

publication of the world zoroastrian organisation

# HAMAZOR

2  
issue 2017



Rediscovering The Faith



Interior of Shakespeare and Company. Above the doorway is inscribed "Be not inhospitable to strangers lest they be angels in disguise". Photo credit Bonnie Elliott, p57.

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## COVER

The Kushti, being a symbol of our Faith, is used for the cover in recognition of the Kurdish Zoroastrians and their struggle.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

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

## WZO WEBSITE

[www.w-z-o.org](http://www.w-z-o.org)

**Members of the Managing Committee**



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

**London, England**

**Mr Shahpur Captain**  
**Chairman**  
E-mail: chairman@w-z-o.org

**Er Jehan Bagli**  
Toronto, Canada  
E-mail:  
wzo\_canada@w-z-o.org

**Mr Rostam Yeganegi**  
Vancouver, Canada  
Email:  
Rostam.yeganegi@w-z-o.org

**Mr Russi Ghadiali**  
Singapore  
E-mail:  
wzo\_singapore@w-z-o.org

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

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

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

**Dastur Kersey Antia**  
**Vice President**  
Illinois, USA  
E-mail:  
vice\_president@w-z-o.org

**Mr Darayus S Motivala**  
**Ms Shahin Bekhradnia**  
**Hon Secretaries**  
E-mail: secretary@w-z-o.org

**Mrs Meher Amersey**  
Mumbai, India  
Email:  
wzo\_india@w-z-o.org

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

**Mr Kayomarsh Mehta**  
President, US Chapter  
Illinois, USA  
E-mail:  
wzo\_usa@w-z-o.org

**Mrs Monaz M Patel**  
**Membership Secretary**  
E-mail:  
membership@w-z-o.org

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

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*Toxy Cowasjee  
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## From the Editor



WZO London, is delighted to inform our members and readers, that the planning application submitted by us for our new premises, presently called Bridge House, on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2016, was finally received on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017 from the local planning authority.

While some matters still need to be resolved with planning we can now start with the reconstruction and refurbishment of the building. The time lapse will inevitably result in the completion of works being delayed but we were exceedingly happy to hear the news.

After nearly 35 years of operating from our homes and a small office in London this will help us to move ahead with our commitment to serve the worldwide Zoroastrian community. We thank all those who have kept their faith in WZO and their ongoing financial and moral support throughout the many difficult years.

In the last issue of the Hamazor a tribute was written for our late past Chairman, Ruby Contractor. Within the message it was mentioned about the change in our constitution in April 1993 making it possible for non-Zoroastrian spouses and the children of interfaith marriages to become members. "... the first time a Zoroastrian organisation had recognised that non-Zoroastrian spouses and their offspring were an integral part of our community ...".

Mobed Peshotan Homi Katrak wrote to us ... "The Australian Zoroastrian Association of NSW was registered as our community organisation in 1971 and from the outset our constitution recognised non-Zoroastrian spouses of AZA members and their offspring as full members of the Association."

We congratulate the AZA for their forward thinking constitution and apologise for the incorrect usage of the words, "the first time". Perhaps in our message we should have written "... the first time an International Zoroastrian Organisation ..." as our membership is worldwide and not limited to a specific city.

This Issue carries quite a few pages on the Zoroastrian Kurds who visited the US in March & April. Despite all odds they are keen to learn about 'their' lost religion and roots; and kudos go to the open minded Zarathushtis who welcomed them in various cities, sharing their knowledge on our Faith. Many travelled from various areas of the US so that they could meet and converse with the Kurds, thereby learning from each other. That is Hamazoor! [Hama from Hameh means all and altogether; Zoor means strength and force"].

Zoroastrian-ism is here to stay and will survive. Parsi-ism is another matter, so while we are all flourishing in our lives let us celebrate our ethnicity and be merry – something we do best of all!

*Loay Contractor*

## Remembering Our Parents, Shirin (Kermani) & Dali Tata

by bella tata

*Shirin Kermani was born in Shanghai in 1914 to Alamai and Rustom Shahrokh Kermani – brother of Arbab Keikhosrow Shahrokh. She completed her education there and moved to Bombay when the Japanese invaded Shanghai, and Rustom thought it safe to send his wife and daughters to India. Two of his sons went to Hong Kong and two to Tehran. His daughter, Manijeh, was married to Aflatoon Shahrokh and was living in Tehran with her husband and children.*



*Shirin was a concert pianist, having studied under the famous Maestro Mario Paci, an Italian conductor / teacher who formed the Shanghai Municipal Symphony Orchestra. Our mother was talented in more ways than one – a super tennis and field hockey player, great cook, avid reader, compassionate and charitable. She met our father in Bombay in 1938, got married in 1939 and then Bella and later Zarine were born 4.5 years apart. From our father's version, it was "love" at first sight when Shirin opened the door to let him into her sister's home in Bombay, where she was staying. Dali Tata was a mechanical engineer born in Bilimora in 1912 to a wealthy family – his father had built schools and done other charitable work there. Dali was a great motorcyclist, having competed in the Isle of Mann races, and had his own repair workshop for cars and mobikes. A kind and loving soul, honest to the bone, and charitable and unselfish as Shirin.*

*In 1942, Dali and Shirin moved from Bombay to Poona, where Shirin started a dressmaking school at home and at one time had 70 students. In Poona, she still played tennis and was the manager for the women's field hockey team in Maharashtra. In 1957, the family moved to Bangalore, which was their home till they immigrated to Canada. Zarine was the first to come to Canada in 1980 and, on finding her soul mate in Vancouver, she sponsored her parents from Bangalore to Vancouver in 1982 – in time for her marriage to Nanu Jal Dastur. Bella immigrated in 1981.*

*Shirin and Dali were very happy in Vancouver, and just loved their life with their daughters and friends. Dali passed away in 1993, and Shirin in 2004. Bella and her soul mate, Farrokh Namdaran, and Zarine and Nanu, all live in Metro Vancouver.*

*We honour our parents for the wonderful people they were; for the sacrifices they made for us, for accepting the serious mistakes we may have made but always supporting us, and for treating everyone with respect, empathy, kindness and generosity despite their very difficult times during some years. We were truly blessed! ■■■■*

# A Spiritual Journey

by beyniaz edulji

*In early February, some friends and I decided to undertake the long journey from Secunderabad to visit Udvada in Gujarat. We have made several road trips in the past but the journey is long (almost 900 kms), with some rough roads on the way so we decided to go by train. The Rajkot Express took us to Vapi where Jeetu our trusted driver and his taxi awaited us. Jeetu is a Gujarati living in Udvada and he knows all the roads, shortcuts, Atash Behrams, Dar-e-Mehrs and places serving the best food and a good bit of the local folklore and Parsi history as well!*



After a quick stop at Ashishvang Hotel for mint and lemon grass infused tea, breakfast and a shower,

we headed to the Iranshah which is walking distance from our hotel. The sleepy village of Udvada remains the same. Its narrow streets have an old world charm and the local vendors selling bakhras and sandalwood seem to be in exactly the same place since I last visited Udvada a year ago! The Iranshah was as majestic and awe inspiring as it has been since I first visited it many decades ago as a little girl.

We decide to take the coastal route to visit as many Dar-e-mehrs as we can, both in Maharashtra and Gujarat. A two-hour drive through verdant green chikoo and leechi orchards later, we reach Dhanu and visit the Cawasji Irani Daremehr which was consecrated on 2 November, 1940. We meander via the scenic seacoast and reach Golvad. The Zai Bordi Parsi Anjuman Agiary

was consecrated on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1916. The garden is as beautiful as the Agiary and an old gardener is tending to the roses and water lily pond outside. He is so happy when I compliment him on his gardening skills. The



Wooden boat at Bordi beach

beaches nearby are beautiful and clean. Wooden boats complete the old world charm of Bordi. We stop for lunch at the JN Petit



Casuarinas along the beach. Courtesy Darayas Malegam.

sanatorium. The manager graciously agrees to serve us lunch although it is past lunchtime although she cautions us that we might have to make do since there isn't very much in choice. But the Sunfish curry and rice, mutton patties and chicken lollipops are absolutely delicious and we make do with a real feast. The view from the verandah (which is the longest I have ever



Cawasji Irani Daremehr, Dhanu

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

seen) is absolutely breath taking. Trees, mostly casuarinas, line the beach. The large open well at the entrance fascinates me. All through this trip, the large wells brimming with water through Maharashtra and South Gujarat make a pretty sight.



Navroji Merwanji Poonjiayi Daremehr, Nargol



Beautiful old building, Nargol

chikoo orchards. The heady scent of mango flowers fills the car. We reach Nargol in Gujarat and visit the Navroji Merwanji

Poonjiayi Daremehr which was consecrated on 5 May 1946. This gorgeous Dar-e-mehr is unique in that it houses two atashes or Holy Fires. The elderly Priest is a storehouse of knowledge. The younger priest has a beautiful Dalmation outside his home and I stop to admire the dog and have a word with the gentleman too. Nargol is a lovely town with beautiful old buildings,

Nani Daman's Meherwanji Navroji Maneckji Daremehr. At the entrance the pillar is inscribed both in Gujarati & Portuguese.

waving coconut fronds and a very interesting open market selling lots of shrimp, fish, and clusters of local fruit like wild plum and 'Velati Kada,' or water apple.

We soon reach Saronda which is a mere 3 km from Nargol. The Saronda Parsi Zarthosti



Anjuman Dar-e-mehr is two centuries old. It is small but very quaint. We meet the head priest Soli Panthaki and his wife Dolly offers us tea; melt in the mouth batasas and freshly made puris. We are glad to rest a while and talk to this lovely couple before setting out for Daman. Nani Daman's Meherwanji Navroji Maneckji Dar-e-mehr was consecrated on 6 March 1838 and has an appealing garden and Portuguese inscriptions on its gate pillars. After a



Above mango icecream, below doodh na puff



short sightseeing trip around the city of Daman with its Portuguese style buildings and Old Fort and Lighthouse, we head back to Udvada and see that the dinner at Asishvang Hotel is fit for a king: Fried Boi or mullet which this region is so famous for, Chicken Farcha, Kid Gosh and lagan nu custard all cooked to perfection make us feel like we can't eat a morsel more. But wait, in comes an autoricksha with a man selling handmade mango ice-cream and we suddenly find room for that too!

The next morning, I woke up bright eyed and bushy tailed to have glasses of doodh na puff before tea and breakfast. It was unexpectedly cold in Gujarat. Generally the weather is humid and warm but I was glad to enjoy the cool sea breeze on this visit. Vendors came to sell us green garlic and saria papads, mint and lemons, which is the speciality of this region. Breakfast comprised of kheema, liver, Parsi omelette and sev, all washed down with mint and lemon grass tea. A quick stop at the Iranshah to give thanks for what was turning out to be a superb trip and then we visited Chikli in Gujarat. The Framji and Dorabji H Guzdar Dar-e-mehr is small but beautiful. I was saddened to learn of the demise of Mrs Shireen Nariman Mehta who had welcomed us so warmly on previous occasions. Her son Rohinton Nariman Mehta is looking after this well-kept Dar-e-mehr which was consecrated on 6 March 1874. He showed me the halls and the wells on the premises and we spoke of his mother.

We drove across a beautiful wide river nearby and made our way to the large town of Billimora. All of Gujarat's sparking water bodies are a sight to behold. Gorgeous winged Bulls welcomed us at the entrance of Sorabji Shapurji Gabba Dar-e-mehr which was consecrated on 21 May 1899. The next town was Gandevi close to Billimora, but we passed some lush green orchards. The roads in Gujarat, even in the smallest places are very good. The Bhikaji Hormasji Chenoy Dar-e-mehr in Gandevi was consecrated on 4 June 1834. Our last stop was at Killa Pardi. The Hormusji Gandabhai Dar-e-mehr was consecrated on 2 June 1881.

I am always struck by the kindness shown to stray dogs all over Gujarat. Most Dar-e-mehrs have a dog or two, or even three, sitting or sleeping outside their walls. The dogs in turn are very friendly and seem as happy to meet visitors as are their human counterparts in these parts of Gujarat.

After a quick but superb lunch that includes fried Boomlas or Bombay Duck at

Udvada, we check out and leave to catch the train back to Secunderabad. We make a quick detour to stop and buy Batasas, Nankhatais and Macroons at the rather grand sounding Bharat Bakery which sells the best biscuits out of a cart.

I am amazed to realise that we have been able to visit so many beautiful towns, villages and cities in just over a day that we have spent here. I can't wait for my next visit to Udvada. ■■■



Udvada's best biscuits at Bharat Bakery



*Beyniaz Edulji lives in Secunderabad, India. A Law Graduate from Mumbai, she also has Master's Degrees in Economics and Politics from Mumbai University. She has written many political commentaries, sports articles (especially on cricket) and features on various personalities, travel, food and Geospatial Technology for magazines and newspapers in India and abroad. Her interests include adventure*

*sports, cooking and travelling.*



## Being Happy, Being Zoroastrian

by jennifer rostami

*I live in New York, so everywhere I look there is a new way to feel better about myself. Workout classes where I can train like a marine, training to tone and stretch my body, food on delivery, and the most recent one: meditation classes. That you pay for.*

I have a friend who invited a bunch of us out to celebrate her debut show as a stand-up comedian. At the pre-party, I met one of her friends who I immediately clicked with. She had the same name too – Jenny. We started talking about our lifestyles, and not far into the conversation she said: you live in Williamsburg? You HAVE to check out this meditation course I am going to do, it is incredible.

Being open to new things, I decided to check it out.

Now, being a business person myself, I must confess that it is really not a bad idea. Circle people up with the promise of giving them a better day, more productivity, and fuller relationships, all for a nominal fee. Not too bad for a business model. No overhead, no programme really, just a teacher to lead a meditation. And if you don't live in New York, don't worry, there's an app for that.

But it really got me thinking, people are selling my mind back to me. I give you an hour of my time to meditate and you'll charge me for the privilege. Of course you also promise to help me find inner happiness, make better decisions, and perhaps even increase my work performance. Is this deal really worth it?

As I contemplate paying too much for another meditation class, I think about what feelings I want to experience and the deeply transcendent state that I wish to achieve. This makes me reflect on the time I visited

the Iranshah at Udvada, in 2014. I was part of a group from 'Return to Roots', and we had been travelling across Zoroastrian India. Having grown up in an Iranian-American family, this was my first opportunity to visit India and Udvada.

The fire had me mesmerized, I was so mesmerized that time disappeared, it made me really happy. I could have stared for hours. It flickered, it danced, it moved. It commanded yet was contained. The more I paid attention to it, the more it offered.

Sitting at my desk on a rainy coldish spring day in New York, I google pictures of the outside of the temple. My memory starts to jog. Seeing these pictures, I think about the town of Udvada, the people whose every day involved walking by the home of such a beautiful fire. For the Zoroastrians who live in that town, I can't even imagine the tranquillity of their every-day experience.

It is a tranquillity that does not come with a price tag, although I know many people who would pay huge amounts for that feeling. Nevertheless I find myself asking how I can bring the feeling of Iranshah to New York.

I do not mean to relocate the sacred fire from India to the United States, of course, but how can I re-discover that magical feeling for myself, from the comfort of my home city? Does it come about simply from watching a fire? I know that when I look at a campfire, I don't get the same feeling. Would I get the same feeling if I copied the Iranshah structure brick for brick? Probably not. I have been racking my brains trying to understand what I experienced.

I do not pretend to have the answers, but I have come to think that any or all of three possibilities could be at play. First, there could be something truly metaphysical that is specific to Udvada itself. I will be the first

to admit that I am not the most well-read Zoroastrian, but even I know that complex rituals were required to consecrate the fire at Udwada. Priests continue to tend to the fire five times a day and a coterie of Zarathushtis offer their prayers around the clock. If that is what makes Udwada so special, I will never be able to have a similar experience in New York.

A second possibility is that the feeling I experienced at Udwada is due to fellowship. When I arrived at Udwada, I was surrounded by fellow Zoroastrians from the 'Return to Roots' tour. We had become close. At the temple, we met several other co-religionists. We weren't praying together or anything, but we were praying separately and we were reflecting in the presence of one another. Maybe if I want to have an Udwada-like feeling in New York, I need to surround myself with other Zoroastrians who are in a similar reflective state.

The third possible answer has nothing to do with ritual or practice. When I think about what I think makes me Zoroastrian, I know I am supposed to choose good over evil. To choose good over evil, I need to focus on happiness. Maybe what made me feel so good at Udwada was this realization, this clarity that happiness helps me choose the right path.

Since I cannot begin to comprehend the metaphysics behind Iranshah, and since I am shy about praying with other Zoroastrians in New York, I am exploring this third path in my daily life. I figure that for now, I will just try to do a few small and simple things to augment my happiness. And if I layer enough of those things through the course of my day, my happiness quotient should increase. I will be able to make better decisions as a result. Through these small actions, I hope I can reach that beautiful mental state that I enjoyed in Udwada.

This article is not intended to offend anyone. It is just my attempt to rationalize something that could very well be beyond rationalization. At the same time, I imagine I

am not alone in thinking through these issues. Those of us who live outside of Asia do not have easy access to temples like the Iranshah.

For me personally, I am loathe to the idea of paying someone else for meditation classes. I am not going to find the feeling that I want by turning myself into a pretzel, nor will I find it by chanting some other person's mantra. For now, I will pursue the Zoroastrian approach by incorporating little things that make me happy, every day. Hopefully over time, this will lead me to the feeling of Udwada in New York.



Jenny lives with her husband in Brooklyn. She is a management consultant and spends her free time enjoying the company of her friends, volunteering, and making art. She attended undergrad at University of Maryland and holds an MBA from Purdue in finance.

## *The Parsis of Bassein*

When the Portuguese established their rule in Bassein (now known as Vasai), they asked the Parsis along with the other local population to get themselves converted into Christianity by force. The Parsis, in their wisdom, asked for some time and making arrangements secretly fled to the hills near Kalyan, outside Portuguese jurisdiction.

Even today these hills are known as "Parsik Hills". The Parsis remained away from Thana for nearly two centuries and only returned to Bassein after the British established their rule.

This case is the possibly the second most important event in Parsi history after their migration from Iran to India, which was only for the sake of preservation of the religion. Unfortunately, it is not much highlighted and therefore very few Parsis are aware. [shared as received]

## *Kurdistan reclaims its ancient Zoroastrian Faith*

by kersi shroff

(Member, Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington & Board Member, World Zoroastrian Organization)

*Over 200,000 persons in Kurdistan, Iraq,* have declared Zoroastrianism to be their religion. So claimed Mrs Awat Hosamadin Taieb, the Zoroastrian Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government, during an inspiring account given in Washington DC of the resurgence of the Zoroastrian faith in Kurdistan. Mrs Awat was visiting the US with a delegation of representatives of minority faiths in Kurdistan. The delegation, whose visit was sponsored by the US State Department, met members of different religious communities at the Washington National Cathedral on March 15, 2017. The theme of the meeting was: "Encouraging Peaceful Coexistence and Cooperation between Religious Groups (Iraq)". A Kurdish interpreter facilitated the discussions.

Kurdistan has a population of around 5.5 million, of which 1.5 million belong to minority faiths. The culture in Kurdistan is different from that of the Arabs and the region serves as a refuge for followers of minority religions. In 2015, the Kurdistan Regional Government enacted a law to formally protect religious minorities. It allows citizens to freely declare their religious affiliation, by "selecting a religion." The word "conversion" is deliberately avoided to appease the Iraqi Government in Baghdad, which continues to exercise control and apply pressure on Kurdistan against various developments, including the protective rights granted to minorities. Mrs Awat stated that the 2015 law has resulted in over 200,000 Kurds declaring themselves as being Zoroastrians. When questioned about this seemingly high number, Mrs Awat stated that the estimate is in fact modest and that there may be many more adherents. She explained that the Kurdish people never lost their ancient faith completely even after forced conversions to Islam. Many Kurds in far off villages kept

alive the culture and tradition of Zoroastrianism. At first, when Mrs Awat started an organization called 'Yasna', a few intellectuals secretly, and some openly, came and registered their names. Others quietly adopted Zoroastrianism, but asked not to register their names. When a Mullah threatened those who had publicly declared themselves as Zoroastrians, Mrs Awat rallied the media and instituted a civil law suit against the Mullah. An apology is stated to have been given by a high-ranking official of the Kurdistan Regional Government. This made tribes, groups, organizations, and individuals come out to show their support. As per a leading Kurdish Zoroastrian in the US : "From that day people started from villages and towns showing courage and declaring their religion as Zoroastrians."

