“...Moreover (I wish) for this person the best of all things, ... to be understanding all his days...”

Yasna 43.2

Hadar translation

Trapeze Artist
Minoo Vafadari,
to perform at London Olympics 2012
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COVER
‘Love Indeed’ Philippa Minoo Vafadari at the Pavillion Theatre, Brighton.
Photo: David Churchill

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

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Volume LXIV - Issue 3/2012

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

Funded by:
Happy Minwalla
Karachi, Pakistan

Cover design by:
Tannaz Minwalla
Karachi, Pakistan

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

As many of us approach the time for celebration – the Kadmi & Shahenshahi Navroze – Hamazor also celebrates and highlights many achievements of our fellow Zarathushtis which have taken place in this quarter.

Nearly every page one will turn in this issue, you will read and feel no doubt a sense of pride for what these people have achieved, so many who are still in the prime of their lives which makes it more commendable. Emails keep flying about how great we were in the past two centuries, which is fine to keep history alive, but I for one look at the future. We have highly educated and committed youth, ready to come forward and share their expertise, their enthusiasm – give them a chance to shine!

Our Institutions and Associations especially in the ‘home countries’ are top heavy with persons over 60 years of age. Progress and new vision can never be there till room is made for fresh thoughts. The usual comforting words are repeated till they are believed, that no one comes forward to do their bit, they haven’t got the time etc, but let us dispel that myth.

Time and effort is wasted in rancour and squabbling over petty matters which become at the end of the day full-sized cancers, rather than looking ahead, facing the issues that can be resolved. Grossly neglected are the aged, the hungry and needy, the wealth of literature, the crumbling edifices and much more, all blinking with a red alert, but firmly pushed under the carpet. The stakes are high and what we need are solutions for a sustainable future. As so aptly put by the African proverb, “to go fast, go alone: to go far, go together”.

As FEZANA celebrates their 25th year, they need to be congratulated for constantly looking ahead, involving their youth who have been taught to think about others who are less fortunate, regardless of their beliefs. Having been in close contact with this ‘body’ since its inception it never fails to impress me how far they have reached out and achieved. Today as they celebrate in New York, they should indeed feel proud having produced thinkers and doers.

We will survive despite shrinking numbers in Parsis, despite Parsi women marrying non-Zoroastrians, despite their children not being accepted, as there will be Zarathushtis shining in the world.

A request for all members of WZO. Please take out a few moments of your time and send your current email ids to: membership@w-z-o.org This is the need of the day, so that we can check on the mailing addresses which very few bother to update. WZO has to pay for the postage costs which are overwhelming and at the end of the day its been a waste, if addresses have changed.

Hamazor wishes her readers Navroze Mubarak, and the NA Congress kudos with continued success.

Toxy Cowasjee, 2A Mary Road, Bath Island, Karachi 75530, Pakistan
Celebration of a Life -

Mehraban Zartoshty 1919 - 2012

Now a great man rests and the whole of his life is legacy. Shall we laud his benevolent charities that transformed the lives of Zarthushtis around the world? Or shall we extol his unassuming presence as he earned our respect and recognition he achieved during his lifetime? Surely we hold up to the light his beloved family and lifelong friends – leaders and laity among them. For Mehraban Zartoshty always kept his eyes on the prize— a better world for Zarthushtis. Through the Zaroshty Brothers Foundation, he supported and created a community in the western world that we enjoy today. For that, we owe him our gratitude.

Mehraban, the younger son, was born to Mobed Jamshid Keikhosrow and Ostad Farangis in Yazd, Iran. He completed his primary education in Farsi, as well as his navar and martab training in Yazd, Iran. He then continued his schooling in Mumbai at the Bharal New High school and Elphinstone College and returned to Iran with the outbreak of World War II. Having lost his father at a young age, Mehraban was greatly attached to his elder brother Faridoon whom he looked up to with reverence as a guardian and advisor. They developed and expanded an import-export business and manufactured plastic products, artificial leather, and fur.

With the revolution in Iran, Mehraban migrated to London, later to Vancouver, Canada, and subsequently to San Diego, USA. Faridoon stayed on to look after business in Iran. When his brother passed away in November 2000, Mehraban was deeply grieved, and his attachment to his brother continued with the name of his brother, which is always listed first in any charitable endowment.

Today the names of Faridoon and Mehraban are synonymous with philanthropy. The focus of his charities has largely been to enrich and preserve the Zoroastrian religion and ethos, promoting education and well-being of youth, and providing medical facilities to individuals and hospitals. Mehraban performed religious ceremonies and managed the Atash Behram of Yazd for more than 30 years. He also established the Council of Iranian Mobed of North America “Kankash-e- Mobedan” to propagate the teachings of Zarathustra and served as its President for ten years.

The charities, which benefit from the donations of the Zartoshty brothers, include the Atash Behram in Yazd, the schools and institutions in his beloved Iran, the B D Petit Parsee General Hospital in Mumbai, the Bilimoria Hospital in Panchgani, Dar-e Mehrs for the benefit of the communities in Chicago, Vancouver, San Jose, Houston and Sydney, education scholarships In India and North America, the reprinting and preserving old books at the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, construction of the Pherozesheh Mehta Library Bhavan at Bombay University, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, and above all, establishing a chair at the prestigious School for Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) in London.

A man of great compassion and authenticity he made the most of every moment of his life. And every life he touched was in turn impacted and uplifted – each one possessing equal value in his eyes and each deserving equally of his attention. He leaves behind a legacy of accomplishment, service and dedication that will continue to inspire and challenge others to use their gifts and talents to the fullest. - written by Aban Rustomji

WZO, HAMAZOR and her readers extend their deepest condolences to his wife Paridokht, his daughters Homa, Vida and Mehrbanu and their families and also to the daughters and families of his brother Late Mobed Faridoon. - Ed.
Yet another very successful seminar was hosted by WZO in London and in keeping with WZO's mission of making knowledge freely available, it was open to all and provided gratis.

The speakers were each extremely respected by one another and when Dr Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis from the British Museum and Dr Ilya Yakubovich from Oxford University (kindly conveyed by his colleague Dr Elizabeth Tucker) all heard that Farrokh Vajifdar was replacing the earlier advertised speaker they made a point of being there to hear him in the first session.

Farrokh was aware of the organiser’s interest in the significance and provenance of the symbol widely adopted by Zoroastrians, namely the Fravahar. Having therefore stepped into the breach at the eleventh hour, he gave an illustrated presentation of the subject, showing the range of cultural influences that have contributed towards the Fravahar symbol which is widely worn round the neck and adorns all sorts of Zoroastrian references.

Starting with the purported image of a winged Cyrus found at Pasagardae, he showed us some Egyptian papyruses where the head cover is identical to that of Cyrus, and he offered the view that he believed the cuneiform inscription revealed that sculpture to be an anachronistic piece of propaganda. He also showed the Assyrian sculptures and bas reliefs which use winged mythical creatures whose striking similarities cannot be disregarded. He also showed several depictions where the Fravahar is present over the bas relief of the Achaemenian kings such as those at Behistun, Naqsh e Rostam and Persepolis and in each case according to Farrokh, the king’s hand is raised in greeting to the Fravahar while a ring of sovereignty is being extended towards the kings.

It is Farrokh’s firm conviction that the salutation of the kings can only be to Ahura Mazda who is referred to throughout the inscriptions as having influence over the actions and thoughts of the kings, and by whose grace they hold sovereignty over the nations they have conquered. Along the way Farrokh showed some interesting illustrations of much earlier (2200 BC) sculptural compositions from the Zagros Mountains where the goddess Ishtar, symbol of the supernatural, was extending a ring of sovereignty to the king Alubalini as slaves were being led in his presence, which offers a much earlier model for the modified Behistun bas relief.

Although Farrokh mentioned that it was Cambyses who conquered Egypt and was "pharonised", he did not dwell upon the idea that it was most probable that from this time of Egyptian conquest onwards, the influence of the Horus figure widely found throughout the ancient Egyptian archaeological remains played a significant role in transferring the image to the Achaemenian kingdom. Interestingly in the Egyptian rendering of the image, there was no head figure whereas in Persepolis there is only one winged Fravahar without a head figure. What is clear is that the Assyrians used the figure in their seals, and yet there is no indication either that they recognised Ahura Mazda as a deity nor attributed the image to that of Ahura Mazda.

Farrokh conceded that it was just possible that the Fravahar figure may have represented the travashi of the kings’ ancestors, while others in the audience opined that the symbol may have
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

represented the Khwarr or divine right to rule bestowed upon kings.

Our 2nd speaker Dr Ilya Yakubovich is a man of staggeringly wide abilities, having started his early life in Moscow as a mathematician, then moving into linguistics and later writing his doctorate in German on Hittite Luvian, (an early Indo European language from Anatolia). After this he branched out into other Indo European languages including Sanskrit, Old Persian, Avestan and the later Iranian languages including Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, Bactrian etc. His reputation among Indo-Europeanists is such that he took up a post doctoral post in Chicago and it has been our good fortune that he has spent the past two years at Oxford where he has been teaching these languages to Oxford students. Ilya chose to speak about a subject about which many of us would not have thought there was any controversy – Were the Achaemenids monarchs Zoroastrians?

Ilya examined the evidence from contemporary administrative inscriptions and as part of his argument, raised the possibility that Mazda worship existed quite independently of Zoroaster. He offered that his role may have been to reaffirm the already existing worship of Ahura Mazda and because of his outstanding lyrical qualities Zoroaster’s status was raised to the originator of the concept.

Through logically presented arguments supported by credible sources, Ilya gave a thoroughly stimulating talk which will be printed more fully in a later issue of Hamazor.

apparently minted there. These carried images or iconography typical of that found in contemporary buildings such as at Persepolis or in the bas reliefs at Behistun, like an archer or a spear holder. Some of the governors or satraps appointed by the kings were allowed to mint their own coins and on the reverse of one, from Samaria, one can find a 4-winged creature holding a ring resonant of the sculpture of Cyrus found at Pasargadae. Others have diverse themes, such as a trireme (resonant of Greek coins) or a royal figure in a chariot. A later coin seems to have deliberately borrowed the earlier iconography of winged figures to emphasise the divine support enjoyed by the king.

Dr Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis who is curator of Middle Eastern Coins at the British Museum presented us with a history of coins from Iran, starting with the 6th BC Darics that bore the head of Darius, made of gold and based on the coinage of Lydia and indeed

Parsi: a People of the Book

The influence of Zoroastrianism on Islam has been deep and widespread. A long-forgotten book, dealing at length with undeniable facts linking the Sage of Ancient Iran with the Prophet of Islam, is in course of being reissued to explain, dispel, and correct misconceptions and mutual misrepresentations. It is remarkable for being written in a wholly favourable light by an Islamic scholar with the sponsored help and encouragement of highly respected Parsi scholars of the time from the Iran League in Bombay and Calcutta’s Iran Society.

The author, S M Taher Rezwi, has used some of the best, and often unfamiliar, sources from University and Islamic libraries, with full references. The book is entitled Parsi: a People of the Book. First published in 1928, having stood the test of time, it is re-published in a new, corrected edition.
Zoroastrianism’s Influence on Islam

Third of a series of articles, how Zoroastrianism influenced other religions.

Zarathushtra’s impact on Islam was diluted, first by 2,500 years of memory loss and by the deflective prisms of the two religions—Judaism and Christianity.

Nevertheless, Zarathushtra’s focus on one high god as creator of the universe, and his passion to uplift the poor found a resonance in the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. Unfortunately, later Zoroastrianism invoked Muslim concepts, cycled through Judaism and Christianity, of angelology and demonology, heaven and hell, and judgment day.

by keki bhote

Early Ties with Zoroastrianism
During Mohammed’s lifetime, there were direct ties with the great Zoroastrian Sasanian Empire. One important contact was a Zoroastrian priest, Dastur Dinar, who was both Mohammed’s teacher and scribe. He recorded the message the angel Gabriel transmitted to Mohammed. As a result, Zoroastrians were protected during the prophet’s lifetime — but not later!

Doctrinal Highlights of Islam
“I created humankind only that they might worship me”... The Koran.

- The centrality of God, the fixation on God and the worship of God as the sole purpose of life is the focus of Islam. Man is but a servant, or “Abd,” of God, life is lived under the command of God and there is no distinction between this worship and the wholeness of human existence.
- The Koran, according to Mohammed, is not his words and writings, but those passed on to him as a revelation from God, through the angel Gabriel. As such, not a word of the Koran can be changed by humans.
- The first pillar of Islam, “the Shahada,” the Islamic code of conduct is based upon faith. The Shahada repeated by every Muslim states: “I bear witness that there is no God but God. I bear witness that Mohammed is the apostle of God.” The Shahada summons people all over the world to worship, to strive for goodness and right conduct.
- The second pillar of Islam, “the Sadat,” which is a liturgical prayer, is recited five times a day, to remind Muslims that they are but worshipful servants of God.
- The third pillar of Islam is the Zakat or alms giving. “Oh you, who believe, perform the Sadat (prayer) and give the Zakat.” It is the pillar of Muslim social action — the duty to share your wealth with the poor, the needy, the debtor, the prisoner, the wayfarer — all less fortunate but equally part of the worshipping community. It is not the quantity of charity but the quality of giving. Discretion is preferred to ostentatious giving.
- “The Sharia” — that rigid Muslim law that takes precedence over any constitution in theocratic Muslim
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countries – is meticulous in determining the amount of alms to be given based on one’s possessions, but an annual rate of 2.5% of a person’s cash balance is the norm. Islam says it is an act of mercy, as much to the giver as it is to a recipient. It is a means to atone for sins that are motivated by self-centeredness or by irresponsible stewardship of possessions.”

- The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting, which is obligatory during daylight hours for the whole month of Ramadan. It is a period in the year when social relationships are reaffirmed, reconciliations encouraged and the solidarity of the community enhanced. (The objective is similar to the Zoroastrian Ghambar festivals six times a year, which are not at all punitive and far more enjoyable.)

- The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage (or Hajj) to Mecca. It is not obligatory but is symbolic of purification and millions go on the Hajj each year, with crowds so jam-packed that hundreds are trampled to death.

**Doctrinal Differences between Islam and Zoroastrianism**

Generally, the concepts that unite all religions are far greater in number and importance than those that divide them. Unfortunately, Islam could be an exception.

**Different Perspectives on Monotheism**

While Islam and Zoroastrianism – as well as Christianity – have a truly reverent view of the heights of monotheism, the Islamic God is transcendent – i.e. beyond the limits of experience, whereas Zarathushtra’s Ahura Mazda is both transcendent and immanent – within the realm of the mind. The Muslim God is an all-powerful figure who dominates every aspect of a Muslim’s life – from the latter’s abject submission to a ritual of worship five times a day and to a rigid conformance to rules and regulations. A Muslim must grovel and bow and lie prostrate before God. Zarathushtra’s Ahura Mazda, on a cosmological level is as unfathomable, but on the human level is an embodiment of love.

**Man’s relationship to God**

In Islam man is a slave to God. “The mainspring of its religious life is fear – fear of God, fear of hell, fear of death and fear of sin.”

The Muslim looks upon the Koran to regulate his life.

The Zoroastrian perception of God is not that of a master-slave but that of a father, brother, friend. He can commune with God directly and not through the interpretation of some mullah, as in Islam. He can share his concerns, his hopes, his dreams with Ahura Mazda in total intimacy.

**The Purpose of Life**

The Muslim purpose of life is the worship of God – period. Nothing else matters, nothing else is important. The Muslim moves through life as an automaton with a deadening fatalism, over which he has no control.

The Zoroastrian, by contrast, is a free thinker and doer but guided by God’s gift of a good mind and sensitive conscience.

**Means and Ends**

It is unfair to label Islam as a faith where any means justify the ends? That may not be its avowed theology but, regrettably, its practice. Any means, fair or foul, can be pursued in the name of Islam and its spread and eventual global victory!

Zoroastrianism abhors the use of unethical, deceitful and bad means for a good end. Honesty and truth are instilled into every child and are a hallmark of a Zoroastrian character.

**The Call to Action**

Islam has a dichotomy when it comes to action. One path leads to its most admirable injunction – alms giving and help for the poor. The other leads to violence and war.
“According to the Koran, if one falls in a holy war to spread his faith, his place is secured in heaven with wine and “houri” (beautiful women) waiting on him. If one wins, he is entitled to booty and to the women of the enemy.”

Zarathushtra’s war, as described so powerfully in the Gathas, is to win over the enemy with persuasion. He asks each person to suit up in the fight for economic prosperity, for social welfare, for political reform and for environmental rejuvenation of the Earth.

The Schisms in Islam
Islam has been buffeted by deep schisms throughout its 1400 year history.
- The contest between the skeptics of Mecca and the faithful followers of the prophet Mohammed.
- Succession to Mohammed’s throng: his son-in-law, Ali ousted by Abu Bakr, who became the first Caliph.
- The everlasting split between the Sunnis and the Shias. Starting with the murder of Ali’s grandson Hussein – a Shia – the Sunni-Shia feud has raced on for 14 centuries – culminating in the political tug-of-war between a Sunni Saudi Arabia and a Shia Iran.
- And finally, the tragedy of the spirituality of the early Koran, now sullied by the militant Jihadists, with their religious intolerance, mayhem and mass killings.
- Not at all in keeping with the meaning of the word, “Islam,” surrender to God!

