemums and birds in joyous tones and vivid colours like vermillion and burgundy, he also has a blue and white creation that resembles an elegant Chinese vase — not archetypal gara hues. At its exhibitions, ASHDEEN tailors and adapts products to local tastes and traditions — so at its Chennai show, for instance, the saris on offer were made of tussar and mutka silk. But in north India, crepe silk is what sells. And jacquard silks almost exclusively attract Parsis. But other than these variations, Lilaowala has designed an impressive range of elegantly embroidered evening bags and clutches, jackets reminiscent of the jazz age, tunics and dresses, dupattas with leheriya tie-dye overlaid with intricate embroidery, and even a playful line of butterfly brooches that tremble and almost seem alive when worn. His latest joint venture with Ekaya, a design house known chiefly for its Benarasi weaves, aims at executing the design of typical gara embroidery in brocade.

But ASHDEEN wouldn't have been where it is today without the steadfast loyalty of its craftspeople and employees. In equal share, credit for this should go to Lilaowala, a model employer in the grand tradition of Parsi businesspersons. In an industry plagued with high rates of attrition and poaching, Ashdeen is a rarity. Lilaowala's



core team, comprising of about 12 persons, has stayed unchanged for a decade. But unlike Lilaowala's skeletal squad from 10 years ago, today, the business sustains 50 craftspersons and their families.

Community responsibility is something Lilaowala has

always taken seriously. After graduating from the prestigious National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, he chose to work at the UNESCO Parzor Foundation for years — rather than take up a high-paying job at a corporate design house — with which he is still associated. The foundation's mandate is to preserve and protect vulnerable Parsi-Zoroastrian heritage. Lilaowala is always ready to volunteer for a good cause and is active in the global Parsi community. In an example of life seeming to come full circle, he was elected as a member of the Parzor Foundation Executive Council. Along with Parzor's Dr Shernaz Cama and Mr Dadi Pudumjee, Ashdeen is co-curating the upcoming "Threads of Continuity" exhibition, which will be held at IGNCA, New Delhi.

In the long run, Lilaowala sees ASHDEEN becoming a globally significant specialist house of hand embroidery. He responds to scepticism about the sustainability of this vision with a pat: "If Lesage can ..." referring to the French couture embroidery atelier. He's right though. If anyone can be the Lesage of the east, it's ASHDEEN.



*The writer, a design enthusiast, is assistant editor at The Indian Express, where he works on the opinion pages. Prior to this, he was at the University of Cambridge, UK, where he read for an MPhil in economic research and the economics tripos.*

## *Shernaz Sethna – Extraordinary Cheese maker from Coonoor*

**S**hernaz Sethna is quite famous in the Blue Mountains or the Nilgiris in South India. She is a cheese maker extraordinaire. Her choice of career is unusual in India and her range of cheese – Gouda, Pepper Gouda, Red Chilly Gouda, Colby, Cheddar, Parmesan, Romano, Mozzarella; Soft Herb Cheese and Roasted Garlic and Paprika is always sold out.

The highlight of her cheese-making career has been her appearance on the NDTV food documentary which changed people's perception about cheese making. The three most memorable television programmes that Shernaz Sethna has been featured in are:

Will Travel for Food – by Aneesha Baig

Zaika India Ka – by Vinod Dua

Follow the Star – Mercedes Benz programme.

*by beyniaz edulji*

She has been featured in many magazines including the prestigious Outlook Traveller. Cheese making is a lot of hard work and fun combined. Shernaz's beautiful home which is over a century old is on Gray's Hill, the name she has given her products. Watching her making cheese was a very interesting experience. In between the pasteurization, setting of cheese curd and the elaborate cutting, draining and adding weights, plus turning over the earlier batches of cheeses in her cheese room, Shernaz fed us delicious cheese platters and lunches. The salads and desserts came from her garden. Her dining room and kitchen have a beautiful array of very old utensils, lovingly restored and kept: some as show pieces; others are still being used.

After each stage of cheese making, a walk in her garden was a delight and a revelation. Shernaz's passion is her garden where she grows fruit, vegetables and herbs organically. Nestled between fruit trees (flowering cherry, plum, green gauge plum, pear, orange, lemon, and Chinese guava) were gorgeous flowering shrubs, orchids and herbs: rosemary, thyme, oregano, allspice, cinnamon, lemon grass,

mint, peppermint, spearmint, chives and garlic chives. Her vegetable patches included the reddish rocket lettuce, Brussels sprouts, artichoke, asparagus, leeks and colocassia (patrel). Her husband Homi had put a few bee boxes as he had done bee keeping as a hobby in school. No artificial feeding the bees, they only take the nectar from the flowers in the garden and the honey tasted like ambrosia.

After marriage, Shernaz worked as a tea taster in Coonoor. She started experimenting and making cheese with friends and family encouragement. The main reason to start cheese making was that the climate in the Blue Mountains is conducive to making cheese. She is firm about supporting the local community by encouraging the local milkmen who supply her fresh cow's milk. Nilgiris have some of the best and healthiest cattle found in India. All the cheese is hand made in small batches, no stabilizers and additives are added. The cheese is matured over months, under natural conditions as per the surrounding weather in a special cheese room. Hence there may be variation in every cheese made – in taste and flavour.

Sethna tells us what made her take up this unusual hobby which turned into a commercial enterprise. "I did my MSc in Foods and Nutrition from the Nagpur University wherein one of the topics in Food Science was cheese making and studied the theory of cheese making. After marriage in Coonoor this was a good option. Initially I was working as an executive in a Tea Export Company. Then I moved to my passion of Food and Nutrition."

She started making cheese in the year 2005. Now her products are available in the Nilgiris – Modern Stores in Ooty and Baker's Junction in Coonoor. The Nilgiri Mountains are a tourist destination and her products travel all over India and also abroad.

