

**ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS**  
**5th RETURN TO ROOTS TRIP**  
**INDIA 2018**  
**ANNUAL TRIP REPORT**



# ZOROASTRIAN RETURN To ROOTS

5TH RETURN TO ROOTS TRIP

INDIA, 2018





RETURN | RECONNECT | REVIVE

THE ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS PROGRAM IS A PARZOR INITIATIVE



# ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS

ESTABLISHED 2012

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.

5TH EDITION

INDIA, 2018



# THE PROGRAM

# WELCOME

“Journeys are made to explore and challenge oneself”.

Every single person is on a journey throughout their life to discover and explore their path and make a mark on their odyssey. As you progress through this report, we hope you find the same joy and tranquility we experienced on our journey through India, and that you are inspired to join us in the future.

On 19th December 2018, 23 young Zoroastrians from the global diaspora met in Mumbai to begin their journey across India and discover the rich, extensive culture whose roots were sown in this very country by their ancestors. The 15-day journey, which came to an end on 2nd January 2019, is the fifth edition of the Return to Roots Programme, which took its first step in the year 2012 with a small group of young, passionate volunteers and the support of the Parzor Foundation. The inaugural trip was held in December 2013 to coincide with the World Zoroastrian Congress in Mumbai.

The success of Return to Roots is apparent not only in providing a transformational experience to its participants, but also in the fact that it has been received with overwhelming support by the community. We hope this report will give you a better idea of the program in detail, and how it has grown over the last five years.

Sincerely,

The Zoroastrian Return to Roots Team

## ABOUT

The Zoroastrian Return to Roots programme is a youth-initiated programme designed to strengthen the idea of the Zoroastrian community and identity among the youth of the world. The programme was born out of the increasing disconnect between Zoroastrians in the diaspora and their ancestral communities in Iran and India. The trip is a means of fostering community links and identity by taking small groups of youth to explore the religious, social and cultural heritage in India.

## VISION

### RETURN ZOROASTRIANS TO THEIR ROOTS

- Visiting centers of the Zoroastrian religion and culture in Mumbai and Gujarat, and smaller communities in Delhi, Pune and other cities over the course of a 10-15 day trip to India.
- Combined visit of historical, cultural, religious and community sites.
- 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 and identity.
- Discover one's own personal connection to Zoroastrian values and 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Return to Roots would not have been able to make its 5th trip without the support of the countless people who have now become the backbone of the programme. We would like to extend our gratitude to all our supporters, patrons, donors, and to the volunteers who have helped in building this programme. They are in no particular order....

Amongst our alumni, we would like to thank the wonderful volunteer team who helped put this trip together and without whom this trip would not be possible: Tanya Hoshi, Sheherazad Pavri, Cyrus Karanjia, Kayras Irani, Zubin Gheesta and Ruxshin Dinshaw who organized, accompanied and assisted the participants on this trip.

To Neville Shroff and his fellow trustees at the Incorporated Zoroastrian Charities of Hong Kong, Canton and Macao for their continued support over the years.

To Dinshaw & Bachi Tamboly and Aspi Ambapardiwala of the World Zoroastrian Organization Trust Funds India for their continued support and for taking us to see the various sights in Navsari and the hinterland villages.

As the programme involves a great deal of traveling and making sure every participant is comfortable throughout the trip, we would like to extend our gratitude to our travel and logistics partner TBL; in particular Mrs. Hutokshi Marker, Mr. Kurush Charna, Mr. Homa Mistry and Ms. Amrutha Poojary.

We are particularly indebted to Vada Dasturji Khurshed for aiding us in expediting the visas of many participants and ensuring they could reach India in time, and to Mehernaaz Shovir Irani, who put in a great deal of time and support in ensuring the visa process went smoothly.

Thanks to Mr. Bomi Patel from BB Travel Experts for making our travel arrangements for overseas participants, and for his constant assistance to the team and participants.

Special thanks to Mr. Hoshang Jal for welcoming us to Cusrow Baug and helping make the beginning of our journey a memorable one.

To Mr. Sam Balsara and Mrs. Lara Balsara-Vajifdar of Madison World, for giving us their time and insight about the work and idea behind the Jiyo Parsi Campaign.

An RTR trip is incomplete without meeting Mr. Boman Kohinoor, the owner of Mumbai's iconic Britannia restaurant, who loves sharing his love for the Queen of England over a scrumptious berry pulao.

As always, we are honoured by our friends and programme mentors Mr. Khojeste Mistree and Mrs. Firoza Punthakey Mistree for their hospitality and guidance, which assisted in building the structure of the programme since inception. Special thanks to Khojeste in particular, for the knowledge imparted to us during the visit to the Doongerwadi and a very engaging session at the Mistree residence explaining the intricacies of our religion.

To Mr. Yazdi Desai and his fellow Trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet and Mr. Vistaspar Mehta, Manager of the Doongerwadi, for granting us permission to visit.

We are deeply grateful to the staff of Bombay House for the excellent curation of the TATA family history at the Tata Experience Centre (TXC).

Thank you to Mrs. Shernaz Acharia and her wonderful staff for a tour of the Ratan Tata Institute (RTI), a behind-the-scenes look at the effort involved in making Parsi food and embroidery, and for letting the participants in on their

secret ingredients while allowing us to work in her kitchen.

To Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia for enlightening us during our visit to the Dadar Athornan Institute about the training of young priests.

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

To Mr. Farrokh Jijina for an amazing open bus tour and guided walk of the heritage precinct of Mumbai city.

To Binaifer Sahukar and the Empowering Mobeds programme, for explaining the work they do towards an amazing cause.

To our dear friends and programme mentors, Jimmy and Delna Mistry and their family, who welcomed us into their home in Mumbai, treated us to the finest of Parsi hospitality while inspiring our participants to dream big, and generously hosted us at the Della Adventure Training Academy (D.A.T.A.) resort in Lonavala.

To Mr. Farokh Rustomji of the R. D. Sethna Trust for giving us a tour and a history lesson of the beautiful Esplanade House.

To Mr. Rayomand Banajee for allowing the participants to relax and interact with the people from the WZCC Youth Wing with a healthy go-karting competition at Ajmera IndiKarting in Mumbai.

To Mr. and Mrs. Petit for allowing us to tour the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital and see first-hand the impressive humanitarian work being done for the community within its green and gracious premises.

To Mr. Xerxes Dastur and the trustees of the Ripon Club for welcoming us on New Year's Day for lunch.

To Parsi Gymkhana for allowing us to binge on dhansak while taking in their history and the importance they hold among the Parsis of Mumbai.

To Dr. Cyrus S. Poonawalla, Founder of the Serum Institute of India and Sarosh Bokdawalla for allowing us to visit the Serum Institute in Pune and for their tremendous hospitality.

To the staff of the Tata Central Archives for welcoming us and showing us around.

To Darius Dorabjee for the wonderful hospitality at his famous Pune establishment.

To Rati Forbes and the entire Forbes family for welcoming us to their beautiful home and hosting a fantastic event and lunch.

To Mabrin Nanavatti for his help with visas for our Pakistan participants.

To WZCC Youth Wing and Jehaan Kotwal, Umeed Kothavala, Shirin Wadia, and Armene Modi for sharing their time and wisdom with our group

To Mrs. Katy Antia and the Trustees of the Meherjirana Library in Navsari for welcoming us and hosting our visit.

To Behzad Suraliwala who's help and logistical support make our visit to Navsari a memorable one always.

To Jamshed and Cyrus Dotivala, for the delightful (and now unmissable) tour of the Dotivala Bakery.

To Yazdi and Vera Karanjia and Mahrukh Chichgar of Surat for their hospitality and hosting the Return To Roots

Program since inception.

To Mr Neville Borzu of Ahura Restaurant for their fantastic hospitality and the tasty treats they give every year to all our participants.

To the staff and management of the WZO Sanatorium in Sanjan, as always, for the delicious lunch.

Homi Gandhi, 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 Rooky Fitter, who has so capably lent her support in the role FEZANA plays to assist the Roots programme in all its financial management in North America, our grateful thanks.

To Rukhsana Lawyer, our immense gratitude for all the hours she has cheerfully put in to support Roots from its inception, and to Suwapee Duanjam, for her kind assistance in this process.

To Homi Khushrookhan, Zarir Cama and Bapsy Dastur for their constant support and guidance over the years.

