

For immediate release
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PARSIS, THE ZOROASTRIANS OF INDIA @ THE CARPENTER CENTER

Sooni Taraporevala's photographs are the first visual documentation and a rare insider's view of India's Parsi community, followers of the prophet Zarathustra.



The Man in the Sola Hat, Photograph © 1985 Sooni Taraporevala

The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University presents *Parsis, The Zoroastrians of India*, an exhibition of photographs by artist, filmmaker, and Harvard alumna **Sooni Taraporevala**, on view at the Carpenter Center in the **Sert Gallery** from **October 25–December 20, 2012**.

The exhibition will open with **Sooni Taraporevala in conversation** with **Homi Bhabha** and **Sugata Bose** on **Thursday, October 25, at 6 pm**, followed by a **reception and book signing with the artist**.

On **Saturday, October 27, at 2 pm** there will be a free screening of *Little Zizou*, with director Sooni Taraporevala in person. Taraporevala was the screenwriter for Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!*, *Mississippi Masala*, and *The Namesake*. *Little Zizou* is her directorial debut.

The result of a thirty-five year labor of love, the exhibition *Parsis, The Zoroastrians of India* is the first visual documentation of India's Parsi community, followers of the prophet Zarathustra. Taraporevala offers a rare insider's view of how the Parsis, a people whose ancestors sailed from Iran to India citing religious persecution, survive today as a religious and ethnic minority of India. In 2003, Unesco celebrated 3,000 years of Zoroastrianism, once the religion of Cyrus the Great's mighty Persian Empire. One of the world's oldest religions, Zoroastrianism greatly influenced other major religions and civilizations, and its followers once numbered in the millions. Today Parsi Zoroastrians are said to be on the verge of extinction: of an Indian population of more than one billion, Parsis number less than 76,000. Yet the community has produced many well-known leaders and artists, including the world-renowned conductor Zubin Mehta, the late rock legend Freddy Mercury, and the international award-winning author Rohinton Mistry. Part of the Indian fabric for over 1,000 years, Parsis have gained a reputation as a highly educated and urbane people who are quite private about their religious practices, which include leaving their dead in specially designed open-air towers to be devoured by vultures, considered by Parsis to be a last act of charity on earth.

Taraporevala's photographs are a vivid window into Parsi life in all its vibrancy and diversity. Her lens takes us from public celebrations to private rituals, from fire-temples to living rooms, from the streets of Bombay to the villages of Gujarat. An intimate insider's view, *Parsis, The Zoroastrians of India* is a stunning chronicle that brings to life a community of intense contradictions and endurance.



PARSIS, The Zoroastrians of India is made possible by the generous support of the Tata Group. Additional funding and support was given by the South Asia Initiative at Harvard University.

Programming:

Exhibition and related programming are free.

Sooni Taraporevala in conversation with Homi Bhabha and Sugata Bose

Thursday, October 25, 6 pm

Lecture Hall

Reception and book signing with the artist to follow in the Sert Gallery

The book *PARSIS The Zoroastrians of India, A Photographic Journey* will be available for purchase at the Carpenter Center on the night of the book signing, at the Harvard Museum of Natural History for a limited time during the exhibition, and also on Amazon.com.

Free Screening: *Little Zizou*

Director Sooni Taraporevala appearing in person, with Iyanah Bativala

Q&A after the screening

Saturday, October 27, 2 pm

Harvard Film Archive

Little Zizou

Written and directed by Sooni Taraporevala. With Boman Irani, Sohrab Ardeshir, Zenobia Shroff, Imaad Shah, Jahan and Iyanah Bativala.

India 2008, 35mm, color, 101 min.

Little Zizou, a quirky and contemporary comedy set in the unique and fascinating world of Bombay's Parsi community, tells the story of two very unusual families in conflict – one headed by a religious bigot, the other by a reforming journalist.

www.littlezizouthemovie.com

Sooni Taraporevala was born and raised in Bombay, India. She received a scholarship to Harvard University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and took courses in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies in film and photography. She earned a Masters of Arts from New York University in Film Theory and Criticism, and returned to India to work as a freelance still photographer. Her photographs have been exhibited in India, the United States, France, and Britain. In 2000 she authored and published a book of her photographs titled *PARSIS, The Zoroastrians of India, A Photographic Journey*, which went into a second edition in 2004.

In 1986 Taraporevala wrote her first screenplay, *Salaam Bombay!*, for director/producer Mira Nair, her classmate and friend from Harvard. The film was nominated for an Oscar, won more than twenty-five awards worldwide, and earned Taraporevala the Lillian Gish Award from Women in Film. Her second screenplay, *Mississippi Masala*, also for Mira Nair, was made into a movie starring Denzel Washington and won the Osella award for Best Screenplay at the Venice Film Festival. Her other production credits include the film *Such a Long Journey*, based on the novel by Rohinton Mistry and directed by Sturla Gunnarson, which earned Taraporevala a Genie nomination from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television; *My Own Country*, based on the book by Abraham Verghese and directed by Mira Nair for Showtime; *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, directed by Dr. Jabbar Patel for the Government of India and the National Film Development Corporation of India; and *The Namesake*, directed by Mira Nair, based on the book by Jhumpa Lahiri.

Little Zizou, the first feature film Taraporevala directed, was based on her own screenplay and won ten international awards including the Audience Choice Award at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, Time/Warner Best Screenplay and Best Director awards at the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival in New York City.

Taraporevala lives in Mumbai with her husband Dr. Firdaus Bativala, and their two children, Jahan and Iyanah.

Homi K. Bhabha is the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities in the Department of English, the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center, and the Senior Advisor on the Humanities to the President and Provost at Harvard University. Bhabha is the author of numerous works exploring postcolonial theory, cultural change and power, and cosmopolitanism, among other themes. Some of his works include *Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture*, which was reprinted as a Routledge Classic in 2004. Harvard University Press will publish his forthcoming book *A Global Measure*, and Columbia University Press will publish his next book *The Right to Narrate*.

Sugata Bose is the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs in the History Department at Harvard University. Bose's field of specialization is modern South Asian and Indian Ocean history. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. His books include *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) and *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.) In *A Hundred Horizons*, Bose crosses area studies and disciplinary frontiers as he bridges the domains of political economy and culture. He was a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1997.



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Gallery Hours *Please note that Main Gallery and Sert Gallery have different viewing hours.*

Main Gallery: Monday–Saturday 10:00 am–11:00 pm; Sunday 1:00–11:00 pm

Sert Gallery: (third floor, at the top of the ramp): Tuesday–Sunday, 1:00–5:00 pm

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

About the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

The only building in North America designed by architect Le Corbusier, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA) is the home of the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies for undergraduate study in the visual arts and a graduate program in film and visual studies at Harvard University, two public art galleries, and the Harvard Film Archive. The Carpenter Center hosts a Thursday night lecture series that brings renowned contemporary artists to Harvard to speak about their work, as well as Visiting Faculty artist talks, and a wide variety of exhibition-related programming and film screenings. **The Carpenter Center celebrates its 50th anniversary in May 2013, with special programming throughout 2012-13.**

Contact for high-resolution images:

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