

Quetta Callingⁱ

Our world is linked by stories; they are the distilling of lived experience into a piece of wisdom to impart to the next generation, a fragment of history to explain to each culture's place in the world and a piece of entertainment to clam the restless children. Just as these stories reflect the diversity of one small place in the world, they demonstrate the universality of everyone's experience. We are all characters in these stories, we are all tellers, and we are those to whom they are told, time and time again.

My mother-in-law, Gool Rustomji, was a fantastic story teller. Her excellent narration, the details and the beauty of her stories had me transfixed. Her stories were all family lores. She wove the lives of friends and family and there was always a moral to the fruitful endings. Memories give our lives their fullest shape, and remembering keeps them alive.

What you are about to read is not a history of all the Quetta Parsis, as many have lived magical lives in this city. Rather, it is a tribute to the Zoroastrians who still live in Quetta and the contributions of their ancestors to the social and economic fabric of Pakistan.

Quetta - An introduction

Quetta is the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan province. At 5500 feet above sea level it is one of the most important military locations in Pakistan. The borders of Iran and Afghanistan meet here and the Bolan Pass forms an important venue of communication in this region.

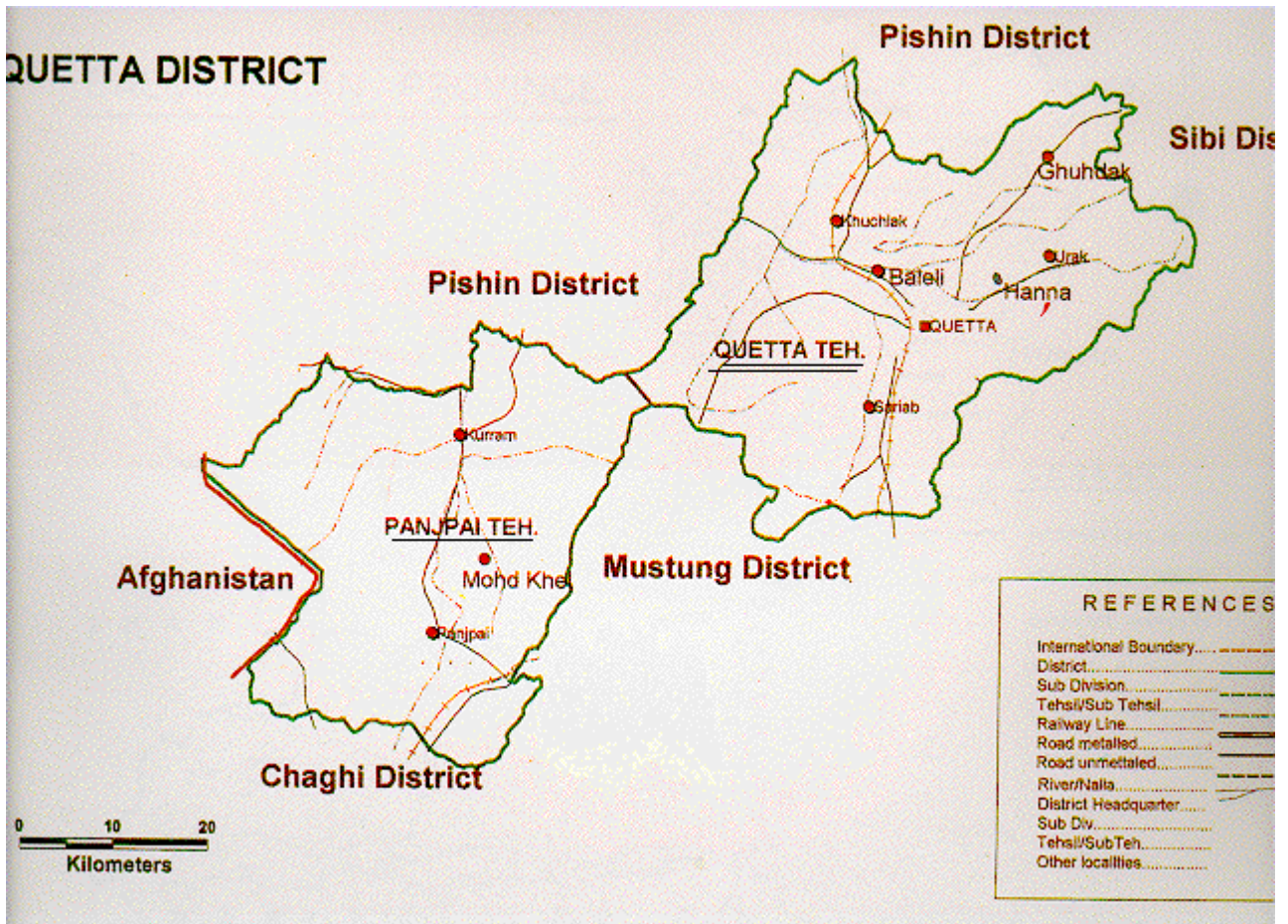
In 1184, an Arab historian Al-Masudi wrote of Zoroastrian habitation near the bank of the Sindhu (Indus) River. Nawab Bugti, a local chieftain, proudly claims that his people, the Baluch, ancestors' were Zoroastrians. He boasts that, "if there is any good in me it is because of my ancestry."

