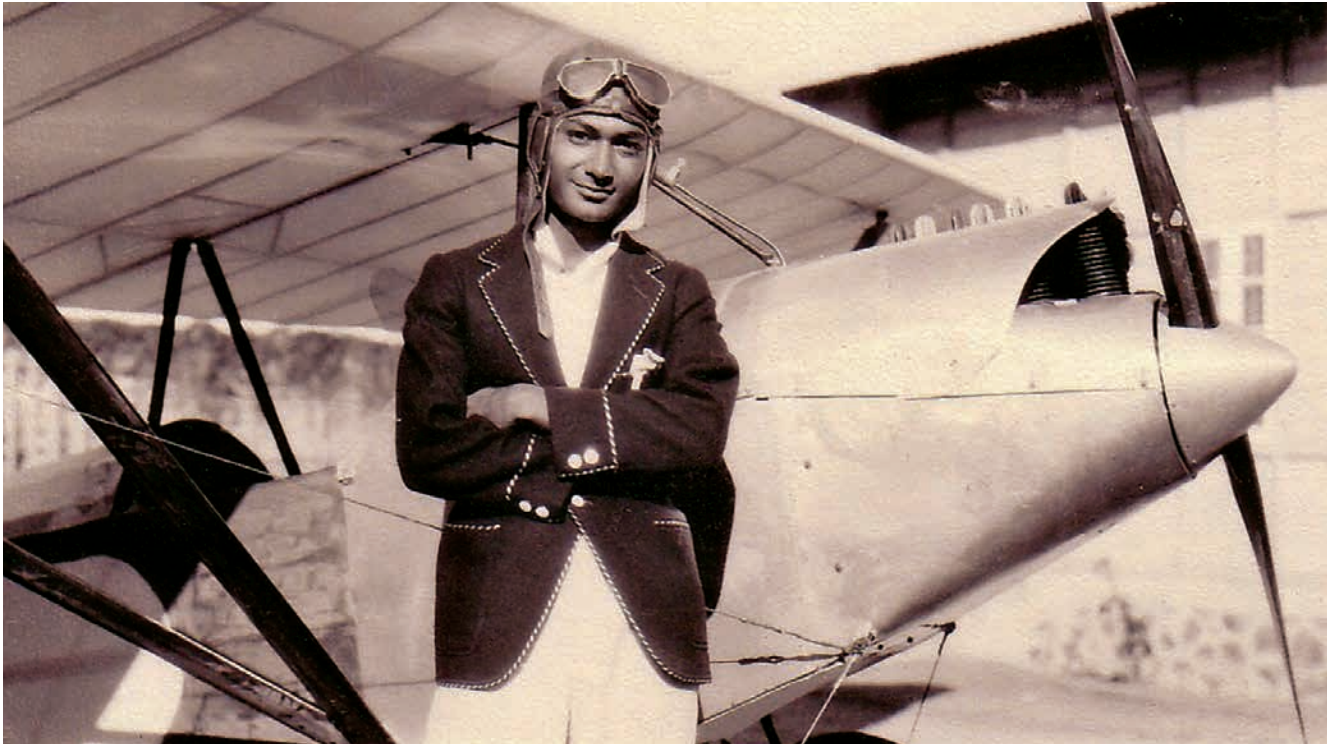


India's Aviation Pioneer

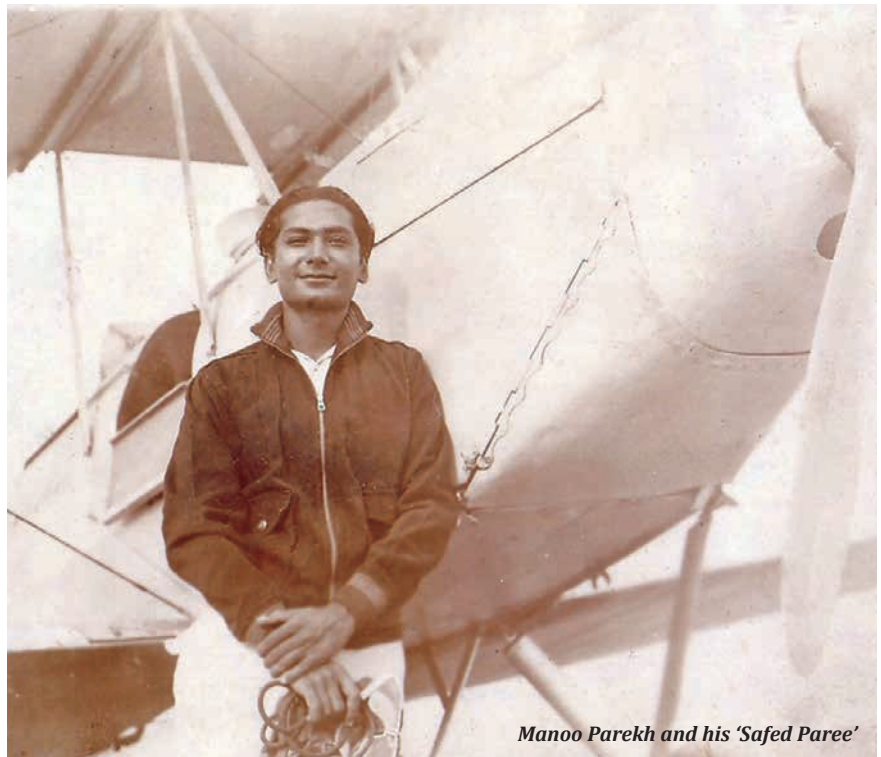
Manoo Parekh (1911–1983)



It's hard to believe that Manoo Parekh, born in 1911, a jeweller's son from Jamnagar in Gujarat, gave up his family business to get into aviation as early as in 1931, even before the Indian Air Force was established.

Having a scientific bent of mind, he first invented a peanut shelling machine in 1929 for which he was given a Gold Medal but his passion was in aeroplanes. He purchased magazines like *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* from where he imbibed plans to build an actual aircraft! He started off by collecting bicycle wheels, pipes, wires and fabric but later had to import the engine and propeller from the UK.

Having then constructed an aeroplane, at a total cost of some Rs 5000, he didn't know how to fly it! He requested many trained pilots to flight test his aeroplane but they were apprehensive about of this homemade airplane which he called *Safed Paree* ('White Angel'). Yet, Manoo didn't give up. Finally a British pilot, after a complete check, agreed to test fly it, which

