



LA CHICA'BAHAR
A GIRL CALLED

SPRING

SHORT STORIES BY JYOTSNA LAL

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PROLOGUE

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01 LA CHICA'BAHAR

I'm Bahar Fakhraie, an Iranian teenager, I'm the only girl in the family among many brothers hence I was named Bahar meaning spring. My Dad Karim Fakhraie, a translator for European firms, affectionately calls me La'Chica Bahar meaning my girl Bahar.

Girls don't have the right to choose the major they like to study. The government decides for them based on the score one gets from the overall exam for the university admission entrance.

Since there are more applicants than actual spots in the colleges, the government will determine what who will study and therefore the government will decide what the person will become. Everybody studies hard to get into the university and then get accepted to the major of their interest. Thanks to my uncle Farzad Taghaboni's relations in India. I came to know about the foreign student cell in Sam Higginbottom Institute of Technology and Agriculture a deemed University, uncle Farzad Taghaboni's son who lives in California, his father in law was the head of chemistry department before he migrated

to US. I have got admission in Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture and Technology for Masters in physics session. I celebrated my birthday June 14 in Tehran and took the Emirates flight via Dubai to Allahabad, international port was Delhi.

I was received at the airport by Rita Richards and her husband Edwin in early hours of the morning at Allahabad airport.

Allahabad named by Mughal emperor Akbar as the city of Allah, you can see here the Triveni Sangam the confluence of the rivers Ganges, Yamuna and underground river Saraswati. Nearby is the old fort built by Akbar. I visited the museum and learnt a great deal about the ancient history of India. The ancestral home of the Nehrus where Mr Gandhi [Father of Indian nation] often stayed who had adopted Feroz Gandhi

One of the best things about Allahabad is that it is a very laid back town quiet and life here is much more comfortable, less traffic and ample greenery. The new Yamuna bridge is a great place to hang out on a cool evening when the cool breeze just blows through your hair. You can sit on the sandy beaches and enjoy a great sunset. Allahabad is the hometown of "Amitabh Bacchan" The star of the millennium.

The Sam Higginbottom university is away from the hustle bustle of the city, situated on the bank of Yamuna, right opposite to it on the other bank is the Ewin Christian college. River Yamuna which flows down from the city of Agra and Delhi meets the river Ganga in a grand merger at Sangam in Allahabad

If you happen to visit the old city of Allahabad which is

called sheher (Ironic ! Isn't it?) by people living near the university campus, you can know it yourself that bad state and poor maintenance of infrastructure and basic public amenities have reduced the city to a little over a village.

In contrast, the roads, drainage system and proper town planning do really exist in and around the University area. The lush green Sam Higginbottom campus is a visual treat for morning walkers/joggers who are found strolling/jogging/running on the campus roads. I'm a ninja, often practice in the early hours before anyone wakes up as I staying with the Richards.No one is aware of my past .Every one was impressed to know that I practised the Japanese ninjutsu martial arts , ofcourse they never guessed that I was a full fledged Ninja . Japanese ninja focuse on the development of self-control, patience and self-respect including unarmed self-defense and the use of weapons.

A lot of women that train in ninjutsu in Iran. The reason is simple: ninjutsu requires a full-body keikogi, a traditional uniform that must be worn during training. Since the training gear covers the whole body, ninjutsu classes attract women of all ages, including those who follow the strict Sharia rules.



Dr Rita Richards had a meeting in Delhi ,so she decided to take me along for somesightseeing. From Allahabad we headed to Delhi by overnight train. I was surprised to find that despite the fact that it took almost 18 hours to get to Delhi . I actually quite enjoyed the train ride. We were in the third AC class, and each had a sleeper bunks. The beds were three high, with the middle one folding down to become a seat during the day. I slept surprisingly well though the night. The train was about an hour and a half late, which was not bad as they are pretty frequently delayed a lot longer than that. We spent the early afternoon touring around Delhi, stopped by the house of Rita's college friend of from high school in Connaught Place, and then took the metro to Old Delhi. We walked along Chandni Chowk, an old market street

that they found rather crowded with a lot of people hassling us as foreigners, stopped by by a Jain temple, that housed a bird hospital. It was rather odd walking around the bird hospital without shoes on (you took them off entering the complex) but there were some pretty interesting birds, along with some quite sick birds, that were being housed there.

I saw Jama Masjid which is apparently the largest mosque in India. As it was Friday they were actually there during the call to prayer Namaz , and it really reminded me of Tehran seeing hundreds of men bow down to pray. The crowd exiting the mosque after prayers

The Mosque was huge, but unfortunately didn't get to go up the towers since I were carrying cameras and didn't want to bother getting tickets to take them in. We did get more stares than usual, and people trying to sneak pictures of us which was rather annoying.

From there we drove around the Raj-Path, Parliament, Presidents residence and the giant India Gate. they were staying with an iranian family who are friends of Rita's family's from allahabad . I must say it was incredibly nice to in some ways step back into an iranian lifestyle for a couple of days. We had a delicious spaghetti dinner complete with Garlic Bread.