In the 1800's, a French archaeologist wrote Quetta was a military station since the time of Cyrus the Great. To substantiate this claim it is said that 30 or 40 miles from Quetta on the road to Zahidan, Iran, he found evidence of a Dar-e-Meher and a barracks for soldiers. The design of the temple remains was the same as we would recognize it today. Being a military station, the city was divided into Civil and Cantonment areas across the Hub Nullah. On the north is the cantonment and on the south is under civilian administration.

In 1892, when the British were extending their arsenal of the Miri Fort, in Quetta, they found a statue of Hercules in the course of their excavation. It is said that the Grecian army erected a statue of Hercules at any site they camp for over six months. This statue is presently housed in Queen Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta.



Map of Pakistan showing the position of Quetta relative to Afghanistan and Iran. Most of Western Pakistan and Afghanistan were part of Iran, and were separated from Iran by the British colonial forces in the course of 19th century.



Map of District of Quetta that has grown considerably in the course of the 20th century.

In the Beginning

There are only oral accounts of the first Parsis in Quetta. Dossabhoy Golwalla, my husband's great grandfather was a pioneer. In the 1800's when Charles Napier's convoy came to Quetta, he accompanied them. While the British rode on camel back, the natives walked on foot. From Sibi to Quetta the terrain changes dramatically. From the plains one climbs into a 5500 ft altitude. The journey over inhospitable rugged mountains, valleys, dry river beds, ravines and winding camel tracks over the Suleiman range, rising to a height of over 6000 feet above sea level. Most of the traveling was done by night as there is scorching heat during the day in the summer months. Dossabhoy survived the journey and established himself in Quetta. Today, we are the 5th generation that claim our roots here and even though we are not permanent residents, my family, including my son Arish and daughter Nerina consider this as our first home and visit it annually.

