

## Speech of Mr Ervad Homyar, Zoroastrian Priest

Good morning, thank you all very much for being here.

Today October 12 is a very significant and important day for all Zoroastrians in Hong Kong. Today is the birthday of this Zoroastrian visionary, the person who was the major donor of this great institution, the University of Hong Kong. This benevolent soul needs little or no introduction. His contributions to the community, society and the city of Hong Kong are unparalleled.

Sir Hormusjee Naorojee Mody was born on October 12, 1838 in the city of Mumbai in India. He was one of the most illustrious and respected members of the Zoroastrian community and was president of our community in Hong Kong in the 1890s.

The life of Sir H N Mody is best summed up by this plaque under his bronze bust: "A distinguished Parsi businessman, renowned philanthropist, and benefactor of Hong Kong for over fifty years."

It would take hours to talk about this man's greatness.

Without his funds the University of Hong Kong, which was Governor Lugard's pet project, would never have gotten off the ground because there would have been no building to house the University. Most people believed that Hong Kong was a business centre and a university would be superfluous but Sir Hormusjee was a dreamer and felt a university would be very useful.

On March 16, 1910, a grand ceremony was held to lay the foundation stone of the University of Hong Kong. Sir H N Mody, proudly wearing his Parsi Pagri (headgear), rose from his seat to give the main speech. He modestly explained his motives in making this benefaction, when he said, and I quote, "the idea of in some measure providing for others what I was myself denied."

Sir Hormusjee was able to see the ground-breaking ceremony, but unfortunately passed away before the building was completed.

A lot can be said about this noble soul's philanthropy. Sir Hormusjee N. Mody made a considerable fortune from his businesses, but he returned much of it to the land and people that made him successful. He was an extraordinary man who combined business acumen with genuine philanthropy. He was part of an affluent group that made contributions towards the development of Hong Kong in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sir Hormusjee believed in and professed the teachings of Zarathustra our prophet who taught "Life is incomplete when man lives for his own self, life is best lived when it is lived for others."

This great benevolent soul passed away in Hong Kong on June 16, 1911 at the age of 73. He is buried in our beautiful Parsi cemetery in Happy Valley and his tombstone bears a very meaningful inscription, which reads: "He made Hong Kong his home for 50 years during which period he did much for the benefit of the colony and finally founded the Hongkong University"

It is a very humbling experience to stand in front of his bust and I consider myself very fortunate to come and perform this solemn act every year on this day and seek his blessings on behalf of the Zoroastrian community in Hong Kong. I shall conduct a memorial ceremony for him at our prayer hall where members of our community will pay tribute to a man who lived his life in true philanthropic spirit of a Zoroastrian.

I shall now garland Sir H N Mody's bust, say a small prayer and pay tribute to this great man.

*"Ashounam vounghuish surao spentao fravshaiyo stomi zubemi ufemi yazamaide"*  
Ashem Vohu (1)

The prayer I just recited means "I praise/remember/invoke the good beneficent soul of this righteous person and sing his glory. We remember this great man who had a high degree of excellence, was fairest, courage giving, wisest and practiced the virtues of good deeds to the highest degree."

Thank you everybody once again for being here.