I went to the Gandhi Museum, had lunch in Kahn Market and saw the National Museum, saw the ashokan peace symbol at the Gandhi museum

I really need to read more about Mr Gandhi, I know very little about him but he really was an incredible man. The museum is in the house that he spent his last 140 odd days before he was assassinated in the back garden. Although there was really too much to read it was a pretty cool museum. There was kind of an odd interactive section on the top floor- but there were guides that led you through and ended up doing most of the inter-active stuff for you which was rather odd. Dr Rita and I had lunch in the upscale Kahn Market, really great Pizza and pasta. I ended the day at the National Museum of modern art which had some cool exhibits along with a few odd Indian touches. There were several main exhibits that you had to walk through empty rooms to get to, and then several exhibits you walked through in succession, and then had to walk back through them all to get out. The third floor also didn't really have lights turned on in the hallway, but there were some cool exhibits. They had a bunch of old coins and did a good job of explaining the different methods of coin making. There was a massive collection of miniature paintings, some stunningly beautiful crafts and decorations, an exhibit on the history of the maritime force/navy and a cool exhibit on textiles. I was surprised to see a Egyptian statue of a pharaoh from 2,000 bc chilling in the hallway, and some random French and Thai stuff. Beautiful chariot outside the National Museum in Delhi

The local guide informed me that Delhi had once been the a part of the ancient Mughal kingdom , the Red fort was the imperial residence . He told me the Red Fort in Agra is more impressive and I should go to see the Qutubh Minar which we did,situated in the mehrauli area

and saw ancient wonder.

I feel like I am starting to get to know Delhi a little bit- and am still incredibly impressed with the efficiency and wide reach of the Metro. It's a really great way to get around the City. I don't know if I'd want to spend a whole lot of time there, but it wasn't a bad place to visit, and there are still a couple of things I'd like to see there. I also liked old Delhi even though it was extremely a crowded ,noisy and the most polluted city

Well, that's it for travel week- although it was a great trip it's also nice to be back home in Allahabad. This week I have a couple of papers and presentations to finish up, It will be busy but interesting. Time has really been flying- it's hard to believe I'm enjoying my time in India.

02 A GIRL CALLED SPRING

Family and friends brought baby shower gifts such as a cot, toys

and baby clothes. she made sure there was a sufficient supply of pastry, cookies, fresh and dried fruits and special nuts on hand, plus tea .Some names were suggested if it was a boy like EhsAn (Goodness of God) or Amjad(farsi Most excellent, glorious) Ofcourse if it's a girl child then BahAr Spring (season),BahArak Small Spring (season) or BahAreh Someone who brings the spring (or a sprint flower)

It has become a fixture of modern medical practice: women giving birth in the comforting presence of

the father-to-be. Now a custom long seen as a sign of western social progress is being adopted in the conservative

setting of Iran as doctors seek to wean the country's women off their preference for caesarean births.

Sarem hospital in Tehran became the first in Iran to allow a father inside a delivery room for the birth of his child.

The hospital is offering couples the chance to stay together during childbirth after being told that it is permissible under Iran's Islamic laws. The atmosphere in delivery rooms seemed so peaceful and I wondered if it was because the fathers were there.

So I offered it to the husband Karim whose name in farsi means 'Generous' of one of my patients Najmeh Fakhraie

"He agreed after we asked if it was religiously permissible and were told that it was. We gave the mother a low epidural. The environment was very spiritual and friendly, with husband and wife laughing and joking. The mother was able to help the medical team a little and delivered the baby, a girl, without great discomfort. The husband was emotional and in tears." His mother was also present.

This baby born on June 14, 1985 was called SRING Bahar

Same day, Trans World Airlines Flight 847, a flight from Cairo to San Diego with en route stops in Athens, Rome, Boston, and Los Angeles. After an uneventful flight from Cairo to Athens, a new

crew boarded Flight 847. The new crew in Athens were Captain John Testrake, First Officer Philip Maresca,

Flight Engineer Christian Zimmermann, Flight Service Manager Uli Derickson, Flight Attendant Judith Cox, Flight Attendant Hazel Hesp, Flight Attendant Elizabeth Howes, and Flight Attendant Helen Sheahan. On the morning of Friday, June 14, 1985 Flight 847 was hijacked by members of Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad shortly after take off from Athens. Most important, the hijackers were identified by an accomplice as members of Islamic Jihad (or Holy War), the shadowy Shi'ite Muslim organization that is regarded as a sort of umbrella for various fundamentalist terror groups operating in Lebanon and other Middle East countries. Sympathetic to Iran's revolutionary ruler, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and quite possibly subsidized by the Iranian leadership, Islamic Jihad and its confederates are blamed for many of the suicide bombing missions that have afflicted American and other Western military bases and diplomatic missions in the Middle East in the past two years. At 10:10am, Flight 847 departed Athens for Rome. It was commandeered shortly after takeoff by two Arabic - speaking Lebanese men who had smuggled a pistol and two grenades through the Athens airport security. One was later identified as Mohammed Ali Hamadi, who was later captured and sentenced to life imprisonment in Germany. [The Shiite Hezbollah terrorists who immediately demand to know the

identity of those with Jewish-sounding names. Two of the Lebanese terrorists, armed with grenades and a 9-mm. pistol, then forced the plane to land in Beirut, Lebanon. On a political level, the hijackers of Flight 847 called for the release not only of the Lebanese Shi'ites still held by Israel, but of a few others imprisoned in Cyprus and Kuwait. They also demanded the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon (a pullout has been under way since January and, except for patrols and forays back into the border area, is now virtually complete) and international condemnation of the U.S. and Israel. In a broader sense, the Shi'ites of Lebanon, newly radicalized by the violence that has plagued their country, particularly since the Israeli invasion of June 1982, are seeking a fairer shake after generations of neglect and discrimination by Lebanon's wealthier and more powerful Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. The hijackers were seeking the release of 700 Shi'ite Muslims from Israeli custody. Beyond all that, the Shi'ite fanatical fringe, inspired by the example of the Iranian revolution, wants to destroy the last vestiges of Western "decadence" in the Islamic world, particularly the presence of the U.S., that "Great Satan." Whether the hijackers of Flight

