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Parsiāna

December 1973

CONTENTS

	Page No.
EDITOR'S COLUMN	2
LETTERS	5
FROM DELHI WITH LOVE by Feroza Paymaster	11
THE RELIGION OF THE GOOD LIFE ..	14
SHIAVAX'S SHOCK THERAPY by P. B. Warden	22
ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE ? ..	24
A WHIFF OF INCENSE by Manjula Padmanabhan	27
HOT BAIRUS AND CANNED COMEDY ... by Geeta Doctor	30

PARSIANA COVER depicting Zoroaster
and Ahriman
by Manjula Padmanabhan



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editor's column

People often wonder what policy a newspaper or magazine follows. For instance is *Parsiana* for or against *dhansak*. Unfortunately we can't take sides. Journalistic ethics and all that require us to be objective and truthful. As a result of which nobody loves us.

So one of our Associate Editors, Sanober Marker, discovered when she went to cover a meeting of the Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India held in Delhi on the 27th of January. After asking for and receiving permission from the Delhi hosts to attend the meeting, Ms Marker was turned out at the instigation of Nadir Mulla, President of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. She was further told that no information of what took place at the meeting would be made available to her either through individuals or a press release. Now when a person bars the press from a meeting or refuses to talk to the press, it usually implies there is something the person does not wish the public to know. The question arises as to what there was to hide. A cyclostyled circular distributed before the meeting listed the following general points for discussion: study of economical and social conditions of Parsis in India; regarding children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers; utilization of Parsi Panchayat Funds outside Bombay; running of co-operative stores by Anjumans; employment problems (and the) adoption bill.

As a decision on any of these subjects will affect Parsis should they not be informed as to how these resolutions are arrived at? When Ms Marker asked Mr. Mulla the reason for her ouster, his reply was that if the discussions in the meeting were reported, controversies would arise; so speakers would be guarded in their talks and free and frank expression of views hindered. The fault with this argument is that men of conviction should never be afraid to express their views in public or in private—their views in both cases being the same—and in the course of events welcome any opportunity to make their thoughts known so as to enlighten people.

Mr. B. K. Boman-Behram becomes the latest trustee to refuse an interview with *Parsiana*. We had approached him through his secretary as he was at home convalescing from an abdominal operation. His secretary after speaking to him conveyed the message that he could not give the interview. In our last issue Trustee (Dr.) A. F. Golwalla who accompanied Trustee S. R. Vakil into the Towers of Silence refused to talk to the press. As a result today both those who agree and disagree with Vakil's disclosures on the state of the *dokhmas*, claim Golwalla is on their side.

While the Bombay Trustees continue their time honoured policy of treating the press and the reading public with contempt, Shiavax Nargolwalla, President of the Delhi Parsi Panchayat spoke willingly and frankly to our Associate Editor Feroza Paymaster. And in our next issue we carry an interview with Behram Sidhwa, President of the Bangalore Anjuman and Ervad Nadirshah P. Unwalla, the Panthaky of the Fire Temple there. Why is it that trustees of places other than Bombay do not fear the Press? Could it be the climate?

Our lead article this month features an interview with John Hinnells who lectures in the Department of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester. Hinnells was on a one month visit to Bombay to collect material on the Parsis for a course on Zoroastrianism. During his first week he found the community "exactly as I expected it to be. And then I began to wonder. In England I thought it is a highly westernized community, that it is a very hospitable community, a very generous community, that it knew very little of its faith, but I felt it was *one* community. After being in Bombay I think I underestimated the generous nature of the community, the charitableness and so on, I think it is even more kind-hearted, more generous. Yes, it is westernized, very much so, and between us I have enjoyed very much going and hearing Mozart being played. You know,

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I've heard more Mozart being played by the Parsis than I have heard Indian music being played by the Parsis. But what I think I was wrong about is this idea of there being one community. I wonder if there is a polarization of the Parsi community into a very small rural community, the existence of which I wonder is really appreciated by Parsis in Bombay, I really wonder if Parsis in Bombay understand the problems faced by the Gujerat Parsis. I read a couple of articles, surveys and so on about the state of the communities in the rural areas. I am basing my judgement on very inadequate sources so I might be completely off. But it strikes me that there is this vast number of Parsis who are not highly urbanized, who are not highly westernized, who are not well off, who are suffering considerably. Some of the reports suggested that there was 65 per cent to 70 per cent of the community living below the Indian poverty line. How many Parsis in Bombay are aware of that? I gather that

something has been tried to alleviate their problems. So the first thing I have gone wrong on is this idea of there being one westernized community. The second thing which has struck me about the Parsis is, they are very forthright and very blunt. I respect them very much for their honesty and forthrightness. I sometimes feel saddened that they are so forthright with each other that there is a lot of acrimony and this is another thing in being one community. I feel there are some ways in which it is like a small industry or a closely knit English family, that there is a lot of quarrelling and as an outsider it seems to me to be very distressing that a community which is shrinking in numbers should be torn by divisions and strife."

Among the many customs of the Parsis, Hinnells was most impressed by our system for the disposal of the dead. "As a Westerner I could not understand why the Parsis like to dis-

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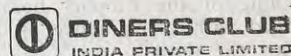
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pose their bodies at the Towers of Silence. Frankly it had seemed horrible. But when I went round—the Panchayat gave me permission—I was deeply moved by it, and I began to understand why people want to preserve it. I don't want to comment on whether they should be preserved, and about the number of vultures, I did not do a count of the vultures, and I did not go inside to see how many bodies there were. It was not until I walked around Doongerwadi that it struck me how morbid an English graveyard is in comparison. The almost jungle-like appearance of the (Doongerwadi) land; the fact that there are peacocks as well as vultures—I saw a squirrel running across. Everything seemed so peaceful, quiet and natural, that I confess that if I was a Parsi I would want to hang on to it if I could. I also went to the Hindu cremation grounds and that really shattered me completely. It was horrible after the Parsi Towers of Silence. I felt physically sick having been to the *ghats*.

Whether Zoroaster himself practised this form of disposal, Hinnells says he does not know "if there is any evidence for or against this. My own academic belief is that it was part of the general religious culture of Iran which quickly became part of the Zoroastrian faith. I think it was practised more by the Magi (a priestly class that performed all the religious functions in ancient Iran) in Western Iran, and as the Magi took over the teachings of the Prophet, so the teaching of the Prophet became merged with this practice of disposing the dead."

One reason why we chose to interview Hinnells before any of our own Parsi scholars is because, as an outsider he would be objective and have no axe to grind. Our scholars tend to shy away from answering questions which they fear would affect their standing. Also because they are often labelled as belonging to a particular school of thought as soon as we interview one, everybody feels we are taking sides or have sacrificed our integrity for monetary gain.

No column would be complete without mention of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. *Parsiana* fans (the few) will recall the sad history of our stormy relationship. The institute asked for a complimentary subscription, we said we need the money, they replied no deal, then a good Samaritan gave them a gift subscription. We wrote and sent a magazine. The magazine was returned with the following letter: "We are in receipt of your letter of November 13. We also note with regret the unwarranted comments made against the Institute in the October issue of the *Parsiana*. The Cama Oriental Institute was established 'for encouraging scholars to prosecute Oriental studies in general and Iranian studies in particular and for offering facilities by way of accommodation, etc., to the existing societies and institutions with which he (Mr. K. R. Cama) was connected.'

"The Institute is thus a research institute housing a Library mainly bearing on Zoroastrianism and containing rare manuscripts and scholarly books. It has never subscribed to any 'popular' Parsi literature (Journals, newspapers, novels, etc.). It was, therefore, on a matter of principle that we could not subscribe to your magazine and make an exception in your case. Even free literature sent to us, which is not useful for our purpose is disposed off from time to time.

"In the circumstances, we are returning herewith the October issue sent to us. In doing so, we take the opportunity to thank Mr. Merchant for his kind gesture in subscribing to your magazine on our behalf."

For Parsis who have tired of the Towers of Silence controversy we offer them another to vent their spleens on. The following letter by Jehangir Rattanshah of Ottawa on sherry appeared in one of the foreign papers and was brought to our attention by P. S. Bhiwandiwalla: "The interesting part of the story of sherry is that it did not start in Jerez, Spain, but in Shiraz, Persia. Herodotus stated that the Perses or the Persians (corruption of the word Parsis—who ruled the first world

empire for 300 years) grew the best grapes and brewed the finest wines. The Persian plateau is excellent for growing grapes. The wine made from grapes grown in Shiraz was called Shirazi wine. The Arabs were very fond of Shirazi wine and introduced the Persian grape growers into Spain. In one area of Spain the Shirazi grapes grew in abundance and the Arabs named the place 'Xeres', Arabic for Shiraz. The altitude and the soil of Jerez and Shiraz are similar. The Spaniards mispronounced it Jerez and eventually the British mispronounced all these into sherry wine.

"Spain's claim to the word sherry is dubious and historically incorrect because it was all started by the Parsis in ancient Persia and not the Spaniards. Further, the claim sounds like the Spanish kettle calling the British pot black."

And lastly even though nobody loves us, Dinshaw Irani of Empire Stores did voice concern about my physical condition. After seeing my sketch in the November issue of *Parsiana*, he wrote: "My dear Jehangir, are you so skinny and drum-stick like? Do take some body-building exercises."

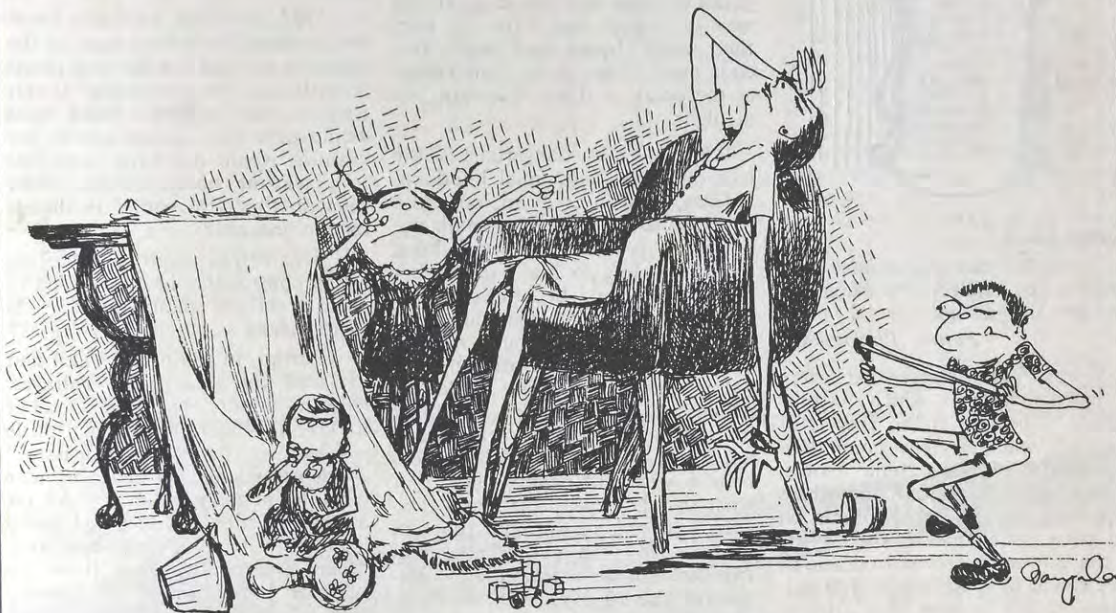
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'Future Shock'

Your last issue of *Parsiana* may suitably be called "Shiavaxana" for obvious reasons.

Pervez Phirozshaw

Shiavax Vakil states that there are some months in which vultures are not to be seen at the Towers of Silence, whereas the committee comprising of Dr. Nelie Noble, Mr. Khurshed C. Sheriar, and others have commented in this column on the same issue, that on their visits to the Towers on several occasions, they found at least 100 to 120 vultures. If the scarcity may arise in future, (at the moment, the argument does not hold any water) the disposal of the dead bodies could be carried out by 'Khurshed Negirashni' i.e. the sun rays. Precaution costs less than the cure, therefore the breeding of vultures must be encouraged without any delay. If the head *Nassesalar* pushed the dead bodies into the pit the very next day, he should be answerable. Vakil should endeavour to find out the reason and set the matter right. Vakil further writes that he would prefer to die in Surat, where vultures are in plenty, but in the book *Jashan Committee and the Parsi Community* written by him, he has categorically stated: "It is a matter of supreme indifference to me whether my body after the departure of the soul is consigned to the Towers of Silence or to the flames or the sea or anywhere else."

I agree with him that *Khandhias* deserve a sympathetic attitude but, according to the religious customs, they must undergo 'Nahan' before

they bow before *Ijayla Atash Padshah* (*Aderan* or *Atash Behram*).

He has further insulted the Parsi youth by saying they are not willing to go further than *Vikhroli* for jobs. Little does Vakil know that those days are over; the youth of today sets out to go all the way to *Karjat* and *Virar* to earn their daily bread and make two ends meet. They leave their homes at the break of dawn to return late at night.

