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Minoo Shroff

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TASTY • TASTY BISCUITS

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Dialog, not diktats

The resolution passed by the High Priests on the ides of March has raised a controversy not only in the community but also amongst the general populace.

Interfaith marriages are a phenomenon common to all strata of society internationally. Their occurrence is not comparable to an exotic religious custom or archaic system for disposal of the dead that affects a minority. This is a topic that touches nearly each and every individual.

A Hindu marries a Muslim, an Afro-American marries a white Anglo-Saxon, a Catholic marries a Protestant, a Jew marries a Gentile, a high caste Hindu marries a scheduled tribe person... the world has seen and experienced it all.

And yet what makes the Parsis unique in this regard is that while other faiths are keen to encompass the spouse and the children of such unions into their folds, the High Priests and their fundamentalist supporters not only want to keep the spouse and children out, they don't even want the Parsi Zoroastrians to continue in their fold!

They offer no explanation for their beliefs except to state that "The High Priests are strongly of the view that our religious scriptures disapprove the marriage of Zoroastrians with members of other communities and faith and consider it to be a transgression of the tenets of the religion."

"Strongly of the view" implies that this statement is only a point of view. And that is correct. Because over the years priests have given contradictory 'views' and the community has been subject to their erraticism. Circumstances and events appear to dictate what the priests will state at a particular time and place.

But they cannot change facts as easily. Zoroastrianism not only permits but enjoins conversion. Thus in

ancient Iran if a Zoroastrian wished to marry a non-Zoroastrian, he or she would have been urged to convert the spouse to the faith and then marry. By stating that conversion is not the tradition in India amongst the Parsis and by citing that practice to justify their stand the Priests are contradicting the original tenets of the religion which enjoin conversion. They can be thereby charged of selectively citing scriptures to suit their convenience.

And this unfortunately is the charge being brought against them in the case of Neville Wadia. Five High Priests permitted the octogenarian businessman's initiation into the Zoroastrian faith despite both his parents being Christian (his father Sir Ness had converted to Christianity and married a Christian lady). But nine years later they turn around and say that children born even of a Parsi Zoroastrian father are unwelcome, that their navjote ceremony should not be performed, that the parents' marriage under the civil act "cannot be considered as religiously valid marriage under the Parsi Zoroastrian faith."

Perhaps this is a new nomenclature, the 'Parsi Zoroastrian faith.' Or even a new religion. We knew of Zoroastrianism and we know that followers of this religion who came to India were referred to as Parsis. But we have never heard of a 'Parsi Zoroastrian faith.' Is this the faith that the High Priests are referring to? And has the community confused this new faith with Zoroastrianism? Are they the High Priests of Zoroastrianism or of Parsi Zoroastrianism? And who is their prophet then?

Just as the High Priests allege Zoroaster converted Mazdayasnis to Zoroastrianism and therefore it was a modification of the religion followed by the Mazdayasnis, so also Parsi Zoroastrianism could be a

modification of Zoroastrianism. So now in addition to the terms Zoroastrian, Parsi, Parsi Zoroastrian and Irani Zoroastrian we have a fifth category, 'Parsi Zoroastrian faith.'

The priests then should not cite Zoroastrian scriptures in support of their claims. They should cite the literature written only after 1908, when the judgement of Justices Dinshaw Dhanjibhoy Daver and Frank C. O. Beaman distinguished between the terms Zoroastrian and Parsi. On the basis of these recent 'scriptures,' they could make out a case for the new caste system they wish to enforce.

The question that most people asked when the Priests issued their diktat was, why now? What sparked off the letter? Why was an issue, that was not rankling in the minds of the community, suddenly projected onto center stage? After all interfaith marriages and the navjotes of children of such unions have been taking place overtly for decades. One answer may be that the orthodox camp, flush with their victory in stymieing the decision of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustees to offer space on the Doongerwadi premises for a prayer hall for those opting for cremation or burial, may have believed this was the time to strike.

But Doongerwadi became a topical issue for two reasons: the absence of vultures and the proliferation of residential buildings around the area. The stench of rotting corpses, the viewing of the naked bodies from the adjoining highrises, all cried out for attention. The solar concentrators provided an alternative and the proposed aviary, if it succeeds, may further alleviate the problem. In this case the community was able to offer a partial solution to a vexing and 'burning' problem.

But what about interfaith mar-

continued on page 52



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Resolution refrain

The Parsi Zoroastrian community should compliment and show their profound gratitude to the revered Vada Dasturs for passing this most needed resolution (see page 24) which can deter the miserable rot and decay caused to our noble community by the effects of intermarriage, juddin navjotes, illicit religious rituals and practices.

Dastur (Dr) Kaikhusroo JamaspAsa deserves the full credit for this change in consciousness and the enlightenment which he has brought to the practising mobed sahebs and other dasturs of our community and to the entire Zoroastrian community as a whole.

The greatest tragedy is that this resolution should have been passed decades ago by those who were responsible like our dasturs, mobeds, the Athornan Mandal and, above all, the so-called apex body of our illustrious community, the Parsi Punchayet of Bombay.

Unfortunately, those responsible have in the past totally failed in their duty to preserve and to protect the sanctity of our consecrated places of worship in accordance with the precepts, tenets and the time-honored customs of our Parsi Zoroastrian religion.

This historic resolution also, beyond any doubts, endorses the resolution passed by the mobeds of Poona (see "Priests' diktat," Readers' Forum, Parsiana, March 2003).

This is the fundamental mandate of the Parsi Zoroastrian religion and our ancient Aryan race; otherwise one of our most sacred prayers, *Ahuramazda Khodae* would have no meaning whatsoever.

Ervad DARIUS N. SETHNA

I refer to the "historic resolution" passed by a few priests of Poona at a meeting held on December 5, 2002 at the J. J. Agiary Complex, Poona which was duly endorsed by a few of our dasturs. In short this resolution declared that:

- the four-day ceremonies be denied to those who do not opt for dakhmenashini (as it exists today), where a dakhma exists;
- not even a *tandorosti* be recited for couples who opt for interfaith marriages;
- children of interfaith marriages, when even the father is a Parsi Zoroastrian, be denied the navjote ceremony.

Such thoughtless resolutions will do more harm than good. By the landmark judgement of Justices Daver and Beaman of the Bombay High Court, vide suit no 689 of 1906, the children of mixed marriages, when the father is a Parsi Zoroastrian, are considered as Zoroastrians for the purpose of navjote or any other rituals.

It appears that our prelates see nothing wrong in altering directives in the *Vendidad* to suit their own conveniences. Some examples:

- as required, the gah sarna ceremony is not insisted upon in the same *gah* in which the person dies;
- the four-day prayers are not recited at the same spot where the gah sarna ceremony was performed. In my stay of more than 28 years in Bangalore, I have not come across even a single occasion when this essential ritual was carried out, although a furnished bungli is provided in the precinct of the Doongerwadi, which is hardly 10 km from our

Bangalore agiary and the priest's quarters. Earlier, even a personal request from a priest, who was a reputed religious scholar in Bangalore, was denied, even when such a request was made by him prior to his death, promising even transportation;

- the period of the muktad ceremonies has been truncated from 18 to 10 days;
- the requirements of isolation during a woman's monthly menstrual cycle and for 40 days during post-partum periods are carried out more in the breach than execution even by the ladies from the priestly families!

•a navjote ceremony was performed of an 80-year-old gentleman, who was born a Christian and was also baptised (his father was a converted Christian and the mother was a Christian at the time of the child's birth), on the pretext that such exceptions are permissible if there is a lapse in only one generation and the concerned person shows regret and genuine desire to reenter the Zoroastrian religion.

Will our prelates move with the times and desist from enforcing their unworkable and unjustifiable ways over helpless and ignorant members of our community by sheer coercion, fear and at times even threats? The manner in which some of our rituals and rites are currently enforced and practiced make one believe that the core teachings of our religion will be safer in the hands of expatriate Zoroastrians who are keen to learn, follow and practice our religion in its most pristine form.

Dr M. D. DISAWALLA

Bangalore

As someone who greatly admires the teachings of our Lord Zoroaster and the type of positive life these teachings encourages us to lead, I feel that we should do our utmost to preserve this great religion of ours. I am afraid that this new High Priests' resolution will only lead to its extinction. We should, on the contrary, be like the Catholics. When they (male or female) marry outside their faith, the Church makes it mandatory under the threat of excommunication that the children of this marriage be baptised and brought up as Catholics. This has done wonders to multiply the Catholics and it would do exactly the same for the dwindling Parsis.



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In large cities like Delhi, Calcutta and Madras we have only a few families living there among millions of non-Zoroastrians and with the majority of Parsis in today's world not being inclined to arranged marriages it is but inevitable that our Zoroastrian boys and girls will marry non-Zoroastrians. We all know that the Zoroastrian religion not only permits but prescribes the conversion of a person born in another religion to Zoroastrianism. This conversion will make them Zoroastrians but not Parsis and they will not be entitled to the eco-

nomic benefits of subsidized housing, schools, hospitals, etc. But, by converting to Zoroastrianism, one should definitely be entitled to enter all the Zoroastrian atash behrams, agiaries and dar-e-mehers as a matter of right, and be eligible to attend the Zoroastrian funeral rites.

This great religion of ours, Zoroastrianism, should not die and our priests should encourage and indeed command people of mixed marriages to have their children be brought up as practising Zoroastrians with knowledge of their faith.

JEROO MANGO

Some of the Vada Dasturs have overnight seen fit to pass a draconian resolution on intercaste marriages that has no basis in law or backing of scriptures. The local Press in deference to our much respected progressive community, is wasting precious newsprint on debates on a subject that has no legal standing. If legal luminaries like Soli Sorabjee, Fali Nariman, Nadir Modi opted to fight this resolution, pro bono in the interest of afflicted members of the Parsi sect, the priestly fatwa would not stand scrutiny before the bench. Keepers of our faith are not vested with authority to excommunicate a Parsi for marrying a person from outside the community.

Throwing out the baby with the bathtub, our learned Parsi religious heads have taken the easy way out by deciding to level the playing field between the sexes. By denouncing both genders marrying outside the Parsi/Irani fraternity they have created a further divide in the enlightened community, one which has not taken overstepping of religious authority and trespassing on fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, either lightly or kindly.

As a matter of fact, sprouting fear by threat of excommunication, will only breed promiscuity among the vulner-

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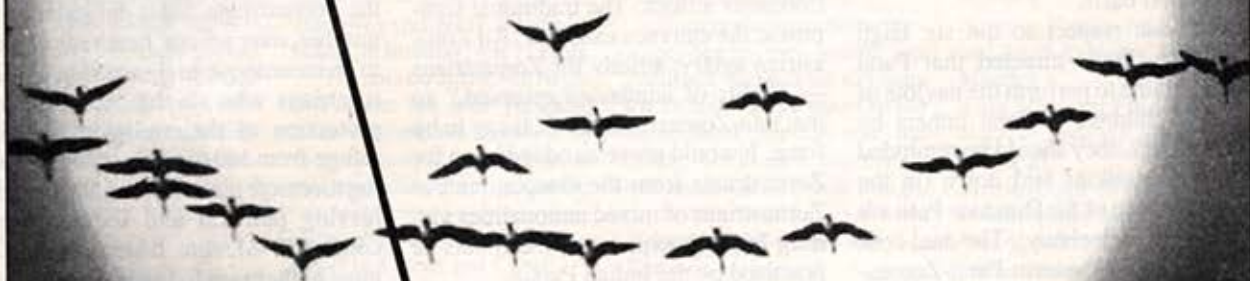
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able youth afraid of giving their intercaste relationships the sanctity of holy matrimony. In other words, preservation of the Parsi race will be at the cost of moral/social values.

No forbidding resolution from even revered religious heads will douse ordained true love between intercommunity couples for marriages are made in heaven.

It is open to any priest to refuse to perform the navjote of a particular person without assigning any reason for such refusal, and none can compel him to perform it. Declining to perform such navjotes falls under Canon law. But for us Parsis there is nothing like Canon law. In Parsis, there are no ecclesiastical councils or courts to enforce any such law, and the view taken by these priests has no legal basis.

With due respect to the six High Priests who have directed that Parsi priests decline to perform the navjote of even the children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers, they should be reminded of the propositions laid down (in the celebrated case of *Sir Dinshaw Petit v/s Sir Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy*). The dual concept implicit in the term Parsi-Zoroastrian applies to a person who is Parsi by race or community by genetic descent in the male line, and is Zoroastrian by religion. The race to which a person belongs is determined by birth and is not a matter of choice. A man may change his religion, but can never change his race which is rooted in genetic descent.

I would neither advise nor encourage navjotes of my grandchildren in India, if their father were a non-Parsi, under the impression that it would make them Parsis or entitle them to rights of a Parsi, even though I would certainly teach them the prayers of the Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrianism is likely to outlive the Parsi race. But I would certainly challenge any individual who dared to stop my Parsi-by-birth daughters from entering any local agiary for as practising Parsis, they would have neither converted to nor embraced any other religion outside of their glorious Zarathushtrian faith. Once a Parsi, always a Parsi. In 1951, even in the matter of the Parsi wife of the late Justice M. Somjee who upon the death of her husband, reconverted to the Zoroastrian religion after having converted to Islam earlier, the view was taken that re-conversion did not stand on the same footing as conversion, because racially she had always continued to be a Parsi and was thereby

entitled to all rights of a Parsi-Zoroastrian again.

In a scenario where by long and uniform usage, conversion is not allowed by Parsis in India, I venture to proffer an amicable solution to this burning issue. There are many small agiaries scattered across Bombay which have difficulty in maintaining themselves. One of these dilapidated fire-temples could be mutually allowed by its cash-crunched trustees to be financed, managed and administered by the inter-married families where one of the spouses is non-Parsi, particularly where the mother is a born Parsi or even the non-Parsi wife wants to embrace her Parsi husband's religion. Their numbers have the will and the resources and many priests are ready to cater to their spiritual needs as Zoroaster's flock. The traditional signpost at the entrance can read "All Zoroastrian agiary: strictly for Zoroastrians — Rights of admission reserved," so that non-Zoroastrians don't barge in by force. It would prove an added boon for Zoroastrians from the diaspora and/or Zoroastrians of mixed nationalities visiting India to experience the rituals as practised by the Indian Parsis.

After all even the Pundolites built their place of worship right next door to the holy of holies Iranshah in Udvarda. Our Parsi traditionalists can then stop bickering about mixed marriages and rest content that no unwelcome outsider will defile their religious rituals and traditions in their sanctum sanctorum.

MICKIE SORABJEE

Zoroastrian priests are the keepers of our faith and they have helped us to maintain our values and traditions in India for over a thousand years. Like everyone else, they are concerned about the future of the Zoroastrian religion, the fact that year-by-year Parsis in Bombay are reducing by an alarming extent and young, very well educated Parsi girls are finding it extremely difficult to get suitable, well educated Parsi boys. About 25 percent of Parsi girls are compelled to marry well educated non-Parsi boys.

Six out of seven High Priests have recently passed a resolution (or fatwa, as the community was not consulted) which overrules the 1908 judgement of Justice Daver and Justice Beaman which gives the children of a Parsi father and non-Zoroastrian mother, the right to follow any religion, including the Zoroastrian religion.

All of us, including the six High Priests, want the Zoroastrian religion to be practised till eternity, like all other major religions and not to be reduced to a page or two in religious encyclopaedias.

What is required is not any paper resolution, but a study by Zoroastrian scholars, including the High Priests, on why, the once powerful Zoroastrian Empire, was not only defeated in the battles by mere Arab tribesmen but almost every Zoroastrian living in Iran was converted to Islam, within a few centuries of the defeat of the Zoroastrian empire. The Arabs also conquered Spain and ruled over there for several centuries, but the people of Spain are Christians.

The conquest of the Sassanian civilization could not completely eliminate the Zoroastrians, but it did reduce their number, over several hundreds of years to an inconsequential minority. The Zoroastrians who stayed behind, sought protection of their religion and took refuge from Muslim life styles by moving to remote places in Fars and Kerman, leaving political and socioeconomic control in Muslim hands. At present most of them are living in absolute poverty as second-class citizens and kafirs.

This situation leads us to pertinent questions: Did the Zoroastrian community fade as it failed to adapt to the changing society? Did the Zoroastrian magi bring about inequality in the society, leading to social discontent to such an extent that Zoroastrians, not only to escape jazia tax but also the distinctions among its own ranks, sought to accept equality propagated by the Islamic persuasion?

NOSHIR M. LAM

This poem "Magnificent six!" is my response to the article written by the High Priests:

Ye magnificent six/In your robes so pure/Ye are not actually/Ordained from heaven!/Spreading the/Holy Word/I am not so sure/Having been/Well versed/In our scriptures/Especially *Avesta*/Taught by/Asho Zarathushtra.

It seems to me/In lieu of unity/Ye are ripping/The community/Front, center/Right and left/Why may I ask/You take pleasure/In playing/With our religion/Russian Roulette?

Ye are leaders/Not enforcers/But preachers/Merely preaching/The Holy Word/Simple shepherds/Guiding their/Lowly herd/On the path/Of Asha/Travelled by/Asho Zarathushtra.

He preached/Humility, simplicity/Love,

respect/Tolerance, equality/To achieve/
Frasho-kereti/Instead of/Hate racism/
Discrimination/And bigotry.

FARIDA BAMJI
Canada

"Options to..."

Dr P. D. Sunavala appears to justify the importance of incinerators on the basis of the cities that operate them or the companies that donate them ("Options to..." Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, February 2003). If London, Munich and Los Angeles use incinerators it is to their peril.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) — part of the World Health Organization (WHO) — announced on February 14, 1997, that the most potent dioxin, 2, 3, 7, 8-TCDD, is now considered a Class I carcinogen, meaning a "known human carcinogen." According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), only 50 percent of dioxin sources are known. Of these, 95 percent comes from combustion processes. Garbage and medical waste incinerators are the largest identified sources. The major source of dioxin in the environment (95 percent) comes from incinerators.

The US EPA report is full of new

information on dioxin including information on how dioxin and dioxin-like chemicals damage the body.

Virtually all dioxin releases are preventable. Environmentalists all over the world are calling for an immediate halt to the incineration of municipal, hazardous, medical and radioactive waste, and any such wastes incinerated in cement and/or aggregate kilns, or other devices including crematoria for disposing human or animal corpses.

As recently as January 2003 it was reported that the New Rochelle city council has banned apartment building incinerators. "This is an important public health measure," said councilman Noam Bramson who spearheaded the legislation. "All the evidence suggests that the pollution produced by incinerators constitutes a public health hazard."

The American Lung Association (ALA) has been actively pushing local governments to halt their refuse burning ways. The New Rochelle ban was initiated by Bramson after representatives of the New York chapter of the ALA encouraged him to push the ban through.

In fact, a national trend to ban garbage burning has been underway for more than a decade now and recent

legislation in many communities throughout the United States are attempting to clamp down on this health hazard. According to a recent study by the American Medical Association, there is an eight percent increase in lung cancer deaths and a six percent increase in cardiopulmonary deaths resulting from toxins released by trash-burning incinerators.

And Sunavala has the nerve to state "Dadrawala is behind times." The fact is Sunavala is behind the times as a consequence of not keeping abreast of the latest scientific trends, thinking and legislations in the western world, of which he seems so enamored.

While concluding I can do no better that quote Bramson: "We will all be able to breathe easier when incinerators are phased out." NOSHIR H. DADRAWALA

"Sojourn to Sanjan"

The film about the solar concentrators ("Sojourn to Sanjan," Readers' Forum, *Parsiana*, February 2003) was not my film. The National Geographic Channel of Australia, contacted me after a report on the subject appeared in *Time* magazine.

Moreover, I have never stated that

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the Hindus should substitute their traditional method of cremation wherein one and a half tree is used to burn each corpse. This was the message of the film, wherein a traditional Hindu cremation is shown and then a solar concentrator, demonstrating thereby that large-scale deforestation could be averted in India through this simple device.

Dr HOMI DHALLA

Phiroze's fame

The late film producer and director of yesteryears, J. B. H. Wadia who created box office hits like *Mela* was a great



Dastoor: memorable music

admirer of *mushairas* and *qawalias* At film functions which used to take place in different parts of the city *mushairas* used to start late in the evening and continue till the early hours of the next morning in the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1932 at Dubash Building near Grant Road where Baijanji Dastoor resided on the second floor there was a unique *mushaira* program of classical singers which Wadia attended. Baijanji was at that time running a billiard saloon in his house. Till the program started Baijanji told his nine-year-old son Phiroze to sing a few lines to entertain the guests. When the little boy sang *Nahak Lai Gavanva* from *Kirana gharana* in *Bhairavi raag*, J. B. H. was pleased. His voice appeared in a number of Wadia Movie-tone productions and he also played a small role in *Sharbat Ankhen*.

When *Lale Yaman* was released in Super Talkies in 1933 it was a box office hit. It was the first talkie to run to full houses for 14 weeks. After that release Phiroze Dastoor became so famous that it became difficult for him to

move around Grant Road and elsewhere as fans wanted his autograph or wished to speak to him.

