Reconstructed Atashgah of Khinalig Azerbaijan

Funded by WZO, London
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Cover
Image of the reconstructed Atashgah at Khinalig, Azerbaijan

Photographs
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From the Editor

Members who are not on the internet or their information not shared with us, may wonder if their Hamazor Issue 4 of 2016 went astray. There was no last publication for the year but we are back again with an issue to suit everyone’s reading pleasure.

WZO has developed a new website which constantly has information uploaded by our energetic subscription secretary who is also now the webmaster. Do log on and see what’s going on. Similarly, our Chairman is sending out news bulletins via email to all members informing them of current developments. Hence sometimes what may come in the Hamazor will be a rehash of what you have already received via email, for which we request your understanding.

Just as we go to print, two developments have taken place.

On the 8th of this month our community in Navsari met to discuss the possibility of having a burial ground for those who wished to opt for this method rather than the traditional dokhma system. Over 150 members of the local anjuman had signed a letter requesting for this facility, to use part of the dokhma land for burials. Though Dastur Firoze Kotwal wrote to the association to refrain from opting for the burial system, when taken to the vote, 156 to six favoured the proposal of a burial ground. This breakthrough from the orthodox way of thinking may well be a lead for other cities to follow suit.

Today, 11th January, news has come that 46-year-old Firdaus Dordi, an American attorney, has been appointed by the Governor of California to the Los Angeles Superior Court. Mr Dordi becomes the first Zoroastrian judge in the United States of America. Further, on 18th January Mr Dordi is to be honoured by the Asian Americans Advancing Justice’s Los Angeles chapter for his pro bono work given to the South Asian community for more than 15 years.

We congratulate Mr Dordi for being nominated as a judge to the Superior Court.

WZO wishes all our members and readers of Hamazor, a happy, peaceful and constructive 2017.

11 January 2017
WZO Calendar of Events - 2017

Saturday 18th March 2017
Commences at 7:00 pm
Marriott Hotel Marble Arch.
134 George St, London W1H 5DN

Nowruz Dinner / Dance with a Persian theme

Thursday 25th May 2017
Commences at 6:00pm
at SOAS Russell Square, London

The nineteenth Dasturji Dr Sohrabji H Kutar Memorial Lecture
By Professor Jesse S Palsetia, University of Guelph, Canada

Sunday 18th June 2017
Registration at 10:00 am
Park Crescent Conference Centre, London

Seminar on Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture

Sunday 25th June 2017
Provisional date. To be confirmed
12 noon onwards
Staines and Laleham Sports and Leisure
Worples Road, Staines, TW18 1HR

Annual BBQ

Saturday 19th August 2017
Commences at 7:00 pm
Marriott Hotel Marble Arch.
134 George St, London W1H 5DN

Shahenshahi Navroze Dinner / Dance

Sunday 24th September 2017
From 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Annual General Meeting
(details will be sent with the annual report)
It is with deep regret we have to inform you of the passing away of Past Chairman of The World Zoroastrian Organisation, London on Tuesday 27th December, 2016 at the age of 88 years. She was a Founder Member of WZO, a Committee Member from the outset in 1980, a Joint Hon Secretary for many years and finally Chairman in 1991 till 1996. Born in an Athornan family (Pavri) in Bombay, Ruby was brought up strictly in line with the Zoroastrian ethos of that time. recitation of prayers, going to the agiary regularly, respect for the elderly and moral behaviour of Humata, Hukhta and Huvarasta in the broadest sense of the phrase. Her family lived in Dadar Parsi Colony, where young Ruby attended the Parsi school in Dadar and after Matriculation joined the Podar Arts College at Matunga, qualifying as BA, with Honours in English. Her written and spoken English was impeccable. Ruby was truly “educated” as she possessed a broad mind that is a hallmark of all truly educated people. She could grasp all sorts of information and details and then use her “educated” brain to arrive at her conclusions.

Ruby learnt all about the religion of Zarathushtra by reading widely, attending lectures and talks on Zoroastrianism extensively. She had read all the translations of the Nyashes and Yashts in Gujarati and English. She was deeply religious and pious but not “orthodox.” She was a gem of a person.

Ruby was an absolute asset to the committee of WZO with her meticulous work as the Hon Secretary, keeping up to date the membership records, recording Minutes accurately and in perfect English; corresponding with Zoroastrians all over the world and bringing deep wisdom and extreme kindness to the deliberations of the committee.

She was part of the first delegation to visit India to spread the word regarding WZO and its aims and objectives. When the Gujarat Farmers Upliftment programme was started, she enthusiastically visited the villages of Gujarat to witness at first hand the extreme poverty of our co-religionists in the vast expanse of that State. She was deeply moved by what she saw. As such, she was ever so determined to play an active part in the WZO committee to alleviate the poverty in which the Parsi agrarians lived and toiled. Ruby was one of the committee members who donated funds to the WZO from day one, by regular monthly payments. The committee of WZO is deeply grateful for the excellent services rendered by our dear Ruby over many years.

In the 1980’s Ruby accompanied the Office Bearers of WZO on two separate occasions hoping to obtain affiliation to UNESCO. Sadly this was not granted as at that time we were not an open organisation. As WZO’s Chairperson in 1991, she convened the first International Gatha Colloquium where 12 international scholars spoke on Zoroastrian religion, history and culture. It was a scintillating event which presented a splendid opportunity for everybody to meet the scholars, members, and supporters from abroad.

On 25th April 1993 Ruby presided over the historic change in the WZO Constitution which made it possible for non-Zoroastrian spouses and the children of inter faith marriages to become members.
For the first time a Zoroastrian organisation had recognised that non-Zoroastrian spouses and their offspring were an integral part of our community, to be treated as equals, without the hideous sanctions heaped on them in the past.

Whilst writing, we must mention, Ruby gave long and very devoted service to The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (INC) for many years. First, she joined with her husband Nari, the House Committee organising the varied functions at the Zoroastrian House at 88 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead, London, along with their lifelong friends Soli and Dina Master. Both Ruby and Soli subsequently joined the main committee. Both had deep rooted love for their community and did everything possible to enhance the unity of the community, with dignity and humility. Both had high intellect that they used effectively in the deliberations of the committee. It was a great shame they were not re-elected to the committee at the AGM of 3rd November, 1985. The local community lost the services of two true Zoroastrians.

Ruby had a very pleasant personality. She was humble, humorous, fun loving person. She was soft spoken but never feared to put her point of view forward in any discussions. Her sense of dress was very good and her choice of saris was immaculate. Both Ruby and Nari were very friendly people and attracted others with their winning personality. Naturally they liked socialising but never at the cost of neglecting community service. Ruby was an excellent cook, serving three to four dishes with Parsi size platefuls and Nari was the person who entertained their guests with hilarious jokes the whole afternoon or evening. One often wondered as to how he could remember so many jokes. It was always a pleasure to attend their lunch and dinner parties.

It is said that what is “Written” is always “Done”. And so our dear Ruby after a short spell of illness passed away peacefully in the loving presence of her family. May her soul rest in Eternal Peace in Garothman Behest and may her exemplary life inspire future generations to dedicate themselves to service of the community.

Atha Zamyat, Yatha Afrinami.
WZO Gala Dinner-Dance

report from sammy bhiwandiwalla

The WZO Fund Raising Dinner-Dance at the London Marriott Hotel on Saturday 26th November was a welcome treat from the wintry weather that had beset us so early this year.

We were delighted to welcome our Guest of Honour, Mr Saikat Sen Sharma, Counsellor (co-ordination) from the High Commission of India to grace the occasion along with all our friends and guests.

Chairman Shahpur Captain in his welcome thanked everyone for attending and spoke briefly about WZO’s past record of looking after the Iranian Zoroastrian community during a particularly difficult political period in the 80’s and of WZO’s commitment to continue assisting both Parsee and Iranian Zoroastrians wherever they resided worldwide.

The evening’s entertainment was provided by the outstanding flamenco dancer Lourdes Fernandez from Spain who had recently performed at the City of London Festival 2015.

Her Flamenco dance performances combined with different styles for an unusual and enhanced version of the traditional Spanish dance, accompanied by an accomplished virtuoso Spanish Guitarist. Our regular group Mustang provided the entertainment throughout the rest of the evening with popular dance music and old and young took to the dance floor till late in the evening.

Armaity Engineer our Social Secretary made sure that no one would go hungry starting with a wide choice of Indian finger foods in the reception area followed by an enticing and mouth-watering choice of entrees, accompaniments and desserts at dinner.

Our sincere thanks to Armaity who must take the full credit for the many successful social events accompanied with good food and entertainment throughout 2016 as in previous years.
Atashgah of Khinalig: the highest fire temple of the world

by farroukh jorat

Over the last 1,300 years due to religious persecution the number of Zoroastrian fire temples has steadily declined in Great Iran. They were destroyed or converted into mosques. In the XIX-XX centuries the persecution of Zoroastrians ceased, but the number of fire temples with permanently burning fires remained the same. But today, with the joint efforts of Zoroastrians of the world, the situation has begun to change: the abandoned fire temples are getting a new life.

Azerbaijan, the land of flames

One of the countries where Zoroastrianism spread to is Azerbaijan. Earliest mention of Zoroastrianism in this region dates back to the Sasanians, who established the fire temples. Mobed Kartir (III c.) wrote in “Kabah of Zartusht”:

“And from earliest times onward for the sake of the Yazads and noble lords and for my own soul’s sake, I, Kartir, saw much trouble and toil. And I made prosperous many fires and magi in the empire of Iran. And I also, by command of the King of Kings, put in order those magi and fires which were for the territory outside Iran, wherever the horses and men of the King of Kings arrived, the city of Antioch and the country of Syria and what is beyond Syria, the city of Tarsus and the country of Cilicia and what is beyond Cilicia, the city of Caesarea and from the country of Cappadocia to Galatia, and the country of Armenian and Georgia, and Albania, and from Balaskan to the Alans’ pass. And Shahpuhr, King of Kings, with his own horses and men visited with pillaging, firing, and havoc. But I did not allow damage and pillaging, and whatsoever pillaging had been made by any person, those things I had taken away and returned to their own country”.

Unusual characteristics of this country are the atashgahs with eternal burning natural flames of oil and gas (methane). The most famous natural flame atashgah is located near Baku in Surakhani. According to local tradition, atashgahs are constructed as chahartaq – a dome with four arches.

Unlike modern fire temples where the sacred fire is hidden from strangers, in the ancient times Zoroastrians kept the sacred fire in open altars such as chahartaqs. Due to the design of chahartaqs the fresh air flows and traction of combustion is produced.

Chahartaqs served the people not only as atashgahs (“the places of fire”), but also as a solar calendar. It is a well known fact that the change of seasons plays a very important role in agriculture. Change of seasons depends on the sun’s position (vernal equinox) which determines the beginning of sowing. Periodic monitoring of sunrise using chahartaq as an astronomically calibrated structure helps in the observation of the sun’s rays at characteristic points. This helps to determine the days of the most important agricultural dates.

In our ancient literary works, there are references of the worship of fire emitting directly from earth. In all the various types of fires, one fire has been described which burns without any fuel. This is the same fire of the natural gas wells which burns night and day without any fuel ... in ancient times, there were a number of Aatash Kadehs in this country similar to the natural gas fire in Baku and in other places ...”

**Atashgah of Khinalig: the highest fire temple in the world**

As J J Modi noted, the atashgah of Baku is not the only one, there were others too. The ruins of a natural flame atashgah also remained in the mountains 200km from Baku, and 5km from Khinalig village.

Quba. This village is famous due to its isolated language, peculiar customs and traditions. The area of Khinalig village was declared by the Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev as a nature reserve. Most of the territory is covered by subalpine and alpine meadows. It has a mountain climate – the average air temperature in July is +12°C and the first snowfalls begin in early October.

Despite that, the Khinalig population is Muslim, their religious views are a combination of Islam and Zoroastrian beliefs; fire is the subject of special respect still.

Ruins of the natural flame of the atashgah of Khinalig is located 5km from Khinalig and 1000m high (~3000m total altitude) on the slopes of the Shah-dagh mountain (“Mountain of king” in Azeri). Therefore it was the highest atashgah in the world known in Middle Ages, and the furthest northern part of the Sasanian Empire. According to local legend the name of the last priest was *Pir Jomard “who lived 1000 years ago”* (in IX-X century).

The tradition to build fire temples on the summit of hills and mountains is known since ancient times. Atar Gushasp was placed on Mount Asnavand in Ataropatakan (ie. Azerbaijan). The Zoroastrian custom of praying at heights is described by Herodotus in the V century BC. One such ancient mountain fire temple (“atashgah”) is located near Isfahan.
Sponsored by The World Zarathushtrian Trust Fund

Ruins of another fire temple located at the top of Kuh-e Kvaja in Sistan, belongs to the Parthian period.

As mentioned in the “Qissa-i Sanjan” during Muslim raids Parsi priests saved the Atash Bahram fire at the Bahrot mountain.

As the atashgah of Khinalig is located on a field of methane clathrate (supramolecular compound of methane and water), the clathrate which looks like snow, is easily transformed into water and methane. Therefore there is a little spring near the atashgah with a burning methane flame.

In V-VI centuries Shahinshahs of Iran built fortresses and cities. The most famous was Shah Khosrau I Anoshirvan, who built a number of cities in the region (Darband, Shabran and others.) In honour of the Shah the highest mountain (4243 m) of the region got its name “Shah-Dag”. There were many Zoroastrians in the Sasanid period. Therefore there is not only an atashgah, but also a dakhma with bones, which is located 40km away from atashgah. Local people call it “Dev-Gala” (“Tower of the devils”).

In the VII century the Arab Caliphate army invaded Azerbaijan. Atashgahs fell into disrepair, but their natural flame continued to burn.

A thousand years after the Islamic conquest, Zoroastrians were able to rebuild the abandoned fire temples in Azerbaijan. Thus, in the XVII-XVIII centuries, atashgah of Surakhani near Baku was restored.

Steps for Restoration

Recently the World Zoroastrian Organization came forward to restore the atashgah near Khinalig. In accordance with ancient tradition, the atashgah has been built of natural stone as a chahartaq structure.

After obtaining permission from the authorities we launched reconstruction work. Due to the severe mountain climate it was only possible to carry out the reconstruction during the summer.

Owing to the inaccessibility of the atashgah, building materials and tools were brought from Khinalig through the winding and narrow mountain trails. All this required careful and well-coordinated work.

The sacred precinct of Kuh-e-Kvaja

Making the foundation. Open flame is under the boulder for safety reasons
Alignment of the site and the laying of the foundation stones is one of the most important steps which influences the rest of the construction. In accordance with tradition, the chahartaq was oriented to the cardinal directions.

Sand and natural stone was collected 3km downstream, at the foot of the mountain. Cement was used as the binder. The stone surrounding the fire is shaped like a tandoor. (a tandoor is round small well-like construction where local bread is cooked on the inside walls with the heat emanating from below).

The first rows of the masonry dried in a day, then the mason began to build the following rows. To build high walls completely in one day is dangerous, because it can cause the collapse of the whole structure. Masons used plummet to control the straightness of walls.

For the construction of arches, the mason used an arc-shaped plywood sheet that allowed him to stack the stones in a circle. The height of the arches is two meters high, enough for a tall man to pass under them.

After the construction of arches, it was left to dry again to acquire the necessary strength.

Several times the restoration process was hindered by the weather. Heavy rains washed away the roads and made it difficult to travel. Once the rain was so heavy it caused the Gudyalchay river to overflow the banks, demolishing the bridge and the roads linking Khinalig with civilization. Restoration of communications took about two weeks, and then work was continued, and in spite of everything successfully completed.

When the arched walls were ready, we could construct the horizontal overlap with a dome in the center.

The last stage was the construction of the central dome. It has four holes to improve the exhaust of natural gas combustion products. Due to this the flame of the atashgah will reach up and become more visible from a distance. According to Shirvan architectural traditions, the dome has a pyramidal shape.
The construction process is completed with landscaping of the adjacent territory and the nearby spring.

At the place of the former ruin, a traditional fire temple has been restored successfully. It reminds one to follow good thoughts, good words and good deeds. As mentioned in Menog-i Khrad (“Spirit of Wisdom”):

“Which land is the happier?
The spirit of wisdom answered thus:
That is the happier, in which a righteous man, who is true-speaking, makes his abode. The second, in which they make the abode of fires ...”.

Farroukh Jorat (name at birth – Akper Aliyev, variant of spelling Akbar Aliyev) is an aerospace engineer and professor of material science at the National Aviation Academy, Baku, Azerbaijan. He was born in Baku in 1978 and in 1985 moved to Moscow, Russia. Post graduated from Bauman State Technical University (2001), worked there as an assistant and then at Tupolev Aircraft Design Company as an aerospace engineer. He was initiated into Zoroastrianism in Moscow in 2005 by Mobed KamranJamshedi and Anjoman Bozorg Bazgashi. Since 2010 he lives in Baku. Farroukh is best known for his contributions towards researching the history of Zoroastrianism in CIS countries and as a member of Russian Anjoman (blagoverie.org). Since 2016 he is a life member of World Zoroastrian Organization.
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The central dome has a pyramidal shape as per Shirvan architectural traditions

The completed atashgah of Khinalig

Husen Aghayev in the centre (Director of the Historical-Ethnographic Museum of Khinalig) with the 4 men who built the atashgah all from the village of Khinalig
Zoroastrian revival in Kurdistan

Zoroastrians in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region, hope that their first official temple in this region, which opened on Wednesday 21 September 2016, will provide the right environment to “reintroduce” Kurds to their ancestral religion.

Awat Hussamaddin Tayib, the chief of the followers of the Zoroastrians in the Kurdistan Region – she calls it Bashur, Southern Kurdistan, in Kurdish – told Rudaw English that dozens of Kurdish people are returning to Zoroastrianism, but that some keep it secret out of fear.

Zoroastrianism was a dominant religion in the region that was largely lost following two major historical military campaigns, Tayib explained, one during the time of Alexander the Great and the other during the Islamic campaign which brought much of present-day Middle East under Islamic rule in the seventh century.

The war against the Islamic State, Tayib said, is on the Kurdistan border. She fears that some Islamists might not be happy about the rise of her religion.

The Zoroastrians opened their first temple in the Kurdish city of Suleimani. They lit a fire and played the frame drum or daf to celebrate the occasion, two elements of their rituals. Tayib takes pride in her religion because she can, like her male counterpart, run the affairs of her fellow Zoroastrians “without any gender discrimination.” In our religion, she explained, we only talk about human beings, and humans by nature do not recognize gender roles.

Tayib, who was living in Europe until four years ago, is the representative of the Zoroastrians at the Kurdistan Region’s ministry of religious affairs. She assumed the position after Zoroastrians received official recognition in 2015.

Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion which grew to popularity in present-day Iran and some parts of Iraq and then spread to the rest of the world.

Zoroastrians are best known by their religious motto “Good Thoughts, Good Acts, and Good Deeds”. They believe in one God, that the world is divided between the good, represented by fire or light in their rituals, and the devil, and a day of judgement.

Many of its adherents in Kurdistan believe the founder of the religion, Zoroaster or Zardasht as it is called in Kurdish, was a Kurd and he spoke a variation of Kurdish language called Avesta.
Tayib said Avesta language is faced with extinction. She does not speak the language but, in an effort to preserve the language, she and members of her congregation are studying it.

