



Zoroastrian
RETURN TO ROOTS

~ 2015 Report ~

Zoroastrian RETURN TO ROOTS



Welcome

Acknowledgement

About

Vision

The Fellows

Return: 2015 Trip Summary

Revive: Ongoing Success

Donors

Welcome



From March 10 -22nd 2015, fourteen Zoroastrian youth from around the world made a journey to return, reconnect, and revive their Zoroastrian roots. This was the second trip run by the Return to Roots program. Started in 2012 by a small group of passionate volunteers, and supported by Parzor, the inaugural journey was held in December 2013-January 2014 to coincide with the World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay, India.

The success of the trips are 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.

Sincerely,

The Zoroastrian Return to Roots Team
August 2015

Acknowledgements

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 second 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.

Next, and in no particular order, we would like to thank the travel agencies that assisted with logistics. From TBI, in particular, Hutokshi Marker, Kurush Charna, Homa Mistry. From BB Travel Experts; Bomi Patel.

Arzan Sam Wadia who runs the Roots website for us and continues to be a valuable resource as we develop the program in North America has also provided his time and energy in fund-raising and being our champion of social media outreach and was an integral part of Roots 2.

Rukshana Nanji, an outstanding scholar, who gave freely of her time, wisdom and learning, to enhance the experience of Roots.

Dhun and Benaifer and Ervad Cawas Bagli, Divya Cowasjee and Shilpi Gulati for welcoming us to Delhi and hosting us at the Parsi Dharamshala. We are particularly indebted to Divya and Shilpi for the opportunity to speak to them as directors of the acclaimed documentary 'Qis- sa-e-Parsi'.

Villie and Anjana Arya for a beautiful Navroz table and Debapriya Das for the display of Parzor crafts at the Sethna farms. Our thanks for a delicious dinner hosted by the Sethna family.

Anahita Dhondy for a delicious meal and inspiring talk at Sodabottleopenerwalla restaurant.

Niloufer Shroff, Kiran Mehta and Arun Arora for hosting and touring us around the Shroff Charitable Eye Centre.

Homi Khusrokhan, 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.

Homi Khusrokhan, a 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.

Shernaz Acharia and Ketu Mehta for the tour of the Ratan Tata Institute (RTI) and the demonstration of the finest of Parsi culture; food and embroidery. We would also like to thank Freyan Bhatena of the Parsi Times and Yazdi Tantra of Zoroastrians.net for their informative and relevant talks.

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 Institute 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-mehrs of the Zoroastrian faith all over the world.

Zarir Cama for his enthusiasm and support to Roots and for his advocacy of it to significant donors.

Dadi Mistry, 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 and Jamsheed Dotiwalla, Mahrukh Chichgar and their delightful families, we would have not have laughed as much or learned what we did. Thanks to Sharmeen Tamboly for her incredible work at the WZO Senior Citizens Home.

In Pune, thanks to the gracious hospitality of Cyrus Poonawalla, we were honoured to have access to the Serum Institute and the Poonawalla Stud Farm, which was shown to us by Rammesh Patiil and his team.

We also had the good fortune to visit the Tata Archives, and were ably guided by Freny Shroff.

In Navsari, had it not been for Vada Dasturji Dr Firoze Kotwal, Berjis, Beza, Bharati Gandhi, Dara Deboo, Katy Antia, Navaz Bamji and Nilufer, our experience of the place, how to make Kustis, and Meherjirana library would have been far less informative and enjoyable.

Vada Dasturji Dr Firoze Kotwal's impromptu lecture to us in Navsari, his home, was a rare privilege for which we are very grateful.

In Bharuch doors were generously opened by Piloo and Sarosh Ginwalla and Mr and Mrs Rohinton Jambusarwalla.

In Dahanu, Farzan Mazda (a RtR 2 Fellow), Dr Behramshah and Roxanne Mazda for organizing a beautiful day full of hilltop and beach views and giving the Fellows a feel of the rural and agricultural roots of their Iranian heritage.

Jimmy and Delna Mistry and their 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.

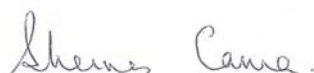
Katayun Kapadia, the President of FEZANA provided us the time, space and support to ensure Roots was well understood and embedded within the FEZANA networks, and continues to be one of our most helpful supporters as we build Roots in North America in partnership with FEZANA. To Nilufer Shroff, who has so capably and helpfully assisted in the role FEZANA plays to assist the Roots programme in all its financial management in North America, our grateful thanks. Also assisting from North America were ZAGNY, ZAPANJ and ZSO, and we look forward to a continued association with them. To all of them our combined thanks.

