

ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS



Annual Trip Report - 2017

ZOROASTRIAN RETURN TO ROOTS

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WELCOME



From 22nd December 2017 - 2nd January 2018, 25 young Zoroastrians from the diaspora made a journey to return, reconnect, and revive their Zoroastrian roots. This was the fourth trip run by the Return to Roots program and the largest in terms of group size. Started in 2012 by a small group of passionate volunteers, and supported by Parzor, the inaugural journey was held from December 2013 to January 2014 to coincide with the World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay, India.

The success of the trips is apparent not only in the transformational experiences of the participants but the overwhelming support of the community. This report will provide the details of that success and the plans for the program's growth. We hope that after reading these pages you will feel as inspired and motivated to act as we have.

Sincerely,

The Zoroastrian Return to Roots Team, 2017



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we look back on four successful trips of Return to Roots, we are reminded, now more than ever, of the countless people who have lent their support and their time to make sure that the youth on each of these trips have an unforgettable experience. All we can offer to those many volunteers and believers who 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 fourth 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 of alumni organizers: Kayras, Natasha, Ruxshin, Sheherazad and Zubin; who accompanied the group on the entire trip. Without them, nothing would have been possible.

Our thanks to our youth co-founders Dinsha Mistree and Rosheen Kabraji; and alumni James Darius Ball for their role in applicant selection and screening; and overall advisory and mentor roles.

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 and Amrutha Poojary. From BB Travel Experts, Bomi Patel.

To Hoshang Jal for welcoming us to Cusrow Baug and making the beginning of our two-week journey a memorable one.

Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia for making our visit to the Dadar Athornan Institute instructive and enlightening.

To our friends and program mentors Khojeste Mistree and Firoza Punthakey Mistree in gratitude for the many hours of talk and hospitality, education and teaching that assisted in building the structure of the program. And to Khojeste in particular, for the knowledge imparted to us during the visit to the Doongerwadi and the Parsi heritage open bus tour,



on the religion and rituals of Zoroastrianism, and the history of Parsi Bombay.

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

To our dear friends and program mentors Jimmy and Delna Mistry and their family, who welcomed us into their home in Bombay, treated us to the finest of Parsi hospitality and inspired the Fellows to dream big.

Homa and Aban Petit for allowing us to tour the Parsi General Hospital and see first-hand the impressive humanitarian work being done for the community within its green and gracious premises.

Shernaz Acharia and her wonderful staff for the tour of the Ratan Tata Institute (RTI) and the demonstration of the finest of Parsi culture, food and embroidery.

Farokh Rustomji of the R. D. Sethna Trust, and architect Vikas Dilwari, for giving us a tour and a brief history lesson of the beautiful Esplanade House.

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

In Gujarat, were it not for the help of Yazdi Karanjia and Aspi Ambapardiwala, we would not have learned as much as we did.

Our thanks to Yazdi and Vera Karanjia, and Mahrukh Chichgar and family of Surat for their continued support and encouragement from the very first Return to Roots Trip, and for making our Surat visits memorable.

Neville Irani, owner Ahura Hotels, for the warm welcome we received on our way to Udvada, and Jamshed and Cyrus Dotivala, for the delightful (and now unmissable) tour of the Dotivala Bakery.

Thanks to Sharmeen Tamboly for her incredible work at the WZO Senior Citizens' Home. We would also like to thank Dinshaw & Bachi Tamboly for briefing the Fellows on the plight faced by certain sections of the Zoroastrian community, and for the remarkable work which he and the



staff of World Zoroastrian Organization Trust Funds India continue to do. We would like to thank the WZOTF for their continued support and encouragement of the program year after year.

In Navsari in particular, had it not been for Katy Antia and the Trustees of the Meherjirana Library, Marzban Giara, Behzad and Shahvir Suralivala, Ervad Farzan, and Navaz Bamji and Nilufer, our experience of the city, how to make Kustis, and the Meherjirana Library would have been far less informative and enjoyable.

Our grateful thanks to the Trustees of the Surat Parsi Punchayet and the Trustees of Jamshed Baug, Navsari, for facilitating us.

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

To Farzan Mazda, an RTR alum who made our sojourn to Dahanu an enjoyable one.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Parsi Gymkhana, and to Xerxes Dastur, Chairman and Trustees of the Ripon Club – we are indebted to their hospitality.

A special thanks goes to Ervad Ardaviraf, Hutoxi, Ervad Adil and Rhea Minocherhomjee, for inviting the Fellows to be a part of their wedding celebration – a first for RTR!

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.

We are also eternally grateful to Dasturji Khurshed, his wife Havovi, and the organisers of the Iranshah Udvada Utsav for the hospitality shown to us, and appreciative of the many months of effort that went into making that landmark event a reality.

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 Shirin Jahanian & Ratan Mistry at FEZANA, who have so capably and helpfully lent their support in the role FEZANA plays to assist the Roots program in all its financial management in North America, our grateful thanks.

To the Trustees and Board of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey and Zoroastrian Association of British Columbia for supporting the program through funding and participation, we look forward to a continued association with them. To all of them, our combined thanks.

We also keep in our thoughts the late Ketii Mehta who helped us in our previous trips to the RTI.

Homi Khusrookhan, 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.

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

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

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

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.



This report was compiled by Natasha and Ruxshin and edited by Rosheen and James Darius Ball on behalf of the Roots 4 alumni coordinators.