Tayib could not give an exact number of Zoroastrians in the Kurdistan region as some followers do so only in secret for “their own safety or social considerations,” but she estimated it could be in the hundreds of thousands.

A 2006 report by the New York Times put the number of Zoroastrians worldwide at 190,000 at the most.

http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/210920163

Kurdish Zoroastrians believe that the Kurdish dialect of Hawrami, still widely spoken in Kurdish areas in Iran and Iraq, has many similarities to the ancient language.

Hawramis believe that the language has remained largely intact due to the limited contact they had with the outside world. Their mountainous areas kept them safe from foreign rule for much of their history.

Awat Darya, representative of Zoroastrians of Kurdistan at Awqaf Ministry in KRG, informs through Dolly Dastoor, a short film for the Kurdish audience has been made which is approx 29 minutes long, with the purpose of sharing the importance of Zoroastrianism for the Kurdish nation. It is in Kurdish with English subtitles.

https://vimeo.com/182390734
The password to watch is: 21041977

Both these images are to be seen with the next article

Left: Awat Darya & Atravan Qadr

L to R : Rostam, Shahrokh, Atravan Qadr, Zoroastrian family, Fariborz & Manijeh, Avat Darya at Q: Qapan
In Search of Zarathushti Kurds

by fariborz rahnamoon

While in Iran we decided to pay a visit to the Zarathushti Kurds and get to know them. We went to Marivan the Kurdish border town in Iran and from there crossed the Bashmahk border into Suleymania in Iraq. We had our own car and had planned to drive across the border and be mobile. At the border, we were told that we need to get the ‘Green Slip’ for the car from the Iranian customs, who required the original papers of the car and the presence of the owner. Since we had neither of them we were forced to park our car at the border and go without it.

The no-mans land between the two border gates was over a kilometre long with duty free shops, immigration and custom offices of both countries. We were made to buy health insurance from a guy sitting in a container and then buy some other slip from another container before we were allowed to enter the immigration office. The immigration officer made us pay 25,000 Dinars each which converts to about $30. The result was a 30-day visa to stay in Iraq. Then we walked out of the building and there was a sign that said ‘Entry to Iraq’ it was a caged corridor that led us to a container where our bags were x-rayed and our passports stamped. On the other side, we were back on the same road that had the duty free shop. We walked about half a kilometre and were at the Iraqi gate which was unmanned. The Iranian gate we entered was unmanned too. We wondered if it were not for the signs could someone just walk in and out?

Outside the gate taxis were available – some of the drivers spoke Persian others didn’t. We showed them the address of the fire temple, whose inauguration was just a few months ago, and all over the social media. We had through friends contacted the people involved, who were happy to invite us and had sent us the address and contact numbers.

A younger driver who as a child had taken refuge in Iran during the 8-year Iran / Iraq war and knew Persian fell to our lot. It was a 120 km drive through the mountain passes before we reached Suleymania or Sulamani as the locals call it.

Kurdistan is a mountainous area with cities developed in lush valleys, entry to the valley is through narrow mountain passes, which has helped the Kurds preserve their language and culture in the safety of these cities. The entry to the Kurdish area begins in Iran from Hamadan (ancient Hekmataneh) where we found the ‘Ganjnameh’ two stone tablets carved into the mountain, side by side, by Daryush the Great and his son Khashayar.

Here they proclaimed their achievements in the name of Ahura Mazda, and being the gateway to the West, with a lovely waterfall, every traveller that passed by would naturally stop here and thereby read the tablets. The first valley is the city of Sanandaj and the next is Marivan with a beautiful lake and tasty fish.

On the Iranian side, the border to Iraq was only 15kms from our lakeside hotel in Marivan but on the Iraqi side Sulmani was 120kms and took us an hour and a half. We had plenty of time to talk with our driver. It was the month of Moharam the first month of the lunar year according to the Islamic calendar. While the Sunni Muslims celebrate their New Year the Shia Muslims wear black and flog themselves with chains.
and mourn the death of Imam Hussain over a period of 40 days. They also go on a pilgrimage to Karbala in Iraq where Imam Hussain was martyred.

The Kurds are mostly Sunnis, so I asked the driver if there were Shias among the Kurds. He said “We are first Kurds and everything else comes after that, but yes we have Shias we also have Jews, Christian and Aryan”. I asked him what he meant by ‘Aryan’ he said ‘Zardashti’. He further explained that “we Kurds are all ethnically Aryan but Islam was forced upon us, but I am not religious”. I told him the address we were looking for is a Zardashti temple where we were to meet some people. We then discussed a little about the Zardashti religion. He then asked me if I had the phone number of the people, which I gave him, the next moment he was calling them and asking for directions. When we reached the city, he called them again and managed to drop us across from where our hosts were waiting for us with their cars.

To greet us were Mrs Awat Darya, she is the representative of the Zarathushtrian in the Kurdish Provincial Government. Her husband Jamal a retired officer of the Kurdish army, Mr Azad the director of the Yasna organization and Mr Esam, a representative from their Syrian chapter. We got into the two cars and drove to their temple, where we meet Mr Qadr the Atravan (mobed) and a group of officials of the Yasna organization. We presented them with a Khorda Avesta which Qadr, the Atravan, accepted with tears in his eyes kissed it and held it close to his heart. He wore a white Kurdish dress with a red shawl tied around his waist with three knots in the front representing the Kushti.

The temple was in a rented average size house, they had a small prayer room with a huge Fravahar on the wall and benches for the people to sit on. The other rooms were converted into an office, a meeting room and of course a kitchen. They had a small yard by the prayer room where they lit the fire. We gathered in the prayer room where the Atravan prayed by reciting the Gathas in Kurdish language.

We than discussed various matters and they said “We do not need any financial help but we need lots of help to increase our knowledge”. They would also love to have an Afrigan – Afargani, for their North American style Dar-e-Mehr. Qadr the Atravan (mobed) spoke Persian and it would be good if he could visit the Iranian mobeds to learn some of the rituals and how to perform prayers. We may need to teach them a lot but I believe we should not disturb their concept of the Kushti.

Kurdish concept of the Kushti

The Kurds are from the ancient Median tribe and they believe that Zarathushtra was from Media and so also were the wise man who went in search of baby Jesus. The dress
that we see in pictures worn by Zarathushtra is an adaption of the Kurdish national dress proudly worn daily by every Kurd in all walks of life. The shawl similar to the one around the waist of Zarathushtra is what they use as their Kushti. They tie three knots to represent Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds and is a public manifestation of their belief. Every Kurd walking the streets of Kurdistan irrespective of their religious belief has this shawl around his waist. Even the women wear it on their native and ceremonial dresses. To brand the shawl as a Kushti is a very important movement. Every individual Kurd, every single day, while getting dressed to leave the house, while tying the shawl around their waist will look at the shawl and debate what it represents and if she/he should return to her/his ancestral religion.

**Ancient Relics**

After about 45 minutes’ drive from the city into the mountains we came across what they call the ‘Qz Qapan’ caves. It is exactly like the graves of Daryush and Khasayar and others at Nagshe Rostam in Shiraz. High up on the face of the mountain they have carved into the mountain, pillars and the bas relief of a king with a bow in hand and a priest with the fire burning in an urn in the centre. There was a small opening and inside they said there were three chambers. They thought it was a temple but it is exactly a replica of Nagshe Rostam. Atravan Qadr led us in prayers.

When we returned to our cars we had a major problem with them and had to wait a few hours to get help. As a result, we had just enough time for a late lunch and had to return back to Marivan in time to retrieve our car. We missed out on being able to meet the other group called the ‘Zand’ organization. Had we not taken our car to the border we could have stayed an extra day.

It was a successful trip for we came to know our fellow Zarathushti Kurds and how sincerely they are trying to revive their
ancient faith. Mrs Awat has established a link with the Provincial Government of Kurdistan in Iraq, has obtained permission to practice their faith and built for themselves a fire temple. She has dedicated her time and energy and has succeeded towards establishing a healthy relation with the officials. Atravan Qadr is busy translating the books into Kurdish and needs help. They are respectful of all other religions and do not consider themselves as converts but consider it a revival of their ancient faith. Conversion from Islam could bring dangerous consequences. So, they do not attribute their revival to the deeds of ISIS. They have established links with other Kurdish cities and have members even in Syria whom we also met. This trip was arranged on the spur of a moment and we did not know what to expect. Now that we have the information we hope to visit them again and stay longer. We invite others to do the same, and to help them in whatever way we can, while being respectful of their culture and their type of Kushti.

Hamazor thanks Mr Rahnamoont for sharing his interesting essay with our readers which he sent to his friends after his return. – Ed
Visit the website: www.ancientiran.com

Fariborz Rahnamoont was born in Yazd, raised and educated in Bombay, lived in Iran, Australia and finally has settled in Vancouver, Canada. Editor of “Iran Zamin” a bilingual research magazine on ancient Iranian history and religion, and webmaster of www.ancientiran.com He has a unique perspective on the Zarathushtri religion and history which is a result of over 40 years of research. His findings and views are available on his website.

He is the President of the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia (ZSBC), the Chairperson of Arbab Rostam Guin Trust – Vancouver, Director of WZCC and Founder & Chapter Chair of WZCC BC.
Six years after the Zoroastrian Association of California Center was opened, the dream of having a prayer hall was finally turned into reality. A unique building in many ways was completed and a long-awaited celebration was about to begin.

At 9:00 am on a beautiful sunny morning on Sunday, November 13, 2016, Roj Mahrespand, Mah Khordad, the beautiful edifice was opened for the use of the community and their guests. The building was sanctified for 48 hours by prayers offered by Mobeds Zarrir and Zerkxis Bhandara.

The morning of the 13th witnessed the beautiful Atash Kadeh decorated inside and out with festive torans and balloons with community members dressed in their finery of daglis and garas/saris awaiting the ribbon cutting ceremony. To the sounds of a joyous rendition of “Chhaiye Hame Zarathosti” the ribbon was ceremoniously cut by two couples together – Arda-e-Viraf and Hootoxi Minocherhomjee and Sohrab and Sharon Charna. The very first Boi ceremony was then performed by Mobed Zarrir Bhandara, followed by a Hama Anjuman Machhi and a Jashan of six kardas was performed by 12 Ervads of the community. Since the hall could only accommodate about 100 guests, arrangements were specially made to stream the entire proceedings live in the main Arjani Hall of the center where the overflow were seated. After the jashan people made their individual offering of sandalwood and lit tea lights followed by chasni and refreshments.

The Felicitation ceremony took place in the Arjani Hall. Perinne Medora Vice President of ZAC welcomed the audience of 250 present in the Hall and emceed the proceedings. The event started with beautiful songs cutely sung by 13 Zarathosti tiny tots directed by Houtoxi Contractor which got a standing ovation from all present.
President of FEZANA Mr Homi D Gandhi who now resides in California addressed the congregation and congratulated ZAC on this great achievement. He mentioned that Fezana encourages all Zoroastrian Associations worldwide to have a prayer hall constructed for the use of their members and to keep the flame of our noble religion alive and well.

Mobed Zarrir Bhandara read out a congratulatory message received from Dasturjee Dr Firoze Kotwal and talked about the importance of fire and prayers in the lives of Zarthushtis everywhere.

President of ZAC-LA, Tehmi Damania then felicitated each and everyone involved in the creation of the Atash Kadeh which included the Architect Sohrab Charna, Feridoun Ghostasbi, a Zarathosti Builder (NIPA Construction) and various other individuals like Firdosh Mehta who was responsible in getting the Aalat of the Jalna Agiary, India and Kobad Zarolia, Ex-President of the NAMC who guided ZAC on what a true Atash Kadeh should have. Major donors such as Arda and Hootoxi Minocherhomjee and key persons involved like Tehemtan Arjani were also mentioned and acknowledged.

The celebrations were followed by a delicious Parsi lunch of Dhan Dar, Kolimi-no patio, Sali murghi and lagan-nu-custard all prepared by community volunteers and cooked by Bomi Patel (ex FEZANA President) in the new role of Master chef. Thank you Bomi and Binu for being such a great help and making this possible for us.

At the end of the day every member of ZAC had one single thought ... Our Atash Kadeh is finally complete and how proud we are of our community’s achievement.
2016 Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ) Conference

“Zoroastrian History : Pre-Achaemenian Times to the Present Day”

Jehangir Darukhanavala reports -

Over 60 persons participated in the 2016 SSZ (Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism) Conference “Zoroastrian History: Pre-Achaemenian Times to the Present Day”, on Saturday, September 3, 2016, at the Arbar Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr, Chicago, hosted by ZAC (Zoroastrian Association of Chicago), and supported by FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America), and WZO (World Zoroastrian Organization London).

The programme opened with a Benediction by Mobedyar Boman Damkevala, and a Monajat by Mani Rao. Participants were welcomed by ZAC VP Afshan Barshan, FEZANA President Homi Gandhi, and WZO USA chapter president Kayomarsh Mehta.

Rohinton Rivetna who along with Roshan Rivetna organized this conference, explained the vision of SSZ, which is to revive the tradition of learning and scholarship within our Zarathushti community, and urged all – academics, priests, educationists, lay scholars, students, and above all community members – to participate in these conferences.

The Morning Session – “Pre-Nihavand History” was chaired by Eric Elavia, who presided over the following five presentations relating to the era prior to 652 CE:

1. Pre-Achaemenian History (before 559 BCE) by Sarosh Irani.
   Sarosh Irani is a student at Wayne State University, Detroit. His ultimate goal is to attend medical school and become a Pediatrician. He has been intensely interested in history and geography from a young age and has won Silver and Gold medals in the Michigan State Geography Bees.

   This presentation focused on the Pre-Median times in Persia, the Median Empire, the birth of Zarathushtra, and the origin of one of Persia’s most iconic symbols – the Fravahar. Excavations dating back to 10,000 BCE reveal evidence of highly civilized peoples, residue of red wine, shift from nomadism to domestication of animals and reaping of plants, along with an excavation of a Fire Temple dating back to 6000 BCE. In the Copper and Bronze ages (5500 BCE to 1350 BCE), additional evidence of civilization among the Iranian, Russian and Indian populations is noted. During this period, the Kayanian Dynasty flourished, with rulers like Kavad, Lohrasp, Vishtaspa, and Prince Esfandiyar. Prophet Zarathushtra (1400 to 1200 BCE) was born during the Kayanian Dynasty. The Median Empire (678 BCE to 549 BCE) was conquered by Cyrus the Great. The word ‘Fravahar’ (Pahlavi) is from Avestan for “I choose”. It is similar to, and derived from, the symbol for the Assyrian God Ashur.

2. The Achaemenian Empire (559 to 334 BCE) by Khursheed Ichaporia.
   Khursheed holds an MBA and MS in Biology, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Education, along with her teaching assignments in the local community colleges.
She has great enthusiasm for ‘Parsipanoo’ and engages in activities with Zoroastrian children.

Teispes, Cyrus I, and Cambyses I of the Fars region were the first rulers of the Achaemenian dynasty. Cyrus II the Great (559 to 530 BCE) conquered the Medes, the Lydians and the Babylonians to become the first Zoroastrian world power. He allowed the return to Babylon of the Jews, who regarded him with reverence. His “Edict of Cyrus” is regarded as the world’s first Bill of Human Rights. Darius the Great (522 to 486 BCE) expanded the empire to Northern India and into Greece and Macedonia. He built the palaces at Persepolis, and the 1500 mile Royal Road from Susa to Sardis. The Achaemenian empire came to an end with defeat against Alexander in 334 BCE.

3. The Selucid and Parthian Empires (312 BCE to 227 CE) by Persis Driver and Kamal Saher.
Persis has a BA and MA in Business and Economics, Masters in Teaching, and is currently studying for a PhD in Educational Psychology. She is currently teaching courses in Child and adolescents development.
Kamal holds a BS in Secondary Math Education, and has taught math in the local schools. Both actively volunteer at ZAC.

After the death of Alexander, Seleucus founded the Seleucid Dynasty in 312 BCE. This rule in Iran lasted for 80 years until the arrival of Parthians in 250 BCE. Arsaces, a Scythian, invaded Iran and is crowned king in 247 BCE. Mithradates I, and II, Phraates, and other kings followed. They drove the Greeks out of Iran, and had battles with the Romans to prevent them from dominating the countries of Asia. Iranian culture was revived while maintaining the title of Philhellenes (“friends of the Greeks”). Arsacid kings chose typical Zoroastrian names from “heroic background” in the Avesta. Zoroastrianism existed in many different forms of practice and belief from place to place in the empire. There were two kinds of Fire Temples (one type with fire as symbol for Ahura Mazda and another with statues of Yazatas and Ahura Mazda).

4. The Sasanian Empire (224 to 651 CE) by Afshan Barshan.
Afshan is Vice President and Board member of the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago. He has held the office of Treasurer in the past and has been extremely active in the Association.

The Sasanian Empire was the highlight of Iranian civilization, with scriptures and commentaries in new phonetics, and was the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire. Ardashir I (180 to 240 CE) centralized power, made Zoroastrianism the State religion, and standardized Zoroastrian doctrines and practice. Under Shapur I (241 to 270 CE) the Sasanian Empire was at its peak, and captured Emperor Valerian. Shapur II (309 to 379 CE) regained provinces between Tigris and Euphrates from the Romans. Khosrau I (531 to 579 CE), also called Noshirwan, introduced governmental, financial, and agricultural reforms. During his reign, the game of chess was introduced in Iran, and a new Avestan alphabet was invented. Yazdegerd III (624 to 651 CE) was the last Sasanian King. The Iranians suffered a disastrous blow at the Battle of Qadisiyya in 636 from the invading Islamic Arabs. The fate of the mighty Sasanian Empire was finally sealed at the fierce Battle of Nihavand in 641 CE. Emperor Yazdegerd III had to flee to Ray, and was killed in 651 CE.

5. Zoroastrianism and Empire in Late Antiquity by Prof Richard Payne.
Prof Payne is a historian of the Iranian world in late antiquity (200-800 CE) and a researcher at the Oriental Institute of the
University of Chicago. His research focuses on the dynamics of Iranian imperialism, specifically how the Sasanian Empire successfully integrated socially, culturally, and geographically disparate populations from Arabia to Afghanistan into enduring political networks and institutions. He has just published a book: “A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity”, that has earned three awards. He is currently working on the role of Zoroastrian religious institutions and the intersection of ideological and material dimensions in Iranian history. Prof. Payne completed a doctorate in history at the Princeton University, and has received several awards, including the Bliss prize, the Crisp Fellowship, and a research fellowship from the German Academic Exchange Service. He was elected a research fellow of Trinity College, University of Cambridge.

The most extensive and enduring of ancient Near Eastern empires was built on Zoroastrian foundations, (the so-called Good Religion). Zoroastrianism transformed the disparate elites of the Parthian period into a unified Iranian ethno-class, a ruling elite defining itself in Zoroastrian terms. In addition to providing an ideological and ethnic identity, the Zoroastrian priest-scholars advanced the material interests of the aristocracy, through juridical institutions. Unlike, its Christian Roman counterpart, a Zoroastrian empire could integrate Christians, Jews, and others into its institutions and networks. It was the capacity to unify its practitioners without excluding non-Zoroastrians that made the Good Religion such an effective ancillary to empire in late antiquity.

The Lunch Session – consisted of the following two presentations:
1. The poem “Achaemenian Empire” by Farida Bamji read by Tina Mistry.