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.

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.

To Monaz Patel for her assistance. To Rukhsana Lawyer our immense gratitude for all the hours she has cheerfully put in to support both Roots 1 and 2 from inception to the present.

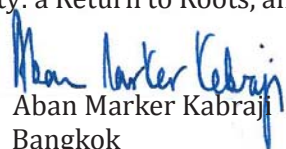
We hope that all those who have accompanied us on the journey of what one participant called, "transformational change", will stay with us and continue to build what we believe is one of the most significant and far reaching movements the generation of the future have launched on behalf of the Zoroastrian Community: a Return to Roots, and beyond.



Shernaz Cama

Delhi

August 2015



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 centres of Zoroastrian religion and culture in Mumbai and Gujarat, and smaller communities in Delhi and Pune and other cities.
- 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



James Darius Ball



“We all have shared values and beliefs, these fundamental commonalities are manifested in a variety of forms.”



“[RTR] gave me a feeling of belonging and acceptance in our global Zoroastrian community.”

“RTR is necessary to provide direct experiences of what it means to be Zoroastrian for the diaspora community.”

James Darius was born and raised in New Jersey with his parents and two sisters. His diverse extended family and wanderlust took him all over the world during his upbringing. It wasn't until his late twenties however that he finally arrived in India and started to re-connect to his Zoroastrian roots. James Darius sees his career as an extension of his Zoroastrian beliefs. Upon graduating with a Masters in Environmental Management from Yale James Darius hopes to work with thought leaders in the green housing industry to usher in the next wave of innovation to the design and construction of our built environment.



Ruxshin Cyrus Dinshaw



“...the tour reminded me that I'm proud to be a Zoroastrian, and as an added bonus, I made some incredible friends along the way.”

“I've gained an interesting view of how the diaspora have adapted to their varying circumstances, while making some great friends in the process.”

I was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan as an only child (and bookworm), and completed most of my schooling at the Convent of Jesus and Mary. I'm currently in the middle of pursuing a bachelor's degree in international development through the University of London's external programmes, and am looking forward to a career in environmental management. I'm also a keen amateur pianist.

A photograph of two young women standing on a sandy beach. They are both wearing white t-shirts and dark sunglasses, smiling at the camera. The woman on the left has her arm around the woman on the right. In the background, there are boats and a person walking on the beach under a clear blue sky.

Zubin Gheesta

“The most important thing I learnt from this trip is that I am a Zoroastrian first and not a Parsi as I always used to believe.”

Hi, I am Zubin Gheesta, born and brought up in Bombay. My job includes transforming people into better and healthy bodies as a fitness consultant. I was always inclined to do something in sports. So even after my graduation in commerce I pursued fitness as my career. I am an American College of Sports Medicine certified health fitness specialist.



“I have always been a religious and community oriented guy but this trip has made my roots stronger which in turn makes my feeling of belonging to the community much more.”



Pardis Gheibi



My name is Pardis Gheibi. I was born in Iran and moved to California when I was eleven years old. I currently live in California, and am a student at UC Berkeley. I hope to attend law school in the future. In my free time, I enjoy dancing and spending time with my family.



“...one of the great benefits of the Return to Roots trip, was being able to familiarize myself with the numerous religious as well as cultural similarities and differences between the Parsi community and the Iranian Zoroastrian community so that I can work closely with these communities here in Northern California and unite the two, because even though our cultures and traditions might differ, we all share the same religious roots.”



“...now that I have had the experience, I choose to put on my Sedre-koshti because I find it to be a much richer, both religious and spiritual experience.”

Farah Minwalla



“I don't feel as lonely within my faith and religious community as I have for most of my life. By being a part of the RTR program I have finally found a wonderful group of young adults who I hope to stay in touch with as life-long friends.”

Farah was born in Olney, MD, where she lived until the age of six, before moving to Las Vegas, NV. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from Marymount Manhattan College. Currently, Farah works for Peterson Management, LLC, which is the family office for the Peter G. Peterson Foundation located in New York City. In her spare time, Farah works freelance for music festivals while volunteering in her community.

“Youth are more inspired to come back to the community to influence inter-community dialogue and change if they feel connected to their lineage and faith. This trip achieves simply that.”



