Yezidism
a cognate to Zoroastrianism is under threat

The entrance to the Sheikh Adi temple in Lalish
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### COVER
Photograph taken by Khanna Omarkhani in Ladish, in 2006.

### PHOTOGRAPHS
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[www.w-z-o.org](http://www.w-z-o.org)
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Note: WZO’s committee is extensive, these are just a few of the names given for member’s convenience.
From the Editor

As each quarter of the year ends, and the Hamazor is on its way to the printers, I sit gazing at the computer screen, in an effort to write something tangible and meaningful as the Editorial.

We have a community in general that is vibrant; individuals who have taken it upon themselves to preserve and promote Zoroastrianism; unlimited people at the top of their fields. Yet, there is a downside: a few individuals who have made it their mandate to see that the Zoroastrians of India at least, do not progress in their thinking. Its now 12 years that I have been the editor of Hamazor, but of late I feel that not a month goes by without the Indian press giving wide coverage to all the discord within the Zoroastrian community in Mumbai. This was not the case a few years ago. Which begs the question: do we really need only adverse publicity to be noticed?

Every chance we are given to speak, we say we are an ageing community. There is no doubt at least here in Pakistan one can safely say it is an ‘aged’ community not just ‘ageing’. Being plainly visible, it is actually quite frightening to see how old everyone is when we gather for some event whether a joyous one or not. Yet when there is so little time in our hands to do some good for our fellow beings, time is wasted in squabbles, endless court cases and a wealth of good money which was given in TRUST to be used for the betterment of the community, is being exhausted in Mumbai. All in the name of religion!

Endless wars have been waged in the name of religion, they still continue all around us, but we the ‘enlightened’ cannot see beyond our noses the futility of such conflicts. Senseless diatribes and vicious personal attacks traded in the public domain are not what one would expect from the “educated”. The few individuals who are quietly trying to support the rights of every individual through legal recourse, earning the respect and gratitude of the community, in my opinion, are inadvertently being jeopardized by some vocal voices through their unceasing circulation of emails within the wider community.

Whilst it is desirable for all manner of individuals to articulate their concerns and views in community matters and not become the silent majority, to do so with courtesy and respect would go further.

To quote Karachi’s beloved Dastur Dhalla “Righteousness rests on the individual’s piety and not on a scrupulous observance of the ceremonials or a practice of elaborate lustrations. Let the Parsi individually, and his community collectively, abide steadfast in the path of righteousness, and they will be practicing true Zoroastrianism.” (Zoroastrian Theology).

How much the community would benefit if the Mumbai High Priests emulated this very wise man, saving unnecessary heartbreak to many individuals.

Each person has the right to choose for themselves, using their own God-given Good Mind, both during life and in the afterlife which is very much part of the Zoroastrian creed. With open minds and tolerance of difference and diversity, everyone can live in harmony.

Whilst going through this issue, readers may wonder why two articles in particular, are published. The article written about the plight of the Yezidis was specifically sought for, as there is a myth amongst many, that Yezidis are an offshoot of Zoroastrians. And the personal stories shared about the Arab-Jewish post-war conflict, though nothing to do with our community, is written by a brave young woman who is a Zoroastrian and reporting from a war-torn country.

Let us value the jewels we have, so that they stay within our small community and continue to do us proud.
Behram Baxter

Behram knew from a young age that business was the only logical route to take. When his siblings were tending to their studies, he would be scheming. Behram would find anything and everything he could sell in order to make a little pocket money for movies and peanuts. Often times this would include selling his own school books. Why would school be that important when one already knows the art of selling and negotiating? This became a special gift that marked the footprint of his life to follow.

After graduating in 1961, Behram decided that he would put his knowledge of air-conditioning and refrigeration to the test. In 1961 Van & Company was born. His first taste of proprietorship was at the age of 20. Behram had rented a very small garage in the crowded streets of Bombay where he designed and installed refrigeration and air-conditioning units as well as marine refrigeration systems. A one-man show with more work than he could handle, Behram continually serviced his clients with a smile. A smile all the way to the bank!

Always wanting more, and knowing that this wasn’t enough, Behram decided that he needed to come to America and the closest to America was Canada. This would be the first stepping stone. After arriving Toronto in 1967 he, took a job as refrigeration and air-conditioning technician with Westinghouse Canada Ltd. With long, tiring days and little pay, Behram came to the realization that there was more to life than punching a clock. He decided to go where the real money is, real estate of course.

In 1968 Behram began his real estate career selling industrial and commercial properties in Toronto, Canada. Achieving his newfound success in this niche market, he moved on to becoming Vice President of Harvey Adleman Ltd., a large and very well respected commercial real estate group in Toronto. There, he specialized in investment properties, land development structuring syndications and property management.

1984 became a turning point when Behram opened his own brokerage firm, Mayfair Realty Inc. There, he would continue to sell investment property to local as well as overseas investors. As the real estate market continued to boom, he set his sites on his own property investments. Later, that same
year, Tribax Management Ltd. was formed. This company would be the flagship of many property management companies within Behram’s portfolio. Tribax Management, Ltd., managed approximately 2000 apartment units throughout the greater Toronto area, as well as forming syndications which would be later used to purchase hotels, motels and vacant land.

In 1988, opportunity once again came knocking in San Diego, California. A 67-room Comfort Inn, once known as a juvenile detention facility was for sale. Though the real estate market had seen better days, Behram could not pass on opportunity. With foresight, the possibilities and potential of this property in the heart of downtown San Diego was endless. In addition to this purchase, Behram set his sites on an old Howard Johnson hotel in desperate need of renovation, which would then later become his flagship property, the Holiday Inn Express. Thus, a hotelier was born and a new move to San Diego was made. Management and hotel renovations were now underway and a new US management company Narven Enterprises, Inc. was created.

In addition to hotel, apartment ownership and operation, in 1989 Behram decided to dabble in the condominium development industry. With his own knowledge and expertise, he built 48 condominium town homes in San Diego, CA, selling each unit prior to their completion date.

Behram has recently completed an 89-room extended stay hotel in Tucson, Arizona and plans to build four new hotels with over 400 rooms in the downtown San Diego area scheduled for completion in 2016. Other projects consist of converting a 118 unit high rise apartment building with entitlements to add an additional 270 units. In addition to condos, Behram has also built several custom homes along San Diego’s affluent coastal communities. Moreover, he has recently completed two apartment buildings consisting of 59 units in Pune, India.

Behram is active in social and community activities in the US, Canada and India. His main focus is the welfare of the senior citizen (the WZO Senior Citizens Center no 2 building was financed by him) and the education of the underprivileged. Behram believes that WZO is one of the finest charities he has supported because it has one of the lowest expense ratios amongst charities and makes maximum contributions to support its work for the benefit of the poor, senior citizens and education.

When Behram is not traveling the world on exotic holidays, he enjoys reading, fine whiskey and sailing.

- sammy bhiwandiwalla
Mumbai Priests - have the courage to say No:
the courage to face the Truth

by jehangir mehta

Good leaders are invaluable to an association, community and the country. Bad leaders and gutter politics can destroy the very foundation of the pillars of any organisation into economic disrepair and third rate status. Much of the wealth was gifted to BPP by the benevolence of the rich and famous families, whose foresight towards community welfare can be visualized through the Tatas, Wadias, Petits, Jamsetjies and many others of Mumbai. We can see the systematic erosion of the core values that BPP stood for and what it is today. What we see is a complete reversal in its objectives towards community work. Money talks and the power of money can be beneficial or destructive. Agenda of cheap personal politics with a cocktail of religious dogmas and ill-conceived ideas, is destroying BPP foundation. BPP is wasting their time and money on petty issues like the banning of priests who have prayed for those departed having opted for cremation. These priests are banned from conducting any prays at Doongerwadi. It very much reflects the dogmatic belief of a bishop in Canada a few years ago who issued a pastoral (decree) banning the eulogies at catholic funeral masses.

On the other hand a few years ago a retired priest in Ottawa died suddenly of a heart attack while cycling. “His funeral was remarkable in that far more people attended than expected. This oblate priest, Fr John Hunt, had developed a funeral ministry outside of the physical church. He went to funeral homes when called upon and sat down with families to develop a history of the deceased person. He helped them in their journey through the grief with a ritual in which they were a part, and that resulted in a true memorial. The moral here is that Fr John connected with people and they in turn remembered and came to say goodbye to the one who helped them in their need to say goodbye.”

Our banned priests Ervads Khushru Madon and Framroze Mirza as well as a handful of others like them, can be likened to the services that Fr John Hunt renedered to the community. To be a good priest starts first and foremost with that relationship with God. To love all mankind is what God would love the most. Each human being must find their own way to be in harmony with their God that inspires love to and from the Divine. This has nothing to do with one’s relationship with the High Priests of the organized religions. A true priest is the one who is in sync with his God - Ahuramazda - when he speaks God’s truth fearlessly and never promotes his own agenda. Priests like Ervads Madon and Mirza stood up and were visible when the laity looked for direction. They lead by example. Many in Mumbai and the rest of the world look up to them with great respect and admiration. For what it’s worth, one cannot imagine a world without all the good priests who pray for those dealy departed in Australasia, North America, Canada and Europe, where burial or cremation is used as means of disposal of dead, in the absence of our traditional Dokhmenashini. Thank God that in Mumbai we have priests who would not be dictated by the absurd behavior of some trustees at BPP who are only serving their self-interest and pretending to be self-proclaimed defenders of faith.
Some trustees at the BPP call them ‘Renegade’ and even support their dehumanizing rhetoric by quoting the meaning from the Oxford and Webster’s dictionary. Unconventional, resisting tradition, rebel, and so on. Those who call them ‘renegade’ are often so busy looking at the traditional customs and clergy laws, that they have failed to live up to their own spirituality and to fully comprehend the teachings of our beloved Prophet. Whatever the cause, they need to live a life and leave others to live their own. And, if we hold to the central teaching of our beautiful Zarathushti religion “let the human beings live and die with dignity”, why does that not extend to all the people in the world and why this discrimination for those who opt for cremation? There exists no scriptural evidence in our faith that directly proscribes cremation as mode of disposal of dead. It makes no sense but to wonder in amazement at this dictum of the High Priests to an equally senseless committee at BPP.

So what does all this mean to actual humans here on earth today? More so to the gullible priest fearing Parsis of Mumbai misled by veiled threats and fatwas. The candles and divas might be burning bright in the agiaries and atashbehrams, but sadly that inner light which exists within each one of us is diminishing in its pristine fight and search towards realizing the truth of why we have arrived on this earth. Silence, blind obedience and unquestioning trust on the part of the faithful Zoroastians can no longer be viable options if the Zarathushti religion is to survive with the High Priest and the clergy at the center. To the Parsis in Mumbai, I say - raise your head and look beyond your borders at the religious and social harmony that exists in places like Calcutta, Indore, Delhi, where the Anjumans and the priests embrace the socio-religious needs of all people, including the non-Zoroastrian spouses and a wider circle of non-Zoroastian friends and families, to co-exist in a happy and peaceful way. This partaking in the tradition and ceremonies is not only restricted to jashans and gahambhars. Indore Anjuman has made a special provision to conduct a separate condolence meeting ceremony in a hall outside the agairy, about an hour and half after the Zoroastian Uthanma prayers, so that non-Zoroastrian friends can attend and pay their respects and meet the family of the deceased.

Late Dastur M N Dhalla wrote in his book Mankind Wither Bound: “All Prophets of one and the same God should be honoured and loved by all men and women of the world as their own. Hymns and prayers of all scriptures should be devoutly recited by all peoples. Righteousness is not the monopoly of the followers of any one particular religion. It is universal. So is Truth. Mankind knows many religions, but God the giver of Religion knows only One Religion.”

As Ervad Jehan Bagli in his book Religion of Asho Zarathusht and Influence through the Ages very poignantly describes - “The collapse of the priestly hegemony left behind a class of ritual performing priesthood, which in time, was at the mercy of the grass-root community for their livelihood.”

Are we treating our mobeds fairly? Also, a question that the priests need to ask - whether they are indeed truly serving the needs of the community. In my mind if the priestly duties is reduced to a mere profession of rattling/mumbling prayers from a book - like that of a hospitality industry, beckoning some tipping, then the mobeds are only self-serving their own livelihood. Once again Ervad Jehan says - “Religiosity of some members may be anchored more to rituals and prayers, while for others the expression of religiosity may focus on the message of Asho Zarthusht. A priest of the future must cultivate tolerance for harmonizing such differences.”

One such priest that comes to mind is Late Bapuji of Calcutta whom I had the distinct honour and privilege to meet in the early 90’s. The community adored and endeared
him for his tolerance, understanding and his gift of love towards all. He understood the socio-religious problems and led by example. Mobeds of such attitude and caliber and wisdom will never have to struggle to make ends meet because the community always rallies behind them. A priest must be friendly and approachable, caring, understanding and forgiving, with a deep love for all people, but most importantly understanding the changing needs of the community and adapting to the winds of change. An example of rallying behind the priests is very much evident in Karachi where the Anjuman offers free housing, medical, schooling for children of priests and one month’s holiday including airfares back to India.

I am afraid the Citadels of our religion in India especially in Mumbai have to change their mind set to be inclusive towards the diverse views and not be monolithic in their thinking. Otherwise the priestly profession will disappear, not because of lack of funding, but because of the distancing of the people from such institutionalized priesthood, whose views differ widely from today’s time and age and the power to challenge - not for the sake of challenge, but for the sake of truth and proper interpretation of the teachings of Zarathushtra. We need more Jehans, Antias, Dasturs, Desais, Katraks, Firouzgary, and the blessings of our dearly departed Dasturs namely, Daboo, Minocher Homji, Hormazdyar Mirza, Dhalla, Bapuji, Bode and many many such enlightened mobeds around the world and particularly in India to bring about a lasting cadre of “wise” priesthood.

In conclusion I would like to quote Dastur Dr M N Dhalla.

“Not only that my religion is mine, but all religions are mine. I venerate not my prophet alone, but I honour all prophets as my own. I hold not my culture only as my own, but I treasure all cultures as my own. I pride myself not in claiming my race as the first favourite of God, but I hold all races as equally beloved of the Lord. Our earth will then turn into paradise and then will dawn, what the sages and seers and prophets of all lands and all times have envisaged, the Golden Age.”

May Ahuramazda bless our Zarathushti religion with people of vision, wisdom and courage. And may courage and strength of Ervads Khushru Madon and Framroze Mirza and others who offer these services bring solace, strength and joy to those who feel so left out and persecuted within the folds of our very own community.

Reference:
Mankind Wither Bound by Dastur Dr M N Dhalla
Religion of Asho Zarathusht and Influence through the Ages by Ervad Jehan Bagli, Pedagogical Pilgrim.

Jehangir Ratansha Mehta lives with his wife Phyrooza in Perth, Western Australia. A Master Mariner by profession, he is currently working as contract marine pilot for offshore oil and gas industry. A foodie by nature, he has embraced cooking and baking in last five years as a passionate hobby.
The floodgates open on the BPP

It is an indisputable fact that the performance of the current board of trustees of Bombay Parsi Punchayet, elected for the first time ever under universal adult franchise has given the Parsis of Bombay plenty to think about, unfortunately none of which is complimentary to the institution or to the trustees themselves.

Some estimates abound that most of the candidates spent seven digit amounts in wining, dining and entertaining the electorate to get themselves elected trustees.

Earlier this year, an initiative was taken by former BPP trustees and others to introduce a code of conduct governing trustee elections. This seems to have died a natural death, as nothing further has been heard in recent months. It will not be surprising in the least if the future elections are also held as before, wining, dining and entertaining the electorate. What a shame!

The former trustees must be repenting their decision to introduce universal adult franchise, as do many right thinking and upright Parsis. Who could have expected that Parsis would succumb to dinner diplomacy laced with a few glasses of wine and entertainment programmes arranged for their pleasure?

The attitude of the newly elected trustees was revealed within a short time of their assuming office when six of the seven hounded out, straight as an arrow trustee Dadrawalla, a candidate of the Adult Franchise for Progress panel that comprised of eminent Parsis, as he did not fit into their scheme of things which simply revolved around pursuing agendas of dictatorially enforcing religious beliefs and trading in real estate. Alleviation of the poor or empowering the community has never been a part of the agenda of the present trustees.

The honeymoon of convenience between the forces of religion and real estate was soon over. Sharp differences and mutual distrust reared their heads. Instead of serving the community and addressing the problems faced by members of the community trustees chose to embroil themselves in various litigations much to the disappointment and bewilderment of the community.

The first salvo fired by the trustees was to cancel the allotment of 104 families whose housing applications were approved by the outgoing board of trustees most of who stepped down prematurely to allow introduction of universal adult franchise. The courts ruled in favour of the present trustees but quickly thereafter a startling fact is said to have emerged. The legal victory is said to have been procured not on merit but through dubious methods.

Riding on the high horse of a judicial victory, the Trustees began to flex their muscles in many matters. They began to spend funds that should have been spent on community...
welfare activities rather than on meeting legal expenses.

After the resounding setback in the renegade priests’ case by a March 2011 judgment of the Bombay High Court the trustees are reported to have encouraged five of the six High Priests to file a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court of India. Senior and respected members of the community, aghast at the level of funds spent on this one litigation alone, said to be Rs.25,000,000 (more than $400,000) have written to the trustees to desist from such wasteful expenditure but to no avail.

With five of the seven trustees deciding to pay the legal expenses incurred on the SLP filed by the High Priests, many in the legal fraternity have opined this to be a collusive litigation that may not stand legal scrutiny in a court of law. But trustees by 5:2 majority have decided to continue funding the legal expenses of the High Priests.

Rs.1,100,000 is said to have been spent so far on behalf of the High Priests for a matter that has yet to come up for admission!

The essence of this litigation, lest readers forget, is to deny the first four day obsequies to those who choose not to be disposed of through the traditional method of dakhmenishini. Such a diktat can be nothing but punishing the souls of the deceased and their family members grieving the loss of their beloved.