847 fitted into that category, or were exemplars of a more classical political terrorism, bent on achieving specific ends in the region, was not yet known. Millions around the world watched their television sets or listened to their radios as the horrific drama unfolded. "He has pulled a hand-grenade pin and is ready to blow up the aircraft if he has to. We must, I repeat, we must land at Beirut. We must land at Beirut. No alternative." After much delay, the curious, grudging reply of the Beirut control tower: "Very well. Land. Land quietly. Land quietly." Then another desperate plea: "They are beating the passengers. They are threatening to kill the passengers. We want fuel now. Immediately. Five minutes at most, or he is going to kill the passengers." After that, another, more excited, more hostile voice, in broken English: "The plane is booby-trapped. If anyone approaches, we will blow it up. Either refueling the plane or blowing it up. No alternative." The plane was diverted from its original destination of Rome, in airspace over Greece, to the Middle East and made its first stop, for several hours, at the Beirut International Airport in Lebanon, where 19 passengers were allowed to

leave in exchange for fuel. Shortly before landing, air traffic control initially refused to let them land in Beirut. Captain Testrake argued with air traffic control until they relented. "He has pulled a hand-grenade pin and is ready to blow up the aircraft if he has to. We must, I repeat, we must land at Beirut. We must land at Beirut. No alternative.

During this time, Lebanon was in the midst of a civil war, and Beirut was divided into sectors controlled by different Shia militia Amal and Hezbollah.

Beirut International Airport, surrounded by a Shia neighborhood, had no perimeter security, which had been over-run by Islamic militias, and nearby residents could simply drive onto the runway. The hijackers had systematically and regularly beaten all the military passengers, but during this stop they selected U.S. Navy diver, Robert Stethem, beat him, shot him in the right temple, and dumped his body out of the plane onto the ramp and shot him again, seeking permission from other Shia Muslims operating the control tower to obtain more fuel. Seven American passengers, alleged to have Jewish-sounding surnames, were taken off the jet and held hostage in a Shia

prison in Beirut.

After airport authorities complied, the stricken plane took off from Beirut, where it had landed after having been hijacked out of Athens. Hours later, it landed in Algiers, then took off again and returned late that night to Beirut, the tension rising, the crew bone-weary. And minutes after landing, the senseless slaying of a hostage, and a harsh voice over the plane's radio: "You see? You now believe it. There will be another in five minutes," and the nightmare rolled on.

On 15 June The proud parents Karim and Najmeh Fakhraie brought home Baby BahAr with much rejoicing ,she was the first girl among many brothers. The Family knew nothing about the hijacking byThe Shiite Hezbollah terrorists. Typically, the relatives and friends visit the new baby, The visits naturally have to be relatively short, . Every relatives announces in advance to the family and which days of the week or holidays are their reception days.

In the beginning, the hijackers were outnumbered by their captives 153 to 2, and U.S. authorities tended to believe that the terrorists

would soon be overwhelmed by exhaustion if nothing else. By Sunday morning, however, with the plane on the ground in Algiers, the ranks of the hijackers had swelled to between twelve and 15, and all but 32 male American passengers and crewmen had been released (another passenger was later freed in order to receive medical treatment). The gunmen set a 10 a.m. deadline (5 a.m. E.D.T.) for their demands to be met, but then inexplicably left Algiers more than an hour ahead of time. Once again, their destination was Beirut. On landing there, they demanded the release of 50 fellow Shi'ite Muslims currently detained in Israel; such a gesture was justified, the hijackers said, by their freeing of three American men the night before in Algiers. The terrorists had been seeking the release of 700 Shi'ites from Israeli custody, and this appeared to be the first step in realizing that goal. If Israel and presumably the U.S.) balked, declared the hijackers, "our blood will be a witness." Nearly a dozen well-armed men joined the hijackers before the plane returned to Algiers the following day, Saturday, 15 June, where an additional 65 passengers and all

five female cabin crew members (flight attendants and purser) were released. That afternoon, the aircraft continued on across the Mediterranean to Algiers, Algeria, where 20 passengers were released during a five-hour stop before heading back to Beirut that night. The passengers and crew endured a three-day intercontinental ordeal passengers were threatened and some beaten. Passengers with Jewish-sounding names were moved apart from the others. United States Navy diver Robert Stethem was killed, and his body was thrown onto the tarmac. Dozens of passengers were held hostage over the next two weeks until released by their captors after some of their demands were met. The hijackers wished to fly to Tehran, but mysteriously returned to Beirut for a third time on Sunday afternoon, 16 June, and remained there for unknown reasons. (The pilot working as Flight Engineer deemed this portion of events could be dangerous to any who may be involved in future situations. The other pilots agreed with him to withhold details of his actions from the media.) The initial demands of the hijackers included: the release of the "Kuwait 17," those involved in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait, the release

of all 766 mainly Lebanese Shias transferred to Israel's Atleat Prison in conjunction with immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, international condemnation of Israel and the United States.

