

An old Zoroastrian keeps the flame alive



Norshir Pundole (left) and Dr Sam Tata performing an ancient Zoroastrian ritual.

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KUALA LUMPUR: Most people his age would be contented to rest at home and enjoy their creature comforts, but not 87-year-old Norshir Pundole.

After stepping down from his family business at the urging of his children six years ago, he has kept busy catching up with friends and assuming the role of priest at many auspicious occasions for members of his Parsi community.

"I'm from the priestly cast, known as 'mobed', so I have been taught how to perform Zoroastrian ceremonies from a young age. I became a priest at 11," he said, beaming with pride.

Speaking with much reverence for his culture and religion, Norshir talked about how he would spend three hours a day praying and meditating on the words from his holy book, the 'Khorda Avesta'.

His favourite verse was 'Yatha-Ahu-Varyo' which means: point inwards or everything you do in this world comes from within.

Norshir's community hails from

one of the world's ancient cultures with one of the oldest religions in the world, Zoroastrianism. Followers of the religion are sometimes called fire worshippers.

Seated in a chair in his apartment situated in the heart of Kuala Lumpur's Jalan P Ramlee, Norshir began narrating the journey of his people, the Parsis of Iran, their culture and religion.

A proud and adaptable people, Norshir said the Parsis left Iran 1,365 years ago when the Arabs conquered the country.

"There were about 10,000 people who left in boats headed for India, that's how the community evolved in India," he said pensively.

Since then many have migrated to the United States, Australia and other parts of the world.

"I can tell you that you can count the number of Parsis here in KL. There are only 20 of us, we are a dwindling community, but we are very adaptable."

Norshir moved to Malaysia from Mumbai in 1965 to take up an appointment as managing director of an oil palm refinery in Johor and has made this country his home.

"I really liked it here and decided to make it my home as I have many wonderful friends here."

Norshir and his wife Roshan, 85, have been happily married for 64 years.

Both husband and wife take their daily prayers very seriously, and at meals times they would link hands and say a silent prayer in Avesta, the ancient Persian language, before they eat.

During the day, Norshir spends time with friends at his club and in the evenings he takes long walks outside his apartment building.

"Sundays are great because many friends come over to visit. I look forward to that," he said.

When he is alone, the octogenarian spends hours on his books which cover a wide array of topics.

After an hour into the interview, Norshir said the discussion into his life was not as his important as his need for a cup of tea, and with a twinkle in his eye he reached for his cuppa.

He then continued to talk about his family, his three children, five grandchildren and a great-granddaughter.



Norshir Pundole and his wife Roshan on their wedding day 64 years ago.