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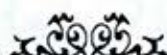
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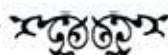
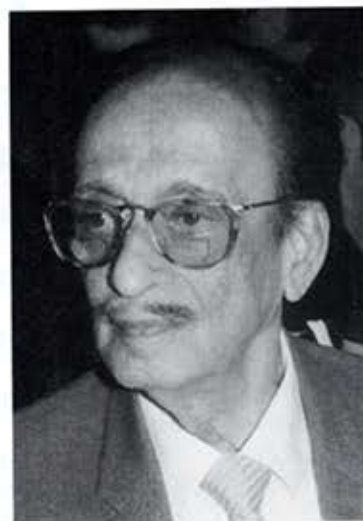
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Cover: *Parsiana's* 40th anniversary



The November 2003 issue of Parsiana is sponsored by Philanthropist Mr NarYman Dubash of Bombay.

Parsiana gratefully acknowledges Mr Dubash's largesse that has made it possible for us to devote so many editorial pages to our youth.



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A Zoroastrian resurgence

Forty years in the lifetime of a publication is not a great number in itself. But when those 40 years represent tumultuous changes both in the country in general and the community in particular, they acquire a different hue.

These have been exciting years with many new, far-reaching developments. Just when the sun appears to be setting on the community, there is a resurgence of energy.

Three more fire-temples have been added in the last 10 years. Publication of books, exhibitions, seminars, world congresses, youth meets, television programs, the formation of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce, the blueprint for a Zoroastrian world body, the revitalization of the Indian economy and strengthening of democratic institutions have all taken place in the last decade.

When in November 1994 *Parsiana* listed the major community developments in the 30 years since the magazine began publication, it was hard to imagine such a frenzy of activity would occur in the next 10 years.

Perhaps one such indication is the keen contest for trusteeship in the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) elections and the increasing demand for universal adult franchise (UAF). Candidates are finding it difficult to justify denying a direct vote to the community. UAF, if it were to come about (and there appears little chance of that) would galvanize the Bombay community. A people denied the vote are apathetic to the electoral system. Give them a say, empower them and they respond. But like the world body, UAF too has eluded the local Parsis even though it is prevalent in nearly every Zoroastrian center throughout the world.

Scanning through the past issues of the magazine founded by Dr Pestonji Warden in November 1964, one can view the highlights of the community over the past decade. The most notable community achievements on the global scale would be the hosting of the World Zoroastrian Congresses in Tehran,

Iran and Houston, Texas, USA, and the formation of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce.

The next item would be the dar-e-mehers constructed, renovated or relocated both in the New World and in India. In Bombay itself three new fire-temples, two of them dadgahs and one agiary, have been consecrated. The consecration of the Shapoorji Fakirji Jokhi Agiary, amongst the largest in the world, at Godrej Baug, was undoubtedly the major religious event of the decade. Thousands of Parsis lined the road from the Vachaghandhy Agiary at Hughes Road to the agiary site at Nepean Sea Road, a distance of around two kilometers. Many faithfuls accompanied the fire from Navsari in Gujarat to Bombay, a journey that took two nights and a day.

For a community that's dwindling in numbers, the spiritual flame appears to burn brighter than before. And the Jokhi family's ties with India were also evident in their largesse to the B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital in Bombay. They donated and continue to give generously. The Jokhis are not the only Hongkong connection. Even the Incorporated Trustees of the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hongkong, Canton and Macau, the richest Zoroastrian association in the world, have donated millions to community causes in India and elsewhere.

The Zartoshty brothers Mehraban and Faridoon, as Arbab Rustam Guiv before them, have proved to be amongst the largest benefactors of the community both in the New World and India.

The Jokhis, Guivs and Zartoshtys are the modern avatars of the Jejeebhoy, Cowasji Jehangir, Wadias and Petits, the community saviors of old.

Of course Indian philanthropy abounds. People like Jamshed Guzder and NarYman Dubash have supported countless causes and individuals and given unstintingly of their wealth. So have many other individuals. Organizations such as

the BPP and the World Zoroastrian Organisation assist the needy, the sick, the homeless and those in search of a better quality of life. The Venture Capital Fund launched by the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India under the auspices of the BPP may not have met with much success but the effort is symbolic of the community's desire to help their brethren.

Less well-endowed charitable trusts and individuals have tried to develop their resources to generate funds for community causes. The Salsette Parsis Association along with the site property developer Hosang Mistry built probably the largest Parsi housing complex in the world: 750 flats at Andheri, a Bombay suburb. And in Poona, the Grant family set up one of the city's most prestigious hospitals, Ruby Hall Clinic.

A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion and Culture tome was a mammoth intellectual accomplishment, as was the exhibition of Parsi portraits at the National Gallery of Modern Art a tribute to artistry. The PARZOR Foundation, assisted by UNESCO and established in Delhi with its minuscule Parsi population, has undertaken major programs in various parts of the country including Bombay, its crowning achievement being the launch of the five-rupee coin honoring the Grand Old Man of India, Dadabhai Naoroji. In collaboration with the BPP (whose chief executive Behram Dastur mooted the idea) the coin was released by the finance minister of India this October on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday.

In terms of recognition of the Parsi contribution to India, this was one of the highest honors the country could bestow.

Zoroastrians achieved other accolades as well. Justice Sam Bharucha was appointed Chief Justice of India and Justice Sam Variava was elevated to the Supreme Court. Soli Sorabjee was once again appointed attorney general of India and Tehmtan Andhyarujina held the post of solicitor

continued on page 139



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.

Anjuman autonomy

Serious concerns have been voiced in various communications addressed to the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and in the Press about the proposed world body of Zoroastrians. The issue, particularly agitating the minds of certain sections of the community, is regarding the definition of a Zoroastrian. This is due to the fact that in various parts of the world several bodies representing Zoroastrians of those regions have adopted their particular definition, suiting the environment in which they live.

Based on current discussions we would like to clarify: As and when the world body does get formed it will have two arms — WZOI (World Zoroastrian Organisation of Individuals); and WZOF (World Zoroastrian Organisation of Federations).

Besides these there will be an apex body, IZO (International Zoroastrian Organisation). The object of the IZO

will be to serve only as a link between the two bodies. It will facilitate communication between WZOI and WZOF and be a repository of important information such as population, medical and social trends. It will have a totally separate board comprising eminent senior representatives from WZOI and WZOF. It will not exercise any control or influence whatsoever over the functioning of WZOI and WZOF.

If the world body is formed, it is obvious that only the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI) will become a member of the WZOF. The BPP will only be indirectly connected with WZOF. It will, thus, be abundantly clear that the question of any non-Zoroastrians exercising any influence on the functioning of its members (FPZAI in this case) or, for that matter, on the BPP does not arise.

All the members of WZOF will have total autonomy within their regions and will be governed entirely by their own code and practices.

In the light of the above the apprehension of a small section of the community that non-Zoroastrians will get the vantage position which will influence the functioning of the WZOF is totally unwarranted.

We wish to assure the members of our community that the trustees of the BPP exist for the welfare of the Parsi Zoroastrians and therefore will do nothing which will harm in any way and/or prejudice the community's interests. M.R. SHROFF

Chairman

Bombay Parsi Punchayet

"World body by end 2003?"

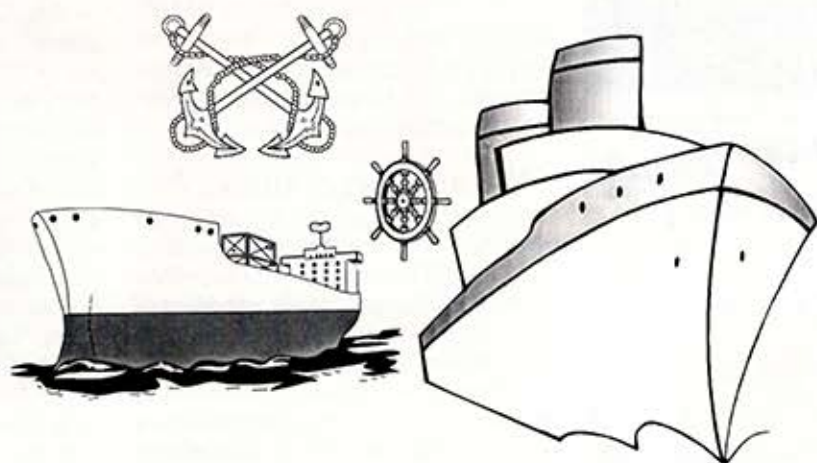
This refers to your coverage of the Federation meeting held in Bombay on June 7 and 8, 2003 ("World body by end 2003?" *Parsiana*, August 2003). You have quoted me as having said that "occupants of community housing, who got their flats at cost price thanks to a protracted legal battle fought by the Thane trustees, the BPP and the Federation against the Divecha Trust and the non-Zoroastrian developer who took over its land, are pressurizing the trustees to adopt standard cooperative society bylaws so that they can resell their flats at a higher price in the open market."

While I did make this statement, it was with reference to occupants of Patell

Apartments which is a 10-storey building constructed in the Agiary compound. This building which has 80 flats was constructed by the Agiary Trust and the ownership flats were allotted at the concessional rate of Rs 500 per sq ft in 1991. The ruling rates for ownership flats in this prime area at that time was approximately Rs 1,500 per sq ft. Today there is an unfortunate situation of conflict between certain allottees of these ownership flats and the trustees of the Agiary Fund on the question of the rate at which these flats can be resold to other Parsis. The principle that the Trust is trying to establish in approaching the complex problem of community housing at subsidized rate is to ensure that at any time in the future the allottees who have benefitted from the concessional housing scheme do not capitalize by selling the flat at market prices and thereby deny the benefit of concessional housing to the subsequent allottees. This principle has the sanction of the court as per the consent terms signed between the Thana Parsee Zoroastrian Anjuman and the Agiary Trust before the charity commissioner in 1997.

In fact this approach at regulating the resale price has been very effectively practiced in the Anjuman promoted building — Ahuna, which was built on the Divecha Trust land around 1993 and is situated within a few minutes of walking distance from the Agiary. It would not be out of place to mention that we have received full cooperation from all the members of this society. While at the Ahuna Society, appropriate clauses have been incorporated in the bylaws, to avoid transfer to non-Parsis and authorizing the Trust to regulate the resale price, there has been a stiff resistance to accepting similar bylaws by some residents of Patell Apartments, thereby holding up even the registration of the society. We are glad to record that at the Ahuna Society, as many as eight to nine out of 48 flats have been surrendered and have been re-allotted at prices that have been regulated, so that while the seller gets a fair appreciation of his assets, the incoming allottee also gets a reasonable concession that is well below the open market price.

We request your readers to react on the larger question of the criteria that should determine the development of trust property for community housing,



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President, Thana Parsee Zoroastrian Anjuman

Arnavaz Mama replies

Thank you for setting the record straight. Our apologies for the error and any misunderstanding caused.

"We are bigger than..."

This refers to the article "We are bigger than the Dadar community" (*Parsiana*, August 2003) based on your interview with Ervad Kobad Zarolia, president of the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation (OZCF).

When Ervad Zarolia was elected as president of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) in 1998, it was through his overwhelming use of proxies. I find it surprising that Zarolia found proxies objectionable when he lost several subsequent votes. It may also be noted that the OZCF which he leads also uses proxy voting.

In the February-March 1999 issue of *Parsiana* Zarolia (who was the president of the ZSO at that time) had made a statement that "the ZSO project to acquire a new place began two years ago but has only collected \$ 55,000 so far." These monies have not yet been turned over to the ZSO.

In March 2000, Zarolia (who was still president of the ZSO) convened a general body meeting to transfer \$ 300,000 of ZSO money (which had been predominantly donated for the current center) to fund another center closer to his own home. The meeting was called on very short notice during the March break, when a large section of the community was on vacation. Zarolia's action was widely viewed as self-serving and inconsistent with the interests of the community. Zarolia's motion was defeated.

In the summer of 2000, Zarolia ran a slate of candidates in an attempt to capture the ZSO executive committee. All the Zarolia candidates were defeated. A Zarolia supporter, became so agitated at the crushing defeat of the Zarolia faction that he rushed to violently attack the treasurer elect and had to be physically restrained. This supporter is now a director of the OZCF.

During Zarolia's presidency of the ZSO he had repeatedly informed the community that an expanded center could not be developed at the current site. Subsequently, the committee appointed to investigate all options for expansion,

concluded that a large hall to accommodate almost 1,000 persons could indeed be developed at the current site.

After a very extensive debate over 18 months, at a historic vote held on October 21, 2001, 78 percent of the community voted for Option # 1 which was "to demolish the current center and re-build another center at the very same location." Option # 2, which was to "sell the existing center and build a new center at a different location" garnered 12 percent of the vote; Option # 3 (which was heavily backed by the Zarolia faction), which was to "build a second center at a different location in addition to the existing center," garnered only 10 percent of the vote. Throughout the period of the debate, the Zarolia faction had used several strong-arm tactics such as a petition to call the vote even before the committee's report was presented, using their own children for various "youth meetings" to drum up support for a center — near Zarolia's own home. The Zarolia faction was again defeated.

The ZSO then embarked upon establishing a fund-raising committee under the leadership of Dr Dhun Noria — an eminent and highly respected lady in the Canadian medical establishment. Noria reached out to the Zarolia faction to invite them into the fund-raising committee, even agreeing to raise funds for a second center after completing the reconstruction of the current center per the 78 percent mandate. Instead, the Zarolia faction launched the OZCF to directly compete against the ZSO for exactly the same dollars from exactly the same donors, at exactly the same time.

The OZCF leadership primarily consists of candidates who were defeated in various ZSO elections. With a track-record of unprincipled positions, questionable financial practices, violence, strong-arm tactics and underhand petitions is it any wonder that the Zarolia faction has been consistently rejected by the respectable members of the Toronto community as represented by the 1,200 strong membership of the ZSO?

Zarolia did not leave in peace. A series of attacks were unleashed against the ZSO consisting of petitions, anonymous letters/phone calls to the neighbors and police. Since the OZCF would be the only beneficiary if the ZSO project failed, Zoroastrians logically concluded that the source of these tactics was the OZCF.

• On May 20, 2002 the OZCF held its



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inaugural jashan. A petition to "rescind the ZSO vote of October 2001," was widely circulated. A special table was set up for distributing the petition, signatures were openly solicited by individuals officiating at the OZCF function.

- The OZCF staged a slate of candidates for the ZSO elections in 2002 to seize control of the ZSO (in a veritable coup d'état) and to promote the motion to rescind the 78 percent vote of October 2001.

- An "anonymous" letter was circulated to the residents on the street on which the current center is located, that a 900+ person banquet hall was to be constructed at the Meherban Guiv Darbe Mehr (MGDM) site, which would cause acute traffic problems.

- While the AGM was in progress, the police were "anonymously" called to serve parking tickets to ZSO members' vehicles.

- At the ZSO AGM of 2002, a large number of allegedly fraudulent ballots were discovered. Over the next few weeks, the ZSO investigated each and every alleged fraudulent ballot; signatures were verified. When the final results were announced, all the OZCF (the Zarolia faction) candidates were declared

defeated. All the alleged fraudulent ballots have been handed over to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) for fraud investigation and the matter is subjudice.

S. J. BHARUCHA
Ontario, Canada

OZCF president Kobad Zarolia replies
It is regrettable that Bharucha has undermined the fundamental concepts of Zoroastrianism through his ill-spirited and illogical comments. He continues to misinform his fellow Zarathushtris with deceit and malicious accusations, incorrect statements, innuendos and general contempt. His oft-expressed diatribe is directed against me personally as well as the OZCF. I would now like to clarify each issue in order:

- On the issue of proxies, Bharucha fails to present accurate facts. OZCF has a limit of only two proxies per individual. A system of unlimited proxies is often misused and does not always truly reflect the views of those offering the proxy, since they are not in attendance at the meeting to engage in discussion.

- On his accusation of my collecting \$ 55,000, he has again not presented the facts. Prior to my election as president of ZSO, a group of like-minded and dedicated Zoroastrians pursued the concept

of building an agiary. As a testament of their trust in me, they sent me personal cheques. The monies were collected outside of any charitable trust so that the money could be returned should the project not have proceeded. Upon abandonment of the project soon thereafter due to inadequate funds, the monies were returned to all the contributors immediately.

- His accusation of spending \$ 300,000 of ZSO money to fund a center closer to my own home is astoundingly bizarre and illogical. A community meeting was held to present the findings of a building committee that was set up to investigate future options for a center. The meeting was conducted professionally with organized presentations. Since the future vision of a larger center was still in conceptual stage, there was never any discussion of where such a center would be built. The open and transparent nature of the meeting obviously did not appeal to Bharucha.

- On his confusing and wrongful statements about strong-arm tactics, underhand petitions, questionable financial practices, and unprincipled positions of the OZCF leadership, all we can say is that the board of directors comprises professionals from all walks of life, dedi-

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cated to serving Zoroastrian interests. Furthermore, our membership also consists of various credible professionals. About OZCF leadership primarily consisting of candidates defeated in ZSO elections, the fact of the matter is that most directors have never run for ZSO elections with me.

•I would rather not lower myself to Bharucha's level and criticise hard working ZSO volunteers but would like to advise Bharucha of the tremendous support we have received from Zoroastrians, within and outside our community, with over 500 members and over \$ 850,000 collected. So how does that sound for an organization formed only two years ago, and according to Bharucha, representing only 22 percent of the total population?

•I would like to clarify that most OZCF members and the entire board of directors and their families, continue to be ZSO members. The OZCF has a vision of purchasing a parcel of land and building a place of worship and community center on an expanding basis to accommodate future growth. We have always promoted the concept of a larger combined facility with ZSO and keeping the current facility as is with minor repairs. Selling the existing facility is another option, however there are many sentiments attached to it. Ultimately, the community must decide what it wishes to do with it. However, the ZSO continues to hold strong to their position of tearing down the entire existing structure and rebuilding at the existing site. So we are left with no option but to buy a large enough parcel of land to build a facility to meet the needs for future generations of Zoroastrians.

•On his ghastly suggestion of a "series of terror attacks" being unleashed by OZCF, no director of OZCF has ever called, spoken or written to neighbors to petition them. As a matter of fact, we openly discourage such action. We are after all Zoroastrians committed to the same cause. On his claim that the existing center will be rebuilt to accommodate over 900 people, it is baffling to understand how such a facility will be comfortably built for so many people and the car parking spaces that will be required, on a one acre parcel. The other one-acre parcel attached to the site cannot be legally built on since this is considered green space by the municipality. Why would a community invest two million dollars to build a facility that does not

take into consideration future growth, on a site already stretched to its capacity? The neighbors around this tightly knit and expensive enclave of homes are well aware of the expansion plans and are deeply concerned over the inconvenience that will be caused by the parking and noise problems and devaluation of their properties. They have already been complaining for a long time about the parking on their streets and noise, with less than half of the anticipated 900 plus currently using the facility. The police have often been called out and have ticketed people parked illegally. Bharucha should address these concerns directly with the neighbors and ZSO executive, rather than blaming the OZCF. •Bharucha suggested that I had something to do with fraudulent ballots. Neither I nor our board of directors would ever partake in such illegal activities. We do hope that the RCMP find the culprits and punish them.

Such derogatory commentary as presented by Bharucha only serves to provoke ill will among community members. Instead he is well advised to divert his negative energies towards encouraging positive discourse on unity and harmony.

We as a civilized and democratic society, enjoy the privilege of freedom of speech and expression. Within our Zoroastrian communities, we always encourage healthy and constructive criticism. We promote meaningful debate on community issues. However, let us do so with decency, objectivity and intellect.

"Conservation at the..."

On reading "Conservation at the Cama" (*Parsiana*, August 2003), the following publications came to mind:

•The *Letters of Dadabhai Naoroji*, ed. R. P. Masani, printed in Bombay in the war years (1945-49). It deserves augmenting and reprinting. When I returned home in 1939, soon after the Munich Crisis, I was appointed lecturer, part-time, at Wilson College, Bombay. Some time after, Sir Rustom Masani asked me to edit the *Letters of Dadabhai Naoroji* which were crumbling away. I declined as I was working on the *Gathas* under the guidance of Dastur Framroze Bode. May I suggest that the Oxford University Press be invited to edit these letters and a Parsi scholar, competent in English and Gujarati, be asked to see it through the press? Copies of the *Letters* must be at the KRCOI and also at the University

library. The library at the Indian High Commission in London should also be explored for letters from Dadabhai.

•*Iran — from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest* by R. Ghirshman, Pelican (Penguin) Book, 1954, is essential reading for all Parsis. May I suggest that Penguin be approached to bring out a new paperback edition? There should be no problems of copyright as 50 years will have elapsed next year since its printing in English.

PILOO N. JUNGALWALLA
New Delhi

"A hero for heroic..."

Old soldiers just fade away and do not believe in publicizing themselves by getting a colored photo printed on the cover page of a community magazine and advertising their personal lives as has been done ("A hero for heroic times," and "A soldier called Sam," *Parsiana*, August 2003). The man with the ceremonial baton seems ready to throw his stick in the air in tune with the music. I have never met Sam Manekshaw, nor do I know him so I have no ulterior motives for writing the letter but only with the purpose of improving the quality of *Parsiana* and not for belittling anyone.

I have known at least three Parsi officers holding high ranks rarely given to Indians by the British. I do not wish to give their names without the permission of their families. One of them rose to be a major. He had left his college studies in commerce at a very young age and joined the Army. He was in the Kumonese Regiment and fighting under the British in the North West Frontier Province near Fort Sandeman with Afghan Snipers raining bullets on them, sleeping at night in the open with revolvers locked to their wrists. Due to injuries he was invalidated from the army on a meagre pension. The other one, a colonel (hardly seven to eight under the British rule), was sent to Hiroshima, fought heroically but due to atomic radiation his thyroid gland got affected and he was invalidated.

The third, a Lt Col in the Tank Regiment, kept on fighting for several days with the Small Indian Tank, was seriously injured three times, but refused to quit. He kept his command and led the tanks but the fourth shell proved fatal.

Any account of such Parsi officers would have inspired the present generation of Parsi boys to join the army. Through investigative journalism, you should find out such persons and give



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KERSASP FRAMJI DALAL
Ahmedabad

The Editor replies

The Field Marshal did not ask for the function to be held or to have his photograph on the cover of *Parsiana*. The publicity has been given by those who take pride in the fact that a Zoroastrian was the first Field Marshal of independent India.

This in no way belittles the gallantry of other Parsis who have served their country honorably. As a matter of fact it is a tribute to all Zoroastrians in the armed forces. It is just that the Field Marshal is the most prominent.

"The Prescription of Parsis"

As the 77-year-old grandson of Col Kavasji Hormusji Mistri ("The Prescription of Parsis," Books, *Parsiana*, August 2003) I was so proud that he had done something for our great community.

He was a doctor and had passed his IMS in England along with six others. He came back to India and joined the British Army. He was in the Third Burmese War in 1885, held a rank of Lt Col and saved many lives on the battlefield.

He was awarded a medal for his actions.

After the war he retired and was made a magistrate and Justice of Peace in Thana. I do not know the date when he died.

My elder brother Rumi Homi Mistri was a Lt Col in the Indian Army who died in Srinagar in 1965. I was a commercial "B" licence pilot and flew in India. As there were no jobs I came to England and worked for British Airways and settled in England in 1952.

KEKI H. MISTRI
Middlesex, UK

"Aimai's Star"

I share S. J. Irani's regret over the closure of Aimai Ghamat's Star Bakery on Naigaum Cross Road ("Aimai's Star," Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, August 2003). During my school days my favorite was cream balls.

The place is now occupied by United Western Bank, Dadar East Branch, on the first floor and by several garment and other shops on the ground floor.

Dr P. D. SUNAVALA

"Scarce sandalwood"

This is further to my earlier letter ("Scarce sandalwood," Readers' Forum, *Parsi-*

ana, May 2003) that was carried along with the response of Jamshed Noshir Sukhadwalla of the sandalwood shop Dadabhoy Motabhoy Sukhadwalla. Since the time of publishing that letter, the price of sandalwood has risen and predictably so, with the muktad and the Parsi New Year having gone by.

My letter was penned having already taken into account the factors determining the high price of sandalwood as explained by Sukhadwalla, e.g. demand-supply, inability of small retailers to participate in government auctions, etc. I agree with him when he says that Ashoi cannot be practiced by only offering pure sandalwood but the angle of Ashoi with reference to this problem of scarcity is only incidental. By not offering pure sandalwood are we not compromising with a traditional religious custom?

The thrust of my letter was for a community body like the Bombay Parsi Punchayet or the Nav-Kutumbi Athornan Mandal of Udvada, or some other trusts, to evolve a mechanism for the bulk-purchase, storage and distribution of pure sandalwood at affordable prices to the community at large.

As is the case with any business enter-

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prise, the businessman is in business to earn a profit. I do not grudge or object to sandalwood merchants earning a profit as everyone needs to be gainfully employed to earn a living but linking profit to a religious commodity is rather incongruous. However as sandalwood is a religious commodity we need to:

- Evolve an administered-pricing mechanism at a community level that will effectively regulate the price of sandalwood so as to keep it within the reach of the average Parsi.

- Petition the government, both central and state, to provide some sort of a "Parsi quota" at reduced rates considering our status as a minority community and the end use, i.e. religious offering of the commodity in question, i.e. sandalwood. Is it too much for us as a community to expect to get an essential commodity like sandalwood at cheaper-than-market rates? After all liquor in Goa or Daman is sold at less than half the regular price as compared to Bombay.

- In the long term, have our own supply of sandalwood by planting or buying sandalwood trees at a community-level.

Another fallout of offering impure sandalwood or any other kind of wood that has largely gone unnoticed, is the

health and environment hazard caused to our priests and worshippers alike who perforce have to inhale the fumes emanated by burning such wood. Many a time, one hears constant coughing and sneezing in the prayer hall around the kebla while praying and watery eyes have also become commonplace. This problem tends to get intensified when collective prayer ceremonies are held, as the space inside a fire-temple remains the same, but the number of people increases and with it, the amount of wood (sandalwood) used to tend the fire.

We must remember that today sandalwood is scarce, tomorrow it might become extinct as has happened with the vultures at Doongerwadi.

KAYOMARZ PATEL

Aid the Ambulance

The Parsi Ambulance Division started on April 1, 1904 (under the auspices of the St John Ambulance Brigade, Overseas, UK) with hand driven and horse-driven ambulances rendering immense service during the World Wars. This was the first division in the whole of Asia. The Division continues to render supplementary

help to essential services like the police, defence, fire brigades during fire, building collapses, riots, public duties, etc. The Division also runs a free sick bed requisite service and free charitable dispensary for the poor and needy. Even today we continue to render such humane services as providing Free Ambulance Services and a free dispensary, attending public duties like Ganpati Visarjan, emergency services during accidents, building collapses, riots, first aid and nursing training, loaning of sick beds, wheel chairs, walkers, etc.

The Division activities are carried out by honorary members and managed by the board of trustees. We are proud of our past members who had sacrificed their time and services in the cause of our Division's formation and growth especially during the Bombay Docks Explosion on April 14, 1944, Bombay riots and on various other occasions.

Times have changed and in view of the difficulties faced in general, we solicit the help from well-wishers and public charitable organizations in raising funds to enable us to sustain and improve our services as we march towards our centenary in 2004.



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Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was Jamssetji Tata's companion aboard the ship 'Empress of India' on their voyage to America in 1893. Mr. Tata was deeply influenced by Swami's ideal of self-reliance. Later Swami helped the Founder to set up the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.



J.N. Tata

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Mahatma Gandhi

Johannesburg - Gandhiji publicly acknowledged Tata's support towards the Satyagrahis in South Africa in 1909 and remained a close friend of Sir Ratan Tata. In 1925 he visited Jamshedpur at the invitation of C.F. Andrews, and successfully took up the issue of recognition of the Tata Labour Association with the Management in 1934, on his second visit.



Subhash Chandra Bose

Subhash Chandra Bose took charge of the Jamshedpur Labour Association in 1928 and provided leadership to the Steel Company's labour till 1937. He took up successfully with the Steel Company's Management the need to infuse qualified Indian engineers into coveted positions.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru continued the patronage of his father, Pandit Motilal Nehru towards the Indian Steel Industry. He first visited Jamshedpur in 1925, with Mahatma Gandhi, and remained a friend of the Tatas and, on becoming India's first Prime Minister, paid a visit to Jamshedpur in 1958, the Golden Jubilee Year of Tata Steel.



J.R.D. Tata

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HOMIAR N. VAKIL
Trustee, Parsi Ambulance Division

Breast cancer study

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers amongst Parsi women. This was first revealed during studies by the late Dr Jussawala in the mid '70s. Since then several researchers have tried to study the reasons for Parsi women being more susceptible to breast cancer.

In continuation of such efforts doctors at the Tata Memorial Centre (Tata Memorial Hospital and the Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research and Education in Cancer, ACTREC) are conducting a study aimed at the analysis of genes related to the functioning of white blood cells. This study is funded by the Lady Tata Memorial Trust and is supported by the UNESCO assisted PARZOR project. Authorities at the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital and a number of renowned surgeons have agreed to help in this study.

This ongoing project (since April 2002), has already recruited 30 patients,

breast cancer patients from the Zoroastrian community to participate in this study. We assure complete confidentiality. The meetings with participants will be arranged at a time and place of their choice to ensure minimum inconvenience. A brief health history is taken and 10-20 cc blood is collected (once only) by an expert technician with a disposable syringe and needle for the purpose of genetic analysis. Patients from cities other than Bombay are also encouraged to participate.

Healthy women in the age group of 50 to 70 years can also participate in this study.

The project team which includes Dr R. A. Badwe, chief of surgery and Dr Rajeev Sarin, a radiotherapist, both at the Tata Memorial Hospital, will be happy to answer any questions, provide relevant information and guide the participants in seeking help from experts at the Tata Memorial Hospital.

I can be contacted at home on 022-25400398; mobile 9819072938 or at office at 022-27412919 ext 5238 or by e-mail at narennjoshi@yahoo.com

Dr NARENDRA N. JOSHI

"Children of the angels"

I reproduce for your readers, a paragraph from the introduction by the eminent scholar the late G. K. Nariman, who edited *Persia and Parsis*, Part I for the

Marker Literary Series for Persia, published by the Iran League in 1925 (Pages iv and v):

"Not only polygamy and concubinage (existed) under the Khosros but if certain Sassanian Codes, which have outlived neglect, are reliable, there were some extraordinary sex relations sanctioned by law (Bartholomae, *Ueber ein Sasan Rechtsbuch*, pg 13). Not only there were legitimate senior and secondary wives but there were legalized temporary concubines (*Zum Sasan Rechts* 1, 29). Not only a man can rejoice in being the husband of more than one senior wife and presumably numberless junior spouses, he was master of slaves of both the sexes (*ibid.* III, 49). An amazing ordinance authorised 'only a father to sell his children into slavery' (*ibid.* V.22). A society co-ordinated with a system of jurisprudence which recognized the progeny born out of wedlock as 'children of the angels' (*ibid.* V, 31) could hardly lay claim to unchallenged moral ascendancy taught by the Prophet of Iran. No, the lofty teachings inculcated by the great Zarathushtra were altered out of all recognition under the Sassanians by the Magian prelates. The latter accommodated the sublime and the simple doctrine of Zoroaster to popular requirements with fatal consequences. Between these mercenary mobeds and their spiritual descendants, the Akhunds and Mullhas of later times, there is little indeed to choose."

Capt (Retd) HORMAZDIAR J. M. DESAI

Edited by Parinaz M. Gandhi

Addendum

The photographs of the Finance Minister releasing the coin on page 18 were taken by C. C. Gandevia.

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Events and Personalities

PARZOR perfect

President of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman Lt Gen (retd) "Adi Sethna asked me to release a commemorative coin for a very great Indian. I readily accepted... Some of the aura of that greatness may temporarily descend on us!" declared India's finance minister Jaswant Singh.

Singh released what Sethna called "the first coin struck by the Bombay mint in many years," presenting the gleaming five rupee coin bearing the visage of Dadabhai Naoroji to Bombay Parsi Punchayet chairman and ex officio president of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, Minoo Shroff. "In this dry and colorless world we inhabit it is our duty, also a pleasure," Singh noted graciously.

The event at Bombay's Tata Theatre on October 2, 2003 marked the beginning of the three-day celebrations of the 3,000th anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture, jointly sponsored by UNESCO PARZOR—the foundation for the preservation of vulnerable human heritage—and the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO, a wing of the central ministry for human resource development (HRD).

The launching of the coin was presaged by the release of the book *Dadabhai Naoroji: A model for Indian Youth Today* by Mohammed Fazal, governor

of Maharashtra. It is a revised edition of the book by the late homeopath Dr Sarosh Wadia which was first published in 1984.

Both Singh and Fazal were warmly complimentary to the community for the role it had played in the development of India. Referring to the "epic story" of the advent of Zoroastrians to the shores of Gujarat, Singh proclaimed the "great admiration I have always had for Parsis... It is necessary that we in India recognize this great faith to which you belong." He recalled his "late friend Piloo Mody (member of parliament known for his humor and rotund figure who was) never afflicted by (any) sense of being inferior in size or otherwise" as an embodiment of the community's self-confidence and its achievements in all spheres of life. Naoroji's achievements in and out of the British Parliament, especially his work in popularizing education for women was "a remarkable tribute to Dadabhai's confidence in himself and in India. What a great political party he established (though) I wouldn't like to comment on it at present," added Singh with a straight face.



The keynote address was an erudite presentation on Zoroastrian culture by Muthuswamy Vardarajan, a former IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer and secretary of the National Minorities Commission. It was followed

by the screening of *In War and Peace: the life of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw MC*.

An exhibition of the Parsi way of life, its religion and practices, its garments, its outstanding entrepreneurs—the Tatas as exemplified by the Indian Hotels Company, the Wadias of Bombay Dyeing, the Guzders of Airfreight, Karan Bilimoria's Cobra Beer, the Khambattas of Rasna... Parsi fabrics and embroidery, calligraphy, history, kusti weaving... There was place for them all in the lobby of the theater, industriously planned by Dr Shernaz Cama, director of PARZOR and her many helpers from Delhi and all parts of India. Close to the entrance was a special section of black and white photographs documenting the freedom struggle and India's first two decades of Independence by the country's first woman photo journalist, the redoubtable Homai Vyarawalla.

The exhibition had been mounted earlier at the request of the HRD ministry to coincide with the Dialog among Civilizations—a major UNESCO program hosted by India in Delhi. While the Dialog was inaugurated by Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee, the exhibition was inaugurated by the director general of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura.

The Bombay program extended to talks and symposia on culture, health and environment and an analysis of the

Reet-Rivaaj survey that had been undertaken by PARZOR at the start of their activities four years ago. It included the screening of *Asha: the Law of*



From left: Singh, Vardarajan, Shroff, Cama, Singh and Sethna at the coin release

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Harmony, a documentary production from UNESCO-PARZOR, Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal's stand alone comedy act, a performance by Shiamak Davar's dance troupe and the felicitation of Manekshaw who received a standing ovation. "I've got many awards... but what I appreciate most is the one given to me by my own community... that my community thinks of me as 'aapro Sam!'" declared the field marshal.

The celebrations ended on a typically Bombay-Parsi note as the community vouchsafed its appreciation of free refreshments from Cobra and Taj Mahal Palace Hotel with a mini stampede.

(A detailed report on the three-day program will follow in a subsequent issue of *Parsiana*.)

Arnavaz S. Mama

Vulture woes

Diclofenac, a widely used pain killer and an anti-inflammatory drug, used to treat both humans and cattle in India, is indirectly causing the death of Gyps vultures, according to research presented at the Sixth World Conference on Birds of Prey in Budapest and reported in *The Bombay Samachar* of June 1, 2003.

"Because of this problem I am sad to say that the Parsis would be very unwise to continue to consider using vultures to consume their dead. It may even turn out that the people who have been devoured have in fact added to the decline of the birds in that area," conveyed Jemima Parry-Jones under whose guidance the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) was planning to proceed with its aviary project to breed vultures in captivity at the Doongerwadi. She emphatically added, "If you build aviaries now and put vultures in them, unless you are absolutely 100 percent sure that no drugs containing Diclofenac have been used in the people who have died, your vultures will

die within about 36 hours of eating the dead people. Not only would this mean that you are going to waste large sums of funds, it also means that you will add to the decline of the vultures and that would be completely irresponsible. Therefore I suggest that until we have the facts completely at our fingertips you hold off any building of pens to keep vultures..."

"Tissues of 23 vultures that had died with the gout symptoms all contained Diclofenac; none was present in tissues of vultures that had died of other causes," conveyed Bob Risebrough's missive, reporting on the Sixth World Conference of Birds of Prey, which was carried in *The Samachar* of June 15.

Michel Terrasse, another specialist on vultures whose 35 years' efforts to bring back to France the Griffon vulture and the European black vulture was extensively reported in *The Rolex Awards for Enterprise Journal* (Summer 2003), wrote in response to *Parsiana*'s queries: "In reality I never believed that this kind of (aviary) project could work successfully when you know the great ability (of) vultures to forage very far in search of a lot of food and not only human corpses."

In its May issue *Parsiana* had carried an article: "Taking wings: The aviary project for breeding vultures is once again on the anvil" based on the inputs received from BPP trustee Maneck Engineer, executive committee member of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) Rishad Naoroji and Zoroastrian Studies founder Khojeste Mistree. Following the Diclofenac revelation Naoroji had promptly issued a clarification on his website: "the project is presently on hold."

In the meantime, *Parsiana* readers



(Above left) Vultures hunted in France a century ago (Courtesy: Belvédère des vautours). Above: A Griffon vulture (recognizable by its long neck) sparring with a European black vulture (Courtesy: J. F. and M. Terrasse)

keep sending us news clippings of the latest developments in this field: K. B. Antia of Hyderabad sent us a report from *The Deccan Chronicle* of September 16 which states that the scientists at Hyderabad's Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology are close to achieving artificial insemination in the White-backed vulture after taking time to distinguish a male vulture from the female and extracting the first semen sample!

On May 7, 2003, *The Indian Express* reported that an Indian Airlines flight was scheduled to carry a rare cargo: three long-billed vultures which were ailing at the Uttara's Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Katraj Zoological Park, Poona to Haryana's Vulture Care Centre in Pinjore. Since the vulture population in India has fallen by 95 percent in the last decade, the BNHS is trying to save as many of these birds who are often found sitting glum and motionless at high altitudes for days after which they just drop dead. Starting with five vultures the facility hoped to increase the number to 40 in a few months. They were also planning to radio-collar five birds in an effort to identify their migration patterns and for this they are using an American satellite to track their movements.

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From left: Dr T. Patel, Gimi, Ruby Lilaowala, Navroze Daver, Bharucha, Shernaz Daver and Phiroze Lilaowala at the Nagpur agiary celebrations

in India is supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, mentioned London's *The Times*, noting that the facility was inaugurated by visiting British conservation minister Elliot Morley.

"Vultures in India used to be as common as pigeons in Trafalgar Square," states the news report referring to the disappearance of vultures as causing "problems for the Parsis who dispose of their dead by leaving them on top of towers...The shortage of the birds has left strict adherents of the faith...in a dilemma."

Nagpur nuggets

"Wear your sports shoes and sporting spirits and — *ramva chaloji*," invited the Nagpur Parsi Gymkhana to the four-day annual salgirah celebrations of the Bai Hirabai Noshervanji Mancherji Mulla Daremehar which started with the games events on October 6, 2003, followed by a talent competition, an entertainment evening and talks by guest speaker Ruby Lilaowala on the subsequent days. Special efforts were made by member Pervin Cassad to encourage audience participation on each day, notes a write-up on the events forwarded by Shernaz Daver.

While the young and the not so young participated in the games organized on the first day by Monica Bhagwagar, Roshan Patel and Cyrus Watchmaker, and presided over by chief guest Sanaya Bapuna, the audience was invited to come with decorative tattoos on their arms.

The next evening saw many youngsters displaying their talent on stage by way of recitation, singing, mono acting, dancing and playing musical instruments. The audience was attired in some very unusual hats and trendy footwear. Chief guest Jal Vazifdar distributed the talent competition prizes as also the prizes for the indoor tournaments held by the Gymkhana every year. Rusi Godha conducted the proceedings organized by

Cassad, Jerroo Godha and Benaifer Siganporia.

On the third evening Lilaowala spoke on "The significance of fire in Zoroastrianism and other world religions through the ages" after which the audience — dressed for the 'B' day when clothes beginning with the letter 'B' were worn — got to witness an Arabian dance choreographed by Parizad Daver and a hilarious depiction of a wedding in the community. The commentary written by Havovi Govadia and narrated by Khurshid Dalal won the acclaim of the chief guest Khurshed Masani as did also the efforts put in by the organizers Taubenda Bhagwagar, Fermin Poacha and Jerestine Watchmaker and the participants.

The concluding day's program commenced with a jashan led by the agiary panthaky Ervad Sohrab Bharucha. Vice president of the Nagpur Anjuman and chief guest for the evening Navroze Daver felicitated the mobeds who regularly assist the Anjuman: Ervads Pesi Chhor, Shapur Govadia, Homiyar Godha and Nazban Dastur. Anjuman prizes for academic excellence as also outstanding performance in cricket were distributed. Whilst appreciating the hard work of the Gymkhana committee in organizing these social and cultural activities he also referred to the work of the Anjuman in the maintenance of buildings, renovation of the Dharamshala, solving the water problem of the Tata Baug residents and improving the facilities at the aramgah.

Lilaowala's speech on "That strange love-hate relationship called marriage" was followed by her felicitation by Association president Shiraz Gimi. "Lilaowala participated most sportingly in all the events," writes Shernaz Daver whether as Queen of Sheba or a judge or entertaining the audience at the talent evening with her rendition of old-time

songs.

Honorary secretary of the Gymkhana Mehroo Watchmaker proposed a vote of thanks after which the congregation enjoyed a sit-down dinner.

Gracing Gulbarga

Based on her aggregate performance in the first, second and third year BCom studies Serafraz Neville Irani of Gulbarga's Nutan Vidyalaya Degree College was conferred the fifth rank by the Gulbarga University, according to a report in *The Hindu* of September 19, 2003. The Gulbarga University covers six north Karnataka districts, including Gulbarga where she stood second, according to a family source. Scoring 78 percent in her first year, 76 percent in her second year and 83 percent in her third year, Irani's aggregate percent worked out to 79. The three subjects in which she fared the best in her final BCom examination were income tax in which she got



Irani (right) receiving award from former home minister Scindia for academic excellence

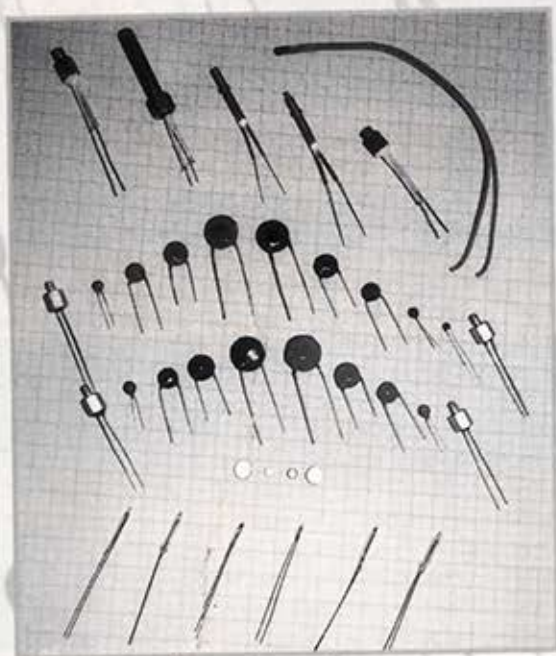


97 percent, Indian economics in which she got 88 percent and business law where she got 80 percent.

The news of the winners which appeared in the local dailies subsequently earned her a felicitation at the Rotary International New Generation District Seminar.

Earlier when she had stood first in the Gulbarga district HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) examination she had been honored by the education minister H. Vishwanath and had won awards from the Zoroastrian Student Teacher Association and the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations for Welfare and Culture. Presently Irani is pursuing her Masters in Business Administration at the Dodappa Appa Institute.

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From left: Guzder (holding trophy), Pavri, Kavarana and Dastoor (inset): honoring courage and heroism

Iran League's impression

It is the parents' responsibility to inculcate in their children some knowledge of their community and the strengths and beliefs of the Zarathushti religion, impressed Brig Soli Pavri who was conferred the Late Maneckji Hataria Trophy for Courage and Heroism by the Iran League at its annual prize distribution function at Cama Baug on Sunday, October 19, 2003. It is up to the mothers to impart the right values to their children, he added appreciating his own upbringing that helped him to rise in his career in the army. For his outstanding leadership during counter insurgency operations and command along the Line of Control with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir he was awarded the Yudh Seva Medal in 2002, noted the press release. Presently the commander of the Pune Sub Area Pavri referred to his immense satisfaction and accomplishment derived from joining the armed forces. As the Indian team leader of the UN Military Observer Group in Iran he had an occasion to see his coreligionists thriving in Iran, he remarked.

Chief guest Jamshed Guzder, chairman emeritus of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), advised the youth to be God-fearing and to give of oneself and one's services generously so that it benefits not only the recipient but also the giver.

Among the other guests present that evening who were welcomed by the Iran League vice president Cowasjee Dinshaw were BPP trustee Silloo Kavarana, Ervads Farokh Sidhwa, Eruch Kuka and Dr Ramyar Karanjia, Homai Mehta, Pansy Mehta and Rustom Tirandaz. Instead of being discouraged by observations that our community is dying and we are a geriatric community we should concentrate on training our youngsters, urged Tirandaz.

The Iran League organizes numerous competitions to ensure that the Zoroastrian religion and the Parsi/Iranian culture and traditions are not forgotten, declared Ervad Vispi Dastur, honorary treasurer and co-ordinator outlining the various activities of the League. The prizes for all the competitions were announced by the chief judge Silloo Shapoorjee. Twenty-eight trophies as also a small replica were presented to the winners for while the rotating trophy has to be returned, the replica can be retained by the recipient. Eleven *Shahnameh* proficiency medals and 134 cash prizes were additionally distributed by Brig Soli and Jasmine Pavri.

The function which started with a jashan sought to encourage participation from the youngsters of the Dadar Athornan Boarding Madressa and the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute who led a hambandagi and also sang monajats that evening. The program ended with Marzban Mehta and the students of Bai Avabai Petit Girls' High School singing *Chhaiyé hamé Zarathoshti* and the national anthem before partaking of the subsidized contributory dinner catered by Minoo Bharucha.

Wow for a wag

In spite of looking after 11 dogs, six goats, a buffalo and

Merchant: assisting dog owners

a dozen chickens between her farm near Lonavla and home in Bombay, Shireen Merchant (née Dhabhar) extends her animal welfare services through her magazine *Woof! The Mag with a Wag* assisting readers on every aspect of dogs and dog ownership. She realized that pet owners had a lot of problems and questions that often remained unanswered and *Woof!* would be the ideal channel through which to solve them. Backed by her husband Junaid who photographs for and is also on the editorial team of *Woof!*, the magazine "has been a runaway hit with dog lovers all over the country," confirms the release. Merchant recalls that *Woof!* began as an eight-page newspaper in May 2002 and has now matured into a more than 30-page glossy magazine. Realizing that there was a dearth of information in India on the "assistance dog angle" (which involves professional training of a puppy for one or two years after which he is placed in the home of a disabled person), Merchant was motivated to help India's disabled to be better looked after.

"I bought your magazine on Saturday and since then it has not left my side. As a dog owner I was excited; at least there is a magazine that is ready to talk about dogs and help us out," writes Harpreet Kaur in an e-mail to the Speak Up! section of *Woof!* Though most of the ar-





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ticles are written by Merchant herself, avid animal lover and animal welfare education officer of the Government of India Supriya Bose and Bombay's only practicing canine cardiologist Dr Sangita Vengsarkar Shah are regular contributors. The Gourmutter column offers easy to prepare and healthy recipes for canine treats. To make Banana and Biscuit Bites, crushed digestive biscuits, mashed ripe bananas and plain yoghurt are mixed together into a crunchy paste which is then filled in small plastic ice cream cups. One chew stick is inserted into each cup and then frozen. This "pupsicle" makes a delicious dessert for a dog, they confirm.