The silver lining on this dark cloud is that a group of logically thinking members of the community have got together, formed a trust, tied up with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay and began constructing a prayer hall adjoining a crematorium in central Mumbai on municipal land. The new facilities are expected to be ready for use by the spring of 2015. Once the prayer hall becomes operational many mobeds are understood to have agreed to perform the obsequies of those whose mortal remains are disposed through alternate methods.

The much touted mobed amelioration scheme of BPP appears to have run out of steam, after the NN & RN Wadia Trust objected to funds meant for repairs to the buildings of the five Wadia Baugs managed by BPP, being diverted for payments to mobeds. Payments to the mobeds are now being inordinately delayed. Whilst the disbursements to the Mumbai mobeds have recommenced, those that do not reside in this city, have not received their cheques for a long time now.

Adding to the BPP travails, the Mumbai Mirror of 22nd September 2014 states there may soon be a shortage of pall bearers (nassesalars and khandhias) at Doongerwadi. Social exclusion, with meagre salaries have made the job unattractive. The Mumbai Mirror further quotes a 58-year pall bearer as saying “We are treated like untouchables. Worse is that BPP does not work towards our upliftment”. The Mumbai Mazdoor Sabha, a trade union, has now taken up the case of pall bearers with the trustees. The Mumbai Mirror report further mentions that even the 18 pall bearers are on the verge of giving up.

A meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI), held in mid September after a period of twenty months instead of the usual six has also brought to light a serious irregularity. As per press report in 20th Sept 2014 issue of Parsi Times it has come to light that the accounts of FPZAI have not been finalized as a cheque for Rs.900,000 issued by BPP to FPZAI towards disbursing doles for the poor has not been reflected in the accounts of FPZAI. Even more surprisingly the bank account at Surat in which the amount has been deposited is not reflected in the balance sheet of the Federation. The Parsi Times report also mentions that the Treasurer of FPZAI who is also a BPP Trustee has mentioned that around Rs.4,000,000 are disbursed annually to FPZAI but these are not reflected in account books.

Strange are the ways in which the BPP & FPZAI work!

The cherry on the BPP cake is by now well known to all Parsis, that four trustees have
filed a complaint of financial impropriety in real estate transactions against their chairman. The latest being that unaccounted cash amounting to Rs.2,100,000 and some guineas (gold coins) and jewellery being found in a cupboard at the BPP office. The cupboard was used by the BPP CEO and pursuant to his untimely demise in December 2013 was kept locked over the months.

As per a report in Mumbai Mirror, “A few trustees have linked the unaccounted cash to the controversial sale of the tenancy of Dady House, on Bora Bazar Street, Fort last July”.

Whilst the police are now investigating the matter one does not have to be Albert Einstein to guess that this matter will finally come to a conclusion with the needle of suspicion pointing to the late CEO, tarnishing the name of a person, who not in the midst of the living, is unable to protect his name and reveal the truth whatever it may be.

How much more can things deteriorate? The BPP trustees never tire of referring to themselves as the ‘apex’ body of Parsis and insist that all others address them as such. If a poll of the Parsis of Mumbai was to be taken, it is more than likely that the trustees will find BPP not at the apex (summit) but at the base (bottom) which is a fair assessment of how the Parsis of Bombay perceive the BPP.

It is time to now move north from Mumbai, the commercial capital of India to its Rajdhani Delhi.

The Delhi Parsi Anjuman, known for its progressive views recently caused a flutter when it announced it would poll members to decide whether non Zoroastrian spouses of Zoroastrian members could be interred in their Aramgah (community cemetery). Big brother BPP condemned the idea as “ultra-reformist”. The BPP chairman commented “It is true that members are increasingly marrying out of the community. It is true that there might be a need to open up in future, but now is not that time.”

On the other hand, the President of Delhi Parsi Anjuman, whilst agreeing the step was ahead of the times commented it was needed. “As it is, we are battling the crisis of extinction. What can be worse?” he said.

Finally the Delhi Parsi Anjuman postponed the poll, with their President mentioning “A committee has been formed, which will take a decision in the near future, after discussions with community members”.

Despite the postponement, there are voices of support in the community adequately echoed by the editor of community magazine Parsiana, who said, “Change is bound to happen. At some point, the community will have to open up,” but added any such radical step must involve the opinion of community members. On the other hand, a Parsi woman who has moved the Supreme Court seeking freedom to enter Parsi religious places after her marriage to a non-Parsi, said the BPP’s stand was “narrow-minded. All these regressive measures are efforts by the trustees to hijack the faith. By rejecting it, we have done no good to the community.”

The Parsis of India in general and those of Mumbai in particular, are simply on a self destruction spree, of that there can be no doubt. Whilst Zoroastrianism, the religion will continue on a low key in Iran, it will certainly flourish in Europe and North America, but Parsis in India like the vultures will cease to be.

On the Indian sub-continent an ignominious end awaits a once dynamic and progressive community afflicted by acute myopia and unable to see beyond the tips of their noses.
Spirituality takes different forms in different religious philosophies. Almost all religions emphasize the need for good deeds but some may prescribe certain pre-requisites such as believing in the prophet as Savior or the Son of God, or believing him to be the sole legitimate prophet on earth, or believing in the theory of reincarnation, or in a God involved in the history of survival of a particular race. In Zoroastrianism, while a belief in Zoroaster as a prophet is self-evident, what is crucial in attaining spirituality is applying his teachings in actual practice. It is not surprising therefore, that the name often used for Zoroastrianism in Avesta and Pahelavi is the Good Religion or the Mazdayasni (One-God-Worshipping) Religion. What then are Zoroaster’s teachings for attaining spirituality?

Zoroaster’s Teachings on Attaining Spirituality

I, for one, find a very short and sweet answer to this question in the very words of our prophet as so well expressed contained in Yasna 34.1: “Let us fully emulate the ways of Lord Ahura Mazda, the way he himself has attained immortality, Asha, Good Rule and Perfection. Let us fully realize them in our own being and in our own life in full measure.” The same sentiment is explained in the beginning stanza of Spentomaiti Gatha (Yasna 47.1) but here in one stanza, as nowhere else in the Gathas, all the seven Amesha Spentas are mentioned along with Spenta Mainyu, the Beneficent Spirit or Godly Mentality. Of all the religions of the world, only Zoroastrianism, in addition to coinng a name for the All Knowing God, Ahura Mazda – perhaps the first time in the history of mankind, also delineates seven attributes of Ahura Mazda called Amesha Spentas, Beneficent Immortals. As enough has already been written about these seven attributes and their corresponding material representation on earth, they are only briefly described below:

Ahura Mazda- All Knowing Creator of Life – Man
Vohu Mana- Good Mind – Cattle
Asha Vahishta – Best (utmost) righteousness – Fire, Energy
Khshathra Vairya – Desirable Kingdom – Metal (sky, environment)
Spenta Armaiti – Beneficent Right Mentality – Earth, ecology
Hauwataat – Perfection – Water
Ameretaat – Immortality – Plants, Vegetation

The message is thus very simple: when we imbibe all these splendid seven spiritual spheres of Ahura Mazda fully in our being and practice them fully and unceasingly, we attain God’s own Beneficent Spirit (Spenta Mainyu) and become Godlike. This also entails not only taking good care of elements of nature represented by the seven Amesha Spentas, but also furthering and improving them, as so vehemently exhorted in Yasna 30.9: “Let us be those who bring about the renovation (Frashokereti) of the world by our actions.” Science, as long as it remains a handmaid of good causes and leads to Spenta (Beneficent) progress is not antithetical to religion in Zoroastrianism. Thus Samuel Laing could declare in the nineteenth century that a Zoroastrian’s faith is not compromised in any way by various discoveries of science. As long as science is employed for the cause of good (Spenta) and not evil (Angra), it only contributes to the advancement of Frashokereti, which literally means making (the creation) fresh or excellent.

Thus the reason Asho Zaratushtra assigned a prominent place to Amesha Spenta in his theology becomes apparent – it was to highlight the majesty of Ahura Mazda as well as to delineate in as simple terms as possible for his pre-historic times a way to attain spirituality in its seven-fold splendor.

Seven thus became a sacred figure and all basic rituals represented seven Amesha Spentas and thereby the seven elements of nature manifested by them. For instance, in a Jashan or Yasna ceremony,
Ahura Mazda is represented by man, Vohu Mana by milk, Asha Vahishta by fire, Khshathra Vairya by metal like the fire-urn, Spenta Armaiti by the earth or the stone stool the priest sits on, Haurvataat by water and Ameretaat by plant products. As the corporeal or physical (Getig) world was conceived by Ahura Mazda in the spiritual (Menog) world as per our scriptures, it is natural that every thing in this world eternally possesses the divine essence of Ahura Mazda and Amesha Spentas. But human beings are endowed from the very beginning of the world with free will (Yasna 31.11) and exhorted to make the right choice again and again in the Gathas, particularly in Yasna 30 and 45. The evil is created not by Ahura Mazda but by the wrong use of free will made by humans by making bad choices endangering and compromising the existence. Mankind’s task is to ensure that ultimately this physical existence is cleansed of all evil generating from the ungodly choices made by humans and restore it fully to the pristine condition in which Ahura Mazda created it and thereby leading it to Perfection/Resurrection (Frashokereti) in every way – Yasna 30.9, etc. Such a theology could have vast appeal. Indeed, as Peter Brown noted long ago: “The Christian Church had inherited through late Judaism, that most faithful legacy of Zoroastrian Persia to the western world – a belief in the absolute division of the spiritual world between good and evil powers, between angels and demons.” (The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750, W W Norton and Company, New York, 1959).

The Robust Importance of the Physical World for the Attainment of Spirituality

The souls coming down from the spiritual (Menog) to the material (Getig) world do not in any way constitute a fall as in Christianity or Manichaeism but signifies completion of Ahura Mazda’s plan for us. Actually, the Getig world is better than the Menog world since it is in the Getig world that the Menog creation got an opportunity to receive tangible and sentient form. However, the Getig world is open to assault from evil in all forms since man’s primary mission on this earth is to fight evil. It is for this reason that Fravardin Yasht (Yasht 13.17) acclaims that the Fravashi of the living person is generally the strongest.

A Zoroastrian therefore does not have to look elsewhere to seek spirituality : benefiting and improving all the creations and creatures of Ahura Mazda and devoting all our energies and intellectual faculties for the rightful, timely, well-done deeds and developing skills of every kind, knowledge and progress where there was none (Visperad 15.1) is a Zoroastrian’s mission on this earth. Restoring it to the original, perfect condition created by Ahura Mazda by fighting evil every step of the way is the path to obtaining spirituality for us.

The prophet makes is very clear that “This truth applies equally to men as well as woman.” (Yasna 53.6). Women, thus have equal opportunity to attain spirituality and salvation as man. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the Avestan word Mazda has a feminine base and three of the six Amesha Spentas are feminine. The door to spirituality is thus open to both genders and it leads us right to the world and people around us - the opportunity is this right where we happen to be and whenever and wherever we are placed by Ahura Mazda on this earth. We are but his Hamkaars (collaborators) living and breathing for Him and His creations, having our being and mooring in Him so we can expend all our physical and mental faculties we can for improving this world in any way, big or small, we can. Learning trades and new skills, pursuing education of every kind, keeping ourselves physically fit to serve our family, town and country, actively opposing the evil and evil doers, working hard to raise a family with many children and educate them in the ways of Ahura Mazda, taking care of the weak and the sick around us, honoring God, parents and (good) rules and rulers of society, participating in religious ceremonies, communal events such as Gahambars and contributing his/her share for them, observing purity in every way so as to avoid unnecessary illness and infection, improving God’s creations in every way we can and spreading its knowledge everywhere so others can benefit by it, spreading knowledge about the Good Religion and observing it faithfully in our own life, not polluting any creation of Ahura Mazda in life or death, making sure our good thoughts, words and deeds far outweigh bad thoughts words and deeds, thereby ensuring
a place for us in paradise. These are but a few examples. Even the Achaemenians 2500 years ago had scant knowledge of the Avesta but they faithfully carried out its injunctions. For instance the aqueducts and underground water canals (Quanaats) they skillfully made to make the arid land fertile are still visible. So is the canal they made to join the Nile with the Red Sea. Even the burial places of the kings carved out from rocks pollutes nothing. Forestation and preservation of nature and animals they provided in their paradise, which was so heavenly it became a word for heaven itself, is another example.

However, even more amazing is the phenomenon that the Parsis of early nineteenth century did not know the meaning of the Avesta and its exhortations and yet they splendidly, faithfully, and zealously carried them out in every way they can as soon as they got the opportunity to do so. They devoted their effort not only to the technological and industrial development of the nation, but also to social causes, protection of the environment, emancipation of women, etc. Examples - ensuring fairness to the labor force and starting labor movements to ensure it even on the face of opposition by the British and that too by an aristocratic guy (Mr B P Wadia), fighting the British brutality such as Jalianwala Baag and that too spearheaded by the daughter of a Parsi baronet (Bapsy Sabawala), starting the independence movement in India as also laying the superstructure for its economic viability, openly rioting against the British in the streets of Bombay in the nineteenth century when it tried to get rid of stray dogs despite their otherwise amiable relations with them, fighting hard for the freedom of India by a tenacious wealthy lady, (Madame Bhikhaiji Cama, 1851-1936) even when expelled from India, starting innumerable communal and cosmopolitan charities, schools, colleges, hospitals, education scholarships, art galleries, orphanages, wells, aquariums, animal shelters, etc., etc. In other words they left the world much better than they found it – in whichever way they could as God’s allies – Hamkaar. Surprisingly, I came across a further validation of these observations in an article by William Pfaff in Chicago Tribune (August 12, 1997, Section 1, p 11): “In India pre-Independence capitalism and industrialism developed chiefly in the Parsee community, Zoroastrians of Persian origin, who take a robust view of the struggle of good with evil and believe in individual human responsibility.” He concludes: “The inherited values of a society do shape its modern practices, but in far more complicated ways than most present discussion acknowledges.”

The Iranian Zoroastrians did the same as soon as they got the chance to do so, even though unfortunately they always had to labour under many restraints. The evidence of the munificence of Arbab Rustam Guiv and Zartoshti brothers is evident today in Iran, India, UK, Australia and of course all over North America.

It seems it did not matter that they did not know the Avestan language, because the religion had become a living tradition and was practiced faithfully to this day. For instance, there are so many Zoroastrian environmentalists even today who are not aware of what the Avesta says about the environment and ecology but are instinctively driven to protecting it at the risk of personal peril. Similarly, the efforts of Behramji Mabari (1853-1912) for the emancipation of Hindu women met strong resentment from the Indian nationalist leader Tilak who could not wait to avenge himself by faulting Malbari’s reformist zeal for not fighting for the acceptance of late JRD Tata’s French mother in his own Parsi fold.

The Iranian epic, Shahnameh, written by a Muslim poet, Firdausi Tusi, represents the Zoroastrian’s constant struggle against evil. And even in our own times, The Times of India in its editorial on July 15, 1984 salutes the Parsis for their deep commitment for moral values: “Think of a half a dozen leading dissidents who have stood their ground whatever the temptations, blandishments and pressures and if you like you can pick all six from among the Zoroastrians. It is a truly extraordinary phenomenon,” more so if you compare the total number of Zoroastrians as under 100,000 compared to one billion population of India.
Books have been written on their accomplishments but even the most comprehensible one on this subject, Eckhard Kulke’s, “The Parsis in India – A minority as an Agent of Social Change.” (1974, Bombay) could not do full justice to it. Their achievement in various spheres could only be described as a nascent inclination, embedded in their religious archetype, towards constantly working for Frashokereti, a view which Kulke also holds. Duschene Guillemin, a great scholar of Zoroastrianism of our times, also attributes it to “their religious commandments” and describes Zoroastrianism as the religion of symbols – symbols which kept the religion and its message alive among the followers for millennia. For instance, the symbol of Sudreh-Kusti embodies the essential principles of Zoroastrianism.

The Way to the Other World is Through This World

Thus, for a Zoroastrian the path to the other world is through this very world – by being Ahura Mazda’s co-worker (Hamkaar) in every way on this earth, making his creation Spenta (progressive/beneficent) and fighting Angra (evil) in every way and by realizing in one’s own life all the attributes of the seven Amesha Spentas as best as one can. We will be judged in the other world by what we do for Ahura Mazda in this world while alive. The divine essence of Ahura Mazda lies in everyone as well as in everything good on this earth and the way to the other world is through incorporating it within our being while alive as well as promoting and perfecting it within us as well as all around us. Spiritual salvation is thus not far away for a Zoroastrian as the opportunity for it lies just where we find ourselves in life at a given time and clime. As the Hoshbaam Prayer tells us, we can become one (or friend) with Ahura Mazda by observing Asha Vahishta (Best Truth) as best as we can in our life and thereby removing all the (Angra) qualities lurking in us and around us. God has never forsaken us after creating this world but is dwelling in everything and everyone around us if we only care to recognize it and use our free will to side with him and help Him to bring about Frashokereti when only the eternal life and goodness will prevail on earth.

Thus, Ahura Mazda’s reason for casting the material world in the mold of the spiritual world seems to be to ensure the spiritual sanctity and significance of this visible world as well as to ensure that His grace is evident every where in, the universe. His Holy Spirit. Spenta Mainyu, permanently permeates the physical world, and cosmic consciousness, (Vohu Mana) and cosmic energy and light (Asha Vahishta) sustain and guide it eternally.

Gathic Way to Spirituality

The divine intelligence/truth/Asha as represented by Asha Vahishta pervades the universe and therefore the prophet says: “Yes indeed I have already come to know Thee O Mazda! as Spenta when thou didst come to me with Vohu Mana. My response to Thy inquiry, “Whom did thou wish to worship?” was: ‘Thy fire. As long as I have the ability to choose (or wish) I will bow to Asha with reverence as my gift.’” (Yasna 43.9). Later on, that led to carrying a piece of wood to fire as a gift.