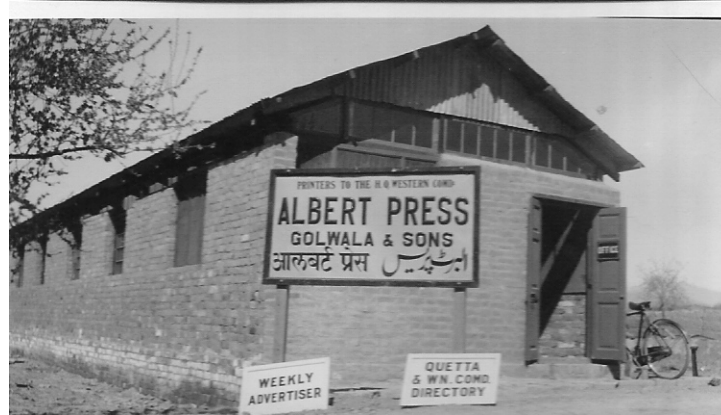
In 1883 the British government gave the present site known as Parsi Colony so the Parsis could build their homes. It was in 1883 that the first Agiary (Zoroastrian Fire Temple) was built. The Parsis of those days donated one month's salary for the construction of the Agiary. The Fire temple was rebuilt in 1926 and then reconstructed after the earthquake in 1939. A Parsi Anjuman was formed and members were elected to form rules and regulations. A primary school was started. The school was named after the donor Khan Bahadur Ardeshir D. Marker Vernacular School. In those days locals were not admitted to the British schools. There were 40-50 Zoroastrian children that studied in Khan Bahadur Ardeshir D. Marker Anglo-Vernacular School. One noted personality, Jamsheed Marker, United Nations permanent ambassador started his early education in this institution.

The Parsi community in Quetta, between 1900–1914 numbered from 350-500. Most of the men and women served in different departments of the Indian Army such as Military accounts, Engineering Services, Hospitals, Supply and Transport. Many Parsis were also in the Civil Services and in the railways.

The Early Settlers

Dossabhoy Golwala-the Pioneer

Dossabhoy Golwala worked as a contractor for the military and established his household. Other family members joined him. His first independent enterprise was to establish a printing press, Albert Press in 1888. This press was later bought over by his son Pestonjee Golwala and the family business was continued by his son Loveji Golwala and my father-in-law Shiavax Rustomji. Quetta Times, a weekly newspaper was printed and published by Albert Press until recently and even though the newspaper has ceased the printing press still continues. Pestonji's daughter Goola Golwala Rustomji, my mother in law, was a social worker and was awarded the Taghma - i- Khidmat for her long service and contribution to the projects that uplifted the role of women in Quetta.



Pestonjee Golwala- the Humanitarian

Second generation Pestonjee Golwala was a humanitarian. A kind man, he was helped others in sickness and health. In those days when antibiotics were not easily available, Pestonjee would ride his bicycle and visit neighboring villages with a bagful of quinine and cough medicine to dispense to the sick. On one of his visits he got badly bitten by a dog. Subsequently he stopped his cycle visits and continued his mission in a *tonga* – a horse driven buggy.



Golwalla Family Photo, Quetta, 1937

Seated L-R: seated Gool Golwalla Rustomji, Peroja Golwalla (grandmother), Pestonji Golwalla, Jeevanbai Golwalla, Aimai Golwalla.

Standing L-R: Shiavaz Rustomji (Gool's husband), Jangoo Golwalla, Loveji Golwalla and Byramji Golwalla

Nadirshaw Golwalla - the Cavalier

Pestonjee had a cavalier cousin Nadirshaw Golwalla. Nadirshaw fought in the Second Afghan War. On his return to Quetta an arranged marriage was planned between Nadirshaw and his cousin Jeevanbai. Nadirshaw took one look at his 12-year-old bride and decided this was not going to work for him. So on the wedding night he packed his bags and left for Australia where he was never heard of again. Pestonjee Golwalla looked after Jeevanbai and growing up we could never understand the two grandmothers we had – Pirojbai who was Pestonji's wife and his cousin Jeevanbai who reared all the children, my mother-in-law Goola, Loveji, Aimia and Behramji.

Before the Earthquake of 1935

In 1918, Ardeshir D Marker and Burjorji Patel gave large donations which were deposited with the Parsi Punchayet, Bombay. These two powerful families had the interest of the community at heart but unfortunately they were not in sync with their own personal relationships and consequently there was never total harmony with the community. Quetta prospered and a number of Parsee families made it their home. Manek F. Mulla in his travels to Iran writes about his brief stay in Quetta. He talks about the two leaders of the community, the Marker and Patel family, the Dar-e-Meher, the school, the rest house and the community. Mulla reports in 1929 the Zoroastrian community comprised of an equal number of Parsis and Iranis who had immigrated from Iran.