“I have for the first time in my life started to feel more like a Zoroastrian and a member of this community. For that I am incredibly grateful to the creators of this program for giving people like me a way 'into' the community.”

Kayras Darayush Irani



“Zoroastrians have always been known to be respected, loyal, and trustworthy people. Observing the community in India live to those standards was truly refreshing and reassuring. Its not a rumor, it is definitely true.”

I was born in Abu Dhabi, UAE and moved to Ontario, Canada at the age of six with my parents and younger brother, where we resided for five years before moving across the country to Richmond, British Columbia. I am a Paramedic with the British Columbia Ambulance Service and have been a Paramedic for seven years. I enjoy volunteering for the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia and have been actively doing so since 2009.

“I just hope that more of the community can learn to be charitable to both Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians, and not just rely on the wealthy Zoroastrian professionals like the TATA 's and Cyrus Poonawalla to be the only ones to give to the needy.”



“I would like to help others discover their community and identity, especially through an amazing program like Return to Roots.”

Khushchehr Italia

Khushchehr “Khush” Italia was born in Mumbai, India, but grew up in Los Angeles, California since the age of 5. From the age of 7 to 24, she played competitive tennis on the national, international, collegiate, and professional circuits through the years. Khush graduated with Honors with a Bachelors in Business Administration, while on a full athletic scholarship, from the University of Cincinnati, majoring in Finance and International Business. After her successful collegiate career, she decided to turn pro and played on the WTA Tour for two years, finally retiring due to a career ending shoulder injury. Khush currently resides in Los Angeles, California, where she has been working as an Analyst in the field of Business and Operations.



“I gained not just knowledge, but greater self-confidence in myself, in my community, and in the idea that one person can truly impact the world.”



“I wish all Young Zoroastrians can experience this, maybe then we would try harder to preserve and maintain our community for generations to come.”



“I have come back with a newly founded love for my community and who I am. I have shared my experience and my love with all my friends, Zoroastrians and Non-Zoroastrians. I feel so proud to be a Zoroastrian.”

Arash Jahanian



Arash Jahanian is a civil rights attorney in Denver, Colorado. Originally from Kansas City, Kansas, he is a graduate of the University of North Carolina and Georgetown Law, and he taught in Chicago's underprivileged schools with Teach For America. His loving family include his parents, Daryoush and Mahin, and brother Keyarash.

“Part of the uniqueness of the Return to Roots journey was that it was at once an individual and a shared experience. We each explored our religion and ourselves through our individual lenses, yet the group experience fed into and informed each journey.”

“The increased understanding of the Parsi experience will hopefully help me and the other Return to Roots Fellows serve as unifying bridges for our own Zoroastrian communities as well as the larger community.”



Natalia Karanjia



“This trip was fabulous, there are some moments which I would never ever forget, like the orphanage where we met the children and we spent quality time with them by dancing singing with them.”



“This RTR program is the best platform where we all Parsis stand together and can explore our religion and our identity.”

I was born and brought up in Karachi, Pakistan. I am 21 years old and currently doing my Bachelors in Commerce. I was always shy from my childhood but as I grew older I gained confidence and learnt how to make your own place in this world. My Navjote ceremony was done at the age of nine. I am a very fun-loving person who loves partying, socializing, talking to people try my best to make others laugh and I am a crazy animal lover, other than that my hobbies are acting, dancing, singing, swimming, cycling. My dream is to open a dance institute in my country which will be free so that everybody can get a chance to excel in their talent even if they can't afford it.



Farzan Mazda



Born and brought up in Dahanu (which lies within the geography of 18th-19th century Parsi settlements in India), I have been actively involved with the UNESCO PARZOR mission in documenting Zoroastrian heritage of the region since the age of 15. Currently a Professor with the Symbiosis College of Arts & Commerce, Pune, I teach undergrad students Entrepreneurial skills. I'm also pursuing a PhD from Symbiosis International University in Tourism Management.

“Its given me the privilege of viewing our living heritage before it withers away for good.”



“...its necessary to make our youth value their lineage.”

Note: Farzan was one of the Fellows from India who also acted as a host for the RtR 2 in Dahanu where he led the tour of Zoroastrian Irani farming heritage.

Anushae Parakh

I was born and grew up in Karachi, Pakistan. I studied at the Karachi Grammar School till I was 18 and then spent four years in the UK for my higher education. I obtained my bachelors degree from Durham University in Sociology. I then went on to pursue my masters from the London School of Economics in Environment and Development. I recently started working for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and am based in Bangkok, Thailand. I am a program assistant for a regional coastal development program called Mangroves for the Future (MFF) and focus on the effective integration of gen- der into the process.



