Darius the Great's Nowruz Audience at Persepolis
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COVER
The bas-relief of Darius the Great’s Nowruz Audience, known as “Treasury Relief”, with permission of Dr Kaveh Farrokh, http://www.kavehfarrokh.com/ which has been coloured for effect.

PHOTOGRAPHS
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Note: WZO’s committee is extensive, these are just a few of the names given for member’s convenience
From the Editor

There has been a great deal published in the Indian Press regarding the Parsis of Mumbai these past few months, as today for better or worse the press inform their readers promptly – and the more controversial, the more advantageous.

As I normally write my Editorial just before going to press, a further announcement has come in the Jame dated 3rd April, this time from the Parsi High Priests with a header: “Parsi High Priests Reiterate that the two ‘Renegade Priests’ had been duly Debarred and cannot perform any Religious Rites”. It is a joint statement from the six Dasturs, and the pertinent sentence is quoted. “We reiterate that the religious orders of the High Priests of defrocking and expelling the two renegade priests from their respective Panths, (ecclesiastical diocese) continue to stand and such errant priests cannot religiously be seen to be Hamsharik, namely performing religious rites and ceremonies with other good and honourable priests.” As the BPP have announced, they will be appealing in the Supreme Court. One has to wait and see the outcome.

It is with regret we share the news of Noshir Dadrawalla stepping down as Trustee of the BPP on 31st March. Professionally he is involved in the field of philanthropy and management of charities for the past two and a half decades. A person having such a qualification would or should be welcomed by institutions especially when offering voluntary service, but regrettably we as a race, chase away individuals who are effectual and committed in assisting the community.

We are pleased to announce, the Hamazor will once again be available to our members in India from the next issue, ie. Issue 3/2011. This has been made possible through the generosity of an individual who will finance the publication for India. WZO has not been in a position since June 2009 to distribute Hamazor in this country, due to financial constraints, but the rest of our members have been fortunate to receive their copies through the kindness of various sponsors. We do need the Indian Zoroastrians to please come forward and sponsor future Hamazors as without this assistance, India may be the losers. I am being presumptuous in saying this with the hope they do wish to receive the Hamazor!

The world recently is in an upheaval, both politically – with the snowballing of uprisings in the countries of North Africa and Bahrain – and physically with the devastating floods / earthquakes / tsunamis in Australia, New Zealand and Japan. These countries have lost countless lives some in the name of freedom, others due to nature, and our sympathies go to all. Yet, we Parsis have countless time and energy to squabble over matters which can quite easily be overcome, rather than make them into tsunamis. A time has come when the silent majority should stand up and speak.

Toxy Cowasjee, 2A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530, Pakistan
Rumi arrived in London from Kenya in August 1961 and joined the Parsee Association where he first set eyes on Hilda. But it was not till a coach trip to Hastings in April 1963 that love blossomed. By the end of the weekend he informed Hilda that they would be getting married! Thus their wedding ceremony, on 1st October 1966, cemented one of the great relationships within the community.

For the first 15 years, Rumi devoted much of his time to business ventures and to developing a successful accountancy practice. However, in 1982, when Shahpur Captain launched an Appeal to extend the community premises, Hilda and Rumi swung into action, working day and night to reach their target. They donated personally and raised another £15,000 over the year by organising plays, sponsored walks, raffles and various other activities.

Rumi served on the ZTFE management committee in the 80’s but left after only a short period due to the internal politics. At Shahpur Captain’s request, Rumi joined WZO in 1986, but by then WZO had already been prevented from using the premises at the local association and WZO found itself without a base. During this traumatic period, Rumi and Hilda came to the rescue and their home became the offices for WZO for several years.

In 1990, a comprehensive survey of the villages of Gujarat, India (commissioned by WZO), found that 35% of our community lived there in abject poverty. WZO sent £1000 to Dinshaw Tamboly to try and get at least one family out of the poverty trap. Once again, Hilda and Rumi devoted themselves to fund-raising and their home became a depository for donated clothing collected by WZO. These were sorted and packed by volunteers into hundreds of cartons for shipment to Bombay, as it was known then. This went on for three years - till we hit red tape with officialdom and customs in Bombay.

This was the genesis of the projects that are run in India today by WZO Trust Funds and it is much to the credit of Hilda and Rumi. Every year, for eight years, they travelled to India at their own expense and videoed the conditions in the villages; and then travelled the world to create awareness amongst Zoroastrians of the poor economic and social conditions that prevailed. They succeeded - and the rest is history. Today the WZO Trust Funds of India is a multi-million Sterling charitable institution.

When Rumi became President of WZO in 2000, his ambition was to bring Zoroastrians all over the world under one umbrella organisation in order that they could be represented in UNESCO and the UN. He travelled the world to drum up support but was thwarted in this worthy endeavour by numerous barriers put up by vested interests. In 2002, when he was Chairman of WZO, there was another attempt, this time from North America, at forming a World Body for Zoroastrians. But it was not to be – due to narrow-mindedness and lack of strategic vision in Bombay.

But Rumi’s and Hilda’s story is one of perseverance, tenacity and commitment. At a conservative estimate, over 19 years of BBQ’s held at their own home and annual Gala Dinner dances, they have raised in excess of £200,000 for the deprived and impoverished Zoroastrian farmers of Gujarat. They continue to make donations to WZO and arrange annual Gala Dinner dances in London, though they now live in the Isle of Man.

Their aspiration for WZO has always been to strive towards uniting all Zoroastrians under one body in order that we may have proper representation at international and governmental level. They also believe that the community must stop casting aside Parsi women who marry out. Instead, the community should support these individuals and their families in their desire to bring up their children as Zoroastrians.
Dear members,

It has been a busy three months with most of my January spent in Mumbai. You can read more about my trip in the following pages.

Since my message in the last issue of Hamazor, we have had the postponed AGM. As at most AGMs, we welcomed some new members to the committee and said goodbye to others. This time, we had to say ‘Farewell’ to Noshir Umrigar who has chosen to stand down after more than nine years. Noshir’s contribution to the workings of WZO has been significant in his calm, considered and thoughtful approach at the committee meetings. He has helped at most of our fund-raising events and his wife Freny, assisted WZO in preparing our calendars. He will be missed by the committee and we send all our good wishes to Noshir and Freny for the future.

Benafsha Engineer and Monaz Dalal were confirmed as full committee members after working with the WZO committee for the past 12 months. Benafsha has assisted her mother Armaity, at all our social and fund-raising events for some years whilst Monaz has been advising the committee on how WZO should be connecting with the Zoroastrian youth. Both Benafsha and Monaz are representing WZO at the forthcoming 5th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Vancouver.

Farangis Kavyani is another member who has been attending our committee meetings as an observer and has now been confirmed as a full committee member. Farangis and her husband, Sohrab, have come from Iran and she has provided the committee with an Iranian perspective on Zoroastrian matters. We are also delighted that Mehraban Pouladi of Tehran has agreed to join the committee. He has been highly recommended by some of our committee members for his close involvement with Zoroastrian affairs in Iran.

From the USA, we welcome Kayomarsh Mehta of Chicago and Dr Parmis Khatibi of California. Kayomarsh has been passionate about Zoroastrian affairs for over 40 years and recently has been working with Keki Bhote on running WZO US Region. Parmis is from a family of Iranian Zoroastrians who have excelled themselves in their chosen careers and are well known for their involvement with the Zoroastrian community. We are indeed very fortunate to have all these individuals strengthening WZO’s committee and we welcome them wholeheartedly.

On 11 March 2011, the Bombay High Court quashed the ban imposed by the BPP on two ordained Zoroastrian priests. It ruled that under the Deeds of Trust of 1884, the Trustees are not entitled to prevent any duly ordained Zoroastrian priest from performing religious rites and ceremonies in the premises of the Towers of Silence (Doongerwadi) and the two Agiaries. This ruling supports the view held by WZO that no individual or a group should enforce their religious views on other free-thinking Zoroastrians. We need to congratulate Jamsheed Kanga and Homi Khusrokhan on their success in the courts and thank them for their perseverance in spite of all the tirade of abuse and the innuendos levelled against them.

On behalf of the Managing Committee of the WZO, let me take this opportunity of wishing you and your families NovRuz Farrkhondeh Baad and may the forthcoming year be filled with prosperity, joy and happiness.

Yours sincerely,

Darayus S Motivala
Chairman
Email: chairman@w-z-o.org
During December and January, I took a six week’s holiday in Hong Kong, Singapore and India. In between sightseeing, meeting family and friends and generally having a great time, I gave a few presentations on WZO and had face-to-face meetings with some key people. I thought it might be interesting for you to hear about some of my meetings.

Hong Kong: The Trustees of the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hong Kong, Canton and Macao (ZCFHK) graciously allowed me to present WZO and our charitable activities at the Kowloon Cricket Club which was founded by Sir Hormusjee Naorojee Mody amongst others. The ZCFHK are a very significant supporter of WZO’s charitable activities in India and it was a good opportunity for me to personally thank them for their generosity. The following day I was invited to their Christmas party at the Zoroastrian Building where I met around 70 Parsis living in Hong Kong.

Singapore: The Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore had arranged for me to give a presentation to some of their members one evening. There were about 18 attendees present. Russi Ghadiali informed me that he has been asked by the President of Singapore to arrange an InterFaith Nowruz celebration which will be attended by him and other dignitaries.

India: My itinerary included Delhi, Lucknow, Navsari and Bombay. At an event to celebrate the 49th anniversary of the Delhi Dar-e-Mehr, I was given the opportunity to present WZO and our global activities. The special guests at this event included Keki Gandhi (past BPP Trustee) and Shernaz Cama (ParZor). There is considerable support for WZO from the Parsis of Delhi. A few more Life Members were made that day and hopefully gained many more friends. Our thanks must go to our committee member, Dadi Mistry and his wife, Nergish, for promoting WZO in the area.

Whilst in Delhi, I met the Vada Dastur of Iranshah, Khurshed Dastoor at Dadi Mistry’s home. He is an extremely knowledgeable and pragmatic priest. Having met him, I can immediately see why he has the support and respect of the majority of the Zoroastrian community. His commitment and dedication to our Iranshah, Udvada, the Zoroastrian religion and our community is beyond question.

Dadi had arranged for me to meet Shri Salman Khurshid MP, Minister of State for Corporate & Minorities. We discussed the need to preserve the Parsi heritage and to find ways of reducing the decline of our population in India. The Vada Dastur, Khurshed Dastoor, accompanied us to the meeting with Shri Arun Jaitley MP, the leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha. We impressed upon Shri Jaitley the need to make Udvada a heritage site in order to preserve our Iranshah which is sacred to all Zoroastrians around the world. At both these meetings, Dadi and I outlined the
charitable work done by WZO in the villages and how it benefits the local community.

Dinshaw and Bachi Tamboly had kindly arranged for me to spend three days at WZO’s Senior Citizen Centre in Navsari. Whilst there, we visited the villages where the WZO Trust Funds carry out their Relief of Poverty programme. We have to thank Dinshaw, Bachi and their dedicated staff for their compassion and commitment to those in need.

After paying homage to the Iranshah in Udvada, Dinshaw took me to visit the Zoroastrian Information Centre which is a museum of Parsi heritage and culture. It is extremely well laid out and covers aspects of the Zoroastrian religion; the Parsi customs, costumes and rituals; the Parsi contribution to Indian politics and commerce and the history and significance of Udvada to the Parsis. I would highly recommend a visit to this museum if you have not done so.

Homi Khusrokhan, our committee member, had kindly arranged for me to meet a number of like-minded Zoroastrians who are very concerned about the mistreatment of our fellow Zoroastrians by those in power, which in my opinion, goes against the principles of Zarathushtra. This form of persecution is particularly gender related, who have chosen to marry non-Zoroastrians, as well as to their children. We should offer them our support at every opportunity we can. It is now widely accepted that there is nothing in our scriptures which suggests any form of discrimination between the genders, nor against inter-faith marriages. These are all customs that have been adopted by the Parsis since their forefathers’ arrival in India from Iran, some 1,300 years ago, and they did so for some very good reasons. However, we should not confuse Parsi ethnicity with the Zoroastrian religion.

I am pleased to tell you that there is a growing support in India for WZO and its principles, thanks to our five committee members based there. The number of new WZO members from India is steadily growing despite the misinformation put out by our detractors.

During my travels, I took every opportunity to expound WZO’s message and ethos as well as making an appeal to boost our much needed funds. The Hamazor is highly regarded in India and we received commitments from two individuals who will each sponsor an issue of the Hamazor for India. I am hopeful that other sponsorship and donations for our charitable activities will follow soon.

It was interesting to meet Zoroastrians from different communities and backgrounds, and discuss their concerns and aspirations for their local community. There is widespread support for WZO’s stance of defending the rights of a Zoroastrian, to practise their religion without the interference from others. These six weeks were exhausting but exhilarating and most enjoyable.
sponsored by Rumi & Hilda Sethna

**WZO’s Calendar of Events for 2011**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 19th March 2011</td>
<td>NowRuz Dinner / Dance with a Persian theme [Event passed, see facing page]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 5th May</td>
<td>The Fourteenth Dasturji Dr Sohrabji H Kutar Memorial Lecture by Professor Alberto</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cantera (University of Salamanca) “Zoroastrian rituals and Avestan manuscripts”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 5th June</td>
<td>Seminar on Zoroastrian Religion, History and Culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 31st July</td>
<td>Annual BBQ at Alex &amp; Valerie Burns’ garden. Inclusive of food &amp; drinks: £18 for adults, £8 for 7-12 year olds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 20th August</td>
<td>Shahenshahi Navroze Dinner / Dance. Tickets: £18 for adults, £8.50 for 5-12 year olds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 25th September</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting (details will be sent with the Annual Report)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 19th November</td>
<td>Gala Dinner Dance in aid of the WZO Education Fund. (details to be advised later)</td>
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The menu card appropriately said it all; the message “together we can make a difference” was the coming together of the two wings of our faith, the Parsi and Iranian Zoroastrians. For the fifth year running, some 140 or so of us got together for an evening of celebration to bring in NovRuz with an Iranian theme. Interestingly, there were more than the usual number of young attendees with their glittering array of party outfits which was enough to warm the cockles and bring a ray of hope that perhaps we were not completely on the road to extinction as yet. There was much warm interaction between the younger generation of Parsis and Iranians many of whom were pleased to meet each other for the first time.

Throughout the evening the Iranian Duo Fantasia played traditional music interspersed with sessions of western music, thereby entertaining a group of attendees with varying musical tastes. During a brief interlude in the merriment and dancing, Chairman Darayus Motivala addressed the guests and introduced Ms Shahin Bekhradnia as the new President of WZO and welcomed our guests from India, Homi Khusrokhan and his lovely wife Dhanoo. Our two young committee members Monaz Dalal and Benafsha Engineer were also requested to step up to the front and introduce themselves as our representatives at the forthcoming 5thWZYC in Vancouver. The evening progressed with a raffle draw and the auction of a prize donated by our supporter Mr Dara Kaka.

Each year we rely unashamedly on Armaity Engineer and her daughter Benafsha to cater for a mixed crowd with culinary demands where some punters want everything mild while others must burn their pallets to find real satisfaction. To accommodate two different catering menus and varying demands simultaneously requires expertise. And then of course the perennial problem of those who request Iranian and are soon queuing in the Parsi section and visa versa. Well all I can say to Armaity is that you manage to work miracles each year and have simultaneously gained my praise and deepest sympathy in equal measure.
An article in two parts. Part One: Zarathustra’s Essential Teachings

Introduction

I was raised in a traditional religious environment. Smell of sukhad-loban and chants of satum prayers at dawn and nyashes and yashts in daytime, wafted daily in my home. As in ancient Zoroastrian times, a glowing coal hearth - representing the light of Ahura Mazda’s wisdom and creation - was reserved in our kitchen for prayers. During my exam days, it blazed with the sukhad I piled on it while praying loudly for Ahura Mazda’s and the Yazats’ boon of doing well in them. Since childhood, I was taken to fire temples, jashans, muktads, obsequies and various religious ceremonies. That ours is a strictly monotheistic faith, born between 1700 - 1500 BC, based on continuing struggle between forces of good and evil and exclusive to those born into it, were dinned into me.

In early adulthood, I mused over how strict monotheism could be compatible with: the worship of Ahura Mazda and at the same time, of a divine pantheon of Amesha Spentas and Yazats (archangels and angels of other faiths); ongoing struggle between two forces, one of good and one of evil; the belief that Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, an evil spirit, were co-equals; man¹ receiving guidance from a supernatural fravashi, and not from Ahura Mazda in a faith its Prophet named Daena Vanghui (religion of good conscience).

Such casual thoughts were replaced by distinct unease when work took me to lands touched by Zoroastrianism - from China to Central Asia, Turkey to Greece, and Egypt to the Middle East. I saw evidence that people of many ethnicities had long practiced it. In Xian (in China), I visited a mosque having clear traces of originally being a fire temple and a tomb of a Zoroastrian Chinese wife of a Chinese lord. Izedi Kurds in Iraq, who claimed to be Zoroastrians, took me their fire temple, in a cave, vaguely resembling ours. Behistan’s rock relief carvings in Iran and statues in ancient fire temples in Armenia, made me wonder why an unseeable Creator and yazats were depicted like idols. I stared dumb-founded at rock relief carvings of our Asho Farohar, but with a circle instead of a human face, atop a 2200 BC temple in Egypt, and those with a human face on 900 BC temples of the polytheistic Assyrians in Iraq. Gothas, who guard entrances to our fire temples, lay scattered in Mosul and the Baghdad Museum as relics sacred to Assyrians. These are but a few examples.

How could I than reconcile them with traditional religious beliefs ingrained in me from childhood? Or, those beliefs - which included revering Ahura Mazda as well as primordial forces and divinities - with Zarathustra’s revolutionary teachings² predicated on the omnipotence of one ever-existent invisible transcendental power of immeasurable wisdom and intellect who created the universe and all in it? Or, elaborate priest-performed rites, rituals and ceremonies other than socio-religious ones like navjots, weddings, jashans and obsequies, with his teaching that man’s path towards Ahura Mazda lay in venerating Him through personal prayers, simple personal rituals to reinforce devotion and living by the faith’s basic principles by using the key of good words, thoughts and deeds? Or, by so doing, man can perfect his urwan and the world, and earn afterlife in heaven? Or, Zarathustra offered his faith to all who might choose it?

To resolve my growing discomfort, I ventured on the journey of studying our faith in some depth. I tried to understand what Zarathustra really taught, the allegorical meanings in his words, and how and when they got transformed to what is now practiced.

As I probed, I was astonished that no godheads, primordial forces or divinities had place in Zarathustra’s teachings and in fact, he denounced them. Yet, they are integral to today’s Zoroastrian beliefs and practices. As my knowledge deepened, I was asked to chair or participate in scholarly discussions of the
faith. That put me in contact with renowned scholars. Some like Dasturji Minocherhomji, Farhang Mehr, Ali Jafarey and Stanley Insler, even befriended me. We explored various aspects of the faith. Some of their explanations, eg. about the forces of good and evil as moral vs. cosmic dualism, forced me to think deeper to find more satisfying answers.

I am sharing what I found, only because I believe that many Zoroastrians may also want to ponder over information that is not easily available to them. Part I of this article gives in simple terms, the essence of Zarathustra’s real teachings. Part II in the next Hamazor, explores the magnitude of their transformation over the ages. There are probably some errors in my findings. But hopefully, the essential thrust is in the right direction.

