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Parsiāna

September-October 1973

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PARSIANA COVER by Manjula Padmanabhan

editor's column

The judge glanced at the papers and then directing his gaze at me commented, "You have published, printed and distributed your magazine and now you're filing your declaration. This has to be done before you bring out the magazine." Humbly I noted, "there was a delay." "Didn't you know you were supposed to file the papers before?" he continued. I answered weakly something about being allowed a month's grace, wondering all the while that of all the judges in Bombay hardly one must have heard of *Parsiana* and why it was I had to appear before him at the Chief Presidency Magistrate Court. And then Justice Jal H. Vakil smiled and said, "Well, anyway, here's my subscription," and handed me an envelope addressed to *Parsiana* all ready for the posting. "Pass the receipt along," he added. We did.

And so *Parsiana* marches on. Another issue has made its way to the Press leaving in its destructive wake, insomnia, fatigue, loss of weight, health, mind etc. And these are only the minor problems. The major ones—ah, that's another story.

A sense of humour has never been appreciated in New Delhi, even though the capital provides 90 per cent of the comedy in this country. So when Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw encroached on the monopoly of the politicians he found himself ostracized and *persona non grata*. Gone were the promised house, secretariat and staff car. The Field Marshal's insignia awaits release. The man who helped win a war for this country and an election for Prime Minister Gandhi left Delhi an outcast. Despite the characteristic lack of gratitude shown by our leaders, Geeta Doctor found the Field Marshal "as ebullient as ever with his irrepressible sense of humour very much in evidence," but reluctant to speak of himself. "When he shook hands at the end of the interview his steely grey eyes rivetting abruptly to attention, his hand shot out stiffly from his side—it was like being suddenly in front of a firing squad."

As the number of young Parsis venturing abroad increases, so

does the likelihood of their marrying out of the community. Parsis on the whole treat the newcomers either with restrained affection, curiosity, benign neglect or hostility. They are barred from attending our religious ceremonies, our places of worship and the grounds where we leave our dead. Whether one approves or disapproves of intermarriage, the fact remains that Parsis are marrying out in larger numbers than ever before and what their spouses think of the community will shape and influence this generation of Parsis and those to come. Joan Contractor, an American married to a Parsi, offers her thoughts and views on the Parsis in a reflective and candid article.

If the Parsis of Hyderabad and Secunderabad are wondering why Shiavax Vakil does not refer to their controversy over the disposal of the dead, it's because he hadn't bought or read the last issue of *Parsiana*. Anyway as he finally supplied a photograph of himself, we reciprocated with a copy. We now boast of two trustees of the Parsi Panchayat as subscribers: P. P. Khambata and Dr. Aspi F. Golwalla. Two down, five to go.

While we're on the subject of subscription, it may be pointed out that the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute will not be subscribing to *Parsiana*. In a letter dated 21st August the institute noted that "complimentary copies used to be received by us. It is requested that complimentary copies be sent to us in future also." We wrote back explaining the huge expenditure entailed by us in both printing and giving maximum coverage to the community and pointed out several libraries throughout the country had paid their subscriptions and so it would be unfair to send complimentary copies to some and not others. The institute wrote back "sympathizing" with our plight, congratulating us on our "commendable work" but "very much regret(ting) to inform you that it will not be possible for our Institute to subscribe to the magazine." No reason was given for the decision. It seems petty to quibble about one subscription but when the subscriber concerned is among the foremost centres for literature on Parsis and Zoroastrian studies one feels

compelled to ask "Why?" If the institute is short of funds we could request some philanthropic party to donate the amount. But for the trifling amount of Rs. 1.50 a month to deny students, scholars and members of the institute (such as ourselves who have paid Rs. 20 a year for membership) access to a magazine whose relevance to oriental studies cannot be denied, verges on the absurd. The Cama Institute owes us an explanation, if not as the aggrieved party, then certainly as a dues-paying member.

A magazine reflects its readers and readers get the magazine they deserve. *Parsiana* flourishes only if you support it. To this end we are pleased to welcome K. Wadia,



Air-India, N. S. Guzder, and Shapoorji Pallonji in our advertising fold. Our many thanks to the Wadia, Guzder, and Pallonji families and the management of Air-India.

Among the papers handed to us by Mahyar B. Patel at the Al-Biruni millenary celebrations held under the auspices of the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman and the Iran League is one entitled "Praise of Truthfulness" with a sub-heading "Al-Biruni's Advice to Authors and Perhaps to Journalists." To imply that journalists write anything but the truth is to ... well ... imply the truth. We are not without fault. But who is? As Al-Biruni's 'advice' is valid for all we quote the scholar:

"We must distinguish different classes of reporters.

"One of them tells a lie, as intending to further an interest of

his own either by lauding his family or nation on the opposite side, by thinking that thereby he can gain his ends. In both cases he acts from motives of objectionable cupidity and animosity.

"Another one tells a lie regarding a class of people whom he likes, as being under obligation to them, or whom he hates because something disagreeable has happened between them. Such a reporter is near akin to the first mentioned one, as he too acts from motives of personal predilection and enmity.

"Another tells a lie because he is of such a base nature as to aim thereby at some profit, or because he is such a coward as to be afraid of telling the truth.

"Another tells a lie because it is his nature to lie and he cannot do otherwise, which proceeds from the essential meanness of his character and the depravity of his innermost being.

"Lastly, a man may tell a lie, from ignorance, blindly following others who told him.

"That man only is praiseworthy who shrinks from a lie and always adheres to the truth, enjoying credit even among liars, not to mention others."

(We fit in the first category.)

While lunching with the Katraks in Dadar Parsi Colony the conversation evolved from daughter Siloo's Ph.D thesis on the Parsis to greeting cards. Ms Jerbanoo B. Deboo explained how she takes used greeting cards, tears out or paints over the written words, slips a new sheet in and presto, the card is reincarnated. "We

have a hard time with ball-point users as you can't remove the ink easily," she says. Her neighbour Ms Shirin Canteenwalla, gives her a helping hand with the transformations. Ms Deboo's small flat is inundated with cards of all sizes, shapes and colours. They arrive from all over the world. An Air-India purser brought three cartons from London and Scindia's transports two or three cartons free from Toronto and London. The cards are sold and the money received, around Rs. 4,000, is distributed to leper homes, blind schools, orphanages, nurseries and other deserving causes. So next time you're wondering what to do with all the greeting cards you receive, send them over to Ms Deboo's 'workshop' at 675 Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay 400 014.

In the cause of alleviating our country's balance of payment deficit, *Parsiana* helps stem the rot. A cheque for three pounds has been received for an air-mail subscription from Dr. and Ms Sohrab H. Kutar in England and a five dollar cheque from Jamshed Pavri in Canada. Perhaps All India Radio will mention this in their next export news bulletin. And on behalf of the scholars in this country we would like to take up cudgels against the Government of India. Scholars, Jamshed Kanga and Faribourz Nariman, among others, had been invited to attend the 29th. International Congress of Orientalists in Paris recently. Exchange was granted to Kanga but not to Nariman. The question now arises as to what criteria the Reserve Bank and the concerned ministry used to arrive at this decision. Was the decision made on an impartial evaluation of their respective papers and if so since when has the Government of India been competent to judge scholarly works? Or was the decision for some totally unrelated reason, such as "you went last year, you can't go again." If that be the case, then a man's proficiency is of no importance, it becomes a hindrance. Surely once a respected international body has judged an individual competent, the Indian Government should not play God and deny a person his freedom of movement and the right to study what he pleases without the fear of incurring political vengeance.

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GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?



Judging from the limited response to our contest seeking a more civilized manner of conducting meals at Navjotes and Weddings, it would seem Parsis by and large are quite content to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune to satiate their appetites. All, however, is not lost. Rusi P. Kharas with his "Kharas *Jamva Chalo*" system, Professor P. D. Sunavala and E. H. Engineer have come up with solutions that solve part of the problem but still leave many miles to go before we eat—gracefully. Below are their recommendations for which they receive Rs. 25 each:

I have had the same problem when I had the Navjote ceremony of my two daughters, so I am getting prepared for their weddings.

Well here is my solution:—As each guest enters give them each a *coloured number ticket*. Yellow for the first sitting, blue for the second and red for the third.

At the head of the table will be a small board indicating the numbers on that particular table with a colour strip indicating the particular sitting for example the first table will show nos. 1-20 with a yellow strip on the top indicating the first sitting. Each seat will have a corresponding number so that the guests will go quietly to their respective numbers.

In this way all the mad rush will be avoided and the host will know exactly how many people are sit-

ting at each sitting. He will only have to count the children to get the necessary discount from the caterer.

If this system is adopted, it should be called 'Kharas *Jamva Chalo*' system.

R. P. Kharas

Every Invitation Card and Reply Card must be numbered, and those attending must be requested to bring the numbered Invitation Card for Dinner. Based upon the replies received and the number that can be accommodated at one sitting, all that needs to be done at the Hall or Baug, is to announce over the microphone that Invitation Card Nos. A to B will be accommodated at the first sitting, Nos. C to D at the second sitting and so on. If possible the exact seats also may be reserved indicating the number of the invitation card and whether for the first or second sitting on a placard attached to the seats.

P. D. Sunavala

Before releasing the invitation cards, the host should prepare a list of the expected guests, group them in the following manner, and give them the numbers as follows:—

Group No. 1

In this group, numbers to be given 1/1, 1/2, 1/3 and so on, which will indicate guests for the first group. This group will be for the guests coming from a far dis-

tance, a few aged, as well as young children, who wish to leave earlier. The dinner for this group may start at about 7.15 and may last for about 45 minutes.

Group No. 2

In this group, numbers to be given 2/1, 2/2, 2/3 and so on, which will indicate guests for the second group. This group will be for the nearest and dearest friends and wellwishers, who would like to wait and enjoy till late hours. The dinner for this group may start at about 8 and may last for about 45 minutes.

Group No. 3

In this group numbers to be given 3/1, 3/2, 3/3 and so on, which will indicate guests for the 3rd group, and they will be the members of the family and the rest. Numbers must be written distinctly on the Invitation Cards, as well as the reply cards, which will be of more importance.

In the invitation Cards, one paragraph will have to be added at the end as follows:—

"Please reply at an early date, on the enclosed self-stamped reply card.

"Our Volunteers will see to your comforts, and will guide you to your secured seat at the dinner table; if you will please tell them your number given on this Invitation card."

(Continued on page 5, col. 3)

LETTERS

To Be Or Not To Be

I have just seen the August issue of "Parsiana" in its new garb and I hasten to offer you my sincere congratulations on your new venture. From beginning to end, the first issue provides not only excellent reading material but also wholesome food for thought.

A. D. Gorbala's article "To Be Or Not To Be" deserves to be read and re-read by every Parsi worth the name. If the first number is any indication of what you are going to serve up month after month, I have no doubt that "Parsiana" will soon rank among the leading journals of the city, and Parsis and non-Parsis alike will enjoy reading it.

With best wishes for your success,

Cyrus E. Lalkaka

Divorce

You may be interested to learn that The Bombay Parsee Association, of which I was one of the founders in 1921, had as one of its activities the "Parsee Arbitration Board." This board had a number of cases withdrawn from The Matrimonial Court, or had them stopped from going to Court, and settled their disputes privately and a number of couples were made to run their households jointly in love, peace and harmony. One case was of a couple who had been separated for 10 years, and the case taken to the Matrimonial Court. Years ago, when I was a delegate of the Matrimonial Court, I had requested the presiding judge, late Justice Bomanji Wadia, through our Foreman the late Kekobad Adenwalla, to allow me to settle the case out of the Court. The late Bomanji Wadia was kind enough to adjourn the court. I was successful in settling the case in the Court Building within three hours.

Besides Matrimonial Cases, cases from the Public Court and one even from the High Court were settled. This activity has ceased since 1970, when I retired from the Presidentship of The Bombay Parsee Association.

This body was first formed in 1921, as the Tardeo-Grant-Road-

Balaram Street Zoroastrian Committee (for the benefit of Parsees). When the number of members increased it was named The Grant Road Parsee Association and some years later when members were from all of Bombay, it was named The Bombay Parsee Association.

Major S. R. Bamji

A Sort of Curse

I was glad to see the newlook *Parsiana* (August 1973) in which two articles were of special interest to me. *Anatomy of a Divorce* was very informative and *A Sort of Curse* cleared an issue about which a lot has already appeared in the Parsi press.