“I did not have a very strong connection to our community. After this trip I have learnt to cherish my community because we have such a vibrant culture which should be preserved.”

“I'd like to make a difference by staying involved with the RTR alumni and stay committed to propagate the trip and capitalize on funding opportunities.”



Perzen Patel



“...[RTR] enlightened me on the issues we are facing as a community and inspired me to do my bit.”

Bawi by birth and a food-lover by life, Perzen Patel is Mumbai’s Bawi Bride. While she didn’t know how to cook even a simple Parsi Dhandar until she got married, Perzen is now on a mission to spread happiness through Dhansak. When she is not writing about food and travel, Perzen runs a full-fledged Parsi catering service, organises food experiences and also offers Parsi cooking classes. Perzen cooked a delicious Navroze lunch for her fellow participants in Mumbai.

“[RTR has] shown me the struggles my ancestors really went to set up in India increased my sense of pride of being a Parsi.”



Veera Rustomji



Growing up in Karachi has had a paramount influence on the person that I am today. It is extremely difficult to reconcile with a city that increasingly becomes hostile to differences and freedom of expression. However as a Fine Art student, I have grown to see and appreciate so many different aspects of my home because it has immense talent and so many open hearts. Being a minority woman in Karachi may seem to be a dead end for a successful career but the social responsibility of an artist and a writer is immensely important and moreover, as a privileged educated member citizen I think it should be a natural inclination to give back to the country that desperately needs her cultural ambassadors.

“The RTR program is a very realistic approach to religion.... it encourages dialogue and creates an avenue for your opinion to matter and to be valued as a young Zoroastrian.”



“When I came back home, everyone's immediate question for me was did you get a boyfriend???? Apparently nothing would top that but in an attempt to do so.... I gained some amazing friends and memories which make me smile and laugh every time I think of them.”

Kersi Shroff

Kersi Shroff is an MBA student at Columbia University in New York. Kersi grew up in New Delhi, India where he was extensively involved with the community both through religious classes at the Delhi Parsi Anjuman and by volunteering for the UNESCO Parzor project for several years. He moved to the US to attend college at Yale University where he graduated with a degree in Economics & Computer Science. Prior to starting at Columbia, he worked as an economic and financial consultant at Cornerstone Research in New York. After graduating from Columbia, he plans to work as a management consultant. In his free time he enjoys running, golf and traveling to interesting cities!



“This program does literally what it promises. Makes sure members feel a stronger and deeper connection to their cultural heritage, making it more likely that they will value and keep up long-lasting traditions.”

“I got to see a more diverse set of the community than I had been exposed to.”



Management Team





Dinsha Mistree, Co-founder & Representative US, Canada

Dinsha was born in Houston, Texas and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. He previously studied at MIT, is finishing his PhD at Princeton, and will be starting a postdoc at Stanford in September 2015. He is married to Fareeza Doctor, a Pakistani alum from the first RTR trip. Apart from meeting his wife through RTR, his favorite RTR moments have come from meeting the other amazing tour participants and from working with the rest of the RTR organizers.



Rosheen Kabraji, Co-founder & Representative UK, Europe, Pakistan, Iran

Rosheen Kabraji was born in Karachi, Pakistan. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Contemporary Indian Politics at King's College London. Her favourite RTR moments so far were spending quiet moments in the Navsari Atash Behram, photographing the fellows on their heritage tour of Bombay, meeting young dynamic Parsi artists and entrepreneurs, and laughing till she cried thanks to some charming and mischievous Zoroastrian bawas and bawis! She has a BSc from University College London and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge.



Kaiyan Mistree, Co-founder & Representative Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong

Kaiyan was born in Houston, Texas and thereafter migrated to Mumbai, India, where he studied through high school. After spending a year interning for Dawn Newspaper in Karachi, Pakistan, Kaiyan enrolled at The Ohio State University, where he graduated B.S. in Architecture. Kaiyan returned to Mumbai, where he worked for a number of years at Architect Hafeez Contractor. He currently works as an Architecture & Design Manager for a top Indian real estate company. In his spare time, Kaiyan has set up an architectural design studio and is an avid sailor.



Shireen Havewala, Co-founder & 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.



