



Zoroastrian
RETURN TO ROOTS

Donor Progress Report | **April 2014**



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Welcome



From December 23, 2013 to January 6, 2014, 16 Zoroastrian youth from around the world made a journey to return, reconnect, and revive their Zoroastrian roots. For the first time this opportunity has been made possible by the Return to Roots program. Started in 2012 by a small group of passionate volunteers, and supported by Parzor, this inaugural journey coincided with the World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay, India. The success of this first trip is apparent not only in the transformational experiences of the participants but the overwhelming support of the community. This report will provide the details of that success and the plans for the program's growth. We hope that after reading these pages you will feel as inspired and motivated to act as we have. The growth of a vibrant Zoroastrian future needs a strong connection to our roots, to support Return to Roots please email us at contact@zororoots.org Website: <http://zororoots.org>

Sincerely,

The Roots Team

Acknowledgement

Constructing a program like Return to Roots requires a sense of mission and commitment, optimism, and many hours of hard work. All we can offer to those many volunteers and believers that have built this program, is our grateful thanks and the hope that reward comes most meaningfully in its success.

We take the opportunity, in presenting the first report of the Return to Roots program, to thank our many donors; the Zoroastrian Associations around the world and the individuals who have contributed with generosity, for their time, their resources and their good will to go that extra mile to assist.

Among those that actually made things happen, credit must go first to the team that built the Roots program: Dinsha, Rosheen, Kaiyan and Shireen. Without them, nothing would have been possible. They were joined for a while by Setare and more recently by Shahyan.

Next, and in no particular order, we would like to thank TBI, the travel agency that assisted with logistics, in particular Hutokshi Marker, Kurush Charna, Homa Mistry, and Bomi Patel for air travel.

Arzan Wadia who runs the Roots website for us, assisted with the Gujarat report, and continues to be a valuable resource as we develop the program in North America.

Rukshana Nanji and Dan Sheffield, both outstanding scholars, gave freely of their time, wisdom and learning, to enhance the experience of Roots.

Marzban Giara for the information shared on Parsi monuments and buildings, and the enthusiasm for the Roots program.

Donn Doongaji and Farokh Subedar, for opening the doors of Bombay house to us, and to Donn for explaining with all his year of commitment, the Tata philosophy and ethics of doing business, and how they are embedded in Zoroastrian values.

Shernaz Acharya and Ketu Mehta for the tour of the Rattan Tata Institute (RTI) and the demonstration of the finest of Parsi culture; food and embroidery.

Homa and Aban Petit for welcoming us to the tour of the Parsi General Hospital, and the impressive humanitarian work being done for the community within its green and gracious premises.

Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia for making the visit to the Dadar Athornan Madressa such an instructive one, and to the young priests who inspired a recognition of how vital a role they play as keepers and guardians of the flame, in the Atash Behrams, Agiaries and Dar-e-mehers of the Zoroastrian faith all over the world.

Homi Khusrokhan, guide and mentor to the program, is one of our most valued supporters, always available to reach out within his vast and high powered Zoroastrian network to bring the best and the brightest to work with Roots.

Minoo Shroff for supporting Roots and encouraging its focus on entrepreneurship.

Keki Daruwalla, helped with his usual graciousness to navigate the officialdom in Delhi, no mean feat, and assistance that Roots will always need.

In Gujarat, were it not for the help of Yazdi Karanjia, Cyrus Dotiwalla, Mahrukh Chichgar and their delightful families, we would have not have laughed as much or learnt what we did. The

Munshi family, at Munshi farms generously provided us a glimpse of rural, Zoroastrian life that indicated how deep our roots go in the Indian homeland.

In Udwada, the glimpse of Vada Dastur Khurshed Dastoor's house opposite the Iranshah took us back to the solemnity and history of this most holy place for all Zoroastrians.

In Navsari, had it not been for Bezad and Bharati, and Navaz Bamji our experience of the place, how to make Kustis, and Meherjirana library would have been far less informative and enjoyable.

Dinshaw Mehta, Chair of the BPP was one of our first and strongest supporters, and the BPP has been our most generous donor. We hope the partnership will continue as Roots develops into the future.

Jimmy Mistry and his family welcomed us into their home in Bombay and vacation camp in Lonavala and treated us to the finest of Parsi hospitality and inspired the Fellows to dream big.

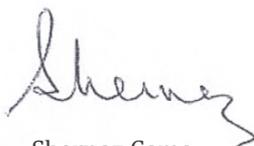
Katayun Kapadia, the President of FEZANA provided us the time, space and support to ensure Roots was well understood and embedded within the FEZANA networks, and continues to be one of our most helpful supporters as we build Roots in North America in partnership with FEZANA. Others who have helped in this partnership include Sarosh Maneckshaw, Aban Rustomjee and Farrokh Mistree. Also assisting from North America were ZAGNY and ZSO, and we look forward to a continued association with them. To all of them our combined thanks.

For Europe and Pakistan we would like to thank Darayus Motivala and the representatives of WZO and Shaveer Behramjee of the Nusserwanjee Trust who sponsored participants to the program.

To Bapsy Dastur and Sarah Stewart we continue to look for enthusiasm and endorsement of what we set out to achieve, in both entrepreneurship and scholarship.

Finally, to our friends, Khojeste Mistree and Firoza Punthakey Mistree in gratitude for the many hours of talk and hospitality, education and teaching that assisted in building the architecture of the program and its achievement. And to Khojeste in particular, for the knowledge imparted to us on the history of Parsi Bombay, and the religion and rituals of Zoroastrianism.

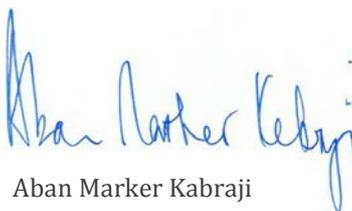
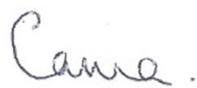
As we move on to Roots 2 in the winter of 2014, when Track B will be launched, we hope that all those who have accompanied us on the journey of what one participant called, transformational change, will stay with us and continue to build what we believe is one of the most significant and far reaching movements the generation of the future have launched on behalf of the Zoroastrian Community: a Return to Roots, and beyond.



