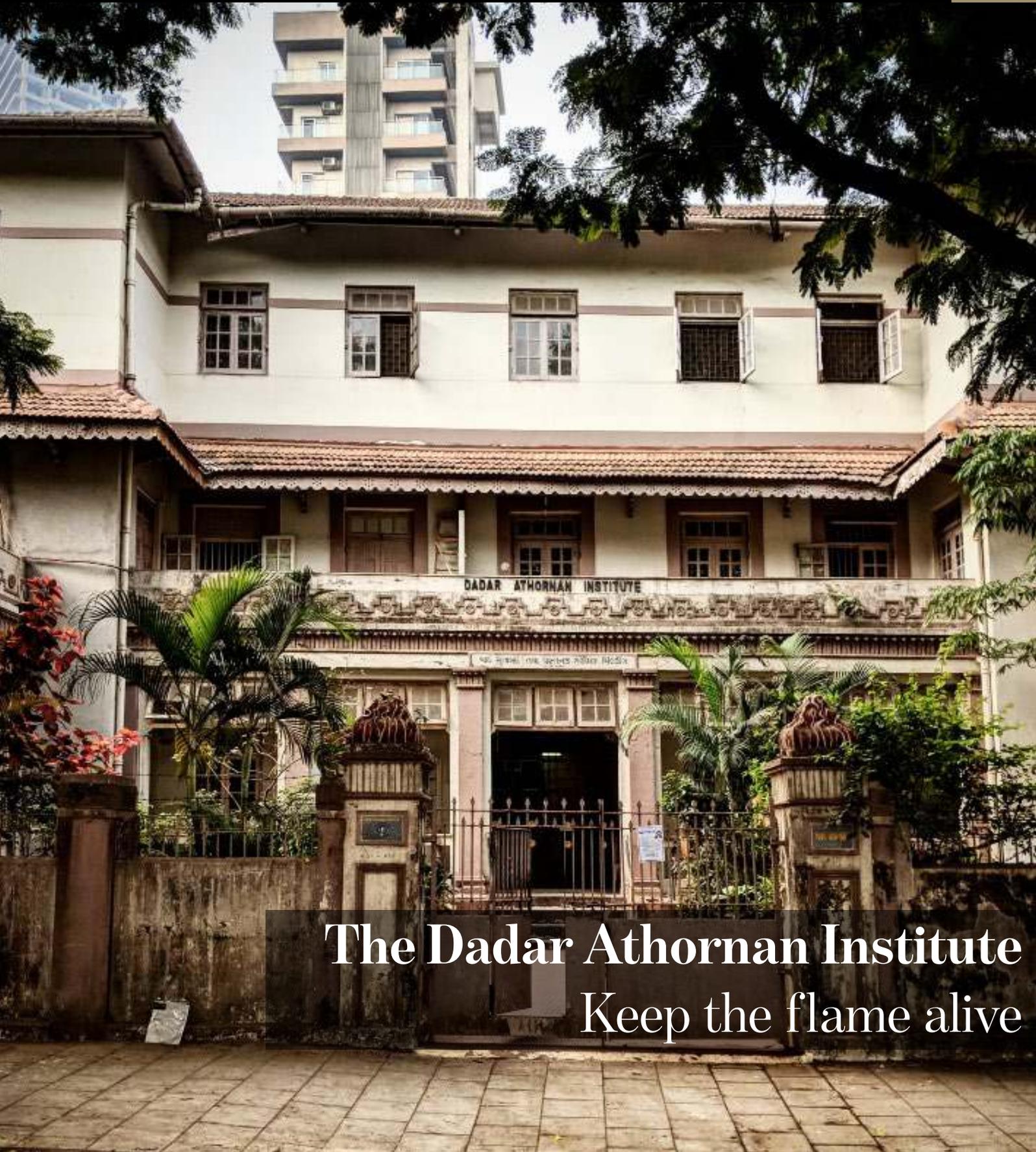


publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

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ISSUE 2019

HAMAZOR



The Dadar Athornan Institute
Keep the flame alive

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From The Editor

I am equal parts nerves and excitement as I write this, ready to present to you my maiden edition of Hamazor. Led so deftly by the highly esteemed Toxy Cowasjee for 17 years, I am in awe and slightly nervous about the size of the shoes I am about to fill. I am eternally grateful for the advice, words of wisdom and generosity that she has provided to me during this handover period. I certainly hope you will have an enjoyable scroll through the variety of essays compiled for your knowledge and enjoyment, in this edition.

This transition of editorship, along with the wonderful Jashan ceremony that I witnessed for Parsi New Year, at the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation (OZCF) in Oakville, Canada, got me thinking about the concepts of preservation and continuity. This jashan was conducted by 5 young mobeds while the older generation gracefully provided guidance and encouragement to them. I felt a joy knowing that there is hope for my children's generation to have priests to look up to and perform religious ceremonies in their lifetime.



Photo: Young mobeds on Parsi New year at OZCF in Ontario, Canada (L to R Nekzad Ilava, Hormuz Javat, Kevan Madon, Kamran Panthaki and Arman Panthaki)

As Zoroastrians we are eager to preserve our rich, sometimes piecemeal heritage and there are efforts world-wide to do just that. Please see Dr. Gholami's and Farroukh Jorrat's articles on their undertakings so far. Now, greater strides need to be made to preserve our Athornans and empower the future of our priesthood. As Dinshaw Tamboly recently mentioned in his article in the Parsi Times, mobeds are truly the lifelines of our faith. Without having a well trained, educated and articulate generation of mobeds, the lifeline that links to the future of our religion and community will be eventually lost. Bearing this in mind, please respond positively to the appeal from Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia for not just sustaining the Dadar Athornan Institute, but ensuring that it thrives for the next and future generations of mobeds. Additionally, the North American Mobed Council (NAMC) takes some brave steps in proposing a new model

for Mobedi in North America.

But it is not just the past that we must look to, we have to enjoy the present and look at ways to embrace the future, as individuals and as a community. The numbers enrolled at 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress held in Los Angeles earlier in the summer should be an eye opener. Zoroastrian youth from all walks of life and all corners of the globe are looking to connect intellectually and otherwise with their 'own'. As Er. Jimmy Madon describes in his essay, we hope to move towards Frashokereti, one step at a time. As active priest and lecturer, he attempts to engage the younger, perhaps distant generation, by making the religion more 'user friendly', accessible and applicable to our time. The first time ever, were the voices of Queer Zoroastrians (QueerZ) given an opportunity to open up, communicate, educate and engage the delegates. This section of our community has for long been ignored or sidelined or worse, excommunicated. 'QueerZ' have taken the brave step to initiate this conversation within the community and I cannot wait for them to feel the strength of your support.

Onwards and upwards, I hope this New Year brings all the readers of Hamazor and our Zoroastrian community the world over, the best of health, love and peace.

Natasha

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CONTRIBUTORS



Noshir H. Dadrawala is the CEO, Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy (CAP) through which he has been offering compliance related advisory to nonprofits and corporate social initiatives. His current international affiliation includes serving as member on the advisory board of the International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL). Earlier, he was on the Board of Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support (WINGS) as also Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium (APPC). In India, he serves as a trustee of a few Foundations namely the Forbes Marshall Foundation, Everest Industries Foundation and the Bombay Community Trust. Noshir has authored several resource books and is also invited as a speaker at many local and international conferences and as guest faculty at leading business schools. He is also trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet.



Shahin Bekhradnia, a Zoroastrian of the Yazdi Iranian tradition, is a teacher of ancient history and classical civilisation, a Justice of the Peace and a legal consultant. Her academic background is from Oxford University where she graduated in Russian & French, and then completed a postgraduate thesis in anthropology on issues of Zoroastrian Identity in the 20th century. She has published several articles and given talks on Zoroastrianism, and is active in inter-faith movements and organisations. She is the Joint Secretary of WZO.



Darayus Motivala has been a committee member of WZO since 1995, some 24 years or so. He is currently the Jt. Hon Secretary. His previous roles within WZO include Membership Secretary, President and Chairman. He is dedicated to WZO and is a firm believer in equality for all, irrespective of gender, class or ethnicity. He takes part in the local Inter-faith activities, is welcoming to non-Zoroastrians married to Zoroastrians and believes that Zoroastrianism is open to all if they wish to follow the tenets of the religion. Darayus is an IT graduate (1972), now retired living in an Oxfordshire village with his wife, Arnavaz. Darayus is also a senior Trustee of the Chilterns Multiple Sclerosis Centre.



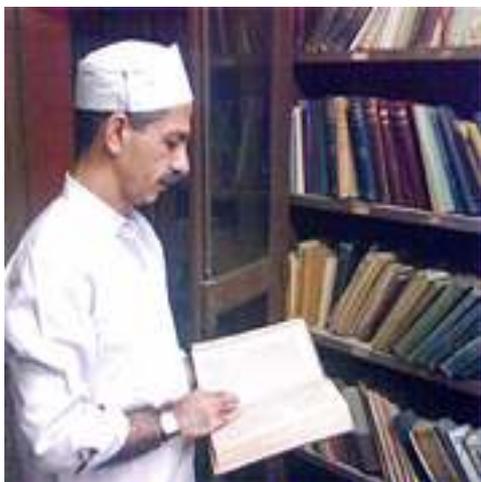
Sammy Bhiwandiwalla together with his wife Ursula started their own company in 1970 and after 35 years in business they decided to call it a day. Both have always taken an active interest in community matters in the UK and were greatly influenced by the actions and sincere beliefs of individuals such as Noshirwan Cowasjee, Shirinbanoo Kutar, Shahpur Captain and many others, that in a changing world it was necessary to create a more balanced and equitable community within the UK. He joined the WZO Board in 1988 and since then has served in various capacities including Chairman of WZO, presently serving as President.



Dr Saloumeh Gholami took her PhD at the University of Goettingen. She is currently a senior researcher at the Faculty of Linguistics, Cultures and Arts of the University of Frankfurt, Germany. She has conducted extensive research on the preservation of Zoroastrian culture in Iran. Since 2010 Saloumeh Gholami has been working on locating, digitizing and studying of Avestan manuscripts and historical documents, as well as documenting of the language of Zoroastrians, Zoroastrian Dari (Gavri, Behdini).



Meher Bhandara lives in Mumbai, India. She is the Director of WaterMaker India Pvt. Ltd. and can be reached at mbhandara@watermakerindia.com for further information or collaboration.



Dr. (Ervad) Ramiyar P. Karanjia, an M.A., Ph. D. in Avesta-Pahlavi from St. Xavier's College, University of Mumbai, India. He is the Principal (Administrator) of Dadar Athornan Institute, a Zoroastrian priestly training school in Mumbai since 1995. An independent researcher in history and ancient Iranian languages; he is the recipient of the following Fellowships - Wenner Gren Foundation Fellowship at Uppsala University, Sweden (1999), Heidelberg University, Germany (2002-3) and the Swiss National Fund at Zurich University, Switzerland in (2011).

Leea Nadeer Contractor graduated from Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2017, with a distinction and was also awarded the prestigious Founders award, along with with The Agha Hassan Abidi award. She currently is working as a Graphic Designer at Dawn Media Group, Pakistans oldest, leading and most widely read English-language newspaper.

Ervad Jimmy Khushroo Madon was born in India and moved to the UK in 2010. He is a Software Engineer by profession and is pursuing his M.Sc. from the University of Oxford while also giving part-time lectures in the same field. He is an active volunteer within the Zoroastrian community in the UK and is also a part-time priest. If he is not programming or organising community events or performing a Jashan, he might be found at a local Latin-Salsa dance social.

Find out more on his comprehensive website

www.ramiyarkaranjia.com and learn more about the Dadar Athornan Institute here www.dadarathornaninstitute.org



Bhavya Dore is a freelance journalist and writes for various publications such as Caravan, Quartz, Scroll, Forbes, Guardian, BBC and LiveMint, where a version of this article first appeared. You can tweet her here @bhavyadore or email her at

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Jehangir Rustomjee is a former racehorse trainer in India and in Bahrain. He is currently General Manager at the Royal Arabian Stud and Registrar for all the Arabian horses in Bahrain.

Tanya Hoshi is a film and web series producer/director based in Toronto, Canada. In 2018, Tanya produced BravoFactual financed documentary "Turning Tables", which premiered at Hot Docs and went on to receive several prestigious awards, including Audience Choice Award at the Women in Film and Television Showcase. In 2018, she directed her first web series "Blackout", for which she has received many nominations, including Best Director. She is currently a Producer at Shopify Studios in Toronto, which allows her to travel and film documentaries around the world.

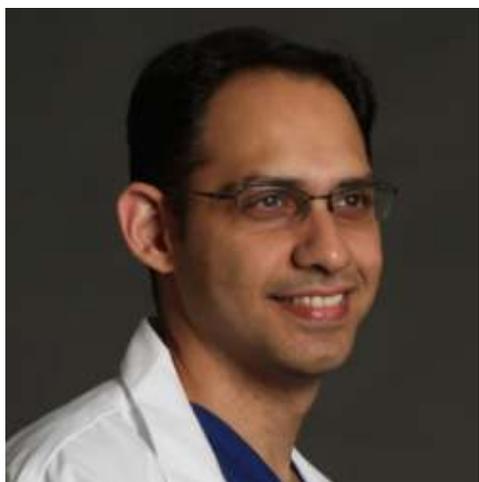
Tanya was a Zoroastrian Return To Roots (RTR) program participant in 2017, and returned as a volunteer in 2018. She is a proud ambassador for the program and supports the team by running social media accounts and marketing the program to potential future participants. Tanya was one of the representatives from Canada that attended the World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum held at the Asha Centre in Gloucestershire, UK and recently attended first Zoroastrian congress, where she was a speaker and panelist.



Huafrin Kotwal is a Genetic Counsellor recently graduated from the University of Sydney in Australia. She is currently based in the U.K. and enjoys reading for the sake of learning, travelling, hiking and food (like any good Bawi).

Writer of 16 cricket books including *The Waugh Twins*, *Six Appeal*, *From Bradman to Kohli* and *World Cup Cricket - A Complete History*, **Kersi Meher-Homji** is a Virologist by profession having done research on Polio and Hepatitis viruses. He is now retired.

Vinayak Talwar is from New Delhi, but has been living in Mumbai for over three years now. When he is not exploring the bylanes of Mumbai for Khaki Tours, a Mumbai-based experiential heritage travel company, he is busy working as an HR professional.



Dr. Mazda K. Turel is a minimally invasive brain and spine surgeon. He is a consultant at Wockhardt Hospital, Mumbai Central, and also an Honorary at Sir JJ Hospital. He can be reached on mazdaturel@gmail.com or +91 993.017.4567. To know more about him you can visit www.mazdaturel.com.

Farroukh Jorat (name at birth, Akper Aliev) was born in Baku in 1978 and in 1985 moved in Moscow, Russia. He was initiated into Zoroastrianism in Moscow in 2005 by Mobed Kamran Jamshidi and Anjoman Bozorg Bazgasht. Since 2010 he lives in Baku, Azerbaijan. Farroukh is best known for his contributions to restoration of Atashkadehs in Azerbaijan through WZO, and research the history of Zoroastrianism in CIS countries. Email: farroukh@blagoverie.org

Dr. Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee is a Founding and Managing Partner of Chicago Growth Partners, a private equity firm managing \$1.2 billion in assets. Prior to founding CGP, he was a Managing Director of William Blair Capital Partners and Head of William Blair's Health Care Research, and was involved in several IPO/secondary offerings. He was a Wall Street Journal All Star Analyst in both the medical device and the pharmaceutical sectors. Arda received a M.Sc. in Pharmacology from the University of Toronto and a Ph.D. and a M.B.A. from University of British Columbia, and was a post-doctoral fellow in pharmacology at University of Washington Medical School. He was a recipient of several scholarships including Tata, Connaught Laboratories, and Canadian Heart Foundation.

Arda-e-viraf was ordained Navar and Maratab in Navsari. He is actively involved in the North American Zoroastrian community and provides volunteer priestly services to Zoroastrians in the US and western Canada.



Dr. Shazneen Limjerwala is a lifelong learner. She is a groupwork facilitator, author and development specialist. She conducts workshops on storytelling, relationships, leadership, amongst other topics. As an active Zarathushti, she mentors individuals tiding over challenging times: looking for a spouse, changing jobs, dealing with bereavement. Married, with twins, Shazneen lives in Mumbai, India.



Ashdin Doctor is a passionate advocate for good health and using habits to improve one's life. You can listen to his weekly podcast "The Habit Coach By Ashdin Doctor" and find additional information on his website www.awesome180.com



Dinshaw Tamboly has been actively associated in community welfare activities since 1983. He is one of the founding Trustees of the three WZO Trusts in India and spearheads their welfare activities. Dinshaw was a Member of the International Board of World Zoroastrian Organisation, London from 1983 to 2004, and Trustee of Bombay Parsi Punchayet from November 1996 to September 2008. He is also Trustee in many other institutions comprising Trusts, Hospitals and an Agyari.

Dinshaw has received many awards for services to community and humanity, from institutions both in India and overseas, including 'Community Service Award' at the IX World Zoroastrian Congress held at Dubai, UAE in December 2009 and 'Zoroastrian Icon Award' at the XI World Zoroastrian Congress held in June 2018 at Perth, Australia.



Dr. Farhad Cooper specialises in HIV and Sexual Health. He is also an ex-teacher of the Zoroastrian Centre's Fun Club for Children in London, England



Fereshteh D Bulsara, BSc, RMT, is a former competitive athlete Olympic-Weightlifting, currently working as a Registered Massage Therapist and Osteopath in Montreal, Canada. She is the founder of the group Zoroastrian LGBTQ- Straight Alliance, which looks to create a safe and inclusive space for Queer youth in our community.



Nasha M. Katrack, ACSW, MA, is a mental health therapist, musician, Reiki healer, and doula, living in Los Angeles, CA. Nasha has worked as a therapist with queer youth, and is an ally to the LGBTQ community. Nasha is thrilled to also be an ally to queer individuals within the Zoroastrian community. Nasha further has a passion for ancestral and generational healing. You can learn more about Nasha's work at www.heartbloomhealing.com.



Nadia Jam, B.Soc.Sc. in French Immersion, recent graduate of a specialization in political science degree, naturally gets to the heart of people and places. She has been enthusiastically involved in the online efforts to increase the visibility of Zoroastrian LGBTQ+ folks and to mobilize like-minded people to discuss and deliberate their status. She currently resides in Toronto, Canada.

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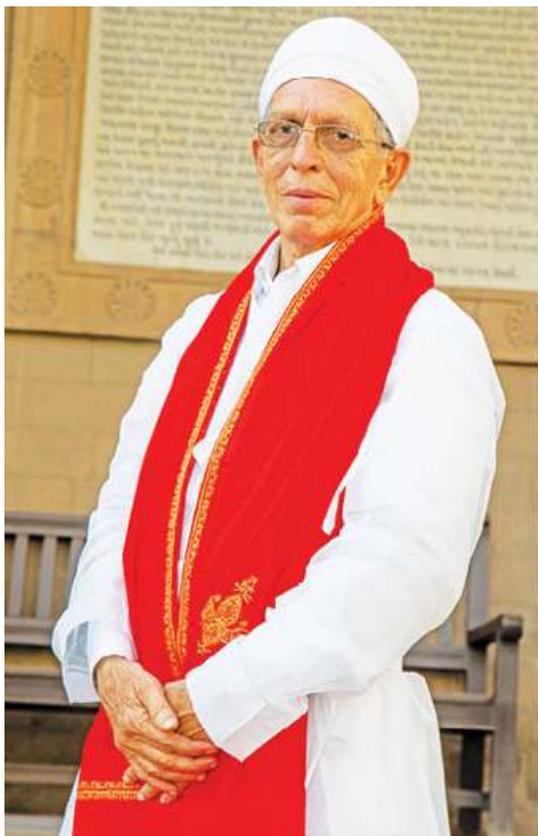
Prasad Ramamurthy was the Features Director at Conde Nast Traveller, India from 2010-2018. In his role as an editor at the magazine, he's written on a range of subjects pertaining to luxury lifestyle, from hotels to airlines, fashion and food. Prior to his stint at Conde Nast, Prasad was a Senior News Editor at NDTV 24x7 (2003-2010) and produced shows such as Urban Trends, which focused on contemporary lifestyle, and Witness, that inquired into, among other things, the business of fashion weeks and heritage conservation. Armed with a Google Pixel, he also masquerades as a photographer.

Farshad Engineer is a Graphic designer/ Illustrator based in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. He has worked as a Graphic Designer at J. Walter Thompson Pakistan (JWT), has successfully held a solo art exhibition titled A walk through my imagination in Karachi, Pakistan <https://www.dawn.com/news/1347186> and is a graduate from the Art Fundamentals and Visual and Creative Arts programs at Sheridan College. His work consists illustrations of portraits, landscapes, and nature. Each Illustration contains bold colour and creativity with deep meaning to express himself and narratives through the work. Each stroke he makes is a stroke with intent. Farshad also strongly believes in encouraging his audience to interpret his work as they see it because it gives him a new dimension to see things better through the eyes of others and improvise his artwork further. "As an Artist, I care most about satisfying the needs of my audience and myself, and will go the extra mile to meet the standards." To get in touch with Farshad you can email him at:

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You can learn more about Farshad's work at: farshadengineer.myportfolio.com

Meet the 18th Vada Dasturji Meherjirana



Photograph Courtesy: Parsi Times



With my father Cavasji Ravji, I have performed more than 3000 gratis geh-sarnas (chanting of the gathas at a funeral) for poor departed souls. I believe that it is their blessings have helped bestow this honour on me.

As the Vada Dasturji, I am humbled to serve and provide leadership to our Parsi Zoroastrian Community.

Recently ordained Vada Dasturji of the Bhagarsath Anjuman Atashbehram (popularly known as the Navsari Atashbehram), I was extremely excited when my name was nominated as the 18th Descendant to the Vada Dasturji Meherjirana Gadi. As a full-fledged mobed, I have been serving as the Panthaki of the Cama Baug Dare-Meher in Mumbai, India for the past 32 years, supported by my wife Roshan, my two sons Hormaz and Farzad (also mobeds) and my daughter-in-law Delnaz. I trained under my father Ervad Cavasji P Ravji (erstwhile Boywalla of Wadiaji Atashbehram, Mumbai), and my mentor Ervad Erachshah Karkaria of Navsari at the Dadar Athornan Madressa.

On the 4th of June 2019, when the trustees of Bhagarsath Anjuman unanimously declared me as the 18th Vada Dastur Meherjirana, I was overjoyed. It was one of the happiest days in my life and that of my family. I was honoured that my life's work made me deserving of this unexpected honour: As part of my regular priestly duties, I have performed hundreds of Navar/Martab ceremonies in Navsari and in Cama Baug.

In my 74 years, I have performed 69 Nirangdins, 5000 Yazashnna, 3000 Vendidad, 22 Hama Yasht ceremonies and consecrated 2 new Varasijaji (sacred white bulls). In 1969, along with the late Ervad Homi Bapuji Kotwal, I consecrated the Kebla of Navsari Atashbehram. **For the benefit of the entire Parsi Zoroastrian community, in India and abroad and for the new generations, I have also recorded the entire Avesta prayers in a recording studio, to listen and learn.**

Leaving Behind A Legacy Of Love And Wisdom

Noshir H. Dadrawala



Dastur Kaikhushru N Dastoor (MeherjiRana)



Dastur Kaikhushru M JamaspAsa

In the Zoroastrian tradition we do not mourn the dead. We celebrate their life and their legacy of love, knowledge and wisdom. In fact we don't even say they are dead or no more. We say "gujri gaya" (passed away) i.e. from the material to the spiritual world. And, even for the afterlife we do not say "rest in peace"; we say, may the soul progress in the spiritual world.

