

Blueprint for “Preserving Parsi Theatre” under the Scheme Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, sanctioned under Sanction Letter No: **28-6/ICH-Scheme/26/2013-14/13641**, Dated: **31st. March, 2014**.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parsi Theatre

The first play of the Parsi Theatre performed in 1853, entitled *Rustom Zabooli and Sohrab* dealt with an ancient Persian theme from the epic - *The Shahnameh*, as did subsequent plays such as *King Afrasiab* and *Rustom Pehlvan*. What drew popular attention to the Theatre however were the farces at the end of the main performance that parodied the follies of child marriages, excessive wedding expenses, quack doctors, superstitions and vices such as alcohol and gambling. The theatre therefore became part of a larger ideological apparatus for the reformation of Parsi society.

By the 1870s however, the Theatre came to be understood as a profit-making enterprise. This period resulted not only in the rage for spectacular plays consisting of magic carpets, gods and goddesses and flying demons that the Parsi Theatre came to be famous for and the secularization of audiences and theatre personnel but also in a distancing of the Parsi Community from the popular Parsi Theatre. In order to mitigate what was seen as a decline in the reformatory role of the Theatre, Kaikhushro Navroji Kabraji founded the Society for the Amelioration of the Drama which began to perform plays that portrayed Parsi families and their problems in Parsi Gujarati, what was to become a linguistic dialect of the Parsi community, resulting in the splintering of the Parsi Theatre into a subgenre of the Parsi Theatre for the Parsi Community.

Kabraji was swiftly followed by other Parsi playwrights such as his brother Bamanji Navroji Kabraji, Jehangir Patel and Phirozshah Marzban whose plays were performed primarily for the Parsi community community performed primarily for thinned to be staged on the day of Navroze until the 1950s. With the advent of the era of Phirozshah's son Adi Marzban, melodrama came to be seen as obsolete and tragedy gave way to comedy as the primary form of entertainment for the Parsi community on days of religious festivities. Adi Marzban was

succeeded by such stalwarts as Dorab Mehta, Feroz Antia, Homi Tavadia and Yazdi Karanjia who developed and established the Parsi Theatre that the Parsi Community knows today.

Currently, the Parsi Theatre is mainly seen on the two festival days of the Parsi calendar in Bombay while in other cities such as Kolkata, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kanpur, Madras, it has shrunk to skits and One Act Plays by amateur groups from within the community. Due to globalization and the loss of Parsi Gujarati as the mother tongue of Parsis outside Gujarat, even these plays use a mixture of English and Gujarati. It is only in Mumbai and Surat that a handful of groups continue to enact Parsi Theatre on a regular basis. Hence the need for a revival which will serve the purpose of preserving the theatre genre.

2. OBJECTIVE

In order to understand the importance of the history of the Parsi Theatre as a cultural unit in India; the successful recording, archiving, preserving and cataloguing of the material and memories related to it would be an important step in manifesting the value of this theatrical form for society. For this purpose it is necessary that the aim of the project 'Preserving Parsi Theatre' be that of preservation through a focus on the collection of material artefacts such as manuscripts, advertisements and handbills, the creation of a digital database of the pre- and post- independence Parsi Theatre's scripts and the recording of the last Parsi thespians of the Theatre

3. PLAN OF ACTION FOR STAGE ONE

By creating awareness of the project within the community, attempts will be made to procure material artefacts such as manuscripts, advertisements, handbills and recordings of the last thespians of the Theatre.

The repository for these is the New Delhi office of Parzor Foundation.

Given that this entails both collection of material and archiving, the estimated timeline for this will be over three months from June 2014 to October 2014. The reason for such a timeline is the caveat pertaining to weather and temperature control. Since these months also entail the monsoon season, collection of material is expected to take time, given that the paper material

being dealt with is very old and is subject to degradation if not handled carefully especially during humid conditions.

Along with collections – our attempt would be to initiate field visits and take interviews of the thespians of Parsi Theatre and their family members in order to create a repository of oral narratives related to the art form.

Through the ‘Preserving Parsi Theatre’ project PARZOR will initiate the process of creating a digital archive of tangible and intangible material consisting of scripts, photographs, recordings and pamphlets in order to save much of this primary information from perishing.