Shernaz Cama

Delhi

April 2014



Aban Marker Kabraji

Bangkok

About

Return to Roots is a youth-initiated program designed to strengthen community identity amongst Zoroastrian youth the world over. The idea of a Zoroastrian Return to Roots Program was born out of the increasing disconnect between those Zoroastrians in the diaspora with their ancestral communities in Iran and India. It is a unique means of fostering community links and identity by taking small groups of youth on trips to explore their religious, social and cultural heritage.

Vision

Return Zoroastrians to their roots.

- Run a ten-day trip to India, visiting Mumbai and Gujarat.
- Visit a combination of History, Culture, Religion and Community sights.
- Meet with Zoroastrian academics, researchers and local guides.
- Discover ways in which one can be part of the larger Zoroastrian community.

Reconnect Zoroastrians to their identity.

- Bring together young Zoroastrians from across the world to recognize their shared commonalities and traditions.
- Participate in educational and community-service oriented activities, which reinforce and reinvigorate their community links & identity.
- Discover one's own personal connection to Zoroastrian values & traditions.

Revive the Zoroastrian community.

- Help realize opportunities for the Zoroastrian Diaspora in India.
- Encourage Zoroastrians to take active roles in community development through Zoroastrian Entrepreneurship.
- Support and encourage local Zoroastrian Enterprises.
- Take advantage of and contribute to Zoroastrian Academia, Music, Art, Oral Traditions and Business.

The Fellows



Farzin Avari
Georgia, USA

Farzin is a graduate student in the Masters of Arts in Teaching Chemistry Program at Kennesaw State University. She lives in the Atlanta area where she has been teaching Sunday School for the past 3 years. Teaching "her kids" is both the greatest challenge and the most rewarding part of her life.

My favorite part of the trip was for once Zoroastrianism was the focus of our lives and experiences."

Farzin's favorite part of the trip was meeting new people, because everyone had a unique story to tell and each story showcased immense passion. Oh and the mouth-watering food! Can't forget the delicious Parsi food.



Binaifer Daji
New York, USA

Binaifer was born and brought up in Dubai, U.A.E. After finishing her Bachelors in Information Technology and MBA in Finance, she started working in Finance & Management Consulting. She is also a Certified Management Accountant (CMA) and Certified Financial Management (CFM). In 2008, she moved to the USA and is currently living in New York City, where she works as a Finance Manager at American Express. Binaifer loves to help the Parsi community & organizes meetups for the youth. She also helps out with the Zoroastrian Women's International Network (ZWIN). In her spare time she loves dancing and playing the piano.

Binaifer's favorite parts of the Roots trip was learning all about the Doongerwadi and experiencing her first World Zoroastrian Congress.



Fareeza Doctor
Karachi, Pakistan

Fareeza was born in Karachi, Pakistan. She studied in Karachi, Pakistan, from where she did her BA and then moved to England to study law. Upon returning to Karachi, she works as an in-house legal counsel at United Bank Limited.

Her favorite part of the Roots trip was visiting and praying at the Iranshah Atash Behram at night with no lights and only divas; stepping on the banks of the Varoli River in Sanjan where our ancestors first landed; the Dadar Athornan Institute where children of the priestly class are provided religious and secular education and are trained to be priests; Jimmy Mistry’s house; and the Munshi Farms where there was lots of fun, entertainment, and laughter.

“I have never been so proud and lucky to be a Zoroastrian.”



Bezan Irani
Vancouver, Canada

Bezan was born in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., where he lived until the age of 5, before moving to Toronto, Ontario. After 5 years in Toronto, his family moved to Vancouver, BC, where he now resides. Bezan received his Electrical Red Seal from BCIT in Vancouver and now works for Alpine West Systems Electrical while maintaining his own electrical company. In his spare time, he enjoys playing hockey and volleyball, as well as coaching.

For Bezan, the most unforgettable experience during the Roots trip was walking on the sand banks in Nargol where our ancestors first landed from Iran.

“We can’t let ourselves be so distant from one another. Together, with all of our resources, we can build a much stronger community.”



Kurush Italia
Los Angeles, USA

Kurush grew up and lives in Los Angeles. He studied Mechanical Aerospace Engineering at the University of California San Diego and is currently an Electro-Mechanical Project Engineer. In his spare time he enjoys sports, DJing (he also DJs events in the local Zoroastrian community), and long walks on the beach.

Kurush’s favorite part of the Roots trip was meeting new people and seeing the place where our ancestors landed in Nargol.

“We have to make a better effort to keep the customs going and to have our community in our mind everyday.”



Sasan Jahanian USA

Sasan was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and grew up in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He earned his B.Sc. in Biochemistry at Temple University and recently completed his Masters in Biology at CSU Bakersfield while developing a non-profit outreach program providing oral hygiene education to rural and low income families in California. In his spare time, he heads out to the coast or mountains for hiking and scenic photography.

His favorite part of the Roots trip was sitting in the Udvada Iranshah Atash Behram during the Nirangdin Ceremony, as well as the heritage tour.



Semira Jahanian San Francisco, USA

Semira grew up in Philadelphia and currently lives in San Francisco. She received her Business degree from Temple University, majoring in Accounting. She worked for Deloitte & Touché for about 4.5 years in external audit, and then attended Golden Gate University where she received her MS in Taxation. Semira currently works as a Senior Internal Auditor for Blackhawk Network, a subsidiary of Safeway. She is very adventurous, and has most recently gone skydiving.

“The program has fostered a sense of belonging to a global community, educated on the religion, while forging long-lasting friendships.”

One of Semira’s most memorable parts of the Roots trip was the heritage tour; it was amazing learning about India and how the Parsis have had so much influence on the community.