His Essential Real Teachings

Ahura Mazda:
Zarathustra gave a double name to the omnipotent power creating the universe - “Ahura Mazda”. Ahura means Lord of Life and Mazda “Creator of Matter” or simply, the “Wise Lord”. He called the teachings, revealed to him by Ahura Mazda for the benefit of all mankind, Daena Vanghui.

Creation:
Eons ago in the Spiritual Universe (Menog), Ahura Mazda drew up a Divine Plan to create a Material Universe (Getik). It was to be governed by His immutable laws of nature, with their actions and consequences (ie. Asha or Absolute Truth).

Zarathustra speaks lyrically about the physical and moral aspects of creation (eg. Has. 30 and 44), but casts little light on the methodology of creation. He talks (Ha. 31.7) of streaming “lights from far-away heavens” (suggesting universe’s birth in a cosmic “big bang” that occurred some 14 billion years ago?), and a universe that is progressing, expanding, renewing and unfolding in accordance with Ahura Mazda’s Divine Plan until it will reach ultimate Perfection (Ha. 34.7, 43.5, 51.6). A part of that Plan was the world’s progressive Perfection in moral and ethical terms, through the active participation of the righteous human mind.

The Prophet taught that Ahura Mazda created the universe and everything in it, through His Spenta Mainyu (Creative Mentality) mentality that is innate within Him (Ha. 44.7, 51.7). He does not mention help from any pre-Zarathustrian divinity, supernatural or primordial being. Indeed, he repeatedly denounces them as non-existent and false. Neither does he mention Amesha Spentas, Yazats or fravashis, all of whom are so integral to the beliefs and rituals of Zoroastrianism today.

Twin Mentalities – The First Step in Creating the Material Universe:
The choice between good and wickedness (called “evil” only by later day Zoroastrians) or truth and deceit, constitutes the bedrock of Zarathustra’s ethical and moral teachings. What necessitates these choices, is explained through his percept of the Twin Mentalities (ta mainyus), “Mazda did create” them (Ha. 30.1) “at Creation’s dawn” (Has. 30.4, 45.2), as His first step in creating the Material Universe. He elaborated (Ha. 30.4): “As twin co-workers, they reveal themselves. Yet, in each thought, word and deed, these two are n’er agreed. One’s Good (Vayo), the other Bad (Akem)…” (Has. 30.3, 45.2). And “When together did they foregather at Creation’s early dawn, Life (Gaem) did one make, and the other made Non-Life (Ajyaitim). And thus, Creation’s purpose is achieved. Dark is the mind of those that cling to the false, but brightly shines the Mind that holds to truth”.

Many scholars regard this as a moral or cosmic choice between good and wickedness, or truth and deceit. But Dr Irach Taraporewala has interpreted correctly (Divine Songs of Zarathustra, p141) that the essential difference between the two “is not so much as between ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’, as between the positive and negative” in everything in creation. In other words, Zarathustra explained in allegorical terms that Ahura Mazda’s first act of creation was to set up two opposing aspects, or poles, in order to hold the Material Universe and everything in it together and to maintain their progress thereafter. Let us think through this.

Earth and heavenly bodies rotate on their axis and orbit in place in the vastness of space, only because their positive and negative magnetic poles create gravity. Matter is held together by positively and negatively
atoms, particles and ions. Birth of most living things, requires two distinctly opposite sexes. Every moral and ethical matter has contradictory dimensions, or aspects, of good and bad. It is because man was created with an inborn capacity for good and wickedness, that he is also given a mind that is free to choose between allying him with the essence of good or bad. He also pays for those choices in afterlife, in either the “Abode of Song and Light” or its contradiction, the “Abode of Woe and Misery”. By designing opposing poles or aspects, He also created antithetical conditions of life and death and of salvation and damnation. They permeate everything in nature and cut across all modes of existence and dimensions of life.

As Taraporewala further explains (ibid, p137), the percept of the Twin Mentalities as the first step in the creation process, however "underwent a strange transformation later. ... From being a creation of Ahura Mazda, the Bad (Akem) has become the rival and almost the co-equal of God”. This transformation, which took place centuries after Zarathustra, "was undoubtedly due to the influence of the Judaic idea of Satan".

**Evil**

Zoroastrians today believe that their faith propounds an eternal struggle between the primordial forces of good and evil between which they must choose. But was that Zarathustra’s original teaching?

As the eminent Zoroastrian priest-scholar Dasturji Dhalla notes (History of Zoroastrianism, p89), the Prophet gave no proper name to evil, nor specify its origin. And nowhere does he mention a primordial or personified evil spirit who initiates or spreads evil, or persuades men to commit it. In his teachings, he only uses words like Aka Mana (Bad Spirit), Achista Mana (Wicked Spirit) and Dregvant (Wicked One). The opposite of Ahura Mazda’s abstract Attribute of Asha (Truth), he calls Druj - which translates as wickedness, not evil. Druj was dropped as Asha’s opposite centuries after, when later scriptures replaced it with Angre Mainyu, the primordial and personified evil.

As Taraporewala reminds us (ibid, pp500-502), Zarathustra used words like angra, angro and anro in only three places (Has. 43.10, 44.12, 45.2). But none mean evil or evil spirit. They mean: (a) **doer of wickedness (angra)**, a person with an inborn wicked nature, who therefore generates cruelty, deceit, fury, greed, wars and the like which assail or embroil other men; (b) **wicked one (angro)**, a person who becomes wicked through the wrong choices he makes; and (c) **victim of wickedness (anro)**, a person forced into wickedness by the wicked environment around him. These usages suggest that wickedness has no substance on its own. Rather, it is man who gives it substance and makes it a reality, when he chooses to use his inborn capacity for wickedness instead of that for good. The key to the destruction of wickedness therefore also lies in man’s hands, by making a choice to ally with the essence of good instead of wickedness.

By doing so, man can contribute to the moral and ethical perfection of the world. Because, when he sheds his propensity to be wicked or choose wickedness, he gradually contributes to his urwan’s perfection. When he does that, he also makes a positive impact on events surrounding him, his family, society and country. He thus progressively contributes to making the world around him more morally and ethically perfect.

**The “Support System”**:

Ahura Mazda created man as His helper (Astis) (Ha.31.22) and friend (Urvar) (Ha.45.11) who would make the world morally and ethically perfect by choosing to perfect himself (Ha.31.11). To cope with that responsibility, and also for the fate of his urwan in afterlife, Ahura Mazda endowed man with the following “support system”.

(i) a destructible body (Tanu) and an indestructible eternal soul (Urwan);
(ii) a **Daena**, a faculty to receive Ahura Mazda’s guidance throughout life about what the righteous choices might be (voice of conscience in modern terminology);
(iii) capacity to receive that guidance through **Serosha**, His Divine Messenger Mentality;
(iv) a Mind (Mano) that is free to accept or reject Daena’s guidance; and
(v) Six abstract **Qualities**, akin to Ahura Mazda’s six perfect attributes innate within Him (Spentas), which man can make increasingly Spenta-like by using his mano to choose whether to contribute to his urwan’s and the world’s perfection.
The linkage between the availability of such a support system and the freedom given to man to choose to avail of it or not, and reap its consequences in his afterlife, is a teaching unique to Zoroastrianism. It goes beyond the popular belief that man can reach heaven simply by worshipping the Creator through constant personal prayers and/or practice of religiosity. It implies living his earthly life by the faith’s basic teachings.

Let us now understand the meaning of these six abstract Attributes and Qualities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ahura Mazda’s Divine Attributes</th>
<th>Man’s Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asha (Male Gender)</td>
<td>Asha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Truth or Righteousness</td>
<td>Absolute Truth or Righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: comprehension of the immutable laws whose acts &amp; consequences govern everything in the universe process.</td>
<td>Capacity: to live righteously in nature, accordance with those laws, and thus help the process of perfection. Asha’s opposite is not evil; it is Druj - lies or wickedness, or Dragvartim – untruth).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vohu Mano (Male Gender)</td>
<td>Vohu Mano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Mind/Divine Love</td>
<td>Good Mind/Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: good mind (the means), good thinking, (the process) &amp; good thought (result); thus, a good mind comprehending truth and love.</td>
<td>Capacity: to choose good and love, that encompasses all. (Vohu Mano’s opposite is not evil mind: it is Aka Mana - bad mind or Achista Mana – worst mind)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armaiti (Female Gender)</td>
<td>Armaiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Service/Devotion</td>
<td>Service/Devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: unswerving devotion, service &amp; loyalty to truth, to make it a reality through righteous thought, word and action.</td>
<td>Capacity: to serve all with devotion, thus bringing substance in thoughts, words and actions to truth. (Armaiti’s opposite is Taromaiti).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khshathra (Male gender)</td>
<td>Khshathra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine Energy/Power</td>
<td>Human Energy/Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: Creator’s energy/power to advance truth and good in the universe.</td>
<td>Capacity: human energy/power to serve mankind, by bringing truth, love and service to fruition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haurvatat (female gender)</td>
<td>Haurvatat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection</td>
<td>Perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: Ahura Mazda’s perfection</td>
<td>Capacity: to perfect one’s urwan by living righteously and giving love and service to all in earthly life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameratat (Female Gender)</td>
<td>Ameratat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immortality</td>
<td>Immortality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodies: Ahura Mazda’s “non-deathness”, His Immortality.</td>
<td>Capacity: to achieve immortality for one’s urwan by following good thinking, truth and service in life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After-Life:

When man’s body dies, his urwan crosses Cinvat Bridge. This allegorical “Bridge of the Judge” signifies its passage from Getik to Menog, the material to the spiritual world (Ha. 46.10, 46.11, & 51.13). The Judge at the Bridge is Ahura Mazda himself (Ha. 46.17). He separates a follower of truth from that of untruth in earthly life. It is unclear what the Prophet prescribed as death ceremonies (obsequies) to be done by priests. They are meant to comfort the relatives of the deceased, and his urwan as it awaits Ahura Mazda’s judgment. But they cannot sway it. It will be based on life led by the deceased on earth.

The ultimate reward for a man who followed truth and used his qualities to perfect his urwan progressively, is its absorption in Ahura Mazda’s emanation. Zarathustra refers to it allegorically as living eternally in His Abode of Song and Light, Garo Damane (Ha. 45.8, 50.4, 51.15). For a man who followed untruth and did not use his qualities, it is eternal life in His Abode of Woe and Misery, Druj Damane (Ha. 46.11, 49.11, 51.14). These “abodes” are therefore not physical heavens or hells, promised by later prophets.

Zarathustra speaks of only these two abodes. He does not mention any intermediate one for urwans who followed truth and untruth in an equal measure in earthly life. While perfection in one lifespan seems difficult to
achieve, the Prophet does not mention reincarnation, except in Ha 49.11. But its scholarly interpretation is controversial.

**Zarathustra’s guidance for implementing these teachings**

Understanding Zarathustra’s real basic teachings is one thing. How to implement them, is another. Fortunately, they do provide guidance on how man can achieve the goal of perfecting his urwan and contributing to the world’s gradual moral and ethical perfection.

As we understood in the preceding paragraphs, man is born with qualities akin to Ahura Mazda’s abstract attributes as well as with an inborn capacity to generate wickedness. However, he can evolve from this mix, by choosing paths which can help his urwan attain a “Spenta way of being” (Ha. 47.1) and thus, immortality in his afterlife.

**How can man achieve that?** By venerating Ahura Mazda and His Attributes through personal prayers, simple personal rituals that reinforce his devotion, and living according to the faith’s basic principles. The “keys” for living in that manner, are good thoughts, words and deeds. But Zoroastrians instead believe these keys to be the faith’s basic principles. When man pursues them consistently, his qualities progressively begin to personify Ahura Mazda’s attributes more fully (Ha. 28.2, 33.8, 34.1, 45.10, 47.1, 50.4).

**What does such veneration achieve?** Besides enabling man to grow spiritually through deliberate choice, it also fulfills three other purposes of his earthly life, namely, to: (i) help defeat wickedness which he often brings to life by letting his free mind ignore his daena’s guidance to choose truth instead; (ii) contribute to making the world ethically and morally more perfect, by progressively renovating his urwan; and (iii) help realize this objective which is Ahura Mazda’s very purpose for creating him.

Man’s reward is, that as his qualities gradually strengthen, his urwan advances towards perfection and immortality (Has. 28.10, 31.21, 33.13, 43.10, 45.4). The other is, that this development positively influences not his urwan alone. It also advances his family, society and country and thus the world, towards moral and ethical perfection.

**Why, and how, does that happen?** Because man’s qualities are both, what generate the reward and the reward itself, in an incremental process towards their perfection. For example, pursuit of good thinking strengthens good thinking within man (Ha. 28.10, 33.13, 34.21). Pursuit of truth, strengthens truth within him (Ha. 31.21). Hence, more he venerates Ahura Mazda and His attributes as guided by his daena, his understanding of good thinking, truth and service becomes keener, and he can more fully hone the qualities of his urwan and advance it towards immortality in afterlife (Ha. 45.4).

**What than are the consequences of wrongful thought, word or action?** In the short-run, it may change a man for the worst. But in Zarathustra’s unique paradigm, in the longer-run, worship and veneration of Ahura Mazda and His attributes will help man begin the process of defeating his inborn capacity for wickedness.

**What is that paradigm?** Zarathustra taught that Ahura Mazda’s way of defeating wickedness is not through fear of punishment. That merely suppresses wickedness, not prevent, defeat, or eliminate it. The right way is to get man to gradually shed his mind’s inborn preference towards wickedness and instead use the faith’s three basic keys to a point where he just does not want to be wicked. While that reinforces a preference for a beneficial way of life, man’s wickedness is likely to still lurk within him and hurt him. It is only when he decides that he does not want to be hurt by wickedness of others, will he realize that it is also not the right way for him to be, or act, towards them.
Through a long process of making choices and experiencing their positive or negative consequences, preferences of most men begin to change. They begin to perceive wickedness’ adverse consequences, the harm it does to them and the benefits of choosing otherwise. Self-realization eventually dawns that it is just not the right way. Their minds then begin to follow their daenas’ guidance to choose truth, not wickedness, in every step of life. The Prophet calls this process “the refiner’s fire” (Ha. 31.9, 47.6, 51.9). In other words, by experiencing the consequences of wickedness on himself, comprehension grows within man that it is just not the right path. Only that of Asha, is.

To put it another way, Ahura Mazda’s justice is predicated on enlightenment. For example, Has. 41 through 44 talk of changing the “minds of both factions”, viz. of those who pursue truth or wickedness, so that both are enlightened into taking steps to perfect their urwans and the world. Ahura Mazda’s goal is to enlighten man’s free mind so that it falls into a pattern of invariably choosing to live by the faith’s basic principles.

What than lies at the core of Zarathustra’s teachings? Devout adoration and rote worship of Ahura Mazda, or practice of religiosity and rites to seek His boons, are not what he teaches. Unfortunately, that seems to be the common Zoroastrian way. What lies at the core, is personal worship and simple rituals. These, and living according to the faith’s basic teachings, can strengthen man’s devotion to the Divine, offer him pathways to comprehend His wisdom, divinity and perfection, and enable him to become Ahura Mazda’s effective helper in order to fulfill the purpose of his creation.

To understand this simple yet profound message, consider these questions: What are the: (i) attributes of wisdom which personify Ahura Mazda? (ii) Qualities given to man, that he is capable of honing? (iii) rewards for honing them? (iv) ways to defeat wickedness, other than through punishment? (v) ways for a man to perfect himself and fulfill Ahura Mazda’s purpose in creating him? (vi) ways to reach Ahura Mazda and spend afterlife in His Abode of Song and Light by becoming part of His emanation?

The answer is the same to each question: (a) truth (Asha); (b) its comprehension (Vohu Mano); (c) its devout pursuit in thought, word and act (Armaiti); (d) power and energy to achieve their realization (Khshathra); (e) attainment of perfection (Hauvratat); and, (f) thereby, attainment of immortality (Ameretat).

[to be continued]

Notes:
1. “Man” or “Men” are the abbreviation used in this article, to refer to both sexes.
2. Unless mentioned otherwise, this article reflects Zarathustra’s teachings in his own words in the 17 Gathas (some have been lost) ascribed to him by scholars. These compositions were carried after his death by rote for some centuries, till writing was discovered. Each teaching is referenced to a relevant stanza (Ha.) of these Gathas, and based on translations by the pre-eminent Parsi scholar, Dr Irach Taraporewala in “The Divine Songs of Zarathustra”, Bombay, 1993, and the leading Gatha scholar, Stanley Insler in his “Gathas of Zarathustra”, Leiden, 1975.
3. In making this analysis, the author is indebted to Dina McIntyre’s insightful discussion of relevant issues in her “The Puzzle of the Amesha Spentas”, Iran Zamin, Vol 6, October 2006, from which he acknowledges quoting extensively.

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The question about children of mixed marriages, i.e. between a non-Parsi father and a Parsi mother has been simmering for decades and even today it continues to remain as tangled as ever.

Being a neutral voice, I am neither an orthodox nor a reformist but a pragmatist. And I believe that in this discussion, questioning, criticism and dissent must be valued.

I for one am not in favour of intermarriage and would not encourage it. My thoughts have been put forward in a lengthy article entitled "A Brief Study of Intermarriage in America with reference to the Parsi Community", which has appeared in the Memorial Volume commemorating the 1251 Anniversary of the Installation of the Iran Shah Fire Temple, published in Bombay in 1972. But as the statistics for intermarriage in Mumbai for the year 2010 has increased to 38% and we have not been able to arrest this trend, we ought to examine this situation in new light and with great discretion. Are we to discard the children of such marriages? I believe that this question has to be discussed at different levels and this is what I wish to do here. (Parsiana, February 21, 2011, p37)

According to the Davar-Beaman Judgement of 1906, the offspring of Parsi fathers and non-Parsi mothers were to be admitted into our fold. But in the last 100 years much water has flowed. Important developments have taken place globally, in India and in our community, which have to be considered in order to obtain a holistic and balanced picture. Hence various facets need to be discussed. Whilst attempting to answer this question, I found it imperative to first examine whether the teachings of the Prophet throw any light on this issue.

A. Zarathushtra laid down the magna carta of gender equity

Although he lived in a patriarchal society he emphasized the idea of gender equity. This principle is clearly put forth when he expressed the concept of Ahura Mazda. As the late Prof Zaehner had opined in The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism that "... in the Gathas we meet with a pure monotheism that not only has the stamp of a profoundly experienced revelation but also gives the impression of having been deeply thought out." When we analyze the concept of Ahura Mazda, we understand the philosophy of the Amesha Spentas (The Holy Immortals). These Amesha Spentas preside over virtues, qualities, spiritual powers and also material creations. In other words, they are also the attributes or powers of the Supreme.

What is pertinent to our discussion here is that out of the six Holy Immortals, three are masculine while the others are feminine aspects. I quote Dr I J S Taraporewala who had stated that:

“It is rather remarkable that three out of the six Holy Immortals should represent the masculine aspects of God and the other three the feminine aspect. This is but one of the many hints we get in Zoroaster's religion of the absolute equality of the sexes.”

While Vohumanah (The Good Mind), Asha Vahishta (Divine Law) and Khshathra Vairya (Divine Kingdom) are the male aspects of Ahura Mazda, Spenta Armaiti (Holy Devotion), Haurvatat (Perfection) and Ameretatat (Immortality) are His female aspects.

