“Now, I shall speak of the best thing of this existence in accord with truth: I know the Wise One who created it to be the Father of effective good thinking. And His daughter is [armaiti] of good actions....”

Yasna 45.4

(Western translation)
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Cover
Photograph courtesy OAKDF. Man’s courage in making make-shift bridge for the stranded to cross over the raging river.

Photographs
 Courtesy of individuals whose articles appear in the magazine or as mentioned

WZO Website
www.w-z-o.org
## Members of the Managing Committee

### London, England

- **Mr Darayus S Motivala**  
  Chairman  
  E-mail: chairman@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Sam H Bhiwandiwalla**  
  President  
  E-mail: president@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Dinyar Modi**  
  Hon Secretary  
  E-mail: secretary@w-z-o.org

- **Mrs Khurshid B Kapadia**  
  Membership Secretary  
  E-mail: membership@w-z-o.org

- **Er Jehan Bagli**  
  Mississauga, Canada  
  E-mail: wzo_canada@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Dadi E Mistry**  
  New Delhi, India  
  E-mail: dadi_mistry@w-z-o.org

- **Mrs Meher Amersey**  
  Mumbai, India  
  E-mail: wzo_@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Rustom Yeganegi**  
  Tehran, Iran  
  E-mail: Rostam.yegagnegi@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Russi Ghadiali**  
  Singapore  
  E-mail: wzo_singapore@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Darius Mistry**  
  Auckland  
  New Zealand  
  E-mail: wzo_nz@w-z-o.org

- **Mrs Toxy Cowasjee**  
  Vice President  
  Karachi, Pakistan  
  E-mail: wzo_pakistan@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Keki Bhote**  
  President, US Chapter  
  Illinois, USA  
  E-mail: wzo_usa@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Russi Ghadiali**  
  Singapore  
  E-mail: wzo_singapore@w-z-o.org

- **Mr Keki Bhote**  
  President, US Chapter  
  Illinois, USA  
  E-mail: wzo_usa@w-z-o.org

Note: WZO's committee is extensive, these are just a few of the names given for member's convenience.

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**Volume LVII - Issue 4|2010**

### Printed by:
A A Graphics  
1721/31 LAC No 2  
Karachi 75420  
Pakistan

### Funded by:
late Nariman K Irani & his wife Franey

### Cover design by:
Tannaz Minwalla  
Karachi, Pakistan

### Design & layout by:
Toxy Cowasjee  
Karachi, Pakistan
From the Editor

Three months have gone by since our last publication, though it feels much more. Time keeps marching onwards at a fast pace, but we Parsi Zoroastrians seem to have all the hours in the world to go on bickering at each other.

I speak for myself when I say, does the diaspora need “big brother” in Mumbai. Our communities in each country carry on with their own ideals, their own aspirations, their own goals and at most times effectively.

With this in mind, WZO decided, with the endorsement from the entire Managing Committee which included people on the Board from all countries, that it was time we broke away from WZO (India) who felt it was their right to dictate terms to WZO. It is to be noted that we at WZO accepted the right of WZO (India) to follow their own viewpoint as long as it was for India only, where they have their own jurisdiction. Unfortunately WZO (India) has behaved as a spoilt child who wails away for attention, by inserting advertisements / letters in the Indian press, creating a combination of mis-information, scaremongering and ignorance. It is time for us to move on, which is our desire, so our energies may be focused on continuing to do useful work in the world.

Our latest gesture of goodwill has been to try and alleviate the immense hardships the internally displaced people of Pakistan are facing due to the onslaught of the flood in July. Donations were sought from our community and friends, and though there is a donor fatigue we have collected substantial funds. Quite a few pages have been taken showcasing this disaster, as it is important the world realises that good people do exist even in Pakistan, and to inform our generous donors how their money has been utilised.

I have been meaning to further update our past donors through Hamazor, regarding the projects WZO undertook to carry out after the Earthquake of 2005. The 133 winter shelters that were meant to be a stop gap till houses were rebuilt, are still being used either as homes or storage place or shelter for animals. They have withstood the weather and time admirably. The two containers that were converted into Basic Health Units and placed at Dahola ran successfully as just that for a number of years and today is being used as a community office both by men and women. Similarly the supply of fresh water to Khoti Khetar is functioning well giving this facility to approx. 1,400 people, though damage was caused at the source due to 2010 flood. The access road built for the village of Gheri and environs, the walls gave way this summer but the villagers have rebuilt this, a necessity which they have grown accustomed to. 21 young children were fitted up with prosthesis which is on-going till they reach maturity. [Subsequently more donations have been received specifically for this purpose]. And the Women Friendly Space at Sirla, being a fore-runner of the concept of women having a place of their own to learn, train, discuss issues, socialise, is thriving. They even permit men to hire the venue for their gatherings! Together we have achieved.

As another year comes to an end, let us wish peace for all, less hunger and illness for the unfortunate millions, and for our Zarathushti community the wisdom to strive for Hamazori.
My dear Members,

This is the last issue of Hamazor for this year and what a year it has been for WZO. The most memorable being our 30th Anniversary celebrations in June.

Since my last message to you, my colleagues on the Managing Committee and I have been very busy on a number of issues. We launched our appeal for the Pakistan Flood victims and your response has been magnificent. To date, we have received nearly Pak Rs 3,000,000 (US $ 35,000; £ 22,000) from around the world for which we thank you. There is a report in this issue on the conditions facing these poor victims and on how we have used your money and hope to further assist. Our Vice-President, Toxy Cowasjee, deserves our utmost gratitude for all her efforts which she did with total dedication, passion and thought. She has ensured that your money has made a difference to them, however small, and will continue till the contributions last.

After almost 26 years in the role, Dadi Engineer has resigned as President of WZO (India). We wish to thank him for his outstanding service to WZO, WZO (India) and the Zoroastrian community. Dadi will continue to serve WZO as a fellow Managing Committee member.

As we approach the end of the year, WZO will be holding its AGM in London. We would urge all those members who are able to do so, to attend the AGM to learn at firsthand what your Managing Committee has been doing this year and get an opportunity to have your say in the running of the organisation. If you are not able to attend, then please return your completed Proxy Form nominating the Chairman or another person to vote on your behalf. Please do make your vote count as it does make a difference. You will be receiving the AGM Notice and your personalised Proxy Form through the post. This reminds me, do we have the right address for you?

We are in touch with the organisers of the 5th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (5WYZC) which will be held in Vancouver in the summer of next year. Amongst others, Benafsha Engineer, a young Managing Committee member, will represent WZO. WZO recognises the importance of the Zoroastrian youth to the community and your Managing Committee took a decision in June to engage with them as a priority task. This initiative is led by Monaz Dalal, another young member of the Managing Committee. We urge all Zoroastrian youth to attend the Congress and we request the adults to provide the necessary encouragement and sponsorship to them. Please contact me if you would like to sponsor them through WZO. If you would like further information about the Congress, please visit their website at www.zsbc.org/congress2011 or email them at congress2011@shaw.ca.

You may have noticed in this issue that our logo has been improved. The lines and text are now crisper and we have added our name as part of the logo. Our thanks go to Darren Contractor, grandson of our past Chairperson Ruby Contractor, for redesigning it for us. We hope you like it.

Let me take this opportunity of wishing you and your family a very happy and prosperous New Year and we look forward to serving you and the Zoroastrian community next year.

Yours truly,

Darayus S Motivala
Chairman
chairman@w-z-o.org
How is WZO structured?

Our Chairman, Darayus Motiwala explains, as there is much confusion in the minds of our members especially those in India. – Ed.

Unless you are familiar with the WZO organisation, the role of the various WZO trusts and charities can be confusing. This article will attempt to clarify any misunderstandings.

It would be easier to look at the WZO Organisation in the image below. Until recently, it was a complete ring with each of the divisions communicating and co-operating with each other. Let us look at the role and aims of each component.

WZO was created in 1980 in the UK to provide assistance to Zoroastrian refugees from Iran. It then turned its focus on its charitable activities in India and latterly in other parts of the world, particularly Iran. From its early days, WZO disseminates information on Zarathushtra and the Zoroastrian religion by way of seminars. I am currently the Chairman of WZO and am supported by the Managing Committee and in particular the President, Sammy H Bhiwandiwalla and the Vice-President, Toxy Cowasjee.

We have members from 24 countries and representatives from 10 countries serve on our Managing Committee. We are headquartered in the UK and are currently a registered charity in the UK, USA and New Zealand. In the UK, we run local events to bring the community together and to raise funds. The Hamazor is a publication of WZO.

We receive funds from individuals, through the website, by post, through bequests and at special events from both Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians. However, the bulk of our income comes from charities and trusts such as ERSF and the Firuz Madon Trust. This is because we are trusted to disburse funds judiciously and responsibly.

Our charity giving in India is primarily through the WZO Trusts there, whilst elsewhere we give directly to the needy or through a local trusted charity. We have a number of restricted funds for specific purposes such as the Noshirwan Cowasjee Medical Benevolent Fund and the Aloo Vatcha Education Fund.

We organise an annual summer seminar in the UK, and we sponsor seminars with other Zoroastrian organisations around the globe. Last year, we sponsored the Gatha Colloquium in NY in conjunction with FEZANA and ZAGNY.

There are two WZO trusts in the UK which provide financial support to WZO. Both these trusts disperse their money from revenues received from its capital, and only through WZO. The Managing trustee of both these Trusts is Mr Shahpur Captain who is the founder member of WZO and still serves on our Managing Committee.

The World Zarathushtrian Trust Fund (WZTF) was set up by a generous endowment of £150,000 from Mehraban and Goli Farhangi. Its role is to support WZO with its charitable work. The rural Gujarat
The project which is now the cornerstone of the work done by the WZO Trusts in India was initiated through a generous donation from WZTF.

The Kutar Fund set up by an endowment by Dr Shirinbanoo Kutar in memory of her late husband, Dr Sohrabji S Kutar. It was supplemented by her own legacy upon her death.

There are three WZO Trusts in India originally set by WZO and now ably managed by Dinshaw Tamboly and his wife, Bachi. Whilst they do receive funds from individual donors, a large proportion of their income is from other charitable institutions around the world including WZO. In the last financial year, these trusts received and spent a total of Indian Rupees 5.5 Crores which is equivalent to US $1.2m or £720k sterling. Their charity giving is within India only.

The World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust administers the Medical and Education funds as well as the relief of poverty programme which includes the provision of a regular income to the poorest in our community and the replacement of the cow dung/mud huts with brick built cottages.

The Women & Children Fund is an initiative by Mr Rustam Gai of New Delhi and financed by the late Dr Shirinbanoo Kutar. It provides free holidays for those most in need.

The WZO Trust manages the two Senior Citizen Centres, the Sanjan Sanatorium, the eight low cost housing buildings and the self employment schemes.

WZO India was set up WZO to represent its interest and ethos in India. Until recently, they were part of the WZO organisation but WZO was forced to sever the links due to the unreasonable demands of some of their committee members. Our reasons for this action have been detailed adequately in the past and WZO India is mentioned here just for completeness.

I trust that the above helps you to understand the structure of the WZO organisation. Whilst we are independent charitable trusts, we all work together for the Zoroastrian community worldwide. If you would like further information on us and our activities, please do not hesitate to contact me at chairman@w-z-o.org or at our registered office in the UK.
Having enjoyed one of the longest spells of dry weather for years and spending the best part of Friday and Saturday in the sweltering sun erecting four gazebos in the lush gardens of our warm hearted and generous hosts Valerie and Alex Burns, Sunday morning opened with cloudy skies and a light drizzle of rain. In a temperate climate like ours, characterised by rainfall all year round, perhaps the efforts of the previous two days would turn out to be a blessing. Luckily by midday the skies began to clear and our guests arrived, many bringing presents for the raffle and gifts of food and sweetmeats.

After an extensive course of delicious starters to get everyone in the mood, the fundraising started with Bingo, the duty of calling the numbers and running the game falling on Nari Contractor. We then broke for yet more food with BBQ Chicken Tikka, Lamb stuffed with rice / mince and nuts, (a very popular dish with our guests), combined with a host of salads and breads. This was followed with Baklawa and authentic Parsi tea. What more could one ask for?

After the raffle, Rohinton Irani with his excellent fund raising skills guided the auctions encouraging guests to bid for hotel accommodation at the grand Radisson Lexington, New York and dinners at the famous Cafe Spice Namaste, Hilton and Runnymede Hotels. This was followed by a prize winning game for the guests, guessing the weights of a watermelon and a donated cookie jar.

A group of Goan musicians called Mustang entertained us all afternoon, were well appreciated by our guests and many of them took to the dance floor during the evening.

WZO Honorary Secretary Dinyar Modi controlled the bar and the drinkers with professionalism. And if that was not enough he showed that he is capable of multitasking.
when he took to the dance floor with Ursula Bhiwandiwalla for a fast paced rock and roll number and as the photograph shows, openly declared his Zoroastrian credentials.

Finally to round off the evening’s entertainment, the evergreen Nari Contractor was ushered back on stage to entertain us with his collection of hilarious jokes.

WZO wishes to record its sincere gratitude to Valerie and Alex Burns for their hospitality and opening their home and gardens for our fundraising event again this year.

The day’s programme was meticulously planned and organised by Armaity Engineer and Rohinton Irani, ably assisted on the day by willing volunteers and well wishers and our sincere thanks to all of them.

To all our corporate and individual sponsors our heartfelt thanks for their contribution towards making this a day of fun and enjoyment and a big success. The net receipts of £2,507 indicated the generosity of those who attended and we thank them sincerely. All the monies collected will be allocated towards WZO’s Education Fund.
The Shahnameh

The Shahnameh is the result of 30 years of unyielding and steadfast endeavor by the master of Persian literature, Hakim Abulqasim Ferdowsi who is known to the Iranian people and the Persian speaking nations as the reviver of Persian language. Iranians owe to Ferdowsi the survival and fortification of their language and that is why Ferdowsi is considered to be the most prominent Persian poet of all times, even though there are disputes between the scholars who believe that Ferdowsi’s work, in a literary and formalional context, cannot be compared to those of Hafiz, Sa’di, Rumi and Rudaki as the nature of Ferdowsi’s work is essentially different from what other notable Persian poets have brought into existence; however, to the majority of scholars, researchers and literary experts, The Shahnameh, regardless of its format and content, features because of its remarkable contribution to the culture of Iran and the historical identity of Iranian people.

It is widely believed that Ferdowsi started the composition of The Shahnameh when he was 30 years old. According to his own poetry, Ferdowsi invested more than 30 years on the foundation of The Shahnameh to preserve the heritage of Persian language.

The Shahnameh is a mythical, 30,000-distich poetic opus which is dedicated to the history of ancient Iran. The content of The Shahnameh can be divided into three main sections: the mythical age, the heroic age and the historical age. In the mythical age, Ferdowsi demonstrates his adherence to the moral and ethical values by praising and eulogizing the Almighty God whom he considers, thanks to his Muslim background and monotheistic mindset, the sole creator of the universe and only initiator of the life. He starts his poetic oration in the name of God:

In the name of the Lord of both wisdom and mind, To nothing sublimer can thought be applied

Then he comes to admire the Almighty God and his extensive, endless power:

The first thing needful for thee is to know The sum of primal elements which He, Who maketh all things, made from naught to show The greatness of His own supremacy

Ferdowsi then continues by telling the story of Kayumars who is legendarily believed to be the first human being descended on Earth, having been endowed with the celestial grace of the Almighty God, which he calls “Farr”.

In the mythical division, Ferdowsi describes the accounts of two legendary kingdoms in Iran which the holy texts of Zoroastrians, including Avesta, include some references.
to: Pishdadian Dynasty in which 11 emperors ruled, and the Kayanian Dynasty. The heroic age of *The Shahnameh* comprises the greater part of the work, including the account of Manuchehr until the conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great. The famous story of Seven Labours of Rustam and the death of Siavash fall under the heroic category of *The Shahnameh*.

The heroic age of *The Shahnameh* comprises the greater part of the work, including the account of Manuchehr until the conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great. The famous story of Seven Labours of Rustam and the death of Siavash fall under the heroic category of *The Shahnameh*.

The stories of Arsacids and Sasanid dynasties which are retold briefly belong to the historical age of *The Shahnameh* where Ferdowsi demonstrates his power of artistic historiography dexterously.

*The Shahnameh* has been translated in more than 40 languages and exists in the world’s largest libraries in miscellaneous, luxurious versions. The Bayasanghori *Shahnameh* which is an illuminated manuscript of the work being kept in the Tehran’s Golestan Palace has been listed in the UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register of cultural heritage items.

As a literary masterpiece, *The Shahnameh* has played a vital role in recording the antiquity of Iranian culture, preserving the heritage of Persian poetry, purifying the Persian language and ensuring its independence from the other languages. Ferdowsi inspired several poets who attempted to surmount his unparalleled rhetoric several years after his demise; however, the history of Persian poetry hasn’t proved any poet to be of greater eminence, competence and reputation than Ferdowsi up to now.

The British orientalist, surgeon and artist James Atkinson was the first to introduce an English translation of *The Shahnameh* in 1832. Atkinson was a multilingual surgeon who served many years as the Assistant Surgeon in the Bengal service of Honorable East India Company. He was completely fluent in Persian and that would give him the precious opportunity to make an acquaintance with the most noteworthy masterpieces of Persian literature. He first made an abridged translation of Rustam and Sohrab story of *The Shahnameh* in 1814 and then completed his free translation in 1829 which was published in 1832 and won him an Oriental Translation Fund gold medal the same year.

Oriental Translation Fund was established in 1828 as a part of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland’s efforts to further “the investigation of subjects connected with and for the encouragement of science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia.”