To Astad Clubwala and the Board Members of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) for their unstinted support since inception of the program.

To our amazing co-chairs Aban Marker-Kabraji and Dr. Shernaz Cama and Programme Director Arzan Sam Wadia our grateful thanks for the leadership, oversight, and coordination of the programme at all levels.

And finally, thank you to our donors (Annex I), who have given so generously over the years to enable youth from every corner of the globe to share in our journey across India, forge lifelong bonds with their fellows, and take back the best parts of their experiences to share with their communities at home.



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STREET  
HAYES

METALINKS

**THE  
5<sup>TH</sup> RTR TRIP  
INDIA 2018**

## DAY 1: MUMBAI

RTR 5 kicked off on 19th December 2018 in Mumbai. 16 Fellows from across the diaspora participated. The participants hailed from the USA, Pakistan, India and Canada.

### CUSROW BAUG

Every event needs a place to kick-off; RTR 5 officially began its journey at Cusrow Baug, where the fellows got to see first-hand a typical Zoroastrian colony, commonly known as a baug. The introductory session, conducted at the baug's pavilion, was opened by Aban Marker Kabraji, Co-Chairperson of RTR and Arzan Sam Wadia, Programme Director, who briefed the fellows about the objectives of RTR and highlighted its key features. They were followed by this year's alumni volunteers – Kayras Irani, Zubin Gheesta, Sheherazad Pavri, Tanya Hoshi and Cyrus Karanjia, who reminisced about their own experiences as RTR fellows, and elaborated on what they hoped the tour would mean for new fellows and their belief in the success of the programme.



Each fellow was asked to formally introduce themselves, talk briefly about their reasons for participating and touch upon what they hoped to gain from the Roots experience. Mr Homi Gandhi, President of FEZANA was also present at the occasion. The session concluded with a short talk by Mr. Hoshang Jal, Secretary of the Cusrow Baug Sports and Welfare League, on the history of the baug, the benefits of community housing and how the system has evolved over the years.

### BRITANNIA RESTAURANT

The tagline above Britannia's iconic rooster emblem aptly reads, "There is no love greater than the love of eating." As the Fellows were given their first taste of Irani cuisine, most could not help but agree with this slogan. While almost half the restaurant was filled with Bawajis chattering and sipping on their Pallonjee's sodas, the chatter died down when Britannia's famous berry pulao, chicken cutlets, salli marghi and Parsi custard came to the tables. Over lunch, Mr. Boman Kohinoor, the café's elderly owner, regaled his patrons with his stories and anecdotes concerning his love for the Queen of England.



### MADISON WORLD

It's always good to see community members excelling in various fields. Sam Balsara and Lara Balsara Vajifdar, owners of Madison World, one of India's leading advertising agencies, have been creating waves in the media and communications industry for years. The group was briefed about the Jiyo Parsi Campaign, now in its second phase. We were also briefed on how an advertising agency works and some of their CSR projects were showcased.

The evening was a light affair, with the participants taking in the night life of the city.



## DAY 2: MUMBAI

### TOUR OF THE DOONGARWADI

The second day began with a tour of the Doongarwadi (Towers of Silence) where the Fellows were introduced to renowned religious scholar Mr. Khojeste Mistree. Mr. Mistree briefed the fellows on the traditional method of Dokhmenashini, the reason it was adopted by Zoroastrians, and why it is the most ecological method of disposing of the deceased. He also talked about some of the challenges this method currently faces in India. A Q&A session followed, after which the fellows were taken on a guided tour of the premises. The serenity of the place combined with the green landscape was a perfect combination of nature and architecture, which stands true to the belief of our culture of not harming the Earth.

### LAUNCH OF THE JIYO PARSİ CALENDAR

After the meet and greet at Madison World on our first day, we were invited to the official press conference of the second phase of the Jiyo Parsi Campaign at the Ratan Tata Institute (RTI). A calendar was launched, which included quirky captions and had real Parsi couples as models. These made the campaign more relatable to people and helped them in understanding the different features of the campaign, with a focus on care for the elderly and setting up creches and daycares. Later, the fellows broke for an informal lunch at the RTI café where they got a teaser of the next day's lunch by raiding the savoury and dessert items.



## DISCUSSION WITH KHOJESTE MISTREE AT SHANAZEEN

After filling up on the scrumptious lunch from the RTI café, the group walked over to Mr. Khojeste Mistree's house. He had prepared a presentation for the group to showcase Zoroastrian culture and history and elaborated on the symbols, artwork, scriptures and rituals of the religion, while addressing the Fellows' queries on various misconceptions about the religion.

## VISIT TO BOMBAY HOUSE

The entire day so far had been a learning experience; from Zoroastrian culture, history, symbols, artwork, scriptures, rituals, concepts of life and death as well as a community scheme to arrest a decline in the population, it was time to go to the industrial age where new inventions and technology were on the rise. The Tata group had been the pioneers in changing the industrial landscape of India.

The group visited Bombay House - Headquarters of TATA & Sons - where the fellows visited the recently established Tata Experience Centre (TXC) in the building which beautifully showcased the rich heritage and archives, their history, social causes as well as the current and future offerings of the group through innovative and informative media. The centre reflects the journey of the group from its inception to date, through its strong leadership, vision and futuristic thinking. The endeavour behind this is to inspire and remind the young generation of the values and ethos with which the group was set up and has been functioning for the last 150 years.

The participants were enthralled on seeing the 3D printed replica models of the awards, machinery received or made by the company as well as old artwork. They had perfectly utilised digital innovation and given a new meaning to a museum experience. Another unique feature of this place was the kennel, open to all stray dogs, which warmed our hearts.



## DAY 3: MUMBAI

### VISIT TO DADAR ATHORNAN INSTITUTE

The day started with breakfast, after which the group was taken to the Dadar Athornan Institute where the fellows had an opportunity to meet the Principal, Ervad Dr. Ramyar Karanjia. Dr. Karanjia showed the group around the institute; the group got to see first-hand the training of young boys for the priesthood. The boys are given religious education while learning prayers and practising ceremonies along with secular education at the DPYA High School close by. Our resident volunteer and priest, Ervad Sheherazad Pavri, reminisced on his time growing up studying at the institute and shared his adventures. It was a joy to see the sparkle in his eyes when he came across his teachers and his juniors.

During the discussion, Mr. Karanjia explained the difference between an Ervad, Mobed and Dastur as well as the Navar and Martab qualifications and the rituals each one can perform. The group then broke up for an interactive question and answer round, which led to new opinions being shared among the Fellows.

### LUNCH AND TOUR OF RTI

By this point, RTI (the Ratan Tata Institute) seemed like home away from home, and the cheerful aunties running the place greeted the group warmly. The delicious and homely lunch was enjoyed by all. After a quick history of the institute and its functioning, the Fellows were taken around the kitchens, where some volunteered to try their hand at making cakes, tarts, bhakras and dal ni poris. Thereafter, we moved to the textile section across the road, which trains women in sewing dresses and beautiful sarees and garas.

### TALK WITH DR. SHERNAZ CAMA

Later in the evening, the group was visited by Dr. Shernaz Cama, the Co-chair of the programme. Not just Milk and Sugar, a film by Divya Cowasji, was presented, after which various art forms which prevail in our culture like the Monajat (religious songs), embroidery and toran making were discussed. As a researcher, Dr. Cama is always on the look-out for new ideas and works towards showcasing the best of the culture. She also shared her discoveries and highlighted upon how we are adapting and evolving as a community.

The Fellows were briefed about the Jiyo Parsi Campaign and Ms. Kritika from the Parzor Foundation also presented the Hamari Dharohar Scheme by the





Indian Government's Ministry of Minority Affairs, whose pilot project is about preserving Parsi architecture and culture in Navsari.

The group retired to an early dinner and a night of packing and relaxing as they had to depart for Pune early the next morning.

## DAY 4: PUNE

Despite an early start, the Fellows welcomed the new day with a slice of birthday cake apiece, in celebration of Fellow

Rohan Madon. They then headed to Pune by bus.

### SERUM INSTITUTE OF INDIA

The group's first stop in Pune was the Serum Institute, established by Mr. Cyrus Poonawalla. Mr. Poonawalla has been awarded the "Vaccine Hero" award recently for the humanitarian work done by the institute in providing vaccines in developing countries.

The Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd. is now the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, and produces a variety of vaccines including those for Polio, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Hib, BCG, r-Hepatitis B, Measles, Mumps and Rubella. It is estimated that about 65% of the children in the world receive at least one vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute. Vaccines manufactured by the Serum Institute are accredited by the World Health Organization, Geneva and are being used in around 170 countries across the globe in their national immunization programmes, saving millions of lives throughout the world.

The group toured the entire facility and was given a brief explanation on the preparation of vaccines in a sterile environment. The highlight of the trip was a personal meeting with Dr. Poonawalla. The meeting was very inspiring to all the Fellows as it was the first time they were meeting a great Parsi entrepreneur. To learn about his achievements was inspiring for the participants, many who were unaware of the impact Parsis have had in science and more in India. Mr. Poonawalla hosted a lavish buffet lunch once the tour was over.





### **TATA CENTRAL ARCHIVES**

Later on, the group visited the Tata Central Archives, where the curators shared the stories of the Tata group with the aid of movies, maps, and images; this is where the group got to learn more about the Tata family and how they ventured into different businesses.

### **DINNER AT DORABJEE'S RESTAURANT**

At RTR, we aim to provide the best food experience while supporting local Zoroastrian businesses. No place could have been better for dinner in Pune than good old Dorabjee's Restaurant, where food is still cooked in traditional wood and coal stoves; and one can feel the distinct taste of food slow-cooked to perfection.

## **DAY 5: PUNE & LONAVALA**

### **ASHA VAHISHTA PRAYER HALL**

The day started with a visit to the Asha Vahishta Prayer Hall, an unconsecrated prayer hall. The group witnessed an Iranian priest recite prayers, which was a novel experience for many. A Machi was offered along with Tandarosti prayers and the melodious tone of the priest early in the morning really energized the entire group.

### **FIRESIDE CHAT WITH WZCC AT TH FORBES RESIDENCE**





The group made its way to the Forbes residence where we were invited by Rati Forbes who had arranged an amazing fireside chat with WZCC Pune. The RTR Fellows got to meet prominent WZCC (World Zarathusti Chamber of Commerce) business and social entrepreneurs who discussed their ideas and experiences. The group got to hear their success stories first-hand and were encouraged to embrace entrepreneurship. The panel was a mix of seasoned and young entrepreneurs, Jehaan Kotwal, Umeed Kothavala, Shirin Wadia, and Armene Modi. After lunch, the discussion was continued with members of the Forbes family speaking about their multigenerational family businesses and some of the challenges that come with the same.





### DELLA ADVENTURE TRAINING ACADEMY (D.A.T.A)

Late afternoon that day, the group headed to Lonavala for an adventurous evening at the Della Adventure Training Academy (D.A.T.A). The military-themed resort is the first of its kind, and is proudly owned by Mr Jimmy Mistry, best described as an avid designer, hotelier, adventurer and entrepreneur. The academy is designed to train civilians with the necessary self-preparation, survival skills and techniques needed to combat real life hostage situations and attacks, all with a luxury stay in the wilderness.

At D.A.T.A. one will experience heightened awareness, improved self-confidence, sharper instincts and a better understanding of the surroundings. The group was extremely excited to be dressed as cadets and participated in activities like zip-lining, wall-climbing, training for grenade bombing situations and much more.

Visiting D.A.T.A. allowed the Fellows to see Parsi entrepreneurial spirit in full force. Jimmy Misty and his family and business have been supporters of RTR since inception and here in the natural environs of Lonavala, the Fellows got a break from connectivity and were able to bond and appreciate the fruition of the dreams of Jimmy Misty, who they would subsequently meet in person, later on the trip.

## DAY 6: SANJAN & NARGOL

### SANJAN

It was an early morning for the group, and a treat as they got to meet Dr. Rukshana Nanji, an eminent archeologist. Dr. Nanji has been working in and around Sanjan looking for remains from the time Zoroastrians landed in India. The group was educated about the Kisse-Sanjan and the stories and myths associated with Zoroastrian history.



The group was thereafter led to the site of the first Dakhma (Tower of Silence) excavated in India. Dr. Nanji briefed the group about this being the oldest archaeological remains related to Zoroastrians on the Indian subcontinent and how it is currently under threat due to an upcoming dam. The group moved further to the Chalto Ambo or Walking Mango Tree. This is a botanical wonder, a field's walk away from the Dakhma site. Believed to be planted by the first Parsis to land at Sanjan, it has "walked" several kilometres from its original location, not because of any supernatural powers, but because it lays down very low branches, one of which gradually takes root and grows while the main trunk dies out.

### **SANJAN STAMBH**

The fellows retired to the beautiful WZO Sanjan Sanatorium for lunch. Before bidding adieu to Sanjan, the fellows visited the Sanjan Stambh, a 50-foot column located beside the Sanatorium, which commemorates the arrival of the Parsis in India.

### **NARGOL**

The group then headed towards Nargol at the banks of the Varoli River to the point where the river meets the Arabian Sea, which was the approximate spot where the Zoroastrians from Iran



landed in Gujarat. RTR's customary group photograph was captured at the spot where our ancestors had first landed using a drone camera in a Roman 5 (V) formation to commemorate the 5th edition of trip. To mark the historic moment, the Fellows enjoyed a boat ride across the river as well.

With the winter calling for an early sunset, and the group headed for Udvada.

## DAY 7: UDVADA

Iranshah Atash Behram and Zoroastrian Information Centre

The characteristic peace and serenity of Udvada always makes this quaint, sleepy village one of the main highlights of the tour. The group woke up by the seaside at the beautiful J.J. Dharamshala and enjoyed doodh puff, rava and akoori for breakfast. After food for the tummy, it was time for food for the soul. The Fellows walked to the Iranshah Atash Behram to pay their respects. After prayers, the group was given free time to explore the tiny hamlet and observe the local houses. A few families were gracious enough to welcome the fellows on their verandahs to enjoy the swings on them. A few of them indulged in shopping, buying traditional bhakras, papads, scarves and other religious items after which they headed to the Zoroastrian Information Centre to learn about the history of Udvada.





After enjoying a bit of gully cricket with the kids on the street and some lip-smacking lunch, the group assembled themselves into two teams as Santa's little helpers and packed goodie bags for the children at the Surat orphanages and the patients of the Surat infirmaries and Parsi General Hospital. This truly was a lovely team building activity. The evening was spent relaxing at the beach and playing cricket.

The most beautiful highlight of every RTR trip is attending the Ushen Geh boi and Machi at Iranshah at midnight. For many Fellows, this was the most magical moment of the trip, as the only sources of light in the Atash Behram are the oil lamps and the Atash.

Feeling spiritually charged, the Fellows called it a day.



## DAY 8: NAVSARI

### NAVSARI ATASH BEHRAM

After bidding farewell to Udvada, the group headed to Navsari, where their first stop was the Bhagarsath Anjumanna Atash Behram. The fellows were met by a young priest, Ervad Farzan Antia, and Mr. Behazad Suralivala who briefed them on the history of the Atash Behram and also pointed out the miraculous etchings on the marble walls around the kebla which have appeared in the veined marble overtime and bear an uncanny resemblance to Dasturji Kookadaru and the First Dasturji Meherjirana.

### MEHERJIRANA LIBRARY

The group was then shown around the Meherjirana Library, which is the perfect place to visit if one wants to delve into old Zoroastrian manuscripts. The team at the library, along with support from Parzor and other institutions, is working diligently to preserve these manuscripts. The group was briefed on the preservation process and showed around the restoration room.