In the editorial of the October/December 2003 issue of the quarterly Merchant encourages the readers to adopt a homeless dog this Diwali: "It takes heart and courage to adopt a shelter dog though, and not everyone has it in them. In this day and age everyone wants fancy pedigree dogs to keep up with the Joneses. Well, take it from me, a homeless dog will give you as much, if not more love and will be a devoted companion for life." Her family has adopted five homeless dogs over the years and they haven't regretted it. She observes that the condition of stray dogs in Bombay is better than that in cities like Poona, but citizens must be patient since efforts to sterilize and neuter the dogs take time. A resident of Dadar's Mancherji Joshi Colony in Bombay, Merchant remarks that there are many dogs in the Colony, most of whom are well looked after. "Parsis by and large believe in dogs," she adds.

Woof! was launched by the popular Canines Can Care organization, also founded by Merchant seven years ago, that pioneered the concept of assistance, search and rescue dogs in India, states the release. In fact, the Canines Can Care search dog team was the only one representing India in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake, she notes. The organization also conducts month long dog training classes for pet owners, holds agility training sessions and offers behavioral advice for dog problems. Though Merchant maintains that setting up Canines Can Care wasn't easy since it was the first of its kind in the country and she was still young, it received a positive response.

When asked what prompted her to return to India after studying and work-

ing in England in the field of canine training and behavior, Merchant explains that it was England's harsh weather and India's lack of information in her area of research that hastened her homecoming. She is the youngest member of The Northern Centre for Animal Behavior and The Pet Behavior Institute, England, states her bio data.

A yearly subscription to *Woof!* costs Rs 120 for four informative issues and can be made to *Woof! The Mag with A Wag!* 806 B, Empire Mahal, Khodadad Circle, Dadar, Bombay 400014.

Simin J. Patel

"A woman of insight"

In her desire to write on the life of a Parsi woman for her forthcoming anthology



Lilaowala:
"inspiring"

of women residing in Bombay, Lisa Elaine Sipes was directed to the residence of community journalist Ruby Lilaowala. The backcover of the 132-page book *Inside Mumbai: Conversations with Ten Women* sums up Lilaowala as "inspiring." The blurb describes her as "Parsi journalist, renowned speaker, forthright, spontaneously funny, follows the creed 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds.'"

"The women I interviewed helped bring a measure of understanding to the city that once stood before me as a mass of confusion," writes the author who spent two years in the city ultimately realizing that "at the core there were similarities that all women share...I hope that this book will help to bridge the gap between cultures inside and outside of India..."

Lilaowala comes across in the book as "religious, but not ritualistic" and explains that she starts her day with a prayer to a "cosmic intelligence...I don't say much. I just thank God for my health and that my five senses are working properly. I also ask that I might bring happiness to every person I meet...When I lie in bed at night I audit the day and ask myself if I have made a difference...Truth, I believe, is the highest religion."

Believing that "we're all products of our unseen past experiences" and that everything contains "energy" Lilaowala impressed the author as "a woman of insight and heart, justice and compassion. Zealous for good deeds. Inspiring

and straightforward. Committed to impacting culture with her words."

Like her parents who had pursued their postgraduation studies after her birth, Ruby too did her law studies after marriage but did not take up a job to appease her mother-in-law. But after her husband's transfer to Qatar she got the necessary avenues to express herself, working on three jobs simultaneously: managing a radio segment that was aired each week, working for the censorship department screening women's magazines and as a columnist for the *Gulf Times*. Her weekly Kaleidoscope page in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* "always impressed (the author) with the matter-of-factness and courage she used in addressing sensitive issues within her community."

On the threshold of 60 Lilaowala told the author, "I refuse to grow old gracefully...The more I grow older, the more I understand the importance of setting and accomplishing goals..."

SPOTLIGHT

Representing St Xavier's Collegiate School, Calcutta at the 50th Annual Inter Jesuit School Elocution and Speech Contest in Ranchi on August



30, 2003, 16-year-old **Keki Dali Fatakia** bagged the gold medal in the seniors category and lifted the Kutar Elocution Shield, according to a write-up in *HT Ranchi Live*. His piece from *The Maid of Orleans* by George Bernard Shaw was judged on logical arrangement of materials, forcefulness, clarity, audibility, poise, gesture and grammar. The competition saw participants from schools in Ranchi, Darjeeling, Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Calcutta and other places.

Compiled by Parinaz M. Gandhi



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There was a time when business in Bombay (now Mumbai) was hit by the plague, when almost every establishment carried a not-so-welcome sign, and the latest advancement in hospitality was the humble thunder box.

But that was before one hotel ushered in the 20th century with a few radical ideas: equality for all, a remarkable cure for low self esteem, and of course, the electric fan.

The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel.

Billed by the Times, London, as the finest hotel in the East, it was perhaps the only place in the world where a British Viceroy could rub shoulders with an Indian Maharajah, where the Congress could debate with Right Wing leaders, and where sailors on shore leave could flirt with the Pompadour Follies.

Built at the cost of a quarter of a million pounds, the hotel introduced a series of firsts that set new benchmarks in Indian hospitality.

In 1903, it was American fans, German elevators, Turkish baths and English butlers.

A suite of rooms including full board involved the princely sum of rupees thirty (roughly forty pence). Prompting the Maharaja of Patiala to check-in with his entire retinue of staff, servants, and a sizeable personal harem.

That year, the hotel industry in India recorded its first-ever hundred-rupee tip.

Over the years, the Taj brought in to Bombay, a Mademoiselle Singy to raise temperatures and a few eyebrows with the Tango, the first air-conditioned ballroom to cool things down, the first cold storage (read chilled beer), the first licensed bar (read Dom Perignon), the first plate of imported kippers for homesick Tommies, the first taste of jazz to get the city Lindy-hopping, haggis for the first annual Burns night, and eventually the city's first real discotheque.

Changing decades brought in new tastes and newer guests. Mick Jagger, Steven Spielberg, David Rockefeller. From rock stars to Nobel laureates, fashion divas to oil-rich sheiks, the Taj represented a global village long before the term was to become a cliché.

Even today, a hundred years on, you'll find the Taj taking luxury to greater heights in all of over 60 hotels around the world. At business capitals, in fairytale palaces, on secluded islands, in private yachts, aboard executive jets, and amidst spas and resorts.

Still, as the discerning traveller will note, a little ahead of its time.



The WTC Heroes Park

September 11, 2003 — the second anniversary of the World Trade Center (WTC) bombing — witnessed a groundbreaking ceremony for the WTC Heroes Park. Conceived as a memorial as much to the many who lost their lives in 2001 as to those who pitched in to save those trapped under the debris, the Park envisages landscaped gardens replete with healing water features according to the combined teachings of Vastushastra and Feng-shui. "The abundance of water features, careful selection of the direction and even landscaping are all done keeping these principles in mind," landscape designer Kaizad Irani told Radhika Pancholi of *The Indian Express* (September 26, 2003).

A 30-foot pond with huge boulders symbolizes the unity of the 50 states comprising the USA as also "the brotherhood that emerges supreme despite the diversity," adds Huned Contractor (*Pune Times*, August 9, 2003).

A professional landscapist who teaches architecture at Illinois' Parkland University, Irani's design was chosen by the US Government from over 400 applications. As Irani elaborated to Contractor, "There was an open international offer for all professional architects to submit their designs and I did so only on the insistence of my students and colleagues."

In May, he was one of 20 architects from all over the world whose design was shortlisted by the US Government. They were flown to Chicago for a three-day brain-storming and presentation seminar where the participants were divided into four teams of five architects each.

"The reason why Kaizad's team over-shot the others can be credited to the fact that they chose to look upon the park as an embodiment of the selfless courage and conviction with which ordinary men and women as also the rescue specialists pitched in to save every victim trapped under the debris," writes Contractor. Amplifies Irani, "When this gory incident took place, I was sitting in front of the television set and praying that I get an opportunity to help in whatever way I can. And my prayer has been fulfilled."

The Poona bred Irani whose mother Roshan had lectured at Bombay University for many years, has imbibed her love for teaching. He sees it as "a noble pro-

fession that gives one the opportunity to pass on not just knowledge but values." And he needed all the commitment learnt from his award winning bodybuilder father Rusi during his first year at the University of Illinois in 1986 after initial graduation from Poona's Abhinav Kalavidyalaya College of Architecture. He needed to deliver newspapers, work in cafeteria and teach martial arts to pay for his food and rent, notes Pancholi.

Irani, whose wife Farzana had fought in the first Gulf War as a part of the US army, is happy to be "aaprosi Parsi dikro," and is "extremely honored" at being the only Indian on the project, note the reports.

Mayor Anklesaria

Bombay born Rattan Anklesaria was elected mayor of Dunstable on May 19, 2003. Apprehensive about future growth, Anklesaria, with a diploma in mechanical engineering and £ 3.10 shillings in hand and wife Sheroo (née Shernavaz Jhabvala) and their two children Heroise and Meera in tow, had migrated to England in 1956 to start again from scratch, "working his way up with British Rail to become an electrical engineer," notes *The Dunstable Gazette* (May 21, 2003). One of his jobs with British Rail was as an instructor on diesel engines, ere he retired from the company as a manager, his younger brother Noshir Anklesaria, a consultant in excise and customs law in Bombay, informs *Parsiana*.

In the process the eldest son of Rustomji and Putlamai became better known as Jim. "They couldn't pronounce Rattan and because I never worked on New Year's Eve, my railway colleagues said 'you're a Scotsman!' So they called me Jimmy," Anklesaria explained the choice of nickname to *The Gazette* reporter Sam Hird.

Among Anklesaria's priorities as mayor is to upgrade the town's rail and road connections to the national grid. The Pasque Hospice, the Keech Cottage children's hospice and the 5th Dunstable



Anklesaria: upgrading infrastructure

Scout and Guide groups are three charities he has identified for particular fundraising attention in *The Gazette*.

Sheroo is an excellent seamstress and dressmaker. Celebrating their father's investiture were Heroise (now better known as Roy), a solicitor, and Meera Terebillini, a linguist settled in Switzerland along with two of the four Anklesaria grandchildren, notes Noshir Anklesaria.

Drama in her blood

Young Nazneen Contractor's rendition of Marina in Shakespeare's *The Adventures of Pericles* at the 2003 Stratford Festival of Canada was hailed by the *Toronto Star* critic as "The most stunning debut (he) could ever recall," writes Roshan Davar in a message to *Parsiana*. The entire performance of the play was given a five-star rating. Her other performances at the Festival were in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Quiet in the Land*, adds Davar.

The 21-year-old daughter of Darius Contractor, a financial and forensic consultant as informs Davar, and his wife Yasmin is a graduate of the Etobicoke School of Arts. Contractor majored in drama and proceeded to the University of Toronto to specialize in drama and sociology. Her brother Percy, a graduate in aerospace engineering, is training to



Contractor: a stunning debut

Photo courtesy Stratford Theater



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be a commercial pilot.

Her aspiration for a career on the Canadian stage and screen is already off to a good start with successful TV serials like *Star Hunter*, *Relic Hunter* and the *Matthew Shepherd Story*.

Granddaughter of internationally renowned puppeteer Meher Contractor, Nazneen has been selected to train under outstanding North American actors and teachers at the well-known Stratford Conservatory.

Tajik 3,000th celebrations

While it is universally acknowledged that UNESCO declared 2003 as the 3,000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture at the urging of Tajikistan, founder of the Mazdayasnie Monasterie, Dr Meher Master-Moos reports that she was the only Zoroastrian officially present at the hurried one day celebration in Dushanbe on September 5, 2003. Tajikistan, it will be remembered, was once an integral part of the Achaemenian, Parthian and Sasanian empires.

Tracing recent Tajik history after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Master-Moos recalls their jubilation and desire to revive ancient glory. A delegation of seven scholars and a member of

Parliament visited India in the summer of 1992, seeking cooperation and support from Indian Zoroastrians. They sought assistance in creating a religio-socio complex on the lines of the Delhi Anjuman's dharamshala/agiary property and mobeds to teach them rituals and perform navjotes. The first anniversary of the free Tajik Republic in 1992 was celebrated with the convening of the first Avesta World Conference which Master-Moos says she attended along with a delegation of eight persons from the UK, Pakistan and India. In December 1992 a planeload of 39 ministers, bankers and government officials led by their prime minister visited India. They sought Indian enterprise in general and Zoroastrian entrepreneurs in particular to help industrialize Tajikistan and develop its trade and commerce.

However, soon thereafter a civil war broke out in Tajikistan and continued for four years. Then and later, the community failed to respond to Tajik expectations, notes Master-Moos. Even the air tickets for Ervad Jehangir Turel and Dr



A. Rahmonov with Moos: releasing first volume of Yashts in Tajik language

Peshotan Peer who were willing to attend the 1,000th year celebration of Firdausi's *Shahnameh* in 1994 in Tajikistan were not sponsored by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP)/Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India.

While the Zoroastrians dallied, Muslim funds poured into the land. Over 600 masjids and mosques were constructed within six months of Tajik independence

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PASSENGER ELEVATOR

thanks to the government of Iran. The Aga Khan's similar efforts led to the Tajik Government granting several acres of land to build a Khoja Jamat Khana Cultural Center and hold the Nazeer Khushroo 1,000th anniversary celebrations in 2003 in Badakshan, Dushanbe, Khorogh and Kubbodian, writes Master-Moos.

Though the Tajik president had personally requested UNESCO to declare the Zoroastrian third millennium international celebrations the participating countries could not focus on a date after Iran said it was unwilling to hold the event on March 21. Master-Moos alleges that when the Aga Khan's institute in Dushanbe became aware of the UNESCO declaration they redoubled efforts to ensure the celebration of the rival Nazeer Khushroo event in September. By the time the Zoroastrian lobby awoke to the situation in late August, most days in September, when Tajikistan celebrates its independence, had been snapped up by the Khojas and the Zoroastrians were left with one day: September 5, claims Master-Moos. Probable participants in the celebrations from South Asia as well as Europe and North America learnt of it too late to be able to attend, she notes.

Master-Moos, who has been a frequent visitor to Tajikistan, carried with her some Zoroastrian publications, kusti contributed by NarYman Dubash and Sohrab Master of Poona and US \$ 3,000 towards the construction of a Zoroastrian center of which US \$ 2,000 had been donated by BPP chairman emeritus Jamshed Guzder and the rest by Bhavik Patel, a Gujarati businessman who accompanied Master-Moos to Dushanbe, and herself.

The celebration of the 3,000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture was inaugurated by the minister of culture K. O. Olimov. The invited foreign scholars and guests included Azarakhsh Hafizi, an Afghan scholar residing in Germany, non-Zoroastrian Iranians from California Masoud Sepand and his wife, Dr Masoud Mirshahi from Paris, Yazdan Manouchehr from Holland and Master-Moos. About 18 speakers addressed the 100-member audience, all in Persian or Russian with the exception of Master-Moos who spoke in English. Volume I of the Yashts coauthored by Master-Moos and Prof Rustom Fuzaylov was officially released at the function by the President's representative A. Rahmonov. Master-Moos writes that she also pre-

sented an afarganyu and read out Guzder's message.

An illustrated book with pictures of yazads and ameshasps discovered in an old fire-temple building excavated in Tajikistan was also released along with a book of poems from Zarathushtra to Borbad. A stage performance of the message of Zarathushtra was said to have been enacted by the leading actors of the country. Simultaneously an operatic rendition of Rustom and Sohrab was offered at an adjacent theater.

On September 8, "at a glittering function held annually at Borbad theater," Emonali Rahmonov, President of Tajikistan "castigated the intellectuals for not giving him sufficient (and) proper support for reviving the ancient original culture of Tajikistan and declared the year 2006 as the official celebrations for the revival of the ancient Aryan civilization and culture," writes Master-Moos.

In the city of Khujand where the Tajikistan Technological University is located Master-Moos claims to have met many persons of old Zoroastrian stock wanting to revive the religion despite having been Islamicized since the time of Timur. Now Avesta is being taught as part of the university curriculum in

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Dushanbe and Khujand, she adds.

"It is up to the Zoroastrians worldwide to lend a timely helping hand to the Tajiks, to revive our ancient common faith and culture. If the Parsis worldwide continue to remain apathetic and indifferent, we will lose our people to Islam. This is the clear writing on the wall, 12 years after independence that I observed during these celebrations," warns Master-Moos.

A suitable match

The New York Times (April 6, 2003) celebrated the matrimonial alliance of two Parsis — genetic engineer and director of business development of the pharma major Hoffmann-La Roche Dr Sherri Treasurywala and London based interbank stock trader for the Bank of New York Cyrus Mistry — with a half-page spread. The wedding at Dadar's Rustamframna Agiary on March 21, 2003 marked the union of two single, career



Mistry and Treasurywala: mobile courtship

Photo: Farok Jassawalla

driven achievers who had been childhood friends but had drifted away to opposite sides of the North Atlantic.

Their parents prevailed upon them to meet — at a Bombay restaurant. But while Mistry was instantly enamored as per the story by Malavika Sanghvi, dating Treasurywala required time and ingenuity. When

she finally agreed, the venue was Zurich because she wanted "neutral territory." He said he'd go to the ends of the earth for her and proposed in the splendor of a setting sun on a deserted sandbar on the Maldives!

Through the fairy tale courtship Treasurywala was reading Vikram Seth's *A suitable boy*. Though she considered their common Parsi Zoroastrian heritage as a "comfort zone," what actually won her over was Mistry's sangfroid as Treasurywala drove him to the New York airport through "horrific traffic"

when he was already late for the flight to London. "He didn't show he was frazzled even once!" an admiring Treasurywala told Sanghvi.

Achievers all

Cyrus Mehta, Arda-e-viraf Minocherhomjee and Hanoz Gandhi are the first recipients of the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce (WZCC) awards for outstanding entrepreneurs, professionals, states the *FEZANA Journal* (Spring 2003). In the words of Ness Lakdawala, chair of the WZCC Recognitions Committee, they "spotlight the enormous latent talent in our Zarathushti community."

Outstanding entrepreneur Mehta co-founded the Cytel Software Corporation in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1987 and in Poona, India in 1998. Cytel's software is used by universities including ivy-leaguers like Harvard and Yale, pharmaceutical corporations like Abbott, Bristol Myers, Wyeth and medical centers such as the Sloan-Kettering. A PhD in operations research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Mehta is adjunct professor of biostatistics at Harvard University and has founded the Harvard Zoroastrian

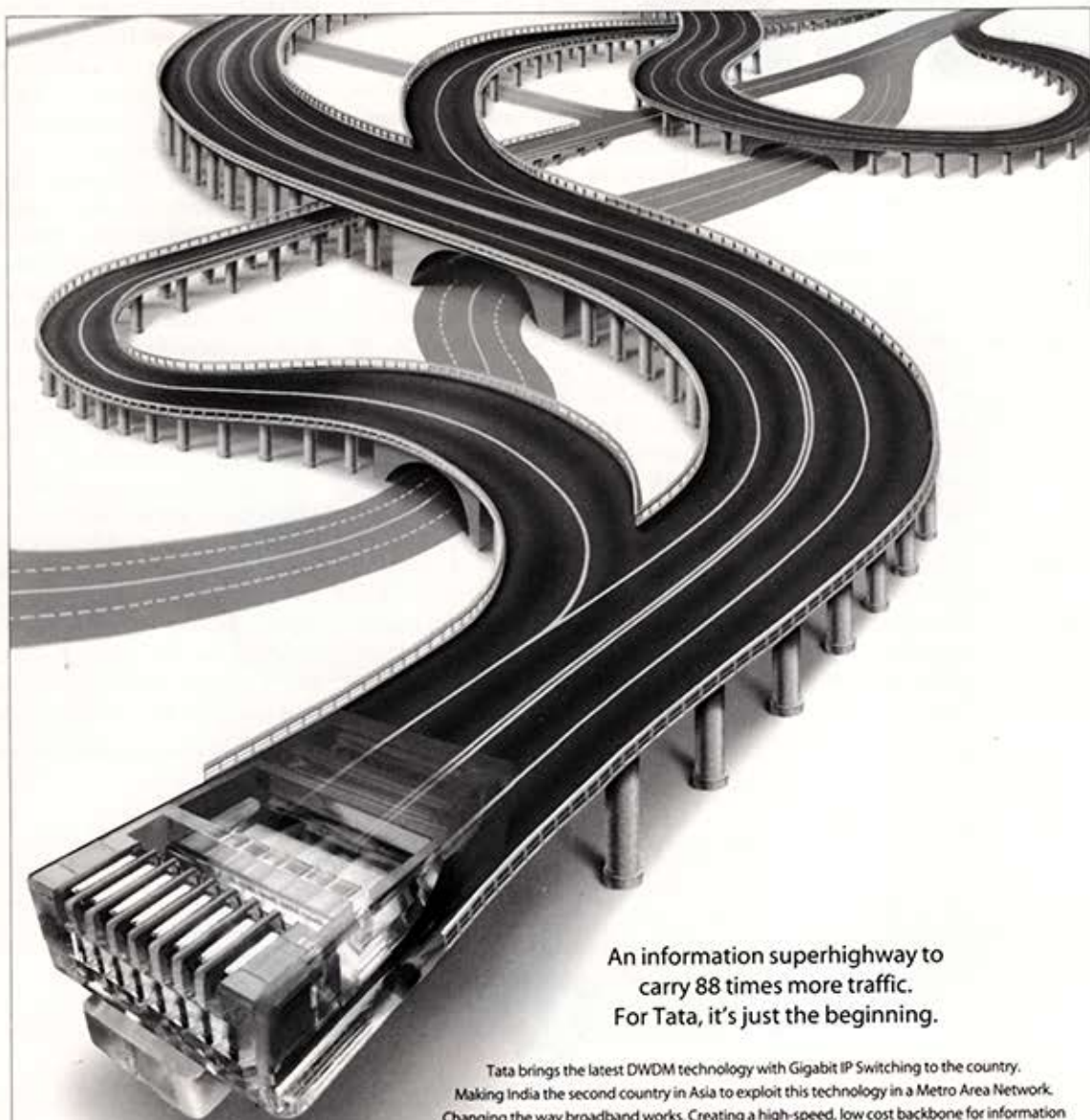
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(L to R) Role model entrepreneurs
Minocherhomjee, Gandhi and Mehta

Association, notes the *Journal*.

Outstanding professional Minocherhomjee is a principal and managing director of William Blair Capital Partners, a premier venture capital firm where he manages healthcare investments ranging beyond \$ 100 million and is recognized by his peers as "lead investor," says the *Journal*. He is also on the board of seven other companies and has been *The Wall Street Journal's* star analyst.

Outstanding Young (35 and under) entrepreneur/professional Gandhi developed the E-business strategy for the Bose Corporation of which he is a director. The Internet thus became a key part of the company's revenue generating and operational infrastructure, informs the *FEZANA Journal*. Gandhi, a master of

science in electrical engineering from MIT, has also led the implementation of offshore development for the corporation and is expanding the strategy globally.

The WZCC recognition of entrepreneurial talent simultaneously aims to provide role models to Zoroastrian youths and encourage them in striving for excellence in their careers, notes Lakdawala.

From songs to spices

"Uncapping a commercial brand he sells, he puts it under my nose and the only thing I can smell is turmeric. 'Aha,' he says. He uncaps his own blend and complex fragrances waft up my olfactory passages. 'That's because I use a lot of the spices such as cardamom and cloves and black pepper.'"

That is Helen Greenwood in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (August 5, 2003) introducing her readers to Mehernosh (Manny) Seervai and Manny's House of Spices that he and his wife Christine have been running since 1986. The Sydney store, accessed down a corridor papered with old videotape

covers, stocks a variety of herbs, spices, an array of basmati rice, lentils, his own chakki-ground *atta* (flour) and much more. Many of the mixes and pastes are Christine's own recipes — particularly relished are the butter chicken mix, tandoori and vindaloo pastes, carrots and raisin pickle — and they bear the Asho Farohar logo to "symbolize the purity of the products," Seervai writes in an e-mail to *Parsiana*.

An alumnus of Bombay's St Mary's School (Cambridge section) and an arts graduate from Jai Hind College, the only child of the late Vicaji and Mani Seervai had begun his working life as a musician, studying music and playing the accordion in uncle Goody Seervai's band. (Anyone over 50 who grew up in Bombay knew the affable Goody, had toe-tapped and danced to his lively renditions of hit-paraders and perennials!)

After a two-year apprenticeship, Manny was sent to Delhi to play at the Oberoi there and returned to Bombay when the Oberoi Sheraton opened in 1983, playing in the Lancers Bar, Carousel Bar and the Cafe Royale. Then the migration bug bit and Manny and Christine who were wed (and had two children) in Delhi went Down Under.

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Alongside: Seervai at his store and (above) with Jimmy, Christine and Nilloufer

"Music was very tough to break into... I played professionally for four years but could not break through, so I ventured out in businesses I never knew of. I used to play Friday, Saturday nights at the El Rancho Hotel in Sydney as a solo pianist and accordionist, and used to work as a courier operator during the day. After a couple of years doing all types of odd jobs, I was asked to take over a small spice shop in Sydney and the rest is history," writes Manny.

He continues to play socially — for functions held by Sydney Zoroastrians. And once a year he hosts a get-together jam session where other Goan musicians who used to play for Goody and Nellie come together for a spot of fun.

Seervai's 25-year-old son Jimmy is currently sales and marketing manager in the family business. Nilloufer, 24, is a child care supervisor. Neither of them are married. While Christine enjoys cooking and gardening as hobbies, Manny says he rides his motorcycle cruiser Kawasaki 1500 on Sundays. Access them on www.mannyspices.com.au

Gandhian footsteps

An experience 20 years ago as a young electronics student led computer consultant, trainer and Internet webmaster Tehemton Adenwalla to compile a commemorative volume on Mahatma Gandhi to celebrate the apostle of peace's 125th birth anniversary. The book was launched on August 15, 2002 at Bharat Bhavan, Wellington by India's High Commissioner to New Zealand Bal Anand in the presence of Wellington mayor Kerry Prendergast and a large and distinguished audience led by Mohanbhai Mistry, president of the Wellington Indian Association.

Divided into six sections, the bilin-

gual (English-Gujarati) book acknowledges editorial and financial contributions, examines the life and message of Gandhi as viewed by a variety of authors, repudiates common misunderstandings and promotes some of the Mahatma's ideas as a policy resource out of the quagmire of 21st century devastation of natural resources. It also provides a comprehensive bibliography on Gandhi.

In his preface Adenwalla recalls his initial tryst with Gandhi: In desperate and seemingly fruitless search for an expensive US research work, *Electronic Circuits* by Philip Cutler, Adenwalla had shot off a letter to the author explaining the situation and seeking a copy. To Adenwalla's "surprise and delight" Cutler replied, noting, "I will be sending the book in honor of Gandhi."

"The book did arrive some weeks later. I was certainly grateful to Mr Cutler for his generosity, but I was also grateful to Gandhi. Using a simplistic way of reasoning, I concluded that Gandhiji had to be a great person; his efforts got independence for India from the British; but better still for me, his name and fame got me a much

Adenwalla at the launch with Bal Anand (above) and Mistry (alongside)



needed book! From that day on, Gandhiji became more than a historical figure for me, he became a sort of personal hero."

The son of Bombay's Bhikhaji and Jer Adenwalla (Bhikhaji is a frequent contributor to *Parsiana's* Readers' Forum) studied at the J. N. Petit High School in Poona and a technical institute in Bombay. He remains an Indian citizen despite having spent 15 years in New Zealand where he edits a newsletter *The Parsee Voice of New Zealand*, writes on religious topics on the Internet and functions as webmaster for the New Zealand Indian Central Association. In an e-mail to *Parsiana*, Adenwalla writes that settling in New Zealand presented no particular problems. However he says he is "getting more and more convinced that Zoroastrians in western countries will inevitably be dissolved in the host culture after the third-fourth generation, despite efforts by parents and associations."

In his speech at the book launch under the auspices of The Wellington Indian Association, Adenwalla had remarked upon the impact of the research on himself: "As the book comes to a completion, I feel a sort of loneliness that I will not be 'walking' with Gandhiji anymore. During this exercise I felt that I was a fellow companion of the great leader. I felt as if I was with him during his student days in England, and during the 20 years

he lived in South Africa where he discovered the profound tools of satyagraha and non-violence. I felt I was part of the non-cooperation movement launched by him as a peaceful protest against British injustice in India. I also felt as (if) I was part of the Dandi March, which was undertaken in the year 1931. And like millions of admirers world wide, I felt the loss on his untimely death in 1948...

"Let us all honor him in the best way we can — and that is by following (in) his footsteps. It is important that we imbibe his teachings in our day-to-day lives, since knowledge and wisdom to be effective has to be practically applied."

Compiled by Arnavaz S. Mama



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Concentrating on education

Reelected Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustee Dinshaw Tamboly says the education portfolio will be his priority in his second term

Arnavaz S. Mama

"The logistics of transporting the Tavdi fire from Navsari to Bombay gave me more sleepless nights than anything, including this election!" Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trustee Dinshaw Tamboly reflected on his role in the establishment of the Jokhi Agiary at Bombay's Godrej Baug, deeming it the most challenging — and the most satisfying — of his assignments during his first seven-year term in the Punchayet. He recalled the traffic jams that then prevailed on the highways of Gujarat where development work was underway. An accident anywhere along the route could have meant a pileup of traffic and precious time lost. Missing a boi would have been a disaster. At every major junction alternative routes had to be charted out in advance so that the fire could reach Sanjan in time for the Havan *gah* boi. The Sanjan-Bombay stretch the following night was fraught with similar peril. "We could have airlifted the fire but Dastur Meherjirana declared it had to be in contact with the earth," Tamboly remembered.

The Godrej Baug agiary had remained a project in limbo until the Tavdi fire was identified as available for rehousing there. The financial barrier dissolved when Hongkong business magnate Keki Jokhi agreed to contribute 75 lakh rupees within 24 hours of an e-mail request from Tamboly. "There was divine help. Everything went like clockwork. Things just kept falling into place," he notes reverentially.

As for the installation of the solar concentrators at Doongerwadi for which the man received considerable flak from detractors during the weeks leading up to the election, Tamboly thinks he has "played a pivotal role in ensuring that the estate and the system (of dakhmenashini) were not compromised." He says he genuinely believes that anything could

have happened if the matter had gone to court. "Minoo (Shroff) and I were pleading with the DDD-AG (Disposal of the Dead with Dignity-Action Group) not to move the courts... My policy is never to



The victor (centre) flanked by (from left) Jimi Jesia, Guzder, Bachi and Mithoo Jesia

shut the door on dialog. Rather, to carry on the dialog to doomsday!"

It is a matter of satisfaction that to date there are four concentrators on the Sethna dakhma financed through donations from Narayan Dubash, Shapoorji Pallonji, Khorshed Sodhi and Khorshed Hanson. "We always ask the family before placing a body under the concentrator. So far no one has said no," states Tamboly. Not only are four more concentrators due for installation over Bombay's Anjuman dakhma by the year end, support for their use is spreading among such conservative communities as in Poona, Ahmedabad, Navsari where they have been/are being installed, notes Tamboly.

Due to Tamboly's Navsari connection (he is Bombay Dyeing's sales agent there apart from his work with impoverished rural Zoroastrians in the area) he was also the trustee-in-charge of the construction of two buildings comprising ownership flats that the BPP built on

its property there. The more than 40 flats of quality housing were sold at Rs 450 per sq foot with only six now remaining. The vast property in front of a maidan in the main part of the city was bequeathed to the BPP by Jamsetji Tata's sister Ratanbai Bamji. It had housed the Choksey Rural Girls' Home until that institution folded for lack of patronage. The BPP plans include the future construction of a sanatorium/dharmashala on the site, says Tamboly.

For the coming years Tamboly says he would like to concentrate on education — the portfolio he inherited from Dr Mehroo Bengalee, his predecessor on the BPP board. "In 1996 we were disbursing 18 to 20 lakh rupees every year. Today it is 80-90 lakhs." And Tamboly hopes to increase this amount substantially — an aim with which his fellow trustees are in consonance, especially the budget allocations for those who seek to pursue the medical stream. One source of funds could be the sale of the Nirlon property, which the Punchayet had purchased in Goregaon, to the Petit Trust — a deal currently under negotiation. "The money that we get would be used for education," notes Tamboly optimistically.

Procuring and budgeting more funds for the Punchayet to give as loans to those seeking self-employment will be Tamboly's other major preoccupation. The World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO)-India has a waiting list of such seekers, he says, adding that the Punchayet too has been giving these loans for the past several years and where the individual's need is large (seven to 10 lakh rupees), the two bodies have been working in tandem, as the WZO's ceiling is 2.5 to three lakh rupees. "There is a sea change in BPP-WZO relations! The WZO accepts the BPP as the apex body in India," laughs Tamboly, respond-

ing to his detractors' frequent allegations of conflicting loyalties.

The venture capital scheme for large businesses where the BPP would be an equity participant and work on the establishment of a management college are other entrepreneur focussed activities of the BPP with which Tamboly is involved.

"In view of the community's demographics" the BPP board feels that 700 flats more would be enough to solve the housing problem. "The Petit Trust is going into housing in a big way. If the Nirlon deal goes through more than 400 flats (will be generated) in Nirlon alone... They want to build in Nirlon something far superior to Cusrow Baug, with a health club, swimming pool, etc. They say the poor of the community never had it so good!" says Tamboly, adding that "they will be using our list of applicants to house there." Some of the money generated by the Nirlon sale would be used to develop a third building of about 100 flats at Panthaky Baug, he adds.

Is it possible for the Punchayet to evolve and stick to an objective housing policy? "Any policy needs to be flexible. Some people need to jump the queue," responds Tamboly matter-of-factly. Denying the usual allegations of the trust-

"There is a sea change in BPP-WZO relations! The WZO accepts the BPP as the apex body in India"

ees' personal agendas, he explains, "I'd love to give flats to young couples. But we need a corpus, we need to generate funds. Some buildings are over 80 years old. They need massive repairs. The annual repair and maintenance bill is over one crore 40 lakhs!"

Originally the BPP shared the cost of repairs 50-50 with the tenants but their unpaid shares were borne by the Punchayet. Now the BPP has reduced its commitment to 25 percent but with renegeing tenants it will end up paying more than 50 percent, notes Tamboly.

While the BPP's original income of eight crore rupees has fallen to less than seven because of falling interest rates, salaries and the Doongerwadi deficit have increased. "We are barely able to make both ends meet. We need to keep gener-

ating funds. Initially I was against the security deposit but I have realized that it is a need of the times."

The security deposit that the Punchayet charges—a lumpsum against the grant of a flat which would be returned to the tenant sans interest when he returns the flat to the Punchayet—is one of the points that the Alert Zoroastrians Association (AZA) has been criticizing. In Tamboly's "personal opinion" the AZA has been playing the role of a good watchdog. "In any public activity, checks and balances are required. They (AZA spokespersons) go off on a tangent, get overbearing at times, but appear concerned for the community," he states.

The world body is still in a conceptual stage, explains Tamboly. The federations of India, North America and the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) have been critical of the WZO's assumption of equal voting rights for individual and association members. However, after years of bickering, threats of going separate ways have been brushed aside in favor of the WZOI, that is the WZO's individual members and the WZOF consisting of anjumans and federations working independently

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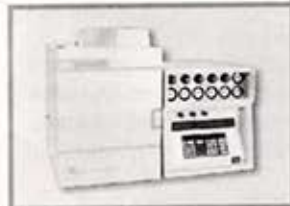
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within their prescribed arenas. A small board of six to eight members, comprising three to four members from each wing now seeks to form an umbrella at the top as a coordinating body, designated the International Zoroastrian Organisation (IZO).

It was as managing trustee of the WZO-India trusts that much of Tamboly's social work has been executed. The total occupancy of the WZO senior citizens' home in Navsari has prompted a donor from California to fund another. Tamboly says a property has been acquired in the vicinity of the earlier establishment where a smaller replica is being built. He is happy that the garden of the WZO's Sanjan sanatorium is in full bloom, that an original squatter has finally been removed from its spacious grounds and a mango and chickoo orchard has been planted. It will take a few years for commercial returns from the fruit but once that happens the sanatorium will become self-sustaining despite its highly subsidized tariff, he notes.

In response to a query regarding the miserable condition of the BPP sanatorium next door, Tamboly notes, "The whole philosophy is different. There (his wife) Bachi had a free hand. Here all seven trustees have to get into the act.

Also, the BPP has its own administration...(and hence) bureaucracy."

It had been expected that Tamboly would walk back into the Punchayet unopposed. But he said he was not surprised to hear of Noshir Dadrawala's candidature. It seems that the latter had written about his intention on a private website and some individuals subscribing to that website had informed Tamboly about it. "Noshir is the only person who can answer the question" why he withdrew. "Yazdi Desai, who eventually contested against me, has claimed that I had bullied Noshir into withdrawing. There is no truth in that statement!" he adds emphatically.

Tamboly says he does not know Desai, had not seen him until the day of the election. "He and his supporters did their best to project me in very poor light, to denigrate my performance for the community, to establish there was something devious in my attitude, that by raising and dispensing funds to various individuals and institutions, I was buying over their loyalties. The voters have given their verdict, but even that is now being challenged.

"Yazdi Desai has written to the board of trustees alleging that this is an indisputable case of me misusing a biased Parsi

Press, my position and influence as a sitting BPP trustee. According to him the money donated through the WZO was used to unfairly manipulate the thousand odd voters in my favor. He has prayed that the trustees set aside my election, declare it void, and instead declare him as being elected trustee and grant him other reliefs as they may deem fit!

"It is for the other six trustees to go through his 'Election Petition' to them and respond as they deem fit. As far as I am concerned I have already given my written response to the trustees in which I have denied all allegations of unfair practice made in the petition. I will naturally see this matter through to its logical conclusion.

"The allegations against me are in extremely poor taste, but even more so is the allusion that a thousand odd voters have been unfairly manipulated. This, according to me, is nothing but an insult to the voters, their intelligence and their faculty of reasoning."

That 94 individuals came together voluntarily from various baugs to work as his campaign team with "military precision" under Mithoo Jesia's direction was enough recompense for Tamboly. That many of them, who had worked on

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opposing sides at other trusteeship elections, had joined forces to work for him made him feel "humble."

Tamboly's approachability has stood him in good stead. Apart from his professional work as import-export and management consultant, devotion to WZO activities, the Punchayet work takes a large slice of time per week. He estimates that each of the trustees spend between 20 to 25 hours a week on BPP work. Before their weekly board meeting at 5 or 5.30 which extends to 7.30 or 8 p.m. they meet at 3 or 3.30 p.m. to dispose of the various issues dealing specifically with housing. The pace can be gruelling, but Tamboly's smiling demeanor is rarely breached. He spells out his view of the community, one that has helped to maintain his composure:

"As a community we are very individualistic. In our army there are only generals, no soldiers. We all perceive ourselves to be leaders, there are no followers. It is my experience that rather than quarrel amongst ourselves we must adopt a policy of live and let live."

Dancing in the rain

The Punchayet's youth wing, called Young Dimensions (YD) splashed into community focus with a Rain Dance on October 18, 2003. Nearly 300 participants attended the function at Pavanika, the Air Force Club at Colaba, says Tamboly who chairs the YD board which includes BPP chairman Minoo Shroff, co-trustees Silloo Kavarana and Dinshaw Mehta, Adi Engineer, formerly of Tata Power, surgeon Dr Rushad Udwadia, Diana Marfatia, principal of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Charitable Institution and team leader for the BPP's annual Holiday Programme for Youth (HPY), and her team members Nozer Meherji and Hoshang Gotla. The community was informed via the *Jam-e-Jamshed* and the baug and colony associations.

As against the HPY Club which comprises alumni of the Holiday Programme for Youth, YD addresses itself to a more mature level, says Tamboly. "The idea is to keep the youth together" and a concerted effort is on to get them to join.

"We purposely kept the rain dance at a neutral venue" so that youths outside the baugs and colonies could be interested to come, says Tamboly.

A half-day seminar on fitness and mental hygiene later in November was also on the YD agenda, Tamboly informs us.

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Desai's denigrations

Adult franchise and traditionalism are the two positive planks in defeated trusteeship candidate Yazdi Desai's armory

Arnavaz S. Mama

Defeated Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) trustee aspirant Yazdi Desai is a self-professed "orthodox." "I won't maim another like the ultraorthodox or kill like the fundamentalist," he jests. His petition to the BPP trustees to set aside the reelection of Dinshaw Tamboly and declare himself (Desai) the winner depends with the board's remaining six members and he has been called on November 11 to plead his case in person, Desai told *Parsiana* on November 4, 2003. Responding to *Parsiana's* request for an interview Desai organized the meet at Bombay's Sea Lounge. Depending on the outcome Desai says he will move the City Civil Court. (At the time of going to press the Punchayet is yet to receive the further information the trustees have sought after the November 11 meet.)

Admitting that he was a "totally unknown commodity" at election time Desai wants to know, "How come I didn't lose my deposit? How did I get 23 percent of the votes?" He alleges that winning candidate Dinshaw Tamboly is a "worried man" because at the election, "barely 50 people shook my hand; 146 didn't. (Tamboly received 490 votes to Desai's 146.) The rest shook his hand and voted for me!" (The Tamboly camp had predicted to *Parsiana* around 150 votes for Desai on the election day afternoon.) He refused to accept this writer's suggestion that his voters were supporters of former BPP trustee and Tamboly opponent Rustom Tirandaz. Neither Tirandaz nor BPP trustee Dinshaw Mehta supported him, he claims.

Desai says that it was with the inten-



Desai: gaining community attention

tion of exposing and bringing the alleged errant deeds of Tamboly to the knowledge of the community that prompted him to stand for election. Only at election time can one gain the attention of the community, he claims. One such deed, according to Desai, is that pictures of the dakhmas' contents were shown at Godrej Baug. "I have seen the pictures. You can't identify the bodies," he adds. He justifies the negativity of his campaign on the ground that he had done nothing so far to speak of; so he had to denigrate what the other had done!

The WZO's (World Zoroastrian Organisation) "reformist ideas" are the proverbial red rag to this orthodox bull. "The *Jamé* is WZO's mouthpiece for the last three to four years," avers Desai, citing WZO founder president Shahpur Captain's three-page article with its reformist ideas. He says he has the "strongest conviction that Tamboly wrote the *Jamé* editorials," especially the ones that he claims devastated Noshir Dadrawala. ("Rusi Dhondy has been *Jamé's* editor for many years. He has written umpteen editorials. Why would I need to write them?" asks Tamboly. "I have been editor of the *Jam-e-Jamshed* since 1987. I should know my job by now!" exclaims Dhondy adding that *Jamé* has been caught in an "unnecessary controversy.")

Desai alleges that when the WZO paid Dhondy four lakh rupees ostensibly to rescue a failing community institution, the *Jamé's* balance sheet had registered a profit. "Now Dhondy says that it was a loan which he will pay back! Is it shown as a loan in the WZO books? *É tau ghérno ghambar ché* (it's all in the family)... Parsis are afraid to say the truth (because) the list of WZO beneficiaries and list of voters [on the BPP's Anjuman Committee (AC)] are almost subsets!" The only WZO project that Desai said he "admired" was the flood-

lighting of the baugs as "it brings the youths together."

("It is the height of absurdity to say that all voters were beneficiaries. It is insulting the integrity of the voters!" notes Tamboly angrily. He explains how he received an appeal from Dhondy for financial support to the ailing *Jamé* in November 1999 which he forwarded to various donors. One donor responded and Tamboly says he passed on the donation to *Jamé*. "No special treatment was given. For all beneficiaries the financial and rehabilitation assistance is considered as an application of funds on the objects of the trust. No interest is charged," he adds.

("There may be a profit on a mercantile basis. But what happens when you need cash to pay for various needs like paper, printing, etc?" counters Dhondy. "The amount is not a largesse. We'll start paying back in instalments," he notes.)

Desai alleges a concerted attempt of the reformist lobby to gain power on the BPP board. As an example, he says, Dr Nawaz Mody, Bombay University's head of the department of civics and politics (and a Tamboly supporter) had told Desai's wife Anahita during the election of Burjor Antia, "By next year we'll have the people we want. We'll pack the BPP with our people." (Mody told *Parsiana* she had no idea who Anahita Desai was until the day of Tamboly's reelection. She says she had spoken to Tirandaz supporter Tanaz Parakh at the Antia election but disclaims such a statement. "Why would I want to make a statement like that?" she asks *Parsiana*.)

Despite Tamboly's repeated disclaimers, Desai alleges that "the AZA (Alert Zoroastrians Association) are Tamboly's agents." ("Though Percy Patel and I have known each other since our diaper days, I have had nothing to do with the

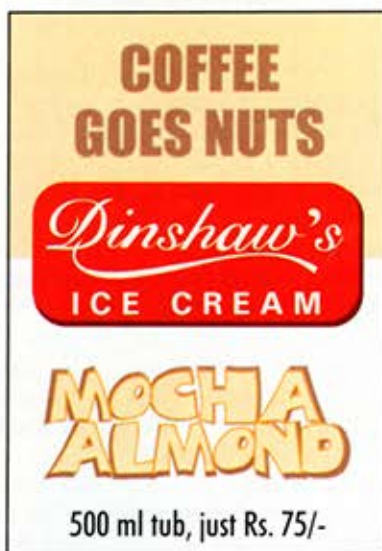
creation of AZA," says Tamboly.) Desai supports his statement by claiming that AZA's Kersi Randeria had told Anahita at the Antia election, that the AZA "will always oppose a sitting trustee because we are opposed to the BPP's housing policy." Yet Randeria and Patel were Tamboly volunteers, Desai noted. [The AZA as an association of people aims at ensuring that funds of community trusts are utilized in accordance with the settlers' mandates, explains Randeria. Currently they are focussing on the Punchayet and its housing policy, he notes. The individuals who constitute AZA have their own ideas about which candidate to support for BPP trusteeship. Hence, says Randeria, he could never have made such a statement to Anahita. For example, AZA member Hoshidar Gandhi had supported Godrej vice president Maneck Engineer in his winning contest against sitting trustee Rustom Tirandaz and had been reviled by Desai on the e-mail. Gandhi however was a firm supporter of Noshir Dadrawala against Tamboly and had arranged meetings with Dadrawala for other AZA members in their individual capacity, says Randeria. Some AZA members worked overtly or covertly for Desai as well, he adds. As for the creation of AZA, Randeria recalls that Maneck Engineer's supporters (at the earlier election which he lost to sitting trustee Dinshaw Mehta) had heard that Engineer's old mother-in-law had received menacing phone calls while Engineer was out of town after losing the election to Mehta. They charged into the BPP boardroom to register their complaint where Mehta reportedly disparaged them stating "Haathi chaale né kutra bhasé (when an elephant walks, dogs bark)." That remark spurred the creation of AZA, noted Randeria.]

Desai says he is supporting the petition against builder/developer Zarir Bhathena who he alleges is circumventing the agreement for the development of the Lal Baug Agiary property. The case is currently being argued in the City Civil Court, says Desai. He sees Bhathena, his lawyer and B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital president Homa Petit, Tamboly and supporters like Nariman Mehta of Nowroz Baug and chartered accountant Yezdi Bhagwagar as part of the "reformist" clique.

He also intends to intervene in favor of Universal Adult Franchise in the BPP electoral scheme when hearings begin in

the Bombay High Court. The BPP has asked for the court's approval of its proposal to double the elected members on the AC, currently pegged to a number equal to the number of donors. Laughing off the demographic fears of the liberal groups, Desai says, "Before we die out at least let's get a chance to vote!"

If he were to get on to the BPP board Desai says he would run it by its objectives: provide religious education — "market it professionally. It should ap-



peal to children," set up a helpline for the aged. He also stresses that BPP trustees need to "behave as akabars... treat people with dignity."

