

Dhun Bagli

Manager, Parsi Rest House,
and purveyor of quality food

When did the first Parsis arrive in Delhi?

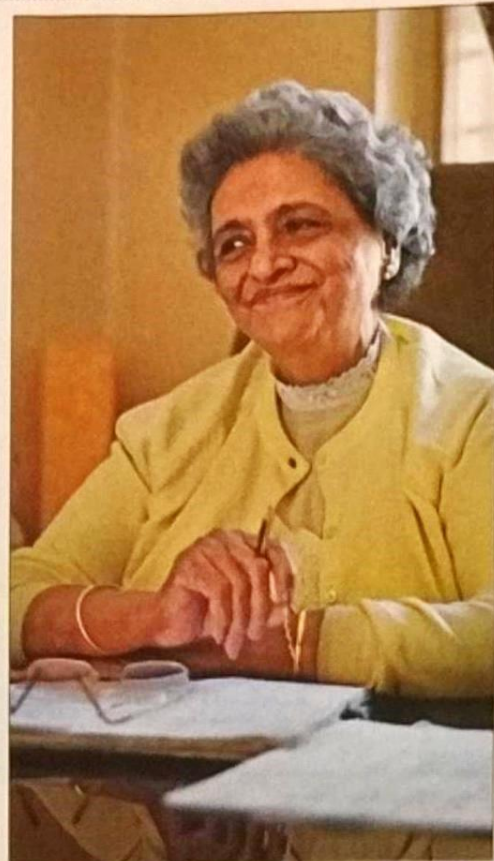
Well, the Parsi Anjuman was officially established in 1934. But there are graves in our cemetery – we call it the Aramgah – dating back to the late 1800s. This is the cemetery that's here. It was closed in 1926, and the Parsis were given a new plot next to what used to be the European Cemetery, on Prithviraj Road.

When was the Parsi Rest House built?

It was built in 1950, with just 12 rooms. Mangusi Billimoria, Dinshawji Challa of Lahore and Sir Cowasji Jeejeebhoy were the main donors. My husband, Daralus Bagli, was a priest, a dastur, and he came to Delhi from Agra in 1950. The aglary was built in 1960. It's the only Parsi fire temple in North India.

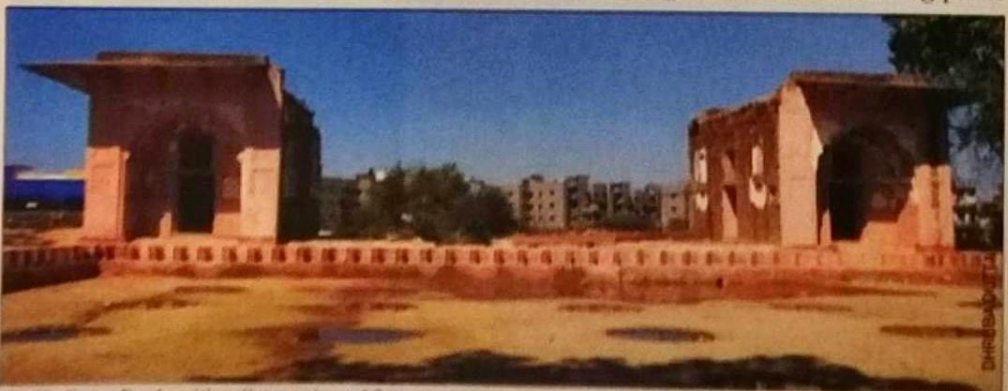
And when did you come to Delhi?

In 1958, after we got married. In Delhi I worked as a secretary with IBM. Then IBM closed in 1978, and I joined the American Embassy. But then I lost my husband in 1979, and had to take a decision about whether I wanted to continue, or take the responsibility of running the rest-house. I chose this. Gradually, two new floors and the Bhiwandiwala Hall came up. Now we have room for 30 guests. And my son Cawas is the head-priest here. *Trisha Gupta*



In a curious twist of collective amnesia, the garden is popularly called "Sheesh Mahal Park" by the residents of Shalimar Bagh colony. The original baradari, the Sheesh Mahal, is still standing (barely) next to a "hathikhana," and there are also two pavilions near the fountain tank. You can make out how the water system worked – starting from a deep well and running to a beautiful, though sadly dry, embellished tank edged with fountains. The remnants of what must have once been pleasant grounds are strewn with litter and a surprising amount of old clothing. The Sheesh Mahal is extremely dilapidated, but you can make out the simple floral paintings on some of the outer alcoves. Beyond the fountain pavilions, the blue glass buildings rising out of the Ring Road look like icebergs.

Perhaps less depressing is the rest of the garden, which though not terribly well-maintained, has a genteel air to it. Curving paths



At Shalimar Bagh, with a distant view of flats

meander through the grass and shrubs. There is a lovely grove of pine trees – quite astonishing for this city – and lots of multicoloured wildflowers. There is even a planned lawn with ornamental palms, where groups of men and women congregate for siestas, cards, and tea. It's got atmosphere to spare and everything seems far more laidback than New Delhi's jogger-and-dog-filled gardens. Even the chipmunks seem utterly unconcerned, scurrying about between your feet. The closest Metro stop is Delhi University (Vishwa Vidyalyaya), from which the garden is a 15 minute auto ride.

Buy a map at the Survey of India

Ignore the uninviting, sarkari atmosphere that the old-style carpeting and stairways of the Survey of India provide. Head into the asthmatically dusty map sales office for a range of Indian maps that you didn't even know existed. The building predates Independence and has housed the office for longer than any of the employees care to remember. The collection of maps itself is astounding. Apart from the "antique" maps that are very difficult to get hold of elsewhere, you can buy trekking maps (Uttarakhand etc); tourist maps of Delhi, Varanasi, Khajuraho etc; hill maps; highly important road atlases; topographical maps for the geographically inclined; and much more, all updated and ready to use. And it's in the middle of town.

Survey of India Map Sales Office, first floor, A-24, Janpath Barracks, Janpath (2332-2288). Mon-Fri 9am-5pm.

Toastmasters Club

Raise a glass to the Toastmasters Club, an international society that has branches in the remotest corners of the world, including fair city. The aim of the organisation is to help people develop their communication and public speaking skills. Groups of 20-30 people meet and then present prepared speeches within timelines, and there are also impromptu talks, where people rant on, and then receive feedback. Are we a city of nervous people, or do we just love the sound of our own voices? Whatever the reason, there are now seven branches of this club across Delhi, and if your dad's looking to branch out on his laughter club and the Rotaract, you can have him, here's an option.

Punjabi Bhavan, Vishnu Digan near ITO. Contact Shivam (9810831506) for details, or www.toastmasters.org.

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