### VADI DAR-E-MEHR

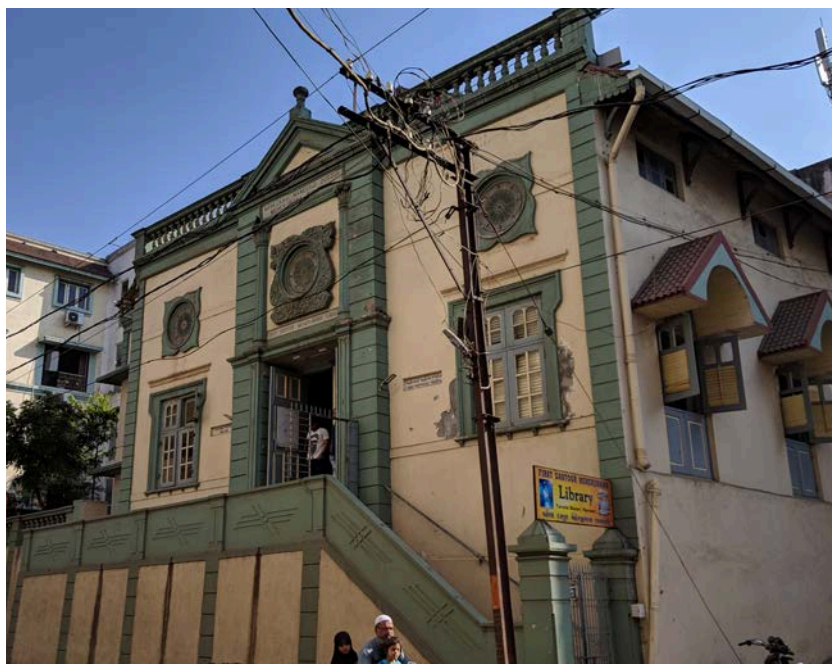
The group was given a tour of the Vadi Dar-e-Mehr, where young Zoroastrian priests are trained and briefed on their training and the rituals performed before they are ordained as priests.

### HOUSES OF SIR JAMSHEDJEE JEEJEEBHoy AND JAMSHEDJI N. TATA

The group also visited the ancestral homes of Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy and Jamshedji N. Tata, both illustrious sons of Navsari. Both these houses have been converted to museums and the group had an amazing and informative time looking at their family trees and artifacts while imagining life in those times.

### JAMSHED BAUG

During the evening the group visited the local shops for some souvenirs and religious memorabilia and then headed over to the hotel to get ready to attend a Navjote reception at Jamshed Baug. Such a celebration was a first for many of the Fellows; the group danced to Bollywood tunes and joined the family in their



joyous day with some Garba as well.

## DAY 9: NAVSARI AND SURAT

### WZO SENIOR CITIZENS HOME AND INFIRMARY

RTR received a warm reception at the WZO Senior Citizens' Home, with a beautiful rangoli of the RTR logo at the entrance. The WZO Trust Fund, under the guidance of Mr. Dinshaw Tamboly, does a wonderful job in running this place. Our resident volunteer Kayras Irani was surprised when his sagan was done and he was wished luck for his upcoming marriage with Sanaya Master, a participant in RTR4.

The participants were treated to some delicious breakfast and were allowed to interact with the residents, who were extremely happy to have some new company. A demonstration on Kusti and toran making was performed thereafter and Mr. Marzban Giara, one of the residents, shared the collection of books he had authored.

Following the Senior Citizens' Home, the group was shown around the Navsari Infirmary. Here the group was briefed on the care being offered to patients from financially poor backgrounds and the challenges they face in providing the best medical care. All the fellows interacted with the residents of both the senior house and the infirmary. They talked and laughed with them, listened to their stories and brought a smile to their faces.

### SURAT BOYS' AND GIRLS' ORPHANAGES

Upon reaching Surat in the evening, the group visited both the Boys' and the Girls' Orphanages. The group also met the Trustee of the Surat Parsi Panchayat, Mr. Yazdi





Karanjia, who briefed them on the condition of the orphanages, the circumstances of the children, and how they are generating funds to keep the orphanages going. The evening was filled with laughter, games and music as the fellows interacted with the children and distributed ice cream and goodie bags which they had prepared in Udvada. They played games with them, sang songs and the more enthusiastic Fellows even taught the children a few dance moves.

The visit to both the orphanages and the infirmary left a lasting impact on the Fellows as they saw, firsthand, the challenges faced in the upkeep of the facilities; many were moved with the spirit of the young children and resolved to go back to their communities and do something for them.



### DINNER AT SASUMAA

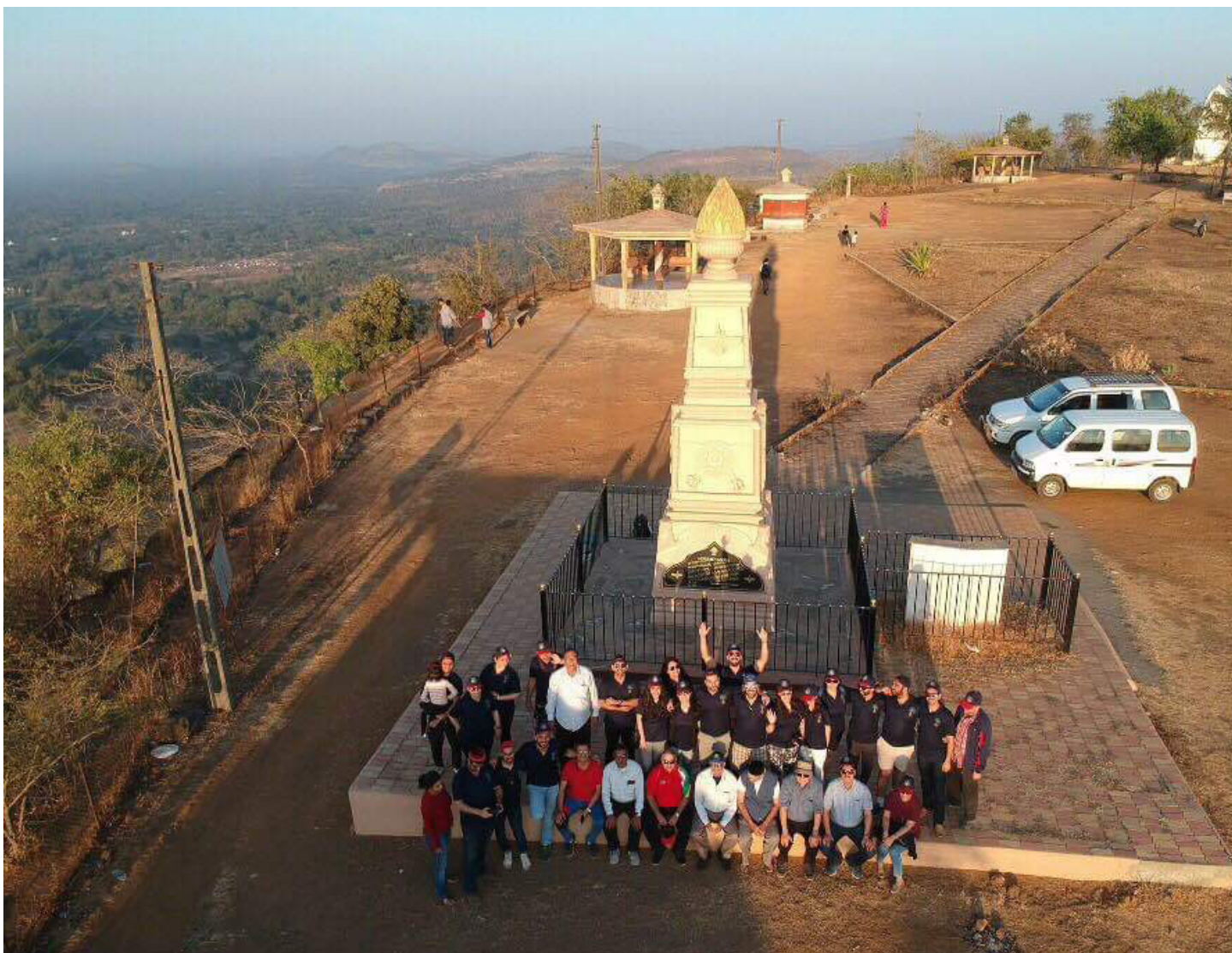
After enjoying Parsi food throughout the trip, the group finally indulged in some Gujarati thali at the Sasumaa restaurant.





## DAY 10: VILLAGES OF NAVSARI

The group met Mr. Dinshaw Tamboly and members of the WZO in the morning and departed to visit the Zoroastrians living around Vansada area. They were briefed about the humanitarian work being undertaken by the WZO to uplift the Zoroastrian families living in poverty by providing them interest-free loans to start their own small businesses



and generate income. Many of these families did not have proper houses until recently; now, with support from the WZO and other generous donors both in India and overseas, they have houses with running water, electricity and sanitation.

The group visited a poultry farm, a brick kiln and a bakery all run and managed by Zoroastrians living in those areas. The group also visited the quaint little Dadgah and an abandoned Dakhma in Mahua. A fun activity was planned in which the Fellows helped in planting Sandalwood and Baval trees around the fields and also took part in making bricks and learning how to milk a cow.

