“Do persevere, for he shall grant to you the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom. …”
yasna 53.3-5

Countdown to Freedom: Unfurling of the 1st Indian flag a 100 years ago
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COVER
Madame Cama holding the Indian National flag 100 years ago. Imram of Creative, rendition from the portrait donated by the Parsi Pragati Mandal

PHOTOGRAPHS
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From the Editor

One hundred years ago Madame Cama, a feisty Zoroastrian lady well before her time, raised the Indian National flag at Stuttgart, Germany, in August 1907. 40 years later India and Pakistan gained their independence ironically in the same month – August. Hamazor celebrates the courage and vision of this lady who sacrificed her health, family and friends for the sake of her principles, and died alone, unwept and unsung.

We have remarkable Zoroastrian women in our midst, countless to mention, each differing in what they have achieved. For this issue, initially by chance, stories were solicited on extraordinary women which then evolved into a theme. These women are outstanding and can easily join the rank of their sisters who have been featured in previous issues and those that are still to come. And to boot, the women who have written these articles are themselves exceptional in their own fields.

In these pages you will also read about a book which has just been launched showcasing inspirational women from all over the world, many of who are Zoroastrians for which one feels immense pride. Researched and written by a spirited Zoroastrian lady [shades of Madame Cama in her own way], the book is fun yet full of information, just like the writer.

Much to my chagrin I realized while writing this editorial that since I took over the Hamazor five years ago, for the first time a woman is on the cover. And to complete the circle, what can be better, especially for this occasion, than a woman art director who designs each cover for us. She in her own right has won many accolades for the firm she runs both internationally and locally in Pakistan. WZO is indeed thankful to her for giving us delightful covers for each issue.

Ladies stand up and take a bow.

Toxy Cowasjee, 2A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530, Pakistan
An evening with Lord Karan and Lady Heather Bilimoria

An overview of the evening prepared by Frenny and Noshir Umrigar

In accordance with our time honoured tradition of celebrating outstanding individuals from within our community, a special meeting was organised on 14th June 2007, at Asia House, Cavendish Street, London. This was arranged so that WZO could formally pay tribute to one of the shining lights of our community, Karan Bilimoria, who has been elevated by the British Government to the House of Lords, as Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea, CBE, DL.

Due to constraints of time and space the meeting was restricted to Board Members of WZO London together with their wives and partners, plus a few invited individuals, who have steadfastly supported WZO over the past two decades.

On their arrival Lord and Lady Bilimoria were introduced to the Board Members and thereafter ushered into the main assembly, where they mingled with all the other guests present. President Darayus Motivala opened the proceedings by formally welcoming Lord and Lady Bilimoria with a precise and eloquent address. Chairman Sammy Bhiwandiwalla then continued familiarising the guests with the multifarious activities of WZO in London and abroad. To document 25 years of WZO’s progress in 25 minutes was by no means an easy task. However, Sammy in his inimitable style, tackled his task with a well prepared and informative speech, aided by a highly effective video presentation.

At the end of the speech a presentation plaque on behalf of WZO was presented by Mrs Ursula Bhiwandiwalla to Lord and Lady Bilimoria, as a token of our high esteem for his achievements.

In reply Lord Bilimoria gave us an insight into his early struggles with the foundation of his business and subsequent meteoric rise to fame, emphasising his close ties with our community and his steadfast attachment to the deep rooted traditions of the Zoroastrian religion. Here was a man who, with foresight and fortitude, ventured to confront the giants of the brewery industry and achieved success of the highest magnitude. The brand name ‘COBRA’ is today a household name.

Addressing the audience Lord Bilimoria stated “Your presentation was thoroughly inspirational and it was wonderful to learn more about the remarkable work done by WZO who put so much back into the community, in particular in helping the poor Parsis in Gujarat. To me, your presentation personified the saying which I believe describes our community ethos so accurately: that it is not enough to strive to be the best in the world, one should also aspire to be the best for the world.”

Karan and Heather (as they always wish to be known) then mingled freely with our members and guests and all enjoyed a delicious finger buffet prepared by Cyrus Todiwala of Cafe Spice Namaste fame.

The evening ended with the departure of our celebrated guests, who we are sure were deeply moved with the sincerity of WZO’s purpose and our commitment to the Zoroastrian community. Our heartfelt thanks to Lord and Lady Bilimoria for giving us the opportunity of presenting WZO to them.

We are delighted to inform our membership that subsequent to the above presentation both Lord Karan and Lady Heather Bilimoria became Grand Patron members of WZO.
Lord & Lady Bilimoria with the Board Members of WZO London

L to R: Darayus Motivala, Heather & Karan Bilimoria, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla

L to R: Inderjit Captain, Heather & Karan, Shahpur Captain [past Chairman, WZO]. Behind: Hilda Sethana, Shahin Bekhradnia

Sammy Bhiwandiwalla presenting WZO's multifarious activities

L to R: Ursula Bhiwandiwalla, Heather & Karan accepting the WZO presentation plaque
Farvardeegan Prayers held by the late Noshirwan F Cowasjee

by shahpur captain

To know and to understand why the above prayers were started by late Noshirwan Cowasjee (and still held annually); one has to delve back into the history of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe. (ZTFE)

Muktad and Farvardeegan prayers were started in the 1960’s by late Dasturji Sohrabji Hormasji Kutar, the High Priest of the Zoroastrians of UK and Europe, ably assisted by late Ervad Burjor M Magol. Dasturji Kutar encouraged other mobeds to join these ceremonies and they did so.

For years on end these ceremonies were attended by Zoroastrians and their spouses, whether Zoroastrians or non-Zoroastrian. Not only did the non-Zoroastrians attend these ceremonies, but they were also allowed to put sandalwood and loban on the afargan, without any hindrance from any participant/attendee.

Our Dasturji passed away on 30th April 1984. Within a matter of months, after the passing away of Dasturji Kutar, the peace and harmony that had always existed within the community in the UK was destroyed. At the Farvardeegan prayers of the following year (1985), the octogenarian Marietje Moos, widowed wife of Jehangirji Moos, ZTFE President of many years, was present. Marietje had a great love for Zoroastrianism and had jointly served the Zoroastrian community with her husband throughout the years. This elderly lady had travelled by train all the way from Beckenham in Kent to Victoria Station in London, and then changed trains for Brookwood in Surrey - a journey possibly taking two hours each way. She had been attending these ceremonies ever since the passing away of her husband in the 1970s.

Throughout this time, many mobeds had recited prayers in the presence of Mrs Moos, both at Muktad and Farvardeegan, without any objection. In the lamentable absence of our Dasturji Kutar, one of those mobeds who had previously participated in prayers with Dasturji Kutar asked Mrs Moos to leave saying (as stated by Mrs Moos) “you are a disgrace to our community and your husband should never have married you.” This act was calculated and callous.

Following this, I (as the then President of the ZTFE) tried my utmost to dampen down the flames but social parties were organized at which petitions were produced and those attending asked to sign in the name of saving the religion. Many of the signatories failed to understand the consequences of what they were signing; and of the 40 or so signatures, one of the signatures was forged. The petitioners wanted the ZTFE Committee to “request non-Zoroastrian spouses of members to refrain from attending Muktad and Farvardeegan prayers”.

A campaign followed to take over the ZTFE Committee by enrolling friends as members of the ZTFE, and electing them on to the Committee at the next AGM in November 1985 and consequently three
long-standing members of the Committee, standing for re-election, were replaced by their friends.

As President of the ZTFE, I reluctantly placed these petitions before the Committee. Darius Sethna read a letter written to him by Dasturji Kotwal of Mumbai, in which it was stated that no non-Zoroastrian should be present within five or six number of ‘farsangs’. This resulted in Mobed Bahman Mobed, an Iranian priest and a Trustee of the ZTFE, laughingly saying to Darius Sethna that every time he prayed at the Zoroastrian House the whole of West Hampstead would have to be vacated. After a lengthy and heated discussion the resolution/petition was not accepted. Unfortunately, at the next meeting, held in my absence, the resolution was passed; despite my requesting the Vice President to ensure otherwise.

At the meeting thereafter, I tried my utmost to get this resolution rescinded, but in vain. As I had been instrumental in bringing the community together in the 1960s and fostering a real camaraderie within the community, I resigned. Half the Committee resigned with me, some immediately, and the rest later.

With the additional resignation of the late Dr Shirinbanoo H Kutar, the community was awakened. The late Noshirwan Cowasjee, who till then had taken no part in the affairs of the community for many years, decided to take an active part. Single handed, Noshirwan castigated the culprits and wrote letters to the community exposing them. In spite of continuous threats against him and even being physically attacked, Noshirwan continued his crusade for religious tolerance. He appealed to those married to non-Zoroastrians to attend the Muktad and Farvardegan prayers with their spouses despite the objection of the Committee.

Noshirwan then decided to hold United Farvardegan prayers for Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrian spouses on the nearest weekend to the actual date, so as not to clash with the ZTFE organised prayers.

Noshirwan sent his letter to many members of the community advising them of the United Farvardegan Prayers to be held at Brookwood cemetery. Noshirwan approached the mobeds in London requesting that they pray at this gathering. All refused, except Ervad Noshir Dordi. Having sent out the notices, Noshirwan was concerned and telephoned me on this matter. I eased his anxiety by telling him that if the priests did not come, I could, with others, recite the prayers. Ervad Noshir Dordi and I said prayers on the very first two occasions, after which Ervad Dordi did not come. At that point, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla, Roshan and Adil Dehnugara, Dinyar Modi, Rumi Sethna, Farrokh F Vajifdar and myself, recited prayers every year until 2004. Prayers were and have been recited out in the open, even on occasions when it has rained.

Noshirwan used to write the circulars, print and post them; prepare sandwiches, tea and coffee in large flasks; all by himself,
and come in a taxi all the way from London to Brookwood, well before the commencement of the prayers at noon. On reaching Brookwood cemetery, Noshirwan would put up the folding tables, lay out the food and drink, plastic cups and plates with serviettes, and hang over the door of the sagdi a banner proclaiming “Once the flame of freedom is extinguished, it never lights again.” Various friends (ladies) helped Noshirwan by preparing sandwiches and serving behind the counter. Some members of the congregation brought other eatables to enjoy after the prayers.

Being very meticulous, Noshirwan would request all those present to write their names and addresses in a book of attendees and sign against their names, as a matter of record as to how many attended the prayers. The number was in excess of 250 every year, much higher than those attending the official ZTFE Farvardegan prayers.

Since the passing away of dear Noshirwan in May 2002, Sammy Bhiwandiwalla and his wife Ursula, with the help of friends, have been organising the prayers every year. A large number of Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians continue to participate in the occasion.

Only three years ago, an Irani mobed Ardeshir Fravahar, willingly agreed to perform the prayers and since then Ervad Jal Karkaria has also officiated at the Farvardegan prayers. So, the dream of dear Noshirwan has finally been achieved.

These prayers have been recited now for the past 20 years continuously, thanks to the zeal and determination of our late friend Noshirwan Fakirjee Cowasjee and will continue to provide a service to many of our UK Zoroastrians who have married outside excluding non-Zoroastrians from attending these ceremonies is rescinded.

This is a shining example of a true Zoroastrian overcoming all odds stacked against him by unthinking and uncaring orthodox Zoroastrians. May the pious soul of dear Noshirwan rest in peace in Garothman Behest and may he bless the attendees of this function from his celestial home. Amen.
The vagaries of English weather promises to put paid to many a social event each year and this year was no exception, as it may in fact go down as one or the wettest on record. But by the grace of God we escaped the worst and on a bright sunny day, some 175 guests ventured out to attend a fundraising BBQ, arranged by Pervize & Rohinton Irani, the doyens of hospitality, at their residence and garden.

The day proceeded with music from the Black Velvet Duo and the customary selection of BBQ chicken, Lebanese lamb with rice, shish kebab, corn on the cob, a selection of sweets and as much wine, beer and fruit juices you could possibly drink. Our guests who never miss an opportunity to step out in their Hawaiian summer wear faced stiff competition when guests Alex Burns wearing a kurta pyjama and his wife Valerie in shalwar khamseh turned up in two stunning outfits.

Rohinton with his fundraising skills once again encouraged the guests to part with their money towards the Gujarat and Medical Relief Fund that provides assistance to the poor, sick and deprived sections of our community. With some enthusiastic bidding for a wide array of offers from hotel accommodation, restaurant bookings and raffle prizes the evening drew to a close with a collection of nearly £5,600.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to both Pervize and Rohinton Irani for their constant help and kindness in supporting WZO and to all the immensely generous donors who so willingly support us each year, the army of helpers and all the attendees for digging deep into their pockets towards a good cause.
“IMPACT – Unleash the Spark Within”
this was the aptly titled theme of the congress. The conference opened with all the razzamatazz of a Hollywood Oscars night, with the images of all the leading players of the convention projected onto giant screens and each individual being introduced to the eager audience of nearly six hundred.

Delegates were welcomed by Daraius Bharucha, an educator by profession, who together with Phee Vania, Chair of the 14th North American Congress, jointly acted as MC for the entire congress and with great distinction. This was followed by the Keynote Speaker Minoo Shroff, Chairman of BPP. Some excerpts from Minoo’s address.

“I am going to allude mainly to the Indian experience as India is where I come from. Our microscopic community’s achievements have been adequately showcased over the years. To our great credit we had the only three elected members from India in the House of Commons before Independence and recently Karan Bilimoria was elevated to the House of Lords. Chief Air Marshal Fali Major is the fourth Parsi to be appointed as one of the Defence Chiefs. Sam Maneckshaw at 92 is the only living Field Marshal. The highest civilian award was conferred on late JRD Tata in late 19th century, but why the earlier vibrant spirit has dimmed among Parsis needs to be examined. We do not have a single Zoroastrian member in the union parliament or state legislatures, nor are any coming forward to enroll in the elite administrative, police and foreign services, nor the defence services. These are the positions of vantage where we can influence public policy and also protect and advance the interests of the community. Zoroastrian prowess is largely in spheres where individual talent and participation is effective. We excel in fields such as medicine, accountancy, law, architecture, consulting and scientific research. Lately young talent has come to the fore in entertainment and media. What is lacking is dash and energy.

“The most serious issue is our declining numbers throughout India. This is because out of every 100 women between the age of 19 to 45, roughly 30% do not marry at all, over 30% marry outside the community and the balance 40%, who marry within the community, do not have more than two children on an average. Sensible compromises are a must for a small community like ours for our survival. We need to revive that spirit of adjustment and reconciliation. Tragically in recent years individualism has prevailed over team spirit. While there are huge problems facing the community, we have abundant competence and ability to face these issues with courage and confidence. Moderation and tolerance are touchstones of Zarathushtra’s teachings.

“We must encourage, inspire and motivate the youth to propel the community forward. They have the energy, enthusiasm and passion which must be unleashed. Besides they have no obligation to carry the baggage from the past. I truly look forward to vigorous interaction from the youth to make us elders sit back and think.”

The plenary session entitled “Talk with the Titans” included - on video conferencing - such business stalwarts as Ratan Tata, Lord Karan Bilimoria, Nadir Godrej, Fali Nariman and Byram Avari who was personally present. Each of them explained their road
to personal success and encouraged the audience to strive for achievement through entrepreneurship as there were many opportunities out there to be grasped. Strangely though, this session focused on Parsi successes but found no place to include the Iranian Titans such as Mehraban Zarthoshty, Arbab Guiv, Mehraban Farhangi etc, as one rather irate Iranian in the audience pointed out. The session ended with Nadir Godrej, who loves to pen his own poems, reciting one of his works replete with anecdotes which was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience.

The day continued with the Fezana Awards Ceremony which recognises successful Zoroastrians of North America within six categories, and for the year 2007 they were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Name</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rohinton Rivetna Outstanding Zarathushti Award – Late</td>
<td>Mrs Khorshed F Jungalwala (posthumous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence in Business or Profession Award – Dr Beheruz N Sethna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamshed Pavri Humanitarian Service Award – Dr Russi D Bulsara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinshaw Joshi Memorial Award for Excellence in Performing Arts, Painting</td>
<td>Dinyar J Vania</td>
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<tr>
<td>or Literature – Dinyar J Vania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding Young Zarathushti Award – Dinsha F Mistree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding young Zarathushti Student Award – Anahita Dua</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifetime Achievement Award – Ambassador Jamsheed K A Marker</td>
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The daily sessions for adults and youths ran simultaneously making it impractical to attend all, but this is a common feature of congresses and one had to choose ones preferred subject. There was no shortage of choice with well attended sessions on Zoroastrian history, religion and culture, the Zoroastrian Diaspora, the Arts, Entrepreneurship, the Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce and Worldwide Mentoring. As always it was a delight to hear speakers of the calibre of Prof Kaikhosrov Irani and Dr Farhang Meher who both still play a defining role in the WZO.