Yasna 43.9 should be read in conjunction with Yasna 30.1 where Asho Zarathushtra sings praise of Ahura Mazda, Vohu Mana and Asha “so that one may attain the vision (Sanskrit-Darshan) of perfection in the realm of light.” The Gathas are generally free of mysticism but this verse is regarded by many scholars, particularly by G Gnoili, as indicative of mysticism. It is noteworthy that it centers on light, a dimension of divine energy/fire. This reminds me of what one Jewish friend turned Christian wrote to me on May 31, 1995: “One of my major life goals was to see the sacred fire of the Parsis. When I finally did, my old mystical life was literally rekindled. I was surprised, because I did not expect the Zoroastrian fire to have such a direct and powerful spiritual influence on me. I had assumed that my mystical experience would be routed through Christianity alone. But I was wrong: The Lord does what He/She wills, despite the lines that we people draw to contain Him/Her.” Yasna 31.7 elucidates how the whole universe emanates with divine light which manifests itself through Vohu Mana and Asha since Ahura Mazda here says he is their creator. Yasna 34.15 (it is recited four times – which demonstrates its significance) compliments Yasna 34.1, as well
as delineates the importance of following the best (Godly) advise and deeds mentioned in Yasna 31.11 and expresses God’s wish that we establish His Kingdom on this earth with Vohu Mana and Asha by making the world fresh (by working for Frashokereti) and full of truth. Thus, just as God wants us to make this world as spiritual as He made it in the beginning (Yasna 28.11), He also wants us to become spiritual and immortal (Amesha) by faithfully following his precepts so that we would acquire new vision, and see and fulfill His wish in everything we think, say and do, and live and breath and have our mooring in Him.

**Pahelavi Texts on Attaining Spirituality**

Even the Pahelavi texts written centuries after the Gathas kept intact this basic teaching of the prophet and inspired the Zoroastrians of their times to work ardently for Frashikard (Frashokereti). They represented Ahriman (Angra Mainya) as a rival of Ahura Mazda Himself instead of Spenta Mainyu as in the Gathas. But except for that phenomenon and their mediaeval tendencies towards mythological elaborations and explanations, they have preserved the true essence of the prophet’s message in many ways despite their desperate situations after the loss of the Sasanian Empire and may have even expanded on it more than the extant Avesta. However, the Pahelavi texts written in the ninth century AD after the defeat of the Sasanian Empire may have tended to overemphasize dualism in Zoroastrianism in order to contrast it with the strict monotheism of their conquerors in order to underscore their stand that the later did not explain the existence of evil in this world if it portrayed God as all powerful and merciful. If this is true, we can understand the reason for the fiercely ontological dualism pervading the Pahelavi texts of the ninth century. Nonetheless, the concept of Frashik(g)ard is not only faithfully preserved in the Pahelavi texts but is also therein greatly enlarged upon. This is the goal towards which the whole creation moves as it is the summum bonum or end result of the evolutionary process undertaken by Ahura Mazda. The Pahelavi phrase denoting this process is Paywandishn e o Frashigard, meaning progressive fulfillment of Renovation, a belief which seems to have later on led to the idea of Resurrection. Denkard (ed Madan, p 492, 5-12) speaks of the Paywand of Frashigard.

Pahelavi texts also thus enlighten us clearly about the very reason Ahura Mazda chose to create this world, which I, for one, have not found in the Avesta. For example, nowhere in the Avesta I ran across such a clear and logical explanation about why Ahura Mazda created this world as I found in the Bundahishna (3:23-24), the book dealing with the origin (Bund) of creation, which may be due to the Pahelavi text preserving some material from the Avesta that was destroyed by the invaders:

“Ahura Mazda deliberated with the perception and immortal souls (Farohar) of mankind and having brought omniscient wisdom to all mankind, said: ‘Which seems more useful to you, that I should create you into material form, so that incarnate you will battle the lie and vanquish it, and that I should resurrect you perfect and immortal at the end, and re-create you in corporeal form, and that you become immortal at the end, and recreate you in the material form, and that you become immortal, unaging and without enemies forever; or is it necessary always to protect you from the adversary.’ The immortal souls (Farohar) of mankind saw, through omniscient wisdom, that the evil from Angra Maiyu would arrive into the material world and [saw also] the final non-opposition of the adversary. They agreed to enter the material world to become perfect and immortal in the final body up to eternity and eternal progress.”

Thus, even our Fravashis were accorded free will for deciding to come to the physical world in order to become perfect And it is all the more striking that their very choice for perfection and progress led to the creation of this world. By granting “immortal souls,” that is Fravashis, a choice in undertaking this mission, He made them, His willing co-workers. How much is this ninth century Pahelavi text in consonance with the prophet's very words in Yasna 31.11, and how much this Gathic verse embellishes and expands
upon its meaning when it says, (though often the reverse is the case):

“O Mazda! The very reason for Thou conceiving, at the beginning of this existence material creations and Good Religion by Thy (divine) mind and wisdom, and the very reason Thou didst create physical body and breath (as also) activity (life of action) and spiritual precepts is to ensure that a person with free will can readily make his/her choice.”

The Role of the Fravashi

The concept of Fravashi (Farohar), introduced here, is striking as the Gathas do not mention it. However, as the very meaning of the word Fravarti (Fravashi) suggests an emphasis (fra) on choosing (Var), there is little in the Gathas that can contradict it. It is the divine essence in us that has already at the primeval beginning chosen right and therefore dwells in heaven and inspires our Urvan (soul) to choose right when living on this earth. As a psychologist I am so amazed at finding important modern day psychological concepts as the very basis of Zoroastrianism from pre-historic times.

According to Yasna 55.1, humans do not just have bodies but have nine constituents in all as detailed below: three physical, three astral, and three purely spiritual:

1. Gaetha: Matter or material elements
2. Tanu: Human body the physical frame
3. Azdi: bones or bony substances
4. Ushtana: Breath, the link between body and mind
5. Kehrpa: Astral or ethereal
6. Tevishi: The subtle etheric substance reflecting our state of spirituality
7. Baodhanga: Intelligence, Id
8. Urvana: Soul attached to each person, Ego
9. Fravashi: The soul representing the divine essence in us and guiding our Urvana intuitively on the right path while on this earth even as it resides in heaven

Ushtana (Sanskrit Praana) plays an important part as a link between body and mind, an idea which is explained at length in the post-Gathic Hindu philosophy and is an integral part of yoga. It must have been an equally important concept for Asho Zarathushtra, as when, for instance, he dedicates “the breath of his own body as a gift” to Mazda for the furtherance of Vohu-Mana (Good Mind) and Asha (Righteousness, Cosmic Truth) on this earth (Yasna 33.14). However, due to our unfortunate history we do not know much about it. But modern psychology too has emphasized the role of breath as a link between body and mind, and used it extensively for treatment for overcoming stress, anxiety, panic attacks, lack of confidence or self-esteem and so on. My own cassette tapes on such breathing exercises have helped many to overcome these psychological problems. Zarathushtra is thus the first person on this earth to emphasize the importance of Ushtana as a link between body and mind.

According to Freudian psychology, human consciousness involves constant interactions between Id, Ego and Superego. Id represents what our intelligence (Baodhanga) perceives and desires for itself even when it is physically, mentally, socially or spiritually not good for us. However, when our intelligence reaches a higher stage in its development process, it could become more discriminative and here the comparison may end. Urvanaa could be compared to Ego which in Freudian terms helps us to tone down our raw selfish instincts and accommodate them to needs of others around us and our society, since Urvana represents higher consciousness and is endowed with free will. Fravashi could be easily compared to Super-ego which follows the dictates of conscience and always guides us to make the right choice and is unhappy if we don’t. A person in accord with his Superego or Fravashi will always do right and further the cause of Spenta Mainyu on this earth. Thus the Avesta repeatedly says: “We venerate the Urvanas of the departed who (have already graduated as) the Fravashis of the righteous.”

Concluding Remarks

We can thus see how comprehensive and yet so logical, lofty, sublime and literally so down-to-earth Zarathushtra’s philosophy is about attaining spirituality and how relevant, inspiring and practicable it is today as it was at the dawn of history. As a matter of fact, when people are turning away from religion and religious dogmas today, his theology holds promise for inspiring us to recognize and fulfill our spiritual mission so easily on this earth, a mission which is not far from our grasp if we only will it.
In our opinion, one of the arguments in favour of Gava, as the country where the Good Religion of Zarathustra originated, is its peculiar geology. This resulted in unusual natural phenomena, such as the underground burning coal seams of the Zeravshan Ridge, which could have evoked awe and a respectful attitude towards the fire. The most famous among them are the coal fires in the Fan-Yagnob coal mines in Tajikistan.

From ancient times, mysterious lights in the valley of Yagnob attracted people’s attention and, perhaps, were the object of worship. In Zeravshan, as we know, Zoroastrianism was widespread. To this day, there are the preserved ruins of an ancient fortress, guarding the approaches to burning mines in the confluence of the Fan-Darya and Pasrud rivers.

Since time immemorial and up to the first 40 years of the 20th century, native sulfur, ammonia, nitrate, sulphate and alum were mined in this area.

The author of a book about cosmography called, “Aja’ib al-makhluqat va ghara’ib al-mawjudat” (“Wonders of creation and the rarity of the existing”), from the 12th century, describes the “mountains of salt ammoniac (ammonium chloride mineral), near Samarkand, where rising hot smoke was settling around and turning into ammonia. Anyone who would go into the mine for the extraction of ammonia, would burn if he or she did not put on a wet rug.”

A smoky cloud, still hangs over the heated land near Kuhi-Malik.

The surface radiates heat and it is impossible to stand here even in shoes with thick soles.

Fires in the valley of the Yagnob river, as described by the ancient authors, have now died out. Their traces, in the form of fields of burnt coal-bearing rocks, are preserved in the north-western flanks of the Fan-Yagnob. So today we have only the echoes of the “fiery whirlwind”, which once covered a larger area.

Perhaps the natural lights of the ancient Gava could have been one of the reasons why fire became a central element in Zoroastrianism.
1 – modern coal fires, 2 – the old mines of ammonia, sulfur, alum, 3 – residues of enrichment industries, 4 – extinct fires, 5 – ruins of the old fortress, 6 – the old caravan routes, 7 – the location of ancient ferries.

The Valley of Yagnob river in the Fan-Yagnob coal mines. For thousands of years fires have been burning here in its depths.

Sulfur-ammonia “volcano” in place where gases can exit.

Crusts of ammonia and incrustations of sulfur over the underground fire near the Kuhi-Malik.
At a point in time where preservation of heritage is transcending time and space, Google Cultural Institute requested UNESCO Parzor to create an introductory Virtual Exhibition bringing awareness of the basic history, religion and culture of the Parsi Zoroastrians.

The exhibition has been launched recently with the launch of the Google Cultural Institute Project India by the Minister of Culture, Government of India – Shri Shripad Yesso Naik.

The exhibit, curated by Dr Shernaz Cama and Ms. Vanshika Singh, also showcases some masterpieces by the stained glass artist – Ms. Katayun Saklat whose brilliant works showcase the life of Zarathustra and the Amesha Spenta. Apart from the vast collection of images and audio-video that Parzor Foundation entails, the exhibit has expressed gratitude and given credit to all the academics, photographers and singers whose works it has used with their due consent. Since Zoroastrianism is a huge topic, the exhibition provides a historical overview from Persia to Akbar’s Court with text, pictures, film, music and chanting starting with the ‘Gathas’ and coming down through ‘Monajats’ till today.

The exhibition can be viewed at http://goo.gl/u4s3g5

Parzor Foundation, which has officially partnered with the Google Culture Institute, plans to follow such researched presentation on Parsi Textiles, Parsi Food, later and later, Navroze.

Given that Google has almost become a second brain for most of the world, this project hopes to bring together information and experience for the Zoroastrians in India. Suggestions and inputs from viewers are always welcome!

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Vada Dastur Firoze Kotwal leading a jashan ceremony in Mumbai.

Cyrus Cylinder - A Marker of Persian Heritage and World’s first Bill of Rights

Artist Katayun Saklat’s depiction of the radiant Amesha Spenta.

The original Sanad of Emperor Akbar issued to the first Dastur Meherjirana housed in the Meherjirana Library, Navsari.
Until a few months ago few people had ever heard of the Yezidis outside a select group of specialists. In August 2014, however, the world was shocked by the tragedy that occurred in Iraq involving the Yezidis, a Kurdish religious minority group. On August 3, 2014 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacked Yezidis in Sinjar (in Kurdish Shingal) and the surrounding area with the intent to annihilate the Yezidis and their religion.

Yezidis are a Kurmanji-speaking community of ethnic Kurds. Their total population is probably over two percent of the Kurdish population. They live in all parts of Kurdistan and in the diaspora, though the majority of Yezidis still live in Iraq; the biggest Yezidi community was living in Shingal.

Yezidis are adherents of an ancient monotheistic religion which does not accept converts. In Yezidism one can find a number of elements also found in other religions, while its cosmogony, dogma and many rituals trace back to the ancient Indo-Iranian religious substratum. There are several elements connecting Yezidism, as well as the religion of Ahl-e Haqq (known as Yarsan in Iran and Kaka’i in Iraq), with early Zoroastrianism. When comparing these three religious traditions, it is interesting to know that they live relatively far apart from each other, and that these traditions flourished in different periods. These religious traditions have a number of common elements, especially in their cosmogonical myths. The Yezidis believe in seven Divine Beings and four sacred elements: fire, water, earth, and air (wind). Fire and to a lesser extent water, play a significant role in their rituals. Moreover, the distinctive signs of Zoroastrians and Yezidis are very similar: they are the white shirt called sudre in Zoroastrianism and toka...
Ezid in Yezidism, with the small pocket called gireban in Zoroastrianism and girivan in Yezidism groups.

The impossibility of converting to these religions, the division into priestly and lay families and prohibition of marriage between them are further similarities. In Yezidism there are two priestly groups and one made up of laymen, which is the lagest. Intermariages are possible only between the members of the Yezidi groups.

The most esteemed sacred religious texts are hymns called Qewls in Yezidism (Kalams in Ahl-e Haqq; cf. Gathas in Zoroastrianism) that are transmitted orally. Yezidis still perform a bull sacrifice during the autumn feast, which is also performed during the feast of Mehragan in Zoroastrianism. These similarities allow speculation about a common origin of these two religious traditions, but that does not necessarily mean that these traditions are identical.

In the 12th century, Yezidism underwent far-reaching reforms under Sheikh ‘Adi b. Musafir (1073/8–1162), who was born in the village of Beit Far in the Bekaa valley south of Baalbek, and died in Lalish. He introduced many Sufi elements, including a rich terminology, to Yezidism, which many Yezidis see as an act that gave the Yezidi community a protective shield in the 12th–13th centuries.

Yezidis believe in one God (Khweda or Ezdan), in the existence of seven Divine Beings (often called archangels in literature), as well as many protectors and saints. During prayer a Yezidi should face towards the sun, which is one of the reasons why they were often called “sun worshipers”.

Yezidis, as well as Ahl-e Haqq, believe in rebirth of the soul, which plays a major role in Yezidi religiosity and is called kiras gorin (changing shirts). Yezidis also believe that some of the events that occurred during
Creation repeat themselves throughout the cycles of history. In Yezidism, the older original concept of metempsychosis and the cyclic perception of the course of time is harmonized and coexists with the more recent idea of an “apocalyptic” eschatology.

Being Kurds and Yezidis, they have suffered greatly from both ethnic and religious persecution throughout history. Yezidi oral history claims that they suffered from 72 massacres (ferman), counting the genocide of Yezidis in Iraq in 2014 as the 73rd one. Partly due to the vast number of religious persecutions, the Yezidis became a closed community, which has led to the many incorrect accounts on them. Their religion was often misunderstood, and Yezidis were described as devil worshipers, both in early Arabic sources and travel notes.

One can find a popular myth about the angel Tawusi Melek, who refused to bow down to Adam, which can be taken to suggest his disobedience to God. The myth shows similarities with the myth of the fallen angel, but there is not a single line about it in any of the existing Yezidi oral religious texts. Yezidis by no means worship the devil, and cannot do so simply because they do not believe in his existence. Before creating the world God created seven Divine Beings or angels, whose leader was Tawusi Melek, represented in the form of a peacock; and it is he who is responsible for all of the world’s affairs.

The main centre of the religion and its ceremonial rituals, Lalish, is located in the Sheikhhan region, in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to Yezidi religious literature, Lalish was sent by God from heaven to the place where He first created the core of the Earth. In Shingal, however, a large number of Yezidi holy places and pilgrimages exist, some of which have already been destroyed by IS.

The Yezidi religious tradition has a vast corpus of sacred poetry and prose texts, handed down orally, the most respected of which are the religious hymns called Qewls. As Yezidis do not have a written Sacred Book and their religious texts are handed down orally, they are not considered ahl al-kitab (“people of the Book”), a term used to designate non-Muslim adherents to faiths which have a revealed scripture, usually referring to Jews, Christians, but also Zoroastrians in Iran. IS refers to Yezidis as...
infidels (*kafir*), whose only option is to convert to Sunni Islam or be killed. Moreover, in Yezidism, there is no such practice as *taqiyya*, which exists in some branches of Islam. It is a practice of religious dissimulation, where adherents are allowed to hide their religion when under threat or during persecution.

Persecution, and in particular attacks by the radical Sunni groups against different religious minority groups in Iraq, including Yezidis, has increased in the past decade. As an example, we may recall 14 August 2007, when one of the attacks on the Yezidis occurred, again, in Shingal. Four suicide bomb attacks killed about 700 Yezidis and wounded twice as many, the majority of whom were from the priestly group.

In August 2014, a large number of Yezidi men were publicly killed for not converting to Islam; about 1,500 girls and women (some even not more than nine years old) were kidnapped and brought to the slave market. Practically all Yezidis from Shingal fled the area. Many villages that are located further south in Kurdistan have already become ghost towns in the face of IS attacks. At the moment around one million refugees (including Christians and Shabaks from Iraq, Kurdish Muslims from Syria, and others) are in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region in Iraq, among them approximately 350,000 Yezidi refugees from Shingal.

From the 1980s onward, a number of Yezidi migrations from the homeland(s) to different European countries took place: in the 1980s mostly to Germany from Turkey, in the late 1980s -1990s many Iraqi Yezidis found refuge in Europe, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, half of the Yezidi population in the Caucasus left Armenia and Georgia. These migrations have a negative effect on the Yezidi religion and religious practices.

