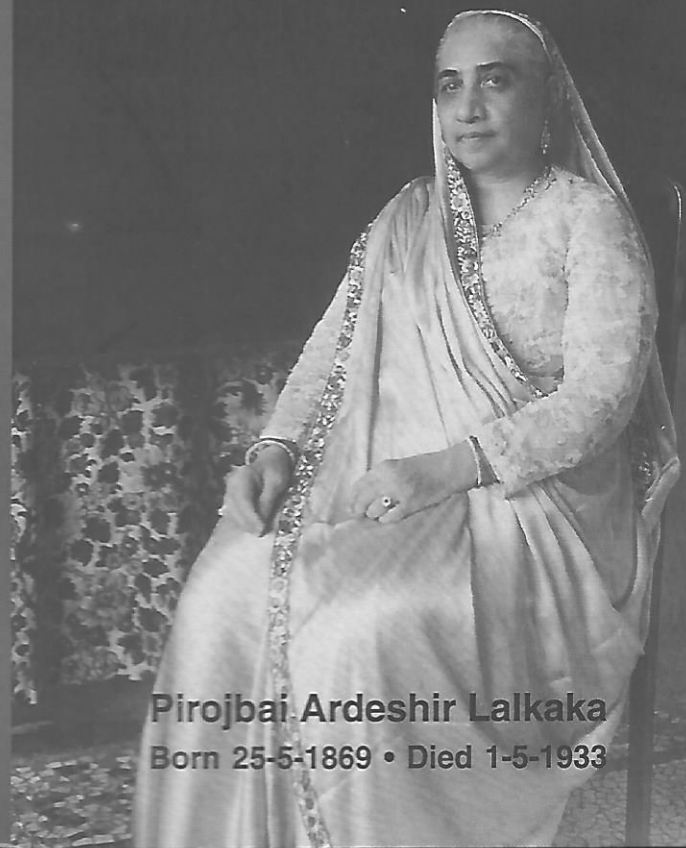


*Mahri Sadguni Mata*  
(My Virtuous Mother)



**Pirojbai Ardeshir Lalkaka**  
Born 25-5-1869 • Died 1-5-1933

## Preface

Translating *Mahri Sadguni Mata* and thereby retrieving a slice of family history, was a rewarding experience for us. The 'voices' of our foremothers are usually stilled forever; therefore, we are fortunate that Pirojbai's 'voice' echoes vibrantly across the centuries through this little booklet, composed as a tribute to her, by her daughter, Shirin Vakil. It was printed at Vakil & Sons, a printing press established by Dinshaw J. Vakil, for his sons Ratan and Erach (who was married to Shirin).

We would like to thank Bachoo Dadyseth for sharing her memories of Shirin Vakil, her mother, and Pirojbai, her maternal grandmother, with us. We thank Sherene Vakil for painstakingly editing the text to make it more readable.

We trust that this little venture of ours will inspire many more of our family members to retrieve their ancestors' 'voices' from the past so that we can as a family grow from strength to strength on their shoulders.

Mumbai,  
August 31, 2010.

Aban Mukherji  
Soonu Davar

## Introduction

***Mahri Sadguni Mata*** (My Virtuous Mother), is a tribute of a loving daughter to her beloved mother, Pirojbai Ardeshir Lalkaka. Though this booklet is primarily meant to preserve the memory of a remarkable mother and keep it evergreen in the hearts of her children and family, it throws light not only on Pirojbai's excellent qualities of head and heart but also on the age in which she attained womanhood.

Pirojbai was the second of five daughters, born in 1869 to Bachoobai and Sir Nowrojee Vakil of Ahmedabad. She was fortunate to be born into a prosperous, liberal and westernized Parsi family. She and her four sisters grew up in a loving and nurturing atmosphere and received some amount of basic education in the mother tongue, Gujarati – enough to make her an avid reader of edifying tracts and newspaper articles right till the end of her life.

Though married at a tender age – on the night of her navjote – and a mother at 16, Pirojbai displayed an innate wisdom in her dealings with all who came in contact with her; and the humane and sensitive way in which she reared her children was far ahead of her times. To declare that sons should be given

the freedom to choose their profession and that girls should be allowed to pursue their interest in higher education if they so wished, speaks volumes for her intuitive understanding of the needs of the individual. Had she been alive today she might have been a leading counsellor or therapist!