What is most dangerous is the fact that if an individual builds an *Aderan*, and allows an out-caste to enter it, according to Vakil, nobody can prevent him from doing so. According to him the number of *Agiaries* could be reduced to 20 from the 44 being maintained at the moment. Religious minded Zoroastrians still take pride in providing funds to those *Aderans*, which are feared to be in danger for the lack of funds. Vakil need not worry about it. For the donors believe with unflinching faith, that whatever they spend for *Atash Padshah*, they get many more times in return. How can a true believer of *Iranshah* think such a thing? Regarding the 10 days' *Muktad* Ceremony that has been changed from 18 days, let me say in no uncertain terms that only "Rainidar Sahebs" are empowered to carry out the religious changes, no one else can, however learned he may be. Tomorrow, someone might say that the "Buoy Ceremony" could be switched to three times a day instead of five. If one cannot afford *Muktad* Ceremony for 18 days, he or she need not be dragged into it. I further strongly feel that the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat have every right to look after the welfare of the community, they are not to be simply concerned about the funds.

My only prayer to *Ahura Mazda* in this hour of crisis is to enlighten the community to stand united with a high virtuous head to sacrifice anything and everything for the cause of the religion and prove to be worthy successors of our forefathers. A word to the wise will suffice.

Ervad Pervez D. Mithaiwalla

Shiavax Vakil's attempt to explicate his stand on Doongerwadi, in your last issue, serves only to reveal his biased and inaccurate thinking. That this is so, can be proved by a systematic refutation, supported by evidence, of several of his statements.

"My grievance was that these bodies should have been kept on the outside *pavis* and not dumped inside immediately," he complains. If this were so, the epidemic Vakil fears would have raged years ago, as the vultures would not have been able to reach the bodies easily. Why then do they still gather in droves on the grounds?

This brings us to the question which controversy has succeeded in exciting in the public mind: Is there indeed a scarcity of vultures?

Earlier, in the press, Vakil had deplored the scarcity of vultures. Now he admits that from October to May 15, "there are enough birds—I have no doubt on that issue." These assertions lead me to wonder what he actually believes. As far as this question is concerned, there is no truth in Vakil's statement that "there are months when there are scarcely any vultures". To probe into this, a few interested Parsees regularly observed the Doongerwadi grounds during the monsoons. They ascertained that though the birds seemed scarcer, this was so only during heavy downpours. When it cleared up, on one occasion, about a hundred birds could be counted near a single Tower. These people submitted several suggestions for the better maintenance of the Towers and its surroundings to the Panchayat. Finding these reports to be of some merit, the Panchayat requested them to continue their work, by officially designating them as the Doongerwadi Advisory Committee. Though I am not a member of this Committee, I am acquainted with two of its members, whose views certainly cannot be dubbed biased.

According to the statistics of the Panchayat itself, the birds on the entire premises number between 250-300. Vakil tries to poke fun at this by saying, "If there are 250-300 vultures at Doongerwadi, and if three to four bodies are consigned

per day, they would live literally at a starvation level." Any knowledgeable man on the premises would tell you that this is not the only source of their food. After a certain time in the morning, they fly away and return only late in the afternoon. This indicates that they fly elsewhere in search of food.

Soon after Vakil made public his views, the remaining six trustees of the Panchayat made a statement in the press, completely dissociating themselves from his allegations. If what he had stated was factual, they would have stood by him. Dr. Golwalla, a man of high integrity, respected as a leading cardiologist of Bombay, who had been to the Towers with Mr. Vakil, says that there is no truth in Mr. Vakil's claims.

The *khandhias* and the *nassesalars* also firmly assert that there are large numbers of vultures, that

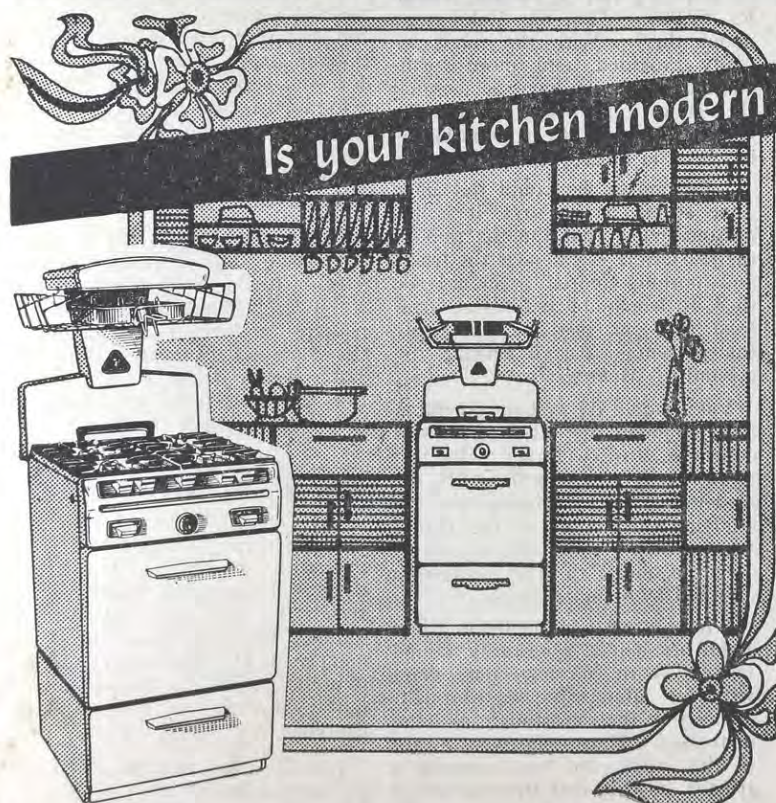
bodies are certainly not dumped immediately into the central well (*bhandar*), and that bodies are eaten to the bone by the birds. This evidence is supported by ornithologists who claim that vultures devour the corpse to the bone within a short span of time. We hear from the *nassesalars* that this process takes less than an hour. Any mature person can consider the statements of Dr. Golwalla and the *nassesalars*, together with that of ornithologists, as opposed to Vakil's assertions, and decide for himself where the truth lies.

About the *khandhias* and *nassesalars* Vakil states, "We treat them as harijans, untouchables. They do not go to functions". This is preposterous. Parsees in general have never ostracised them socially. Perhaps a microscopic segment of the community may react to them in this way, but even

about this, I have serious doubts.

Regarding the use of the Doongerwadi land Vakil explains, "A burial ground I have suggested for the simple reason that the lands are marked for a cemetery. Now as regards a crematorium, naturally the Parsis are highly emotional as they consider fire sacred. So it would be impossible to establish a crematorium, I have been against it frankly." It is difficult to imagine how an educated man like Vakil could advocate burial. Today, even western countries find this system very expensive. The strongest argument against burial is that land which could be more profitably utilised for housing, industrial or agricultural purposes, has to be reserved for cemeteries. To resort to burial is to turn the clock backwards.

If we use the Doongerwadi land for burial, after a certain time it will



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naturally be exhausted, and then the community will have to pay a fantastic price for land elsewhere. The Towers have no such limitations. More than two lakh bodies have been consigned to the Bombay Towers over the past 302 years. They can be used indefinitely, and will be.

Commenting on the paucity of priests, Vakil advises, "Give them adequate remuneration, provide educational facilities for their children. If priests are well provided, the second and third generation will continue to be priests." Why has Vakil not mentioned a word about the 'Scheme for the Amelioration of the Priestly Class' which was drawn up as far back as 1965, under the auspices of the Parsee Panchayat? Dasturji Hormazdiar Mirza, Dasturji Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa and Dr. Minocher Karkhanawalla studied the problems of the priests and formulated just such a scheme as Vakil calls for. In fact, Nanabhoy Hormusji donated one lakh of rupees towards it, and Jehangirji Cama, Rs. 50,000. What has Vakil done about this? With the funds already provided, and more forthcoming, he could have accelerated the slow implementation of the scheme, in the fifteen months he has been in office.

Of course, he could not have done so, if, as he says, it is his personal view that the function of the trustees is "to manage the trusts and nothing more." Should we then, to benefit by his advice in at least this one instance, substitute the present board of trustees by a band of 'Mehtajis'?

Vakil would do well to remember the judgment of his professional colleague, Justice Daver, who had ruled that the trustees should be the leaders of the community. On studying the history of the Parsee Panchayat, we come across remarkable instances of the leadership afforded by some trustees.

I have known of incidents when Vakil has helped generously, young Parsees, with his own purse and with his mind. He has brought comfort to the unfortunate and the distressed. Those who were aware of this, applauded his becoming a trustee, as they felt that he would do much to implement various plans for the welfare of the community.

But now it seems that Vakil considers it more important to ram his opinions down the throats of the Parsees. However much he may deny "attacking the system", it is obvious that he is only attempting to convince the undecided that he is advocating other methods of disposal because of present-day circumstances. When told that present-day conditions are not unfavourable to the Doongerwadi system, Vakil does not like it.

It is now apparent that Vakil has been against *dokhmenashini* even before he was elected a trustee. Here it is significant to add that as early as in 1970, he had asked the trustees to consider "an alternative mode for the disposal of the dead". Of course he did not disclose this in his election meetings, at one of which he loudly declared that ours was the best system, preferable to cremation, burial or consignment to the sea. He announced that he wholeheartedly believed in it. This lecture has been tape-recorded.

The majority of those who had voted for him from the 'E' register felt betrayed by his contradictory proclamations about the *dokhmas*. Not this alone; they felt that this portended further irresponsible acts on his part, which would breed dissension and bitterness within the community, and would mislead the uninformed.

Ninety members of the 'E' register forwarded an individually signed petition to the trustees, asking that Vakil resign. Such an occurrence is perhaps the first in the history of the Parsee Panchayat. Does not Vakil feel it to be a clear indication of the lack of confidence in him?

H. Variawa

Ebb Tide

Dr. Golwalla's silence perplexes me. The learned doctor should come out with the truth. If he saw what Vakil saw, he must say so. If not, he must say that Vakil is wrong. Merely signing the statement made by the other five trustees is not enough. The learned doctor must realize that in trying to please everyone, he pleases no one.

I am surprised that the Panchayat is wasting lakhs of rupees over building a wall when the money could be utilized for the benefit of

poor Parsis. This is all due to the wrong sentiment that non-Parsis should not see the dead bodies of Parsis. This injunction does not exist in our religion. This custom came into existence after we lost Iran to the Arabs.

I have suggested an alternative method of disposal that of '*Jaldeh*' (disposal in the sea). An authority from the *Vendidad Pargard* V paragraphs 15-20 says the sea never gets *riman*. It is only on the shores that pollution takes place. One-third of the world is earth and two-thirds the sea. It will not be polluted.

In Karachi, the vultures were shot down by the military. It is a trait of the vultures that if you kill one vulture, other vultures do not come to the spot for three months. In Calcutta, vultures were scared away by bombs thrown by the rioters and they did not appear for a month. Of course, Karachi, Bhavnagar, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay have a natural advantage: a sea shore—an ideal opportunity for '*jaldesh*'.

Vakil should have elaborated on his point concerning conversion. Both the Privy Council and High Court decided that children of a Parsi father are Parsis. Even in the chapter relating to Parsis in the Indian Act, a Parsi is defined as a person born of a Parsi father and Zoroastrians coming from Iran. From both the above judgements, it is stated that if a non-Zoroastrian prefers to follow the Zoroastrian religion, the Parsis cannot take any steps against nor object to it. They can only deny him the benefits of trusts that were created for Parsis.

Phirojshah S. Bhiwandiwalla

Mehtaji's Premises

I wish to draw attention to the plight of Mehtaji's premises at Doongerwadi where particulars of all the bodies that arrive at the Towers of Silence are recorded. The structure, which is made of stone, is white-washed after long intervals and the flooring also seems to be washed at that time only.

The furniture consisting of some broken chairs and uneven benches is seldom cleaned and does not seem to have received any coat of polish ever since it was first introduced. On every *Farvandin Roj* devout Parsis make our worthy priests squat on the floor to pray for the heavenly peace of the departed ones. The priests are made to sit on *satranji's* (mats) that must have been donated decades ago and I don't think have ever been washed. Devout Parsis who attend the ceremonies are made to sit on projections of the wall covered by flimsy *satranji's* which are in worse condition than the ones the priests sit on.

Mehtaji's premises occupy a lot of space but the usable carpet area is minimal. If some charitable Zoroastrian contractor breaks this place and rebuilds it, he will have the satisfaction of his own funeral being recorded in a more aesthetic and hygienic environment by his descendants.

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Objective

To-day's generation of Parsis knows pretty little about our Parsi religion, our old history, the meaning of our various ceremonies or rules laid down in the Gathas, the meaning of our prayers, etc. Of course, there are separate books on these different topics, but few are inclined to search or spend for them. Your magazine could thus fill a great need of informing the younger generation and all those who cannot read Gujarati, about our Zoroastrian History, Culture, Literature, etc. Only one thing should be borne in mind—the writing must be objective, not coloured by orthodoxy or the other extreme of liberalism. I am sure many Parsis would then like to subscribe—both those in India as also those abroad.

Ms Tehmi P. Sidhwa

You have induced me to subscribe to Parsiana in the hope that you will give us something wholesome and knowledgeable to read—something beautiful that can enlighten your readers of "that far-off purpose divine, to which the whole creation moves." That, I feel is the divine need and inquiry of the moment: Numerical facts and controversies may be left to statisticians and academicians.