Important centres of concentrated Yezidi religious knowledge have always been Shingal, Bashiq and Bahzan villages, near Mosul. They are now under the control of
ISIS extremists and the inhabitants have fled to different regions of Kurdistan, Turkey and Syria.

Yezidis, observing the transformations of their religious system under the influence of globalization, media, etc., often used to say that whatever happens to their religion in the diaspora, till there is Shingal, a religion will survive. Shingal is of a great importance for all Yezidis. On this territory there was a Shingal principality. Emigration and settlement of this community in different places will most certainly tragically affect the Yezidi religion as a whole. As Shingal Yezidis are the most traditional community, who still have the greatest number of religious knowledge experts, their genocide may well mean the killing of Yezidism as a whole.

Readers who may wish to have a further insight on the Yezidis, Ms Shahin Bekhradnia has placed her article on WZO’s website, www.w-z-o.org titled: *Are the Yazidis Zoroastrian?*

In 2012, the first edition of the Turkish translation of the Avestan texts was published by the best Kurdish publishing house in Turkey, called Avesta. This year they published the second edition of the book. Khanna (Usoyan) Omarkhali wrote the introduction to it. See the following link: http://www.avestakitap.com/urun.php?id=11913.

Khanna writes: “It is a good edition, we have even recalled the legend about the writing of the Avesta on the bull skin and prepared the title page according to this legend!”

Moreover, they are planning to publish the English version. A few years ago Hanna also wrote the chapter on Zoroastrianism in the university teaching book on Religious Studies, which was in Russian. This book was republished four or five times.

Khanna Omarchali is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Iranian Studies, Georg-August University Gottingen. She is a Yezidi from the Pîr priestly group. She was granted her Doctor of Philosophy of Science in 2006 by Saint Petersburg State University. Omarkhali’s research interests are Kurdish Studies, Religious Studies, Minority Studies, and Oral Literature. Her works have been written in several languages and the most recent volume she has edited is *Religious Minorities in Kurdistan: Beyond the Mainstream* (Wiesbaden, 2014).
Rt. Hon. Mr. David Cameron  
The Prime Minister of UK  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

Rt. Hon. Sir,

The Yazidi Zoroastrians of Iraq

The Committee of The World Zoroastrian Organisation, London is very concerned at the plight of the Yazidi Zoroastrians as a result of the advancement of ISIS forces threatening their very existence on the grounds that the Yazidis are devil worshipers.

We Zoroastrians emanating from Iran, nearly 1400 years ago, at first living in India and now spread all over the world but mainly in the western countries, are reminded of the fate met to our ancestors when Islam spread from Arabia to the then Iran defeating the Sasanian Zoroastrian empire. We would not like the same fate to befall fellow Yazidi Zoroastrians.

We would urge you Sir to do everything possible along with USA and Continental countries to save the fleeing Yazidis from lack of water, food, shelter and medicines. The full weight of the armed forces of European nations along with the Americans should be used to air drop supplies and create a corridor for the stranded Yazidis to travel to the safety of Kurdistan.

We also urge you Sir to do whatever you deem necessary politically and militarily to contain and defeat the dark forces of ISIS which have wreaked havoc on the minority communities of Iraq and Syria.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Shahram F. Captain,  
Chairman of The World Zoroastrian Organisation
Umm el-Fahem, ISRAEL - Tensions between Israeli Arabs and Jews escalated during Israel's war with Gaza. Although post-war tensions remain, so does continued cooperation between the two communities as portrayed in the Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery, located in Umm el-Fahem, which looks over Wadi Ara, a wadi (valley) of 20 km located in Northern Israel. Umm el-Fahem and Wadi Ara are populated by Arabs and Jews, but the majority of the population is Arab-Israeli.

Said Abu Shakra is the founding director of the Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery. Abu Shakra created what he calls the first Arab-Jewish Gallery in Israel. The purpose of the Gallery is to portray a fusion of two cultural and historical narratives – the Arab one and the Jewish one.

Abu Shakra recounts his boyhood. Raised by a single mother, he is reminded of the comforting touch of his mother's hand.

"Every night she put all of us seven boys and girls to sleep in the same bed. But I cannot remember the difficult economic situation. I remember only the hand of my mother," said Abu Shakra. "She woke up often in the night to touch all the kids to be sure that we were all covered and warm. The touch of my mother was her giving us the dream, to give us the life."

And today, four years after her passing, Abu Shakra's mother still remains as his inspiration. He believes the love of his mother symbolized by her touch is what instilled a sense of his cultural pride as a Palestinian. And now he instills a strong sense of belonging in people through art.

Abu Shakra said that he wants visitors to the gallery to understand the narrative of
the Palestinian people, but not as a victimized people.

“We are not victims. We have to behave like very strong people with responsibility and to work for ourselves. If we behave like victims, maybe some of the people will feel solidarity with me, but they will not help me. I would like to help myself. I have to empower myself and empower the people in not just Umm el-Fahem but in all the places.”

The gallery started as a small room in 1996 (100 square meters) and it is now a multistory building (1,700 square meters), in the process of completing its renovation. Recently the gallery opened the Olive Tree Exhibition. The olive tree is a symbol of the land and also symbolizes the ongoing tension between Palestinians and Israelis.

“Through the exhibitions, we want to create a special dialogue of the most difficult questions in Israel,” said Abu Shakra.

Noa Heyne and Tom Attias are two Jewish Israeli artists who are taking part in the Olive Tree Exhibition. Their work of art is called “Olive Tree / Marionette,” which is the skeleton of a dead olive tree, adjacent to it a ladder.

Heyne and Attias said they are trying to portray the abuse and exploitation of the olive tree literally and symbolically.

Curator of the Olive Tree Exhibit, Michael Halak said, “This exhibition is not just about the art or the tree. It deals with more: the land, the tradition, and the people.”
Abu Shakra felt that in order to portray the narrative of the Palestinians he had to translate it into something that is unknown to something tangible.

“I know the narrative of the Jews but I don’t think the Jews know my story. I have my own words, history, and memory. And I want people to come here and touch it.”

Speaking of the emotions of his people, “I knew that in order to face the fear I had to translate the fear to something to touch. I can’t create dialogue without giving people something to touch.”

Rina Peleg is a Jewish-Israeli artist who has studio space in the gallery. In return for the studio space, she teaches a pottery class to 30 Arab and Jewish women.

“Even during the war, I was here everyday teaching class. I knew through love and art everything was going to be ok,” said Peleg.

Abu Shakra and Peleg both believe that during times of war is when people should learn to continue to live together and support each other. However, Abu Shakra saw a significant drop in Jewish visitors during the war.

During the war, Abu Shakra lived with a heavy heart. “I felt bad everyday but seeing the artists, Jewish and Arab, together making art I felt happy. They charged me up with energy.”

Part 2

Arab-Jew post war tension

The Um el-Fahem Art Gallery is symbolic representation of the post-war relationship between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Although political tensions have sustained between the two groups of Israelis for decades, they escalate during times of war.

They say that Arab-Israeli tensions escalated during the last war between Israel and Gaza and the same sentiments remain now.

“Whenever there is a war, we see there is tension and Israelis look at us differently,” said Mohammed, a community organizer.

Mohammed said that he sees Palestinians living in the Gaza strip and the West Bank as his brothers and sisters and so the State of Israel is fighting against his relatives. Thus, Israel doesn’t consider the feelings of the Arab Israelis when they wage war.

Fadua and Mohammed attend meetings with Jews and Arabs as a means to converse and interact on a regular basis. They both said that less and less people are attending these meetings during and after the war.

Fadua and Mohammed attend meetings with Jews and Arabs as a means to converse and interact on a regular basis. They both said that less and less people are attending these meetings during and after the war.

“Whenever there is tension between Arabs and Israelis, there will be space,” said Fadua, a retired school teacher from the Ministry of Education.

“On a person to person level, we can live together and know each other,” said Mohammed.

“We have our relations, our interactions on a social level. We get along well. But, on a political level, it’s really bad.”

Mohammed says that he is against all religious parties and to him, it doesn’t matter who is in charge of the political parties, Jews or Arabs. He will vote for the party that he feels has community’s interest.

“I am against the Islamic movement. I am against the Christian movement in America. I am against the IS (Islamic State). It’s between me and God. I’m not represented by the Islamic movement. Even my vote goes to Jewish parties,” said Mohammed.

Fadua and Mohammed Younis often attend gatherings between Jews and Arabs on a regular basis. These social gatherings are cultural exchanges, ideally a means to
Iris said that she noticed less Israeli residents making trips to Wadi Ara during the war because of ongoing violence of young residents of the region throwing stones at cars passing through the junctions.

“Young Jewish kids were throwing stones at Arab cars. Yes, Arab kids also throw stones at Jewish cars. These kids are the same. They have nothing to really say. They just repeat slogans,” said Iris.

According to Iris, business wasn’t affected much during the war but relationships were.

“I posted a photo of us on Facebook holding hands in a peace procession, both Arabs and Jews and one Jewish client of mine was angry that I would show solidarity with Arabs. So he deleted me. Ok so what? I lost one client.” said Iris.

Iris and Rami belong to a group called Neighbors for Peace. The mission of Neighbors for Peace is to promote continued understanding and peace between Arabs and Jews in the region. Often members of the groups stand, hand in hand, in junctions of roads in the area to portray their message of coexistence.

Iris also added that during Ramadan many Israeli Jews come to see and participate in Ramadan celebrations in Wadi Ara. But all of that was cancelled this year due to the tensions caused by the war.

Rami commented on the increasing post-war tensions between Arabs and Jews. “People are not treating each other as individuals. They stereotype and group all Arabs as the same and all Jews as the same.”

improve relations between Jews and Arabs. Less and less people attend the gatherings, Jews and Arabs both. Fadua and Mohammaned continue to go.

Although Wadi Ara is predominantly populated with Arab Israelis, there are Jews who live in the region. Iris and Rami Samson are residents of Ein Iron, a community located in Wadi Ara. The couple owns a weekend getaway and also run a mediation group, teaching others how to cultivate positive thinking. They said that during the war between Israel and Gaza Arab residents would still participate in activities with Jewish residents but there was a deep sadness during their gatherings.

Zenobia Ravji is a three time Alumna from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign: BA in economics and Spanish language, MA in Political Science and MS in Journalism. She was born in Mombasa, Kenya and moved to Chicago with her family as a child. She is a Jerusalem based journalist.
In the age of the schmoozing, swashbuckling, hyperactive-on-social-media celebrity author, Cyrus Mistry is notoriously reclusive. But an encounter with him turns out to be both frank and forthcoming. Also full of smiles and dry asides. He talks, et al, of his latest book, Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer, which won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature at this year’s Jaipur Literature Festival, the relevance of awards, the continuing fascination of the outside world with the Parsi community, and how so minuscule a minority can be made to represent so universal a human condition.

by bachi karkaria

bk : Your second play, Doongaji House, your first novel Radiance of Ashes was about Jingoo Moos and now Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer is centred on Phiroze Elchidana, the son of a devout Parsi priest who follows his heart and takes the drastic step of becoming a khandiya, a corpse bearer, the only ‘caste’ of untouchables in an otherwise casteless community. What is it about us that so fascinates the writer in you?

cm : That most of my stories, plays and novels are peopled by Parsi characters is no more – nor less — an accident than being born into a middle-class Parsi family.

As a child, I grew up among Parsi neighbours and relations; yet even as early as my middle school years, I remember opting to befriend non-Parsis, always slightly embarrassed by the clannish claims my Parsi friends made on me (such as preferring to exchange notes, or drop phrases in Gujarati, even in the company of those who didn’t speak the language). My wife, incidentally, is a Christian whom I met at college, and who speaks almost no Gujarati, except with hilarious imprecision. She is fluent in her own mother tongue, a dialect of Marathi, and between us, and our son, it’s always English we use to communicate.

So much by way of preamble: to underscore a somewhat hackneyed truth that teachers of creative writing courses always emphasize — write about what you know best. In that sense, it’s no accident that my characters are often Parsi. But it would be over-simplification to suggest that this is
invariably so. In *The Radiance of Ashes*, *The Legacy of Rage*, as well as many of my short stories, I have invented characters that do not belong to my community. That’s because I am more powerfully drawn to another truth teachers of creative writing often underplay: that the imagination is powerful enough to breach cultural boundaries, ford unfamiliar regions, and ultimately, to tap the humanity that seethes beneath us all, irrespective of community or class.

bk : How have you managed to make a tiny minority convey such a universal human condition?

cm : Have I? By giving complete attention to detail of story-telling, I should think.

I am reminded of something that John Rawlston Saul, President of PEN International, said at the Jaipur Literature Festival, after the ceremony at which he and Gloria Steinem presented me with the 2014 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. He said, “People used to try to move away from localism to ‘the international novel’. I never understood what that was really, because all of us come from somewhere, we’re all born somewhere: we all have an experience, and when we write our fiction it comes out of that place. The great novels are all local and if they’re truly great, they become universal because of how local they are.”

This was spoken not in reference to Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer, and hence I’m compelled to call it serendipitously pertinent. Serendipitous, because I’m pretty sure Saul hadn’t read my novel at the time he made these remarks. Yet, he could hardly have found a more apt example to illustrate the point he was making. It’s possibly because khandiyas are such a microscopic ‘caste’ within the already minuscule minority of Parsis, that the goings-on at the estate of the Towers of Silence, in my novel, reverberate with a certain universality.

bk : It’s easy to understand Parsi novelists almost always writing about Parsis. What’s more difficult to comprehend is the fascination that the larger Indian world has with our community. Even in the secular press, all Parsi news gets the kind of space completely disproportionate to the readership. Why do we continue to be the subject of interest considering that we lost all our glory days long ago?

cm : The power, wealth and respect which the Parsi community had earned for itself in pre-Independence times was very tangible. Perhaps the continued interest in the community is merely a residual after-glow of that period. On the other hand, on innumerable occasions, I have had to explain to Indians in other parts of the country, away from the metros, who or what a ‘Parsi’ is. So the glow of that past ‘glory’, like the community itself, is finally fading out, I believe. Besides that, I do believe that a minority, by definition, attracts more attention than persons from a majority. There is more angularity and uniqueness about the former, more roundedness and commonality with the latter.

One example of the authority and respect Parsis once wielded: I was only 12 or 13, I remember, when one evening my entire family went to watch a movie at Mumbai’s Regal cinema, along with an uncle, who was visiting us from Dharamshala. After the film, on the way back home, we caught a BEST bus. During the bustle of boarding it, my father discovered his pocket had been picked. He immediately yelled to the driver and conductor to stop the bus. The driver pulled up obediently to the sidewalk, and my Dad was just about to initiate, with the conductor’s assistance and willing cooperation, a body search of all passengers on the bus — when a young man rushed
down the steps of the double-decker, pointing at the dark pavement, and shouting excitedly, ‘There’s your wallet, there’s your wallet...’ Obviously, it transpired, he had flung the emptied-out wallet himself into the street, and by creating such a diversion, was able to make his escape without meeting any resistance.

I dread to consider the fate of any Parsi man who, in today’s day and age, attempts to stall a BEST bus and body-search its passengers!

bk: In Chronicle of a Corpse-bearer why did you choose the world of the khandiyas? Was it to present a slice of morbid exotica and the hidden world of the Doongerwadi and esoteric Zoroastrian funeral rites, or is its focus marginalization, or larger questions of life and death?

cm: In 1991, while I was still a free-lance journalist and an occasional scriptwriter, I was hired by a film producer to write up a ‘treatment paper’, i.e. a proposal for a documentary film, on the khandiyas and nussesalars of the Parsi community, subject he wanted to interest Channel 4, UK in commissioning. I spent about 15 days on the project, meeting and talking to khandiyas, nussesalars, and if I’m not mistaken, one or two priests about the subject of our rituals and method of disposal of the dead. I had tentatively called the proposal ‘The Living and the Dead’. It was never accepted.

Twenty-three years later, after my first novel, The Radiance of Ashes, had sunk like a stone in the slime of incompetent marketing and deliberate lack of interest on the part of the publisher, and I was wondering what my second novel should be about, I remembered the research I had done for the documentary, and thought it could make a fine novel. Besides, after the unfortunate outcome, or lack of one, of The Radiance of Ashes — an excellent novel, I still hold — I suppose, the notion of ‘impermanence’ was uppermost in my mind.

bk: Who really is your favourite character: the ethereal Sepideh who Phiroze falls in love with, his rigid father, or Phiroze himself? If you were to write this book again, who or what would you have delineated differently?

cm: If I have to choose, I would say Framroze, the father. If I were to write the book again — there’s no way I would — perhaps I would try to make Sepideh more substantial as a character, a little less ‘ethereal’.

bk: Tell us something of the real-life story that prompted this novel.

cm: It concerned a khandiya by the name of Mehli Cooper. I never met him. He had died perhaps 20 years before I did my research for the film. But I met his son, Aspi. At the time, Aspi seemed to be working as a khandiya himself, though that was perhaps only to be able to continue occupying his quarters at the Towers of Silence. He had already found various part-time occupations in the world outside.

Mehli Cooper, his son told me, did not hail from the khandiya caste. He was a dock worker, who was compelled to leave his job and become one because he was in love with a girl who was the daughter of a khandiya. This extreme condition of marriage into the caste, and renunciation of the outside world was imposed on Mehli by the girl’s father, as a form of savage retribution or vendetta against Mehli’s family, which had had some old family quarrel with the girl’s father.