Reference
1 Zoroastrian Society of Ontario Newsletter, May, 1976
4 IBID

The first part of this article, which appeared in Hamazor 2/2012, described the
beginnings of Avestan studies at Oxford and the creation of an ‘extraordinary professorship of Zend (Avestan)’ for L H Mills. After the death of L H Mills in 1918 the study of the Avesta received encouragement over the next six decades from three professors of Sanskrit in succession: A A Macdonell (1899-1926), F W Thomas (1927-1937), and T Burrow (1944-1976). Although they differed in their scholarly specialisations, all three had historical linguistic interests, and appreciated how Vedic studies and Avestan studies can enhance each other.

The young H W Bailey (later Sir Harold Bailey), shortly after he arrived in the UK from Australia, took the Oxford BA in Sanskrit and ‘Zend’ in 1927-8, with a special subject in the ‘Comparative grammar of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and Zend’. Although Bailey held the chair of Sanskrit at Cambridge University 1936-1967, he is remembered above all for his outstanding work on Iranian languages, and it appears that his lifelong interest in Iranian philology was nurtured by the Avestan component of his BA at Oxford.

In the 1930s the Oxford Examination Statutes were updated to reflect recent progress in scholarship on the texts and language of the Avesta. The work of Mills on the Gathas had long been superseded by that of C Bartholomae, author of the only comprehensive Avestan dictionary ever published (Altiranisches Worterbuch, Strassburg, 1905). In 1917 Bartholomae’s pupil, H Reichelt, had published an Avesta Reader in English, with support from the Parsee Panchayet. ‘Texts printed in Reichelt’s Avesta Reader’ became the syllabus for students of Sanskrit, who were now required to study both Old Avestan and Younger Avestan texts, including a number of the Yashts. This Reader, with its useful collection of texts and glossary, formed the basis of the Oxford Avestan course until the 1980s.

Avestan with main language Persian continued - at least according to the official University statutes - exactly as before, and not only all the Gathas (in K F Geldner’s edition) for the language option, but also the Avesta translations in Sacred Books of the East for a special subject, were still on the books in 1944. But suddenly in 1950 Jackson’s Avesta Reader reappeared not in the statutes for the option in ‘Zend’, but for Persian as main language! Hitherto the Persian course had always included a historical linguistic element, namely ‘the Old-Persian Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Mainyo-i-Khard (edited by E W West)’, but the addition of the Avesta must have been connected with the appointment of R C Zaehner to the Oxford lectureship in Persian. It appears that Zaehner, who in 1955 published Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma at the Clarendon Press, was determined that all his students should study a number of Zoroastrian texts. When
Zaehner was elected to the Oxford Spalding Professorship of Eastern Religions and Ethics. He was succeeded as lecturer in Persian in 1953 by George Morrison, who had studied Avestan in Cambridge with Ilya Gershevitch. There followed a period of just over 20 years when Oxford was fortunate to have three scholars (Burrow, Morrison and Zaehner) who were engaged in Avestan studies.

In 1954/5 the option in ‘Zend’ was finally renamed ‘Old Persian and Avestan’, as the Achaemenian Old Persian inscriptions had been banished from the main Persian course, which was gradually coming to focus on Medieval and Modern Persian studies. The inclusion of the Achaemenian material in the ‘additional language’ course benefited not only those students with linguistic interests but also those interested in the early history of Iranian religion. Then in 1968 ‘Old Persian and Avestan’ became known as ‘Old Iranian’, in order to comply with an Oriental Studies Faculty rule that BA students can only be examined in one ‘additional language’. ‘Old Iranian’ is a historical linguistic term for the most ancient documented stage of the Iranian language family, but it has the disadvantage that it does not immediately convey to everyone that the Oxford course consists of the Avesta and the Achaemenian royal inscriptions in Old Persian. At the same time an ‘additional language’ option in ‘Middle Persian’ devoted entirely to Zoroastrian texts was created and taught by R C Zaehner, but unfortunately this course did not survive long as it was discontinued following Zaehner’s sudden death in 1974.

This account of Avestan and Zoroastrian studies at Oxford during the twentieth century would not be complete without a mention of the Ratanbai Katrak lectures and the famous publications based on these. The ‘Ratanbai Katrak Lectures on Zoroastrianism’ were established at Oxford in 1922 by Dr Nanabhai Navroji Katrak in memory of his deceased wife, Ratanbai Katrak, and provision was made for the University to invite a distinguished scholar to deliver a series of public lectures on the Zoroastrian religion at Oxford every decade. The Oxford series, which has been faithfully maintained to the present day, was inaugurated in 1922 by L H Gray of Columbia University (The Foundations of the Iranian Religions, published in 1930, Bombay), followed in 1936 by H W Bailey (Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books, published by Oxford University Press in 1943, revised edition 1971) and W B Henning in 1949 (Zoroaster, OUP 1951). Then came Mary Boyce in 1975 (A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism, OUP 1977), John R Hinnells in 1985 (lectures revised as Zoroastrians in Britain, OUP 1996, and The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration, OUP 2005), and Philippe Gignoux in 1996 (Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran, Serie Orientale Roma XCI, Rome, 2001). The most recent lecture series, which was delivered in 2009 by six different scholars, reassessed the impact of Mary Boyce’s academic work (to be published in the Bulletin of the Asia Institute later in 2012).

For the past 35 years Avestan has survived precariously at Oxford, as there is no dedicated University post for either the language or for the Zoroastrian religion. We are no longer in an academic era where it can be expected that at least one University post-holder in Sanskrit or Persian will possess the specialist knowledge needed to teach Avestan. Yet during this time the ‘Old Iranian’ (Avestan and Old Persian) course has been extended in availability to BAs in Classics and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Above all, interest in the Avestan language from the point of view of Indo-European comparative and historical linguistics has steadily increased, since the spelling conventions and historical phonology of Avestan are now much better understood than they were in the first part of the 20th century. The two most recent holders of the Oxford chair of Indo-European Comparative Philology (Anna Morpurgo Davies and Andreas Willi) have done much to encourage the linguistic study of Avestan at a graduate level. Thanks to a recent generous legacy from an Indo-European scholar, Jill Hart, the Oxford Faculty of Oriental Studies and the Faculty of Linguistics now share a small trust fund dedicated to Indo-Iranian Philology, which should in normal circumstances be able to support a postdoctoral appointment from time to time. Such postdoctoral researchers will sometimes be qualified to teach Avestan, but the continuous availability of teaching and hence the future of the undergraduate course, whose history I have described here, is far from certain. However, an encouraging fact is that the numbers of students who want to learn Avestan has slightly increased in recent years.
A critical approach to the Holiness of Chishm-e-Shafa at Balkh - Discovery of Bactro-Achaemenid fire-altar

“Ardvi Sura Anahita, who makes the seed of all males pure, who makes the womb of all females pure for bringing forth, who makes all females bring forth in safety, who puts milk into the breasts of all females in the right measure and the right quality”.
(Khurd Avesta, Aban Yahst)

Located 30km south of the ancient city of Bactra (36’32’50.63”N-66’58’05.26”E, Elev. 497m) at the entrance of a high gorge where the ancient Aranga river (Balkhab River) flows, Chishme Shafa (the spring of health) attracts pilgrims who come there from far distances. Men and women wash themselves in the spring water with the aim of gaining fertility and prosperity. Why is it called Shafa and labelled as a holy place? Is it a superstitious belief or a ritual reminiscent of a different religious belief of washing at a river or spring for gaining fertility, as it is unknown to Islam which is now the religion of these people? But what is known to Islam is mainly washing the body (ghusl) with the aim to pray; pilgrimage, getting clean after intercourse, handling of a corpse, which can take place in a river or bathroom.

Existence of an old mosque with an inscription dated mid 18th century AD, has survived with its dome having the spring incorporated within a Timurid design, is testimony to the antiquity and constant visit to the site. The locals refer to an old story related to the site with its authenticity confirmed by the inscription in the mosque. According to the local myths, Ali the 4th caliph (1st Imam of the Shi’as) fought under the walls of the fort located on the left side of the gorge, but failed to capture it as the injured infidels would recover after washing themselves at the spring of health within the fort. With an miraculous act, Ali ordered the spring to disappear from the fort and flow next to the river. After the Muslim triumph, the fort of infidels was destroyed and the flag of Islam was elevated. Without dichotomy, a similar myth is inscribed. Certainly Ali never visited the area but the
region was invaded by Arab Muslims in the 7th century. In addition to the myths of Ali, there is a second local tale which says that King Yamma built three palaces of stone, iron and glass in this gorge and used horses and mules for water supply. Indeed, both stories were brought about due to the politico-geographical importance of the area on one hand and the problem of water supply on the other.

The term of Chishm-e-Shafa and ritual of washing as mentioned, is not exclusive to Balkh but it is known in many places in Afghanistan. In all cases, the ritual takes place next to the river. Washing at Amu Darya (Oxus River) with the chanting of Quranic verses is considered as an effective way of recovering health for men.

Sophisticatedly, the tradition of gaining fertility and health happens at the lake of Band-i-Amir, Bamiyan where the woman who is accompanied with family members, exposes to the water of the lake while tied by a rope. The ritual begins when another woman throws some wild rue [spand] in the fire and prepares some food for the participants. Then the men and women pray at the mosque located near the spring. Similar to Cheshme Shafa at Balkh there are mosques near all these springs. However, existence of the mosque indicates sanctity of the site for the Muslim residents of the region.

Historically, the site of Chishm-e-Shafa of Balkh is located in a valley which is called Darayi-Gaz and is mentioned in Persian sources of 10th AD as the trade route from Central to South Asia. The Sultans of Ghaza, Ghur, Mongols and later Aurangzeb used this route for their campaigns at Balkh in 1647. Moreover, the locals narrate a story
related to the Persian mythical hero Rustam, in which he made his arrow from a Gaz tree from this valley and killed Isfandiyar. The name *paikan* (arrow) and *gaz* (Gaz tree) for the valley, emphasises on the deep connection of Iranian myths with the area. During his visit to Balkh, Firdausi might have heard a local version of this story and also about Samangan and connected the catastrophe of Isfandiyar’s tragedy with the area. Apart from the Persian chronicles signifying on the importance of the area from the trade aspect, the recovery of Hebrew scrolls from Daray-i-Suf clearly refer to merchants arriving from other countries, in the area before and after the arrival of the Muslims. The recovered scrolls (*Gezina*) can shed light on the name of the district Baraq (south of the site) which is derived from Hebrew *barukha* which means blessing. Therefore, the gorge which has almost the status of a commanding location must have been an important location to observe the transit route. This shows the historical importance of the area and its old fame among the people, but can’t justify the ritual for gaining fertility. Perhaps what could explain the reason of the holiness of the spring and motivation behind this tradition came to light by recent archaeological excavations.

In 2008, the Delegation of French Archaeologists in Afghanistan (DAFA) considered exploring two major sites; searching for Greek settlements at Tepe Zargaran and Chishm-e-Shafa for Achaemenid remains. The former unravelled a Buddhist temple dated 2nd c AD and Chishm-e-Shafa yielded the largest fire altar carved out of limestone. Further surveys showed that the site of Chishm-e-Shafa is located between two archaeological sites; the lower part along the left bank of the river and the upper part called Kafir Qala located on the right shoulder of the gorge. An initial observation shows that the plan of the lower part is comparable with the old city of Qandahar and Persepolis. Moreover, the plants of *Hum* are available around the gorge and recovery of the mortars from the chambers of the upper part can explain its association with the holy Zoroastrian drink. The mortars are identified as Achaemenid, but well-made Kushan inscribed Islamic potteries and bricks are also scattered on the upper part, which help us to recognize the chronology of the site.

The recovered object is 2m. high and 1.30m. wide and identified as a stepped fire altar which has a shallow bowl on its upper part for placing the fire. Its shallow pit indicates that the fire would not stay alight for a longer duration, as the shallow bowl would hold very limited inflammable material; suggesting this altar possibly would have been used for occasional rituals or possibly the fire may have burnt in a metallic bowl having been refilled periodically during the ongoing rituals. The walls are built with uncarved stone and mud used as mortar. The larger hall was built for congregation and the ashes from the fire altar would have been stored in a chamber near it. Architecturally, the early fire altars in Central Asia have been constructed with unbaked bricks, plastered with gypsum in an open chamber. Generally, two groups of fire altars have remained; the distinctive Iranian altar with a stepped top and base and on the other hand the crenellated tower altar which is almost entirely absent in the Iranian archaeological record; though the...
Achaemenid used this type too, which unfortunately does not exist now. Based on archaeological data, building of a fire house with an altar within it, became popular during the Achaemenid rule in Central Asia. Being under an open sky or in a roofless space is an Achaemenid character of the fire house. Contrary to that, the Sasanian fire altars were placed in a domed sanctuary called chartaqi. This had a square ground-plan and four corner-pillars which supported the dome (the proper gumbad) on squinches. Certainly, the fire house of Cheshme Shafa had no roof, either flat or domed, and it had no carved decorations unlike those of Sasanian altars. Thus this feature classifies it as an Achaemenid fire altar. Besides, the present name of Dehdadi, which lies next to the gorge, is derived from the old Persian words of Dahyu (region) and Dad (justice) connecting the area with the Achaemenid era.

It is accepted that Araedvi Sura Anahita is associated with the river Vakhsh (Oxus) and is also recognized as the goddess of fertility and celebrated in Yast 5. As a water-divinity she is worshiped as a bestower of fertility, who purifies the seed of all males, the wombs of all females, and makes the milk flow which nourishes their young. Zoroaster prayed to her on the bank of Vanguhi-Daitya (Oxus River) and later mythical Iranian heroes worshiped her. She was the goddess of all waters including Aranga (Balkhab river) as well as the fire house of Cishme shafa with Achaemenid characteristics in an Achaemenid area indicating that it could have been dedicated to the goddess Anahita. After all, the ritual of praying to her on the banks of a river, was an old Zoroastrian ritual survived till today. It is Islamized in form but not in essence, as veneration and dedication to Anahita at the fire house was replaced by praying to Allah at the mosque, but with the same purpose of gaining fertility and prosperity. Indeed, the ritual of today's Afghan men and women at the site of Cheshme Shafa in Balkh, Bamiyan, Herat, Baghlan and Ghazni with the aim of gaining fertility is reminiscent of an old Zoroastrian custom which was common in Afghanistan prior to the arrival of Islam and the holiness of the site also comes from this religion. Its survival and the construction of the mosque on each site indicates, that Muslim society not only widely accepted this custom but also is preserved till today.

Tbilisi Ateshgah

The Tbilisi Ateshghah aka Atashgah or Fire Temple) was under restoration in 2007. That work is now complete and, mercifully, the restorers have been gentle. The old brickwork has been cleaned, and in a few places discreetly repaired, but has largely been left “as is”, without any gross tampering. A perspex roof has been added to protect the site from the elements.

Authentic Zoroastrian fire temples are extremely rare, especially outside Iran (the Atashgah at Baku is an 18th century Zoroastrian construction). According to the sign outside the Tbilisi temple, it is believed that it was built between the 5th and 7th centuries, and later was used as a mosque, while retaining its old name as “Ateshghah”. This seems reasonably plausible as Tbilisi was under Persian occupation and influence for a while. Zoroastrianism (like Christianity) was loosely tolerated under Islam, so the Ateshghah might easily have survived in active use for several centuries after the 7th Arab invasion.

The Ateshghah exterior is a large featureless brick cuboid, perhaps 20 feet on a side. There are steps leading up to a pair of stout wooden doors just to the left of the Ateshghah. These open into what at first looks like a private family courtyard, but if you turn right actually leads into the Ateshghah interior. There is a new wooden floor, but they have left parts of the original floor exposed. There are no windows, but instead there are blank arches on each face.

Back in the days, a sacred flame would have burned here and there would likely have been a matching pool of clean water nearby. A small hollow is visible in one corner, but it isn’t clear what purpose (if any) that served. The Ateshghah is at GPS 41.68885,44.80559 around 100 meters east of the Betlemi Church, on the Old Town slopes NE of the Mother Georgia statue.

[conservation works in 2007 were funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and Riksantikvaren and implemented by ICOMOS Georgian National Committee.]
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

Charles Poston

Just recently on April 20th Charles Poston's 187th birthday took place and the occasion was commemorated by a group of Arizona Zoroastrians. Why would they have bothered to climb up a pyramid shaped hill known as Poston's Butte in Florence, Arizona, to remember this man who died in obscurity at the age of 75? A clue may be found in the fact that he had called the mound Parsee Hill in 1878.

Charles Poston was a remarkable man by today's standards and yet he was just one of the many typical US pioneers with interests and abilities that could be applied to an enormously wide number of fields. Men like him helped to shape the United States and he was elected the first representative for Arizona as a Republican in the 38th congress in 1864, hence the title “the Father of Arizona”.

Orphaned at the age of 12 in Elizabethtown Kentucky, he had to fend for himself. In a short while he became an apprentice at the local law court and married the daughter of the court clerk at the age of 23. Soon afterwards he moved to Tennessee where he did his legal apprenticeship at the supreme court but it seems that he did not spend much time with his wife who became paralysed when giving birth to their daughter - when at 26, he was lured into the California Gold Rush, preferring to seek fame and fortune. Years later he managed a very lucrative silver mining operation in Tubac Arizona but was driven to abandon it after local Apache Indians mounted a siege. After a period in different enterprises, and in several public offices, he took up law as a profession which he practised in the second half of his life.

