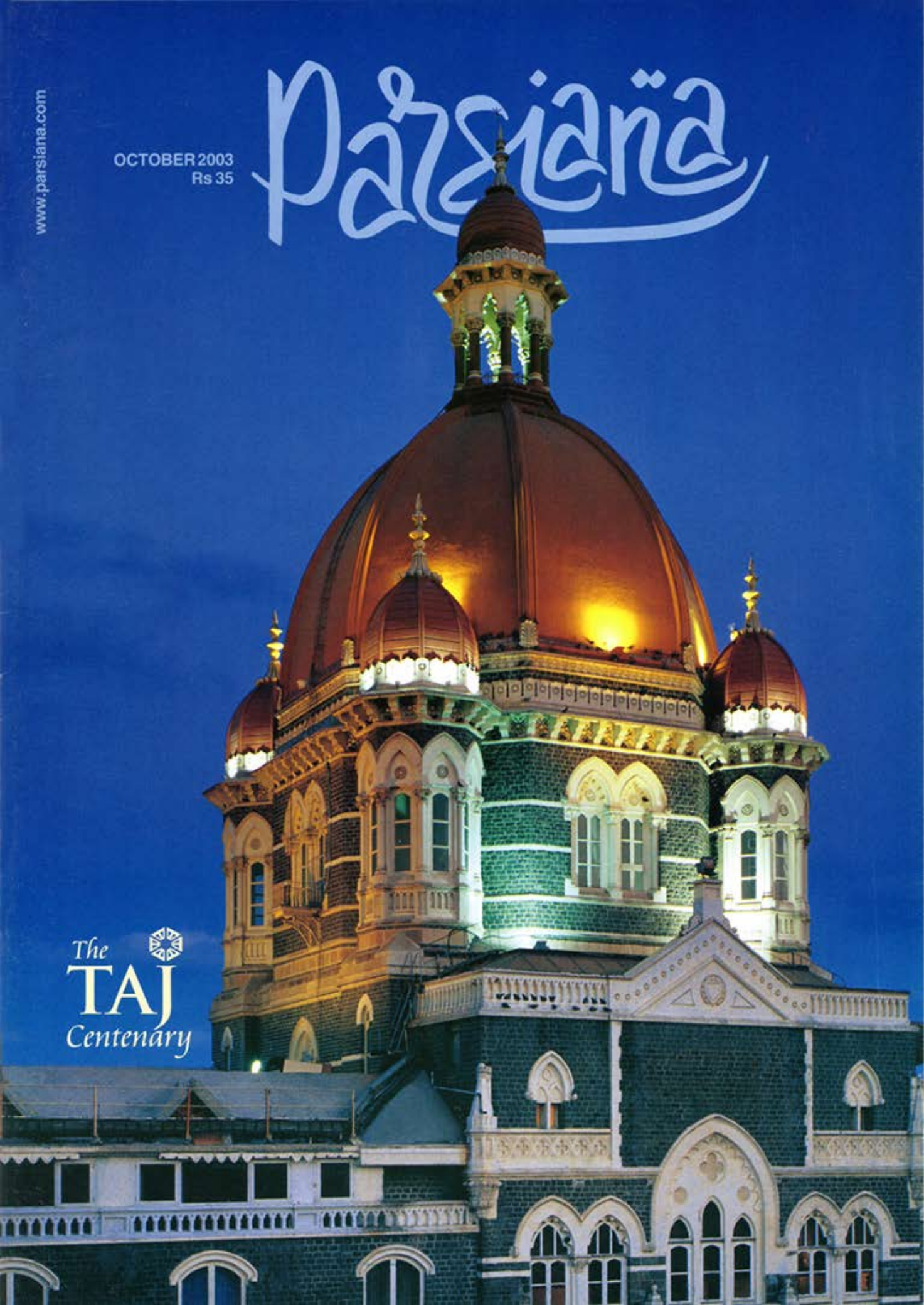


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MANAGING EDITOR Arnavaz S. Mama
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Parinaz M. Gandhi
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Photo courtesy: The Taj

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The rise of Zoroastrian fundamentalism?

The incipient rise of Zoroastrian fundamentalism in the last quarter century can be traced to the 1981 Anjuman Committee elections. The orthodox elements in the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) under the chairmanship of the late B. K. Boman-Behram denied Parsi women married to non-Parsis the right to register as voters on the electoral roles of the BPP.

The Bombay High Court upheld the women's right to register. Nine years later when a young Parsi woman married to a Hindu tragically died in a car accident and her family in accordance with her wishes had wanted her body consigned to the Towers of Silence, the then chairman of the BPP Dr Aspi Golwalla, in consultation with some other trustees, denied the family the permission to do so. Subsequently the Punchayet conceded that Parsi women married to non-Parsis who continued to practise the Zoroastrian faith could be consigned to the Tower.

But members of the orthodox camp pressured the High Priest Dastur (Dr) Firoze Kotwal to issue a declaration terming interfaith marriages as 'adulterous' and the children of such unions 'illegitimate.' Though there was an outcry deriding Kotwal's remarks, his views were echoed by a younger priest in Nagpur two years ago. Addressing a gathering at the Nagpur Parsi Gymkhana function, the speaker again termed such offspring illegitimate though he used a nastier term.

But the real test for the orthodox came when the BPP trustees, bowing to the pressure of notable Parsis who complained about the unhygienic condition at Doongerwadi due to the non-existence of vultures, granted permission for a bungli to be built on the Doongerwadi grounds for funeral rites of those opting for an alternative mode of disposal.

The orthodox camp backed by the High Priests coerced the Punchayet to put the decision on hold. It was only the introduction and subsequent success of the solar concentrators that has put the issue of disposal on the back burner, so to say.

Flushed with their victory over their opponents, the orthodox camp then

decided to focus on the rising interfaith marriage phenomenon in the community. One in three marriages are outside the faith. They coaxed the High Priests into issuing their infamous resolutions to derecognize Parsis married outside the faith and their progeny.

Here the orthodox camp clearly overstepped their bounds and the public outcry both from within and without the community was so virulent that three of the six High Priests retracted a portion of their statements, thus reverting to the status quo.

For some time the orthodox camp laid low. When the reelection of Minoo Shroff was due, they didn't put up a candidate to oppose him. Shroff wasn't viewed as a thorn in their side.

But BPP trustee Dinshaw Tamboly was another matter. A man universally respected for his charitable work; a person who has rendered and continues to render assistance to countless men, women and children, not to mention institutions and trusts, appeared the least likely to incur anybody's wrath.

Though his views may be more liberal than others', they are not very different from several other trustees who have sought reelection and won.

Tamboly's World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) connection was harped on as the body accepts non-Parsi spouses as members as well as the progeny of such unions. Yet BPP trustee Dadi Engineer, a senior office bearer of the WZO was elected unopposed over a year ago.

Then what is it? Tamboly was one of the prime supporters of the solar concentrators. He was also opposed to the implementation of the aviary project to breed vultures proposed by orthodox scholar Khojeste Mistree and his supporters. Tamboly stated that the aviary project was financially unviable and would divert much needed community funds from other deserving causes. Though the Punchayet stood by its commitment to proceed with the aviary project, funds forthcoming, in hindsight Tamboly's opposition proved prophetic. Ornithologist Jemima Parry-Jones, who specializes in the breeding of birds of

prey, noted vultures were dying of Diclofenac poisoning, a common drug consumed by humans and livestock. She advised against proceeding with the project to breed the vultures at Doongerwadi. Jones was introduced to the Punchayet by Mistree so her antecedents are beyond doubt.

The idea of solar concentrators was mooted and pursued by Dr Homi Dhalla, a firebrand orthodox leader of the early 1970s. No one could term him a reformist or a liberal. Yet his orthodoxy was questioned by speakers and a section of the audience at the Samast Anjuman Meeting at Rustom Baug called by the BPP to acquaint the issue of disposal. When it came to a divergence of views the orthodox elements even blindly turned on their own. By examining the problem dispassionately, Dhalla was able to evolve a solution that is now being used all over the country by anjuman and may one day be used by members of other faiths who wish to conserve wood and electricity.

But despite the orthodox genesis of the solar panels, the opposition venom was directed at Tamboly. First orthodox spokesman Noshir Dadrawala chose to oppose him. Dadrawala who once edited the WZO journal, *Hamazor*, was miffed with Tamboly for supporting the Punchayet's decision to hand over land for building a bungli for those opting for cremation or burial. Strangely enough Dadrawala chose *The Bombay Samachar* to announce his candidature rather than the *Jam-e-Jamshed* to which he was and is a regular correspondent. The *Samachar's* 'Parsi tari arsi' column is edited by noted solicitor Berjis Desai whose father, Minoo was once the Gujarati daily's editor. A member of the CER (formerly the Committee for Electoral Rights and subsequently the Committee for Economic Revival) and honorary secretary of the Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians, Berjis would logically have been the last choice as a confidante for a member of the orthodox camp. But Dadrawala had fallen out with the *Jam-e-Jamshed* editor Rusi Dhondy and hence the preference for the *Samachar*.



In Memoriam
Mr Fali Meherji Variava
(Late) Director

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Dadrawala had also helped edit the CER newsletter many years ago.

But when Dadrawala realized that Parsi politics is vicious and unrelenting, he stepped out of the fray and in his stead came Yazdi Desai.

A relatively unknown person in community circles, Desai represented the fundamentalist state of mind. Unlike the High Priests and Dadrawala, Desai had made no notable publicized contribution to the community except some e-mails two years ago denigrating the then BPP trustee aspirant Maneck Engineer and his employers, the house of Godrej. One of Desai's well-wishers was former BPP trustee Rustom Tirandaz whose relations in the Punchayet with Tamboly were strained. The Tirandaz camp were sore at Tamboly for not supporting Tirandaz's reelection bid. Both Tamboly and Tirandaz reside in the Mancherji Joshi Colony at Dadar and are prominent social workers.

The fundamentalist camp knew they had no chance of winning so they used the opportunity to mudsling at every individual or institution they viewed as liberal. Desai and his supporters took on all comers. They threatened to have the *Jamé* closed down,

demanded Tamboly provide proof of his disbursement of charitable funds under the Evidence Act, sent a legal notice to *Jamé* columnist Ruby Lilaowala...

Desai also moved the charity commissioner's office to delay the election, thus causing considerable uncertainty and inconvenience to voters and the Punchayet administration. Not that more time would have resulted in a victory for him. The object was to obstruct and delay the inevitable.

Thus the orthodoxy of Desai and his supporters indicates a new and disturbing trend in Parsi politics. The voters of course whole heartedly endorsed Tamboly. The community by and large votes for middle of the road candidates, not extremists.

Trusteeship is an honorary office. There are no perks, no house, salary, car, conveyance and often — no respect. The community is exceedingly fortunate that so many good people come forward to serve unselfishly. Then why malign them personally?

If the orthodox wish to shake off the image of 'a lunatic fringe' as their detractors term them, they have to move to the midstream. The Labour Party in Britain was once written off as the 'Loony

Left.' When it forsook its archaic socialist policies, Labour came to power.

The extreme orthodox group's agenda has normally been a negative one. Oppose all change and attack those who propose it. The building up and strengthening of community institutions is ignored. Even some of the orthodox institutions are in disarray, unable to enunciate a clear-cut action plan. The orthodox have not been able to even sustain a publication espousing their point of view. They have no publicly announced agenda for reforming moribund institutions.

But of late they are trying to enter the main stream. The formation of the Traditional Zarathushtrian Trust, the resurgence of *The Parsee Voice*, the candidature of both Dadrawala and Desai, are all indicative of a trend to work within the system. To that extent their efforts are positive and need to be encouraged. After all they are as much a part and parcel of the community as the non-Parsi spouses and the children of interfaith marriages whom they consider outcasts.

We are too minuscule a community to keep anyone out. Everyone has to be made welcome. That is the key to survival.

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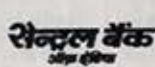
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Readers' views are welcome on any subject of interest to the community and should be sent to the Editor, Readers' Forum, Parsiana, G.P.O. Box 892, Bombay 400001. Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity. Unsigned letters or those without an address will not be published.

"Aimai's Star"

This is regarding S. J. Irani's recollection of the Star Bakery and its owner Aimai Ghamat ("Aimai's Star," Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, August 2003). Nobody who lived in the Dadar-Matunga area can forget the fresh bread, biscuits and pastries of the Star Bakery shop which was located close to Khodadad Circle. I can proudly say that I grew up from infancy on Star Bakery bread and white butter. Two large loaves of bread and a packet of fresh white butter would be left by their delivery man very early in the morning. We had a separate entrance at the backside of the two-storied building where we used to hang a wire mesh basket in which the delivery man would leave the items on a daily basis. Their delivery man would come pushing a metal box cart and would lock the doors of the cart while making deliveries lest someone take away the goods during the period he left the cart unattended.

On special occasions my father and I would go directly to the Bakery shop and purchase *khari* biscuit, *nan-khatai* and wine cakes. The success of Star Bakery and the heavy demand for its products led to another enterprise, the Mahavir Bakery, being opened next to it. In addition to bakery products this bakery sold popular items like potato wafers, *sev-gathia*, *chevda*, *patrail*, etc. This resulted in pulling some customers away from the Star Bakery which later closed down. Many Parsi-owned businesses disappeared from the Khodadad Circle area because the next generation did not see themselves as shopkeepers.

ARDESHIR B. DAMANIA
Davis, California

"A soldier called Sam"

Sam Manekshaw — India's first field marshal/A nonagenarian now and doing his community proud/Most ably conducting himself in all he does.

My salutes to a man who has served the country/And also served the community in a way/Nothing that he has done so far has/Evidently created a stir or even a whimper/Kindness personified, this gentle giant of a personality/Seeks no publicity and lives a simple quiet life./Humility being his "middle" name, he is/Amiable by nature but of stern disposition./We say "Long live Manekshaw" — go on to a ton. ADI M. TARMASER

Your August 2003 cover story prompted me to write a short piece on the army career of my late uncle Brig Jamshed Dadabhoi Nadirshaw (Jimmy to everyone) who passed away peacefully at the age of 88 at his home in Poona on September 13, 2002. He joined the British Indian Army as a junior officer shortly after graduating from college. His entire army career was spent in the thick of action.

During World War II, the British Indian Army fought alongside allied forces in many theaters and as a young officer, Jimmy served with distinction in Burma and North Africa.

After Independence, in 1948, by then a seasoned, battle-hardened lieutenant colonel, Jimmy was given

the responsibility of creating the 6th Battalion/8th Gurkha Rifles from the personnel of two other battalions. He raised the 6th/8th Gurkha Rifles on February 4, 1948 in Clement Town, Dehradun and as father and first commanding officer of the battalion, turned his men into a potent fighting force in a short span of just nine months. The first war with Pakistan over Kashmir had already begun. In October 1948, the 6th/8th Gurkhas were inducted into battle in Jammu and Kashmir. The battalion was ill equipped, had no snow clothing, no signal equipment and was also short of arms and ammunition. In his characteristic style, Jimmy personally led his young battalion into battle. His outstanding leadership and courage resulted in the battalion defeating the enemy and capturing the heights of Naghoun, thereby keeping the crucial lines to Poonch open. They were also credited with winning the battles of Ramgarh and Kagani Gali and cleared enemy forces from several other ridges. For these victories, the 6th/8th Gurkhas won the battle honor "Naghoun" and theater honor "Jammu and Kashmir," the first in their continuing and illustrious history. For his courage, dash and leadership, their commanding officer Nadirshaw was decorated with the coveted Vir Chakra. To this day, Jimmy is revered by men of the Gurkha regiments and is part of their regimental folklore. His portrait hangs in the mess at the 8th Gurkha Training Center at Dehradun.

During the 1950s and 1960s Jimmy spent many exciting years in active stations in NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency), Assam, Nagaland and other north-eastern states, and on the Chinese border. In 1959 he was decorated again with the Ashoka Chakra. His exceptional leadership qualities resulted in him being chosen for several special international assignments — In 1959 he

was assigned to the Indian Military Training Group in Nepal. In 1960, just prior to the Vietnam war, he was posted to Saigon, as one of the commanding officers of the Indian Army contingent with the UN peace-keeping force in Vietnam known as the United Nations International Commission on Indo-China. On his return to India, by then



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promoted to the rank of brigadier, he was given command of an elite independent infantry brigade.

On his retirement in 1964, Jimmy was immediately recalled and once again given a special assignment. He was appointed deputy inspector general in the then fledgling Border Security Force (BSF), with the responsibility of raising the force in Gujarat. Jimmy literally created the BSF from scratch in Kutch and other border areas of Gujarat. To a very large extent, it is thanks to him and the force he created, that our Gujarat borders with Pakistan are secure.

In 1971 Jimmy retired to private life in Poona. Ram-rod straight, with his upturned handlebar moustache, grey-blue eyes, ready smile and hearty laugh, he became a well-known sight on his twice-daily walks or riding his moped. He had a wide circle of friends whom he regaled — with his wit, with his inimitable magic tricks and with his exciting stories of his experiences in the army. If he had any fault, it was being too generous. Jimmy remained a bachelor all his life but was a much beloved favorite brother, uncle, grand uncle and great-grand uncle.

KAVAS N. PETIGARA

Just for July

I am unable to respond positively by suggesting what literature could be reproduced in the July 2004 issue of *Parsiana*. However I am responding from the point of view of what should not be reproduced.

The July 2003 issue contains matter which may be historically interesting, but is liable to make the community (as inheritors of the *Rivayats*), a laughing stock. It contains thoughts which appear to me utterly ludicrous.

If one reproduces matter to enlighten and convey information, let it be sensible matter with some aim behind the writing which would enhance our pride in our heritage and not the opposite.

FEROZA H. SEERVAI

The Editor replies

Since many people cite ancient scriptures in support of their views, *Parsiana* wished to demonstrate that much of these scriptural references may not be relevant in today's context. It is only when we study them that we will be able to ascertain what to follow and what not. While part of the *Rivayats* depict women and non-Zoroastrians in inferior social positions, they also state that conversion is

acceptable even of grave diggers and corpse bearers! Thus the religion did not bar even people considered social outcasts from its fold.

People selectively cite the passages they believe will support their views. What is required is an open and honest debate on what customs and traditions to observe in today's context.

It was with this intention that *Parsiana* selected the *Rivayet* extracts. There was no motive to denigrate the texts or customs. It was only to inform.

...

Parsiana has invited suggestions from its readers as to what it should carry in the July issues for the coming years (*Parsiana*, July 2003).

I venture to suggest the following:

- Full story of the tragic death of a son at the hands of his father — Rustom and Sohrab (or Rustom Nameh, if there is any). *Parsiana* should go a little backward in time and give the readers the dynasty of Rustom and, then, narrate how Rustom unwittingly killed his own son, Sohrab. Will an ode — *Sohrab and Rustom* by English poet Mathew Arnold, help *Parsiana* in any way, if it decides to narrate the unfortunate story of Rustom and Sohrab?
- The life of Alexander, the Greek warrior, who invaded Persia and almost ravaged the country; his ruthless destruction of the Persian literature by burning it. In short, the impact of invading Persia with the army under his command.
- The life study of the last of the Persian Kings, Yazdegird III, who was defeated by the Arabs and the subsequent end of the mighty Persian Empire. It is with this last King Yazdegird that we Parsis associate our Yazdegirdi era.

BHIKHAJI M. ADENWALLA

For your next July issue, you may consider any of the following:

- Comparative study of seven major world religions;
- National and international oriental scholars who have richly contributed in all fields of Zoroastrian studies;
- Ethical principles enunciated in Zoroastrian Avestan and Pahlavi scriptures.

Capt HORMAZDIAR DESAI

It would be a good idea to serialize the 765-page book *A Zoroastrian Tapestry*, by Pheroza J. Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree in your July issue of *Parsiana*.

Perhaps you may have to pay copy-

right fees to the original publishers, but you can compensate by increasing the price of the July issues.

Further, the pictures and the accompanying text would enhance the value of your serialized July issues over several years.

Dr P. D. SUNAVALA

The Editor replies

Parsiana prefers to reprint books/literature that are out of print and not generally available to the public.

"New community anthem"

With regard to Jehangir Medora's letter ("New community anthem," *Parsiana*, May 2003), may I suggest Freddy Mercury (Farok Bulsara)'s classic hit *We are the Champions* as an alternative to *Chhaiyé Hamé Zarathushtri*? The following is merely a suggestion for the first verse, but the words from the Queen (as his band is known) hit can easily be adapted:

"We are Zoroastrians, my friend, and we'll keep surviving to the end, for we are Zoroastrians, / We are Zoroastrians, / No time for losers, for we are Zoroastrians of the world."