I close with apologies for the above suggestions and an earnest request not to let perverse and sordid subjects creep into healthy homes through *Parsiana*.

Ms A. N. Bharucha

Before or After?

There is a crying need for urgent reforms as set out in Noshir Vajifdar's eminently sensible letter in your November issue. *Parsiana* can play a very important part in implementing much needed reforms and it is to be hoped that emphasis will continue to be put on this aspect in future issues.

Dina Nayar

Counterpoint

Mahyar Patel comes to the conclusion that in ancient Persia the Persians never expose the corpses

according to the system of *Dokhmenashini*. Patel further states that eminent scholars seem to agree with this view.

The *Vendidad*, which contains this mode of disposal, was definitely written before the Persians came into contact with the Medes. Making sweeping generalizations as Patel does, does not help us to arrive at the truth.

B. R. Pavri

'Vaepaya'

My friends and I are college going teenagers. We don't think you should poke such stupid mean fun at our Prophet. Why do you suggest he could have cursed someone to be a homosexual? How can he utter such an abuse? Please don't be hurtful in trying to be sophisticated. We're a pretty mod crowd but we don't dig your kind of faff.

Cowas D. Kavarana

'74 Calendar

Congratulations on your memorable calendar. The Parsee stalwarts who built Bombay and in whose eminence the reflection of the Parsee Community grew in the image of the cosmopolitan crowd have now been enshrined for our youth to whom they would be an ideal and who we pray imbibe their greatness.

Fali M. Vania

I have received the *Parsiana* 1974 Calendar and I liked it very much. The only fault I could find was that quite a number of the pictures were too faint and had they been in a darker colour would have looked better.

Prof. P. D. Sunavala

Pride fills me to see the pictures of the past famous (Parsi) personalities on each page of the calendar. Had a small paragraph on each one's life-history been included, it would have carried more value. However, this venture is appreciable and worthwhile.

S. J. Contractor

FROM DELHI WITH LOVE

Feroza Paymaster

"We are a small island surrounded by lots of other communities here in Delhi," says Shiavax Nargolwalla, President of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. There are approximately 750 to 1,000 Parsi families in the Capital most of whom are "well-settled and have good jobs or business.

"We have institutions such as the *Agiary*, *Aramgarh* and the Social Center which organizes debates, dramas and children's functions," Nargolwalla notes. Formerly there was only an old *Aramgarh* with land around. With Independence, the land was transferred to the Delhi Anjuman. This transfer took place, partly because the *Aramgarh* was there, and also through the good offices of Cooverji Bhabha and Burjor Sidhwa who were then working with the Government. On this land was built first the *Dharamsala* then the hall (Bhivandiwalla Hall) and finally the *Agiary*. It is a very valuable piece of land, right in the heart of Delhi. Before the *Agiary* was constructed, there was no place of community worship, and it was a badly felt need.

"Today, tremendous use is being made of it. To begin with, we had two priests. Then one died, and it was very difficult to find a replacement. A priest will work in Bombay and starve, but he will not come here. If he does come, he will feel home-sick and disappear."

The *Agiary* is well frequented, notes 'Sappy' Dinshaw, a trustee of the Anjuman and Editor of *Dipanjali*, a half-yearly journal of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman. "We have regular *jashans* for every *roj* which the members attend. Some come very regularly. With the absence of the second priest, we felt there was too much work for one priest. The only way to relieve him we thought would be for members of the Anjuman who are *navars* to offer their services. We wanted to draw up a panel of names. There are a couple of *navars* but there was no response. We advertised for a second priest and got one from Bombay.

"The majority of Parsis here are connected with private business firms as representatives or managers, and a small per cent work with the Government. Some have their own business. There are more middle-aged Parsis in Delhi than any others. Next come the young, and finally the older people. Parsis are well-known in Delhi. I don't think they miss Bombay. There are too many shortages there. It's good enough to go to Bombay for a holiday and meet everyone, but you always want to come back.

"Parsis here mix freely with members of other communities. When the youngsters go to school and college, they certainly mix with

their class-mates who belong to other communities and succeed in assimilating with them. My own son, for example, knows more non-Parsis than Parsis. There are quite a number of young Parsis in Delhi. An appreciable number of teenagers and quite a number in the 20-25 years age group. Some of them are working, others are at college. They take quite an active interest in the Anjuman's activities. For example, with the return of Dr. Junglewalla after a lapse of 10 years, religious lectures have been started again. Quite a number of young boys and girls attend them and ask intelligent questions. They don't take religion at face value. The whole



Nargolwalla conversing with the Shah

Anjuman can attend these lectures and quite a few of the elderly people of the community are also present. When the young come to the functions organised by the Anjuman, they take a great interest in meeting and greeting each other, but whether they are actively interested in the welfare and progress of the Anjuman, or not, it is difficult to gauge. It does seem to be lacking. It's true they do have their own problems—college life, exams, etcetera, so until they settle down in the community, one cannot really expect active interest from them.

"While Delhi Parsis are readily accepted by the other communities, dating with non-Parsis or within the community itself is not very common. The reason for this is that parents would not like it. There have been some cases of people marrying outside the community though. This is mainly due to the ratio of boys to girls not being proportionate. There are very few boys in the community. Also, the girls of the community are better educated than the boys, who start earning as soon as they can. This creates a gap between them. Then there is the accommodation and housing problem.

"If the trusts of the community could be used to have schemes for employment and could aid in solving the housing problem of the youngsters, it would be doing much. This problem has been brought before the Delhi Anjuman, but our actions here are restricted as we don't have the necessary funds. It could be more effectively tackled by the Parsi Panchayat which has a lot of money. The "Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India has discussed this problem to some extent."

"The idea for the Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans was born after the second Zoroastrian Congress had met in Bombay in '62-'63" says Nargolwalla. "It was felt each country should have a national federation and that there should be a World Federation under the United Nations. The Federation in India is representative of about 50 to 60 per cent of the Anjumans. A number of Anjumans have very few members, so it is not possible for them to join. Among the members of the

Federation are Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Kanpur, Ajmer, Agra, Gujarat, Surat, Navsari, Madras, Secunderabad, Bangalore and Nagpur. In these places Parsis are in sizeable numbers. The Federation holds three to four meetings a year, by rotation in Bombay, Delhi etcetera. Two to three years were spent in framing the constitution. The Delhi Anjuman took a leading part in this.

"The Parsi Panchayat had a suspicion that they would become a number two body if the Federation was formed, but we assured them it wouldn't happen, and today they are still a premier body. The Federation is still in the process of organizing itself; meeting people, exchanging ideas etcetera. An important item on the agenda, is the unemployment among educated Parsis. The housing problem and Parsis not wanting to leave Bombay also appear on the list. There have been cases of Parsis refusing to go out of Bombay for work. For example a Parsi owning a bakery in Surat wanted to teach Parsis the art of baking, so that they could start their business in the villages, but the response was poor.

"Most Parsis are born and brought up in Bombay. To them it is home. Given the opportunity to move out and start work outside, they are not willing to do so. They are more keen in taking up jobs with LIC or a bank rather than to leave the city. People feel, where can we go outside Bombay? Those who have left, have done well. Parsiana should encourage the young to go out of Bombay, to Madras, Secunderabad, Hyderabad, anywhere. Parsis must make up their minds whether they really prefer to stay in Bombay with white collar, ten to five jobs, going to the cinema in the evening, or whether they prefer to move on. Three hundred years ago Parsis were very different. They went wherever their work took them—to China, Hong Kong.

"The real problem of the Bombay Parsis and therefore of almost the entire Parsi population in India since 80 to 85 per cent of it lives in Bombay, is that they do not have a real Anjuman like ours in Delhi, or the one in Calcutta. Many blame them (the Trustees) for not being active, but being only



Dinshaw: 'You always want to come back.'

the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat funds and properties there is not much they can do. I personally feel that the Bombay Panchayat is a 'whipping boy' for everybody. People always criticize and say that it is composed of old fogeys, that the Panchayat is indifferent to the problems and requirements of the community. However, I feel that these opinions are one-sided. From what little I have seen, I can say that people like Nadir Mulla for example are very sincere and keen to help. They are not that orthodox. The Panchayat did try to do something about the housing problem. Mulla explained to me that when they tried to build charity houses at nominal costs, the municipality did not co-operate. They levied taxes etcetera as a result of which, even in the charity-blocks the rent is fairly high.

"The main handicap of the Parsi Panchayat Trustees is that they do not represent the community in a democratic way. They are only trustees of trusts and properties, and, therefore, they have to handle them according to the wishes of the original donors. The Trustees are given the money with specific directions and they have to use the funds accordingly.

"The system of elections is not very straight-forward, not direct. In Delhi, we have the members of the Anjuman. Every member is a voter. We have an annual

meeting, during which, names are proposed and the trustees elected. The Delhi Anjuman was the first Anjuman to recognize Women's Liberation. We introduced the convention that out of the 11 trustees, two should be women. Now we have three women. If the wife is a trustee, the husband cannot be and vice-versa. We have various committees for the social centre, *dharamsala*, etcetera. We work through committees, not through individuals. Even I, as President of the Anjuman, cannot act. The committees must decide and bring the matter to the Board and the Board decides. Then the funds are given to the committee, which does the needful. The Parsi Panchayat has an indirect and very complicated system of elections, by registering etcetera. This is not democratic. The younger Parsis have no say in the election. I believe that the Panchayat Trustees are elected for ten years. There are no office-bearers. All the Trustees are equal and the work is divided between them. They have a secretary. The Bombay Parsi Panchayat is completely different from Anjumans all over India. The criticism of the Panchayat is misplaced. They are bound by

rules and regulations of the trusts. For example there is little room for them to make changes like using Rs. 10 lakhs to help Parsi entrepreneurs.

"Many people say that the collection of funds is a very difficult task. My experience has been that collecting funds is the easiest thing if the appeal is made to small donors. We made an all-India appeal, and collected more than a lakh of rupees. What really is difficult to do, is to get people to work steadily, and this is another accusation against the Parsi Panchayat with which I do not agree: people just want to occupy the chair. Anybody who wants to become a Trustee is sentencing himself to life imprisonment.

While Bombay is engaged in a controversy over methods for disposing the dead, Nargolwalla notes that in Delhi "Not one feels the lack of the Towers of Silence. This is because the cemetery is as old as some of the oldest *dokhmas*. The closest *dokhmas* are those in Indore and Ajmer. But in spite of that, people meeting with accidents and death have always expressed the desire to be cremated here.

"Non-Parsis are allowed to come in for the funeral ceremony. For

example, when Mr. Masters passed on, many officers and army men as well as civilians who were non-Parsis attended. In Bombay after the rites, non-Parsis are not allowed to see the body. This is a stupid custom. We should be nationally integrated. We should not adopt any custom which militates against national integration. What harm is there if non-Parsis pay their respects to a dear departed friend? It's a last respect. Why should a good friend be prevented from paying it, and an absolute stranger, just because he is a Parsi, be allowed?

"We are a small island surrounded by lots of other communities here in Delhi. At least in Bombay, Parsis are a sizeable minority. If we were to adopt the same custom, we would be nowhere. Every year on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, our *Dasturji* goes with the priests of all the other communities, and recites prayers at Raj Ghat and Shantivana.

"The greatest asset of the Parsi community is its adaptability. Those in Pakistan owe allegiance to Pakistan, those in Canada to Canada. We must be loyal to our country and adapt to the town or village in which we live."

"QUALITY IS NEVER AN ACCIDENT — IT IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF INTELLIGENT EFFORT." —John Ruskin



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THE RELIG

PARSIANA: Who was Zoroaster?

HINNELLS: There is little or no strictly historical evidence regarding him. The Gathas are composed by one person. They are the outpourings of a very personal nature. I do not accept for one moment the arguments of some scholars that they are fictitious. Some people say that the Gathas are fictitious and that they are composed by the later Zoroastrian community, that Zoroaster never lived. This I find utterly implausible. The Gathas I think, linguistically, are the work of one person. They are the outpourings of one soul. They are very personal in style and if you disbelieve in the existence of Zoroaster then I think you've got to posit somebody who wrote the Gathas, and the name of the person who wrote the Gathas is Zoroaster, so you've only got to end up positing the Prophet, or his existence, anyway. Beyond the evidence of the hymns, I don't think we have got much reliable evidence. There are later traditions about him, some of them are I think probably reliable because they are not the sort of legend that people invent. For example he was said to have been murdered at an altar by invading hordes. I don't find anything implausible in that, you can't prove that it happened, but I don't see why it shouldn't happen. There are the struggles of his early life, trying to convert people to the faith. Some of the Gathas almost have a note of despair, almost, but not quite. This is not the sort of thing that later people attribute to the founder of their religion. He comes out of the Gathas to me as a man totally committed to his God. Absolutely convinced of his personal experience his personal vision of God, that God was somebody who was a real forcing power to him and he wanted to communicate his living experience to others. And yet he struggles to do this. He struggles to get his message over to Man. He has to fight and at times he almost gives up and he feels despair, and he feels despondent and he turns to God and pleads for help. He is a very real, emotional person. I can't construct



The life of Zoroaster is shrouded in ambiguity. His date of birth, his marital status, his physical appearance are all subjects of debate. Aside from the Gathas, which record Zoroaster's monologues with God, all other literature on the Prophet is of a different or disputed origin and time. It is only as archaeologists unearth new evidence from the ruins of ancient Iran that we can hope to get a clearer picture of Zoroaster and his times. John Hinnells lectures on Zoroastrianism in the Department of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester in England. In the following interview he tries to throw light on questions that puzzle and divide Zoroastrians today.