She was born in Nagpur, Maharashtra, to parents Khushroo and Najoo Doongaji. She went to the J N Tata School and graduated from the L A D College. Her Post Graduation was from the Nagpur University. Her brothers Jehangir and Shiraz live in Nagpur. She met her husband Homi in the Annamalais, South India where she went to attend her dearest friends Khushnoor and Ajay's wedding reception. She has two sons: Sarosh who is studying Hospitality Management at the University of Huddersfield, UK and Jehan who is studying Law at the University of Reading, UK. Her dogs – Devon Dudley, Lola kootti, Giya and Enrix live with her and husband Homi in Coonoor.

Since cheese starters are not easily available in India, she gets them from her sister-in-law Aban Grant from Chicago and her friends from US and Canada also help her out.

Her products include Marmalades – Orange, Lemon, Grapefruit, Pummelo and Whiskey Marmalade during Christmas and Easter.

Preserves – Plum, Orange, Spicy Plum Preserve, Strawberry and Rhubarb, Rose Petal,

Jams – Pear & Ginger, Grape, Plum and Tender Ginger.



Shernaz with her cheeses and below a display of her produce.  
Photo credit: Mukesh Munim





Relish – Mango and Raisin, Lemon and Date, Pineapple, Tree Tomato, Gooseberry  
Specially made Mustard – Mustard in Vinegar and Spicy Mustard in Vinegar.  
Jelly – guava  
Pickles in Vinegar – Green Pepper, Mango  
Ginger and fresh Turmeric.

Shernaz's family has always encouraged her in all her endeavours. She says, "My family is my biggest critic and source of much encouragement." Her husband Homi keeps busy with his beekeeping, Parsi Anjuman work, and Honorary Club work. He looks after the splendid rose patch which was established by his parents Noshir and Freny Sethna. He is the Managing Trustee of The Parsee Zoroastrian Anjuman of Ootacamund. There are around 27 Zoroastrians in Ooty and Coonoor.

Even her children take interest in her work. Sethna says, "Yes, I discuss a lot with them and take their ideas and see their perception. They both cook. Sarosh specialises salads, roast and egg dishes. Jehan specialises in desserts and makes the most amazing Pavlova – seven layered sinful delight."

At heart she is essentially a small town girl. What she likes best about Coonoor are her walks and playing bridge at the Coonoor Club.



Cheese ready for packaging



Homi displaying the honeycomb



Shernaz in her garden. On right, cheese cupboard



Beyniaz Edulji lives in Secunderabad, India. A Law Graduate from Mumbai, she also has Master's Degrees in Economics and Politics from Mumbai University. She has written many political commentaries, sports articles (especially on cricket) and features on various personalities, travel, food and Geospatial Technology for magazines and newspapers in India and abroad. Her interests include adventure sports, cooking and travelling.



L to R: Sarosh, Homi, Shernaz & Jehan Sethna

# Farah Ghadiali – A Musical Journey

by mehroo kotval

“I may not have had the best opportunities but I believe I have made the best use of what I have received,” says Farah Ghadiali who got her voice training in Bombay, India and is honing it at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London where she has just completed one year post graduate diploma – ISP Advanced (vocal training) in classical music towards an intensive MMus (Masters in Music) specialising in performance, psychology and teaching.

Her voice teacher Patricia Rosario, OBE at Trinity says, “We have discovered an excellent voice and I am heartened by the seriousness and commitment of this young singer.” Linda Hirst, who is head of vocal department at the Trinity, believes “She is reliable, hardworking and willing to learn at every opportunity.”

No wonder she is a straight ‘As’ achiever in all her subjects at college. At the conservatoire, she is “completely immersed in music.” Linda also commends her on her “absorption of her new life, has worked tirelessly at singing and performance, which when she came was able but unpolished and unrefined...” – a nuanced difference. Her exposure in Bombay was limited to regular training, somewhat laidback practice after putting in a nine-hour workday at the National Centre for the Performing Arts as Senior Manager Events Marketing versus 12 to 14 hours a day at Trinity pursuing subjects related only to music.

Having known her as a young girl, I recall her being present at family lunches. On one such occasion chez her great-grand aunt, my brother entertained the five year young lady by teaching her the skeletal system. She persisted even then, until mastering the names of the bones tibia and fibula, which seemed to faze her. Then, at an instant fire exchange quiz, she had it all right! Even at that age, she liked being challenged.

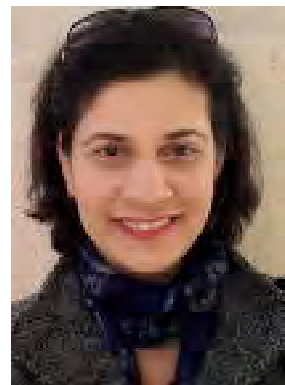
As Farah lists the number of subjects towards her MMus you run out of breath, as in a Handel

phrase. The principal teacher assists in improving technical skills, the dedicated vocal coach suggests repertoire, inputs are given for stage performance, over and above sight reading, choir singing, song classes and pronunciation in languages – Italian, French and German being mandatory. She also learns history of music, form, doing research on background of music and composers or different styles of music and other subjects.

The budding artiste also attended master classes by Dame Felicity Palmer, conductor John Elliott Gardiner and baritone Matthew Rose among several others of repute in a year. She beams as she narrates how opera scenes are enacted, as part of the curriculum, to hone expression of feeling, characterisation. She has already performed in three operas in London in the last year and has been selected to sing regularly at the Church of the Crown Court of Scotland, Covent Garden this year. Farah has a string of interests through which she renews herself – mainly reading and nature walks.