ACHAEMENIAN EMPIRE
“Humatanam Hukhtanam / Hurvershtanam Yadacha / Anyadacha Varejyanamancha Vavrezananamachaa”
(Good Thoughts Good Words / Good Deeds here and else where / Are performed and have been performed)

I dedicate this part of the / Aringhan Prayers / To our Great Achaemenian Kings / Cyrus Xerxes Darius. These kingly kings knew / That the vast Empire / Was bestowed upon them / Through the grace of Ahura Mazda / They kept in mind / The three-fold Path / Of Humata Hukht Hariarwshtha / They ruled their Empire / With an iron fist / In a velvet glove / They let their subjects / Live in peace / Instead of a push and a shove

They showed compassion / As well as humility / ’Cause when they met / Their Creator Ahura Mazda / They didn’t want to be charged / As guilty / They were just and Noble rulers / Though their fame spread / Far and wide / Yet they were down / To earth souls / Without Ego and Pride

I am truly proud to be / A part of this Glorious History / I think the following line aptly applies / “Mazadayasno Ahmi Mazdayasno Zarathushtis”
- Farida Bamji (faridabam@gmail.com).
July 20th 2016

Kersi is an attorney (Bar at Law in England, and graduate of George Washington Law School), specializing in International and comparative law, serving in the US Government for 33 years, in major capacities. He has undertaken independent studies of the archaeology, civilizations, and traditions of the Persian Empires, and former Eastern Iranian lands in Central Asia. He joined a Russian archaeological expedition to Tajikistan in 2013, to excavate 5th and 7th century CE sites in ancient regions of Sogdiana. He returned to Tajikistan and neighboring Uzbekistan in 2014 for further study.

The Vendidad lists the lands created by Ahura Mazda, beginning with the mythical Airyana Vaejah, and continuing with the regions of Sogdiana, Margiana, and Bactria. In a Pahlavi text,
Shahristaniha i Iran, a legend is preserved that “the Avesta itself was preserved in the citadel of Samarkand, the capital of Sogdiana. Sogdiana, in present-day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, in Central Asia, was conquered by Cyrus the Great in 540 BCE. Per scholars, Sogdian religious practice could be a polytheistic variant of Mazdaism, different from the later reformed Zoroastrianism of the Sasanians. Sogdian art depicted images of multiple gods, but these were sometimes altered to conform to the Iranian model. Among the identified deities portrayed, are 23 of Zoroastrian origin, including Sroasha, Verethragana, Anahita, Mithra, and Mehr-Ahura. The veneration of fire was common, and archeological findings have revealed places of worship where these deities were honored. Based on Kersi’s visits in 2013 and 2014, to several archeological sites in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, he reports the findings of an extensive number of artifacts, documents, funerary items, temple structures, and coins, indicating the practice of a variant form of Zoroastrianism from the 5th to 7th centuries CE.

The Afternoon Session – “Post Nihavand History” was chaired by Dastur Kersey Antia, who presided over the following three presentations relating to the era after 652 CE:

1. The Sasanians and Zoroastrian History after the Arab Invasion by Dr Daryoush Jahanian.
Dr Jahanian, MD was born and raised in Tehran, Iran. He has been a community activist since early years, founder and president of the Fravahar Zoroastrian Youth Organization in Tehran, first president of Zoroastrian Association of Kansas, and has taught the Gathas to students and at various seminars and conferences. He has a published book – “The Zoroastrian Doctrine and Biblical Connections”. Soon to be published is his new book – “Gathas, the Message of Zarathushtra".

Dr Jahanian talked about the Sasanians, and what happened after the Arab invasion. Due to continuous persecution, discrimination, financial pressure, and massacres, the population of Zoroastrians of Iran, estimated at four million at the turn of the 15th century, dwindled to only seven thousand at the middle of the 19th century. With the support of their Parsi brethren and their own faith, the Zoroastrian community in Iran revived and their fate turned around. Today, they are well-educated and enjoy the respect and trust of the general Iranian population and have built a reputation of “scrupulous honesty”.

2. Heritage and Diaspora of Zoroastrians by Dr Dinyar Patel (via Skype).
Dr Patel is assistant professor of history at the University of South Carolina. He received his PhD in history in 2015 from Harvard University, where he completed a dissertation on Dadabhai Naoroji.

A global diaspora of Zoroastrians has been in existence for far longer than many people think. Indeed, the very fact that the Parsis settled in Gujarat is quite likely the result of there already being communities of merchants in the region. Both Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians have long traditions of being mercantile communities. This has been the defining factor in explaining our mobility over the centuries. Dinyar explained the development of diaspora communities from 1700 CE onward, and how Zoroastrians can maintain their own identities as the community becomes increasingly scattered around the world.

Prof Choksy (BA, Columbia; PhD, Harvard) is Distinguished Professor and Professor of Iranian Studies at Indiana University. He is on the Council overseeing the US National Endowment for the Humanities. He has held numerous fellowships from distinguished institutions, including
Stanford. He is the consulting editor for the Encyclopedia Iranica. He is the author of three very scholarly books relating to Zoroastrianism.

Prof Choksy explained the impact of Zoroastrianism and its teachings on the coexistence of disparate thoughts and behaviors. The ingrained concept of forgiveness led to mercy, pity, and forbearance. The Zoroastrian goal of seeking “Asha”, the desire to satisfy God’s will, led to more measured responses to grievances. These principles are based on the teachings in our Gathas, Yashts, and other Avesta books.

The programme closed with a Benediction by Dastur Kersey Antia for the 33th anniversary of the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr, Chicago.

During the networking hour, at the end of the day, two interesting participants explained their interest in Zoroastrianism. Dr Paulina Niechcial, Asst Prof at the Center for Comparative studies, Krakow, Poland, has done field work in Iran, conducting ethno-graphic research on contemporary Zoroastrianism. Her publications include – “Zoroastrian Minority in Modern Tehran: on Collective Identity in the Context of Shia Domination”. Dr Galina Wood, PhD from Charles University, Prague, resides in Baku, Azerbaijan. Her research focuses on Zoroastrian ethical values, the identity issues of practicing communities, and the cultural heritage of ancient Zoroastrian lands in Post-Soviet countries.

The theme during the entire conference was to encourage the participation from younger generation Zoroastrians, and to disseminate knowledge, including books and other scholarly literature.
The Global Working Group

The Global Working Group brings together representatives of Federations in the diaspora. The GWG met in Hongkong on 15th December commencing with a Jashan performed by the resident mobed with deliberations carrying on till the 16th. As per tradition, the meeting was presided by the host Federation Chair which this year was Neville Shroff of Hongkong. The meeting coincided with the AGM of the WZCC which was also graciously hosted by Hongkong. The GWG regretted the absence of any representative from the BPP though Farokh Rustomji from FPZAI was indeed participating.

The GWG discussions took on from the previous meeting in December 2015 at Udvada which preceded the landmark 1st Iranshah Udvada Utsav. In retrospect the GWG consensus was that the 1st IUU had been a great success and congratulations were tendered to the Organising Team led by Vada Dasturji Khurshed. The GWG looks forward to the next IUU scheduled for 23 and 24 December 2017. Dinshaw Tamboly briefed the GWG about preparations and the progress in the regeneration of Udvada, with help from the dynamic Central Minister Mrs Smriti Irani. The GWG welcomed the proposal to establish a Museum in Udvada as a milestone towards regeneration. Meher Bhesania was delegated with progressing this idea, based on suggestions received from the Prime Minister himself and Mrs Irani and the help and encouragement coming from that direction. There was also a suggestion to examine if the museum could be established in Mumbai rather than in Udvada but the balance of logic was in favour of Udvada – considering the cost of land in Mumbai. The Museum Project would be developed in conjunction with Dasturji Khurshed and Mr Tamboly while calling upon the technical expertise of Shernaz Cama, Pheroza Godrej and Firoza Mistree.

A proposal to enable overseas Anjumans and Donors to donate in each case one year’s supply of Kathi to agiaries that require such assistance was also taken up. Mr Tamboly will be the coordinator and Anjumans should approach him direct.

The GWG received an update on preparations for the 11th World Congress to be hosted in Perth, Australia – from Firoz Pestonji and Jimmy Medhora on behalf of the Organising Committee. Details will be released in due course by the Organisers.

The GWG has appointed two committees, to handle the 11th WZC Awards programme headed by Meher Bhesania and another headed by Homi Gandhi to select the venue for the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress.

The GWG also decided that Yazdi Tantra will expand the portal Zoroastrians.net to disseminate information on Demographics, Opportunities, Activities and related Developments worldwide and the Regional Federations will publicize this portal to their memberships. This should ensure a Single Window of Information.

It was mooted that GWG should appoint an Administrator to oversee progress on its decisions and be a central point for communications. Initially Neville Shroff of Hong Kong was requested to take up this assignment subject to the agreement of the Hong Kong Board.

The GWG has initiated the following sub-committees with individuals charged with reporting their work:

Women : Behroze Daruwalla and Katayun Kapadia
Youth : Arzan Wadia
Resettlement and Information : Each Region to appoint one Coordinator and report the name within the next 30 days
As regards Entrepreneurship, it was felt the WZCC was the right forum to progress this initiative. Subsequently several members and well wishers have continued this dialogue and will be taking forward initiatives to Change the mindset of Zoroastrian youth and more importantly their parents towards Risk Taking.

The GWG reiterated the view that it was most important for leaders and in particular elected officers from the diaspora to meet and talk periodically because the contacts and friendships that are made in such interaction serve dramatically to improve relations and tackle problems.

Neville Shroff and his team were profusely thanked for their hospitality and for hosting these twin events with great warmth and professionalism.

Note: Dorab wishes to acknowledge the big part played by Rohinton & Roshan Rivetna in the GWG. Rohinton is the father figure of this group and both Roshan and Rohinton play a prominent part in the paperwork, planning and execution for the GWG besides giving their valuable input.

The Awards for WZCC for 2016 were:

**Outstanding Zarathushti Entrepreneur of the Year -**
Ms Delna Bhesania of Canada.
Conferred for her entrepreneurial zeal, pioneering efforts, commitment and vision in the field of animation.

**Outstanding Zarathushti Professional of the Year -**
Dr Arnavaz Havewala of India & Mr Arzan Sam Wadia of USA.
Arnavaz awarded for remarkable professionalism and high commitment towards providing superior and innovative Dental Solutions.
Arzan for displaying rare professional qualities in collaborative Designs and Architecture Projects and in the Field of Digital Media and Information Technology.

**Outstanding Young Zarathushti Entrepreneur / Professional of the Year -**
Mr Hanoz Tarapore - India.
Awarded for excellence in higher education and his ability to plan, process, connect and leverage relations across multiple geographies.

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**The Parsi Directory - Now as an Android App**

**TheParsiDirectory.com** has been around for over 10 years now, with more than 79,000 live registrations, making it the largest, free, worldwide Listing of Parsis, Iranis, Zoroastrians across the world.

1. Over the years, thousands of Zoroastrians have connected with family and friends using this medium
2. Many non-Zoroastrians have found long lost Zoroastrian relatives and friends, by requesting information from this valuable resource
3. Innumerable businesses have been discovered as well as valuable trade and commerce has been generated online. You may find Tour Operators, Caterers, Accountants, Lawyers, Film Makers, etc.

**TheParsiInstitutions.com** incorporates Institutions such as Agiaries, Associations, Baugs for Wedding and Navjotes, Dharamshalas, Sanatoriums, etc., across the world.

Both these extremely valuable resources are now available on your mobile phone as an Android App - just follow this link (https://goo.gl/XNDVBN) to download it from the Play Store. Once you have installed the app and registered yourself you will have the full power of connecting with any of the 79,000+ registered users based on name, location, profession or any combination of these. You will also have access to more than 750 Parsi Institutions from across the world.

Besides, you now also have the option to subscribe to daily Roj, Salgarehs, Uthamna and Z-News from all over the world.

Make new connections, revive old ones - download the app now! (https://goo.gl/XNDVBN)
A service provided by Yazdi Tantra, Mumbai.
Congress 2000 legacy continues

Congress 2000 legacy is an award programme of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston. This Legacy Award was established as a result of the funds that ensued from the success of the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress held in Houston, Texas. This is the 10th year where students are recognized and honored for their excellence in academic achievements, extra-curricular activities and for their community service, within the Zoroastrian Association of Houston as well other local community projects.

The two 18-year-olds for the 2016 Outstanding Youth are:

Rayhan Nariman – the Congress 2000 Legacy Award. An enterprising young man, with a passion for life and thirst for knowledge. A graduate of Clements High School in Sugar Land TX, Rayhan was inducted into the National Honor Society and was co-chair of the Ranger Camp, an annual event for incoming freshmen. An active member of the Theater Society he was always available for his Zoroastrian community to step up and volunteer anytime he was requested. He was selected for the Peer Assisted Leadership program where he mentored kids with special needs.

Freyaa Daroga - the Cyrus Rohinton Desai Award. She graduated from Clements High School and was inducted in the National Honors Society and received several academic excellence awards. She was also a member of the Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL) programme where she mentored and worked with elementary and middle school students.

Actively involved with ZAH activities Freya served as secretary as well as the president of the Zoroastian Youth Group. Her leadership skills were evident when she organized a Blood Drive, International Night fundraiser, car washes, worked with Seniors Meals on Wheels program, the Houston Food Bank, Senior Homes and the Second Mile Mission. Freya is also an accomplished Bollywood dancer.

The “Cyrus Rohinton Desai Award” was set up by the Desai family in memory of their son, a courageous young Houstonian who lost his battle with cancer. It was Cyrus’ ardent desire to go to college, even for a day, but sadly this was not meant to be. That is why this award is given exclusively to the person who is going off to college for the first time.

A distinguished panel of judges who are invited by Dr Farrokh Mistree from North America. This year the judges were: Dr Beheruz N Sethna, Dr Poras T Balsara, Dr Tinaz Pavri, Dr Farah Shroff and Mrs Pearlne Collector as the ZAH Youth representative.

The ZAH Executive committee and the congress legacy committee congratulate the 2016 winners. We believe these students deserve to be recognized as innovators and leaders for tomorrow’s global community. By supporting the next generation of great minds we pay tribute to the success of the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress where the initial funds were generated.
The WZO Trust team involved over the last 25 years in welfare activities in the villages of South Gujarat accompanied Capt & Mrs Percy Master and Mr Percy Kaikobad from Lions Club of Byculla on a round of a few villages during mid 2015 to have a firsthand experience of the work that we have been doing.

Satisfied with what they had experienced, Lions Club of Byculla collaborated to jointly undertake a project that would change for the better, lives of eleven families in village Zavda, situated in the Dangs District a notified backward area of South Gujarat.

Zavda is a village situated in inhospitable terrain, a two and a half hour drive from Navsari, where most people stay in huts, bereft of any worthwhile infrastructure. A major drawback being the availability of water, with only a couple of wells being the only source from where the residents could draw water.

A group of 11 families residing in a cluster had to trudge long distances to draw water from the village well, the ladies specially enduring hardship. In 2014 WZO Trust began to replace the huts in which these families resided to brick and mortar cottages. However, whilst the transition from residing in huts to cottages did enhance the quality of their lives, the lack of adequate water was proving to be a challenge.

Enter the Lions Club of Byculla with a generous proposal to fund a project that would provide water at the doorsteps of these 11 families. The WZO Trust undertook to identify the sub-terrain water table, had a bore well drilled, [keeping in mind erratic power supply] a submersible pump installed operated through conserving energy into solar panels, constructed a tower into which water was pumped into a 3,000 liters tank.
from which it was piped to the cottages of the 11 families.

On September 17, 2016 some members of the Lions Club of Byculla - President Vistasp & Bakhtawar Sachinwalla, Capt Percy & Arin Master, Cyrus & Kamal Disawala, Percy & Zenobia Kaikobad, Behram & Zarine† Rabadi, Percy & Arnie Buhariwala and Sorab Balsara - once again visited the village to formally inaugurate the water system that would now further enhance the quality of lives of these 11 families.

Accompanying them were members of Team WZO Trust.

Trustees of The WZO Trust extend their sincere gratitude to Members of Lions Club of Byculla for having funded the project as also to Aspandiar Bharucha who conceived, planned and executed the project and Aspi Ambapardiwalla and Sarosh Gazder our dedicated team members for following up on the project. Aspandiar, Aspi and Sarosh made innumerable visits to Zavda to sort out frequent challenges that arose due to shortage of infrastructure, lack of availability of professional carpenters, plumbers etc.

This project will result in 11 families and surrounding inhabitants of Zavda Village being benefited in procuring their requirements of water for both drinking, domestic use and irrigating their fields, without having to depend on village water or electricity. The Project has brought smiles to the villagers and will be of particular great help during summer months when there is always an acute shortage of water.

A difficult project has been executed that will result in lives of 11 families undergoing a positive metamorphosis. A project undertaken jointly that has established what institutions and individuals working in harmony and dedication can achieve.

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The Boomerang Effect

by dina mcintyre

The idea of whether or not menstruating women are spiritually unclean in our religion has been the subject of discussion in which historical facts are conspicuous by their absence. We have a lot of opinions, a lot of ancient-sounding words thrown about (many of which are not Avestan) but few facts in support of this tradition. Yes, we have such a tradition in Zoroastrianism. But no one seems to have examined when and how this idea came into being in the long history of our religion. Over the centuries, the underlying idea has resulted in many different practices in dealing with this phenomenon. Today, in ‘orthodox’ and Ilm-i-khshnoom circles, a menstruating woman cannot attend religious ceremonies (because she is a spiritual pollutant). In ‘liberal’ circles, she may attend a ceremony — so long as she does not touch anything of religious significance (because she is a spiritual pollutant) — she cannot go up to the fire urn (afargan) to add sandalwood and incense to the fire, or touch its instruments or the ashes, or do any one of the things others are encouraged to do — which naturally signals her ‘condition’ to everyone present. Many are embarrassed to publically discuss this tradition, (while still enforcing it). But we can no longer ignore this ten ton elephant in the room. We cannot continue to teach this tradition to our children and enforce it — however quietly — without hurting them and ourselves, and failing to follow the path of the truth. We need to look it in the eye, and decide. Are menstruating women a source of spiritual pollution? I cannot claim to have been instructed by invisible people on Mt. Demavand. I can only tell you what our ancient texts say. I would like to show you — with the best available evidence — when this tradition arose, and on what it was based, so that each Zoroastrian community can make an informed decision on whether or not it wants to let this tradition go.

Our most ancient texts are the Avestan texts — the oldest being the Gathas and
later the Yasna Haptanghaiti (both composed in Old Avestan), then the other Yasnas, the Visperad, Yashts, Nyaishes, Gahs and Afrigans (composed in Younger Avestan (YAv.) — just as today’s English is different from older versions). These YAv. texts have been translated in Sacred Books of the East (SBE) Vols. 31, and 23, with the Avestan texts in Geldner’s Avesta. None of them teach that a menstruating woman is spiritually unclean, nor prescribe exclusionary rules to avoid her spiritual ‘pollution’.

So far as I am aware, the first mention of this idea occurs in the Vendidad (Videvdad), a text composed in what purports to be YAv. But scholars (who are linguists) have long since concluded that it was written after Avestan times, when our priests were no longer fluent in the Avestan language, because its Avestan is full of grammatical errors.

Zaehner speaks of “the appalling grammatical confusion that characterizes that ... work.” Humbach and Faiss mention in passing “...the well-known fact that the grammatical endings found in the Videvdad are notoriously doubtful...”. Hintze thinks the Videvdad (Vendidad) was composed in the post-Achaemenian period.