This will be done through the participation of professionals - photographers, preservation supervisors from Parzor Foundation and theatre experts who, while guaranteeing that paper scripts, recordings and other material culture are carefully dealt with, shall ensure that the digitisation is conducted comprehensibly.

4. LOCALE

Sources for Collection of Material : Calcutta (West Bengal) , Bombay (Maharashtra), Kanpur, Surat (Gujarat) and New Delhi

Preservation: New Delhi

5. DATES

1st June 2014 to 31st October 2014

6. CONCLUSION

The project at, with the provided grant at this point in time, attempts to prioritise preservation of the material and immaterial culture as it is necessary to ensure their survival for future generations, community members, the general public and research scholars. Given that we are required to work within the sanctioned grant, it is only after this crucial step that we will be able to look at other aspects such as making these available to the above mentioned concerned individuals and photographing and archiving the sites of the Parsi Theatre.

We are attaching for your perusal, the breakup of the grant received.

S.No.	Activity	Expenditure (In Rs. Lakhs)	Remarks
1.	Digitization	85,000	Includes the digitizing cost by high resolution professional imaging
2.	Cataloguing	15,000	Subsequent cataloguing for preservation and sustained organization of material
3.	Field Work - Identification, Communication, Interviews, and recording of surviving theatre artists or their descendants including Travel / Manpower costs.	85,000	Field Work is required in Gujarat, Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and other centres. To include travel by the expert from India and abroad.
4.	Office Expenditure, Miscellaneous & Overheads	15,000	Communication costs, Meeting costs, Accounting, Secretarial, Office Equipment for project work etc.

	TOTAL	2,00,000	
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REPORT – PHASE 1 : PRESERVING PARSİ THEATRE

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF STAGE ONE (PROGRESS STATUS)

The first stage of the project has been devoted towards reaching out to members within the community who could aid us in procuring material artefacts such as manuscripts, advertisements, handbills and recordings of the last thespians of the Theatre. Given that one of the most efficient modes of communication among the community is the local magazine ‘Parsiana’, our research expert Dr. Rashna Nicholson, published an article titled ‘More than a Natak’ (21/07/2014) in this magazine. The article announced that under the Scheme Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, sanctioned under Sanction Letter No: **28-6/ICH-Scheme/26/2013-14/13641**, Dated: **31st. March, 2014**, Parzor Foundation invites material artefacts such as manuscripts, advertisements, handbills and recordings of the last thespians of the Theatre from its community members. Additionally announcements at important festivals such as Navroze (New Year) Celebrations that gather community members, the word-to-word publicity accrued us several benefits in collection of intangible material pertaining to our project.

Despite the uncertain weather conditions, we have successfully procured material from Calcutta Amateur Dramatics Club (CADC), and groups and individuals associated with Parsi Theatre at Delhi, Mumbai and Kanpur (U.P). We have for your perusal attached the inventory of scripts that we have received up till now. The repository for the material has been Parzor Foundation office in Hauz Khas. To share one of the interesting collections, our project head – Dr. Shernaz Cama has found images from a booklet of an amateur *Hamlet* production in which Jal Khambatta (a descendant of Jehangir Khambatta) performed. The booklet dates sometime back to the 1950s. You will find the images of these as pictorial evidence in the C.D submitted for your perusal.

The field work for Phase 1 has also led to positive results. Our researcher for ICH Projects – Vanshika Singh visited Mumbai from 28th May 2014 to 8th May 2014. Because of the faith of the people in the credibility of our project, the researcher managed to meet Dr. Piloos Hakim the grand-daughter of the foresighted banker Sir Sohrabji Pokhchanawalla – who started the Central Bank of India as back in 1911. Dr. Hakim’s interview provided us insights into how the stalwart

took out time to engage in Parsi Theatre, what were his ideas pertaining to Indian Nationalism and how did he manage to work amidst several distinct fields. The interview also explained how Parsi Theatre brought the community together as Dr. Hakim spoke of her performances as well. The interview has been digitized and attached for your perusal.

We also procured among several files, the interview of another thespian – Mr. Noshir Gherda, and have attached the audio file.

The field work also led to our meeting with a descendant of the legendary Dadabhai Naoroji – Ms. Shirin Vakil who contributed portraits, photographs, handbills and a treasure of material culture pertaining to Parsi Theatre.