Not only is this music triumphant and uplifting as an anthem should be, it was also written and sung by *apro* Farok!

I'm sure that legal and copyright issues can be amicably sorted out by the numerous interested parties.

JAHAN DIVECHA

Herts, UK

Resolution refrain

Invited to a jashan in a Parsi home, a Hindu friend was impressed. It reminded him of a Vedic 'havan' and chanting. He had a most favorable opinion of Parsis as a modern, progressive, achieving community. Having borrowed my *Parsiana* of April and May, 2003, and appalled by the controversy created by the Parsi High Priests, his frank and direct reaction was: "Of what consequence are these High Priests in such a modern, educated community?"

For years the community has tried to retain respect for the High Priests, despite some flagrant statements of a few. Now, as a collective group, they themselves have put that respect and their future credibility in the community on the block! They should take long, conscientious 'sanyas,' to seriously consider with a higher 'Vohuman,' the self and community damaging consequences of their unwise and inhuman resolution;



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worry. In fact, with so much value for money, I've decided my second cupboard will also be a Godrej Storwel. There are so many

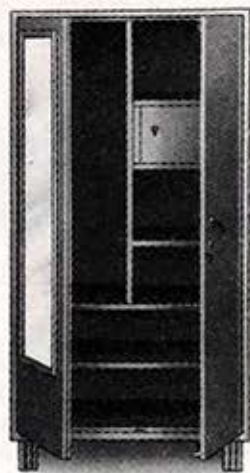
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unwise in their own and the larger interest, inhuman to thousands of Parsi families who have members married outside, and especially to their innocent children. That damage is in four ways.

First, to their discredit, that resolution totally lacked any supportive evidence or reasons in scripture, history or social science for their categorical views. To that extent, it did seem like the Imam's 'fatwa' or authoritarian 'diktat,' of which they have been accused. Were they influenced by a few Fundamentalist elements? They should have known in this time, that any kind of Fundamentalism is hate inspired, and does either physical, or moral, or psychological violence to its victims; though they may disclaim it and state other objectives. Are their perceptions of themselves, and the community, and matters on which they arrogantly "hereby declare," several centuries out of date, and, under the skin, a reflection of caste influence of early centuries in rural Gujarat? If so, what is their relevance to 21st century Parsi Zoroastrians in India and abroad?

How come the High Priests were so divorced from the views of thousands of well educated, responsible and good Zoroastrians? Do they live in an isolated shell of their own, even when they say they are concerned with the survival and identity of the community? In plain words, these High Priests have landed themselves in a mess of their own making; apart from a realization by half of them, of the harm they have done to the very community in whose interests they claimed to make that rash resolution.

The third amazing damage is the lack of any intellectual understanding of the nature of the problem they claim to remedy, "the survival of the community." What is their knowledge and competence in the demographic and sociological nature of the problem? When they speak of only "stray instances of past mixed marriages," they show little scruple for truth or Asha, unfortunately. If they had cared for factual truths, they would have found such marriages as high as 30 percent, in places, even higher at about 50 percent and growing. Complex problems require a respect for factual truths first.

The fourth reason for their concern was "the preservation of our religion," a valid concern of priests especially. A time has come to ask about the role of High Priests and priests in the 21st century of science, stress, conflicts, inter-

faith times, and multicultural societies. In such a globalizing world, what have Zoroastrian priests done, or should do, at least in a humane, pastoral role to help grow good Zoroastrians beyond the navjote ceremony? What have they done or should do for Zoroastrians who are poor, widowed, orphaned, aged, or in any form of suffering? If mixed marriages are their anathema, what have they done in the suffering of those divorced, and their children when the father or both parents are Zoroastrians? Surely these are meaningful, humane areas of concern for priests claiming to be concerned with people's lives and souls, their preservation, identity, religion.

It is amazing that in 2003 — not 1003! — our High Priests' resolution seems in violation of at least four major aspects of Zarathushtra's message, the true Zoroastrianism. First, respect for 'Asha' or Truth of the problems of their claimed concerns, "survival of the community" and "preservation of our religion." Second, 'Vohuman' or application of the higher mind for 'harmony' and total community, not sectoral, narrow concerns. Causing dissension and suffering is hardly an example of 'Vohuman.' Third, their implied denial of the universality of Zarathushtra's message for all humanity, not exclusive for any ethnic or tribal or caste group, and certainly not racial. Fourth, after repeated "hereby declarations" without any evidence or reason, the High Priests forget that Zoroastrianism expects each man to "hearken with his ears to the best councils, reflect upon them with illumined judgement."

These issues are far bigger. They are crucial for the future of all caring, responsible Zoroastrians. ASPI D. MODDIE

The six High Priests have certainly put "the cat amongst the pigeons" (or should I say "amongst the vultures"). The resolutions of the six High Priests only underlines the importance of the clergy, and yet so little is done to ensure that only the best amongst us be trained to become mobeds and dasturs.

Enter the Anglican Church. Admittedly it was not an easy decision, but now this church entertains women priests. So why can we not do so? We need new blood, fresh ideas (liberal, moderate and conservative). And on a similar theme why should our priests only come from certain families and "castes?" We want

the best, so the market place should be opened up for all Zoroastrians, male or female, priestly caste or other.

Pay peanuts and you get monkeys. Hence all our priests should be paid competitive salaries. They could be sponsored, either by affluent Zoroastrian organizations or by rich individuals. Now I'm not suggesting that all dasturs sport a logo on their apparel whilst performing their duties, but mention of the sponsorship could be made in any official literature or at functions. Perhaps agiaries in their entirety could be thus sponsored.

Perhaps the single most attractive aspect of living in the West is the concept of "freedom within the law." So if an individual wishes to be cremated, that is his choice, as it would be if he wished to donate his body for the benefit of medical research or if he chose to become an organ donor.

I think that our religion is rather insular. In the UK for example, there are multi faith committees, action groups, etc comprising leaders of different religions, where topical issues are discussed openly, frankly and amicably. Naturally, one of the benefits of such forums is that leaders have opportunities to pick up ideas, and perhaps for the more enlightened amongst them to actually try and further these ideas. I believe that there is great mileage in learning from other great religions, and borrowing good ideas from them, and conversely ensuring that obvious negatives are avoided like the plague. And even more than religious doctrine, I refer to customs and the way these other religions "conduct their business."

Take Judaism for example. We can learn from Jewish charities, and how these charities ensure that poverty amongst Jews is anything but commonplace. True, there are many wealthy Jewish businesses and foundations, but what is noteworthy is the quality of the charitable activity that works closely with such organizations, and with individuals, both wealthy and not so wealthy. I'm sure that Zoroastrian charities can learn from Jewish charities. Letters in *Parsiana* always seem to mention the greatness of our religion and of Parsis. However until poverty is eradicated, until the old are looked after with full dignity in their autumn years, until all our agiaries are always well maintained, until our priests are well paid (and which therefore would mean no more shortages), until our infirm can get the best medical attention



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(overseas, if such treatment is not available locally), until there is a good fostering and adopting process for orphans, (and I daresay there are other areas that I could mention), the word "great" is perhaps overkill.

S. RUSTOMJI
Middlesex, UK

World body

Recently a lot has been said and written about the need to form a world Zoroastrian body which was vehemently opposed by the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) in 1997.

I being one of the founder members of the WZO in the UK — who was involved in the formation of the original WZO constitution — can, safely say that the current setup of the WZO cannot honestly be described as even a poor imitation of the original formation of the WZO or its aims, objects and purpose.

The WZO perhaps does not remotely represent one percent of the world Zoroastrian community who may be considered as truly Zoroastrians. It cannot be accepted as a Zoroastrian organization by virtue of its non-Zoroastrian membership. At best and in truth, it can only be considered as an Anglo-Zoroastrian organization or an Indo-Zoroastrian organization. It is said that the majority of its membership consists of those who are inter-married and their progeny.

Their (WZO) aims and objects as far as one could see or understand, seem to promote, propagate and enhance the cause of intermarriages and conversion, both of which are totally against the Zoroastrian precepts, tenets and the fundamental belief of the Mazdayasni Zarathushti faith.

Beyond doubt one needs a proper, genuine world federation of traditional Mazdayasni Zarathushtis; totally independent and separate from the WZO to safeguard the original precepts, tenets, doctrines, scriptures, customs and traditions of this most profound and wonderful Aryan religion. Ervad DARIUSN. SETHNA

UK

WZO chairman Rumi Sethna and WZO president Rustam Dubash reply

Over the past few months much has been written about the WZO, some of which has been in the realms of fantasy.

WZO was formed in 1980, mainly at that time to assist Iranian Zoroastrians who were being persecuted by the regime in Iran to seek refuge in the West and in particular, the UK and US. Over

the past 23 years WZO has been successful in assisting such Zoroastrians and it is proud of its record. For the safety of these people, WZO has never publicized this part of its activity until quite recently.

The membership issue of WZO creates frenzy without equal, but this is done without understanding the qualification for membership. The following can become members of the Association subject to election as hereinafter provided:

- persons born into and confirmed into the Zoroastrian faith; or
- non-Zoroastrian spouses married to Zoroastrians; and/or
- children of marriages described above.

It is crystal clear from the above that for a person to become a member under Clause 4a), not only has that person to be born into, but must also be confirmed into the Zoroastrian religion. This clearly illustrates that a born non-Zoroastrian who has had his navjote performed even by a recognized priest, cannot become a member of the WZO.

The only category of non-Zoroastrian members is that of spouses married to non-Zoroastrians and since this clause was brought in some eight or nine years ago, only a handful of spouses have become members.

Allowing non-Zoroastrian spouses as members is nothing new and in fact, our understanding is that a substantial number of organizations in the US have similar clauses. It does nothing more than bring families together, create a Zoroastrian way of life — of good thoughts, good words and good deeds. A very simple philosophy but one which is hard to practice.

Someone recently wrote that the majority of WZO's membership consists of persons who are intermarried and their progeny. This is a totally inaccurate statement, made simply to flame the fires without having any evidence to backup such a statement.

It has also been said that the aims and objectives of the WZO appear to "promote, propagate and enhance the cause of inter-marriages and conversion," again, another wild statement. In fact, the constitution of both the WZO and the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Inc (ZTFE) are very similar. If one were to make that statement about WZO, then it would apply equally to ZTFE, but we do not see anybody making such wild accusations about that particular organiza-

tion.

WZO has also been criticized that it does not represent the entire Zoroastrian community and that its membership is fairly small. What people seem to forget is that WZO assists thousands of Zoroastrians and has never asked them whether or not they are members of the WZO. WZO is there for the community. WZO has been here for the past 23 years assisting Zoroastrians in the best possible way that they can with the funds provided to them by generous donors.

It has over the past years provided stimulating seminars on Zoroastrian religion and culture, without imposing on any individual either a liberal or a traditional view. Zoroaster gave his people the wisdom to hear, think and choose wisely. WZO believes that religion is for the individual; it is for them to decide whether they wish to live their lives according to the religion given to them by Zoroaster, but as in any democracy, WZO allows free discussion on the burning issues of the day.

WZO has been in fruitful discussions with the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America and the ZTFE to see how best these federations/associations could work with WZO to form a body which could better represent Zoroastrians throughout the world. It would not be fair to any of us to say anything more at the moment, but simply that there is an abundance of goodwill on all sides and with the grace of Ahura Mazda, there should be a significant development in this respect fairly soon.

Referendum essential

One of the many services *Parsiana* renders is to provide data on interfaith marriages. You have stated that as many girls, as boys marry outside our fold. One in three marries outside.

An ugly controversy surfaced recently, as a consequence of the six High Priests' diktat. Despite the retraction by three High Priests, the community still remains vertically split.

A part of the reason lies in the fact that the Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians has no candlepower — forget horsepower.

Many questions arise out of this demographic equation:

- What should we do with the children of intermarried Zoroastrians — particularly

continued on page 49



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Events and Personalities

Secunderabad snippets

A solar concentrator installed on September 8, 2003, *mah* Fravardin, *roz* Fravardin, at the Seth Viccajee and Seth Pestonji Meherji Dakhma will serve the needs of nearly 450 Zoroastrian families in the Secunderabad-Hyderabad area. Many members of the community attended the jashan led by Ervad Kaikobad Dastur. Seven mobeds from the three agiaries in the twin cities joined in the jashan. A concentrator here had become imperative due to the total absence of vultures and the resulting delay in the disposal of the bodies, wrote Jehangir Bisney of the twin cities. The entire cost of the erection and installation was borne by Air Vice Marshal (Retd) Eruch Lala and his wife Coomi in memory of Eruch's late parents Shiavax and Tehmina.

The initiative for acquiring the solar concentrator was taken by Hilla S. Moos, president of the board of trustees of the Seth Viccajee and Seth Pestonji Meherji Trust, writes Kerfegar Antia, honorary secretary of the Zoroastrian Club. It was installed in a record time of two months, writes Antia, adding, "It is worth appreciating that in addition to donating the entire cost of the solar concentrator, including the installation charges which also are substantial, Lala himself visited Vadodara and Bombay to study the system and its practical application at the site. In this noble venture he was ably assisted by Capt Kayarmin Pestonji, Kersi

Patel, Petarasp Nalladaru and Capt Jehangir Darabna. The installation was undertaken by Nevil Soonawala of Rashron Energy and Auto Private Limited of Vadodara.

With a population of 1,244 Zoroastrians, there are two dakhmas in the twin cities. The Zamistanpur dakhma is managed by the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of Secunderabad and Hyderabad (PZASH) and the Seth Viccajee and Seth Pestonji Meherji Dakhma at Bholguda which is more in use because of its proximity to the city. To strengthen the Zamistanpur dakhma, 1,500 trees were planted last year which have already started attracting birds, reported the August 21, 2003 PZASH newsletter. "The dakhma at Zamistanpur is available for the disposal of...all Zoroastrians residing in the twin cities and is not reserved for any particular family," reiterates the newsletter.

Over the period August 19, 2002 to August 6, 2003 there were 29 deaths as against six births, reports the newsletter, urging parents to notify births at the Anjuman office to update the census records.

Among the community institutions currently in the news is the Bai Ratanbai Jehangirji Chenoy Parsi High School which was adjudged the best school at the All India General Knowledge 2002-03 competition, as the best school by the Vijaya Art Academy and prizes in a computer competition (south zone) held by NIIT, states the newsletter.



Solar concentrator installed at Secunderabad

Bonhomie in Surat

To bring the members of the community together during the auspicious muktad and Gatha days, the Zoroastrian Women's Assembly of Surat (ZWAS) organized a series of programs from August 11 to 16, 2003 so that the coming year would see them enjoying bonhomie and fellow feeling, as notes a write-up from trustee Maharukh Chichgar.

President of the Surat Parsi Panchayat Darayas Master and the other trustees assured their cooperation to the ZWAS which serves as a friend of the Surat infirmary, a confidante of the girls and boys orphanages and assists the needy Parsis in and around Surat.

To create the mood for the festive season with the necessary zest and pep the New Year Festival was launched by the ZWAS team under its president Kainaz Kapadia, secretary Benaifer Engineer and trustees Chichgar and Piloo Bhatena. A prayer competition for the four-six, seven-10, and the 11-15 age-group on the first evening was judged by Ervads Kobad Bharda and Zubin Dalal. This was followed by a slide show depicting the life of Zarathushtra and a screenplay *On being a Zoroastrian* which was directed, conducted and conceived by Chichgar with the assistance of Sarosh Sanjana. The compere for the evening was Perin Karanjia, chairperson of the program committee.

The following day saw 32 teams compete as the Katlesh, Kabab and Petis teams in the Antakshari rounds hosted by Hemin Engineer and Ketul Patel where the background music was provided by Bagda Melodies. A mystical magic show by Mukund Gajjar was the treat scheduled for August 14. A games session on August 16 saw the young and old join in the fun and frolic as *masti*-makers Benaifer Engineer, Anahita Mistry and Pearl Daboo kept everyone entertained until the contributory dinner by Yazdi



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Winners of the antakshari competition (left) and prayer competition (below) with ZWAS committee members and Master (center)

Engineer.

Assisting Perin Karanjia on the program committee were Farzana Karanjia, Daboo, Vira Karanjia, Vahista Variawa, Roxanne Ghadiali, Mani Jehangir, Khushnaz Italia, Farida Anklesaria, Gulshan Dumasia, Maharukh Davierwala, Nazneen Wadia and Aban Bhathena.



Dadar data

Over 4,000 Zoroastrians residing in the Dadar-Matunga area have been included in the fifth edition of the *Mancherji Joshi Colony Directory* published in 2003 by The Dadar-Matunga Parsi Zoroastrian Association (DMPZA). "We have taken care to make this edition as comprehensive and informative as possible," notes DMPZA president Rustom Chothia confident that "it will prove equally useful and popular as those published in the past."

The alphabetic listing of the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and where available the e-mail contacts and blood groups has filled 131 pages of the 212-page *Directory*. Twenty-six pages of advertisements, plus write-ups with color photographs on the different community managed institutions in the locality, a separate telephone listing of the emergency services, medicos and health specialists, professionals and businesses take care of the remaining pages. If searching for a particular contact, it is best to go through the entire list for whilst *Parsiana* features among the institutions offering Zoroastrian books, cassettes, artefacts and literature on Parsi history, culture and religion, it does not among the Press.

The *Directory* was funded from the receipts of the advertisements and donations received specifically for compiling and printing. The DMPZA had methodically gathered the data. After distribut-

ing the data forms at every household, they placed collection boxes at some of the landmark Parsi institutions in their vicinity. A proof copy of the *Directory* was then kept on display at the J. N. Petit Reading Room and Library, Dadar for more than a month to allow residents to check whether their details had been entered correctly. The DMPZA was responsible thus far and no further for, as enunciated in their disclaimer cause, "Names appearing therein have been provided to the Association by residents themselves, but no proof of residence, ownership or tenancy has been asked for or verified...This *Directory* is not an official document for any formal, governmental, municipal or legal purpose such as establishing tenancy rights or ownership of any premises, etc, and cannot be produced as proof of the same in any court of law, government, municipal or other establishment."

Nevertheless, "A well-informed directory regularly published by the DMPZA is an asset to the soci-

Mancherji Joshi's legacy lives on

ety and the same is of great help to (the) police," declared deputy commissioner of police, Zone IV Mohan Rathod in his message carried in the *Directory*. "The Parsis (who) have always been very helpful to (the) police in maintenance of peace, communal harmony and national integration...are (an) example for the people of other areas in the city. I have high respect towards their virtues and decent behavior," he added.

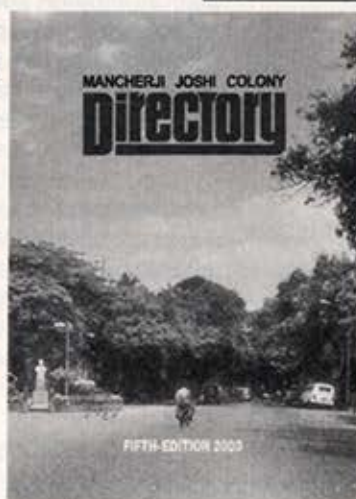
The deputy mayor of Bombay, Babubhai Bhawanji, whilst announcing his "great honor and happiness in representing you wonderful people," gave credit to the "joint efforts of the residents for maintaining the cleanliness and greenery of this area...The Dadar Parsi Colony with its numerous trees and gardens is a rare natural spot in the midst of our overcrowded city."

In addition to the DMPZA, the other prominent community institutions functioning in the vicinity are The Dadar Parsee Colony Gymkhana, Dadar Parsee Welfare Centre, The Dadar Parsee Youths Assembly headquartered at Perviz Hall, Mancherji Edalji Joshi



Colony Residents' Association, The Parsi Central Association Cooperative Housing Society Limited, Sohrab Palankote Hall and J. N. Petit Reading Room and Library, educational bodies like

The Athornan Boarding Parsee Madressa, Bai Jaiji Katrak Training Classes for Parsi Women, Mancherji Joshi Memorial Education Fund, The Dadar Parsee Youths Assembly High School, The J. B. Vachha High School for Parsi Girls and the C. J. Primary and Infant School, and Homavazir's 11th Central Mumbai



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Bharat Scout Group, religious shrines like the Seth Rustomji Nusserwanji Rustom Faramna Agiary and Seth Naoroji Cawasji Narielvala Agiary, and charitable trusts like The Mancherji Edalji Joshi Memorial Trust, Dadar Jashan Trust, FKS Foundation, The Young Rathestars and The Senior Citizens of Five Gardens, Dadar, Wadala and Matunga.

Detailed maps of the Dadar-Matunga estate as also the Colony, citing plot numbers against different roads to explain the layout of the buildings would enable a visitor to get familiar with the area. Designed and produced by Aspi Vasania with photographs by Fareez Vasania, the *Directory* can be purchased for Rs 50 from Chothia (Jashan Committee Bldg, 757, Rd No. 7; Tel: 24148394).