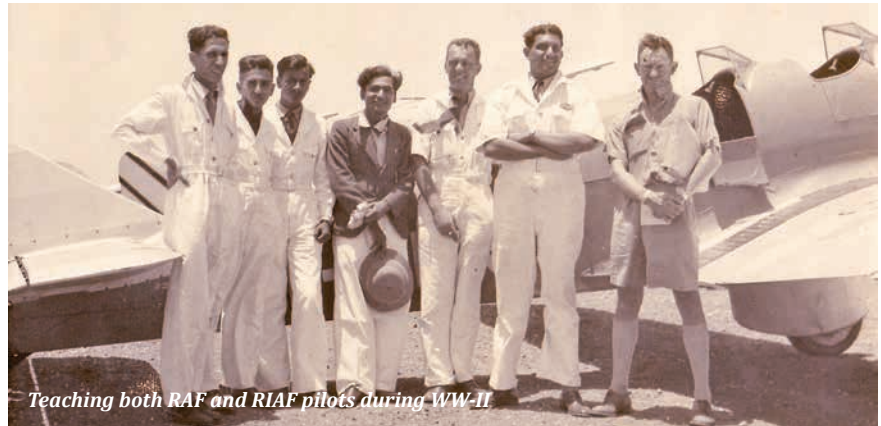


Manoo Parekh and his 'Safed Paree'

he did and later exclaimed that it was “a very gentle baby to fly”!

During those days in India, there was no certification authority and so Manoo's pilot's license was given by the British. Manoo's father Uttamchand then sent him to the Karachi Aero Club for continuing his flying training, and this was where he met the legendary JRD Tata and earned his 'B' licence.

All this while, even as he was carrying out flying, he remained a *Gandhivadi*, following the nationalist leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Manoo had a Bell & Howell 16mm camera with which he continuously recorded many historical events over the years 1928 to 1932 which involved India's freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi, Sarhadhi Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Saudamini Deshmukh, all of them



Teaching both RAF and RIAF pilots during WW-II

were recorded for posterity in his films. Major events covered by him included were the Salt Satyagrah, a procession of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the Indian National Congress meeting at Karachi in 1928.

