

**POWER**

for sustainable development  
**CREATIVITY**

Vol. 2, August 2008

**SPECIAL FOCUS ON  
PARSI CULTURES**

Parsi Embroidery

Parsi Crafts

Parsi Cuisine

Hadvaid: the Bone Doctor

Navsari: the Parsi Heartland

**HERITAGE FOR  
DEVELOPMENT**

Safeguarding Living Heritage of  
Indian Cities: Maheshwar

Wisdom of Traditional  
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Tour Guides: the Urban Storytellers

**DESIGNERS MEET  
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East Meets West at Santiniketan

**INTANGIBLE HERITAGE**

Indian Traditional Magic

The Damai Music of Kalpaari Society

**PARZOR CRAFTS  
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BRINGING SCIENCE TO LIFE



# From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

Our world is comprised of at least 200 nations, 6700 language communities and a myriad of socio-cultural groups. India alone has 28 States, each with its own distinctive history and traditions. Then there are its 5161 cities, 22 official regional languages and some 1500 'mother tongues' according to the Governmental Census. This is not to overlook the fact that this fast growing economy still retains at least 697 tribal groups. Among the infinite wealth of cultural diversity this entails, how many of them are given the recognition and respect each deserve, and what is transmitted to the next generation as the globalisation of the economy and dominant commercial culture impacts on the life of all?

Culture is fragile. Its transmission can be disrupted by many causes, ranging from natural disasters to human factors such as war and pollution. However, the most detrimental cause is the disinterest of people, in particular the abandonment by communities of a commitment to uphold the practices we define as culture. The second issue of the *Power of Creativity Magazine* is a tribute to the effort of some devoted individuals in reviving the otherwise lost cultural traditions of India.

How many of you have heard of the **Damai musical** tradition of the Kalpaari people in Uttarakhand? While the **Indian traditional magic** is famous, how many of you are aware that this millennia old art which has been transmitted from father to son is on the verge of disappearance - as the traditional families of the artists are now banned from the streets as 'illegal' performers? You will discover the stories of individuals, struggling to revive these traditions to restore the dignity of the people affected.

The present issue also commemorates nearly 10 years of collaboration between UNESCO and the Parsi-Zoroastrian Foundation in the form of the UNESCO-PARZOR Special Project for the Preservation and Promotion of Parsi-Zoroastrian Culture and Heritage. The **Parsi-Zoroastrian community** in India faces a particular challenge: the loss of 10% of its population due to genetic diseases particularly affecting the Parsi people is recorded in every decennial census. From 1991 to 2001, its population has dwindled from 76,000 to 69,601. With this steep demographic decline, the legacy of Parsi-Zoroastrian culture is at risk of disappearing.

Launched in 1999, the UNESCO-PARZOR Project, sustained through funds raised by the Parsi community, is aimed at researching, recording and reviving the interest of their own community and the public at large in the many facets of Parsi-Zoroastrian culture and its peoples. This includes the arts and crafts, its living heritage, especially rituals and oral traditions, religious practices and priesthood, as well as raising awareness about medical and demographic issues. This is all in addition to the value of the existing archival material and the tangible heritage left behind by their ancestors. Five articles featured in this issue as well as the mini-catalogue of Parsi crafts inserted in the magazine provide only a small introduction to the vast array of Parsi cultural forms.

**Urban heritage** is perhaps another form of cultural heritage that is fast eroding in the context of 21st century India. With their growing populations, historical cities are subjected to unprec-

edented pressure to respond to the need for housing, public facilities and modern infrastructure, often resulting in a chaotic urban scenario. The consequence, to be sure, is not just aesthetic. The disappearance of historical areas has often been accompanied by the loss of the sense of "neighbourhood" associated with its traditional spatial organisation. The human dimension that holds together settlements is the ultimate resource that a city has in ensuring conviviality of daily life and in fostering cooperation between people. Greater awareness of that special linkage between space and community must be instilled for our cities to remain human in the face of sweeping globalization and unplanned, uncontrolled growth. Otherwise, we run the risk of turning India's fabulous diversity of neighbourhoods into monotonous space deprived of any unique features.

To assist the municipal authorities in balancing the need for urban development and concern for heritage conservation, in September 2006, UNESCO, with the endorsement of the Union Ministry of Urban Development, launched the **Indian Heritage Cities Network** (initially launched as the Network of Indian Cities of Living Heritage). This was done to provide a platform for city planners and mayors to discuss their common challenges and exchange solutions.

In support of the above network, the *Power of Creativity Magazine* will highlight in each issue one historical city and the efforts made to place its heritage value at the centre of urban regeneration. Featured in this volume to kick-start the series is the city of **Maheshwar** in Madhya Pradesh. This is followed by an observation on the **wisdom embedded in traditional earthquake resistant architecture** in the particular context of Kashmir. The merit of traditional architecture lies not only in its aesthetic value and therefore touristic potential, but also in terms of its intrinsic engineering principles.

A 'majority' they may be in terms of number, but nonetheless 'marginalized' are the craftspeople whose access to the mainstream market is still restricted. The *Power of Creativity Magazine* will also continue featuring initiatives in support of artisans, this time with the example of a **TRIFED-UNESCO design workshop for tribal artisans in Santiniketan**, organized in collaboration with young designers from the Royal College of Art, London.

To end with, please enjoy the inside story of **tour guides in India**, who we count on as our valued allies in sensitizing the public on heritage protection and conservation. For the tour guides to play the role of "cultural ambassador", however, their social status merits greater recognition and respect accompanied by more stability in their income.

Thank you for reading our magazine and we look forward to receiving your comments and ideas for articles at [newdelhi@unesco.org](mailto:newdelhi@unesco.org)

**Minja Yang**

Director and UNESCO Representative for  
Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka.







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# East Meets West at *Santiniketan*

By Anna Bella Tete

*Santiniketan*, the “abode of peace”, is renowned as a university town, envisioned by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore as a centre of learning and a meeting ground for the cultures of the East and the West.







**T**ribal people spread across the length and the breadth of India make up about 8 percent of the country's population. Tribals usually live in settlements close to the forests, in harmony with nature. They are among the most vulnerable groups in India, and integrating them into the market economy is one of the major challenges for the country's government. A major portion of tribals' income is generated from the cultivation and gathering of non-timber forest products. Their creative and utilitarian handicrafts for sale are made primarily from locally available natural materials such as metal, textiles, leather, sholapith and bamboo. These sales supplement their income during lean periods of agriculture and are a precious source of livelihood.

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED) works for the social and economic development of the indigenous people through marketing and development of these products. It is a livelihood generating initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs of the Central Government. TRIFED also collaborates with like-minded organizations to provide appropriate skill development in design and technical know-how of the tribal craftspeople, so that they can develop their work into a full-time economically viable handicraft sector.

Last year, UNESCO, in collaboration with TRIFED, invited two talented designers, Chiara Bello and Sian Smyth, to participate in a "Designer Meets Artisans" workshop at Santiniketan with the tribal craftspeople. Chiara and Sian travelled for the workshop from the Royal College of Arts, a post-graduate university of art and design in London, to Santiniketan, in Birbhum district of West Bengal. Santiniketan, the "abode of peace", is renowned as a university town, envisioned by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore as a centre of learning and a meeting ground for the cultures of the East and the West.

As this was the first visit to India for the young designers, both Chiara and Sian were delighted with the diversity of cultures found in everyday life. They were interested in exploring as much of it as possible, from the cuisine to the local dress – whether *salwar kameez* in the cities or sarees in the villages – as well as the recreational dance forms of the tribals at Santiniketan. The mix of the traditional with the modern in everyday life inspired them with new ideas and insights.

The designers were enthusiastic about working on the challenging project of livelihood generation with inexpensive, readily available raw materials. They did thorough research and conducted an assessment of the tribal products on sale: the types of handicraft made, the materials used by the craftspeople and their techniques of production. They also studied their competition in the handicraft sector. While staying at Santiniketan they visited the neighbouring villages of Mahisadhal and Kamaroara to observe sholapith and terracotta techniques employed by villagers and the different products sold. This helped them gauge the strengths as well as areas where improvement was needed, to make the workshop useful and relevant to the craftspeople.

The fifteen-day workshop brought Chiara and Sian together with a local Indian designer, ten artisans specializing in bamboo products and twenty craftspeople skilled in sholapith from the neighbouring tribal villages. Sholapith is a light reed with a soft centre about an inch and a half in diameter; it is peeled and turned into sheets from which art objects are made. The tribal people usually make items for religious purposes and home decor from this fragile material. At the workshop, the craftspeople were trained to make sholapith handicrafts in combination with other materials like hand-made paper and bamboo to give them durability.



Ring Chair



Growing Chair



Pasta drainer



Coffee table



Striped lamp shade



Tube table lamp



Folding picnic hamper



Bamboo/sholapith table lamp





Bed/laptop table



Room divider



Bamboo stool or small table



Ear rings



Ring



Children's mobile



Bookmarks







Chiara and Sian during the Design Workshop







They were also taught to make furniture from bamboo, as the designers noticed that the tribal craftsmanship in bamboo was limited to weaving and basket making, even though bamboo's natural strength and durability made it ideal for furniture making. Making furniture called for the introduction of new techniques for treating bamboo, i.e. bending and burning it to make it more pliant. The designers also looked at the existing handicrafts items besides the ones produced at the workshop and gave valuable suggestions to improve their appeal on the international market. For example, greater care was needed when adding finish touches to give

the products a polished look. Measurements, angles and joints needed to be more precise, and attention should be given to the packaging of products.

Chiara and Sian came up with 11 sample products and 36 product designs during the workshop, ranging from multi-purpose items like bed trays or laptop tables to room dividers; from extending chairs to striped bamboo lamps; picnic hampers to hanging mobiles for infants, and pasta drainers to bamboo and sholapith handbags. UNESCO hopes to identify sponsors who would assist tribal craftspeople to reproduce and commercialize these products.

The design workshop provided a rich learning experience for both the designers and the artisans. Chiara and Sian found an opportunity to test their expertise in a challenging environment for livelihood generation, while the artisans gained valuable insights on international design and learned to put familiar material to innovative use. This will help them enormously in supplementing their income and make them less dependent on the vagaries of agriculture for their livelihood. Meanwhile, consumers in India and overseas can begin to enjoy a whole new range of products that combine the traditional with the contemporary.

# Indian Traditional Magic

## Casting a Spell Over the World

By James Baer

Since ancient times, India has been perceived by the rest of the world as an exotic and mystical land. Part of the reason for this must be the fact that for centuries Indians have been performing magic. The Sanskrit words *indrajala* and *mayajala*, both terms for magic, first appear in the Vedas, where they were primarily philosophical concepts. *Indrajala* is the net of the king of the gods, Indra, which he uses to deceive, entrap and defeat his opponents – but this net can also be used by humans, and they were

quick to learn. Magic trickery gradually developed into a folk art form. In times when foreign travel was still uncommon and communication was mostly by word of mouth, the incredible performances of Indian magicians provoked exaggerated stories of the supernatural and of miraculous happenings.

Traditional Indian magic was performed not just for maharajas in their palaces and at royal *durbars*, but also on the street. Magicians travelled from one village to another to present their art. A sub-continent of diverse cultures and languages was knit together by the itinerant artists: from the magicians of the deserts of Rajasthan to the street performers of Kerala, all performed the same Indian magic, unifying people of different states and communities in wonderment and delight.





All this makes magic perhaps the only truly pan-Indian art form. And it has enabled interest in magic to spread beyond the common people to those with more esoteric pursuits: spiritualists, theosophists, and psychical researchers. Meanwhile, many Indians of all educational and class levels have a strong interest in what they might call the mystical sciences. And even today, there are people all over the world with a belief in the magical powers of yogis who live in the Himalayas.

In our day-to-day lives, however, most of us encounter magic on the street, thanks to the craft of street magicians who perform the seemingly impossible for the public. It is estimated that there are about 25,000 street magicians in India. Unlike the spectacles of famous American performers such as David Copperfield, these magicians perform close-up magic, relying entirely on the skills and techniques of their hands and using straightforward props. The *fakir* or *jadugar* is marked by his simple clothes and coloured turban. Squatting on the ground, he unravels his bundle of tricks for the crowds that push forward avidly to observe his performance. No assistants hover around to help him, save perhaps sometimes a young boy.

One of the famous Indian magic feats that does use an assistant is the Basket Trick, in which a child is put into a basket, and swords are then thrust through the basket. At the conclusion of the trick the child either climbs out of the basket or reappears from behind the crowd, miraculously unharmed. Less violent but just as spectacular is the Mango Trick. This amazing feat shows a mango tree growing from a seed in a few minutes. The mango seed is placed in an empty pot under a tripod formed by three sticks. The tripod is then covered with a cloth, after which the pot with the seed is taken out and filled with soil. Water is poured into it and the pot is again placed under the covered sticks. After a while the magician lifts up the cloth and takes out a mango plant. More water and soil are added to the plant and it is again replaced under the cloth. Suddenly the plant seems to grow bigger and ripe mangoes start falling and rolling out from under the cloth. Finally the magician removes the cloth to show a full-grown mango tree laden with fruit!

Another audience favorite is the Water of India Trick. The magician performs this

using a mud pot with a tiny spout. The magic pot is first filled to the brim, and then all the water is poured out. The pot is held upside down and a stick is inserted to show the audience that the pot is completely empty. The magician chants some magic words and closes the mouth of the pot with his palm. He then shakes the pot a few times before removing his hand. He tips the pot and water gushes out of the empty pot. This pot seems to pour water endlessly, even after it should have run dry.

Despite its appeal, street magic is fast becoming a lost art. The intense pace of urban life means that people have less time to watch street shows, and the density of pedestrians and vehicles leaves little space to stage a performance. Even in villages, markets are vanishing, depriving magicians of natural gathering places where they could perform.

As with many traditional crafts, magic also faces competition from changing attitudes towards work and careers. Magicians pass their secrets down only to family members, and it takes a magician six or seven years of intense training and hard work to learn his art. Traditional magic has to compete with all the new forms of entertainment for the public's attention, and some magicians are beginning to take advantage of modern technology to develop more spectacular effects. But despite the technical innovations that have made it possible to perform previously unthought-of tricks, close-up magic remains the more skilled and impressive form. A simple coin vanishing in the hands of a spectator still has a greater power to delight than purely technological wizardry.

Street magic performers do not have the protection of any governmental organizations, nor are they supported by welfare associations. This means that the 25,000 families dependent on this career lack job security and prospects for the future. MAZMA – the Society for Uplifting Traditional Magic and Performing Arts – is a Delhi-based NGO that is working to popularize and promote Indian street magic as an art form deserving of preservation and nurture. Together with Invis Multimedia, Kerala and UNESCO, MAZMA has produced a two-disc DVD set, *Enchanting Illusions: Traditional Magic of India*. The DVDs offer a special look at some of the traditional street magic of India, providing ample proof of the skills and



**Street magic performers do not have the protection of any governmental organizations, nor are they supported by welfare associations. This means that the 25,000 families dependent on this career lack job security and prospects for the future.**

technical finesse involved. A portion of the sales proceeds goes to support magicians. MAZMA provides insurance coverage, as well as education for magicians' children. And the Society plans to approach shopping malls to obtain permanent spots for performance, ensuring a place in the country's latest modern social spaces for one of its ancient traditions.

For more information on the DVD on traditional magic, contact [info@invismultimedia.com](mailto:info@invismultimedia.com)



# Forgotten Songs

## The Damai Music of Kalpaari Society, Uttarakhand

By Moe Chiba

Few would dispute that all cultures should be equal in their value and rights, but the reality is that the cultures of marginalized communities, despite their rich traditions, have attracted little recognition and are steadily disappearing in the face of cultural competition from stronger communities. The Damai Music of Kalpaari Society, performed by 'untouchable' Damai balladeers is one example of a cultural heritage that is facing silent death. But there are moves afoot to reverse the trend.





Deep in the central Himalayas, well off the tourist map, lies the Kumaon region, which stretches across the easternmost section of the State of Uttarakhand in India and three districts of the Far West Region of Nepal. This area, bifurcated by the River Mahakali (named after Lord Shiva's wife), is home to the Kalpaari people with a distinct and fascinating culture, with their own pantheon of gods and goddesses, their own language,

and a particular musical tradition. At the core of this lies Damai music.

For the people of the Kalpaari society, Damai music is particularly important because it incorporates their myths, legends and devotional hymns. These are sung by a balladeer, who is accompanied on bowl-shaped drums called *damau* which give the music its name. The families who perform it are themselves given the name Damai.

Considered 'untouchable' because they have traditionally been the handlers of dead animals, the Damai families find themselves at the bottom-most rung of the social hierarchy in both India and Nepal. As one of India's most disadvantaged populations, they are categorized as Scheduled Caste by this country's government. However, such fact should not minimize the great values of the Damai music tradition. Because the Kalpaari do not have written or audiovisual records, the Damai balladeer-drummers have traditionally been – and remain today – the only repository of community memory and knowledge. Damai music serves not just as entertainment but also as an expression of the Kalpaaris' devotional and spiritual pursuits.