In Bombay, she sang with the Stop Gaps choir and performed in music festivals in Asia and Europe. “I was the only Indian selected by TV5 Monde to sing at the Chanson Francophone. In 2010, I was selected to participate in the master classes of a renowned singer and music educator, Patricia who comes to India three times a year and she is now my principal teacher. In 2012, I participated in the British Isles Music Festival, UK.” She continues, “This exposed me to a broader music experience and made me realise the need to study intensively at a world class music college in order to achieve international standards of performance.” It was Patricia who was instrumental in discovering Farah’s coloratura range as she rode a high F with ease and poise during warm ups.

Farah feels well recognised as she has received a part scholarship from the Trinity Laban Conservatoire as well as news of some funding towards her tuition by the Rothschild Foundation and the WZO London.





At the Enterprise Dubai 2014, she was invited to perform prayers Ashem Vohu and Yatha, composed by Jamshed Turel who accompanied the soloist on the piano. She has also sung 'Jashme' in Bombay from the choral work 'Ahura' composed by Meher Madon Jansen inspired by Parsi Daily Prayers. She also seized opportunities at home by singing in theatre productions of Sam Kerawalla; and in historic and art festivals.

Her exposure to music started with her *bapawa* (paternal grandfather Jal), who regularly heard records of Indian ragas and classical music. She remembers and cherishes memories of her mother Goolrukh singing lullabies to her. Subsequently, off she went to music teachers once a week, even gave exams. The clincher was winning a solo vocal competition in the eighth standard which emboldened her to study music to the next level. She went on to sing solo with her choir in her first concert and also spread her wings to sing at the World Choir Games in Xiamen and Germany's International Choir Competition in Sulzbach.

Accelerando is what ensued. Farah started regular vocal training in 2010 with Minaish Doctor, a student of Patricia. She did her ATCL and LTCL of the Trinity Board. She decided to go to an international school to pursue what she knew was her meetier. From the safety of J B Vachha High School for Girls, a stone's throw from home in Dadar and R A Poddar College, she flew to London where she contended with, different climate, food and bias. Over and above this, she was told "your singing is not sophisticated enough." A comment hardly understood by her initially, as she did not know where she was going wrong. She adds, "nuances (of language) are different, interpretation was unknown, understanding the character (you are performing), what's the feeling in the song, where it occurs in the opera" were not stressed on previously in her studies. And to "top it all", (tongue firmly in cheek - despite attaining a high F with ease), she was also homesick and found her colleagues "not as warm as Indians ...", and the stereotypical soprano suddenly springs to life.

Citing her own example, she philosophises "lots of talented people want to pursue music (in India) but there is no conservatoire level music education. Those students who want to (learn music) do not have enough money. I don't want them to give up for limited resources. I know the tribulations." This makes her determination all the more resolute as she uses her time in Bombay on holiday, chasing donors and visas while practicing and performing. Hardship is not new to her. She lives a very frugal existence and depends mainly on scholarships and educational grants. If you would like to support Farah in her endeavour to be a world class singer and pedagogue or would like to know more about her upcoming performances; please contact her at farahghadiali@gmail.com

Farah's dream is to ultimately return home and prepare future talent. Her philanthropic side is also expressed in performing for old age homes in India during Christmas and volunteering for the Mercy Ships Africa fund raiser in the UK.

Assignments at college are often crafted – for one such she made a teaching aid out of a board game termed "mermaids and monsters" to make theory, rhythm and aural awareness easy for students who are differently-abled. She is currently working on a pop-up book to introduce little children to the orchestra and sounds of each instrument. She is also involved in researching on different approaches to teaching music to students with learning difficulties (mainly through imagery and pattern association). Whatever handicap she faces being on par with co-students at Trinity, she mitigates with hard work, ingenuity and creativity. ■■■■



Mehroo Kotval, HR executive for 32 years with international corporations in Bombay, pursued her dream of working with NGOs. She set up HR systems for a women's and a street children's NGO. A seasoned choral singer, her interests include people, process work and travel. She is currently senior editor at Parsiana, a liberal Indian Parsi magazine.

## *Singing their way to Las Vegas - Living the dream*

by farida master

A strong passion for singing had the mother-daughter duo, Mehernaz and Persis Darukhanawalla compete recently at an international level at the prestigious Sweet Adeline International Convention held in Las Vegas.

Representing New Zealand as members of the Greater Auckland Chorus (GAC) at Las Vegas, 44-year-old Mehernaz and her 20-year-old daughter Persis found themselves performing in an arena that could accommodate 8000 people.

The world event held under the auspices of the sprawling MGM Grand Casino Hotel on the Las Vegas Strip in Paradise, is considered one of the largest hotels in the world.

"The hotel was so big that we had to allow at least 20 minutes to walk from our hotel room to the arena which is also a part of the hotel," says Mehernaz, a school teacher at the Elm Park School in Auckland.

However, the highlight of the trip to Vegas was performing on the world stage with her daughter.

While Mehernaz has performed internationally in Seattle in 2010 this was the first time that Persis, the youngest member of the GAC chorus was with her singing her heart out.

They were so excited about travelling together that none of the setbacks like their flight getting cancelled few hours before takeoff or missing their bags once they touched Los Angeles, really affected them.

"Fortunately we always carry our costumes in our hand luggage in case of mishaps like these," says Mehernaz. "We can't get on the riser if you don't have the right costume or jewellery."

Originally from Pune, the Darukhanawallas moved to Auckland, New Zealand in 2001. Within a few months of settling into their new

home, Mehernaz found her voice in a local choir group.

The 'barbershop' style of singing which first started off as a hobby soon became a passion.

Sweet Adelines is one of the world's largest singing organizations for women, boasting members from five continents. The organisation transcends the art form of barbershop harmony, also known as 4-part harmony, in where music is sung without the need and accompaniment of any musical instrument.