Phiroze became well versed in Urdu also after performing a memorable role in *Vaman Avtar*. Phiroze worked successively at Eastern Arts and Minerva Movietone for many years and in 1945 he retired from the movies. He had worked in 15 films. He became a pupil of Swami Gangharva. Dastoor gave performances in a program called Sangeet Jalsa in 1949 at Karachi. This program was organized by the All India Music Conference. During his memorable train journey to Karachi he was accompanied by famous singers Gangubai Hungal, Ustad Esnaad Khan, Kumar Gangharva, etc. He sang on All India Radio regularly. He was also appointed to teach music to college students by the Bombay University.

DINSHAWNATERWALLA

Edited by Parinaz M. Gandhi

CORRECTION

In "Congratulating Guzder," (Events and Personalities, *Parsiana*, March 2003), we had erroneously misspelt Najoo Dodhy's name as Najoo Dordi. The error is regretted.

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Events and Personalities

Shahnameh on CD

The great 10th century Persian poet Firdowsi is said to have spent 12 years to complete his 60,000-couplet epic, the *Shahnameh*. In the 21st century Benaifer Bhoot and her team spent two years to bring out a digitized set of seven interactive CDs whereby Firdowsi's magnum opus can be assimilated conveniently with the click of a mouse. "I put everything on hold to pursue this project," Bhoot was quoted in the *Mumbai Newslane* of March 5, 2003.

Although she had initially planned to release the set priced at Rs 4,000 or US \$ 80 (Rs 3,000 being the introductory offer) in early April, with the war hovering over the Middle Eastern skies and the Iranian ministers unable to adhere to a schedule to preside

over the launch function, she was considering deferring the official ceremony by about a fortnight. Thereafter she will proceed with the release even in the

absence of an Iranian dignitary to grace the function, mentions Bhoot who is desperate to recover Rs 60 lakhs invested in this project.

With no Parsi trust or institution willing to financially support this venture Bhoot had to dip into the family coffers. Her sister Lily Bhoot, director of the family business Atash Private Limited, a transport

and multimedia company, along with managing director Rustom Dastoor obliged. To source her material Benaifer turned to the Iranian Culture House (ICH) which permitted her access to their archives and books once she convinced

them of her motive. Under her directions, teammates Tushar Shah and Pinal Satta then digitized all the information. These easy-to-use CDs do

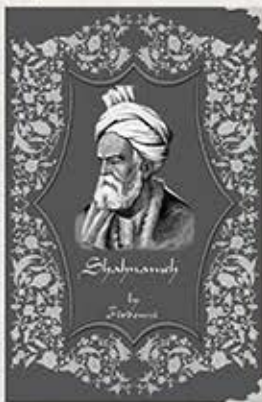
not require the viewer to be computer literate, stresses Benaifer. They have only to follow the instructions which will accompany the set. For further enquiries contact 22070560 or 22075124.

"Not only is the text accessible but there are voice-overs (done by Qusem Nezhad and Sudhir Deodhar of the ICH) for certain sections of the story. Digitized miniature paintings, authentic Iranian music, a bit of history, a small archive of textiles, armor, jewelry, coins, seals and pottery that go as far back as the great Iranian city of Persepolis (are also included)," mentions the *Mumbai Newslane* write-up.

"The *Shahnameh* has always fascinated me," reports Benaifer recalling the oral stories related by her grand maternal uncle, the late Nariman Dastur of Udvada, which prompted her to pursue this project.

The next project on her cards is digitizing the *Bible*. Her team was also invited by the Iranian government to attend an exhibition on books in Tehran in mid-May to consider collaborating on another venture. But the onset of war has thrown many plans out of gear.

A visual of a non-functional Tower of Silence in Iran (below) and the team involved in the *Shahnameh* CD (from left): Dastoor and B. Bhoot (top), Vidyesh Narveyakar and Shah (center) Satta and L. Bhoot



HELP accessible

"Dr Hufriah Suraliwala, medical information manager of Dr Malpani's Health Education Library for People (HELP)...has been organizing free health related talks on the first and third Saturdays of every month

since 1999 at Om Chambers, Kemps Corner, (Bombay)," notes an entry in the *Limca Book of Records 2003* in its medical sciences section. It has been featured as the "longest running series of talks on health awareness," as the first HELP talk was delivered on June 19, 1999 by oncologist Dr Vijay Haribhakti who spoke on "Everything you wanted to know about cancer and did not know whom to ask."

Aimed at making patients savvy by empowering them with authentic health information provided by various specialists, in the last nearly four years the eminent doctors who have participated in the series include Drs R. K. Anand, Prakash Kothari, Rani Raote, Kirit Mody, Rajesh Parikh, Anjali Mukerjee, Ashit and Rekha Sheth, yoga exponent Zubin Zarthoshtimanesh, fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhania and holistic health speaker Mickey Mehta. The diverse topics covered range from cancer, cosmetic dentistry, breast feeding, magnet therapy, sexuality, sports medicine, suicide prevention, tai chi, heart disease,



Suraliwalwa: health savvy

mental disorders, spirituality, deafness, diet and nutrition, homeopathy and cosmetology.

"I think it is a brilliant concept to let lay people know about health-related subjects. Creating physical and behavioral awareness is an urgent need today," opined Dr Rakesh Sinha, the pioneer of gynecological endoscopy in India and a motivational expert who has in the past spoken at HELP.

Starting with a modest attendance of 16-20 people initially, over the years "the popularity and attendance of these programs has increased tremendously (being) known among masses for bringing in medical experts of high credibility," notes Suraliwalwa. "We hand-pick our speakers, selecting those who are the most prominent in their field of expertise," Suraliwalwa was quoted in *The Indian Express* of February 25, 2003. At the end of a session participants are given a response form to indicate their area of interest so that the organizers could arrange talks on subjects where additional information is sought.

At HELP, information on every topic concerning health can be available in minutes, attests a write-up in the *Afternoon Despatch and Courier* of March 3, 2003. Hitherto the HELP talks have

been organized in English but realizing that people who have the least information on health issues do not speak or understand English, Suraliwalwa admitted that it was one area that needed to be improved upon.

A cosmetic dentist by profession, Suraliwalwa has held several talks in her field of specialization. She is also a consultant to the *Limca Book's* medical sciences section. For more information on HELP talks call Suraliwalwa on 23683334 or e-mail: drhufrish@hotmail.com

An example for his peers

"Based on his outstanding accomplishments to date and the noble example he has set for his peers and entire community," the American Biographical Institute's Board of International Research selected Rusi B. Bhungara "Man of the Year 2003." This distinction is "reserved only for men who have significantly enhanced world communities and professions," notes an introduction to the citation.



Bhungara: significant contribution

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the endeavors of men around the world because of our list of recognized who's who titles. Singling out a limited number to receive the accolade...has been difficult indeed. Much deliberation was held to choose those whose achievements and dedication toward exemplary goals were among the best we have seen," noted a letter to Bhungara from the Institute president J. M. Evans.

Involved in social work for the last several years, Bhungara is presently president of the National Sports Club of the Blind, general secretary of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations for Welfare and Culture (FOZAWAC), and joint honorary secretary of the World Zoroastrian Organisation, India, the Parsee Gymkhana and the All Parsees Sports Foundation. Among the other community institutions with which Bhungara is connected are the Bombay Parsee Association, Liaison Committee and the Jussawala Sanatorium Trust. He has also lent his services to the Mumbai Cricket Association and the Lions Club of Byculia. Two years ago he was felicitated by the Surat Parsi Panchayat for his consistent efforts to promote sports among the youth, notes a press release.

Star of Sunbeam

Four hundred and fifty underprivileged children's lives have been transformed thanks to the intervention of Sunbeam, a movement initiated by some friends from CRY (Child Relief and You). Managing trustee Khurshid Dabdi and her band of over 30 volunteers and 22 full-time staff members are striving "to fulfil the physical, emotional and educational aspirations" of 150 children living in slums, 169 at construction sites and 131 on the pavements of Bombay.

Sunbeam has seven centers where they conduct Balwadis for children in the three-five age-group as also classes in non-formal education for those aged six and above to prepare them for regular school. For the convenience of the children they have their centers at construction sites on space temporarily donated by builders or in rooms taken on rent at municipal schools in the vicinity of the children. From motivating the children to attend the classes to preparing them for formal schooling has been a challenge for the teachers. But they find it particularly rewarding when some children who've moved away from their original sites willingly travel long distances to attend their coaching classes in

Dabdi with some Sunbeam children in a classroom (right) and below with supervisor Shanta (far right)

English or computers.

Starting with six children in 1997, after two years they registered as a public charitable trust and functioned from a place sponsored by CRY. Beginning 2000 they started getting support from non-governmental organizations like the Ratna Nidhi Charitable Trust which provides mid-day meals to street children, Magic Bus which sponsors their excursions, Comet Media which undertakes staff training, the Children's Toys Foundation which comes with their mobile van of toys, children's movies and indoor games at new centers. They have valued individual donors too who help with uniforms, books, stationery for the children.

Their volunteers are usually housewives and college students, mainly from St Xavier's, who willingly put in more than the required hours of work, commends Dabdi whose own graduation studies were done at Hinduja College from where she completed her BCom. Her schooling was at the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution, having studied on scholarship, she informs us. For a year she was a teacher at St Anne's School before she joined CRY.

During her early years with Sunbeam, she continued to work part-time but since 2001 she has had to quit CRY due to the steady expansion of work at the new Sunbeam centers, she clarifies. The administrative work experience she gained during her 10 years with CRY is more than what she would have gained studying for a social work diploma, she is sanguine. When her father Paurusasp Dabdi, at his age, can show commitment as secretary of the Banaji Trust which offers educational and medical aid to Parsis, Khurshid believes she has a responsibility to society too. Her coordinator Aban Bharucha, formerly of CRY, has also joined hands with Dabdi.

As their work keeps expanding they



have now started a Social Involvement Program whereby 25-30 overall excellent performers, with the full support of their families, will be enrolled in private schools so that they get to interact with a socially better class of society. They realize their efforts in community empowerment have succeeded when they see the poor construction workers slogging harder to ensure that their offspring do not become child laborers or when the parents of street children, previously surviving from their children's earnings as beggars, take the initiative of being self employed by undertaking flower arrangements for weddings and other functions. The National Slumdweller's Federation with which they are coordinating has given them an assurance that families which have been residing on the streets prior to 1995 will be given permanent accommodation in a year or two. Those who would like to interact with Sunbeam can contact them on tel: 23867796 or e-mail: sunbeamtrust@hotmail.com

Learning at 83

Senior citizen Soli Bamji called the Helpline of Dignity Foundation for guidance to fix a software program in his digital camera. "Little did I realize that the 83-year-old student was going to teach me not just a lesson or two in digital shooting and computer pricing but a whole package of attitude to life

and living," wrote editor Dr Sheilu Sreenivasan in *Dignity Dialogue* (February 2002) which carried a cover story on Bamji: "An Extraordinary Commoner."

"Perhaps there's nothing like an ordinary human. It just needs situations to bring out the extraordinariness in people. On the face of it...Bamji would seem like your regular next door neighbor, leading a retired life alone in an old south (Bombay) house. Beneath this quilt of ordinariness lie layers of extraordinariness," noted an introduction to the piece.

"The table there is just 85 years old, the tape recorder 27, sewing machine 85...That's my speciality — to keep things in good shape, to make things last," revealed Bamji, adding, "That's what has kept my ego intact. My belief (that) I can do things." To keep his expenses low he creates useful gadgets for his home, designs furniture, paints the rooms of his house, stitches curtains, retouches paintings to keep them looking new. An avid photographer, he bought a new computer to learn how to manipulate and enhance photographs taken on his digicam and not just to send mails and chat with his son Cyrus. "As I grow older and move out less, I shall use



Bamji: constantly discovering Photo: *Dignity Dialogue*

it for aggressive surfing," he has decided. A science graduate from St Xavier's College, over the years Bamji's innovative skills have surfaced in different work areas, he disclosed to *Dignity Dialogue*. During his uneventful 19-year tenure as textile technician for Tata Mills Limited he once had an opportunity to overhaul a machine to speed up production. As a research technician with Thomson Research Associates in Toronto, Canada he was able to increase the life span of the felt used in drying paper by applying a specially formulated chemical. His next assignment was for a jute mill in Calcutta where he devised a contraption to regulate the moisture content. In France he got into the export-import business and gave talks in French on his area of expertise — Asia. His last professional working assignment was in Australia where he sold spray coating material to metal industries.

A model sporting an evening wear created by Vakil (below)

His decision to move to another country or stay on at one place was invariably guided by the interests of his late wife Khursheed or Cyrus' schooling. Although not planning on a career after marriage Khursheed was persuaded to start as an officer with the Government of India's tourist office, made director of southern region subsequently, asked to start a tourist office in Toronto, posted to Paris and Australia thereafter. Her last posting was as joint director general at the Directorate of Tourism. Undermining his sacrifice, Bamji conveyed, "I recognized that she was the more dynamic and focussed of us two...I did things by close thinking; but she would go in a flash; she was quick in judgment." After her tragic end 13 years ago following an accident, Bamji has learnt to accept life. He does though cherish fond memories of their togetherness as in 1953 when they covered 22,000 miles and 20 countries, driving all the way from Sweden to Bombay in their Mercedes diesel!

When asked if he regretted spending his retired life in India instead of Canada or Australia, his answer is invariably a 'no,' on the rationale, "Though many things are disturbing about India, especially the confrontations with government agencies, I enjoy the familiarity of things out here, the friendliness of its people and never cease to wonder at the great fact of how a billion people live in India in relative peace...Though I am technically lonely...I don't dwell on that...I enjoy so many things, the computer, new friends, new places and I am constantly learning, investigating, discovering..."

Fashion forecast

"Today Zubin Vakil's day includes client meetings, supervision of his tailors at his two workshops, besides forecasting new looks, styles and colors for the next season," writes Mithi Chinoy of the upcoming fashion designer of Hyderabad.

Last August he launched his pret collection of skirts, tops, negligees and casual wear. "While his creative mind



conjugates up imaginative, bold, funky and elegant designs, he is inspired by the pleats, suspenders, pinafores and shirtwaists of a bygone era," writes Chinoy. In a profession which demands novelty, Vakil believes, "To make

something out of nothing is what fashion is all about. Therein lies the challenge."

Trained at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Madhapur, Hyderabad, Vakil who is in his twenties, says, "Fashion was always an obsession with me. I would get up every morning and think of fashion, walk in the street and think only of fashion. Being a creative person, it seemed the most obvious choice for me."

Vakil has been in demand for the last couple of years. At the Gladrags contest in Bangalore in 2000 he designed swimsuits modeled by Simi Kumar. It is necessary for the woman of today "to dress her mind before she dresses her body," recommends Vakil who insists he is "not in this field to be mediocre. I want to be at the top."

Compiled by Parinaz M. Gandhi

Jijina: structurally sound

Cowsie Jijina, a principal in New York's prominent structural engineering firm Severud Associates, and his four colleagues were among the hundreds of engineers who responded to the Structural Engineers Association of New York's call for volunteers to help guide debris removal and inspect damaged buildings around the site of the World Trade Center (WTC) disaster in September 2001.

Firefighters, rescue teams and cleanup contractors were demanding snap judgements. For the safety of these workers the engineers had to advise on questions like which beam could be moved, whether heavy equipment could be driven over certain areas, notes an article in *The Trend in Engineering*, a publication of the University of Washington (UW).

Five teams at a time, each comprising five engineers — two with at least 20 years' experience who were principals of a firm, two with at least 15 years' experience plus one additional engineer — worked 12-hour shifts. Each team concentrated on its quadrant of the devastated site. The fifth team floated to where help was required. The teams received their assignments in a dimly lit classroom at P.S. 89 — the makeshift command center where Jijina, his company associates plus 20 others worked sitting in kindergarten chairs or on the floor. Here, at the end of each shift, the replacing teams got their briefing from those who had worked the previous 12 hours.

Though enormous cranes were on hand to clear the rubble, the engineers were required to determine whether specific areas of the site could bear their weight. Collapsed subways and train tunnels under the WTC had to be inspected and shored up before such equipment could be allowed to function.

"Going below ground was extremely disorienting," the article quotes Jijina. "It was pitch dark, water dripping all over, beams creaking and crunching and you were walking on top of collapsed ceilings and toppled bookcases. Nothing was level." Team members used cell phones to keep in contact with colleagues above ground and when lost, asked them to shine a flashlight down a hole or bang on a steel beam. Once Jijina stumbled on something soft which mercifully turned

out to be a mannequin.

There were professional surprises for Jijina and his fellow engineers. There were no chunks of concrete left. It had been pulverized into dust. Structural steel connecting plates, 1.5" thick, had been "ripped like a perforated writing pad even though the nuts and bolts were



Standing (from left): Jijina, Janice, Marc and Lauren. Sitting: Jiji and Shireen Photo: Glenn Edwards

intact. Welded connections did not rip and earned his new respect," notes the article. While inspecting a neighboring building Jijina found on its 12th floor setback a column approximately 25 feet long and weighing about five tons. "It looked like someone had thrown it there as if it were a little dart," Jijina told *The Trend* reporter.

That the buildings continued to stand for an hour in one case and an hour and a half in the other was attributed to its innovative tube design which allowed time for nearly 25,000 occupants to escape with their lives. Nor would the buildings have collapsed by the impact of the planes alone, states the article. The fatal blow was dealt by the burning jet fuel which ignited the interiors into "uncontrollable infernos." The intense heat "weakened and deformed the steel structural frames to the point of collapse," as was noted by the investigating

team of the American Society of Civil Engineers in their report published by the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

The son of Shireen and former Indian Airlines regional director Jiji Jijina grew up with three generations of engineers on both sides of the family, notes the article. His maternal grandfather Munchershaw Ghasvala was a civil engineer who had worked as an overseer at the construction of Bombay's Taj Mahal Hotel in 1903, adds his uncle Pashang Ghasvala. Cowsie's brother Darius, who chose to qualify as an ENT surgeon, was the odd man out.

After schooling at St Xavier's in Vile Parle he joined the Vile Parle College before graduating from the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi. Cowsie continued his education at the UW, Seattle, acquiring his masters in civil and structural engineering. There he met his future wife Janice, an oceanography student. Degrees in hand, the young Jijinas moved to New York in 1979; Cowsie securing a job with Severud Associates. There he was "thrown into projects. If I didn't know how to do something, they would direct me to a book and expect me to learn it," Jijina recalled in *The Trend* article. He attributed his continued success at his various tasks to the excellent theoretical grounding he had received at the UW.

The Neuroscience Institute in La Jolla, California, Universal Studios and Geffen's office buildings in Beverly Hills and The High Museum of Art in Atlanta are career landmarks. He likes working in earthquake prone California because of the challenge of its seismic code requirements. Also, its local building department demands peer review of a project design before granting approval.

The La Jolla Project — a building shaped differently from floor to floor with not a single column extending down more than one floor and yet meeting seismic zone four regulations — was a professionally gratifying achievement, notes the article.

Among his various assignments Jijina plans the rigging for concerts at Madison Square Garden where sound, light and laser systems for groups such as Metallica and a suspended party barge holding dancers for a Britney Spears

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show had to be hung from the Garden's cable supported roof. Such equipment can exceed 100,000 pounds in weight. Though now done on computers with special software to determine and position the loads for optimum effect and safety, "it used to be a nail-biting experience to calculate the loads by hand. Concert deadlines are tight, people are sitting under all this equipment and you must do it right the first time," Jijina provides a peek at the tension involved in the job.



Jijina: "thrown into projects"

Apart from engineering Jijina is a prolific reader and enjoys listening to western classical music. Janice played the French horn in her college orchestra and their daughter Lauren, 17, a "whiz kid in maths" also plays the French horn. She is currently the youngest member of the New York Philharmonic Youth Orchestra which was recently on a world tour. Ghasvala provides glimpses on the Jijinas' domestic lives. Lauren and her brother Marc, 15, study at the Kennedy High School and are the only competing fencers to represent the Bellmore Merrick Central High School District of Long Island, New York where the family resides.

After 23 years of learning by doing, Jijina is waiting to construct his 'perfect building.' I can't describe what it would be like, but I'll know it when I see it," he says.

Devitre: corporate finance

"Strategic financial thinkers are a rare breed and Dinny (Dinyar Devitre) is one of them." Peter Georgescu, chairman emeritus of the accounting firm Young and Rubicam who said he has known Devitre for 15 years, was pronouncing on the latter's suitability for his new assignment as chief financial officer (CFO) of America's tobacco and food giant Philip Morris.