I have followed the "curse controversy" ever since it started sometime in May 1973. I was amazed to read all sorts of sweeping remarks and vague accusations



against a promising scholar like Mr. Fariburz Nariman. In my opinion Mr. Nariman's erudite rejoinder in the *Bombay Samachar* countered the issues raised by his critics but from the layman's point of view, it left something unsaid. This 'something' has been mentioned by you briefly and in the most appropriate manner by means of relevant quotes from Mr. Nariman's lecture. By discreetly selecting these passages from the lecture, you have proved beyond doubt that the subject of the lecture was purely academic and certainly not one which would affect or endanger the existence of our religion or community in any way.

P. P. Framroze

Parsiana

Congratulations for your *Parsiana* August 1973. Through your *Parsiana* I got a peep deep into the present day Indiana. You are doing very well by nourishing the new and healthy thought-roots of your community by which one day the whole nation could benefit.

As there is a deep-rooted relation of an individual to the Universe likewise there is an interdependence of a community and the Nation. Unless communities in their own right are healthy no nation can be a healthy nation in the world.

With frank and free-minded writers like Geeta Doctor and others you are bound to succeed in your mission.

Rochak Pandit

I was thrilled to read 'Parsiana' and more so when other communities take interest—by getting to know and understand others I feel, one day we could blend into one common humanity.

Arzan Rikhya

DINNER (Continued from page 4)

The youngsters of the family will come out willingly to work as volunteers and will work wonderfully, if encouraged a little. The host will have to supply them with the copies of the list prepared for the incoming guests with the numbers allotted to them, group by group. Their duty will be to welcome the guests and guide them to their secured seats.

As soon as all the replies are received, arrange them according to the groups and numbers. Make provision for those families whose numbers are more.

All the chairs are to be numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on.

Suppose a few may not be able to attend the function, and some may not reply, and yet at the last moment they may turn up! To accommodate such guests, volunteers may arrange for them on certain vacant seats if any, or arrange for a few extra chairs and tables, according to convenience.

In my humble opinion, this solution, if worked out in co-operation, will turn out to be effective and fine.

E. H. Engineer

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Widening Perceptions of the Parsi Community

JOAN CONTRACTOR

It often comes as something of a shock to the average, upstanding Bombaywala Parsi, to learn the world outside of India, or even Bombay, has rarely heard of the Parsi Community. That I had heard something about the community, before meeting and marrying a Parsi, and taking up residence in Bombay, was somewhat exceptional. The word "Parsi" first came to my attention at the age of 17 in an American Literature class. We were studying the latter half of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which a zombie-like character who is described as a "fire worshipping Parsi" named Fedallah, appears unaccountably as a confederate of the obsessed and mentally tainted Captain Ahab. The emaciated, dialogueless character, with the inaccurate name, was intended to represent shadowy evil and extreme exoticness. The cultural representation, like the name had no basis in sociological fact, but, unlike the average high school literature student, the word "Parsi" stuck in my mind. The next year, while still in high school, an exceptionally educated and informed World History teacher while discussing the Persian Empire, mentioned that the few remaining Zoroastrians in the world were the Parsis that lived in India. I progressed to University, and in an Asian Studies course learned that the Parsis fled Iran because of religious persecution with the advent of the Muslim religion, and that was the reason for their location in India.

So, a certain minimal historical knowledge of the Parsi community was gleaned from my formal education. Also while in college I met my would-be husband, a concrete example of a Parsi. Seeing Farok from across a large auditorium, my first impression was that he looked self-conscious and very Jewish. I decided he was a peculiar individual, but then again, I had always gotten on well with international and individualistic types. He lived near where I did on the large University of Michigan campus and as we walked in the same direction toward the same bus stop, he paused to talk to a fellow Indian student. It was a new insight. Such a strange individual had friends! Because of being members of the same organization, we met again a few hours later at a party. I was disappointed that the only chair in the room was opposite this introverted seeming person, and wondered what on earth I would say to him. That proved to be no problem as he immediately began to explain to all and sundry that he was from India, not an American Jew as I had thought, and that he was a graduate student, not, as I had thought, a lowly freshman. I had noticed that his style of dress was not at all in the high class men's store mode which



I admired. Farok wore a checked jacket, a maroon patterned shirt, a tan striped tie, and brown corduroy pants, and green suede square toed slip-ons. He explained that the tie was of a hand woven cloth that Gandhi had encouraged Indians to weave as a symbol of resistance to the British Raj. I was impressed with this fact and forgave the tie, but the shoes bore my disapproval forever after.

As I grew to know Farok he began to discuss the Parsi Community. He told me about the Towers of Silence in which human bodies are left exposed to the elements. This practice did not particularly upset me, as I am not fussy about what is to happen to my body after I die. He also told me about his *navjote* ceremony, in which he sipped a small quantity of cow urine. This custom upset me a bit more. I also got glimpses of a typical Parsi wedding, at which long tables of people ate big meals off banana leaves. I caught the inference that the wedding is the prime social event in the Parsi life.

I also caught the inference that Parsis generally enjoyed social life. As I began to meet Farok socially, he pointed out to me, with a certain amount of pride, that he was encouraged to go out. I learned that Indians of other communities are not so encouraged. Farok had a certain social honesty, a tendency to help himself to another portion of food without being urged, or to point out a mistake, or something that he disliked with a minimum of prevarication. This social iconoclasm made him entertaining and very well liked. Farok liked to attend western classical music concerts, movies and usually stopped off at a restaurant after these events. He enjoyed eating. He also enjoyed parties and liked to talk to everyone, not stay in a corner and talk to only the people he already knew. I was surprised to realize that Farok liked American jazz and spent hours

listening to live jazz bands in Bombay. I remember walking down a sidewalk in an American city, on a lovely warm night dancing and singing all the words to "Ain't Misbehavin'". I gradually realized that the oft discussed cultural gap between East and West didn't much exist between Farok and myself.

After two or three years friendship, Farok and I decided to marry, and circumstances dictated that we would live in Bombay. Now I was to see that oft described Parsi Community at close hand. It is easy to generalize about a group of people by studying one individual in that group, but to generalize about a group from a group is much more difficult. Also, the Parsi Community, in general, loves to talk about itself, and it is difficult to separate the observations that I have often heard the Parsis make about themselves, from the observations that I, myself, have made. What Parsis generally say about themselves constitutes the Parsi Myth. The Typical Parsi Couple are fun loving, eccentric, excitable, charitable and genetically and religiously exclusive. In my experience, I have met many individuals who fall into this proto-type, but I am not quite sure if, left to my own devices I would have made quite the same observations.

I observed that my husband enjoyed a good time in very Western modes of theater and concert attendance, restaurants and dances. It has been my observation that the typical Western classical music concert audience in Bombay is about 75 per cent Parsi, who visibly and vocally express their appreciation of the performances by standing, and shouting "encore". Similarly, the amateur English theater, audiences are packed with Parsis and a few Parsi names are sure to appear in the programmes. A typical crowd in any restaurant is sure to have a large table of vociferous Parsis, and it is common to see several familiar faces and perhaps, a few acquaintances. I have also observed that the Bombay dance floor is not complete without a smoothly and showily performing dance studio trained Parsi team, going through their paces, and perhaps, a few less

professional Parsi couples as well. From these observations I could generalize the Parsi Community has whole-heartedly adopted Western forms of entertainment.

Another form of entertainment, not quite so typically Western is the before-mentioned Parsi tendency to talk about themselves. The self-amused conversations usually fall into two general categories, anecdotes of past practical jokes, and anecdotes about the eccentricity of particular individuals. If people have so many practical joke stories to relate, then playing practical jokes must be another full scale method of entertainment.

Individual eccentricities also provide hours of entertainment. The man who liked to work on his car at 4.00 A.M., the woman who used to hold tea parties for her ceramic cats, the same woman who used to whip the rickshawallas with her umbrella, and her good works that motivated the hapless workmen to forgive her. In such anecdotes the conversation is provided to fill in between band numbers at dances and courses at restaurants.

Parsis love to entertain themselves with stories of their eccentricity, and I am sure that the community has full measure of it's share of unusual personalities, but the human community in general, has many. Any family can produce crazy relative stories. One of my ancestors was a very religiously involved Puritan who faithfully left food in his backyard to feed the good spirits, and devoted one half of his life trying to get the stiff Calvinist community to change a fine point of religious dogma. After he succeeded, he had a vision that convinced him to spend the later half of his life trying to persuade them all to change back, thus his nickname "Troublechurch Brown". Even my younger brother showed a marked affinity for the old time movie actresses, Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis, etc., in his early teens, and long before such nostalgia was in style. So, I would say that eccentricity is a human, not an exclusively Parsi characteristic.

The myth that the Parsi Community is eccentric goes hand-in-hand with the stereo-type that the

Parsis are temperamental. True, I have observed that even the most even-tempered of Parsi males is a machine of recrimination and menace behind the wheels of his car, even to the point of shouting abuses at a fellow Parsi. I have also observed one of the mildest of my friends become downright threatening when he felt the need to stick up for his sister. A given situation will, in general, bring out the temper in any Parsi, but a given specific situation will bring out the fiery side of any human being. The Parsis I have met are as capable of over-looking a slight or inconvenience as reacting to it. We kept one friend locked out of our apartment until 1 A.M., with no good excuse and his greeting to us was pleasant, even cheery. I'm sure that in the same situation I would have been very angry.

If the typical Parsi believes himself to be eccentric and excitable, he also thinks himself to be charitable, a basically sound observation. Parsis do go enthusiastically into organized money raising ventures. These ventures, such as fund raising, concerts, plays, and dances are in consonance with the already mentioned tendency of Parsis in general, to enjoy these activities, and it is difficult to say whether the charity motivates the social activities or vice versa. I know individuals who devote most of their lives to organizing charity ventures, and that they have accomplished much. I have seen



Quick! My HARPOON!

old *dugli* clad Parsi men give alms to beggars, although whether one approves of this charitable outlet is in question, and I have known poor boys who have vaulted themselves up financially with educational aid from Parsi trusts.

The stereo-type of the Parsi as genetically and religiously exclusive, I have found to be true. It is well known that the Parsi Community will let no one join the religion without one's father being a Parsi. I have heard it said that even if one's father is a Parsi, one's mother must be a Parsi to really qualify as a "Real Parsi". I have been reminded that the Parsis are the "best" people in India, although no one has explained in what way Parsis are best. This attitude is partly a competitive *esprit de corps*. I have also been told that members of other communities have said similar things about their group. Regretably, a feeling of group superiority is an Indian characteristic, that Parsis have adopted.

The reaction of the Parsi Community to a foreigner married to a Parsi may be an interesting study in group attitudes. A friend tells me that when the ladies of the community first heard of my husband's impending marriage to a foreigner, before I had even arrived in India, they were already wondering what he saw in me. At my wedding reception, which was held in Bombay, I did notice several scowling stares. People, from time to time, thereafter have reminded me that some other Parsis, not themselves, have prejudices and resentments against foreign wives. I have noticed with people I have known that when a Parsi-foreign marriage breaks up, the blame is placed squarely on the shoulders of the foreign wife, even when the husband has made noticeable mistakes. One always has to account for the fact that people have more in their minds than they are saying, but on the whole I don't think that the Parsis that I have met bear me much illwill. I have attended Parsi wedding and *navjote* functions and parties where Parsis of all age groups have gathered; and I have met innumerable Parsis. Everyone has treated me in a friendly manner. Indeed, I count

Parsis among my best friends. Good, bad, or indifferent, it is human nature to get used to a situation, and people cannot continually be shocked at my existence in Bombay married to a Parsi. When surprise wears off, disapproval wanes.

I have written about some of the characteristics that make up



BEST COMMUNITY? WHY—WHAT
OTHERS ARE THERE?

the Parsi stereo-type, but there are other characteristics that I have noticed about the community that the community does not, so much, notice about itself. When I first arrived in India, I had difficulty picking a Parsi out from the rest of the local population, but it was not long before I learned to recognize a certain aestheticism in the community. If I see a young woman, wearing a short, straight, sleeveless dress, and sandals, with short hair, and a few gold bracelets, I know that I am looking at a Parsi. I have noticed that Parsi women like to wear cotton prints in shades of brown, gray, black and maroon. Simple, short dresses are worn in the daytime, but in the evening, the women tend toward a lush formality in dress. Any Parsi wedding or *navjote* is the display opportunity for yards of satin, chintilly lace, and nylon crepe with gold work. Parsi women love Chinese things and Chinese embroidered saris and sari borders

are representatively Parsi. Parsi women love diamonds and emeralds and a really important wedding is not complete without the display of lakhs worth of gems in necklaces, bracelets, and earrings.

The tendency toward rich formality is also noticeable in the manner in which Parsis decorate their homes. The before-mentioned love of Chinese things is apparent in the Chinese style vases which no upper class Parsi home is without. I have been in several homes in which lovely hand carved rosewood furniture is preserved. Another typical feature is brocade upholstery, often with 18th century European pastoral scenes. Crystal chandeliers are prized, and European China sets are often displayed. The peasantry and insubstantial in home furnishing seem to receive short shrift from the Parsi housewife.