In later Zoroastrian theology, we notice that some of the Yazatas (Worshipful Beings) are also feminine in nature.
From the above, I reiterate the point that the Prophet in propounding the very foundation of his religion, ie. whilst explaining the nature of the Godhead emphasized gender equity. Moreover, his followers later accepted this thought when they elaborated on the concept of the Yazatas.

B. Zarathushtra was not only a Prophet but also a reformer who transformed the religious landscape of his period

When one studies the early history of the world’s religions, we come to the conclusion that all Prophets were also reformers and Zarathushtra was no exception. When he propounded his religion at the early dawn of history, the Mazdayasna religion was already in existence. He brought forth changes in religious thought, which was deeply embedded in the matrix of those days for centuries. He did so, as he thought it necessary at that point of time. The profound religious transformation brought about by Zarathushtra can be gauged through the opinion of Prof Mary Boyce:

“Zoroaster was thus the first to teach the doctrines of an individual judgement, Heaven and Hell, the future resurrection of the body, the general Last Judgment, and life everlasting for the reunited soul and body. These doctrines were to become familiar articles of faith to much of mankind, through borrowings by Judaism, Christianity and Islam ...”

C. The crucial role of the Divine Feminine in various cultures

The Divine Feminine is an immaculate force in Creation. Feminine energy, which is woven into the cultural fabric, nurtures, heals, comforts and motivates. It manifests itself in different goddesses across various cultures. The tradition of invoking female deities is an integral part of most ancient cultures. American mythologist, Joseph Campbell links the image of the Earth or Mother Goddess to symbols of fertility. Campbell states that the image of the Mother Goddess was linked to agricultural societies in regions like Mesopotamia and Egypt. Legends flourished in the Greek and Roman Era. From the Homeric hymn to Gaia ‘mother of all’, to the erotic Sumerian ‘Ninhursag’, the Egyptian ‘Isis’, the Aztec ‘Toci’, the Celtic ‘Anu’, the Germanic ‘Nerthus’, the Olympian goddesses of classical Greece and the great Roman goddesses – all were venerated in the ancient world. In East Asian tradition, ‘Xiwangmu’, the queen mother of the west is one of the oldest female deity of China. Tibetan Buddhism has a pantheon of goddesses invoked for different reasons including health, wealth, wisdom and victory. Even today in some cultures, faith in the feminine energy remains a significant characteristic of spiritual beliefs. In Hinduism, Durga continues to help all devotees who turn to her. The tradition of Devi worship is reflected in different art forms - dance, music, painting, sculpture, architecture and textiles - to showcase different aspects of goddess worship.

D. Position of women in ancient Iran

The position of women serves as an index to the condition of an age. Several references in our scriptures point to the fact that women enjoyed a high status in society. In the Aiwisruthrem Gah we come across the term nmamo paiti and nmamo pathni which terms connote the ‘lord of the house’ and the ‘lady of the house.’ This shows that a wife enjoyed an equal status at home.

The Pahlavi text Madigan-i-Hazar Datistan deals exhaustively with the rights of a woman, wife and daughter. Women were allowed to select their own husbands and widows allowed to re-marry. They could hold property and represent themselves in court. She could legally conduct her husband’s case in court. Qualified women were appointed as judges. Some of these women had also evolved to a lofty spiritual stature and hence the Avestan allusion to women saints. It is thus evident from our scriptures that Iranian law firmly upheld numerous rights and privileges of the wife, which for obvious reasons cannot be discussed here.

Thus in ancient Iranian society, wives held a high position in the social as well as spiritual spheres, which was not inferior to her husband in anyway. The renowned scholar, Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana states, “In the Avestan period the position of the Iranian wife was one of equality to that of her
husband.” (For further details see my paper on the “Position of Women in Ancient India and Iran” in *Cyrus the Great Memorial Volume* published by the Iran Culture House, Bombay, 1974). And I am further reminded of the words of that great French savant, Prof James Darmesteter who had said: “The moral victory of Zoroastrianism is the work of a woman, and that no picture of woman is nobler and higher than that which is drawn in the Avesta.”

**E. The mother not only nurtures life but also sustains it**

It is the mother who nurtures the child in her womb for nine months - it is her blood that transforms it into a miracle of life! Modern genetics shows that though the genetic information of the child is encoded in the nucleus of the cells (both paternal and maternal) there is the cytoplasm mitochondria or energy producing organelles that have their own genetic code. Being in the cytoplasm, it is strictly passed on from mother to child and like any other gene can have effects, favourable or deleterious. This shows that the mother has a special place in the genesis of the child.

Stem cells are pluripotential, are self replicating and are today the key to future transplants. Various sources of stem cell collection are being considered. But menstruation which is a natural and regular phenomenon will perhaps be the best source of such cells.

**F. Human Rights of women cannot be ignored**

The loss of 50 million lives was the tragedy of World War II - this was the saga of man’s inhumanity to man. This cruel catastrophe gave birth in 1948 to a Charter specifically intended to prevent history from repeating - it was the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is pertinent to note that it was an outstanding woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the driving force behind this Declaration.

U Thant, who was the Secretary General of the United Nations, once quoted Eleanor Roosevelt’s statement: “*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the ‘Magna Carta of mankind.’*” Amongst the world’s major religions, there are many spiritual leaders who have supported human rights as an expression of their faith. Today, the championing of human rights is a global reality. This encompasses economic and social as well as civil and political rights, the equality of the sexes and the rights of the individual on an international as well as a national plane. Fundamental human aspirations for human dignity are universal because they are rooted in human nature.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the cornerstone for efforts all over the world by religious and secular leaders to build a system of law so that the moral imperatives of human rights might be promoted, respected and enforced. The Declaration asserts, “*Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world …*”

The source of human rights law is the Declaration, which is now an integral part of the customary law of nations. Today the question of religious freedom has become ‘inseparable’ from other fundamental human rights. We have to clearly understand that freedom, equality and participation are basic elements of all human rights.

Articles 2-21 of the Declaration emphasizes “*… freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of opinion and expression …*”

Parsis have recognized the role of Cyrus the Great, the Achaemenian ruler, as probably the earliest player in this field. By granting the Jews religious freedom, by allowing them to rebuild their Temple
destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, by providing assistance from the royal coffers for this, Cyrus becomes the first known human rights activist.

At a function organized by the Rotary Club of Mumbai on April 22, 1993, the late Mr Justice Bakhtavar Lentin gave a lucid exposition on human rights. Pertinent extracts are given herewith:

“This right to human dignity and to human self-respect is more than even freedom of speech and expression. It signifies the right to equality of all men and women, wheresoever they be and whosoever they are. It is the result of understanding and tolerance and the conviction that all men are born equal. If not born equal, they must be made equal and more importantly, made to feel equal.”

He further stated that “The right to human dignity and the right to human self-respect is the birthright of the teeming millions of womenfolk in this nation. It is this birthright, which in this country is violated every month of the year, every day of the month ... Let us face it. Ours, even today, is essentially a male oriented, a male dominated and a male chauvinistic society. We think of human rights as a male prerogative. It is not.” In the light of this, I ask the pertinent question, what about the rights of Parsi women married to non-Parsis?

At a seminar to observe Human Rights Day in New Delhi in December 2003, the Attorney General of India, Mr Soli J Sorabjee said that people must pledge to make human rights a living reality, adding, “Rights without remedies are useless.” He stressed that remedies also need to be addressed.

G. The Constitution of India safeguards the rights of women

It is pertinent to note that our Constitution also emphasises the importance of human rights. Besides this, it deals with the various rights of women. Given below are the relevant Articles of the Constitution:

In the case of Valsamma Paul (Mrs) v. Cochin University, (1996) 3 SCC 545, the Supreme Court of India after considering the various Articles of the Constitution including Articles 14 and 21, the Hon Court held that:

“Human Rights are derived from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person. Human rights and fundamental freedoms have been reiterated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and have mutual reinforcement. The human rights for women, including girl child are, therefore, inalienable, integral and an indivisible part of universal human rights. The full development of personality and fundamental freedoms and equal participation by women in political, social, economic and cultural life are concomitants for national development, social and family stability and growth – cultural, social and economical. All forms of discrimination on grounds of gender is violative of fundamental freedoms and human rights.”

In various judgements delivered by the Supreme Court of India from time to time, the Hon Court has held that “… The world has witnessed a sea change. The right of equality of women vis-a-vis their male counterparts is accepted worldwide. It will be immoral to discriminate a woman on the ground of sex. It is forbidden both in the domestic law as also international law …”


In this context, it is pertinent to examine the views of Justice Sam Bharucha, the ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. Inaugurating the meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India which was held at Jamshedpur on December 2, 2000, inter alia he said, “... I must go on to add that the Anjumans and Panchayats should consider the admission into the faith, by the
performance of the navjote, of a child born to a Parsi mother and a non Parsi father, provided such child is the product of wedlock and the father is a consenting party. I know that a judgement delivered long back by the Bombay High Court would seem to be standing in the way, but if the Anjumans and Panchayats all resolve that this is the appropriate practice to adopt and the practice is challenged on the strength of that judgement, it can, given the change in the circumstances, be over-ruled.” (The BPP Review, Spring 2001, p17).

Mr Fali Nariman, the eminent jurist had delivered a lecture in New Delhi on January 9, 2000 on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. The theme of his talk was “Parsi Law – Its effect on Parsi Society.” He had expressed similar views by stating, “... After all, customs are not eternal and ancient customs in a modern society are fast changing. Parsis settled in Canada and United States have shown the way quietly, unobtrusively - children of parents one of whom is a non-Parsi have been freely admitted into the religion, and have fervently professed and practiced it. We have to be patient.”

H. Several customs that have been dropped

A certain section of the community are of the firm opinion that nothing has changed for centuries as far as our customs and rituals are concerned. I wish to demolish this false notion by pointing out various customs, which have been dropped by the community over the centuries.

Dr Sir Jivanji Modi who has been the greatest authority regarding Parsi customs states in the Preface of his monumental work, The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsis: “The times are rapidly changing. The ‘new’ has been springing rapidly upon the ‘old.’ As often said, the heresy of today becomes the orthodoxy of tomorrow; the liberalism of this year, the conservatism of the next. The reader will find that many a ceremony, ritual or custom has been spoken of as having become obsolete or as being more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Many more will be obsolete in the course of a few years. Customs are often as despotic as fashions but they also change as fashions.”

“Some of the intricate tedium of purification carried to an extreme from the original reasonable thoughts of sanitation and purification, has now passed off and is passing away.”

Gleaning through the various chapters of the Vendidad and other texts, we come to the conclusion that different customs/beliefs have been dropped. A few of these may be mentioned here:

From the Vendidad translated by Prof James Darmesteter:
Chapter IV. Deals with Contracts:
   If a man breaks a hand-contract, the penalty is 600 stripes.
   If a man breaks a verbal-contract, the penalty is 300 stripes.
Chapter XII. Various periods of mourning for father, mother, brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, cousin, etc.
Chapter XIV. Atonement for the murder of a dog/otter.
Chapter XVI. On the various precautions for women during menses.
Chapter XVII. On disposal of hair and nails.
Chapter XVIII. On punishment of heretic priests.

From the Supplementary Texts to the Sayest ne-sayest (Sns.) translated by Dasturji Dr Firoze M P Kotwal, Copenhagen, 1969:
1. One should recite prayers after the paring of nails (p28).
2. When a child is born a fire is to be kept burning throughout for three nights for protection against the demons (p30).
3. “Sins and their money-values. In the Pahlavi literature, we come across certain sins, which are redeemable when the sinner counter-balances his sins by performing a certain number of meritorious deeds, or by paying a fixed fine prescribed by the Dastwar’s, which may have been
devoted to religious observances. The Sins, and the Persian Rivayats furnish us with the names of the sins and their corresponding values and weights, which are seldom uniform” (p114).
4. The non-performance of five ceremonies, which leads to sin at the Chinvat Bridge (p38).
5. When a goat is slaughtered, the different parts of the animal are dedicated to certain Yazatas and beings (p23).

From A Guide to the Zoroastrian Religion edited and translated by Dasturji Dr Firoze M P Kotwal and James Boyd, California, 1982:
1. Child marriages, which took place before the age of seven (p125).
2. Rules regarding maternity (p133).

The Uzirin Gah refers to the “sraoshavareza” priest before whom a person confessed his sins.

I. Lessons from other religious traditions
In every religious tradition there have been certain practices/customs, which have been in existence for centuries, but have now been discarded. A few books of the Bible actually support and sanction slavery (Exodus 21.21, Leviticus XXV: 44-45, Thessalonians 3:22). Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were slave-owners. But the emancipation of slaves had to wait till the advent of President Lincoln and a savage civil war. Let us not forget that slavery existed also in ancient Iran. The Pahlavi text, Madigan-i Hazar Datistan gives details about this.

One of the books of Old Testament, the Deuteronomy (22.21) states that a girl who does not bleed on her wedding night should be stoned to death. Today, the Jews certainly do not follow this practice.

It is a well-known fact that the caste system has played a very important role in Hinduism for thousands of years. Hindu scriptures like the Rigveda (Book X Hymn XC), Manusmriti (Ch.I.31) and Bhagwad Gita (Ch.IV.13) have supported it. But it is the caste system, which gave rise to the pernicious practice of ‘untouchability’, which has been anathema. Although Mahatma Gandhi was a devout Hindu, he fought against it. Notably, Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolishes untouchability. Anyone abetting, inciting or practicing it in any form can be sentenced to a rigorous jail term.

From the above we see other religious traditions have introduced changes by discarding certain practices although they were sanctioned by their scriptures. Then why are some Parsis supporting gender discrimination?

J. Dialogue is the cornerstone – flexibility is the key
There is a divide between the orthodox and the reformists in our community. This is nothing unusual, as this type of a divide exists amongst all communities. Living in a vibrant democracy, each has a right to his opinion.

But it is time, high time, that both sides should be prepared to come to an understanding for the larger good of the community. This can be done if we are willing to dialogue, discuss and debate this most crucial (issue) with decency, dignity and decorum.

In light of the above data, it would be necessary to have a dialogue about the question of the acceptance of children of Parsi women, who are married to non-Parsis. If the non-Parsi husband has no objection, let the child be initiated into the fold. I know that there will not be a flood, but under the circumstances when demographically our position is very precarious, every single child counts! And I emphasize, that every single child certainly counts. To buttress this argument further, I may state that Ms Meher Amersey, President of the Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians
(AIMZ) informs me that often she is approached by Parsi women who wish to have their children admitted into the fold as their husbands have no objection to this.

In this context let us not forget that a mother has a large role to play, or perhaps larger, in nurturing and ingraining the first seeds of religious fervour in her child.

K. This is not conversion

Every time an intermarried child is refused admission into the faith, it causes pain, anxiety and a sense of rejection in the confused mind of a mother. Even when her non-Parsi spouse has no objection about their child being initiated into the Zoroastrian faith, the community slams the door into her face. We should thus dismantle the barriers of insecurity for these women by upholding their rights and allow their children to be admitted into our fold. If we allow a child of an intermarried Parsi woman into the Zoroastrian fold, it cannot be termed as ‘conversion’ – this is ‘acceptance’.

There are some who contend that in other patriarchal societies, the children of intermarried girls are not accepted. This does not help our case. This argument does not hold good because of the drastically dwindling population of our community. The problem of numbers is not so acute in other communities.

Let us not forget that when Mr R D Tata who was the father of Mr J R D Tata evinced a desire to marry a French lady, Suzanne Briere, it was the learned High Priest, Dastur Kaikhooshroo Jamaspji who performed her Navjote ceremony.

Moreover, it is a known fact that although Sir Ness Wadia, father of Mr Neville Wadia was a born Zoroastrian, he converted to Christianity through the Church of England and married a Christian lady by following Christian rites. Their son Mr Neville Wadia who was baptized in the Church of England, till the age of 80 years he remained a Christian. Later when he wished to become a Zoroastrian, his Navjote was performed although he had a non-Parsi mother and a father who had converted to Christianity!

In this context, there was a letter written by the late Dasturji Dr Hormazdiar Mirza and Dasturji Dr Kaikhooshroo JamaspAsa wherein a reason for the performance of this Navjote was mentioned. They considered this as an exception. Why should religious injunctions be so flexibly interpreted? Why should our scriptures be interpreted to suit the convenience of a millionaire (who was a Christian for 80 years of his life and had a non-Parsi mother) and the same right be denied to a child of a Parsi mother who has been practising Zoroastrianism all her life?

L. The patriarchal form is being challenged

Today, the perception of gender equality is being endorsed even by the courts in India. A decision of the Delhi High Court in March 2011 is very apt. Underlining the concept of gender equality in its true sense, the Delhi High Court has accepted the alimony plea of a man who becomes destitute after separation from his wife. He asserted that if a woman can claim maintenance to match the standard of living of her estranged husband, so can a man. The High Court held that “Law is equal for both. When the husband is unemployed, wife who is working and capable of maintaining him, should maintain him”.

There are a few amongst us who wish to deny the rights of Parsi women on the ground that ours is a patriarchal society. They fail to understand the notion, that men should dominate every aspect of life is being challenged for the last few decades. They have to realize that an alternative outlook now exists and notice the signs of change, growth and evolution. We certainly see the decline of patriarchy and the emergence of new models of gender equity and partnership in different parts of the world. And the sooner this dawns upon us, the better.
Bombay’s High Court gives their verdict on the Parsi Priests’ Case

Excerpts from what the Papers say -

11 March 2011 : Daily News & Analysis - **Bombay high court raps Parsi Punchayet, says it cannot ban priests**

“Trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) cannot arrogate powers to themselves in a mistaken belief that they are custodians of religion, the Bombay high court said on Friday, while lifting a ban on two Zoroastrian priests from praying at the BPP’s facilities.

... BPP chairperson Dinshaw Mehta said, ‘We will probably go to the Supreme Court to challenge it, but we still want to decide on that as what needs to be done as future course of action.’” [Manoj R Nair]

11 March 2011: Indian Express – **HC upholds liberal view in Parsi community**

“'The court has carefully gone through the Deed of Trust and we do not find any provision that empowers the trustees to prevent a duly ordained Zoroastrian priest from performing religious rites and ceremonies in the Tower of Silence and Agiaries as far as it is for Parsi members,’ a division bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and A V Mohta have observed.

The court further remarked that if such an arbitrary power is given, then it is likely to be subjected to grave abuse. ’The court cannot be a party to encourage religious obscurantism,’ it said.”

12 March 2011: Indian Express - **Parsi Panchayet trustees have no powers to ban priests: HC**

“Lifting the ban imposed by trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet (BPP) on two priests for performing ‘unreligious ceremonies’, the Bombay High Court on Friday observed ‘the trustees (of BPP) cannot arrogate powers to themselves in a mistaken belief that they are custodians of the religion. Religion and faith reside in the hearts of the multitude for whom devotion to faith is a matter of conscience. The court cannot be a part to encourage religious obscurantism.’”