The caves of Ajmalgarh were where the Iranshah fire was kept hidden for 14 years before being taken to Udvada. Accessible only by jeep, the hilltop has an important place in the community's history. To commemorate this, a symbolic stumbh (column) has been erected at the summit. The Fellows visited this after lunch at one of the houses and were briefed on the entire route along which the Iranshah fire was transported from Sanjan before being finally enthroned at its current location. The Fellows were in awe of the strength and resolution of the priests who had undertaken this arduous journey for such a long period to preserve our faith in such treacherous terrains.

## DAY 11: SURAT

A significant portion of the next day was devoted to visiting fire temples in Surat. It started with a visit to both the Kadmi and the Modi Atash Behrams, after which the group went to the Goti Adarian to offer prayers.

### VISITS TO THE ATASHBEHRAMS AND THE GOTI ADARIAN

We began our morning with visits to the two beautiful Atashbehrams in Surat. Within walking distance of each other, these are some of the oldest Atashbehrams in the world. We then continued to the Goti Adarian, a beautiful old building that has a storied past.

### DOTIWALA BAKERY

After prayers, the group visited the famous





Dotiwala Bakery, where the Fellows got to see how the famous Parsi batasas are rolled and baked and also observed the workers decorating cakes and pastries. They also got to see both traditional brick kilns and modern ovens. All returned with bags of goodies from the bakery.

### LUNCH AT THE GOLDEN DRAGON RESTAURANT

The group's final stop in Surat was for lunch at the (Parsi-owned) Golden Dragon, where the Chinese food was a welcome change to what was, once again, becoming a Parsi food overload. After lunch the group enjoyed games of Mafia with some dance and music aboard the bus as it travelled back to Mumbai.

### DINNER AT HOTEL AHURA

We embarked on the long bus journey back to Mumbai, with a pit stop for dinner at Hotel Ahura. Neville And Mitra Borzu, the owners of the wildly popular eatery on the Western Express Highway welcomed us with open arms. Fellows feasted on all kinds of Parsi dishes for dinner. They were sent away with small goodie bags courtesy of the owners.



## DAY 12: MUMBAI

### OPEN BUS TOUR AND HERITAGE WALK

After everyone gathered at the Cusrow Baug gate in the morning, we were joined by some local guests aboard the open double decker bus. The group got to meet RTR alumni Perzen Patel, popularly known as the Bawi Bride and Mr. Edul Daver, Global President of the WZCC. This year, Mr. Farrokh Jijina showed us around the beautiful heritage precincts of Mumbai city and highlighted the contribution of our community in the development of the city.



The first stop was the Bhika Behram Well, where the fellows all offered their prayers. They were briefed on the history of the well, its construction and the reason it is so revered. From the well, the group was given a walking tour of the Parsi statues in the vicinity and the contribution of each of these stalwarts to society. The Fellows saw the areas surrounding two of the four Atash Behrams in Mumbai, Crawford market, the JJ School of Art and Architecture, CST station, and the Bombay Municipality building. All these places highlight the contribution of Parsis to society and are a true

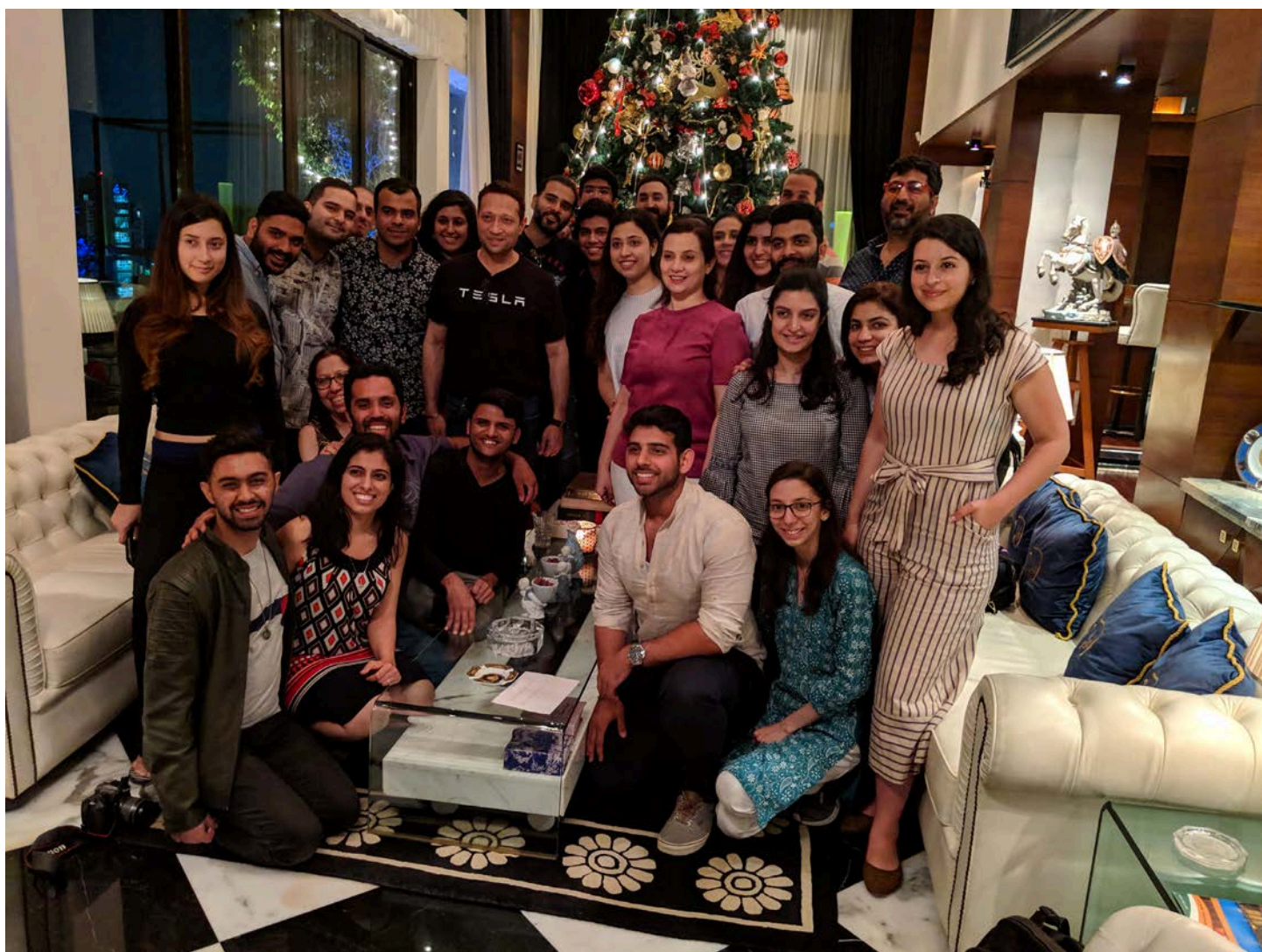
testament to their legacy.

### **JIMMY BOY**

The group jumped back on the Parsi-food bandwagon again, visiting Jimmy Boy for lunch, and was treated to kid gosh, dhan dal and patio.

### **EMPOWERING MOBEDS**

In the evening the group visited the Dadar Athornan Institute where they met the group working on the Empowering Mobeds initiative, a platform for Mobeds to learn and connect with each other and develop a better connect with the laity. This is a joint initiative of the WZO and Athornan Mandal which had over the past year held training programmes on leadership skills, mental health programmes, heritage





walks and utilising social media to build a good connect with community members while educating them and increasing footfalls in the fire temples.

The group got to hear the viewpoints of young and old Mobeds and also introduced themselves and shared their experiences of their local Anjumans and Trusts back home.

### MEET AND GREET WITH JIMMY MISTRY AT DELLA TOWER

After the interaction with the amazing group of the Empowering Mobeds programme, the group walked to the majestic Della Tower which stands out in the urban landscape due to its beautifully designed architecture inspired by Persepolis. The RTR group attended a Machi prayer ceremony hosted by Mr. Mistry and his family in their new Dadgah and then went upstairs, where he hosted the Fellows for evening tea. In a short talk, he encouraged the group to be passionate about what they do and stressed on the importance of giving back to the community.