The rattling of financial skeletons in corporate America, post Enron, has cast a "heavy burden" on CFOs, Devitre acknowledged to Naazneen Karmali of *Business India* (January 6-19, 2003). But the man who not only cut his managerial teeth in the firm but headed its India operations in 1976, was president of its Asian region and presided over the

company's work in Japan, apart from a stint as its chief administrative officer in New York and, later, head of corporate planning, knows "every aspect of the business" and hence is well prepared for the task. His only spell away from Philip Morris was three "frustrating" years as Citibank's head of consumer banking in Europe. "Financial services was not my scene," he realized.

A non-smoker since the past 12 years, Devitre has a judicious approach to the company's tobacco business. Whereas his Indian stint was complicated by the Emergency, FERA (Foreign Exchange Regulation Act), striking unions and excise cases, from his Hong Kong base as president of the Asian region he was to see sales of Marlboro, Philip Morris' best selling cigarette, escalating. While he was in Japan the company's profits rose from \$150 million to \$850 million. Confronted by advice that the company get out of its tobacco business when smoking has been judicially accepted as a health hazard, Devitre believes that "the solution is to manage it responsibly. We're spending our resources on developing harm-reducing products and I am proud of that," he told Karmali.

An MBA (1970) from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Devitre's 27 years with Philip Morris began with rotation through the various departments of its Indian subsidiary. Further orientation in Melbourne and a spell at the corporate headquarters in New York followed. By the time he was 29 and married to his business school sweetheart Ashish, the company had chosen him to head its Indian operation.

A golf addict, an "arm-chair mountain climber" with a taste for Oriental and Japanese food, Devitre was picked by outgoing and incoming CEOs of Philip Morris for his present assignment as CFO of the \$79 billion corporation, notes the article. Georgescu confirms their choice of man: "His keen analytical ability combined with an exemplary personal integrity makes him very special in my book."

Compiled by Arnavaz S. Mama

Correction

Dr Katy Driver of Toronto was mistakenly identified as Dr Katy Mirza (Zoroastrians Abroad, *Parsiana*, January 2003). The error is regretted.





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"To safeguard the survival..."

The recent decision by the High Priests debarring priests from performing the ashirwad for interfaith marriages or navjotes of children of intercommunity marriages has created a furore

Parinaz M. Gandhi

"The High Priests hereby declare..." The seven proclamations made public by the six High Priests of the community on March 23, 2003 aroused the ire of the liberal members of the Zoroastrian faith. Wont to exercising their freedom of choice in personal/religious matters they were not prepared for the directives issued by the High Priests who sought "to safeguard the survival of the community and prevent further damage to the Parsi Zoroastrian identity."

Under the new edict (see box for Resolution in its entirety) any intercommunity marriage (irrespective of whether the man or the woman opts for a non-Zoroastrian spouse) "cannot be considered as a religiously valid marriage under the Parsi Zoroastrian faith... cannot be considered lawful from a religious point of view." Further, no issue of intercommunity marriages will now be permitted to be initiated into the faith to claim "religious rights of the Parsi Zoroastrian faith."

Contradicting the opening sentence of their missive which refers to the "increasing number of intermarriages within the community," the six High Priests claim in their seventh edict, "There have been stray instances in the past of mixed marriages in the community and 'navjote' of children of Parsi fathers and mothers belonging to other communities and faith. However this was never accepted by the priests or the community at large. In fact, the community, at Samast Anjuman Meetings, has from time to time condemned such acts. The High Priests reaffirm the resolutions passed at these meetings." The intercommunity marriage figures published annually in *Parsiana* show that nearly 30 percent of the Zoroastrian population marries outside the community. Hitherto, according to the law of the land, as prevailing since the judgement given by Justices Dinshaw Daver and

Frank C. O. Beaman in 1908 (Petit vs Jeejeebhoy) children of Parsi Zoroastrian fathers and non-Parsi mothers have been openly navjoted while the children of Zoroastrian mothers and non-Parsi



From left (top row): Kotwal, Mirza and JamaspAsa; (second row): MeherjiRana, N. Dastur and Unvalla (Below): K. Dastoor

fathers have confessed their faith covertly.

Of the seven High Priests in India, the six who have signed the resolution are Dasturs (Dr) Hormazdyar K. Mirza, (Dr) Firoze M. Kotwal, (Dr) Kaikhusroo M. JamaspAsa, Meherji K. MeherjiRana, Noshirvan Dastur Manchershaw Dastur and Nadirshah P. Unvalla. Dastur Khurshed Kaikobad Dastoor of Udvada, the last to join the ranks of the High Priests following the demise of his father Kaikobad last year, is the only one who abstained from signing the resolution. (Khurshed Dastoor's name had erroneously appeared in the *Jamé* weekly of March 23 as one of the signatories to the proclamations. The *Jamé* carried a retraction in its next issue.) "I definitely do not support intercommunity marriages nor am I in favor of juddin navjotes,"

declared Khurshed Dastoor, the new president of the Athornan Mandal, when *Parsiana* asked him his reasons for not signing the resolution. The issues raised by the High Priests are "nothing new. It is just old wine in a new bottle," he stated. "The way certain points had been elaborated" was not acceptable to Dastoor who opted not to support the document, disregarding the pressures brought on him. The *salahnamu* (advisory document) signed by 14 dasturs of yore had similar contents, mentioned Dastoor who is trying to procure a copy of that whilst he is deliberating on issuing an individual statement.

"The edict is misleading," declared Meher Amersey, president of the Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians (AIMZ) which convened a meeting to pass a counter resolution condemning the High Priests' strictures which have "caused a great deal of pain and confusion in the collective minds of the Parsi community. Parsi Zoroastrians married out of the community are safeguarded by the Special Marriage Act, 1952, granting them the right to practise their religion in the same manner as other Parsi Zoroastrians... We also feel that this resolution is retrograde and is in no way going to deter Parsis from marrying out



of the community... We are aware the *Gathas* are the original teachings of the Prophet and nowhere in them are there any such strictures — explicit or implicit. Zoroastrianism is a religion of rationality and all attempts to interpret it otherwise go against the tenets and spirit of the religion."

"Who gives these priests the right to be spokesmen and watchdogs for an

entire community and to say what the group accepts and what it doesn't?" AIMZ legal advisor, advocate Darius Shroff's query was reported in the *Mumbai Newslane* of April 1. Many members of the community had mouthed similar openly defiant statements which were carried in the general media: "It appears that now the Talibanisation of Zoroastrianism is complete. Is this not the persecution that our forefathers fled from in ancient Persia?" Daulat's statement was carried in the *Mid Day* of March 31. Nekzaad N. Vakil blatantly countered in the same day's paper: "This new rule would not deter me from marrying outside my community." "Does the Zoroastrian religion indeed preach that one must be false to one's heart in order to be true to the faith?" asked columnist Armin Wandrewala in the *Bombay Times* of April 1. Musician Farhad Wadia countered in the *Afternoon Despatch and Courier* of March 29: "They are nothing but religious bigots who are not concerned about the dying Parsi race. It is discrimination at its worst and is legally wrong." "The priests are not the only protectors of our identity...I feel that the community is educated and liberated enough to decide what is right or wrong for it. In fact, some of the priests who have passed this resolution have themselves in the past performed navjotes for children of mixed marriages," stated Nawaz Mody, head of Mumbai University's politics and civics department (*The Times of India*, March 30). Ophthalmologist Dr Rusi Dastoor (*Afternoon Despatch and Courier*, March 29) declared: "This is only aimed to mitigate our already small community and in years to come there will be more harm done." According to liberal priest Ervad Framroze Mirza who was quoted in the *Mumbai Newslane* of March 28, "The High Priests are insecure and just want to display their power...There are priests fighting for power, dragging the whole community down in the process."

The High Priests have found supporters in the community too: Calling on "all true Zarathushtris (as also)... all morally upright and righteous non-Zoroastrians" to support the High Priests' stand, the resolution of the Traditional Zarathushtris Mailing List (TZML) signed by its 11 board members notes: "The pillars of our religion are neither up for debate nor are we authorized to tamper with them... These religious laws are in place to pro-

tect the religion, and the High Priests are the custodians of the religion therefore they have the moral right and the moral authority to reinforce the religious laws. The High Priests have done their religious duty, and we fully endorse and support their stand." "Academic studies have shown that only one out of 100 offspring of interfaith marriages weds a Zoroastrian. If we allow interfaith marriages, within a few generations our unique Parsi identity will be wiped out completely. Our priests are the keepers of this faith and ethnicity. It's because of them that we have maintained our traditions and values for a thousand years. They are concerned about the future of the community. Let us understand what they are trying to say and follow their guidance instead of castigating them," Zoroastrian Studies founder Khojeste Mistree was quoted in *The Times of India*, March 30. Trustee of the Traditional Zarathushtrian Trust (TZT) Karl Sahukar told the *Times* of March 28, "This should have been done much earlier. I think it is a positive step in the right direction." Supporting him was TZT president Noshir Dadrawala, "We are not saying we are racially superior. But intermarriages will dilute our identity...The edict should be a deterrent to such marriages (*Mid Day*, March 27)." Principal of the Dadar Athornan Boarding Madressa Ervad Ramiyar Karanjia told the same newspaper, "The latest resolution is a reminder to the community, especially youngsters, that the community faces the danger of extinction if the trend of such marriages continues."

The voices of moderation declared: "The High Priests, by limiting its access in this manner are doing a great disservice," pointed out script writer Sooni Taraporevala (*The Times of India*, March 30). "The Parsi racial stock has ethnologically been relatively pure. But now that the survival of this stock itself is under threat we should compromise and allow some dilution," opined artist Jehangir Sabavala (*Times*, March 30). "Intelligent and free-thinking people cannot allow themselves to be restricted by resolutions passed by the keepers of the faith. The hope of continuity of our small community can only lie in expanding it rather than strangling it," businessman Byram Jeejeebhoy stated in *Afternoon Despatch and Courier* (March 29). "Some of the most progressive Indians have been Parsis. It's ironic that the community's future is at peril because of

some Dasturjis," regretted Rahul Anand, an engineer with a Parsi mother, in the *Mumbai Newslane* of March 28.

The community publications, *Jam-e-Jamshed* and *The Bombay Samachar* had voiced their apprehensions on the futility of such a resolution. As noted an editorial in the *Jam-e-Jamshed* of March 30, "In such sensitive matters the High Priests should not rush in where the community fears to tread...We are afraid that the High Priests, by passing these resolutions, may have hurt the very cause (they) have espoused..." "This so-called resolution binds none," it was written in bold in noted solicitor Berjis Desai's "Parsi tari Arsi" column in *The Bombay Samachar* of April 6. He added, "These gentlemen have no authority, legal, moral or ecclesiastical to issue any edict or diktat or fatwa. The so-called resolution are the views of these gentlemen. We must respect their right in a democracy to hold their views. They must respect our right to dub their views as high nonsense...This will go down as the starting point when the orthodox began to commit mass suicide of their cause..."

Many Parsi Zoroastrians (born of a Zoroastrian father and non-Zoroastrian mother) cannot come to terms with this new verdict. As wrote journalist Kimi Dangor in the *Sunday Mid Day* (March 30), "To all the men who got together one morning and decided that I wouldn't have been a Parsi if I'd been born 20 years later, I defy you every morning when I say my prayers. So what if you will excommunicate me for marrying outside the faith and won't let my children into a fire-temple. I still have my prayers. Zarathushtra still remains my prophet and I still wear my sudreh kusti. So sue me." Adi Pocha, in a letter addressed to his predeceased father Jimmy Pocha in the *Mumbai Newslane* of March 29, enquired: "A few days ago, seven learned men decided that all things considered I should no longer be called a Parsi. Because this lady you met on Tableland (wife Uma), this lady who loved us and all Parsis, this lady who grew us proud to be Parsi, who nursed you through every second of your cancer, this lady who still takes care of me when I am ill and talks to my sister when she is lonely — this lady is not a Parsi. Dear daddy, please tell me: What should I do? Postscript: Should I change my name to Adolf?"

"Half-Parsi" Namrata Bangera conveyed the pathos of the exclusive atti-



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Resolution Passed By The High Priests

We, the undersigned Parsi Zoroastrian High Priests, are pained to observe the potential threat to the very survival of the Parsi Zoroastrian community due to increasing number of intermarriages within the community and the so-called initiation of the progeny of such intermarried couples into the Parsi Zoroastrian faith. This is against the tenets of the religion. If this trend continues, the day is not far when the unique 'Parsi Zoroastrian' identity which the community has zealously preserved since centuries will be diluted and subsequently wiped out. We are also pained to observe that certain priests are performing the "ashirwad" ceremony of couples where only one partner to the marriage is a Parsi Zoroastrian and the other is not. Subsequently these renegade priests also perform the "navjote" of children born of such intermarriages. Taking a serious view of the above stated circumstances and with a view to safeguard the survival of the community and prevent further damage to the Parsi Zoroastrian identity, we the undersigned High Priests hereby resolve as under:

1. The High Priests are strongly of the view that our religious scriptures disapprove the marriage of Zoroastrians with members of other communities and faith and consider it to be a transgression of the tenets of the religion. The Parsi community recognizes only the marriage between two Parsi Zoroastrians where both the marrying individuals are born of Parsi Zoroastrian parents, and where the "ashirwad" ceremony which includes the "Nahn," Holy Sacrament, and prayers specific to the ceremony are duly and properly performed.

2. The High Priests hereby declare that marriage of a Parsi Zoroastrian man or woman with a person of another faith cannot be considered as religiously valid marriage under the Parsi Zoroastrian faith.

3. The High Priests hereby declare that the marriage of a Parsi Zoroastrian, male or female, with a member of another community or faith under any civil law of the country, is a civil contract. However, marriage from the Zoroastrian point of view is a sacrament and, therefore, such civil marriages may be valid from the point of view of civil law, but such

marriages cannot be considered lawful from a religious point of view.

4. The High Priests hereby declare that the performance of "navjote" of children where only one of the parent is a Parsi Zoroastrian, cannot give religious rights of the Parsi Zoroastrian faith to such children.

5. The High Priests hereby declare that the children born of Parsi Zoroastrian father with the mother belonging to another community or faith are not accepted in the community as per the Religious tenets of the Zoroastrian Faith.

6. The High Priests hereby declare that no Parsi Zoroastrian priest should perform the marriage ceremony where only one of the marrying partner is a Parsi Zoroastrian and the other is not. Also, no Parsi Zoroastrian priest should perform the 'navjote' ceremony of children of such mixed marriages.

7. There have been stray instances in the past of mixed marriages in the community and 'navjote' of children of Parsi fathers and mothers belonging to other communities and faith. However, this was never accepted by the priests or the community at large. In fact, the community at Samast Anjuman Meetings has, from time to time, condemned such acts. The High Priests reaffirm the resolutions passed at these meetings.

The High Priests request the Panthakies, Priests and the Trustees of all the Atashbehrams, Agiaries and all other institutions of all the Anjumans in India to take note of these Resolutions. The High Priests have, by hand, forwarded a copy of this Resolution to the Office of the Trustees of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet with a request to safeguard the interests of the Parsi Zoroastrian Community, as they are the custodians of the Funds and Properties of the community.

Dasturji (Dr) Hormazdyar K. Mirza (Udwada), Dasturji (Dr) Firoze Meherji Kotwal (Mumbai), Dasturji (Dr) Kaikhusroo M. JamaspAsa (Mumbai), Dasturji Meherji K. MeherjiRana (Navsari), Dasturji Noshirvan Dastur Manchershaw Dastur (Surat), Dasturji Nadirshah P. Unvalla (Bangalore)

tude of the community in her letter in *Mid Day* (April 1): "I will forget those moments of hurt confusion when I was not allowed to eat the *chasni* (consecrated offerings) at the school jashan... Those moments of endless wait outside a fire-temple while my Parsi friends and relatives finished their prayers. The deep yearning to experience just once the sight of the sacred fire in all its glory, to smell the sandalwood as I bow my head at the threshold to chant *Ashem Vohu* loudly because I am allowed to. And finally, the most difficult, I will give up the hope that one day I would be accepted..."

"If a Zoroastrian should have a clandestine and perhaps illicit affair with a non-Zoroastrian, such a person cannot only remain within the community but can continue to visit agiaries and atash behrams and follow his/her religion. However God help him/her if he or she sanctify that relationship into a legal marriage...Is this true Zoroastrianism?" asked activist Phiroze Amroliwalla in the *Jamé* of April 6. Anil Thakraney's bottom line in his column in the *Sunday Mid Day* of April 6 stated: "Better to have... 'half bawas' than to have none at all." Morparia's cartoon referred to the sparring nature of this sparse community as "Sparsees."

"The potential threat to the very survival of the Parsi Zoroastrian community" and the fear that "the unique Parsi Zoroastrian identity which the community has zealously preserved since centuries will be diluted and subsequently wiped out" are the reasons cited by the religious savants for coming out with a new verdict. The loss of numbers is not their concern, actress Tanaz Currim conveyed her experience to the *Bombay Times* of March 29, "I would love to bring up my daughter Zianne as a Parsi but that's not possible. And that's merely because I was excommunicated when I married outside. Aren't they losing out on numbers with such rules?... Now even my brother who's married outside the community stands to be excommunicated. What about his children who are Parsis?" (There is no excommunication in the community — Editor)

But she is not the only one facing uncertainties. There are many grey areas which will have to be addressed. Barely a decade ago most of the signatories to the present resolution had consented to the navjote of Neville Wadia when the octogenarian industrialist had chosen to embrace the faith of his ancestors. What

counsel would they now offer to the scions of the Wadia family?

What about the funeral rites when a Parsi Zoroastrian marries outside the faith? Hitherto all facilities at the Doongerwadi were available to men who had married out and in the wake of the Roxan Shah tragedy, even to women if an affidavit was given that the woman married out had continued to profess her faith.

In 2001 the Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Ajiary had announced that their spacious premises would be available for celebrations if any one of the parties to the marriage is a Zoroastrian. Do they have to reconsider their decision?

The High Priests have requested the "panthakies, priests and the trustees of all the atash behrams, ajiaries and all other institutions of all the anjumans in India to take note of these resolutions." Those residing abroad are free to follow their own conscience? What happens to Parsi Zoroastrians of Indian origin who have settled abroad? And what happens to athornans and behdins who choose to ignore the new resolution?

As eminent solicitor and former chairman of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet Eruch Desai declared in the *Jamé* of

April 13, "How can they (the trustees and other priests) be compelled to take an action which would not be in consonance with the correct legal position?... Nothing can be hostile to religion which is agreeable to justice... It would therefore be an act of statesmanship on the part of the concerned High Priests if they were to rethink on this aspect and issue an appropriate clarification..."

Since more questions are raised than answered by the High Priests' resolution, the community can hope that more constructive decisions will emerge after substantial rethinking. After all, some of the High Priests did not first recognize Unvalla as Dastur when he was conferred this distinction by the Bangalore Anjuman in 1996 but joint deliberations over contentious issues did apparently get them to reconcile to the new situation. As the High Priests had then forewarned: "Faith runs into all spheres of life but in religious matters faith without knowledge and understanding degenerates into fanaticism and even threats of violence as it happens on some occasions. This is detrimental to the very existence of our community."



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Priestly contradictions

Since the High Priests contend there is no conversion in Zoroastrianism let them present the evidence, states the author

Jamsheed G. Kanga

The recent statement issued by the six High Priests — Dasturs (Dr) Hormazdyar Mirza, (Dr) Firoze Kotwal, (Dr) Kaikhusroo JamaspAsa, Meherji MeherjiRana, Noshirvan Dastur Manchershaw Dastur and Nadirshah Unvalla — in the form of a pronouncement defining the very identity of a Parsi Zoroastrian has created confusion particularly among those whose future as Parsi Zoroastrians is affected by their pronouncements. The priests claim that this pronouncement is based on the authority of scriptures. While there is no Parsi ecclesiastical or canon law and the priests have no authority per se to make such pronouncements, the community respects their views as they assume these views are based on an authentic interpretation of the scriptures. Traditionally the people turn to the priests to clarify their doubts about the scriptures, particularly when there are contradictory opinions. Our learned High Priests should explain how they claim that the resolution is based on 'the tenets of our religion,' despite the considerable evidence to the contrary. The learned High Priests should enlighten us on the following points:

•Who is a Parsi Zoroastrian has been considered in great detail as far back as 1908 in the landmark case of *Petit vs Jeejeebhoy*, Suit No 689 of 1906 wherein the two eminent judges, Justices Dinshaw Dhanjibhoy Daver and Frank C. O. Beaman, after examining over 200 witnesses, concluded:

"The Zoroastrian religion not only permits but enjoins the conversion of a person born in another religion and of non Zoroastrian parents. Although such conversion was permissible, the Zoroastrians, ever since their advent into India 1,200 years ago, have never attempted to convert anyone into their religion. However children of Parsi fathers by non Parsi mothers would be allowed to be vested with the sudreh and

kusti as this practice was followed in the past."

This finding was arrived at after a thorough examination of hundreds of witnesses including some of the most learned dasturs and other scholars. If this finding is not correct, what is the scriptural basis for your recent resolution? Is it sufficient to set aside this legal pronouncement?