Bonding in Borivli

Notwithstanding the torrential rains lashing the city on August 23, 2003, the chairman of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet Minoo Shroff, chairman emeritus Jamshed Guzder, trustees Silloo Kavarana, Dinshaw Tamboly and Dadi Engineer travelled 50 km from South Bombay to join in the New Year celebrations organized by the Borivli and Suburban Zoroastrian Association (BASZA), notes a press release from the Association summarizing the day's proceedings.

While Shroff congratulated the hosts for organizing such successful events every year, Guzder appreciated the bond of unity displayed by the Association members under their president Noshir



To pay homage to the heroes of the Armed Forces who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation, the Bombay Parsee Association laid wreaths at the War Memorial at Khareghat Colony on mah Fravardin, roz Farvardin, September 8, 2003. Among those present were senior trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet.

Photo: A. F. R. Suder

Paghdwalla. Engineer and Tamboly further encouraged the BASZA members with their words of solidarity.

For the Borivli Parsis who spend nearly three hours daily commuting back and forth from work, the monthly get-togethers serve to promote a healthy bonding, mentioned Paghdwalla. He was thankful to the Rustomjee Group of Companies, particularly Boman Irani, Percy and Susan Chowdhary, for so willingly placing, free of cost at the BASZA disposal, the premises and infrastructure at the Rustomjee International School at Borivli.

To keep alive the Zoroastrian ethos amongst the youth and the elderly who otherwise feel alienated in the vast inter-communal diaspora of the suburbs, BASZA regularly organizes religious lectures, debates, colloquiums and seminars as also social and cultural events and pilgrimage tours.

At the August 23 function compered by Jennifer Paghdwalla BASZA children who had fared well in academics and

sports were awarded prizes at the hands of Shroff. Then followed a humorous variety entertainment program presented by Pervez Mehta and directed by Sam Kerawala. Marzban Mehta rendered some popular Parsi Gujarati songs. The evening ended with a sumptuous dinner catered by Ketayun and Bomi Khambata.

"Honored and humbled"

In recognition of his exceptional achievements as a young entrepreneur, chairman and managing director of Rasna Private Limited Piruz Khambatta was conferred the Dadabhai Naoroji Millennium Award on September 13, 2003.

The Dadabhai Naoroji Awards, instituted in 1998 by the Dadabhai Naoroji International Society, honors the memory of the first Asian in the British Parliament, a peerless patriot who laid the foundation of India's freedom struggle. The Award is given to persons who have significantly contributed to the advance-

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Above: Shroff (left) being felicitated by Paghdwalla. Alongside (from left): Silloo and Dadi Engineer, Shroff, Paghdwalla, Guzder, Bachi and Dinshaw Tamboly and Kavarana



Ethnicity: an electoral issue?

Challenger Yazdi Desai could not change the community's perception of Dinshaw Tamboly as one of its most dedicated social workers

Arnavaz S. Mama

"Please do not have any apprehensions. Our religion is not in danger!" the garlanded and tilaked Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trustee Dinshaw Tamboly, assured the community on the threshold of his second seven-year term. He was preaching to the converted however. The firecrackers had exploded even before the final count was in (Tamboly: 490; challenger Yazdi Desai: 146; invalid: three). There had never been any doubt about who would win this election.

Unlike Tamboly's first election against sitting trustee and former vice chancellor of Bombay University Mehroo Bengalee when too "virtually every orthodox-liberal controversy was referred to and laid at his door (see 'A clean election,' *Parsiana*, September 1996)," this time there was a mindlessness and negativity in the charges made by Desai and his camp.

At the first (and only) public meeting addressed by Desai at Dadar on September 20, 2003 as per orthodox spokesman Adi Doctor who was in the chair, Desai was introduced as a "total newcomer" whose qualifications according to Doctor were that he was over 30 years old as required by clause 53 of the electoral scheme and, citing Tamboly's first manifesto of 1996, had the "time, interest and dedication to be of service to the community." Doctor said that he had known Desai for less than a year. As per Desai's speech his only effort on behalf of the community was that he had collected 10,000 signatures and opinions from priests and high priests against the BPP resolution allowing the use of Doongerwadi bunglis for the funerary rites of those who opt for cremation or burial.

This comparative newcomer to community affairs started by describing him-

self thus: "I'm not orthodox like [BPP trustee and World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO) India president] Dadi Engineer. I don't go to the agiary every day. I'm not religious like (Dadar's

renowned social worker and chief organizer of Tamboly's election campaign) Mithoo Jesia: I don't do muktads at home. I'm not a pragmatist like Tamboly but a practitioner of Parsi-Zarathushti tarikats. I'm not a visionary like Minoo Shroff: I cannot create a world body. I'm not a priest though my father and grandfather were priests."

Desai said he had grown up in a Christian

colony where "friends teased (but there was) awe and admiration in the way they treated me." He says he discovered in early childhood that he "loved being a Parsi," is turned on by jingles such as "Minoo makori, ghadialni takori!" and the sight of "a priest praying before a crackling fire in a dark agiary." "It broke my heart to hear of intermarriages... I watched cherished institutions fall apart but I was impotent; just a middle class Parsi with no money and no position."

Now a professional chartered accountant, a director of Writer and Company and a trustee of the Kripa Foundation which fights drug abuse and the HIV-AIDs affliction, says, "Today I have the money, the resources, the willingness to go after anyone who tries to mess around with our religion and our customs." Having wholeheartedly supported Noshir Dadrawala, Desai declaimed against the "vicious attack in the *Jamé*" against Dadrawala and alleged, "Noshir Dadrawala could have died that day;" he almost had a "nervous breakdown."

In his attempt to prevent issues being "swept under the carpet," Desai referred to "contradictions" regarding Punchayet

housing and the solar concentrators at Doongerwadi accredited to Tamboly's support: "Who gave him the mandate? There were 2,000 people at the Samast Anjuman meeting; 98 percent wanted the aviary. Tamboly could have raised three crore rupees in minutes but he wanted to enforce his pragmatism!" (According to the Punchayet no money has so far come in for the aviary project estimated to cost over two crore rupees. The solar concentrators have all been funded by the community).

Conservative BPP trustee Burjor Antia was faulted for his statement at a meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India that "we should help Tajiks start an agiary." BPP chief executive officer Behram Dastur was castigated for his views on accepting the children of mixed marriages and permitting non-Zoroastrians to view the Parsi dead even after the ceremonies. He rebuked Tamboly for "misrepresenting and distorting facts" because at his Rustom Baug meet on September 18, Tamboly had presented an outline of the move for a world body since 1960.

"Ali Jafarey (scholar of Zoroastrianism and founder of the Zarathushtian Assembly) will scuttle our religion but Tamboly says the World Body is a necessity of our times." (Desai and his supporters believe the world body should be restricted to Parsi-Zoroastrians. The draft agreement of the world body defines a Zoroastrian as one professing the faith and envisages a place for the emerging Zoroastrians of Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc whose forefathers had been Zoroastrians prior to Muslim and Soviet conquest of their countries and who now seek to revert to their ancient religion.)

Desai even alleged that Dasturs (Drs) Kaikhushroo Jamasp Asa and Firoze Kotwal and Ervad (Dr) Pervaz Bajan have opted out of the Athorman Mandal because of pressures generated by the WZO financed scheme for the betterment of working



Tamboly: grateful for "faith and confidence"



L to R (1st row): Bachi and Dinshaw Tamboly; Anahita and Yazdi Desai; (2nd row): voters marking their ballot; 102-year-old voter, Tehmina Sholapurwala; Minoo Shroff and Jamshed Guzder



mobeds. (On checking with JamaspAsa Parsiana learnt that he had indeed left the organization but it was due to internal problems and had nothing to do with the WZO. Bajan continues to be a trustee of the Athornan Mandal.)

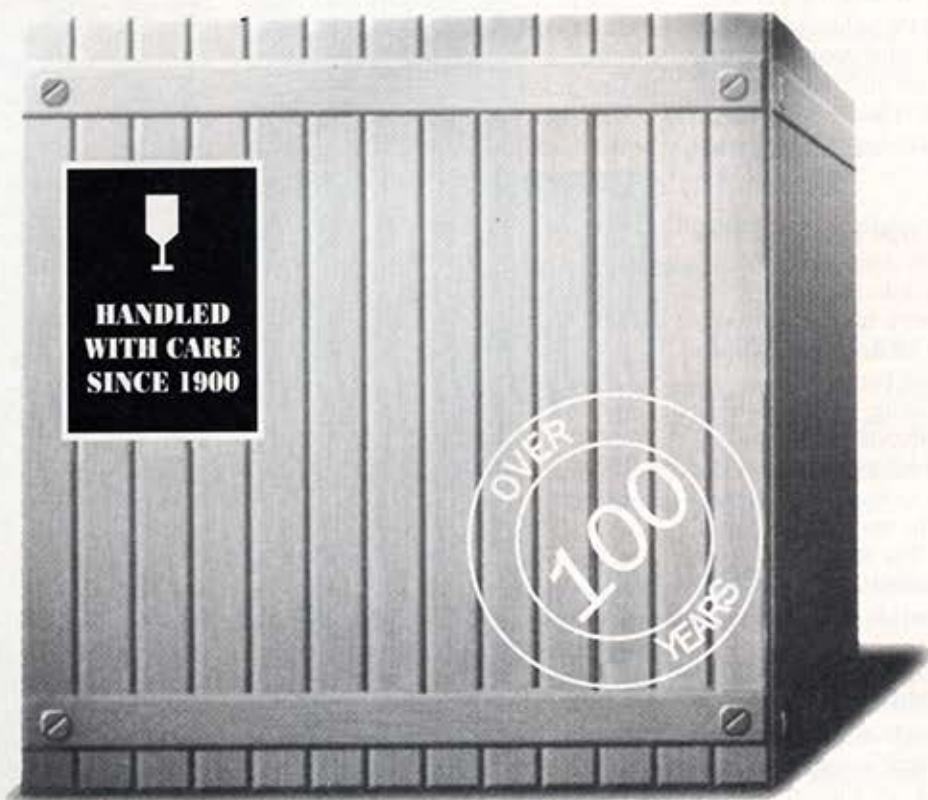
When Desai spoke of Tamboly and Engineer actively opposing the Punchayet's leadership of the world

body, Tamboly supporter Viraf Doctor from the audience demanded to know the source of the "data you are feeding the electorate" and Desai had to admit that it was "private data" whose source he was unable to attribute.

Desai cited the establishment of the WZO sanatorium at Sanjan as evidence of the

L to R (3rd row): Modi, Lalkaka, Hormuzdiar and Dastur; Mehelli Colah (ext left) and Punchayet staff sorting the ballots; (4th row): Phiroze Patel, Pervez Aibara and Adil Crawford providing duplicate certificates; voters getting ballot papers; Nariman Mehta and Zarir Bhathena keeping count of voters

continued on page 36



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Sheltering the community

The Bombay Parsi Punchayet's housing policy is always under public scrutiny

Arnavaz S. Mama

How many flats are locked up in Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) colonies? Why is some people's money called a deposit, earning them only the right to occupancy as licensees while other people's money is termed a donation and earns them the status of a tenant? Why are some tenancies converted into leave and license agreements even for bonafide inheritors?

These are the type of questions the Alert Zoroastrians Association (AZA) says it has been asking the BPP. No satisfactory answers have been forthcoming, allege AZA representatives Kersi Randeria and Percy Patel.

The plain speaking, volatile duo put their business interests and family affairs on hold to speak to *Parsiana* about their community concerns and the alleged skeletons in the BPP closet on March 28, 2003. The BPP's responses, sought by *Parsiana* prior to publishing this article, feature in brackets after each AZA charge.

A letter in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* (April 27, 2003) pertained to the grant of a second flat in Ness Baug, on tenancy. It alleged that many special conditions were granted including an alleged right to resell the premises without paying the Punchayet its 40 percent share as landlord. [The tenant was the highest bidder for the flat whose availability was known to the community by word of mouth, say BPP CEO Behram Dastur and assistant CEO Mehelli Colah. There was a tie between him and another, which was settled between them. The tenant paid a whopping Rs 75 lakhs for the flat — of which the Punchayet got 40 percent as non-refundable money. So the Punchayet granted him the right to resell the flat within the community without paying the landlord's share for a period of five years. (This is a practice followed by many landlords in Bombay largely due to the general slackness in the real estate market — *Editor*) "In light of the demographic situation, who knows whether

prices will rise or fall for these community flats in the years ahead?" reasons Dastur.] Another letter (July 2003) dealt with the collusion between a litigating member of the community and a sitting trustee in 1998.

The AZA has consciously decided to be the thorn in the BPP's housing flank



Patel (left) and Randeria: "Any public trust deed is a public document"

until the trust, they say, displays more transparency, replaces ad hocism with tenable policies. Though the body is yet to be registered, its object is to enforce the rights of the poor and needy of the community, says Patel. With youth no longer getting jobs and facing a "frightening prospect of community beggary (when) our community had been a leader in looking after its own," he is appalled that commercial premises/shops that fall vacant in BPP properties are given to non-Parsis at high rent and/or deposits. "Why can't they give it to Parsi boys on five-year terms?" he questions. (There is no covenant that binds the Punchayet to sell shops to Parsis, note Dastur and Colah. Traditionally the shops have been allotted to the highest bidder.) Patel views the "selling (of) tenancy rights (as) an encouragement to ghettoization" because it encourages better-off Parsis to sell their cosmopolitan accommodation at a profit and relocate in cheaper Punchayet properties.

There is a "lack of transparency, honesty among the trustees. The BPP has to show openly what it is doing, come up with policies to put the community's

socioeconomic affairs on track. If youth is given a chance, three out of five will come back (to return the favor)," says Patel. He criticizes the Punchayet for its alleged lack of cogent planning. "They don't know who the youth are!" he says, citing the example of the ceremonial launch of the Bombay chapter of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce in January this year, where speaker after speaker remarked on the absence of the youth in the audience. (The absence of youth was due to some miscommunication between the trustees and the BPP administration as to who was to be invited to the meet — *Editor*.)

Decrying the alleged "double standards (which) have been the rule of the (BPP's) game," Patel cites the example of the Punchayet's fight against the A. H. Wadia Baug flat owners who want to adopt the model byelaws in their cooperative society which would enable the flats to be sold in the open market. (BPP says the case is sub judice. The land belongs to the Punchayet and a caveat has been filed in the cooperative societies court to prevent the flat owners from by-passing the Punchayet and adopting model byelaws, say Dastur and Colah.) "The covenants (governing the donated properties) are for 'poor and deserving Parsis.' You choose the part about 'Parsis' and not the part about the 'poor and deserving,'" alleges Patel. "The role of the trustees is to carry forward the wishes of the benefactors... The community and BPP trustees 10 to 15 years hence may pay the price for such flaunting of the donors' directives," he adds. That the well-endowed M. B. Jeejeebhoy Trust handsomely finances the projects of the Poona Parsi Panchayat but not the BPP, speaks for itself, he claims.

"The trustees must use their authority to further the cause of the trust, not to demolish the cause of the trust," states Randeria, citing the closure of the BPP's waiting list for housing for (two) years. "If they do not allow you to apply, you

are losing points for periodicity," he notes. When the AZA threatened to go to court if the waiting list was not reopened, "they said we already have 1,200 on the waiting list. What shall we do with more?" recounts Randeria. (The waiting list for housing was reopened on January 2, 2003 after being frozen for two years, says Dastur.) And yet, according to the BPP only 100 of those on the waiting list had a monthly income under Rs 3,000 and 400 had a monthly income under Rs 10,000, he notes. Empathizing with the plight of such low income families Randeria wonders, "What must the man be earning? Where must he be living? What education must he be giving his children? Must he be using the bus or walking? Has the Punchayet ever asked?"

To circumvent some of the indentures of the properties vested with the BPP has required the payment of bribes to get the necessary sanctions, allege the AZA representatives. ("There is no question of bribing. We explained our stand to the charity commissioner," says Dastur. Colah adds that five buildings of ownership flats were constructed at Panthaky Baug in 1970-71.) More bribes allegedly have to be paid when urban land ceiling (ULC) exemptions, obtained earlier, are not renewed, invoking seven digit penalties. (The BPP executives disclaim knowledge about such an occurrence.) "The trustees are bound by the Bombay Public Trust Act to function as trustees, bound to find the money. So they sell the property meant for the poor to the rich," alleges Randeria.

The AZA attributes a cynical quid pro quo policy to the trustees. In the absence of a well formulated housing policy, "the prestige of trustees (rests) on the favors they can dispense. These brownie points are converted into letters of support, votes and business opportunities," claims Randeria. He alleges a caterer was "rewarded for providing free food at Dinshaw Mehta's election with a mobile canteen at Godrej Baug. (The caterer got the right to run the canteen at Godrej Baug because he was the highest bidder, says Dastur. The executives explained that when bids were invited recently for running a canteen at Khareghat Colony via an advertisement in the *Jamé*, the same caterer was one of the bidders. He would not have got the Khareghat Colony canteen however because of the BPP's conscious policy to spread such entrepreneurial opportunity among the community.) "See the favors which as-

sociation members of various baugs are getting," he says citing the case of a family in Rustom Baug which has four BPP units to its name — two residential and two commercial. (Dastur, in turn, cites the case of a family of four brothers occupying four different flats in Cusrow Baug — a development dating back 15 to 20 years.)

Randeria, alleges there were "genuine massive irregularities on the day of voting" (trustee Dinshaw Mehta's re-election on June 2, 2001 at Khareghat Colony) leaving challenger Maneck Engineer's supporters with "disgust at the end of the day." Randeria referred to the free food provided by Mehta to voters, to the placing of the booths with Mehta's being cheek by jowl with the Punchayet's, the apparent partiality towards Mehta's supporters on the part of the establishment (see "The Mehta-Maneck match," *Parsiana*, June 2001) in justification of his statement.

Some months later, when 10 to 12 of them met, they recalled how people they had met in the course of the election campaign had talked about housing. "So we shot off a letter to the BPP in October (2001) asking very general questions

like what is the Punchayet's housing policy? What are the guidelines governing the quantum of security deposits?"

In response, the trustees invited Randeria, Patel and Zereeh Jehangirji to a meet at the Willingdon Club where one of the trustees allegedly sought to denigrate the community as "ungrateful," another swore his truthfulness on a collection of photos of spiritual gurus... But the AZA's queries — like why did deposits at Godrej Baug range from five lakh rupees to 30 lakh rupees? — remained unanswered, say these critics. "The trustees asked (us) for facts and figures. We promised one a week!" laughs Randeria.

"We ensure that what we are talking about has substance (so that there's) no opportunity for someone to slap us with a defamation suit," says Patel. "We never pay anything for the information we get. (But) our plans also leak out to them," adds Randeria.

A topic that sizzled was the sale of ownership flats in two buildings at Panthaky Baug. Randeria says the AZA sought to buy a copy of its trust deed from the Punchayet but their request was negated on the plea that the trust deed

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was a private document. Instead they were given a copy of the 1884 deed of indenture of the BPP, a massive document devoid of information about properties donated later. "Any public trust deed is a public document. We obtained it on payment from the Registrar of Documents at the office of the Collector of Bombay," he notes.

They claim that the Ruchi Construction Company that has been constructing at Panthaky Baug has built on BPP property with BPP funds and then sold the constructed buildings to the BPP at the rate of Rs 200 per sq foot. Despite the AZA criticism there has been no change of builder at Panthaky Baug, they say. At the same time P. D. Jilla's case against the BPP is hanging fire in the court and the Punchayet faced a stiff penalty for non renewal of the exemption under the ULC, the AZA martialled charges against the community's apex body. (Jilla's appeal was dismissed by the High Court a fortnight ago, Dastur informed us.)

When the trustees challenged the AZA, describing them as a cluster of disgruntled elements without a mandate, the 6-month-old AZA openly invited community members with complaints about the Punchayet's housing allotments through the columns of *Jam-e-Jamshed*. Between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on June 30, 2002, 100 people came to Parklane, a small hotel near Dadar station, "to express their solidarity," Randeria related that one old man with a 50-year-old application stated that the BPP's then housing executive (since removed) reportedly told him, "It's time to die! Why do you need a house?" "People remarked that if the BPP heard them for only half the time the AZA representatives had spent with them, (they would have been satisfied)," added Patel.