The comfortable substantiality of the Parsi woman's taste seems to be a reflection of her position in society. The Parsi girl must be college educated to qualify for society and generally Parsi women do something with their educations. All the Parsi girls that I know are trained to do something professionally. I have friends who are micro-biologists, architects, textile designers and literature translators, executive secretaries, professors. Parsi women who are married usually stay involved with the community at large. I know women who are extensively involved with club work, and cultural activities, and others who teach sewing and cooking classes. Parsi men, in general, take women seriously. They may joke about woman's inferiority, but they wouldn't say it unless they expected women to understand the humor. If they really believed in women's inferiority, they wouldn't consider it a joke. Parsi boys that I know are very critical of a girl's mental and intellectual abilities and are consciously attracted to girls who are lively, articulate and well read.

Another outstanding characteristic of Parsi social relations, is that there is less segregation of the generations than is noticeable in the West. Many social functions

(Continued on page 17, col. 3)

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

(Below is a slightly abridged and edited version of Shiavax R. Vakils "An Appeal to the Parsi Community of Bombay.")

I have during the last six months or so undergone a tremendous mental conflict on the issue whether I should bring out the truth or suppress willfully and deliberately from the members of my Community true facts. I hold the position of a trustee and the members of the Community are the beneficiaries. A trustee is under an obligation to act with utmost good faith in relation to the affairs of his beneficiaries. He should not suppress a material fact coming to his knowledge which affects the interest of the beneficiaries. After due deliberation, I have come to the conclusion that I would be perpetrating an open fraud on the Community if I suppressed the truth about the existing state of affairs of the Towers of Silence.

Between December 1972 and September 1973, I have gone inside the Towers of Silence several times (on many occasions with one of my co-trustees, Dr. A. Golwala) with a view to ascertain their condition. I have also on several occasions checked the issue of paucity of birds and I set out below my observations:

It is a myth to suppose that even during the months when the birds are there 'in plenty' the flesh of the bodies of the departed is substantially consumed by the birds. There is a paucity of birds, whatever the reasons may be, with the result that substantial parts of the bodies remain untouched. Small portions are eaten not only by vultures but by crows and kites.

Every human carcass is consigned to the well (Bhandar) on the next day after it is laid to rest. When the bodies are lowered in the well, they are consigned one over the other like dead carcasses of animals and remain so in that state for months rotting and stinking in the process of decomposition.

At present there are only portions of three Towers of Silence in use. The use of the other Towers is suspended because persons from buildings in the proximity can view and in fact were viewing the dead bodies when laid to rest. Some of the bodies consigned to the Tower now not in use for over a year are still rotting in the stage of decomposition.

These are the facts. I am therefore of the opinion that:

A stage has now arrived (though late it be) that the members of the Community sit together and arrive at a solution for an alternative method for disposal of the dead. The three possible methods are: burning, burying and consignment to the sea.

The problem today has acutely affected not only Bombay but Karachi, Calcutta, a number of villages adjoining Surat (including Bhesan, Rander, Bhatha, Adajan, Ichhapor, Kudiana and Ilav) and a number of towns in Maharashtra and a number of towns in Madhya Pradesh where the birds have become practically extinct. It is for want of guidance from the Parsi Community of Bombay that the 'status quo' continues.

It is no use suggesting breeding the vultures. The vultures have the same instinct human beings have, viz., to go where they can thrive, not where they have to strive for survival. Three to four bodies a day on the average is not enough for flourishing the world of vultures, who have enormous appetites. Human bodies due to some reason or other (modern medicines and drugs probably) do not provide an attractive meal for vultures unlike the carcasses of cows, buffaloes and other animals.

On 22nd April 1970, I published a pamphlet, in which I expressed my views regarding the Towers of Silence and stated as under:—

At Bangalore there was a Parsi graveyard in existence. A Tower of Silence was built in the year 1939-40 in which the head priests and Dastoorjis played a leading part. Litigation ensued and today both are functioning simultaneously. It is the Tower of Silence which divided the Bangalore Parsi Community, which upto that date had been united. The result is that the Tower of Silence is hardly used.

At Delhi, there is a burial ground. Parsi corpses even after the last rites, are allowed to be touched and seen by non-Parsis. The last *darshan* is not barred, unlike at Doongerwadi, to non-Parsis. It is this outdated custom of not allowing a dead body to be viewed by non-Parsis who wish to pay respect that has given momentum to the crematorium movement in Bombay.

Whilst Doongerwadi is not a place where there can be a crematorium it is neither in the hands of the reformists nor in the hands of the orthodox to decide the place of crematorium. No Government or Municipality would allow a crematorium to be erected in the heart of a locality which is covered



practically on all four sides by palatial skyscrapers. The first people to object to such a move would be non-Parsi neighbours residing in the locality.

On 12th May 1970, I addressed a letter to the trustees of the Parsi Punchayet in which I stated:—

The Trustees are also aware of the fact that certain photographs alleged to be those of Doongerwadi Tower of Silence were exhibited at Raveline Street. I would like to know:—

If the Trustees have investigated the authenticity of the said photographs, if so, what is their finding?

Why are the Trustees hesitant to issue a clarification about the interior cleanliness of the Towers of Silence?

Why should the Trustees not allow a few representatives of the Community to enter the Towers of Silence after undergoing *Nahan* and other ceremonies, with a view to enable them to assess the state of affairs and place before the Community first-hand information of the inner conditions of the Towers of Silence? Are the Trustees aware that at several Towers of Silence in the Mofussil the bodies are lying for years untouched by any bird, in particular, at Kudiana, Bhesan, Mahuva, Ilav, Igatpuri and Bangalore? What constructive suggestions have the Trustees for the bodies which have been lying so for years past?

On the 23rd November 1971, a year and a half after receipt of the above letter, I was invited by the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet for a meeting. I reproduce below the relevant extracts of the minutes as recorded by the Trustees:

Mr. Vakil stated that he had already put his views in his letters and had raised three issues. One was the matter of the method of the disposal of the dead. He felt that the problem had assumed great importance because of the paucity of the birds at various places such as Karachi, Calcutta, Igatpuri and many other places in Gujarat and at Bombay also. He was of the opinion that because of various factors the number of birds were getting lesser and lesser day by day. He, therefore, requested the Trustees to guide the community and lay down certain principles of alternative suggestion for the disposal of the dead. He pointed out that alternative mode(s) of disposal were to be found at various places where there were no *dokhmas* and even at Bangalore where a *dokhma* was in existence a burial ground was also there and it was taken greater advantage of by the Parsis. It was argued by some that the Doongerwadi lands could not be used in any other manner or for any other purpose. He agreed that if there was a grant of land by the Government for this purpose then the land could not be utilised for any other purpose except the purpose mentioned in the grant. However, with regard to the lands either donated or purchased by the Trustees, in spite of the fact that there may be a restrictive covenant to utilise the land for a purpose, the Trustees could go to the Court and get this restriction removed. He was afraid that sooner or later a time would come when the Trustees would have to close down the *dokhmas*. In small villages like Bhesan and Ilav round about Surat the Parsis should be asked to consign their dead bodies at the Surat *dokhmas* as he

had found that there was no paucity of birds at Surat. He again requested the Trustees to make up their minds and think of an alternative solution as he thought that with this jet age noise and big buildings coming up round about our Doongerwadi premises, the vultures would ultimately disappear.

On expiry of one year from the date on which I was called by the trustees of the Parsi Punchayet, I was elected a trustee. In light of the above views which I had expressed openly, before I was elected a trustee, I was invited by one of the Parsi Associations of Bombay to express my views of *dokhme-nashini*. I stated that 'Looking to the present circumstances, *dokhme-nashini* is the best method of disposal of our dead bodies.'

I have repeatedly indicated in the past that I am more concerned and interested in the uplift of the living rather than the disposal of the dead, and that the controversy about disposal of the dead bodies can best be solved by a discussion and a rational conclusion arrived at by the members of the Community. However, I feel that a stage has now been reached when one has to face the truth.

In the interest of the Community, I feel it is essential that a realistic view be taken of the situation. I am fully aware that any suggestion for an alternative method for disposal of the dead is bound to meet with fierce opposition.

Destructive criticism will serve no useful purpose. It is no use dwelling in the past or blaming the leaders of the Community for their alleged past omissions, though much can be said in that respect. What we are now concerned with is the future. The world is changing fast.

It is futile, in my view, to rely on the trustees of the Parsi Punchayet *alone* or on any other leaders of the Community. The members of the Community must unite and find out a solution. The trustees of the Parsi Punchayet are the servants and not the masters of the Community. I feel that even at this stage, setting aside all our differences and personal prejudices we should sit together across a table and try to evolve a solution which would be accepted by us as an alternative method of disposal of the dead *as a reserve*. Is it difficult for we who claim to be an educated and enlightened Community to find out a solution for this problem?

With a view to prepare ground for a solution, it is imperative that we should at least lift the ban which we have imposed upon our Priests not to perform the funeral and other obsequial ceremonies for Zoroastrians who believe in other methods for disposal of the dead. It is an unjust ban. Whatever faith we have in our ceremonies is shattered as a result of it. There is no tyranny in the world greater than spiritual tyranny. After having ascertained the truth about the state of affairs prevailing at Doongerwadi, you cannot blame a person who conscientiously believes that rather than allow the bodies of our dead and departed dear ones to rot and stink and decompose for months, one chooses to adopt another method of disposal. There is no religion greater than truth. I am confident that before it is too late, the members of the Community will wake up and arrive at a workable solution.

ECONOMIC REGENERATION OF THE PARSI COMMUNITY

By Dr. P. B. Warden

Founder Editor of *Parsiana*



Coming in contact with a good many middle class families we discover a strain of anxiety in all of them about the immediate and the remote future of the new generation now studying in high schools or in universities. Many families say they are willing to sacrifice all comforts and utilize their resources to fully educate our boys and girls. But what thereafter? Jobs are more and more scarce and competition is keen, or even unfair, when influence and nepotism are rampant. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. Self-interest is therefore something fundamental which need not be hid under a cloak of hypocrisy. But self-reliance is the end-product of self-discipline which day by day deteriorates.

Living is impossible without extraneously pressured restrictions and self-imposed restrictions. Total unrestricted freedom exists nowhere. It is better to help the younger generation to understand that and make that understanding the nucleus of self-reliance.

Jehangir Framroz Shroff is constantly drawing the attention of the community to remedy the perilous psychological conditions leading to employment difficulties in the Community.

His plan of establishing a Financial Corporation is making no headway because of our listlessness. He speaks. We listen. Both rest for a while and wile away time, completely losing sight of the fact that this is the ideal, the most desirable and the most practical scheme. It is collective bargaining for our betterment. It is comprehensive and flexible. It can expand with new needs and serve the requisite purpose. More than anything else it shall prove to be an effective weapon against the snobbery of charity. "People pine away under the tyranny of snobbery. Honest

kindly hearts dry up and die. Gallant generous lads, blooming with hearty youth swell into bloated old bachelorhood and burst and tumble over. Tender girls wither into shrunken decay, and perish solitary" (W. M. Thackeray, *Books of Snobs*).

Let us collect information not to be learned but to be wise. "Carlyle could define a university as a collection of books, Socrates might have defined it as a conversation about wisdom" (Griswold—*Essay on Education*).

We need to work and accept the dignity of labour. Israel has set a splendid example. David Ben-Gurion in his *Earning a Homeland* (1915) says "The true right to a homeland springs not from any political or court authority but from work". Elsewhere he states "We don't consider manual work as a curse, or a bitter necessity, not even as a means of making a living. We consider it a high human function, as a basis of human being, and which ought to be free and creative. Men ought to be proud of it." Work is the measure of civilization.

Sapur Desai, a former Secretary of the Parsi Panchayat had published some statistics about the role played by Cottage Industries and Small Scale Industries in the industrial development of Japan. It stated that 45 per cent of components of large industries were supplied to them by Small Scale Industries. This was a clear indication of the situation cropping up in India. Shroff rightly points out that all those who anticipated it have prospered by now. We did not enter industries on the same scale as others. To Shroff belongs the unique honour of starting at the lowest level, rising to the highest office and becoming a director in the same textile unit he started in.

We have to concede that he knows what he is talking about. It is high time we earnestly make a move to re-educate the community in the spirit of the dignity of labour. In East Germany an employee was punished with extra-labour on an uncompleted task. The Union objected to it on the ground that work was a sacred privilege of man and cannot be used for any undignified purpose. That is the spirit that lifted up Germany so rapidly after the vast devastation caused by war. Work is worship, nowhere is work classified and graded into worship and non-worship groups.