Rustom Kapadia London, UK

Rustom was born in London, England. Currently finishing his Bachelor’s degree in economics, Rustom also works in the aviation industry. Upon completion, he hopes to enter into the world of commercial aviation as an airline pilot. Having thoroughly enjoyed the RTR trip, Rustom hopes to continue work, representing the organisation to his UK counterparts.

“Understanding my religion on a cultural, political, and social level gives me a great sense of pride and ambition to become more involved in the community.”

Rustom feels that the Roots trip was an experience of a lifetime. He had the opportunity to meet people and garnered a deep respect for the Zoroastrian faith, its practices, and achievements.



Jehangir Madon
New York, USA

“I think we are a strong group and it would be easy to work with any of the people in this group to achieve goals.”

Being born and having half his formative years in Bombay, Jehangir has strong connections to India. He did his BA in geography and economics at Rutgers in New Jersey. Jehangir works hard and prays hard along with his father for the community during the Mukta prayers and whenever priestly services are needed in the New York area. When not doing the above, Jehangir can be found biking, travelling, and even partying proudly in his Sadra spreading knowledge about Zoroastrianism among his NYC social circles.

One of Jehangir’s favorite parts of the Roots trip was witnessing the Nirangdin ceremony at the Iranshah Atash Behram in Udvada.



Armeen Mistry
Minnesota, USA

Armeen was born in southern California and grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She earned degrees in Journalism and Economics from the University of Missouri and is currently pursuing her law degree at the University of Minnesota. Armeen makes annual visits to Bombay to visit family, and has made presentations to high school and college classmates about Zoroastrianism. She enjoys hiking, looking at maps, and learning to be a Minnesotan (i.e., listening to *A Prairie Home Companion*).

Her favorite part of the Roots trip was examining some of the Avestan texts at the Meherji Rana library in Navsari, Gujarat.



Vandad Pourbahrami
Vancouver, Canada

“Meeting other young Zoroastrians helped remind me that there are others like myself around the world.”

Vandad grew up on planet Earth – more specifically Vancouver, Canada. Vandad has lived in Canada, USA, Australia, and the UK and has traveled to Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia to-date. Vandad studied Business & Finance at McGill University and works as a Management Consultant for Accenture. In his spare time, Vandad enjoys playing basketball, long distance running, and spending time with his 4 nieces and nephews. In the Zoroastrian community, Vandad has been involved with the North American Youth Congresses and Sports Olympics.

Vandad’s favourite memory of the Return to Roots program was the tour of the Zoroastrian monuments (and influences) in South Bombay and visiting the historical Udvada Fire Temple.



Jennifer Rostami Indiana, USA

Jenny currently lives in Indiana and is pursuing her MBA at Purdue. She is involved with ZAGNY, as she previously lived in NYC. She currently enjoys painting in her free time, reading, friends, cooking and zumba!

Her favorite part of the Roots trip was being with such a fantastic group that became like brothers and sisters. Her favorite place was hands down Udvada.

“I now have a substantive understanding of our practices and symbolisms.”



Anahita Sidhwa California, USA

Anahita Sidhwa was born in Northern California, spent her formative years in Karachi, Pakistan, and has lived in Southern California for the past 15 years. She has a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from University of California Irvine and a M.S. in Computational and Mathematical Engineering from Stanford University. Currently she is working and residing in Los Angeles.

By participating in the first Return to Roots trip, Anahita learned a lot about her religion and heritage. She is looking forward to getting more involved in the Zoroastrian community in Southern California.



Burzin Tampal Toronto, Canada

Burzin Tampal was born in Dubai and grew up in Toronto, Canada. He studied Biology, Health Studies, and Psychology at the University of Toronto. He is affiliated with the local Zoroastrian community, ZSO, where he has been an active member since childhood.

“I have gained two of the most invaluable assets: knowledge and friendship.”

His most memorable experience from the Return to Roots program was getting to meet new Zoroastrians from around the world and participating in various activities/events that provided insight into our heritage.



Cumbysis Tampal

Toronto, Canada

“This program is necessary to give people in the community that awareness of what and who we are, and also to give Zoroastrians that sense of being on a team.”

Cumbysis is a 2008 graduate from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering (Hons); Mechatronics. Cumbysis was born in Dubai and grew up in Toronto, Canada, since the age of 6. He is currently working in the mining industry as a Mechanical Engineer and is also considering further education to pursue his MBA in a few years. As a devoted member of the community, Cumbysis has spent many years alongside his fellow Zarthushti peers in Toronto by being involved and taking part in the Toronto 1st Zoroastrian Scouts Group for over 20 years. Cumbysis has also contributed to the community by volunteering his time at the Darbe Mehr for various events and occasions including the Sunday Religion Classes.

The most memorable parts of the Roots trip for Cumbysis were the tour of the Taj Hotel, dinner at Jimmy Mistry’s house, and visiting the Iranshah Atash Behram in Udvada.