A British poet named Matthew Arnold who was a cultural critic and school inspector and at the same time, a close friend of William Wordsworth, published another abridged translation of Rustam and Sohrab tragedy in 1853. [our own Renu Setna, UK actor, had performed this soliloquy admirably, for the community of Karachi in November 1999.- Ed.]

In 1925, the brothers Arthur & Edmond Warner published a complete, 9-volume translation which paved the ground for the further acquaintance of the English readers with *The Shahnameh*.

Germans were also among the pioneers of translating *The Shahnameh* into European languages. In a speech dated September 27, 1934, the renowned German Iranologist and orientalist Hans Heinrich Schaedler elaborately explained the efforts made by the Germans to introduce Ferdowsi and *The Shahnameh* to the international community.

In his speech titled “Firdosi und die Deutschen”, Schaedler called the year 1819 a pivotal juncture in the course of Germans’ familiarity with the oriental culture. Along with the publication of new Deutsch translations of Hafiz and Rumi, the renowned German writer Johann Joseph von Gorres completed his translation of *The Shahnameh* in this year which received great welcome with the German readers.

According to Schaeled, *The Shahnameh* had a great impact on the German orientalists and inspired many scholars to conduct exploratory researches about Ferdowsi. The other credible translation of
The Shahnameh belonged to the German poet and historian of literature, Adolf Friedrich von Schack whose version was published in 1851. Friedrich Ruckert’s translation was also published after his death in 1866.

However, the French also played a fundamental role in bringing into the light the exquisiteness of Ferdowsi’s masterpiece. They contributed to the familiarization of Europeans with The Shahnameh predominantly and translated the epic opus of Ferdowsi several times. The volume of researches done by the French orientalists about The Shahnameh and Ferdowsi is indispensably noteworthy.

In 1826, the French government assigned the mission of translating The Shahnameh to Jules Mohl, the renowned French orientalist and philosopher. He astonishingly dedicated 40 years of his life to the translation of The Shahnameh and accomplished the mission up to his death in 1876. He reviewed several partly-translated versions and even sought the help of Iranian scholars in interpreting the oratory of Ferdowsi. The first volume of his translation came out in 1838 with a well-researched preamble he had written on it. This preamble is said to be one of the most reliable introductions on Ferdowsi and his works in French language.

One millennium has passed since the composition of The Shahnameh by Hakim Ferdowsi and every Persian-speaking citizen knows well that the magnificence and majesty of this Muslim, Iranian poet cannot be erased from the pages of world’s cultural memory. Millions of words and sentences do not suffice to introduce and interpret Ferdowsi. He passed away physically, but he rejuvenated the Iranian identity and perpetuated his name until the subsistence of the world:

I am deathless, I am the eternal lord
For I have spread the seed of the Word

Celebrations for the Shahname
by Babak Salamaty
translated by Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary

The Millennium Celebrations for Ferdowsi, have not been kept up in Iran, as intended originally. In spite of the fact that 15th May of every year had been nominated as a National day to honour Ferdowsi, yet for this year, which has been nominated by UNESCO as the 1000th year of the compilation of the Shahname, the caliber of celebrations, in Iran, for this world famous poet has been the least impressive.

Some four months back the Secretary General of The Ferdowsi Foundation, Yaser Movahed, in a press review with the Fars News Agency, criticized the various Cultural Organizations involved, especially those of the Cultural Heritage Maintenance and the Tourism as well as the Ministry of Culture, for their lack of cooperation in organizing suitable events to celebrate this Millennium event.

In early 2010, Mir Saeedi, who is an assistant-in charge of the Celebrations Committee of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization, while formally announcing the UNESCO’s declaration of 2010 as the 1000th year of the writing of the Shahname declared that in view of the impending cold winter any official celebrations would be considered soon after the start of the Iranian New Year. However, in spite of our being towards the end of the third Iranian month and even after the existing annual Ferdowsi Memorial Day, no worthwhile celebrations have been held for this great poet who is considered to be the custodian of Farsi language and literature.

About the only official Ferdowsi Memorial Programme that has been held this year, was the one that was held in Tehran on 13th May. Even though personalities like President Ahmad Nejad, and the heads of the Cultural Heritage Organization and the
Iranian Handicraft Industries attended the get together held at the Tehran National Library, the programmed events were hardly satisfactory.

President Ahmadinejad started his speech by saying “During the entire course of history Iranians have been the only nation that have upheld justice, and monotheism. The Shahname all through, is a message of unity”. A brief translation of some of the highlights of his speech are:-

The culture and beliefs of Iranians all along, has been that creation has been formed on an equal basis for the entire human race and not limited to a specific boundary or limitations. The real progress for humankind lies in the provision of equal justice for all.

The outstanding characteristic of the Iranians has been that, throughout their history they had the power and intuition to spread tolerance throughout the wide territory that they ruled, and even beyond. During the reign of the Iranian Emperors who ruled over vast territories one cannot find any evidence that this Empire was founded on the use of force and spearheads; on the contrary we have varied evidences that the surrounding weaker nations were attracted to the prevailing justice and civil rights, joining within the circle of the Iranian Empire.

President Ahmadinejad then proceeded in praising the immense cultural and academic achievements that Ferdowsi created, especially for the Iranians and in general, for humanity.

President Ahmadinejad is reported to have unveiled a rare copy of the Shahname at the Iranian National Museum, in Tehran.

Celebrations outside Iran

The Secretary General of The Ferdowsh Foundation, Yaser Movahed, in a press review with the ISNA News Agency on 15th April 2010, announced that:-

With the effective follow up of The Ferdowsh Foundation (Iranian), with the support of the Iranian Ministry of Culture and the Association of Musical Talents, the Millennium Celebrations for Ferdowsi were celebrated on 31st March at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in the presence of representatives from 192 UNESCO member countries.

According to him during this programme 16 melodramas under the subjects of Nowruz and Shahname, along with introductions of Iranian touristic attractions sponsored by the Ferdowsh Foundations and directed by Shahram Salemi were brought to stage. The programmes included Shahname recitations with and without acting and some musical concerts as well.

Round-table discussions at a scientific and research level on the subject of “Nowruz and Shahname” with the participation of Shahname research experts from eight world countries and high level UNESCO management level personalities was also a part of this Paris UNESCO held programme.

In addition to the above, with the joint efforts of the Ferdowsh Foundation (Iran) and the Irano- German Friendship Association the “Fifth Congress to honour Ferdowsi” was celebrated at the Concert Hall of the Cultural Centre of Berlin on the occasion of the Shahname Millenium Celebrations. This was on 28th May.

Mr Movahed added that the staging of concerts, traditional music, Shahname recitals with and without acting, and displays of miniature and other Shahname related paintings as well as ancient copies of Shahname will be displayed in the Dehkhoda Cultural Centre Gallery as well as The Sea Red Rose Hall in Berlin.

With the help of the Malek o Sharo Bahar Foundation “The Shahname and Youth” Congress will be held in the Zone 15 Municipality Hall, which is the usual meeting point of local Iranians. Resident Iranian language students and other Farsi speakers will attend. The making of a serialized film “The Fame of the Millennium” directed by
Mahnaz Rokni with having an objective of introducing Ferdowsi and his Shahname on the occasion of the Ferdowsi Millennium to the English language speakers is yet another activity of the Ferdowsi Foundation.

Amongst the other programmes envisaged for outside Iran will be the Shahname exhibitions to be held in Germany during mid December to mid March 2011. The above programme was decided during a meeting between Dr Stephen Weber, Head of the Berlin Islamic Arts’ Museum with Dr Rahnema the Cultural Attache of the Iranian Embassy, there. Several Shahname related cultural programmes are envisaged. The Islamic Arts museum is one of the most popular museums and in the year 2009 it had over 550,000 visitors.

The Honouring of Ferdowsi by NGO’s and common people (In Iran)

This year’s public celebrations for the Annual National Day of Ferdowsi Celebrations which used to be held every May 15th, or around, has not had any worth mentioning events except for a few short and low quality celebrations. Many believe that the main reason has been the refusal for the use of public halls by the Municipalities due to the existing public gathering restrictions since the last election related events. Even some of the permissions that had been granted to NGOs were cancelled at the last stage.

Shahname experts and learned persons such as Dr Mir Jalaludin Kozazi, Dr Mohamedali Eslami Nadushan, Dr Mansoor Rastegar Fassayi, Dr Fereidoon Jonneydi and the likes who used to keep very busy during this period had hardly any appearances anywhere.

Ferdowsi’s Shahname is gaining popularity day by day amongst the Iranians. I, the writer of this article am a witness to the popular demand for attending Shahname classes and private recitations. It is as if the Shahname is being reintroduced after 1000 years of it’s writing.

Firdausi and the Iranian National Epic: from background to centre-stage

by Farrokh Vajifdar

This article presents the historical backdrop and scope of a thousand-year-old poem of epic proportions – the Shah-nameh – enshrining the history of pre-Islamic Ancient Iran. It covers a time span from an indeterminate legendary past of several thousand years to the well-attested 652 AD when the last Zoroastrian king of Iran, the sovereign State of Iran, was murdered. Here we possess a narrative record, both real and imagined, of the epochs of heroes and kings, beauteous yet strong-willed ladies, and villains and usurpers, composed by Firdausi, the poet of incomparable genius from eastern Iran.

Many an attempt had been made to record the turbulent and checkered history of that ancient land. The earliest such narrative was commissioned by Yazdgard III Shahryar, who ruled from 632 – 652 AD. Its compiler was a dehqan, a scholarly scion of the landed gentry (a feudal lordling?) named Daneshwar who, assisted by several learned Zoroastrian priests, pieced together the stories of the land from the first man Gayomard or Kayumars down to the despicable emperor Khosro II Parvez (591 – 628), grandfather of Yazdgard III, and likewise murdered. That collection was the Khwaday-namagh or “Book of the Lords”: a learned prose compilation, drafted in Middle Persian or Pahlavi.

Edward Browne had concluded, “The same cause which led to the loss of the scientific and philosophical nasks of the Avesta (the hatak mansarik), namely, the comparative indifference of the Zoroastrian priests, who were practically the sole guardians of the old literature after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, to all books which did not bear immediately on their own interests, led, no doubt, to the loss of the greater
part of the profane literature of the Sasanian period.”

We can hardly blame Alexander III for the Arabs’ cultural vandalism of a thousand years after the gizistag Macedonian’s depredations.

The despoliation of the Arab conquest would account for the disappearance of many literary works. The strict supervision of the political and cultural affairs of post-Sasanian Iran was effected by the first Omayyad Caliph ‘Umar (634–644). Patriotic literature was discouraged, whilst works of other kinds were to be destroyed as unnecessary and superfluous, seeing that henceforth the Qur’an was deemed the pure fount of all knowledge.

The Pahlavi original of the Khwaday-namagh was lost shortly after the Muslim invasions of Iran, but it had been firstly translated into Arabic, and from there into New Persian, the kindlier linguistic descendant of Middle Persian. Chief among the 8th century Arabicizers was the converted Magian, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, a past master in both Pahlavi and Arabic. His conversion to Islam was merely expedient; in 759 AD he was put to death for his suspect orthodoxy.

With the commencement of the Abbasid caliphate in 750 AD, there was a resurgence of national pride. The Persian dynasty of the Samanids ruled from Bukhara for 125 years (from 874–999 AD). Its founder was one Saman, an Iranian nobleman descended from Bahram Chubin who had briefly set up a rival kingship against Khosro II Parvez. Under the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r.786 – 809AD) Saman’s four grandsons served as governors in Samarkand, Ferghana, Shash and Herat in north and eastern Iran. A lively interest in Ancient Iran was maintained by the amirs [“commander; governor; prince”] at the Samanid courts.

Among the many fragmentary Shah-namas (“Books of the Kings”) was one compiled in Persian prose in 957-8 on the orders of the governor of Tus, a convert to Islam named Abu Mansur bin Abdur-Razzaq; its authors were four Zoroastrians from Herat, Sistan, Nishapur, and Tus, who had used sources additional to the Khwaday-namagh.

But even more influential upon Firdausi were the two 9th century Pahlavi redactions of the Yadgar-i Zariran, or “Memorial of the Zarirs”, also called the “Shah-nama of Gushtasp”, Zarir being Gushtasp’s brother, and the Karnamag-i Ardashir-i Pabagan, or “Book of the Great Deeds of Ardashir, son of Pabag”. Both these secular works deal with the semi-historical personages of early Iran, and it is the latter work that yields the greater resemblance to our poet’s Shah-nama.

Many of these 10th century prosodists and story-tellers sought to preserve the heritage of Ancient Iran before it was forgotten and absorbed by the new Islamic culture which was changing the old Persian language by a massive influx of Arabic words and expressions. But this intrusive influence was also substituting new ideas and ideals for the Ancient Iranian mores, preserved in the lays of minstrels and early folklorists.

Professional story-tellers – naqqals (“transmitters”) – transmitted episodes from these oral traditions with their own embellishments. Patriotic impulses for preservation of the old world in new ways have helped transmit the Iranian National Epic down to our own times, and serve as guide-posts to a forever vanished Ancient Iranian civilization.

Among the most brilliant of the new generation poets was the famed Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Ahmad (940–975/980) who bore the takhallus or nom-de-plume of Daqiqi. His patron at the Samanid court was Nuh II, son of the amir Mansur bin Nuh (961 – 976), who commissioned the talented lyricist to versify the mass of material inherited from the epic history of pre-Islamic Iran. It was a remarkable tour-de-force, for in Persian literature, epic poetry is at the opposite pole to lyric poetry. His work came to a premature end, however, for he was murdered by his Turkish man-servant for whom, it was rumoured, he had conceived an illicit
passion. Equally plausibly, despite his Muslim name, his Islamism was at best lukewarm, and his true leanings were towards the Zoroastrian religion of his Persian forefathers. Indeed, he had completed but a thousand verses exactly covering the episodes of Zoroaster’s appearance and the conversion of Gushtasp (Vishtaspa) when he was killed. Those thousand verses were taken up and incorporated by Firdausi into the fabric of his own great national epic.

Daqiqi’s alleged Zoroastrianism has been adduced mainly from two distichs:

> Of all that’s good or evil in the world
> Four things suffice to meet Daqiqi’s need:
> The ruby-coloured lip, the harp’s lament,
> The blood-red wine, and Zoroaster’s creed.”

Elsewhere, Daqiqi had further fuelled suspicion of apostasy with his declaration: “I affirm before God that the one who does not tread the path of Zoroaster shall not attain to Paradise.”

Firdausi was the takhallus conferred upon the dehqan Abu’l Qasim Mansur, born in Tus around 940. His pen-name signifies Paradise, just as hakim, his honorific (laqab), indicates his scholarly status of learned doctor, or sage. Firdausi had commenced his great work in 975 AD with the encouragement and sponsorship of the governor of Tus, Husayn bin Qutayba, and the local aristocracy. When the Samanid kingdom passed into the rule of the Ghaznavid dynasty under Sultan Mahmud bin Sabuktagin (971–1030 AD), the vast materials collected from the early poetic and prose sources on the pre-Islamic history of Iran were finally entrusted to Firdausi.

The epic style was well established before Firdausi. The mutaqarib metre employed by Daqiqi remained the only one used in epic, and the language was clearly differentiated from that of lyrical poetry: it was much less arabicized, and instead was full of archaic Iranian words. The Arabs had neither epic nor epic poetry, and this low proportion of Arabic vocabulary was also a feature of prose works on similar subjects. Firdausi’s Shah-nama contains as little as four per cent of Arabic words.

Mahmud of Ghazna ordered his treasurer Khoja Hassan Maimandi to pay to Firdausi one thousand gold dinars for every thousand verses, but the dehqan preferred the sum to accumulate till all his work was completed. His reason given was to amass sufficient capital to construct a barrage for his native city of Tus which had long suffered from defective irrigation – a project which had been the chief dream of his childhood. The poet, however, had somehow incurred the growing displeasure of paymaster Khoja Hassan, who often withheld the interim payments due or advances sufficient for the necessities of sustenance, such that Firdausi passed the latter portion of his life in great privation, despite enjoying royal favour and fame accruing from his work-in-progress.

He completed his great work in 60,000 couplets, some thirty-five years later in 1010 AD, when he was into his seventies. Keeping to his word, Mahmud ordered Khoja Hassan to take the poet as much gold as an elephant could carry; the disgruntled treasurer managed to persuade his master that it was far too generous, and that an elephant’s load of silver would be more commensurate! 60,000 silver dirhams were accordingly placed in sacks on camel-back and taken by the Sultan’s Turkish favourite, Ayaz, to the aged poet who, enraged at this deception, gave away 20,000 pieces to the courier Ayaz, the same to the local bath-keeper, and handed the rest to a beer-seller. Firdausi huffily sent back the response that it was not to gain money that he had taken so much trouble.

With the same courier Firdausi also sent Mahmud a sealed paper which was to be handed him after 20 days had elapsed. This gave the aged poet ample time to set off on his travels — actually in anticipation of the
Sultan’s wrath, for the sealed article contained the celebrated satire which nowadays is prefixed to copies of his Shah-nama, and which is perhaps the bitterest and severest piece of reproach ever penned. In it he had taunted Mahmud on his slavish birth. As expected, Mahmud flew into a violent rage and sent after the poet, promising a large reward for his capture, but Firdausi was already in comparative safety in far-off Mazandaran whose prince Kabus received him well and promised him both patronage and protection. When Kabus, however, came to learn of the circumstances under which the dehqan had fled Ghazna, and fearing the vengeance of the all-powerful Mahmud, he dismissed Firdausi with every decent dignity and a most handsome present.