The information dissemination from our end regarding the project has even led to Parzor Foundation's interaction from members outside the Zoroastrian community. These are distinguished members of the academic community who have inquired and discussed with us details regarding Parsi Scripts, namely Dr. Kathryn Hansen, Professor Emerita, Department of Asian Studies, University of Texas at Austin, USA and Dr. Edward Wilson-Lee, Fellow in English, Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge

2. PLAN OF ACTION POST COLLECTION

Now, that we have procured substantive amount of material, we aim to move towards digitization of the precious heritage by creating a digital archive of tangible and intangible material consisting of scripts, photographs, recordings and pamphlets in order to save much of this primary information from perishing.

We have already contacted professional photographers for this work – which we intend to complete by November. This will also involve other professionals such as supervisors from Parzor Foundation and theatre experts who, while guaranteeing that paper scripts, recordings and other material culture are carefully dealt with, shall ensure that the digitisation is conducted comprehensibly.

We do believe that a lot of other field visits, information dissemination drives and involvement of research experts will accrue us further treasures of this intangible heritage. Ms. Rashna Nicholson, a doctoral research candidate at Ludwig- Maximilian University of Munich visited Bombay on her own expense to help us in tracing practitioners and archival material.

We believe we have maximised the potential of the received amount from the grant and will be able to continuously offer qualitative work with further receipt.

3. LOCALE

Sources for Collection of Material : Calcutta (West Bengal) , Bombay (Maharashtra), Surat (Gujarat) and New Delhi

Preservation: New Delhi

Interview with Mr. Noshir Gherda

24th December 2010

Defence Colony, New Delhi

Interviewer: Dr. Shernaz Cama

TRANSCRIPT

My name is Noshir Gherda, I'm 88 years old today.

In school, in the 4th standard, for the first time, I was asked to do a play for the school. *Prince Charming*. The lead role, because they couldn't find anyone else doing it. And I'd memorised the play because I was just part of the crew. After that, every year, I did plays in school. I did Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. I was Ariel. I flew through the air! They strapped me around the chest, and they had hooks at the back, hooked me up and they pushed me forwards, so I was moving like a pendulum!

(Tell us about) the Calcutta Amateur Dramatics Club, your wife, and how you became a very important member over there.

As I told you, I'd started acting when I was in the 4th standard, and I acted every year in school, in St. Xavier's College and thereafter when I went to St. Joseph's College, North Point, I continued my acting career. Because the Fathers found my...my histrionic talents very good. I came back to Calcutta in 1939 but the Dramatics Club didn't think I was good enough to act in Gujarati plays, because they thought my Gujarati was very Anglicized. In 1945, Saklat did some plays, English plays, and Behramsha Madan, who was then director, wanted some young boys to join the Dramatic Club. I was one of them that were chosen among the few that were enrolled.

Which plays did you do with the Saklat club?

Can't remember.

How did you meet your wife and how did you get involved in Calcutta Amateur Dramatics Club?

Katy was a very old resident of Calcutta, and I just happened to know her family very well. I joined the club in 1946, all male members were members and male members only took part as ladies as well. It was in...I can't remember...in 1956 I think, lady members were introduced, and Katy had put in her name as one of the applicants. Five or six new members were taken on, I can't remember offhand the names, but if I see the souvenir I'll point it out to you.

Can you tell us about Madan? And his role in this revival of Parsi theatre in Calcutta, and also about Vistasp Balsara. These are the 2 things. And could you describe how a typical play started and when it was performed?

Which Madan are you referring to?

Khushroo madan.

Khushroo Madan?

Your main Madan...Cyrus Madan's grandfather.

Aah, J.F. Madan.

Yes, J.F. Madan. Also, Nariman Oonvala, please.

J.F. Madan wasn't really involved in our dramatic club as such, he may have been a person who helped the club out financially...gave us his theatre free of charge. There was a Corinthian theatre in Calcutta which did these plays for Madan. 1907, every year at Pateti time, on Navroze, we did a play free of cost for the Parsis. The first year, if I remember correctly, we didn't do a play...we put up some sort of a tableau performance of physical exercises etc., weightlifting so on and so forth, and the people felt that this was a very good idea, having a free play or some sort of performance, for the Parsis during the new year. Thereafter we got the old plays from Bombay, can't remember the names offhand, but if you refer to the 50 years souvenir, got the full details.