The Marker family

Ardeshir Marker came to Quetta in 1880 from Bombay to work for his maternal uncle Eduljee Dinshaw, one of the builders of Karachi. In those days a journey from Bombay to Quetta of 1800 miles took him five days by train. He started his life with Rs. 15 a month plus two or three sets of

clothes of the year and board and lodging. In 1900 when Eduljee Dinshaw closed his business, Ardeshir Marker started taking military contracts on his own, and soon was in a position to purchase Dinshaw's property and establish himself in Quetta.

Ardeshir's son Kekobad Marker furthered the family business and used his family wealth for many philanthropic projects. Schooling was a combination of games and studies. Kekobad Marker in his autobiography writes ...there were four Parsi boys Tehmurasp Karanjia who left Quetta after the 1st World War, Pheroze Patlu whose family owned the Victoria Printing Press and left Quetta after the 1935 earthquake and Jehangir Kapadia who worked lived in Quetta and continued to work in the Political Agents office. To help the government in judicial work, Honorary Magistrates were appointed. Both Ardeshir and Kekobad Marker served on the bench and were highly regarded. Both were also members of the Quetta Municipality and Kekobad was active in Freemasonry and Theosophical movement and a volunteer of the Baluchistan Volunteer Rifles.

The Marker family had a pioneer in Kekobad Marker. He started the Marker Alkaloid pharmaceutical factory that made medicine from the ephedra plant. He also had other successful business and was a caring community member who in spite of his wealth one always felt he was one of us. Kekobad Marker's wife Mehran Marker was a pioneer in social work, started the Adara I Tareeqi I Niswan for women to sell their embroidery work and was instrumental in Guide Guides and All Pakistan Women' Association. She was a leader and a feminist when being a feminist was not in vogue. Deeply interested in community affairs she wrote a book "The History of Parsis" and the total proceeds of the sale of the book went to the Gujarat farmers in India, a WZO project. Their son Jamsheed Marker is a distinguished United Nations Ambassador at Large and was instrumental in resolving the crisis of East Timor. Jamsheed Marker's diplomatic services were as ambassador to Ghana, Romania, Russia, Canada, East Germany, Japan, West Germany and France. Aban Marker Kabrajee, a fourth generation Marker in Quetta, is the Asian Animal Rights advocate and is well respected in her field.



Kaikobad Marker addressing his audience, Quetta, 1958

Rustom Irani family

Bruce Road presently known as Jinnah Road had a fish shop owned by Rustom Irani. He had migrated from Iran with his mother and his wife. Rustom and his son-in-law Mehrwan were both kind and honest businessmen. Mehrwan's grandson Abadan continued a profitable line of business but was unfortunately kidnapped four years back and has not been heard of. His valiant wife Nilufer Abadan remains in Quetta, bravely conducting her husband's business and waiting for his eventual return.

The Patel family

Another outstanding leader of the community along with the Markers were the Patel family. They were both self made men that had successfully built their business and built their empires. Dorab

Patel a third generation Patel was the justice of the Supreme Court in Pakistan and the only one who gave a dissenting vote in the public hanging of Zulfiqar Bhutto. He was admired for his straight forwardness and astute judgment. He donated a significant portion of his wealth for the construction of a Kidney Hospital in Karachi and a multi-storied hospital has been named after him. His younger brother Jhansoos Patel generously bequeathed the family land to various social groups and foundations in Quetta to the point where none of the old homestead, business remains in its recognizable stage. Rodabe Patel married a famous cardio-vascular surgeon Rohinton Khumbatta presently lives in Karachi.