N OF THE GOOD LIFE

Photographs by
Farokh Reporter

anything of his life. But I think you get quite a feeling of the personality of the Prophet from the Gathas. I don't think we really need to go much beyond that, the fact that he is a live person, packed with emotion, with feeling, with his conviction of the presence of God, that is more than anyone can ask for, really, of any prophet.

PARSIANA: From most recent evidence, what is the closest you could place the birth of the Prophet?

HINNELLS: My own hunch, and I want to stress *hunch*, because I don't think you can prove it conclusively, is about 1,000 B.C., give or take a 100 years. The Greek writers date him about 6,000 B.C. The Greek traditions I think are late and I don't think are reliable. There are a number of middle-Persian Iranian texts which date him 258 years before Alexander and this would place Zoroaster in the sixth century before Christ. These and certain other Syrian, Christian and Armenian sources all place him in the same period, but they are all so late that again I distrust the evidence. The reason for my saying about a 1,000 B.C. is that the dialect in which they are composed dates from approximately 1,000 B.C. But even that evidence is vague because dialects can be preserved in one part of the country for much longer than they are in another part. In my own part of England, for example, the dialect which is spoken is much closer to Old English, and somebody coming from Mars in 2,000 years time, if he heard a tape-recording of my voice would probably date me about three or

four hundred years earlier than I really am because of this very old dialect. And of course it's possible that the Prophet could have been living in 6,000 B.C. They have preserved a dialect which we would date at a 1,000 B.C. and there is no way of proving or disproving that with the present evidence.

PARSIANA: Would you say he must have come from a rural background?

HINNELLS: Undoubtedly. There is nothing in the hymns to suggest anything like an empire. The social structure which is envisaged in the hymns is of a rural community, of a nomadic pastoral people, of a people herding cattle and so on.

PARSIANA: And do you think he was married, with children?

HINNELLS: Yes, the names of the children are mentioned, and one of the Gathas is usually interpreted as a marriage hymn for his daughter. Yes, I think he believed in marriage and practised it.

PARSIANA: Some Western writers have called Zoroaster a witch doctor and other unflattering names. What causes them to say this?

HINNELLS: Scholars thrive on new theories. It had to come. I don't think there is anything to justify it, whatever. It is a very, very dubious translation of certain texts and passages in the Gathas, a translation which I for one can't accept for one minute. There are other scholars who have also said that he was a great political schemer. That

just doesn't sound true to me for one instant. I don't believe and I don't respect either of those extreme theories. It is a purely imaginative interpretation and translation of the text and I don't think it should be taken seriously.

PARSIANA: What are the basic teachings of Zoroaster?

HINNELLS: You've got to start, I think, with his concept of God, with his conviction of his own personal experience and relationship with God. There was for Zoroaster, a God with whom he had intense personal communication, who filled Zoroaster with a conviction that there was the true, the righteous path of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, and he was determined to make Man commit himself either to right or to wrong. He was fed up of people sitting on the fence. His God was somebody who filled him with a terrific drive and passion for righteousness and he would go around and he would say 'It is no good sitting on the fence. You have got to commit yourself to God, you are either for him or against him, and you can't be in between.' There is the right path, there is the wrong path and you've got to know the difference, and you've got to do something about it, and then the consequences of this—there is the belief that if you don't practise the true and the right path then you go to hell or the abode of the worst existence. He didn't only feel that it was he himself who had this intense personal relationship with God, all men could. An intensely close relationship with God was not something unique to the Prophet. It was something which was not impossible for man. It was the essential duty of all men to attain to.

PARSIANA: Do you feel Zoroaster was the first prophet to say there was one God?

HINNELLS: That goes back to the dating problem in a sense. I'd give him a 1,000 B.C. Probably yes, but then you've got to go through dating certain passages of the *Upanishads*. I think that he was probably the first person to feel this intensely personal, passionate, close, intimate

There was for Zoroaster, a God with whom he had intense personal communication, who filled Zoroaster with a conviction that there was the true, the righteous path of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, and he was determined to make man commit himself either to right or to wrong.



He was a man of God, not a man of books.

relationship with God. I don't think even the Jewish prophets have this intense, passionate, personal, intimate relationship with God. Zoroaster thought of himself as a man and God was forever God. Zoroaster never presented himself as a God-man and yet he felt that he was very close to God. Although the Jewish prophets thought themselves close to God, I don't think any western commentators have really done justice to the intense personal relationship between Zoroaster and his God, which I think is closer than any of the Jewish prophets thought. But that also is a very subjective judgement.

PARSIANA: Now when Zoroaster says there is good and evil, did he envision one god who was good, and one god who was evil?

HINNELLS: I don't think that for Zoroaster anybody or anything could compare with the Lord that he experienced in a vision. If he believed there was an evil spirit in existence, that evil spirit could never compare with God—God was the source of all, the Creator of light and of darkness, of misfortune and fortune, the source of everything. He was the Beginning and the End. These are all phrases that he uses in the Gathas. And I don't think any evil spirit could be described in those terms. Ahura was above all, beyond all, was a All and yet that All was something you could relate to, no matter how much you had to struggle with an evil force that really was seeking to destroy all that was good.

PARSIANA: How did dualism come into the religion in the later stages?

HINNELLS: If I could answer that question I would deserve not a professorial chair, but a complete city! There are two possible explanations. One is that the idea of a good god and an evil devil was in existence before the time of Zoroaster. Some scholars have argued this. Some people would say that it is the later philosophical, intellectual attempt to rationalize the idea of evil in the Gathas. I am not a betting man and I don't know which I'd put my money on. I think probably the latter. Zoro-



aster was so caught up in his own personal relationship with God. He was not a philosopher. He was a man of God, not a man of books and he didn't sit down and work out logically, this concept of evil. Later philosophical people try to do that, and when they did that, that is how I think they arrived at the belief in two opposing gods. But that really is only an academic hunch. It is impossible to prove or disprove that it was a later development, not something that existed prior to the prophet.

PARSIANA: And how long do you think dualism continued as a belief among Zoroastrians?

HINNELLS: Dualism is an ambiguous term. People mean different things by it. The idea that there are two gods of equal power existing from eternity to eternity—I doubt if that has ever existed in any religion. All religious people must feel that God is ultimately more powerful. If by dualism you mean a belief in two opposing forces of Good and Evil but not necessarily equally powerful, then I would say it exists in many religious communities to this day.

PARSIANA: Where would you say Zoroaster was born?

HINNELLS: I have no reason to argue with the usual Western academic theory that he was born in North East Iran. I don't think there is a lot of evidence to prove it. I don't think there is any evidence, serious evidence, that he was born in the West. What hints there are suggest North East Iran. I think that is the most plausible explanation.

PARSIANA: Do you think there was a written language in his time?

HINNELLS: In that region, probably not. In some parts of the world, perhaps. Over in West Iran yes, but I doubt if there was in his area.

PARSIANA: What language must have been spoken in his area? Avesta?

HINNELLS: Well, we don't know what they called their language, we call the language of the Gathas, Gathic, but simply because it is the language. It is a variant of the Indo-European language family, from which Latin also comes, Sanskrit also comes and Greek comes as well. There must have been, at some time way back in ancient history, a family of tribes which we loosely call the Indo-Europeans, which scattered through into India and throughout Europe, and the language spoken by the Prophet is one off-shoot of this family of languages. But what he would call his own language, I don't know. Perhaps he didn't have a name for it himself.

PARSIANA: How old is the Avestan language? Is it a written or spoken language or both?

HINNELLS: The answer is that scholars don't really know. The Avesta itself, probably, was never written down until about 500 years after Christ. Just as the priests now learn the prayers off by heart, so they did then. Whether the texts were written down during that Achaemenid period, for example, before Alexander the Great, we don't know for sure. If I was put into a corner with a gun at my head and somebody said I'm gonna shoot you if you don't give me an answer, then I would say my hunch is that yes, there probably was a written form of the Avesta before Alexander the Great. But it's very difficult to prove it.

PARSIANA: What is the difference between the name Iran and Persia? Which is older?

HINNELLS: Iran is the proper one. Iran means the land of the Aryans. Persia means the land of Persis which is a region within Iran in the South West, around Persepolis. For many years the land of Iran has been ruled by the people from Persis, and so it is often called Persia, but the proper name, histori-

cally, is Iran and since the Shahanshah has made it the official title, that is the name by which it should be called.

PARSIANA: Who is a Parsi?

HINNELLS: A Parsi strictly means a Persian, one who comes from the region of Persia, and has settled in India.

PARSIANA: A region of Persia or the region of Phars?

HINNELLS: Yes, region of Phars, using Persia in its strict sense of South West Iran.

PARSIANA: Is Parsi a racial term or is it not?

HINNELLS: Parsi is a racial term, yes.

PARSIANA: Can a person convert to Zoroastrianism?

HINNELLS: That's a question for your Dasturs to answer. I am trying to maintain a sympathetic understanding. The Dasturs that I have spoken to have stressed that 'Zoroastrian' and 'Parsi' have become synonymous. Whether the community thinks they are synonymous is up to the community. Historically they have been different. What they mean now must be for the community itself to decide, not for me as an outsider to pass judgement on.

PARSIANA: But there are Irani Zoroastrians also. So it is not just Parsis who are Zoroastrians?

HINNELLS: Yes; there are Zoroastrians in Iran. There are some Zoroastrians in London. There are some Zoroastrians in London who are born in London, who think of themselves as English, who have

I do not see or understand how the community could have grown unless he set out to convert people to his faith.

never been outside England, who speak far better English than myself. Their English is King's English or Oxford English and I sound a right country yokel compared to some of them in the London community. But they certainly consider themselves followers of the Prophet and very devout followers of the Prophet. Yet to call them Parsis or Persians seems an odd term to them.

PARSIANA: Would you call them English?

HINNELLS: They hold English passports.

PARSIANA: To what age did Zoroaster live?

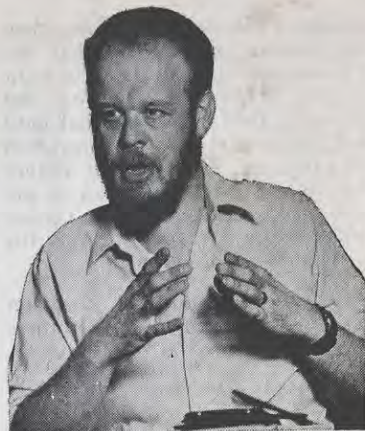
HINNELLS: Tradition says that he lived until he was 77 and I see no reason for disbelieving that tradition, although you can't prove it.

PARSIANA: And how do you picture him physically?

HINNELLS: I have no idea. Most Parsis believe that one of the reliefs in Iran depicts the Prophet. Most western scholars believe that relief depicts the God Mitra. If that is not the Prophet, then we don't really have any definite evidence as to what he looked like. We have later traditions, some of which aren't all that complimentary about his physical appearance.

PARSIANA: But the people in that district, how would they have looked? Were they semetic or mongloid, tall or short, dark or light?

HINNELLS: It is very difficult to give a definite answer because when you dig up a skeleton, it doesn't have a label on it saying from which tribe it came. Not semetic, not mongloid; they were, generally



speaking, what we would call medium height, medium build, very tough people. They had to be tough to survive in the environment in which they did; they were probably fair skinned, and a healthy, strong, possibly war-like people in appearance.

PARSIANA: You think Zoroaster must have started converting the people in his area?

HINNELLS: That's a loaded question!

PARSIANA: In the sense that, did he leave and go somewhere else and start converting people to Zoroastrianism or did he start in his own village? What was the reception when he started?

HINNELLS: In the East there are some Parsis who believe that conversion has never been a part of the Zoroastrian faith. I cannot personally, from the outside, imagine that anyone with the burning passion and conviction of the Prophet could have kept his faith to himself. I do not see or understand how the community could have grown unless he set out to convert people to his faith. He was so full of passion, I do not see how he could have kept it to himself.

PARSIANA: Do you think he met with much resistance?

HINNELLS: The Gathas reflect a lot of opposition. There are prayers asking God, 'Where can I turn to for help? Where can I turn to for aid?' Notes, as I said, almost of despair, and yet though the hymn starts off in despair it very quickly turns into an affirmation of faith, that God will see him through. But

He would go around and he would say 'It is no good sitting on the fence. You have got to commit yourself to God, you are either for him or against him, and you can't be in between.'



obviously there were moments when the Prophet underwent what the Christians would call the dark night of the Soul—before he saw the vision of God. He despaired until his faith in God gave him conviction to carry on. That despair cannot be explained without opposition and there are passages in the Gathas which express fear for the very life and safety of the Prophet.