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 and 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 centers of the Zoroastrian religion and culture in Mumbai and Gujarat, and smaller communities in Delhi, Pune and other cities.
- Visit a combination of historical, cultural, religious 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

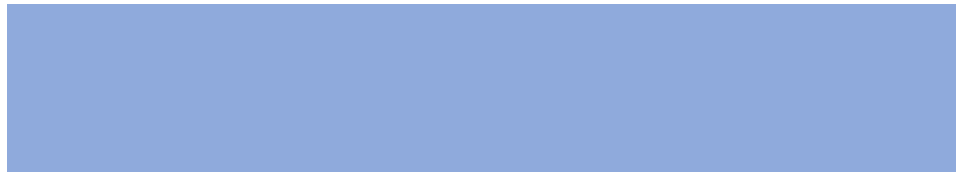
- Bring together young Zoroastrians from across the world to recognize their shared commonalities and traditions.
- Participate in educational and community-service oriented activities, which reinforce and reinvigorate their community links and identity.
- Discover one's own personal connection to Zoroastrian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



THE FELLOWS





Afshin Yazdgardian

Afshin is an original Mumbaikar who moved to Vancouver at age 12. Growing up, he has lived a significant portion of his life in British Columbia before returning to India, replenishing and revitalizing his Zoroastrian heritage while attending the RTR program. Afshin has recently acquired his Electrical Red Seal certification from BCIT, and has big plans for the future.

His leisure time is spent outdoors, hiking, camping, canoeing or simply just walking a trail after work. Exploring new places, be it by road, train or plane is something that Afshin thoroughly savours and lives for. Whenever possible, Afshin likes to take part in and contribute his time to various events and occasions at the Dar-e-Mehr.



“Spending my young days growing up in India, I learnt the practices of Zoroastrianism, but never the why. Meeting with the scholars on this trip has really helped me gain some very deep understanding of the teachings and reasoning of our great religion. It has also really helped me see and hear views of fellow Zoroastrian youth around the world and find out that I am not alone with the questions I have had for the longest time which have now been answered.

Seeing how our community in India has peacefully weaved into its culture while helping it grow in ways which might not have been possible without Parsis really motivates me to continue doing the same, just that this time it will be abroad.”



Anahita Hormozdyari

Anahita was born and raised in Iran. Currently, she lives in Orange County, California. She is a Chemistry Major and her goal is attending a pharmaceutical science program. Her family has always been very active in different Zoroastrian associations in Iran such as Faravahar institution, so she has always been involved in religious activities. She is now works at CZC-Westminster, teaching Kindergarten children how to read, write, and speak Farsi.



“I have been always had a lot of questions about our religion which went unanswered in my home country Iran, which were answered here.

Before the trip, I had a very good understanding of being an Iranian Zoroastrian and now after RTR, I have a good understanding of Parsi Zoroastrians and have realized that we might have difference but we are all still the same – and that is Zoroastrian.”



Anahita Verahrami

Anahita is a wildlife biologist working with the Elephant Listening Project, a lab at Cornell University that utilizes passive acoustic monitoring to study and conserve the forest elephants of Central Africa. Currently, she is living in the rainforest of the Central African Republic studying the forest elephants in the region, but when she is back in the states, she lives in Ithaca, NY. Some of her hobbies include photography and hiking around Ithaca, NY with her pup, Oscar!



“I honestly didn't have much of an understanding of the religion before the trip. I hadn't been to Avesta class in years and didn't really absorb a lot of the information. But I felt like I learned a lot from the trip about myself and my culture and heritage. It provided me with a network of friends that I still keep in touch with and also deepened my understanding on why some of our traditions are the way they are.”



Aubtin Yazdgardian

Aubtin Yazdgardian was born in Mumbai and now resides in Vancouver, BC Canada. He completed his studies in the field of Automotive, and is currently a Service Manager in an Automotive Fleet Repair Facility. He has been actively involved in the ZSBC community since 2011 and has attended various Z Games and Congresses. An urge to reconnect with his Zoroastrian roots prompted him to sign up for the fourth RTR programme.



Before attending RTR I was a bit skeptical as to what was I going to gain and experience from it since I lived the majority of my life growing up in the community in Mumbai. Looking back I'm glad I did attend because after visiting the various places along with coming across some of the most inspiring individuals over a period of 2 weeks, it made me realize that even though we only make up an insignificant part of the population in this world, it's not the quantity of Zoroastrians that are out there but the quality of people, who we are as a whole which, when put together with our values and our heritage, serve to better humanity.

It has also given me a better and deeper understanding of who I am in this world living as a Zoroastrian, why we perform some of the most beautiful rituals and ceremonies from the beginning to the end of our life journey, how closely we are connected as well as one with nature and how we are taught to live and be one in harmony with this earth. Towards the end of the trip, and now reflecting back, this has truly been a memorable lifelong experience and has given me a proud sense and feeling to be born as a Zoroastrian”



Cyrus Karanjia



Cyrus is a resident of Karachi and is currently in his final year of Media Studies. He also works as a freelance art director, director and actor, and is now working towards writing and producing movies and animation stories.

“Personally speaking there are some rituals of which I had no idea about but got to know of through this trip. I wished we could have seen students (young Priests) in training at Dadar Athornan, as it would have been lovely to see how the young mobeds are trained.

This trip for me was more like a winter camp, where I got to meet new people (except for a few whom I knew previously), made good friends, exchanged interesting conversations and had an amazing time.”



Delara Solan

Delara is a recent graduate of UCSI University and holds a Bachelor's in accounting and finance. She grew up in Karachi, Pakistan and did her schooling from Mama Parsi Girls School.