The Greek government released the accomplice, Ali Atwa, and in exchange the hijackers released eight Greek citizens, including Greek pop singer Demis Roussos, to be flown by a Greek government business jet from Algiers back to Athens.

By Monday afternoon, June 17, the 40 remaining hostages had been taken from the plane and held hostage throughout Beirut by the Hezbollah. Nabih Berri was the chief of the Amal militia and the Minister of Justice in the fractured Lebanon cabinet. One of the hostages was released when he developed heart trouble. The other 39 remained captive until intervention by US President Ronald Reagan with Lebanese officials on 30 June, when they and the pilots held captive on the airplane were collected in a local schoolyard and met with international journalists, then driven to Syria by the International Red Cross to the Sheraton Hotel and a press conference in

Damascus. The hostages then boarded a U.S. Air Force C-141B Starlifter cargo plane and flew to Rhein-Main AB, West Germany, where they were met by US Vice President George H. W. Bush, debriefed and given medical examinations, then flown in a TWA Lockheed non-stop to Andrews Air Force Base and welcomed home by President and Mrs. Reagan (accompanied by Reagan's Chief of Staff Donald Regan). Over the next several weeks, Israel released over 700 Shia prisoners, while maintaining that the prisoners' release was not related to the hijacking. TWA employee Uli Derickson was largely successful in protecting the few Jewish passengers aboard by refusing to identify them. Most of the passengers were released in the early hours of what turned out to be a 17-day ordeal, but five men were singled out and separated from the rest of the hostages. Of these five, only Richard Herzberg, an American, was Jewish. During the next two weeks, Herzberg maintained to his attackers that he was a Lutheran of German and Greek ancestry. Along with the others, he was taken to a roach-infested holding cell somewhere in Beirut, where other

Lebanese prisoners were being held. Fortunately, the TWA hostages were treated fairly well.

On June 30, after careful negotiations, the hostages were released unharmed.

Since the terrorists were effectively outside the law's reach in Lebanon, it appeared as though the terrorists would go free from punishment.

A Woman Leading The Effort

Maryam Rajavi , the charismatic Iranian opposition leader presiding the National Council of Resistance of Iran umbrella group, has been the first to call for the formation of a united front against Islamic fundamentalism. She has been the Muslim woman advocating Islam supporting absolute gender equality in every field. From marriage and inheritance, to equal pay and equal participation in political leadership, and decision-making positions in the economic domain. As a Muslim leader she rejects the mullahs' so-called sharia law. Mrs. Rajavi is the vanguard in the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism, representing the possibility of a Muslim political leadership based on the rule of law, equality, democracy and freedom. This is the sole solution to end extremism and fundamentalism. She leads a force for change in Iran that should be supported by all women across the globe, and indeed all mankind. Critics say the group began to transform into a cult

centered around its leaders, the married couple Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, after the Iran-Iraq War, when thousands of its fighters were killed.

In 2003, New York Times reporter Elizabeth Rubin visited the group's Iraqi compound at Camp Ashraf and described it as resembling a "fictional world of female worker bees ... dressed exactly alike, in khaki uniforms and mud-colored head scarves, driving back and forth in white pickup trucks, staring ahead in a daze as if they were working at a factory in Maoist China." Followers at Ashraf were reportedly cut off from the outside media, required to attend regular self-criticism sessions, and barred from personal friendships and emotional relationships.

But the group played its cards well as Western concerns grew over Iran's nuclear program, reportedly passing information from its supporters within the Islamic Republic on nuclear facilities to the U.S. and, according to some reports, cooperating with Mossad to assassinate Iranian scientists. It also began a multiyear, multimillion-dollar lobbying campaign to remove itself from the terrorist list, including paying American figures like Rudy Giuliani and Howard Dean to give speeches on its behalf. It worked, and in 2012, Hillary Clinton took the MEK off the list.

Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MEK)

The National Liberation Army of Iran (the group's armed wing)

National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) – the MEK is the founding member of a coalition of organizations called the NCRI.[17][18]

Monafiqeen (منافقون) – the Iranian government consistently refers to the People's Mujahedin with this derogatory name, meaning "the hypocrites"

Since then, the group's influence has been growing. Its supporters regularly crowd hearings on Capitol Hill dealing with Iran and its increasing influence in Iraq. The Iraqi government has long viewed the MEK with hostility and has carried out several brutal attacks on its compound. U.S. officials also believe Iranian troops participated in a 2013 attack that killed at least 50 MEK members in 2013. One of its staunchest supporters on Capitol Hill, Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, held up a planned arms sale to former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government in part over concerns about the treatment of the MEK.

Ted Poe, R-Texas, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, which held Wednesday's hearing, is another prominent MEK backer. Shaylyn Hynes, a spokeswoman for Poe, told me by email that Rajavi has a "long history of speaking against what she calls 'Islamic fundamentalism,'" and "can speak to how ISIS' ideology is both similar to and different from the mullahs leading Iran." Asked if there were any concerns given the MEK's history, Hynes replied, "the administration does not consider them a terrorist group and neither do we."

Rajavi was certainly feeling the love from Congress on Wednesday, testifying before an overflow crowd at the hearing, which was titled "ISIS: Defining the Enemy." Rep.

Brad Sherman, D-California, compared her appearance to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to Congress that day, noting that Japan had also once been an enemy of the United States. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, is not a member of the subcommittee but dropped in to refer to Rajavi as a "great leader."