The traditions of the Kalpaari community were captured in particular in the personality of a senior performer and musician, Jhoosia Damai (1910-2005), who was born in 1910 in Nepal and was a citizen of India for the last 60 years of his long life. Jhoosia Damai's ballads sing of an integrated, harmonious world of mountains and forests, rivers and streams, gods, kings and mortals. His songs united the community by encapsulating their collective memories and reinforced their moral values with local tales of bravery, courage, patience, faith and generosity. Today, however, this master of Damai music is no more, and the Damai tradition find itself threatened with extinction.

Until fifteen years ago, the Indian side of the Kalpaari area had been declared a "Restricted Area" by the Government of India because of its proximity to the border of Tibet. No outsiders, including Indian nationals from other areas, were permitted to enter. As a result, the culture and traditions of Kalpaari society remained untouched until recently. However, with the opening-up of the frontiers, Kalpaari society has undergone radical social change, with the rapid growth of a consumer market and the increasing dominance of Indi-



**What happens when an oral tradition like that of the Damai is threatened? With the tradition goes the language itself, and its loss would represent yet another setback to the language diversity of the world, which sees one language die out every two weeks on average.**

an and Nepali popular culture. Popular music, films and soap operas produced in Mumbai and Kathmandu are available through inexpensive commercial cassettes and CDs, as well as via satellite TV. These have found great favour with the younger generation, and in the face of this competition, the Damai musical tradition of tales and balladeers has suffered, its memory rapidly eroding among the Kalpaari people. The death of Jhoosia Damai, the last master of Damai music, in 2005, came as another critical blow to the tradition.

What happens when an oral tradition like that of the Damai is threatened? With the tradition goes the language itself, and its loss would represent yet another setback to the language diversity of the world, which sees one language die out every two weeks on average. But the ramifications are by no means purely of academic interest. In the absence of a script, Damai music has served as a repository for the memories, history, wisdom, philosophy and worldviews of Kalpaari society. If the music disappears, so will the knowledge as-







## How Many Forgotten Songs?

Prose, songs, riddles and jokes... Language conveys an essential part of our living heritage. However, according to the experts, 50% of some 6700 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing.

How to safeguard living cultural traditions and to ensure the diversity of cultural expressions worldwide in the face of contemporary challenges, especially for minorities and marginalized groups, constitutes one of the main concerns of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

In 2003, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and, two years later, the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, in order to integrate a concern for the safeguarding, protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions within national and international policies. The Government of India is a signatory to both Conventions.

Given the enormity of the territory, the diversity of communities and the wealth of cultural traditions in India, large-scale collective effort is required to cast light on the country's forgotten local cultural traditions.

**Power of Creativity Magazine** would be happy to learn and write about the work of other Rachna Singh and Vijay Shanker Choudharys. If you are working for the revitalization of cultural traditions, including crafts, performing arts, oral traditions and traditional knowledge of nature, please write to: [newdelhi@unesco.org](mailto:newdelhi@unesco.org) in the care of *Power of Creativity Magazine*.





sociated with it, and this would make it very hard to sustain the society in the long run. The consequences are stark: a community and its culture could go from being distinct to extinct.

However, all hope is not lost. Before Jhoosia Damai died, he and other members of the Damai community consented to allow two devoted film-makers, Rachna Singh and Vijay Shanker Choudhary to make audiovisual recordings of Damai music performances, tales, clan rituals and conversations. Since 2002 they have produced 40 hours of professionally shot recordings, a first in the history of Damai music!

Rachna and Vijay hope to raise funds to produce a series of four documentary films on Damai music and other related traditions in order to transmit the art of Jhoosia Damai to the younger generation

of Damai musicians and to revive the pride of the Kalpaari community in maintaining their tradition. Rachna and Vijay intend to create a databank of Damai music and Kalpaari cultures within the community itself to serve as a reference point, because ultimately it is only with the support of the community itself that the survival of the tradition can be ensured.

The recent history of the Kalpaari community and Damai music serves as a cautionary tale about the effects of globalization. Globalization is indeed a blessing in many respects, connecting peoples worldwide through improved transport as well as information and communication technologies. But the other side of the coin is an extreme inequality of information flow and influence. The cultures of smaller and weaker groups suffer in the onslaught from economically stronger communities. The example of Damai music should give us pause for thought. Behind the excitement of globalization and the apparent diversity of cultural expressions overflowing the media and the market, how many cultural traditions of marginalized peoples are actually disappearing from the world, silently and almost unnoticed?

History shows that the culture of dominant communities has always overwhelmed that of weaker groups. This is how many civilizations have emerged and dis-

**Each peak of the Himalayas is associated with a God and Goddess with their rich stories. There are also tales of kings and warriors, long dead, hymns to the Five Pandava Brothers, and songs related to the changing seasons, sowing and harvesting. Old people knew and sang these myths and devotional songs. The present generation remembers the names of the gods but not their stories.**

**Rachna Singh and Vijay Shanker Choudhary.**

appeared over the centuries. However, in an era where democracy and equal rights are increasingly recognized as universal values, it should prick our conscience if we allow the perilous state of the cultures of marginalized peoples to be disregarded, treating their disappearance simply as a natural consequence of "progress." The attempts to preserve and rescue the musical traditions of the Kalpaari people and their music are a heartening sign that there are ways to ensure that people who have suffered social exclusion are not deprived of their ultimate resource – their culture.

*To learn more about or assist their works in the revitalization of Damai music, please write to Rachna Singh and Vijay Shanker Choudhary at [vr.indianfilms@yahoo.co.in](mailto:vr.indianfilms@yahoo.co.in).*









# Reviving an Embroidered Legacy

## Parsi Embroidery

By Shivaa Rawat

A glimpse of the Parsee gara (saree), with white silk floss embroidery on purple Sali gaaj silk filled with the forbidden khaka stitch, takes the breath away with its sheer beauty, rich colours and extraordinarily delicate embroidery.

*Detail of Parsi Gara which beautifully illustrates embroidered birds and floral motifs*





*Motif of contradictory birds perched on the divine fungus, done in Aari stitch at Parzor workshop*



## Introduction

Parsi Zoroastrian embroidery has become an inseparable part of traditional Indian textiles. This ancient art, which traces its origins to Bronze Age Iran, has also assimilated cultural influences from Persia, China, India and Europe.

The Parsi reverence for nature is evident in the flowers (lily, lotus, chrysanthemum, and peony), trees (weeping willow, cherry, pine, bamboo and divine fungus), and birds (cranes, peacocks, swans and pheasants) that adorn the embroidery. Pagodas, boats, Chinese architectural structures, human figures and scenes typical of Chinese society and daily life are also commonly depicted. Each motif carries deep meaning: for example, the divine fungus (a symbol of longevity and immortality) is believed to give protection especially to children when embroidered on their *jhablas* (jackets). Among other motifs, trees and vegetation represent seasons, and

chrysanthemums symbolize joy and represent spring.

The strikingly beautiful Parsi *garas* (saree), *jhablas* and *ijars* (pantalons) in bright reds, maroons, pinks, purples and blacks, offset by delicate embroidery in pale white and pastel shades, are works of exquisite craftsmanship that combine elegance and aesthetics.

## History

Community accounts of elderly Parsis from Bharuch to Kolkata confirm the role of Chinese *pherias* in familiarizing Parsi women with Chinese embroidery. *Pherias* were craftsmen from China who came with big bundles or chests full of embroidered pieces for the Parsis. They travelled across cities and met their Parsi clientele to deliver pre-ordered *garas* and *kors* (borders). They also taught some of the women their craft.

As Parsis travelled and settled in other parts of India, especially the Deccan, they acquired local skills like Zardozi embroidery

*China Chini Garas had embroidery depicting Chinese men and women in their daily lives. Architectural details such as pagodas and bridges, interspersed with trees, plants, birds and animals were used to re create a scene from Chinese life and society.*







Butterflies in vivid colors  
embroidered on a patterned silk



The Sassanian “Circlet of Pearls” motif travelled from Zoroastrian Persia to China during the Tang Dynasty and then found its way back to the Parsi embroidered *garas*. The historical trade in silk between Surat and China and the incorporation of European designs, and even the Gujarati Mochi stitch, all went to create a fabric, which was unique. The *kors* and *garas* worn by Parsi women were distinctive, and came to be known popularly as the Parsi sari in all parts of the country.

An amalgamation of various cultural traditions, Parsi embroidery is a unique blend of the East and the West in terms of motif and technique.

- Chinese symbols and elements of mythology: China-Chini (*Chinese man & woman*), bat motif, The Divine Fungus, The Phoenix, flowers such as the chrysanthemum and peony; cranes and Taoist symbols
- Persian symbols: Chakla Chakli motif or Contradicting Birds, flowers such as the lily, jasmine. The paisley, which is based on the symbol of Cypress tree swaying in the wind and signifies life and eternity.
- British imperial influence: Flowers, baskets and bow motifs
- Indian influence: Peacock, lotus, ambi or Indian paisley motifs
- Zoroastrian Culture that presents a respect and reverence for nature - Rooster motif, plant life, fish, the Simurgh or bird of Paradise and the 30 flowers representing the 30 angels who watch over each day of the month.
- A variety of stitches are used: Satin stitch is largely used in Parsi embroidery. Variations of Satin stitch are extended, bound, voided, embossed. Other stitches include French knots and forbidden stitch (*khakha* – a very difficult stitch whose complexity can make a person go blind). However, it is the voided satin stitch, which is largely used, giving a realistic impression of nature.





Research material provides the base for a modern interpretation. A master craftsman learns Parsi embroidery at the Delhi Workshop.

and incorporated these in their repertoire. With European influence came European stitches, designs and new shades of colour. There was a large crossover of vocabulary as Parsis imbibed the best from East and West to create their own particular form.

### Rescuing a Craft in Crisis

Sadly, the great legacy of Parsi embroidery is slowing fading, unable to escape the crisis facing most traditional crafts in India, due to the competition arising from cheaper industrial machine made materials, a limited pool of skilled craftspeople; the decrease in the demand of traditional crafts has been inevitable. And it is suffering additionally because of the added crisis of the dwindling Parsi community. The population is declining so rapidly that it is 10% smaller with each decennial census. While the loss of cultural traditions is a growing phenomenon worldwide, the sharp demographic decline poses a danger that Parsi Zoroastrian culture will be completely extinct. Recognizing these challenges, the Parzor Foundation, UNESCO and the Indian Government have come together to rekindle interest in the craft of Parsi embroidery and prevent it from being wiped out.

The Parzor Foundation has been working since 1999 with the support of UNESCO to revive the heritage and culture of the Parsi Zoroastrians of India. It conducted the first



Craftswomen from Kutch experiment with Parsi embroidery using their own repertoire of stitches at the Ahmedabad Workshop.





Display of unique Garas at a Symposium and Exhibition on Parsi Embroidery - "Painting with a Needle" – which was held at the NCPA, Mumbai.

serious research into the origin, history, development and technique of Parsi textiles and embroidery, with experts travelling across India and beyond to trace its roots from Tehran, Yazd and Kerman in Iran to Hong Kong and Shanghai in China.

The Foundation grasped the need to commercialize this craft in order for it to survive and become a means of livelihood for its practitioners. In fact, the possibilities for commercial expansion are significant. As Parzor's Dr Cama points out, while the West may be losing interest in doing laborious hand embroidery, there is yet a large potential market for fine handwork in the domestic as well as other international markets.

A series of workshops for the revival and contemporization of Parsi embroidery were conducted in Ahmedabad, Navsari, Mumbai and New Delhi in 2005 and 2006. The aim was to help the craft become competitive in the contemporary market, while ensuring that products remain sensitive to the original forms and carry the hallmark of Parsi tradition.

The workshops imparted a whole range of livelihood skills, from the technical knowledge of embroidery stitches to design skills and basic business management know-how, such as packaging of products and interaction with prospective buyers. Design motifs were sketched out on computer to help standard-

**The Parzor Foundation has been working since 1999 with the support of UNESCO to revive the heritage and culture of the Parsi Zoroastrians of India.**

*Delicately embroidered cranes, willows and foliage.*









As the younger generation realizes the elegance of the embroidered *gara*, *kors* and *jhablas* and begins to understand the symbolism behind them, our fears about the disappearance of Parsi embroidery can be dispelled.

A lush scene is depicted on this red *gara* specially ordered for a *parsi* wedding.





Auspicious Chrysanthemums are depicted on a purple gajji silk, this color combination being one of the most popular amongst Parsi women.

Stylistically unique embroidery of peacocks perched on two different divine fungus motifs reveal the importance of this sacred design.



ize and explain them. At the workshop in New Delhi, participants not only recreated Parsi gara embroidery but took advice from professional designers on creating commercial products with wide appeal and the potential to sell fast, such as, cushions, spectacle cases, mobile phone covers, bags and scarves. Ashdeen Lilaowala, a designer and Textile Consultant at the Parzor Foundation, offered feedback on the standards of craftsmanship needed to ensure marketability, using a Parsi phrase to explain what could not be allowed to happen: *agal hira, pachal kira*, "In front are diamonds and at the back are worms!" The embroidery in front is as beautiful as diamonds but the back is like worms.

It's hoped that the workshops may be developed into a long-term training programme, which will fully revive Parsi





Symmetrical design seen on a child's Jhabla or jacket.



A densely embroidered saree border / kor.

**The revival of this tradition is nurturing the skills of the craftspeople, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs and catching the eye of patrons.**

embroidery by creating a guild of craftspeople, entrepreneurs and designers. In the meantime, the Parzor Foundation has become an international centre for information on Parsi textiles and embroidery, attracting textile researchers, academicians and designers. Parzor also hopes to bring out a book on the embroidery that will document its important linkages to Central Asia, China and India.

Dr Shernaz Cama, Director of the Parzor Foundation, is quite optimistic about the future of Parsi embroidery. She shows me a splendid Parsi *gara* passed down to her by her grandmother. This exquisite *jamuni* (purple) coloured *kanda-papeta no garo* with its delicate embroidery is indeed a treasure to cherish. She remarks, "As the younger generation realizes the elegance of the embroidered *gara*, *kors* and *jhablas* and begins to understand the symbolism behind them, our fears about the disappearance of Parsi embroidery can be dispelled". The revival of this tradition is nurturing the skills of the craftspeople, encouraging prospective entrepreneurs and catching the eye of patrons. Thanks to the work of the Parzor Foundation and the UNESCO partnership, Parsi Zoroastrian embroidery will be here for a long time to come.



# Parsi Crafts Gifts From The Magi

By Shernaz Cama

Some say that the Three Wise Men who came bearing gifts for the infant Jesus to welcome his birth, were in fact Zoroastrian priests. Gifts form an integral part of the Parsi Zoroastrian tradition. These support a craft tradition descending from Bronze Age Iran which gathered momentum along the Silk Route, adapting Chinese, Indian and European influences to create distinctively Zoroastrian crafts.

Parvez Chinoy of Hyderabad displays intercultural links. The necklace bearing the motto of the religion is European, the Indian sari embroidered with Chinese stitches displays the Iranian Zoroastrian sacred bird, the rooster.





The Zoroastrian craft tradition, begun in Iran, predates the foundation of the religion. Zoroaster, it is said, asked for only a woven girdle as a gift from his father when he left his home to seek enlightenment in the high mountains. This girdle persists today seen as the *Kusti*, the sacred girdle worn by all Zoroastrians. Woven with 72 woolen threads, it is a hollow tube completely inverted with great skill. Weaving is one of humankind's most ancient skills and in the *Vads* of Navsari and other Parsi settlements, this skill continues, linking Bronze Age Central Asia and 21<sup>st</sup> century India.

When women, who constitute all the weavers of the *Kusti*, could not weave a sacred material during their periods of ritual "uncleanliness", they used the same loom to fashion a beautiful decorative *toran*. Tiny glass beads are painstakingly designed in traditional patterns – the rooster for protection, the fish for plenty, flowers of blessing, Swastik and fire symbols. A few young girls still learn this craft from their grandmothers and weave *torans*. Unfortunately, customers in urban centres where they are sold do not always realize the skill involved and the cost of the beads, of which the finest quality come from Eastern Europe.

Zoroastrian men were also skilled weavers. Xenophon describes Cyrus the Great coming into battle "wearing a purple tunic



Close up of Toran weaving

shot with white...trousers of scarlet dye about his legs", while tablets from Susa at the time of Emperor Darius mention not only flourishing weaving industries but also clothes of coloured embroidery. Marco Polo reports that "a thriving silk industry and Safavid weaves of twill, satin, lampas, brocade and velvet were well known".

As the Silk Route developed, the Iranian linkages with China grew. Several centuries later, Parsi weavers from Surat and Chinese traders began a cross-cultural dialogue. There are many versions of the creation of the weave which we today call *Surti ghat* and the *gajji*, a fabric light enough to be draped as a six-yard sari and yet strong enough to bear the weight of several kilos

of heavy embroidery. This technique is a lost art today. With the help of textile and silk researchers, Parzor hopes to be able to revive it. A revival would be of great benefit not only to Zoroastrian crafts but to the entire fashion industry of India.

The weaving of *tanchoi*, is another Parsi craft. The name originates in the three (*tan*) Parsi men (*choi*) who lived in China. These three brothers travelled to China and learnt the art of Jacquard weaving, which they brought home to Surat. Later, this craft shifted its base to Benares, where unfortunately its origins have been forgotten.

Weaving techniques are difficult, and simpler crafts were used to enhance daily



Monaz is one of the few young people to maintain the craft of toran making.

These pieces with "Chin ni banavat" - "made in China" in Gujarati- show the intercultural links in trade and technique.