•Prior to the suit — *Petit vs Jeejeebhoy*, in 1908, the question of conversion was not objected to on grounds of religion even by the high priests. It was generally not practised so as not to antagonize the other communities among whom the Parsis lived. However there were many such instances of conversion of children of Parsi fathers by non Parsi mothers, some even performed by leading high priests. In fact as far back as 1882 as per the evidence in this case, the High Priest Dastur Jamaspji Minocherji JamaspAsana had converted five females and four males whose ages ranged from 35 to 70 years, and who were the children of Parsi males by non Parsi females. JamaspAsana, one of the two High

Priests of the Shahen-shahi sect, and a very learned and eminent scholar, was a fellow of the Bombay University who had been awarded the degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa by the Oxford University, and whose painting hangs in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. At that time there was rivalry between him and Dastur Peshotan Sanjana the other High Priest. Peshotan alleged in a pamphlet that the navjote was not proper as the bareshum ceremony was not performed. The conversion was not objected to, only the ceremonies to be

performed were questioned. If this conclusion was arrived at so far back have any new scriptures been discovered thereafter to suggest that this conclusion was erroneous? JamaspAsana, we are told, is the great-grandfather of one of the High Priests who is a signatory to this resolution. In fact when R. D. Tata, the father of J. R. D. Tata wanted to marry a French lady, Suzanne Briere, her navjote was performed by the learned High Priest Dastur Kaikhooshroo Jamaspji. Obviously he must have applied his mind to the scriptures and come to the conclusion that he was not doing anything contrary to the precepts of the Zoroastrian faith?

•When the community wanted to know the correct position in our scriptures on the question as to whether conversion was permitted in the Zoroastrian religion or not, the anjuman appointed a committee of scholars and experts to examine all the existing scriptures. The committee consisted of the most eminent scholars of the time and included Dr K. R. Cama, who was so highly regarded that his biography was written

by no less a person than Shams-ul-Ulama Dr Jivanji Modi, himself an eminent and highly respected scholar of Zoroastrianism and the secretary of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP). Another member of the committee was Dastur Darab Peshotan Sanjana, referred to in the judgement as "the High Priest of the Parsis, and Head Priest of one of the most ancient Atash Behrams in Bombay, whose father

and ancestors have been high priests before him." The committee in its report came to the unanimous conclusion that "no prohibition of any sort is found



Suzanne (Sooni) Tata was married to R. D. Tata

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directed in any place in the Zoroastrian religious books against admitting any non Zoroastrian into the Zoroastrian religion, but on the contrary it appears to have been specially directed to admit non Zoroastrians into the Zoroastrian religion." Do you consider that such eminent scholars would have arrived at

such a categorical finding without being certain that this was the correct position according to our scriptures? Do you consider that the opinion of such eminent and highly respected scholars can be set aside by you without explaining to the community why you differ from their conclusion? Is it not patently incorrect to say, as one of you have claimed, that the judicial finding was based on the opinions of reformists?

Surely Cama was not a reformist! This report extensively quoted in the judgement and mentioned in the evidence must be unearthed from the libraries of the BPP and K. R. Cama Oriental Institute as it is very important for clarifying this issue.

•In the recorded history of the life of Zarathushtra it has been stated that "at the age of 30 years Zarathushtra came down from the mountains and started propagating the new faith against stiff opposition from the magicians and sorcerers who were not prepared to accept this faith. However, Zarathushtra converted King Gustasp and other members of the King's family to the new faith... Gustasp's son Prince Asfandiyar propagated Zarathushtra's new faith in far-off lands. After a holy war with Turan's King Arjasp for not accepting this new religion, Gustasp was victorious and succeeded in spreading the new faith to Turan also (*Zoroastrianism* by Ervad R. Motafram published by the BPP)." Justice Daver in the judgement has stated "the Zoroastrian religion is a revealed religion. It was revealed by the Supreme Being Ahura Mazda to Zarthost. Scholars differ as to the period when Zoroaster flourished, but they are agreed that he flourished in the time of Kai Vistasp, one of the kings of the Kyanian dynasty. The religion revealed to Zoroaster was by him communicated to King Vistasp who promulgated it amongst his people. It seems to me that all revealed religions must necessarily enjoin proselytization, for otherwise how is the religion to

progress beyond the prophet to whom it is revealed?"

How do you explain that the religion revealed by the Supreme Being to Zarathushtra could have been communicated to people who were unaware of this new doctrine without converting from the religion which they were hitherto practising? If this is not conversion from one religion, the old one, to another religion, the new one, what is the meaning of the term conversion?



Justice Daver and (below) Justice Beaman

•There are some so-called scholars who try to explain this by stating that there was no conversion because the pre-Zoroastrian religion which was being practised before Zarathushtra's birth was similar to the new one and it was merely purified and re-interpreted by Zarathushtra. Hence it is explained that it was more purification of the old religion and not a conversion to a new one. Do you agree with this view? Then how can Zarathushtra be called a great prophet of a unique new religion about whom the poet Rabindranath Tagore says in the *Religions of Man*, "While all religions of the primitive type tried to keep them bound with regulations of external observances, Zoroaster was the greatest of all pioneer prophets who showed the path of freedom to men, the freedom of moral choice, the freedom from blind obedience to meaningless injunctions, the freedom from multiplicity of shrines?" Is it not devaluing our great religion by categorizing it only as a modification of the old one? Do you accept this view?

•Based on overwhelming evidence, Daver and Beaman have clearly held that while the Zoroastrian religion not only permits but enjoins conversion of a person born in another religion and of non-Zoroastrian parents, the Parsis when they settled in India decided that it was necessary for their self preservation to abstain from conversion. In his evidence before the court, Dastur Sanjana stated, "There were no conversions, because at first there were difficulties in the way of the emigrants who

found a safe refuge in India. Jadav Rana of Gujarat, gave them refuge under certain conditions. Those conditions were not favorable to converting his subjects or anyone else in India to Zoroastrianism. During the first century of their settlement in India, the emigrants who settled in India had great difficulties in preserving their own people from going away from their own religion — they had great difficulty in preserving their religion and performing their religious rites and ceremonies and safeguarding their religious books...It was felt besides that it would have been ingratitude towards the Rana who had given them refuge to try and convert his subjects." Justice Daver therefore concludes that Parsis did not convert after settling in India because it was the only safe course for a small group of immigrants to follow. To quote Justice Daver: "Far from trying to proselytize, the Parsis, as years went on, adapted themselves to the ways of the people they lived amongst, that they earned goodwill."

•Are you aware that another question submitted to the above mentioned expert committee of which Cama was a member was "What are the ceremonies that shall be performed (for admission of non Zoroastrians to the religion)? To this question, the expert committee has given a very clear and definite reply: "There are to be three ceremonies: firstly, after a year's probation from the date of the written application of the candidate, he or she, after undergoing the purifying ceremony of nahn, is to be invested with sudreh and kusti in the same way as an

ordinary Zoroastrian child; secondly, the candidate is then to be given the bareshnum; and thirdly, the candidate is to be then reinvested with sudreh and kusti." Would the committee have given such a finding if they were convinced that conversion was prohibited?

•The judgement in *Petit vs Jeejeebhoy* has been in existence for over 95 years now, and navjotes of children of Parsi fathers by non Parsi mothers has been accepted by the community barring some fundamentalists. There are innumerable instances of children of such marriages being accepted as Parsi Zoroastrians. One such person was the late J. R. D.



thers by non Parsi mothers has been accepted by the community barring some fundamentalists. There are innumerable instances of children of such marriages being accepted as Parsi Zoroastrians. One such person was the late J. R. D.

Tata who was revered by all Parsis as being one of them. The entire community felicitated him at a public function by the BPP when he was awarded the Bharat Ratna. When he died in Switzerland his uthamna ceremony was performed at Doongerwadi. If he was not a true Zoroastrian why was this done?

•In this connection it is interesting to quote what the late Justice Jal Vimaladai had to say in his book *Seven Discourses* about the relevance of this judgement. Vimaladai was a very learned and orthodox religious scholar besides being an eminent judge of the Bombay High Court. He was also a trustee of



Neville Wadia: accepted into the fold

the BPP. Hence no one who knew him could ever accuse him of being a reformist. Vimaladai states: "There are however some priests who do not accept the law laid down in these two cases (the other being the Privy Council judgement of 1925 in the *Bella vs Saklat* case) and decline to perform the navjote even of the children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers. It is, of course, open to a priest to refuse to perform the navjote of a particular person without assigning any reason for such refusal and none can compel him to perform it. These priests, however, profess to follow, what they call 'Canon Law' in declining to perform such navjotes. 'Canon Law' is a body of codified ecclesiastical law, especially of the Roman Catholic Church, as promulgated in ecclesiastical councils and by the Pope. For us, there is nothing like 'Canon Law' and there are no ecclesiastical councils or courts to promulgate or enforce any such law and the view taken by these priests has, therefore, no legal basis... What is more, such an extreme stand is not in the interest of the community for it seeks to unsettle a settled legal position and might cause an undesirable public reaction. I venture to say that the propositions laid down in *Petit's* case and *Bella's* case in regard to the definition of the expression 'Parsi Zoroastrian' are so sound that they would be reaffirmed by any court, however high it may be, if an occasion to reconsider them unfortunately arises in future and I make bold to

say this regardless of 'threats' to the contrary held out by some interested persons to have the matter reagitated in courts of law. I use the plural 'courts' advisedly, for it would mean taking the matter right up to the Supreme Court which would entail enormous waste of money that could be put to better use for the welfare of the community."

•The orthodox group argues that Daver did not give any legally binding judgement on this issue and his observations are to be considered as obiter dicta. To quote again from Vimaladai: "When a judge says something in his judgement which is not necessary for the decision of the points that

actually arise before him in a case, such statements are called obiter dicta. Such statements as well as statements which are in the nature of mere passing observations, are not binding as legal decisions. It is contended by some people that it was not necessary for Daver or Beaman to define the term Parsi in that case and, therefore, their definition of the term Parsi is obiter dicta and cannot be said to have laid down law which is binding on us. Without going into the technicalities of the concept of obiter dicta, I must point out that since the trusts in question in that case were for the benefit of Parsi-Zoroastrians, or in terms analogous to that expression and it was claimed that the French lady (J. R. D. Tata's mother) was entitled to the benefit of those trusts, it was absolutely necessary for the learned judges to decide whether she fell within the definition of the expression 'Parsi-Zoroastrian.' It has been laid down by an authority as high as Lord Halsbury that it is only statements which are not necessary for the decision of a case that can be said to be obiter dicta and, as such, to have no binding authority. Without defining the term Parsi-Zoroastrian, the learned judges could not have decided the claim made on behalf of the French lady and those definitions cannot possibly be said to be obiter dicta and not binding as such."

•There is also the evidence of the *Persian Rivayats*, which support this position. To quote Prof Kaikhosrov Irani, "It

was popularly believed that contact between the Indian Jathostis and the Iranian Zardushtis had been severed for several centuries, apart from the occasional brave refugee fleeing persecution and impoverishment in the Fatherland. In India, where conditions were far less harsh, the Parsis of Gujarat had lapsed into an increased adoption of local Hindu customs and beliefs. Certainly Hindu names proliferated among the provincial Parsis, and the ritual had succumbed to much adulteration. Matters having doubtless come to a head, the concerned Davar Changa Asa of Navsari and some co-religionists were determined upon obtaining correct answers to several questions of doctrine, ritual and practices. The first emissary, Nariman Hoshang was sent, at great risk, along terrifyingly dangerous routes to the priests in Iran in 1478 and again in 1487.

"Among the answers brought back in direct response to questions from the Parsis, one addressed the problem of conversion: 'If slave-boys and girls have faith in the Good Religion, then it is proper that kusti should be (given to them to be) tied (that is, they should be converted to Zoroastrianism), and when they become intelligent, attentive to religion and steadfast, they should give them bareshnum and it is also proper and allowable to eat anything out of their hands!' For some who irresponsibly wish to exclude children — legitimately born from exogamous unions or born out of wedlock by Parsi fathers from non Parsi mothers — from the religion of their Zoroastrian fathers, then we must present an even stronger guideline from the 1599 *Kaus Mahyar Rivayat* whose response includes categories from even lower-deemed persons: 'Can a grave-digger, a corpse-burner and a darvand become behdins (i.e. be converted to the Mazdayasnian religion)?' Its answer: 'If they observe the rules of religion steadfastly and (keep) connection with the religion, and if no harm comes on the behdins (thereby), it is proper and allowable!'" In the face of such categorical statements do you have any evidence that conversion is against the tenets of our religion?

•It is not being suggested that the community should open its doors to all and sundry, by conversion. In fact Daver himself considered this issue and came to the conclusion that it would not be in

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The managerial credo

Incoming chairman Minoo Shroff aims to streamline the Punchayet into corporate efficiency

Arnavaz S. Mama

"The perception is that the Punchayet is not responsive, that it lacks consideration and care for the community," accepts Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP) chairman and ex officio president of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India (FPZAI) Minoo R. Shroff. He also believes that change "must start at the top (because) bottlenecks occur at the top of the bottle! No company or NGO (non governmental organization) can be better than the man at the top."



Shroff: 'Not a laid back job'

Though his hair may have both thinned and blanched since his first arrival as BPP trustee in 1986 (trouncing two lady wannabes who have since become his supporters), the lithe vice chairman of Raymond Limited continues to portray disciplined upper crust meritocracy. As selective in his habits as in his dress code, Shroff rises early ("if you are not an early riser you can't do much NGO work. You have to catch people early in the morning... You have to be a day ahead of everyone else to be successful"), walks daily, speaks softly, eats sparingly and maintains that "good grooming shows a tidy mind. Not all of us can be Albert Einstein!"

Having reached the helm of a somewhat sluggish Punchayet during the last six months of his second term of trusteeship, Shroff finds "this is not a laid-back job. People want to see you, meet you." Accordingly, he says he has been joining Maneck Engineer and Burjor Antia, the most recent inductees on the BPP board of trustees, in their weekly trips to various colonies, meeting residents and association representatives with minutes

of the discussions drawn up immediately and confirmed by both sides. To that is added almost daily telephonic contact with the Wadia Committee which manages the baugs.

Also, the board meetings at the Punchayet which started at 6 p.m. or later and droned on for hours with a meandering agenda which was often hijacked, are now said to start at 5 p.m. and end at 7 p.m. with all the points on the "more focused agenda" receiving due consideration. There is also greater emphasis on the working of the board of trustees as a team. What is percolating down the line is that no individual trustee can give instructions on substantive issues like housing. The community is also being made aware that such substantive issues may only be raised with the chairman or the BPP's chief executive officer in their official capacities — not as individuals. Because as he has noted in his essay, "Good governance in India" [published by the Forum of Free Enterprises (FFE)] "no public body or trust of some size can operate and accomplish its objectives unless the... lines of command and communication are clearly spelled out."

A policy of rotating jobs as in a corporation has been instituted in the Punchayet to counter the community's apprehension of executives acquiring vested interest in their portfolios. Shroff agrees that "mindsets need to change." In his good governance essay Shroff had quoted the Chinese proverb, "A man without a smile must not open a shop." Conscious though he is that the staff, "often harangued and pressured by the way people come and talk, is also very adamant," Shroff is trying to impress on them that "we are the interface with the community..."

Another problem the Punchayet faces is that of the cooperative society of flat owners at Parel's A. H. Wadia Baug

seeking to adopt model bylaws which would enable them to sell their community entrusted property in the open market. "We'll take legal action if they force the pace; protect our rights as landlords," notes Shroff with asperity.

An election in mid-June (Shroff's term of office ends mid July unless reelected) will be the fifth trusteeship election performed by the present Anjuman Committee (AC) whose term of office expired in 1999. The lame duck AC is being made to render this function because of a revised scheme for election of trustees filed with the Bombay High Court. The Punchayet says that the issue being sub judice it cannot hold an AC election. No hearings have been held to date and there is no report of any attempt by the Punchayet to expedite the matter. "It will need to be pursued," admits Shroff.

The revised scheme seeks to alter the ratio of elected members to donors from the current 1:1 to 2:1 i.e. twice as many elected members to each donor. There is also a strong lobby seeking adult franchise. Shroff had been in favor of amending the scheme to bring in an upper age limit for trustees as well as limit the number of terms a trustee can stand for reelection. He was, however, outvoted on the issue, he says.

As for the attempt of the six High Priests to put the clock back by 95 years on the issue of intermarried Parsi men and their progeny, Shroff says, "The Punchayet has decided to leave the religion to (the High Priests)."

"We like to claim that we are the apex body of the community. Now we are trying to do what we can to assume the role," he notes with a trace of amusement.

Shroff is optimistic on the outcome of negotiations on the formation of a world body of Zoroastrians. "It is a breakthrough that we can work with the World

Zoroastrian Organisation. There is a possibility of reaching agreement in the current year," he asserts.

Though his years as senior BPP trustee and therefore (ex officio) joint honorary secretary of the FPZAI did not witness much overt contribution from Shroff, as ex officio president of the all-India body he says he is in constant touch with its affairs, attending the fortnightly meetings of its defunct anjuman subcommittee.

The only Zoroastrian on the steering committee of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), Shroff was privy to a session with the Duke of Edinburgh. The various religions and their organizations invest between four to seven trillion US dollars, he estimates. The ARC is trying to mandate that this huge amount be invested in environmentally responsible areas of industry worldwide, he explains.

The Zoroastrian faith is said to be one of 11 recognized by ARC. As Shroff noted in his speech at the Avan Ardevisur Parab jashan where he was chief guest, the other faiths number votaries anywhere between 15 million to over 1,000 million as compared to our minute community of 150,000-200,000 Zoroastrians worldwide (if unsubstantiated figures from Iran are accepted)! But at the London meet Queen Elizabeth II surprised him with "her curiosity and deep interest in our religion and well-being." He said that the Queen enquired about "the significance of fire and I had to clarify that besides light and energy it symbolized purity, incorruptibility, divinity and fecundity. She then went on to enquire about how Zoroastrians, a microscopic community, were able to hold their own and command such respect not only in India but even in the United Kingdom. She commented that Zoroastrians should be very proud of



At the 1986 election: 'You have to be a day ahead'

their magnificent contribution as, in which ever society they have lived, they have not asked for any special concessions like other minority groups. This set me thinking. Do we truly realize the awe and dignity we command in the world?

"However, times have changed and we cannot merely cash in on past glory. We must run ahead of others to retain our pre-eminence... which we are quite capable of doing provided we do not falter."

Though not directly piloting the World Zarathushti Chamber of Commerce's Bombay chapter, Shroff says he and the Punchayet are a source of "moral support." The current president of the FFE which was founded by his uncle A. D. Shroff in the teeth of Nehru's socialist dogma, Minoo Shroff is apt to quote the late financial wizard's words, "Free enterprise was born with man and shall survive as long as man survives." Minoo Shroff is actively pursuing the establishment of a management college under BPP aegis likely to be located on a Zoroastrian trust property in the western suburbs if current negotiations fructify.

An alumnus of the Bharda New High School and St Xavier's College, the son of Rustomji and Jerbai Shroff qualified as management accountant and business economist. Fellow of the London-based institutions, the Chartered Institute of

Management Accountants and the Institute of Directors, Shroff has a background of 45 years in the running of public institutions. He remembers Narayan Dandekar and Kalyan Basu, founders of the Bombay Management Association (BMA), appointing him secretary of the BMA while he was still in his twenties. He later became its president. As president of the All India Manufacturers' Organisation he had had numerous occasions to interact with then finance minister Morarji Desai. Invited by US AID (Agency for International Development) 40 years ago along with Indian stalwarts like G. L. Mehta (of the India Investment Centre) and A. D. Shroff, Shroff says he "met people from (New York governor Nelson) Rockefeller down," including people like Paul Mcgregor who later became economic advisor to US President Richard Nixon. On this occasion he participated in the first Advanced Management Program for developing countries at the University of Michigan.

In industry at home Shroff was general manager of J. N. Marshall for five years before setting up as a management consultant. He initially joined J. K. Industries as an economic advisor. Somewhere on the way he had been nudged along by the likes of Col Leslie Sawhny and Sir Dinshaw Petit, he recalls with respect and gratitude. He who has inherited Nani Palkhivala's mantle as president of the FFE and the Lesile Sawhny Programme notes, "When you are interacting with a lot of people, *thoru ghanu bi tau rub off thaiy ni* (some of their sheen rubs off on you)." His work as president of the Indo-Japanese Association and as a business leader invited by the Government of Japan was rewarded in 2000 with the award of The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon conferred on him in the name of the Emperor of Japan. Former chairman of the Indian Advisory Board of Standard Chartered Bank, Shroff's expertise on economic and financial mat-



With wife Viloo and daughters Soona (right) and Niloufer Mistry



Chatting with the voters at his 1996 trusteeship election

ters has been tapped by leading industrial groups for over 25 years, notes his bio data.