A different, but related, account is given by Nizami Arudi-i-Samarqandi (11th/12th century). Fleeing Mahmud’s anger, Firdausi sought refuge in Tabaristan with the Sipahbadh Shirzad whose origins were from the family of Yazgdard III. To him the poet gave his Shah-nama, including the satire on Mahmud, saying, “I will dedicate this Shah-nama to you instead of to Sultan Mahmud, for this book deals wholly with the legends and deeds of your forebears”. Shirzad reasoned with him to retain his original dedication to Mahmud after expunging the offending 100 couplets for each of which deletion he paid Firdausi 1,000 dirhams.

The poet next went to Baghdad to find refuge at the court of the caliph al-Kadir (991–1031). There he composed Yusuf and Zuleikha – a poem of 9,000 couplets on the Qur’anic theme (in Sura 12) of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife ( Gn. 39). This poem, less well known than his immortal Shah-nama, is extant.

In the meanwhile Sultan Mahmud was minded not to pursue Firdausi further, and was even prevailed upon to give him full reparation for his now completed work. Mahmud’s change of heart, however, came too late. Firdausi, now a broken and decrepit old man – he was in his eighties – had by then returned to his native Tus.

There, whilst wandering through its streets, he chanced to hear a child lisping a verse from the very satire in which he berated Mahmud on his lowly birth. The old man was so affected by this proof of universal sympathy with his misfortunes that when he found his way home, he succumbed to a melancholia and died shortly after in the year 1020 AD.

He was buried in a garden just outside the city gate. The bigoted chief sheikh of Tus refused to read the usual prayers over Firdausi’s tomb – shades of this misbehaviour in India against out-married Zoroastrian women? – on the spurious grounds that the poet had been of a heretical disposition – a Rafidhi, or Shi’ite, and a Mutazili, or Seceder – having during his life glorified fire-worshippers and unbelievers! An extension to this story tells that this sheikh dreamt on the very next night that the poet had appeared in Paradise, clad in green and wearing an emerald crown, thereby adroitly restoring the deceased Firdausi to full post-mortem orthodoxy!

On hearing his chief adviser recite some verses pertinent to a stand-off during one of his many raids, the Sultan enquired after their authorship, to be told that they were Firdausi’s who had been so mistreated by Mahmud. Upon his return to Ghazna, a conscience-stricken Mahmud arranged for 60,000 dirhams’ worth of indigo laden on his own camels to be sent, with his apologies, to Firdausi in Tus. But even as the sumpter beasts were entering through the Rudbar Gate, the corpse of Firdausi was being carried forth from the Gate of Razan. The story of Firdausi’s funeral is repeated by Nizami with the variation that the bigoted preacher had denied the poet’s burial in the Musliman cemetery, and instead his remains were interred in a garden belonging to the poet outside the Razan Gate. The poet’s garden tomb is now a national shrine; the fanatic’s resting-place is all but forgotten. Mahmud’s considerable gift of indigo was then offered to Firdausi’s daughter, a feisty lady “of very lofty spirit” – so wrote Nizami – who declined it, saying “I need it not!” News
of the preacher’s disgraceful action was conveyed to Mahmud who ordered that the fanatic be expelled from Tabaran for his officiousness, exiled from his home, and for his money to be given for repairs to a rest-house on the boundaries of Tus along the road between Nishapur and Marv. His instructions were faithfully obeyed.

On the subject of Firdausi’s alleged heretical leanings, the accusation has no factual basis. As Robert Zaehner had affirmed, the poet was throughout his long life “a pious Shi’a Muhammadan, and in his Shah-nama Zoroastrianism is presented to us in a uniformly pietistic and respectably monotheistic garb: Zurvanites and dualist Mazdeans might never existed!”

The character of the Shah-nama mirrors the character of its author. Reuben Levy has summed it up admirably: “Firdausi’s genuine compassion for the poor and the wronged, his remarkable and persistent sense of social justice, his courageous and vocal condemnation of irresponsibility of rulers, his altruism and idealism – in short his profound humanity – account for some of the most moving and ennobling passages in the Shah-nama and endow it with a consistent integrity”. Firdausi’s grand epic is a collection of episodes not composed in chronological sequences proper to a work of history. Nevertheless, drama, comedy, tragedy – all are immortalized here.

Descriptions of Nature and of the Seasons are the nourishment of 10th and 11th century Persian poetry. Iranian festivals such as the nauruz, the autumnal mihragan, the wine-harvest, and mid-winter sada – celebrated at night by great fires, were all eulogized in wine and verse in Sasanian times – at the majlis-i sharabs – as well as by their Muslim successors. Recent Islamic attempts at prohibiting these festivities in Iran on grounds that they belonged to the pagan period – the period of jahiliyya or “ignorance” abusively applied by uncultured Arabicized Iranians – were met with deep misgivings, the stiffest of protests, and were ultimately frustrated. It is understood that passages from Firdausi’s Shah-nama were repeatedly brought to the attention of the kill-joy Muslim authorities who nevertheless still strove to obliterate the varied jubilant expressions of Iran’s rich pre-Islamic civilization.

“The Shah-nama lives on!”

Farrokh Vajifdar comes from a sensibly orthodox priestly family. Life-long student and independent researcher in Indo-Iranian cultures. Specializes in literature and languages of pre-Islamic Iran. Focuses on Zoroastrian religious beliefs and practices on which he writes, lectures, and broadcasts (radio and TV). He is referee and reviewer for (as Fellow of) the Royal Asiatic Society.

Regarding the veracity of his stories, he cautions the reader not to relegate them to the realm of “lies and myths.” Rather, he insists, his stories must be understood to contain both knowledge and mysteries:

“Deem not these legends lying fantasy,
As if the world were always in one stay,
For most accord with sense,”

[source New World Encyclopedia]

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فردوسي و شاهنامه
شاهنامه بی‌گمان شناخته‌نامه‌ای نزد ایرانیان است. فردوسي شاهنامه‌ها درست یکهزار سال پیش به پایان رساند. در روزهای پایانی شاهنامه، فردوسي میگوید که تاریخ پایان رسیدن این گنجینه فردوسی در سال چهارصد هجدهم قمری است. امسال 1431ق. برادر یکهزار مال خورشیدی است. فردوسي سرود شاهنامه را در زمان ساسانیان نخستین فرمزویان ایرانی پس از بورش نازیان آغاز کرد. در آن زمان پر از جنگ و جویش بود که شناخته‌نامه‌ای ایرانیان باره بز تا دانست و سروده سرایانی چون رودکی و ندوشی و فردوسي پرچم خاک آلد ایران را از زمین برداشت و به فردوسی گلرود دیگری از فردوسی‌ها یک این جنس مردمی و هزینه‌زند نگه‌دارنده نگاه معمولی "همه چراغی را پس از پروز نازیان کشور مصر با ان جازه‌دیشان باستани خود توانست سران و فردوسی‌ها خود را نگه‌داشتند و بیک پارچه بهره‌یک کشور نازی جز خود کرفت؟" "همکا" "یکینا با سخ داد، ما مصوریها سخت‌خوری چون فردوسی نمایشی" "دقیقی کمی پیش از فردوسی سرودن شاهنامه‌ها آغاز کرد به دود از سروده های دقیقی برداشت می شود که گرایش به دین زرتشتی داشته چنانچه میگوید:
برخیز و بر افزور تو آن می روی نتایج برداشت - بنشین و بر افزور تو قرار (کید) برتشک چرخ که زرتشت برفت او دکتر یک کتر را بسیب زرتشت شاید روزهای اینی بوده که مردمان بی‌سکال و خرافتی دقیقی را از پا درآوردن.
فردوسی با دانایی یک‌بُخِزان بند از سروده های دقیقی را در شاهنامه‌نامه‌انست. این وارونه دقیقی سروده های دقیقی را در پرده دی نزد می پوشاند. در زمان فردوسی، ترکان غزنوی فرمان روا بسیار ایرانی سامانیان ایان به ارویدود دیدند. با آینده دربار پادشاهی محمود غزنوی سپرای ایرانی بود اما چون غزنویان از نزاده‌ایان نوزند فردوسی روزه فروشی آن ها نداشتند. شکفت این که مهیج غزنویان زبان پارسی را تا سر زمین هندوستان گسترش دادند. امروز زبان پارسی بیشتر مردم آذربایجان کشیش از زبان ترکی است. اما آذری بابایی نیستند. آن‌ها ایرانیان می‌یادند که زبین‌هایش ترکان نیستند از زبان باستالی خود را از دست داده اند و از این رو آن‌ها را "آذری" "می‌یادند. ترکان از نزاد غرر و آذربایجان ایرانی نیستند. فردوسی چنان خوان ایرانی در گرف و ریشه این می‌جوشید که ترکان را هم از نزاد ترکی می‌دانند. یک گمان همه آگاهان که ترکان‌ها هم‌کسانی از نزاد ایرانی می‌دانند.
Shahrokh Vafadari was born in Kerman in a priestly family. After his early education in Kerman he finished high school in Alborz, Tehran and later on studied engineering at the University of London with post graduate studies in business management. He worked as a consultant to the petroleum industry. After retirement he attended SOAS and was the last student of Mary Boyce. He has founded a research centre for learning ancient Iranian languages at the University of Kerman and is a Trustee of Nikan Foundation in Kerman and Ferdowsi Trust Fund in the UK.
MIT quantum astrophysicist Nergis Mavalvala was announced on September 28 as one of 23 winners of the coveted 2010 MacArthur Fellowship, also known as a genius grant, and will receive a $500,000 “no strings attached” award over the next five years.

“I had always known of the MacArthur fellowship and all the wonderful scientists, historians and artists who had won it in the past, but I never, ever, in my wildest dreams thought that I would be one of them,” Mavalvala, the first-known Parsi to receive the award, told India-West.

“I am incredibly humbled and so grateful to my colleagues and everyone who has supported my work,” she said from her office at MIT on the afternoon the winners were announced.

When she received the call 10 days ago from MacArthur Fellows Programme director Daniel Socolow, Mavalvala was sure it was a hoax. It wasn’t until she woke up on 28 September, to 200 congratulatory e-mails, that she realized she had actually won.

Mavalvala, who was born and raised in Karachi, studies gravitational waves, which can penetrate regions of space which light or electromagnetic waves cannot. Albert Einstein first predicted the existence of gravitational waves in 1916.

“Everything we know about the universe comes from observing light,” said Mavalvala, adding that gravitational waves are a different kind of tool that allow researchers to learn “new and enormously interesting things.”

“Black holes, for example, are very dense, massive stars that light cannot escape from”, said Mavalvala. But by using gravitational waves, researchers can explore the environment close to black holes, she explained.

42-year-old Mavalvala is uncertain yet how she will use her half-million dollar grant. “The thing that very much excites me about this grant is that it can be used for speculative, risky, flat-out crazy ideas that would otherwise be hard to get funding for.” She declined to elaborate on those ideas, jokingly saying she wasn’t prepared for colleagues to hear them yet.

Mavalvala attended the Convent of Jesus & Mary School in Karachi, where she was inspired by her physics and chemistry teachers.

“Advanced biology meant dissecting an animal, and I knew I couldn’t do that, so I quickly moved to the physical sciences,” said Mavalwala with a laugh.

The daughter of Minoo and Meher Mavalvala (who now live in Vancouver, BC), Nergis lives in Arlington, Mass., with her partner Aida Khan and two-year-old son, Evren. She credits her parents for recognizing her ability in math and science early on, and always encouraging her work. An older sister, Mahrugh, who also studied physics, is now an actuary living in Seattle, Washington.

Mavalvala received her PhD in physics from MIT in 1997, and a bachelors’ degree in physics and astronomy from Wellesley College in 1990.
Now Zerbanoo is honoured in an exhibition commemorating the 90th anniversary of women being given the vote in the United States. “The 90th Anniversary of Suffrage”, a gallery and online exhibition of photos of those who have advanced women’s rights, was staged by the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum in Washington DC, and opened on Equality Day, August 26th, 2010.

The inscription accompanying Zerbanoo’s photo reads, ‘To a woman who has dedicated her life to women’s rights internationally and who is fearless of standing up for freedom and justice.’

When asked how she felt about such an accolade for her work championing the cause of women internationally, Zerbanoo said, “Women’s equality is the final frontier for those who fight for a fairier and more just world. If man can land on the moon, and spend billions on armaments of war, then surely we can ensure than every girl is cherished at birth. She should be given a rounded education, her health and nutrition cared for, and she should be allowed to express herself with her own unique gifts and encouraged to take her rightful place in her community. Degrading and suppressing women must be a thing of the past. It is totally unacceptable to crush the lives of half of the world’s population for no other reason than their sex.

“I have seen a gradual improvement in the status of women over my lifetime and been fortunate to meet some of the most extraordinary women in the world who have excelled in every field of endeavour and yet kept their humanity. I have also been fortunate to be at the heart of the international movement to ensure that women are able to share power and resources and to reclaim their dignity as equals. I am proud to have dedicated my life to empowering women and enlightening men.”

The Sewall-Belmont House and Museum keeps alive the stories of the women who fought for the right to vote and houses the largest collection of suffrage artefacts in the United States. Sewall-Belmont was also included in the original Save America’s Treasures Act, together with the Star Spangled Banner, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence.
Jamshedji Nusserwanji Guzder

Jimmy Guzder was a successful businessman but humble and always accessible to one and all. Poor and needy Parsis used to meet him virtually everyday at his office at Neville House with their problems and he seldom let anyone return empty handed or disappointed. He gave because he found joy in giving and putting a smile on people’s faces. He was a man who loved life and even at a very advanced age looked dashing – he exuded happiness.

When he completed his term as Chairman of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, his colleagues decided to confer a unique honour upon him – something unprecedented in the entire history of the BPP. He was made Chairman Emeritus – an honour which he so richly deserved. Jamshed had served as a Trustee of the BPP for 27 years.

He not only looked like a traditional Sethia – he indeed was one and probably the last of this class of true philanthropists.

Jamshed went to his heavenly abode on 20 August. [Excerpts from Noshir Dadrawalla’s article on Mr Guzder]

Homi Nusserwanji Sethna

Former Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) chairman and one of the guiding lights behind India’s first nuclear test, Homi Nusserwanji Sethna, died on 5 September at his Walkeshwar residence after a prolonged lung ailment. He was 87 years of age.

Sethna’s career started neither in a laboratory nor a workshop, but in the swimming pool of the Wellington Club near Haji Ali. Legend goes that nuclear scientist Homi Bhabha met Sethna while the two men were enjoying a swim at the club during the late 50s. Sethna impressed Bhabha so much that he invited the young man to his office. The next day, after a brief interview, Sethna was offered a job.

Sethna helped conduct its first nuclear test in 1974 at Pokhran. “Sethna actually came to Pokhran 48 hours before the experiment. He was in New Delhi meeting officials. Some officials at the Prime Minister’s Office wanted the test to be delayed,” recalled Iyengar, a team member. “Sethna telephoned us at Pokhran and explained the situation. We said we cannot stop the test at this stage. He then met Mrs Gandhi who gave the go-ahead.”

During their meeting, Sethna reportedly told Gandhi: “I am pushing in the device (bomb) tomorrow and after that do not say remove it because I cannot. You cannot tell me to stop.” On the day of the test, Sethna said to his colleagues: “Whose head will be chopped if the test fails?” Iyengar replied: “If the law of physics works, no head will be chopped.”

The test conducted successfully, Sethna sent a coded message to Gandhi,” saying “Buddha Is Smiling”. [Information from the Times of India]

Colonel Bharucha-Reid

Commander of Fort Mead’s Army Field Support Centre was laid to rest with full military honours at Arlington National Cemetery on 9 September. Brig (Rtd) Ervad Behram Panthaki led the funeral procession with the army chaplin. A posthumous
award of Legion of Merit was presented to his mother and only two days before his death Colonel Bharucha-Reid was presented with the Hall of Fame Award for his work in Human Intelligence (HUMINT). This is only the second time that such an award has been given. He was 55 and died of pancreatic cancer.

He joined the army in 1973 and in 1980 was assigned to the Special Forces Detachment Korea, commissioned as a military intelligence officer in the late 1980s, deployed to Bosnia, then Afghanistan as the first HUMMIT officer to provide direct support to the US Army Special Operations Command. In 2006 Bharucha-Reid was deployed to Iraq serving in an interagency coordination cell. Called a ‘great American Soldier’, Bharucha-Reid was remembered by about 500 colleagues and friends from the Intelligence Corps in Army, Navy and Air Force who had gathered to honour his 37-year army career. The Zarathushti community was well represented at the ceremony including the Colonel’s family members. [Excerpts from the report compiled - information supplied by family and Brig (Rtd) Panthanki]

British Museum loans Iran, Cyrus the Great’s Cylinder

‘On 10 September, the Cyrus Cylinder, which has so far been kept in the British Museum, arrived in Iran,’ Vice President Hamid Baghai, who heads the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation, told Fars news agency.

He said the artifact arrived ‘under special security and will be on display for four months. Forty years ago was the last time the cylinder was in Iran, when it went on display for 10 days.’ The Cyrus Cylinder was last shown in Iran in October 1971 during the reign of the former Shah, for commemorations marking 2,500 years of the Persian monarchy.

In February, Mr Baghai said Teheran had cut ties with the British Museum in protest at repeated delays in lending it the antique, and in April he was reported as saying Iran wanted 300,000 dollars in compensation over the delays.

The treasure’s showcase has also been brought from London, and on Saturday [11th Sept] ‘in the presence of experts the cylinder will be placed in the display.’ It will be shown in Iran’s National Museum, according to its director Azadeh Ardekani.

The British Museum justifies the loan by saying: In recognition of the fact that the Cyrus Cylinder is truly a part of the world’s cultural heritage, the Trustees of the British Museum are eager that as many people as possible should have an opportunity to see it, particularly in Iran where Cyrus the Great is held in special reverence. Although political relations between Iran and the UK are at the moment difficult, the Trustees take the view that it is all the more important to maintain the cultural links which have been so carefully built up over a period of years and which could in themselves lead to a better relationship based on dialogue, tolerance and understanding. Colleagues in Iran’s museums are part of a world-wide scholarly community in which the British Museum plays a leading role.