"Last January, 22 AZA members entered the BPP office to discuss Panthaky Baug. We told them that the Panthaky Baug issue must be resolved in the boardroom, in the court or in the streets. We asked that the original incumbent be removed from the housing portfolio. The BPP agreed to give one building of 52 flats and approximately 30 flats in the second building of 56 flats for the poor. The 24-28 flats which had already been booked earlier would be delivered as ownership flats. A third building of 80 flats would also be reserved for the poor plus 140 flats at Nirlon. The trustees would aim for donations up to six crores (the cash equivalent of the flats) to en-

able them to give to the poor," Randeria related the agreement reached with the Punchayet.

"Within one month they started changing their mind. We sent them the draft minutes of the meeting. They sent back a reworked draft with the key points omitted," Randeria claimed angrily. In the meantime two Parsi trusts proffered financial help — one to sponsor a whole building, the other to sponsor 12 flats with a donation of Rs 1.15 crore. "This was in answer to our public appeal made in December 2002, before the meeting with the BPP." These trusts made no conditions, asked for no nomination rights, emphasized Randeria. (The current position regarding the two buildings constructed at Panthaky Baug is that the BPP has received the occupation certificate for building B only. Hence all who have booked flats in building A have the option to transfer to B which will become wholly ownership, explains Dastur. Flats in building A will subsequently be allotted on leave and licence. In this connection "not a penny has been received from any trust so far," he adds.)

The AZA campaign on behalf of the community registered a victory of sorts when a BPP scheme to demolish seven buildings in Bharucha Baug to make way for a 14-storey commercial-educational-residential complex was abandoned when incoming trustee Maneck Engineer, an established civil engineer, declared the buildings sound.

The AZA has no membership card or fees. "People offer us money but we do not collect funds. We spend from our own pocket," says Patel. "When people ask how do we become members of the AZA, we say 'dil se' (from the heart). We have representatives in almost all colonies - people who are active, come for a specific program like the signature campaign against the selling of Panthaky Baug flats. Over 1,200 signatures were collected in less than two weeks — with names and addresses — and it was not even a concerted effort," Randeria underscores the community's positive response to what they are doing.

The AZA wants to have a representative or two on the BPP's Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) because they have been entrusted by many community members with their papers vis-à-vis BPP housing. Also, they estimate that between 300 and 400 flats will be created by the Punchayet in the next few years. Their aim, they say, is "to prevent

some of them from disappearing by manipulation!" (AZA representation on the HAC is under active consideration, says Dastur.) But the activists believe the Punchayet is looking for a pliant representative while the AZA would prefer to second a tough negotiator.

The AZA views the legal delay in the revised scheme for trusteeship elections with a touch of cynicism. The matter is yet to come up for hearing in the High Court even though the term of the present Anjuman Committee (AC) which elects trustees, expired in January 2000. The matter, they say, has been conveniently stalled "because new electors would have broken (the trustees') vote bank!" In the event all seven trustees have been elected/re-elected by a moribund AC. ("We are eager, we are following up the matter" in the High Court, says Dastur.) Patel and Randeria are also rueful that the S. B. Bharucha Baug, which is the most pro AZA, has only three voters on the AC and two of them have migrated.

Patel owns a travel agency and a fast food shop — *Exquisite Delylits* — which capitalizes on his wife Tina's cooking abilities. They have two college going children Natasha and Areez. The equally youthful Randeria is a construction contractor who learnt his trade under Maneck Engineer and also owns the Ahura Mazda Manufacturing Company Private Limited. Deadly protective of his family's privacy, Randeria reveals no personal details saying, "I'm publicity shy!"

The AZA representatives admit that their "initial anger was sharper. But in the attempt to make the trustees see the light we must not harm the community... The day the BPP goes back to being the trustees of the community, the AZA will go back into the woodwork..."

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The *taj* of the Tatas

In its 100th year, the Taj is renamed The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower

Hilla P. Guzder

When Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata's grand creation, The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, opened in Bombay on December 16, 1903, it stood in solitary splendor — on the all-quiet eastern waterfront. Each dawn, starbursts of the golden orb of day touched its magnificent onion-shaped cupolas, cusped arches and carved cornices; the moon over the midnight blue waters of the Arabian Sea sent in its silver through the 125.5 ft central cupola which stood vastly taller than the surrounding structures.

Its famous next door neighbor — the honey colored basalt arch of the Gateway of India — did not exist. It was built, on land reclaimed from the sea, and inaugurated 21 years later! The Indian Electricity Act was still being framed by the British colonial masters, there was no telephone. The plebians traveled by ox-drawn carts or in trams drawn by horses clip-clopping through the streets; the gentry used the horse-drawn victorias (carriages) or elegant gigs and landaus.

"Ahead of its time since 1903," states the Taj's motto. When the first 17 guests checked in, the Hotel was well ahead of its time! Scouring the cities of the world

— London, Paris, Berlin, Dusseldorf — Tata imported for his luxurious hotel "the latest arrangements and contrivances." While the Hotel was being constructed, he had visited an exhibition in Dusseldorf and contracted with a German firm to electrify the Hotel at a cost of two annas per unit! The Taj was the first commercial establishment in Bombay to be electrified ("... and then the lights came on," by Goolam E. Vahnavati, advocate general of Maharashtra, published in *The Taj*, Volume 32, No 1, Centenary Issue 2003). It had electric lights, fans, bells and clocks and four electric passenger lifts! Its laundry had electrically heated irons, the kitchens, cellars and services were of the latest type. The sanitation was modern; exotic Turkish baths enveloped guests in a cocoon of relaxed luxury. "A 15-ton carbon dioxide ice-making plant provided refrigeration and cooled suites of rooms, and the mechanical marvels of the Hotel were nicely rounded off by a soda water factory, an electroplating plant, machines for washing plates and burnishing silver..."

(The article adds that three years later, it was Jamsetji's sons Dorab and Ratan who formed a company with a totally

Indian capital of Rs 175 lakhs to develop electric energy by harnessing the abundant rainfall in the Western Ghats. Two huge reservoirs at Lonavla would create a waterfall of nearly 1,800 ft and turbines and generators at Khopoli at the foot of the Ghats would generate electric power which would be transmitted along 43 miles of transmission lines to the outskirts of Bombay, from where "the current would be stepped down" and brought to consumers in the city. The scheme aroused a storm of agitation and active opposition from vested interests rather than acclaim! Ultimately the British government took the stand that it was impossible for them not to sanction the introduction of cheap electricity into Bombay, but the Tata Hydro Electric Supply Company was granted a license initially only to supply power to bulk users like factories and the railways!)

Jamsetji's vision was large — and nationalistic. He had already made a personal fortune out of Lord Napier's Abyssinian War in 1867 through contracts for the 16,000 British troops sent

On the waterfront (from left) Taj heritage structure, Tower Wing and the Gateway of India

from Bombay. His first industrial venture, the Alexandra Mills, commenced the manufacture of cotton goods in 1869, taking on the British at their own trade. Six months of study and observation in Lancashire led to the launch of the Empress Mills in 1877 in Nagpur. Jamsetji believed in making profits, and was not diffident about the acquisition of technology and knowledge from the West. His entrepreneurial spirit saw steel when he learnt that rich deposits of iron had been found around the small village of Sakchi in remote Bihar and that the Jharia coalfields nearby could supply the necessary coal. Among Jamsetji's last journeys was a visit to Alabama and Pittsburgh in the United States to study the coking process. Steel meant self-reliance for India, he believed. Jamsetji's concept was consolidated by his sons, when India's first private steel mill was set up in the steel city that bears his name (Jamshedpur).

Jamsetji died on May 19, 1904. Ninety nine years later, the Tata empire presently under (non-executive) chairman Ratan Tata has blossomed, as per their fact file, to become India's largest employer in the private sector, with 2,30,000 employees across 95 companies! Its turnover is more than US \$ 11 billion, equivalent to 2.6 percent of India's GDP (gross domestic product). The firsts have continued — India's first international airline (Tata Airlines later Air India), the first car maker in India (Tata Engineering, now Tata Motors) to design and build an indigenous car aptly christened Indica, the first Indian software company (Tata Consultancy Services) to cross the \$ 1 billion (Rs 5,012 crore) mark in total revenue; India's largest ITD-services provider (Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited); the first Indian multinational corporation in the global tea market (Tata Tea) following its acquisition of the Tetley brand... The Tata footprint covers the sunrise industries of the new millennium as well as old war-horses like Tata Steel and Tata Chemicals, nimble footing their way through the first decade of the 21st century.

And the hotels have grown too. The matriarch at Apollo Bunder is the *taj* (crown) of the Taj Group of Hotels, now encompassing 65 hospitality entities with 8,155 rooms in India and abroad, as per their 102nd annual report 2002-03. Categorized into luxury, leisure and business segments, they cover beach resorts, garden retreats, wildlife sanctuaries, his-



toric and business centers...

For the centurion, however, age has not withered nor custom staled her infinite variety. "If the walls of the Taj could speak, what tales would they tell?" queries Ravi Dubey, senior vice president, corporate affairs/projects. Tales of mustachioed maharajas in full regalia with their retinue of retainers; of royal reveries of the heads of state gracing grand banquets — King Emperor George V and Queen Mary on their state visit in 1911, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, the Shah of Iran and Queen Farah; modern day king makers and politicians of all persuasions — Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Lord and Lady Mountbatten, President Nasser...

From celebrated men of letters George Bernard Shaw and Somerset Maugham to romantic novelist Barbara Cartland; Hollywood heartthrobs Douglas Fairbanks and Gregory Peck to modern day actress Susan Sarandon; from Yehudi Menuhin to Paul Harrison, John Lennon and Mick Jagger... the Hotel has seen it all — the fame, the frailties and the foibles of the bold and the beautiful; the diffident gawking of out-of-towners viewing five-star opulence for the first time!

The stories and the pictures linger — of the deceased maharaja given a stately farewell carried out seated upright in a chair as befits royal dignity; of Rutty,

Towering personalities (from left): Jamsetji, Dorab and Ratan Tata



daughter of Sir Dinshaw Petit and wife of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, seeking refuge in the Hotel when she quarreled with her famous husband; of Sarojini Naidu holding court in what was almost her permanent suite in the Taj; of JRD (Tata group chairman prior to Ratan) and wife Rodabeh receiving important guests...

Encapsulating the decades — from the time bits and bites pertained to culinary delicacies, when grass meant lawn and a big mac referred to an oversized raincoat — to the megabytes of 21st century cyberspace is Zafar Hai's film entitled *The Taj of Apollo Bunder*. Well-known actor Roshan Seth — tailcoat, red rose in buttonhole, stiff upper lip and tongue-in-check — takes us through the trials, tribulations and triumphs of 100 years.

Built at the then phenomenal cost of £ 500,000, World War I saw the Hotel being partly converted into a 600-bed hospital; it felt the reverberations of World War II and its economic aftermath. When India "awoke to life and freedom," the Taj took a while to find a fresh avatar in independent India. The elegant soirées, the live orchestras, the beat of the British regimental bands had made their passage out of India from the Gateway. In place of royal privy purses came the deep plastic of corporate clients; the lilt of the waltz and the swirling skirts were replaced by the dulcet notes of shehnai, the red and gold of brocade and zardozi as wedding guests swished their way up the staircase to the Crystal Room shimmering in the crystalline clarity of the enormous Belgian chandeliers.

An invitation to navjotes and Parsi weddings in the Crystal Room, now alas reduced to a trickle, saw maroon and magenta garas amidst the carved pillars (which once adorned Petit Hall, the palatial residence of the Petit family, before it was demolished), lustrous diamonds and rubies of Parsi matrons glinting in the sparkle of the chandeliers lighting up the Taj when their days at



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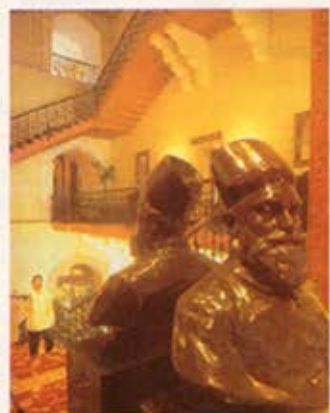
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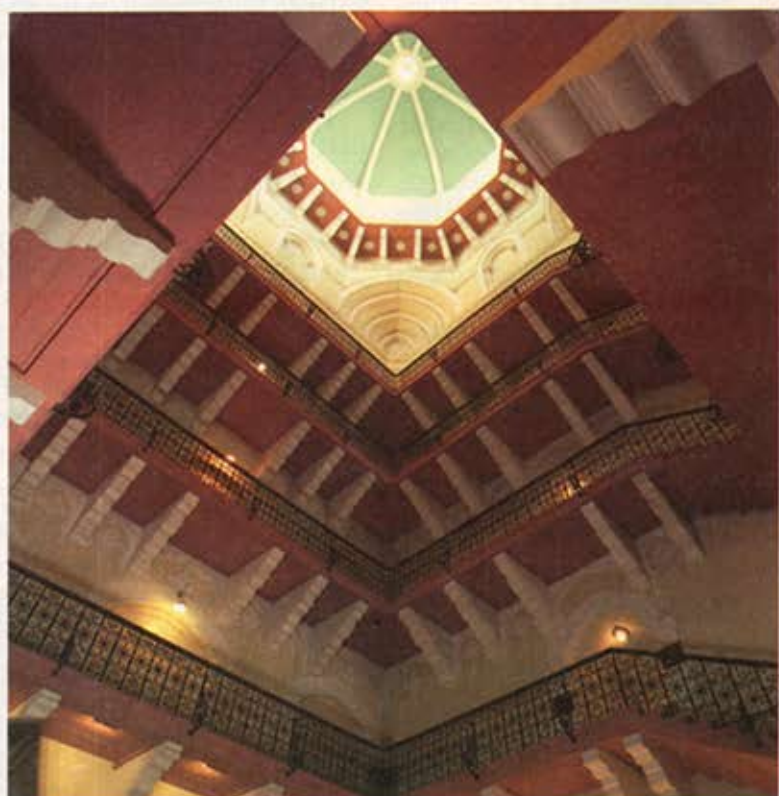
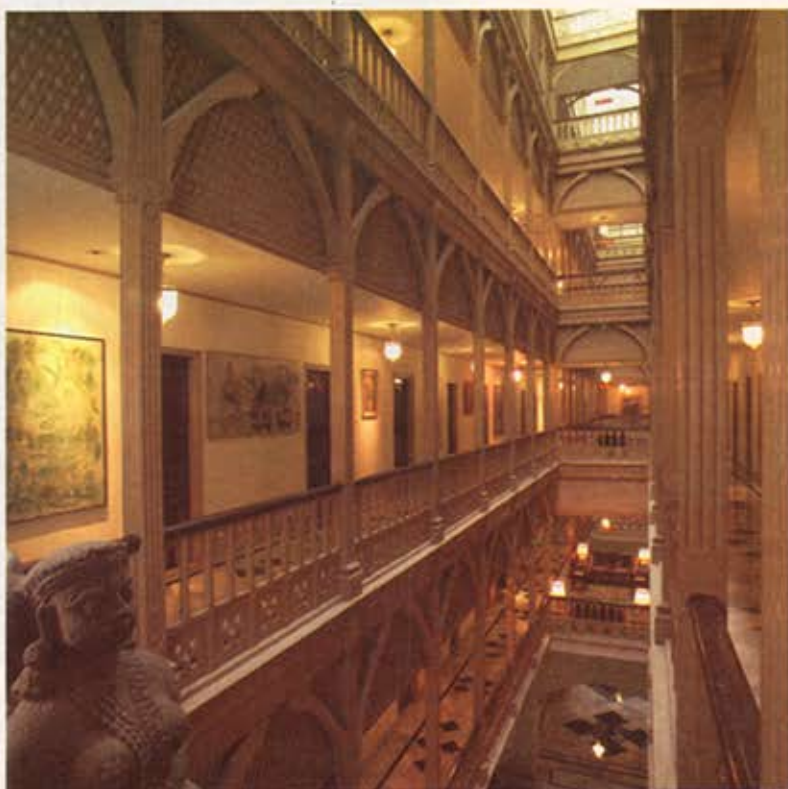
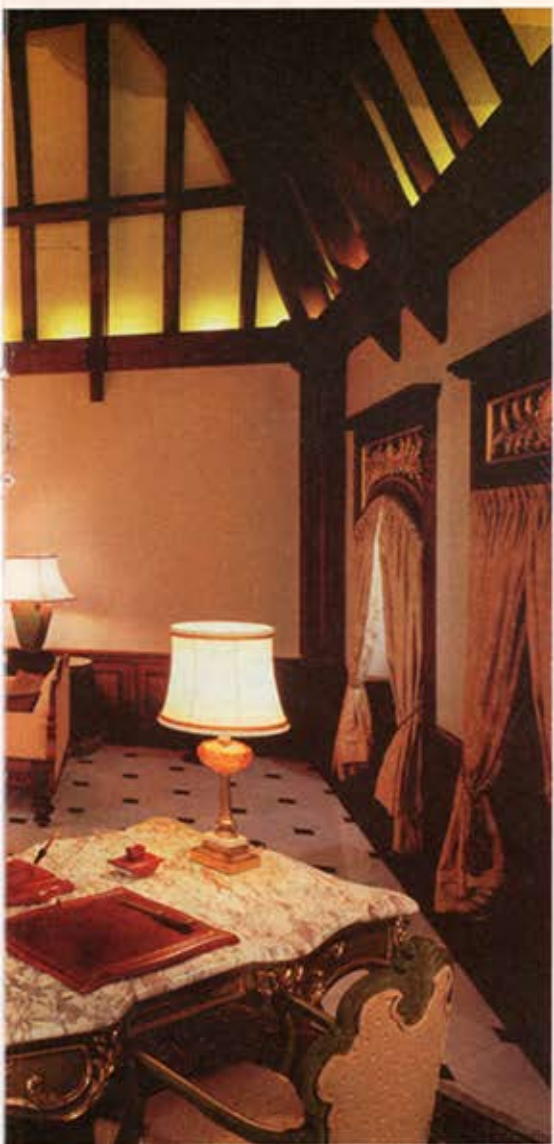
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Clockwise from top left: Room with a view; the opulence of the Presidential suite; the old and the beautiful — the Heritage Wing; the magnificent stairwell and dome; antiques in the Tata suite; the Shamiana — contemporary coffee shop; Jamsetji — regal reflection

All photos courtesy Taj Magazine/Tata Central Archives

Petit Hall were done. And the young ones shaking a leg to Goody Seervai and his accordion, Nelly and her band.

Noted filmmaker Ismail Merchant recalls earlier years: "...elegantly dressed Parsi ladies... took afternoon tea (at the Taj)... On one such occasion — just after the film *Rock Around the Clock* had taken Bombay by storm — there was a dance in the Ballroom, and everyone was rocking and rolling so furiously that dancers collapsed and had to be dragged outside to cool off. The haughty Taj suddenly resembled a madhouse and the genteel Parsi ladies were appalled at having their tea and their tranquility disturbed in this way (*The Taj*, Volume 32, No 3, 3rd Quarter 2003)."

Undisturbed however are the treasure trove of paintings, furniture and artefacts that adorn the suites, public areas and corridors. Maqbool Fida Husain's enormous canvas entitled *Three Stanzas of the New Millennium* adorns the lobby of the Tower Wing (constructed in 1973 where the Greens Hotel once stood), paintings by Shiavax Chavda, K. K. Hebbar, K. H. Ara, Anjolie Ela Menon, Naina Kanodia and other leading Indian painters are among the Taj's impressive art collection. Jehangir Sabavala's oil on canvas dating from the early 1970s entitled *Outward to the Unknown* hangs, appropriately enough, in the Bell Tower suite!

A Pandora's box of exquisite lacquer, Oriental and European porcelain

Grace and grandeur of old Ballroom (top); sugar and spice of the '30s cabaret (far right); all attention at the Reception (center); keeping watch over old Bombay harbor (below left); stately and sedate transport

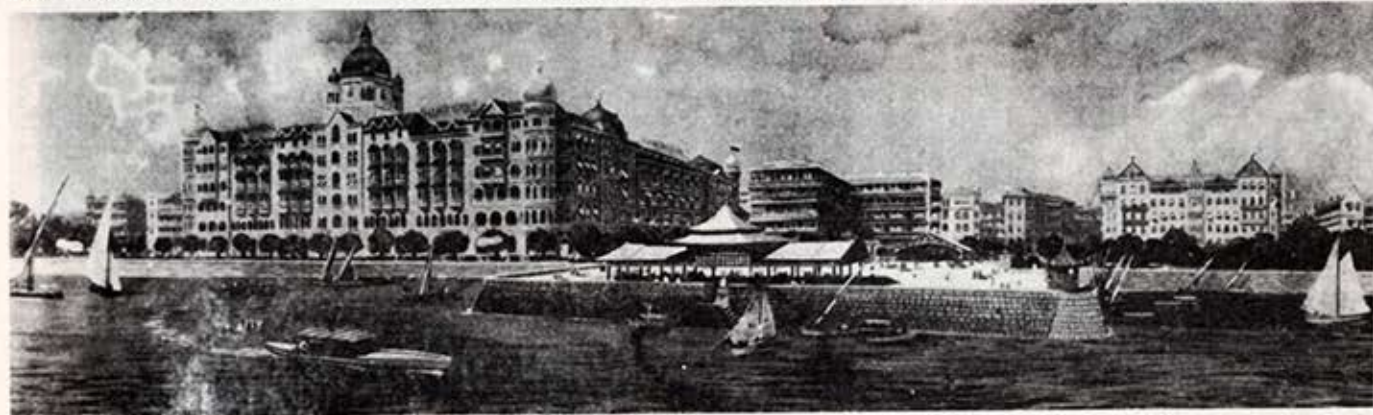


and pottery, Victorian colored glass, teak, rosewood and mahogany furniture, metal work and tribal art set the Hotel with its 500 plus rooms including 50 lavish suites apart from the Johnny-come-lately, steel, glass and chrome competitors mushrooming rapidly all over the city.