The lives of both, Dastur Kaikhushru N Dastoor (MeherjiRana) and Dastur Kaikhushru M JamaspAsa were a celebration of all that is truly Zoroastrian. I knew them both and interacted with them on several occasions.

I first met Kaikhushru N Dastoor when I was in my early twenties. He was not a Dastur or High Priest back then. At that time he was legal advisor to the Bank of Baroda and immaculately dressed with a tie and jacket. His eyes had a mischievous twinkle and in the very first meeting he left me with the impression that he was a man of prudence with deep understanding of law, science, music, comparative religions, but above all else, a great sense of humour. He matched his prudence with a practical approach to life and living.

There was a Zoroastrian Conference in Gujarat where both of us were invited. His first reaction was "These conferences are a waste of time and achieve nothing." He added, "These conferences remind me of birds and trees outside my window. Birds sit on the tree sing a bit, eat a bit and fly away". However, when he realized it was a youth conference he changed his mind and agreed. He saw a window of opportunity in possibly igniting a spark of devotion among at least some of the youth.

We travelled together by train. My son was listening to Bohemian Rhapsody on his 'Walkman' and Kaikhushru watched him enjoy the music. He was a man fond of and knowledgeable about classical music, but, he listened to my son's rock music for some time and said "majenu che" (it's good). He was neither critical nor judgmental. And, that's what many of us liked about him. He was accepting and accommodating and had a way with the youth.

He was orthodox by upbringing and conviction. But, he did not wear orthodoxy on his sleeve. Throughout his banking career he did not wear a Parsi cap at work and that did not make him less Parsi or devout. His ultra orthodox critics called him UME (ungare mathena ervad) or bare-headed priest. But, he did not care. He used to say, a truly religious person is one who does all his worldly duties and does it righteously without false pretence.

KN Dastur had a very scientific outlook towards religion and he often used to say Science is increasingly knocking at the door of Mysticism. Dastur often used to quote Prof. Paul Davies (Professor of Mathematical Physics and Natural Philosophy at the University of Adelaide). One such quote I remember is: "But in the end a rational explanation for the world in the sense of a closed and complete system of logical truths is almost certainly impossible. We are barred from ultimate knowledge, from ultimate explanation, by the very

rules of reasoning that prompt us to seek such an explanation in the first place. If we wish to progress beyond, we have to embrace a different concept of "understanding" from that of rational explanation. Probably the mystical path is a way to such an understanding. I have never had a mystical experience myself, but I keep an open mind about the value of such experiences. May be they provide the only route beyond the limits to which science and philosophy can take us, the only possible path to the Ultimate."

Though Dastoor and JamaspAsa shared a common name - Kaikhushru, they had little else in common. Dastoor loved talking while JamaspAsa was a man of few words. I had never seen JamaspAsa without his priestly turban or traditional priestly clothes. If Dastoor has a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, JamaspAsa had a fixed and staid gaze, though whenever he smiled it would be absolutely charming and disarming.

JamaspAsa was a scholar in the true sense of the word. But, he was as comfortable talking to his peers at Oxford as he would be talking to a lay Parsi seeking his advice at his home or at the Atash Behram. He used to have a fixed routine and be at the Anjuman Atash Behram every day in the morning and several devotees would seek his wise counsel. Others would simply bow and seek his blessings.

I first met JamaspAsa almost forty years ago when I was assigned the task of microfilming rare Zoroastrian books under the auspices of the now defunct Havrashta Foundation. This was long before we had scanners. I used to meet him at the K R Cama Oriental Institute and he was always helpful and encouraging but very protective about the books. Books to him were like children - require special care and attention. There is so much that I know about the religion today thanks to prelates like him.

JamaspAsa took his priestly duties seriously and remained uncompromising where matters of religion were concerned. He also had a dry sense of humour and was a cricket aficionado. He laid great emphasis on living an ethical life as per Zoroastrian precepts. But, he used to lay equal emphasis on need for preserving the ritual tradition. He used to say that religion is a blend of ethics and rituals. Take rituals out of a religion and you are left with just a dry philosophy devoid of culture. He believed that religious rituals are indispensable in deepening spiritual insight. The repetition of rituals (be it a simple ceremony of tying the Kusti or a Jashan) instills religious values and attitudes in the lives of the worshipers. Ritual also expresses and emphasizes the things that bind the faith and community together; and through ritual both individuals and communities make visible their most basic religious needs, values and aspirations.

Both Dastoor and JamaspAsa lived a life that was full and fulfilling. Both have left behind a rich legacy of their love and learning. I for one feel deeply enriched having known and interacted with both.

Where I am concerned, Dastoor has left behind for me several anecdotes of wisdom, while JamaspAsa has left me with deep insights into the finer nuances of the religion. I feel truly blessed having known both of them.

My Father Burjor Avari

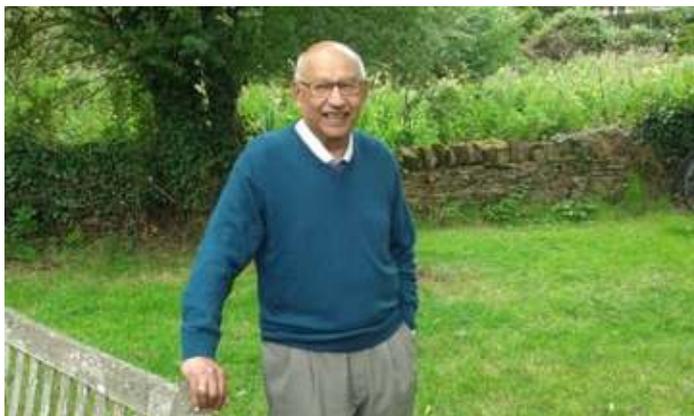
Rushna Avari

Mr Burjor Avari, MBE, passed away on 29th March 2019 from kidney cancer. Throughout his illness, he remained positive, calm and always eager to read, write and discuss everything with friends, family and colleagues. He was a gentle soul who was passionate about learning and cared deeply for the rights of others.

It was at his Celebration of Life, on April 12th 2019, that his friends and colleagues thought of the idea to set up an annual memorial lecture in honour of Burjor, to be held at the Manchester Metropolitan University.

His friend George Joseph wrote an obituary for the Guardian.

Burjor Avari Obituary - George Gheverghese Joseph



Burjor Avari's upbringing in East Africa gave him a strong commitment to forging links with people of African descent, and his Zoroastrian background helped him to have a footing in several cultures

Burjor Avari, who has died aged 80, was a teacher, historian and champion of multiculturalism. Over the 60 years that he and I were friends, our paths criss-crossed, often running in parallel lines, in India, Kenya and the UK. We both started our careers as teachers in Mombasa, Kenya, and ended up as academics in Manchester.

He was born to Jal and Jer Avari, in Navsari, Gujarat, India, and moved at the age of three with his family to Mombasa, where his father had taken a job in the port. His upbringing in East Africa gave him a strong commitment to forging links with people of African descent, and his Zoroastrian Parsee background helped him to have a footing in several cultures.

He moved to the UK in 1955 to take A-levels in Portsmouth before studying history at Manchester University. After teaching training at Oxford, he taught history in secondary schools, first in Kenya, from 1962, and then in Manchester.

While a teacher, he wrote a paper for the Department of Education recommending a more multicultural syllabus for history and geography in the school curriculum. In the late 1980s he and I delivered race relations courses for the police and teachers in Greater Manchester and London.

Soon we each began writing for a wider audience, with Burjor producing the outstanding books *India: The Ancient Past* (2007) and *Islamic Civilization in South Asia* (2013), which came from his years of teaching Indian history – his passion – at the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) from 1988 to 2003. We also co-edited several volumes, including *Interwoven World* (2016).

A restless spirit at times, Burjor was at his best when thinking, writing

(including letters to the Guardian) and debating. He left his mark on multiculturalism in the north-west with a programme of adult evening and weekend lectures, based at MMU, which brought academics and others from Britain and beyond to talk on topics as diverse as Eastern Christianity, the influence of Indian philosophy on the Greeks, Chinese medicine, Islamic art, cricket in the Commonwealth and African history, in around 2,000 sessions over a 20-year period.

His courses rivalled anything on offer elsewhere in the UK. An unusual aspect was the depth of community involvement in finding speakers. His passion for his mission led to the building of a large network of supporters from every kind of background. In 1988 he was appointed MBE.

Burjor's unassuming nature, his courtesy and mischievous sense of humour endeared him to those he met. He is survived by his wife, Zarin, whom he married in 1971, their daughters, Rushna and Anahita, and his brothers, Noshir and Edul.

Article Courtesy of Guardian News & Media Ltd. (Date of Publication 19 June 2019)



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

World Zoroastrian House, 5 Hanworth Road, Feltham. TW13 5AF

Charity No 1023334

Website: <https://www.w-z-o.org>

(Globally supporting Zoroastrianism, its people and traditions)

Inauguration of the WORLD ZOROASTRIAN HOUSE and Felicitation and Honoring of WZO Chairman SHAHPUR F. CAPTAIN

Sammy Bhiwandiwalla



On 10th August 2019, WZO welcomed members of our community who had played a significant part in the establishment of the World Zoroastrian House to celebrate and participate in the official opening of the center.

The Committee welcomed all the guests as they arrived on the premises and offered them light refreshments.

Distinguished guests included Lord Bhikhu Parekh of Kingston upon Hull and wife Pramila, Seema Malhotra, Member of Parliament for Feltham and Heston and husband Sushil. Deputy Mayor Raghwinder Siddhu of London Borough of Hounslow and Rohit Vadhvana, First secretary (Economic) at the High Commission of India.

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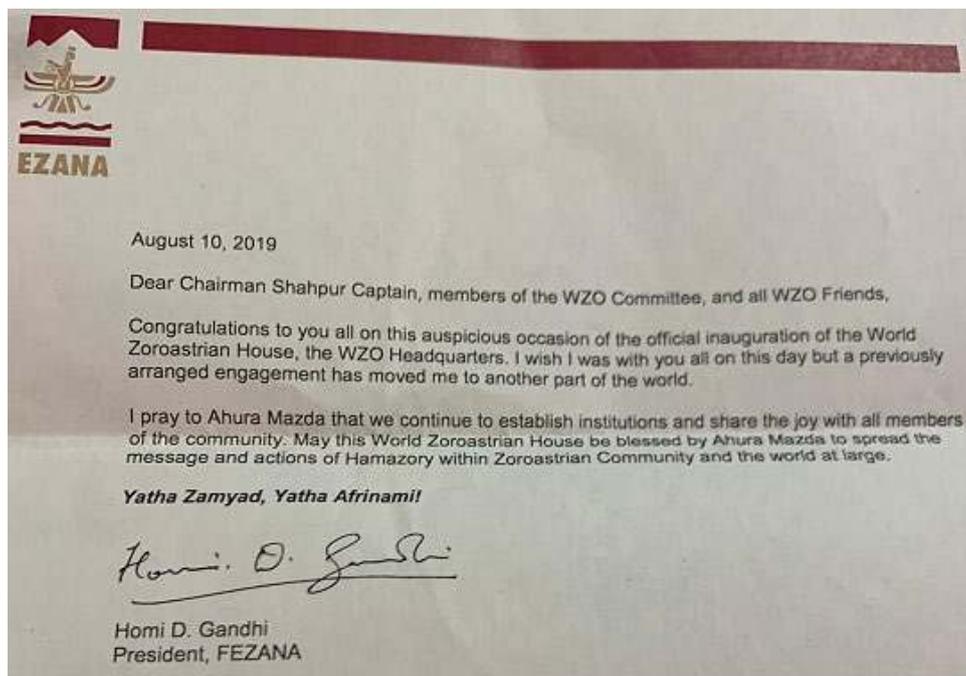
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Sushil Malhotra, Richard and Zerbanoo Gifford and MP Seema Malhotra

The program started with a Boi ceremony in the Worship room conducted by Ervad Jimmy Madon to which all were welcome, after which guests returned to the main hall.

Jimmy read out a letter sent by Homi D Gandhi, President Fezana.



Chairman Shahpur Captain welcomed all the guests and thanked them for attending. He wished them all an enjoyable and memorable evening.



The first speaker of the day was Joint Secretary of WZO, Darayus Motivala who presented a power point presentation on “who we are and the House project.” A short history about WZO’s formation, its charitable work in India and Iran and a timely reminder to all who were present that we are a charity to serve and to bring forth progress and reform within the our community, in practices that have no connection with the teachings of Prophet Zarathushtra.

In his presentation Darayus has given us an insight as to how the ownership of the House crystallized. Apart from the munificent donation from Abtin and Mehrafzoon Sassanfar, he continued to thank the Trustees of the Firuz Madan Foundation and The Trustees of Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation not only for supporting the building project but over the years funding many other worthy causes.



Darayus Motivala speaking on behalf of WZO

It would be impossible to name all the donors today but Darayus felt compelled to name some of the individual donors and in particular Rumi and Hilda Sethna, Behram and Rena Baxter from the USA, and our Chairman, Shahpur Captain and his wife, Inderjit.



Armaity Bedford, Shahpur Captain and his wife Inderjit Chhabra

Darayus concluded by thanking London Borough of Hounslow, its current Mayor, Tony Louki, and some of our Ward Councillors, Hanif Khan and Bishnu Gurung. WZO has a good relationship with their local MP, Seema Malhotra whose support we could look forward to in the future.

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The presentation was well received by all.

[\(Click here for Darayus's powerpoint presentation on the WZO website.\)](#)



Lord Bhikhu Parekh In his presentation he spoke about “Gandhi and the Parsis”

The next speaker **Lord Bhikhu Parekh** was introduced by our committee member Dr Zenobia Nadirshaw MBE. *“Bhikhu Parekh has made a unique contribution to British society. His distinguished academic career would be admirable in itself, but he has enriched that, and us, by drawing on elements of his Indian culture that give his political philosophy and his public service a highly distinctive character. His life’s journey began in his family and community in rural India. He has lived much of it in British academia. Family, community, social justice, the life of the mind and reflective patriotism have been themes of his philosophy and his life.”*

Our sincere thanks to Lord Bhikhu Parekh for presenting a memorable vignette in the history and time of Gandhiji and the Parsees of India.

[\(Click here for the full text of Lord Bhikhu Parekh’s speech which is reproduced on the WZO website\)](#)



Audience listening to Lord Bhikhu Parekh's speech

This was followed by a short addresses from the Deputy Mayor Raghwinder Siddhu of London Borough of Hounslow and then by Mr Rohit Vadvana, First Secretary (Economic) at the High Commission of India.

This was the right time to break and dinner was served with the first course consisting of some excellent Indian starters placed on each table to delight the palate.

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WZO Chairman Shahpur Captain with Guests

Staff having cleared the tables after the first course Master of Ceremonies, Jimmy Madon invited past-Chairman of WZO, Rumi Sethna to address the guests. This was un-announced in our program and was indeed a surprise for our guests.

In his speech, Rumi spoke about only one person, the present Chairman of WZO Shahpur F Captain. Shahpur who has reached the glorious age of 90 has served the Zoroastrian community for nearly 60 years during which he predicted and warned that our community faced many changes and cajoled many in our community to face up to those challenges.

He made many sacrifices in his family life and his career as a Chartered Accountant and Lawyer and today it was time to recognize the legacy that he will leave behind.

[\(Click here for the link to Rumi Sethna's full speech on the WZO website\)](#)

Rumi Sethna's speech ended with loud applause and visible signs of appreciation for Shahpur's life time achievements.



A warm embrace from Rumi to Shahpur

Ursula Bhiwandiwalla was invited to present a beautiful Lalique vase to Shahpur Captain on behalf of the WZO committee.



Ursula Bhiwandiwalla presenting the gift from the committee to Shahpur Captain

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This was followed by Hilda Sethna being invited to unveil a beautifully framed portrait of a young and dapper Shahpur Captain taken in the early years.



Hilda Sethna unveiling a beautifully framed portrait of a young and dapper Shahpur Captain



The potrait of Shahpur Captain



WZO Social Secretary Armaity Engineer presenting a Bouquet of Flowers to Shahpur Captain's wife Inderjit Chhabra

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The famous author, journalist and columnist Bachi Karkaria presented Shahpur Captain with a selection of her books for the WZO library.



Bachi Karkaria

This show of appreciation was most unexpected by Shahpur Captain and he thanked all those present for the warmth, affection and appreciation that filled the hall on his behalf.



Paurus and Tenaz Daruwalla



Zubin Writer, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla & Jimmy Madon



WZO IT Resource Manager Minoo Mistry Shahpur Captain and Mahzaver Mistry

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Naval Heramaneck Rumi Sethna and Feroza Heramaneck

Our sincere thanks to Rumi and Hilda Sethna who played a defining part in the presentation for Shahpur Captain.



Our sincere thanks to Rena and Behram Baxter for their continued support to WZO



Shahpur Captain with Behram Kapadia

Winding up the event the MC Jimmy Madon appealed to all those who were present to get the young members of the community to engage in the life of the community and participate in the forthcoming Zoroastrian Youth Conference to be held in London in three years' time.

The Main Course of dinner was served and followed by Desserts and tea and coffee.



Zerbanoo Gifford with Lord Parekh, Zenobia Nadirshaw and Premila Parekh

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Shahpur Captain with Mohammad & Benafsha Mulla and WZO Social Secretary Armaity Engineer

The evening rounded up with live music and dancing till late into the evening.



Audience Dancing



Pictures of the WZO Committee at the Inaugural Event



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Celebrating Jashne Tirgan at World Zoroastrian House on Sunday 24th July 2019

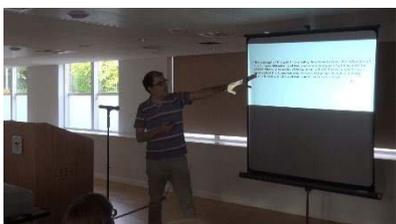
Shahin Bekhradnia

For Zoroastrians the manifestations of various aspects of nature give rise to joyous celebrations. Whilst we are all familiar with the customs around the spring festival of Nowruz which celebrates the return & the awakening of life in nature's cycle via our symbolic 7 (Haft) s(h)in table, some readers may not be aware that the existence of water is also celebrated through the festival of Tirgan which occurs in summer.

The point of these & other festivals is to bring the community together. On the one hand the festivals provide the opportunity for dispersed friends and community members to come together for fun and feasting, for the exchange of news and for sharing joys and woes, and on the other it is a chance to meditate upon our dependence on these wondrous facets of the natural world while the religious rituals are practiced.



The desire of our late benefactors Mr Abtin and Mrs Mehrafzoon Firouzgar was that such traditional festivals and gatherings should be facilitated with the opening of the World Zoroastrian House (WZH) and it was a matter of great joy that we have been able to implement their vision for the 3rd time since the building came into use. The premises have great potential for the celebration of events in our Zoroastrian calendar, and if we do not organise communal events here on a regular basis, then the building is not fulfilling its purpose. It is very meritorious to be able to offer such events at no cost from time to time to those who choose to come out of their way to participate.



On in Feltham to celebrate the existence of water in our world which is the point of the Jashne Tirgan. As this festival occurs at the height of summer when the month of Tir and the day of Tir coincide (although our gathering was inevitably not exactly on the correct day), the importance and pleasure of water is particularly significant in the desert conditions that most of Iran is subject to - and indeed the need for water was not lost on us here in Europe either where we were experiencing a heat wave at the time of our gathering.!

It is the custom for young and old to join in a bit of water fun, whether by shooting harmless water pistols at each other, or lying hidden on the top of a flat roof in Yazd, waiting to pour a bucket of water over an unsuspecting passer by below!

Although this activity was not done for this first celebration of Tirgan at our new premises, it is hoped that at our next celebration we can make up for lost time as Tirgan is not really Tirgan without this playful light-hearted dimension.



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However, we tried to ensure that a water element was present, as we chose the date when our neighbourhood friends had organised a summer fair on the grassy areas centred around the main feature, namely the water pond in front of our premises. So those who came early for our function, were able to take advantage of the enjoyable atmosphere created by the Friends of the Bridge House Pond. From 12-3pm just in front of WZH on the grassy banks of the pond, stalls were set up in the style of a traditional English fete. Ice creams were on sale, as were tea and cakes, and of course the ubiquitous tombola was there to tempt fate. If you wanted your face painted or you just wanted to bask in the sun in your deckchair and picnic while listening to the band, set up in WZH's car park, you could close your eyes and imagine yourself wherever you wanted to be. The local organisations of interest such as Friends of Hanwell Park House had a pitch so there was a real sense of a neighbourhood event here.



Towards the end of the afternoon friends covering 3 generations of Zoroastrians and well wishers attended a dazzling display of virtuosity on the Santur (hammered Dulcimer) played by Peyman Heydarian whose sell-out concerts are renowned, and later there were some short readings from the Shahnameh with English translations which we plan to feature on a regular basis. The Shahnameh's importance for Zoroastrians may be cited by many, but it is both helpful to us and an inspiration to delve into this epic work more deeply so that

we can better appreciate its relevance to us.

During the event, Jimmy Madon kindly recited prayers while lighting the fire in the Afriguni and he was followed by Dr Mehrbod Khanizadeh who explained both in English and Farsi with the help of slides supporting the sources he cited, the legend of Arash the Bowman and the link of Tir and Teshtar (the star Sirius). The evening was rounded off by an opt-in Persian meal for a mere £5, and there were hardly any who chose not to join in the feast.



According to the many messages of thanks received, the event was considered a resounding success and was much appreciated by those who came along.

Through this and other similar events, we have attracted some new members and some generous donations. There is furthermore, a chance to experience the facilities which may lead to the hiring of the premises for a private function in due course.



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Hounslow Friends of Faith Walk starts at WZO's new community centre.

Darayus S Motivala

Every year, the Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFOF) have a walk around Feltham, Greater London (Middlesex) visiting different places of Worship. This year, for the first time WZO participated in this walk on 22 June with over 40 walkers from many different religions taking part.



The walk started at the World Zoroastrian House (WZH) and then went on to visit the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Nishkan Sewak, the Islamic Integration Community Centre and finally St. Mary's Church.

All the walkers witnessed at first hand, a "Boi ceremony" performed in the Satayesh Gah by Ervad Jimmy Madon, WZO's committee member and an ordained priest. Jimmy gave an explanation of the Boi ceremony that he had just performed and took questions from the congregation on the Zoroastrian Religion.



The Worshipful The Mayor of the London Borough of Hounslow, Tony Louki, said he found the service very serene and moving. Jimmy and Darayus Motivala, WZO's Jt. Hon. Secretary, went on to describe the work done by WZO and its desire to work with HFOF and other organisations to play its role within the local community. This was done over a warm reception of tea and biscuits prepared by WZO's Social Secretary, Armaity Engineer. A number of the walkers commended this welcome given by WZO and said they felt privileged to observe the ceremony in front of the sacred fire.