Aspi was still a child when his father, now working full-time as a corpse bearer, led a strike of khandiyas for better working conditions. The strike, however, fizzled out in two or three days. Mehli Cooper was
immediately suspended. Later, Aspi says, he was reinstated. But by then, all that had been rebellious and ebullient in Mehli was extinguished, and for the remaining 40-odd years of his life and career as corpse-bearer, he had turned completely quiescent and submissive. Try as I did, I was never able to trace any record in the Parsi Panchayet of the strike, which according to Aspi took place in 1942. In the real life story, it should be noted, there was never any priest’s family involved.

bk : This book is so much about religion, and ritual. Are you a believer in both, do you have the kind of faith in esoteric prayer that Phiroze’s father did in the hope of him becoming a more serious student?

cm : I am afraid I moved away from formal religion when I was only about 16. But my father, towards the latter part of his life, was deeply influenced by such esoteric beliefs. Some of it could have rubbed off.

bk : This book is about the traditional method of disposal, albeit in a time when there was an abundance of vultures which made it quicker and cleaner than cremation or burial. Today, along with intermarriage, the Tower of Silence system is the biggest controversy dangerously dividing the Parsis. Do you have strong views on this?

cm : Well, if you consider our traditional method for disposing of the dead, it’s both hygienic and ecologically sound. There is no pollution of the elements as occurs in cremation or burial. But now that there are no vultures — and the experiment to breed them in captivity hasn’t quite succeeded — we have only the solar panels which, given Mumbai’s weather and smog conditions, must be of limited efficacy. This is a question which only the experts can answer. I have no views on it. Except to say that the beauty and quiet of the self-enclosed Doongerwadi make it a haven of sheer peace. Had there been vultures still extant in Mumbai, I personally could not have wished for, or dreamed of a more serene exit from this world.

bk : You are a notorious recluse. How do you deal with the now obligatory social whirligig of book launches and litfests, the serial tweeting and social media promotions that authors are now expected to get into to promote their books?

cm : The media onslaught, if I may call it that, began only in January 2014, with the DSC Prize. Prior to that, if journalists contacted me, it was usually to ask about my more celebrated brother in Canada. I do feel rather strongly about not squandering time on self-promotion. Besides, I’m not much good at it, even if I was willing to participate in what you call the ‘social whirligig’. I can only hope that after a few more books that ensure my stature as a serious writer, journalists will learn respect my need for privacy. And that my publisher, too, will find more inventive ways to publicize my work, which do not require my own active participation.

bk : You are no stranger to awards. Was there a difference to getting, say, the Sultan Padamsee award for Doongaji and the most recent DSC Prize for Chronicle at the Jaipur Litfest? How important is the publisher in the scheme of things. Am I right in presuming that you were bitter about the indifference of Picador that led to the fact that Radiance sank without a trace? How different was your experience with Aleph.

cm : When I won the Sultan Padamsee Award for Doongaji House, I was only 21. It confirmed me in my course of wanting to be a writer. However, the exigencies of earning a living led me away from the strait and narrow, into journalism, film scripting and even, briefly, freelance copywriting for ads. All these alternative sources of income were no more, in retrospect, than a squandering of my time and energy.
The DSC Prize on the other hand was an even greater confirmation of my belief in my talent as a writer. Only it came a little late, after more than thirty-odd years of wayward and somewhat erratic struggle to continue writing. In the meanwhile, I also went through nearly eight or ten years of trying to subdue an illness — multiple sclerosis — something I am happy to say I have been fairly successful in achieving.

Only after the illness — and during it — came the first novel. Unfortunately, Picador UK has a very quick turnover of editors. The editor who believed in the novel and actually commissioned me to complete it on the basis of three chapters and a synopsis, had already left the firm. It was the third editor after her who read my finished manuscript, and thought I should excise about half of it and turn it into a pacy, action-based thriller. I couldn’t agree, and after a year-long tirade of to-and-fro argumentative emails, had my way with the support of the publisher. By the time, of course, the editor was cheesed off with me, and not interested in promoting the novel at all. It was a big blow to my self-confidence that something I thought was a very fine first novel went completely unnoticed.

Then came Chronicle ... Because it is such a big prize, it not only solved all the financial difficulties I was embroiled in, it gave me the confidence to want to spend whatever time I have left as a writer in completely serious literary work. That’s why, journalists please note, my reluctance to participate in the brouhaha of literary festivals and events. By the way, Aleph has been quite wonderfully responsible in their commitment to all aspects of excellence in publishing.

bk : Arundhati Roy, shortly after The God of Small Things, said “Rewriting a sentence is like redrawing a breath.” How do you write? All in one easy flow to be polished after the book is complete, or agonized writing and rewriting? In fact tell us about your writing style. Do you have a favourite time, place?

cm : I am able to write only for two or three hours very early in the morning. The rest of the day I do fairly normal things like shopping for fruits and vegetables, cooking, thinking about my work. I try to avoid meeting people when I am working.

For those two or three hours in the morning, when the writing is actually happening, it’s almost pleasurable: a state of quiet, meditative concentration where the mind is engaged in a dialogue with the words on screen. Every sentence should ideally lead to the next, every para dictate what will come after. If, and when such spontaneity, and fluidity, is achieved the process of writing which normally can be quite gruelling, actually becomes a joy. There is no getting away from the hard work, though, of refining and polishing. But I would never describe such work as “agonizing”. Finding the right word, instead of an approximation, is an exercise that sharpens the mind, quite like meditation. It remains for me very satisfying and pleasurable.

bk : How is writing in Kodaikanal where you now live different from writing in suburban Mumbai? Does being far away from your subject make a difference? For the better or worse?
cm: Writing in Kodaikanal is no different from writing in Mumbai. My disaffection is with the city, the crowds, the noise. It is unfortunate for me that I haven’t had the time to take formal lessons in Tamil. Unable to speak the language, I haven’t really been able to assimilate Tamil culture. I can only say that the Tamilian people seem very nice and civilized. Or perhaps this is just the effect of living in the midst of nature, in a small hill town.

bk: Has being married to Jill Misquitta, an East Indian and another minority, influenced your chosen subjects?

cm: I have lived with my wife Jill and her brothers and sisters since 1980. They have completely accepted me in their fold, and been the most supportive in-laws anyone could hope for. My play The Legacy of Rage is inspired by my understanding and perception of the East Indian Christian community of Mumbai, and their socio-economic problems.

bk: Chronicle is drizzled with ribald humour, the Parsis’ ‘second language’ of MC and BC. In your earlier avatar as a journalist, you wrote for Debonair which fancied itself as India’s Playboy. The editor said you were very good at erotic writing? Have you considered that as your next project?

cm: While I was working for Debonair magazine as Assistant Editor, I did write three erotic stories for the magazine under a pseudonym, as I wrote several straight journalistic pieces under my own name. These were all ways and means of supplementing my measly monthly salary. Why don’t you ask the editor – or the former publisher — about that?

bk: No? So what is the next Cyrus Mistry project?

cm: My next project will be a novel. I also have an incomplete play I want to finish.

bk: Now, a wicked question. Another Cyrus Mistry has occupied the public mindspace after the retirement of Ratan Tata. Has this led to any amusing, awkward confusion?

cm: Yes. The other, more eminent Cyrus Mistry did cause some moments of awkward confusion – not so much for me, as for a member of the audience at a discussion I was participating in at the last Jaipur Literature Festival – he had attended the session only to listen to the other more worthy Cyrus Mistry, and was quite naturally disappointed by anything I said. As also happened with a coffee plantation developer, who wrote a letter to my literary agent in London, (which was then redirected to me by my agent’s office) urging me to invest in coffee plantations in South India! He must wonder why I never replied to him.

Bachi Karkaria is an author, columnist of The Times of India, and regular panelist on news channels. She created and edited some of the country’s most innovative papers. Her specializations are urban and social change. She is festival director of the prestigious Times of India Literary Carnival, Mumbai.
Zanzibar - two Zoroastrians left

Posted July 22 (year unknown) by Farah Bala on http://farahbala.wordpress.com/

If you are familiar with the Zoroastrian community, you probably know that it is one whose numbers are dwindling very rapidly with an approximate world population of 300,000, including both the Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians. When two Zoroastrians meet for the first time, there is an instant sense of familiarity followed by a barrage of questions inquiring about families, home towns, ancestry and a whole lot more. Yes, I am a Parsi Zoroastrian.

During my conversations with the locals when I heard, first of a likelihood, and then a definitive assurance, that there was indeed a Parsi family still living in Zanzibar, there was no way I was leaving the Island without meeting them. Finding out where they lived wasn’t as difficult as I would have thought. Just then, Amanda told me she had read an article not too long ago of the existence of an agiary (Parsi Temple) in Zanzibar, relatively close to Stone Town. I was now on a mission! However, not too many people knew about this temple.

Although there was a thriving Zoroastrian community in Zanzibar for hundreds of years, a majority of them had left during the revolution. Those who stayed on had slowly passed away. We tried to find the woman who had written the article on the internet, but to no avail.

After more inquiries, I found out that the agiary had been sold a few years ago, to the Muzammill family – they own high end appliance stores in Zanzibar. The building was supposedly still there and if anyone would have more information about it, it would be one of the owners at the Muzammill store. I was supposed to leave the next day, but decided to extend my stay for a day. I had to meet this Parsi family, and visit the agiary.

Upon inquiring at the store the next day, I was told to come back later that afternoon which is when one of the owners would be there. A bit despondent, I headed towards the house of the Parsi family. There was a Tourist Safari Agency on the ground floor. I asked them how I could get to the apartment upstairs. I was directed to a doorbell outside the building and told to stand there, in full view of the windows above, so that I could be seen and approved, before anyone came to open the door. I rang the bell and waited. What was I going to say?

Looking up to see if anyone was at the window, but all I saw was closed curtains. After what seemed like an eternity, a woman opened the door. I introduced myself, and as soon as I said I was Parsi, I saw that smile of familiarity on her face.

Diana Darukhanawala, was warm and more than willing to talk to me. I wasn’t the first stranger to ring her doorbell. She said lots of Parsi travelers managed to find out about her, and came to pay her a
visit. She lived with her 83 year old father. Her mother passed away last year.

Diana’s grandmother was from Zanzibar and grandfather from Bombay. It was an arranged marriage. He came to Zanzibar on one of his work trips, and decided to stay on after the wedding.

She spoke of the thriving Parsi community she had grown up in, and when it became unpleasant to live there, they all moved away; to Canada, India, America and England.

When I asked about the agiary and if I could go see it, she warned me that it was now nothing but a dilapidated building. Community representatives from London had come and taken all the scriptures, books, altar materials and paintings in an effort to preserve them. She spoke of visiting the agiary as a child and her memories of the beautiful rose gardens; she had never seen anything like those blooms.

Soon after my visit with Diana, I headed on my walk towards the agiary. I was told to ask for Shamba ya Parisi (Swahili for The Temple of the Parsis). Thirty minutes later I was at exactly what I was told to expect – dilapidated building hidden amidst unattended grounds that once used to bloom exquisite roses.

I met John, the old caretaker of the property. He only spoke Swahili. Luckily, his daughter Mariam, who is expecting her third child any day now, spoke English and became our translator. He had lived there all his life, caretaker of the grounds since the time it was an agiary. They didn’t have keys to the locked building. I saw an open window and climbed up to it, to see if I could get a glimpse of anything – no luck.

The Muzammiils are using the property as a godown for storage. They’ve hired John to keep the place going. He showed me where the priest lived with his family, and then took me to the cemetery attached to the grounds.

Walking through the wild, tall grass and taking pictures of hidden tombstones; obituaries inscribed on stone, on marble, some in English, some in Gujarati, others in both, reading names and brief stories of a generation twice removed from mine, was probably the most beautiful of my experiences.

On my way back, I got a spurt of internet signal where my emails started coming in on my phone. One of them was from my mother wishing me for my birthday (the Persian one) – Zoroastrians follow the Persian calendar and hence celebrate two birthdays. After showering me with blessings as only a mother would, she told me to make sure I did something special that day.

Farah Bala writes on her blog: An Actor, Educator, Traveler, Seeker, I’m a huge fan of the Human Spirit. Through personal experiences, artistic endeavors, adventurous travels, I strive to use this space to tell stories, ask questions and challenge thoughts.
Dadi Mistry: Profile of a Devout Zoroastrian

Delhi-based Dadi and Nergish Mistry have not only nurtured a home, family and business, they have extended their love to everyone from slum kids to adivasis. Now grey haired and over 70, they have a lifetime of wisdom and beauty to share with others.

Professionally a Mechanical Engineer from Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute, (VJTI) Bombay in 1958, Dadi Eruchshaw Mistry started as an apprentice with Tata Electricals after he was assisted financially through college by the Tatas. He has never looked back since then. After working for a few years with J N Marshall & Co, under the stewardship of Mr Daraius Forbes, Dadi came to Delhi in 1963.

From 1975 he honed his entrepreneurial skills with the blessings and support of his mentors Jimmy Guzder and Dhuunj Neterwalla and has worked in the fields of Energy, Power, Environment Conservation, bringing state of the art equipment to the country and in the past few decades has successfully received approval for over ten collaborations/joint ventures.

With his unshakable faith in Ahura Mazda, the efficacy of prayers and his deep compassion for those in need, Dadi Mistry is a model Zoroastrian who has made tremendous contribution to the community.

Dadi is perhaps among the dying breed of Parsi men who were eager, willing and ambitious to strike out where they gleaned opportunities for achievement and advancement outside the safe haven of Bombay baghs and Parsi colonies and allow their entrepreneurial spirit to have free play. This was a trait the Parsis who came to India demonstrated so vividiy until they got comfortably settled in Bombay. They became a community of professionals – doctors, lawyers, bankers, accountants – many distinguished ones amongst them no doubt, but it heralded the end of the Parsi entrepreneur. This Dadi understood and regretted; and on his part was ready to give a helping hand to any young Parsi willing to take the risk of striking out on his own. He also demonstrated in his own life the success of his venture and hoped it would be an example for other youngsters.

With his genial nature, ability to give generously of his time and energy to human causes, Dadi spread his vision over a wide arena. But what was closest to his heart was the cause of the Parsi Zoroastrian, and his name is associated with most of the prestigious associations set up for Zoroastrian affairs.

Dadi has spearheaded several projects which have rejuvenated Zoroastrian organizations. Always forward looking he encouraged change and progress in the community. Keeping alive the wishes of Nergish’s parents Meherbai and Maneckshaw Langrana, Dadi and Nergish have sponsored several navjotes of children whose families could not afford the expenses of the ceremony.

Dadi has been the founder member of the World Zarathushhti Chamber of Commerce and saw his vision fulfilled when he opened the first chapter in Delhi of the WZCC which has now spread all over.
He was the fourth in line of illustrious Presidents who guided the Delhi Parsi Anjuman — Dr Sorab Shroff, Mr Shiavax Nargolwala, and Lt Gen Adi Sethna, all of whom were men of vision. Dadi continued that tradition. Under their benevolent leadership Delhi became a progressive, well-integrated community moving forward with the times.

The Delhi Anjuman was pragmatic in facing a situation where a growing number of its members were marrying outside the community. When, way back in the late seventies, a survey of the Delhi Parsees recorded 33 percent married out who had shied away from joining the DPA, Mr Nargolwala the then President, was quick to proclaim that the community could not afford to lose these families and it was imperative to keep them within the fold. The non Zoroastrian spouses were offered associate membership so that they could integrate socially with the rest of the Parsees, though they would have no religious rights. As the number of such families grew, efforts were made to draw their children into religious classes run by the Farohars. This served the dual purpose of introducing these children to an understanding of the religion as well as keeping the young together as friends. Dadi and Nergish have given full support to this venture. Another laudable programme, the Parzor Project which is active in recording and rejuvenating the Parsee community, have also received unstinted support from the Mistry’s who are keen on the proposal for setting up a special Zoroastrian Museum in the capital.

The interfaith dialogue initiated by the Delhi Parsi Anjuman with groups representing other religions with Dadi’s support and leadership has led to better understanding and harmonious integration of the Zoroastrian community into the cultural, social and academic fabric of the capital and the country.

Credit goes to Dadi who played an active part, along with stalwarts like Nargolwala, in pioneering the establishment of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India in 1975, under the aegis of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. This has helped coordinate the activities of Anjumans all over India and unite the community.

Apart from serving important organisations, he has undertaken fund-raising campaigns for various projects relating to the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. Dadi had fine-tuned the art of putting his hand in the pockets of well-endowed fellow Zoroastrians and persuading them to donate generously to Zoroastrian causes. As he says, “I am a salesman and never take no for an answer”. During the period we served together on the Board of Trustees of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, I often remember Dadi urging the Board to collect donations quickly for the Anjuman’s needs, as he felt that the generation of old sethiyas who gave generously were passing away and the concept of giving for Zoroastrian causes was not as strong among their progeny.

His tireless efforts have borne fruit, resulting in the expansion of the facilities by way of resident quarters for our priests being two new wings at the Dharamsala with generous donations from Dhunjishaw Neterwala. He has also been able to fulfill his dream of renovating the community hall with contribution from the Godrej family.

Not limiting his service to the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, Dadi Mistry works zealously for the cause of economically disadvantaged Zoroastrian farmers in North Maharashtra and South Gujarat, by offering them technical expertise and facilitating loans to entrepreneurs. Not surprisingly, his motto is: “Never leave for tomorrow what can be done today.”

Known for his diplomatic skills, he enjoys excellent rapport with the Indian Government, and has successfully liaised with government organisations, both at the Centre and State.
levels, for furthering the Zoroastrian cause. He has been instrumental in creating a Zoroastrian space in the cultural psyche of the nation.

He retired from business last year but his zeal and dedication to work for the welfare of the community has continued.

Dadi has to his credit several years of honorary services such as:
- Patron - Delhi Parsi Anjuman (served from 1965 to 2012)
- Founder & Member of Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India
- Founder & Vice President World Zoroastrian Organisation, London
- Founder & Director World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce
- Trustee – World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation
- Member of Bombay Parsi Panchayat
- Member – Inter Faith Organisation

It is not therefore surprising that in March 2014 Dadi was nominated as Member (Parsi) National Commission for Minorities, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, for a tenure of three years giving him the much needed platform to address the several issues faced by the community in India, be it reservation of seats for Parsi students in Parsi endowed Institutions specifically medical and engineering colleges; protection of land and property of the Parsis in different parts of India; dwindling population; and several other matters where government help is needed.

Like his predecessors he too has set the boat sailing with meetings and conferences with the Honourable Minister for Minority Affairs, Dr Najma Heptullah, who has promised to give her support and assistance to the issues facing the Parsi community in India.