Questioned about the expletives peppering the e-mails he exchanged with Godrej employee Gandhi at the time of Engineer's election (see "An acrimonious election," *Parsiana*, September 2003), Desai initially said he was not always prone to use them, then added that they were in common use by the community! "I was provoked! Maneck Engineer's manifesto came on my office e-mail!... (He) had collected signatures for DDD-AG (Disposal of the Dead with Dignity-Action Group)!" When this reporter criticized his denigration of the House of Godrej which has done so much for the community, Desai alleged that the company "used the community as a source of cheap labor, encouraged them to remain (backward)." When he reminded him that it was the late Naoroji Godrej who rescued the Athravan Educational Trust from the avalanche of community criticism, gave it physical and emotional space to establish itself,

Desai relented, exonerating the earlier generation but maintained that it was now an ailing concern with its FSI and warehouses on sale. On being told that Godrej, through Engineer, had a substantial role to play in the beautification of Doongerwadi, he countered, "They're destroying Doongerwadi with gardens and manicured lawns! Let it be a jungle! Let the wild boars and peacocks roam!" ("I have never had anything to do with the DDD-AG," says Engineer. "These allegations are made against me because of the late Soonumai Godrej's cremation. Even a staunch orthodox like Eruch Desai had attended the uthamna," he adds. Engineer told *Parsiana* that Godrej is leasing out its facilities in Bombay and moving to other sites because the cost of labor here is four to five times higher than in other places. As for Desai's allegation regarding the House of Godrej using the community as a source of cheap labor, Engineer counter questions: "To how many Parsis has Desai given employment?")

Another source of Desai's ire against Godrej pertained to the launch of the book *A Zoroastrian Tapestry* [coauthored by Pheroza Godrej and Firoza Punthakey Mistree of Zoroastrian Studies (ZS)] at the Taj Mahal Hotel in 2002: "The seniormost High Priest, Dastur JamaspAsa was sitting in the rear! He should have been on the podium! Instead, a printer was sitting there!" (Contacted by *Parsiana*, Punthakey Mistree explained that she had gone up to JamaspAsa twice, urging him to come forward but he declined. "We should have asked the high priests for a benediction that day, but we slipped up. It was not intentional. All the high priests are very friendly with us," she noted.)

Desai says he is planning to form a trust or association of likeminded people with a middle-of-the-road ideology, generate an alternate avenue for funds. His aim is a seed capital of 35 to 40 lakh rupees. And "with or without ZS" he wants to pursue religious education for youths. He also intends to start a helpline for the aged to deliver doles to their door instead of the old people trekking to the BPP to receive their monthly support. (On checking with BPP CEO Behram Dastur *Parsiana* learns that doles to various beneficiaries including those in central and south Gujarat and distant Bombay suburbs are despatched by money order. Only those who choose to come and collect in person and are fit



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enough to do so, receive the amount in cash every quarter.)

Son of Hosi Desai, a former employee of Bombay Dyeing and the late Katie, Desai, 44, grew up in a cosmopolitan area of Byculla opposite Rustom Baug where he now lives with his wife Anahita, his elder brother Viraf who freelances as a freight forwarder and his ailing father. After graduating in the commerce stream from Sydenham College, Desai completed his chartered accountancy, articling with A. F. Ferguson and Company. Currently a director of Writer Corporation, Desai looks after its finance, legal and administrative work along with Denzil DeSouza. The company which is said to be a market leader in corporate relocations, information and records management, freight forwarding, travel services, etc had begun as a Parsi concern founded by P. N. Writer who had learnt the art of packing peoples' personal effects at the Army and Navy Stores. When the A&N Stores closed after India's independence, Writer commercialized his expertise to help individuals change houses, move from one city to another. He was joined by Charles DeSouza, a typist with entrepreneurial flair and when Writer retired in 1964, the

company became the DeSouzas' family concern.

When Desai joined then in 1984 they had one branch in Delhi and about 100 employees. But the relocation business had become focussed on corporates with a few individual exceptions like J. R. D. Tata and under the "dynamic" second generation of DeSouzas — Denzil and the late William — the company began offering other related services to its generally repeat customers which include top corporates, consulates, multinational banks. Their records and information management center, located in a warehouse and an airconditioned room in Vashi stores documents and files for its clients and can produce an urgently required item in an hour's time or, at the most leisurely pace, take upto 24, says Desai. Their ticketing and tours department has grown from the corporates' need for travel at short notice.

Starting as an accounts assistant Desai had found himself "involved in almost everything — octroi, customs, legal matters. Denzil, William and (I) did everything as the company grew." With 22 locations in nine cities in India, over 1,000 employees and growing, Writer Corporation is now a professional con-

cern rather than a family one. They believe in centralized control however and play a "steering role in every meeting... every major decision is passed through Denzil or me," says Desai.

It was Denzil's mother Alice who induced them to support the Kripa Foundation which had been formed in 1981 by Fr Joe Pereira and a recovering addict Ossie Pereira to fight the menace of substance abuse, Desai informs us. Desai, along with the DeSouzas, joined it in 1986. Now a nominee trustee on behalf of Denzil, Desai says he is actively involved. The trust's 21 centers, many of them in North East India, have earned international recognition and receive funding from government. The success rate fluctuates at 50-60 percent as at least 40 percent of the addicts who are put through detoxification, counselling and rehabilitation, tend to relapse. About a dozen Zoroastrian youths have availed of the trust's facilities in the course of 20 years, reckons Desai.

Desai's hours of work are eclectic. Most days he is at the office from noon to midnight or later. Nonetheless he feels he can devote at least an hour a day or four to six hours a week to community work. He says he enjoyed the experience of standing for election — even the spate of critical e-mails — and would like to stand again. The experience has taught him that "it's always good to be forthright and say the truth. It's easier to defend..."

"You get the leader you deserve"

"When you are on the wrong side of 60 you are more acceptable to the community!" notes Noshir Dadrawala acerbically. He had withdrawn from the electoral fray a day before the nominations closed on August 27, 2003. A frequent lecturer on religious topics under the BPP's Zartoshty Brothers Fund program, Dadrawala has also been a spokesperson for the orthodox lobby.

There was no doubt, he says, that he was "extremely disturbed by the *Jamé* editorial and the language used" but he discounts the claims made by Yazdi Desai that he had had a "nervous breakdown" (see: "Ethnicity: an electoral issue?" *Parsiana*, October 2003): "Far from it." He also disclaimed any "direct badgering" from his opponent. "Certain circumstances were created which made things bitter. If people around Tamboly were so keen... if the chair was so impor-

continued on page 139

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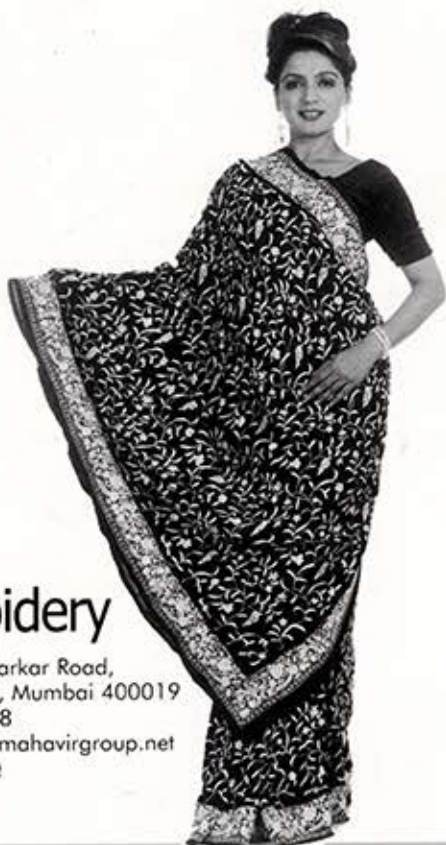
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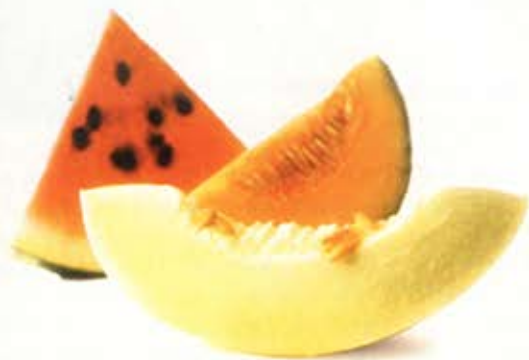
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Youth speak

The young have their say on what it means to be a Parsi and/or a Zoroastrian

Parsiana requested youth in Bombay and elsewhere to write their views on the community and what it meant to be a Zoroastrian. Of the many individuals we contacted 12 youngsters kindly obliged.

Parsiana would have liked to get more points of view from the other community centers but as time was short and our resources limited and the young were also occupied with their studies or work, we were unable to do so.

The brief given to the writers was to honestly state their views on any and all aspects of the community, including its strengths and weaknesses and where they see the community headed in the next 25 years.

These views may not represent a cross section of the global community but they do provide an insight into how some of the young perceive the community.

The pieces are presented in alphabetical order, region wise. The details about the authors vary in length depending on the information supplied.

Bombay

'How they flinched'

What I remember about the day the High Priests issued the diktat banning intermarriage are not the names of the priests, the wordings of the statement, the date, or what I thought of it at the time... Instead I remember college, I remember standing in the foyer, when some of my less politically correct friends asked my half-Parsi friends if this meant they weren't Parsis anymore. I remember how they either flinched and got defensive, or flinched and acted indifferent, but what I remember most clearly is how they flinched.

Conflicts of identity surround us today... but this one affected me more directly because I see what I may have to

put my children through, because of a choice I make. A choice that seems to be in some cases, between the needs of one's community and one's own needs. I haven't worn a sudreh for a few years but I've noticed that I find greater recognition and acceptance as a Parsi than my half-Parsi friends who do, because my genes are Parsi, through and through.

There was a point when I was sure that on the whole the Parsi youth felt the same way I did, that intermarriage wasn't a problem in the sense that a child with one Parsi parent should be accepted without opposition, but I have begun to change my mind. I find more and more young people do believe that Parsis should be 'pure.' I was so sure that things would change I didn't worry about them, but I wonder now if I should.

In this world where the media focuses mainly on the long arduous search for love and for that elusive life partner, because that seems to be what people relate to the most, how can we limit our options to less than 50,000 men? The same people who click their tongues at single Parsi women in their late 40s argue that those women should only

The same people who click their tongues at single Parsi women in their late 40s argue that those women should only marry Parsi men

marry Parsi men. But these Parsi men are not obliged to marry them because the rules of intermarriage are more flexible in their case; I stop wondering why we are where we are, it seems obvious.

I see the community cocooning into itself instead of growing. It seems to be

withering, its walls crumbling in, trapping us. On the other hand, when a cocoon opens up, it brings brilliance. But this brilliance comes from internal growth, change and social revolution. Do we choose to be the cocoon, which dries up and dies, or the butterfly that flies out and enriches the world with its beauty?

Nekshaan Irani is an ex-student of the J. B. Petit High School for Girls, Bombay. She is currently a second year arts student at St Xavier's College, Bombay.

'Ethical structure'

I have given great thought to *Parsiana's* request to write a few words from my point of view as a young Parsi Zoroastrian living in Bombay. At 17 years it is difficult to put wisdom to paper when it's so much more fun to play football or immerse oneself in a good rugby tackle.

But I decided that the timing of this piece is important, not only because of the upcoming World Zoroastrian Youth Congress to be held in Poona in December, but also because the community has over the last four or five years been convulsed by a number of controversial issues which have left the youth confused and concerned. I believe that if my generation has to play a constructive role in the future we must first know what it means to be a Parsi Zoroastrian.

Despite thinking rugby is sacred, I am, I believe somewhat atypical as I have grown up with a family background to think independently, question everything, and find the answers to life's questions through processing information, thinking things through, and by gaining Zoroastrian inputs that can engineer the mind.

For me, growing up in Bombay has been a meaningful experience — it has also been so much more easier for me to be a Zoroastrian and enjoy my *Parsipanu* because the infrastructure is all here. I know that the older generation of Parsis always lament the loss of Iran, but here in Bombay we have everything that one needs to be a full five star practising Zoroastrian. We have our agiaries, our





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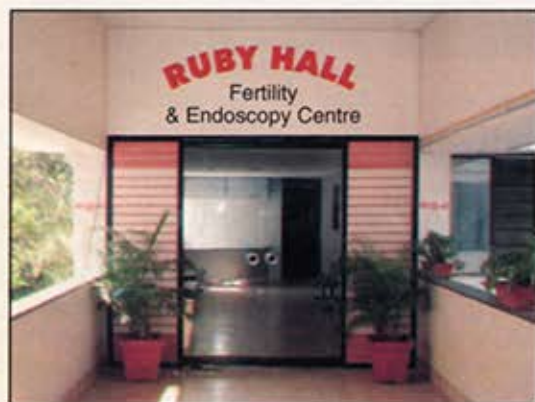


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baugs, our community infrastructure, the B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital, our dakhmas, rituals, priests and so much more; and where on earth in the world would you see thousands of Parsis thronging the sea shore on *Avan mah*, *Avan roz* and offering a big thank you for the many and varied gifts of the sea. I remember, my aunt who lived in Pakistan, when on a visit to Bombay, would stick her head out of the car window and say, "Look another Parsi. My god they are all over the place!" This joyous recognition of one Parsi of another is what emphasizes a shared community feeling.

So how different are we from others? Well when I was growing up, Parsi truths that embraced the community's ethos, were constantly echoed, "Kaiyan, you must be a friend to the right, not a friend to the wrong;" (a variant of King Darius' writings) "Speak the truth always, if you tell a lie you will always be found out." Most people grew up with normal aphorisms quoted to them like, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." I grew up with, "A good deed a day keeps Ahriman away. Do charity Kaiyan — give your pocket money for charity." It was of course a bit like the Islamic Zakat, a

forcible deduction of my pocket money, which was done under protest when I was young, but it has now become the norm.

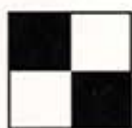
A quote I grew up with, which is my favorite, was taught to my mother by a venerable old Iranian gentleman Rustam Irani and was quoted to me often.

In Bombay we have everything that one needs to be a full five star practising Zoroastrian

"Kaiyan, if evil seeds are planted in the garden of Paradise and you water it with the waters from heaven it will only bear evil fruits." All this subconsciously created in me a very strong Zoroastrian notion of right and wrong. It is this persistent and continuous injection in one's upbringing which is so Zoroastrian and makes one think twice when doing something wrong, and it is this overdeveloped sensitivity that makes you feel a lot more comfortable doing that which is right. Of course this didn't stop

me from ordering 24 pizzas all at once from Smokin' Joe's and feigning ignorance and getting caught for it. But it was a great learning curve — dal and rice for the next one month! For me being a Zoroastrian is part of a great whole which begins with little actions, mannerisms and reactions, so typically Parsi, which collectively and eventually go on to create the complete mosaic of becoming a good Zoroastrian.

A great change that has happened in the community is the notion of freedom of choice. Whenever I talk to people my age they tell me, "Hey, it's a cool religion. It gives you freedom of choice." I basically think that if you are a bit intelligent, and you can use your mind, and if you notch up on the totem pole of life's experiences realistically, you would turn round and say, "Who are you kidding; freedom of choice! Ha!" Yes we all have a choice of whether we want to have a cappuccino or espresso or should I wear beige trousers or navy but let's get real, beyond the mundane, the choice in Zoroastrianism is rigorously controlled through a very commanding ethical structure where so much is black and white. While at a superficial level, you do have



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a choice, the wrong choice gets you busted eventually. So the choice I believe is limited, and a pretty strait-laced one, of doing everything that is right and proper or you have as much chance of crossing the famous Chinvat bridge, as a snowball has in hell fire. So I guess it takes long term strategic planning, when making the right choices and that's the right Zoroastrian way to go.

Have things in the community changed whilst I have been on this planet? It's hard to say. There is certainly greater accessibility for learning Zoroastrianism, as there are so many religious classes run by organizations like Zoroastrian Studies (ZS), where I was given my strong foundation, and the Internet is a powerful learning tool. No more can kids say there are no books, for Ahura Mazda will thunder back, "Haven't you heard of the Net?" So learning is easy, but I am saddened on two counts: a lot of people my age are not wearing the sudreh and kusti, especially girls. Most teenagers hardly know their prayers, and the generation older than me is marrying out. I know there is angst on both sides about the issue, but as the so-called next generation, I can only say that it is hard enough to be a practising Zoroastrian with both parents being Zoroastrian and knowledgeable about the religion, so how much more difficult it must be when one parent is of another religion and one grows up with an amalgam of two faiths.

I sit in a fire-temple and I look at the flames, and I forget sometimes to pray. As I stare deeper, I think of our kings Cyrus the Great, Ardeshir, Shapur, Anoshirwan-i-Adil, and it amazes me to think that when I pray, I am repeating not just the words they may have recited, but the words of our prophet Spitaman Zarathushtra. I think of Darius III, the Achaemenian who fought against the accursed Alexander and lost. I think of Yazdegard Shahriyar who fought the Arabs and lost and I ask myself will my generation and the next to come, fight as hard to save the religion or will we be defeated before the battle even begins? I think it all depends on how much we cherish our religion, its practices, our rituals, our customs, our traditions, and indeed our history, for us to live as Zoroastrians, it is this that must survive.

In the next 20 years an entire new generation of Zoroastrians who today constitute the youth will be in significant positions within the community. I would like to see the community unfolding in many levels. I would personally prefer and endorse a policy of preservation and restoration of the vulnerable traditions, customs, practices and religious ceremonies of our faith. Parsis support the preservation of all kinds of animals and mammals, from the lion to the whale, so I do not see why they cannot also choose to protect, nurture and preserve their own traditions. Surely we do not wish to be in a position where we are party to wiping out a religion and a way of life that has survived for 3,500 years because we wish to promote some modern notion of secularism and change, only to find two generations down, in another 60 years, an organization like ZS or PARZOR, raising thousands of dollars to ask anthropologists and social scientists to rediscover and retrace and redocument our ancient heritage and past so that once more we can learn what it means to be a Zoroastrian. This would be a sad indictment on the collective wisdom of our community, that in their quest to change all things great and small, they unthinkingly pressed the delete button once too often.

It has been said that there is wisdom in our traditions and



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practices. I say to you let there be wisdom enough to protect these traditions and practices. And as for my community, I wish nothing more, than the gift of wisdom for generations to come — for this after all is the true gift of the Magis.

Atha Zamyad Yatha Afrinami!

Kaiyan Khojeste Mistree, 17, studied/tuned his elocution and debating skills at the Cathedral and John Connon School and was introduced there to his first love rugby. Kaiyan plays the violin and was the youngest member of the School Orchestra. He was a delegate at the Harvard Model United Nations (HMUN) in Boston and has twice won the Col Kothawala Trophy for the Best speaker in scouts. He also won the Best Participant award in the Holiday Programme for Youth (HPY) run by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet. Presently he is pursuing commerce in Jai Hind College.

Returning the favor?

Bahman Sanjana's *Kisseh-i-Sanjan* speaks of boatloads of Zoroastrian refugees migrating from a troubled Iran across tempestuous seas to the hospitable shores of western India. Sanjana's narration has been the first to document this exodus and has over the years been

categorized by some as a historical novel. Our grandparents and parents tell us of our courageous decision to leave Iran so as to preserve the faith and our dangerous journey at sea. But not much is mentioned of the kindness of the Hindu

What if Jadi Rana had consulted his high priests who in turn passed a resolution prohibiting Zoroastrians from living in Sanjan

raja Jadi Rana, his people and country that sheltered us when we landed on the shores of Sanjan.

"O you King of Kings, give us shelter in this city. We are poor and have come to your city and at your abode to ask for protection."

And Rana let us make Gujarat our home since. As Drs Mani Kamerkar and Soonu Dhunjisha observe in their book *From the Iranian Plateau to the Shores of Gujarat*, "The early Zoroastrian Ira-

nian settlers in India, though they deeply influenced the culture and art of India, did not make any specific effort to keep their separate identity.

Because of the overwhelming similarity in ethnic make-up, religious foundations, linguistic closeness combined with the absence of enemy assaults, the will to exist as a separate ethno-religious group was weakened, except in some few enclaves right up to the 14th century, when they were driven out by the massacres of Timur." They further state that by the end of the 13th century the population of the Parsis in the coastal towns of Gujarat and the Konkan had increased considerably due to the migration of the Zoroastrians from North India and probably through intermarriages and conversion of local people. How much of this history is remembered today? The small Zoroastrian community in India had to survive and could only then prosper.

What if Jadi Rana had consulted the high priests of his faith who in turn passed a resolution to prohibit the Zoroastrians from living in Sanjan, believing that their presence would be a "potential



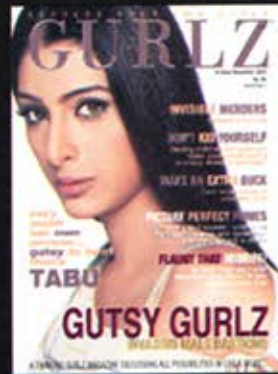
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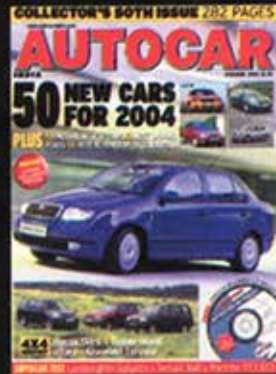
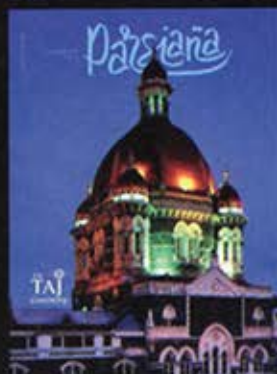
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threat to the very survival" of the Hindu community? That they may marry Hindus and thereby defile the genes of the Gujaratis? India welcomed the Zoroastrians and both the Hindus and Parsis have survived. Must we not in turn welcome into our community the descendants of those that sheltered and continue to shelter us?

Even the common belief that the Zoroastrians fled Persia to escape religious persecution by the Muslims has been questioned. Eckehard Kulke in *The Parsees in India* quotes G. K. Nariman, who calls the theory of religious persecution in Islamic Iran a myth. He points out that a poll tax (jazia) was imposed upon Zoroastrians as it was upon Christians and Jews, but the Zoroastrians remained otherwise relatively unmolested. He further mentions that it may very well have been the profits of trade, not persecution, that brought the Parsis to Western India.

If our doubts about Islamic tolerance persist, instances from King Akbar's reign may dispel them. Kamekar and Dhunjisha note that Akbar, deeply influ-

enced by Zoroastrianism, adopted the practice of performing jashans. He was supported in his endeavor by his Hindu wives who kept a "havan" for various ceremonies. Akbar also made it mandatory for all courtiers to rise in homage when the lamps were lit in the evening and prostrate themselves before the sun, practices also influenced by Zoroastrian belief. If in the 1500s, Akbar, a Muslim king kept Hindu wives and adopted Zoroastrian customs, has our thinking in the 21st century really progressed?

As the Parsis settled in India and their economic and social life became more stable, it was easier for them to rivet as one. The coming of the British strengthened our sense of self. Perhaps we will have to reduce to a few boatloads in number again to realize that those who aided our survival should not be repaid with discrimination.

Simin J. Patel, 19, is a second year liberal arts student majoring in English literature at St Xavier's College, Bombay. During her vacations she helps the editorial department of *Parsiana*.

The 'heart' of the matter

It took four years of living away from India for me to realize how important one's roots really are. When I moved to the US in 1999 to study for my undergraduate degree, I had no intention of returning to India. In my mind, India was overcrowded and totally unorganized. I bought a subscription to the canned arguments that went something like, "Why would anyone want to live in a place where buying vegetables or fruits means having to squabble with the *tarkariwalla* (vegetable vendor) in a crowded and smelly market when instead the US is full of nice, clean supermarkets with no crowds and only the smell of fresh bread from the bakery?" That, of course, was a major mistake, evaluating the merits of two countries on the basis of their supermarkets. Ha! Well, in my defence I was only 17 at the time.

After a few months of settling into American life, home sickness started to settle in as well. Sure, I missed my family but I admit, that more than my family I



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missed my home. I missed Bombay. When I was in a supermarket (which by the way wasn't very often), I used to miss jostling through the crowds and hearing people bargaining with the *tarkariwalla*. I missed meeting this aunty or that uncle and hearing about how the *machiwalli* (fisherwoman) was in rare form that morning. Don't get me wrong. I loved my college and the friends that I made in New York, but come summer and winter break, I would be counting the days for my vacation in Bombay.

On several occasions, while having dinner in the college cafeteria with a diverse set of people, the topic of where I was from would come up. As soon as I said I was from India, it was taken for granted that I was a Hindu which, of course, always led to the generalization that I was a vegetarian. So when they saw me eating meat, the next question they always asked was, "Isn't that against your religion?"

I used to explain to the people sitting around the table that I was not a Hindu but a Zoroastrian and that my religion had no restrictions on eating meat. When I said "Zoroastrian," I was shocked that people had even heard of it, especially 20-year-olds. It turned out that most of them had studied about it in high school. I was also amazed at how interested they all were in asking me questions about it. Sometimes, it was embarrassing when I didn't even have answers to all their

their religion if there is no one to teach them about it? Yes, there are Dharmagnyan classes held at various places in Bombay, but it's not the 10 to 13-year-old age group that needs to learn about their religion as much as the 14 to 17-year-old age group.



I, myself, attended Dharmagnyan class when I was about 10 years old and I will be the first to admit that I remember very little of anything that I was taught there. It's not that the teachers of these classes are not doing a good job, but it's the need to educate children who are a little older, since they are more likely to remember what they are taught.

Ask a bunch of 20-year-old Parsis if they've been to the agiary even once in the last month, and I bet the answer will be a resounding no. Why? Because in our community it has become uncool and very embarrassing to do anything remotely connected with religion. This is a sentiment that I find very difficult to understand in light of the fact that my friends who follow other religions have no such inhibitions about going to the temple or to church every week or to do anything religious.

Take for example, my friend Sandhya, who drives all the way from Juhu to Prabhadevi (a good 10 km) to visit the Siddhivinayak Temple every Tuesday at 11 p.m. or my friend Kelly in New York, who every year on Ash Wednesday goes about her business with a cross marked on her forehead with ashes. Not to mention my Jewish friends who wear their yarmulkes, every single day. But go to an agiary on a Saturday and you will find

that the number of people below the age of 30 is probably as many as you can count on your fingers.

Last year, I was sitting at a church in Colaba listening to midnight mass with my cousin, also a Parsi, and we were both lamenting that we never have anything like midnight mass in our religion. Later, it occurred to me that we do, in fact, have something like it but how many Parsis know about it, let alone show up for it. Consider this, every year on Pateti night there is a ceremony that takes place at about 1 am in the agiary, when all the vases from the muktad tables are taken down. I live right next door to an agiary but have never been there at that time. Yet, I have been able to make it to midnight mass every year, for the last three years, including one year in at least eight inches of snow. Perhaps, if we renamed it muktad mass or something as ridiculous and asked everyone to dress up in their finery then people would show up. It's really sad when even religion has to be packaged into a box with a neat little ribbon so that people can buy it.

I think both points of education and embarrassment can be tackled with one simple solution and that solution is parents educating their children about religion at home. Let's face it, no 15-year-old is going to be forced to go to a lecture on religion every week. However, if from a young age kids are taught about their religion or at least if what they have learned in Dharmagnyan class at age 10 is reinforced in them, then perhaps they won't be so uninformed about their own religion.

My sincere advice to our community is to educate the Zoroastrian youth before it is too late and before we approach a time when there may not be anyone left to teach about our religion. Parents may not be able to teach their children due to their lack of knowledge but surely there are grandparents or grandaunts or old neighbors who would be more than happy to teach kids about their religion.

As for me, I'm back in my Bombay after spending four wonderful years in New York. Do I regret my decision? Absolutely not! It would have been much easier for me to continue living in the US. For one thing I wouldn't have been faced with umpteen questions on why I decided to come back from so many people. I could have lost myself in the diaspora of re-energized Parsis, who revive and sometimes reinvent their religion in order to feel like they are "back

Why would anyone want to live in a place where buying vegetables or fruits means having to squabble with the *tarkariwalla* in a smelly market?

questions.

That's when I began to think about our own community and I wondered how many 20-year-old Parsis could talk about Zoroastrianism with as much understanding as some of my friends of the same age talked about Judaism or Christianity or whatever other religion they followed. I certainly could not. This seems to be the biggest problem facing our community today. How can we expect Zoroastrian youth to understand



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home." But I would not have been happy with the sweet'n low alternative. I wanted the real thing. I know where I belong, where I feel comfortable and where I don't have to justify my being. That's one of the many lessons that four years of living away from home and family teaches you. You can run far and away, and you can even hide, but home is always where the heart is. And I had left mine in Bombay!

Natasha Treasurywala graduated from New York University/Stevens Tech with a Bachelor's degree in 2003. She is presently studying at Government Law College in Bombay.

Delhi

'Expansion or extinction'

Last Sunday, I was attending a friend's navjote. I had just returned from Bombay that morning where I attended the PARZOR exhibition that celebrated 3,000 years of Zoroastrian Culture. I caught up with one of my friends and started discussing the entire event. We talked about our Parsi community, the difference between the Delhi and Bom-

bay Parsis and so on. As we were talking, he asked me where I thought the Parsi community was heading.

Well, in the beginning, there were various ideas swarming in my head. But the first thing that came to my mind is

I had an encounter recently with one of our 'narrow minded' bawajis, who upon hearing my name, took a few steps backwards

that all of us *bawajis* are extremely proud and loyal towards our religion. Going back to the question as to where we are heading, there are two distinct paths we can follow according to me — either expansion or extinction. The latter could probably occur within the next few generations if stringent steps are not taken; but then we could also go for the former which would take time along with a definite reversal of attitudes and trends.

According to me, awareness is the

key ingredient in preserving our culture. We Parsis, known for our enthusiastic and active spirit are always willing to help and know more about our religion in any way possible. Though at times, we think that performing our daily *kusti*, visiting the *agiar* and knowing about a few customs and traditions is enough, there is still so much we do not know about this vast religion which is slowly getting lost amidst the sands of time.

Surely if 1,400 years ago a few 100 courageous and noble Parsi men and women reached India to save and propagate the religion preached by our Lord Zarathushtra, we Parsis today who stand over 76,000 strong have more reason to be optimistic about preserving and promoting our Parsi religion, culture and heritage.

In Delhi, even though we have a very sparse population of 650 Parsis, we still manage to stick to our roots. We have our Parsi Anjuman which holds a social gathering every few months, not to mention the fabulous dinners on New Years, *ghambars* and other good occasions. Even the kids are sent for *Farohar* classes every alternate Saturday which teaches

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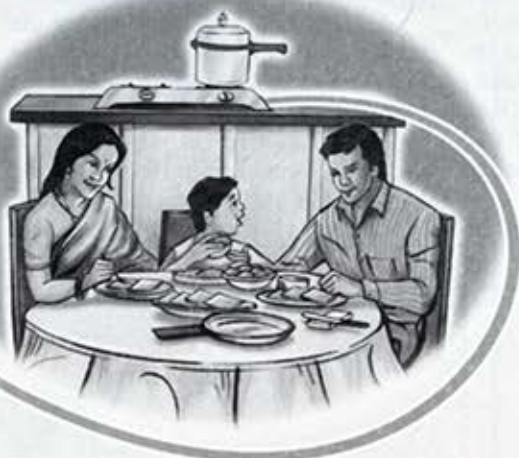
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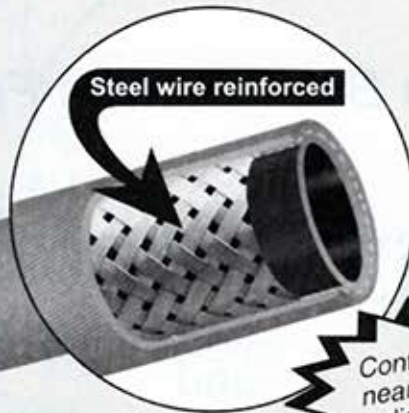
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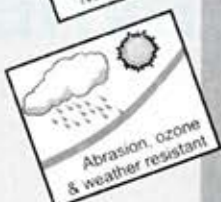
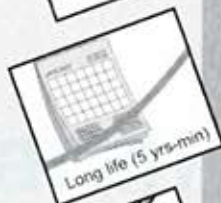
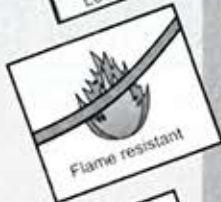
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them about the religion. I too have attended these classes for eight years and was taught by Dr Shernaz Cama who told us such amazing stories and taught us the meaning of all our prayers. It definitely made me see my religion in a totally different light.

In Bombay too, when I attended the



PARZOR exhibiton, I got to watch the 'Reet Rivaj' show by Prof Rumi Mistry who told us about so many traditions which half of

us hadn't even known of. And though we may look on in alarm and shock at the situation, we are the ones to cause it in the first place.

How many of us still wear the sapat and how many men wear duglis and phetas on good occasions? These crafts are passed on from father to son for generations, but when there is no demand for these items, they obviously have to go another way to earn their livelihood. Thinking realistically, who from the next generation will continue making them?

Then of course, along with our fun-

loving and idiosyncratic behavior of touching wood and praising Ahura Mazda for being born a Parsi, we do tend to get quite narrow-minded at times. I am half Parsi-half Bengali (of course when I say I am both, I get some real crazy comments). I had an encounter recently with one of our 'narrow-minded' *bawajis*, who upon hearing my name, took a few steps backwards. And on hearing that I have had my navjote performed, took a few more steps 'backward,' as if reeling under a vertigo attack!

Let's face reality. How many true blue young Parsis are actually present in this day and age? And how many of them are marrying or going around with Parsis or half-Parsis? So if we allow children of mixed marriages to enter our community, aren't we in a way expanding it too?

All I can say in the end is that the choice is in our hands. I cannot say that there is a clear cut path towards which we are heading. But I can see that if we all take more interest in our religion and culture, we could definitely be moving towards our aim of expansion. Let us make every effort on our part to sustain

our remarkable race and religion as sacredly as we preserve our grandmothers' precious garas.

After all, I touch wood and thank Ahura Mazda that I'm a Parsi!

Seventeen-year-old Ela Das is in the 12th grade at Convent of Jesus and Mary School, New Delhi. Her interests include reading books by Indian authors, swimming, playing basketball and trekking in the Himalayas. She plays the piano (grade 3 from Trinity College) and has won inter-school writing competitions.

'Why do we not increase?'

Parsis, though few in number, are like any people, an important part of history. We have had the greatest triumphs and the greatest dishonors. I am a Parsi of 12 years. I have had my navjote; I wear the sudreh and kusti even though I do not know the prayers as well as I had once. Many of my friends are Hindu, Muslim and Sikh and as I am the only Parsi among them they find me slightly different than the rest but that does not matter to me. I have learnt my history, my present and my religion. My father is one of the

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trustees of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman and so is my grandmother. It was in fact my father who requested me to write this article about the Parsi community and so I begin.

We were being invaded, plundered, looted and killed by the Mongols and Arabs in Iran. As a last chance we fled to India and settled down adapting ourselves to Indian customs. We were there during Vasco Da Gama's coming, we were there during the reign of the Mughals, we were there during the fight

for Independence and we are still here, but few in number. Seven hundred in Delhi, 70,000 in India, less than a lakh in the world. This is the amount of Parsis in existence.

But why are we so few in number? Why do we not increase? These are questions I ponder upon. Is it because our religion disapproves of those marrying outside the faith? I would like it

**Many of my friends
are Hindu, Muslim
and Sikh and as I am
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them they find me
slightly different**

if the Parsi community would increase in numbers and let the world know who Parsis truly are, as there are so many people who do not know about them. I see no difference between us and people of other cultures and religions. We are all human beings. At present we are, I believe, moving at a slow rate and we could improve on the Parsi community if better attention

were given. Instead of improving, according to me, we just argue amongst ourselves and gossip about the lifestyle of other Parsis.

Earlier this year we had met President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam on the subject of Parsis in India. Before I met him I was not interested in the Parsi community. What he told us about the Parsis got me thinking. President Kalam said, "I will help you. But what do you plan to do?" Then I knew that without helping ourselves there would be no improvement. Amongst us we would reach nowhere. This is the present state of the Parsis; 70,000 in a country of more than a billion.

The future? Although time and a lot of hard work, physical and mental is needed to improve our current status, I hope to see a much larger, stronger and better Parsi community when I reach my manhood instead of having to witness the same current Parsi community.

Jahan Adil Nargolwala, 12, resides in Delhi and is a student at Vasant Valley in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. He loves eating good food, and enjoys swimming, badminton, rock climbing and hockey.

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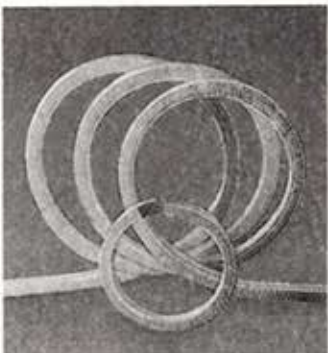
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'Prescription for confusion'

When one mentions Zoroastrians, one normally associates them with the Parsis and Iranians. One is aware that there are Zoroastrians all over the world like in Russia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and the other states of the old USSR and God knows where else.

But to me, being a Zoroastrian in India is a prescription for confusion. We

Zoroastrianism is a simple, uncomplicated religion... made complicated by clerics and leaders

and the whole world are aware of how Zoroastrianism is the oldest known religion in the world predating Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Zoroastrianism is a simple, uncomplicated religion, made complicated like in the case of other religions by the power hungry clerics and leaders. It seems to me that the essence of this liberal way of life has been lost by the chains attempted to be tied on its followers.

Suffice that I elaborate this dichotomy and travails of we, the youth, by the various points listed below:

- The shrinking opportunities vis-à-vis the government reservation policy (similar to the plight of the Brahmins.)
- The shrinking opportunities for marriage due to sex imbalance in different locations.
- The (limitations) of the Parsi punchayets to help out with housing, especially in Bombay where housing is beyond the reach of young couples.
- When a large slice of the combined income of the parents goes towards housing how can they afford to have the second, third and fourth child? If this is not the cause of the shrinking population, then what is?
- Selfish individuals above 60-70 years who live in huge charity houses alone while young couples have to squeeze into small flats. This is probably why marriage seems like such a monumental responsibility and staying single seems so welcoming.



•The fatwas of the clerics may sound very patriotic but actually are a death knell for the community.

•The archaic practices at the Tower Of Silence and diehards who would not like to change to more practical and cleaner disposal methods like cremation in view of increased life expectancy and scarcity of vultures. I am sure that our religion does not want flesh to rot in the Tower for months as there are no vultures to feed on it. Also what are people in cities, like Madras, who have no dakhmas supposed to do if we are not allowed to continue to bury or cremate within the bounds of the religion?

When the land earmarked for us for



our burial ground gets filled, then what? Would it not be better for us as a community and the relatives of the dead, to cremate the body, and then bury the ashes in our own burial ground, instead of looking at outside solutions?

What it seems to me we can do is to go back to our roots and arrange spouses from Iran if it is necessary to preserve our "genetic purity." It would also help infuse fresh genes into our very inbred community. We could also make better use of our relationship with the UN (United Nations) and the protection they have given us as a dying race. We could seek their help so that such married couples can settle abroad as I don't think there are many foreigners who would like to settle in India. This would help in finding partners and better prospects abroad rather than in India.

Finally I think we should stop playing second fiddle to the orthodox and clerics

who would like to enslave the community. It's time the community woke up and took its future in its own hands, liberating itself based on our innate strengths of honesty, integrity, intelligence, hard work, family values and pioneering capabilities and vision.

Nina Mehta, 19, completed a diploma in Media Technology from SAE Technology College, Madras which is affiliated to SAE Technology College, Singapore. Her interests are learning languages, trekking, travelling, visiting new places and modelling.

'We have our own style'

"Are you an Indian?" I was asked once when I said I am a Parsi, and I found it rather amusing. Well, that's a South Indian's knowledge of Parsis for you!

I am extremely proud of my religion and fascinated by every event, every miracle and every piece of information about our history which I have heard. I am especially fascinated by the way in which we got permission to stay in India.

My personal opinion about us Zoroastrians is that we are quite unique and yet so simple. We stand out in a crowd and command much respect from the society. At least this is what I have experienced over the years.

No doubt we have our own style. Sights such as the *bawa* cleaning his car until it is spotlessly clean; taking extremely good care of it to ensure it purrs

Sights such as the *bawa* cleaning his car until it is spotlessly clean are quite frankly.... priceless!

like a beauty, are quite frankly.... priceless! Then it is a known fact that Parsis love their food. In fact there is a popular saying that while others eat to live, we Parsis live to eat! Well, these are the sort of things really that hold testament to the fact that we are such passionate people and love living life to the fullest. This to me is the quality that distinguishes us from the rest.

There is so much talent within the community and several Parsis have made the community proud in various fields. We can actually relate to these people and identify ourselves with them.

However I am saddened by the alarm-



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ing rate at which our population is shrinking. We all know of the time capsule buried in Gujarat containing everything one needs to know about Parsis. My concern is that why are we so negative in our thinking? If the present has such an



attitude, then imagine the impact this will have on the Parsis of tomorrow.

I had read somewhere about the high priests thinking of making it mandatory for all Parsis to marry within the community if they are to be considered a Zoroastrian. If this happens, and when it does, then whether it will benefit us or cause harm to what is already an area of concern, is to be seen. I feel that a mere passing of such a rule will not guarantee an increase in our population. Maybe some smart campaigning coupled with an increase in youth exposure, might just do the trick. We need to rise to the challenge and why not? After all, we boast of having some of the best minds in the country!

Noshir Patel, 19, is in his final year BCom at Loyola College, Madras. He intends to do an MBA (marketing or advertising). His interests

include surfing the net, hanging out with friends, writing, watching cricket, playing snooker and table tennis.

USA

'Give back double'

My Zoroastrian identity is special because there are very few of us left in the world. The world is a place with billions of people. Yet, somehow, there are a mere 200,000 or so of us Zoroastrians

**For me, it is a wonder
how I am here, a
Zoroastrian-Indian-
Iranian-American.
Who could have
imagined this identity
so long ago**

left. While it disturbs me that there are so few of us, I also celebrate my uniqueness.

My religious identity is special also because I am of the newest generation of Zoroastrians in the world. We help con-

tinue the thread.

It is a task we take seriously. Our precepts of good thoughts, good words and good deeds are not just religious theory for us. We live them every day among the larger society. We also try to exceed expectations.

It is our way of making an impact beyond our small numbers. In our small Zoroastrian community in the United States, where I live, my friends and I, try to do our best, and then 10 percent more.

In a way, my sense of being a Zoroastrian puts pressure on me. It is not just an identity, but also a responsibility. I feel I need to give double back for everything I receive from my community. I help out as much as I can.

My school, Rosa International Middle School, in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, requires students to do community service. It is a privilege to do a lot of the service for my fellow Zoroastrians.

My close friends who are not Zoroastrians know of my faith because I told them about it. They see me wearing a sudreh and kusti. They know it is the



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most ancient of faiths.

For me, it is a wonder how I am here, a Zoroastrian-Indian-Iranian-American. Who could have imagined this identity so long ago, when my ancestors had to flee from Iran to India to preserve their faith from Arab invaders? Who could have imagined that the ancient Zoroastrian religion would sprout in a place called America and I would be among the first of the Zoroastrian generations born in this country?

Thirteen-year-old Malcolm Porus Cooper, resides and studies in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

'Don't classify, combine'

Why? Why must I ponder over and over on the thought of our great religion in the future? To be quite honest with you my Zarathushti friends, lately, I have had doubts if we can even survive the next 50 years. Can you believe this? I, a youth, growing up in a world where my generation is supposed to be the most pious generation of them all, have doubts about the future of this great religion. I grew up believing that our religion was constantly in a state of utopia. While other religions had problems, we Zarathushtis always

stood strong and united. Well, I know now, I was mistaken.

What is so wrong with our religion? Our religion is growing for the better everyday. More and more people are learning and understanding the greatness of our religion. Yet, with so many outsiders who learn and love our religion, it is a great sorrow that so many of

Let me tell you my youth friends, do not look at each other as Parsis or Iranians

us do not realize it ourselves. The first question that my generation ponders is, why some of us cannot get along with one another on the basis of culture? Do we not face other races and cultures in the work place, school or community? Then why can we not get along with other Iranians or Parsis? We Zarathushtis have a head start compared to our co-workers or classmates; we have a common spiritual bond, the religion of Zarathushtra. I understand we might have some linguistic problems, food differentiations, or even a few customs that are a

tiny bit deviated, but learn from one another; this will be the only way that our religion may grow prosperously in the future. I have attended numerous Zarathushti events around the world and I have seen the great interaction between the Parsi youth and Iranian youth. Let me tell you my youth friends, do not look at each other as Parsis or Iranians. If you would like our religion to be as prosperous as others, do not classify our cultures but instead combine them.

As technology continues to grow, so will the spread of our religion's concepts. In the future, I can only wonder if our generation will be able to harness technology's power to further the cause of spreading our religion. With technology's capabilities, Zarathushtis will be able to unite one another from countries all around the world. Who knows, Jash-ne-Sadeh can be celebrated over the net with Zarathushtis, no matter which location they are at. Yet all in all, our great religion is moving forward. The new generation that has awakened is full of shining lights. We youth have grown



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into a body full of understanding, patience and knowledge; all qualities of great leaders. The future looks prosperous as long as we kindle the flame that Zarathushti so long ago fought for. Our Zarathushti community will be larger, wiser and ever more united in the year 2050. At least that is what I'm striving for the year 2050, aren't you?

Nikan H. Khatibi will graduate with honors from the University of California at Irvine, majoring in Biological Sciences and then pursue a career in medicine. He is a Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Lions Club. In 2004 he will be running for political office.

The American 'nexus'

The 10th North American Zoroastrian Youth Congress took place in Toronto, Canada in July 2003. The Congress was hosted by the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) and attended by 406 youth — a record for the largest attendance at a youth congress in North America. The four days of activities brought youth together from Canada, USA, UK, India, Pakistan, Iran and Australia.

The theme of this year's Congress was nexus. Nexus is defined as a link

or connection. Many Zarathushtis found their nexus with their ancestors, their religion, the culture and youth from other countries. The nexus organizers felt that in the past congresses too much time was spent in discussing controversial issues with no solution

The nexus organizers felt that in the past congresses too much time was spent in discussing controversial issues with no solution

and that it was time to encourage our youth speakers and give the congress a different kind of program. Many people found that the sessions were geared more towards learning than discussions. The nexus committee organized many social activities so that the youth could get more opportunities to meet and make friends.

The first day of sessions related to the Zarathushti past. The youth learnt about the great Persian kings from the *Shahna-*

meh. Freddy Mirza narrated stories about Firdowsi, Rustom and Sohrab, King Shyavakhsh and King Kai Khushroo. Pervez Mistry spoke about our primeval scriptures and the similarity to modern day science. Bahram Jam enlightened the youth on who a Zoroastrian really is and how to lead a good Zoroastrian life. Rashna Wadia had the youth discussing what it was like to be a first generation youth in North America. Mirza, along with the ZSO religion class students, presented a shadow play on the history of the *Avesta* and our scriptures. Where do our Zoroastrian practices come from? The youth of Houston showed us their play on the story of King Cyrus which was written and directed by Shahnaz Sidhwa. Daraius Bharucha had an interactive session on the message that is contained in our Zoroastrian myths and legends. They interpreted the myths and legends and their meaning and relevance to our time. Farrah Bhesania gave us an overview of the Zoroastrian funeral ceremonies and the well-developed ideas behind them. The last session was a match-making session where surprisingly approximately 100 people attended. There was quite a bit of chaos to organize 50 men and ladies to meet each



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other but, after some reorganizing, each person had three minutes to chat with each other. This session started many new friendships. The evening was spent at Ontario Palace, along Lake Ontario with a beautiful view of the Toronto skyline.