During the latter half of the 19th century, the Social Reform Movement was well under way. By 1849 the first Parsi girls' school had already opened. Behramjee Malabari was spearheading the movement against child marriage and enforced widowhood, and the idea of an educated wife being an asset to her husband and family was gaining ground. This is reflected in the lines attributed to Napoleon that Pirojbai quotes to vindicate the importance of education for girls.

Though a product of her times, emphasizing the importance of being a dutiful and obedient wife, ever ready to please her husband and in-laws, Pirojbai also clearly states that the relationship between husband and wife should be based on mutual understanding, affection, respect and trust.

Pirojbai, strikingly good looking, well-built, very fair and light-eyed, was the heart and soul of her family, greatly loved by her husband and children.

She was a thrifty and punctilious housewife and, according to her daughter Shirin, had an 'engineering' bent of mind. She seems to have abhorred clutter and firmly believed that being burdened with unnecessary furniture and surrounded by useless objects at home only prevented one from living a meaningful life as all one's energies went into looking after them.

In 1933, when she died of jaundice brought on by faulty treatment, she left a void that nobody could fill. Shirin, the youngest of her five children and her only daughter, was devastated. She had always been very close to her mother and keenly felt her loss. Writing this booklet must have been a form of catharsis for her, freezing into permanence the fleeting memories of a mother who epitomized the virtues so dearly prized by members of the Lalkaka family.

Aban Mukherji

### **Dedication**

With respect and reverence, in a spirit of deep devotion and unbounded love, I present this little book as a humble offering in memory of the priceless qualities of my dearly beloved departed mother Pirojbai.

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### **The Virtues Possessed By My Revered Mother**

Contentment	Endurance	Courage
I love	Punctuality/regularity	Caring
Harmony	A kind heart	Enthusiasm
Good conduct	Honesty	Magnanimity
Humility	Patience	Competency
Tenderness	Cleverness	Independence
Simplicity	Benevolence	Purity
Peacefulness	Trust/Faith	



**Pirojbai with her family (from left) :**  
daughter-in-law Mehra, son Kaikhushru, husband Ardeshir, Shirin, Pirojbai,  
son Savaksha and grandson Navroze at her feet

### Mayaloo Mahri Mata (My Loving Mother)

Every day you shower us with happiness.

My loving Mother,

You are a true saviour in the world.

—My loving Mother.

The more I sing your virtues the less they seem.

I cannot enumerate them all

—My loving Mother.

In a world full of selfishness

Your dear ones see you as caring and noble.

—My loving Mother.

A mother always protects her offspring

Whether good or bad.

Alas! Have we not seen abandonment by others!

—My loving Mother.

They repent later

Who reject a mother's virtuous teachings.

—My loving Mother.

Children deprived of a mother's love

Are forever lost in sorrow and confusion.

—My loving Mother.

A mother's heart is like an ocean of love

Created by God on earth.

—My loving Mother.

(Source unknown)

Our revered mother, Pirojbai, was the second daughter of Sir Nowrojee Vakil and Lady Bachoobai. She received an excellent upbringing in her parents' home where she enthusiastically and diligently acquired all the household skills. At a very young age, she was bound by the sacred ties of marriage to our revered father, Ardeshir Jamshedji Lalkaka. She respected her parents and loved them dearly, always remembering their loving kindness and excellent upbringing with gratitude. Even in her in-laws' home, she treated her parents-in-law with great respect and won the hearts of everyone with her loving, harmonious and contented nature. She undertook all her work with tact, skill, enthusiasm and sincerity; and her sweet face clearly reflected her contentment and happiness. She was quiet, loving, kind, patient and courageous by nature – ever eager to help and advise others. She was truly a pure and noble wife and delighted in fulfilling her wifely duties, happy and contented to satisfy her husband's slightest wish. She always said that the true dharma of a virtuous woman was to deal tenderly with her husband, and address him with

respect as "Tame," and never to call him by the familiar "Tu," because marital happiness could be achieved only by following his wishes. She was a very caring and loving mother. She loved her four sons and only daughter dearly, and showered affection on her sons and daughters-in-law in equal measure. Her grandchildren she absolutely adored.