The delegation from Kurdistan was led by Mr Mariwan Kakashikh 'Naqshbandi', the Director General of the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. He described the situation in Kurdistan, Iraq, as being complex, and riddled with political, military and religious cross-currents. He noted the great influence of the Iranian government over Baghdad. There are said to be "Iranian plots", and Iranian attitudes are in the mindset of Iraqi clerics and officials. Iraq is a "graveyard for religious minorities" and the Baghdad government is a lost cause for Kurdistan, he stated. The rich Mesopotamian culture recognizing two major faiths, Islam and Christianity, and other minority faiths, is being destroyed in Iraq. Baghdad has cut the budget for Kurdistan, so salaries and other funding are not being provided. A referendum is planned in Kurdistan seeking to break-off the region from Iraq. The support of the world community will be essential for achieving the split.

An Iraqi law on identity cards allows the entry of only two religions: Islam and Christianity. A clause in the law, based on Sharia, dis-inherits the siblings of persons who convert to Islam. While inter-marriages between Muslims and spouses from other religious communities are registered, any offspring is automatically considered to be a Muslim. Under the former regime of Saddam Hussain, children of mixed marriages were free to declare the faith of their choice upon achieving the age of majority. Another clause allows nine-year old girls to be married. The law also makes provisions for the contracting of “temporary marriages.” The President of Iraq refused to sign the ID measures into law, but under their legislative procedure, it came into force after the passage of a set number of days.

A so-called “Jafarey law” (negating the rights of religious minorities) is slated to be imposed on Kurdistan by Baghdad. There are two other contradictory Iraqi laws of note:

1. No law can be enacted that is against the principles of Sharia.
2. A later law requires that no laws against democratic principles be enacted.

Kurdistan was stated to emphasize the requirements of the latter law.

The social bonds between minority communities in Kurdistan are strong. They campaign together on furthering various minority rights and against discriminatory practices. All the communities recently observed the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from Iraq. A multi-faith demonstration against the ID law was held in front of offices of the United Nations in Erbil. Kurdistan has also resisted the application of Iraqi anti-Bahai laws.

Per Mrs Awat, under the pretext of finding remains from the Iraq-Iran war, Iranian personnel are damaging ancient sites, including the ruins of ancient Zoroastrian

temples, and looting any artifacts they uncover. In one instance, she had a wall/fence built around a building with an *atash gah*, but it appears that the structure stands the risk of being officially declared as a Christian site. She also stated that they have approached UN agencies concerned with the conservation of historical sites, but have not received any support.

Mrs Awat noted that Kurdish Zoroastrians were like “foreigners in their own lands” until the 2015 law allowed them to re-engage with their 3,700-year old faith. However, there is constant pressure from Baghdad and there are repeated accusations that Zoroastrians are ‘fire worshippers’, commit incest, and indulge in propaganda. The takeover by the Islamic State (ISIS) of Iraqi territory has added a great pressure on Kurdistan. The region has sheltered many internally displaced persons, including Christians and Yazidis. After the departure of ISIS, things could get much worse, she said. The minority communities participate in the Pesh Marga forces, the military arm of Kurdistan. Thankfully, the Kurdistan Regional Government is very supportive of its minorities.

Mrs Awat declared that Kurdish Zoroastrians must create their own institutions and change the mindset of the majority community. She is requesting support for the establishment of multi-faith committees for the protection of all religions and to fight against ignorance, poverty, violence against women, and female genital mutilation. The US State Department does not report on the “horrible things” that Baghdad is doing against the Kurds, she said.

Asked about the biggest problem facing Kurdistan, the delegation was unanimous in stating that an independent Kurdistan is the only answer to their problems. To them the creation of Iraq was an aberration, foisted on the region by colonial powers.

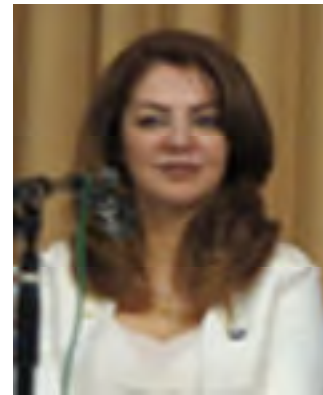
## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

Mrs Awat spoke with passion about prospects for the further revival of Zoroastrianism in Kurdistan. Her people were forcibly converted to other religions and are now seeking their rightful Zoroastrian heritage. She also spoke of her vision of uniting worldwide Zoroastrians and to welcome them in Kurdistan one day. To quote the leading Kurdish Zoroastrian in the US : "One brave woman broke the ice and lit the flame of Zoroastrian[ism] again in Kurdistan. Now, she is here seeking cooperation to manage this amazing rebirth."

Mrs Awat and the delegation from Kurdistan visited Detroit, Oregon & Los Angeles during their trip to the US. - Ed.

## Mrs Awat Darya -

Representative of the Kurdistan Zoroastrians in the Kurdistan Government, addresses the gathering at The California Zoroastrian Center on April 9, 2017



"Ladies and gentlemen

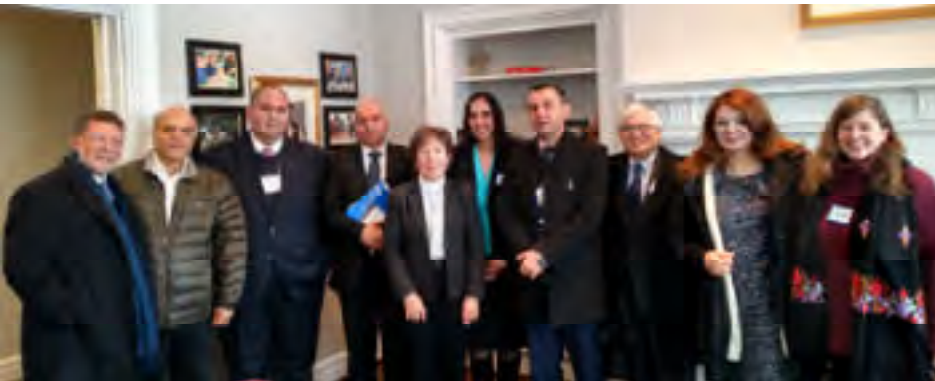
On behalf of the Yasna organization, to which I and the entire Zoroastrian community in Kurdistan belong, I welcome you

all and thank you for your presence. I thank all those who have come from far distances. I also thank all Yasna members for their steadfast work to show our Good Religion to the oppressed people. I thank my beloved husband Jamal for his continued support.

In the last few days your generous hospitality has made us very happy and we feel we are among our own families. It is truly a great experience to see several Atashgahs and meet many great people. I had meetings with very important persons and we find many interesting ways to support and work together in the areas of education.

We, the Zoroastrians have seen many bad days for centuries. Enemies of our religion and our nations have attacked us on our lands. I cannot go on and talk to you about those days. You are all aware of that, and we are living it again now in the Middle East.

Today, in the Middle East the hands of darkness are destroying the lands, harvesting many innocent souls, destroying our heritage and historical sites, taking women and children as prisoners and selling them in the slavery market as sex slaves. Kurdistan especially is becoming the war zone along a border that extends for over 1500 miles.



The Kurdish guests. Mrs Awat is 2nd from right. Photo credit: Rev Dr Carol Flett, Washington National Cathedral.



*Kersi Bhikhaji Shroff, an Attorney, acquired an LL.B from Karachi University, a Bar-at-Law in England, and a graduate degree of Master of Comparative Laws (American Practice). He served in the elite Senior Executive Service as Co-Director of Legal Research, and, Chief, Western Law Division, which provides legal services in international, comparative and foreign laws to the US Congress and Executive Agencies. He is a founding member of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington, Inc.*

**Note : In Issue 1/2017, there is a informative article on the Zarathushti Kurds in Kurdistan on pp 15-18.**

People are living in a very harsh situation. Over two million refugees have come to live among a population of five million. Just imagine the burden on the living people. Many people have immigrated through lands and seas. Many of these people have died under difficult situations, either drowned in the seas or died in the cold weather in the mountains, or just got ill from hunger and passed away quietly in the remote lands.

My dear fellow Zoroastrians, the soul of the world is crying for help. It is asking why all these atrocities? Why we cannot live in peace in an advanced civilization? Does not this remind you of Yasna 29 verse 1?

You all know who can help in this case. The Gathas, the way of Asho Zartosht, the good people like us can give some help.

We Zoroastrians are the first who wrote the Human Rights articles. Today, we ourselves are the ones who do not have the rights to practice our religion freely. All Zoroastrian nations live on their own lands as second-class citizens. That is not right.

Fortunately, to us, the Zoroastrians of Southern Kurdistan live under a region which is semi-independent. Our Parliament and the government have approved the article 5 which gives freedom to practice our religion and every citizen can freely choose his religion. Now, the Zoroastrians of Kurdistan are contributing to the country in many ways, like taking care of the environment, planting trees in the barren mountains. volunteering to clean up city streets, helping the needy. Having youth organizations, finding jobs for young people, having weekly seminars to educate and make people aware of our religion, making good relations with other religious groups and organizations and supporting our brave Peshmerga fighting the forces of darkness, the ISIS, also known as Daesh.

I hope soon the other countries like Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and others do for Zoroastrians like the Kurdistan Government has done. The Zoroastrians are peace

loving, country loving, progressive, and will contribute very good to the progress of their nations.

In Kurdistan, we have started the Yasna organization. This organization is the frontline to gather the Zoroastrians together. Slowly the ones who were practicing the religion are coming out and announcing their religion with no fear. The Zoroastrians are growing in numbers, groups and lately, tribes are coming out and announcing openly to be Zoroastrians. Just last Friday, a tribe close to the Peeramagron mountain whose villages are close to the ruins of Zoroastrian Atashgahs invited the Yasna organization and announced openly their Good Religion.

As a representative of the Zoroastrian in the Government of Kurdistan, I have good relations with various other religions like Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Kakae, Yazidi, Mandae, Jews, and other organization. We have good relations with foreign consulates like the United States of America, France, and others. We have a good presence in the media. We appear on many talk shows and debates. Our voice is reaching many. We have an Atashgah in the city of Sulaymania. It was inaugurated in 2016. Many dignitaries like the Governor of Sulaymania, Mr Haval Abubakr and Mr Marewan Naqsgbandi were present and cut the ribbon.

I admit we do not have adequate financial capabilities to open branches in various cities and town. But, the growth continues. We have large Zoroastrian communities in many towns and cities, but we do not have adequate financial capability to open an Atashgahs in each of these cities. The economic situation is very harsh now in Kurdistan due to this war by ISIS against us.

My dear Zoroastrians, the time has come to stick our necks out. The world is in a very bad situation. The solution is in our book Gathas to help build the good mentality and eliminate the destructive ones. This civilization is in need for Good Thoughts, Good Word and Good Deeds.

To unite and act we need a few easy steps we must all practice it:

1. Gathas: It is the key for our good mentality. Try to learn it from your sources. You are lucky you are close to very intelligent persons here. I and my colleague have to travel thousands of miles to come and see them and learn from them.

2. Contacts: Keep contact with your friends and family all the time and learn from each other.

3. News: We broadcast our activities every month. Please read them, circulate them around and send them to your friends everywhere. This way, we will be connected spiritually. Before you know it, you will find you are in love with every Zoroastrian in the world.

4. Look for the leaders: Listen to them and create nice youth groups and contacts. The youth can make seminars and lectures among themselves. Not just about religion. They can communicate about science, jobs, or just friendship.

5. Help: Your brothers and sisters in Kurdistan are on the front lines making a huge change. They are spearheading the return of Zoroastrianism. Sometimes they need help. Work with your leaders and organization to organize a good help in an effective way.

These are very simple things to do but are very effective to unite us and work together.

I am leaving tomorrow, but my heart is not willing to go. I think, I will leave and my heart here to stay behind. I hope I see you all visiting us in Kurdistan.

Better days are coming.”



### *Kurdistan, the only government in Middle East that recognizes religious diversity*

From <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/321804d4-5b58-4008-848d-e1cc263230b4/Kurdistan—the-only-government-in-Middle-East-that-recognizes-religious-diversity>

*Kurdistan Regional Government* (KRG) representatives were warmly received and awarded at the California Zoroastrian Center, Los Angeles.

Awat Darya, representative of Kurdistan's Zoroastrians received an award presented by the CZC in honour of her attempts in being a voice for the religious minority in Kurdistan Region.

Darya told Kurdistan24, she has been contacting people of her faith across the globe to create a network of support and to inform them that in Kurdistan Region, they are officially protected.

A new Zoroastrian temple was opened in Sulaimani in 2016. Darya is the only female representative among all religions that are recognized by KRG. Currently, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Yaranism, Yazidism, Alevism, and Judaism have representatives in the KRG.

Mariwan Naqshbandi, a top official with Kurdistan's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs, was in the United States as a guest of the State Department to spread peaceful coexistence among all religious groups that were prosecuted at different times in history.

While religious diversity is now facing increasing danger in Middle Eastern countries, especially in Syria and Iraq where the Islamic State took over, Kurds are embracing religious diversity. Kurdistan Region is the only Muslim-majority government where the laws officially protect the rights of all religious groups, Naqshbandi told Kurdistan24.

The Zoroastrian movement claims to have as many as 100,000 followers in Kurdistan Region although Awat said she suspects the real number is higher, adding that many fear to publicize their religion. She also added that more and more Muslims, disappointed and disillusioned by Islamic State's interpretation of Islam, are converting into Zoroastrianism. ■■■

## SOAS scholar to digitise interviews documenting lives of Zoroastrians since 1979

Malcolm Deboo, President of ZTFE informs ...

*On 13 March 2017, SOAS University of London received a donation of £2,500 from The Patron's Fund, a fund established to acknowledge the work of the charitable organisations for which Her Majesty The Queen acts as a Patron, on the occasion of her 90th birthday.*

The Patron's fund gift will support the digitisation of over three hundred interviews, mainly in the Dari language, recorded as part of a research project on contemporary Zoroastrian communities in Iran. Dr Sarah Stewart and Mandana Moavenat will undertake this project.

Dr Sarah Stewart, Lecturer in the Department of Religions and Philosophies, received a British Academy Research Grant to undertake the project. Dr Stewart travelled to seven cities as well as to all the remaining Zoroastrian villages across Iran to record the oral testimony of Zoroastrians from all walks of life: priests, laymen, city and urban dwellers with Mandana Moavenat, researcher and a former SOAS student. The aim of the project was to document the changes that had occurred in the religious and social lives of Zoroastrians since the Revolution of 1979.

The interviews have created a living map of Zoroastrianism in Iran and the archive will preserve at least 20 to 25 of the remaining Dari dialects. The Dari of Yazd and its dialectical variations are still spoken in the villages of the Yazdi plain. But these are gradually being abandoned for the cities, and a new generation is using more Persian words, especially in digital communication. Consequently, these interviews provide a rich linguistic archive for future research. They will also enable future generations of Zoroastrians in the diaspora to listen to the language spoken by their forebears in Iran.

The digitisation of the recordings will be made available to coincide with the publication of the research by Dr Stewart. All 300 interviews will be transferred to the Endangered Languages Archive of the SOAS Library. Other collections of recordings from Parsi priests in Bombay and Gujarat as well as older recordings from priests in Iran have been already been committed to the Archive. This will establish a world resource of Zoroastrian material in Dari, Persian and Gujarati languages at SOAS.

The Endangered Language Archive is a digital repository preserving and publishing endangered language documentation materials from around the world, and is at the forefront in making endangered language collections available in digital formats.

As an institution, SOAS is recognised globally for its studies of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The SOAS Library holds invaluable academic resources for the studies of these cultures and myriad languages. Digital technologies allow researchers to collect and preserve material – written and oral – including endangered and lesser-spoken global languages and dialects.

With the benefit of the Queen's Patron's Fund gift this invaluable language digitisation project will go ahead, preserving one of the world's endangered languages for all time. The Fund received around £750,000 in donations from a number of supporters including individual donors, businesses, schools and community groups raised by way of The Patron's Lunch in June 2016. SOAS is one of 300 charities and organisations in the UK and the Commonwealth to have received a gift from the Fund.

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/news/newsitem119703.html> ■■■



## *Burial System from the pre-Zoroastrian period to present day Dakhmas*

by dadi surti

The writer shares an abridged version of the chapter from Rafique Jairazbhoy and his book Zoroastrian Evolution.

*At present there is a lot of discussion, confusion, and various theories, put forward in our community about the future of the Dakhma. Being a morbid subject, there are very few books exclusively on Dakhmas though all the scholars have amply described this subject in their books. But unfortunately, none of them have thoroughly investigated the origin / evolution of this form of disposal.*

Examining history, it is quite clear that the ancient Zoroastrians did not follow the Dakhma system; nor did Prophet Zoroaster prescribe it. There is no mention of origin of Dakhma in the Gathas, or in any other ancient scriptures, except in Vandidad which elaborates on hygiene and maintenance of Dakhmas.

Just how old is this type of dead bodies disposal? One modern author states, quite categorically, that "the modern Dakhma, were not found in a pre-Islamic context in Iran"<sup>1</sup>. Recently however, it has been suggested that a Greek period brick edifice in the south of Soghdiana might have been a Dakhma.<sup>2</sup>

During Prophet Zoroaster's period and in the prehistoric period, the corpses were carried to nearby hills and placed on a southern slope. It must have seemed a natural thing. Clothes, armour, ornaments etc. were removed from the corpse to facilitate its fast decomposition. The bones were collected, placed in a box or vessel known as an astodan or ossuary.

In the early Achaemenid period, the great kings of Persia were buried, and not exposed. Cyrus the Great had a monument, and his bones are supposed to be buried inside. Cyrus' successors, instead of using stone tombs, used the excavated chambers in mountain itself.

At Naqsh-e-Rustom, near Persepolis, Darius I and his successors had their tombs cut from the rock. Also at Firozabad, Taq-e-Kisra etc.<sup>4</sup>

It was because of the old Magian and not Zoroastrian, influence that ossuaries began to be used after exposing the dead.<sup>5</sup> Herodotus (480 BC) states that the body of a Persian male was never buried, until it had been torn by a dog or a bird of prey.<sup>6</sup> Even the prophet Zoroaster is supposed to be buried and his tomb may be near Mazhar Sharif.

In case of disasters like wars, famines, plagues, etc., it would have been a very unpleasant sight; thus, a mud and stone wall was placed as a screen, gradually became a circle. This is the EVOLUTION of modern Dakhma.

In Alexander's time (324 BC). According to Strabo, Ancistoloulus during his conquest, saw corpses exposed to vultures in Taxila, but nowhere else in India.<sup>7</sup> Much later, the Chinese writer, Wei-shu (572 AD), noted that the Persians exposed their corpses on hills.<sup>8</sup> In the earlier Dakhmas, the corpses were simply left.

According to Mellaart the painted scenes of enormous vultures pecking at headless corpses at Catal Huyuk depicted in a charnel house connected to a shrine.<sup>10</sup>

One of the three types of burials in the Harappa period (c 2500 BC) involved the collection of the bones and their burial, after the exposure of the body to wild birds and beasts.<sup>11</sup>

In the medieval times the excavations in the Islamic town of Siraf, on the Persian Gulf (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), some of the tombs were used for collective burials. The first large

scale migration of Zoroastrians from Iran to India dates to this period (c 936 AD).<sup>12</sup> They must have taken this form of burial and persists to this day amongst the Parsi community in very few cities.<sup>13</sup>

In early twentieth century as the Dakhmas were not really performing properly, the Iranians themselves voluntarily gave up the Dakhma system in favour of burial. The Iranian Anjumans of Tehran, Yazd and Kerman agreed, and built, a cemetery at Ghaser-e-Firouzh. In 1970 it was officially forbidden by law.

Some of the oldest Dakhmas had baked brick walls, which clearly indicate that this custom of burial occurred well after prophet Zoroaster's period. Old Dakhmas are now found in Yazd and Kerman only.

In the early Achaemenid period, the great kings of Persia had their bodies embalmed and buried in tombs. At Nagsh-e-Rustum very near Persepolis, Darius I and his successors had their tombs cut from rock. There are four tombs near Persepolis. This proves that nobles could afford to build tombs, whilst the average person's dead body was left exposed.

Dakhmas have been very well explained in the booklet "Tower of Silence", published by the Trustees of Parsi Panchayat Fund and Properties.

There are five Dakhmas at Malabar Hills in Mumbai. The largest one belongs to the Anjuman. In Karachi there are two.