The year following his congress representation, he failed to get re-elected. so he travelled to Europe and on his return to America he was quickly given an interesting mission to China by the US Secretary of State. His return journey from China is of interest to our community because it was while he travelled through India that he became aware of the Parsee community and the primacy of the role of fire. Thanks to his close contact with Native American Indians which he had experienced during his pioneering days, it seems that the reverence for the sun found in the indigenous Indian culture struck a chord of resonance in on discovering the primary place of the sun in Parsee discourse. He chose to make a six-year stay in the UK during his return journey back home, and in this time he seems to have published two titles dealing with his new found interest: The Parsees (1872), and the Sun Worshippers of Asia (1877). When he eventually did return home, he hoped that his connections with well placed people would secure him the role of US consul in London and allow him to return, but this hope was dashed and instead he was sent back to Arizona as the Register of the United States Land Office at Florence. It was during this two-year period between 1877-79 that he decided to build what he called a Parsee temple on a nearby hill which was thought to be a native Indian site of special significance. He himself paid for a road to be constructed to the summit, but sent a telegram to the Shah of Persia, Nasser ud Din asking him to contribute towards the construction of a temple.
dedicated to the religion of Ancient Iran. He apparently did not accept the first snub which was sent back in response, and followed the cool reply he received with a further attempt to secure the funds he needed but to no avail.

His professional career was very unstable from this point onwards and he kept on moving from post to post and town to town. His wife, having been cared for by relatives up to this point, died in 1884 and he quickly re-married a year later, but that marriage did not seem to have been any more successful. Poverty overcame him and when his plight was brought to public attention in 1897 he was awarded a state pension of $25 monthly which was increased to $35 monthly in 1901. He died in 1902 when he was 75, and was buried in Phoenix Arizona, but on his 100th birthday, thanks to the further publicity and interest which this most unusual man attracted, a public subscription raised enough money to have his remains removed and interred on the top of his own mound, Parsee Hill. Thanks to the publication by John Goff of Charles Poston’s life story and achievements, we have been able to gain insights into the original thinking of this most eccentric of men, said to be one of the first Western converts to Zoroastrianism.

A copy of The Parsees is available in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The publication (described as a lecture) contains some interesting observations by a sympathetic outsider about Parsee customs of that time and from the accounts he gives about customs and rituals over birth, marriage and death, as well as comments he makes about appearances, values and lifestyle, it is quite evident that he must have got to know some Parsees very well. He is particularly sympathetic to the plight of the Zoroastrians at the hands of Islam, and poetic verses to this effect are sprinkled throughout the short lecture. He cites the principles of Zoroastrianism with sincere understanding and admiration.

Interestingly, unlike his lecture discussed above, his second publication The Sun Worshipers of Asia, is easily available from Amazon, having undergone a reprint and renaissance recently. It is nothing less than an exact duplication of the text contained in The Parsees, but it was printed in 1877 in the US rather than in London. A second difference is that its final pages contain an appendix called the The Ruins of Persepolis (which appears to have been written by the publisher himself or some close relative bearing his name rather than Charles Poston), whereas his The Parsees concludes with observations about the rest of his travels back from China. The chapters I found most charming are those that describe the female attire and the male appearance and from these it is evident that he was very much taken by the Parsees as a good looking bunch of people.

While these identical works are a testament to his admiration of Zoroastrianism as a philosophy for conducting ourselves, in these works we do not find any conclusive and overt allusion to his own formal conversion. His last comments make his position clear: I hope that the extracts which have been given will convince you that the “Sun Worshippers of Asia” are worthy of a higher place in your estimation than mere idolaters; that they are the followers of a pure and sublime religion which deserves respect for its great antiquity and for the persecutions it has survived ...

The Parsees worship the sun as brightest creation of God, as the emblem of His purity, as the mirror of His brightness, as the evidence of His omnipotence, as the majestic throne around which innumerable worlds revolve in their orbit, subject to His will. 

Poston’s firetemple which he named “Parsee Hill”. Short while later people nicknamed it “Poston’s Folly” however today it is known as “Poston’s Butte”.

Charles Poston, in his youth & senior years
In the mid-twenties of the 20th century M P Khareghat, the then President of the K R Cama Oriental Institute [KRCOI, Bombay], urged its Joint Honorary Secretary Jivanji Jamshedji Modi to arrange for English translations of the several classical Greek and Latin passages by ancient authorities concerning Zoroaster.

That task, by no means an easy one, was entrusted to the classicist Professors W Sherwood Fox and R E K Pemberton of the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. Their collaboration resulted in a 150-page KRCOI paperback publication (1928) of the reliably well translated passages from Zoroaster, the Prophet of Ancient Iran (1899) by the famed Iranologue A V Williams Jackson, jointly presented with Louis H Gray as Appendix V. The over-subscribed Cama volume soon went out of print.

Some 70 years later the KRCOI President Muncherji N M Cama and the Board of Trustees were happily inspired to engage a brilliant young Parsi classicist Phiroze H Vasunia – as Junior Research Fellow! – to translate afresh the original material found in the Jackson–Gray Appendix V and much more besides. It resulted (2007) in a vastly expanded set of original texts rendered into excellent English, and published in a formidable 444-page hardback by the KRCOI with the support of the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation. Beautifully printed and well presented, carefully proofread after being unusually well organized by this astonishing Parsi scholar, its intrinsic value extends immeasurably beyond its very low cover price: the benefits far, far outweigh cost.

Among the main attractions of this volume are its well-argued, clear Introduction, indispensable for orienteering within its very wide spectrum; an appetisingly summarized Contents (with a useful list of monarchs, a hair-raisingly extensive Bibliography, and crucial Indices of Sources with dates, and Names). It all makes for comfortable resource-filled reference through its 15 chapter headings: the idly curious will doubtless heave sighs of relief; the assiduous students from present and future generations will find masses of rich material to investigate, ponder, and thereafter be ever grateful to Phiroze Vasunia.

Format description over, it's time to attempt a discussion of its form and content.

Vasunia, author and co-author of other tomes besides, has taken great pains to make his work accessible and readable for those who would deepen their knowledge beyond mere hearsay and "western biased" transmission of very percipient, and sometimes polemical, antique authorities. However well informed on Persia and Persian customs, those ancients often were prey to the demands of the other majority religions of their times. Zoroastrianism, minus its overburdening rituals, was variously assessed over huge time-spans – it intrigued and challenged by turns.

Who and what was Zoroaster/Zarathushtra? Vasunia’s substantial Chapter 2 has facilitated a synthesis of views ranging from Magician to Myth figure, Philosopher to Fantast, and Ritualist to...
Rationalist. For reasons best known only to their proponents, the appellation of Philosopher arouses mindless denials. Since none of the ancient thinkers had ever encountered the eastern Iranian Sage, it befell them to rely on such information as could be gleaned from the western Magi who, when embracing Zoroastrian teachings in the 5th century BC, claimed him as one of their own – hence the association of Zoroaster with “magic”!

Eudoxus of Cnidus, 4th century BC contemporary and disciple of Plato, had compared his master to Zoroaster – probably through his contacts with the Magi, he had interviewed a Zarathushrotemo (“most like Zarathushtra”) who had passed on whatever he had absorbed of the Sage’s true precepts.

Slightly puzzling for this writer is Vasunia’s contention (p 53), “For the life of Zarathushtra, see the Gathas, ...” etc. The Gathas, in fact, give no firm indication of major related events with which (auto-)biographies are normally invested; but our author would be right in suggesting that the self-descriptions outline his main functions. The field was thus left open for all manner of fanciful productions from the authorities cited, including some named modern ones who deny the Sage’s very existence despite naming himself over a dozen times in his wonderfully cohesive verses.

[The preposterous datings of 6,000 years before Troy, etc., can be discounted by reference to the three tri-millennia of the material world’s existence when the first two are taken up with Ahriman’s appearance, his confused state and his destructive activity. According to this overall 12,000 year Zurvanite scheme, Zarathushtra existed alongside all of Mazda’s creation in a spiritual state (his pre-existent fravashi) for the first 3,000 years. The Sage of Zurvanite provenience makes his material appearance in its 6,001 / 9,001 year reckoning – whence the wholly untenable early date of the Sage’s appearance and ministry.]

Equally absorbing are the short chapters on “Doctrine and Belief” and “Fire”, but for reasons of space they cannot obtain discussion here. Suffice it to say that the entire book is shot through with the deep erudition and easy communicative skill of this brilliant star in our Zoroastrian galaxy.

Chapter 15, “Manichaeism”, offers insights through the pens of uniformly hostile writers into the conflict of two contesting religious systems – the Mazdayasna of the early Sasanians versus the escapist syncretism attempted by Mani, passionate but pessimistic advocate of schism of body and soul. One is particularly distressed by the unthinking inclusion by Marius Victorinus of “Zoradis” (Zoroaster) amongst the proven pessimists that were “Manes” (Mani) and the Buddha – what was alleged by him was “how many people have (been) led astray by these teachings?” A sinister pre-echo of a present-day High-priest who had claimed a similar effect of Zarathushtra’s Gathas upon the Parsi community – more’s the shame!

Whilst renouncing Mani with his claims and teachings, an 8th century Anathema also called upon Zarades / Zoroaster and his disciples to be condemned. One suspects that those earlier teachings from the Levantine East had posed a serious threat to the success of a struggling Christian propaganda. Extracts from the Cologne Mani Codex explain Mani’s tenets: a lengthy critique is offered by Alexander of Lycopolis. One recalls that Mani had enjoyed royal favour with Shahpuhr I (240-270 AD) and his son Hormizd I (270-271 AD); under the Bahrams (271-274, 274-293, and 293 AD) Mani was hounded, then incarcerated, finally dying of mortification.

The Bibliography, impressively sizeable, includes several familiarly known names; others, less noticed, are necessary for the purposes of Vasunia’s commendably balanced views. What attentive Zoroastrians will notice are the absences of famous Parsi authors, from Dhalla to Dhabhar, Tavadia to Taraporewala, who had in their time contributed much to the knowledge of Zarathushtra and his Religion.

A little about Phiroze Vasunia.
Has written extensively about the classical Greek and Roman tradition. He teaches at the University of Reading, in the UK. He is the author of The Gift of the Nile (2001) and the editor of the Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies, among other publications. His monograph about India, Britain and the classics is due to be published in 2013.

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In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

These should occasion little surprise, for our author is essentially a classicist and this volume concentrates exclusively on his work of translation from original Greek and Latin sources.

From Ephesus in Asia Minor came the strongly dissenting voice of the aristocratic Ionian Greek philosopher Heracleitus (540-470 BC) who censured Pythagoras, among others, for the inadequacy of their wisdom. Doubtless for this reason, Heracleitus was in turn dubbed a “dark philosopher” with his obscure and paradoxical sayings. On examination, this ancient one in his time was far nearer the truth in matters dealing with the ebb and flow of events – “all things are in flux”; Plato’s summing up of his “you cannot step into the same river twice”; the universal fire through whose condensation and rarefaction the natural elements are formed and dispersed; the metaphysical fire which judges mortals and their deeds; and so on! In our own times, Gathicists have consistently indicated the closeness with Zarathushtra on such subjects, including the Fire that is strengthened through Truth, thereby evaluating and judging the good and the bad. The Greeks’ assimilation of Magian ideas in fact forms part of Vasunia’s Chapter 13 on “Iranian Thought and Greek Philosophy”.

The renowned Martin P Nilsson, expert on Greek religion, had declared on the subject of westward transmission of Zoroastrian ideas: “The influences of Persian ideas on the Greeks had been great, but their ways were obscure and circuitous; often it was not directly exercised, but through other peoples who themselves had grasped the power of Iranian thought”.

On careful study of this Vasunia volume, one realizes that its true worth lies in its lifting much of this obscurity – it was, after all, his Zoroastrian duty to shed Light where previously there was Darkness, and, my goodness! has he succeeded brilliantly in that painstaking endeavour!
“I thank noble Lords very much. The debate has shown that Britain is a Great Britain thanks to the contribution of minority ethnic and religious communities.”

Motion was agreed.

Historically, the first Zoroastrian peer has moved the motion in the House of Lords, keeping our ‘flag flying high’ after 90 years. The first Zoroastrian MP, Dadabhai Naoroji entered the House of Commons as a Liberal in 1892, followed three years later by Mancherjee Bhownagree as a Conservative and later in 1922 Shapurji Saklatvalla or better known as Comrade Sak who was elected as a Communist. Lord Bilimoria said in his maiden speech “I now sit, as a Zoroastrian Parsee, as an independent Cross-Bench Peer. We have squared the circle.”

Through our publication, we congratulate Lord Bilimoria for bringing forward our Zoroastrian community so prominently, especially whilst United Kingdom is celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty, which is designated as “A Year of Service.”

Two Zarathushtis at the Thanksgiving Service at St Paul’s

The National Service of Thanksgiving to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen at St Paul’s Cathedral was held on Tuesday 5 June as the finale of a long weekend of celebrations.

The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe was represented by President Malcolm M Deboo and Vice President Paurushasp B Jila, on this occasion, who said;

“We were very proud that the Zoroastrian and other faith communities were part of this very historic occasion. The whole diamond jubilee weekend celebrations brought the country together in celebration of the outstanding contribution which Her Majesty has made in selfless service to the community.”

‘Later at the reception at the Guildhall we were introduced to Princess Alexandra, cousin of Her Majesty and youngest granddaughter of King George V as well as Prince Edward and Sophie, Earl and Countess of Wessex. As we spoke they both recalled visiting our Centre 10 years ago on the occasion of Her Majesty’s Golden Jubilee. On behalf of the Zoroastrian community we conveyed our good wishes to the Earl and Countess of Wessex for the speedy recovery of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh’, writes Malcolm.

Hamazor appreciates the effort taken by Malcolm Deboo and ZTFE for taking our community forward, thereby gaining recognition for a faith and its people not widely known.

[source: http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2012-05-24a.865.0&m=100961]
Chef Cyrus Todiwala prepares luncheon for Her Majesty, The Queen

The Queen visited three areas of London on 29 March, as part of her tour of Britain to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee.

At Walthamstowe, they were busy preparing lunch for a Queen as this was the day to celebrate London’s diversity. On the menu was Shephard’s Pie with an Indian twist, all the ingredients were British but there was added spice. The star chef, Cyrus Todiwala said “it doesn’t get bigger than this - it doesn’t get more exciting than this. This is a very simple lunch because I know they like simple food and of course they are always pressed for time.” [spoken on ITV]

In a private email he wrote, “The day I cooked for HM on the 29th of March setting off her Diamond Jubilee celebrations with the first official luncheon the weather was just very Indian. ...This dish [Shephard’s Pie] is going into a Diamond Jubilee celebration book.
Jehangir Sarosh - New Year’s Honours list 2012

WZO is pleased to inform the community that our life member Jehangir Sarosh was the recipient of an OBE, in the Jubilee year of Her Majesty the Queen’s New Year’s Honours list 2012.

Anne, Princess Royal presented Jehangir with the coveted OBE at the investiture ceremony held at Buckingham Palace on 23rd May 2012.

Jehangir Sarosh has been a devoted participant in the interfaith movement and was for many years the Chairman of Watford Inter-Faith Association in the UK. He presently holds the position of President Emeritus of the European Chapter of the World Council on Religions for Peace. The OBE was awarded for his outstanding promotion of peace and understanding and services towards interfaith relations. His career has seen him meet many religious leaders including Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama.

by sammy bhiwandiwalla

Through the medium of WZO’s Journal, Hamazor, Jehangir wished to thank all his friends and colleagues for the good wishes and congratulations he received on the occasion of his appointment as an Officer of The Order of the British Empire (OBE).

“I cannot tell you how overjoyed I am. As an immigrant to Britain to be recognised and accepted by my adopted country gives me a sense of belonging and being welcomed.

“I wish my community would similarly welcome those who are “returning” or accepting Zoroastrianism and offer them the feeling of belonging.

“I appeal to all to open their hearts and doors and welcome the “new Zoroastrians” by inviting them and offering them an opportunity to have their voice heard, just as you and I have been offered the welcome to Britain.”

Our heartiest congratulations to Jehangir Sarosh on receiving this well-deserved recognition for his magnificent work in furthering the awareness of the Zoroastrian community in Europe and worldwide and a great honour indeed for Jehangir, his wife Irma and family.

As the representative for Zoroastrians in interfaith meetings he has demonstrated the community’s dedication to working for peace among people of all faiths.

Sammy and his wife Ursula have always taken an active interest in community matters in the UK and were greatly influenced by the actions and sincere beliefs of individuals such as Noshirwan Cowasjee, Shirinbanoo Kutar, Shahpur Captain and many others, that in a changing world it was necessary to create a more balanced and equitable community within the UK. He joined the WZO Board in 1988 and since then has served in various capacities including Chairman of WZO.
We the followers of Zarathushtra, after commencing our unrelenting march following the death of the Prophet seemed to have retained certain indelible qualities. One among them, in the quest to adjust to changing circumstances, we have not hesitated to shed our family names to more ‘suitable’ ones to, as it were, go well with the trade, profession and place of our new settlements. We have frequently adopted place names, trade names and even those of our opponents of the Primal Homeland. Semitic, Graeco-Roman and other alien names then followed. On the Subcontinent, the local place and trade names became a norm and the rate of change progressed further to Anglo-Saxon names, including even first names after the occupation by the British.