“As a youth, I had this different approach and perception about our religion. I had lots of questions in my mind, and I was looking for a religious scholar to talk to and discuss the questions so that I should have a purpose and meaning to life. Through RTR I was able to connect with such people and have meaningful discussions.”





Dilnawaz Pervez Irani



Dilnawaz hails from Karachi, Pakistan and holds an MBA. She is currently working as an HR Assistant Manager at Habib Bank Ltd. In her free time, Dilnawaz loves exploring different places, travelling, hiking, trekking, socializing, cooking and baking.

“Before this trip I was quite anxious to explore India, which is also known as our Religious Land. Visiting religious and sacred places, historical places and meeting scholars like Mr. Khojeste Mistree has motivated me to strive to be a better Zoroastrian in many ways. I will never forget all the lessons learnt from this auspicious and pleasant trip.”



Hanoz Santoke

Hanoz was born and raised in southern California and has been an active member of the local Zoroastrian community since childhood. He has attended several Zoroastrian congresses and volunteers at many events; in addition, he manages the website for the Zoroastrian Association of California. Hanoz holds a PhD in environmental engineering. He currently teaches chemistry at the college level and engages in research on water pollution.



The main benefit of RTR to me was the opportunity to actually see Parsi institutions first hand and be reminded of our rich past and the contributions that we have made to India's development. I also learned more about the community by meeting young Zoroastrians from all over the world (particularly Pakistan) and talking about the status of the communities in different places. The main impact of this trip on my life was an appreciation of our past and a renewed enthusiasm about the future.”



Jamsheed Cooper

Jamsheed was raised in Dubai and in Atlanta, Georgia. He is an intern at the UN disarmament office in Geneva at present.

In his own words, his work involves “research on how to prevent killer robots from taking over the planet or terrorists from acquiring biological or nuclear weapons”.

Apart from that, Jamsheed likes to eat Ben and Jerry's ice cream, plays guitar and bass, and is a self-proclaimed nerd.



“This trip didn't change my worldview much to be honest, interesting and enjoyable as it was. But what it did give me was friends and exposure to culture and India and smiles and laughs with cool people. And judging by the number of greasy mutton cutlets I consumed, probably early heart disease too...”



Jasmine Baetz

Jasmine is an artist and educator living in Boulder, Colorado, territory of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations. She is an MFA student at the University of Colorado, and holds a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Toronto, and a BFA in 3D Fine Arts from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.



“Despite my serious concerns about the exclusionary structural issues of the community, I had a very meaningful trip, and met many people I will stay in touch with. RTR’s generous financial aid enabled me to meet family I’d never seen before, and garner a far deeper understanding of what I come from. Now that I’m nearing the end of my education and moving into a more stable time in my life, I plan to return to India often.”



Khodarahm Partovi

Khodarahm was born in Iran and moved to California about 4 years ago. He has recently finished his Masters in Geotechnical Engineering from Cal Poly Pomona and is now working as a Civil Engineer. He was an active member of Zoroastrian youth organizations when he was in Iran, and is now part of the Art group at CZC-Westminister.



“I have a good knowledge of my religion, though I did not know much about Parsi history. This trip helped me to become more familiar with that side of Zoroastrian history. Before the trip, I had a very good understanding of being an Iranian Zoroastrian and now after RTR, I have a good understanding of Parsi Zoroastrians and have realized that while we may have our differences, we are all still the same, and that is Zoroastrians.”



Khushnam Jamshed Karanjia



Khushnam was born in India, but now resides in Pakistan and holds a Pakistani nationality. She is an HR Talent Acquisition Lead at UBL Fund Managers, which is an Asset Management Company in Pakistan. She is engaged to fellow RTR-er Rayomand Irani.

“I honestly thought this would be visit to a zillion religious places where we would be forced to practice what the religion states, but to my surprise it was quite an experience. It was a mixture of learning, understanding, questioning, fun and everlasting memories.”



Kooshan Khosravi

Kooshan is originally from Iran, but moved to the United States nearly 9 years ago. He has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from UCI, and is now in the process of getting his AA degree in business administration.



“Before coming on this trip, I had thought that Iranian Zartoshtis had similar rituals as the Parsis, but I got to see that not every ritual is the same. I had also heard that Parsis were super rich, but thanks to RTR, I now know there are many Zartoshtis in need of assistance.”



Layla Mazdyasni

Layla was born and raised in San Diego, California. Currently, she is in her last semester at UC Berkeley, and will graduate with a Bachelor's degree in cognitive science. She is interested in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, and the complexity of these relationships. Following graduation, she will be working in retail management. In her free time, she loves doing and teaching yoga, staying active, and exploring new places.



“Before the trip, the majority of my understanding of my religion came from my family and our interactions. Growing up in California, I consider myself Persian-American. After RTR, I felt like I finally had a real life glimpse into the struggles of the diaspora, of how our religion has evolved differently on two sides, and how our cultures are not actually intertwined with our religion. We eat different foods, we celebrate to different songs, we have different dress, but we all can still feel connected through the basics of being Zoroastrian.

Tto me, that's enough. That's where we should focus our energy, on learning and growing from one another, on being able to start a conversation because we know the same prayer, but not letting that be the only thing that connects us. I really, really had a wonderful RTR experience and I'm very thankful for you all.”



Parshan Khosravi

Parshan is a 2nd year Master of Public Policy student at UCLA. He resides in Orange County, California, and will be chairing the 7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in 2019.



“Our religion is beautiful. However, that does not mean that it's flawless. That's the biggest lesson I learned through RTR. We have a lot to be proud of, but we also have a lot that needs to be done to better support our community and create a more welcoming and equitable space.”