"Everything is not hunky-dory," Shroff readily admits to the BPP's "grey areas," adding hopefully, "Once you are in the driver's seat you are in a better position to convince your colleagues... (Also), anyone with genuine injustice is welcome to come to me. There is no concrete evidence on lack of probity, of money changing hands (but) people can come to me in camera with evidence."

To make himself more accessible to the community, Shroff has set up his personal office a stone's throw away from the Punchayet in premises belonging to the A. D. Shroff Memorial Trust of which he is managing trustee. The elegant though simple refurbishing of a large room in an old building has been at his personal expense. He has also been traveling — to Delhi to attend the felicitation of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw who entered his 90th year, to Dubai where he was invited to meet some of the 1,500-1,600 Zoroastrians who work in the Gulf, to see for himself what opportunities and challenges the area provides for Zoroastrians, to London for world body consultations and ARC conventions... He also continues with Raymond because "you need an income to carry on working with various bodies."

Shroff is bent on bringing professionalism into the BPP. He feels he

Badgered by the Alert Zoroastrians Association (AZA), the Punchayet had to rethink its allotment policy vis-a-vis two new buildings at Panthaky Baug, originally conceived as ownership flats for Parsis. It is now committed to providing leave and licence accommodation under the MRS (merit rating system) to those on the waiting list in one building, while it will honor its commitments to those who had booked ownership flats earlier, in the other. About 70 flats will be ready for occupation by May or June at the Nirlon complex in Goregaon. An additional 250 flats at a cost of 12 crore rupees would be available there if funds are forthcoming, says Shroff. Allotment in the Nirlon complex will be entirely according to the MRS, he adds.

"The MRS is human. There are complaints largely because peoples' status changes while they are on the waiting list. We now have an appeal agency — the Housing Advisory Committee — comprising of the Punchayet's critics to look into grievances," notes Shroff. However some complaints are absolutely bogus, he argues. Investigations reveal that the party already has a flat or that the family's true income is not disclosed. "There are around 2,000 on the waiting list. But after scrutinizing I doubt if even 700 or 800 may be eligible," he adds. Averting that it is the disqualified ones who are disgruntled, Shroff asks, "Do you hear from the people who have received flats?" He concedes however that "perception is important. How you

has been able "to build confidence with contending groups." Dealing as he is with "elected people with different approaches," his managerial credo is to "get the best out of a man without slighting him." Aware that "it takes time and effort to bring chaps together," Shroff says, "now that I have a better feel, I think I can make an impact on the aspirations of the community with the support of my colleagues, staff and community."

Married to his cousin Viloo, the Shroffs have two daughters Soona and Niloufer Mistry and a grandson, Arman. It makes him sad to see that many young Zoroastrians today opt to remain single

seem to be doing a thing is important."

As for deposits against leave and licence flats which according to the AZA range from five lakh to 30 lakh rupees, Shroff notes, "Originally the trust got nothing" when the occupancy of a flat changed. Now the Punchayet values its flat at about 30 percent below the open market rate in the area for out-of-turn allotments and claims its share of the sale price as landlord. An illegitimate inductee is charged a higher rate than others, he adds.

According to Shroff flats in Nowroz Baug, Jer Baug and Captain Colony do not come within the ambit of leave and licence deposits. "When such flats become vacant we even buy them over and pass them on for MRS allotment. But how can you give away Cusrow Baug flats costing Rs 80 lakhs to a crore?" Shroff justifies the Punchayet's decision to acquiesce in Montreal's successful entrepreneur Ness Lakdavalu buying the property from its original incumbent and paying the Punchayet its legitimate 40 percent share as landlord. Lakdavalu is starting a business and wants to relocate here, says Shroff. A somewhat similar case exists at Ness Baug, he admits. In both instances the new inductees have acquired tenant status in exchange for paying a higher share (Rs 5 lakhs) to the Punchayet.

Shroff says that he has worked on streamlining the allotment policy. "New clearer guidelines" will be published after the board concurs on them.

or opt to have only one child or none. He feels they are denying themselves the joy of caring, of sharing, of rearing children to carry on the legacy and of their companionship.

He hopes to leave behind some visible impact on the 350 years plus institution because "what happens, happens in the first six months." Shroff believes in reflecting his Zoroastrian faith in his behavior: "People may doubt what you say; they believe what you do." He says he is "doing small things in an effective way. Because it's much nicer to see smoke brighten into flame than flame degenerate into smoke..."

"Architect by choice"

Percy Nazir's designs and execution for the Border Security Force and Coal India have won him many accolades

Dilnavaz E. Bhagwagar

While still a student Percy Phiroze Nazir was invited to design the Director's Bungalow at the Rakhikol collieries, near Parasia in Madhya Pradesh. Now 40 years old, the bungalow, as old as Nazir's career in architecture, still sits atop the hill near the mines. "Little did I know then that my work would start and end with collieries," mused Nazir.



Nazir who specialized in town planning and industrial architecture began his career as an associate with Mavlankar and Mavlankar. When the Indo-Pak War broke out in 1971, the BSF (Border Security Force) advertised for the post of assistant commandants in the technical wing. The glamor and glory of a uniform beckoned. Nazir applied and was selected. However, he hadn't reckoned on the rigorous 10 weeks' training for soldiers! "Parades, firing, tactics and maneuvers. Those 10 weeks really toughened me up. I emerged stronger in spirit and strength," said Nazir. After his basic training Nazir was posted at the BSF headquarters, New Delhi, in the civil engineering wing.

He set up BSF establishments and townships in the eastern sector at Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. He was also associated with planning and designing of the four premier BSF Training Institutes at Gwalior, Indore, Hazaribag and Bangalore. "My

mentor and role model in those days was K. F. Rustamji, then director general of the Border Security Force. He was a soldier, a scholar and a gentleman," said Nazir.

After 12 years with the BSF, Nazir was expected, as per BSF norms, to undergo another round of intensive field training before he could qualify for higher promotions. "That was when I decided to quit," laughed Nazir. "I was afraid they would make me forget my profession as an architect and turn me into a soldier."

In 1983, Nazir went on deputation to Coal India Limited (CIL), the country's largest public sector undertaking. In 1986 he was absorbed in the company. In his 19 years with CIL, Nazir traveled widely, serving in the different subsidiaries of CIL, such as Central Coalfields Limited, Northern Coalfields Limited, and Western Coalfields Limited. "It was rough

going, with most postings being in remote and near primitive areas," remembered Nazir. "But seeing a forest or barren land being transformed into a model township, was very rewarding." It took its toll on family life though as his wife was unable to reconcile to the situation. Their elder daughter Dilber is now a management consultant with Siemens and younger daughter Tushna is associate guest service manager of the Oberoi International.

Of the numerous townships and colonies he built, Kumbarkhani near Chandrapur in Maharashtra was a project Nazir is specially proud of. "The land was undulating and inhospitable. But we created a beautiful township of 350 houses for colliery workers of different categories, along with the supporting infrastructure of roads, school, dispensary, etc using the natural topography to good effect."

Nazir is aware of the importance of human resources to any industry, specially one that is as labor intensive as coal mining. Both quality and quantity of production depends upon labor. He feels that motivation

of any individual is attained only through providing him with the basic requirements of good shelter, clean environment and such amenities as will improve the quality of their lives.

Another landmark project handled by Nazir was the Latur Earthquake Rehabilitation Scheme. Yelwat village comprising over 150 homes was rehabilitated with quake-



A model of the general manager's office at Wani (above) and the hospital in Ghugus designed and built by Nazir (top)

proof houses and supporting infrastructure in a record six months' time and handed over to the villagers before the monsoons. Nazir received special appreciation from the then minister of coal, Ajit Panja, for the speed of construction and quality of work.

"If the job is to be completed within a strict timeframe, entrust it to Nazir. His commitment to his work and to his word can be fully relied upon," his superiors at CIL had a very good opinion of one of the very few Parsis working in the government behemoth.

The Rashtriya Nirman Ratan Award, 2000, National Gold Star Award, 2000, Rashtriya Udyog Excellence Award, 2001 and the Rashtriya Shiromani Award, 2001, presented at the hands of Krishan Kant, then Vice President of India are just a few major awards, among the many he has received. In recognition of his worth, the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India conferred the Award for Excellence in the sphere of professional competence for the year 2001 to Nazir on November 23, 2002.

Born and raised in Nagpur, Nazir was a shy, handsome, hardworking boy. When he retired from CIL last year at age 60, he was a shy, handsome, hardworking man. "I became an architect by choice and not

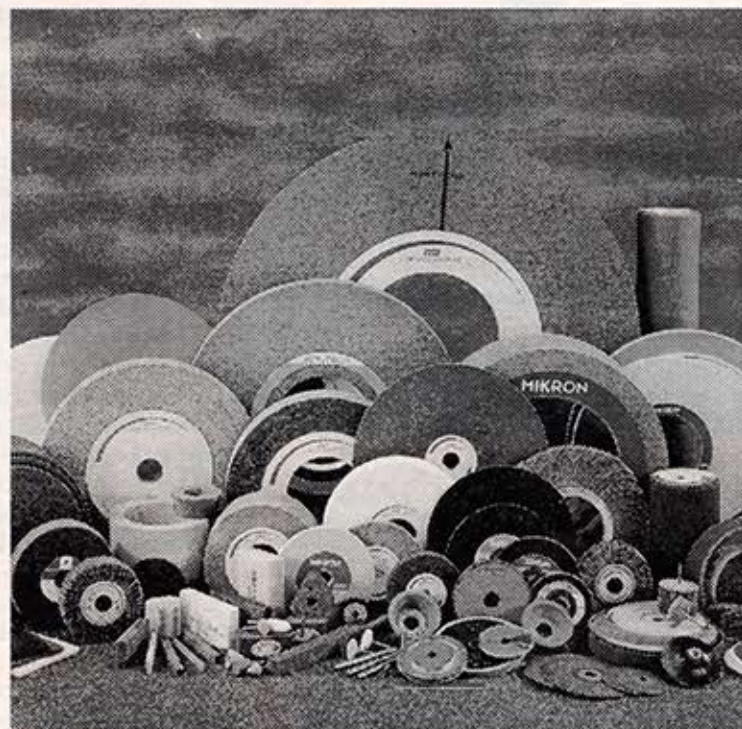
by chance," said Nazir. "I always enjoyed sketching and was fascinated by space, proportion and perspective. My eldest brother Cawas was studying civil engineering. I would love to watch his plans and drawings. Architecture, I decided was an artistic extension of the same discipline." In 1960 the Visvesvera Regional College of Engineering, Nagpur, upgraded its diploma course to a full-fledged BArch. Nazir was admitted to the first batch of degree in architecture from Nagpur University.

Nazir acknowledges his late father Phiroze as the most formative influence of his early life. "Dad's principles of honesty and integrity in every dealing and his tremendous courage in the face of prolonged physical pain, are deeply etched in my psyche," said Nazir softly. "In hindsight, I can even appreciate my mum's (Mehroo) goading," laughed Nazir! His other siblings are Minoo who is a banker and sister Shereen Hirji.

Nazir's looks belie his years. Being a sports and fitness freak all his life is paying rich dividends. Hockey, football, basketball, table tennis, he has played them all but cricket was and is a passion. While in college, he played university level cricket, in Delhi he played for the Indian Police Service cricket team, in

Calcutta he played 'A' Division professional cricket for the Calcutta Parsi Gymkhana. Now Nazir takes pleasure in watching and organizing cricket matches. A walk of 10 to 12 km is a daily must even today.

Nazir, the award winning architect is always available to friends and fine causes where he gives happily and freely of his expertise, without any expectation of returns. A condolence hall and dharamshala at Indore, mandirs in Singrauli and Parasia, a gurudwara in Nanakpur and a Lutheran church in Nagpur are some of the places he has designed and supervised, in this way. The managing committee of the Nagpur Anjuman draws heavily on his experience and advice. Recently, they requested him to supervise the landscaping and beautification of the long neglected aramgah. Not only did Nazir do an excellent job of it, he went further and made a painstaking plan of the entire cemetery of over 1,200 graves. It is proposed to display this at the entrance, to make it easy for people to locate the grave of a loved one, if they know the grave number or seek it from the register of names kept there. This then, is his blueprint for success — service beyond the call of duty, or giving a little more than what is expected or asked for.



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Arc of triumph

Green fields in Jamshedpur, colorful bows, a nascent archery association and a coach on the lookout for promising youngsters in 1995 — these were the beginnings of 18-year-old Yazneen Rana's assignment with archery. "I was 10 at that



Yazneen Rana: lone Parsi archer

time. I happened to be passing by and, being inquisitive, went in just for a look. I was persuaded to try and pull the bow. Observing my hand structure, Sanjeeva Singh (Arjuna awardee and secretary of the Jharkhand Archery Association who coaches Rana) saw promise in me and so I joined," Rana relates.

Shooting straight from the shoulder, Rana picked up a gold medal in the team event as part of the junior Jharkhand archers at the 25th Junior National Archery Championship held at Jamshedpur from January 2-5, 2003. Selected to participate in the Indian team in the 1st Junior Asian Archery Championship from January 9-12, Rana struck bull's-eye with a silver in the team event at the archery range of the J. R. D. Tata Sports Complex in the steel city.

"Archery is a very relaxing sport," opines the Loyola School student who

has just completed her standard 12 board exams. "You have this beautiful field, you have your equipment and your thoughts. You don't have to depend on others. You meditate and cool down before starting. If the heartbeat quickens, the hand shakes so you have to subdue the excitement." Using a 36-poundage Hoyt fiberglass bow manufactured in the US, Rana elucidates that the heavier the bow the better the accuracy for a distance of 70-90 m. "The equipment costs around Rs 70,000 as everything is imported. The carbon arrows are around Rs 700 each, so if the arrow is lost or damaged you lose a lot!" she explains. The stabilizer reduces vibration and hand shake. The bow jumps when the arrow is released so the heavier the long bar at the front the quicker the bow drops after release. The height of the bow from top to bottom is around 5.8-6 ft, more than her own height! Temperature, wind direction and speed are relevant factors in a successful shoot.

"It was rather unfortunate that more teams could not participate as this was the first time a junior Asian archery championship took place. Some were held up due to fog at Delhi airport while others like Japan and Korea were participating at a meet elsewhere. Still it was an experience," she narrates. Shooting at junior archery state and national level competitions at Pushkar (Rajasthan), Delhi, Jamshedpur, Chandigarh and Meerut over the years, her tally of medals currently stands at

eight gold, five silver and nine bronze, as per her bio data. An international experience slipped by last June when she was selected to represent India in the Junior World Archery Championship in the Czech Republic, but the team did not depart "due to technical reasons."

"I have yet to meet a single Parsi who is into archery. The only other Parsi around at competitions is my dad Sarosh who takes great interest in archery and is the official team manager who accompanies the Jharkhand team," states Yazneen. A Jamshedpur resident, Sarosh works as manager, operations and contract, in the information technology services division of Tata Steel. Yazneen's mother Pervin is a teacher at Sacred Heart Convent where the teenager did her schooling, securing 87 percent in the ICSE exam two years ago.

With para sailing, river rafting, swimming and basketball among her interests, Yazneen was awarded a gold medal for adventure, sports and social service conferred by the Duke of Edinburgh (the International Award for Young People). Her 10-minute video film on the markets of Jamshedpur won her a third prize in a video competition organized by the SAARC Youth Festival in Delhi in December 2001. Among the host of awards she has received are the Khel Samman Patra from the chief minister of Bihar five years ago, the sportsperson of the year trophy from the Jamshedpur Parsee Association for seven consecutive years, the late Pesi Tarapore Memorial trophy for



Six-a-Side cricket champions Navsari with Roshan and Burjor Antia (second and third from left)



From left: Well-known judoka Cawas Billimoria with team champions Avabai Petit school and Mancherji Joshi Memorial Trust; veteran swimming champion and coach Adi Bharucha (extreme right) receiving trophy from BPP trustee Burjor Antia

academic and all-round excellence, etc.

Archery should be given more felicitation by the central ministry as archery is a difficult and expensive sport, Yazneen believes. "It's always cricket, hockey, tennis, etc which are in the lime-light," she rues. Archery receives no boost at all, says the teenager who intends to continue making her arcs of triumph.

Successful six

Willowing their way to victory for the second consecutive year, Navsari lifted the trophy at the 8th All Parsees Six-a-Side cricket tournament conducted by FOZAWAC (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations for Welfare and Culture). In the final on January 12, 2003 at the Parsee Gymkhana in Bombay, Navsari responded with 71 for 2 after Parsee Cyclists Sports Club were all out for 69.

Navsari's Kaiwan Kasad was the man of the tournament from amongst the 12 teams from Bombay, Secunderabad, Surat, Navsari, Billimoria, Thana and Umargaon. Secunderabad's Vardhavan Debara emerged the best batsman, with Navsari's Cyrus Munshi and Surat's Kaizad Karanjia the best bowler and best fielder respectively of the tournament, states a communiqué from FOZAWAC general secretary Rusi Bhungara. Aspi Tantra was "mainly responsible for conducting the rounds smoothly," adds Bhungara.

In the running

Young Karen Mistry bettered the Maharashtra state record with her timing of 8.5 sec in the 50 m run for girls under eight and Scherezade Contractor

achieved the same distinction for the 100 m (15.1 sec) in the girls under 10 at the Jal D. Pardivala All Parsees Annual Athletic Meet on February 1-2, 2003. For their special achievement, the two children were awarded Rs 3,000 each at the meet which was sponsored by the World Zoroastrian Organisation, states a press release from the All Parsees Sports Foundation.

Running away with the Jal D. Pardivala Trophy for the best athlete of the year was Ayesha Billimoria. As per a report in the *Mid-Day* of January 24, Billimoria had achieved the distinction of breaking the 100 m and 400 m records at the inter-ICSE schools meet and qualified for the national school athletic championship in Bangalore at the end of January.

Coasting past his competitors at the All Parsees meet was Mehernosh Bamboat, the fastest man of the meet while Ayesha Shroff was his feminine counterpart. The Avabai F. Petit Girls' High School and the Mancherji Edalji Joshi Memorial Trust lifted the women's and men's team championship respectively.

Track record

Off the blocks at veteran athletic meets over the past 14 years, Calcutta's Prochy N. Mehta (see "Veterans all," *Sports, Parsiana*, February 2001) was at the forefront of medal winners at the 17th Sri Lanka Veterans International Athletic Championship held in Colombo on January 10-11, 2003. Her four

golds secured her two overall trophies — champion of the meet and best female athlete, notes a write-up forwarded from Calcutta.

In the women 45-49 age group, Mehta sprinted 100 m in 14.8 sec, 200 m in 31 sec and the longer 400 m in 1.13.3 sec to achieve three golden orbs. Her long jump of 3.85 m also carried her to first place.

Reporting on the championship on January 12 a Sri Lanka newspaper noted: "Prochy who holds the record in the 400 m made in Jakarta in 1996 said she was happy about her performances. She played hockey and basketball at national level but after the children grew up took to athletics."

Ironing it out

Hurling the iron ball to a distance of 10.05 m, 14-year-old Kainaz Mistry (see "Putting a long shot," *Sports, Parsiana*, May 2000) created a new record for junior girls at the ICSE national (school) games held in Secunderabad in October 2002. Coached by Samad Pawaskar, the Bombay Queen Mary schoolgirl was the lone record breaker in the girls category, states a press release.

"The coach and Kainaz had worked very hard and that really paid off," says Kainaz's mother Beroze adding that stiff competition can lift an athlete's performance several notches higher. At the larger arena of the national (all



Mehta: continuing winning runs

schools) athletics held in Bangalore in February '03, Kainaz missed out on podium position, placing fourth in the under-16 group.

Kainaz's fine showing at the 5th Ryan Maharashtra state level athletic meet in December 2002 with a throw of 8.99 m in the under-16 won her the gold in a competition which witnessed, according to *The Indian Express* of December 11, 2002, a huge participation of around 9,500 athletes. School and junior college students from institutions in Bombay, its distant suburbs and even places like Raigad, Panvel and Dahanu travelled to the University Sports Pavilion in South Bombay to showcase their skills. Reporting on the event, the *Mumbai Newslines* of December 13 states that 13-year-old Meherzan Mazda of Dahanu representing the town's Yazd Sports Club created two meet records on both the days he participated — hurling the shot-put 12.44 m in the boys under-14 and the discus 35.14 m in the same category to eclipse a record set by Sheriar Irani in 1999. The paper adds that the boy had to leave his home at around 4.30 a.m. to reach the venue on time and could return home only around 9.30-10 at night. "There were so many competitors, the meet resembled a mela," laughs Kainaz.

