

THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE - 2012

By Shanta Acharya

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Born on 21 April 1926, married on 20 November 1947, Princess Elizabeth was a beautiful young mother of two when her life changed. She and her husband, Prince Philip, were on holiday in Kenya; they spent the night in the Tree Tops Safari Lodge unaware that her father, King George VI, had died in his sleep. They were on vacation in a beautiful hunting lodge when the news finally reached them.

The Queen, Her Majesty Elizabeth II, inherited the throne on 6 February 1952; her coronation took place on 2 June 1953. She celebrated her Silver Jubilee (25 years) in 1977 and her Golden Jubilee (50 years) in 2002.

On her accession to the throne in 1952, she became Head of the Commonwealth and Queen of seven independent Commonwealth countries: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan, and Ceylon. The number of her realms has varied as territories gained independence and some realms became republics. Today, the Queen is Head of State of the UK and 15 other Commonwealth realms—Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas, Grenada, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Belize, Antigua and Barbuda, and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Her reign of 60 years is the second longest for a British monarch; only Queen Victoria's reign was longer at 63 years. This is the second Diamond Jubilee in the history of this country—after Queen Victoria's in 1897. George III reigned for 59 years, James I of England 58 years, Henry III 56 years and Edward III 50 years.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations began on Saturday, 2 June 2012, with the 41-gun salute in London. She attended the Epsom Derby. If not a horse whisperer, the Queen is a horse lover and owns several racing horses, though none of them has won in the Epsom Derby races.

The celebrations began in earnest on Sunday, 3 June, when a flotilla of barges, gondolas, tugs, steamers, yachts, pleasure cruisers, dragon boats, kayaks and other ceremonial boats took to the river. More than a thousand vessels travelled along the Thames from Battersea Bridge to the Tower Bridge. The Thames is about 250 miles long, but it is the bit which flows through London that has been the backdrop of many a royal occasion representing power, wealth, prestige and pageantry.

The inspiration for the Thames Pageant was a painting by Canaletto depicting the Thames on Lord Mayor's Day. It is a stunning piece of work that hangs in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. And the Thames Pageant did indeed resemble Canal-

etto's paintings of festivals in Venice and on the Thames. I wonder which artist of today will capture this Jubilee event for posterity. There were various artists, mostly unknown, on the Millennium Bridge, the one connecting St Paul's and the Tate Modern. But then the one that captures the spirit of the celebrations will certainly become famous.

An estimated 1.2 million people lined up along the banks of the river, on balconies of houses, on every building along the Thames, on the bridges—fourteen between start and finish—to commemorate the occasion. Twenty thousand people took part in the event. It was a memorably English kind of



The Queen on board the royal barge Spirit of Chartwell

day—cloudy with steely grey skies to start with, and then it began to rain leaving the pageant resembling a modern impressionistic painting. It could have been worse, thunder and lightning with gale force winds. On balance, it was not a bad day though the rich colours of the Spirit of Chartwell, the barge the Royal entourage was on, did not shine and sparkle in the sun as Cleopatra's burnished barge may have done as she floated down the Nile to meet Julius Caesar.

Perhaps, the weather struck the right note as the people's Queen was being felicitated for six decades of selfless service to the nation. The Royal barge was brilliantly adorned in red, gold and purple (red and gold being the colours of the State Livery), with rich floral decorations and garlands, even a large

proportion of the 10,000 flowers used were red. These flowers were from the Queen's gardens. The barge sported an ornate, gilded prow sculpture featuring Old Father Thames, a pair of scaly, sharp-toothed classical dolphins—a symbol of the Thames—and the royal cipher at the centre.

The royal family members boarded the Spirit of Chartwell which was moored at Cadogan pier. Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge, wearing a bright red dress and matching hat, and William, the Duke of Cambridge, were received by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of London, Lord Bilimoria,

Half way through the pageant, the rain got worse. It got so misty that the impressive pyramid-shaped glass building, The Shard—loomed like a ghost in the background. Over the past decade or so, the London skyline has changed completely—several extraordinary buildings now give London a modern, cosmopolitan, international atmosphere that is unrivalled perhaps anywhere else in the world—the old and the new jostling amicably for the viewer's attention. London remains among the world's finest cities.