Diana Vania

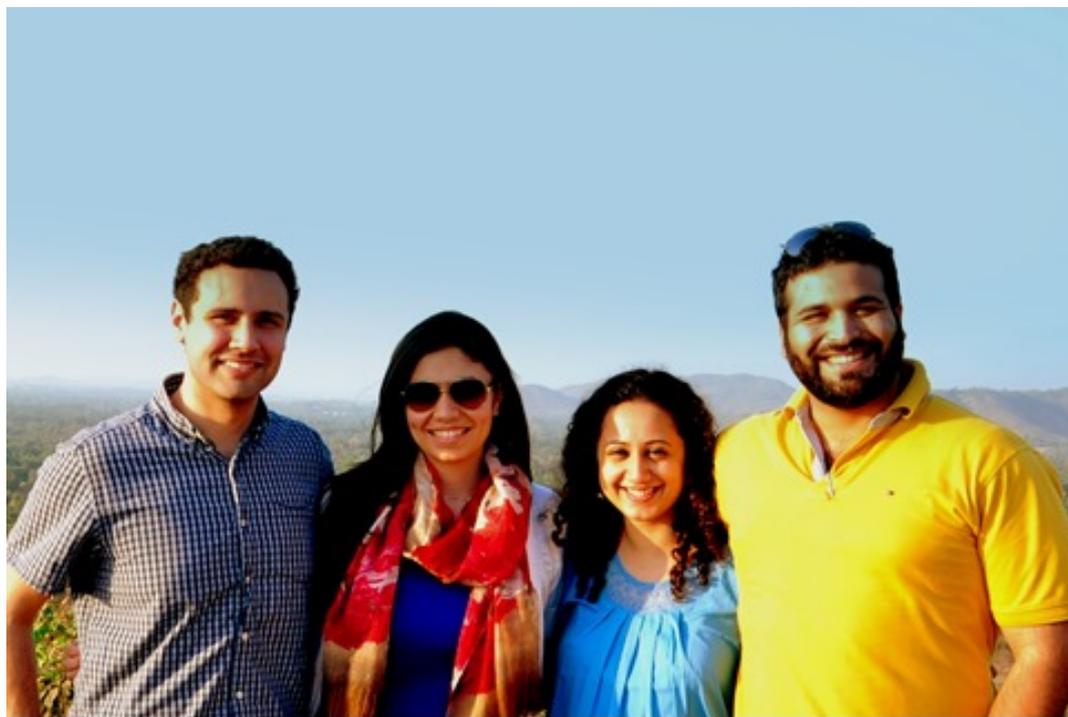
Toronto, Canada

“The RTR program is essential to maintain our Zoroastrian values, ideas, and traditions for future generations.”

Diana was born and raised in Toronto, Canada. She is currently pursuing her Masters of Science in Global Health and is interested in health and social policy in India. Diana has volunteered for the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario since she was young and has represented FEZANA at the United Nations.

Her favorite part of the Roots program was meeting like-minded Zoroastrian youth from around the world and learning about the Parsis’ impact on India.

RTR Core Team



Dinsha Mistree, Rosheen Kabraji, Shireen Havewala and Kaiyan Mistree. (left to right)

Shireen Havewala, Representative India, UAE, Singapore

Shireen was born in Mumbai, India, making her the only “local” on the project. Shireen completed her undergraduate in political science at St. Xavier’s College in Mumbai before migrating west where she acquired an MA in International Studies at Diplomacy at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Following a stint where she worked in Washington D.C., Shireen returned to Mumbai to work at Gateway House. She is currently a senior officer and project manager with the Royal Bank of Scotland Foundation, India.

Dinsha Mistree, Representative US, Canada

Dinsha was born in Houston, Texas and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. He studied at MIT, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he picked up a S.B. and an S.M. in political science. He currently is doing his Ph.D. at Princeton University in New Jersey. He is an active member of ZAPANJ.

Rosheen Kabraji, Representative UK, Europe, Pakistan, Iran

Rosheen was born in Karachi, Pakistan before moving to London, United Kingdom. Rosheen has a B.Sc. in Anthropology from University College London and an M.Phil. in International Relations from the University of Cambridge. Rosheen is currently Deputy Head Asia Program at Chatham House, a foreign policy think tank, in London. Rosheen was also involved in the exhibition ‘The Everlasting Flame’ at SOAS in London (October-December 2013).

Kaiyan Mistree, Representative Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong

Kaiyan was born in Houston, Texas and very soon thereafter migrated to Mumbai, India, where he studied through high school. After spending a year interning in Karachi, Pakistan, Kaiyan enrolled at The Ohio State University, where he graduated B.S. in architecture. After graduating, Kaiyan returned to India where he worked for Architect Hafeez Contractor. In his spare time, Kaiyan is an avid sailor.

Dr. Shernaz Cama, Co-Chairperson Return to Roots

Shernaz is the co-Chairperson of Return to Roots. She is an Associate Professor at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University. Shernaz has edited and authored several books and has assisted international senior scholars in their research projects on Zoroastrianism. In 1999, Shernaz was invited by UNESCO to initiate a project on the Preservation and Promotion of Parsi Zoroastrian Culture and Heritage. As honorary Director of UNESCO Parzor she guides researches in Zoroastrian culture and demography. Shernaz has been awarded the Mazda Education Foundation Award and Mancherji Edalji Joshi Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Zoroastrian community.

Aban Marker Kabraji, Co-Chairperson Return to Roots

Aban is the co-Chairperson of Return to Roots. She is from Quetta, Pakistan and Bangkok, Thailand. She is the Regional Director for Asia at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. She has been married for 35 years to Kairas Kabraji, has three children and loves dogs.

Return: 2013-14 Trip Summary

Day 1	Arrival in India
Day 2	Banaji Limji Agairy, Jimmy Boy, Tata's Bombay House
Day 3	Bombay Heritage Walk, Prince of Wales Museum
Day 4	Taj Heritage Tour, Dadar Parsi Colony, Rustom Faram Agiary, Dadar Athornan Madressa, NGMA, Jimmy Mistry's House
Day 5	World Zoroastrian Congress
Day 6	World Zoroastrian Congress
Day 7	World Zoroastrian Congress
Day 8	World Zoroastrian Congress
Day 9	Doongerwadi, Parsi General Hospital, RTI, Rippon Club, Cusrow Baug
Day 10	Banaji Atash Behram, Khareghat Colony, Jashan at Saher Agiary
Day 11	Nargol, Sanjan, Udvada
Day 12	Iranshah Atash Behram, Surat
Day 13	Shahanshai Atash Behram, Dotivala Bakery, Kadmi Atash Behram, Nariman House, Orphanage, Munshi Farms
Day 14	Navsari, Meherji Rana Library, Jamshed Baug, Kusti and Toran Demo, Deboo House, Jamshedjee Jejeebhoy Museum, Senior Center

Reconnect: The Story of Track A

Mumbai

The inaugural PARZOR – Zoroastrian Return To Roots (RTR) youth-led program initiative was launched successfully in 2013. 16 Fellows arrived in India from Canada, UK, USA and Pakistan to participate in the tour held from 23rd December 2013 to 6th January 2014.