The worldwide organization of women singers, established in 1945, is committed to advancing the musical art form of Barbershop harmony through education and performances.

The independent, not-for-profit music education association is one of the world's largest singing organizations for women. 'Harmonize the World' is the organization's motto.

It has a current membership of 24,000 and holds a yearly international singing competition.

Closer home in Auckland, in 2014, the GAC won the coveted New Zealand National title in Barbershop singing for the sixth time which qualified them to represent New Zealand at the world championships.

The GAC comprises of around 70 women between the ages of 19 and 75 who come together to make breath-taking music.

Devoting hours of practice, the group of professionals sing at night and work by day.

"When I first participated internationally in 2010 I had just joined the group and didn't know much about form part harmony. It's a great way to meet people and make lifelong friends."

Though she has been a part of the GAC for a while, she still finds it stimulating and very nourishing.





Farida Master has been the editor of several publications in India which include 'Stardust', 'Society Fashion', 'Citadel', which are magazines, and the 8-page lifestyle supplement of 'Pune Times Of India'. She has also authored, 'The Making Of A Legend', a biography of Dr K B Grant. In Auckland, Farida has been the Features Editor of 'The Auckland' a magazine. Currently, News Editor 'Botany and Ormiston Times', a community newspaper in Auckland.

"With time there are different styles. It's about how you place your voice in your mouth. And which part of your head you want the sound from."

Both, mother and daughter find it very inspiring when the best international coaches of the world come in to train the chorus. They are taught correct techniques so that they don't strain their vocal chords.

Barbershop singing that originated in America started because women got tired of waiting for men to come home, explains Mehernaz. "The forward thinking women said they want to spread it all over the world."

Now a bass section leader, Mehernaz says the chorus is a big part of her life and she loves the opportunity to share it with her daughter.

"It's not just a hobby, it's a lifestyle and it's wonderful that I can share this with Persis," she beams.

Persis, who studies at Auckland University of Technology was a part of the Macleans College Barbershop chorus, Macappella, for several years, and was also a member of a champion quartet at Macleans.

"This has been a dream of mine since high school. I can't believe it has actually come true," she enthuses.

She strongly believes that joining GAC after high school was undoubtedly one of the best decisions she's made.

"As well as this, singing together in a chorus on the international stage had been a dream that mum and I had always looked forward to accomplishing together. So when GAC won the New Zealand Chorus competition in May 2014, we knew we were one step closer to achieving that dream.

Getting vocal about it she continues, "While my mum sang her way up the ranks at GAC, I was formally introduced to Barbershop when I started high school in 2009. I competed with my school chorus Macappella in our Auckland regional competitions as well as in the national competitions, gaining many successes. As

well as this, I was fortunate enough to also be a part of a champion quartet, named 'Dolce', as we won the New Zealand Young Women in Harmony quartet competition in 2012."

Persis admits she simply loves the stage and is very competitive.

"Ever since I won with my quartet in 2012, it has ignited a fire in me. I know I can achieve it and now I am known for Babershop singing."

"I love contests," she says unabashedly. Living the dream, she has already registered for the A Capella Harmony Academy (AHA) that will take place at the University of Auckland in July 15-17, 2016.

The proposed theme of the event is inspired by Senior Director of Marketing and Communication Tena Woolridge's concept of the '11-Chord Challenge.' The aim is to challenge members to build a stronger performance, to take their vocal and performance skills to the next level.

AHA is the spark that dares people to step up in their game and rise to the top!

The 20-year-old is also participating in the Rising Star International Contest and is currently getting her quartet together.

Looking back at the eight days in Vegas she says that not only did she enjoy the sound, music, showmanship and seeing where they stand on the world stage, but also the fact that she got to meet international coaches.

She recollects meeting the director of Lions Gate Chorus in the elevator who told her she could come anytime to Vancouver and join the chorus.

"It means whenever you go overseas you can arrange to live next to where they practise and be a part of it."

That way the magic of music continues to fill their lives with unadulterated joy!



Please turn back to p 18 to see the image of the singing duo.

## A behind-the-scenes account of 'An Uncensored Life'

Biographer Farida Master reveals the real story behind the writing of Zerbano Gifford's biography.

**F**or once I didn't have any time to think about myself at all!

Stepping into Zerbano Gifford's dizzyingly energetic, dramatic and frantic world felt like an out-of-body experience that had me spinning into a heady vortex of raw emotions, inner thoughts and feelings.

At times it was like being on a carousel at full speed where every pore and fibre of my being was possessed by the powerful dynamics of an uncensored life.

How does one trace the life of a fire brand human rights campaigner, prolific author, founder of the awe inspiring leadership centre, the ASHA Centre in the Forest of Dean, UK, who has led her life at break-neck speed?

My mind was in constant overdrive as I spent every waking hour thinking of the defining moments, milestones, mindset, characteristics, belief systems, values, incidents that best described my muse.

A huge presence pervaded every ticking moment to grow into a magnificent obsession.

My life took a complete backseat as I tried to understand the intricacies of a personal portrait of a proud Zoroastrian that captured a section of history and vaulted over different worlds from the ancient to political, social, cultural, charitable, global and the esoteric.

The opportunity to write Zerbano's biography, aptly titled 'An Uncensored Life', to be published by Harper Collins, came into my life at the opportune moment when I asked the universe for a challenge that was both fulfilling and all consuming! And as always, the universe made it happen!

A compelling desire to explore an extraordinary life drove me to drop everything I was doing, leave home, hearth and husband in New Zealand and zoom halfway across the

world. I found myself in the ancient woodland of the Forest of Dean, fabled to be the mysterious woods of Middle Earth where the literary giant J R R Tolkien took artistic inspiration. This is where Zerbano now resides with her husband Richard.