Zoroastrians are anxious to maintain the Dakhma system. The Anjuman in Mumbai has experimented with solar panels system, but not much success. Solar heat is basically cremation. They had even referred this problem to Thomas Heatherwick, famous designer. His solution, a vast aviary with a breeding place for vultures, is practical but most expensive and not conclusive.

Orthodox Zoroastrians staunchly believe that a dead body cannot be exposed to fire,

water, etc, the elements of God. Some of today's Zoroastrians state that as they consider fire to be holy, and maintain a small (diva) fire in their houses, thus offering their dead body to the fire (cremation) is proper and may be technically better.

Let us face the facts that, without vultures and wild dogs, our grand Dakhma system cannot function properly and is gradually failing. Similar rectangular burial forms were found in Ferghana, Baluchistan, and southern Iran, etc, dating from the first millennium AD. Construction of cairn burials continued, even in the Sasanian period, when orthodox Zoroastrianism prevailed in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

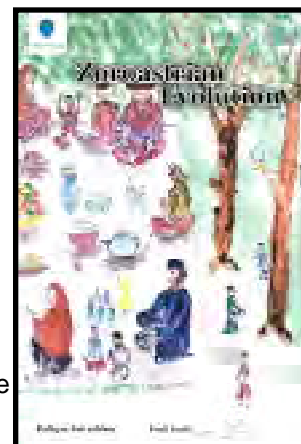
UNESCO has declared Yazd as one of the oldest architectural city in the world and is a tourist resort. The two famous Towers of Silence are located on a hill in the Safayeh district in the south end of Yazd.

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13. Towers of Silence, The Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat Funds and properties.



*Dadi Surti burn in Bombay 1931, qualified as architect from London, with offices in London, Iran, Karachi, Colombo and UAE. Visiting lecturer at London and Karachi. Has travelled extensively. His other book is "Danny's Days" and "Why Not? Laugh" is under preparation.*



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Pages 108

## Tehmtan Andhyarujina – Former Solicitor General of India

by yesmin madon

- from the information shared by Zal Andhyarujina and Frenny Bilimoria

*India, these days, is grieving the loss of* one of its renowned sons – Tehmtan Andhyarujina. Born on 17 November 1933, the former Advocate General of Maharashtra (from 1993 to 1995) and Solicitor General of India (from 1996 to 1998), left for his heavenly abode on 28 March 2017 after a brief illness in Mumbai. He was 83.

He graduated in 1957 from the Government Law College in Mumbai, and was awarded the Sir Charles Sergeant Scholarship and the Vishnu Dhurander Gold Medal in Law by the Bombay University, and despite being selected for the prestigious Indian Foreign Service in 1958, he chose to pursue a legal career and joined the chambers of H M Seervai – the then foremost Constitutional Law authority of India, as a Counsel. “The die had been cast and Andhyarujina’s decision was to prove providential. For the better part of the 1960’s and 1970’s, Andhyarujina appeared alongside Seervai and played an important role in formulating and advancing arguments on behalf of many state governments in several landmark constitutional cases, including the Parliamentary Privileges case (In Re: Keshav Singh) and the Fundamental Rights case (*Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*)”.<sup>1</sup>

He fought brave and successful battles in the legal arena, leaving “behind a legacy in judgments he helped shape, with his submissions as Counsel, on constitutional law.”<sup>2</sup>



Andhyarujina, however, was not merely a constitutional lawyer of the highest calibre, he represented a number of educational, religious and charitable institutions all through his career. “However, he would do so gratuitously, regardless of their financial capacity, because he considered their cause to be noble and altruistic. He also

donated generously, but discreetly, to several charitable and not-for-profit organisations. I recall that there was in fact a certain school in Lonavala which had been the beneficiary of a number of his personal books and other items over the years. But these were not matters that he liked to freely discuss with others.”<sup>1</sup>

He was the Chairman of the committee on banking laws appointed by the Government of India in 1998 and a member of the task force on the committee of Centre-State Relations Review appointed by the Government of India, 2007.

At an academic level, Andhyarujina was a part-time professor in Constitutional Law at the University of Bombay, a visiting lecturer at Queen’s University of Belfast in 1990, and an Honorary Professor at the National Law School of India University and other leading law colleges in India. He lectured at the Oxford University in 2012, and in the same year, he was awarded a Doctorate of Law by the University of North Orissa.

Ashish Chugh, in his tribute to the great man has this to say about his calibre: “However, Andhyarujina was not merely a constitutional lawyer par excellence. He

was, more importantly, a forthright and pukka gentleman from an era when the bar had high and lofty standards. Speaking of Marcus Aurelius (the great stoic philosopher and the last of the five good Roman emperors), George Long once wrote that a man's greatness did not lie in his wealth, status or even intellectual capacity but in the consciousness of an honest purpose in life and a steady obedience to the rule which he knows to be right regardless of what others may think or say. Andhyarujina exemplified how that philosophy worked in modern day life."<sup>1</sup>

Tehmtan Andhyarujina has authored highly acclaimed books. "One of his concerns as a jurist was about the existing system of judicial appointments much before the debate arose in public domain over the collegiums and national judicial appointments commission ..."<sup>2</sup> In 2013, four decades after the judgement, Andhyarujina published 'The Kesavananda Bharati Case: The untold story of the struggle for supremacy by the Supreme Court and Parliament.' The book analysed not the judgement, but the very people in court and behind-the-scenes-conflicts that resulted in the path breaking verdict."<sup>2</sup> Earlier, he had authored two other books – Judicial Activism and Constitutional Democracy in India (1992), and Judges and Judicial Accountability (2002); he frequently wrote on Constitutional and Public Law in journals and newspapers.

"Andhyarujina will however be remembered for his succinct, candid and incisive advocacy and the forthright manner in which he conducted himself as an officer of the court. The significant number of times he was appointed by the Supreme Court as amicus curiae (friend of the court) in complex constitutional cases (particularly in recent notable cases such as the criminal defamation case, the passive euthanasia case and the setting up of the regional court of appeals case) is a fitting testament to the fact that his discerning legal acumen inspired confidence in the court. In an era plagued by judicial corruption, legal improprieties and muddled thinking at the

bar, there was clear blue water between Andhyarujina and many of his contemporaries."<sup>1</sup>

On a personal basis – because of his 'self-effacing and gracious nature' – many of these qualities have not been made known to the general public. He excelled in all the aspects of his career and family life, and was widely respected for his high standards of professionalism, commitment to principles, and his upright ways with a high degree of decency in all matters. He was a lover of Western classical music and a voracious reader. He was a loving husband of Silloo, a devoted father to his children Zia Mehta and Zal Andhyarujina, a beloved brother to his sisters, and quite a father figure to his many nephews and nieces.

Shernaz Cama – a friend, in her tribute to him said, "Tehmtan Andhyarujina always stood out in a crowd because of his pink and white complexion; a legacy of his priestly lineage. We bonded over the delightful dinner parties at which he and Silloo entertained so many of us from different generations. Our love of books ensured that we exchange those we wanted to share and his passion for Western classical music led to long discussions on performances and recordings of great maestros. Tehmtan and Silloo were gracious and generous – good Parsi virtues in the extremely competitive environment of Delhi. The country has lost a great legal mind but I have lost a kind friend."<sup>3</sup>

#### References:

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2. *Bar grieves loss of legal giant: Tehmtan R Andhyarujina passes away*: Swati Deshpande.
3. Personal tribute by Shernaz Cama.



Yesmin holds a master's degree in Microbiology, which enabled her to work as a Quality Control Chemist, Chief Chemist, and Works Manager in Karachi. In 1985 she taught at The Mama Parsi Girls' Secondary School, later became the Head Mistress in the 'O' Level section. After a break worked for the Oxford University Press as an editor for a brief period in 2005. Her volunteer work with KZBM & KPI kept her busy as the Joint Secretary from 2000 to 2006. She has now emigrated to Australia.

## The Mystery of the Clock Tower Deaths

by aditi sen

**A century and a quarter after two Parsi girls fell to their death from the iconic Rajabai Clock Tower in Mumbai, the shocking incident continues to intrigue . . .**

*On 25 April 1891, at about 4pm,* Bachubai and Pherozebai fell to their death from Rajabai Clock Tower in Bombay University. Bachubai was the wife of Ardeshir Godrej, the founder of Godrej Brothers Co., and Pherozebai was his sister. Their bodies showed evidence of sexual assault – nail marks on breasts, legs and groins.

After a few weeks, on 8 July, one Maneckji Aslaji was arrested for attempted rape and murder and tried at the Sessions Court before being acquitted on 14 July owing to insufficient evidence. The acquittal was followed by major public outrage and appeals were made to reopen the trial.

The Bombay police were accused of hasty investigation and corruption. The case became a labyrinth of botched forensic data, missing evidence, hostile witnesses, confused testimonies and a major subject of contemporary social discourse.

### The search for the culprit

At first glance, there were clear signs that the two women had been sexually assaulted right before their death – several of the scratches even penetrated the skin on their breasts and thighs. Pherozebai's hymen showed a slight rupture as well, which further strengthened the case for attempted rape.

Maneckji Aslaji was a suspect right from the start. The police were tipped off by Enty, an assistant managing clerk at Ms Conroy and Brown Solicitors, who said he had seen a fracas at the second floor of the tower between “two Khojas (rich merchants) and two Parsi girls”. He said he even saw Maneckji intervening and his jacket was torn in the process.

On the evening of 25 April, Maneckji returned home in a Victoria carriage (*horse and carriage*) accompanied by a friend who appeared deeply worried, according to



Courtesy, Dr Pheroza Godrej, Chairperson Godrej Archives Council

Maneckji's manservant Bala. Both their coats were torn. The clothes were put in the laundry basket.

Later that night the police repeatedly visited Maneckji's house. Bala realized the clothes

may bear connection to the Rajabai murders, so he tied them in a bundle and took it to Khoja Ahmed Thooar and tried selling it to him for Rs5.

Thooar examined the clothes and found a penciled note in the pocket that read “To Nensi Peru and Seth Nur Mohammed Suleman, Let it be known to you that you must come to Rajabai Tower this evening at 3pm and bring Rs40 with you. Don’t forget. Pay one rupee to the bearer of this note.”

Thooar took the bundle to a Marwari trader next door, who agreed to keep the bundle and give Bala the Rs5. The next day, Bala came and informed Thooar that he intended to use that bundle for blackmail.

Promptly, Thooar informed Jehangir B Murzbaan, the editor of Gujarati newspaper *Jam-e-Jamshed*, who in turn contacted the officer investigating the case, Fremji. Bala was immediately arrested. The police, however, waited for 56 hours before visiting the aforementioned tradesman to retrieve the bundle. It had vanished in the meantime.

### Witnesses ignored

Enty, who had been standing near the tower when the two women fell to their deaths, was one of the main eyewitnesses in the case. He had not been alone; his companion, Rattanji Aga, also saw the same thing. Oddly enough, neither was called in to give statements in court. Another eyewitness, Henry Charles Shon, a professor of German, French and Russian at Bombay University, saw the bodies after they had fallen. He also saw Enty conversing with Maneckji and later with the police superintendent, McDermott. Shon even said he had seen McDermott and Maneckji speaking in private near a tree.

When he wanted to give testimony in the Sessions court, McDermott told him “not to make a fool of himself”.

There were also two children whose testimonies directly implicated Maneckji, but

they were completely ignored. Another eyewitness, Bhagwandas Ranchhoddas, was considered hostile because he had had an altercation with Maneckji in the past.

However, Ranchhoddas maintained that McDermott and Maneckji had offered him a Rs50 bribe to lie, and that when he refused to do so, his testimony was dismissed.

Several other important witnesses who were not cross-examined included Mullakbhoy Manikbhoy, Syed Lall and Prabhashankar, who were at the top of the tower right after the women had fallen.

Atmaram Babji, the university havildar, who had accompanied the women up to the tower, Gangaji Hiraji, another employee of the university who saw the women go up, and Hemchand Kachara, who also saw the women making their way up the staircase, were not called upon by the court.

And the witnesses who were called in court gave contradictory testimonies, though most were in favour of Maneckji. None of them, however, were cross-examined, as a matter of “kindness to the prisoner, who had not had the onus thrown upon him of calling them”.

### Victoria #247

The police – McDermott, in particular – were accused of accepting a bribe of Rs5,000, a hefty sum in those days, from Maneckji, based on the account of Mohansingh Dhansingh, the driver of a Victoria.

He claimed that McDermott had originally rented his Victoria, and had picked up a havildar the driver knew by sight and then Maneckji. Dhansingh said he had overheard the conversation, including the offer of a bribe of Rs5,000 for McDermott. The havildar received another Rs500 for his services.

The driver added that he had even seen Maneckji count out the money and hand it to them, and that McDermott had assured that the money would be shared by other officers involved in the case.

### The medical evidence

Meanwhile, the bodies had been examined by four Indian doctors and the official coroner, Sidney Smith. Early on in the investigation, Smith agreed with the other doctors that sexual assault was likely the case. However, he later changed his statement and maintained that a projecting buttress or gravel on the road caused the scratches on the women's bodies.

When a dummy was thrown from the tower, though, it did not hit against any buttress; further, there were eyewitnesses who saw the fall and were certain that the bodies had not hit anything.

Smith then argued that the marks on the breasts were from the silver buttons on their waistcoats. Since there was determined to have been no actual penetration (the slight rupture of Pherozebai's hymen was not definitive evidence, as it could have been caused by other factors) and both women had been virgins, despite physical evidence the idea of attempted rape and sexual assault was eventually dismissed.

It was Smith who was instrumental in influencing the court's decision even when the Indian doctors disagreed with him and maintained that the women had been sexually assaulted. Maneckji was eventually acquitted by the Sessions Court.

Bachubai's spectacles, headdress and kusti (sacred thread) were missing; there were also rips from knee to waist on Pherozebai's trousers. Rogue trees, jutting buttresses, opportunist buttons and immoral gravel received all the blame for their physical condition.

### The aftermath

In November 1892, a petition signed by 40,000 people from various communities and professions was sent to Lee Warner, secretary to the government of India. The case was by then popularly referred to as the Rajabai Tower Mystery.

The petition requested the appointment of an independent committee to inquire into

the case and file a fresh appeal against Maneckji in the Bombay High Court. According to Warner, the appeal had two main flaws:

First, the petitioners had already decided that Maneckji was guilty. The petitioners appeared to be clueless about the ongoing investigations, and had assumed that the police had deliberately ignored some important evidence, he said.

The medical evidence may have been that of attempted rape before the autopsy, but that was a hypothesis, which was later found incorrect, Warner said.

Second, he added, since no prima facie case against Maneckji could be established, there was no reason to pursue it further. The police had established it was either accident or suicide, and the government agreed with the verdict.

The petitioners were accused of pandering to hearsay, being misled by prejudice and racism, and were even told that baseless allegation of bribery could be viewed as perjury.

The suicide accusations had put the focus on the Godrej family. On 28 August 1891, in a letter to the editor to *The Times of India*, Ardeshir Godrej wrote about the poor quality of investigation of the case, but his main concern was to reiterate that there had been absolutely no reason for the women to have committed suicide.

He added that a Gujarati newspaper had published slander about the family based on the account of one Kerawalla, a man completely unknown to their family. However, his wife Bachubai's virginity was bound to raise questions (the couple had been childless), and the authorities further used that to establish the case for suicide.

The appeals did not cease – the next petition had 60,000 signatures, and it focused on the signed testimonies of Thooar and the Victoria driver Dhansingh. What followed was a very interesting debate



The Rajabai Tower

between the petitioners and Warner about the nature of evidence.

The petitioners argued that they had obtained signed testimonies from all the witnesses. Warner argued that the people who had attested the testimonies were biased and had already decided that Maneckji was guilty. He totally negated the driver's testimony as lacking any credibility. He further added that the two alleged Khojas that the eyewitnesses had seen, actually never existed.

Murzbaan was accused of being an enemy of one of the investigating officers in the case, inspector Fremji. This was allegedly the reason he had created witnesses to malign the police force and humiliate the inspector. Shon, Enty, Aga and Thooar were all declared as hostile witnesses who had personal scores to settle with the police.

Warner also added that the financial situation of some of the witnesses showed that they could easily have been bribed.

Ranchhoddas, it was pointed out, had had an altercation with his father, it showed he lacked character and integrity; therefore, his testimony was of no value.

Two years after the case, in 1893, Dhansingh admitted to lying about the bribery conversation in his Victoria. He claimed he was bribed by a Parsi man to tell his story, according to an article in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Warner openly declared that the Parsi baronets were famous for their notoriety and had forced others to sign the petition.

The case got plenty of attention, primarily because influential people were involved. It was even discussed in the British parliament, but the verdict of suicide or accident was never contested. The case has still stayed in the public memory, particularly among the Bombay Parsi community. While we will never know what actually happened on 25 April, the incident continues to intrigue us even today.

Sources: *British Library, India papers, L/PJ/6/304 (1432) and L/PJ/6/329 (1672). Kaiser-e-Hind (1891-92).*

**The author would appreciate any feedback from a reader who may have more information on this mystery. Please contact [senadit@gmail.com](mailto:senadit@gmail.com) - Ed.**



Aditi Sen is a historian based at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario – Canada.



## *The life of Ardeshir Burjorji Godrej*

by pheroza godrej

*Over 119 years ago, a young man of 29 set up a small factory at Lalbaug to manufacture locks. This small step set in motion a process, which would eventually lead to the foundation of a flourishing business and a household name - Godrej.*

man, you are in the wrong profession.” He firmly replied; “I have realized so myself”. Ardeshir returned to Bombay and gave up legal practice altogether. The end of this chapter marked the beginning of a new one in Ardeshir’s life.

### Early Life

Ardeshir was born on 26th March 1868 to Burjorji and Dosibai Gootharajee of Broach, Gujarat. Burjorji and his father Sorabji dealt in real estate and owned some property in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. The family moved to Bombay in the latter half of the 19th century, where, after passing his matriculation from the Fort Boys’ High School in 1887, Ardeshir decided to study law.

In 1890, Ardeshir married Bachubai. However the marriage was not to last long as she passed away on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1891 in a tragic accident, when she and Ardeshir’s sister Pherozbai fell from the Rajabai clock tower in Bombay. Ardeshir rarely spoke of his loss, nor did he ever remarry. He erected a plaque at a Sanitarium in Deolali in memory of his wife.

In 1894, Ardeshir, fresh out of law school, was hired by the well-known firm M/s Little, Smith & Co. to fight a case for a client in Zanzibar. Legend has it that in order to win the case, Ardeshir had to state before the court that his client had visited a particular place. However, since there was no hard evidence that the client had done so, he refused to twist the truth, and instead withdrew from the case. This resulted in many solicitors saying to Ardeshir, “Young



### Pioneering the Locks Business

After his return, Ardeshir tried his hand at manufacturing surgical instruments, but left it in frustration when he realised that there was no market for products with a “Made in India” tag. Still on the lookout for a business venture, when Ardeshir read in the newspapers that incidents of burglary were on the rise in Bombay, he saw an opportunity. He resolved to manufacture a lock that would be guaranteed to be “unpickable”. Ardeshir went to Merwanji Cama, a merchant in Bombay

who was also his father’s friend, to describe his plans for the new venture. Cama promised to raise the necessary capital. Before leaving, Ardeshir is said to have promised, “I don’t know if I’m the first (Parsi Lockmaker), but I’m certainly determined, with the help of a benefactor like you, to be the best.” With Cama’s funds in hand, Ardeshir rented a small garage like shed next to the Bombay Gas Works at Lalbaug, Bombay. At a monthly rent of Rs. 20/- and with a dozen workers, production began on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1897.

Ardeshir’s first lock was a high security lock under the *Anchor* brand, which he guaranteed was “unpickable”. Next he

began production of simpler and cheaper tumbler locks, though with a note cautioning that their security was not guaranteed. The notes that he attached to the locks also clarified the misconception about the number of levers; a well-made four-lever lock was infinitely more secure than a poorly made eight-lever lock. In addition, he guaranteed that each key and lock pair was unique.

A few years later, Ardeshir patented the first of his inventions, a lock that would subsequently be called a "Gordian Lock". It came with two keys, both of which could lock and unlock the device. The second key could also be used to modify the inner workings of the lock and disable the first key. Shortly thereafter, Ardeshir developed a lock based on Jeremiah Chubb's 1818 Detector Lock design, which was meant to apprise its owner of attempts to open it. When one attempted to do so, a bolt was thrown that could only be released with the correct key, and only if the key was first turned as if to unlock the lock.