The loan generous loans National Museum Forgotten Empire exhibitions in the British reciprocates the made by the of Iran to the and Shah Abbas 2005 and 2009 at Museum.
How did you meet the Wadias? What role did they play in bringing HAPTADAMA to life, and what is the genesis of the title HAPTADAMA?

I met Nariman and Coomi on my first trip to Mumbai, in December 2004. I was working on a project with my ensemble, The Esoterics, of choral music inspired by Hinduism, and was interested in publishing a series of six Vedic choral hymns by the composer Vanraj Bhatia, a friend of the Wadias. I actually met Nariman and Coomi on the internet via their son Sorab, through the activity of their choir, The Paranjoti Academy Choir, and their involvement with Mr Bhatia’s work. After working closely with the Wadias for a month in Mumbai, and on the day of my departure for the US, Nariman gave me a small book of Zoroastrian prayers, which I read on the plane ride home. I have long been interested in Zoroastrianism, ever since I first read Gore Vidal’s historical fiction entitled *Creation*. Nariman’s small gift only ignited the spark of my already abiding interest in the various different world religions, their original ancient scriptures, and ‘reading between the lines’ thereof.

On my second trip to Mumbai, Nariman arranged for me occasion to study the Gathas and *Bundahishn* at the Cama Oriental Institute, and also arranged for me to hear the Gathas sung by several devout Parsis, priests and non-priests alike (because I obviously was not able to attend worship in any fire temple). Nariman also loaned me his fantastic portable recording equipment (because British Airways lost my luggage – and therefore my own equipment – for the entirety of my month-long trip), so that I could document this fantastic singing and transcribe it at home. After I read the entire *Bundahishn* at the Cama Institute Library, I retold several of their stories to Nariman and Coomi. The Wadias were wonderful ‘sounding-boards’ for my process of deciding which parts of the scripture to include in my ‘libretto.’

The title of The Esoterics’ concert series, HAPTADAMA, was my rendering of “the seven creations” in an Avestan/Pahlavi hybrid. The title of my opera is *The seven creations* – I think it’s a beautiful phrase, one that can draw an audience that is eager to learn more.

You have coordinated the Gathas and Bundahishn beautifully in your libretto. These are two compositions separated in time by more than two millennia. In your opinion, do you perceive any major distinction between them?

Thank you! The linguistic difference between the languages is very obvious to me. Avestan is a much older language, and therefore has much more phonemic variation – the very specific sounds of Avestan have simplified as the language evolves through Pahlavi toward present day Farsi. In terms of phonemic wealth, almost every modern language is simpler than its ancient predecessors. In terms of structure, the *Gathas* are clearly songs, with meter and rhyme; the *Bundahishn* is more prosaic, and much more dramatic – it’s a creation myth, and one of the most beautiful cosmogonies that I’ve ever read.

The Gathas speak very sparingly about creation. How closely do you see the creation story of Bundahishn reflected in the Gathas?

There are several *Gathas* that ask directly about the origin of the world, and I found several verses from the *Bundahishn* that answer these questions in dramatic and compelling detail. During my research, most of the Zoroastrians that I spoke with were very familiar with the *Gathas*, but several
of them had never even heard of the *Bundahishn*. This surprised and saddened me, because I find the Persian creation story to be so beautiful. I realize that this creation story was documented long after the *Gathas* were recorded, and that there may be very little relationship between the two texts, but as an outsider that has spent equal time with both texts, I find the connection to be strong.

The *Gathas* are believed to be the words of Zarathushtra. What was your impressions of the Gathic hymns a) as poetic composition and b) in their Divine message?

The *Gathas*, as poetry, seem obviously to be the result of a very long oral tradition, with layer upon layer of symbolism assigned to them, and generations of scholarly *exegesis* to consider. For me, the divinity of the *Gathas* is measured by the great care with which these songs have been protected over the millennia to the present day.

Please explain for our readers what is an a cappella choral opera? What is the role and innovative contribution of The Esoterics in it?

_A cappella_ is the term used to describe choral music that is sung without the aid of any instruments. I called this work an opera (which is merely the Latin term for ‘works,’ the plural of _opus_) because it was large (concert-length) and dealt with a dramatic subject matter. The work was composed for The Esoterics, the choral ensemble that founded here in Seattle. It was written for 40 voices that sing together in ensemble, but each singer has a distinct role in the story as well. Twelve singers represent the constellations of the zodiac, seven represent the planets in the sky, one sings the role of Gav (the first animal), and another sings the role of Gayomart (the first human) – these are just some examples of the 40 roles I composed into _The seven creations_ for the singers of The Esoterics.

What moved you to believe these Avestan scriptures would translate to the medium of an a cappella choral work; which is a form more usually associated (or at least originating) with Judeo-Christian music?

Every culture on the planet sings together without the aid of instruments. _A cappella_ singing is _not_ an art form that originated in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is just the tradition that cultivated singing and capitalizes on today. My mission with The Esoterics is to take unaccompanied singing _out of_ this particular Judeo-Christian box, and develop a repertoire of choral music that is more universal and culturally inclusive.

The work does not appear to possess a story line in the conventional linear sense, though, interestingly, such linearity is a feature of Zoroastrian theology. How would you describe the structure of HAPTADAMA for the listener?

I respectfully and strongly disagree. The libretto, as I’ve constructed it, is highly linear. A synopsis of _The seven creations_ would go something like this. Ahuramazda and Ahriman are the universal deities of good and evil. Before the beginning of time, Ahriman climbs out of the abyss and attacks Ahuramazda on high. Ahuramazda chants the ancient melody of the _Ahuna var_, and stuns Ahriman into submission. While he is unconscious, Ahuramazda creates the world, which takes seven forms: the Sky, the Water, the Earth, the Plants, Gav (the first animal, an ox), Gayomart (the first human), and the Fire (that which is sacred to all Zoroastrians). After these seven, Ahuramazda creates the Sun, the Moon, the Stars (including the zodiac), and his six avatars: the Holy Immortals. Alongside Ahuramazda, the Holy Immortals become the caretakers for each of the seven creations. When he comes to, Ahriman attacks each of the seven creations, bringing death and destruction to each, but also contributing to the beautiful form of the world as we know it. Ahriman is vanquished by the Sky Warrior and the Frahvars, and thrown into Hell. The world is then repaired by Tishtar, the Wind Warrior, the Tree of Life, and of course, Ahuramazda himself.
You have always been interested in the esoteric ideas. What was it that particularly focused your attention on the Zoroastrian cosmogony?

I think that Zoroastrianism interested me, first and foremost, because it is the world’s oldest recorded monotheism. I think that anyone who is interested in studying religion or its influence on historical events would find these texts interesting. Personally, I find that too many people are interested in ‘interpreting’ texts of their own religion, and too few people are interested in reading the original scripture of religions other than their own, to find potential common ground. I wish that this were not the case, but it seems to the world in which we now live. With works like this opera, I have tried to use my artistic vision and vehicle to tell a story that others would not otherwise hear.

The first movement Before time sets the stage for the seven creations. How do you perceive the ethical dualism embedded in that section?

What I love about this first conflict (between Ahura Madza and Ahriman) is that good repels evil by **singing** to it, and stuns it into submission. What a wonderful testament about the non-violent power of singing.

In Zarathushtrian theology, fire is a physical incarnation of Ahura Mazda, and commands boundless reverence. How do you perceive fire as described in the Gathas relative to the creation as elaborated in Bundahishn?

Obviously, the last of the seven creations is the most holy and mystical. Fire seems to be the most ‘physical’ manifestation of Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism. In my musical representation of fire, I tried to capture it in all of its attributes – glowing, warm, living, moving, even smoldering and smoking – attributes given to it by Ahriman in his initial attack.

Vohumanah is philologically interpreted as ‘good mind’ or ‘good thinking.’ With a few exceptions, you have consistently interpreted it as ‘love’ (G 50.1, 44.3). Is that just artistic license or is there a rationalization in your meaning?

In my study, I encountered several translations of this word, and ‘Love’ was the one that appealed to me most among them. “Mindfulness” was certainly a contender (and spoke to my Buddhist sensibilities), but I found ‘Love’ to be more malleable and multi-faceted as a concept, and more easy to personify (like ‘Strength’ or the other Holy Immortals).

In the movement The restoration of the world you have used Tishtraya and water extensively. How do you perceive a place of element water in Zarathushtrian theology as a whole?

Water, the second creation, surrounds the earth in the story of the Bundahishn, and Tishtar uses water to cleanse the surface of the earth (the third creation) of the venom left there by Ahriman’s vermin. I love that this ‘venom’ is transformed into ‘salt’ in the oceans and seas. I don’t feel comfortable speaking about water’s role in Zoroastrian theology (or any aspect of Zoroastrian theology, for that matter). As an artist, and as a reader of this story, I found the role of water poignant and beautiful, and wanted to tell its story.

The last movement of the opera is entitled The house of song. Can you summarize its significance and how it relates to The seven creations?

Although Gav and Gayomart perish at the end of the Bundahishn, their legacy lives on in a multiplicity of animal species and humankind, and their essences are enshrined in the Sun and the
Moon, to reflect upon our world and remind us of their sacrifice at the beginning of time. As well, the plants are enshrined in the myriad of stars in the sky. After these celestial beings are redefined, the narrative continues upward, to the outer realms of the sky. Here, I chose to conclude the opera with some of the most joyous Gathic strains that refer to heaven with the unforgettable moniker: “the house of song.” What singer and choral enthusiast wouldn’t love to endorse such a description of the afterlife?

Not having heard the work yet, how does the work’s harmonic structure reflect the seven creations? What should we listen for?

There are so many things to listen for! Each of the seven creations has its own consonant key area, and with evil comes the introduction of dissonance. I have tried to stay true to the meter of the Gathas in my scoring, and have even harmonized them with parallel intervals that refer to how they are often sung by several dastur in the agiary. My musical manifestation of the constellations of the zodiac is actually a choral mapping of the stars along the ecliptic (the celestial equator) over time. Many people are very fond of the progression that I use to describe the creation of the world (while Ahriman is asleep). My musical description of fire (at the end of the second movement) is lively and complex, like a licking flame. My setting of Ahriman’s attack upon creation (in movement four) is quite frightening, and my setting of the “house of song” is some of the most ecstatic music that I’ve ever written. However, I’ve lived with this music for several years now. My opinions could be biased.

The Avestan script in the libretto, demonstrates beautiful calligraphy. Did you learn Avesta and write the script?

I learned both Avesta and Pahlavi, and converted the Pahlavi of the Bundahishn into transliterated Avestan for the libretto. I did not write the script, although I love all things calligraphic; the libretto is in the font called Avesta.

If they are useful, here are the notes from the frontispiece of my score:

The seven creations is concert-length a cappella opera that recounts the creation story of the ancient Zoroastrians. This composition is the result of two separate sojourns to Bombay, India (in January 2005 and January 2007), and my friendships with Nariman, Coomi, and Sorab Wadia, who were my first exposure to this fascinating culture and faith. Zoroastrianism is arguably the world’s first monotheism, and was the most populous faith on earth during the life of Christ. Even though Zoroastrianism began in what is today modern Iran, north India is home to most Zoroastrians (who are known as Parsis, to differentiate them from Zoroastrians in Iran, called Iranis). In India, Bombay is among the most densely-populated enclaves of Zoroastrianism, a faith which predates and has influenced the most populous religions on the planet: including Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

While I was in Bombay, Nariman Wadia was kind enough to arrange for me the opportunity to research Zoroastrian texts at the Cama Oriental Institute. While there, I was able to read from copies of the Avesta (the compiled sacred texts of the Parsis), including the Gathas and an ancient copy of the Persian cosmology, called the (Greater Iranian) Bundahishn. While the Bundahishn is a document with its recorded origins in the 6th or 7th century AD, the Gathas are hallowed as the words of Zarathushtra (known as Zoroaster in Greek). The Gathas are most likely the oldest music in recorded history, and have been handed down by the rote oral memorization of Zoroastrian priests (or mobed), from father to son, since Zoroaster first uttered them. Some think that Zoroaster lived between 1500 and 2000 years before Christ, perhaps 4000 years ago.
The language of the *Gathas* is so old that, when Zoroastrian priests finally decided to record them in the 6th century, they had to invent a phonetic alphabet to do so. At that time, the priestly class spoke Middle Persian (or Pahlavi), which was the language of the *Bundahishn*. However, the language of the *Gathas*, which only priests could speak or understand, had been so pristinely preserved that it contained many sounds that were foreign to the vernacular. So, the priests invented a language to record the *Gathas*, and since the language and its script were meant only for this sacred text, they called it Avestan. This is the beautiful font that you will find throughout the texts and translations of this entire cosmological cycle.

The relationship between the *Gathas* and the *Bundahishn*, even over such a vast stretch of time, is truly remarkable. The hymns of Zarathustra ask so many questions about the origins of the universe, and the cosmological text from two millennia later answers them in great and beautiful detail – always acknowledging the cosmic balance between good and evil, and emphasizing the human choice between the two that is so essential to the Zoroastrian faith.

A synopsis of *The seven creations* would go something like this. Ahuramazda and Ahriman are the universal deities of good and evil. ... Although Gav and Gayomart perish, their legacy lives on in the multiplicity of animal species and humankind, and their essence is enshrined in the Sun and the Moon, to reflect upon our world and remind us of their sacrifice at the beginning of time. Throughout the narrative of this cosmology, verses from the *Gathas* are interspersed, concluding with the most joyous strains that refer to Heaven with the unforgettable moniker: “the House of Song.” What choral singer or enthusiast wouldn’t love to endorse such a description of the afterlife?

I must acknowledge the writings of Mary Boyce and Raiomond Mirza, as well as the library of Mark Ketter, who helped me immensely with gaining the cultural context to undertake writing this piece. The timeless melodies of the *Gathas* included in this composition were given wonderful voice by Ervad Aspandiya Dadachanji. There are so many people to thank for making this work possible: from Pervez, who fixed my dying computer in a single afternoon, to Bobbo, the British Airways agent who found my missing luggage. I also have to acknowledge the kindness of Mary Wieneke, who allowed me to work on movements IV and V at her camp at Bear Island, New Hampshire, and the patience of Jon Seydl and Daniel McLean, who provided the solace for movements VI and VII in Cleveland, Ohio. However, none of this would have been possible without generosity of the Wadia family: Sorab, Coomi, and most of all, Nariman. I will always cherish their kindness and grace.

Jimmy Pochkhanawalla, the successful excise duty lawyer, is in animated conversation with retired Supreme Court judge, Sam Variava. What draws him and the loyal long table groupies to the Club every afternoon, despite summer swelter, monsoon squall or year-round temperamental lift? Convenience? Yes, it’s just a brief’s throw away from the High Court. The food? Yes, you are unlikely to get as hearty a lunch at this price elsewhere. But the true attraction is more visceral: “It is the Ripon Club’s Parsi character, and we will resolutely ensure that this never changes,” says apro Jimmy emphatically.

He elaborates, “In the 45 minutes or so that I spend here, I can get my mental cells completely rejuvenated in the company of like-minded — or more often unlike-minded — fellow Parsis. We can joke irreverently about our own foibles, everybody else’s shortcomings, and freely use language that would make non-Parsis take offence.”

And what is this magically recharging conversation about? Pat comes the reply: “Lewis Carroll!” and our lawyer friend launches into a schoolboy recitation of ‘The Walrus and the Carpenter’: “‘The time has come the Walrus said / To talk of many things./ Of ships and sails and sealing wax / Of cabbages and kings.’ Yes. Madam, the talk on any afternoon will cover any and every thing.”

There’s a sanctity about the long table. Only members can sit there; if they have brought a guest, they are relegated to one of the smaller four and six-seat arrangements in the cavernous hall. All the tables are laid with white table linen, unstarched but unbowed.

Apro Jimmy, who joined the club in 1981, is a toddler as memberships go. The oldest in terms of age is Minoo Vajifdar, 94, former MD of Tata, and he was elevated to this slot recently with the death in July of Homi Vakil at 88, who had outlived all the people who had joined the club when the past century was still young. Alas, Rustomjee K Bomanjee who held this record when I had first encountered the Ripon Club some 40
years ago, has passed on to the great long table in Paradise. Lingering over mint tea and the Evening News of India (which too is now history) in white cotton three-piece suit with detachable mother-of-pearl buttons, he had acerbically corrected me, “I am the oldest in membership, not in age. I’ve been here since 1916.” Peering through the haze of cataract and memory, he recalled that “the club was a far livelier place. There was an exchange of ideas. And it had the reputation of serving the best food at a reasonable price. For twelve annas I used to eat a six-course meal. And I hope you don’t mind my saying so, Madam, but this club used to be more relaxed before ladies were allowed in.”

Indeed, this was the most cataclysmic of the small gusts of change that have crept past the club’s heavy doors. At first they were admitted on the premises only after 4 pm, then they were allowed as associate members. But the doughty women lawyers and brokers from the nearby Bombay Stock Exchange soon asserted themselves, and now enjoy full-fledged rights. The old stag emblem of the club is a mocking reminder of a historic defeat.

The secretary, Mediomaha (‘Jarthostsahebnamamava’) Canteenwalla, rifles through a dog-eared AGM report and informs us that membership today stands at 669, with women accounting for 79. Mr Canteenwalla is a “retired chemical engineer who spent all my working life at Godrej”. The ‘joonna jamana ni’ 10-ft high steel cupboards flanking the flaking walls of his ledger-piled office however bear the imprimatur of ‘Allwyn’. Sacrilege!