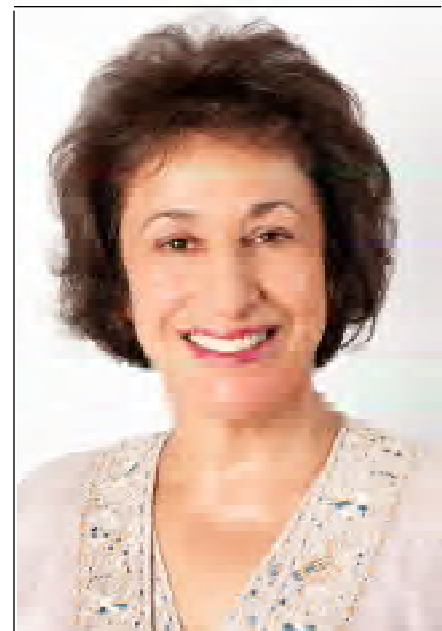
Blanking out of my life, as I willingly lived Zerbano's free-spirited one for a couple of months in UK was amply compensated with invaluable lessons that I gleaned from the go-getting daughter of Bailey Irani, the founding president of World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO).

It was an open invitation to grab the gauntlet, take courage and have faith that there is justice for all. Everything we want is always on the other side of fear. Rising to the challenge without allowing pusillanimity to imprison us involves battling through the chaotic by lanes of life to achieve our true purpose.

*An Uncensored Life* to be launched at the 'Times Literary Festival' in December, and later in the month at the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in New Zealand, will be followed by launches in UK, US, Dubai, Mauritius and the Balkans. It contextualizes a life that provides a bridge between then and now.

The biography traces the life of a housewife and mother of two, with the resourcefulness to rise above the yoke of conformity. The life sketch zooms into the action-oriented life of a fiery politician, a dedicated philanthropist, champion of women, an acclaimed author of several books and founder of ASHA Centre in England, who speaks her mind and has been a game-changer.

In spite of crushing set-backs, Zerbano didn't wait for the storm to pass but danced in the



rain. Her story is unique yet universal. Born in Pune, Zerbanoo moved to England at the age of four. She created British history by infiltrating the all-white male bastion of British politics as the first non-white woman to stand for parliament. It was at a time when ethnic minority women and social power were seeming contradictions and the second sex was a forgotten one in politics. She went through a baptism by fire, literally, when the xenophobes threatened to burn down her home and kidnap her children. Zerbanoo watchers have described her as Durga, the warrior goddess, fearless in her fight for justice.

Telling people where to get off, Zerbanoo's forthrightness did not always sit well in a world censored by politically correct platitudes. Undaunted, she was a catalyst for cultural change and helped transform lives.

Zerbanoo was at the heart of the women's movement, relentlessly fighting for social and economic empowerment of women. Challenging the status quo, she has seen the power equation change dramatically in her lifetime. The voice for the voiceless, she passionately fought for neglected children and those subjected to bonded labour and abuse.

Zerbanoo's life story is a source of self-discovery as it unveils a map of the many roads she travelled. It navigates through different cultural bridges while briefly stepping into the back alleys of violence and hate.

Her path meandered from Britain's colonial past that reeked of unremitting racial prejudice and gender discrimination that I must admit I've never experienced in my personal or professional life.

Wired differently, Zerbanoo's life theme reads as one of daring adventure; taking risks without letting the fear of consequences restrain her free spirit. Whilst most people would ask 'can I?' Zerbanoo dives head-first into the challenge saying, 'why not?' She springs into action even before finishing her sentence, leaving people speechless in her wake.

To give you a glimpse of Zerbanoo's fierce sense of urgency reminds me of the time the

two of us were driving back from London to Gloucestershire. As the car gathered momentum on the express lane, I casually mentioned to Zerbanoo that being a Rotarian with the Rotary Club of Somerville, in Auckland, New Zealand, I was keen to attend a Rotary meeting in England some day. 'Some day' is a phrase that obviously doesn't exist in her lexicon. The very next moment, she swerved the car, taking an immediate exit to the village of Hungerford. Suddenly, we were off the motorway whilst I sat open-mouthed with words hanging mid-sentence.

Even before I could comprehend what had just happened, she was introducing me to the owner of an antique shop, Annabel King. Annabel, I discovered was President next of the, Rotary Club of Hungerford. Being an old friend and loyal client of Annabel's, she didn't waste a second connecting me with a fellow Rotarian. We attended their Rotary meeting, the very next week.

Zerbanoo was invited to be the guest speaker. In a blink of an eye, she had added momentum to the entire sequence of events which, left up to me, would have taken a while to transpire. And it didn't end there. The Rotary Club of Hungerford was invited to the beautifully landscaped ASHA Centre in Gloucestershire, which they visited two months later.

My daughter Sanaya who joined me at Zerbanoo's son Alex's apartment where I was staying still laughs at my feeble attempts to harness the 'power of now'. It was like being on roller-skates 24x7. I often found myself running up the flight of stairs that connects to Zerbanoo's home with uncombed hair, trying to button my shirt, slip on my shoes and grab my coat, diary, scarf and laptop – all at once. It was an elementary lesson that it is not only time and tide, but even Zerbanoo, waits for no one (not even her biographer). She often reminds me of a quivering arrow, intoxicated with a burst of energy and passion for life. With so much to do and so little time, she's always on the run, fired up with new ideas, theories and an exhaustive list of things to do. Space shuttle Zerbanoo, did someone say?

Most of all, working on the biography was awe-inspiring. I couldn't quite fathom how the universal spirit scripts the intricate wisdom of billions of lives whilst I grappled with just the one.