Jamasp and Gulbai Irani of Yazd

Another old and interesting family of Quetta was Jamasp and Gulbai Irani, who migrated from Yazd, Iran in 1890. Jamasp was an agriculturist and he procured land on lease and cultivated fruit orchards all over Quetta. The couple had three beautiful daughters who married three young men from Iran and all of them lived in a joint family system. After the Earthquake of 1935 the family settled in Bombay. But their grandson, Mehrwan and Boman Irani returned to Quetta. Mehrwan continued with farming and his daughter a fourth generation Quettaite Roshan Bharucha a renowned social worker and activist and presently a Federal Minister in the Pakistan Government achieved highest fame and respect. Boman Irani first cousin of Mehrwan Irani was a premiere land broker and he and his wife Mani led a simple life but were always hospitable and welcomed visitors to Quetta and made them comfortable at their modest home.



Mehrwan Irani (center) with two of his farm workers (*bushkars*), Quetta, 1988

The Bharucha family

In those days, Quetta was the second largest garrison town in the British Empire and not surprising there were two printing presses in the city that were both run by Zoroastrians.

Victoria Printing Press, the other press, was run by Pheroze Patlu another long term resident of Quetta and the press closed down after the earthquake. Pilla Patlu was a very active and popular member of the Parsi Community and was fondly called Pilla Mama by all. His nephew, Minoo Bharucha is the last of the long standing members of the Quetta family who retired from the Quetta Electricity Company by the way has been a good oral source of my history notes. Minoo's son Khursheed Bharucha who is married to Roshan, Pakistan's premiere senator, and daughter Mazareen Gul continue to reside in Quetta.

The Residents of Quetta Electric Supply Co.

Khan Sahib Ardeshir Romer came to Quetta with his family during the First World War as an officer of the Military Accounts department. His son Noshirwan Romer, a confirmed bachelor, and a certified engineer from Benares University also served at the Quetta Electricity Company and after his retirement amassed his fortune in procuring agriculture land. Unfortunately he died without a will and land grabbers around him have decimated his wealth and property and there are yet any definitive answers to his property claims.

Hoshangji Talati came from Surat in 1905 to join the Provincial Government and later on worked in Grindlays Bank. He was a long serving secretary of the Quetta Parsee Anjuman along with my father-in-law Shiavax Rustomji. Hoshanji was an educationist. All of us that had our schooling in Quetta went under his tutorship before major exams. He had the magic of explaining the hardest theorems till they made crystal clear sense. He was against memorization and would be a perfect example of the critical thinking skills method. He left for his birth place Surat in the 70's after he suffered a stroke and died soon after.

A comparative newcomer amongst the settlers was Eduljee Rana who came to Quetta in 1929 and joined the Quetta Electric Supply Co. as an assistant engineer. Two of Eduljees sons Pheroze and Pervez Rana, are residents of Quetta.

The Kaikobad family

Among the well known political families of Parsis who settled in Quetta just before the turn of the century was that of Kaikobads. Kaikobad Palonjee Kaikobad was a talented Extra Assistant Commissioner and often mistaken for a Britisher with his fair complexion and his light blue eyes. He was fluent in the local languages namely Pushto, Persian, Baluch, Brauhi and Sindhi and was much admired for his dedication to his job and fairness to all. His son Jamshed continued serving the local government and at the peril of his life chased some dacoits in the interior of Baluchistan where he lost his life at a young age. His wife Diana is a Quetta resident and his only son Tehmurasp is presently settled in Atlanta, US.

Makujinas - Quetta Priests

Another family that survived the upheavals of Quetta is the Makujina families who for three generations have served as our priests. Sohrabji Makujina gained honor and respect of all around him with his knowledge and common sense approach to all matters of our religion. He is succeeded by his son Rustom who until recently was serving the small community in Quetta.



Makujina Family of Quetta, 2001
Celebrating 100 birth anniversary of Sohrab (front- right) the long time Zoroastrian priest of Quetta. Seated with him, his daughter-in-law Homa, Standing L-R: Daughter Jerbanoo, and grand daughters, Phiroozi and Farishte. Dastur Makujina passed away in Quetta in 2004 at age 103.