## DAY 13: MUMBAI

### ESPLANADE HOUSE

Our day started with a visit to Esplanade House. This was once the residence of Jamsetji Tata. Major refurbishment work has been done to preserve it and it is now a UNESCO-certified heritage site. Mr. Farokh Rustomji of the RD Sethna Trust which currently owns this building gave us a quick history lesson about it and showed us around the offices housed in it.

### GO-KARTING

The next fun activity planned for the group was Go-Karting. Here, the Fellows were the ones behind the wheels for a change. Mr. Rayomand Banajee, who runs Ajmera IndiKarting and is a member of the WZCC Youth Mumbai, welcomed the Fellows and split them into two teams along with the WZCC youth for a race..A healthy interaction followed amongst the youth.

### NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

After the exciting race, the group returned to their hotel to relax and get decked up for the New Year's Eve Party at Godrej Baug, where they danced and dined into the night. For many of the participants, this was the largest congregation of Zoroastrians they had seen.





## DAY 14: MUMBAI

2019 was started by taking a tour of Mumbai's Atash Behrams, followed by lunch at the Ripon Club.

### RIPON CLUB

This iconic club, founded in 1884 and located in downtown Mumbai, was once a watering hole for lawyers, chartered accountants and erstwhile greats like Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. Today its membership is open to all Parsi Zoroastrians and is gender inclusive. The group assembled to have some lovely dhansak as their first meal of the year.

After lunch, some of the fellows relaxed on the typical Parsi lounge chairs, better known as easy chairs, which were particularly fascinating as many of them had never seen this peculiar piece of furniture before. Part of the group went for some quick shopping nearby while waiting for the next activity.

### JASHAN AT SEA

The Fellows boarded a boat at the Gateway of India and sailed across the bay before returning to the Gateway. The sea waves lashing against the boat combined with the melodious chanting of prayers from our two residents Mobeds - Ervad Sheherazad Pavri and Ervad Zerkis Bhandara – made this unique experience a memorable one for everyone present. As the night was free, the group finished their packing and went out for a last hurrah as it was their final night together in India.

## DAY 15: MUMBAI

No one looks forward to the end of a trip like this one, and this year's Fellows were no exception. As their time together in India came to an end, the Fellows reminisced on their shared experiences and ruminated on the fact that



all too soon, they would be heading back to their routine lives.

#### **B.D. PETIT PARSİ GENERAL HOSPITAL**

The last day of the tour began with a visit to the Parsi General Hospital where the fellows distributed care packages to the elderly in the general ward and interacted with the patients. The CEO, Mr. Malik, gave a short presentation on the work carried out by the hospital, which has been providing affordable healthcare services to the community since the 1920s.

#### **DEBRIEF & CONCLUSION OF THE TRIP AT PARSİ GYMKHANA**

Lunch was at the famous Parsi Gymkhana. The group was shown around the premises and briefed about the club's cricketing legacy and current laws. This was followed by a debrief session. Valuable feedback was provided by the participants, which shall be taken into consideration and incorporated into the planning for future trips. The group also discussed various other initiatives they can kick-start within their own communities back home. With an abundance of memories, the Fellows departed for the hotel and home after exchanging their final goodbyes.





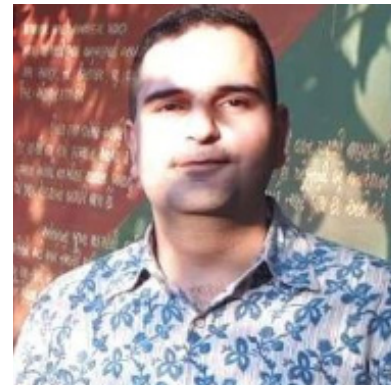
**THE  
RTR  
FELLOWS**

# AURASH YAZDGERDIAN

Aurash Yazdgerdian, a B.Sc., DACC, CPA PEP candidate and an accountant by profession, grew up in beautiful British Columbia. He serves as Secretary for The Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia (ZSBC).

Bonding with the diverse group of Zoroastrians from different geographical and cultural regimes on this trip showed Aurash that unity in Zoroastrianism is key and very much plausible.

**A**FTER THIS TRIP, I FEEL MORE MOTIVATED IN MAKING EFFORTS TO SHOW THE SIMILARITIES AMONGST ALL ZOROASTRIANS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD. I WILL FOCUS ON BRINGING UNITY TO WHATEVER EXTENT I CAN AMONGST ALL ZOROASTRIANS.



# KHUSHNUMA DRIVER



Khushnuma is from Miami, Florida. She is a guidance counselor and therapist by profession.

**W**HILE ON RTR, I REALIZED THERE IS SO MUCH YET TO BE LEARNED. I HAVE ONLY STARTING PUTTING A DENT INTO LEARNING ABOUT THE INTRICACIES OF OUR COMMUNITY. ONE OF THE BIGGEST TAKEAWAYS HAS BEEN CONNECTING WITH YOUTH ON A MUCH SMALLER SCALE. A SMALL GROUP SETTING LIKE THIS REALLY ALLOWED ME TO GET TO KNOW PEOPLE VERSUS A BIG CONGRESS SETTING. WITH THAT BEING SAID, I THINK THE LARGEST IMPACT HAS BEEN CONNECTIONS, EITHER WITH PEOPLE OR WITH THE COMMUNITY AND THAT IS TRULY AN INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE.

# ZERKXIS ZARRIR BHANDARA

Zerkxis Bhandara is from Irvine, California. Recently, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. In his local Zoroastrian community, ZAC, he has been serving as a priest alongside his father for the last 12 years.

**I**T WAS AMAZING TO SEE THE IMMENSE RELIGIOSITY AND RESPECT FOR TRADITIONS THIS GROUP HAD. WHAT STOOD OUT TO ME WAS A COMMUNITY THAT STILL IS ALIVE AND WELL, SMALL BUT DOING OKAY.



# JAMSHED BHAGWAGAR

Jamshed is from Baroda, India and is currently working with Government of Gujarat. He has organised various workshops and certificate programmes for Youth Ambassadors and Smart Sarpanch Summits for village leaders, along with government schemes for rural India.

**I**T'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT INTO WORDS HOW AMAZING THIS TRIP HAS BEEN. YOU JUST HAVE TO EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF LIKE I DID.



# ZUBIN PATEL



Zubin is from Karachi, Pakistan and is currently completing his undergraduate studies in Software Engineering. He is also a freelancer in web developing.

**R**TR HAS HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THE RELIGION AND THE CULTURE AND TO FOLLOW IT IN THE RIGHT WAY. THE TRIP CLEARED SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS WHICH WASN'T POSSIBLE BACK IN PAKISTAN. THIS TRIP HAS ALLOWED ME TO MEET SOME AMAZING NEW FRIENDS AND MAKE A LOT OF NEW MEMORIES.

# SHAHYAN BHARUCHA

Shahyan is from Karachi, Pakistan and an electronic engineer. He is currently working as an E&I Engineer at the Pepsi factory.

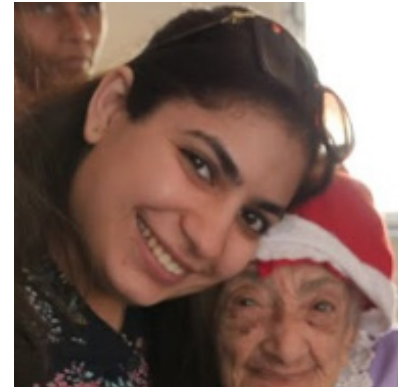
**R**TR IS A COMPLETE PACKAGE SHOWING THE RELIGIOUS AS WELL AS THE CULTURAL ASPECT OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN INDIA. THE TRIP WAS AN EYE OPENER BECAUSE BEFORE THE TRIP I WAS CONNECTED TO THE RELIGION ONLY WITHIN KARACHI, BUT I FOUND OUT THERE ARE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE RELIGION I WAS UNAWARE OF AND THE TRIP LED ME TO DISCOVER IT. I HAVE ALSO ABSORBED A SENSE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT AFTER INTERACTING WITH SEVERAL PARSİ ENTREPRENEURS WHICH I WOULD I LIKE TO PROPAGATE.



# NERISSA MAVALVALA

Nerissa hails from Karachi, Pakistan and currently resides in Toronto, Canada. After completing her business degree from the Institute of Business Administration, she joined Unilever as an HR professional. On a personal note, she is an avid traveler and a sports enthusiast with a passion for community service.