Jashan ceremony with 100 priests

The need for the RTR program stems from the increasing disconnect between Zoroastrians in the diaspora with their roots in India, Pakistan and Iran. The program aims to return, reconnect, and revive the religion and community by fostering community links and identity. As part of the tour, the first batch of participants or RTR Fellows had an opportunity to explore and discover their heritage while learning about their commonalities and the diversity that exists across the diaspora. Their visit to places of religious and community significance in Mumbai and Gujarat gave them a holistic understanding of the strong industrial foundation laid by the community in India; a result and reflection of strong Zoroastrian values and traditions. This tour instilled in the Fellows a sense of ownership of Zoroastrian values and the need to support local community institutions and enterprises that will sustain Zoroastrian customs, crafts and community.

For some of the participants this was their first visit to India. The Fellows came from a range of professional and educational backgrounds and included four participants of Iranian Zoroastrian heritage.

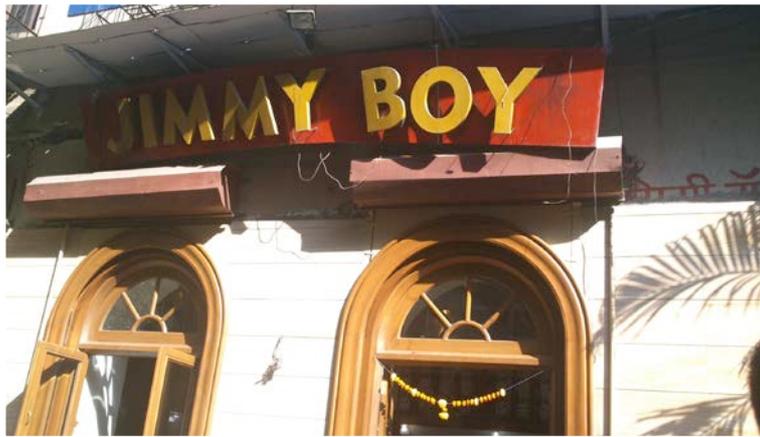
The Mumbai portion of the RTR trip began with the Fellows arriving late at night at the Fariyas Hotel, Colaba on 23rd December 2013. Some of the Fellows had already arrived earlier to visit family and friends.



Orientation at Fariyas Hotel

The first day of the RTR Program began with an orientation session at the Fariyas Hotel. The session was conducted by the RTR team, comprised of Rosheen Kabraji, Shireen Havewala, Dinsha Mistree, Kaiyan Mistree and Shahyan Dastur, led by the program's co-chairs Ms. Aban Kabraji and Dr. Shernaz Cama. Ms. Aban Kabraji oriented the Fellows on the purpose and need of the RTR Program, followed by Dr. Shernaz Cama's presentation on the need to preserve and sustain our community – its values and systems. Following the presentations, the Fellows were briefed on the itinerary of the tour and discussed their expectations of the program and its organizers. It was comforting to learn that everybody in the room was on the same page regarding their desire to understand their Roots by reliving the fundamental experiences that shape/shaped Zoroastrian identity and using that knowledge to revive and reconnect our community all over the world.

After the session the group was taken to the oldest Agiary in Mumbai, the Seth Banaji Limji Daremeher (Est. 1709 A.C.). The Fellows then walked through the streets of Fort-Mumbai, and found their way to lunch at the famous Parsi /Irani restaurant, Jimmy Boy. Mr. Irani the owner of the restaurant treated the fellows to a delicious meal of Dhan-Daar Patiyo, Kid Ghosh, and Dukes Raspberry



Lunch at Jimmy Boy

Mr. Irani gave them a quick introduction to various, traditional, Parsi cuisine dishes. After a delicious meal, the Fellows visited the Bombay House, headquarters of The Tata Group. At Bombay House the Fellows were met by two top Tata directors, Mr. Homi Khushrookhan and Mr. Don Doongajee, who introduced the

Fellows to the business values and practices of the Tata Group. The interactive session lasted 4 hours, and included time in the main boardroom of Bombay House. The Fellows also had the opportunity to sit in the Chairman's seat, which was a fun highlight for some. The movie "Keepers of the Flame", showing the rise of the Tata Empire and an insightful visual into the family, was screened for the Fellows. The rest of the evening the Fellows had free time to catch up on their jet lag and called in an early night.



Heritage Tour in Mumbai on an open deck bus

The next day was Christmas day, the 25th of December 2013. The Fellows assembled in the morning at Electric House in Colaba, for an open-air, BEST double decker bus, Parsi Heritage Tour; conducted by RTR guide Mr. Khojeste Mistree. On the drive from Colaba to Bhika Behram Well, Mr. Mistree introduced the Fellows to the Parsi role in building the city of Bombay. At Bhika Behram well, Mr. Mistree informed the group of its illustrious history and continued with a tour of the Parsi statues in the close vicinity. From Bhika Behram Well, the bus continued to Metro Cinema, the Parsi Ambulance Brigade Division, Sir Cowasjee Jehangir Hall and Reading Library, and to the famous Irani cafes of Bastani Bakery and Kiyani Restaurant.



Parsi statue in Mumbai

The group alighted from the bus to visit the Wadiaji and Anjuman Atash Behrams. For some of the Fellows this was the first time they had visited an Atash Behram, and it was a very moving and introspective moment. For Semira Jehanian (US) “Visiting Parsi landmarks and places of worship, and learning the richness of our wonderful religion through scholars and priests have made me want to explore, understand and practice my faith even more; and I feel truly blessed to be born a Zarthusti.” After the Atash Behrams the bus continued towards the heritage precinct of Crawford Market, the JJ School of Art and Architecture, VT Station and the Bombay Municipality Corporation (BMC) building (all reflections of Zoroastrian craftsmanship and entrepreneurship). The bus continued on to Dadabhai Naoroji Road, where the Bombay Parsi Panchayet’s offices are situated.