Hormasji Kapadia, another old settler family from Bhrooch India who served in the Baluchistan Provincial Civil Services. Three generations of the family worked and lived in Quetta but the present generation are in the US, Canada and Karachi.

The Poonegar family was another family that has one member Sera Bharucha remaining in Quetta presently. Savak Poonegar presently retired and lives in Karachi was a well respected civil servant and held high offices in the Baluchistan Government. He was well respected for his upright dealings and fairness in the high positions he held.

Earthquake of 1935

It was half a minute to 3:00 am when the Quetta Earthquake struck. The clock tower in the Quetta Post Office stopped at that moment. The entire city was devastated 70,000 people perished of which there were 47 Parsis. Entire families perished. A mass grave in the Farvandan indicates the names of those who were buried under this massive calamity. The city of Quetta was cordoned off for two years. Nobody was allowed to enter till the dead bodies were disposed of and the city declared safe for habitation. The majority of people didn't return to the City. Parsis from Karachi met the trainloads of people that were traveling. They had nothing on them but their night clothes on and they were met with blankets and shawls and were looked after well.



In Memory of the Parsi Victims of Quetta Earthquake.

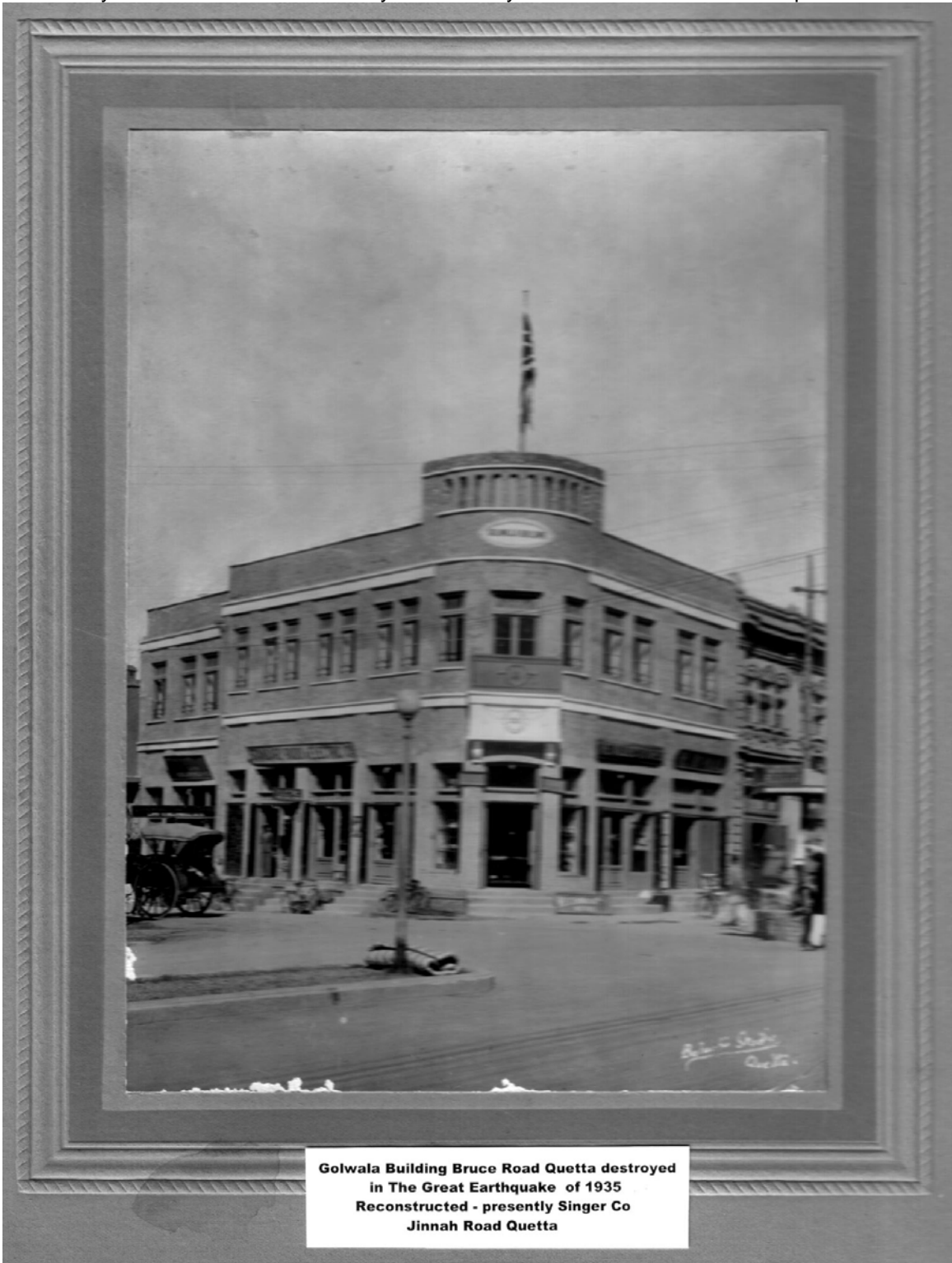
કવેટાના ધરતીકંપમાં માર્યા ગયેલા જરથોસ્તીઓની યાદમાં.
 કવેટાના મજબૂતાક ધરતીકંપનો ભોગ બનેલા જરથોસ્તીઓની વરસ દીવસ
 આજને દીને ત્યાંની પારસી આરામગાહ આગળ ત્યાંના જરથોસ્તીઓ
 ભેગાં મળી હમબંદગી કરી હતી તે વેળાનો દેખાવ.