My own session “At Home Abroad” was shared with Dr Jesse Palsetia, Associate
Professor of History at Guelph University, Canada. The central theme was to explore the Zoroastrian Diaspora in North America and the impact of this emigration on communities and organisations in the traditional homelands. Dr Palsetia, with his specialised knowledge of the history of the Parsis, and my multimedia presentation on WZO and its role within the Diaspora were well received.

The Gala Dinner Dance superbly organised by Dr Dhun Noria, Chair of the Gala Committee, was a spectacular event. With a menu of pure indulgence at the table, the Zoroastrian Symphony Orchestra, under the able lead of Farobag Cooper, entertained the guests to the music of Johan Strauss Jr and Bizet. This was followed by the young and talented Meher Pavri who sang Mozart’s “Alleluja, from Exultate Jubilante”. Tara Jamshidian, another budding singer, showed her vocal dexterity by performing Parizad Irani’s “Suite from Zarathushtra” to the delight of the house. But it was the magical keyboard skills of Dr Darius Bagli and his powerful rendition of Greig’s “Concerto in A Minor” that brought the house down. During the evening we had all succumbed to the most entertaining display of artistic and musical talent that our North American community has fostered.

The last day concluded with a Jashan performed by 17 mobeds, with simultaneous translations of the prayers being projected onto two large screens, in English and Farsi. We were then entertained by the talented Iranian Cultural Kanoun Choir led by Sharam Bastani followed by the ZSO Religious Education Classes Children’s choir led by Zia Mahmoudzadeh. Some thirty strong heavenly voices sang - to the delight of the crowd - *Chai Hame Zartheshty.*
A Gentleman Diplomat - Ambassador Jamsheed Marker

by shahrokh mehta

At the 14th North American Zoroastrian Congress in July 2007, sponsored by FEZANA and hosted by ZSO (Zoroastrian Society of Ontario), in Toronto Canada, Ambassador Jamsheed Marker was the recipient of the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award for his ‘outstanding contributions to public services with substantial national and international recognition beyond the Zarathushti community.’ Only three others have won this award in the past 17 years. (Zubin Mehta, Prof Kaikhosrov Irani and Dr Farhang Mehr) Niloufer Mama, a close relative, received the award on behalf of Jamsheed, who was unable to attend.

Jamsheed Marker has served as Pakistan's ambassador to nine countries (Ghana, Romania, USSR, Canada, East Germany, Japan, West Germany, France, and United States) with concurrent accreditation to a further nine countries. In addition, he served as Ambassador to United Nations (New York) as well as permanent representative to European Office of the United Nations, in Geneva. Jamsheed was the personal representative of Secretary General of the United Nations (Kofi Annan) and played a key role in bringing about the resolution of the East Timor conflict and the independence of that nation.

Representing one’s country in the various major capitals of the world for over three decades is a remarkable achievement in itself. However, to have a member from a tiny minority Parsi/Zoroastrian community represent the Islamic Republic of Pakistan at the world capitals is an incredible accomplishment. In addition, Jamsheed’s service during elected civilian governments (Zulfikar Ali and Benazir Bhuttos, Nawaz Sharif and others) as well as military governments (General/President Ayub and Yahya Khans, Zia-ul-Haq and others) in Pakistan during some of the most tempestuous times, is simply extraordinary, if not amazing.

So what is so special about Ambassador Marker? Well, several things come to mind when one talks and writes about Jamsheed. Having met him on several occasions, I describe Jamsheed as a man of impeccable character, high family values, and commitment to personal beliefs. He is a Parsi/Zoroastrian with a deep sense of loyalty, ingrained honesty, and abundance of humility. Jamsheed is a smart businessman with strong negotiating expertise. He is a natural leader as well as a consensus builder. He is a diplomat, who has repeatedly shown courage and conviction.

The Marker family of Quetta is well known for their business acumen, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy. Jamsheed Marker joined the family business after three years with the Royal Indian Navy during 1942-1945, immediately prior to the creation of Pakistan. In addition to management of his own business, Jamsheed became director of several corporations within the shipping, pharmaceuticals, banking, and insurance industries. He was active in industrial relations...
and was a member of the Pakistan delegation to several conferences of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva.

My earliest memories and those of other contemporary young Parsi boys growing up in Karachi during the fifties and early sixties, was hearing Jamsheed as a passionate radio cricket commentator, along with co-commentator late Omar Kureshi. Together they brought live and exciting commentary (before the advent of TV in Pakistan) into the living rooms of millions of Pakistanis – bowl by bowl including the googly deliveries on sticky wickets covering the silly mid-on and mid-offs. The test matches between India and Pakistan were particularly interesting, where passions ran high and so did the levels of emotions as described by the able commentators.

As Ambassador to USSR during 1969-1972, Jamsheed negotiated the establishment of the only steel mill in Pakistan and participated in extensive diplomatic negotiations in the Kremlin, particularly with Prime Minister Alexie Kosygin, during the crises leading to the emergence of Bangladesh. Jamsheed was closely involved with the negotiations that led to the Geneva Accord 1988, and the subsequent withdrawals of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The New York Times dated September 1, 1988 article, titled “Linchpin of US – Pakistan Alliance” the US state department and the US congress describe Jamsheed Marker, Pakistan’s Ambassador to Washington as, “tough, shrewd, and cultivated.” The article further states that “of all the diplomats in Washington, few work so intimately with the Reagan administration as Mr Marker.”

In the same article, the then Senator Gordon Humphrey, Republican of New Hampshire said “Mr Marker was a superbly effective, very smooth and self-assured diplomat, a real heavy-weight.” He said “the Ambassador played a major role in smoothing out the bumps in the US – Pakistan relations, especially disputes over Pakistan’s nuclear program.”

I have often wondered about the reason for the long, enduring, and close friendship between Zubin Mehta and Jamsheed Marker – both recipients of the Lifetime Achievement Award. The answer is obvious. Both are in a way, ambassadors of goodwill – one using hard-core diplomacy, the other using music – the international language of peace and harmony; both love opera – one as a conductor and other as a connoisseur; both love the game of cricket with passion - one as a die-hard fan and other as a national commentator. Both would have been cricketers or associated with national cricket in Pakistan and India, if their diplomatic and musical careers would have taken a different turn. Both are strong debaters of world politics. Like Zubin, Jamsheed too is fondly called aap (ours) by Karachi Parsis.

Jamsheed is truly a Man of the World, a diplomat par excellence and a Parsi/Zoroastrian of the highest integrity. Karachites in particular and the Parsi/Zoroastrian community in general are proud of the legendary accomplishments of Jamsheed. We congratulate Ambassador Jamsheed Marker in receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award and wish him and his family continued successes, good health, and a prosperous semi-retirement.
The Youth Leadership Enhancement Program
(An initiative of World Zoroastrian Congress - 2009)

Your opportunity to be
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Program gearing up for the
9th World Zoroastrian Congress

28 - 31 December, 2009
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For more information read program outline on opposite page

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Youth Leadership Enhancement Program
Empowering the Young Community Leaders of Tomorrow
Encouraging teamwork in leveraging resources for the community

What is the “Youth Leadership Enhancement Program”? The “Youth Leadership Enhancement Program” is a new initiative which aims at encouraging community leadership among 23 to 35 years old. The program is being launched to gear up for presentation at the 9th World Zoroastrian Congress to be held in Dubai in 2009.

The objective of launching this program is to build a network of enthusiastic young individuals and create a sustainable pool of next generation leaders that will benefit the community in the long run.

The youth will be mentored by eminent industrialists/entrepreneurs and receive valuable inputs/advice from them. They will be encouraged to support several community causes. What’s important is that the youth will have an opportunity to explore and experience the qualities of leadership, collaboration, entrepreneurship, creativity and community rootedness.

The application process:
- Youth with commitment to Zoroastrian ideals and ethics, good communication, leadership & team building skills and proven excellence in his/her field of activity will be eligible to apply.
- Acceptable age group is 23 to 35 years.
- Applications will be accompanied by an essay, not exceeding 600 words, on the following topic:

“A Worldwide Youth Leadership Enhancement Program”

Deadline
Entries must be submitted electronically to WZCYLEP@gmail.com, by 31st March 2008

Format
Applicants are requested to provide details as per the prescribed format on this page.

Judging
Winners will be judged by a select panel of judges on the following three criteria’s:
1. Creativity
2. Recognition of leadership qualities
3. Persuasive writing style

What will be the benefits of the Program?
The benefits will be as follows:
a. The youth will be a role model for the younger generation
b. Be an ambassador for the community
c. Receive inputs, advice from Mentors on projects/services, goal setting, future progress
d. Network with Business Leaders in the community
e. Interact with young members in different regions/countries and develop like minded projects/share ideas and develop

f. Develop a sense of support for the community, safety, quality of life, culture awareness, environment, history
g. Have a handshake with world renowned personalities.

About the Program:
In the year 2008 the selected applicants for the program will learn more about each other, share their future plans, learn how to design life goals and identify possible ways to accomplish those goals with the mentors who will be leading personalities from various fields and impart advice and provide creative inputs.

In the year 2009 – the selected Youth Leaders will be divided into teams and each team will present a program at the congress on 28th December 2009. The Title of the program will be “Young Community Leaders – Sharing with the Community”.

Awards:
All members will receive awards and the winning team will receive exciting prizes as “Future Responsible Leaders” at the congress.

APPLICATION FORMAT

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ESSAY TOPIC:
“A Worldwide Youth Leadership Enhancement Program” (600 words)
(Each candidate will give ideas on most important issues facing the community and the leadership skills necessary to address these issues and a detailed action plan to bring about a positive change in our community)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:
I certify that the information provided on this application is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge. I confirm that I have not received any assistance in preparation of this essay and that I am a Zoroastrian between the ages of 23 to 35 years.

I also agree to support the program and work with dedication towards its success.

Name of Applicant: ____________________________
Signature of Applicant: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
The World Zarathusti Chamber of Commerce in its commitment to rekindle the spirit of enterprise in the community organized a successful trade delegation to Karachi from September 8 to 13, 2007. The group of sixteen representing trading activity as diverse as numismatics to aircraft ground handling, made impressive presentations at official and private forums with distinction.

The single person responsible for this trade fair was Byram Avari, a highly respected hotelier and industrialist of Pakistan whose business empire stretches across continents. The WZCC rightly bestowed the accolade of Honorary Membership – 2006 as Byram epitomises the true Zoroastrian ethos of enterprise, benevolence, integrity and humility.

All the participants were from India with the exception of one from Dubai. With the missing ingredient of a sound political and trading relationship between India and Pakistan over the past 60 years this meeting was indeed a milestone. The highlight of the Trade Delegation was the formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between WZCC - India and Karachi Chamber of Commerce during the visit.

Karachi felt like home away from home, everything from the dug up roads to the warmth and hospitality of our co-religionists. Contrary to the impression that people are suppressed and generally unhappy in a dictatorial regime, there was freedom of press and law and order had evidently improved in comparison to earlier democratic regimes. Corruption had greatly reduced and the economy was faring reasonably well with GDP growth of nearly 7%.

It was also observed that people were drawn from the private sector to participate in the government. This was a refreshing change as it brought a pragmatic approach and helped remove bureaucratic shackles.

Trade between India and Pakistan needs to be given a serious look for mutual benefit. The official figure is $1 billion but it is believed the unofficial trade could be more than that. Even considering that, the figures are dismal when compared to business with China which is ten fold. There is no doubt that both Pakistan and India share similarities of culture, language, dress code, eating habit, likes and dislikes.

A recent example of shortsighted trading policies was the shortage of cement in India in spite of 150mt capacity and Pakistan having a surplus of as much as 10mt in spite of just 1/6 of Indian capacity. Similarly there could be other areas and products that could be explored to the advantage of both nations. Attempts therefore are needed to build synergies at both ends.

The US has been the principle trading partner of Pakistan accounting for over 25% of total exports from Pakistan. The other major partners being UAE and Saudi mainly for crude and allied products with China also being a major trader. Cotton fabric, yarn, ready made hosiery, bed wear, towel, rugs, carpets and other textiles made up are responsible for 60% of total exports of $16.45 billion. Other export items are leather, rice, fish, petroleum products, sports goods and pharmaceuticals. Pakistan has a total import bill of $28.58 billion, crude and crude products and machinery and equipment each contribute for more than 20% of total imports. The other major imports being motor vehicles, iron and steel, plastic, edible oil and fertilizer.
It is also a well know fact that the unofficial trade between two countries is more than the recorded trade which is a mere $1 billion. Additionally, trade also takes place through the Dubai route which adds unnecessary costs. A realistic and pragmatic view therefore needs to be taken by removing restrictions and bottle necks which are harmful for both the countries.

Viraf Daroga, Homi Ghadially, Sheroy Irani and Cyrus Kharas.

The performance as a group under the inspiring leadership of Minoo Shroff was outstanding and his recall of economic figures was astounding. But the overall success shall largely depend on the individual benefit to every participant in terms of business generated or at least the interest evinced during one to one meetings with business counterparts which was arranged for every participant. It may be too early in the day to draw conclusions but the feedback received so far has been very encouraging. Business is likely to get firmed up in supply of chemicals, machinery, handmade embroidery, dairy products, software and aircraft ground handling.

Every delegate will have many happy memories of this trade visit.

The reception and response at all official meetings, through the good offices of Mr Avari, were very encouraging - before His Excellency the Governor of Sind, the Honorable Federal Minister of Trade, the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Karachi Chamber of Commerce. The media was very receptive with good television and press coverage and a special interview with CNBC.

The long cherished desire of the International Board of WZCC came to fruition with the inauguration of Karachi Chapter of WZCC and the appointment of Chapter Chair, Soli Parakh, at a grand ceremony held at Avari Towers organised by the host Byram Avari. The Karachi committee comprises of Shahveer Byramji, Kersi Limathwalla is a senior practicing chartered accountant. He is Vice President of WZCC International Board and associated with several professional, social, cultural and charitable organizations, locally and internationally. He is an International board member of WZO.
An enthusiastic crowd of over 135 attendees gathered at the Zoroastrian Heritage and Cultural Center, Houston on June 24, 2007 to listen to two young entrepreneurs and a young professional describe their struggles, hopes and aspirations in pursuit of success. It was the first ever event organized by World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce to honour and recognize our youth. It was a joint event organized by the Houston and the Dallas chapters of WZCC. Thanks to the hardworking members of the Executive Committee, the event was a real success.

The president of the Houston Chapter, Behroze Daruwalla and the International WZCC Director and President of the Dallas Chapter, Firdosh Mehta, welcomed the attendees. Rustom Engineer introduced Zarine Commissariat, an International Director and the Secretary of the Board from Mumbai who was visiting Houston. Mrs Commissariat has been master of ceremony at countless events where celebrities like Dalai Lama, Royalty of Brunei, Bollywood stars, etc. were chief guests. She has played prominent roles at many national and international events organized by the Asian Secretaries & Administration Professionals; the Lion’s Club and also has anchored many television programmes.

Mrs Commissariat very eloquently delivered a talk on “A World Perspective on the WZCC”. Starting with the success of the two WZCC delegations to Dubai and Iran, she highlighted some of the up and coming programmes that the WZCC Executive Committee headed by the Chairperson Bomi Boyce is currently working on. The talk was followed by some interesting questions and answers.

Our first young entrepreneur Neville Medhora whose exploits have been written up in the Wall Street Journal was introduced by the Houston Chapter Executive Member, Kaemerz Dotiwalla. Neville’s topic was, “Achieving Success in E-Commerce on a Shoe String.” He regaled the audience with his life experiences in the Internet industry. Neville’s interest in entrepreneurship perked when he saw one of the Zoroastrian entrepreneurs in Houston driving around in, “cool cars”. He also wanted to make money, be independent and not have to depend on anybody for his future progress and success.

Neville had no idea how to get started in business. He overcame this hurdle by reading a lot of books on the lives of entrepreneurs who had made it. Neville took his first plunge into the world of business at the young age of about 13. He taught himself the then cutting edge technology of web design. He built a website at the age of 16 years while still in high school. Since then he has developed a number of internet related businesses, some of which sustained him through college and which he still operates. He also stated that being a member of the Zoroastrian community was of great benefit to him as that allowed him to gain Zoroastrian mentors who were successful in the business community and who taught him the ropes. I had an opportunity to visit further with Neville after his talk. Some of the things that this young man has done, are very interesting, well worthy of a look.

Neville’s advice to other young entrepreneurs was:
✓ Get a mentor and don’t hesitate to request an expert to be a mentor for you. The mentor does not need to be in the same business that interests you.
✓ Write all your ideas down and develop a niche from the list by a process of elimination.
✓ Read a lot; do research on your ideas. For him, books on psychology and how to manage people were more helpful than actual technical books.
✓ Once you make some money, establish an investment account and use it for anything to improve yourself.

Neville suggested that the Chamber develop programmes to motivate aspiring entrepreneurs and start a mentorship programme.

Our next young entrepreneur was Aaresh Jamshedji, whose topic was, “From Mufflers to Night Club in 7 Short Years?” Aaresh informed his audience about how at a very young age, he would buy a packet of gum and sell each individual stick of gum to his classmates for a profit.