Celebrating Christmas 2000 in Houston, USA with a silver in shot-put and a bronze in discus in the women's category at the World Zarathushti Games during the Seventh World Zoroastrian Congress, Kainaz was acutely disappointed, says Beroze, at not being allowed to participate in the track events in the younger age group due to a mix up in the entry form. Kainaz's successful outings throughout 2001 led to a gold at the prestigious National School Games at Patiala in early 2002. An enthusiastic participant in the triathlon (100 m, long jump and shot-put), a troublesome ankle sometimes restricts the range of events, though she continues to train for the sprint under Homiyar and Rachita Mistry at the University Sports ground at Marine Lines. Set to step into the final year of schooling shortly, Kainaz says she

Kainaz Mistry with her reward at Patiala



Raiyan (far left) and Aresh Banaji: burgeoning medals tally in athletics

will keep up the training through standard 10 as well, though on a reduced scale.

The brothers Banaji

"Only the two best athletes in an event from each state are selected for the national games," says 13-year-old Raiyan Banaji (see "Sporting siblings," *Sports, Parsiana*, August 2001), explaining the background to his participation in the 200 m and the 4x100 Maharashtra state relay team at the 48th National School Games athletic championship in Bangalore in January-February 2003.

Enjoying the "feeling of being free, of running without barriers," the long, empty track curving invitingly ahead, Raiyan asserts that the 'get-set' position at the start of a race is the most nerve-racking: "You don't know exactly when the starting gun will go off, whether your start will be quick enough or you will make a false start." Getting off the blocks at precisely the right second can make or break a sprint, he asserts.

Though a medal eluded him at Bangalore, Raiyan's performance at the Maharashtra State Sub-junior Athletic Championship at Karad in February secured him the silver with a timing of 12.3 sec in the 100 m. The silvery orb had also adorned his neck in the triathlon (100 m, long jump, shot-put) at the 35th Bombay City District Amateur Athletic Association (BCDAAA) meet in December last year, establishing a meet record as well, according to his bio data.

Sharpening his running skills under Homi-

yar Mistry at Adille Su-mariwalla's Ace Athletic Club, Raiyan's tally at various levels up to February 2003 stands at seven gold, five silver and two bronze medals. A special moment, he says, was at the 109th Mumbai School Sports Association athletic meet in December when, after trailing at the 50 m mark, he surged ahead to claim gold with his best timing of 24.7 sec in the 200 m in the under-14.

Equally enjoying the "feeling of speed and agility" is Raiyan's sprinting sibling Aresh who at under 10 years of age is the holder of three Maharashtra state records — for the 50, 60 and 100 m and has equalled the state record in the 80 m in his age group. As per his bio data, his timing of 7.4 sec in the 50 m at the 35th BCDAAA meet last December sent into a spin a record which had stood for 32 years! Aresh also obliterated his own state record in the 100 m (established a month earlier) with his new timing at the meet of 14.2 sec. The nine-year-old was also part of the Cathedral School squad running the 4x100 m relay clinching second place in the boys under 16!

His toughest competition, says the fourth standard student, was at the Maharashtra State Sub-junior Athletic Championship at Karad in February 2003, where he equalled the meet record (7.4 sec) in the 50 m and created a new meet record (14.3 sec) in the 100 m. Slightly nervous before the race, the little front-runner who trains under Savio D'souza at the Ace Athletic Club says he tells himself to "look straight ahead, run your race, once it's over, it's over," and he has reaped his reward, which stands up to February 2003 at 16 golds, four silvers, one bronze and six individual championships!

Compiled by Hilla P. Guzder



Youth delegates chat with Kalam

Tea with the President

One of the highlights of the 16th Youth Conference in New Delhi was a meeting with the President of India Dr Abdul Kalam

Adil Nargolwala

While youth meets are mainly about *masti-majaa* (fun and frolic), making friends and exchanging ideas, there should be a serious content too, and issues relevant to the community should be discussed, it had been decided. To further this trend of thought the 16th annual Zoroastrian Youth Conference was held in Delhi from January 24 to 27, 2003. News of inclement weather in the preceding week when Delhi experienced one of its worst cold, windy, foggy and cloudy spells, and the consequent delays and cancellations of incoming rail and air traffic, did result in a disappointing turnout of youth, especially from Bombay and South India. In all 35 youth attended, the maximum representatives from Gujarat.

The four-day proceedings started with a jashan followed by a short opening address by Lt Gen (Retd) Adi Sethna, president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, welcoming the delegates. In his talk on

the relevance of the Zoroastrian religion in modern times, Noshir Dadrawala, an orthodox columnist and speaker, elaborated on the value system and ethics of the universal faith. Advocating reverence to all of God's creations, he noted that if Zarathushtra's teachings were to be summed up in one word, it would be *Asha* which could be variously interpreted as truth or righteous conduct or divine order and man's duty to live in harmony with that order. It also stands for purity in thought, word and deed and behoves every Zoroastrian to fight for the good at the physical (cleanliness, etc), social (alleviating poverty and human suffering) and ethical (overcoming greed, anger, envy, etc) levels, he reiterated. The ensuing question and answer session had to be interrupted as the youth had an appointment with the President of India at 1.30 p.m.

An enthusiastic group boarded the bus heading for Rashtrapati Bhavan. Dr

Abdul Kalam, known for his fondness for the young, was a little surprised that among the Parsis those up to 35 years of age are considered to be youths! Chatting informally with some of the youngest in the group he referred to the influence of teachers in an age where both working parents were unable to devote adequate time to their children. He also impressed on the group the need for a strong self-reliant Indian nation and the role the youth would be required to play to make this possible. The audience was followed by tea and snacks and a guided tour of Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Mughal Gardens.

The afternoon session was devoted to a talk on marriage and fertility practices among the Parsis by Ava Khullar who explained how extreme modernization, urbanization, higher education among men and women and expectations of a high standard of living had brought about a pattern of late marriages or no marriages among a large segment of the community leading to a serious demographic decline. Unless remedial measures are taken by the youth who are the future of the community it could lead to the eventual extinction of the Parsis, she warned.

Dr Lata Narayan of Bombay's Tata Institute of Social Sciences who will be conducting a study of Parsi youth under the UNESCO sponsored PARZOR project then discussed community issues with those present. When interacting with the youth she tried to understand their concerns to see how those could be best addressed in the proposed study. During the first two days when the panel of Khullar, Narayan and Dr Shernaz Cama of PARZOR guided the deliberations, the topics of life, marriage, the often differing expectations of partners, the role of parents and the expectations from their children were openly discussed. The males who outnumbered the females denigrated the high expectations of females as well as their unwillingness to move to smaller towns outside Bombay. The reluctance to change and to be more realistic, as also the passive and negative role of the parents in influencing their children's decisions were viewed as the other deterrents.

A message from Dinshaw Tamboly, managing trustee of the World Zoroastrian Organisation (India) Trust and Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustee was read in his absence on the morning of January 25. Urging the youth to fight complacency and strive for excellence in a highly competitive environment, Tamboly referred to the various crises — urban family life-style, personal health, leadership, dwindling population, erosion of human values — facing the present-day Parsis.

A feast of four films was organized for the delegates on the second day: *Glimpses* which gave an insight into the PARZOR project, *Asha: the Law of Harmony, a study of environmental consciousness in Zoroastrian rituals* which was submitted for UNESCO's awards for "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," a film by Ashdeen Lilaonwala explaining the art of kusti weaving based on her study "Threads of Continuity, A study of the Textiles used in Rituals and Customs of the Zoroastrian community," and an excerpt from a film on the life of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw which was released on April 3, 2003.

To encourage Parsis to join the de-

fence services, the afternoon session on the second day saw Air Marshal Adi Ghandhi and Air Marshal Fali Major share their experiences in the air force, demonstrating how exciting and fulfilling a career it can be. This was followed by a promotional film on the Indian Air Force. Opportunities in the hospitality sector were laid bare by Ravi Bhoothalingam, former president of the Oberoi Hotels who referred to the different sectors like administration and food and beverages and the openings in the wine industry. He stated that the main objective of the hospitality and hotel business was to give a memorable experience to the customer which required human skills in dealing with people, communication skills, a genial temperament and a trustworthy personality. Appealing to the youth to be bold enough to start their own independent enterprise as did their forefathers, Adil Nargolwala, youth trustee of the DPA, said that the reward of creating your own empire (maybe a very small one) and then nurturing it is very close to creating a family by getting married, having children and watching them grow. Therefore in all of us there is something of an entrepre-

neur. The freedom to work at one's own pace, the financial rewards and the ability to be one's own boss are the added perks, he revealed. The growing need for creative thinking which plays a crucial role in any venture in this competitive age was stressed by Navroze Dhondy who related his own experiences in the field of advertising and the opportunities available.

At the valedictory function Porus Karanjawalla of Ahmedabad was presented a silver plate in recognition of his leadership in steering the Federation of Zoroastrian Youth Associations of India for several years.

The intellectual discourses on the first two days of the Conference were followed by outdoor trips on the last two days. Attending the Republic Day Parade, visiting the Delhi Haat Complex which has on display handicrafts from around the country and a full-day excursion to Agra were the other highlights of the youth meet.

The four-day meet was meant to enthuse the youth. As Tamboly had noted in his message, the youth had the capacity to think rationally, analyze objectively and execute decisively to lead the community to a glorious future.



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PRIESTLY CONTRADICTIONS

continued from page 29

the interest of the community to have unrestricted conversion and since there was overwhelming evidence of navjotes of children of Parsi fathers, by non Parsi mothers only this could be permitted as it was done in the past. Now perhaps, considering our dwindling numbers we should consider entry of children by Parsi mothers also into the community, as well as the non Parsi spouses. This will result in only those who have a genuine connection with, and love for the community, being allowed in. Also the definition of Parsi would not allow the converts to enjoy the benefit of trusts which are for Parsi Zoroastrians only. This issue has also been settled by Dastur in his judgement.

A few years ago when the late Neville Wadia approached all the High Priests and expressed his desire to convert from Christianity to Zoroastrianism many of you agreed that he could be converted. But you felt that a proper navjote ceremony would be inappropriate because of his age, but if he took a ritual bath or nahn or an ablution bath after recital of suitable prayers, he could put on a sudreh kusti and be considered as admitted to the Zoroastrian religion. Thereafter he would be considered as a proper Zoroastrian and would be free to enter agiaries and atash behrams particularly the H. B. Wadia Atas Bahram and he could also be taken to Doongerwadi like any other Zoroastrian. The reason given for permitting this as mentioned in the letter of Dastur Mirza and Dastur JamaspAsa is as follows:

"We appreciate the services rendered by your illustrious forefathers to the Zoroastrian community. We appreciate also your honest and genuine desire to rejoin the faith for the sake of the doctrines of our religion and for no other ulterior motives. It has been stated in the *Persian Rivayats* that it is proper and allowable to take back a Zoroastrian man or woman who wishes to revert to his/her religion which he/she has abandoned under certain circumstances and accepted an alien religion. Your letter carries terms of solution laid down by Dasturji Kotwal. We do agree with the said terms but we firmly believe that the navjote ceremony should be performed as an exceptional case. In fact, the nahn ceremony (sacred ablution) precedes the navjote ceremony proper. Regarding your entry into an atash behram and/or agiary, we state that in India, particularly in Bombay and

towns of Gujarat, entry into such places of worship will be determined by the concerned authorities and/or the anjuman of that place."

Only Dasturs MeherjiRana and Kaikobad Dastoor had categorically disagreed with this opinion. It is not clear on what scriptural interpretation you all came to the conclusion that Wadia was a Zoroastrian earlier and had loved the religion and was now wishing to revert to his religion which he had abandoned under certain circumstances and accepted an alien religion. I am sure you must be aware of the fact that his father Sir Ness Wadia, though originally a Zoroastrian, was converted to Christianity through the Church of England and married a Christian lady by Christian rites. Their son Neville Wadia was baptized in the Church of England and until the age of 80 years continued to be a Christian. Thus, as per your pronouncement he cannot qualify as a Zoroastrian, as he had a non Zoroastrian mother. Thereafter he desired to become a Zoroastrian because of his immense love for the community and admiration for the religion as expressed by him in his letter. While one entirely applauds the bold and correct decision taken by the High Priests, one cannot understand why this rule cannot be followed universally. On what basis can an exception be made in one case and denied in another? Can religious edicts be so flexibly interpreted? Do you have the right of dispensation, even from what you considered as a fundamental 'tenet of our religion'? There is no doubt that the Wadia family has been one of the greatest benefactors of the community, and thousands of Parsis have a roof over their head because of their charity. However, can scriptures be interpreted to allow what is deemed generally to be unacceptable as permissible?

•Have you considered what a traumatic effect your pronouncement will have on innocent children born out of interfaith marriages whose navjote has been performed and who are devout Zoroastrians believing in the faith and regular in their performance of their prayers, etc? If they are now told that they are no longer Zoroastrians, and all that they have been practicing is false, would it not be traumatic? A similar irresponsible statement was made by one of the high priests during the famous Roxan Shah case, that marriage between a Parsi girl and a non Parsi male is akin to adultery. It seems to be based on a cal-

lous disregard of the implications of the pronouncements. One wonders what has provoked you to make such statements without giving the scriptural evidence, despite the judgement.

What is the remedy for this impasse that the community finds itself in? To whom can they turn to ascertain the truth? It is likely that to counter the criticism of the High Priests' pronouncement some fundamentalist elements may resort to foul abuse and hate mail against any one who disagrees with them, and organize a public meeting where rabid attacks may be made on all the persons who have sought clarification. In the words of Irani, "Today it is sadly evident that many Parsis, largely religiously ignorant, are allowing themselves to be deceived by prelates and preachers who have vested self-interests in projecting versions of a religion which do not conform to Zarathushtrian truth. They persist in deluding themselves and others that Zoroastrianism is tribally restricted and countenance the perpetuation of ignorance, errors and falsehoods of the past. That then is the furtherance of deceit and *jadugih* which the founder had so vehemently condemned."

The average panthaky and priest will not dare to disobey the diktat, since terms such as 'renegade priests' are used to describe those who perform such navjotes. Almost every Parsi family has someone who has outmarried and hence it is necessary to get this matter clarified at once. What is necessary is face-to-face discussion, where honest doubts and conflicting interpretation of our scriptures are examined and a consensus reached. I feel that it is the responsibility of the trustees of the BPP who are the akabars and leaders of the community to get this matter clarified by the High Priests and other experts from anywhere in the world. They should arrange a Round Table conference of eminent persons from India and abroad so that once and for all this issue is settled, otherwise the fate of a large number of Parsi Zoroastrians will be uncertain. I appeal to the High Priests to agree to such an honest dialog. If they have facts they can convince the skeptics, otherwise they will lose their credibility. After all does not our religion ask us to seek the truth and follow it? Why be afraid of the truth? If the trustees fail to shoulder their responsibility as the leaders of our community and try to remain neutral they will have failed in their duty and should step down. Fortunately the present body has eminent solicitors like

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Dadi Engineer and Burjor Antia who are used to sorting out conflicting issues on the basis of evidence. We have a galaxy of eminent lawyers like Fali Nariman, Justice Sam Bharucha, Soli Sorabjee and Tehmtan Andhyarujina and many others who can be asked to examine the evidence, and give the BPP their advice. The High Priests could also present their views to them. Our eminent chairman Minoo Shroff and other trustees like Dinshaw Tamboly can also be relied upon to act boldly in the interest of the community. I sincerely hope they do not fail us. I share Vimadalal's wish that this matter should not go to court lest we become the laughing stock of the country.

A retired Indian Administrative Services officer, Jamsheed G. Kanga held senior posts in government including that of the municipal



commissioner of Bombay. He is at present a senior corporate advisor to the Tata group of companies. A former trustee of the Bombay Parsi Punchayet, he is on the board of several compa-

nies and is active in heritage conservation and town planning.

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Zoroastrian quotations

"Quotations summarize and preserve for the future the wisdom of the past and the experiences of the ages...The ethics and ideals of Zoroastrianism are reflected in the quotations selected for this book. In the practice of these ethics and ideals is the key to Zoroastrian success worldwide in all spheres of life," notes the preface by Nadir Ardeshir Jivanji Modi in *A Treasury of Quotations from Zoroastrian texts*. This 156-page hardcover book published in 2002 is a revised and restructured version of Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi's *Moral Extracts from Zoroastrian Books*.



J. J. Modi: recording for posterity

While the original version had only English translations, the present edition carries the transliteration of the relevant Avesta, Pahlavi and Pazand passages before the translation "for the benefit of the general reader and for the use of writers and speakers...of Zoroastrian religion, culture and history."

"Though the original book is very balanced and satisfactorily fulfils the purpose for which it was written...some new useful quotations and four new chapters (on 'Faith,' 'Prayers,' 'Prosperity' and 'Protection') have been added in the book," explains Ervad (Dr) Ramiyar P. Karanjia, principal of the Athornan Boarding Madressa, who was



Karanjia: preserving the wisdom of the past

primarily responsible for the additional inputs in the form of transliterations and extra passages. The 32 chapters in the revised edition, starting with "Cheerfulness and Contentedness" and ending with "Zeal and Perseverance" have also been listed

alphabetically. While the Zoroastrian triad of good thoughts, words and deeds merits a direct/indirect reference in almost every chapter of the book, its importance is reiterated in certain passages such as in the chapter on "Conscience And The Principle Of Right Conduct" where through a series of interrogations it is explained: "Who is the most fortunate

man in the world? Ans: He who is most innocent. Who is the most innocent man in the world? Ans: He who walks in the path of God and shuns that of the devil. Which is the path of God and which that

of the devil? Ans: Virtue is the path of God and vice that of the devil. What constitutes virtue and what vice? Good thoughts, good words and good deeds constitute virtue; and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds constitute vice. What constitutes good thoughts, good words and good deeds and what constitutes evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds? Ans: Honesty, charity and truthfulness constitute the former; and dishonesty, want of charity and falsehood constitute the latter."

Quoting from the *Mino-i-Kherad* in the chapter on "Cheerfulness and Contentedness," there is a question asked: "By how many meritorious ways and means do men reach Heaven?" The answer elucidates: "The first meritorious work is liberality. The second, truth. The third, gratitude. The fourth, contentment."

In the chapter on "Good manners," the citation from *Pand Nameh-i-Adarbad Marespand* advises: "Bow when you speak and when you do a thing. Bowing will not break your neck; sweet words will not foul the breath of your mouth." Just as mastery over anger is advocated in "Self Control," diligence is recommended in "Work Or Industry" with a reminder: "Be an early riser so that you may always be able to finish your work!"

The quotations have been sourced from different scriptures like the *Gathas*, *Nyaishes*, *Yashts*, *Dinkard*, *Vendidad*, *Arda Viraf Nameh*, *Ganj-i-Shaygan*, *Iyadgar-i-Vazorg Mitra*, *Visparad*, *Ashirvad* or *Paiwand Nameh*, *Bundahishn*, *Hadokht Nask*, *Revayat*, *Pand Nameh-i-Buzorgcheh Meher* in addition to the two texts referred to earlier.

This concise and revelatory work is published under the aegis of the Society for the Promotion of Religious Knowledge and Education (R-11, Central Bank Building, 3rd fl, Sir Homi Modi Street, Bombay 400023) which functioning under the Bombay Parsi Punchayet (BPP), seeks to disseminate knowledge of Zoroastrian religion and culture by publishing useful books at affordable prices. Nadir Modi as president of this Society expresses his gratitude to the Zartoshty Brothers Fund (a BPP trust) for "financing the needed research and making this publication possible..."

Priced at Rs 150, the book is dedicated with "gratitude, affection and admiration to Mehraban Jamshed Zartoshty and the late Faridoon Jamshed Zartoshty whose far-sighted and far-reaching charities have contributed magnificently to the welfare of the Zarthushtrian world."

PARINAZ M. GANDHI

Child's play

Within 10 sentences we are given a succinct introduction to Prophet Zarathushtra and Lord Ahura Mazda. The next 15 sentences convey the message of Zoroastrianism. The significance of the navjote ceremony, of Avestan prayers and the sacred fire-temple is related in the ensuing 20 sentences. The last nine pages carry the text and the meaning of the basic *Ashem Vohu*, *Yatha Ahu Vairyo*, *Kemna Mazda*, *Hormazd Khodae* and *Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda* prayers. And presto, the 28-page book is over.

Meant as a primer for little children, Jamshed Rivetna's hardbound *My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book* with its bright yellow cover has all the essentials to arouse a child's interest: The text in simple language, illustrations — courtesy Ava Mehta — on every page, frequently of child-like characters mouthing sentiments with which the children can identify, large types printed on art card so that leafing through the book becomes a pleasure and not a chore.

Without getting didactic or rigid, certain religious habits are indirectly reinforced as in: "Sometimes it's

My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book



By Jamshed Rivetna
Illustrations by Ava Mehta

hard to say the words in our prayers but it is still a good idea to say them as well as you can because Ahura Mazda hears them... You can say your prayers anywhere you want but sometimes it is nice to go to a special place called a fire-temple."

While the virtues of honesty, consideration, concern for the environment have all been cleverly depicted in the book, the concept of generosity could have been better handled instead of showing a rosy-cheeked girl asking, "Are you poor? Please take this coin." No recipient of charity should be made to feel "poor."