Another interesting event was when he was flying reels of India's first motion picture 'Sayandhri' from Karachi to Bombay. Owing to a technical fault, he and his copilot Gadgil force-landed at an open field near Vasavad in Gujarat. After carrying out repairs, they started the engine but the loud sound obviously greatly annoyed a nearby bull which then charged the aeroplane and severely damaged it. The angry bull tossed the aeroplane into the river and after its recovery, it was unceremoniously recovered from the river tied on a bullock cart! For posterity it must be recorded that the aircraft was registered as VT-ADU.

The Jamsaheb of Jamnagar, supported by his brother Himmat Singh were impressed by Manoo Bhai whom they sponsored to the UK for receiving a commercial pilot license. They were not only royalty but accomplished cricketers, playing in the Ranji and Duleep Trophies. Aviator Manoo would often fly them from Jamnagar to Karachi from where



Bullock power "rescuing" Manoo's aeroplane from the river



A dapper Manoo Parekh with his aeroplane

they would take an international flight to England to play test cricket.

Aviator Manoobhai continued his aviation career which included flying for the King of Malaya. Then came World War II, during which time he imparted flying training to both RAF and IAF pilots. Even though he was a professed Gandhian, the British never arrested him possibly as he was very useful for the defence of India during the War. Did he therefore miss being given the *Freedom Fighter* status since the British never jailed him?

During the turbulent months preceding partition of India in 1947, the Jamsaheb of Jamnagar asked Manoobhai to create an independent *Kathiwari Air Force* but he refused and Sardar Patel requested him not to do any such thing but “Go for One India”. He also flew refugees from Multan in Pakistan to India without any charge.

In 1955, even though he had lost his flying licence owing to poor eyesight, continued to retain his hanger No.10A at Juhu Airport in Bombay. In 1962, he applied for an IOC petrol pump in lieu

of his hanger which was opposite the Esso multinational oil company. Of the 427 applications submitted, he got the petrol pump on a prized half acre plot in 1962. Later, his son Jitoo was to open the very first CNG dispensing unit in Bombay in March 1993 which was a huge success, the CNG gas at that time being disbursed at Rs. 9.71 per kilo.

Manoobhai Uttamchand Parekh passed away in February 1983, an unknown aviation hero as the Gujarati's of Bombay and Jamnagar had forgotten him and his pioneering aviation activities which went into oblivion. Till now that is! 🛩️



Article and images from Jitoo Parekh, son of Manoo Parekh B.FA (Cinema), Concordia, Canada



Celebrating 100 years of flying in India, on 16 December 2003 Manoo's photo was proudly displayed at the Nehru Science Centre in Worli, Mumbai.

Clippings from the past



A FORCED LANDING.—The pilot of this aeroplane, Messrs. N. G. Gadgil and M. V. Parekh, had some racing adventures, while flying near Vauxhall. They first had to make a forced landing owing to a defect in the engine, and then a second one, as a bull charged the machine, and did considerable damage. The plane was carrying the film "Sairandhree" to Bombay.—Photo, M. L. P.

LATE NEWS SUPPLEMENT, October 22, 1938.

Tribute to Nawab of Patnaud
Bradman, Silli a Power
Prince Doleep Shahji Interviewed

KARACHI, Wednesday.—Bradman and Silli are considered the best batsmen of the world, and the Nawab of Patnaud is a great admirer of the two. He has written a book on the subject, and is now in Karachi for an interview with the Nawab of Patnaud. The Nawab is a great admirer of the two batsmen, and is now in Karachi for an interview with the Nawab of Patnaud. The Nawab is a great admirer of the two batsmen, and is now in Karachi for an interview with the Nawab of Patnaud.

PLANE CARRYING FILM FORCED TO LAND

Information has been received by the Bombay Flying Club that a Moth plane of the Karachi Flying Club, which left on Friday afternoon for Bombay, carrying the first Indian multi-coloured talkie "Sairandhree" has had a forced landing at Gondal, Kathiawar, as the machine suddenly went out of order.

It appears that Messrs. N. G. Gadgil and M. U. Parekh, who piloted the plane thought it advisable to land at that place as it was risky to proceed further.

On receipt of information, Mr. A. C. Patel of Messrs. Patel Brothers flew to Gondal on Saturday and returned to Bombay with the film on Sunday morning. The talkie belongs to the Famous Pictures Company, Bombay.