The wise counsel that she gave her dear children from their earliest years is best noted down in her own words: "Never tell lies, because once you tell a lie, to rectify it ten more will have to be told. That is why children should be taught to tell the truth. Always lead a simple life, learn to be thrifty and do not spend beyond your means. Even when something costs only five paise, if you do not have even that much money in your pocket, you should not buy it, but firmly resolve to wait until you have the means to purchase it. Never buy on credit." She would further state that a truly wise person would only keep essential items in the house. Things should not be bought just because they look attractive. The desire to accumulate delicate

furniture and lots of clothes should be curbed, because looking after them would only tire one out, leaving no time to fulfill one's duties and engage in worthwhile work. If you have any old articles and they are in good condition, preserve them as they may come in use later on. Our mother had an 'engineering eye'. She would not let anything go to waste. If she had some pieces of wood, she would store them carefully, and when required have the carpenter make small stools or other useful items out of them. She also said that accounts should be maintained properly so that we know exactly what we have spent our money on. She would always say, "If anyone has given us money for safekeeping, never spend even a rupee out of it, intending to put the amount back later. If we do this once, the temptation may continue, and we may land ourselves in trouble. Therefore be firm in your resolve not to touch anything belonging to others."



Our mother was very kind and tender hearted and would always tell us to feel compassion and empathy for the poor. If anyone comes to our



doorstep asking for help, they should never be turned back empty handed, because only a person in dire need would come knocking at our door. So, never humiliate such persons, but look upon them with compassion (phool nahi ne phoolni pankhdi jetloo bi apvu).

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**F**urthermore, we should not demean ourselves by interfering in the affairs of others without being asked for advice. It is a great offence to falsely criticize others. Always think good thoughts as these inevitably lead to good deeds. Therefore, let your mind always be filled with good thoughts and drive away all unworthy ones. Just as we can keep a horse under control with the help of reins, we should keep our thoughts reined in with a firm mind. Our mind should always be involved in some work or the other. If we do not have any work to do, we should sit down and polish our shoes, so that the mind is occupied, and we should fully concentrate on whatever work is in hand.

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**W**e should bestow affection and compassion on our poor household servants. If they commit a mistake, instead of flaring up immediately, patiently explain their mistake to them, so that they will pay attention to their work next time. This will have a good effect on them. By giving in to anger, our own health and work will suffer. To dismiss good servants who have worked for us for a long time, and constantly employ new servants, is a big mistake; because a servant who has lived with a family for many years develops a feeling of love and respect for his master, his master's home and all the family members. And when the time comes to prove his mettle, though illiterate, he often acts with even more devotion and loyalty than many a family member. It would be difficult for a new servant to develop such feelings in a short time.

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**M**oreover, we should always remember never to act arrogantly or rudely towards the rich or the poor, the mighty or the lowly, because our children will emulate all our actions; and remember, outsiders will deal with us in the same way. Therefore, always

think twice before speaking about what, where and with whom you speak. Once you have spoken in anger and pained another with your words, nothing will help rectify matters however sweetly you try to remedy the situation. If you become very angry, control your mind and tongue, recite five Yatha Ahuvariyaos and you will feel your anger abate to a large extent and you will be able to utter good words. We should always have a generous disposition, rejoice at other people's happiness; and never feel unhappy at another's good fortune lamenting as to why such good fortune has not befallen us. Thinking such thoughts does no harm to that person, but we ourselves become discontented and unhappy. If we sometimes get less of something than another, we should never fight or quarrel about it. We should be large-hearted enough to think, "Never mind, God will give me something in another way." And so, by having faith in God, we are invariably helped by the Saviour at the right time. We should never envy others. Sometimes it so happens that our good work gets spoilt, or what we had thought would definitely

happen, does not materialize however hard we try. At such times we should not be disheartened, because if we have full faith in God, He does not allow anything to go wrong, therefore why would He spoil our work? If we think in this way, we will realize later on, "If my work had been done, then, in fact, it would have proved detrimental to me." Believe implicitly that when things go wrong, it is always for the best. From an early age, children should be taught to pray from the heart and have respect and faith in God. In this transient world, what is achieved by the power of heartfelt prayer can never be achieved by any other means. Prayer emanating from a true heart is a mighty weapon, and if we pray with true faith, in times of difficulty we will get a lot of divine help, courage, patience and contentment; and the mind will be at peace. The young and the old, all should pray sincerely, even a little, in the morning and at night, so that the day goes off well, and we find the strength to do good deeds. Children should be taught to sing hymns at prayer time so that they will feel a lot of joy and contentment. Always be just and never trample on another's rights.