### From Locks to Safes

In 1901, Ardeshir turned to safes. He wanted to build safes that were not only burglar-proof, but also fire-proof, which he believed most safes were not. Ardeshir made several designs on paper and held innumerable discussions with his engineers and craftsmen, until he was convinced that the only way to ensure security was to make each safe out of a single sheet of steel.

The resultant design had altogether sixteen bends. Joints were welded, not riveted, and the coffer was covered by a second sixteen-bend sheet offset to the first by 90 degrees. The door was double-plated. The total weight of the safe was 1½ tons. Three patents covered the Ardeshir design.

The first safes entered the market in 1902. In the same year Godrej safes and locks were awarded a gold medal at the Ahmedabad Exhibition. In 1903, two gold medals were won by Godrej safes and locks

at 'the Madras Exhibition'. In 1905, Godrej safes and locks were displayed at the Bombay Industrial Exhibition.

### Manufacturing Vegetable Soaps

A restless innovator, Ardeshir soon went from safes to soaps. In keeping with the Swadeshi mood of India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ardeshir took the Swadeshi vow to counter the flood of foreign soaps in the market, like Vinolia White Rose soap and Regina Peroxide soap, and also brands like Pears glycerin soap, Windsor, Cuticura and Lux, positioned at the time as "the beauty soap of the film stars". Ardeshir seems to have felt very strongly about the influx, and more importantly, the popularity, of these foreign soaps in India. In a newspaper interview with the *Indian National Herald* in 1926, Ardeshir said, "Öye foolish children of India, what have you done for the Swadeshi industries? If you see your mother bleeding in so many parts of her body, will you leave her alone and continue enjoying your lives at her cost? Do you realize Mother India has been bled white by foreign exploiters who have made us slaves of their tastes and goods?"

However, he had found a solution to the problem by then. While holidaying at Mahabaleshwar, Ardeshir collected some seeds fallen from the trees in several bags and extracted some oil from them. The Idea was thus born - to manufacture soap with vegetable oil. Until then, soaps used animal fats. His experiments led to the manufacture of the first vegetable soap in the year 1918. This unique product called for innovative marketing. He distributed pamphlets in Gujarati *Vacho ane Seekho* (Read and Learn) explaining how soap was made using vegetable oil. He came out with a soap called Chavi Bar in the year 1918, followed by a variety of soaps such as No.2 in 1919, No.1 in 1922, Turkish Bath in 1926 and shaving soaps in 1932.

### Love of the Land

In 1928, Ardeshir handed the locks and safes business over to his younger brother

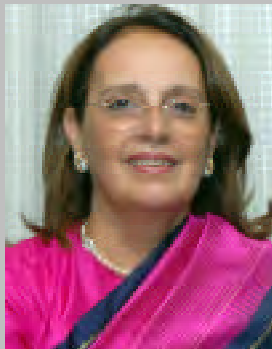
Pirojsha in order to focus on soaps. As the soaps manufacture too stabilised, Ardeshir had more time on his hands. He decided to address issues that were close to his heart. Long of the belief that self-reliance and not temporary charity would help society, Ardeshir was upset about the growing number of poor and destitute in the Parsi community. Agriculture, he believed, would go a long way in providing much needed self-sufficiency. To that end, he bought land near Nasik, where Godrej Farm would provide for Parsi families to train and pursue agriculture and dairy farming. A similar enterprise for Parsis had been attempted in Gwalior state a decade earlier, when Ardeshir was the president of the Zoroastrian Association.

Sadly, as efforts were underway to realise this dream, Ardeshir passed away in 1936. As per his wishes, Pirojsha and Ardeshir's trustees carried on the Godrej Farm project. It was a long and arduous process and it was not to reach fruition. After tackling several hurdles, and seeing few results, the project was wrapped up in 1942. A Gandhian and a believer in self-reliance, Ardeshir tried to contribute to his country and community in more ways than one, and while some did not work out, the ones that did, carry on till today.

*Based on the writings of B K Karanjia on the Godrej family*



*Dr Pheroza J Godrej, is an art-historian, and a PhD in Ancient Indian Culture. She is a member of the Board of Studies for the Department of Ancient Indian Culture of St Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai.*



*In 1971, she founded the Cymroza Art Gallery, and has written and co-edited publications and curated several exhibitions in leading National and International Museums.*

*Dr Godrej is a member of the Apex Committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art; former Chairperson of the Advisory*

*Committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai; Chairperson of the Museum Society of Mumbai; President Emeritus of the National Society of the Friends of the Trees, and Chairperson of the Godrej Archives Council. She is a Trustee of the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Impact India Foundation and the Sea Cadet Corp India.*

## Buck Ruxton

by zerbanoo gifford

*'Red stains on the carpet  
Red stains on the knife  
Oh Dr Buck Ruxton  
You murdered your wife  
Then Mary she saw you  
You thought she would tell  
So Dr Buck Ruxton  
You killed her as well'*

*Not a night passes in Britain without a murder being shown on television. The daily diet of murderers and their gruesome acts of violence has made the British a people obsessed with the lives of men and now even women who decide to kill out of acts of passion, greed and often crazed blood lust.*

When I was last dragged around the 'Chamber of horrors' in Madame Tussauds and was confronted by the wax model of the most notorious 1930's murderer a doctor named Buck Ruxton of Indian origin I guessed he must have been a Parsi who had decided to Anglise his name. I became fascinated with him.

I had written about and chaired the centenary celebrations of the great Dadabahi Naoroji, the first Asian Member of the British Parliament and known as the grand old man of India. His death anniversary will be celebrated this year. I have also researched and written and produced a traveling exhibition of so many illustrious Zoroastrians the world over but I had never encountered such a famous Parsi murderer.

I contented myself that Dr Ruxton, born Buktyar Rustomji Ratanji Hakim, on Navroze, the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1899, was not just any old murderer but the most notorious of his generation. He looked like a matinee movie idol and was respected by his patients. Over 10,000 people signed a clemency appeal to save his life to then Lord Chief Justice Hewart. Songs were created to remember Buck Ruxton's



photo credit : Wikipedia

gruesome killing of his common-law wife and her maid Mary Rogerson.

He was born of Parsi – French descent in India. Buck Ruxton was educated in Bombay where he qualified as a doctor. Later he later became Medical Officer to the Malaria Commission. On 7th May 1925, he married a well to do Parsi girl

called Motan. The marriage was short lived and he went to Edinburgh to do post graduate studies. It is then he changed his name by deed pole to Dr Buck Ruxton.

It was while in Edinburgh he met Isabelle Kerr who at the time was married to a Dutch man who she later divorced. Isabelle and Buck Ruxton never married but they set up home at number 2 Dalton Square, Lancaster where he became the local general medical practitioner. They went on to have three children, Elizabeth, William (Billie) and Diane.

Although he was very popular with his poor patients because he did not charge medical fees to those that could not afford to pay, it was also well known that Isabelle and Dr Ruxton had endless rows over her supposed infidelity. Ruxton was described as morbidly jealous of her relationship with supposed other men.

Ruxton's notoriety began when tourist Susan Johnson saw what appeared to be a human arm sticking out of the river Annan. After a thorough search by the police 30 packages of human body parts were found.

One was wrapped in a special edition of the Sunday Graphic which was a newspaper only sold in the Lancaster area. Initially the police were unsure of how many bodies were mutilated and prompted fears that it was the work of a serial killer.

Dr Ruxton was the prime suspect and the high-profile case caught the imagination of the British public and was called the case of the century. It lasted over 11 days. Over 100 witnesses were called, two hundred prosecution items of evidence were displayed and 100 international journalists attended the case that had morbidly fascinated the public which exchanged vast sums of money for the limited seats available in the court.

The dismembered parts were examined by the famous professor John Glaister an expert on forensic evidence at Edinburgh University. They were painstakingly reassembled and dubbed by the press as the 'jigsaw murders'.

A new technique of superimposing photographs was used. They matched two photographs of Isabelle Kerr taken in the same orientation, a portrait and one of the skulls found. The match was perfect. There was another new procedure used, forensic anthropology, to identify the age of maggots on the body to give an approximate date of death. New finger print techniques and dental records were also used to help identify the bodies.

The police made several public appeals for help. One was for anyone who had seen a stone coloured car in the Milnthorpe area. They found out that Buck Ruxton in his rush to get home from getting rid of the body parts had knocked a man from his cycle and had not stopped to pick him up. The man remembered the number of the car and reported it to the police. The police knew it was stone coloured Austin 12 Saloon which was traced backed to Ruxton.

Ruxton was convicted of murder after one of the most celebrated murder trials in British history and hanged at Strangeways

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

prison, in Manchester, on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1936 by the famous hangman Thomas Pierrepont. Dr Ruxton was 5' 7" and weighed 137 lbs and so was given a drop of 7' 11" leading to a dislocation of his 2 and 3 cervical vertebrae. A textbook hanging.

A few days after his death Dr Ruxton's signed confession, which was sealed in an envelope which he insisted was only to be opened after his death, was published in the 'News of the world' newspaper. It said "I killed Mrs Ruxton in a fit of temper because I thought she had been with another man. I was mad at the time. Mary Rogerson's was present at the time. I had to kill her." Ruxton was paid £3,000 the equivalent of half a million pounds in today's money for this confession. The money was used to care for his three orphaned children. Although right up to the end Ruxton insisted he was innocent.

Ruxton's surgery and home became a place of interest to sightseers until it was recently demolished, there was a pub called Ruxton opened just 50 meters from the original house. The bath he dismembered his two victims in, is still with the Lancashire police and was used as a horse trough for the mounted police division. A popular play around the case was even performed in 1975. The play by David Ponwall 'Buck Ruxton' was staged in Lancaster at the Dukes playhouse. The play presents Dr Buck Ruxton as a kind man and suggest that racism of Lancaster upper classes may have been a contributing factor in the unfortunate events that transpired.

I still wonder whether Ruxton could have been acquitted under slightly different circumstances. He was represented by some of the most brilliant barristers of the day, Norman Birkett KC and Philip Kershaw KC. If he had not carelessly wrapped one of the body parts in a local Lancaster newspaper and knocked a man of his bike after driving back from dumping the body parts of his wife and maid on the borders of Scotland. It is the silly things that catch us out. Maybe if he had been an English doctor the jury might have decided

it was a crime of passion. He had been provoked endlessly by his common-law wife supposed adultery. The Home Secretary of the day might have also responded to the extraordinary appeal from the British public for Dr Ruxton to be shown clemency.

I too would have paid to have a front seat in the court. But I am sure I would not have joined the massive crowds outside Strangeways prison to see a fellow Zoroastrian be hanged.

For those interested more in the case – The Ruxton case, a smashing tabloid hit in its day, has been the subject of its own book, T F Potter's *The Deadly Dr. Ruxton: How They Caught a Lancashire Double Killer*. It's also featured in many general true crime books, including Colin Wilson and Damon Wilson's *Crimes of Passion: The Thin Line Between Love and Hate*, Colin Evans's *The Casebook of Forensic Detection: How Science Solved 100 of the World's Most Baffling Crimes*, and Harold Schechter's *A to Z Encyclopedia of Serial Killers*.



There are a vast number of images to see on Buck Ruxton if one logs on to Google images. Though permission was requested no answer was received. - Ed

*Author, human rights campaigner and founder of the ASHA Foundation and Centre, Zerbanoo Gifford holds the International Woman of the Year Award 2006 for her humanitarian work, which spans over 45 years of grassroots and global activism. In 1989, Zerbanoo was presented with the Nehru Centenary Award for her work championing the rights of women, children and minorities. Pioneer for Asian Women in British politics, she was elected as a councillor in Harrow in 1982 and was the first Asian women to stand for parliament, she chaired the Commission 'Looking into ethnic minority involvement in British Life'*



*and was a member of the advisory group on Race Relations to the former British Home Secretary. A former director of Anti-Slavery International, she was awarded the Freedom of the City of Lincoln, Nebraska, for her work combating modern slavery and racism. She is also authored seven books her latest 'Confessions to a Serial Womaniser – Secrets of the worlds Inspirational women' highlighted the lives of over 300 exceptional women from 60 countries for which she was awarded a 'NESTA (National Endowment of Science Technology and Arts) Fellowship'. Zerbanoo's biography 'An Uncensored Life' by Farida Master is published by Harper Collins.*

# Navrozji Fardunji, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Reformer

by dinyar patel

*March 10 marked the 200th birth anniversary of one of the most influential figures to emerge from western India during the 19th century, one who played an outsized role in the political life of colonial Bombay and went on to contribute significantly to the emergence of the nationalist movement. But though he was hailed as “Tribune of the People” and “one of India’s greatest sons” when he died in 1885, Navrozji Fardunji (or Nowrozjee Furdoonjee), is hardly remembered by India today.*

Born into a relatively prosperous Parsi family in Bharuch in Gujarat, a young Navrozji proved to be an unusually bright student and was sent to Bombay. Here, he was enrolled in a school run by the city’s Native Education Society, which provided free education to deserving Indian pupils. Its schools became a launch pad for Navrozji and a generation of reform-minded Indians, collectively known as “Young Bombay.”

Navrozji’s intellect and talent soon caught the attention of Alexander Burnes, the British explorer and political officer who had shortly before achieved fame for a daring expedition through Central Asia and Persia. In 1837, Burnes recruited the 19-year-old Parsi as a secretary and translator for a new diplomatic mission to Kabul, then at the epicentre of “The Great Game” between Britain and Russia – a period of economic and political competition between the empires for influence over Central Asia.

His time in Afghanistan, however, was cut short when he learned of the death of his father. Navrozji petitioned Burnes for leave and trekked back overland to Bombay. His father’s death, ironically, probably saved Navrozji’s life – by 1839, the Great Game tensions had devolved into the first Anglo-Afghan War, which ended in one of the bloodiest defeats ever suffered by the British. Burnes and his colleagues were killed in 1841 by an Afghan mob.

## Academic stint

Having returned to Bombay, Navrozji took up a relatively safer vocation: that of a teacher. He was appointed assistant professor at Elphinstone College, where, alongside the brilliant Maharashtrian polymath Bal Gangadhar Shashtri Jambhekar, he educated many future leaders of Bombay.

Their pupils included Bhau Daji Lad, Dadabhai Naoroji, Sorabji Shapurji Bengallee, and Vishwanath Narayan Mandlik. Navrozji became a trusted mentor to these students as they initiated Young Bombay’s programme of religious and social reform in the late 1840s and 1850s.

Aside from working closely with Dadabhai Naoroji on matters of Parsi religious reform, Navrozji engaged with a broad spectrum of Elphinstone graduates in promoting female education among various communities in Bombay. The idea that young Indian girls deserved an education was, at this time, a



Furdoonji Naoroji by unknown photographer carbon print, published 1889 9 5/8 in. x 7 5/8 in. (246 mm x 195 mm) image size Purchased, 1975 NPG Ax28711 National Portrait Gallery courtesy - creative commons

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

dangerous proposition: Navrozji and others regularly received threats from irate Indian fathers who balked at the suggestion of sending their daughters to school. The Bombay government, furthermore, offered little financial support for setting up and running girls' schools.

But persistence paid off. By 1858, Navrozji was in charge of a successful network of Parsi girls' schools in the city, managed and financed by an energetic troupe of Indian volunteers and philanthropists, which operated in tandem with a growing number of schools for Gujarati and Maharashtrian girls.

Throughout his life, he remained a staunch advocate of public education in India, criticising the British for making government-aided schools unaffordable for poor Indians. When, in 1880, the Indian Education Commission spoke about reducing the already paltry government support for Indian schools, Navrozji warned its members of "disastrous consequences" that would jeopardise efforts "to qualify the Natives for self-government."

### Laying the grounds

Broaching the topic of self-government in 1880, especially before a panel of British government officials, required a degree of pluck. Navrozji, however, had never worried about taking controversial positions in political matters. In 1852, he was a visible force behind the Bombay Association, where the *shetia* elite and young reformers joined hands to form the city's first political organisation.

Navrozji, along with Bhau Daji Lad, led the radical wing of the Association, which drafted a petition to the British Parliament in relation to the renewal of the East India Company's charter in 1854. Their petition demanded an ambitious set of political reforms, including Indian representation in the British Parliament as well as local councils and the broad appointments of Indians to the civil service. While the petition was criticised by more conservative

members of the Bombay Association, it anticipated much of the agenda that the Indian National Congress would put forward more than three decades later.

Navrozji was particularly vocal about the need for Indian representatives in the British Parliament. In 1874, he collaborated with a prominent British supporter of Indian political reform, John Dickinson, on a proposal to create eight seats for India in the House of Commons, pointing out that the French, Portuguese, and Spanish already allowed some colonial representation in their legislatures.

In Bombay's municipal corporation and town council, Navrozji set the tone for strident Indian political activism, something later taken up by the likes of Pherozeshah Mehta. "His energy, his fluency, and his example have done more than any thing else to make the Municipal Corporation of Bombay the first representative body in India," the *Times of India* observed. Increasingly, however, Navrozji became consumed with one issue: poverty. In the 1870s, along with Dadabhai Naoroji and members of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, he began to push for immediate and wide-ranging political form to address India's glaring impoverishment. In a letter to British Prime Minister William Gladstone in 1871, republished in the *Times of India's* February 14, 1871 edition under the heading "Mr Nowrojee to the Premier", he condemned the "deplorable" results of British rule, saying:

"The people are burdened with heavy taxes; India is impoverished by the drain of its wealth to the governing country; the people are denied an honorable career by being shut out from all the higher offices in the public service of their country, and no adequate efforts are made to rescue the people from ignorance, improve their condition and increase the produce and develop the resources of the country."

Such language quickly earned Navrozji many enemies within the British Indian establishment. In 1876, an astonished



Dinyar Patel is an Assistant Professor of South Asian History at the University of South Carolina. He received his PhD in History from Harvard University in 2015. He has most recently co-edited, with S R Mehrotra, *Dadabhai Naoroji: Selected Correspondence*, published by Oxford University Press in 2016.

*Bombay Gazette* reviewed Navrozji's thoughts on Indian poverty and accused him, along with Dadabhai Naoroji, of promulgating "the extraordinary doctrine that the British Government of this country was an unmitigated curse." He caused additional consternation in Simla and Calcutta by publicly speaking out against racist British attitudes towards Indians, documenting officials' practice of exacting forced labour from peasants in western India and characterising the administration of justice in the country as "bad and reprehensible."

Navrozji passed away in Bombay in September 1885, just a few months shy of the first meeting of the Indian National Congress in December. News of his death apparently "spread like wildfire" through the city's streets, and the Bombay Municipal Corporation suspended its session as a token of respect.

### Fading away

By 1930, however, he was already becoming an obscure figure in public memory. G A Natesan, the liberal politician and publisher from Madras, noted that year that Navrozji's "solid but unpretentious work received due recognition in his own day, but, like all such work, is apt to be superseded and forgotten by the very people who benefited most by it" (from Natesan's *Famous Parsis*, 1930).

Today, a short lane behind the Taj Mahal Hotel in Colaba is named after Navrozji Fardunji. You will likely encounter a dusty portrait of him in one of Mumbai's old institutions or libraries. He deserves better than this. Mumbai would benefit from more meaningful remembrance of one of its most spirited public leaders and his legacy of reform and fearless activism.

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## *The D N Mehta Sarvajanik Hospital at Navsari reaches new milestones*

from dinshaw tamboly

*The Dorabji Nanabhoy Mehta Sarvajanik Hospital at Navsari*, popularly known as "Parsee Hospital" has risen from very humble beginnings and established itself into a very much sought after facility providing multiple medical services to people, especially those of South Gujarat.

On 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, The Dorabji Nanabhoy Mehta Sarvajanik Hospital, well known as "Parsee Hospital" of Navsari, celebrated its 103<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary in a modest way by Cake Cutting Ceremony organized by their staff members.

The institution began operations on January 15, 1915 as a Lying in hospital with a capacity of 44 beds catering to the needs of only the Parsi community. As the population of Parsi's began to decline, the then Trustees of the Lying In Hospital in a display of farsightedness moved the appropriate authorities to convert the institution from a 'Lying In' facility to a 'Sarvajanik Hospital'.

Over the years, the hospital in its new avatar has evolved from a 44 bed facility into a 136 bed multispecialty hospital having various departments of Medicine, Surgery, Orthopaedics, Gynaecology, ENT, Paediatrics, Pathology, Radiology, Dialysis (10 units), ICU, Dental unit and also has its own Cardiac Ambulance and Morgue.