He helped his parents at their gas station/garage. After graduating from high school, Aaresh purchased a Midas Muffler franchise which was about to go under and the price was right. Aaresh spent many long days and turned the business around in a very short time by adding services and products which were not previously provided. At the age of 20, he was the youngest franchisee in Midas’s history. Aaresh’s next business venture took root because a friend asked Aaresh to lend $5000.00 on a car at interest. This led Aaresh into the finance business of buying and carrying notes. This again is his second successful business venture.

Aaresh likes to work hard and play hard. When most of us go to a bar or a disco, we are busy sipping drinks listening to music and cutting the rug. Aaresh did all these things. However, he did one additional thing. He counted the number of drinks costing about $1.50 being sold at $7.00. This lit the fire in his belly to get into the nightclub business.

He went around studying various nightclubs in town and visualized his dream nightclub. He bought a run down clinic and spent 11 months building the nightclub with his own hands with the help of his father and brother. There were many days when he would come home so tired and dirty that he would sleep on the floor next to his bed, as he had no energy to take a shower and sleep on a clean bed.

Aaresh thanked his grandparents and parents for instilling in him gratitude to Ahura Mazda for his blessings. He said that Zoroastrian religion has played a major role in his life. Closings for both his businesses were done on March 21, Jamshedji Navroze. A divo is always burning at his place of business.

Aaresh was followed by Smita Eduljee, an unassuming young professional lady showing great determination. Smita’s topic was, “Making it in a Professional World”. Smita is presently working for Shell Research, a one time bastion of the good old boy mentality. Smita related to the audience how she ran into a stone wall from her male co-workers especially at the refineries and plants. She conveyed to us how through patience, perseverance and hands on hard work she overcame this resistance, gained respect in their eyes and has made it in a man’s world.

She told us about how her interest in chemistry took her from Mama School in Karachi, Pakistan to MIT, and then to Shell Research in Houston. Her story was of special inspiration to our young girls in the field of hard sciences. There were a number
of young ladies present at the seminar and she certainly lit a fire for some of them.

As the seminar came to an end, one could see from the enterprising spirit of these young Zoroastrian Entrepreneurs, that Zoroastrian entrepreneurship is not dead. The spirit of Tatas, Wadias, Readymonies, Petits, Godrejs and so many others is still smoldering, waiting for that breath of fresh air to whip it into an inferno of Zoroastrian enterprises as it once was. Will WZCC become this breath of fresh air? Additionally, will the charitable nature of our sethias of old be matched by our new Zoroastrian moguls to reflect their Zoroastrian Pan? That will be a test only time will tell.

Ushta Ahamai Kummai Ushta Kammai Chit

Homi Davier born in Bombay, India. His quest for excitement took him to Oman & from there to Houston, Texas in 1980. In 1986 he founded The Capricorn Group, Inc; a company in the aviation, transportation and IT industries. In 1995, Davier was the Co-Founder, President and Board Member of a US based corporation in the aviation business that was traded on the Nasdaq Stock Exchange, doing business in the Baltic Republics & Russia in the Aviation, Catering & Distribution Industries. He was the co-founder of the Zarathushti Business Conference which led to the formation of WZCC and served two consecutive 3-year terms as the VP International, stepping down to allow for new blood and fresh ideas. He is an active member of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston, having served several times on the executive committee and was the co-chair of the WZC 2000. In his spare time he paints resulting in successful exhibitions.

It is the greatest houses and the tallest trees that the gods bring low with bolts of thunder. For the gods love to thwart whatever is greater than the rest. They do not suffer pride in anyone but themselves. - Herodotus
Zoroastrian Youth Music Movement

WHO?

✓ Everyone you, me, and who ever else would like to participate.
✓ Need those who will write lyrics for faith-based songs
✓ Need those who can help us put these songs to music (compose)
✓ Need a variety of singers male and female all musical ranges

WHAT?

The goal is to achieve a new generation of faith-based music for the youth of the Zoroastrian community. It should be fun and should be contemporary. We want music that is catchy. Words need to be in English, easy to pronounce, understand and sing with lyrics that can be set to music that appeals to the younger generation such as pop, hip hop, rap etc.

Ideas of themes the songs can center around include, prayer, happiness, truth, good deeds, holding on to faith, basically the sky is the limit let you imagination run wild!

Dont worry if you are not a composer. Just write!
We will adapt and set it to music. Right now we just need to start and getting the lyrics is our first step.

Main goal is to keep it upbeat, purposeful and faith-filled.

WHEN?

We would like to have all lyrics in place to work with composers by September 1, 2007, but open for receiving additional lyrics.

WHERE?

As for now the work on this project is being done in Mumbai. It would be better to say this process is being managed from Mumbai and recording for this music is expected to take place here.

WHY?

Music is the best way to express so much of who we are and it connects us all on a level that nothing else in the world can.

HOW?

Please send your lyrics, questions, or comments to Freyaz Shroff
Phone : +91 98922 73973 (Mumbai mobile)
Email: freyaz@aol.com
In the 4th issue of the Hamazor 2006, p10, Mehlli Bhagalia refers to Dasturji Manekji Dhalla as the doyen of the reformist movement, who, when asked if he would perform navjotes of those who were not born Zoroastrians, replied: “No, he himself would not perform the navjote of a son born of a Parsi father by a non-Parsi mother”. When asked, “Why, Dasturji Sahib?” Dasturji replied, “Because the collective conscience of the community is strongly opposed to such navjotes”. When pressed further, Dhallaji said “It would not be permissible as it would be breaking the 1200 year old tradition”.

The above is said to have been the exchange of questions and answers at the end of a series of lectures given by the High Priest some time in the 1900s.

Here was a sincere, intelligent and inquiring mind, devoted to Ahura Mazda, and to the teachings of His Holy Prophet, Asho Zarathushtra; a prophet who had himself been asking questions of the One and Only Spiritual Creator: trying to discover the True Identity and Nature of the Creator of the physical and the Spiritual Worlds; as well as the Divine Purpose of His doing so.

Dasturji Dhalla was a strong yet gentle soul, not given to abuse or condemnation of others, especially not of the innocent. He had courageously made his views, his beliefs known to the Zoroastrian community and, like our very first High Priest, Asho Zarathushtra, had made Ahura Mazda’s purpose known to his listeners, and how this purpose may be achieved. The prophet had then left it to those who came to listen.

Before the time of our Prophet the princes and priests had complete power over the masses, and this power was used to satisfy their own desires for control and the acquisition of wealth.

The Zoroastrian community has come a very long way even from the time of acceptance of the Prophet’s message. Now, I am not a scholar, and must depend on those who are. But Ahura Mazda did give me a MIND, and intelligence, as well as a desire to discover the truth about the religion which has so influenced other faiths, and which has brought us to where we are today. We seek the truth which cannot be discovered by manipulation of the TRUTH.

Please allow me to deal with the above quotation, given by Mehlli Bhagalia, as I see it.

“It would not be permissible as it would be breaking a 1200 year ‘tradition’”, said Dasturji Dhalla.

By this quote and the previous one, “Because the collective conscience . . .”, Dasturji Dhalla is pointing out the fact that the 1200 years the Zoroastrians of India had made difficulties for those who would have converted to Zoroastrianism. The reasons for this have been written about before, so I won’t repeat them. But what Dasturji Dhalla did not say was that Asho Zarathushtra or Ahura Mazda had forbidden it. Nor did he say that conversion had not taken place before the last 1200 years. It was the Zoroastrian community who had denied it to the non-Zoroastrians. Now the practice of keeping non-Parsis out had become a 1200 year old tradition. A tradition is not a law of God, or His commandment. A tradition is only a practice or custom which has come into being because the people wished it to be so, or for whatever reason might have prevailed at the time: may even have been for our own protection, who came seeking refuge.

Besides, Dasturji Dhalla had seen the schisms which had taken place in the other
major world religions, and the terrible pain and suffering it had brought upon mankind, and was still destroying religions, communities, even when they follow the same prophet, and say they worship the same God.

He did not want a schism within his own community, and tried to protect the UNITY of his little flock he had been entrusted with. Not that I believe we would resort to bloodshed – but hooliganism? Yes!

It isn’t enough to know “facts” and “figures” – even these the orthodox do not always get right – one must have an insight into the “whys” and “wherefores” where human activities are concerned, especially when dealing with religion and GOD. Having quoted the words of Dasturji Dhalla, Mehlli Bhagalia now waves the High Priests reply like some triumphal banner, without any understanding of the man’s/priest’s strongly held beliefs. Had he begun to question some of the traditions and customs, and practices as Asho Zarathushtra had? Is this the reason which led him to study our religion more closely?

Obviously, Mehlli Bhagalia considered his own knowledge of so many subjects made him an authority on the MIND and will of Ahura Mazda, and the teachings of our Holy Prophet.

Bhagalia goes on to tell us that the Zoroastrians who had fled to parts of Europe and Asia perished, and believes that their open-door policy and inter-faith marriages and proselytism was the cause of it. Yet world history tells us just the opposite. By the time Zoroastrians fled to other parts of the world Christianity had become a militant religion; even Islam had undergone great changes, and soon began slaughtering each other. Zoroastrians now had to defend themselves against these two religious protagonists during our long history. Both these religions were very eager to swell their own numbers, and not always by gentle persuasion either. Remembering the Zoroastrians’ own reluctance to convert others to their faith, what in heavens’ name did this bank manager and others like him expect?

Before the invasion of Iran by the Arabs, our ancestors already had violent clashes with the Christian church, before the major religions eventually settled down to a more civilized existence.

Mr Bhagalia ends his article with another long quote from the Zoroastrian Scholar, Mary Boyce, under whom Khojeste Mistree is said to have studied. There can be no doubt about her affection and respect for the Zoroastrian faith and our community, nor her faithful and very extensive research into our religion, history and culture. For this she deserves our greatest respect and deepest gratitude. Even she did not say that Zarathushtra forbade people of other races from being accepted into the religion; in fact what she says shows just the opposite.

In her book “Zoroastrians - Their Religious Beliefs and Practices,” she writes, “How or exactly when, the religion then reached Western Iran, where it first enters recorded history, remains unknown. IT SEEMS, HOWEVER, THAT BY THE TIME IT DID SO, ZOROASTER’S GREAT VISION OF A WORLD FAITH HAD BEEN LARGELY LOST, AND HIS RELIGION HAD COME TO BE REGARDED AS SPECIFICALLY THAT OF THE IRANIAN PEOPLE.” She continues: “There must have been a number of reasons for this. Nothing is recorded for the fate of earlier inhabitants of eastern Iran at the time of the great migrations, but those who were not overwhelmed were evidently absorbed by their conquerors.” This tells us that of whatever race they may have been (eg. Scythians or Tarts) they now became a part of the Iranian people. The Shahname holds clues concerning what happened during this time of our ancient history.

She speaks of the misunderstanding and misapprehension for which some western scholars are responsible, but do the conversion of non-Zoroastrians or their rejection figure among them? I believe not.
But the quotation M Bhagalia has chosen clearly shows her concern for our dwindling community, for she writes: “. . . but as the cloud of misapprehension slowly lifts, it can be seen that whatever changes and developments may now be desirable, the tradition of this community is one deserving of the utmost respect”.

In her most gentle, yet strongly convincing manner she is telling our community that certain changes are needful if our RELIGION is to survive; the RELIGION which our Holy Prophet Zarathushtra preached, and his earliest followers passed on to successive generations. Today Zoroastrian scholars – Parsi and Irani – are quoting chapter and verse, not only from the Gathas, but other sacred books of our ancient religion: yet, it is obvious, there are none as blind or deaf as those who do not wish to do so.

If the so-called orthodox priests and laity truly loved and respected our Prophet, and the religion he vouchsafed to his earliest followers, our community would not need to turn to other religions or other “guides”, “peers” etc, to satisfy their spiritual needs, as they are doing today.

As for the affection and respect Mary Boyce had for our community – Mr Bhagalia forgets that she had only had the experience of well-behaved Zoroastrian audiences, in England and in Iran, where she had lived for a year among the Zoroastrians of Sharifabad. She had never witnessed the mob-like behaviour which has disrupted meetings in India.

The dwindling Parsi community makes me sad, but the ever decreasing number of Zoroastrians makes me even sadder, especially when I consider the aspect of our religion which the orthodox believe are of vital importance to our spiritual welfare.

Personal experiences, as well as those of others, have nurtured an inner conviction, that when we face the ONE and ONLY GOD, we shall not be judged according to the RACE we belong, but rather the Spiritual PATH we have travelled.

I have found Zoroastrianism to be the most comprehensive, spiritually fulfilling religion, because Asho Zarathushtra made it very clear that our salvation lay in our own hands: and how this will be achieved.

Putting emphasis on race, bad behaviour at meetings, body-parts of loved ones lying around in dakhmas, only darken the LIGHT and destroy the spiritual wholeness of the religion Asho Zarathushtra entrusted to his followers.

Perin Divecha was born in Saharanpur and educated at a boarding school in Mussorie, India. Served in the WAC(I) RAF Co. for three and a half years, but her ambition was to teach. She taught children in Pakistan and England, aged 6 – 15 years. Subjects of interest have always been Literature, History and Religion; myths and legends of different cultures; the development of religion; trying to understand how the human mind works; its capacity for physical and spiritual experiences.

Arman Ariane, California, USA writes ...

A few months ago I discovered the best book on the subject of leadership. At first I ordered ten copies for friends and now we are re-selling a dozen copies per week at my retail store.

The book was written 2400 years ago, but Peter Druker the founding father of the study of management calls it “Xenophon’s Cyrus the Great - the earliest book on the subject - is still the best book on leadership”.

The insights about leadership that are revealed in this book have inspired great men from Julius Caesar to Benjamin Franklin to Lawrence of Arabia.

Cyrus the Great
Editor: Larry Hedrick
ISBN 0-312-35531-9 also in paperback
A brief biographical sketch of Dastur Bode (1900-1989) & personal recollections

by Kersey Antia

Highlights of Bode's career

Dastur Dr Framroze Ardeshar Bode was the high priest of Fasli Petit Fire-temple in Bombay. He was born into a poor Bhagaria priestly family in Surat on May 17th 1900 and died in Bombay on February 2, 1989 after a protracted illness with Alzheimer’s.

He supported himself as a young man as a Yozdathregar (full-fledged priest) while studying Avesta-Pahlavi at the University of Bombay becoming a full-fledged navar at 17 and martab at 18. He obtained his BA in Avesta-Pahlavi from the University of Bombay in 1925 and later his MA. When I came to know him, he was honorary secretary of the Rahnumae Mazdayasni Sabha – a liberal forum started by Dadabhai Naoroji and K R Cama - where he gave lectures every week on behalf of the Sabha, which I frequented. Twice I was requested to fill in for him as a lecturer during his long absence from India, during my college days. He was also the honorary secretary of K R Cama Oriental Institute and many other organizations for many years. He expounded the liberal cause in various ways to the Zoroastrians of his day who were quite orthodox at this time.

He was a strict vegetarian and became the President of the Indian Vegetarian Society and at one of its annual conventions organized by him in the Esplanade Maidan in Bombay, was addressed by the then President of India, which I attended whilst still at college. He was very close to the industrialist Mr P N Mehta, who founded Boys’ Town in Nasik, where he used to be a teaching consultant as also at the Dastur school in Poona.

If I mistake not, he also taught at my alma mater, M F Cama Athornan Institute at the beginning of his career. It was only from his writings that I learnt that Sir Dorab J N Tata was actively planning to start an institute for priestly education but Cama’s sudden offer of Rs2,500,000 dissuaded him from going ahead with his plan, which Bode seemed to regret. It is hard to imagine the later Tata’s showing such an interest in the well-being and upliftment of their own priestly heritage – J N Tata, his two sons, Dorab and Ratan and his cousin, R D Tata all being navars (priests). The pendulum has swung so far away from those days of symbiosis between the Tatas, or for that matter, wealthy Parsis and the community.

He wrote many articles and his book on the Gathas, *Songs of Zaratushtra*, co-authored with Piloo Jungalwala lucidly presents the Gathic philosophy to the layperson. He was also invited in 1962 by the Tehran Zoroastrian Anjuman to lecture on Zoroastrianism, and the Iranians unlike the Parsis, adore him to this day. The Irani Zoroastrians were quite enamored of Bode and his views. As a matter of fact this sketch of his life is written only at the request of Dr Mehrborzin Soroushian to whom it is dedicated.

In the early 1950’s Bode moved to Los Angeles, California and earned a doctorate degree there and taught eastern philosophy and Zoroastrianism thereafter from 1955 onwards, but returning to India intermittently to continue his work there. He returned to India for good when Alzheimer’s was in the early stages and was cremated according to his wishes. He was survived by his wife, Homai, who diligently supported his work and lovingly looked after him during his long illness. She gladly provided me essential
information about him and corresponded with me until she passed away. Bode having married in his later years left no children.