I agree. The Achaemenian kings would never have tolerated giving priests as much power to rule and punish, as they have in the Vendidad.

I realize that Ilm-i-khshnoom claims the Avestan language was not a language for everyday life, but was created and used solely for rituals (and therefore could not have such mundane things as grammar). This is not true. Linguistic evidence has established beyond doubt that Avestan is in the Indo-European family of languages (would you believe, the English word ‘star’ — in the sky — is Avestan star-), and Avestan is very similar to Vedic Sanskrit. One has only to study the texts to see that the language was for everyday use (and was also used for rituals). The texts describes many non-ritual things — the ringlets of a bludgeon bearing warrior; the square earrings and fur clothing of a ‘goddess’ (just two examples).

So where does the Vendidad fit (time-wise), in the history of our religion? Zarathushtra’s date is not precisely known. Estimates range from the earliest, around 6,480 BCE to the latest around 589 BCE. Some linguists and writers think he lived around 1,000 BCE or 1,700 BCE or earlier. From Zarathushtra’s date through the centuries of the Younger Avestan texts (which even then regarded him as very ancient) through the fall of the Achaemenian Empire around 331 BCE, we have a period of several centuries. There is no textual or other evidence that the religion considered menstruating women as spiritual pollutants, or practiced resulting exclusionary traditions during all those many centuries.

Then how did this idea came into being? Well, in some YAv. texts, we see the idea of cosmic dualism — two uncreated Entities — an all good God, in conflict with an all evil Devil (there is no Devil in the Gathas, except for interpretations personal to the translator). The Pahlavi text Sikand Gumamig Vijar, explains that if Ahura Mazda is all good (as He is in the Gathas), he cannot have created anything evil. Therefore (the ancients reasoned), there would have to be another creator of everything evil. And thus was born the idea of the Devil — an all evil Entity. In the Gathas, the only spiritual pollutants are things that are intrinsically ‘evil’, such as lies, cruelty, violence, anger, tyranny, bondage, murder, theft, harming, injuring, etc. In later Avestan texts, what is ‘evil’ was extended to anything that was harmful to man (although not intrinsically ‘bad’) — wolves, disease, sickness, etc. and these ‘evil’ things were considered the creation of the all bad Entity — the Devil. At the time of the Vendidad, the cause of menses was not understood, but in their experience bleeding was caused by harming someone, and the Devil was the source of all harm. So menstruation (which could not otherwise be explained) was thought to be caused by the Devil (harming the woman). How do I
know this? Because the *Vendidad* and ancient commentaries say so. The following references to the *Vendidad* are from Darmesteter’s translation in SBE Vol. 4, pp. 181 - 184. In Fargard 16.7, the question is asked, how much food should be brought to a menstruating woman (who is in isolation). The answer is that she should not be fed too much, because any strength she might gain from the food would strengthen the Devil (who was causing her to bleed).

“How much food shall he bring to her? How much bread shall he bring? (Only) two danares of long bread, and one danare of milk pap, lest she should gather strength.” Fargard 16.7.

The Pahlavi Commentary explains,

“‘Soshyos says: For three nights cooked meat is not allowed to her, lest the issue shall grow stronger.’ As the fiend is in her, any strength she may gain accrues to Ahriman.” Darmesteter ft. 4.

There is a very lovely Avestan maxim repeated in Younger Avestan texts. It does not appear in SBE translations, but appears (in Avestan script), in identical form, in Geldner.4

`aevo pantao yo ashahe vispe anyaesham apantam`

(There is) one path, that of truth, all others (are) non-paths, (my translation).

Under this teaching, a ‘tradition’ is nothing — a non-path — if it is not in accord with truth. The idea that menstrual bleeding is caused by the Devil is untruth. A non-path. Today, we know that the menses is just the lining of the uterus, which is enriched to nourish the fetus, and is sloughed off (as menstrual bleeding) if no fetus attaches to it. That is truth. Many other reasons have been proposed to justify the exclusion of menstruating women (by people unaware of the original reason). One is that it allowed women to rest. Kindly, but not supported by any text. The ideas that the auras of menstruating women snatch power from a man or his aura, (an Ilm-i-khshnoomi thought), or that the touch of such a woman draws power from a man, or sours milk, or makes pickles turn out badly, are not found in any ancient Avestan text. These are all fear-driven (or control-driven) superstitions that have neither a factual, nor textual, basis. The idea that menstrual bleeding is caused by the Devil is the only textual basis for the exclusion of women during their menses.

If indeed, menstrual bleeding were caused by the Devil, we should ask: Who vanquishes the Devil every month like clock work? Women do. So are women spiritually superior to men? Of course not. Spirituality has nothing to do with gender. In Avestan texts (which were composed during Av. times), men and women are treated as equals. Indeed, according to the *Aerpatastan & Nirangistan* (believed to be part of the lost Avestan *Husparam Nask*),5 both men and women were priests.

Those ancients in the *Vendidad* were not afraid to use their minds to arrive at conclusions (although faulty), based on then available knowledge (although incorrect). Do we have their courage? If menses is not caused by the Devil we should stop practicing any exclusionary traditions against such women. If you believe that menses is caused by the Devil, then you should practice all of the *Vendidad*’s exclusionary mandates — anything else is hypocritical. I will summarize these mandates here (in addition to feeding such women only a little bread and milk) — all of which are ignored today. The *Vendidad* mandates,

— that menstruating women be kept in a separate building “...and they shall erect a building there, higher than the house by a half, or a third, or a fourth, or a fifth part, lest her look should fall upon the fire.” And that she should be kept “Fifteen paces from the fire, fifteen paces from the water, fifteen paces from the consecrated bundles of baresma, three paces from the faithful.” BB 2, 4;

— that a person bringing her food should keep his distance — “Three paces from her shall
he stay, who brings food to a woman who has an issue of blood, either out of the ordinary course or at the usual period.”; that her food should be brought “in vessels of brass, or of lead, or of any common metal.” ßß 5 - 6;

— that “... If a child has just touched her, they shall first wash his hands and then his body.” ß 7 last para. (footnote 5: including a “child whom she suckles”);

— and that after her “infirmity” is over, she must undergo a purification ritual in which 3 holes are dug, and she is washed by gomez in 2 holes, and by water in the 3d ßß 8 - 12.

No Zoroastrian community today — not even Ilm-i-Khshnoom — follows any of these mandates. Yet the Vendidad is clear that it is not just a such a woman who is spiritually impure, her spiritual pollution is infectious — to everything — it infects the space around her, what her glance falls upon, and any person or non-metal thing she touches. So if the Vendidad is true, then the whole Zoroastrian community today (in fact the whole world!) is spiritually polluted because at home and outside it, such women live, cook, eat, sleep, go to work, shop, look upon and touch people and things in 1,001 ways — in total disregard of the Vendidad. Why? Because it is convenient. Yet such women are still excluded from touching religious things, or attending religious ceremonies. Why? Because that inconveniences no one else (except young girls and women).

The Vendidad classifies many things as spiritual pollutants — worse than menstruating women! — which today, we totally ignore. For example, hair and nails (once cut) were spiritual pollutants. The following references are to Fargard 17, Darmesteter translation, SBE Vol. 4, pp. 185 - 189. Allowing a person’s hair and nails to fall into the earth without protective rituals (the Vendidad says) produces Daevas on earth, and causes corn in the fields, and “clothes in the wardrobe” to be eaten up by insects. To prevent such dire consequences, hair and nails were required to be buried in the earth at a depth of 10 fingers if the earth is hard, or 12 fingers if the earth is soft, while performing various ritual actions, recitals and dedications (ßß 2 - 10). Those who did not, were sinners.

“All such sinners, embodiments of the Druj, are scorners of the law; all scorners of the law are rebels against the Lord; all rebels against the Lord are ungodly men; and any ungodly man shall pay for it with his life.” ß 11.

Today, we do not regard hair and nails as sources of spiritual pollution. They are just material rubbish which we dispose of in the garbage without protective rituals. Yet in the Vendidad, hair and nails are a source of spiritual pollution worse than menstruating women in that such women must be kept only 15 paces away from sacred things (16.4), whereas,

“... whenever ... thou shalt comb thy hair, or shave it off, or pare off thy nails thou shalt take them away twenty paces from the fire, thirty paces from the water, fifty paces from the consecrated bundles of baresma…” Fargard 17.4,

Why do we still believe that menstruating girls and women are spiritual pollutants, when we have stopped believing that hair and nails are spiritual pollutants? Could it be that if everyone menstruated, the Vendidad’s ideas would have long since gone the way of hair and nails?

In conclusion. Menstruation is part of the process that generates the miracle of new life. If we believe in ‘God’, then we believe that the process which creates new life was designed (or set in motion) by Him. Can anything He designs (or sets in motion) be a spiritual pollution? To see any material thing as a source of spiritual pollution is a contradiction in terms — an oxymoron. So the choice that confronts us is this. Do we wish to be the prisoners of a ‘tradition’ unsupported by any evidence during the first several centuries or our religion’s existence, a tradition which first appeared after the fall of the Achaemenian empire, which is demeaning and hurtful to young
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girls and women, which has no basis in truth? If we keep this ‘tradition’ will we keep our millennials? Can any community so humiliate young girls and women without humiliating itself?

Notes
4. In Geldner 1Part p. 239 (for Yy72.11), and 2Part p. 31 (for Visperad 24.3); and 3Part p. 139 (in the concluding paragraph of the Vendidad).

‘Sajedo by Juddins’ - Homage by non-Parsis

by hoshang bhoot

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Nothing is more elegant in concept than this sublime principle.

Amongst all other communities, barring Parsis, there is no restriction or any other sort of reservation on paying homage to a deceased person. Unfortunately in our community the restriction is imposed on the grounds that the mere presence of a non-Zoroastrian or his/her mere glance would somehow vitiate the prayers.

How is it then, that prayers recited at navjotes, weddings and jashans incorporate ceremonies in the presence of non-Zoroastrians and are not vulnerable to defilement?

This practice carried on since centuries, may have been the result of some stray incident that may have occurred in the distant past in the sixteenth century when the Zoroastrian community faced tremendous hostility in the Shiite Safavid Empire. Our ancestors faced religious discrimination and forced conversion, and it is likely, that as a matter of retaliation this ban was imposed on “Islamists” of those days. Presumably, this action took root and is followed even now blindly, especially amongst Mumbaiker Parsis.

There should be a shelf life for such practices, customs and traditions, which due to their age are not likely to hurt the religious sentiments or the Zoroastrian faith. Our prophet declared that Zoroastrian religion is UNIVERSAL, which we should respect and not impose humiliation and disrespect to non-Zoroastrians from paying homage to the deceased Zoroastrian’s corpse. Is it only to exhibit our “Parsipanu.”?

Dina G McIntyre, is a Zoroastrian, born in India and came to USA in 1956. She earned a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Law and practiced law in the United States, since 1964. Prior to her retirement she was a member of the bar of all federal and state courts in Pennsylvania, and the United States Supreme Court. She has been a student of the teachings of Zarathushtra since the early 1980s, and was the Editor of a 12-lesson course on the Gathas called An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra, which she distributed world-wide in 1989-90. She has lectured on the teachings of Zarathushtra at various conferences and seminars in the US, Canada, England and India. Her writings on the teachings of Zarathushtra appear on these websites: www.wohlean.org and www.zarathushtra.com
Basically, our prayers contain praises of our Creator and his creation, and contain lessons on morality, spirituality, humanity, philosophy and ethics and taking care of fauna and flora etc. There is emphasis on good thoughts, good words and good deeds. It provides a guideline for spiritual living.

Ironically, this tradition that originated in Iran and handed down to us (Parsis), as I understand it, this obnoxious custom has been (rejected) invalidated by the present generation, and now there is no ban on ‘sajedo’ by non-Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians settled in western countries do not follow this custom and allow ‘sajedo’ to take place.

“The very essence of rationalism is that it assumes that the reason is the highest faculty in man and the lord of all the rest.” quote from Lyman Abbott (American author).

Faith refers to belief that lacks reason and evidence, Faith rests on inspirational revelation and may be held without any evidence or reason. Can our custodians of religion be intellectually honest in confirming that a non-Parsis’ gaze on a deceased Zoroastrian’s body during prayers will debase the whole prayer ritual and render the ceremony ineffective?

Unfortunately, the disposition of ancient customs and traditions everywhere are a stumbling hindrance to human advancement, peaceful living and communal harmony.

To resolve this sensitive issue what is required is a pinch of spiritual wisdom and rational mind-set, rather than rushing to the archives to sift through ancient scriptures.

Whilst introspecting this time barred tradition, one has to remember that God is everywhere but is most manifest in human beings, besides fauna and flora. Serve them with dignity, honour, love and respect, that is the worship of the Almighty Creator. Any prayer recited by devoted clergy in good faith and spirit is never vulnerable to defilement, just by the presence of beings, who by chance are not born Zoroastrians.

“Adam ko khuda mat kaho
Adam Khuda nahi
Lekin Khuda ke noor se
Adam juda nahi”

Tailpiece

One has to acknowledge the universal truth that marriages are made in heaven, and so are the birth and death. However one may try to avoid, but cannot escape the fate of destiny. In this modern society and proximity of cosmopolitan culture, interfaith marriages are on the rise. The trend is in every community and Parsis are not the exception. So take it for granted that in time to come most of the Parsi families are going to get extended families in the form of non Parsi relatives.

God forbid, if some tragic event like death strikes the family, the host faces a most embarrassing situation during the time of ‘sajedo’ (homage). While everyone gets up after the prayer for a last glimpse of the deceased, the non-Parsi relatives are left alone to gaze at each other, face humiliation and disgust. It is quite likely that the non-Parsi may translate such a divisive policy as a matter of “complex” than religious agenda.

As a last resort to amicably settle the sensitive issue of ‘sajedo by juddins’
(homage by non-Parsis) the trustees and custodian of religion should leave it to the family members to decide whether they are open to allowing non-Parsi relatives, friends and associates to view the ceremony and even allowing them to see the deceased’s face to pay the homage.

If one tries to read between the lines of Zarathustra’s Gathas’ we learn that there is “rationalism” in “Zoroastrianism”. The most appealing aspect is unlike the dominating scriptures like “fatwa” in other religion, our prophet Zarathustra’s gave mankind “free will” to decide good verses bad using their own judgment and to act upon it. After the demise of our prophet Zarathustra, that concept was totally overlooked and ignored by those who had vested interests. Thus, we are in the trap of “fatwas” sort of traditions ever since.

If ultraorthodox still have any objection of utilising an existing prayer hall, let the trustees build a separate hall where cosmopolitan mourners can sit together with the family of the deceased, and observe full ceremony and finally pay the homage. This is the only optimum solution to save our community from the tag of non-secularism and also to bury once and for all the sensitive issue of ‘SAJEDO BY JUDDINS’.

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Hoshang Bhoot is an automobile engineer, having put in 35 years of service as an Export Manager at a leading automobile manufacturer in Mumbai. Currently, with his wife Nergish, they export automobile spare parts to the Gulf and Fiji Islands. Not very religious minded, but believes in spirituality, and according to this belief, religion divides whereas spirituality unites. He is an activist in saving stray dogs.

Lt Commander Firdaus Darabshah Mogal - a tribute

by marzban giara

Lt Commander Firdaus Darabshah Mogal was born on 15th October 1974 at Ahmedabad. After completing schooling from Maneckji Cooper School he joined the prestigious National Defence Academy at Khadakvasala, Pune in 1992. He was commissioned into the executive branch of the Indian Navy as a Sub Lieutenant on 1st January 1998.

He completed the basic submarine course and was an anti submarine warfare officer at INS Shalki. He was appointed training coordinator, submarine school, INS Satvahana, Vishakhapatnam and executive officer (second in command), INS Shankush. His submarine was on operational deployment on the high seas on 30th August 2010. The sea was very choppy and the submarine developed a technical snag. The maintenance crew came up to repair the defect. A few sailors were washed overboard. Firdaus managed to rescue six of his colleagues but he himself fell overboard. He suffered a concussion on his forehead. He exhibited unmatched fearlessness in the face of death by saving the lives of six sailors at the cost of his own. He was given a military funeral at the tower of silence at Mumbai.

Lt Commander Mogal was commended by the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Naval Command in 2007 for professional competence, zeal, enthusiasm and devotion to duty of a high order. On Independence Day
2011 he was posthumously awarded the country’s third highest gallantry award – the Shaurya Chakra for bravery.

As a participant he had attended the Holiday Programme for Youth (HPY) in 1990 conducted by the Bombay Parsi Puchayat. He volunteered to conduct the Armed Forces Capsule of HPY in 2009 and 2010 to give back what HPY had done for him.

A building for training submariners within *INS Satavahana*, a naval facility in Visakhapatnam has been renamed after late Firdaus in 2012, as Firdaus Mogal Simulator Complex. *INS Satavahana* was late Firdaus’ alma mater and he had worked towards setting up the Simulator Complex. Recently on Sunday 11th September 2016, The Parsi Wad was renamed in honour of Firdaus who comes from the illustrious Mogal family of Mahuva village which is 27 kilometres from Navsari in South Gujarat. The function was organised by Mahuva Gram Panchayat and Shri Mahuva Parsi Anjuman.

Mr Ganpatbhai Vasava, Minister for Tribal Development, Tourism and Forests, Government of Gujarat was the chief guest. Mr Prabhoubhai Vasava, member of parliament from Bardoli, Mr Mohanbhai Dhodia, MLA from Mahuva, Sarpanch and Talati as also committee members of Mahuva Gram Panchayat and Shri Mahuva Parsi Anjuman.

Mr Ganpatbhai Vasava, Minister for Tribal Development, Tourism and Forests, Government of Gujarat was the chief guest. Mr Prabhoubhai Vasava, member of parliament from Bardoli, Mr Mohanbhai Dhodia, MLA from Mahuva, Sarpanch and Talati as also committee members of Mahuva Gram Panchayat, members of the Mogal family, trustees of Surat Parsi Panchayat, Bardoli Jarthosti Anjuman, Pardi, Vyara and Gandevi graced the occasion by their presence. Commodore Aspi Marker, Indian Navy (retired) was the guest of honour who specially came from Mumbai for this ceremony. Plaques carrying the new name were unveiled at either end of the road by the honourable minister and Commodore Marker.

11th September is a memorable event in the history of Mahuva. The people of Mahuva have honoured Lt Commander Firdosh Mogal by naming a street after him making his name immortal. His portrait is also unveiled in the agiary at Mahuva by Ervad Dr Rooyintan Peer. A poem written in Gujarati as a tribute to late Firdosh by a poet of Mahuva was read out.

Commodore Aspi Marker said: “Firdosh was second in command of *INS Sankush* a submarine. When he saw from the control tower that six of his men were struggling in the stormy sea he rushed to their rescue wearing a life jacket. He referred to the team spirit in the armed forces which is not found amongst civilians. …”

In the evening, members of different communities such as Jain Samaj, Audichaya Brahman Samaj, Dhimmar Samaj and the office bearers of Mahuva People’s Cooperative Credit Society gathered at Manekwadi (a community hall of Mahuva Parsi Anjuman) to felicitate Armin and Darabshah Mogal, parents of the late Firdosh and each group presented them with a *sanman patra* a scroll.