The second day of sessions was geared towards the Zoroastrian present and future. The attendees heard talks from young mobeds, Ervads Darayus Bajan (India), Mehernosh M. Bhadha (Pakistan), Ardeshtir Hormozyari (USA) and Cyrus Khory (Canada), who were sponsored by the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) to attend the Congress. The mobeds expressed their views and concerns about the shortage of priests and what led them to join the priesthood. Susan Karani, Aysha Ghadiali and Jehan Rivetna spoke on FEZANA and the United Nations (UN) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Conference. They promoted many humanitarian causes such as the children's program at Gram Seva Trust hospital in Kharel, Gujarat. They are looking for more youth to get involved in such causes. Ketayun Bana and Nauzer Mistry spoke on Bombay:

the city that Parsis built. They covered the big Parsi contributors to Bombay in many aspects, especially the architectural environment in Bombay. Roxanna Mirza spoke about how it is not uncommon to find ethnic groups to have specific health conditions that they are more prone to than others. Global studies found that Zarathushtis living in India have the highest inci-



dence of specific diseases — more than other groups. The session focused on causes, risk factors and preventive measures. Feroze Sidhwa spoke why such few Zoroastrians are known for political activism. Diana Engineer presented the results of her survey which was done on the Internet by Zarathushtis from all over the world. The World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce (Toronto and Chicago chapters) hosted a session to energize the Zarathushti entrepreneurial spirit. Youth entrepreneurs, Aareh Jamshe-dji (Houston), Aflatoon Aflatooni (Toronto) and Perry Unwalla (Florida) spoke about what motivated them to start their businesses, how

they overcame obstacles and achieved their success and how the youth today can get a business started. The afternoon ended with a three hour Game-a-Thon; a fund-raiser for the Breast Cancer Foundation. Zoroastrian women have been found to be among the highest in the population of those with breast cancer. This fund-raiser was organized to continue practicing charity and to help our Zoroastrian community. The night ended with a masquerade ball and award distributions.

The Zoroastrian Women's International Network (ZWIN) selected and sponsored four girls from India to attend the Congress. This project titled "Make a Dream Come True" was made financially possible by a few families from the United States and with the help of their Canadian hosts, Dara and Mehroo Homavazir, Kashmira Udachia and She-razade Irani were selected from Pune and Khursheed Mistry and Pearl Mistry from Bombay based on their Zarathushti involvement, talent and personalities. The girls thoroughly enjoyed the congress and had an opportunity to address the attendees at the Toronto Dar-E-Mehr. The girls spoke about themselves and their involvement in the Zarathushti



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community in India.

The Congress ended with a jashan performed at the Toronto Dar-e-Mehr by seven priests: Adil Minocherhomjee (Chicago), Bhadha, Bajan, Cyrus Panthakee, Zavaihere Balsara, Farhad Balsara and Firdosh Balsara (Toronto).

The post-Congress activities were attended by 15 delegates from USA, Canada and India. Activities involved a tour of Toronto and Niagara Falls, a day at Canada's Wonderland and ended with some of the youth attending the Rolling Stones concert.

Born in Bombay 26-year-old Afreed Mistry spent her childhood in Muscat, Oman. She and her family moved to Toronto, Canada in 1989. Since the age of 13, Afreed has been an active volunteer for the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO). She was the chair of the ZSO Youth Committee (1993) and is currently a member of the ZSO executive board. Afreed enjoys studying about the Zoroastrian religion.

For the past 10 years, Afreed has been teaching children aged six to 14 the Zoroastrian religion. She loves to travel, read and play sports. Afreed has a bachelor's degree from Wilfrid Laurier University and works as a telecommunications analyst for the Royal

and Sun Alliance Insurance Company of Canada.

'What is my dharma?'

I recently entered high school and walked into my World Civilizations class in the second period. My teacher handed each of us a card and said, "Welcome to World Civilizations, please answer each of the questions written on the board on this card." The questions seemed rather fundamental until I reached the question, "What makes you unique?" I heard some people say, "I'm related to..." yet this was not the kind of thing that set me apart. I realized that what truly set me apart from all the other people in the classroom was the fact that I was a Zoroastrian, and no one could ever take that away from me. It was my identity.



There, sitting at that little desk, I realized what the religion truly was to me. It was not limited to the box that religion is something in which one only prays when a soul is troubled. It is what you use to thank for your happiness, it is what helps you get over troubled times,

it is what you believe in and follow, it is your identity. It gives you a group into which you are categorized and recognized. And though as a Zoroastrian this group is small, it is an honor to be born into this group. It was only the next day that I found out that one of the themes for this class was to be "How does mankind make sense of its

I realized that what truly set me apart from all the other people in the classroom was the fact that I was a Zoroastrian

universe?"

About a week later in World Civilizations, we began to study about Hinduism. We were asked to read and define a few of its basic terms. One of them was dharma. I read that dharma was the duty that each person was meant to fulfill. I realized that every religion had such a thing. So I thought

continued on page 175

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The ABC of the sudreh kusti

Working at the grassroots level, these individuals and organizations teach religion to the young

Parinaz M. Gandhi & Simin J. Patel

In order to appreciate the efforts being made by individuals and institutions in Bombay who have taken the onerous responsibility of educating the young about the religion, *Parsiana* spoke to a few stalwarts such as Rati Peer who has been conducting religious classes for nearly three decades, Ervad Vispi Dastur who is a pillar of the Bombay Parsee Association and Iran League, Ervad (Dr) Ramyar Karanjia and his students of The Athornan Boarding Madressa, Dadar and Jeroo Nargolwalla whose religious classes at Godrej Baug are attended by the primary school children.

These views may not represent a cross-section of the community but they provide an insight into the thinking and future aspirations of some members.

A God given opportunity

"The community today is only interested in *khaani-peeni* (eats and drinks)," sums up Rati Peer who for over three decades has been striving to cultivate in the Zoroastrian children a love for their religion, their prayers, their traditions and customs. Peer is one of a handful of devoted religious instructors within the community. Amongst the various associations that foster religious education, two long-time notables are the Bombay Parsee Association and the Iran League. "Earlier parents gave a lot of *kaalji* (attention) to religious education. Today's parents only concentrate on studies," she regrets. While she can appreciate the parents' concern to give importance to school education she reiterates, "To build up your true self, you need a religious foundation."

The children, in her view, are like "gai-golab (gentle as cows and fragrant

as roses); intelligent, smart, sweet. All fault lies with the parents. *Bachao nu nakhot varéch* (ruining the children's future)." As the religious instructor at

will be loitering or cycling on the roads. "Nowadays we don't know how to respect our elders, how to live with our neighbors," she regrets.



Peer with students circa 1970s

the Bengalee Girls' School, B. N. Gamadia Girls' School, Sir J. J. Girls' School, Bai Avabai Petit High School, Ratamai, as she is better known, teaches the Parsi children *Avesta* prayers and Gujarati (reading and writing). While she insists there is need for annual assessment in these subjects the majority of the parents protested saying the children are already under excessive academic pressure and don't need to be burdened further. "Children need good religious books which would interest them," she realizes. She has developed a standardwise course for each academic year. Religious instruction includes the recitation and meaning of prayers, the significance of ceremonies, knowledge of Parsi songs and monajats. Looking at the callous disinterest shown by the parents "anyone else in my place would have stopped long ago," points out Peer.

At Cusrow Baug where too she has been conducting children's and ladies' classes for several years she has noticed that parents from a neighboring building won't send their children to the Sunday morning class although these children

There are moments of gratification too when those who have learnt from her start sending their children to the class or having settled abroad invariably enquire after her welfare and the progress of the class or remember to send her wedding invites long after they have outgrown the class.

This thankless task often made her go out of pocket but she appreciates

the cooperation and understanding from every member of her family, particularly her late husband Ervad (Dr) Peshotan Peer, son Ervad (Dr) Rooyintan, and daughters Hutosha, Tehmina, Havovi and Ketayun who take care of the domestic chores leaving her free to attend to other calls. Tehmina now assists her mother in many of the organizational responsibilities too. Whether at the prayer recitation competitions organized by the BPA or the drawing, rangoli, elocution, religious quiz, monajat and music competitions organized by the Iran League, Ratamai and Tehmina's contribution is invariably recognized in getting the participants, suggesting the subjects and sharing in the administrative workload.

"Only money does not bring happiness," states Ratamai happy that she has earned a lot of "*maan* (respect) from the Parsi community. Whoever shoulders such work in the future will feel a lot of satisfaction and happiness too," she is sanguine. "With their microscopic and telescopic vision our forefathers put in so much effort and sacrifice to preserve our faith," she reminds, adding, "Working for the community is a God given opportunity. However talented and in-

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telligent you are, you can't do anything unless He wills it."

Ratamai feels duty bound to perform the role of a social worker and counselor too. Entrusted with funds by different individuals she keeps a judicious account of all the monies distributed to deserving beneficiaries.

She respects the awards and felicitations accorded to her over the years. A silver salver was presented to her by the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute "for her invaluable services in the promotion of Zoroastrian education and values among the youth for several decades." Likewise her services have been appreciated by the World Zoroastrian Organisation, the Youths Own Union (YOU), Zoroastrian Student Teacher Association, the Navsari Ava Baug and the BPA which created a record by presenting her, Peshotan and Rooyintan (three members from the same family) awards at the same time.

The World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation launched by Dr Homi Dhalla and the Zartoshty Brothers Fund managed by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet have also been encouraging her work. The financial support recently extended to her enables her to move around in a taxi at the age of 77, a privilege she may have denied herself earlier fearing the financial strain on the family.

Born in Navsari to Dinbai and Dosabhai Kanga, before marriage brought her to Bombay in 1950, she was a physical education teacher at the Bai Navajbai Tata Girls' High School and had introduced the Girl Guides activity in that town, she notes. At the age of 17 she had started religious classes at the Shantadevi Mahila and Bal Pustakal (Library) in Navsari, she says, acknowledging the inspiration she derived from Jerbai Tata and Baimai Daboo. In Bombay when she started the children's class under the auspices of YOU in 1967 there used to be an average attendance of 60 kids. With the families shrinking in size and many relocating to the suburbs the attendance at these classes gradually waned over the years.

Ratamai ensures that she or one of her assistants is always present to conduct a class. Her enthusiasm and persistence undimmed over the years she says she now wants to introduce regular humbandagi for the children of the community. Anyone with knowledge of Hindi is welcome to learn Gujarati from her in 20 minutes, she assures. Often invited to give religious lectures in places like Surat,

Poona, Sholapur and Bangalore, to recharge her own batteries she spends a month at the Cama Home at Bandra each year.

Deriving fulfilment from her self-imposed mission she notes, "My only wish is to be born again as a Parsi Zoroastrian and to once again give my services to the community."

Discipline should come from example

"The religious fervor among the youth today is perhaps much more than what it was when we were young," observes Vispi Dastur, president of the 83-year-old Bombay Parsee Association (BPA) and coordinator and honorary treasurer of the 81-year-old Iran League, the two organizations which over the years have been zealously trying to create a community awareness among the youth by holding various competitions.

The annual prayer competition conducted by the BPA at the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution is witness to the interest level among all age-groups: three-year-old children from the pre-primary classes to 85-year-old grandmothers. School children are expected to be proficient in the prayers prescribed for each academic year. While some parents may complain that it is the same students who walk away with the prize each year as the children of athornans invariably have an upper edge, there are other parents who view this exercise as a revision of prayers, both for themselves and the children! In fact the Madressa boys are assessed separately, explains Dastur. A kusti weaving com-

petition on the same day sees young girls from the Bai Avabai Petit High School vying with experienced veterans.

Under the auspices of the Iran League are conducted competitions in *Shah-nameh* recitation, religious quiz, essay writing, elocution, drawing, rangoli, Parsi songs/monajats, Gujarati language, west-



Dastur (left) and Peer: "inspiring youngsters"

ern vocal and instrumental, Indian vocal music, etc for Zoroastrian school children, collegians, youth and elders at the Bai M. N. Gamadia Girls' High School. In the younger age groups there is equal participation from both the sexes but with advancing age, very few men are willing to compete with the experienced females, mentions Dastur. Here too the judges are faulted for rewarding the same winners every year but when so few judges are willing to come forward the organizers are helpless, points out Dastur noting that "keeping everyone happy is a difficult task. We should take an overall view."

Besides giving cash prizes to the first three winners in each category, there are trophies awarded. Beginning this year the trophy winners have been presented a special memento which they can preserve whilst the rotating trophy is returned at the end of the year. Dastur notes how happy he was to see one participation certificate framed in a Parsi household that indicated the family's joy in being associated with the event.

At the prize distribution function there are costs to be borne: for hiring the baug (albeit concessional), electricity and chair rental. Plus cash gifts and distribution of free dinner coupons to the winners and judges invariably requires a good reserve of funds. With donations having dwindled and so too the interest rates, it is difficult for small organizations to sustain themselves until some obliging donors come forward, Dastur explains the logistics. In days of yore there were benefactors like Dinshaw Merchant, Rustom Kooka who pledged their support year after year but such munificence

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Selection from prize winning entries in this year's Iran League drawing competition



*From left to right
Bharthania, Soonawalla,
M. Daruwalla*

All photos by Simin Patel
Karanjia photo: Homay Mistry



*B. Gandhi,
Jamasbi,
Deboo,
Engi-
neer*



*K. Patel,
Malaowalla,
Katrak, M.
Patel, N.
Gandhi*



*Jodey
Daruwalla,
Johaana
Daruwalla,
Pauvri,
Panthaki,
Zenja
Nejadkay*



*Z. Patel,
Dubash,
Znoishta
Nejadkay*



*Left: Karanjia
at Madressa
with students
and Nargol-
walla wea-
ving a kusti*



*From left (top row): Motafram, Dastoor, Kham-
batta; 2nd row: Panthaky, Bhadha, Ichhaporia,
Mandviwala. Right: students studying texts*



*Nargol-
walla
teaching
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is not assured now. "The prop of the community is the typical middle class lady," says Dastur appreciative of the behind-the-scenes support rendered by the corps of Parsi women who do not seek any publicity. He gives particular credit to Rati Peer who with her team of volunteers solicits participation from the youngsters of different baugs and colonies.

"The idea is to encourage youngsters," reiterates Dastur. And it is done in different ways: whether it is the two youngest boys from each madressa who are made to lead the humbandagi, or other members of the madressa fraternity who are invited to sing monajats, or the girls of the Avabai Petit School who sing *Chhaiyé hamé Zarathoshti*. The BPA has now instituted youth achievement awards for those excelling in academics and sports. As a founder member of FOZAWAC (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations for Welfare and Culture) it also takes pride in the different activities conducted to promote academics and sports within the community.

"Running down the kids and youth of the community is not a good thing. We have to encourage them. Competition

now is becoming very severe," impresses Dastur. In extracurricular activities the standards may have fallen as compared to earlier times when there was no lure of TV or pressures of studies, he states, adding, "The days of physical punishment are gone. Discipline should come from example and inspiration. Children should be allowed to show their originality."

During the early years the Iran League had been striving to maintain cultural relations between the Zoroastrians of India and Iran, offering guidance and help to those who wished to visit Iran, conducting Persian and Gujarati classes, publishing books on the Zoroastrian religion and Iranian history, organizing lectures from visiting scholars and remitting financial aid to Zoroastrian educational institutions when permitted by the foreign exchange regulations. Its sphere of activities is now geared to the youth.

"Parsipanu jaalaavanné vasté (to fan the flames of community belonging)" the BPA has also taken upon itself the responsibility of maintaining all the Parsi statues in the city with the support of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and or-

ganizing a function at the war memorial at Khareghat Colony on every Fravardigan *parav*. As explains Dastur, ultimately the purpose of all these functions is to inspire the youth of the community, the "trustees of posterity."

Priesthood beckons

"A decade back the students were not so keen to go into priesthood. They mainly obtained a graduate degree and then a clerical job," explains Ervad (Dr) Ramyar Karanjia, principal of The Athornan Boarding Parsee Madressa, Dadar. Today, however all the boys wish to pursue part-time if not full-time mobedi. Most of the 29 students at the Madressa want to join the commerce stream after their schooling because "it is the general trend," notes Karanjia. He recollects the time when he decided to join St Xavier's College, Bombay, for a BA degree, despite getting a high percentage: "It is a common mindset that Arts is meant for those who can't do anything else."

Sixty percent of the Madressa students are from out of Bombay, informs Karanjia, adding that though previously the majority came from Gujarat, many students now come from Poona which is

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"the new Parsi base." The boys reside at the Madressa, visiting their homes during their summer, muktad, Diwali and Christmas breaks. On the last Sunday of each month, their parents may come to visit. A picnic or outing is organized for the students on the weekends.

The boys study at the nearby Dadar Parsee Youths Assembly High School, free of cost. Karanjia mentions that the School, a "great support, without which we would not be able to manage," has offered "totally free education" to the Madressa boys since 1966. While the senior students attend school in the morning and study at the Madressa through the afternoon, the reverse is followed for the juniors. The senior students are taught Math, Hindi, Marathi, Science, at the Madressa as well which serves more as tuitions to help them fare better in these subjects. In addition to the residential principal at the Madressa are four residential teachers, office staff, servants and a cook, with eight to 10 visiting teachers.

Commenting on youth in general and Parsi youth in particular, Karanjia observes that they "have a feeling for their religion and community." When interacting with them at youth congresses and discussions he notices a "keen desire to know and learn." But "where practice is concerned it is sacrificed, due to lack of time."

Parsiana had an occasion to speak to some of the Madressa children:

Yazad Bhadha, 12 years, from Bombay, VII std

Bhadha hopes to practice mobedi part-time. Shah Rukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan and Rustom Pehlvan from the *Shahnameh* are all his idols. He is fond of reading Tinkel story books and his Bal Bharati text book. He says that it is "good that we are pure and we are standing first in all religions, but (we should) not marry inter-caste."

Eric Dastoor, 12 years, from Udvada, VIII std

He wishes to pursue mobedi part-time. After completing school, he wants to join the commerce stream. He doesn't enjoy reading books outside his curriculum much but follows the sports programs on television. Dastoor was awarded the Jamshed and Shirin Guzder Award for best youth at the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrians Anjumans of India,

this August, for securing 79 percent marks in standard six. He believes that the Parsi community is "progressing nowadays, but needs younger mobeds because there is a shortage." The weakness of the community, lies in the fact that the "population is less."

Arzan Ichhaporia, 15 years, from Bombay, X std

With his father's brother and mother's



Young priests at the Dadar Madressa

(Photo: Simin Patel)

brother, both part-time mobeds, Ichhaporia is inclined to take up the profession part-time. He enjoys reading novels and mystery books. He observes that the community "is small but spiritual and educated. It is decreasing due to inter-caste marriages. Girls are more educated and do not think the boys are capable."

Arzaan Khambatta, 14 years, from Poona, IX std

Khambatta hopes to practice mobedi part-time, till he graduates, after which he may consider pursuing it as a full-time profession. He enjoys reading religious books and comics but doesn't watch too much television. He is glad that the community is "sending more boys to practice mobedi," but is weary of "more people marrying outside" causing our population to "vanish someday. That is the community's weakest point," he clarifies.

Yazad Mandviwala, 12 years, from Navsari, VIII std

He looks forward to practicing mobedi part-time, while he studies science in a Bombay college. Mandviwala likes reading Hardy Boys books and novels as well as watching National Geographic, sports and news channels. He feels that the community is "fighting amongst ourselves." Ours being the "oldest community in the world, we

must follow truth: wear our sudreh-kusti," the sacred vestments that no other community wears."

Urvaksh Motafram, 13 years, from Bombay, VII std

Motafram hopes to practice mobedi part-time. After his schooling, he wants to enroll in a BMM (Bachelor of Mass Media) course in a college in Bombay. He enjoys reading comics and the

Shahnameh and watching most of the channels on television. "I am proud to be born in the Parsi community. 'I have a good job (as a priest) even if I do not excel in studies.' Like most of his colleagues, he thinks the weakness of the community lies in the increasing number of "inter-caste marriages."

Speetman Panthaky, 12 years,

from Ahmedabad, VII std

Panthaky wishes to pursue mobedi part-time, hopefully in New Zealand, as his parents have suggested. Fond of painting, he wants to enter the commercial arts stream in Bombay after his schooling. He passes some of his free time reading Tinkel story books and suspense novels and watching Animal Planet and the Ten Sports television channels. "Ours is the oldest community in the world and the literature and religious books we have, I don't think that other communities do." Panthaky is confident that in the future "inter-caste marriages will be stopped."

Dutifully praying

Like the soldiers and police wear theirs, the sudreh and kusti are our uniform, believes Jeroo Nargolwalla. Her eager students in the five to nine age-group feel the same, promising to wear their sacred garb throughout their lives. At her Godrej Baug residence Nargolwalla teaches approximately 20 of the colony students their navjote and other prayers plus Zoroastrian basics like the 101 names of Zoroaster, the names of the 30 days of the month, six ghambars, etc.

When Nargolwalla moved into her Godrej Baug residence with her husband Rustom, five years ago, a neighbor requested her to teach her son his navjote prayers. It has now progressed into regular prayer classes, held thrice a week, for an hour each, free of charge. Though the

continued on page 159

Making young thinkers believers

A sound grounding in the religion and its traditions are necessary if the young are to take pride in being Zoroastrians

Khojeste P. Mistree

In extracting the life of Cyrus the Great, Xenophon in his work *Cyropaedia* outlines the vigorous training given to Zoroastrian Achaemenian youth in order that they may emerge in life as the rightful inheritors of the Iranian ideal of upright, righteous, discriminating and just individuals — born to command and rule, as indeed the Achaemenians were, as the ancient world's first great empire that ruled vast territories beyond their homeland.

The youth in those days were, as indeed Cyrus himself was, educated "in conformity with the laws of the Persians." These laws eventually in Cyrus's reign came to be acknowledged as "the laws of the Persians and Medes that altereth not." There are several references to the inviolability and sacredness of these laws in the *Bible* when referring to episodes concerning Zoroastrian kings.

All youth for instance were sent to pass their manhood in "schools of justice" so that they could fulfil offices of rank and distinction with righteousness. Achaemenian society demanded an exacting standard, and a man's weight was measured not by his own will, but by his adherence to the law, both religious and social.

Among the things taught were manners and public protocol in civic life and when at war. They were trained horsemen, skilled with the short sword and sensitive to their socio-religious code of life. Thus to urinate or spit or to blow one's nose in public or bypass an elder without a salutation were seen as a breach of public decorum. They were also exposed as part of their education to all strata of society and were made to deal with the ordinary foot soldier and farmer, as well as with men of rank and nobility. They received religious instruction from the magis and kings themselves were involved in acts of public worship of the

sacred fire, before going into battle as is attested in history. They were seconded as apprentices with noble clansmen in different parts of Iran. With this training they developed an intense pride in being Iranian and that was synonymous with being a Zoroastrian and thinking as a Zoroastrian which was quite different from being Babylonian or even a Greek from Asia Minor. The sixth century society of the Achaemenians was emulated by their rightful inheritors, the Parthians, and in later times the Sasanians. These ancient societies provided the best training grounds for the youth and were in effect, the finest finishing schools of their times.

Readers may wonder why I have chosen to highlight a society lost in the fading light of times past, but it is essential to examine, although briefly, the early period which laid the groundwork for the present Parsi Zoroastrian society. Today the world over Parsi Zoroastrians have abrogated their responsibility to train and mold young adults into a Zoroastrian way of life. In the twin convergence of over-secularization and over-westernization, in the last 80 years, combined with growing religious plurality, Zoroastrianism as a way of life and as a living religion has lost its defined links with its historical past and has emerged poorer for it.

As a community based organization involved with religious education, it has been a policy at Zoroastrian Studies (ZS) to engage positively with children, especially with teenagers and young adults. At any given time in the year, ZS runs classes in five or six Parsi schools, and takes two to three adult classes and holds a number of workshops throughout the year. On an average we teach 400 Parsi children and adults every week. This gives us a fair idea of the strengths and weaknesses that are prevalent in the community and a perspective to judge the

evolution of their relationship with the community and the development of their core values within society.

Most children enjoy an innate intelligence and therefore we offer a course of studies on religion which is logical and consistent with the conceptual structure, based primarily on an academic framework. Our teaching style is both narrative, and in the form of arguments that present propositions about the religion that they have never considered. This sharpens their critical faculties, nurtures strong conviction and deepens faith building. Young thinkers who become believers, with a faith grounded in strong conviction, find it easier to uphold the theory and practice of the religion, especially if it is anchored in understanding, knowledge and a wealth of cherished religious ideals. At their age there is an urgency to find a reason for existence and life. Questions such as "Who am I?" "Can I just promote good thoughts, words and deeds and still be a good Zoroastrian?" "Where have I come from?" "Why is there evil?" "What is there after life?" These and other questions need to be answered. If these questions can be tackled from a Zoroastrian perspective then half the battle is won in helping them on the road to becoming practicing Zoroastrians.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of our younger generation specific to Bombay where the largest concentration of Zoroastrian children in the world live? The most interesting to teach and train are those in the age group of six to 16 years who are wonderous about the religion and are a clean slate to work on. Their interest in religion is self cultivated and activated within them by curiosity and a desire to find answers about things religious. If their questions are answered in an intelligent way, there is awe, understanding and a wonderful suspension of disbelief that allows faith to grow. To such a group, if religion is

taught well, it transports them to a different level of understanding and builds within them the basic structure of the religion. The drawback for this group is in effect their parents, who with little or no knowledge of the religion, persist in encouraging children to follow and worship religions other than Zoroastrianism. This leads to a dilution of the Zoroastrian religious identity and a confusion of facts on Zoroastrianism, instilled in the minds of the young through institutional training. There is also a tendency amongst parents to give classical Zoroastrianism a miss in favor of esoteric and cultic messages. Time and again we have to deal with children who are forced by their parents to dilute their faith and divide their loyalties by forcing their children to attend mosques, dargahs, churches, mandirs and poojas as part of their daily worship. Until 50 years ago this was a lower middle class phenomenon. Today this eclectic worship of various babas and other religions has crept into all the echelons of Parsi and Iranian society, leaving a fragmented understanding of the faith, a weak formative base and questionable allegiance to Zoroastrianism.

Poor exposure to world issues, an inability to systematically filter diverse information that encourages a process of independent thinking, failing to be conscious of global environmental concerns and normal civic duties, and most of all an untutored response to the preservation of our vulnerable religion and heritage, are some of the problems faced by the Zoroastrian youth.

Yet these very same children when transferred abroad are able to cope with the exposure and develop their innate talents and contribute progressively to society. But here again religion is often a low priority although schools play an overwhelming role in molding challenging perspectives. This is not done here in India.

The post teenage group in Bombay is harder to work with, specially if they have escaped religious training in their early years. However the name of the game is to challenge them with questions and propositions, however incredulous, and through it creatively expand the elasticity of the mind, and train them to offer possible solutions to problems, working from a base line of knowledge already built. The problems of this group are in many ways similar to the earlier group, except that their exposure begins to get

It easier to uphold religious theory and practice if it is anchored in understanding, knowledge, and a wealth of cherished religious ideals

wider and if nurtured can be channelled beyond the MTV arena, to play a productive role in the community.

It is at this young adult stage that noticeable indifference to community affairs takes place, especially if the right kind of religious base at an early age has not been given. At this level there is a drop in the number of young adults who wear the sudreh and kusti, and a corollary that follows is that they stop their religious communication with God through prayers.

There is also a tendency to take community infrastructure for granted and an attitudinal problem, in all likelihood inherited from parents, makes an appearance. They demand that the Bombay Parsi Punchayet should fulfil the role of a benign godfather constantly doling out funds and subsidies to the deserving and the undeserving. This has had a crippling effect on our youth. It obscures drive, inhibits initiative, creates either undirected aggression or its opposite, a total lack of drive, which prevents ambition from soaring. Those that are professionals and high achievers must recognize this malaise for themselves and not repeat the mistakes of the previous generation. So if they want a basketball court or lights for their baug, they must desist from going to the Punchayet or other organizations until they have garnered enough community spirit, to raise at least 50 percent of the funds needed, before they approach philanthropic organizations for financial handouts. A case in point is the Aga Khani community where the Aga Khan finances projects, provided 50 percent of the monies for any project has already been raised by the community.

We freely criticize the poor who ask for doles, but do not find it morally reprehensible for our well-to-do, who have cars, homes, their own professional companies and yet approach the Pancha-

yet and various trusts for doles, euphemistically termed as scholarship monies, when they wish to send their children abroad for studies. Today a South Indian family from the same economic background will take a bank loan for a house, or for studying abroad, and instill in their children a work ethic that demands rigor because they must repay their loans. This rigor and work ethic is missing in the Parsi/Irani youth today. An average Parsi, whether young or old, will first ask, "Why shouldn't the Punchayet give us money?" To use a well worn analogy, a Parsi is subsidized from womb (B. D. Petit Parsee General Hospital) to tomb (Doongerwadi) by community organizations and trusts. But because the rich also take advantage of this welfare system it is our real-time poor and the middle class, who with no influence with the powerbrokers of the community and no favors to redeem, get left out and suffer. If our youth are to compete and succeed in life, it is this attitude they must actively change and shun.

From the community's side we have not provided the youth with role models that have in any way upheld the religion or have provided leadership to the young where religion is concerned. The great and good of the Parsi community relish in calling themselves Indians first and Zoroastrians second and thereby intentionally or otherwise downgrade the religion. The irony is that these modern secularists have no idea themselves what it really means to be Indian; they do not understand Indian culture, music or mythology. They have never read the *Vedas* or the *Puranas*, know even less of India's history and therefore are hardly Indian themselves, except in a vague political sense and yet persist in sending out this misleading message at every community function.

They advocate a vague plurality of religious positions that has yielded an undifferentiated humanist philosophy based upon the erroneous assumption that all theologies are equally valid and should be accommodated in the process of worship despite significant theological and ideological differences. The promotion of these assumptions confuses the youth, demands multiple allegiances from them and the underlying message sent out to the youth, is the lack of confidence adults have in the truth of one's own religion.

Yet it is admirable that despite these drawbacks the Parsi-Irani youth, if in-

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The post teenage group in Bombay is harder to work with, specially if they have escaped religious training in their early years

spired, do rise to the situation. A case in point in recent times is the enormous youth turnout and active participation, during the shifting of the fire installed in the agiary at Godrej Baug and their avid interest in protecting and promoting the Doongerwadi system.

If we wish our religion to progress and prosper, we must convey to our youth, as Toynbee did in his model for the Jewish community, that the religion and the community can best be served by a determination on part of the youth to make every effort to retain their special racial identity, what we loosely call our *Parsipanu*. This determination should be founded upon the voluntary need to observe rituals and religious laws, to believe that the

religion is worth defending, and that its traditions and practices are inviolable and need to be cherished, learnt and put into practice.

The youth are the community's repositories for the future and have in their own Zoroastrian being, an ancient seminal wisdom which needs to be cultivated and matured so that they can stand in faithful defence of a religion and community that has given them so much.

Khojeste Mistree schooled at the Bishops School in Pune, and then studied in the United Kingdom. He is a qualified Chartered Accountant from the UK and holds an honors



degree in Oriental Studies from the University of Oxford. Mistree co-founded Zoroastrian Studies (ZS) in Bombay whose primary objective is the dissemination of religious knowledge.

Since May 1994, he has been taking Zoroastrian groups on educational-cum-religious trips to Iran. Recently he initiated an Oral Studies Programme, by recording the living traditions of the Zoroastrians in the environs of Yazd, where he has also begun to promote poverty relief programmes.



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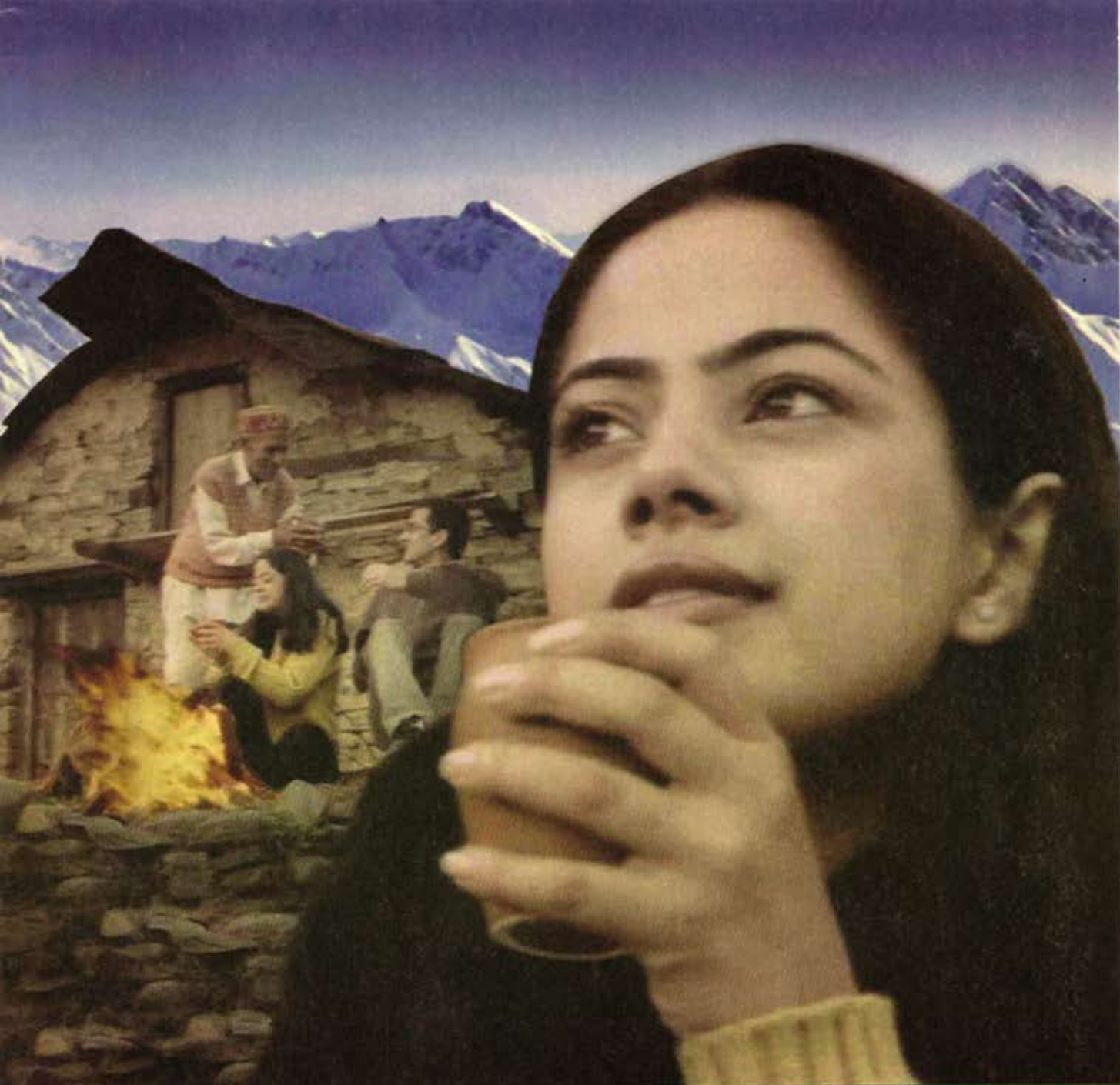
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A view from the hill

The youth residing at Doongerwadi are firm followers of the faith

Parinaz M. Gandhi

"We don't know what's right and what's wrong. The high priests themselves say different things at different times. What are we to understand?" enquires Kershasp Marolia in Gujarati. It is only thanks to the deeds of our forefathers that the Zoroastrians are respected today, he adds.

His experience as bungli *kaamdaar* (worker in charge of cleanliness) at Bombay's Doongerwadi has taught 24-year-old Kershasp that unlike the community members of yore who were committed that "*dharam nu kaam baraabar thai* (religious duties are meticulously performed)," the present generation is only interested in looking after their own conveniences and facilities. Family members of the deceased will enquire regarding the availability of eats and drinks but they will not bother to ask regarding the religious observances for the four days after a death, he cites instances. Following the *geh sarna* until the *chahrum*, a diva is supposed to burn incessantly. But often the families leave the bungli unattended until the *uthamna* so nobody knows when the flame is extinguished. Sometimes even if a family member is there he/she may not inform the bungli *kaamdaar* to refill the oil or change the wick with the result that the lamp burns out. "In fact even I did not know of this until my mother's demise," confesses Kershasp complaining that "until religion is taught it will not be learnt."

Infighting is a major drawback in the community in Kershasp's opinion. "Any cause for dissatisfaction is reason enough to start a fight. Nobody wants to adjust to changes," he says. Doongerwadi workers are not respected by the community: "*Naam saaru nathi, ijjat nathi* (Neither a good name nor reputation is earned)," he says. Whilst originally they were openly ostracized, people now do it more

subtly, he notes. At the Doongerwadi there is no one of his own age and his few friends are either from Ambawadi or from Godrej Baug.

He is content to do his kusti prayers



From left: Kolah, Marolia, Patrasp and Yazad Bajan

once a day and visit the agiary as and when he feels the spiritual urge. He had never envisaged a future for himself at Doongerwadi, candidly admits Kershasp. Contrary to his father's advice Kershasp learnt and later started teaching swimming at Body Rhythm. When he was not paid on time he had to give up that job and take up employment at Doongerwadi where a regular pay was assured. He continues to work part-time for a video photographer when his services are summoned. When he gets a chance he looks forward to playing games like table tennis and volley ball.

Of his three siblings, Porus works for the Sir Ratan Tata Institute, Adil, at a bakery in Kuwait and Farzana does miscellaneous work for a car rental firm. Farzana who had studied at the Avabai Petit School was the only one to complete her schooling. The three boys gave up studies mid-way. "There was nobody strict in the family to push us," realizes Kershasp. Father Darasha was a *khandhia* until a paralytic stroke necessitated him to take up work as a bungli *kaamdaar* who has to clean the bunglis during the four days of prayers. This ensured that the family continued to have residential quarters at the Doongerwadi. (Porus and Farzana being away at work on the morning of October 29, Parsiana was not

able to interview them just as we missed out on an opportunity to speak to three other youths staying in the same chawl.)

Among the Marolias' neighbors are the Kolahs — Kersi who is a *nassessalar* and his wife Pervin who bathes the bodies of deceased Zoroastrian ladies. Their only daughter Ashish studies at the Avabai Petit School and comes home during vacations when too she is not very happy as she

has few companions and misses her friends from school most of whom are Parsis. She finds her Parsi friends "are more helpful; always wear the *sudreh-kusti* and always speak the truth." It is her Parsi friends who come to her assistance when she has to complete her homework, says 14-year-old Ashish who studies in Std VII.

During school days she gets a chance to visit the fire-temple on auspicious days. When she is on holidays she visits the Banaji Atash Behram on Mondays and Aslaji Agiary on Fridays. Doing the kusti prayers twice a day is a regular habit with her. She prays for the health and well-being of her family and for her success in studies, mentions Ashish who would like to be an air hostess when she grows up.

Although she can speak and write Gujarati, she says her Hindi is better. Among her hobbies she lists drawing and coloring. With her mother's permission she has drawn an *atah*, *chamach* and *chipya* on the kitchen wall over their hearth. Fond of singing too, she is a member of the Petit Choir.

Staying barely 50 m away are the Bajan brothers, Patrasp who is 14 and Yazad who is 12. They are the sons of Ervad Darayus Bajan who as the manager at the Farvardian was given staff quarters at the Doongerwadi 10 years ago. The boys too have been trained as *navar-maratabs* and are of the opinion



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that non-Parsis should not be allowed inside the fire-temples "as they don't know anything about our religion. They don't know our prayers. They may blow at the fire or touch some religious implements with their feet."

Patrasp who is in Std X at the Sir Cowasjee Jehangir High School likes to go to the fire-temple every two or three days while Yazad who is in Std VII at the same School goes to the agiary once a week. They invariably pray at the

Family members of the deceased will enquire regarding eats and drinks but not the religious observances

Farvardian dadgah because that is where their father or grandfather Noshir who is the panthak take turns in doing the boi prayers. While Patrasp prays that he may do well in his examinations, Yazad adds that they also pray "for the health of their parents so that they are there to look after us." Supplementing their father's income as a full-time priest is mother Parizad who accepts catering orders and regularly supplies cutlets at food outlets.

During school days Yazad stays with his paternal grandmother at Gamadia Colony so Parizad has to divide her time between two homes to ensure that both the boys concentrate on their school curriculum: supervise Yazad's studies when he is back from school and coordinate with Patrasp's tuitions. While Patrasp would like to pursue a future in computer engineering, Yazad has not yet made up his mind. He only knows he does not want to do science. Since Yazad was taught Gujarati in school, he can read the language but Patrasp missed out on the opportunity. Most of their classmates are Hindus with whom they enjoy games like cricket, football and volley ball.

The brothers feel that Parsis "are strong and healthy because they eat *marghi-machhi* (non-vegetarian food)." Seeing gluttonous Parsis fight over food at ghambars does not befit the community, they believe. Their experience has taught them that while "some Parsis are mad and greedy there are others who are very smart."

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Icon kaun?

Even if the youth are seeking and finding newer role models to emulate, the future of the community holds promise

Kimi Dangor

Pelvic thrusts in leather leotards, a mustachioed drag queen with a pronounced bucktooth — Freddie Mercury, aka Farokh Bulsara, gave India and the world Zoroastrian population their first truly international icon. One star in the galaxy of celebrities that they could point to and proudly say, 'Aapro Freddie.' Freddie Mercury was truly the Queen!

Of course, before another one bit the dust, many stalwarts had already set standards of generosity and enterprise that others to follow would find difficult to emulate.

Dadabhai Naoroji 'The Grand Old Man of India' played an invaluable role in India's freedom struggle. Philanthropist and patriarch of the Tata empire, Jamshedji Tata's hands shaped the prospects of an emerging nation.

Scientist Dr Homi Jehangir Bhabha made a notable contribution to India's atomic energy programme, while Sir Pherozeshah Mehta became the president of the Indian National Congress and later vice chancellor of Bombay University.

Financial wizard and economic critic Sir Dinsha Wacha was a prolific writer and business pioneer. J. R. D. Tata built an empire whose legacy continues to prosper.

Sometime in the 1960s, maestro Zubin Mehta stormed into the world of symphonies and philharmonics and held the world in thrall.

Polly Umrigar, Nari Contractor and Farokh Engineer have at various points wielded the willow, captained the Indian cricket team and kept wickets, setting an example for generations of aspiring cricketers.

Tatas, Wadias, Godrejs, Jejeebhoy, Petits — these families built institutions, hospitals, schools and trusts and gave to

Bombay and the Zoroastrian community a lot of its earlier glory. R. K. Karanjia, Jehangir Sabavala, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, Sohrab Modi — the list is long, with the possibility of having missed a name here or there. Remarkable people with extraordinary legacies and outstanding

lives — individuals to look up to, emulate and

"WHO'S YOUR ICON, SON?...
TATA? WADIA?..."



hold up as examples for a community that believed in charity and altruism.

That was then, this is now. Generation Me is a lot younger, brash and bold, delving into less explored venues like acting, health and fitness and the performing arts. This is not a generation of bankers, industrialists or nine-to-five jobholders. Free spirits eager to break the mould or plain foolhardy and blasé, indifferent to the future? We have many a shining example of our youth who people the city's Page three pack, but are they capable of leading the brat pack?

We did a head count of some newer names that popped up as 'outstanding' slightly predictable, a trifle surprising, the list doesn't take too long to compile — Ratan Tata, Cyrus Broacha, Cyrus Oshidar (there must be something about that name!), Sooni Taraporevala, Riyad Vinci Wadia, Kaizad Gustaad, Perizaad Zorabian, Arzan Khambatta, Shiamak Davar, Mehr Jesia, Tanaz Currim,

Boman Irani, Shernaz Treasurywala. Per chance there must be other names that fit the bill, some we've left out due to space constraints. All emerging stars, forging a different path, not treading the road our forefathers chose. A deviant dream, an emerging generation. A jolly jokester for the MTV motley, an upcoming starlet, the ultimate 'muse' model, a 'scripture' sculptor — notable names, but icons for Generation Now?

Naushad Buchia thinks not. The 25-year-old, who is currently doing a Human Resource course and running a part-time network marketing business, says, "There is tremendous potential in today's youth but no will and determination to see it through."

Freishia Bomanbehram, 22, assistant producer with Red FM, agrees, "There isn't a single person we can really look up to. There might be loads of hidden icons — ordinary people doing extraordinary things — but no single individual comes to mind. A Cyrus Oshidar or a Perizaad Zorabian may possibly be style icons" but not in other regards.

Firoza Buchia, 23, a teacher training to be a yoga instructor, is of the opinion that even for the present generation it is the Godrejs and Tatas who set an example. "Which is not to say that the youth aren't doing well. Among our contemporaries a few girls like Perizaad Zorabian and Parizad Kolah are setting a good example, though not of the same standards."

Physiotherapist Firuzi Desai believes the sense of urgency and commitment is missing. "More and more young people want quick money, hence, boys and girls today are taking the easier option — models, air hostesses, stewards, dancers, even fitness instructors, for god's sake! The emphasis on education is missing, which is why we see a decline on the professional level as well."

Aashish Hiranek, a 30-year-old independent communications consultant, agrees and says it's usually professionals, industrialists and pioneers who are looked up to. "Nowadays, most of us, especially the men, are not inclined towards entrepreneurship. Today, it's very rare to spot a Parsi who's an outstanding businessman. We've lost our entrepreneurial ability. Though I still think there are some people like sculptor Arzan

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Khambatta who are doing great work and displaying tremendous potential."

Adds Naushad, "Our generation has had it easy — there's been no need for us to forge an identity like our forefathers did, so I guess the entrepreneurship has died."

Expecting a good fight on my hands, I'm surprised to see the youngsters capitulate. No one to look up to, young people not motivated enough, no fighting spirit — the opinion and voices vary but the view remains the same.

Ashdin Doctor, a student of sociology and anthropology at St Xavier's College, Bombay, believes one needn't have a contemporary role model. The 20-year-old says role models needn't necessarily be young: "Gandhiji will never cease to be a role model, even for the present generation." Doctor's idea of role models are the Tatas, "The Tata family has given us the Indica — a car manufactured wholly in India — which is just one example of their grit and determination. I don't necessarily have a contemporary I look up to. I've seen Zubin Mehta perform live and I really admire him."

But student Gulnaar Kavarana (name changed on request) doesn't need an

icon. "Why can't I follow my own star? Why should I have someone to look up to?"

Bomanbehran seconds that. "I don't think anyone in the present generation

Generation Me is a lot younger, brash and bold, delving into less explored venues like acting, health and fitness and the performing arts

— be it a Parsi or a non-Parsi — has or needs an icon. We are a self-motivated and self-driven generation." Though she does have her own icon in her aunt Dr Frene Ginwala. "She is the speaker of the National Assembly, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. She is an amazing human being and a very strong woman who has been called 'the sari in Parliament.' She's my idea of grit and strength."

Naushad's idea of an icon is "Some-

body who dares to dream and teaches us to do the same. Because very few Parsi youth are willing to take a risk and do something different," and then he says almost self-effacingly, "I will eventually join my father's business."