We forgo the fabled Wednesday dhansak (an even bigger sacrilege). Over the akuri on toast starter to the main course of ‘keema pan rolls’ (mine) and macaroni-cheese (hers), my member host, Kamal Mulla, tells me of the long-drawn out problem with the building’s lift which has made the earlier lunch-time attendance sali thin. But Wednesdays and Fridays offer fare that still makes members haul themselves up three flights of the wide, wooden staircase. Friday is “Parsi too, usually pulao-dar, murghi na farcha etc”.

What do the members want of the meals, which are the club’s only noticeable activity? The caterer, Tehmtan Dumasia replies promptly. “Sojju ne sastu, good and cheap.” He hands us a xerox-ed copy of the monthly menu and the gratuitous
information that he “also caters for the Parsi Gymkhana, Campion school, daily dabbas and party orders”. In fact, the Ripon Club itself is happy to host a member’s dinner or even high-tea party; non-Parsi guests covet the opportunity to slip into this time quaint time warp that has survived Mumbai’s tsunami of change.

Indeed, for a brief period in the 1980s the ‘RC’ was ‘discovered’ by the young (Sacrilege no.3?) when jazz concerts used to be held on its terrace thanks to the aficionado Niranjan Jhaveri, who wasn’t Parsi, but his wife Marina was. These ended after ‘some’ residents of nearby buildings objected. “Of course we Parsis would never break the rules, less so pay to break them, and so we stopped the music, however popular it was,” chimed in another member.

For the same reason, the ‘Pithu’ has perforce undergone a ‘change in user status’. It’s a strange cane trellised enclosure. It began life as a bar, hence the name which comes from the stills in the old Parsi settlements where alcohol was lavishly brewed and quaffed. But, as Pochkhanawalla points out, “We realized that there were too many licences to be applied for and too many bribes to be paid.” Which the upright community would never stoop to, no? So a TV set was installed and members watch cricket matches, no doubt recalling the good old days of ‘apro Nari and apro Polly’. You can bet your last dagli that no one, but no one, would deign to switch on the saas-bahu soaps that have the rest of India enthralled.

“Times have changed,” despairs Pochkhanawalla, “and it breaks my heart to see the club’s antique Chinese vases and silver tureens now locked behind glass cases instead of being proudly displayed. So many businesses, and Parsis, have moved to the more affordable north Bombay; the ‘Fort’ stronghold of the community is a shadow of itself.”

But Sir Pherozeshah Mehta’s bust on the marble pedestal remains steadfast. Indeed unmovable. Justifiably so. Wasn’t he the moving spirit behind the Ripon’s founding on a sultry August Sunday in 1884 in the stately drawing room of the baronial Readymoney Hall on Malabar Hill? In attendance was a glitter of worthies, the Jeejeebhoyos, Petits, Jehangirs, Banajees, Wadias, Camas, Kangas ...

With the typical compromise of the community, a club formed to instil nationalism was named after a British Viceroy. (“I say, Sir Dinshaw, we can’t call it the Rammohun Roy Club, can we?”) Besides, wasn’t Lord Ripon known to select pro-Indian jurors even in cases where a Briton was in the dock? Hadn’t a European club, incensed by his sympathy for the “damned Black”, hoisted a garland of shoes on its flagpole the day he sailed away from the shores of Ind?

The Club grew, and soon its excellent bill of fare became more popular than its politics. No one can blame the Parsis for not getting their priorities right. Grand banquets and lavish entertainment was laid on for the city’s important citizens; the magnificent terrace was the venue of many a ball where the finest orchestras played and the gentry waltzed till dawn broke over the tiled roofs. When Sir Cusrow Wadia bowed out of the textile industry selling his Century Mills to Sir Chunnilal Mehta, where else could the farewell dinner be held but at the Ripon?

But soon the glitter began to tarnish. The sun had set on the Empire, and with it faded the Parsi hey-day. The past glory sunk into the shadows, or at least sunk into the ‘fornicator’ arm chairs still lining one wall of the dining room. They remain the privilege and preserve of the older solicitors snoring away their lunch.

Tread softly, stranger, for the ghosts that lurk here are precious and unique. Outside roars a raucous world of thundering double-deckers and strident commerce. But here in the cool shaded hall, this is but a distant whisper. The faded portraits of baronets, the dull black Burma teak sideboards, the chiming clocks, yes even hat racks, all
stand observing an eternal minute’s silence to the memory of a
more gracious era. In the mottled glass bookcases, volumes quietly
disintegrate: D F Karaka and Rustom Masani, the classics, outdated
encyclopedias, bound copies of ancient National Geographic.

We tiptoe out of this world of Dhansak and Dickens and leave
undisturbed Muncherjee Micawber waiting for something to turn up
(probably caramel custard), Pestonjee Pickwick perusing the
afternoon papers and Cyrus Marner poring over his gilt-edged pot of
Tata shares.

Photos taken by Tommy Dumasia on behalf of Hamazor, after written permission
sought from Ripon Club, Mumbai.

Bachi Karkaria is National Metro Editor of The Times of India. She is the first Indian on the board of the
World Editors Forum; she also sits on the Board of the India AIDS Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation.

She is popular columnist, an authority on urbanisation and AIDS, and recipient of the international
Mary Morgan-Hewitt Award for Lifetime Achievement. She is the author of ‘Dare To Dream’ (Viking-
Penguin), the best-selling biography of M S Oberoi, as well as two collections, “Erratica” and “Your Flip
Is Showing”. She has adapted The Rummy Game, a play which has been successfully staged in India,
Europe and the USA.

Mumbai Parsis encouraged to play cricket

The first Indians to take up cricket when the
British introduced the game in India, were
 Parsis. They dominated the game in Mumbai
for more than a century but lately the Parsis
of this city are not attracted to the game.

The Parsee Gymkhana, the Parsee Cyclist
Club and former captain of the Indian team
Nari Contractor have announced a project to
revive the game in the community. The BPP
will provide grounds at its housing colonies in
Byculla, Colaba and Napean Sea Road to
train young Parsis in the game with former
Ranji player Zubin Bharucha as coach.

The Rustomjee Group who are financing the
project have created pitches, training
enclosures and will provide kits. Boman Irani,
chairman and managing director said,
“Cricket is an immensely popular sport in
India and the world over, and is a favourite
among the Parsi community. We are happy to
be associated with the cause and sponsor the
game among younger generation of the
community to further promote cricket.”

After the Oriental Cricket Club was formed in
1848, more than two dozen other clubs sprung
up in the Parsi localities. When a group of
Parsis travelled to Britain in 1886 to play, they
were the first Indians to do so. Players such as,
Russy Mody, Polly Umrigar, Nari Contractor,
Farokh Engineer and Rusy Surti played for the
national team. In the 1961-62 Indian tour to
West Indies, there were four Parsis on the team
but the last time any Parsi was on the Indian
team was wicket keeper Farokh Engineer in the
70s. Since Bharucha played in the Mumbai
Ranji team in the 1990s there has been no
player from the community. Neville Wadia, a
former Kanga League player was recently
mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records
when he became the oldest player to score a
century in T-20 cricket at the age of 64.

[source: http://www.ndtv.com/article/cities/cricket-
pitch-parsis-aim-to-recover-lost-ground-59705]
Few organizations endure past the first few years of their existence. Once the fervour of the initial founders dims it is difficult to sustain the organization and after those founding fathers are gone often so is the organization that was founded on high principles and noble aspirations. Not so the YMZA. Founded in 1910, by the then youthful and enthusiastic male members of our community (and thus the name) it was named the “Young Men’s Zoroastrian Association”.

YMZA was founded along the lines of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) with a special emphasis on religion, literature and drama. The call to form the organization was given by Pherozeshah R Mehta, the editor of the Parsi newspaper the Parsi Sansar. Dinshaw Nadirshaw Kabraji mobilized the young men of the BVS to come together to form the organization and thus the YMZA was founded with Sir Jehangir Kothari as President, Sheriarji Contractor and Jamshed Nusserwanji as secretaries, Dinshaw Kabraji as Treasurer, and Dr Dhalla as Advisor.

In its hey day the YMZA had its own cricket team and even offered ambulance and first aid services under Dr Kaikhusrow Contractor. The YMZA was often the preferred forum for lectures by the learned Dastur Dhalla. In addition the society hosted literary activities including readings from Shakespeare and the Shahnameh as well as religious activities including communal prayers on Hamkaras. The association’s commitment to literary and cultural pursuits was such that in 1923 the great poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore accepted an invitation to the society to an event held in his honour. [this event was jointly hosted with KZBM, the ‘sister’ assoc. - Ed]. In addition classical Indian dancer, Uday Shankar and singer, Omkarnath performed for the patrons of the society. By this time the YMZA had its own hall, the Hormusji Katrak Hall and a library, the Sohrab Katrak library.

Other prominent presidents and workers of the YMZA include Sohrab Katrak and Dr Dhalla.
later on Behram Rustomji who revived the YMZA after a period of inactivity along with Zal Contractor, Feredoon Dadachanji, Kawas Colabewala and Godrej Sidhwa, the latter who continues to render service to the community and the YMZA.

The organization which was formed in British India has weathered turbulent times from the partition of the subcontinent to wars and civil strife and a changing demographic landscape, which has seen younger members of the community move away from Pakistan.

But with the exodus of the Parsis to far off lands the youth of YMZA went into oblivion and were left with some die hard members who struggled to keep YMZA alive but due to lack of enthuse a time came when all YMZA activities came to a halt.

Even though the YMZA has been dormant for stretches of time some young stalwart or the other has always come along to shepherd it through difficult times and into a new era of community service.

In 1990, one such group of our community's youth took over the reigns and after a hiccoughing start set the ball rolling. The rechristened Young Mazdayasnian Zoroastrian Association (to be more inclusive and allow females into its rank and file and onto the Council of Management) has rekindled the flame alighted by our forefathers. In these last two decades, YMZA has managed to successfully reactivate all the dormant events of YMZA and introduced some new activities. The response of our community towards all these events has been overwhelming. YMZA’s signature events, the elocution competitions, film viewings and religious lectures are being held in tandem with the newer annual events like the music competition, the art competition and Gujrati Naataks (plays). A conscious effort towards our elders is being made by way of holding regular activities for the BMH Parsi Hospital and infirmary patients.

Today’s Council of Management include - Shahpur Maneckji (President), Ervad Sohrab Katrak, Behram Rustomji, Zal S D Contractor (courtesy Aalla Contractor), Feredoon Dadachanji (courtesy Zarin Kakalia), Godrej Sidhwa (courtesy Dina Sidhwa).

YMZA building in 1920 which unfortunately does not exist today

Godrej Sidhwa, Behroze Khambatta, Kaizer Irani (Joint Honorary Secretary), Dinshaw B Avari (Joint Honorary Secretary), Freddy Sidhwa (Honorary Treasurer), Nergesh Jamasji, Perin Mama, Shahrazad Irani, Natasha Mobed, Natasha Mavalvala & Ratanshaw Makujina.

YMZA’s main aims are -
a) The diffusion of secular, ethical and religious knowledge and the cultivation of elocutionary and argumentative powers by means of lectures, debates, and readings
on literary and scientific subjects, open either to the members of the Association only or to the general public as the Association may from time to time determine.

b) The promotion of the interests of the Parsi community.

c) The promotion of goodwill and friendliness by means of social gatherings, entertainments, and such other functions.

d) The promotion of all sports and games indoors and outdoors – for the physical well being of the Parsi community.

The Association as a body being non-political does not join nor affiliate itself with any political activity or movement. This shall not, however, debar members from lecturing on subjects political under the auspices of the Association at meetings of the Parsi community.

YMZA’s main competitions are -

- Katayun & Navroze Maneckji’s Dr Pithawala English Poetry & Prose competition in English
- Athornan Mandal’s Macca & Darab Sachinwala Gujarati elocution competition
- Minwalla Music Competition
- Jamshed Mehta English Elocution competition
- Hilla & Noshir Jamasji Drawing & Painting Competition

The YMZA library, initially established at the Katrak Hall, has been moved to the Dinshaw B Avari Colony and amalgamated with the Dastur Dr Dhalla library.

To commemorate the centenary of the YMZA on 21st March 2010, a commemorative silver coin was made and sold to the Karachi Zarhostis and the diaspora; a jashan ceremony held on March 21; on special request by YMZA, Mrs Rashna Gazdar’s (nee Bhumgara) School of Music put on a piano recital on March 28, for the community; a special Centenary competition entitled “Su Tamay Paanchmi Class Na Student Thee Hushiar Chao?” on June 5; finally, a natak troupe will perform for the entire Gujarati community of Karachi on November 5th - 7th 2010, called “Kutra Ni Punchdi Waaki” also known as “Bicharo Burjor”, directed by Yazdi Karanjia.

Synopsis:
For starters, *Kutra ni Punchdi Waanki* means a dog’s tail is never straight. No matter how much and how long one tries, a dog’s tail can never straighten. This is the theme that runs through this hilarious drama about a play-boyish husband and his family.

Burjor is the main character of the play - a carefree young man prone to gaiety. He takes full advantage of the opportunity afforded by the temporary absence of his wife, Farida, to invite over an old flame, Dinavaz. Unfortunately, Farida’s sudden return earlier than expected upsets Burjor’s applecart. Farida comes home just at the wrong time, when Dinavaz is visiting him and scampers to hide somewhere. In desperation, to conceal the reality, Burjor calls upon his friend Jehanbux to extricate him from his awkward predicament. To add insult to injury, Burjor’s ‘ex-ex’ old flame and other acquaintances drop by. Now the situation is one complication after another. The two friends work as a team to keep everyone happy. Will they succeed?
Zoroastrians welcomed The Most Rev’d & Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury to their place of worship in Harrow. The foundation of the See of Canterbury by St Augustine dates from 597 AD, thus it was a historic first for both religions – Zoroastrianism and Christianity for the senior most religious leader in the UK, second only to Her Majesty, The Queen, and the senior most primate bishop of the worldwide Anglican Communition to visit a Zoroastrian place of worship.

The Archbishop was welcomed to the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) by Mr Malcolm M Deboo, President of ZTFE, on a rainy Friday afternoon, 1 October 2010 at 1:45pm. Parsi Zoroastrian women wearing traditional colourful garas welcomed His Grace by performing the traditional ‘achhu michu’ ceremony and showering him with rice. Mrs Shernaz B Sadri JP, ZTFE Joint Social Secretary, placed a garland of flowers on the Archbishop’s shoulders, followed by the Iranian Zoroastrian women - Mrs Mahnaz Ostad and Mrs Mandana Moavenat, sprinkling rosewater, allowing His Grace to see his face in the mirror and offering him figs, almonds, pistachio nuts and Persian sweets.

His Grace was delighted to see the photograph of his friend the Late Professor Mary Boyce “Honoured Friend of the ZTFE” adorn the walls of the Zoroastrian Centre. President Deboo was informed by His Grace that he had known Professor Boyce and aware of her immense contribution to Zoroastrian Studies. His Grace had spent much of his earlier career as a lecturer in divinity at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford successively and was delighted to learn from President Deboo, that Professor Boyce together with the Zoroastrian philanthropists Zartoshty Brothers had established the only Chair in Zoroastrian Studies in the world at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Malcolm Deboo formally welcomed His Grace, The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, noting the visit as “historical, the first time in the 149 year old history of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, that we have been graced by the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. To the best of my knowledge it is the first time in the history of Christianity and Zoroastrianism that an Archbishop of Canterbury has made an official visit to a Zoroastrian place of worship. We are delighted and humbled you have put time aside to spend the day with
us face to face and get to know us better. We believe you are a true friend to make so much free time available to us. We value your friendship and present to you today a mosaic spread of our Zoroastrian religion, heritage, culture and cuisine”. He invited the Archbishop to raise any question and points he may wish to be addressed.

His Grace the Lord Archbishop responded by saying, that he was looking forward to his visit and added; “For a community relatively small in size, its contribution has been enormous to the life of this country and also to the life of so many great world religions.” His Grace added; “In the light of this community I feel that I am touching some very great root of the religious inspiration of so many of the world religious faiths at this present point in time”. The Archbishop expressed his delight at being invited to “listen, learn and deepen our friendship”, adding that “for a small community in size your contribution is great”. His Grace concluded by thanking his Zoroastrian host by stating; “It’s important in this country to remember the smaller communities of faith, just as I have sometimes said; there is no such thing as a small church, only small Christians. Heart and vision is what matters.”

Lord Karan Bilimoria CBE DL Baron of Chelsea, spoke of the close links that the Zoroastrians had forged with the British Empire, who considered the community as impartial and people of integrity. His Lordship gave an account of the first three non-English members of Parliament who were all Zoroastrians, the contributions of Zoroastrian owned global companies to the British economy, such as the House of Tata, which since its foundation in the nineteenth century has given away two thirds of all profits to worthwhile causes.

Dr Rashna Writer, Historian and Lecturer in Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS, gave an account of “Who are the Zoroastrians?” ZTFE Past President and current Vice President Paurushasp Jila gave a power point presentation of the history of the establishment of the present day Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe. Counsel Emeritus Noshir Avari, informed the Archbishop of the concept and mode of Zoroastrian worship in the United Kingdom and mentioned that during all the 35 Jashans, the Zoroastrian priests pray for ‘the monarch, for it is under her rule, in her land that we must live’.

Ms Nazreen K Avari, Religious Teacher of the Zoroastrian Education Fun Club, gave a power point presentation on how Zoroastrian values were being inculcated into the very young through the religious educational fun club she runs with two other teachers. Master of Ceremonies, Past President Dorab Mistry, invited the Archbishop and guests to watch a short film “Zoroastrian footprints on sands of time”, premiered at Ninth World Zoroastrian Congress in Dubai 2009. The film highlighted the advancement of the Zoroastrian community as they have migrated throughout the world in the last 50 years.