The old faithfuls are still around. "In 1933, Gazdar's (Gazdar Private Limited) — elite jewelers to the finest families in the country — became the first commercial outlet to open at the Taj," writes Meher Marfatia in *The Sunday Times of India* of June 22, 2003. To Noshir Dotivala, a spry 80 today, goes the distinction of being the oldest employee still at work in the building (with the possible exception of Meherwanji Chinoy, a Gazdar's director two years his senior), continues Marfatia. The Smithsonian in Washington possesses a jade vase from Gazdar's, notes Dotivala with pride. Philanthropist Bapsy

Sabavala once rode a horse up the staircase en route to a Crystal Room fund raiser; maharajas who had regular meetings (prior to Independence) in the Princes Room were among Gazdar's best customers, recalls Dotivala.

The tête-à-têtes and the rendezvous remain, albeit in different avatars. The centenary refurbishment has seen a new check-in lobby for the Heritage Wing. The heavy interiors of the Indian restaurant Tanjore have been replaced by the minimalist decor, the contemporary look and nomenclature of Masala Kraft. The Rooftop Rendezvous, popular with the Parsis in the 70s is no more — in its place comes Souk with its Middle Eastern decor and cuisine. The smoked salmon, schnapps and soufflés remain at the restaurants



but the tandooris, tikkas and thalis give stiff competition! In 1903, a suite of rooms including full board involved the princely sum of Rs 30 (roughly 40 pence); in 2003 the price of a bottle of bubbly at the aristocratic Zodiac Grill may run into four figures! The Harbour Bar was Bombay's first licensed bar, holding Bar License No 1; the new Starboard is "Bombay's trendiest bar," says the Taj's website www.tajhotels.com. The flounces and fishnet tights of the risqué cabaret in the Ballroom have metamorphosed into the cool chicks and dudes dancing at *Insomnia*, "Bombay's most happening nightclub!" Aromatherapy and yoga at Jiva, the Taj Spa alongside the pool, are in the fitness of things. Modems and telephone lines for internet connectivity are passé in this e-age — WiFi (a new broadband solution using Wireless Fidelity) allows guests the convenience of high speed internet from their laptops in any part of

in Bombay at that time — refused him entry on racial grounds. Another story has it that his experience of the great plague, which began in 1896, convinced him that he needed to put up a great hotel to restore the image of his beloved Bombay, a hotel which would be Indian owned, managed by European staff and open to visitors and guests of all races. The fact remains that the idea took his family by complete surprise even as his friends feared that Jamsetji would end up with a white elephant," writes noted journalist and former editor of *The Times of India* Dileep Padgaonkar in the Centenary Issue.

The aristocracy of its architecture ensured that the Taj instantly joined the "chain of caravanse-rais which sumptuously punctuated the travels of later day British imperialists — Shepherds in Cairo, Raffles in Singapore and the Peninsula in Hong Kong," continues Padgaonkar. The Taj was located at Apollo Bunder, popularly known as 'Palva' (a corruption of the word *palla* or *palwah*, the sable fish found abundantly in the surrounding waters where the Koli fishing boats landed at the *bunder* or pier). 'Palva' was a popular *hava-khana* [literally 'eating the air,' (source): *Bombay, The Cities Within* by Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra] for the burra sahibs and memsahibs of the British Raj, as well as the locals including the prosperous Parsis who viewed Palva and the Taj with proprietary pride! (*chaalo*, Taj *farava jayeé*). The western promenade — the grand curve of Marine Drive — was not completed till the 1930s.

Adding to the stories surrounding the Taj is the popular perception that it was built back to front and that the architect committed suicide when he realized what had happened! "Not true at all," emphatically asserts Dubey. "What Jamsetji really wanted was the maximum number of rooms facing the sea. The Hotel was built

exactly according to plan. We have the visuals of elevation with us." The architectural plans were originally initiated by Sitaram Khanderao Vaidya and D. N. Mirza, but Vaidya's untimely demise brought on the scene a radical Englishman by the name of W. A. Chambers who completed the project, states public relations executive Rubana Pestonji.

The style was eclectic, described variously as Moorish, Eastern and Indo-Saracenic. The U-shaped wings around a central courtyard, the high ceilings and long verandahs were designed to tap the breezes blowing not directly from the harbor with its picturesque piers, but from across Back Bay to the west where the original entrance was and where the swimming pool now stands.

At the heart of the structure was the magnificent cantilevered central stairway which stands today, a century later, in a cascade of carpet sweeping down from the central dome, Jamsetji's patrician figure in *dagla* and *pugree* seated benignly at the top of the first flight.

Among the most farsighted of Bombay's citizens at that time, Jamsetji's schemes for the improvement of the city were many, but most of them did not see fruition, primarily due to the shortsightedness of the authorities. A "splendid project he envisaged was the development of a suburban Venice on 1,200 acres of low-lying areas, criss-crossed by creeks and bounded on the west by the village of Juhu Tara, where he proposed to reclaim 500 plots, each comprising an acre, to be surrounded by canals with sluice gates. In addition, the village of Juhu Tara was to be developed as a fashionable seaside resort. Jamsetji unfortunately died... and although his sons and successors were keen to implement his ideas, priority was given to constructing the Tata steel works at Sakchi and the reclamation



the Hotel.

Over the decades, myths about the Hotel's conception and construction have grown. "How and when he (Jamsetji) toyed with the idea of a hotel is far from clear. Rumor has it that he thought of it when either the Watson's or the Pyrke's — two of the finest hotels

Bombay (old and new)
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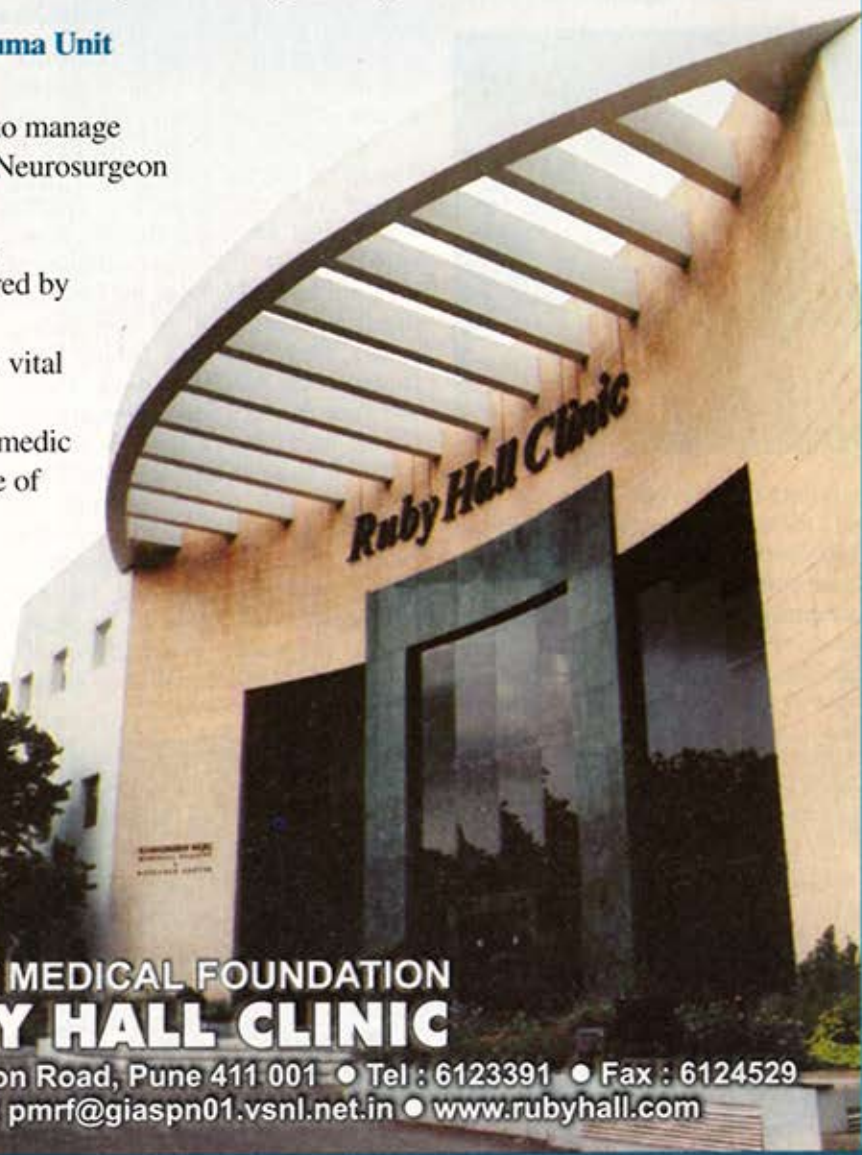
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projects were indefinitely postponed (*Bombay, The Cities Within*)."

According to his biographer Frank Harris, Jamsetji purchased land on the island of Madh, in Juhu and Bandra and built bungalows on each plot in the 1890s. On the island of Salsette (which mainly comprised the Bandra and Thana regions), he purchased a house and the whole village of Anik. Large numbers of people had fled to Salsette during the plague epidemic and had built small, ramshackle houses amidst the swamps and scrub. On the large properties he owned north of Bandra, Jamsetji made plans to build houses for the middle class at moderate rents, but his schemes were frustrated by a series of building fines imposed by the Bombay Government on undeveloped lands. Jamsetji carried on a protracted correspondence with the collector of Thana regarding the Rs 1,500 fine per acre that would have to be paid on the houses as well as on the gardens and compounds that surrounded them.

The levies were in fact much higher than those at Bombay itself. In 1899, as spokesman for the residents of Salsette, he petitioned the Bombay governor: "Apart from a mere handful of Bombay residents desirous of having houses in the suburbs, those desirous of building residences there are mostly men of moderate means... By far the greater portion of these are the permanent residents of the suburbs themselves..." The Government however maintained that the properties were, in fact, owned by capitalists. In sheer frustration, Jamsetji finally wrote to the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon. Whilst pointing out that he was the only 'capitalist' among the signatories to the appeal, Jamsetji asked for protection to the 10,000 landholders of Salsette. Although the press and the public supported Jamsetji's stance, the Government continued with its intractable attitude.

Meanwhile, Jamsetji persisted in his efforts to implement other plans such as a reclamation scheme around Mahim creek, stretching from the causeway to Bandra and Santa Cruz. To improve the health of these localities, he proposed the reclamation of low-lying swamps and their conversion into pasture ground for milch cattle, also eliminating thereby the nuisance of malarial areas. He hoped to create a fishery too at Mahim creek to provide a sizable supply of salmon, mullet and prawn to feed the city's rapidly growing population. Although Jamsetji's plans did not fructify, his



efforts symbolized the potential that private entrepreneurs were recognizing for the Greater Bombay region and by the 1900s the Government began to commence investment in infrastructure for this region (*Bombay, The Cities Within*).

Almost a century after Jamsetji's efforts to develop the suburbs, the Taj obtained a sibling in the north — the erstwhile Regent Hotel, now known as the Taj Lands End, near Jeejeebhoy Point in Bandra. States the annual report 2002-03 of The Indian Hotels Company Limited which owns the Taj Group: "This was probably the largest acquisition in the hotel industry in India to date, (making the Taj) the only one in Bombay to have a large presence in north and south Bombay." (The Taj President was acquired earlier.) Breaking new ground in South Bombay are the Wellington Mews Serviced Apartments (also a first for this part of town) to be launched in the last quarter of the financial year 2003-2004, which will provide five-star, exclusive, serviced apartments to long-staying guests.

India's experiment with socialism in the middle years of the 20th century, with stifling controls and heavy taxation, almost checked out the five-star hospitality industry. Through the decades the Taj came to be known as the Taj Mahal Hotel, the word 'palace' lost in the mists of time. In its centenary year, the hotel is renamed The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, in keeping with the vision of its founder. The Taj Palace and The Taj Mahal Hotel in Delhi, The Taj

Witnessing the royal welcome to King George V and Queen Mary in 1911 at Apollo Bunder

Bengal in Calcutta, The Taj West End in Bangalore, The Taj Coromandel Hotel in Madras and The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, Bombay are members of the "Leading Hotels of the World." More recently the Taj Exotica Resort and Spa, Maldives, Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur and Rambagh Palace, Jaipur joined the exclusive list of "Leading Small Hotels of the World," according to Hotel sources.

Keeping up royal connections is the recently inaugurated Usha Kiran Palace Hotel in the erstwhile princely state of Gwalior; the Falaknuma Palace is slated to open in late 2004 in the one time residence of the Nizams in Hyderabad. With luxury suites and apartments in London and hotels in Dubai, Oman, Yemen, Zambia, Colombo, Kathmandu and Maldives, their new Taj Exotica adds to the list when it opens in the azure surroundings of Mauritius in November 2004, according to the *Taj News* of August 2003. The Taj Group is the largest hotel chain in South Asia, as per their annual report.

Piloting the progress are the people. Heading the board of directors is the reticent Ratan Naval Tata, who moved from executive to non-executive chairmanship in December last year on his reaching the age of 65, in keeping with Tata Group policy. R. K. Krishna Kumar is vice chairman. Others on the board are octogenarian Jamshed Bhabha,

Noshir Soonawalla, Keki Dadiseth, Shapoor Mistry, Zubin Dubash, Deepak Parekh, S. K. Kandhari, Jagdish Capoor, Tejendra Khanna and Burjor Nariman who is also the company secretary. Raymond Bickson of the US is managing director. Maneck Patel, vice president and general manager of the Taj in Bombay, Jamshed Daboo, chief operating officer of the Leisure Division, Shirin Batliwala, vice president, coordination, Luxury Division, Rohinton Commisariat, general manager, marketing, Luxury Hotels are among the several in the top echelons of management.

While the government has somewhat loosened the strangles on the five-star hospitality industry with the relaxation of the luxury tax and expenditure tax, the board is still battling the shocks and awe of international occurrences like September 11, 2001, the Iraq War and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) this year. In sync with Ratan Tata's vision of a people's car (costing around one lakh rupees), the Taj Group has also "witnessed considerable progress in the development of a model 'value for money' hotel to be launched by the Group," states their annual report. The Group also aims to establish a

significant presence in international gateway cities such as New York, Los Angeles/San Francisco and Singapore, as well as in fast growing markets like China. The profit after tax for the year ended March 31, 2003 at Rs 40.48 crore declined by 50 percent over the previous financial year, as per their statement of accounts.

"What adds a unique dimension to the Taj is the fact that a significant part of the profits of the enterprise go back to the Tata Trusts which, for some eight decades, have been working to build our nation, to bring relief to those in distress, to educate the most talented minds... at the heart (of the house of Tata) lies the unique concept of trusteeship," states Krishna Kumar. The Taj community development philosophy involves distribution of surplus food to charitable homes, providing training in kitchen management and housekeeping to deserving persons and institutions like remand homes, prisons and hospitals, interaction with street children and youth in slums and charitable homes, etc.

The year-long centenary celebrations are not all partying, elucidates Dubey. The Hotel continues to espouse environmental, social and cultural causes. It

sponsored a conference on the Game Theory by Nobel laureates John Nash and Amartya Sen in early 2003. Maestro Zubin Mehta, whose father Mehli Mehta had played the violin at the Taj when Zubin was a child, wove magical melodies with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the Jamshed Bhabha Opera House in March, with the Taj hosting the Orchestra's stay.

Concerned about the deterioration to its famed namesake in Agra, the Taj Group has funded a panel of international experts from institutions like the Getty Foundation, the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the US, says Dubey. Contributions to the National Culture Fund have seen progress on the visitor facilitation center being improved, repairs to sidewalks, etc. The expert panel will "look at the marble itself soon," notes Dubey.

History and the hotel are intertwined. The rites of passage will go on with cosy conferences, international conventions, wedding nights spent in suites, golden anniversaries celebrated. The small picture changes, the large palette stands. One hundred years on, the Taj remains one of the most precious jewels in the Tata crown.

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ETHNICITY: AN ELECTORAL...

continued from page 20

conflict of interest between the WZO and the BPP. Why didn't Tamboly renovate the old dharamshala instead? asked Desai. Viraf Doctor informed him that at another meet Tamboly had explained that the Maneckbai Jeejeebhoy Sanatorium had been instituted by the WZO to prevent that extensive Zoroastrian property from falling into the hands of another community which aimed to set up a madressa next to the Stambh. When Desai, in his turn challenged the authenticity of that statement, this *Parsiana* reporter pointed out that the genesis of the Sanatorium had been documented in the magazine two years ago. Dropping all reference to the Sanjan sanatorium Desai charged that Dastur had written "on the BPP letterhead" to a community member seeking funds for *Parsiana*. When members of the audience stood up to defend Dastur's use of the Punchayet's good offices to garner support for *Parsiana* or any Parsi organization seen as doing good work Desai retorted, "Is it on (the) BPP's trust deed?" He claimed he would stop such activity if he got on the BPP board. He said he would run the Punchayet "as the settlers wanted it to be run. If I can't do my job I'll quit in the first year!"

Viraf Doctor asked Desai, who said he would intervene in the High Court hearings on the proposed changes in the BPP electoral scheme to seek universal adult franchise (UAF), "Isn't that going against the wishes of the settlers?" He was referring obliquely to the pre-1908 judgement of the High Court which introduced a 100-member electoral college to the Punchayet. Until then BPP trustees had been nominated for life. In answer to a question Desai stated that his UAF scheme would include all Parsis of Greater Bombay. V. Doctor challenged, "The BPP manages and controls properties outside Bombay. Don't the people of those areas have the right?"

"You're going into details" fumed Desai. Responded V. Doctor, "I'm just asking technical questions which show that UAF could be difficult, almost impossible to implement."

Desai dismissed a question on reservation with "It encourages inefficiency." Somebody asked how he had acquired his Rustom Baug flat and Desai stated that it had been a straightforward deal with him paying 60 percent of the price of the flat to the outgoing tenant and 40 percent to the Punchayet. "I swear on

Ahura Mazda I never paid a pai (extra) to anyone to get the flat."

Other Desai-isms: "Why is Dinshaw Tamboly so frugal in his use of the word Parsi? Is he ashamed to be a Parsi?" "If Tamboly is not a reformist why are all reformists and DDD-AG (Disposal of the Dead with Dignity-Action Group) members supporting him?" And in contrast, "What work Khojeste is doing is wonderful! The youths are in awe of (him)."

At Tamboly's meet at Rustom Baug Beroze Guzder first raised the issue of UAF by stating "very few people elect BPP trustees. It is wrong to assume that they are the voice of the community." When Tamboly explained that "it is not in our hands to expand the electorate" and that a revised scheme has been submitted to the Bombay High Court and was overdue for a hearing, Guzder insisted, "Our community has 100 percent educational levels. Why doesn't the BPP push (UAF) forward?"

Admitting to the "integrity and work of the WZO — the shift (in emphasis) from provision of doles to work (tools) is excellent," Guzder nonetheless maintained that "WZO ideologies do not match those of India." She also voiced apprehension about Indian Zoroastrians being "swamped by Zoroastrians of the western world... our atash behrams/ agiaris being swamped by converts."

Tamboly tried to set such apprehensions at rest by emphasizing that the world body aims at networking and contacts for the betterment of Zarathushtis everywhere and did not focus on religious issues. "Each zone would have its own definition of Zoroastrian." He also drew attention to the trust deed of each agairy/atash behram that protects it. "(We) respect the views of people who are traditionalists but we have to have open minds." Tamboly's sentiment met with general applause.

