

Mumbai Without Parsis Would Be A selfish and sick city

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In honor of Parsi New Year, take a moment to consider the religious community's outstanding contributions to Mumbai

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Parsis are members of a small religious community that exists largely in Mumbai. Navroze, the Parsi New Year, is celebrated on August 19.

Everyone in Mumbai has their favorite "mad bawa/bawi" story. Bawa/bawi being a synonym for a member of the Parsi community in Mumbai.

By **Malavika Sangghvi**

All-time favorites are of the late Bapsy Sabavala who lived alone with her collection of dolls, and who was known to call up the city's leading doctors in the middle of the night if any of her dolls fell ill.

The owners of the famous Britannia restaurant were so enamored of their pet black rooster that it would preside on their cash counter.

Then there's the one about the gentleman from Khushroo Baug Parsi colony who would take his six balancing pomeranians on his bike for a

ride every Sunday.

On the occasion of the Parsi New Year today, August 19, Mumbai can thank its endearingly eccentric Parsi populace for a few of our favorite things.

Humor

In Mumbai it is said that the only Parsi without a sense of humor is a dead one.

So whether on stage with the legendary Adi Marzban, Adi Pocha, Bomi and Dolly Dotiwala, or on the page with great wits such as Behram Contractor and Bachchi Karkaria, or on the TV with comedian Cyrus Broacha, you can be sure that if Mumbai got through the last century laughing, these funny few helped us along.

As a Parsi blogger [once wrote](#), "Our madness is a gentle, harmless, twittering kind of madness. The kind that makes other people smile."

Wellness

What is it about Parsis that makes them almost Californian in their embrace of alternative healing and wellness methods?

Ever since the late naturopath Jehangir Jussawalla put Indians into sitz baths, Parsis have distinguished themselves in the field of alternative healing.

Be it the mother–son duo of yoga exponents Dhun and Jahangir Palkhiwala, psychic healer Nan Umrigar or Firooza Moos and Meher Davis with alternative remedies for curing Mumbai's allergies, the list of Parsi healers is long.

Mumbai Parsis

The Indian followers of Zoroastrianism are called Parsis. The religion arrived in India from Persia in the seventh century.

Foodiness

Leading Mumbai's foodie vanguard, fork and knife first, are Parsi gourmets such as Muncherjee Cama and Adi Dubash.

The city is similarly dotted with Parsi ladies like Aban Mobedjina, Shirin Adenwala and Kainaz Messman of Theobroma patisserie, who service

its sweet tooth, and caterers such as Faroukh Khambatta, Vera Lam and Tanaz Godiwala.

For a community that gave us patra ni machhi (steamed fish wrapped in banana leaf), dhansak (mutton or chicken in lentils) and sali murghi (spicy chicken with fine potato crisps), it's no surprise that Parsis are recognized as gourmands.

More on CNNGo: Mumbai's best Parsi meal

Performing arts

Whether it's the father son-duo of Mehli and Zubin Mehta, Coomi Wadia of the Paranjoti choir, Tushan Dallas who ran a ballet school, dancers like Shiamak Davar and Faredoon Bhujwala or great thespians of English theater such as Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal, Ronnie Screwwalla, Burjor Ruby and Shernaz Patel, it is to the Parsis that Mumbai looks for sustaining and patronizing Western performing arts.

Add to that rockers such as Gary Lawyer, and you can see where Mumbai gets its penchant for Brecht, Beethoven and the Beatles.

Rectitude and activism

From the fiery old Nani Pallkhiwala, who championed untold good causes, to ace lawyers Frenny Ponda and Aspi Chinoy, Parsis have taken the lead in good deeds.

Also on the roll call of distinguished do-gooders: child rights activists Mahrukh Adenwala, Jeroo Billimoria, Dinaz Stafford and Shaheen Mistry of Teach for India; and Gool Bhujwala and Shirin Bharucha, who adopt and save Mumbai's green spaces.

Horse racing

Drop in any morning at the Mumbai racecourse and you will be overrun with Parsis.

A majority of the Royal Western India Turf Club managing committee members are Parsis.

Parsis such as Cyrus Poonawalla and C.N. Wadia have served as its chairmen. And we can't forget to mention some of India's most successful jockeys and trainers, such as Pesi Shroff, Karl Umrigar, Bezun Chenoy and Dallas Toddywalla.

Mumbai Parsis

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Aesthetics and architecture

Path-breaking fashion models like Persis Khambatta and Meher Jessia, makeup artists like Micky Contractor, fashionistas like Meher Castellino and Xerxes Bhathena have had an impact on the world of glamour in Mumbai.

And when it comes to architecture and interiors, Hafeez Contractor, Noshir Talati and Nowzer Wadia are still the last word.

More onCNNGo: Sari sorority: Why Parsi ladies are a national fashion treasure

Philanthropy

The jury's not out on whether Parsis invented philanthropy, but it's safe to say that their contribution in the field is immense.

Mumbai continues to profit from the benevolence of great Parsi philanthropic families such as the Jeejeebhoys, the Readymoneys, the Camas, the Petits, the Tatas, the Godrejs and the Wadias.

Professional excellence

There is a remarkable synergy between Parsis and professional excellence.

Be it medical families like the Soonawalas, the Udwadias and the Banajis, or leading physicists like Homi Bhabha and Homi Sethna, fertility expert Dr Firuza Parikh, legal eagles Fali Nariman and Soli Sorabjee, filmmaker Sooni Taroporewala, cricketers Polly Umrigar and Faroukh Engineer and novelist Rohinton Mistry, Parsis have exemplified high performance.

Mumbai would be a less amazing city without its gentle, funny and philanthropic community of Parsi people.