News paper clipping reporting on the mass burial prayer ceremony at Quetta's Aramgah (Zoroastrian cemetery) for the 47 Parsi victims of Quetta earthquake of 1935. The Aramgah lot was given to the Parsi community by the British colonial administrators in 1833 and is suited about 3 miles away from Parsi colony at the time in the outskirts of the city, but in 2006 in middle of housing developments.

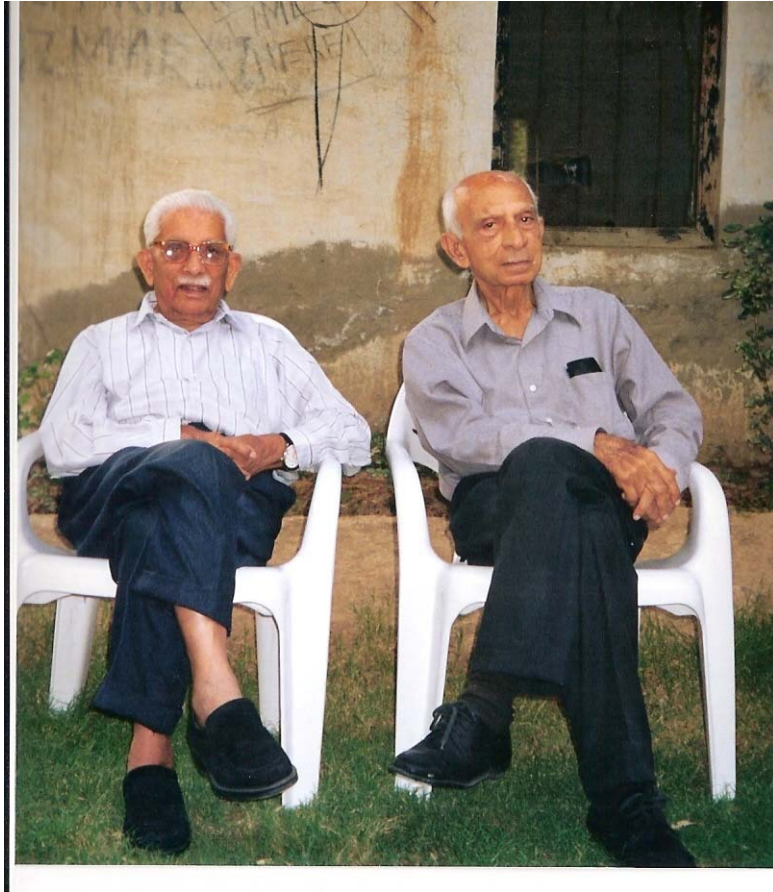
There was not a single family that escaped tragedy. The lucky ones had one member lost and some lost all. One remarkable incident was of Mr. Lawyer who was dug out from under the debris after 12 days. It was a miracle that he was alive!