Tanchoi piece with Mrs. Diana Khambatta, a descendant of the original Jokhi brothers who went to China.

life. The Parsi craft of chalk decoration is one practiced even today. Outside most Parsi homes there are little designs printed on the ground. Now made out of chalk powder, they originated in Iran where lime was used outside homes to keep away insects. In India, this mingled with the *rangoli* decorations of Gujarat, developing a decorative design vocabulary which distinguishes Parsi homes.

### Silver

Another craft descended from an ancient past is working in silver. Silver symbolizes purity in the Zoroastrian tradition and is used on sacred occasions throughout life; after death, silver *muktad* vases permanently commemorate the soul. It is interesting to note that silver bowls found in archaeological digs of the Achaemenian period bear stylistic links with Parsi silver found today. The embossed decoration, floral motifs and central rosettes are common features across two millennia.

The silver *ses* is a most visible feature of the Navjote and wedding rituals, while the silver *muktad* vases are often works of art. The *muktad* is the annual period of remembering the dead. It is still the most important time in a family when, it is believed, those who have passed away return to their homes to be with their family. During this period they are remembered with fresh flowers and fruit each day during special prayers. The flowers are placed in special vases, only used at this time each year. Each *muktad* vase bears the name of an individual and the dates of birth and death engraved on it. Consecrated during prayers, it will stand testimony for that soul in perpetuity.

One of the few surviving silversmiths of the Parsis in Mumbai today is Mr Dossabhai Minocher Shroff. He explains that silver is a part of the Zoroastrian life cycle from birth to death, being used at birth, through childhood, the Navjote, wedding and for the last rites. It is also used for all ceremonial purposes, both in the Fire Temple and at home.

There were once three major Parsi shops for silver in Mumbai. Today only his, established in 1894, has continued the tradition. According to him, China used to supply the articles used in the *ses*. Every woman carries a silver *ses*, gifted by her father to her married home. This round silver plate, filled with ritual objects, symbolizes family strength and unity. The *ses* also invokes upon the household the blessings of all aspects of creation as can be seen in the silver fish, betel leaf, coconut and other little objects in it. Later, as pure silver became expensive, a plated alloy known as German silver became a popular substitute.



Chalk design – While simple designs are used on the lintel daily, elaborate pictures are created on special occasions.

Silver Vases







*Modern Ses - Kavas Dadabhoy its designer, is a Chartered Accountant but his Studio creates exclusive articles in silver. Started by his mother Prochi Dadabhoy, about 50 years ago, he draws upon traditional designs, moulding them to fit into contemporary life styles.*

Just as in the case of the ritual ses, silver rattles, whistles and enamelled silver toys are traditional gifts for children at their birth, while silver frames, dressing table sets and vases are gifted at the Navjote to both boys and girls.

## Jewelry

Gifts of jewelry form an important part in the life rituals, especially for women. Gold and pearls were traditionally used in Zoroastrian jewelry, a tradition kept alive by the famed Parsi jewel houses of Bombay. Catering mainly to Parsi clientele, it is time that their skills were appreciated by a wider audience. Intricate and delicate loops and wires of filigree continue patterns found first in Achaemenian Pasargadae. The Parsi *vala* is a traditional bangle, popular still at marriages and child birth, while the trellis and flower design, the rope chains or *cheda*, fish pendants and little horse shoes seen in Parsi jewelry reflect its intercultural links.



*Fish from a traditional Ses*



*Silver inkstand- After the birth of a child, a silver ses with a silver inkstand filled with red ink, a silver pen and a white sheet of paper, are placed next to the crib. Oral tradition tells us that the Guardian Spirit of the child comes to write the infant's fortune on the sixth night after birth. This sheet of paper is then carefully kept for life.*



*Silver toys*





The amethyst pendant and cameo ring bear the engraved portraits of Parsi nobility.



The use of the *kerba* or amber is also traditional. A baby is given small *kerba* bangles for protection, prayer beads were often made of amber and amber jewelry is popular. Parsis believe that the *kerba* has healing properties. A jaundice patient is made to wear a *kerba*, as it is believed to draw out toxins and cleanse the entire system. Specialist shops in Mumbai supplied amber to jewelers, the translucent red being the most valuable. The *jerba*, often mistaken for amber lends itself more to jewelry design today. It is more cost effective and suits modern taste for chunky beads and chains.

Several other crafts of the Parsis lend themselves to a craft revival. The wood carving of the Zoroastrians is again a multicultural tradition drawing together ancient Iranian design, Indian sandalwood carving, Chinese motifs and the Portuguese love for elaborately carved details in furniture.

The *Pettigara Petis* or caskets intricately carved with animals, especially the lion, royal foliage and scenes from the myths of the *Shahnameh*, are still prized possessions. The Pettigara family started this carving in Surat and lent their name to a craft treasured across India. This deep carving in sandalwood used border frames of ivory



Chinese Jewelry was a popular choice among Parsi women. This Chinese locket and the filigree earrings are designs commonly found in many Parsi homes across India.



The Begum Vadi screen in rosewood at Bharuch is over 6 feet tall and 15 feet wide.

Baby bangles, prayer beads and chains of amber in different colours.







Nauzer Chinoy of Hyderabad displays a Pettigara peti.

or bone to create velvet lined jewel caskets and boxes in which to store precious documents and rare prayer books. The boxes are so skillfully made that they remain airtight even 200 years after their creation. The scent of sandalwood wafts out of them when are opened.

Painting on glass developed in Europe in the Middle Ages. It came to the Parsis through the Chinese and is seen particularly in the depiction of epic heroes. Its centres in India from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Satara and Poona in Maharashtra. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stained glass portraits created a tradition which is still being followed by Parsi craftspersons, a famous stained glass artist is Katayun Saklat of Calcutta.

Thus we see that Parsi Crafts permeate all Parsi life. From the craft of chalk patterns which decorate homes each morning to ones that adorn elaborate lifestyles, they constitute a unique multicultural heritage of humanity.



A glass painting of Rustom from the Shahnameh found at the Bharuch Agiary.

## Zehar-E-Khoosh, (Poison of Delight)

### The craft of wine making

Legend tells us that wine was discovered during the reign of King Jamshed of Iran. King Jamshed's world was a land of plenty. He had planted huge orchards and there were large vineyards of grapes. Excess fruits from the palace garden were plucked and stored in gigantic vats made of wood.

In King Jamshed's court was a young maid who seemed to be suffering from a strange disease of sadness. Her looks had changed; even family members began to avoid her presence. She decided to put an end to her life.

From the collected fruits a huge vat of grapes had fermented and begun giving off a strange smell. The King had called his men of science who decided that the fruit had become spoilt and poisonous. Placed in one corner of the palace gardens, every one knew that it was supposed to be poison and not to be touched.

The young girl decided to poison herself with the liquid and end her life. She opened the vat and drank some cupfuls of that rich red liquid. Dizzy, thinking she was about to die, she lay down and prayed for a quick release.

When she awoke she thought she had reached heaven. The garden was the same, the vat still stood near her but all

the pain and discomfort in her body had vanished. Uncertain about what was happening, she again drank a cupful, felt dizzy and went to sleep. This time she awoke, feeling absolutely healthy and normal. She realized that the strange liquid had healing properties, the power to cure sadness.

The next day she plucked up courage and met the king. As she stood before King Jamshed she said "Great King of the World, I have some news to share, but please forgive me first for having disobeyed your command". The king, puzzled, asked her to tell him what had happened. The maid told the whole story of how she had drunk the "poison" and had found a cure to her sadness and disease. King Jamshed sent his personal doctor to have the brew from the vat tested in the palace.

Soon the doctors found that the liquid which had come out of the fermented grapes had many curative properties and gave a feeling of wellbeing to the drinker. They started the practice of drinking this wine in moderate quantities as a drink which could restore health and happiness. Because the liquid had been considered poison it was called Zehar-e-khoosh or "Poison of Delight". This is how, it is said, the secret of wine making was discovered.



## The Tanka System: The Craft of Water Harvesting

The Zoroastrians brought the consciousness of water related rituals and the concept of harvesting water from ancient Iran. The tanka is a unique water harvesting system, providing pure drinking water at Parsi homes in Bharuch, South Gujarat. Following traditional methods of collecting rainwater, this system has a series of filters, which purify the water.

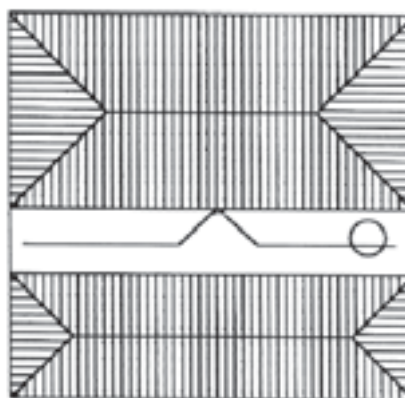
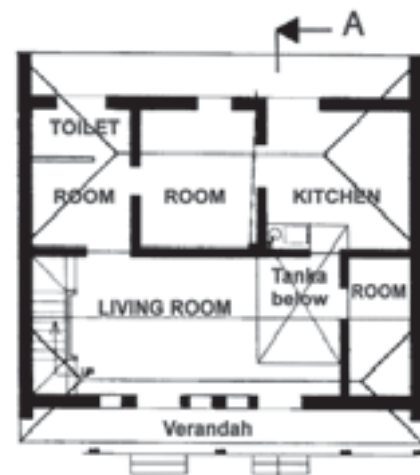
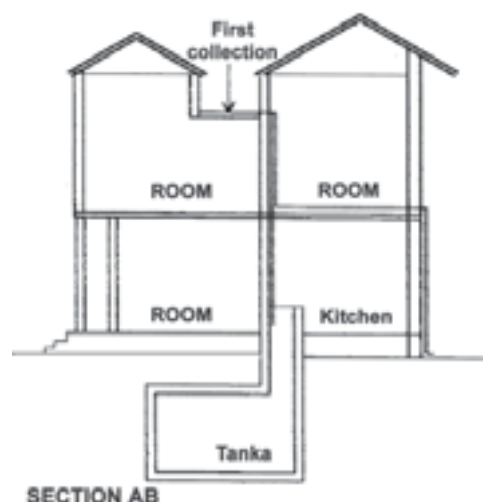
The tanka is an underground tank, accommodated inside the house, preferably under the kitchen or dining room, made of chiseled blocks of stone, in lime mortar. It is unlined but made waterproof by an indigenous herbal mix which renders the inner surface waterproof, seals minor cracks

and prevents bacteriological growth. The tanka is large enough to store sufficient drinking water for a family for six to eight months, its average capacity being around 25,000 litres. With sizes reaching nearly 20 feet by 60 feet and a height of 12 feet, arches and vaults are needed to support the earthwork and the superstructure on top of the tanka.

The tanka is filled from rainwater collected through roof runoff. This simple system of collection, via a 3" to 4" pipe, depends on successive sumps whose water is collected and overflows on its way to the tanka. Settled impurities are flushed out through an overflow pipe.

During the first days of the rainy season, water is made to run down the overflow pipe, ensuring a maximum cleaning of all surfaces. When the owner is certain of the cleanliness, done by constant visual testing and actual tasting of water, the overflow is plugged and the tanka inlet opened. This starts the flow of water into the tanka.

The tanka has a hatch cover which is kept closed except for the time when water is pulled out as from a well, by a bucket on a pulley. The water retention capacity of these tanks is seen in the form of a particular 'danger level' indicated inside by the depiction of a sculptured 'fish' along the inlet neck. Filling the tank above this mark is considered dangerous as the hydraulic



A Tanka at Bharuch



The Dining room at Begum Vadi, Bharuch. Beneath the floor is a Tanka, which keeps the room cool even in summer.

pressure inside could exceed the retaining capacity of the tank wall.

The tanka is filled gradually up to the 'fish' mark, and the stored water is used long after the rains have stopped. The opening of the tanka is placed so that direct sunlight does not enter, and there is no contamination. This makes the tanka a most precious source of drinking water, especially in the hot summer months. Most owners clean the tanka only once in 5 to 10 years. The water in Bharuch has been tested and found to be of potable quality.

The tankas, built without cement or concrete, have withstood devastating earthquakes in Gujarat for the past 200 years. Even when houses have fallen, tankas, full of enormous volumes of water, have remained unaffected.



# CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN AYURVEDA & SIDDHA

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The Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha is an apex research Organization for the formulation, co-ordination, development and promotion of Research in Ayurveda and Siddha in the country. The research activities include Fundamental & Literature Research, Drug Research, Reproductive & Child Health Care Research and Bio-medical instrumentation research etc.

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- ❖ Feasibility of Introducing Indian Systems of Medicine (Ayurveda & Siddha) in the National Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Programme at the Primary Health Care (PHC) Level: Launching of the Pilot project with 17 Ayurvedic and 18 Siddha Medicines: ICMR CCRAS collaboration.
- ❖ Validation of safety of Ayurvedic and Siddha metallic Bhasmas.
- ❖ Reverse Pharmacology of selected classical drugs.
- ❖ Golden Triangle Partnership (GTP): Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia Committee (APC) & Siddha Pharmacopoeia Committee (SPC); Extra Mural Research (EMR) Projects on Ayurveda/Siddha and related topics.



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# Jamva Chaloji: Let us Eat!

## The Art of Parsi Cuisine

By Ava Khullar

Parsis are known for their love of all good things, especially food. Anyone who has witnessed the rows of white linen draped tables, shining green banana leaves, and huge silver (kalai) serving dishes being carried out to serve exquisitely dressed and bejeweled ladies and gentlemen at a Parsi wedding understands how important feasting is in this culture. This is one tradition which believes that feasting, not fasting, is the way to appreciate the bountiful Spenta (creation) which is this world.



The hosts greeting their guests enjoying a Parsi feast served on banana leaves in the traditional way.  
Photo Credit: Parsis: The Zoroastrian of India, A Photographic Journey by Sooni Taraporevala.



**T**he first story of the Zoroastrians in India, who were called Parsis because they sailed from Fars or Pars in Southern Iran seeking refuge from persecution, is the story of "The Sugar in the Milk". On reaching the court of Jadi Rana of Sanjan on the west coast of India, they were presented with a bowl full of milk, signifying the country had no space for refugees. According to legend, their Priest, stirred in a spoonful of sugar, signifying that they would mingle with and sweeten the land without putting a burden on it. Impressed, the king welcomed them.

The cuisine of a people reflects its geographical and historical experience. The Zoroastrians blended their food customs with the offerings and influences of the coastal region of their new home, creating a distinctive cuisine. Thus the herbs of the Iranian plateau mingled with the condiments of India, creating Parsi cuisine.

### From Iran to India

The spices used in Parsi food combine the dry fruits and nuts available abundantly in Iran with the coconut and spices of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Almonds and cashews are ground with coconut and other Indian spices to make the curries which accompany the afternoon rice meal in a Parsi home. Nuts and raisins are also fried and sprinkled over rice *pulavs* and other savoury and sweet dishes.



Patra ni machi

Photo credit: Parsi Kitchen by Jeani Mohinder

### The herbs of the Iranian plateau mingled with the condiments of India creating Parsi Cuisine.

Most peoples of the Middle East are meat eaters, and the Parsis never succumbed to vegetarianism, even during their sojourn in Gujarat, a vegetarian stronghold. No Parsi meal would be complete without a meat, fish, chicken or egg dish. What perhaps distinguishes their non-vegetarian preparations are that the meat, chicken and eggs are cooked with vegetables - potatoes, green peas, spinach and so on, revealing once again an Iranian bias.

Fish, a symbol of plenty, is always served on festive occasions, and at happy events such as marriages, even milk sweets are made in the shape of a fish to be served or sent to relatives and friends. The first choice is always pomfret, a delicately flavored sea fish abundantly found on the west coast. A perennial favorite at wedding feasts is *patra-ni-machi* or fish fillet covered with green chutney made of coconut and coriander, wrapped in banana leaf and steamed.

The Parsis brought from Persia their fondness for a touch of sweetness even in their savoury and spiced preparations, a preference they discovered they even shared with their Gujarati neighbors. *Khatamitha*, meaning sweet and sour, is a term by which Parsis are identified.

