

What's On

Monthly Newsletter of Karachi Zarthosti Banu Mandal

MARCH 2014

Fareeza Doctor's Account

On Zoroastrian Return to Roots



In picture above: Fareeza is seen towards the centre in polka-dot T-shirt

“In numbers Parsis are beneath contempt, but in contribution, beyond compare.” These words were spoken by Mahatma Gandhi, which the Return to Roots programme did a beautiful job of targeting. It selected a group of 16 friendly, energetic and enthusiastic young Zoroastrians from across the globe for its inaugural tour at the end of last year. The Return to Roots Fellows explored Zoroastrian India by visiting historical and religious sites across Bombay and Gujarat. The trip was extremely memorable and reinforced the idea of returning to your roots and reviving the community.

The tour started with a visit to the oldest Agiary of Bombay, the Seth Banaji Limji Agiary, followed by travelling and dining at some of India's finest Parsi locations and experiencing Parsi culture first hand. The most memorable places visited included, amongst many others, the Bombay House and the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, where personalised tours of the famous Tata family and their history and accomplishments was given; the B.D. Petit Parsi General Hospital; the Dadar Athornan Institute where religious and secular education is provided to children of the priestly class; the Doongarwadi; the Ratan Tata Institute that provides employment to Parsi ladies who show their creativity in the outfits they make, such as children's dresses, embroidery and restoring saris and garas.

Additionally, there was a Heritage Walk during which we witnessed Parsi-influenced architecture in Bombay and covered the Bhikha Behram Well, a sacred site for the Parsis that generates sweet water even though it is situated close to the Arabian Sea and quenched the thirst of thousands of people when Bombay was hit by drought in the eighteenth century.

There was also a visit to the Prince of Wales Museum to learn about the Cyrus Cylinder, a symbol of religious tolerance and diversity approximately 2,600 years old and often referred to as the first bill of human rights.

The Gujarat part of the tour proved to be the highlight. Visiting the two Atash Behrams in Surat and Navsari, and the beautiful, powerful, yet breathtakingly calm and serene Iranshah Atash Behram at Udvada was most memorable. The arrival of our forefathers in Sanjan to flee persecution in Iran and trying to save our religion, culture, heritage and tradition, and adapting to the norms of the Indians showed how passionate they were back then. This renewed our belief that the religion will be kept alive by future generations.

All in all, this trip was fantastically organised. From accommodation, to travel, to dining, to meeting new people and making friendships for life, it is the most talked about tour in the Zoroastrian community, and rightfully so. Knowledge about our ancient religion has increased manifold; experienced scholars have taught us the importance of our rich culture, heritage and traditions; they have taught us the meaning of our prayers and why it is important for us to pray in the manner we have been taught to pray. There are emotional, spiritual, cultural and traditional triggers pulled on each part of this wonderful tour that have broadened our perception of Zoroastrianism, that we are not a dying community and are here to stay.

Return to Roots is a regular programme, and there will be more tours in 2014 and beyond. We hope for more participants from Pakistan on the next tour, so do keep checking the website www.zororoots.org to apply.