12 March 2011: Times of India - **Parsi Punchayet ban on priests quashed**

“The issue before the HC bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and Anoop Mohta was the interpretation of the 127-year-old Trust deed. Settling the controversy sparked by the ban in the shrinking community, the HC said, ‘Under the 1884 deed, the BPP has no power either to ordain a priest or to divest an ordained priest of his entitlements.’ The court held that the trustees have no power to prevent an ordained priest from performing rites at the Towers of Silence for exposure of the dead so long as they accord with the tenets of the faith and are for a person of the community.” [Swati Deshpande, TNN]

13 March 2011: Jame Jamshed - **HC Reprieve for Mirza & Madon**

“Round Two has gone to the ‘Renegades’! On Friday, a bench of the Bombay High Court, comprising Justices D Chandrachud and A Mohta, struck down an earlier order of the Bombay High Court that had stayed the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) ban, in what is popularly called the ‘Renegade Priests Case’. Round Three will probably be played out in the Supreme Court of India, although it is too early for the confirmation of this premise.

... “He further stated that beneficiaries are entitled to ‘engage a duly ordained priest’ of their choice and the BPP Trustees cannot either ordain a priest or exclude him. He added that those who opt for cremation do so out of contemporary concerns and not because they have left the faith.”

17 March 2011: Bangalore Mirror - **A question of trust, a matter of faith**

“The Parsi community is unique, and uniquely Indian. It has many great qualities, perhaps the greatest of which is its remarkable generosity of spirit. It is this spirit that the judgement recognizes when it condemns a narrow, sectarian religious perspective: ‘At least the Court cannot be a party to encouraging religious obscurantism.’ (This judgement of the Bombay High Court will now be taken to
the Supreme Court. There, hopefully, it will be left untouched, for this is a judgement that India both needs and deserves. In a country which claims to be truly secular by law but which displays every indication to the contrary, this judgement is a reaffirmation of one of our most cardinal Constitutional principles. In it, we hear the distinct echo of Forster’s recommendation for temperance. And we hear, too, the equally distinct voice of Nietzsche calling from the past: “You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.” [Gautam Patel]

27 March 2011: Bombay Samachar, PTA – Orthodoxy suffers an epoch making reverse

“The liberals skillfully managed to portray the BPP as the Parsi Taliban terrorizing the community into meek submission and trampling upon the rights of whoever dared to oppose them. All these WAPIZ self-goals made Chairman Dinshaw Mehta realize (the shrewd and seasoned litigant that he is) that legal merits of the BPP case were taking a back seat. It was too late, however, to make amends and WAPIZ preferred to ignore hints from the Court to end this litigation and compromise. ...

“The irony, is, that perhaps the BPP did not have such a bad legal case. Every trust has a right to decide which service provider it wants. This proposition has been rubbished by the Court. Sometimes bad antics in Court spoil a good legal case. As they say, bad facts make bad law.” [Berjis Desai]

4 March 2011: Navroze Issue of The BPP Review: “Even as I wish all our dear community members a Happy Navroze we are saddened to inform you all that the Division Bench of the Bombay High Court has reversed the Single Judge’s Order dated March 5, 2010, and granted reprieve to the two renegade priests, Framroze Mirza and Khushroo Madon on March 11, 2011, in the case filed by Jamshed Kanga and Homi Khusrokhan. The High Court has stayed its operation for a period of four weeks to enable the Trustees to challenge the same in the Honourable Supreme Court of India. The BPP is under advice from its lawyers to take the matter to the Supreme Court.” [Dinshaw Rusi Mehta, Chairman]

£1M Donation assures future of Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) has received a £1 million donation from a charitable fund set up to advance research into and public understanding of Zoroastrianism, one of the world’s oldest living religions.

The Zoroastrian Professorship Fund, supported by private donors, will secure a long-term endowment for the Zartoshty Professorship in Zoroastrianism at SOAS in the Department of the Study of Religions.

SOAS is the first university in the world to boast an endowed professorship in Zoroastrianism.

This donation realises the vision of the late Professor Mary Boyce, who taught Zoroastrianism and Iranian Studies at SOAS from 1947 to 1982. The acclaimed academic championed the founding of an endowed post and achieved significant recognition and support for her work from the Zoroastrian community. A part-time, later full-time, post was set up in 1997 with generous funding from Zoroastrian philanthropists Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty.

This new £1 million donation will be used along with the Zartoshty funds to ensure that the endowment will continue to advance the study and understanding of Zoroastrianism at SOAS in perpetuity. The donation was celebrated at a special ceremony at SOAS on Wednesday 9 February 2011 which was attended by representatives and trustees of the private donors and the current and former presidents of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe.

... While Zoroastrianism is studied at a small number of other international universities, no other institution has an endowed chair. This gift ensures that the religion will continue to be researched and taught at SOAS in perpetuity. [Press release from SOAS]
The Eight Lady Mobedyars of Iran

From the report sent by the Tehran Anjoman e Mobedan through courtesy of Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary.

Tehran Anjoman e Mobedan at the Khosravi Community Hall, in Tehran, had arranged an awe-inspiring celebration which coincided with Jashn e Esfandgan (Rooz Spedarmazd - Mah Spendarmazd, considered to be Mother’s / Women’s day, an occasion meant for paying tributes to the spiritual aspects of Spenta Armaiti), and a unique ceremony with a view to glorify the position of women within our Society – the initiation of eight lady mobedyars.

Eight out of fifteen candidates who had undergone stringent and extensive training in the entire Avesta recitations required for carrying out our common religious rites, and who had acquired high levels of religious knowledge enabling them to teach our religious principles and general knowledge to the laity; and committed to serve the Anjoman e Mobedan in the latter’s quest for the upkeep these values, were bestowed upon with titles as Mobedyars.

They were, Mrs Mitra nee Moradpour, Mrs Mehrzad nee Kaviani, Mrs Fariba nee Mali, Mrs Parva nee Namiranian, Mrs Sarvar nee Tarapouvala, Mrs Rashin nee Jahangiri, Miss Paria Mavandi and Miss Behnaz Naeemabadi.

The ceremony consisted of two parts. A variety of lectures and a group recitation of a ceremonial Jashan with Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary as the Zaotar (Zoot). A summary of the event is shared with our readers.

Beginning with the recitation of some verses from the Gathas, Mobed Pedram Soroushpour who conducted the ceremony shed an insight into some aspects of the songs and the belief that Asho Zarathushtra named his daughter PaorooChista (meaning equipped with much knowledge) to indicate His belief and desire that women ought to seek knowledge, especially religion.

Prof Katayoun Mazdapour, a Zartoshti researcher and university professor, was invited to speak. She spoke about Asho Zarathushtra’s stress upon the equality of men and women as human beings, and the cultural heritage that He left behind leading into acts of Human Rights with justice and peaceful attitudes all along. She then identified extracts from Hirbadestan (Aerepatestan) dating back to early Achaemenian Dynasty, indicating that women acquired and imparted religious knowledge in the same capacity as men for religious practices, including the job of tending to the Holy Fire without any restrictions. In spite of all the above, outside influences and the victory of force over reason left the female subdued over by the male gender until about some decades ago when the emancipation of women came about. Saviors such as Gulestan Banoo Izadyar’s revelations to the Parsis of India, regarding the restrictions in Iran, which culminated in the activities of Manekji Limji Hataria, followed by several others and of recent past, namely, Farangis Shahrokh who brought about sweeping changes for the benefit of our community, especially for our womenfolk. She said that wisdom is the only instrument to choose the truth.

Dr Esfandiar Ekhtiari – Zartoshtis’ representative in Parliament – called this day as a very great and historic one. He marvelled at the insight and foresight of Asho Zarathushtra who put forward the very idea that it is the humanity of human beings that count and not genders, race, or material power. He counted this occasion as a demonstration of the advanced thinking of our community and praised the Anjoman e Mubedan for not stooping to oppositions. He also praised the lady Mobedyars for their bravery and religious feeling, in spite of the fact that each one of them were highly educated and came from affluent families. Dr Ekhtiary presented each of the candidates with a gift as a token of his appreciation for their courageous endeavor.

Mehrangiz Shahzadi – the representative of the Zartoshti Women’s Organisation – spoke of Frashkart. She said that the religious principles are strict but subsidiary laws should be changed along with time and considered this event a good Frashkart.
Dr Rostam Khosraviani – the Tehran Zartoshti Anjoman president – was the next speaker. He praised the role women have played in the fields of education and social work. He considered this occasion as a solid proof that our community is progressive and praised the Anjoman e Mobedan for all the hard work and determination they had rendered, to achieve such a goal in spite of fierce oppositions from different quarters.

Mehrangiz Shahzadi, a board director of the Zartoshti Women’s Organisation cited the limitations that existed for women in holding public posts till only a few decades back. The Tehran Zartoshti Anjoman had held a community referendum in order to decide if women could be elected to the Anjuman’s Board of Directors. The votes were overwhelmingly in favour. As a result two ladies were elected then and that trend has continued ever since. Soon after, Farangis Shahrokh founded the Iranian Association of Zartoshti Women in Tehran, exactly 60 years ago.

Mobed Dr Khorshidian, the current President of the Anjoman e Mobedan began with praises for the high rate of literacy amongst our community, both male and female. He had prepared a three page written account of the set of rules listing the expectations and limitations of the lady Mobedyars. To begin with they were expected to be primarily active in the fields of teaching and in helping the Anjuman spread our religious knowledge and culture. As Mobedyars they were welcome to perform Sedre Pushi, Jashans and other limited ceremonies permitted to their male counterparts, however, only in case of emergencies or for occasions and places where it was required. To begin with and until formally announced the ladies would not enter any Atash Behram or Darbe Mehr Adorans to tend the Holy Fire, nor would they opt to pray at the burial ceremony in any Aramgah.

Mobed Ardeshir Khorshidian, also listed the basic principles of Zartoshti religion, amongst them principles that uphold the equal rights of men and women as well as the one which states that the duty of human beings is to make the world progressive (Frasho kereti) by supporting this move. At this part of the ceremony the candidates received their Mobedary Certificates and each one read out a statement expressing their thanks for being selected to such a holy post and their commitments to serve the community.

Mobed Pedram Soroushpour, who had played a very active role in the management and success of the Mobedary programme, conducted the Initiation Ceremony and spoke in detail about the duration of the training and how these eight out of fifteen candidates had passed the strictest tests. Both he and Dr Khorshidian announced the Anjoman e Mobedan’s commitment to continue their efforts in maintaining discipline amongst the priestly class and their Yars (assistants) and promised other ladies who were interested for further training and graduation to Women Mobed Yars, this would be given.

The ceremony was continued by Avesta reciting – rejoicing Jashan – which each of the eight mobedyars recited a part under the supervision of Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary.

As you may note, from the above, the candidates have been promoted with the aim, besides meeting their enthusiasm for fulfilling their religious duties, they would in no way be competing with the full time practicing Mobeds / Mobedyars. On the one hand they are highly qualified academically, postgraduates and MDs and have no material needs to earn through providing prayers etc. Moreover to begin with, they are restricted from tending to any Atash Behram / Agiary fires, as well as the “Geh Sarna” ritual for dead dispositions.

During Jashan recitals in Iran, there are portions where the priest holds up one and then two branches of myrtle and the congregation follow. In doing this, everyone present prays that the benefit of the ceremony may reach Ahura Mazda, with the first branch and to every human being who is a follower of Good Thoughts ... Deeds.
He strikes the metal plunger bell and orders Keshoo (sepoy) to bring the first standard teacher. And here comes a Gujarati gentleman, in his dhoti with a wonderful smile, the most respected, loving, wise, the one and only teacher, Kantilal M Upadhyaya. Kantilal Saheb escorted the young recruit to the last class room, informing on the way that he has taught all his four brothers, who were very good students! We enter the class room and Kantilal Saheb introduces me as Soli Pirojshah Kawasji Dastur from Tarapur and requests me to occupy the only empty desk left. Kantilal Saheb brings his dhoko (club) to me, saying: “Sorabji! you are the monitor of this class and take care of it in my absence!” Thus started my initiation to this magnificent boarding school, The Mancherji Framji Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI). The memorable day was June 20th 1945, which began the most formative nine years of my life, until I passed the SSC (High School) exam in March 1954.

All I am today, is due to the wonderful training we all had in this Institute, under the tutelage of those unbelievably dedicated teachers, namely, Kantilal, Kaikhushroo S Daruwalla, Rustomji S Sanjana, Mobed Tehmurasp P Sidhwa, Faramroze P Patel, Dr Peshotan K Anklesaria, Rana, Khambata, and many others. And as a monitor, I was fortunate to have as my class mates, nay as my brothers, Ervads Dr Kersey Antia, Dastur Feroze (Framroze) Kotwal, Noshir Bharucha, Late Gustad Andhyarujina, and many others.

The secret of MFCAI Education during my time (1945-1954)

The MFCAI education during this time was a balanced diet of activities, starting with the hundred plus peels of bell at 5:20am all the
way to 9pm, ending with the singing of the favourite Gujarati monajat, Khudaavind khaavind parvardegaar. Even to this day, when I lay my head to sleep, I hear the melodious echoes of 70+ students and the duty teacher singing this monajat. We had an equal mixture of bhantar studies (religious prayers to be learnt by heart for Navar/ Martab ceremonies beginning with the Gehs, Nyayeshes, Yashths, and those 72 Yasna Has and 23 Visperad Kardas) on one side, kriyaa kaam practice to learn the intricacies of performing Yasna and Visperad ceremonies on the other side, together with classes in Gujarati, English (no Hindi yet), Persian in the last four to five years, and Avesta/Pahlavi, in the last two years. Histories of India, Britain, and Iran, subjects like Math and Geography, and the weekly recitation of the Shahnameh, interspersed with one an a half hours of exercise and outdoor play, usually cricket in three divisions, rounders, and Aataa Paataa during the rainy season which we used to call fondly Kajiyaa nu kaalbut.

This went on daily, with a weekly outing usually by foot to Juhu Beach, Versova, and an occasional annual visit to the Victoria Garden Zoo where our kitchen staff would bring the lunch in huge tapelas and serve us in the open. Such an outing may include a movie or a Parsi Natak occasionally. The lucky ones who had relatives in Bombay, came each Parents’ Day, being Sunday afternoon for a visit, bringing the much sought after Parsi goodies for their boys. In my nine years, I had two visits from my brothers; however, I was fortunate enough to have friends whose relatives visited frequently. Among all these daily/weekly activities, was there free time? Oh yes, about an hour between dinner and final monajat singing at 9pm when we played indoor cricket, table tennis, chess and that very competitive and sometimes dangerous “I Spy” game.

The total cost for all these amenities was IRs 3 per month for the first years and an increase to IRs 5 for the senior years. What’s more, free washing of our clothes by the famous Marshall dhobi and a frequent haircut were also included in these fees! There were many of us whose parents could not even afford this amount, but thanks to the magnificent philanthropic hvarshta (good deed) of our benefactor, Seth Meherwanji Mancherji Cama, all were taken care off. Kantilal Saheb wrote a monajat for this noble man which began, Sneha thaki vandan sahu kariye, pyaaraa Camaji! Upakaaro kadiye na viseriye, pyaara Camaji – with much love, we bow to our beloved Camaji! Never shall we forget your beneficence to us, our beloved Camaji!

I feel due to this busy and balanced schedule, and having survived these formative tough years, we are successful today.

The alumni of the Institute form the bedrock of priests on hafta keshwar zamin (all seven continents of the world). It has produced three Dasturs – Late Dastur Navroze Minocher Homji, Dastur Feroze Kotwal, and Dastur Peshotan Hormazdyar Mirza. Dastur Minocher Homji and Ervad Manecksha K Panthaki, the father of Ervads Behram and Gustad Panthaki were the first batch of 36 students enrolled in the Institute in 1923 and Ervad Manecksha was the first navar from here on 2 November, 1928. In addition there were two mobeds from Iran, Dasturs Firooz Azargoshap and Rostam Shahzadi, who received their training at this Institute. They were sponsored by the Yazd Anjoman e Moobedan and the Bombay Irani Anjuman, under the leadership of the late Dinshaw Irani.

The school has been a steady influence throughout our lives and, we owe everything we have accomplished to that great philanthropist and far-sighted Parsi Zarathushhti, late Meherwanji Mancherji Cama who built this boarding school for the upliftment of the Athornan families. Many of us school graduates still take the names of late Meherwanji and his.
father Mancherji in all our Afrigan Deebache even today, a tribute of our gratitude.

The vision and foresight of Seth Meherwanji Muncherji Cama a 100 years ago

On the subject of MFCAI, I feel students have not written enough for this wonderful Institute. One of the few written materials I found is an excellent little booklet – The M F Cama Athornan Institute Beckons You, which is available from the Principal, Ervad Khushru N Panthaky, Ph: 0091-22-2265-6348; email: mfcamainstitute@gmail.com. It gives the following vision statement which is very appropriate to quote here:

“Mr Meherwanji Muncherji Cama, realised long ago that the members of the Athornan community had considerably degenerated materially and intellectually and their remuneration and prospects as priests were so poor that it made their sacred calling unattractive to the educated and intelligent members of the community. He also realised that their education was so much neglected, their intellectual attainments so low and their qualification for advancing the spiritual welfare of the Zoroastrian community so poor, misconceived and misdirected that they never could command that respect and regard which as the Spiritual Leaders and guides of the Community they were entitled to expect.”

He wrote a letter dated 12/08/1912 to the Trustees of the N M Wadia charities, Bombay, to take up the question of amelioration of the Parsi Priests, stating: “We have all sorts of funds and Institutions of various kinds. They have been and are well supported by our community and to supplement them will do little good. What I do suggest to the Trustees is to do something that has been so sorely needed and if its object is fairly fulfilled will have lasting effect upon the social, moral and religious welfare of the Parsis.

“If things are allowed to remain as they are, I am afraid the number of priests will dwindle down as it has already begun to do. And we shall have to put up with a still lower class of them.”

This sound advice of the greatest well-wisher of the Athornans went unheeded by the trustees of the various charity trusts. Hence this great man, Late Seth Meherwanji Muncherji Cama founded the Institute on Tuesday, 22nd March, 1923 in memory of his father, Late Seth Muncherji Faramji Cama, “to produce enlightened, full-fledged Yozdathregars”.

What profound foresight Seth Meherwanji had almost 100 years ago and how accurately his predictions for the Athornans have proved true. Alas, gone are the glory days of this Institute with 70+ students and 12+ teachers during the 1950’s, with teeming activities around the clock. As the Trustees say in the booklet mentioned: “Today we have five boys but we expect this number to rise gradually, looking to the sincere and dedicated efforts by the Principal and staff.” This is NOT happening.

The revival efforts of Trustees and past students

For the last few years, the MFCAI’s past students are trying to revive this Institute and they deserve all the help from our community worldwide. However, we wish to bring the sorry plight of this once magnificent Institute to the notice of all Zarathushtis, and seek solutions to revive the Zarathushti mobed community worldwide.

We intend to do so with the help of MFCAI Trustees, past students and willing contributors as well as showcase a series of articles with what it was, what it has become, and some solutions to uplift the mobed community at large and in so doing, the school itself.

And finally, I leave you with that haunting echo in my ears of the last lines of our nightly Khudaavind khaavind parvardegaar monajat – Maneh paasbaani maa taari suwaad, bhalaa kaamo karvaa savaareh uthaad! (Let me sleep under your watchful eye, and wake me up in the morning to do good deeds (again)) – especially for our beloved MFCAI.

Yazdaan Panaah Baad! - May Ahura Mazda keep a watchful eye over us!
Symbols of Identity

by Meher Marker Noshirwani

“Preserve the Past, Protect the Present, and Perfect the Future” -
North American Zoroastrian Congress Houston, 29 - 31 December 2010

“We are at the threshold of a momentous time in our history. Our survival is at stake. Let us live in humility and harmony. It is our turn to protect our religion for the future generation.” - Roshan Z Sethna, Co-Chair North American Zoroastrian Congress Houston 2010.