Nergish & Dadi have two children. Son Armeen married to Margarita having three sons and daughter Bella married to Navdeep also having three children. He has faith and confidence in his grand children continuing his legacy and work towards the community.

Ava Khullar has been involved in research on the Parsi community, especially concentrating on its demographic and socio-economic situation. She is an active member of the Parzor Foundation and is currently associated with its Craft Module which is trying to revive Parsi embroidery.

An aerospace engineer -
Dr Cyrus Ostowari

Kersi Meher-Homji pays a tribute

Dr Cyrus Ostowari was truly one in a million, a multi-talented international scientist and an inspiring human being. His sudden passing a few months ago has been a tragic shock for all those who knew him in Sydney, Texas, Boston, Massachusetts, Rome and Indonesia. He was an aerospace engineer with a loving, caring persona; a jewel in the crown.

An author of four books and numerous research papers on aerodynamics and the recipient of international awards, Cyrus was a PhD on Aerospace Engineering at Texas A&M University. His PhD thesis was on experimental investigation of three dimensional flow of aviation twin-engine aircraft.

Cyrus Nawzar Ostowari was born in Pune, India, on 5 December 1950 and went to Teheran with his parents Nawzar and Akhtar and attended the renowned Alborz High School. Later he migrated to Australia with his family in 1968 where he completed his schooling in Sydney. At the Sydney University he graduated in 1974 majoring in Aerospace Engineering.

Following in the footsteps of his illustrious father late Nawzar Ostowari he constructed the library and the pergola among many other fixtures for the Australian Zoroastrian House in Annangrove, Sydney. When presented with an award for these contributions he was highly embarrassed and said that it was just a labour of love.
Cyrus also deeply appreciated Western classical music, especially the compositions of Brahms, Mahler, Wagner whose works he interpreted with understanding.

As a husband he was an inspiration. He indefatigably devoted the last few years of his life caring for and nursing his beloved wife Asha (nee Thackersey) by virtually turning his home into a hospital rehabilitation area, constructing several gadgets personally, including physiotherapy tables for her ease, comfort and security. He also designed and constructed fibreglass prosthetic boots and hand frames to try to combat her spasticity.

Cyrus and Asha were childhood sweethearts, who married in 1972 and remained sweethearts forever. About five years ago Asha suffered a burst aneurysm in the brain. The surgeon saved her life but she became a total paraplegic. After a long stay in hospital, she was in a nursing home for a few weeks but Cyrus was appalled by the care she was receiving.

So he decided to take her home and look after her himself. He converted the best room in the house into a hospital room with all the equipment required to care for her condition. She could not move, talk or eat by mouth but her brain function was, and is, adequate.

At times she suffers from terrible painful spasms mostly in her legs, so Cyrus would sleep on the couch in the same room to be there to help her whenever the spasms came. The strain took an enormous toll on Cyrus’ health. The tragedy is that he died from the same condition as Asha’s. He had survived bowel cancer a decade ago but succumbed to a burst cerebral aneurysm.

He was a wonderful husband, a doting father to his three children and a loving son and brother. A high flyer he provided a model for us to emulate and has left a rich legacy behind. He is survived by wife Asha, children Sasha, Tiwon and Sabrina, mother Akhtar, sisters Putli and Shahnaz, brother Kaikhushroo and three grand children.

To care for Asha was and remained his magnificent obsession.

first met Jehangir Pocha in 1990, when we both entered Mumbai’s SP Jain Institute of Management and Research. I didn’t know then our paths would cross several times, over the next three decades, as he broke one rule after another during his unconventional, yet brilliant career.

Even in those early days, he stood out from the rest of the class. He had an amazing sense of humour, was a great storyteller and loved a good debate. He was a true rock star at all inter-business school competitions, winning prizes in debating, and sweeping every personality contest. He could charm attractive women across our campus. He rarely competed for top grades, didn’t enjoy heavy quant-based courses and believed in the value of a good, liberal education in broadening one’s mind.

When we graduated, Jehangir and I were handpicked by Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA), which was then India’s premier ad agency. The stint proved nothing what we had imagined it would be. There was very little intellectually stimulating work. Much of what we did was run up and down Lakshmi Building in Mumbai’s Fort area, getting artists to complete a pile of artworks in record time. Neither for us stayed there. I quit advertising a year after Jehangir did. He moved to the US to pursue a career with technology major Unisys, and I took my first, uncertain step into business journalism. We lost touch for most part, as he moved from the US to Singapore to head marketing for another software company. But every time he came back to see his mother and his family on his occasional trips to Mumbai, we’d catch up at his sprawling apartment near Breach Candy.

After returning to Mumbai in 1998, he pottered around for a while at an investment bank. But I never got the impression it was

Jehangir Pocha: A master story-teller
by indrajit gupta
something he enjoyed. Destiny had something else in store for him.

In 1999, Jehangir went to Harvard to study foreign policy at the Kennedy School of Government. Around the time he got back, I was working on a cover story for Businessworld on the Pallonji Mistry family. Even though they were the largest shareholders at Tata Sons, little was known about them. No one had attempted to tell their story and how they had come to own a chunk in such a sprawling empire.

Jehangir knew the complex web of relationships and history that defined the Parsi entrepreneurial story. I remember listening intently on the balcony of his home, as he narrated the history of the Tatas, pointing out specific buildings in the vicinity where momentous events had taken place. Those nuggets were invaluable in reconstructing history because until then, it was almost as if someone had deliberately smudged out the Mistry family from the official biographies of the Tatas.

Perhaps this modern-day chronicler in Jehangir came to the fore soon after, as he embarked on the most adventurous chapter in his life: moving to Beijing as a global correspondent at The Boston Globe. By then, China was making its presence felt on the world stage. And he took it upon himself to unravel the mysteries of that mammoth economy, market and society. It was an expensive place to live on a stringer’s salary. And so, I helped him develop a plan, with him to cover China for Businessworld. When Tony Joseph, our editor then, received his pitch, he immediately agreed to a regular feed of stories that would help Indian readers understand China.

Right from the engrossing opening cover piece on how to do business in China, it was an amazing body of work. Jehangir brought to life different facets of the China story — how its big cities were pushing out the poor, the looming water crisis, the surge of the big Chinese brands that were headed to the West ... all written with colour and detail and fearless reporting. Many stories carried risks. Many a time when he called me, he’d surprisingly switch into speaking in Hindi. Later I learnt his phones were tapped and the Chinese authorities monitored his internet activity. Jehangir didn’t care a damn — and continued filing stories for us and other leading publications across the world.

Just when you thought he had found his mojo, life took a different course. Many of us moved out of Businessworld around 2005. And two years later, Aveek Sarkar decided to invite Jehangir to take over as Editor of the magazine. It was a bold move, given that he had never worked inside a newsroom. But then, this wasn’t the first time Sarkar had picked an untested editor. Jehangir was back in Delhi steering the ship, rebuilding the team — and putting together a stronger philosophical underpinning that had gone missing.

He had many detractors. In the hidebound environs of Delhi media, not many people understood his new-fangled ideas for the newsroom, his obsession with China’s economic model, his accent on a broader, global perspective shaping our work as journalists or even his ideas on magazine design. I remember hearing that even the then Finance Minister P Chidambaram once got annoyed with him for arguing with him on some economic policy issue during a post Budget interview. Even though Aveek Sarkar may have heard these voices of dissent, he continued to support Jehangir. He allowed him to bring in global designers and trainers to work with the team — and upgrade skills and standards.

But soon, his own ambitions for the magazine began to outstrip the ability of the somewhat somnolent business system at ABP. They simply couldn’t see eye to eye on the pace of the scale-up. Neatly conceptualised events would go a-begging without sponsors.

Investments in digital would be woefully inadequate. And hirings would take ages to happen.

That may have provided the springboard for Jehangir’s final adventure: as co-founder of
his own venture. After patiently waiting for ABP to play catch up, he chucked it all up, to team up with the promoter of Nai Duniya, to make an audacious bid for NewsX. Just before that, Jehangir told me that he had the backing of several leading industrialists. But when it came to putting up the money, many of them disappeared. Eventually, he raised money and started running it. Despite his best efforts, the channel did not deliver results and it was put on the block.

Congress politician Vinod Sharma’s younger son Kartikeya took over and Jehangir was asked to continue as Editor-in-Chief. It may not have been an easy transition. But NewsX stuck to its core news agenda, eschewing the shrill prime-time debates that dominated the air waves. This was a tricky period, and I am not privy to everything he had to go through to save jobs and offer a sense of continuity to his team.

Around December 2011, the Tata group picked Cyrus Mistry as Ratan Tata’s successor. I was into my third year as founding editor of Forbes India and couldn’t think of anyone better to script the back story of the two families over the years. It was meant to be a sharp 1,000 word piece. In less than a couple of days, Jehangir wrote a defining story. He sheepishly told me after he started, he couldn’t stop writing all night. What emerged was 4,500 words from a master craftsman — and we didn’t have the heart to edit even a wee bit of it. The piece eventually won an award for Best Feature Story at the Red Ink Press Club Awards the next year.

While the transition was on, Jehangir did not give up trying to dream up new ventures. But money had almost dried up in the media industry. We would often talk on the phone and lament the declining fortunes of our profession. He now had a family to look after as well. Perhaps, that curbed his natural instinct to take risks. If images attached to his Facebook posts were any indication, he had quietly begun enjoying his family life.

Less than a week before he passed away, I got a call from him. He sounded agitated. Venture capitalists had promised him they’d step in after the elections. But they hadn’t to back his plans. He wanted to bid for some distressed media assets in play. The frustration was beginning to creep in. “I’m completely frustrated with the Indian system. I’m dying to go abroad,” he told me. I told him we should catch up for a drink the next time he was in Mumbai and talk this over. That meeting never happened.

Today, I’ve lost a dear friend, a confidant who was willing to offer advice whenever I needed — and a fellow professional smitten by the story-telling bug.

Jehangir, I will miss you dearly. May your soul rest in peace.

[Adapted from the original piece written by the author, which was published in http://businessworld.in on July 12, 2014.]
AIESEC. Great journalist & wonderful person. RIP.
Sudheendra Kulkarni
Columnist and chairman of ORF:
Sad to know Jehangir Pocha, a sr journalist with international experience, is no more. I knew him to be a gentle person with a nose for news.
Ayaz Menon Cricketwallah @cricketwallah
Senior Journalist and editor:
Shocked at dear friend & colleague Jehangir Pocha’s sudden death. Man of superb intellect, robust integrity and above all great compassion.
Anupam Kher @AnupamPkher Jul 12
Actor:
Can’t believe that Jehangir Pocha is no more. Just spoke to him few days back. One of the best journalists & human beings. So so sad. RIP
Nilanjana Roy @nilanjanaroy
Independent journalist, author and columnist:
Sorry to hear of Jehangir Pocha’s sudden death: he believed that being a good person was necessary if you wanted to be a good journalist.
Narendra Modi @narendramodi Jul 12
Prime Minister, Govt of India:
Jehangir Pocha will be remembered as a leading voice on TV, print & social media. His frank & insightful views on issues will be missed.
Jessica Mayberry (On Facebook)
I am so deeply saddened by the passing of Jehangir S. Pocha. In 2011, this media mogul created a weekly series called Speak Out India on NewsX centered around our community videos. It was the first time - as far as I know - that any media company had paid for content produced by marginalized communities. He knew it was unsexy; he assumed it wouldn’t rate well. But he did it because he felt it was the right thing to do, and he wanted to be adventurous and use media to change lives. I will never forget the pride of our Community Correspondents as they saw themselves on Jehangir’s channel; just as I will never forget what Jehangir did for community voice in India.
Govindraj Ethiraj @govindethiraj
Founding editor, Bloomberg TV India:
RIP wonderful guy, India’s best China journalist, great writer.
Tony Joseph, former editor, BusinessWorld:
Hard to believe that Jehangir Pocha is no more. We came into contact with each other when I was the Editor of Businessworld and was looking for someone to cover China. He was already the Beijing Correspondent of a US publication, and his ideas on what he could do for BusinessWorld were robust enough for us to engage him. He delivered as well as he promised and so a few years later in early 2007, when I was leaving Businessworld to head a venture that I had co-founded, Jehangir’s was one of the three names I had recommended to Mr Aveek Sarkar of the ABP as potential successors. It then fell to me to convince Jehangir to come on board. We had long conversations about why it made sense for him to come to Delhi and start engaging with the Indian story, rather than the Chinese one. He took the challenge and the rest is history. He was full of life, always had ambitious plans for the future, and made a positive difference wherever he was. I am glad that I had a chance to get to know him. It is very sad that he is no longer with us.
Pierre Fitter, a young journalist who worked with Jehangir Pocha at BW and NewsX:
There are many examples about JP’s personal generosity. Like the time he offered an ex-colleague his chauffeur and car for as long as she needed, when a close relative passed away. Or the time he personally marched down to India Gate when one of his young reporters was injured during the Delhi Gangrape protests. Or the time he offered another ex-colleague a job because her previous employer would not take her back after she’d taken a break following the death of a parent.
But the one thing he was most generous with was his time. He’d work with young reporters for hours to improve their stories & story-telling ... adding a fact here, or turning a brilliant little phrase there. He exhorted us to “elevate” our stories. He was an aesthete. Style mattered as much as substance. He’d counsel us about love, friendship, career choices, lifestyle choices. He’d talk movies, books, religion, philosophy, music (he loved his music, as most Parsis do!). He was a keen photographer and would spend time with the camera team, discussing their fine art.
None of this was work for him. This was about building his people. And it never mattered whether we excelled under his employment or our next. He took pleasure in seeing us grow.
Wu Nan
Journalist and worked with Jehangir in Beijing:
“Jehangir, what does your name mean?”
You explained that it was the name of an ancient Indian king. Then you asked me, “Could you give me a Chinese name. I’ll need it for reporting in China in the future. People may not know how to pronounce my name.”
After some thinking, I recommended the name Bo Hanjie. Bo sounded like your last name “Pocha.” It means knowledgeable in Chinese. Only later did I know that you were a graduate of Harvard University. So it was a nice fit. Hanjie sounded similar to your first name.

It literally translated as “the excellent one among men.” Jie alone means hero, just like your Indian king was.

You loved the name and asked me to write it down. In fact, soon afterwards you used it to register for your press card with the Chinese foreign ministry. You told me that the registration officer said your Chinese name was so “heroic.”

Thus you became known in China as Bo Hanjie, and you will be remembered as Bo Hanjie, by my family, by your cleaning lady and by the hundreds of Chinese whom we interviewed and wrote about for more than three years.

Your reputation soared as we did many in-depth and unique stories on China. I can still recall some of them.

In Autumn 2005, we interviewed Zheng Bijian, the former director of China Reform Forum and a senior advisor to the Chinese leadership, who was known as the one who coined the term “China’s peaceful rise.”

I was a bit stressed out because he was almost the highest-ranking Chinese officials we could do long interviews face-to-face with, and I had to do spontaneous translation. I had a week ahead to prepare, absorbing all the media reports and talks by Zheng, and grasping many political terms.

At the interview, I was stuck by what a tough man Zheng was. Sometimes, his piercing eyes made me sweat. But your composure calmed me down. I could feel your complete trust in me and carefully listened to every word I was translating.

That interview with Zheng turned out to be a great success, and the story was distributed widely. As hard as it often is to satisfy both the readers and the interviewee, Zheng’s secretary called later to say that they liked our reporting after studying the Chinese translation of the story.

That was not the only success. What you wrote about China and India’s soft-power race, Professor Joseph Nye quoted in his well-known book “Soft Power.” I met Nye last October in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He still talked about you and that story.

Tata Sons: Passing the Baton
by jehangir pocha

The passing of a crown is always a delicate affair. In 1991, when JRD Tata handed his to Ratan Naval Tata, his courtiers had rebelled. It took time for RNT to subdue the satraps and prove JRD’s decision on his successor was perhaps his finest. But then JRD was always renowned for his ability to pick men. The circumstances around anointing RNT’s successor exactly two decades later were rather different. The world and the Tatas had changed.

It would take more than an arbitrary announcement from RNT to achieve a smooth succession in what is now one of the world’s largest conglomerates. So, if Cyrus P Mistry is the first Tata head to have been crowned by committee rather than King, and the first from outside India Inc.’s first family, it is a testament to Tatas’ ability to move with the times. Yet, to those who know Tatas and its history, there is also no doubt that there is a continuing thread of history in Mistry’s appointment.

Ties between the Mistry and Tata families have been close — and contentious — ever since 1936 when Cyrus’s grandfather Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry bought 17.5 percent of Tatas’ main holding company, Tata Sons. Shapoorji’s frugal and industrious father Pallonji was a builder, but construction then was not the lucrative business it is today. The family lived in a cramped tenement near Grant Road in Mumbai and built their future stone by stone.

At around the same time, the 1860s, Nussurwanji Tata and his cousin and brother-in-law Dadabhoy Tata were just entering ‘the China trade’, a euphemism for the ships that ran from India to China, carrying opium on the way in and tea, silks and pearls on the way out.

Both Tatas made a fortune in the business. But unlike other traders, there lurked an industrialist’s soul in both Nussurwanji’s and Dadabhoy’s sons, Jamsetji and Ratanji (RD).
While other traders spent their wealth building sumptuous homes that still grace Mumbai’s streets, in 1874, Jamsetji and RD ploughed their profits into building the Empress Mills in Nagpur. The US civil war had taken American cotton off the market and Indian textile companies like Empress Mills made a killing.

Even as the Tatas prospered, the Mistrys struggled. But Shapoorji was tenacious and formed an eponymous company Shapoorji Pallonji & Co. whose flawless execution of several contracts impressed architects and clients. But the real turn in Shapoorji’s fortunes came when he began building homes for the city’s elite.

One of them was the eminent landowner-lawyer-financier Framroze Edulji Dinshaw. The scion of a landed family, he grew his inheritance to include some 2,200 acres of land and even today his estate is one of Mumbai’s biggest landowners.