Arzan Sam Wadia

Arzan is a licensed architect and practices as an architect and urban designer in New York City, where he currently lives with his wife Shirrin. Along with his architectural practice Arzan also runs a technology consulting business providing complete solutions to the CAD and BIM industry. Arzan is involved with the Return To Roots program since its inception and serves as its North America Liaison and also helps maintain its online web presence. Arzan is a board member of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY). Arzan now chairs the Information Technology Committee of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA). Arzan also runs Parsi Khabar (www.parsikhabar.net) an online portal about Parsis.



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. 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. She is currently working as the Co-Curator of the SOAS Everlasting Flame exhibition for India 2016 and Coordinator for the National Everlasting Flame Parsi Program, as well as National Coordinator of the Government of India's Jiyo Parsi program



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. Ms. Kabraji has been honoured with several distinguished awards. She received the Order of the Golden Ark by the Grand Master of the Order, His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, and is also a Yale University McCluskey Fellow. She has authored and co-authored a number of publications on conservation strategies, the environment and security and conflict prevention. She is married, has three children and loves dogs.

The Return



Trip Summary

Day 1: New Delhi

Parsi Dharamsala, Aramghar, Sethna Farms

Day 2: New Delhi

Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sodabottleopenerwalla, Shroff Charitable Eye Centre

Day 3: Mumbai

Brittannia, Dadar Madressa, Mistry Residence

Day 4: Pune

Tata Archives, Serum Institute, Stud Farms

Day 5: Mumbai

Doongerwadi, RTI

Day 6: Mumbai

Parsi Heritage Bus Tour, Jimmy Boy

Day 7: Gujarat

Ahura, Nargol, Parsi Dakhma, Sanjan Stumbh

Day 8: Navsari

Meherjirana Library, JRD Tata's House, Kusti Weaving, Deboo House, JJ Museum, WZO Senior Citizen Home

Day 9: Bharuch

Old Parsi Homes, Surat Orphanage, Dotiwalla Bakery

Day 10: Dahanu

Hilltop Hike, Beach

Day 11: Mumbai

Parsi General Hospital, Navroze Table, Bombay House



Day 1: Delhi

Qissa-e-Parsi:

Return to Roots 2015 officially kicked off on 10 March 2015 at the Delhi Dharamshala. As an introduction to the Parsi community in India we started by watching a screening of *Qissa-e-Parsi*, a beautiful and insightful documentary created by Divya Cowasji and Shilpi Gulati. For some this was already an educational experience of the unique characteristics, from food to humor, that the Parsi's are known for. After the film we had the special treat of speaking with the film's directors. Young and passionate, Divya and Shilpi, shared the challenges and rewards of working on such an important cultural project. As we were all starting our own return to our roots it was powerful to hear about the journey these filmmakers went through to discover and narrate the story of our shared ancestry. After a lively discussion of the film and a delicious meal we moved to the Agiary for a Boi ceremony.



Agiary:

For diaspora youth, the opportunity to visit an Agiary is a rare and special occasion. For some, this was their first time in a fire temple. The RTR hosts were gracious in showing those that were less familiar the traditions and customs. We each lit our Divos and the dasturji conducted the sacred Boi ceremony. Each of us took time to have both a personal experience of this sacred space and look around to take in the group experience as well. This balance of inner, personal reflection and outward, social sharing would accompany us throughout the trip.



Aramghar:

While we were still soaking in the experience of the Agiary we next took a walk through the local Parsi Cemetery. It is a very calm and peaceful place, full of trees and flowers and provided a nice respite for the afternoon.



Sethna Farms:

In the evening we took the bus to the Sethna Farms outside of Delhi, home of Adi Sethna, an ex-General of the Indian Army, Representative to the Minority Commission, and President of the Delhi Dharamsala among other accolades. It is a stunning property and gave us time to settle into the fact we were all together in India, starting this journey together. Some of the Sethna family and their children joined the celebration and after a Navroze Table we dived into dinner.



Day2: Delhi

Bus Tour:

By day 2 our group had already set up our routine that we would enjoy for the rest of the trip, music on the bus, jumping photos, and lots of laughter. In the morning we took a tour of Delhi sites including India Gate and Gandhi's house.



Sodabottleopenerwalla:

Sodabottleopenerwalla set a very high standard for the rest of the meals on the trip. The unique drinks and new twists on traditional Irani Café dishes were complimented by the restaurants hilarious decorations. A special treat was meeting the Chef Manager, Anahita Dhondy, a young Parsi entrepreneur.