Exhibit Room: Intercontinental Hotel

Gara’s and duglees, topies and kors, torans and ses, sadras and kustis, jablas and ejars, Avestas and Shahnamahs, culture, religion, traditions, and history, blended together to illustrate a Zoroastrian tapestry. The exhibition room at the North American Zoroastrian Congress in Houston was filled with heirlooms, books and embroidered textiles lent for the NAZC by local members of the Zoroastrian community. Attended by over 550 delegates, including a diverse group of speakers, performers and participants, the 15th North American Zoroastrian Congress was held in Houston from 29 to 31 December 2010. The theme of the Congress “Preserve the Past, Protect the Present and Perfect the Future” was aptly portrayed in the exhibition where exquisite artifacts some of them almost 200 years old, were on display to show the diversity of our ancient culture. This exhibition was organized by Meher Rustomji, Villi Bhappu, and Behroze Daruwalla. The Parzor project provided historical descriptions of the items on display based on the research it has conducted on Zoroastrian heritage. According to Parzor “Parsi arts and crafts reflect an inter-assimilation of four cultural traditions – Iranian, Indian, Chinese, and European which have produced the hybrid Parsi culture. Parsi embroidery and textiles are famous. Their wood carvings, silver, jewellery, paintings, and music, deserve further study and research.”

Silver Vessels: Family Unity

In the exhibit room, two glass cupboards containing a number of silver ses in different sizes, a large farohar on a chain, silver vases, photo frames, silver bowls, sugar, milk, coffee pots, and other objects from Parsi homes were on display. According to custom “every woman carries one round silver thalli filled with ritual objects to her married home. It symbolizes family strength and unity. The round plate stands for unity, where fire, water, plant and animal life are represented in the holy element; silver. The daily lighting of a silver divo is to remind us of the enlightenment of wisdom. The ses also invokes upon the household the blessings of all aspects of creation as can be seen in the silver fish, betel leaf, coconut, and other little objects in the thalli.” A number of ses, large and small, plain or intricately designed with the initials of a girl’s father engraved into the side of the thali, evoked memories of khushali occasions in every family. The size, quality and price of a ses depends on the amount of silver it contains. A ses contains a “soparo, a cone symbolizing a mountain of sweetness that holds rock sugar (khadi sakar) or flat sugar rounds (patasa). The gudabaz, a long necked rose water container, a pigani containing vermilion paste known as tilli, a divo (oil lamp) and a coconut are the symbolic accessories of a ses. Water symbolizes purity, an egg a life giving force, betel leaves for suppleness, betel nuts for strength, rice to denote abundance sugar crystals for sweetness, rose petals for happiness, a garland for joy, dates symbolize resilience, unshelled almonds virtue and honesty, pistachio firmness, and silver and gold coins wealth.” Usually a ses is passed on to each generation through the women of a family and at a child’s Navjote the ses used by the Navjote child is usually the same as the one used at the parents wedding. And often “on the occasion of the child’s wedding the old ses is either passed on to the next generation or a new one is bought depending on the number of children in the family.” This tradition of continuity is a powerful binding force within the community, and every Parsi household keeps a ses as a symbol of joy and happy occasions. Images of women in garas carrying a ses, behind a young child on his Navjote came to my mind, as I looked at the different ses’ shining behind a glass case.
Silver trays, boxes, and coffee sets were also lent by Parsee families living in Houston for the exhibition. Silver artifacts are integral to Zoroastrian tradition, because silver symbolizes purity, and silver vessels are used on sacred occasions throughout life. Silver vases or karasias are used in the muktad prayers, and each vase bears the name of the individual, with the birth and death date engraved on it. Silver rattles are a traditional gift at the birth of a child and silver glasses are used to pour milk over a child’s feet on birthdays. At all Navjote’s and Lagan’s a silver ses is used, and the last rites and muktad rituals also use silver objects to symbolize purity. So both within the home as well as in an agyari silver is used for all ceremonial purposes.5

Sudreh and Kusti: armour against evil

A few sudreh and kusti’s were also on display and in particular an embroidered sudreh almost 100 years old was carefully exhibited on one side of a table, among kustis and topies. Under Meher Rustomji’s strict supervision no food or water was allowed into the Exhibition room, to ensure all items were protected from the “malido” fingers of the viewers. Malido and batasas, were served every morning for breakfast, a reflection of the Parsee love for traditional food wherever we roam.

Of all the symbols of our faith the sudreh and kusti are spiritually the most powerful, and instructions are given to us at our Navjote to wear these all our lives, since they provide protection and remind us each day of our Zoroastrian credo. “The sacred shirt, sudreh and sacred girdle, kusti are the armour of the Zoroastrian in his war against evil. Each Parsi is invested with them at the Navjote ceremony. These are always to be worn. The sacred shirt is made of white muslin and has a gireban, the pocket of good deeds, which needs to be filled every day. The sacred girdle, kusti is made of 72 threads of lamb’s wool. The figure 72 symbolises the 72 chapters of the Yasna. The kusti is tied in three loops around the waist to remind one of Humata, Hukata, Huvarashta, Good thoughts, Good words, and Good deeds. Its four knots, two in front and two behind remind the wearer of the four duties of human kind – the worship of God, obedience, and self sacrifice, consistency in battle against evil and complete obedience in God’s justice.” 6 This symbol of our faith has been tried and tested over thousands of years. The tell-tale ends of a kusti peeping out of our shirts at school is the shared identity we have with other Parsee students. Each of us will remember being told by a friend “your kusti’s showing” as we hurriedly shoved our kusti back into our jeans, or trousers running to classes in school.

Kasab ni Topies, Paghris, and Phetas: protection from evil

According to Zoroastrian belief covering the head is protection from evil. It is believed that Angra Mainya or Ahriman7 could enter the skull if it is kept bare, and hence the importance of headgear in all religious and social functions is reinforced in the form of simple velvet prayer topies or elaborate zardozi kasab topies, phetas, and paghris. The community in Houston had lent a number of kasab topies for the exhibition which were placed alongside the other embroidered items. Until the late 19th and early 20th centuries both boys and girls wore similar topies. European influence led to the introduction of colours, like pink, ivory, and purple for girls, and maroon, black and red for boys. Girls generally wore their topies till puberty, and after they got married they wore mathabanas.8 Boys also wore kasab topies till puberty and then graduated to phetas or paghris. “Older men wore paghris as a symbol of being a Parsi especially when praying, attending ceremonies, visiting dakhmas or agyaries. The paghri was shaped and finished using starched, lacquered cotton cloth, which gave it stiffness and sheen. While the paghri reflects Chinese influence, the pheta evolved from a combination of the half rolled turbans worn by Kadmi priests and the dome-shaped, molded felt clad bowler hats worn by the British.” 9

A range of phetas and paghris were also seen during the fashion show parade of the youth at the Congress, and during the entertainment in the evenings. Dressed in garas, duglees, paghris and phetas, young men and women showed off a variety of
saries and gave us a glimpse of the social and religious customs which bind us as a community wherever we are.

**Garas and Kors: protection, fertility, wealth and beauty**

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*Gara* embroidery is probably the most famous of all Parsi culture. Over the years it has become a part of the identity of the Parsis, and symbolizes the elegance and status of the community. A combination of Chinese, Persian, Indian, European motifs and stitches blend to create an inclusive art of exquisite beauty. The purple and white combination seen on many garas goes back to Cyrus the Great, who came into battle “wearing a purple tunic shot with white ... and a mantle all of purple”. During the Tang and Song dynasties (618-907 AD and 960-1279 AD) as traders to China, the Parsis brought back to India designs of Chinese symbols, and mixed them with Persian and Indian influence to create the typical distinct gara embroidery. In the Zoroastrian Pahlavi text “The Bundahishn”, every flower symbolises an angel. The thirty Yazatas or archangels, who represent each day of the month, can be seen across generations of embroidery tradition. The Divine Fungus was adopted from the Chinese as a symbol of protection, and the rooster, the Ariz or fish an emblem of fertility, and the Iranian Simurgh which roosts on the Tree of Seeds in the Avesta, were powerful symbols of protection retained by the Zoroastrian tradition.

Similarly, stitches like the khakho or seed pearl stitch known as the “forbidden stitch” was also handed down through oral transmission. This intricate, fine, and rare embroidery stitch has been recorded, but it remains a memory, and has unfortunately been lost to the future generations of weavers. “Women used special techniques and rare, intricate stitches as well as gold and silver thread and ‘tills’ to create designs on kors. Chinese, European and Indian influence can often be seen in the motifs in zardosi work.”

Sari borders or kors are equally elaborate and intricately designed, and the many beautiful borders on display at the Congress were admired by delegates and participants. Skillfully organized by Behroze Daruwalla, many people who visited the exhibition room were amazed at the quantity of beautiful and valuable items on display. Among the saris were garas, some completely embroidered, and others with borders or kors. Of particular significance was a gara with its own wooden lacquered box from China. In the past garas with painted wooden lacquered boxes from China were used to transport and store these embroidered saris.

In Zoroastrian heritage, kors are another important part of a Parsi woman’s wardrobe, and “gara’s when ordered in China were regarded as easier to make than the fully embroidered pieces.” Hence, the different sari’s displayed at the Exhibition showed the continuing value of our heirlooms among the Parsi community in Houston.

**Spanish shawls and embroidered coats: evidence of intercultural trade**

Spanish shawls and embroidered coats: evidence of intercultural trade

The influence of trade on embroidery tradition is evident in the use of “Spanish shawls” and embroidered coats, worn and used by Parsi women. “Intercultural trade between China, Parsis on the west coast of India and Europe gave rise to the ‘Spanish shawls’. They often reflect naturalistic embroidery from the Persian tradition, Chinese motifs and European flowers. The silk shawls were worn over saris by Parsi women in winter”. Spanish shawls were also called piano shawls, and were used as decorative drapes on pianos or as tablecloths. Similarly, embroidered coats were a popular feature in fashionable Parsi
households. This was worn over a sari in winter, a derivative development from the Spanish shawl tradition. These coats usually had intricate scenes from Chinese life, symbols and motifs from Chinese architecture, and bridges and rising towers were symbolic of links to higher worlds." I was surprised and pleased to see a Spanish shawl displayed at the Exhibition in Houston, since I had not seen one before. Obviously this was a garment used and worn among the older generation of Parsi women, and it is not a common item of clothing for younger women. An elegant, yet elaborate shawl and probably difficult to wear in the changing world of fashion, it reminded me of an era when formal wear required sophisticated attire which would be hard to follow in current fashion trends. So imagining an era of grace and dignity I turned to admire the jhablas and ejars, which were being carefully arranged for display by Villi Bhappu.

Jhablas and Ejars: affection and protection

Another essential part of Parsi clothing are jhablas and ejars, which were among the items displayed as part of the embroidery section at the Congress. In the past jhablas were normally worn by children until their Navjote, and carried in their embroidery many symbols of protection and affection. For instance the rooster, the divine fungus and butterflies were all symbols for protection. The rooster sacred to Sarosh Angel of Prayer, is seen in embroidery on jhablas to protect children before their Navjote. And the Divine Fungus was adopted from the Chinese as a symbol of protection. In some cases larger jhablas were worn by women over their sudreh and ejars at home.

The ejar is a remnant of Zoroastrian garments from Persian and Central Asian regions. It has a large width which enables the wearer to be able to ride a horse or mule which was the normal mode of transport in ancient Iran. Fortunately, ijars are still worn at Navjotes, and handed down within families as part of tradition. Once again they remind us of a bygone era, when intricate hand embroidered pieces were commonly used as part of normal clothing.

Torans and Coins: crafts and trade

“Hormazd created fire and attached to it a ray from the endless light.” (Bundahishn)

And so I drifted around the room, gazing at the variety of objects, enjoying the colours and imaging what it was like to live in a Parsi home at the end of the 19th century, when the vibrant colors of glass beads caught my eye. The glass mirrored stand in the centre of the room was sparkling with many torans draped around it. I picked up the delicate glass cylindrical beads, and wondered which woman had spent many hours making this toran. The art of toran making is a typical Parsi craft and gradually disappearing. Tiny glass beads must be threaded together with a very fine needle. If even one bead breaks or is placed in the wrong position the entire design is ruined. Once the pattern is complete the threads are cut from the loom and sealed with a candle. Traditional designs include fish, roosters, flowers, and Chinese people. Women learnt to make torans during the time of month when they were isolated from the rest of the household and could not practice the sacred craft of kusti weaving. Toran making is an intricate skill, and the craft is passed down from mother to daughter. Auspicious colours of red and green welcome guests into a household, and glass beads used in most torans came from Czechoslovakia. Large or small torans are an integral part of our daily customs, and there is rarely a Parsi home without a toran on its door. In glass beads, flowers, leaves, or silver, in Mumbai, Karachi, or Houston, torans greet us as we enter our homes, provide us with protection, and identify a Parsi household.

Moving towards another section I noticed, an important part of our history, which is not commonly known, which is the role Parsis played in banking and finance. Two brothers Viccajee and Pestonji Meherji, who traded under the name of Viccajee Meherji at Bombay, established a pecuniary connection with the Nizam of Hyderabad’s government, and traded in Hyderabad (Deccan) under the name of Pestonjee Vicajee. They minted their own coins called...
after them the Pestonshahi currency in a mint which they had set up at Aurangabad, and this was considered to be legal tender during their reign.\textsuperscript{17} The Pestonshahi Sicca of Hyderabad recalls the power that Seth Viccaji Meherji – 1783 -1854 and Seth Pestonji Meherji – 1798 -1853 of Hyderabad had at the Nizam’s court. Seth Pestonji Meherji’s initials were engraved on this coin struck both in copper and silver at the Aurangabad mint. The Chinoy family of Hyderabad commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Chinoy family by making replica’s of these coins with a note on their history. A set of these coins were also on display which reminded me of the power some of our ancestors held in the past.

Avestas and Shahnamahs: prayers and poetry

At the corner of the room, in a glass cabinet a few prayer books were placed, with their pages open for us to read these ancient articles of faith. The Khordeh Avesta is the Zoroastrian book of daily prayers. The texts of the Avesta which are all in the Avestan language were composed over the course of several hundred years. The most important portion, the Gathas, are the hymns thought to have been composed by Zarathustra himself. Different sizes of the Avesta prayer books with beautifully embroidered covers to protect them, from dust and a devotee’s hands were testimony to a living religion, which has survived over centuries through the devotion of its followers.

In another section, rare and valuable hand painted copies of the Shahnamah was available for us to view. The Shahnamah or “The Book of Kings” is an enormous poetic opus written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1000AD. Consisting of almost 60,000 verses, the Shahnamah tells the mythical and historical past of Iran from the creation of the world until the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century. The work is of central importance in Persian culture, regarded as a literary masterpiece, and definitive of ethno-national cultural identity of Iran. It is also important to the contemporary adherents of Zoroastrianism.\textsuperscript{18} During the Congress, readings from the Shahnamah were also held for participants to listen to the stories from this famous book.

The Navroze table: thanksgiving

Continuing with the Irani Zoroastrian tradition a table signifying Nowruz stood close to two enormous replicas of the columns from Persepolis. Last year in 2010, the UN recognized 21 March as International Day of Nowruz. A UN press release said, “The General Assembly this afternoon recognized the International Day of Nowruz, a spring festival of Persian origin. According to the preamble of the resolution on the International Day (document A/64/L.30/Rev.2), Nowruz, which means new day, is celebrated on 21 March, the day of the vernal equinox, by more than 300 million people worldwide as the beginning of the new year. It has been celebrated for over 3,000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions. The Assembly called on Member States that celebrate the festival to study its history and traditions with a view to disseminating that knowledge among the international community and organizing annual commemoration events. Welcoming the inclusion of Nowruz into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 30 September 2009, the text notes the festival’s “affirmation of life in harmony with nature, the awareness of the inseparable link between constructive labour and natural cycles of renewal and the solicitous and respectful attitude towards natural sources of life”. The text was introduced by Azerbaijan’s representative, who said that, as a holiday celebrated in many parts of the world with themes important to all humanity, Nowruz encourages intercultural dialogue and understanding. Speaking after the Assembly took action on the draft, the representative of Iran marked its adoption by quoting lines of the Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi that expressed the holiday’s theme of rebirth “on our planet and in our souls”\textsuperscript{19}.

The Nowruz table at the Congress was placed among the other exhibits bringing
together the Parsi and Iranian culture and traditions. Filled with fruit, vegetables, sugar, eggs, sweets, flowers, candle stands, and an unusual painting of Zarathustra in the background, the table connected the Iranian Zoroastrians to the Parsis.

Parzor: revival of crafts

And finally embroidered items from the Parzor project which works towards preserving our ancient heritage were displayed to illustrate the revival of Parsi crafts. As part of the craft revival project Parzor has been teaching young women across India, the dying art of Parsi embroidery. By using designs collected through research and adapting them to a variety of contemporary items, traditional gara patterns have been adapted to appeal to changing trends in fashion. The theme of this North American Zarathushhti Congress, “Preserve the Past, Protect the Present, and Perfect the Future” aptly reflects what Parzor is doing through documentation and recordings of past traditions, to building archives, restoring libraries, and creating awareness to adapt to the future through a revival of crafts. Parzor items were also on display since it intends to continue to preserve the tangible and intangible heritage of Zoroastrian culture. Thus, the Exhibition room at the Congress brought together the past and present, the old and the young to understand, to value and feel a sense of identity in the different aspects of our Zoroastrian heritage.

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Meher Marker Noshirwani is a Sociologist, and has worked in the field of women, development and environment since 1985. The period 1991-2009 spans a career in women and social development in various positions with Shirkat Gah, a women’s NGO established in 1975. She is currently working independently as a consultant on gender and development issues, and is doing social research for the Parzor Foundation on Parsi / Zoroastrian textiles. With an interest in crafts, she also develops hand crafted cane products using local resources made by skilled artisans to preserve a local craft.
Early Life: Deena Mistri was born in Hyderabad, Sind, on 21st May 1925 to Dhunmai & Pestonjee Jamshedji Soparivala. Her birth was of particular interest to her parents as she was delivered breeched – considered very lucky in those days, as it was very rare for such babies to survive.

She was the great granddaughter of Seth Shapurji Soparivala who founded the ‘Bai Virbaiji Soparivala Parsi High School’ in 1859. The school was initially co-educational, for the growing Parsi population of Karachi and in 1919 BVS became a boy’s only school. With the independence of Pakistan, and upon Quaid-e-Azam’s request to the managing committee, BVS began accepting Muslim students.

Education: Deena finished her Bachelors of Arts from the Bombay University (Karachi) in 1945. It is after completing her BA that she started visiting the BVS Parsi High School and helped students with elocution competitions as well as tutored English to those that needed extra help. She was only 20 years young when she decided to go into teaching, completing her BEd with Honors in 1958 from the University of Karachi.

Career: She began teaching English to the secondary classes at the BVS in 1950 and was the first lady teacher to teach the secondary classes during those days. While she was teaching at BVS she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship from the US in 1961, where she completed her Diploma in Education (Administration). She taught at the University of Athens, Ohio and at the University of Austin, Texas as a visiting professor.