Can you tell us about *Topsy Turvy* or any of the plays in which Nariman Oonvala was the director or Behram Madan.

Nariman Oonvala was not...the first director was Mr. Talati.

Yes?

After Mr. Talati, Nariman Oonvala took over and he was our director many, many years - you'll find it in the souvenir - what year he retired. Thereafter Katy, my wife, took over as director and was director for 18 years.

Before your wife came into the Calcutta Amateur Dramatics, what were the roles you played and can you just describe how the concert started and ended.

As I told you, I started acting in 1946, but then they didn't think my Gujarati was so powerful so they made me a policeman, made me a detective, small little roles like that were given to me. When Katy became a director, she knew my past history and gradually began giving me bigger roles. I preferred doing cameo roles rather than main roles - for one thing, main roles were very long to memorize. The cameo roles...you could stand out better.

How did a community performance start? Can you remember the song and recite it for us please?

The opening song?

Yes, with the music please. And the closing song. Just try and remember. At your own time.

Do you remember any of the songs and can you describe a typical stage set with...who were the musicians, what did you have and was it only in the Corinthian?

Initially, all our plays were in the Corinthian Theatre.

Can you locate it for us please?

5 Dharmatalla Street in Calcutta. The building still stands there at 5 Dharmatalla Street, now it is run as a cinema hall.

The musicians?

They were all *tablawalas*; harmonium and *tabla*.

Did you ever have a piano?

No.

Did you have a *sitar*, because I have seen some *sitars* and things...?

We never played any *sitar*, we only had the *tabla* and we had a pedal harmonium.

Can you try and recall the introduction, the prayer song? Why did you sing a prayer song at the beginning?

[sings Opening Song]

Excellent! But tell us why you sang this song at the beginning.

This song was initially composed by...I can't remember the gentleman's n...

Jhangir Polishwala.

Jhangir Polishwala!

In 1908.

Yes.

Why was it composed? What was the reason for this song at the beginning of the ...

You see its... it's like a prayer, an opening prayer.

So was Parsi theatre in Calcutta seen as mainly a community gathering or was it seen per se as theatre?

It started off only as a Parsi gathering on New Year's Day, it was tradition. Free for the

Parsis, performed by Corinthian Theatre for years. Thereafter we found...to get funds we did a public performance, for Gujaratis, open for anybody. It was a paid performance. In those days, earlier styles it was sponsored and financed by *Sethias*, gradually we began taking small adverts to get funds.

How did the Gujarati audience react vis-à-vis the Parsi audience? Because the Parsi jokes and Parsi Gujarati is very different from traditional Gujarati theatre.

The Gujaratis enjoyed our Parsi language, they liked our humour, and they liked our dramas. They had no other outlet, they had no Gujarati dramas coming, no Gujarati performers there. So naturally we were very popular.

[Singing again – Closing Song]

Thank you, that was lovely!
I know it was awful!

No, it was really lovely!
It was completely out of tune!

Doesn't matter! Now tell me, we have got some cameo roles. What were your favorite cameo roles?

The best cameo role that I did was in *Chaalo Zer Paiye*. This was a play copied from the English play...

Arsenic and Old Lace.
Arsenic and Old Lace. Correct

I know my history!

And I was the mad nephew. The two old ladies were taken to PSPG accommodation, old people who were fed up with life, and then gradually poisoned them and thought they were doing a great deed. The mad nephew was called in to bury them. So he'd dress up as a commander-in-chief, as a naval commander or general commander or something or the other and carry the body down, dig the grave and bury them.

Can you tell us something about *Kunvaru Mandal*, 1950. You were playing in it.
Kunvaru Mandal?

Haan, Kunvaru Mandal, 1950.
As what?

You were...

Policeman?

I think so...

And you also acted in *Zoopdinoo Zaver*.

In the earlier plays I can't remember much of a role, except as I told you, either I was a detective or a policeman or ...

Behram ni Sasu? What was your role in *Behram ni Sasu*? You were a policeman there.

Yes, possibly.

And *Have Manai Joi Levo*? What was your role there?

I can't remember.