Anahita Desai, wife of the challenger Yazdi, cited an old article in the *BPP Review* in which she said Tamboly had argued in favor of status quo as against UAF and said "leave the system alone." Her second charge was that the draft of the world body, for which she held Tamboly responsible, spoke only of "Zoroastrians" not of "Parsi Zoroastrians." Describing herself as "an ordinary Zoroastrian," the 63-year-old Jesia said, "I am always proud to be a Zoroastrian. I know I'm a Parsi (but) I never had to qualify this."

Wellknown stage personality Dinyar



L to R (1st row):
Tamboly
supporters and
Desai supporters



(2nd row):
Keeping count of
the voters (left);
Arnavaz Mistry,
Nozer Tantra,
Maneck Engi-
neer, Kersi
Randeria and
Zaree Jehangirji



(3rd row):
Tanaz Parakh
and Homi Lord;
Jesia; Dr Porus
Turner; Sarosh
Daruwalla,
Mahiyar Das-
toor, Tantra and
Burjor Antia



(4th row): Kersey
Gherda; Freddie Mehta;
Rusi Sethna; Yezdi
Bhagwagar and Noshir
Talati



(5th row): Silloo
Kavarana; Jeroo
Khurshedji and Soonu
Andhyarujina; Adi
Doctor collecting his
duplicate certificate

Contractor noted, "When a man has done so much for the community... you criticize him for not adding one word — 'Parsi!?' What have you done for the community? When you want to win an election tell us who you are and what you have done."

According to *The Bombay Samachar* ("Parsi Tari Arsi," October 19, 2003) Desai "has filed an election petition to set aside the election of Dinshaw

Tamboly and to be himself declared a trustee." The appeal has been made to the BPP trustees, notes *The Samachar*. It alleges unfair practices adopted by Tamboly viz the (old) cheque of four lakh rupees given to *Jam-e-Jamshed* editor Rusi Dhondy; Tamboly's refusal to participate in a debate with Desai and providing free transportation to voters and the *Jamé's* attack on the *Parsi Voice* (which had been revived to give the challengers a forum) and on Desai's

wife Anahita.

The *Jamé* had castigated her for threatening legal action against the weekly as well as against Mancher Daruwalla whose infant daughter Jennifer had benefited by an expensive operation financed by donations through Tamboly.

In the earlier phase of the election Noshir Dadrawala and his supporter Perzon Zend had visited Tamboly on August 4, 2003 with a legal affidavit they wanted him to sign as a price for an



With
best wishes
from

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&
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uncontested reelection. The affidavit's seven clauses included affirmation of the definition of Zoroastrian as being Parsi Zoroastrian, one who is born of both Parsi Zoroastrian parents and whose navjote had been performed by a Parsi Zoroastrian priest. Other clauses required Tamboly to oppose intermarriages and the navjote of their offspring; the adoption of children from secular adoption centers; cremation or burial where dakhmas exist. He was required to state that he refused to recognize Jafarey as a Zoroastrian or as a *ratu* (leader) and that converts from Central and South America would never be accepted/recognized as Zoroastrians by the BPP/WZO or any other Parsi Zoroastrian organization. Strangely, this clause was thrust on Tamboly when an earlier clause demanded his resignation as officer and member of the WZO!

Unlike the vituperation in the Press, specifically the *Jamé* (see "An acrimonious election," *Parsiana*, September 2003) the election day (September 27, 2003) was peaceful enough to be dull. Just about 50 percent of the total electorate of approximately 1,300 live members of the Anjuman Committee came to vote — a few in their 90s and one who was 102! A rueful Dastur estimated the direct cost of the election at two lakh rupees, the indirect cost at three lakhs and the empirical cost of all those man hours lost at two million rupees!

Again, 41 duplicate certificates were issued — 25 to elected members, Desai supporter Adi Doctor among them, and 16 to donors.

Rustom Hormuzdiar presided over the proceedings as he has been doing over the past two decades and more except when abroad. With a bow to propriety Rusi Bhungara, joint honorary secretary of the WZO, who normally functions as a scrutineer at these elections, opted out this time. Hence Homai Modi, the other well established scrutineer, was joined by Ratan Lalkaka, former CEO of the Petit Trust.

The sound of popping champagne and a spirited rendition of *Chhaiyé Hamé Zarathoshti* marked the curtain closure on yet another BPP trustee election by an electoral college that had outlived its statutory existence by nearly four years. Hopefully, by the time of the next election in 2007, a new Anjuman Committee will be in place. No matter which way the High Court mandates it, Dastur's cost estimates will be left far behind.

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A legacy of love

President Kalam's visit underscores Bel-Air's position as India's leading medical facility for treating HIV-AIDS patients

Arnavaz S. Mama

Panchgani, the little hill station in the rain shadow of the Indian Peninsula's Western Ghats best known for its few boarding schools, was atwitter with excitement. A flood of official cars and swarms of security officials overpowered its narrow roads, barred entry to its favored promenade — the tableland. On the plus side water, a rare commodity in the town (and drought hit Maharashtra this summer) was flowing again! "History was made as a small hospital in a small town received the President of India"

on May 28, 2003, noted Kersi Gherda, chairman of the Red Cross Society, Maharashtra state.

A survivor of 90 years of vicissitudes, the Dr. R. B. Billimoria Bel-Air Sanatorium and Hospital is now internationally recognized for successfully transmuting its dedication to the cause and care of tuberculosis (TB) patients to the service of HIV-AIDS (Human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) sufferers. After all, the scourge of TB had been as frightening a death sentence, with its sufferers treated as social outcasts in 1912 when Dr Rustom Billimoria set up his facility, as AIDS is today.

It was to honor the Bel-Air Hospital and its doctors' seminal courage in welcoming and treating patients — including little children born with the HIV scourge — when bigger, better and more prosperous establishments refused such service, that the President Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam agreed to inaugurate its 90th anniversary celebrations. Not only

does Bel-Air address HIV-AIDS patients' immediate medical problems be it broken bones, teeth or eye problems, the recurring fevers, the propensity to

speaking to some of the patients and accepting floral tributes from the child patients and Billimoria's granddaughter Sarah Cheesman, the President recalled

the "vision and unflinching commitment of Rustom Billimoria... a great son of India" and said he was "touched to receive flowers from his granddaughter."

Recording his impressions of the place, Kalam said he "saw the HIV-AIDS patients, saw the environment that gives them emotional support." He described these doctors and staff as "people of strong mind... divine

persons (who) cure pain in body and mind." Referring to the strides made by medical science and technology, he noted how "TB is now curable. One day HIV will also be curable." Speaking of Indian researchers work-

Members of the Bel-Air subcommittee, volunteers and members of the Shapurji Billimoria family. Alongside: Kalam and Gherda

contract TB, a disease which has seen a massive comeback all over the world with the onset of AIDS, but their severely bruised psyche is treated with tender loving care. When their health improves, such patients help the staff in simple labor and managerial functions and in the Red Cross Society's social program in the villages to educate the people and bring home the message that HIV-AIDS is not a contagious affliction, that its spread is limited to the sharing of body fluids like blood, saliva, semen and that there are ways to prevent this from happening.

Addressing the audience in the gaily colored shamiana after meeting the medical and administrative staff of Bel-Air,



ing with international collaborations on creating an anti-HIV vaccine, Kalam hoped that five years hence new HIV cases would be prevented. Emphasizing the vital need for awareness among the youth, the President urged schools to include moral science in their syllabi, teach children "how to lead a good life." Praising National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)'s program of low priced care combined with information to fight the dreaded disease, he spoke of the AIDS affected children's need for general education free of discrimination and for "all teachers and parents to realize that HIV-AIDS is not contagious. It's a mission for all of us in good health — to propagate the message to treat



Clockwise from top left: Kalam being welcomed by children from the local schools; bust of Rustom; bust of Bomi; Modi and Fr Tomy jubilant at

the morning's success; Villoo and Eruch Ghadially; Cheesman; the office block; (L to R) Maharashtra health minister Digvijay Khanvilkar,

Kalam, Fazal, Ramalingam and Fr Tomy lighting the inaugural lamp



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File photos: Bomi and Rustom Billimoria (below and alongside, from left) with Mehru Masina and Gulestan Billimoria (3rd from R)



patients with God's love and kindness." By 2020 he hoped India's progress will ensure "health for all" and the elimination of HIV, TB, water borne diseases, heart disease and cancer. "It is a big responsibility for scientists, technologists, industrialists (to provide) not only physiological treatment but also psychological treatment" and hoped that the MBBS syllabus will provide enough importance for psychology courses.

Maharashtra governor Mohammed Fazal who escorted the President spoke of the need for family accommodation for migrant labor as "unnatural sex is the major cause of AIDS in this country, especially among truck drivers."

In his welcome address Gherda recalled how the 44 acre Dalkeith property had been gifted by Sir Dorab Tata to Billimoria and how the Dorab Tata Trust continued to support the Hospital which has been reborn from the "decayed state" it had reached five years ago.

Dr Vimla Ramalingam, secretary general of the Indian Red Cross Society — India's largest NGO with the President of India as its ex officio president — spoke of its work in all disasters, natural and manmade. Like wars and communal riots "HIV is another manmade disaster... We do not have hospitals that look after the needs of HIV-AIDS patients. Here, such a patient is treated as a human entity."

Bel-Air administrator Fr Tomy Karyilakulam referred to the institution's services which include a general hospital section, the TB specialty, community care center for HIV/AIDS and an ayurvedic naturo-

pathic center. Recounting how "the ignorance, fear, discrimination and mental agony created by HIV-AIDS is a major problem in its treatment," Fr Tomy narrated the case of their "first HIV patient who had multiple fractures from an accident and who was refused by many orthopedic doctors in Satara and Poona. Our Dr Sunil Pise took a courageous decision to conduct a surgery to fix his bones. First we had to hunt for an anesthetist because all were refusing. Then my operation theater sisters came to me weeping because they were afraid. We postponed the operation. It took me two days to convince them before they took up the challenge.

"We are also ignorant. Our doctors just didn't know how to manage the complications arising out of HIV. We searched for answers and didn't find them, not in (Bombay), not in (Madras). That is why Bel-Air doctors were (subsequently) sent for training by WHO (World Health Organisation) to Bangkok and Spain. We also have begun international exchange programs for capacity building of our staff.

"Several HIV positive people are being brought to this Hospital, very sick and on stretchers. Not only are they becoming better (and) go back to work but they are also overcoming fear and discrimination. Due to the impact of the work by Bel-Air there is a sea change of attitude now



in the villages of Satara district. Dear ones and families are taking care of the HIV positive patients with love and affection where they were abandoned earlier. This change in social attitudes is also reflected in the bold decision of the New Era High School and its principal Dr Mehreza in availing Bel-Air facilities despite the stigma attached to our Hospital. Other schools in Panchgani have slowly begun to follow suit."

A national consultation on HIV/AIDS, conducted by the Government of India (GOI) between May 12-14, 2003 at Bangalore, had reviewed pertinent programs at the Sir Jamsetji Jejeebhoy (JJ) Hospital, Bombay, at Sahara, Delhi, at YRG CARE in Madras and Bel-Air, notes a press release. The convention, attended by senior officials of the health ministries of the GOI and the states, recognized the Bel-Air model as the most comprehensive as it integrates home care, community involvement, medical and psychological training and programs for education to generate a change of attitude in society at large.

Today Bel-Air has been nominated as a national training facility in HIV-AIDS management for doctors and health care professionals by NACO and USAID (United States Agency for International Development). As a member of the Avert Society, cofounded by NACO, the Government of Maharashtra and USAID, Bel-Air's Community Care Center works with patients and families to reduce the transmission and mitigate the impact of all sexually transmitted diseases (STD), notes the 76-page illustrated art paper book *Dr R. B. Billimoria Bel-Air Sanatorium and Hospital, Panchgani (1912-2003)* published by the Indian Red Cross Society, Bombay, documenting the history and resurgence of Bel-Air.

Dr Shireen Billimoria



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India," noted joint honorary secretary of Bel-Air and the Indian Red Cross Society, Maharashtra State Branch, Homai Modi as she thanked the President, the governor and Maharashtra's ministers of health and finance who had come to Panchgani in tribute to Billimoria's social vision and its contemporary manifestation. Modi's commitment to the cause of Bel-Air, relentlessly pursued for several years, and her talent for organizational nitty-gritties had been rewarded by this first-ever visit by the President of India. It was a short respite from her ceaseless search for funds to maintain the momentum the institution had acquired.

The institution

One of Bombay's leading physicians and a TB specialist, Billimoria wanted to reduce the incidence of TB and provide the environmental assistance that would aid the recovery of his patients. "Hygienic and clean surroundings was his first priority," records the book. With a loan of Rs 6,000 from Sir Ratan Tata he hired a bungalow in Poona in 1912 and Bel-Air was born.

"The first patient at Bel-Air was Dr Billimoria's ENT professor's cousin who was suffering from TB of the lungs, larynx and bowels. After a prolonged stay and treatment, the patient recovered completely and subsequently led an active life as a practicing dentist for 30 years," states the book. Though not all cases were as successful, by 1914 the bungalow could not accommodate the many who sought treatment. The search for new premises was proving fruitless, as Maneckshah Pochkhanawalla, a fellow traveller on a Poona-Bombay train, accidentally learnt from a disappointed Billimoria and his friend. He advised the young doctor to "wait till you hear from me." Soon thereafter the doctor received a letter stating that a bungalow large enough to accommodate 12 patients, with a separate doctor's cottage, dispensary, laboratory, stables and servants quarters was available in Panchgani: Sir Dorab Tata had agreed to donate his 44-acre estate, Dalkeith, to Billimoria!

The doctor, appreciating the priceless gift of the scenic es-

HIV-AIDS patients serving the hospital and spreading AIDS awareness in Satara district



A section of the operation theater

tate, with a dry bracing climate ideally suited to the recovery of TB patients, "left no stone unturned to transform Bel-Air into a sanatorium that could compare with its European counterparts," notes the book.

He had his teething problems. Owners of hostleries in Panchgani, some of whom accepted TB patients as boarders, claimed that the sanatorium would affect their livelihood and sought a government order prohibiting its establishment. The government despatched Major Liston, the head of the Haffkine Institute, to visit the sanatorium and report on its feasibility. His positive findings prompted Sir Leonard Rogers to recommend that the Government "help, not hinder the noble work," and Lady Willingdon, wife of the governor of Bombay, became the first in a long line of visiting dignitaries as she opened Bel-Air's Recreation Hall. Governors, chief ministers and international health professionals have visited its portals over the years.

Every week the doughty doctor took the 3 p.m. train from Bombay to reach Wathar station at midnight. From there he took a tonga (a light horse drawn vehicle) — and even continued the nine-mile steep incline of the Parsani Ghat on foot when the rickety contraption broke down — to reach Panchgani at dawn. By the early 1920s the institution was the finest in Bombay state and had a national

wards, administrative offices, laboratory, x-ray room, operation theaters, mess, kitchen, recreation hall, linen room, sterilization facilities and staff quarters, states the book. Clean and efficient, they nestled in the colorful garden amid the scenic mountains. The golden jubilee in May 1962, presided over by Union Health Minister Dr Sushila Nayyar, marked the acme of Bel-Air's achievements under Billimoria.

Once the institution achieved stability, Billimoria's thoughts had turned to ensuring its continuity and, in 1926, he had transferred its management to a board of trustees. The arrangement had worked well, records the book. However, in 1965, Billimoria transferred the management of the Hospital to the Indian Red Cross Society and over the past 38 years it has continued as a Red Cross project.

From its inception Billimoria had ensured that Bel-Air had a social slant. There were only three blocks for paying patients, the emphasis being on concessionary and free treatment. Run on totally secular lines, there were no distinctions of caste, creed or religion. Donations, a small fee, beds reserved by government organizations and banking institutions covered a part of the expenses. The annual operating deficit was covered by a grant-in-aid from the state government. "This arrangement worked smoothly till the 1990s, but from thereon, (with) budgetary constraints and receding

public health care funding by the State Government, this important source of funding dried up, with the State reneging on its health care obligations. This was a lethal blow," documents the history.

From 1965 to 1980 the hospital capacity grew to 250 beds. The laboratory had the facility for biochemical, pathological





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and microbiological work. The patients had recreational facilities and received rehabilitation training. Nonetheless, by the mid 1980s the tide had turned. New anti-TB drugs eliminated the need for hospitalization and the occupancy dropped sharply. Donor fatigue and erratic government support impacted medical and staff appointments and efficiency. Combined with spiralling drug prices, unchecked land encroachment and labor militancy, these factors drove the management to the wall, despite the support of the Holy Cross nuns, professionally trained nurses, whose commitment sustained the institution through those "difficult and dark years," records the book.

Into this seemingly hopeless quagmire walked a young tourist, a priest from Kerala. Astutely assessing the potential of the institution and the estate, Fr Tomy approached the Red Cross authorities in Bombay with the proposal that his Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS) would be willing to manage the Hospital as a Red Cross project. In 1994 the Red Cross signed an agreement entrusting the administration of Bel-Air to the MCBS and appointing Fr Tomy as the administrator.

With 30 patients in three wards, three nun sisters shouldered the entire burden of nursing. Funds were so low — the corpus was almost gone — the hospital couldn't even buy equipment for sputum removal. Fr Tomy and the managing committee of Bel-Air concentrated on raising seed money to turn the institution around. The Dorab Tata Trust, headed by Russi Lala, sanctioned a recurring donation which played a "catalytic role" in rebuilding the eroded corpus, notes the book.

Attempts to discipline the support staff which had begun to threaten the medical and nursing staff "reached a flashpoint in 1998, when an unruly mob instigated by a section of the workers went on a rampage, attacking the staff, destroying hospital property and forcing the police to place the administrator in the lockup for his safety." The Bel-Air management declared a lockout (which endured for two months), shifted the patients to Satara and Poona and undertook the task of completely overhauling the setup.

Recognizing Bel-Air's position as the only hospital of its kind in Satara Dis-



Patients participating in a play to propagate community awareness

trict, the new management committee appointed by the Red Cross worked towards adding departments like orthopedics, pediatrics, general medicine and an intensive care unit.

A donation of Rs 1.25 crore from Mehraban and Faridoon Zartoshty emboldened the managing committee's fund-raising drive. A firm handling of the labor problem helped to instil discipline and the overall impetus revived Billimoria's legacy of service among the medical professionals.

With an eye to creating a source of income an Ayurvedic and Naturopathy Centre was established in an area well removed from the rest of the hospital complex, with an independent entrance and parking facilities, offering oil massage, yoga, herbal medicines, steam baths, etc. Ayurvedic therapies have been successful in the treatment of hemiplegia, sciatica, cervical spondylosis, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, obesity, psychosomatic and nervous disorders, says the book, while naturopathy with an array of services like jet massage, mud bath, asthma bath, etc, claims to treat a variety of disorders ranging from hepatitis to hypertension, hypothyroidism, anxiety neurosis, depression, gout, eosinophilia, etc.

Apart from the in-depth elaborate therapeutic programs that span about a month, the center offers stays ranging from four days to 21 days in private rooms with single or double occupancy. These range from Rs 3,000/Rs 4,000 to Rs 12,500/Rs 17,000 for single occupancy in standard/deluxe room respectively for the two periods of stay with several variations in between. The packages include a daily oil massage, alternate steam bath, alternate underwater massage, routine hydrotherapy treat-

ments, daily yoga/physical exercises, natural and therapeutic diet. Deluxe room accommodation includes TV, phone and attached bathroom, notes a Bel-Air press release.

Funded by NACO, Bel-Air runs a 50-bedded Community Care Centre where HIV-AIDS infected persons afflicted with active TB or other infections are treated and their families — thanks to the committed interaction of staff and social workers — are encouraged to visit, stay and help nurse the patient. Many such patients have been located in distant villages by Bel-Air's social workers, the Bel-Air's history informs us.

Starting with eight HIV-AIDS patients in 1995, Bel-Air treated 376 in 2002. It offered medical treatment free of charge to 408 patients and at concessional rates to 117 in 2002-2003.

On his final visit to Bel-Air in 2001 as governor of Maharashtra and ex-officio president of the Red Cross Society of Maharashtra State, Dr P. C. Alexander stated, "I have visited Bel-Air regularly during the last eight years since I have been the governor of the State. I am impressed by the change I see today — the cleanliness of the place, the improvements that have been brought about and the additions made in the available medical facilities. The smiling plants and flowers welcome me and there is an atmosphere that permeates peace, tranquility and hope."

Even so, many of the old blocks are in disrepair. Much of the wiring, according to Fr Tomy is 75 to 90 years old. "We need a lot more funds... to strengthen the infrastructure, to bring it to the international standards of Dr Billimoria," he adds. Working towards the institution's sustainability, Fr Tomy says they are already working with the local schools. "If all the schools utilize the Hospital, it would be enough... Naturopathy can be a sustainable project but we need at least 50 percent occupancy." As of now the 10 double rooms and the 10 dormitory beds in the Naturopathy Centre are occupied only in the season.