PARSIANA: Do you think Zoroaster wore a *sudra* and *kusti*? Is there any mention of it in the Gathas?

HINNELLS: There is—I'm speaking from memory—no mention of it. My guess is that something like at least the *kusti* was worn, for the *kusti* and the sacred cord worn by Brahmins go back to a common Aryan origin. It could be that one got it from the other later on, but it also could be that they came from a common origin, in which case it would have been customary to have worn it at the time of the Prophet. My own personal belief is that it is a very ancient part (of the religion) and therefore the Prophet may well have worn it, but I can't prove it.

PARSIANA: What do you think it signifies?

HINNELLS: Signifies then or now? Because I am sure that Zoroastrianism, like Christianity, like any other religion, has changed over the years, and it must change if it's to be meaningful and so by saying that the interpretation has changed, I don't intend any disrespect. I would imagine that it is the badge of the true believer, and for Hindus perhaps the true believer has come to mean the priest. As for Zoroastrians they retain more of the original tradition. It is difficult to say what's in it then because you have no explanation. I'm only guessing and it is no more than a guess. But the later texts stress that it is a symbol of the honour of God, that it is the sword belt of the faith. There are very involved texts explaining the symbols—and particularly of the *kusti*. About the 72 threads in one, and the 72 chapters of the Yasna; of the six *ghambars*, and the 12 months of the year; the hollow inside the thread which is said to symbolize the space between this world and the next world. It is a very involved symbolism, throughout the ages,

and that symbolism goes back to at least the medieval period.

PARSIANA: Did Zoroaster believe in an after-life?

HINNELLS: Yes. Some people say that he believed in rebirth or reincarnation. That depends on the translation of two particular texts. My own translation of those texts would not fit in with the idea of rebirth. I think that he believed in a heaven and a hell and that he believed in judgement by one's own actions—and that you cross the bridge of judgement to a heaven or to a hell. I think that it is not possible to prove beyond all doubt that he also looked forward to the end or the renovation of the world. But I don't suppose rebirth is an impossible interpretation. I am just thinking it is an unlikely interpretation of the texts.

PARSIANA: Is this heaven and hell permanent? For all time?

HINNELLS: In the medieval texts it is not for all time. In the Gathas the text is ambiguous; I don't think it was for all time for the Prophet. I think he did look forward to a resurrection of the dead. But there



I think that he believed in a heaven and a hell and that he believed in judgement by one's own actions.

are western scholars who would disagree with me on this.

PARSIANA: Which other religions did you study besides Islam and Christianity?

HINNELLS: Hinduism.

PARSIANA: What is there in Zoroastrianism which the other

religions don't have? Is there any one specific thing?

HINNELLS: It's difficult to put it down to one specific thing. The distinguishing feature between Zoroastrianism and Christianity is the importance of individual responsibility. That you are ultimately responsible for your own actions. You are judged just by yourself in Zoroastrianism, whereas in Christianity there is the Saviour. For a Zoroastrian it is not possible that one man can die to save all and there is this great emphasis on the responsibility of every man in this life and in this world, to carve out his own ultimate destiny. Another feature which I think distinguishes Zoroastrianism is the terrific respect for this life. There is a great stress on the importance of the spiritual life, but there is also the great respect and stress on the development of the material life as well. This is God's world and man has a moral and a religious responsibility to make the best of this world; so that being a monk, being an ascetic, being celibate, these are not virtues for the Zoroastrian. Whereas in Christianity, Hinduism and Islam—Islam to a lesser extent—these are considered virtues. I greatly respect Zoroastrianism for what seems to me to be a very wholesome attitude to life and the way to live life. Parsi charity, benevolence, social concern and educational concern goes after this fundamental religious attitude to the world and I think one of the things the world has come to respect Parsis for is something which has grown out of their religious attitude to the world. I think that is a second distinctive feature.

PARSIANA: Between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism?

HINNELLS: Well, it is this attitude to this world which sharply distinguishes it from Hinduism. It is difficult to pin down differences between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism because there are so many forms of Hinduism. As soon as I think of one comparison I can straightaway think of a Hindu school which believes the opposite.

PARSIANA: What is the difference between Zoroastrianism and Islam?

HINNELLS: I think the outstanding difference would be the idea of free will. That in Islam Moham-



I think if you just stopped any of the Achaemenian Kings on the streets of Persepolis and said 'Excuse me sir, are you a Zoroastrian?' he wouldn't quite have known what you meant.

PARSIANA: You spoke of a purifying fire. Is it in the sense that if he would have put something in the fire, it would destroy and purify it?

HINNELLS: That is not what he speaks of. He speaks of the fire purifying the individual at the Judgement. That all men will be purified through the fire. Zoroaster is concerned more with Man's own religious relationship with God than with anything else. And so that is the context in which he sees the fire.

PARSIANA: When did you first become aware of Zoroastrianism or Parsis?

HINNELLS: I was originally a New Testament specialist and many people said that there was Zoroastrian influence on the New Testament, but nobody had ever written a book about it. There were studies of Zoroastrianism in the Old Testament and there were odd short studies on Zoroaster in the New Testament, so when I decided I was going to do research, I was going to do research on this. But then when I started studying Zoroastrianism I got so interested in it that I never got around to the New Testament, I just stayed in Zoroastrian studies.

PARSIANA: Do you find that most Parsis are aware of their religion?

HINNELLS: What has struck me, about most Parsis, the lay people, is that they say their faith is a very simple one, not one involving compulsory attendance at temples, or necessary rites for the ordinary person. It is the religion of good

thoughts, good words, good deeds. It is something that you live out in your daily life and which you are responsible for. They are not generally aware of the medieval developments or doctrines. They are not aware of the history of their faith. But they know what is expected of them in their daily life, yes.

PARSIANA: If a Zoroastrian or a Parsi knew nothing of his religion, aside from what he had been brought up with, where should he start to learn, what is the essential thing that he should know?

HINNELLS: The teachings of the Prophet.

PARSIANA: And where would he get this from?

HINNELLS: I have to confess that I don't think there is a decent book in English on the Teaching of the Prophet written by western scholars. I can't say much on books written by Parsis because in England we don't hear of the books written by Parsis much, and one of my purposes in coming here is to know what is written by the Parsi community. From the Western point of view the best book written on the teaching of the Prophet is in German, and it is in very difficult German and I wish somebody would translate it. Books written in English on the teaching of the Prophet

don't think are very good. I think on the idea of the Avesta, the history of the Zoroastrian church, and for an explanation of some of the rituals, one book stands out better than any other and that is a book by Jaques Duchesne Guillemin, which is in French. Dr. JamaspAsa is translating it into English, and it should be available soon. It is well translated and the best book written by a European in print at the moment about Zoroastrianism.

med's experience of God led him to stress that God was Sovereign and Lord over all things. And particularly in the medieval literature this was developed to mean that God pre-destined all your actions whereas for Zoroaster his own experience of God led him to stress Man's free will and Man's responsibility to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. The idea of free will and of Man carving out his own future has been a major aspect of Zoroastrian history. There have been some schools of Zoroastrian thought which have believed that man's future is pre-determined, but by and large this has never entered the main stream of orthodox Zoroastrian thought.

PARSIANA: Is fire mentioned by the Prophet in the Gathas?

HINNELLS: Frequently. He pays reverence to it. It is the focal point of much fierce religious devotion. He speaks also of the Fire of Judgement and the purifying fire is obviously central to the Prophet's religious belief.

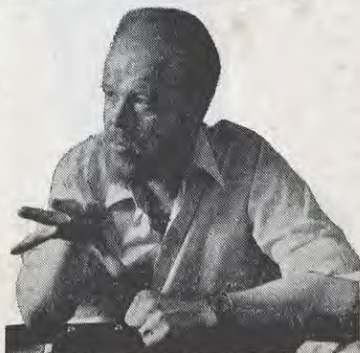
PARSIANA: You think he worshipped fire?

HINNELLS: No! He worshipped God.

PARSIANA: And fire was a symbol of God?

HINNELLS: If he had ever used the word symbol I would imagine he would have considered it perhaps to be a suitable expression. It is the point at which he quite naturally expressed his religious devotion to God through fire. It is the focal point of his religious practice but it is not the focal point of his religious belief.

But for very many, Zoroastrianism was a dead letter, and although there was a lot of persecution, and a lot of bloodshed, many people did convert to Islam because it was a living faith.



PARSIANA: After Zoroaster died, what happened to his religion? Did it continue to flourish?

HINNELLS: It must have done, otherwise it wouldn't be alive today. But we have no texts, no archaeological records, which help us to establish the history of the religion with confidence until about the third century after Christ. Gradually, bit by bit, from archaeology and studies of texts, scholars are putting together a jig-saw picture of the facts. But there are many pieces of the jig-saw missing, and of course when you've got pieces of the jig-saw missing, you can always put some of the other pieces in the wrong place. But I do think that we are constructing gradually a picture of the history of the Zoroastrian faith. The picture emerges of the teaching of the Prophet gradually moving from community to community, getting known more in the West, which was the centre of the Iranian empire, and from Iran spreading to other nations and gradually becoming so popular, that by the third century after Christ, it became formally established as the state church of Iran. The old picture was that the Zoroastrian faith was preserved only by a few in one small part of Iran and then suddenly in the third century after Christ those people came to power and implanted it as the formal orthodox church of the whole country. My own belief is that the archaeological finds that come to light show this to be a wrong interpretation and that it was a much more gradual process. What happened in the third century was the formal state recognition of the nation-wide popularity of the Prophet's teachings.



There is a saying in Christianity that the best fertilizer for the Christian church is the blood of its bishops.

PARSIANA: Who had been the ruler at that time?

HINNELLS: Ardeshir and Shapur.

PARSIANA: In which reign is this?

HINNELLS: This was the Sassanian Empire when it became the official state church. There was a high priest by the name of Kartir who was obviously a great diplomat as well as a priest, and he managed to get the establishment of the church as the state religion.

PARSIANA: Would you say Cyrus the Great was a Zoroastrian?

HINNELLS: There is little evidence, but I think it is highly improbable. I think if you just stopped any of the Achaemenian Kings on the streets of Persepolis and said 'Excuse me sir, are you a Zoroastrian?' he wouldn't quite have known what you meant. Zoroastrianism as an 'ism' I don't think really existed until the Sassanian period. What I think was happening is that the religion of Iran was gradually being modified and modified, as the teachings of the Prophet gained power. So the principles which the Prophet taught came to influence the religion even of the King. But whether he would have then said he was a follower of the Prophet, I doubt.

PARSIANA: What was the religion of Iran if it wasn't Zoroastrianism? What would Cyrus have believed in?

HINNELLS: He would have believed in the religion, I think, of the Aryan people. Mixed to quite an extent with the religion of the Babylonians. When he took over Babylon, he didn't present himself as the conqueror of Babylon but as the true and natural king as crowned by the Babylonian God—Madruk—and in this I think he was influenced by the culture which he ruled. I think he was very tole-

Any Parsi who thinks that his faith is not facing a terrific threat, is just blind.



rant. I don't think that he believed in one God, I think he believed there were many gods. I think that when he was in Babylon it was his religious responsibility to pay respect and veneration to Madruk. When he was in Iran I guess he felt it was his religious duty to pay veneration to the gods of Iran.

PARSIANA: Was there no name for the religion Cyrus believed in?

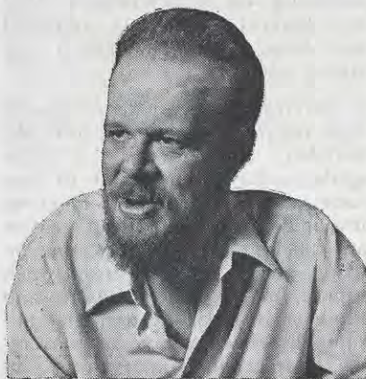
HINNELLS: I don't know. Some people say they were Mazdayasnians, believers in the worship of Mazda. Mazda is a god who existed before the time of the Prophet. Yes, I think Mazda, was venerated before Zoroaster. Very few prophets introduced any new gods. What they did was to reform or to give new life to the religion which existed. And I think this is the way in which the Prophet worked. So probably Cyrus and the others worshipped Mazda. In the Gathas, Mazda means wise or wisdom and Ahura is the Lord, the Lord of wisdom, or the Wise Lord. It never occurs as one word, it occurs as two separate words and they don't always go side by side. In fact it's striking how rarely they do coincide. They are usually apart. He prays to the Lord; he prays to Wisdom. It is in the later texts that the words Ahura Mazda coalesce. On the inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes you have Ahura Mazda. In the medieval texts the two become one, Hormazd.

PARSIANA: After the third or fourth

century when Zoroastrianism became the state religion, what happened?