Still, not everyone was as welcoming. Former State Department counterterrorism director Daniel Benjamin, who had been scheduled to testify, dropped out of the hearing rather than appear with Rajavi. Another, former ambassador to Syria and prominent administration critic Robert Ford, told Foreign Policy he was "shocked" to learn she was on the panel and demanded that the subcommittee "put me on a panel without the MEK or I wouldn't appear." He wound up speaking earlier in the day.

Suspect groups playing on American naiveté by telling gullible politicians exactly what they want to hear. Anybody remember that great band Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi Expatriates? They sure were reliable sources, weren't they... More...

In her appearance, via satellite from Paris, Rajavi made a case familiar to anyone who listened to Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress in March: that ISIS and Iran are two sides of the same coin, despite the fact that Iranian-backed militias are fighting the group in Iraq. "The Mullahs regime is not part of any solution to the current crisis. Instead, it is the heart of the problem," she said,

referring to the Iranian government as the “Godfather of ISIS.” She referred to the current fight between ISIS and Iran as merely an “internal power struggle” within Islamic fundamentalism and warned that “fundamentalism of the Shiite kind is more dangerous than the Sunni one” because Shiites already have a state, Iran, which is projecting its power in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

While the support for Rajavi was a bipartisan affair, her message seemed to resonate in particular with critics of the Obama administration’s Iran policy. Hynes denied to me that the timing of the hearing had anything to do with the ongoing debate over nuclear diplomacy and Iran sanctions, saying “There is no relation. Ms. Rajavi is an expert on radical Islamist extremism and is being called to testify in that capacity.” Still, Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-New York,, who praised Rajavi and the MEK as the legitimate democratic opposition of Iran, said during the hearing that when he listens to the administration’s rhetoric on the Iranian regime, “I honestly do not know if my president is on the same team as I am.”

03 ESTHER

I went to church with Rita Richards , something I could never do in Iran . There was no gender bias all men and women sat together worshipping Jehovah .

Worshippers sang hymns from books , some played musical instruments , The priest/pastor read the holy Bible and preached about ? Guess who ?

brave Persian Queen Esther was the wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who prevented the extermination of her people by the king's vizier Haman.

As the story goes the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), held a feast for all his vassals , nobles and chieftains in the grand palace in Shushan The kings and princes were seated in the great palace hall adorned with blue and white hangings fastened with silver rings with gold chairs ,wine was served to them in vessels of gold

The king wanted to show his majesty and glory to his guests ,he sent his chamberlains to bring his Queen Vasti dressed in royal garments with the royal crown on her head in the palace hall

Queen Vasti was beautiful but arrogant woman she refused to obey and did not come before the subjects .

The king became very angry and banished Queen Vasti from the palace he sent out a royal decree that all eligible

young virgins to be brought to Shushan and King Xerxes will select a new queen

Modcai was a Jew who lived with his adopted daughter Esther in Shushan. Esther was among the selected virgins to be presented before the king, Modcai forbade her to tell the chamberlains that she was a Jew. Esther pleased everyone in the palace with her intelligence and sweet disposition. After purification as Persian custom she was presented before King Xerxes, he was pleased and made her the queen.

Modcai used to walk in front of the palace gates to learn about Esther's well-being. One day he heard about a plot to kill King Xerxes; he informed the queen, who told King Xerxes, the plotters were hanged. And Modcai's name was written in the chronicles.

As years passed by, the king's vizier Haman became powerful and greedy. He hated Modcai because he was a Jew and plotted to destroy him. He told King Xerxes that some people were planning a rebellion and asked him for a royal decree that they should be destroyed.

Modcai stood before the palace gates weeping and

renting his garments ,wearing only a sackcloth queen Esther was troubled and sent chamberlains to Modecai who showed the letter . Modecai commanded Esther to come forward and save her people.

Esther was afraid of the kings anger , it was the royal custom when the king was in the inner court for 30 days no one may go in without permission

The queen requested Modecai and all the jews of the nation to fast and pray for three days when she prepares to go to the King if he is displeased he may punish her. Queen Esther dressed in royal garments with the royal crown on her head went in the inner court of the palace and knelt before the King.

Xerxes was pleased and extended his scepter towards her and asked her “ what is your petition queen Esther”

“ My lord I request you to come a banquet which I have prepared in your honour”

That day King Xerxes went to the banquet after feasting he again asked her “ what is your petition queen Esther”

“ My lord I request you to come a banquet which I have prepared in your honour and bring vizier Haman with you ”

After the banquet the king could not sleep he ordered that the royal chronicles to be read aloud and the incident about Mordechai was written down. The king realized that he had not rewarded him. The vizier Haman was overjoyed with the invitation and was thinking about himself when King Xerxes asked how should a man who had saved the king's life be rewarded. Haman said he should be dressed in royal robes and seated on the royal horse and given a land as gift. King Xerxes ordered Haman to honour Mordechai in the same manner. Haman's heart was filled with fear. That day in the banquet King asked Esther "what is your petition queen Esther?"

She requested him to not to destroy her people the Jews. The King was perplexed and wanted to know about it. Queen Esther said that this wicked vizier Haman has plotted against them. Then the king's rage was kindled and he ordered that vizier Haman and all his followers and entire family be put to death. He wrote a royal decree that all enemies of the Jews should be destroyed.

