



Malcolm Deboo



Malcolm M Deboo of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

A toddler of the SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education

How did I come to join the Working Party

On 24th February 2016, I received an email from Peter Woodward informing me;

“We had a meeting of the SHAP Working Party last Friday and since John Hinnells seems to have devolved the provision of Zoroastrian dates to yourself, I suggested that we might usefully invite you to become a member of the Calendar Group producing the e-Calendar and Wallchart; and since all the other contributors are members of the Working Party itself, we would like to invite you to become a member of Shap as well.”

I gladly accepted Peter’s invitation. By doing so, I became the most recent member to join the Shap Calendar Group and the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. The first AGM I attended of the Shap Working Party was on 30th March 2017. One of the items on the agenda was planning the 50th anniversary, while at the same time members showed general support for the winding down of the Shap Working Party, but agreed to for the Shap Calendar Group to continue. Naturally I was disappointed, being informed at my first AGM that Shap Working Party is winding down. Having heard the views of the more long term



members, which were reiterated at the Final AGM of the Working Party on 14th April 2018, I accepted the inevitability. But I am glad that the Working Party agreed for the Calendar Group to continue, because Shap's pioneering contribution to the inter faith religious education has made a significant contribution in the multi cultural landscape of the United Kingdom. By the Calendar Group continuing, Shap's contribution will continue, albeit in a relatively minor way compared to the last 50 years.

What are my richest memories of being a Shap Member

I am a Shap toddler since I only joined Shap Working Party in 2016. I do not have memories compared to my senior colleagues, many of whom are founder members and 50 year battle hardened Shap veterans of inter faith religious education. But some of my richest memories of Shap are when Mrs Tina M Mehta, one of my early teachers of Zoroastrian studies, gave me my first copy of Wallchart of the Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals back in the early 1980s. It had the dates of the Zoroastrian new year – NoRuz, prophet Zarathustra's birth anniversary – Khordad Sal, death anniversary – Zartosht no diso and Farvardigan / Muktdad when Zoroastrians remember the souls of the departed. I was happy to see these Zoroastrian festival dates, because this was a time when I had just left school and most people in the United Kingdom had never heard the word Zoroastrian, leaving aside the fact that there is an ancient world religion called Zoroastrianism still being practiced by its devout followers.

Tina Mehta was a friend of Dr Jenny Rose. Both of them were studying Zoroastrianism at SOAS under Professor Mary Boyce. Tina and Jenny contributed an article in the Shap Journal in the 1980s on the Zoroastrian New Year festival of Jamsheedi NoRuz. Both of them are also known to Roger Butler as Jenny worked for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and also to Professor John R Hinnels through Professor Boyce, who was then the head of Comparative Religion at Manchester University. Through Tina I was not only introduced to Zoroastrian studies and to Jenny Rose, Professors Mary Boyce and John R Hinnells, but because of Shap I was also introduced to inter faith religious education. I found the annual Shap Journals extremely informative, thus enticing me to subscribe when I went to university. The Wallchart of the Calendar of Religious Festivals stuck on the wall of my room at the Halls of Residence was a talking point when fellow students visited me.

What have been my major contributions to the work of Shap?

In the early 1990's, after graduating, I became involved with Zoroastrian religious education at the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE). As their Information Officer, I also hosted visits to the Zoroastrian House for interfaith and university groups. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed an increase in the ZTFE celebrating Zoroastrian religious festivals, besides



the four mentioned then in the Shap Calendar. Also the 1990s witnessed growing inter faith awareness and more inter faith groups were being established in the United Kingdom and as a result more enquiries being received by the ZTFE for dates of Zoroastrian festivals for inter faith calendars and newsletters. Thus I tabulated a list of Zoroastrian festivals celebrated by the ZTFE, enabling me to calculate the dates a year or two in advance, because the Shahenshai Zoroastrian religious calendar referenced by the Parsee community only has 365 days and does not have a leap year. (Over 95% of practitioners of Zoroastrianism in the UK follow the Shahenshai Zoroastrian religious calendar.)

Since the Shap calendar listed only four Zoroastrian festivals, I wrote to Shap requesting an increase in the number of Zoroastrian festivals listed, because the Shap Wallchart was used in many schools and in work places. By listing more Zoroastrian festivals this would reflect a more accurate picture of Zoroastrian religious life in the 1990s UK. On 16th April 2009, out of the blue, I received an email from Peter Woodward, so I emailed him the list. Following an exchange of few further emails, we mutually agreed on the increased number of Zoroastrian festivals to be included in the Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals. Being a Shap toddler, this is my only contribution to Shap. But my contribution to Shap will continue as a member of Shap Calendar Group.

Fifty years ago the flame of the SHAP Working Party on World Religions was lit with a burst of enthusiasm at the Shap Wells Hotel, Cumbria. It burned brightly for several decades as the SHAP Working Party made a significant contribution to multi religious education. Today the SHAP flame is flickering, but hopefully my minute contribution as a Zoroastrian member of the Shap Calendar Group will help in fuelling the SHAP flame.

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