Okay. What do you remember about the type of play you were doing at this time? 50s, early 50s; were they all farces and comedies or did you act in any historical plays like *Naaja Shireen* etc.?

No, I did no historical plays, after 1946 I can't remember doing any historical plays.

Earlier do you remember seeing historical plays, Parsi plays? In Bombay or anywhere else?

No.

Do you remember Parsi plays in any language besides Gujarati?

No.

Okay. In *Sample Soonaamaasi*, which was a very late play for you, 1974, do you...you were acting with your wife. You had been married by then.

Yes.

How was it to act with your wife as an actress and as a director?

She made sure I learnt my part because I was a very naughty boy, never learnt my part till the last one week! But on stage I was perfect. I never let the club down.

When we look at your plays, the archives show that each of you had a different written copy, later a printed copy, and there was a prompter's copy which is most valuable because it has all the parts. Who actually hand-wrote all these copies for you?

Jimmy Guzder initially used to hand write all the copies for us, from the original book or original play, he'd make a prompter's copy, and for the individual actors, he used to just write out their paragraphs, the touch word, and carry on.

Your copies are written in Gujarati, but many of you didn't read Gujarati well. How did you learn?

No in those days, in the earlier days, everyone spoke Gujarati and they read Gujarati.

You read Gujarati?

Yes.

And your wife must have read it very well

Yes, of course.

Now can you tell us a little about how you all practiced, because all of you were professionals and working men and women. Can you describe a typical practice session, where it was held, how it was done?

We had club rooms at 226, Bow Bazaar Street, comprising of 2 rooms, where we housed all our furniture, all our gear, costumes, everything. We had our harmonium there, we had our *tabla* over there. Behramshah Madan used to play the harmonium for us and those who knew how to sing were made to sing over there, every evening from about 6 o'clock in the evening to 8 o'clock in the evening we drew out for practicing.

Was it totally voluntary? Were you ever paid transport or anything?

In the earlier stages, no...no remuneration was given. But later on, it became very difficult to get transport so we provided free transport for people to go home.

When you say singing, was there a separate orchestra, and where would the orchestra sit vis-à-vis the stage?

In those days, all theatres had a small pit in front, offstage, where the harmonium man sat and the *tabla wala* sat.

Who was the *tabla wala*?

I can't remember their names.

And any names of the ladies or men who sang?

Behramsha Madan sang, Nadir Gandhy sang, (Nariman?) Oonvala sang, Phiroze Guzdar sang, Godrej Karai(?) sang, Savak Mehta sang, Katy Gherda sang, Yasmin Kapadia sang...

You have no written music, so how did these people learn the song? Have you ever written down the music?

No, no music was ever written down, Behramsha would play on the harmonium and

give us the tune and the people would pick it up.

Can you tell us about your costumes? I have found your policeman's costume and I have it in my archive. Can you tell us about the more comic costumes like the Chinese and the others?

These were made in the earlier days depending on the roles and they were kept in the cupboard in the clubroom.

The clubroom in Bow Bazar Street is...must have been a part of old Calcutta because now it is almost unapproachable. Can you tell us a little about Bow Bazar Street and why your club was there?

We found premises, that is why. In fact it is a very old building...house, where all Parsis were living. Behramshah Madan used to live on the first floor, second floor was Dr. Guzdar and his family, third floor was some more Guzdars; and there were two rooms available on the second floor, which were rented out to us; we had to pay a nominal rent of about 300 rupees a month.

That means the Parsis of Calcutta were actually very much in the old city before they moved to Park Street and things. Can you tell us a little bit about the sociology of that move, and the history of the Parsis. I know you've done this before, but we want it in your own words. Why...how do you think the leap into Anglicization came?

Well there were Sethias in Calcutta who lived in Park Street and Reni Park and Ballygunge from the beginning. They had their own bungalows, palatial houses, there was the R.D. Mehta house, that was in Reni Park which was subsequently sold for 14 crores. And the beneficiaries were the *agyari*, because all the...heritage, all the people who were to inherit their money had died. The will was so made out that nobody got the bulk money, they all earned from the interest money.

What were the Parsis in the city, like in Bow Bazar, doing? Umrigar, etc.