One such name has been the Roman Zenobia (267-273 AD), who had shown hostilities towards Shahpur I (240-271 AD) Hormazd I (AD 271-272). [see ‘Sasanian Dynasty - historical perspective’, www.avena.org - Shahpur I & Hormazd I]. Some Zarathushtis still believe it is an ancient Mazdayasni name. In Gujarati, the ubiquitous ‘J’ has somehow crept in and replaced ‘Z’. The name has become ‘Jeannie’ for short. I have met a Parsi lady called Jenny whose Gujarati birth name is Zenobia. There are other modern derivatives too like Zenia, Zeena, Zina, etc.

Who then was this much quoted Zenobia, who made even Rome so very uneasy during her six year rule? Born a Roman, she was quoted in admiration by the Roman Emperor Aurelian (270-275 AD): “What a woman she is ... the wisdom of her decisions, her firmness in carrying them out, her security towards her soldiers, both generous as well as cruel as necessity calls ... ” A woman of great ambition, energetic in military affairs, and adept at several languages she certainly was resolute. She had a dark tan complexion from years of exposure to the sizzling heat of the Syrian desert. Her wide eyes and glittering teeth made her look like a Roman ‘Goddess’. She dressed like a Roman Emperor, wore a helmet and a purple cape of royalty. She could withstand the adversities of the harsh desert climate more than most soldiers with whom she marched on foot along with the battalion.

The painting [Fig 1] by Giambattis Tiepolo dated 1730 AD, is based on the historical description of her features. Many Italian operas and plays have been enacted in her name. Even an Italian film was made with Anita Ekberg as Queen Zenobia. Based in Antioch, the eastern capital of the Roman Empire, a Roman Commander, Septimus Oedinathus 257-267 AD (Pahlavi: Udainth) [Fig 2] managed to seize power from the Semitic tribal lords and keep the population entirely under his control.

The place was a large lush green oasis (Arabic: ‘Tadmor’ - city of date trees) in the midst of grassy hills in the rich caravan trade route linking Syria with the cities of Mesopotamia and along the Mediterranean Sea. He had managed to obtain support and recognition from Rome as a coalition ally hoping to destroy Ctesiphon, the Capital of Sasanian Airan. During the Parthian Era the Emperor Trajan (249-251 AD) had annexed it to the eastern Roman Empire and had renamed it ‘Palmyra’ (city of palm trees). Populated by people of Semitic
Having won some battles against the Hellenised Parthians, the Romans now planned to invade Sasanian Airan and destroy the capital city, Ctesiphon [see ‘Sasanian Dynasty - historical perspective’, www.avesta.org – The Renaissance]. On several occasions during the period 253-260 AD Valerian I repeatedly violated the peace treaty entered into by his predecessor Trajan 249-251 AD in attempts to repossess Mesopotamia, which had been conquered by Ardashir I (224-240 AD) from the Romans. In the Battle of Edessa 258 AD, Valerian’s army was completely routed by Shahpur I. In the thick of the battle Shahpur himself captured Valerian. [Fig 5] The Roman Odenathus (257-267 AD), his wife, Zenobia and son, Vabalathus (Pahlavi: Waballth) 267-271 AD made a surprise attack on Shahpur’s retreating army to rescue Valerian. Suddenly caught unawares and unarmed, Shahpur’s retreating army initially sustained heavy losses. Needless, Shahpur I regrouped his army and routed the attacking army of Zenobia inflicting heavy losses in return. Valerian, imprisoned in Ctesiphon died in captivity AD 260. Shahpur I then pressed on with his campaigns against Rome and again seized Antioch and Caeseria.

History records that the Romans had failed to win a single battle against the Sasanians (224-641 AD). Indeed, the decay and ultimate fall of the Roman Empire was largely due to their expensive futile efforts to destroy the Sasanian Empire instead of concentrating on their possessions in Europe and Africa.

Unfortunately, the Roman Governor Herod, stationed in Antioch, plotted against Oedinathus and had him and his son by his first wife assassinated. Oedinathus’s young son Vabalathus 267-271 AD by his second wife, Zenobia was appointed ruler with his mother as ‘Regent’. She embarked on her late husband’s wishes of expansion and conquest. Her Commander, Cassius Longinus, who also acted as her young son’s ‘preceptor’, along with General Septimus Zabdas conquered all of Syria, Lower Egypt around the Nile Delta and...
decided it was time to take decisive action and prepared to invade Palmyra in 272 AD. Meanwhile, Zenobia pleaded for help from Hormazd I (271-272 AD). Hormazd I failed to realize the importance of Palmyra as a buffer state and ignored Zenobia’s pleas. Aurelian landed in Antioch and went on to defeat the Palmyran forces in the Battle of Palmyra 272 AD. He then laid siege to the City of Palmyra and captured Zenobia (272 AD) and took her under fetters as a prize captive to Rome. She was at first paraded in the streets of Rome in chains and then sentenced to be isolated under house arrest in a villa outside Rome, where she died the following year. Aurelian, as was feared, later returned with a grandiose plan to reconquer Mesopotamia and destroy Ctesiphon, capital of the Sasanian Empire. He also ordered that the City of Palmyra, which had once been spared, be sacked, plundered and the trade route and trading facilities destroyed. The trade route was converted later to a military garrison by Emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD). Soon, the remaining parts of the Palmirian Empire once more fell into Arab domination under Emir Fakhruddin.

References:
As a historian, I am simply appalled at the state of many of the Parsi institutions where I have worked. I wrote about some of the most egregious cases in an article published on the New York Times’ “India Ink” website in March 2012. For example, the JN Petit Institute in Bombay has, according to one scholar, been selling off some of its most priceless books (I have recently seen with my own eyes some of these items, including rare publications from the nineteenth century). This is completely unacceptable behavior by one of the community’s most aristocratic families. The same scholar informs me that the Alpaiwalla Museum in Kharegat Colony, managed by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet and only Parsi museum in existence, lost its entire book collection due to rain damage. Burglars had, in any case, hauled away some of the Alpaiwalla’s most valuable treasures in 1998, including personal artifacts belonging to Dadabhai Naoroji. Staff at the Meherjirana Library in Navsari, including the late Dasturji Meherjirana, sifted through the trash of abandoned Parsi homes in order to save priceless vanshavalis (family tress) and manuscripts carelessly tossed away by the last Parsi inhabitants. I have had the misfortune to come across DDT—an antiquated and extremely hazardous method for keeping away insects — in more than one research facility. These are all stories worthy of a community either in the depths of extreme poverty or in a state of utter, complete carelessness about protecting its past. And we all know into which category we fall.

There are some rays of hope. The Meherjirana Library in Navsari has been actively preserving its material and granting visiting scholars the same degree of support and freedom as is done in the West. It will be holding its first international seminar — on Zoroastrian and Parsi studies — in January 2013. The KR Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay has been restoring some of its oldest manuscripts. Parzor has been actively collecting rare books and heirlooms and has launched an ambitious project to collect, edit, and publish Dasturji Firoze Kotwal’s voluminous writings. All of these efforts come at a great cost to otherwise cash-strapped institutions. Therefore, it is imperative that community members step up and contribute — financially and otherwise.
We, as a community, need to undertake a very necessary task: identifying important historical collections in order to ensure their preservation. I have heard far too many stories from individuals telling me that their ancestors bequeathed them valuable books, handwritten autobiographies, family albums, and other precious articles — which were subsequently thrown away or sold off to the raddiwala. If you possess items that you feel are of value, please make sure that you take steps to protect them and, if they are not heirloom items to be passed down to your children, make plans to donate them to a community library or organization such as Parzor.

The amount of valuable material in private hands is vast. Over the past several years, several Parsis have shown me some amazing materials in their possession: a miniature, one-inch-by-one-inch Jame Jamshed edition from the 1930s; old photographs of some of our most eminent community members from the late nineteenth century; autographed books; and old portraits and photographs. We all have a tremendous responsibility to protect and preserve these items. Unfortunately, many individuals simply toss such items in steel cabinets and hope for the best. This is highly irresponsible, to say the least. We all need to become more acquainted with up-to-date methods of proper preservation. This is a special imperative in the subcontinent, where weather wreaks havoc with printed items. Books, photographs, and newspapers all need to be kept in as temperature-controlled of an environment as possible: this means limited humidity and very limited exposure to the sun. Termite (white ant) and water damage are two other major causes of destruction of collections in India and Pakistan. Furthermore, much of the paper produced in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had high acid content, which means that paper quickly becomes brittle and falls apart. Methods of repair for such damage can oftentimes be costly and only carried out by professional conservationists. But damage can be mitigated by proper handling of such items and making sure that material is not exposed to the elements.

One of the most priceless and endangered components of our culture is our journalistic heritage. In the 1800s and early 1900s, Parsis played a dominant role in journalism in western India, running several Gujarati and English language papers and other periodicals. Chabook and Rast Goftar (which included prominent Parsis such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Nowroji Furdoonji, and Sorabji S. Bengallee) were important players in nineteenth century community debates involving the scope of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet’s authority, planks of the social reform movement such as the introduction of female education, and

Khulase-e-Panchayat, probably written by Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy under a pen name (Mazdayasni dinno labedar)
religious reform. *Parsee Punch* (later *Hindi Punch*) provided hard-hitting commentary on both British and Indian officials in the late Victorian era — in the novel form of cartoons. *Sanj Vartaman* and *Kaiser-i-Hind* were, at times, important outlets for nationalist opinion in the early twentieth century: Mahatma Gandhi, for example, contributed a column for navroze in 1921. We had numerous other community papers in cities across the country, such as *Navroze* in Calcutta or *Parsi Sansar* in Karachi. Even the London community had at least two journals in the 1910s and 1920s: *The Parsi Chronicle* and *The Zoroastrian*.

Tragically, we have very little record of any of these papers. Nothing remains of *Navroze*. The University of Mumbai’s library might still have a few copies of *Rast Gotra’s* earliest, and most significant, numbers — it is to be hoped that they are still in readable condition. I have seen only two or three editions of *Sanj Vartaman*. The majority of the editions of the *Jame Jamshed*, one of the longest publishing and most illustrious of our community papers, is now mostly lost — probably nothing survives prior to the 1930s. When we fail to protect the sources of our past, we lose an inestimable chunk of our heritage. A good deal of our history, consequently, is lost forever.

I would therefore like to make a special appeal to readers: if you possess especially old copies of Parsi journals, newspapers, and books — whether in Gujarati or English — please do make sure that they are preserved for future generations. If you are unwilling to part with originals, at least ensure that a scanned or photographed copy reaches a responsible institution. Under no circumstances allow such material to join so much of the rest of our history and heritage in the memory hole that we have created. Parzor is one organization that is willing to accept donations of such materials, and which has established a credible track record of preserving and making accessible important historical documents to researchers and interested community members. I urge you to do a great favor to fellow community members and future generations of Parsis.

If you are interested in donating to Parzor, you can contact me (dinyar.patel@gmail.com) or Dr Shernaz Cama at shernazcama@hotmail.com,+91 9810007717 or +91 11-2411-4794, or write to Dr Cama at C-53 Anand Niketan, New Delhi 110021.

Dinyar Patel is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Harvard University, where he is working on a dissertation on Dadabhai Naoroji. He is currently based in Delhi a Fulbright scholarship where he is conducting dissertation research at the National Archives of India.

A pay roster of the Elphinstone Institution (now College) from the 1850s, showing Naoroji and a few other Parsis.
The Maharaja Exhibition & the Silver Carriage of Pestonjee Press

by nazneen spliedt

At the recently concluded exhibition, 8 April - “Maharaja: the Splendor of India’s Royal Courts” held at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco - a wealth of objects on loan from the V&A in London were on view.

The objects, paintings and photographs on display documented the presence of real people who lived real lives and offered the viewer a glimpse into the complex and fascinating world of India’s great kings.

The exhibition went behind-the-scenes to analyze the roles and qualities of kingship in India as well as tracing the way the institution of kingship changed from the early 18th century through the 1930’s, a period that saw a change from their status of being independent rulers to becoming ‘native princes’ under British colonial rule.

All this was represented by a stunning range of objects from photographs to arms and armour, furniture, costumes and jewellery of magnificent stones and pearls, all mainly worn by the Princes themselves.

A wonderful collection of old saris belonging to the Begums of Hyderabad were also displayed. One of them being a silver cut-work zari kor and pallo, very reminiscent of what some of our mothers wore in the 1930’s and 1940’s.

Not just the costumes on view but the representations of people in the paintings tell us a lot about the social, religious or ethnic affiliations, and how those individuals choose to be seen and understood.

Of special interest to Parsis was the magnificent silver coach made specially for the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, who commissioned Mr Pestonjee Press and his Fort Coach Factory to build a carriage for him that would be both elegant and distinguishing.

Combining the elegance of European design and artistry of the Indian artisan, the carriage is embellished with flowers, enamelled birds and animals, swans crafted in high relief and highlighted in gold and coloured enamelling techniques. Of special interest to us is a small ‘afarganyu’ on the side of one door, with a beautifully enamelled yellow/gold flame which shows the afarganyu lit up by a burning flame.

There are many such small and intimate detailing of various flowers and birds and animals making this a wonderful piece of artistic fantasy. This carriage also bears the “badge” of the Fort Coach Factory, which is unusual and suggests that Mr Press considered this carriage to be his masterpiece.

This carriage is now owned by Sinai & Sons and was on loan to the travelling exhibition, which was seen in Toronto, San Francisco, Richmond, Virginia and Chicago.

Pestonjee Press was a master coach builder who built carriages for many of the Maharajas as well as for various British Governors. He was famous for his technology as well as his artistry in making gold and silver carriages. His company also built car bodies in later years.

To make the exhibition relevant to modern audiences and to the children, a local animator – Sanjay Patel was asked to design modern murals within the building and asked if he could “activate the exterior of the building based on the exhibition”.

What he came up with really caught the museum visitor’s attention and his ‘fame’ brought many more visitors, specially from the South Asian community, who rarely visit museums, into the building. He took the story of the maharajas and their consorts and built them into modern animated images by using the ancient symbols and bringing them to life for the viewer.

This exhibition showed that there was a great deal of give and take among the cultures and even under the Raj, Indian artists continued to find ways to keep advancing. The cultural and artistic interchange between India and England was one of the most interesting and fundamental aspects of this exhibition.

The Victoria & Albert Museum has a vast treasure trove of objects and it was a great pleasure for audiences in North America to have the opportunity to get a glimpse of a small selection.

Sources: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco-Magazine Fall 2011; Parsiana- Oct 21, 2010 issue

Photo Credit: Author’s husband, Ehler Spliedt
Sanjay Patel artwork: Courtesy of Asian Art Museum San Francisco CA. USA
The carriage door

The elaborate wheel brace

The afarganu on the carriage

Rear of carriage
“I wonder if you are aware that the permanent Parsee population of Udvada is less than 100 souls, out of which 70% are senior citizens, well above 70 years of age”, writes Dinshaw Tambo to Parvez Damania, the person who made the effort to arrange this exhibition in Mumbai.

Parvez replies, “I feel greatly frustrated and upset that we are doing nothing about it. Even the houses are in such a sorry state. All will be lost very soon.”
city of Udvada

Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
27th March - 7th April

Parvez Damania commissioned Shantanu Das to capture Udvada over a period of about two years.
Udvada -

“The place has a unique culture, a serenity and simplicity that is worth a watch. Its dynamic location along the Maharashtra and Gujarat border does little to conceal its uniqueness,” writes Parvez. “Pictures captured by star photographer, Shantanu Das depicts its nostalgia, its semi-urban settings and distinctive heritage in terms of architecture, furniture, lifestyle and more.”

Parvez Damania, noted businessman first drew Shantanu’s attention to this place. In the words of Shantanu, “I chose Udvada because of its immense need for restoration and its historic importance which is being lost in this fast-paced world. No one has the time to stop and look around this place. These are greying Parsis living in a peaceful setting, yet there’s no one coming forward to restore this historic land to a glory it deserves. The pictures cry out for the need to lend a helping hand to the community and the place and to take efforts to protect this fast diminishing heritage.”

Shantanu Das writes a bit about himself ...

“As a child, I was very fond of a prehistoric 120-format Agfa click 3 camera owned by my uncle. Each time we went out for a vacation, my uncle used to carry that magic lantern with him. I was never allowed to touch the camera and that only instigated my curiosity about the machine. God knows from where I got the idea that there is someone who lives inside a camera and creates the plants, hills, sunsets and human beings who always smile. Years later and much before I started freelance photography, the myth of a man who lives inside a camera was exposed, but the fantasy and magic that revolves around photography still lingers on …

“I’m now in the field of photography for the last 15 years; earlier working as a freelance photographer and then coming onboard the Bombay. Presently even as I work at the Times of India Group in Bombay, I regularly participate in all major National and International photographic exhibitions and competitions and have received various and accolades for my work both locally and internationally. Recently I won the National Geographic Traveller Photography Award 2011.

“I’ve participated in numerous exhibitions around the world; be it in Spain, the Caribbean islands, Philippines, Austria and Germany etc., apart from many cities across India.”
**In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla**

**A 13-year old mobed tells his story**

**Intro:**
My life is, or was, very different from other 12 to 13 year olds. While they would be playing on their digital devices, I would be sitting and reciting my prayers or studies.

**Starting point (Dadar Athornan Institute):**
When I was merely 7, I was admitted in DAI. It was June 2006 when I entered. I was in the second standard. I had just left “Kangaroo Kid”. There were 31 students at the DAI.