The only thing that matters as you reach the last page of '*An Uncensored Life*' an uplifting testament of tenacity and ability to transform lives is what you take away from it. It could pique your curiosity, push you to take action, embrace a new challenge, ratchet the stakes to unthinkable levels of urgency or just make you stop and think.

The unfolding of Zerbanoo's life hits home a message that each one of us has the power to create the world we dream of. It is a powerful trigger, a timely reminder that we can fill up the unwritten pages of our lives with whatever story of greatness, moral sensibility or generosity we may want it to be.



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Issue 1/2016 will carry the review of the book and the various book launches.

## Cyrus the Great – *Celestial Sovereign* by Sam Kerr

reviewed by zehra bharucha

**C**yrus the Great (599-529 BCE) was the founder of the Achaemenid Empire and a towering figure in the history of mankind. Considered the father of the Iranian nation, he was the first world leader to be referred to as 'The Great'.

Much has been written about Cyrus and his achievements, but 'Cyrus the Great- Celestial Sovereign' is a fictionalized historical biography with a slight difference. It is a history not just of one king, but a commentary and social history of the life and times he lived in, a sort of mirror held up to the prevailing social mores and customs of the times. The life of the king has been reconstructed from a variety of sources and the blanks filled in with fictionalized dialogue and narrative, all of which make for an interesting read.

Cyrus was not a 'typical' leader or conqueror. He was an empire builder in the true sense of the word. Vanquished peoples were incorporated into this kingdom and allowed to flourish. In the words used in the Introduction to the book:

'This attitude is the product of the vision of life provided by the Mazdayasni faith of the Persians, the religious teachings of the Prophet of ancient Iran – Zarathushtra. Understanding Cyrus, the empire builder, is helped by considering some relevant aspects of the belief structure of Zarathushtra's faith.'

The book tries to recreate the life of this great historical figure in chronological order, relying on the Old Testament and archaeological and other legitimate sources. Understandably, there is a great deal of uncertainty around events that took place over 2000 years ago, but the author deserves credit for his meticulous and diligent research.

The book opens with a detailed history of past societies, their organisation and structure and progress. For the purposes of this book,



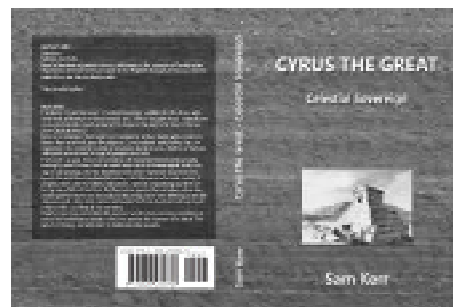
emphasis is limited to the study of the Ancient Classical world where the phrase 'cradle of civilization' refers to the Indo-Aryans who 'settled down early in a permanent state of settlement'. This early society was thus able to influence other societies around it by conquest, migration, assimilation, trading contacts and, most importantly, language. It is interesting to note that the Indo-European languages became the preferred designation of the language group - *Indo-European* of the people who occupied the original Aryan homeland and their descendants who gradually spread out.

The book then continues with a brief description of the various civilizations eg. the Sumerians, Elamites, Babylonians, etc., followed by a time line of important historical events occurring in the years prior to the birth of Cyrus. Thus the stage is set, in a metaphorical sense, for the arrival of the hero. The earlier chapters deal with the birth and early childhood of Cyrus and his marriage before moving onto his political and military conquests. Even when Cyrus succeeded to the throne he was not yet an independent ruler. Like his predecessors, Cyrus had to recognize Median overlordship. Cyrus revolted, conquered the Median capital Ecbatana and deposed the king of the Medes, Astyages. Cyrus soon found himself embroiled in new wars. The first was with Croesus, King of Lydia whose subjects included the Greek cities along its coast. Cyrus took Croesus's "impregnable" capital of Sardis and went on to capture Babylon. Cyrus posed as both a liberator and a supporter of the local gods and once in power pursued a careful policy of religious toleration. The most important example of this was his allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. Not only the civilized states to the west but also the steppe peoples to the east engaged Cyrus's attention, and during his remaining years he pushed his frontiers to the Indus and the Jaxartes (modern Syr Darya). He died in 529 somewhere east of the Caspian Sea, fighting a tribe called the Massagetae. In all, Cyrus added a grand total of more than 3.5 million square miles of conquered territory to his original kingdom, comprising the largest empire known to the Classical World. The

emergence of Persia as a hugely dominant world power is the most striking political fact of the 6th century BC., while the conquest of Mesopotamia (Egypt was left for Cyrus's son Cambyses) marks the first time that a true Indo-European-speaking people had gained control of the old centres of civilization.

The author concludes with a homage to Cyrus, a description of his ideas and ideals and his spiritual beliefs and concludes with some fascinating information about the famous Cyrus Cylinder, his tomb and the Cyrus bas-relief. But perhaps the last word should be left to the great king himself, on whose tomb the modest one line inscription reads: *'I am Kourash, King, of Hakhamani descent'*.

A huge amount of material already exists about Cyrus, but this book makes a welcome addition. The meticulous research and attention to detail by the author is worthy of praise. The story is further enhanced by the lively imagination of the author as he constructs a narrative from a variety of sources. Personal anecdotes are cleverly woven into the larger canvas of historical conquests and a portrait of Cyrus the man begins to emerge complete with fascinating insights. The little personal touches are what make the story so compelling. However, this is not a work of fiction. It is a scholarly, well researched and historically accurate literary look at a man whose rule and way of life was exemplary and whose belief system in the form of the famous Cyrus Cylinder has now been recognized as the world's first charter of human rights.