The Moth plane will leave for Karachi shortly.

(Earlier news on page 22.)

INDIAN AVIATORS AT JUBBULPORE

JUBBULPORE, Feb. 15.

Messrs. M. V. Parekh and C. B. Bess, two Indian aviators, working with the Laxmi Flying Club of Karachi, arrived here yesterday afternoon in their two-seater Moth plane V T A A Y, after covering nearly 1,500 miles in 17 hours, and landed at the aerodrome at Khamaria, about 7 miles out from here.

The young men were practically stranded, but Mr. D Costa of the C P police motored down, and took them over to the bungalow of Mr. Mahadeo Singh.

A large number of people proceeded to the aerodrome, and partook of free joy rides. These enterprising young lads are the first Indians to pilot a plane out here.

Aged 9 and 21 respectively, they left Karachi at 7-30 a.m. on the 7th, and arrived Bombay at 5 p.m. leaving Bombay on February 10, at 9 a.m. they reached Khandwa at 2 p.m. and left at 8-30 a.m. on February 12 arriving here at 12-15 noon.—United Press.

KARACHI-JAMNAGAR FLIGHT

Gujarati Aviator's Aerial Trip

KARACHI, Wednesday.—A Karachi aviator's excursion in the course of his training to Jamnagar in an aeroplane throws an interesting light on the possibilities of development of commercial aviation between Karachi and Cutch and Kathiawar.

The aviator is Mr. M. V. Parekh, at present a pupil of the Karachi Aero Club who, the *Star Observer* understands, had a successful aerial trip to and from Jamnagar during the week-end.

He left Karachi at noon on Saturday and reached Jamnagar at about 6 in the evening. In between, he halted at a place in Cutch and had a stay there for about an hour and a half.

He returned to Karachi the next day.

In his trip, Mr. Parekh was accompanied by another local aviator, Mr. Gadgil.

The distance between Karachi and Jamnagar is about 260 miles and the actual time taken by the Karachi Aero Club's machine in which the trip was made, was three hours and forty five minutes.

The time required to reach Cutch would be two hours at the outside.

Ordinarily by railway route, it takes about three days to travel between Karachi and Cutch. Travel by aeroplanes would reduce this time to less than an hour.

The time required to reach Jamnagar from Karachi is not less than 60 hours. By aeroplanes one can reach there in three or four hours.



IS BRIGHTEST STAR IN TERRA FIRMAMENT

First air mail between Bombay and Kathiawar was met on arrival at Jamnagar Aerodrome by Mr. M. U. Parekh in Hillman '14'. Mr. Parekh is Manager of Coronation Motors, progressive Distributors for Kathiawar; himself qualified pilot, has logged over 700 solo flying hours in own D.H. Moth.

Die erste Luftpost zwischen Bombay und Kathiawar wurde bei Ankunft auf dem Flugfeld von Jamnagar durch Herrn M. U. Parekh in einem Hillman '14' empfangen. Herr Parekh ist Leiter der Firma Coronation Motors, die fortschrittlichen Vertriebsunternehmer für Kathiawar. Er ist selbst qualifizierter Flieger und hat mehr denn 700 Solo-Flugstunden in seinem eigenen D.H. Moth zu seinen Gunsten.

El primer Correo Aéreo entre Bombay y Kathiawar fué acogido a su llegada al aeródromo de Jamnagar por el Sr. Don M. U. Parekh en un auto Hillman '14'. El Sr. Parekh es Gerente de la casa Coronation Motors, Concesionarios progresivos para Kathiawar; él mismo es piloto competente y ha registrado más de 700 horas de vuelo solo en su propio D. H. Moth.



An Indian Aeroplane-BUILDER.

Mr. M. V. Parekh of Jamnagar, Kathiawar, who has constructed an aeroplane with a flying capacity of 90 miles per hour. All the parts were constructed here, with the exception of the engine and the propeller which are of American make.

સૌરાષ્ટ્રના એક એવો પુરુષ. મહત્વના અભિવ્યક્તિ આ રીતે વહી શકે છે. તેની ક્ષમતા ૯૦ માઈલ પ્રતિ કલાક છે. આ રીતે બનેલાં ભાગોમાં એન્જિન અને પ્રોપેલર અમેરિકાના છે. બીજાં ભાગો સૌરાષ્ટ્રમાં જ બનેલાં છે.