**Vansda navjote and Bode**

Along with the famous Gandhite, B F Bharucha, he tried to awaken the conscience of the Parsi community in early 1942 by recognizing the pleas of 77 illegitimate children of Parsi landlords with non-Parsi women near Vansada, Gujarat, for becoming Zoroastrian as they were already following the Zoroastrian religion and customs. Similar navjotes were performed on nine individuals in Mazagam, Bombay on June 26, 1882 by a well-known JamaspAsa Dastur, Kekhushroo Jamaspasa of Bombay. However, the Parsi community was vehemently opposed to Bode’s action and never forgave him for it, the majority harshly criticizing him for it throughout his life time. Yet along with B F Bharucha, he saw it as a moral duty to accept them in the fold as otherwise the Prince of Vansda was contriving assiduously to make them Hindus. The progeny of these neo-Parsi have become very staunch and faithful Zoroastrians. At one of his lectures I attended at the Cama Oriental Institute, he presented one such lady who looked like a typical Parsi, and was so proud to be a Zoroastrian.

On the golden jubilee of the Vansda Navjotes Jehan Daruwalla, erstwhile editor of Bombay Samachar vehemently vindicated the validity of his action and detailed how it led to the addition of staunch Zoroastrians to our miniscule community (Bombay Samachar June 14, 1992; reprinted in Jame Jamshed Weekly on February 11, 2007, pp 13-14).

“Another bush fire made its appearance in Bansda. This controversy as long as it lasted, electrified the whole community and surcharged it with currents that forebode evil. It was the navjote of some 77 Parsis between the ages of seven and 60 alleged to have been born of Parsi fathers and alien mothers and supposed to be within the Davar judgment definition. Forms signed by some 20,000 Parsis requesting the trustees to call an Anjuman meeting to protest against such navjotes, which could harm the fabric of the Parsi communal ‘oneness.’

“The trustees were though as between two stools. If they call a meeting as demanded they might be hurting the rights of some legitimate cases falling under Davar’s judgment; if they did not they would be party to an act the majority did not subscribe to.

“In order therefore to get at the validity of the new navjotes to fall within the limits prescribed by Davar’s definition the trustees asked the parties concerned to send genealogies of the navjotees. In the meantime some 30 associations and anjumans sent their protest too against the navjotes to the trustees. And some anjumans, mostly nearby, moved the Maharaja of the Bansda state also. The trustees moved very cautiously in the matter and even went to the length of taking opinion of two well-known counsels. Dubash and his friends kept on urging the trustees to call the Anjuman meeting. One of the navjotees filed a suit in the High Court against the trustees of a Bombay agiary to enforce his rights to enter the premises for the purpose of making use of the same as an agiary and for the purpose of saying his prayers and worshipping thereat. With this the matter became sub judice and the question of the Anjuman meeting went into hibernation.

“On August 2, 1942 athornans of all ‘panths’ of Bombay followed their kith of Udvada and Navsari to condemn the navjotes. Jehan had often opined these views to me when I met him.

The furious intensity which the Parsi community reacted to the Bansda navjotes is well illustrated by Shapur Desai, the then secretary of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, which I had read in the original and was glad to see reproduced in Parsiana (July, 2004, p14):
And he wanted assurance to that effect. In their reply the trustees informed Dastur, among other things, that, 'It is the duty of the trustees to investigate all the necessary facts and form their own judgment, and it would be a breach of their duty to promise any party beforehand that they would accept the truth of the facts as stated by that party alone.' Finally, Dastur agreed with this view.

"The question after having gone into hibernation died out, although the gentleman who had filed suit in the High Court had withdrawn it for reasons best known to him. But the dying embers kept emanating smoke from time to time, until the Mumbai Vartaman, now defunct, undertook to bring the two sides together and failed. The President of the Parsi Punchayet Sir Shapoorji Billimoria then tried and succeeded in putting cold water on the embers. He brought together the two principal parties Bode and Dastur Kekhushroo Kutar together to agree to the case law as at present prevalent (ie. Davar's judgement), and to admit that it is harmful to admit into the fold persons born out of wedlock with alien women.

"But this good attempt at rapprochement also failed in the end. There were white-turbaned gentry who were against any kind of children, whether born in or out of wedlock with non-Parsi females. They agitated and wanted to hold meetings condemning even the case law. It seems Sir Homi Mody brought the two dasturs together to get over this and Kutar agreed, but later due to pressure or otherwise from the athonians, turned around and asked Bode to drop references to the Davar judgment part but the latter did not agree. Kutar ultimately withdrew his signature."

Bode's obliging nature

Even though I knew him only slightly by running into him when I frequented the K R Cama Oriental Institute in the 1950's, and by being distantly related to him, his uncle (masa) being my father's first cousin, he went out of his way to help me get college funds from various Trusts and wrote letters of recommendation for me as was the vogue in India then, including to the illustrious Minoo Masani, who obliged by interviewing me in his office, though a little chagrined by Bode's request.

Disparagement and denouncement by the community

Bode was a good, forceful and very engaging orator, but unfortunately he was born a generation or two too early for his community to appreciate him. His detractors often angrily greeted him by throwing eggs and tomatoes at him. An orthodox Parsi scholar wrote not too long ago in the Parsi press that even Professor Mary Boyce had told him (perhaps in strict confidence, if at all) that she had avoided meeting with Dastur Bode when he visited London despite his many requests. However when I personally asked her when she was in Chicago if it was true, she did not confirm it but was surprised and sad that something like that was even published in the Parsi press.

The Parsis did not fail to criticize Bode for marrying someone who divorced her well-placed husband for him, but I have it on authority from Homai’s previous husband’s first cousin, Keki Bhote, that the two were not compatible in many ways all through their marriage. Homai Bode was an outgoing socialite whereas, Mr Bhote her first husband, was very reticent and private. Even a great critic of Dastur Bode, erudite Professor Dinshah D Kapadia, a great Avesta-Pahlavi scholar as well as a Professor of Mathematics at a Poona University and the President of the committee for doing research into Zoroastrian religion, used to tell us the same when some critics of Dastur Bode brought up this subject. That this subject came up in such a committee which met then (1959-60) in the very room at the K R Cama Oriental Institute which Dastur Bode occupied when he was in Bombay is indicative of the high emotions running against him amidst the Parsis then.

However, Mrs Bode told me that all those who opposed him virulently came to appreciate him when their own children married out, which is so much on the rise
Sir Rustam Masani, who was his ardent supporter and a navar himself, tried to mediate between the then fourteen high priests and induce them to come to some common agreement on controversial issues. Bode and Dabu agreed but most others headed by the late Dastur Mirza opposed it for months in the Parsi press, especially in the long defunct orthodox weekly, _Parsi Awaaz_. Sir Rustam was himself suspect in the eyes of the orthodox as his children had married out. Nevertheless, well-attired, well-educated and well-spoken Bode was quite popular among the upper class. I remember Lady Homi Mody and her sister, Mrs Jiloobai Vakeel speaking well of him to me and Zubin Mehta and his father, Mehli proudly telling me Bode had performed Mehli’s wedding. Zubin told me in 1982 that Bode used to attend the orchestra conducted by him in Los Angeles and “I used to introduce him to my orchestra staff as my Pope.”

**Supportive role played by Bode’s wife Homai**

She was from the Bhownaggree family from Bhownagar, but I regret I never asked her if she was related to Mr Mancherjee Bhownaggree who became Member of British Parliament in early twentieth century. I would not be surprised if he was her uncle, but alas I never inquired. She was every bit as gutsy and spirited as Dastur Bode and supported him in all his moves though she told me she did not view religion and religious views as he did. She was her own person and yet was totally committed to standing by her husband in her own way and fully believed in his mission.

She later told me that some conservatives were very critical, even threatening, when she tried to fulfill his wish to be cremated, as he did not feel the dakhma system was working as it should in the overcrowded city of Bombay due to various reasons. His wife corresponded with me regularly since 1984 and offered me whatever books I liked from his library. His wife told me his illness was diagnosed as MS or Parkinson’s but I told her he looked more like having Alzheimer’s. The only words he uttered after hours of total silence and self-absorption as if in a trance-like state during my presence was “Do it gently, gently.” He was then a different man from the dynamic man, almost manic in his disposition that the world had known before. I noticed some lapses in memory and incoherence in his speech when the Zoroastrian Association of Chicago invited him in 1977 for the Second North American Zoroastrian Congress, but he did remember the name of a common relative of ours and asked me if he was there, which suggests that his cognitive faculties were somewhat intact then.

Rampant criticism of his views and actions over his lifetime had not dampened his spirit even as Alzheimer’s was setting in and he proudly spoke about performing the navjote of a Jewish American in Japan and advised the North American Zoroastrians to be open-minded if they wanted to survive in North America.

He was very peaceful, passive, quiet and so easily manageable as an Alzheimer’s patient, unlike most diagnosed as having Alzheimer’s who I have worked with. Alzheimer’s disease ran wild in his family and affected his brother, a pious and life-long Yozdathregar priest at the Anjuman atash behram whom I used to know too, and also some of his cousins. And yet many of his critics would not leave him alone even in his death and attributed his having Alzheimer’s as God’s punishment for espousing liberal causes. His sincerity and integrity were often questioned by his conservative critics but on my inquiry, his assistant and secretary confirmed through his son in Canada, that he was very sincere about what he preached and did. However, like many Parsis of his time, his thinking was coloured by theosophy, Vedanta and mysticism; perhaps intensified during his one-year stay at Rabindranath Tagore’s Shantiniketan and working with Mahatma Gandhi at times, and certainly during his stay in Los Angeles where he also taught Vedanta, eastern philosophy, etc. He might have also worked for the Mazdasnan Movement related colleges when in Los Angeles, which too leaned heavily on
eastern philosophy and yoga. Homai Bode patiently withstood criticism by his opponents on these grounds too.

For this reason Bode along with Dabu came under severe criticism at a conference in Israel by Khojeste Mistree, who following Mary Boyce, saw them as straying away from the Zoroastrian tradition.

Dastur Kotwal who was present at the conference could not defend his predecessor, Dabu. There may be some validity to Mistree’s thesis. However, Dabu, though a post-graduate in Avesta-Pahlavi, did not have access to Western scholars as Mistree had, and was respected more for his utter selflessness as well as piety, rather than for his academic scholarliness, which was however by no means lacking.

However, I am not sure he was a formal member of the Theosophical Society and so I will welcome any authentic information about it.

When Mother Gloria of the Mazdasnan Movement in the US and Germany visited Bode in Bombay sometime in the 1940’s he attracted attention as well as criticism from the orthodox Parsis who resented Mother Gloria praying Ashem Vohu on piano, etc. A friend and supporter of Bode, Ervad J C Katrak, one of my school teachers and an Avestan scholar, has written a book on Mother Gloria. He had also performed the Vansda navjotes along with Bode though he fully knew, he too would suffer greatly for it. The founder of the Mazdasnan movement was often alleged to be a fraud which was sufficient justification for those who tried to disparage Bode and to depict him as one too, though there is no evidence Bode was initially even aware of the former’s antecedents. He seemed rather fascinated by its appeal to modern man and times, and as far as I know he was not even one of its executives and had nothing to do with its formation. Nonetheless, guilt by association was fair grounds to calumniate him.

Tributes by Dasturji Dabu and Dhalla

He often attended oriental congresses in India and elsewhere. He spoke enthusiastically on comparative religion, eastern philosophy, Sufism, Mithraism, etc., wherever he went. He travelled widely and I vividly remember reading as a teenager his travel accounts of Norway fjords, etc., in Jame Jamshed. As my revered guru Dasturji K S Dabu, a staunch theosophist and a rather conservative high-priest, aptly notes in his forward to Dastur Bode’s book, Man, Soul, Immortality in Zoroastrianism. [a compilation of four lectures at the Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay in 1958]: “The author is well known as an enthusiastic spiritual guide of the Parsis, ever seeking new light and new fields of research; and courageously maintaining an independent attitude in propounding the tenets and principles of the Message of Zarustrha, according to his own convictions based on deep studies. Dasturji Bode has for many decades undertaken (voluntarily and without extraneous consideration of reward or praise) the sacred mission of spreading knowledge of Zoroastrianism in India, Europe, and America. He often challenges old conventions and beliefs, where he thinks it necessary to do so. We admire him for this stand even when we do not agree with him on details.”

Dasturji M N Dhalla, though not a theosophist himself, had even kinder feelings and regards for as well as greater affinity with Dastur Bode as he was the only other contemporary liberal high priest during Bode’s time. Bode invited Dhalla often to Bombay for giving lectures which were arranged at C J Hall, the largest lecture hall in Bombay at the time. They were packed to capacity. I considered myself so fortunate for having attended his lectures and felt his angelic presence even from so far away in the audience. Later I read all his books but even as a teenager I often based my compulsory sermons at the Cama Athornan Institute entirely on excerpts from his autobiography, earning the nickname of Dhalla jokingly from my dear classmate, Firoze Kotwal, later Dastur Kotwal. How I wish these great priests were alive today to
guide our young generation that face changes in this modern world that humanity has never witnessed before and seek inspiration to survive as Zoroastrians despite of it all. May God Bless the souls of all these Dasturs and may their souls still guide and inspire us! Amen!

Dastur Dr Kersey H Antia is High Priest of the Zoroastrian community in Chicago area since 1977, when he was awarded the Dastur’s shawl by ZAC. He has served the community as an honorary priest for over half a century; lectured widely since he was 17, and is the author of numerous papers on religion and psychology. He is a licensed clinical psychologist in full-time private practice in Illinois and is also affiliated with several hospitals. He is listed in several “Who’s Who” and included among the “2000 outstanding Religious Personalities and Scholars of the 20th Century”.

Dakhma in North America

Dhunmai Dalal from Los Angeles writes ...

At the Annual General Body Meeting of the Zoroastrian Association of California on June 9th 2007 a presentation was made with slides by Silloo Mehta’s group, The Mazdayasni Connection regarding a Dakhma in North America. The proposal was put to ZAC so that the Association could take it to the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America and sponsor the idea. A vote was taken by a show of hands and an almost unanimous decision was taken to sponsor the issue.

Silloo Mehta and her contacts had done good work and covered most of the obvious questions concerning this matter. Bishop George Haw Russell who owns acres of land in Texas in a pristine, undeveloped and open region has offered to the Zoroastrian community one acre on a 99 year lease for one dollar per annum. This is a generous offer from one who cares about the environment and aims to keep this space natural. This property is about two hours from Houston and I believe, that Silloo with a Parsi gentleman from Houston, Mr Jehangir Shroff has seen the property. Bishop Russell drove with a photographer describing the land, pointing out a pond and lake and asked the photographer to zoom onto the trees in the distance. His excited voice pointed out dozens and dozens of vultures seated in the trees - black vultures and turkey vultures. The American Native population also practised the green or sky method of disposal of their dead and Bishop Russell was all for it. To offset any of the problems, such as the rules and regulations on death and the embalming of the corpse, a special air craft with special ice box (Ziegler) was available to bring the body to the site. The family would follow in the normal commercial air plane. The funeral could be done among the family and friends before the body was transported.

The cost of a dakhma was approximately $100,000 - $200,000 depending on size. A prayer place and some lodgings for the family would cost another $200,000 and within $500,000 total, it was possible to build this green and sky method for our last rites. This would be for all Zoroastrians in North America and with atleast twenty-five associations and more small groups, the amount mentioned would beforth-coming for this ancient rite. This was an unconsecrated dakhma. However, although difficult to have a consecration with the many priests needed, it may not be impossible.

So to conclude, as one considered our way of disposal primitive only a few short months ago, there has been a huge evolution and turn around in thinking as the environement and nature has brought this ancient rite as the way to go.

"And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there shall be no cloud nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings but one equal eternity." - John Donne
Farzaneh Goshtaspi is 33, married to Mobed Pedram Soroushpour and have a son Asha. She has a license for the practice of Physiotherapy besides being a student of Tehran University studying Ancient Iranian Languages recently having submitted her thesis for a PhD degree. She conducts classes in her subject of studies to various religious classes conducted by the Anjoman e Moobedan and Kanoon e Daneshjooan. She is repeatedly appointed as a member of the examining and judging committee of the “Manthra” competitions in which the religious skills of community youths are contested.
آفرینش مادی و مینوی اهورایی و هم یادآور تکامل
روحی انسان برای رسیدن به مزداست.
به یاد بهمن امشاسیند که از همه امشاسیندان به
داهار زندیک تا است و در جهان مادی گوسیند و جامه
سپید بیان تم و تعقیب دارد، ظرفیت شیر و تعدادی گرم
بر سر سفره می‌گذاریم تا به خاطر داشته باشیم که با
رسیدن به خردنیکه و اندیشه درست تنها یکه ای با
مزداهوورا فاصله خواهیم داشت.