Mrs Mistri became the principal of the school in 1972 till 2004. During this time, future leaders were born in their fields, such as medicine, engineering, business and politics. During her tenure as a Principal, BVS secured 100% results in the Science and General Groups, with almost 99% of students securing ‘A grade’.

Personal Life: She was married to Minoo P Mistri, who completed his schooling from the J J School of Art in Bombay and went to become a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA). He moved with his mother to Karachi in 1935 after he took a liking to the city and completion of several work projects. They have two sons Farhad and Afshad, who now both reside in the US.

Highest Honor Bestowed: Deena was awarded the “Pride of Performance” by the then President of Pakistan, General Pervez
Musharraf, on 23rd March 2002, for her contribution to the education system in Pakistan. She was also on the Governor’s Education Committee for the Sindh Board of Education.

Personality: According to Mrs Nighat Razzaq who spent 30 years working with her, “despite her tough exterior, she was very generous towards those in need, those that were less fortunate, and those that could not afford an education. Each year there were two to three children of her staff, whose tuition fees were paid by her and the staff, on condition of anonymity. Many of those students have now become doctors, engineers and respectable citizens of our society.”

During the revolution in Iran many Irani Zarathustis moved to settle in Karachi and were given free education at the two Parsi schools. ‘Deenu Aunty’ as most Parsi children called her – was always the first to offer free tuitions at home for these children, to get conversant with the Pakistani education system.

Deena was loved and feared. “When she entered a room, the noise would just die, not fade out, just die,” said Yashaan Mavalvala, her great-nephew. “She had this cane in her office which everyone talked about; it kept everyone in line. I remember her at our annual prize distribution when I won a drawing competition, after receiving the prize she pulled my cheeks and lovingly slapped me in front of everyone!”

Zohair Nanjiani another student of hers, reminisces, “She had an unusual way of instilling an uncompromising, self-sustaining moral code in all ‘her boys’ and in setting elusively high standards for seeking knowledge from eclectic sources. Immediately after her periodic ‘killer’ English test, she would have students exchange books and self-check. Since there was no prescribed course for these tests that were based on her somewhat high expectation of our English skills, a ‘C grade’ was a feat. Bruised and beaten, we would be encouraged to rise again. Having finished the full year’s prescribed Matric textbook within three months, most of the time with Mrs Mistri was spent in open and spirited discourse.”

Despite her formidable personality, she was very approachable and fond of being challenged and debated. Ervad Paurushap Magol recalls, “as a teenager I wrote a funny poem about her and it somehow came into her hands, I was very scared as she wasn’t the one to ‘spare the rod’. But to my surprise she laughed and read the poem out loud in class! Such was her nature.”

After Semi-retirement: Mrs Mistri served the BVS Parsi School for 55 years, teaching three generations – grandfather, father and son. She took partial retirement at the age of 79. She was re-employed at two other schools from 2004-2011. At the time of her death, Mistri was Chairperson of Westminster School and College, and a consultant at The Accel School, Karachi. She worked till the week before her passing.

On January 27th, 2011, Deena breathed her last at OMI Hospital in Karachi and was hospitalized only a week prior. She was looking forward in getting discharged and going back to school, but her condition turned for the worse, had a stroke and was in a coma for two days.

A tribute from her students
“How do we honour such a person that changed so many lives, how do we give back a little to keep her memory alive?” Her students are embarking on a mega project.

With the help of The Citizens Foundation (TCF) the BVS Alumni Association will build a school in her name, in the most needy area of Karachi, for those children that would never get the opportunity to go to school. The average cost for constructing and fully equipping a one unit TCF Primary School is US$124,000 + US$ 52,500 for the running expenses of the school for the first three years. Total cost of the school will be US$177,000.

To acknowledge her contribution to the Parsi School, the campus will be called “Deena Minoo Mistri Campus” and will also contain a 12” x 18” memorial plaque inside the building with this inscription:

“This campus was donated by the Alumni of The B.V.S. Parsi High School in fondest memory of Late Mrs. Deena Mistri.”

Please visit: http://www.bvsvirbaijeetes.com/ for full details.
Gitty Ankers, an Iranian Zoroastrian, has been in England since 1979 but because she lives in Cornwall which is in the far south west of Great Britain we don’t often see her at our Zoroastrian gatherings. As far as I can tell very few of our compatriots in the UK even know that such a great honour has been bestowed upon her. It is no mean thing to receive the MBE and it is particularly significant that it was Prince Charles who conferred the award on her as he is of course the Duke of Cornwall as well as the Prince of Wales. More significantly, he is best known for his concern for the environment which is the exact field in which Gitty has been working.

Gitty’s Yazdi parents were keen on her and her three sisters to be educated and qualified so her initial university education where she studied Industrial Health and Hygiene took place in Tehran. During these student years she was active in the Zoroastrian students’ group, organising events and even teaching Avesta. Her graduate studies however were interrupted by the Islamic revolution which engulfed Iran during her student days and forced universities to close.

She then moved to the UK where her uncle was already studying, and after receiving offers from three universities subject to a satisfactory level of English which she achieved after just eight months, Gitty’s life in England got going. Her MSc from Newcastle in Industrial Medicine & Safety allowed her then to undertake research at Manchester on air pollution.

At this point Gitty married her English husband Brian (with her parents’ blessing!) whom she had met at Newcastle University and soon thereafter Brian took up a contract in Saudi Arabia. As Gitty did not want to live there, she applied for a number of jobs, and learnt something valuable along the way – using her husband’s surname secured the interviews that the same CV with her Iranian name [Abyari] had not done! In 1984 she landed a great job in Cornwall as an inspector in the Environment Management department of the county council and when her husband returned from his various contracts around the world, he too

Prince Charles awarding Gitty Ankers the MBE
was quickly snapped up by the county council. Twelve years later she started to work for Environment Agency in 1996 where she worked in environment planning, followed by working closely with businesses on pollution prevention, waste minimisation / reduction and sustainable good practice.

During these working years she also gave birth to two sons, Pehmon (now 24) and Narimon (22), so she was clearly a capable and organised lady, keeping her family together and maintaining a successful career. After an absence of almost 30 years she returned to Iran in 2008 taking her family with her. They responded with pleasure to the beauty of Iran reflected in its wonderful historic cities and in its stunning landscapes and countryside. Now that they have tasted the delights to be found there, they plan to return again en famille next year.

Cornwall is famed for its beauty and Gitty is fully alive to the special place it holds in the mindset of the British. As she says, Cornwall is a very beautiful part of England that attracts over 2.5 million tourists every year from both England, USA, Europe and many other countries. So it is important that she continues with her work with businesses / industries to make sure that they don’t pollute our environment and that people continue to enjoy the beautiful scenery in Cornwall. Gitty’s great strength seems to lie in being able to bring people from diverse backgrounds together and in motivating them into positive action through which they can all share the same vision for a better future.

Because of her 28 years of experience in waste management / regulation, many of the companies she worked with went on to win local and national environmental and sustainability awards. One of her projects won a national award and another was short-listed. Most of her work has always involved looking after the environment but to receive the award from the Duke of Cornwall, (witnessed by her two sons, her husband Brian, and her sister Mahvash) clearly suggests that Gitty went well beyond the requirements of her job. She put in hours and effort to secure results which make a difference in the long run to generations to come.

We should live, as she quite rightly says, “particularly making sure that we minimise our impact on the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil we grow our crops on. More or less the same important message that Prophet Zarotosh taught us: without a clean environment we can never exist”.

Some years after her first degree from Oxford university in MFL, her Iranian priestly background inspired her to do post graduate studies in anthropology again at Oxford university. She writes articles and is regularly invited to speak to academic audiences about Zoroastrianism, but also takes part in Interfaith activities to promote understanding and knowledge about our religion. She has also been invited by radio and TV channels to speak on the subject which she does with passion. She has many times acted as expert witness in asylum appeal cases on behalf of Iranian Zoroastrians in the UK and in Europe. As the WZO religious affairs spokesperson she answers email queries on behalf of WZO and organises their annual seminar.

In the last 10 years she has raised funding and set up the Pourchista Foundation in Yazd which runs a skills academy for females, a senior citizens’ day centre and is hoping to start a kindergarten for the few Z children who are still left in Yazd. Items such as sedreh and koshti made by the young Z ladies of Yazd are available for sale via Shahin.
In accepting the award, Zubin is quoted as saying “I have to say, what a wonderful surprise to have three orchestras I have worked with perform for all of us today. I am grateful to this country which has taken care of me for so many years.” The Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California serves as a permanent public monument to achievement in the entertainment industry. The 5-pointed terrazzo and brass star is embedded in the ground recognises an eclectic mix of actors, musicians, directors, producers, and theatrical groups for their entertainment contributions. The Walk attracts about 10 million visitors annually and has played an important role in making tourism the largest industry in Los Angeles County 1. Zubin becomes the 2434th recipient and probably the first Parsi/Zarathushti to be awarded this honour in the 50 year history - enshrined in the archives of Hollywood’s celebrity history.

The IPO’s concert in Los Angeles at the Disney Hall included Haydn’s Symphony No 96, “The Miracle” and also Mahler’s Symphony No 5. Mark Swed of LA Times summed up the performance as follows: “And this was a distinguished Mehta — about to turn 75 next month and immortalized on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in a ceremony before Tuesday’s concert - demonstrating that he has aged far better than many of us who once dismissed him as brash and slapdash could ever have imagined.” At the Naples, Florida concert playing Haydn’s Symphony 96, Liszt’s “Les Preludes” and Schubert’s Symphony No 9 - “The Great”, Zubin was recalled to the stage.

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But in boycotting the concert, the protesters missed a performance of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony that presented a kind of truth and represented a kind of peace that regularly escapes even well-intentioned political leaders.

Macio Bezerra of the Daily News writes after the concert in West Palm Beach, Florida: “The revolutionary aspects were emphasized by Mehta and his Philharmonic in a thrilling performance. One of the last truly great conductors still working, Zubin Mehta is a magician of the baton. Conducting by memory, he shapes single phases, every detail, demonstrating total control of the ensemble. He has the kind of stage presence that has become more and more rare: a calm, dignified individual through whom a spiritual light shines when he is performing.”

Special bond with Israel and IPO:

Zubin’s association with the state and people of Israel are deeply rooted. Zubin fondly recollects his cordial encounters with Israel’s first Prime Minister Ben-Gurion (who gave Zubin lessons on the history of Zoroastrianism!) and subsequent Prime Minister Golda Meir. His musical involvement in the 1967 six-day war and 1973 Yom Kippur war are well documented. Zubin is the Music Director for Life of IPO. Over 3000 concerts and dozens of world tours spanning five continents, Zubin has been quoted as saying “It is just concerts after concerts of internal spiritual satisfaction.”

There is probably no major orchestra in the world more contentiously diverse in politics and attitudes. Orchestra members who champion Palestinian settlements share music stands with those who adamantly oppose them. Differences – musical, cultural and temperamental are equally notable. A big part of Zubin’s job is as peace-keeper. Being a Parsi/Zarathushti from India, is the perfect music director for this orchestra, writes Mark Swed of LA Times.

Zubin’s sympathetic outsider status and his own temperament as an insistent conductor is a huge asset for some virtuoso members of the orchestra. As an artist in his own right, Zubin has been a vocal critic of many of the Israeli government’s policies towards the Palestinians over the period of years, and has been deeply troubled especially after the Israeli offensive in Gaza strip during the winter of 2008-09. In recent times he has made several references in minimizing the honour and the title “music director for life” as just a handshake. He said “there’s no contract, and I always tell the orchestra (IPO) that they can dispense with me any time they like.” Whatever the case and for the time being, Zubin Mehta continues to remain a national treasure of Israel and its goodwill ambassador par excellence for the world to see and enjoy the music he makes.

Events in the second-half of 2010 and first-quarter of 2011:

In July 2010, Zubin Mehta led the IPO in a unique concert in Eshkol Park near Sderot, Israel and within the rocket range of the Gaza Strip. The concert was held to create world awareness of the abducted Israeli soldier GILAD SHALIT and being held captive by Hamas for over four years. In October, Zubin led the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra on a concert tour of South America, where a free concert was held with over 30 thousand (with millions watching live on TV) people giving standing ovations. Works by Strauss, Bruch, Tchaikovsky and Kreisler were performed. The following month with IPO, several
concerts were held in Seoul, Korea. Zubin has been quoted as saying that he would very much "like to play in Cairo, Amman and hopefully one day in Beirut." In December, IPO led by Zubin Mehta performed in Baku, Azerbaijan at the Rostropovich Festival – the first Muslim country visited by IPO in its modern history. At the time of writing this article, Zubin is on a world-tour with the Teatro Del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino orchestra, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy. The tour includes Japan, China, India, Taiwan, Russia, and Hungary (the ‘Asian’ leg includes Hungary on the way home). Two scheduled concerts were performed in Yokohama and Tokyo, two days after the earthquake/Tsunami hit Japan in mid-March.

Zubin’s Musical career spanning five decades:

In 1958 Zubin made his conducting debut with Vienna at a young age of 22 and has conducted the world famous New Year Concerts in 1990, 1995, 1998 and 2007, watched by millions of people around the world. Zubin was the Music Director of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra 1961-67 and also assumed the Music Directorship of the Los Angeles 1962, a post he retained until 1978. In 1969 he was appointed Music Adviser to the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and was made Music Director of that orchestra in 1977. In 1981 the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra awarded him the title of Music Director for life. Zubin Mehta has conducted over three thousand concerts with this extraordinary ensemble including tours spanning five continents. In 1978, Zubin took over the post as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic (NYP) commencing a tenure lasting 13 years, the longest in the orchestra’s 169 years history of the nation’s oldest orchestra. Since 1985, Zubin has been chief conductor of the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence, Italy. Between 1998 and 2006 Zubin was Music Director of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. In 2006, Zubin opened the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, Spain and since then the President of the annual Festival del Mediterrani in Valencia. The ‘Live from Lincoln Center’ TV series during his years with NYP; along with the famous three-tenors’ concerts in Caracalla near Rome in 1999 in and at the Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles in 1999, brought classical music to homes across the United States and made millions of people, opera fans around the world.

Zubin Mehta’s list of awards and honours is extensive and includes the “Nikisch-Ring” bequeathed to him by Karl Bohm. He is an honorary citizen of both Florence and Tel Aviv and was made an honorary member of the Vienna State Opera in 1997, of the Bavarian State Opera in 2006 and of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Wien in 2007. The title of “Honorary Conductor” was bestowed to him by the following orchestras: Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (2001), Munich Philharmonic Orchestra (2004), Los Angeles Philharmonic (2006), Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (2006), Bavarian State Orchestra (2006). In October 2008 Zubin Mehta was honoured by the Japanese Imperial Family with the "Praemium Imperiale".

In 1999, Zubin Mehta was presented the "Lifetime Achievement Peace and Tolerance Award" of the United Nations. In 2009, Zubin Mehta established Mifneh (Hebrew for “Change”), a music education programme for Israeli Arabs, in cooperation with Bank Leumi the Arab-Israel Bank. Three schools, in Shfaram, the Jezreel Valley and Nazareth, are taking part in the pilot project. In an interview in February with David Mermelstein of the Wall Street Journal about his special bonds with the state of Israel, Maestro Mehta is quoted as saying that among his aspirations “it is absolutely my dream to have an Israel-Arab kid playing in the Philharmonic one day. It will happen. About six of them have already made it "to the university. I see this as the future of Israel. Maybe music will help us come together.”

Zubin established ‘Mehli Mehta Music
Foundation’ in 1995 in Mumbai, India to promote western classical music and motivate young Indian musicians.

The receiving of the recent star at the Hollywood Walk-of-Fame is just one more star in the five decades of star studded life of the shining star. The legacy of the star – Zubin Mehta, continues to dominate the symphony halls around the world, beginning as always with – the rise of the baton, a quick glance at the ensemble and the creation of world’s most beautiful music.

References:
7. http://www.zubinmehta.net/5.0.html

For readers who want to learn more about the life and Zubin Mehta’s body of work with greatest orchestras of the world, read Zubin Mehta’s autobiography, “The Score of My Life” ISBN-10:1574671X available on Amazon.com Zubin-Mehta-Score-Life-Amadeus/dp/157467174X

Shahrokh Mehta was born in Karachi. He is a Certified Management Consultant and President of Integrated Technologies, LLC. In July 2007, Shahrokh achieved the prestigious rank of “Life Master” in the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL). In August 2007, at the Toastmasters International Convention, Shahrokh, earned the high honour of Distinguished District Governor and was inducted in the Hall of Fame. Shahrokh lives with his wife Gool in Syracuse, NY.
Karachi says ‘Thank You’ to the Extraordinary Eight

On Sunday 13 February 2011 more than 700 Zarathushtis gathered on the lawns of the Karachi Parsi Institute (KPI) to say “Thank You” to eight extraordinary men and women for their services to the community of Karachi.

The function was organized and hosted by KPI and it’s “Friends” – the Karachi Zarathosti Banu Mandal (KZBM), the Pakistan Parsi Collegiate Association (PPCA) and the Young Mazdayasnian Zoroastrian Association (YMZA).

As Shahveer JHP Byramji, President of KPI, said in his opening remarks: “why do we have to wait till someone passes on before we express our appreciation and gratitude for what they have done for us?” With this in mind the organising committee had nominated eight senior citizens to honour that evening; being, as they said, fully cognizant of the fact that there were many others who had served and continued to serve the community, but who they felt were still too young, and that their turn would come another day.

For each person being thanked a speaker was designated to highlight their contribution to the community. The eight that were honoured, and the person who spoke for them were, in alphabetical order:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honorees</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Ardeshr R Cowasjee</td>
<td>Ambassador Jamsheed Marker</td>
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<td>Mrs Perin J Dinshaw</td>
<td>Mrs Zarine Kakalia</td>
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<td>Mr Russie M Dinshaw</td>
<td>Mrs Toxy Cowasjee</td>
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<td>Dr Kershaw B Khambatta</td>
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<td>Mrs Hilla E Umrigar</td>
<td>Mrs Kermin Parekh</td>
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<td>Mr Naval M Vakharia</td>
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As Shahveer said: “each one of them in their own special way, in one form or another, has touched and enriched our lives. They did not do it for power, pelf, or popularity, but from the goodness of their hearts, for which we shall always be extremely grateful”. Each honoree was garlanded and presented with a small commemorative plaque by Navaz Aga, President of KZBM.

After the accolades had been delivered, Dr Kershaw Khambatta gave a very gracious reply thanking the organizers on behalf of all the recipients. He remarked that no matter how humble or modest an individual, it is always gratifying to hear that one’s efforts and services are recognized and appreciated.

A synopsis of the honorees:

Mr Ardeshr R Cowasjee: He is quite possibly the best known Parsi in Pakistan. Since the end of the 1980s he has written boldly, fiercely and consistently each week. His subjects have been various, emphasizing social consciousness and responsibility, but outstanding has been his commitment to the city of his birth, Karachi. Through his columns he has launched endless campaigns to save parks, other open spaces and amenity plots, to save trees, to halt illegal constructions, and to awaken the public to the desecration of their city by its administrators and politicians.
Through the Cowasjee Foundation, a Trust run by him and his two brothers, benevolence has been spread both to the community and the public sector of Karachi by way of education and health benefits. He is always ready to help all those who come to him and is a champion for the less fortunate.