Firdaus is survived by his wife Kerzin and son Yashaan. Eight-year-old Yashaan is a winner of interschool and district level competitions in swimming, with history being his favourite subject. On national days during school assembly, he is happy to speak about his father and remembers him with pride.

Firdaus’ memory lives on.
I am very grateful to the editor of Hamazor for requesting an article on myself. Till now I have never done this, as autobiographies tend to be presumptive and subjective. But I hope through this I can bring to light the horrific socio-economic plight of the people of our Country.

In the past I have often touched more on the life of my late wife, Anuradha (Anu), who, I believe deserves more attention due to her exceptional qualities. She was the most honest, justice-loving, simple and straightforward person I have met – childlike, like her inner emotions reflected on her face as a mirror. Though extroverted and dynamic, falsehood, pretence, conceit, etc were inconceivable in her, no matter that she was a well respected post graduate lecturer, a renowned mass leader in the Nagpur area, and a well established thinker / writer on social issues (particularly women and Dalit). Every year since her death a memorial meeting is held in Mumbai, and the one to be held soon will have, I am told, Angela Davis from the US as the speaker.

No article on myself would be complete, without a brief account of her. Besides, I do believe she was an excellent example of the Zoroastrian tenets of “good thoughts, good words, good deeds”. No doubt to live by those principles today is getting more and more difficult; where might alone is right. This was not the situation in the late 1960s, when I was drawn to social activities and Marxism, while studying for the CA in London. In those days nearly half the world was communist, and socio-political cultural movements were raging worldwide. Having grown up in a somewhat protected atmosphere, I was shocked to witness racism against Indians in the UK. This led me to study social phenomena and the history of the freedom struggle. Having studied Gandhi, Dadabhai Nowrojee and others; utilising the British Museum Library, I finally veered towards Marxism, which was in vogue those days. After passing two of the CA exams in the first attempt, I decided becoming a corporate honcho was not my calling. So I threw up the CA and returned to India in 1972. I may have returned a year earlier, had it not been for an arrest and two months imprisonment. Though it was we who were attacked by racists while giving speeches, it was only three of us who were arrested, beaten up by the cops and later sentenced to jail by a biased judge.

Since then it has been an exceedingly long journey, traversing over 40 years of work amongst the poor and oppressed, mostly in Mumbai and Nagpur. Also, as a journalist I have generally defended all just causes, whether it was for tribal’s (against corporates taking over their lands), Dalits (against inhuman and savage caste oppression), women (for equal rights and opportunities and against patriarchy), the environment (against the rape of nature), etc. Little did I expect that the final destination of this rugged path would be jail, where I have spent the past seven and half years, with release nowhere in sight. But, I suppose, this was inevitable in this day and age where injustice and inhumanity is everywhere and criminality of the ruling elite the norm. In India thousands of peasants are committing suicide due to spiralling debt, 215 million people are undernourished, 750,000 children die yearly due to malnutrition while 38% of children are stunted. In Delhi the number of rapes daily has increased three fold since the Nirbhaya incident in 2012 and molestation cases seven fold. While India’s bottom 40% are one of the poorest in the world, the 100 richest people have more money than two-thirds of the population put together.

Recently we have seen three well respected nationalists that too over 70, shot and killed
in broad daylight. In that way I am luckier to
be alive, though the establishment has
attempted judicial murder by consciously
prolonging my Delhi case, and by slapping
a host of false cases all over the country,
even in places I have never heard of.
Knowing full well that I am 70 years old with
numerous ailments, they know it may be
difficult to survive the trauma.

Of course I try and maintain my health
(physical and mental) with an hour or two of
yoga daily (when not unwell) and utilisation
of my time in reading and writing.
Particularly in Delhi the jail / police / court
system is designed to break one physically
and mentally. But with the constant flow of
health foods and vitamins from my sister
and her Delhi friends / relatives, strong
support of Anu’s entire family, including her
89-year old mother, my classmates from the
Doon School and the DOSCO magazine,
the Parsi community and Parsiana, and
most importantly civil liberty activists and
progressive lawyers – I have been able to
sustain myself so far. But, for how long I
don’t know, particularly if legal procedures
drag on.

In Tihar jail in Delhi, where a single case
with minor charges dragged on for nearly
seven years, and where I was finally
acquitted of the main charge; it was a
veritable nightmare. I was kept with petty
thieves, and ruthless killers in a high
security ward (a jail within a jail), under 24
hour surveillance with a CCTV camera in
the cell and with regular and humiliating
searches and scanning. I was taken to court
/ hospitals in a police van, locked within a
suffocating cage (with two more sets of
gates outside it), with the most crude,
insulting and corrupt police officers in
charge. The entire atmosphere was geared
to destroy the individual. Of course, there
was one positive aspect of Tihar and that
was its medical service.

Once this case got over in June 2016 and I
was shifted to Hyderabad jail there was a
somewhat better environment. It was like
moving from a caged zoo with dangerous
reptiles all around, back to civilisation. Even
when I recently spent a month in Patiala jail
in Punjab, in a totally fake case, there was a
general decency all around – from police,
jal officials, lawyers etc. That was why the
case was wrapped up in a mere 20 days,
when I was acquitted of all charges. Yet,
shifting jails has taken a further toll on the
health.

There are still 12 cases pending in
Telengana / AP and three more in other
states – all places I have never been. And
these cases have just begun as the Delhi
government prevented my cases in other
states running simultaneously. So much for
the criminal justice system of this country
which tends to be police-centric rather than
judge-centric. For example, all my
remaining cases are based on a fake
‘confession’ I was supposed to have made
to the AP police – which I had not signed,
made in a language (Telugu) I do not know,
and which I denied having made as soon as
it was presented in court. In addition to this
fact, all these cases are based on the
assumption that I was a member of the
banned CPI (Maoist) – on which charge I
have already been acquitted both in Delhi
and Patiala. Yet, the judicial procedures
drag on and on. Even though the judges
have been so far fair, they necessarily have
to follow procedures based on police
accusations, however fake.

Now, the question that arises is why is the
police / government resorting to such
duplicit measures, that too at the fag end of
my life when I have been active for about
four decades and never once been
arrested? The reason is that I have
consistently stood (and written) on the side
of the poor and against the policies of the
respective governments, whose decisions
favour only the top 1% of the population
and, in particular, a handful of top big
business houses.

To briefly recount my past activities
After coming back to India I started social
work in the slums near our home at Worli
Sea Face. Mayanagar was a fully Dalit
slum, with no proper electricity, sanitation,
etc. Now, due to constant struggle the
government has since developed it. Within a few months of my return the Dalit Panther movement (inspired by the Black Panthers) burst out in Mumbai. Its centre was Worli where pitched battles were fought for months between the Dalits (led by the Panthers) on the one side and Shiv Sena / police on the other. I got fully immersed with the Panthers, wherein Mayanagar became the main fortress in the struggles. This rich experience also helped me get some basic understanding of the Dalit (scheduled caste) question in India.

This first ground-level interaction resulted in my taking up the Dalit question throughout the rest of my life – an issue that was then anathema to the communists of all hues. I took up a detailed study of the caste question (lately it has become a major issue amongst Indians in UK as well), including a study of all Ambedkar’s lengthy volumes. Finally in 1978, I came out with a detailed analysis on the caste question in India which was printed in the weekly magazine ‘Frontier’ and translated into Marathi and reprinted in the magazine Satyshodhak Marxwad from Dhulia.

In the course of these activities I was in touch with a student / youth group where Anu was a student leader in Elphinstone College. She later did her MA in Sociology and became a lecturer. Being a sociology student she developed greater insights into the caste and women’s question in India. The dept of her thoughts have been captured in a book of her writings, brought out posthumously. Particularly her near 100-page study on the caste issue has been path-breaking.

We began working together in the slums and amongst unorganised workers in Mumbai. In 1975 the Emergency was declared and thousands were thrown into jail. We propagated against the Emergency, though secretly. When the Emergency was lifted in 1977, there was a wave of civil liberty movements throughout the country. Both of us, along with many others, plunged into this and were instrumental in forming the CPDR (Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights) in Mumbai. We developed the organisation and coordinated with others from all over the country. It was then that Justice Tarkunde of the PUCL brought out his study of the fake killing of Naxalites entitled “Encounters are Murders”. Meanwhile in November 1977, Anu and I got married at a small function at my parent’s home in Mahableshwar. Anu’s parents were most supportive as they too were earlier active communists. Also my parents were liberal and not orthodox Parsis.

In 1982 we both shifted to Nagpur with the aim of working in the more backward areas of Maharashtra. Anu became a postgraduate lecturer at Nagpur university. I worked part-time with the daily English newspaper, Hitavada, helping bring out the Sunday supplement focusing on the separate Vidarbha issue.
While in Nagpur we lived the bulk of our 16/17 years in Maharashtra’s biggest Dalit basti – Indora. We were part of the building up of extensive support of the youth (both female and male) in the basti. Anu, inspite of her regular lectures, became a well known leader, getting invited as a speaker to functions all over the Vidarbha region. Besides Dalits, we also worked amongst unorganised workers in three MIDC and other industrial areas. Anu also worked extensively amongst women and even went to distant tribal belts of Bastar and Jharkhand to take classes of tribal activists on women’s issues and patriarchy. I too visited the tribal belts of Bastar and wrote a booklet on the development work done by Naxalites in the 15 years since their entry into this region from AP in 1981.

It was after one such visit to Jharkhand in 2008 that she contracted the deadly falciparum malaria. By then Anu had already been afflicted with arthritis and systemic sclerosis. Not being able to diagnose the malaria in time after coming back to Mumbai, she passed away at the young age of 54, on April 12, 2008.

Besides our activities both Anu and I had been continuously researching and writing on varied issues. Many of Anu’s writings are lost, but some important studies have been brought out in the book “Scripting Change”. I wrote mostly on economic issues, having done 10-15 budget analysis and two books (published in 2004 and 2009) on the Indian and World economies.

Within a year-and-a-half of Anu’s death I was arrested by the AP police in Delhi and thrown into Tihar. In jail, after the immediate shock, I decided to take up serious study. This was facilitated by the fact that for the first three to four years I was not disturbed much. Later though, the regular 3-monthly transfers from one jail to another not only prevented any study and writing, but also resulted in a serious deterioration of my health. Though a six-day hunger strike in 2014 put an end to this, the damage had already been done. The health condition deteriorated so much, that the judge granted in September 2015, three months interim bail on health grounds. I could not avail of this due to the numerous other cases, resulting in further health problems.

In Tihar, besides many economic articles, my main study was the issue of “Freedom” through history. The excellent IGNOU notes from the jail library helped this study. It also sought to encompass my lengthy experiences, as also the causes for the collapse of the communist societies worldwide. The seven piece articles, appeared in the monthly ‘Mainstream’ and was recently brought out as a book by a Kolkata publisher.

In this book I sought to posit “Freedom” not in the traditional sense, but as an essential goal for the individual and society. In Anu, I saw the essence of what a truly ‘free’ person could be: a person who acts and behaves as they are, not as what we are forced to pretend to be. A freedom where the person is not alienated from themselves which does not infringe on another’s freedom – resulting in an association of free individuals. A freedom, unthinkable unless deeply interwoven with positive moral values of simplicity, modesty, truthfulness, justice-loving, etc., and opposed to all negative values of arrogance, falsehood, cunning, selfishness, pretences etc. The latter are nothing but a personal view of an individual or between two persons, and have nothing to do with real moral values as long as they do not harm anyone or foster hatred, jealousy etc. Once the basic necessities of the people have been met in any society, unless the above values are inculcated the system will degenerate. The book brought out this reality.

Many of the concepts of freedom and social justice were delved into by a host of prophets and thinkers of the past, including Zoroaster. Prof Oktor Skjaervo says, “Social justice goes right through the history of Zoroastrianism. Fighting evil underlies its essence. The Gathas are about looking after the poor, separating what is good and what is not.”
Finally, writing this article from jail, I cannot but recollect Oscar Wilde’s poem written two centuries back. It’s first two stanzas say:

If each should know the same –
That every prison that man made
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun:
And do well to hide their Hell
For in it things are done
That son of God nor son of man
ever should look upon.

December 1st, 2016
Cherlapalli Central Jail
Hyderabad

Notes:
Nirbhaya - means fearless. It was the word used to hide the identity of one of the most horrific rape cases in Delhi.
Dr Ambedkar - was a famous Dalit (untouchable) lawyer. He started a movement to convert Dalits to Buddhism. He was the Law Minister and later the “father of the Indian Constitution” in Nehru’s time.
PUCL - People’s Union for Civil Liberties.

Vidarbha, Jharkhand, Bastar - all extremely impoverished backward tribal areas.
Telengana AP - Andhra Pradesh.
MIDC - Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation.
Justice Tarkunde - a famous Human Rights lawyer.

From the Editor: Unlike the years he spent in Tihar jail, Delhi, today in Cherlapalli Central Jail he has political prisoner status, which entitles him to a bed and a TV in the cell, all of 8x10ft. Being a disciplined man he rises at 5:00 am to do his yoga in the open courtyard where his deprived body can take in a bit of the sun. Possibly he is enjoying slightly better treatment too.

ZWIN’s Zoroastrian Elderly Assistance Link (ZEAL) Project in India

We appeal to every Zarthushti world-wide to consider contributing even $10 a month (paid quarterly) to the plight of elderly, struggling Zarthushtis in Pune, India. The ZWIN ZEAL program has been supporting a few families, along with the WZO Trust, and we are at the end of our funds. Your small contribution will make a very meaningful difference and you will be blessed.

1. We request you to donate generously, even $10, $30 or $50 a month (remitted on a quarterly basis) for at least one year to “Sponsor an Elder in Need” as a regular allowance;
2. Or you can send ANY lump sum donation towards the ZEAL project, which will be used towards much needed and verified personalized services. These monies will be used for pressing needs that an individual Elderly has, like transportation for medical services, wheel chair, food delivery.
3. Checks can be made out to: “ZAGNY Critical Assistance Fund” with a clear notation on the check that it is “For the ZWIN ZEAL project” and mailed to: Yasmin Ghadiali, 2686 Belcher Street, Baldwin, N.Y. 11510, USA ghad@optonline.net Yasmin will send a tax-exempt receipt only if the donation is $250 and over. Your check is automatically a receipt.
4. Donors in India. Funds may be sent to: The WZO Trust, Hermes House, 3rd floor, Mama Parmanand Marg, Opera House, Mumbai 400 004. Donations are exempt u/s 80G of the Income Tax Act.
5. Please also definitely copy or send an email to Dr Zareen Karani Araoz, ZWIN Network Director and ZEAL program Coordinator at zareen@managingcultures.com indicating that the check is either for services to the elderly or as a monthly sponsorship for a year. Thank you very much!
Combating a Killer Disease – Drug Resistant Tuberculosis

Dr Zarir F Udwadia’s Pioneering Efforts

by homi khusrokhan

Dr Zarir F Udwadia is a consultant chest physician at the Hinduja, Breach Candy and Parsee General Hospitals. He is recognized today both nationally and internationally as a key opinion-leader in the fight against Drug-Resistant TB, a horrific disease. He spent five years training in various centers of excellence in the UK including the Sir John Crofton’s TB Unit in Edinburgh and the prestigious Brompton Hospital, London. He has over 120 PubMed indexed publications and over 3,000 citations to his credit. He is an MD, DNB, FRCP (London), and FCCP (USA). On his return to India as a bright young doctor, with medicine in his genes and fire in his belly, he established an active chest department at the Hinduja Hospital, which includes Mumbai’s busiest Bronchoscopy and Pulmonary Function Test (PFT) Services and the city’s first Sleep Apnea Laboratory. Dr Zarir Udwadia, was the only Indian invited by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to serve on the “Guidelines Group” which met in Paris in 2010 to formulate the 4th edition of the WHO TB Guidelines in 2010.

The microbes that cause TB have been known to have existed for at least 15-20,000 years from the analysis of maternal mitochondria found in fossils and the earliest references to deaths caused by the disease date back to 460 BC. The “father of Western medicine,” Hippocrates, estimated that ‘phthisis’ (Greek, for ‘consumption’) was the most widespread disease of his age. He told his students that they shouldn’t attempt to treat patients in the last stages of phthisis, as they were sure to die and it would only ruin their reputation as healers. The word “tuberculosis” was coined by Johann Lukas Schonle in 1839, from the Latin “tuberculum,” meaning “small, swelling bump or pimple” and till then the disease was referred to as ‘consumption’ – because it appeared to consume the individual, with a drastic drop in their body weight. In 1882 Dr Robert Koch discovered the tubercle bacillus, for which he won a Nobel Prize in 1905. TB is no respecter of persons and the long list of those who succumbed to the disease includes kings, presidents, musicians, poets, authors and other celebrities. Names that surprised me were Henry VII, Andrew Jackson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Kamala Nehru, Chopin, Boccherini, John Keats, Jane Austin, Louis Braille, Vivian Leigh, Anton Chekov, George Orwell and Cardinal Richelieu.

But in 2015, an estimated 580,000 people worldwide had already developed Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR-TB). India, China, and the Russian Federation accounted for 45% of the 580,000 cases. It is estimated that about 9.5% of these cases were co-infected with HIV.

As per WHO data, TB was one of the top 10 causes of death worldwide in 2015, responsible for more deaths than HIV and malaria. About one third of the world’s population (~1 billion people) is infected with tuberculosis (TB) bacteria. A small proportion of those infected will become sick with this dreaded disease. People with a weakened immune system are at greater risk - a person infected with HIV is about 30 times more likely to develop active TB. In 2015 there were 10.4 million new cases of TB worldwide. Six Countries account for 60% of the total cases with India leading the count followed by Indonesia, China, Nigeria, South Africa & Pakistan. An estimated 1.8 million people died from TB, of which 0.4 million were co-infected with HIV.

One of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 is to end the global TB epidemic. The WHO “End TB Strategy”, approved by the World Health Assembly in 2014, calls for a 90% reduction in TB deaths and an 80% reduction in the TB incidence rate by 2030, compared with 2015.

It was only in the 1970’s that TB began to be considered to be a curable disease, but because of its highly infectious nature, particularly pulmonary TB, which is very easily transmitted by coughing or sneezing, it has always invariably carried with it a
certain social stigma. People who developed TB were generally shunned by society and before chemo-therapeutic agents were invented to treat the disease, TB patients were generally consigned to sanatoriums in Hill Stations, like the Bel Air Sanatorium in Panchgani, established in 1912 by Dr Rustomji Billimoria (on land donated by Sir Dorabji Tata), where the air was cleaner and more conducive for those afflicted, to spend the remaining months or years of their lives in clean air and pleasant surroundings. Ironically even family members felt more comfortable when a TB patient was quarantined and isolated in these sanatoriums.

Heroin was once marketed by the drug company Bayer as a safe, non-addictive treatment for tuberculosis, but the first modern drug found to be effective in treating TB was streptomycin in 1944 and thereafter combined with pyrazinamide and isoniazid (1952). However the duration of the treatment was 18 months and only after the discovery of ethambutol in 1961 and rifampicin in 1970 did the treatment duration come down to 26 weeks.