Parsis in Bow Bazar were generally maximum in a place called Madon Mansion. They were mostly all employees in commercial houses. Later on some boys took up engineering, shipping line. In Bow Bazar we had more doctors. Dr. Godrej Karai was a doctor but he didn't live in Park Street. Dr. Guzdar was a very old resident of Calcutta, he was a doctor. My uncle Dr. Minochal Gherda was a doctor.

How did your family shift to Calcutta?

I wouldn't remember how they shifted to Calcutta but I know that my...Kavasji Gherda, that is my father's grandfather, came to Calcutta in 1860.

From?

I presume Bombay, I don't know. Either Navsari or Bombay.

What did he do?

He was doing trade with China.

Over the land route or over the sea route?

Over the sea route.

Trade in what?

I wouldn't know offhand what. But I know that I've got some very old Chinese vases which were used as packing material and they used to ship ginger and other things from China.

Did you ever hear about the Chinese silk trade? And do you remember women, like your mother and grandmother, doing embroidery? Or *kusti* weaving?

No, we did no *kusti* weaving. My mother used to do embroidery and very good knitting.

Did you ever see them embroidering a *gara*?

No. Nobody embroidered *garas* in Calcutta.

Now, was your family musical? Did you have a pedal harmonium at home? Can you tell us how 3 generations of your family has been involved in western music?

In our family we had no musicians, we had no instruments in the house, except the gramophone. My mother was very fond of Indian music, and English music and we had a lot of 78 records.

Can you tell us which Indian music she was fond of?

Oh I wouldn't remember.

Do you have the 78 records still?

No.

When did the piano come into your house?

The piano came into my house after I was married and my daughter Kerman was born. She was interested in learning music. In the earlier stages, I had this piano on hire. After a few years the gentleman who owned the piano was going away and he sold it to me for 2000 rupees. Why, (a) because he was a friend of mine, and (b) he thought I paid enough in hiring the piano, so 2000 was a good figure in those days.

Can you tell us a little about your grandsons continuing your musical tradition? Name him, give his details please.

My grandson Kaizad Gherda learnt...began learning the piano from a young age, from a teacher called Sammy Engineer. His mother, my daughter-in-law, Navaz Gherda also played the piano, she was musically-minded. Kaizad did up to Grade 8 or Grade 9 in piano, classical music.

How did he switch to pop music? And what is he now doing with that?

Kaizad now, in addition to playing on the piano, plays on the keyboard; and he had music in him, it was just spontaneous. He joined some band or the other after he joined college, and then he took up sound engineering as a profession. He's passed out now as a sound engineer.

Can you tell us about the *monajats* that were taught to Parsis in Calcutta by Katayun Saklat's father?

I'm afraid not. You've to ask Katayun if she remembers or Freni, her sister in Delhi. If they remember.

Did you ever have *humbandagis* with music in the agyari?

Not that I can recollect.

Okay. Coming back to theatre, what was the highlight of your role in theatre and how were you propositioned or proposed to? Please tell us that story.

I don't follow.

You were playing the role of a woman. And you were very beautiful. Tell us that story. [laughter] Which play was it?

I can't remember the name of the play.

Tell us your role. What were you playing?

Charlie's Aunt was the name of the...it was a short sketch, Godrej Karai and myself.

What were you wearing in *Charlie's Aunt*?

Sari and a blouse!

Then what happened?

Nothing happened, what?

Somebody fell in love with you, tell us that story!

Not with me! Somebody...Gujarati fellow fell in love with a man called Nariman

Mehta. He used to act regularly as a girl, and he insisted that she was a lady, till he was taken back stage and 'she' took out her blouse!

[laughter]

How did women come on the stage? And what was the opposition? Why were you opposed to Parsi women on the stage?

We were not opposed to them except in the one year there was a debate in the club and we felt our freedom of speech, freedom of movement may be () as male members, but the next year I think it was carried in one vote that ladies should now come in, it was time to change. It was difficult to get men to act as girls and the botheration of dressing up and things like that. So it was better that we changed, modernized ourselves a bit. We modernized ourselves also by putting in plays with a box scene, because as long as we were in Corinthian theatre, we had drop scenes, where you had painted scenes put in and each different scene they'd drop. So we'd change the scene every time. It wasn't practical in other places, so eventually the trend was in the modern theatre was box scenes. Modern plays were written by a gentleman called...Firoze Antia's plays, very popular, *Behramni Saasu* is a very popular play. We performed it twice. After Behram...after Antia died, we did several of his plays. Then after that we were doing plays from...where were we doing plays from?