The late Mr. Jehangir H. Patel, of The Associated Cement Companies, very strongly advised the younger generation, immediately after Independence, to go in for manufacture. When asked what to manufacture his reply was: "Anything—the country and the world is hungry for manufactured goods and will remain so. With expanding economies in developing countries its end cannot be envisaged." What Shroff reiterates is that even the present is still a beginning.

Why we as a community failed to grasp this simple fact was our lack of faith in the potentialities of our own people. We did not willingly accept the idea that with the exodus of the British our country would make good economically and industrially. This was our psychological handicap which arose out of the favoured position we enjoyed in the British regime.

Another venture doing well, namely of doll making under a European lady married to a Parsi, ended with the death of that lady.

We as an ethnic group are lacking vigour. Let us discover for our own good new avenues, new ideas, new outlets and a new set of able men.

(Continued on page 17, col. 2)



THE FIELD MARSHAL WORE ORANGE

GEETA DOCTOR

A thread of mist wound itself round the exhibition stalls as Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw stepped in. Organisers of the eightieth exhibition of the United Planters Association of South India (UPASI) at Coonoor crowded round him in an excess of solicitude perhaps to compensate for the fact that the Field Marshal had been made the Guest of Honour mainly on account of Minister Subrahmanium's non-appearance. If the soldier was aware of this he did not give any sign of it as he briskly undertook an inspection of the stalls, showing alert interest in the mechanics of some of them and heroically accepting massive chunks of decorative pottery and

packets of fertilizer.

Shortly afterwards as the members of the UPASI settled down comfortably to receive the few words of approbation that the Chief Guest was called upon to deliver, the Field Marshal stood up and announced, "I am quite alive to the fact that this honour is mine because Mr Subrahmanium did not keep his date with you. My position is not unlike the man whom a bride marries after going to church and discovering that her bridegroom is not there." The audience gasped with shock and delighted laughter.

"However," he went on in his clipped, matter of fact manner, "my study of matrimonial bliss

indicates that marriages of this nature are always very happy ... for the first year. The bride is determined to be nice to the rebounded bridegroom. But at the end of the year she starts thinking again of the man who stood her down and begins making overtures to him once more. So ... I shall wait and see next year..."

Coonoor is a sleepy little hamlet, managing to preserve in spite of Family Planning posters and Hindi films, a quaint English charm with its cottages lined with mixed flower beds, climbing roses over the porch and chintz curtains at the windows in the parlour. Ladies of somewhat ancient vintage can be seen walking in their sensible

Britishy tweeds with small waist-coated dogs trotting superciliously at their feet ... one of these ladies, a gentle white haired soul complete with cameo brooch at her throat, on being asked the whereabouts of Manekshaw looked a bit puzzled. "I am afraid I don't know the gentleman but the name sounds rather familiar."

In these surroundings Sam Hormuzji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw looked more like a proper British gentleman-soldier than ever, with his fresh pink complexion and light grey eyes. The Field Marshal was relaxing after the rigours of having been a guest of honour and wore a bright orange T-shirt which was oddly at variance with the fierce regimental mustache that is his trademark, and of course one could not help but feel slightly disappointed that he was not holding a swagger stick. But it was time for tea and even Field Marshals don't carry swagger sticks while drinking tea. Besides tea was quite an elaborate affair with Ms Manekshaw in command dispersing tea all around and keeping up a steady supply of salami slices on hot buttered toast in the direction of her husband.

The Field Marshal was astonished to be asked how he spent his time. "I get up early in the morning (5.15 to be precise) have my breakfast and after that I take my dogs, two Gurkhas and my wife up to see our house and find out how the work is getting along."

"Notice the order of preference," said his wife quietly. Whereupon he immediately expostulated, "Ah that is because she's always late so she's the last one to be ready." He had, he said, decided to settle down in Coonoor as far back as in 1959-62 during the time he was Commandant at the Staff College in nearby Wellington. "We bought up a whole hillside and now we are building our house on it." Having lived there before he was very familiar with the place and the people around though originally he had come from the north, "from a town called Amritsar," he said, making it sound very remote and exotic.

As to his plans for the future Manekshaw adroitly fielded any questions on the subject without specifying his intention. He did not intend becoming a planter as had

been suggested by one of the UPASI members and he did not want to write a book though he had received several offers to do so. "At present I am the repository of so much secret information that it would not be correct to make use of this." If he wrote anything about his experiences they could prove to be a source of embarrassment and later on they would be of no interest, so he had no plans whatsoever of breaking out in print.

In the past also the soldier has been adept at keeping the curious at bay and a story is told of how shortly before the last war Manekshaw found himself at a Navjote besieged on all sides by anxious inquiries as to the imminent possibility of a war. Carefully denying any knowledge of this he tried to answer a few questions until they became so persistent that he lowered his voice conspiratorially and pointing to an unsuspecting lady across the room whispered, "Can you see that lady over there? Ask her. She seems to know all about it."

Talking of the war in retrospect, however, he said, "I was quite clear in my mind that war was inevitable. It was only a question of whether we had the time to be ready. But as it happened we had plenty of time to make our plans. After that to tell you the truth I had no qualms. I had a free hand." Ms Manekshaw who was in Delhi during the time also agreed that at no point had she felt any anxiety. "It was just a very busy time for all of us," she said.

As he recollected some of the main points of the last conflict he recaptured again the drama and exhilaration of the moment. "I didn't think they would be such fools as to attack. But on the evening of the 3rd of December at 5.45 p.m. the enemy planes crossed over our borders." Though they had all along been expecting it, the attack nevertheless came as a surprise. "The Prime Minister was in Calcutta, the Defence Minister was in Cawnpore and Swaran Singh was out of the country. It was all very interesting and satisfying to see how all our plans went immediately into action."

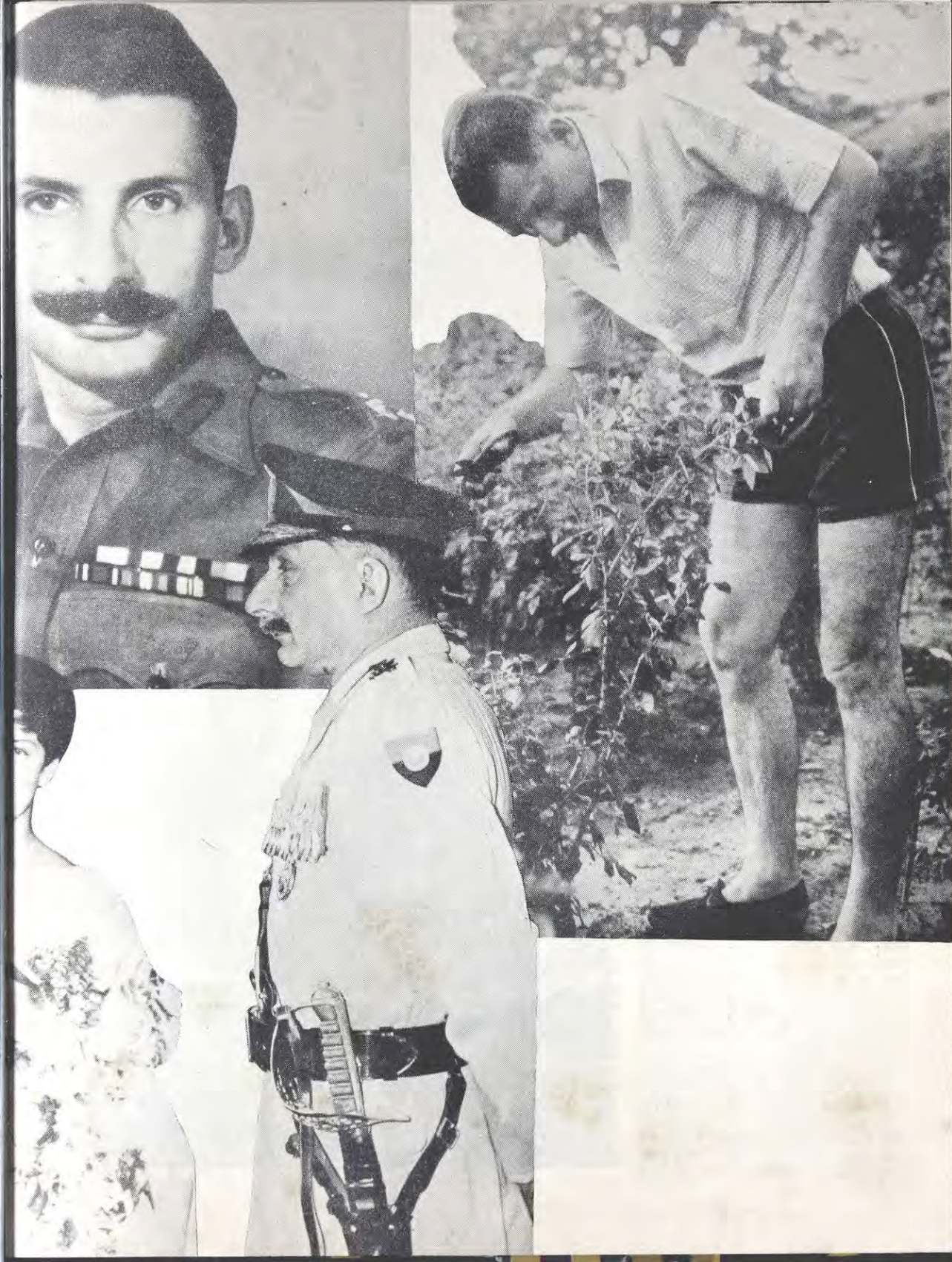
The Field Marshal himself, the recipient of the highest award given

to an Indian soldier, showed the deep attachment he had towards his men whenever he talked of them. "The Indian soldier is a thorough gentleman," he said, "Before the conflict I went round to every formation and told my men what I expected of them. I told them that I was quite certain that we were going to win and that they were going to fight like gentlemen." Asked to comment on whether this idea of war, which in the British papers had been described as a somewhat more violent game of cricket, was not rather outdated, Manekshaw replied, "Warfare has now become a very dirty thing. The British were surprised that India should fight in such a clean way. They never imagined that we would keep our troops so completely under control. There was no looting or indiscipline. They behaved with courtesy and dignity."

How then did the Field Marshal reconcile himself to the idea of the Prisoners of War being kept for so long. Did he not feel that his word to them had been dishonoured. Manekshaw answered sharply, "At no stage did I say that they would be allowed to go back home. I had said they would be treated with dignity and respect. Why, they are living in barracks, while my own soldiers are outside," he protested. "They are provided with food, clothing and shelter without doing any work. They are given a substantial amount of money for their personal use and provided with books and recreation. They can listen to any transmission from anywhere. In fact they were treated better than any other prisoners. There is no point in outsiders coming in and complaining that they don't have dunlopillo mattresses. They sleep on *charpoy*s like my men. They are treated exactly like my soldiers except of course that they are under guard. As for their being sent back it has nothing to do with the Armed Forces."

At this point one of the dogs which had been clamouring for attention outside rushed in and threw himself into his master's arms almost dropping a teacup off the table. A Gurkha immediately appeared and led him away like a child that had





escaped from the nursery. The Field Marshal fortified himself with another salami sandwich. "The lunch was one of those buffet affairs," said his wife, "where one can rarely have time to eat properly." The Field Marshal was amused to be questioned about there being a fighting spirit that distinguished one set of people from the other. "I have heard this for years. I had under my command people from all over India. All of them fought extremely well. It did not matter whether the man was a Kashmiri pundit or someone from the South here. It all depended on the sort of leadership they had. After all when you come to think of it the Parsi community does not particularly distinguish itself by a martial spirit. I know we have a background which traces its ancestry back to Cyrus the great and so on; but basically the Parsi community has been a trading community."

"I think all this talk of going back to Cyrus and the influence of the past is made too much of," said Ms Manekshaw in her forthright manner. "I don't see any point in it."

Speaking about the community Manekshaw was frank in his admiration of its achievements, though he maintained that he would not describe himself as "a rabid practicing Zoroastrian." I was strongly tempted to inquire whether he had circled his *kusti* three times and prayed that *Ahri-man* may be rooted out of this world before he embarked on his victorious campaign but desisted from doing so as I did not notice any *sudra* lurking under his orange T-shirt. "I lead a godly life and that's about all," he said. Both his daughters had married Parsis but that, confessed Manekshaw, "was just a coincidence" for he did not have any strong feelings on the subject. Nor did the fact of his being a Parsi have any effect on his career. He had he said been first and last a professional soldier and had always been treated as such.

He felt that if the Parsi community had done well for itself it was due to the basic integrity and self-confidence in themselves combined with a strong sense of purpose. "It is a small well-knit community. Possibly this was a

pre-requisite for its survival in the early days. I see no reason to believe, why it should not keep on going. After all it has survived for a pretty long time. Though it might not last in the same form.