Within a few years of moderate success in treating TB, the world began to see a mutation of the bacteria, particularly in resource-poor countries where it was difficult for patients to comply with the 26 week treatment regimen. Drug resistant TB is also seen in patients with HIV because of their impaired immune systems – another major concern in India. Despite the DOTS (directly-observed treatment, short-course) programme adopted by the Government of India in the 1990’s to monitor compliance, nasty drug-resistant strains emerged. The irony about DOTS was that traditional TB therapy does not work in patients afflicted with drug resistant TB and the only consequence of DOTS is that it results in wasted time and effort. Switching to alternate therapies after identifying the problem rapidly is the only answer. Dr Udwadia says that if these drug resistant strains are identified early by advanced test methods, like DNA based molecular diagnostics, then more potent (and unfortunately more expensive) drugs can be employed. He has, through his long years of experience, developed different treatment regimens that have proved to be successful in combating many of these resistant strains but unfortunately affordability of both the diagnostic tests and the advanced TB treatments is a huge problem.

The biggest challenge Dr Udwadia faced in his early encounters with drug-resistant TB was convincing the Government that this was a very serious threat, which they refused to accept at first. In fact they questioned his findings and at one stage seized his patient records. He was not cowed down and as a consequence became even more vociferous in his demands for recognition of this disease both through medical journals and the media. Finally the Government accepted that TB was a notifiable disease, increased the staffing & budgets for TB and recognised it as a Disease of National importance.

In a country like India, with slums, congested living conditions and crowded public places, including trains and busses, MDR TB could someday result in a pandemic. Public Health Specialists today bless Dr Udwadia for surfacing the risk and drawing attention to this ticking time-bomb that the country could be sitting on. The real answer as Dr Udwadia says lies in early recognition through good diagnostics and the right treatment for a particular bacterial strain.

Recently, on 4th December, Dr Udwadia was a speaker at a TED-X conference in Mumbai. His talk shook many in the audience. But what also came through very sharply was his care, concern and compassion for his poor patients. There were several in the audience with moist eyes and a lump in their throats as he spoke of a patient he had lost (Salma) who died despite every possible effort to save her over two long years. She proved to be resistant to 15 different drugs available today and was one of the several victims he has seen of Extensively Drug Resistant TB.
Salma leaves behind her a six year old daughter who also is infected with the same virulent strain.

There are many doctors who specialise in care of the heart, but only a handful who have a caring heart. Zarir Udwadia, like his eminent father Dr Farokh Udwadia, is a true healer and both father and son have said to me on separate occasions that their happiest days were when they worked with the miserably poor in free hospitals and earned the gratitude and love of these patients – people who are not only destitute, but abandoned by society and have become an inconvenient reminder of the abysmal state of Human Development in poor countries like ours.

For the last two decades now, Dr Zarir Udwadia has been running a free TB Clinic at the Hinduja Hospital where people line-up for hours on Mondays for a consultation with him. Around 8,000 patients a year pass through this clinic and their number only seems to be growing. He exposes himself to the risks of handling these infectious cases in a well ventilated room but without wearing a mask himself. He says “How can I relate to a patient if I myself am hiding behind a mask”.

It is going to be difficult to eradicate a disease that has plagued mankind for many millennia but with the advances of technology we see around us today one can only hope that someday, perhaps in another couple of generations after ours, a cure will be found and till then what the world needs is a little empathy and kindness towards those patients inflicted with this awful disease.

Homi R Khusrokhan was the MD of Glaxo & Burroughs Wellcome in India who were the first company in India to combine the three drugs needed for treating TB into a single blister pack to aid compliance. He is also the (proud) uncle of Dr Zarir Udwadia and his magnificent work.
Danny Khursigara – soars to extraordinary heights

an interview by farishta dinshaw

Danny Khursigara, Founder of TRANSCEND Consulting, Executive / Life Coach and Author, was named one of 2017’s first Top 100 Authorities by The Influence Magazine. According to Sharon Ricci, Editor-in-Chief of Influence Magazines, the driving force behind her team’s Top 100 Authority Issue is to, “inspire readers from around the world by giving them a unique and personal look into the inner life and experiences of these 100 intriguing and high performing professionals.” In addition, Danny was recently awarded a National Academy of Best-Selling Authors Quilly Award, for coauthoring the best-selling Jack Canfield book, “Road to Success”, Volume I.

In this interview for Hamazor, Danny talks about growing up in Karachi, his best-selling book, and his work lives.

Please tell a little about your family and memories of growing up in Karachi.

Growing up in Karachi was a lot of fun. Being a Parsi in Pakistan did have its privileges. It meant being well respected and well regarded in a predominantly non-Parsi majority.

My parents Roshan and Rustom (Chum) and my older brother Cyrus are a close family and I have always enjoyed the support of relatives and friends. Back when I was growing up hardly anyone left Karachi for abroad because it was a great place to be. I have many fond memories of growing up in Parsi Colony, studying at Bai Virbaijee Sopariwala Parsi School, (undoubtedly one of the best in the country) and being part of the Parsi colony ‘gang’! Playing volley ball, cricket and baseball in the ‘bagicha’ [garden] were seasonal highlights.

My mom has always been a social worker and a ‘selfless giver’ and I believe that this led her to spend most of her career in teaching and helping others in time of need. She is more of a go-giver than a go-getter. This indeed makes me very proud. Dad is an accountant by profession and spent most of his career in shipping and was always a pillar of strength and support for the family. I believe that Cyrus and I hugely benefitted from the freedom of choice we were allowed from a young age. I believe the four of us are not just family, but also close friends.

Did being a Parsi-Zarathushti in a largely non-Zarathushti society shape your identity? Your world view?

I am indeed very grateful to be a Zoroastrian. My world view was also largely influenced by upbringing and the various countries we lived in, the people we met and the experiences we had socially as well as professionally. But, I also believe that once you identify with something or someone or a particular society or way of life too strongly, you sub-consciously create ‘limitation’. In my mind, putting a label on yourself in terms of identity can be a limitation to success and growth. I choose to identify with qualities of ‘being’ such as kindness, passion, giving, inspiring and empowering, etc as opposed to identifying to a particular country, religion, society or way of life. This way you open yourself up to infinite possibilities.

How did you end up where you are now? Please share a turning point or defining moment in your journey.

Well, I believe there were a few turning points, some subtle, some not so subtle and a culmination of choices based on what one
envisions and aspires for at certain points in time. Simplistically speaking, my choices are based on: receiving inspiration, forming intention, taking action, and experiencing growth.

One of them was moving to Tokyo, Japan with ABN AMRO Bank in 2004. That was my first posting abroad and since then I experienced growth both professionally as well as personally. This was the start of a progressive career taking us to the Philippines, Hong Kong, Shanghai and back to Hong Kong and many travels in-between. I believe that turning points come about when you put yourself out there. Growth is all about taking calculated risks, allowing your self to be vulnerable and believing in a higher power because I believe that surviving a risk beckons an even bigger blessing.

A defining point came about when I discovered ‘purpose’. In ‘The Road to Success’ I mentioned that in some detail. I believe my purpose has always been evolving through the experiences of an expat life, embracing change and diversity and living in the awareness that people are intrinsically the same and want the same things regardless of cast, colour, culture or religion. When I was at the point of seeking something more from life and allowed myself to live in the question for a while I believe that’s when I discovered ‘purpose’ – to inspire and empower others to become successful through leading happier lives by becoming the best version of themselves. One can always strive to bring perfection to someone else’s life while embracing your own imperfections.

Could you explain what a Life Coach does? What does a typical interaction with a client look like?

To put it simply, a Life Coach typically helps you get from where you are now to where you want to be. And it’s not necessarily always about giving what clients want but it is more about what they need. That can be an important distinction in most cases. I specialize in Life Coaching and also Executive Coaching and Business Consulting, depending on the needs of the client or corporation. I typically cover either one or all seven key areas – career, finance, relationships, health and well being, fun and recreation (or Me time), personal growth (spiritual and emotional) and contribution to society. I believe that one cannot be whole by succeeding in only one area of life as that does not necessarily define success at the core, but rather only prioritizes a particular area at a particular point in time. I also believe that there’s been an energy shift that has heightened awareness and consciousness in this decade. I typically help people in taking their life to the next level by creating mental, physical, emotional and psychological breakthroughs. That could entail freeing yourself of negative emotions, limiting beliefs and self defeating thought patterns such as guilt, resentment, anger, depression, procrastination, etc. Helping people discover their life purpose, and aligning purpose, passion, vision and goals to achievement. Building self-esteem and self confidence. Helping them create a personalized roadmap or a shortcut to success. Helping them to figure out ways to double their income and their free time so that they can do the things they always wanted to do but never got around doing it. For corporations, its about advising them on think about how to taking their business and productivity to the next level by building high performance culture, teams and business plans.

I believe in experiential learning and awareness as opposed to theoretical concepts. Because people learn best when they go through an experience. This can entail around seven different types of meditation practices, processing skill and techniques, taking ownership and accountability, changing habits that don’t serve you, building peer groups and lots more. But the most important thing is to have fun in the process while allowing yourself to grow and unfold.

My intention is transformation and I am 100% invested in their growth and success.
A typical first session, if it’s an individual 1-1 session, is always a free trial because it’s important for the client to feel comfortable and for me to know whether the individual is coachable. In my opinion, you can only get full benefit from working with a coach when you have made a decision to ‘commit to change’ or in other words ‘you are sick and tired of being sick and tired’ with your present situation and want to transform your life into something that’s more fulfilling and meaningful. It’s like flicking a switch from anxiety to excitement. In my experience, more often than not the thing that stands between you and your dreams is ... you!

What is your favourite aspect of your work?

When I see transformation happening right before my eyes is when I know what makes me get out of bed each day. I enjoy what I do and sometimes I even work on Sundays, but it never feels like work. Someone once said that when your vocation becomes your vacation that’s when you know you’re on the right track. The beauty of it is that I can do it as a sole entrepreneur or in my corporate job, face to face or long distance, individually or though seminars and workshops. It’s pretty flexible. I believe I am always evolving and so is my work. Also, my peer group has changed and the people I interact with. It’s been said that ‘you are the sum of the five people you spend time with’, and this is very true.

What is your least favourite or most challenging aspect of your work? Do you face skepticism or even dismissal of your work as “too new age-y”?

I don’t have a least favorite part in this work, but of course sometimes there can be challenges like in every other field. I have noticed that recently this work is being embraced and understood a lot more than what it was previously, especially where I have lived and with audiences I interact with around the world. This is based on the awareness and knowledge that if you do what you’ve always done you’ll get what you’ve always gotten. Personally, I always hold the intention to attract the right people, but what’s meant to be will be. Some people might not subscribe to it or might not be ready for it yet and that’s okay too. Everybody’s journey is different – just don’t forget to have fun along the way.

You have recently co-edited a book with Jack Canfield, Road to Success.” Congratulations on winning the Quilly Award for that book. Could you tell us how Jack became your mentor and how the whole project came about?

Firstly, thanks for the kind wishes. Well, the premise of the book was that if you have an aspiration or a goal you want to achieve or a challenge you want to overcome, someone somewhere has already done it. So instead of reinventing the wheel you can learn from the experiences and strategies of others who have achieved what you are seeking to achieve. This book is based on real life stories with real life challenges and real life solutions. If you work the principles, the principles always work!

Jack and Nick (the publisher of the book and four-time Emmy award winner) invited individuals from various fields and across various industries to contribute a chapter to this book so that there’s something in it for everyone. We had doctors, lawyers, spiritual healers, psychologists, financial consultants, life coaches, bankers, real estate experts, sportsmen as contributors. Based on the feedback we have received so far, I believe this book resonates with many people. There’s also a second volume.

I was mentoring and coaching in the corporate world for several years already but not at such deep level as I do now. I believe everyone should have a coach or mentor. I had a few too. Jack Canfield was the one who resonated with me the most.
and so did Tony Robbins. Training closely with Jack I got to know him as my coach and friend.

I was pleasantly surprised how much of what Jack talks about in his chapter in the Road to Success corresponds with what Zarathushtra said millennia ago – be conscious of self-talk (good thoughts), use affirmations (good words), service to others (good deeds). And you too have said that “spiritual awareness exemplifies success”. Have you consciously borrowed from your spiritual heritage? Has Zarathushtra’s message influenced your work?

I would hardly call myself ‘religious’ but I do believe in the power of prayer and meditation. I also mentioned that briefly in my chapter. In prayer you ask, in meditation you listen. It’s my hour of power each morning. Like all other faiths, our prayers have tremendous power but I believe that we are all spiritual beings first. And having an open mind and learning experientially is equally important. So, to answer your question I would say it’s more about understanding, experiencing and embodying it and letting that resonate with our spiritual heritage. I believe that we’re not meant to intellectualize spirituality, but rather we’re meant to spiritualize the intellect!

In your experience, what are some of the common ways people self-sabotage their success? What can they do to turn this around?

I conduct a full day transformation seminar on this topic. Briefly, there are many ways in which people sabotage success. Some of the common ones are wrong thinking; holding on to negative emotions that don’t serve you like guilt, resentment, anger, competition, envy, negative self-talk, etc; adopting limiting beliefs, fear, doubt, lack of self-esteem and self love.

There are various ways to turn this around - some of this is intellectual and conceptual while other ways may need deeper processing to deal with it. Just to give a simple example, an intellectually simple way to create a turnaround statement for a limiting belief is to first acknowledge your limiting belief and write it down. Then, ask yourself and write down how adopting this belief has served you thus far. After that, ask yourself and write down what would you rather feel and experience. Lastly, a turnaround statement about how you want to show up in the world by adopting a new and more empowering belief. This is a very basic example while there are more deeper concepts and practices too that facilitate a longer lasting turnaround process.

In your chapter in Road to Success, you talk about “victim consciousness” as a roadblock to success. Could you explain this concept for our readers? Do you still fall into the trap?

Victim Consciousness means that ‘life is happening to me’. It’s the very first stage of the four stages of consciousness. Most people reside here, unfortunately. Here’s where we give our power away to external factors and current reality, allowing us to think of ourselves as victims of circumstance. In this stage, we believe that others are responsible for the quality of our
life. And here’s where self-defeating habits and beliefs tend to get the better of us. The key is to move beyond this stage and into higher stages. Do I feel these emotions? Yes of course. But it’s not really about that – it’s about having the awareness that considerations, fears and roadblocks will appear and that they are part of your personal journey and unfolding, only then can you deal with it and move beyond it. I recall Tony Robbins once saying that the quality of your life is in direct proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably live with.

You also talk about intent and the power of visualization. What are you currently aspiring towards?

I tend to have a never-ending list of aspirations. One of my goals is to impact at least 5000 lives within the next five years.

What do you like to do when you aren’t working?

I am now blessed with a family of five – my wife Shermeen and three daughters, Shanaia, 16, Sarah, 14, and Ariana, 12. Although I’ll always be outnumbered, there’s never a dull moment at home. A great reason to wake up each morning! I love spending time with the kids, watching movies together or just chilling out on a beach, trying out new restaurants, travel and enjoying a good workout.

Farishta Dinshaw works as a Community Development Worker with ethnocultural communities in Toronto to raise awareness about problem gambling and family violence. She also teaches at Ryerson University. She is the author of the insightful story of a fictional boy befriended by Zarathushtra called “Discovering Ashavan”. Farishta has edited a cookbook “Eat, Live, Pray: A celebration of Zarathusti cuisine and culture” available for free download at http://www.fezana.org

Three Decades of Expertise in Non-Profit Law in India

Noshir Dadrawala & Meher Gandevia-Billimoria chat with Hamazor

On 7th November 2016 the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy (CAP) completed 30 years of service to the philanthropic sector in India. It advises and works closely with not just big corporate and family foundations but also intermediaries and small grassroots level NGOs. Its two key founders were Parsis – Late Russi M Lala and Darius M Forbes. Even right now, CAP’s chairperson is Rati F Forbes.

An attempt is made here to capture through the eyes of the CEO (Noshir) and the COO (Meher) not just the evolution of CAP over the last three decades but also what has changed within the sector, for the better or for worse!

Entry into the Social Sector

Noshir: As a student, I first volunteered at the Zoroastrian Community Development Institute (ZCDI) and was later offered a full-time job as project manager at ZCDI. Back in the eighties, this institution was ahead of its time, attempting to computerize data and information on about 600 Parsi charitable trusts. That was my first introduction to charitable trusts. Later I joined the B D Petit Parsi General Hospital, but, it was too cushy a job for someone in his mid-twenties and thus, when Russi Lala who was then Director of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust asked me if I would be interested in heading the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, I decided to embark on what seemed back then a “risky adventure” to many.

Meher: It was purely by default rather than design. I graduated from catering college and had my home-baking business. Post that, a diploma in Montessori. I was teaching in the British International School in Thailand. On return to India after six
months at the American school, I was referred to Akanksha (an education NGO) and I couldn’t have asked for a better stepping stone into the non-profit world.

**Over the years, how have you seen the social sector evolve?**

**Noshir:** Back in the eighties the social sector was for the retired and bored housewives. Today, corporate executives are switching over to this sector either at the start or mid-way in their career. Today the sector is far more organized and professional. Younger men and women carving out successful careers within the sector, not just the MSWs but also the MBAs. This is truly heartening. The vibrancy of the sector depends on its youthfulness and its ability to bring new thinking and ideas for change.

However, on the downside, the legal environment today is far less enabling. The laws continue to be the same, but, the government is increasingly trying to step out of its ‘regulatory’ role and get into ‘control’ mode and this is rather distressing. Compliances have increased many fold and amendments are so frequent that it leaves NGOs confused.

**Meher:** The sector is evolving at a rapid pace but unfortunately not its reputation. Today it is certainly far more professional and sees a lot more corporates switchovers; it is still viewed as less proficient with often a trust deficit on its capabilities and intention.

**Your views on Parsis & Philanthropy**

**Noshir:** When the British ruled India, they had coined a phrase, which still hold good: “Parsi thy name is charity”. Philanthropy literally is part of our community’s DNA. We have pioneered education and health care in India and institutionalized it. May be one reason we are so philanthropic, unknowingly or knowingly is because from a Zoroastrian point of view poverty, illiteracy and disease are all seen as afflictions of evil and it is every Zoroastrian’s duty to negate the shadows of evil with the light of goodness – goodness of the heart and the good mind!

It is rather unfortunate that while we were once pioneers in philanthropy, today we rest mainly on the laurels of our forefathers. As a community, some of us have become too dependent on our charities and instead of ‘giving’, some only think only in terms of ‘demanding’ what they believe to be their hereditary right from education and health care to housing and employment! While the sector has evolved exponentially, some Parsi charities seem stuck in time.

**Meher:** Most Parsis have little clue of the non-profit or social sector as it stands today. They still equate non-profit management with social work at the grassroots. It takes a lot more than visiting an orphanage occasionally or being associated with an NGO to manage a successful non-profit. The average Parsi Publication would rather feature a failed professional lawyer or doctor than an effective non-profit leader. Perhaps coz they have no clue of what it takes to make a successful non-profit.

**What is the one thing you wish you could change about the social sector in India?**

**Noshir:** To put the ‘heart’ back into the sector. I am delighted to see the sector evolve professionally. But, somewhere, excessive professionalism has taken the ‘heart’ out of philanthropy. I am not against the modern mantra of “Strategy, Sustainability and Impact”, but, not at the cost compromising “Values, Compassion and Inclusiveness”.

**Meher:** I think a lot more social entrepreneurs and individuals want to make positive change. However, I think change is taking longer because everyone works isolated. Someone needs to lead solving the issue (such as cancer/slum poverty) by bringing all the non-profits working with that cause to work towards mitigating it.