**R**ight from childhood, children should remain in good company, because it is inevitable that “you are affected by the company you keep (Sobat tevi assar).” Parents as a matter of true duty should be vigilant about the effect their servants could have on the tender and impressionable minds of their children. They should also keep a check on where their children are wandering and what sort of books they are reading. It is imperative to pay attention to these matters, as a small child picks up bad habits more easily than good ones, and it is very difficult to break bad habits later on – very often, they can never be rectified. We must constantly tell those servants and ayahs who are in close proximity to the children that they should never utter lies or speak heedless nonsense in front of their charges, and should speak gently to them, so that the children learn to do the same. Children should be taught to do things neatly by themselves. Do not allow your sons or daughters to go out alone or go anywhere by themselves until they have reached a certain age. A trusted servant or you yourself should be in attendance, because in today's day and age you will

find more people ready to lead them astray than to help them tread the straight and narrow path. At such times, even angels can be deceived, so who will look after and protect these small children? Moreover, if they start indulging in bad habits right from childhood, their attention will be diverted and they will not be able to concentrate on their studies. In adulthood they will regret it and blame their parents for it. We must remember that our children will be the parents of tomorrow, and whatever upbringing they receive from us will be imparted to their children, so that their offspring too, can be raised in a virtuous manner.

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**O**ur clothes should be simple and decent, and we should pay great attention to our health, because, “Good health is equivalent to a thousand blessings.” Without health we will never be able to enjoy the wealth and comforts that come our way.

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**A** daughter who will be a future mother should be made fluent in the mother tongue and should be

given a school education, up to matriculation. If you so desire, let her study further; but side by side, continue teaching her household skills, because just getting a BA or an MA degree does not lead to happiness. Even if she knows to cook and sew a little and run her household thriftily, she will be able to make her husband, children and the world around her happy. Maiji used to paraphrase Napoleon's priceless lines: "Says Napoleon: To make a country prosper, the best and only way is to educate the mother." (Educate a woman and you educate a nation.) One must remember that only if a mother is well educated and virtuous can she bring up her children properly, benefiting the nation and everyone around her. In the same way, a son, who will be a father in the future, should be given a good school and college education and qualities of virtuous and ethical conduct should be inculcated in him so that when he grows up he will be a role model for others. He should be encouraged to work diligently and sincerely at whatever work he likes to do and should always be advised to tread the path of honesty and justice. Only if he is honest will he be

trusted and God will grant him success. But if he deceives others, using dishonourable means, he may succeed in the beginning, but nature herself will not allow this to continue. We should, therefore, always teach them to be honest and pure. Very often, a son, after obtaining an education becomes prosperous and rich through his endeavours, gains all the material comforts that he desires and becomes engrossed in pleasures. He forgets his parents, God and everything else, and is totally oblivious to who brought him up and educated him to reach his present state of happiness. Such instances do occur; but a child who has been given a good upbringing will never do that. A virtuous child who, after obtaining an excellent upbringing, obtains a high post and becomes independent, is joined by the bonds of marriage and is prosperous and happy with his wife and children, should remember that his parents are primarily responsible for his present happiness, and therefore, at this time of happiness, he should never forget God, his parents or his Guru. He must always respect them, so that they will be happy. Then

again, always remember your poor relatives, family members and close friends, as well as the poor and needy and give them as much help as you can, because money is here today and gone tomorrow. Joy and sorrow are created for one and all. No one has seen tomorrow, therefore only the good and pure deeds performed by you on earth and your loving behaviour towards others will help you and stand by you in times of difficulty.



**S**ometimes a young husband finds himself in a difficult position; when obeying his parents' wishes, he displeases his wife; and if he tries to fulfill her wishes, his parents' desires cannot be implemented. Because he loves them both equally, it is the duty of a wise man to fondly and lovingly explain to and persuade his wife to try to obey his parents' wishes, because at that time he should remember: "My mother, experiencing a lot of suffering, amidst great difficulty, has given birth to me and nurtured me with love. My father, with the sweat of his brow has educated me and raised me to manhood with a thousand hopes. Therefore,

what expectations will such unselfish parents have from me?" Not the arrogance of money or the disregard of their wishes, but the only one great hope that they will harbour is that he will remain a dutiful son, support them in their old age, show them respect by fulfilling their wishes and obtain their heartfelt blessings. Remember that in this transient world, by throwing money about, you will certainly fulfill your material needs. But, be sure that even if you squander crores of rupees in this world, you will never get such a sweet gift (mitho mevo) like kind and loving parents. So, never lose the opportunity that God may grant you to give them happiness and comfort, and always be ready to grasp that golden opportunity of obtaining their heartfelt blessing, whose worth cannot be measured in crores. In the same way, it is also a man's duty as a kind husband, to cherish his wife with true love, be faithful to her and give her happiness; but he should not give in to her unreasonable demands and dominating ways or be controlled by her. And he should stick to his resolve, as behooves a man, because he is the master of the house, and it is the duty of a loving wife

to humbly obey her husband. Therefore at that time, by loving persuasion, her mistakes should be corrected. A husband and wife should behave with respect towards each other, try to please each other and never find fault with or insult one another in front of others or wash their dirty linen in public. Similarly, they should look upon each other's parents as their own, and show them respect.