Dinshaw was a close associate of the Tatas and in the 1920s asked famed architect George Wittet, who’d designed Tatas’ HQ, Bombay House and Victoria Terminus, to build him a house in Poona. When Dinshaw showed Wittet’s drawings to his friend Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, the banker insisted that the only contractor who would do it justice was the man who had just built his own home, Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry. Dinshaw and Shapoorji got along famously.

When the Tatas began executing their vision of industrialising India, Dinshaw was instrumental in financing them.

This was crucial to Tatas’ success. While Jamsetji’s vision of building India’s first steel mill and hydro power plant transformed industry in India, the projects almost bankrupted the Tatas. If they persevered it was because of a sense of mission.

After Jamsetji’s death in 1904, the onus of executing his grand vision fell to his sons, Sir Dorabji and Sir Ratanji. They were joined by Jamsetji’s old partner R D Tata. The three merged RD’s family firm Tata & Company with Jamsetji’s family firm Tata & Sons to create the company that eventually brought the Tatas and Mistrys together — Tata Sons.

It remains Tatas’ main holding company to this day.

Tatas’ suffered another setback when Sir Ratanji died prematurely in England at the age of 47. He was a sensitive and artistic man who initiated many of Tatas’ social works.

Sir Ratanji was childless, and after setting aside the Tata Palace opposite the Bombay Gymkhana and a small portion of his approximately 40 percent stake in Tata Sons for his widow, Lady Navajbai Tata, he bequeathed his assets worth about Rs. 80 lakh to the Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

The move transformed Tatas. Not only did Sir Ratanji’s endowment establish Tatas’ trusteeship principle, as one of the oldest charitable institutions in India, it pioneered modern ideas of secular, social services-oriented philanthropy.

Now, the hand of God is always present in the fortunes of men. When Sir Ratanji died, the Tatas, all observant Zoroastrians from a priestly family, were unsure of how to perform his Uthamna, or death ceremony, as it is traditionally conducted by a son.

Sir Dorabji decided the solution lay in Lady Navajbai adopting one of four young orphans he was sheltering in an orphanage. The boys were the children of Ratanbai Rao, the niece of Sir Jamsetji Tata’s wife Hirabai and the boys’ father, Hormusji, was also a Tata.

Lady Navajbai agreed and chose the one “with the nicest eyes”. His name was Naval Hormusji Tata. At the time, Lady Tata probably had no inkling of how her decision was destined to echo through history.

Sir Dorabji also remained childless. The Tatas, as business chronicler Gita Piramal put it, “are not a fecund family”.

But R D Tata’s branch of the clan had no such reproductive problems. He married a French lady, Suzanne Briere, and they had five
children, Sylla, Jehangir (JRD), Rodabeh, Darab and Jimmy.

In an interesting footnote to history, RD christened his wife Sooni and tried to have her converted to Zoroastrianism. But the Parsi community, which bases its identity on its Persian origins and ancient faith, objected and RD lost what became the community’s first court case on conversion.

Through all this, RD and Sir Dorabji soldiered on, often risking their personal wealth and doubtless their health, to build Tata Steel and Tata Hydro. Dinshaw continued to fund and advice them, and his role and importance in the group grew.

When Tata Steel fell into serious financial trouble in 1924, Sir Dorabji pledged his entire fortune worth about Rs. 1 crore (including his wife's jewelry and Tatas' renowned family home Esplanade House) to bail out the company. This was despite the fact that Sir Dorabji now owned less than 25 percent in Tata Steel.

Dinshaw also stepped up to lend Tata Sons another crore, a fabulous sum at the time. In 1926, Dinshaw agreed to loan Tata Sons another crore, this time to rescue the flailing Tata Hydro.

In return, Dinshaw was to get 25 percent of the money Tata Sons made from Tata Steel and 12.5 percent of the money it made from Tata Hydro in its then capacity of managing agent.

But Tata Sons never managed to repay Dinshaw in full and over the years his outstanding loans got converted into equity. The exact size of Dinshaw’s take in Tata Sons has never been formally disclosed but it has been estimated to be 12.5 percent.

Initially, this didn’t bother anyone because Dinshaw had such close financial and social ties with the group and family.

In fact, JRD considered Dinshaw to be “the most brilliant man” he’d ever met and was grateful for his seasoned advice and presence on the board. If JRD could have seen the future, he’d have felt differently. But in 1926, the young Tata was dealing with another crisis. His father died in Paris at the age of 70.

RD left his entire estate to JRD, his eldest son, making him the second-largest shareholder in Tata Sons after Sir Dorabji. But

JRD was a modernist and his father’s patriarchal decision didn’t sit well with him. So, he divided his inheritance equally between his siblings. It was a decision that would come back to haunt him and Tatas.

At the time, JRD was too busy battling demons of a more immediate nature.

RD died owing large sums of money to Sir Dorabji. By this time, Sir Dorabji had become a cantankerous old man, often at odds with his brother’s and JRD’s family.

It rankled JRD all his life that the dying and childless Dorabji made him repay all his father’s debts, even forcing him to sell his family’s much-loved Malabar Hill house, named Sunita (for Sooni Tata) after his mother.

Dorabji finally died in 1932, leaving his entire fortune, including some 40 percent in Tata Sons, to the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

So, it was now estimated that about 80 percent of Tata Sons was owned by the trusts. Dinshaw was believed to own about 12.5 percent and JRD’s and Naval’s family the rest.

In a final snub to JRD and Naval, Dorabji gladly carried out his father’s will by ensuring his ageing cousin Nowroji Saklatvala headed Tatas instead of them.

Saklatvala was the son of Jamsetji’s sister Virbaiji Tata and Bapuji Saklatvala. He’d served
in Tatas’ Svadeshi Mills and had proved to be a reliable insider. Saklatvala’s short and unexceptional reign at Tatas turned out to be crucial for one man — Shapoorji Pallonji, and by extension his grandson, Cyrus, who might otherwise have never come to head Tatas.

Imagine the world of 1932 when Saklatvala took over. All the ‘four greats’ who had established Tatas — Jamsetji, Dorabji, Ratanji and RD — were gone. Lady Navajbai Tata was the only surviving link to the old days.

The intense and driven JRD was a natural leader but too young to be chairman. The gregarious and non-confrontational Naval Tata appears to have reconciled early to playing a supportive role in the group.

Globally, the Great Depression and fascism were consuming America and Europe. In India, the freedom movement was promising liberty but also threatening instability. The British Empire seemed like it was falling into complacent decay.

So, it was in the keeping of things that ancients like Saklatvala and Dinshaw ruled Tatas. They met every noon but the old energy was gone and the group tread water.

When Dinshaw died in 1936, his estate fragmented. His land went to the F E Dinshaw Estate, which is now administered by Nusli Wadia. The bungalow Shapoorji built for Dinshaw in Poona ended up becoming the Tata Management Training Centre.

Old timers say Dinshaw’s stake in Tata Sons was also poised to transfer to a trust. But one man saw the opportunity in acquiring it, and he did.

Shapoorji Pallonji had by then become one of Bombay’s pre-imminent builders. He had also become very close to Dinshaw. He saw the value of buying Dinshaw’s stake in Tata Sons when few others had the foresight, gumption or cash to do the same.

How exactly Shapoorji got Dinshaw’s heirs and trustees to sell him the Tata Sons stake in still unclear. No conclusive account of what happened has ever been issued.

Those well disposed to Shapoorji say it was a simple, straightforward sale. Those less well inclined to the master builder say he used a unique blend of sophistry, charm, pressure and cajoling to get what he wanted out of family members and trustees who were aging, ignorant and trusting. The truth, as always, probably lies somewhere in between.

What is clear is that Saklatvala knew Shapoorji — he had built Saklatvala’s grand new home. But why Saklatvala did nothing to prevent Shapoorji’s entry into Tata Sons is a matter no one from the Tata group or family has ever discussed.

But JRD was incensed at Shapoorji’s “intrusion” into Tatas. He got even more infuriated when Shapoorji proceeded to buy further stakes in Tata Sons from his siblings, Sylla and Darab Tata.

The young Darab had always envied his older brother and was given to emotional outbursts. He reportedly sold out to Shapoorji in a fit of rage, just to spite JRD.

All in all, Shapoorji came to own about 17.5 percent in Tata Sons by the time Saklatvala died in 1938. The trusts held just under 80 percent, and JRD and Naval’s family the balance.

Bombay House old timers liked to sit over a beer and muse that if JRD had been chairman of Tata Sons instead of Saklatvala he would have fought Pallonji off. But as a director he didn’t have the muscle, and as a son who’d just paid his father’s debts, he didn’t have the money to bid for Dinshaw’s stake himself.

In many ways, the story echoed the experience of countless Parsi families, where eccentric individuals often fought excessively over trifles, losing themselves and their wealth in a maze of litigation, accusation and resentment.

JRD himself never spoke publicly about Shapoorji, Darab or Sylla, as was the norm in the days when grace mattered and linen was never washed in public. But he did say in his later years that Shapoorji took advantage of people who were “weak-willed and credulous”.

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JRD liked to joke that the Tata Sons board made him chairman in a moment of mental aberration. He surrounded himself with exceptional managers and threw the somnolent group into expansion mode. Tata Chemicals was incorporated in 1939 and became India’s first soda-ash supplier under Darbari Seth. Tata Motors was established in 1945 and nurtured by Sumant Moolgaokar. Tata Steel grew under Homi, and then, Russi Mody. JRD himself was the steward of Air India’s growth, even after its nationalisation in 1953. Naval Tata led the Tata electric companies, and the group’s textile and oil mills.

It is a testament to JRD’s values that despite his miniscule holdings and shrinking personal wealth, he gave the bulk of his estate to the JRD Tata Trust in 1944, when he was just 40.

With JRD and Naval now holding miniscule stakes in Tata Sons, they controlled the group through three means. Their family trusts controlled about 80 percent of Tata Sons. Secondly, India still had the managing agency system and Tata Sons and other holding companies, such as Tata Industries, were the management agents for all Tata companies. Lastly, both Tatas carried the natural authority of their surnames, and, though this was more so in JRD’s case, their personalities.

Shapoorji was smart enough to see his 17.5 percent stake was no match for this. His family was limited to having just one seat on the Tata Sons board, which is the case even today. His shares also gave him no authority to nominate board members and the company’s existing directors were all loyal to JRD.

Shapoorji was also smart enough to see there was more value in him letting JRD’s team grow Tatas than in trying to do so himself.

“He was practical, he was not aggressive,” a Tata insider says. “He committed to JRD that he would never vote against Tatas.”

So Shapoorji channeled his ambitions through his own firm, which quickly became India’s premier construction company.

Name almost any landmark in Mumbai and it has probably been built by Shapoorji Pallonji & Co., be it Brabourne Stadium, Bombay Central station, Breach Candy Hospital, State Bank of India’s HQ, or the World Trade Centre. Shapoorji also expanded into industrial construction and foreign markets, building power plants and palaces for oil sheiks with equal success.

Despite becoming far wealthier than the Tatas, Shapoorji remained invisible to the world. He loathed publicity, ignored the social circuit and spent most of his free time with family. “He was fairly religious. He did his kusti (prayers said holding the sacred thread) everyday and even slapped himself for his sins,” one old-timer says.

When a Tata executive once described Shapoorji as “a shadowy figure in Bombay House”, the label stuck.

After Shapoorji’s death in 1975, his son Pallonji took his place in Tata Sons. The Mistrys’ tradition of naming their sons after the father has created a good deal of confusion. Since Parsis use their father’s name as their middle name, people often thought the first Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry, Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry and Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry were the same person.

In reality, father and son were very different. “Pallonji established a much better relationship with JRD. They got to being cordial,” a Tata insider said. “Pallon never interfered, never challenged, and never sought any power.”

Pallonji was as obsessively private as his father, earning him the sobriquet, ‘the phantom of Bombay House’. He was also as shrewd and patient as his father. The Mistry’s fortune crossed a billion dollars under Pallonji, and one reason was his better ties with Tatas. This allowed the Mistrys to gain several Tata agencies and win lucrative contracts from Tata companies such as Tata Power. Pallonji also appeared to have the Right of First Refusal on Tata businesses, buying companies such as Forbes & Company when Tatas exited them.
Since JRD and his wife Thelma were childless, it began to be reasoned that Tata Sons’ next chairman would either be a professional, a Mistry, or one of the three sons Naval Tata had from his two marriages. The first, to Soonoo Commisariat, had produced Ratan and Jimmy Tata. Their half-brother, Noel, was born after Naval’s second marriage to Simone Dunoyer.

The marriage of Pallonji’s daughter, Aloo, to Noel, helped ease tensions between the Tatas and Mistrys. But it also created new ones. “It became natural to look at Noel as a future Tata chairman. But Tatas have never worked this way and it annoyed people,” the same Tata insider said.

When JRD finally chose Ratan Tata (RNT) as his successor in 1991 he was motivated by two things. “Ratan is young and modern, others are old,” JRD told an interviewer. Later, he told his biographer Russi Lala, “I chose Ratan because of his memory. Ratan will be more like me.”

As someone basically brought up by his grandmother, Lady Navajbai Tata, JRD realised Ratan possessed very strong ethics, integrity and feeling for the group. Also, Ratan hadn’t parachuted into his position but had spent 16 long years working in Tata Steel’s furnaces and another decade turning around Tata companies and starting new ones in sunrise sectors like IT and biotechnology. JRD liked that and Pallonji accepted his decision. “Pallon liked Ratan,” the insider says. “They grew more and more cordial.”

Their one common mission was to improve financial controls in a group seeing a fair bit of financial misappropriation and to rid Tatas of satraps like Russi Mody and Darbari Seth who were overstepping their authority. After intense corporate battles, RNT accomplished this by simply enforcing a forgotten rule that set 75 as the retirement age for Tata directors.

There were face-offs. RNT was worried about Tatas fragmenting and set about shoring up stakes in group companies and building interlocking holdings between them. To finance this, Tata Sons issued rights shares in 1996. The trusts didn’t subscribe to their rights but signed them over to Tata companies like Tata Steel. As a result, the trusts’ holding in Tata Sons fell to 66 percent and Tata companies came to own 13 percent in the holding company. Controversially, the companies paid for their stakes by issuing rights shares to their shareholders.

Mistry spent Rs. 60 crore maintaining his stake, which had now inched up to 18.5 percent.

Then, during the 1990s IT boom, the Mistrys wanted to list TCS, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Sons valued at a stupendous $50 billion.

But RNT demurred. TCS was a cash cow Tata Sons used to up stakes in other companies. Taking TCS public would have restricted the manner in which its huge profits could be used.

When RNT finally agreed to selling 10 percent of TCS to the public in 2003, he cut a deal with the Mistrys that gave the Tata companies and trusts greater say in Tata Sons. RNT did this by getting Tata Sons to announce a buyback of up to 20 percent of its shares.

The trusts announced they would not participate in the buyback and hold onto their shares. This resulted in their shareholding in Tata Sons going up to 68 percent.

The Mistrys agreed to participate in the buyback, which brought their shareholding in Tata Sons down to 18 percent.

In return for not participating in the buyback, the trusts and Tata companies got TCS shares that yielded them huge profits when the company listed. The deal enhanced the trusts’ say in Tata Sons and ensured that Tata shareholders who participated in the controversial 1996 rights issue were rewarded.

Pallonji stepped down from the Tata Sons board in 2005, shortly after turning 75 and chose Cyrus to take his place. To his elder son Shapoor, Pallonji gave management of his eponymous construction company.
His succession done, Pallonji acquired Irish citizenship and retired to a mansion overlooking a spot where Ireland's rolling hills sweep down to meet the sea.

In 2005, RNT had just pulled off a coup. Earlier, the Tata trusts' control over their assets was subject to oversight by the Charity Commissioner. RNT convinced the government to allow trust boards full control over their decisions. With this he, and all future Tata trust chairmen, were once again in real control of the trusts and company their forefathers had founded. JRD must have smiled.

Power and privilege are never easy to give up. Yet, when in 2007, I had asked RNT if he would retire when he turned 75 in 2012 he had said with some feeling that he didn’t “want to go out in a wheelchair”. Many had waved off the comment, cynically assuming that RNT would ignore the retirement age he’d enforced for others and would stay in office until the very end, just like Jamsetji, Dorabji, Saklatvala, and JRD.

That in November 2011 Tatas announced RNT’s successor to be Cyrus Mistry and that the two would work together for a year to enable the transition, is a testimony to RNT’s precision, professionalism and sincerity.

Perhaps no one has done as much to nurture Tatas’ legacy, and most importantly to institutionalise and imbed it in the DNA of the group’s 82 companies and 425,000 employees. For RNT, Tatas is life; the companies, the family, the trusts and the employees all deeply intertwined into his very being. How else could he have written his first strategic plan for the group from the bedside of his dying mother, almost as a testament and tribute to her?

If despite this strength of feeling, RNT was able to step away from a position others would have died, or killed for, it’s because he was never consumed by hubris or swept away by his own press. Though he grew up like royalty, he was always embarrassed by it, perhaps because he internalised his father’s own experience of poverty and the capriciousness of fate. It was the innate sense of decency and rectitude that RNT learnt from his grandmother and father that led him to carry his own bags, handwrite his letters, and expect more from himself than anyone else. As the son of the man JRD eclipsed, he never fully expected to head the group and remains grateful enough to have just had the honour.

Also childless, like so many Tatas, if RNT resisted the urge to try and preserve his life’s work by handpicking his own successor, it is because he is believing and sincere in his desire to do — and be seen to do — the right and professional thing. Rather than have someone beholden to him, RNT wanted someone who would forge his own path. All RNT felt it necessary for him to do was to ensure the committee tasked to find his successor represented every contending interest in Tatas and was empowered to express their choice.

How much did RNT influence the committee? It’s hard to say. His comment that he’d like his successor to be in his 40s was a clear hint. His later comment that Noel was not adequately prepared for the job probably closed that option.

Has Cyrus been a wise choice? Would a professional have been able to hold the group together? Can a non-Parsi ever head a group founded by a Zoroastrian priestly family steeped in a culture of Gujarati jokes, and middle-class Parsi values?