The Jews established an annual feast, the feast of Purim, in memory of their deliverance. According to traditional rabbinic dating, this took place about fifty-two years after the start of the Babylonian Exile. Given the great historical link between Persian and Jewish history, modern day Persian Jews are called "Esther's Children". A building known as the Tomb of Esther and Mordechai is located in Hamadan, Iran. Their deliverance is celebrated in the Jewish festival of Purim in Feb or March (the 14th of Adar in the Jewish calendar), commemorating Esther, who saved the Jews from destruction in 473 BC during the Persian occupation. The festival includes a complete reading of the Book of Esther (Old Testament Book) in the synagogue, during which the listeners respond with stamping, whistling, and hissing to the names of the evil characters.

I was born in Iran and never knew about Esther.

04 EMPRESS OF THE PEACOCK THRONE

In 1607 AD (1016 AH), Prince Khurram, also known as Shah Jahan, was betrothed to Arjumand Banu Begum

who was just 14 years old at the time, but would nonetheless become the unquestioned love of his life. Born as in Agra in a family of Persian nobility as a daughter of Abdul Hasan Asaf Khan, making her a niece and later daughter-in-law of Empress Nur Jehan, the wife of the emperor Jahangir. Nur Jahan was born on 31 May 1577 in Kandahar, present-day Afghanistan, into a family of Persian nobility and was the second daughter and fourth child of the Persian aristocrat Mirza Ghias Beg and his wife Asmat Begum. Both of Nur Jahan's parents were descendants of illustrious families - Ghias Beg from Muhammad Sharif and Asmat Begum from the Aqa Mulla clan. For unknown reasons, Ghias Beg's family had suffered a reversal in fortunes in 1577 and soon found circumstances in their homeland intolerable. Hoping to improve his family's fortunes, Ghias Beg chose to relocate to India where the Emperor Akbar's court was said to be at the centre of the growing trade industry and cultural scene. she was named Mehrunnisa or 'Sun among Women' Her father was appointed diwan (treasurer) for the province of Kabul. Due to his astute skills at conducting business he quickly rose through the ranks of the high administrative officials. For his excellent work he was awarded the title of Itimad-ud-Daula or 'Pillar of the State' by the emperor. Her fortunes took a turn for the better when she married Jahangir. The Mughal state gave absolute power to the emperor, and those who exercised influence over the emperor gained immense influence and prestige. Nur Jahan was able to convince her husband to pardon her father and appoint him Prime Minister. To consolidate her position and power within the Empire, Nur

Jahan placed various members of her family in high positions throughout the court and administrative offices. Her brother Asaf Khan was appointed grand Wazir (minister) to Jahangir. To honour his new beautiful and faithful wife Jahangir gave her the titles of 'Nur Mahal' or 'Light of the Palace and 'Nur Jahan' or 'Light of the world'. Jahangir's affection and trust of Nur Jahan led to her wielding a great deal of power in affairs of state. To honour his new beautiful and faithful wife Jahangir gave her the titles of 'Nur Mahal' or 'Light of the Palace and 'Nur Jahan' or 'Light of the world'. Jahangir's affection and trust of Nur Jahan led to her wielding a great deal of power in affairs of state.

Furthermore to ensure her continued connections to the throne and the influence which she could obtain from it, Nur Jahan arranged for her step daughter Ladli to marry Jahangir's youngest son, Shahryar and her niece Arjumand Banu Begum (later known as Mumtaz Mahal) to marry Prince Khurram (the third son of Jahangir and the future Emperor Shah Jahan). The two weddings ensured that one way or another, the influence of Nur Jahan's family would extend over the Mughal Empire for at least another generation

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They would, however, have to wait five years before they were married in 1612 AD (1021 AH), on a date selected by

the court astrologers as most conducive to ensuring a happy marriage. Arjumand Banu Begum was married at the age of 19, on 10 May 1612, to Prince Khurram, later known as Emperor Shah Jahan, though betrothed to Prince Khurram in 1607, she ultimately became his second wife in 1612 and was his favorite. After their wedding celebrations, Khurram "finding her in appearance and character elect among all the women of the time", gave her the title 'Mumtaz Mahal' Begum (Chosen One of the Palace). The intervening years had seen Khurram take two other wives. But by all accounts however, Khurram was so taken with Mumtaz that he showed little interest in exercising his polygamous rights with the two earlier wives, other than dutifully siring a child with each. According to the official court chronicler, Motamid Khan (as recorded in his Iqbal Namah-e-Jahangiri), the relationship with his other wives "had nothing more than the status of marriage. The intimacy, deep affection, attention and favour which His Majesty had for the Cradle of Excellence (Mumtaz) exceeded by a thousand times what he felt for any other.

Mumtaz Mahal had a deep and loving marriage with Shah Jahan. Even during her lifetime, poets would extol her beauty, grace and compassion. She was Shah Jahan's trusted companion, travelling with him all over the Mughal Empire. His trust in her was so great that he even gave her his imperial seal, the Muhr Uzah. Mumtaz was portrayed as having no aspirations to political power in contrast to her aunt, Empress Nur Jehan, the chief consort of Emperor Jahangir, who had wielded considerable

influence in the previous reign.^[6] A great influence on him, apparently often intervening on behalf of the poor and destitute, she also enjoyed watching elephant and combat fights performed for the court. It was quite common for women of noble birth to commission architecture in the Mughal Empire, so Mumtaz devoted some time to a riverside garden in Agra.