While a Punjabi's favorite dish would be *sarso ke saag* and *makhi ki roti* and the South Indian's *dosa*, *idli* and *sambhar* rice

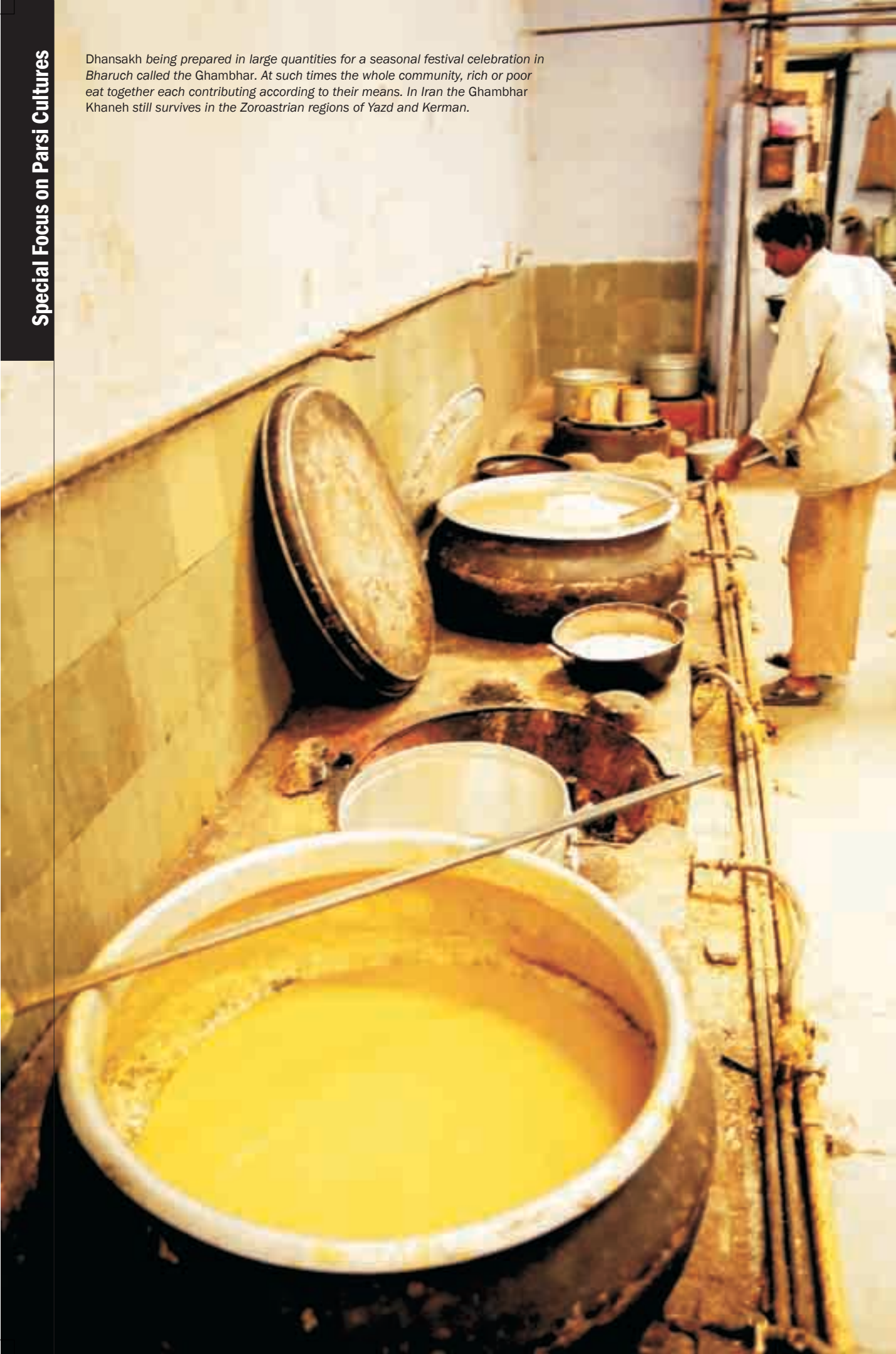


A sweet vermicelli dish with nuts- Sev, served on festive occasions.

Photo credit: Parsi Kitchen by Jeani Mohinder



*Dhansakh being prepared in large quantities for a seasonal festival celebration in Bharuch called the Ghambhar. At such times the whole community, rich or poor eat together each contributing according to their means. In Iran the Ghambhar Khaneh still survives in the Zoroastrian regions of Yazd and Kerman.*

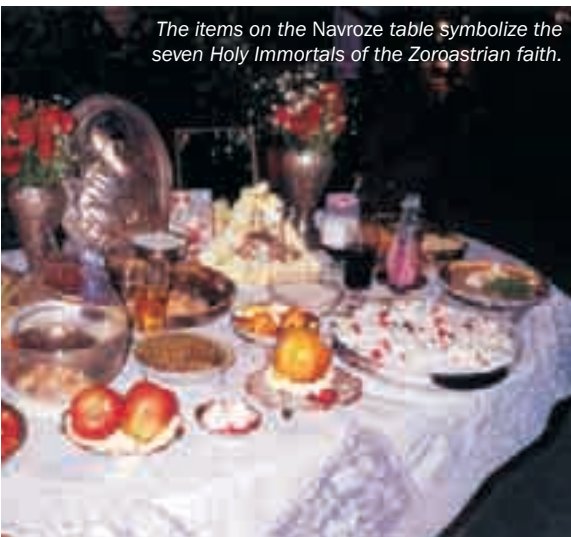




is famous, the best known Parsi dish is *dhansakh*. The origin of this spicy, rich lentil and meat dish served with brown, caramelized rice is probably the Iranian *khoreste esfannaj*, a dish cooked with meat, lentils and spinach. Over time further spicy embellishments have made the *dhansakh* of today a Sunday afternoon meal in most Parsi homes. It is also a great favourite with other communities and officegoers in Mumbai who throng to small luncheon cafes like Café Ideal and Café Britannia, which only serve Parsi delicacies.

Most Parsi sweet preparations, flavored with rosewater and served richly decorated with nuts – such as *sev*, *ravo*, *falooda* and *murambas* – have an Iranian origin. This subtle blending has created a multifaceted cuisine with a unique identity.

The items on the Navroze table symbolize the seven Holy Immortals of the Zoroastrian faith.



The Iranian New year falls on 21 March, the spring equinox, symbolizing the arrival of spring and the rejuvenation of the land and its offering of grain, fruits and vegetables. On this day, *falooda*, a rich milk drink flavored with rose water, is prepared for the special Navroze Table set up even today across Iran, Central Asia and Iranian homes in India to welcome the new season with a symbolic gathering of the fruits of the earth.

### The British Influence

Of all the Indian communities, the Parsis were perhaps the most influenced by the language, culture, education and life style of their British colonial rulers. As social contact with the British grew, particularly in Bombay, this influence became visible in their food. Well-to-do Parsi families

**Of all the Indian communities, the Parsis were perhaps, the most influenced by the language, culture, education and life style of the British colonial rulers. When social contact with the British grew, particularly in Bombay, this influence became visible in their food.**

in particular prepared western, continental dishes when entertaining, and through the slow process of assimilation and adaptation, these became a regular part of Parsi cuisine. A meat roast, marinated in *dahi* (yoghurt) and spices was influenced by the English roast meat, while baked dishes in white sauce and English sweet dishes such as bread and butter pudding, caramel custard, cakes and blanchmanges became part of Parsi food. Baked custard, also taken from the English became *Baked Custar*, served at weddings with a liberal addition of nuts.

It is speculated that Parsi men invited to a meal in an English home (in the early years women did not go out much) would describe the food to their wives, who would then create the Parsi version of famous English dishes. One such was the baked fish in bechamel sauce which became *machi no saas*, fish in a tangy white sauce, popular at weddings and parties.

So many English dishes became part of Parsi cuisine that the classic Parsi cookery book *Vivid Vani*, written by Mehrerbai Jamshedji Nusserwanji Wadia, in the late 19th century, has a total of 2,050 recipes, of which 700 are English.

Cover of *Vivid Vani* – A classic Parsi cookery book, by Mehrerbai Jamshedji Nusserwanji Wadia.



Father and son at the Dotivala Bakery continue the family tradition.

### Making it Pay

These culinary specialities, spanning a range from vegetarian to non-vegetarian food, sweet dishes to pickles and chutneys, have moved from the home kitchen to larger manufacturing units run by private family businesses. One such family is the Dotiwalas of Surat who are descendants of Mr Faramji Pestonji Dotivala, who learnt to make bread from the Dutch traders. This was fermented with toddy to prevent spoiling on long sea journeys. If left unsold, this bread became dry, with a light and crispy texture, which was sold cheaply to the poor. Faramji innovated, making small round baked biscuits which have today become the famous *Farmasu Surti Batasa*. For over three centuries the Dotivala biscuits, now identified as Parsi biscuits, have included the *Surti batasa*, the *Nankhatai*, and the



Making jam tarts in the confectionery department of RTI, Mumbai.  
Photo Credit: Parsis: The Zoroastrians of India, by Soonil Taraporevala.



*Irani* biscuits. Although their forte was fermenting the dough with toddy, a drink much favored by Parsis, prohibition in Gujarat took away that option. To recreate the crisp original, the Dotiwallas again innovated to get the same result. The light, salty version, popular in Irani tea shops, came to be known as *Irani* biscuits. Thus, sweet and salty Parsi biscuits have pioneered the baked goods industry in India.

Skills in food preparation have created several Parsi legends. In 1885, the then famous Parsi Theatre troupe, the Victoria Natak Mandli, failed to get a license to perform its plays after arriving in London. The Mandli had no money left to buy its passage back to India. In the group were some who could cook. They rolled up their sleeves, created delectable Parsi dishes, and by selling them on the streets of London gathered enough money to sail back home.

The potential in the craft of Parsi food inspired Sir Ratan Tata, son of the founder of one of India's largest industrial houses, to create the Ratan Tata Institutes in 1929 as a charitable enterprise across India to make women economically independent. RTI has been committed for almost 80 years to helping less fortunate and disadvantaged women within the Parsi community, and later all Indian women, by training them to make special Parsi food. The goal of RTI is to offer a life of dignity which is not dependent on charity. It has an outlet with a huge kitchen on Hughes Road in Central Mumbai. The organization has Parsi and non-Parsi employees, many of whom have spent a lifetime of work with the RTI. However, the RTI's difficulty in matching salaries offered elsewhere places it at a disadvantage with today's younger generation.

The proliferation of eating outlets in large urban centres like Mumbai has increased the competition. Nevertheless, while struggling to meet the challenge, RTI continues to provide interest-



## Bhicoo Manekshaw

**B**hicoo Manekshaw, the community's best-known culinary expert, exemplifies in her work and writings the varying influences that have created Parsi cuisine. While she received her training in continental cookery, she has also done intensive research on the history and development of Parsi cuisine by travelling to the heartland of Gujarat, where a substantial majority of families who maintain the old traditions of Parsi cooking reside. Her book, *Parsi Food and Customs*, (Penguin Books, India, 1996) is a treasure house of recipes and customs that define the Parsi way of life.

Bhicoo was brought up in a traditional Parsi home in Bombay, where all customs and traditions were observed and celebrated. She relates how Goan food has been incorporated into Parsi cuisine: "After coming home from the market each day, our Goan cook would prepare Goa curry. It would be ready by 11 am, so that whenever any servant had any time they would go to the kitchen and help themselves to it. This Goa curry became a part and parcel of many Parsi homes, because children like me were practically brought up on it by our *ayahs*".

Many years later, when Bhicoo's husband, Air Vice Marshal J. F. Manekshaw, was posted in London, she continued to develop her love of food. Bhicoo wanted to do the Advance Certificate of the famous Cordon Bleu School in London. She was told that there was no vacancy for a year as they took only ten students at a time in that course. Bhicoo asked the Principal to review the manuscript of her first book, *Traditional Recipes of India*, which she had just finished writing, as she was not sure if it was worth publishing. After going through the script, the Principal told her that she should publish it and asked her to give a cookery demonstration. Parsi cuisine came to the fore. Bhicoo gave a demonstration of *papata ma murghi* (chicken with potatoes) and *kera pur enda* (eggs on bananas). She was accepted on the course as the eleventh student!



Bhicoo Manekshaw

ingly distinct and authentic Parsi cuisine – healthy food and snacks prepared in a clean and hygienic environment at reasonable prices. A great boon to the elderly and to working women with families, RTI supplies full daily meals at a monthly rate of Rs. 1,500 for vegetarians and Rs. 2,500 for non-vegetarians, delivered to the home.

Ice-creams, chutneys and *achaars* are the preserve of the Kolah family of Navsari, which has a concentration of Parsis dating back several centuries. Pickles, chutneys and *aachars*, mainly of a sweet and sour variety, are a favourite accompaniment to Parsi food. The *lagan nu aachar* served at weddings has dry fruits and car-

rots in a mixture of spices and vinegar, while sweet mango chutney was once made in every home, until the Kolahs began supplying it across the country. The Kolahs



Faroshgard Kolah serving ice cream at his parlour

started their enterprise with the creation of special vinegar. With the coming of ice-cream, Rustomji Kolah began carrying straw baskets of this new food on his head from door to door in the Parsi Vads of Navsari. Today his descendants have a flourishing Ice-Cream Parlour where this 120-year-old tradition continues. Faroshgard Kolah today uses only natural fruits; mango, chikko, custard apple, banana and strawberries to create his special ice-creams and kulfis.

"Sugar and spice" is an apt summing up of both the Parsis and their food. With its vast repertoire of dishes and varieties of taste, it's a cuisine that deserves a larger clientele.



# The Traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian “Hadvaid” **A Historical Perspective**

By Kayomarz Patel

A Hadvaid is primarily a ‘gifted’ healer, skilled in the art of bone-setting. Through his highly-evolved sense of touch, he or she is able to diagnose and cure, without surgery, disorders pertaining to the bones and the nerves of the human body.



*Nergish Behramshah of Surat is one of the few women Hadvaid. She is seen applying a laep or poultice at her clinic in Surat.*



***“In numbers, Parsis are beneath contempt, but in contribution, beyond compare...”***  
**– Mahatma Gandhi, 1924.**

**A**mong the many ways in which Parsis have enriched Indian culture, the traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid is one of the most unusual and fascinating. *Hadvaid* is a Gujarati word which translates literally as “bone-doctor” (*had* = bone and *vaid* = doctor). An anglicized version of the name, which is also sometimes used, is “bonesetter”.

A Hadvaid is primarily a gifted healer, skilled in the art of bone-setting. Through a highly-evolved sense of touch, he or she is able to diagnose and cure, without surgery, disorders of the bones and nerves of the human body. A Hadvaid sets or “manipulates” the joints or the vertebra in the spine to cure such disorders.

The Zoroastrian link with healing is a very ancient one, first seen in the special prayers or *nirang* which are still recited for cures today. The first Hadvaid may well have been the founder of Zoroastrianism, the Prophet Zarathushtra of Iran. Legend has it that Zarathushtra, through the power of *manthra-vani* (prayer and touch), was able to miraculously cure the favorite horse of King Vishtaspa of an illness that had completely paralysed the animal. Samba, the son of Lord Krishna, was cured of leprosy by Iranian priests, as is related in the *Samba Purana*. The Tibetan Emperor Sngtsengampo invited an Iranian doctor to become the Imperial Physician, and Tibetan pulse determination has its roots in imperial Iran.

The traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid relies on a highly developed sense of touch to palpate the muscles and ligaments of the patient to understand their problem, and then uses manipulation to set bones into position or heal fractures. In the case of some Hadvaids, this may be followed by massage therapy or the application of anti-inflammatory poultices or *laeps*. These contain rare ingredients from Iran and Central Asia, combined with ingredients from Indian traditions of healing. Although in earlier times Hadvaids did not use any oral medicines, some of them today supplement their treatment with time-tested oils, balms and homeopathic or Ayurvedic pain-relievers.

Depending on individual circumstances, a traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid may treat patients afflicted with spinal disorders like back pain, lumbago, sciatica, spondylitis or slipped discs; conditions like rheumatism and arthritis; even some types of dislocations or fractures; and in rare cases, paralysis or polio.

Viewed from a contemporary perspective, the traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid is what the world knows as a chiropractor. Both chiropractors

Close-up picture shows Dr. Kayomarz Patel performing a chiropractic manipulation (left-side) on a patient diagnosed with Cervical Spondylosis.



**The practice of a Hadvaid, in many ways, is similar to that of a Chiropractor, in that both use similar techniques of manual adjustment/manipulation to treat specific disorders of the bones/nerves of the human body. Yet, one may hasten to add, that for the same condition the treatment from the Hadvaid will, in a majority of the cases, yield a better and quicker result for the patient.**





Picture shows Dr. Kayomarz Patel delivering the "kick", i.e. manipulating the patient's spine by positioning his foot on or around the hip region of the patient and then "manipulating" the spine with application of subtle force. This technique of spinal adjustment / manipulation which requires intense skill, judgement and accuracy is the hallmark of the traditional Parsi Hadvaid. It involves positioning the Hadvaid's foot and applying a certain amount of directional force all of which will vary from patient to patient, depending on the diagnoses or the kind of pain in the spinal region, e.g. slipped-disc, lumbago, lower back pain, etc.

and Hadvaid use similar techniques of manual adjustment and manipulation to treat specific disorders of the bones and nerves of the human body. Yet many patients will attest that for the same condition, treatment by a Hadvaid yields a better and quicker result.

The origins of chiropractic in the USA at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its subsequent spread through the western world, are well chronicled, but no such records exist for the traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid in India. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid by far pre-dates the modern chiropractor.

Meanwhile, a study of the evolution of the Hadvaid tradition within the Parsi-Zoroastrian community, conducted over the past few years as part of the Parzor research project, has yielded some interesting insights. One of the unique characteristics of the traditional Hadvaid is that almost all of them originated from or around South Gujarat, i.e. the region between Val-sad and Ahmedabad.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Hadvaid tradition, however, which sets it apart in medical practice, is that Hadvaid traditionally worked only for charity. All the great Hadvaid of the past used their gift as a form of service to the community, without any differentiation of caste, creed or status. None of them ever charged fees to any of their patients, save the costs of medicines. Nowadays this comes to just around US\$4 for a full course of 15 days, which includes oils or balms, homeopathic tablets and some Ayurvedic powders used in the course of treatment. In the case of very poor patients, even the cost of medicines is waived.