The hospital has a special ward for Parsi patients wherein medical treatment as well as dialysis is done at subsidised rates and free in house medicines up to Rs5000 provided for Parsi patients.

Treatment to residents of Bai Dosibai Kotwal Parsi Boys Orphanage and Pre & Post maternity treatment to Parsi women, is given absolutely free.



## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

Recently the hospital management joined hands with Parzor Foundation, New Delhi and WZO Trust Funds, for providing cashless treatment to beneficiaries of South Gujarat taking advantage of the government funded JIYO PARSI Programme.

During the financial year 2015 – 2016, the hospital has provided financial subsidy amounting to Rs3,802,216 to poor patients from their Poor Patients Relief fund.

Very recently, on January 15, 2017 the hospital inaugurated its new wing Seth Faramroz Gotla Wing comprising of 16 beds ICU, New CT Scan Unit and OPD - Trauma Ward.

Late Tehmina & Jehangirji S Sooi - ICU Unit occupying the second floor, of the new building has been funded in their memory by their children Sam, Freny, Katy & Dolly. It is an ultramodern ICU ward with instruments of latest technology conforming to international standards, including four isolated rooms for burns, dialysis and infected cases.

Late Zarin Neville Sarkari - CT Scan Unit on first floor donated in her loving memory by Neville Homi Sarkari of USA, is a unit equipped with 16 slice CT Scan Machine from Siemens Ltd that provides facilities at moderate rates.

Late Jashwantraï Lalbhai Naik - OPD and Trauma Ward on the ground floor has been donated by his wife Dr Madhurika J Naik, having nine OPD consultation rooms and Trauma Centre.

Total cost of the project was Rs 57.5m out of which amount Rs 33.0m were received as donation and balance amount of Rs 24.5m used from reserve fund of the hospital.

The hospital is managed by a Board of Trustees – Mr Farrokh Mehta, Mr Malcolm Mehta, Mr Dinshaw Tamboly, Mr Dinyar Mehta, Mr Dara Deboo, Ms Freny Goiporiya, ably assisted by a Managing Committee comprising of Mr Rohinton



D N Mehta Hospital



Entrance to ICU unit



The new wing

Contractor, Mr Cyrus Vandriwala, Mr Aspi Ambapardiwala, Mrs Sharmin Tamboly and Mr Jimmy Mehta.

The Hospital Management requests charitable institutions and individuals to extend their whole hearted support by donating to our building fund as well as instrument fund to enable further augmentation and procurement of instruments required for the new ICU wing which includes:

**Items Required - Approximate Cost**

- Ventilators – three : Rs2,700,000
- Multi Para Monitors – eight : Rs1,900,000
- Colour Doppler – one : Rs1,000,000
- Portable X-Ray – one : Rs500,000
- Syringe Infusion Pumps – ten : Rs270,000

Hospital Management will be very grateful if individuals and institutions would consider generously supporting our institution to enable us to enhance the qualitative service that we provide without distinction of colour, caste or creed.

Cheques may be drawn in favour of:  
 The D. N. Mehta Sarvajanic Hospital,  
 J N Tata Marg,  
 Lunsikui,  
 Navsari 396 445.

Donations are eligible for exemption under section 80G of Income Tax Act 1961.



New CT Scan Unit



New ICU with beds



*Dinshaw Tamboly has actively associated in community welfare activities since 1983. He is a Trustee of the three WZO Trusts in India spearheading their activities; as well a Trustee on other Trusts, Hospitals and an Agyari. He was on the International Board, WZO London from 1983 - 2004 and Trustee of BPP from 1996 – 2008. He has received awards for services to community and humanity, from institutions both in India and overseas, the most prestigious being two awards from WZO, London in 2000 & 2005, and the Community Service Award received at the World Zoroastrian Congress in Dubai in 2009.*

## *Adopting a Treasure - Story of the Alpaiwalla Museum*

by ava khullar

*Mr Framji Dadabhoy Alpaiwalla was an avid, almost fanatical collector of artifacts and antiques of all kinds relating mostly, to the Parsi community. His collection literally pushed him out of the eleven rooms of his house forcing him by the 1950s to seek refuge in his kitchen! Sixty odd years later, the enthusiasm and zeal of an eighteen year old Parsi girl, Zara Heeramanek, has started a movement to restore some of the porcelain collection of the museum which now lies, locked in boxes, badly requiring restoration. Her efforts hopefully will enthuse the Zoroastrian community to come forward and revive the The F D Alpaiwalla Museum in Mumbai – the only Parsi Iranian Museum in the world.*

The story of this museum started in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Mr Alpaiwalla started collecting, items such as stamps, coins, perfume bottles, art pieces, porcelain, Egyptian antiquities and picture postcards from antique dealers. He housed the collection in his large home until his death. The collection was then bequeathed to the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP).

Under the advise of Dr S Gorakshakar, a former Director of the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai, an ethnographic Museum was set up under the guidance of Alpaiwalla's friend, Dr Jamshed Unvala. Unvala was a French speaking scholar priest who trained as an archeologist at the Ecole du Louvre School of Archaeology, France. Unvala's own collection of archeological finds excavated over a period of 10 years in the historical Iranian cities of Yazd and Susa were also added to the Museum. These two collections housed at the Kharegat colony hall became the Alpaiwalla Museum.

Until 2013 the Museum was largely ignored and limited funds, were disbursed for its upkeep. Its long serving curator, Mrs Nivedita Mehta, also added to the museum

collection by tirelessly collecting material on the lifestyle of contemporary Parsis which included Parsi textiles, *garas*, portraits, paintings, and photographs. However, much of the collection required restoration, better lighting, modern display cabinets which lack of funds would not permit. The Museum situated in the heart of Mumbai attracted a range of visitors.

The fortunes of the museum changed with the announcement of the Tenth World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC) hosted by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) in Mumbai in 2013. The trustees of the BPP wanted the WZC to leave an enduring legacy for the community and the city of Mumbai. The BPP took up the suggestion of Mrs Pheroza Godrej, an art conservationist and Firoza Punthakey Mistree, to restore the Alpaiwalla Museum. The BPP trustees set aside funds to kick start the revival and appointed both ladies as honorary consultants to the museum.

The first step was to restore the heritage building and consequently the Museum collection was packed in boxes and stored while the building was restored.

An advisory group including Pheroza Godrej, Firoza Punthakey Mistree, along with conservationist architect Vikas Dilawari chalked out a plan for revamping the Museum.

The revamped museum it was decided will have a section dedicated to ancient Iran where Unvala's excavated artifacts from Yazd and Susa would be displayed. A recreation of a twelve foot long glass etching of the Western Staircase of the Apadana from the Palace of Persepolis in Iran would line a section of the wall; at the core of the museum would be the recreation of the inner sanctum of a Fire Temple where the Holy sacred Fire is traditionally kept. This would allow non-Zoroastrians who are

not given entry into fire temples a chance to view for the first time an accurate model of the inner sanctum with a fire vase. Both these were displayed at the SOAS exhibition *The Everlasting Flame Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination* in London in 2013, and are now part of the Museum. The glass etching and fire temple model were made possible through a generous donation given by philanthropist Cyrus Poonawalla of Serum Institute, who has generously supported and funded several Zoroastrian cultural and heritage projects.

The Museum has some rare pieces which includes an old *pol* or city gate from Navsari. This historic piece from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, served to protect Navsari from the raids of the Pindara tribesmen who frequently attacked and looted the inhabitants. Among other valuable museum quality antiques are an Astodan, used as a repository for the bones of the dead, relics from Nehavand, where Yazdegird III, the last Zoroastrian king of the Sasanian dynasty of Iran, was defeated by the Arabs, and an original Firman from the Mugal emperor Jehangir with his seal, giving a grant of land to the ancestors of Dadabhoy Naoroji.

Phiroza Godrej recalls, that when they were in the process of packing the collection, they selected a few cuneiform bricks from Unvala's archeological finds among other artifacts for display at the Everlasting Flame Exhibition in London, but the department of the Archaeological Survey of India declared them as 'National Treasures' and refused to give permission for the bricks to be exhibited.

While the plans to revive the Museum are ambitious there is a huge scarcity of funds. Nivedita, the Curator, bemoans the fact that Parsis are not taking any responsibility in preserving their rich heritage. The task is uphill – Firoza Punthakey Mistree explained to me that a single state of art display cabinet may cost from Rs 200,000 to 600,000. That kind of support is not forthcoming.

However a ray of hope appears with young Zara Heeramaneck whose passion for art and art conservation has been nurtured by her family who are established names in the jewellery and antique business – Heeramaneck and Sons.

A visit to Alpaiwalla Musuem in her teens and seeing the poor state of the objects housed there, fuelled a desire to do something to help restore the antiques. Her pride in being a Zoroastrian made the mission doubly important to her. This is especially creditable when we consider how the present day Parsi youth are totally disinterested in the community's rich cultural and historical heritage.

Young Zara came up with the idea of interesting family and friends to invest in saving the Alpaiwalla Museum. She realized that this plan required targeting the older members of the community who would have the resources to invest. She personally went around meeting people and talking to them. The response from non-Zoroastrian friends of the family was remarkable. She prepared a publicity pamphlet to project her idea and to garner support, she distributed these to selected friends. She called her project 'Adopt an Antique' whereby one could adopt a piece and pay for its restoration. Her concern was limited to a small group of 25 porcelain items identified as requiring restoration. She has succeeded in collecting Rs400,000. Her first success was restoring a beautiful two-foot high umbrella stand which at one time languished in the Doongarwadi complex. How did it get there? Interestingly old Parsi homes often had gardens decorated with large porcelain pots, gardens stools, statues and porcelain umbrella stands. With the passage of time many homes were replaced by high rise buildings and these garden objects were donated to the community and left scattered in the Doongarwadi complex without much security. Over the years many were stolen until the remaining were collected one day and handed over to the Alpaiwalla Museum. This umbrella stand was broken but has now been beautifully restored by the Parsi

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata



Chinese red glazed porcelain walking stick/cane/umbrella stand. H61, W24cms.

conservationist Edul Fannibunda at a cost of Rs40,000, and Nevidita tells me proudly that it now sits in a cabinet facing her desk so that she can enjoy its beauty.

When contacted, Zara had this to say about her upbringing which led to her involvement in the world of art:

*“Being born in a family who for generations has been in the business of antiques and jewellery, I have been surrounded by beautiful objects in surroundings that compliment their beauty. My upbringing is such that my sense of aesthetics, and a keen and discerning eye for quality developed, evolved and were honed as I grew up.”*

Zara is inclined more towards art restoration, and with her family background, she would perhaps like to specialize in this area. Though still young, she hopes to ultimately join her father’s business. In the meanwhile she sees the Alpaiwalla project and the restoration of beautiful objects as a part of her learning process and of understanding

beauty and beautiful things. Her active involvement in facilitating the restoration of antique porcelain pieces to its original state, has given her a first joy of accomplishment. She believes that each piece is special and has a story to tell.

It is truly refreshing to find a young Parsi showing such pride in her Zoroastrian heritage. We hope Zara may start a trend to enthuse other Parsi youth to be aware and proud of their heritage, and urge her Parsi peers to wake up to the community’s predicament, and come forward to change things by helping to preserve their glorious heritage.

Ultimately the idea is not only to restore the museum collection but to create awareness among Parsis for their heritage and to have pride in their community.

It is Zara’s dream to raise enough funds for restoration and ultimately to restart the museum in its full glory! May her wish be fulfilled.



*Ava Khullar has been involved in research on the Parsi community, especially concentrating on its demographic and socio-economic situation. She is an active member of the Parzor Foundation and is currently associated with its Craft Module which is trying to revive Parsi embroidery.*



Chinese yellow glazed porcelain jar with lid. H32,W22cms.



Chinese celadon glazed garden stool. H47, W32cms.



Chinese blue and white glazed porcelain rectangular jar. H34, W19cms.



Chinese blue and white glazed porcelain ginger jar. H31, W25cms.

Porcelain was invented in China in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries and imperial kilns were established to produce translucent paper thin porcelain. During the Song dynasty (960-1279) large quantities of porcelain were exported and this was a source of revenue for the government. Canton was an important port through which Chinese porcelain was exported. Ship captains were instructed in the purchase of porcelain and were given specific notes to refer to, for colour, design and shape of the porcelain. Iran was the main source of cobalt blue and cakes of cobalt were imported and ground to a fine powder and used to create blue paint. The porcelain was painted by artists who were masters in particular motifs. Chinese used a combination of kaolin, feldspar, crushed stone and quartz to make porcelain. During the Ming dynasty, new modes of porcelain making were introduced in both design and style.

Chinese porcelain with their vibrant colours and Chinese scenes, flowers and birds delighted much of Europe and India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Every home had a piece of porcelain some with the fineness and fragility of an eggshell and so named eggshell porcelain.

Under Emperor Qianlong, some of the finest porcelain was made, and after his death in 1796, a less expensive, cruder form of porcelain was made to meet with the rising demand.

Source: From the exhibition catalog *Across Oceans and Flowing Silks: From Canton to Bombay 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and No Parsi is an Island*.

Porcelain collection: F D Alpaiwalla Museum, Mumbai.

Images & summary on Porcelain: courtesy of Dr Pheroza Godrej.

## *John Lockwood Kipling: Luminary of the Arts and Crafts in 19<sup>th</sup> century India*

by jenni mehta

**What connects a royal house on a small British island, the son of a Methodist minister, Indian art school education and one of the most philanthropic Parsis who was born into relative poverty?**

*A recent free exhibition at the wonderful Victoria and Albert Museum in London "Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London", reveals all.*

John Lockwood Kipling is relatively little known today, having been eclipsed in fame by his author son, Rudyard. Perhaps this enlightening exhibition that travels to The Bard Graduate Center, New York in September, will re-establish his name in the forefront of the minds of those interested in the major arts and craft-skills of the world, and both Pakistan and India in particular.

It is a given that any special exhibition at the V&A will be of a high standard and this was no exception. With so many items from the museum's collection to call on, plus pieces lent from many public or private collections including from Rudyard Kipling's Batemans House in Sussex and those of Her Majesty the Queen's, it was hard to be unimpressed.

Spectacular examples of craftsmanship and art from many parts of the subcontinent were shown in well-lit Perspex cases, in niches and on daises. The exhibition commenced with a small sparkling display including exquisite silver paan boxes and delicately enamelled accessories; it was laid out in a zigzag labyrinth, with a new jewel-like wall colour around each turning. Deep mulberry red followed on from the entrance of lamp black and lead into kingfisher blue with emerald and dark sand enhancing the textiles, illustrations, enamelwork and carvings. The high ceilings of the display space lent gravitas and allowed for two large movie screens, showing the sights, history and heritage of Lahore and Mumbai.

Lahore, the ancient capital of the Punjab in what is now Pakistan, was shown from all its urban angles - and then in sublime views, in a film installation with soundtrack created by the National College of Art Lahore; it concentrated on objects and sites that would have been significant to Kipling - from the Zam Zamma Gun to the Bhad Shai Mosque. The colours and patterns displayed in the films of both cities are enough to produce immeasurable inspiration for any disciple of the arts and they evoke a sense of place for those who may not be familiar with cities of India and Pakistan.

Much of the display covers the contribution that Kipling and his cohort, both Indian and British, made to the preservation and development of fast declining crafts of India in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Decline was partly caused by the arrival of cheap British Empire goods into India; often of poor manufacturing quality, they devalued the home-produced merchandise.

Having rejected following his father into the Methodist church as a vocation, Kipling craved an artistic career and took an apprenticeship at Burslem in the Staffordshire Potteries, where his skills as a draughtsman and modeller in clay were developed. His exceptional talents, which are evident across many examples in the exhibition, lead him to the National Schools of Art and Design in London. The formal training he received gave him access to opportunities available to young men at that time to unite art and industry, and in 1861 he worked on the ornamentation of the buildings that now form the V&A, alongside



sculptor Godfrey Sykes. In the future, decorative architectural work was to prove a major part of his large artistic portfolio.

An early visit to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, with its displays of Empire, had inspired a young Kipling with an enduring curiosity for India. Consequently, shortly after his 1865 marriage to Alice MacDonald (herself a talented artist and craftswoman), the couple sailed for India.

So soon in time after what the British described as “the Indian Mutiny”, many friends thought the choice of a new home in Bombay was imprudent. However, following the destabilising effect of the American Civil War on US cotton production, cotton sales boomed for India and Bombay proved an exciting “blazing beauty of a city” for Kipling and his young wife, and their first son Rudyard was born there.

It was a crucial decision to take on the headship of the architectural-sculptural department of the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art. Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, a self-made man who built his magnificent fortune through hard work and mercantile prowess, had endowed the School of Art in 1857. He recognised the necessity to support those less fortunate and his benevolence, which surpassed his own Parsee community, was unsectarian, cosmopolitan and often supported the arts. Queen Victoria knighted Jeejeebhoy in 1842 and he was the first Indian subject to be granted a Baronetcy. One feels both he and Kipling would have found much to compare in their lives and ideals.



Kipling is fourth from the right

Kipling quickly realised that exports of raw materials alone - and mostly to one country, Great Britain, would not benefit India. He had an ideal of hard work and



## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata



Study of a weaver

public service and determined to set up workshops and studios for various craft disciplines while concentrating himself on architectural sculpture. Recording scenes in the workshops, Kipling's monochrome illustrations of craftspeople engaged in their skills of weaving, carving and embroidery, or a patient camel being loaded with bulging bales of cotton, show his consummate drawing ability and fill a wall of the exhibition. The delicate tendrils of line brought to mind some of the later works of the artist Chughtai.

Moving to Lahore in 1875 as the principal of the Mayo School of Industrial Art and as curator of the city's museum, gave Kipling the opportunity to further a programme of encouraging additional crafts such as inlay-work, metalwork and pottery. He abolished student fees and attempted to break down the divides between castes and religions (hope someone wished him good luck with that!). Museum Director Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke and Kipling were entrusted with a budget of £5000 (a fortune at that time) to select and buy exemplar pieces to send to England for the embryonic Indian section of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A).

One section of the display is intimate and homely. The ceiling is lowered and a domestic design covers the walls. Here is a traditionally decorated Indian wedding chest with the Kipling name, there - a painting of a domestic servant; books with Kipling's "doodles" in the margins show his witty observations of some compatriots. One wall is covered in a set of blue and white plates, each showing not-quite-flattering characteristics of the native workers. Entitled "Our Intimate Enemies" the illustrations show negative stereotypes of the Indian population and reflect outdated views that were common among the British ruling class; skilfully drawn, but more than slightly unsettling for this English observer married to a Bombay-born Parsee. However, I immediately took to the man again when I read his idea of happiness was "eating a mango while smoking a cigar" – the vision of which made me laugh out loud in this quiet space.

Hung at the back of a recess presenting a Regency style chair decorated in immaculate floral Kashmiri lacquer work, Kipling's Companion of the Indian Empire medal could be easily overlooked; it represents a life commitment to ensuring the elevation Indian crafts to the highest level.

The exhibition also shows film of the work of contemporary artist Noor Ali Chagani from Karachi, whose extraordinary work is

inspired by the red brickwork found in so many parts of India and Pakistan and not least in the architecture of the Lahore Museum. Winner of the Jameel Prize Residency, Chagani manufactures from red clay perfect miniature bricks that he builds into elegant structures, waves and adornments - the delicacy of which may be difficult to imagine, given that they are made of bricks. Now we can Google his art via the Internet. What would Kipling have made of that?

Later in life Kipling curated 28 international exhibitions of Indian craftsmanship and clashed with many over how best to support Indian traditions. He recognised that society was changing and that arts and crafts should adapt to these shifts. In 1889, Kipling returned to Britain and with Bhai Ram Singh developed designs for two royal residences: at Bagshot Park in Surrey and Queen Victoria's summer residence Osborne, on the Isle of Wight. The exhibition shows photographs and the architectural elevations for the Durbar Room at Osborne drawn up by Ram Singh, with the amazing peacock decoration and extraordinary plasterwork designs in Indian style.

Kipling said, "The world is slow to recognise how much artists have to do in framing the ideas of society." His contribution to the impact of the British Empire on India's (and Pakistan's) crafts heritage is still recognised and debated today.

Strangely there is no catalogue for this fascinating exhibition but an exhaustive book is available at £40 in the museum shop.