**by dinshaw paurusasp magol**

**Khordeh Avesta:**
First of all in Zoroastrianism we need to know the basics. One of them is the Khordeh Avesta. I started the KA in June 2006 and completed it in seven months, which included 5 gehs, 5 niyashes, Doa Vispa Humata, Doa Nam Satayashne and Char disa no namaskar; also Hormazd Yasht, Ardibehsht Yast, Haptan Yash, Sarosh Yasht Hodokht, Sarosh yasht Vadi, Hom Yasht, Vanant Yast and Siroja Yasht and it was done in a pretty amazing period.

**Yasna:**
I had completed my yasna in 1.5 years approximately. The yasna includes 72 chapters (or Has), along with a small extension of 22 chapters (or Kardas). This extension is also known as the “Visparad”. Mostly people complete the yasna in three to four years, some may even take five to six years!

**Navar:**
I became navar on 10.11.2008 in the Parsi Calander 24.03.1378. Before we perform any Pavmehel ceremony in Udvada, we have to take a nahan. A nahan is a period of 10 days where you clean your sins by staying in solitary confinement. In the navar ceremony we have to take two nahans. One is for ourselves and the other is for the ‘ravan’ (or the person for whose sake we take the nahan). One is ‘Anushe Rawan’, that is, the person for whose sake you take the nahan is dead; the other is the ‘Zinde Ravan’, for the person whose sake you take the nahan is alive.

**Vendidad:**
The vendidad is a prayer which we perform during the “Maratab” ceremony. It includes 22 chapters and the Yasna and Visparad all mixed up. You have to sit all night to complete it because it is so long. I completed the Vendidad in one year. Most people take two to three years. In the Vendidad the chapters are called “Pargarads”.

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by dinshaw paurusasp magol
Maratab & Shamel:
I became a Maratab on 25.10.2009 and in the Parsi Calendar 08.03.1379 which coincided with my mom's birthday. Just two days after your maratab you have to give an exam known as the Shamel. In the Shamel many senior mobeds take your test to see whether you are fit to be a boywalla for Pak Iranshah Saheb. One question which is clearly etched in my memory, is like this: “What is the name of the 19th Paragarad of the Vendidad?” I wasn’t even 10 years old at that time and tried to figure the question out, but one of the other mobeds said that it wasn’t fair to ask such a small boy such a difficult question. I would also like to mention the names of a few mobeds who took my Shamel exam. Faramroz Bhadha, Faramroz Sidhwa, Baji Mirza, Firoz Dastur, Jehanbux Bharda and Dara Bharda. Dara did my navar etc.

Experiences

Navjote: I was 6 years old at that time in the 1st standard and quite a bit afraid of all the mobeds. I always thought priests always had long, long beards, fierce tempers and ham-like hands. Whenever we enter any agiari or Atashbehram, first we have to say ‘sahubji’ to all mobeds, known or unknown. I was very unfamiliar with this practice. However, my father told me that it was a courtesy to wish the mobeds, as they are always preoccupied with prayers. I was very afraid of the mobeds as I have told you and thought that if I didn’t do ‘sahubji’ they would give me a scolding. Of course, nothing such ever happened, nevertheless I always did ‘sahubji’ to every mobed. The prayers of the navjote ceremony are very simple and I was brilliant. My navjote was done in the atashbehram by the Vada Dasturji Khurshed K Dastur. I was wondering what on earth did this big man with his big name was doing? My father explained to me that a Vada Dastur was the head of the management of an Atashbehram. There is normally only one Vada Dastur in an Atashbehram but in Udvada there are two. Because IRANSHAH is the most sacred, holy and an old fire temple in the world.

Navar: I was 9 years old at that time and in the 4th standard. I had all my prayers ready and fluent. There are 4 yasnas to do in navar. My first two yasnas were with Er Kobad Bharda and the last two were with Er Dara Bharda. On the 4th day we had organized a grand party and invited every member of the family.

Martab & Shamel: I was 10 years old and in the 5th standard. I was very nervous and did not like to pray all night in a mosquito ridden place. However, it went very nicely and with no problems except for some very severe cramps in both the legs as you have to sit cross-legged from 12:40 am to 7:45 am. Maratab was a quiet affair and no one was invited except Mamavaji, mamaiji, Aban fuiji and Armaity fuiji. Just two days afterwards I gave my Shamel and passed it. Senior mobeds were very happy with my answers.

I also put sukhad on Pak Iranshaji with ‘Nahan’. It was very nice.
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

So that is the story of my life. Hope you like it.

[The text has been unedited to retain the charm of the young writer.]

Magol, now 13, completed the three degrees of Zoroastrian priesthood study including ‘Navar’, ‘Maratab’ and ‘Shamel’ at the Dadar Athornan Institute. This makes him the youngest priest in the country to become eligible to perform rituals at the 270-year-old fire temple in Udvada. – Ed]

Father Paurus writes this as a note to the Editor:

“Junior forgot to mention that the DPYA (Dadar Parsi Youth Assembly) school and the DAI taught him free as long as he was in the DAI, for which we are extremely thankful. Presently he is studying in the Activity High School.

“That he has also done his Shamel – Chasni on 06.05.2010 (21.09.1379) which means that the performing priest with nahan have accepted him in their inner circle. It is a very important ceremony, without which you cannot do the pavmehel ceremonies in Udvada. He entered Iranshaji on this day for the first time and perhaps the youngest to do so.

“That he has not done the boy ceremony as he has to perform in the Magol (Katila) family turn, with family senior and only after his NOC he can perform on his own. Our turn does not come in the May vacation so we have a big problem.

“Doing quite well in school, enjoys Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton. Excellent reading habits, but very talkative and mischievous in school. (Paurus was a terror and most probably still is! - Ed). And finally credit, if any, must go to the mother who is quite aggressive in Dinshaw’s studies. Followers of David Hume are known to be complacent.” – [Maharukh & Paurusasp are the proud parents]

Young Doctor writes his first medical book

Sheheryar Kairas Kabrai is a resident in internal medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. He graduated from Yale College, University of Cambridge and Oxford Medical School. He lives in Boston with his wife and daughter. This is his first book.

Book description: Clinical Skills for Medical Students covers virtually all the skills that are taught and examined at medical school.

The clear and concise text, attractive layout, and numerous tables and figures make it very easy for medical students, junior trainees, and other healthcare professionals to prepare for clinical examinations and/or succeed in clinical practice.

Available from: amazon.com
The Long & Rich Maritime History of Zarathushtis:
The ancient Persians were recognized to be master craftsmen and worthy naval warriors. The Persian armada of the Achaemenian era was a battle-hardened fleet having fought many historic naval battles in the Greco-Persian Wars (Battles of Marathon – 490BC; Battles of Thermopylae & Salamis – 480BC) involving at times as many as 600+ ships. Persian traders and merchants were also known to have traveled on Persian vessels to faraway places including China.

After the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 AD, small groups of Zarathushtis fled to India by sea to escape the increasingly violent persecutions by the new followers of Islam. No voyage was too perilous and no land too distant for these Zarathushti believers to preserve, protect and practice their religion. It is believed that these voyages during the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries began mostly from the southeastern shores of Khorasan and the Strait of Hormuz, regions of Persia (now Iran) and at times encountered serve weather conditions, but commendable navigational abilities brought these refugees safely to the coastal areas of Gulf of Khambhat (Cambay) in the Gujarat province of India.

More recently, during the 18th and 19th centuries in Mumbai, prominent Parsi/Zarathushtis shipbuilders like the Wadias and merchants such as the Jeejeebhoys, the Sethnas and the Readmoneys became pioneers in opening up lucrative sea-trade routes with China. The families of Dinshaws and the Cowasjees of Karachi owned and operated merchant fleets during the major part of the 20th century. More recently, in the late 1970s the chief of naval staff in India was Admiral Jal Cursetji. Some may say that seafaring has always been in the DNA of the Parsi/Zarathushtis, be it in war or shipbuilding or trade or in the defense of the nation.

Mumbai - The City & its History:
The modern growth of the port city of Mumbai was primarily due to the expansion of trade and commerce with the maritime world. Mumbai as we see today is built upon the blood and sweat of hardworking and visionary Indians. The seven islands of greater Mumbai consisting of Colaba, Mazagaon, Old Woman’s Island, Wadala, Mahim, Parel and Matunga-Sion have a long and rich history dating back to once being part of the north Indian kingdom of Ashoka, later of the Thackerays, the Mauryans, the Sultans of Gujarat, the Portuguese and finally the British. Each civilization left their footprint on the seven islands. The original settlers of the seven islands were the Koli fishermen, who worshipped Mumbaidevi (her temple still stands at Babulnath near Chopatty). The Kolis called the island Mumbai – after mother goddess – Mumba. It was the British
who built a city out of the group of seven islands and called her Bombay.

The Parsi/Zarathushtis & the British: Parsi/Zarathushtris in India for centuries were farmers, shopkeepers, craftsmen and merchants, working mostly out of small towns and villages on the western coast of India in the state of Gujarat (ie. Surat; Navsari; Udwada; Daman; Sanjan; Pardi; Hansot; Ankleshwar; Bharuch; Vandodra; Kambhat, Diu). They were hardworking, honest and enterprising members of the immigrant community and excelled in their respective vocations. The establishment of the British owned powerful East India Trading Company, and subsequently the government of Britain ruling the Indian continent for over a century, provided enterprising Parsi/Zarathushtris with a historic opportunity to advance their vocational and business acumen. They started migrating from Gujarat to the growing sea port of Bombay. Parsi/Zarathushtris became faithful allies of the British masters, especially in the industrial and economic development of Bombay. As a result of this mutually beneficial alliance, educational, social and cultural infrastructures were built, their business leadership was strengthened and Parsi/Zarathushtris became influential members of the Indian society.

Parsi/Zarathushti Shipbuilders - The Wadia Family: The shipbuilding family of the Wadias (meaning shipbuilders) was originally from Surat, an important trading post on the western coast of India, where the British, along with the French, Dutch and Portuguese had established trading posts as early as the 15th century. The patriarch of the Wadia dynasty was Lovji Nusserwanjee. The British East India Company had contracted the services of Lovji and his brother Sorabji to build and maintain ships and dry-docks in Bombay around 1750. For the next 150+ years, several generations of the Wadia family built over 400 ships for the British mercantile and the British navy as well as were engaged in building dry-docks and ship salvage operations. The Wadias built ships from cutters and clippers to sloops and schooners and from merchant ships and man-o-wars to frigates and steamships. The HMS Tricomalee (built in 1817 by master shipbuilder Jamsetjee Bomanjee Wadia), restored and placed in ‘Hartlepool Maritime Experience’ museum in England is considered the oldest surviving British warship. Ships built by the Wadias of Mumbai have sailed the seven seas and have played decisive roles at many historical maritime events of the world.

Wadias & the New World: An American merchant, George Nicholas from Salem, Massachusetts visited India in 1799 and established business relations with Parsees like Nasservanji Maneckji Wadia and others. In his autobiography, Nicholas wrote, "Parsees were some of the most intelligent people, rich and honorable in their dealings." Hand-painted portraits of Nusserwanjee Maneckjee Wadia as well as Rustomji Hirjeebhoy Wadia are at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.

It is interesting to note that Ardeshir Cursetji Wadia, grandson of Nusserwanji’s Maneckji Wadia’s brother, was the first Parsi to visit United States in 1849. And the first Parsi on record to come to the US for education was Burjor Wadia in 1916 at University of Michigan who later became a top-ranking engineer with Ford Motor Company.

HMS Minden: Among the hundreds of ships built by the Wadias, one particular ship built by Jamshedji Bomanji Wadia, named HMS Minden, was launched from the Duncan Docks in Mumbai on June 19, 1810. The Bombay Courier wrote on June 23, 1810 about the beauty of this man-o-war’s construction.
including “strength of its frame, superiority of its timber and skills of its architects.”

Named after the German town Minden and the battle of Minden in 1759, a decisive victory of the British and Prussian forces over France in the Seven Years’ War, this was the first ship built in colonial India that was commissioned into the Royal Navy and began active service around the world. HMS Minden was a 74-gun Ganges-class ship. It weighed 1721 bm tons and was 169 ft. long (gundeck); beam of 48 ft. and depth of hold 20 ft. It took nine years (1801 to 1810) from the time the Minden was ordered till it was finally launched.

HMS Minden saw action and service in Java (1811); Chesapeake Bay (1812); Trincomalee, East Indies (1819); Plymouth (1830); Malta (1839); Cape of Good Hope and South America; and in Hong Kong as a hospital ship (1841-42). The ship was finally scraped in 1861. In memory of the versatility and historical achievements of the ship, two streets in Honk Kong were named after her, Minden Row and Minden Avenue, located behind the Single Hill of Tsim Sha Tsui in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

HMS Minden & the War of 1812:
The 1812 war between the newly formed republic of the United States (in 1776) and its past colonial ruler Britain was a two-year battle that set the boundaries between the United States and Canada. The British forces by August 24, 1814 had burned the US Capitol, the White House and the offices of Treasury Departments. From there, the British troops moved on to attack Fort McHenry in the Baltimore harbor in Chesapeake Bay.

Francis Scott Key & the Writing of the American National Anthem:
Just prior to the attack on Fort McHenry on September 11, 1814, Dr William Beanes, a local physician in the town of upper Marlboro in Maryland made a citizens’ arrest of several rowdy stragglers. This act was taken as a hostile action by the British commander. British forces immediately took the physician into custody. Upon hearing of Dr Beanes’ arrest, American Prisoner Agent Colonel John Stuart Skinner and a young Baltimore lawyer, Francis Scott Key pleaded with the British Commander for his release. The British Commander agreed to the release, but temporarily detained the lawyer, the colonel and the doctor aboard one of his troop ships, the HMS Minden, as the three became aware of the intended attack on Fort McHenry as well as the strength and position of the British units. The attack of Fort McHenry was fierce and Key, also an amateur poet, who witnessed (“Oh say can you see”) the horrendous bombardment (“the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air”) from the deck of HMS Minden, seemed to believe that the fall of the Fort was imminent.

As the sun went down, Key saw (“o'er the ramparts we watched”) the large red, white and blue flag of the republic remained flying (were so gallantly streaming) from the fort (“what so proudly we hailed by the twilight's last gleaming, whose broad stripes and bright stars”) and was convinced that by the following morning, the fort would be
destroyed and the republic’s flag would be replaced by the Union Jack, as a sign of the fort’s surrender. But when the morning came (“dawns early light”) Key was amazed to see the flag still flying (“gave proof through the night that our flag was still there”) although scarred from the battle. Key was most likely overwhelmed by emotions at the sight of the tattered flag still waving high over the fort (banner yet wave o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”)

As a result, Key was so inspired, he hurriedly scribbled a few lines describing what he had witnessed and when put together later, it read as follows: “Oh say can you see, by the dawns early light what so proudly we hailed by the twilight’s last gleaming, whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight, o’er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming and the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh say, does the Star-Spangled Banner yet wave, o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

The poem was anonymously published a month later on September 20, 1814 in a local Baltimore paper, The Baltimore Patriot, titled “The Defense of Fort McHenry”. The poem was quickly reprinted (with three additional paragraphs added) in many local and national newspapers and renamed “Star Spangled Banner.” After music was added to the narrative, with an executive order from President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 (one hundred years later), and a congressional resolution in 1931, it officially became the American National Anthem, on March 3, 1931.\(^6\)

The National Anthem is played thousands of time a day in the United States, at the start of sporting events, on military bases at the beginning and end of each day and at local festivals, fairs, and community gatherings. The striking words of the anthem have much emotion and significance for those who sing and those who listen. It often brings tears to many, especially to the millions of war veterans and servicemen and women. Whether the United States is at war or during peaceful times, the Anthem resonates through the mind, body and soul of Americans.

Conclusion:
The Parsi/Zarathushtis of India and especially the illustrious Wadia family of master shipbuilders have unknowingly left a lasting legacy by constructing generations of superior quality ships connecting the seaways of the world. The expansion of international maritime trade and commerce brought recognition and prosperity to India. It brought enormous affluence especially to the pioneering Parsi/Zarathushhti community that used the wealth in building and funding educational institutions, libraries, hospitals, temples of worship, low-cost community housing and numerous charitable foundations.

Today there are more Parsi/Zarathushtis living in the United States (10,000+) than at any other time in its history. The Star Spangled Banner is their national anthem. But now, with this connection, every time a Parsi/Zarathushhti hears the national anthem, it may have an additional relevance - one of heritage and pride.

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Shahrokh Mehta was born in Karachi, left for Tehran in 1965 and immigrated to the US in 1980. He is a certified management consultant who lives and works in Syracuse, New York. Shahrokh’s maternal grandmother Jerbai was a Wadia from Porbandar. The family legend has it that part of the Wadia family was asked by the British to move to Karachi to set up a shipyard there as there was not enough work for all the Wadia master carpenters/ship builders at the Bombay dockyards. But on their way, they were shipwrecked at Porbandar. Since the late 19th century, Wadias have been living in Porbandar and today only a small number still live there.
Homi & Feroza Seervai

Homi Seervai was one of India’s greatest legal minds. His monumental work ‘The Constitutional Law of India’ (in words of Lord Bingham) “has an assured place among the great legal treatises of the world”. Apart from being an eminent jurist he will always be remembered for his high principles and fierce independence. He espoused causes which he believed were right and was totally fearless in his criticism of any wrong-doing, irrespective of where it originated from or the person responsible. He was the Advocate-General of Maharashtra for 17 years and politely declined an invitation to be the Attorney General for India, because he had, at the time, embarked on crafting his magnum opus on Constitutional Law and placed its completion above all else. Earlier in 1957 he had declined a Supreme Court judgeship. Had he accepted it, he would have had a 14-year tenure in the Supreme Court, with five and half years as Chief Justice. He was also the only Indian to be ever conferred an Honourary Fellowship of the British Academy (FBA) for services rendered in the field of Law. Homi passed away on 26th January 1996.