The committee members of the WZO thanked the chair of the HFOF, Ms. Charanjit Ajitsingh and her entire team of volunteers for welcoming the WZO into the local community. They hoped to see them again soon at WZO's new community centre, the World Zoroastrian House.

The second stop was at the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Nishkan Sewak where the walkers listened to a presentation on the Sikh ideal of service to all which was followed by a delicious vegetarian lunch in the langar. At the Islamic Integration community centre the walkers heard about the extensive educational programme provided for all ages and had a tour of the purpose built prayer hall and the facilities at the centre. The walk concluded with a visit to St Mary's church where the vicar, Reverend Philip Smith, spoke about the life and worship of the parish and the history of the church, part of which dates back to the 11th century.

WZO intends to participate in these annual walks in the coming years.



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Seminar on Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture held in association with the Firuz Madon Foundation and the World Zarathushtrian Trust Fund on 9th June 2019

Sammy Bhiwandiwalla



Would we be successful with our first ever seminar at WZ House or would we be let down by our recently installed audio visual systems was for me my initial concern. Thankfully it all seemed to function without a hitch when first tested. For many who attended this was their first visit to the hall and they were greeted with light refreshments before the first speaker opened the seminar.

Darayus S Motivala opened the event by thanking Sammy Bhiwandiwalla for arranging the 2019 seminar and welcomed the audience, praising them for taking the time to attend so early on a Sunday morning. He briefly introduced the three speakers Kerman Daruwalla, Fariborz Rahnamoon and Ervad Jimmy Madon and invited the first speaker Kerman Daruwalla to open the first session.

Kerman Daruwalla is a third-year PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). He is a recipient of the European Research Council (ERC) PhD studentship for the study of the Training of Priests in the Zoroastrian Tradition, and is part of the Multimedia Yasna project led by Prof Almut Hintze at SOAS. He holds an MA degree in Iranian Studies from SOAS, and also an MA in Avesta-Pahlavi from the University of Mumbai.



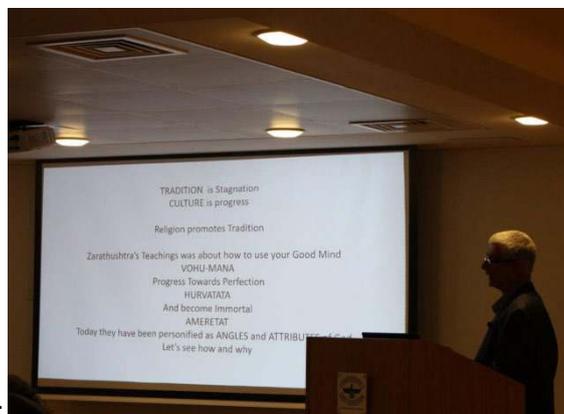
Kerman spoke on rituals and the training of young priests at the Athornan institutes, a subject that you don't very often hear about from scholars of the Zoroastrian faith.

From a very early age boys from the priestly class memorise, recite and learn to perform rituals at various levels of learning known as the Outer "hushmordi" rituals, which a single priest can perform and the Inner "pav-mahel" rituals which require at least two priests to perform. Examples of the outer rituals were the Navjote, Jashan and Ashirwad. The inner rituals included the Yasna, Vivedad etc performed in consecrated places and by priests who had undergone training to the level of Navar and Maratab.

Kerman further explained the significance of the Yasna ritual. Its principle aim was to maintain Asha (order) in the Good Creation of Ahura Mazda and was therefore performed daily at all fire-temples.



Our second speaker **Fariborz Rahnamoon** was born in Yazd; he was educated in a Catholic school in Bombay, which led him to research his own religion at a very early age. He has a unique perspective on the Zoroastrian religion and history, derived with the help of the Bible wherein all the reported deeds of the Persians are based on Wisdom. He says; “the Zoroastrian history that has come down to us has been written by its adversaries over the last 2000 years and the Avesta has been deciphered and translated by scholars with preconceived ideology thereby leading us astray.” His finding and views are available on his website www.ancientiran.com He is also in the process of translating the Gathas which has turned out to be mind-blowingly unique. Samples of which are on the same website.



Fariborz spoke on the History of the teachings of Zarathustra. In his dissertation he illustrated by example that Zarathustra’s teachings was about how to use the Good Mind VOHU-MANA, Progress towards Perfection HURVATA and become Immortal AMERATAT Later they were tabulated and called the Eternal Law the Amesha Spenta



Ervad Jimmy Khushroo Madon was born and brought up in Mumbai, India, and moved to the United Kingdom in 2010. He procured a First Class Honours degree in Computing from the University of East London and is currently pursuing a part-time M.Sc. in Software Engineering at the University of Oxford.

Jimmy is an ordained priest, a ‘Navar-Martab’, and has been actively carrying out liturgical ceremonies for the Zoroastrian community worldwide. As the youth coordinator of the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) and a committee member for the Young Zoroastrians of the UK, he actively helps in organizing community events in the UK. He further volunteers to teach at the religious educational classes in London for kids and parents alike and was the keynote speaker at the 6th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in New Zealand in 2015.



Jimmy Madon’s presentation, “Zoroastrianism: A Way of Life”, aimed to address the modern ‘young’ Zoroastrian, whether he/she was an ascetic freethinker or an old-time conformist. The presentation was an open and unconventional discussion on how to practically use Zoroastrianism in one’s own life – be it in academics, in one’s own professional career, hobbies or relationships. It took Zoroastrianism beyond the cliché of Good Thoughts, Words and Deeds paradigm, taking the *Jashan* beyond the *Malido* and the *Navjote* beyond the ‘birdy dance’ or the ‘*patra-ni-machi*’!



The seminar ended with a plenary session where all three speakers were present to answer questions put by the audience. Our sincere thanks to our three erudite speakers and for the full hearted participation of the audience throughout the day.

Preservation of Zoroastrian Heritage: Endangered Oral and Written Material in Iran

Dr. Saloumeh Gholami



Image 1: Videvdad of Pouladi collection discovered an February 2016, written by Marzban Wahrom Marzban Fredon (dated 1653)

A large number of Zoroastrian manuscripts, historical documents and photographs, are in serious danger and held in very poor condition in the cellar of the old houses and seriously damaged by termites and rodents. The deterioration of this material is further caused by the accumulation of dirt and dust on account of negligent housekeeping practices. However, the most serious threat is theft, which has already taken place several times in recent years in the Priests' Quarter in Yazd.

The situation is urgent and should be addressed immediately.

Background

Zoroastrian documentary heritage in Iran is at risk due to general neglect, poor storage and damaging environmental conditions.

The fascinating and holy literary and oral heritage of Zoroastrianism in Iran are vanishing without trace in front of our eyes in the homeland of Zarathustra. The main part of this cultural treasury has been never documented and described before. This treasury expresses the unique knowledge, history and worldview of Zoroastrians. The loss of this treasury means that we lose a part of who we are. In what follows, I briefly discuss three aspects of endangered Zoroastrian heritage, namely language, manuscripts and documents.

1. Language of Zoroastrians of Iran: Zoroastrian Dari (Gavri, Behdini)

Zoroastrian Dari is spoken only by Zoroastrians of Iran, who mostly live in Yazd and the surrounding areas, and in Kerman and Tehran. Zoroastrian Dari is one of the most important Iranian languages from a historical and typological point of view. This language is of particular importance for the study of the historical development of Iranian languages, as it has changed very little over the many years of their history in Iran. While Muslims adopted New Persian, the dominant language of the country, the language spoken by Zoroastrians remained close to the original local language.

Zoroastrian Dari is unfortunately critically endangered. There are many reasons for the endangerment of Zoroastrian Dari. Migration, Lack of intergenerational transmission, the status of Persian as a prestigious language in Iran and loss of functions in everyday life are the most important causes.



Image 2: Banu, one of the last speakers of El Abadi dialect of Zoroastrian Dari in Yazd.

During the period between 1879 and 2011, the number of Zoroastrians in Kerman and Yazd declined dramatically, while it increased massively in Tehran during the same period. Most of the migrants who came to Tehran were either looking for jobs or continuing their education. In recent years, a large number of Zoroastrians have migrated to other countries, mostly to the USA, Canada and they stop to use the language in new home.

The second problem is that many Zoroastrian parents speak only Persian with their children, and the intergenerational transmission of Dari has thus ceased, especially in the communities in Tehran and Kerman. As a consequence, it is imaginable that in the future there will no longer be any speakers who use Dari as a first or even as a second language.

Dari has also gradually been losing significant communicative functions as it falls under the shadow of Persian, the dominant and official language of the country. Only Persian is considered to be a prestigious language in Iran. For this reason, many other languages and dialects have also reached endangered status, slowly becoming dormant and extinct.

In the locations where Dari has kept functions in daily activities, the language has been better preserved. This is why the status of the Yazdi dialect of Dari is comparatively better than the status of the Kermani dialect.

Within the framework of my project "Documenting of Zoroastrian Dari in Kerman" (granted by Endangered Languages Documentation Program (ELDP), SOAS, University of London, my colleagues and I were able to document the language of the last three speakers of Zoroastrian Dari in Kerman. In addition to language documentation, we planned to encourage younger generations to speak the language as they grow and to encourage parents to teach their children the language through giving talks in the community, interviewing with local radio and television, and writing articles for the community journals.

In the past 20 years, we know of approximately 10 subdialects of Zoroastrian Dari that have gone extinct. 20 Yazdi subdialects are critically endangered and need to be documented and preserved before it is too late. Many of these disappearing subdialects have never been described or recorded and so the richness of their culture is disappearing without a trace.

2. Avestan and other Zoroastrian manuscripts

The Avesta language, the language of the holy book of the Zoroastrian religion, is attested solely by manuscripts. The earliest discoveries of Iranian Avestan manuscripts were made by foreign Avestan scholars conducting exploratory expeditions in Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New theories regarding the transmission of Avesta and linguistic, philological, religious or cultural studies about Avesta led to the rediscovery of the importance of the Avestan manuscripts as the sole witnesses of the Avestan texts and motivated Avesta scholars to travel to India and Iran in order to find as many Avestan manuscripts as possible. For such reasons, E. G. Browne, Niels Ludvig Westergaard, A. V. Williams Jackson and other scholars visited Iran with the aim of discovering Avestan manuscripts.



Image 3: Damaged Avestan manuscripts discovered in Yazd in 2016

However, the trips were not consistently successful and led to the assumption that there were no more Avestan manuscripts remaining in Iran. However, recent research and fieldwork in Iran have resulted in important findings disproving this assumption.

After 2000, this topic of Avestan manuscripts received relatively more attention on account of the discovery of various previously unknown manuscripts in Iran.

Two important articles published by Prof. Katayoon Mazdapour drew the attention of Avesta researchers to the fact that there were still many yet undiscovered and unknown manuscripts in Iran that had not been used in the edition of the Avesta text. In these articles, Mazdapour listed and described various manuscripts, most of them had been found in the houses of priest families or appeared for sale on the black market.

This information motivated us to travel to Iran with the goal of locating, preserving, and digitizing Avestan manuscripts. Since 2011, many activities have been undertaken by both Iranian scholars as well as by members of the Avestan Digital Archive (ADA) team. During more than ten fieldwork trips, we were able to locate ninety-six manuscripts. Many of them were in the possession of smugglers

and collectors, while some of them were found in catastrophic conditions in the cellars of old houses.

One of these important discoveries consisted of Avestan manuscripts found in a Zoroastrian house in the Priests' Quarter (Mahalle-ye Dasturan) in Yazd in February 2016. The manuscripts were found in old boxes in two rooms of this old house. Two of the manuscripts, were found by accident in old baggage in a cellar in the backyard of the house.

Our new projects were taken up, targeting some of the most important manuscript collections Iran. With the advancement of information technology, digitization promises documentation and preservation of original texts, we facilitate a greater access for scholars and researchers.

3. Historical documents

Over the past 10 years, about 100,000 documents have been discovered only in Yazd. A part of these documents has been digitized through my project "Preservation and digitization of Zoroastrian historical documents and Avestan manuscripts (EAP1014)" (granted by Endangered Archives Programme, British Library).

The aim of this project was to digitize and preserve the collection of historical Zoroastrian documents and Avestan manuscripts in Arbab Mehraban Pouladi's Archive and to safeguard original material by finding a suitable local home and ensuring both long-term preservation and wider access.

The archival collection has remained in scattered locations until recently, and valuable seventeenth to nineteenth century documents have been kept under deteriorating conditions. This project digitized approximately 20,000 pages and made them available to scholars and the public worldwide.

The project was organized into four principal stages:

1. Photographing and scanning the original material by using a high quality camera/scanner.
2. Saving the images in a high quality format.
3. Preparing meta data, mounting the images with metadata.
4. Making the metadata and images freely available via the Web to the scholars all over the world

Most of the documents of this collection are commercial documents including bookkeeping record books, legal contracts dealing with sales, leases, settlements of disputes, letters, and official actions. They also include Documents regarding Zoroastrian associations and organizations, personal letters, daily notes and injunctions. They provide us with relevant information about the structure and work processes of various institutions and organizations during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods in Iran. The most of these documents are from ca. 1850-1950. These documents contain also many information about trade of Zoroastrians of Iran with other countries, particularly with India and England.

For preservation of these materials, we chose digitization because it preserves the content of the materials, even if the physical materials may disappear in the future. The objective after digitization is to undertake a survey and to increase access to, and the visibility of, one of the most valuable and

endangered components of Zoroastrian heritage. One of the main problems in the field of Zoroastrian and Avestan studies is the lack of research material. A large number of materials are not available, because either they have been held in private collections, which are mostly unknown to us, or they are held by dealers. In both of these cases, it is very difficult to access them.

The results of this work make new kinds of interdisciplinary teaching and research possible, while at the same time, it facilitates the study and critique of how these impact cultural heritage and digital culture. An open access archive would give opportunities for scholars from different disciplines such as Iranian Studies, and Zoroastrian and Avestan Studies to answer existing relevant research questions and to challenge existing theoretical paradigms, generating new questions and pioneering new approaches.



Image 4: A commercial document, written in the theft of tobacco signed by 37 Bombay in 1920.



Image 5: A letter of complaint about the theft of tobacco signed by 37 merchants, dated 28.06.1913



Image 6: Historical documents in Pouladi collection before digitization

The challenge is great to preserve Zoroastrian cultural heritage materials that are threatened by factors inherent in their physical structures or by the environments in which they are housed. A good stewardship of resources requires especially equal attention to both access and preservation. Preservation is essential to the survival and development of Zoroastrian culture and scholarship.

Becoming a WaterMaker

Meher Bhandara

In 2004, when my brother Pallan Katgara first heard about atmospheric water technology from Dan Zimmerman, a co-traveler at JFK Airport, it was with a sense of disbelief. Dan Zimmerman was an innovator who simply told him “I make water from air” and that intrigued Pallan enough to go into it deeper. What was this water from air? Was it something like rain? And how was it possible to make water from air? When he learnt more, he told our late father Adi Katgara, my brother Homi and my sister Hilla about it and we thought it would be a great technology for India. We obtained the rights for India and then later for Africa and other parts of the world. I am happy to say that we were successful and now manufacture our own WaterMakers near Mumbai.

How does WaterMaker work?

The technology uses optimized dehumidification techniques to extract and condense moisture in the air to produce healthy purified drinking water as per IS 10500 2012/WHO standards. The atmospheric water generators require stable 24x7 power source and function best in coastal areas that are hot and humid. They are “plug n’ play” machines and easy to maintain. The larger machines are outdoor machines. Costs range from USD1500 for a 25 litre unit to USD 38,000 for a 2500 litre unit. Maintenance costs are not high, and maintenance is easy, requiring just filter changes twice a year and regular cleaning of the internal water tank and air filters.

To test the market in India, we flew in a 500 litre machine for the Water Asia Expo in 2005. People were amazed at the atmospheric water generator (AWG) technology requiring no water source. A great deal of interest was generated, the product was innovative, there was a market for it and it would benefit many people. And as a result of this interest and innovation, WaterMaker India Pvt. Ltd came into being.

My personal journey

The Katgara family has always been in the service industry. Well known in global logistics (the 119-year-old Jeena & Company) and travel tourism. We had no experience in technology or manufacturing, but we felt it was time to look to the future and expand our activities. I worked with TCI – Travel Corporation India Pvt Ltd, India’s largest travel and tour company for over 25 years. Never did I dream that I would one day be in a totally different field – with no prior knowledge of science or technology. I learnt fast and now head WaterMaker India. The journey has been most challenging and a lot of hard work for me.



Trying to do offer a solution

To read year after year about the tremendous hardships people in India had to face due to water scarcity, contamination, thousands of children dying of

water borne diseases and poor medical services in rural areas. This affected me deeply and I felt it was my chance to do something that would help to improve the situation by offering our WaterMaker solution.

In 2009, when we set up our first rural Air Water Station at Jalimudi village in Andhra Pradesh, an old woman blessed me with tears in her eyes, saying “Thank you, you have given us water from God.” This was my Eureka moment. When I talk of this touching experience, even today, I still get goosebumps.



Photo: Jalimudi WaterMaker Inauguration (2009)



Photo: Jalimudi Village Air Water Project (2009)

Eco-friendly philosophy

Most of us take water for granted. It’s always been there, but today it is finite and future predictions of tremendous water shortages and even wars fought over water are of concern to everyone. What if we could do our bit and produce safe drinking water from air, requiring no water source? It would conserve existing water resources, eliminate the use of non-degradable plastic water bottles, save on transportation and fuel costs, and thus contribute towards a green environment.

What’s next?

My ultimate aim is to marry alternate water with alternate power, so that water literally becomes free and our WaterMakers are totally green. There are so many countries in the world which do not have 24x7 power, some have limited or contaminated water resources, no water connections and people who have to walk more than 3 km a day to find water, specially the women

and children. One day in the near future, we hope we can be the agents of change by working with Governments, NGOs, trusts, social enterprises and enlightened individuals who can help us in our efforts.

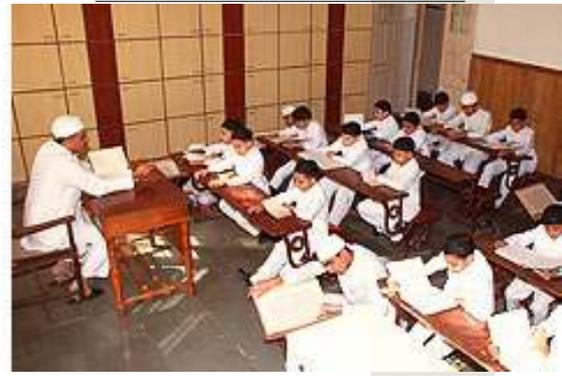


Photo: At the 2015 Inauguration of the Gandhigram WaterMaker.



Photo: Gandhigram WaterMaker Air Water Station at its inauguration

Zoroastrians and Parsis are known for their charitable work for the welfare of all people. If you would like to work together as change makers, please do come forward and let's join hands to make the world a better place – drop by drop!



THE DADAR ATHORNAN INSTITUTE KEEPING THE FLAME OF OUR FAITH BURNING BRIGHT

An Appeal to the Community

It is an accepted fact that no community can survive without a strong religious foundation. At the same time no religion can survive without an enlightened clergy. The success and survival of our Zoroastrian community is therefore directly linked to our religion and our Priests (Mobed's).

It would be safe to conclude that training and introducing new Mobeds into the mainstream of our community is very vital, for without trained erudite Mobeds we can only face the bleak future of there being no religion and in turn no community.

In a world that constantly keeps on changing, it is essential that whilst we adapt to changing times in secular matters, what has to remain constant is following our faith by observing the basic tenets as laid down in our scriptures, the true essence of which can only be understood by the laity if explained by an enlightened clergy.

The Dadar Athornan Institute, was established in 1919 by the Athornan Mandal, Mumbai, with the main object being to train youth from the Athornan families to imbibe the wealth of religious knowledge that they in turn can impart to the laity.

It is a matter of pride that our institute, popularly known as Dadar Madressa is celebrating its Centenary year. Over the years thousands of young Athornans have received training at our institute and brought name and fame to themselves, their families as well as to our Institute where they received their training.

At present our Institute has 25 students studying at various levels. They are being trained for priesthood and taught religious scriptures, rituals, religion and Iranian history, apart from academic education up to S.S.C. level. Boarding, lodging, education and all other facilities are provided totally free of charge. The expense incurred on each child is in the region of Rs.200,000 per annum.

To sustain our Institution and ensure that we continue in the same vein as hitherto, the Trustees seek generous financial support from individuals, supporters, well wishers, philanthropists.

We request all to come forward and extend support to our institute through donations, made either in cash or by Cheque, favouring 'Athornan Mandal', and sent to:

The Principal,

Dadar Athornan Institute,

651-52, Firdausi Road,

Parsi Colony, Dadar;

Mumbai 400 014, INDIA.

The Athornan Mandal is also authorized to receive donations from overseas.

Overseas donors can transfer funds directly to Athornan Mandal's FCRA Bank Account (Account Name : Athornan Mandal; Saving Bank A/c. No:1000691715; IFSC: CBIN0280634; Bank Name: Central Bank of India -Wadala Branch) through either SWIFT, NEFT/RTGS.

Should any further information be required, please do not hesitate to contact us on Tel:+91-22-24138086; Email: info@dadarathornaninstitute.org

or write to:

The Joint Honorary Secretaries,

Athornan Mandal,

240, Navsari Bldg., 2nd Flr.,

Dr. Dadabhai Navroji Road,

Fort, Mumbai 400 001. INDIA.

Telephone: Tel: +91-22-2207 0784.

The Dadar Athornan Institute.

Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia

The Dadar Athornan Institute (formerly known as Athornan Boarding Madressa) is an important educational Institution, an asset of the Parsi community and a landmark in the Mancherji E. Joshi Parsi Colony, Dadar. It keeps alive the traditions and life style of Parsee priesthood in the modern, fast changing times. It is a charitable Institute committed to the cause of providing religious as well as secular education to children of the priestly class since the past 95 years. It was established in 1919 by Athornan Mandal, an association of priests, and is still managed by it.

The Institute started with 10 students under Principal Ervad Barjorji Erachji Bajan at a bungalow in Golanji Hill, Parel. Later a need for a larger premise was felt, and a one storeyed building was constructed in Dadar Parsi Colony through the largesse of Bai Dhunbaiji Pestonji Hakimji, where the Madressa was shifted in 1924. A couple of years later a second floor was added to this building by the Athornan Mandal.

In 1990 an Annexe Building was constructed adjoining the old building. The Annexe houses the Mancherji E. Joshi Hall on the first floor; a Library on the second floor and resident staff quarters on the third floor.

The aim of the institute is to impart scriptural, religious and ritual education to children of the priestly class along with secular education upto S.S.C. (High School) level. All this, along with boarding, lodging, and allied facilities like laundry, medicines, books and stationery are provided absolutely free of costs.

Presently, the strength of the Institute is 23 students, who come from all over India, especially from Mumbai, Udwada, Surat, Navsari, Bulsar and Poona. The Institute is indebted to the Management of the Dadar Parsee Youths Assembly High School for providing totally free academic education to its students.