***Cyrus the Great - Celestial Sovereign*** is available only on demand, online. 2015, Lulu Press, 334pp

Go to WEBSITE: <http://www.lulu.com> (Lulu – Online Self-Publishing Book & eBook Company)

In SEARCH type full name of the book: **Cyrus the Great - Celestial Sovereign** & press Enter

## *Sailing Towards Hope: Jhanghir Kerawala's The Phoenix of Persia*

reviewed by sharmeen mehri

It is 2015 and 3.2% of the world's population do not live in their country of origin. Many of them have fled their homelands due to crises and circumstances that leave them no other choice but to migrate. As part of a minute community in Karachi, Pakistan, it is saddening to confess that I do not know the core details of Zoroastrianism's historical exodus. My community, like so many Zoroastrian communities in the sub-continent, persists from the time of our forced migration. Jhangir Kerawala in his *Phoenix of Persia* explores our historical past with the purpose to inform the youth about the circumstances that Zoroastrians had to face in the struggle to keep our religion alive.

The novel is set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the Sassanid period, which tells a story of three generations of the Mahraspandan family. Jamshid, a young inquisitive boy, is the narrator of the story. His consistent questions directed towards protagonists such as the great Zahl and Peshotan, Jamshid's grandfather and father respectively, become a history lesson for the reader. The narrator is like us; and what I mean by 'us' are the Zoroastrians who can self reflect and admit that we have been indifferent about our past. Not only does Kerawala help the reader visualize the displacement of Zarathostis, he gets into the mindset of the social order during the Muslim conquest. The Ummayad's tax collectors would taunt and insult Zoroastrians, while ordering them to provide a *Jizyah*, "a tax for being *dhimmis*, people of the Book, non-Islamics". Not only do such facts help the reader understand the time and place better, a younger reader can take advantage of this novel as a history lesson.

Such precise information makes this historical fiction a great read for young adults who can further connect to the coming of age story that takes place in the book. As readers we see Jamshid from his adolescence struggling to live a child's life. We find Jamshid intrigued by the great Zahl's battle stories, wanting to be just like his grandfather. He, along with his

family members and all the villagers, set out on an exodus to find a peaceful place to call home. During this migration, to imitate Zahl, he finds ways to help his father lead the rest, only to make matters worse. Jamshid's stream of consciousness from his adolescence to adulthood makes him a complicated character; a character who tries to find placement in his displacement; who knows that the only way to save this religion is to leave his own homeland.

Jamshid's three-dimensional character and his philosophizing leads the reader to think about the main principles of Zoroastrianism and what we have been forgetting all along. When we find ourselves amongst people ignorant about this "fire worshipping" faith called Zoroastrianism, which is amongst most people, we start off by simply addressing the three main ideas: good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. But here is where we need to reeducate ourselves. These principles have been conceptualized from a bigger, more important foundation of Zoroastrianism. Kerawala puts it well - "righteousness and truth". What the Mahraspandan family has to decide between is more than just good or bad actions. What they need to follow is the Asha in them, the divinity more commonly known as Asha Vahista, the best truth. By carrying the fire, literally and metaphorically, the Mahraspandan family, along with the habitants of Mehrigard set on an exodus to keep the eternal fire alive. The significance of Asha lies in the action of doing the right thing. The right thing to do is to not be a coward and to not surrender your faith even if your life depends on it. Here Kerawala promotes the best truth by reinforcing time and time again that no matter the obstacles, the fire needs to keep burning and that the Zoroastrians need to survive and find a place where they can continue to follow their faith peacefully and freely.

This repetitive theme – keeping Zoroastrianism alive – is portrayed in the title itself.



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Amazon.com,  
Kindle Store  
for £4.30 : \$6.60  
Print length 255 pages

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IRs295

*The Phoenix of Persia* has a symbolic importance throughout the novel. The phoenix, a mythical creature, is a long-lived bird, which dies in a self-created fire, only to be reborn from its own ashes. Not only does this creature signify the cycle of life and death, its power to rise from the ashes of its precursor symbolizes immortality. This imagery portrays an infinite characteristic of Zoroastrianism, which has survived since Alexander the Great. When the Greeks left, Zoroastrians reconstructed the libraries and rewrote the books. When the Muslim conquest began, Zoroastrians hid the holy fires, and the holy books with the price of torture and their lives. Even after the ill treatment and the “othering”, they fled their homes so Zoroastrianism could resurrect from the ashes of war. Not only does the phoenix represent characters such as the great Zahl, but the bird also represents the essence of the bright burning fire within us.



Kerawala is a true scholar of this faith. From ancient roads to small villages to big cities, he knows the map of the Persian Empire as if he lived during these times. The geography makes the reader interact with the setting in depth. Beautiful descriptions of the mountains and the countryside, of names and places once unknown, romanticize the nostalgia and the broken identity, which the exodus possesses.

The stunning backdrop is contrasted with the imagery of battle and bloodshed. The antagonist of the story is Sayyid Abul Yaser, the commander of Pars who is set on to eradicate the Mahrspandan family. Yaser's motives lead to many devastating sub-plots in the novel. These sub-plots exaggerate the conditions for Zoroastrians at the time. He

does this by widening the division between polarities: them/us, colonizer/colonized, Muslims/Zoroastrians. However, these polarities become blurry as the novel reaches to an end. With his skillful characterizations, Kerawala uses Ardeshir, a warrior and follower of the great Zahl, to break the boundaries of these dichotomies. Ardeshir questions the separation Zoroastrians and Muslims create between one another. From his experiences, he comes to realize that all Muslims are not violent and all Zoroastrians are not peaceful. It is people who are violent and people who preach compassion and freedom.