"We are a self-supporting community which is more advanced and better educated than many others. Basically it is a very honest community with a sense of honour

and a sense of loyalty. That is why it has been trusted in India. It has never demanded any rights but has identified itself with India completely throughout. Also I must add that it speaks highly of the majority community that it has no prejudices whatsoever towards us."

On the prospects of peace for the sub-continent Manekshaw ex-



pressed a more optimistic view than has normally been heard in these times of disenchantment. He did not feel that either Pakistan or India were in any position to start another round, though both countries may have replenished their stockpile of weapons. Pakistan had lost a majority of her technical staff and a great many of her senior officers had been compulsorily retired. While it was possible to train a soldier in six months, it was not possible to train a staff capable of manning and maintaining the sophisticated military equipment that was increasingly being put into use. Besides he felt that it was just not possible to conquer a vast country like India and it was this confidence in her own strength which was vindicated in the last war. "It was a resounding victory which India has not had for years. If they don't have faith in themselves now they never will."

This was however no reason to get complacent and in this context Manekshaw mentioned that the anxiety shown in the Indian press regarding Iran's military build-up served a useful purpose. "It's a good thing for India to have these fears. It stops her from slowing down her defence preparations." On the other hand there was certainly no need to misinterpret Iran's belligerent postures as a direct threat to India. "Iran has certainly procured arms," he said, "the Shah has his own reasons for this. He is surrounded on all sides by Arab countries. He has a tremendous amount of surplus funds. You must realize that Iran and Pakistan are close neighbours with the Baluchi tribes in the middle who divide themselves between the two countries. Any disruption of Pakistan is dangerous for Iran. As it is Pakistan is in a bad way politically and the situation on the N. W. Frontier and in Baluchistan is far from comfortable. This is why the Shah has said that Iran will not tolerate the disintegration of Pakistan. Iran would come into the conflict only to protect her own interests."

It was 6 o'clock and one of the Gurkhas came and reminded the Field Marshal of something. He invited us to join him in a ceremony outside. We went out and found the three dogs, two labra-

dors with golden coats gleaming in the last rays of the evening sun and a black one also, sitting at attention in a line. In front of them lay their bowls of steaming supper. Manekshaw walked up to them, hands behind his back. They looked up expectantly. "Good boys," he said, and at that word the three dogs lunged at their bowls and noisily slurped up their dinner.

The mist had started rising up the valley in swathes of blue and purple. In the few minutes of fading light, the white starry blossoms in the trees shone brightly against the dark green hillside. For a moment everything looked incredibly fresh and bright and pure. "Do you wonder now why I am staying here?" said the soldier. ●

WARDEN (Continued from page 11)

If we now start a Financial Corporation commercially executed and spiritually oriented it shall succeed admirably because we need one badly and urgently.

All out-dated methods, faulty approach, and erroneous attitudes must change. How long shall we wait for our urgent need: A Financial Corporation? Immediately with its formation, new ideas for suitable ventures will pour in.

In previous issues of *Parsiana* the urgency and necessity of an Industrial Estate has been emphasised. Better still instead of locking up large capital, leave capital free and take on hire rooms in already existing Industrial Estates in different locations suitable to the young entrepreneurs, who have their own capital for their own enterprise but not sufficient money initially to take on the load of big monthly rents. Retiring men may join hands with them.

Our housing problem cannot be solved by the Parsi Panchayat. On my asking Nadirshah Mulla, a trustee of the Panchayat what our financial position is his reply was "All that comes goes." It is very true and the Community must not rest its hope all the time, in all matters, on the Parsi Panchayat.

Besides why in a Financial Corporation set up for commercial and industrial purposes incorporate a body that in law cannot trade? ●

LOOKING IN

(Continued from page 8)

that I have attended have included the host or hostess's parents. In the West, parents are to be seen little and heard less, and it is not necessary to address more than a "good evening" and a "thank you" to the host parents. In Bombay, it is *de rigor* to converse with your friend's parents at greater length, and include them in conversations. If a friend's parent gets sick, a visit to the hospital may be called for. This would not be considered necessary in the West. Great issues of race relations, controversial wars, and a sharp change in cultural behaviour, music, art, etc. along with the great changes brought about by the growing industrial revolution and contrast of the financial boom of the post World War II years, with the depression of the nineteen thirties, have driven the generations apart in the West. In India, things do not change so fast, the level of prosperity has not altered so greatly over the past fifty years, and government foreign policy is not largely questioned. So the concerns, tastes and attitudes of the family man or matron in her fifties, will not differ much from those of the young couple in their twenties. The children's education, the latest concert, the best recipe, the performance of the family car will be discussed with equal relish by young and old.

I have described my experimental journey of familiarity and knowledge of the Parsi Community from the scraps offered by my formal education, to knowing one Parsi individual, to confronting the largest concentration of Parsis in Bombay. I have dealt with generalizations that people make about Parsis, and have made a few generalizations of my own. But, the Parsi Community is nothing more than a group of individuals with the same cultural, and religious backgrounds, and a similar life experience. Generalizations cannot cover individuals and exceptions to rules may outweigh the rules themselves. So, my knowledge and familiarity with the Parsi Community as a group of individuals continue to grow. ●

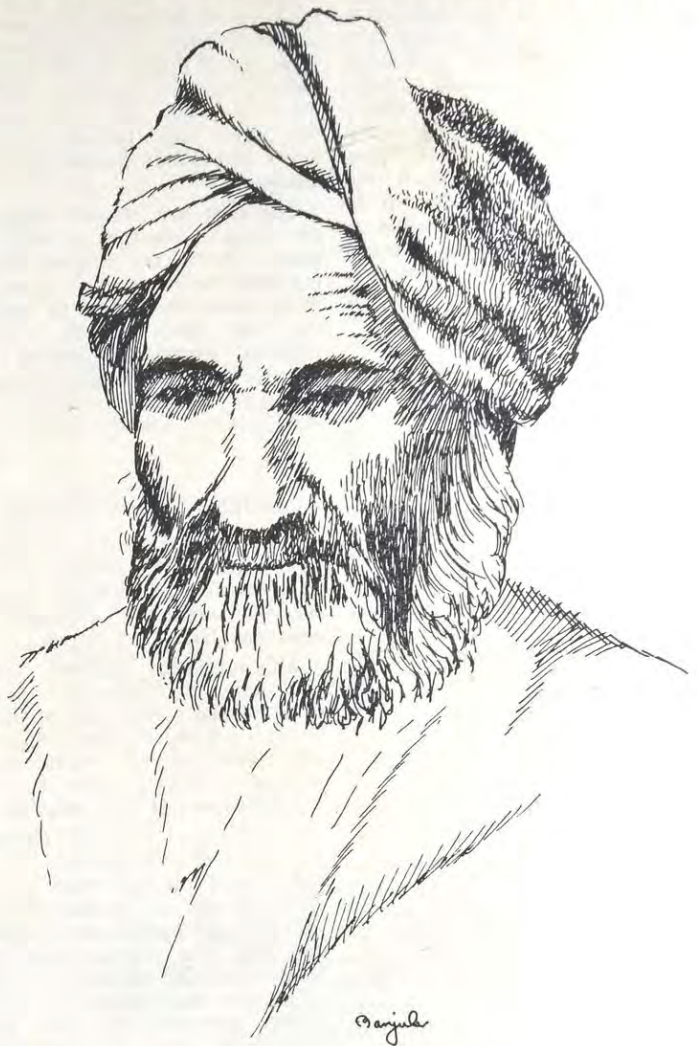
THE VERSATILE GENIUS: AL-BIRUNI

The small gathering at the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Hall last month to commemorate the 1000 birth anniversary of the scientist-scholar Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni did little honour to the man. Perhaps as Jehanbakhsh Daruwala, who read a paper on the Arab scholar noted, Al-Biruni's efforts were directed in the fields of mathematics, theology, astronomy, philosophy, chemistry and the like, subjects with which the layman cannot easily identify. "Everyone knows of Firdausi (his contemporary) but not Al-Biruni," he noted.

Abu'l Raihan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al-Biruni was born in September 973 A.D. in the territory of Khiva, now part of the U.S.S.R. Khiva was then known as Khwarizm, one of the cultural centres of its time, and Al-Biruni was therefore often referred to as Khaarizmi. He was a Shia Muslim but like Firdausi he wrote eloquently of the glory and culture and history of Iran.

Daruwala notes that early in life Al-Biruni distinguished himself in scholarly pursuits and in turn won favour with the ruling prince of Khiva, who appointed him councillor at his court. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, a powerful neighbour of Khiva, invaded the kingdom in 1017 and took as hostages many prominent citizens, including Al-Biruni.

"Ghazni (in Afghanistan)," says Daruwala, "had a cosmopolitan population of soldiers, literary men and artisans from different parts of the world including India, many of whom had been brought there as captives because of their learning or proficiency in the arts. In such an environment, where the vast wealth of India in terms of material and human resources was adding to the prosperity of Afghanistan, Al-Biruni's attention was diverted more and more towards India and things Indian. Here he could learn directly from the Hindus as well as from their manuscripts which were available in abundance ... in his captivity he wrote *Tarikh al-Hind (Indica)* a treatise on the various aspects of India in the 10th and 11th centuries."



As for the Parsees, Al-Biruni gives exhaustive details not only of the religion of the Zoroastrians but also of the Jews, and the Sabians. The German scholar Edward Sachau, records that many residents of Khiva believed in *Ahura Mazda* and that in many cities fire temples existed in the time of Al-Biruni.

Rashid Irani, who left for Iran recently to attend the Al-Biruni birth millenary celebrations there, had his paper, "The causes that led to the appearance of learned men in Iran after the advent of Islam," read in Persian by Meher-

ban Bahmani. In the paper, Irani quotes Al-Biruni on the customs of the Zoroastrians of those times: "The first day (of the *Jashn-i-Faghkan*, the festival of lights) is known as *Nim Sardah* and the second as *Maian id Khara*. On these days, they assembled in the Fire-Temple, where food was served to them specially prepared from maize-flour, ghee (clarified butter) and sugar. Some of them calculated the *Nim Sardah* five days earlier, when it fell on the first day of the month of *Mihr* of the *Parsis*."

"Biruni gives the following account in his book about the

festival of Nao Ruz and of the mysterious and astonishing light which used to appear on a mountain in Fars, as well as about the Fire of Kalwazeh. He mentions: "Said Ibn Fazel says that on the top of the mountain Dema (in Fars), on every Nao Ruz night, flashes of lights appear, irrespective of the clear or cloudy condition of the weather. But the Fire of Kalwazeh was much more mysterious than the former, and it is hard to believe unless by direct perception. Abul Faraj Zanjani Hasib told me that I have seen this Fire. The year in which Azad-ud-Dawlah came to Baghdad (during the second-half of the fourth century A.D.), we went out to Kalwazeh. The Fire was like myriads of lighted candles and it appears on the night of Nao Ruz on the western bank of the Tigris, directly opposite Kalwazeh. Azad-ud-Dawlah posted his guards there to investigate the truth of the matter, lest the Magians (Zarathushtrians) may not be playing tricks upon him. The guards failed to detect the source of the Fire. The more that they pressed forward towards the Fire, the further it receded away from them, but when they withdrew away from it, the Fire approached nearer them."

In the field of science, Daruwala notes, "Al-Biruni discussed geometrical methods of trisecting plane angles and other problems which cannot be solved with ruler and compass alone. Later on they were known as Al-Biruni problems. The author simplified stereographic projection, described accurate methods of determining latitudes and longitudes and wrote on geodetic measurements. He discussed the question of the earth's rotation on its axis, but failed to reach a definite conclusion, possibly for want of adequate scientific data. He deduced the values experimentally for the specific gravity of eighteen precious stones and metals. His findings are remarkably accurate.

"He knew that the speed of light was immensely greater than that of sound. A thousand years ago he explained on hydrostatic principles the ascent of water in natural springs and artesian wells. As a keen observer of natural

THE SULTAN AND THE SCHOLAR

Al-Biruni made no secret of his dislike for Sultan Mahmud. Moving in the entourage of Mahmud he never spoke of him in the flattering terms customary in those days. Mahmud was merely "Amir Mahmud" for him.

Ali Akbar Dekhuda the eminent Persian Scholar has given an interesting legend in his treatise on Abu Raihan (Al-Biruni). According to *Tarikh-i-Negaristan* and *Nafais-ul-Funun*, when Al-Biruni and two other scholars entered Ghazni Sultan Mahmud gave them an audience. The courtiers while introducing Al-Biruni said that he (Al-Biruni) was so perfect in the science of astrology that nothing was hidden from him. Mahmud said that God alone was omniscient. Al-Biruni asked Mahmud to put him to the test so that he may be convinced. "I have taken a decision," said Mahmud. "Tell me what it is." The Sultan had decided by which gate he would leave the palace on that day, the palace having twelve gates.