### The "Kick" that Cures

Before orthopaedists and physiotherapists became a part of the standard medical landscape, the Parsis relied, along with many others, on the "kick" that cured ailments of the spine. The "kick" remains a unique and distinct feature of the Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid tradition.

The "kick" is a method of performing a spinal adjustment or manipulation in which the Hadvaid uses his leg instead of his hands and fingers, positioning it on or around the hip of a patient lying on the floor to stretch or loosen several vertebrae at a time with a forceful, high-velocity thrust. This stretches



the spinal column beyond its normal range of movement in order to increase its mobility. This form of spinal manipulation is usually accompanied by an audible series of pops and clicks.

While “kicking” a patient, the skill of the Hadvaid lies in correctly applying the principle of leverage and judging the right degree of force in the thrust. Although the process appears simple, it calls for intense concentration and an extremely high degree of accuracy on the part of the Hadvaid. There is simply no margin for error.

The “kick” is almost an art form, and there is only one Hadvaid remaining who uses this method today. British chiropractors at the Chiropractic Clinic, University of Surrey, to whom the “kick” was demonstrated in 2003 by Dr Kayomarz Patel, marvelled at the high level of precision that appeared to have been so easily mastered by the Hadvaid.

### **Dr Manchershaw Madhivala and Dr Jal H. Amaria**

Perhaps the two of the greatest exponents of not only the “kick” but indeed the whole tradition of the Hadvaid in India were the late Dr. Manchershaw Madhivala (Suraliwala) and his nephew, the late Dr Jal H. Amaria, who was also the guru of Dr Kayomarz Patel.

Dr Madhivala’s practice as a Hadvaid grew famous in India around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, just as chiropractic was gaining ground in the West. He travelled the length and breadth of Gujarat, healing fractures and dislocations, slipped discs and other serious problems, with his poorer patients lining up to meet him at the railway stations en route. Dr Madhivala was even provided with a “Silver Pass” on the railways by the British authorities because of his great gift of healing and charity.

Dr Madhivala had a huge, sprawling house in the village of Madhi, near Bardoli in Gujarat, which at the peak of his practice was almost converted into a hospital. The former India Test Cricket Captain and owner of the Hindustan Spinning & Weaving Mills, Vijay Merchant, made special arrangements for Dr Madhivala to travel regularly to Mumbai and hold a clinic at his mill premises, where hundreds of patients used to line up for treatment.

Over a 15-year period prior to his death in 1997, Dr Jal Amaria saw on average over 300 patients every Sunday and around 200 patients every Wednesday at his home/clinic in Mahim, Mumbai. He also treated a further 200 – 250 patients each month at other clinics in and around Mumbai.

The fame and reputation of both Dr Madhivala and Dr Amaria may be gauged from the fact that during their lifetimes they put in over 90 years of practice as traditional Hadvaids and treated at least half a million patients. Some of the people who were cured by either of these two men would vouch that there was a certain inexplicable, saintly aura about them. From the common man on the street to a former President of India, people from all strata of society, from India and even from overseas, have made use of the services of a Hadvaid at some time.

### **The Future of the Traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid**

While there are a few other traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaids, Dr Kayomarz Patel may be the only traditional Hadvaid who practices solely as a form of charity today. Keeping alive the tradition of his guru Dr Jal Amaria, he is also the sole exponent of the “kick” as the principal technique in spinal manipulation. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous Madhivala Liniment and the Madhivala Pain Balm



*Picture depicting Dr. Kayomarz Patel performing a chiropractic manipulation (right-side) on a patient diagnosed with Cervical Spondylosis.*

that are still available today as over-the-counter medicines are an enduring legacy of Dr Madhivala, kept alive by one of his relatives, Dr B.E. Patel, a homeopath by profession and a former Principal at the College of Homeopathy at Vile Parle (West) in Mumbai.

However, the outlook for Hadvaids and their healing work is unfortunately not good. The traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid is nearly extinct. In their lifetime, both Dr Madhivala and Dr Amaria had a team of 15 – 20 volunteers who assisted them in their clinics and camps. Sadly, none among the Parsi youth of today have either the aptitude or the training to practice as Hadvaids. Only about 20 to 25 Hadvaids remain, scattered across Mumbai and Gujarat, especially Vadodara, Ahmedabad and Surat on the west coast of India.

In the year 2000, there were 81,000 chiropractors in the world, 61,000 of them practicing in the USA. There is an urgent need to integrate the skills and knowledge of the traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid with the growing global chiropractic movement, while retaining recognition of the originality and uniqueness of the tradition. This is the only way the traditional Parsi-Zoroastrian Hadvaid heritage can be preserved. Otherwise, this precious heritage, which though intangible has touched so many lives, may be lost forever.





*The Anjuman Atash Behram, Navsari. The Fires are graded in the Zoroastrian faith. The highest grade is the Fire of Victory – the Atash Behram, while the Aglary is a Fire of a lesser grade, requiring fewer priests and rituals.*

# Aapru NAVSARI OUR NAVSARI

By Ashdeen Lilaowala

The narrow roads of the ancient town of Navsari are a blend of traditional houses belonging to Gujarati, Jain and Parsi families. These characteristic two-storied, tiled houses sharply contrast with modern buildings, which have suddenly sprung up in these narrow streets. Yet, even with rapid development, the town retains a wonderful multi-ethnic charm held together by a common language, rituals and traditions.



The narrow roads of the ancient town of Navsari are a blend of traditional houses belonging to Gujarati, Jain and Parsi families. These characteristic two-storied, tiled houses sharply contrast with modern buildings, which have suddenly sprung up in these narrow streets. Yet, even with rapid development, the town retains a wonderful multi-ethnic charm held together by a common language, rituals and traditions.

Navsari nestles on the banks of the Poorna River in South Gujarat, 20 miles from Surat. It was in the territory of the kingdom of the Gaekwads of Baroda. Close to the sea, and just four hours from the International airport at Bombay, it should be declared a Heritage Town of the Parsi Zoroastrians. A group settled here, after leaving Sanjan in 1142 AD, finding the climate very similar to their ancient town, Saari, in Persia, they named it *NaoSaari* or New Saari.

The town is approximately 2000 years old. Its name, Navsari, has several legends associated to it. The Hindu community largely believes that the town was named after nine (*nav*) lakes (*sar*) found there. In the course of time, *Navsar* became Navsari. Some of these lakes, now more like ponds, are still a part of the landscape. The Muslim community on the other hand, believes that one of their Saints, Noor Satagar, married Princess Palande, the daughter of the King, Raja Surchund. He was adorned (*Araee*), as a bridegroom (*Naosa*) so they called the city, *Naosa-Araee*, which got transformed into Navsari.

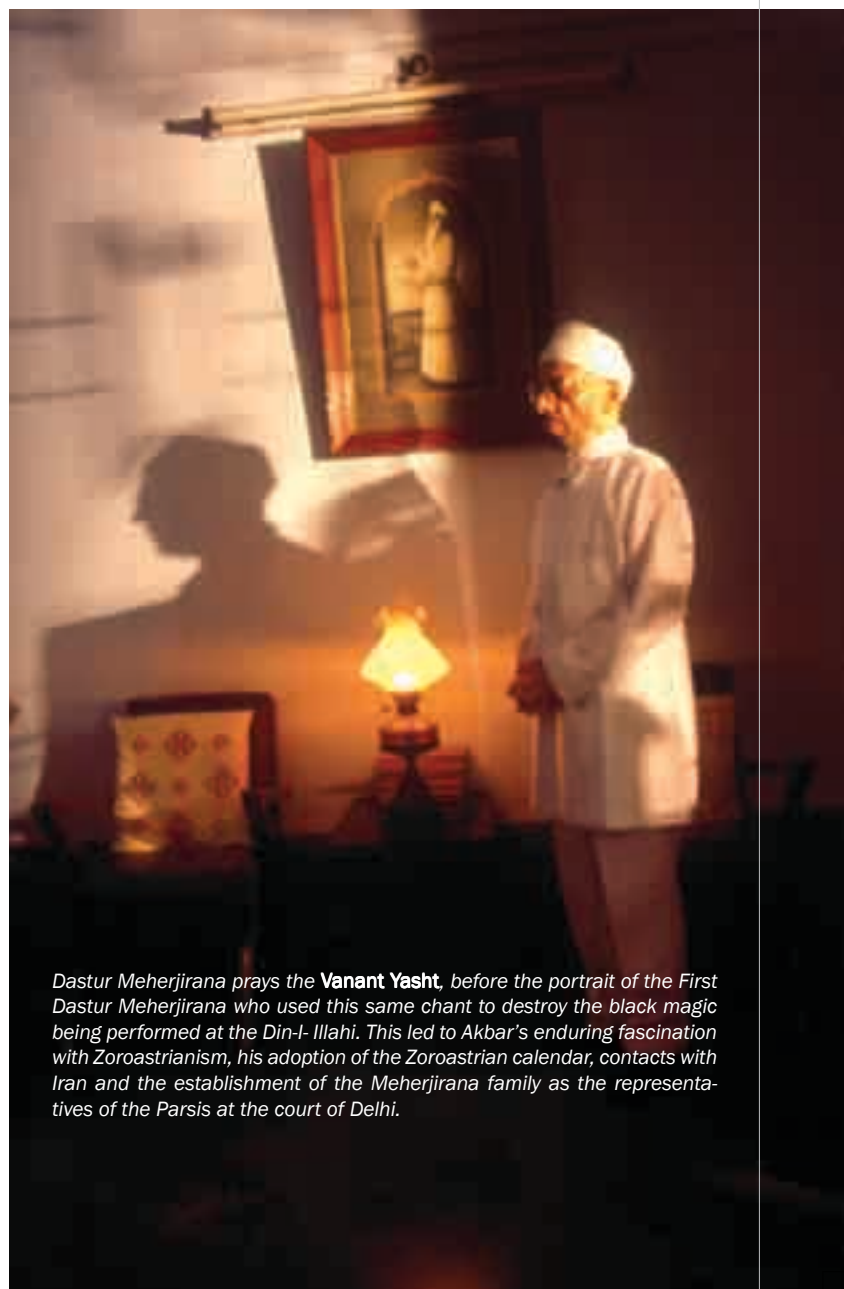
In 1419, the Sacred Fire of the Parsis Iranshah, moved to Navsari at a time of battle and siege. Today, while this Fire has been shifted to Udwada, Navsari houses one of the most revered Fire Temples of the Zoroastrian faith – The Anjuman Atash Behram. Dasturji Sorabji Rustamji Meherjirana consecrated this important Fire Temple in 1765. The high priest of the *Atash Behram* carries the title of Dastur MeherjiRana. The *Atash Behram* building is impressive with a double-height columnar verandah with a replica of the relief found in King Darius Tomb in Pasargadae.

The impressive interior hall is filled with painted portraits of Prophet Zarathustra, high priests and patrons of the temple, framed in thick, large wooden frames. Antiques like crystal chandeliers, standing clocks and marble busts adorn several of the walls. The hall glows in the warmth of the hundreds of *divas* lit by Parsis who visit the temple regularly. The gentle soothing humming of Avesta prayers being recited by the faithful and the ritual gongs create a comforting atmosphere. Zoroastrians across the world, come to Navsari to visit the *Atash Behram* and the five other *Agiaries*. Small shops sell sandalwood sticks and other religious souvenirs for the religious tourist and worshiper. Parsi *dharamshalas* like Jamshed Baug, offer pleasant surroundings for their stay.

Navsari and the Parsis came to the attention of Emperor Akbar during his conquest of Gujarat in 1573. The erudite Dastur Meherjirana, in his white robes with his flowing white beard attracted the Emperors attention. Several legends exist about the role of this Zoroastrian priest in the foundation of Akbar's syncretism, which created the Din-I-Illahi religion at Fatehpur Sikri. In Navsari, Parzor Foundation has found proof of the connec-



Inside the Atash Behram, a priest recites his prayers in front of the divas, oil lamps



Dastur Meherjirana prays the **Vanant Yasht**, before the portrait of the First Dastur Meherjirana who used this same chant to destroy the black magic being performed at the Din-I- Illahi. This led to Akbar's enduring fascination with Zoroastrianism, his adoption of the Zoroastrian calendar, contacts with Iran and the establishment of the Meherjirana family as the representatives of the Parsis at the court of Delhi.





This enormous Sanad, with the blue royal seal, hung dusty and forgotten in a corner of the Meherjirana library. During Parzor's first field trip, it was discovered and to the exciting discoveries of the links with the Mughal Court.

tions. This proof exists in one of the most interesting institutions in Navsari, the Meherjirana Library. Established in 1872 under the patronage of the Meherjirana Family, this is a treasure trove of rare manuscripts, Akbar's Sanad, Tansen's *Khyal* on the miracle performed by Dastur Meherjirana at the Court, Abul Fazl's letters as well as rare texts in Avesta, Pahlavi, Pazand, Persian and Old Gujarati on Zoroastrianism, the Sufi Tradition, history, medicine and even magic.

The preservation of the exceptional manuscripts and documents has attracted international attention. Over 90,000 manuscripts have been successfully microfilmed. The European *Videvad Project* has visited Navsari with the help of Parzor. The Meherjirana Library, along with the British Library and the *Bibliothèque Nationale* has become a



Narrow houses of the Parsi mouhlo are in sharp contrast to the bungalows built by big Parsi sethis.



centre for Avesta and Pahlavi Studies. The Videvad project's aim is to digitize data collected, making it available to scholars across the world.

The Fire Temples and Library are a part of the Parsi settlement, known as the Parsi Vads or *Mohallas*. Families with similar surnames stayed together in a particular *mouhlo*. The houses of the Vads have a distinct character. These narrow, long and multistoried houses consist of an open verandah that is followed by a sitting room. The

verandahs are generally decorated with patterned iron fences. Some of the popular patterns include the face of Queen Victoria and Prophet Zarathustra. The living room with its high ceiling is decorated with wooden furniture and lots of frames of deceased family members. A long corridor leads you to a courtyard, which has a small well, and the kitchen. The bathroom and toilets were also always at the back. A wooden staircase leads to the upper floor that consists of bedrooms and prayer rooms.





A Parsi lady with a mathubano covering her head stands on the verandah.



The Iron fence is decorated with portraits of Porshehs.







s decorated with  
phet Zarathustra.

**The Fire Temples and Library are a part of the Parsi settlement, known as the Parsi Vads or Mohallas. Families with similar surnames stayed together in a particular mouhlo.**

*A two-storied house stands alone locked. Several houses lie vacant and neglected, as the owners have migrated.*





Glimpse of an interior with a toran hanging on the door.

The rooms have large wooden windows, which can be opened, in levels. The prayer rooms would be always kept pure, with extreme rules of purity followed to this day.

In these very houses some of the most prominent figures of the National Movement have been born. Jamsetji Tata – The maker of Modern India was born and brought up in Navsari in a priestly Parsi family. His vision and extraordinary business

skills helped him build modern India. Dadabhai Naoroji who went on to become the “Grand Old Man of India” and the first Indian to be elected to the House of Commons in 1892 was also born in a priestly family from Navsari, as was the first Indian Baronet, Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy, famous across the world for his immense charities. Legends like Zubin Mehta- one of the world’s greatest conductors and Homai



Every morning and evening chalk patterns are made on the verandah.

Vyarawalla- India’s first woman photojournalist, both have roots in Navsari.

Even today, a typical sight is Parsi men dressed in their *sudreh* and *leggho* sitting on the verandah, reading a newspaper and greeting neighbours and friends as they pass by. The women, morning and evening, sprinkle water on the verandah and create wonderful patterns of *chalk* or *rangoli*. This ritual observance settles the dust and *chalk* keeps away insects. Even though most verandas have been tiled or cemented, simple daily traditions continue with immense faith and fervor.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Parsis prospered immensely and several families moved to bigger cities like Bombay. Due to this strong migration, a large number of houses lay vacant and derelict. Today the *Vad* is in need of heritage tourists who can, in Navsari, truly experience the Parsi ambience. While the scent of sandalwood and incense wafts down the narrow streets, the *Kolah*





**Navsari is an ideal town for people who want to experience different cultures and traditions. Each lane offers little stories richly woven to create an amiable atmosphere, interesting shopping and memories for a lifetime.**



A game of carrom at the W.Z.O. Senior Citizen's Home.

Ice-Cream Parlour and pickle shop attract visitors. The Parsi food of Navsari, the Parsi Garba, dance and music at the Navratri Celebrations and at Diwali, are all a part of an ancient intercultural tradition. The Senior Citizens Home, today provides a pleasant retirement community where Parsis from across India find company and care in their twilight years.

Parsi Crafts like *kusti* weaving and *toran* making are still alive in numerous Parsi homes and help generate income. *Kusti* weaving, which was earlier practiced only by women from priestly families, is now done in most Parsi homes of Navsari. Some women only spin wool into yarn. You notice Parsi women with their heads covered spinning wool sitting on the front porch; they spin and weave during their spare time and in between daily chores. It is this craft, which supplements family income and provides for the continuity of the emblems of the faith.

Another craft practiced, on the same loom as the *kusti*, is *toran* making. *Torans* are generally made of small glass beads woven together, with immense skill to adorn doorframes and bring in good luck. All Parsi homes have decorative *torans* either with floral and animal motifs or religious blessings carefully crafted with beads. These indigenous crafts have been largely targeted for Parsi tourists but have a great potential for creating woven objects of beauty for a discerning public.