Woman spinning with baby



At the exhibition



*Jenni Mehta was born and lives in London with her husband Soli and has two adult daughters. Trained in textiles and stained glass design, Jenni enjoys the varied London arts, music, film and theatre. She is fond of visiting woody British landscapes in autumnal weather and major artistic European cities - always realising her schoolgirl French is almost totally inadequate.*

## A pause for Astad Deboo to see The Queen

by carol andrade

*The intimation came towards the end of January, when Astad Deboo was already into a new year of frenetic activity. Would he accept this special invitation to an event in London on February 27? Formal invite to follow of course.*

Not the normal sort of invitation, but then, being invited to a party at Buckingham Palace by Her Majesty The Queen, isn't exactly common or garden! And of course Astad was most pleased to be able to say he would certainly accept the invitation when it came.

*“The Master of the Household”, it said, under a beautifully embossed royal crown with the initials ER, “has received Her Majesty’s command to invite Mr Astad Deboo to a reception to be given at Buckingham Palace by The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to mark the official start of the UK-India Year of Culture etc.” You can pretend to be as blase as a Hawaiian at a hula-dancing competition or Dick Whittington’s cat, but an invitation from The Queen of United Kingdom is something else.*

*“I knew of course that there would be many of us going for the event from India. Artists, actors, fashion designers, dancers – but it was a thrill for me to be going as India’s pioneering contemporary dancer and I was pleased as grateful to be chosen. As, I imagine, anyone would be. And so I packed my bandhgala<sup>1</sup> and a kantha shawl<sup>2</sup> and went off to be presented to The Queen”. He makes it sound so easy when it was not.*

The past year has been busy for Astad. Just the second half of the year saw him performing with the Manipur Pung Cholom drummers<sup>3</sup> at the Opera House Bastille in Paris to rave reviews. The drummers have been a part of his unique body of work, as much as thang ta<sup>4</sup>, or the martial arts

dancers from the same state. Followers of his choreography all over the world as well as in India have thrilled to his presentations, both with the drummers as well as with the martial arts exponents as they perform to



Launch of the UK-India Year of Culture at Buckingham Palace on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017, to strengthen the special cultural partnership between the two countries. Astad Deboo wore a bandhgala and a Kantha stole when he met The Queen. Photo courtesy Astad Deboo.

lavishly drawn creations with Deboo as the centre.

From Paris, it was off to Lisbon for a performance at the Fundacion Oriente and then he broke away from the group to dash to New York. There, rehearsals were waiting with Yukio Tsuji, the Japanese music composer, for his latest work, Eternal Embrace.

By the time he returned in November, his work for this year was already begun – with a five-city tour that took Deboo and Tsuji from Mumbai to Chennai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Delhi, through December and into January.

Everywhere, it was the same – spellbound audiences and rave reviews for the 60-

minute performance that evoked a dream-like jugalbandhi between music and movement, light and space. This is what sets Deboo far beyond anyone else attempting the genre in India, yet still bound by traditional dance techniques. Deboo's own rigorous training as a classical Kathak dancer has instead, been the springboard for endless experimentation. Exploration has in fact been the leitmotif of his oeuvre, along with a fearless nod to the possibility of failure to connect. Thankfully, there has been very little failure in his life!

With practically no rest, January saw performances in festivals in Hyderabad and Mumbai. Knowing what a strict disciplinarian he is, and how he has been known to stop a performance to admonish an audience or even untruly photographers who use flashes during a show, I ventured to ask whether everything had gone off smoothly. Oh yes, he replied serenely.

And then there was the intimation of the invitation to Buckingham Palace which arrived in due time and had to be prepared for, even as the frenzy of his extraordinary existence continued.

The whole of February went by in raising funds for the upcoming performance in March in Delhi by the Astad Deboo Dance Foundation along with the Raza Foundation. *"People think I have a cushy life,"* said the dancer who has received both a Sangeet Natak Akademi award as well as a Padma Shri for his pioneering and creative work in modern dance. *"The truth is that every day of every year that I have dedicated to the perfection of my craft has been a struggle. Most of the acknowledgement and the adulation I have got has been from abroad where audiences can gauge the originality and significance of my work. In India, what most audiences and sponsors look for is Bollywood. Though that is changing as globalisation inspires people to look outward and explore the meaning of the genre."*

The Palace party itself caused as much excitement among Deboo's friends as

among his family, so much so that he ended up good-naturedly wearing his friend's smart Armani jacket instead of his bandhgala. But the kantha shawl went along with him on that drizzly evening, kindly offered to a couple of his friends as protection from the London weather – drizzly and cold.

Once the formalities were over, he entered the vast hall where hundreds of people milled around greeting each other, nibbling on 5000 canapes prepared by Veeraswamy of London – paneer in herb crusted squares, pineapple and almond halwa tartlets, soya gujjias, strained yoghurt kebabs – and chocolate-coated boondi – and waited for The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

*"It was rather wonderful and very regal, with the dazzling décor and brilliant lights and people dressed to the nines. As I chatted to friends, an aide to the Queen came up and told us she was headed our way. And then she was there with us, someone whose presence is so familiar in spite of never meeting. She shook hands with me and it was wonderful, like a dream coming true. She knew who I was and what I was doing and in her own kind way, indicated with a little mudra that she could also dance!"*

In his inimitable style, he described how he met the super elegant Duchess of Cambridge, Princess Kate, with Prince William, and how the latter seems very struck by Bollywood and its glamour and pizzaz. *"No surprises there"*, he says, with only the hint of irony.

He met the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Boris Johnson, who immediately brought his own brand of jokey iconoclasm to the proceedings. *"He said his wife was half Indian and she was in Goa at the time, teaching cooking. He was a lot of fun,"* said Deboo. And he met a man who was in charge of the Queen's horses, who described how the Indian High Commissioner came to Buckingham Palace to present his credentials with horses



Carol Andrade has been a journalist for four decades and simultaneously a media educator for two. Currently, she is the Dean of St Pauls Institute of Communication Education. She has known Astad Deboo for almost 25 years and is an admirer of both the person and the artist.

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

preceding the cavalcade. 'Never done before', he confided.

And there was a lady-in-waiting, who said she had been with the Queen for 38 years but was not the senior most, as she was out-ranked by others who had been in these ceremonial positions for the past half-century!

There were Astad's friends, constantly meeting and greeting in different parts of the world. Manish Arora, the fashion designer, resplendent in a bronze coloured sherwani, designer Anita Dongre, dancer Aditi Mangaldas, others who orbit his social peregrinations like familiar planets.

And then it was over, and outside the rain continued to fall, but for the first time ever, the front facade of Buckingham Palace facing the Mall was lit up with a giant peacock in honour of the event. Thousands strolled up to watch the play of dancing figures that made up the fanned tail of the peacock.

For Astad however, there was no rest, nor does it look like there will be much this year and he is thankful for the fact that this year also marks his 70<sup>th</sup>, just as a month later, the country observes the completion of its 70<sup>th</sup> year of Independence.

The day after the party, he returned to Mumbai and left for Delhi immediately. We are pleased to report that the performance went off without a hitch and in fact, led to an invitation from the Greek government to take part in their cultural festival next year in August! And barely was this over, when it was on to a two week residency with a couple of his dancers and two choreographers brought in by Chicago-based

choreographer Shirley Mordine. The collaboration will mean a show in Chicago in June next year.

The energy is unflagging, his schedule punishing enough to bring a man half his age to his knees. Since 2015, he has been working with Swedish choreographer Rani Nair based upon his own archival body of work from the 1970's and 1980's. "There is no record of these pieces except for some photographs, and it is amazing how the body recalls the work."

So in early April, Rani is here to see where he rehearses and get a sense of the preparation for a performance. In August, there will be a world premiere of Rani's work in Sweden called Astad the Dancer.

"Meanwhile, *Eternal Embrace* will be performed again in New York in May and in June in Princeton, then back to India, then to Sweden, then to Chicago in the second week of August for a two week residency, then perform in September in Washington, then come back and take the Manipur drummers to perform at the Royal Festival Hall, then dash to Seoul for a project with Noruem Machi, the well-known Korean music ensemble. They have composed music with three Karnatic musicians to which I will dance. Three performances in October, then I bring my Manipuri dancers to Seoul for a performance and then it is Pusan and one more city and by that time we are in November and we are in Kowloon with theatre director Danny Yung."



At this point you want to beg for mercy but there is none from Astad Deboo who revels in immersing himself in dance, his first love and his last, and you are

Elemental, Divine - Dance performance by Astad Deboo and Troupe, March 21 at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) - Astad Deboo who employs his training in Indian classical dance forms - Kathak and

Kathakali— to create what is unique to him. His work has been seen in seventy countries and a critic sums his work as poetry in motion. Photo courtesy, Shernaz Cama, PARZOR.

thankful that he seems to be loved right back.

In November, he will perform in Jamshedpur, where he lived for the first two decades of his life and where he is the pride of Loyola. And in Kolkata, where he first discovered how to get deaf persons to dance, exploring how to focus attention on synchronization, attain familiarity with open spaces and do mirror exercises for reflexes. The Action Players, they called themselves, and with Astad, they won plaudits and acclaim at Deafway II in Washington where more than 2000 entries were received and his was one of the 20 selected ... but that is another story.

Has he peaked yet? Past record shows that this is a dangerous statement to make. For Astad Deboo, dancer, choreographer, explorer, experimenter, it's all about the journey. The destination will take care of itself.

Notes:

1. Bandhgala – A Jodhpuri suit - is a formal evening suit from India as a western style sartorial attire. Also known as Jodhpuri Suit, it is a western style suit product, with a coat and a trouser, at times accompanied by a vest. Wikipedia.
2. Kantha – is the famous embroidery of the state of West Bengal, India. Kantha evolved out of necessity to drape or protect against the cold. Kontha in Sanskrit means rags. It can rightly be called the recycling art.
3. Pung Cholom – It is the soul of Manipuri Sankirtand a music and Classical Manipuri dance. The Pung Cholom is a unique classical dance of Manipur. This dance may be performed by men or women and is usually a prelude to the Ras Lila. In this style, the dancers play the pung (a form of hand beaten drum) while they dance at the same time. Pung cholom borrows elements from the Manipuri martial arts Thang Ta and Sarit Sarak and also from the traditional Maibi Jagoi dance.
4. Thang-ta – Huyen langlon is an Indian martial art from Manipur. In the Meitei language, huyen means war while langlon or langlong can mean net, knowledge or art. Huyen langlon consists of two main components: thang-ta and sarit sarak. Wikipedia.



## Veeraswamy

*Veeraswamy is a 90-year-old restaurant located on Regent Street, London. Apart from the distinction of being the oldest Indian restaurant in the city, it was also recently honoured with the highly prestigious Michelin Star.*

Edward Palmer, the son of an English military strategist and a Mughal princess founded E P Veeraswamy & Co in Hornsey in 1896 to promote Indian food. He was a retired British Indian army officer who was approached by the Indian Government Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition to represent India with a restaurant in 1924. The restaurant managed to draw in large crowds at Wembley Park and served an average of 500 curries a day.

An official Indian Government report from 1924 says of Edward, "His selection (as advisor) was happy, and the success of the Indian cafe was largely due to him. The Indian cafe was not only appreciated by Indian visitors to Wembley who were able to get their vegetarian food, but was very popular with the British public."

After the exhibition shut down in 1926, Edward decided to relocate Veeraswamy to Regent Street, where it still stands. The restaurant shared its birth date with the Queen herself, and sold traditional curries such as Madras Curry, Duck Vindaloo, and Dak Bungalow Curry. The owner even published a book called *Indian Cookery for Use in All Countries*, which is still being sold.

Indian cookery with its spices is neutralized with beer, and at Veeraswamy they brought this concept in. Prince Axel of Denmark finding the food so delicious started sending a barrel of Carlsberg beer each year to the restaurant, which introduced this tradition.

During the past 90 years, the restaurant has seen many owners and changes in interior decor. In 1996 this fine dining restaurant was acquired by Ranjit Mathrani and Namitha Panjabi who restored the interior to its original 1920s opulence.

Recently, *National Geographic* wrote that Veeraswamy was amongst the 10 best "destination and special restaurants" in the world.



## Sunita Golvala receives an MBE for “For services to South Asian Dance in the UK”

by sammy bhiwandiwalla



Sunita striking the Krishna pose

*Sunita Golvala, renowned exponent of Bharata Natyam and Kathak, was born in Bombay, India. Trained under Nabadkumar Sinha and Madam Menaka she was presented to audiences at the early age of six, in Tagore’s ballet, Tasher Desh. Successive years, saw her appear in other famous Nritya Natikas while continuing her classical training under the tutelage of famous dancers like Shirin Vajifdar, Krishna Kutty and Sitara Devi.*

Sunita (nee Cooper) was born in Mumbai and graduated from New Era School and St Xavier’s College where she completed her BSc in Microbiology.

After graduating from University, she was offered the post of Assistant Director of Nritya Manjari, where she taught Dance for over nine years.

Along with her duties as teacher, Sunita was a prima ballerina with the Indian National Theatre, Bharata Vidhya Bhavan, and Nritya Darpana, with whom she gave acclaimed performances all over India.

Since her arrival in England, in 1965, Sunita has extensively travelled the UK, Europe and the USA giving dance recitals, lecture demonstrations and workshops to promote the understanding of Classical Indian Dance and Culture.

In 1968 she was appointed Director of the Nava Kala Dance Academy and started classes under the auspices of the Sangam Community Centre and the Inner London Education Authority.

In addition to numerous successfully created ballets performed in London,

Sunita has choreographed and appeared in Dance sequences for Operas, Plays, Films and Television and in 1978 represented India at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in Canada, where she was invited by Alberta University to present a paper on ‘Dance and the Child’.

Sunita has been awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for “For services to South Asian Dance in the UK,” and received her award at the investiture held at the Buckingham Palace on 16 March 2017.

Bharat Natyam and Kathak exponent Sunita Golvala was named among the 503 recipients selected for the distinguished Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) as per the New Year’s Honours list for 2017 announced on December 30, 2016.

Sunita’s family are steeped in music, acting and dance. Her husband Minoo’s career as a singer / actor spanned the world of opera, musicals, stage and television.

Their son Zubin (Varla) trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and follows in his father’s footsteps. An actor, singer and musician he has played major roles in television and the West End in productions like Jesus Christ Superstar, Cyrano de Bergerac and Julius Caesar to name but a few. He is a member of the National Theatre. ■■■■



Sunita with her MBE



*Ursula and Sammy 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.*

# Bombastic Bollywood - Looking Back with Pride

by tehnaz bahadurji

## Part I - The Ancients

*India has only two categories of super-whopper-mega-stars. Cricketing champions and Bollywood badshahs and bombshells. And somehow, even in this esoteric arena, we Parsis, with our 'beneath contempt' numbers, have still managed to make our 'contribution beyond compare', as Mahatma Gandhi averred so many decades ago. The Parsi theatre scene was throbbing with activity, and many of the earlier cinema pioneers actually came across from here. Their talent and ability was so huge, that it would not be false to say Parsi pioneers in the early 1900s shaped the Indian cinema scene in every department – acting, singing, dancing, recording, directing, producing and distributing. It would never be possible to include every single one, but this is an exploration of some of the notable players in that era.*

his money in the British Army supply business and received an OBE and a CBE for his efforts. He was fascinated with Parsi theatre and made more money in producing it and taking theatre troops touring around the country. And then he turned these mega-bucks to the service of cinema. He started producing silent films first, some dedicated to the cause of Indian Freedom and to pride in our Indian roots. In those days, movies were still called bioscope and shown in hastily set-up tents in public squares. But in time, J F Madan came to own 127 cinema houses throughout the country, some of which are still functioning today in Mumbai and Kolkatta. He imported many foreign films, and even brought in foreign directors to leapfrog the creative and technological gap in the nascent local film industry. His production house made 113 films, and his role in bringing this medium to the masses is incontrovertible.

In Chennai too, the Irani family owned and operated several movie theatres in the city and played a vital role in the propagation of the medium. The Casino, which was recently refurbished, was the first Art Deco building in the city, and was designed by **Phiroze J Irani** (though initially he spelt his name as Firoz) when he was still studying architecture. It received rave reviews for its boat-shaped auditorium and other architectural features on its inauguration and again 70 years later when it was gloriously restored. There were many Parsi-owned movie theatres around the country, in big cities and little hill stations, and their part in taking this fledgling medium to the public heart cannot be gainsaid.

**Ardeshir Irani** was an important man at this silent films-talkies cusp, as he made the first Indian talkie –

One of the names I remember my parents talking about, was **Sohrab Modi**. He was known as a Shakespearean actor, but his name and fame are really in his historical melodramas, set in the Mughal courts, or around the Rani of Jhansi, or the invading Alexander. His baritone voice and his

histrionics were legendary in the film industry, where he has played actor, director and producer. His voice drew even blind people in to movie theatres; remember this was the time of silent movies giving over to talkies, and this was a compelling and exciting new genre, and he strode it like a colossus.

**J F Madan** was a pioneer of Indian film production and distribution. He made



Phiroze J Irani. Photo courtesy his daughter, Zenobia



Ardeshir Irani



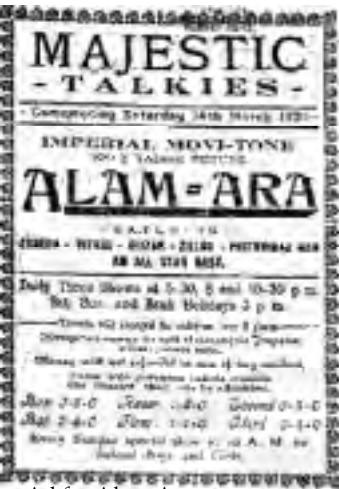
Modi in Sikandar



J F Madan



## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata



Ad for Alam Ara

Alam Ara, inspired by watching Jazz Singer on a visit to New York. The film had seven hit songs! And he made the first Indian colour film – Kisan Kanya. This was a pioneering era, but even amongst pioneers, Ardeshir Irani was a serious contender. He was writer, director, producer, actor, film distributor, cinematographer and informal music director. And he made films in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Urdu, English, German, Indonesian and Farsi, including the first Farsi talkie; it is said up to 250 film productions in his

life. He introduced star actors like Prithviraj Kapoor and Mehboob Khan. His studio was next to a railway track, and the filming often had to be done at night between train runs, and there were many innovations and adjustments as a result. He shifted the filming from the outdoors using bright natural light, but where sound disturbance was rampant, to the indoors on silent sound stages, where filming had to be done under artificial lights. And with all these innovations and activities, he had time left over to successfully run a number of film theatres, a gramophone agency and a car agency.

Another very early name in the 1930s and 40s, was **Khorshed Minocher-Homji** and her sister **Manek**. They loved music and their father had encouraged them to study Hindustani Classical music. They performed on the radio as the popular Homji sisters. Soon after, Khorshed joined Bombay Talkies, and her first job was to help the movie actors through the ordeal of learning the songs – this was the era before playback singing. It took many many rehearsals, often requiring her to

simplify the music for them or to substitute music for lyrics. But her diligent work paid off and she soon got offered a music directorship. Her younger sister started as an actress. This strike for independence by Parsi females in a circumspect industry like Bollywood created a major flutter in the Parsi community. To protect their identity, the girls changed their names to

### Saraswati Devi and Chandraprabha.

And Saraswati Devi became the only second ever female music director in the industry. She has given us many memorable songs, one even being adopted by BBC as its signature tune for its Indian News Service. In a Chandraprabha film, where Saraswati was doing the music, the younger sister had a sore throat and could not sing that day, but the song had to be shot, so they draped a curtain behind the actress, and Saraswati sang while Chandraprabha lip synched, so in a sense, they were the pioneers of playback singing too.



Poster for Chandraprabha (Manek Minocher-Homji)

### Dinshaw Tehrani

was another pioneer of the time, though in Tamil cinema, not in Bollywood. His story is so fascinating, that he earns an honourable mention. He grew up in Iran, and stowed away on a ship to Chennai at age only 14. With no skills to serve him in this alien land, not even language, this courageous lad became a porter at the railway station. Fortunately for him, he was a devout Zoroastrian, and when his sudreh and kusti were observed by chance by Parsi wayfarers, he got a sponsor and a break in life. From this start, he rose to eminence as an audiologist, sound engineer and a top film producer of Tamil Nadu, making films with the likes of MGR, Jayalalitha and Shivaji Ganesan. He was an innovative solution finder, experimenting and turning anything to hand to use to get his desired sound effects, even, it is said, hanging a big bell over a singer's mike to get that echoey sound that today is so easily created digitally. His was a real life rags to riches story, based just on his conviction that a better life was available if he only reached for it.