Since its inception, about 500 students have studied at the Institute. The alumni of the Institute include Dasturjis (Head priests) like Dr. Hormazdyar K. Mirza and Khurshed Kaikobad Dastur of Udwada, Meherji K. Meherji Rana of Navsari and Nadirshah P. Unwala of Bangalore. It has also given to the Community several high caliber ritual priests (Boywalla, Panthakis, Yozdathregar Mobeds), Religious teachers, scholars, Principals and countless other priests.

In 1965 the Institute was closed down on account of financial constraints. It was re-opened in 1966 under a new management. Ervad Rustomji N. Panthaki was appointed Principal, under whom the Institute grew and flourished. Much of the present grandeur and glory of the Institute, including the construction of the Annexe Building in 1990, is due to the untiring zeal, efforts and dedication of Rustomji and his noble wife Jalamai. Rustomji served as the Principal till 1995, after which Ervad Dr. Ramiyar P. Karanjia, himself an alumnus of the Institute, took over as the Principal.

The Institute functions on donations from philanthropic individuals and Charitable Trusts, and depends on their largesse for its functioning. It has been blessed by the good will of the community, and as long as that continues, it will serve the community and religion in the years to come.

JAMJOJI

Leea Nadeer Contractor

According to legend, the story of the Parsis (the people from Pars) begins with food as a symbol for survival. Many of us have grown up hearing the story of the Arab invasion of Iran, which led to Zoroastrians fleeing the mountains of Khorasan and arriving on boats as refugees on the shores of Sanjan in Gujarat. Legend has it that the local Hindu ruler met with the refugees with a brimming cup of milk, to show that there was no room for more people in his kingdom. In response, one of the Parsi priests added a pinch of sugar to the milk, which dissolved in to it, sweetening the milk without anything spilling over. This was used as a metaphor to indicate that Parsis would in fact make the lives of the citizens “sweeter” and adapt and enrich the Subcontinent without altering its character.

Adaptation was key to our survival, and it remains the defining feature of Parsi food today. Over the centuries, we have drawn from the Hindu use of warm spices and fondness of seafood, which was found in abundance along the Gujarat coast. When the Muslims took over Gujarat at the end of the 13th century, we incorporated their way of cooking meats and poultry in to our cuisine, and 400 years later, Parsi food was influenced by the British when they entered the region in the 17th century.

Despite these influences, our recipes continue to have very deep Persian roots which can be seen by our liberal use of dried fruits and nuts as well as the mix of sweet and sour that makes our cuisine what it is. For Parsis, like for most other cultures, food is an integral part of our identity. Many dishes have ceremonial value, while others tell the story of Persian, Indian and Colonial influences that have shaped who we are today.

As a prehistoric religion with people who have fled persecution time and again, we have preserved the crux of our religion by using storytelling and oral communication to pass down knowledge from generation to generation. This has been explained in the book *The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination*, in which the author states that due to the “paucity of material available for the early period of Zoroastrianism” the religion was quite dependent on spreading their ideas and beliefs verbally.

Similarly, Parsi recipes that are highly treasured are often passed down from generation to generation. Some are closely guarded secrets, while others feel a sense of immense pride and joy not only in sharing their recipes, but also in sharing the stories that surround them.

Food is a very effective trigger of memories associated with both feelings and emotions. Something as simple as the taste, smell or even texture can transport you back into a time or moment when it was not only last eaten, but also of the place and setting. It is these memories and stories that makes food more than just a necessity. As the Parsi diaspora expands abroad in countries such as England, Australia, the USA and Canada, people often use food to form a connection with their community and culture.

I have often noticed that as more generations of Parsis are growing up outside the subcontinent there is a need to reinforce the connections between food, stories and community.

My strongest food memories were associated with my grandparents, Dinaz and Mino Bamjee, who had a huge impact on my life.

Growing up I would always have lunch and dinner at my grandparent's house. I considered this time with them the most precious to me as we would all gather together as a family to share our stories with one another. I would love to listen to all the memories my grandparents would share with me and till this day I do remember how they would talk so fondly of their younger days.

I slowly began to associate certain memories with my grandparents when eat a specific dish, for example I remember that when we were eating Kekra Nu Curry Chawal my grandmother would break open the crab and take

all the meat out for me as I was too young to do it myself. I remember my grandfather whenever I eat Roast Chicken as he would always leave the wish bone aside for me, and the two of us would break it after eating.

After my grandparents passed away, I wanted a way to honor the memories that I have of eating and enjoying Parsi food at their house. I started to record stories of food and memories, and designed a project called ‘Jamjoji’. It is a compilation of food memories and recipes that have been collected from the community, and converted in to multi-media. So far, some of these stories have been housed on Facebook in a way that is accessible to youth and young adults, particularly those of the Parsi community living abroad.

By weaving food and narratives together, I hope that Jamjoji will forge a deeper sense of belonging to the community through this aspect of Parsi culture, which will continue to grow as a collaborative and interactive platform for sharing food memories.

One of the first stories I collected, and one that is quite close to my heart is the story shared by my mother and her three sisters (Anita Contractor, Lyla Daroga, Natasha Tarapore and Phiroza Setna). The story is as follows:

Our parents were married for almost fifty years. They did everything together: from travelling around the world, to raising four children and ten grandchildren!

Over the years they led by example, teaching us how to be kind, generous and loving, how to be better people and better Zoroastrians, but most of all they taught us how to celebrate every moment of life, together!

The song below is based on the Carpenter's “On Top of the World”, and was written by all four of us sisters. We sang it for them on their silver wedding anniversary, as family and friends came together from around the world to celebrate forty amazing years of their marriage.

From as far back as we can remember, for every happy occasion such as a birthday, anniversary or New Year, Ravo, has been a favourite celebratory dish in the Bamjee household. Even relatives and friends visiting on these occasions would look forward to sampling some of the Ravo and whether served warm or cold, they would relish it.

To date each one of us carries on with the tradition of serving Ravo even though our beloved Mum and Dad are no more.

*40 years for mum and dad it's been
40 glorious years of loving tenderly
There've been ups, there've been downs
There've been joys, there've been frowns
But a winning team they sure do make we see
They made us everything we are today
Taught us how to live our lives with love each day
From the love in their eyes we're enriched in our lives
With their Manashni, Gavashni, Kunashni
(Chorus)
They're on the top of the world looking
Down on creation
And the only explanation we can find
Is the love that they found ever since they joined as one
Their love puts them at the top of the world
They married in December '59
Not knowing what in life they each would find,
What they knew for sure, was their love could endure
Any test of time or fate they may meet
There is only one wish in our hearts
That happiness is always in your stars*

*That wherever you go, with health and happiness you glow
 We're so proud of the gems that you are
 They're on the top of the world looking
 Down on creation
 And the only explanation we can find
 Is the love that they found ever since they joined as one
 Their love puts them at the top of the world
 They're on the top of the world looking
 Down on creation
 And the only explanation we can find
 Is the love that they found ever since they joined as one
 Their love puts them at the top of the world*

To see these and other stories

please visit us on Facebook at :

<https://www.facebook.com/ChaloJamjoji/>

or scan the QR Code below.



JAMJOJI

Savour our Stories

RECIPE FOR RAVO

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsp thick ghee	Pinch of salt
3 tbsp semolina powder	1 tin evaporated milk
3 tbsp sugar, heaped	½ tsp cardamom powder
4 eggs	1 tsp vanilla essence
	½ cup sliced almonds
	½ cup raisins

METHOD

- Heat the ghee in a pan, add the semolina keep stirring till it turns pink in colour.
- Add in the sugar and stir till it melts.
- In a separate bowl beat the eggs with a beater and add in the evaporated milk and beat again.
- On a very slow fire add in this mixture gradually to the semolina and keep on stirring till it turns thick and creamy.
- Add in the vanilla essence and cardamom powder.
- Serve with fried almonds and raisins garnished on the semolina.



Moving towards “Frashokereti”, one Youth Congress at a Time - An Experience Report

Jimmy Khushroo Madon

Four years whizzed by after the 6th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (6WZYC) which was held in stunning Auckland, New Zealand back in 2015. But earlier this summer, the youth of our community got a chance to do it all over again at the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (7WZYC) in sunny Los Angeles, USA. 400 participants jumped on that opportunity to make it a truly memorable event.

My experiences of community events, growing up in Parsi-centric Mumbai made me think that these congresses would all be the ‘same’ – starting with a Jashan, ending with a Gala night and wading through discussions in between on the same old community issues without causing any lasting change. One would further think that not a lot could change for our community in just 4 years. Thankfully, I was very wrong on both counts.



Photo: Inaugural Jashan Ceremony (Photo Credits: 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

The seeds that were sown in New Zealand had now turned into little flowering saplings. In Auckland (2015), we discussed the possible reasons for the hereditary nature of Zoroastrian priesthood since the Sassanian times. We also discussed on why it was a privilege to only men at the time. Most of us left thinking that we are still continuing a cultural practice by suppressing the wisdom we have today and not giving truth a chance. But this year in LA, we did quite the opposite. Firstly, it was great to see that the opening Jashan which I was fortunate to be a part off was performed solely by young priests. But I was even more privileged to sit next to Mahshad Khosraviani. I met Mahshad when she visited London in 2015 to speak at the WZO’s seminar on Zoroastrianism. I was delighted to introduce her to the audience as the youngest female priestess in Iran and the first ever in North America. We wondered when we would get a chance to pray together. Now here we were four years later, praying together alongside 12 other young mobeds for a positive start to what would be a very fruitful congress. For the first time, I felt like I practised the verse of the “Yenghe Hatam” prayer while reciting it in the Jashan, for it talks about the equality of both, righteous men and women, in our wonderful religion.

As the events of the first day unveiled, I realised yet another way in which our global community has matured. The congress had more “Iranian” volunteers working alongside their “Parsi” brethren to make it a truly Zoroastrian congress. For once, there was no need to explain that while every Parsi could be a Zoroastrian, not every Zoroastrian is a Parsi. A notion many of us have been indoctrinated with by the previous generations, especially in the Indian subcontinent. Most importantly, it demonstrated how both the groups could collaborate together on a grand scale leaving behind their trivial dinner cuisine preferences!

This congress had a lot more panel discussions than individual speaker sessions. This meant that the delegates could get a better flavour from a group

of experts and benefit from their collective experience on the various topics. The topics themselves were carefully selected to be relevant to a global young Zarathusti in the 21st century. Some of these topics were never discussed before at such a forum. The first panel discussion on climate change aptly set the tone by connecting our ecological religion to the environmental concerns our world faces today. The panel on LGBTQ+ issues in particular was outstanding – as participants shared their personal stories increasing awareness on the stereotypes that exist in our community and society. The panel discussions on women having equal opportunities and rights within our community was yet another eye opener on how the patriarchal society has negatively influenced our culture in some ways.



Photo: Zoroastrian Women of the World Panel (Photograph Credits 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

The panel on Zoroastrian priesthood was another popular session which saw a plethora of issues being discussed. The classic topics of inter-faith marriages and accepting genuine people wanting to follow Zarathushtra’s philosophy into our community were touched upon. The congress had delegates from all of the above groups. This helped other members of the community connect with them better and understand first-hand the positive aspects of being an inclusive accepting community.



Photo: Inaugural Jashan Ceremony (Photo Credits: 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

The topics were not limited to religious and cultural issues. For the very first time, young Zoroastrian entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to pitch their ideas in the very first Zoroastrian Shark Tank. A full day of events was planned by the youth wing of the World Zarathusti Chamber of Commerce ably led by Ervad Jehaan Kotwal with assistance from Rashna Sanjana and others.



Photo: Zoroastrian Women of the World Panel (Photograph Credits 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

The congress had its share of fun social activities – from the Freddie Mercury movie night, to a comedy cum dance night and finally, the Gala ball to end it all. It was indeed a spectacle to see hundreds of Zoroastrians storm Santa Monica Pier. The delegates got their taste of America as they strolled through the streets of Downtown Los Angeles. But nothing gets more American than dancing through the sunset on a Fireworks Cruise to celebrate the 4th of July wearing the colours of America. These activities ensured we could all build a few good friendships with members of our youth from 12 countries around the globe! Cause at the end of the day, very few of our elders are interested to know if we learnt more about the religion or tried to resolve important community issues affecting our generation. The first thing everyone asks when we head back home is if we found that someone special. I think that is slightly difficult considering you're meeting 400 people in 5 days. But I am sure we will cherish many of the friendships we've made for a lifetime.



Photo: Fireworks Cruise with WZYLFFellows (Photograph Credits: 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

Thus, the congress organisers did a fantastic job in achieving their main goals. Kudos to the congress chair Parshan Khosravi and his entire team of volunteers and mentors. The Southern California youth were mentored by the dynamic program co-chair, Arzan Sam Wadia, founder of the famous Parsi Khabar blog. His exceptional professional, organizational, social media and marketing skills not only ensured that a great number of participants enjoyed the congress but also catered to the people who could not make it! Every single session of the 5-day event was streamed live on Facebook and will be available to watch later on YouTube for posterity.

Being an active volunteer within the community for many years, I have noticed that the youth of today haven't been handed down the religion by the previous generation in a way that they would choose Zoroastrianism. Cultural and traditional notions have been mixed into the pure religion of Zarathushtra which made it less practical and accessible to the youth. We have never been able to apply the meanings within our prayers or in the

message of Zarathushtra's Gathas in our daily life. Consequently, the youth of today is going from being ignorant to indifferent - from not knowing much about the actual religion to not really bothering to care as it doesn't really help them in their life. The constant bickering and in-fighting amongst our opinionated elders have not helped the cause either. This was the sole purpose to create focused initiatives such as the World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum held in England in 2018. 12 of the 20 fellows of this forum were present at the congress ensuring that the projects they identified to tackle the main issues the youth face today were taken up by many more young individuals present at the congress.



Photo: Jimmy Madon (author) presenting his talk (Photograph Credits: 7WZYC and Anahita Verahrami)

It was heartening to see that the trend to differentiate one's ethnicity, culture and identity from the philosophy of our religion has gained momentum from the last congress. The youth were slowly beginning to give more importance to using their Good Mind, in accordance with their conscience to seek the Truth in all of the panels mentioned above. Discussions were always healthy, and even when members had different perspectives on topic, everyone respected each other's opinions.

We remember our lives best through the milestones that we achieve – our first day at school, the day we graduate, birthdays along the way, buying a house and even getting married. There are events that we look back upon that make certain things in our lives normal, which once were only a dream. I feel this congress has done just that for the community. The next Youth Congress is going to be held in London in 2023 and the UK youth are already fired up to further the goals achieved by the previous congresses. Even though the road might be long, I feel that we are well on our way to achieve the Zoroastrian idealistic state of perfection – for ourselves and our community. A state we call 'Frashokereti'.

For a full detailed report by Arzan Sam Wadia:

<https://parsikhabar.net/7wzyc/7th-world-zoroastrian-youth-congress-a-report/>

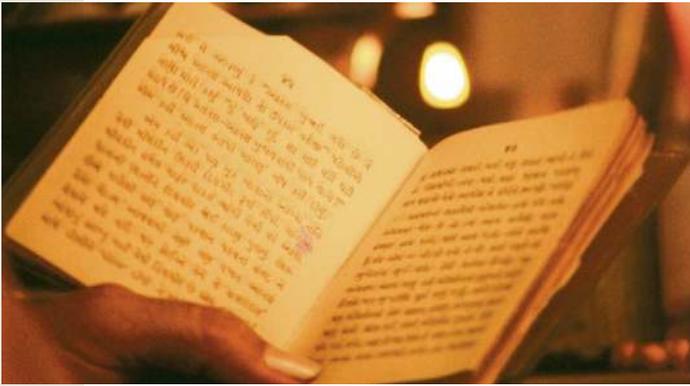
Preserving the Parsi-Gujarati language

Bhavya Dore

Anton Zykov snaps open his laptop and sifts through the video files. He opens a folder of a Parsi man showing him around a burial ground in Navsari, talking to the camera in Gujarati as he leads the way. “Here, he is talking about the construction of the ground, how they purify the body,” explains Zykov, during a meeting at an Irani café in Mumbai. “The way he speaks would be typically associated with his profession”.

Zykov, a Russian national, is a Sorbonne University scholar at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco). He has spent two-and-a-half months making such recordings in an effort to capture the variations and vibrancy of Parsi-Gujarati—a form of Gujarati unique to India’s 57,000-odd Parsi community.

“Parsi-Gujarati (or I would call it simply Parsi) is a separate language and it is endangered,” he says. “I am documenting Parsi colloquial speech, which I believe is a separate language, different from standard Gujarati, and has its own unique morphology, syntax, lexical and other features.”



When Zoroastrians arrived in India between the eighth and 10th centuries AD, fleeing persecution in Iran, they were given refuge off the coast of Gujarat, and, according to legend, promised that they would assimilate. They adopted the local language and some local habits while retaining their religious distinctiveness. Now, as their numbers dwindle, as they intermarry and settle abroad, with younger generations sundered from their heritage, the threat of language erasure is increasingly becoming a reality. “...they would lose a bunch of oral culture, the munajats (Parsi popular devotional songs), the kahavaten (sayings), the galliyan (swear words). All this,” says Zykov, lapsing into a showy touch of Hindi, “kafur ho jayega(will vanish).”



Photo: A Parsi home in Ahmedabad

He has so far spoken to about 200 people and made about 60 recordings, aiming to capture a range of speakers in different contexts: men and women, children and older people, rural and urban residents, and representatives of different typically Parsi professions, such as law, medicine or certain types of businesses.

Often, it’s easy to get a person talking, especially if they have a story to tell or if it’s about their work and topics are readily available. “If it’s a professional context, I go to

a wine shop, he talks about this booze, that booze, chickoo booze,” says Zykov. “At a bakery, he would talk about biscuits and the variety he has.”

The goal is to document words specific to certain aspects of culture, religion or the Parsi way of life, not every single word. “Someone can do a full-scale dictionary, but that would not be that exciting. It would be the same as doing a New Zealand English dictionary or a Belgian French dictionary,” he says. “There would be different words and these dictionaries exist, but it would not be super exciting.”

Similarly, Gujarati dictionaries exist, but, ultimately, whether or not Parsi-Gujarati is a language or a dialect is a matter of debate. “The question of what is dialect and what is language is more of a social and political notion,” he says.

So what are the technical and linguistic variations that set apart the two tongues? In terms of phonetics, for instance, Parsis would use dental consonants compared to retroflex ones. So a Gujarati would say pani (with a hard n) but a Parsi person would say pani (with a soft n). Or a Gujarati speaker would say “tame su karo cho?” (what are you doing?), and a Parsi speaker would say “tame su karoch?”. Though Parsi speakers might believe it is a sweeter version, Gujarati speakers consider it more impure.

Even within Parsi-Gujarati, there are variations, not just between urban and rural centres, but between the first wave of refugees (Parsis) and the later 19th and 20th century ones (Iranis). Being more recent, Irani speakers retain the lingering aftertaste of Zoroastrian Dari, or Gavruni, with vestigial elements persisting in some swear words or colloquial words. “In the third generation, they would switch to Gujarati but still some would have the reminiscence of the language they came with,” he says. “Some features distinguish Irani speech in Gujarati from Parsi speech. Iranis would use some code words that are distinctive; for example, chom for bhonu (food). One distinguishing feature (of Parsis) would be a worse knowledge of syntax in Gujarati in the sense they would sometimes make mistakes in the use of the three genders: neuter, masculine and feminine.”

Zykov’s next step will be to record Parsi-Gujarati speakers in the remaining cities with a significant Parsi population—mainly Secunderabad, Jamshedpur, Bengaluru and Kolkata. Once he is done with fieldwork, he will move to transcribing, translating, annotating and then processing this data through speech analysers to understand the nature of the sounds. “It’s important to preserve language, and his is a significant effort,” says Shernaz Cama, director of the Parzor Foundation, a non-profit focusing on Parsi culture and heritage. “A language dying is a marker of a culture dying. Many of our children no longer speak it, so it could be lost forever.”

Zykov is fluent in Hindi, a language he first studied at school in Russia, and, more recently encountered during a work stint at the Russian embassy in Delhi. He also knows French, Persian, English, Russian and Hebrew, but arrived for his fieldwork with virtually no knowledge of the language he needed most: Gujarati.

For his MPhil in modern South Asian studies at the University of Oxford, Zykov studied the history of khandias or nasusalars (Parsi corpse-bearers). For his PhD, he turned to the minority group again, being familiar with their history and habits. “I really love the community,” he says, “and what I value is their ability to be pluralistic and critical of themselves, to have free debates in the community and an academic openness.”

With his blond curls and foreign accent, he clearly stands out as non-native. “There is a postcolonial critique of what I’m doing. I’m a foreigner working on an Indian language. Obviously, I’m bringing my background and education and the way I understand linguistics to what I do,” he readily concedes.

“Unfortunately, there is so far no Parsi person doing it and I bet they would do it better than I would, but sometimes being an outsider helps. Sometimes, teachers who are non-native speakers and have learnt the language this way, know how to acquire language.”

Press him further on his motivations, and it leads to a circular conversation. “Let me ask you, what is a good reason according to you for doing this?” he counters. “Why are you a journalist? Why do you enjoy it? So the ultimate answer is just like that. It is something that is inscrutable. I’m just interested in the Parsi community and linguistics.” *The article first appeared on livemint.com on 8th April 2019*

Parsis in Racing

Jehangir Rustomjee

Equestrian or even general sports enthusiasts may have noticed a disproportionately large number of Parsis involved in horse racing in India. This article attempts to elaborate on this notion. For that we need to go start with a bit with a short history lesson.

It is said that according to Zoroastrianism, the horse is one of the foremost animals belonging to the Goshend or beneficent category. There are five different words for the horse in the Avesta. The most common of them is Aspa. Many Parsi names are associated with horses like Pourasp, Vishtasp and Kershasp as a few examples. Several stories abound in the Zoroastrian religion about horses. The most famous of them is the infant Zarathustra being saved by a white stallion from a herd of stampeding horses. And of course we all know of the famous steed Raksh-e-Rustom from the epic Shahnameh.

Let's advance a bit to the Parsi passion with horses and horse racing in modern times. During the British Raj, most of the Parsis in India were part of the privileged class with all the associated trappings which included their horses for transport and pleasure. On a jocular note, Parsis are known to treasure their animals and give them more care than their own wives and children.

Organised horse racing arrived in India with the British over 240 years ago and it has always and continues to be a hugely elitist pastime. In those days, the Parsis probably looked down on professions in the sport that would get their hands dirty and so limited their involvement to ownership of racehorses. Racing in the then Bombay used to be held at the Club in Byculla, but as the metropolis grew in importance, it was felt that an upgrade was needed and the Mahalaxmi racecourse was built with an interest free loan and on land donated by industrialist Sir Cusrow Wadia. It is said that he underwent the arduous ship journey to Australia to see the already famous Melbourne racecourse with his own eyes so that he could have it replicated in his beloved home city.



Photo: Adi Wadia (second from left in the white suit) leads in his Indian Oaks winner Gamble For Love in 1950

A few years before Independence Fali Wadia became one of the first Indian breeders and founded the iconic Yeravada Stud near Pune which was to stride the industry like a colossus till the late seventies. In fact it's founder died of a heart attack brought on by the joy of watching horses bred by him fill the first three places in the 1976 Indian Derby. His son Farrokh a renowned nephrologist continues to breed horses at the historical stud, but a few poor

stallion choices in the eighties set the stud back badly and it continues to struggle to return to its former glory days.