به یاد ارديبهشت امشاسیند که برترین پرلیکاری،
بی مرگ و بپرکت خون است و در گیتی آتش را خوش است،
چمری از آتش و بوهای خوش بر سفره می‌گذاریم.
به یاد شهریور امشاسیند که خوشکاری اش شفاعت
در ویژشان کراند ظرفیت روز هر روزد است و در گیتی فلز به او
تعلق دارد، ظرفیت روزه بر سر سفره می‌تهیم تا بهانه
و به یاد داشته باشیم که قدرت حقیقی می‌شده در رسیدن
به شهریوری کمرنگ و تسلیم بر خوش خواهیم می‌شود.

امشاسیند بعدی سهنداره‌است که وظیفه او پرورش
آفریدگان است و طبق بندهشان هر چیز را برای آفریدگان
کامل می‌کند و نیکو، کمال اندیش، راد و فراخ بین
است. لیکیون این است که قانع است، کمال الینی
شاید این است که همه ای که یا که هی یا که هی یا
به‌شدی، و رادی این‌اکنه همه آفریدگان زندگی خود را
از او درآنند. در گیتی زمینه به سهنداره دارد
و به همین مناسب‌سازه‌های بر زمین پاک می‌گذرانیم
تا به یاد داشته باشیم که سهنداره‌رد را نیازارم و
هم‌جویی زمین یخنده، صبور، کمال انگیز و به‌مان
باشم.

به یاد خرداد امشاسیند که در دنیا سرور آباست و
همسان و زانیش و پرورش هم موجودات و آبادانی زمین از
اوست، کامه ای آب بر سر سفره می‌گذاریم تا کمال
روحی و پیکی باطن را به عنوان پله بعدی برای رسیدن
به معنیت و به یاد داشته باشیم.

به یاد اردیبهشت که مرور گیاهان است و در گیتی
گیاهان به او تعقیب دارد، شاخه های سبز مورد و سرو
و شکاد بر سر سفره می‌گذاریم تا به دست نماید قدم
نهادن در راه کمال منوی، رسیدن به امرداد و باور
داشته به‌جامانگی حقیقی و کنار نهادن مادیات مزگون‌م
این جهانی است.

از میان سفره های زرتشتی، سفره چش‌نوروز که
تبدیل به سفره هفته سین شده و به عنوان یک رسم ملی
در آن‌ها است، نیز احتمالاً همان سفره هفت امشاسیند
بوده است، کامه آب و آویشن، سبزه ونگ، کوزه
سفالی و زمین پاکی که سفره را بر آن می‌گوردند،
سکه های تقریب و ظروف روبن، شع و آتش و بوی خوش،
لزوم زنده نگاه داشتن سنتهای زرتشتی

جامع ادیان دارایی سنت هایی ماست که یادگار و میراث بناهایی بسیار کهن است. آن سنت هایی که در اعتقادات دینی یک قوم داشته باشد، کمتر ساخته و برداشت خیال آدمیان است و بیشتر از عمق بناهای آن کیش مشاهده گرفته، به همین سبب دارای معنی و مفاهیمی بسیار عمیق و ریشه دار است.

دین کهن زرتشتی نیز دارای چنین نوع سنت هایی است. آنچه ما از مفهوم سنت در دین زرتشتی در می یابیم، بسیار ویژه و خاص است. سنتهای دین زرتشتی به معنی نزدیک هستند نا آتای و رسوم خشکه مذهبی، مثل احترام ندان و پای ناحه داشته ۴ آخشن یعنی آتش و آب و خاک و هوا، سنتی است که همچنان زنگ گنهنگ گیگیرد، ما هنوز می توانیم مادربرگه‌های خود را به یاد بیاوریم که هنوز آفت از نوزده در آتشسان آتش‌نشین که خود را به دست گرفته و هم این فضای خانه ای را سردار از بوی خوش است، و کندر می‌ساختند، سی سی جازویی به دست گرفته و هم این فضای خانه و هم کوچه راجاروی‌بندند و آب می‌پاشند و آب از بعد تیر شدند از ساختن ابی خوان‌نشانی داشته دل‌سان نا آتای و خانه، راز‌هایی از او انجام دادند، در آب‌های شیرین، و خانه‌ها امروزی که توان چنین رساهایی را هر زمان اجرا کرد وی هم که حداکثر در روزهاي عزیب بوی خوش است، وکندر از خانه های زرتشتی نشین به مشام می رسند.

شادی یکی دیگر از سنت‌های پس‌سده نیاکان ماست. شادی سنت دین زرتشتی و از کشتی آفریده‌‌ها اهورامزدا است. در بندی‌شنای این‌گونه می‌خوانیم: "او خسته آسان را آفرید و به بار آسانی شادی را آفرید، بدان روز برای او شادی! را فراموش کن اکنون که آمیختگی است، آفریدگان به شادی دارد از آمیختگی.

و به همین ترتیب است سنت سه‌گزایی از آفریدگار و نبی‌یار، و وقتی داد و دهد و پرمزکاری که به مناسبت های مختلف مانند بزرگداشت ۶ مرحله آفریدنش به نام گنه‌نارها، و جشن‌های ماهیان افکام در کرده است.

از سنت‌های زیباکی که در این چشمه‌های می‌پردازند آن عمل می‌شده، گسترده‌‌تر و آپسینی است که به

ائز سنت‌های زیباکی که در این چشمه‌های می‌پردازند آن عمل می‌شده، گسترده‌‌تر و آپسینی است که به

او نظر من دارای محتوى عمیق و ریشه‌های دار است، این سفره‌ها که جهان در مراسم جشن‌ها و گنه‌نارها و شاد و جهان در مراسم بزرگ‌داشت درگنشتگان گسرده، می‌شود در بیاد دارد ۷ مسیر به یاد گفت‌پذیریه بزرگ‌داشت درگنشتگان گسرده، می‌شود در بیاد دارد ۷
In barren mountains where one only comes across snow leopards, mountain goats, yaks, monks and nomadic tribes and where the sky kisses the land, it was an extremely difficult ride for the two passionate souls. They proved themselves on the modern day horse (bike), 150 cc Honda Unicorn. We are talking about none other than the journey to the Roof of the Earth – Tibet, which was largely explored by Dara Anklesaria (56) and Soli Cooper (51), two Zoroastrian bikers of Tata Power Company from Mumbai.

Riding into Tibet from Nepal is really a hard nut to crack. The entire country is situated between 3500 meters up to 5050 meters above sea level, with roads on such an incline, that one wonders whether the bike is moving or not. Moreover owing to the height, at times they found it extremely difficult to breathe. Landslides were a daily occurrence.

The two Parsi Mumbaikars dared all this and finally made it to the Great Wall of China spanning a distance of around 9,000 kms. Their dream run from “The Gateway of India to Great Wall of India” started on 5th July at 6:30 am and after a grueling 37-day journey they finally achieved their destination in less than the stipulated time.

While making it ahead into China, they really faced difficulty while getting the road permits, as only 200cc and above bikes were used by China. “Our bikes being 150cc, persuasion had to be used with the authorities and to convince them in making them believe that the bike would actually be able to perform. But to our pleasant surprise, it even out-performed their bikes,” expressed an elated Soli, one of the riders. The toughest problem they had to face was the Chinese language. As per norms
though they had hired a guide at a heavy price and when it came to food, they were virtually alone.

Unfortunately they could not ride all the way to Beijing, as beyond Lhasa they were not given the road permit to take the bikes. Instead they took the train, and visited the Great Wall of China. Their host in Beijing was Mehernosh Pastakia, an enterprising Zoroastrian who runs the only Indian restaurant called the Taj Pavilion. He very kindly extended hospitality to them. Beijing as a city impressed them, having enormous six lane roads through out and footpaths thrice the width of those in Mumbai.

Keeping in mind Soli’s cousin’s inspirational quote given to him before their flag off from the Gateway of India, A WINNER NEVER QUITS AND A QUITTER NEVER WINS, their journey was “an absolute unusual experience” conclude the duo.

[Sarosh Cooper was scheduled for this trip but was unable to obtain leave for such a long period - Ed]

Dinyar Vania - Tenor

Dinyar Vania is rapidly emerging as one of the America’s most exciting new talents, whose attributes include a rich lyric voice of astonishing power and beauty. The 2006-07 season included his debut as Rodolfo in La Boheme at New York City Opera, Opera Roanoke, and Knoxville Opera. The season continued with debuts at Syracuse Opera as Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor, and Toledo Opera as Cavaradossi in Tosca. He makes his debut with Opera Delaware in a Gala Concert and follows this with his first Alfredo in La Traviata at Opera Cleveland.

The 2007-08 season is quickly filling up with engagements including his return to New York City Opera as Rodolfo in La Boheme, a role he will also sing in his debut with Madison Opera. He will make his debut as Cavaradossi in Tosca at Dallas Opera and will repeat the role at Sacramento Opera. He also will perform holiday concerts with the Naples Philharmonic, Verdi concerts with the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, and Beethoven’s 9th Symphony with the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra.

Highlights of recent seasons include debuts at Connecticut Grand Opera singing Rodolfo in La Boheme, at Knoxville Opera and Cedar Rapids Opera Theater singing Pinkerton in Madame Butterfly, and at Nevada Opera Theater singing Cavaradossi in Tosca. In his Spring 2006 debut at New York City Opera he was heard in the role of Meleagros in Mark Adamo’s Lysistrata, and last summer was a featured soloist in their New York City Opera in The Parks concert series.

Mr Vania celebrated his Carnegie Hall debut as tenor soloist in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, as part of a “Pakistan Relief Concert,” [Hamazor issue 4/2005 p35] and also sang the symphony with the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra.

The beauty of his voice has garnered him first place in the important Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition, second place in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Competition, and he was a semi-finalist in Placido Domingo’s Operalia in Madrid (Spain). Summer of 2005 featured a full tuition scholarship at the prestigious International Vocal Arts Academy in Tel Aviv (Israel), where he performed excerpts from Lucia di Lammermoor under the baton of Maestro Paul Nadler and the New Israeli Chamber Orchestra.

Sarosh Cooper says: “I am a typical crazy bawaji, 41 yrs old, with wife and daughter doing adventure sports since over 20 years. Am a certified advance alpine skier, basic mountaineer (Everest Base Camp amongst various others) and also Padi Scuba diver; indulged in para gliding, water skiing, rafting. I work as a senior manager in Marketing & Sales in Perks Engineering who are the pioneers and leaders in the field of shrink and stretch wrapping machines in India, owned by a Parsi.”
Praying at the water well

Before the hearth fire - saying her Hoshbam (morning) prayer

Girl stitching

I came across them in an English translation of a French Book, ‘Les Parsis’ (Vol II) written in the 1800s by a French traveller Mademoiselle Delphine Menants. There is no mention of the year, the printer or the publisher of the French publication or even of the translator. But M. M. Murzban, Esq., Bar-at-law (Eng), Advocate of the High Court of Bombay and Officier d’Academie (France) is quoted as the ‘Editor’ of the translated version.

‘The Parsis in India’ Vol II was printed by Modern Printing Works, Mount Road, Madras in 1917 and published in Bombay by M M Murzban. - Sam Kerr, Sydney, Australia
Today ‘ordinary’ Zoroastrian women are no longer so - they range from politicians, to professionals in every field.
Independence!  It is born!  It has been made sacred by the
India is for Indians” – Bhikaiji Cama (1861-1936). Madame Bhikaiji Cama, a fiery patriot who dared to defy the might of the British Empire, made history by unfurling India's first national flag. She was successful in focusing the world's attention on India’s plight long before India’s attained independence. A powerful orator who travelled all over the world including the US on behalf of India’s freedom, she was one of the most industrious, far sighted and progressive woman of her time. But her life was a dichotomy. Her intense patriotism and her impatience with things in general made her a militant nationalist. Born to wealth she turned away from a life of luxury and spent most of her time in philanthropic activities and social work. She established a number of organizations to mobilize the independence movement and yet spent the greater part of her life in exile and died lonely. She was clearly a leader, perhaps a leader before her time, and perhaps an unhappy person disappointed how life turned out for her. Had she lived in present time would she have fit into the main frame of society with the ease and be valued and recognized for her nationalism?

Bhikaiji Cama was born to wealthy Parsi parents Sorabji and Jaijibai Patel. Her father, a lawyer by training and a merchant by profession, was an influential member of the Parsi community. A wealthy man, he bequeathed a sum of 13 lakhs (Rs1,300,000) to each of his sons and created a trust of one lakh (Rs1,000,000) for each of his eight daughters, a large sum in those times. Young Bhikaiji attended Alexandria Girls School, was by all counts a diligent and disciplined child, with a flair for languages and an interest in the personalities of the nationalist movement.

Bhikaiji married Rustom Cama, son of the renowned Oriental scholar K R Cama, a pro-British lawyer with a desire to enter politics. While they were both dedicated to social causes, ideologically the husband and wife were poles part. Rustom Cama loved everything British - culture, mannerisms, way of life and was of the opinion the British had done a lot of good for India. Bhikaiji on the other hand, was a full fledged nationalist, always believed that the British had fleeced India and practiced the worst form of imperialism. She was a torch carrier of the Independence struggle and wanted to throw away the shackles of British imperialism. Consequently, the marriage proved to be incompatible. Her passion for freedom was so intense that violent revolutionary methods seemed natural to her. In her appeals and speeches she drew vivid pictures of the misdeeds of the government, the sad plight of her people and the urgent need for national uprising against the British. Whatever Madame Cama tried to do she did it with both thoroughness and courage. When she accepted violence as an inescapable method of ousting foreign rule, she organized the trainings of young revolutionaries for making bombs.

In 1896 plague broke out in Bombay and without concern for her own life Bhikaiji plunged into several social activities. She tirelessly nursed the ill back to health and then like a good missionary converted those she helped to the cause of Independence. She contracted the plague herself and survived. Severely weakened, she set sail for Europe for subsequent medical care and recuperation in 1902. In London she received word that her return to India would be prevented unless she sign a statement promising not to participate in nationalistic activities. She refused, and remained in exile in Europe until shortly before her death at the Parsi General Hospital in Bombay in 1936.

Her brief but meteoric political career started in London from 1902-1907 where she served as a private secretary to Dadabhai Navroji, the great Indian leader in the forefront of the national movement. In 1907 delegates from different countries had gathered in Stuttgart, Germany for the 2nd
International Socialist Congress. Madame Cama addressed the gathering as she hurled defiantly at the might of the British Empire. She captivated her audience with her sincerity, logic, emotion and fiery speech. Describing the atrocities of British imperialism and the agony of her countrymen she appealed to the audience to cooperate in freeing from slavery one-fifth of the whole human race inhabiting the oppressed country of India. With a dramatic gesture she unfurled a tricolor flag. The flag had green, saffron, and red stripes. Red represented strength, saffron victory, and green stood for boldness and enthusiasm. There were also eight lotuses representing the eight provinces and princely states of India. “Vande Mataram” in Devanagari adorned the central saffron strip which meant “salutation to Mother India”. The sun and the moon were representations of both Hindi and Muslim faiths. The flag was designed by Veer Savarkar. She declared that India would be a Republic; Hindi would be the national language, and Devnagari the national script.

“This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you gentleman to rise and salute this flag, I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag in freeing one-fifth of the human race”. These were the emotional words of Bhikaiji Cama.

After Stuttgart, Bhikaiji went to the United States where she informed the Americans about Indians struggling for Independence. She was well termed as “Mother India’s first cultural representative to the US”. She also visited Germany, France and Scotland. On her return to London she started publishing booklets on patriotic literature. Though a believer in non-violence she urged freedom fighters to resist unjustified violence. Tyrannical foreign rule was unjustified, and she stood for Swaraj or self rule. “March forward! We are for India and India is for Indians” she declared and fought for the unity of Hindus and Muslims. She continued financing revolutionaries in and out of India. She secretly escaped to France and turned her French home into a secret hideaway for revolutionaries. She came in contact with other notable members of the movement for Indian sovereignty made friends by sending pistols disguised as Christmas gifts to Irish and Russian nationalists. Needless to say the British were not happy with her and asked France to extradite her to India. When the French government refused, the English exiled her from her motherland India and seized her inheritance. Her portrait appeared in French newspapers along with Joan of Arc.

Her Paris home became a shelter for revolutionaries. Lenin visited her. She encouraged other revolutionaries like Veer Savarkar and made it financially possible for him to write the history of the 1st Indian War of Independence. When no English publisher came forward to publish it, she sent it to Holland for printing, and it was smuggled back in the country with ‘Don Quixote’ covers. She became publisher and distributor of Bande Mataram, a revolutionary magazine. Another magazine Madan’s Talwaar was also started in the memory of Madanlal Dhingra who laid down his life for the country. Both magazines were banned in India and England, but Madame Cama found ways to circulate them and send them to India.

Influenced by Christabel Pankhurst and the suffragette movement, Bhikaiji Cama was
vehement in her support for gender equality. Speaking at the National Conference at Cairo, Egypt in 1910, she asked “Where is the other half of Egypt? Sons of Egypt, where are the daughters of Egypt? Where are your mothers and sisters? Your wives and daughters?” She stressed the role of women in building a nation.