A few months ago on 5th March 2012, his loving and devoted wife Feroza passed away, mercifully after a very brief illness and with all her mental faculties intact. Feroza was an amazing lady. She made no bones about the fact that she was an atheist, but it would be impossible to find even a single non-Zoroastrian trait in her.

She, like Homi, was a great champion of truth and was always ready to fight for what she believed was right. With her amazing grit and tenacity she often achieved the impossible. Feroza was not a lawyer herself and yet, rarely would Homi settle his arguments in an important matter without bouncing his own early thoughts, as they first took shape, off Feroza. He made no bones about publicly acknowledging this ‘failing’ of his and there is many a delightful tale of the mention en-passant of Feroza’s views by Homi, in the course of arguments, within the hallowed premises of the Supreme Court of India.

Courtesy of Homi Khushrokhan

Hamazor requested Prof Sheryar Ookerjee, one of Feroza’s oldest friends from her student days at Wilson College, to write about them by way of a tribute to these two wonderful lives. Sheryar has put together a piquant collection of personal encounters with both of them over several years, and, for those who had the good fortune of knowing Homi & Feroza, this little piece will bring back wonderful memories of an extraordinary couple, a delightful family and several of the principles that were so dear to both of them.
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

Homi & Feroza - A personal impression

by sheryar ookerjee

Feroza and I used to attend a course of lectures on Bradley’s Appearance and Reality by J C P d’Andrade, the doyen of philosophy teachers in Bombay, at Wilson College, on every Monday evening. Feroza thought nothing of taking bites at a sweet lime during the lecture, something which could not have occurred to us to do in the 40’s. (I saw it done at New York in 2001). She made no bones about announcing, on the slightest opportunity, that she was an atheist. A fellow student, who also happened to be a Manager of some firm, asserted God’s existence. “How can the world go on without God’s guidance?” he asked. Feroza was quick to answer, “Because you are a Manager, you think the world also needs a Manager!” Students in those days would not dream of addressing each other by their first names. A Mr Bisney tried it on Feroza. “Miss Lalkaka, please”, she snapped back.

With such an active mind, it is a pity that Feroza did not pursue working for her MA by thesis under Prof Pratapgiri of Wilson College. She had declared she would not think of marriage for ten years. For the first time, Homi was late in meeting her one day at the Asiatic Library, because his tram had caught fire. But meeting her on that fateful day, “his heart caught fire”, she said, and soon they were married. “But what about your thesis on “The Right to Revolt”, I asked. “Oh, my husband will be a far better guide than any other. “The Right to Revolt” was abandoned.

Feroza’s keenness to help others penetrated the roads and by lanes of their lives. She was in college, a talent scout. She took under her ample wing, students with any potential and coaxed them, goaded them to go in for debates, oratorical competitions and dramatic competitions at College Day. She backed Nissim Ezekiel’s choice of taking literature and almost forced me to do Philosophy, a choice I have never regretted. She herself was an effective debater and won for the college a coveted inter-college trophy, beating (metaphorically) a famous debater, Bobby Padamsee. She was a competent actor, and once did Henry VIII (well suited to her personality).

Feroza displayed tremendous energy in helping others to do things and also activating them, if hesitant out of diffidence or laziness, to do things for themselves. Deriving no benefit herself, she would press them repeatedly till they acted. Her own life furnished examples of “never take no for an answer”. According to a law at the time,
anyone who reported the vacant possession of a flat to the proper authority had a right to the flat. She did this, but the officer concerned would not act, and evaded his duty for sometime by saying that some other party had reported this matter before her. She then sat in his office and said she would not leave until he proved to her satisfaction that this was a fact. The flat at Churchgate, where she and Homi lived for around half a century, was assigned to her. She expected others to perform similarly.

Homi’s helpfulness generally (not exclusively) concerned legal matters. He diligently inspected the agreements we made with builders in the case of two of the flats we bought, but the more spectacular was the help he rendered to the Petitioner in the Lawande Vs. The Syndics of the Bombay University in 1962. Dr Lawande, Professor of Philosophy at Wilson College, was dismissed due to an adverse resolution passed against him by the University. Homi fought for 12 days, free of charge, for the professor, on the ground that the University’s resolution was a case of conspiracy and that the University had no jurisdiction over a private college to hire or dismiss a teacher. Apart from the legal question, Homi’s indignation welled up because Lawande was a poor man with a large family. If you went to attend a hearing, you did not need to inquire in which court the case was being heard. As you stepped out of the lift, you heard Homi’s piercing voice at full steam. The room was filled to overflowing. The rector, who represented the Syndics, was mauled by Homi for three days, at the end of which he was helped out by his friends, a ‘shattered wreck’ (in Homi’s words). Because the Judge made a strong plea that the matter be ended, a compromise was reached. The question of jurisdiction was never settled, to our great disappointment.

The Seervai family’s love of literature was well known. Feroza, when in USA and England, even attended classes to learn to polish up her versification, and published a slim book of poems. Justice Jahagirdar related how during a conference, provoked by some reference, Homi walked up and down and rolled out Mark Anthony’s entire speech from Julius Caesar. One morning, Homi did not appear to be his usual cheerful self. He took down an anthology of verse and read out to me a moving poem. I didn’t see its relevance till I learned later that one of his close friends, Mr B P Sethna had died that morning. At my wife’s cremation, we had no prayers, but Feroza on her own, read out two poems. It was very fitting that at Feroza’s cremation, her children read out her favourite poems.

Homi had immense self-confidence when dealing with legal matters, legal and many others which interested him, but in details of daily life, he showed extreme caution, particularly where children were concerned. Once, when we were holidaying in Matheran, a picnic was organized to Panorama Point, about 2Ω miles from Rugby Hotel. Homi decided that we must all go by rickshaw. I said I would walk. Homi, who had a completely unjustified notion that I was unpunctual (a grave shortcoming for him), turned down my proposal, because I would delay the expedition. I was ready to ride. “No” said Homi, “not where children are around”. So, at precisely 3pm, the cavalcade set off from Rugby Hotel with seven rickshaws and a hamper of tea and snacks. It was a glorious afternoon, everyone was in high spirits. But not for very long, because little Navroz would insist on wanting to go to the edge of the hill. “We are going back”, announced Homi to my wife and me. So the two of us stayed behind to gaze at the magnificent panorama and partake as much as we could of the tea and snacks. He also did not approve of my taking Feroza to some place by a short cut. “No, stick to the main path”, said Homi, “we know all about your short cuts”.

Homi Seervai - 1953
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

The Seervai Family

All the Seervais shared a remarkable trait, very prominent in Homi. When they meet someone with whom they are keen to talk about some matter of special concern, that person appears to them in a kind of close-up. All others on the scene fade out of their visual field. Their mind focuses, for the time being, with a highly concentrated laser beam on one small spot. Only after that matter is settled, do the others spring into being. For some months, Feroza and I were engaged in preparing for the press, the manuscript of d’Andrade’s book, *Philosophy and Life*, of which Homi was one of the editors. After many a busy afternoon’s work, she and I would drive to the High Court to fetch Homi for the usual walk on Marine Drive. On the dot of 7 o’clock, Homi would come down to the car. Without any introduction, he would, without fail, ask Feroza, “How is Mehroo?” (his five year old daughter, Meher). And Feroza would invariably reply, “Jolly”. Only then would I exist for Homi. He would shake my hand with a tight grip and a huge smile. And what a smile! It added something, as Sterne would say, “to this fragment of life”.

Sheryar Ookerjee was a lecturer and professor of Philosophy at the Wilson College for over 40 years. When appointed, he was the youngest head of that department. He is truly a polymath - a scholar of music, a player of both the piano & organ, a great photographer, painter, sketch artist, very knowledgeable and learned in literature, poetry, history and may other of the fine arts. He published his first book at the age of 84: ‘Human Reason and its Enemies’, being a rigorous critique of post-modernism. Recently, the K R Cama Institute published his lectures: Plato & the Arthasastra on Plato’s Political Thought & Indian Political Thought.
Their most recent production, ‘Mind Walking’, uses the trapeze hoop as a metaphor for the door through which the human mind, struck by Alzheimer’s, enters and leaves the realms of reality and memory. In the play, the protagonist is a Parsi who begins to get back in touch with his religious and cultural roots after Alzheimer’s breaks down the barriers he has built, so carefully, between his present and his past. The play explores the social tensions created by a mixed marriage, of being disowned by his Indian family and the cultural cost endured to assimilate into the dominant culture.

This struggle between authenticity and social compromise, between past identities and new allegiances, is a theme that runs through the artistic projects undertaken by Vafadari, over two decades of creativity. It finds expression in the Youth Theatre she runs in Brighton, which grew out of her desire to connect with teenagers who had arrived on these shores from turbulent societies and war torn lands. “A bit of my mission was to show them that they too could be part of western culture and have a voice in it. They came together to create their own play.

“Many had made their journey to the UK on their own and in difficult circumstances. Here, too, they have suffered hardships and misunderstandings. I felt very strongly that they should not be an isolated group and so I invited local young people to join them. They met every Saturday and together they wrote a play, ‘The Last Meeting’, recalling their last moments in their own countries. The play was put on at the Pavilion Theatre, in Brighton.”

Vafadari is a veteran fundraiser. She got a grant in 2006 from the European Social Fund to develop employability skills through theatre. She believes that the theatre provides an excellent opportunity for imparting life skills, such as team work, trust and responsibility. She was inspired by her own youth theatre experience, “where the director, Sue Gibbons, respected young people as performers. Now that I have a
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

youth theatre myself, I try to be like that with them: building their confidence and encouraging them to support one another.”

I ask what fires this passion to tell the story of new arrivals and of their past lives? “My heritage,” she puts it simply, “is about East meeting West.”

I take what Vafadari’s passion to tell the story of new arrivals and of their past lives? “My heritage,” she puts it simply, “is about East meeting West.”

Vafadari is one of four children of a culturally mixed marriage: her English mother, Anne, is a nurse and her Iranian Zarthushti father, Shahrok, is an engineer. Though she was brought up in the exclusive, white, stock-broker belt around Ashtead, in Surrey, and did not visit Iran till she was 29, she is familiar with Iranian culture. “The five Iranian families in the area formed a tight social group and we also had a stream of visitors from Iran. My aunts came and stayed for some time. After the Iranian revolution, we were joined by cousins who had converted from Zoroastrianism to the Bahai faith and had to flee from persecution by the new regime.”

Her own time at school was not always smooth. “There was some racism,” she recalled. “I told a class teacher, I was told, ‘don’t tell tales.’ In primary school, the other children didn’t want me to be in their show and I remember getting kicked out of the swimming pool.” Today, Vafadari produces videos such as, ‘See it! Say it! Stop it!’ where members of her Youth Circus Theatre worked with school children, to produce a short film encouraging young people to challenge and report racially and religiously motivated bullying.

“My school showed no interest in our cultures,” she recalls. “For example, the Headmaster didn’t seem to know that my brother and I were not Christians and he expressed astonishment that, ‘Philippa and Martin aren’t Christians yet they were Head girl and Head boy!’

“Once, when I applied to work with an elderly woman and she found out I was Iranian, she said, ‘I don’t know if I can trust you in my house.’ Over the years I have also sensed that the Iranian adults we knew had experienced the proverbial, ‘glass ceiling’ in their careers.”

Her parents took her to Zoroastrian House and, though a child of mixed parentage, she found that most people were ‘very accepting’ – her mother, however, may not have received a positive reception from ‘much older people’. And there was the odd occasion such as when a Parsi lady tried to bar non-Zarthushtis from a navjote. As a teenager, she put it down to ignorance. She willingly attended Ervad Bhedwar’s Avesta classes but neither she nor her siblings had their navjotes done. “I’ve got multiple identities”, she points out. “Overall, my positive outlook is because I’m a child of my father. He had the attitude that when it comes to religion, there’s a choice that you make. So, just as we were not brought up to be Christians, neither were our navjotes done for us. I believe it’s not such a significant ceremony for Iranian Zoroastrians as it is for Parsis. He was

Sudreh pooshi of Philippa Minoo & her siblings

Photographs of Phillipa Minoo taken by David Churchill

‘Pussy Galore’, Edinburgh, 2002
really thrilled when we made the choice. In 2007, when Mobed Kamran Jamsheedi came from Sweden to perform our brother’s marriage, all three of us – brother and sisters – had our sudreh pooshi done. Now, on our father’s 80th birthday, five of his grandchildren will do their sudreh pooshi.” It is not often that children fulfill their parents’ aspirations by following their own entirely individualistic and novel path. Yet, Philippa Minoo seems to have done just that. From the age of three, she took ballet lessons, encouraged by her mother who had wished she had learnt classical ballet herself. At 14, she joined a youth theatre and would have stepped directly into an artistic career but for her father’s academic expectations. So she completed a degree in English Literature, then immediately embarked on another three year degree, in Dramatic Art, at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

She worked for 10 years as an actor and, at the same time, trained at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, in West London, to become a teacher of Shivananda Yoga. Always pushing at boundaries, she collaborated with a Canadian contemporary ballet company, Tripsichore, to create ‘yoga dance’. Their Yoga Theatre produced three dance dramas, using yoga as a means for dramatic expression.

It seems that Philippa Minoo enjoys reinventing herself. Fifteen years ago, she began to study trapeze skills – rarely taught or practiced in the UK at that time. “I could see how I could use this, so I decided to train full-time with The Circus Space.” The art form provided lucrative commissions such as performing in music videos, or in commercials for L’Oreal. “It was highly paid work but not very rewarding.” That’s when she took her art out of the gilded world of commerce and into the exciting landscape of social drama.

Her company, BandBazi, (www.bandbazi.co.uk) uses aerial theatre to help people find a voice and to communicate outside their own environment. Recently the company received a grant to work with people who had mental health problems. “We took the seed of their personal experience and created an installation, using different forms of artistry to express the multiple layers of their journey: through descent into ill health, personal crisis, and finding peer support. We rehearsed every week for six months. Then, over one week, the public came and experienced their journey.”

Philippa Minoo is constantly seeking to link the in-group with the out-group. Hers is a search for connectedness and inclusion; as well as a tribute to the contribution that diverse cultures make to what is Britain today. Last month she transformed the famous Bathing Huts of Brighton into an exotic venue which local people could visit to get to know the stories of five Iranian women. She has also made a film, ‘Swimming in the Persian Gulf’, as a “metaphor for freedom and choice. An Iranian woman swims in Brighton – something she may not be able to do in public in Iran unless she wears the hijab; but she may also choose, in Britain, to wear a hijab.” Those are the contradictions that delight and inspire the artist in her.

Philippa Minoo’s partner, David Churchill, is a photographer. They live in Brighton with their two young children, daughter, Minoo, 9 and son, Hardy, 12. We will all be watching out for her at the London Olympics.

[Philippa Minoo Vafadari will be writing in the next issue of Hamazor her experience of performing at the London Olympics – Ed]
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

The Z Factor

The Z Factor is a unique exhibition, which was launched in London at the Women’s Library on May 23rd. The exhibition highlights the tenets of Zoroastrianism and features Zoroastrians, past and present, who have left extraordinary legacies, not just for their own community but for everyone. It also celebrates the achievements of Zerbanoo Gifford as a symbol of her Zoroastrian community. Her life has combined the Zoroastrian tradition of public service, philanthropy, and fighting for others’ human rights with the modern imperatives of sustainable living, women’s empowerment and interfaith action.

by adrian locher

The theme of each of the seven exhibition panels is illustrated by the lyrics of a song by one of the most incredible Zoroastrians, the rock star, Freddie Mercury. During the Millennium celebrations, his song, We are the Champions, was voted the most popular of all time.

This groundbreaking exhibition for the first time puts in a simple yet compelling format, the story and importance of Zoroastrianism and the followers of Zoroaster and their impact across time and continents.

The Z Factor, which eventually will go online on the ASHA website www.ashacentre.org, can be used throughout the world to illustrate the beauty and eternal message of the prophet’s teachings as well as the extraordinary lives and achievements of his followers, who have made their mark in every field, with integrity and industry, and have been an inspiration not only for their own community but for the world.

Although many, many more could have been included, those featured are there because they illustrate the sheer diversity of talent in such a small community. They show those whose lives are now the stuff of legend, and modern Zoroastrians whose impact on the societies they live in is an example of excellence. Even though there are now only around a hundred thousand Zoroastrians in the world, their contribution is staggering. The twentieth century spiritual master, Meher Baba, whose Irani family settled in Pune when he was a young boy, was the inspiration for the award-winning song Don’t Worry, Be Happy, and Pete Townshend of The Who dedicated the

Zerbanoo Gifford
rock-opera, *Tommy*, to him. Others include Homi Bhabha, the father of Indian nuclear power, who died a young and sudden death when his plane exploded over the Alps; Jamsheed Marker, the world’s longest serving ambassador, a distinguished and much loved diplomat; India’s first Field Marshal, Sam Manekshaw, whose wit and courage are legendary; the Engineer Brothers whose flying achievements were unparalleled; the Godrej family whose industry and philanthropy in the field of environmental protection and wildlife conservation have been second to none; Aban Marker Kabraji who has also made her mark as Asia Director, of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature; the Tata family who spawned J R D Tata, the founder of Air India and Ratan Tata who made the Tata Group the first industrial house in Britain; Zed Cama, the banker recognised as a leader in corporate responsibility; and Shapurji Saklatvala, who was a British Communist member of parliament in the 1920s.