Rayomand Pervez Irani

Rayomand grew up in Karachi, Pakistan. He majored in Finance, currently



works at Cathay Pacific as Sales Manager Pakistan, and has over 10 years of experience in the aviation industry. He is engaged to Khushnam, who also accompanied him on this trip. Rayomand enjoys playing sports and tries to participate in all inter community sports competitions.

“This trip has helped me understand our beautiful religion and practice it daily in the right ways. A lot of unanswered questions, which back home were not at all possible to get guidance or answers to, were answered.”



Sanaya Master

Sanaya Master hails from New Zealand. A former communications specialist with health software provider Orion Health, Sanaya was instrumental in organising the first ever World Zoroastrian Youth Leaders Forum hosted at the ASHA Centre in March 2018. She was also involved in organising the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Auckland, New Zealand in 2015, where she was responsible for the marketing and publicity material in the four years leading up to the Congress.



“Whilst I have always been proud of our Zoroastrian heritage I wasn’t really informed about our roots. Honestly, it was not something I had dwelled on.

Hearing about our roots from archaeologists, priests and other knowledgeable Zoroastrians made a huge difference. Visiting the Tower of Silence that I had never been to and being at a place where our last rites are done was a powerful experience. Being on the same shores where our forefathers first arrived in India is something I would have never experienced if it wasn't for Return to Roots.

The Return to Roots programme has filled me up with a sense of wonder and pride of being a Zoroastrian especially after learning about the immense contribution that our forefathers made in terms of art, education, music, technology and the corporate sector. It was also wonderful to be able to explore our cultural boundaries and look at issues from different perspectives.”



Sohrab Noshirwani



Sohrab was born in Karachi, Pakistan and currently resides in the UK. He holds a Masters in Mechanical Engineering and is working for Jaguar Land Rover UK. His interests lie in dancing, cycling, model aviation and bicycle restoration. His reasons for signing up for RTR include “meeting new people, facilitating his identity crisis, and basking in the presence of a majority”.

“I have become confident in myself as a person in meeting new people and I am proud to identify myself as a Zoroastrian. I was able to clarify myths and irregularities that are taught to us as children and learnt the significance of our traditions”



Tanya Hoshi

Tanya is a Film Producer/Director in Toronto, Canada and is currently directing a 12-episode web series she financed through private and government funding. She works full time at Shopify, where she coordinates all national and international film productions. In addition to having experience in filmmaking, she is a Canadian Reserves Officer and an avid skier.



“Before RTR, I wasn't involved in our religious community. I didn't celebrate Navroze, didn't attend Navjotes, or any other celebrations or events. This is partly because I didn't feel emotionally connected to any of this because I was so distant from the community due to school and work. I didn't have any interactions with Zoroastrians out of my own immediate family and generally had a very close-minded view about religion in general, so I didn't want to be involved. But ultimately I knew this hurt me since I didn't have a grasp on a proper identity or community for myself.”

After RTR, I realized that it's important for me to interact with my fellow Parsi youth and create long lasting friendships in our community. I have a better understanding of our history and the meaning behind our customs and traditions. I still have lots more to learn but I've taken the first step to be more involved in our community and have a desire now to make it better.”



Zeryus Patel

Zeryus hails from Karachi, Pakistan. He completed his first degree, a BSc Hons in Biomedical Sciences, at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, and is currently pursuing his MBChB Medicine degree at Dundee University in Scotland, UK. He has also done a 2-month internship in the middle of his Newcastle degree in Cancer research at Columbia University in New York, USA.

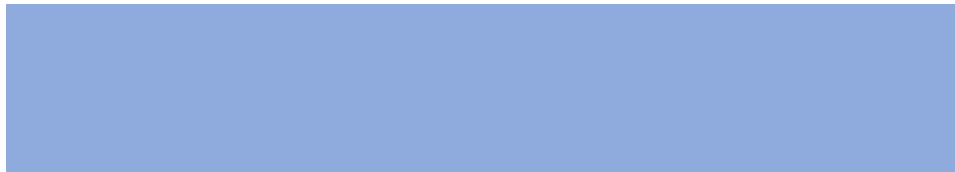
As I did not study at a Parsi school, my knowledge about the roots of the Zoroastrian / Parsi faith is almost nonexistent. Therefore RTR provided an opportunity to learn and experience history first hand.



I also learnt more about the community to which I belong, how this community and the Zoroastrian faith preaches peace, humility and love. This is so important today when religions are dividing the world instead of unifying people. I got an idea of the viewpoints of different scholars and heard about how they would like the religion to progress in the near future



THE TEAM





Each year RTR brings in their alumni to help out with logistical support, visa documentation and for liaising with travel agents and local benefactors. Our alumni coordinators for 2017 were:

Kayras Irani



Kayras Darayush Irani was born in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and moved to Ontario Canada at the age of six. Kayras has been a Medic with the British Columbia Ambulance Service for seven years and in 2013-2014 he pursued further studies by travelling to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island to achieve a license in Advanced Care Paramedicine. He has been an active volunteer with the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia (ZSBC) for 9 years and enjoys spending time with youth and seniors within the community and outside of it as well. He enjoys playing volleyball, badminton and recreational swimming during his free time and is an all you can eat sushi lover. When time permits, he likes spending time doing various boating activities.