Shroff Charitable Eye Centre:

The Shroff family has a legacy of four generations of India's leading optometrists. Their practice has the unique model of providing private paid services to finance free public services. We were given a private tour of their charitable hospital including a screening of their 100 year anniversary video, and a personal discussion with the Centre's CEO.



Day 3: Mumbai

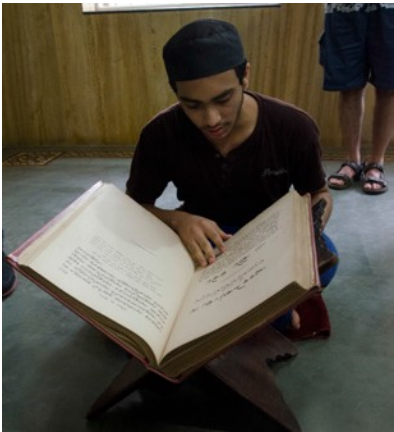
Britannia

If there is one Irani Café to experience it is Britannia, not just for the food, but for the host. A man with eight names, and still loyally devoted to the British throne, we all enjoyed reading his personal correspondence with the Queen and photos of the royal family.



Jimmy Mistry Residence:

Our time in Dadar Parsi Colony spanned the two extremes of the community. We started with a tour of the Mistry Residence, home of Jimmy Mistry of Della Group. The opulent mansion recalls the architectural tradition of Persepolis from the ornate entrance to reliefs on the walls.



Dadar Madrassah:

To bring us back down from the heights of the Mistry Residence we went next to the Priest School. Ramiyar Karanjia, the Principal of the Madrassa, gave us an eloquent introduction into Zoroastrian faith and the life of the Zoroastrian Priesthood. Before he could even finish his remarks, our hands were in the air with questions. We were all hungry for this first hand knowledge of our faith and squeezed in as many questions in the limited time we had. Many of us bought religious books and after meeting some of the young priests, reluctantly left.



Della Adventures:

That night we were treated to a night at Della Adventures in Lonavala through the generous hospitality of Jimmy Mistry. Jimmy joined us for dinner and dancing and a late night retelling of his climb to fame and fortune and the importance of perseverance in any endeavor.



Day 4: Pune

Tata Archives:

The archives are not open to the general public and we were starting to realize the extremely privileged treatment that we were getting as part of the Return to Roots Program. Welcomed by Freny Shroff, the head of the archives, we got a personal tour of the collection including a replica of JRD's office, and his original medals.



Serum Institute:

Zoroastrian entrepreneurs and their businesses have had major impact and helped millions of people. From the Tatas, to the Poonawallas they have all made incredible contributions to India and the world. For the Poonawallas their impact is summed up by the fact that 1 in 3 children in the world has been vaccinated with one of their vaccines. Their hospitality was more than gracious, with a tour of the factory, their stud farms, and a delicious meal, which filled the rest of a picturesque day in Pune.



Day 5: Mumbai

Doongerwadi:

Back in Mumbai, the home of the Parsis, we were joined for Day 5 by religious scholar Khojeste Mistry. First Khojeste gave us a lecture on the Zoroastrian religion with special insights into the traditions of the funeral ceremony. We then walked through the Doongerwadi gardens and buildings. It was hard to realize that we were still in the heart of Mumbai and overwhelming to feel that these sacred grounds belong to our heritage.



Ratan Tata Institute:

Lunch was provided by the Ratan Tata Institute with presentations made by Freyan Bhatena of the Parsi Times and Yazdi Tantra of Zoroastrians.net. Freyan had recently completed a survey of Zoroastrian Youth in Mumbai with gave us invaluable insight into how our diaspora experience compares with the Mumbai upbringing. Lunch was followed by a tour of the local Parsi shops, including a demonstration (and short lesson) on sewing.

That afternoon we were given leisure time to explore Mumbai. Many of us chose to visit local Agiaries and Atash Behrams, others did some local shopping or relaxed at the hotel.



Day 6: Mumbai

Heritage Bus Tour of Mumbai

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 advisor, 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 Kaiyani Restaurant. The tour concluded with a much needed lunch break at Jimmy Boy's restaurant.



Day 7

Gujarat

With just over half the trip complete we were still to experience some of the most memorable times yet. In the early morning of the seventh day we piled into the buses to leave for Gujarat. On the way we stopped at Ahura, a roadside Parsi restaurant and by the early afternoon we were at Nargol.