Zoroastrian women have also been at the forefront of industry, the media and campaigning for women’s rights, from the revolutionary Bhikiji Cama, who is known as the Mother of Indian Independence; Frene Ginwala, the veteran ANC activist and first woman speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa; and Farangis Shahrokh, a campaigner for Iranian women’s rights.

Young Zoroastrians also feature in the exhibition, from Tanya Dubash and Nisaba Godrej, sisters who hold prominent positions in Godrej Industries, to Shireen Irani, the lawyer and award-winning founder of the legal charity, i-pro-bono and Kyra Shroff, the multi-discipline sportswoman. As ever, the Zoroastrians were the first in so many fields from the first woman barrister and women’s rights campaigner, Mithan Tata, to India’s first photo-journalist, Homai Vyarawalla; Bachi Karkaria, the first Indian on the board of the World Editors Forum; and Homai Durawalla, the first chair and woman director of the Central Bank of India. Zoroastrians have also shone in the field of interfaith where Jehangir Sarosh is co-moderator of the European Council of Religious Leaders; the journalist and politician, Feroze Gandhi, who married Indira and was the father of Rajiv Gandhi, both prime ministers of India; and Ratti Jinnah, the wife of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Zoroastrian women have also married into the highest ranks of the British aristocracy, including Bapsybanoo Pavry, the Marchioness of Winchester.

The Z Factor also illustrates that cities such as Bombay, Karachi, Aden and Hong Kong were developed by Parsi initiative and investment. The Adenwallas developed the port of Aden; Jehangir Ruttonjee was a Hong Kong philanthropist, famous for founding the Ruttonjee Sanatoriums; Edulji Dinshaw was a legend in the history of Karachi. He became the largest single land-owner in the city and set up hospitals and dispensaries, while his extensive charitable trust continues to serve the community to this day. Today, Ardeshir Cowasjee is admired for his fearless newspaper columns that expose corruption and is known as the ‘guardian’ of the city of Karachi.

The exhibition has been personalised by featuring Zerbanoo Gifford who is celebrating the 30th anniversary of her historical election in 1982 to Harrow Council, when she became the first non-white woman to be elected for the Liberal Party anywhere in the country, and the following year again creating history by becoming the first non-white woman to stand for parliament in Britain. It has taken a generation for Asian women to be elected but Zerbanoo remains the pioneer whose dignity, style and relentless striving after excellence have led her to be one of the few Zoroastrians in the British public arena today.

The sixth and seventh panels look at Zerbanoo’s campaigning and the work of the ASHA Centre, which is now recognised by the British Council and the European Union as the premier centre in Europe for leadership training for young people. On the last panel there is a lovely photograph of young British Zoroastrians enjoying tea-time.
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

at the ASHA Centre and a group of young people from around the world celebrating Navroze and learning about the importance of the spring equinox to the ancient Persians.

Although it took Zerbanoo a great deal of time to research and put together the lives of individual Zoroastrians who feature in the exhibition, it left her even prouder of her community, whose impact on the world has been staggering. She also mischievously said that if the unique Zoroastrian, Sohrab Godrej, a much loved friend of hers, and a former president of the World Wildlife Fund, Asia, could put a preservation order on the cute and cuddly panda, surely there should be a World Zoroastrian Fund that should put a preservation order on original and eccentric Zoroastrians wherever they are to be found!

The Z Factor was opened by Baroness Jan Royall of Blaisdon, the Labour leader of the House of Lords, a neighbour of Zerbanoo in the Royal Forest of Dean, where the ASHA Centre is situated. The day after, on Thursday 24th May, there was a debate in the House of Lords on ‘Minority, Ethnic and Religious Communities’ Cultural and Economic contribution’, initiated by Lord Bilimoria, at which the Baroness Royall of Blaisdon singled out Zerbanoo Gifford in her speech to the lords: ‘I pay particular tribute to one, Zerbanoo Gifford, a tireless campaigner for justice and human rights and a passionate advocate for democracy and women’s empowerment. She is the founder of the Asha Centre in the Forest of Dean. “Asha” means “hope”. It is a place of many faiths and cultures, a haven of peace and beauty where people, especially young people, from Britain, the European Union and the rest of the world come together to learn about conflict resolution. Arab and Jewish Israeli young people spend time with each other then go home united rather than divided. It promotes volunteering. The centre fosters community participation through a programme of projects, arts and working on the land encouraging young people to celebrate their similarities, not their differences. Young people, united by the strength of their common endeavour, work together for a better future in which we celebrate our differences as well as our similarities’.

Seldom do an individual and their work get so generously highlighted in Parliament. Zerbanoo was thrilled that the unique work of the ASHA Centre was recognised by the Baroness Royall, who is one of the most respected member of the Lords and former leader. On the Baroness’ recent visit to the Centre, during a training course on issues of Peace and Change for young people from ten different European countries including Britain, she demonstrated her genuine interest in the welfare of young people and the importance of youth empowerment. She wowed the young people by speaking their language and understanding their demands for a more holistic approach to life and work. She said she loved being and honorary Zorro as Zerbanoo calls her because she displays the qualities most prized by Zoroastrians, intelligence, integrity, industry and abundance of charm and guts.

The Z Factor exhibition will be offered to the organisers of the next world conference of Zoroastrians in Mumbai in 2013 so that Zoroastrians can see for themselves the extraordinary DNA they have in them.

The construction of the seven panels was partly funded by the Erach and Roshan Sadri Foundation and Zerbanoo also thanked all those who have contributed to the Z Factor exhibition with enthusiasm, citing their generosity of spirit as a very typical Zoroastrian quality.

Adrian Locher is an actor, voice coach and director of many years’ experience. He studied the History of Ideas at Sussex University where he earned a first class degree, before training at The London School of Speech and Drama. He is one of the co-founders of the Gloucester Theatre Company. As the Artistic Director of the ASHA Centre, he has run numerous drama-based programmes with young people from all over the world.
Ratan Tata receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Ratan Tata, Chairman of Tata Sons was bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award by the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation in New York, on 28 June, for innovation in philanthropy.

The Foundation, celebrating 100 years of global innovation, honoured individuals and institutions with its second annual Innovation Awards.

Speaking on the occasion, Tata said businesses should be sensitive to the fact that they are making a difference in places where they operate and they have to do things to help the community prosper.

“When you see in places like Africa and parts of Asia abject poverty, hungry children and malnutrition around you, and you look at yourself as being people who have well being and comforts, I think it takes a very insensitive, tough person not to feel they need to do something, not just by providing material support but by playing a role in helping give prosperity to the community in which they belong,” Tata added.

“It has become the DNA of the organisation to play a role in the community.” Tata gave the example of a voluntary group in his organisation in which employees get leave from their jobs to help victims of natural disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes in India. Tata employees help in rebuilding and adopting villages and then return to their jobs.

Ratan Tata was honoured by the Foundation for incorporating public good into the business model of the Tata Group.

Last year’s recipient of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Lifetime Achievement Award was former US President Bill Clinton.


ASHAVANS: A Legacy of Leadership

As world citizens, Zoroastrians have risen to prominence, wherever they have chosen to live. It is this essence of eminence that ASHAVANS – A Legacy of Leadership, a new book on outstanding Zoroastrians captures. Featuring the profiles of 101 achievers and community stalwarts from various walks of life, it not only depicts their career graphs, but also offers rare personal glimpses. It opens a window to the lives and ideologies of these high performers, coming from different geographical regions around the world, from Iran to India and from Hong Kong to Europe and North America.

This elegant coffee table book has an eclectic array of outstanding personalities from different spheres of human endeavours, such as Business, Finance, Art, Literature, Science, Religion, Technology, Medicine, Law, Community service and other areas. Within the covers of the book are portrayals of not only community patriarchs, but also of young and enterprising Zoroastrian entrepreneurs and professionals who have made their mark.

Apart from containing profiles of Zoroastrian men and women who are actively involved in their chosen fields, it also has an ‘In Memoriam’ section, which pays tribute to stalwarts of yesteryears, as well as an audio CD of our important ancient prayers, with a lucid translation and evocative music. Its a labour of love which has evolved into a treasure.

The volume authored by Meher Bhesania, was released on 9th May 2012. A limited edition, the book is available at IRs 4,400. There will be no reprint of this book in the future and interested persons should send an email at wzcongress2009@gmail.com. Delivery of the book will be arranged free of cost within Mumbai.
She seeks to humanise education

"But why?" Renowned educationist Roda Billimoria Desai says this question has influenced many of her decisions. The dynamics of why were later expanded to why not. And the maxim Do not see things as they are and ask 'why'. Dream things that never were and ask 'why not' became the touchstone of her career and mission.

The first person to set up India’s first diploma course in Integrated Education, adds, that the vein of pioneering runs in the family blood. Roda’s grandfather Sir Shapurji Billimoria was among those who first set up chartered accountant firms in the country. His brother Dr Rustom Billimoria pioneered treatment for tuberculosis in Panchgani back in the 1920s and 1930s.

This background impelled Roda to ask a series of whys during her internship at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, when she was sent to teach at the B M Institute for Mental Health, Ahmedabad. Two schools functioned out of the campus run by the same management – one for normal children and one for those with special needs. “I asked myself why can’t there be just one school. Why must the children be hived off and segregated?”

The burning questions over segregation took a meaningful direction during the two years she then spent in Minneapolis-St Paul in USA on a Fulbright Travel Grant. It was the seventies and US legislation had just called for deinstitutionalisation of children with special needs. “I asked myself why can’t there be just one school. Why must the children be hived off and segregated?”

Returning home she realised the need to look at the issues of disability in India in depth and went back to TISS, this time to enrol for a doctorate from the department of Sociology of Education. This in-depth theoretical research was later complemented by various work experiences including making a detailed study of the facilities available in the city of Mumbai for children with disabilities.

It was in the seventies that the Normalisation Principle began emerging in Sweden which would enable people with disorders, impairments and disabilities to participate in normal day-to-day living activities, whereby they would be integrated in society. Interested in the ways and the means that would prevent segregation Roda went to the Uppsala University to study under the guidance of Dr Bengt Nirje, the father of the Normalisation Principle. She was awarded a Masters in Education (Social Sciences) for her thorough and extensive research into organization, policies and legislation of this Normalisation Principle in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries.

After another stint in India during which she worked with the SNDT University, Roda went to Australia on a Rotary Ambassadorial scholarship. This time she wanted to study how the Normalisation Principle was being adopted. In so doing she discovered that under Labour prime minister, Gough Whitlam, in the seventies a landmark education report was prepared by Peter Karmel. This report revealed the inadequate quality of education offered to aboriginals, migrants and those with
disabilities. Such education had little meaning to their lives. The voluntary sector, which did not really have adequate professional skills, was running institutions and schools for the disabled. Gough Whitlam's government then made a momentous decision. It said it would "Assume Responsibility" for their education and framed policies for the same. One of the most significant outcomes evident today is that no qualified teacher can be enrolled to practise until s/he has undertaken additional training in education for children with special needs.

Armed with a Masters degree from the Macquarie University in Sydney, Roda returned to India, determined to do something to bring about these concepts of normalisation in India. "I had the fire in my underbelly and knew I was misplaced in a non-questioning system. I wanted to put together all the knowledge, experiences and learnings I had garnered over the years in three different continents and both hemispheres. My mother handed me rupees one lakh and told me it was time to start."

"Training even one teacher in integrated education can impact a school and has a multiplying effect. The overall impact could be huge," explains Roda.

This multiplying effect is important because of the huge shortage of teachers. Under the government’s policy of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (or Education For All) 400 million children (in the 0-14 years age span) will have to be educated. This means that on a 50/1 ratio eight million teachers are needed but there are only 5.5 million leaving a gap of 2.5 million teachers. Then there are 25 million kids with learning problems of which only one per cent are served. Teachers in 1.3 million schools have no knowledge of learning problems, disorders or special needs. So how can one bridge the yawning chasm?

Can an eclectic approach, which combines methodologies of general, special and remedial education into a unified whole that addresses diverse needs of children, be a possible solution to the problem, wondered Roda. It would be cost effective as three courses would be rolled into one and it would also put less pressure on demands by schools since one teacher would be required as against three.

“There were people who expressed their doubts. They asked if the government would allow me to set up such a training course. But I was countering them with why not?” she says.

In answer to all these whys and why nots, the Sir Shapurji Billimoria Foundation was set up in 1998. It was named after her grandfather who came from humble circumstances but rose to a position of relative eminence. From 1993 to 2003 a comprehensive process took place to help design the innovative training programme for teachers. Workshops were held on diverse subjects like observation, assessment and behaviour problems, tribal art forms and theatre. People with disabilities were invited to talk of their problems and inputs sought by parents of disabled children on what teachers need to know. “We cannot design a course for children, without their inputs,” notes Roda.

Then in 2003 India’s first two-year diploma course in integrated education was launched under the aegis of SNDT College and subsequently recognised by National Council for Teacher Education. It would offer an innovative course whereby students would be able to teach in mainstream, special and remedial schools.

Roda, who is particular about semantics, spells out the difference between the more commonly used term ‘inclusive’ and her particular concept of integrated education. The word ‘inclusive’ used by UNESCO implies including children who have been excluded from the mainstream of education – in India these would be street children, children from families below the poverty line, those from Schedule Classes or Schedule Tribes.

In contrast the word integration has two Latin derivations – integras which means integrity or complete or whole and integrare which
means bringing together scattered parts into a whole. In view to education, she says, these derivations would imply integrity to the child, to one's self as educator whilst integrating would mean addressing the child as a child not as an able/disabled or gifted child and combining different teaching methodologies into a unified whole. “Say for example if we include someone’s name in an invitation to a wedding it would not necessarily imply that the person is integrated with all the other guests in the wedding. Similarly whilst inclusion is being adopted by some schools integration is not necessarily happening,” explains Roda.

Usha Bhatia, principal of the Teachers Education Centre which conducts the two year intensive programme, elaborates on the innovative teaching practices that make this course in integrated education different from others. Till date eight batches of trainees have gone through the intensive two year programme whereby they give 50 practice lessons to students from a wide spectrum of schools ranging from the CBSC to those for street children.

In addition students are provided additional inputs in Braille, sign language and ability to fashion assistive devices. These special skills modules certified by specialised institutions can serve as red flags for early detection.

One second year student, explains how she has learnt to make a tactile map of India using strings and beads for a visually impaired child or how to teach functional maths for a child with special needs whereby s/he learns how to read time when looking at the watch or to recognize weights and size of various packages – learning skills that they will use practically in their lives.

Another student in the first year of training says she finds the teaching methodologies with emphasis on understanding very interesting. “With fewer students we get the attention we need.”

The Foundation’s future plan is to establish India’s first Institute of Integrated Education which will house a demonstration school, a professional training centre offering certificate, diploma and degree courses and a research and documentation centre. “We also plan to offer E training and we hope to reach out to larger sections of students through courses in Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati as well.”

The institute has already begun taking shape. “The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust made a grant to the Foundation and we won an open bid for purchase of land in Khargar, a suburb of Mumbai. During the intervening period though land prices had shot up tremendously. My family gifted the Foundation a painting by Jehangir Sabavalla which was sold to help contribute towards the costs. The plinth stage is now over and construction will hopefully start for the first block which is the training course centre. We would welcome any assistance by individuals or trusts or an offer of collaboration by any educational institute or organisation that believes that all children are equal. The contributions and efforts will be given due recognition,” says Roda. Once established it can serve as a model of replication and thereby help in actualising Roda and her Foundation’s vision of humanising education and bringing about respect for diverse needs.

[[image:Rodabdesai@gmail.com]]
Everyone is talking about Zia Mandviwalla. And with good reason! Recently, the 34-year-old accomplished film maker had the distinction of having her short film ‘Night Shift’ short listed for the prestigious 2012 Short Film Palme d’or at the Cannes International Film Festival. A rare honour as Zia’s film made it to the final ten of 4500 entries worldwide. Something every film director aspires for. ‘Night Shift’ is Zia’s fourth short film, after ‘Eating Sausage’, ‘Clean Linen’ and ‘Amadi’. ‘Night Shift’ tells the story of Salote, a faceless airport cleaner who quietly tries to make it through another long night shift.

Essentially a people’s watcher, Zia is known to create films that are deeply insightful, using the complex human condition as the basis for her storytelling.

by farida master

Her work has been screened at film festivals worldwide including London, Pusan and Melbourne. In 2009, Zia was named SPADA’s (Screen Production & Development Association New Zealand) New Filmmaker of the Year, signalling her arrival as one of the most exciting directors in Australasia. The girl from Mumbai, who moved to Dubai and later to New Zealand, has a string of awards to her name including Best Short Film Script at the Screen Director’s Guild Awards 2005; Best Director and Best Short Film at the Fitzroy Shorts in Melbourne in 2006.

We zoom in on an extreme close-up of the passionate film maker who has been globe-trotting since her red carpet entry at the Cannes International Film Festival. A tete-a-tete with Zia Mandviwalla, our fellow Zoroastrian who does us proud.

FM: Could you describe the moment you first heard that your film ‘Night Shift’ has been short listed in the Short Film category at the Cannes Film Festival? Who was the first person you shared the news with?