Mrs. Kolah with her great grand daughter on her lap spins wool for the kusti.

Navsari is an ideal town for people who want to experience different cultures and traditions. Each lane offers little stories richly woven to create an amiable atmosphere, interesting shopping and memories for a lifetime.



# Safeguarding **Living Heritage** of Indian Cities





By Anil Kumar Roy

India's unique cultural heritage lies in its cities, towns and settlements, which form a complex and highly developed fabric of human habitation. The country's flourishing urban culture is continuously undergoing a process of change, interacting with new elements and assimilating new ideas as well as the aspirations and creativity of its people. Cities thus renew themselves while maintaining their unique and diverse heritage, both cultural and natural.

Rapid urbanization, along with the influence of globalization, has in recent times accelerated the pace of change in all aspects of Indian life, and particularly in urban settlements. India's cities and towns find themselves under pressure to accommodate rapidly growing populations, with all the demands on technology and public services and utilities this entails. This can lead to a chaotic urban scenario disturbing the delicate balance of the city's physical, social, cultural and ecological environment.

If Indian cities and towns are not strengthened to cope with these abrupt changes and transformations, the uniqueness and diversity of the cultures that exist in them will soon be lost forever, and they risk becoming homogeneous and monotonous. The preservation of the culture and heritage of cities and towns is a major challenge for local authorities and citizens alike. All stakeholders – government, citizens, the private sector, NGOs and specialized organizations active in the field of development and conservation – must collaborate on strategies for the preservation and conservation of India's urban cultural heritage.



The Indian Heritage Cities Network, founded by UNESCO New Delhi, brings together representatives of India's diverse cities and towns on a common platform where they can discuss their urban challenges with other members in India and experts from abroad, sharing experiences and good practices for sustainable urban development that is compatible with the conservation of their unique cultural heritage. Established in September 2006 with the endorsement of the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, the Network's growing membership currently comprises fifteen Indian and seven French cities, two universities and a number of NGOs.



# CITY'S HERITAGE IS ABOUT . . .

... its streets



... and  
public  
spaces



... and  
other  
public  
utilities



... including the gutters



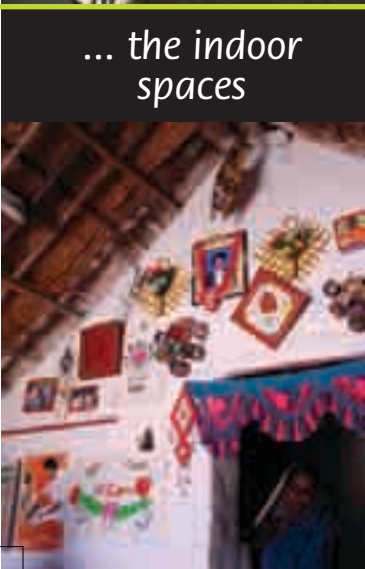
... its neighbourhoods, families and people



... the courtyards and gardens



... the indoor  
spaces



... and the meticulous detailing





... It is about public buildings and private houses



... the water bodies



... the markets



... crafts and crafts people



... about people's livelihoods



... It is about festivals and rituals and about being part of the community

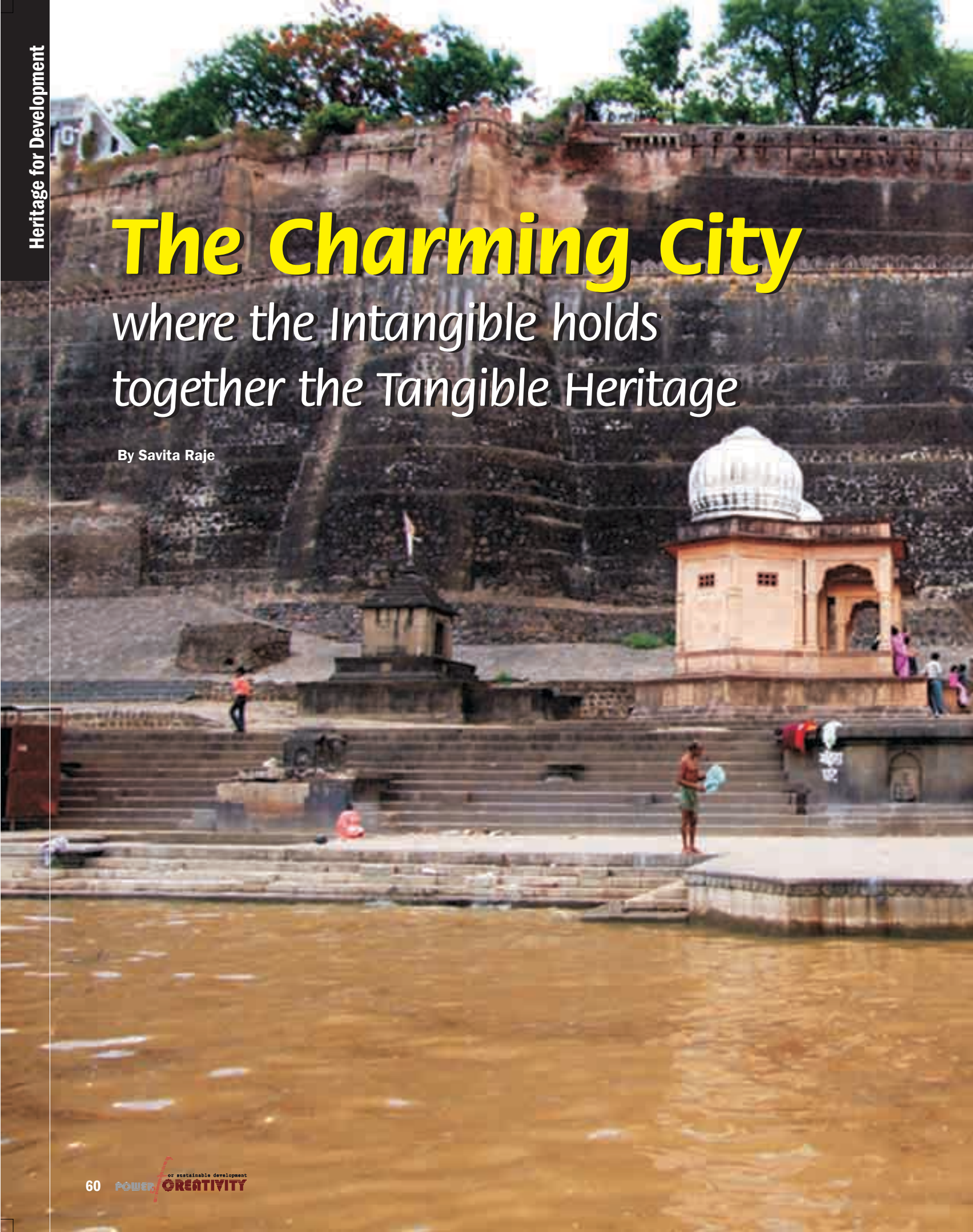




# The Charming City

where the Intangible holds  
together the Tangible Heritage

By Savita Raje





Since time immemorial, the city of Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh has been at the crossroads of culture. It is situated at an important junction on the ancient trade routes that joined the north and south. Thousands of visitors and pilgrims are drawn to its centuries-old buildings: the temple complexes, city squares, historical buildings, cenotaphs and *ghats*, rivers and ponds are all part of Maheshwar's tangible heritage. But there is an intangible quality to the place as well, its architectural treasures enhanced by faith, beauty and the splendour of life in this historic city.

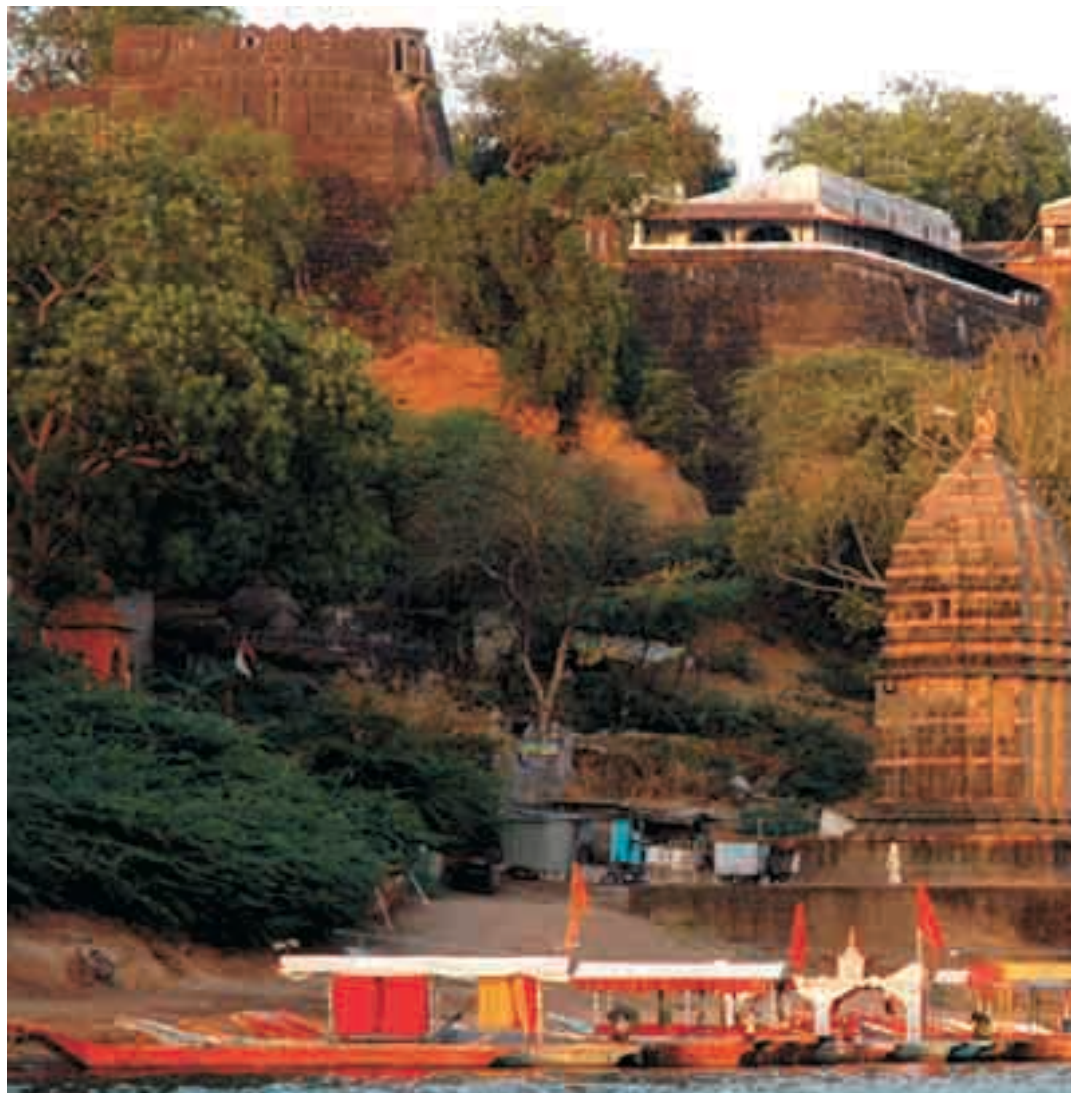




The Ahilya Temple Complex. Photo by Prof. Serge Santelli

With a history dating back to before the Stone Age, Maheshwar finds mention in the *Puranas* as Mahishmati, a major pilgrimage destination. Carbon 14 dating of the Chalcolithic habitation has revealed the dates as 1000 B.C. (top layers) and the earliest layers as 1500 B.C. It is believed that the mere sight of the divine waters of the River Narmada, which flows through the city, could absolve people of all their sins, whereas one has to actually bathe in the River Ganges to achieve purification. The city was founded by King Maheshwar of the Mauryan Dynasty, in the first half of the sixth century A.D., on the same site as the Mahishmati of the Haihaya Emperor Kirti Viryarjuna. The name of the city appears on coins and in donation records found at Sanchi, which range from the first to third century B.C.. As a revered pilgrimage destination, the town has many temples built even before the Parmara rule of the 9<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Maheshwar also appears in Kautilya's *Arthshashtra* as "Maheshla, a centre for manufacture of cloth of the finest variety." To this day, the principal industry of Maheshwar is the cottage industry of handloom weaving. Nearly 800 handloom units work to produce the famous Maheshwari sari. Maheshwari fabric reaches both the national and the interna-



The towering Ahilya Fort, the ghats at its foot with cenotaphs and the River Narmada. Photo by Prof. Serge Santelli



tional markets and is the backbone of the city's economy.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Mughal Emperor Akbar commissioned the Fort at Maheshwar as an important military base. But it was the Marathas who fully established the town in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1730, Malhar Rao Holkar made Maheshwar the capital of the Holkar Princely State.

The period from 1767-1795 saw a great upsurge in artistic and religious activities under the patronage of the Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar. She was a pious lady, an ardent believer in Lord Shiva and under her patronage, Hindu temples all over India which had been razed during the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's regime were reconstructed, including the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. The weaving of the famous Maheshwari textiles also found immense recognition and was instrumental in making the region economically sound. The queen's dedication to social welfare



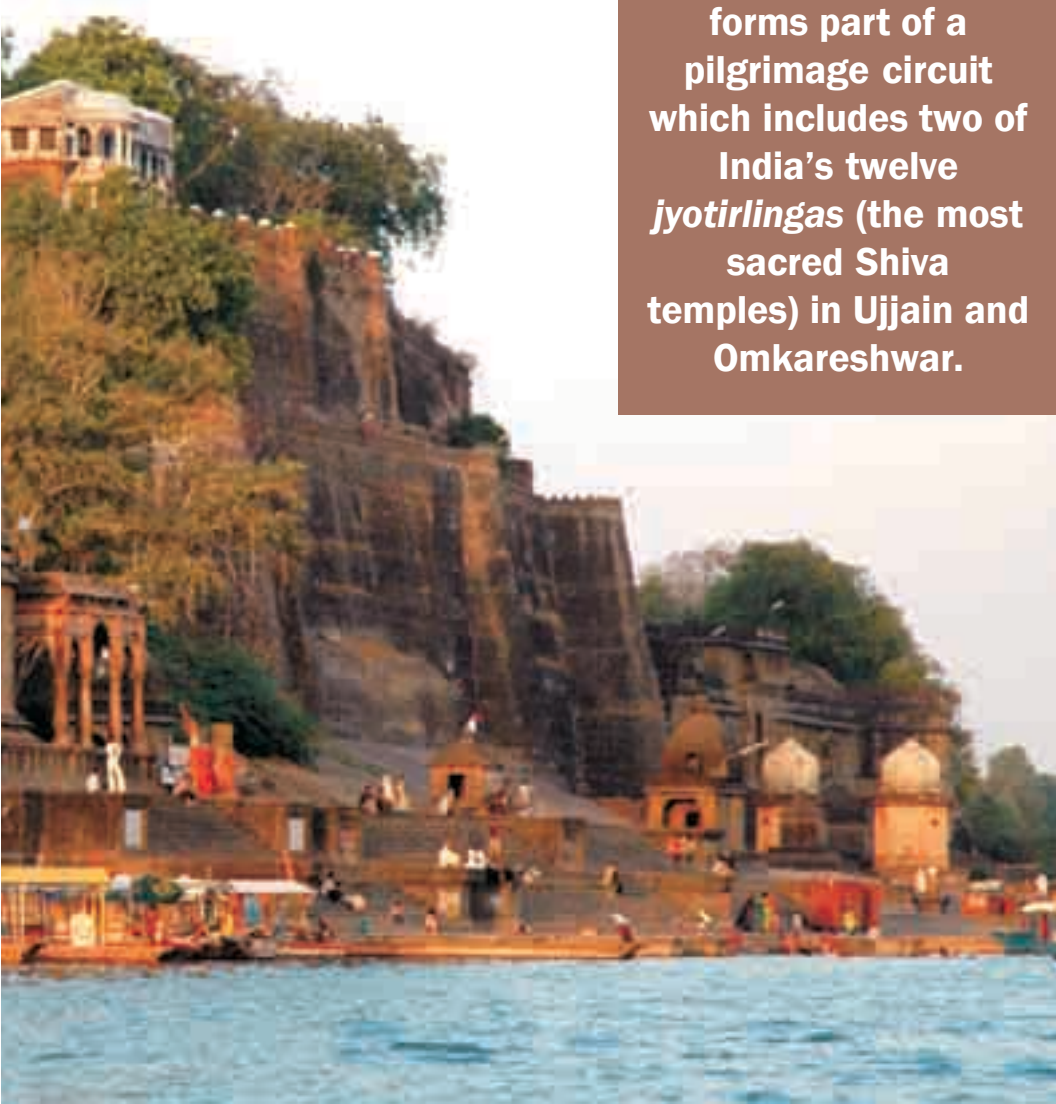
Ahilyabada: The court where Ahilya bai Holkar addressed the meetings and the public. Photo by Savita Rajee

**Most of the temple complexes in Maheshwar are devoted to Lord Shiva, and the city forms part of a pilgrimage circuit which includes two of India's twelve *dyotirlingas* (the most sacred Shiva temples) in Ujjain and Omkareshwar.**

and to building was continued by her descendants, even after the capital moved to Indore. The Princely State of Indore (Holkars) finally merged with the Indian Union on 22 April 1948.