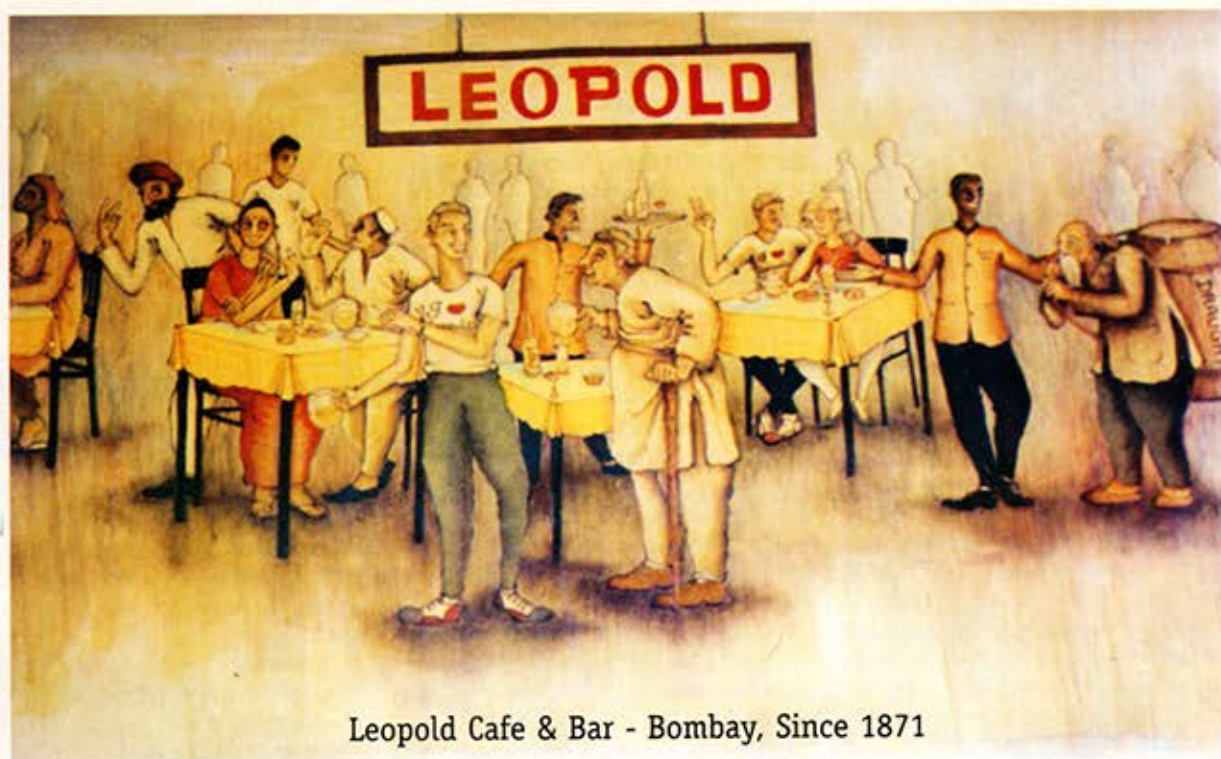
So what do our almost-icons have to say? The effervescent Zorabian says, "When I think of a successful, honorable, intelligent Parsi gentleman I think of Ratan Tata. He has taken his lineage to another level and I adore him." In her opinion, today's youth have definitely made a place for themselves in the world of entertainment. "We've gone from being stereotypical gag bags to being respected in our field. I was once offered a role as a Parsi girl with a fetish for pink shoes who spoke broken Hindi and I turned it down. I refuse to be compartmentalised. Now we have made it to the mainstream." Among her contemporaries she thinks Oshidar and Broacha are doing a brilliant job. "You think MTV, you think Cyrus Broacha. Even in dancing, no one comes close to Shiamak Davar. They are all unique people. It's too early to call them icons but there's definitely great potential there."

On the flip side is Oshidar, MTV vice president, creative, whose answer sim-



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ply is, "I-kaun?" The problem, he says is not with the community but the country at large. "The youth across the country don't have icons. The only icons you can think of are film stars and cricket players who are too busy lining their own pockets. For me, the last great sporting hero was Muhammad Ali — he stood for something, he had an opinion. We need another Muhammad Ali."

Pretty Nauheed Cyrusi, 21 and on her way to attaining stardom, says, "The last of the real icons I can think of was Persis Khambatta. I'm sure Parsi youth are capable of producing other icons but the lack of names popping into my head is also because not a lot of Parsis are inclined towards doing business anymore."

Entrepreneur Riyadh Cama (name changed on request) ties it in neatly: "Unfortunately, it does seem a little sad when the youth themselves have a diffident viewpoint. But, let's face it — all the great people who made a name for themselves didn't become legends at the age of 30. So, even though we might not have enough shining stars at the moment, maybe our youngsters will emerge winners in the end."

Striking a balance is well-known fit-

ness instructor Firdaus Anklesaria who says, "Of course, we have people to look up to in the form of Shiamak Davar, a modern day achiever who started his own dance academy. People like restorer Jimmy Mistry, fitness guru Mickey Mehta and martial arts expert Vispy Kapadia are all doing great work in their respective fields. Why Mehr Jesia gave the country its first super model!" But he has a word of caution: "Everything said and done, over the last 60 years, the kind of professions Parsis have been following have changed drastically. From heading businesses they are now doing mediocre jobs, opting for nine-to-five jobs and playing it safe. Lack of enterprise is bringing our community down. Parsi youth need to take an initiative and become pioneers in more adventurous fields."

On a more optimistic note comes Cyrus Dastur, a 27-year-old who runs a theatre company called Two Plus Productions. "Of course, there are a lot of people with potential, you just need to look around and you will find them. Generally, people tend to look up to people we hear of or see in the papers ever so often. For example, a Malaika

Arora, who's in the news every few days but doesn't have substantial backing, is looked upon as an icon. But there are people like Noel Tata who are not known but are doing great work and are very successful. Shiamak Davar too has achieved a lot and he's not even a typical Page three person. People like Perizaad Zorabian and Shernaz Treasurywala are examples to follow for young women who are interested in the glamor industry. Most young people haven't even heard of Dr Rusi Soonawala. A Jeh or Ness Wadia is known because of their lineage, but not many know that they might be training to take over their business. There is a fresh generation, slightly low profile but ready to take on the baton. Just because they are not in the news doesn't mean they aren't doing much." Like Dastur says, seek and you shall find.

The question remains, is it a community/youth weighed down by its past or too nonchalant about its future? Nevertheless, it's heartening to see a dwindling community showing some sense of promise in various fields — be it art, culture, medicine, films, etc. Much as today's generation is still finding its feet

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and struggling to realise its identity, there's a strong message here. There is potential just waiting to be explored. So whether we have a handful of Tatas, Godrejs or Wadias or many talented Davars, Broachas or Khambattas — the future holds great promise.

The emphasis on education is missing, which is why we see a decline on the professional level as well

The future of the community lies not in endless, multitudinous discussions undertaken by some archaic and rabid minds on various e-groups where a lot of self-congratulatory bouquets and self-deriding brickbats are traded among a handful.

The future lies in Xerxes who wants to start a modeling agency, Zubin who wants to be in the armed forces, Delna who desires to be an actress or Mehnaaz who's training to be a chef.

At the risk of sounding irreverent

and being inundated with mails asking me 'What do I know about the *Vendidad*' and castigating me for 'knowing nothing about our great religion'... I know this for sure — the future of this community lies in its — you guessed — future!

Desai wraps it up neatly: "We might not be able to fill the shoes of the stalwarts who preceded us but we are growing and we will get there."

Kimi Dangor is a sub-editor-cum-features-writer with *Sunday Mid Day*, Bombay. She graduated in English Literature from the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda and acquired her post-graduate diploma in mass communication and journalism from the Xavier



Institute of Communications, Bombay. Kimi writes on fashion, food, travel, trends and personalities for *Sunday Mid Day* — a job she enjoys immensely.

Besides writing, her other interests include reading, travelling, theatre, art and music. She has also been, at various points in her life — a ballet dancer, gymnast, martial artist and a horsewoman.



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The trustees of posterity

The strengths and misgivings of the young are analysed by the author

Diana D. Marfatia

A community thrives on two credentials — its past and its future. The Parsi community has a past that few can rival, for sheer effort and effect. One and all extol the great achievements of our illustrious forefathers and the trails they blazed. They excelled in every sphere of human activity and set standards and examples which are benchmarks and pinnacles of achievement visualized by all.

And so, our thoughts turn to the future. And the future of a community can only mean one thing — its youth. As is rightly said — “The youth are the trustees of posterity.”

How exactly does the community view this youth? And perhaps, more importantly, how does this youth view the community? And is there a common meeting ground in these views, which would create hope for the years to come? Difficult questions — but questions that need to be asked and answered — nonetheless. This is perhaps the most important exercise that we Parsis, as a community, must do.

The first thing that Parsi youngsters realize, on coming in close contact with people from other communities is that they are privileged. And, perhaps equally so, tied down and held back. This may seem like a paradox but is reality too.

They feel privileged because:

- Most of them have studied in the “better” and more “elitist” English medium/convent schools of the country.
- The religion offers them freedom to act and think independently in ways many others don’t.
- Our women too, are not subjugated and have full liberty to choose their paths and follow them and in fact several of our community women are leaders in the fields they have chosen.

But there is an equally strong feeling of being held back — mistakenly attributed to the old traditions and rituals that the elders fight so hard to keep alive. So, as the pace of life gets faster and faster,

and technology assumes dimensions nobody ever dreamed of, there is unfortunately a feeling of impatience and restlessness at the stress laid on traditions and rituals — which as the youth put it — “not many of us really understand and is being understood lesser and lesser as time goes by.”

This makes the youth critical and alienates them from their religion; unsavory controversies worsen the situation. This also then further leads to poor religious bonding but fortunately the social bonding and strong community feeling is very much alive.

This is also not to say that belief is lacking. We know for a fact, that when given a chance to really understand the true beauty of our religion, the youth respond as our forefathers did. The problem, they say is the lack of a standard and truly authoritative voice.

But then, if there is a lack of religious bonding, the same can never be said about the community feeling among the youth today. With the advent of technology, “keeping in touch” has never been easier. The various sporting events and social functions organized through the years are witnessing larger congregations all the time. The youth are also becoming socially aware of their responsibilities to the elders of their baugs and colonies. Which is why we can see a great deal of effort going into social activities that play a small but invaluable part in our existence.

The strengths of our youth are their independent and nonconventional thinking, their strong belief in themselves and the fact that they already were privileged to be a few steps ahead and better placed as compared to their friends from other communities.

Their weaknesses are a lack of original thinking, ‘following the herd’ mentality and the great influence of the western way of living and styles. Their love for the lucre and the desire to acquire it

in a hurry is a drag which leads to impatience and dislike for hard work. Also, they often feel that the only road to success is the one that leads them to foreign nations. But then again today more and more youth are realizing that though foreign lands may be good to educate oneself in, the real place to thrive is back home. And therefore increasing numbers are returning to home ground. And even those who aren’t, are making an impact wherever they are and are creating an awareness about our community, thus helping us gain an international image and good will.

A large chunk of the youth feel that the community is doing more than enough for them and they get a great sense of security from this. Yet, there is a small section that feels that more should be done especially in the area of helping them set up their own ventures and enterprises.

Again while there is a section of the youth who enjoy their parents’ and community’s support and relish their “spoonfeeding” them till quite an advanced age, there is another section who loathe this and feel that this has been the major contributor to the youth’s laidback and complacent attitude. It is this segment of the youth that has great courage of conviction and are ready to move on and take the community forward so as to at least maintain the height and glory of the past, if not surpass it.

Thus, there is great hope for the future of our community as it is in the very safe hands of our responsible, thinking, ambitious, well guided and focused youth.

A reputed academican, Diana Marfatia is the



Principal of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Charitable Institution and heads the Bombay Parsi Punchayet’s Holiday Programme for Youth.

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The pride of Pathardi

Within a few months of taking charge as chief officer of Pathardi town, Alice Pastakia has earned the confidence of the citizens

Parinaz M. Gandhi

"*Bai tumhi paach varshé rahaach* (Madam, you must stay for five years)," was the title of an editorial written in the Marathi daily *Pathardi Bhumika* of February 24, 2003. The editorial was all praise for Alice Pastakia who as chief officer of the small town of Pathardi (60 km from Ahmednagar in Maharashtra) had won the confidence and respect of the populace within a few months.



"What a municipal commissioner is to a city, a chief officer is to a town," explains the 28-year-old who was assigned her first posting on December 2, 2002 after she passed the Maharashtra Administrative Service (MAS) examination. Reportedly the first and only Parsi to have joined the ranks of MAS officers, Alice takes her responsibilities very seriously irrespective of the fortnightly rumors floated "*Baichi badli zaali* (Madam has been transferred)" by those with vested interests who seek to oust her. There are 20 councillors including the president (equivalent to a mayor) who control the political reigns. "In May last, a couple of councillors tried to get me transferred," says the chief officer. Shortly thereafter "the rest of the councillors came to Mantralaya (the headquarters in Bombay) to get that order cancelled." Actually she is unfazed by all such developments realizing that a routine transfer is due every two years.

Pleased with the trust the majority has reposed in her Alice explains, "If you know what you are doing is right and convince the public, then they stand up for you. People realize that things are going wrong. But who's going to bell the cat? Till then you have to be there for them. You don't have to be a martyr for them." With a staff of 150 working for

her, Alice's first priority was to win their trust. She would sit with them from morning to evening "to give them the confidence that I'm there for you. No one can throw you out (apparently a regular threat given to government employees)." With the necessary patience and tact she urged them: "Think for yourself if you are doing the right or wrong thing."

Within a fortnight of assuming office, Alice launched her anti-encroachment campaign. According to the law, "if any councillor is involved in illegal encroachment he/she is liable to lose the chair," she explains how she felt duty bound to report against the activities of two of them.

Recently an overbearing councillor barged into her office and tried to intimidate her but to her relief her staff physically dragged him out of the office confessing later that never in the past had they felt obliged to undertake such a step. Along with the discomforts come certain perks like a government vehicle at her disposal. Actually she is entitled to personal security too which she has declined because Alice prefers to keep the lines of communication open between herself and the nearly 24,000 residents of the town.

Despite the threats against which she operates Alice maintains, "It's not frustrating at all. There are moments when you feel you are stuck but then you move ahead. It's one of the best jobs that you can do. If you go about your duties strictly by the law and with a clear conscience, at the end of the day you feel you are doing something...I always wanted to get into the civil services. I had opted for it so I had to be prepared."

There are infinite opportunities to work. As the chief officer she has to fulfil both her obligatory duties and discretionary duties. Responsibility for water supply, electricity, roads, cleanliness fall within the purview of obligatory duties while making parks and maintaining gar-

dens would classify as discretionary duties. Last August she was instrumental in creating the town's first children's park. She recalls how within one and a half hours the townsfolk had committed to donating Rs 3,00,000 worth of equipment for the park once word spread around. The land for the park on the main road was also donated by one of the locals. Within eight days the park was ready. The people took pleasure in doing *shramdhan* (laboring voluntarily) to make the project a success. In this primarily agrarian economy where life expectancy is 70 years, the hospital and the 20 odd schools are run by the zilla parishad. Before Alice leaves this area she would like to build a few roads, a library, a shopping center, a gymnasium in this predominantly Hindu town. There are a good number of Muslims too but she is the only Parsi, she realizes.

Being a young lady officer Alice does not allow her age or sex or dress code to undermine her authority in the region. She is sometimes dressed in a salwar kameez when invited to formal functions like flag hoisting on Independence Day or administering of the first polio drops to a child at the time of the pulse polio immunization drive. In her day-to-day job she is often dressed in trousers and sneakers. The fact that she speaks fluent Marathi is enough to win over the local population. When *Parsiana* interviewed her at her Godrej Baug residence in Bombay she was twice required to answer telephone calls, both of which saw her prowess in Marathi.

Occasionally work at Mantralaya brings her to Bombay on one of her fleeting visits when she gets a chance to meet her parents, father Kersi who has retired from Godrej and Boyce Manufacturing Company Limited, mother Hilla, and younger sister Bakhtawar who is a senior executive with H. T. Nanavati Securities Private Limited. Otherwise it is just telephonic interaction which sus-



As chief officer Pastakia is invariably invited to launch different projects and activities in the town

tains the family ties. Alice gives credit to her parents for being "very understanding...very supportive... Magazines brought home were always those which would expand our knowledge like the *Competition Success Review*, *India Today*, *Frontline*. They always told me, 'If you need to buy a book, you must tell us, never mind the *kharcha* (cost).' Even today if my dad finds something in a newspaper which he feels I need to know, he will send me that newsclipping. My drawer is full of such cuttings which I never destroy not knowing when they will be useful."

Just as Alice gives credit to her parents for giving her sound values, she is equally happy that she studied at the Godrejrun Udayachal School in Vikhroli which has "a heterogenous environment where a manager's child and a worker's child study in the same class." While on the one hand they were proud of being Parsis on the other they learnt to assimilate themselves in a cosmopolitan environment. It is there too that she learnt to converse as freely in Marathi and Hindi as she would in English and Gujarati, she reveals, unable to empathize with the bias against Hindi and Marathi which most Parsi youth seem to harbor. They are willing to learn a foreign tongue but not local languages like Hindi and Marathi, she points out. To join the MAS knowledge of Marathi is essential just as to join the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) knowledge of Hindi is a prerequisite. Next year Alice is contemplating on giving her IAS examination.

After her schooling Alice did two years of science at the Somaiya College, then graduated in arts from Ruia College, did her postgraduation in politics from the Bombay University and a post-

graduate diploma in human relations. The National Cadet Corps camps that she attended taught her to rough it out in the barracks in the absence of home comforts, she reports.

To clear the MAS examination where lakhs of students compete for the few available vacancies Alice did not need to attend any coaching classes. There was however systematic effort put in with lots of reading and constant self assessment of one's general knowledge by trying to answer different quizzes. She also realized that it is not enough to know the answer. Considering that one is required to answer 200 questions in two hours, within the specified time one must know how to present the maximum amount of data which requires regular practice. After clearing the preliminary examination which tests a candidate's general knowledge and the expertise in an optional paper, come the main examinations where one has to pass six papers — two in general knowledge, two optional and two in languages. After you pass the main examination you are called for an interview. The overall rank you earn determines the post to which you are entitled. When she passed her examination there were nearly three lakh candidates vying for the 311 vacancies in eight posts, Alice gives the details. Following a write-up on her which appeared in *Parsiana* ("Mant-

From left: Kersi, Bakhtawar, Alice and Hilla Pastakia



ralaya's new officer," Events and Personalities, January 2001) she received two or three enquiries from Parsi girls but has not heard from them since.

"There was a time when in every field we were at the top. What do we see today? The best we can think of is becoming an air hostess or joining the bank. I am not demeaning any job. But for a community that has seen Dadabhai Naoroji, J. R. D. Tata, Sam Manekshaw...this is not enough. We have lost the vision," sums up Alice. When members of the Godrej family and other guests visited her School, Alice remembers thinking to herself, 'If they could do something worthwhile surely I could as well.' Looking at the youth in Godrej Baug who are content to spend hours roaming on their bikes she wonders, "What are they getting out of it? It's scary sometimes..." Alice would like to "request the parents to take a little bit of interest in what the children are doing and guide them with the right reading material. Parents play a major role in what the child ultimately becomes. It is not just studies... games, outings and vacations are equally important. They shouldn't be neglected."

The community should read about our individual achievers, says Alice who realizes how she got deeper insights when she proof-read Dr Nawaz Mody's compilation, *The Parsis in Western India*. She refers particularly to the life of Mme

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Bhikaiji Cama and Sir Homi Modi both of whom had made a name for themselves in the political arena. "If at that time they could achieve so much, why can't we do the same today with all the facilities at our disposal?" she asks rhetorically.

"If the community wants to have its voice heard, it needs more people hold-

**"There are moments
when you feel you
are stuck but then
you move ahead. It's
one of the best jobs
that you can do"**

ing responsible positions in government — in the political and executive wing," advises the young bureaucrat. There are known to be three ladies who are making their presence felt in the Indian civil services: Manizhe Khedawalla, Firoza Dastur-Malhotra and Kismet Turel. Alice is wary of the community making "a fool of itself in front of the rest of the world with unnecessary debates." While she

appreciates dakhmenashini as a scientific and hygienic method of disposal she believes that "we can't be so steadfast. A little bit of accommodation and alteration on our part is necessary." The issue of intercommunity marriages she sees as "more of a social and economic problem than a religious one. The fear that 'baddhu non-Parsi né malsé' (non-Parsis would be the inheritors) is the overriding fear." Insisting that she would "prefer to stay away from this debate, not that I wholeheartedly oppose or support it," Alice notes, "The best thing to do is to lead by example."

The fact that Alice may not have had an occasion to visit the fire-temple in the last year "does not make me any less a Zoroastrian than those who go there twice a day," she clarifies. Rather than put in a rushed visit she would prefer "to spend a decent amount of time there once I go to an agiary," she states.

"With what I see today..." Alice does not envisage a very bright future for the community. "Even the dog on the street survives," she points out. "If we survive we had better do so with some standard... If we have to slog a little bit, it's definitely worth it in the long run. It's up to the youth to make a glorious future."



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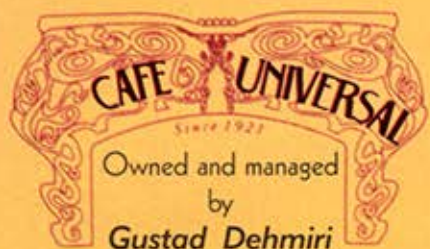
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Armin Turel's campaign "Save the Parsee community" has been lauded for its photographic content and message

Parinaz M. Gandhi

"The Parsi community... has come to a point of standstill...no progress...The Parsi youth need to come out of the rut and restart the journey...It is the responsibility of each and every Parsi to take part in the revival of their most beautiful community...The whole campaign — "Save the Parsee community" — revolves around the idea that...the community is shrouded in darkness and you can be the ray of hope," explains 21-year-old Armin Nairiyosang Turel.

From the different incisive black and white photographs that constituted her campaign, 12 were selected for display at the National Centre for Performing Arts to coincide with the UNESCO PARZOR sponsored celebration of 3,000 years of Parsi culture. One of the exhibits showed the facade of the Seth Shapurji Sorabji Kappawala Agiary at Tardeo which bears a replica of a scene from Persepolis where rulers come offering obeisance to the great King Darius. "Where once you led, you now don't even walk," is Armin's interpretation of the visual.

In another photograph, an empty settee stands in solitary isolation in an almost vacant room. The play of light

and darkness is used to capture the stark reality. "A fading picture"... "Losing vision"... "Resting in peace"... are some of the many captions used for this series of photographs.

The next set of photographs introduce an element of hope, a possibility. "On the verge of existence"... "Turning over an old leaf"... "A subtle chance"... show this progression in thought. Finally comes the willingness to "Nudge into the future."

"The campaign is aimed at motivating the silent youth of the community into action and to bring out their true spirit and nature of belonging," conveys Turel who had taken up this project when in her final year (2002-03) of studies at the Sophia Polytechnic. To earn her diploma in commercial art she chose to dwell on the theme of unity within the community, having been inspired by the exhibition of community portraits at the National Gallery of Modern Art last year.

Divine help and guidance made possible the completion of this assignment in a record period of 15 days, reveals Armin. Initially the professors were on strike for two months, then her Nikon F-65 camera was stolen from the College campus and miraculously sighted at a

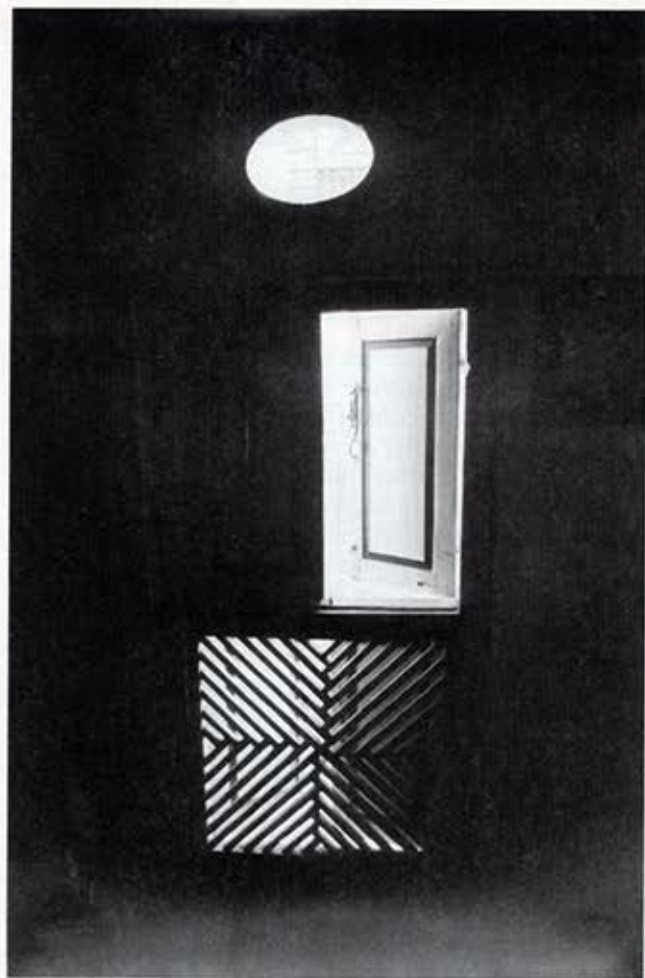
camera shop days later. (Since she had already lodged a police complaint, the custody of the camera was returned to her at no cost.) When her father Ervad Nairiyosang was performing his first nirangdin ceremony in Surat despite her busy college schedule she managed to spend some hours in that city and surprised herself with the interesting photographs she shot there of the Seth D. N. Modi Atash Behram and the Goti Adarian as also the interior of Gool Coyaji's spacious 100-year-old bungalow that captured the quintessence of the community, its properties and institutions. The next day she hurriedly shot photographs of establishments within Bombay and left with little time to edit the pictures, she got it printed and presented her efforts at the Sophia Polytechnic exhibition. She was rewarded with the best photography person award. At the Communication Arts Guild inter-collegiate exhibition she was presented the bronze award in the Cub Photographer category.

Pleased with her efforts, the Bombay Parsi Punchayet agreed to sponsor her basic costs of Rs 17,000. Soon thereafter came the opportunity to display her work at the PARZOR exhibition. In De-



Turel (left) values her identity and heritage





ember 2003 she will be sharing her insights with the delegates at the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress in Poona. To ascertain the views of the community youth prior to her assignment, Armin had distributed a questionnaire seeking feedback on their level of religious and community awareness, suggestions for the community to remain united, views on controversial topics like dakhmenashini and interfaith marriage.

She herself is a strong advocate of traditions saying, "Religious ceremonies and customs should be adhered to..." Armin is keen to continue with the dakhmenashini tradition. An intercommunity marriage is "a definite no...An intercommunity marriage always subtracts from the community," she feels. "The community will survive," she is sanguine although she is not sure of the quality that will endure.

"It is the duty of the parents to spend more time with the family, to impart more knowledge to our children on religious and social/cultural matters," insists the youngster. "The respect and reverence for elders is not there. Excessive westernization and exposure to tele-

vision have reduced the parents' grip on their children," she adds. Her thinking does not differ radically from her parents', she observes. Father Nairyosang was with Union Bank of India for 32 years before he retired and joined the H. B. Wadia Atas Bahram as a boiwalla priest. Mother Pervin retired from the Bank of India. But while her father tries to go out of his way to do *samaj seva* (social service) for others, Armin says that she would help others only if it does not inconvenience her. Her family includes younger sister Farzana who is in her second year of hotel management studies and brother Pourushasp who is in the sixth standard.

After earning her diploma in applied art from the Directorate of Art, Maharashtra state, the commercial artist is now working with Sai Advertisers where she is exposed to copywriting, designing, and photography which is her forte. An alumnus of The J. B. Vachha High School, Armin's hobbies include rangoli, painting, writing poetry, playing word



The play of light and darkness in Turel's visuals

games and singing, having passed examinations in Indian classical vocal music.

For her campaign the photographer had poetically expressed her dream for the community: "The tall castles of the past stand witness to heroic battles and conquests of love and hate. But most of all they tell of an undeterred spirit and unbent perseverance. Some have stood the test of time, others haven't. My castle is still standing, though now nearly in ruins. It has awed the world with its beauty, glory and architecture and even when it is the oldest standing, it is new. But it is standing on the thin line between total annihilation and a chance to turn over the old page...My castle has nurtured me, protected me, cared for me and now it's my turn to return the favor. My castle is my identity, my heritage — my community. I will restore it to its former glory brick by brick...You too can be a part of my dream..."



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A sporting salute

With flair and fervor, Zoroastrian youth in India achieve success in sports

Hilla P. Guzder

Float like a butterfly or sting like a bee. Young Parsis have, by sheer dint of practice and hard work, moved from novice to qualifier to winner at district, state and national level in sports. Many have competed in their age groups at events outside India — and reaped their rewards.

In a country of one billion people, there are no easy pickings, even at local level. As one youngster wailed: "No matter how hard I try, there is always someone better!"

Sifting through the copious notes of conversations with competitors and their parents, we observed that a few factors ran through as a common thread: families with a sporting background among parents or grandparents threw up many a winner, albeit in a totally different discipline! The role of Parsi fathers and mothers was a revelation. Their enthusiasm was unbounded! Barring a few stray cases where there seemed to be indifference or opposition, the vast majority of Parsi parents took great pride and joy in their children's sporting successes.

We spoke to fathers who have over a period of many years ferried their young children at 5.45 or 6 a.m. to distant places of practice, sitting there for a couple of hours to drop the children back home or straight to school. Mothers have taken over for daytime or evening practice, till the children were old enough to fend for themselves. Sunday siestas have been sacrificed for the heat and dust of competition. The "Daddy says yes, Mummy says no, Granny says something different" situation seemed to arise but occasionally.

The stern "studies-to-the-exclusion of all else" syndrome surfaced only in

stray cases. In fact, most parents seemed to feel that a couple of hours of freedom for the child to pursue his/her passion resulted in good grades. "I would not

as well as middle class families, putting in three-four hours of energy-sapping practice in hot and humid conditions, preferring to "hang out" at the squash

court, in a boat, at the basketball court or dojo, rather than dawdle over cups of coffee with their friends at the city's newest hotspot.

What came through too was the big heart and sincerity of competitors participating at the state and national level — at venues where athletes are told to sleep on the floor in the classrooms of municipal buildings or carry their own bedding, where the toilet facilities are "appalling," where they are told to "drink the water from anywhere," where events start several hours behind the scheduled time, with competitors compelled to sit in the hot sun,

starving and dehydrated, listening to the pomposity of politicians!

In a world where sport is a billion-dollar industry, our youngsters compete in a country of contrasts — sports facilities at some places like Bangalore or Hyderabad may be superior, but in most places stadia are run-down, synthetic tracks peeling, officials are not familiar with the rules! In age group competitions, competitors cheat with the connivance of parents and officials by producing false birth certificates or by exchanging chest numbers! "We see any number of injustices. The only thing one can do is to appeal to the organizers to set things right. If you throw your weight around, their ego gets bruised and your child may get victimized. But generally, they realize it for themselves if you point it out rationally," explains a parent.

And the financial disparities — on the one hand, the Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu comes call-



Rustom Patel: zooming past the competition

want a child who is a bookworm," said one mother. "My boy feels refreshed after he plays," said another. Quite a number of young ones cheerily opined they had no difficulty combining studies with sports!

The bugbears arose in the Std X and Std XII years. Several of the achievers dropped the intensity of training, but continued to participate in competition. Taking a full sabbatical would mean serious setbacks, particularly for those who had taken their sport to a certain level. "I want my child to be happy. I will not even take him into the business if he is successful in his chosen sport," remarked one mother. Basic education, at least to graduate level, seems a prerequisite for most.

Astounding too was the enthusiasm of young people from extremely affluent

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Top row, from left: Yohann Doongaji (left) on a roll; Kyoshi Shihan Vispy Kapadia (back, 2nd from right) with students (front row) Hormazdyaar Chinoy, Shahan Sidhwa, Azhaan and Zarvaan Merchant, (back row) Anaisha Patch, Natalia Dalal, Rohmin Aref and instructors. Below: Adventure enthusiasts Denzil (left) and Sanya Muncherji



salute the phenomenal contribution Parsi associations/groups/gymkhanas have made for the promotion of the Zoroastrian sporting spirit. Natural talent often surfaces, for example, at all Parsi meets where children from orphanages running in bare feet outrun Nike and Adidas-shod city slickers!

The gap between potential and performance is, understandably, easier bridged if good coaches are readily available, at convenient training venues. Where coaches are ready and willing, facilities are often not up to the mark.

"The lifespan of a synthetic track such as the one at PDP (Priyadarshini Park in Bombay, where athletes train regularly) is around eight-10 years. The PDP track is much older than this. It has become hard. Continuous running on such a track gives rise to shin and knee pain so we mostly use the grass patch in the center for training," says Homiar Mistry, himself a successful athlete now into coaching. "The PDP is crowded with walkers, footballers and casual fitness people. There is hardly any space! Hurdles are not available, weight training facilities are available to members only, and the rates are high."

The highly competitive, 21st century world of sport requires large infusions of time and money. "The liberalization of the economy in India has brought greater competitiveness into the business environment for large organizations. Companies are into financial restructuring, e.g. Air India and Indian Airlines which used to employ large numbers of sportspersons no longer do so, their rivals Jet Air or Sahara (which is, however, a lavish sponsor of sportspersons) may hardly employ any," explains eminent judoka and judo/sumo wrestling

ing on the Center for money, as much as Rs 190 crores (according to *The Sportstar* of October 18, 2003), for the conduct of the Afro-Asian Games from October 24-November 1 this year in Hyderabad; on the other hand all over India competitors participate at state and national level competitions by digging deep into their own pockets or skip the meet if they can't afford it!

In this article, we have focussed on individual achievers currently into sports or related activities, the upper age limit being 30 years. Those under 30 who are taking a break or have 'retired' are not mentioned here due to constraints of space. Predictably, the largest number is from Bombay, probably due to the size of the Parsi population in the city compared to other metropolitan centers like Madras, Delhi or Calcutta where the community is small. To obtain information we contacted Parsi associations,

trustees, sportspersons in the know, etc in the metros as well as in places like Jamshedpur, Nagpur, Surat, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Poona, Hyderabad/Secunderabad, Bangalore, etc. Some responded. In several cases, even repeated follow-ups by phone and e-mail yielded no result! In a few cases, the information arrived too late for inclusion. By calling for bio data, we have tried to verify facts as far as possible.

We have also included individuals under 30 who have taken up sport or sport related activity as a career or profession.

Success in all Parsi sports or inter-bang events are not included, but we

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teacher Cawas Billimoria. "But everyone today, including Parsi youth, are more aware of sports or fitness industries. It is possible to create a niche."

The big bane, however, seems to be academic pressures. "Promising youngsters often fade away as they are taxed a lot in school," analyzes cricket umpire Shahvir Tarapore of Bangalore. "The formative years, from 12-16, are most important." Agrees Hufish Nariman, well-known badminton player who is into coaching: "Children do not train seriously. They play for a couple of years and give up."

"There is too much politics in sport, and that leads to disillusionment," opines women's hockey stalwart Arnavaz Damania of Poona. "We used to be so good. There are very few schools today even in Poona which really promote women's hockey. We do still have the sporting spirit. I would not say that parents are discouraging."

"One of the main reasons for being unable to go beyond a certain level is lack of money and sponsors," asserts Homi Motiwala, national sailing coach. But things are looking up, believes Rusi Bhungara, honorary secretary of Bombay's Parsee Gymkhana. "Standards will improve, they cannot get worse. Corporates are beginning to view other sports besides cricket with more enthusiasm."

Along with the rewards and recognition, however, come the downsides of worldwide sport today — the whisker wins, the moments of triumph which turn suddenly into nightmares of shame after a failed drugs test, the "inject and play on" syndrome which seeks to circumvent the whole-hearted respect one should have for the body and its boundaries.

Due to shortage of space, we present only brief snippets, a sampling of the pride and passion, the 'chariots of fire' that drive these young people. It is not possible here to do full justice to all their achievements. The various disciplines have been arranged in alphabetical order. The list is not comprehensive; there may be several more Zoroastrian sportspersons in India whose exploits are unknown to us.

Archery

Moving from Jamshedpur to Bombay this year to join college, (see "Arc of triumph," Sports, *Parsiana*, April 2003) 18-year-old archer Yazneen Sarosh Rana

finds herself in a fix! While the Tata Archery Academy in Jamshedpur, from where Yazneen honed her skills to pick up many a medal, was a second home close to home, Bombay has no archery range within miles of either the college where she studies or the hostel where she lives! But Yazneen is upbeat, despite the fact that the sports official she met here was left scratching his head in bewilderment at this strange request for a place to practice archery! "We have shifted her target by truck from Jamshedpur to Bombay," says mother Pervin, a task far simpler than finding a place to shoot arrows in a megapolis. "Don't worry, I will work something out," says Yazneen with the commitment of a champion!



Athletics Marathon

In November last year Peshotan Jehanbux Mehta ran a distance of 42.2 km in two hours, 48 minutes and 55 seconds and secured a 19th rank at the 18th All India Prize Money Indira Marathon in Allahabad. "I am aiming at climbing upwards in the rankings — am looking at a seventh or sixth placing," he says, adding that to his knowledge there is no other Parsi in the medal placings. "Running long distances improves your fitness, you live longer. A proper, balanced diet is very essential," says the marathon man who trains regularly along Marine Drive, the Race Course, Worli Naka or Shivaji Park in Bombay.

Shot put

"Shot put and discus throw are my hobbies," says 14-year-old schoolboy Meherzan Beheramshah Mazda who lives and trains in Dahanu Road, 100+ km from Bombay. "I used to be a fair shot in basketball, then I took up shot put and started winning! I'm a good runner too, so I can do both," he smiles. Narrates mother Roxana: "Sometimes at competitions Meherzan tells me, 'see those huge guys — like sumo wrestlers, I won't win.'" But win he does and breaks records too, often travelling from Dahanu to Bombay for competitions, leaving home at 4.30



a.m. and returning by 9 p.m. the same day, exhausted but elated.

In her ICSE year in Bombay is 15-year-old Kainaz Yazdi Mistry who, despite the lack of regular training this year, picked up a gold at the ICSE nationals at Lucknow in October 2003. "We athletes are rough and tough. I'm very happy doing shot put — I relax and enjoy it" (see "Ironing it out," Sports, *Parsiana*, April 2003). Concentrating currently on studies, Kainaz laughingly queries: "Do I have a choice this year?"



Track events

Mehernosh Jamshed Bamboat's employers allow him time out for training. "Sports promotion is important for organizations," says the 25-year-old athlete who has been training since 1994 and has represented Maharashtra at the nationals in 200 m on three occasions. Winner at state championships and at the World Zoroastrian Games in 2000 at Houston, Texas in 200 m ("it was freezing cold, -1°C on the day of the race!"), the Bombay boy says he loves the competition as well as the workouts at the gym and on the field — the speed and endurance build-ups, "the torture" workouts! Mehernosh has also recently stepped into coaching for young kids.

Having started training just three years ago, slim-as-a-gazelle, 16-year-old champion sprinter Ayesha Neville Billimoria quips: "What I really miss is the food I can't have — no junk food, chocolates or any sweet stuff! I have to have boiled chanas, khajoor (dates) with milk, etc which will build up my strength. Sometimes my timing goes down and my family and my coach in Bombay get very upset with me. I have to sort this out! I want to continue training, I want to reach international level."



"Success in sports means a certain amount of sacrifice. You either give up or you give in," says sprint siblings Raiyan and Aresh Burjor Banaji's mother Jenai. Everything in the boys' lives —



6. Rayomand Banajee
 7. Omar Balsara
 8. Zeenia Patel
 9. Peshotan Mehta
 10. Ruhshaad Daroga
 11. Simone Poonawalla





3



4

1. Yazneen Rana
2. Zerwan Suratia
3. Kyra Shroff
4. Kaikhusru Irani
5. Kainaz Mistry



5



9



10



11



Raiyan
(left)
and
Aresh
Banaji

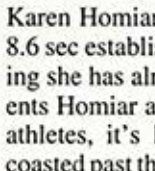
schooling in Bombay, tuition timings, outings, etc — is tuned to athletics (see "The brothers Banaji," Sports, *Parsiana*, April 2003.) Being on track at state meets in smaller towns like Karad in Maharashtra bring the boys in touch with athletes from different backgrounds and levels. Interaction and communication in Marathi become the name of the game, along with winning or losing!

"I love athletics, the place where I train, the friends I train with," says 13-year-old Kayrus Maneck Unwala. Last year, the Bombay schoolboy became a navar, coming as he does from a navar family. "Of course that meant a drop in performance for athletics," says mother Feroza, but with two-and-a-half to three hours of training and exercise, four times a week, Kayrus is back on track and raring to go!

Training seven evenings a week in Bombay is 10-year-old Scherezade Hoshedar Contractor. Participating in anything from 50 m to 400 m, Scherezade also does sand running and cross-country (one to one-and-a-half km). "I like cross-country and middle distance," she chirps. Remarks mother Aban: "Though it's still early to tell, Scherezade shows good potential for middle distance or long distance. We want her to excel."



She's seven-and-a-half years old, has started training but recently and already has a state record under her belt! At the Maharashtra State Sub Junior Athletic Championships held at Karad in February 2003,



Karen Homiar Mistry's 50 m sprint in 8.6 sec established a new record, a timing she has already bettered! With parents Homiar and Rachita both national athletes, it's little wonder Karen has coasted past the competition with a gold

at every meet she has participated in so far!

Basketball

At 6'3½", Poona's Rayumand Eruch Irani has the height required of a basketball player. Irani was among the 16 probables assembled in Delhi for the selection of the India team for a forthcoming Asian basketball event. "On the basketball court, you are in action all the time. In cricket, for example, you wait for the ball to come. Basketball requires great stamina. Practice at selection camps can go up to eight hours a day," states the lanky lad who is also a good volleyball player (see "On a new high," Sports, *Parsiana*, September 2002).



Billiards/Snooker

"In 1995, I started playing billiards for fun at Bombay Gymkhana," narrates 25-year-old Omar Rohinton Balsara. Competition successes followed and Omar is currently ranked number three in Maharashtra in men's snooker. Now working with his family firm, Omar continues to participate in major competitions, though work pressures cut into regular practice. "The sport (snooker/billiards) is quite addictive," he chuckles.



Cricket

Left arm spinner, right hand bat and captain of the under 15 Hyderabad team is 15-year-old Khushal Parvez Jilla, who has been selected in the under 17 probables for the state. "I enjoy batting, bowling and fielding equally," enunciates the Standard X student who says he takes it all, including the captaincy, in his happy stride. "There are other Parsis playing at Club level. Khushal has progressed up to state level," says Parvez. "It's a lot of extra effort, but it's worth it and I want to take it up as a profession," notes the Hyderabad lad who has played so far in 256 matches in various age groups, with a batting average of 44.20 and has taken 390 wickets.



Football

Versatility is the name of his game. He

plays first division football and hockey in his hometown, Calcutta. "I have loved football since I was very young," says 22-year-old Jahan Noomi Mehta. "The Calcutta League is the toughest league in India," he explains. Playing this year for Wari Athletic Club in the super division of the IFA (Indian Football Association) League and the IFA Shield, Jahan explains that the IFA Shield is one of the oldest soccer tournaments in the country. The sheen of silverware in his trophy cupboard includes awards in table tennis, athletics and cricket! "Dad and I play hockey in the first division together," he says, while weekends may see father and son playing soccer together! Mother Prochy is still a medal winner in veteran athletics while sister Sanaya is an aerobics instructor. It's all in the genes!



Gliding

"Gliding is definitely worth it as a sport," says 25-year-old Beheram Russi Mistry who established a record last year when he flew a glider over Poona for seven hours, 35 minutes (see "The fun of flying," Sports, *Parsiana*, October 2002). "It's frustrating however that we don't get to fly cross-country (as the chances of damaging the glider are higher)," he declares. It's a strange kind of sport, too, he explains, as a flight can last from a few minutes to several hours and one can go on flying till the weather conditions die out. With gliding clubs heavily subsidized by the government, "it's tremendous to get to use these facilities at very reasonable cost." Cutting in on the popularity of gliding are activities like para sailing which "gives you much more freedom. You can para sail at your own time, pack up and walk home!"



Martial arts

Judo/Sumo wrestling

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old judoka Jehangir Rustom Jejeebhoy, describing his three training stints in Japan. Since children in Japan start learning judo at a much earlier age

than in India, by the time they are 12 or 13 they have fine-tuned their technique and can concentrate on speed and power, he explains. Standing first at practically every competition he has participated in since 1997, Jehangir won the gold at the Maharashtra State Junior Judo Championship in Parbhani in August 2003 and was invited to participate in the Open Trials at Patiala for selecting the Indian judo team for the Senior World Championships. The Bombay junior college student has also represented India in sumo wrestling at the Asian Sumo and Junior Sumo World Championships in Osaka in 2001 and 2002. "I like the discipline of judo. If you work hard the chances of success are good. In cricket, for example, you may practice long hours at the nets, but your team-mate may drop that vital catch!" explains the lad who is also a keen cricketer. "In judo, it's your own glory or your own blame!"

Karate

"As a form of fitness karate has many advantages," says 23-year-old Jasmin Homi Amalsadvala (see "Striking silver," *Sports, Parsiana*, February 2000). "It gives you confidence, even on the street you can defend yourself. You're bettering your body. If you are careful injuries can be avoided." International rules are changing, notes the karateka who has won in Macau and Japan.

Rohmin Rohinton Aref obtained his Ni-dan (2nd degree) junior black belt at the young age of 11 in December 2002. "I love karate. I feel it's fun. You can build up your body very well too," says the 12-year-old who started karate when he was three-and-a-half years old! Part of the All India Goju Kai Karate-Do (I.K.G.A.) team who went on a training-cum-competition program to Japan and Malaysia in November 2003, Rohmin picked up a



silver in kata and a gold in shiai in the tournaments there.



Anaisha Feroze Patch also did her Ni-dan last December. Though she is currently in Std X, Anaisha was part of the I.K.G.A. team, winning silver medals in shiai in Japan and Malaysia. Now 16, Anaisha also started karate when she was three years old.

Also doing the Ni-dan examination was Hector Freddy Nadirshaw. "The series of fights, the punishment you take is very tough," says the 15-year-old who is in his final year in school.



Among the I.K.G.A.'s prize winners in the Far East are brothers Zarvaan and Azhaan Merchant, Hormazdyaar Chinoy, Natalia Dalal and Shahen Sidhwa.

Taekwondo

Cherag Sarosh Rana, 17-year-old Std XII student of Jamshedpur, has talent and tenacity — he is a black belt (Dan I) and medal winner at state level taekwondo championships; has won the 'best diver' prizes in interclub swimming for five years and loves going off on hiking, camping, rappelling and other adventure activities. Cherag is presently into coaching juniors in taekwondo. Says mother Pervin: "Taekwondo is a difficult and dangerous sport. One can really get hurt if the opponent doesn't play clean." Cherag is archer Yazneen Rana's brother.



Motocross

Daredevil biker Rustom Kersi Patel is irrepressible! "I am very happy with my spirit and form," he chirps, having raced in five events in the last couple of months and won in all! "In a place like Bombay, where can I practice," queries the 24-year-old. In Bangalore, up-and-coming riders ride on track regularly, he elaborates, but "I have to just focus on keeping myself fit" — jog



five km, cycle 10 km, spend hours at the gym (see "Revved and ready," *Sports, Parsiana*, October 2002). Among the top bikers who form Team TVS Racing, Rustom has a complaint: "I wish we racers were more recognized in the country. A cricketer plays two matches for his state and joins a legendary league! We achieve so much in a dangerous sport and no one even knows who we are!"

Racing

In his fourth consecutive year of racing and currently standing at the top of the 2003 JK Tyre National Racing Championships in the Formula Maruti class is Sarosh Peerooze Hataria (see "Hataria's formula," *Sports, Parsiana*, April 2002). With three straight wins and a second place in Rounds I and II, the 24-year-old looks to the going getting speedier and speedier! Having won the 2001 and 2002 editions of the Championship, Sarosh became the first driver to win this national event (Formula Maruti's) two years in succession.



"With a super new track at Coimbatore, the future of motor racing in India seems to be improving," notes Sarosh, though the biggest hurdle is lack of funding in what is a fast and furious and very expensive sport. Racing has a high advertisement value and Sarosh is banking on individuals, Indian or non-resident, and companies to provide the crucial sponsorship and support. "Despite all the difficulties, I am 100 percent committed to my dream of 'Racing for India,'" says the man on the fast track.

Convincingly winning in Calcutta the second round of the six-round MRF Formula Mondiale National Karting Championships, Poona's Rayomand Dadabhoy Banajee stands in joint first place (with Deepak Chinappa, as of October 8, 2003) in the championship rankings. "Yes, I am satisfied with my racing performance so far, considering that finance has always been a problem," says the 23-year-old (see "From pole to podium," *Sports, Parsiana*, November 2002). "I have been racing on scholarships. There is a lot I want to achieve, but I desperately need sponsorships." Having finished second in the Indian National Formula Racing Championships, Rayomand won a scholarship to race for Team India Racing in



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Malaysia. With opportunities arising abroad, Rayomand says he can take part "only if I can produce the finances." Does the 'fear factor' of racing bother him? "Not really," he replies. "It's part of the game. In fact, the excitement is what draws you."