The Bombay Parsee Panchayat opened a Relief Fund for Parsi sufferers in the Quetta earthquake. Applications were invited by sufferers and help was generously accorded. After all the provisions were made to individuals, a substantial sum was left over thanks to the generosity of the Parsi community in India. The Trustees kindly donated this amount to the Quetta Parsee Anjuman to rebuild the Dar-e- Meher and six earthquake proof houses for the residents. One additional house was built from the donation given by the trustees of late Kaikhushru Irani of

Karachi. A house for the residence of our mobed Makujina was built next to the Dar-e Meher donated by Daulat Clubwalla in memory of her family members killed in the earthquake.



Picture of the Golwala Building reconstructed after Quetta's major earthquake of 1935



**Two long term Parsi residents of Quetta,
L-R: Mr. Minoo Bharucha, and Mr. Tehmton Nowrosji Hodiwala, 2001**

Present Day

Even today Quetta has reminiscent scenes of Arabian nights tales – sturdy men shouting and arguing, others comfortably sprawling on the ground, camels sitting in the compound, stretching their necks to pick up a vegetable as they bid for consignments for sale.

In 1939 the reconstruction of Parsee Colony started. The houses were now built with earthquake proof reinforcement and each room had four door ways for easy escape. This resulted in a hard way to position furniture in the room. But the rooms are expansive and a garden surrounding seven homes was built along with an Agiary.

My childhood home and one that I still come to each summer was No. 1 Parsee Colony. My father was a later arrival from Bombay during the Second World War. An Engineer by profession from the Poona College of Engineering he came to Quetta in the Army in 1941. My mother, Nergish daughter of Khan Bahadur Rustom Lafa, superintendent of jails in several places in India, led a very happy and content life in Quetta. I as their only child never felt deprived of anything. A love of nature was embedded in me early in life when both my parents would tend to their garden themselves. I can still remember my mothers tinkle laughter when I pulled out a plant that I thought was weeds and she taught me that it was a sweet pea instead.

As a leading engineer my father was responsible for a number of buildings that were constructed during the 50's – 80's. Banks, churches, monuments all bear my dad's traces and I was a proud to walk through the city and feel his presence in every nook and corner of this town. My mother was a well respected and loved by all around her for sound advice, her independence and her social work to help the poor and needy of the town.

Here lies a vital layer of the Zoroastrian contribution in the cultural landscape of a land of my youth. These families, like other Zoroastrian families in other cities, are a testament to permanence and a demonstration of commonality that exists in the world.

Present Day Statistics

Quetta has 7 homes in the Parsi Colony and 2 outside the Colony with a population of 17- people total. Interesting enough that there are five of us that married our childhood sweethearts. The rest found partners elsewhere. But regardless where we are we Quettities always feel there is a bond and as the famous song in Fiddler on the Roof goes...where else can Sabbath be so sweet. (In this case - Quetta Agyari)

My deepest gratitude to the friends and family I write about in these pages and give thanks to everyone who knows that each of us has a right to tell our stories, to be truthful to our own memories, no matter how flawed, private, embellished, idiosyncratic, or improved they may be. I also offer apologies to anyone whose experiences I have recorded here without asking permission. I offer up these memories in hopes that others will feel invited or inspired to conjure up and share their own.

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¹ This article was posted on vohuman.org on August 22, 2006.