**T**HE RTR TRIP WAS AN EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME. ALL THROUGHOUT THE TRIP THERE WAS EXTENSIVE LEARNING ABOUT OUR FAITH COUPLED WITH LOTS OF FUN. IT WAS A GREAT WAY TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY AND CREATE A REAL IMPACT IN THE LIVES OF MANY. WE WERE ALSO INTRODUCED TO AN AMAZING NETWORK OF COMMUNITY LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS AND WIDER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. VISITING ALL THE AGIARIES AND ATASH BEHRAMS WAS A TRULY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE, AND HELPED US DEVELOP A STRONGER AND DEEPER CONNECTION WITH OUR FAITH. THIS TRIP MADE ME REALIZE THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR THE YOUTH TO VOLUNTEER AND SUPPORT THE DIFFERENT ASSOCIATIONS TO KEEP THE COMMUNITY UNITED. I WILL TREASURE VERY FOND MEMORIES OF THIS TRIP. ALL IN ALL, I FELT PROUD TO BE A ZOROASTRIAN, KNOWING THAT I BELONG TO SUCH A WONDERFUL COMMUNITY.



# NATASHA BHARUCHA



Natasha is from Karachi, Pakistan. She is a law graduate, currently working in-house in the legal department of a manufacturing company.

**A**FTER COMING ON THE RETURN TO ROOTS TRIP, I HAVE GAINED SO MUCH KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUR CULTURE AND HERITAGE, OUR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS. FOR A PERSON WHO IS AN INTROVERT BY NATURE, THE RTR TRIP MADE ME STEP OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE TO INTERACT WITH NEW PEOPLE WHO, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE FELLOW ZOROASTRIANS, WERE STRANGERS IN ESSENCE. NOT ONLY DID IT GIVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH FELLOW PAKISTANIS BUT WITH A VARIETY OF ZOROASTRIANS FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD. THE TRIP WAS OVERALL AN AMAZING AND FUN EXPERIENCE AND I FEEL I HAVE GROWN AS A PERSON IN MORE THAN ONE WAY. THE RTR TRIP HAS FOSTERED A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN ME. NOW BACK FROM THE TRIP, I AM ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PLAYING A PART IN THE ACTIVITIES OF MY LOCAL ZOROASTRIAN COMMUNITY AND HELPING OUT IN SOME WAY TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY IN ANY LITTLE WAY THAT I CAN.

# MEHRZAAD DRIVER

Meherzaad is from San Francisco, California. He is currently working in Advertising at Google.

**T**HE RTR TRIP WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MYSELF, MY RELIGION AND MY PEOPLE. I LEFT FEELING MUCH MORE CONNECTED TO MY CULTURE, AND WITH A GREATER SENSE OF PRIDE IN MYSELF AND MY IDENTITY. THIS MAKES ME FEEL MORE PRIDE AND HAPPINESS IN MY IDENTITY AS A PARSI IN AMERICA AND DRIVES ME TO CONNECT MORE WITH THE COMMUNITY GOING FORWARD.



# FIONA NOSHIRWANI



Fiona is from Karachi, Pakistan and completed her Bachelors in Management & Psychology from Monash University in Malaysia. She is currently working in HR and Organisational Development at a Real Estate Management company in Karachi.

**B**EFORE RTR I DID NOT HAVE A VERY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING ABOUT MY RELIGION AND WAS NOT VERY CONNECTED TO MY COMMUNITY. I FOLLOWED CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS BECAUSE I WAS ASKED TO AND DID NOT HAVE A VERY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING ABOUT WHY I FOLLOWED THEM AND WHAT WAS THE REASON BEHIND THEM. THIS PROGRAMME DID NOT FOCUS ONLY ON THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT, BUT ALSO INTRODUCED ME TO THE RICH CULTURE AND HISTORY OF MY COMMUNITY, WHICH MADE ME FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO MY COMMUNITY AND HELPED ME CREATE A SENSE OF IDENTITY. IT ALSO MADE ME MORE AWARE OF CERTAIN CUSTOMS AND RITUALS AND WHY THEY WERE FOLLOWED. OVERALL THIS TRIP NOT ONLY MADE ME FEEL MORE SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED TO MY RELIGION BUT ALSO MADE ME REALIZE THAT I SHOULD BE MORE INVOLVED WITHIN MY COMMUNITY AND PLAY A PART IN PRESERVING ITS RICH CULTURE.

# DR. RASHNA NAOZER VIRJI

Rashna is from Karachi Pakistan and is currently a part time teacher at a medical university and full time doctor in training at a local hospital.

**T**HIS TRIP DECONSTRUCTED A LOT OF CONCEPTS I ORIGINALLY HAD AND PIECED THEM TOGETHER AGAIN IN A DIFFERENT WAY, RECONSTRUCTING A MORE WHOLESOME IDEA OF OUR RELIGION AND HERITAGE. IT WAS GREAT TO KNOW THAT OUR COMMUNITY IS LOOKED UPON SO FONDLY WORLDWIDE AND THE IMPACT OUR PEOPLE HAVE MADE, ESPECIALLY IN INDIA. RTR IS A RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL, CULTURAL, FUN FILLED, TASTE-BUD-STIMULATING, EXHAUSTING BOOT CAMP, AND BECAUSE IT'S ALL OF THESE THINGS I'D RECOMMEND IT AS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME TRIP FOR EVERY YOUNG ZOROASTRIAN.



# FARZAD IRANI

Farzad is from New York and is a Physical Therapist specializing in Orthopaedics.

**M**Y MIND HAS BEEN EXPANDED SPIRITUALLY, CULTURALLY AND EDUCATIONALLY. I HAVE TRULY BECOME A BETTER PERSON AND WILL SPREAD THIS TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS I CAN.



# DILSHAD MONDEGARIAN



Dilshad was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan and immigrated to Canada at the age of nine. She completed her undergraduate studies in environmental engineering at the University of Waterloo and has since been working at an environmental consulting firm called GHD.

**M**Y UNDERSTANDING OF OUR RELIGION AND COMMUNITY WAS QUITE LIMITED BEFORE I CAME FOR RTR. I STOPPED WEARING MY SUDREH AND KUSTI SHORTLY AFTER MY NAVJOTE. I CONVINCED MYSELF THAT IT DIDN'T MAKE ME A BAD ZOROASTRIAN BECAUSE I DIDN'T PRAY OR DO MY SUDREH KUSTI. HOWEVER, AFTER BEING ON THIS TRIP, I REALIZED THAT THESE CUSTOMS ARE IMPORTANT, NOT JUST FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE RELIGION BUT FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ONESELF.

# AVA DAMRI

Ava's formative years were spent in Florida, USA (where she was born), Mumbai, India (where she learned to speak Gujarati), Auckland, New Zealand (where her family contributed to the founding of ZANZ), and Texas, USA (where she completed her education and began her career). She currently lives in the suburbs of Dallas-Fort Worth, TX and works as a Human Capital consultant with Deloitte. Ava is motivated by social justice and volunteers her time advocating for voting rights in her community. She is a recent MBA graduate from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan and holds bachelors and masters degrees from the Lyle School of Engineering at Southern Methodist University.



**Z**OROASTRIANS OF THE DIASPORA ARE USUALLY TAUGHT THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF WHATEVER COUNTRY THEY LIVE IN BUT MISS OUT ON LEARNING ABOUT THEMSELVES. WHAT I GAINED FROM THIS TRIP WAS AN APPRECIATION FOR OUR RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND I MADE SOME NEW FRIENDS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. I DID NOT REALIZE HOW MUCH OUR

ANCESTORS CONTRIBUTED TO INDIA'S HISTORY, CULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. I FEEL A STRONGER BOND TO OUR COMMUNITY NOW - CULTURALLY, HISTORICALLY AND RELIGIOUSLY. I AM NOW MORE INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT OUR RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND LEARNING THE MEANINGS OF SOME OF OUR PRAYERS.

## KARL RAGHINA

Karl is an Engineer at a Biotechnology company in San Diego, California, USA.

**R**TR HAS ENTIRELY RESHAPED MY VIEW ON ZOROASTRIANISM AND THE RELIGION. MUCH OF WHAT WE ARE TAUGHT AS KIDS IS COMPLETELY WRONG.