Racehorse breeding

"Horse breeding is a difficult industry — it needs years and years of experience and hands-on work," asserts 27-year-old



Simone Zavaray Poonawalla who manages a part of the Youngstock Division at the Poonawalla Stud Farms in Poona (see "Spurs to success," *Parsiana*, August 2002). Simone has a strong emotional bond with horses, but managing a stud farm "needs sharp businessmanship — it can be a very daunting job!" she asserts. Racehorse breeding is also

a secluded industry, which requires a lot of time at the stud farm and for keeping abreast of the worldwide scenario in horse breeding. While family background and support are advantages, she laughingly adds that she has "a very tall order to fill because of Dad (Zavaray) and Uncle (Dr Cyrus Poonawalla)" and their multifarious achievements.

Rappelling, Rock climbing, River-crossing

Jamshedpur girls Sanya and Denzil Sarosh Muncherji are fired by the spirit of adventure. Now 11 and nine-and-a-half respectively, the girls took part in a trek in 2001 to Dodital in the Garhwal Himalayas. Organized by the Tata Steel Adventure Foundation, the trek from the base camp at 4,500 ft to Darwa Pass at 12,600 ft meant that both children, along with parents Sarosh and Friyan and others, covered a total of 80 km, sometimes trekking for more than 16 km a day. "I love the excitement," says Sanya who particularly enjoys trekking through jungle. "Rock climbing is fun. It's not so very difficult as the rope is there to help you," pipes Denzil. Among the thrilling pursuits they have taken part in are river crossing (where one walks across a shallow river, battling the current and the cold!) and "monkey roping" where one hangs upside down on a rope, suspended by a loop around the waist, and pulls oneself across to the other side.



*Sanya and Denzil
Muncherji*

River rafting ("in a moderate degree of difficulty, with no rapids, but the hard part is rowing and steering the rubber inflationary raft," explains Sarosh) and para sailing in Jamshedpur are great fun too, say the girls. They are the youngest para sailors in Jamshedpur, remarks Sarosh. The parents encourage adventure activities bearing in mind the

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cardinal principles, particularly in mountaineering — careful planning and safety first. "In the mountains, you have to be very disciplined. There is no second thought about it," observes Friyan.

Riding

Sixteen-year-old Poona lad Zerwan Phiroze Suratia took part this year in 11 events at the Second All India Sainik



Public Schools and Open Equestrian Championship 2002-2003 held in Nasik — and won a medal in each of them! His tally was the highest among all competitors, including cadets from Khadakvasla's National Defence Academy. "I've been riding since age three," says Zerwan. First it was a hobby, now it's a passion and Zerwan wants to carry it to a higher plane, though equestrian events are expensive and carry some inherent risks. "We are stabling a horse for him at the Equestrian Academy of Poona, though it is a heavy expense. We do not want him to be sidelined, in case a choice of good horse is not available," asserts mother Binaifer. Aiming to send Zerwan for training abroad, the family is looking to community support, not only in terms of finance but also in terms of knowledgeable information as to the most suitable academies or instructors under whom the lad can train.

"Riding is very mentally relaxing and is a good de-stressing medium," says Poona lass Huzannah Dada Bhoj Banajee who is a riding instructor at the Jalaloupe Equestrian Centre (JEC) at Talegaon near Poona. Huzannah competed last year in the 16-18 age group dressage competition as part of the JEC team in the All India Schools Equestrian Championship in Poona. Though in college in the Peshwa city, Huzannah spends summer, Diwali and Christmas vacations at the JEC, training some of the best riders there for higher levels of competition, with dressage being her forte. "To me, riding is not only a sport... it is my life... I want to



be a horse trainer and psychologist some day, training horses to be of help as therapy for the mentally and physically challenged," she declares. Huzannah is racer Rayomand Banajee's sister.

Roller skating

Having participated in the Seventh Junior Artistic World Roller Skating Championship in Germany in 2002, Bombay's Zeenia Khushru Patel (see "Zeenia's skating skill," Sports, *Parsiana*, September 2001) describes her experience: "It was



scary, but very nice. It gave me a lot of confidence." The exposure to international standards also brought to the fore aspects often lacking in India. "Everything was on the dot, very systematic, very organized — so different from the way things are done in India."

With figure skating requiring a fine-tuned technique in the display of turns and edges, Zeenia practices two to four hours every day upping it to six hours before a championship!

Champion roller skater, Yohann Shiraz Doongaji of Nagpur is not only into roller skating but plays roller hockey as well. Captain of the under-14 Maharashtra team in roller hockey, the 12-year-old has no doubts in his mind: "I want the competition to be tougher! I want to do more. Two hours of practice is not enough!" Explains Shiraz, "Nagpur dominates skating at national level" (see "On a roller ride," Events and Personalities, *Parsiana*, May 1998).



Initiated into skating during a holiday to Kulu Manali when he was but five years old, Yohann's potential was soon spotted and encouraged. To raise the level of his sport, Yohann intends to take a short course in roller hockey in north India, adds Shiraz.

Rugby

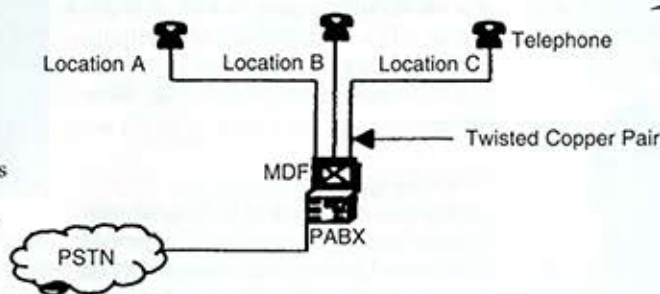
"To be a good rugby player, you need to have the mind of a chess player, the fitness of an Olympic athlete, the strength of a bull, the heart of a lion and the grace of a gazelle," describes Kaiwan Turel who was one of the seven Parsis among the 17 players comprising the Hammers (Bombay Gymkhana 'B' team) at the All

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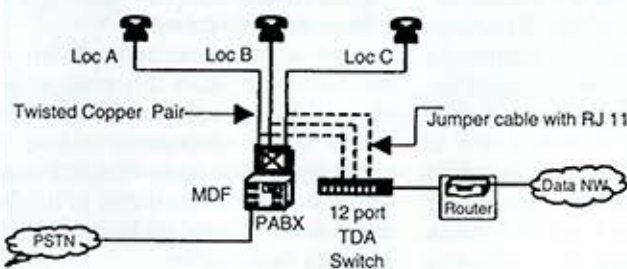
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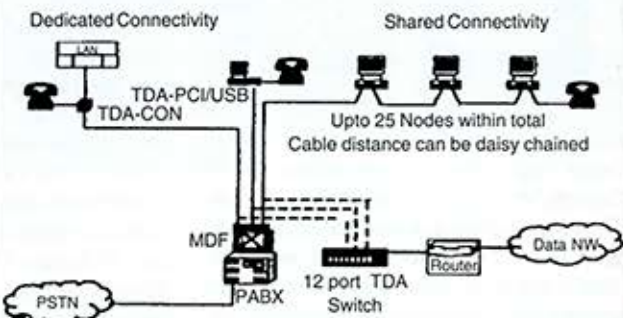
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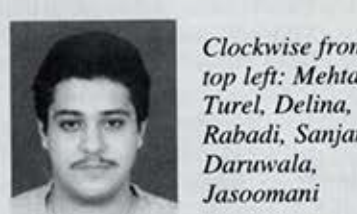
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Clockwise from top left: Mehta, Turel, Delina, Rabadi, Sanjana, Daruwala, Jasoomani

India Rugby Tournament in Bombay in September 2003. Zarwan Delina, Zarksis Daruwala, Zubin Jasoomani, Sherzad Rabadi and Vistasp Sanjana were the others in the 'B' team while Viraf Mehta played for the Bombay Gymkhana 'A' team.

Most of the players were introduced to the Bombay Gymkhana team just a month before the tournament by Perzon Zend of Peekay Wines. While the 'A' team were runners-up from among the 15 teams in the fray, the Hammers picked up the prize for the most sporting team in the tournament with a display of "disciplined and passionate rugby."

"Rugby has brought out a whole new person in me. I have discovered new capabilities in myself!" says Rayomand Russi Jeejeebhoy of Calcutta who is currently working in Bombay. Having played cricket, tennis, football and table tennis earlier at the Calcutta Parsee Club which is to sporting Calcuttans "a second home," Rayomand got into rugby by



chance when Herman Balsara (now emigrated to New Zealand) "taught me all I needed to know about the game." The fact that Indians are generally small built is a disadvantage as size and strength matter. "It's a physically challenging sport, but you can't be scared. If you are, you're better off playing some other game."

Shooting

Living on a chikoo farm in Palghar near Bombay probably provides 20-year-old Kaikhusru Mervan Irani the serenity he requires for shooting! "Nobody taught me to shoot," he asserts. "I loved to handle weapons since I was a kid. One day Dad said 'try it out' and I did. I have improved by trial and error. Dad guides me as he also likes guns. My Dad and I are a team!" Kaikhusru picked up three golds at the G. V. Mavlankar Shooting Championships in Madras in September 2003.

Participating in standard, free, center fire and sport pistol events, Kaikhusru says he uses a pistol loaned to him by a family friend. It is "interchangeable" and can be used for different shoots. "Since I don't have a coach, I have to work much harder, be more religious about the practice," he observes, adding that Gulestan Faram Irani of Farshak Travels sponsors a part of his traveling and other expenses, including the cost of ammunition which varies from five rupees to Rs 25 per round of bullets.

Squash

"I was a leading squash player at the junior national level less than a decade ago... (Later) I took up coaching... and successfully completed the Asian Squash Federation Level 3 certified coaching course which made me the highest qualified squash coach in the country... About four years ago I was appointed the national coach at the age of 23... I am the youngest national coach in the world," says 27-year-old Cyrus Mehli Poncha. Two years ago Cyrus shifted base from his hometown Bombay to Madras where the Squash Racquets Federation of India had built a world class squash complex.

India is currently among the top five countries in the world for junior men and women's squash. Since his appointment as national coach, Cyrus has nurtured the team and traveled with them to six



handful of Parsis playing at the national level, he says.

Ranked number two in Maharashtra and number four in India in girls under 17 is 15-year-old Shahnaz Eric Dastur, now in her ICSE year which means regular training has taken a temporary backseat. Shahnaz is looking forward to going back to squash as well as ballet which she has also been doing for the last several years. "Both squash and ballet have given her a lot of good things," says mother Navaz. Into badminton earlier, Shahnaz moved to squash as both parents and brother Zahan, now 12, were all into squash! "I am enjoying it so much I would like to continue for as long as I can," says the teenager. With Zahan also into competitive squash, the game gives the children a direction besides studies, believes their mother.



Though Parsiana was unable to contact the players, November newspapers in Bombay mention several Parsi boys taking part in the Maharashtra State Open and others squash championships—Cyrus Vakil, Cyrus Sidhwa, Cyrus Appoo, Cyrus Warden, Riyad Seervai, Ness Billimoria, Neville Tata...

Swimming

Winner of two bronze medals [200 m butterfly and 400 m individual medley (IM)] at the recently concluded Afro-Asian Games in Hyderabad is 18-year-old swimmer Rehan Jehangir Poncha (see "Prowess in the pool," Sports, Parsiana, February 2003). Swimming at the FINA World Championships in Barcelona in July 2003, Rehan's timing was the fastest ever recorded by an Indian swimmer in the IM. Analyzing his performance with clinical professionalism, Rehan says: "Yes, I did win two medals at the Afro-Asian Games but to

World Championships, six Asian Championships and 15 individual squash championships. Currently there are only a

be frank, I thought I had worked hard enough to do better. I was disappointed with my timing. Every swimmer's priority in competition is to do the best timing. If a medal comes along with it, that's fine. I have not spared myself at all during my short training stints in Perth, Australia. I have shaved off two seconds in the 200 m butterfly and three seconds in the 400 m IM." But to achieve any substantial result, one needs to train there for continuous longer periods, he believes. "I love the group I train with in Australia. The levels of motivation are so high. There are 30-40 other swimmers, so a race situation develops even during training."

With his college, Shree Bhagwan Mahavir Jain College in Bangalore, extremely supportive and his parents Shirin and Jehangir ready for him to sacrifice a year in studies, Rehan says he hopes to achieve the Olympic Qualifying Time (OQT) which is set at 2:04.56 min for the 200 m butterfly. Notes *The Sportstar* of August 9, 2003: "For a 17-year-old Indian, even an Olympic qualification would



Rehan Poncha

be a noteworthy achievement. Though younger swimmers from powerhouses such as Australia and the US had been making the Olympic mark, for an Indian junior such an achievement itself would place him above the country's rest."

Training at the Body Rhythm pool in south Bombay under coach Vispy Besania since January 2001 is 10-year-old Hormuz Zarir Baliwalla (see "Aquatic achievement," *Sports, Parsiana*, February 2003). At the Maharashtra State Aquatic Championship in Nasik this year, Hormuz won a medal of each hue and was selected for the sub junior nationals in Delhi where the team won a gold in the 4 x 50 free style relay. "I'm very satisfied with my progress; my coach is happy too," says the youngster. "There is increasing competition. Standards are improving, records are being broken at every meet," remarks father

Zarir, adding *Hormuz Baliwalla* that academic pressures in Bombay and Maharashtra are too great and little support is given to people excelling in sports. Hormuz's 12-year-old sister Zara also trains five days a week under the same coach and participates in competitions as well.

Twelfth standard student Aresh Firdosh Daruwalla has been into competitive



Aresh, Shazneen and Spenta Daruwalla

swimming for 10 years and currently also plays water polo for his Bombay college team. Thirteen-year-old sister Shazneen is quite a "veteran," having started at the age of five (see "Splashing



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success," Sports, *Parsiana*, July-August 1997). Eight-year-old Spenta seeks to match her siblings stroke to stroke! "It's always a mad, mad rush," laughs mother Pervin.

Successful swimming siblings from Nagpur are 13-year-old Ayesha and 11-year-old Rohan Shahrukh Master. "My dad gave me a choice between karate



Ayesha
and
Rohan
Master

and swimming," says Ayesha who won golds at the CBSE West Zone Swimming Championship in August 2003, while Rohan picked up a gold and a bronze at the zonals last year. Brother and sister train at their school pool. "It is not at all difficult to combine swimming with academics," feels Ayesha.

Table Tennis

Securing second rank at the Surat city Inter School Table Tennis Tournament in October 2003, 12-year-old Zena Mehernosh Chipia is among the five selected from Surat for the state level meet in Bhavnagar this month. Coached by Surat's Viraf Varachhawala, Zena puts in two hours of enthusiastic practice every afternoon to enhance her strokeplay.



Tennis

"My power and consistency have improved. I am moving on court much more," explains 11-year-old Bombay girl Kyra Firdaus Shroff who has been training since January 2003 at The Nike-Bhupathi Tennis Academy in Bangalore (see "Pursuing her passion, Sports, *Parsiana*, August 2003). Practice at the Academy is seven hours a day, she says, and academics have to move along too. "We have received tremendous support from everyone — her school (St Anne's at Fort), administrative officials, etc," asserts Firdaus. If people see you are serious about the sport, they help in working towards one's goal. "It all depends on your



focus as a family — it obviously is contagious!" says the father.

"Sports makes life so interesting," bubbles 16-year-old Shanaya Khushru Anklesaria of Ahmedabad. Representing her state (Gujarat) at national tournaments, the interaction with different people and the travel to distant places add to the thrill of winning, says the teenager who has been into tennis since she was eight years old. Shanaya will represent Gujarat University at the All India University Games to be held in January 2004 in Bangalore.



Into competitive tennis too is Shanaya's 12-year-old brother Urvaksh who is among the players shortlisted to represent the state (Gujarat) at the National School Games to be held in Surat next month. Urvaksh, who puts in a solid four hours of practice each day, was a semi-finalist in the boys under 14 doubles and a quarter finalist in the singles at the Gujarat State Ranking Tennis Tournament in October this year.



Having played in tournaments in Sholapur, Nasik, Kolhapur, etc as well as his hometown, Nagpur, 13-year-old Yash Behram Patel finds the intensive coaching camps conducted by the Maharashtra State Lawn



Tennis Association "very interesting" and the competition pretty tough! The boys get up to "a little mischief" and get punished for it sometimes, he chuckles, with disarming candor.

Weightlifting

Among his several medals is the gold at the Greater Bombay Junior Weightlifting championships in September 2003. "Body building and weightlifting are two different sports," explains 17-year-old Ruhshaad Neville Daroga (see "Like fathers, like sons, Sports, *Parsiana*, Feb-

ruary 2001). "In body building, you build up and strengthen muscles. Weightlifting requires the application of strength in the muscles, using the right technique." Coming as he does from a family of eminent weight lifters, Ruhshaad trains under his father Neville and uncle Vispy Daroga. "Dietary supplements are essential but expensive," explains Neville, adding that while weight lifters in colder countries can train for two-three hours, "here you get bushed after an hour" due to the heat and humidity in Bombay.



Yachting

Sailing along in their Optimists (eight-foot sailing dinghies) are young Bombay mariners 12-year-olds Viraf Cyrus Heerjee and Xerxes Sheri Bamboat (see "The young men and the sea," Sports, *Parsiana*, March 2002.) "I love the fresh air, the fun of being on the water alone," states Viraf who is among the first 10 selected for the IODA (International Optimist Dinghy Association) Asian sailing championship to be held in Bombay at the end of this year. "I am sailing better, getting my boat to move faster," says Xerxes, who is also among those selected for the special, rigorous coaching camp conducted by champion yachtsman Farokh Tarapore, in preparation for the forthcoming Asian event.

Room at the top in sports is often fragile and fleeting. When you are ahead by a minute, it seems so small; when you are behind by a minute it seems like eternity. To all you young, deserving sports persons whose exploits have not been included, we can only say — tomorrow is another day!

Viraf Heerjee (left) and Xerxes Bamboat (right)



EDITORIAL VIEWPOINT

continued from page 3

tor general. Abroad, President's counsel Kairshasp Choksy was named finance minister of Sri Lanka and in South Africa Dr Frene Ginwala continues as speaker of the South African National Assembly.

The Royal family paid its first visit to London's Zoroastrian Centre and Zoroastrians are present for Royal and Commonwealth state occasions in the UK.

Jamsheed Marker of Pakistan was named the United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy to the troubled island of East Timor; Karan Bilimoria of Cobra Beer was named by the London Chamber of Commerce as its Entrepreneur of the Year; Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Ice-Candy-Man* was made into a movie, 1947 *Earth*, and her play *Sock'em with honey* was performed at London's Cockpit Theatre, the first play written by a Zoroastrian to be staged there. Novelist Rohinton Mistry was twice nominated for the prestigious Booker award; Kaizad Irani's design for the Heroes Park at the new World Trade Center to be constructed in Manhattan was selected from over 400 entries.

India's first indigenous made automobile, the Indica, rolled out of the Tata stable and its Bombay landmark, The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel observed its 100th year. The House of Godrej also completed 100 years of existence and set up amongst other things the Confederation of Indian Industry Naoroji Godrej Centre of Excellence in Vikhroli. The Zoroastrian Co-operative Bank became a scheduled bank and has extended its services to 10 locations. Dr Firuza Parikh's pioneering work in stem cell research established her as an authority on reproductive assistance.

In community news the installation of the solar concentrators at Bombay's Doongerwadi demonstrated the community's ability and willingness to come up with a practical solution to a highly sensitive issue. The greening of Doongerwadi, with the assistance of the House of Godrej, demonstrated the community's commitment to the environment.

The establishment of a college at the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution marked one of the community's few forays into post

school academic education in Bombay. Parsi schools are aplenty (though sadly not Parsi students) but colleges unfortunately were not given priority.

The High Priests' resolution ostracizing interfaith marriages and their progeny and the subsequent retraction by three of the priests was a religious watershed. For the first time an edict by the clergy was treated with both scorn and outright contempt. The retraction underscored the realization that priests cannot

The consecration of the Shapoorji Fakirji Jokhi Agiary was undoubtedly the major religious event of the decade

expect people to comply with religious dictats issued without first ascertaining ground realities.

Our community now extends to the resurgent Zoroastrians of Tajikistan, Ukraine and Russia and the neo Zoroastrians in South America and elsewhere. This is their decade. The 3000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture celebrated under the aegis of UNESCO was mooted by the Tajiks. And so our tribe increases.

At *Parsiana*, NarYman Dubash's largesse made it possible to substantially extend editorial coverage on the community's young in this issue. Normally, on account of restricted financial resources, the number of editorial pages is determined by the amount of advertisements published. By having a sponsor, *Parsiana* was able to more than double editorial coverage. Though this meant a considerable workload for our small but highly dedicated staff, the returns outweighed the difficulties encountered. If the coverage appears uneven it is because we have undertaken this type of venture for the first time. If we obtain sponsorship for future issues this experience will stand us in good stead.

In our list of accomplishments over the past decade we must have left out many deserving events and individuals, both in India and abroad. To them we offer our apologies. It is only be-

cause we are hard pressed for time and pressured that the omissions have occurred. Readers are welcome to write to us to share their views on the past 10 years' achievements.

Parsiana is exceedingly grateful to all its well-wishers, readers, subscribers, advertisers, donors and sponsors for the generous assistance they have rendered us over the past four decades. We survive because of you.

And so on to the next decade. What will it bring? We can't be certain. Everything is so unpredictable. Maybe we'll get a world body. Maybe interaction between Zoroastrians, old and new, will increase. Technology will drive communication and communication will drive change. For a long time India lost the lead in matters Zoroastrian to North America. But now there seems to be a resurgence in India.

As this sleeping giant India awakens, so does the community. We are no longer a third world country to be scoffed at. There is a sense of pride in our accomplishments, perhaps more than ever after the first euphoria of Independence.

Even if the Zoroastrian community continues to shrink in numbers here, one thing is certain: we won't go quietly!

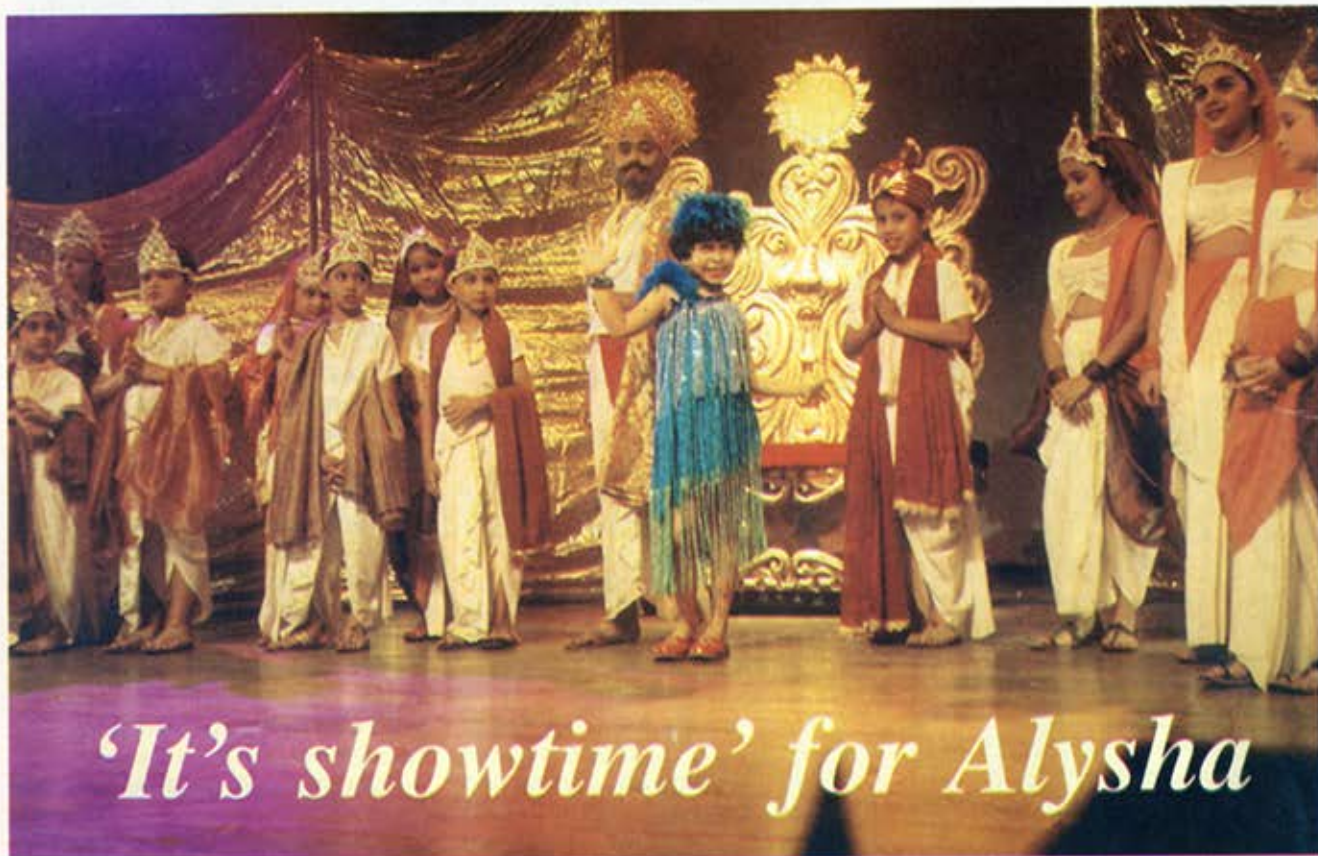
DESAI'S DENIGRATIONS

continued from page 52

tant to him, go ahead. You get the leader you deserve. My idea was to be of some service in view of my professional background." Dadrawala assured *Parsiana* that the pamphlet disparaging Tamboly "was not my work."

As a very active executive secretary of the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, Dadrawala has been doing a lot of traveling. Even before the election on September 27 he had spent time in the Philippines. During the election he was in India but not in Bombay and on October 24 left again for the US on professional work. When he returned after "two happy weeks in the US," his secretary told *Parsiana* that he did not want to speak to the Press. However, when *Parsiana* called him at his residence a couple of days later, Dadrawala, an old friend and contributor, was agreeable to a short telephonic chat.

We asked him if he would stand again. "I don't think I have any plans... nothing right now... I (just) want to put a lid on this and get on with life."



'It's showtime' for Alysha

Enacting the role of a choreographer young Alysha Khodaiji impresses the audience in the mythological musical

Parinaz M. Gandhi

On her fragile six-year-old shoulders rests the responsibility of unraveling the developments in the popular stage production, *It's showtime folks!! The Ramayana revisited*. The cast list has Alysha Khodaiji's name at the very top for she enacts the role of a choreographer in the 90-minute play. Whilst she delivers her impressive dialogs that appeal to both adults and children she creates quite a few ripples in the audience.

At the shows held at St Andrew's Auditorium and Sophia College Auditorium the audiences who come to witness the Raell Padamsee directed drama are not just friends and the doting parents of the 75 star cast in the five to 12 age-group. Often seen among the spectators are popular figures from the corporate, hospitality and entertainment world who have brought their own kids to witness

the magic and message of the timeless epic. Not that names or faces matter to Alysha who is so absorbed in her role that she has little time to think of anything else. Set in a modern day school, the children's behavior is juxtaposed against relevant episodes from the *Ramayana* to reinforce the values of sharing, caring, honesty, loyalty in an entertaining manner. Like all the other lines that she has learnt by heart Alysha repeats: "If I'm scared, how can I enjoy myself? And if I'm not having fun, how can I act?" Alysha remembers Padamsee's soothing words when she was anxious before the first show, "Chill out; everything will be fine."

Does she need any backstage prompting? Alysha does not understand the question. If she forgets her lines is there someone to help her? Yes, she says, a



Top: Alysha Khodaiji (center) with the star cast of *Ramayana*
Above (from left): Karishma, Behram, Alysha and Roxanne

person seated in the audience. Ask the little lass which is her favorite scene and prompt comes the reply, "I enjoy the ending where we dance, shout and finally the audience starts clapping." The musical includes participants from The Youth Wing of Sangit Kala Kendra, The Academy for Creative Expression, from Hormuzd Khambatta's dance troupe and kids from Akanksha, a non-governmental organization.

The months of hard work, the reduc-



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tion in her leisure time, the sacrifice of parties Alysha did not mind. As she puts it, "We did lots of practice, but it was lots of fun too." One particular practice session she found harrowing was when they had to rehearse in excessive heat in the absence of electricity.

Conversant now with Hindu mythology the artiste is familiar with the legends and folklore associated with Zoroastrianism too, she insists. "I ask people and they tell me. My Hindi teacher tells me about the different Gods and Goddesses... Jal Uncle (Ervad Jal Kootar) tells me stories" connected with the Zoroastrian religion. He will soon be readying her for her navjote in December.

Studying in the first standard at the Dhirubhai Ambani International School Alysha's present ambition in life is "to be an actress or a fashion designer." In the past she had nurtured different dreams, she confides. With her fascination for flashy clothes and jewelry will the sudreh-kusti be a part of her regular attire after her navjote? "On my navjote I will be giving a promise to God



that I'll wear the sudreh-kusti regularly," she declares. "I like to go to all temples," maintains the child who is a regular at the Mevawalla Agiary in Byculla and enjoys the tranquility at the H. B. Wadia Atas Bahram too.

She may not know the names of her favorite fire-temples or be able to convey her reasoning for liking it in there but she insists, "I'm very happy that I'm a Parsi. I'm proud that I'm a Parsi," her expressive eyes light up. "I feel proud that I can go to the agiary with people whom I know, with my friends from Rustom Baug."

Very happy to be a denizen of Rustom Baug, Alysha enjoys her camaraderie with her colony friends with whom she spends her evenings, playing Hide and Seek or other games. She is pleased that she can participate in different programs like the sports camp organized at Rustom Baug during the summer holidays. "I would always be last in the races," she candidly admits and yet, "My favorite game is running..."

Keeping pace with her are her parents Roxanne and Behram. After working for 14 years as an air-hostess with Air India, Roxanne is now devoting time to her daughters. Behram has a business, Supertec, with factories in Goa and Lonavla to manufacture corrugated boxes, and in his hometown Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) he has a dealership for Godrej products. Elder sister Karishma studies in the sixth standard at the Dhirubhai Ambani School. In fact she was the first from their family to show an interest in elocution and drama, training under Meher and Noshirwan Jehangir. A regular at all the Rustom Baug productions, Karishma's past experience and behind-the-scenes guidance helped little Alysha to shine out in the musical.

There were other Parsis too who made their presence felt on the stage like the lead vocalists Rhea Mogul and Zahaan Mehta. Backstage, the Zoroastrian contribution came from Fali Unnwala for sceneography design, Khambatta for choreography and Rashna Cooper for costume execution.

Each of them acts well the part. Together they muse on the myth, the melodies and their mission.

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The social spirit

Parsis continue the tradition of fund-raising for deserving causes

Hilla P. Guzder

It was a combination of cause and celebration. The cause was the raising of funds for the Maharashtra State Women's Council and the Time and Talents Club. The celebration was "Fiesta Adora," an afternoon of fun with a Spanish slant — Spanish music, a demonstration of Spanish cooking, a mini bazaar, free gifts, raffle prizes and a chance for one lucky person at the Taj Ballroom on August 2, 2003 to win an 18-carat diamond-studded rakhi, on the eve of Raksha Bandhan, courtesy Adora Collections!

The organizational thread weaving the afternoon together was DBS Office Business Centers and its dynamic director Pervaz Aggarwal. "Adora" means glory in Spanish, announced Aggarwal, exhorting the assembled ladies and the sprinkling of gents to walk around the Ballroom to view and buy the trendsetting jewelry, sparkling in its showcases, as well as the embroidered articles and novelties on sale at the various stalls.

Stirring up an appetite for Spanish cuisine with a live demonstration was young Taj chef, Kaizad Kamdin. "Onions, garlic, herbs and olive oil are basic ingredients in Spanish cooking," narrated Kamdin, towering over his collection of pots, pans, spatulas and spoons, the tall chef's cap adding to his considerable height! "It's always a little bit of this, a little bit of that; the Spanish play with the food and improvise," he described, deft fingers sprinkling pepper, peppers and potatoes into the whisked egg mixture, popping it into the oven and upturning the well-risen Spanish omelette onto a plate.

"I have always been fascinated by the hotel industry," Kamdin told *Parsiana*. "After I started my training at the Indian Institute of Hotel Management at Aurangabad, I realized I had a strong inclination towards the kitchen. For me cooking is a passion and Parsis, as you know, are fond of food!" Specializing in Continental cuisine and attached currently to the banquet rooms, the young

man originally from Poona has been with the Taj in Bombay for four years.

As tall glasses of sangria (a cocktail of red wine, orange liqueur, orange juice, chopped apple, etc), did the rounds of



The creativity of cuisine: Aggarwal (right) felicitates Kamdin

the Ballroom, Aggarwal announced: "With the typical generosity of the Billimoria family, Cobra Wines forwarded to us a case of red wine to use in the making of sangria."

Chief guest Zarine Khan, successful entrepreneur and interior designer, lauded Aggarwal's "zest, enthusiasm and effort" despite the unexpected problems that cropped up due to a change of date from July 30 to August 2 because of a Bombay bandh. One of India's first fashion models, Khan exhorted women to assert their individual identity. "The creativity of the wife should not be strangled, it should flow and grow," she stated, asserting that women are equal if not better than their male counterparts in all fields today. But never let go of your feminine traits or become bullies or nags at home, she advised. Khan's interior design business has blossomed to include export of furniture, as well as interior design for prestigious projects like the palace of the king of Nepal, five star hotels, corporate offices, etc, despite the fact that she has no formal

degree in interior design.

In addition to running DBS Office Business Centers — the "you run your business while we run your office" people — which has seven centers in six major cities, Aggarwal also runs an enterprise called "My Beautiful Embroideries" which promotes Indian hand embroidery. The 1992 riots in Bombay displaced many skilled artisans who went from door-to-door seeking work. "I enjoy helping the craftspeople and am excited about finding a market for their talents. The fountain of enthusiasm it brings forth is truly appreciable and keeps alive the spirit of creativity in my life," she asserts. Young men take the order and then courier it off to their villages — hundreds of miles away — where the entire family works around the frame upon which the fabric to be embroidered is fastened. The work force has increased from two families to three. Along the way "some trials, plenty more tribulations" are encountered but the final product does us proud, she notes.

The rich creations of saris, scarves, stoles, skirts, kameez-pants, etc are exported on order to the US, UK, Canada, Europe, Hongkong, Bangkok, etc, ranging in price from US \$ 100 to \$ 800, which include air courier charges, according to their brochure. Aggarwal favors the "Parsi gara" style of embroidery — flowers, birds and borders in resplendent colors on rich silk. "I use motifs similar to the traditional *garas* and modernize them with georgette or chiffon, instead of the traditional *gajji* silk," Aggarwal told Namrata Sharma Zakaria in a newspaper interview. "This brings the cost down drastically. While a traditional gara would cost anything between two lakh to five lakh rupees, the ones I make cost between Rs 28,000 and Rs 48,000. Some people frown, saying 'Oh, but this is new.' I think it makes the saris more accessible and keeps them alive." Aggarwal's Parsi lineage has given her six traditional *garas* which she preserves

From left, 1st row: clear water on tap; the pre-project trudge uphill; 2nd row: Time and Talents Club ladies with villagers at Morba and Pimpalwadi



as antiques as they are too precious and delicate to wear and she believes it is sacrilege to cut up a gara. "My travels take me to a lot of exciting places and along with me goes a bundle of My Beautiful Embroideries," she states, as Indian embroideries are "hot fashion news in the West."

With *Millennium Recipes*, the cook book published by The Time and Talents Club (T&TC) in 2002, achieving brisk business from their stall at the Fiesta and elsewhere, T & TC president Delara Jejeebhoy says the Club is down to its last few copies and a reprint would be required. Sale proceeds from the book serve to further the Club's

numerous charities. As part of an ongoing project, five villages in Panvel district have been helped with a clean supply of piped water, and the Club is soon to embark on the sixth village (jointly with the Red Cross), explains Jejeebhoy, adding that the project came about as for several reasons villagers had been relocated by the government to a place which was uphill and far from a water source. "The women had to walk several kilometers up and down many times a day to fetch water. Now that the pipes have been laid and pumps supplied, the vil-

lagers have benefited to such an extent that Balwadis have opened, women are occupying themselves with sewing, etc. The government has declared one of them, village Shivansai, a model village," states Jejeebhoy. With T&TC now in its 70th year, major fund raisers are planned for later this year and in early 2004 to further their objectives of help to the deserving in the fields of health, education and social relief.

"At the close of World War I, there was a feeling among the women of Bombay, both Indian and European, that

From left: Savera School products on sale; children in need of special care in song and dance



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the energy aroused during War Work should not become dormant and (they) decided to form a Women's Council. Thus the year 1919 heralded the birth of the Bombay Presidency Women's Council [later christened the Maharashtra State Women's Council (MSWC)] with the wives of the then British officials/dignitaries as president and chairman and Lady Mehri Dorab Tata as vice chairman," states the MSWC resumé.

Tata was also the first Indian president of the Council which has dedicated itself over the last eight decades to the social and economic upliftment of women and children. While MSWC's Gulestan and Rustom Billimoria Savera School at Fort focuses on children in need of special care, The Homi J. H. Taleyarkhan Training Centre seeks to provide skills like embroidery, catering, beauty and grooming, etc to young girls sent to their Asha Sadan ('House of Hope' for women and children, established way back in 1921) which also rehabilitates commercial sex workers by providing them an alternative profession.

"We have a number of Parsi ladies on our Funds Committee—Thirity Taleyarkhan, Khorshed Aga and others have been with us for a very long time," ex-

plains current MSWC vice chairman Farida Patel. "Perveez is the vice chairman of our Funds Committee and helps us with ideas as well as facilities."

MSWC also runs the Bapnu Ghar at Worli which provides temporary shelter and a hostel for working women in social distress, the Nari Khandelwal Sadan which runs a free library and reading room; projects for street children, health clinics, family planning and adoption programs. The Labour Committee, Matunga Labour Camp runs child and adult literacy classes in Hindi, Marathi and English at Dharavi (Asia's largest slum). Their permanent building with a courtyard, amidst the squalid labyrinth of open sewers and shanties, serves as an oasis of learning. It also has vocational training and recreation facilities. The Funds Committee has its task cut out, with an annual 15 percent increase in expenditure, due to inflation as well as increases in pay scales, according to MSWC sources.

"How deep is your love for your brother," queries Aggarwal. Put it to the test and join hands for a good cause, she adds, endorsing the social spirit for which the Parsis have long been known.

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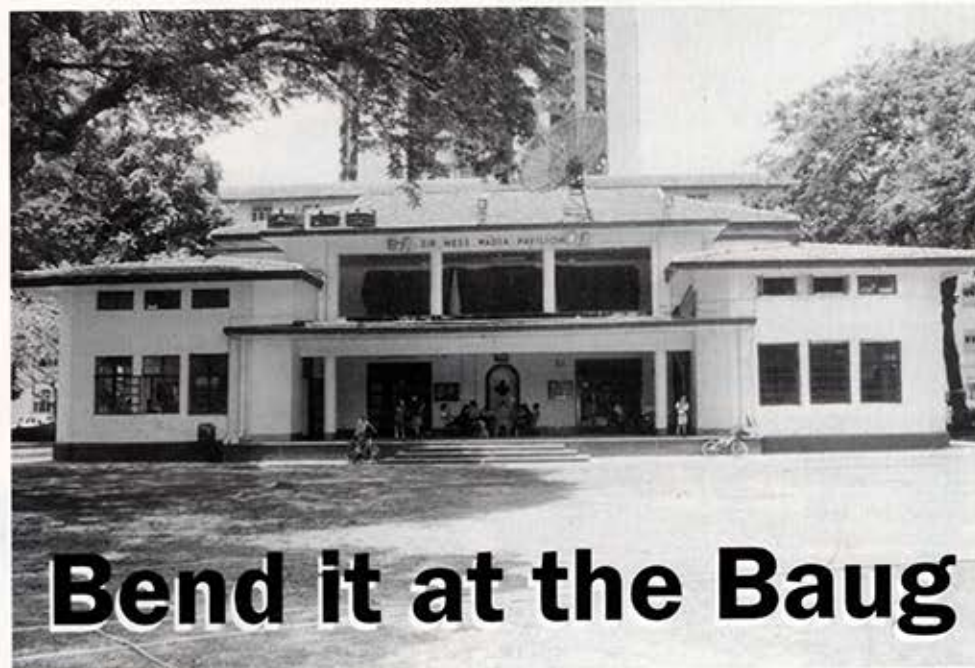
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The Sir Ness Wadia Club inculcates a sporting culture amongst the residents of Rustom Baug

Rashna Ardeshir

A center for sporting, cultural and social activities for the entire Parsi community, the year-round events organized by the Sir Ness Wadia Club (SNWC) ensure that the members have something to look forward to. Badminton, cricket, table tennis and football tournaments, the all-Parsis body beautiful contest, the May Queen Ball, athletic coaching camp, ghambar...are all popular. The two-fold objectives of organizing the indoor and outdoor tournaments are explained by the president of the Club Dr Porus Turner, "Young boys and girls should have some activities during the year that make them come together and cheer their teams. Secondly, in order to be winners, they (need) to improve their skills in the game and have a fit body."

If there is willingness, transparency and positive results, procuring funds from the community is never a problem, has been Turner's experience during the 10 years he has been elected president. "The Club's accounts always show a loss. It is only the May Queen Ball (recently organized by the Club along with the Rustom Baug Association on April 30, 2003), which helps us offset the losses... Besides generating much-needed funds for sporting and social activities of the SNWC it also helps in bringing young boys and girls of Rustom Baug and other Parsi colonies together. They learn to sing, dance and improve their poise by taking part in the fashion

show." The money received from the May Queen Ball is ploughed back into the Club's account.

Dara Doomasia, noted athlete of yesteryears, approached the Club to start the first ever Athletic Coaching Camp for young Parsis in April 2003 to impart training in sports and games. Says Turner: "Dara, along with his team, offered to coach free of cost. Approximately, 200 boys and girls had enrolled for this camp. Buses were hired to get the enrollees from Nowroz Baug and Godrej Baug via other Parsi colonies to Rustom Baug... Some philanthropists donated amounts worth Rs 25,000 each to make this camp a success, whereas some residents of Rustom Baug paid Rs 5,000 each." SNWC members contributed too as did charitable organizations like the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO).

The SNWC managing committee is also trying to make the ghambar an annual event. At the 2002 ghambar, an entertainment program was organized by the residents of Rustom Baug and Bai Jerbai Baug. Adds Turner: "Noted theater personality Dinyar Contractor and a couple of artistes from the Dadar Parsi Colony very kindly provided help... Those who could afford bought their tickets. Those who couldn't, were given free meals."

In its golden jubilee year the SNWC

is contemplating to organize a two-day carnival for all Parsis for the first time in December 2003. Says Turner: "We have been promised all help by the WZO and the BPP."

According to the SNWC constitution, only residents of Rustom Baug and Jerbai Baug can become members of this Club. Other members of the community are permitted only if they are temporary residents of these baugs. Their membership is renewed every two months.

Membership starts from the age of seven. Members under 18 are considered juniors. The fees for both permanent and temporary members are as nominal as Rs 6,000 for life, Rs 360 per annum for ordinary members and Rs 216 per annum for junior members. Memberships, are also given on quarterly basis.

There are some activities of the Club in which only residents of Rustom Baug and Jerbai Baug can participate. For example, bridge and carrom tournaments and senior citizens' night when the elders from both these baugs come together, listen to old songs, play housie and have a good time.

When Sir Ness Wadia died on April 22, 1952, his son Neville decided to build a recreation center in his memory

The Sir Ness Wadia Pavilion at Rustom Baug (above)



1 to 4: Coaching, athletics and camaraderie at the Zoroastrian Athletic camp



5: Volley ball
6: Badminton court
7: Cards and the senior citizen
8. The popular Ladies' Gym





From left : Turner, Jasoomoney, trustee of the R. D. Sethna Trust Farokh Antia, Dara Doomasia (also below), Mehta, Guzder, Zarthoshtimanesh, Sheroo Doomasia, Jokhi and Sethna; (Below) coaches of the Zoroastrian Athletic Camp



Guzder who is one of the trustees of the Adenwalla Trust and Dinshaw Tamboly, WZO Trust Funds managing trustee. Both of them readily helped us with the finance from

for the residents of Rustom Baug and the neighboring Jerbai Baug. The Sir Ness Wadia Memorial Pavilion was constructed and equipped from the funds of the Rustomjee N. Wadia Trust. It was declared open by Sir Homi Mody on May 10, 1954.

Using the Club for recreational purposes and maintaining the Club well, are two different ball games altogether. The two peons open the gates of the Club (the Club's timings are 7.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.), look after the cleanliness, supervise games, help members in giving chairs, balls and run other errands. The custodian of the Club, Minoo Wadia, collects fees and maintains accounts...

The Men's Gym of the SNWC has been fully renovated, thanks to the magnanimous donation by NarYman Dubash. This encouraged the managing committee to start a separate Ladies' Gym and the entire Club's renovation was undertaken, the finance of which was provided once again by Dubash. In case a resident does not wish to become a member of the Club and just wants to



avail of the Gym's facilities, the membership fees are Rs 1,500 per annum. The membership of the Men's and Ladies' Gym is 72 and 83, respectively.

The indoor badminton court is, according to Turner, "one of the best in Bombay with complete wooden flooring and lighting of international standard."

The Rustom Baug grounds form part of the Club. Maintaining the grounds is the biggest expenditure for the SNWC. There are three gardeners engaged to ensure that the Club's lawns are always lush green. Turner reminisces: "The Rustom Baug grounds were rough, brown and uneven, filled with jutting stones. If, by chance, children would fall while playing, they (were likely to) break a bone. When we got a quotation of Rs 6,00,000 we approached Jamshed

their respective trusts. Money was also collected from residents of Rustom Baug and SNWC members. We converted the rough grounds into a lawn where children now play with confidence without getting hurt. We also noticed that some children could play only after dark when their parents returned from work. We floodlit the grounds, thanks once again to the WZO."

Private functions are allowed on the grounds only for residents of Rustom Baug and Jerbai Baug, their dependents and their immediate family members. Also, relatives staying in the Baug and whose names are on the list of tenants with the N. N. and R. N. Wadia Trust are eligible to reserve the grounds for private functions. But why not extend this facility to other non-resident Parsis as well? Replies Turner: "It can become a nuisance to residents. Forget about the loud music, we may land up with sanitation and hygiene problems. Food always attracts mosquitoes, rodents, cats..." The Rustom Baug grounds and the Club are made available once a year for activities of the BPP's Holiday Programme for Youth (HPY).

Obtaining donations and other help would not have been possible without the unity of the SNWC and the Rustom Baug Association which looks after the needs of residents, has its own president and its own managing committee. Says Turner with gratitude: "We consider the Rustom Baug Association as



Felicitating sports achievers: (top) Badminton player Hufriah Nariman; (left) sprinter Adille Sumariwala and Guzder and (right) athlete Hirji Nagarwalla and Mehta



part of us. Every year the Association contributes to the funds by way of advertisements worth Rs 10,000. They also contribute partly to the maintenance of the Rustom Baug grounds every year. Sometimes some disgruntled and misguided elements try to create a rift between our Club and the Association."

The successful running of the Club is due to the tireless efforts of its managing committee. The committee regularly holds its meetings every fortnight. When the need arises, they may even meet every alternate day. There is an election for the post of president every year. Turner had taken over presidentship from Homiar Shroff, vice president of the present managing committee. The other managing committee members comprise Adi Vazifdar, another vice president, Aashdin K. Billimoria and Khushro Contractor, joint honorary secretaries, Rustom L. Jasoomoney, treasurer and Darius Randeria, Cyrus Contractor, Hutoxi P. Dudhwala, Hoshang Doomasia, Kaizad Doomasia, Percy Bahamani, Hoshi Batliwala, Ratan Cooper and Nozer Tantra, members at large. SNWC members elect the managing committee, which in turn elects

the office bearers.