When the 1st World War broke out in 1914, Madame Cama along with other Indian revolutionaries tried to secure help of Turkey and Germany, Britain’s enemies, for overthrowing British rule in India. According to the History Sheet of the Criminal Intelligence Office of the Home Department of the Government of India in 1913, she was one of the recognized leaders of the revolutionary movement in Paris. Earlier the British had banned her entry to India being afraid of her revolutionary past and confirmed nationalistic outlook but when England and France became allies and pressure was brought to bear on the French to arrest and imprison her. She spent three years in prison in France. She lived in Paris for 30 years, nursing to the end of hope that India’s freedom would be realized in her lifetime.

Bhikaiji Cama was getting old and after 35 years of fighting on foreign land had taken its toll. Weak and ill, she was brought back to India in 1935 by Sir Cowasjee Jehangir. She died in 1936 unwept, unsung and unhonoured. In the minds of the fighters of freedom, her memory remains as an ineffaceable symbol of true sacrifice. Several Indian cities have streets and places named after her. A birth centenary stamp in her honor was issued on Republic Day, January 26, 1962. The Indian coast guard has a ship named after her. She donated her personal assets to the Avabai Petit Orphanage for girls, and Rs 54,000 to her family temple, the Framji Nusserwanjee Patel Agiary at Mazagaon where a ceremony is performed every year to remember her life as a courageous patriot who led a lifetime of unparalleled adventure and influence.

Sources


Aban Rustomji, retired recently as a high school media specialist, lives in Houston where she is the recipient of several educational awards. An advocate for education and libraries, Aban is currently involved in establishing a library at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston whose mission is “to serve as a leading repository of knowledge that fosters the awareness and study of Zoroastrian religion, history and culture”. An avid reader and traveller, Aban’s educational visits to the Middle East have resulted in successfully conducting teacher training workshops in Pakistan, and fostering cultural connections with educators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
She says her father, Khan Bahadur Rustomjee C Kaka, died when she was only six, and he had chosen the name ‘Alice’ for her, hoping she would experience a wondrous life. This was not to be, and her only wonderful experience is perhaps the fulfillment she derives from her noble calling.

She says her social-worker-genes came from her father. With his demise and the hostile attitude of her relatives from her Zoroastrian father’s side, her deprived girlhood led her away from the inflexible attitude of our community; she went on to marry Krishna Garg, Professor Emeritus of the Physics Department of the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur.

Alice taught in school for eight years, and when she found that the deprived children’s environment did not encourage education, she took to voluntary work in 1972, associated with various welfare activities for women, orphans and destitute children. On societal level, her work was on the untouchables and the so-called saansi criminal tribes, to spread awareness in the oppressed and the oppressor, about human rights and social justice. Finding women very responsive to the drive, for the last over twenty years, her focus of work has been on the empowerment of the girl-child and the woman.

The Bal Rashmi Society, of which Alice is the Honorary Founder Secretary, disburse about one crore rupees [ten million rupees] to poor women as loan. Her activities, concurrent in five districts of Rajasthan, involve running a resource-cum-training center, taking up social field studies, and publication of research and study reports. The Editorial of Parsiana of 7 April 2007 (from which this article has borrowed heavily) says that ‘her report on the scavengers and rag pickers titled The Mehtars of Jaipur is a meticulously researched and documented study of their existence.’ She has also published Hamne Rah Banai. Parsiana reported that in her avid social activity and development work, ‘Garg had earlier earned the wrath of the Bharatiya Janata Party government. In July 1998, while agitating to prosecute influential individuals who had gang raped a woman, the Bhairon Singh Shekhawat led ministry slapped around nine cases against her, her two daughters, her son in law and 15 other individuals connected with the Bal Rashmi Society which she had founded. Four of her colleagues were imprisoned, some of them tortured, states Amnesty International. The charges against Garg ranged from murder, rape, sexual exploitation of women to embezzlement and one of the such ridiculous cases against Alice came up ‘by coercing an illiterate woman to place her thumb impression at the bottom of a page. The allegation was Garg took Rs500 but did not issue a receipt.’

Parsiana reported that ‘fearful for her well being, her family members and others insisted she go underground rather than risk being imprisoned, tortured and made to confess. For nearly five months she hid in the home of family friends outside of Rajasthan. Civil rights groups camped in Jaipur to render the family assistance in their struggle.'
'When the BJP led government lost the elections in 1999, her husband, Krishna approached the Congress chief minister and requested him to reinvestigate the cases. On doing so it was found there was no substance in them. A magistrate who had interned some of the social activists alleged that Garg was a Christian who converted others to Christianity! The Rajasthan High Court passed strictures against the judicial officer.

‘After the cases were dropped or quashed, Alice met Shekhawat to ask why he had pressed such horrendous charges against her. His feeble reply was ‘I was pressured.’ Shekhawat is now the vice president of India. Who says crime does not pay?

‘But despite the respite, Krishna persuaded Alice to stop social activism and concentrate on developmental work. He told her the next time a government turned mean they would target the grandchildren. The only reason they escaped the first time was because they were toddlers. And Krishna himself was in the USA at the time the charges were being pressed, so he was spared.’

Having grown from strength to strength, Bal Rashmi manage to run a full-fledged programme for promoting school education in the entire Tonk district in the state of Rajasthan, especially in the rural areas that remain neglected and are overlooked by others; they run a number of middle and primary schools for the poor and encourage children, particularly girls, not to drop out; they help local schools in improving the quality of education; organize summer camps to boost their English, Science and Mathematics; they look after their needs in the matter of books, school dresses, nutrition, etc and they run a unique Camel Cart Mobile Library, which covers six villages in a week. This is the only one of its kind in the country and has been acclaimed internationally! They also run a Home for orphans and the destitute.

Their work does not end there. They have intensive programmes (run through grants from private funding agencies to avoid political interference, and one is run in association with UNICEF) that encourage women’s self-help groups for economic independence through meetings/group tours for awareness and action, they encourage effective participation at village level planning and decision making, lowering the infant/mother mortality rate – a great scourge in Rajasthan – through appropriate health programmes. Their support to poor widows and communities as a whole has included a ‘Light Up the Homes of the Poor’ project, harvesting rainwater, organizing health camps for cataract operations and corrective surgery for polio affected children.

This tremendous volume and intensity of work has won for Alice Garg 23 local and international awards. The most notable amongst them, are the Saragoi Award for work on women and children; the Pan-Am/Neerja Bhanot Award for bravery in fighting against the might and muscle of the government; and the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for rural development. Parsiana has added, “But the government victimization ‘broke the back of the women’s movement in Rajasthan’”, she (Alice) says ruefully. After seeing the example the government made of Alice, the others shied away.

“They had a commission for cows in Rajasthan but not one for women’, she recalls. And the female child is still unwanted in the state. Wearing white cotton saris with a coloured border, Alice shuns ostentation. The red bindi on her forehead disguises a scar she received when assisting the mehtars, the lowest of the low castes, to enter a temple frequented by upper caste Hindus. She received several injuries in the scuffle.”

Alice has held several other positions in various capacities at government and district levels in the fields of medical/ health/hospital services, education, social welfare services involving women and children, on advisory boards, on youth league recreation, the clean-city society and free legal aid society, etc. She is a life member of the Indian Federation of the UN Association of New Delhi.
What links a hugging saint, a ground-breaking scientist who took on the multinationals, a French Resistance heroine who took on the Gestapo, a judge who took on Saddam Hussein, a high flier who was educated by an elephant, a spiritual giantess who danced with Fred Astaire, the original Cosmopolitan Girl, a politician who lives with two Oscars, a Bollywood actress worshipped by millions, a Chinese entrepreneur immortalized on a postage stamp and a princess who is able to touch her nose with her toes?

They are just some of the extraordinary women you’ll encounter in Confessions to a Serial Womaniser: Secrets of the World’s Inspirational Women. In the first venture of its kind the book contains the wisdom of over 200 of the world’s most dynamic women, who speak frankly about everything: their mothers, families, education, men, gurus, love, feminism, fairy stories, failures and successes. In an era that worships celebrity, this is a celebration of true celebrities – women who will leave a lasting legacy enriching the lives of future generations.

Author and social campaigner Zerbanoo Gifford has completed an epic challenge of meeting and documenting the lives and careers of hundreds of inspirational women, from 60 countries and every field of endeavour. Women who excelled whether it be in the world of business or government, the arts or science, academia or religion.

What emerges from their stories is a unique portrait of womankind at the start of the twenty-first century. Each has an individual perspective and experience of life and together they build a complete picture of women coming into their own and speaking with a powerful and collective voice.

The women have a magical presence which has been captured in a set of specially commissioned portraits by the artist Jeroo Roy, *Women – a world of inspiration*. The 208 paintings will go on view at the National Portrait Gallery from 18th September 2007 for one week.

**National Portrait Gallery launch and exhibition**

There will be a VIP reception on Thursday 20th September 2007, accompanied by the book launch, a debate and an opportunity to meet Zerbanoo and many of the women in person. The exhibition will then move to the South Bank Centre before embarking on a national and international tour.
Some of the women featured in the book

Glenda Jackson MP (politician and Oscar-winning actress); Yue-Sai Kan (founder of a cosmetic empire, broadcaster, immortalised on Chinese stamps); Madhuri Dixit (Bollywood icon); Helen Gurley Brown (founder and president, Cosmopolitan International); Dawn Airey (former Managing Director BSkyB TV); Martina Milburn (Chief Executive The Prince’s Trust); Caroline Casey (founder, Aisling Foundation and mahout); Eve Ensler (author of The Vagina Monologues); Sarah Miles (actress and author); Zandra Rhodes (designer and founder of the Fashion and Textile Museum, London); Lady Shakira Caine (artist); Lucie Aubrac (French Resistance heroine); Divya Mathur (author); Rt Hon. Clare Short MP (former cabinet minister); Sister Cyril (head of Loreto school); Bronwen Vicountess Astor (psychotherapist); Claire Bertschinger (Red Cross nurse, inspiration for Live Aid); Judge Zakia Hakki (first woman Judge in the Middle East, member of the Iraqi Parliament, founder of the Women’s Kurdish Movement); Nafis Sadik (UN Under Secretary General); Kirsten Rausing, (Director Tetrapak and horse breeder); Barbara Stocking (Chief Executive Oxfam); Bauke Ho (Director, Institute of Science in Society); Baroness Helena Kennedy (former head of the British Council and author, Queen’s Counsel); Wendy Fortescue-Hubbard (Maths agony aunt); Judge Leila Seth (first female Chief Justice in India); Her Excellency Maleeha Lodhi (Pakistani Ambassador); Christina Lamb (award-winning war correspondent); Gwenneth Lewis (poet laureate of Wales); Maharani of Tripura (politician); Frances Cairncross (Rector of Exeter College Oxford); Sheila Dikshit (Chief Minister of Delhi); Wendy Somes (prima ballerina); Indu Jain (CEO Times of India); Zenobia Nadirshaw (professor and psychologist); Esther Rantzen (founder of The Women’s Royal Army Corps); Lilian Langridge (founder of the National Theatre); Lord Vivian Dymock (former Member of Parliament for the United Kingdom); Lord Dubs (founder of the Childline); Rajkumar Hirani (director and producer); Lady Gisella Pilade (founder of the November Project); and Mira Nair (director of films, including Salaam Bombay, Monsoon Wedding).

The ASHA Centre

The proceeds from the sale of this book will go to The ASHA Centre, a charity fostering greater peace and understanding amongst diverse communities, especially the young. Located in the beautiful surroundings of the Forest of Dean, England, The ASHA Centre is an international retreat that encourages community participation through a holistic programme of performing and visual arts, conservation projects and personal transformation.

For further information:
www.asha-foundation.org/women
www.ashacentre.org
www.zerbanoogifford.org

How to buy Confessions to a Serial Womaniser: [£19.99]

Order online via the ASHA website
Your local bookshop
Telephone The ASHA Centre 01594 822330

Briefly about Zerbanoo:
She holds the International Woman of the Year Award 2006 for her humanitarian work, and the Nehru Centenary Award for championing the rights of women, children and minorities. A pioneer for Asian Women in British politics; a former director of Anti-Slavery International, she was awarded the Freedom of the City of Lincoln, Nebraska, for her work combating modern slavery and racism.

Zerbanoo has authored “The Golden Thread . . .”: “Dadabhoy Naoroji . . .”: “Asian Presence in Europe”: “Celebrating India’s 50 Year Anniversary”: “Thomas Clarkson & the Campaign Against the Slave Trade”.

As the director of ASHA Foundation & ASHA Centre, Zerbanoo actively promotes philanthropy and peace worldwide.
Setting up Victoria Diamond Trading Co and Jewel City is probably the most exciting event in my life. A single child to my parents, I was born in Bombay and lived 30 years of my life in Pune where I was married and gave birth to my two most priceless diamonds.

As a young child I was always fascinated with gems and jewellery, antiques and art. At the same time I never took a fancy to academics, school work. Even then I did get through my ICSE and qualified as an Interior Designer and worked with some very well known architects in Pune.

I loved to trade, talk to all kinds of people, all that sort of stuff. I loved the freedom to live and learn. Travel and be myself.

I think I was ten when I started my first enterprise out of begging my fuiji (paternal aunt) to give me a suitcase full of babywear that she used to manufacture, and made a magnificent profit of 46 Indian Rupees.

The idea of trading in diamonds, art, jewellery, gemstones was far too appealing. When I was 21 I got a chance with a relative of my husband who owns a diamond manufacturing and export company in Bombay, to market their creations in Pune. So I qualified as a Gemologist and Diamond Grader via a private institute and began my most wonderful and fascinating journey into the most magnificent world of diamonds and gemstones.

Moving to Auckland, New Zealand was what really opened up my world. I had to re-qualify, which I did, with The Gemological Institute Of America and passed with distinction. I also won an award for selling the maximum number of rings of one carat and above in New Zealand, Australia and Fiji in 2005. Shifting jobs every year in different walks of the diamond jewellery industry taught me a lot. I identified where I wanted to work, took the experience I wanted and moved to the next part I wanted to learn about. I really enjoyed that.

In the mean while I started planning how I was going to set up Victoria Diamond Trading Co. and how I was going to come up with the money to set it up. I spent one month looking for Angel Investors. Mind you I didn’t leave any stone unturned, in New Zealand or any other point of the planet where I thought I may receive some assistance.

I didn’t get any! Guess my cheese had moved.

So I started marketing Victoria Diamond Trading Co. and whatever I could summon up and with the support of my suppliers, created the capital I required. The best part was, I started selling to people who had employed me and to their friends and relatives, because they could not beat my prices or quality. Honestly, that was simpler and easier than asking for a grant from anywhere.
At the moment there are two subsidiary companies to Victoria Diamond Trading Co. One being Jewel City which is an internet based, one stop jewellery shop, providing excellent diamonds and gemstones, jewellery, gold jewellery and all associated items on a global scale. The website is fully functional and specifically designed to support the traffic and customer service, even so the stock levels are still being built up and should be in full force by the Christmas of 2007. Everything comes with an authenticity guarantee.

The second company “House of Farah”, is specifically for private consultations for very large diamonds etc.

Living life is the most amazing adventure if you are up to it, and as long as you can identify exactly what you want out of it.

Zarina Mehta

CEO - BINDASS - The UTV Group

Zarina Mehta is one of the three founder directors of United Television (UTV), a leading Pan Asian Media Company and is on the board of the UTV group. She is in charge of UTV’s Youth broadcasting agenda.

As Chief Operation Officer of Hungama TV her innovations drove Hungama TV to beat a decade of leadership by an international giant and become the number one kids channel in a record 18 months of launch. Hungama TV’s list of innovations includes:

✓ The first local kids channel in India.
✓ The first time use of mass media in the Kids Space.
✓ The unique Captains Hunt where a nationwide hunt for the Kids Board of Director who help run the channel.
✓ India’s first mini marathon for kids “The Hungamathon”.
✓ Using synergy with UTV, Hungama TV launched “John aur Kaun” a hunt for two kids to act in a UTV movie with icon John Abraham. Zarina believes this is the best way to use a brand ambassador: to get your audience actively involved with both your brand and the ambassador.

The Walt Disney Company acquired Hungama TV in Dec 06; this is their first ever acquisition of a kids channel.

Zarina also helped to launch and creatively controls Astro Ceria the first local kids channels in Indonesia and Malaysia. Within six months of launch the Malaysian
channel’s strong local flavour is beating its competitors in the prime time Sunday morning slots.

Zarina now heads a joint venture between UTV and Astro to launch India’s first local youth entertainment brand. The youth brand is being envisioned by her as a total brand encompassing channel/s, events, mobile channel, websites, gaming, merchandising and the creation of special hang out places for the youth.

Over the last 15 years, Mehta has been responsible for the start-up and creation of some of UTV's major divisions and has produced over 3500 hours of high television rating point award-winning television programming in multiple languages.