Rivetna, a business and software consultant in the real estate industry lives in Dallas, Texas, USA with his wife Tamara and three young daughters Olivia Zarine, Natasha Diane and Alea Yazmeen. He has dedicated his book "to my lovely children... so that you can begin to learn and understand our beautiful religion and prayers." Active in the local Zarathushti com-



Top: Olivia Zarine (left) and Natasha Diane who inspired Jamshed Rivetna to write his book

munity, Rivetna serves on the building committee of the Zoroastrian Association of North Texas which is currently planning and raising funds for a Zoroastrian center.

A teacher by profession, Mehta of London "has dedicated her life to children and creativity," states the book, adding, "One good day her next kiddies book will see the bookshelves of all Zoroastrian children." A single parent

raising her two little girls Mehta has addressed her efforts to her "two angels Jehanara and Tishtrya who daily help show me I too can fly and have wings... And also for all children everywhere who make each day a truly heavenly experience." The "undying support" of Rivetna's parents, Roshan and Rohinton, in the forefront of community activities in the USA and the world over, as also sister Zenobia Damania's "help with layout and design" have been acknowledged in this book.

For Zoroastrian children in Bombay who see many of their flock wearing a cap when praying, a *topi* is not unusual. But those spread over the continents would be better able to relate with the illustration of a stranger asking the band of Zoroastrian children, "May I join the *topi* club?" It is precisely for this reason that those living abroad may value *My First Zoroastrian Prayer Book* more than those in India. The book is available at the Parsiana Book Club, K. K. (Navsari Chambers), 39B Amrit Keshav Nayak Road, Fort, Bombay 400001, Tel: 22074335, 22074347. Price: Rs 275 (if mailed in India, Rs 305; foreign, Rs 495). P.M.G.

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MILESTONES

This issue of *Parsiana* carries Milestones data for the months of February and March sans the list of those who breathed their last in February as the same was published in the March 2003 issue.

The age of Zoroastrian brides (as listed in this issue) ranged between 22 and 38 years, the arithmetic mean (the total number of individual ages divided by the total number of brides) being 26 years. The corresponding figures for the grooms were 23 and 45 years, averaging at 30 years.

The death list for March featured the names of 66 Zoroastrians while community births for the two months numbered only 17. Heart disease claimed 17 lives of whom nine were in the 80+ age category. The other killers were pneumonia/lung disease (13), hypertension (seven), cancer (five), old age/general debility, kidney failure and septicemia (three each) and diseases of

the liver (two). Nervous disorder, hypoproteinaemia (deficient protein in the blood plasma), Alzheimer's disease, brain disease, uremia, anemia, asthma, gastro-jejunoscopy (a surgical intercommunication of the branches of two or more arteries or veins between the stomach and the jejunum), sepsis, atherosclerosis (deposition of fatty substances in the arteries), diabetes and leukemia were the isolated cases registered in March. The viscera of a 38-year-old male (the youngest to die) was preserved for chemical analysis and his tissues for histopathological examination. The oldest age at death was 94 years. The Zoroastrian life expectancy at birth for March, in Bombay, was 77 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 break-up 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.

Adil Rustomji Bhathena; February 25
Benaifer Sam Calagopi and *Farhad Jamshed Adajania*; February 27
Parvana Khodadad Mojgani of Secunderabad and *Yezdi Jimmy Bulsara*; February 27
Anahita Cyrus Dadrawala and *Zubin Firoze Gheewala*; March 1
Tina Rusi Poonawalla of Poona and *Neville Rumi Umrigar*; March 4
Parizad Kersi Karanjia and *Urvakh Russi Bharucha*; March 6
Parizad Ruzbay Choksey and *Phiroze Soli Contractor*; March 8
Natasha Yezdiar Edal-Behram and *Aadil Rohinton Sethna*; March 8
Avan Minocher Patel and *Navrooz Jamshed Irani*; March 21
Scheherazade Kersi Treasurywala and *Cyrus Jessie Mistry*; March 21
Dilber Jimmy Poonawalla and *Percy Khushroo Mistry*; March 22
Armaity Baji Mistry and *Peterasp Paul Panthaki*; March 23
Sanobar Fakir Jokhi and *Hector Aspi Mehta*; March 28
Benaz Kersi Pavri and *Yezdi Noshir Dhamniwala*; March 29
Niloufer Rustom Irani and *Armand Naozer Aga*; March 30

BANGALORE

DIED
Roshan (Nergish) Eruchshaw Mistry (87), mother of Dadi, late Povru Bomi Writer, Dinoo Dara Rivetna, Ketu Bomi Bhaka and Sharukh on March 11, 2003

BOMBAY

BORN
A girl to *Kainaz* and *Arzan Singapurwalla*; February 16
A boy to *Anahita* and *Hoshang Chothia*; February 17
A girl to *Sanobar* and *Paurush Bhesania*; February 18
A boy to *Firuzi* and *Farhad Dholoo*; February 18
A boy to *Suzanne* and *Percy Chowdhry*; February 19
A boy to *Mahtab* and *Cawas Panthaki*; February 19
A boy to *Kashmira* and *Firdosh Bhathena*; February 23
A girl to *Vinita* and *Merzin Tavaria*; February 25
A boy to *Roshni* and *Rayomand Marfatia*; February 28
A boy to *Havovee* and *Hormuz Sethna*; March 1
A boy, *Zerxes*, to *Havovi* and *Daravus Bajan*; March 5
A girl, *Vahishta*, to *Reenaz* and *Yezdi Patel*; March 10
A boy to *Amanda* and *Roomi*

Shroff; March 12
A girl to *Kainaz* and *Cyrus Talati*; March 16
A girl to *Anahita* and *Samir Uberoi*; March 16
A boy to *Ruksheen* and *Fredy Aga*; March 23
A girl to *Hutokshi* and *Phiroze Colabawalla*; March 31

MARRIED
Manaz Mehrooz Ghadiali and *Rashid Cawas Batliwalla*; February 2
Irish Cawas Toddywala of Vapi and *Vicky Ratanshaw Bhavnagri*; February 2
Daisy Khushroo Anklesaria and *Homi Bahadur Morena*; February 2
Aban Sohrab Mistry and *Firdos Jimmy Bhoot*; February 3
Vabeez Aspandiar Irani and *Jehangir Ratan Karkaria*; February 6
Binaifer Nardirsha Variava and *Zarir Kersi Kasad*; February 6
Yasmin Hoshang Panthaky and *Adil Kaikobad Patel*; February 6
Mahrugh Shahrukh Cooper and *Khushroo Darabshaw Kanga*; February 7
Huafid Behram Khambatta and *Hormazd-Shapur Sidhwa*; February 8

Delnaz Bomi Karanjia and *Rohinton Mehernosh Bharucha*; February 9
Zenobia Jehangir Medhora and *Merwan Boman Irani*; February 10
Anahita Baji Avari and *Porus Jamshed Hakim*; February 11
Farah Marzban Ardeshir and *Cyrus Pervaz Manekshaw*; February 14
Shirin Naval Pagdiwalla of Poona and *Homi Jahantux Marfatia*; February 14
Ziya Khurshed Bulsara of Poona and *Areez Hoshang Patel*; February 14
Nazneen Edul Karanjia of Poona and *Neville Burjor Navalmanek*; February 15
Benaaz Hoshang Oomrigar and *Merzi Bomi Bomanji*; February 18
Ashish Sam Taraporewala and *Firdosh Phiroze Pooniwalla*; February 21
Kaynaz Dadi Shroff and *Pollad Hoshang Kalyaniwalla*; February 23
Bakhtawar Noshir Master and *Porus Jal Katrak*; February 23
Zarine Adil Makhania and *Sammy Fali Shroff*; February 23
Shernaz Kersasp Sidhwa of Thana and *Noshir Hoshang Karanjia*; February 24
Sharmin Homi Kapadia and

DIED
Jal Ratanshaw Bhathena (80), residing at C/15, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; March 1
Khushroo Sorab Darukhanawalla (38), 6/3, Kashinath Bldg, Kashinath St, 127, Tardeo Rd, 400034; March 1
Dadi Framroze Daruwalla (82), Windmere, Cuffe Parade, Colaba, 400005; March 1
Aloo Keki Mukadam (86), F/3-81, Godrej Hillside Clny, L. B. S. Marg, Vikhroli (W), 400079; March 1
Namdar Rustom Irani (78), A/19, Om Khushan Co-op Soc, Vir P. D. Marg, Vile Parle (E), 400057; March 2
Khorshed Shapurji Lala (83), 1A/22, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc, Elphinstone Rd, Parel,

400012; March 2
Nariman Edulji Marawala (85), 1B/28, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc, Elphinstone Rd, Parel, 400012; March 2
Silloo Jal Dotiwala (84), 102, Green Gates, Perry Cross Rd, Bandra, 400050; March 4
Ami Nariman Pardiwalla (93), Dinshaw Bldg, Parsee Agiary Lane, Old Duddh Naka, Kalyan, 421301; March 4
Jamshed Cawasji Bhuri (84), 4, Parsi Clny, Pipeline Rd, Jamshedpur, 831001; March 5
Dolly Fardoon Irani (Kasnavia) (87), Devchaya Bldg, H. K. Marg, Dahanu Rd, 401602; March 5
Sapal Sorabji Tamboly (78), 760, Shobhan Bhavan, M. Joshi Rd, Dadar, 400014; March 5
Pervez Soli Udwadia (55), 203, Trisandhya Apts, B/97, Dadasaheb Phalke Rd, Dadar, 400014; March 5
Sohrab Jehangirji Chinniwala (69), Ranjit Vilas, Dadiseth 2nd Cross Lane, Babulnath, 400007; March 6
Dhanmai Dhanjishaw Daruwalla (78), 13, Lam Bldg, N. M. Joshi Marg, Lower Parel, 400013; March 6
Diana Bomanshaw Khambatta (72), 16, Banaji Hse, N. Contractor Bldg, Mori Rd, Mahim, 400016; March 6
Burjor Rustomji Kapadia (94), A/15, Cozy Home Co-op Hsg Soc, Pali Hill Rd, Bandra, 400050; March 7
Homi Sorabji Mehta (91), 5/A, Monisha, St Andrews Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; March 7
Bapsy Jal Sethna (70), 40, Chaple Rd, Bandra (W), 400050; March 7
Dara Ratanji Wadia (76), F/31, Cusrow Bldg, S. B. Rd, 400039; March 8
Jala Savak Avari (88), 816, Mistry Bldg, Jame Jamshed Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; March 9
Gool Keki Doctor (80), B, New Khareghat Clny, N. S. Patkar Marg, 400007; March 9
Kamalrukh Dhunjishaw Cassad (90), Currimbhoy Manor, 41, Warden Rd, 400026; March 10
Pervin Pervez Dalal (52), B/203, Ahura Co-op Hsg Soc, S. S. Rao Rd, Parel, 400012; March 11
Dadiba Dinshawji Malesra

FIGURES AT A GLANCE*									
	This issue	Bombay 2002 [†]	2003 [○]	This issue	India 2002 [†]	2003 [○]	This issue	World 2002 [†]	2003 [○]
BIRTHS									
Boys	10	77	15	—	5	1	7	42	1
Girls	7	103	13	—	6	1	1	23	2
MARRIAGES									
Parsi	37	200	69	2	17	2	1	20	1
INTERCOMMUNAL									
Males married out	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	4	—
Females married out	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	7	—
DEATHS									
CONSIGNED									
Males	38	451	100	9	79	18	11	33	10
Females	28	441	91	6	80	13	4	32	4
CREMATED									
Males	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

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

○Running totals for 2003 (March 2003-April 2003 issues)

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

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

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

^oRunning totals for 2003 (March 2003-April 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.

(92), E/2, Shapur Baug, V. P. Rd, 400004; March 11
Katy Phiroze Bhadha (72), D-4-32, S. B. Bharucha Baug, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; March 12
Jal Jamshed Bulsara (70), Mamoon Manzil, 16, M. P. Agiary Lane, Grant Rd, 400007; March 12
Bahadur Bomansha Mistry (76), P. A. Patel Dar-e-Meher, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; March 12
Darabshah Manchershaw Patel (93), Shival Motilal Bldg, Lamington Rd, Mumbai Central, 400008; March 12
Sammy (Sam) Munchershaw Sethna (76), 613/B/8, Gulnaz, Khar (W), 400052; March 12
Jer Soli Mewawalla (57), 2A/29, Tata Mills Co-op Hsg Soc, Elphinstone Rd, Parel, 400012; March 14
Meheroo Rumi Tatory (57), Cama Bldg, Kashinath St, Tardeo, 400034; March 14
Mani Rusi Antia (76), 8, Ness Baug Annexe 2, Ness Baug, Nana Chowk, 400007; March 15
Bepsy Homi Munshi (72), R/21, Nowroz Baug, Lalbaug, 400012; March 15
Gev Hormasji Pawwala (63),

B-2/206, Simla Complex Co-op Hsg Soc, Mira Rd (E), Thana, 400107; March 15
Nargis Khushroo Tarapore (74), 21, Fardoon Abad, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; March 15
Noshir Sorabji Viccajee (74), 304, Varun Apts, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Parel, 400012; March 15
Hoshang Jahangir Wadia (72), Minerva Mans, Near Super Cinema, Grant Rd, 400007; March 15
Cawasji Sorabji Nagporewalla (79), 13, Malcolm Baug, S. V. Rd, Jogeshwari (W), 400102; March 16
Feroze Nariman Polishwala (55), 14, Atur Apts, Minoo Desai Marg, Colaba, 400005; March 16
Piloo Edulji Amroliya (75), 733, Rd no 4, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; March 17
Jimmy Jal Cooper (70), 212/B, Swagat Theresa Apts, Lepara St, Bhayander (W), 401101; March 17
Dara Maneckji Vaghhchipwala (70), B/1, Avabai Petit Chawl, Balaram St, Grant Rd, 400007; March 17
Noshir Jamshedji Rivetna (89), 669, Katrak Rd, Wadala,

400031; March 18
Perin Maneck Colabawalla (86), Old Chinoy Bldg, Zoroastrian Blocks, Chikalwadi, 400007; March 20
Manijeh Shaporji Desai (86), 2, Mehta Bldg, Khan Est, M. M. Chotani Rd, Mahim, 400016; March 20
Fali Burjor Poonjiaji (88), Albless Bldg, Banaji Fire-Temple Compd, Thakurdwar, 400002; March 20
Khushroo Behram Zandian (78), 15/17, Mani Bhavan Bldg, Thakurdwar, Karelwadi, 400002; March 20
Rattan Manchershaw Hansotia (70), 4/52, Wadia Bldg, Parel Tank Rd, 400033; March 23
Perin Jehan Nanji (90), 903, Bhima, Pochkhanawalla Rd, 400025; March 23
Phiroze Navroze Engineer (72), 808, Khushnum, Dr Ambedkar Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; March 24
Fali Dhunjishaw Dharwar (92), 75, Jehangir Mans, Hughes Rd, 400007; March 25
Keki Hormasji Vania (72), 5, Mehta Bldg, Khan Est, M. M. C. Rd, Mahim, 400016; March 25
Perin Erach Daroga (83), E/35, Jer Baug, Dr Ambedkar

Rd, Byculla, 400027; March 24
Gai Firoze Gazdar (80), D/33/303, M. I. G. Clny, Gandhi Ngr, Bandra (E), 400051; March 26
Dinamai Khurshedji Panthaki (92), D/2/11, S. B. Bharucha Bldg, S. V. Rd, Andheri (W), 400058; March 26
Perin Burjor Motiwalla (68), 103, Riverside Palace, Irani Rd, Dahanu, 401601; March 26
Chandan Naval Bamboat (87), Albless Bldg, Thakurdwar Rd, 400002; March 29
Cawasji Hormasji Daruwalla (87), 202, Daruwalla Hse, Swadeshi Mill Rd, Chuna-bhatti, 400022; March 29
Farokh Eruchshaw Sanga (64), B, Siddick Ebrahim Mans, 180, D. Bhadkamkar Marg, 400007; March 29
Roda Rusi Bhungara (73), West View Bldg, Uranvala St, Grant Rd, 400007; March 30
Adi Tehmuras Pochee (72), Dhun Bldg, Sant Gadge Maharaj Lane, Dadar, 400014; March 30
Naval Nusserwanji Santok (93), 659, Keki Hse, Sohrab Palamkote Rd, Parsi Clny, Dadar, 400014; March 30
Keki Limjibhoy Bhagat (88), A/2, Hitniketan, J. M. Rd, Kokannagar, Bhandup (W), 400078; March 31
Firoz Jehangir Bode (80), 1, Evergreen, 2nd Dadiseth Cross Lane, Babulnath Rd, 400007; March 31
Dara Keki Miller (55), V/3-5, Cusrow Bldg, S. B. Rd, 400039; March 31

INDORE

DIED
Daulat Banoo Rustumjee Khambatta (93); February 6

NAVSARI

DIED
Freny Vakharia; February 14

SECUNDERABAD

MARRIED
Naju Minoo Patel and Framroz Adi Mody; February 17
Nargis Minoo Patel and Jahangir Adi Mody; February 17

DIED
Adi Pirojsha Bhagat (54), brother of Homi, Sam, Annu,

Roshan and Perin; February 12
Dara Bomanshaw Karkaria (83), father of Armin Cavas Deboo and Marzban; March 19

SURAT

DIED
Noshirvan Kekhashru Dishawala (75), Laywala Bldg, Muglisara, 395003; February 3
Nadir Bejanji Saher, husband of Seroo and father of Rohinton; February 9
Barjorji Edalji Wadia (89), Uganano Mohallo, Machhli-pith, 395003; February 22
Savaksha Faramji Bhathena (82), 8, Savasadi Sadan, Bhavnagri St, 395003; February 23
Villaben Shahpurji Marfatiya (92), Mahavir Bldg, Mount Rd, Mount Abu, 307501; February 24
Parvez Sorabji Bariya (75), Athugar St, Nanpura, 395001; March 2
Dinamai Dhanjisha Patel (88), Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; March 23
Ardeshir Mahervanji Tadiwala (80), Opp Nariman Home and Infirmary, Shahpore, 395003; March 24
Firoz Kavashaji Vakil (88), 40, Sarjan Soc, 395003; March 27

UDVADA

DIED
Kashmira Hoshang Rustumji (48) of Poona; January 27

CANADA

Ontario
BORN
A boy, Behzad, to Zenobia and Viraf Talaviya, brother to Perzaad in Mississauga; December 17, 2002
A boy, Bergis, to Veera and Dicky Karbhari, brother to Anaheez in Mississauga; February 12, 2003

JAPAN

Tokyo
BORN
A boy, Rushad, to Keshmira and Behzad Kolah; November 4, 2002

PAKISTAN

Karachi
MARRIED
Faranaz Sheshberadaran and Esfandiar Irani of London, UK, son of Zenobia and Jamshed; January 25, 2003

SOUTH AFRICA

DIED
Pirojshaw Navroji Phiroz (89), father of Arnavaaz, Aspi, Freny and Yezdi; March 4

UK

Essex
DIED
Phiroze D. Nania (79), 24, Moorfield, Harlow; February 22

Hertfordshire

DIED
Jillioo Captain (68), 10, Mitre Gardens, Bishops Stortford; January 15

London

BORN
A boy, Bezan, to Delnaz and Hanoze Contractor, brother to Shayan; October 25, 2002
A boy, Saen, to Naomi and Xerxes Kazak; December 18
A boy, Hanoze, to Perviz and Farokh Daruwalla; December 24

DIED
Rusi Navil Mistry (55), 123, Ravelstoke Rd, Wimbledon Park; December 2
Soonoo Firoze Ragi (75); December 24
Manek Kekhashru Vajifdar, 34, Brookwood Avenue, Barns; December 29
Mani A. Bhungara (84), 24, Noel Hse, Harben Rd; January 18, 2003
Keki Bhadha (77), 6, Kemble Hse, Masefield Avenue,

Harrow; January 18
Dinshah Hormasji Rana (82), 59A, Chestnut Grove, Ealing; January 22
Aspi Dastoor (77), 7, Rushby Court, Studley Est, Stockwell; January 29

Northhamptonshire

BORN
A boy, Kia, to Navaz and Zubin Sethna, brother to Mahya; October 28, 2002

North Yorkshire

DIED
Nariman Bejanji Shroff (95), father of Dini, Freni and Rusi; March 27, 2003

Surrey

DIED
Freny Darbin (90), 4, Homeworth Hse, Mt Hermon Rd, Woking; October 22, 2002
Phiroze Shapurji Modi (79), 41, Heathside, Hanger Hill, Weybridge; November 6
Minoo Jehangirji Mistry (82), 16, Parsons Mead, East Molesey; January 3, 2003
Cawas Meherji Sethna (74), 2, Freshfields, Croydon; February 22

USA

Texas
BORN
A girl, Alea Yasmeen, to Tamara and Jamshed Rivetna, sister to Olivia Zarine and Natasha Diane in Dallas; February 14

Compiled by Roxana A. Driver

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The site is hosted courtesy Viraf Hansotia of On-line Systems who has worked honorarily to design and develop parsiana.com

As resources permit the site will be upgraded and expanded.