Tomy is also keen on installing solar heaters as the schools in Panchgani have done, start a vermiculture project to enrich the beauty of the grounds. The beautiful fountain in the garden needs repair: "These are joys you can provide." Himself a disciplined man (through the years

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of travail at Bel-Air Fr Tomy says he completed his LLB from Poona University and has been working on a postgraduate diploma in hospital administration via distance education) Fr Tomy says labor problems "come from attitudes... The best logic of management is equitable payment and no self-interest. I have no favorites."

The Billimoria family

Raised as a devout Zoroastrian, by his father Bomanji, Rustom Billimoria, the youngest of four siblings, was to know the pain of death several times in his life. His mother died when he was but two years old. His first wife Shireen (née Aga), a qualified doctor prevented from practising by virulent asthma, and their only son Bomi, a brilliant thoracic surgeon, painter, pianist and award winning photographer as Cheesman remembers him, predeceased Rustom Billimoria.

Always clad in a Parsi dagla (white cotton coat), white cotton trousers and a pugree, Billimoria was "a man of few words, soft-spoken, civil, but without meaning to be discourteous, brusque," describes the book. A traditionalist with great faith in prayers, Billimoria at the age of 76, is said to have stood and prayed throughout the death ceremonies of his brother, friend, and mentor Shapurji, who founded the venerable accounting firm of Billimoria and Company. To Shapurji, Rustom was "Raja" — a king among men, and that is the name the whole Billimoria clan knew him by. Shapurji's daughters Dina and Roda remember how he teased them, pulling their pony tails, removing the ribbon from their hair. When their father had a heart attack "Raja kaka" treated his brother at his own home. "He was very unpredictable — couldn't stomach fools,



Mavis and Bomi with Sarah, Rustom and Jal. Alongside: Rustom and Bomi as a child

was annoyed by absurd questions. But it never stopped him from looking after his patients," says Dina. Roda speaks of his dry humor: "He had no bedside manners but he had a heart of gold."

"To most people he came across as a fiery but kindly eccentric," records the book. One such eccentricity was to always hold — and to exhort patients and family to do so too — a large white handkerchief over his mouth and nose to prevent the entry of dust into the lungs.

Rustom's second wife was the renowned social worker Gulestan Bahadurji, several years his junior. Extroverted and public-spirited, Gulestan was the antithesis of her husband who shunned the limelight. Yet they helped and supported each other, notes the book and "it was Gulestan who presided at Bel-Air annual functions and gave the welcome address to the governor."

Bomi who had accompanied his mother to Switzerland, had schooled there and proceeded to UK for his medical education. After securing his FRCS qualification he continued to live and work in London. He returned to India in 1947 accompanied by his English wife Mavis, a professional midwife

L to R: Mavis and Gulestan and a government minister



and nurse, and their one-year-old daughter Sarah. The accomplished surgeon dedicated a few days a month to operate at Bel-Air, starting with one and gradually increasing to seven surgeries a day according to former patient and old hand at Bel-Air, Eruch Ghadially. They had two sons in India — Jal and Rustom.

Cheesman, who schooled at the Fort Convent in Bombay and her Cathedralite brothers spent holidays at Bel-Air with father. She remembers her grandfather as "overpowering (and) very strict. Dad (who) was softer, quieter and

very western in his way of life (was somewhat) in awe of him. Our navjotes were very quiet, at Silloo and Shapurji's house. Grandpa had arranged for the priests," recalls Cheesman. She says Bomi always wore his sudreh-kusti though "I don't know whether he knew the prayers. Dad died before grandpa and he was cremated, against grandpa's wishes."

The sensitive Bomi was never quite reconciled to his father's second marriage and Rustom and his son remained very divergent personalities is the picture that emerges from *Parsiana's* chat with the surviving Billimorias. After Bomi's death, Mavis, who according to Sarah had "loved it here," took the children back to England where she died.

It was when Sarah joined Air-India as an air hostess and came periodically to India that she came to know her grandfather better. She says her brother Jal, an electrical engineer, is very much like her grandpa while Rustom, who has also passed away, resembled their father. Cheesman's three children share the professional interests of their great grandparents. Her daughter Selina is an accountant, son Nevil a psychiatrist while Ricky is pursuing medicine at Oxford. They chose their fields without any prompting, says Cheesman who also studied accountancy at the age of 44.

"I have a great desire to come to India and do something," says Cheesman who wants to dedicate six months a year to welfare work here. A Billimoria scion would probably have much to contribute...

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 12

where the Parsi spouse has not changed his/her faith?

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•Should we throw out these families and further dilute our Zoroastrian ethos and ethics?

•With emigration continuing (for various reasons), should we build more houses?

•The examples of depleting population in Mhow, Jamshedpur and Karachi are only illustrative.

The problem has been with the community for close to a 100 years, and interfaith marriages took place only amongst the elite.

The Parsi farmers in south and central Gujarat had umpteen mistresses, and our priests looked the other way. The offspring of these Parsi farmers and *dubris* provided "fodder" for doing menial jobs in our agiaries and dakhmas; because the fathers were Parsis, their navjotes and weddings were solemnized.

Now the situation is different; the

elite continue to marry outside; the Parsi farmers and their *dubri* mistresses have dwindled in numbers, with the abolition of the zamindari system in Gujarat (and in most states); and 90 percent of those marrying outside are the educated, well placed middle-class.

This trend does not show any sign of stopping. Compared to Parsis, fewer Irani Zoroastrians marry outside.

This issue cannot be left only to the High Priests. Instead a referendum should be held not only in India but even abroad, in South East England, Toronto and in major pockets of the US and elsewhere.

Our dithering on this subject — and on many other subjects — is undermining our interests. It is time to wake up.

BEHRAM T. DASTUR

The dedicated doctor

Dr Farokh B. Dhondy became a doctor in 1947 when he was 22 years old, thus fulfilling his father's dream of having a doctor in the family. His first step as a doctor was to go to the fire-temple and take the Hippocratic Oath. He had graduated from the Grant Medical College, whose dean was Colonel S. C. Bhatia, and the late surgeon Dr Kersi Dastur was his batch mate and a lifelong friend.



Dhondy: philanthropic medical man

For the next 35 years the good doctor practised at Kemp's Corner and looked after the health of not only the common man, but his patients included several well-known Europeans, like founders of Larsen and Toubro, the famous engineering and cement company. One European who was proceeding on leave to England asked the doctor whether he could bring him some medicines or instruments. The doctor replied that his good wishes are what he required. When the patient came back from England, he brought with him a car that he presented to the doctor who used it for the next 20 years! At last the doctor had to retire and settle down. On the last day before the doctor retired there was a crowd of about 200 persons assembled around his dispensary, looking sad and gloomy. The doctor told them that he was grateful to all of them, that he was just going away from Kemp's Corner and settling at his cottage at Bandra's Land End. He was



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not leaving this world so there was no occasion for any sadness. When someone from the crowd said in Gujarati that their father was leaving them, the good old doctor replied that God is our Father who merely used him to treat his patients!

Today at 84 years of age and being the last surviving member of his family, the doctor has decided that after him his bungalow would be used as a dispensary or for medical research.

Such is this doctor, when comes such another?

This reminds me of another incident a few years ago when I was asked to get a checkup from a cardiologist. A famous cardiologist near Bandra took my cardiogram, examined me for about 45 minutes and charged me Rs 800. He further suggested a follow-up after six months. As I could not afford to spend Rs 800 for the follow-up, I went to the Holy Family Hospital, Bandra, where this doctor also comes once a week in the morning. The doctor examined me for two minutes, then he put his stethoscope just once on my chest and immediately removed it. I was shocked at the difference in the two examinations. A doctor who does not get any remuneration to examine outdoor patients, is never forced to come to any hospital. The hospitals favor the doctors by giving them wide opportunity to examine a variety of patients. Why misuse such facilities?

NOSHIR M. LAM

Donate for dispensary

With the blessings of Pak Iranshah, the Seth M. C. Damanwalla Charitable Dis-

*Seth M. C. Damanwalla Charitable
Dispensary: in need of funds*

pensary was established in Udvarda way back in 1867 to cater to the medical needs of the poor Parsi inhabitants. However with the passage of time and few funds rolling in, we extended this service to other ailing and deserving people of sister communities of Udvarda and surrounding villages.

Our activities today include free medicines and doctor's care not only for the Parsis of Udvarda but also to those Parsis who visit the town to pay homage to Iranshah; doctor's visit to patient's residence at Rs 10 per visit during daytime and Rs 20 during the night; medicines and doctor's attention at highly concessional rates to members of sister communities in and around Udvarda; absolutely free medicines and doctor's care to people living below the poverty line.

With the phenomenal increase in the price of medicines, coupled with inflated staff salary bills, we find it absolutely impossible to sustain our month-to-month operations without incurring appreciable loss. Though our hearts cry out for the sick and needy, there is very little we can do for them without your love and help.

We therefore make a fervent appeal to all fellow Zoroastrians to extend their utmost help to this philanthropic and noble institution. Please remember, charity for the benefit of the sick and the suffering is never lost.

Kindly forward your donations through cash or account payee cheques to either: Keki S. Dastur, Honorary President, Tardeo Chambers, Flat A-19, Avabai Kashinath Road, Tardeo, Bombay 400007 (Tel: 24940375) or Zarir M. Dastoor, Honorary Secretary, C/o M. C. Damanwalla Dispensary, Dr D.

N. Road, Udvarda 396180 (Tel: (0260) 2340190).

K. S. DASTUR

President, Seth M. C. Damanwalla Charitable

Dispensary

We fight for peace

I am a 13-year-old subscriber to your magazine who was recently inspired to write a little poem:

So many times in life, / We seem to forget who we are, / And what our duties are. / So often it seems as if, / Humanity just died. / Along with the true religion. / Haven't we so often fought, / Within ourselves? / Haven't we fought with another caste? / And isn't it wrong? / We fight in the name of god, / Though god willed us to remain peaceful, / We fight in the name of religion. / Though religion, is another word, / For peace and harmony amongst all. / Let's preserve our religion well, / Let the others rise and fall, / Let us be kind and helpful to all, / Let us stay stable, let our roses not wither, / Because we are Zoroastrians, / And that's what we owe our religion. RHEA CAWSI DHANBHORA

New Year vision

Our Navroz was once again here, / Some truths we need to face without fear, / *Muthibhar* we were when India took us in, / With our holy fire we settled in, / From there on it was a steady climb to prosperity, / We pioneered industry and business abundantly, / Never did we miss the land we left behind, / We are proud Indian Parsis, we need to keep this in mind. / My wish for this Navroz is that we are free, / From pettiness, diktats, dogmatism and orthodoxy. / May every Parsi have his home and family, / A good job or business, whatever he wants to be, / May our dasturs come out of their self inflicted isolation, / Be more friendly, caring in their communication, / May they simplify the application of our beautiful religion, / Make it more tolerant with a progressive vision, / May no one be denied the prayers or shun, / A Parsi who opts for a burial or cremation, / May the navjote of all children with one Parsi parent be done, / This way we will increase our numbers, whether daughter or son, / May all darkness from our life be dispelled immediately, / Through Ahura Mazda's encompassing light on you and me, / This then is my prayer this New Year, / May Lord Zarathushtra bless everyone who is near and dear.

RODA D. HAKIM

Vadodara



Edited by Parinaz M. Gandhi

Parsiana

Pocket/purse date diary 2004



Courtesy: **Café MONDEGAR**

This December *Parsiana* will publish and mail subscribers a pocket/date diary, courtesy Café Mondegar, who have kindly offered to bear the cost of processing, printing and paper. The diary (size: 9.3 cm x 11 cm or 3.6" x 4.3") will contain the Shahenshahi, Kadmi and Fasli rozs and mahs and also have room for subscribers to write their appointments, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.



WANTED

Second hand Maruti 800, Esteem, Zen or Alto in good running condition. Budget Rs 1.5 lakhs. Write to:

The Advertiser (Auto)
Parsiana,
GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

MATRIMONIAL

A 31-year-old, 5'5½", fair, slim, Parsi lady teacher residing in Poona invites matrimonial correspondence from Parsi men. Interests: travel, music and cooking. Please apply with bio data and photograph (returnable) to:

The Advertiser
Parsiana, Matrimonial (Oct/23-2003)*
GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

*Please make sure the reply envelope bears the reference number cited here.

MATRIMONIAL

Parents of daughter, 25 years, smart, good looking, post graduate and having her own business, invite alliance from Parsi youth, 30 years and below, intelligent, well spoken with good family background and preferably in engineering field. Please respond with photographs (returnable) and details to:

The Advertiser
Parsiana, Matrimonial (Oct/26-2003)*
GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

*Please make sure the reply envelope bears the reference number cited here.

SPACIOUS FLAT FOR SALE

A flat in Rustom Baug - Byculla, Mumbai of about 1,600 sq. ft. carpet. It has two bedrooms, a large hall, verandah, a large kitchen, a separate bathroom. Monthly outgoing only Rs 825. Clear title. Buyers and brokers welcome. Contact Tel: 22817321 Fax: 22810743 E-mail: zarin200@rediffmail.com or Write to:

The Advertiser
Parsiana (Flat for sale)
GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

FLAT FOR SALE

Available for sale — South Bombay apartment with sea view, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, living room, kitchen. Beautiful, fully furnished, well-maintained, in prime location. Great investment opportunity per Govt. of India approval for NRI property ownership for Zoroastrians/Iranis.

Contact:
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Mailing address: **The Dina Hotel**
Mahabaleshwar 412806, India.
Tel: +2168 260246/261246 Fax: 260946

MATRIMONIAL

Alliance sought for our graduate daughter, 25 years old, fair, slim, 5'4½" tall. She is a personal fitness instructor. Suitable partners may reply giving full details and a recent photograph (returnable) to:

The Advertiser
Parsiana, Matrimonial (Oct/24-2003)*
GPO Box 892, Bombay 400001

*Please make sure the reply envelope bears the reference number cited here.

The age of Zoroastrian brides (as listed in this issue) ranged between 25 and 42 years, the arithmetic mean (the total number of individual ages divided by the total number of brides) being 31 years. The corresponding figures for the grooms were 22 and 43 years, averaging at 31 years.

Community births numbered only 11 as versus 63 deaths. Diseases of the heart felled 20 Zoroastrians of whom 15 were in the 80+ age category. Pneumonia/lung disease took a toll of 12 lives, whereas seven patients succumbed to cancer and six to septicemia. Kidney failure and old age/general debility took the lives of three victims each and two each fell prey to paralysis and diseases of the liver and brain. The causes of deaths of isolated cases were hypertension, gastroenteritis, diabetes, cerebral malaria, myasthenia gravis (muscle disorder) and uremia. The community lost a stillborn baby boy. The youngest to breathe her last was a 51-year-old, the eldest — a centenarian at 102. The Zoroastrian life expectancy at birth for September, in Bombay, was 80 years.

The data on births, marriages and deaths has been compiled from information supplied by various newsletters and anjuman in India and abroad, courts and hospitals. This information is not always complete or consistent: we are unable to carry data from areas where the anjuman do not furnish the particulars; the birth figures for Bombay are supplied by two hospitals — births in suburban hospitals and private nursing homes are not included unless individuals send us information together with a copy of the birth certificate. There may be an inadvertent repetition of names in the marriage list when a civil marriage precedes a religious ceremony. In the breakup of deaths according to illnesses, especially of the elderly, death is often due to a combination of several diseases.

If readers have any births/marriages/deaths they would like published, some proof to ensure the veracity of the report would be required. We are sure our

readers would appreciate this requirement and cooperate with us.

BOMBAY

BORN

A boy, *Darrien*, to *Jahaneen* and *Shaun Johnsen* on September 11, 2003
A girl to *Poorvi* and *Marazban Kotwal*; September 13
A girl to *Aloo* and *Darius Chichgur*; September 15
A girl to *Bachi* and *Tempton Hathiramani*; September 17
A boy to *Mahrukh* and *Khushroo Kanga*; September 18
A boy to *Shernaz* and *Sarosh Anklesaria*; September 19
A boy to *Faranak* and *Raiomand Irani*; September 19
A girl to *Kamal* and *Zarir Jabbar*; September 20
A boy to *Viloo* and *Sharokh Nikorawalla*; September 21
A boy to *Rashna* and *Pervez Mehta*; September 22
A girl, *Zoey*, to *Smriti* and *Zubin Irani*, sister to *Zor*; September 23

MARRIED

Vabeez Zarir Master and *Jamsheer Byram Avari* of Karachi, Pakistan; July 10
Shehnaz Keki Elavia and *Gudi Pestanjee Patel*; July 27
Bhikhoo Kawas Katpitia and *Pashin Kersi Katpitia*; August 29

DIED

Shapoor Nariman Daji (72), residing at D/11, Shapoor Baug, V. P. Rd, 400004; August 31
Khorshed Dhunjishaw Marolia (90), 24, Aderbad, N. S. Patkar Marg, 400007; September 1
Bachan Pesi Shroff (79), 808, Khushnum, Dr B. Ambedkar Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 1
Homi Sorabji Udwarda (78), 12/9, Bhedwar Bldg, Khan Est, M. M. C. Rd, Mahim, 400016; September 1
Jerbanoo Cawasji Bhathena (90), 7, Mistry Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 2
Noshir Jehangir Dastur (79), 11/13, Seth Jamshedji Tata

Bldg, Tata Blocks, S. V. Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; September 2
Behram Jalejar Bhesania (57), 13, Station Ter, Sleater Rd, Grant Rd, 400007; September 3
Keki Framji Doctor (90), 804/A, Ghamat Lodge, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 3
Freny Jamshedji Marolia (74), 93, August Krant Marg, 400036; September 3
Burjorji Hormusji Sarkari (89), 6/4, Sir Ratan Tata Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 3
Nergish Jehangir Italia (84), 3/3, Meherhomes Co-op Hsg Soc Ltd, Station Rd, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; September 4
Pervin Minoo Khambatta (51), Victoria Bldg, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; September 4
Sam Savakshaw Sethna (56), 1002, D. N. S. Towers, Court Naka, Thana (W), 400601; September 4
Abaad Bahadur Engineer (51), 2, Marine Chmbs, Marine Lines, 400020; September 5
Perin Jamshedji Shroff (87), Cozy Bldg, Gowalia Tank Rd, 400036; September 5
Homai Jahanbux Bhathena (61), B/41, Bina Apts, Sir M. V. Rd, Andheri (E), 400069; September 6
Khorshed Rustom Pardiwala (91), Jerro Villa, Opp Good Sheperd Church, Four Bglws, Andheri (W), 400053; September 6
Vafader Boman Irani (83), 11/29, Dadachandji Bldg, Bombay Central, 400011; September 7
Kersas Meherwanji Jaorewalla (80), Girdhar Niwas, S. B. Rd, Colaba, 400005; September 7
Pesi Dhunjishaw Billimoria (83), Sanjana Bldg, Forjett Hill Rd, Tardeo, 400036; September 8
Phiroze Sorabji Khambatta (80), 690, N. E. Dinshaw Bldg, Dinshaw Master Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 8
Jamshed Framroz Petigara (90), K-4/64, Merwanji Cama Park, Cama Rd, Andheri (W),

400050; September 8
Noshir Rashid Irani (65), 11E/A, Harbour Height, Colaba, 400005; September 9
Coomi Dadi Kapadia (80), 6, Ashish, 18th Rd, Khar (W), 400052; September 9
Najamai Savaksha Saiwalla (86), 7, Padamjee Bldg, Khan Est, Chotani Rd, Mahim, 400012; September 9
Sohrab Kaikhushroo Commisariat (78), 5, Rajesh Mans, D. V. Rd, Churchgate, 400020; September 10
Hormasji Savaksha Dalal (96), F-33, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; September 10
Jer Pesi Gandhi (72), 17-A, Anand Ngr, Forjett St, 400036; September 10
Dinshaw Behramji Master (76), M/7, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; September 10
Rustom Ardesheer Pirozmand (85), Mohd Ali Roge Apts, Thakurdwar, 400020; September 10
Coomi Jehangir Deboo (78), B-2, Petit Block, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; September 11
Rustomji Nusserwanji Mistry (87), B/9, Ginwalla Bldg, Captain Clny, Tardeo, 400034; September 11
Jamshed Ardesheer Panthaky (66), 101/1, Salsette Parsi Co-op Hsg Soc, Andheri (E), 400093; September 11
Sam Framroze Dadrawalla (93), 103, Silver Isle, Mahatrapada, Amboli, Andheri (W), 400058; September 12
Coomi Dhunjishaw Daruwalla (83), A-29, Navyug Mans, N. Bharucha Marg, 400007; September 12
Tehmi Rustom Irani (67), 19/15, Panthaki Baug, Andheri (E), 400069; September 12
Mani Rustomji Madon (102), 44/C, Batliwalla Villa, Sleater Rd, 400007; September 12
Jaloo Jehangir Shroff (78), Nicholson Bldg, Wadia St, Tardeo, 400034; September 12
Baji Dhanjishah Siganporia (71), Sangam Theatre, Andheri (E), 400069; September 12