The Indian horse breeding industry is still dominated by Parsi founded and owned stud farms. The Poonawalla Stud started by Soli Poonawalla and Khushroo Dhunjibhoy's Nanoli Stud are two of India's leading nurseries today. The former is now in the care of Dr. Cyrus Poonawalla and his brother Zavareh and is the first stud farm in India to have bred winners internationally thanks to the vision of Zavareh. Construction magnate Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry bought the Manjri Stud Farm from the former rulers of the princely state of Gwalior and is attempting with some success to bring it back to the position of pre-eminence it once enjoyed.



Photo: Khushroo Dhunjibhoy with Picasso at Nanoli Stud

Racing in India was governed entirely by its colonial masters and as the British started leaving India after 1947 there were many Parsis who filled their positions to run the sport. Virtually all the five major clubs had Parsis at the helm of administrative affairs and in the positions of honorary and stipendiary stewards to police racing. Names like Soli Captain, Dara Mody, Zavaray Wadia, Nusli Padumjee and Rusi Seth are legendary and are known to have conducted themselves with firmness, integrity and most importantly dignity never allowing the sport they so loved to be brought into disrepute.

My own grandfather Adi "Tomcat" Wadia nicknamed after one of his favourite horses is still remembered fondly in his capacity as a top class handicapper (the official responsible for allotting weights for horses to carry in each race to theoretically equalize their chance to win) at The Royal Western India Turf Club (RWITC). He was a man of principle and had many differences with the stewards standing by those very principles and defending his views. He had a quirky sense of humour and didn't suffer fools easily. He used to unnerve and distract such unwelcome visitors to his office with a nearly life size painting of a semi clad Moulin Rouge beauty hung up behind his desk. It was also the source of permanent embarrassment to his assistant Hiroo Daulat sitting directly opposite him. Wadia was succeeded by Macky Meherjee and later MMT Pandole who were also good at their work, but clearly less intimidating.

Nowadays only the race clubs in Calcutta and Mumbai have Parsi stewards and officials. Khushroo Dhunjibhoy is the chairman of the RWITC. The only other Parsi on his committee is Ms. Zinia Lawyer, one of the very few women in such a position. Former chairman Cyrus Madan and Rustom Daroga

serve as committee members at the Royal Calcutta Turf Club. The former is credited with bringing the club back from possible closure and to some of its former glory. Behram Engineer, the last Parsi secretary of the RWITC retired last year.

The aforementioned Macky Meherjee was a fairly successful trainer in his youth as young Parsis took to the training ranks in the fifties. Dady Adenwalla who later became a stipendiary steward was one of the the best of them. Few if any will ever surpass the greatness and success of Rashid Rustomji Byramji, a third generation trainer and unarguably India's best trainer ever. His son Darius who has also done well carries the family flame today.



Photo: Rashid Byramji (extreme left) leads in Indian Derby Winner Astronomic in 1993

Dara Pandole, son Noshir Pandole and nephew Cooji Katrak were excellent trainers as was Bezan Chenoy who enjoyed huge success till the turn of the millennium and continues to ply his trade today. Dallas Todywalla is another senior trainer who with a group of loyal owners, a lot of them Parsi, maintains his status as one of the leading trainers in Mumbai and Pune. The current undisputed star amongst Indian trainers is Pesi Shroff. A former champion jockey, Shroff is the perennial leading trainer in western India with his huge string of mostly Parsi owned blue bloods.



Photo: Jockey Pesi Shroff on his Indian Derby Winner Revelation in 1985

In these difficult times when the new tax regime has crippled Indian racing and breeding, trainers like Noshir Cama, Hosi Daji and Nirad Karanjawalla brave the crisis as do Noshir's assistant and son Behram and my sister Roxana also an assistant trainer. There is a smaller Parsi presence in the trainers ranks down south. The now retired Zareer Darashah was a lion in his own den of Bangalore and Mysore, but still totted up 2335 winners in a colourful career spanning 50 years. His son Neil is one of the new kids on the block and is doing quite well.

It was Shroff's cousin Karl Umrigar who was India's first really well known

Parsi jockey. The teenaged Umrigar metaphorically raced across the firmament like a blazing comet before his tragic death from injuries after falling during a race. He was India's darling as he swept to championship after championship and won the Indian Derby and several other big races before he turned twenty. It was all too short, but it didn't deter his younger cousin from pursuing the most dangerous profession in racing. Shroff took a while to get his career going, but at the end of it had won a total of 1751 races including a record 8 editions of the Indian Derby.

Not too many Parsis have taken to becoming jockeys. Ruzaan Choksey was a handy natural lightweight (an advantage for jockeys who have to undergo torturous diet regimes to maintain a minimum weight) who after riding over 500 winners in India including an Indian Derby emigrated to Canada. He met with limited success in Vancouver before he was forced to retire from the saddle after he was diagnosed with a degenerative bone condition.



Photo: Ruzaan Choksey on his Indian Derby winner Supervite in 1999

Malcolm Kharadi is another one as was Hormuz Antia a contemporary of Shroff's and is also now a trainer. The first lady jockey in India Ayesha Captain is a Parsi.

Young Zervean Suratia carries the flame for the community and is ranked as one of the top 5 jockeys in the country today. He is extremely fortunate to return to riding after an accident in Calcutta in which he came down with his mount and she rolled over him and for all purposes destroyed his left leg. After a long rehabilitation and multiple surgeries he is back in the saddle and riding great guns in Bangalore as we speak.



Photo: Jockey Zervaar after winning on Secretive Force in Bangalore trained by Darius Byramji



Photo: The Poonawalla family proudly lead in their Indian Derby winter Star Superior in 2019

It is a combination of dedication, honesty, integrity, a capacity for hard work and mostly a genuine love for animals at large that has stood the Parsi community in such good stead in an increasingly competitive industry.

The Power of Film to Connect Zoroastrians

Tanya Hoshi

Zoroastrianism is a huge part of my identity and having recently attended my first Zoroastrian Youth Congress, I was given a huge reminder that this community is still alive and our youth are the leaders of today and tomorrow. So why is it that we are constantly bombarded with the same, tiring story about how our religion is diminishing, that the fire is fading, and the youth are not invested in their faith? I refuse to uphold that belief. That story is simply not inspiring. The story of a dwindling population does not help our disenfranchised youth and does not enlighten our current youth leaders. That is not the story we should be telling our fellow Zoroastrians to convince them to be involved and create impact. That is why I have decided to change the narrative and use my privilege as a filmmaker to tell stories about our community and religion that will inspire the next generation and bring to the forefront the stories that need and deserve to be told.

There is a famous saying: "A picture is worth a thousand words". I believe, in that case, that a video is worth a million. Nothing has as much impact as the moving image. It creates emotion within the viewer by stirring passion, outrage, enlightenment, and other powerful emotions that pictures or words just cannot at the same scale.

My story as a filmmaker begins only 5 years ago, when I first entered the film industry in Toronto, Canada. After having worked on the set of several feature films and web series, I decided to produce my own work in order to tell my own stories. It was during this time that I returned to my Zoroastrian community after a decade long absence. This was greatly in thanks to the Zoroastrian Return to Roots Program, which takes Zoroastrian youth on a 2 week trip in India to reconnect with their faith and culture,

while learning more about our religions rituals and practices. While on this trip, I got to meet so many Zoroastrians and learn about their contributions to our community. There were so many incredible stories I was never aware of, which made me proud to be part of such an amazing community with a rich history. I quickly realized that I could use my abilities as a filmmaker to tell Zoroastrian stories, in order to make others aware of the incredible stories within our community.



My first short film project related to Zoroastrianism was about the First Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum at the Asha Centre in Gloucester, England in March of 2018. During this forum, twenty Zoroastrian youth leaders from around the world gathered to form a vision, mission and action plan for tackling some of the most contentious issues facing the worldwide Zoroastrian community. I had the pleasure of capturing this impactful week and using this video to share at Zoroastrian congresses and AGMs in order for others to see the vision and ideas we set forth during the forum. I also had the pleasure of creating a short video about Mahshad Khosraviani, the youngest female Zoroastrian priestess in Iran and the First in North America. This video allowed me to humanize Mahshad and share her story with others who are challenging her place as a spiritual leader in our community. I have also gone on to create short videos for the Zoroastrian Return to Roots Program, as a way to share the trip highlights with others who may potentially attend the trip in the future. All of these films ultimately have my point of view attached to them and that is the case for any documentary film - the filmmaker's point of view is an essential element of the film itself! Having now created a few short videos, my next goal is to create my first feature length film that highlights a story within our community, ideally with a focus on a young Zoroastrian subject. I am currently accepting stories from anyone in the community who may know a story worth telling!



I was recently a panelist at the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Los Angeles, California. My co-panelist was LA filmmaker Simran Jehani, who recently directed her short "The Skimmer", which features a Zoroastrian teenage girl as the protagonist. We both had an engaging discussion about how we want to bring Zoroastrianism into mainstream media, in order for more people to be aware about our community and culture. What our community needs is a strong visual narrative to tell our stories. Reading about those events, or hearing rumors, lacks the visual power and doesn't create as much impact. It doesn't have the emotional quotient. Films about our community will be the best tool to tell our stories and have a massive reach. With Zoroastrians dispersed around the globe, it's difficult for everyone to stay connected via newsletters or emails. We need films that have a global reach and are easily shareable to inspire our community and make Zoroastrians the world over proud to be who they are. It is only by sharing these videos that we as a community can ensure our stories reach Zoroastrians worldwide, especially youth - many whom are disconnected with their culture and could benefit from seeing stories told about a vibrant and thriving community that they can be a part of.

The question that haunts me now is: What will be the next step? As a filmmaker and as a young Zoroastrian, I argue that what we need is a strong visual that supports understanding, generosity, and good will. A strong visual that makes us, as Zoroastrians, want to be better people and members of our community. A visual that offers hope, especially to our disenfranchised youth. We need that visual, and quickly.

Think Before You Leap: genetics, testing and it's consideration

Huafrin Kotwal

Genes; the kind you wear since birth

If you read anything that is written, whether it is on paper or nowadays online, it is in a language presented and ordered in a particular manner. Similarly, all of the instructions or the manual for constructing the human body is written in a universal code shared by all living things. However; this code is not just floating in the ether; it is organised in a very deliberate way called genes.

Genes are present with us from the day we are born, our own unique mixture provided by half of our mom's genes and half of our dad's. Which half and in which order the genes that we get from each parent is entirely random, like shuffling a deck of cards. This is why differences in humans exist between different races, cultures and even family members.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Zoroastrians have been shown to share a very similar genetic code organisation amongst each other unlike ethnicities from other countries; helped by our cultural practice of mostly marrying within the community and our limited numbers.

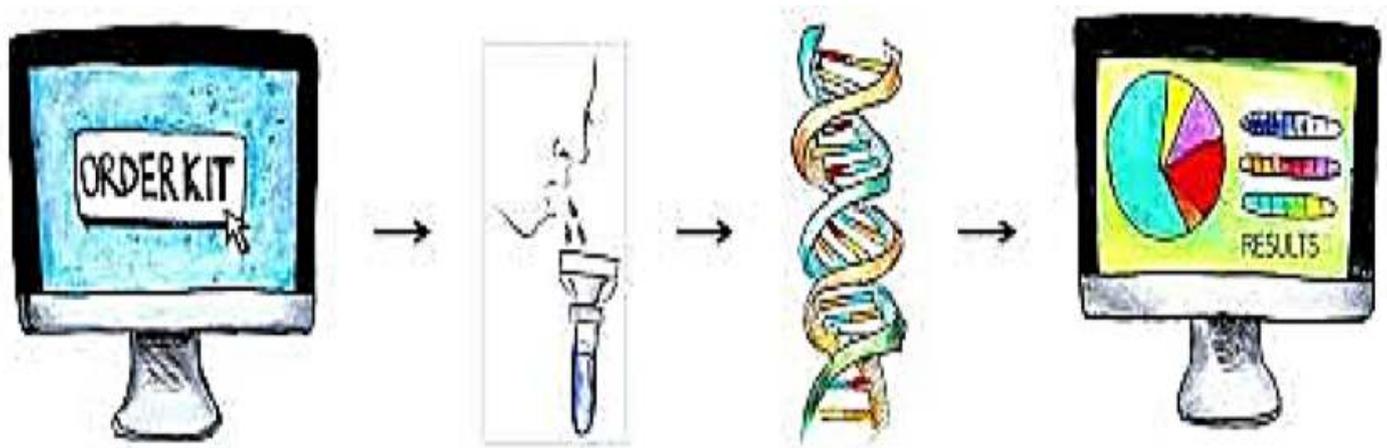
We can look at our genes in one of two major ways,

- 1) Lineage or ancestry, to find out more about where we come from.
- 2) Our health; most genes keep us healthy and well, but if they have a change in them, it could have an impact on our health.

You can get this information by paying for it yourself and providing a spit sample (D.I.Y. Genetic Testing Kit) to an online company or by accessing relevant health professionals in a genetics clinic who can support and guide you accordingly. Both avenues and their appropriateness are discussed below.

D.I.Y. Genetic Testing Kit – Nothing like an IKEA trip

When we look at online lineage testing offered by companies such as 23andMe and Ancestry, they may provide only very general information about our ancestors (i.e. geographical), something most Zoroastrians anecdotally already know or could investigate within their own family. Therefore, it is important to consider what type of information about our ancestors we wish to know and which avenue is the best and most effective one to expedite this.



The problem with paying and ordering for your own genetic testing arises when we wish to know more about our health and what our personal risks are. Online companies do offer this, but they do not provide a lot of context or professional guidance of what you are actually signing up for.

Some changes in our genes can increase our likelihood of developing a condition that can affect our health. When and how that happens is also dependent on our lifestyle, age, ethnicity, environment and family history. This is because our genes do not exist in a vacuum and external influences may affect how they work.

But some changes in our genes are harmless. Given that we have 20,000 genes, it is expected that most of us will show small alterations in this universal code. Even though our technology is sophisticated enough to pick up minor changes, our current knowledge does not expand as quick; we cannot always interpret these changes and so we cannot be always sure what role they play.

Therefore, genetics should never be seen as yes or no solution, it can be used as a sliding scale to determine if the person with a change in the gene is more susceptible than an average person who does not have the same change to develop the disease. Some people's gene changes fall on the higher end of the scale; however, they may never show any severe signs or symptoms or develop the disease.

For example, I attended in speciality clinic for patient's with Huntington's Disease (a inherited disease that affects the brain and progressively gets worse with age). Patients presented either with no, mild, moderate to severe disease progression despite all having the same change in the gene that causes Huntington's. Therefore, genes can guide us to problems with our health, but they are not the crystal ball showing our present or future situation.

Think before you leap

The usefulness of a genetic test can be better maximised with a geneticist or genetic counsellor. For example, most notably, Angelina Jolie was found to have a change in the gene BRCA1. This gene change is strongly associated with an increased risk of developing breast cancer. Angelina was now alerted to a potential health risk that was yet to happen rather than at a stage where it was too late.

Angelina chose to manage this risk proactively by removing her breasts, however; this is neither the best nor the only option available. What is important is that Angelina gave herself the opportunity to be fully aware of all the outcomes and choices before making an informed decision.

Had Angelina just ordered the test directly online without consulting a professional, she may have ended up in a state of greater misinformation which is harmful. It is recommended that people who wish to look at their gene changes from a health aspect do so with the help and advice of professionals.

Pandoras Box

Going down the route of genetic testing for your health whether it is through a clinic or online, can present with unforeseen consequences not just for you, but also your family. Some gene changes only require to be inherited from one parent for the person to be at an increased risk of the disease, some require changes in the same gene from both. As such, some people may feel guilty especially if they find out their children may share the same gene changes as they do for certain diseases.

It is important to know inheritance is a random process, not something that people can control and is in no way anyone's fault. Despite knowing this, people can still experience these emotions and may not wish to know their own genetic status. It is important that the right to know is respected as much as the right not to know.

Some gene changes that increase our risk for cancer; heart or brain conditions may have to be disclosed to insurance companies. Whilst this does not affect existing policies, it is important to consider how it may affect future policies for children before undertaking a genetic test.

In Summation

We have many expectations of what our genetic code can tell us, however; these should be treated with caution as the source of the information may not be appropriate and the information itself may not provide all the answers to our questions. As with any undertaking it is always prudent to consult with professionals who can guide and prepare you before leaping into the unknown.



Fact Sheets

Centre for Genetics Education:

<https://www.genetics.edu.au/publications-and-resources/facts-sheets>

Guys and St Thomas Hospital:

<https://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/genetics/patients/patient-leaflets.aspx>

Understanding Genetics NCBI

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK132167/>

Four Great and Admirable Zoro Test Cricketers

Kersi Meher-Homji

If you are not great yourself, you can have the consolation that you know great personalities. I have been fortunate to know four great Parsi Test cricketers personally. I wanted to narrate interesting anecdotes on the four great Zoro (short for Zoroastrian) Test cricketers I have met and admired in this essay. At the end are the relevant statistics of all 11 Parsi Test cricketers are given at the end of the article.

Year 1957: In our teens my cousin Fili and I are returning from a morning show at Metro cinema in Bombay. On the way home we are watching a cricket match at Azad Maidan when approached by a handsome young player. "One short, one short", he was saying. Looking at our blank faces he explained, "We are one short of a player, would one of you like to play for us?" I said why not, wore Fili's white shirt and requested him to tell my parents that I'll be home late. I did not shine out with bat or ball but discovered that the player who had approached us was Farokh Engineer!

A teenager then, he had yet to play a Ranji Trophy match, but the way he kept wickets and batted had hallmarks of greatness even then. He had that certain friendly flamboyance.

So when he was picked to play for India in the Kanpur Test against England in 1961 I felt as if I had played in that Test!

The highlight of his career was the Madras Test against West Indies in January 1967. He hit 109 spectaculars runs against the dreaded Windies attack of Wes Hall and Charlie Griffith, 94 of those runs coming before lunch.

But success did not go to his head. When he toured Australia with the World team under the legendary Gary Sobers in 1971-72 he remembered me. Nervously I invited him along with Sunil Gavaskar and Bishan Bedi to our one-room flat in Sydney. The trio visited us gladly, enjoying the snacks served by my wife Villie and had fun with our one year-old son Jehangir.

He never forgot this meeting and called us when he was in Sydney a few years ago. At first I did not recognise him. The athletic acrobatic Farokh had put on many kilograms. But he was the same friendly Farokh reminiscing as if nothing had changed in the fifty odd years when he had approached me at Azad Maidan in Bombay saying "One short."

After retirement from Test annals Engineer played county cricket for Lancashire. England's wicket-keeper Alan Knott wrote, "Farokh is a bundle of energy, a joy to watch in action, always happy, a great entertainer and a tremendous inspiration to his fielders. He is capable of really brilliant things behind the stumps. ... With his consistently brilliant performances Farokh must go into the bracket of all time great wicket-keepers."

Farokh remains the only Parsi cricketer to play World Cup. In 1975, he scored 54 not out against East Africa at Birmingham as his highest score.

He is the last of the 11 Parsi cricketers to play Test cricket for India. No other Zoroastrian has made it to Test annals in four decades since he retired in 1974. In the 1990, Ronnie Irani (born in Lancashire) played three Tests for England with moderate success.

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I often wonder as to why there is no Zoroastrian in an Indian Test team in 45 years. When India toured West Indies in 1961-62, four Parsis – skipper Nari Contractor, all-rounders Polly Umrigar and Rusi Surti and wicket-keeper Farokh Engineer – had played in the first two Tests at Trinidad and Jamaica. Four players out of 11 makes it 36.36 percent, but not one Test cricketer for India since 1974. How come Zoros have now become zeros at Test level?



Photo: Farokh Engineer and England's tall Tony Greig going out to bat for the World XI against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1971.

Is it because we are more education and job oriented now? Or is it because there is no role model for youngsters to emulate?

Year 1952: My principal at Sir JJ High School in Mumbai was Dr Jal Wadia. A cricket fanatic, he took cricketers who represented the School to the Brabourne Stadium, Bombay to watch the Test match between India and Pakistan in 1952. India won by 10 wickets thanks to eye-catching innings by Vijay Hazare and Polly Umrigar. I clapped like mad when they reached their centuries. They became my heroes.

I followed Polly's progress with bat and ball with increasing interest culminating in his becoming India's captain. Journalists called him palm-tree hitter as he smacked best bowlers in the world for sixes while next generation cricketers affectionately called him "Polly kaka."

Journalists called him "Palm-tree hitter".as he smacked best bowlers in the world for sixes while next generation cricketers affectionately called him "Polly kaka."

In the 1950s, when Indian cricketers were called "dull dogs", Umrigar infused life into the game with his towering sixes. It was in the West Indies Polly was nicknamed "Palm-tree hitter".

Until Sunil Gavaskar came on the scene, Polly held many Test records for India- the most number of Tests played, most runs scored, most centuries, the first Indian to hit a Test double century and the first to score 3000 Test runs. He captained India in eight Tests.

He kept his best for his last overseas tour. Despite being 36 and suffering from a bad back, he top-scored for India in both innings against the terrifying pace of Wes Hall and the spin of Lance Gibbs in the Port-of-Spain Test of 1962. He scored 56 out of India's 197 in the first innings and an unbeaten, heroic 172 in the second. He captured 5 for 107 off 56 overs in the first innings. A week later he played his final Test in Jamaica making 32 and 60, a fine swan song.

Yet statistics do not tell the whole story. He was big in every way, in build and heart.

One of Polly's regrets was not playing a Test in Australia as there were no Indian tours to this country from 1948 to 1962, his Test span. Yet his sharp off breaks (4 for 27) against Richie Benaud's team in the 1959 Kanpur Test

Yet statistics do not tell the whole story. He was big in every way, in build and heart.

One of Polly's regrets was not playing a Test in Australia as there were no Indian tours to this country from 1948 to 1962, his Test span. Yet his sharp off breaks (4 for 27) against Richie Benaud's team in the 1959 Kanpur Test contributed to India's first victory over the mighty Australians.

Umrigar toured Australia in 1977-78 as the manager of the Indian team led by the colourful Bishan Bedi. The tour provided dramatic moments as the series was tied two-all before Australia won the final Test in Adelaide despite India amassing 445 runs in the fourth innings.

The tour marked the start of our friendship. As I watched the Indian cricketers in net practice at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Bedi threw the ball at me as a joke. Although 51, Umrigar never missed an opportunity to don the pads and chance his arm. Much to his boyish delight, he smashed my slow off-spinners all over the park. But one of my innocuous deliveries managed to beat him and he presented the ball to me after autographing it.

When I visited Bombay a year later on my son's Navjote we enjoyed his and his wife Dinoo's hospitality. When Polly passed away in 2006 of lymph cancer aged 80, it was like losing a friend.

Year 1970: When my wife and I settled in Sydney friends in India asked me these three questions: How do you like the Sydney Opera House? Have you met Don Bradman? Does Rusi Surti still play for Queensland?

I told them that Rusi Surti, or rather "Rossi Serti" as the Aussies called him, played Sheffield Shield with panache becoming the first player ever from Queensland to take a hat-trick in the Sheffield Shield. I interviewed him over the phone many times and featured his achievements in Indian dailies.

He honoured my wife Villie and I by visiting us in Sydney. His sons Percy and Kaizad were getting Navjoted and he wanted Villie to teach them Kasti prayers. When the prayer sessions were going on we discussed cricket, his many highs and a few lows.