**What are the highs and lows of being in the sector?**
Noshir: For me, personally, the highs are the ‘feel good’ factor and challenges that continue to keep me excited and on my feet even after three decades.

The lows are the change in values I see in some quarters – iconic charitable institutions which have succumbed to corporate intrigues. Also, the fact, that ‘smart selling’ has overtaken ‘selfless service’.

Meher: The children at Akanksha I taught English to in 1999, taught me how to use NetSuite and explained using a database in 2015. It’s amazing to experience change and to be a small enabler of that process. Having said that until India is able to address larger issues at a macro level, this change will continue to be a drop in the ocean.

CAP’s Philosophy & CAP’s Core Programmes

Noshir: CAP’s philosophy has always been, “being a charitable organization is not a license to compromise on whatever is required under law”. CAP started out and still continues to remain a one-stop shop for non-profit management.

Meher: In its thirtieth year, CAP is offering a due diligence and review programme – “Compliance-Complete Certification”. Non-profits will work with CAP towards being compliant in the following core areas – Legal, Financial, Human Resources, Board Governance, Communication, Strategy, Fund-raising, and Volunteer Management. We do this through a series of capacity building workshops and consultancy. At the end of the year after an audit on these eight areas, they are awarded a Compliance – Complete Certificate.

What is important to you in your personal life?

Noshir: Three things (3Ps): Peace, Progress and Prosperity. Peace leads to Progress and Progress leads to Prosperity and ultimately Prosperity leads to Philanthropy.

You cannot ‘give’ unless you first ‘have’. And, therefore, it is key having thoughts of peace, words of progress and deeds that lead to prosperity for all!

Meher: My relationships and friendships that keep me going.
A Heritage Homestay
by katie bhujwala

The Bhuj House is the ancestral home of the Bhujwala family, located in the town of Bhuj, Gujarat. Built in the late 1800’s, it has witnessed seven generations and survived the devastating earthquake of 2001. The family have lovingly restored the house, recently opening it as a ‘heritage homestay’ (www.thebhujhouse.com), accommodating visitors from across the world, who come to explore Kutch’s exquisite textiles, salt desert landscape and ancient Indus Valley sites. Katie Bhujwala tells Hamazor about the history and renovation process of the house built by her Great-Great Grand-father-in-law, Pestonji Sorabji.

We are not exactly sure when the Parsis arrived in the little, far-flung kingdom of Bhuj, but when our fore-father, Sorabji Dadabhoy arrived in the early 1800s, there was already a well-established Parsi family in town. Sorabji had taken-up residence in Bhuj’s ‘Camp’ area, the cantonment of the British Garrison, located directly beneath the fortified Bhujia hill and a little away from the old walled city. In its hey-day (early 20th century), approximately 20 Parsi families resided there. Sorabji Dadabhoy founded the family distillery, and distributed imported liquor throughout the princely province of ‘Cutch’, as it was called back then.

It was Sorabji’s eldest son, Pestonji Sorabji who adopted the family name ‘Bhujwala’, and built the house that would evolve into the large, courtyard home that we know and love today. Pestonji was a highly respected figure within the province. He was bestowed with the honorific title “Khan Bahadur”, in recognition of his services to the Government, which included capturing the dreaded dacoit, Mohar Sindhwani, and helping eradicate a plague which had swept through the coastal town of Mandvi. In memory of his father, Pestonji self-funded the construction of Kutch’s very own agiary, which he wished to be inaugurated by the Rajput prince, HH Maharao Kengarji. This was an unusual request, that clearly honoured the generous treatment that the Parsi community had received from Kutch’s royal nobles. Sadly, Pestonji died suddenly, before the inauguration took place. His family postponed the event and in May 1905, a year later, the agiary was inaugurated at the hands of the Maharao.

In 1957, when Kutch was merged with the ‘dry’ state of Maharashtra & Gujarat, the family liquor business folded overnight, and a migration towards more opportunistic and cosmopolitan hubs commenced. My father-in-law, Pestonji Ardesir Bhujwala, was in his late teens when the family moved to Bombay, but his affection for his childhood home and town never diminished. He brought his own family for regular vacations, and, with the support of his wife, Pervine, he passionately held on to the Bhuj house, while almost all of the other houses in ‘Camp’ disappeared. Our house, the agiary and our late Aunt Roda Boatwala’s house remain as the only symbols of a relatively brief but significant part of Kutchi history.

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The first time I visited Bhuj was in August 2005. Jehan was keen to introduce me to the wild desert landscape that had captured his imagination as a child, and I was curious to visit this little town which featured in my newly acquired, marital name.
As we chugged along a dusty track with Abdullah, the family’s trusted auto-wallah, towards our ancestral home, I was immediately struck by the aftermath that still remained following the devastating earthquake of 2001. Empty foil packets of chips and biscuits were strewn amongst the piles of dust and rubble, while multi-coloured polybags, impaled on the thorny scrub looked like some sort of disturbing art installation. But, this was Bhuj’s reality: a quaint town completely over-burdened by disaster and rapid modernisation.

We seemed to chance upon the house. There was no indication to suggest we were nearing; the rickshaw just stopped in this busy, cluttered locality, and there it was, holding-up one corner of the crossroads, gracefully accepting that its finer days belonged to a different era. Inside the house, the surfaces were coated in fine, sandy dust and the sultry heat had seeped into every dark corner. The stark walls, flaking and unpainted after the post-earthquake repairs, revealed the extent of the damage. Every room was interconnected with heavy, wooden doors and each opened on to the inner courtyard where the julla (swing) and functioning well were located. Apart from the pillars and the carved stone frescos around the outer doors and windows, it was a simple, unembellished building, and the atmosphere was sleepy and comforting, as though some energy still resided there making you feel utterly invited. Antique furniture filled the rooms, mostly cupboards stacked with embroidery, crockery and artefacts belonging to ancestors long passed. Huge portraits of men hung above the doorways, a mixture of Bhujiwala ancestry and Kutch royalty. Cats stalked the rooftops. I hoped they’d be friendly and come down.

The pantry was my favourite space in the house: one end of the inner verandah was cordoned off with a wooden jafri (screen), that opened on to a profusion of white bougainvillea and a pretty pink rangoon creeper. It was here that I began to fall in love with old objects and the way they encouraged us to calm our pace, such as the pinjara or meat-safe, a jalli lined cupboard which sat on top of heavy stone blocks with water-filled moats that stopped the ants from climbing in. We kept our milk in there, as there was no fridge, and boiled up one small packet at a time on the gas burner. We spooned out tea-leaves from a copper pot and brewed them in a steel kettle with strands of freshly picked lemon-grass, and toasted our bread on an iron tava, which gave the crusts a subtle burnt flavour that tasted wonderful with melted butter. We devoured this little breakfast using old, mismatched china, whilst gently swinging on the julla in the courtyard.
Each morning, the house became a flurry of activity with crinkly ladies as old as the furniture, who swept, or rather ‘shifted’ the dust, and insisted on washing our clothes. We were fussed and petted with their dry, toughened hands and offered generous smiles under their soft dupattas. At lunchtime we were brought thick bajra rotis – deliciously over ghee-ed, or a hot-pot of khavo, a festive preparation of slow-cooked, spiced mutton in rice, piled with the sweetest roast potatoes. The attentive welcome that we received could only reflect the extent of their affection towards the Bhujwala family – who they and their families had worked for, over many generations.

We spent our days exploring the region of Kutch: the coastal town of Mandvi with its private beach and medieval wooden dhow-making industry; the old hunting estate which contained an enchantingly overgrown, walled garden and crocodiles in its lake; simple villages that produced extraordinary textiles and crafts. Locally, the landscape is referred to as ‘Kalo’ meaning black, but the layered sediments of sandstone, especially during the early or evening light, are rich tones of earthy oranges and pinks, “blackberry jam on a cottage loaf”, my father once commented. Over the coming years we found ourselves back in Kutch again, and again.

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In 2011, Pestonji began talking seriously about his desire to undertake the repairs at the Bhuj house, to make it secure and generally more livable. Talks and ideas evolved, and in Feb 2012 we commenced our project to restore and renovate the Bhuj house into a heritage homestay.

The house had stood through the ravaging earthquake of 2001, but it needed to be stabilised. As we chipped away at the plaster, we discovered that all of the sandstone bricks were held together with a mud mortar, which is probably what saved the house from falling. The damaged roof was removed entirely, which allowed us to tie up the walls with a reinforced cemented layer and replace some of the termite-eaten beams. The walls were deeply scarred in places and had to be ‘stapled’ back together.

Over the generations, some ‘practical-mindedness’ had altered the aesthetics and scale of certain areas of the house. The inner verandah had been converted from a sloping tiled roof to a boxy flat terrace propped up by chunky, concrete beams, so we reverted to the original style, sourcing tiles and old teak pillars from a local reclamation yard. An additional kitchen was taking over too much of the courtyard, and we were ready to knock it off, until we decided to open up the walls on three sides and create an ‘open’ pantry where we could serve breakfast. It has now become a wonderful, vibrant space where everybody gathers – very much the ‘heart’ of the
house. Other projects involved converting the old, outdoor toilet block as a new guest room; planting a mini-oasis of flowering plants and trees in the courtyard, and sourcing additional furniture and textiles from the rich abundance of local artisans.

One year has passed since we first opened our doors to visitors. We’ve had an overwhelming response, and it has been a privilege to host such a diversity of people that a place like Kutch draws: textile aficionados, designers, social workers, musicians, people tracing their ancestral roots. One of the greatest pleasures we had in completing the house, was bringing together family relations from Mumbai, Pune and UK, some of whom hadn’t visited Bhuj in 30 odd years. The reunion took place over a weekend in September. We marked the occasion with a small navjote ceremony for our children, Kai and Ella, which took place inside the house. As an inter-cultural family, the ceremony for us was less an act of religious belief or initiation, but more a symbol of the rich traditions, heritage and responsibilities that will one-day pass to them.

Pestonji Sorabji had achieved so much during his life in Bhuj, and his home and the agiary that he built, still stand today because of the love and pride instilled within his Great-Grandson, Pestonji Ardeshir.
Sometimes I question why we want to hold on to these symbols, these buildings and sentiments? Should we not let go and allow the vessel of time to carry us beyond? I find ourselves balancing somewhere between the two, breathing a new form of life into our history house, one that is relevant and viable today. Because, it is not actually about preserving a house, but providing a compass for the generations that will follow.

Katie Bhujwala grew up in Wiltshire, UK and travelled to India on a post-University ‘gap year’ in 2001. There she met her husband-to-be, Jehan and together they set up their wildlife lodge, Shergarh at Kasha Tiger Reserve, MP, where they reside with their two children. In 2012, they began restoring Jehan’s ancestral home in Bhuj, which they opened as a ‘heritage homestay’ in October 2015.

Jehan, Katie, Kai & Ella at the entrance of the house. Photo credit Sooni Taraporevala.
Ariana Vafadari was born in Iran. Her mother is French and father Iranian. She moved to France at the age of five. She graduated as a civil engineer and then studied at the Academy of Music in Paris and at the Hanns Eisler Academy of Music in Berlin. She has performed internationally in many opera roles including the role of Dido in ‘Dido and Aeneas’ (Purcell) and Proserpine in ‘Orfeo’ (Monteverdi) and Dorabella in ‘Cosi fan Tutte’ (Mozart). She also performs in concerts interpreting work by a range of composers including Berlioz, Schubert, Shumann, Britten, Weill and Debussy. Besides performing on stage, Ariana works behind the scenes as assistant director at the Opera de Paris (2016) and musical creator for the MC2, Grenoble. As well as interpreting the Gathas, she has composed the music for the ancient Persian Poetry and that of the Kurdish poet Mal.

Ariana lives just outside Paris with her husband, two children and her dog, Gluck. Philippa Vafadari interviewed Ariana by email in December 2016.

Q: You could pass for an Iranian (father) or Frenchwoman (upbringing) or as a Zoroastrian. Who is the real Ariana Vafadari?

Ariana: I am the sum of my origins and my history. I am lucky to live in a cosmopolitan city, where I can be proud of my origins and meet Iranians that make me feel at home. It is reading again the Gathas and other books about Zoroastrianism when I was about 20 that made me realize Zoroastrian thought was so intimate. I really identified with it and the way I was automatically living my life. Trying to find the truth in things.

Q: Is it important for you that you first studied Engineering before focusing on opera singing? How might this make you a more rounded performer?

Ariana: Being an engineer is not important. It was studying Maths that I really loved, I really wanted to be a mathematician, the abstract world is where I love to be, but emotion was missing from Maths. I realized I needed this when I started singing more seriously with professionals. I could express all my emotions. And now I miss Maths, but it helped me to see the world in a logical way. Sometimes that is necessary so that emotions do not overwhelm me.

Q: You’ve made a CD of the Gathas. What inspired you?

Ariana: My Father, Kasra, was the first to make me sing the Gathas. He didn’t have to push me much, for I loved chanting with the mobed (it was my favourite moment). I transform the chanting to singing for my own pleasure, and improvising became composing, and it took more and more importance.

Building the CD itself was inspired by the philosophy of Zarathustra, and how it linked with my personal story: these words seem so close to me. The story I am telling is the story of my own life and the important steps I have made in it.

Q: Opera is a western art form. How have you tried to make it relevant to other cultures?

Ariana: Opera is an art that has to be alive, most people love it but they don’t know. The power of opera is enormous but recorded music takes away most of the harmonics, and the emotion is not comparable. If people don’t go to opera house, it is important to bring opera in places where it is not normally seen. Take it out of the elite buildings to the people.

Q: How do you relax when you are not working?

Ariana: I love sport, and Nordic walking in the forest with my friends and my dog is my favourite moment / or doing yoga which relaxes me and is great for my breathing. I go to the theatre and concerts in Paris which is a short commute from where I live.
Q: What has been your favourite role and why?

Ariana: Carmen, the role is so intense and playing this character is very exciting and very difficult at the same time. But she represents all women at once - passionate, in love, sweet, savage, angry. And the work combining the body and its physicality with the singing is fantastic.

Q: What other musical genres do you enjoy singing and listening to?

Ariana: I enjoy singing jazz, songs. I love to listen to all kind of music, especially pop and soul that are so far from the music I interpret.

Q: What would you say to a young person who wanted to become an opera singer?

Ariana: Actually I am teaching Opera to young singers. It depends on the person, but when they are afraid to go for it, I tell them that they have to find their own identity. A voice is unique, and if they are sincere and moved deeply and of course ready to share this, the public will cry. If they see it that way then it is the most beautiful form of art!

Philippa Vafadari trained as an actress at the Scottish Royal Conservatoire. After working in regional repertory theatre including the Royal Court Theatre, London, she went to train as an aerial artiste at The Circus Space, London. As Artistic Director of BandBazi she aims to integrate narrative theatre with aerial metaphors in what the company calls 'Aerial Drama'. In 2011 she co-produced Mind Walking for BandBazi with Q Theatre Productions, Mumbai. BandBazi commissioned award winning British Asian writer, Tanika Gupta to write the script which toured the UK and India, with a further national UK tour in early Spring 2013. It was a partner piece to the heritage exhibition 'Like Sugar in Milk: Stories of Zoroastrian Migration to the South East of England'. Philippa is currently running a 2-year arts participation and emotional wellbeing project, #ResilientArts, in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council as well as complete an MA in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Roehampton.

Ariana Vafadari along with her team at Quart de Lune has produced a new album of music titled: Gathas, Songs My Father Taught Me. Ariana Vafadari, vocal; Habib Meftah Bousheri, percussions; Haroun Touboul, oud, tanbur, ney; Mohamed Hafsi, double bass; Julien Carton, piano. Her CD is distributed in France only but can be heard or purchased on any of these platforms. Deezer, iTunes, Qobuz, Spotify. https://play.idol.io/ariana-vafadari-gathas-songs-my-father-taught-me
Or purchased on www.fnac.com or www.amazon.fr
Her websites are : www.arianavafadari.com www.selvamthorez.com
Diniz wanted to bring India on the world map where the fitness industry was concerned, so she decided to set a Guinness record for the longest aerobics marathon. In January 2010 she set the record for 26 hours of non-stop aerobics, with 30,000 people viewing this event at the grounds in Hyderabad, India and millions of people watching it live on TV.

In August 2010, she was invited to take part in the Miss Fitness World and Universe Contest, and in this contest she won the 3rd runners-up trophy. She was the first Indian to ever participate in this although the contest was running for 27 years.

Diniz set another Guinness record for the largest Zumba class in the world, in 2013.

Grit and determination are the words that best describe Dinaz Vervatwala. She has had several major set backs in her life and occupation but each time she has come back stronger and has tried harder than before to overcome the obstacles and achieve something greater.

A chartered accountant who went on to become one of the biggest names in the Fitness Industry, Dinaz started her Fitness Classes in Hyderabad, India, in 1991. She is a Reebok certified fitness trainer and is known everywhere as “Aerobics Dinaz.” Her special focus is on women’s health and well-being.

Diniz was born in a middle class Parsi family in Jamshedpur, India, and was the youngest of three children. She says, “Life was chugging along well until my father passed away with a massive heart attack when I was 12. Life came to a halt all of a sudden. The house was flooded with people who had come to pay their last respects to the man they loved and admired.” The lasting impression in her young mind was that “it is not the respect we earn when we are living but the respect we leave behind when we die that counts.” Dinaz went to Mumbai after her schooling, studied commerce and went on to become a chartered accountant. She moved to Hyderabad after her marriage.

Diniz describes how she changed gears from being a chartered accountant to a fitness instructor. Her sister-in-law Zareen was a fitness trainer in Yemen. Zareen used to visit her family in India every year and would talk about her experiences as a trainer in Yemen. Dinaz says, “I started getting very interested because I was always interested in sports or an exercise. One fine day I told her why can’t I do that in Hyderabad and she was extremely encouraging but she also said that you need to join an aerobics class, understand what Aerobics is, then learn it. I ran this thought past my husband Jamshed. He initially thought about whether this would work in Hyderabad and I said lets try it out so I give myself an entire year for this venture. I joined an aerobic class, then I joined instructor training programme and every waking hour of mine either I would watch the recorded television exercise programmes or I would watch a DVD and I would keep practicing the moves until I thought I was perfect at it. It was time for us to start the classes but we were staying in Parsi Colony then and I was not allowed to do any business at home and the house itself was extremely small. My husband and I decided to move our residence to another locality so that we could conduct our classes and I would be able to look after my...
son who was just a year old then.” They found a home in the upmarket area of Banjara Hills in Hyderabad and it was there that Dinaz started her first centre in 1993. Dinaz went on to advertise her classes, barely receiving eight enquiries but not even one converted to sales. At that time, aerobics was barely known of in Hyderabad. Six months later she got her first student and then that student was so happy and satisfied that she went and told her friends who joined up. Word spread and the class kept growing. Dinaz says, “I kept up my belief in what I did, I worked hard I had tremendous amount of support from my husband who pumped in all the money that he had, into the business with not much return. But for me it was a serious job although I wasn’t making much money. Whatever I made, I would pay back my husband for what he did for me. It took a toll on my health because it was a one-man show and whether I was well or not, I still had to go and take classes. But my commitment and my dedication paid off as the years went by, the classes were so full and there were long lines of people waiting in queues for my classes so we decided to move into our next house. By then my second son was born, my hands were full with work and home, but I continued working, never ever giving up even for a single day. I worked with a lot of positive attitude and things just moved into place.