According to Turner, the Parsi youth is definitely geared to rise and take up the challenge for this minuscule community.

The future of the Club appears to be bright: "There are other Parsi colonies such as the Dadar Parsi Colony, which are doing equally

Summer camp

An array of activities were organized for children in the seven to 12 age group by the Rustom Baug Association during the summer holidays. The three-week summer camp from April 14 to May 3 kept 42 children happily engaged in a series of fun and educational activities, notes a report sent by Association vice president Kumi Darooowala.

Sessions in art and craft were conducted by Zarine Master, Hutoxi Irani and J. Bansal, dances by Urvi Sheth, cookery by Purnoor Taraporewalla, table manners by Dr Lily Mistry, flower arrangements by Armaity Mistry, karate by Sensei Vispi Kapadia, yoga by Shirley and Reshad. Classes in personality development, communication skills, voice culture, time management were conducted by Bansal. Gujarati classes where children were taught songs, poems, monajats, reading and writing by Mani Mulla were highly appreciated

by the children and their parents. The Gujarati sessions were sponsored by Dr Homi Dhalla of the World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation, mentions the press release.

Outdoor excursions to the Aarey Milk Colony and the Western Naval Command to see the ships and helicopters were both educative and enjoyable.

In addition to the regular competitions in rangoli, quiz, public speaking, dance, drama, etc, the grand finale on May 3 at the Sir Ness Wadia Pavilion saw the children of the summer camp as also the talented children of Bai Jerbai Baug and Nowroz Baug stage a delightful entertainment program. It was conducted by the project co-ordinator Dr Lily Mistry. The president of the Association Rustom Sethna appreciated chief guest Dhalla's efforts in promoting Gujarati at different baugs and schools.



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good work for the community. Considering the few members we have (100 life members and 200 ordinary members), and the number of residents in Rustom Baug and Jerbai Baug,

we are doing very well in our own small way. Of course, we hope to do even better in the near future."

The ambience of athletics

Rustom Baug's vast 'green lung' (central field or maidan) and serene surroundings provided breaths of fresh air for city children assembled for the four-week Zoroastrian Athletic Camp. For the many who live in small urban apartments and go to schools which have little or no playgrounds, the early morning freedom to run, jump and exercise on a green carpet whetted their appetite for sporting encounters.

Organized by Rustom Baug's Dara Doomasia under the auspices of the Sir Ness Wadia Club (SNWC) from May 4-31, 2003, the Camp was free of cost for the youngsters who were also given complimentary T-shirts and caps to shield them from Bombay's strong midsummer sun. The Camp attracted a registration of 242 children who came from all over Bombay and from as far as Thana as well. Free transport was arranged from pick-up points such as Gamadia Colony at Tardeo and Nowroz Baug at Parel.

"A heartening feature was the sight of over 50 children in the age group three to six," states Doomasia who is a former Indian universities and state decathlon champion and a qualified Loughborough coach of England's Amateur Athletic Association. Doomasia is also the coach of St Agnes High School which has won the championship several times at Bombay's inter-school athletic meets. Since almost 90 percent of the children at the Zoroastrian Camp were novices, a 'preview performance' was conducted in the first couple of sessions to assess potential, says Doomasia. The children were placed in specialist groups headed by 10 state and national level coaches and athletes. Khushro Contractor and Govind Dangi supervised the sprints and jumps, Perinaz Printer and Karishma Birdy concentrated on the senior girls. Behram Irani was in charge of middle and long distance runners. Hiten Chagata demonstrated correct throwing techniques in the shot put and discus, Jennifer Billimoria trained the javelin throwers. Children below six years were put through their paces by Prof Jehangir

(Jhangoo) Mistry, Jehangir Sholapurwala and Scherezade Mistry. "Yes, we could see potential even in the youngest ones and we sent some of them up into the next higher group," remarks Jhangoo Mistry. Correct stretching exercises and warm-ups strengthened muscles and avoided injuries.

A Sunday was enlivened with a talk and demonstration by Zubin Zarthoshtimanesh, renowned yoga exponent, assisted by sports medicine doctor Vispi Jokhi, not only for the children but for their parents and coaches as well. A novel touch was added during the last week when the 10 coaches brought some of their own medals and presented them to promising children, to ignite the spark of pride in athletic achievement.

While the Camp was inaugurated by Dinshaw Tamboly, trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) and managing trustee of the WZO (World Zoroastrian Organisation) Trust Funds, BPP chairman emeritus Jamshed Guzder and BPP trustees Dinshaw Mehta and Maneck Engineer lent their support. Raising resources to meet the expenses of the Camp was a major task, says Doomasia, but generous help from various sources such as the BPP, WZO, R. D. Sethna Trust, Antia Trust, etc helped to balance the budget. At the concluding function, the presentation of certificates and medals added sparkle to the show. Donors, coaches and senior sportsmen who had been associated with Rustom Baug in the past were felicitated.

"The Camp was very professionally conducted. There was strict discipline, good management, no loitering on the lawn," remarks parent Roxan Aspi Driver, but the children had so much fun that by 6.30 a.m. they were up and raring to go! "My sons had never done athletics before," asserts Meherzin Kerawalla. "They found the Camp most interesting."

With exuberant youngsters ready to make a game bid for action in athletics throughout the year, the lack of finances is a major hurdle that has first to be crossed, says Doomasia. Hilla P. Guzder



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Cooper's caliber

Sir Dhanjishah Bomanji Cooper was not only a pioneering industrialist but also Bombay's Presidency's first chief minister

Jamsheed Kanga & Farrokh Cooper

Very few Parsis know about the man who became the first Prime Minister of Bombay. To commemorate the life and times of Sir Dhanjishah Bomanji Cooper, a prominent Parsi politician and industrialist of Maharashtra in the 1940s, his grandson Farrokh Nariman Cooper took on the task of collecting information on his life and work, and commissioned a biography in Marathi by Jaywant Gujar, a renowned Marathi journalist, titled *Sahastrakatil Vegla Parsi Sir Dhanjishah Cooper* (Millennium's Unique Parsi).

In the presence of over a thousand friends and associates of the Cooper family, the book was formally released on August 10, 2003 by Dhanjishah's daughter-in-law, Homai Nariman Cooper. Amongst those present were Abhaysingh Raje Bhosale, a scion of Shivaji's family and an MLA, as well as industrialists Rahul Bajaj, Baba Kalyani, Suman Kirloskar, Mukundrao Kirloskar and others. This function and the speeches made by the leading industrialists of Maharashtra, whose families had been associated with Dhanjishah, demonstrated the enormous goodwill and respect the people of Satara still have for Sir Dhanjishah Cooper. An English edition of the book is now being prepared, to make it accessible to Parsis.

Since the Parsi community in this country has now shrunk to 76,000, it is difficult to imagine that at one time so many Parsis had played such a prominent role in the political life of India, particularly in Bombay city and the Bombay Presidency. In the 18th and 19th century Gujarat Parsis who were

mainly agriculturists came in contact with the British at their factories in Surat. Appreciating their honesty, the British

that the majority of the persons nominated or elected in the municipal bodies were Parsis. Persons such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Sir Dinsha Wacha made a name for themselves in the city government and national politics. However nearly all the Parsis who entered politics operated in the urban areas, particularly Bombay city and other cities in Gujarat such as Ahmedabad, Surat, etc. But one person from the rural part of Maharashtra in Satara District, who made a mark in local politics and later on moved to the city legislature in Bombay and ended up as the first Prime Minister of the Province, was Dhanjishah Bomanji Cooper. This is the account of this unusual person who functioned in the Maratha territory of Shivaji.

Cooper was born on January 2, 1878 to a poor family in Satara and he was the only surviving son amongst three daughters. His father Bomanji was an artisan working in a government liquor warehouse repairing wooden barrels and hence the name Cooper (barrel maker). After his matriculation, he started earning to help his family. To better his prospects he moved to Poona where he joined the Pudumjee family business of wholesale and retail liquor. This gave him an opportunity to learn the liquor business thoroughly which came in useful later on when he started his own liquor business. However, he was too ambitious to work as an employee and he returned to Satara to start his own business. He initially took up small contracts for supplying goods to the army and soon became one of the



Dhanjishah Cooper in his formative years (All photos sourced from Sahastrakatil Vegla Parsi Sir Dhanjishah Cooper)

conferred on them many important positions and eventually the Parsis became prosperous and leaders of society. When the British shifted their activities to Bombay, many Parsis too relocated and were associated with the British in various activities. They also started their own businesses and industries and became involved in local and national politics. Early reports of the Municipal Council in Bombay and Ahmedabad show

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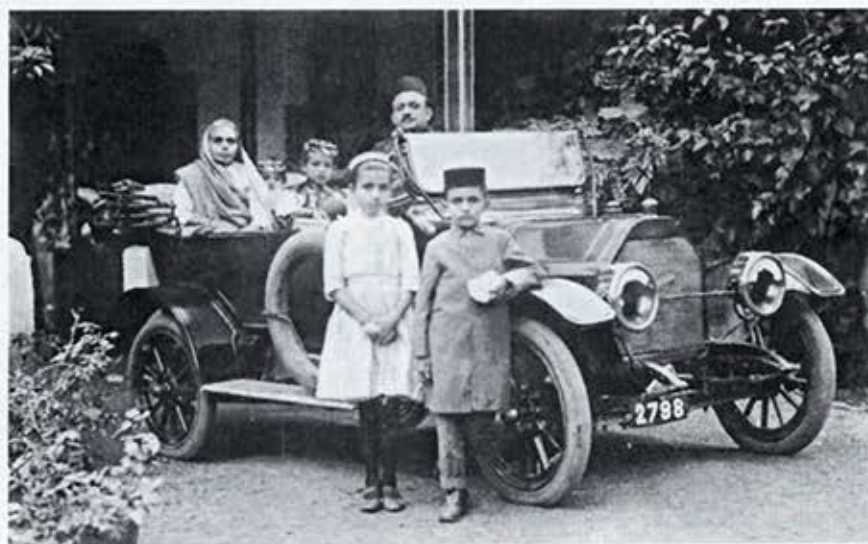
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biggest contractors in the Satara area supplying goods such as tents, furniture and food items to the army camps which were located there. Cooper was also a big agriculturist and planted different varieties of mangoes from Gujarat in his orchards.

He married Goolbai Batlivala in 1905 and began raising a family. His first daughter Tehmina was born in 1907 followed by a son Nariman in 1908. He had five daughters and one son, and he ensured that they were all well educated, in Satara and Panchgani. Nariman graduated from the Government agricultural college in Poona.

Despite the fact that there were very few Parsi families living in Satara at that time Dhanjishah decided to enter into politics. During this period the politics of the Province as well as the administration and economy were dominated by the Brahmins who though small in number were better educated. Even non-Brahmin rulers of various states used to employ Brahmins as their trusted ministers and dewans.

As a reaction to this, a strong non-Brahmin movement was started in Maharashtra by Jyotirao Phule, a social reformer (1827-1890). Protests were staged employing rejection, confrontation and conflict. Non-Brahmins supported the movement. Unfortunately the Marathas who were mainly uneducated farmers had no leaders capable of fight-



Top: Goolbai and Dhanjishah with children. Above: Nariman and Homai

ing the Brahmin politicians. This movement must have encouraged Dhanjishah to enter local politics and provide leadership to the non-Brahmins from whom he received support. His first foray into politics was in the Satara District Local Board. These bodies were the first attempts at permitting local persons elected from within the district to manage the development of the local area. Cooper

along with a few other non-Brahmin leaders emerged successfully during the elections that took place in the 1920s and 1930s.

It must be due to his inherent capability that in an overwhelming non-Parsi electorate Cooper was able to get elected to the District Local Board from 1920 onwards. He was also successful in the Satara Municipal Council elections and was vice president of Satara Municipal Council from 1920-1923 and president from 1923 to 1927. In the District Local Board he was vice president from 1922-1925, chairman of the School Board from 1925-1928 and its president from 1929 to 1932.

During the same period that

Verandah of the Cooper residence

he was active in local politics, Cooper also consolidated his financial position through his various businesses which now included liquor. He was an excise contractor. He had at one stage a large number of liquor shops throughout the district which helped him build up his capital for the future. He then decided to start a factory for the manufacture of agricultural implements and items useful to farmers. With this purpose, he started a grey iron foundry and small machine shop called Satara Industrial Work (SIW) in 1922 in Satara itself, closer to the market for agricultural implements. His first major product was the iron plough which till then was not manufactured in India. This was one of the first companies in India to give the farmers strong and durable hardware for tilling the land at affordable cost. Aside from iron ploughs, SIW soon manufactured sugarcane crushers, wheels and spokes for well lifts and other items required by farmers. Six years later in September 1928 the company's name was changed to Cooper Engineering Works and other products were added, including manufacture of weights and measures. In 1932 Cooper went into partnership with a British firm, Duncan Stratton Company, and renamed his company Hindustan Engineering and Implement Company. This Company undertook the manufacture of diesel engines

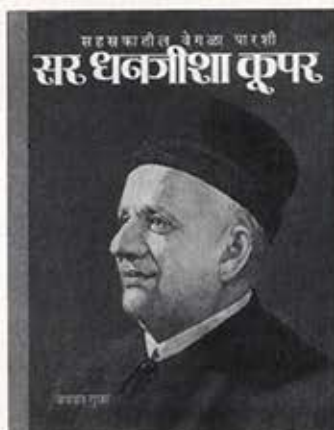


under the supervision of British technicians. These engines were suitable for flour, rice and saw mills as well as for drawing water from the wells and for driving other kinds of machinery. This was the first factory in India to manufacture diesel engines which were till then imported.

Cooper had a unique gift of getting on with people at all levels in society, whether rich or poor. Perhaps it was this capacity which enabled him to succeed in politics as well as in business. Whether it was another industrialist like him, namely Laxmanrao Kirloskar or a poor villager who sought his help, he was able to deal with them in the same manner. An example of this was his treatment of Babasaheb (Bhimrao) Ambedkar, who became the first law minister of India, and his father Ramrao.

Subedar Ramrao Ambedkar retired from the Indian Army and decided to settle in Satara town. However, as he was a Dalit, he was forced to live in a small hut in Maharwada, one of the most unhygienic parts of the city. Babasaheb, who was a school boy, faced the discrimination that was the fate of all Dalit boys. However, he was a diligent student and made his mark in the same school where Cooper had studied — The New English School in Satara. This was noticed by Cooper who, when he realized that the promising lad was unable to study due to poor living conditions, rented a small house which he owned in Sadarbari, opposite the Parsi agiary, to Ramrao for a nominal amount. He also assisted Babasaheb financially to pursue his studies. This was truly an unusual gesture as Dalits were not considered capable of undertaking higher education. The initial confidence Cooper reposed in Babasaheb Ambedkar and the support he gave his family, must have helped Ambedkar in achieving eminence later on. Ambedkar subsequently reciprocated this gesture when Dhanjishah's ministry was facing difficulty.

Another factory for the manufacture of agricultural implements was started by Laxmanrao Kirloskar at Kirloskarwadi in Sangli District. There was considerable competition between Cooper and Kirloskar, both of whom manufac-



Author Gujar and his book



tured the same implements. In order to improve his mar-

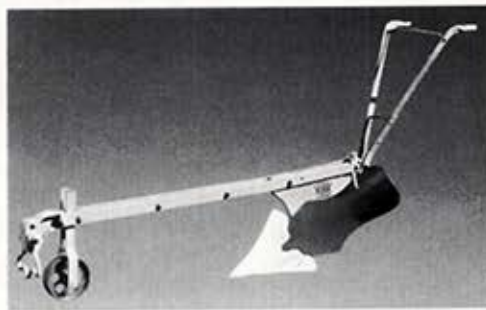
keting, Cooper persuaded Kirloskar's ace marketing executive, Bhaurao Patil to join his factory along with a few

of his co-workers. Patil later became one of the most distinguished educationists in western Maharashtra and founded an organization called the Rayat Shikshan Sauntha which started 1,200 schools and 72 colleges in the rural area, imparting literacy to thousands of rural boys and girls. When he joined Cooper's factory Patil claimed that he be given a share in the profits on the understanding that he would provide skilled workmen from Kirloskar's factory. He also expected Cooper to help in meeting part of the cost of the education schemes which he had in mind. However, during that year the factory made meagre profits and he was dissatisfied with the share and demanded more. This led to a quarrel between them. Patil got desperate and at a function where he knew Cooper would be present, he came with a pistol in a bag to shoot him. At that time Keshavrao Sitaram Thackeray or Prabhodanker as he was known, father of Bal Thackeray of the Shiv Sena, was a prominent social worker and was also involved in the non-Brahmin movement. Thackeray noticed the pistol in Patil's possession and realizing he might do something rash, quietly removed the pistol from the bag and hid it. Thereafter he persuaded Patil to give up his desperate objective of killing Cooper. Had Patil succeeded, Satara district would have been doubly poor, for the loss of Cooper, who took the district to greater glory later on, and the loss of Patil, who raised the educational standards and made Satara one of the most literate districts in western Maharashtra.

In order to expand the production and

range of engines, Cooper needed more capital. Walchand Hirachand, a prominent industrialist joined Cooper in his business. Hirachand can be credited with having started in this country the first Indian shipping line viz Scindia Steamship, the first automobile company viz Premiere Automobile; the first aircraft company viz Hindustan Aeronautical. Hirachand had a dream of making India's first motor car and was on the lookout for a suitable engine for the car. After examining various models, he believed that the Cooper diesel engine would be most suitable and agreed to finance the development of the engine at Cooper Engineering. Dhanjishah and Nariman, with the help of their English general manager Arthur Lund, developed an engine suitable for use in motor cars. Hirachand fitted the engine in a Morris car and it was deemed successful. Fitted with the Cooper diesel engine the car was driven before the commerce member of the Government of India, Nalini Rajan Sarkar and the governor of Bombay Sir John Colville during his visit to Satara and both felt that the engine was suitable for a vehicle. This emboldened Cooper to approach the Department of War Transport in Delhi in 1942 to give assistance in setting up facilities for manufacturing engines for cars and trucks which could be used in the war. However, the Government did not wish to encourage competition with the British car industry. Dhanjishah and Hirachand even approached the American Technical Mission for assistance in starting a factory for the manufacture of cars in India but their efforts were not successful. If fate had been kinder, perhaps a Cooper car may have preceded the Tata Indica.

Simultaneously, Dhanjishah continued to play an active role in politics. He was elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly from 1921 to 1926 and also from 1930 to 1937. During this period he was simultaneously involved in the District Local Board and the Satara Municipal Council and was a revered figure in the District. The British Government also had great confidence in him and he was appointed minister for Lo-



the District. The British Government also had great confidence in him and he was appointed minister for Lo-

The plough made by Dhanjishah

cal Self Government, Public Health and Public Works Department from November 1933 to June 1934. Thereafter, he was the minister for Revenue and Finance from June 1934 to March 1937. Dhanjishah was entrusted with all these important portfolios by turn and appears to have acquitted himself creditably. His contribution was recognized by the British Government and he was given the title of Khan Sahib in 1917, Khan Bahadur in 1920 and was knighted in 1937.

The Marathas revere Chhatrapati Shivaji as their greatest hero as he was the founder of the Maratha dynasty. Unfortunately, Shivaji's direct descendant lost the kingdom of Satara when it was annexed by the British and Satara was thereafter in British hands. Shivaji's family was however allowed to retain its properties as well as receive a privy purse. In March 1925, Chhatrapati Pratapsingh alias Bhausaheb Maharaj, the last living heir to Shivaji died without any male issue. This would have given the British an opportunity to abolish the title and stop the family's privy purse and privileges under the law of Primogeniture which allows only direct male heirs to inherit the title. Dhanjishah was aware that Chhatrapati Pratapsingh had been trying to adopt a male heir from amongst his blood relations but had not been able to complete the process. He realized that unless a male heir was immediately adopted legally, the family would lose its privileges and because of his close relationship and regard for the family, he identified a blood relation (Chandrasen Bhosale) and convinced the British Government to accept the adoption and declare him as an heir. It was his diplomacy which persuaded the Government to accept an heir and thereafter, the British Government appointed a board of trustees including Dhanjishah to act as a Regency Council during the period of minority of the ruler.

The British Government enacted the Government of India Act of 1935 referred to as the Minto Morley Reforms. Under this Act the provinces would be governed by elected representatives who

called carried out a comprehensive program and undertook measures in keeping with its policies. Amongst measures taken by them were cancellation of three orders passed in the Bombay Special

(Emergency) Power Act, 1932 and Refund of Securities of 20 newspapers and presses. It also released the freedom fighter Veer Savarkar who was imprisoned in Ratnagiri jail and removed all restrictions placed on him. At one stage the Congress party wanted to pass a no confidence motion against the ministry and asked the Ambedkar party to support them.

Ambedkar refused to work against Dhanjishah's ministry, perhaps out of gratitude for his earlier help to their family.

Eventually, the viceroy gave the assurance of non interference to the Congress and they decided to accept office in the six states where they had received a majority. The Interim Ministry of Cooper resigned on July 15, 1937 and the Congress ministry headed by B. G. Kher formed a government.

Now that the reigns of power were in the hands of a popularly elected government, Cooper though still a member of the legislature, began to take more and more interest in his factory and with the help of Nariman to expand its activities. In 1939 the managing agency was transferred to the Walchand Group as he felt that it would be able to allow the company to expand and invest more capital. However Dhanjishah and Nariman remained as director and managing director respectively.

In 1942 despite difficulties in getting essential materials, Cooper Engineering Limited rapidly extended its diesel oil engine manufacturing program by introducing engines of a higher horse power and increasing production capacity. The company became the largest oil engine producer in the country and the Government of India Stores Department and the Army began using it in large



The present Cooper family: (from left, standing) Mahrukh, Zal, Kavita and Manisha; (seated, from left) Farrokh, Saam, Homai with Feroza and Jamsheed Kanga

would be responsible to the elected legislature. This was a major step in the direction of self rule. However, the Act gave the governor the right to veto any legislation which he considered as not being in the interest of the British. In the elections held under this Act the Congress party won 106 seats out of a total of 201 seats in the legislature. The Congress Working Committee believed that the governor would use his powers to interfere in the working of the ministry, even though the party had a majority in the legislature. Hence they refused to hold office till satisfactory assurance was received from the viceroy not to use his veto powers. The Muslim League which was approached by the governor also refused to form the government. As a result there was a piquant situation with no party willing to form a government. Finally the governor asked the seniormost independent member, Dhanjishah, to form the ministry consisting of other independents, and he took over as the first elected Prime Minister of Bombay Presidency (as the chief minister was then called) on April 1, 1937. The Interim Ministry as it was



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numbers. At the end of World War II, to meet the demand for diesel oil engines the company further expanded and increased its production to an annual output of 6,000 engines, covering a range from 5 BHP to 256 HP suitable for industrial purposes of each and every kind. It was during this period that the successful motor car diesel engine was developed but unfortunately the car industry was not ready to use it. The company's capital was increased three-fold and its area increased from 20 to 126 acres and a small township was built alongside the factory employing 1,200 workers. Its engines and machine tools

were exported to nearby countries.

Unfortunately, in 1944 Dhanjishah suffered a grievous blow when his only son Nariman died after a brief illness at Satara leaving behind a young widow and three small children. Though suffering grievously, Dhanjishah took over the added responsibility and continued to look after the affairs of the company and attend to his duties as legislator. However, not having any other male heir to assist him, Dhanjishah found it impossible to manage a large factory as well as his own personal business. It is a pity that the Parsi community lost an opportunity to have another large business group.

Dhanjishah died of a massive heart attack on July 29, 1947 at the Taj Mahal Hotel while in Bombay attending the session of the Legislature. His main achievement lay in nurturing the young Marathas from western Maharashtra for politics under his Democratic Swaraj Party. Many leaders such as Balasaheb Desai who was a senior minister in the later government of Y. B. Chavan had worked under his leadership in the District Local Board of Satara and the Satara Municipality. He also pioneered in the establishment of an industry in a rural area long before the Government had. He achieved all this in an area where the community was insignificant in numbers.

When Dhanjishah passed away in 1947, his two grandsons Saam and Farrokh were not even in their teens. They were brought up and educated by their mother Homai who had shouldered the responsibility of looking after their vast agricultural estate as well as their other property. However, Dhanjishah's entrepreneurial

spirit was still alive in the family. Before his death, Dhanjishah had requested Walchand Hirachand and his brother Lalchand Hirachand to assist his grandchildren. When Saam wanted to start a small industrial unit in Satara, the Hirachands assisted him by giving him some machinery on hire and guided him in setting up a small factory called Satara Industrial Works. Setting up his small machine shop in 1960 the business has been developed by Dhanjishah's younger grandson Farrokh and great-grandson Zal. It has grown into a large foundry and machine shop and has a sales turnover of Rs 100 crore. Their products have reached markets all over Europe and America and are highly regarded for their quality. Dhanjishah would have been proud to see that his grandsons and great-grandson have shown the same entrepreneurial spirit which made him begin in a humble way and yet achieve success through hard work and honesty. Cooper Foundries and Satara Industrial Works are large industrial units in Satara.

Today Satara is a bustling town with 700 acres of industrial area, with major industries such as heavy engineering, scooters manufacture, pharmaceuticals, a brewery and many others.

Dhanjishah's dream to bring industries to the rural area has at last been realized. Y. B. Chavan, the first chief minister of Maharashtra, when unveiling Cooper's statue at the Cooper factory said that in the days of the freedom struggle, when he (Chavan) was a fugitive and there was a parallel government in Satara called the "Patri Sarkar," Cooper was considered an enemy as he supported the British, but now we appreciate his vision. Dhanjishah's spirit must be feeling gratified. Equally so must be the fact that his grandsons and great-grandson have continued in his footsteps and have established a modern foundry and a manufacturing unit exporting to the USA and Europe. Dhanjishah's legacy continues.

A retired Indian Administrative Service officer, Jamsheed G. Kanga held senior posts in government including that of the municipal commissioner of Bombay. A former trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, he is on the board of several companies.

Farrokh N. Cooper is the chairman and managing director of Cooper Foundry.

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THE ABC OF THE SUDREH KUSTI
continued from page 93

students attend the classes primarily to learn their navjote prayers, they often continue to come even after their navjote to learn to read and write Gujarati as well as revise their prayers. Since the children are taught Hindi in school, teaching them to read and write Gujarati is much simpler, she admits. Nargolwalla also weaves and sells kustis, an art she learnt from her mother in Nargol. At the classes, for a little while, she weaves a kusti in the presence of her students, while explaining the complex procedures involved and their importance in the making of the final thread.

Commenting on today's Parsi youth, Nargolwalla remarks that their minds are not being occupied, either by praying or attending talks. Instead they while away their time, like the youth in her colony, smoking and abusing. She observes that there is a dearth of Parsis in the army, navy and other services. "First there was Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, but now who?" Hoping to encourage community marriages, Nargolwalla plays match-maker "by just passing on phone numbers of prospective partners." But the Parsi girls have too many "nakhraas," since they are well educated and earn better, she observes. Parsi boys therefore do not match their expectations. Each one of us has to do something to stave off the dwindling population, she believes.

Although too young to make any profound statements, speaking to the young children of her class it emerged that praying has become a regular habit with them:

Anosh Bharthania, eight years, St Mary's High School (ISC), III std
"I like the Parsi people because they are neat and clean. I go to the agiary once a month with my mother and pray daily."

Jodey Daruwalla, eight years, Gopi Birla Memorial School, II std
"We should not tell bad words. We should speak good words and be good. I go to agiary once a week and pray once a day."

Jahaan Daruwalla, nine years, Gopi Birla Memorial School, IV std
"I like our religion because our religion is pure and no Muslims and Christians can come. Parsis are very sweet and big hearted. I go to the agiary with

my brother on Saturday and Sunday and pray twice a day."

Mehr Daruwalla, five years, Walsingham House School, pre I std
"I like the Parsi agiaries because they are nice, clean and neat. I like the people. On Saturday and Sunday I go to the agiary with mummy, daddy and brother. I pray."

Jazreen Deboo, six years, Queen Mary's High School, I std
"I go to the agiary on Saturday and Sunday with my daddy. I like going to the agiary at Godrej Baug and I like my friends in Godrej Baug."

Tanya Dubash, seven years, The Alexandra Girls' English Institution, II std
"I love to pray and go to the agiary. All Parsis are nice. I visit the agiary once a week and pray twice a day."

Yohan Engineer, six years, Christ Church High School, I std
"I go to the agiary with my mummy, daddy and brother. I don't pray at home. I like the community because I like going for navjotes and weddings. I like the food especially the rice and daal. I like the colony because my friends are here."

Berezida Gandhi, eight years, The J. B. Petit High School for Girls, III std
"I like going to the agiary and saying my prayers. I go to the agiary once a week and pray twice a day. I take part in the prayer and piano competitions."

Niyosha Gandhi, seven years, The J. B. Petit High School for Girls, I std
"I like our religion. I go to the agiary once a week and pray twice a day. I take part in the prayer and piano competitions."

Jamshed Jamasbi, six years, Cumballa Hill High School, II std
"Parsis are very good and nice. I pray for my family. I pray to all Gods — Hindu and Christian. I pray twice a day and go to the agiary once a week."

Dilsaz Katrak, five years, The Alexandra Girls' English Institution, higher KG
"I go to the agiary with my mummy once a month. I like the Parsi people because they are kind."

Karl Malaowalla, five years, St Mary's High School, prep III std

"I don't like Parsis. I don't like anybody. I like the agiary. I go to the agiary sometimes with mummy, daddy and my brother."

Zenia Nejadkay, five years, Walsingham House School, prep class
"I like navjotes because all my friends are there and I like my birthday because my mother celebrates it. I go to the agiary with my mother and sister."

Znoishta Nejadkay, nine years, Walsingham House School, IV std
"The Parsis are very brave because they fought against the Muslims. I go to the agiary with my sister sometimes."

Vahishta Panthaki, nine years, The Alexandra Girls' English Institution, IV std
"Our religion is much better than the others' because our sudreh and kusti protects our "ijjaat." I go to the agiary thrice a month and pray everyday. I stood first in the prayer competition."

Karishma Patel, six years, The Alexandra Girls' English Institution
"I like to pray. I pray twice a day. I go to the agiary sometimes."

Mehernosh Patel, five years, Cumballa Hill High School
"I like to go to the agiary. I go to the agiary with daddy. I like to go out with mummy, daddy and my sister to Breach Candy. I like to go to navjotes and weddings because my mummy-daddy take me."

Zishta Patel, seven years, Queen Mary's High School, II std
"I like my religion because it is very good and nice. I like the people. I go to the agiary alone or with my family and pray everyday but sometimes I forget to pray."

Kainaaz Pauvri, five years, Walsingham House School, prep B
"I like the religion because of the people. I go to the agiary with my mama and pray at home, once a day."

Benafsha Soonawalla, seven years, Villa Theresa High School, II std
"In school the teacher tells us to pray for our country, parents, teachers and Mother Mary and Mother Teresa. I pray to every God. I saw the story of God. God's mother was Dogdo. I pray twice a day and go often to the agiary."

Drawn to dates

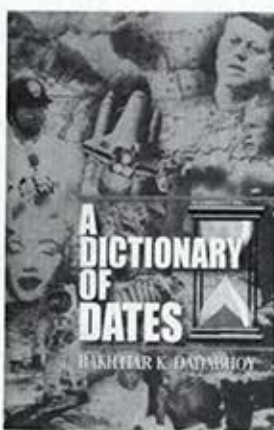
Deputy chief vigilance officer of the Western Railway, Bakhtiar Dadabhoy's fascination for general knowledge led him to compile *A Dictionary of Dates*

Rashna Ardesher

Enjoy your dates. Any given date in a year is of significance—to historians, to politicians, to scientists... to Bakhtiar K. Dadabhoy whose 960-page *A Dictionary of Dates* lists over 6,000 happenings in the last 2,000 years.

"I shall feel gratified by the reader's 'Is that so?' or the 'I didn't know that,'" writes Dadabhoy in his introduction citing how the Indian nationalist leader Pherozeshah Mehta and the creator of *Asterix*, Rene Goscinny share a birth and death anniversary. Whilst "standard" events find a mention in this educative and entertaining book, the inclusion of additional "information, anecdotes, quotations and trivia... reflect my own interests," candidly admits the author.

Take a dip into any day of the year, say, April 15. The author writes: "On this day... in 1865 Abraham Lincoln died at 7.30 a.m. after being shot the previous day by an actor, John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. while he was watching the comedy *Our American Cousin*... Born on this day were: Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), the Italian artist, architect, sculptor, poet, philosopher, mathematician and inventor considered to be the most versatile genius of all time; Guru Nanak (1469-1539), Indian spiritual teacher who was the first guru of the Sikhs; Leonhard Euler (1707-83), Swiss mathematician and physicist, who made important contributions to geometry, calculus and mechanics... In 1912, the British luxury liner *Titanic* (the ship thought unsinkable) sank in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland, less than three hours after striking an iceberg... In 1955 McDonald's, the world's largest ham-



burgerchain, was founded in De Plaines, Chicago by Ray Kroc. In 1986 Vivian Richards hit the fastest Test century measured in balls received (56) against England at Antigua..." These and a number of other incidents that happened on April 15 are noted in the book. With such entries spread across all the 365 (or 366) days of the year, embracing a rich diversity of subjects,

A Dictionary of Dates, published by Rupa and Company (7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002), is an ideal reference guide for any one with an interest in dates, apart from being a treat for the quiz enthusiast.

But how did Dadabhoy manage to get this wealth of information? He replies: "I have a huge variety of resources — *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all the 20 volumes of the *Grolier Encyclopaedia*, a large reference library at home with dictionaries, reference books, et al. I just had to pick up the information and compile it." The book, priced at Rs

695, is mostly sold to libraries and other institutions. A paperback edition is expected by the end of the year at half the price. The book has stood on the fourth, 10th and 10th positions for three successive weeks in the Best Seller (non-fiction category) list compiled by the *Asian Age* and on the fifth position as per the *Gujarat Mitra* (of Surat).

Having a love for quizzes and debates since childhood, few people may know that Dadabhoy stood second in the preliminary rounds of the popular BBC show, *Mastermind India* (where he had to answer 50 tough questions in just half an hour), or that he cleared the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination after which he opted to join the Indian Railways.

Presently Dadabhoy is deputy chief vigilance officer (Operating and Commercial Branches) of the Western Railway. All station masters of the Western Railway, booking clerks, computerized reservation centers, goods clerks, parcel caretakers... are under his administration. The scheduling of trains, introduction of new services, also fall under his purview. He handles mainly bribery and corruption cases: "My job profile comprises carrying out investigations based on public complaints, preventive checks on people whom we know are of doubt-

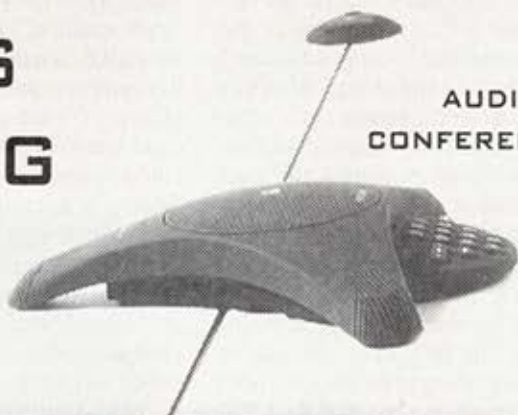


(Top) Dadabhoy: fascination for dates; (along-side) At the book release function (L to R): Keki, Ms Rangarajan, C. Rangarajan, governor of Andhra Pradesh and Bakhtiar



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THE DIFFERENCE IS TECHNOLOGY. THE DIFFERENCE IS GODREJ.

ful integrity, decoy checks, etc. A group of inspectors who work under me carry out all the raids."

The Indian Railway Traffic Service is considered a Class I service of the Central Government. Joining at this level is not everybody's cup of tea: "Writing a Civil Service examination isn't a national time pass. The process of qualifying in the preliminary exams, the main ICS examination and, finally, the interview conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, takes nearly a year."

Dadabhoj's career kick started at the managerial level in 1987 at the young age of 23. For two years he was on probation, reporting to the Railway Staff College, Baroda, at a basic of Rs 2,200. Those were the Pre-Pay Commission days. His first posting immediately after probation was as assistant commercial manager at Churchgate, Bombay. By dint of hard work and a bit of good luck he grew up the ranks to become divisional operations manager (Bombay Division), senior electronic data processing manager, deputy chief commercial manager (Passenger — Marketing), senior divisional commercial manager (Bombay Division) and now deputy chief vigilance officer, equivalent to a director to the Government of India. Of all the positions held, he found being senior divisional commercial manager the most challenging: "The pace of work in that position is very hectic. There are pressures from the public as well as from our own officers."

In his initial years, Dadabhoj found this huge organization quite "complicated." It took him nearly five years to

realize the various designations and posts: "I didn't know for quite some time that there's a separate category of staff which looks only after the clock at different stations!" Talk about downsizing the staff by introducing VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme), and Dadabhoj explains: "We are aware of all these concepts but to implement them is a different ball game altogether. The structure is filled with bureaucratic rules and procedures... I get visited by MPs (Member of Parliament), receive calls from ministers, receive request transfers and postings of staff, requests for dropping charge sheets. My principle is to be polite and do the right thing."

Would privatization be the solution then? Dadabhoj disagrees: "We know what is wrong with the system and what needs to be done. But one person or even one group cannot do much. Plus there are the unions to be dealt with. Some time ago, rail travel service agents were to be given terminals. Employees thought their jobs were at stake and there was a furore. You can't privatize in bits and pieces, and there's no one organization in India that can take over the entire Indian Railways!"

Dadabhoj has learnt from his experience. As deputy chief commercial manager (Passenger — Marketing), he was instrumental in introducing terminals that give tickets on the spot. This was in consultation with a group of Japanese officers. It turned out to be a failure "largely because people are not interested in making it successful." In another case he had got the Tata Infotech touch kiosks installed to provide the status of waiting lists, accommodation, etc. for the convenience of long distance passengers. After working for a few years, "Tatas lost interest in maintaining the kiosks."

Dadabhoj has received recognition twice from the financial commissioner of Indian Railways for his good work — for computerization of two modules, goods and coaching, for traffic costing — with cash rewards of Rs 10,000 and Rs 5,000, respectively.

Thanks to his efforts, railway passengers travelling to Udvada shall, in a couple of years' time, avail of a host of facilities such as waiting rooms, coach guidance systems, PC-based announcement system, enhancement of the covered area of the circulating area, platform development, renovation of urinals/toilets... Says Dadabhoj: "Being a small

station, Udvada had the lowest classification amongst stations. We (the Western Railway) have now made a new rule that places of religious and tourist importance should be upgraded. Udvada falls under the list. Donations for water coolers, etc are welcome..."

"Our representation in Government is important. It is in the interest of the community as it would result in a little more integration of Parsis in the national mainstream. "Keen to see Parsis become civil servants instead of joining foreign banks and private companies, Dadabhoj maintains, "Unfortunately, many Parsis don't know how hot a Class I Government job is!"

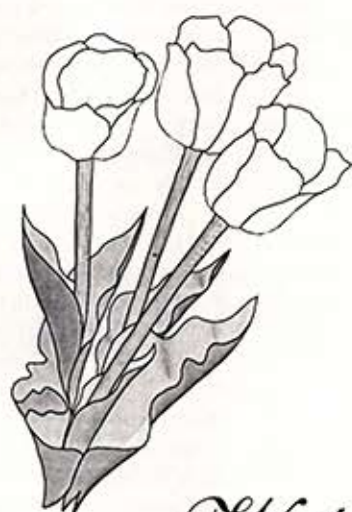
These words are not at all surprising because not only is Dadabhoj a civil servant, but so was his father, who was with the Indian Police Service. Dadabhoj was born in a well-to-do family to Rati and Keki Dadabhoj on December 28, 1963. Rati has always been a housewife and Keki retired as director general of police, New Delhi, in 1992. Keki got transferred frequently. This gave their studious son a chance to see a lot of India and have exposure to different schools — St Xavier's School, Loyola Hall and Amrut School, Burn Hall, St Paul's, St. Mary's and the Delhi Public School — in Ahmedabad, Srinagar, Rourkela and New Delhi. He made friends along the way. It helped him adjust quicker to an all-India service like the Indian Railways. He realizes: "If I would have spent my childhood only in one place, I wouldn't be today having an all-India vision that is required in my job and I wouldn't be speaking Hindi so fluently."

The civil servant has an elder sister, Tushna Kotwal, a housewife, married to merchant marine engineer Phiroze Kotwal. But he himself is still an eligible bachelor, waiting for the right match, someone with whom he can "vibe intellectually" and someone who can "make me happy."

He is religious and prefers "to go the traditional way, though it doesn't make any difference after I take another body." Dadabhoj has a message for readers: "Ours is a great community. Let us not do anything that sullies the bad name. If we enjoy a certain respect in society, it is for our integrity and straightforwardness. Let us always live up to that reputation. Some values are eternal. Money comes and money goes. Ultimately, values count."

With fond memories
and deepest affection we
remember our beloved
husband and father

Beji Cowasji
Bajan



*With compliments
of a
Well Wisher*

Pervez, a progress

Pervez, a novel by Meher Pestonji. Published in 2003 by HarperCollins Publishers India Private Limited, B/315, Okhla Phase-I, New Delhi, 110020. Pp: xii+318. Price: Rs 295.

Meher Pestonji's first novel *Pervez* is a quest novel in which the female hero (ambiguously called Pervez, which is normally a male name, instead of Pervez), finds her own identity — social, political and sexual — against the backdrop of the turbulent early 1990s. Pervez returns to Bombay, as it was then still called, from Goa and finds a city becoming increasingly polarised along communal lines. Her personal trauma, the result of a bad marriage, is mirrored in the public spaces of the city. The spatio-political divide between her brother's posh Marine Drive flat and her friends' modest Kalina residences tears Pervez apart and she begins to evolve from a shy, unhappy person into a socially aware woman who can hold her own in any context.

Education in the form of a postgraduate degree in Psychology and her own home in Kalina, help in this process. As she moves closer to her activist friends she begins to realize how hypocritical her brother's friends and professional acquaintances were. As her friend Naina's political activist partner Siddharth says: "You've grown Pervez, six months ago you wouldn't open your mouth. Now you're debating ideology."

The ideological education moves into a higher gear when Pervez starts accompanying Siddharth and his photographer friend Pawan into the Dharavi slums. Here she is confronted with the factional politics that was leading to a communal divide in the city. Pervez's involvement in Dharavi though is at a human rather than an ideological level and brings her in contact with her estranged husband's aunt and a young Muslim boy whom she befriends.

While Pervez is thus finding herself and experimenting with a sexual involvement with Pawan, India's engagement with Hindu fundamentalism enters a new phase with the demolition of the Babri

Masjid in Ayodhya. The fall-out of this act is experienced in Bombay especially in the deprived areas like the Dharavi slum where Pervez and her friends worked. Pervez is caught up in the riots as she was in Dharavi when the carnage, looting and arson began. Pestonji describes her fear and helplessness in powerfully evocative language — "Dead streets. A ghoul perched on an antenna... Her feet walked, her eyes blind to the locked doors... She was aware of eyeballs peering from cracks in doors. Palpably aware that the slightest wrong move might cost her life."

Interwoven into the bloodshed and shredded lives in Dharavi are the shameful episodes of the indifference of the rich of the city — what Salman Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, an earlier novel on the Bombay riots and bomb blasts of 1992-93, called "the Malabar Hill types." Pestonji is also critical of the attitude of the Parsis during the riots who invoked a millennium old wrong done to them by the followers of Islam, to justify the throwing out of Muslims who'd sought refuge in Parsi baugs and colonies from Hindu mobs.

The novel ends on a quiet note of reconciliation as the citizens of Bombay break across caste, class and religious boundaries to join hands through the city in a chain of harmony. As the last notes of the national anthem die away there is "pin-drop silence. As if the gods had descended in response..."

On the personal front too Pervez has found herself, and home was now the little flat in Kalina, across the road from the University campus where she taught. This personal and political peace is threatened in the epilogue when in a vicious manner history repeats itself and the monsters of communalism create havoc in Gujarat, recalling the trauma suffered by the city now called Mumbai, 10 years earlier. Pestonji makes a pointed reference to not just the new name but also the new ethos of the city — "Yeh dil maangé more (the heart craves for more)."

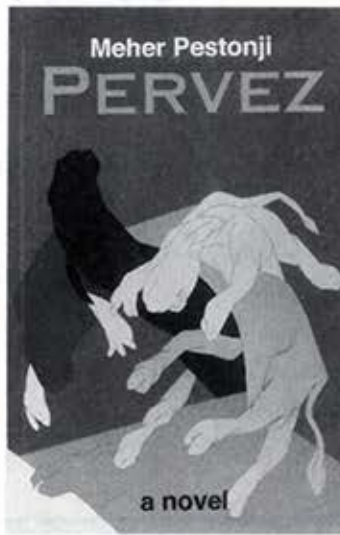
"Shop till you drop." Modern mantras plastered across Mumbai's billboards. Bombay would have been embarrassed by them. The massacre at Ghodhira followed by the butchering of Muslims all around Gujarat assumed the stature of a personal tragedy for Pervez, when her friends Siddharth and Naina are caught up in the horrific events and Siddharth is seriously injured. Pervez is once again drawn into public protests and finds hope in her work with women from different communities whose voices at least momentarily pierce through the hatred that had once again gripped society as they sang — "Log ro rahé hain... Shanti do... Hé Bhagwan, O Allah, Shanti do (The people are crying for peace)..."

There were two things that struck me as I read *Pervez*. The first concerned the craft of writing and the second with the state of the construct called 'The Parsi Novel.' When I had reviewed Pestonji's collection of short stories I had felt that she was yet to find her voice as a storyteller. Now I feel that she has found this voice and although the journalistic register does assert itself now and again in her novel, its interference level is very low as compared to the interference in the short story collection *Mixed Marriage and Other Parsi Stories*. As for the genre of the Parsi Novel it came into being in the 1990s with the texts of Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai, Rohinton Mistry and others. It was focussed on ethno-religious details of the Parsis and their Zoroastrian religion. There was also a grand-standing and last-witness element in the Parsi Novel.

Engagement with the reality of postcolonial India was minimum or if there, as in Mistry's *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, filtered through the time-warp of the diasporic writer. Mistry is undoubtedly the superior craftsman and better writer, his innumerable awards stand testimony to that — but where Pestonji scores is in her hands-on experience of Mumbai and her political activism that



Pestonji: has evolved as a writer



gives her novel a sense of immediacy lacking in Mistry's work. Also, although the Parsi element is present in *Pervez*, as the titular female hero is a Parsi, it is at no point foregrounded. There is also a severe critique of the distancing of Parsis from the reality of India, especially among the upper classes who are cocooned in their wealth and the privileges this can buy them.

In the final analysis I feel that *Pervez* is a good first novel, written with much passion. It is also a novel in which Pestonji's social commitment shines through clearly and in which the human element more often than not triumphs over the machinations of power-politics.

DR NILUFER E. BHARUCHA

Zarathustrian essentials

Insights Into The Zarathushtrian Religion: Selected Writings of Roni K. Khan. Published in 2003 by the Traditional Zarathushtrian Trust, 11/B, Sai Niketan, 4th floor, Mazgaon, Bombay 400010. Pp: 210. Price: Not mentioned (book retails at Rs 100).

Roni K. Khan (1947-2002) was indeed a man of many parts and accomplishments. His biography can be summed up in one sentence from the material to the spiritual. A man of varied interests ranging from opera, photography and vintage cars to history and astronomy, this successful corporate executive, who rose to become the vice-president (marketing) with the Richardson Hindustan Limited, voluntarily retired from the "rat-race" of the corporate world in 1986, and shifted to the quiet town of Nashik, to devote the rest of his life to the spiritual pursuit of understanding and explaining the traditional religion of Zarathushtra.