Despite her frequent pregnancies, Mumtaz travelled with Shah Jahan's entourage throughout his earlier military campaigns and the subsequent rebellion against his father. She was his constant companion and trusted confidant, leading court historians to go to unheard lengths to document the intimate and erotic relationship the couple enjoyed. In their nineteen years of marriage, they had fourteen children together, seven of whom died at birth or at a very young age.

Shah Jahan ruled in what is considered the Golden Age of the vast Mughal Empire, which covered almost all of the Indian subcontinent. It was ruled from the newly constructed capital of Shahjahanabad and the fabled imperial citadel Red Fort, with its marble and golden halls bedecked in jewels and silk, perfumed water fountains and canals running, surrounded by fragrant gardens. Sumptuous feasts, religious festivals, extravagant receptions for state guests, with innumerable artists and musicians, a large zenana and thousands of soldiers, courtiers and servants who ensured for a colourful and joyful life far away from everyday worries. The focus around which everything revolved was the emperor, where he gave audiences and received petitioners. The court

and its ruler was a mirror image of paradise on earth, in the very centre of the empire. Amongst the various titles he carried, such as Great King (Badshah), he was also the Shadow of God (Zill-i-Allahi), making him the executor of God's will. The sovereign therefore also held a court of justice. It was therefore necessary to have a proper seat or Throne of Solomon (Takht-e-Sulaiman) to underscore his position of the just king. Just like Solomon's throne, the Peacock Throne was to be covered in gold and jewelled, with steps leading up to it, with the ruler floating above ground and closer to heaven.

Since the imperial treasury at that point was full of precious jewels, Shah Jahan had ample resources and decided to put the jewels and pearls into a more public use. Said Gilani and his workmen from the imperial goldsmiths' department were commissioned with the construction of this new throne. It took seven years to complete. Large amounts of solid gold, precious stones and pearls were used, creating a masterful piece of Mughal workmanship that was unsurpassed before or after its creation. It was an opulent indulgence that could only be seen by a small minority of courtiers, aristocrats and visiting dignitaries. The throne was even for the Golden Age Mughal standards supremely extravagant and cost twice as much as the construction of the Taj Mahal. The appearance of the throne was in stark contrast to the older throne of Jahangir, a large rectangular slab of engraved black basalt constructed in the early 1600s, used by the father of Shah Jahan.

It did initially not carry a name and was simply known as

the "Jewelled Throne" or "Ornamented Throne" (Takht-Murassa). It received its name from later historians because of the peacock statues featured on it. It was inaugurated with a triumphant ceremony on 22 March 1635, the seventh formal anniversary of Shah Jahan's accession. The date was chosen by astrologers and was doubly auspicious, since it coincided exactly with Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, and Nowruz, the Persian Spring festival. The emperor and the court were returning from Kashmir and it was determined that the third day of Nowruz would be the most auspicious day for him to enter the capital and take his seat on the throne.

Muhammad Qudsi, the emperor's favourite poet, was chosen to compose twenty verses that were inscribed in emerald and green enamel on the throne. He praised the matchless skill of the artisans, the "heaven-depleting grandeur" of its gold and jewels, mentioning the date in the letters of the phrase "the throne of the just king"

Poet Abu-Talib Kalim was given six pieces of gold for each verse in his poem of sixty-three couplets.

The master goldsmith Said Gilani was summoned by the emperor and showered with honours, including with his weight in gold coins and given the title "Peerless Master" (Bibadal Khan). Gilani produced a poem with 134 couplets, filled with chronograms. The first twelve reveal the date of the emperor's birth, the following thirty-two the date of his first coronation, then the ninety couplets giving the date of the throne's inauguration.

Towards India he turned his reins quickly and went in all

glory,

Driving like the blowing wind, dapple-grey steed swift as lightning.

With bounty and liberality, he returned to the capital;
Round his stirrups were the heavens and angels round his reins.

A thousand thanks! The beauty of the world has revived
With the early glory of the throne of multi-coloured gems.

When Shah Jahan travelled from Balapur Fort to Burhanpur, mother of Mirza Azam and elder daughter of Shahzada Mirza Badi-uz-Zaman Safavi, alias Shah Nawaz Khan of the Safavid dynasty, the princess Dilras Banu Begum, wife of Aurangzeb along with Mumtaz and cousin/brother Shah Beg Khan, along with military personnel - stayed three nights near Argaon at Hiwarkhed, before the birth of their fourteenth child

She had been accompanying her husband while he was fighting a campaign in the Deccan Plateau. She died in Burhanpur in the Deccan (now in Madhya Pradesh) during the birth of their fourteenth child, a daughter named Gauhara Begum.

Mumtaz Mahal mothered fourteen children by Shah Jahan, including Aurangzeb, the son who temporarily succeeded Shah Jahan until deposed by his brother and the Imperial Prince Dara Shikoh, the heir apparent anointed by Shah Jahan and Jahanara Begum, the Imperial Princess, Her body was temporarily buried at Burhanpur in a walled pleasure garden known as Zainabad originally constructed by Shah Jahan's uncle

Daniyal on the bank of the Tapti River

The contemporary court chroniclers paid an unusual amount of attention to Mumtaz Mahal's death and Shah Jahan's grief at her demise. In the immediate aftermath of his bereavement, the emperor was reportedly inconsolable. Apparently after her death, Shah Jahan went into secluded mourning for a year. When he appeared again, his hair had turned white, his back was bent, and his face worn. Shah Jahan's eldest daughter, Jahanara Begum, gradually brought him out of grief and took the place of Mumtaz at court.