Born in Surat, he played 26 Tests for India as an all-rounder. He spent his last 43 years in Australia, representing Queensland in the Sheffield Shield with distinction in 1970s.

An elegant left-hander, Surti could bat like a millionaire, bowl like a miser and field like superman. He was India's first agile fielder. To see him perform in the middle was like sipping a glass of champagne, lots of bubbles and fizz with a glorious aftertaste.

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Even a short innings by Surti gave endless pleasure because he was like a panther on the prowl. When he toured Australia and New Zealand in 1967-68, we saw a mature Surti; not flashy but doggedly consistent. He outscored all his fellow Indians on that combined tour by scoring 688 runs at 45.87 in eight Tests.

The Test he cherished most was played in Brisbane in January 1968. Apart from taking six wickets in the match, he scored 52 and 64 as India lost narrowly by 39 runs.

In the final Test against New Zealand at Auckland two months later he made 99, which sadly remained his highest Test score.

The famous New Zealand cricket writer Dick Brittenden wrote: "Surti looked the best of them [Indians] as a batsman and comparisons made with Garry Sobers were in many respects valid. For watchfulness and subconscious

elegance, he stood alone."

It was his intensity that caught the eye. In the 1969 Bombay Test, remembered for an ugly riot, he had an on-field argument with the Australian captain Bill Lawry.

The next season he became the first Indian to be invited to play for Queensland in the Sheffield Shield. Soon he was hitting the headlines. Against Western Australia in Perth in 1969 he scored 63 and captured six wickets, including a hat-trick.

Surti was later a respected coach for top clubs in Queensland. He passed away in 2013 aged 76. He would have made an excellent Twenty20 player.

Year 1969: Gallant opener Nari Contractor made tragic headlines in 1962. He almost died on the pitch when facing West Indies fast bowler Charlie "Chucker" Griffith in the match against Barbados. His skull was fractured. A week earlier he had captained India in the Kingston Test. Tragically he never played Test cricket again but is still alive 57 years later aged 85. I visited him in 1969 and had the privilege of interviewing him at his flat in Cusrow Baug in Bombay.

He oozed friendliness. "I was nine when I watched a Ranji Trophy match between Bombay and Baroda at the Brabourne Stadium in 1943. Bombay's Jehangir Khot performed a hat-trick, clean bowling all three victims. I was so thrilled that it became my burning ambition to become a cricketer."

Born in 1934, he blossomed into a left-handed batsman with dazzling shots. He smashed unbeaten 404 runs in an inter-collegiate match for St Xavier's against National College. As a teenager he was asked to play for Gujarat in a Ranji Trophy match against Baroda in 1952.

The opener had the rare distinction of scoring a century in both innings (152 and 162 not out) in his debut in first-class cricket, emulating the feat of another left-handed opening batsman, the great Arthur Morris of Australia.

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From 1958-59 till his tour of West Indies in 1962, the moustached opening batsman Nari was a permanent fixture in the Indian team, never flinching against the fury of fast bowlers. Wrote Wisden 1960: "Courage was his greatest attribute as he showed in the Lord's Test when he was suffering from a cracked rib."

His finest series was against Richie Benaud's Australians touring India in 1959-60. His stylish batting almost overshadowed the brilliant Aussie stars Neil Harvey and Norman O'Neill. Next year he was appointed India's captain.

Tragedy struck Nari and Indian cricket, when fast bowler Griffith's chucking delivery broke his skull in a match against Barbados. Two operations were performed in West Indies and one later in Vellore, India when a steel plate was inserted under the skull.

That sadly was the end of his Test career. He was only 28 then and at the peak of his career. His contribution to cricket was recognised by the MCC when he was made its Honorary Life Member in 1969.

Still with us, octogenarian Contractor remains an inspiration to young and old.

Test statistics of all eleven Parsi Test cricketers (in alphabetical order)

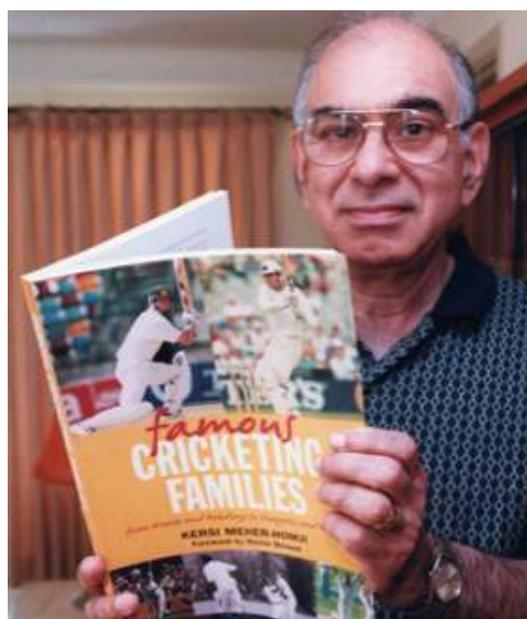
Name	Tests	Runs	Batting Average	100s	Wickets	Bowling Average	Catches	Stumpings
Soli Colah	2	69	17.25	0	0	-	2	0
Nari Contractor	31	1611	31.58	1	1	80.00	18	0
Farokh Engineer	46	2611	31.08	2	0	-	66	16
Jehangir Irani	2	3	3.00	0	0	-	2	1
Rustomji Jamshedji	1	5	-	0	3	45.66	2	0
Kharshed Meherhomji	1	0	-	0	0	-	1	0
Rusi Modi	10	736	46.00	1	0	-	3	0
Piloo Palia	2	29	9.66	0	0	-	0	0
Rusi Surti	26	1263	28.70	0*	42	46.71	26	0
Keki Tarapore	1	2	2.00	0	0	-	0	0
Polly Umrigar	59	3631	42.22	12	35	42.08	33	0
TOTAL	181	9960	34.34	16	81	46.31	153	17

Colah and Palia played in the first ever Test for India, against England at Lord's, London in June 1932. Jamshedji played in the first ever Test played in India, at Bombay in December 1933.

Jamshedji and Meherhomji were never out so do not have a batting average.

*Surti's missed a Test century by one run; his highest Test score was 99.

Of these Parsi Test cricketers only Contractor, age 85 and Farokh, 81 are alive. May they continue their long innings.



Stumbling upon Mumbai's Parsis of yore

Vinayak Talwar

First of all, a confession. I am neither Parsi, nor a Mumbaikar, not even a historian. What I am instead is a curious soul who stumbled upon this little community while trying to make sense of a city I was new to, and who then kept on discovering more, sometimes stuff that even surprised Parsis about their rich heritage hidden in the streets of Mumbai. And so, here I am, writing for a Parsi Zoroastrian magazine about Mumbai's sometimes hidden, Parsi heritage.

Growing up, I didn't know much about Parsis. Just some names and terms that were taught to me in school in the subject of Social Studies. More than two decades later, certain aspects about the Parsis remained in my mind, especially that they prayed at a fire temple and their dead would be sent to Towers of Silence. I can still recall the outline of the Asho Farohar on my textbook as I read about Ahura Mazda and Ahriman and a Jesus and Mohammed-like figure named Zoroaster. However, my knowledge of the Parsis till recently was limited to just these few words. There were no opportunities to meet Parsis in the Gulf and North India, between which I shuttled in my childhood, and even during a brief stint of two years in Jamshedpur when I passed by a fire temple for the first time, I didn't bother to find out more. Till I came upon the shores of Mumbai. For any visitor to Mumbai, it is quite impossible to not come across a Parsi reference while walking through its streets and discovering that famous brands such as Godrej and Tatas were Parsis as well.

Things changed in 2016. As I was looking for options on things to do over the weekend, I came across heritage walks conducted by Khaki Tours. (Disclaimer: I now conduct heritage walks with them.) Back then, I had only heard of walking tours in the cities of Europe and this was quite a new discovery for me. As I went about attending these walks, I uncovered layers upon layers of Mumbai's amazing but ignored heritage. I caught the bug too and thus began a thirst to know more and more.

The first few walks I attended with them, it dawned on me that the legacy of the Parsis was rooted into the heart of this city in all forms. On one of these walks, was the first time, I came across the well known story of Qissa-e-Sanjan. The part about the community mixing with the country 'like sugar in milk' had me thinking, "What a brilliant answer to give at the perfect time." Soon enough, while passing by through the lanes of Fort, I came face to face for the first time with a fire temple and stood transfixed at the sight of the mystical winged bulls, the age-old architecture and the portraits of the founders, with the smell of the scented smoke in the air - all of which compelled me to step inside, before I noticed the large board on the gate, "Entry for Parsees only". My disappointment lasted only for a few days as I realised that one could observe the legacy of the Parsis in more ways than one.

As I entered into the hallowed grounds of the J. J. School of Arts, I was introduced to the businessman and philanthropist, Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (JJ), the merchant prince of Bombay who brought prosperity to this city in many different forms. As I picked a book on him, I found innumerable mentions of his establishments across the city as I set about in search for what remains of it today. From the location of his house on Dr Dadabhai Naoroji Road, to what remains of his Mazgaon castle, to his Dharamshala on Bellasis Road, to his three statues sculpted by Baron Marochetti, this was a treasure hunt that had me endlessly excited.

A theme began to develop in my research about the city. I would take up famous Parsi families, trace their family trees, find out about their contributions to the city. I would look for clues that could help me root these discoveries to physical spaces in the city. More books started being picked, maps studied, interviews conducted and connections being made, piecing together fact upon fact till they pointed me in the next direction. Some would reach dead ends but some would lead to something bigger; a revelation, a deduction, a sense of satisfaction.

Imagine how satisfying it was to discover that the fire temple I had passed by in Jamshedpur had a connection to Mumbai; it had belonged to the family of Cursetjee Maneckjee Shroff and was earlier located on a road named 'Siri Road' at Malabar Hill. The agiary stood beside the Surrey Cottage which was owned by the same family and had even housed the famous Duke of Wellington as well!

And the search goes on even today, be it fire temples, bungalows, towers of silence, spirit-inhabited wells, statues, tanks or even theatres. For the longest time, I had never met a Parsi in my life and here I am chasing the feats of a small group of individuals from Iran who had managed to accomplish so much. It is definitely a story worth finding more about.

I have put together my discoveries of lesser-known Parsi heritage into a walking tour you can try by yourself when you are in the city next.

1. JJ's statue at the Asiatic Society library, Town Hall

An unmistakable building of the city, the Town Hall houses the Asiatic Society which houses a life-size marble statue of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy. You will have to enter from the side entrance of the building.

2. Ardho Kuo (Half Well), the last vestige of the city's first fire-temple

A five-minute walk from the Town Hall, enter into the Agiary Lane from Modi Street to find a unique half-well that has been covered up. This spot is said to be the location of the first fire temple in the city, the Hirji Vachha Modi Agiary that was established at the end of the 17th century but was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1803.

3. Maneckji Sett Agiary

Opposite the well are the walls of the Maneckji Sett Agiary founded by the Sett family. Notice the Lahmasus (the winged bulls) at the entrance of the structure. The Setts once held a large tract of land in the Fort area called the Maneckji Sett ni Wadi. The Wadi no longer exists, the Sir Phirozeshah Mehta Road now runs through it..

4. Bomanjee Hormarjee Wadia Clock Tower

A minute's walk away on Bazargate street is a clock tower and fountain built in memory of a former Sherrif of Bombay. Inscriptions in the Cuneiform script, taken from rock inscriptions in Behistun in Iran, can be seen on three sides of the structure.

5. Tata's office at Victoria Building

A five-minute walk away on S. A. Brelvi Marg is a now nondescript building that once housed the first offices of the Tatas. JN Tata sat out of here.



Photo: Victoria Building, Tata's first office.

6. Readymoney Fountain

Head into the grounds of the St Thomas Cathedral next door to see the fountain donated by Cowasji Jehangir Readymoney. His own community was not too happy with this donation and named the fountain as the Cowasji Cross.



Photo: Readymoney Fountain

You can now walk down Jagannath Shankarsheth Road from Dhobi Talao and pay your respects to the Anjumanna Atash Behram. There is a lot more Parsi heritage to explore here, but from here on you are on your own. I look forward to the writing a sequel, but until then, I hope you enjoyed taking this tour with me!

7. Banaji Limji Agiary, the oldest surviving agiary in the city

Walk further down Churchgate street. Notice a lane to your right? It leads to the oldest-running fire temple in the city. The fire inside has been burning for more than 300 years.

8. Bhikha Behram Well

Walk further down Churchgate street beyond the Flora fountain till you reach the Oval and Cross Maidans. You will notice a structure to your right. It houses the Bhikha Behram Well that was established in 1725 by Bhikhaji Behramji.



Photo: Bhikha Behram Well

9. Esplanade House, JN Tata's home

As you take a right and walk down Fashion Street, you will reach a fork in the road. Look to your right to notice the grand Esplanade mansion where once lived JN Tata. The family crest has the words 'Humata Hukhta Hvarshita' upon it.

Walk further down Fashion Street till you reach the junction known as Dhobi Talao and look at the neoclassical structure of the Framji Cowasji Institute. It was built over the site of the Dhobi Talao (Washermen's Pond) after it was filled up, in the memory of merchant prince and philanthropist Framji Cowasji Banaji, a titan of his times. He laid the first water pipes in the city to supply water at a time of scarcity to the residents of Kamathipura from his wadi at CP Tank. He was also an agricultural pioneer who brought a scientific perspective to farming in that day and age.

The Minimalism of Maximality

Dr. Mazda Turel

On the 16th of March this year, I was invited to give a TEDx Talk, an extremely prestigious occasion. TEDx is a non-profit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short powerful talks. It began as a conference in 1984 where technology, entertainment, and design converged, hence the name. A TEDx Talk is a showcase for speakers presenting great, well-formed ideas in under 18 minutes. Imagine a day filled with nine brilliant speakers, thought-provoking videos, and mind-blowing notions. This TEDx event, the third edition organised by the students of Somaiya Vidhyavihar, created a unique gathering in which to unleash new ideas, inspire, and inform, and I was happy to be part of it. The day was brimming with insights from an educational futurist, a visual artist, an architect, a culture editor, a data scientist, a psychological illusionist, and the founders and curators of social cases such as Dharavi Reloaded and Earth5R. Then, of course, there was yours truly, a humble neurosurgeon, who is happy to share some excerpts from his talk.

What's the difference between God and a neurosurgeon? God doesn't think he's a neurosurgeon.

A neurosurgeon is someone who operates on the human brain and spine, and that's why we like to believe, albeit erroneously, that we are on the top of the totem pole of all medical specialists. We have the reputation of being arrogant and occasionally even obnoxious. We are the only progeny of surgical specialties who have access to the insides of the human brain on a daily basis, and even so, we haven't yet figured out how most of it works. Researchers tell us that humans use only about 10% of the brain, but I'm sure most of us have had personal encounters with those who use much less.

Over 100 years ago, there were no specialist brain surgeons. Brain tumours were removed by general surgeons or even obstetricians and gynaecologists, for that matter; pretty much in the same way they delivered babies. The mortality rate for operating on the brain was 100%. A general surgeon renowned for performing super speedy amputations managed to beat that statistic: While amputating his patient's leg at the hip, he accidentally sliced through the fingers of one of his assistants resulting in uncontrollable bleeding that killed both patient and assistant. Another doctor observing the operation collapsed watching the blood bath and died of a heart attack. The general surgeon in question, therefore, had performed a surgery with a 300% mortality rate.

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However, for brain surgery, much has evolved since then. In the early 1900s, if someone went home alive after surgery, even if in a vegetative state, it was considered successful. Then came a time when people got out of the hospital pretty much the same way they came into it, and that was considered success. Over the years, we have started seeing improvements in neurological functions and deficits at discharge. Today, a patient can even go home the same day or the next after brain tumour or spine surgery, with a justifiable expectation of full functional recovery, alleviation of pain, and an improved quality of life.

What has made this possible? Our understanding of anatomy and physiology has evolved, and like in every other field, technology has chipped in. The MRI shows us fibre tracts that can delineate eloquent areas of the brain. We can study metabolic activity, look inside arteries and veins, and now, with virtual reality, we can tip-toe into someone's head, looking around the corners of brain tumours and vascular aneurysms. Today, we are also able to remove a brain tumour in someone who is fully awake. Patients can move their hands and legs as we perform brain surgery; this helps us safely push the limits and achieve maximal tumour excision while preserving neurological function. While all of this goes on, the patient can view his brain tumour being removed in real time on a monitor in front of him. The brain itself physically feels no pain, and yet, all the pain-generating centres are smack within it. That's what makes this organ the last and grandest biological frontier; the most complex thing we

have discovered in the universe yet.

The brain itself physically feels no pain, and yet, all the pain-generating centres are smack within it. That's what makes this organ the last and grandest biological frontier; the most complex thing we have discovered in the universe yet.

The way we visualize the brain has also changed. From operating with bare eyes and magnifying loupes, the introduction of the microscope made operating on the brain an ethereal experience. We can use fluorescence to get tumours to light up, which then helps delineate the ugly monster from within the pristine brain. Today, we are able to remove brains tumours by entering the skull through the nose. Using small tubular pipes or endoscopes, we can get a panoramic view of the brain that takes one on a journey of breath-taking views, stunning beauty, and miraculous outcomes, curing a patient's woes with a simple operation.

Let me tell you, however; that no surgery is simple – only a surgeon who makes it seem so. Simple is actually really hard. It takes about 5-6 years of medical school and another 6-7 years of residency to graduate as a neurosurgeon. Most of the latter time is spent working 20-24 hours a day in sub-optimal living conditions, sacrificing family, friends, and another four-letter word that starts with F. Food! It takes 15 years to learn how to operate but another 15 to learn when not to.

As a result of all that training, we can now enter the brain through the eye, nose, and ear; please don't attempt to imagine any other orifice. But yes, as unimaginable as it may sound, we can also get into the brain through the groin. We can guide microcatheters into vessels of the brain and remove blood clots and coil aneurysms, things that we needed to open up the head for just a few decades ago. Functional neurosurgery has started gaining momentum. We can insert electrodes into the brain and cure tremors caused by Parkinson's and other movement disorders. Imagine curing a professional violinist or guitarist whose hand goes into spasm only while playing a certain note. You can get them into the operating room with their musical paraphernalia and make them play. With their brain lying open in front of you, you stimulate the targeted area responsible for that particular action, and voila! He's cured.

We are now beginning to try this for depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, obesity, and maybe even erectile dysfunction; who knows where this may stop. Can we use this power of tweaking the brain to achieve immortality? If you think that's pushing it, how about inserting an electrode in the prefrontal cortex of a rapist, and when he walks out of the operating room, he's transformed instead into a messiah for promoting women's rights and protecting them. Can we use transcranial magnetic stimulation to soften hardened criminals? Can neurosurgery transform society and make us nicer, kinder and more humane? Of course, one can argue that the Art of Living Foundation can do that as well, but there are some among us who would prefer if all it took was a few hours rather than having to meditate for 30 minutes each day for the rest of one's life. From attempting to cure diseases, could the next frontier be enhancing one's quality of life? On the other hand, can we regulate certain centres in our brain to become more intelligent, enhance our IQ, augment our memory? If Roger Federer wants to improve his backhand, and no amount of practice or coaching is doing it for him, can he undergo neuromodulation and win a few more grand slams? Can those on the death penalty be given one last chance to turn their lives around?

How many senses do you believe humans have? Most of us think it's 5: we can list sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Recent data suggests, however; that we may have anywhere between 22-23 senses: a sense of balance, a sense of movement, a sense of knowing which parts of your body are where without looking at them, how we sense the passing of time, how we feel pain, how we experience temperature... I'm not sure if a sense of humour makes it to this scientific list of other senses, but there are some senses that animals have and we don't: the ability to feel electrical fields around us, the ability to sense the Earth's magnetic field or even polarised light and use it to navigate, for example. What if we could externally enhance these senses to perform better; to increase awareness, become more mindful, or even simply to stay protected?

Is exploring the hidden potential of our brains by means of assisted devices ethical and acceptable in society or is this just some sort of audacious optimism? Who decides who can avail of it, if it is possible at all? Are we really trying to play God?

Is exploring the hidden potential of our brains by means of assisted devices ethical and acceptable in society or is this just some sort of audacious optimism? Who decides who can avail of it, if it is possible at all?

Are we really trying to play God?

I only have the questions; the answers are yet to be given to us. Today, the world is turning towards spirituality. We are surrounded by people who have a higher understanding of the self and the subtle body. With the right guidance and a little bit of practice, we can tap into the power of the subconscious mind to rid us of negativity and stress, reshaping our health and destiny to live a miraculous life.

In my opinion, paradigms will truly shift when we are able to combine medicine with superior technologies and spiritual nourishment to bring about a holistic form of healing and health to one and all.

In my opinion, paradigms will truly shift when we are able to combine medicine with superior technologies and spiritual nourishment to bring about a holistic form of healing and health to one and all. You see, it's not just a neurosurgeon who's been given the license to create miracles. Miracles lie in compassionate gestures, a few kind words, a loving touch. Miracles lie in extraordinary ordinariness. And that's what brings you closer to God.

19 May 2019 was the first time this article appeared in the Jame Jamshed.

Project of restoration of Zingar: the Atashkadeh at Jek, Azerbaijan Restored Atashgah of Khinalig: the highest fire temple of the world

Farroukh Jorat

“Hamazor” magazine (Issue 1/2017, pp. 8-12) published my article “Atashgah of Khinalig. The highest fire temple of the world” about our works on Atashkadeh (Atashgah) restoration. Restored fire temple is located in Azerbaijan, 200 km far from Baku near the Khinalig village (Guba distr.) at an altitude of 3000 meters on the slope of Shah-dag mountain. This is the highest fire temple of the world and its eternal natural flame burns due to a field of methane clathrate (supramolecular compound of methane and water). It was listed in the “List of state protected historical and cultural monuments of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, ID#4647.

After that publication I and Hasan Aghayev (a local school teacher; who with his team of four builders restored the temple structure) got a lot of positive feedback from Zoroastrians around the world.



Author at the place of Atashgah, 1500 m altitude. (It covered by thick layer of soils and stones)

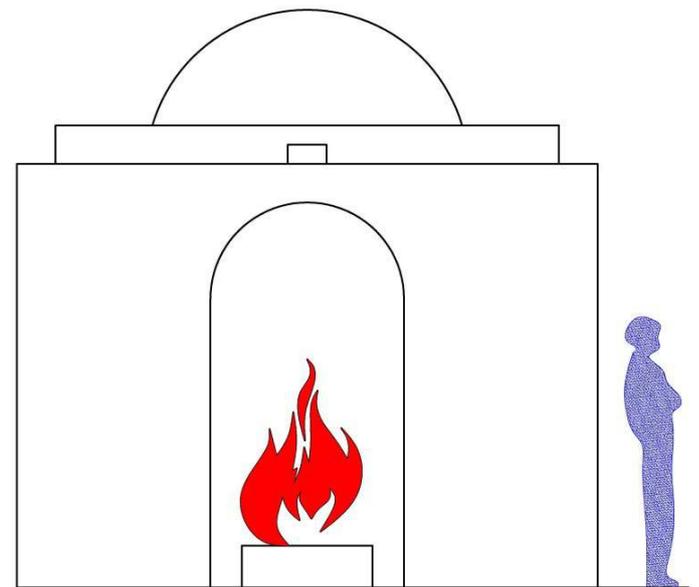


Restored Atashgah of Khinalig, 3000 m altitude

Another abandoned Atashkadeh. Drafts for restoration

Atashgah of Khinalig was not the only one in that area. Another abandoned Atashgah also located near Jek village (20 km from Atashgah of Khinalig and at 1500 m altitude).