The metamorphosis in Khan's personal life was sparked by the Roxanne Shah episode and it was only after acquainting himself with all the allegations and counter allegations, that he decided to undertake a deep study of the ancient sacred Zoroastrian literature and writings to determine for himself what could be the true position according to the Zoroastrian scriptures. (Shah died in a road accident and was denied consignment in the Towers of Silence as she had married out of the faith.) He not only

self-studied the *Avesta* (assisted by Avestan scholar Bejon Desai), but also Sanskrit. After such self-study he wrote his first meticulously researched article titled, "No Adultery Please!" Thereafter he went on to write many more articles, which established his name as a Zoroastrian scholar of repute. The Traditional Zarathushtrian Trust (TZT), a religious trust established in 2002, one of whose objectives is "to create and promote enlightened public opinion on various religious issues affecting the Parsi Zoroastrian community and religion" has brought together the scattered writings of Khan into a single volume titled *Insights Into The Zarathushtrian Religion*.

Since the book is a compilation of essays written between 1994 to 1998, and addresses different audiences, there tends to be a frequent repetition/restatement of the same facts, history and ideas. Hence the best way to review the book would be to first attempt summarizing the salient ideas contained in the book, and then make a reference to certain debatable/controversial aspects of Khan's writings.

Salient ideas regarding Parsis and their faith: The author traces the ancestry of the Parsis to "Zarathushtra and his Aryan people." While most Indian and Western historians have placed the date of birth of Zoroastrianism to between the 6th and 7th centuries BC, Khan on the basis of astronomical data, philological research and testimonies of the ancient Greeks places the year of Zarathushtra's birth at 8300 BC. The Aryan people lived in Central Asia, moving southwards over the centuries, till they finally settled in what is modern Iran around 1300 BC. In Khan's account of the history of the Parsis, two significant points emerge. Firstly, that a great Aryan migration took place around 1300 BC, and it was during this great migration that "the Vedic branch" migrated southward along a different route and finally settled in northern India. "Thus," says Khan, "it will be seen that at one time long ago the Iranian and Vedic branches of the Aryans formed a united people and this is amply corroborated by some striking linguistic and theological similarities be-

tween the ancient Zoroastrian and Vedic scriptures." Secondly, the long period of forced conversion and persecution after the Arab conquest of Iran led to a few hundred Zoroastrians setting sail for India around 700 AC with the sole objective of preserving their faith and "since then the Parsis have remained in India and have become an integral part of the country, going on to make important and pioneering contributions in every field of human endeavour."

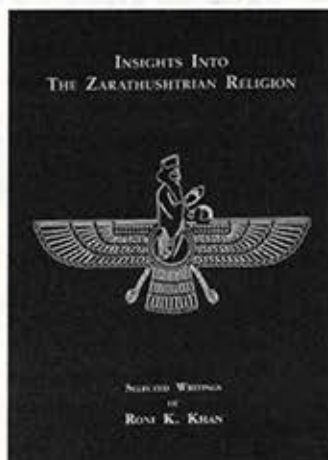
Scattered over the many essays are the philosophies behind the Zoroastrian faith/religion which have been the principal moulders of the Parsi character. Some of the key concepts of the religion that Khan deals with are: First of all, the religion is strictly monotheistic believing in only one Supreme Divine Being that is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Zarathushtra calls him Ahura Mazda (Brahma would be the Vedic parallel concept, perhaps). Ahura means Lord of the Spirit and Mazda means Lord of Matter. Thus the living universe is a fusion of spirit and matter and its source is Ahura Mazda.

Secondly, though Zoroastrianism postulates that Godhead is monotheistic, it views creation as dualistic. Zoroaster reveals that at the dawn of creation two primeval spirits, forces, called mainyus were simultaneously produced and even today continue to pervade the cosmos. One is Spenta Mainyu or the good spirit; the other is Angra Mainyu or the evil spirit. The two forces in nature are opposites that are ever engaged in a tussle or tug-of-war. All pairs of duality, such as light and darkness, male and female, action and reaction (the law of karma), start from this first pair of Spenta and Angra.

Thirdly, Zoroastrianism believes in free will. Ahura Mazda gave man the free will to choose between the good spirit and the evil spirit. Zarathushtra declares that the freedom to choose between the alternative of good and evil is man's birthright and also man's greatest responsibility. The spiritual progress of the world can take place only if human beings exercise their free will correctly by choosing good over evil. Thanks



Khan: explaining the religion



to this gift of free choice, good actions will bring good effects, while evil actions bring evil effects.

Fourthly, this leads one to the concept of "karma" or what Zarathushtra called "Kerdar." If man has the freedom to choose between good and evil, he must also be ready to bear the good and bad consequences thereof. "Man must therefore always choose to put good thoughts, good words and good deeds into motion so that their good harvest may be reaped throughout the world and evil may be rooted out forever." It follows, as Khan observes, that Zarathushtra thus freed humans from the shackles of primitive fear and superstition. Man was not a puppet or pawn in the hands of capricious fate but master and architect of his own destiny which he forms through his own free choice between good and evil. In a special essay, written in 1996, devoted to the concept of karma in the Zarathushtrian religion, Khan says that there is no such thing as undeserved forgiveness of sin. We have to earn our redemption through the powerful penitential therapy of *Patet Pashemani*. In the Zarathushtrian concept of karma, it is the Lords of Kerdar, the Yazatic trio of Meher, Sarosh and Rashnu who pro-

nounce divine judgments on each and every soul at the Chinvat bridge. The righteous shall pass through or cross the bridge, says Zarathushtra, while the wicked one "condemned by his own acts and by the activity of his tongue" is denied passage. It is only by living out our karma that we can attain *Haurvataat* or perfection and *Ameretaat* or immortality. With regard to the all-important question namely, "Will not the doctrine of karma imply accepting rebirth?" Khan opts to remain silent. All that he observes is, "Although karma and rebirth are treated as twin concepts, the latter has intentionally been by-passed in the present article. Since opinions on rebirth are sharply divided and often generate disproportionate heat in our community, this writer has thought it prudent to avoid this otherwise important topic," and goes on to add, "Suffice it to say for now, that come what may, these 'fruits' will have to be 'eaten' — whether 'down here' or 'up there'..."

Fifthly, Zoroastrianism lays great emphasis on the concept of "Asha." No other word finds such frequent repetition in the Zoroastrian scriptures as the word "Asha," which means righteousness — absolute, perfect, unchangeable

and uncompromising Righteousness. Asha/Asho or righteous life through the active practice of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, is the first and foremost law of creation, the source of all other laws, the fountainhead of all ethics and morality and the principle behind the operation of the law of karma and ultimate salvation. Service to humanity is the most important way of living "Asha." This is what is emphasized in the final part of the mantra, *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* deemed to be as sacred to the Parsis as the *Gayatri* mantra is to the Hindus, or the *Lord's Prayer* is to the Christians.

Sixthly, on the centrality of fire worship, Khan opines in a 1997 essay, that fire, is absolutely central to the practice of Zarathushtrian religion. It is the sole authorized medium (*marefat*) for the channeling of worship to Ahura Mazda — "to the Father (Ahura Mazda) via the Son (fire)." In the Yasht (2:2.1) it is said, "Through the agency of this fire, O most beneficent spirit Ahura Mazda, we first approach thee and thee only."

The last and seventh key concept in the Zarathushtrian faith, which figures in the book under review and which needs to be mentioned, is the term "Ratu" in the



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Gathas. The term occurs in the sacred *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* mantra's first line which translated reads, "Just as the Sovereign Lord (is) all powerful, so is the spiritual teacher by reason-of-the-store-of-(his)-Asha." Ratu stands for "God appointed superhuman personage of supernal spiritual stature and angelic attributes." All the instances pertaining to Ratu in the *Gathas*, refer, directly or indirectly, to Asho Zarathushtra, who is none other than the Savior and Prophet, purity-perfect, a paragon of holiness and the direct appointee of Ahura Mazda.

The debatable aspects of Khan's writings: While giving credit to Khan for distilling the essential teachings of Zarathushtra with lucidity, sincerity and conviction, the learned and revered Dastur (Dr) Kaikhusroo M. JamaspAsa has made two significant observations in the Foreword to the book. One is "some readers may differ with his views." The second is, "Roni's style of writing is lucid and one often finds him tongue-in-cheek about a serious point, while driving it home." In this reviewer's view some aspects of the book, which may be deemed debatable/controversial are the following:

Regarding the Aryan homeland —

the view currently propagated by archeologists working on the mythical Saraswati River civilization, and, even in some government text books is that the Aryans are a people who originated in India and then carried the Aryan civilization with them (even to Iran itself) as they moved westward. These scholars also claim to base their conclusion on scientific research, study of archeology, ancient texts and astronomy.

Regarding conversion — Khan opines that Asho Zarathushtra converted nobody because in the year 8300 BC none of the other great world religions had yet been codified/established. He further goes on to say that "our recorded history goes back to roughly 12,000 years starting with Shah Gayomard (or Kayomarz) the first king of the Peshadian dynasty. This is not the history one may find in many books on the history of world civilizations or in noted encyclopedias. Then of course we have the Hindutva intellectuals (equally quoting their scriptures as also scientific research techniques, astronomy and archeology) who consider Manu the first man and Sanskrit the first human language given by God himself (hence Dev Vani). Christianity (*Old and New Testament*) pro-

claims Adam to be the first man and Jesus to be the only Son of God. In short, if all ancient faiths claim absolute superiority for their sacred books, may we not end up with a war among ancient faiths each trying to establish its superiority/antiquity, etc over other faiths?

Regarding dakhmas — Khan argues that using the towers of silence is the best method of disposal of the dead because "the Zoroastrian code of ecology holds that fire, earth, air and water should not be contaminated in the slightest way." I call it controversial since there are scientists who do not accept the view that cremating or burying the dead "contaminates." A devout Christian whose faith is that if "Dust thou Art, To Dust thou returneth" cannot be expected to accept that he is "contaminating" the earth. Similarly, a modern human being may want to know how using an electric crematorium contaminates the environment.

Regarding mixed marriages — Khan states that the true Zarathushtrian "who always has, and always will, revere the entire catalog of our sacred Avesta scriptures, ranging all the way from the most abstract, the holy *Gathas*, to the most specific the Pak *Vendidad* cannot accept mixed marriages (Chapters 11 to 14 deal

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elaborately with the theme of mixed marriages). However, when Khan speaks of our sacred literature as "time-tested, time honored and scientifically-based law book of the ancient Iranians" one is reminded of near identical claims made by sanatani or orthodox Hindus for their sacred texts, especially the *Rig Veda* and *Manusmriti* which they deem as the God dictated "scientific" law of right living for all mankind and available in Sanskrit which they regard as originating in India. The Hindu sanatanis claim Bharatvarsha (modern India) to be the blessed land of God precisely because the first scientific laws and the first sacred language were revealed/born on the holy soil of Bharatvarsha.

The dilemma faced by modern humans of all faiths is whether we should allow our lives to be solely governed by ancient faith and sacred books or should we also not attempt to reconcile the ancient faiths with contemporary rationality and the morality contained in such documents as the Universal (U.N.) Declaration of Human Rights and progressive modern constitutions and progressive common civil law codes based on the recognition of equal human rights? Perhaps the contemporary Muslim, liv-

ing under a theological regime, which in the name of upholding the ancient/true faith, is often found by Western liberals and intellectuals (including Human Rights Commission) to be the biggest offender/violator of human rights and human dignity, faces this dilemma most acutely today.

The best way to conclude this review would be by again citing from the Foreword to the book written by the learned and revered High Priest, who while describing Khan as one of "the foremost scholars of Zarathushtrian religion," also observes that "even those who may disagree with him should accept the honesty and intellectual conviction with which Roni Khan has attempted to explain complex subjects pertaining to the faith." I could not agree less with the learned and revered High Priest when he also says, "I offer my homage to the pious soul and righteous Fravashi of late Roni Khan and pray the spirit of his written words may stir the heart of every reader."

ADI H. DOCTOR

A profusion of stories

The Braided Tongue by Roshni Rustomji. Published in 2003 by Tsar Publications, P. O. Box 6996, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W

1X7 Canada. Pp: 176. Price: \$ 18.95.

Roshni Rustomji was born in Bombay and has lived, studied and worked in India, Pakistan, Lebanon, the United States of America and Mexico. As a corollary, Katy Cooper, the heroine of her novel moves from Half Moon Bay in California, to Devinagar in India, to Mexico in search of herself and to discover the truth about her parents and to find the missing jigsaw pieces to complete the puzzle of her life. She is accompanied on her travels by an elderly ghost, a barefoot woman with a scar on her neck and black butterfly fluttering above her.

In fact it is the ghost who sets things in motion by pushing Katy as she is about to hang up a print of the 'Vegetarian Vampires' and causes her to knock down a framed photograph of a family of three people on the reverse of which is written 'Freddy Cooper and Margaret Shriver Cooper with baby Katy Cooper born in Devinagar, India, October 1958.' This shatters the middle-aged Katy's composure as she has always believed that she was born in England; one wonders why she thinks so as she is rather 'brown' skinned as her friend Carmelita Gutierrez points out. After the death of

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Katy's father when she was a very young girl, she is adopted by the Sanders who have since passed away and left her their home in Half Moon Bay. The incident of the broken frame forces Katy to undertake a journey to Devinagar, to find out who she really is and who her mother was. It is here that she is introduced to her family. Aunt Agnes, her cousin Roxanne Japanwallah, an advocate from Devinagar, who together initiate her in



Rustumji: braiding various experiences

her family history and try to fill in the gaps.

At the center of the novel is the myth of the braided tongue, a story which Carmelita tells Katy. Carmelita's grandfather Ignacio had run into la llorona. Contrary to the general

belief that la llorona was supposed to have killed her children because her lover had abandoned her to marry a rich woman, Ignacio believes that she killed them because she could not feed them. She makes Ignacio promise that whenever he sees an abandoned child, he will take it home to his wife so that she could

care for the child. Ignacio does so and as he has to feed and clothe his ever-increasing family, he travels to far away places to earn his livelihood. He visits so many different places that he suffers from an identity crisis which is evident from the state of his tongue which is torn, shredded and split. Carmelita's grandmother Luz decides to braid each strand of his tongue. The underlying implication of the myth applies not merely to Katy herself but to the novelist as well as other diasporic writers who have to speak with a braided tongue; they have to integrate and make a unified whole from separate disparate experiences which they undergo in the country of their birth as well as in the one they have adopted.

This theme is reiterated in the frantic search for a gara which is a family heirloom. It has been brought to India by the son of a Parsi gentleman and his Chinese wife who are ancestors of the Cooper-Japanwallah-Mehta family. The gara was to be passed on from generation to gen-

The Braided Tongue

Roslani Rustumji



eration through the eldest daughter or daughter-in-law. It was given to Dinaz Mehta who subsequently migrated to America; the gara was now urgently needed in India as there was a marriage in the family and the mother of the bride had to wear the gara on the wedding day if the marriage of the daughter was to be a happy one.

A crowd consisting of Katy and Carmelita, her American cousin Kamal

Mehta as well as her Indian cousins, Roxanne and Sarosh, travel from the United States to Oaxaca and Monte Alban in Mexico in search of this gara. But like Ignacio's tongue, the gara has been cut into pieces to provide for a *jabloo* (loose blouse for children) for one person and a scarf for the other and needs to be painfully pieced together.

Though the novel is a mere 176 pages, it is populated by a host of characters. Name follows name in bewildering succession and the reader is often quite lost as to which name he should remember and which he should forget as most of

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these characters are named once and then quite forgotten.

There is a similar profusion of stories. The novel is episodic in nature and often seems to read like a number of short stories loosely strung together. Many of these reflect the theme but some seem rather pointless like the episode of the visit of Eleanor Roosevelt to Karachi and a menstruating camel or the search for doughnuts in Mexico. Even the story of Putlibai who acts like a foster mother to Katy and who also is an immigrant with various strands of experiences to be braided seems a bit overstretched and long.

The trip which Katy makes to find her parents and her association with Roxanne and her clan and the elaborate history of the entire Cooper-Japanwallah-Mehta family eventually seems a bit pointless when it transpires that she is not the daughter of Freddy Cooper at all but the illegitimate child of Maala and the nephew of Ms Lalacji who is merely rescued and taken care of by Freddy Cooper. But the point which Rustomji is making here is expressed in Katy's Aunt Agnesmai's letter that there could be sustaining relations between people without the 'blood-flood thing.' As her entire

claim to being a Parsi is very suspect and she is no blood-relation of the Cooper family, the story of Katy and the search for the gara seem to be two parallel plots which reflect the same theme but never really coalesce into a unified artistic whole.

It is no coincidence that most of the characters in the novel are women. A common thread running through them whether it is Katy, Carmelita, Ratna, Kamal or Putlibai is that they are all displaced from the land of their birth and are trying to adjust to a new way of life in an alien country. It is these women who bond together and provide Katy with the family she needs and help her to eventually discover who she is.

There are several typographical errors: the very first sentence '...an old woman wondering around barefoot in New Hampshire...', several commas are positioned in the wrong place and a landlady becomes landlad.

The various strands of the novel: the truth about Katy's past and the cause for the excruciating pain in her knees, the history of the Cooper-Japanwallah-Mehta families, the search for the gara, the presence of the supernatural, makes the reader wonder where the novel is

eventually heading. As a result, the novel loses focus and seems to be a sort of curate's egg. One often feels that Rustomji sets out to accomplish too much and one wonders at the end of the novel if she has managed to braid the various strands of her novel into a well-fashioned and unified whole.

FIRDAUS J. GANDAVIA

Marshall's memoir

Katharatan by Dr Ratan Rustomji Marshall. Published in 2003 by Sahitya Sankul, Chowta Bazaar, Surat 395003. Pp: 256. Price: Rs 140.

Essentially a man of letters, Dr Ratan Marshall is a journalist, a columnist, an academician, a social reformer and what not! It is not in vain that the South Gujarat University recently conferred on him the title of Doctor of Letters in recognition of his multi-faceted personality. What Marshall is today, is a result of hard work, honesty, diligence and perseverance. The scattered thorns on the path of life give one an exposure to the meaning of life. Naturally, therefore, one would be inquisitive to know something about the struggle of a man of

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Marshall's magnitude. Fortunately, we have before us *Katharatan*, a memoir that projects the multi-colored scenes from his life on our mental screen.

In fact, *Katharatan* is erroneously called an "autobiography" in so far as it appears to be a conscious attempt on the part of the writer to highlight the rosy colors of his own life.



Marshall:
source of
inspiration

A major portion of the book is devoted to his beloved wife — a true and ideal better half — the late Dr Freny. The glorification of his worthy son Rustom, a leading advocate practising in the Gujarat High Court, sounds an exaggeration.

There is hardly any place in the entire book which shows the limitations that every individual is subject to. There is no denying the fact that the life of Marshall is a source of inspiration for many a young man of the present generation. He, too, like every individual, is subject to certain instincts that no civilized person would ever dare to confess the way Mahatma Gandhi has done in his autobiography. Hence, 'memoir' would be the right term to describe *Katharatan* as it is an account of the writer's written account of his own life and experiences.

It would certainly be unfair not to acknowledge the depiction of Marshall's struggle. His benevolent and loving nature accompanied by rare jocosity makes him larger than life. The reminiscences of a grand old Parsi reminds one of the recollections of a retired school-master in *Good-bye, Mr Chips*.

Dr Gunvant Shah, an eminent thinker, essayist, poet and miscellaneous prose writer of Gujarat has written a preface to the first edition of *Katharatan*: "If we compare the people of India with a huge cake, the meagre Parsis are the... icing on it." I would use a different simile. The Parsis, mainly scattered on the western banks of India, are like a shining necklace worn by Mother India and Gujarat is a pendant in it. Marshall is a glittering sapphire studded in that pendant — what a justification

to the very name 'Ratan' which literally means 'gem!' PROFASHOKN.DESAI

A show of hearts

Merchants of Philanthropy: Profiles in Good Corporate Citizenship by Noshir H. Dadrawala. Published in 2003 by the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, Mulla House, 4th floor, 51, M. G. Road, Bombay 400001. Pp: viii + 120. Price: Rs 150.

Aeons ago, in one of our Yasnas in the *Gathas*, Prophet Zoroaster proclaimed that "among living beings who is better in acts of worship, of such Ahura Mazda is aware on account of their holiness, all such, both men and women, do we revere." This ancient prayer comes to mind on reading Noshir Dadrawala's new book, where he describes an age old business principle of giving onto charity so as to enrich oneself and society. The book cites instances of men and women who in recent times have put this adage into practice, and are hence worthy of respect.

The *Yenghe Hatam* prayer recited above has acquired new meaning and new jargon over the centuries. Holiness has evolved, though the concept of one being holy, as one who is charitable and kind by disposition, has not changed. The individual has given way to institutions, and even business houses, companies indulging in trade, with an eye permanently placed on the bottom-line. The name has transmorphosed hence to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Corporate Citizenship (CC), but it yet commands as much respect as it did in Avestan times.

Dadrawala puts forth this business principle where long-term interests of business are served when its profitability and growth are accomplished alongside the development of communities, the protection and sustainability of the environment, and improvement of

people's quality of life. The first section of the book provides the backdrop to the principle, outlining the various social and developmental challenges facing the country and why doing good makes business sense. The second section is where the author really takes off from being a textual primer to an original researcher, though, for reasons best

known to him, not a commentator or reviewer. In this section, he profiles the CSR programs of various companies and the vision and motivating factors that has driven their leaders to integrate CSR as part of their business strategy.

Dadrawala presents the readers with nine case studies of CSR as glimpsed by him after interviewing and moving around with corporate chiefs. He speaks to Anand Mahindra, who tells how the Mahindra Group invests in education, and outlines the many charities and schemes that they have initiated or promoted and supported to further education in the country. The Forbes Group's head honchos share with Dadrawala and readers the rationale for their investing



Dadrawala:
celebrating the
joy of giving

in charity only in and around their plant at Kasarwadi near Poona. Deepak Parikh of Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) who founded this innovative organization recounts the satisfaction of making people happy — and this interestingly includes Narayan Murthy of Infosys who, Parikh informs, bought his home by taking a loan from HDFC. Dadrawala has met almost all the modern tzars and sought their views on CSR, including the Fortune 500 favorites like Mukesh Ambani (of Reliance) and Azim Premji (of Wipro), and old Parsi favorites such as the Godrejs (Jamshyd) and Tatas (Ratan).

The concept of industrialists taking on social responsibilities is 'chicken soup for the soul,' which no good Zoroastrian can resist, even if offered on an *anroja* (days when meat eating is abstained from). Dadrawala makes it even more interesting, garnering his chicken soup with spices ranging from narration of company history to personal anecdotes relating to its head and family members, all laid out to bring forth the rationale for the charities indulged in. The book hence celebrates 'the joy of giving.' "It is also," as Dadrawala writes, "an attempt to connect people and create consciousness on the potential of corporate philanthropy and promote organizational capacity."

In an age where advertising and marketing strategies drive companies, and the creation of brand image is of paramount importance, Dadrawala's book



brings out numerous examples of how CSR has advanced the 'feel-good' brand image, even as Godrej rightly points out, that people are not going to buy a mediocre product or accept poor service because "you are philanthropic or care for the environment." The book would be an excellent handbook for today's public relations practitioner, in view of such fine statements, and Premji's 10-point program for success, to quote just two examples.

At the end of a fast-paced un-put-downable single read (though one is certain one will go dipping into the book on several occasions), there is only one regret that Dadrawala has chosen not to reflect and comment on the CSR programs of his subjects. Probably, this was deliberate, as he wanted the readers to draw their own conclusion, or probably, because he did not wish to offend the charitable sensitivities of his subjects. Yet, if one were to take some time off to do the same, Dadrawala's work gives the impression that every company's CSR does provide an insight as to how the company's leading figures think. Mahindras and Dr Badrinarayan Ramulal Barwale (who established the Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Limited or MAHYCO) have invested in education and eye-care respectively, because education changed the Mahindra family's fortunes, and Barwale was impressed by the technology that saved his eye and sought to make it available for his people. Then, there is the 'bania' school of philanthropy, which has been practiced by Parekh, Ambani, Narottam Sekhsaria, who want to give back to society, primarily because only then you can do more business and make more profit. "The higher the purchasing power of people, the greater will be the demand for goods and services. The greater demand will increase turnover," reasons Ambani, a view almost echoed by Parekh who responds with "How can any prudent businessman consider doing business in a poor and illiterate country with beggars and hungry millions?"

Pardon the self-flattery, but maybe, it is only the Zoroastrian community that truly indulges in CC. Godrej believes that to "give back what one receives should generally come quite naturally," and not as a result of market forces and exercises at brand building. And, Tata has the last word: "We are not doing this (CSR) for propaganda or visibility. We are doing it for the satisfaction of know-

ing that we have really achieved and given something to the community in which we are working. We are doing it because we really wish to do it by choice." Which is probably why in public perception, the Tatas will always be Tatas, and the Ambanis, Ambanis.

A dog-eared *Oxford Dictionary* reminds me that the word "merchant," which Dadrawala uses as a title to his book, means a wholesale trader. Is CSR then merely a trade, as Dadrawala himself subtly seems to indicate?

HOMI J. ROGERS

(Revised) rites of passage

Essential Ceremonies — Death and After (with Informatory Notes) by Irach Sorabji Kuka. Published in 2003 (as part of Avan Series) by the author, 665, Band View, Lady Jehangir Road, Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay 400014. Pp: 118. Price: Rs 20 (subsidized price).

Really, how old are the prayers recited at a Zoroastrian funeral? Irach Sorabji Kuka in his book, *Essential Ceremonies — Death and After* sheds new light on ancient practices by packing in a nugget that tells us that the prayers to be recited at a funeral could date back to just 1920,



Kuka: shedding light on old practices

when they were revised and condensed, and a lot of mumbo-jumbo (not his words, though) was 'officially' eliminated following the advice of 11 respected priests, including Shams-ul-Ulama Dastur Dorabji Peshotan Sanjana, (late) Dastur Minocheher Jamasji Jamasp Asa, Dr Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, the Kutar brothers (Ervads Mahiyar and Framroj) amongst others. The advice was sought by the Zoroastrian Jashan Committee, a socio-religious body of repute, which recognized that the community was getting fed up of the growing demands of priests for money under the guise of ceremonies for the dead, and with hard times on, took the prudent step of inviting opinions of learned religious scholars and revered well-versed athravans to find out which ceremonies are most essential and need to be performed. The report submitted was ratified by the Athornan Mandal, another reputed organization of the priests, and a fresh and condensed list of prayers from Day Zero to Day 365 of a person's death drawn up and approved.

Now, if only the priests and community of today had that much courage and moral fibre!

Kuka's slim book is filled with such telling facts, and though, it may otherwise read as a condensed version of Modi's seminal work, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, it is worth every page for many an eye-opening and path-revealing fact. Many in the community may not agree with the different interpretations of what Kuka puts forth, but they do make compelling reading all right. For example, Ushahin *gah* is considered yet by most community members as the fifth and last *gah* (period of day), though Kuka's conclusions would want the reader to believe that it is the first *gah*. Similarly, there are discussions in Kuka's work as to which uthamna ceremony is truly necessary — the one at the dawn after the third night/ fourth morning when the soul 'gets up' (hence, uthamna — to get up) and departs from the material world, or the bamdad uthamna ceremony which is performed at midnight (Ushahin *gah*) on the third day. Similarly, Kuka even rubbishes the much followed pattern of having a *jorianu uthamnu*, where during the evening uthamna ceremony, one of the two mobeds prays for the deceased (*anusheh rawan*) and the other for the living partner (*jindeh rawan*).

At first glance, the compilation gives an impression of being just a handy book, especially right for the behdin (layman), on the ceremonies and prayers that should be recited once the body is declared 'dead.' But, the slimmest of chapters on oft-mentioned ceremonies like paidust, Sarosh no kardo, geh sarna, dhup nirang, is truly misleading. For, though Kuka does not waste pages on detailing these ceremonies, he states what prayers have to be recited then, and hence offers a simple guide and even a manual to what is being recited by the priests. The same exercise is well continued in the chapters on *masiso* (first month), *warsi* (first year) prayers. The plus point here is that Kuka tells the reader why these particular prayers have to be performed, and why some other prayers need to be dropped, or are superfluous.

The strength of Kuka's slim book is hence not so much in its contents, as in its footnotes. Here's one work that should be read in complement with the additional information accompanying it, where the source of the same is also

given for the curious reader.

Three 'lists' which are given towards the end of the book are the highlights of the work. The first list enumerates the essential and required ceremonies to be performed by mobeds. The list does not feature ceremonies undertaken on *bamsi* (second month after demise) and *chhamsi* (sixth month). It also clearly states that "on none of the days during the whole (first) year, the vendidad ceremony is to be performed," or the farokshi recited. Yet, harboring a misconception, possibly pre-1920s, Zoroastrians continue to spend a bomb on the advice of their panthakies and mobeds to have a vendidad ceremony done at great costs, and have the farokshi recited with almost the same mandatory air as astringent and baaj.

The second list outlined in Kuka's work is of prayers that may be recited during the first year by relatives of the deceased. The third is of ceremonies and customs which are optional and may NOT (capitalization ours) be performed.

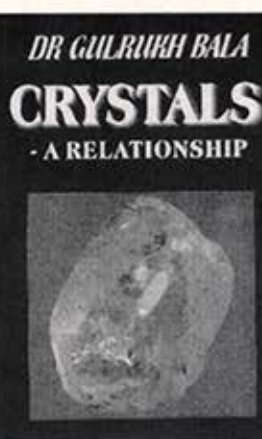
The reader may tend to agree or otherwise with Kuka's dissertation. But the book, rightly sub-titled 'with informative notes' deserves to be read for the latter, even if the 'informative' notes are 'inflammatory.' At its subsidized price of Rs 20 only (the book is co-published by Daulat S. Wadia in memory of her husband Dr Sarosh R. Wadia), the publication is a steal! Get a copy, and keep it bound along with your Modi. And pray for another modification in Zoroastrian rites and rituals. Kuka's work shows that history too does approve of the same.

H. J. R.

Crystal clear

Crystals — A Relationship by Dr Gulrukh Bala. Published in 2001 by Suman Book Centre, 88 Princess Street, Bombay 400002. Pp: 87. Price: Rs 75.

Step aside Swarovski, Dr Gulrukh Bala is here. A 'crystal therapist,' aromatherapist and a holistic lifestyle educator, Bala has put forth an 87-page handy book which may not present crystals with elegance, but certainly with more erudition, and hence — believe it or not! — greater enticement than a Swarovski



catalog. For, at the end of the read, most readers would want to own a crystal, or probably more than one of the 28 crystals outlined by her, depending on one's needs.

Crystals — A Relationship is a very simple, stick-to-facts read. The author defines a crystal, and through the first chapter (almost half the book) introduces the reader to the many different types of crystals from amethysts

and agates to topazes and turquoises. Each crystal is simply defined, followed by what it does for the wearer. The benefits of crystals, as one discovers, are manifold, and, if one has to believe them, then maybe a crystal a day would keep not just the doctor, but many a surgeon and the moneylender as well away!

The book goes on to tell the reader how to choose the right crystal (with assistance from Bala, we suppose), 'program' the crystal so that it works for one, and even how to 'cleanse' the crystal. It can all be rather complicated, but Bala's simple style, makes it all seem rather easy.

The book is illustrated with 16 color pages showing 31 crystals in different sizes and shapes — none of which look attractive (though, they may be true to color and type). But then, as in relationships, beauty, as we know is just skin-deep.

The book should certainly help a lay reader in discovering which crystal (or gem, as lay persons would know them) is the right type, depending on one's requirements, and also on one's star signs. For the sceptics, there are the mandatory case studies which narrate how Bala through her crystal healing workshops and healing sessions has helped people overcome their troubles.

The next time one spots a heavily bejeweled person, dripping with ruby rings and peridot pendants, don't assume that here's a specimen flaunting wealth — you could be witnessing a person fraught with ailments and saddled with negative energies!

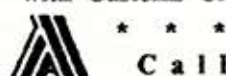
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***Please make sure the reply envelope bears the reference number cited here.**

The age of Zoroastrian brides (as listed in this issue) ranged between 22 and 25 years, the arithmetic mean (the total number of individual ages divided by the total number of brides) being 23 years. The corresponding figures for the grooms were 25 and 32 years, averaging at 29.

Eighty-four Zoroastrians were interred in Bombay's Towers of Silence in October this year. On the other hand births numbered only nine. Eighteen of the 27 victims who succumbed to heart disease were octogenarians and nonagenarians. Lung disease/pneumonia took the lives of 12 patients whereas five Zoroastrians each fell prey to cancer, brain disease and septicemia. The other killers were old age/general debility (four), diabetes and hypertension (three each) and liver disease (two). Among the 17 isolated causes of deaths were: kidney failure, malaria, hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body), haematemesis (vomiting of blood), anemia, bronchospastic disease (sudden constriction of the bronchial tubes), gastro-intestinal disease, malnutrition, hemiparesis (a slight paralysis or weakness of one half of the face or body), syringomyelia (an uncommon progressive disease of the nervous system of unknown cause), blood disease, Parkinson's disease, gastritis, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, hypokalaemia (abnormally low potassium level of the blood), Alzheimer's disease and asthma. The age range fluctuated between 48 and 97 years. The Zoroastrian life expectancy at birth for October, in Bombay, was 78 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.

AHMEDABAD

DIED

Rustom Faramji Khambatta (80) on August 29, 2003

BARODA

DIED

Jerbanoo Bomanshaw Vandriwala (81); August 24
Frenymai Nadershaw Tavadia; September 3
Bachamai Pestonji Khodaiji (83); September 5

BOMBAY

BORN

A girl to *Shiraz and Freddy Avari*; October 3
A boy to *Rashna and Homiyar Dhamodiwala*; October 7
A boy to *Simi and Cyrus Nallaseth*; October 8
A boy to *Meher and Darayus Khodaiji*; October 11
A boy to *Natasha and Hormuzd Karanjia*; October 16
A girl to *Shireen and Zubin Davar*; October 18
A girl to *Nainaz and Kannan Nadar*; October 18
A boy, *Danesh*, to *Nilofer and Darayas Khajotia*, brother to *Vahbeez*; October 20
A girl to *Aybeza and Dariush Irani*; October 31

MARRIED

Binaifer Kersi Mistry and Cyrus Noshir Hadvaidd; October 5
Khushboo Shiraz Zilla of Neral, Dist Raigad and *Cyrus Tehmurasp Tampal*; October 9
Parizad Dhanju Chichgur and Fahrad Rohinton Mehta; October 30

DIED

Phiroze Jehangirji Amrolia (92), residing at 22/C, Nawab Tank Rd, Mazgaon Dock, 400010; October 1
Khorshed Dinshaw Siodia (82), 8, Khareghat Clny, Hughes Rd, 400007; October 1
Rustom Framroze Billimoria (58), J-19, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; October 2
Jerbanoo Dossabhai Lath (88), 5/10, Panthaky Baug, H. S. Lane, Andheri, 400069; October 2
Nargish Phiroze Siganporia (72), F. S. Parukh Dharamshalla, 34, Hughes Rd, 400007; October 2
Rusi Hiraji Baria (70), Silverene, 34/35, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; October 3
Percy Sam Birdie (54), 739, Rd no 5, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 3
Mani Nadersha Mandviwalla (71), 3-7/C, Tata Clny, Tardeo Rd, 400034; October 3
Ratanshaw Savaksha Sethna (71), D4/34, S. B. Bharucha Baug, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; October 3
Pervin Soli Tata (73), 29, Jaiphal Ter, Forjett St, 400036; October 3
Homai Eruch Bhote (73), J/15, S. B. Bharucha Baug, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; October 4
Dinoo Shapoor Damri (80), D/4, Ben Nevis, B. Desai Rd, 400026; October 4
Freny Kersi Kapadia (68), 6, Dawn, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; October 4
Jamshed Bapuji Shroff (79), 11/A, Sayaji Nagoji Bldg, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; October 4
Pesi Sorabji Mohta (73), J/32, Merwanjee Cama Park, Cama Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; October 5
Shehera Framroz Nanavati (93), 67/G, Gilder Hse, B. Desai Rd, 400026; October 5
Dolly Rustom Suratia (73), B-24, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; October 5
Bejon Hormusji Baldawala (77), 6/5, Spenta, Little Gibbs Rd, 400006; October 6
Phiroze Sorabji Bulsara (67),

21/B, Usha Kiran, 2nd Pasta Lane, Colaba, 400005; October 6
Shera Erach Chiniwala (81), 91, Mint Rd, Fort, 400001; October 6
Mehera Kersasp Lawyer (91), 752, Dr Ghanti Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 6
Nozer Adi Hakim (55), New Khan Bldg, 275/N, Chikalwadi, 400007; October 7
Tehmi Bejonji Mistry (85), 783, Readymoney Block, Mancherji Joshi Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 7
Nariman Navroji Daruwala (72), 11, Pundole Bldg, Jehangir Daji St, Grant Rd, 400007; October 8
Piloo Savaksha Olpadwalla (86), B. Wadia Block, Old Khareghat Clny, Hughes Rd, 400007; October 8
Mehru Kaikhushru Khodaiji (84), 620, Rajiv Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 9
Najoo Khurshed Merchant (83), 658, Khorshed Abad, Firdosi Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 9
Jehangir Naoroji Shroff (91), 3, Native Dispensary Bldg, Chandanwadi, 400002; October 9
Sam Phiroze Driver (77), 603/15-A, Sangam, Dr G. Deshmukh Marg, 400026; October 10
Dhanjishaw Merwanji Hansotia (48), G/12, Mt Nirmala Clny, St Joseph Baptist Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; October 10
Bhica Jehangir Bam (83), C/o G. C. Bamjee, 12/G, Sagar Darshan, B. Desai Rd, 400026; October 11
Piloo Dady Bottlewalla (89), 5, Sohrab Minar, M. L. Dahanukar Marg, 400026; October 11
Noshir Sohrabji Ellis (89), 51/52, Tardeo Apts, Tardeo Rd, 400007; October 11
Shirin Mehli Keravala (55), Keravala Lodge, 33, Stn Rd, Santacruz (W), 400054; October 11
Katy Rustomji Palamcoat (83), E/29, Jer Baug, Ambedkar Rd, Byculla, 400027; October 11
Coomi Edulji Antia (80), 5,

Ivanhoe, 139, Bhosale Marg, Mantralya, 400021; October 12
Noshir Khurshedji Batliwalla (86), 10/2, Khareghat Bldg, Gamadia Clny, Tardeo, 400007; October 12
Roshan Meherwan Irani (70), Cama Bldg Hse, Khetwadi 14th Lane, Opp Mohammedi Minar, 400004; October 12
Erach Hormusji Nariman (76), 208, Waterfield Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; October 12
Coomi Darabshaw Parakh (84), 303, Rizvi Palace, Chinchpokli Gulli, Bandra (W), 400050; October 12
Eruch Nusserwanji Billimoria (82), F-22, Contractor Bldg,

Soonawalla Agiary Lane, Mahim, 400016; October 13
Baby girl of Delnaz Meherzad Deolaliwalla (stillborn), Q-29, Godrej Bldg, Off Nepean Sea Rd, 400026; October 13
Freny Dinshaw Patel (82), A/9, Gnat Vikrant Co-op Hsg Soc Ltd, Poddar Rd, Santacruz (W), 400054; October 13
Pesi Ardeshir Cama (67), Dara Mirza Bldg, Tata Blocks, Off Guru Nanak Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; October 14
Jeroo Shawaksha Dolikuka (76), Amtoobai Blocks, 170, S. V. Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; October 14
Russi Jehangir Seervai (86),

K-11, Cusrow Bldg, S. B. Rd, 400039; October 14
Shawaksha Palanji Contractor (Hilloona) (91), 260/A, Kuka Sadan, Parel, 400012; October 15
Najoo Rustom Kakalia (82), Pandya Mans, 62, G. S. S. Rd, 400002; October 15
Manek Rustom Mobedji (59), 16/22, Cama Bldg, Gilder Lane, Lamington Rd, 400007; October 15
Perin Dorabji Mirza (76), Mirza St, Udvada, Gujarat, 396180; October 16
Bacha Nowroji Tarapore (85), N/33, Nowroz Bldg, Lalbaug, 400012; October 16

Naju Eruchshaw Dalal (74), 83, Hirabai Petit Bldg, Grant Rd (E), 400007; October 17
Sheroo Merwanji Pardiwalla (73), 5-6/618-B, Bhiwandiwalla Ter, Dhobitalao, 400002; October 17
Tehmi Jehangir Shroff (89), 102, Aderbad, 34, Hughes Rd, 400007; October 18
Framroz Pirojshaw Antia (87), West Hill, 27, Nepean Sea Rd, 400026; October 19
Mehroo Adi Cursetji (69), 3W, Dilpazir, B. Desai Rd, 400026; October 19
Jamshed Minocher Desai (86), B/34, Nowroz Bldg, Lalbaug, 400012; October 19

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YOUTH SPEAK

continued from page 82

about mine; what is my dharma? For me it is my duty to my family, my religion, or something else? I pondered on this question a little and came to a conclusion. It is all three! To my family I must be a good son, brother, cousin, nephew, and grandson and also be a good student. To the religion I must stand up for what I believe in, follow the religion, and carry the torch that my forbears had lit and carried so well. So what else is there? one may ask. Well, there are many things. First and foremost to show a constant, never fading support to my country. I must also always take it upon myself to attempt to be the best friend and helping hand that I can humanly be. I must give to those who have not been born as blessed as I have. Funny though, all of my duties listed above seem to be intertwined; because that is what they are. And that... that is what it feels like for me to be a Zoroastrian living in the United States.

Fourteen-year-old Darayus Cyrus Toorkey lives and studies in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA and is in the ninth grade. He was born in Wisconsin and has lived in Minnesota and California before moving to Cherry Hill 10 years ago. He is proud to be an American and of his Parsi Zoroastrian roots. He is interested in science and enjoys reading, watching TV and playing games.

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Correction

In "The Taj of the Tatas" (Parsiiana, October 2003) Rodabeh has been mistakenly mentioned as J. R. D. Tata's wife. Rodabeh Sawhney was J. R. D.'s sister. His wife was Thelma. The error is regretted.

Reader Rustom Hormuzdiar pointed out that Bapsy Sabavala did not ride a horse up the Taj staircase. This was done by trainer Jimmy Bharucha. Sabavala guided a horse up the stairs, not rode on it.

Viloo Darabsha Ranina (72), F/16, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; October 19

Aloo Framroze Subedar (87), E-42, Jer Baug, Ambedkar Rd, Byculla, 400027; October 19

Ratty Jal Battiwalla (91), M-2, Eden Hall, Dr Annie Besant Rd, Worli, 400018; October 21

Najoo Adi Daruwalla (82), 6/36, Mistry Bldg, Sunmill Rd, Lower Parel, 400012; October 21

Roshan Nariman Katpitia (73), 502, Gayatri, Off J. P. Rd, Andheri (W), 400053; October 21

Adi Dinshaw Printer (78), 6A/2, Satnam Hse, Parsi Wada, 19, Sahar Rd, Andheri (E), 400099; October 21

Sohrab Bhikhaji Bachana (80), 1/32, A. H. Wadia Baug, Parel Tank Rd, 400033; October 22

Perin Jal Daruwalla (83), F/18, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; October 22

Dadi Rustamji Dordi (70), 280/A, Jawalkar Mans, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Parel, 400012; October 22

Rustom Hormusji Sarkary (78), 17, Naya Daur Co-op Hsg Soc Ltd, Amboli Naka, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; October 22

Dolly Rustomji Umrigar (81), 784, Readymoney Block, M. Joshi Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 22

Minoo Rustomji Mistry (60), G/4, S. B. Bharucha Baug, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; October 25

Rati Kawasji Tarachand (83), 3, Ness Baug, Nana Chowk, 400007; October 25

Nargis Maneckshaw Mistry (97), 11, Moonlight, 158, M. Karve Rd, 400020; October 26

Tehmina Sorabji Mistry (76), 16/4A, New Dubash Bldg, Gamadia Clny, Tardeo, 400007; October 26

Rusi Fardunji Writer (83), 40, Ahmed Bldg, Gunpowder Rd, Mazgaon, 400010; October 26

Framroze Pestonji Batliwala (87), E2/506, Bharat Ngr, 342, Grant Rd, 400007; October 27

Homi Motabhai Shroff (88), 725, Dinshaw Master Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; October 27

Dina Rustom Balsara (85),

FIGURES AT A GLANCE*						
	Bombay		India		World	
	This issue	2003*	This issue	2003*	This issue	2003*
BIRTHS						
Boys	5	44	2	5	1	16
Girls	4	47	—	7	2	16
MARRIAGES						
Parsi	3	105	—	11	—	13
INTERCOMMUNAL						
Males married out	—	33	—	—	—	4
Females married out	—	18	—	—	—	6
DEATHS						
CONSIGNED						
Males	35	369	8	56	1	26
Females	49	363	9	78	—	19
CREMATED						
Males	—	6	—	—	—	—
Females	—	1	—	—	—	—

*Running totals for 2003 (January 2003-November 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.

22, Aziz Bldg, 135, Tardeo Rd, 400034; October 28

Perin Shapoorji Bharucha (90), S-8, Cusrow Baug, S. B. Rd, 400039; October 28

Homi Padamji Cooper (83), E/6, Godrej Baug, Off Nepean Sea Rd, 400026; October 28

Hilla Burjor Bharucha (84), 65/405, Sibylle Apts, Worli Hill Rd, 400018; October 29

Freny Nusservanji Bhorucha (88), 11/3, Tata Clny, Sir Ratan Tata Rd, Tardeo, 400034; October 30

Minoo Hormusji Engineer (77), Petit Sanatorium, Kemp's Corner, 400036; October 30

Arnavaz Shiavax Shroff (80), 201, Robert's Ark, Chichpokli Rd, Bandra, 400050; October 30

Ruci Naserwanji Wadia (87), 51, Bakhtawar Annexe, N. Dabholkar Rd, 400006; October 30

Zenobia Dara Wadia (67), A/64, Meherzin, Wodehouse Rd, Colaba, 400005; October 31

CALCUTTA

DIED

Dolly Patel, wife of Framroze and mother of Roshni F. Vazifdar, Farida Parvez Guzdar and Purveen Khushroo Poonevala; October 11

SECUNDERABAD

BORN

A boy, *Shiamak*, to *Armaity* and *Nevil Bhathela*; August 14

A boy, *Anoush*, to *Rashna* and *Daraesh Mistry*; August 19

DIED

Dhunjishaw Meherwanji Wadia (75); October 24

Maneck Khorshedji Lashkari (91), sister of Navsha, Hilla, late Mehra and Naja; October 28

Rati Taraporewala (73), wife of Navroze; October 30

SURAT

DIED

Homai Naushirvan Vimadlal (87), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; October 1

Sam Jamsedji Ilaviya (65), 5, Raju Chmbs, Kharvawad, Nanpura, 395001; October 2

Noshir Kekhashru Karanjia (76), 2/297-98, Mota Mohallo, Rustompura, 395002; October 7

Shavakshah Dinshaji Amalsadiwala (82), Gam Amalsadi, Tal Mandvi, Dist Surat; October 10

Bamansha Kuvarji Ichhaporia (74), Kuka Chawl, Rani Talao, Bibiniwadi, 395003;

October 12

Rustamji Doshabhai Rao (75), Gopaleshwar Soc, Tadvadi, Rander Rd, 395005; October 20

Gustadji Manchershah Bodhanwala (76), Bhaya Mohallo, Nanpura, 395001; October 23

Keti Faramji Palia (87), Palia Bglw, Machhlipith, 395003; October 25

Mehranmai Ardeshtar Dhala (91), Ghanti Sheri, Rustompura, 395002; October 26

AUSTRALIA

New South Wales

BORN

A girl, *Aria*, to *Sharon* and *Sheriar Pestonji*; April 26

A boy, *Jowin*, to *Nahzrin* and *Eddie Dubash*; May 20

UK

Greater Manchester

DIED

Rohi Jamshed Gazdar, brother of Pesi and late Adi in Manchester; October 17

USA

California

born

A girl, *Jenovia*, to *Shenaz* and *Darayush Mistry*; October 5

Compiled by Roxana A. Driver



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