Al-Biruni calmly took up his astrolabe and set to work. After some time he told Sultan Mahmud "I have worked out the reply." He wrote the reply on a piece of paper, sealed it and handed it over to the Sultan. Mahmud ordered that the wall of the palace facing him should be broken open for his exit. Then he triumphantly opened the sealed reply with a crushing look at Al-Biruni. But to Mahmud's shock and dismay, the sealed reply showed the astrologer could read the Sultan's mind like a book. An angered Mahmud ordered Al-Biruni be hurled down to death from the tower of the palace. Khwaja Husain Maymandi, the Vazir, saw to it before carrying out the royal order that a net was spread out over the ground. Al-Biruni thereby escaped with a minor fracture.

After a few days the Sultan expressed his regret at his hasty decision. Taking advantage of this opportunity the Vazir made a clean breast of it and was asked to bring the humiliated scholar before the king. Asked Mahmud, "If you claim

that nothing is hidden from you how was it that you could not foresee your predicament?" Without a word Al-Biruni produced the written forecast he had prepared before the first meeting with Mahmud. The crestfallen Sultan ordered Al-Biruni held in solitary confinement for six months. Only one slave was allowed to look after the prisoner.

It is said that once when the slave was passing through a field an astrologer stopped him and said, "If you give me two dirams I will tell you something interesting and worth your while." The coins exchanged hands and the astrologer said, "A good and noble man with whom you are connected is in distress but within three days he will be rid of his troubles, will be awarded the robe of honour and will be restored as a courtier. The slave ran to his master and imparted the good news. But Al-Biruni laughed at him and said, "It was stupid of you to listen to such nonsense and throw away two dirams."

Meanwhile, as the period of six months had expired, the Vazir tactfully steered the conversation on astrology to Al-Biruni and lamented that on both occasions he was surprisingly correct and yet was unfortunate enough to incur the wrath of the Sultan. Mahmud thereupon said, "On both occasions his predictions were against my opinion. Kings want that an opinion expressed before them should be in keeping with their known views. On that day if Al-Biruni had shown that at least one of his predictions had gone wrong, I would have rewarded him." Mahmud then released Al-Biruni and richly rewarded him. This happened within the period stipulated by the unknown astrologer. Out of professional curiosity Al-Biruni interviewed the man and found him ignorant of astrology. He then examined the man's horoscope and found that his stars were such that even if he predicted something apparently absurd and impossible it would come true.

Abridged and edited from J. Daruwala's paper on Al-Biruni.

(Continued on page 28, col. 3)

DO YOU WEAR THE SUDRA-KUSTI?

FEROZA PAYMASTER

The following eight interviewees were specially chosen to represent a cross-section of the community. They are not a random sampling and, therefore, deductions as to what per cent of the community as a whole wears or does not wear, knows or does not know the significance of the sudra and kusti cannot be drawn. In order to enlighten us as to the meaning of these sacred ornaments, Dastur K. S. Dabu offered the following explanation:

Sud-reh=path of benefit=path of purity. It reminds a man of his fight against evil, and our ancestors called it an armour of a soldier. On it there is a small pocket near the chest which has two implications—

1. the bag in which you fill merits (savab). 2. the bag of faith. It is known as Giroban—bag of faith, kisseh-e-kerfa—bag of righteousness. On the sudreh, there is the kusti which again is an emblem of a soldier's sword-belt. Thus Zarah-

thustra compared life with a battlefield—fighting against evil, handicaps and misery. These two are the uniform of a Mazdeyasni. It means that this was the uniform

worn by Kayanyan kings and priests even before Zarathustra. He too went through the Navjote ceremony as one of the Magi. In our confession or creed we are now known as Mazdeyasni Zarathustra. The four knots of the kusti, represent four commitments, 1. I shall worship God (Ahura Mazda). 2. I shall follow Zarathustra. 3. I shall fight against Evil. 4. I shall have full faith in God's justice.

Cotton is allowed for the sudreh, not silk. However this is a disputed point. Wool is supposed to represent the innocence of a lamb.

Navjote means enlisting a new recruit to the army fighting against evil—since he is a worshipper of God. But in Iran, it is called Navzad i.e. the second birth of a Soul undertaking responsibility—a spiritual birth. It admits the male or female to the religious fold as well as the community. As Samuel Laing wrote: "Grant me oh Ahura in thy ranks to stand, Valiant soldier, faithful to the end."



Zarir Cama, 26, Assistant Accountant, Mercantile Bank

"The sudra-kusti is the only tangible form of communication with my religion, which is after all very important to me. I wear it all the time because it means to me basically that I'm a Parsee. I've been told that it symbolically is a kind of shield against *Hari-man* (devil). But that in itself is intangible—it's purely symbolic. To an educated person it may not mean much, but it's a necessary symbol." The shape and size of the sudra says Zarir, "must conform to one's basic idea of a sudra. It shouldn't be something like a shirt."

When asked if the kusti is too expensive for the lower and middle income groups Zarir said he was not aware of the price. On being told it costs anywhere between Rs. 16 to Rs. 40 depending on the length and thickness, he remarked

"I wouldn't say it's expensive. It lasts for around two years and works out to less than Rs. 2 a month. Nothing can be done about it with rising costs. I think for the sudra you could use a coarser material than Malmal. Wouldn't make a difference. My father wore khaki sudras in World War II." However, he said he did not feel that instead of the standard kusti "a great, big, thick rope be tied around."

When Zarir had his Navjote ceremony performed he says he was "too young to feel it important." As to whether he would want his children to wear the sudra-kusti, he says "Definitely. I'd insist. Of course, by the time they grow up if I insist they wear it, they'd no doubt tell me to go to hell. I would feel slightly hurt. If I married a non-Parsi I'd want the children



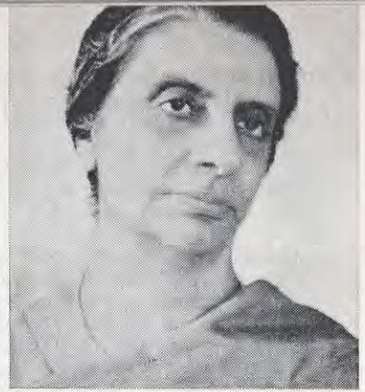
to be Parsis. But if they don't wear it, I'd feel less hurt. The influence of the mother is greater than that of the father... I'm a firm Zoroastrian. Being a Parsi means a lot to me."

Coomi Paymaster, 53, Housewife

"Of course I wear it all the time. Actually, more because of its association with the Zoroastrian religion and also because I'm habituated to wearing it. Quite often, the *sudra* is uncomfortable, especially with today's shorter saree blouses. I vaguely feel the *sudra-kusti* has some protective power—the thought of ages behind it that it is a sort of protecting armour against evil. It makes me feel to some extent at least that I'm obedient to the preservation and unity of Zoroastrians which, I think, is my duty. In the Dasturji's classes I attended, I learnt that the *sudra* is a reminder to keep our thoughts pure." Ms Paymaster

says she "very vaguely" recalls the Navjote ceremony. "Yet, it is an important event in one's life, for this is the time when we are admitted into our religion."

Regarding the shape and size of the *sudra*, Ms Paymaster says, "If a person is wearing a *sudra* he'd better wear the proper design as laid down by custom. The shape and size can change with the times. But the thought behind it is more important—keeping our words and deeds pure." Since "the impact is the thought," she feels that a change were it necessary would not make a difference. "The *Giroban* is a symbol to remind us that our good deeds are collected.



I would want my children to wear the *sudra-kusti* but if they don't it wouldn't upset me. It wouldn't be a catastrophe. Following the message of Zoroaster is more important."

Farok Bhaisa, 29, departmental head, Hardcastle Waud

"I don't think it's necessary to wear the *sudra-kusti* to prove I'm a Zoroastrian. I never wear it. I stopped wearing it, when I was about eighteen. I guess the *sudra-kusti* is a symbol of religion. If you believe, you don't need symbols. I've a faint idea of what it represents. It's not just a piece of cloth. To some it might represent faith, but to me it does not represent it well enough. I would want the Navjote ceremony to be performed for my children. They must have something to belong to. I would like them to wear the *sudra-kusti* to start with. Afterwards their religious life is up to them."

Regarding the shape, design and size of the *sudra*, Farok says "Anything will do. It means what it means. I don't feel the impact would be lessened if a material other than malmal is used." As for the name and meaning of the small pocket on the *sudra* he confesses, "I don't know. Not really." Nobody "in particular taught me about the *sudra* and *kusti*." He does not remember his Navjote ceremony "in detail. It was such a long time back. I don't know, but I don't think I felt it was an important event in my life. Even now, I don't think it's that important, except that this is the



ceremony which takes you into the religion."

Vira Patel 23, Staff, Hopefuls Baby Care Centre

"I do wear the *sudra-kusti* all the time. However, when I wear sarees the *sudra* is not worn fully. I wear it because we are made to wear it—because we are Parsees we have to wear it—it differentiates us from others. It doesn't mean anything to me, but I have been told that the *sudra* with the seven seams and front 'thing' represent purity. My granny taught me about the *sudra-kusti*, and we also learned in school at religious instruction classes. I would not force my children to wear the *sudra-kusti*, but I would like them to. I wouldn't feel offended if they didn't wear it. They must lead their own life. It's not a sin not to wear the *sudra-kusti*. Even if we don't wear it people will call us Parsees."

She feels "there should be a regular shape" for the *sudra*. "I think a *sudra* made of malmal has its significance. It can be differentiated from other clothes. No other clothing is made out of malmal. I would want my *sudra* to be made of malmal. Another material would lessen the impact of the *sudra* and *kusti*. The stages that the *kusti* has to go through in its making could not be done on any other material. These stages are important. I partly recall my Navjote ceremony. There are two important events: the Navjote and Wedding, when you undergo all the ceremonies. I would like to have the Navjote ceremony performed for my children." Vira feels "the *kusti* is expensive. Poor people



who know how to make the *kusti* should be given wool at a nominal cost so that they can earn a livelihood by selling *kustis*."

**Zubin Nadirshaw, 24, Export Executive,
Forbes Forbes Campbell**

"I've developed a kind of affection for the *sudra-kusti*," says Zubin. "I've been wearing it for such a long period of time, it's a kind of habit with me. Sometimes I don't wear it, but that's very seldom, if I don't I'd be uncomfortable. It's like a watch, you feel a need for it. I wouldn't feel totally lost without it. I don't think I've been told at all what the *sudra-kusti* represents, but I believe it stands for purity. I don't know how expensive the *kusti* is, but I believe it is expensive."

"Any shape or size for the *sudra* certainly will not do. It has to be a size which is comfortable and

neither too long nor too short, neither too broad nor too tight fitting. Certainly not wasted." Regarding the material used for the *sudra-kusti* Zubin says, "I guess I wouldn't be able to tell. The most comfortable material to my mind is malmal. All the same, I don't particularly think the impact would be lost if another similar material is used, and the thought behind it remains the same. On the other hand, I think the *kusti* should remain the *kusti*. The same kind of wool should be used. It should have the same texture, feel, length." The pocket on the *sudra* is called "the Ganyan



or something," says Zubin. As to what it represents, he asks, "Is it purity? I don't know."

Zubin would certainly want the Navjote ceremony performed for his children. "But it depends on the times and also on whether my wife wants it or not."

**Mani Meherhomji, 23, Secretary-cum-research
assistant, Personal and Productivity Service**

"It's like this. I wear a *kusti* most of the time because it doesn't come in my way—it's more a matter of habit than anything else. The *sudra* on the other hand I feel is very uncomfortable and impractical to wear outside, so I only wear it at home. I stopped wearing the *sudra* approximately three and a half years ago. You start growing up and I felt uncomfortable. I mean, why should I unnecessarily put myself into discomfort. When I first started learning my prayers, I was very enthusiastic. The Navjote was an important event in my life—it was something centered round me, and then, it lost all relevance. The Dasturji taught me about the *sudra-kusti* before my Navjote. I don't

think it represents anything. It's just a piece of cloth and rope."

"The *kusti* is certainly very expensive, especially for the poor and middle class. Yarn is expensive. Something should be done about it. The malmal, used for making the *sudra* is very hygienic since it absorbs the body's perspiration. Nothing can be better than that. However, a change in material for the *sudra-kusti* would not lessen its impact as it doesn't have an impact in the first place." The shape of the *sudra* doesn't matter either, she says though it's very loose and baggy. "Sudras before looked much better." If she were to have children Mani says she "wouldn't mind if they did not wear the *sudra-kusti*." As



to having a Navjote ceremony performed for her children, she says "If I marry a Parsi it will depend on him. If I marry outside, then never."