By around 5pm, 419 boats had reached Tower Bridge—setting a new world record for the number of boats taking part in a parade. The event surpassed the previous record of 327 boats in Bremerhaven, Germany, last year. As the rain poured, an oversized pink hat on one of the boats in the flotilla came in rather handy for some to shelter from the weather. Perhaps, the weather was blessing the celebrations in its own inimitable manner.

The British are still very good at working against the odds. A group of singers of the London Philharmonic Orchestra sang *Land of Hope and Glory* with much gumption and dedication defying the rain. If you closed your eyes and heard them sing, you would think you were in some concert arena. The LPO even played *Singing in the Rain*. There could have been more music royal barge, or the LPO barge could have moved alongside the royal one. Before the closing ceremony with the national anthem—*God Save the Queen*—the LPO played a jig that set everyone moving in rhythm, including the royals.

The Thames Pageant, broadcast live on the BBC, ended at 6pm. The broadcast began at 1.30pm but really started after the Queen boarded around 3pm. It is a pity that during this time the BBC did not take the opportunity of reporting in greater detail the history and background of many small boats, some manned by disabled civilians and wounded soldiers, participating in the pageant. One barely had a catnap, when another pageant started at 6.30pm in the grounds of Windsor Castle. For a moment, I could not figure out how the Queen managed to go from Tower Bridge to Windsor Castle,

The Ursula Catherine Belfry Barge carrying The Royal Jubilee Bells was the

first vessel to sail through followed by the £1million barge, *Gloriana*, led by Olympic gold medalists, Sir Matthew Pinsent and Sir Steve Redgrave, rowing with sixteen others. A 41-gun salute was fired from the Tower of London to celebrate 60 years of the Queen's reign. As the royal barge approached Tower Bridge, the bascules of the bridge opened up saluting the Queen as she sailed through and moored at the HMS President where the Royal Family remained to watch the seven mile-long flotilla making its way down the Thames.

While I would have loved to have seen the spectacular fireworks live at the end of the concert, I am not sure I would have survived the whole extravaganza in the open even though the weather gods were kinder on Monday, and the stage, the Palace and The Mall looked brilliant against the sunset. As it got darker, the images of London that flashed across the TV screen were simply breathtaking though the temperature dropped suddenly. It was cold enough inside.

The concert was pretty hot featuring Alfie Boe, Shirley Bassey, Renée Fleming, Jools Holland, Jessie J, JLS, Elton John, Grace Jones (she kept a hula-hoop swinging around her waist as she sang) Tom Jones, Lang Lang, Annie Lennox, Madness (the group sang *Our House* from the roof of Buckingham Palace while electronic images of Britain's streets were superimposed on the Palace, quite surreal really!), Paul McCartney, Kylie Minogue, Ed Sheeran, Robbie Williams and Stevie Wonder (who sang *Isn't She Lovely?* and *Happy Birthday*) supported by the BBC Concert Orchestra. The Queen arrived just after Tom Jones' performance around 9 pm. This musical pageant, for which tickets were free but allocated by a secret ballot, ended with Prince Charles thanking everybody, including the Queen, for making it all happen. Then the Queen lighted the National Beacon, the last in a network of over 4,200 lamps across the UK and the Commonwealth to celebrate the Jubilee. The first was lit in New Zealand.

Unfortunately, Prince Philip was taken ill with a bladder infection. He had to be taken to Edward VIII Hospital as a precautionary measure. Bladder infections can be frightfully painful, he needed an intravenous antibiotic injection to alleviate the pain and deal with the infection. Bladder infections are not age related—though it may have been aggravated by his age. It is worth the mention that Prince Philip and the Queen both stood throughout the entire length of the pageant. Both the Duke and the Queen are indefatigable, a quality reflected in their

change into a new set of clothes and appear at the 'All the Queen's Horses: A Diamond Jubilee' special event within such a short time and looking so calm. Then it dawned on me even the amazing Queen could not achieve such a feat. This event, recorded earlier, was impressive, it including performances by various groups from the Commonwealth.