UTV’s innovations include:
- ✓ India’s first daily soap Shanti which went on to breaking records and was sold in seven countries including Sri Lanka where it was the number one show for two years.
- ✓ India’s first Game Show Snakes and Ladders which helped launch Zee TV India’s precursor to all chat shows Chakravyuha
- ✓ India’s first telethon
- ✓ Gol Gol Gullam India’s first kids game show which won the award for Best Asian Game show.

Zarina was also involved in the creation of High TRP, award winning shows like The Mathemagic Show, Hip Hip Hurray, Saaya, Shararth, Shanno ki Shadi, Shaka Laka Boom Boom, Sanya & Hero.

Her filmography includes being associate producer of movies such as Chalte Chalte, Lakshya, Swades, The Blue Umbrella, Rang De Basanti and The Namesake.

She has worked with every major broadcaster and is also a multi-award-winning director of corporate documentaries. Mehta’s initial training was as a theatre actor. She is a Parsi Zoroastrian, born and brought up in Mumbai who passionately loves the city and is a graduate of St Xavier’s College where she did her BA in Eco (Honours).

Commitment achieves success

Background: Tragedy befell on 4 1/2 year old Ushta Confectioner in Mumbai. She suffered third degree burns over 65% of her skin when she accidentally fell into a vat of boiling milk in a store in Mumbai. Ushta was admitted to Masina Hospital in Byculla on July 3, 2007 and is expected to have five skin grafting operations, the first of which was completed on August 11. The doctors are using Ushta’s own skin for these procedures. Since there is not much healthy skin available for them to use, they will need to wait for the new skin to grow so that they may use it for the future grafts. As both the parents are without income, though having returned from the Middle East where Zarir was working, FEZANA Welfare Committee sent out an appeal. Lucky for the Confectioner family, Freyaz Shroff happened to be in Mumbai, who is a committee member of FEZANA’s Welfare and has been working directly for the family. With the help of FEZANA’s volunteers, an offer was received from the Shriners Hospital in Boston to provide free treatment for Ushta. This hospital specializes in children with severe burn injuries. This may lower overall costs and provide better medical treatment for Ushta. Current bills at Masina Hospital have been paid and Ushta needs a 2nd skin graft before travelling to Boston. Meanwhile, FEZANA has made arrangements for visas and for hosting Ushta’s parents (and one nurse during travel only) to come to the USA.

Present: Dinshaw Tamboly who chairs WZO Trust India, says “Fortunately for the Confectioner family, FEZANA’s live wire Freyaz Shroff is at Mumbai. Freyaz who is in her early 30s, has single handedly handled matters efficiently and on an extremely low key.

“Freyaz took it upon herself to visit the hospital, interact with Ushta’s parents, took a personal interest in obtaining visas for the family, organized the travel plans, ran from pillar to post to get the best possible rates for the air tickets, you name it, Freyaz did it. What a great asset Freyaz is to FEZANA and to the community.

“FEZANA, FPZAI and others who recognize such selfless outstanding service should consider an award for this outstanding young lady.

“WZO Trust who has been in close touch with Freyaz and has raised and made the following
disbursements (which includes IRs.100,000 received from FEZANA: WZO UK GBP2,000: ZCF HongKong IRs100,000 besides individual donors ) on account of Ushta Confectioner. Rs310,000 to Masina Hospital directly, Rs72,839 to Zarir Confectioner for medical expenses already paid by him to Masina Hospital and Rs13,566 for visa fees. For the nurse, her travel and training Rs2,000 and her visa fees Rs4,617. As on 16 September 2007, Rs184,689 is on hand from donations received.”

It is known, Zarir has received extensive funds direct from individuals but the figures have not been informed either to FEZANA nor to WZO Trust, though requested.

No more funds are required in India for Ushta. We thank all the generous donors for coming to Ushta’s aid.

Ushta, her mother and nurse have reached Boston thanks to Freyaz and FEZANA. The airline tickets have been purchased by a donor, the air ambulance service in the US has been donated by the pilot himself and the hospital has provided the ambulance free of charge at Boston. US$17,000 that FEZANA Welfare have received has been kept for further expenses in the US, less the Rs100,000 sent to India.

**Future:** Rustom Kevala, FEZANA’s president says. “Although Shriner’s Hospital and Dr Sharidan will be providing free services, there are many other costs, including medications, transport, etc. ... FEZANA does not have a budget for long term help, although several families have volunteered to host them during their stay.”

Ushta’s father, Zarir needs to consider seeking gainful employment urgently in India so that he may support his family once they return.

Through team work, a tragedy has been turned around gainfully in a short span of three weeks.

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**“If today be Sweet”**

In her remarkable new work, *If today be Sweet* (William Morrow/An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers; May 2007), Thrity Umrigar presents her most poignant and captivating novel yet of a woman caught between two worlds. The moving tale of a middle-aged widow, Tehmina Sethna, who must decide whether or not to leave her beloved India for an unknown future in America. *If today be Sweet* is a remarkable work of love, loss, and survival from one of today’s most talented and acclaimed novelists.

A novel rich with emotion, is also a piercing and personal account of some of the darker social issues that face today’s immigrants struggling to adapt to American society while maintaining their personal customs and beliefs. It is an illuminating and compelling new work from one today’s most gifted voices. It is rich with emotion, beauty, texture, and, of course, the magnificent prose that is Umrigar’s trademark.

**About the Author**

A journalist for seventeen years, Thrity Umrigar has written for the Washington Post, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, and other national newspapers, and contributes regularly to the Boston Globe’s book pages. She teaches creative writing and journalism at Case Western Reserve University and is a recipient of the Nieman fellowship to Harvard. The author of the novel *Bombay Time*, *The Space between Us* and the memoir *First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood*, she lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

Visit Thrity’s website: http://www.umrigar.com/

[Shared by Tamina Daver, London, UK]
Not satisfied with high society and its facade, Meher Pestonji, a well-heeled Colaba resident, turned instead to Mumbai’s dark underbelly and found fulfillment in the genuine company of street children whose energy and bounce gave her a newfound zest for life. The 61-year-old Pestonji’s tryst with street children began in the 1980s with the release of Salaam Bombay, a movie that put the spotlight on the lives of children who live on Mumbai’s roads. The actors themselves were street children. As a freelance journalist, Pestonji was among the first to write about the film. However, her involvement with the kids went beyond her role as a journalist and she soon made friends with Shafiq, the protagonist of the film who would frequent her house on Sundays to watch television.

She watched Shafiq as he struggled to cope with his new-found success and a schizophrenic life divided between the streets where he lived and the five-star hotels that he visited as an actor. Unwilling to go back to a menial job and unable to find a foothold in high society, she observed Shafiq flounder as he strived to find his own in life. Though she never worked for any NGO, she has been closely involved with a number of them, often networking between NGOs in India and abroad. She witnessed a rapid growth in the number of NGOs working with street kids after Salaam Bombay. “Earlier, NGOs thought they knew what children needed. However, in the 1980s, they conducted the first ever survey in which street children themselves were asked what they wanted most in life. The answer took everyone by surprise — a safe place to sleep at night, uninterrupted by the police who harassed them for ‘hafta’ and street gangs who controlled Mumbai’s footpaths,” says Pestonji.

Through her conversations with children, she began piecing together the matrix of their lives. She used her insights to weave together the story of Rahul (a runaway kid eking out a living as a rag picker and ‘part-time pickpocket’ who finds love and emotional security in an abandoned baby whom he discovers on a railway platform) in her novel, Sadak Chhap. Rahul’s character is a combination of a number of children whom Pestonji has been closely acquainted with. Towards the end of the story, Rahul starts earning easy money escorting tourists in Colaba and loses himself in a web of drugs and prostitution. This is based on Rasool, one of the children rescued in the Anchorage case which hit the headlines in 2001. The case involved British national Duncan Grant who started the Anchorage Shelter Home for street children in Colaba, but was later found supplying children to paedophiles.

Pestonji helped document the testimonies of children rescued from Anchorage on camera as well as in writing. The testimonies were used in court and helped nail Grant and Allan Waters, a foreigner who frequented the shelter home.

Like Rasool, Rahul in Sadak Chhap chooses to return to life in the “tourist trade” despite the efforts of social workers who
tried convincing him otherwise. After all, the money, gifts and flashy lifestyle earned through prostitution were far more than any job a social-worker could offer.

Pestonji was present during the long sessions in which a social worker tried to counsel Rasool and convince him not to return to the flesh trade. "Paedophiles are only interested in young boys and will discard you once the stubble appears on your chin. What will you do then?" asked Meghna Sawant, a social worker with Childline India Foundation. Rahul's answer in the novel is exactly the same as Rasool's answer in real life — I would jump off the Gateway of India and into the sea.

Alongside working with street-children, Pestonji has also campaigned extensively for the housing rights of slum-dwellers. She was actively involved in the feminist movement of the 1970s at a time when women were campaigning for a change in the rape laws. "Many people I knew thought I was stupid to question the Indian constitution. But I simply couldn't accept laws that called for a witness in a rape case and refused to accept a case of rape against a woman who was not a virgin," says Pestonji.

Pestonji's identity as a Parsi gave her access to both Hindu and Muslim localities in Dharavi during the communal riots in 1992-93. She was involved in the Mohalla committee movement to foster communal harmony after the riots. Once, during the riots, she lost her way in Dharavi and found herself at a local branch of a right-wing fundamentalist organisation. She was shocked when the head of the branch reprimanded her for her clothes — she was not wearing a revealing mini skirt but was fully covered in a salwar kameez and dupatta. It turned out that the men had a problem with the colours she was wearing — green and black. "They are Muslim colours," said the man. Pestonji was furious. She threw caution to the wind and argued back. In return she was verbally abused. Luckily, she escaped unhurt after the encounter and began walking hurriedly away from the men. Before she realised it, she was being followed. Terrified, she stopped and asked the man following her what the matter was. He thrust a paper packet full of sindoor (the red powder worn by married Hindu women on their heads) into her hands and asked her to put some on the next time she was in the area. This would protect her from harm. She was touched by the consideration shown by a member of the very same organisation that had, a few moments ago, reviled her. The experience helped her realise that people could not be viewed in black and white.

According to Pestonji, since Mumbai has a sizable Parsi population which is by-and-large wealthy, well-respected and largely unaffected by communalism by virtue of being neither Hindu nor Muslim, it's important they use their privileged position to bring about peace and harmony and not detach themselves from the larger Indian matrix.

24 year old Anahita Mukherji is a reporter with The Times of India, Mumbai. She covers the education beat and writes on issues such as corporal punishment, learning disability, lack of teachers in civic schools as well as government policies on education. She has also written on how the police turned a blind eye to girls going missing in Malad, a suburb of Mumbai. While at the Times, she has had the opportunity to travel to a few villages and small towns in Maharashtra.

He or she who knows
That enough is enough
Will always have enough
Lao-Tzu [6 century BC]
Saturday evening’s Grant Road house collapse was not just a routine monsoon casualty. No one should die while buying and selling joyous mithai. More than that, the two casualties — 19-year-old Meher Mogrelia visiting Mumbai from Chennai, and, no less, Mohammad Alam Khan, the 43-year-old sweetshop employee — represent a tribal angst.

Not just Parsis, every one can feel the family’s grief, as uncomprehending as it is unwalled. The ‘why’s and the ‘what-if’s’ jostle in our minds, begging to know what swivels life’s touch-and-go tango. Every mother must pray to be spared the agony of Mrs Mogrelia who stepped out of the path of the crashing roar moments before it swallowed her teenaged daughter. How many dreams got buried with the girl? And, once again, I am confronted with my community’s fatal flaw. We either die too young, or live too long.

The death of Mohammad Alam Khan diminishes us no less. Not as an individual, but for the institution he represented. Lookmanji Sweets on Grant Road had an iconic status among Mumbai’s Parsis. Its Bohra founder was never found framed along with portraits of the Prophet Zarathushtra, Jamshedji Tata and ‘apri Rani’, but the distinctive Lookmanji box, wrapped in logo-strewn, white paper, presided over all our celebrations. And in its death, it took the young Parsi girl whom it should have accompanied when she got into college, got a job, got married, got pregnant.

Lookmanji Sweets was fully geared to meet the onerous role bestowed on it. The brothers at the counter had flat, sample-size boxes for the whorls of fine sutarfeni and plumb jalebi; the khajas came by weight, exactly 250 grms each with boxes into which one, two or four could be exactly ensconsed. And in the wall-mounted showcase were marshaled in ascending order gold-cardboard cones to indicate the different sizes of agharni na ladva, distributed to mark the seventh month of a first pregnancy.

I came to Bombay to work, and remained unaware of the mythic Lookmanji for my first couple of years here. But once I arrived on the doorstep of domesticity, it asserted its domination. From the time my future mother-in-law handed me a token envelope 36 years ago to when I went over to order the agharni no ladvos to herald our first grandchild, last October.

Lookmanji Sweets was fully geared to meet the onerous role bestowed on it. The brothers at the counter had flat, sample-size boxes for the whorls of fine sutarfeni and plumb jalebi; the khajas came by weight, exactly 250 grms each with boxes into which one, two or four could be exactly ensconsed. And in the wall-mounted showcase were marshaled in ascending order gold-cardboard cones to indicate the different sizes of agharni na ladva, each labeled with weight and price.

But when it came to the mandatory sweets of celebration, they would always troop here. Negotiating the broken pavements and honking chaos, they sat down on the rickety, steel folding chairs to place their bulk order of sutarfeni, mawa/malai na khaja, the 12” diameter jalebi - and, most distinctively, the rich boondi cones called ‘agharni na ladva’, distributed to mark the seventh month of a first pregnancy.

They might buy their sticky ‘Bombay halwa’ from Royal Sweets, or the flaky ‘Mahim no Halwo’ from an eponymous shop in Dadar.
Hamazor - Issue 3 2007

A Treasury of Persian Cuisine

Tamford House Publishing is proud to announce the publication of the second edition of Shirin Simon's truly unique and superbly written Persian cookery book. This is a fascinating history book, an autobiography and a remarkable cookery book as well as being a delightful guide to healthy living.

A Treasury of Persian Cuisine is a fascinating insight into another culture and another history and its reflection in a different cuisine. Shirin Simmons takes us thousands of years back to a Persian civilisation that existed before the Greeks were heard of, then forward via Artaxerxes and Ghengis Khan to today's Islamic state of Iran, interweaving the whole with a broad knowledge of the traditional foods of the region and their significance. The qualities and medicinal properties of the ingredients she cites are detailed in depth and their place and relevance in our diet is explained.

While the Britons were still mixing woad, the Persians were constructing canals, farming, building cities, and trading across Asia and Europe. Medicine was closely linked to the religions of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity (and later Islam) and these were closely linked to diet. The author highlights the significance of particular foods to health and well-being, and explains how these fit in the ancient Persian culture but can also be enjoyed today.

Shirin Simmons brings great personal warmth to the text, recalling particular dishes and recipes as she encountered them at particular stages in her life. She ties religion, health, politics and family medicine directly to the recipes she describes, and then tells the reader exactly how to prepare them. The emphasis throughout is on fresh ingredients, particularly fruit, nuts, vegetables and pulses, making these recipes ideal for a modern, health conscious western audience.

Shirin Simmons, born in Yazd, Central Persia, now Iran was the youngest of five children from a middle class Zoroastrian family. Her grandfather was the author of a book on the culture and food of the country and Shirin's Mother was a gifted cook who passed on her culinary talent to her daughter. Shirin left Persia in the 1950s to study English in London where she qualified as a nurse and then as a beauty therapist. She also took a course in Art and then returned to live with her parents in the capital city Tehran where she became a teacher and also practised as a nurse.

Shirin has been back in London since the 1970s where she enjoys hosting dinner parties and buffets within her circle of friends. She is currently working on her next book A feast of my Persian Heritage.

ZTFE will be launching this book on Tuesday 2nd October at 5:30 pm after the Fasli Mehergan Jashan. The Mehrgan festival is associated with the harvesting season and popularly known by the Iranian Zoroastrians as 'Mehr Izade Mehr Maah'. A Ghambar dinner will follow the book launching.

Available for £19.95
Please tell Hamazor readers about your recent project promoting Parsi cuisine in the UK.

I was invited by the Worgret Manor Hotel in Dorset [www.worgretmanorhotel.co.uk], which is about two hours south of London, to be part of campaign to promote their beautiful property by incorporating Parsi food into their menu. The people who run the hotel are old family friends and many years ago they had visited us in Karachi [Pakistan] and had tried and loved home-cooked Parsi food.

In July, I conducted a cooking course over two days where all meals served were Parsi dishes. I demonstrated nine dishes and served those at lunch while the hotel chef prepared dinner dishes from recipes I shared with him. On the first day, there was so much interest we had to squeeze Akuri [special kind of scrambled eggs] for breakfast early next morning! Amazingly, when we took a general vote for the best dish it was Bhaji Jhinga [spinach with prawns] that appealed to all. For that I have to thank my Mum who persuaded me at the last minute to add it to the menu. Also, I was quite taken aback every one wanted to learn how to prepare Dhansak. I thought they would find it too tedious a task so I left it off the menu. I have been invited again to do another course and I will definitely have to make it next time.