Natasha Karanjia

Natasha was born and brought up in Karachi, Pakistan. She holds an MBA in Marketing and is currently working as a Channel Planner at one of Pakistan's largest telecom operators. She also has a keen interest in International Politics. Besides RTR, Natasha is also a junior member at the Karachi Zarhosti Banu Mandal – Child Chapter and a member at PPCA (Pakistan Parsi Collegiate Association). She also frequently volunteers at community events in Karachi. She attended RTR as a participant in 2016 and returned as an alumni volunteer in 2017.



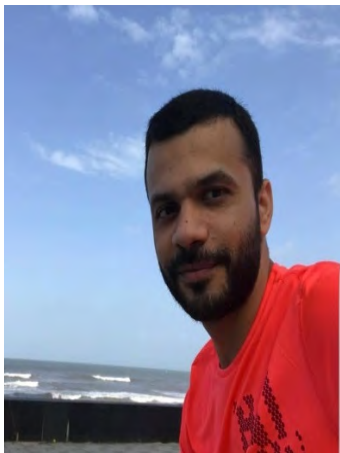
Ruxshin Dinshaw

Ruxshin is based in Karachi, Pakistan and holds a BSc in International Development from the University of London. She currently works in communications and programme coordination at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). She was a participant on the second Return to Roots tour and helped organise the fourth trip. She is a bookworm with a particular love for high fantasy and historical fiction.



Sheherzad Pavri

Sheherzad, aka Sherry, is our resident Dasturji. He is an entrepreneur, running his own business in the travel industry. He is a fully fledged priest, performing high ceremonies. Born and brought up in Mumbai, he is an alumnus of the Dadar Athornan Institute where he underwent his priestly training. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Biotechnology and was also involved in the Scouting movement with the 16th East Bombay Scout group.



Zubin Gheesta

Zubin Pervez Gheesta was born and raised in Mumbai. He is a Fitness Consultant by profession and has been in the industry for the past 9 years. Zubin started his individual Freelancing Fitness Consulting in August 2011 and there has been no looking back for him since then. Transforming people's bodies into their respective healthier versions has been Zubin's motivation so far and will always be. He first came to know about the Return to Roots (RTR) program in the

North American LA Congress which he attended in Dec 2014 and was instantly very eager to be a part of it, and has been since 2015.



Aban Marker Kabraji - Co Chairperson RTR

Aban hails from Quetta, Pakistan and Bangkok, Thailand, and is the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Regional Director, Asia. 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 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 Chairperson RTR

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 Program. She is also the National Coordinator of the Government of India's Jiyo Parsi program.



Arzan Sam Wadia - Program Director

Arzan is a licensed architect and practices as an architect and urban designer in New York City, where he currently lives with his wife Shirin. 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 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). 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 also runs Parsi Khabar (www.parsikhabar.net), an online portal about Parsis.



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

Born in Karachi, Pakistan, Rosheen is currently pursuing her PhD in Contemporary Indian Politics at King's College London. Rosheen was active in supporting the smooth running of the RTR trip from 'behind the

scenes', in all aspects of coordination and planning. She holds a BSc from University College London and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge.



James Darius Ball - *Social Media and Outreach Director*

James Darius was born and raised in New Jersey with his parents and two sisters. James was instrumental in promoting the RTR trip on social media as well as leading in disseminating presentations at various funding and youth awareness platforms. James also aided in developing the itinerary of the trip. He is now Regional Manager for the MaGrann Association in Washington, specializing in building consulting and engineering



Dinsha Mistree - *Co-founder & Representative US, Canada*

Dinsha was born in Houston, Texas and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. He is now a Fellow at Stanford Law School in the Program in the Rule of Law.



THE RETURN





TRIP SUMMARY

Day 1:	Mumbai	Cusrow Baug, Doongarwadi, RTI
Day 2:	Nargol, Sanjan, Udvada	Ahura, Varoli River, Sanjan Dakhma, Sanjan Stumb, Udvada Utsav
Day 3:	Udvada	Udvada Utsav
Day 4:	Navsari	Navsari Atashbehram, Vadi Dar-e- Mehr, Meherjina Library, Jamshed Baug
Day 5:	Navsari, Surat	Senior Citizens Home Navsari, Navsari Infirmary, Surat Orphanages
Day 6:	Gujarat Villages	Various villages, Ajmalgarh
Day 7:	Surat	Surat Atashbehrams, Goti Adarian, Dotiwala Bakery
Day 8:	Dahanu	Chikoo farms, Dahanu beach
Day 9:	Mumbai	Esplanade House, Dadar Athornan Institute, Brittainia
Day 10:	Mumbai	Bus tour, Jimmy Boys', Jimmy Mistry
Day 11:	Mumbai	Rippon Club, Boat ride
Day 12:	Mumbai	Parsi General Hospital, Parsi Gymkhana



Day: 1 Mumbai

RTR 4 initiated its tour on 22nd December 2017 in Mumbai. 20 fellows from all over the diaspora participated in RTR 4. Participants were from the USA, Canada, UAE, UK, Pakistan, India and New Zealand and included both Iranian and Parsi Zarthustustis. This was the largest group of participants in RTR's history.

Orientation at Cusrow Baug:



The programme officially kicked off with an orientation session at Cusrow Baug. The fellows got to see firsthand a typical Zoroastrian Baugh. The session, conducted at the Baug's pavilion, was opened by Ms. Aban Marker Kabraji, Co-Chairperson of RTR and Arzan

Sam Wadia, Program Director, who briefed the fellows about the objectives of RTR and highlighted its key features. They were followed by this year's alumni volunteers – Ruxshin Dinshaw, Zubin Gheesta, Sheherazad Pavri, Kayras Irani and Natasha 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.