As we saw later it was a Godforsaken place with no flame and covered by more than 1 m layer of stones, mud, sand and soil.



Draft of “chahartaq” for Atashgah of Jek

The basic idea is to restore it as a fire temple of traditional Sassanian style (“chahartaq” structure with “gonbad”).

Permission process

As in the case of Atashgah of Khinalig, the use of modern materials was not allowed.

Otherwise it cannot be considered as the restoration of an ancient structure, but only as a construction of a new one. New religious buildings can be built only by registered religious groups of local residents. There is no officially registered local Zoroastrian community of Azerbaijan yet. Therefore the structure will be of natural rock stone bricks as it was in ancient times.

One of the issues is to obtain permission from the government to carry out restoration work. In Azerbaijan up to April 2018, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was responsible for such projects. Our application for restoration of Atashgah and its drawing was sent to them in September, 2017.

Step 1. Archaeological excavations

In December 2017, according to local law, before obtaining the permission for restoration, archaeological works were performed. This work is carried out by a special group of scientists.

The Atashgah is located on the inclined surface of the Shahdag mountain spur between the village of Jek and the bridge over the Gudialchay river. The place of fire temple is revered by the local inhabitants and called "Zangar" (Zingar). According to their testimonies, the fire finally disappeared approximately 30 years ago. The disappearance of the fire is associated with a landslide, which covered the place of the gas outlet. The coordinates of fire place are 41 11.1393, 048 13.0085.



Space survey of the territory



The adjacent area with characteristic traces of landslides

After digging to a depth of more than 1 meter, it became clear that the fire temple foundation was originally a quadrant with diagonal of about 4 meters.



The process of excavation, December 2017

The upper surface layer of the earth consisted of a clay-rubble layer 20 cm thick, below the ground was a burned 1m layer of clay, crushed stone and sand of black color:



Ancient stonework

The height of the uncovered existing masonry is 40-45 cm; width is 50-60 cm. No flame occurred.



Central crater with no flame (1 m depth)

Therefore the depth of the central gas outlet excavation was enlarged 120 cm deeper. As a result we finally saw the flame and weak water flow.



Finally we uncovered natural burning flame (2 m depth)

Step 2. Pave the way. Working on-site.

Three months later after excavation works, in order not to waste time, we decided to perform some preparatory works that did not require permission. It was the creation of an access road, removal of a layer of excessive soil and water drainage.

Despite the fact that we have removed the mudflow of more than 1 m depth, the flame is too weak now and therefore we must remove 1 m of soil again on the construction terrace. Also it will be used for leveling the fire temple and nearby site area of 20 m.



Removing the mudflow from nearby zone for the future leveling the construction terrace

Clathrate decomposes into methane and water. Methane burns as altar flame, water saturates the soil and should be removed as a spring and small river.

Rock debris in the spring time made it impossible for logistic vehicles that would have to bring sand, stones, cement and tools to access the construction site.



Stone debris on the driveway to the top of the mountain

Therefore we cleared a 2 km driveway place from the “Guba – Khinalig” road to site.



Laying the way

Step 3. Still waiting for permission

While we were performing archeological excavations, our application was under consideration by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, due to the new decree of the president of this country, in April 2018 the ministry was abolished. The newly created State Tourism Agency began to be in charge of the restoration of monuments. We had to send them a new application, which we did. However, from April 2018 until the present time (April 2019), the application is still pending. They did not give a negative answer and verbally expressed their agreement. However, official permission for the legal construction work has not yet been issued.

We do not despair and are sure to get permission and are ready to continue the restoration.

Special acknowledgements

I would like to express my special appreciation and thanks to Mrs. Smita Crishna-Godrej for her trust and patience. She visited restored Atashgah of Khinalig in Sept., 2017 and kindly agreed to be a financial patron of Atashkadeh at Jek restoration project. She sponsored all costs of works performed including government fees for the archaeological expedition, on-site preparation works and road laying.

I would like to thank WZO chairman Mr. Shahpur Captain and other members for their support.

Thank you all!

A Proposed New Model for Mobedi:Zoroastrian Priestly Services in North America

Mobed Arda-e-viraf M. Minocherhomjee

This article describes the roles of the North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) and North American Zoroastrian Associations/Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) in the 21st century and proposes a sustainable alternative to the current practices. The purpose of this analysis is to understand what worked for us in India (India in this article represents the whole sub-continent including India, Pakistan, and Ceylon), what did not, prevent making the same mistakes, and help understand the similarities and differences between the Indian and North American models. Recommended changes should then allow us to build organizational structures and religious and cultural institutions relevant to 21st century North America (NA).

Introduction

NAMC is an independent organization consisting of Mobeds from NA, and its executives are elected by its members. Its mission is two-fold—to promote the understanding, practice, and perpetuation of Zarathushtri religion in North America, and to promote the interests, welfare, and professionalism (including education) of Mobeds in North America.

In North America there are approximately 200 Mobeds and 19 Mobedyars (assistant Mobeds) who serve over 20,000 Zarathushtris belonging to 25 Zoroastrian Associations based primarily in major cities. Additionally, there are 14 Corresponding Members of FEZANA based in the smaller cities. Larger cities have Dar-e-Mehers/Atash Kadehs, and Mobeds to provide services in those areas. NAMC started the Mobedyar program to serve the needs of communities where Mobeds are not readily available.

Presently, Mobeds in North America perform most religious ceremonies including Navjotes, Ashirvaad ceremonies, Jashans, Gahambar prayers as well as Parabh Jashans, Muktdad prayers, Vendidad, and Fareshta. NAMC membership is fortunate to have senior Mobed members who bring their collective lived experience, authorship and knowledge about the history, culture, and doctrines of our religion. Many of them have published extensively and conduct seminars in various cities in the United States and Canada. Of the 200 Mobeds in North America, we estimate that less than half practice Mobedi on a regular basis. We do not have any full-time Mobeds in North America, and many Mobeds provide their services on a volunteer basis.

The role of NAMC

There are several issues facing NAMC and our community that need to be jointly addressed on a near-term basis. It is imperative that NAMC and associations/FEZANA formulate a long-term strategy that addresses the rapidly changing religious and cultural environment in North America. The two key near-term issues facing our community are:

- The ageing of a number of senior Mobeds/scholars, and
- The changing religious and spiritual needs of the younger Zarathushtris—both Mobeds (the service providers) and Behdins/Ostas (the clients) of these services.

The older generation of Zarathushtris from India focus on ceremonies and Farajyat (obligatory) prayers, whereas the younger generation is more interested in understanding the meaning of our prayers, the religious doctrine, and how to make the religion relevant to their daily lives.

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NAMC is addressing these issues through lecture series, video conferences, and weekly quotations with the translation of our prayers, to better help our community understand the key concepts in our scriptures. Complete information on our organization and programs are available at www.namcmobeds.org.

Last year, NAMC offered fellowships to 10 young Mobeds to attend a continuing education course in California with a goal to transfer the extensive knowledge base from our senior Mobeds/scholars to the younger Mobeds through seminars and religious courses. We believe that the younger Mobeds will be able to more effectively communicate our scriptures to their peers based on common experiences and life styles.

Although both NAMC and the associations are trying to address these issues, we need to evaluate if we have the appropriate organizational structures and resources to address the rapidly changing environment of the 21st century.

Governance

Governance plays an important role in determining how organizations function. It is typically the processes, structures, and organizational traditions that determine how power is exercised, how the stakeholders have their say, how decisions are made, and how decision makers are held to account. There are many factors that contribute to good governance including strategic vision, effectiveness/efficiency, and transparency.

Given the rather tumultuous history of Mobedi in 20th century in India, it is important that we appreciate factors (including organizational structure) that have contributed to the precipitous decline in the income and consequently the number of Mobeds in India. In North America, we must strive to not repeat the same mistakes. The volunteer model practiced here is not sustainable in the long term. The premise behind a suggestion for indepedant governance is based on the fact that all organized religions have full-time paid priests and have well-defined organizational/reporting structures.



Fig 1: Current Organizational Structure of the North American Zoroastrian Associations in relation to FEZANA and NAMC

Figure 1 shows the current organizational structure of the North American Zoroastrian Associations in relation to FEZANA, and NAMC. As mentioned earlier, there are 25 North American Zoroastrian associations and 14 Corresponding Members associations under the FEZANA umbrella. Both the associations and FEZANA have their own executives. The associations' executives are responsible for oversight, administration, and programs (including fund raising and community outreach) as well as the maintenance of the Atash Kadehs. The religious function seems to be "outsourced" to Mobeds in some cases who essentially report to the Executive Committee/Board.

NAMC provides guidelines to the Mobeds and associations on religious issues, but each association is run autonomously having its own charter/constitution and by-laws. It is noteworthy that most Zoroastrian Associations and Corresponding Members who receive tax exempt status from the governments provide funds to FEZANA but not NAMC, North America's only Zoroastrian religious organization.



Fig 2: Generalized Organizational Structure in India

Figure 2 suggests that in North America the associations have tried to emulate their organizational structure (model) from India. Further; the model currently implemented in India is different than the one originally practiced in Iran. As mentioned by Mobed Cawas Desai, Parsees, primarily Behdins, were fortunate under the British rule to start businesses and thereby accumulate wealth. Many benevolent Parsee families who were in businesses started great philanthropic organizations. Some also started Atash Adarans and Atash Behrams. During this time the governance framework transitioned from Mobeds who were responsible for religious matters to mostly Behdin boards/trustees who were appointed by the founders of their institutions.

The model worked well for first few decades but that has not been the case over the last 50 to 70 years. Many factors contributed to the exodus of practicing Mobeds over the past few decades; the primary reason being poor compensation.

Pricing pressure at that time could be attributed to several factors including excess supply of Mobeds relative to number of Behdins—number of Behdins were declining at a faster pace due to lower birth rates and inter-marriages, and their religiosity was also on the decline in big cities. Further; trust funds did not keep pace with inflation and Mobeds had no ability to negotiate their compensation as it was determined by the board/trustees. This may explain why pricing is still under pressure in India when the supply of Mobeds has now declined significantly in comparison to the demand. It is unclear why price/cost increases could not be passed on to the users of their services whose compensation mostly increased with inflation. The process is not transparent and somewhat ambiguous.

These factors led to a brain drain of educated Mobeds into other professions. A conclusion that could be drawn is that the decline in Mobedi in India was partly a result of the loss of empowerment of Mobeds, and Mobeds losing control over their destiny, and the clients of these services not being proactive in addressing the situation. In general, the organizational structure is highly decentralized with no central Mobed body defending the working rights of the mobeds.

The North American Environment

The North American environment is in many ways quite different from that in India, in that Mobeds in all age cohorts are educated professionals or business persons, and are often professional or community leaders in their own right.

The users of the religious services (Behdins/Ostas) could be divided into two broad age cohorts—the older generation mostly immigrants from India, and the younger generation born in North America. The religious/spiritual needs of the immigrants has stayed roughly the same and they started the same organizational structures in North America. Those born in North America have different religious/spiritual needs as mentioned earlier. The rapid changes at the macro- and micro-levels behoove us to make at least some changes to our organizational structures. Building on a failing model and expecting a different outcome is unrealistic.

The current North American Associations’ model is fraught with elements of potential conflicts and difficulties, as well as lack of strategic focus and planning. In general, focus seems to be more on cultural than religious activities. The amount of funds spent for religious vs. cultural activities is neither clearly identified, nor defined. Religious policies and procedures are sometimes set by Boards which can lead to politicization of religious issues. Since Boards can change every two to four years, Mobeds could potentially face new rules/procedures frequently. On occasion, some members/Boards try to usurp authority from the Mobeds/NAMC whenever there is a disagreement with Mobeds. Associations and their members should try to avoid opinion shopping in matters relating to the practice of our religion in North America. Many of these issues arise because decision making is highly decentralized, and the lines between religious and cultural activities and responsibilities are not well delineated.

NAMC recommendations

Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat it.

—George Santayana.

We were taught a slight variation of the quote when I left India 42 years ago my dad told me to practice the three As —Adopt, Adapt, and Adept to survive and prosper in the new continent, and to always get an A for Attitude.

NAMC is recommending that we adopt/adapt to the new environment/circumstances by proposing the following:



Fig 3: Proposed Structure of North American Zoroastrian Associations and NAMC Governance

Separation of Atash Kadeh and State

In this case Atash Kadeh would be represented by NAMC/Mobeds of the local Atash Kadehs, and the State would be represented by the Associations/FEZANA executives. NAMC/Mobeds should be in charge of all religious activities, and associations/FEZANA should be responsible for all cultural activities. This would be similar to what is practiced in our Adopted home countries of USA and Canada, commonly referred to as “separation of the Church and the State”.

Direct Financial Support

Associations should contribute \$1 to \$2 per member per annum directly to NAMC in addition to contributing to FEZANA—Adapt to changes in the new environment/purpose. We need to provide Fellowships to young Mobeds to enhance their education. While FEZANA does fundraising for charitable causes and scholarships, most of their other activities are cultural rather than religious in nature.

Invest in your Clergy

If we want our next generation of Mobeds to be Adept and excel in performing ceremonies, preaching, and become community leaders we must start making an investment in them today.

NAMC proposal

NAMC continues to evolve. We are instituting better governance. For example, on any major issue we try to build consensus, and if that’s not possible, we look for a super-majority vote. We are a service organization and will treat the users of the services (Behdins and Ostas) with utmost respect and as if they were our only/best client.

Our guiding principles and mission will remain unchanged regardless of whether associations contribute or not. NAMC and Mobeds will continue to provide free services to anyone who cannot afford to pay for any service. With Ahura Mazda’s blessings three associations and several benevolent Behdins and Ervads have contributed towards our cause of educating young Mobeds, and educational seminars. However; if we do not institutionalize these funding activities, our religious survival and/or growth may be in peril. A possible alternative could be direct contributions to NAMC by association members (vs. boards).The vast majority of Behdins and Ostas treat their Mobeds with utmost respect.

Conclusion

NAMC needs help and support from all knowledgeable Mobeds (conservative or liberal), Mobedyars, Ostas, Behdins and as well as non-Zarathushtri scholars to further our cause. To become more efficient and effective, we must establish institutions and form organizational structures that will best position us for growth in the 21st century.

Our hope is that our religion will survive and prosper in North America based on our ability to continually adapt and work as a team and become adept at doing that. As humans, we could naturally disagree on some issues but we must never be disagreeable. NAMC’s commitment to our community is steadfast and unconditional. We hope that our community can appreciate the reciprocate this.

Lastly, I recall what late Dasturji Navroze D. Minocheher- Homji said to me many times:

Any problem big or small can be solved when women and men with two key attributes come together—Asneh Kheradi (innate wisdom), and Gosho Sruteh Kheradi (wisdom acquired through knowledge)—from Doa Naam Setaayeshne.

An XYZ summer vacation well spent

Dr. Shazneen Limjerwala

This year, our twins, Ava and Yazad, will complete 5 years. They were “premmies”. Up until then, I was (and still am) an accomplished professional: adept at teaching, writing and conducting workshops. Now, I have added one more feather to my cap: flexibility. No one has taught me this more than my family. And of course the deep need to continue to grow professionally. Which is not disjoint from personally. But, let me veer back to my topic. A vacation well spent. Why would I write about this? Because, I want to make the point that spending time with children meaningfully, in activities that contribute to their exposure, and consequently growth, is worth it. Also that women, in contributing to children, (conceiving, nurturing, raising them) are making a valuable and worthwhile contribution to our community. Somehow, these latter facts get shadowed. To the extent that sometimes, I have felt less worthwhile, being a mother, than being a professional, whose contributions have been celebrated. This is my self-reflection.

Coming back to our vacation, we started off with the XYZ summer camp. For those of you who haven't heard of this, XYZ stands for Xtremely Young Zoroastrians, an initiative of Hoshang Gotla, and his amazing team of volunteers. Children from the ages of 5 to 15 engage in a variety of activities – storytelling, praying, singing, dancing, games. Children who sign up are part of groups in various areas of Mumbai, including the suburbs. I enrolled Ava - Yazad in the XYZ Summer camp and at 4 years and 9 months, they were probably the youngest there.

The camp was amazing. It was filled with activities that were engaging, well planned and executed with genuine love and care by the volunteers, a number of them women. The inauguration involved a number of races and fun games involving both parents and children. It was like a family day out. We learnt about team work, with fun games like trying to push a ball between our legs, all standing in a line, whilst the last team player ran in front. Each day began with an Ashem Vohu and Yatha Ahu Vairyo (ourshort yet powerful Zarathushti prayers). There was Zumba dancing, storytelling (a rendering of the Behram yazad ni katha/ story, Mishkin, the farmer and his daughter), plays created and enacted by the children themselves with some moral takeaways/ learning. There was also a treasure hunt through the Salsette parsi colony, the venue of this camp.

There was a visit to Banaji Atash Behram, where each of us prayed individually and then together; the Bhikha Behram well, where the kids enjoyed looking at the fish and drinking water. The younger kids learnt to bow their heads before entering the Atash Behram by observing the older ones doing it.

At Cusrow Baug, we played crickball for the first time: a combination of cricket and baseball. It involved batting and then throwing the bat and running to the next base. It was commendable how the teeny weenies not only understood the game, but also played it diligently. The backdrop, the beautiful Cusrow Baug grounds, added to the fun.



Photo: Learning how to play “crickball” for the first time

In these inter-Baug events, the kids get to meet others living all over the city, including in what is commonly referred to as “cosmopolitan” buildings (not exclusively Parsi, but all communities), which is very important.

The participants enjoyed sumptuous Biryani and Parsi Bhonu (food) at these inter-Baug events. The final day was a visit to a water park, where parents of younger children participated too. These camps are a way to inculcate the Zoroastrian culture vicariously: i.e. through observation. The children observe their peers and learn from them. Slowly, over a period of time, one hopes, it gets imbibed in them.

One of the abiding strains in my parenting has been to give Ava-Yazad exposure to different places, people and situations. Just like I have learnt over the years, I learnt the value of this during my growing up and fieldwork during PhD. So, for example, I used to participate in most of the FOZYA (Federation of Zoroastrian Youth Associations of India) conferences. I would prepare diligently on the topic of choice (often related to Zoroastrianism): do research, write and then learn ‘by heart’ and speak. Often, there would be question answers, where sometimes, I was at the ‘shooting’ end and at other times, at the receiving end. It also gave me exposure to living in different settings. So, for example, sometimes, we were put up in hotels where we shared the bathroom with one other person. Sometimes, in dharamsalas and schools where the accommodation was dormitory like, bathrooms were shared with a number of participants. This did not in any way, detract from the fun we had. In fact, it led to greater sharing (make up tips, hair dryers, gossip, the works!). In fact, each FOZYA conference I have attended (over a dozen) has been celebratory, joyful and impactful.

Another period of intense exposure I've had, has been during my fieldwork for my PhD. My research involved listening to women experiencing violence, going to police stations, NGOs, courts, in the urban and rural areas of Gujarat. The several hundred kilometres of travel (mostly in public transport: trains, buses and chakdas (a wagon led by a motorbike), was itself an intense (and somewhat taxing), learning experience, (at the end of which I was ready to write a book on my travels!). Later, when I got married and moved to Mumbai (I was born and brought up in Ahmedabad), I was daunted by the rush of Mumbai locals. As a mother, I ensured that Ava Yazad travelled in Mumbai locals from year one itself. This need was also brought on by our participation in nursery rhyme sessions in Bandra (we live in Andheri). They enjoyed looking out of the window; most women offered them their lap (it was also my way of getting them accustomed to strangers, a precursor in India where people skills are paramount to progress/ advancement).

We've also walked extensively, through varied, often challenging, terrain. This includes manoeuvring through traffic, walking on footpaths (they now excel at calling out for rickshaws with their hands waving in front!). In fact, our son, has now learnt, that if rickshawallahs refuse to ply you, just don't tell them your destination before getting in!



Photo: The volunteers and the XYZs at the Bhikha Behram well in Mumbai



Photo: The group paying their respects at Banaji Atashbehram in Mumbai

We live in a widely notorious area called Pump House, which is perpetually jammed with traffic, anathema for rickshawallahs! We've walked through chaals (small houses through narrow lanes) to avoid the main roads. We find these much safer and shorter. As we have walked, we have learnt the names of trees, built stamina, and sang nursery rhymes, learnt the alphabet, numbers and words. They carry their own bags (mama can't carry their stuff; she already has hers!), wear their own shoes, and sometimes their clothes; do their hair when needed (other times, moving the hand through it works!). They've been to fish markets (not the cleanest in India), Agiyaris, churches, schools, (including day care, municipal and international schools), a movie (dad Zubin's choice), mall (dad's choice), Dadar Parsi Colony, the beach, Borivali National Park.

Ava Yazad love Nature. Ever since they were young, we visited our garden, a small spot of green in our colony, most frequented by us. They enjoy playing with the mud there; are most at peace there. (Educationists following Rudolf Steiner, a German philosopher recommend that children play with natural materials (wood, mud, clay) and discourage contact with plastic). I suppose because I'm most at peace there too, doing my yoga and breathing. We've hugged trees, watered plants, attempted climbing one, and even planted three seeds (don't know if they've grown though!).

I regularly read to them. We have a library of books in our home, which we're happy to share with others. Each day, afternoon and night, they select the books and I read to them. Sometimes, I ask them questions: they don't always take well to that. They'd rather have me read uninterruptedly to them. But, if I skip over a page, then I'm immediately pulled up and my mistake corrected!

This vacation we visited a kids museum: the Chatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya, more popularly known as the Prince of Wales Museum, that has a kiddies section to it. Since it was "environment week" when we visited, we also engaged in outdoor activities like shell painting, manure making, amongst others. The kids loved seeing the different birds and animals. It built their stamina too as it involved a rickshaw, train and bus ride to get there and back!

We also visited and invited over senior citizens of our family and friend circle. It has been my endeavour that they interact and engage with them. After all, they are the roots, we are the trunk, our friends, peers, professional experts are the branches, and Ava Yazad are the fruits. Someday, they'll be the seeds. That's how the circle of life moves. And life prevails.

Atha Jamyad Yatha Afrinami.

Habits Maketh the Man

Ashdin Doctor

Imagine getting ready for an important presentation. While putting on your shirt, you start sweating profusely. You can feel your heartbeat racing. You feel disoriented. Taking off your shirt you try wearing another. Soon your legs give way and you collapse on the floor.

This is the situation I found myself in 5 years ago. Lying on the floor in a puddle of sweat and a drenched sadra. This was the most afraid I have ever been for my life.

I thought I was living the dream. I had all the material things I could want. That is after all, what society defines as success. A great job, I had just become the head of one of the divisions in my business. But in the process, I had completely ignored myself. I was not happy.

I was 15 kilos overweight. I slept for 5 hours a night. Chocolates, doughnut and cupcakes was the diet of choice. Worst of all, I was stressed, very very stressed, both at work and in my personal life.