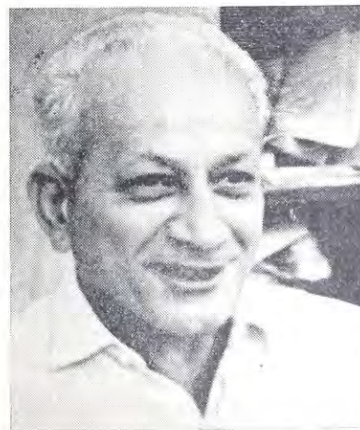
**Hoshang Parbhu, 56, Foreman, Paint Department,
Godrej & Boyce**

Parbhu says he wears the *sudra-kusti* "because I'm born a Parsi. It means something to me, a sort of religious 'thing' I'm born a Parsi and I want to continue that way. I would want my children to wear it, but I would not feel offended if they didn't, certainly not. I don't think it's a sin not to wear it."

"My mother taught me about the *sudra-kusti*. I don't remember anything of my Navjote ceremony, I'm now fifty-six, the Navjote was at the age of eight. It was and is an important event in life and I'd

like it to be performed for my children."

According to Parbhu "Malmal is rather convenient (material for a *sudra*)—its the thinnest and the best." Regarding the shape and size of the *sudra* he feels "the *gariyan* should be there, and there should be a regular shape. Good deeds and good thoughts collect in this pocket (*gariyan*)" The *kusti* is "definitely very expensive for the poor and middle class," says Parbhu. "What can be done about it is for the Panchayat and Dasturjis to decide."





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Single children do not hate their newly-born brothers or sisters; they feel a mixture of love and jealousy. The degree to which they feel either emotion depends directly on the parents. If a mother can assure the older child that the baby in no way displaces her affection for him, she will have gone a long way towards endearing the one to the other.

The jealousy takes many forms. Sometimes the older child openly attacks the baby or perhaps tolerates it unconcernedly for a few days and then suggests taking it back to the hospital. Other children simply resort to being a general nuisance, systematically destroying priceless heirlooms or reverting to earlier distress-signals, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. Again, some children do not allow their jealousy to show at all and either lose all interest in any activity and mope or they make a point of being affectionate to prove to themselves that they are not jealous.

It is only natural that they should feel jealous since the hours of attention formerly devoted solely to them have necessarily to be adjusted to include the new baby. The best way to deal with any of the more demonstrative forms of jealousy is to gently but firmly prevent the child from heaving a building-block at his little brother or sister and to impress upon the child that one understand these feelings but will not sympathize with the actions. To humiliate or punish one while consoling the other would only inspire further jealousies and desires to remove the latest family member. The less overt forms of jealousy need a little more careful handling since the cause of a child's subdued behaviour would not be immediately obvious. Parents who fondly observe, "Oh, my little daughter actually loves her baby brother—she even hugs him so hard that he cries," ought to understand that their daughter's motives are not entirely honorable.

SMOKE SIGNALS FROM THE FIRE WORSHIPPERS

GEETA DOCTOR

A vivid orange flame leaps out from the cover of both books. In the case of Perin Bharucha's novel, *The Fire Worshippers*, it is a sedate dignified flicker, while in Burjor K. Karanjia's *More of an Indian* the fire burns greedily and seems to engulf even the heroine in a vivid glow of orange. Though the primary aim of both covers is obviously to draw the attention of the prospective reader, it is not entirely a co-incidence that these authors should choose this particular symbol to illustrate their theme, for the underlying concern in both books has been to examine how much longer this flame will continue to burn. Or as Karanjia puts it in his best prophetic manner, "This fire that has burned for a thousand years may soon be quenched, these temples closed for the lack of both priests and worshippers. People are turning their hearts away from the light."

Perin Bharucha specifically cautions the reader that her book should be considered as a 'novel' and not as "a commentary on the Parsis of our time." In the face of this, one cannot help wondering whether one is in the wrong company in agreeing with the *Onlooker* critic who states that the book, "is so typically Parsi that it could have been written only by a Parsi—it gives a vivid picture of the different strata of Parsi society." In this context it is also interesting to consider what kind of audience Ms Bharucha and Karanjia had in mind when they wrote their books. A great deal of the background information that is covered in both the books is of the kind that would hardly come as a revelation to anyone, let alone Parsis, unless of course we sanction the belief that Parsis are so interested in their own selves that they do not mind a story being repeated *ad-infinitum*, as long as it concerns them. Both authors for example cannot resist repeating what must be the most retold story in the world, about the ancient Parsis landing on the Indian

coast and being received with a pitcher of milk, or *handa* as Ms Bharucha will have it. And then of course not content with a mere reference to it, both authors cannot help but embroider in the all too familiar details also. In the same way Karanjia describes the Navjote of his heroine with earnest fidelity without ever being able to actualize it in a meaningful manner to give it significance in itself, and certainly it has only a passing relevance to the story. He makes a self-conscious use of Parsi words so that they stand out of the text in italicized attention and are explained below, as for example *sudra* which one immediately learns is a 'sacred shirt' or *Kusti* which is given an even more detailed description. While these may be of some interest to non-Parsis ignorant of these quaint practices they cannot be of startling value to Parsis themselves. Or can it be that the authors have very sincerely tried to provide an "Everything you've always wanted to know about Parsis but were never interested enough to find out" kind of exposé with Karanjia looking after the philosophical angle and

Ms Bharucha dealing with the more human concerns as when her heroine attends a funeral (described in loving detail) and involuntarily starts thinking of necrophilia and the sub-human existence that the corpse-bearers have been forced to lead?

Perhaps the answer is that both the authors in their own ways have tried to gain an insight into the community to which they belong and the very honesty of their appraisal provides something of significance to anybody who reads the book. Inevitably, however, despite Ms Bharucha's qualifications, both books cannot but be of greater relevance to Parsis, for the question that is debated, is the ultimate question of the survival of the Parsi community. This may be a reason why the entire history and all the traditions dear to the Parsi mind are paraded and weighed against the demands of the future. The result of this libration is what gives a meaning to the story.

Certainly one cannot ignore the fact that but for this deeper motive underlying the two books, they could easily lapse into the sort of material that a particular kind of female is reputed to spend entire afternoons reading with moist eyes and palpitating heart. The blurb to Karanjia's book starts off, "Against the turbulent background of the linguistic disturbances of 1956, which almost tore Bombay apart, Shirin and Ashok find love." It is LOVE in large neon letters followed by the trouble without which all true lovers cannot be expected to live happily after. The affair between Shirin and Ashok is conducted stealthily at first with several recourses to Parsi places of worship and long conversations between the couple to fill up the awkward moments which in a Hindi film would have been utilised by a song and dance sequence.

Gradually the families become aware of the situation and much *paan* chewing fury is vented by the young man's father, though in the case of Ashok's mother, the



traditionally possessive Hindu mother is as gently uncomplaining as the cow itself which the devout Hindu is in the habit of referring to as his mother without so much as ascertaining the animal's feelings on the subject. Shirin's father on the other hand, being in a position to discuss Parsi theology does so with great passion and at great length to prove to his daughter that "love has blinded you to your duty".

While the events in the city are racing to a climax, Shirin and Ashok's passion for each other reach a similar pitch, and in a scene which the author stoically describes with the kind of realism that one would expect in a 'penny dreadful' the inevitable happens. Naturally the ayah discovers Shirin's 'condition'. But instead of the hysteria and panic that such a situation would normally create, the story with a little impetus from the twists in the sub-plot quite surprisingly resolves itself on account of this. Shirin's father rather suddenly sees the light and the young couple quietly get married at a registrar's office.

Nor is it possible in the case of this book to pretend that the quality of the writing is such as to mitigate the effects of the story. Particularly in the early parts, Karanjia writes in a forced descriptive style that is hard to accept. The scenes are as natural as a film set, with "mogra nestling in leafy nooks" and "the bleeding gash of sun in a cloud contused sky". When Shirin is saying her prayers we hear that "a drop of perspiration trickled down between her breasts and went coursing towards her navel". After following this enterprising feat on the part of a solitary drop of perspiration the reader is naturally eager to find out Ashok's response on beholding his fair Shirin for the first time but all we are told at that crucial moment is that "He swallowed saliva."

The conversation is forced and brittle, for his characters are seldom talking, but discussing things. The first time we hear Shirin talking to Ashok she is made to say, "My religion is a part of me. Unlike most Parsis I don't go to the *Atas Behram* on special days but as and when I feel like it. And I feel like it quite often. Today for

instance. Wish I could convey to you what the Sacred Fire means, what it does to us, to me..."

Compared to this, Ms Bharucha's novel seems to possess all the qualities that Karanjia's first effort lacks. There is a sophisticated briskness with which she begins the book with the description of a sudden effulgence in an evening in July when the monsoon clouds are brushed aside and the scene swept clean before the action begins. She draws in her characters with the same sure touch, so that in scene after scene we feel we are moving in a real world and not in one of abstractions. The language is also smooth and easy, whether it is Adi Rewasia, the neighbourhood tough talking to his friends or Rhoda talking to the suavely fascinating Khurshed. She introduces Parsi phrases with complete naturalness and with good effect in the conversation, providing a glossary for the uninitiated at the end. Ms Bharucha's facility is such that she can even re-tell without any embarrassment some of the oldest jokes that have been knocking around and weave them into her story to make it seem a part of her invention, as for example with her little dissertation on Parsi names or in the recounting of the 'buttocks' anecdote.

All of which only contributes to the sense of disappointment at the end when the plot is quickly boiled down and all the characters sacrificed in the mousse. Adi Rewasia murders his sister-in-law to get a motorbike and after providing some interesting moments for the astute inspector on the scene, crashes to his death. Rhoda who at the beginning of the book is a sensitive intelligent woman, attractive enough to catch the attention of the sophisticated, slightly bored Khurshedji, scion of a noble family, turns out to be a fairly standard type of witless female who will sacrifice all for love even after knowing that the man she loves is not worth it. As for Khurshedji, he is the biggest disappointment of all. Behind all that cultured veneer lurks a melancholy philanderer who regularly lures women into his bed, for which wickedness he is made to perish in an air crash. Only Nari, Rhoda's brother is happy, for, partly as a result of Rhoda's championing of

his cause, and partly as a result of Adi Rewasia's death, his parents reconcile themselves to the idea that their son will marry out of the community. One cannot help but wonder whether Portia Roy, the girl he wants to marry, being half-English and half-Indian will make it easier for her to be accepted, as also the fact that she is rich. Karanjia at least does not try to make any concessions: Ashok is a full blooded 'native' with a father who spits and belches.

Yet for all the evidence that can be brought against the books there is an equal amount that can be said in favour of them. If facility is the hallmark of Ms Bharucha, sincerity is that of Karanjia. In spite of all the painful awkwardness of the language and the situations, there is an inner core of such deep conviction and sincerity that we are able to forgive him his excesses. Karanjia appears to be sorting out a matter which affects him deeply and which he feels is of deep concern to all Parsis, the question of their survival. He does not pretend to have found a solution except in the compromise made by Shirin's father, and also in the clear sighted faith with which Shirin and Ashok face the future. After all the elevated emotions in the earlier part of the book, the end is surprisingly restrained. There is something touching in the scene where Shirin after the perfunctory formality at the registrar's office, feels free again in the rainswept atmosphere of Hanging Gardens. She shakes the raindrops from an overhanging branch over them, "There, that's better than rice," she cries. "Now we are truly blessed," and thinking of her unborn child she concludes, "never mind if her community didn't confer its label upon it. A label wasn't more important than what it stood for."

Ms Bharucha is more vehement in her criticism though one is not quite sure whether she is merely contending herself with criticizing particulars such as Parsi attitudes to charity, their indifference to the plight of the corpse-bearers, their sense of superiority and so on, rather than attacking a basic problem. In fact through Khurshedji she voices a casual opinion about

(Continued on page 26, col. 3)

ALL FOR LOVE

"Quite frankly," says Perin Bharucha of her book, *The Fire Worshipers* "I finished writing it and that was an end to the matter. I hardly remember the plot or the characters now!" It is at least seven years since she wrote the novel and her work as Personnel and Public Relations Officer at Dharamsi Moraji Chemicals leaves her little time for looking back.

"To the best of my knowledge, this is the first novel about the Parsis," says the author. She wrote it in this capacity because, "I'm a Parsi" and because, she says, "In my job I met a lot of foreigners and they were intrigued about the community and had a lot of garbled ideas. Basically my book is to inform people about our community." It is, therefore, with some pride that she says "It might come as a surprise, but it is now recommended reading for sociology and anthropology students of Monash University in Australia."