Only time will tell. But as RNT and Cyrus sit back and reflect on the founding vision, the family squabbles, the twists of fate, the personal rivalries and friendships, the deeds of kindness and bravery and the acts of deceit and greed that have combined to bring them both to where they are, one realisation is bound to dawn — that Tatas has a heartbeat and power of its own. If they tap into it, and stay true to it, the rest will take care of itself.

For this story, Jehangir Pocha won the award for Best Feature Story at the Red Ink Press Club Awards in 2012. Reprinted with the kind permission of the Editor of Forbes India, Mr R Jagannathan.
Ardeshir's raspberry soda is Pune's very own drink. Now 130 years later Murzban Irani, great grandson continues the legacy. His family first arrived in India in the mid 19c from Iran, when Ardeshir spent his first few years in Bombay before finally making Pune his home. He pioneered the local drink, named it Ardeshir's, which was savoured by the British soldiers and a few Indians. Traditionally known for its two flavours, soda and raspberry, today it boasts 10 flavours, and even presently is modestly priced at Rs7.

Watch out for a new coffee table book, set to be released in 2015. The Irani Cafes of Bombay by Simin Patel and photographer Hashim Badani. Simin says “There has been no in depth study – one that combines a historical archive with an oral one,” ... “All the attention attests to how well-loved and cherished the cafes are. The more they are in the limelight, the better it is for everyone”.

With the football mania emanating this summer, more so due to the World Cup in Brazil, we have our own 25 year old, Sanaya Anklesaria. She has represented Maharashtra thrice and captained the team in 2008. Two years ago she stepped into coaching studs.

Yazdi Tantra in July said: “When we started the blog in 2007, we had no idea that we would reach a million hits with a community as small as ours.” The main focus of zoroastrians.net is to be positive, having input on food, education, matrimony, religion, naviotes and weddings, interesting galleries, topical news and some fun stuff too are all available on this site. The sister sites are:

www.TheParsiDirectory.com
www.TheParsiFamily.com
www.TheParsiInstitutions.com
www.TheMissingParsi.com

Jiyo Parsi, sponsored by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India came into being in July of this year commencing with a workshop in August where 20 couples were accepted on a first cum first basis. This was the first in the series promoting a holistic approach to change the often negative perceptions our community has towards relationships. The Jiyo Parsi scheme has two important components: advocacy and medical treatment. The medical assistance involves treating fertility-related issues. If couples need further treatment, the scheme provides for assisted reproductive technologies like IVF. “Parsis are very conservative and many of them are reluctant to go for IVF treatment. But we are reaching out to them and counselling them,” Cama, the Parzor Foundation director, said. Fertility centres have been set up in Jaslok hospital in Mumbai and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi. Six couples have been initially accepted receiving funds from the Centre for infertility treatment, which has been successful and the good news is, at least seven babies are expected. During the first week of October, the first set of twins – a boy and a girl – have been born under this scheme. With a funding of Rs 10 crore over a four-year period, Parsi couples having trouble conceiving can undergo in vitro fertilisation, artificial insemination, and other infertility treatments, and also get the treatment cost reimbursed. The Jiyo Parsi initiative has been implemented by the Parzor Foundation. Sam Balsara and his team at Madison have designed a four-pronged campaign that urges Parsis to have early marriages, childbirth, provide the child with a sibling and even have a third baby.

Pirojsha Godrej, youngest son of Adi Godrej, with his management skills is virtually changing the real estate industry by formulating corporate strategy. With his outstanding reputation for quality and innovation, he is popularly known as “developer with extraordinaire spark or recognition in the construction world”. Pirojsha has said, ‘we sell reality not dreams. We build homes not houses and keep in mind that customer satisfaction is always the priority. We want that every person should have their own home.’
Pharma billionaire Cyrus Poonawalla, of Serum Institute of India, is said to have bid $937 million, for London’s Grosvenor House Hotel. “The 494-room property, located in the Mayfair area and managed by JW Marriott, is owned by the Sahara India Group whose controversial boss Subrata Roy has been languishing in an Indian jail since March for dues owed to the market regulator, the Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Khushroo Poacha, a superintendent with the Indian railways, runs Indianblooddonors.com at the same time. It is a SMS, IVRS and Mobile App based helpline which assists patients requiring blood donors to connect with voluntary blood donors. When asked how he thought of this project, his reply was “1999 was the year of the dotcom era. Everybody and anybody were launching a website every day. We did not know how to make a website. I did my research across magazines and later one of my brother’s friend helped me in making a website for Rs 15,000. I almost spent my saving and some from my provident fund to shape my thoughts. I call this moment as Eureka moment.” His full interview is available on http://insideiim.com/just-call-for-blood-interview-with-khushroo-poacha-founder-indianblooddonors-com/  

47-year-old Narius Patel, an IT consultant specializing in data warehousing is a guitar man. He feels strongly the community should encourage the youth to take up their passion in music whether it be classical or rock. Whilst speaking to Parsiana he said “we need to encourage participation from an early age and also create a more positive perception of the arts.” He further said, “The arts should not take a backseat to academic success.” Narius entertains people as a hobby who regularly sings and plays the guitar in local pubs and even on radio stations. He has been playing and singing for the past 32 years, a self taught musician.

Zarathustra’s Advent date: Edul Kanga writes, “for an incomprehensible reason, some Parsis think that 3500 years ago, means 3500BC not realizing that 3500 years ago means 1486BC which is 5514 years ago”. He has written a paper Non-Zoroastrian scholars on Zoroastrianism which is available on request from Mr Kanga – ekanga@sympatico.ca

Vistasp Kharas, the Bandra architect, who was beaten up for stopping two men in a BMW from littering, has become the face of Mumbai, against litter-bugs. Vistasp suffered from a broken nose, bloodied lips and bruised shoulder when he questioned the two men for throwing out the empty can from their car. This episode has prompted a campaign for punishment to those who throw litter from their cars.

The Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago held a one day conference arranged by the Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism on 6th September.

The Museum Society of Bombay screened the film “Legacy of the Flame” on 13th August. The film deals with the panorama of the Parsi community right from the past, with archaeological facts and their contribution to the Indian community. A considerable emphasis has been made on the present scenario and how young urban Parsis are dealing with contemporary situations which face the community and its future.

The oldest fire temple in Mumbai, the Dadysett Atash Behram at Chira Bazar is now 232 years old. It was consecrated by Mulla Kaus Rustam Jalal in 1783 and is listed as a heritage structure. It has a goat pen, a barn for a white bull, an imposing portico and a shady walkway. The Parsi Prakash, a periodical of yesteryears, wrote, ‘a jashan to invoke rains was organized by the Parsi Punchayat on June 30, 1824. The next day at 5am, there were heavy showers for 10 minutes!’

On 23 August, The Persian Zoroastrian Organisation at San Jose, honoured and celebrated the contributions made by Mr Jamshid Pishdadi, who has served the community for over 60 years by teaching and educating. He has been instrumental in the promotion and education of the Zoroastrian culture, religion, history and language through written articles, and several published books.
The House of the People (the Lok Sabha) has 543 elected members and 2 nominated seats. Article 331 of the Constitution stipulates that the nominated seats are exclusively for members of the Anglo-Indian community. This provision was made in 1950 in order to reassure the Anglo-Indians that their voice would continue to be heard in Parliament even after the departure of the British. Meanwhile, another community – the Parsis – which has made an extraordinary contribution in various walks of life in the country faces the threat of extinction. It is therefore proposed that Article 331 and 333 of the Constitution be amended to throw open the nominated seats in the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies to both the Anglo-Indians and the Parsis. This will give much needed political strength to India’s smallest ethnic cum religious minority and reinforce the country’s commitment to its secular ideals. Side by side, this move will preserve the nation’s commitment to the Anglo-Indian community despite its depleting numbers.

Written for today’s generation of cooks and food enthusiasts, the cookbook “Parsi Cuisine Manna of the 21st Century” by Rita Jamshed Kapadia provides classical and regional Parsi recipes as well as an introduction to its heritage, history, and culture. The book’s full colour photographs and 340 pages are intertwined with descriptions of ancient and modern Parsi ceremonies, poetry, folktales, travelogue excerpts and anecdotes. Paperback, available for US$50.

Archeologists in Northwest China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region have discovered major Zoroastrian tombs, dated to over 2,500 years ago. This unravelling is leading to startling controversial speculation about the religion’s origin. On China’s sparsely populated Pamir Plateau, ancient people lived and battled, and created a marvelous civilization. These massive tombs, now being excavated, are the world’s earliest traces of the religion of Zoroastrianism found so far.

The only Parsi family in Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Gondia and Bhandara districts of the Vidarbha region, is Mahiyar Gundevia (65) with his wife Minnie who live in their ancestral home at their farm in Rajura. They have been the only two Parsis living here since 1987. Previously seven to eight families in Ballarpur and Chandrapur emigrated in the 1970s to Nagpur and Mumbai. They have no plans of moving and count their three German Shepherds as their best companions and caretakers!
**Requiem for a Bird**: Documentary on the Towers of Silence. A short documentary portraying traditional interviews with animation and choreographed dance which will throw light on the private and public lives of the Parsi through their spiritual relationship to the vultures. Cristin Hughes, a freelance producer is working on this film and is planning to start filming in Mumbai in January 2015.

The European Centre for Zoroastrian Studies in Brussels organized a 3-day congress in Copenhagen during 1st – 3rd August. About 40 speakers, musicians, dancers, singers, theatre actors, sound technicians, and programme planners took part in this event. Amongst the topics discussed the participants were reminded of Zarathushtra’s philosophy -

“The aim of our life is to live a happy and joyful existence on this earth”; and “the purpose of our creation is to take part actively in improving this world, so that all living beings: humans, animals and plants live in peace and fulfillment”.

The BPP announced in early September, Dr Cyrus Poonawalla desire to gift a sum of Rs10,000 per annum on the occasion of the Shahenshahi Navroze to both practicing and non practicing mobeds of India. The list of 215 mobeds available with the BPP has been forwarded to Dr Poonawalla.

**The Buckingham Secret** had its premier at the Tata Theatre, NCPA on 13th September. This is NCPAs fifth production, which was a comedy. “According to this fictitious story, somewhere down the bloodline, the British Royal family was ‘compromised’ with a Parsi heir, and so, the current generation of monarchs —from Queen Elizabeth to Prince Harry — are actually Parsis! This also includes everyone who marries into the family. No one, except the trusted royal butler (who is also a Bawa) knows that the British family is actually a closeted Parsi family, with all their eccentricities in place. The audience gets to witness what happens behind the closed doors of the palace and naturally, it’s good fun to see the Queen bickering in Parsi-Gujarati with hubby Prince Philip, or Diana reveal she is as Bawi as can be. Of all the characters, it’s Prince Philip who steals the show.”

Meherzad Patel is writer and director of the play with Sabira Merchant playing the Queen, supported by Danesh Irani, Nauheed Cyrusi, Azmin Mistry and others.

ZTFE London held a Gala Charity Night on 11th October in aid of the B D Petit Parsee General Hospital, Mumbai. Present for this occasion was Mr Homa Petit with his wife Aban, who flew to London for this event. Mr Petit is the Chairman of the hospital and a leading solicitor in Mumbai. ZTFE took the opportunity, to honour Mr Sarosh Zaiwalla who with his firm has been a success for the past 30 years in London. (see Hamazor Issue 3/2014 where Mr Zaiwalla was interviewed).

A 43-year-old Parsi, Mehrnoskh Khambatta of Mumbai with his family celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi each year with fanfare and proceed to Navsari to bring home Lord Ganesh. “I start preparing for my Bappa since May. The artisans from Surat make ornaments using jari thread and American diamonds to adorn the idol made from clay. (Apparently the diamonds cost Rs136,000). I have been doing this for the last nine years. My mother told me that when I was five years old I uttered Ganpati Bappa Morya and since that day I have been a devoted bhakt of Ganpati,” he said. What is surprising is that in Navsari’s Juna Thana, Parsis residing in the area join the Khambattas in celebration during the 10 days after installation. They help in cleaning, performing the puja and also the immersion celebrations. (The pure Parsi race ...?)

24-year-old Avesta, her nom de guerre was the same as our holy book. She was a Kurd and part of the group of 13 fighters whom she commanded. Eight of them are female from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a rebel group that has fought the Turkish states for three decades in pursuit of Kurdish rights, and consider Zoroastrianism as their original creed. In a four-day battle that ended on 10th August against the IS, the Kurdish guerrillas retook control of their main target, a camp of more than 10,000 Kurdish refugees. Avesta
was killed on September 12th when she was leading a unit to re-take a village near Makhmour.

Shahrokh Shahrokh, founder member of WZO, and its first joint Honorary Secretary; past President of ZTFE, passed away on 16th September in London. Shahrokh was an architect, who designed and supervised in an honorary capacity the construction of the extension at the old Zoroastrian House. Later he volunteered his services for renovating the Grade II listed art deco heritage building which today, is the Zoroastrian Centre at Harrow. Shahrokh being a good friend of late Mobed Mehraban Zartoshty, was instrumental in the late Zartoshty brothers, to donate large sums both to ZTFE and to SOAS where the Zartoshty Brothers Chair in Zoroastrian Studies is established.

The Kamran Dar-e Meher, opened on 20th September for the residents of the Washington DC area. It is a gift to ZAMWI from the philanthropic Iranian Zarathushti, late Khodamorad Kamran, his wife Banoo and the Kamran family. It was made possible with further donations received from over 200 individuals and five associations. The Prayer Hall is still to be furnished which hopefully will be completed in the coming months. This is the second Dar-e Mehr to be inaugurated in North America, the earlier one being in Dallas, Texas.

Afshad Mistri living in Mountain View, California has been working at Apple headquarters for nine-years. He has been leading Apple’s entry into Healthcare with the Health app on iOS 8 that is now touching millions of iPhone users. Afshad has been working with the Special Projects team on HealthKit API’s and Apple Watch for over two years. With the new Health app, iPhone users will have an easy to read dashboard of their health and fitness metrics. Users will also be able to send their data directly to their physicians, which will reduce healthcare costs and keep patients connected to their healthcare providers.

As the White House was interested in learning about their strategy Afshad was asked to visit with them with Apple’s Chief Technology Officer Dr Bud Tribble (seen in this picture on the left), who joined Apple in 1980 and worked closely with Steve Jobs.

A new author, 47-year-old Xerxes Setna of Ouston, UK, says, “About twelve years ago I decided to try to write a novel. It took a few years to write and edit it and since then my ambition has been to see it published but I’ve never done anything about it until now. The feeling of realising an ambition and seeing something you’ve worked hard on finally come to life is amazing and I’d recommend anyone with an ambition, whatever it is, to go for it.”

Maffee and the Space Detective is a humourous action-adventure story aimed at children aged nine to 13 years old. It follows the adventures of an android and an alien who have to team up to save planet Earth. Available on Amazon for £4.98 in paperback and 77p on Kindle.

Russi Ghadiali of Singapore received an award on 27 September, as a tribute “to the pioneers for building the harmonious nation of Singapore.” Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth presented the award on behalf of the Prime Minister. Russi is a member of the Managing Committee of WZO since many years.

Afshin and Nusha Sepehri have created The Stories of Shahnameh, The Persian Book of Kings, which is an audio book...
both in English and Persian. It is now on the market. The information is available on: www.shahnameh-audio.com

Noshir Mehta is the only elected politician from the Parsi community of India after the late Rustom Tirandaz and Congress MLA and state minister late Marzban Patrawala.

At one time Parsis were members in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, state assemblies, councils and municipal corporations. Parsi stalwarts included Cooverji Bhabha, who was the first finance minister in the interim cabinet in the early 1950s. R N Sidhwa, a member of the constituent assembly, was also a member of the team which framed the Indian Constitution. The late Homi Mody was Uttar Pradesh governor, while his son Piloo was a Swatantra Party MP from Gujarat. So was Minoo Masani. In the 1960s, CPI trade union leader Homi Daji was active in Madiya Pradesh.

The late B K Boman Behram was mayor of Mumbai, while Naushir Bharucha was a corporator and member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly in the early 1950s. Khurshed Nariman (after whom Nariman Point is named) exposed the Backbay Reclamation scandal in the 1920s; was elected mayor in 1935. Other Parsi members in the municipal corporation were Ardeshir Sabavala, Mancherji Joshi, Minocher Bilpodiwalla, Dara Dinshaw Vania and Rusi Mehta.

Sir Dhunjishah Bomanji Cooper became the first prime minister of Bombay in 1937 and had his political base in the Maratha-dominated territory of Satara.

Among the last well-known Parsi politicians was Homi Taleyarkhan, a Congress man who held many important posts.

A reminder came on ‘Parsis, Iranis, Zarathushtis – all under one roof,’ to offer a special prayer for three consecutive days, owing to Bakri Eid, namely Gospand Ocha Mare te Mate Nirang. – posted by Behnaz Jamshedji Gaiwala [no, the surname has not been coined!]

Architect Dinyar Wadia has been selected as one of the inductees in the New England Design Hall of Fame for 2014.

Dinshaw Mehta, chairman of the BPP, who has been a member of the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission for the last five years and whose term expired on July 30, has been re-nominated as a member of the commission by the Government of Maharashtra for a period of five years from the date he assumes office.

Dastur Khurshed Dastoor, High Priest of Udvada has surprised the Parsi community of India, as he urged them to vote for the BJP and support Narendra Modi on the eve of the state polls. This is a first for a High Priest to voice his opinion on a political issue. He said, “The Modi government has kick-started the economy. The PM’s diplomacy has put our nation back on the international high table and secured foreign investments. The Parsi community, unfortunately, has no presence on the political stage... We appeal to the community to strengthen the hands of the PM by voting for the BJP.”

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Parsi Khabar & ZTFE’s emails to members.
Advertising in the 6th WZYC Official Congress Booklet is now open. This is a unique opportunity for businesses to showcase their brands amongst Zoroastrians globally, as well as upcoming entrepreneurs and businessmen. Individuals and families are also invited to pass on their wishes to the Congress Committee and Delegates that attend.

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“...For Zarathushtra does give the breath of even his own person as a gift, in order that there be for the Wise One predominance of good thinking along with (predominance) of the action and the word allied with truth...”

Yasna 33.14

Inzler translation