On Monday, 4 June, the highlight was the Concert—with a host of musicians and singers from the rock, pop and classical worlds presenting on the same stage—outside Buckingham Palace. The arena was the size of seven Royal Festival Halls arranged in a semi-circle. The stage had an orchestra, and enough space for all the performers and presenters. The band of the Scots Guard started off the event, which was the brain child of Gary Barlow and Lord Lloyd-Webber. They presented singers from all over the Commonwealth though I cannot recall anyone from India. Raghu Dixit sang at the Windsor Castle pageant.

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There was also a rather moving tribute on TV from the Prince of Wales to his 'mummy'. What Prince Charles had done was retrieved footage of films, mostly taken by his father and other family members, creating a story of the life of the Queen. She was not only a mother of four, but served as her country's ambassador travelling all over the world, keeping in touch with the 54 countries that are the Commonwealth. The Prince highlighted her achievement in Ireland with her visit in 2011 laying to rest past hostilities,



The flotilla makes it way past Tower Bridge

hoping to build a future based on trust. The death of Lord Mountbatten, Prince Philip's uncle, assassinated by the IRA was a deep loss for Charles. Even after all these years, one could see the forlorn look on his face as he watched the funeral. But there was one comment he made about the Queen that

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with tiny star-shaped flowers, arrived at St Paul's for the service and the crowds chanted 'God save the Queen'. The Queen wore a matching hat and a 'chunni', yes it looked very much like a chiffon 'chunni', which was pinned in place by a big diamond brooch on her left, and elegantly aligned at the back. It did not fly about or fall off her shoulders, just looked perfect.

After the Lord's Prayer, hymns and sermons were read by David Cameron, the Queen's 12th Prime Minister, as well as by the Most Rev Dr Rowan Williams, the Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, Kamlesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, along with others. The Queen's sense of duty and life long dedication to her country was duly noted. Following the service at St Paul's, she attended a reception at Mansion House—the official residence of the Lord

George VI.

He had already heard President Obama's message to the Queen. He referred to her as 'a steadfast ally, loyal friend and tireless leader.' I presume every other head of state also sent the Queen a message. To have done any job for 60 years is worth celebrating, to have been the constitutional monarch of the UK and 15 sovereign states is no mean feat. In a fast-changing world, she has brought stability and continuity to matters of state.

She is the only living Head of State in the world who has seen and known intimately so many other heads of state, prime ministers, and religious leaders and watched over not just the fate of her own nation but that of several others. She is an invaluable repository of knowledge, an asset to the world. President Obama pointed out that she has been 'a loyal witness' to the unique alliance between his country and the UK 'and the chief source of its resilience'. That can be said of the Queen with regard to many other countries. And the love she continues to inspire among her subjects was perhaps best captured in a flag on The Mall on Tuesday. It said 'Elizabeth—The Great: She is a Diamond'. That said it all.

Shanta Acharya was educated at Oxford; she was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard. www.shantaacharya.com

Prince Charles and Camilla accompanied the Queen in one carriage while the Duke

and Duchess of Cambridge and Harry went in the other. They were led along The Mall by soldiers from the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment, and the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, fired a 60-gun salute. The day culminated with an appearance by the Queen, Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall, Princes William, the Duchess of Cambridge and Harry—a rather slimmed down monarchy—on the famous balcony for the flypast.

The flypast with 18 aircraft including World War II aircraft—spitfires, hurricanes, Lancaster and the Red Arrows—zooming over the Palace with white, red and blue colours streaming across the sky lighted up the Queen's face as she smiled. She smiled a lot during the Thames Pageant and at the Horses pageant. I did not notice as many smiles during the concert—except when Charles thanked her 'Majesty' and then 'mummy' for her extraordinary reign. After the flypast, the Irish Guards gave the Last Salute with three cheers to her Majesty. There were lots of three cheers during the Jubilee.

The British are terribly good at pageantry—so were the Maharajas in India. Just when you thought things had come to an end, the Queen appeared on TV and radio to thank the nation and everyone who made the Jubilee a success. It was a two minute message; you would have missed it if you went off to make tea. She was wearing a blue dress with her memorable three-string pearl necklace that she wore through the celebrations. In fact, she wore a three-string pearl necklace on the plane when she flew back from Kenya after hearing of the death of her father, King George VI.

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