Speaking of the reactions to her book, Perin says, "It came under attack from certain quarters, certain unexpected quarters. Mostly from Parsis who were upset that somebody had written a book about the Parsis and about certain subjects which are taboo in the community. What they felt was that there are certainly things which are wrong about the community but why did we have to go and write about them?" The subjects which were particularly reprehensible she feels, were her handling of the issue of intermarriage and of the *dokhma* system of disposing of the dead. Perin feels that these are problems

which must be faced and that she was justified in bringing up the topics in her book.

"I'm very conservative," she says, adding with a laugh, "though you might never think so." This was in reference to an article of hers which examined the subject of whether marriage is obsolete. "It is not," she holds, "and won't ever be—at least I don't think so, as long we remain the same as we are now." Her views on marriage tie-in closely with those on women's lib: "It's a lot of bunk; most of the outward manifestations are rubbish. I agree with it upto a point." She believes Indian women do not have much need for the movement; the fact that Ms Gandhi is prime minister "makes things completely different." Perin says it is important that women should do something apart from sit at home with the housework. "Every woman should be able to feel satisfied with what she is doing. She should have some other interests, more than just the children. Her first duty is certainly to the children, but they must not become the be-all and end-all of her life. When they're out of the house what happens to her?" She feels it will soon be imperative for the community to open itself out because of in-breeding and certain social reasons. "The problem of intermarriage depends on two unrelated points. The first is that if a Parsi woman marries out of the community, her children are not accepted as Parsis. That's not fair. Why should a community draw this kind of idiotic distinction? Particularly in those cases where she has undergone a civil marriage it makes no sense. The second is that we are growing smaller in number. We are one of the only communities in India in which the women outnumber the men. The last census shows us as having 46,463 females as against 44,803 males. What are all those women going to do? They're not going to sit back and remain unmarried because of this imbalance. They would have to marry out."

"I'm very proud to be a Parsi," she notes. "I think for a community our size we've achieved a lot. We have a lot of good points—our sense of humour for instance."

However she maintains, the Zoroastrian religion means, "nothing at all" to her. "To me it makes very little sense as a religion; maybe it makes sense to a religious scholar. I don't wear a *sudra* and *kusti* except on those days when I feel obliged to go to the fire temple or to a funeral."

Perin has contributed off and on to various publications such as *The Onlooker Annual*, *The Hindustan Standard*, *Eve's Weekly* and the *Free Press Journal*. "There are two kinds of stories—serious articles and fiction stories." She writes mostly the former variety sometimes under an assumed name though she has published short stories. Her book was clearly written under the impetus of strong inspiration: "I can give you exact dates, I started on the first of August and finished on the fifteenth of December 1966. Of course it underwent a lot of re-writing, editing and changing but the main part was written at that time."

"Publishing is a hard business," Perin says. "I went to two printers. The first one was in Delhi. They were highly unethical. They told me, 'You put up the money and we'll print your book.' In Bombay they asked me to put up half the money. I was going to take the Bombay printer's offer because I felt I wouldn't have a choice." It was finally published by the Strand Book Club. The hard cover edition sold out by the end of 1968 but the paper-backs, though they have been printed have not yet been released by the publishers. "In this country," she says, "you either write for love—or not at all."

—Manjula Padmanabhan

SMOKE SIGNALS

(Continued from page 25)

the prospect ahead for the community, "Personally I give about two centuries more—after that pfft! There will be no such thing as a Parsi" and Rhoda is made to say more conclusively, "Zoroastrianism is no longer a faith to be lived, it's just an unique cultural heritage."

It is by striving to be a partial reflection of this unique heritage that both books rise above their particular limitations and become in their own way—unique. □



THE GREATER END

"At one time I didn't think the Parsi Community offered much scope for writing," says Burjor K. Karanjia. The soft spoken editor of *Filmfare* and the Chairman of the Film Finance Corporation has since then studied the community and religion with the depth of regard which made his work on *More of an Indian* possible.

"People thought I wrote it because my daughter married a Muslim boy—an Ismaili from Dares-Salaam, but that had nothing to do with it. In fact I wrote the book before she got married." A mild heart attack and a lot of free time made the book possible: "I first thought of the title. I felt it would be wonderful if one could write a book on such a subject."

Notwithstanding a gestation period of three years the novel may still have never seen print had it not been for a chance encounter with a publisher at a conference in Berlin. "I showed him the manuscript because I thought he would just read it and comment on it," says Karanjia. "The next time I spoke to him about it, he handed me the page proofs. I still wanted to make some changes but there's not much you can do at that stage and it had already been very well corrected. So I let it be. I'm still not very happy with it."

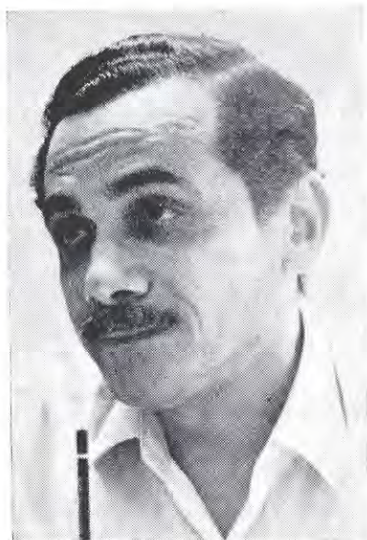
Karanjia has two books in print and several short stories to his credit. "This is my second novel," he says, "I tore the first one up before it was printed." His other book is a biography of Sir Rustom Masani. His long association with the eminent statesman and scholar began in 1943, the same time he determined to leave the I.C.S. "He was a great man," Karanjia says of Masani, and it is his deep admiration for the man which makes the author feel he could "come to grips with his subject" when he wrote the biography.

"Basically my first love is the short story." He has been writing these since his college days but it was some time before any were published. The first story to be printed was one called *The Puppet* which caught the attention of Mr. Mandy, former editor of *The*

Illustrated Weekly. "It was a very personal story," says the author, "and it was true." As a young boy Karanjia had lived a "very sheltered life" with his family. The story is about a meeting with a prostitute; "I suppose I was still rather naive. It upset me a great deal at the time. I wanted to help her so I told my mother that I wanted money for a movie. Then I gave that money to her but she just laughed at me. It left a very deep impression on me, I felt I had to write about it." He writes about "anything, funny things ... the short story is much more fascinating as an art form. Its scope is narrower than a novel so you can concentrate more on one subject, develop it more fully."

"I have to slave a lot while writing," he says. "I re-wrote *More of an Indian* three or four times and each time I changed it the worse it seemed to get. It just didn't sound right. I wrote the opening at least seven or eight times until it just came one day when I was taking a walk with my dog." The end of a novel can be as much of a surprise to the author as to a reader. "I had a definite plan in the beginning," he says, with a slightly bemused smile, "and then somewhere in the middle, particularly in the latter portion, things began to take control of themselves." Though the author feels completely at home writing in English because he "thinks in English," he feels this makes translation of the more succinct Gujarati phrases difficult.

One of the positive motivations for the choice of theme was the author's own strong feelings about the Parsi community. "I don't think of myself as a Parsi," he says though he feels there is much about the community to be admired. He feels being Parsi is basically a question of religion. For this reason the concept of marriage out of the community would always rankle in the hearts of scholarly and religious Parsis, epitomized by the father of the heroine in his novel. In the author's opinion, intermarriage with non-Parsis would be bound to "destroy the pristine purity of the religion," but that in



the long run "a country is greater than a religion. I feel it is a loss to religion but the other is the greater end." To illustrate his point he cites a case when out of three applicants for a post on the magazine staff, a Parsi boy was considered most suitable. After the committee had made its choice Karanjia felt he would like to make it clear that his decision had not been affected by the boy being from the same community as himself. Once he had brought attention to this possibility there was consternation among the other members even though there were no other Parsis on the staff to suggest that favoritism was likely. He feels this is a good example of how communalism can interfere with what would otherwise be simple issues.

"I'm very much of a recluse," says Karanjia, speaking of his work as the editor of *Filmfare*. He finds much more satisfaction with his work on the Film Finance Corporation though he considers that on the whole the Indian film world is "chaotic." He hopes to write about it in his next novel. "One wouldn't believe the kind of things that go on, it's like a kind of jungle. If I wrote about it, I wouldn't write it as a complete story, but as disconnected events, confused and dis-

joined, because that's how it is." Remarking on the current tendency among youth publications to focus their attention increasingly on film-stars, he says, "I don't know why they're doing it, the stars have so little to say."

"Many people have told me that my book would be good for the films, that it had cinematic potential. Someone even asked me if I would sell the film rights. But I didn't write it with the films in mind at all. For instance, the first scene takes place in a fire temple. No camera man could possibly go in to shoot that sequence." He feels that since it was about a very average, middle-class Parsi family it would have no relevance to anyone except Parsis. Though he knew that some felt he had brought in his heroine's pregnancy as a dramatic gimmick he feels, "I didn't think of it like that at all. Pregnancy is such a thing ... I wanted to bring out the beauty and pathos of it and also the fact that her father is not so upset about his daughter being pregnant and unmarried: what matters to him

is that she is pregnant by a Hindu." Echoing a remark made by Khushwant Singh, Karanjia feels that writers lead a poor life in India. "I didn't get anything out of my book. I haven't even seen the accounts." The book was printed in hard cover first and recently, in paperback. He has yet to get himself a copy of the pocket-book edition because the last time he had gone to buy one it was out of stock. "Frankly," he says, with a wry smile, "I don't want to go and check the sales in case it isn't going!"

In criticism of his novel Karanjia feels "the dramatic conflict between the girl's love on the one hand for her lover and on the other, for her father, has not been brought out as well as it might have by a better writer. The story isn't gripping, though I feel very deeply about it. The characters are not real enough, they don't live." He doesn't see himself as a major Indian novelist though he definitely expects to continue writing. "This is just a beginning," he says, "I have to learn a lot. I

would not like to be judged by one novel."

—Manjula Padmanabhan

Al-Biruni (Continued from page 19)

phenomena, he carefully marked the succession of changes in the light of the sky at dawn and dusk, and was thus the first accurate observer and describer of the Aodiagal Light. He calculated the radius and circumference of the earth with remarkable accuracy."

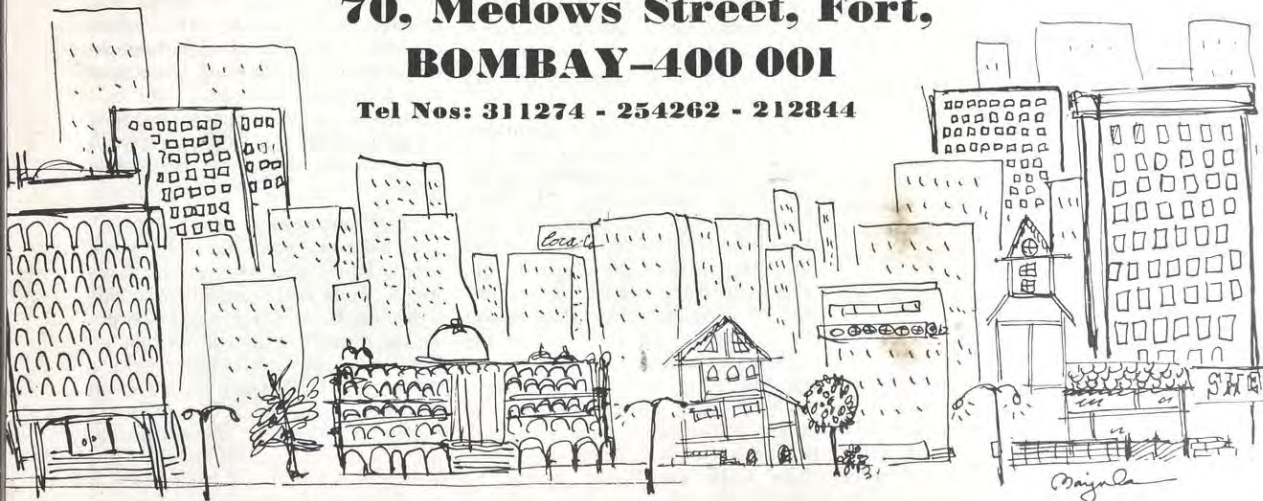
Dastur N. Minocher-Homji while referring to Al-Biruni's "encyclopedic genius," related how the seeker of knowledge on his death bed reminded a friend of his promise to tell him about the finer points of the Muslim inheritance law. "Now?" asked the bewildered visitor. "When else then," replied the scholar. The friend obliged and departed. Barely had he crossed the street when he learned that Al-Biruni had died. □

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