Nargol:

For many of us standing on the beaches of Nargol was the climax of the RTR experience. Most of us even took the small ferry boat across the river and back, just to pretend that we were like the first Parsi's arriving at these shores. We took the necessary





jumping photo and learned the history of the Parsi's arrival from Rukshana. But most importantly we each considered on our own the significance of standing at the same place which many years before us our ancestors had arrived to start new lives. We all lived in completely different places around the globe, but that beach, and its sleepy town, holds a common link that we all share.

Dakhma:



Visiting the oldest Dakhma in India is special enough, to do so with the archaeologist who excavated it is a once in a life time experience. Rukshana shared with us her extensive knowledge and stories of the Parsi and their migration to India. We walked with her across the fields to visit the walking Mango tree and learned of how the Parsi's are linked to almost every story in this region of Gujarat.

WZO Sanjan Guest house:



A traditional Parsi meal was served for us at the traditional Parsi accommodations of Sanjan. We ate, rested, played carrom, and made plans to give donations to the needy Parsis of Gujarat.

Sanjan Stumbh:

The Sanjan Stumbh commemorates the landing of the Parsis in Sanjan. With the diversity of our group we were able to read most of the languages that the Stumbh's inscriptions are written in (only realizing after translating the Parsi and Gujarat that English was on the other side).

Udvada:



Our brief visit to Udvada started at the Zoroastrian museum. Some of us visited the Iranshah while others enjoyed the sunset on the beach. That evening we spend the night in Daman.



Day 8

Navsari:

Meherjirana Library:

From the building itself, to its collection of books, and preservation work, the Meherjirana Library is a vital source of Zoroastrian Heritage. We were given the extra privilege of being welcomed by Dastur Kotwal who blessed us with his enlightened perspectives on the past and future of Zoroastrianism. After touring the library, and getting to see first hand ancient Zoroastrian texts we took off for the other sites of the town.



Navsari Tour:

There is so much to see in Navsari, so we quickly toured the Priest house, local Agiaries, the Zoroastrian store, JJ Tata's house, and a restored Parsi home.

Jamshed Baug:



We lunched at the Jamshed Baug and then were given a demonstration of Parsi crafts. Only upclose can you appreciate the delicate art of Kusti weaving and toran making and we even got to spin some cotton ourselves.

Senior Citizen home:



Our group had agreed to make donations to the residents at the Senior Citizen home. As we entered the living room where they were all sitting we quickly separated and sat down with each of them to ask them questions and share our stories. You could see their faces light up to have a group of Zoroastrian youth visit from around the world and sharing their generosity.



Day 9

Bharuch:

We were welcomed into the Parsi homes of Bharuch as if we were family. With beautiful views, and Rukshana's historical stories, we soaked up the richness of the experience. Unique to some of these homes was traditional rainwater storage systems known as Tanka's that the Parsis brought from Iran.



Surat:

In Surat we toured (and tasted) the Dotivala bakery. The sights and smells of pastries and chocolates tempted us all and we were generously given a sampling to take with us. That afternoon we visited the Orphanages. The youth were shy at first but by the time we left they were singing and dancing with us in the courtyard. We had brought them ice cream and a donation for the institution and were sad to leave them.



That night we dined with the Dotivala family. After dinner we convinced the hotel management to let us have a small fire in the backyard so we could properly celebrate Navroze in the Iranian manner, by jumping over the fire!



Day 10

Dahanu:

From a hilltop in Dahanu we could see all the way to the coast to the Nargol River where the journey for the Parsis began. While sipping on fresh coconut it started to sink in that our journey had almost come to its end. We all gathered under a large banyan tree for one of our final group photos. From the hilltop we headed to the beach for some walks into the water, cricket, and horse back riding.





Day 11

Mumbai:

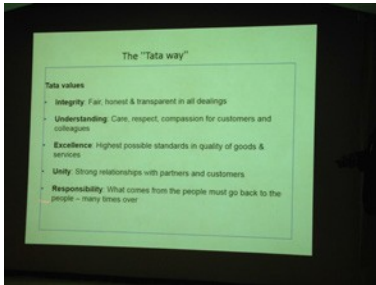
Parsi general hospital:

Tears welled up in many of the patients eyes when we showed up with Navroze snacks in hand at the Parsi General Hospital. Elderly men and women almost jumped out of bed to shake our hands and exchange well wishes.