Dinshaw Tehrani with his wife & son. Photo courtesy his family.



Saraswati Devi (Khorshed Minocher-Homji)

In spite of his prodigious talent and proven ability, **Vistasp Bulsara**, or Vispy as he was always known, did not make it to the Bollywood Greats. He made a name for himself as an instrumentalist, orchestra conductor, music teacher, and as music director in Bengali cinema and for non-film songs. He was a gentle soul, and was dubbed the Gentleman Musician, and was universally loved and respected.



Vistasp Bulsara

**Shammi** was an actress who had a long and successful spell, and a late career comeback after more than a decade of silence. Born **Nargis Rabadi**, she was advised to change her name because there was already a renowned Nargis in Bollywood. Her father was an Agiari priest who died when she was only three, and this eldest child became the breadwinner of the family, taking lead star roles, second lead, comic roles, even vamp roles, to keep the home fires burning. The family had lived in subsidised Parsi housing, but when she made money, she compelled them to move out so that 'other deserving candidates' could get the benefit too. She was a woman of guts, of principle, and popular to boot.



Shammi (Nargis Rabadi)

**JBH Wadia** and his younger brother **Homi** of Wadia Movietone, made some fantastic movies in their time. Theirs was a well known ship-building family, and filmmaking was definitely considered infra dig, but JBH was ever the rebel. Their sensational artist was Fearless Nadia, whom Homi eventually married, and whose fame as Hunterwali is still



JBH Wadia

undiminished. They made the first Hindi movie without songs, a practice that is still remarkable even today. JBH was deeply involved in the Indian Freedom Struggle, and had strong opinions on the emancipation of women, and universal education – he was for them. And on corruption, the caste system and superstition – he was against them. Their films incorporated this belief system, and while entertaining, were also blowing the modern winds of education and empowerment through society.



Homi Wadia

**Daisy** and **Honey Irani** are remembered first for their roles as curly haired moppets, Daisy being India's answer to Shirley Temple. They were so highly successful and popular as child stars, that movie scripts were written just to include them. Neither of them could transfer this early acting success to adulthood, however. They have been heard to lament that they lost their childhood, not being allowed to study or play, and that they never enjoyed the financial rewards either. Daisy transferred her crushed maternal longings to Meena Kumari, alongside whom she often played onscreen, and received her love in return. She had a comeback in a recent film, and proved to be as popular as ever. Honey went through a very low period after her divorce, with two little kids in tow, and even resorted to an embroidery business before lucking out as a screenwriter, and then making it into the big league. Despite the stated lack of formal schooling, she made her mark in this field, with many award winning films.



Daisy Irani



Honey Irani

**Cawas Lord** and his sons **Kersi** and **Bujji**, or the Lord family musicians, had an immeasurable impact on opening up the music scene in Bollywood. Cawas was part of a jazz band that played at the Taj Mahal hotel,



Cawas Lord

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata



Kersi Lord



Burjor (Bujji) Lord

which is where he caught someone's discerning eye and was roped into Bollywood. His USP was that he could read Western style music notation, which most Indian musicians couldn't. This had him in great demand. He was probably one of Bollywood's most talented musicians and was very prolific, at one time playing for every third Bollywood number, it is said. He bought strange instruments like the bongos and the conga from departing foreign bands that came to the Taj, and introduced them into the Bollywood scene. He was almost always accompanied by his son Kersi, who played the accordion and exotic instruments like the glockenspiel and the minimoog. The younger son, Bujji, proved to be a most innovative percussionist and drummer, introducing a wide variety of new instruments including the ghunghroos, played perfectly to match a cine dancer's steps. Both boys were playing professionally when they were still in school, and the family has played for every

Bollywood music director of repute. Yet they remained personally unseen and unsung, and ultimately retired to more prosaic professions, in Bujji's case because he got fed up of film politics. How immense was their pioneering role is probably hard to define, but Bujji alone worked on more than 18,000 songs, which tells us that the family's contribution must have been monumental.



Rattana Pestonjee

**Rattana Pestonjee** had nothing to do with Bollywood, but he still earns a brief mention, as he is known as the Father of Contemporary Thai Films, playing director, producer, screenwriter and cinematographer to the fledgling Thai film industry, where he was a pioneer and innovator. Harrowed and hounded in his day, he was posthumously awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004 at the Bangkok International Film Festival.

**Fali and Jal Mistry** worked in both black and white and colour films and innovated



Fali Mistry



Jal Mistry

many techniques during this crossover era. Fali came to be regarded as the most highly reputed cinematographer of his time, eventually wandering into directing and producing. The brothers brought a European sensibility to Indian films using technical advances to create mood lighting. Some of their films like Nagin and Guide are familiar even to complete Bollywood novices.

Many of these people are quite unknown to me personally. I hardly recognise them as famous or even know some of their names. But in the early 1900s,

when Bollywood was but a new born baby, these men and women played vital roles. Many of them shaped acting, directing, music, dance, production, distribution of films, were the first in this or that, or opened new avenues for the newborn industry to meander down. They brought their earnest diligence, their learnt-on-the-job skills, their talents, their innovative energies and their intense passion to the job. Along with scores of others, they played a part in creating an industry that has become the heartbeat of our Indian nation. They deserve our remembrance and our salutes. This one is mine.

**To be continued in the next issue – The Moderns.**



*Tehnaz Bahadurji is convinced that lifelong learning is a window through which one looks upon the world. Believe that one should keep an open mind, but not so open that one's brains fall out. Agree with Shakespeare that there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so, and with Picasso that art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. Love to read, travel, help and empower people, and to rejoice in family, friendship and the many splendours that life has to offer.*

## School Principal is a Rally Racer

by tushna patel

*If fifteen years ago someone had suggested, "Why don't you try rally racing?" I would have reacted with, "Are you out of your mind!" Of course, at the time I would not have known that being married to a man who lives and dreams car racing you are bound to be drawn in.*

Ronnie took to car racing in his youth and some of us from Jamshed Bagh, Karachi, where we lived, would get in another car and go to watch him race at Gharo auto-cross on Sundays. By mid-1990s the sport dried up, not to be heard of for a decade. On another plane, Wendy School was owned by Ronnie's *masi* (mother's sister) and when she emigrated, he bought the school. My mother-in-law took charge and I was actively involved in the administration and curriculum of the school. In 2007 she hung up her boots and I became responsible to run the school.

The school has two branches, both have Montessori, Primary and Secondary sections and 300 students between them. We offer Secondary School Certificate as is in India and Bangladesh. It is a modest school by today's private school standard, yet we have produced some prominent Pakistanis.

As an educationist and a mother, I feel parents should pay closer attention to their children when they are in their teens as that is when they are most vulnerable. Also, parents should uphold good values rather than have mobiles and social status define them.

It seems that the school and racing have run parallel in my life. I was content being involved with the school and returning home to be with my children, when in 2005 four rally racer friends decided to revive the sport and sought out Ronnie who was an established name by then, to help them out. This man of mine helped round up 100 cars and Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally was born!



The Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab was seeking to promote Cholistan culture and historical heritage, so promoting motor sport became a way to attract tourism. The rallies have also provided opportunities for the locals as well as promoted inter-provincial harmony among the people.

At the Cholistan Rally Ronnie came second, with Noshir Irani (better known as Yazdani) as his navigator. The excitement was fever pitch, and the celebration that followed with a cultural night, fireworks, camel dance had me completely absorbed.

Soon to follow was the Jhal Magsi Desert Rally in Baluchistan. By then the rally racers and their families bonded like one big family, taking care of one another. I found myself managing a 40-men crew at stage break (pit-stop) where drivers stop for refuelling, repairs and refreshing. My commitment was to all drivers, to help each one 'complete the race'. This was very important to me never realising how much the racers counted on me.

In the 2012 rally, Sarfaraz Dhanji turned up at the stop with a busted radiator. We tried

## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata

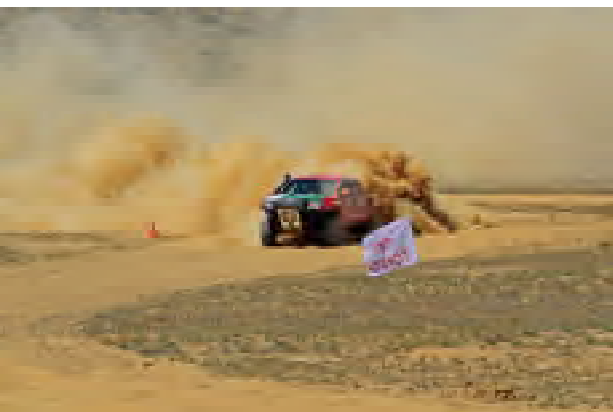
many things to stop the leak and what finally worked was a handful of turmeric! We were forty minutes into the repairs and all were asking Sarfaraz to abandon the race, but I urged him on. He finished the race, and being the only one in his car category, was declared a winner for it! To set up the stage breaks I would drive at sunrise, with my team in tow, into the desert terrain over sand dunes and turns; or on a widely varying landscape of rocks, river and sand. Most times I would be driving back each day at sunset, as the rallies are normally 3-4 day events. This experience has toughened me and I have gained inner strength.



A bit on the rallies for better understanding: The rally season in Pakistan is in the winter months of November to March. Jhal Magsi's first rally is usually in November and Cholistan's last rally is in March. Both have very different



terrains: Jhal Magsi has a 220-kilometre track with every conceivable topography: rocks, rivers, canals, hard surface, salt flats and sand dunes but no sudden ditches.



Cholistan track commences at the historic Derawar Fort and has two circular routes in Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur districts; the second in Bahawalnagar and Bahawalpur, but the terrain

distance of 500 kilometres which is covered over three days.

The rally cars are categorised by their engine into A, B, C and D: 3000cc, 2700cc, 1800cc, but in 2013 the 'Stock Category' was introduced which meant that anyone with a 4-wheel drive with some minimal changes could participate.

Here was my chance! With Ronnie's encouragement, I competed in the 2013 Jhal Magsi Rally with eight drivers in the stock category. I came fourth but with bruised egos of all the male drivers! Three ahead of me moaned, "what! winning against a woman!". The three behind felt worse, "imagine losing to a woman!" But all was not lost: a 'Women's Category' was subsequently created.

In 2016 Cholistan Rally, Jamila Asif competed with me and beat me. In 2017 we had another lady join us – Dr Ambreen, but by and large it is a challenging sport with limited facilities on the track which deter our women. They need to come out of their comfort zone and participate in the races. More men need to bring their wives and families to the races to give them the feel. It is the mind-set which needs to change but with one new woman participating it is a step forward, and I celebrate it.

As for my personal goal in racing, I quietly and constantly try to out beat my previous performance so that maybe in 4-5 years I can compete in at least one men's race. Ronnie is full of knowledge and experience in rally racing and I continue to listen and learn from him. There is also the other part of me, a mother and wife, that cautions me from taking undue risks, as one wrong decision on the track can ruin everything. Let's see how these two play out eventually. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the support of my family on both sides, which gives me inner strength to face the stress level a race presents. Unbeknown to most, the very start of a race can be challenging as thousands of people including the simple village folk and thrill-seeking bikers are crowded at the starting

point. In their excitement bikers often whizz over the track creating a cloud of blinding sand to drive through, as you put your foot on the pedal. This completely unnerved Jamila Asif, who was the third woman participant at the 2017 Cholistan Rally. Often you need sheer guts to just commence the race.

The spotlight on me came at the 2016 Hub Rally cross when Major General Bilal Akbar, the Director General of Rangers presented the winning trophy to me in the Women's Category. He was in the limelight in those days and the leading national daily DAWN featured a story on the race, and since then has covered my performance in their Sports Section. The Express Tribune covered "Mr & Mrs Racer", which was cute! Thereafter BBC Asia came on the scene and did live interviews of the racers at Cholistan, with me in the opening frame as the first woman racer. All this did feel good, but I know I am a learner before the seasoned racers.



Our national company Pakistan State Oil put me on one of their 2017 desk calendar pages. They are celebrating national personalities who have shattered stereotypes: be it a woman truck driver or a disabled rickshaw driver or a gentleman riding a bike for a cause, or little me 'rallying for change', and others similarly placed. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, the Academy Award winning film maker has made a documentary sponsored by Gul Ahmed Textile's brand 'Ideas' to celebrate 2017 International Women's Day with four inspirational Pakistani women, yours truly being one of them. In conclusion, I will say that although on the tracks I have not faced discrimination being a woman, in fact being a known face to most having been there over a decade, I am greeted warmly and success wished by them. It is our children Meherwan and Dina who remark, "Dad is the racing champion and how come they are talking about you, Mum!" He is their hero and will be, and that keeps my feet on the ground!



*Tushna Patel considers being the Principal of Wendy School her profession and rally racing her passion. Equally important to her is the upbringing of her 15-year old son Meherwan and 13-year old daughter Dina, in both of whom she and her husband Ronnie rejoice.*

All images are of Tushna whilst competing in various rallies.

## A letter which created history, in its original form

Date: 02 - 07 - 1909  
Divisional Railway Officer,  
Sahibganj,

Respected Sirs,

I am arrive by passenger train Ahmedpur station and my belly is too much swelling with jackfruit. I am therefore went to privy. Just I doing the nuisance that guard making whistle blow or train to go off and I am running with lotaah in one hand and dhoti in the next when I am fall over and expose all my shocking to man and female women on platform. I am got leaved at Ahmedpur station. This too much bad, if passenger go to make dung that dam guard not wait train five minutes for him. I am therefore pray your honour to make big fine on that guard for public sake. Otherwise I am making big report to papers.

Your faithful Servant,  
Okhil Chandra Sen

Okhil Babu wrote this letter to the Sahibganj divisional railway officer in 1909. It is on display at the Railway Museum in New Delhi. It was also reproduced under the caption Travellers Tales in the Far Eastern Economic Review.

Why is this letter of historic value? - It led to the introduction of toilets in Indian trains!

## Secret Literary Gardens

by zehra bharucha

“The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man.” T S Eliot

*Like good bookshops everywhere,* libraries are places of ‘furtive self-education’, secret gardens full of wonders and treasure troves of discovery. They are refuges from the chaotic world outside, community hubs and places that create desires as well as satisfy them, stirring yearnings for books we didn’t even know exist until we stumble upon them.

Books have been central to our history – in particular, the history of ideas – and to human experience: first, painstakingly handcrafted and painted; then hot off revolutionary new printing presses; then sold as “penny dreadfuls” and sixpenny paperbacks; finally mass-marketed for a post-Second World War public hungry for entertainment and self-improvement; and now digitally available at the click of an icon. Books transport one to another world, to other possibilities, to the thrill of a new idea or insight, or just simply to a place of peace. Books, and by extension, bookshops and libraries, are places where, according to mark Twain, “you feel in some mysterious way that you are absorbing the wisdom contained in all the books through your skin, without even opening them.”

Miles of text have been devoted by writers to favourite bookshops and libraries. Here, in no particular order, are just a few that have enthralled, inspired and entertained bibliophiles the world over.

**The London Library**, founded in 1841 by celebrated author Thomas Carlyle, is today the largest independent lending library in the world. Containing over a million books and over seventeen miles of bookshelves located over seven interlocking buildings, its collection stands at over 1,000,000 titles, covering over 2,000 subjects in 55 different



The London Library

languages. The books range in date from 1500 to 2015 complemented by bound copies of over 2,000 periodicals dating from 1699 to today. Over 8000 volumes are added each year with a strong emphasis on the humanities. The collection is particularly strong in history, literature (including fiction), biography, art, philosophy, religion and related fields. With over 7000 members ranging from Dickens to Darwin and from Poet Laureates to Winston Churchill, the London Library has long been a haven for intellectuals, thinkers and lovers of books.

The collection also contains some of the Library’s oldest, rarest and arguably most interesting volumes: highlights include the first edition of Martin Luther’s 1522 translation of the New Testament into German as well as the Library’s first folio ‘He’ version of the King James Bible of 1611. All these books are freely available to library members. Not too many people can wander into their local library and request a copy of Henry VIII’s *Assertio septem sacramentorum aduersus Martinu[m] Lutheru[m]* (1521), the work which earned him the title ‘Defender of the Faith’!

Moving now to the other side of the world, nestled among the teeming hordes of South Bombay (or SoBo!) an imposing Gothic pile hosts the **J N Petit Library and Reading room**. This is one of Mumbai's oldest libraries and was founded in 1856. This library contains a collection of 150,000 books with new titles constantly being added. The library is also home to a rare gold leaf illustrated copy of Firdausi's *Shahnama*, dating back to the 11th Century. In addition a special room houses rare and priceless books and manuscripts on Zoroastrianism. Popular with students, academics and visitors alike, the reading room with its whirring fans, stained glass windows and recliner chairs seems to transport one back to a past where the only way to seek out information was to look for it in a book. This wonderfully airy gem of serenity and quiet is a refuge in a city that seems to run on steroids. The building is beautiful enough architecturally to warrant a visit. Add the Library and Reading room to the mix and this becomes a must-visit.

Not all book havens are old and imposing buildings dating back to a distant past. Books can be found everywhere book lovers congregate, including sun-kissed Greek islands. The Greek island of Santorini is home to **Atlantis Books**, perhaps rather unimaginatively named, but that's probably the only criticism one can find.

Many travellers find themselves wistfully wishing they could leave their old lives behind, settle down in the exciting place they have just discovered and lead a kinder, gentler life. Usually farming, keeping goats or chickens and long leisurely lunches figure heavily in these musings mostly carried out while under the influence of alcohol and exhilaration. Morning usually brings a healthy dose of reality. Fortunately for bibliophiles everywhere the 'morning after' never came for two American students who found themselves in the little town of Oia with nothing to read. Having exhausted the tourist shop rack of reading material and wandering home in a pleasantly alcohol fueled stupor, the two impulsively decided to open a bookshop and call it Atlantis Books.



J N Petit Library and Reading room

Santorini is one of the most beautiful of the many breathtaking Greek islands. A crescent-shaped island in the southern Aegean, it is a remnant of a gigantic volcanic eruption that took place around 1600 BC, sinking the center of a larger island into the sea – a catastrophic event that some believe to have been Plato's inspiration for the legend of Atlantis. Built on the steep hills that surround the water filled caldera, or crater, that was a result of this eruption, the villages of Santorini offer an unmatched view of the water, the blindingly white building and the blue domed churches that are so numerous. A newer tourist attraction can now be found at Atlantis books, enthusiastically run by an ever-changing staff of young people from all around the world. A walk along the centre of Oia will lead the traveller to a low wall painted with a decorative mural of books. Next to this a steep staircase leads down to a treasure cave of two rooms stuffed floor to ceiling with books – mostly in English, but also in Greek, French, Italian, German, Spanish, and Chinese. To maximise visual and aesthetic appeal books are displayed on tables as well as shelves. Among the many on offer there is an array of hardback first editions of English-language classics, among them Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. A closer look will reveal that tucked



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within the shop's white walls are the nooks and loft beds where the staff sleep – one of the beds perched right above the fiction section in the front room, hidden behind two hinged bookshelves. Unusual, quirky and beautiful, Atlantis Books serves as a testament to the vision of two young men who had a dream and were able to turn it into a reality.

Another American features prominently in the creation of the next treasure trove on this very incomplete list. **The Morgan Library and Museum** is yet another imposing and beautiful building in the heart of New York City. John Pierpont “J P” Morgan was an American financier and banker who dominated corporate finance

and industry in the late 19th and early 20th Century United States. In 1924 J P Morgan, Jr, gave his father's extraordinary



The Morgan Library and Museum

library to the public. As well as being the most influential financier in US history, Pierpont Morgan was also a voracious collector. He bought on an astonishing scale, collecting art objects in virtually every medium, including the rare books, manuscripts, drawings, prints, and ancient artefacts that are the core of The Morgan Library & Museum's holdings. He acquired illuminated, literary, and historical manuscripts, early printed books, and old master drawings and prints. To this core collection, he added the earliest evidence of writing as manifested in ancient seals, tablets, and papyrus fragments from Egypt and the Near East. Morgan also collected manuscripts and printed materials significant to American

history. Some of the highlights of the collection include The Crusader Bible, also known as the Morgan Picture Bible, the Maciejowski Bible, and the Shah 'Abbas Bible. It is one of the greatest medieval manuscripts in the Morgan and ranks as one of the greatest visualizations of Old Testament events ever made in 13th Century France. The Morgan Library & Museum is also the only institution in the world to possess three copies of the Gutenberg Bible, the first substantial book printed from movable type in the West of which only fifty copies survive today in varying states of completeness. A centerpiece of the collection is the sole surviving manuscript of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, transcribed and corrected under the direction of the poet. Other collection highlights are Charles Dickens's manuscript of *A Christmas Carol*, Henry David Thoreau's journals, Thomas Jefferson's letters to his daughter Martha, and manuscripts and letters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Lord Byron, Wilkie Collins, Albert Einstein, John Keats, Edgar Allen Poe, Abraham Lincoln, and John Steinbeck. The vision of the Morgan Library is to “celebrate creativity and the imagination, with the conviction that meaningful engagement with literature, music, history, and art enriches lives, opens minds, and deepens understanding.”