“When we moved into our third house in 1995, it wasn’t easy because the business grew but the demands of the children was also great as my younger son was always sickly because he had pneumonia just after he was born; he was a weak child, but nevertheless I managed to cope. I had a lot of whole lot of celebrity clients join my class but they were used to a lot of pampering and used to push their weight around our class. I always started the class on time and always ended the class on time and I maintained high levels of discipline during the work out I would not budge for anybody and that really paid off in the long run. The journey was not easy as well because that was the time when I used to have a lot of problems with my support staff at home so I had to do pretty much everything for my two sons. I had to look after home as well as my business since my husband was working abroad and only home six months of the year.”

Dinaz’s relationship with clients was good and she continued her education in the fitness industry, always making sure that she was on top of the industry giving her clients her very best. She hardly took anytime off and became very well known in Hyderabad for her hard work. She also started appearing on television and her fitness centre got transformed and very well known. She opened a second fitness centre and then a third. One of her centres was completely ruined by the Hyderabad floods in 2000 and she had to permanently shut it down. But her major setback in the year 2005 was in the form of a gas leak at home and the fire accident left her with 45% burns on her face, chest, arms, back and feet. She was in immense pain but remained mentally strong and went back to work within four months of the accident although the doctors wanted to hospitalise her for at least six months.

Dinaz also had a major financial setback. She says, “In 2013, we were struck with some financial difficulties, so we chose to sell our house in 2014 and pay off the loans that I had taken for the business and moved out of Hyderabad for two years with my dignity intact.”

2016 saw her return back in Hyderabad with her family and has started life from scratch. She is also a spiritual healer and practices a technique called shaminism. She has done a professional baking course from Delhi and continued her education in the culinary field. She plans to start taking cooking and baking classes too. Her husband and she also run a home business of designer cakes and cupcakes called Angel Cakes and also provide healthy food which they have named The Good Kitchen.
History of the Famous Parsi Batasa: In Conversation with Cyrus Dotivala of Dotivala Bakery in Surat

by edul daver

WZCC Global President Edul Daver spoke with Cyrus Dotivala of the legendary Dotivala Bakery of Surat. The interview is published below with Edul’s permission.

Mr Davar says, “Cyrus Dotivala recently visited the new New York Dar-e-Mehr with his uncle Dinyar Wadia who coincidently is the architect for the Building. I was introduced to Cyrus and we started talking about Cyrus’ business and WZCC. I was fascinated about the history of the famous ‘batasa’ and the fact that the Dotivala Bakery had not only remained in business but maintained its premier position for over 150 years.

Being a business person I appreciated the fact that this was no run of the mill business and besides offering an extremely interesting story it also offered business pointers which our members could learn from and get motivated to start their own businesses. Before we parted Cyrus had agreed to become a WZCC member. After Cyrus returned, I sent him a list of questions which he has now responded to.”

As a follow up to Mr Davar’s questionnaire, the editor of Hamazor sent in her queries to which Cyrus replied most willingly.

E.D : Is it true that the Dotivala family invented the famous Parsi Batasa? How and when did this come about?

Yes, our forefathers were the inventors of the famous tea-time biscuit popularly known as Batasa. It was in the early 1800’s when our forefather Mr Faramji Pestonji Dotivala joined the Dutch Bakery set up by the Dutch Settlers here in Surat. These bakeries used to manufacture bread for the European population here who were settled for purpose of trading. Once the Dutch left Surat, they handed over the ovens to Faramji who started manufacturing and selling bread. But as the settlers’ started leaving Surat, the consumption of bread decreased. In those days the fermentation of bread was done by using toddy. The leftover bread never got spoilt as toddy was a natural fermenting agent. All that happened to those breads was that they lost moisture. The dried bread became a product to relish by the local people. Doctors too advised eating this dry bread when patient was sick. It was easy to digest. The demand slowly grew for this bread. Faramji then started drying this bread in the ovens to meet the demand. This gave birth to the popular Irani biscuits which are still made and consumed regularly by our customers. The doctors started prescribing something more nutritious once the patients recovered. Faramji started adding more shortening (in those days pure ghee) to this biscuit. And made it more palatable by adding caraway seeds for flavour. This gave birth to the famous batasas of Surat. For about a century after Faramji invented the batasas, pure ghee was used as shortening.

E.D : How many generations and years?

My father Mr Jamshed Peshotan Dotivala is the fifth inline to own this business and I am the sixth in line. Exact year of inception is not known but we have been doing business in the current premises since the year 1861.

Hamazor: Is your father actively involved in the business?
E.D : What were the guiding business principles which allowed the “Dotiwala” bakery to maintain it’s leadership position and keep competitors at bay?

Our forefathers had only one point principle while doing business and that was “Maintaining High Standards of Quality”. This ensured that our customers always got the best. Later on generations also concentrated on innovations. Bringing in new products and keeping up with new trends. Ethical and honest in our dealings, we have managed to survive six generations and God willing will continue further.

E.D : Over its long history did the product evolve to keep up with changing taste buds? Was this issue a major business decision?

Yes, the products have evolved a lot since they were first invented. And for our forefathers who were brought up with the old school of thoughts, it was a major business decision. With time the raw materials changed drastically and severe changes needed to be made. One such change was a shift from pure ghee to Vanaspati (hydrogenated vegetable oils). At that time my grand uncle could not shift easily as he felt he was giving a product of lesser quality. He continued to sell the products made with pure ghee at the prices of products made using Vanaspati. His competitors would sell and make profits while my grand uncle had to suffer losses. After a lot of persuasion by his brothers, he agreed to sell products made from Vanaspati. But after the shift too, he made sure that the product was of high quality.

E.D : Family businesses seldom last beyond three generations. What did the Dotivala family do to maintain harmony and sustainability which indeed is a major business accomplishment?

Our family has always been a very united family. In the old days all the brothers and cousins lived together as a joint family. Went to the same school and later shifted to where ever their career took them. The main reason for survival of our business has always been the passion that our forefathers had to sell high quality products to our customers. There was a sense pride to own and run this business and every generation had one member of the family ready to take over the business.

Hamazor : You mention above “every generation had one member of the family ready to take over the business” and you are the sixth generation in business. Does that mean other relatives of each generation did not come into the business? Possibly that may be the reason it has lasted so long as once there are too many individuals in the same business, there are conflict of interests.

It is not a rule as such that only a single member of the family runs the business. It just happened that way till now. And yes for the longevity of a business over generations, I guess what you have stated can stand true. Amongst us we are three brothers. I have joined the business while the other two are doctors.

Hamazor : Does your bakery make any other items?

Yes we do make many more items. Apart from batasas, khari and nankhatai we make many types of biscuits, cakes, pastries and breads.
Hamazor: The image of the batasas in a box with the original interview published, is it by chance a ready mix? And do you feel it is the same quality as freshly baked ones in your bakery?

The image of the batasa box is the one that we use for exports. It is a box printed and designed as per international laws. Whenever we receive an order for export, we pack batasas in these boxes of 200gms each. The packing is developed to retain the freshness for a long time. The batasas have a very long shelf life and once heated in a convention oven before serving, it gets back its freshness.

Hamazor: Is there one outlet only?

We have in all six branches in Surat. Three are owned and operated by us and the other three are our appointed stockists.

Hamazor: How many people are employed to run the bakery?

We have a staff of around 50 employees. We have seven managers to look after different departments, of which one is a Parsi. He is a graduate in Commerce and looks after the cash counter.

Hamazor: Any other interesting bits you can share will be appreciated, as batasas being an all time favourite with everyone, I am sure our readers would appreciate.

With every generation that comes in to run the bakery, changes have to be adopted. Our forefathers didn’t use so much of technology but still managed to produce batasas. Batasas are made using a traditional recipe. In order to maintain that original flavour and texture sometimes infusion of a lot of technology does not work. So for such traditional products, its best to be as traditional as possible. The trick is how you adopt to the changes in raw material, technology and ingredients which occur with time.

E.D: Would you like to pass on some advice to Zoroastrian entrepreneurs who may be thinking of starting a new business?

Well, I am too young to advise anyone but for our industrious community who has always been an example of entrepreneurship, I would urge the young generation to pursue doing business. Let not the industrious spirit in us die. Our forefathers spent a lot of their energy in setting up businesses which can reach new heights with the infusion of new blood.
“Avo jamwa chalo ji” is the call sign for any Parsi lagan or navjote crowd to start moving, preferably at a fast pace, towards the tables piled high with food. The anticipation, the anxious wait, the clanging and opening of the dishes is the long awaited climax to most of our community celebrations. Indeed, very often, no one remembers what the bride wore or the groom said, but if the food was not good, the poor host family would never live it down ...

There is even a common belief amongst many communities, that “wherever Parsis gather, the food will be exceptionally good.”

What is it about our community that attracts such compliments about our culinary skills? From the famous caterer Tanaz Hodiwala of Mumbai to Cyrus Todiwala of London, the quality of our gastronomic skills are being praised from all sides.

This should not be surprising to the average reader, as in recent years, food shows and television programmes and channels have also become extremely popular, not only amongst Parsis, but all over the world. Indeed, Masterchef is rated as one of the most popular TV shows of all time. There is Masterchef USA, Masterchef UK, Masterchef Australia and even Masterchef Kids!

But what is surprising is that, while we always knew our food was good, the fact that so many talented young chefs have sprung up recently in our community is an eye-opener; for instance, there was recently a celebrity Parsi chef on Masterchef India. And there is a famous celebrity Parsi chef on a Food Channel in Pakistan – Zarnak Sidhwa of Masala TV. Both of them are female! In addition there are several young Parsi ladies, in both India and Pakistan as well as in North America who are breaking the traditional stereotypes and setting up their own catering businesses by providing a variety of foods ranging from gourmet dishes, to full meals to specialty desserts. This is an important achievement for our youth and community at large and needs to be celebrated and recognized.

The Parsi chef on Masterchef India is, of course, Anahita Dhondy. It would seem that some families in our community have the food bug, or interest in culinary catering in their genes. According to Anahita, her family, and especially her mother was the one who inspired her, and who “exposed her palette to different kinds of foods at home.” Nilufer has been catering Parsi food from home for over twenty-five years, and was amongst the pioneer’s to start supplying Parsi food exclusively in New Delhi. Anahita started helping her mum bake ice cakes and originally learnt cooking from her mother.

Nilufer, herself, was born in Allahabad to Veera and Dossabhoy Ghandhi. While she was in school, her passion and interest revolved around food, and trying out new dishes. Her inspiration in turn, had also been her mother, who is an excellent cook, as well as her maternal grandmother, Bano, who lived in Ajmer. Bano made the most delicious Parsi dishes such as Curry Chawal, Saas ni Macchi, Papeta Ma Gosh, etc. Her paternal grandmother, Gula Mai, was also quite accomplished and made the typical Parsi snacks such as Daal ni Pori, Patrel, Bhakras, etc.

Growing up and spending time in the kitchen allowed her to learn the ropes at a very early age, and she took this up even more seriously as a subject in her Class XII exams, as well as in college. Nilufer studied at the 150-year-old St Mary’s Convent
Allahabad, and then joined Sophia College Ajmer for her Bachelors in Arts.

Her main passion revolved around baking, and after she got married to Navroze Dhondy, someone she has known since she was born, she ventured into a more commercial space by baking amazing cakes and desserts for her friends and acquaintances.

Along the way her ad-man husband, Navroze, coined her company name, KITCHEN SECRETS, and encouraged her to launch her label, and add to her range of products.

Nilufer’s popularity grew in every town they lived in – Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Gurgaon. Now her son Kurush, a foodie and a designer, also helps her in designing her new labels and branding.

Her 24-Carrot Cake, the Apple Cinnamon Cake and Chocolate Sin Cake have been evergreen hits, and the most popular over the last 30 years. She also diversified into making an incredible mayonnaise, and her classic creation: White Wine Mustard.

Over the years Nilufer has been making an amazing concoction of masalas, made from a recipe that has been handed over the generations by her husband Navroze’s great grandmother. On one of her trips to Poona, Navroze’s aunt Rati Dhondy, shared this very special and secret recipe that involved the use of 15 spices to create the most wonderful Parsi Dhana-Jeeru and Sambhaar masala, helping hundreds create the favourite dish Dhansak. People from all over the world order this creation, to make the most famous Parsi creation in the UK, US, Canada, Australia and many other countries.

When her daughter got back from her Masters at Le Cordon Bleu London, and joined SodaBottleOpenerWala, (SBOW) as the Chef Manager, Nilufer’s special Dhana Jeeru and Sambhaar masala was tested by the top Chef Saby. During the food trials, everyone was wowed by the taste, and this has now become the staple masala used by SBOW, across not one but all seven restaurants that the chain has grown into.

Nilufer has always enjoyed experimenting with cuisine, and her excellent skills and passion for food make her a wonderful hostess, who lays out a delectable spread each time the family has anyone over.

Over the years Nilufer has been encouraged and supported by her parents, her in-laws Meher and Dinyar, her siblings Darius and Gulzarina, and her husband Navroze, her two kids Anahita and Kurush, to keep adding more to her repertoire.

The fact that Anahita has picked up the baton, and has proceeded to make a name for herself in her own right is owed, in no small measure to her parents and family support. Anahita is now well established in the culinary world. Appearing on Masterchef India as a Celebrity Chef, Anahita Dhondy, Nilufer’s daughter, is following on in her mother’s footsteps, and has made her family as well as our community proud.

Anahita’s inspiration, is her mother, who she observed and learnt from while growing up. Of course, as mentioned earlier, the fact that both mother and daughter have managed to break into an industry that is
traditionally male-dominated, and to establish a reputation for themselves is extremely noteworthy. To quote Anahita, the industry “isn’t easy to get into, or adjust to. It’s not your regular 9-5 shift, it’s tough, physical labour with long hours” and it is also very difficult and yet vitally important to maintain the quality and authenticity of the cuisine produced. The Indian patriarchal society also doesn’t make the process for new female entrants into the catering business easy, as women are not regarded or taken seriously as professional chefs. This in spite of the fact that it is still most women who actually make, or at the very least supervise the cooking of meals for their husbands and families at home!

Nilufer and Anahita both firmly believe that in order to achieve your dreams one must be passionate and willing to work hard so that such dreams and goals can be achieved or turned into reality.

It is safe to say, that, with noteworthy figures of such culinary talents in our midst, the community’s fame and call sign of “Avo jamwa chalo Ji” is in safe and confident hands for another generation to come!

Mumbai’s non profit Music Organisation puts up piano keys for sale

by benita fernando

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Mumbai’s famed music institution, The Mehli Mehta Music Foundation, in association with Furtados, kicks off crowdfunder to gift Rs68 lakh grand Steinway piano to its students; donors can sponsor individual keys for Rs76,000 each.

Music patrons in the city and across the country are in for a rare opportunity where they can sponsor, not an entire grand piano, but just a key from it. The cost? Just Rs 76,000.

In a first in the country, the Steinway 88 Keys Programme was launched last week by the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation (MMMF), named after Western classical maestro Zubin Mehta’s late father and instituted by classical musician Mehroo Jeejeebhoy. MMMF has its eyes on an instrument from the world’s leading piano manufacturers, Steinway and Sons (also known as Steinway). While it is the smallest model of grand pianos made by Steinway, it comes at a whopping price tag of Rs68 lakh, a cost that the non-profit music foundation cannot afford. “We want to raise the quality of Western classical music education in the country and this grand piano from Steinway, known to be one of the best makes in the world, is a step towards that goal,” says Jeejeebhoy, at the Cumballa Hill school.

On a suggestion from Kalbadevi’s reputed music instruments store, Furtados, MMMF initiated this fundraiser, allowing people to crowdfund the piano, key by key. Moreover, the actual price of the piano is upward of Rs71 lakh (based on currency fluctuations) but being offered at a preferential rate of Rs68 lakh by Furtados for the school’s philanthropic agenda.

Out of 88 keys, 85 come at Rs76,000 per key; the remaining cost more: the middle C — the first key learnt by a child — costs Rs1.4 lakh, and the keys of the highest and lowest notes come at Rs1 lakh each. “This is just a strategy for funding this piano. It is not possible for one donor to contribute entirely,” explains Jeejeebhoy.

The innovative crowd-funding model, which has been occasionally implemented across other countries, is explained on the Steinway website and sometimes even
borrowed by pianos of other makes. This time around, the fundraiser is a collaborative effort between MMMF and Furtados, which has the Model S, measuring 5 feet 1 inch, stored in their warehouse. Anthony Gomes, director of Furtados, says, “We hope that the ask from donors in the Western classical community is not perceived as a substantial one. This is not so much a purchase as much as an acquisition for the school; it has been an aspiration for the school, which has regrettably remained unfulfilled for long due to funding reasons,” he adds. Jeejeebhoy also says, “When we can spend lakhs on a motorcar, we can do the same for an educational tool of good quality. A Steinway piano is not a luxury.”

As a precedent, the 21-year-old non-profit Foundation has purchased the middle C while Furtados has donated the F, the store’s first letter.

Both Furtados and MMMF testify to the legendary stature of the handcrafted Steinway grand piano, which have been developed over 160 years. “Steinway has an artiste roster of about 1,600 top pianists [including Cole Porter and Billy Joel]. To become a Steinway artiste, there is only one precondition: an artiste must believe in the brand and therefore, own a Steinway piano. Unlike other brand endorsements, Steinway works differently. You must invest in a piano before you can endorse it,” he says.

Jeejeebhoy, an accomplished pianist, owns a Steinway that she has been playing on for the last 40 years. “It is a fine instrument and gives you many years of good service. I wouldn’t like to compare it with other brands, since not everyone can afford a Steinway,” she says.

The model S is made of carefully selected woods, one of which is Sitka spruce wood from Alaska for the soundboard. The wood selection and construction are such that the sound created by the piano should potentially reach the end of a concert hall without the use of a mic. The science behind the piano, says Jeejeebhoy, should allow students to learn the nuances of controlling the sound and the touch of the keys. Once the piano finds its 88 donors, it will have to be kept in temperate conditions with regulated humidity, tasks MMMF will look into in the future.

The school has currently enrolled 640 students, who start at the age of one-and-a-half and learn instruments around the age of 7 till they reach their late teens. MMMF also does an outreach music lessons for 884 students from low-income communities in BMC schools. “Students will not begin training on a Steinway; it is only in their later years that they will perfect their skills on it. While we help students from low income communities to learn on the violin and cello, it is difficult to train on a piano, since it requires you to have an instrument at home,” says Jeejeebhoy.

The acquisition of this Steinway is the first step for MMMF to become an All-Steinway School in the coming years, a position held by reputed schools such as the Royal College of Music, London. However, the Steinway association is not without its share of criticism, right from its demand for exclusivity and the “monoculture” of sound it has bred. The pianist Garrick Ohlsson, for instance, was banned in the 1970s from using Steinway after he praised Bösendorfer, another piano manufacturer, in public. Furthermore, will there be those who question the need for a Steinway — the Rolls Royce among pianos — in a music school?

But, both MMMF and Furtados are unfazed by these instances. “This is a chance to create awareness about Western classical music through our junior conservatory. We want our students, whether they are learning or playing it at a concert, to know that they are using a special instrument,” says Jeejeebhoy.

http://www.mid-day.com/articles/mumbai-non-profit-music-organisation-puts-up-piano-keys-for-sale/17585156
... have ye the power, Wise One, ... to protect your needy dependent – as I indeed am – with truth and good thinking?...

Yasna 34.5

Insler translation