Traditional Iranian food at Britannia

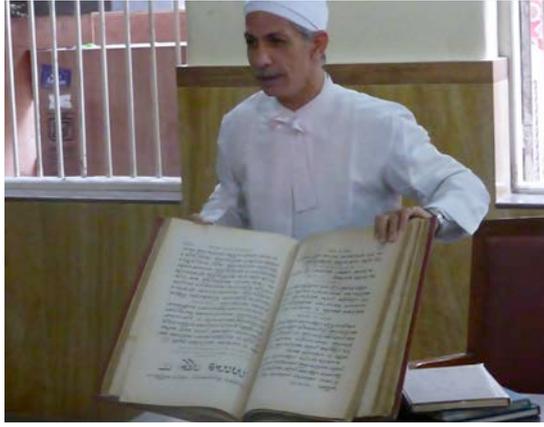
For lunch the group stopped at the famous Irani restaurant Britannia, for its delicious chicken berry palao, Bombay duck fish, chicken cutlets, Sali Boti with a splash of Parsi owned Fram’s Raspberry soda from Poona. At Britannia the group was joined by a Zoroastrian scholar and RTR guide, Dr. Dan Sheffield, who is a lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. He had agreed to give the group a private tour of the Cyrus Cylinder exhibit at the Chatrapati Shivaji Vidyalaya Musuem. After lunch the group was taken to the Chatrapati Shivaji Vidyalaya Museum (C.S.V.M formerly The Prince of Wales Musuem). Dr. Sheffield explained to the

group the significance of this ancient clay cylinder, now broken into several fragments, on which is written a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script by Persia's Achaemenid king, Cyrus the Great. The text on the cylinder praises Cyrus, sets out his genealogy, and portrays him as a king from a line of kings. Dr. Sheffield's extensive knowledge of Persia, King Cyrus, and Zoroastrianism, was very interesting for the group. The Fellows had many questions, which were answered by Dr. Sheffield. The group was given a free evening for them to explore the city on their own and meet up with their relatives and friends.



[Exclusive tour of the Taj Mahal Hotel](#)

On day three, the RTR Fellows began their day at the Taj Mahal Hotel, where Mr. Viren Dsa, who manages the cultural and heritage knowledge cell for the hotel, led a tour of the hotel. He described the architecture and design of the building, shed light on the lifestyle of a typical guest, spoke of the tragic terrorist events of 26th November 2011, and the heroic efforts of the staff and the entire management in bringing the Taj back to its old glory and splendor. He took the group to some of the most exclusive rooms at the Taj where the world's greatest leaders and personalities have stayed. The Fellows also had the opportunity to meet Taj's official photographer Pearly who has photographed every corner of the building and every famous person to walk through the Taj doors. She regaled the group with interesting stories and personal anecdotes of her time with the Tata family and other guests at the hotel over falooda and ice cream at the Sea Lounge.



Principal Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia

After a very informative morning, the group hopped on to the bus to commute to Dadar Parsi Colony. As it was a long ride, a packed lunch from RTI was provided which included cheese, chicken and egg sandwiches. In Dadar, they visited the Dadar Athornan Madressa - the Zoroastrian Priestly Seminary, one of the last few remaining Zoroastrian Seminaries in Mumbai. The principal Ervad, Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, was kind enough to talk to the Fellows about the history and practices of the madressa as well as the priestly rituals and duties. A

number of young priests talked to the group about their experiences of doing prayers for the community, their lifestyle, and their commitment to the faith.

After Dadar Madressa, the Fellows rushed back to the National Gallery of Modern Art (N.G.M.A) Colaba, to the opening of the Zoroastrian exhibition, "Across Oceans and Flowing Silks: From Canton to Mumbai, 18th -20th Centuries", curated by Ms. Pheroza Godrej and Ms. Firoza Punthakey Mistree. The Fellows had their first real interaction with members of the community from Mumbai. The chief guest of the night was the eminent doctor, Dr. Farrokh Udwadia who regaled the guests with his stories and anecdotes.



The male fellows at the Della Tower in Dadar Parsi Colony

After the opening event, the Fellows were cordially invited to a lavish dinner at Mr. Jimmy Mistry's house at the iconic Della Tower in Dadar Parsi Colony, which was inspired by the Persepolis palace in Iran. Mr. Mistry, an architect by profession and also a trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, had many stories to share of his early struggles that made him the success that he is. Welcomed into the home of Jimmy Mistry, Bezan Irani (Canada) stated, "the interactions with Mr. Jimmy Mistry really helped me understand how one Zoroastrian entrepreneur can make such a big impact in the community. Seeing how an individual, such as Mr. Mistry, developed a business empire and gave back to the community has left a mark on many of us, while instilling the desire to do the same". For the Fellows, it truly was as inspiring experience and a reaffirmation that hard work, good education and a drive to do well always pay off.

From the 27th of December 2013 till the 30th of December 2013 the fellows attended the World Zoroastrian Congress, where they mingled with community members from all over the globe. The delegates were exposed to a variety of issues through sessions that ranged from community related issues to business leader forums, sports, health, and more. On the 3rd day of the World Zoroastrian Congress RTR was given a 40-minute time slot to address the Congress delegates. The session began with the co-chairs Dr. Shernaz Cama and Ms. Aban Marker Kabraji introducing the program, and later the core team of Ms. Rosheen Kabraji, Ms. Shireen Havewala, Mr. Dinsha Mistree and Mr. Kaiyan Mistree, discussing the various aspects of the program. The presentation was well received by the congress delegates and the different Zoroastrian association sponsors from across the world.



[Presenting about the Return to Roots Program at the World Zoroastrian Congress](#)

On New Year's Eve, the 31st of December 2013, the Fellows were taken on a guided tour of the Doongerwadi Complex, by Mr. Khojeste Mistree, who explained the religious rituals, practices and significance of the Doongerwadi Complex and its role in the Parsi / Irani community of Mumbai. After the tour, the Fellows were taken to the Parsi General Hospital at Breach Candy, where the Trustee Mrs. Petit took the Fellows on a tour of the hospital and its patients. The group then visited the RTI facility at Hughes Road where Ms. Shernaz Acharya, who manages the facility, showed them around where the Fellows were able to interact with the Parsi ladies who run the kitchens and embroidery departments. The Fellows were then taken to the venerable Rippon Club. At the Rippon Club, the fellows were fed a sumptuous meal of Dhanshak, Tomato Par Eda, Chicken Cutlet, Stew and Lagan Nu Custard. For New Year's Eve the Fellows were specially invited by Mr. Jimmy Mistry to his Della Adventure Park in Lonavala where they were treated to live music and an elaborate buffet. The Fellows also enjoyed a wide range of adventure sports.



