

In the name of God

TRAKING DOWN THE ROOTS PUNE TIMES OF INDIA ABOUT M. REZA HAMZEH'EE

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Dr Reza Fariborz Hamzehee is an expert in ethnology and has studied many communities from across the world, including the Ghorbati gypsies from Pune

He believes that each person has many identities and every identity comes to the surface, according to the given situation. And just like what he believes in, Dr Reza Fariborz Hamzehee exemplifies a multi-cultural identity. A Kurdish author from Kermanshah in Western Iran, who spent his college days in Pune, he now spends his time between Germany and Iran.

Hamzehee, as he is known to his Indian friends did his PhD from the Poona University in 1986, then his DPhil from the University of Augsburg three years later, followed by his - post-doctorate from the University of

Kassel and then eight years later the University of Osnabrueck conferred on him Dr Habil - the highest German academic title. With all these glittering titles, Hamzehee got involved in many interesting projects in Germany, but he laments, "Actually I don't always get a project according to my liking, because they can't afford me." And why is that? He explains with a grin, "With my qualifications, the German government has fixed my salary, which can't get any higher and everyone has to pay me that."

That apart there is a timeless quality about his work, his area of interest and his very persona. Just like his! book Warcham, Hamzehee's most powerful work, about a paradise lost. Warcham is a mythical town, the prose weaves realities with myths and he questions throughout the meaning of reality - the historical, mystical and the mythological. He did extensive research on the Yaresan - a religious minority group of Kurdistan and wrote a book of the same name.

Hamzehee's life is full of the unex- pected, like the time in the 1990s, when he found Persian-speaking gyp. sies in the slums of Shiva Nagar. He had already done extensive fieldwork on the gypsies in western Iran, and now found traces of common threads in a comparative study of the two farflung communities. In this instance he has compared the Ghorbati – the Pune based gypsies and the Kauli - the Kermanshah gypsies, to gypsies in other parts of the world.

At universities in Germany Hamzehee is considered the last word on ethnology, a subject close to his heart and to his mindset. He says "No social phenomenon is in isolation. In fact, it is influenced by many factors. I am trying all the time to look at the psychological, cultural historical and economic aspects to come

nearer to reality." He believes that group identity is not absolute and unchangeable, as perceived earlier and that one person may carry different identities.

In his many avataars, he has gone to his roots in Iran and is working on projects of sustainable development. This is, along with research and teaching Economics, Rural Ethnology and Rural Sociology at different universities. Hamzehee can be credited with introducing the subject of sustainable development in Iran. In fact, he single-handedly organised an international congress that was attended by over 700 delegates. He has also founded an organisation to study and preserve indigenous knowledge and oral tradition in the agricultural area.

Coming to Pune every few years isn't only about catching up with friends; Pune is real hometown for Hamzehee. This time he came armed with a digital camera, which he believes gives him greater reach and flexibility to document what interests him, like the neighbourhood of Modi Khana in camp. Of course he is passionate about doing a project on the Parsis, which he has already researched, but wants to film it. He spent hours tracking down old Zoroastrians, the trials and tribulations and successes that they face in their adopted country. But for this he is looking for finance from the community he wants to document.

Hamzehee's search for ethnic roots and connections never ends and he wants one day to document the old relations of Iranian and Indian civilisations. But that's for another day.

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