HINNELLS: I can't help feeling that what happened to Zoroastrianism in that period is just what is happening to the Church of England now. Two things happened to it—I don't think they were necessarily related—there was a very intellectual movement with a lot of philosophical reflection on the nature of Zoroastrianism; and there was also a very conservative tradition of remembering the texts. One can't help but comment how faithfully many of the ideas in the texts were preserved. But a third thing happened to it and that was, what Richard Fry, in his book 'The Heritage of Persia', has called the 'decaying ritualism of the state church'. The King was the head of the church. Allegiance to the King meant following certain religious rites, whether you believed it or not, you did it because it was the right thing and if you didn't, you were a traitor to the nation. Religion became tied up with politics, it no longer mattered what was the right thing to believe. What mattered was if you did the right ceremonies—that you could believe anything, providing you adhered to the formal rituals of the state. And I don't think there is any surer way to kill a religion than to tie it up with politics in the state. This is one of the things that happened to the Zoroastrian church in the Sassanian period. By the time Islam came on the scene, the spirit of the Prophet had died out in much of Iran. It lived of course in a few, and there were of course very devout people who, presumably, had a very live and living faith, otherwise they would never have set forward as the pilgrim fathers of the Faith to India. But for very many, Zoroastrianism was a dead letter, and although there was a lot of persecution, and a lot of bloodshed, many people did convert to Islam because it was a living faith. Because it was a dynamic faith, because there was conviction to it. There was life to it. There was vitality to it, and compared with the ritualism of the state church, I think it seemed to a lot of people like a breath of fresh air. But of course there were others—to whom Zoroastrianism was still a living faith and if there hadn't been

those pilgrim fathers, then the Parsi community in Bombay would not have existed. But you can't explain the success of Islam in Iran just by persecution, because some times persecution is a healthy thing for a religion. After all I think one of the things that made Christianity so successful is the vicious persecution it suffered from. Because it really made people think about it, and people came to respect it for it's martyrs and there is a saying in Christianity that the best fertilizer for the Christian church is the blood of its bishops—I am not saying that's why I gave over my own Christian ministry! But it really did well for Christianity in some ways. I mean I would never desire to be a martyr, I would not enjoy the experience, but you can't explain the success of Islam just by persecution. Because if Zoroas-



If Mrs. Gandhi were to declare that India should be a Zoroastrian nation, then I think that would be the ultimate threat to the Zoroastrian community.

trianism had been a really live and living faith, throughout all Iran, there would have been the martyrs, there would have been the pockets of resistance, and Islam could not have lasted unless it also had something which did in fact appeal to people. People who had converted just by the sword would have gone back to Zoroastrianism as soon as the sword disappeared, unless there was something about Islam which kept them in the fold.

PARSIANA: Do you feel that what happened to the Zoroastrian religion then, with the spread of Islam, is happening to Zoroastrianism in Bombay today?

HINNELLS: It is much more simple and it is much more dangerous. Persecution can make a religion flourish. Urbanization, secularization are more deadly cancers and one of my impressions is that the problems Christianity is facing in England, the Parsi community is facing in a much greater and more dangerous form in Bombay. Any Parsi who thinks that his faith is not facing a terrific threat, is just blind. It is not just the decrease in numbers, it is the problems of urbanization, the problems of the secular state and the secular society. A secular state is a much greater threat to any religion than persecution. There is only one greater threat than secularization and that is becoming the state church. If Mrs. Gandhi were to declare that India should be a Zoroastrian nation, then I think that would be the ultimate threat to the Zoroastrian community. But the second greatest threat, I think, is secularization and that is happening in Bombay to many communities, not least the Parsis.

PARSIANA: What do you feel the Parsis should do to keep their identity?

HINNELLS: I want to stress that I do not come to teach the Parsis. Many Zoroastrian scholars in the past have come to teach the Parsis the true Faith. I have not come to teach, I have come to learn, and I can only speak as an outsider. I hope that Parsis come to know more about their faith. I study Zoroastrianism and the Parsis because I have terrific respect for the Faith, a respect I find difficult to put into words. I could not study any religion if I didn't respect it immensely. I respect it because of it's integrity and I hope Parsis can come to learn of that quality in their own faith which I find so worthy of respect. Whether this is through classes in their religion, whether this is through formal instruction, however it is done, it is for the community to decide. But there is so much in the faith that demands respect that I hope Parsis come to know of it and learn to respect their own heritage.

SHIAVAX'S SHOCK THERAPY

By Dr. P. B. Warden

Founder Editor of *Parsiana*



To be or not to be in tune with Shnavax Vakil is a conflict imprisoned in many a Parsi mind. To this dilemma one offers poetic justice:—

"In the prison of his days

Teach the free man how to praise"

W. A. Auden

For years we have conducted a campaign against all unrest. It is heartening to have with us somebody who knows better and is willing to expose us to shock therapy, a notorious treatment believed to restore sanity and stability to confounded minds. For years our charitable trusts have functioned only as importers of donations and exporters of doles. It was all well that far but with the changing times we are heading for disaster—social, economical, religious, and political. A rude awakening was necessary and thanks to Shnavax we got it.

His interview with *Parsiana* (November issue) encompasses a broad range touching upon all the aspects and spheres of our old unrest. We all have differences. But we are willing to lay them aside and try out Shnavax if he can take us anywhere. It is not necessary to agree *in toto* but it is necessary to agree to some form of action.

Shnavax's statement, "I am a realist," implies a disinterested objectivity, a trait most needed in the community, particularly by trustees. On *Dokhme nashini* he is clear in his mind. "I have described what I saw," he states but "I still favour *Dokhme nashini*." That is realism *par excellence*. Mutilation and stench are natural to the environment Shnavax saw. What offends us is the dumping of dead bodies in the pit without giving them exposure to *Khurshed-Negirasni* (the sun's rays) which would do two things, disinfect and

dessicate (dry up) dead matter and deodorise it. Early dumping causes grotesque distortions and generates stench. Dumping bodies close together causes chemical changes forming a substance known as Adepocire (margarate and oleiate of ammonia). It is a fatty substance saponified and resembles Adeps i.e. fat and cera i.e. wax. It was first described in 1786/87 when the Churchyard of the Innocents at Paris was cleared out. It was presented to the Academy of Sciences in 1789 by Fourcroy. The substance was again studied in 1812 by Chevreul. Ammonia contained in it being volatile it emits a very strong odour.

The fear of an epidemic arising from the *dokhmas* appears to be ill-founded. Uptil now not a single epidemic has been traced to that source. Fortunately organisms invading living and dead matter are different. Those subsisting on living beings are parasites, which cannot survive on dead matter and those thriving on dead matter are saprophytes which live on putrefying matter and cannot survive in living bodies. There are exceptions but those saprophytes are of a different category.

It is of least concern whether the two trustees who went inside the *dokhma* broke any law, disrespected any convention or offended the sensibilities of the other four trustees who were present when the two trustees entered. If they were really sincere was it not their duty to stop them then and there from entering the *dokhma* instead of later expressing their pious resentment as if they were not party to this inspection tour? Dr. Golwalla may back out and seek shelter against public uproar but the man of conviction, Mr. Vakil has not. It was the correct thing to do for Shnavax as a trustee to inspect the matter under his joint charge with Dr.

Golwalla. It would be reprehensible if he did not inspect it, did not know anything about it and pleaded ignorance as and when the public questioned him on his portfolio. He would have belied his trust.

Between the first and the second world wars we made headway but slowed down thereafter. Rapid change overwhelmed us and we received no guidance. Money was ample and free-floating. Speculation was rampant and to the unguided Parsi Community it looked like the chance of a lifetime, that eventually ended in frustration. Recently two crores of rupees were lost by Parsis as stated by Mr. Vakil in speculative investments. Mr. Jehangir Shroff's scheme for a Zoroastrian Finance Corporation as an economic stabilizer and tutor of feasibility of income could very well have taken firm roots. A fifty lac rupee scheme may not have established large industries but would have sufficed to open the eyes of the younger generation that the knowledge of the Three R's require a concurrent balance of the Three I's: Independence, Initiative and Imagination. The Three R's can be taught but persons can only grow into the Three I's. When shall we put them on that track?

The circumstances in which we are trying to move forward are least propitious. We have many pathways but most of them end in blind alleys. Most trustees have no clear concept of their trusteeship. They look upon it as a status symbol and not as a duty. There is conflict as personalities invariably clash. Therefore, in the Parsi Panchayat and several other Parsi Trusts nothing gets through. Little wonder Mr. Vakil has informed the community that if he cannot get on he will of his own volition give up the trusteeship but not on the issue of *Dokhme nashini*. That is because he clearly distinguishes between the problems of the dead

and the problems of the living and intends to combine them for the good of both. As cemetery land Doongerwadi has no value but part of it far away from the *dokhmas* can become our economic asset if trustees act reasonably, offer it to Parsi contractors at a reasonable price and under sensible covenants. If trustees demand a very high price the buyer must rise higher in space and overlook the *dokhmas*.

The trustees want the price of Rs. 1,000 per square metre of land. They can get this price but only from non-Parsi builder syndicates for sky scrapers. If the trustees want to accommodate the earnest desires of the community with reasonable recurring income to the Trust they should accept an offer of Rs. 500 per square metre at seven and a half per cent interest with the covenant not to build any structure overlooking the existing *dokhmas*. If government wants part of this land let us give and take with the covenant for height incorporated. Fair exchange is no robbery.

Forty-four *agiaries* for Bombay are too many. If we amalgamate some

of them we do not need to change the Trust deeds. The basic idea of the donor is not negated thereby. What we need is a change in the minds of the trustees. The sentiment that an *agiari* cannot be displaced or sold is erroneous. Karani *Agiari* now located in Cusrow Baug was formerly at another site. *Iranshah* now in Udwarda was located at several other places. *Sayastela-Sayest*, a Pahlavi treatise, teaches that in circumstances beyond our control any substitute solution is permissible in religion.

Those who have land have no money to build with. Those who have money have no land to build on. Is it impossible for all Parsi Trustees to come together, to give and take and start building activities? Yes! It is wellnigh impossible so long as we continue to look upon trustees as God's chosen few and so long as they choose to wear a halo round their head. They all should rest content with Hair—nature's own ornament, and if it has been shed, let them retire. This artificial elevation of trustees has made them strangers and any graceful stepping down they look upon as their downfall. Mr. Vakil

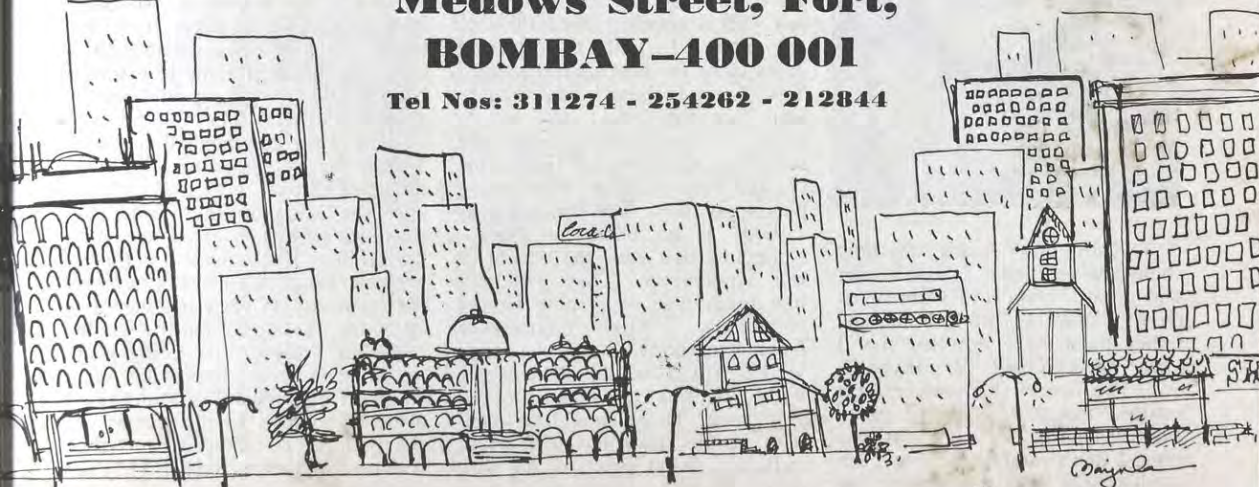
has enumerated a number of places under different trusts which have available vacant land or space which could be created by the demolition of the small present structures. But trustees fear that if they lose their hold on immovable assets they will become superfluous to society; failing to realise that really it is they who would be the infrastructure of our social uplift if they would co-operate in a constructive movement. "What we need is humanity more than anything else today," says Vakil. The sooner people awake to overthrow complacency the better for the future of the community. A vacuum exists that only our own energy can fill. Perhaps dramatic and startling events lie just ahead. We shall have to build the future on campaigning rather than on legislative records. In Shiavax we have secured the inspiring leadership; it needs backing by dedicated devotion. I am not suggesting that Shiavax is faultless. I can count his foibles and failings; but I am not counting on them. I am counting only on his one merit—the merit of being able to give a shake-up.