Ms Shernaz Engineer, the founder of Verity Group, a London based employment enterprise, and Chairperson of World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce (WZCC), UK Chapter, informed the Archbishop of her endeavour to promote entrepreneurship amongst the Zoroastrians thereby expressing ethical and moral values through commerce. Mr Jehangir Sarosh, an eminent interfaith representative and President Emeritus of Religions for Peace Europe, spoke about the Zoroastrian community’s active involvement in furthering interfaith dialogue in UK and Europe.

Mrs Zerbanoo Gifford founder Trustee of Asha Centre, eminent Social Worker, writer, politician and former Harrow Councillor – first Asian Councillor elected - and Liberal politician, spoke of the “Asha Centre”, as a place of ‘beauty and inspiration for all faiths and people’ on Zoroastrian principles for the preservation of the natural elements of the earth and of goodness and charity.

After the formal presentations His Grace engaged with the speakers by asking questions on the various presentations he had...
heard. This was followed by a tea break where The Archbishop sampled sweet milky tea with mint and home made Zoroastrian delicacies including sweet natural yogurt, sev and ravo (roasted vermicelli and semolina dishes garnished with almonds, cashews, pistachios and sultanas), dar-ni pori (pie made from rice flour stuffed with sweet lentils), dried fruits and nuts, Iranian baklava, naan khataai and batasas (sweet and savoury crumbly biscuits).

The Archbishop together with the Bishop of Willesden and other eminent guests were invited by the Zoroastrian priests, dressed in white robes, to visit the Setayash Gah (prayer room) to witness a demonstration of the Zoroastrian Bui Ceremony (feeding the Holy Fire) with the recital of the Atash Nyish (litany to fire). President Deboo explained to His Grace the significance of various stages of the procedures for the act of reverence of the Fire; that the Zoroastrian religion recognises a consecrated sacred fire as a living entity. Thus it has an immortal soul and a proper name, generically referred to as “Atash Padshah”.

At 5pm the Zoroastrian Centre was open to ZTFE members and their families to celebrate Jashn-e Mehregan and dine with His Grace The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. Amongst the 400 plus audience were many invited noteworthy guests. His Grace The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury together with the Bishop of Willesden re-entered the Zartoshty Brothers Hall, the fire was lit in a silver afarganyu (fire urn) on the stage and Atash Nyish (litany to fire) recited by the Zoroastrian priests. During the recital, His Grace had his head covered and was following the prayers in the Khordeh Avesta in English Transliteration and Translation by Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga. After the recital Ervad Rustom K Bhedwar gave a brief explanation of the ceremony.

Following the prayers, Mandana Moavenat wished everybody a happy Mehregan in English and Persian followed by a presentation on the observance of Mehregan. Mandana concluded by thanking the generosity of Mrs Goli and Late Mehraban Farhangi to whom ZTFE extend their heartfelt gratitude for their continuous support of Jashn-e Mehregan. President Deboo in his address welcomed His Grace The Lord Archbishop, as a Friend of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and of the Zoroastrian community in the UK. The President stated that Zoroastrians valued this friendship as it allowed them to sweeten the milk by contributing to the wellbeing of the UK, just as Zoroastrians continue to do in India, the country that gave our ancestors religious sanctuary over a thousand years ago.

Past President Dorab E Mistry narrated the journey of the ZTFE, during his presidency, purchasing a heavily dilapidated grade II* listed heritage building in 2000. By working in partnership with English Heritage and Harrow Council the building was restored by 2005 under the supervision of architect and past President Mr Shahrokh Shahrokh. He recounted that when the ZTFE entered into

Zoroastrian Education Fun Club, aged from 4 to 14, to the performance of Sheer-e Shireen – The Sweetened Milk. His Grace thoroughly enjoyed the performance and the positive message of Sheer-e/Shireen of welcoming refugees.
agreement to purchase the site from the exiting owners it did not have the required funds, but the Zoroastrian community had rallied and donated money. Past President Mistry was certain that there was an invisible hand working in background as it brought forward the Zartoshty Brothers, the legendary philanthropists to contribute the lion share of funds not only to purchase but also to restore the building to its original beauty for which the Zoroastrian Centre was awarded the plaque by Harrow Heritage Trust. Today the Zoroastrian Centre is the only registered Zoroastrian place of worship in the UK.

His Grace commenced by thanking the ZTFE and the Zoroastrian community for their warmth in welcoming him earlier in the afternoon and thanking all those who made presentations to educate him, very successfully and so very attractively about Zoroastrianism. His Grace also thanked the young children for their magnificent performance of ‘Sheer-e Shireen’ observing that he had expected to meet some new friends today, but had not expected to meet prophets, priests and kings. He informed the audience that he was familiar with the Zoroastrian faith in his personal capacity as he had a Zoroastrian friend, but also academically recognised that the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were deeply saturated with Iranian (Zoroastrian) religious imagery and ideas. In his closing remarks, His Grace returned to the Zoroastrian integrity and standing before a purifying fire, which is central in the Zoroastrian tradition, a concept shared by all in the UK and in our world at the moment. He concluded by thanking the Zoroastrians not only for their hospitality but for inspiration. [The Archbishop’s full address follows after the report].

The Zoroastrian priests made a presentation of a woollen shawl, wrapping it around the shoulders of His Grace, which is a traditional mark of respect to holders of high office, together with a silver ZTFE medal. This was followed by a presentation of the Gatha CD by Trustee Ervad Rustom K Bhedwar. On behalf of the Iranian Zoroastrian community, Mandana Moavenat presented His Grace with a Zoroastrian carpet from Iran. ZTFE President presented a copy of the 6kg book; “A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art Religion and Culture”, edited by Pheroza Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree.

Following the close of the formal proceedings, His Grace The Lord Archbishop was escorted out of the Zartoshty Brothers Hall and led to the balcony accompanied by ZTFE President and Lord Bilimoria, to engage with Zoroastrians and invited guests. Forty-five minutes later, the Archbishop re-entered the Zartoshty Brothers Hall and was invited to partake in Ghambar with all present, for sagan-nu dhun dar (rice and lentil dish), kolmi-no paatio (prawns in sweet and sour tomato gravy) and lagan-nu custard (baked custard). His Grace enjoyed the hearty meal just as he had the various Zoroastrian delicacies served earlier at tea.

At exactly 8:30pm as previously agreed between Lambeth Palace and ZTFE, His Grace departed the Zartoshty Brothers Hall for the last time to the cheers and claps of Zoroastrians.
Archbishop of Canterbury’s address to the Zoroastrian community

President Malcolm Deboo, Lord Bilimoria, Honoured Guests and friends:

My first very pleasant duty is to say what a great pleasure and privilege it’s been to be welcomed as I have been welcomed this afternoon by this community. I must say a special word of thanks first to all those who made presentations this afternoon to educate us so very successfully and so very attractively about Zoroastrianism.

Second, my thanks to the young people who presented us with such a magnificent performance of the ‘sweetening of the milk’. I had expected to meet some new friends today, but I hadn’t expected to meet prophets, priests, and kings.

One of my dearest friends came from a Zoroastrian family - the late, much lamented and much loved Nadir Dinshaw, who although he had grown up as a Christian spoke to me time and time again of how important in his life had been the heritage of the Zoroastrian community and Zoroastrian faith. Almost every time we met and that was quite frequently over many years, he would speak about his beloved grandmother and about how most of what he understood about God had come from his grandmother. I think it’s possibly something that grandmothers do the world over, to pass on the knowledge of God, but that’s a matter for another session.

But I remember what he said because it brought alive for me the way in which some religious communities seem to be destined by their history to be interpreters of different worlds. Very often these are communities that have been through deep trauma, that have been uprooted, displaced, that have a history of suffering, and yet somehow through all that have been given the great gift of spreading reconciliation because they have had to inhabit so many different worlds and speak so many different languages. They have a role in bringing strangers together, and this is one such community. It is a community whose history going back over thousands of years now is a history of displacement, after that long period of which we have been reminded today, when Zoroastrianism was the faith of one of the world’s greatest civilisations and one of the great empires of the ancient world. From that came centuries of wandering and of creating new life in alien environments. Lord Bilimoria spoke a little while ago about the way in which loss and suffering brings you close to the edge of despair and yet generates somehow a strange energy and perhaps a new depth. That is certainly, once again, the history of this community.

Years ago when I was first doing my academic research I focused on the life of the Russian Emigrés; in Paris and there once again you see a small group of people dispersed, uprooted and traumatised, stripped of the power and influence they once had. And yet, when they arrived in Western Europe they became an extraordinary catalyst for new thinking, new discoveries, new spiritual depths. That kind of community shows some kind of analogy to what’s happened in Zoroastrian communities century after century.

Of course it is one of those many areas in which the experience of the Zoroastrians and the experience of the Jewish people comes so close together. I spoke earlier this afternoon in my introductory remarks about
the way in which the Zoroastrian faith and the Zoroastrian heritage had fed into the mainstream of so many of the great religions. When I first began to study the Bible seriously and began looking at the footnotes (not always a good idea but sometimes it has to be done) again and again there would be references to “the influence of Iranian ideas”. And most of those who have read the Jewish scriptures with care and attention will realise that, yet again, the experience of uprootedness and exile for the Jewish people, exiles in the Persian culture, meant that they too became carriers and interpreters of new ideas. When they returned from exile they brought with them a new vision of angelic protectors, of a battle between good and evil forces in the universe, a sense of the impending end of things when we would stand before our maker, even the hope of a saviour.

Through that Jewish absorption of Iranian ideas, Christians themselves took on many of the most characteristic features of their faith. And when the Muslim faith begins centuries later there is once again a sense of the deep penetration of the imagery and thinking and poetry of that faith by some of these ancient traditions and insights. When we speak of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we might speak of three religions deeply saturated with Iranian ideas and religious traditions also.

But that’s not all, because the Zoroastrian community, displaced into the great Indian sub-continent, that astonishing, fertile, hospitable environment where so many religions have rubbed up against each other for so many centuries or even millennia, that transposition to India meant that the Zoroastrian community became yet again an interpreter, a mediator between different worlds. It carried with it an understanding of the complex religious environment of India, the Hindu & Sikh traditions, Jainism and Buddhism, as if this community through its history and its geography was destined to be one carrying all these histories, all these legacies, all these understandings of God, befriending them all, threatening none of them. That is a very great gift of God, a very great gift to the rest of us through this community.

But there is a little more to say and Lord Bilimoria has once again given me the cue to say it: ‘Industry and integrity’. Integrity is something we all long to grow into in our own lives and is something that we long to see in our society. When there is a bit of a famine of integrity we all feel it - and we have all felt it at times, sadly, in this country in the last few years. We know what we’re missing: integrity, the word itself, comes from the Latin for ‘wholeness’. Integrity is the ability to hold your life together, not to let it be fragmented, broken up, with parts of it hidden and parts of it revealed, but rather to be able to stand in the light, in the truth without fear. That’s integrity, but for that to be real we need a sense of the living truth, of a living light to which we are answerable, which pours out strength and benefit upon us; a reality that we’re responsible to and yet a reality that is a caring environment for us, the reality ultimately of God.

We Christians read in our Scriptures that ‘our God is a consuming fire’. We recognise that that image of painful purification fire suggests is one which tells us that integrity, that wholeness, is costly. It’s hard work letting go of our lives and our self protections and that is why the call to integrity is something which will never be simple, yet is always attractive, because we want wholeness.

So this faith, this religious tradition and this community, for which the concept of integrity standing before a purifying fire, is so central, is a tradition and a language which has a very great deal to say to all of us in this country and in our world at the moment. Integrity is vital for us, integrity is hard work - but it can be done when we believe that the light, strength and life in whose presence we stand, the God in whose presence we sit, is a God whose will is for our wholeness and our welfare.

So let me say thank you not only for hospitality but for inspiration. Thank you for witness to that fiery integrity which many centuries, many millennia of your history shows us. Thank you for that contribution to the world of religious dialogue which you represent and which you have inhabited in so many different places and in so many different languages, and in all of them shown the same honesty and welcome. Thank you for the gifts you have given all of us, the gifts God has given through you; thank you once again for making me so much at home in this unforgettable environment and this unforgettable community.

© Rowan Williams
His trials, tribulations, and “exhilarating experience” (p 415) of peacemaking as the United Nations Secretary General’s Personal Representative have been chronicled by Ambassador Marker in an earlier volume – *East Timor: A Memoir of the Negotiations for Independence* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2003). The current volume leads readers through the complicated world of the second half of the 20th century – from colonialism to post-colonialism and the rise of nationalism and fundamentalism.

Through it all, Jamsheed Marker did not simply hobnob with the globe’s movers and shakers; he was and is one of them despite the modest title of his narrative tour de force. On each page of *Quiet Diplomacy*, the reader will glean not just Marker’s “constant endeavor ... to record ... the events” but will learn much about how and why events transpired as they did thanks to his generously proffering “personal thoughts and reactions at the time they [ie, the events] occurred” (p 420).

Early in his diplomatic career within Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, Marker witnessed the rise and fall of African hopes for stable states that should have represented citizens’ wills and fulfilled their aspirations (pp 13-40). He does not mince words in summing up an underlying reason for the devastation that Africa has been experiencing: “a region caught up in the throes of the consequences of an event, which had transpired on a different continent, in an earlier century ... The Berlin Conference ... [and] ... Partition Treaties” (p 18). Yet he appropriately points out that local leaders often were “autocrats” (p 17) whose “ideological whims proved even more damaging to the economy” of nations (p 23) where problems were already being compounded by mounting poverty (p 37).

Marker’s career is remarkable for his knack at being at the right place at the right time, for next he held ambassadorships to Romania, Bulgaria, and the former Soviet Union (pp 45-164) during the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s when American and Russian rivalries had crystalized in the Cold War. Marker contrasts the “stunning variety of natural beauty” (p 47) with those communist nations “ruthless” leaders (pp 59, 79). Woven amidst the geopolitics are cultural gems like performances of the Bolshoi Theatre (pp 81-82) and tender memories of his daughters wishing goodnight to Soviet spies who listened through a microphone in their bedroom (p 113).

Then he plunged into nuclear proliferation issues as ambassador to Canada (pp 171-
172). Yet there too Jamsheed Marker found time to savor the land – even the Arctic Circle (p 176). After stints in then communist East Germany with concurrent accreditation to democratic Iceland, Ambassador Marker learned the ways of the Land of the Rising Sun – especially in connection with Japanese entrepreneurship, foreign policy, and national security (pp 225-229). Next in his steady upward rise, it was off to the United Nations in Geneva where constant interactions with international bureaucrats serving the various UN organizations further honed Marker’s already monumental diplomatic skills, from 1978-1980 (pp 239-259), even as he endured a family tragedy.

Jamsheed Marker would go on to represent Pakistan in Bonn, Paris, and Dublin as political, economic, and social conditions in Afghanistan deteriorated and Pakistani-American involvement there grew (pp 298-302). So it was most fitting that he was chosen to serve as Pakistan’s ambassador to Washington DC in 1986 where he would be directly enmeshed in dealing with “the revolving door of the American political system, whereby persons of talent, capability, and wealth move into public office ... and place their skills and experience, at the service of the nation” (p 312). President Ronald Reagan’s warm wishes for Marker’s birthday, which coincided with his presentation of credentials at the White House (p 316), proved an auspicious beginning. Despite Pakistan’s nuclear ambitions and the crisis in Afghanistan owing to the Soviet-Russian presence there, Marker would become a most-highly respected diplomat not only among his international colleagues but with American politicians as well (pp 328-353).

A brief interregnum, filled with teaching at Eckerd College in Florida, was quickly interrupted by a return to national service – this time as Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. That 4-year assignment (pp 368-415) took Marker into the heart of global decision-making: the UN Security Council. Twice during his tenure in New York, Pakistan assumed the rotating presidency of the Security Council (p 393). There, at the lofty heights of international diplomacy, Ambassador Marker’s great talents were put to test dealing with crises in Bosnia, North Korea, and Rwanda.

Ambassador Marker’s diplomatic memoirs are a poignant tale as well, by an astute insider, of how much Pakistan itself has changed from “a moderate Muslim state – peaceful, progressive, and developing on sound economic lines” (p 3) to “national self-denial ... with the government in Islamabad becoming dysfunctional” (pp 413-414). It is a sweeping eyewitness account of a world and a nation in the trials of modernity, by an individual who is very much an homme engagé involved in the important events and ideas of his time.

The characteristics of “idealism and intellectual humility” that Jamsheed Marker observed among the best of humans during his travels far and wide (p 421) apply in full measure to him as well. Throughout three decades of serving Pakistan and the world, Ambassador Jamsheed Marker was not only aware of the “successes and failures” of statecraft but, as important, brought to that great endeavor “the test of reason” (p 421). So read Ambassador Marker’s lavishly illustrated book, and learn from an internationally-respected statesman how and why geopolitics is so complicated, vibrant, and absolutely pertinent to all our lives.

Jamsheed K Choksy is professor of Central Eurasian, Iranian, Islamic, and International Studies and former director of the Middle Eastern Studies programme at Indiana University, Bloomington. He also is a member of the National Council on the Humanities at the US National Endowment for the Humanities. The views expressed are his own.
To mark the Shenshahi Navroze, 10 Parsi personalities who one would enjoy meeting or want at your dinner table were profiled by Deepika Sorabjee on 19 August, 2010.

Shaheen Mistry, 39, social activist and educationist
Shaheen Mistry makes one marvel at how a simple idea, when backed with dedication and belief, can make a real difference to so many. She is the founder of both Akanksha and Teach for India. For 20 years Akanksha’s dedicated volunteers, led by Mistry, have changed the lives of underprivileged children through art and education. And they continue to do so. They’re now looking to expand into existing government schools.