Banoo Minocher Irani (69), F. E. Dinshaw Bldg, Dr C. H. St, 400002; September 13
 Jal Ardeshir Dhunjishah Moos (80), F/23, Arsiwalla Bldg, 57, Wodehouse Rd, Colaba, 400005; September 13
 Perin Bahadur Wadia (68), 26, Sea Bird, 114, B. J. Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; September 13
 Mani Homi Mehta (84), 275/M, Damania Bldg, Chikalwadi, Tardeo Rd, 400007; September 14
 Dina Fakirji Gandhi (79), E-20, Jerbai Baug, Dr B. A. Rd, Byculla, 400027; September 15
 Naju Homi Mehta (92), 815, Engineer Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 15
 Aloo Pesi Cama (85), Adenwalla Baug, Tardeo Rd, 400007; September 16
 Keki Kavasha Kotwal (82), 7, Cuffe Parade, 400005; September 16
 Jimmy Darabsha Engineer (64), 623, Marker Mans, Lady Jehangir Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 17
 Nadarsha Faramroz Mistry (90), Damania Bldg, Zoroastrian Blocks, Chikalwadi, Tardeo, 400007; September 18
 Neville Minocher Gandhi (60), 788, Avabai Mans, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 19
 Jal Rashid Irani (84), 4, A1 Bldg, Proctor St, Grant Rd, 400007; September 20
 Nergish Rusi Jall (67), 502-B, Patel Co-op Hsg Soc, Paliram Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; September 20
 Shera Bahadurji Mistry (83), Fakhri Manzil, Bhaji Gali, Grant Rd, 400007; September 20
 Dali Hormusji Wadia (82), 12/5, Panthaki Baug, Andheri (E), 400069; September 20
 Hilla Jimmy Contractor (86), N/2, Eden Hall, Dr Annie Besant Rd, Worli, 400018; September 21
 Feroze Kaikhushroo Daver (86), 2/2, Nadirsha Edulji Dinshaw Bldg, Babulnath Rd, 400007; September 23
 Najoo Nowroji Dubash (89), 19, Sagar Kunj, 78, Nepean Sea Rd, 400006; September 23
 Rustomji Jamshedji Chergeman (92), 4/25, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc,

FIGURES AT A GLANCE*									
	This issue	Bombay 2002♦	2003○	This issue	India 2002♦	2003○	This issue	World 2002♦	2003○
BIRTHS									
Boys	6	77	39	—	5	3	5	46	15
Girls	5	103	43	—	6	7	6	27	14
MARRIAGES									
Parsi	3	210	102	1	17	11	8	22	13
INTERCOMMUNAL									
Males married out	—	46	—	—	1	—	2	5	4
Females married out	—	49	—	—	2	—	3	8	6
DEATHS									
CONSIGNED									
Males	33	451	334	3	79	48	10	38	25
Females	31	441	314	8	80	69	6	33	19
CREMATED									
Males	—	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females	—	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

♦Running totals for 2002 (January 2002-October 2003 issues)

○Running totals for 2003 (January 2003-October 2003 issues)

Overseas deaths are listed in the consigned column as *Parsiana* does not have a breakup of those cremated.

*These figures pertain to information provided to or collected by *Parsiana*. They do not represent the total number of births, marriages and deaths in the Zoroastrian community in India and abroad.

*Running totals for 2002 (January 2002-October 2003 issues)

oRunning totals for 2003 (January 2003-October 2003 issues)

Overseas deaths are listed in the consigned column as Parsiana does not have a breakup of those cremated.

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Elphinstone Rd, Parel, 400012; September 24
 Dhun Pestonji Billardmaker (73), Old Wacha Hse, 22, Mariya Hill, Gunpowder Rd, Mazgaon, 400010; September 25
 Jerroo Nadirsha Kapadia (74), A/33, Bharat Ngr, Grant Rd, 400007; September 25
 Jal Burjorji Battiwalla (95), M-2, Eden Hall, Dr Annie Besant Rd, Worli, 400018; September 27
 Baby boy of Farida Feroze Kotwal (stillborn), 505/1, Mahavir Apts, Versova, Andheri (W), 400053; September 27
 Shirin Faramroze Irani (91), 724, Dinshaw Master Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; September 29
 Perviz Faramroze Pastakia (76), 27-D/2, The Chitrapur Co-op Hsg Soc, TPS III, Bandra (W), 400050; September 29

CALCUTTA

DIED
 Shera Ardesher, sister of Jimmy; September 7
 Mehru Dadabhoy Buchia, mother of Dinyar and sister of Dinoo Pestonji;

September 29

POONA

MARRIED
 Ferieda Rattan Postwala and Firdaus Farrokh Hawewala of Bombay; August 23

DIED

Rustom Aspiandiar Irani (Mubarakah) (99), husband of Shireen and father of Armaity and Gordafrid Tahamtan Aresh; March 27

SURAT

DIED

Rati Hoshang Dastoor (77), Elahi Baug, Rustompura, 395002; September 1
 Gev Jamsheji Paghadiwala (73), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; September 7
 Nargishbanu Ratansha Medhora (82), Devji Pura, Juna Gam, Fort Songadh; September 8
 Tehmina Jalejar Bhagvagar (78), 11/2505, Near Gira Medical, Maachlipith, 395003; September 10
 Sehroo Pirojshaw Dumasia (63), 1/983, Palia St, Nanpura, 395001; September 14
 Twins (boy and girl) of

Darayas Bomi Daruwala (5 mths miscarriage), 3, Nilkanthvarin Apts, Corner of Godha Mohalla, Nanpura, 395001; September 16
 Yasmin Noshir Patel (46), Kuka Chawl, Rani Talav, Bibiniwadi, Sayedpura, 395003; September 23

CANADA

British Columbia

BORN

A boy, Shahaab, to Parvin and Babak Oshidary; October 26, 2002

MARRIED

Niloufar Ezzati and Borzu Jangi in North Vancouver; April 17, 2003
 Shideh Khorasheh and Mehrdad Ashooian in Burnaby; April 19

Ontario

BORN

A boy, Zaul, to Morvarid and Ramesh Fereidooni; August 2

MARRIED

Janine Tamboli, daughter of Zareen and Rusi, and Kevin Mancherjee, son of Jerroo and Hosie in Richmond Hill; August 3

Quebec

MARRIED

Delna Ghadiali, daughter of Roshan and Jimmy, and *Zahir Sorabji*, son of Parvien and Parvez; August 9

IRAN

DIED

Irindokht Farhangi (Sassani) in Tehran; June 17

UK

Essex

DIED

Perin Godrej Merwanji (79), 32A, Mansfield Rd, Ilford, IG1 3BD; March 17

Rustom Navroji Cooper (84), 13, Lombard Court, Poplar St, Romford; April 10

Godrej E. Merwanji (79), 32A, Mansfield Rd, Ilford, IG1 3BD; April 16

Fali Jal Dubash (70), 14, Mendoza Close, Hornchurch, RM11 2RP; July 2

Hampshire

DIED

Mahrugh Stephen Austen (47), Wickham Vineyard, Botley Rd, Hants; June 8

Hertfordshire

BORN

A girl, *Vahishta*, to *Marz-been* and *Paurushasp Jila*; June 13

Kent

DIED

Shirinbanoo Sohrabji Kutar (92), 117, King Harold's Way, Bexleyheath, DA7 5RD; April 30

London

MARRIED

Sanobar Vatcha of Middlesex, daughter of Nawaz and Ratan, and *Malcolm Kodja* of Middlesex, son of Silloo and Soli in Hounslow; July 19

DIED

Phiroz Merwanji Dudha (77), 13, Deanery Close, East Finchley, N2 8NS; June 16

Middlesex

MARRIED

Farmeen Sorab, daughter of Jesmin and Faroukh, and *Cyrus Kapadia* of Surrey, son of Daulat and Minoo; August 2

DIED

Prochee Jal Tarachand (78), mother of Daisy and Nosh; December 11, 2002
Sheroo Jehangir Irani (67), 12, Hillary Gardens, Stanmore, HA7 2NQ; April 30, 2003
Keki Jehangirji Bapuji (73), 30, Oakley Close, TW7 4HZ; May 14
Merwanji Jahangirji Bajina (96), 72, Clayton Avenue, Wembley, HA0 4JT; August 10

Surrey

BORN

A girl, *Feroza*, to *Mahafid* and *Farhad Jamooji*, sister to Zal; April 5

DIED

Cavas Darasha Dhanbhoora (76), Persepolis, Town Hill, Lingfield, RH7 6AG; July 3

USA

BORN

A boy, *Mason*, to *Courtenay* and *Zubin Shroff*; August 3

MARRIED

Persis Khambatta of Washington DC and *Kapil Sharma* of New Jersey; July 5

DIED

Cawas Todiwala (65), father of Pearl Bulsara; June 24

California

BORN

A girl, *Jaden Avanti*, to *Anahita* and *Zubin Fitter* in Los Angeles; January 16
A boy, *Zain*, to *Armaity* and *Viraf Patel* in San Francisco; April 28
A girl, *Ziana*, to *Monaaz* and *Zarir Sarkari*, sister to *Zenaz* in San Jose; May 23

MARRIED

Nazanin Ezzati and *Koorosh Kaikhosrow Shahrokh* in Los Angeles; April 26
Margaret Lin of South Carolina and *Zubin Damania*, son of *Shireen* and *Rustom* in San Jose; May 11

Connecticut

BORN

A boy, *Rohan*, to *Tanaz* and *Mehernosh Mistry*, brother to *Kayanosh* in Milford; September 1

Illinois

BORN

A girl, *Khshaeta*, to *Farzeen* and *Xerxes Cama* in Chicago; August 10

married

Roxana Mehta, daughter of *Nergesh* and *Kayomars*, and *Nevin Dubash*, son of *Jeroo* and *Nozer* of Dubai in Chicago; August 1

DIED

Sheroo Daruwalla in Chicago; September 9

Indiana

DIED

Shahzad Dorabshaw (34), husband of *Pouroochisti*, father of *Daryus* and *Rohan*, son of *Firoze* and late *Freny* and brother of *Ferzad* in New Albany; June 13

Maryland

DIED

Meherwan Cavasji Irani (86), father of *Frederick*, *Shireen* and *Phillip* in Pittsburgh; May 2

Michigan

BORN

A boy, *Sarosh*, to *Shireen* and

Firoz Gandhi in Novi; June 8

Nevada

MARRIED

Pareen Dholoo of Gaithersburg, Maryland, daughter of *Shahdokht* and *Jimmy*, and *Jeffrey Mechlin* of Baltimore, Maryland, son of *Sue* and *Mark*; July 6

New York

MARRIED

Kyriaki Carrie Panagakos and *Edulji Bharucha*, son of *Gool* and *Rustom*; May 11

Texas

MARRIED

Cainaz Vakharia, daughter of *Arnavaz* and *Adi*, and *Michael Heaton* of Oak Harbor, Washington in Dallas; July 12

Wisconsin

BORN

A girl, *Myah*, to *Mehernaz* and *Zahir Balaporia*, sister to *Zarvaan* in Green Bay; April 3

Compiled by Roxana A. Driver

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Judicious dignity

Parinaz M. Gandhi

Died: Justice (Retd) Dinshaw Nusserwanji Mehta, 74, former judge of the Bombay High Court and trustee of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, on July 6, 2003 in Bombay following myocardial infarction.

Eulogizing Mehta's "illustrious career" Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court C. K. Thakker commended his "many landmark judgments" in the course of the High Court reference made to "an eminent jurist" on July 23, 2003.

"It was an outstanding experience to appear in his court. He conducted himself with tremendous but quiet dignity. He treated all members of the Bar uniformly and with unfailing politeness," recalled advocate general of Maharashtra Goolam Vahanvati at the High Court reference. "All lawyers and litigants who came out of Justice Mehta's court left with a feeling that they had been treated courteously and fairly... (He) had impeccable manners and a sterling character... a dry sense of humor and understatement was typical of him," attested Vahanvati.

"Throughout his life, Justice Mehta was a very humble man. He was very courageous. Whatsoever may be the assignment, he never refused to take up the challenge. He would take up an assignment whether it was high profile or not; or whether it was fraught with danger or not," declared P. K. Dhakephalkar, president of the Advocates' Association of Western India, revealing that when Mehta tried the famous A. R. Antulay case in the Bombay High Court he refused any personal protection offered by the authorities. At the trial of the former chief minister of Maharashtra who was accused of corruption, Mehta framed 21 charges against Antulay and discharged him for the remaining 22. Mehta's order was carried in appeal to the Supreme Court which consistently maintained that

Mehta had dealt with the case absolutely fairly and impartially, declared Vahanvati.

"Very few people know that he was appointed as a one-man commission to probe the Khalistan issue in Punjab when the situation there had reached a crisis of grave magnitude," revealed Dhakephalkar who remembered him as being "soft-spoken yet firm." A month before his retirement in 1990, Mehta informed a very senior counsel in no uncertain terms that the "court would not be dictated to by any counsel, howsoever senior he may be," added Dhakephalkar. Simultaneously, "the confidence he developed in the minds of juniors... was phenomenal and (if) many of us could look beyond our capacities it is simply because of Mehta," conveyed Rajiv Patil, vice chairman of the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa. Patil remembered Mehta's advice to his juniors: be honest with your case, present it without fear or favor, and rest...

Mehta's own legal career had commenced after his early education at Poona's Sardar Dastur Boys' School, graduation in Arts from the Wadia College and in law from the Law College. After enrolling as an advocate of the Bombay High Court in 1952 he commenced practice in the High Court and the City Civil and Sessions Court. In 1964 he was appointed as a special public prosecutor in the Court of Sessions at Bombay. "His stint as a prosecutor was very exacting. His reputation was that of a fair and fearless prosecutor," president of the Bombay Bar Association Rafiq Dada shared his reminiscences. Thereafter Mehta was appointed judge of the Bombay City Civil and Sessions Court for 10 years after which he was elevated to the Bench of the High Court in 1978, superseding three other senior colleagues, a step unprecedented in the history of the Bombay City Civil and Sessions Court, wrote Capt Hormazdiar Desai in his tribute to Mehta.

After his retirement as High Court judge Mehta was appointed chairman of the legal advisory committee of the Shivaji University, Kolhapur and subse-

quently the governor of Maharashtra appointed him chancellor's nominee on the management council of that University. He was also selected by the Government of Maharashtra to chair the review committee of the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) and a year later was appointed as a member of the review committee constituted under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, writes Desai who was instrumental in inducting Mehta as a trustee and a governing body member of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. "His balanced judgment was always valued and appreciated," noted a condolence letter from the president of the Institute Muncherji Cama. Presiding over several lectures and functions organized by the Institute, "His speeches were sprinkled with appropriate anecdotes, wit and humor and were greatly appreciated by the discerning audience. Every one connected with the Institute will greatly miss him," added Cama.

Among the corporate bodies to have gained from Mehta's expertise were the Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited where he had served as chairman of the second and third social audit committee, and BSES Limited where he was chairman of the Consumer Disputes Appellate Committee.

Yet another community organization where Mehta had served as trustee was the Framjee Cawasjee Institute which conducts a reading room and offers scholarships to students. Primarily broadminded "he always maintained that the community should move with the times instead of being dogmatic and getting bogged down by outdated rituals," mentions his wife Najoo. And with his legal acumen he realized that judgments which served a purpose in the prevailing milieu cannot be held sacrosanct for time immemorial. He respected his religion but derived greater joy in worshipping his work and being of help to his fellowmen.

His elevation to the Bench had no effect on his laid-back yet warm appreciation of people's need for legal help or advice. Nor did it dampen his penchant for tongue-in-cheek humor and array for naughty jokes, recalls a childhood friend Arnavaz Mama.

In response to the felicitation accorded to him by the Bombay Bar Association when he was appointed judge of the



Mehta: fair hearing

Bombay City Civil and Sessions Court, Mehta had concluded his speech: "At the end of my sojourn on the Bench, I shall be satisfied if it be said of me that 'he did his duty according to his lights.' Then let the critics say 'That may be so, but those lights were rather dim.' I shall not mind."

"I shall be satisfied it were said of me that 'he stuck to the letter and word of the record and did not stray into the realm of imagination.' Then let the critics say 'That was because he had no imagination at all.' I shall not mind."

"I shall be satisfied it were said of me 'although by no means brilliant, at least he was honest.' Then let the critics say 'That was because he lacked the courage of the corrupt.' I shall not mind."

On behalf of the legal fraternity Dhakephalkar summed up: "At the end of his career the critics said that the lights were shining bright...that he was pragmatic and had a great (expertise) to read between the lines... that he was honest to the core and had courage to refute all allurements in life."

The respected jurist is survived by his wife Najoo, son Cyrus and brother Phiroze.

EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES

continued from page 18

ment of the country or society across several fields of activity like industry,



Khambatta (right) receiving award from Chaturvedi

agriculture, art and media, social awareness, etc with the exception of politics, according to a write-up forwarded by the Delhi based Perfect Relations. Among the past recipients of this Award are J. R. D. Tata, Ratan Tata, Sohrab Godrej, Satyajit Ray, Amitabh Bachchan, Lord Swraj Paul...

Accepting the prestigious award at the hands of the governor of Karnataka, T. N. Chaturvedi, Khambatta acknowledged, "I am deeply honored and humbled... Receiving this prestigious award at this age is an inspiration to



Variava (left) receiving award from Deole

accomplish much more. This gives not only me but also my whole team further impetus to lead Rasna to where we want to take it. Rasna is an Indian company for the Indian people. Our endeavor is to make Rasna a part of the life of the common man. We want Rasna to touch the lives of a billion Indians."

A market leader in the soft drink concentrate sector enjoying 90 percent of the share of the market dominated by multinational players, Khambatta has succeeded in developing the family owned business to a progressive corporate establishment, states the release. Under Khambatta's control, "the company has developed core strengths in brand salience, consumer understanding led marketing and a distribution network that spans the length and breadth of India." Exporting to 40 countries across the globe, Rasna has an office in USA and a manufacturing base in UAE. Constantly introducing new products in the market with state of the art vending machines, in the last summer season the company launched its ready-to-drink sachets like Rasna '1 ka 2' and instant drinks in varied flavors including the favorite *mosambi* (sweet lime) not offered by any competitors.

Tribute to a teacher

The Mayor's Award for best teacher for the year 2002-03 was conferred on Rukshana Kersi Variava on September 15, 2003 at Bombay's Dinanath Hall at Vile Parle by Mahadeo Deole. Of the 137 applicants, 50 were selected for the award, only six of whom were from 'aided' schools like hers, reports Variava. Head teacher of the primary section of Sir Cowasjee Jehangir High School since May 1997, Variava has served as overall supervisor and examiner for the Middle

School Scholarship examinations. Instrumental in organizing inter-school competitions she has been honored with trophies by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and with mementos for being an active committee member, notes her curriculum vitae.

During her 26 years of service she has impressed other organizations too and has been invited to judge competitions at other schools. As attested the

principal of her School Abaan Patel, "She is sincere, hardworking, efficient and capable of handling the school matters. She has organized and conducted various competitions at the ward, inter-school and school level."

To create a social awareness among school children she encourages her students to contribute to the blind, crippled and handicapped strata of society.

For Zoroastrian children she conducts Gujarati classes at her School every week. A resident of Shapurji Bharucha Baug she is active in organizing sports, games and outings for her Andheri colony.

Outstanding at SSC

Securing 93 percent marks at the Secondary School Certificate examination conducted in March 2003, Shahenaz Farokh Kapadia earned the 10th rank in the Surat division, mentions the *Gujarat Samachar* of June 17, 2003. Scoring 651 out of 700, Kapadia's best performance was in mathematics where she got 99 out of 100. Among the other subjects where she fared equally brilliantly were science and Sanskrit, in each of which she got 97 out of 100, art, where she got 96 and social studies, 95. In Hindi she scored 85 and in English, 82, as per her marksheet. The young aspirant is planning to pursue a career in medicine.

As a student of Lourdes Convent, Kapadia had been topping her class every year since she was in the sixth standard, notes a press release. She has also passed her Intermediate drawing and Vardha Hindi examination with distinction. Besides writing poetry, the brilliant student enjoys reading, painting and participating in inter-school quiz competitions.

Compiled by Parinaz M. Gandhi



Kapadia: class topper



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