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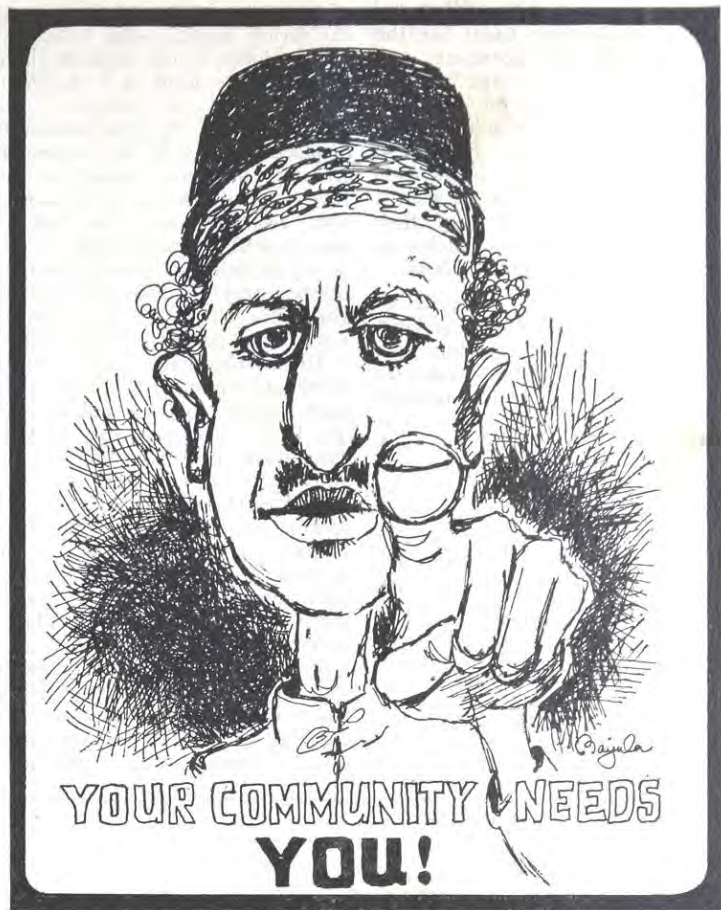
Interviews by Feroza Paymaster

The elections for the 'E' Register, So-nu-Mandal, is scheduled for the Parsi Panchayat office at 209 Dadabhoy Naoroji Road on the 23rd February 1974. Are you going to vote? Are you registered? If not why not? These are the questions we put to our seven interviewees this month. Ask yourself the question and if the answer is 'no' in both cases, don't feel too bad. Very little propaganda has been carried out by the concerned bodies to enlighten the community about the elections.

Out of the seven interviewed, two were registered and five were not. This is not a random sampling and therefore what percentage of the community is registered cannot be determined. But from all indications it is apparent, that a very large majority of Parsis are ignorant of their voting rights.



"I really don't know anything about the elections. I wasn't ever sent a card. I am told I am registered. I don't know. If I am, my father must have enrolled me. I have never voted for anybody, ever. I've never taken any interest in these things. My father died in 1940. Maybe he did tell me at that time, I don't remember now. I am so disgusted with the present day



Sehra Singara, 68, Housewife

Panchayat. They have no backbone—not dignified. However, if I get a card and if I know the person who is standing, then I'll vote—I might. I think the election dates come in the Gujarati papers. Yes, I read them." Ms Singara feels that we should take an interest in the Panchayat but she feels "we have elected them, sort of, and they manage. Why go on picking at them. The Panchayat as a body is an exclusive thing—something that's for the benefit of the community. They wouldn't like to divulge everything to the community. With interference from everybody, how can they work? But I would like people with gumption to come into the Panchayat. There should be business people—they have the right outlook. What can you do with four lawyers out of seven

trustees?"

As to whether she looks to the Panchayat for leadership, Ms Singara says, "We do elect them as leaders. Before when trustees like Cawasjee Jehangir came to a function, everybody got up and made room for them. They were real leaders. They commanded respect. Today they don't. Thus there is no leadership at present." However, she feels that "they do a good job, even with their arrogance. But the problem has extended so much they can't cope with it, it's beyond their capacity. Poverty has increased among the Parsis. On the whole they (the trustees) are doing well in housing, and improving the standard of Parsis. The Panchayat also has to look to the wishes of the donors. To malign them (the trustees) is rather unfair. They're working."



Hosi D. Pajnegar, 37, Accountant, National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bhabha Fellowship Council

"No, I do not know when the elections for the committee of 100 is going to be held. I have not registered either. Can anybody vote, or only members of the Panchayat? I feel that our community is passing through difficult times and I would like to vote. It's better if the younger generation takes a lead and participates in the activity of the Panchayat. This would help to get the best candidates. I'm completely in the dark at the moment as to how one keeps informed on the dates of the election. I suppose this information is in the Gujarati papers. I have never tried to find out. But I do not read them."

The Panchayat does not provide leadership, says Pajnegar "they don't inspire us. Nothing to look forward to. No one to lead. They are just a bunch of people. I have a hazy idea of what they are supposed to do—look after the affairs of the community, and the funds. Trustees should be appointed every year. Then there would be opportunities for a more progressive outlook. There would be more competition. With that efficiency would also increase. Knowing that he is elected for ten years, the trustee is not bothered as he knows he is going to be there for that period."

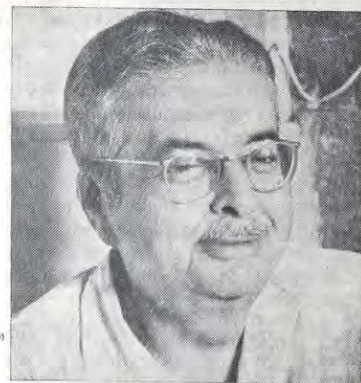


Shirin Bahadurji, 17, Student, St. Xavier's College

"I don't really know whether I would register and vote when I'm 21. Depends on what I feel then. But the modern generation doesn't know anything about the Panchayat; neither does the generation before—our parents. We have nothing to do with it, only our grandparents and people living in the Parsi colonies, who have some dealings with the Panchayat. The Panchayat does not exist for the younger generation. If someone explained what they are doing—if we know that what they are doing is worthwhile, for the community, I would register." At the moment, Shirin says, asking her to vote for the Panchayat is "like telling me

to vote for some Udyog or something—which I wouldn't know about."

She says she heard about the Panchayat "vaguely through my granny, but it didn't mean anything to me. I suppose if I got interested, I would get information about the elections through someone who reads Gujarati papers. I myself cannot. There should be some organised way of letting people know about the election dates and the Panchayat. How can I look to them for leadership when I don't know anything about them. It's so vague. You have to look to something concrete for leadership."

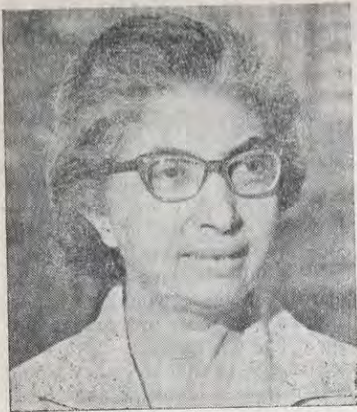


Pestonji Bharucha, 65, retired

"I know that the elections are to be held somewhere at the end of February. I am registered to vote. Fifteen years ago I registered, of my own accord, being interested in the welfare of the community. Before that if something had been coming in the papers with the pros and cons of the elections—what are the advantages to the community and myself—I might have registered earlier. I will definitely vote. I think it is my duty to.

"I read Gujarati papers. I have heard about the election dates but I am sorry there is no propaganda being carried out. The community has not been given any education on the subject still." Bharucha

feels "everybody should take interest in the affairs of the Panchayat." Regarding leadership he says, "Who is going to give the leadership. They have not given it in the last 20 years. People who stand for elections should be able to spare time, energy and have some background of administration and an interest in the community and not just seek pomp and show. I don't know what their constitution says. What are they supposed to do exactly? They are supposed to be the servants of the community, according to Shrivastav Vakil, supposed to look after the welfare of the community. They don't seem to be doing anything."



Perin Wadia, 52, Teacher, Princess High School

"No, I don't know the election date. Never taken an interest in this. No one seems to approach us. Never registered to vote, since I never felt interested. We used to talk about it, but we never felt like taking any action. Since you have approached me, I will be voting." Ms Wadia says she does not see how she would keep track of the election dates "unless I read it in the Gujarati papers. I have no connections with the Panchayat, not my business. The Pan-

chayat needs some young blood. Just to, you know, change. In this present modern time we need some new ideas, isn't it? There's nothing wrong with having older people, but we also need the young. Why not give them a chance?"

As for the Panchayat giving leadership Ms Wadia is at a loss. "What is there to say. I don't think there's any leadership. Some of the people do follow them, maybe for some religious purposes, I don't know."



Kerman Bharucha, 26, Computer Programmer, ACC

"I don't know when the elections are to be held. I am not registered to vote. If I am eligible for voting, I'll definitely vote. It's probably our shortcoming that we don't know more about the Panchayat. I never bothered to find out. The Panchayat seems to be absolutely cut off from the average Parsi. Since I feel I don't have any access to them, I don't find out."

"I can't read Gujarati at all," says Kerman, "I get news of what's going on from people who are in the know." He feels that "the younger people should definitely step in" and take an interest in the Panchayat. "By no means

should it be left just to the elders and eminent members of the community."

"I don't feel the Panchayat provides leadership. I can only hope they're doing something for the community, I don't know what. They seem to have slipped up very badly regarding the land surrounding Doongerwadi. I don't particularly pay attention to what other things they are doing. I think they are supposed to ensure equitable distribution of funds for the poorer sections of the community, but this is only my guess, and I don't really know if they are doing it."



Nargis Irani, Age not given, Hairstylist, Gulnar

"I don't know about the elections. I am not registered to vote. Never voted in my life; wouldn't even know who to vote for. If anybody approached me I would. I am so busy with my work, plus I don't have so many Zoroastrian clients, and so I don't even hear by word of mouth. I don't know if I'd vote still, because I wouldn't know who to vote for. Somebody has to guide me as to who is a genuine person. If somebody does this then I would want to vote. I read Gujarati papers very occasionally. I don't get any, but borrow them from my neighbour."

Nargis feels that "the public should help and take part in the Panchayat. They should give suggestions and ideas as to how the Panchayat can utilize money more profitably. For example, the Gov-

ernment should not charge taxes on charitable money. We should object. People should take an active part in it." The Panchayat must be doing a good job, says Nargis, "because they are very careful in giving out loans. They do send people to find out details about the people asking for loans. They gave me a loan for opening my shop and till business did well didn't push me for payment. You are not harassed. I wouldn't know if they're utilizing money adequately or not."

"I don't particularly feel the Panchayat provides leadership. Our community is going down. The Panchayat should come forward, and find where the need is. I know we can count on them in the hour of need."



A WHIFF OF INCENSE

When Pheroza Shroff went in search of a gallery to exhibit her paintings she found "the Jehangir was booked. The Taj said 'You'll have to wait a year,' and there was just no place available in a short time." That frustrating experience laid the foundation for the Cymroza Art Gallery. "I felt the one thing I had to do was start a gallery of my own for artists who can't wait so long or pay that much money," she recalled.

So Pheroza set about transforming an old godown in the family building on Warden Road into a gallery. "The place was a real mess," she said. The floor was untiled, the walls unpainted, there was no ventilation and only a naked bulb illuminated the room. Today a whiff of incense pervades the brightly lit air-conditioned atmosphere of Cymroza and the works of many established and to-be-established artists adorn the freshly painted, primrose-yellow walls. "We don't accept an application more than three months before a show and we don't work at all on a commission basis," notes Pheroza "Cymroza isn't a profit-making institution."

The second anniversary of the gallery was celebrated recently with an exhibition of the paintings and photographs of several young artists, and a host of cultural programs. As one speaker noted, Bombay is indebted to the Shroff family for their contribution to Art. The name Cymroza, despite its familiar ring, is a Shroff family hybrid: 'Cy' is from Pheroza's brother's name, Cyrus; 'm' is from her mother, Mitha; 'roz' from her father, Phiroze and 'a' from the end of her own name. "It was my mother's idea," says Pheroza, "she worked on it while I was finishing my B.A." Her mother runs The Miniland School which is housed in the same building as the art gallery. And when mother and daughter are out of town Mr. Shroff, who was formerly



Pheroza with one of her works

with Lyons Ice-cream, helps run the show.

While all the visitors who visit the gallery may not be buyers, Pheroza finds that "People have a lot of spending capacity. Most of the time they pay the price all at one go; sometimes they tell me, 'We can't pay a lump sum of 1,000 rupees,' and arrange to pay it in instalments." It is difficult to specify what is the most popular form of art with the public. "Anything goes," she notes. "They like something they can identify themselves with." She cites the case of a Turkish artist whose Embassy recommended Cymroza for his exhibition. "His work was very traditional and realistic—sort of Turner-esque. I wasn't too sure it would sell but I had his show anyway. And he had a fabulous sale. They were really buying his

art left right and centre. He had little miniatures, which were bought for 600 rupees."

In addition to true art exhibitions, there are exhibitions of 'handicraft' items, such as hand-embroidered sarees and ceramic ware. "People tell me, 'Why don't you concentrate on that'—because they know that they (the sellers) can make a store on them." Her own preference, however, is for art rather than the "commercial stuff" and she tries to select shows which also have some artistic appeal, adding "some of it is very good."