**L**ove and raise your children, however many God has given you, in an impartial manner. If you love one more than the other, you will naturally pain the soul of an innocent child, and nature herself, seeing this, will not be able to tolerate it, and sooner or later, the parents themselves will have to pay for it. Never scold and humiliate your children in front of outsiders, because it will have a detrimental rather than good effect on them, and they will insult you in the end. But if you explain their mistakes to them quietly and in private, they will listen to you more intently and be willing to mend their ways. Never correct a child with threats and beatings, because if he learns to fear his parents he will cover up his

offences with lies. Therefore, with love and empathy teach your children all the good qualities of virtuous conduct and feel no hesitation or shame while frankly imparting good advice to them, because if a child of exemplary behaviour becomes a role model, he will make the world around him happy and bring joy and satisfaction to his beloved parents, family and friends, as well as the less privileged.



**O**ur revered and beloved mother had till the last moment given the benefit of her noble advice and excellent upbringing to her children. Then, unfortunately, she fell ill, and her illness lasted for about six months. Even at that time she, as usual, exhibited tremendous courage, patience, calm and trust in God. She would never let anyone know her pain, and by always appearing cheerful never frightened the people around her. Though bedridden, she would always welcome any relative or friend, young or old who came to meet her; and, after lovingly embracing them, chat with them for a while. She was very fond of reading and always

greatly praised good articles. Right till the end she would make everyone read instructive articles from books and newspapers and constantly said, "It is necessary to read some good material every day even for half an hour." Moreover, however busy or sick she was, she would say a prayer, morning and evening, with great sincerity. While praying, she would always remember her departed ancestors who she believed, gave her the strength and courage to endure all hardships. During the grave illnesses of her kind and loving husband, as well as her beloved children, she displayed great patience and courage, nursing them back to health with unflagging devotion and diligence. Even during her final illness she never shirked carrying out her duties towards her relatives or the poor and needy, doing her best to make everyone happy. Then, unfortunately, her illness took a turn for the worse, and in spite of the arduous efforts, care and countless remedies administered by her children, loving husband and kind doctors, nothing helped, and finally, on the fateful morning of May 1, 1933 at 11 a.m., surrounded by her beloved husband, all

her children, her beloved sister and many other relatives and loving friends, she bravely gazed upon them with a look of contentment for the last time. And, because she was so virtuous she was able to see the sweets and the beautiful, scented roses sent to her by her kind friends, which made her very happy. Amidst great peace, patience and forbearance and the chanting of sacred prayers by her children, she, having successfully completed the round of this transient world, with an angelic expression on her face, like a flower, surrendered herself to that Great Saviour. She had won the hearts of all with her humble behaviour, so that even people of other faiths paid their last respects to her with great feeling.



**A**t that moment I became very unhappy and started lamenting at the painful thought of losing forever my loving and pious mother from whom I was irrevocably separated. But in a little while I controlled my emotions and quieting my mind I thought, "If I go on lamenting in this manner, I will prove unworthy of my beloved mother and lag

behind in fulfilling my last duties towards her, thereby becoming a burden on all at home." I prayed quietly with concentration and asked God for His blessings and His help and that Great Master heard my ardent request and granted me divine courage, patience and power to perform my duties. My beloved relatives and loving friends, whose kindness I shall never forget, shared my troubles and gave me much courage as well as priceless help.



Our revered and affectionate Maiji has left behind forever the scent of her kindness, competence and virtues. So, it is the duty of all her children – young and old, to preserve and spread this fragrance and never let it evaporate in vain. They should strive to obtain her blessings even from the heavenly world, by keeping her sweet memory alive forever. Keeping in mind her excellent advice they should walk on the noble path of virtue, as desired by her. From the bottom of my heart, I express gratitude to God Almighty that He gave me the opportunity for so many years to taste the sweet 'mevo' that was my

loving and virtuous mother. Great Saviour, grant my beloved mother's pure soul an excellent place in the highest heaven of your divine world and grant her everlasting peace.



### **AMEEN**

With my heartfelt blessings to all,  
Your affectionate sister,  
Shirin Erachshaw Vakil.