Teach for India, a newer idea and larger in scope, is taking the endeavor further afield. “Teach For India is a nationwide movement of outstanding college graduates and young professionals who will commit two years to teach full time in under resourced schools...” They’re currently open for applications for their fellowship programme, which has 8,000 places to fill. Through education, Mistry, a recent TED India speaker, hopes that the people she touches will become more self sufficient, with a possible route out of poverty.

Astad Deboo, 63, contemporary dancer
He apprenticed with the legendary Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Dance company early on in his career, which led to his life-long dedication to dance. Facing hardships that all new art faces in terms of funding and appreciation, his is a remarkable career that blossomed against the odds. “The main problem is the lack of platforms and presenters for modern dance,” in India, he says.

Deboo’s performances with Manipuri drummers, the deaf children from Chennai and the children of Mumbai’s Salaam Balak Trust have taken him from Brazil, to choreographing a dance in Mani Ratnam’s latest film “Raavan,” to the recent coronation of the new King of Bhutan. He will soon go to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. His new work “Incontro” is a collaboration with Swiss choreographer Thomas Mettler and premieres in Munich late October. Sadly the world sees far more of him than we do in Mumbai. [Hamazor had commissioned Ramu Ramanathan to interview Astad Deboo which appeared in Issue 3/2002 pp50-52]

Sarosh Patel, 39, event manager
His unflappable manner helped Zubin Mehta conduct the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra smoothly through an outdoor concert with Placido Domingo singing in front of a 5,000-strong crowd at the Cricket Club of India grounds in 2008. It was Patel’s covered stage and arrangements that ensured a successful evening through the light drizzle and subsequent spectacular fireworks. As the evening had to observe Mumbai’s strict 10 pm ‘noise’ deadline, his clockwork arrangements and on-the-spot adjustments were just the thing to please all parties.

His event management firm Effects Tech hosts corporate events for major companies across India and music concerts as well.
Kainaz Messman, 29, chef entrepreneur

Kainaz Messman’s Theobroma has, in the few short years since it first fired its ovens, become something of an institution at the southern end of Colaba Causeway. Serving cakes, sandwiches, excellent brownies and coffee, it is a hangout for tourists, the college crowd and all us mums who need to tuck in and use ‘stocking up for our hungry kids’ as an excuse. Messman’s family pitches in; after all Kainaz cut her teeth early helping in her mother’s home-baking business while still a young girl.

Ever smiling, she finds time to chat however busy and will often ask you to sample something new from the ovens with your coffee. After graduating from catering college at the Institute of Hotel Management in Mumbai, she honed her skills as a pastry chef with years of rigorous training at Oberoi hotels around the country. The business took a while to pick up as she learnt commerce on the job, but she now has outlets in Bandra and Mahalaxmi.

Zane Dalal, 46, conductor

Dalal, a Parsi who came from Los Angeles to Mumbai in 2007, was intrigued when told by an uncle that a Symphony Orchestra of India had been started at the National Centre of Performing Arts under the aegis of its Chairman Khushroo Suntook. He said the idea of the Indian orchestra sounded “wild and fantastical.” He stayed on after, sitting in at a rehearsal.

Three years on as Resident Conductor, working alongside conductor Marat Bisangaliev, Dalal is kept busy exploring “new territories with an orchestra still being built.” He finds his temporarily adopted city warm and welcoming and audiences and local Parsi friends have embraced his handsome presence. Last year he conducted a series of well attended music appreciation classes making Western Classical music more accessible to newer Mumbai audiences. [Profiled in Hamazor Issue 3/08 pp 56-60]

Shireen Gandhy, 45, gallerist

Don’t let that boisterous, lustrous spring of hair fool you. The head that lies beneath is a strong one. While much of the art market has slowed in recent years, Gandhy, at the helm of her gallery, Chemould Prescott Road (CPR), has not only managed to stay afloat but in the last year has taken her artists to the best fairs around the world. In a year which saw major downsizing in the budgets of the art world, her unstinting support of her artists and a substantial gallery practice is to be applauded.

She has ably taken over the mantle of one of the oldest galleries in Mumbai, founded by her parents Kekoo and Khorshed Gandhy, and in its fifth decade CPR has spacious new premises, an admirable roster of artists, both established and the new. And you can bet your last paint brush that at an after party she’ll be the first to shake her leg on an improvised dance floor.

Kaiwan Mehta, 35, architect and lecturer

Mehta brought Peccha Kuccha nights to Mumbai. A Japanese concept where you have 20 slides projected for 20 seconds to tell your entire story, turned out to be a hit in Mumbai. An architect and writer he also teaches art history while pursuing his doctorate at the Centre of Culture and Society in Bangalore.

Mehta’s book “Alice in Bhuleshwar - Navigating a Mumbai Neighbourhood” documents fast disappearing architectural details and a way of life in his “native
town” of Mumbai. He assisted as urban researcher on a recently completed project on Abu Dhabi that was seen at the Venice Biennale in 2009 and he is in the process of establishing, as one of its founder directors, Arbour, Research Initiatives in Architecture to be launched in October 2010.

He is a wonderful speaker and a joy to listen to as he walks into Jnanapravaha’s Indian Aesthetics class, almost always kurta clad, unraveling myths and symbols for you.

**Mehlli Gobhai, 79, abstract painter**

If you know Mehlli well, then you will accept that a visit to his studio will involve several phone calls as the light changes during the day. The way the light falls on his canvases will influence the time of your visit. But a visit to the studio of India’s foremost abstract painter is a wonderful morning into afternoon into evening kind of conversation that meanders, a persistent affable dog at your legs and, in the past, the cawing of a rescued and tenderly looked-after crow. And then the paintings. Parchment like weathered paper and canvas stack the walls and immerse you in the most mesmerizing grays and charcoals and reds all painstakingly layered and defined as the light changes in the studio and enters his canvas. Every flat surface is covered with books.

Having had successful shows with Chemould Prescott Road gallery in the past, we look forward to his next show with them in a few months as he promises to take on a new dimension in his canvases.

**Sooni Taraporevala, 53, filmmaker**

Petite and gentle under her trademark bob hairstyle, Taraporevala has packed in some amazing work in film since graduating from Harvard and NYU Cinema Studies. She wrote the screen play of Mira Nair’s critically acclaimed cross-over film “Salaam Bombay” and subsequently the scripts for “Mississippi Masala” and “Such A Long Journey,” among others.

Growing up within the community Taraporevala has chronicled the Parsis both in her book, “The Parsis: The Zoroastrians of Bombay” and in her critically acclaimed first feature film “Little Zizou” which won the National Award for the Best Film on Family Values. In both she captures the quaint, unique qualities and the fine nuances and eccentricities of this dwindling community that in years to come will be a documentation of customs that may have disappeared forever.

Between writing scripts and screening her films at film festivals around the world, she roams Mumbai’s streets with her digital Leica camera, capturing still moments in our busy city.

**Rishad Naoroji, 59, conservationist and photographer**

I have always found it ironic that as a Parsi, Naoroji should be so enraptured by raptors. He is an independent researcher specializing in raptor conservation. His definitive book, “Birds of Prey of the Indian subcontinent” took years in the making, perching on macchaans in various sanctuaries for months at a time and extensive travels around the country. His work over three years in Rajpipla forest resulted in the area of 500 square kilometers being turned into the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.

An accomplished photographer, he works closely with the Himalayan Club and the Bombay Natural History Society. Spend an evening with him and you will be regaled with stories of the wild not often heard in Mumbai’s salon circuit; after all, such single-minded dedication is rare.
Small plates for sharing include green mango paneer, anchovy tamarind pizza, and chickpea crusted skate with mint yogurt sauce. Foie Gras raspberry crostini accompanies a walnut salad, and grapefruit “confit” tops pork dumplings worthy of Beijing’s best eateries. Another customer favourite is the duck Portobello gratinee. The restaurant’s signature dish is pickled ginger scallops with candied red chilies. For dessert, try the hazelnut chocolate caviar cupcake with chocolate-chip ice cream. These gourmet dishes range from $7-15USD and are infused with enough passion and verve to compensate for the restaurant’s somewhat cramped dining quarters.

Chef Mehta was born in 1971 in Mumbai, India and grew up enjoying large portions of dhun-daar prawn patia (yellow lentils, spicy prawn salsa, and boiled rice) as well as other Parsi delicacies. Mehta’s grandfather was very knowledgeable about the medicinal properties of various ingredients and cured his grandson’s ailments with hot milk with turmeric or — in the case of the sniffles — one tablespoon each of honey, lime juice and brandy. As a child, Mehta grew fascinated about the curative properties of different types of food.

Much to the amusement of his family’s maids and cooks, young Mehta took an interest in the goings-on of the kitchen. Although Mehta’s father was a Chartered Accountant and his uncles and grandfather were all bankers, the child knew he was far less interested in counting rupees than...
onions, carrots, and peppers. The young man eventually announced his desire to learn about the culinary world beyond India, pursue a career as a chef, and eventually open his own restaurant.

Since Mehta’s parents raised him to pursue his passions even if they did not conform to other people’s expectations, they put their full support behind him and sent him to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Mehta thrived at the prestigious cooking school, especially since he had already gained a strong culinary foundation by working at the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering, Technology and Applied Nutrition in Mumbai.

After Mehta’s first job at L’Absinthe in New York in 1996, the aspiring chef landed a position he truly longed for at Typhoon Brewery, where he worked as the pastry chef to the brilliant James Chew of Vong fame. From there it was a short yet logical jump to Jean-Georges in 1997. The following year, Jean-Georges Vongerichten selected him to open his new restaurant, Mercer Kitchen, quickly to become one of the hottest destinations in New York. Desiring a change of pace from the high volume of Mercer Kitchen, Mehta accepted a position to work with Rocco di Spirito 1999 at Union Pacific, and in 2001 he joined Jean-Georges’ colleague Didier Virot who was opening his own restaurant. Following a short-lived but highly acclaimed run at Virot, Mehta solidified his reputation for creating avant-garde desserts as pastry chef of Compass. During this time, he extended his partnership with Didier Virot, and in 2002 opened the Upper West Side culinary destination Aix.

In 2003, Mehta launched his event management business through an online site partistry.com. The same year he started Candy Camp to encourage children aged between 4 and 14 to appreciate the complex ingredients in food, by preparing simple savory and sweet dishes. “I firmly believe healthy eating is not about deprivation and dieting but just about making small substitutions that you will be able to stick to in the long run,” says Mehta. “To give you an example, if you love sweet things, instead of having a dessert after every meal, incorporate sweet ingredients in your meal, such as scallops, yams and beet.” Mehta, more recently, has travelled all over the country promoting a new initiative called, “Kids Food Adventure with Chef Jehangir”, which involves taking children on a shopping spree at Whole Foods (a large food store in the US) and encouraging them to taste new foods. “By encouraging children this way, I hope to open their minds to healthier food choices,” explains Mehta.

In 2007, Mehta opened his restaurant Graffiti and released his first cookbook “Mantra the Rules of Indulgence” (Harper-Collins). From his 50 square foot kitchen, Mehta produces some of New York’s most artistic yet scrumptious dishes, which have been reviewed in numerous food magazines. Over the years, Mehta has appeared on many national television programmes including Martha! and on the Food Network. In August 2009, Mehta was a contestant on
Iron Chef America where he competed against Iron Chef Morimoto in “Battle Coconut.” In October 4th 2009, Mehta was a contestant on the Food Network’s “The Next Iron Chef.” Most recently, Mehta has auditioned to appear on the Oprah Show.

Mehta says operating a restaurant is challenging, especially given a limited budget. “There are innumerable restaurants in New York City and even I as a guest, would not dine at a place that does not offer something exceptional,” says Mehta. “So my biggest challenge then was to be consistently excellent with the quality of service and food. Consistency is the key. For in a restaurant you only have one opportunity to please the customer. If you fail the first time, you will never be given a second chance.” Fortunately, the bustling kitchen and packed tables at Graffiti testify to customer’s immense satisfaction with Chef Mehta and his staff.

When asked about his advice for young Parsis considering entering the culinary world, Mehta replied, “Enter this field only if you are really passionate about food and about pleasing people.” He added, “For, the first ten years in this career are very hard. No matter how talented you are, and no matter what you have studied, you have to work with a well-known chef so you can learn more and gain credibility in the industry. The hours of work are very long, and the work is physically demanding as well. Plus you have to be prepared to never spend any fun occasion with your family as you are always working that day. So it’s important for you to have a supportive family. Having said that, let me add that it is also a very rewarding career for you get recognized for your talent and feel so satisfied knowing that you made someone happy through your food.”

Deena Guzder is an independent journalist who has reported on human rights across the globe. Her work has appeared in Time, Mother Jones, Common Dreams, National Geographic, Washington Post, Ms. Magazine, and elsewhere. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Peace & Conflict Studies from Oberlin College as well as advanced degrees in journalism and international affairs from Columbia University. Guzder is currently finishing a literary nonfiction book on religion-inspired social justice movements throughout US history, Divine Rebels (Chicago Review Press, 2011). Her website is www.deenaguzder.com
In August 2010, epic floods inundated vast expanses of Pakistan in the worst natural disaster in the country’s recent history. The floods displaced an estimated 20 million individuals, damaged 5 million homes, submerged 5,000 miles of roads, and washed away 7,000 schools and 400 health facilities that will take years to rebuild. As the media coverage of more recent world events overshadows that of Pakistan’s unprecedented flooding, the crisis continues unfolding.

I arrived in Pakistan in mid-September on a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting to cover the floods. As an American journalist who had never visited Pakistan, I did not know what to expect. For many Parsis, Pakistan is seen as a dangerously volatile country full of armed religious zealots. Most Americans’ exposure to the country is limited to photos of Taliban fighters and suicide bombers. The reality I found in Pakistan bore no resemblance to this widely disseminated misperception. When traveling across the country, from the southern tip of Karachi to the northern tip of Kohistan, I met countless people who greeted me with genuine warmth and kindness. Pakistanis treated me with more respect and appreciation than many of my compatriots back home, and they often invited me to join them for a cup of chai after our interview although they had recently lost their entire lives during the flood and were not in the position to entertain guests.

My trip across Pakistan started in Karachi where I spoke with doctors at the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT) to gain a better understanding of the challenges ahead. Although international organizations such as UNICEF and Red Cross are often seen as a third-world country’s first-line of relief after a disaster, regional medical outfits such as SIUT are often better positioned to respond to local disasters since its medical staff is already versed in the problems afflicting its own population. Doctors at SIUT told me the most common post-diluvia ailments include scabies (a highly contagious parasitic skin disease that flourishes in cramped, moist quarters), gastroenteritis (a painful
inflammation of the stomach and intestines that causes vomiting and dysentery), and conjunctivitis (more commonly known as pink-eye). Just southeast of Karachi, in the flood-destroyed historic city of Thatta, I meet an overworked surgeon donning seaweed green scrubs who shows me around the SIUT field hospital and mobile clinics. “We set off with a van and ask if there are any ill people,” explained Dr Rehan Mohsin. “They come to [us] and we distribute oral rehydration packages, medicines, and anything else needed.”

Back in Karachi, I speak with a fashion designer named Yousuf Bashir Qureshi who is one of many Pakistanis taking flood relief efforts into their own hands. Immediately after the floods, Qureshi sent out a personal appeal to his family and friends: “please come under one flag—the Pakistani flag—and for the sake of humanity.” Soon, Qureshi and his team had launched “United Pakistan” with the tagline, “Rescue, Relief, Rehab, and Rebuild.” He transformed three empty warehouses into storage spaces for relief supplies and converted his artists’ commune into an auction room where photographers, painters, and sketchers donated their work for charity.

The next day, I fly to the third largest city in the Sindh province, Sukkur, which is situated on the west bank of the Indus River. I spend the day with a Pakistani philanthropist named Afzaal Shaikh, a wildlife photographer and dolphin conservationist who runs a construction business in Karachi. Shaikh, a burly man with a broad build and moon-shaped face, jumped into action when he learned the floodwaters were rapidly approaching his city. Shaikh started an organization, “V Need U”, which defrayed the cost of Sukkur’s main hospital and provided free food, medicine, and shelter for 3,000 people in an IDP camp that Shaikh continues to run today off Airport Road in Sukkur.

I spend the remainder of my time in Pakistan’s rugged northern region. Unlike in the south where the floodwaters slowly and stealthily supersaturated entire villages, in the north the floodwaters raged through the steep mountains with the ferocity of a derailed train. Today, parts of Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province region still resemble a warzone: battered bridges, crushed schools, and leveled villages. Instead of bullet holes, there are watermarks.

In Islamabad, I meet the staff of the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation (OAKDF). They are striving to build a democratic and peaceful society based on the values of equity, tolerance and justice in which all people are assured a life of dignity and quality. The foundation works with citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable, to promote both political and socioeconomic justice for Pakistanis across class strata. Through town hall meetings, OAKDF encourages citizens to engage with the state to reform institutions and revamp policies. The foundation promotes skill building workshops, credit provision programmes, micro-finance plans, people participatory meetings, and community infrastructure projects. The OAKDF staff of 60 activists are building a grassroots movement through a decentralized decision making process in which power is horizontally shared.

After the floods, the foundation visited Kandian Valley and collaborated with the community to design a cash-for-work project to reconstruct pedestrian paths destroyed by mudslides. OAKDF is currently working on constructing a new suspension bridge in Dubair, Kohistan. “What we’ve seen work very well is collaborating with the people affected by the disasters as equal partners,” explained Rashida Dohad of OAKDF. “We established principles and guidelines such as trust-building and community empowerment opposed
to giving out tokens [such as dropping food parcels from helicopters]. We believe our approach is more effective and it allows displaced people to preserve their dignity."