I strongly suggest that the youthful Zoroastrians, and people who want to know more about this ancient faith, read *The Phoenix of Persia* by Jhangir Kerawala. As a Zarathosti reader, I am reminded of day-to-day rituals, of special occasions, of the history and theology of Zoroastrianism, and most importantly of the great migration to keep this faith immortal. I suggest that you do read this novel, not only to inform yourself, but also to question the knowledge which you hold of your identity. By reading this novel, I hope you question what is truth and what is righteousness because that is where you will begin to understand the roots of your selfhood.



Sharmeen Mehri is from Karachi, Pakistan. She graduated from the State University of New York at Plattsburgh with a degree in English Literature and English Language Arts. While dealing with a Biryani obsession and not being able to find any in Upstate New York, she is applying for graduate studies in English.

## Special Guest & Keynote Speakers

Time flies and now with less than a month to go for the most awaited event on the Zoroastrian youth calendar, finally the well kept secret is out. The Organising Committee of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Youth Congress – which is being held at Kings College, Auckland, New Zealand, between 28<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016 – is excited to unveil the Special Guest and Key Note Speakers, who will inspire and educate young Zoroastrians arriving from different corners of the world.

Who could be than the feisty human rights campaigner and founder of the most unique leadership Centre in the Forest of Dean in England?



For those who haven't met the passionate Zerbanoo Gifford, the Special Guest Speaker of the event, you are in for a treat. She has led her life at a sprinter's pace moving from one winning post to another despite the many roadblocks along the way.

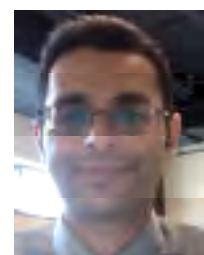
As one of the first non-white women who made political history in Britain, Ms. Gifford is now leaving behind a legacy of leadership and empowerment at the ASHA Centre she founded. The ASHA Centre is recognised internationally as a hub of activity for people from all over the world to experience each other's cultures, faiths and shared humanity. Zerbanoo has also been the director of Anti-Slavery International, London Organiser for SHELTER, and helped set up Charities Aid Foundation in India.

The author of seven books, she also holds numerous international awards for her humanitarian work, which spans over forty years of grassroots and global activism. These include the Nehru Centenary Award for her work championing the rights of women, children and minorities, International Woman of the Year in 2006 and Splendor Award in Hollywood in 2007, for her lifetime achievements in the field of equality and human rights.

Turning to our Keynote Speakers, **Jimmy Antia** and **Jimmy Madon**, who hail from equally interesting and impressive backgrounds.

**Jimmy Antia** is an International Security and Development Analyst with experience in Latin America and Southeast Asia. His work experience includes working with the US Army Corps of Engineers, where he focuses on working with other components of the U.S. government to promote resilient and sustainable use of water resources.

Prior to this, Jimmy consulted with the Department of Defence where he investigated programs, objectives, and strategic goals to create solutions that enhanced strategic planning process. He also worked with the Environmental Protection Agency to create new programs to increase resource conservation. Jimmy has extensive experience in politics having worked for the 2012 re-election campaign for Barack Obama, and with the US House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure committee as well as working on transportation issues post-9/11.



Another speaker in love with possibility is **Ervad Jimmy Madon** who moved from Mumbai, India to the United Kingdom five years ago where he procured a First Class Honours degree in Computer Science from the University of East London. He is currently employed as a Software Systems Development Engineer at GENE Software Ltd., a Warwickshire based company that specialises in the field of Lean Engineering and Consultancy. As the youth coordinator of the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) and the Social Secretary for the Young Zoroastrians of the UK (the youth wing of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe - ZTFE), he actively helps in organizing community events and also volunteers to teach at the 'Young Flames' religious educational class in London for kids and parents alike.



Globally, over 250 delegates have already registered to attend the Congress. All Zoroastrians between the ages of 15 and 35 are invited to attend. If you're still thinking about it, go on and register! Do not miss out on this opportunity of a lifetime, after all, where else will you get the chance to meet so many young Zoroastrians in one of the most beautiful places in the world?

For more information and to register visit: <http://www.6wzyc.co.nz>

- Sanaya Master







# Recalling the Past

*"If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away when they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive." - Barry Lopez*



## **Andia Khosravi**

*November 2015  
Yazd, Iran*

I have a multitude of memories of you – all beautiful. Your radiant smile which shines on me as I look at your photograph, reminds me of the happy hours we spent together. Your wise counsel, the stories of your past, the peaceful moments just sitting by your side. Oh for those warm hugs or the hot cup of chai made to perfection by you, what I would do just to experience that again! How I would love to walk through that old house again, and see you sitting on your chair gazing at me with so much love which I treasure and keep safe in my heart. I wish I had as much faith and trust in God as you had, I can only hope one day I attain this belief. Two years have now gone by but your presence is beside me every moment of my life. I miss you ...



## **Pash Jehan**

*November 2015  
Sydney, Australia*

My awesome Dad JehanBux who was one of a team of very young and adventurous Zoroastrians that brought industrialisation to an isolated country Bhutan. My father accompanied his cousin Jamshid or Jemi as he was fondly called as a 19 year old. They literally cleared the forests with their own hands and with help from local labour and built the first modern Distillery in Bhutan which produced the finest alcohol in Bhutan and probably the best that India had tasted of liquor manufactured in the subcontinent. This was the beginning of many years of plenty till the Distillery was Nationalised by the Bhutanese Government.

*Please join the Facebook community 'Karachi Parsis' and share the stories and memories of your loved ones.  
<https://www.facebook.com/Karachi-Parsis-839640906153356/?ref=hl>*

“...Which man did fix the course  
of the sun and of the stars?

Through whom does the moon wax  
(now), wane later? These things  
indeed and others I wish to know,  
Wise One.”

Yasna 44.3

*Insler translation*



The World Zoroastrian Organisation