The orientation was also attended by Ms. Katayun Kapadia (FEZANA) who stressed on the importance of such programs for the youth.

Each fellow was asked to formally introduce themselves, briefly elaborate on their reasons for participating, and touch upon what they hoped to gain from the





Roots experience. 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.

Tour of the Doongarwadi:

The fellows were then taken to the Doongarwadi (Towers of Silence) where they were introduced to Mr. Khojeste Mistree. Mr. Mistree briefed the fellows on the burial method, 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.





Ratan Tata Institute (RTI):

After the Doongarwadi visit, the fellows were treated, at long last, to their first plate of Parsi Food. The ladies of RTI had prepared a delectable *Dhansak* for the fellows, a Parsi staple which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Lunch was followed with a talk on the establishment of RTI, its objectives, and how, over the years, it has successfully shaped the lives of the women who have worked for it.

The fellows were then taken for a visit of the premises, most importantly, the kitchen. There, they were let in on the secret of making the perfect *bhakra* (this involved both assisting the bemused cook in preparing this beloved Parsi delicacy, and of course, sampling it with the air of a lifelong epicure). The making of a variety of other food stuff was also demonstrated.



The next stop, the RTI embroidery division, gave the fellows an insight into the time and effort expended in producing traditional *sarees* and *garas*. The fellows were also able to observe the workers preserving an old saree by transferring it onto a newer fabric.



The evening was a light affair as many of the fellows retired early to pack and to rest for a day of travelling ahead.



Day 2: Nargol - Sanjan - Udvada

Breakfast at Ahura:

Day 2 started at the crack of dawn as the group departed Mumbai for Sanjan. The first pit stop of the trip was for breakfast at Ahura Restaurant where the group enjoyed a scrumptious breakfast of *akoori*, *Parsi poro*, *qeema av* and tea (or as the fellows took to calling it, Choi!!!)



The group was joined by archeologist Dr. Rukshana Nanji, an RTR favourite who has enlightened every group of fellows since the program's first tour. Dr. Nanji briefed the fellows on her work in Sanjan, the importance of Sanjan and Nargol with regards to the Zoroastrian exodus, and the work being done by others in this regard.

Nargol:

The group then headed towards Nargol and the banks of the Varoli River to the point where the river meets the Arabian Sea – supposedly the spot where the first Zoroastrians landed from Iran. The fellows took the customary official photograph here on the same banks where their ancestors had first landed.





Sanjan:



The fellows then headed towards Sanjan, where they were taken to the site of the first Dakhma (Tower of Silence) to be excavated in India. Dr. Nanji briefed the group about the site and how it was discovered. The main excavations have been filled in again to protect the ruins, but this site proves that one of the first Zoroastrian settlements in India was in Sanjan.

The next stop, the *Chalto Ambo* or Jumping Mango Tree, is a botanical curiosity, 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 where it was first planted, 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.



After spending a morning in the open, the fellows retired to the Sanjan Sanatorium for lunch. Before bidding adieu to Sanjan, the fellows visited the Sanjan Stumbh, a 50-foot column located beside the Sanatorium, which commemorates the arrival of the Parsis in India.



Udvada:

In 2017, the usually idyllic village of Udvada hosted the Iranshah Udvada Utsav (IUU). RTR headed over (for the first time in its history) to see what all the fuss was about, making the industrial city of Vapi their basecamp.

Arriving in the nick of time to witness the Utsav's opening ceremony, the fellows enjoyed a fun filled evening, with speakers highlighting the importance of the festival to dance performances, and a showcase of Parsi Garas and Sarees a la runway. The dinner, laid out *ghambar*-style, was a first for many of the fellows.



Day 3: Udvada

Day at IUU:



The second day of the IUU brought the fellows to a series of panel discussions and lectures, and a meeting with Dr. Shernaz Cama, co-chair of RTR. Dr. Cama briefed them about the Parzor Threads of Continuity project, which was also on display at the IUU, and a general discussion followed on the importance of preserving the community's history.



The fellows were also fortunate to meet Mobed Firozgari, the high Priest of Iran, and attend his talk on the marriage ceremony in Iran. A panel discussion on “Youth in Zoroastrianism” was also conducted and the group participated in the morning programme with a great deal of enthusiasm.

The morning session was followed by lunch, after which the fellows were at leisure to discover the village and visit the Iranshah Atashbehran to offer prayers.



The second evening’s programme consisted of lighter entertainment, a play and a variety of musical performances. The evening’s festivities were rounded off by The Big Red Bus, the Parsi community’s very own boyband, and Utsav goes rang in Christmas with a collection of old rock and roll hits which many in the group were found to be tapping their feet and

grooving to.

However, youthful entertainment aside, the main highlight of RTR’s Udvada sojourn was the *boi* ceremony marking the changing of the Geh after 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 divas and the main fire, giving a sense of serenity.



Day 4: Navsari

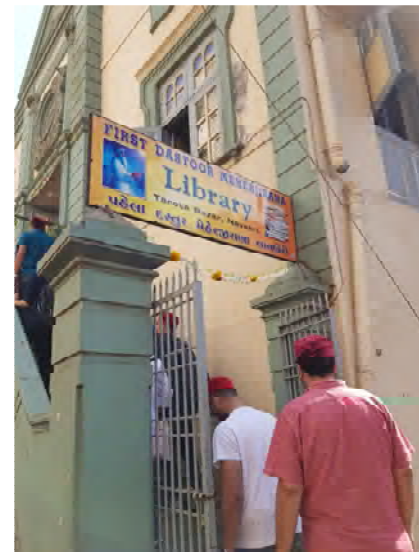
Navsari Atash Behram:

After bidding farewell to Udvada, the group headed to Navsari, where their first stop was the Navsari Bhagarsath Anjumanna Atash Behram. The fellows were met by a young priest who briefed them on the history of the Atash Behram and also shared its holy significance by showing the group some of the 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 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 process and showed around the restoration room.