ZM: I heard the news one evening when I was looking for a car park at the supermarket. I was starving, had been to the gym and saw this long number come up on my phone. I didn’t know what to make of it. When I heard a French accent say they were calling from the Cannes Film Festival, I made sure I pulled over! The first person I called was Ari Wegner, the cinematographer - she was in Melbourne. When I called she said she was about to sit down to dinner with her family and could I call her back? I said no, I couldn’t call back and that we had gotten into Cannes. What followed was 24 hours of disbelief. I didn’t receive the official email until a full day later. As a consequence, I started to wonder if I had imagined the voice down the telephone - that I was hearing voices or experiencing the onset of some kind of mental illness.

FM: How did you celebrate the rare honour?
In loving memory of my son Cyrus Happy Minwalla

Farida Master has been the editor of several publications in India which include ‘Stardust’, ‘Society Fashion’, ‘Citadel’, which are magazines, and the 8-page lifestyle supplement of ‘Pune Times Of India’. She has also authored, ‘The Making Of A Legend’, a biography of Dr K B Grant. In Auckland, Farida has been the Features Editor of ‘The Aucklander’ a magazine. Currently she freelances with a host of publications in New Zealand and India.

ZM: I am still celebrating! It’s been celebrated many times - with friends, family, fellow filmmakers at Cannes and believe me the buzz between filmmakers at Cannes is incredible – everyone shares a very similar sense of joy at the amazing accolade of being selected for such a prestigious festival. I am most of all looking forward to celebrating with the cast and crew who are yet to see the finished film and with whom we are yet to celebrate the Cannes experience.

FM: How were you received in Cannes? Any special experience that stayed with you after the initial euphoria died down?

ZM: Cannes is an incredible place. The festival welcomes you and looks after you very well. The film itself was received very well – the response to it was very, very positive. There are numerous special experiences that have stayed with me – most of all were some of the very inspiring conversations I had with other filmmakers who imparted words of wisdom and sound advice about where to proceed to next. On a more frivolous note, there were many star sightings, incredible parties, amazing fireworks and dinners at beautiful hotels that shrouded the entire experience in a surreal kind of magic!

FM: How did the original idea for Night Shift come about?

ZM: The story for ‘Night Shift’ came about through considerable delays at airports and long hours flying to and from the antipodes. Airports have always intrigued me as places – as public spaces they are filled with people preoccupied with their own destinations (literally). However, there is so much human drama underneath the comings and goings – as people leave lovers, are reunited with family, return home for the first time in twenty years, or take their children overseas for the first time. Airports are emotionally charged, highly surveillanced yet very public spaces. All those things combined make them fascinating to me. And alongside this I am very fascinated by the people who work behind the scenes in places like this.

FM: Can you talk about the essence of the film that gave it the winning edge?

ZM: I honestly have no idea. We just as a team told a story that we believed in and did everything in our power to tell it as truthfully and sensitively and as well as we possibly could. We were honoured and humbled by the selection for Cannes.

FM: How did you pick on that particular worker at the airport?

ZM: I am always interested in the people who exist on our periphery, the people we often don’t see or pay attention to. I wanted to tell the story of someone like this, to explore and give an audience the opportunity to see what lies behind the surface judgments and perceptions we all make until we know someone’s true predicament.

FM: How do you tell a story in fourteen minutes flat?

ZM: With brevity! But also with a poetic and allegorical awareness. Short films are like pieces of poetry – sometimes the less you show, the more you say. Sometimes the smallest things can have the largest meanings. Understanding this can be vital in learning to tell a story in a short space of time.

FM: Do you dig deep into your personal experiences when you make a film? You’ve been quoted saying, “Human emotion transcends culture – we all know and understand love, loneliness or separation, regardless of what language we speak.” As a migrant did you feel that longing to belong or a sense of separation that got scripted in your films?

ZM: I do dig deep into my personal experiences when telling my stories; however what comes out is always indeed fiction – which could be grounded in some kind of personal emotional truth. I have certainly felt a sense of separation and isolation and that was a huge part of my migration to New Zealand. However, I no longer feel that. In fact, I feel very much at home in New Zealand, as well as very comfortable in my own skin as a cultural chameleon – having been born in India, grown up in Dubai and now living in the Antipodes.

FM: Tell us a little about your first tryst with creative arts and film making?

ZM: My first attempt at filmmaking took place in my back garden – literally. I have always been interested in creative writing and drama and after university I did a screen writing course part time – just for fun. Through it, I met some people who are
into films and felt encouraged to borrow a camera and shoot something at my house with my friends. It was a 3-minute film about a girl with an imaginary friend. At that time there was a great thing in New Zealand called the Wellington Fringe Film Festival where students could take their films, go up on stage and talk about them.

FM: What/who inspired you?

ZM: I am inspired by so many different things. I am mostly inspired by the lives of others. I am a continuous observer of other people (often being reprimanded by my tendency to stare!) and some people might call it being nosey. But humans and their lives and the stories that build their lives intrigue me. I am inspired by the work of numerous filmmakers, writers and artists. To name a few: Andrea Arnold, Hirokazu Koreeda, Lodge Kerrigan, Mike Leigh, Lynne Ramsey, Alejandro Inarritu. I am also inspired by many of my peers - New Zealand filmmakers like Florian Habicht who is an inspiration in the innovative and unusual processes through which he makes his films.

FM: Apart from the Kiwis, the entire Zoroastrian community is proud of you. Do you have any message for the readers and for aspiring film makers?

ZM: My biggest piece of advice to aspiring filmmakers and artists of any kind is to keep doing it – it is only through doing that you learn and grow and develop your work and hone your craft. Someone gave me a great piece of advice once which was, if you want to be something, then everyday do something towards that, no matter how big or small. It might be writing a scene, it might be shooting an action sequence or it might be making a phone call or sending an email. However big or small do something everyday towards that goal and you will eventually realise it.

FM: What is it that drives you to achieve. The secret formula of making a thought provoking and sensitive film that the world will sit up and see?

ZM: I am driven to tell stories about the world in which we live and stories that look at the brands of humanity we put out into the world. I am aware of what a cliche this is, but I do say with all earnestness. When you make films and you have the opportunity to screen your film in front of an audience you are all of a sudden placed in a very privileged position. For the duration of your piece, the only light in a darkened room comes from your work. You have as a result the opportunity to say something of importance, of substance and while you might not change or save the world, you may just be able to provoke thought. And the opportunity to get someone to momentarily think about their own lives, or the lives of others is what drives me.

[You can see and learn a bit more about the film on http://tvnz.co.nz/breakfast-news/kiwi-film-going-cannes-video-4841216] - Ed.
The First Zarathusthi International Day of Service
Zoroastrians Stepping Forward - Youth show the way

by khushnuma driver & behrose taraporewalla

Zoroastrians Stepping Forward (ZSF) arose out of an intergenerational dialogue at a NextGenNow (NGN) session at the 5th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress held in Vancouver, Canada in 2011. The goal of the project is to facilitate Zarathusthi organizations to support those in need by collecting and donating shoes, both locally and internationally.

“An estimated 300 million people live each day without a pair of shoes. A pair of shoes allows our feet to stay clean, healthy and safe; free of any infection or disease” (Soles 4 Souls). This is a major concern in larger cities where “there are a lot of debris and even glass on the ground. A small step can lead to a much bigger problem if your feet aren’t protected” says Mahfrin Santoke of Los Angeles, California. Our religious community joined together to give back those who lacked these basic necessities. Older youth in Chicago set a prime example for the younger generations by educating them on the diseases and infections that are caused by a lack of proper footwear. The youth created a stimulating environment with different terrains and climates to show these young Zarathusthis what it is like to walk in someone else’s shoes.

The project attracted participants from over 25 associations worldwide. Individuals and families even in remote areas got a chance to participate. Positive responses came from the United States of America, Canada, Dubai and Pakistan among others. In Basel, Switzerland, a very small population of Zarathusthis, hosting this event, stressed the importance of giving back to the needy, to their children. In Karachi, shoe-donation drops were set up in many of the Parsi colonies, with widespread support and enthusiastic participation. The 1st Annual International Day of Service was held on May 5th, 2012. Several organizations, associations and small-groups hosted recreational events such as a Sports Day, Walk-A-Thon, picnic or social gathering.

Los Angeles: The youth of Zoroastrian Association of California (ZAC) gathered together to host their final ZSF event for 2012, on June 23rd, at the Orange County Rescue Mission where they provided meals, clothes and shoes for the center’s residents.

Chicago: To illustrate what children experiencing great poverty live through, the religious class teachers of Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago created an obstacle course of sorts- where the kids experience walking through different types of terrains without shoes. This taught the religious class children how hard it is to go without shoes. Students then reflected on the significance of the experience of walking an hour without shoes, and participating in a shoe giving movement.
to bring together all age-groups in an effort to foster unity and spark intergenerational dialogue, while collecting shoes for non-profit organizations. Some groups collected monetary donations. Many centers involved children from religious classes and taught them the importance of giving to the needy, an idea embedded in our Ahunavar prayer. They stressed the importance of the acts of collective giving as part of our history and culture. By the end of the project, approximately 6,000 pairs of shoes were collected.

We hope that ZSF will continue to grow in the years to come. The team wishes to expand and seeks more international participation from individuals who would like to give of their time and share their ideas to make a difference in the world. Most of us know the comfort of a pair of shoes; however, there are still many children and adults who consider a pair of shoes a luxury.

“It is through giving that we truly learn to live: whether the entity that we give is knowledge, money, or shelter is irrelevant. It is more important the impact that these entities provide an individual and community. People are not remembered for how rich they are but more so how much they contributed to society,” says Hormuz Nicolwala of Houston, Texas.

We invite you to take part in our 2nd International Days of Service that will be held from March 1st - May 5th, 2013. The vision for Zoroastrians Stepping Forward in years to come is one of being inclusive of other faith based organizations and even inviting those who profess no particular faith but are good, charitable human beings wishing to partner with us in serving together.

For more information, please visit our website at: http://zoroastrianssteppingforward.weebly.com/
Join our Facebook community, by searching: “Zoroastrians Stepping Forward” www.facebook.com/zoroastrianssteppingforward
Email: zoroastrianssteppingforward@gmail.com
Contact: Behrose Tararaporewalla, ZSF Lead 626.378.5564
The Russian School of Piano in Geneva

by yasmine jhabvala

More than a hundred years have passed since the birth of the Russian piano school. Brilliant pedagogical work has given us many great names, many geniuses. How much depth, force and richness of sound is to be found in their performances, yet what lightness and magical colours in their pianism!

The most important characteristic of the Russian school, which is immediately recognizable with each performer, is its strong emphasis on differentiation. But equally important is its vocation of teaching the music “before” that of the instrument.

The individuality of each performer is the hallmark of the Russian piano school on two levels: the creative approach to the masters’s music coupled with a brilliant spirit of pianism; the complete obedience to artistic expression.

The great traditions of Russian piano school continue to this day, undiminished by time. They carry on from generation to generation, from teacher to student, from hands to hands. These traditions bring to all of us the experience of great art, with unforgettable moments of musical pleasure.

In writing this brief article, I wished to share with the community my own experience with the Russian school of piano. I had started piano at the early age of five but stopped playing seriously at the age of 22 and completely ceased playing at the age of 32.

I was fortunate, four years ago, to acquire a beautiful piano of the Fazioli house; but I was even more fortunate in meeting Djordje Milojkovic, founder and director of his school in Geneva, The Traditional Russian Piano School. Professor Milojkovic is a renowned pianist and teacher, in Switzerland and internationally. He is known as a true representative of the Russian tradition.

I re-started piano at the age of 54, that is, in January 2008. Professor Milojkovic set up for me, as with all his students, a specific programme suited to my likes and level, and during the first year, we worked hard to bridge the gap created by having not played the piano for so long. I practised only about a couple of hours a day after my working hours, as I did not have much free time. At week-ends and on holidays, of course, I practised a longer time. I took up two Master classes, one in July and another in September, which enabled me to attend to the lessons of other international students and thus benefit from these. I also played at all the concerts given by the School to finish off the year (this is a practice strongly recommended and used in the Russian pedagogical tradition), which gave me additional practice and experience: in fact, after each public appearance, I experienced a big jump in my practice and ability to progress further. By the yearend, after an examination and to my great surprise, Professor Milojkovic welcomed me in his “professional class”. I began to increase gradually my practice to about three to four hours after my job, and to about five to six hours at week-ends. Eight months later (August 2009), I was received in the first year of Virtuosity, following another examination with Professor Milojkovic, and a year later (June 2010) in the 2nd year. By then, Professor Milojkovic had had me play in several concerts of the School and each of these events served as a strong step to further progress. In October 2011, I passed the first examination to obtain the Diploma of Virtuosity and am now preparing...
intensively my final exam (public concert) to obtain my Diploma of Virtuosity in the coming months.

I also was able during this time, to witness the progresses made by the other students: in four years, all have progressed, albeit at their own pace and capacities, and most importantly, all have acquired greater musical knowledge and deeper understanding.

Professor Milojkovic has honoured me, a few weeks ago, with the proposal of becoming his partner in the School he founded.

I am proud to inform the community that its members are most welcome to come and study with the School in Geneva. Our School is enabled by the State of Geneva to deliver the necessary diplomas at all levels: Bachelor, Master, Post-Master (Virtuosity), which are recognized for their prestige. We arrange accommodation in Geneva for the students joining the School, either for a few years in order to obtain a diploma, or joining us for a Master class (one week basis).

Our Master classes are generally held thrice a year, and all lovers of piano are welcome to rejoin us for a musical week.

Simran Shaikh’s story

by anahita mukherji

The word family brings a tinge of sadness to Simran Shaikh’s voice. When Simran, an attractive, strapping member of the Hijra community in New Delhi, sees fellow hijras living with their families, she is reminded of the middle-class Parsi household where she grew up in Mumbai’s Dadar Parsi colony, a family for whom she is as good as dead.

Simran, who oversees programmes for the Indian arm of an international non-profit, can’t help wondering how different life would have been if her family had accepted her the way she was. A rejection of her identity is what drove Simran to leave home and brave the mean streets of Mumbai, working as a bar dancer and sex worker.

“I would not have left home or changed my religion, had my family accepted me,” says Simran. But she has no regrets in life. “Despite the hardship and the humiliation I have faced, I’ve still made it in life,” she says. But even today, as a respected social activist in the NGO sector, she knows that she can never return home. For all attempts to contact her family are met with the same response - ‘Our son is dead for us.’

“I started life as a homosexual boy in a Parsi family. I ran away from home at the age of 14 because I felt that there was something terribly wrong with me, and that my parents would have to face a great deal of humiliation because of me,” says Simran, who does not wish to divulge her name before she joined the hijra community.

Simran still recalls the painful taunts thrown at her by friends and family while growing up. “I remember an incident that occurred during a terrace party that my father had thrown for his friends in our Parsi colony. I overheard my father’s friend mocking him for having a ‘pansy’ son. I can’t forget the humiliation I saw in my father’s eyes,” says Simran. Her navjote an initiation into the

After obtaining her degree Licence en histoire des religions in 1978, from the University of Geneva, Switzerland, Yasmine Jhabvala studied the Avestan and Pahlavi languages. In 1979, she spent several months within the Parsi community in Bombay, furthering her knowledge of Zoroastrianism and of the Gothic language. Back in Geneva, she became the assistant of Prof Rudhardt in History of Religions and began teaching on Zoroastrianism. In 1991, she defended her doctoral thesis “Vers Ahura Mazda”, in which she presented a new vision of the Gathas of Zarathustra. During these years, she has also participated in different congresses organized by the
Zoroastrian religion was no better. Simran can still recall Parsi Gujarati words like “baylo” floating in the air during the ceremony.

“I ran away from home when I simply couldn’t bear the taunts any longer. I only had Rs16 in my pocket when I left the house. I had no idea where I was going. For three days, I slept on the platform at Bombay Central station,” she says.

A Hijra found the young boy lying on the platform and made sexual advances at him. She also offered the boy food and shelter. “That was my first contact with the Hijra community, with whom I felt completely at home,” says Simran.

That’s where the young Parsi boy found a new identity as Simran Shaikh. “The Hijra who found me on the platform took me under her wing and taught me how to drape a sari. She would beg in railway trains during the day and solicit customers at night. I was very shy at the time and would not accompany her while she was begging. But at night, I would come with her to dance bars where she taught me the skills required to attract customers and get them to part with their money,” says Shaikh.

It’s during her days as a bar-dancer that Simran first met Zeenat, a Hijra guru from Kamathipura, Mumbai’s famous red-light district. “I was doing well in my profession and Zeenat offered to take me under her tutelage as her ‘chela’,” says Simran, who has worked as both a bar dancer and a sex worker.

She is not ashamed of her past. She says her role as a sex worker was neither completely voluntary nor through coercion. “It’s just something I had to do to survive,” she says.

Simran landed her present job with India HIV/AIDS Alliance, where she works as Programme Officer for West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, Manipur and Tamil Nadu.

Her message to young people who are confused about their sexual identity is simple – believe in yourself. It took Simran over two years to believe in herself and accept her identity.

But believing in oneself can be a trifle difficult when faced with a homophobic world that treats transgender as an aberration. Simran is used to men scratching their crotches in front of her and women vacating seats in public transport because they don’t want to be near her.

“I don’t travel by the Delhi metro any more. It is extremely hurtful when the person sitting next to me gets up and walks away. Or when I’m told to vacate my seat in the lady’s compartment,” she adds.
“...Moreover (I wish) for this person the best of all things, ... to be understanding all his days...”

Yasna 43.2

Trapeze Artist
Minoo Vafadari,
to perform at London Olympics 2012