Lunch at the Rippon Club

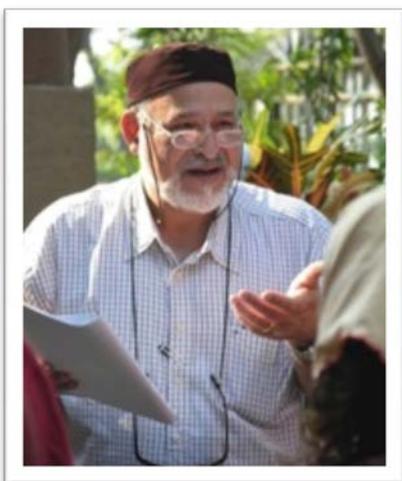
On the 1st of January 2014, the Fellows had a late start, and were taken to the Banaji Atash Behram, followed by a lunch at Mr. Khojeste and Firoza Mistree's house. The group had a debriefing session with Ms. Aban Marker Kabraji and the RTR Core Team about their experiences on the trip so far. As Rustom (UK) stated, "slowly but surely we were developing a sense of cohesion amongst each other, as well as an understanding of the religion on a cultural, and religious level was beginning to take place. All the information that I was absorbing was giving me a great sense of pride and ambition to become more involved in the community". After lunch the Fellows were taken on a private tour of the Zoroastrian exhibition, "Across Oceans and Flowing Silks: From Canton to Mumbai, 18th -20th Centuries", by the co-curator Ms. Firoza Punthakey Mistree. She walked the Fellows through the various centuries of Parsi trade between China and Bombay, giving the Fellows an insight into their ancestry and identity. The Fellows were given the evening off to prepare for an early departure the following day for the Gujarat sector of the trip.

Gujarat

The core ideal of The Zoroastrian Return to Roots program was to instill a sense of belonging and pride within the participants for their cultural, social and religious roots in India. Nowhere did this get magnified as much as it was when the 2013 fellows embarked on a four-day trip to Gujarat.

After taking in the sights and sounds for 10 days in Mumbai, the group set out for Gujarat early in the morning on January 2nd, 2014. Over the next four days they would visit Sanjan, Nargol, Udvada, Surat and Navsari to be immersed in the history, culture and way of life that went back to the beginning of the landing of Parsis in India.

Nargol was appropriately the first stop of this journey. Sitting on the banks of the Varoli river, Nargol is a sleepy fishing village, which urbanization seems to have bypassed. As the group gathered on mud flats of the Varoli river, it dawned on all that this was probably the same exact location where some of our earliest forefathers had landed on small sailing vessels, from faraway Iran.



[Khojeste Mistree leading a short humbandagi](#)

Khojeste Mistree led the group in a short “humbandagi” at the site. With the whiff of dried Bombay duck in the background, Khojeste Mistree explained to the group what the early settlers would have experienced as they set foot on a foreign land.

The next stop brought us to the Nargol Agiary. A beautiful and quaint place of worship, it is located in a residential neighborhood that had almost all the homes shut. We were informed that the homeowners, all of them Parsi, had moved to bigger cities, and were holding on to their beautiful homes, in the hopes of selling them when the property market hits a peak.

Aban Marker Kabraji encouraged the group to think of ways that we all could bring entrepreneurship to this area, so as to enable people to either move back or stay here. Nargol’s location and proximity to the beachfront and the Arabian Sea make it a perfect place to develop and nurture tourism; maybe converting these architecturally distinct homes into bed and breakfast hotels.



On the shore of Sanjan

After Nargol we left for Sanjan, another small fishing village, which archaeologists believe to be the site of the first Zoroastrian settlement in the Indian Sub-Continent. En-route we stopped at the site of the oldest known Zoroastrian structure in the Indian Sub-Continent. The structure is an old dakhma dating back to the 14th Century. Eminent archeologist Rukshana Nanji accompanying the group, gave a detailed explanation of what they found when they had excavated the ruins in the early 1990's. The dakhma was found intact, bones and all. After detailed documentation, it was packed back with the excavated earth, so that it would remain protected from the elements.



The Sanjan Stumbh

The group took a break for lunch at the hospitable WZO Dharamsala, and after lunch visited the Sanjan Stumbh. The Sanjan Stumbh is a commemorative column put in place to mark the first Zoroastrian settlement in India, dating back to 9th century A.D.

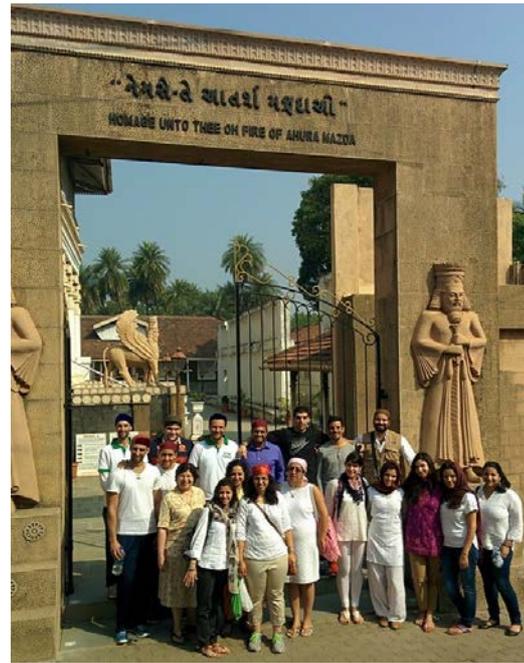
The next stop was Udvada, where the Fellows checked into the beautiful and newly built JJ Sanatorium, right on the beachfront in Udvada. After checking in, the group made their way to the Iranshah. The Fellows were present for the Boi ceremony for the Aiwisruthrem Gah. This was a moving experience for the participants, especially the few in the group who were visiting the Iranshah for the very first time in their lives.