## ROHAN MADON



Rohan lives in Carlsbad, California, where he is currently a communications student at CSU San Marcos.

**B**EFORE I CAME TO RTR, I DIDN'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE THE SPIRITUALITY OF OUR RELIGION, BUT AFTER THE TRIP I FINALLY FELT WHAT IT TRULY MEANS TO BE A PART OF THIS BEAUTIFUL RELIGION.



# THE TEAM

# TANYA HOSHI

**RTR FELLOW 2017, RTR 2018 COORDINATOR**

Tanya Hoshi was born in Karachi, Pakistan and immigrated to Canada when she was 6 years old. She is a film and web series producer/director based in Toronto. Tanya is currently a Producer at Shopify Studios in Toronto, which allows her to travel and produce documentaries around the world. Tanya was an RTR participant in 2017 and returned to volunteer this year as the trip's official coordinator, videographer and social media strategist. Tanya was one of the representatives from Canada who attended the World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum held at the Asha Centre in Gloucestershire, UK. Tanya attended her first Zoroastrian Congress this July in Los Angeles, where she made a presentation on RTR.



**T** HIS TRIP HAS ALLOWED ME TO HAVE GREATER PRIDE IN BEING ZOROASTRIAN, WHICH IS TRULY ONE OF THE GREATEST GIFTS RTR HAS GIVEN ME, ALONG WITH MAKING FRIENDS I'LL HAVE FOR A LIFETIME.

# SHEHERAZAD PAVRI

**RTR FELLOW 2016, RTR 2017, 2018 COORDINATOR**

Ervad Sheherazad Pavri is from Mumbai, India and is an alumnus of the Dadar Athornan Institute. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Biotechnology from the University of Mumbai. An entrepreneur by profession, Sheherazad is also a practising priest well versed in the higher Pav Mahal rituals such as Yasna, Vendidad and Nirangdin. He is also actively involved with the Empowering Mobeds Programme that works towards the betterment of the priestly class by conducting workshops on developing their skills and encouraging youngsters to take up the noble profession. Sheherazad was an RTR participant in 2016 and has volunteered in this year and last year's trips. He was also one of the representatives from India who attended the World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum held at the Asha Centre in Gloucestershire, UK.



**I** HAVE FELT PROUDER ABOUT MY IDENTITY AT THE END OF EVERY TRIP. OUR YOUTH IS OUR ASSET TO LEAD THE COMMUNITY AND MUST BE MENTORED IN THE RIGHT WAY.

# KAYRAS IRANI

**RTR FELLOW 2015, RTR 2016, 2017, 2018 COORDINATOR**

Kayras is an RTR Volunteer and Alumni. He was born in Abu Dhabi, UAE and moved to Canada in 1992 with his parents and younger brother. Kayras is an Advanced Care Paramedic by profession. For the last decade, Kayras has been an active volunteer with local and international Zoroastrian community affairs. He got engaged to his fiancé (an RTR alumni) during RTR 2017 and got married in New Zealand in 2019.



**R**TR IS A SPIRITUAL, EDUCATIONAL AND WORTHWHILE EXPERIENCE. AFTER FOUR TRIPS, MY SENSE OF UNDERSTANDING HAS GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY SINCE 2015! REVISITING THE PROGRAMME ANNUALLY IS NOT JUST TO PARTICIPATE AS A VOLUNTEER, BUT ALSO TO HAVE A CONSTANT REFRESHER ON EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT OUR RELIGION. I WILL HAVE A FAMILY IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE AND I WANT TO BE ABLE TO EDUCATE MY CHILDREN ACCURATELY ON WHAT I KNOW. EVERY TIME I ATTEND A TRIP, IT ALWAYS LEAVES A POSITIVE IMPACT ON ME, AND THIS TRIP WAS NO DIFFERENT.

## ZUBIN GHEESTA

**RTR FELLOW 2015, RTR 2016, 2017, 2018 COORDINATOR**

Zubin is a Mumbai-based fitness consultant by profession and has his own freelancing fitness training business specialising in pre- and post-surgery rehabilitation, special & general population. He also teaches at a fitness institute by the name of Exercise Science Academy.

**T**HIS TRIP HAS BROUGHT ME CLOSER TO MY RELIGION AND ITS SPIRITUALITY. I AM MORE AWARE OF THE GREAT HISTORY AND THE SACRIFICES MADE BY OUR FOREFATHERS TO KEEP THE RELIGION ALIVE THROUGH UTMOST ATROCITIES, AND THE CONTRIBUTION EMINENT PEOPLE FROM OUR COMMUNITY HAVE MADE FOR THE SOCIETY AND ITS WELL-BEING.



## CYRUS KARANJIA

**RTR FELLOW 2017, RTR 2018 COORDINATOR**

Cyrus is from Karachi, Pakistan, where he completed his Bachelor's in Science in the field of Media Sciences, majoring in Advertising and minoring in Film Making. He is currently an Art Director for Print and Visual designs, along with film and scripting.

**R**TR IS AN EYE OPENER TO ZOROASTRIAN CULTURE AND ALLOWS YOU TO MEET ZOROASTRIANS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. THE TRIP HELPS YOU DISCOVER WHO YOU ARE, AND HENCE TENDS TO BE A JOURNEY OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT.



## ABAN MARKER KABRAJI

### CO-CHAIR, RETURN TO ROOTS PROGRAM

Aban Marker-Kabraji hails from Quetta, Pakistan and currently resides in Bangkok, Thailand where she heads the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as its Regional Director, Asia.

Aban 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 the Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Medal of Excellence) by the Government of Pakistan for her contribution and dedication to nature conservation.

She 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.



## DR. SHERNAZ CAMA

### CO-CHAIR, RETURN TO ROOTS PROGRAM

Shernaz 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 research 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 was Co-Curator of the SOAS Everlasting Flame exhibition for India 2016 and Coordinator for the National Everlasting Flame Parsi Programme. She is also the National Coordinator of the Government of India's Jiyo Parsi programme.



## ARZAN SAM WADIA

### PROGRAM DIRECTOR, RETURN TO ROOTS PROGRAM

Arzan is a licensed architect and practices as an architect and urban designer in New York City, where he currently lives. Along with his architectural practice, Arzan also runs a technology consulting business providing complete solutions to the CAD and BIM industry.

Arzan has been involved with the Return to Roots programme since its inception and as Program Director he oversees all aspects of the running of each trip and the overall RTR Program.

Arzan is a board member of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY). In May 2016, Arzan was elected as the Vice-President of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) and continues to serve as committee chair on various FEZANA committees.

Arzan is the founder editor of Parsi Khabar ([www.parsikhabar.net](http://www.parsikhabar.net)), an online portal about Parsis.



# POST TRIP UPDATES

Upon their return to their communities, each of the Fellows has brought back their Return to Roots experience. We are still finding ways to share what we learned but we have already done the following:

Khushnuma Driver (RTR Fellow 2018) made a presentation about RTR at the 2019 FEZANA AGM in Orlando.

Kayras Irani (RTR Fellow 2015) got married to Sanaya Master (RTR Fellow 2017) in New Zealand on April 6th, 2019 and the wedding ceremony was performed by Ervad Sheherazad Pavri (RTR Fellow 2016).

Parshan Khosravi (RTR Fellow 2017) was the Chair of the recently concluded 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Los Angeles. He was joined by Anahita Hormozdyari (RTR Fellow 2017) as Vice-Chair and Khodarahm Partovi (RTR Fellow 2017) as Treasurer of the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress.

Tanya Hoshi (RTR Fellow 2017), Kayras Irani (RTR Fellow 2015) and Sheherazad Pavri (RTR Fellow 2017) made a presentation on RTR at the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Los Angeles in July 2019. After the presentation a lot of the youth attendees reached out wanting more information with the aim of attending the next RTR.

29 of the 81 overall RTR Alumni attended the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress in Los Angeles in 2019. Various alumni were speakers, panelists and volunteers.

RTR's social media presence in the last year has expanded with over 6000 followers across platforms.

A new film on the last RTR trip debuted at the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress. This was made by RTR Fellow & Coordinator Tanya Hoshi and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2AcXpycpZU&t=5s>

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**THE 6TH RETURN TO ROOTS TRIP TO INDIA IS  
SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 2020**

**TILL THEN .....CHEERS !**



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