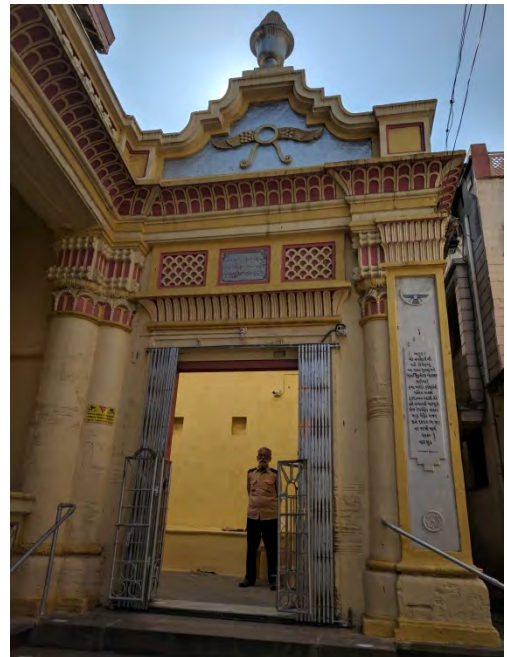


The group was also given a demonstration in Kusti weaving and Toran making by the local Parsi women and many in the group tried their hand at both these arts.



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.





Discovering Navsari:

Following lunch at Jamshed Baugh, the fellows were taken for a walk through the old Parsi settlement in Navsari called Parsi Vad. The fellows were curious about the unique architecture of the houses and quaint lanes.



The group also visited the ancestral homes of Jamshedjee Jeejebhoy and Jamshedji N Tata. Both these houses have been converted to museums and the group had an amazing and informative time looking at the artifacts and imagining life in those times.

During the evening the group visited some local shops for some souvenirs and religious memorabilia followed by dinner at Jamshed Baug.

Day 5: Navsari

Senior Citizen Home & Infirmary:

The next day in Navsari included a visit to the WZO Senior Citizen Home. The group was met by Mr. Dinshaw Tamboly and his wife, who introduced them to many of the residents. The group was also fortunate enough to spend time with Mr. Marzban Giara, a Parsi historian.

The fellows were also introduced to Mr. Malcolm Deboo, Ms. Dolly Dastoor, Mr. Homi Ghandi and Mr. Behram Pastakhia of FEZANA, who were present there.





Following the Senior Citizen Home, the group was shown around the Navsari Infirmary. Here the group was briefed on the care being offered to the patients 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 in general brought a smile to their faces. After a final lunch at Jamshed Baug, the group departed for Surat.



Surat Orphanages:

Upon reaching Surat in the evening, the group visited both the Boys and the Girls. The group also met 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 and music as the fellows interacted with the children and distributed chocolates and sweets. They played games with them, sang songs and the more enthusiastic fellows even taught the children a few dances.





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 - Traditional Gujarati Thali:



After 5 days of almost non-stop Parsi food, even the most ardent Dhansak lovers admitted that the traditional Gujarati Thali was a not only a well-needed break, but an experience in and of itself. Gordhan Thal had the honour of being the group's host.





Day 6: Villages of Gujarat - Ajmalgarh

The next morning was an early start as the plan for the day was to visit the Zoroastrians living around Vansada area. The group was accompanied by Mr. Dinshaw Tamboly and his enthusiastic and informative grandson, who briefed them on the work being undertaken by the WZO to lift the Zoroastrian families living here out of poverty. Many of these families didn't have proper houses until recently; now, with support from WZO and other generous donors both at home and abroad, 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, all of whom, with the support of the community, were able to start their own business.



Ajmalgarh, a hilltop overlooking the Barhot caves where the Iranshah Atash was kept hidden for 14 years before being taken to Udvarda, was the group's destination for lunch. Accessible only by jeep, the hilltop has an important place in the community's history. To commemorate this, a symbolic *stumbh* (column) has been placed at the summit of Ajmalgarh. The fellows visited this and were briefed on the entire route which the Iranshah fire had taken. The fellows also marveled at the strength and resolution of the priests who had undertaken this arduous journey for such a long period in such treacherous terrain.





Day 7: Surat

Surat Atashbehrams and Goti Adarian:

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 Behram, after which the group went to the Goti Adarian to offer prayers.



Dotiwala Bakery:

In keeping with RTR tradition, the next stop was the Dotiwala Bakery, of which the group was given a tour. Among the ceaseless and varied activities that take place in a bakery, the fellows saw *batasas* being rolled and baked, and 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 - The Golden Dragon:

For lunch, the group headed over to 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 fellows were given some free time for the rest of the day, and many took this opportunity to sightsee in Surat while others rested at the hotel.

Day 8: Dahanu

Gholvad and Chickoo Farms:

Day 8 consisted mainly of a road trip to Dahanu and back, where the fellows visited the Irani Zoroastrian settlers and their farms. On the way, the fellows stopped at the Umargaon Lighthouse, where they met up with RTR alumni Farzan Mazda. From the top of the lighthouse, the fellows could see the Varoli River and the path ships would have taken inwards on the waterway.

This was followed by lunch at a Parsi owned resort in Dahanu, after which the group headed towards the chikoo farms. Here, they were greeted by the farmer and were given a tour of his farm. He talked in length about the various methods and practices he employs to grow various foods on his farms, and how he maximizes his yield.