This event was the spark that caused me to rethink my life and begin a change. I asked myself, if I died tomorrow and met god. If he asked me how my life was, this precious gift given to me. I can't say it was "meh", "so so". I can't say I did not enjoy it! Something had to change!

I asked myself, if I died tomorrow and met god. If he asked me how my life was, this precious gift given to me. I can't say it was "meh", "so so".

I can't say I did not enjoy it!

Now, being the typical type A, goal-oriented person that I was. I gave myself the hardest possible goal I could think of. To get a "six-pack" or "abs". This now consumed me, I soon realised that doing 4,000 crunches on the floor will not give me the six-pack that I want. I realised I had to do different kinds of exercises. Soon my body began to change, when I started I could not do a single push up. Soon I was doing 20-30 pushups. It was amazing seeing this change. Then I realised that exercise was not enough, I had to learn about food and nutrition. The kilos started dropping away.

I learnt that there was a science to this whole process. I began to read and learn about hormones and how they interacted with each other. This became my life and passion. Within that year I had achieved my goal of a six-pack. I began to wonder why people found it so hard to be healthy. If you follow the science, it is so easy to do! Right?

Soon I quit my job and started a fitness business called FitterBee. The idea was "fitness through playing games". It was designed for people who hated working out, who got bored in gyms and disliked yoga or running. The idea was to create a community of fun. Where people left smiling and not just sweaty.

I did this for two years and it was going well. But it did not have the impact that I wanted. I saw people getting fitter but not healthier. While they exercised for one hour, the remaining 23 hours were not being lived in a healthy manner.

I was more interested in living disease-free, I was looking at longevity as a new interesting way of thinking about health. Being a Parsi, longevity is already an added benefit.

By this point, my own understanding of fitness had changed. I no longer saw it from the aesthetics of a being lean and a six-pack. I was more interested in living disease-free, I was looking at longevity as a new interesting way of thinking about health. Being a Parsi, longevity is already an added benefit. All our grandparents live to 90 or 100 years. But imagine if we could live for 120 or even 140 years? With today's science, it is becoming increasingly possible.

Having seen me go through this transformation, many friends would come and ask me for advice on how to lose weight, how to sleep better or how to manage stress better. Many found a lot of benefit from these informal

discussions and would see a big change in themselves. Other would give an excuse like, "I don't have your motivation" or "self-discipline". This puzzled me because I am the least disciplined person on the planet!

I soon realised what I did manage to do successfully was to create habits.

By now people were asking me to coach them but I was not certified in any way to coach them. More importantly, such a certification did not exist. Hence I decided to create something new that could fill this gap. One day while meditating in Leh, Ladkhakh, the idea for my new business came to me. It was a 6-month program, designed to get your fundamentals of health in place. These included, sleep, nutrition, movement, hydration, breathing and de-stressing. The idea was that each month we would focus on only one of these fundamentals.

I believe that the biggest problem with relying on motivation to make a change is that motivation disappears in a day or two. Hence, this program had to remove motivation from the picture and replace it with habits. Small things you could do every day, whose effects would compound over time.

I started informally partnering with doctors, psychologists, natural medicine practitioners, meditation teachers and thought leaders in the different fields to learn and create the tools for the program. I finally started Awesome180, my habit coaching business, in January 2018. The plan was to get 5 clients that year as my focus was still on FitterBee. We ended that year with 24 clients. All through word of mouth and people sharing their experiences with each other. This soon became my primary focus.

In December of 2018 we launched **The Habit Coach Podcast**. A podcast is like an internet radio show. Where I could share my learnings to the world for free. Every week we release 3 podcasts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I look at the podcast as my way of giving back and it is my labour of love. It took on a life of its own. People started writing in and sharing their stories about change, about how the podcast has impacted their life. As of now each month we have close to 100,000 downloads of the podcast (which is great for a new podcast with no celebrities!).

This year has been about conducting workshops across India and the world. I spread only one message, your habits define your life. **You have to focus on the tiny things you do every single day, most of them subconsciously.**

Think about yourself, dear reader. I would like to you to give some thought to some of the 'simpler' habits to incorporate in your life.

When you look at your day, what are the habits that rob you of energy and what are the habits that give you energy. Through our life, we do things that are constantly draining us of energy. These are the things that we need to stop first. Things like arguing or complaining about people. Eating the wrong kinds of food gives us pleasure but do not really nourish us. Spend a moment to think about what makes you feel lazy and tired. Lets try to limit and try to eventually get rid of those.

When you look at your day, what are the habits that rob you of energy and what are the habits that give you energy?

Think about our most favourite Parsi motto "Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds". **Science is now proving in social experiments that by saying positive things to ourselves and helping others, we bring joy to our own life.** If you think about it, the happiest moments of your life probably came when you shared a moment with someone. So your simple habit is to wake up in the morning and say something good about someone who has had a positive impact on you. You can say it aloud or write it down. When this becomes easy, think of 3 people. The idea is to feel gratitude for that person. It could even be an old school teacher.

The next simple habit is to do 20 squats every time you do your kusti. Or 20 squats when you use the toilet. Our legs are the largest group of muscles

and it's very important to give them some exercise. They lose their function just sitting around. If doing a squat is hard, hold a chair and squat. Getting physical activity back into our lives is the most important thing we can do for our overall wellbeing. Our body loves to move and needs to move!

The last habit is to take a long hard look at our food. What kind of food are we really eating, the quality and the way it was made! As a society, we have moved away from simple nutritious food to more extravagant and indulgent food almost every day. I feel that we have some amazing Parsi dishes. Bhonu that makes my mouth water just thinking about it. But let us try make vegetables a part of every meal. Try experimenting with simple leafy salads. Get into the habit of eating a big leafy salad with your meals.

All in all, I believe that we can create an amazing society if we can get everyone to be healthy, happy and secure. In order to achieve this we need to take small doable steps ourselves. Please help me in spreading this dream of mine.

A JOINTWZO TRUST / WZCC-INDIA / FEZANA INITIATIVE
To provide clean drinking water to Zoroastrian families in the village of Bardipada.

Dinshaw K. Tamboly

Dr. Cashmera P. Bhaya had undertaken in the late nineteen eighties a sample (not census) socio economic survey of Zoroastrians living in the villages of South Gujarat. The report when published made Zoroastrians all over the world aware of the abject poverty in which many Zoroastrians lived in the villages of South Gujarat.

It was essentially the Bhaya Report that triggered off the creation of the World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust (WZOT) in 1991. The focus of the Trust in the initial years was on rehabilitating the poor Zoroastrians living in villages of South Gujarat and adjoining villages in nearby Maharashtra.

Over the years the WZOT has been actively involved in multiple community welfare projects such as raising funds for these poor Zoroastrians and extending support to them in their activities such as farming, setting up poultry and dairy farms, providing support to individuals towards being self employed in multiple professions, providing medical and educational support, financial support to elderly and physically handicapped, replacing huts in which Zoroastrians live into cottages. WZOT has between 1991 and 2019 (31 March) touched the lives of 498 agrarians in 202 villages and replaced 290 huts into cottages.

One of the objectives of the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce (WZCC) is to get involved in Socio-Business projects to help the less fortunate Zoroastrian population in India. It is one of the objectives of FEZANA to engage in charitable activities as required by the Zoroastrian faith.

WZCC-WZOT- FEZANA have now jointly undertaken the initiative to provide clean drinking water to twenty-plus Zoroastrian Families in the village of Bardipada. The village of Bardipada is situated in Taluka Surgana of District Nashik in Maharashtra State. It is just a kilometre within the Maharashtra State border with Gujarat.

There is an acute shortage of clean drinking water in the village. The shortage faced by Zoroastrians who live in an enclave, can be overcome by drilling a well 350 feet below the ground, immersing a submersible pump operated by solar energy into the bore well, constructing a tower on which a water tank would be placed from which water would be piped to each of the 20 families cottages / huts. Initial testing indicates that the well water should be potable. If final testing indicates otherwise, a purification system will be installed depending on the contamination present.

The total cost of the project is estimated to be in the region of Rs.10,00,000/= (Rupees ten lakhs).

Individuals having any questions or needing more details about the project may contact Edul Daver, Global President, WZCC (E-mail: eduldaver@gmail.com, Tel: +1 908 397 4443).

Zoroastrians from all over are requested to extend support to the initiative of providing clean drinking water to these poor Zoroastrians by donating generously towards the same.

Zoroastrians from within India interested in supporting this project may send their donation cheques made out in the name of The World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust and forwarded to:

The World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust,

C-1, Hermes House, 3rd floor,

Mama Parmanand Marg, Opera House,

Mumbai 400 004.

Donors in India wishing to remit funds directly into our bank account can also do so by making remittances directly into our bank account as per details below:

Name of Bank: Deutsche Bank.

Branch: Hazarimal Somani Marg, Fort

Branch Address: D. B. House, Hazarimal Somani Marg, Fort,

Mumbai 400 001

Account title: The World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust

Account No: 400004259620019

Account type: Savings

IFSC Code: DEUT0784PBC

Donors making remittances directly into our bank account should inform us by way of a letter or an e-mail (admin@wzotrust.com), details of the direct remittances, their PAN and address where the receipt has to be sent.

Donations to WZO Trust are eligible for exemptions under sec. 80(G) of the Income Tax Act.

Donations can also be made out by Checks made payable to FEZANA with notation in memo column "Bardipada Clean Drinking Water Project" and mailed to: Rooky Fitter, FEZANA Treasurer, P.O. Box 266, Sunset Beach, CA 90742, USA

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QueerZ – being LGBTQ and Zoroastrian

Fereshteh Bulsara, Nadia Jam, Nasha Katrak & Farhad Cooper



Photo: Panelists Nadia, Fereshteh and Nasha

At the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress held in Los Angeles, California, this summer, the Zoroastrian youth put together a panel to discuss sexuality and sexual orientation within our community. The four young panelists all identifying as members of the “LGBTQ2AI+” community (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Trans-Queer-2Spirited-Asexual-Intersex) had an hour-long panel to share their stories, provide some insight and debunk a few myths. The discussion was intended to be a friendly introduction to the spectrum and depth of sexuality as well as an opportunity to raise awareness for LGBTQ2AI+ (referred to as just LGBTQ from now on, for brevity) identifying people within the small but mighty Zoroastrian populace.

“We thought that the best way to run the session, was to make it personal and relevant to the whole audience, young and old, LGBTQ and not. We wanted to tell our own stories. Stories of how we realised we were queer; how we came out, and how we live our lives as both LGBTQ people and Zoroastrians.”

Why discuss sexuality and sexual orientation?

We know that many Zoroastrians identify as LGBTQ, or at least know somebody who is. Unfortunately, not all of them feel that they can talk about it openly and live their lives as they need. Often these individuals distance themselves from the community because they feel unwelcome, disconnected, and misunderstood. As a result, a disproportionate number of LGBTQ Zoroastrians suffer from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and have suicidal thoughts and attempts. This is a tragedy that can be addressed and avoided by initiating open communication and better understanding.

Taking care of the Zoroastrian community entails making all members of the community feel appreciated, valued and loved regardless of who they love. This can be achieved by ensuring your current beliefs are questioned and your thoughts imbue enough open-heartedness to manifest them into socially inclusive words and deeds, such as not assuming that everyone is seeking a partner of the opposite sex. No one should have to choose between their identities and reject one in order to feel embraced by the other. This is why the main purpose of the panel was visibility, followed by affirming to the next generation that they can, for example, seek same-sex love within the faith and that being Zoroastrian and LGBTQ are unquestionably compatible.

“Taking care of the Zoroastrian community entails making all members of the community feel appreciated, valued and loved regardless of who they love.” Nadia Jam, Panelist

Pre-Panel events and support from the delegates

With the organisers’ enthusiasm and support, we hosted an informal queer ‘meet and greet’ on the first day of Congress.

At dinner time, stickers with the Zoroastrian LGBT - Straight Alliance logo were handed out to the hundreds who formed long lines for the taco truck and dosa stand. Reactions from the delegates were 99% positive, from “I am so happy this is finally being talked about, it’s about time” to “Me and my friends can’t wait for the panel” and “Can I have a whole sheet of stickers to distribute back home?” The only trouble was that 200 stickers was not enough for all those who wanted to show their avid support!



“I am so happy this is finally being talked about, it’s about time” - Congress Delegate

The Session

As this was a totally new realm of discussion at a Congress, the aim of this session was to provide an introduction and information about the queer community in general and Zoroastrians in particular - starting with an anecdote about how there is little or no visibility of the gay Zoroastrian community!



Photo: Panelists Fereshteh, Nasha and Nadia

Nasha Katrack kicked off the panel by explaining the acronym “LGBTQ2AI+”, the Kinsey scale and the difference between gender and sex.

Submit Anonymous Qs!
 1. Go to [slido.com](https://www.slido.com)
 2. Search #7WZYC
 3. Ask your Question



Defining LGBTQ2+

- L = lesbian
- G = gay
- B = bisexual
- T = transgender/ transsexual
- Q = queer
- 2 = 2-spirited
- Non-Binary
- Pan-sexual
- ... etc

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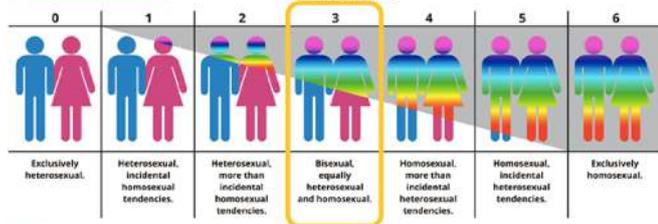


Photo: Definition of LGBTQ2+

Submit Anonymous Qs!
 1. Go to [slido.com](https://www.slido.com)
 2. Code #7WZYC
 3. Ask your Question



The Kinsey Scale

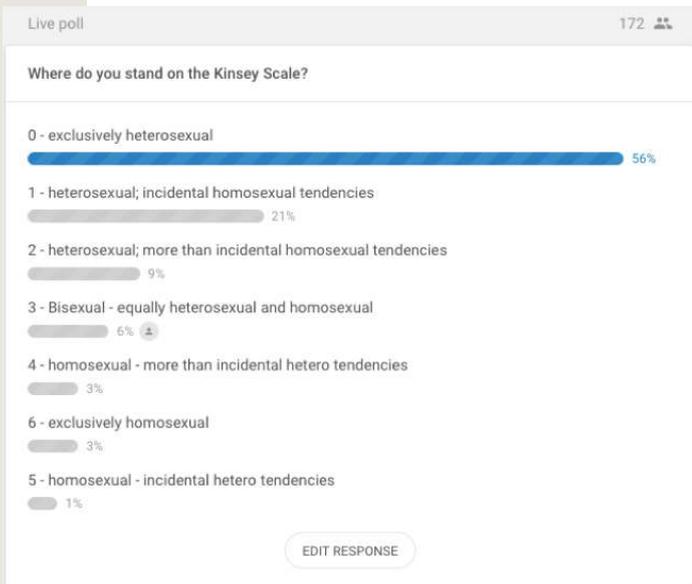


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Photo: The Kinsey Scale

The audience was encouraged to join in by participating in an anonymous online poll of their own sexuality, with a total of 172 respondents. It concluded (with likely biases and errors) that 56% of participants were exclusively heterosexual while revealing that youth were generally comfortable with being on the Kinsey spectrum.



A personal narrative of being LGBTQ and Zoroastrian

Personal narratives were shared by all four panelists about their journey of self-acceptance, coming out to their loved ones, and the effect it had on their relationships. Each had a unique experience, and a range of reactions from family members and friends. With changing times and rising clarity of how common/normal it is to be LGBTQ, it is important to recognize the extra burden that LGBTQ people carry, for example, in the East compared to the West. Society and government laws in many regions across the world remain relatively socially conservative and discriminatory, leading numerous LGBTQ+ members astray into a path of self-dislike, humiliation and psychological problems.

Farhad's story

(Farhad was unable to attend the conference due to work commitments, so he recorded two videos that were played to the audience.)

Farhad is a Parsee Zoroastrian, born and brought up in London, England to a not particularly religious family. He is a doctor specialising in HIV and Sexual Health, and spends a large part of his life working with the LGBTQ community. He started by reminding the audience that we wouldn't all be here if it wasn't for sex, and that having fun is important, as is staying healthy - so we shouldn't forget to go and get our sexual health tests done regularly if we need them!



He explained how "coming out" is a personal thing. "You don't need to come out to anyone or everyone if you don't want to." For him, however, it was extremely important to just be honest and authentic with those close to him. He chose to tell his brother he was gay, first, at the age of sixteen, followed by his best friend at school, and then various other close friends and family members. He came out in the 1990s, at a time when it was illegal to talk about homosexuality in schools in England and when there was no legal recognition of a non-heterosexual relationship either.

Telling his mum was something he wanted to do right, as he wanted to make sure they heard it from him and nobody else.

"I decided to give mum a lot of preparation that there was something personal and really important I wanted to talk to her about. I asked her if she would want me to talk to her about it, and she said that of course, she would. We decided on a day when we were going to go out together and not be interrupted. By the time I told her, I don't think it came as a complete shock as a result. What is really important, is to keep returning to the topic afterwards, as although it felt good to be honest with her, and have a weight lifted off my shoulders, she naturally, had various questions and worries that wanted to talk to me about."

In Farhad's case, his mum's main concern was about having grandchildren. This is never an easy issue and it was particularly difficult for Farhad to hear how she felt about it. He finds that the only way to deal with it is to continue to be honest and talk about things - if she wants to. Things have changed a lot since the 1990s and there are many ways to have a family. LGBTQ parenting is commonplace. Although she sadly suffered a massive stroke 5 years ago - almost a decade after he came out to her, (and so communication is a little bit more tricky!) he makes sure that she always has the opportunity to be involved in his life, and ask questions if she has any.

The challenges and successes

It wasn't all a walk in the park, however! "I had some very close family criticise me for actually wanting to be honest with my mother. I was told it was unnecessary, that she may not understand, that she may reject me, why would I want to hurt her unnecessarily.

"Thankfully - I just ignored them. And they couldn't have been more wrong. I can now look back and laugh about it, but when you are young, you actually believe that those closest to you have yours and the other person's best interests at heart. Not to mention the obvious conflict with what our faith teaches about honesty!"

"Who is anyone to decide what another individual should or shouldn't be allowed to know about something relevant to them, other than person themselves? It's their choice and no-one else's. It's why I think it's important to prepare the other person properly when coming out to them, and let them decide for themselves whether they'd want to talk to you about this important and personal issue. I imagine that in 99.9% of cases, a

loved one will only say yes. And why it's important to support them afterwards.

"Mum was shocked at what they told me and so glad I was honest with her. I think this probably happens a lot in our community. It's paved the way to a really honest relationship with her, where, although she's almost 80 and had a major stroke that's affected her cognition, I know that absolutely nothing is off-limits, whether it's about me or anything. She's so great like that - she always implies she'd rather know everything if asked about a tricky topic. Most of us would.

"We also forget that too many LGBTQ people and their loved ones will suffer from addictions, physical and mental health problems and probably relationship breakdowns, as a result of those people not being able to be 100% open about who they are. This is completely avoidable, and our community has a duty to tell LGBTQ people that they will be welcomed in every aspect of community life. That's the only way we can make such unnecessary suffering stop.

Sexuality and Zoroastrian Scripture

Nadia Jam opened the discussion around the aspect of what is said in Zoroastrian scripture regarding homosexuality. While the Vendidad, a set of purity laws written circa 3rd century C.E. some 2000 years after the era of the Prophet, condemns certain acts in section V of Chapter VIII, but the words of Zarathustra himself never touches upon sexual orientation in the Gathas. This realization put the panelists at some ease knowing that there is no sin in who they love, and thus should have never had to feel embarrassed or be fearful of punishment by the religion per se.

According to Mobed Jehan Bagli, mobeds (should) play a vital role in integrating LGBTQ+ individuals in the prevailing social environment by first fully comprehending the problem they are facing and then proceeding to resolve the situation. He states "If being gay is part of Nature's creation, their mode of sexuality is part of their natural consequence. They are not any less truthful or less righteous by following that path" This is very touching and rational. Mobed Tehemton Mirza also had comments in this discussion and he spoke with eloquence, clarity and progressivism - "So what if you're gay or bi-sexual, you are first and foremost a human being. If there are two people in love, who are we to stop them?"

Closing remarks on this topic ended with noting that an emphasis should be placed on language and openness. If people are vocal about their support for the LGBTQ+ community and avoid using bigoted and insulting slurs, closeted individuals will endure less emotional stress, be more inclined to share their truth, and be able to live and love as they are, moving on to more important things in life!

Mobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani summed up the overall message beautifully:

"The Gathas of Zarathustra is the core of our religion and provides us with the foundation that our faith is built on by furnishing one's mind with the lofty, timeless, divine, fundamental and philosophical principles, to serve as a guide, throughout one's life. However, the Gathas are not prescriptions and interdictions, consisting of dos and don'ts. If this was the case, they would be only relevant for its time, or shortly thereafter, but the Gathas, and doctrine of Zarathustra are as relevant today as they were when composed by our prophet millennia ago. In fact, they are timeless and ever abiding. It is a doctrine based on the trifecta ethos of "Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshta", denoting "Good thoughts, Good words, and Good deeds." which highlights the importance Zoroastrianism places on free will, providing and empowering, each individual with the ability and authority of self-determining their own destiny by the choices they make, for themselves and by themselves. Consequently, each individual is responsible for his or her actions, and is entitled to live the life that they desire so long as it does not harm no other."

The Q&A

Exactly 50 questions were posted to the anonymous online Q&A. While there was only enough time to answer a few questions, the objective ones were tackled with the help of Mobed Tehemton Mirza, who was brought up for questions such as, "What is the official position on homosexuality in Zoroastrianism?", "Can same-sex couples be married by Dasturs?", "If a same-sex Zoroastrian couple has children, will they be considered Zoroastrian?" "What can we do to support the gay and lesbian community in the East and West?" "How can I be an ally?"

To see the responses to this Q&A and the whole session, simply go to FEZANA's Facebook page, and select the recording of Day 5 Morning 7WYZC starting at 2h26m49s

The next steps for our community

If you are going through some turmoil, we recommend going at your own pace and not comparing your journey to others'. If you are reading about this subject matter for the first time, then good on you for gauging interest, educating yourself and delving into a new conversation, knowledge is power after all.

Currently, our Facebook group (Zoroastrian LGBT Straight Alliance) and email (ZoroGSA@gmail.com) are the only available resources, but we expect big developments in the upcoming years, whether it be conducting research or continuing the discussion at future congresses.



Photo: The Zoroastrian LGBTQ-Straight Alliance Facebook group

To this day, it is no surprise that there is no case of a Mobed ever performing a same-sex wedding, but there is no reason this cannot change, if perspectives and attitudes do.

We call for a shift in the intense and intimidating hetero-normative culture and expectations present at Zoroastrian gatherings. This shift requires the open ears, hearts and arms of all Zoroastrians irrespective of age, location and faction. This truly is just the beginning.

"Show me O, Almighty, the best path, so that I may decide which path is in accord with Asha. Reveal to me through good mind the recompense which befalls me, so that I may feel exalted with joy. Make me aware of everything; O Mazda Ahura, which has happened in the past or may happen in future."

Yasna 31 Verse 5

(Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb Translation)



The World Zoroastrian Organization