The same night, the Fellows were informed that the Nirangdin ceremony would be performed. Udvada has very few nirangdins performed, and therefore this was a fantastic opportunity for all to witness the highest liturgical ceremony of our religion. Khojeste Mistree gave us a primer on what the nirangdin entails and the significance of this event. Past midnight the group again gathered to be present for the boi ceremony of Ushahin Gah at the Iranshah, and then sat to witness the amazing Nirangdin ceremony.

Next morning the Fellows gathered back at the Iranshah post-breakfast for a special Macchi that was organized for the entire Return to Roots group, fellows, organizers and all.

After the Iranshah, the group made its way to the Zoroastrian Information Center, to see the permanent exhibit in place. Khojeste Mistree gave a detailed guided tour to the entire group, and patiently answered all the questions that came up.

After a scrumptious Parsi lunch, with tody, tareli boi and mango ice-cream, the group bid adieu to Udvada gaam. It goes without saying that the stay had a deep impact on the group and everyone was sure they would be back again soon to worship the Pak Iranshah.



The Iranshah Atash Behram



Yazdi Karanjia Theatre Group

The next stop was the industrial powerhouse city of Surat. Surat is a thriving mid size city in Gujarat with textile as one of the main industries. It is also home to a relatively large population of Zoroastrians and two of the oldest Atash Behrams.

The Surat Parsis put up a wonderful entertainment program for the Fellows, followed by a gambhar that was attended by the local community members and the students of the Surat Parsi Orphanage.

The next morning we visited the Kadmi and the Modi Atashbehrams. The Atash Behrams are housed in architecturally distinct buildings that are themselves a couple of centuries (or more) old.



The Surat Parsi Girls Orphanage

After the visit to the Atash Behrams we made our way to the Surat Parsi Girls Orphanage. It was amazing to meet up with all the young children. A few of the Fellows turned into kids, playing with the young ones and feeling completely at home. The kids welcomed us with open arms and beautiful smiles. When informed about the activities of the Orphanage, and some of their major challenges; the Fellows decided to address these issues in the coming weeks and come up with a sustainable plan to help the Orphanage with time, expertise and money.



Dotivala Bakery

From the Orphanage we found our way to the world famous, 200 year old, Dotivala Bakery. We got a detailed tour of the inner workings of the bakery, including an all-you-can-eat of the tasty cookies and cakes. The Dotivala family generously gave everyone a large hamper of baked goodies to take back home.

Later in the evening, we made our way to the 250 year old Munshi farm on the outskirts of Surat. There we got to see first-hand the workings of a Parsi owned farm, growing a variety of crops and livestock. The farm has been run by generations of the Munshi family and is run on solid Zoroastrian ideals.



Walking tour of the Munshi Farms

The last day of the trip brought the group to Navsari, the old seat of Zoroastrianism in India. Dan Sheffield, joined the group again on the last day. After a visit to arguably the grandest of the Atash Behrams in India; the group got a detailed tour of the workings of the First Meherji Rana Library. The 140 year old institution houses some of the oldest manuscripts of the Zoroastrian religion, many of them centuries old. The Fellows spontaneously raised a 1000 US\$ on the spot towards the restoration of older manuscripts. They hope to go back to their Zoroastrian associations in their cities and urge them to donate towards the upkeep of these priceless treasures.



Manuscript at the Meherji Rana Library

On exiting the Library, the Fellows got into an impromptu cricket match with the locals and performed quite well, keeping in mind that some of them had never held a cricket bat in their lives.

The next stop was the Vadi Dar e Mehr, the oldest fire temple in India. This is also the place where generations of priests have had their Navars and Martabs performed.

Further stops in Navsari included the Desai Hall, which was the headquarters of the Desai family which controlled the area around Navsari. We also got to see Jamshedji Tata's house, which is now restored as a museum.

Lunch was at the beautiful Jamshed Baug, which is one of the major venues for Parsi celebrations in Navsari.

The last stop was the home of Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy, which is also restored to be a museum. The life and times of one of the greatest Parsi entrepreneur and philanthropist inspired the group about what the Zoroastrian ethos is.

As evening fell, the group made their way back to Mumbai. With a pit stop for dinner at the Parsi owned Ahura Restaurant on the National Highway 7, the group reached Mumbai.

For all those present, the four days outside of Mumbai provided them a glimpse into what Zoroastrian heritage, culture and society have been for the past so many centuries. With knowledgeable chaperones like Khojeste Mistree and Rukshana Nanji, the Fellows were able to see and hear about places that are off the beaten track for most Zarathushtis, even those living in India. The tour provided the Fellows a deeper understanding of the Zoroastrian way of life outside of the power center of Mumbai, and gave them a glimpse into rural India.

As the Roots Fellows made their way back to their own homelands, the past two weeks will remain in their collective memory for a lifetime.



Revive:On-going Success

- RTR Fellow Jehangir Madon served as a priest at the ground breaking of a new Dar-be-Mer in New York.



- RTR Fellows Sasan Jahanian and Diana Vania wrote about their trip experience in Hamazor:

<http://www.unescoparzor.com/images/articles/article.pdf>

- RTR Fellow Semira Jahanian wrote about her trip experience in the ZAPANJ Newsletter.
- RTR fellow Diana Vania presented about the RTR Program to her local association, the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO)
- Presentation of the Roots program at the FEZANA AGM in May 2014, by Roots Fellows.
- Please refer to all media coverage on the Roots program at

<http://zororoots.org/media/>

Donors

- Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP)
- Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA)
- Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY)
- Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO)
- World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO)
- Hommie Jamshed Nusserwanjee Charitable Trust
- Generous individual donors from around the world

Partners

- Dotivala Bakery
- Munshi Farms
- Yazdi Karanjia Theatre Group
- Della Tecnica