Mrs Perin J Dinshaw: She has devoted her entire adult life to social work and charitable causes. Starting from an early age, she was involved in occupational therapy for veterans of World War II, the old Girls Association of the Mama School and the Parsi Collegiate Union. After her marriage to Julian Hoshang Dinshaw she took a keen interest in all the Dinshaw family charities – be it housing, hospitals, education or financial aid. In addition she was an active and dedicated committee member of several Trusts and Institutions, such as the Lady Dufferin Hospital, the Parsi General Hospital, the Mama School, All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA).

Mr Russie M Dinshaw: Coming from the family of Eduljee Dinshaw - great grandfather, Nadirshaw Dinshaw - grandfather and Minocher Dinshaw - father, all benefactors not only to the community but to the citizens of Karachi, Russie is no less a philanthropist. He continues to expend funds to very many deserving community members as monthly stipends, payment for school and college fees, medical and hospitalisation expenses, whether they are for surgery or the excessive amounts required for treatment of cancer. Any youth wishing to go abroad for higher studies, he willingly gives them a loan on easy repayment basis. No one who approaches him ever goes empty handed and this largesse is given to all communities.

Dr Kershaw B Khambatta: A native Karachiite, Kershaw received his medical training at Grant Medical College, Bombay, and then his FRCS from Edinburgh. He returned to Karachi in 1963. Since then, for nearly fifty years he has given free medical advice and assistance to the Zarathushti community of Karachi. As the Consultant to the Parsi General Hospital he has given honorary dedicated service, performed hundreds of operations and dispensed thousands of consultations. He has given his valuable time without hesitation, approached by one and all, his expertise ad even financial help when needed. There is perhaps no family in Karachi that has not received Kershaw’s help at some time or another. As Dr Banoo Mama said: “he has been a Farishteh for so many of us.” Kershaw is perhaps the most loved member of our community.

Eravd Godrej D Sidhwa: As a scholar, a teacher, a preacher and social worker he has served the community for more than sixty years. He has taught our religion at both, the Parsi boys and girls schools in Karachi and also at the University level. He has lectured on Zoroastrian Theology and Ancient Iranian History at various cities around the world, including London, Chicago and Dubai; and closer to home in Lahore, Multan and Quetta. For more than fifty years, he led the Humbundagi prayers and delivered numerous sermons. He had been the Honorary Secretary of the Karachi Parsi Anjuman Trust Funds from 1991 to 2006; and served in various capacities on several Zarathushti trusts and organisations.

Mobed Jehangir N. Sidhwa: Jehangirjee, as he is known to all – young and old – came to Karachi in 1948. He became a navar at the age of 12, worked for six years in Udvada, and then for four years at Mumbai’s Boyce Agairy before coming to our city. For the past 62 years he has been serving the community - initially as a mobed and from January 1999 as the Punthakey of the H J Behrana Dar-e-Meher. No matter what the time of day or night; and no matter what the occasion, Jehangirji is always there to serve our community. As is inevitable, age is now catching up with him, but even then he is always available and willing to assist, albeit on occasion, somewhat reluctantly due to his advanced age.

Mrs Hilla E Umrigar: As Toxy Cowasjee, the then President of KZBM said in her address on Hilla’s retirement: “your name has become synonymous with Service”. In 1949 she married and moved here from Mumbai as her husband came to work in Karachi. Since then, till her retirement from
KZBM in 2000, she has served on various committees of KZBM all in the service of the poor, the needy and the indigent of our community. Her retirement has not diminished her zeal and commitment towards “seva ne sakhavat”. She still continues to serve and assist the needy of the community in every way possible by enlisting the aid of other Zarathushti Trusts and Charities.

Mr Naval M Vakharia: A civil engineer by profession, he voluntarily looks after the repairs, renovations and maintenance of all the Karachi Parsi Anjuman properties, which includes housing estates, the Wadia Dar-e-Meher and the Towers of Silence. This is a huge, challenging and time-consuming endeavour - all without remuneration. He recently designed and implemented a process of rapid decomposition of bodies at the Towers of Silence by lining the interior walls of the Tower with stainless steel plates to raise the temperature by reflection of sunlight and thereby accelerate the decomposition process.

The above are octogenarians, but the most remarkable aspect is that all of them (except one who is in poor health) continue to be active in their service to our community. They are an example and an inspiration to us all.

Photographs courtesy: Ronnie S Dubash

garlands & mementoes

Understanding Schizophrenia

The FEZANA Journal, Spring 2009, Vol 23 No 1, pp 87-88, carried a heart wrenching incident, which saddens me each time I think of this tragedy, and should not have happened. Jasmine Chapgar, sister of late Zal, wrote her feelings and experience frankly, with the hope she may save someone else’s life. Since then I have tried to find a person to write on schizophrenia, which at last follows, with the hope of creating awareness amongst us. – Ed.

“... Brilliant, warm-hearted, handsome, and talented 23 year old boy – my younger brother Zal. He struggled with mental illness since Sept 2007, and jumped off a building on Dec 1st, 2008. ... I write this to create awareness to problems that we as a community can change – the attitude toward mental illness and the support given to the mentally ill.

In college, my brother suddenly started hearing voices in his head. Schizophrenia was one of the possibilities – a scary thought. I had never heard of anyone around me having it. ... It was a foreboding name to accept for him – and us. Yet when I started discussing it, nearly everyone in fact knew someone with it – a family member, a friend. ... I thought ‘why did they never mention it? Why don’t people talk about it?’

Maybe Zal would have been more receptive if it was something more openly discussed like other diseases. ... I too stopped going to events ... was asked to avoid discussing details with people that didn’t know what was going on.

Then again – based on the responses of the people that did know what was happening, would it have helped if more people knew? Most people did not rush to Zal’s side the way they have for people with a physical illness. ... I met a person my age whose younger brother has schizophrenia and what she said was very telling ... how hard it is on the family and how it should be treated
like any other disease – but it’s not. She mentioned the huge difference in reactions to her brother’s schizophrenia and then a year later to her father’s cancer. But with her brother, things were kept quiet... And with schizophrenia, socialization is important to recovery – yet people tend to keep their distance.

... Zal came home last winter, saw a psychiatrist and took medication... He was aware of how he appeared to others, though he believed the voices he heard were real. It was frustrating, and he slipped into a deep depression. He slept constantly and did little when he woke up in the evenings. I would... ask to do things together – to which he often gave half-hearted “maybes” and mostly “nos”.

... but I persisted... I thought, ‘I’m just being annoying...’ Then he said “you know what Jas? I’m really lucky to have you. If it wasn’t for you, I would commit suicide.” I cried, “well you will always have me, so you cannot do that, but why?” And he said “I just feel so alone”. And he cried, and we hugged and talked.

So I learned that night – even if he says no 90% of the time, at least he sees someone is truly there for him. I don’t know if my efforts kept him going longer but I know I am glad I devoted myself to him. But I do think after a while, it wasn’t enough... just having his sister and a few others around...

At his funeral, hundreds of people came – some that hadn’t seen him in months or even years. While touching, it was also sad. If a tiny portion of them had reached out to him when he was alive and struggling, it may have added to his reasons to live. Now the room was overflowing with people and tears – but too late for Zal...”

[with permission, courtesy Dolly Dastoor, FEZANA Journal]
particularly in our community where mild eccentricities are celebrated, but a diagnosis of mental illness is still stigmatized. For instance, the symptoms involved in this illness are often frightening for observers, making it easy to assume that the afflicted person is dangerous or violent. Media also hyped up this stereotype. The reality is that most people with schizophrenia tend to be reclusive and isolate themselves from society. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "Studies indicate that except for those persons with a record of criminal violence before becoming ill, and those with substance abuse or alcohol problems, people with schizophrenia are not especially prone to violence" (2001).

Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss psychiatrist, first used the term "schizophrenia" in 1911 to describe patients whose thought processes seemed disjointed. However, since the word literally means "a split mind," people often think it is a multiple personality disorder. Actually, schizophrenia is a brain disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. The person finds it difficult to tell the difference between what is real and what is only in their imagination. They may have hallucinations, may not be able to think logically or speak coherently. Medication has helped many people with schizophrenia to lead fulfilling, productive lives. The Oscar-winning movie, A Beautiful Mind, depicts the true story of John Forbes Nash Jr who went on to become Nobel Laureate in Economics in spite of dealing with schizophrenia. Vaslov Nijinsky, one of modern ballet’s greatest dancers, documented his battle with schizophrenia in his autobiography, The Diary of Vaslov Nijinski. It is important to remember that this mental illness is only one aspect of their personality. That is why it is respectful to say “a person with schizophrenia” than label the person “a schizophrenic”.

Some Facts about Schizophrenia:

- Schizophrenia affects an estimated one percent of the world’s population.
- Symptoms usually appear between the ages of 15 and 35.
- Schizophrenia affects males and females equally, although symptoms often appear earlier in males.
- People with schizophrenia have a higher rate of suicide than the general population. Approximately 10 percent of people with schizophrenia (especially younger adult males) commit suicide.
- Schizophrenia can run in families. The risk for inheriting schizophrenia is 10 percent in those who have an immediate family member with the illness. However, heredity does not explain all cases. About 60 percent of people with schizophrenia have no close relatives with the illness.
- People with schizophrenia have a two to four times higher risk of developing Type 2 diabetes than people in the general population.
- Currently there is no cure for schizophrenia, but the majority (80%) of individuals with this disorder can lead functional productive lives if treated.

Risk factors

Although the precise cause of schizophrenia is not known, scientists have identified certain factors that seem to increase the risk of developing or triggering schizophrenia. Having a family history of schizophrenia is one of the key risk factors, and is of particular importance in the Parsi-Zoroastrian community, which has a pattern of marriages between people who share a genetic history. There is a 10-15% chance of developing the illness when a sibling or one parent has schizophrenia; when both parents have schizophrenia, the risk rises to approximately 40%-50%. Nieces, nephews, or grandchildren of someone with schizophrenia have about a 3% chance of developing the disorder.

Other risk factors include:

- Exposure to viruses, toxins or malnutrition while in the womb, particularly in the first and second trimesters
- Stressful life circumstances
- Older paternal age
- Taking psychoactive drugs during adolescence and young adulthood
Most Common Indicators

Many of the families who contributed to Learning about Schizophrenia: Rays of Hope A reference manual for Families & Caregivers (Schizophrenia Society of Canada, 2003) said that they had not acted on the early warning signs listed below. With the benefit of hindsight, however, these family members urge others to seek medical advice if several of the behaviours listed are present, or they see a marked change from previous behaviour, and persist for more than a few weeks.

• Social withdrawal, isolation, and suspiciousness of others
• Deterioration and abandonment of personal hygiene
• Flat expressionless gaze
• Inability to express joy
• Inability to cry, or excessive crying
• Inappropriate laughter
• Excessive fatigue and sleepiness, or an inability to sleep at night (insomnia)

Other Signs

• Altered sense of smell and taste
• Attempts at escape through geographic change; frequent moves or hitch-hiking trips
• Change of behaviour: dramatic or insidious
• Cutting oneself; threats of self mutilation
• Decline in academic or athletic performance
• Depression (intense and incessant)
• Deterioration of social relationships
• Dropping out of activities (and life in general)
• Drug or alcohol abuse
• Early signs of migraine
• Excessive writing (or childlike printing) without apparent meaning
• Extreme devastation from peer or family disapproval
• Extreme religiousness or preoccupation with the occult
• Fainting
• Forgetfulness and loss of valuable possessions
• Hyperactivity or inactivity, or alternating between the two
• Inability to concentrate or cope with minor problems
• Indifference, even in highly important situations
• Involvement in auto accidents
• Irrational statements
• Noticeable and rapid weight loss
• Peculiar use of words or language structure
• Refusal to touch persons or objects; insulation of hands with paper, gloves, etc.
• Rigid stubbornness
• Sensitivity and irritability when touched by others
• Shaving head or removal of body hair
• Staring, not blinking, or blinking incessantly
• Strange posturing
• Sudden shift in basic personality
• Unexpected hostility
• Unusual sensitivity to stimuli (noise, light, colour)

IMPORTANT NOTE
None of these signs indicate the presence of schizophrenia on their own. People with brain injuries or brain tumours can have similar symptoms so please do not use the information outlined here to diagnose yourself or a loved one. A physical exam, an MRI of the brain to check for injuries or tumours, and a blood test, as well as a psychiatric evaluation, is needed to diagnose schizophrenia.

Helping a Family Member with Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia in the family affects everyone. Family members may go through many emotions such as stress and anguish, guilt and shame, bitterness, sacrifice, limited financial resources, and diminished personal health and wellness. The family not only suffer because they see a loved one suffering, but sometimes because there is not enough understanding of the illness and how to help.

Here is some advice for helping a person with schizophrenia from eHealth MD.
• Remember that schizophrenia is a
medical illness. Do not feel ashamed because someone in your family has it.
• Do not feel guilty or seek someone to blame. Schizophrenia is nobody’s fault. Acceptance is important.
• Educate yourself about your relative’s personal symptoms. Early clues, such as changes in sleep patterns or social withdrawal, can indicate that a relapse may be happening.
• Establish a daily routine for the person to follow.
• Help the person stay on the medication.
• Let the person know that he or she is not facing the illness alone. Keep lines of communication open.
• Try not to show overt anxiety or distress. Avoid harsh or direct criticism.
• Compliment on achieved goals without being effusive in your praise.
• Realize that caring for the person can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Take time for yourself.

If you are a family member of a person with schizophrenia, Learning about Schizophrenia: Rays of Hope - A Reference Manual for Families & Caregivers (2003) is an excellent resource produced by the Schizophrenia Society of Canada. (Check the reference list for the website from which it can be downloaded for free).

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Update on Flood Relief in Pakistan
Toxy Cowasjee reports

The two ongoing projects undertaken by WZO with OAKDF in Kohistan, have long last been completed. The estimated period of one week for the bridge and six weeks for the track road was over ambitious. OAKDF were not aware of what hurdles they would be facing both with nature and man, an area that believes in no law besides their own, but has finally been completed.

The suspension bridge’s location had to be changed which affected the initial costing of Rs400,000 but the difference of Rs86,300 were borne by the community themselves. OAKDF have not charged for their overhead costs for which we acknowledge and thank them. The Kas Jag bridge spans 120 feet and has six steel cables two on top, four below, as well as two on the sides forming the abutment which is the base for the concrete pier. The cables are tied onto anchors that are built some distance from the piers. The wooden planks that are placed on the bridge are six inches wide, four feet long, and two inches thick. This project has been achieved from donations received by WZO.

The road in District Kohistan starts at one end of an 8-kilometer tunnel called the China Dam tunnel situated in the Union Council Dubair Payeen. It crosses into the Union Council Dubair Khas and ends in Village Mauj Gali in Union Council Dubair Bala. Thus it connects the people of three Union Councils, and also enables access to the main Karakorum Highway as the China Dam tunnel at the other end connects with it. This project has been funded solely by the Zoroastrians of Toronto through their two associations, The Zoroastrian Society of Ontario [ZSO] and Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation [OZCF] amounting
Nina Godiwalla is the author of a book released this February, *Suits A Woman On Wall Street*. It is a touching memoir where Nina has woven her family story, her relationship with her sisters, her mother, her grandmother and most especially, her father; with the story of her experience in the high pressure environment of banking and high finance. As a young university student, Nina, with much perseverance, hard work and self reliance, began to realize her dream by gaining an internship with J P Morgan in New York and then, upon graduation, a job with Morgan Stanley on the corporate finance division team, responsible for conducting major financial transactions for the country’s largest blue-chip companies. As the only woman on the team of twenty-five, Nina did very well, proving herself with the most challenging of projects; meeting grueling deadlines and handling crisis.

As she tells in her story, Nina very much wants to succeed and make her parents and community proud. She wants it for herself, but most especially for her father, a wish that he would think her successful. She hears her family’s words as she encounters dilemmas; the words of a father who immigrated to this country so his family would have a better life, a mother who sacrifices for her family, a grandmother who nurtures with love and great cooking, a younger sister who asks philosophical questions such as, “Is that who you want to be?” With her career going so well and with excellent reviews, Nina should have been happy and satisfied; but Nina sensed that something was not quite right, she began to feel that “she was being rewarded for agreeing not to think, speak, have an opinion.” At one point she asks one of her team members, “*Do you feel like something in you is slowly dying?*”

And so, Nina begins to experience a stream of consciousness flowing from her Zoroastrian values and philosophy. And she begins to ask herself those eternal, philosophical questions, “Who am I, where am I going and where have I been?” “The person who I knew who started working here a year ago was suffocated by layers of suits, annual reports, spreadsheets, judgments and so many other things that, deep down, I knew were unimportant.” And so she wonders, “How do I know who I want to be if I can’t even remember who I am?”

As I read one of the passages, where Nina reflects upon the character of the building where she works, “*If compassion managed to get past our revolving doors, it would be squelched*”; I
remembered a Jungian story about how *The Rainmaker* was invited to a village where there had been a drought for a long time. He was asked to please “make it rain”. The Rainmaker looked at the village and observed, meditated and then said to the people, “When I came to your village, I saw the inner and outer disorder. I went into a hut and got myself in order.”

When Nina walked into the world of Wall Street, when she entered the building where she was to spend most of her hours, she entered into an inner disorder, an environment, not in tune with ASHA; where compassion was missing and where great personal sacrifice was the order of the day, and money was the end goal. With her Zarathustrian values, well grounded in the concept of Good Thoughts (analytical, reflective thinking), Good Words (articulate and meaningful speech) and Good Deeds, she guided herself to leave that disorder so that she could walk in the path of Asha, get herself in order, and “do the right thing”.

In her article, *A Zoroastrian’s Walk Through Wall Street*, Nina says, “I’d grown-up determined to prosper in this country, but I had enough deep-rooted values to know money couldn’t be my only goal. . . . After a few years in banking, I made a switch for the better, carefully choosing to work for companies that were mission-driven rather than money-driven”. Listening to her compassionate voice and munificent nature, she did not allow her spirit to be broken.

The joy and warmth of *Suits* is how Nina brings to life her family characters through vignettes, which reveal the family love, goodness, and devotion. It is a story of how our hope finally lies in the trust that individuals will do the right thing. Marc Polonsky said that “Stories are the containers of our lives,” and that “we understand and explain ourselves by our stories”. Nina’s book is such a story and a reminder that we are all called upon to “do the right thing”. Nina has woven a timely, truthful, inspiring and uplifting story. I celebrate her book and I very much look forward to her next one!

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**A little about Nina -**

Nina Godiwalla has an MBA from Wharton School of Business, a MA focused in Creative Writing from Dartmouth, and a BBA from University of Texas. She has written for several publications including The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and Houston Chronicle. Her articles include: *A Zoroastrian’s Walk Through Wall Street*, and *What We Can Learn from Prisoners*.

Before founding MindWorks, which provides stress management and meditation training to corporations and professional organizations, she spent almost a decade working for Fortune 500 corporations including Morgan Stanley and Johnson & Johnson. She speaks nationally on leadership and diversity in the workplace and has been featured in several major publications including Bloomberg BusinessWeek and ABC News.