The day closed with a beautiful sunset on Dahanu Beach (and a romantic proposal – a first for RTR!). After dinner at the resort, the group departed for Mumbai.





Day 9: Mumbai

Esplanade House:



The next leg of the tour continued in Mumbai with a visit to Esplanade House. This house is a UNESCO-certified heritage site and was once the residence of Jamsetji Nusserwanjee Tata. The house was in a dilapidated state for a period, and has recently had a great deal of work done to preserve it; the interior now houses offices. The tour of the

house was spearheaded by Mr. Vikas Dilawari, the lead architect involved in the building's restoration.

The group also met the trustee of the RD Sethna Scholarship fund and were given a briefing of the scholarship at their office in Esplanade House.

Dadar Athornan Institute:

At the Dadar Athornan Institute, the fellows were greeted by Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, who conducted a session with the fellows and spoke on a wide variety of religious topics.

He also fielded multiple questions from the group. Amongst other topics, Dr. Karanjia explained the process of becoming a priest and how the madrasa maintains a balance between both religious and academic education. The fellows were also shown around the institute and the





hostel area.

Britannia:

Lunch for the day was at the iconic Britannia restaurant, where the fellows feasted on traditional Iranian and Parsi food which included their famous berry pulao, chicken cutlets, marghi ma sali and Parsi custard washed down with Pallonjee's Soda. Mr. Boman Kohinoor, the 90 year old owner of the café, still waits on tables and enthralls the patrons with his stories and anecdotes.



Meeting Mr. Khojeste Mistree:

In the evening, Mr. Khojeste Mistree graciously hosted the fellows for an informative discussion on religion. The fellows took active part in the discussion and asked questions related to various topics. The topics discussed included religious theory, ideology, the role of women and interfaith marriages, the concept of dualism and Fravashis.





Day 10: Mumbai

Open Deck Tour:

Day 10 of the trip started with everyone gathering at the Mumbai Electric House, Colaba for an open bus tour. Mr Khojeste Mistree was the guide for this tour and he gave an introduction to the contribution of the Parsis in developing Mumbai 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 present in the vicinity where Mr. Mistree further informed the group on the contribution to society of each patron. The walk then continued towards Fort area and the downtown district. The fellows saw the area surrounding Crawford market, JJ School of Art and Architecture, VT station, Bombay Municipality building and the building housing the Bombay Parsi Panchayet's office. All these places highlight the contribution of Parsis to society and are a true testament to their legacy.



Jimmy Boy:

Lunch was a fun affair at Jimmy Boy. The fellows indulged in *kid ghost* and other items, but the star of the meal was the crispy fried rice crackers!!!



Jimmy Mistry New Year's Bash:

To ring in the New Year, the fellows were invited to Jimmy Mistry's house for an informal meetup followed by dinner. Jimmy told the fellows about his life and how he built up his business, and encouraged the fellows to take an initiative and dream big if they wanted to achieve something.



Day 11

Ripon Club:

After a free morning where fellows had the option to visit various Agiaries and Atash Behrams in Mumbai, the group had their first meal of the New Year at the Ripon Club. This iconic club, founded in 1884 and located in downtown Mumbai, was once a watering hole





for lawyers, chartered accountants, and other men of business. Today, its membership is open to all Parsi Zoroastrians and is gender inclusive. The fellows were briefed on the historical importance of the club. The typical Parsi Lounge chairs found at the club were particularly fascinating to the fellows, many of whom had never seen this peculiar piece of furniture before.



Boat Tour:

The evening programme included a boat ride that started from the Gateway of India and toured the bay before returning to the Gateway. Fellows got to see some of the iconic buildings lining Mumbai's coastline, such as the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel.

Parsi Wedding:

The first day of the New Year also saw another first for RTR – an invite to a traditional Parsi wedding. After a quick rendezvous at the hotel to change, the group headed off to Rhea and Adil Minocherhomji's wedding at the beautiful Colaba Agiary. For many in the group this was the first time they had attended a typical Parsi wedding.





Day 12

Visit to Parsi 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 visit to the hospital highlighted one of the major problems for the elderly Parsi population – affordable healthcare and how to set up and sustain community-funded healthcare. The

group was briefed by the Administrator of the hospital regarding the many challenges they face and also on the new Center which is being established by the Shroff Family, which will be open to treatment for all; the revenues generated will help in managing the healthcare facility of the patients at Parsi General Hospital.

Debrief at Parsi Gymkhana:

Lunch was at the famous Parsi Gymkhana. The group was shown around the premises by Mr. Burjis Wania and Mr. Adi Pardiwala and briefed on the club’s sports legacy and current laws.

Lunch was followed by a debrief session. Valuable feedback was provided by the participants, which will be considered and incorporated while planning the next tour. The group also discussed various other initiatives they can take within their own communities back home.





REVIVE - THE SUCCESS STORIES

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:

Parshan Khosravi, Kooshan Khosravi, Anahita Hormozdyari and Khodarahm Partovi - Fellows in RTR 4 made a presentation about Return to Roots at the 2018 FEZANA Annual General Meeting in LA, USA.

Anahita Verahrami (Fellow RTR 4) presented her experiences with the RTR trip to her local Zoroastrian organization.

The 1st World Zoroastrian Youth Leadership Conference (WZYLC) was held at the Asha Center, UK in March 2018. The Conference was organized by Sanaya Master, and 8 of the participants, including Sanaya, were RTR Alumni.



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