The participants had come from Essex County and Gerrard’s Cross as the course was advertised in the BBC Good Food Magazine, UK and the Waitrose Magazine, UK. Three of them were retired while two others worked locally. The three retired participants had medical backgrounds and cooked out of interest. One of them actually was there only to eat as her husband was the chef of the family. She definitely had the most fun and enjoyed each bite of everything! One woman had travelled the world and knew a lot about India, Pakistan, Rangoon [and even Kashmir]. Before coming to the course, she had read up on Zoroastrianism, our culture and heritage. It was rather coincidental, but on the second night BBC ran a documentary on Zoroastrians, which one of the participants watched. It was breakfast conversation for all the next morning.

How long have you been demonstrating cooking?

I started rather young when I was 17. Some friends of my parents requested me to teach their 9-year-olds something simple to keep them interested during the summer holidays. It was an absolute success and I don’t know who enjoyed it more, the 15 girls or me. I still remember trying to create menus for seven days that did not need the use of knives if possible. We made crepes on the last day with the little ones standing on a stool to comfortably reach the stove. I am still in touch with some of them, who are now married and mothers and, I believe, are all good cooks. I have been doing it ever since.

What tips would you give novice cooks just beginning to show interest in cooking?

Cooking is something you have to “feel”. When I first showed an interest my father bought me a plaque, which I still display in my kitchen, that says, “Cooking is like love — it should be entered into with abandon or not at all.” It’s very true. You may cook a favourite dish a thousand times, but if your heart is not in it one day, it will not be the same. If you are in a bad mood it will reflect in your food. I tell each class that cooking is an art, while baking is a science. Be creative when you cook, build the flavours as you go along; tasting it in your mind. Use the recipe only as a guideline. On the other hand, when you bake, be precise if you want to create the same taste over and over again.

It is rumoured that cooks sample the food while cooking ... what is your favourite cuisine to prepare?

There isn’t one particular cuisine that I favour. However, crepes is my favourite thing to make. It is soul soothing. Tedium cooking where one has to take twenty steps to reach the end, like Dhansak, is my
least favourite, but now I have come up with my own version of *Dhansak* – it’s quick, it’s easy and it’s still just as delicious.

**What is your guilty pleasure?**

I have to say *Badam Pak* [almond sweet] is my indulgence. Dark chocolate is a close second.

**Do you focus on healthy cooking in your own personal menus?**

You are what you eat. I never prepare fried foods. I use minimum oil and use paper towels to drain fats from cooked food. I also balance the weekly menu with different proteins - fish, lamb, chicken, beef, and shrimps - to keep a healthy, nutritional meal plan. Once you do it for a while it comes naturally. It is more common sense then rigidity. One should eat tons of fruits and vegetables. Fruit is the only food God has created that can be eaten without cutlery, plates, pots or pans! Vegetables are also important. We need to relearn the art of cooking vegetables — cooking it to a pulp does nothing for the nutrition we are supposed to receive from it.

**Over the years what have you learned from your passion for cooking?**

Food is the most universal language in the world. It is one thing that everyone shares and enjoys. It’s a “happy place” for all. Also, culture and geography of the people is reflected in their cuisine. For instance, there is nothing in our cuisine that is made “for two”. It’s always served family-style in a dish and never in an individual plate. This is the same in cultures where families eat together and friends share the table. This is more unusual in Western cultures. A family that eats together grows old together. The importance of eating together as a family, without a TV on in the background, should never to be underestimated.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I am trying to organise a programme for young people who will be going off to college soon and have to fend on their own. Each person needs to know how to prepare reasonably healthy meals at least once a day. If one is unaware of where to start its obvious they will all take the easy way out and eat whatever is readily available. It’s already in action – Erindale High School [in Mississauga] sends their Italian language class to my cooking demonstrations as part of their curriculum each year.

I have been approached by a Toronto-based newcomers’ club to do some demonstrations. This summer, I did one for them; we did an “around the world theme” and I demonstrated seven appetizers to them from seven different countries. I am also looking to promote Parsi cuisine to a larger population through sharing family recipes in highly-esteemed magazines like *BBC Good Food*, UK. Eventually, I will publish a cookbook on Parsi cuisine with my Mum. The recipes are already in place, we just need to get the photography done.

Farishta Dinshaw has teaching in her genes. Currently she works as a Community Development Worker, Family Violence Initiative, supporting 11 ethno-cultural agencies in Toronto to raise awareness about violence against women, children & elders. She has presented papers on various topics relevant to the Zoroastrian religion and community at three international congresses. Farishta is also the author of the insightful story of a fictional boy befriended by Zarathushtra called “Discovering Ashavan”.

Niloufer in her kitchen
To the death of my own Family, David Meth’s riveting play features Farah Bala in an internationally acclaimed one-woman performance which tells the story of an Afghan-American woman who returns to Afghanistan to help her father escape, only to witness the carnage of her entire family. Upon her return to the US, she is interrogated as a suspect, detained, humiliated and forced to justify her journey in order to reclaim her citizenship.

Meth’s dramatic nonlinear play is the story of people caught between cultures, a chronicle of the suffering one bears when human rights are violated.

This controversial play has toured the US for over two and a half years opens at the Abrons Arts Center at the Henry Street Settlement on Thursday, September 27, 2007 for three weeks.

Directed by Peter Ratray, veteran of Broadway, Off-Broadway, TV and film, the play has just returned from a highly successful India Tour with standing-room-only and standing ovations: Chennai, Bangalore, Pondicherry, and Mumbai, where people who had to be turned away nearly started a riot until a second, unplanned performance was agreed upon. The play has just been selected for the Kathmandu International Theatre Festival 2008.

Having originated the role, Farah Bala, who is from India and now living in New York doing Theater, TV and Film, has toured with the play for over two years.

Aban Rustomji who sent the above information says “Farah Bala, [was] one of the participant of the Zarathushti Field Student programme who attended the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress, Houston, TX.”

Delivery was faultless, usually early in the morning, and always earned a tip for the ‘boy’. The arrival of the box wrapped in logo-ed paper and tied with monogrammed string elicited a Pavlovian response, and not just in the children of the house.

Yes, it was always Lookmanji’s, and always from the branch on Grant Road; after all this street was, for over a century, the centre of the Parsi universe. Its bazaar provided their choicest pomfrets, Motilal Masalawala pounded to perfection the esoteric blend of spices that make a Dhansak masala, and, before it disappeared decades ago, Star Bakery turned out the flakiest khari biscuits, the crumbliest nankhatai, the crunchiest butter batasa, and ambrosial almond ‘makrooms’. Relatives visiting from Bombay always brought along a large oil tin layered with these delights.

Even Grant Road’s positioning was heavy with metaphor. It separated the gentility of the Parsis enclaves on one side from the unmentionable abominations of Foras road on the other.

Grant Road is becoming a flashy phoenix. Lookmanji’s, messiah of Parsi celebration, is unlikely to rise from the debris. It deepens our desolation.
Latest update in the earthquake area of N Pakistan

As we approach the second anniversary since the earthquake took place, we bring our donors from all corners of the world up to date of how their donations are still being used through WZO. Three projects have been in the pipeline since end last year but due to further weather damage, and village disputes, a much longer time frame has transpired, which was not anticipated. - Toxy Cowasjee

Report sent by Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation

Project 1:
Improving access for the people of Village Gaeri, Union Council Nammal, District Abbottabad

Village Gaeri is situated across Muzaffarabad on the bank of River Jhelum. The village consists of 74 households. It was devastated by the earthquake. Initial relief assistance in the form of shelters [all through WZO] and other material was provided to the village in collaboration with WZO and other supporters.

Prior to the earthquake, the people in the village used a small access road to reach an old suspension bridge leading to Muzaffarabad. The road was regularly affected by landslides and rain cutting people’s access. Through support from WZO, a proper concrete path was constructed along with a retaining wall to ensure its protection against landslides, etc. The protected concrete path provides better and safer access to the suspension bridge which is used by the people of Gaeri, as well as other nearby villages including Tarach, etc.

The Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation signed a Terms of Partnership with the local People’s Organization to undertake this scheme. The construction work started in February 2007. The Foundation maintained close overview which enabled correction of faults in drainage. Also, OAKDF helped local POs manage an internal conflict which was affecting the completion of the project and its future maintenance. Heavy monsoon rains also delayed construction. However, the scheme was completed in end June 2007. The total cost of the scheme is Rs.232,400 which includes Rs.46,500 as community contribution (in the shape of cash and labour), and WZO’s commitment of Rs.199,842.
Project 2:
Women Friendly Space in Village Sirla, Union Council Dalola, District Abbottabad

Introduction

In December 2005, the results of a rapid assessment of concerns faced by women affected by the 2005 earthquake shaped the Women Friendly Spaces (WFS) project. The WFS is a structure and a programme. It aims to:

- Create a safe space for women to meet
- Support survivors of the earthquake to cope, and to move on
- Enable women to share experiences and build solidarity
- Provide skill-building opportunities for women
- Expand income opportunities for women
- Increase women’s access to information

Partnership with local communities in Sirla

In collaboration with WZO, OAKDF is setting up a WFS in Village Sirla, Union Council Dalola. In early 2006, the initial site for this collaborative project was Village Dalola in UC Dalola. The site/land was selected and construction had also started. However, the landlord later demanded an exorbitant amount for the land and so the site for the WFS was shifted to Village Sirla.

OAKDF is also working in collaboration with Shirkat Gah and the UNFPA to set up WFSs in three villages of District Mansehra. Though the geographical outreach of the collaboration with WZO and UNFPA-Shirkat Gah are separate, concepts and training interventions are shared across the four sites.

OAKDF has strong roots in Sirla and works closely with the local People’s Organizations of women and men. In the latter half of 2006, the Foundation introduced the WFS concept in Sirla. Its acceptance led to drawing up a Terms of Partnership which included the right of use of privately-owned land (owned by a local person in the village) for the WFS project to be implemented by the Foundation.

Women shape the programme of the WFS

Retaining wall to protect WFS against landslides, & on opposite page
In September 2006, three staff members attended a three-day training organized by Shirkat Gah in which a needs assessment process was designed to allow local women to determine the use of the WFS, and take a leadership role in managing it. OAKDF conducted the needs assessment process in each village. In Sirla the process was conducted in February 2007. A management committee consisting of local women was constituted, and training in organizational development was provided in April 2007.

**Responding to needs: training and other activities**

**Skills training in construction**
Under a separate project, in March-April 2007, the OAKDF trained more than 40 women in masonry, steel fixing, concrete block-making and carpentry. There was some resistance to involving women in this training (as skilled labour is perceived to be a male domain). The Foundation was able to overcome the resistance and ensured that women interested in this training were able to access it. The training is not only enabling women to reconstruct their own houses but has also given them skills for income generation.

In April 2007, OAKDF set up a library in Sirla with books and publications provided by Shirkat Gah. Women access reading material from the library. The Foundation staff also assist local women in organizing group reading sessions.

**Training in Gender and Legal Rights**
In June 2007, a two-day training was held on Gender and Legal Rights. Women activists from Sirla attended the training.

**Training in Reproductive Health**
In July 2007, a seven-day training was held for midwives (traditional birth attendants) to improve their skills.

**Training in Psycho-Social Trauma**
In September 2007, a three-day training is being provided to women activists to understand and cope with psycho-social trauma and learn skills in providing counseling support to other women.
**Construction**

The WFS in Sirla is a permanent structure. It includes a meeting room, toilets, bathing facilities, a courtyard with space for an oven (tandoor), and a boundary wall. It is designed in conformity with local traditions, and the structure will be earthquake-resistant.

Through an open tender process, a contractor was selected and awarded the assignment of constructing the WFS in April 2007. Unfortunately, the selected contractor backed out of the agreement after the award and the process was repeated through which another contractor was selected and awarded the contract in July 2007. The construction using indigenous material started towards the end of August 2007 (some delay was caused due to heavy monsoon rains). As the area is mountainous, land leveling was required and a retaining wall was also needed.

A hand pump will be installed to supply clean drinking water for the WFS. The water will also be used in the construction of the WFS structure. The construction of the structure is expected to take up to four months to complete. The estimated cost of the structure is Rs1,900,000.

**Project 3 :**

**Restoring access to drinking water for Village Khori Khetar, Union Council Nammal, District Abbottabad**

Khori Khetar is a small village consisting of 107 households. It is on the periphery of the larger Village Majuan. Prior to the earthquake Khori Khetar accessed water from a source in Village Nakhetar. Its distribution network within the village was destroyed by the earthquake. In collaboration with WZO, the Foundation initiated discussions with local people in February 2007 to reconstruct the distribution network and restore access to water supply in Khori Khetar.

As the dialogue commenced with Khori Khetar, it became evident, that accessing the water source from Village Majhoot rather than Village Nakhetar will not only provide better quality water, it will also ensure greater volume which could also benefit the nearby hamlet of Bari (which had no direct access to water prior to the earthquake and women in the village would walk long distances to fetch water), and also provide additional water to the larger village of Majuan (500 households).

To leverage benefit to a wider population, the Foundation in close collaboration with local people of the three villages designed the rehabilitation of the water supply. The total cost of the redesigned scheme is Rs.1,700,000 of which WZO’s contribution of Rs.500,000 will rehabilitate the distribution network in Khori Khetar. The remaining funds are provided by other donors.

The technical redesigning of the scheme is complete with Terms of Partnerships drawn up. The intake chamber at the new source (from other donor funds) has been constructed. Work on distribution tank is underway for which the second installment has been released for the procurement of pipes and other accessories. The scheme will be completed before this winter.

Once projects 2 & 3 are completed, further avenues will be looked into for improving the lives of the earthquake victims with funds still available with me. Rest assured your donations will be used well. - Toxy Cowasjee
The Joint Honorary Secretaries  
The World Zoroastrian Organisation

Dear Sirs,

As I desire to become Grand Patron / Patron / Life Member / Ordinary Member / Student (delete as appropriate), I request you to submit this application to your Committee.

I am born of Zoroastrian parents /Non-Zoroastrian spouse of a Zoroastrian (delete as appropriate), I agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles and Rules and Regulations so long as I remain a member of The World Zoroastrian Organisation.

I note that the annual subscription for Ordinary Membership is payable on 1st January of each year. In case of arrears, I understand that my membership will be terminated after three months of sending the reminder.

Yours truly,

Signature

Block Capitals please FULL NAME ________________________________

PROFESSION/OCCUPATION ________________________________

IF STUDENT DATE OF BIRTH ________________________________

ADDRESS IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE ________________________________

__________________________  E-MAIL ________________________________

__________________________  TEL RES ________________________________

__________________________  OFF ________________________________

Proposed by ________________________________ Seconded by ________________________________

Note: The Proposer and Seconder must be WZO members. For subscription fees please check overleaf.

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# Membership Fees

For Indian residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Level</th>
<th>Fee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Patron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permanent Assoc Member</td>
<td>£ 150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordinary Assoc Member</td>
<td>Rs10 pa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Member</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Gratis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordinary Member</td>
<td>Rs450 for 3 years till 21 years of age</td>
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Please send application form to: The World Zoroastrian Organisation (India) to Union Press, 13 Homji St, Fort, Mumbai 400 001. Tel: (022) 2660357 or 2665526

For UK residents & other countries

<table>
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<td>Life Member</td>
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<td>£ 10 pa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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</tbody>
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Please send application form and cheque payable in Sterling to WZO, London to: Mrs Khurshid Kapadia, 217 Pickhurst Rise, West Wickham, Kent BR4 0AQ. Tel +44 020 8777 5778

For USA residents

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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Please send application form and cheque payable in US Dollars as “WZO US Region” to: Mr Keki Bhote, 493 Woodlawn Ave., Glencoe, Illinois 60022. Tel: (847) 835 1984

For Canadian residents

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Please send application form and cheque payable in Candian Dollars as “OZCF, WZO Fees” to: Mr Marzi Byramji, Regal Press, 3265 Wharton Way, Unit, Mississauga, Ontario L4X 2X9. Tel: (905) 238 8005

For Pakistani residents

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<td>Student</td>
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Please send application form and cheque payable in Pak Rupees as “WZO” to: Mrs Toxy Cowasjee, 2 A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530. Tel: (021) 5867088

For New Zealand residents

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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Gratis till 25 years of age</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please send application form with your cheque payable in NZ Dollars as “WZO, New Zealand”, to: Mrs Farah Unwala, 39 Buckingham St, Whakatu, Hawkes Bay 4250. Tel: +64 6 870 1171
“Do persevere, for he shall grant to you the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom. …”
yasna 53.3-5

Countdown to Freedom: Unfurling of the 1st Indian flag a 100 years ago