Navroze Lunch at the Mistree residence:

Hosted by Khojeste & Firoza Mistree's for lunch we started with an explanation of the Navroze table by Khojeste and had a delicious Paris meal prepared by RTR Fellow Perzen Patel.



Bombay House:

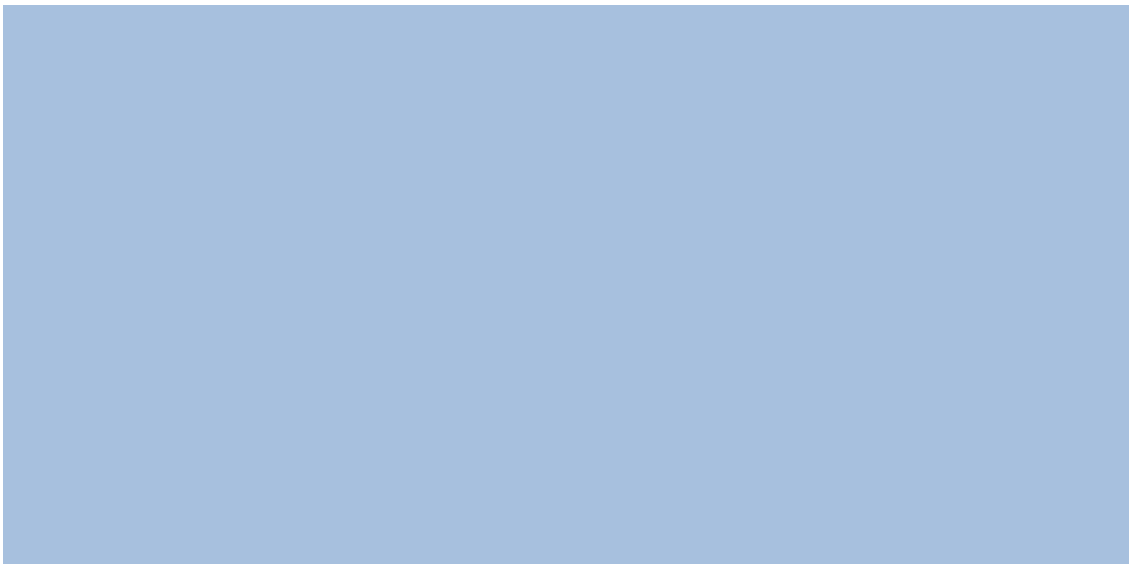
Our final cultural visit was to TATA Headquarters, Bombay House. We watched a film on the company's history and then treated to speeches by some of their top executives. As young professionals their stories and advice were invaluable to us.

Lunch at Bombay Gymkhana:

RTR 2 ended at the Parsi Gymkhana with a bittersweet goodbye. We each shared our stories and experiences of the trip over our final meal together and looked forward to staying connected.



Revive





Upon returning to our communities around the world each of us brought back to them our Return to Roots experience. We are still finding ways to share what we learned but we have already done the following:

FEZANA: Rosheen, Arash, Khush, Veera, Pardis and Perzen all wrote articles about the RTR 2 trip which are to be published in the Fezana journal Summer 2015 issue.

2015 FEZANA Annual General Meeting: Dinsha, Arzan, Farah, Sasan and Fareeza attended and presented at the FEZANA AGM held in Philadelphia in May 2015 (picture above). This was a combined presentation made up of RTR 1 & 2 Fellows. RTR, where possible, is also encouraging through Zoroastrian community events, AGMs etc to connect and network all RTR alumnis.

KZBM presentation: Veera, Ruxshin, Natalia and Anushae gave a presentation to the Karachi Parsi community about their trip which was well-received and featured in the KZBM 'What'z On' publication. In addition, Veera wrote an article for the HAMAZOR magazine.

With the generous support of our community publications and associations we hope to keep spreading the word about RtR and the ongoing work our Fellows are doing in their home communities globally.

Donors

Adil & Husna Jilla

Amb. Jamsheed Marker

Anahita Sidhwa

Ardeshir Kiamanesh

Bezan Irani

Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA)

Hommie & Jamshed Nusserwanjee Charitable Trust

Jim Wadia

Kayras Irani + Miscellaneous Donors

Karachi Zarthosti Banu Mandal (KZBM)

Pearl Ball

Vandad Pourbahrami

Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY)

Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware (ZAPANJ)

Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO)

*To support Return to Roots
please contact us at:*

*contact@zororoots.org
Website: <http://zororoots.org>*