Not surprisingly, given their illustrious patron, most of the temple complexes in Maheshwar are devoted to Lord Shiva, and the city forms part of a pilgrimage circuit which includes two of India's twelve *dyotirlingas* (the most sacred Shiva temples) in Ujjain and Omkareshwar. Within the city and its immediate surrounds, there are many pilgrimage destinations: the Kalagni Rudra Tirth at the confluence of the Maheshwari and the Narmada Rivers; the Triveni pilgrimage where the rivers Karam, Booti and Narmada meet, and Sahastradhara, a unique hydro-geological formation within the river that divides the waters into several streams. Every year, thousands of Hindus undertake the *Panch Koshi* walk that connects these important pilgrimage places. There are many festivals annually, both Hindu and Muslim, and the continuing reverence for Ahilya Bai Holkar is visible as thousands of devotees throng to the Ahilyabada, the palace within the fort from where she ruled and held meetings to coordinate her welfare and building works.

Besides the temple complexes, Maheshwar's houses define the city's identity and character. Shops opening to the streets with residences behind and on the upper floors, sometimes with a central courtyard and a backyard for animals. In weavers' houses, the street front offers a workshop-cum-sale area. Within the residential sectors, there are many *haveli*







Tazias taken out in processions during the Moharram of the Muslims. Photo by Savita Raje



The Facade of the Puranik House. Photo by Savita Raje



A typical Haveli temple with the priest house. Photo by Savita Raje

temples, where a temple is placed deep inside the front hall or at one end of a courtyard, flanked by rooms which house the resident priest or which serve either as a *dharamshala* for pilgrims or an institution, eg. Sanskrit School. Many houses boast pronounced entrances, with projecting balconies on beautifully carved wooden brackets. All residences typically have broad, shaded platforms towards the street, where the travelers can sit to rest or to be served water or even meals, a brimming water tank





from where the cows and other animals can quench their thirst and a built in feeding bowl for the birds, always kept full of grains. During the period when thousands of pilgrims visit Maheshwar, the local residents supply food to them voluntarily and free of cost.

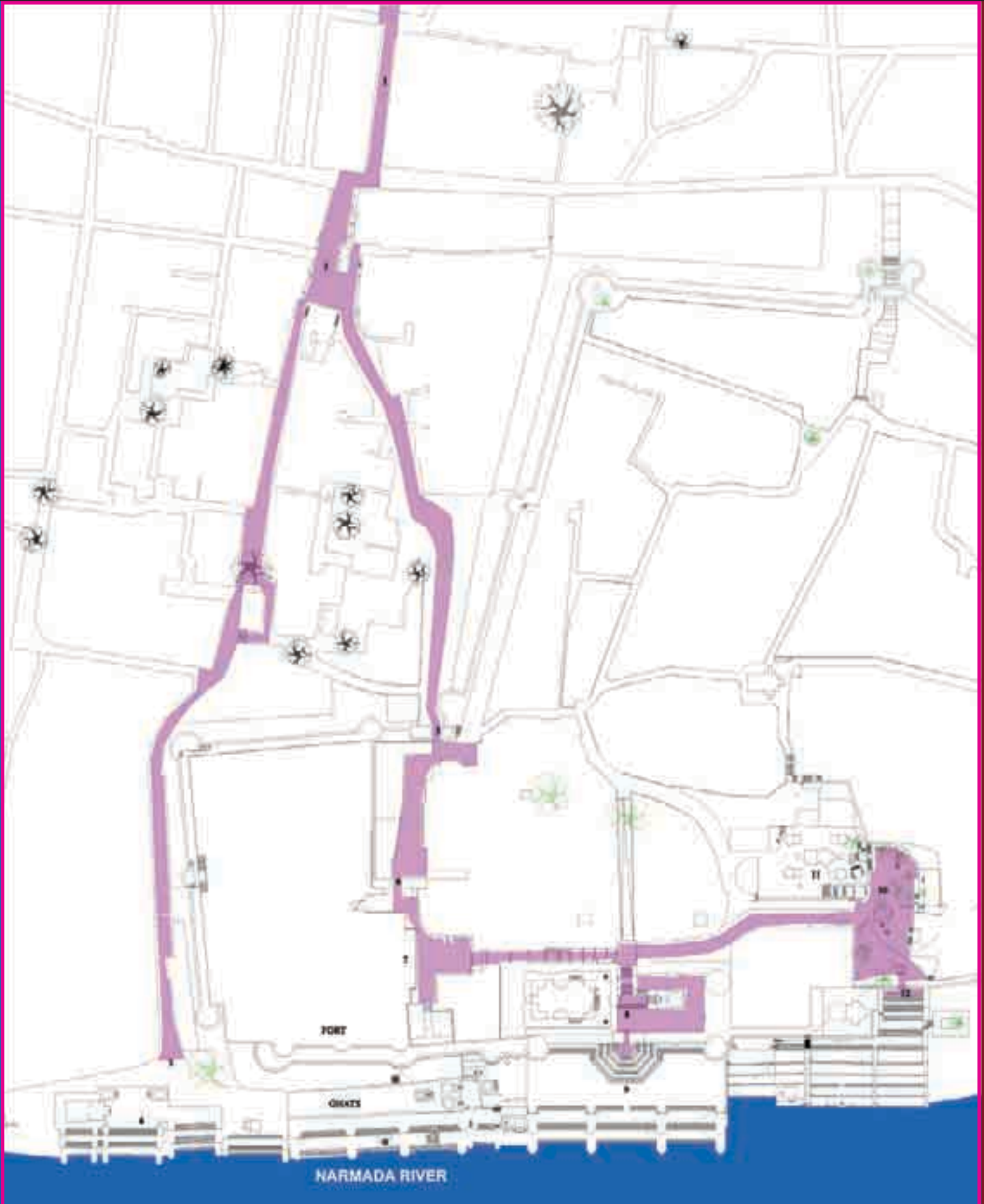
The rising importance of Maheshwar as a tourist centre and the rapid pace of industrial development across the river are typical of the challenges of modern devel-

opment that face many historic cities in India. The state's Town and Country Planning Department has drafted a development plan for Maheshwar, that focuses on the famous temple complexes and *ghats* with regards to conservation. But a variety of concerned individuals and organizations have come together to safeguard the city's overall ambience of peace and tranquility by striving to maintain coherence between the religious architecture

and the rest of the city. In July 2005, the Living Heritage Alliance, a non-profit, voluntary organization committed to education, research and conservation of heritage, formed the Maheshwar Partnerships, bringing together the local member of Parliament and member of the regional Legislative Assembly, the Panchayat president, the president of the Business Community, the representative descendant of the Holkar Dynasty and other city repre-



## Maheshwar: Plan of the Historical Core



- 1: Main Axial Road, 2: Market Square (Bazaar Chawk), 3: To the Ghats (Built up Water Front), 4: Laxmi Bai Sahib Ghat, 5: Entrance Gate to the Fort, 6: Entrance Gateway to Ahilya Palace, 7: Ahilya Bada (The place from where Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar ruled, Refer Fig.4), 8: Ahilyeshwar Temple Complex, 9: Ahilyeshwar Ghats, 10: Raj Rajeshwar Square, 11: Ancient Raj Rajeshwar Temple Complex, 12: Raj Rajeshwar Ghats or Kashi Vishwanath Ghats.



**The rising importance of Maheshwar as a tourist centre and the rapid pace of industrial development across the river are typical of the challenges of modern development that face many historic cities in India.**



*A typical house of the weaver: the handloom placed in the front room that acts as the workshop cum sale area*

sentatives. The Maheshwar Partnerships believe that their city can be developed as a model, integrating its architectural and landscape heritage through public participation and institutional partnerships. As a result, the local economy will benefit through the increase in tourism. There are carefully planned steps to make this vision a reality: the identification and documentation of buildings and places of heritage value; restoring the identity of traditional habitat and work areas; preparing a mas-

ter plan for conservation; and formulating regulations that will help the city retain its unique identity.

Three pilot projects are in the works. First, the development and conservation of the busy Bazaar Square at the main axis of the city. This busy market square symbolizes the city's commercial and cultural heritage. Then there is the conservation of the *ghats* to prevent soil erosion and improve waste management, and to treat the temples and other religious buildings by

them as part of the whole. Finally, the grand gateways to the town from the east and west will be restored as important focal points and reminders of ancient routes that have long been part of the city's identity. Maheshwar, a historic city of great cultural heritage and manageable proportions, aims to treat its heritage as an asset and its unique identity as something to be cherished and sustained.

*(Writer is the president of Living Heritage Alliance)*







# Wisdom of Traditional Knowledge Against Earthquakes

By Rohit Jigyasu, M.Arch., Dr.ing

*During the Northern Kashmir Earthquake on 8 October 2005, which killed more than 87,000 people in Pakistan and 1,300 people in India, many buildings suffered enormous damage because of poor workmanship and lack of adequate construction knowledge. However, several examples of building using local Kashmiri techniques of taq and dhajji dewari did survive the earthquake, thanks to several earthquake-resistant features which they incorporate. Such earthquake-safe construction systems have also been found in the earthquake-prone region of Gujarat. Why has such precious knowledge been discarded? It is perhaps time to shift our mindset and rediscover the relevance of local traditional wisdom for our modern building needs.*







### Why most structures failed?

**W**hen the dust settled on the devastating earthquakes in Gujarat in 2001 and Kashmir in 2005, many were shocked to see which buildings had survived and which were destroyed. Many of the constructions most damaged by the tremors were modern reinforced cement concrete constructions. Though widely perceived to be very strong, they did not withstand the force of the quakes as well as buildings constructed with traditional materials like wood, mud mortar and brick.

What went wrong? How could supposedly sophisticated contemporary engineering fail to make buildings safe in an earthquake? Seismology – earthquake science – is a complex subject, and many factors affect a building's performance in an earthquake, but the roots of the deadly problems in Gujarat and

Kashmir lie in some basic construction deficiencies. Reinforced cement concrete (RCC) performs extremely well in earthquakes if it is mixed and used properly, and if the buildings are constructed following careful principles and guidelines. But those are big "ifs". The sad reality is that many of the RCC buildings in Gujarat and Kashmir – whether individual houses, large blocks of flats or commercial buildings – were of extremely poor quality. Heavy concrete roof slabs sometimes did not rest directly on the roof beams as they should, but instead on two or three courses of brick placed over the beams, which gave way in the earthquake. Sometimes the roof slabs had virtually no reinforcing bars inside them, or mud terracing had been laid on top, increasing the weight. Columns often lacked sufficient reinforcement, too. As a result, when the earthquake struck, many of these buildings collapsed like a pack of cards

**The sad reality is that many of the RCC buildings in Gujarat and Kashmir – whether individual houses, large blocks of flats or commercial buildings – were of extremely poor quality.**



## The survivors

Amid the general catastrophe, however, several kinds of traditional buildings did survive these devastating earthquakes. Some of them were old and were already veterans of previous quakes. Others were more recent but were built according to traditional methods. Those methods, it turns out, made them more resistant to the earthquakes than their RCC counterparts.

In Kashmir, there are two local building techniques which characterize many of the older buildings in that region. *Taq* constructions have walls of masonry laced with timber: wooden beams are laid horizontally along the length of the wall at each floor level, and often across the tops of windows too. This simple device has the effect of tying the structure together and making the wall much stronger than it would otherwise be. A second type of construction, *dhajji dewari*, creates walls using timber frames with diagonal bracing, which are filled in with masonry and then plastered over. This kind of wall is both lighter and more flexi-

ble than a simple masonry wall: in an earthquake, it can flex and dissipate the seismic forces. The plaster may crack and fall off, and some of the masonry in a panel may even fall out, but the overall structure can remain standing even after a severe shock, preventing loss of life. (Fig. 3)

Earthquake safe construction systems are also found in Gujarat. *Bhungas*, the typical traditional dwellings of the Kutch region, have endured for centuries, withstanding earthquakes thanks to their circular form, which is very good at resisting seismic forces. Wattle and daub constructions, especially where wood is used as reinforcement for the wall, also proved to be very effective.

The evidence seems to show that the traditional buildings of these regions contained the knowledge needed to protect their inhabitants in the case of an earthquake. Developed over centuries and tested by time, these constructions were far more than traditional or quaint – they were scientific, and they were safe.



Surveying the appearance of cities in Kashmir and Gujarat today, however, one can only conclude that this ancient science has been ignored, and at a terrible cost. As a result, this knowledge has degenerated and is threatened with disappearance, replaced by a modern method of construction that is poorly understood and imperfectly put into practice, with disastrous results.





As wood slowly became less affordable, people started making alterations to their structures which in many cases made them more vulnerable to earthquakes. Construction in Kashmir and in Gujarat, as in many parts of the world, seems to have fallen victim to the fallacy that what is modern is scientific – or more precisely, that the traditional is inherently unscientific





### Lure of the modern, loss of the traditional

What has caused the abandonment of traditional ways of building that would save lives? The reasons are economic and cultural. Wood was once one of the primary building materials for housing in several earthquake prone regions, and its combination with stone masonry helped to give buildings better seismic performance. However, as wood slowly became less affordable, people started making alterations to their structures which in many cases made them more vulnerable to earthquakes. For example, in the Kutch region of Gujarat and the Poonch region of Jammu and Kashmir, unbraced walls were often extended to over 15 feet in height, simply to support the ridge of the roof and avoid using wood for a roof truss. Walls like that are unlikely to stay standing in a serious quake. Even where wood was still used, sophisticated – and stable – joinery using tongue and groove joints was replaced with the simple nailing of wooden members, which more easily give way in an earthquake.

Alongside the cost motivation was the appeal of new materials like cement over traditional ones such as mud. Mud has been increasingly seen as weak and outdated, yet it can provide precisely the kind of flexibility that is needed in mortar to withstand the shaking of an earthquake. Concrete has to be mixed very precisely to be strong, but corners have often been cut to reduce costs. And other specifications often prove unrealistic: for example, “curing” new concrete with frequent applications of water is virtually impossible in the drought prone regions of Kutch. As a result, materials such as brick and concrete are sometimes combined randomly with traditional materials such as stone and wood. This cuts costs, but it also affects the structural integrity of a building and makes it less able to withstand seismic forces.

With changes in materials and technology, traditional craftsmen have found themselves unable to practise their skills. Local masons, for example, who were skilled in shaping and laying stones, were not trained to handle brick and concrete constructions. As a consequence, they found themselves incapable of using the new materials, and their own knowledge of stone masonry gradually degenerated because of lack of demand. As they moved on to other occupations, the knowledge which was traditionally imparted from one generation to the next was

gradually lost. Meanwhile, those who could afford modern RCC constructions still could not find the level of skilled workmanship required to make these types of constructions earthquake safe.

### The traditional is scientific

Construction in Kashmir and in Gujarat, as in many parts of the world, seems to have fallen victim to the fallacy that what is modern is scientific – or more precisely, that the traditional is inherently unscientific. But as P. Richard pointed out when surveying the indigenous agricultural and food production system in West Africa, “Traditional knowledge is knowledge that is in conformity with general scientific principles, but which, because it embodies place-specific experience, allows better assessment of risk factors... This kind of knowledge arises where local people undertake their own experimentation, or where they are able to draw inferences from experience and natural experiments.” These observations apply to traditional construction in India too. Other observers have pointed out that traditional information systems are dynamic, continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as contact with external systems. This continuous process of experimentation, innovation and adaptation enables traditional knowledge to blend with science and technology.

Rather than categorizing “traditional” and “scientific” knowledge into mutually exclusive domains, the solution might be to recover the scientific aspects of traditional knowledge, making them more easily understood by professionals. At the same time, broad scientific concepts need to be communicated in ways that are understood by the local people who must implement them, so that modern innovations can be used safely and productively. The story of *taq* and *dhajji dewari* and their ability to withstand some of the worst natural disasters is a reminder of the power of the creative process and its response to changing needs, constraints and aspirations. And it is also holds up to us the advantages of maintaining a local sense of identity that literally builds on the accumulated experience of the past. Our cultural heritage, it seems, has a lot to tell us about mitigating disasters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# *The Storytellers*

Licensed Guides to Cultural Ambassadors





By Shaguna Gahilote

With the growing tourist market in India the need for guides has been increasing many folds. The Ministry of Tourism is therefore launching new schemes to bridge this gap and organizations like IITM, INTACH and UNESCO have come forward to assist in their execution. However, what still remains a big question is the knowledge base of the existing licensed guides. To check the genuineness of this particular complaint I tried to uncover the truth of the guides in India and though the situation cannot be generalized I did manage to discover a small community of guides for whom guiding is not just a mere profession but a passion to tell a story – the story of India.