You were doing plays from Antia, Mehta, Cooper, Tavadia. Earlier you were doing *Gulfaam* and the great *Kabraji*. Did you ever see Parsi theatre in its original home in Bombay?

No, I'd never been to Bombay so I couldn't see it.

Can you tell us about *Kabraji* and *Gulfaam* and also about *Khambatta*, because *Khambatta* has acted with some of the great actors of the world. Can you tell us a little bit about the playwrights, what were you told about them?

Nothing. I have no recollection. I'm afraid I can't help you.

Okay. Can you tell us about how...what was the heyday of Parsi theatre in Calcutta and why did it decline?

I don't know the exact year...round about 1990, we found it difficult to find people to do...to speak Gujarati and do plays. So what we eventually were doing for people who could not read Gujarati was to translate it into English. *Kaizad*, for example, had a histrionic talent, he didn't know Gujarati, he didn't translate it into English, he translated it into Hindi! And he memorized them very well and performed very well.

Did you always...you all made a decision to continue till your 100th year. How was that decision made? Any ideas, can you tell us?

Well, we wanted to complete a 100 years. It was an achievement. I think in the whole world, you won't find any other dramatic club, amateur dramatic club, nonstop performing for one hundred years. Hail, rain or snow we performed, curfew we performed, riot we performed.

Did you ever have a non-Parsi towards the end? Usha Uthup performed with you all in 2007. *Bae Bairiwala Burjorji*, do you remember that?

Usha Uthup?

Yeah, Usha Uthup is supposed to have performed in 2007. Usha Iyer, who has now become Usha Uthup and a very well-known singer. Was she singing for you or did she only come in as a cameo role?

I have no recollection of Usha Uthup taking part in a play. In the 2007 celebrations she may have taken part.

Okay. What do you think you would like to see for Parsi theatre in the future?

Well, in the dramatic club we are trying to continue for as long as we can. We are finding it extremely difficult to get people to take part in Gujarati plays, come for rehearsals. People find rehearsals too boring. They don't realize that in any good play, English or otherwise, Gujarati, any play, must have at least constant rehearsal and very...

Do you think the loss of the regular play has led to a disintegration of the community? Do you think a loss of the regular bi-annual performance has led to a disintegration of the Calcutta Parsi community feeling?

Well, the Parsis always want a Gujarati play because they enjoy it, it's something to go and see and also to meet a lot of people. So the Parsis want a Gujarati play always. But the dramatic club is having endless problems in putting up the play; one, to find plays, secondly, to find people to perform.

Do you think if you took help from the National School of Drama or the Calcutta dramatics...from the Sahitya Akademi, do you think you could solve this problem?

I wouldn't want to comment on this subject because I don't direct plays and I have not been so closely attached with the club for the last 2-3 years.

What was the last play you performed in personally?

(hesitates)

Can you tell us why music was so important in the plays? There are lots of songs in the plays. Any line you remember. Or any naughty dialogue you remember.

Pedroo Peter pedroo Peter hai mera naam, () jab aaya sab karta salaam!

Thank you, thank you so much!

My grandson graduated from Calcutta, St. Xavier's college...He took a 2 year course in sound engineering in Andheri, and he is now composing music for TV, background music. There's a play called *Alchemist*, in English by...who is it?

Paulo Coelho.

That play has been converted by some director in Bombay...

I heard of that...

Into a...sort of an opera. If you see the play, you won't be able to follow it. It has nothing to do with the old book. It's more like a complete musical and Kaizad has been entrusted with the music and the background sound and is also acting in it as the lead role.

What about your granddaughter?

My granddaughter is studying photography in some college in Bombay.

And what about her music?

She's not up to too much in music. She started doing...learning the piano but I think the teacher was too tough with her, she said "he can't dictate to me", so she stopped it.

Anybody else in your family who still has continued the acting tradition? Tell us a little about Kerman and Aspy.

Well, Kerman and Aspy are also members of the Calcutta Dramatics Club, they've acted in several plays, they probably have a better recollection if you can talk to them.