En route from Islamabad to Charsadda with OAKDF staff, we drive past smashed schools and collapsed homes. “The floods were a natural disaster but linked to that is the state’s failure to invest in vital infrastructure such as dams and canals, which would have made the flood less devastating,” explains Dohad. We stop at a union council in Utmanzai, Charsadda that OAKDF set up to help community members voice their hopes and frustrations in wake of the flood. In a dimly lit room with a mud floor, we meet with a group of seventeen women who range from young adults to grandmothers. “The people we voted for did not come until five days after the flooding,” complains an elderly woman wrapped in a colorful shawl. More recently, OAKDF has organized art therapy classes in Charsadda to help children cope with anxiety resulting from the flood. “In our psychosocial session for children, we ask them to draw what they fear most,” explained Dohad. “Many of the drawings are full of blue, full of water.”

The next day, I embark on a nine-hour trip with OAKDF staff members, Mumtaz Tanoli and Hassan Ali Khan, to the northern district of Kohistan. Quite aptly named, Kohistan means “land of mountains” in Persian. We zigzag through jagged roads, abruptly halting and speeding as the potholes dictate. Driving past a pile of rubble, Ali notes: “People built a 18 kilometer road and electric plant here, but now nobody can believe there was anything here before the floods.” After the raging floodwaters demolished a bridge between Shangla and Battagram, OAKDF helped install a cable car so villagers could cross the Indus River. We stop in Battagram, catch a ride on the cable car, and speak with locals benefiting from the new form of transportation. “We are very happy and grateful,” says an elderly man with a fluffy beard and discolored snaggletooth.

Shortly before leaving Pakistan, I speak with CNN correspondent Reza Sayeh over green tea in Islamabad. Sayeh notes that, “Pakistan is seen as dangerous and scary to many Americans.” With a tinge of irony, he continues, “The US mainstream media exaggerates violence in Pakistan” and drowns out the voices of ordinary Pakistanis. “We report fanaticism as if it’s the only story,” he says. As a journalist, I am painfully aware the media is interested in what’s most sensational, what’s most likely to sell. I am extremely grateful I had the opportunity to visit Pakistan and witness the other side of the story that rarely catches world headlines. And, that is the story of a nation full of warm-hearted and generous people who are elbow-deep in the nitty-gritty work of rebuilding their country, bridge-by-bridge and life-by-life. 

This article was reported with a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting
On 24th August, nearly a month after the crisis began, WZO solicited donations in order to help the victims primarily giving aid to SIUT, as they were treating and distributing medicines in all four provinces. The delay in taking action was due to the extensive area of the flood, too many individuals rendering assistance, and relevant question - how best to achieve results. Earlier, individuals did approach me and were directed to send their donations to Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation, if they wished, having worked so closely and effectively with them after the earthquake of 2005.

Flyers were sent off throughout the world to all the people whom I knew would assist if they could, both to Zoroastrian organisations and individuals. Our Chairman, Mr Motiwala informed our members wherever email addresses were available.

Our first stop was at the camp set up by a group of individuals, headed by known past governor of Sindh and retired Supreme Court Judge – Fakruddin Ibrahim, the Trust being registered as Aitemaad Pakistan. The camp was half way to Makli on the main road between Dhapeji and Gharo which is in Thatta district. Their local volunteer, Mr Ahmad Mazari, arranged by Zahid Ibrahim, was there to show us around and answer any questions. The large tents had been donated by the Swiss Red Cross suitable for a family of even eight with ground sheets, being the only camp which we visited having this facility. Tents were pitched in straight lines, with large walking spaces between rows. Food rations are given out to each family on a weekly basis which is then managed by themselves – cooking as they wish. Utensils, clothing, charpois [local bed] were allocated to the displaced as they arrived, whereas fresh water is brought daily in tankers and supplied to all. Large water containers are all along the rows of tents for the people to use for washing and drinking. A separate tent with a medical practitioner where people can come for immediate treatment, and those who are more serious are transported to the closest hospital by ambulance. The common problem seen
everywhere was scabies, diarrhea, malnutrition and some suffering from malaria. In this well run camp where contentment was obvious, the men were mainly fishermen, a few labourers, barbers and carpenters.

Our next stop was the SIUT medical camp at Makli where the present exodus is reaching from middle Sindh. [on 17th this was the case but the dire situation in October is Sehwan, Dadu and environs]. SIUT have taken over a small government building which they have converted into their lab, scanning room etc. Outside on a narrow strip of grass, three large tents have been set up. The middle tent is for the doctor on duty who attends to any outpatients, with full treatment being given at one time saving the patient to return daily. The other two tents are used for keeping patients who need more supervised treatment. The serious cases are sent by ambulance, to the main SIUT hospital at Karachi.

As there were no out-patients at the time, the two doctors came with us to visit the Saudi run camp and hospital. Enroute, tent camps stretched for about five miles, being methodically arranged by the army to be run either by NGOs or private parties. The Saudi run hospital which was housed in the army barracks and reputed to be state of the art, unfortunately we were not permitted to enter. The camp for the refugees was opposite which seemed to be receiving all the necessary aid and though the lanes in between the tents were more spacious than elsewhere, they too had no ground sheet and only the earth to sleep / sit on.

The SIUT run a mobile medical facility twice daily in Makli, parking at a site where people can come easily. Here we saw quite a few people though no more than 70, but were informed an average of 700 people are treated daily.

All along the way from outer Karachi to Makli / Thatta, we saw unauthorised tents on both sides of the road, some genuine refugees, some capitalising on the situation and generosity of people. [Update: as SIUT do not require funds for purchasing medicines for the flood victims at present, I have diversified the donations].

On 19th early morning we flew from Karachi to Sukkur via Mohenjodaro. As we approached Mohenjodaro we could see the extensive flooding. The raging river had abated now flowing peacefully, having made many incursions and destruction. At Sukkur, a friend of my daughter’s Afzaal Shaikh, who is from this area but lives in Karachi, was our able guide for the day. Afzaal, is a giant of a man both in stature and heart. He has set up two camps, which are definitely the best in this city with his own resources and that of some friends. Now they need monetary assistance or commodities in kind. Weekly rations are handed out, treatment for every ailment is on hand having volunteer doctors coming daily who specialise in eyes, stomach, or general problems. A large tent where an equally large blackboard has been placed, making a temporary school for the children who are about 800. They attend daily for lessons both in Urdu and a bit of English and when the children leave they are given biscuits, juice packets and chocolates. In this camp the food is very generous, with meat or chicken once a week, as well as vegetables, flour, rice, pulses and clean water. A volleyball court has been set up where they play under floodlight with the amazing young men who are volunteering their time. Football and board games are also supervised. All refugees are registered when they arrive with name, age and national ID number. While driving around Sukkur, we saw SUVs or jeeps which had trailers containing fresh water hooked on, supplying to camps and to individual pitched, courtesy of “V need U” or Afzaal Shaikh.

In the grounds of the Civil Hospital the Canadians had set up a large enclosed capsule, obviously brought with them, complete with airconditioning to treat cholera patients. They had worked here most effectively for some weeks leaving behind a grateful community but before
departing, teaching the doctors from the Indus Hospital, Karachi, how to manage this deadly disease.

We drove to the Sukkur Barrage and over the Rohri Bridge where the river had been 30 feet high which was hard to imagine now. While driving from one location to another, Afzaal showed us the Sukkur agiary and another building which must have been a dharamsala, in total neglect, housing squatters in the spacious grounds of 6000 sq yds. The engraved sign on the agiary building was still there, though with missing words and above the words ‘Mama’ was the very prominent farohar. The adjacent building had ‘Marker’ inscribed, and on the same road was the old Parsi colony, now owned by others.

On 20th we flew to Islamabad where we were welcomed by my friend of post earthquake days, Ali Asghar Khan and some team members of OAKDF at their office. Soon thereafter we left for Charsadda which took well over three hours to reach, though travelling on good surfaced roads. Charsadda is the district adjacent to Nowsherra having suffered the same outcome due to flooding. To explain how areas work in Pakistan, we have a district, in it is a Union Council, in which there are towns, and hamlets known as ‘mohalla’.

Destination was Mohalla Saadat, UC Utmanzai, Charsadda. This mohalla is tucked away and approached by small lanes, all destroyed now, and as we drove we could see houses ravaged, though made from red brick and even some sturdy concrete ones. Main exterior walls were gone with gaping large expanses now remaining. Some people were remaking their walls, some still camping in their own territory in tents, but nothing was left whole. This was due to the flooding of the Jindi River (colloquially called a nullah, literally a trickle normally), which is a tributary of the main Kabul River that meets the Swat River and flows into the Indus at Attock. Deena has already mentioned the meeting of women and children. Our next stop was to see the rural damage at Mohalla Chena, UC Mirza Dher - just miles of water logged sugar cane fields destroyed. One cannot fathom how strong and fast these rivers must have flowed till one physically sees the destruction left by them.

Twenty-first morning, our long but interesting trip to Kohistan which began at 7am and ended at 9:30pm at Abbottabad, where we were staying in Ali’s office to save further hours commuting to Islamabad. At last I was going to a territory which has been on my “wish list”, via the Karakorum Highway; carved through the mountains by the Chinese and the Pakistan army to China between the years 1958-78 and considered a modern wonder of the world. “Highway” as the West may conjure in their minds should not be taken literally. It is a surfaced road enabling to and fro heavy traffic to move safely which is used mainly for trade.

After leaving Battagram, the road was more or less running parallel to the river and we could see the havoc caused. The land had receded by double, the watermarks of the flooding was visible, and the huge river stones weighing hundreds of kilos, had been left behind all over the landscape.

Our stop was at Kund, where 18 bridges have been swept away, the only means of commuting. At present with all walking tracks lost, people take from four to six days to come from their homes to the road. The solid concrete bridge had collapsed into pieces, but no sooner the people had made a “cage” of sorts, which was suspended on rope, produced from where I don’t know and manually operated across the river. One cannot help but admire their courage for improvising a means of crossing where the river had turned into a rapid at a height of 100 feet. Ali and his team were the first to arrive at this site to render help and a cable car was installed, operating on cable wire with a truck engine having gears. Very basic, but safe and effective. The cable car has been handed over to the committee to run themselves now, which is greatly appreciated by the Union Council. And then the fun part, going across in the cable car and returning – just terrific and so fast, high up in the air across a vast span! Our last
stop was the beginning of the Dubair valley in Kohistan where the Dubair nullah destroyed the whole market, bridge, road, and taking away a large section of the land. This area is part of Tehsil Pattan of District Kohistan. While this destruction was taking place a villager took a video on his mobile phone which he has given to Ali. The link where you may watch this scene is: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFS-dY1_FUA&feature=related
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yotH0CnFGk&feature=related

Once again Ali with his team were the first to come here with food and basic necessities, which they are still supplying. The only way these people have managed since ever, has been walking on their tracks either for basic needs or moving their livestock. These having gone now, they have to scale the Karakorum mountains till someone renders help with the remaking of countless tracks, as Kohistan is a forgotten area of Pakistan.

Websites of the four worthy NGOs mentioned in the report is shared. We are blessed with countless good Samaritans who quietly carry on doing whatever they can. We are not all terrorists or corrupt as Pakistan is popularly pictured.

Omar Ashgar Khan Development Foundation – http://www.oakdf.org.pk
SIUT - http://www.siut.org/index.php
Aitemaad Pakistan – http://www.aitemaad.pk/
V Need U – http://www.vneedu.com

WZO gratefully acknowledges and thanks each donor for coming forward to assist enabling us to help the less fortunate. GBP 2,332.48 is with WZO in UK which will be transferred to Pakistan. Rs3,650,102/- [average rate taken: GBP 27,239 or US $ 42,942] is the amount received by me till 15 October, primarily from overseas, from which the following has already been given for:

✔ Rs200,000 for Lifesstraw-family units on 14 September which gives good potable water without the use of electricity or batteries. This amount has been matched by United Bank who are a private bank in Pakistan. 157 units have been purchased and will be sent by UBL on our behalf to remote areas of Sindh. Check out: http://www.vestergaard-frandsen.com/lifestr/lifestr-family/features

✔ Rs30,000 to OAKDF on 22 September, to hold therapy sessions for children in various locations where relief work is being carried in Charsadda & Nowsherra districts.

✔ Rs400,000 to OAKDF on 22 September, to build a wooden jeep-able bridge at Dubair Valley, Kohistan, work to commence week of 18th October.

✔ Rs1,100,000 to OAKDF on 14 October, to complete the 7.31 km jeep-able track in the Dubair Valley, which will link three Union Councils having more than 30,000 people. Half the amount has been paid now, balance on completion. The people themselves have already made tracks with their bare hands of 13 km and now need this assistance to complete their ‘road’. The project will take 6-8 weeks to complete. This has been made possible through the generosity of ZSO & OCZF of Toronto, Canada who collected funds from their community for the flood relief.

There is much to be done but together we can achieve!

Donations may be sent by bank transfer direct to :
Mrs Hutoxy Cowasjee WZO, a/c No: 18-1049259-01, Standard Chartered Bank, I.I. Chundrigar Road, Karachi 74000, Pakistan. Swift Code SCBL PKXX. Please inform me by email: toxy39@gmail.com so that I may follow up my end.

Or to: Cheques payable ‘WZO’ and sent to the Chairman, WZO, 135 Tennison Road, South Norwood, London SE25 5NF, for UK residents. For overseas: By Bank Transfer to HSBC account; Sort Code 40-44-51, Account No 71455982, Account Name WZO. Swift Code MIDLGB2159J. The IBN is GB94MIDL followed by the Sortcode 404451 and the Account no 71455982.

photos: Deena Guzder / Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting
Aitemaad Pakistan - Dhabeji camp - [photographs: Toxy Cowasjee / Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting]

- Tent life
- Tanker water being supplied daily
- Visit to the camp doctor
- Cooking on village style stove
- Baby on the mend after fall from 'joola'
- Being treated for severe scabies
- Good quality cooking utensils

SIUT medical camp, Makli - [photographs: Toxy Cowasjee]

- Outpatients arriving at SIUT camp. [Deena Guzder]
- Tent for outpatients
- Above left: Doctor sorting medication for mobile van, right: boy being administered a drip for dehydration at the camp. Bottom row: people crowding for attention from doctors on Mobile van, facility given twice daily.
Exodus entering Sukkur

Rescuing old man afloat on his 'charpoi'

Children crossing river on their buffalo

Flooding of Sukkur Barrage

Centuries old historical site, flooded

Immediate right: children’s playground under water, seen are the two top bars of the slide. Far right above: children taking shelter under ‘charpoi’, below: Afzaal fed people daily along the high river bank during Ramadan.

Photographs appearing from pp50 -62 may not be used without permission.
Charsadda - [photographs: Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation]
Kohistan - [photographs : Deena Guzder / Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting]

1st row: Mohalla Saadat,
2nd row: Mohalla Chena - destruction of crops.

photographs: Deena Guzder / Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting

Destroyed bridge at Kund

Cable car erected by OAKDF at site of destroyed bridge, Kund. The tall structure right of car was completely submerged during the flooding - 100ft height, [see below middle - OAKDF]. Deena & Toxy going across in cable car.
Landsliding on Karakoram Highway

Riding the 'dollie' - a wooden small platform to get across the river

Manual operated cage for crossing the river at Kund

One man’s courage - building a 'bridge' using the fallen pylon and wires, so people may cross over

Another 'bridge' made by the people after the flood

Beautiful Dubair before the flood

Dubair, what is left after the flood

Damaged bridge at Dubair
Tracks are gone, people find alternative ways of carrying relief goods back home or to bring the sick to the nearest point of transport.

Two portable ultrasound machines purchased and given to SIUT to be used in their medical camps for flood displaced persons.

Lifestraw-family units for flood affected persons in Sindh. 157 units for Rs200,000 matched amount by UBL Pakistan.
To The Joint Honorary Secretaries
THE WORLD ZOROASTRIAN ORGANISATION

Dear Sirs,
As I desire to become Grand Patron / Patron / Life Member / Ordinary Member / Family / Student / Friend of WZO (Delete as appropriate), I request you to submit this application to your Committee.

I confirm that I am (Tick only one except if applying as a Friend of WZO in which case do not tick any box):
(a) person born into and confirmed into the Zoroastrian faith.
(b) non-Zoroastrian spouse married to a Zoroastrian.
(c) a child of marriage as described in (b) above.

I note that the annual subscription for Ordinary membership is payable on the 1st of January in each year. **In case of arrears, I understand that my membership will be terminated after 3 months of sending a reminder.**

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.

Yours truly

...........................................
(Signature)

Block Capitals Please
FULL NAME ............................................................................................................
PROFESSION / OCCUPATION ..............................................................................
If Student, please give date of birth......................................Email Address.............................................................
ADDRESS: (IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE) ............................................................
TEL. NOS: (Res).............................................(Office)...........................................(Mobile)…...............................
Proposed by: .................................................................
Seconded by: ...............................................................
## Membership Fees

For UK residents & other countries

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<th>Membership Level</th>
<th>Fee (UK)</th>
<th>Fee (USA)</th>
<th>Fee (Canada)</th>
<th>Fee (New Zealand)</th>
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Please send completed application form and cheque payable in Sterling to WZO, London to: Mrs Khurshid Kapadia, 217 Pickhurst Rise, West Wickham, Kent BR4 0AQ.

For USA residents

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

For New Zealand residents

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</tbody>
</table>

Please send application form with your cheque payable in NZ Dollars as “World Zoroastrian Organisation, to: Mr Darius Mistry, 134A Paritai Drive, Orakei, Auckland.
“Now, I shall speak of the best thing of this existence in accord with truth: I know the Wise One who created it to be the Father of effective good thinking. And His daughter is [armaiti] of good actions...”

Yasna 45.4

(mother translation)