The artists, Pheroza feels, are always interesting people, but "very petty. They'll run down other artists and quarrel over little things. I mean, I'm really being taught a lot of patience; some times I feel I'm a counsellor," she

says, explaining that this is because many of the young artists, often exhibiting for the first time, come to her with their problems—financial or otherwise. When, for instance, they come from other cities and do not have the means to live in Bombay, Pheroza occasionally arranges to have them stay with her. One of Cymroza's distinguishing features is that on some evenings the gallery doubles as an auditorium for varied cultural activities, from sitar recitals to readings of contemporary Indian poetry. Indian musicians, however, Pheroza feels, "lead a harder life than artists, actually," because it is even more difficult to hire a place to be heard in than to exhibit art. "They're a lot like artists in a way—you have to flatter them a lot." However, even with Pheroza's mediating presence, feelings sometimes run high, an example being an incident which took place at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. A show of short 'art' films by neophyte directors had been arranged by Pheroza: "Two rival directors both turned up to watch the

films and there was a fight right there at the auditorium. So I had to tell them that if they had some argument between themselves would they please settle it outside. You have to be very diplomatic." Parsees, says Pheroza, are "not too interested in the evening get-togethers, because they are not brought up on that sort of music. But they do come for the exhibitions." An interest in art is something she feels is shared by all communities alike.

"I get very confused painting on my own sometimes," she says, referring to the influence the work of the artists who come to Cymroza has on her. "I don't think I really have a style of my own yet," she maintains, though she has won prizes for her work thrice in a row. She prefers to paint in oils, "basically, landscapes," she says, "sort of roots in the earth, and soaring up towards the sky. Mostly realistic stuff," sometimes inspired by the photographs taken during frequent trips around the Indian countryside. Pheroza has been painting since "my ninth birthday, when I got my first

painting book and paint box. The first word I wrote was 'Art'." She has been to art school at the Nutan Kala Mandir, having studied there for three years. She feels concerned about the standard of art in India, saying, "We have produced famous schools of art before but now we're just copying from the West. We still do have a lot of folk artists, but they're working on their own. I guess I'll just have to start a school of art myself!"

Pheroza is a veteran of Cathedral School and Sophia College. "I didn't want to go to college at all but my parents said I should so I went." There was no one she knew, or from her school and the first three months, she says, "I was so disgusted with it all. I joined all the societies I could—elocution, drama, poster painting, classical Indian dancing, folk dancing, tabla playing, the works. I was painting furiously, and I used to come home as soon as college was over for the day. Then I won first prize in the drama competition and

(Continued on page 32, col. 1)

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The Indian National Theatre somehow manages to combine the excitement of a circus with the celluloid glitter of a Hollywood film in its productions.

Certainly the INT's latest Gujarati play *Taru Maru Bakaliu* directed by Burjor Patel and Tarak Mehta was no exception. As the curtain went up there was frenetic action on the stage, accompanied by rollicking music and all the lights frantically blinking on and off. It was apparently meant to turn the audience on to the right frame of mind for another "sex comedy" but was in fact oddly reminiscent of a circus with its roll of drums, its clowns and even a ring master to announce the entertainment for the evening. Perhaps the only attitude to take towards a "commercial" play such as this one, is to go to it as though it were a circus, where the entertainment is limited, but satisfying within these limits.

The play has all the ingredients that people may be counted upon to laugh at: mistaken identities, a fat man, people falling off stools, people getting stuck in lifts, people dressing up in other people's clothes, people getting drunk and so on. As a *pièce de résistance* to add an extra dash of local flavour to the plot, they had a man from Ahmedabad bringing with him all the predictable jokes about Ahmedabadis and their parsimonious ways. Yet these local ingredients mixed together in Broadway sauce, adapted from a play called, *Let Sleeping Wives Lie*, proved a hearty enough dish to keep the audience sufficiently happy for almost three hours.

That it did so, was hardly a reflection on the originality of the authors, who did not take the slightest risk of deviating from the inexorable path of situation comedy, which can roughly be described as follows: first part—establishing the situation, second part—exploding the situation, third part—picking up the pieces. Accordingly, *Taru Maru Bakaliu* was divided into three parts, all of which took place in and around the honeymoon suite of Hotel Obairuz (notice pun). Ms



Exploding the situation

Maneckshaw (Ruby Patel) has been booked in this room by her boss Babulal C. Parikh or B. C. ji (Tarak Mehta) who, being a considerate type, has discovered that it is her wedding anniversary. B. C. ji has come down all the way from Ahmedabad to confirm Ms Maneckshaw and her colleague Bobby Nicholson (Cyrus Bharucha) in their jobs, but before he can do so, he insists on meeting their respective better halves. This creates a problem as Ms Nicholson (Aban Patel) flatly refuses to be inspected, while Ms Maneckshaw is so afraid of shattering her husband's ego, that she does not even tell him that she has such an important job, let alone persuade him to come up for inspection. To get over the crisis she passes off an old admirer Jimmy Junglewala (Dinyar Contractor), "call me Jimmu", a mas-

sive ball of a man, with an ingratiating smile and hair neatly parted in the centre of his head, as her husband. At the same time a maid working in the hotel, who is sympathetic to the problem, suddenly volunteers to do the same for Nicholson. B. C. ji being the kindly soul that he is, spares no effort in graphically describing to Jimmu how he should spend his anniversary night, while Ms Maneckshaw, running in and out of the bathroom clutching a towel, tries bravely to play the loving wife on one hand and foil Jimmu's ardour on the other.

Eventually, of course, the inevitable happens, the Husband (Burjor Patel) arrives on the scene very much the He-man in white flannels and cricket bat. He is puzzled at the opulent surroundings in which his wife, whom he imagines a humble typist, is accom-

modated and his surprise only turns to annoyance when the neon sign in red letters saying HOTEL OB AIRUZ slips right in front of his wife's window in such a way as to spell HOT BAIRU (Hot Women). "HOT BAIRU and in red letters too!" he cries, bringing the whole house down.

The rest of the play can easily be imagined. Ms Maneckshaw does her level best not to let her husband find out the mess that she is in, but he finds out all the same and stalks out in a rage demanding a divorce. Just as he is going down, the lift gets stuck. The moment he comes out, Jimmu gets stuck on top of the lift. Meanwhile the Nicholsons are sorting out their own problems, with Mr Nicholson getting dead drunk in the process. B. C. ji runs about witlessly, still trying his best to get Ms Maneckshaw into Jimmu's arms and even wrapping him up in a gigantic dhoti that prompts Ms Maneckshaw to remark, "You look like Dara Singh on top and Jagjivan Ram below!" Needless to say all problems are resolved at the end.

The one thing the play was not lacking in was action. People went up and down lifts, they chased each other round the bedroom, the bathroom, the balcony and Jimmu ran down the corridors and the staircases with a nimbleness which was hard to believe in so rotund a man. The mechanics of the play worked on oiled wheels particularly to convey the suggestion that the lift had got stuck at one point and a little later had gone berserk with Jimmu standing on top of it, howling dismally as it went up and down. The set too was imaginatively designed, to stage this bedroom *grand prix* and besides looking quite authentic, provided innumerable exits and entries through which the various characters could chase each other. The only disadvantage of an elaborate set is, of course, that it cannot be changed easily and the audience is soon inclined to get bored staring at the same thing for over two and a half hours.

There were some details how-

ever which were put in for mere convenience which could have been handled in a more subtle manner. A voice over the hotel intercom for example would frequently nudge the action on by making such announcements as, "Mrs Maneckshaw your husband is waiting for you in your bedroom." In a comedy such as this where the whole story is improbable at least the details should be authentic so as to make the background, if nothing else, seem real. It is so unlikely that a hotel would make such announcements that they immediately strike a false note. Here too one must mention that the special appearance of a guest star who has a conversation with the hotel manager regarding his wife, whom he describes as resembling a post box with 46-46-46 measurements, was tiresome and unnecessary, since he has nothing to do with the plot.

In these circumstances, the actors did their best and should be given credit at least for keeping up the frantic pace. They gave solid uninspired performances. Tarak Mehta, as the Ahmedabadi gave a very assured and realistic portrayal in the earlier parts. As the play progressed however and the em-

phasis shifted to the confrontation between Jimmu and Mr Maneckshaw B. C. ji was left on the fringes of the action with nothing much to do.

The women generally appeared to be overacting, though here again in a comedy of this kind it could perhaps not be avoided. The clothes bordered on the garish and at the risk of sounding like a prude one wonders why Ms Nicholson, who was supposed to be pregnant, had to wear an outfit that displayed so much of her midriff and shapely legs, it would have been more suitable for a go-go dancer, than a middle-class wife.

Bobby Nicholson acquitted himself quite well in a secondary role and though drunken scenes are another commonplace, managed to lurch effectively through the act. Jimmu on the other hand did not impress very much except by his size. Burjor Patel, looking like a Parsi Walter Mathau, gave a good but unremarkable performance, earning most of his laughs by getting in and out of ridiculous looking garments.

Having said this much one is only left to wonder why a person with Burjor Patel's reputation should waste his time with such



stereotyped inanities. The answer could well be that he is only giving the audience what it wants. He is like a man who insists on serving baked beans out of a can even when fresh vegetables are available, because he knows the audience will eat it no matter what he gives them. Are we to blame him for doing this or is it the audience which must demand a change of diet?

Geeta Doctor

Cymroza (Continued from page 28)

people got curious about me, so I began to make friends." She had her first exhibition at Chetna Art Gallery in 1968 and Cymroza was conceived during the final year of her B.A. "I didn't expect to but I did well in the exam, so that made me want to do my M.A. afterwards. It was a lot of bravado; now I plan to do my B. Ed. in '74." In addition, she teaches seventh graders at Cathedral School, runs handicraft classes for children and acts in plays. "I love acting—if it wasn't for my painting, I would have joined the drama school in Delhi. I like to live the part, get completely involved."

As for her involvement in religion, Pheroza notes, "I'm not anti-Zoroastrian or pro-Zoroastrian. I believe in a God. I feel that you belong somewhere and that you are here for some reason. I respect all religions just as much as I expect others to respect mine." Thus while she often goes to the Fire temple to pray she believes as well in the Virgin Mary, and feels "no conflict" in her belief. "It's just a faith I have and maybe I'm just sort of blindly following it." She remembers vividly an experience she had concerning a small shrine in a village near Madras called Velankani: "I was very nervous about my Inter-Arts exam and just before I did it I heard about this place. I thought about it and it got to be a real 'thing'. Finally, I got through my exam with flying colors so I decided I would definitely go there." Though she was disappointed in the avarice of the priest there, what impressed her was the museum there, "filled with fantastic things, sent by the people whose wishes had been granted. There was a replica of a little Parsi boy in silver—apparently,

they were supposed to have sent one weighing 20 pounds if they wanted him to live but they sent only 10 pounds, so they had to make another replica. And he got well in the end."

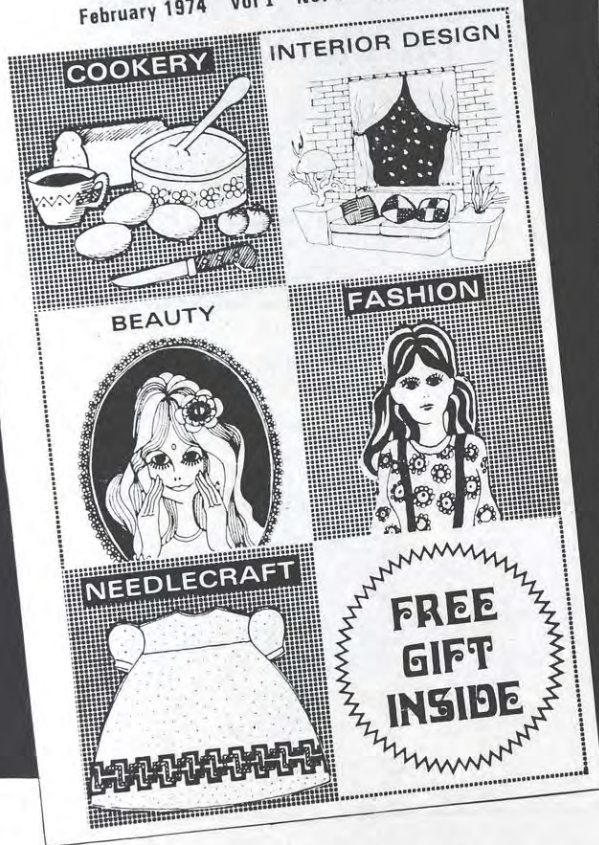
If Pheroza were to marry out of the community, she says, her parents "would have a fit. They're not orthodox, they're liberal, but they'd still be upset about things like marriage." She feels that this was so despite the fact that her parents have "such a large cosmopolitan group of friends that some people ask them, 'Why do you have so many non-Zoroastrian friends?' Its mainly the thing about conversion, I think, that would upset them. But they'd allow me if I really wanted to." Pheroza herself feels that she has not thought about the subject enough to discuss it. "I've no time to think about marriage!" she says. For the moment, she plans to continue "painting on my own and working on my next exhibition." As for Cymroza, Pheroza wants it to "succeed. It will rise up to be an institution of high standing—a sort of platform for the Arts."

Manjula Padmanabhan

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