Gujarati Journalism

Due to exigencies of space the second instalment of Dr Ratan Marshall's article "Gujarati Journalism — II" will be carried in the May 2003 issue of *Parsiana*.

"Conscience of the nation"



Arnavaz S. Mama

"When a republic comes to birth, it is the leaders who produce the institutions. Later, it is the institutions which produce the leaders. The question — where are the leaders of tomorrow? — can only be answered by the other question — where are the nation-building institutions which can produce the leaders of tomorrow?..."

"What we need today more than anything else is moral leadership at all levels. It is particularly essential in the field of education — moral leadership founded on courage, intellectual integrity and a sense of values."

Nani Palkhivala's comments, read out on his behalf, were a part of his response to the chancellor, vice-chancellor and senate of the University of Bombay conferring on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on January 19, 1998.

The citation documented his many achievements: "You have, as India's leading jurist, through your scholarly

writings, not merely articulated the definitive treatise of our tax system and laws, but through myriad essays, articles and speeches on subjects ranging from the rich cultural heritage of this ancient land, the invaluable democratic institutions and traditions we have inherited, the necessity for an independent judiciary, economics, literature, incisive analyses of India's annual budget and various aspects of nation building, succeeded in educating the people and making them realize and appreciate their unique legacy. You have stood tall in the business world and have executed with distinction your role as India's Ambassador to the United States of America. You have done all this with rare intellectual integrity, simplicity and sincerity, with devotion and dedication, with courage and conviction and above all frankness so that our democracy remains vibrant and alive. You, Mr Palkhivala, have extensively, inexhaustibly and explicitly argued many landmark cases which are benchmarks against which later generations will be judged. Barring

some exceptions, these cases were all fought by you without charging any fees as a matter of service to the nation."

The US universities of Princeton and Lawrence had similarly endowed him, earlier, with their honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

But the celebrated public speaker's once great capacity for speech was muted and the growing materialism of Indian society cast a pall of despondency that increased his depression.

In an interview with rediff.com in 1996 [reprinted in the *Afternoon Despatch and Courier (ADC)*, December 12, 2002] he had noted, "We are reaping the fruit of neglect. You cannot have a democracy with adult franchise when half the people are illiterate... I think we are headed for a disastrous future... We are misleading the people. It is not that the nation is left to fend for itself. It is positively misled. And it is positively misled by those who come to power on adult franchise." In 1993 he had told the *ADC* editor Behram Contractor, "The Singapore budget has allocated 18 per-

cent on education; we have allocated three percent. In France, the second most important person in the cabinet after the prime minister, is the education minister. I am ashamed to admit, I do not know who our education minister is. Do you?" As noted T. J. S. George in *The Indian Express (The IE)*, December 16, 2002 "Nani Palkhivala, one of the few Indians in India, was a depressed man towards the end. The loss of moral decencies in public life and the rise of scoundrels to political power seemed to hurt him personally."

In the year 2000, 40 public organizations joined the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (BVB), which Palkhivala served as vice president and trustee over three decades, to form the 80th Birthday Felicitation Committee chaired by then Governor of Maharashtra Dr P. C. Alexander. Capping the tributes from a number of dignitaries Alexander had then said, "We respect you for all the great achievements in your life but we love you and respect you for being a Moral Man." The governor attributed this "growth of the soul in search of truth and goodness (to) the abiding influence of the teachings of the great prophet Zarathushtra."

The man whom C. Rajagopalachari, free India's first governor-general, had described as "the gift of God to modern India," had stated in an interview published in *The Times of India (The TOI)*—August 5, 1998, "I believe that the basic pattern of an individual's life is predetermined... Life has taught me to have deep faith in the existence of a force that works. You may call it chance or accident, destiny or God or higher intelligence... I acknowledge this force because my intellectual mind says so. Religion is one of the ways to seek God... I try to imbibe Prophet Zarathushtra's teachings in my personal as well as professional life."

When the recent twilight years flashed to an end with a massive heart attack on December 11, 2002 love and admiration for the man who epitomized the nation's conscience welled forth in condolence meetings, comments, articles and letters in the Press.

A full court reference of 32 judges of the Bombay High Court paid rich tribute to the eminent jurist, reported *The IE* (December 20, 2002). "He was one of the earliest advocates to be offered a seat in the su-



preme court directly from the bar, but he chose to continue at the bar," former attorney general Ashok Desai told *The TOI* (December 12, 2002). He had earlier refused the office of attorney general of India. Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar described Palkhivala as "a titan in the field of economics, constitutional law, diplomacy and public administration who had enriched India's public life with his erudition, eminence and grace," reported that newspaper.

Two aspects of Palkhivala's career placed him in the legendary category. As Lakshman Sundar wrote in *ADC* (December 17, 2002), "Nobody could explain the fiscal jargon as simply as Palkhivala." Within a couple of days of the budget being presented by the union finance minister, Palkhivala dissected it, projected its socioeconomic repercussions in the country, compared it to the exercise in other major democracies, all in simple English injected with his own cocktail of humor, statistics, anecdotes and examples to highlight his arguments. So enthralled were his listen-

Photo flashes before a budget speech and (below) in 1999, paying homage on Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary

ers that the annual exercise, held under the banner of the Forum of Free Enterprise (FFE), which began at the Green's Hotel in 1957 with some 600 attending, swelled to 100,000 people thronging the Brabourne Stadium from early afternoon. Some offices closed half day to enable its employees to find a place to sit. And, by the time Palkhivala called it off in 1995, the annual exercise was repeated in Calcutta and Madras.

Cusrow Irani, editor and managing director of *The Statesman* who is Palkhivala's cousin, recalled how, the day after the first such event, his cheque of Rs 25,000, in payment for Calcutta's Indoor Stadium which seats 12,000 people, was returned to him with a letter from Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's secretary "conveying that what Nani Palkhivala had to say was in the nature of public service. The West Bengal government does not wish to charge for the stadium."

"He gave his last lecture in 1994. He was struggling with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. He felt he could not go on. The last telecast was shown on TV four times because of requests from the audience," Palkhivala's friend, biographer and longstanding Forum secretary M. R. Pai told Manoj Nair of *Mid-Day* (December 12, 2002).

"The art of argument by *reductio ad absurdum* was his hallmark. His arguments in the High Court were so focussed, his sense of timing and emphasis (unbeatable)," commented Bansi Mehta, former president of the Institute



of Chartered Accountants of India.

ACC director and company secretary P. K. Sinor described the annual general meetings Palkhivala chaired as chairman of the company's board of directors. "Presiding over shareholders' meetings, Mr Palkhivala's conduct was an object lesson in the art of chairmanship and it was a treat for the shareholders. He understood their psyche and respected their views/sentiments. He was a great proponent of constructive dissent and gave freedom to all speakers to voice their views." Speaking of the ethical practices Palkhivala incorporated in ACC, managing director M. L. Narula told *The Economic Times* (December 12, 2003), "He would take decisions based on whether they are in the interests of the company and the nation."

"It was always a punishment to speak after Nani had spoken," said Tata Sons director Freddie Mehta. He recalled his astonishment when Palkhivala made a passionate plea for moral values to an audience of international bankers, enumerating the spiritual splendors of India's great rishis.

Palkhivala's "involvement with the BVB was total. We could walk into his cabin (any time) for guidance," noted fellow vice president of the Bhavan Pravinchandra Gandhi as he recalled the spiritual power of this deeply religious man whose compassion and love enveloped all suffering human beings.

His probity added to his legal acumen made Palkhivala the bulwark for democracy in India. When, in the heyday of socialism, Indira Gandhi nationalized about 14 major banks in 1969 Palkhivala fought for the rights of their shareholders—"hundreds of thousands of middle class citizens whose hard earned savings were invested in the banks," as he wrote in *We, the People*. The Supreme Court struck down the action nationalizing the banks without payment of what the law regarded as compensation. The Government brought in the 25th amendment of the Constitution to supersede the Court's decision.

When Gandhi sought to abolish the Maharajas' privy purses, guaranteed by the Constitution of India, in 1970, Palkhivala argued, "If privy purses could be stopped by mere executive action,



Dissecting the budget: reductio ad absurdum

the most unsafe investment in the world would be the securities of the Indian Government in which the funds of charities and trusts for widows and orphans, and provident funds of millions of workers, are invested. If privy purses could be repudiated, so could the Government's obligation to pay the principal and the interest in respect of Government paper, because the Constitution used exactly the same words in guaranteeing privy purses as for guaranteeing the Government's obligation in respect of securities (arts. 112(3) and 291). What was at stake was nothing less than the nation's honor and its reputation for financial integrity in the eyes of the world" (*We, the People*).

After the five-month deliberations in the Kesavananda Bharati Case the majority judgment of a bench of 13 Supreme Court judges upheld Palkhivala's contention that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution is limited so that its basic structure and the rule of law are preserved. These 'basic' features of the Constitution include the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, its democratic, republican structure, the freedom and dignity of the individual, the principle of equality, the independence of the judiciary and its right to strike down laws that contravene the provisions of the Constitution, etc.

When the Allahabad High Court ruled against Indira Gandhi as having been elected by unfair means, she turned to Palkhivala to pursue her appeal in the Supreme Court and he managed to get

her a conditional stay on the High Court order. Then she proclaimed the Emergency and prevention of civil liberties and censorship became the order of the day. His moral courage never in question, Palkhivala returned the brief, maintaining that his decision was "not negotiable." When the *TOI* said they couldn't carry the news because of press censorship, "Nani phoned and said we'd move the

court to ensure it was," noted former president of the Bombay Bar Iqbal Chagla. He led 144 lawyers with a writ petition in the High Court in defense of the fundamental right to freedom of expression, added Chagla.

Former Chief Justice of India Yashwant Chandrachud was Palkhivala's contemporary. Both were born, graduated, married in the same years and started practice on the same day at the Bombay High Court. Chandrachud who was one of the 13 judges hearing Palkhivala in the Kesavananda Bharati case, noted, "My colleagues were amazed and dazed with his arguments. (They were) worried that carried away by his arguments they'd give a wrong judgement!" Speaking of Palkhivala's "unparalleled forensic skills" Chandrachud declared, "Nani could lighten dark corners of the law, make intricate points of law so easy... He was clear, simple, logical and a master of ingenuity."

Chandrachud said he had ruled against Palkhivala in one case during the Emergency. "He never held it against me; the others did."

When the Congress party was defeated at the hustings after the Emergency was lifted and the Janata party came to power, finance minister H. M. Patel wanted to make Palkhivala a member of the tax committee, noted Bombay Parsi Punchayet chairman Minoo Shroff. Prime minister Morarji Desai wanted to mend India's poor relationship with the US and chose Palkhivala for the job of Ambassador to the US, said Shroff. Palkhivala's commitment and passion for public causes led him to be an active president of the FFE and the Leslie Sawhney Programme



The youthful lawyer, a career ahead

for Training in Democracy. He was "often critical that people did not look beyond their nose. We citizens need to give time and talent (to the country) along with taxes," Shroff added.

Palkhivala never forgot that he had received his first brief from the eminent solicitor, the late Rustom Gagrati and it was Gagrati who had martialled the case for Palkhivala when the latter's seminal treatise, *The Law and Practice of Income Tax*, was attacked for plagiarism in the Madras High Court. Though he was defended by such prominent lawyers as R. J. Kolah and Hormusjee Seervai, the judge observed that he had "never witnessed a cross-examination so destructive of the case for the petitioner." In the witness box Palkhivala cited from memory some of the 2,000 cases on which he had based his book and how they had affected the law and practice of income tax, noted Gagrati's son and senior solicitor Jangoo. The book went into several editions. A copy from each edition was autographed with a suitable inscription and presented to Rustom Gagrati. "Palkhivala was the only lawyer with a (mere) four-year standing to appear before the Supreme Court and the youngest member of the Law Commission," added Jangoo.

"Envy, the besetting sin which cannot countenance the fame and success of others, never consumed him. The holier than thou attitude was alien to him. He was not the one to smile and shake your hand and thereafter stab you in the back," wrote attorney general Soli Sorabjee who had been Palkhivala's junior at the time of the Kesavananda Bharati case. Former director general of police, Arvind Inamdar told *The IE*, "His love for his country and his countrymen was tremendous. He was a man with a razor sharp brain and a golden heart."

Chairman of BVB's UK center Manek Dalal recalled Palkhivala's "quiet spoken, unassuming presence (and) concern for justice for the lesser man." Former legal assistant Dinesh Vyas described the two phases of Palkhivala's life: the mundane with the lectures, the legal profession, as industrialist, diplomat and "para political figure" who never joined a party or faced elections. And his real life: "a journey for a spiritual quest, (using) BVB to come in contact with virtually every inspiring spiritual leader of the country viz Mother and Aurobindo (he was legal advisor to the Pondicherry Ashram), the Swami of Kanchi who regarded Palkhivala as a



true Brahmin."

Vyas said that Palkhivala loved and studied all religions but what he practised — the Satya Sai Baba's message — consisted of five words: *satya* — truth/intellectual integrity; *dharma* — follow your own religion but respect the religion of others; *shanti* — peace/inner calm; *prem* — compassion/understanding; *ahimsa* — non-violence/oneness with everything precious in life. "He implemented this religion as a Parsi... When he was felicitated on being appointed Ambassador to the US he had said that he would like to be born again as a Parsi," recalled Vyas.

Thanking the eight anjumans of Gujarat who felicitated him on his 75th birthday at Bombay's Patkar Hall, Palkhivala had declared, "If I had to choose a religion voluntarily, one which appeals most to my soul and my mind, I'd choose unhesitatingly the religion of Zoroaster... (It) transcends limitations of race and gathers together all human beings in one circle of union. Zoroaster's was the first religion that rescued religion from a tribal god and gave it to all mankind. Zoroaster was the greatest of the pioneer prophets who showed the path of freedom to man. (Unfortunately there are those who) think they're Zoroastrians because they belong to certain schools of thought. (There is) no tolerance for thoughts not their own. I am deeply distressed by what I see happening to my own community as I come to the end of my life... Everywhere dogma is put in place of truth, trappings in place of essence. We number barely 100,000 throughout the world. We can't afford dissensions. I beg of you, bear in mind the real message of the Prophet... It is not a religion meant for 100,000 human beings. It is meant for the entire human race. It is a message we need to relearn." At the second International

Birthday celebration 1989: Palkhivala (2nd from left) with Engineer, Rustom Gagrati, wife Nergesh and Maneck J. Gagrati

Congress convened by the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in 1989 Palkhivala had noted succinctly: "Zoroastrianism had been tried and failed. The religion of Zoroaster is yet to be tried."

"Palkhivala was to the 20th century what Dadabhai Naoroji was to the 19th century... He was the conscience of the nation, a trustee of all good human values. He practiced them and it showed," noted Pai.

He was compared to Demosthenes because like that famous Greek democrat and orator he had conquered his stammer to rise to great heights of eloquence. A first class first through his BA, MA and Law exams, he was afflicted with writer's cramp and had to have someone else write his papers for him. His speed of thought made him dictate like the Rajdhani Express, his last secretary T. Dolikuka told ADC. M. R. Narayan, his first secretary at Tata's recalled that Palkhivala "never took any carbon copies and often said that he had everything stored in his head." "You were always given a fair and complete hearing and the contribution you could make was generously acknowledged," notes Shirin Bharucha, Tata's legal officer and Palkhivala's junior colleague.

"No one ever saw him in an idle moment... He once said time was the only enemy in his life," noted former solicitor general Tehmtan Andhyarujina. He was "over-emersed in his work — a fault with him," rued friend and physician Dr Farokh Udawadia. "I advised a break, a holiday. It was constant advice that he constantly refused," he added.

Senior solicitor and BPP trustee Dadi Engineer recalled how Nani limped into

the room, apparently in pain, when it was his wife Nergesh who was supposed to have returned from an operation abroad after a nasty fall. "He explained that since he had to be with Nergesh in hospital, he decided, in order to save time, to get himself operated for his hernia!" wrote Engineer in the ADC in a tribute on Nani's 83rd birthday — a month after his death.

In the latter years he was persuaded to stay over for the FFE programs held outside Bombay. "I discovered that he liked to visit zoos... and expressed wonderment and humility at nature's marvellous creations," noted Engineer.

To make ends meet he helped his parents by playing the violin in the band at weddings and navjotes as also by giving tuitions, Irani had noted. One reason why Palkhivala did not accept the offer of judgeship of the Supreme Court was because he actively looked after his aged parents and wanted to be by their side, noted Andhyarujina. He had also worked at the Royal Western India Truf Club's tote window for a time and greeted his former boss with all the respect due to a senior when the twain met unexpectedly after Palkhivala had become a national celebrity.

DIALOG, NOT DIKTATS *continued from page 2*

riages and navjotes of children born of such a union? What is the solution here? A blanket ban that is non-enforceable? Name calling? Barring priests from blessing such unions? Denying initiation into the faith?

The High Priests' letter was in the making for over six months to a year. There was obviously discussion, debate and differences on the issue. The fact that the Udva High Priest did not sign shows there was dissent. And here Dastur Khurshed Dastoor, for whatever reasons he chose to abstain (he refused to elaborate when asked by *Parsiana*), deserves credit for taking an independent and sensible stand. So much criticism has been levelled at the six Dasturs — including questioning the right to the title of some of them — that sufficient commendation has not been given to Khurshed Dastoor for opposing the majority opinion.

It is not that the Priests have no other problems to occupy their minds. The dearth of Parsi employees in many agiaries results in non-Parsis sweeping and cleaning the

Palkhivala's first choice of vocation had been teaching. When the appointment he sought at Sydenham College went to a lady competitor because she had the experience he lacked, Palkhivala took to the practice of law, he had told *The Bombay Samachar*. As a busy young advocate he shared his enthusiasm for the subject with aspiring lawyers at the Government Law College. Many a leading member of the bar recalled packed classrooms when Nani lectured. His zest for sharing his knowledge with others contributed to the historic budget speeches as much as to his other public speeches and articles in the press. *We, the People*, *We, the Nation* were selected items reprinted in book form. He also wrote *Our Constitution: Defaced and Defiled* and in 1967, *The Highest Taxed Nation*.

The proceeds of the last edition of his income tax compendium went towards setting up a memorial for his friend the veteran Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan who had battled the Emergency, his health deteriorating during the months in jail, noted Pai. The earnings from the privy purses case were constituted into a trust, said Udawadia who had received a donation to start a lung research laboratory at the J. J. Hospital. Palkhivala "was

premises (outside of the kebha). In places away from Bombay where Parsi electricians and plumbers are not available, non-Parsis have to be called in to repair fixtures. It is not that the trustees of the agiaries are against the 'Parsi Zoroastrian faith' but the practical difficulties remain. Should an out-of-town agiary spend Rs 1,000 to send for a Parsi electrician from Bombay to change a tube light fitting? Many agiaries are unclean. The dirt stains on the floors are easily visible. And yet Zoroastrianism advocates cleanliness.

What about the chronic shortage of priests? A situation has arisen where one agiary or anjuman snatches priests from another. Some unscrupulous priests take advantage of the desperation of the trustees and laity to ride roughshod over the local community. Surely these issues deserve collective attention?

How did the Priests so completely misread the mind of the community? On the issue of Doongerwadi they had support. But on this issue, which touches each and every Parsi household in one way or the other, they were deservedly chastised.

unaware that he was responsible for the research that won praise," noted the physician. Many a cause, public and private, found in him a munificent contributor.

To Goolam Vahanvati, advocate general of Maharashtra, "He was larger than life. He was everything you looked up to. Everything you aspired to be. Everything you admired and idolized... He mesmerised people. He hypnotized an audience. And he cast such a spell over the court that judges felt they had to take time after Nani had finished arguing to give their judgement, because they had to allow the effect to wear off..."

"This was the man you went to meet in Bombay House, on the top floor, for a major opinion. You were a trembling junior, but he made you comfortable with the warmth of his smile and the generosity of his person... And when the conference was over, and you were still completely dazzled, he personally led you out, opened the door and accompanied you to the lift. You were simply overwhelmed. Humility and greatness is an unbeatable combination."

Palkhivala is survived by his brother Behram and sister Amy Ranina.

Perhaps they will now channelize their energies to constructive themes. They are after all men of integrity and intellect. The community is fortunate to have High Priests of such fine caliber, devotion, dedication and honesty. Most of them are scholar priests having studied in India and abroad and are held in high esteem in academic circles. They make no monetary demands. They live modestly on modest incomes.

They are people who, if you approach for guidance, help, reassurance, comfort, willingly give their time. They have devoted their lives to the community. If they have made an error it is not from any other motive than to serve what they believed to be the best interests of the community.

We are too small a community to divide between the liberals and the orthodox, the progressives and the conservatives. If the Priests want to put forth a point of view they have to do it through dialog, not diktats. They have to function as the High Priests of the entire Zoroastrian community, not only a portion of it.



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