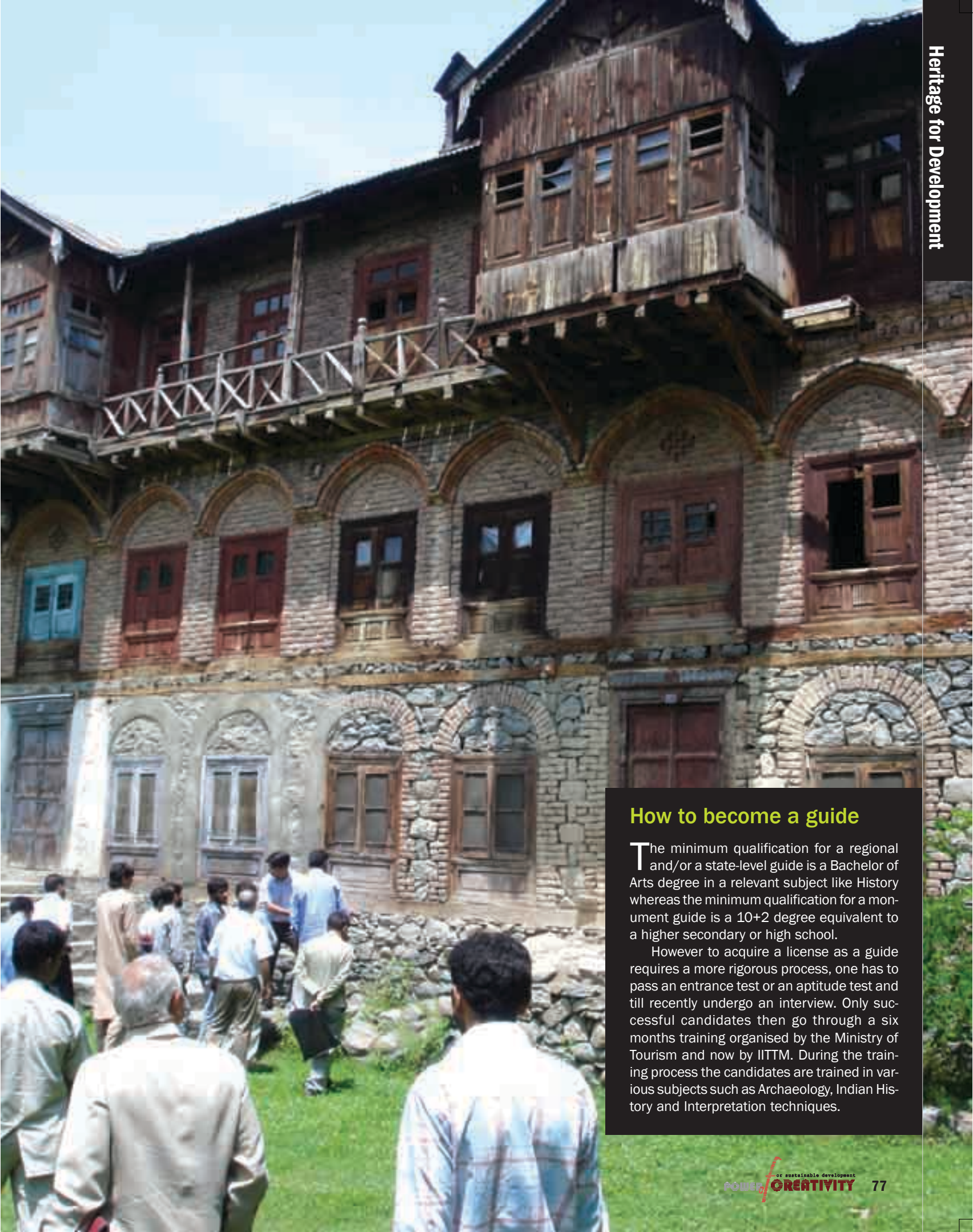
I've been following a passionate maverick across Delhi today. He reported for duty at seven in the morning, to be greeted by a group of 15 sceptics out to see the real India. He's been travelling with them from one monument to another, explaining not just these few sites, not just the several centuries of the city's evolution, but the whole history of India, its 9,000 years of civilization. He's been patiently answering all queries: about the cuisine, about the significance of the *bindi*, about the position of Muslims after the Gujarat riots, about the influence of the British, about the birth of Buddhism, and much more. Moving backwards and forwards in history and mingling the contemporary in between. On a more prosaic note, he's keeping the vendors at bay, giving instructions on safety and rec-

ommending places to shop and eat, all the while explaining the splendour of the architectural wonders with a first-timer's passion in the heat and dust of a country known for its harsh seasons. At the end of his 12-hour day he leaves a satisfied group exchanging email addresses with promises to keep in touch, digesting a fulfilling experience which has paid him Rs. 1,150. This is a day in the life of an Indian Guide.

If the mention of money makes you feel cheated for all the times that you've been forced to take your friends, cousins and colleagues around to see the city for free, then you are not the only one. Some professional guides feel that the money offered for their services makes them little more than unpaid labourers. On the other hand, some customers are of the view that the

The number of tourist arrivals in the country has been on the upswing; in 2007 India saw five million foreign tourist arrivals and with the Ministry of Tourism busy selling India as a 365-day tourist destination, the target figure for 2010 is a whopping 10 million. Following the increased tourist arrivals, arises the need for guides which has long been overlooked however this year the Ministry of Tourism through IITM finally undertook the training of new guides after a long interval. This January 350 more northern region guides were added to the existing 350 in Delhi, with a total of perhaps 1500 existing in the northern region alone. However needless to say that the northern region is by far the more popular tourist destination in the country and can therefore not serve as a standard for other regions. In the northern region even in the hot season of May when traditionally the tourist season is supposed to have died, now-a-days with seasonal discounts one finds bulk tourist coming to India.



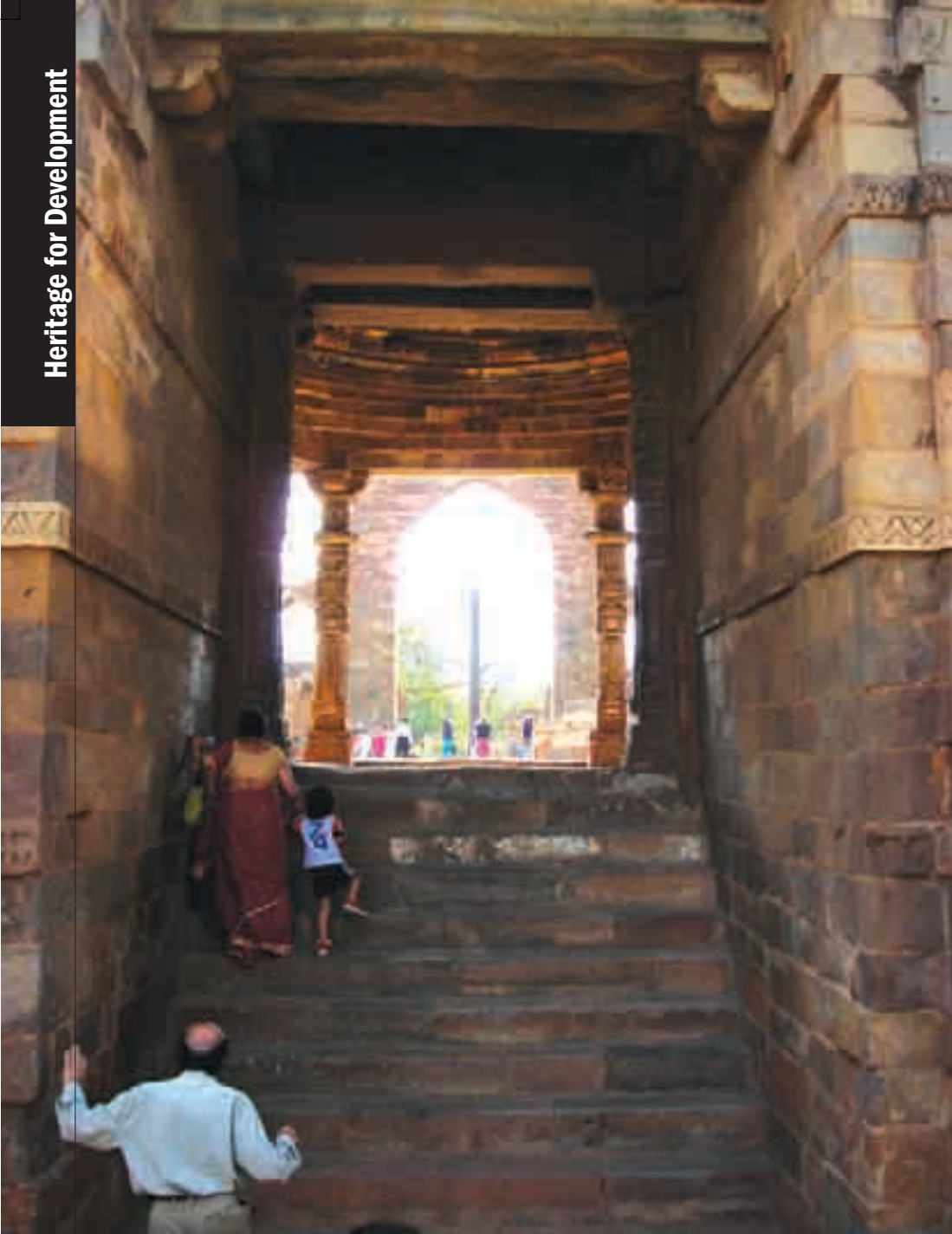


### How to become a guide

**T**he minimum qualification for a regional and/or a state-level guide is a Bachelor of Arts degree in a relevant subject like History whereas the minimum qualification for a monument guide is a 10+2 degree equivalent to a higher secondary or high school.

However to acquire a license as a guide requires a more rigorous process, one has to pass an entrance test or an aptitude test and till recently undergo an interview. Only successful candidates then go through a six months training organised by the Ministry of Tourism and now by IITTM. During the training process the candidates are trained in various subjects such as Archaeology, Indian History and Interpretation techniques.





## Evolution of guide licensing in India

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) protects approximately 4000 monuments in India. The monuments under ASI have been classified according to their significance namely, national, state and local; the same division was allocated to the tourist guides for issuing licences. Until about the 1970s ASI had the sole right to issue licences to guides to work at ASI monuments but in the 80s the responsibility was shared between the ASI and the Ministry of Tourism and they jointly signed certificates for guides. However in 2002 when the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture (ASI comes under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture) merged, the sole responsibility of issuing licences fell on the shoulders of the Ministry of Tourism. The Ministry passed the responsibility to Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management (IITTM), established by the Ministry of Tourism and now an autonomous body headquartered at Gwalior.

**Today's traveller looks for information not just about the particular monument but about modern India, with comparisons from all over the world. Guides must therefore be equally well informed and must impart correct information.**

money is far more than they deserve for all the "knowledge" that guides impart. And it's undeniable that even while guiding has become a somewhat lucrative profession today, it does not always attract the best qualified people. With the exception of a few cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Aurangabad, the quality of guides leaves a lot to be desired.

What is it that makes this profession a taboo? A guide's job is still not looked on as a real full-time career option in India, and though the work demands an immense knowledge of varied subjects, it is not considered a pursuit for the academically inclined. A licensed guide who has been practising in Delhi for 15 years and who wishes

to remain anonymous relates his story: "In the early 90's I found it impossible to find myself a bride because no body wanted to marry a guide. So in order to get married I enrolled as an insurance agent and only then found myself a bride." He confides that since his passion is guiding he has continued to work as one, but he has to endure the taunts of his wife for deceiving him into marrying a guide!

The problem goes beyond the popular image of guiding to the quality and reliability of guides, particularly outside the metropolitan cities and at heritage sites throughout the country. Most Indian tourists and backpackers from abroad who do not take a package tour hire guides direct-





## Types of guides in India

Today there exist three types of guides in India; the first is the regional level guide – the northern region guide, the southern region guide, the north-eastern region guide, the western region guide and the eastern region guide. A northern region guide for example is licensed to work in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Union Territory of Chandigarh; likewise for the other regions. The second category of guides is the state level guides who are licensed to work in a particular state of India. And the third category of guides is the monument guides to work only at a particular monument. The latter two categories have lost popularity amongst guides today and are primarily found in the state of Rajasthan. The regional and state level guides licences are provided by the Ministry of Tourism whereas the guides licenses for monuments are provided by the ASI, however this is more or less an obsolete category as ASI has not issued any fresh licences for these guides and the ones which are been issued (if at all) are purely on compassionate grounds when generations of the family have been working in the monument as guides, or on the demise of the registered guide to the children if he was the only earning member of the family; but such licenses have become rare. There is however a pending proposal in which the regional guides with 5-10 years of experience may be allowed to upgrade their licences to national level. A national licence does not exist as of today.

## Re-training and re-licensing

All guides have to renew their license every 3 years however there is no compulsory re-fresher's course or tests involved. There is a scheme of the Ministry of Tourism of refreshers course for existing guides but there is evidence of only one such refreshers course organised by the Ministry of Tourism in Delhi in 2005. The Ministry of Tourism under this scheme sponsored the first workshop of the Indian Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide (ICHSG) Programme, organized by UNESCO and INTACH.

ly at the site, negotiating a fee of anywhere from Rs. 100 to 400, but there is never a guarantee that such a guide is really licensed, even though one might have been shown an ID card. As a result, the guide's level of knowledge, and even his interpretation and language skills may be poor. What's more, some guides tend to glorify the past, passing off folklore as fact and bringing in their own beliefs, rather than taking a more objective stance or providing multiple interpretations.

Guides themselves are aware of these problems, and many feel that in order to improve the image of the profession, the Government needs to put in place regular programmes to upgrade their knowledge

and skills, as well as a rigorous training process for new entrants. The level of knowledge imparted during the initiation course has to match the standards of today's traveller, who is often extremely well informed and won't be satisfied by a mere recitation of historical facts. Today's traveller looks for information not just about the particular monument but about modern India, with comparisons from all over the world. Guides must therefore be equally well informed and must impart correct information.

Despite these issues, guides are gaining a higher profile in popular culture. Several television advertisements focus on guides to sell their products. The popular





### Earn while you learn

For the Commonwealth Games in 2010, there is a need for 30000 extra guides, a gap which the Ministry is trying to fill by using innovative ideas like their newly launched scheme 'Earn while you learn' in which it hopes to recruit students as guides to meet the shortage during the Games in Delhi. Even hotels have been asked to have their own 'guide banks' of students for whom the hotel should provide a short-term course on the subject and thereafter use their services for approximately Rs 1000 per day. In addition

a sustenance allowance is to be provided for students who are involved in the programme for periods when there is no work. The eligibility criterion for prospective guides is students pursuing graduation/post graduation between 18 and 25 years of age. A No Objection Certificate from the college/university is required for joining the programme. IITM commenced the 21-day training programme in December 2007, and the scheme attracted students from some of the better universities of Delhi.





## The Indian Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Programme

UNESCO New Delhi launched the Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Programme in December 2007 with support from the Ministry of Tourism (India) and in association with INTACH, JNU, IGNOU and IITM. The programme aims to provide accredited guides with the opportunity to strengthen their skills in interpreting heritage sites and related cultures thereby enhancing the educational experience of visitors and contributing to the sustainable safeguarding of heritage sites by sensitizing visitors about conservation and code of responsible conduct. The programme was originally launched by UNESCO Bangkok Regional Office, in association with ICCROM and the Asian Academy for Heritage Management, in 2005.

actor Abhishek Bachchan plays a U.P. guide at the Taj Mahal for a cellular connection company, capturing the mannerisms and language skills perfectly. The advertisement about the guide who uses his mobile phone to attract a Spanish tourist became so popular that the company produced a sequel. Even beauty products have been using female guides to highlight their role as the face of India. This spotlight on guides seems promising, as does the fact that in cities like Delhi, women from the upper middle class and affluent families have joined the profession. What may have started as a hobby or a pastime for some of them is now a full-fledged career.

But when all is said and done, guiding is not an easy job, as a well-known guide in Delhi, Suez Akram, recalls: "I once had a

tourist couple from Europe who came with a book that was published years ago in their country on how to see 55 monuments of Delhi in a day. When I had a look at the monuments I knew that most of them had been destroyed. However, the couple insisted on seeing all the monuments and did not take my word that they did not exist any more. To prove my point, I asked them to pick any monument on their map, and luckily for me they chose a monument that no longer existed. I took them to the place and asked them to lead me as per the map. After reaching the spot and interacting with locals, they realized that I was right about the monument. Thereupon they left their itinerary to me, and loved the Delhi I showed them!" Such incidents are common, affirms Sanjay Jain, recommended as the best guide

in Delhi in the Lonely Planet guide book. "We constantly are confronted by tourists with an itinerary formulated by young interns who do not have the slightest clue about the places they recommend on paper. There is also pressure of competition amongst tour agents and they push for such itineraries; however, on the ground we, being the face of the agents, have to manoeuvre our way to best manage the day's visits and yet keep the tourists happy."

In the end, being a guide is not just a profession, it's a vocation: a passion for history, culture and heritage, and a passion to relate a story. While a qualified guide may just require a bachelor's degree in arts, in reality he needs to possess a knowledge of history, archaeology, geography, international relations, anthropology, psychology, language skills and much more; he has to be a manager, a people person, and sometimes a crisis resolution expert; and be able to relate to tourists in their own language. Sometimes a philosopher, maybe even a friend, the guide is someone who weaves together all these qualities to be, for every tourist and every visitor, the master storyteller.





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Nine years ago, Corinne discovered  
true love while on holiday.  
Today, her home is where her heart is.

Corinne first saw Krishna on a moonlit night in a temple ground. His eyes, his lips, his demeanour, his attire, everything mesmerized her. She spent an entire evening gazing at him. And somewhere during those magical hours while he engaged in a battle of wits with Arjuna, she fell in love. And a passionate Corinne renounced the world to learn the dance drama called *Kathakali*. Nine years later, she teaches *Kathakali* to students from across the world. And somewhere in the back of her mind, she knows that she'll never be able to leave this land where she first met her Krishna.

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