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**Learn from Prisoners.**

**Magdalena Rustomji** was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico and immigrated to Texas as a young child. She is now retired after working for 27 years, as a Licensed Professional Counselor, with “recently arrived” immigrant high school students from all over the world in individual and group counseling sessions, as well as with the original Zoroastrian Youth Group in Houston. Now in retirement, she presents Poetry Workshops for teachers and other groups. She has just begun a project to update the modules she used in her counseling work, believing in the healing power of Poetry and Writing.
A Photojournalist & Reporter’s diary

Kashmir – January to October 2010

Dilnaz Boga shares her diary with Hamazor

The beginning

My first bout with a curfew was in January 2010. A teenager has been killed and no one was held accountable, so the people poured on the streets to show their anguish. The clampdown is more severe in the Downtown area of Kashmir than Jawahar Nagar (where state officials reside). Paramilitary troopers are caught on cell phone videos throwing stones and breaking windowpanes of people’s homes. There are some streets in Downtown that have no windowpanes!
By the tenth day, I’m out of food and find myself on a staple diet of bananas, thanks to the poor vendor who takes a risk and ventures out late evening.

Fear of the sun

It’s been almost two months since we’ve been under curfew in Kashmir. It’s not the echoes in the empty streets decked up with concertina wires imported from Israel that are disturbing, it’s the rising sun I fear that brings with it the news of deaths by tear gas shells or bullets.

Bearing witness

As journalists we are issued curfew passes by the government. Most times, the local police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) fail to honour them. When I pick my camera to take photos, they threaten me with a baton. Getting past every street is an achievement, with the police and the paramilitary playing God.
Last month, when the government imposed a media gag, the CRPF stood outside media offices and our homes, preventing us from moving out. Journalists who were only doing their job were beaten up and fired upon. They were taking photos of soldiers firing on funerals, and soldiers entering people’s homes and destroying property.
Doctors from hospitals say that the injured have been shot mostly in the head and chest. No security personnel have perished in the fierce clashes, hospital sources add. In the past month, the violence has intensified, with up to eight deaths a day. Hundreds have been injured due to firearms or assault.
Just as the people mourn for one death, another one follows. They are firing at ambulances that ferry the injured. Only if people in India knew what was happening here. The media is sold to propaganda. Those killed have been unarmed civilians. A young woman who was drawing curtains to protect her home from tear gas was shot in the chest. An eight-year-old boy was beaten to death by the paramilitary. I don’t want to be Indian anymore.

In India, the people what to know why?

The killings have caused even more people to come on the streets to protest the killings since the justice mechanism is
not in place. How can justice evade a people in supposedly the world’s largest democracy?
They are preventing journalists from going to villagers where protesters have been killed. They are blocking phone signals in those districts. There has been a ban on SMS. They’ve even shut the airport on the pretext of repairing the runway. They don’t want to hide the killing fields.
Thank God for Facebook. We’ve learnt to pick bits of information from there and verify it. Someone said that a meeting was being held in Delhi to “tackle the internet”. They decide not to go ahead with the Internet blackout, as it would also affect subscribers in Punjab. The local press has reported that in the last month, 1,400 people, mostly teens, have been booked under draconian unconstitutional acts that the state uses as instruments of suppression. Kashmir does not have juvenile homes, so the minors share cells with criminals far away from home. Nightmares follow them upon release, a lawyer tells me. This flouts the Juvenile Justice Act and international child laws that India is signatory to. Who cares?

To report or not to report

For journalists, to confirm a death and report it is tricky. The Police Control Room rarely shares information. The authorities block the cellular phone signals of the area where the killing has taken place. The government for the last two months has already banned SMS service. Busy doctors in hospitals, who have their hands full, help us confirm the killings. Law enforcement authorities withhold information, fearing a backlash.
Calls from Kashmiri friends fill up the day as hardly any news manages to trickle out. The national media, on the other hand, chooses to demonise the stone-throwers, blaming the violence on ISI, Pakistan’s intelligence agency. This aggravates the locals. State propaganda has played a pivotal role in delegitimizing the struggle for independence. Full marks to the state. Shame on my tribe!

Internet to the rescue

With Internet as their only vent, youngsters post all kinds of messages on networking sites such as Facebook – angry, sad, frustrated, determined but not confused. Everybody here wants freedom from India. They want independence.

We’re Indian, we hate Pakistan: Jingoism at its best

I requested a friend in the media from New Delhi to cover the unrest, with the approval of her editor. She arrived and we started shooting before sunrise to circumvent the curfew. Covering ground was difficult as we’d be stopped and asked to turn around everywhere we went on our way back before noon. The fact that we were not local media helped us commute. After burning the midnight oil, and putting together four very difficult packages that covered the turmoil, she headed back only to be told by her channel’s head that “the stories could only be screened on a Pakistani news
channel”. Nationalism and conforming to the state’s rules are two qualities that the Indian mainstream media excels at. My friend quit her job of nine years later that month.

**Alone but not lonely**

I haven’t seen anyone in a week. We haven’t been allowed to step out at all. The killings are at their peak. I’m constantly on the phone with my colleagues. We are uploading stories online all through the night. None of the newspapers have made it to the stands today. The police have confiscated them. All the more reason to focus on the job at hand.

With people being cooped into their homes for long spells, tempers are running high. Families are finding it hard to get along. Friends are more irritable, highly strung, sleepless, restless, depressed, helpless and very angry. They all want to step out of their homes. Some can’t even peep out of their windows as they hear gunshots.

Days later, I manage to visit most of them, negotiating my way through groups of protesters, security personnel and empty streets. Some of my friends look like they just got released from jail. Others are unusually quiet. Some cry. Some even curse saying that we should all get bombed together, instead of a few being shot every day. Anger is hurt turned inside out, said one.

**’Nothing to lose’**

Meanwhile, people in India are wondering why parents can’t keep their kids at home. Little do they know that a teenager gets shot outside his home while playing carom. A teenager tells me, “I am living for nothing under this occupation, at least I will die for something.” His friend, also a stone-thrower added, “I have nothing to lose and everything (freedom) to gain.” My father calls and asks how my day went. I told him they killed another kid. He asks, “What did he do?” I hang-up. I’m disgusted.

**Sign of our times**

On August 19, I finally crack. Two days ago, this story was supposed to be about a miracle survivor, who had cheated death despite the grave nature of his injury. But today, it is not. At 4 am, nine-year-old Milad Ahmed Dar, lost his battle to death after six days of battling hard.

Hailing from Laar in Ganderbal, Milad had gone along with his family, to visit a relative in South Kashmir. His father Mohammed Amin Dar. He recalled how Milad vomited after he returned home from the darzgah on August 14, and then passed out.

At first, his family rushed him to a district hospital in South Kashmir amidst violent clashes. “We passed mobs. Then I saw blood on my sleeve. I thought he must have hurt himself when he fainted at home,” said Dar.

Milad was soon referred to a city hospital. A doctor who saw him in the Emergency ward said, “When the child was brought to us, he was already in a coma and was suffering from fits. He was bleeding from his nose and also had a small puncture wound, measuring 0.5 cm on his head. He had a history of
fever and diarrhoea.”
He added, “We called the paediatrician and opted for a CT scan, thinking may be it was an infection in the brain. We had no idea he had been shot in the head. Even his parents didn’t know. The bullet had travelled from one side of the brain to the other.”
I had to get to the hospital to see him. I had to see my miracle survivor. I walk for an hour and then hitched a ride in an ambulance. Its easy to walk with a laptop and camera in my bag. Its heavy but I’m numb.
The ambulance driver warns me that if the paramilitary stops them and discovers that I’m a media person, there might be hell to pay. I don’t care. I have to see Milad. I need hope.
I reach the ICU and regret the fact that I made it. They are shooting kids with my tax money. With a tube, sticking out of his mouth, tiny Milad lay on big bed. Milad looked too tiny on the full-sized ICU bed meant for adults, with his face, bandaged right up to the bridge of his nose. “Fire Arm Injury to head,” the file lying by his bed said. His father hovered around him, with a worried look.
Parents feel helpless when they can’t shield their children. In Kashmir, after six decades that helplessness and sadness has ripened to rage. This explains the increasing number of street protests in the last three years.
On condition of anonymity, a doctor said, “No one could explain how, when or where the child was shot in the head. This is the sign of the times we live in. I’m assuming the child must have gone numb in extreme fear or excitement that he did not even feel the pain of the bullet piercing his head. Had he felt pain, the nine-year-old would have complained or cried at least.”

Curfew pass?
In an attempt to collect the pink slip that would allow my free movement in the city for the next four days, I made my way to the Information Department from my home. After all, what good is a journalist cooped up in his or her home at a time when the job requires you to bear witness to what is happening outside?
A group of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel stopped me as soon as I stepped out of the gate. “If there was a curfew in Delhi, would you step out?” he asked. “Yes, I’m a journalist and I need to get my curfew pass,” I replied. There have been several curfew days in the last few months and I’ve stepped out before, I added. He checked my credentials, and let me proceed. The pedestrian after me wasn’t so lucky despite the fact he had a curfew pass. They charged at him with a baton.
Negotiating my way through five groups of argumentative CRPF personnel, I finally heaved a sigh of relief. Had I been a local, there was no way in hell I would’ve been allowed to make the trek. The fact that I look Indian and I’m a woman also helped.

Militarised masculinities
On curfew days and regular days, I walk a lot in the city to take photographs. Some of the policemen and CRPF that morning let me through because they recognised my camera, I
guessed. “Madam, I’ve seen you in Maisuma several times during protests,” said a cop. I politely nod and walk on after showing my credentials and explaining repeatedly what I was doing out there. The only people out on the street were men in uniform and cops in civilian clothes, lots of other government employees from the security sector in cars without number plates and hospital staff on their way to work in ambulances.

Upon my return from the hospital, I was dropped close to home. I walk four hours a day on an average. It helps. The CRPF stops me. “Where do you think you’re going?” he asked, while the rest of his crew gawked. “Home,” I said. “Where are you returning from?” he persisted. “Work.”

He wasn’t about to give up easily, “Don’t you know its curfew. I didn’t see you earlier on in the day walk from here.” I told him that was because I had a curfew pass and I had taken the bund. Finally, he let me go. But a man with a curfew pass behind me got assaulted with a baton by a local cop. Nothing feels as rotten as a potent concoction of helplessness and fear. I waited for a few seconds and walked on. I turned back, praying that they had let the man go. Strangely enough, the guy had started walking in my direction as if nothing had happened. Then the realisation hit me, he must be so used to it that batons failed to faze him.

Cope or cop out

There’s no manual one can refer to about coping with non-stop spells of curfew, or being cooped up within four walls with raging emotions that extend from despair to anger and frustration to helplessness. Maybe knowing how prisoners cope within confinement might help in my case. After all, Kashmir is one big cage with prisoners where no one is allowed to speak, post comments on Facebook without being slapped by draconian laws, protest on the streets against murders or attend funerals only to get fired upon and killed by “security” forces. Nothing is normal here. No one is allowed to be normal. The government probably thinks normal is boring.

The anger and the frustration are, these days, not merely emotions that cloud the collective consciousness of the locals alone. A policeman deputed at a stone-pelting site near the airport, lamented, “We are caught between the government and the people. How much are we expected to endure? I have to go home in my civilian clothes, without the uniform, because of social ridicule. And if the stone-pelters lay their hands on me, they will lynch me. Even my family is not safe because of this job.”

Sources say, usually the authorities don’t cut off the electricity, as they want people to stay home and watch television and not come on the streets to protest. Obviously, this, along with other measures like shooting unarmed protestors in the streets fearlessly has shown little results in changing hearts in Kashmir.

So, while emotions lay bottled up tight into chests tonight, along with the memories of the gruesome past all across the Valley, I lay in my bed and murmur a prayer to defeat hate and fear in me.
and the rest.

The day the Gods forgot Baramulla

North Kashmir’s Baramulla district is no stranger to violence and bloodshed. But the last few months have been exceptionally hard on its well-conditioned population. With restricted access to press, the grass root-level situation has largely gone unnoticed from July to November 2010. Palhalan village in Baramulla saw 35 consecutive days of curfew. After a day of relaxation, the authorities resorted to the same strategy to control the situation.

“We have never treated so many patients with gun shot injuries,” said Dr Khursheed Ahmed Khan, Block Medical Officer at Block Kreeri Hospital in the neighbouring village. In the last four months, the number of injured received in the hospital due to bullet injuries was 36, said Dr Khan.

The hospital even now receives four to five cases of “alleged beating” daily, disclosed hospital sources. Going by the statistics, brutality at the hands of the men in uniform is a norm here.

Three women suffered from gun shot wounds in the four-month turmoil in Kreeri - out of them two have crippled for life, disclosed Dr Khan, accessing his records.

A witness outside the hospital recalled, “People were even arrested by the army from this hospital during the unrest. During the first raid in hospital, they caught two protesters injured in firing. Then, personnel from 29 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) of the Indian Army came again and picked up two more boys from the operation theatre,” Shamim Dar (name changed) said.

Recalling the events preceding the hospital raid that day, Shamim, who is a higher secondary student, said, “That day, there was so much shelling (teargas), and two people had been killed in Palhalan. We went to the hospital in Kreeri. Soon the hospital was raided and four people were picked up. They were beaten in police station. They were kept there for six days.”

Razak Malik (name changed), who also escaped from the hospital that day, with a bullet wound remembered, “We went for the funeral of Ghulam Rasool, who had been shot that morning. The forces fired on his funeral at 2 pm. This is not a protest, the people said. A second person was killed there.”

As he lifted his pant to reveal his calf to show us the injury, Razak said that he had not gone to the hospital since that day and had been treating his wound at home.

To save their lives, some of the mourners ran on the hill. “We were six in a group. An army man caught me and the other one shot me from close range. In the scuffle, I got away. Another guy was shot in the stomach. We hid in our homes, as the forces didn’t let us go to the hospital.”

Razak knew the end was near. Fear overcame desperation and the boys decided to defy death. He said, “We took the car and I told the driver to overrun the army personnel if they got in our way. Either way, they would’ve beaten us up despite the bullet injuries. They tried to stop us and broke the
windshield of the car.” Razak had tied his leg but was bleeding profusely. Finally, the group reached the hospital. “The army got there and hit four members of our group with rifle butts while I hid. They even broke Station House Officer’s (Kreeri) wrist. The police intervened and took the detainees with them. When people went to the police station and protested then they released us,” Razak said. The guy who was shot in the stomach alongside, died. “He was shot in the stomach through and through – he didn’t make it after he was thrashed. They (security forces) let him bleed to death.” This was not the end of the turmoil that Palhalan witnessed. After a day of relaxation of curfew last week, the police imposed restrictions again “as a precautionary measure”. Palhalan completed 42 days of curfew on October 31.

Dilnaz Bega is a journalist from Mumbai. She worked for Srinagar-based website Kashmir Dispatch in Jammu and Kashmir in 2010. She has worked for the Fininvest Times as Chief Copy Editor on the International Desk in Mumbai. Previously, she worked for a few city-based newspapers, covering issues like health, women’s and children’s issues, human interest, civic, education and crime. Dilnaz has also covered conflicts in Kashmir, the North-East, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra for several publications. She completed her BA in English and Psychology and her MA in English Literature from Mumbai University.

In July 2004, Dilnaz completed her MA in Peace and Conflict Studies with a distinction on her dissertation ‘Cycles of violence: The psychological impact of human rights violations on the children in Kashmir’ from the University of Sydney in Australia. The following year, she shot a documentary in Kashmir on the same subject titled Invisible Kashmir: The other side of Jannat (Heaven), which was screened at film festivals all over the world. Dilnaz has won the Agence France-Presse Klaus Webb Prize for her courageous work in Indian-administered Kashmir, the AFP Foundation announced Wednesday 16 March 2011, at a ceremony in Hong Kong.
A pro-freedom under-age protester being taken into custody by the police in Srinagar.

A boy watches a paramilitary soldier gear up. Kashmir is the highest militarised zone in the world. It also has the highest rate of suicide.

All summer the government forces and the pro-freedom protesters battled in the streets of Kashmir. Over 100 people were shot to death in these demonstrations. It was a battle between stones and bullets last year.

The paramilitary would walk through lanes breaking car windows and throwing stones into people’s houses to intimidate them. There are entire suburbs in Srinagar that have no window panes.

Sometimes, the ambulance was the only mode of transport for me. I was always warned that if the security forces found out that I was a journalist they could get violence with everyone who was travelling with me.
Anti-India graffiti, a part of the pro-freedom amalgam’s Graffiti Campaign, sprung up all over Srinagar last summer. The locals refer to the Indian troops as dogs.

For months, the streets of the entire Kashmir Valley remained under tight curfew. Even medicine shops next to main hospitals were not allowed to remain open.

The victim shows a gunshot wound on his leg in Baramulla district in North Kashmir. He had to escape from the Kreeri hospital without getting his wound treated as the army personnel barged in on pro-freedom demonstrators.

The boy sitting in this pic is Farak Bukhari of Baramulla. He was picked up from a pro-freedom demonstration and his tortured body was discovered from an unmarked grave by the border. The forces cut off his hand, his family said. I saw the pics of the corpse to confirm.
continued from p 50

to Rs1,100,000/-. WZO and the people of Kohistan are indebted for their generosity and patience to see this project through.

A donation of £2,541 was sent to Merlin, London, UK, in March, from the funds collected in London by WZO, as this NGO is accepting contributions only in UK. Merlin, the selected charity for Christmas 2010 by The Times, have been working in Pakistan in all four provinces, to ensure the communities they have been assisting, progress towards rehabilitation and recovery by end 2011 and into 2012.

This donation on your behalf, will be used to reduce morbidity and mortality of those affected by the floods. They target their assistance to the most vulnerable members of the community including pregnant and lactating women, children and the elderly.

Zubin Surkari, 31, is only the third Parsi cricketer to represent his country in a World Cup. Farokh Engineer the flamboyant wicketkeeper of the Indian cricket team was the first one, during the inaugural Prudential World Cup in 1975. Ron Irani who played for UK and now Toronto-born Zubin represented Canada in the 2011 World Cup. As he was away in India representing his country, Hamazor will carry a profile of Zubin in our next Issue 3/ 2011. - Ed.
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 / OCCUPTION ....................................................................................................................

If Student, please give date of birth......................................Email Address.............................................................

ADDRESS: (IN COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE) ..................................................................................................

TEL. NOS: (Res).............................................(Office)...........................................(Mobile)............................................

Proposed by: ..................................................
Seconded by: ..................................................

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NOTES:
1. The proposer and seconder must be WZO members.
2. Family membership includes all dependents (children and parents) living at the same address. Voting rights for all over the age of 18. Only one copy of publication will be sent to the primary member. Please list all secondary members.
3. Friends of WZO is for those persons who are interested in Zoroastrianism and WZO but do not qualify the criteria stated above. They will have all the benefits except they do not have voting rights and will not receive the Zoroastrian calendar.

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The World Zoroastrian Organisation
# Membership Fees

For UK residents & other countries

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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.

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<td>Hamazor Subscription for Individuals</td>
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For Canadian residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Type</th>
<th>Fees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Patron</td>
<td>C$1200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Member</td>
<td>C$300</td>
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<td>Ordinary Member for 3 yrs</td>
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<td>Ordinary Member</td>
<td>C$30 pa</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Gratis till 25 years of age</td>
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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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Membership Type</th>
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<td>Ordinary Member for 3 yrs</td>
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<td>Ordinary Member</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Family</td>
<td>NZ$550</td>
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<td>Friends of WZO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamazor Subscription for Individuals</td>
<td>NZ$35</td>
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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.
"...the family, the community together with the clan, entreated for the grace of Him, the Wise Lord, (saying) 'Let us be Thy messengers...'."

Yasna 32.1

insier translation