Passing from lofty buildings established by billionaire bankers to aristocrats straight from P G Wodehouse we move to the rarefied streets of Mayfair in London to **The Heywood Hill**, ‘the most beloved bookshop in London’. This small bookshop, owned by a Duke, recently celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the age of Amazon and e-retailers offering fantastical discounts, a bookshop run from a chandeliered sitting room of a town house that offers no sales or discounts – ever – seems an anomaly. Moreover, customers are unlikely to find the



Heywood Hill

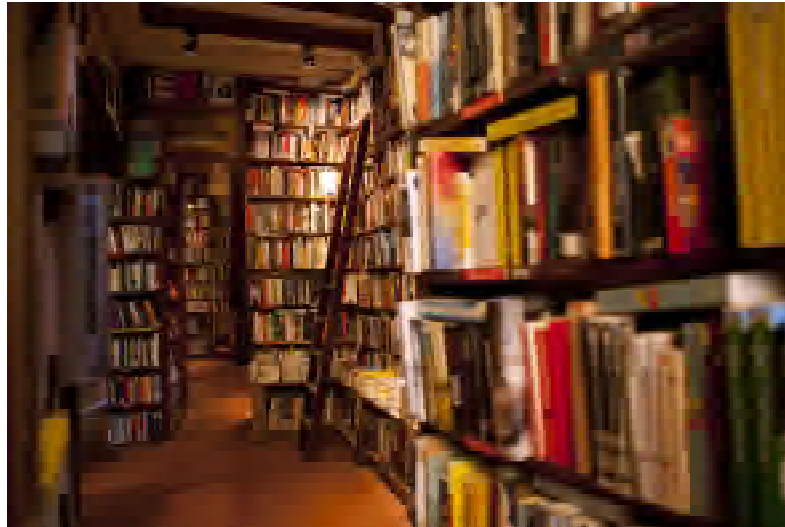
latest blockbusters or the next overhyped film tie-in on its shelves. Rather, Heywood Hill offers an almost bespoke service, much like the establishments at nearby Savile Row. Customer service is legendary and taken very seriously indeed. Consider “A Year in Books,” the Heywood Hill scheme wherein subscribers are sent a surprise parcel every month. Every month three of the booksellers personally choose titles for more than 700 customers, based on “reading consultations” in which they name books and authors they have most loved, or genres they can’t abide. No two people get the same. One is rather doubtful if Amazon.com is likely to be offering this service any time in the near future. It is this dedication to their craft, the unusual and interestingly uncommon books they offer and the legendary attention to detail that continue to make Heywood Hill, in the words of its Chairman, Nicky Dunne, “a very nourishing place to spend time.”

Finally, no article on bookshops could ever be complete without a mention of possibly the most famous of them all –

**Shakespeare and Company.**

Established in Paris in 1951 by American George Whitman at Kilometer Zero, the point at which all French roads begin, the shop was originally called Le Mistral. George changed it to the present name in April 1964 – on the four-hundredth anniversary of William Shakespeare’s birth – in honour of an American bookseller he admired, Sylvia Beach, who’d founded the original Shakespeare and Company in Paris in 1919. Her bookshop was a gathering place for the great expat writers of the time – Joyce, Hemingway, Stein, Fitzgerald, Eliot, Pound – as well as for leading French writers. During World War II Sylvia, who had started the bookshop with a loan, had been interned and the bookshop was closed. George fell in love with Paris and started buying so many books while he lived there that eventually he had to open a bookstore to store them all. Being a great admirer of Sylvia Beach he modelled his new store after her, carrying forward her original plans and inviting writers to eat, sleep and work there. The store was a success; so much so

that when Sylvia Beach went along to a reading at the store she allowed George to use the name of her shop and Shakespeare and Company was back in business again.



Exterior and interiors of Shakespeare and Company. Photo credit Bonnie Elliott. Photographs sent by Adam Biles, Events & Communications Manager.

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During his early life, George Whitman had travelled the world as a self-professed “tumbleweed”, after the dry, rootless plants that “drift in and out on the winds of chance.” Wishing in some way to repay and acknowledge the hospitality of all those people who had helped him George founded the bookshop with the motto “be not inhospitable to strangers lest they be angels in disguise”. From the very first day the store opened, writers, artists, and intellectuals were invited to sleep among the shop’s shelves and piles of books, on small beds that doubled as benches during the day. These ‘Tumbleweeds’ have only three things asked of them: read a book a day, help at the shop for a few hours a day, and produce a one-page autobiography. Thousands of these have now been collected and archived, including those by then unknown authors like Zadie Smith, David Simon, Edward St. Aubyn, Philip Pullman, Hanif Kureishi, Siri Hustvedt and Martin Amis, among many others.

Although George Whitman passed away on December 14, 2011 – two days after his 98th birthday – his bookshop, a Left Bank literary institution, continues to thrive under the control of his daughter Sylvia, as well as by the thousands of people who continue to read, write, and sleep at Shakespeare and Company.

“So please, oh please, we beg, we pray,  
Go throw your TV set away,  
And in its place you can install  
A lovely bookshelf on the wall.  
Then fill the shelves with lots of books.”

*Roald Dahl, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

Further reading:

Browse: *The World in Bookshops*, Ed. Henry Hitchings, 2017, Pushkin Press.

Library: *An Unquiet History*, Matthew Battles, 2003, Norton.

For Readers who may wish to visit these ‘literary gardens’ :

The London Library, 14 St James’s Square, London SW1Y 4LG. <http://www.londonlibrary.co.uk>

J N Petit Library, 5 Maharshi Dadhichi Marg, Azad Maidan, Fort, Mumbai 400001. <http://www.jnpetitinstitutue.org>

Atlantis Books, Oia, Santorini, Kyklades, Greece. <http://atlantisbooks.org>

The Morgan Library & Museum, 225 Madison Avenue, 36th St, New York 10016. <http://www.themorgan.org>

The Heywood Hill, 10 Curzon Street, London. <https://www.heywoodhill.com>

Shakespeare & Company, 37 Rue de la Bucherie, 75005 Paris. <https://shakespeareandcompany.com/>



Originally from Karachi, Zehra Bharucha has lived in Sydney, Australia for the last 15 years. When not working as an editor in the legal publishing business she can usually be found reading or cooking elaborate banquet style feasts for family and friends.

# Mr and Mrs Jinnah:

*The Marriage That Shook India* by Sheela Reddy

review by bachi karkaria

*A class of 12-year-olds was asked to write a short story after the teacher told them that a good one had to have religion, tears, aristocracy, sex and mystery. A boy chewed his pencil right through the period and, minutes before the bell rang, scribbled his offering. It went: "My God!" wept the duchess. "I'm pregnant! Whodunnit?"*

One can hardly link this joke, or any, with the formidable man who divided a subcontinent and created a narrative of hate that continued for 70 years and counting. But, Mr Jinnah did end up providing a script with all those elements. With not a little help from the other protagonist of this



Jinnah in his 40s

tale. 'Mrs Jinnah': this cold label too hardly fits the pampered, self-willed, smoke-ring-blowing, low-cut-blouse-wearing, emeralds-and-repartee-dripping, riveting daughter of Bombay's fabled Petit clan. Ruttie was also 16 years old when she fell in love with the 40-year-old barrister friend of her father.

Why did no book till now centre on the 'affair' which churned gossip across India's rich and powerful, led to a Parsi version of a fatwa and was followed by a Muslim vs Parsi newspaper controversy? As Sheela Reddy noted in an article on her daunting venture, "there are hardly any authentic details available, with almost nothing written by his contemporaries until long after both Jinnah and his wife, Ruttie, had died, and that too only passing references in other

people's autobiographies, fading memories of what was once a seminal event, basing their stories on what they had heard from others, or from their own prejudiced point of view."

True, the several Jinnah biographies had regurgitated the juicy morsels such as the

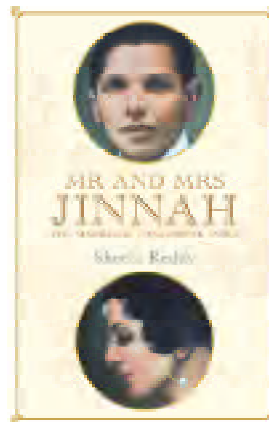


Ruttie, the teenager

clever barrister first getting his friend Sir Dinshaw to pompously expound on his liberal views on inter-community marriages and then asking for his teenaged daughter's hand; of Ruttie slipping out from palatial Petit Hall with just an umbrella tucked under her arm to get secretly married; or Jinnah leaving the Governor's dining table when Lady Willingdon disapproved of his wife's barely-there dress.

All the letters between them had mysteriously disappeared, not a trace to be found even in the national archives of Pakistan where there was only one letter from Ruttie, a tender, touching lament for the love they once had, begging her estranged husband to think of her as 'the flower he had plucked' and not what he had trod upon. Jinnah was too busy and congenitally disinclined, but Ruttie loved writing letters: long and racy, written with the recently invented fountain pen, on

clever barrister first getting his friend Sir Dinshaw to pompously expound on his liberal views on inter-community marriages and then asking for his teenaged



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**Product Dimensions:** 23.4 x 16 x 4.4 cm

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special monogrammed paper, during the long time they spent apart during their two-year courtship and 10-year marriage. As Reddy despaired, "How was one to investigate, with the letters gone and these two resolutely taking their secrets to the grave with them, what had gone wrong between them, and why? I nearly gave up."

But then serendipity always steps in to lift a researcher's spirits. One day, idling in Delhi's Nehru Memorial and Museum Library, she chanced upon a forgotten trove of Ruttie's letters. There were around a hundred pages in all, some of them written from her Petit Hall, and some from imposing

Petit retreats in Poona and Mahabaleshwar. There were others from 'South Court', a short distance from her father's palace, which became her so-called home. These letters had been written to Padmaja — Sarojini Naidu's elder daughter.

A close friend of Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, Padmaja, who also became Governor of West Bengal, spent her last years actually living in an annexe behind the Nehru library while she set up the archives. As a starter, she

had contributed the massive correspondence between the Naidu family and their wide network of friends and acquaintances.

A great deal of Ruttie in 'Mr And Mrs Jinnah' is revealed through this cache. Sarojini, the poet who became one of the most mellifluous voices of the Home Rule movement, was often a house guest at Petit Hall. The well-read and romantic teenager poured out her feelings to her. She found in her a kindred soul, Sarojini too, a generation earlier, had defied conventional Bengali society to marry the South Indian medical officer in the service of the Nizam. And Mrs Naidu, like thousands, was

besotted by the brilliant M A Jinnah. By extension, her daughter Padmaja, then also 15, became the recipient and sounding board of Ruttie's floridly expressed emotions, often couched in intellectual generalisations. This often one-sided correspondence inexplicably stopped a year before her death at 28, and when Padmaja lay wracked by TB in a sanatorium. From these letters emerge the woman behind the wealthy, socialite who held every man in thrall: warm, spontaneous, witty; passionate alike over beauty, dogs, cats, horses, poetry, Paris and politics. In them we hear about her fond, and later unbearable, exasperation with "J", as she called her workaholic, middle-aged husband, and her differences with his sister, Fatima. Ruttie also wrote extensively to the younger Leilamani, and was a close friend of the two Naidu boys as well.

However, there was no epistolary window to the inner Jinnah. His letters to acquaintances and colleagues at the Bar and in politics were all dry, short and business-like. Says Reddy, "They yielded nothing, blocking all doors to the inner him. Even by the standards of his too proper and formal Victorian contemporaries, Jinnah was the most unself-revelatory subject I could have picked to write on."

She took a trip to Karachi, the city where he was born and returned to die, "to bring me nearer to the Jinnah walled up behind his stony fortified walls. Most Pakistanis I met seemed to assume that there was nothing of the personal Jinnah to be found in Pakistan. He had presumably left his heart along with his personal life behind in Bombay, where his wife was buried. But here, in the university library, locked up in a special hall in the basement dedicated to



Padmaja



Leilamani

him, I found what I was looking for, in the books that he had carried away from his Bombay home. Hidden in the pages of these now antique volumes, in tiny notes and lines, was a different Jinnah, confiding his thoughts and feelings by means of a blue pencil underlining sentences that resonated for him. These margin notations in his books, acquired and read when he was a student in London and later, during the troubled political years which coincided with his marriage, had somehow escaped Pakistani historians, hungry though they have been to uncover the man behind the politician, afraid perhaps to face the human person behind the myths.”

‘Mr and Mrs Jinnah’ unfolds against the backdrop of the independence movement and of Jinnah’s meteor blazing across it. According to his biographer Kanji Dwarkadas, it was his wife’s death more than Gandhiji’s Congress which took the fire out of the comet’s tail, and left him embittered, egocentric and hypersensitive to any criticism.

Reddy sketches a detailed portrait of an amazing young woman, often carried away by the romantic literature she’d fed on, but as deeply influenced by the works of political thinkers. A woman who had a mind, and spoke it, her own intellect as much as her privileged status making her unintimidated by authority. Before ‘offending’ the Governor’s wife with her low-cut dress, she had taken on the Lord Chelmsford. Making a dramatic entry into Simla’s Viceregal Lodge in a short, sleeveless blouse and diaphanous sari, Ruttie had refused to curtsy but greeted the lofty Viceroy with a namaste after shaking hands with him. Chelmsford, refusing to ignore the ‘slight’, patronized her with ‘Mrs Jinnah, your husband has a great political future, you must not spoil it. In Rome do as the Romans do.’ Her immediate retort was ‘That is exactly what I did, your Excellency. In India I greeted you like the Indians do.’

Her standing out among the pro-British Parsis was even more marked during the

meeting to decide on the contentious memorial for the retiring governor, Willingdon, which was opposed most vehemently by Jinnah. Outside the hall, in the Elphinstone Circle Gardens, five months pregnant, she impetuously jumped on a soap box and declared ‘We are not slaves’ to tumultuous applause. Reddy writes, “At the best of times Ruttie was hard to cow down, and here she was charged up and exhilarated by her first foray into political action.” She retorted ‘Mr Vincent, first of all you have no right to stop me as I have a right to speak as a citizen of Bombay. Secondly, whatever you may do, I am not going to move from here.’ “Instead of sending a police contingent with their batons to break up the impromptu meeting, (Vincent) ordered that the water hoses be turned on the gathering. Ruttie was not spared, but ... she still refused to budge from her makeshift platform continuing to address the crowd with even more fervour. The crowd, all male was spellbound, rooted to the spot despite the spray. It was their wildest dream come true ... . Half a century later, a Pakistani historian, Aziz Beg, rhapsodized, “As she was completely wet, her curvaceous figure looked all the more attractive ...” Oblivious of the male gaze, Ruttie went on with her speech almost until the meeting inside the hall broke up. According to Kanji Dwarkadas, she was sitting on the steps of the town hall smoking a cigarette by the time the men emerged from the meeting.”

But then with an equally cavalier disregard she arrived with a proudly packed lunch for her husband projected as the greatest Muslim leader – ham sandwiches.

Parsi readers might sense a weary *deja vu* in the community’s violent reaction to the news of this unlikely marriage. Ruttie had wanted to ‘wake it up’ from its unfashionable prejudices, but became the object of a nightmare. She maintained a disdain towards this, even in her intimate correspondence, but it was her father’s head that the high priests and BPP trustees demanded in lieu of the couple’s.

“Although held on a Sunday and no outsiders were invited, the meeting of the



Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Ruttie's uncle and head o BPP

Parsi priests (in the Dadyseth Atash Behram) to 'express its disapprobation of marriages of Parsi women with non-Parsis' was widely reported including for the first time in the British-run Times of India... . Sensing that the time was ripe for bringing the community back to the basics, they advocated a sweeping change in the lifestyles of the elite, especially the way they were bringing up their daughters... . Few could have missed

the message in the priestly injunction: Parsi girls out of purdah for almost a century were to be put back under the same restraints as girls from other communities. They were to be deprived of their English tutors and dancing teachers, their riding and shopping trips and garden parties... ." It was nothing short of being told to lock up their daughters at home until they were safely married in the old, arranged way ... .

"The priests set down a severe penalty not just for the girl who had dared marry outside the community, but her parents as well... . In the resolution, the priests ... threatened to excommunicate them ... . In such a case no Parsi priest would be allowed to perform any religious ceremony for them, including the death rites..."

At this first meeting they "had carefully couched their injunctions as recommendations. They could not forget that they were, after all, dependent on these fabulously rich Parsis who had in the past bribed their way into being permitted to bring their foreign brides into the fire temples. But now after the relentless press

campaign, ... they decided to crack the whip on those in their own profession ... even priests who unknowingly ended up in a Parsi home where the culprit (the girl or her family member) was present would be severely punished. The penalty for not leaving without conducting the ceremony he'd been called for was excommunication for the priest too."

Reddy goes on to describe in great detail the greater witch hunt at the meeting of the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, exacerbated by the rivalry between the two Parsi baronets. Sir Dinshaw Petit and the fourth Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Lady Petit's cousin who had inherited her father's title and estates. The latter was universally acknowledged as the community's preeminent leader.

But despite the upheaval it caused, the temperamental mismatch and the strain of leadership in those roiling political waters proved too much. The most dramatic marriage of the age disintegrated. And so did each of the protagonists. The Naidu correspondence and Kanji's record reveal the depth of Ruttie's debilitating depression which unrelentingly led to her death from an overdose of sleeping pills. As for Jinnah, "according to Kanji, her death left such a deep wound that he changed completely from a 'cheerful, pleasant and social friend with a dry sense of humour' to someone 'egocentric and sensitive to criticism. He reacted to his wife's death so severely that he not only never mentioned her name ever again but became so bitter ... . This is the correct analysis of Jinnah's political bitterness which lasted throughout the nineteen years he lived after his wife's death ...'. If Ruttie had lived, Kanji was convinced, Jinnah would never have turned communal."

The book ends with the daughter the couple had brought into a marriage which as fraught as the political atmosphere – and whom they had neglected to such an extent that they had not even given her a name.

Dina, then nine, gave herself that of her maternal grandmother, Lady Petit who had

stepped in to take charge of the now motherless child.

Then the wheel came full circle. Sir Dinshaw's anger, and discomfiture, found a reincarnation in Jinnah's predicament when the daughter of this rigid Muslim leader chose to marry the Parsi Christian Neville Wadia. He threatened to disown her, but like her mother, this only made her more adamant. "He collapsed under the emotional strain. 'For two weeks,' one of his drivers recounted to Urdu writer Sadat Hasan Manto, 'he would not receive visitors. He would just keep smoking his cigars and pacing up and down in his room. He must have walked hundreds of miles in those two weeks.'"

'Mr and Mrs Jinnah' is impressively researched in its swathe across the political, the social and the personal. However sharper editing would have tightened the narrative and excised the often-annoying repetitions.



Jinnah with his daughter Dina



Jinnahbhai Poonja, Jinnah's father

mine. The higher you set your ideal the  
lower it falls  
I have loved you my darling, as it is given  
to few men to be loved. I only because you that  
our tragedy which commenced with love  
should also end with it.  
- Darling Good night & good bye  
I had written to you at Paris  
with the intention of posting the  
letter here. But I felt that I must  
rather write to you  
afresh from the place  
of my heart.

Ruttie's last letter to Jinnah before she died



## Remembering Dali & Shirin (Kermani) Tata



Sir Dinshaw Petit, Ruttie's father



Lady Petit, Ruttie's mother



*Bachi Karkaria is an author, columnist of The Times of India, and regular panelist on news channels. She created and edited some of the country's most innovative papers. Her specializations are urban and social change. She is festival director of the prestigious Times of India Litfest, Mumbai. Her latest book 'In Hot Blood: The Nanavati Trial That Shook India' will be out end-April.*

“...May the Wise Lord listen,  
in Whose glory I have taken  
counsel with good thinking.  
May He instruct me in  
His best intentions.”

Yasna 45.6  
*Inslar translation*



The World Zoroastrian Organisation