Her personal fortune (valued at 10,000,000 rupees) was divided by Shah Jahan between Jahanara Begum, who received half and the rest of her surviving children. Burhanpur was never intended by her husband as his wife's final resting spot. As a result, her body was disinterred in December 1631 and transported in a golden casket escorted by her son Shah Shuja and the head lady in waiting of the deceased Empress back to Agra. There it was interred in a small building on the banks of the Yamuna River. Shah Jahan stayed behind in Burhanpur to conclude the military campaign that had originally brought him to the region. While there, he began planning the design and construction of a suitable mausoleum and funerary garden in Agra for his wife. It was a task that would take more than 22 years to complete: the Taj Mahal.

After Shah Jahan's, his son Aurangzeb, who carried the title Alamgir, ascended the Peacock Throne. He was the last of the strong Mughal emperors and after his death in 1707, his son Bahadur Shah I reigned from 1707-1712.

Bahadur Shah I was able to keep the empire stable and relaxed religious policy, however after his death the empire was in inexorable decline.

The later Emperors were weak and the mughal empire declined

Jahandar Shah's reign was short-lived. His nephew Farrukhsiyar who entered Delhi in a procession on February 12, 1713 strangled him to death. Farrukhsiyar, in his turn, was assassinated in the Nakkar Khana of the Red Fort in 1718 by the Sayyid Brothers. After a quick succession of two rulers, whose reigns lasted for just a few months, Mohammad Shah, the grandson of Bahadur Shah I, took over as the new king. He was the last Mughal Emperor to sit on the Peacock Throne. People called him Mohammed Shah Rangeela (the Merry Monarch) because the only thing he cared for was merry-making! He loved wine, music and dancing-girls - three things that dominated his life.

His favorite pastimes were watching animal and bird fights, mimics, jokers, play actors, puppeteers, acrobats, and conjurers. As a result all these crafts were developed and patronized during his reign. The Bhagat Baz or play-actors performed plays based on epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Bahuropees (actors who dressed up as different characters) were patronized too, and so were the dancers, known as nats and natnis.

But Muhammad Shah Rangeela's reign is considered important for a special reason. It is because some important cultural developments took place during the

time. It was during his reign that Wali Deccani, said to be the first Urdu poet, came to Delhi with his collection of Urdu poetry. The new language was developed and recognized as never before and provided a new meeting ground for the Hindus and the Muslims. Rangeela was the Emperor who made Urdu a court language. From a mere dialect it was given the status of a full-fledged language. Khayal, a new style of classical singing, was also developed to perfection during this period. In fact it grew so popular that the old style of Dhrupad was virtually pushed aside. Both Qawwali and the dance form of kathak made great strides during this period. Nawab Salar Jung in his Muraqqa-i-Delhi mentions many famous musicians in the court of Rangeela Shah, such as Naimat Khan, a great veena player, and Feroz Khan. The Emperor gave them the titles of Sadarang and Adarang.

But every single thing Rangeela did was accompanied by bouts of drinking. During one such carousal, the Persians, led by Emperor Nadir Shah, invaded India. But the merry monarch was too busy to take the messenger's warning seriously. "Hanooz Dilli Door Ast" (it's a long way to Delhi) said he, pouring more and yet more wine from the goblet. By the time he really woke up to the seriousness of the situation it was too late. Nadir Shah and his men were already at the threshold of the seventh city of Delhi.

Among the known precious stones that Nadir Shah looted were the Akbar Shah diamond, Great Mogul diamond, Great Table diamond, Koh-i-Noor, Shah diamond, as well as the Samarian spinel and the Timur ruby. These stones were either part of the Peacock Throne or other thrones,

or were in possession of the Mughal emperors. The Akbar Shah was said to form one of the eyes of a peacock, as well as the Koh-i-Noor, The Shah diamond was described by Tavernier as being on the side of the throne. Many of these stones ended up becoming part of the Persian crown jewels or were taken later by the British colonialists.

When Nadir Shah was assassinated by his own officers on June 19, 1747, the throne disappeared, most probably being dismantled or destroyed for its valuables in the ensuing chaos. One of the unsubstantiated rumours claimed the throne was given to the Ottoman Sultan, however in reality this could be a minor throne produced in Persia and given as a gift. Persian emperor Fath-Ali Shah commissioned the Sun Throne to be constructed in the early 19th century for him. The Sun Throne has the shape of a platform just like the Peacock Throne. Some rumours claim that parts of the original Peacock Throne were used in its construction, however there is no evidence to that. Over time the Sun Throne in Tehran was erroneously referred to as the Peacock Throne, a term that was later appropriated initially by the West as a metonym for the Persian monarchy. No proofed parts of the original Peacock Throne survived. Only some of diamonds and precious stones that are attributed to it have survived and been re-worked.

A replacement throne was probably constructed after the Persian invasion for the Mughal emperor, which closely resembled the original. The throne was located on the eastern side of the Divan-i-Khas, towards the windows. This throne however was also lost, possibly during or after

the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the subsequent looting and the large-scale destruction of the Red Fort by the occupying British colonialists. The marble pedestal on which it rested in the Divan-i-Khas has survived and can still be seen in the Red Fort